

Canova's Statues of Venus*

BALZAC, in *Grandeurs et misères des courtisanes*, refers to 'a white body as perfect as Canova's Venus'. There can be little doubt that he had in mind the *Venere Italica* which, for a while, took the place of the *Medici Venus* in the Uffizi, Florence, and is now shown in the Palazzo Pitti. It is among Canova's most famous statues and one which has always been widely popular. It is not, however, his only Venus. At about the same time, and from the same *modello*, he carved two others (one now in the Residenzmuseum, Munich, and one untraced) introducing small variations especially in the hair and drapery. Some time later he executed a new and entirely different *modello* from which he carved a statue which was bought by Thomas Hope. This work, known as the *Hope Venus*, is mentioned by most of Canova's biographers, but it has not been previously reproduced and, indeed, its whereabouts have been unknown since it left the Hope collection in 1917. The rediscovery of this important work (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 15, 17) in the Leeds City Art Gallery has prompted the present article.¹ But the significance of the *Hope Venus* in Canova's development cannot be understood except in relation to his three earlier statues of Venus including, of course, the *Venere Italica*.² And the history of these works calls for considerable clarification.

* I am very grateful to Conte Carlo degli Alessandri for allowing me to consult and quote from unpublished manuscripts in his family archive and to Professor Fred Licht for drawing my attention to them. Dr Sandra Pinto kindly brought the documents in the Uffizi archive to my attention. For comments on the text of this article I am most grateful to Ulrich Middeldorf. I should also like to thank the staff of the Biblioteca Civica, Bassano del Grappa, for their unfailing help and Professor Giancarlo Savino for giving me access to the Puccini papers in the Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Pistoia, although they are in course of re-arrangement. In the following notes I have used abbreviations to designate these manuscript collections: *Alessandri MSS* for documents in two volumes entitled *Lettere del Marchese Canova* in the Archivio degli Alessandri, Florence, and *Alessandri MSS Benvenuti letters* for those in a volume entitled *Lettere di Pietro Benvenuti* in the same collection; *Uffizi MSS* for documents in filza XXXVII (1811-2) sec. 68 in the archive of the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; *Puccini MSS* for documents in the Puccini papers in the Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Pistoia; *Bassano* for documents in the Biblioteca Civica, Bassano del Grappa. In referring to manuscripts in Bassano I have cited the reference numbers given by A. SORBELLI: *Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia Bassano del Grappa*, vol. lviii, Florence [1934] (for papers in the four boxes labelled *Commissioni*, which are numbered separately, I have placed the letter C before the Sorbelli number).

¹ For help in connection with the *Hope Venus* I should like to thank Professor Robert Rosenblum, Mr Terence Hodgkinson and Mr Terry Friedman. My thanks must also go to the Director of the Leeds City Art Gallery, Mr Robert Rowe, for allowing me to publish the work. For an account of the provenance of the statue see note 65 below.

² L. CICOGNARA: *Biografia di Antonio Canova*, Venice [1823], pp. 61-2, in his catalogue of Canova's works: '1805. Statua di Venere ch' esce dal bagno, poco più grande della Medicea. Vedesi nel Palazzo Pitti a Firenze. Sul modello di questa ne vennero eseguite altre due, l'una pel re di Baviera, l'altra pel principe di Canino, la quale ora trovavasi in Londra nel palazzo del marchese di Lansdowne'. As the documents cited in the present article reveal, the *modello* for the *Venere Italica* was executed in 1804, not 1805, but otherwise Cicognara's account is substantially correct. That Canova was in the first place commissioned by Lodovico I of Etruria to execute a copy of the *Medici Venus* is recorded, but without dates, by M. MISSIRINI: *Della vita di Antonio Canova*, Milan [1824], p. 183 and A. D'ESTE: *Memorie di Antonio Canova*, Florence [1864], p. 326. A. G. MEYER: *Canova*, Bielefeld/Leipzig [1898], pp. 60-2 appears to have based his brief account on these earlier sources. V. MALAMANI: *Canova*, Milan [1911], pp. 165-8, still the best monograph on Canova, says nothing of the origin of the commission but correctly states that

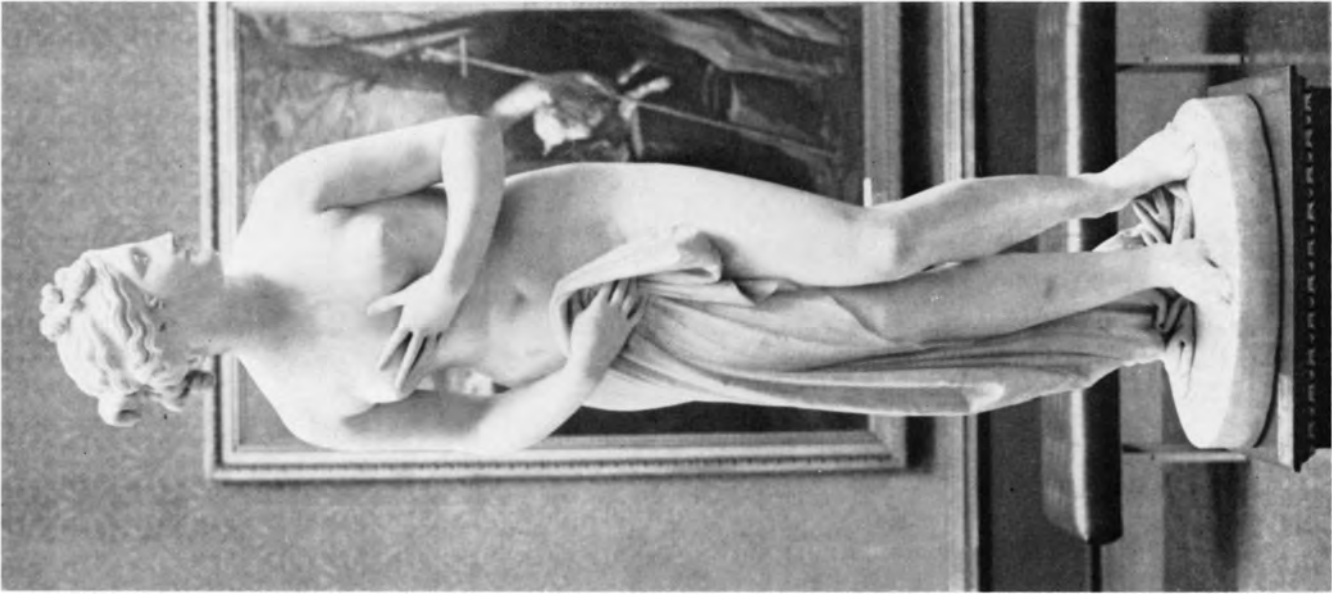
The story of the *Venere Italica* begins in June 1796 when Napoleon, then merely General Bonaparte, was taken round the Uffizi by Tommaso Puccini, the Gallery's director. Napoleon showed great interest in the *Medici Venus* and remarked that should Tuscany declare war on France he would have her taken to Paris.³ When a French invasion of Tuscany seemed imminent in 1800, Puccini presumably recalled this conversation, for he prudently had the *Medici Venus*, and many other important works of art in the Uffizi, evacuated to Palermo. This did not, however, prevent Napoleon from obtaining the *Venus*, claiming her as a 'bride' for the *Apollo Belvedere* which had already been taken from Rome to Paris. After much international negotiation Puccini, who was in Palermo doing his best to guard the Uffizi collections, was obliged to hand over the *Medici Venus* to the French authorities on 11th September 1802.⁴

To compensate for the loss of what was certainly the most famous, and many would have said the best, statue in the Uffizi, the Florentine authorities decided to address themselves to the most famous of living sculptors - Canova. A chance of discussing the matter with him presented itself very soon, for Canova stopped for a few days in Florence in December 1802 on his return journey to Rome from Paris where he had modelled a portrait of Napoleon. He had always been opposed to the widespread practice of copying antique statues and he was reluctant to execute a copy of the *Medici Venus*. But this was an exceptional occasion. Moreover, he took a great liking to the Barone Giovanni degli Alessandri, the president of the Florentine

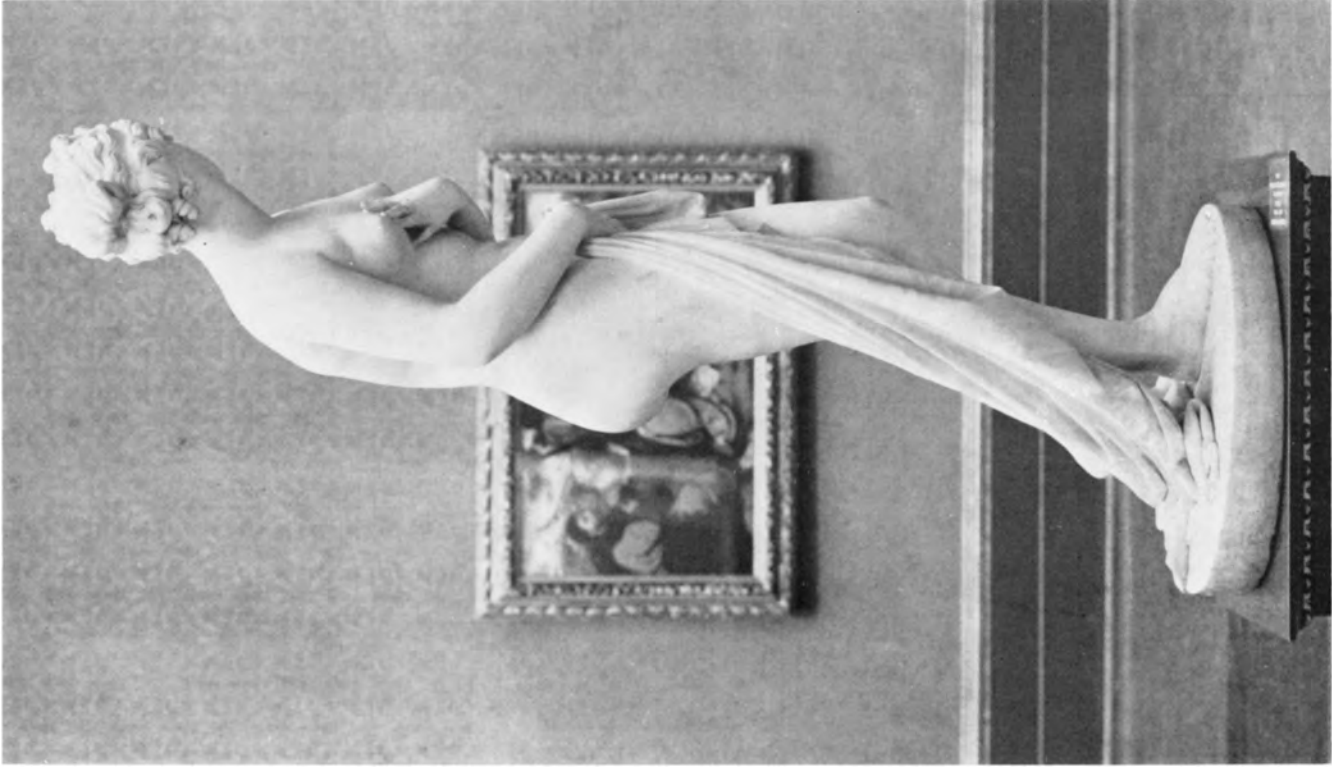
the *Venere Italica* was placed in the Uffizi in 1812. In one of his several very valuable articles, F. BOYER: 'Nouveaux documents sur Canova et Napoléon' in *A travers l'art italien du XVe au XXe siècle: Publications de la Société des études italiennes 1941-1948*, Paris [1949], pp. 199-201 gives a brief account of the commission and quotes previously unpublished documents relating to the purchase of the statue. The account of the statue in G. HUBERT: *La sculpture dans l'Italie napoléonienne*, Paris [1964], pp. 149-50 is based on the early printed sources and the documents published by Boyer. Most other recent accounts of the statue have been incorrect. G. DELOGU: *Antologia della scultura italiana*, Milan [1956], p. 313 states that the *Venere Italica* was 'sculpta nel 1812 per sostituire la Venere Medicea'. E. BASSI: *La Gipsoteca di Possagno*, Venice [1957], pp. 197-9 (an invaluable work to which I, like all other students of Canova, am deeply indebted) gives a surprisingly erroneous account of the whole proceeding by stating that the *Medici Venus* was taken to France in 1799; that the King of Bavaria commissioned Canova to execute a copy which was abandoned in 1804 because he had in the meantime been commissioned to execute a Venus of his own invention; that the marble *Venere Italica* was not finished until April 1812; and that also in 1812 'Canova ne fece due repliche; una per il re di Baviera, cui era legato dal vecchio contratto, poi trasportata a Londra nel palazzo del marchese di Lansdowne ed un'altra per il principe di Canino'.

