

FROM FATHER TO SON:
TWO ALABASTER
RELIEFS OF THE
MADONNA AND CHILD
BY FELIPE BIGARNY
AND GREGORIO
PARDO

— JAIME EGUIGUREN

~ STUDIES ~



JAIME EGUIGUREN
~ STUDIES ~

NUMBER 3

From father to son: two alabaster reliefs of the *Madonna and Child*
by Felipe Bigarny and Gregorio Pardo

Author

Rosario Coppel

Design and Layout

Laura Eguiluz de la Rica

Publisher

Jaime Eguiguren

Project Director

Jaime Eguiguren

Photography

Joaquín Cortés Noriega

Román Lores Riesgo

Translation

Laura Beratti

Floriana Beneditto

Printing & Binding

Artes Gráficas Palermo

Special thanks

Cristian Amaya

Gonzalo Eguiguren

Sofía Fernández Lázaro

FROM FATHER
TO SON: TWO
ALABASTER RELIEFS
OF THE *MADONNA*
AND CHILD BY FELIPE
BIGARNY AND
GREGORIO PARDO

ROSARIO COPPEL

ISBN: 978-84-697-9884-3

© 2018 All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any storage and retrieval system, without the prior permission in writing from the publisher.



FOREWORD

This publication follows the line started by *Studies 1* and *2*, designed to make unpublished works known in their historical and artistic context.

On this occasion I have been extremely lucky to be able to bring together two pieces that, despite their different provenance, are connected by significant links. The first one of them, the relief of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist*, is a unique model that, both because of its technique and because of its style, may be attributed to Felipe Bigarny. The second one, the relief of the *Madonna and Child*, belongs to a series of versions whose similarity suggests they must have been made by the same sculptor. Concerning this set, there have been various attributions over time, in some cases still maintained today. The attributed authorship has been shared by Diego Siloe and Felipe Bigarny, although more recently the name of Gregorio Pardo, Bigarny's son, has emerged.

Felipe Bigarny has been considered one of the most prestigious Spanish sculptors during the Renaissance, together with Bartolomé Ordoñez, Diego Siloe and Alonso Berruguete. His son, Gregorio Bigarny Pardo (who would sign only his mother's surname, Pardo), has gone unnoticed until very recently, perhaps because he devoted himself to continuing the works his father had left unfinished upon his death, or because his own production known so far is quite limited, since he survived his father by only ten years.

Throughout this study, Renaissance Sculpture specialist Rosario Coppel carefully analyses and describes the technique used for carving these two pieces out of such a delicate material as alabaster, and also the different treatment of models by one and the other. Basing the attribution on the study comparing the works signed or documented as made by the two artists, she differentiates the styles of both, arriving at conclusions that provide decisive details for cataloguing their production.

The continuation of workshops according to family tradition is common in Art History, but in this case the strong bond existing between Felipe Bigarny and Gregorio Pardo, between father and son, is sufficiently established.

Jaime Eguiguren



CONTENTS

- 10 INTRODUCTION
From father to son: two alabaster reliefs of the
Madonna and Child by Felipe Bigarny and
Gregorio Pardo
- 12 FELIPE BIGARNY (ATTR.)
(LANGRES, FRANCE,
C. 1475 – TOLEDO, SPAIN 1542)

*MADONNA AND CHILD AND
JOHN THE BAPTIST*
- 42 GREGORIO PARDO (ATTR.)
(BURGOS, 1512/1513 – 1552)

MADONNA AND CHILD

From father to son: two alabaster reliefs of the *Madonna and Child* by Felipe Bigarny and Gregorio Pardo

Introduction

The publication of this study brings two unknown alabaster reliefs. In the first of them the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* is depicted; in the second, the *Madonna and Child*. Both works have in common their size, 20-30 cm; the material, alabaster; the composition of the scene in an oval frame; the iconography taken from the Florentine Quattrocento; and the treatment of the figures. The poses and details, such as the exposed forehead of the Madonna, the swathe of the veil, that is secured on her chest with a clasp, and the way of enveloping the scene with its draping folds are identical. The Child's tunic, who is fully clothed in the two reliefs, is the same. Also similar is the way of carving the hair, the eyes and the hands which, in both cases, play an exceptionally role.

