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(Burgos, 1512/1513 – 1552)

Madonna and Child

Alabaster with traces
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21.5 x 18 cm (without frame)

28 x 24.5 x 3.5 cm (with frame)

Original wooden frame with the following inscription:
 “O DIVINA CELSII / V DO / QVIS DIGNEV/ ALEBIT
 TVAM RA / DIOS AM / CONTEMPLARI”.¹

This relief, like the previous one, was inspired by the representations of *Madonna and Child* that emerged during the Quattrocento in northern Italy. The features of the Virgin Mary's face are remarkable, and it may look a portrait, with her wide face and her hair off her forehead thanks to a tiara from which a veil comes out. She has been portrayed in a three-quarter view, dressed in Roman style with a robe, covered by a veil with fine creases that, fastened by a clasp in her chest, wraps the whole scene, including the Christ Child figure. The Child is up, standing on a cherub's wings and covered by a wide robe that only shows his arms and feet. The Virgin Mary's hair is made up of thin parallel locks, with one of the locks over her ear. The Christ Child's hair is curly, and He has a halo on his crown. Virgin Mary's hands, with her middle and ring finger together and her index and little finger separate, express the love and protection she wants to give her son. The whole scene is represented in an oval within a rectangle whose corners are crowned by cherub's heads. Both the figures' hairs and the cherub's wings show traces of gilding while their eyes, mouths and her clasp show some touches of colour.

This *Madonna and Child* relief is part of a series of works of art, all of which are very much alike in size, materials, models, techniques and style, and which may be attributed, under Diego Siloe and Felipe Bigarny's influences, to Gregorio Pardo.

Gregorio Pardo (Burgos, c. 1512/1513-1552) was Felipe Bigarny's and his first wife's María Sáez Pardo first son. In 1532, when he was about nineteen years old, he moved to Zaragoza to work at Damian Forment's workshop, where he trained for two years to learn the art of drawing and the alabaster technique.²

In 1535-1536 he worked in Valencia and, once back in Burgos, his hometown, he went on to help in his father's workshop until he moved to Toledo in 1537, where he married one of the daughters of Alonso de Covarrubias, the Master Architect of the Cathedral. He worked with Covarrubias on the Alcázar of Toledo (as well as with Francisco de Villalpando, Gaspar de Vega and Enrique Egas Jr.) and, together with Felipe Bigarny, he was in charge, among other jobs, of half of the Cathedral's choir stalls, since the other half had been entrusted to Alonso Berruguete.³

He was, no doubt, a predestined artist who knew how to benefit from his position, being the first son of one of the best sculptors of the time, and collaborator of his father-in-law, the architect Alonso de Covarrubias. Had it not been for his premature death, Gregorio Pardo would have become one of the most prestigious sculptors of Spain during the Renaissance. His works show he not only knew the alabaster and wood techniques very well, but also the fact that, when it came to choosing and designing his models, he always followed certain aesthetics thanks to his father's strong influence.

Despite Gregorio Pardo's favourable personal situation all along his career, in terms of criticism, he was not very lucky, and he even went unnoticed by the historians of the time. We've only found one reference to him by Ceán Bermúdez, who described him as:

*"...an sculptor, and one of the best ever in Toledo during the good times of the fine arts. Maybe he did not study in Italy, but he was, undoubtedly, Vigarny's, Berruguete's or any other master's most profitable disciple."*⁴

According to Azcárate, *"his training is unknown, though judging by his style, he may have been in touch with the masters of Valladolid, keeping from Burgos the good techniques and the correct shapes."*⁵

Gómez Moreno defines his *"softness a bit feminine, so different from the Grand Master Felipe's energy... a good, elegant sculptor, very French in style, a characteristic shown in his delicate feminine figures."*⁶

Finally, Camón Aznar said that *"he is one of the most delicate artists, with such refined Tuscan beauty in his sculptures that the idea of a trip to Italy should not be dismissed"*.⁷

The catalogue of the works of art that were identified as Gregorio Pardo's is not so big.⁸ His first recorded work, with some signs of Damián Forment's influence, is the relief called *Christ's Resurrection*, from 1535-1536, placed at Valencia Cathedral.

Between 1536 and 1537, while in Toledo, he worked on part of the *Puerta de la Torre* decoration, a gate which was designed and built by Alonso de Covarrubias.



Fig. 1 Gregorio Pardo, *Alonso de Castilla*, Calahorra bishop, alabaster, Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional.