³ Letter from Tommaso Puccini to his brother quoted by A. CHITI: *Tommaso Puccini*, Pistoia [1907], p. 60; cf. also A. LENZI: *Napoleone a Firenze*, Florence [1936], pp. 53-4.

⁴ For a full account see A. ZOBBI: *Storia civile della Toscana dal MDCCXXVII al MDCCCXLVIII*, Florence [1851], vol. iii, pp. 518-22 and appendice pp. 243-50. C. GOULD: *Trophy of Conquest*, London [1965], p. 60 states that the *Medici Venus* was taken to Palermo 'with some cameos and other precious objects'. A. CHITI, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-5 reveals that the 'other precious objects' included several of the more famous antique statues, a large number of High Renaissance and later pictures and also such works as Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles*, Pollajuolo's two small paintings of *Hercules* and Giovanni Bellini's *Pietà*.



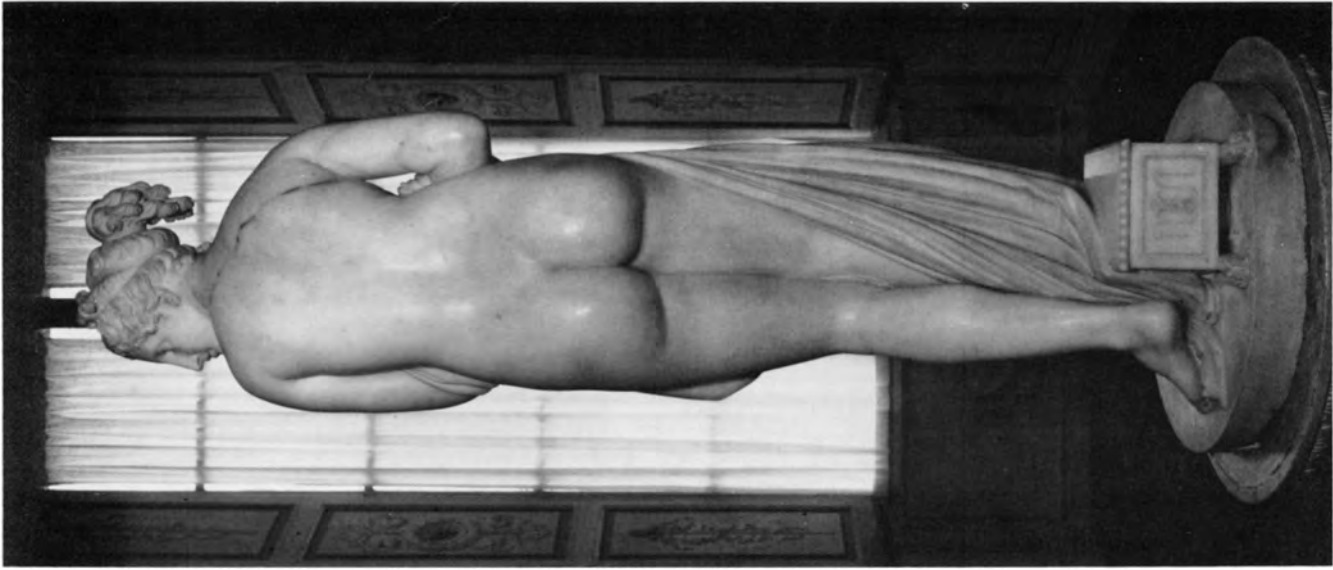
2. Front view of *Hope Venus* illustrated in Fig. 1. *Photo. Ron Turner, Leeds.*



3. Right side of *Hope Venus* illustrated in Fig. 1. *Photo. Ron Turner, Leeds.*



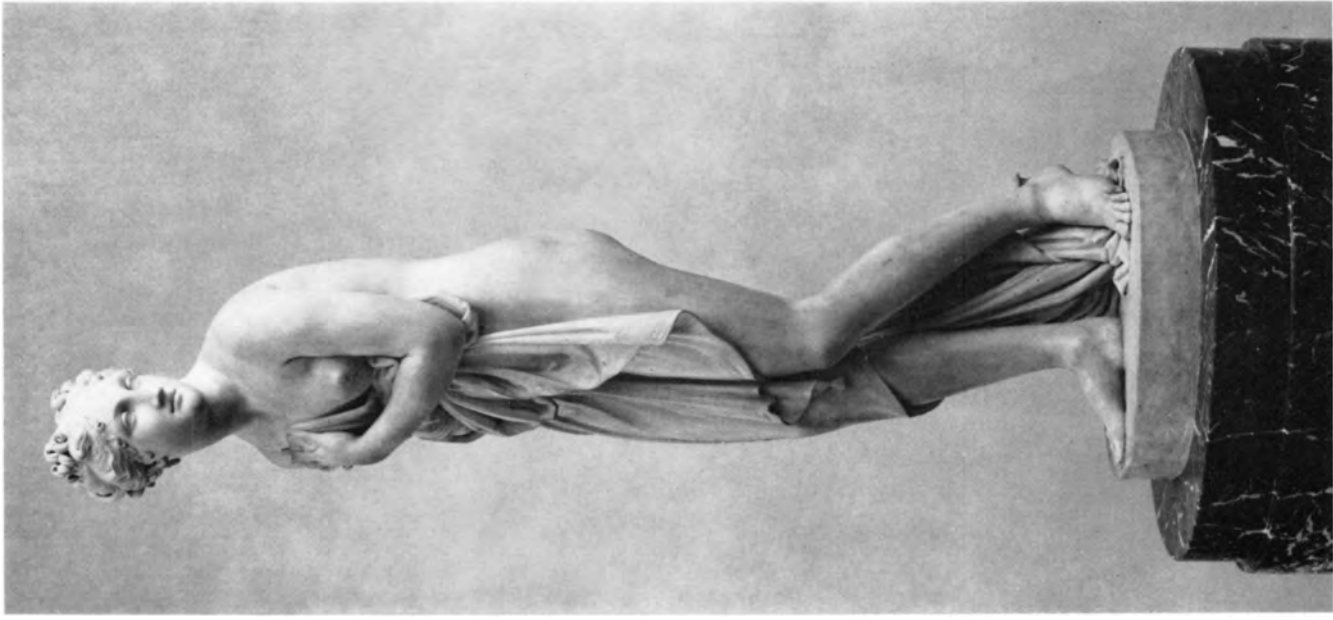
4. Front view of the *Venere Italiana*, by Antonio Canova. Completed 1811. Marble; height, 172 cm. (Palazzo Pitti, Florence.) *Photo. Anderson.*



5. Back view of *Venere Italica* illustrated in Fig. 4.



6. Front view of *Venus*, by Antonio Canova. Completed 1810. Marble; height, 172 cm. (Bayerische Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Museumsabteilung, Munich.) Photo. *Verwaltung der Staatl. Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Museumsabteilung.*



7. Left side of *Venus* illustrated in Fig. 6. Photo. *Verwaltung der Staatl. Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Museumsabteilung.*

Accademia delle Belle Arti who was in charge of the transaction. Yet he refused to give a definite answer immediately and returned to Rome without committing himself.⁵ Alessandri was both pressing and flattering, writing to him on 31st January 1803 of his hope that the *Medici Venus* would be replaced by an equivalent work from Canova's chisel and saying that he would consider himself fortunate if Canova would be his guest in Florence and carve the statue there.⁶ Canova succumbed and on 4th February 1803 wrote to ask Alessandri to send him a cast of the *Medici Venus*. 'Mi studierò di eseguire la preziosa ordinazione quanto più presto potrò', he declared.⁷ On 14th February Alessandri wrote a memorandum on the commission and next day sent a letter to Canova expressing 'i più genuini ringraziamenti per la graditissima Sua Accettazione di assumersi di rivendicare a questa Re. Galleria a decor della Patria, la dolente perdita fatta della Venere Medicea col riprodurla in marmo . . .'.⁸ Four days later the Primo Ministro di Stato in Florence, Giulio Mozzi del Garbo, wrote to Canova to convey the thanks of the King of Etruria – Lodovico I Borbone.⁹

In his letter of 4th February Canova said that he did not wish to fix a price for the work, but would accept whatever reward was thought appropriate when it was completed.¹⁰ This offer seems to have embarrassed the Florentines. Alessandri in his memorandum of 14th February suggested that they should give Canova one or more gold medals – with his portrait on one side and the *Medici Venus* on the other – to the value of 2,000 *zecchini*. He also wrote to the young Tuscan painter, Pietro Benvenuti, who was then in Rome, asking him to find out if such an arrangement would be acceptable and saying that the Florentines would pay the cost of the marble block which ought to be of the finest possible quality 'giacchè qui ramentasi tra i Pregi della Venere Medicea la prerogativa dell' Eccellente marmo che la componeva'. It was most important that enquiries should be made without offending Canova's 'somma delicatezza'.¹¹ Benvenuti replied on 18th March saying that a fee of 2,000 *zecchini* would be a just recompense but he thought Canova would prefer to have it in cash rather than in medals as Alessandri

had proposed.¹²

On 5th March Alessandri wrote to tell Canova that a cast of the *Medici Venus* was being sent to him (it arrived before 5th April).¹³ By this time the news that Canova had agreed to carve the copy was already out.¹⁴ But Alessandri's letter of 5th March suggests that Canova had, in fact, undertaken to make rather more than a simple copy. 'Qui molti si parla di questa lodevolissima impresa', he remarked, 'e nel ricuperare la Venere si conta per indubitato il guadagno che si farà nella nuova sulla sicura maggior perfezione delle parti de' restauri aggiunti al Greco di questa perduta Statua'. In other words he was expected to provide a copy of the antique marble but not of the existing restorations; he was to revise the latter in order to produce what would amount to a new reconstruction of the figure. This is a point of some importance for, as we shall see, it may well have influenced Canova when he modelled his *Venere Italica*.¹⁵

The King of Etruria died in June 1803 but his widow, the Queen Regent Maria Louisa, confirmed the commission for the copy, though no formal document had been or was now drawn up.¹⁶ On 4th October Pietro Benvenuti told Alessandri that the piece of marble destined for the statue had been placed in Canova's studio in Rome and the work of rough-hewing it would soon begin.¹⁷ Canova himself on 26th November, wrote to Alessandri: 'Si è cominciato a mettere sotto i punti la Venere'.¹⁸ Next year, on 7th April 1804, Benvenuti recorded that he had just visited Canova's studio where he had seen 'la Venere sta sotto ai punti che si lavora continuamente e ben presto sarà abbozzata', remarking also on the exceptionally fine quality of the marble.¹⁹

Shortly afterwards, probably in the summer of 1804, Canova executed the *modello* for a statue of Venus of his own invention – 'un'altra mia Venere in piede' as he described it in a letter to Puccini dated from Rome 19th October 1804. In this letter he wrote: 'mi è lusinghevole assai la vantaggiosa osservazione Sua per la replica della Venere Medicea. Dio voglia ch'Essa sappia meritarsi il bel titolo di Gemella. Sarei molto vago ch'ella potesse vedere il modello d'un'altra mia Venere in piedi'.²⁰

⁵ Anonymous biography written in 1804 and partly corrected by Canova, Bassano 6022.

⁶ 'Nel mentre che questa Re. Galleria è nel desiderio e lusinga di recuperare, mercè il suo Scalpello, la Venere Medicea e che brama dimostrarsi superiore alla sofferta sommissa col rimpieggiò d'una equivalente opera dall' insigne Sig. Cav. e Canova, io voglio sperare da questo riscontro una fortuna per me, cioè che Ella si decide a maggior gloria della Toscana di produrla in Firenze con aggradire un' amichevole ospizio in mia casa, ciò potendo combinare in quei mesi specialmente che l'aria di Roma non è favorevole alla sua Preziosa Salute . . .' Bassano c.559; draft in Alessandri MSS.