However, the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* has been executed with a deeper relief, the models are more stylised, and the scene develops in the space with greater freedom. There is no other known version of this relief. Instead there are at least seven other reliefs of the *Madonna and Child* that are conserved in the following places: Burgos, Cathedral Museum; Valladolid, Diocesan Museum; New York, Metropolitan Museum; London, Victoria and Albert Museum; Warsaw, National Museum; Toledo, Saint Nicholas Church; and lastly, the only one that is bigger and in a different material – wood – that is held in a Private Collection. All these pieces were partially gilded and present traces of colour in some areas. There are several small differences between them, such as the inclusion of a book on the lap of the Virgin Mary in the versions

in Valladolid and London, but in all of them, apart from the one in Valladolid, heads of cherubs appear, either to serve as a support for the Child, to rest the hand of the Virgin Mary on, or to fill the corners, as in the version in Toledo and that which is published here.

Heads of cherubs are a constant in the documented works of Gregorio Pardo. They appear in the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the National Archaeological Museum of Madrid, and are developed in profusion in the relief of the *Bestowal of the Miraculous Chasuble upon St Ildefonso* in the Choir of Toledo Cathedral. In this latter one, similarly oval shaped, the corners have also been used as in the two reliefs mentioned.

The *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* may be the lost model of the series of oval reliefs of the *Madonna and Child* attributed to Gregorio Pardo. Its greater technical quality and its style lead it to be attributed to Felipe Bigarny.



Felipe Bigarny (attr.)

(Langres, France, c. 1475 – Toledo, Spain 1542)

*Madonna and Child
and John the Baptist*

Alabaster with traces of gilding



Felipe Bigarny (attr.)

(Langres, France, c. 1475 – Toledo, Spain 1542)

***Madonna and Child
and John the Baptist***

Alabaster with traces of gilding

30 x 24.5 x 4 cm

Original oval pine wood frame

The other reliefs, clearly dependent in so many aspects to this first, must be made by someone very close to his style, and the prime candidate is his son, Gregorio Pardo who, throughout his career, made the strong influence of his father very clear.

The Virgin Mary is portrayed in three-quarter length, dressed in a tunic and covered by a full veil that, starting from her forehead, falls onto her shoulders, envelops the entire scene, and is secured on her chest with a rounded clasp. The Christ Child is standing with a foot resting on an open book that is in the lap of his Mother. He is dressed in a tunic that reveals his arms and legs from the knee down. In his right hand he is holding an apple and with his left he is stroking Mary's chin. He is looking towards the young St John who, half kneeling, is positioned in the lower part of the scene. He is dressed with a shorter tunic, whose edges have the look of camel leather. His arms are raised towards the Christ Child. There are gilded traces on the hair of the three figures and on the camel leather of the St John's tunic.

The face of the Virgin Mary is oval, with half-closed eyes and a slight smile. The waves of hair pulled back leave her forehead uncovered, and fall behind her shoulders. The length and narrowness of her fingers are striking. Both, the Christ Child and the little Saint John, present similar infant models, with almond-shaped eyes, full cheeks and short, curly hair. Their expression, with a closed mouth, renders the gravity of the moment.

The relief has been crafted with great technical perfection. The scene completely fills the oval that frames it, where the head of the Virgin Mary and the figures of

the Children are almost in the round. The veil, with its folds and twists, blankets the figures of the children and gives unity to the scene. The feeling of intimacy that the three figures succeed in conveying demonstrates the skill of a great sculptor.

