

PELAGIO PALAGI AND THE BELZONI FAMILY COLLECTION OF EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

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The manuscripts describing the origins of the Egyptian collection belonging to Bologna painter Pelagio Palagi are mostly unknown to scholars. Unpublished letters dating from March 1826 to March 1827 have enabled us to reconstruct the sequence of sale negotiations for Egyptian artefacts between Palagi's intermediaries and the family of the Paduan explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni. The negotiations failed but at least one of these objects, a faience shabti from the tomb of Sety I, was later acquired by Palagi on the antiques market. A detailed inventory of the antiquities inherited and offered for sale by Belzoni's family, significantly more than listed in his will, is published here. It lists a number of objects, including a limestone seated statue of the high priest of Amun Hapuseneb, that may also have been acquired by Palagi in the years following the end of negotiations with Belzoni's heirs. These antiquities are now kept at the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna together with the entire Palagi collection, considered one of Italy's most important and of international relevance.

The Bologna painter Pelagio Palagi's (1775–1860) (fig. 1)¹ interest in Egyptian antiquities is well known and attested by over 3,000 artifacts now in Bologna's Museo Civico Archeologico.² Palagi reached the apex of his fame as an Egyptian antiquities collector in 1831–32, following his purchase of the third collection

* With this dedication to Emily, I wish to give her heartfelt thanks for the warm welcome she gave me when I joined the CIPEG board, her constant support, and for being an inspiring example as a museum professional.

1 BCABo (Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna), Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 25, fasc. 1, Palagi's autobiography; Matteucci 1974; Grandi and Morigi Govi 1976; Poppi (ed.) 1996; Royere 2017.

2 Kminek-Szedlo 1895; Bresciani 1975; Pernigotti 1980; Bresciani 1985; Jaeger 1993; Morigi Govi and Pernigotti (eds) 1994; Pernigotti 1994; Picchi 2009 and 2015a.



FIG. 1: Pelagio Palagi's portrait (MAMbo, inv. no. 98768).

of Giuseppe Nizzoli (1792–1858), chancellor at the Austrian consulate in Egypt from 1818 to 1828.³ However, the manuscripts describing the origins of this collection through acquisitions of small and larger groups of objects over the years from around 1824 to 1845 are mostly unknown even to scholars.⁴ Palagi acted both personally and through intermediaries, usually chosen from amongst his professional relationships or friendship circle. The dismemberment of important eighteenth-century collections⁵ and, above all, the arrival in the Italian ports (Livorno, Genoa, Venice, and Trieste) of pharaonic antiquities, exported in abundance from post-Napoleonic Egypt,

offered him a wide range of options. Over the years he embarked on many negotiations, although not all were successful due to his failure to agree a price or his competition with richer or better-placed rivals, who got the upper hand.

Centre stage in one of these negotiations was the family of Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778–1823),⁶ a resourceful and versatile individual, with considerable physical presence at over two metres tall. A sequence of experiences in various European countries, in particular a long stay in England, had shaped the man who landed at Alexandria in June 1815 together with his wife Sarah Parker-Brown (1783–1870)⁷ and faithful companion James Curtin (1796–1825).⁸ The hydraulic knowledge gained during his youth in Rome, and matured on subsequent occasions, had led him to seek his fortune in Egypt, after hearing news that the country's highest authority, Muhammad Ali Pasha (1769–1849), was looking for someone to solve its drought problem. Belzoni's ambitious project to modernise Egypt's hydraulic system through a pump of his own invention failed, but this did not discourage him. He changed trajectory,

3 Pernigotti 1991: 3–84; Daris 2005; Picchi 2011a.

4 The most important archive of Palagi manuscripts is kept at Bologna's Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio: see Bonora and Scardovi 1979; Scardovi 1987.

5 See for example: Picchi 2012 and 2015c.

6 Montobbio 1984; Mayes 2003; Zatterin 2019.

7 Picchi 2011b; Warmenbol 2019: 124–131.

8 Morkot 2013.

devoting his life to exploring the country and recovering pharaonic vestiges: a highly profitable business, in which the main European consuls and their emissaries played an undisputed role.

In three successive journeys along the Nile (1816–18) Belzoni accomplished various well-known archaeological exploits that have gone down in history,⁹ although his past career as an actor in England and his acerbic character hindered full recognition of his value both then and subsequently. The result of these explorations was a wealth of archaeological finds of various types and sizes, which followed Belzoni when he left Egypt for England in September 1819. He disembarked at the port of Venice in November of that year to visit his family in Padua, whom he had not seen for twenty years.¹⁰ Padua welcomed him with full honours, grateful for his gift of two seated statues of the leonine-headed goddess Sekhmet.¹¹ The city later coined a medal designed by Luigi Manfredini (1771–1840), engraver at the Milan mint, showing the two Sekhmet statues on the obverse and a dedication celebrating some of the illustrious explorer's exploits on the reverse (fig. 2).¹²



FIG. 2: Struck bronze medal in honour of Giovanni Battista Belzoni by Luigi Manfredini, 1819 (MCABo NUM 9181).