⁷ Uffizi MSS.

⁸ Alessandri's memorandum is in Uffizi MSS; the draft for his letter of 15th February in Alessandri MSS and the letter as sent Bassano C.560.

⁹ Bassano C.561: Canova's reply, 25th February 1803 is in Uffizi MSS.

¹⁰ 'Terminato il lavoro se questo riuscirà degno del Suo aggrèdimento io mi farò coraggio di offerirlo, ed Ella sarà in piena libertà di accordarmi qualunque benigna ricognizione'.

¹¹ Alessandri MSS Benvenuti letters, draft undated but apparently February 1803: 'Fù estremamente gradita da questo Ministero l'accettazione dell' esecuzione del lavoro della Venere gentilmente comunicatomi dal Sig. e Canova . . . In fatti il primo Ministro di Stato Sig. e Cav. e Senator Giulio Mozzi del Garbo mi commissionò di scrivere al Sig. e Canova Lettera di ringraziamento per parte del Rè. Vedo ora giusto col Ministero medesimo che sia corrisposta la provvisata del marmo, e Le spese vive occorrenti a prepararlo senza disborso del Sig. e Canova. Ciò non crederei che dovesse offendere la di Lui somma delicatezza per essere in sostanza un dovere di non caricarlo di tal pensiero'. Alessandri went on to remark on the quality of the marble needed and finally alluded to the price suggesting that in view of the 'forze debolissime di questa Pubblica Finanza hò creduto di proporre circa 2 m. a Zecchini'.

¹² Uffizi MSS ' . . . due mila Zecchini mi pare che anderan benissimo è potran fare onore à chi li da e à chi li riceve: poichè sebbene il Perseo gliela abbia pagato il Papa tremila Zecchini considerando che questo è affatto d'invenzione e che è molto più grande della Venere, mi pare che due mila sia una giusta ricompensa. Credo ancora che egli gradirà più di averli in denaro che in un regalo'.

¹³ Bassano C.562; draft in Alessandri MSS. In a letter to Alessandri, 5th April 1803, Benvenuti states that 'Il gesso della Venere è arrivato felicemente nello studio del Sig. e Canova', Alessandri MSS Benvenuti letters. In a letter to Alessandri 13th April 1803 (Uffizi MSS) Canova stated, however, that one arm was broken.

¹⁴ On 6th March 1803 the Marchese Manfredini wrote to Puccini from Vienna: 'Se Canova supplirà alla perdita ne parleranno i viventi e i posteri, perchè è di certo un uomo sommo', Puccini MSS quoted by A. CHIRI in *Rivista d'Arte* V [1907], p.8.

¹⁵ In his letter to Alessandri of 18th March 1803 (Uffizi MSS) Benvenuti remarked that Canova 'migliorerà molto le braccia che erano un mediocre restauro'. The restoration of the *Medici Venus* had been under discussion some time before its removal from Florence. On 26th April 1796 Leopoldo Cicognara wrote to Puccini: 'E verissimo che le braccia della Venere si potrebbero bramare rimesse da Canova, il suo voto incontrerebbe la pluralità degli amatori e la mia prima d'ogni altra'. It is not known if Canova was approached at this period: his friendship with Cicognara dates from several years later.

¹⁶ See note 22.

¹⁷ Alessandri MSS Benvenuti letters: 'Canova à di già situata il marmo per la Venere e presto mi dice che farà cominciare ad abbozzarlo'.

¹⁸ Alessandri MSS.

¹⁹ Alessandri MSS Benvenuti letters: 'li assicuro che un marmo più bello e sincero non si può dare non vi è una macchia neppure come un vaglio di miglio'.

²⁰ Puccini MSS.

There can be no doubt that the *modello* in question was that for the statue later to be called the *Venere Italica*. And although it has generally been assumed that Canova designed the *Venere Italica* to replace the *Medici Venus* in the Uffizi it is clear that he had no such idea when he executed the *modello*. In a letter to Alessandri of 6th December 1805 Canova remarked that he had originally intended this statue '*di mia invenzione*' for the Vatican Museum but subsequently agreed to execute a marble for the Queen Regent of Etruria to '*accompagnare la Venere Medicea rinnovata*'.²¹ According to a memorandum drawn up by Alessandri in 1812 Canova received this second commission '*viva voce della Regina Reggente*', presumably when he spent a few days in Florence in November 1805.²² But there was no question of substituting the original Venus for the copy at this date. Despite the new commission, work continued on the copy and on 9th June 1806 Alessandri wrote to Canova that Signor Fedi, who had recently returned to Florence from Rome, had spoken to him of the rough-hewn copy of the *Medici Venus*.²³ He went on to say that both the copy and the '*altra bellissima Venere di vostra invenzione*' were awaited '*con tanta premura*'. In his reply, of 14th June, Canova remarked that he would be working on the statues of Venus – '*nelle vostre Veneri*' – in August.²⁴ Next year, on 11th July 1807, Canova again used the plural when he said he was working on the *Veneri*: but after this date only one statue is mentioned, the Venus of Canova's own '*invenzione*'.²⁵ The copy slips silently out of the correspondence to appear again only in memoranda (of 1811 and 1812) concerning the original commission: so we do not know what became of it or even if it was ever finished.

In a brief account of the contents of Canova's studio, written on 19th February 1805, Artaud de Montor mentioned among the works which had not yet been completed, '*une copie de la Vénus de Médicis commandé pour la galerie de Florence*' and also '*une Vénus debout, prise au moment où elle sort du bain*'. The latter, he said, '*n'a aucun rapport avec la Vénus de Médicis*'.²⁶ Later in the same year the German dramatist August von Kotzebue inspected Canova's studio and noted: 'A Venus modestly covering herself with a light robe. It may be said that the artist has to a certain degree imitated the position of the Medicean Venus; but I think his performance in this respect far superior to the latter, for this Venus cannot be charged with that confoundedly stiff position of the arms which the other appears to have learnt from a dancing master'.²⁷ He does not mention whether or not Canova had a patron in mind for this figure. But when in Florence some months earlier, he had noted in his travel diary: 'The pedestal on which the Medici Venus stood is empty; and it is supposed that it can never be occupied again: I think it ought to be assigned to Canova only, and that in a few centuries a statue of his will fill the place with credit'.²⁸

Artaud de Montor and Kotzebue were not the only people who saw and admired the *modello* for the *Venere Italica* in Canova's studio. The young Crown Prince Ludwig of Bavaria appears to have been another. For the Venus now in Munich was commissioned from Canova by Ludwig at some date prior to 1808 when Canova wrote to tell him that he had '*già condotta quasi al suo fine una statua di Venere per far omaggio alla commissione che mi compiacceva ingiungermi*'.²⁹ It is more than probable that this commission had been given in the Spring of 1805 when Ludwig first visited Rome (he was not to go there again until many years later) and struck up a friendship with Canova whom he described as the greatest sculptor in Europe, and as modest as he was great.³⁰

Another marble version of the statue was commissioned from Canova by the Russian diplomat Count Andreas Kyrillovitch Razoumovsky (Beethoven's patron who was ambassador to the court of Vienna from 1792). This commission seems to have been negotiated by the Italo-Russian painter Antonio Vighi who was in Rome from the autumn of 1806 until the summer of 1807.³¹ Yet another version

²¹ Uffizi MSS: 'Avendomi Essa fatto capire che gradirebbe moltissimo che io potessi accompagnare la Venere Medicea rinnovata coll' altra di mia invenzione destinata per Museo Vaticano ed altronde non essendo poter ella contenta di una replica, per servire al suo desiderio gentile, ho fatto molto finora anzi spero di averla già liberata, con aggiustarmi col museo, e quindi farne l'offerta e l'uso da Lei bramato'.

²² This memorandum, drawn up by Alessandri 12th August 1812 when the price to be paid for the *Venere Italica* was under discussion, provides the fullest account of the commission, Bassano C.600 and draft in Alessandri MSS: 'Su tal proposito credo opportuno il repeterle quanto ebbi l'onore di esporle nel mio rapporto dei 29 Agosto 1811, cioè che nell' anno 1803 io d'ordine del Rè Lodovico I trattai con Canova per impegnarlo a fare a questa Galleria una copia della Venere Medicea; ma che l'altra commissione della Venere di propria invenzione Ei l'ebbe direttamente l'anno seguenti di l'va viva voce della Regina Reggente. Ne per la prima, ne per la seconda di tali opere fù stipulato contratto, o pattuito prezzo veruno; e solo per la Copia della Venere Medicea una lettera del Segretario di Stato Mozzi fece sentire in genere a Canova che il Rè era nella determinazione di fargli provare gli effetti della sua Real Munificenza. E bensì a mia notizia che la intenzione del Governo era quella di distinguere il merito di Canova da quello dei comuni Artefici con dei donativi nei quali il prezzo intrinseco della materia andasse congiunto alla onorificenza. In questa veduta infatti io avevo proposto di premiar la Copia della Venere Medicea con tante Medaglie d'oro che contessero il valore di circa 2,000 Zecchini fiorentini, e queste coniate a bella posta col busto dell' Artefice da una parte, e il Simulacro di Venere dall' altra. E quanto alla Statua d'invenzione, meritando essa per la sua originalità maggior premio dell' altra, designava la Regina Reggente di decorar lo Scultore dell' Ordine di S. Stefano, conferendogli una Commenda di un' annua rendita, ed aggiungendo a tale illustrazione il presente di una Croce di brillanti del valore egualmente di circa 2,000 Zecchini fiorentini'. The letter quoted in note 21 suggests, however, that the *viva voce* commission for the original statue of Venus was given to Canova in 1805 and not, as Alessandri implies, 1804. Canova is not known to have visited Florence in 1804 but he stopped there for some days on his journey from Vienna to Rome in November 1805 (letter to T. Roberti, Florence 19th November 1805, Bassano, Roberti MSS. R.374).

²³ Bassano C.572. A letter from Canova to Alessandri, 21st March 1806 reveals that Antonio Fedi was then in Rome (Alessandri MSS).

²⁴ Uffizi MSS. Alessandri wrote to express his pleasure at hearing this news, 26th June (Bassano C.573).

²⁵ Uffizi MSS.

²⁶ T. IUNG: *Lucien Bonaparte et ses mémoires*, Paris [1883], vol. iii, p.58.

²⁷ A. VON KOTZEBUE: *Travels through Italy in the years 1804 and 1805*, London [1806], vol.iii, p.154.

²⁸ *idem*, vol.i, p.161. It is, of course, possible that Kotzebue wrote or re-wrote this passage after seeing the *modello* for the *Venere Italica* in Rome.

²⁹ This is the first of the series of letters from Canova to the Crown Prince, later Ludwig I of Bavaria in the *geheimes Hausarchiv*, Staatsarchiv, Munich, published by A. ZUCCONI in *La Nuova Antologia* [1st October 1941], pp.223–32. The Crown Prince replied from Nymphenburg 2nd July 1808: '*Mi meraviglia che la Venere è vicina di essere finita*', Bassano 1610. His Italian was not fluent at this date and it seems likely that he intended to express delight rather than amazement that the statue was nearly finished.

³⁰ The Crown Prince had been deeply impressed by, and wrote a sonnet about, Canova's *Hebe* in Palazzo Albrizzi, Venice. Writing to his father from Rome in 1805, he described Canova's Marie Christine monument and his group of *Theseus killing the Centaur* but appears to have said nothing of the Venus, cf. A. ZUCCONI: *Lodovico innamorato*, Milan/Rome [1944], pp.19–28.

³¹ Vincenzo Pacetti recorded in his diary that Vighi was in Rome 15th November 1806 and about to leave 4th July 1807 (Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Rome, MSS. 654–5). In a letter to Canova, Vienna 10th August 1807, Vighi remarked that Count Razoumovsky was '*anzioso di posseder presto l'opera che si è compiaciuto prometterle*' (Bassano C.902). And in a later letter



8. Detail from *Venus* illustrated in Fig. 6. Photo. Verwaltung der Staatl. Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Museumsabteilung.



9. Detail from *Venus* illustrated in Fig. 6. Photo. Verwaltung der Staatl. Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Museumsabteilung.



10. Detail from *Venere Italica* illustrated in Fig. 4.



11. *Medici Venus*. c. 200 B.C. Marble; height 153 cm. (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.) Photo. Anderson.



