



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ART & ANTIQUES

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Workshop of Juan de Anchieta  
Last quarter of the 16th century

**ST. MICHAEL THE  
ARCHANGEL**

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***St. Michael The Archangel***

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Polychrome wood

81 x 42 x 20 cm

Provenance: private collection, Italy

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*Rosario Coppel*

**Juan de Anchieta (Azpeitia, Guipúzcoa, ca. 1533 - Pamplona, 1588)** is considered one of the most prominent exponents of Renaissance sculpture in Spain. Through Gaspar Becerra, who he worked with as a skilled assistant on the high altarpiece in Astorga Cathedral between 1558 and 1562, he became influenced by Italian art, particularly that of Michelangelo. Shortly afterwards, in 1563, he moved to Valladolid, where he collaborated with Inocencio Berruguete and Juan Bautista Beltrán on the altarpiece of the church of El Salvador in Simancas, immediately after which he joined the workshop of Juan de Juni, who named him in a document (1577) expressing his final wishes as the sculptor most capable of completing the Medina de Rioseco altarpiece.<sup>1</sup>

Having set up a major workshop in Pamplona in 1578, he outstripped the competition, dominating the art markets of Aragon, the Basque Country, Castile and Navarre, specialising exclusively on religious art and introducing the so-called “Romanist” style.<sup>2</sup> The reputation he garnered for himself among his peers is evidenced by the fact that in 1583 he was summoned to El Escorial, the most important artistic centre of the day, to value Juan Bautista Monegro’s statue of *St. Lawrence*.<sup>3</sup>

Anchieta worked in alabaster and wood, and his strong artistic personality may be discerned in his sculptures throughout his career. His figures are physically robust, presenting solid musculature inspired in classical sculpture, and their physiognomic features are recognisable in their characteristic poses or gestures, often proud, haughty and serious. In them, he was capable of transmitting restrained spiritual expressiveness and pathos in faces that were self-absorbed and scowling, aware of their dramatic mission.

***St. Michael the Archangel*** is carved in gilt and polychrome pine, measuring 81 x 42 x 20 cm. Being half real-life size and presenting a flat back, it was probably used to decorate one of the niches from the predella of an altarpiece. (Figs. 1 and 2)

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1 J. Camón Aznar, *El escultor Juan de Anchieta*, Pamplona, 1943; J. J. Martín González, “La estancia de Juan de Anchieta en Valladolid”, *Príncipe de Viana*, no. 185, 1988, pp. 469-476; M. C. García Gainza, “El escultor Juan de Anchieta en su cuarto centenario (1588-1988)”, *Príncipe de Viana*, no. 185, 1988, pp. 443-468; M. J. Redondo Cantera, “El aprendizaje y los años vallisoletanos de Juan de Anchieta”, *Memoria Artis*, vol. II, Santiago de Compostela, 2003, pp. 481-497; M. C. García Gainza, *Juan de Anchieta, escultor del Renacimiento*, Madrid, 2008; L. Vasallo Toranzo, *Juan de Anchieta. Aprendiz y oficial de escultura en Castilla (1551-1571)*, Universidad de Valladolid, 2012.

2 The powerful influence of the style of Raphael and Michelangelo gave rise to this new artistic movement known as the “Roman maniera”, or Romanism, which spread throughout Europe, reaching Spain through the Italian painters Philip II hired to work on El Escorial, and Gaspar Becerra, who had spent 17 years in Rome. M. C. García Gainza, *La escultura romanista en Navarra: discípulos y seguidores de Juan de Anchieta*, Pamplona, 1969 (re-ed. 1986).

3 Sculpted between 1582 and 1583 along with the *Six Kings of Judah* and the *Four Evangelists* for the outside of the monastery.