During his short stay in Padua, Belzoni began negotiations for the sale of three mummies to Stefano Andrea Renier (1759–1830), professor of natural history at the University and director of the local Museum of Natural

9 Belzoni 1820. See also BCPd (Biblioteca Civica, Padua), 2670/VIII and 2670/XIX, copies of Belzoni's letters to his brother Domenico, dated 15 August and 30 October 1818, to update him on his Egyptian exploits. For the transcription of these and many other documents concerning Belzoni in Padua, see Gaudenzi 1936.

10 Mercati 1943–44: 297.

11 BCPd, CA, 2670/X, a copy of Belzoni's letter (Alessandria, 12 March 1819) to his brother Domenico announcing the arrival from Trieste of the two statues to be given to Padua.

12 ASPd (Archivio di Stato, Padua), Atti comunali fonds, b. 405 (tit. XIV, Istruzione Pubblica), fasc. 2431, prot. 3149, Belzoni's letter to the Podestà of Padua, dated 12 June 1821, to thank him for the medal issue. See also Turricchia 2002: 159–61, no. 58.

History.¹³ The proceeds from the sale of the mummies were to support his family, of whom Belzoni always took care; however, the negotiations failed despite Renier having already signed a contract. This can be deduced from the incipit and ending of a letter addressed to his mother and brothers from London, dated 2 June 1820.¹⁴ In this same letter Belzoni, who left Venice for London in February 1820, asked once again for information on the shipment of his collection of Egyptian antiquities, which his brother Francesco was to have dealt with.¹⁵ Worried about his family's finances, Belzoni allowed them to keep non-ancient objects for their own benefit in these special circumstances.

The archaeological material collected by Belzoni would have arrived in England almost intact, except for some papyri offered as a gift to Cardinal Ercole Consalvi (1757–1824), secretary of state to Pope Pius VII (1742–1823), with whom he had been in correspondence since 1818.¹⁶ In London, as is well known, Belzoni proceeded to sell the bulk of his collection, which was auctioned off the following year,¹⁷ by organising an exhibition at the Egyptian Hall. This celebrated, in particular, the discovery of the tomb of Sety I, and was inaugurated on 1 May 1821.¹⁸ This exhibition was followed by two others: the first in Paris in December 1822, featuring the same reconstruction of the tomb of Sety I and models of buildings explored by Belzoni, but without the same wealth of finds;¹⁹ the second in London in March 1825, organized by Sarah and James Curtin 'for the support of Mr. Belzoni's aged mother and numerous relatives at Padua' after Belzoni's death.²⁰

On Belzoni's death on 3 December 1823 in Gwato²¹ – news of which only reached England in April 1824 – Sarah replaced him in caring for his family, who were to inherit two thirds of Belzoni's estate. Before going to Africa, in fact, the explorer had written his will, aware of the dangers he was to face.²²

13 The correspondence dealing with the sale is at Padua University: Medical Faculty, 1820, correspondence, b. 9, prot. 112. See also Zanovello 2019: 112–17.

14 Bellorini 1923–24: 111–14, 117–18. Concern for the financial condition of his family transpires from almost all Belzoni's letters.

15 Already in a letter dated 21 April 1820 Belzoni wrote: *Le statue non sono ancora arivate [sic] ma non possono ritardar di molto* [The statues have not yet arrived but cannot take much longer]; see BCPd, CA 2670/XIV.

16 Mercati 1943–44: 287–329. At any rate, other minor gifts of antiquities to extend interest in his archaeological exploits cannot be ruled out.

17 Catalogue 1822. Other antiquities, for example the famous alabaster sarcophagus from the tomb of Sety I, were sold privately; see Taylor 2017: 8–21.

18 Pearce 2000.

19 Hubert 1822. Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) is cited as the possible author of two thirds of this catalogue in Hartleben 1909: 278.

20 *The Times*, December 11, 1824. For further information on Belzoni's family genealogy and its vicissitudes, see Gambino and Chilò 2019: 102–9.

21 Now Ughoton, in present-day Nigeria.

22 The will was drawn up in Fez on 23 May 1823. A copy of it was sent on 16 June 1824 to Belzoni's mother by banker Samuel Briggs, a dear friend of the explorer. The document is transcribed and commented on in Bellorini 1923–24: 120–21. For another translation of the will, which was partially written in English, see BCPd, CA 2670/XX.

His wife Sarah, his younger brother Domenico (1780–1829), and his mother Teresa (1755–1829 or thereafter) were each entitled to one third of his assets, provided that his by now very elderly mother was still alive. Otherwise her share was to go to Teresa (1814–84), daughter of his deceased brother Antonio (1781–1818). Francesco (1788–1829), the other younger brother, his first companion on his European travels and with whom relations had at a certain point broken down, was apparently left out, but a letter anticipating the contents of Belzoni's will shows that he did not intend to exclude him.²³ The division included the sale of the antiquities still in the explorer's possession, which appear to have been far fewer than those documented in some unpublished letters kept at the Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna.²⁴ These letters contain information on the true size of Belzoni's bequest to his loved ones, including a reference to a hitherto unknown object from Sety I's tomb.