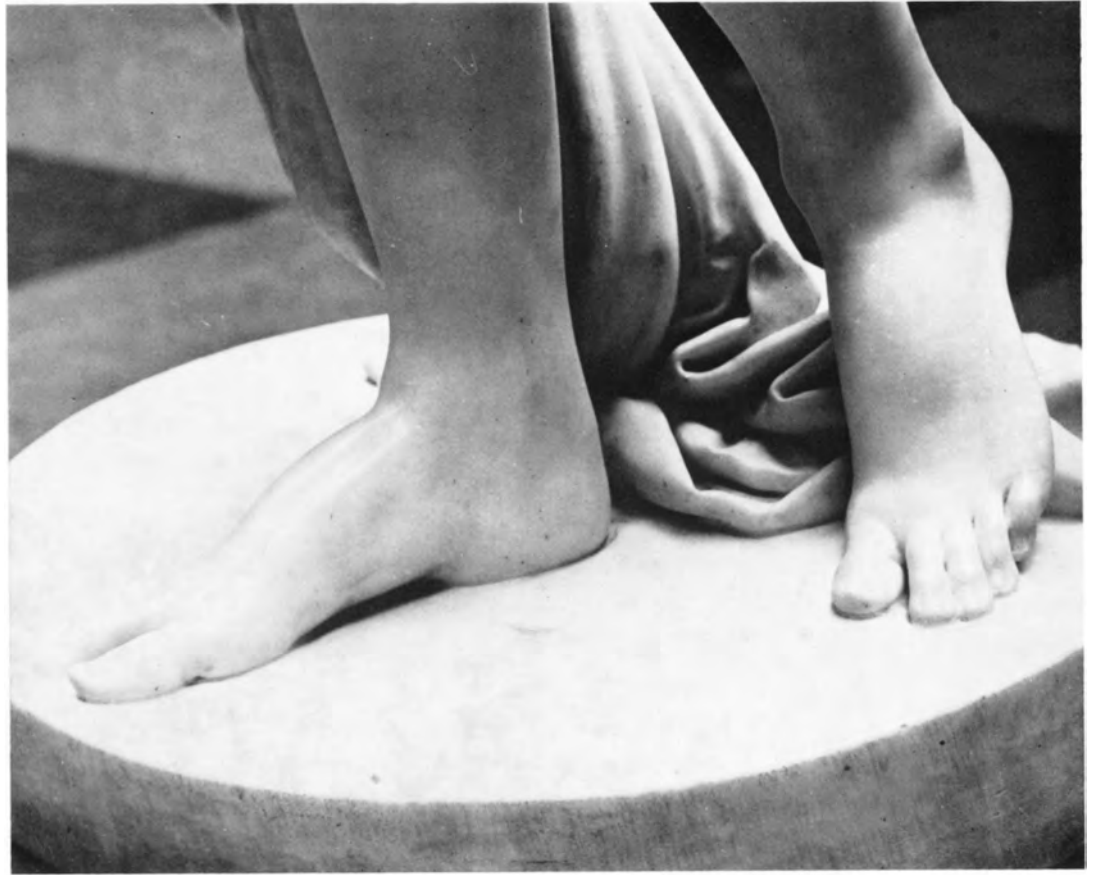
12. *Capitoline Venus*. Roman copy of Greek original, c. 320–280 B.C. Marble; height, 187 cm. (Museo Capitolino, Rome.) Photo. Anderson.



13. *Callipygian Venus*. Roman copy of fourth-century B.C. Greek original. Marble; height, 152 cm. (Museo Nazionale, Naples.)



14. *Venus*, by Antonio Canova. Completed before July 1814. Marble; height with base, 233 cm. (Formerly Lansdowne House, London.)



15. Detail from *Hope Venus* illustrated in Fig. 1.

appears to have been commissioned by the King of Spain before his 'abdication' in May 1808.³²

Writing to Quatremère de Quincy on 21st January 1809 Canova remarked that he had recently finished two Venuses in marble.³³ He did not, however, mention which of the four patrons were to receive them. Two of his patrons, the Queen Regent of Etruria and the King of Spain, had been driven into exile by Napoleon and may well have seemed *hors de combat*. A third, the Crown Prince Ludwig, had as yet paid no advance.³⁴ In any event, no further reference is made to the two finished statues until the summer of the following year when a fifth patron appeared on the scene – Napoleon's brother Lucien, Prince of Canino. On 10th June 1810 Canova drafted a letter to him declaring: '*Io voglio fare ogni sforzo per secondare le Sue graziose premure mettendo a Sua disposizione l'una delle mie Veneri già destinate come Ella sa per altra persona. Il dianzi Re di Spagna e quel Sig. Russo mi accordarono per essa il prezzo di due mila zecchini*'.³⁵ Two days later Lucien replied from Tuscolo that he would be pleased to have '*una delle Veneri che avete terminato*'.³⁶ But on 1st August Lucien set off from Tuscolo intending to go to America – though he was to be captured *en route* and obliged to go to England instead – and it is not known if the statue of Venus was delivered to him before he returned to Italy in 1814.³⁷

On 6th January 1811 Canova wrote to tell the Crown Prince Ludwig that '*la Venere è già condotta al suo termine*'.³⁸ A few days later, on the 11th, he wrote to Alessandri that he was finishing some small tasks '*per essere tranquillo quando lavoro nella vostra Venere*'.³⁹ On 8th April he was able to tell Alessandri: '*La vostra Venere si avvicina al suo termine, e spero di non essere malcontento nemeno io, che ordinariamente voglio essere il meno contentabile degli altri nelle cose proprie*'.⁴⁰ He was

still giving '*l'ultimo mano alla Venere*' on 25th June.⁴¹ This statue, the *Venere Italica*, appears to have been completed by 29th August 1811 when Alessandri wrote an official report on the commission.⁴² Later that year Canova told Alessandri that it was not the first marble carved from the *modello* – '*avevo di già fatto un' altra prima ma nella vostra vi sono molti variazioni ed è migliore*'.⁴³ In other words, the Venus now in Munich was the first and the *Venere Italica* the second statue to be finished.

As we have seen, no formal contract was drawn up when Canova agreed to carve a statue of Venus '*di propria invenzione*' for the Queen Regent of Etruria. In 1807 she abdicated, Tuscany was annexed to France and in 1809 Napoleon's sister Elisa Baciocchi was created Grand Duchess. Although she was as much an admirer of Canova as her brothers and sisters and equally anxious to own works by him, Elisa was reluctant to pay out of her own allowance (which she considered too small) for a statue commissioned by her predecessor for a public gallery. She therefore persuaded Napoleon to pay for the *Venere Italica*. This took time and it was not until 28th February 1812 that Alessandri was able to tell Canova that Napoleon had agreed to pay – '*perchè questa bellissima Opera rimpiazza l'antica Venere Medicea nella I. Galleria di Firenze*'.⁴⁴ Significantly, this is the first occasion on which the *Venere Italica* is mentioned as a 'replacement' for the *Medici Venus*. On 6th March Daru wrote to tell Canova: '*S.M. l'Empereur a bien voulu autoriser l'acquisition de la Statue de Vénus qui avait été demandé pour Florence où elle remplacera celle qui a été envoyé à Paris*'.⁴⁵ Although the question of the price still remained to be settled, Canova sent the *Venere Italica* to Florence on 18th April, remarking that it was going to be placed in '*un posto troppo onorevole*' – in that left vacant by the *Medici*

Moscow, 1st August 1808, he refers to Razoumovsky '*altrevolte della corte di Vienna per il quale Ella ha fatto una Venere, che si compiacque mostrarmene l'abbozzo*' (Bassano C.909). In this letter Vighi mentions Andrea Razoumovsky's elder brother Alexis who also wished to purchase a statue by Canova. On 15th December 1808 Vighi wrote to say that '*Conte Rozomosky*' (sic) agreed to pay 2,000 zecchini '*per una statua di marmo di grandezza naturale di Sua propria mano, ed il soggetto a Sua scelta, la quale sarà certamente degna di Lei*' (Bassano C.905), but this seems to refer to Alexis rather than Andrea Razoumovsky.

³² The king of Spain's commission seems to be mentioned only in Canova's draft for a letter to Prince Lucien Bonaparte quoted below, Bassano C.933.

³³ '*In questo frattempo terminava due Veneri in marmo, e la statua della principessa Paolina sdrajata sopra un sofa*', quoted in A.-C. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY: *Canova et ses ouvrages*, Paris [1834], p.368. The original letter is in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MSS dept. Fonds italiens N.65 f.69.

³⁴ See note 38.

³⁵ Bassano C.933.

³⁶ Bassano C.934.

³⁷ T. IUNG, *op. cit.*, pp.158, 175. Prince Lucien left his collection in deposit with a bank in Rome and, possibly with the intention of selling it, published *Choix de gravures à l'eau forte d'après les peintures originales et les marbres de la galerie de Lucien Bonaparte*, London [1812]. Canova's statue is neither mentioned nor illustrated in that work.

³⁸ A. ZUCCONI [1941], *op. cit.*, p.228. The Crown Prince replied 2nd February 1811 saying that he was arranging to have payments made for the *Venus* (Bassano C.1036) and 18th March apologising for a delay (Bassano C.1037). But it was not until 4th December 1811 that Carli & Cie. of Augsburg wrote to inform Canova that, at the King's request, they had arranged for the Torlonia bank to pay him 4,400 scudi in ten monthly instalments (Bassano C.1038). On the 31st December 1811 Cardinal Aloys Häffelin, Bavarian Minister in Rome, wrote to explain that '*l'ordre et l'économie, qu'on introduit dans les finances de la Bavière sont cause que la somme a été divisée*' (Bassano C.1039).

³⁹ *Uffizi MSS*.

⁴⁰ *Alessandri MSS*.

⁴¹ *Uffizi MSS*. In a letter to Quatremère de Quincy, 8th September 1811 (*ms. cit.* f.99v.) Canova remarked that he was '*terminando alcune statue in marmo che aspettavano la mano mia da tanto tempo. Una Ninfa del Ballo, una Musa, una Venere, e un Paride e tre altre teste di donna ideali . . .*'

⁴² Canova's half-brother who acted as his secretary wrote to Alessandri 19th July 1811 saying that the price for the statue should be 2,000 *Zecchini d'Oro* (*Uffizi MSS*). In an undated note the Intendant de la Couronne en Toscane, Petiet, acknowledged a letter from Alessandri of 29th August 1811, remarking: '*Vous annoncez que cette statue d'invention est terminée et qu'il est disposé à la transporter à Firenze*' (copy, Bassano C.588). In this letter Petiet stated that the Queen Regent had in 1804 given Canova '*l'ordre verbal d'exécuter une Vénus de son invention au lieu de la Copie*'. But Alessandri corrected this statement (though not the date) in his memorandum of 12th August 1812, see note 22.

⁴³ *Alessandri MSS*.

⁴⁴ Draft and Canova's reply of 4th March 1812 in *Uffizi MSS*. It seems probable that the *Venere Italica* was described as a replacement for the *Medici Venus* at this stage in order to persuade Napoleon to pay for it.

⁴⁵ Bassano C.592. The price remained to be settled, however. Canova or Alessandri acting on his behalf, had asked 25,000 francs for the statue and a further 396.62 for transport and installation. Referring to this figure, the duc de Cadore, Intendant Général de la Maison de l'Empereur, 30th March 1812, told Petiet that Vivant Denon who had inspected the statue in Rome and '*fait le plus grand Eloge*' of it said that its price was '*Deux mille sequins*' or 22,000 francs; he was therefore authorised to pay no more than 22,396.62 francs in all (Bassano C.595). Alessandri maintained the demand for 25,000 francs in his memorandum of 12th August 1812. On Denon's advice the price was raised to 23,680 francs (equivalent to 2,000 *zecchini fiorentini*), a compromise was reached and Canova was eventually paid 24,000 francs partly in October 1812 and the rest in May 1813 cf. P. MARMOTTAN: *Les arts en Toscane sous Napoléon*, Paris [1901], pp.71–2; G. HUBERT, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.* G. B. Sartori Canova 19th September 1812 referred to a suggestion that the statue should be sent to Paris: '*Ma strano assai, e meraviglioso, per non dir peggio, è il progetto di far andare a Parigi la Venere . . .*' (*Alessandri MSS*).