**Fig. 1 Workshop of Juan de Anchieta, St. Michael The Archangel, polychrome wood. Private collection.**



**Fig. 2 Workshop of Juan de Anchieta, St. Michael The Archangel (detail).**

*The Archangel* is depicted as a youth, full face and in Roman dress, with short tunic, skirt and a cloak which, secured over the left shoulder, covers his thorax and passes over his right arm, then falling down to the base. His head is tilted towards his right, and his facial expression is restrained, as if resigned, in recognition of his feat in defeating the devil, who appears prostrate at his feet, contorted and looking upwards. St. Michael clasps a sword in his right hand, while his left arm hangs by his side, holding a shield by two straps. His right leg is slightly bent and pushed forward, generating a certain tension. His broad face with its eyes wide open features very thin eyebrows, long nose, small mouth and extremely long neck. His flowing mane of hair falls over his shoulders in thick, wavy locks. His arms are strong and his hands are big. He wears boots almost to the knee which, open at the front, expose his toes. His wings have not been preserved. (**Fig. 3**)



**Fig. 3 Workshop of Juan de Anchieta, St. Michael The Archangel (detail).**





Fig. 4 Workshop of Juan de Anchieta, St. Michael The Archangel (detail).

*The Devil* has human form, with bulging eyes and knitted brows, a pointed left ear (there is only a suggestion of the right one), large nose and mouth, horns and a clump of hair in the middle of his skull. He is naked, lacking any anatomic detail, his arms and legs bent over and writhing under the weight of St. Michael who is standing on top of him, using him as a base (although there is a small base under the Devil). The back has not been sculpted and is completely flat. (Fig. 4)

The work's **state of preservation** is very good, and the original **polychromy** has survived, with evidence of *sgraffito* and *estofado* work. The palette of colours used is made up of gold, red, a greenish blue with fabric folds, and ochre. St. Michael's hair is golden and his carnation is pale, as opposed to the much darker colouring of the Devil. Both the cloak and the shield present vermillion with golden highlights. Furthermore, the clothes present branchlike phytomorphic patterns with little brush-applied motifs such as a cherub's head in profile and a fantastical female figure, seen full face, among flowers and fallen leaves. His boots also feature similar decorative motifs. All of this was in accordance with the norms set out by the final session of the Council Trent on 3 December 1563, which issued its "Decree



Fig. 5 Workshop of Juan de Anchieta, St. Michael The Archangel (detail).

on Images”. From that time on, grotesque motifs were abandoned, deemed pagan, being replaced by naturalist phytomorphic motifs, with abundant patterns involving vegetation and birds, sometimes with cartouches, sprouting buds and other images. (Fig. 5)

## Iconography

St. Michael was one of the seven archangels, captain of the heavenly hosts and defender of the Church, who fought against the rebel angels and the dragon of the Apocalypse. One of his missions was to lead the dead and weigh their souls at the Last Judgement.

Although he started to be worshipped in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was during the Counter-Reformation that he became the Catholic Church’s representative against the Protestant heretics.

He tends to be depicted with great wings, dressed as a soldier or knight, with chainmail, shield featuring the cross, a flaming spear or sword, and on occasion holding scales to weigh souls. The Devil, in half-human form or as a dragon, is pictured under his feet. (Fig. 6)

Better than any other saint, St. Michael the Archangel driving his spear into the Devil symbolises the triumphant spirit of the Catholic Reformation, so he often appears in the altarpieces of churches dedicated to him.



**Fig. 6** Saint Michael Archangel. Vitoria, Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro.



## Attribution

A comparative study between the style of this *St Michael the Archangel* and models created by the sculptor Juan de Anchieta are the basis for this attribution, and leave no doubt whatsoever that this carving came from his workshop.

Of the most important works from the early years of Anchieta's artistic career, it is worth highlighting the altarpiece of *St. Clare*, in Briviesca (Burgos), executed between 1565 and 1569, a work commissioned by Pedro López de Gámiz, which was left without polychromy.<sup>4</sup> But even more key to the study we are presenting here was another of the artist's early works, the altarpiece of *St. Michael*, from the Epistle side of the chapel of San Miguel in the Cathedral, or Seo, of Zaragoza, for which Gabriel Zaporta acted as patron, completed in 1571 featuring alabaster relief work and statues.<sup>5</sup>

For this major work, which is perfectly preserved, Juan de Anchieta was commissioned to depict:

*“the story of St. Michael and on either side St. Gabriel and St. Raphael, and underneath the devils, as many as would fit in the stone, in accordance with the dimensions of the figures above”*<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 7)

Following the instructions of his patron, the sculptor executed a St. Michael in the Romanist style, drawing on the model created by Giorgio Vasari for the alfresco works on the ceiling of the Chancery Palace in Rome (Fig. 8), which was subsequently reinterpreted by Gaspar Becerra in the (also alfresco) scene depicting *Perseus and the Golden Fleece* from the ceiling of the Pardo Palace on the outskirts of Madrid.<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 9)

According to the 1569 contract, the polychromy of the Zaporta chapel altarpiece was executed by the Navarre-born painter Juan de Rivera, who gilded the wood using fine, burnished gold, with grotesques in the so-



**Fig. 7 Juan de Anchieta**, altarpiece of Saint Michael, polychrome alabaster, 1571, Capilla de San Miguel o Capilla Zaporta, Zaragoza, La Seo.

4 J. Sanz García, “El retablo de Santa Clara de Briviesca (Estudio documental)”, *Boletín de la Comisión Provincial de Monumentos Históricos y artísticos de Burgos*, 1934: pp. 114-121 and 140-147; 1935: pp. 170-181, 225-230, 319-323, 366-369; 1936, pp. 346-356; A. A. Barrón García, “El retablo de Santa Clara de Briviesca en el romanismo norteño”, *Boletín del Instituto y Museo Camón Aznar*, LXXVIII-LXXIX, 1999, pp. 241-300.

5 A. San Vicente, “La capilla de San Miguel del patronato Zaporta, en la Seo de Zaragoza”, *Archivo Español de Arte*, no. 142, 1973, pp. 99-118.

6 San Vicente, 1963, op. cit.

7 García Gainza, 2008, op. cit. pp. 110-111.



**Fig. 8** Giorgio Vasari, Saint Michael, fresco painting 1544-1546. Roma, Palacio de la Cancillería.



**Fig. 9** Gaspar Becerra, El triunfo de Perseo, pintura al fresco, 1562-1567, Madrid, Palacio del Pardo, Patrimonio Nacional.

called fantastic, Mannerist style. He employed red, blue and blackish ochre, with flowing hair in gold, in accordance with Italian Quattrocento polychromy.

Soon after, in 1575, Anchieta worked alongside Esteban de Velasco on the *St. Michael* altarpiece from the church of San Miguel in Vitoria, where he carved the sculpture of the titular saint and the reliefs for the predella featuring the *Flagellation* and the *Crowning with Thorns*, and another two of lesser scale, *Moses* and *David*. These pieces are all currently on display at the Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro (Cathedral Museum of Sacred Art) in the city's new cathedral.<sup>8</sup> (**Fig. 10**)

Between 1576 and 1580, Anchieta introduced the Romanist style into Navarre with his *St. Mary* high altarpiece in Cáseda. He signed a contract for the commission on 27 November 1576, undertaking to complete it within four years. Dedicated to *Our Lady* and executed in walnut, it was gilded, with “estofado” technique applied (to the tabernacle and the *Assumption of the Virgin*) by Juan de Landa in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> (**Fig. 11**)

At the same time he was working on the Cáseda project, Anchieta also executed an altarpiece for the

8 The altarpiece was left unfinished and was then subsequently completed by Gregorio Fernández. F. Tabar de Anitua, “Del retablo de San Miguel de Vitoria: una escultura inédita de Juan de Anchieta”, *Archivo Español de Arte*, no. 187, 1974, pp. 328-330.

9 García Gainza, 1982, op. cit.





**Fig. 10 Juan de Anchieta**, Saint Michael Archangel, polychrome wood, 1575, Vitoria, Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro (from the main altarpiece of Iglesia de San Miguel de Vitoria).