Given the failure of the London exhibition designed to raise money from the finds inherited,²⁵ it was probably in spring-summer 1825 that Sarah sent her husband's relatives a substantial group of antiquities, their shares of the inheritance, retaining only a small part for herself.²⁶ This group of objects therefore retraced its journey back to Italy, barely five years after it passed through en route to Britain. Reports of a previous dispatch of objects to the family, immediately after the closure of the Paris exhibition, is not supported by the documents found to date.²⁷ The *terminus ante quem* of the expedition appears to be given by a letter from Count Alessandro Papafava (1784–1861)²⁸ sent from Rome on 29 September 1825 and addressed to Count Giovanni de Lazara (1744–1833) in Padua.²⁹ Its opening sentence mentions an Egyptian object, attributing it to Belzoni: *Eccole l'interpretazione dei geroglifici della figurina di Belzoni, fatta da Champollion, e avuta col mezzo di persona sua conoscente; mentre egli si trovava quà in Roma: vedrà che egli ha avuto bisogno di correggerla come nell'unito disegno per trovarne il senso che è quello di tutte le consimili* [Here you have an interpretation of the hieroglyphs on Belzoni's figurine, made by Champollion, and obtained by means of an acquaintance he met while he was here in Rome: you will see that he needed to correct it, as in the attached drawing, to identify its meaning common to all similar objects].³⁰ The interest taken by these two Paduan noblemen in Belzoni's figurine, in all likelihood a shabti, is difficult to comprehend in the absence of direct knowledge of the artefact. It should

23 BCPd, CA 2670/XIX, letter from Fez, May 1823.

24 All these letters are published in an extended Italian version of this article: Picchi and Chilò 2019.

25 BCPd, CA 2675/l, incomplete and *sine data* letter written by Domenico Belzoni to Sarah a few weeks before the opening of the second exhibition in London.

26 Warmenbol 2019: 124–31.

27 Hartleben 1909: 278.

28 Bonato 1890.

29 Caburlotto 2001.

30 Cittadella della Cultura di Lendinara, Malmignati Archive, Carteggio Giovanni de Lazara, b. 8, fasc. 4, no. 299. The drawing is not to be found in this archive or elsewhere.

be noted that both were friends of Belzoni, to whom he had turned to find a publisher for an Italian version of his travel accounts.³¹

It was in this high-class, cultured environment, with which Palagi occasionally came into contact,³² that negotiations for the sale of Belzoni's antiquities developed. Taking advantage of his friends and professional relationships to sift through the antiques market in search of finds to collect, Palagi tried to buy the Belzoni family's collection through some intermediaries. The first of these was painter Giovanni De Min (1779–1859), Palagi's pupil, held in great esteem by Padua's aristocracy since 1818.³³ De Min started negotiations for Palagi, as a letter dated 3 March 1826 makes clear. Therein he reports the outcome of a first meeting with *quello che a Londra, e credo anche in qualche altro luogo, tenne compagnia al celebre illustratore* [he who, in London, and I think elsewhere, spent a lot of time in the company of the famous illustrator],³⁴ that is to say Francesco Belzoni.³⁵ He had provided De Min with a document containing a list of the Egyptian objects inherited by the family with price estimates (figs 3–4 and Appendix);³⁶ Francesco was, therefore, able to benefit from his older brother's legacy, showing right away that he was the most interested in a deal and the most accustomed to dealing with these antiquities, which he knew about even prior to the legacy.³⁷ The list sent by De Min to Palagi describes several dozen objects from the main archaeological sites explored by Belzoni, including Sety I's tomb, the pyramid of Khafre, and various tombs and temples in the Theban area. The antiquities inherited from the family, some of which had been in the auction catalogue of 1822,³⁸ are of considerable historical, artistic, and economic value, and more numerous than might have been expected. From the same letter we also learn that Palagi was not the first to take an interest in these Egyptian objects, as a papyrus in excellent condition had already been sold to the Sanquirico brothers, well-known Venetian art dealers, perhaps the very people involved in ongoing negotiations for the purchase of a seated statue in white marble, corresponding to number 2 on the list.

The short period of time that elapsed between this first letter from De Min to Palagi and the following one, dated 15 March 1826,³⁹ reveals the Bologna

31 Gambino 2007. For the Italian edition, see Belzoni 1825 and 2019.

32 See, for example, BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 9, ns 53 and 55, as well as b. 6, fasc. 31.

33 Paludetti 1959: in particular 114–46. For other information on this artist, see Dal Mas 2009.

34 De Min considered Giovanni Belzoni to be the author of the illustrative plates of the *Atlas* published together with the *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries ... in Egypt and Nubia*.

35 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 32.

36 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 4 (Appendix).

37 Francesco joined his brother in London in November 1821, in the midst of attempts to sell his Egyptian objects and organise further exhibitions; see BCPd, CA 2670/XVII.

38 For example the 'colossal toe, from the Colossus, discovered among the ruins of Carnac, the head of which is now in the British Museum—red granite' (Catalogue 1822: 5) is easily identifiable with *Parte di un dito di Granito, appartenente ad una statua Colossale* (BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 32, no. 8).

39 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 33.

