

PORTLAND VASE,
FORMERLY THE BARBERINI.

THIS beautiful monument of ancient art was discovered in the neighbourhood of Rome, in the pontificate of Urban VIII. (Barberini), and consequently between the years 1623 and 1644; the former being the year of his advancement to the papal chair, and the latter that of his death.

A mount of earth, called *Monte del grano*, about three miles from the city, in the road to Frascati,* at that time brought into cultivation, was perceived by the labourers, in digging, to have a large vault under it; † on being opened, was found to be a sepulchral chamber, inclosing a sarcophagus of excellent workmanship, and, within this, the vase in question full of ashes.

There was no inscription to give any light with respect to the person whose remains were deposited in the sepulchre. Foggini‡ observes, that the mausoleum, which may be presumed to have been originally erected upon it, was probably demolished during the incursions of the barbarians, who destroyed every thing that was either magnificent or delightful above ground in the country about Rome; and that the earth, of which the mount appeared to consist, (which some§ suppose to have been brought thither on purpose to cover the sepulchre,) might have proceeded from the ruins of the mausoleum, mouldered during the many ages in which that whole country remained desolate.

* Venuti, Spiegazione de bassi relievi nell'urna sepolc. d' Alessandro Severo, p. 1.

† Venuti, *ibid.*—Mus. Capitol. tom. iv. p. 1.

‡ Museo Capitolino.

§ Bartoli, Antichi Sepole.

The sarcophagus was placed in the museum of the Capitol, and still remains there. The vase was deposited in the library of the Barberini family, and continued, for above a century, one of the most admired pieces of that celebrated collection; it was generally distinguished by the name of the *Barberini vase*.

After the dispersion of this library the vase was purchased at Rome by Sir William Hamilton, to whom this kingdom is indebted for so many others of the finest remains of antiquity. By Sir William it was disposed of to the late Duchess of Portland, but with so much secrecy, at her Grace's request, that she was never known, even by her own family, to be the possessor of it.

At the sale of her Grace's very curious and valuable museum, in 1786, the vase was purchased by the present Duke of Portland, for about a thousand guineas; and, from the zeal of its noble proprietor to promote the interests of the fine arts, I was immediately indulged, to the utmost of my wishes, with an opportunity of attempting to produce copies of it; his Grace having been pleased, for that purpose, to entrust this inestimable jewel in my hands for upwards of twelve months. A copy being now executed, I rely upon the candour of the public in judging how far I may have succeeded in this arduous, and by some deemed even presumptuous, undertaking.||

|| The vase was first purchased by the late James Byres, Esq. the antiquary, who parted with it to Sir William Hamilton.

It was said that the first of these transfers was occasioned by an ill run of cards in a Roman princess, the representative of the Barberini family, who on that account was under the necessity of selling her finest antiquities. The circumstances became known to the Pope. His holiness forbade

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