



ala Villa negroni

L. S. 99

# Jacques-Louis David's 'Thrones' Identified<sup>1</sup>

• FEMKE DIERCKS •

In 1997 the Rijksmuseum acquired a drawing by Jacques-Louis David (fig. 1) from Lodewijk Houthakker's collection, where it had been accompanied by a similar sheet, both showing antique marble thrones (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> The throne in the Rijksmuseum's drawing has a concave back and a solid base decorated with a volute and acanthus-leaf motifs, while the front supports take the form of lion's feet and legs extending to the hock. The one in the other drawing, now in a private collection, is of the *klismos* type, the curvature of the legs echoing the deeply curved upper element of the back. David's sources for these objects have not been identified, and it has been suggested that they were not based on specific examples but were generic representations.<sup>3</sup> In fact, as we shall see, they are reasonably accurate portrayals of existing marble thrones.

After winning the Prix de Rome in 1774, David spent five years in Rome, from 1775 to 1780. During this period he made over a thousand drawings, mostly of antique sculpture and Italian paintings, which he later assembled in twelve albums, often misleadingly referred to as the 'Roman sketch-books'.<sup>4</sup> David's stay in Rome and the repertory of images he made there played an important role in the development of his Neo-classicizing style, and his later paintings contain

Fig. 1  
JACQUES-LOUIS  
DAVID (1748-1825),  
*Sketch of a Marble  
Throne*, c. 1775-80.  
Pen and brown ink,  
brown and grey  
wash over a black  
chalk sketch,  
212 x 153 mm.  
Amsterdam,  
Rijksmuseum,  
inv. no. RP-T-1997-50;  
purchased with  
the support of  
the Rijksmuseum-  
Stichting.

many citations of antique works recorded in the albums – including chairs of both general types in his *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* of 1789 (fig. 3).<sup>5</sup> Several of David's sketches also proved a source of inspiration for other French artists, among them the furniture makers Georges Jacob and the Jacob-Desmalter workshop.<sup>6</sup> The throne sketches were in the sixth album until it was taken apart in 1979.<sup>7</sup> Among the other drawings in this album were sketches of sculptures at the Villa Giustiniani, the Villa Borghese and other popular sites, and it also

Fig. 2  
JACQUES-LOUIS  
DAVID, *Sketch of  
a Marble Throne*,  
c. 1775-80.  
Pen and brown ink,  
brown and grey wash  
over a black chalk  
sketch, 213 x 154 mm.  
Private collection.





Fig. 3  
 JACQUES-LOUIS  
 DAVID, *Lictors  
 Returning to  
 Brutus the Bodies  
 of his Sons*, 1789.  
 Oil on canvas,  
 323 x 422 cm.  
 Paris, Musée du  
 Louvre, inv. no. 3693.  
 Photo © RMN –  
 Gérard Blot/  
 Christian Jean.

contained copies of Raphael's Sistine tapestries and illustrations in publications on antiquities.<sup>8</sup>

The most important indication of David's source for the thrones is the inscription 'a la villa Negroni' which occurs on both drawings. This refers to the sixteenth-century casino and gardens, now usually called the Villa Montalto-Negroni, which occupied the site of the present Termini railway station in Rome. Along with the Villa Borghese and the Villa Albani, this was one of the most popular sites for artists and tourists visiting Rome. Situated at the edge of the vast complex of the Baths of Diocletian, the house was built in 1579 by the architect Domenico Fontana for Cardinal Felice Peretti Montalto (1520-1590), later Pope Sixtus v (r. 1585-90), who used it as his principal residence and filled the house

and garden with his collection of classical sculpture, much of which remained there until the late eighteenth century (fig. 4). The site played an important role in the extensive urban renewals Sixtus initiated during his papacy. After his death, the villa and his extensive library and art collections passed to his nephew Alessandro Peretti, Cardinal Montalto (1571-1623), who subsequently added to them.<sup>9</sup> It remained in the Peretti family until the end of the seventeenth century, when an inventory of the antique sculptures drawn up between 1680 and 1685 records no fewer than 864 items in the house and gardens.<sup>10</sup> These were presumably included in the sale when the last of the Peretti was constrained to sell the property in 1696. The purchaser was Cardinal Gianfrancesco Negroni (1629-1713), and it was under

his name that the complex was known when David made his sketches.<sup>11</sup>

David must have visited the Villa Montalto-Negrone on one or more occasions to study the antiquities, and it was also during his stay in Rome in 1777 that a series of frescoes was excavated from an ancient house found under the gardens of the complex, which excited the interest of the whole artistic community.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the two thrones, five more drawings in David's albums are annotated as having been made at the Villa Negrone, including sketches of two seated philosophers, a bas-relief of two sphinxes and male figures around a vase, now in the Musei Vaticani, and a seated *Roma* in Castello Massimo in Arsoli.<sup>13</sup> David also drew a clump of pines and cypresses there: although this is not annotated it can be identified from drawings by other artists.<sup>14</sup>