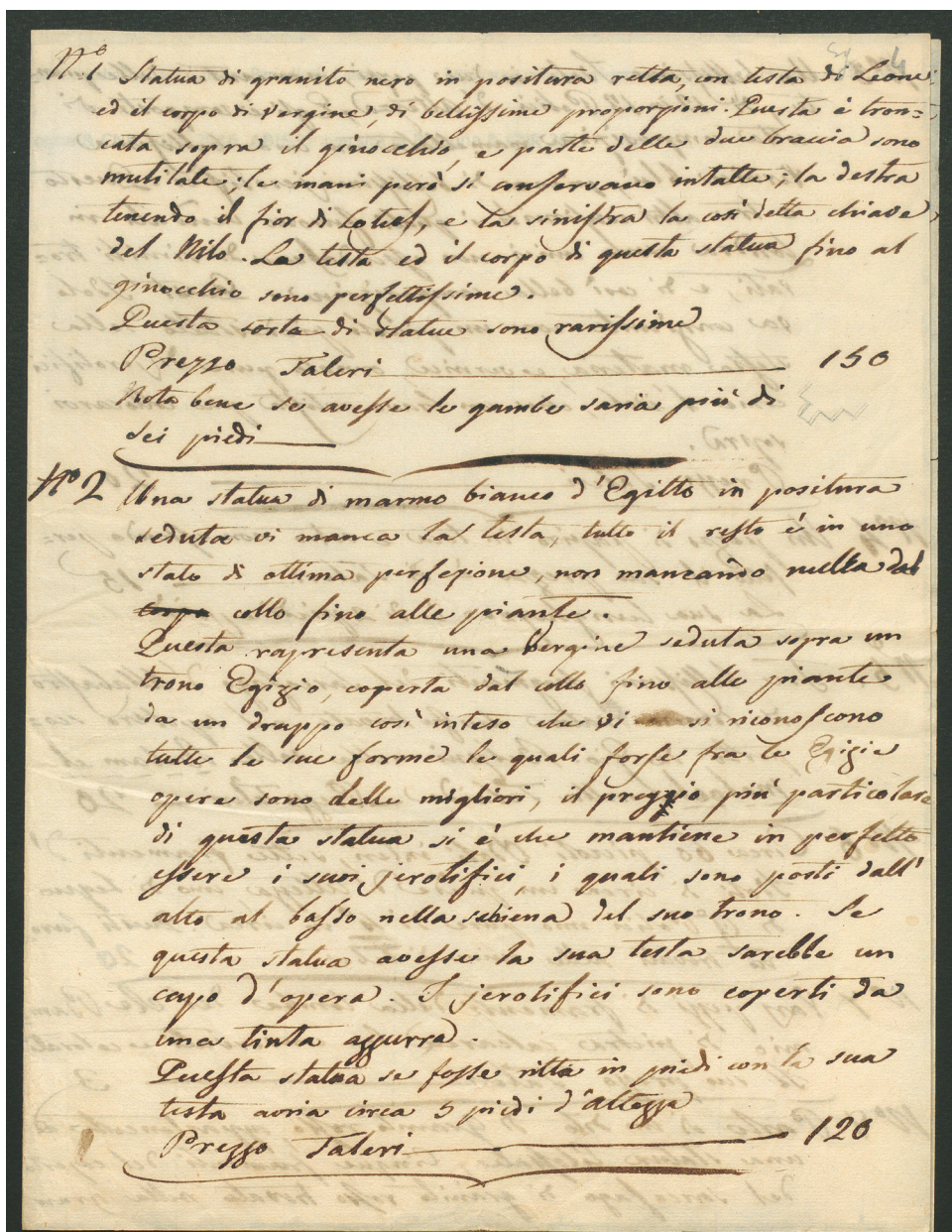


FIG. 3: List of the Egyptian objects inherited by the Belzoni family (BCABo, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 4).

painter's considerable interest in Belzoni's collection, although he had no intention of paying the amount requested by the family. In response to the 200 thalers⁴⁰ offered by Palagi, the Belzoni family lowered its initial estimate from 370 to 300 thalers, undermining De Min's attempted mediation, who at the same time invited the painter to make a higher offer in consideration of the

40 Convention thalers (of 28.06 g of 833/1000 fineness silver, diameter 40/41 mm) were minted in Venice under Francis I of Habsburg-Lorraine (1815–35). See for example Gigante 2005: 280.

rather low costs involved in transporting the objects. It was Domenico Belzoni who complicated the negotiations by not being willing to agree to a further discount, as De Min points out in a third letter, dated 8 April 1826.⁴¹ The same letter highlights Palagi's fear of potential competition from other buyers, the aforementioned Sanquirico brothers, who sold him various Egyptian antiquities in subsequent years,⁴² and Giuseppe Vallardi (1784–1861), thanks to whom he had already obtained many objects belonging to the Venetian Nani di San Trovaso family.⁴³ The liveliness of the northern Italian antiques market and Palagi's reputation as a collector must have prompted him not to appear as De Min's principal in the hope of obtaining more favourable sales

