

THE LANSDOWNE ATHLETE



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Marble head of an athlete,
Museo Archeologico
Nazionale, Palestrina, Inv. no 568



The Entrance Hall of Lansdowne House

THE LANSDOWNE ATHLETE

1st century B.C. to 1st century A.D.

Made of Pentelic marble, 25.6 cm. (10 in.) high

The striking, just under life-sized, head of a young man, with idealised features, is turned slightly to the left. His head is crowned with closely curled luxurious hair, he has a slightly parted mouth with full lips and dimpled corners, with a rounded cleft chin below and perfect straight nose above. The facial features are finely sculpted, with a hint of musculature, cheek bone, and delicate neck folds.

The naturalistically modelled head encapsulates both power, innocence and boldness, displaying the skill and virtuosity of the unknown sculptor to incredible effect. Indeed the workmanship can be likened to the great Greek sculptor, Lysippos, whose many bronze masterpieces exhibited the same finesse and dexterity; characteristics often admired and emulated by others.

The identification as an athlete can be made by the distinctive facial features of the youth, including the closely cropped hair, challenging gaze and thick muscular neck. Parallels with other known pieces include; the *Head of an Athlete*, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Palestrina, Inv. no 568 (cf. illustrations), as well as reflecting such iconic works as the bronze *Antikythera Youth*, National Museum Athens, Inv. no 13396.

Pentelic marble

Pentelic marble is from a quarry complex on the slopes of Mount Pentelicus, some 16 km. north of Athens. The stone is characterised by its fine grain and pure colour; the white tinged with a golden hue. In Classical times the south slopes were pockmarked with over 25 quarries, much of the stone was destined to be used for the buildings and sculptures of Athens especially during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. From the 2nd century B.C. onwards, with the rise of the Roman empire, large quantities of stone was shipped to produce statuary, sarcophagi as well as architectural detailing.



Gavin Hamilton



William Petty-FitzMaurice

GAVIN HAMILTON AND THE LANSDOWNE COLLECTION

Gavin Hamilton, originally born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, will be forever linked with the 18th century Grand Tour. Having studied at the University of Glasgow, Hamilton, became an accomplished painter, using the classical world as his inspiration. He travelled extensively in Italy, eventually settling in Rome. He was there not only to paint but to undertake excavations, specifically, between 1769-1771, of Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli.

Hamilton often spending days in the swampy low-lying area, known as the Pantanello, adjacent to the site. Much of the statuary from the villa complex was deposited there, by unknown hands, as the instability of the later Roman empire unfolded, there they lay, forgotten and undiscovered, for some 1200 years.

Hamilton quickly realised that there was a huge thirst for antiquities, with prominent members of British society looking to establish their own collections following their visits to the great ancient sites as part of their Grand Tour.

Soon Hamilton was one of the most highly regarded purveyors of Roman sculpture, renowned for both his integrity and aesthetic judgement. His extensive journals and correspondence provide an incredible record of the formation of many of the United Kingdom's key private and public collections.

William Petty-FitzMaurice, 2nd Earl of Shelburne, 1st Marquess of Lansdowne, was an Irish born British politician, who after attending the University of Oxford, rose through the Whig political ranks to become firstly Home Secretary and finally Prime Minister.

In 1763 the Marquess acquired, from John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, a majestic Robert Adam's designed house in the heart of fashionable Mayfair, the house, at the south side of Berkeley Square (cf. illustration), was still under construction, and would be soon named Lansdowne House.

After visiting Italy in 1771, he resolved to adorn his new London home with a collection of ancient sculpture, which was eventually to become one of the leading collections in the country. He turned to Gavin Hamilton to source and advise him on purchases to be housed in the specially designed galleried space.

Eventually the Lansdowne Collection would include, along with this mesmerising head of an Athlete, over 100 superb sculptures, exemplary examples of their type, indeed many are now to be found in leading museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum, the Getty Museum and the Louvre.

Before joining the Lansdowne Collection the head passed through the Rome workshop of the renowned sculptor and restorer Bartolomeo Cavaceppi (1716-1799). Here Cavaceppi erroneously married the head to a torso of the *Diadoumenos*, a youth tying a fillet around his head. Additionally, arms, lower legs and a base were added, thus the head in its newly acquired form was given the name of 'Cestiario' or Boxer, and illustrated as such by Charles Othon de Clarac in 1851 (cf. illustrations).