Venus.⁴⁶ It arrived in Florence on 29th April.⁴⁷ At first it was displayed on the plinth of the *Medici Venus*, but when Canova reached Florence a few days later he insisted that another pedestal should be found for it.⁴⁸ On 9th May he wrote to Cicognara: '*La Venere è già situata, e generalmente compatita con un entusiasmo pubblico sì lusinghero, che io non avrei mai osato aspettarmi*'.⁴⁹ For although the more notable of Canova's previous works had each been greeted with a chorus of praise he could hardly have anticipated the profusion of poetic tributes issued on this occasion.⁵⁰

It seems probable that Canova had wanted to have the *Venere Italica* safely installed in Florence before he dispatched another *Venus* to her destination.⁵¹ At this point his actions become rather difficult to follow for several letters are missing. In May or June he seems to have written to Razoumovsky. The letter is lost but its contents may be guessed from the reply, of 4th July 1812, in which Razoumovsky said he was surprised to learn that Canova had disposed of his statue to someone else and he would prefer to have one of another subject rather than a repetition.⁵² On 1st July

⁴⁶ Bassano Roberti MSS R.519. On 19th April Canova wrote to tell Alessandri of the statue's departure from Rome (*Uffizi MSS*).

⁴⁷ Note from Petiet, *Uffizi MSS*.

⁴⁸ Canova wrote to D'Este from Florence: '*Mercoledì s'incominciò a far vedere la Venere a parecchi artisti . . . io non ho voluto che sia collocata sopra il piedestallo della Venere de' Medici, nè in quel posto, ma in altro; ho troppo rispetto per quel singolare antico monumento, ammirabile, non imitabile*' (A. D'ESTE, *op. cit.*, p.184). Giovanni Rosini who had been in Florence when the *Venere Italica* was installed, later recalled (*Saggio sulla vita e sulle opere di Antonio Canova*, Pisa [1825], p.56): '*Posto sul piedestallo dell' antica, fu visitata da ogni ordine di persone, e col nome d'ITALICA salutata dalla pubblica voce . . . Poco dopo, venuto in Firenze l'Artefice, mentre raccoglieva i meritati tributi di ammirazione, faceva togliere con amichevole, ma ferma volontà, la sua Venere dal luogo, e dal piedestallo della Greca*'. On 9th June Pietro Giordani wrote to Cicognara that the *Venere Italica* had been placed in the Tribuna of the Uffizi but it had been impossible to overcome '*la modestia di Canova a collocarla sulla base della greca*' (P. GIORDANI: *Epistolario* (ed. A. Gussali), Milan [1854-5], vol.ii, p.301). A note dated 14th May 1812 in *Uffizi MSS* records that the base formerly used as a support for the *Faun* in the Tribuna was adapted to serve '*ad uso della nuova Venere di Canova*'. It was provided with a turntable which enabled the statue to be rotated and admired from every possible angle. Most visitors to the gallery assumed, however, that the *Venere Italica* had in every way replaced the *Medici Venus*. Thus Samuel Rogers describing the Tribuna in his diary: '& now in the place of the Venus, Venus by Canova' (J. R. HALE: *The Italian Journal of Samuel Rogers*, London [1956], p.199).

⁴⁹ V. MALAMANI: *Un' amicizia di Antonio Canova*, Città di Castello [1890], p.8.

⁵⁰ The verses were published in a volume: *Per la Venere Italica scolpita da Antonio Canova: Versi d'autori Toscani*, Pisa [1812]. The later history of the statue can be briefly summarized. Alessandri, 18th March 1815, told Canova that the newly restored Grand Duke wished to have it transferred to Palazzo Pitti (*Bassano* 1319). This suggestion was made again after Canova had secured the return of the *Medici Venus* from Paris, but Canova told Alessandri, 27th February 1816, that he would prefer to have his statue placed '*nella camera della scuola Veneziana, si perchè io appartengo a quella Nazione, come pure perchè mi pare che avesse un buon lume, e certamente poi sarebbe egualmente in vista di tutti quelli che vengono in Galleria*'. (*Cinque lettere pubblicate da Giuseppe Fasoli*, Bassano [1876], p.14). It was, however, moved to Palazzo Pitti where it has remained ever since. As Napoleon had paid for the work the French authorities attempted to claim the *Venere Italica* for the Louvre in 1821 and 1827, cf. F. BOYER, *op. cit.* and G. HUBERT, *op. cit.* Boyer quotes a letter of 1827 from the vicomte de La Rochefoucauld: '*. . . La statue fut transportée à Florence et placée dans la salle où se trouvait autrefois la Venus Antique; mais ce n'étaient qu'un simple dépôt, il avait été arrêté que la statue ne serait payée qu'à condition qu'elle serait envoyée à Paris et qu'elle ferait partie de l'exposition de 1812 . . .*' cf. my note 45 above.

⁵¹ Canova told Quatremère de Quincy, 11th February 1812: '*in questi giorni ho fatto in marmo la seconda Venere*' (A.-C. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, *op. cit.*, p.383). It is difficult to judge the significance of this remark and especially of the word '*seconda*'. It may indicate that Canova had executed some further work on one of the statues declared to be finished in 1809. Alternatively, he may not have been counting the first marble carved from the *modello* and thus referred to the statue which he later sold to Prince Lucien.

⁵² Bassano C.909, Canova subsequently sold to Razoumovsky his *Dancer* with her hands in the air, apparently finished in 1815.

Canova wrote to the Crown Prince Ludwig suggesting that instead of sending him the *Venus* which had been finished two years previously, but kept covered up for the past year, he should carve a new statue for him making certain improvements '*come suole accadermi in ogni ultimo lavoro, anche al giudizio altrui*'.⁵³ But the Crown Prince wanted the statue that was already finished, and it was handed over to his agent in Rome in October.⁵⁴ Canova also completed a third *Venus* which was in the possession of Lucien Bonaparte by mid-July 1814.⁵⁵

Thus, by the end of the Napoleonic wars Canova had executed three statues of *Venus* from the same *modello* – the *Venere Italica* now in Palazzo Pitti, Florence, the *Venus* in the Residenzmuseum, Munich, and Prince Lucien's *Venus* now known only from a photograph. The Munich *Venus* was finished first, in 1810, the *Venere Italica* was finished by the summer of 1811, and Prince Lucien's *Venus* seems to have been finished later though it may well have been begun by 1811. Comparison shows small variations between all three statues, in the treatment of the drapery, the hair (especially the stray locks on the forehead, temples and neck) and, in a way that can hardly be defined – the expression (Figs.4, 6, 14). The Munich *Venus* differs from the other two in the corkscrew locks (Figs.8, 9). But the most striking difference is in the arrangement of the drapery between the feet: on the *Venere Italica* it seems to vanish into the plinth (Fig.5) while on the other two it is bunched into folds terminating by the big-toe of the left foot. This tempts one to suggest that the Munich statue and Prince Lucien's were related and that Canova worked on them at the same time even though the former was finished before and the latter appears not to have been completed until after the *Venere Italica*. It is, however, clear that these three statues should properly be described not as one original and two copies but as three works carved from the same *modello* – and it is very unfortunate that in this case the *modello* has not been preserved.

A mysterious Mr Standish now comes on the scene. Probably in 1815 or 1816 he commissioned a *Venus* from Canova. And thus, before the end of 1816 a fourth marble

⁵³ A. ZUCCONI [1941], *op. cit.*, p.229.

⁵⁴ *idem*, p.230. G. DILLIS, Munich, 14th March 1813 told Canova that the *Venus* had arrived '*sana et intatta*' (*Bassano* 3113). Although the statue was included in the catalogue of a sale of works of art belonging to the King of Bavaria 5th December 1826 (G. HUBERT, *op. cit.*, p.136) it appears to have remained in Munich. It has been shown in the Glyptothek, the Residenz, and for a while was in a niche in the park at Nymphenburg but returned to the Residenz after the last war (information kindly supplied by Dr Manfred F. Fischer).

⁵⁵ V. PACETTI, *op. cit.*, noted 18th July 1814: '*mi ha mandato a chiamare Luciano Bonaparte il quale ha voluto che gli collochi la statua della Venere di Canova nella Galleria, e gli è messa in buona situazione*'. After the Restoration Prince Lucien sold the statue to Lord Lansdowne. On 28th November 1816 C. Boyer wrote to Canova saying that D'Este could collect it whenever convenient (*Bassano* 2416). Lord Lansdowne asked Canova to have it sent to England and it was installed in Lansdowne House, London, before 1st May 1819 when B. R. Haydon referred to it in a letter to Canova (*Bassano* 1569). A print and description of it were published by T. K. HERVEY: *Illustrations of Modern Sculpture*, London [1832], vol.i (pages unnumbered). The statue, together with a receipt for the purchase price signed by Prince Lucien's agent C. Boyer and a bill of lading, was sold with other marbles from Lansdowne House by Messrs Christie, 5th March 1930 lot 120. The purchaser's name is given as 'Permain' in the marked copy of the catalogue in the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

had been roughed out from the *modello*. But Thomas Hope who was in Rome from early December 1816 until mid-April 1817 intervened and persuaded Canova to finish it for him.⁵⁶ In a note to Canova dated 15th April 1817 Hope announced his imminent departure from Rome, remarking 'Il prend la liberté de lui recommander le plus précieux des objets qu'il y laisse – sa Vénus'.⁵⁷ Nearly two years later, on 13th January 1819, Canova wrote to Hope offering him, in place of the statue commissioned by Mr Standish, a new statue of the same subject which had already been begun in marble.⁵⁸ Hope accepted this offer and on 6th June 1820 Canova drafted a letter informing him that this statue was finished but asking if he might keep it on display in his studio during the coming winter. He remarked that the price was the same as that agreed for the other statue, 2,000 *zecchini* (or 4,400 *scudi romani*) and Hope promptly instructed the Torlonia bank to pay him that sum.⁵⁹ The statue was shipped after the end of August 1821.⁶⁰ On 12th January 1822 Hope wrote to Canova from York to say that he had learned of the arrival of the *Déesse* in London.⁶¹ He wrote

again, from London, on 11th March expressing his delight with the work, 'plus précieux, plus achevé même que celui dont j'avais obtenu la promesse'.⁶² It was placed in Hope's house in Duchess Street. Lady William Bentinck saw it there and playfully wrote to Canova comparing it with Prince Lucien's statue which had by then been acquired by Lord Lansdowne and was also in London: 'I perceive you have given her less drapery . . . & knowing your dislike of those necessary &c &c I only wonder that you should have condescended to give her any at all'.⁶³ On 21st July 1822 Sir Thomas Lawrence remarked in a letter to Canova: 'I have seen your beautiful statue for Mr Hope which of course is placed in the best situation that his Gallery presents'.⁶⁴ The statue remained in the possession of Thomas Hope's heirs until 1917 when it was acquired by Colonel (later Lord) Brotherton whose niece gave it to the Leeds City Art Gallery in 1959.⁶⁵

So much for the documented history of the four Venuses.⁶⁶ What of their artistic conception? Unfortunately no *bozzetti* appear to have survived. The handful of drawings that have been connected with the statues tell us little about the development of Canova's ideas and the majority of them may easily have been executed after the *modello* was finished rather than as preliminary studies.⁶⁷ Nor can we learn more from Canova's previous representations of Venus in two sculptured groups and two oil paintings which were

⁵⁶ For the relationship between Canova and Thomas Hope see s. BAUMGARTEN: *Le crépuscule néo-classique: Thomas Hope*, Paris [1958] with full transcripts of Hope's letters to Canova pp.241–3. On this topic nothing is added by D. WATKIN: *Thomas Hope and the Neo-Classical Idea*, London [1968]. It is probable that Canova and Hope first met in 1795 or 1796 when the latter was in Rome with his brothers Adrian Ellis and Henry Philip. On 11th March 1798 Henry Philip Hope agreed to buy Canova's *Cupid and Psyche* (standing version) but was unable to do so as he was obliged to leave Italy on account of the Revolution (*Bassano* C.178 and 6022). Thomas Hope was back in Rome and Naples in 1802–3. A letter he wrote, Naples 24th December 1802 (transcript in S. Baumgarten p.239), is assumed by both Baumgarten and Watkin to have been addressed to Canova; but as it begins 'Monsieur le Marquis' and refers to Mme la Marquise it was certainly not written to Canova who was not created a Marchese until 1816 and never married (the recipient may have been the Marchese Torlonia). The letter refers to some affair which concerned Canova but which remains obscure, possibly the export of antiquities which the Hope brothers had purchased from D'Este and Pierantoni in 1796 and were finally exported in 1803 (cf. A. BERLOTTI in F. GORI: *Archivio storico artistico*, Rome [1877], p.88). It was probably at this time that Canova offered a cast of his *Perseus* (completed 1801) to Thomas Hope who refused it (C. F. BELL: *Annals of Thomas Banks*, Cambridge [1938], p.62 quoting letter from Hope of 22nd April 1805; Watkin dates the offer c.1800 but without documentation). When Canova was in London 2nd November to 7th December 1815 he visited Hope's house in Duchess Street, noting 'bellissimi vasi etruschi, bellissimi quadri di parecchie maestri', Flaxman's group of *Aurora and Cephalus* as well as a number of antiques including the heroic scale *Minerva* found at Ostia by Fagan and an *Apollo and Hyacinth* restored by D'Este. He also remarked: 'Gli mobili di questa casa sono di disegno del padrone Sig. Hope' (*Bassano* 6089). WATKIN (p.239) states erroneously that Canova visited Hope's house with Flaxman in 1819 (a misreading of HENRY CRABB ROBINSON: *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence*, ed. T. Sadler, London [1869], vol.ii, p.133): Canova was in London only in 1815.