In 1784, coincidentally while David was on a second, briefer visit to Rome, the villa and its contents changed hands again. They were acquired by the Tuscan entrepreneur Giuseppe

Staderini, who sold off the collections to the British artist and agent Thomas Jenkins in September 1785.<sup>15</sup> British aristocrats, inspired by their Grand Tours, were avid buyers of classical antiquities, and they were often advised by British agents in Rome such as Jenkins, who was one of the principal middlemen in sales to wealthy British collectors.<sup>16</sup> Even with vast amounts of ancient marbles finding their way to Britain during this period, Jenkins's purchase of the Villa Negrone collections was to create a stir among the collecting community; he himself boasted that his acquisition of its sculptures would cause 'as much Noise in Rome, as a Pitt or Fox in London, Jealousy & consequent Envy have an Extensive field, let them feed on it'.<sup>17</sup> It was Jenkins who negotiated the sale to Sir Joshua Reynolds of one of the most spectacular items from the Villa Negrone, Bernini's *Neptune and Triton*, which later came into the possession of Charles Anderson-Pelham, 1st Baron Yarborough (1748/49- 1823), in the garden of whose seat, Brocklesby Park



Fig. 4  
Fountains in the garden of the Villa Montalto-Negrone, from G.F. Venturini, *Le fontane ne palazzi e ne giardini di Roma*, vol. 3, Rome 1969, p. 16.

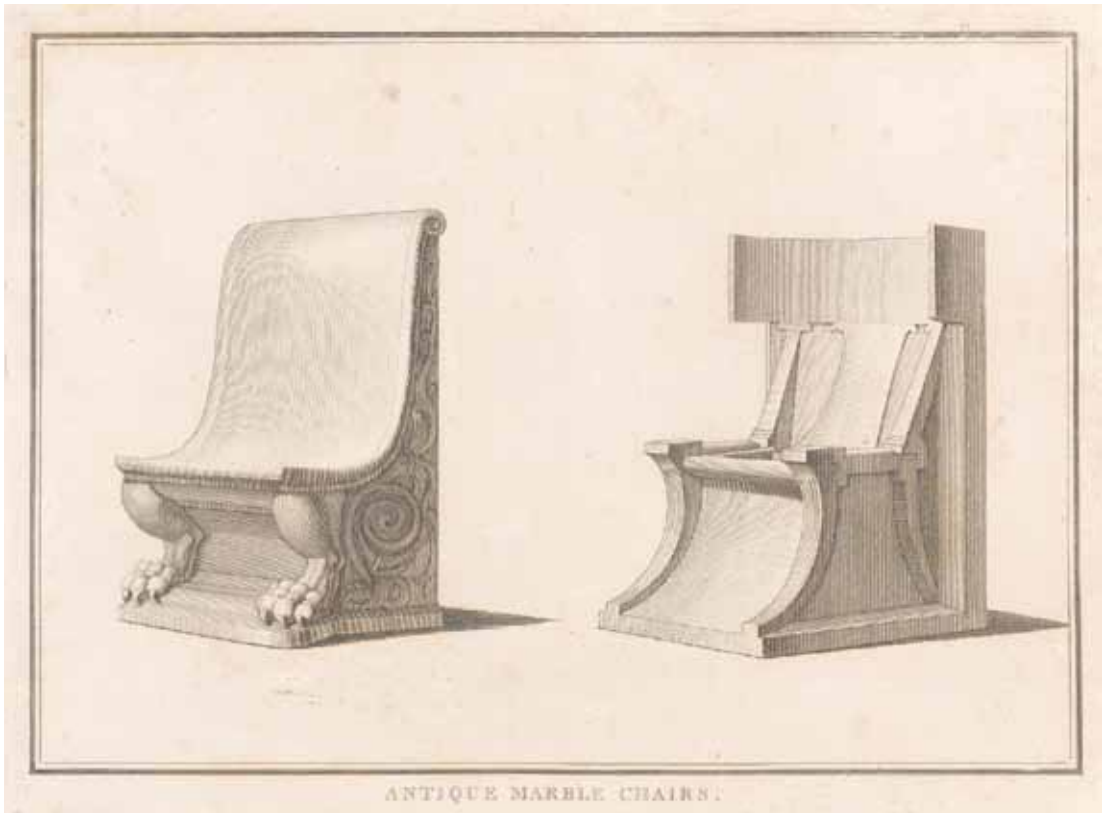
in Lincolnshire, it remained until it was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1950.<sup>18</sup>