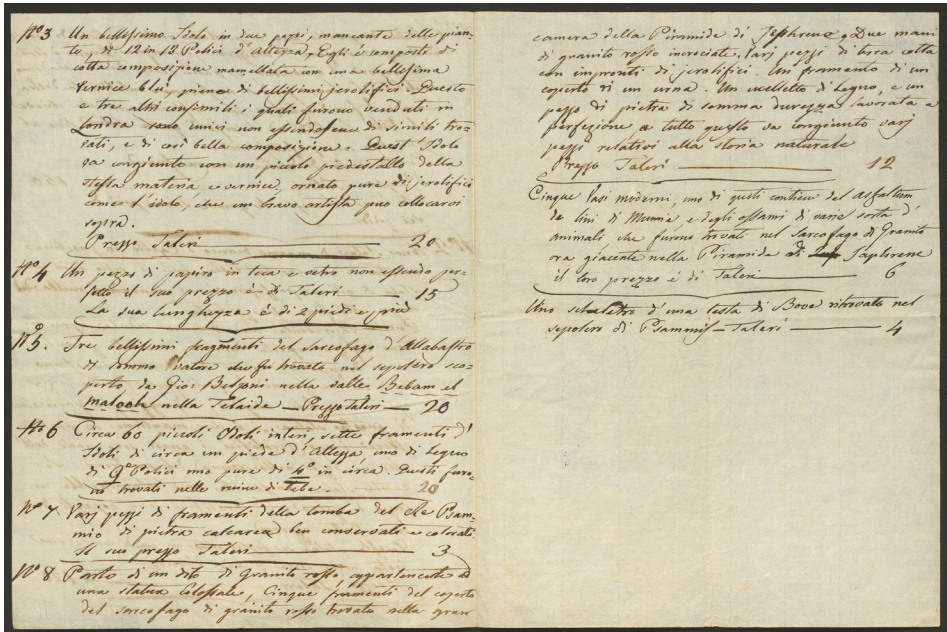


FIG. 4: List of the Egyptian objects inherited by the Belzoni family (BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 4).

conditions and avoiding costly intermediary work by skilful dealers. However, these precautions did not prevent Antonio Sanquirico from purchasing a number of items from the Belzoni family, including a candlestick later offered to Palagi,⁴⁴ and a small canopy, about which the latter asked for information.

Three letters from the doctor-writer Giuseppe Montesanto (1779–1839)⁴⁵ to the well-known Petrarchist Antonio Marsand (1765–1842),⁴⁶ then residing

41 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 34.

42 Picchi 2009b: 38–40 and 2011: 278.

43 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 6 and fasc. 6; Picchi 2011: 278 and 2012: 99–101.

44 See BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 6, lett. d, including a drawing.

45 Zannini 1841.

46 Chiancone 2006: in particular 82–132; BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 24–25 and 104; Cittadella della Cultura di Lendinara, Malmignati archive, Carteggio Giovanni de Lazara, b. 8, fasc. 3, no. 258.

in Milan like Palagi, attest to the involvement of other mediators supporting De Min and a change of strategy in the conduct of the negotiations. In the first letter, written at two different moments on 17 June 1826,⁴⁷ Montesanto declares that he went, together with De Min, to see Giuseppe Orsolato (1812–1902),⁴⁸ his patient and Domenico Belzoni's brother-in-law, in an attempt to get him to change his mind and agree to the sale. For the first time this letter highlights a family dispute that does not seem to be completely related to the contingent circumstance of the negotiation. Domenico disagrees with his brother Francesco and mother Teresa, who is equally eager to *far denari, perché con essi si mangia, e colle pietre non già* [make money, because with it one can eat, but one can't do that yet with stones]. He fears *di non incassare per sé un soldo se si contenta di una somma* [not to earn a penny for himself if he settles for a certain sum], which Montesanto believes to be *pre-mangiata* [pre-eaten] by Francesco and his mother. It is unclear whether this is because Domenico already owed his family money, or because he does not trust his brother Francesco, who might have agreed a surcharge in his favour at the start of negotiations, or because there might have been a disadvantageous dividing up of the legacy. The only result obtained by Montesanto and Orsolato,⁴⁹ following this further intervention in favour of Palagi, was a ten thalers discount that brought the overall estimate for Belzoni's antiquities down to 290 thalers. The doctor also informs Palagi that one of the main objects is stored at the free port of Venice. In his second letter to Marsand, dated 28 June 1826,⁵⁰ Montesanto specifies that the object mentioned corresponds to the list's *statua di marmo bianco d'Egitto in positura seduta* [white marble statue from Egypt in a seated position].⁵¹ He was awaiting the outcome of a fresh mediation attempt by Orsolato, who was convinced of the advantageous nature of the deal for his brother-in-law Domenico, too, and meanwhile discouraged Palagi from making a partial purchase proposal. Palagi then decided to increase his offer to 230 thalers, as evidenced by the third letter to Marsand, dated 31 July 1826,⁵² but Domenico once again did not accept the proposal, despite Sarah intervening from England in favour of the sale.

At this point negotiations broke down and only resumed almost a year later, at the behest of one of Belzoni's brothers, undoubtedly Francesco, who declared himself willing to sell one of the statues or even the entire group, if Palagi would increase his previous offer. The very busy De Min was replaced

47 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 24.

48 Maggiolo 2013.

49 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 104.

50 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 25.

51 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 4.