⁵⁷ *Bassano* C.1153, s. BAUMGARTEN, *op. cit.*, p.241. Hope was in Rome by 7th December 1816 when Canova remarked that he had sold a copy of Cicognara's *Storia della scultura 'all' Inglese Hope'* (v. MALAMANI: *Un' amicizia . . .*, p.72).

⁵⁸ Canova's letter is lost but Hope resumes its contents in his reply 15th February 1819 (*Bassano* C.1154, s. BAUMGARTEN, *op. cit.*, p.241). Watkin tentatively identifies 'M. Standish' with Charles Townley-Standish.

⁵⁹ In his draft (*Bassano* C.1156) Canova wrote: 'La Statua della Venere che Ella mi commise d'eseguire è oramai intieramente finita in marmo, e sta al mio studio a di Lei disposizione. Vorrei solamente pregarla che non sul finir del venturo inverno . . .' Hope's reply (*Bassano* C.1157, s. BAUMGARTEN, *op. cit.*, p.242) reveals that in making a fair copy of this letter Canova or a secretary rephrased it and omitted a negative.

⁶⁰ On 24th August 1821 Canova told Lord Cawdor: 'La Venere per il Sig. Tom. Hope dovrà partire fra poco tempo per Londra, e sarò lieto d'intendere il di Lei savio parere sul merito di questa figura eseguita da un nuovo modello' (Cawdor papers quoted by Courtesy of the Earl of Cawdor and kindly brought to my attention by Mr John Kenworthy-Browne).

⁶¹ *Bassano* 3505, s. BAUMGARTEN, *op. cit.*, pp.242–3. Hope dated the letter 12th January 1821 but this is clearly a slip of the pen; it is post-marked 1822.

⁶² *Bassano* 3506, s. BAUMGARTEN, *op. cit.*, p.243.

⁶³ *Bassano* 1352, dated '4th March'.

⁶⁴ *Bassano* 3601; for Canova's reply see D. E. WILLIAMS: *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Thomas Lawrence*, London [1831], vol.ii, p.30.

⁶⁵ The statue was sold at The Deepdene, July/August 1917 sale No. 90, lot 268 and bought by Colonel (later Lord) Brotherton who bequeathed it to his niece Mrs D. U. McGrigor Phillips who presented it to the Leeds City Art Gallery in 1959.

⁶⁶ L. CICOGNARA, *op. cit.*, p.70 in his list of works left unfinished at Canova's death mentions among the 'Opere in marmo, alle quali lo scultore stava ancora lavorando' a 'Statua di Venere, ripetizione con variazioni da quella di Firenze. L'autore vi ha lavorato moltissimo'; and among the 'opere in marmo avanzate, alle quali lo scultore non aveva per anche posta l'ultima mano' a 'Statua di Venere, ripetizione di quella di Firenze'. It is tempting to identify the former with the statue commissioned by Mr Standish which Thomas Hope had intended to buy. But I have not been able to discover what became of either of these unfinished works. A very large number of copies of the *Venere Italica* are known and some of these may have been executed in Canova's life-time though not in his studio (see my article in THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE CXIV [1972], p.226). The Pisani brothers of Florence wrote to Canova 7th June 1814 asking if they could buy the 'modello in gesso' of the *Venere Italica* (*Bassano* 4314). A. TADOLINI: *Ricordi autobiografici* ed. G. Tadolini, Rome [1900], p.217. records that he executed 1845–7 'Una piccola Venere, copia di quella del Canova, di palmi 3, per scudi 85. Altre tre copie di questa Venere fatte col trasporto per luigi 80'. Copies of the *Hope Venus* are less common. Thomas Hope himself is said to have had one executed by Bartolini (D. WATKIN, *op. cit.*, p.39). A copy of good quality, said to have come from the collection of the Duchess of Marlborough 1912, in the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., is inscribed: A.CANOVA.I. Mrs P. S. Newton has kindly informed me of another copy in a private collection in Guatemala.

⁶⁷ The following drawings are associated with the *Venere Italica* by E. BASSI: *Il Museo Civico di Bassano: I disegni di Antonio Canova*, Venice [1959] – E.a.34.947, back of female figure in pose similar to *Venere Italica* and possibly a preliminary study; E.b.163.1174, free sketch of a nude woman holding drapery in her hands, a study from life not necessarily connected with the *Venere Italica*; E.c.155.1354, head of a woman similar to *Venere Italica*; F.3.14.1522, nude woman in profile, a study from life but in a sketchbook which Canova may have been using when he modelled the *Venere Italica* (one page is dated 1806); F.3.17.1525, front view of nude woman in the same sketchbook. H. OST: *Ein Skizzenbuch Antonios Canovas*, Tübingen [1970], pp.25–6, implausibly suggests that a drawing in Canova's sketchbook in Biblioteca Comunale, Cagliari (f.34) is a preliminary study for the *Venere Italica* but does not note its connection with *Bassano* E.b.163.1174. He also suggests that Canova was inspired by the statue of Venus in Watteau's *Plaisirs d'amour* (Dresden), but this seems unlikely to me.

supposed to be 'Titianesque'.⁶⁸ And, according to Rosini, Canova refused to say anything 'della sua intenzione' in carving the *Venere Italica*.⁶⁹

There can be little doubt that Canova modelled his *Venere Italica* as a direct result of beginning work on a copy of the *Medici Venus*, even though he had originally intended it for the Vatican Museum, and not for Florence. He had not at that date been commissioned to execute a statue of his own invention for Florence and can hardly have foreseen that the work he began for the Vatican would one day stand in the centre of the Tribuna of the Uffizi. As we have seen, the copy he was asked to make of the *Medici Venus* was to embody certain 'corrections' to the work as it had been restored in the seventeenth century. And it seems likely that when he examined closely the plaster cast which Alessandri sent him from Florence he realized that the restorers had made more mistakes than the archaeologists had recognized – mistakes not only in the arms which they added but also in piecing together other parts of the statue. He probably appreciated that the turn of the head which distinguishes her from all other antique Venuses was the result of inept restoration.⁷⁰ That he should have doubted his ability to produce a reconstruction that would satisfy his own standards and win the approval of those familiar with the *Medici Venus* is hardly surprising. And it is highly characteristic of his general attitude that he should have abandoned the replica or reconstruction he had begun in favour of a wholly original work inspired by but not copied after the Antique.

The *Medici Venus* (Fig. 11) is now generally believed to be a copy of a post-Praxitelean bronze statue which probably dated from about 200 B.C. To modern eyes it seems little, if at all, superior to many other statues of the same period and distinctly inferior to several earlier representations of Aphrodite. But from the time of its arrival in Florence in 1677 until well into the nineteenth century it was regarded as a standard of perfection in sculpture. Most of those who commented on it in the eighteenth century stressed the beauty of the material – the Parian marble is indeed outstanding both for its colour and texture – and, more surprisingly, the voluptuousness of the form. 'It has such a Fleishy softness, one would think it would yield to the touch', wrote Jonathan Richardson. 'It has such a Beauty and Delicacy; such a Lightness, 'tis such a *Leggiadra* figure'.⁷¹ In 1764 Gibbon described in his travel diary the sensation of seeing for the first time the statue which he knew so well from prints and copies: '*C'est la sensation la plus voluptueuse que mon oeil ait jamais éprouvé. Les contours les plus moelleux, les*

plus elegans, une rondeur douce et pleine, la molesse de la chair communiquée au marbre, et la fermeté qu'on desire encore dans cette chair exprimée sans dureté'.⁷² Even Winckelmann who generally had few metaphors to spare for female statues, selected one to suggest the sensuous appeal of the *Medici Venus*, likening her to a rose-bud opening its petals at sunrise. He remarked that the statue represented a girl at the age when the breasts have just begun to swell, and said that he saw her as *Lais* standing before *Apelles* who was to instruct her in the art of love.⁷³

Most visitors to Florence supposed the *Medici Venus* to be above criticism. But there were some exceptions. Despite his praise for the statue as a whole, Jonathan Richardson noted 'the Head is something too little for the Body, especially for the Hips and Thighs', also commenting on the 'Fingers excessively long and taper'. Edward Wright and C. N. Cochin both recognized that the fore-arms were restorations, though this was not acknowledged at the time by the authorities at the Uffizi.⁷⁴ That Smollett should have sung out of tune with the chorus of praise is only to be expected. 'It may be want of taste that prevents my feeling that enthusiastic admiration with which others are inspired at sight of this statue', he wrote in 1765. 'I cannot help thinking that there is no beauty in the features of Venus; and that the attitude is awkward and out of character'.⁷⁵ The Earl Bishop of Bristol and Derry may have been joking when, in 1794, he suggested that Canova should execute a statue of Apollo without the defects of the *Apollo Belvedere* or a Venus without the faults of the *Medici Venus* which he characterised as '*détestable – l'attitude d'une Coquette ou d'une Putain*'.⁷⁶ Yet Kotzebue was seriously comparing Canova's *modello* for the *Venere Italica* with the *Medici Venus* when he complained of the latter's 'confoundedly stiff position of the arms'.⁷⁷ And one may wonder whether others had not also noticed but hesitated to record the rigidity of pose which strikes the modern eye.

In executing his *modello* Canova seems to have been anxious to create an entirely new image of Venus, differing from the *Medici* statue as much as the conventions for representing the goddess would permit. He repeated the side-ways turn of the head; indeed this seems almost to have determined the pose of the figure (unlike the *Medici*

poetic description of the *Medici Venus* is in JAMES THOMSON: *Liberty* bk.iv, lines 175–83:

The queen of love arose, as from the deep
She sprung in all the melting pomp of charms.
Bashful she bends, her well-taught look aside
Turns in enchanting guise, where dubious mix
Vain conscious beauty, a dissembled sense
Of modest shame, and slippery looks of love.
The gazer grows enamour'd, and the stone,
As if exulting in its conquest, smiles.

⁷² G. A. BONNARD (ed.): *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome*, London [1961], p.179. For his later and more famous account of the statue see J. MURRAY (ed.): *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, London [1896], p.267.

⁷³ J. WINCKELMANN: *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Dresden [1764], p.164. A later German writer, the mysterious author of *Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura* of 1804–5 characteristically described the statue's posterior '*als den bekanntlich gelungenstein Kunstteil dieser Göttin*' (dreizehnte Nachtwache).

⁷⁴ E. WRIGHT: *Some Observations Made in Travelling through France, Italy, &c. in the years MDCCXX, MDCCXXI and MDCCXXII*, London [1764], p.406; C. N. COCHIN: *Voyage d'Italie*, Paris [1758], vol.ii, p.36.

⁷⁵ T. SMOLLETT: *Travels through France and Italy*, London [1778], Vol.ii, p.91.

⁷⁶ In a letter to Canova, Turin 25th March 1794, *Bassano* 1391.