From the iconographic point of view, the portrayals of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* were very popular in the Italian painting of the 15th century. Already since medieval times, in texts attributed to Pseudo-Bonaventure, the account had been told that the Holy Family, on their return from Egypt, had settled with Saint Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary's cousin, and with her son, the young Saint John. Furthermore, the book is a common accessory of the Virgin Mary, that appears in Renaissance paintings with the purpose of portraying her as a "Mater Sapientiae", carrying the Book of Wisdom, whilst the apple that the Christ Child is usually holding in his hand has traditionally been associated with the fruit of the Tree of Wisdom and alludes to Him as the future saviour of humanity from the Original Sin.

The composition of the scene is inspired by portrayals of the *Madonna and Child* that emerged during the Quattrocento in the north of Italy. Donatello (1386-1466), the great sculptor of the first Renaissance, was the creator of a model of the *Madonna holding the Christ Child* that had a great impact amongst sculptors around him. The Virgin Mary with the Child in her arms, carved in low relief, depicted in half-length, began to appear wall-mounted on Florentine funeral monuments, in tondos located in the tympanum, as in the tomb monument of the Antipope John XXIII, created by Donatello in collaboration with Michelozzo in the decade of the 1420s in the Baptistery; the tomb of Leonardo Bruni by Bernardo Rossellino, in Santa Croce; that of Marsuppini by Desiderio da Settignano, in the same place; that of Count Hugo of Tuscany by Mino da Fiesole, in Badia; and the tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal by Antonio Rossellino, in San Miniato al Monte. Very soon, this iconography appeared in free-standing reliefs for chapels or oratories of domestic use, such as those created by Donatello: the *Pazzi Madonna*, in marble, that is conserved in the Berlin Museum and which was the first that gained great popularity, being reproduced in polychrome stucco; and the *Chellini Madonna*, a bronze tondo of 28 cm diameter, that also had a great impact (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

The iconographic model of the Virgin with Child arrived with the first Italian artists who came to work on the Iberian Peninsula. It can be seen, for example, in an oval tondo located in the upper part of the tomb of Cardinal Pedro González de Mendoza in the Main Chapel of the Primate Cathedral of Toledo, created by Domenico Fancelli at the beginning of the 16th century, and later in that of the Bishop of Scala, Baltasar del Río, sculpted by Gian Giacomo and Guglielmo della Porta in Seville Cathedral. But even more important was the introduction

of models by Spanish sculptors who had trained in Italy: Alonso Berruguete in Florence and Rome; and Diego Siloe and Bartolomé Ordóñez in Naples.

However, although the relief model of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* that is being revealed in this study originates from those mentioned, and has in common with them the excellent technique, the idealism and the iconography, it presents some significant differences: the material – alabaster instead of marble; the size – three or four times smaller than them; and the gesture of the Child, who is touching his Mother's chin, that originates from the Flemish painter Jan Gossaert (1478-1532). Also, as Wethey has already noted in a pioneering article on the subject, the fact of dressing the Child denotes the conservatism that existed in Spain at the time which resulted in an aversion to nudity in art.¹

Wethey published the relief of the *Madonna and Child* that is conserved in London, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (to which we will return in later pages in this study) as a work by Diego de Siloe from which followed the versions in Burgos Cathedral and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. For him, the version in London was the first in a series that would later be created by anonymous sculptors from the Burgos School who were also close to Felipe Bigarny. The most significant difference that this historian noted is the melancholy that the London version conveys, which is not present in the others. But the comparative study carried out to suggest its attribution to Siloe can be equally applied to his contemporary and collaborator, Felipe Bigarny.

In 1528, Diego Siloe left Burgos to move to Granada, whereas Bigarny continued in the city, although he also had a workshop in Toledo, where he crafted the last works of his life. In both the carvings created by Bigarny in the altarpiece of the Chapel of the Constable, as well as in the alabaster and wooden pieces in Burgos Cathedral (amongst others), we find the characteristics of style that have led us to attribute this relief of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* to him, as will be seen.