52 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 26.

by artist Francesco Dal Fabbro (?–post 1857),⁵³ who updated Palagi regarding these developments in a letter dated 7 March 1827.⁵⁴ Palagi continued to turn to Montesanto and Orsolato as intermediaries, who once again put the answers obtained by Belzoni’s family in writing, the same of the previous year, bringing negotiations to an end. The 230 thalers offered by Palagi were definitively refused.⁵⁵

In any case, at least one object on the list Francesco Belzoni sent to De Min did become part of the Palagi collection, although the time and circumstances of its acquisition are currently unknown. It is the list’s number 3 (see Appendix), the *bellissimo Idolo in due pezzi, mancante delle piante, di 12 in 13 Polici d’altezza ... composto di cotta composizione mamellata con una bellissima vernice blu, piena di bellissimi gerolifici* [beautiful two-piece idol, lacking its feet, 12–13 inches in height ... comprising a mamillated [‘breasted’] figure of baked composition, with very beautiful blue paint, full of beautiful hieroglyphs],⁵⁶ that is to say a shabti in faience from the tomb of Sety I in larger size and of a finer production (fig. 5),⁵⁷ which could be the object mentioned in De Lazara’s letter to Papafava.⁵⁸



FIG. 5: Sety I’s faience shabti (MCABO EG 2056), 19th dynasty, reign of Sety I (1290–1279 BC).

53 With the limited information available, it is difficult to reconstruct Francesco Dal Fabbro’s life. He was born in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in Belluno (or nearby Conegliano, according to other sources) and is mentioned as still alive in *Il Diavoletto. Giornale Triestino*, Year X, no. 108, 20 April 1857.

54 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 3.

55 BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 12, fasc. 27, note by Orsolato, dated 29 March 1827, sent on by Montesanto to Palagi on 31 March 1827.

56 See note 36 and Appendix, no. 3. It appears that the shabti’s clenched fists were interpreted as breasts.

57 Kminek-Szedlo 1895: 244, no. 2056; Picchi 2019: 292.

58 See note 30.

The Bologna statuette corresponds perfectly to Francesco Belzoni's description, especially regarding its lack of feet and joined up two-piece body. The rarity of this shabti and a further three similar statuettes offered for sale in London in 1822, is highlighted in the list defining them as *unici non essendosene di simili trovati, e di così bella composizione* [unique, since no others have been found, and of such a beautiful composition].

The same listing also provides hitherto unknown information on *un piccolo piedistallo della stessa materia, e vernice, ornato pure di jeroglifici come l'idolo, che un bravo artista può collocarvi sopra* [a small pedestal made of the same material [i.e. faience], and paint, also adorned with hieroglyphs like the idol, which a good artist could relocate on top], that is suggested to come from Sety I's tomb.⁵⁹ This 'small pedestal' would seem to correspond in material, colour, and size



FIG. 6: Fragmentary faience base of statue (MCABo EG 3151), 18th dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III (1388–1351 BC).

to a fragmentary base in the Palagi collection (fig. 6), although the latter is not attributable to a shabti.⁶⁰ The date and circumstances of its purchase are not currently known. An interesting hypothesis, although one which is not further documented, is that it is the very same *piedistallo con caratteri egizi* [pedestal with Egyptian characters] included in a list of objects sold, after various unsuccessful attempts, by antiquarian Francesco Pajaro to Palagi in

⁵⁹ This object is currently under study. The name of the god Aten, mentioned in the text, is written *itn* instead of *itn*. This writing is attested both during Amenhotep III's reign (see for example Helck 1957: IV, 1696.20 and 1702.15) and at the beginning of the Ramesside period (Leitz 2002: I, 611–12). The faience seems to be more typical of the reign of Amenhotep III than that of Sety I. At present the provenance of the object from Sety I's tomb it is just a hypothesis, so it cannot be excluded that Belzoni linked this base with Sety I's shabti for commercial reasons.

⁶⁰ Kmínek-Szedlo 1895: 350, no. 3151.

1843 via Antonio Sanquirico.⁶¹ Furthermore, immediately below it in the same list, the generic description of 2. *Pezzi di mumia porcellana* [2. Pieces of porcelain mummy] might suggest that this fragmentary base was sold together with the two-piece shabti of Sety I.

Another Palagi collection artefact that may have been part of the Belzoni legacy is a seated statue of the high priest of Amun Hapuseneb (fig. 7, Appendix, no. 2),⁶² which corresponds almost perfectly to the previously mentioned *statua di marmo bianco d’Egitto in positura seduta* [white marble statue from Egypt in a seated position]⁶³ and headless. The limestone, from which the Bologna statue was carved, might have been confused with marble. The two sculptures are similar in quality, size, type, and hieroglyph colour, a blue that should correspond to Egyptian blue. Only the distribution of the text on the stone is different: on the

