

= Vénus de Quinipily =

The Vénus de Quinipily (French pronunciation : ? [venys d? kinipili] , Breton : Ar groareg Houarn / Groah Hoart , English : The Iron Lady) is an ancient statue of uncertain origins , located southeast of Baud , Morbihan , Brittany , in north ? western France . It is approximately 2 @.@ 2 metres (7 @.@ 2 ft) in height and carved from granite . The statue represents a naked woman and stands in front of a fountain on a 2 @.@ 75 m high granite pedestal . The large basin beneath the statue is also carved out of a single granite block . It is believed that the statue may be of Greek , Roman or Egyptian origin . There is similar uncertainty about its subject ; it may be a Celtic deity , the Roman Mother goddess Cybele , or an Egyptian Isis statue .

It was originally erected at the site of a former Roman camp in Castennec in Bieuzy @-@ les @-@ Eaux , a commune in the Morbihan department in Brittany . It was the centre of superstitious rites in Brittany for centuries and became an object of a pagan veneration . At the request of the Bishop of Vannes , the statue was thrown into the Blavet river twice ; first in 1661 and then again in 1670 , but recovered both times , first in 1664 and then in 1695 by Pierre de Lannion , the Lord of Blavet Quinipily . In 1701 , the statue was substantially altered and placed in its present position at Quinipily where a garden has been created to showpiece the ancient monument .

The statue is classified under Monument historique ? a National Heritage Site of France on August 24 , 1993 . The heritage protection was made applicable from November 18 , 1943 . It is indexed in the Base Mérimée ? a database of architectural heritage maintained by the French Ministry of Culture .

= = History = =

= = = Origin = = =

The origins of the Vénus de Quinipily are uncertain , but it is believed to have been sculpted around 49 BC . It was originally erected at the site of a former Roman camp in Castennec in Bieuzy @-@ les @-@ Eaux , a commune in the Morbihan department in Brittany in northwestern France . Various origins of the statue have been proposed , including Greek , Roman or Egyptian ; a Celtic deity , the Roman Mother goddess Cybele , or an Egyptian Isis statue . It has also been proposed that the statue did not survive its restoration in 1696 by Pierre de Lannion , the Lord of Blavet Quinipily , and that he secretly replaced it with a new one . According to the French archaeologist Monsieur de Penhouët , the statue was built by Moorish soldiers in the Roman army .

= = = Names = = =

During the seventeenth century , the statue was worshiped by pregnant women and had various names in the Breton language such as Er Groach Couard , the " Cowardly Old Woman " , or as the " Good Woman " , Groah @-@ Goard , la Couarde , or la Gward . The color of the stone from which it was carved also inspired the name Gronech Houarn ? The Iron Woman . The statue has also been called Groah Hoart (The Old Guardian) . It is said that as the statue stood in the Roman guard house , it was called as Hroech @-@ ar @-@ Gouard , the Old Woman (or Witch) of the Guard @-@ House . The inscriptions on the pedestal say that it is called the Venus Armoricorum Oraculum . The inscriptions also claim that after the Romans conquered Gaul , it was dedicated to Venus Victrix . According to Macquoid , however , the statue could never have been meant to represent a Venus .

= = = Related superstitions and rites = = =

The statue was an object of superstitious rites in Brittany for centuries . It was believed that sick people would be cured by touching the statue . Childless people would often pay a visit to the statue

in the hope of producing offspring . It is said that during seventeenth century " foul " , " indecent and obscene " rites were also practiced at the statue , and that many couples performed " erotic " acts near the statue . The statue was also credited with being a sorcerer who would help those who approached her with dignity but would avenge herself on those who neglected to treat her with due honour .

The rituals performed at the statue by pregnant women involved walking round three times , reciting charms and touching one 's abdomen . Women would also carry a band which would either be touched to the statue and then tied around their waist , or half of the band would be tied to the statue while the remaining half would be kept on the woman 's body until the child was born . After the childbirth , the basin in front of the statue was used by women to bathe in . The rites performed in the honour of the statue were said to be similar to those performed by Phoenicians in the worship of their Venus .

= = Demolition and restoration = = =

As the statue became an object of a pagan veneration , missionaries and the Bishop of Vannes Charles de Rosmadec asked Claude de Lannion , Lord of Blavet Quinipily , to destroy the statue . In 1661 , Lannion ordered the statue to be thrown into the Blavet river . Abundant rain destroyed the harvest soon after , which peasantry and devotees interpreted as an act of anger by their insulted idol . In 1664 , the statue was drawn from the river and restored to its original location .

In 1670 , Rosmadec approached Claude de Lannion again and requested him to break the statue into pieces . Lannion ordered this to be done . However , the workmen , for fear of the peasants and devotees , only mutilated one of her breasts and one arm and again threw the statue into the same river . Soon after this , Claude de Lannion fell from his horse and died , which devotees considered as " a judgement from heaven for his having consented to destroy the idol . " The statue remained in the river for 25 years until Bishop Rosmadec decided to root out paganism in his diocese and asked Pierre de Lannion , son of Claude de Lannion , to destroy the statue . As Pierre was an antiquarian , he pulled the statue up from the river in 1695 but did not destroy it . The events associated with the demolition and restoration became a local cause célèbre .

= = Modification and ownership = = =

In 1696 , Pierre de Lannion transported the statue to his château at Quinipily . It is said that it took forty yoke of oxen to drag the statue and the large granite basin there . Soldiers posted along the route from Castennec to Quinipily came to blows with peasants furious at the loss of their idol . Residents of Castennec protested against the " abduction " of the statue and with the help of Duke of Rohan sued Lannion to regain the possession . However , in 1701 , the court confirmed the ownership as Lannion 's by virtue of his saving it from the river . Supposedly , Pierre damaged the statue during the restoration and secretly replaced it with a new one on a pedestal .

= = Design = =

The seven @-@ foot tall " Venus " statue represents a naked woman standing in front of a huge but dilapidated fountain on a nine foot high granite pedestal . Her arms are wrapped around her belly , and the lower part of the body consists of straight legs placed slightly apart . The breasts are damaged , and the hair is straight . The statue wears two bands as her only ornamentation . The first band is tied around head whereas the other is around the neck , with the ends hanging down in front of the body , reaching down to the thighs , and broad enough to cover the genital area .

The statue wears a fillet with three large letters ; either " I. I. T. " , " I. T. T. " , " J. I. T. " or " L. I. T. " engraved on it . These letters may have been engraved when Pierre de Lannion re @-@ chiseled the statue and may have originally read " ILITHYIA " , the Greek goddess of childbirth . It is also speculated that these letters were carved later by one of the young Roman officers to amuse himself by carving his initials on the forehead . The fingers and toes of " Venus " are represented by lines

and the facial expression has distinct similarities to those of Egyptian idols .

The large cistern beneath the statue is carved out of a single granite block , filled with water . It is believed that Pierre de Lannion was " deceived " by the nature of the worship paid to the statue , thus he placed the statue above a pedestal with Latin inscriptions , one on each side of it . It is believed that the design has oriental influences , but it may not be a Gallo @-@ Roman design .

The statue was classified under Monument historique ? a National Heritage Site of France on August 24 , 1993 with the identification number 88378 . The heritage protection was made applicable from November 18 , 1943 . It is indexed in the Base Mérimée ? a database of architectural heritage maintained by the French Ministry of Culture , under the reference PA00091021 .