⁷⁷ A. VON KOTZEBUE, *op. cit.*, vol.iii, p.154.

⁶⁸ A group of *Venus crowning Adonis* modelled in clay in 1789 (Gipsoteca di Possagno) but never carved in marble; a group of *Venus and Adonis* begun 12th July 1789 and finished in marble shortly before 30th September 1794 (now Villa La Grange, Geneva). The two oil paintings represent reclining Venuses, cf. E. BASSI: *La Gipsoteca . . .*, pp.53–4.

⁶⁹ Giovanni Rosini referring to the preface he supplied for the volume of poetic tributes to the *Venere Italica* wrote in a letter to Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi, 6th November 1812 (Biblioteca Nazionale Florence, Cart. Var 450.6) '*Canova nulla ha voluto dire della sua intenzione, ed è convenuto indovinarla*'.

⁷⁰ For a statue apparently derived from the same Hellenistic prototype as the *Medici Venus* but with the head in the original position see C. ALEXANDER in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, XL [1952–3], pp.241–51. For the *Medici Venus* see G. A. MANSUELLI: *Galleria degli Uffizi, Le sculture*, vol.i, Rome [1958], pp.69–73.

⁷¹ J. RICHARDSON: *An Account of Some of the Statues . . .*, London [1722], p.55. A

Venus) and may well have been Canova's point of departure. He used the canonical scale of female proportions derived partly from the *Medici Venus*, but by giving the body a slight stoop he adroitly avoided the impression that the head is too small for the trunk – and also smoothed the motion of the turned head from an abrupt to a gentle movement. Otherwise he departed radically from the *Medici Venus*. His statue is appreciably taller – 172 cm. as against 153 cm. high – and thus closer to the natural height of a girl of 17 or 18 years. He reversed the stance not only of the *Medici Venus* but of nearly all the other antique statues of Venus he could have known, bending the left knee rather than the right and, in accordance with the rules of contrapposto, placing the left hand above the right. The coiffure he adopted is closer to that of the *Capitoline Venus* or the *Callipygian Venus* in Naples (Figs. 12, 13). And, of course, he introduced the drapery which his figure clutches to her breast.

This drapery is alone enough to indicate that Canova's statue differs from the *Medici Venus* in subject as well as pose. The dolphin at the feet of the *Medici* statue reveals that she represents Venus coming ashore after her birth – Aphrodite Anadyomene. Canova's statue was originally described as '*Venere ch' esce dal bagno*'.⁷⁸ There were several antique precedents for this subject, most notably the *Capitoline Venus* who stands beside an urn over which a fringed bath-towel is draped. That statue is, however, as nude as the *Medici Venus*. For a partly draped figure Canova could have found another antique exemplar in the *Callipygian Venus* – a model not infrequently imitated by eighteenth-century artists. But, characteristically, Canova departed from the spirit of this statue by showing his figure partly covering rather than partly displaying her nakedness. The *Callipygian Venus* may also have influenced Canova in providing a precedent for the use of drapery as a structural support for the figure (in place of the urn of the *Capitoline Venus* and the dolphin of the *Medici Venus*); though he was careful to avoid the solidity of her almost columnar robe. Far from seeking to imitate the *Medici Venus* or, indeed, any other antique statue, Canova clearly aimed at creating a wholly original figure – a '*Venere di propria invenzione*'. One may wonder whether he did not drape his figure partly to stress this.

The encomiums which greeted the appearance of the *Venere Italica* in Florence and, still more, the number of commissions he received for other marbles carved from the same *modello*, testify to its contemporary success. But he appears to have remained somewhat unsatisfied with it. In the summer of 1812, only a few months after the *Venere Italica* had been placed in the Uffizi, he offered, as we have already seen, to carve an 'improved' version of the statue for the Crown Prince Ludwig. And before the beginning of 1819 he had executed the entirely new *modello* from which the *Hope Venus* was carved.

Several contemporaries commented on the way in which the *Hope Venus* differs from the *Venere Italica*. The reasons they advanced to explain Canova's intentions in executing

this new Venus are of interest even though they tell us as much or more about their attitudes than about his artistic practice. Thus, the severely classical theorist, Quatremère de Quincy, attributed the change to criticism of the earlier work. '*Sans doute, on en couviendra, l'action matérielle de sortir d'un bain, sollicite fort naturellement l'action matérielle aussi d'étrancher l'humidité*', he wrote of the *Venere Italica*. '*Mais alors on voudroit que la noblesse des traits caractéristiques d'une déesse n'impliquissent pas, pour un gout délicat, une contradiction trop évidente, entre l'élévation de la personne, et l'action, ou la position commune et vulgaire dans laquelle on la fait voir*'.⁷⁹ It was, he assumed, to avoid this conflict between divine status and merely mortal needs that Canova decided to represent Venus in a different attitude. In fact, the *Venere Italica* does not appear to be drying herself so much as concealing her nudity. But, as Quatremère suggests, Canova may well have been aware of this criticism.

Adamo Tadolini, who worked as an assistant in Canova's studio from 1814, provides a strikingly different explanation, telling a story which reads like a sequence from a bad costume film. It concerns a remarkably beautiful girl whom he introduced to Canova. She agreed to pose for him, but when she was asked to undress in his studio and had partly taken off her clothes was suddenly overcome by shyness – perhaps because Canova's half-brother, the *abbate*, was also in the room – and clutched her shift to her breast. Canova told her to stay still and made a small sketch '*e da quella idea ricavò l'anno dopo un'altra Venere, acquistata da Mister Hope inglese*'.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, the action described is not that of the *Hope Venus* but of the *Venere Italica* which Canova began many years before Tadolini arrived in Rome. Antonio D'Este and Missirini, who were much closer to Canova, provide an explanation for the change which is more plausible if also more prosaic – that he was ashamed of repeating himself. According to Missirini he was more satisfied with the *Hope Venus* than with the earlier statues, having found '*un migliore ovale ne' fianchi, una fisionomia più spirituale, ed un atto nelle gambe più giusto*'.⁸¹

The re-arrangement of the drapery and the placing of the hands in the conventional pudic attitude bring the *Hope Venus* much closer to the *Medici Venus* (though the pose is again reversed). In addition to removing the drapery from the breast, he was much bolder in cutting away the folds which form a structural support for the statue. He omitted the casket (see Fig. 10), and evolved for the drapery lying on the base a more satisfactory arrangement than in his earlier statues (Fig. 15). He repeated the turn of the head but gave it a much simpler and tighter coiffure. Missirini remarks that he worked on the marble of the *Hope Venus* with '*amore ed ispirazione*'. And it is instructive to see how he improved on his gesso *modello* not only by varying details and drapery but also in the subtler modelling of the flesh, especially on the buttocks and back (Fig. 16, 17, 18). Comparison between the *modello* and the marble shows, indeed, how he strove after the '*vera carne*' that he so much admired in antique statues.

⁷⁸ A.-C. QUATREMÈRE DE QUINCY, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁸⁰ A. TADOLINI, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁸¹ M. MISSIRINI, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 184; A. D'ESTE, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

⁷⁸ *Catalogo cronologico delle sculture di Antonio Canova*, Rome [1817], p. 11.

In his statues of Venus, Canova expressed his ideal of feminine beauty. Inevitably it is an ideal which differs as much from that prevalent in the Hellenistic world of the *Medici Venus* as from that of our own times. The difference is psychological no less than physical. The shy modesty of the *Venere Italica*, which now seems precariously close to coyness, was a quality much admired in Canova's time. 'I have a respect for women', wrote Delacroix in his journal in 1822. 'However depraved I may think them, I blush when I wound that modesty which, in outward appearance at least, ought never to desert them'.⁸² Of course, modesty was also erotically stimulating.

There can be no doubt that the *Venere Italica* exerted considerable erotic appeal, enhanced by the modest gesture, the drapery and the slightly lofty turn of the head. A few months after the statue was put on show in the Uffizi, Ugo Foscolo wrote: '*Ma quando vidi questa divinità del Canova, me le sono subito seduto vicino . . . ho sospirato con mille desiderii, e con mille rimembranze nell' anima: in somma, se la Venere de' Medici è bellissima dea, questa è bellissima donna*'.⁸³ The distinction between goddess and woman was one that was to be

⁸² A. JOUBIN (ed.): *Journal de Eugène Delacroix*, Paris [1932], vol. i, p. 12 (13th September 1822).

⁸³ U. FOSCOLO: *Epistolario*, 15th October, 1812 quoted by A. GONZALEZ PALACIOS: *Canova*, Milan [1966], p. 7.

made by many later writers who compared the two statues, usually to Canova's disadvantage. Leigh Hunt, while complaining of the comparative slenderness of the *Venere Italica*, wrote: 'Venus, above all goddesses, ought to be a woman; whereas the statue of Canova, with its straight sides and Frenchified head of hair, is the image (if of anything at all) of Fashion affecting Modesty'.⁸⁴ It was the distinctly human quality of the statue that appealed, however, to Heinrich Heine. In *Die Bäder von Lucca* the narrator declares that he often thought of '*die Venus des grossen Canova*' and dreamed that she slowly came to life, whispering to him, as she lay in his arms. And, as we have seen, the statue represented an ideal of feminine beauty for Balzac.

It is unlikely that Canova had intended his statue to stimulate emotions such as those experienced by Heine. That it could and did arouse them he would have thought a blemish: and hence the greater nudity and conventional gesture which serve to separate the *Hope Venus* from the mortal world. For whereas the *Venere Italica* seems to be stepping out of her Grecian bath into the world of *Liaisons dangereuses* – and is all the more appealing for that – the *Hope Venus* is essentially a pedestalled goddess, an image of the remote and unattainable, a symbol of yearning for an ideal which can never be satisfied.

⁸⁴ LEIGH HUNT: *Autobiography*, London [1860], p. 374.

ALLAN BRAHAM

Charles de Wailly and Early Neo-Classicism*

OF the many general terms used to distinguish periods and styles in the history of art, the word Neo-classical may be unavoidable, but it is one of the least satisfactory. It imposes a simple preconception upon an epoch that was, above all in France, a time of intellectual revolution, when preconceptions held for centuries were themselves overturned. The complexity of the period is at once apparent in the works of art it produced. The long history of the Renaissance may have arisen in Florence in the early fifteenth century in an orderly manner, but it drew towards its end in France in the eighteenth century in no such convenient way. The more extreme work of Bouchardon stands in relative isolation at the beginning of the century, while the revolution in painting secured by David brings the century to its close;

* The present paper is the text of a public lecture given at the Courtauld Institute in May 1972. I should like here gratefully to acknowledge the help and advice I have received from many quarters in considering the work of de Wailly, especially from M. Michel Gallet of the Musée Carnavalet, Mme W. Bouleau Rabaud of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, M. Robert Vassas in his capacity as architect of the Théâtre de l'Odéon, Mlle Nicole Villa of the Bibliothèque Nationale and Mme Chevalley, Librarian of the Comédie Française; in Leningrad I have enjoyed the kind assistance of Mme A. Voronikhine, and in Dijon the valuable help of M. Yves Beauvalot, and of M. J.-C. Garretta and M. Gras of the Bibliothèque Publique.