Fig. 2 Gregorio Pardo, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, polychrome and gilding alabaster, Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional.

Besides, he was in charge of the sculptures from two altarpieces with painter Juan Correa in San Nicolás, Toledo.⁹ He also worked on the altarpiece placed in Herrera del Duque, Badajoz, which was dismantled in 1937,¹⁰ and on the main altarpiece at San Clemente, Toledo's monastery, in 1542, which his father had entrusted him, but which, unfortunately, was destroyed by a fire sometime later.

In 1539, Pardo worked on the praying statue of *Alonso de Castilla*, Calahorra bishop, for the funeral chapel placed in the long gone Monastery of Santo Domingo el Real in Madrid; and he also worked on a relief called *the Assumption of the Virgin*. Both works of art are made of alabaster and can be found at the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid.¹¹ The bishop's praying statue has a size of 127 x 58 x 47 cm. It was finished in 1542 with the help of Esteban Jumete, who made the reliefs of the cope (Fig. 1). *The Assumption of the Virgin* was made on polychrome alabaster and has a size of 93 x 54 x 30 cm. It was also finished in 1542. It was commissioned by the bishop of Calahorra to decorate his funeral chapel; but later he decided it should be placed at the front part of the building. The Virgin Mary is represented at the exact moment when four



angels are sending her up to Heaven, while two other angels are crowning her. She is over a cherub and a half-moon. It has been emphasized the influence of Felipe Bigarny and Damián Forment (Fig. 2). In these two works, Gregorio Pardo shows his artistic maturity.

Sometime later, in 1541, Pardo returned to Toledo where he continued working with his father until the last one's sudden death in 1542 and, even though Pardo went back to Madrid in 1543 to help Covarrubias with the new façade of the Alcázar, he also devoted himself to finishing the works Bigarny had left unfinished. Among these, there is the outstanding oval alabaster relief *The Bestowal of the Miraculous Chasuble upon San Ildefonso*, which is placed behind the choir archbishop's chair at the Toledo Cathedral. It was finished in 1548 (Figs. 3 a & b). The scene's composition is similar to the one created by Bigarny at the Descent Chapel in the same temple (see fig. 7 in previous chapter). This is exceptional because it is useful to compare the differences in style between father and son.



Figs. 3 a & b Gregorio Pardo, *The Bestowal of the Miraculous Chasuble upon St Ildefonso*, oval alabaster relief placed behind the choir archbishop's chair at Toledo Cathedral.



Fig. 4 Gregorio Pardo (attr.), *Madonna and Child and John the Baptist*, polychrome alabaster, Zamora's Cathedral Museum.

Fig. 5 a Gregorio Pardo, *Cupboard of the Antechamber*, wood, Toledo Cathedral.



The statue of the *Madonna and Child and the John the Baptist*, which comes from the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Zamora, and is kept nowadays at the Cathedral's Museum, had been attributed to Gregorio Pardo (Fig. 4).¹² But one of the most personal works of Gregorio Pardo is the *Cupboard of the Antechamber* in Toledo Cathedral. It was made in pear wood in 1549-1550. It has sixty soffits with grotesques, horizontal scenes in the plinth and decoration in the pilasters with their bases. Over the ledge there are four candelabra and five coats of arms. In these reliefs, Pardo mixes an assortment of secular motifs with religious scenes, like the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Virtues* and a *Prophet*. They are superb models where Michelangelo's influence may be seen through the decoration in Alonso Berruguete's choir stalls in the same temple (Figs. 5 a, b & c).¹³



Figs. 5 b & c Gregorio Pardo, *Cupboard of the Antechamber* (details), wood, Toledo Cathedral.





Fig. 6 Gregorio Pardo (attr.),
Madonna and Child, alabaster,
Cathedral Museum in Burgos.

Fig. 7 Gregorio Pardo (attr.),
Madonna and Child, alabaster,
Diocesan and Cathedral Museum
of Valladolid.

Alabaster oval reliefs of the Madonna and Child

As it has been already mentioned, there are a number of versions of an oval relief in which the *Madonna and Child* is represented. They are around 30 cm high, made in alabaster, with only some slight differences among them. Historians agree that the model was inspired by Diego Siloe and Felipe Bigarny, but they have been recently attributed to Gregorio Pardo.¹⁴ Such attribution is based on the comparison with the relief called *The Bestowal of the Miraculous Chasuble upon San Ildefonso*, which is placed in the back of the choir archbishop's chair at Toledo Cathedral (See fig. 3). It should be noted, though, that for this work, Pardo used his father's sketches, so it should not be surprising to find models with the same characteristics, particularly in the way of placing the Virgin Mary's veil, which emerges from her tiara and then becomes concave, in the way of creating her hair, with long, regular, wavy locks, or in the way cloths fall, making parallel lines.