**Fig. 11 Juan de Anchieta**, main altarpiece, polychrome wood, 1576-1580. Cáseda (Navarra), Iglesia de Santa María.

church of Añorbe (Navarre). Twenty years later, in 1597-1601, it was Juan de Landa who was once again hired to carry out the polychromy. The structure included free-standing and high-relief figures in the Roman style, some of medium size, while the decoration covering the altarpiece architecture was made up of friezes and pediments with motifs featuring naked children lying down holding up spheres with their feet or free hands, and angels' heads. In the first section we find the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul (together in a single high relief) on the Gospel Side, while the image of St. Michael Triumphant over the Dragon appears on the Epistle Side.

The polychromy is extremely interesting. It presents phytomorphic branchlike patterns, cartouches and other living things. The giltwork alternates burnished and matte gold, with the latter predominating. The decoration is made up of "estofado" work imitating brocades and damasks, and in the ornamentation featuring bishops and saints we find pearls, gems and diamond tips, as can be observed in the *St. Michael*. (Fig. 12)

In 1584, Juan de Anchieta carried out the high altarpiece for the church of San Miguel in Aoiz



**Fig. 12 Juan de Anchieta**, Saint Michael, main altarpiece, polychrome wood, 1577. Iglesia de la Asunción, Añorbe (Navarra).



**Fig. 13 Juan de Anchieta**, Saint Michael, main altarpiece, 1584. Iglesia de San Miguel, Aoiz (Navarra).

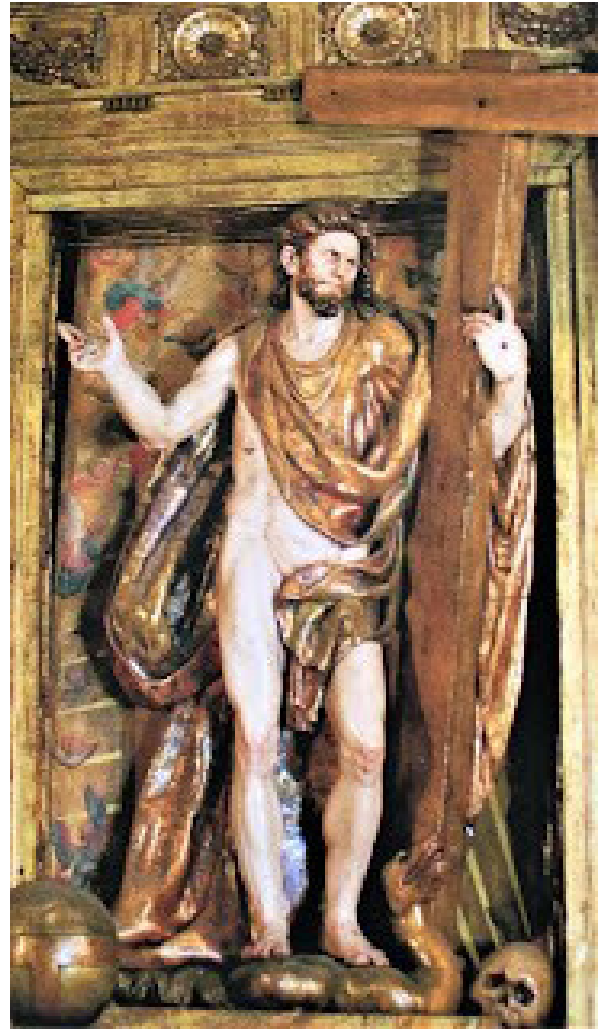
(Navarre), which was renovated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Surviving pieces by the master include an image of the *Virgin and Child*, a small-scale *Christ on the Cross* (62 x 72 cm), and the titular saint, *St. Michael, the Archangel*, which does however bear little resemblance to the Zaporta or Añorbe works, seemingly more closely-based on the Vitoria model. **(Fig. 13)**

In 1583, the sculptor carved the tabernacle for the church of *Santa María* in Tafalla (Navarre) and, a few years later, in 1588, he designed his masterpiece, the high altarpiece from the same church. Of colossal proportions, standing some 15 metres tall (50ft), this huge project passed to Anchieta's pupil, Pedro González de San Pedro (1560-1608), following the unexpected death of the master. Juan de Landa carried out the gilding and "estofado" work in 1598. **(Fig. 14)**. It is worth highlighting the image of *The Saviour*, which is directly inspired by Michelangelo's *Christ carrying the Cross*. **(Fig. 15)**





**Fig. 14 Juan de Anchieta**, main altarpiece, polychrome wood, 1588. Parroquia de Santa María, Tafalla (Navarra).



**Fig. 15 Juan de Anchieta**, *El Salvador*, polychrome wood, 1588, main altarpiece of the Parroquia de Santa María, Tafalla (Navarra).