Among Jenkins's clients was Sir Richard Worsley, 7th baronet, of Appuldurcombe (1751-1805). Worsley visited Rome twice as part of a tour to the Levant – during the winter of 1784/1785, and again at the end of his journey in 1787, when we can be certain he was at the Villa Negroni, for he addressed a letter from there.<sup>19</sup> During his travels Worsley bought a large quantity of predominantly Greek antiquities, which he later displayed at Appuldurcombe House, his seat on the Isle of Wight.<sup>20</sup> The highlights of his collection were the Greek stele with a girl with doves from Paros, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and a Roman group of Bacchus and Acratus.<sup>21</sup> On his return to England, he turned his attention to the publication

of a sumptuous catalogue of his collection, the *Museum Worsleyanum*, in which texts by the Italian expert on classical sculpture, Ennio Quirino Visconti, were illustrated with detailed engravings of all the items in his collection.<sup>22</sup> These include two marble thrones that the accompanying text indicates were both from Sixtus v's Villa Montalto. The German scholar, Adolf Michaelis, later stated that they had been purchased through Jenkins (fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> The thrones are also mentioned in the export licence Worsley obtained in Rome on 31 March 1788.<sup>24</sup>

There can be little doubt that these are the thrones that David drew.<sup>25</sup> The throne on the left of the engraving in the *Museum Worsleyanum* and the one in the Rijksmuseum drawing are essentially identical, except that David's throne is slightly tilted and he has exaggerated the curvature of

Fig. 5  
Engraving of  
the two thrones,  
from *Museum  
Worsleyanum*  
(1824 edition).  
Amsterdam,  
University of  
Amsterdam,  
Special Collections.



the back. The differences between the *klismos* chair and David's drawing are greater, since David entirely omitted the marble support at the rear of the throne shown in the engraving and added a decorative motif to the base of the chair corresponding with that on the other drawing.<sup>26</sup> It is clear, nonetheless, that David must have been inspired by the thrones at the Villa Negroni. The throne in the Rijksmuseum drawing can also almost certainly be recognized in the 1680-85 Montalto inventory, which lists 'Una sedia di marmo bianco con zampe di Leone alta p.mi 4 2/4 lar. 3' in the corner of the garden.<sup>27</sup> The other throne cannot be identified with equal confidence among the eight others described in the inventory, and we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the differences between the drawing and the engraving are not the

result of artistic licence and that David drew one of these other chairs.<sup>28</sup> David was not the only artist to have drawn thrones at the Villa Negroni: the Danish sculptor Johannes Wiedewelt visited between 1754 and 1758 and portrayed the *klismos* throne in a drawing now in the Danish Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>29</sup>

The thrones' later history brings us back to Brocklesby Park.<sup>30</sup> When Worsley died in 1805 his estate passed to his niece, Henrietta Simpson (1788-1813), wife of Charles Anderson-Pelham, 2nd Baron, later 1st Earl of Yarborough (1781-1846), the son of the buyer of the Bernini group. Even before the family disposed of Appuldurcombe House in 1855, the antiquities, including the thrones (figs. 6 and 7), had been absorbed into the collection at Brocklesby Park, a fact that Michaelis deplored in his account of the ancient marbles in British collections. 'The

Fig. 6  
Marble Throne,  
Brocklesby Park,  
Lincolnshire.  
H. 107 cm. Cologne  
Digital Archaeology  
Laboratory, Arachne  
Images Database,  
FA 1170-01.

Fig. 7  
Marble Throne,  
Brocklesby Park,  
Lincolnshire.  
H. 87 cm. Cologne  
Digital Archaeology  
Laboratory, Arachne  
Images Database,  
FA 1170-10.