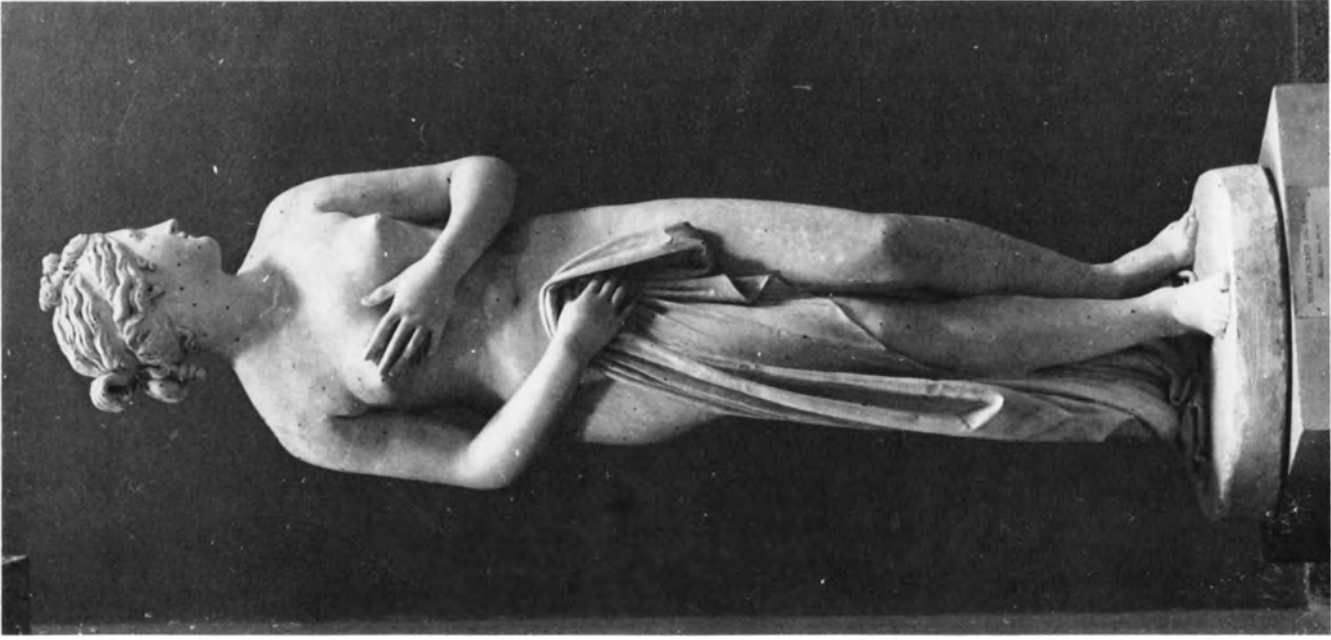
A list of the abbreviations used in the footnotes is set out at the end of note 80.

in between lie most of the great monuments representing Neo-classical architecture in France. Soufflot, the architect of the church of Sainte-Geneviève, was active in the same years as Boucher and Pigalle, and Ledoux a close contemporary of Fragonard. The work of these two architects may be revolutionary in what can be called its subject-matter, but it seems at the same time lifted above the doctrinaire classicism to which it gave rise in a large part because of the visual qualities that would at once betray its early date. For the painting of the late eighteenth century changes of style have been studied in some detail,¹ but the architecture of the period, and the priority that it assumed in so many ways, are themes that have not been thoroughly investigated. Many of the monuments of the period are now destroyed or altered; they are best known in the bleak engravings of the early nineteenth century, or in the unbalanced judgments of the critics of that time, and the resultant distortion has continued to prejudice the way they are interpreted and the way they are actually seen.²

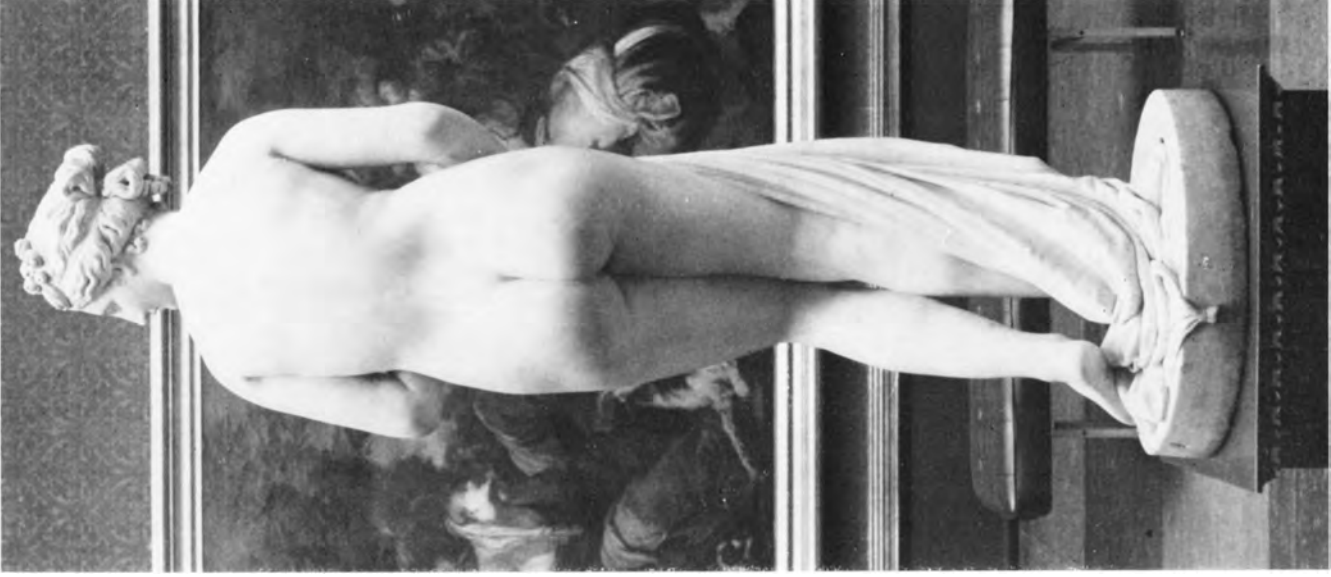
General reflections such as these are prompted by the

¹ Especially in R. ROSENBLUM: *Transformations in late eighteenth century art* [1967].

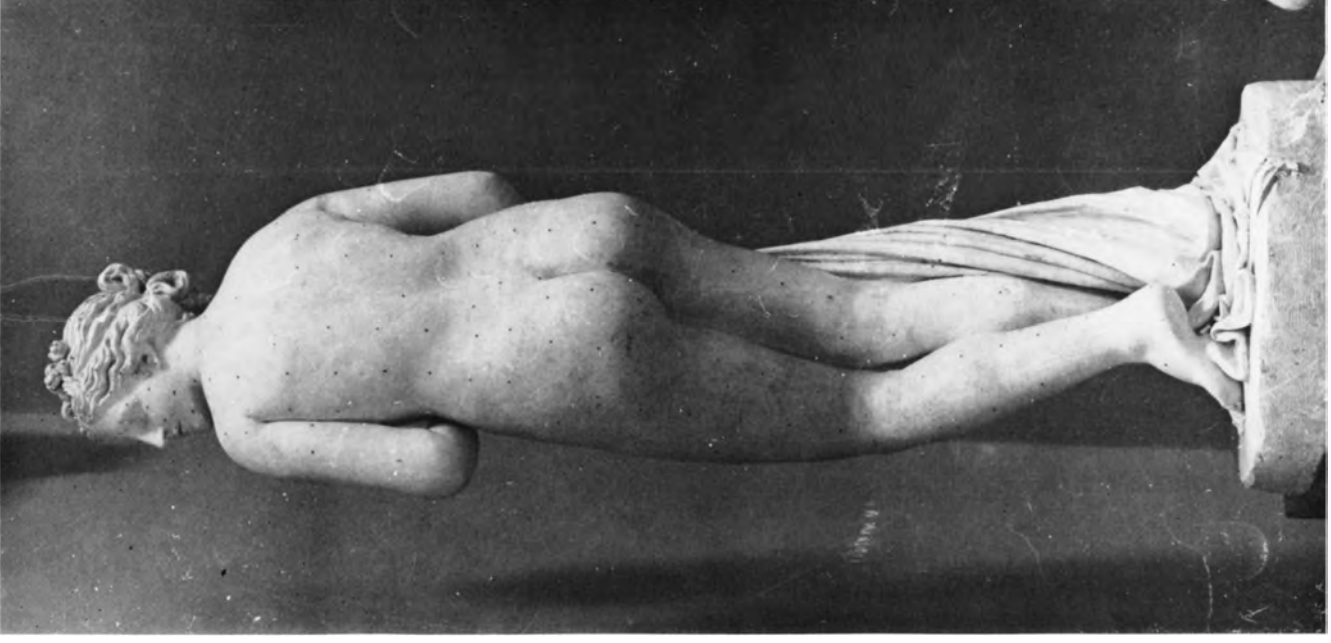
² This bias, valuable in many ways, is clearly apparent in E. KAUFMANN: *Architecture in the Age of Reason* [1955].



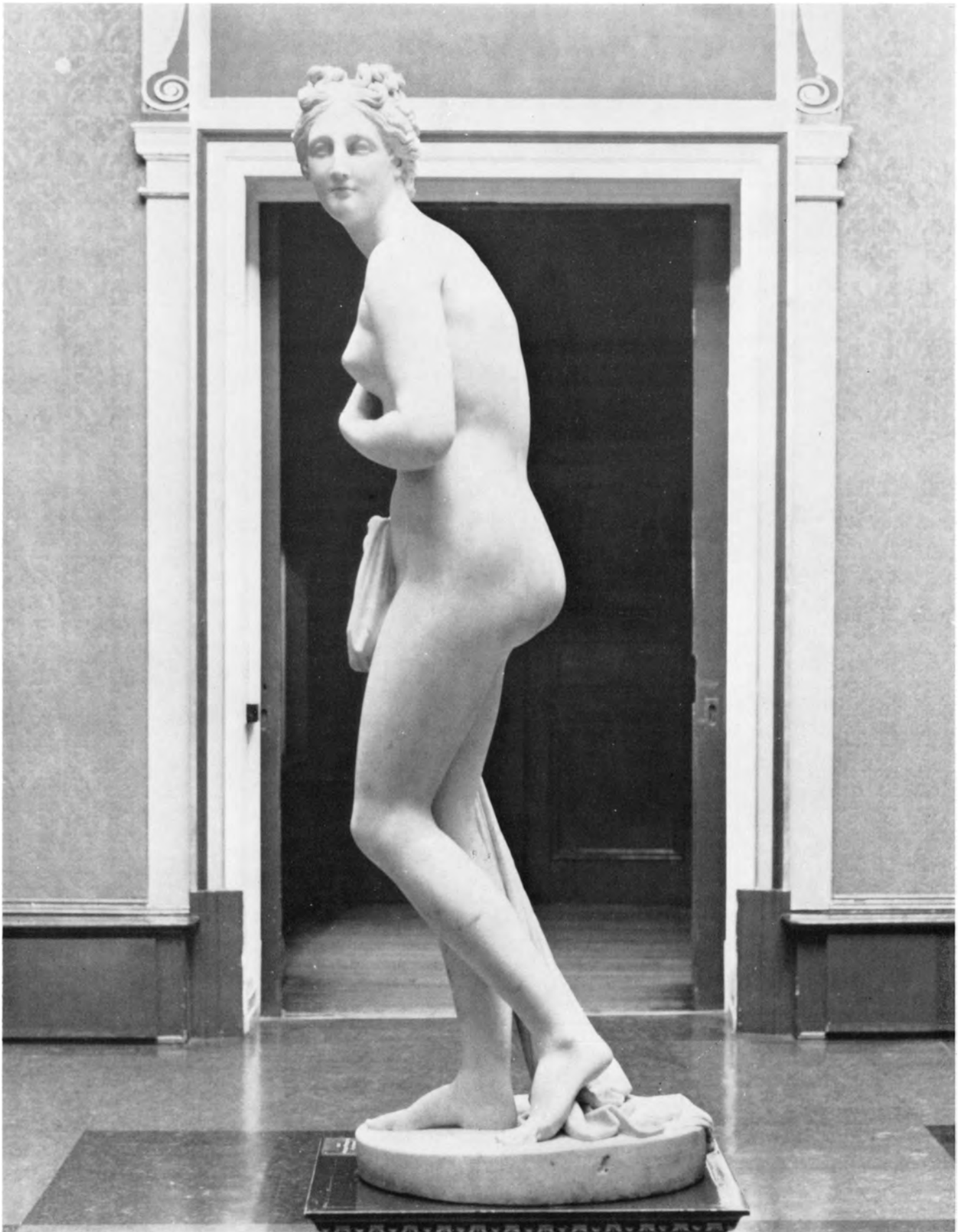
16. *The Hope Venus*, by Antonio Canova. Modelled before 1810. Gesso; height, 180 cm. (Gipsoteca, Possagno.) Photo. Istituto di Storia dell'Arte, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice.



17. Back view of marble *Hope Venus* illustrated in Fig. 1.



18. Back view of gesso *Hope Venus* illustrated in Fig. 16. Photo. Istituto di Storia dell'Arte, Fondazione Cini, Venice.



1. Left side of the *Hope Venus*, by Antonio Canova. Completed 1820. Marble; height, 177 cm. (Leeds City Art Gallery.)
Photo. Ron Turner, Leeds.