## Comparative Study



**Fig. 16 Juan de Anchieta, *La Anunciación*, polychrome wood, 1588, Main altarpiece de la parroquia de Santa María, Tafalla (Navarra).**



**Fig. 17 Juan de Anchieta, Saint Michael Archangel (devil detail), polychrome wood, 1575, Vitoria, Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro (from the main altarpiece of Iglesia de San Miguel de Vitoria).**

In the first place, we need to highlight the composition of the group, with a diagonal axis passing from the Archangel's outstretched right arm to the head of the devil. Then there is the almost full face position of St. Michael's head, slightly tilted, the muscly arms and the way the clothing hangs down. And, most of all, his physiognomic features, the blond ringlets of flowing hair and the melancholic look on his face. These are characteristics we see time and time again in the sculptures of Juan de Anchieta.

The work that best encapsulates our artist's style is the *Angel of the Annunciation* from that Tafalla altarpiece in Navarre. This is a youthful, adolescent male, with perfect anatomy, bare chest and shoulders, leg slightly bent and folds in the loosely-secured cloak creating an effect of light and shade. His hands are extremely expressive and his hair is skilfully executed, depicted in thick locks. (Fig. 16)

Another model that invites close comparison with our image is the *St. Michael the Archangel* from the eponymous altarpiece in the church in Añorbe. In addition to the physical similarity, we can identify major points of convergence in the composition, which is created on the basis of open diagonal axes, marked by arms and unfurled wings. This helps to avoid an overly full-frontal effect, and introduces a slight sense of movement. (Fig. 12)

With regard to the figure of the devil, what is most striking is its vanquished posture, squirming under the weight of the Archangel, its amorphous body lacking any anatomic detail, and its tormented gaze directed towards its executioner, much like we find in the works from Añorbe, Aoiz, and Vitoria. (Fig. 17)





Finally, it is worth emphasizing the importance that Anchieta gave to polychromy in all his works, contracting the best painters at his disposal. The most important of these was Juan de Landa who, as we have seen, worked on the Cáseda, Añorbe and Tafalla altarpieces. One work that serves as an excellent example of his skills would be the Tafalla tabernacle, one of Anchieta's masterpieces from 1583, whose gilding and "estofado" work fell to Landa. In this piece our sculptor demonstrated his ability to work on a small scale, and not just on a monumental or even colossal one. (Fig. 18)

**Fig. 18 Juan de Anchieta**, *Sagrario*, 1583, polychromed by **Juan de Landa**. Iglesia de Santa María de Tafalla (Navarra).

## Conclusion



**Fig. 19 Juan de Anchieta**, Altarpiece of Saint Michael (detail), policromado alabaster, 1571 Capilla de San Miguel o Capilla Zaporta, Zaragoza, La Seo.

The characteristics of Juan de Anchieta's models are highly personal and, as such, may be recognised in the works created by him and executed at his workshop by his best assistants and apprentices. The compositional model, the robust anatomy, the physiognomic features with the wide face, long nose and small mouth, the mane of hair hanging down in tangled ringlets (often gilt), and the serious and concentrated expression, all serve as authorial trademarks. It is as such that one should highlight the similarity between the face of this *St. Michael* and those of the angels on the altarpiece from the Zaporta chapel in the Zaragoza Seo. (Fig. 19)

The sculpture of *St. Michael the Archangel* we are introducing in this study is another addition to the catalogue of works by Juan de Anchieta, a prolific sculptor of great personality, who was able to create a major workshop popularising his style throughout the north of Spain. With regard to its chronology, it may have been part of an altarpiece executed during the same period as the Cáseda and Añorbe ones, in Navarre between 1577 and 1580, given it matches the model, style and polychromy of both.

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