Worsley marbles do not deserve to be left to ruin in a damp summer-house: a fate which now threatens them since they have been removed from Appuldurcombe to Brocklesby Park and there incorporated with Lord Yarborough's sculptures.<sup>31</sup> That was in 1873, and the thrones are apparently still there (fig. 8).<sup>32</sup>

Fig. 8

The Worsley Collection displayed in the Orangery at Brocklesby Park, with the Bacchus and Acratus group on the

left and one of the thrones on the right. Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory, Arachne Images Database, FA 1162-12.



## NOTES

- 1 This research was undertaken as part of the catalogue of Parisian Decorative Arts in the Rijksmuseum collection. I would like to thank Ilona van Tuinen, David de Haan and Duncan Bull for their help and advice.
- 2 P. Fuhring, *Design Into Art. Drawings for Architecture and Ornament. The Lodewijk Houthakker Collection*, The Hague 1989, nos. 446, 447.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 P. Rosenberg, *Jacques-Louis David 1748-1825. Catalogue raisonné des dessins*, vol. 1, Milan 2002, album no. 6, esp. p. 530, fol. 19.
- 5 Rosenberg, op. cit. (note 4), p. 530. So far, attention has focused on the *klismos* in this painting; however the chair in the centre is similar to the drawing of the chair with the round back, save for the lion's legs.
- 6 Fuhring, op. cit. (note 2), no. 447.
- 7 Ibid. The albums were sold at auction in 1826 and again in 1835. Only five remain intact.
- 8 A. Sérullaz, *Inventaire Général des Dessins École Française. Dessins de Jacques-Louis David 1748-1825*, Paris 1991, pp. 11-31.
- 9 D. Ribouillault, 'La villa Montalto et l'idéal rustique de Sixte Quint', *Revue de l'Art* 173 (2011), pp. 33-43.
- 10 M.G. Barberini, 'Villa Peretti Montalto-Negrone-Massimo alle Terme Diocleziane: la collezione di sculture', in E. Debenedetti (ed.), *Collezionismo e ideologia: mecenati, artisti e teorici dal classico al neoclassico*, Rome 1991, p. 17.
- 11 A. Wilton and I. Bignamini (eds.), *Grand Tour, The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*, exh. cat. London (Tate Gallery)/Rome (Palazzo delle Esposizioni)/London 1996, p. 225.
- 12 H. Joyce, 'The Ancient Frescoes from the Villa Negroni and Their Influence in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Art Bulletin* 65 (1983), no. 3, pp. 423-40. The frescoes were sold to the Bishop of Derry (later Earl Bishop), for incorporation into his Irish house. They never arrived and are known only through engravings by Anton Raphael Mengs.
- 13 Sérullaz, op. cit. (note 8), p. 97. A sketch of a figure in draperies was in the third, now dismantled, album (fol. 5, Rosenberg, op. cit. (note 4), p. 436, no. 502) – the sculpture has not been identified. Also in the third album was a sketch of the seated *Roma* or *Minerva* (fol. 7, *ibid.*, p. 443, no. 511), now in Castello Massimo, Arsoli. In the seventh album are sketches of the sculptures of the philosophers Posidippus and Menander (fol. 4, *ibid.*, pp. 547-48, nos. 745, 746), Vatican Museum, Rome. The sketch of the bas-relief with the sphinxes, lastly, is in the eleventh album (fol. 18, *ibid.*, p. 736, no. 1175), Vatican Museum, Rome.
- 14 Rosenberg, op. cit. (note 4), album no. 8, p. 618, fol. 20.
- 15 J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven/London 1991, p. 556.
- 16 B. Ford, 'Thomas Jenkins, Banker, Dealer and Unofficial English Agent', *Apollo* 99