Felipe Bigarny (Langres, c. 1475 – Toledo, 1543) came to Spain from the French region of Burgundy to walk the Camino de Santiago but, on passing through Burgos, stayed in the city and became one of the most prestigious sculptors of the Renaissance.²

Diego Sagredo described him in 1526 as a "quite unique craftsman",³ and shortly afterwards Cristóbal de Villalón in 1539 praised him in the following terms: "Sculpture in today's Spain currently has two masters: Felipe and Siloe, whose excellence illuminates and clarifies our age, because neither Phidias nor Praxiteles, the great sculptors of the antique, can be compared to them."⁴ Later, Juan de Arfe referred to him as an innovator on the subject of the proportions of the human body.⁵

Ceán Bermúdez, gathering quotations from earlier historian, declared that “*he re-established good taste in sculpture, and reordered the symmetry of the human body, increasing the nine faces to the height that Pomponius Gauricus had indicated by one third.*”⁶

The first conserved document locates Felipe Bigarny in Burgos in 1498, the year in which the creation of the relief representing the *Road to Calvary* was commissioned for the retrochoir of the ambulatory of the cathedral (Fig. 1). But the starting point of his professional success was afforded to him by Cardinal Cisneros when he turned to Bigarny in 1499. After this, other commissions came in, amongst the most important being the altarpiece of the Chapel of the University of Salamanca, and the sculptures of the main altarpiece of Palencia Cathedral that he executed in Burgos in 1505-1509.

As proof of the close relationship Bigarny held with Cardinal Cisneros, the magnificent relief portrait in alabaster, originally oval and measuring 33 x 25.5 cm, has been conserved, which was polychromed by Hernando del Rincón (Historical Heritage Complutense University, Madrid). This is a small masterpiece that already reveals many of the sculptor’s style traits. Executed towards 1518, it is directly inspired by models from the ancient world, that were picked up again in Italy and drawn from the portraits that appeared on coins and from the series of emperors and other Roman personalities. More specifically, the *Relief Portrait of Cardinal Cisneros* reminds us of those of *Plato* and *Aristotle* that were in wide circulation in the first half of the 16th century. In this work, Bigarny understood how to combine classical influence, incorporating grotesque elements on the dalmatic, with the religious theme, by representing *Bestowal of the Miraculous Chasuble upon St Ildefonso* on the circular clasp, the emblem of the archbishops of the seat of the Primate of Toledo (Fig. 2).⁷

The only record that exists that Felipe Bigarny made the trip to Italy has reached us through a comment he himself made at the end of his life and in which he referred to a stay in Rome during his youth. Nevertheless, contact with Spanish sculptors that had trained in that country could have been sufficient for the evolution of his style. In this context it should be noted that he worked in Zaragoza, on the tomb of Cardinal Selvagio, with Alonso Berruguete; on Burgos Cathedral with Diego Siloe; and in Granada, on the altarpiece of the Saint John and on the Royal Chapel with Bartolomé Ordóñez.⁸



Fig.1 Felipe Bigarny, *Road to Calvary*, alabaster, one of the reliefs of the retrochoir of the ambulatory of Burgos Cathedral.⁸



Fig. 2 Felipe Bigarny, *Portrait of Cardinal Cisneros*, alabaster, polychromed by Hernando del Rincón. Historical Heritage Complutense University, Madrid.

Fig. 3 Diego Siloe and Felipe Bigarny, altarpiece in the Chapel of the Constable, polychromed wood, Burgos Cathedral.





At all events, Felipe Bigarny was already enjoying great prestige when he joined Alonso Berruguete to create the tomb for Chancellor Selvagio in 1519. He was Master of Burgos Cathedral and had open workshops in several Spanish cities. He had created the altarpiece for Haro Cathedral, that of the University of Salamanca, the chapel of the sanctuary of Palencia Cathedral, and, together with Andrés de Nájera, the choir stalls of Burgos Cathedral. It was in this city, which is where he settled, buying a house beside La Moneda Palace, that he joined up with another of those who would become one of the great Spanish Renaissance sculptors, Diego Siloe, who had recently returned from Italy. Together they constructed the altarpieces of the Chapel of the Constable in 1523 (Fig. 3).⁹ Later Bigarny would execute the tombs of Pedro Fernández de Velasco and Mencía de Mendoza, which are masterpieces in their genre (Fig. 4).¹⁰ Furthermore, his admiration for Damián Forment, the other great sculptor of the period, became evident when he sent his son, Gregorio Pardo, to work in his workshop to complete his training, learning the technique of sculpting alabaster, as will be seen in this study.¹¹