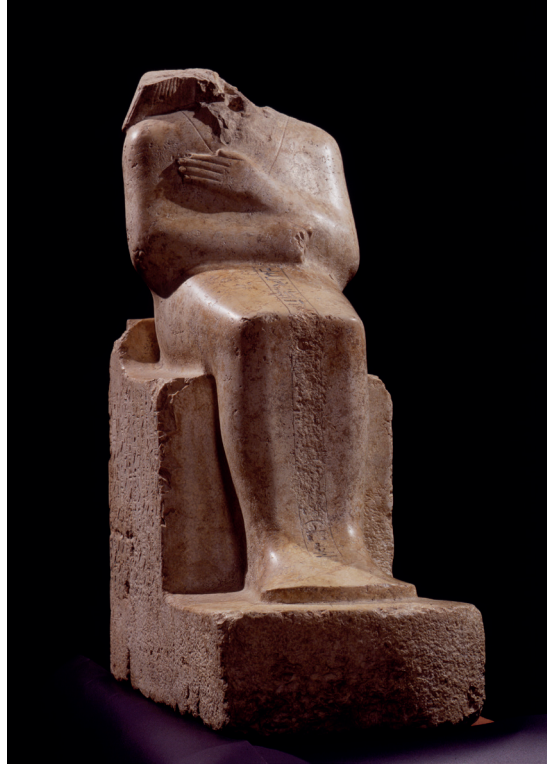


FIG. 7: Hapuseneb’s limestone statue (MCABo EG 1822), 18th dynasty, reign of Hatshepsut (1479–1458 BC).

list it is said to be placed *dall’alto al basso nella schiena del trono* [from top to bottom on the back of its throne], while on the Palagi collection’s sculpture it covers the whole throne with the addition of a column of hieroglyphs running from under the right arm, resting on the belly, and as far as the feet. The fact that this headless statue remained at the *Porta di Dogana* [customs port] in Venice for the entire period of the negotiation might explain this inconsistency between the description given in the document and the object itself. The sculpture, identified as a *Vergine* [maiden], might also correspond to the ‘Isis’ that Auguste-Louis De Sivry, an antiquarian active in Venice from 1808 to 1842, sent to Palagi in 1831.⁶⁴ This latter antiquarian was particularly attracted by fine quality sculptures and not only Egyptian ones. The weight

61 BCABo, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. h, no. 4 and, also, b. 20, no. 85 and Picchi 2011: 40.

62 Kminek-Szedlo 1895: 156, no. 1822; Pernigotti 1980: 33–36, no. 6; Piacentini 1990: 34.

63 See note 36 and Appendix, no. 2.

64 Picchi 2009b: 37.

of the crate containing the Isis, sent by De Sivry to Palagi, is comparable to the weight of the Belzoni statue. If this was the case, a hypothetical *terminus ante quem* of the fragmented sale of the Belzoni antiquities might be 1831 with Palagi managing to acquire at least some of these, despite the unwanted intermediation of certain art dealers.

The documentation found to date provides no further information regarding the objects Belzoni left his family. The two main players in these negotiations, Domenico and Francesco Belzoni, died three days apart in January 1829, leaving their elderly mother alone. Pending identification of other archival material of potential use in the continuation of this research, it can be added that, together with the two Sekhmet statues, a number of papyrus fragments attributed by oral tradition to the Belzoni family are still kept in Padua.⁶⁵ Identifying them with number 4 in the list sent to De Min, *pezzo di papiro in teca e vetro* [piece of papyrus in a display case and glass]⁶⁶ cannot be certain, but Edda Bresciani is worth mentioning in this regard as she reports restoration work carried out *per eliminare alcune manipolazioni, cioè piccoli pezzi di papiro, con tracce scritte oppure con segni di scritture di fantasia, aggiunti per ottenere una fittizia impressione, e l'autore ne era stato, con tutta probabilità, lo stesso Belzoni* [to eliminate certain additions, that is, small pieces of papyrus, with written traces or with creative script signs, added to achieve a fictitious result, which were probably Belzoni's own work].⁶⁷ †

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⁶⁵ Bresciani 1960; Gambino 2014.

⁶⁶ See note 36 and Appendix, no. 4.

⁶⁷ Bresciani 1988: 9.

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APPENDIX

BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 31, fasc. 4, lett. i, no. 4

List of objects made by Francesco Belzoni and sent to Giovanni De Min, undated, attached to BCABO, Pelagio Palagi fonds, b. 6, fasc. 32.⁶⁸

No 1 *Statua di granito nero in positura retta, con testa di Leone ed il corpo di Vergine, di bellissime proporzioni. Questa è troncata sopra il ginocchio, e parte delle due braccia sono mutilate; le mani però si conservano intatte; la destra tenendo il fior di lotus, e la sinistra la così detta chiave del Nilo. La testa ed il corpo di questa statua fino al ginocchio sono perfettissime. Questa sorta di statue sono rarissime. Prezzo Taleri 150. Nota bene se avesse le gambe saria più di Sei piedi.* [Black granite statue in a standing position, with a lion's head and the body of a maiden, in beautiful proportions. It is truncated above the knees, and parts of both arms are mutilated; however, the hands are intact; the right holding the lotus flower, and the left the so-called key of the Nile. The head and body of this knee-length statue are perfect. These sorts of statues are very rare. Price 150 thalers. Note if the statue had legs it would be over six feet in height.]