- (1974), p. 416; Ingamells, op. cit. (note 15), pp. 553-56.
- 17 V. Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760*, Oxford 2009, p. 101. A small number of the best pieces from the Negroni collection were not sold to Jenkins, but went directly to the preeminent collector, Charles Townley. Ingamells, op. cit. (note 15), pp. 553-56.
- 18 W. Collier, 'New Light on Bernini's Neptune and Triton', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968), pp. 438-39. E. Maclagen, 'Sculpture by Bernini in England', *The Burlington Magazine* 40 (1922), no. 228, p. 115.
- 19 Worsley stayed at the Villa Negroni as a guest of the Spanish ambassador José Nicolas de Azara, who lived there while supervising the excavation of the frescoes discovered in 1777. I. Bignamini and C. Hornsby, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome*, vol. 1, New Haven/London 2010, pp. 344, 346.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 1018-19. Worsley continued to collect both antiquities and paintings when he returned to Italy as British Resident in Venice (1793-97). See J. Yarker, 'The last Resident. Richard Worsley and his collection of Venetian paintings', *The Burlington Magazine* 64 (2012), no. 1306, pp. 37-43.
- 21 Coltman, op. cit. (note 17), p. 256. The stele was bought by the Metropolitan Museum in February 1927 from the 4th Earl of Yarborough (inv. no. 27.45). The Bacchus group is at Brocklesby Park. A. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, Cambridge 1882, p. 237.
- 22 Work on the catalogue must have started in Rome, for many of the engravings are signed by Vincenzo Dolcibene, a mediocre Roman artist who was nonetheless employed by both Jenkins and Townley. The plates, too, must have been produced in Rome. The *Museum Worsleyanum* was published in six tranches or 'classes' in the course of eleven years, from 1749 to Worsley's death in 1805. A second edition was published in 1824. J. Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity. British Collections of Greece and Rome*, New Haven 2003, p. 156. Michaelis praised the publication as an exemplary book on a classical sculpture collection. He was, however, less impressed by the collection itself. Michaelis, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 116-17.
- 23 *Museum Worsleyanum*, vol. 1, London 1824, p. 99. Only the second edition was available to me. Also described by Michaelis, op. cit. (note 21), p. 236, nos. 86, 87.
- 24 'Due Casse con due sedie antiche di mediocre lavoro', Bignamini and Hornsby, op. cit. (note 19), p. 345. The licence does not give a provenance for the thrones. The comment that the thrones were of mediocre quality may have been added to ensure the works were allowed to leave the country.
- 25 The catalogue gives an even earlier provenance in the collection of Fulvio Orsini. Whether this is correct or an enhancement of its history is unclear.
- 26 Visconti explains the hole in the chair by suggesting that the throne did, at one point, hold a sculpture. *Museum Worsleyanum*, op. cit. (note 23), p. 99.
- 27 Barberini, op. cit. (note 10), p. 39.
- 28 Ibid., p. 39. Eight chairs in total are found in the inventory. None of the descriptions matches the shape of the other chair exactly. Ibid., p. 31: 'Un sedile et all'appoggio diuersi quadretti piccoli con intaglio di marmo bianco. Somo 9 et anche insieme fanno il quadro di p. mi. 5 1/2'; ibid., p. 31: 'Doi sedili di peperino con intagli colorati di uari allusioni all'arme di S.E. Longhi p.mi 9 'l uno, larghi 2, alti 4.'; ibid., p. 33: 'Un sedile di marmo et in mezzo co' soi ferri e coi doi sfingi di basso rilieuo<sup>33</sup> doi mascaroni di donne attaccati insieme con la testa di Giano buttano acqua per bocca un dentro la peschiera l'altro fuori alt. p.i. 3'; ibid., p. 34: 'Una sedia di uarij pezzi di marmo messi insieme alti p.mi. 5 larg. 2 1/2'; ibid., p. 35: 'Doi sedili co suoi piedi di trauertino'; ibid., p. 35: 'Quattro sedili ciascheduno con mascaroni sotto di basso rilieuo che sostengono coll'ali et fermano in terra zampe di leone.'; ibid., p. 36: 'Doi sedili di peperino un per parte, ciasche. o lungo p.mi 16'; ibid., p. 39: 'Una sedia di marmo bianco con zampe di Leone alta p.mi 4 2/4 lar. 3'.
- 29 Barberini, op. cit. (note 10), appendix 11, p. 53 and fig. 14.
- 30 It was Maclagen's footnote about the curiously similar provenances of the Bernini group and the Brocklesby chairs that put me on the track of the thrones. Maclagen, op. cit. (note 18), p. 115, note 32.
- 31 Michaelis, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 116-17.
- 32 Brocklesby is included in Cologne University's Archané project, which researched and photographed antique sculptures in British private collections. H. Oehler, *Foto+Skulptur, Römische Antiken in englischen Schlössern*, Cologne 1980, p. 27, fig. 11.