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**Museum Project: Torso of Aphrodite/Venus**



Torso of Aphrodite/ Venus is a life-size Roman Marble statue dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. A positive identification is difficult to make, since she is missing her original head, arms and feet. Another possible identification would be Elektra; the statue has been compared to similar statues of Elektra in Naples. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was common practice to mix and match pieces of ancient statues to produce a complete statue for sale. Sellers sometimes even fabricated or had new body parts made for the statues to make them more profitable. There is evidence that this statue had once had a different female head and arms attached to her. The added pieces are now among the missing as well.

Torso of Aphrodite/Venus has a fairly short history. She was discovered outside of Rome in 1771 and by a wealthy English collector. He displayed the statue in his home as Venus

Victrix, or Venus as a goddess of victory. It is likely that this English collector was a mere antiquarian in search of antiquities to display his wealth and cultured interests. There is a nineteenth century sketch of the statue while it rested in the English collector's home. The sketch displays her in a contrapposto pose grasping at her clothes with one hand and holding something in the other. If the statue in the sketch was the complete original statue, it is possible to say that the piece was either a dedication statue or possibly just for decoration. Joseph Veach Noble acquired the piece around 1986 for his collection which the Tampa Museum of Art now proudly displays.

She is clothed in a thin and transparent cloth with a belt tied around her waist. Much of her body is revealed through the thin cloth and one breast is completely exposed. Aphrodite for the Greeks or Venus for the Romans was commonly thought to be the Goddess of love and beauty. She is also usually dressed in a sheer drapery, if she has any at all. A couple more of her commonly associated attributes include apples and birds. For the Greeks, Aphrodite was the daughter of Zeus and a sea-nymph, Dione. She was the mother of Eros, or Cupid the God of Love. She also was the mother of Aeneas, the Trojan hero who settled in Italy where Rome would one day form. For the Romans, Venus was a symbol of love and fertility. She was honored in annual festivals called Veneralia. She was worshiped as Venus Cloacina (the Purifier) and as Venus Myrtea (the myrtle goddess). Elektra was an Argive Princess and the daughter of Agamemnon. Agamemnon was killed in the Trojan War and Elektra and her brother, Orestes, sought out revenge against their mother and step-father. Without the head or other original body parts, it will remain unclear which of these marvelous women the statue actually was meant to be.