The mastery that Bigarny came to acquire in the creation of his models can be admired in the carvings that are found in the main altarpiece of the Purification, in the Chapel of the Constable in Burgos Cathedral. The Virgin Mary of the *Nativity* group and the *Presentation at the Temple* in polychromed wood are a precursor of the beauty that he knew how to instil in his female figures, very similar to those of Diego Siloe in the movement of the folds and the arrangement of the hair (Figs. 5 & 6).



Fig. 4 Felipe Bigarny, *Tomb of Pedro Fernández de Velasco and Mencía de Mendoza*, alabaster, Chapel of the Constable, Burgos Cathedral.



Fig. 5 Felipe Bigarny, *The Nativity*, polychromed wood, main altarpiece of the Purification, Chapel of the Constable, Burgos Cathedral.

Fig. 6 Felipe Bigarny, *The Presentation at the Temple*, polychromed wood, main altarpiece of the Purification, Chapel of the Constable, Burgos Cathedral.

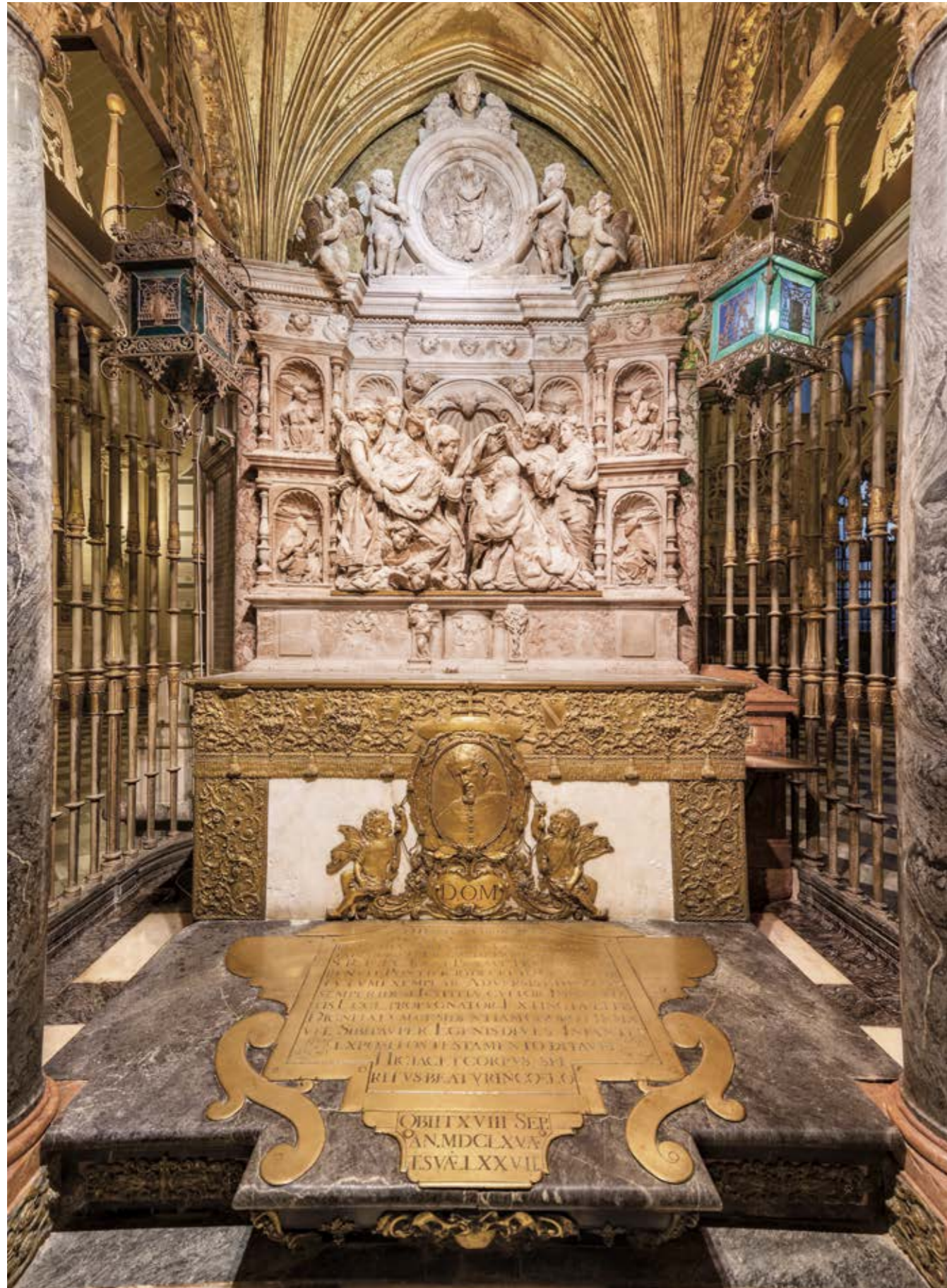
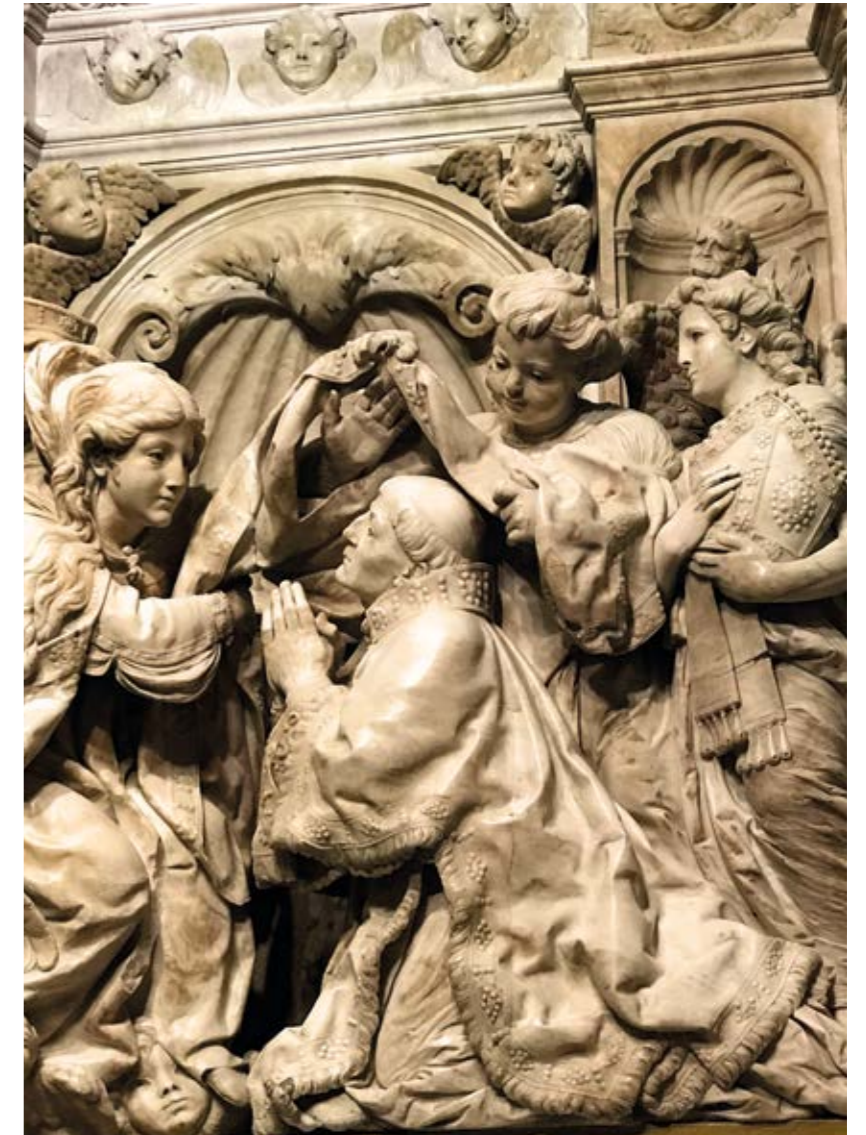


Fig. 7 a Felipe Bigarny, *Altarpiece of the Descent*, alabaster, altar in the Descent Chapel, Toledo Cathedral.