No 2 *Una statua di marmo bianco d'Egitto in positura seduta vi manca la testa, tutto il resto è in uno stato di ottima perfezione, non mancando nulla dal corpo collo fino alle piante. Questa rappresenta una Vergine seduta sopra un trono Egizio, coperta dal collo fino alle piante da un drappo così inteso che vi si riconoscono tutte le sue forme le quali forse fra le Egizie opere sono delle migliori, il preggio più particolare di questa statua si è che mantiene in perfetto essere i suoi jerolifici, i quali sono posti dall'alto al basso nella schiena del suo trono. Se questa statua avesse la sua testa sarebbe un capo d'opera. I jerolifici sono coperti da una tinta azzurra. Questa statua se fosse ritta in piedi con la sua testa avria circa 5 piedi d'altezza. Prezzo Taleri 120.* [A white marble statue from Egypt in a seated position lacking its head, everything else is in a state of excellent perfection, with nothing from the body neck to the feet missing. It depicts a maiden seated on an Egyptian throne, covered from her neck to her feet by a cloth so taut that her form is entirely recognisable and perhaps the best of the Egyptian works. The statue's most peculiar virtue is that its hieroglyphs are perfectly preserved and positioned from top to bottom on the back of its throne. If the statue's head had survived it would be an artistic masterpiece. The hieroglyphs are covered in blue paint. Standing upright with its head the statue would be about 5 feet in height. Price 120 thalers.]

⁶⁸ The sometimes variant spellings of the original are kept here. Some partly legible pencil notes by Palagi on the back of the second letter seem to supplement the list of objects with some jewellery.

No 3 *Un bellissimo Idolo in due pezzi, mancante delle piante, di 12 in 13 Polici d'altezza. Egli è composto di cotta composizione mamellata con una bellissima vernice blu, piena di bellissimi jerolifici. Questo e tre altri consimili i quali furono venduti in Londra sono unici non essendosene di simili trovati, e di così bella composizione. Quest'Idolo va congiunto con un piccolo piedistallo della stessa materia, e vernice, ornato pure di jerolifici come l'idolo, che un bravo artista può collocarvi sopra. Prezzo Taleri 20.* [A beautiful two-piece idol, lacking feet, 12–13 inches in height. It comprises a mamillated figure of baked composition, with very beautiful blue paint, full of beautiful hieroglyphs. This and three other similar ones which were sold in London are unique, since no others have been found, nor of such a beautiful composition. This idol has to be joined with a small pedestal of the same material, and paint, also adorned with hieroglyphs such as the idol, which a good artist could relocate on top. Price 20 thalers.]

No 4 *Un pezzo di papiro in teca e vetro non essendo perfetto il suo prezzo è di Taleri 15. La sua lunghezza è di 2 piedi e più.* [A piece of papyrus in a display case and glass not being perfect, its price is 15 thalers. Its length is 2 feet and more.]

No 5 *Tre bellissimi fragmenti del Sarcofago d'Alabastrò di sommo valore che fu trovato nel sepolcro scoperto da Gio: Belzoni nella valle Bebam el malooh nella Tebaide – Prezzo Taleri 20.* [Three beautiful fragments of the highly valuable alabaster sarcophagus that was found in the tomb discovered by Gio: Belzoni in the valley of Bebam el malooh in the Thebaid – Price 20 thalers.]

No 6 *Circa 60 piccoli Idoli interi, sette fragmenti d'Idoli di circa un piede d'altezza, uno di legno di 9e Polici uno pure di 4° in circa. Questi furono trovati nelle ruine di Tebe. 20.* [Approximately 60 small intact idols, seven fragments of idols around one foot in height, one in wood of 9 inches in height, one also in wood of about 4. These were found among the ruins of Thebes. 20 thalers.]

No 7 *Vari pezzi di fragmenti della tomba del Re Psammio di pietra calcarea ben conservati e colorati. Il suo prezzo Taleri 3.* [Various fragments from the tomb of King Psammio in well-preserved and coloured limestone. Its price 3 thalers.]

No 8 *Parte di un dito di Granito rosso, appartenente ad una statua Colossale, Cinque fragmenti del coperto del sarcofago di granito rosso trovato nella gran camera della Piramide di Jephrene. Due mani di granito rosso incrociate. Varj pezzi di terra cotta con impronti di jerolifici. Un fragmento di un coperto di un urna. Un ucelletto di legno, e un pezzo di pietra di somma durezza lavorata a perfezione, a tutto questo va congiunto varj pezzi relativi alla storia naturale. Prezzo Taleri 12.* [Part of a red granite finger, belonging to a

colossal statue, five fragments of the lid of the red granite sarcophagus found in the great chamber of the Jephrene pyramid. Two red granite crossed hands. Various pieces of terra cotta with hieroglyphic imprints. A fragment of the lid of an urn. A little wooden bird, and a piece of stone of the greatest hardness, worked to perfection, to all this must be added various natural history related pieces. Price 12 thalers.]

Cinque Vasi moderni, uno di questi contiene del asphaltum de lini di Mumia, e degli ossami di varie sorta d'animali, che furono trovati nel Sarcofago di Granito ora giacente nella Piramide di Japhrene, il loro prezzo è di Taleri 6. [Five modern vases, one of which contains mummy asphaltum and linen, and bones of various kinds of animals, which were found in the granite sarcophagus now in the Japhrene pyramid, their price is 6 thalers.]

Uno scheletro d'una testa di Bove ritrovato nel sepolcro di Psammis – Taleri 4. [An ox's skull found in the Psammis sepulchre – 4 thalers.]