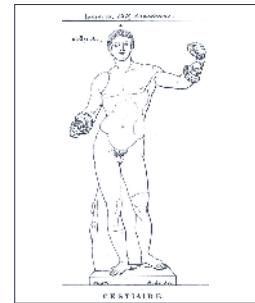
It was only after the 1966 Sotheby's sale that the head was finally removed from the incompatible torso, to once become as found by Gavin Hamilton and as we see today.

This head, with its mismatched torso and base, was included in a shipment of antiquities sent to Petty-FitzMaurice and mentioned in correspondence by Hamilton. On 6 May 1775, he writes about the shipment, stating; *'I have sent your Lordship inclosed (sic) a note of the statues I have shipped off for your garden, which I may venture to say are the best that ever were put in any garden in England.*

The Marquess of Lansdowne was evidently delighted with this new addition to his burgeoning collection and the Cestiario was positioned, not in the garden as first suggested by Hamilton, but in the entrance hall, standing in the right-hand of a pair of apses which flanked the doorway that lead to the main staircase. The piece remained an integral and prized part of the Lansdowne Collection, welcoming distinguished visitors to the house, for over 150 years.

After the sale of the statue at Christie's in 1930, where much of the London collection was dispersed following the economic upheaval of the previous decade, the athlete found its way into the Lorbet-Altounian Gallery, Mâcon, before arriving back in London where it was listed in a warehouse inventory of 1953. In 1966 the statue was once again at public auction, with Sotheby's selling it to Rudolph Forrer, numismatic expert at Spink and Sons, presumably bidding on behalf of a private client.

The head has featured in numerous publications over the years including the revered record by Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (1882), and most recently in Angelicoussis', *Reconstructing the Lansdowne Collection of Classical Marbles* (2017), although unfortunately the author was unable to examine the head in the flesh.



Drawing by Charles Othon de Clarac, 1851



View of the Lansdowne House, Berkeley Square

Provenance

Acquired by Gavin Hamilton, in or prior to 1775

Collection of William Petty-FitzMaurice, 1st Marquess of Lansdowne (1737-1805), bought from Gavin Hamilton for £20; sent from Rome on 6 May 1775, on the Tartar

Thence by descent to Henry Petty-FitzMaurice (1872-1936), 6th Marquess of Lansdowne; at Lansdowne House, Berkeley Square, London

The Celebrated Collection of Ancient Marbles: The Property of The Most Hon. The Marquess of Lansdowne M.V.O., D.S.O., Christie's London, 5 March 1930, lot 97; sold £47 5s

The Lorbet-Altounian Gallery, Mâcon, France

Recorded by C.C. Vermeule, author of updated edition of *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, as in a 'warehouse, London', 1953

Highly Important Egyptian, Western Asiatic, Greek, Etruscan

and Roman Antiquities, Sotheby's London, 13 June 1966, lot 179; consigned by George N Krimitsas

Acquired from the above by Rudolph Forrer, numismatic expert at Spink & Son London

Publications

Charles Othon de Clarac, *Musée de sculpture*, 1851, 2180A, pl. 851

Adolf Michaelis, *Die Sammlung Lansdowne*, in: *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 20 (1862) 339

Adolf Michaelis, *Lansdownehaus*, in: *Archäologischer Zeitung* 32 (1875) 35, no. 3

Adolf Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, 1882, 438, 3

Arthur Hamilton Smith (ed), *A Catalogue of the Ancient Marbles at Lansdowne House, Based Upon the Work of Adolf Michaelis. With an Appendix Containing Original Documents Relating to the Collection*, London 1889, 14, 3

Adolf Furtwängler, *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik: Kunstgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, 1893, 446

Adolf Furtwängler, *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture*, 1895, p. 245

Seymour Howard, 'Bartolomeo Cavaceppi, eighteenth-century restorer', diss. University of Chicago (1958, 1982), 89-90, 96

J. A. Rebassa (éd.), *Art y Olympisme; Palma de Mallorca, Oviedo, Las Palmas*, mai 1999 - janvier 2000, p. 131 no.108

Animan, no. 123/108 Août-Septembre 2004, 22

Elizabeth Angelicoussis, *Reconstructing the Lansdowne Collection of Classical Marbles*, Munich 2017, 132-135





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