Fig. 7 b Felipe Bigarny, *Altarpiece of the Descent* (detail), alabaster, altar in the Descent Chapel, Toledo Cathedral.



However, one of the works that we most want to draw attention to is the relief of the *Altarpiece of the Descent*, in Toledo Cathedral, created in 1523-1527 in white alabaster from Cogolludo. In the main group, that depicts *Saint Ildefonso Receiving the Chasuble*, with the Virgin Mary and the saint in question, five full-bodied angels and cherubs at their feet, we find the oval face of the Virgin Mary, framed by soft locks of hair, covered with a veil that starts directly from her forehead and that would become a distinguishing feature of his models throughout his career (Figs. 7 a & b).

In 1536, Bigarny had completed the stalls in the Monastery of San Clemente (Toledo), of which only two seats remain as the majority were lost in a fire in 1561. In one of them, the *Annunciation*, he already reveals himself as an innovative sculptor with a harmonious composition and idealised imagery where the importance of the clothing, the hair and the open hands with tapered fingers is striking.¹²



Fig. 8 Felipe Bigarny, *Madonna and Child*, medallion in relief located on the upper part of the Tomb of the Bishop of Tuy, Diego de Avellaneda, alabaster, currently in the Chapel of Saint Gregory, National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid.

Fig. 9 Felipe Bigarny, *Madonna and Child*, medallion in relief previously located on the upper part of the Tomb of the parents of Diego de Avellaneda, alabaster, currently in the National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid.

Some years later, in 1536, Felipe Bigarny signed a contract to execute the tombs of the Bishop of Tuy, Diego de Avellaneda, and of his parents, for his funeral chapel in the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine in Espeja (Soria). (Currently a ruin, the tomb of the Bishop and some fragments from it and that of his parents have been conserved in the Chapel of Saint Gregory, in the National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid).¹³ There he turned to the decoration of the tondos in the upper part of the monument with the image of the *Madonna and Child*. In one of them, the iconographic models are the same as in the relief of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist*. The child Christ is positioned standing on his Mother's lap who is holding a book with her left hand. He is stroking her chin whilst with the other hand he holds a ball that represents his power over the world. The veil envelops the scene in a similar way (Figs. 8 & 9).



One of the angels from the lower part of the tomb of the parents of Avellaneda is now held in a Private Collection. He has a striking resemblance to the Christ Child, identical pose, and the way of sculpting the hair, the folds of the robe and the hands and feet, indicate they have been done by the same artist (Fig. 10).

In his last work, the *Choir Stalls in Toledo Cathedral*, which he carved in part with Alonso Berruguete and was finished by his son, Gregorio Pardo, Bigarny once again returned to a female model that was very similar to the image of the *Queen of Sheba*, a powerful, full-length figure, of great artistic beauty (Fig. 11).¹⁴

Fig. 10 Felipe Bigarny, *Angel with a pilaster*, fragment previously located on the lower part of the Tomb of the parents of Diego de Avellaneda, alabaster, currently in a Private Collection.

Fig. 11. Felipe Bigarny, *The Queen of Sheba*, wood, Choir Stalls of Toledo Cathedral (detail).





Finally, one of the works recently attributed to him, the *Bust of a Veiled Woman*, (Private Collection) perfectly defines Felipe Bigarny's style. This marble bust, measuring 43 cm in height, inspired by Roman portraits from the times of Augustus, contains the facial features, the enigmatic smile, the way of sculpting and gathering the drapes of the robe (which is secured with an oval clasp), as well as the fall of the hair in gentle waves with a smaller lock in front of the ears, that are the hallmark of Felipe Bigarny (Fig. 12).¹⁵

These are the most original features and are present in the relief of the *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist*. As will be seen below, this model could have been the starting point for the series of small, oval alabaster reliefs attributed to Gregorio Pardo, who was able to assimilate and continue his father's style.

The skill shown in the alabaster technique, the idealisation of the models, the highly personal way of rendering the hair with regular thick locks, the importance of the hands as a means of expression, and the treatment of the drapery to unify the composition, are Felipe Bigarny's characteristics of style that are to be found in this relief. In it, the sculptor has succeeded in conveying the tenderness and complicity between those portrayed, and in so doing contributing to the sought-after objective in these types of work: starting with a harmonious and beautiful portrayal and providing a precious object of devotion that was so in demand and appreciated in those times.

Fig. 12. Felipe Bigarny, *Bust of a Veiled Woman*, Private Collection. (In 2009 in Matthiesen, London).

NOTES

1. H. Wethey, "A Madonna and Child by Diego de Siloe", *Art Bulletin*, XXII, 1940, pp. 190-196.
2. For Felipe Bigarny see J. M. Azcárate, *La Escultura del siglo XVI, Ars Hispaniae*, Madrid, 1958, p. 227; M. E. Gómez Moreno, *Breve historia de la escultura española*, Madrid, 1935 (reedl. 1951, 2001), pp. 79 and 93; J. Camón Aznar, *La escultura y la rejería española del siglo XVI, Summa Artis*, XVIII, Madrid, 1961, reed. 1981, p. 207; and the monograph by I. del Río de la Hoz, *El escultor Felipe Bigarny (h. 1470-1542)*, Valladolid, 2001.
3. Diego del Sagredo, *Medidas del Romano*, Toledo, 1526, facsimile edition of 1549, Madrid, 2000 (Introduction by F. Marías and A. Bustamante).
4. Cristóbal de Villalón, *Ingeniosa comparación de lo antiguo con lo moderno*, Valladolid, 1539, in F. J. Sánchez Cantón, *Fuentes Literarias para la Historia del Arte Español*, vol. 1, pp. 21-33 (quote on p. 29).
5. Juan de Arfe, *De varia Commesuración para la Escultura y Arquitectura*, Seville, 1585-1587. Publ. Albatros, 1979.
6. A. Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España*, Madrid, 1800, publ. Madrid, facsimile, 1965, vol. V, pp. 228-231.
7. At the same time he executed that of Antonio de Nebrija that has not been conserved and is only known of through engravings.
8. A.A. V.V., *El libro de la Capilla Real*, Granada, 1994.
9. M. Estella Marcos, Ex. cat. *La imaginería de los retablos de la Capilla del Condestable*, J. C. Elorza (com.), Burgos, 1995.
10. I. del Río de la Hoz, 2001, cit.
11. M. C. Morte, Damián Forment. *Un escultor del Renacimiento*, Zaragoza, 2009.
12. I. del Río de la Hoz, 2001, cit., pp. 266-267, figs. 33-36.
13. J. M. Cruz Yábar, "El retablo Mayor del Monasterio Jerónimo de Santa María de Espeja. Una vieja imagen y una nueva visión", *Archivo Español de Arte*, vol. 84, 2011.
14. A. Franco Mata, "Sillería alta de la Catedral de Toledo", *Abrente*, 42-42, 2010-2011, pp. 113-165.
15. Found in the Matthiessen collection in 2009. I del Río de la Hoz, Ex. cat. *The Mystery of Faith. An eye on Spanish sculpture, 1550-1750*, Matthiessen Fine Art LTD and Coll & Cortés Fine Art, Madrid, London, 2009, pp. 190-197, no. 19.



Fig. 13. Back of *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist* by Felipe Bigarny (attr.), Buenos Aires, Jaime Eguiguren.