One of the first versions of the *Madonna and Child* is located at the Cathedral Museum in Burgos. It comes from the Chapel of the Constable. Pedro Fernández Velasco, fourth Castile Constable, had donated it, according to an inscription in the back of the relief. It is 35 cm high and it still keeps its original wooden frame and a base with the Velasco family coat of arms. On the bottom, there is a cherub over which the Child places his foot (Fig. 6).¹⁵ There is a similar version at the Diocesan Museum of Valladolid. The only difference between both versions is that the last one shows the Virgin Mary holding a book. This relief may probably come from the ancient collegiate church of Santa María la Mayor (Fig. 7).



At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, there is another one which has been classified as a version created from a model by Diego de Siloe or by Felipe Bigarny.¹⁶ It measures 28.6 x 21.6 cm. It shows traces of polychrome and, like Burgos one, it has a cherub on the bottom (Fig. 8).

There is a similar relief that Wethey attributed to Diego de Siloe,¹⁷ located at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This is also made of alabaster with signs of polychrome and traces of gilding; the Virgin holds a book and there is a cherub at the Child's feet, but the clasp is missing. The Museum's new classification keeps Siloe's attribution in the records (Fig. 9).¹⁸

Fig. 8 Diego Siloe or Felipe Bigarny (attr.), *Madonna and Child*, polychrome alabaster, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 9 Diego Siloe (attr.), *Madonna and Child*, alabaster with signs of polychrome and traces of gilding, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.





Fig. 10 Gregorio Pardo (attr.), *Madonna and Child*, walnut, Private Collection (previously located in Matthiesen Gallery, London).

There is still another version at the National Museum in Warsaw, which has been classified as coming from Felipe Bigarny's workshop.¹⁹ There is also a version at the parish church of San Nicolás in Toledo. In this version, the oval is within a rectangle, with cherubs' heads in the corners and, even though composition is the same, the excess of polychrome (the veil shows horizontal lines) makes it look like a workshop creation, all in all less successful than the previously mentioned versions.²⁰

In 1987 a model with similar characteristics was sold at an auction in New York. Classified as an Italian-Flemish model, from the end of the 16th century or the beginning of the 17th century, it only differs from other versions in that the veil's upper shape is different.²¹

Finally, there is only one model made of walnut, which is bigger (58 x 36 cm) and shows a distinct composition, because even though the upper end is round, its bottom part is straight. There is yet another difference: the Child is on a pillow with tassels. It is from around 1548-1550, when Gregorio Pardo was working on the stalls at Toledo Cathedral (Fig. 10).²²

All works mentioned have a number of features in common: size, material, (except for the last one, which is bigger and made of wood), technique, style and iconography. Despite the objects' small size and the fact that they have been created for private devotion, they have been made with extreme care. The Virgin Mary is always in the same position, dressed in a similar way, sometimes wearing a clasp that fastens her robe, sometimes holding a book on her lap and showing a cherub at her feet. The Christ Child is dressed, quite an unusual feature in this kind of relief, because He is usually only covered by his mother's veil.

The relief of the *Madonna and Child* that this study reveals is, together with the relief at the parish church of San Nicolás in Toledo, the only one – though the main scene is within an oval – that is part of a rectangle with cherubs placed at its four corners. Besides, it keeps its original frame, with a short prayer, which clearly shows its devotional features. With an extra cherub at the bottom, which is a detail that can also be found in the models located at Burgos Cathedral, the church of San Nicolás in Toledo and the Metropolitan Museum, New York, it is the most complete relief. It was probably made at the same time that the Burgos and Valladolid versions. What is more, the originality of the Virgin Mary's features, make it a singular and very beautiful work of art.

These two works, *Madonna and Child* and *John the Baptist*, and *Madonna and Child* made a valuable contribution to study and compare Felipe Bigarny and his son's styles. They are exceptional items to the knowledge of their artistic careers and of Castilian Sculpture from the first half of the 16th century.

NOTES

1. “OH DIVINE, SUBLIME / GRANT WHOEVER MAY BE WORTHY YOUR KIND CONTEMPLATION OF GOD.”
2. Training letter published by A. Bustamante García, “Forment, Bigarny y Gregorio Pardo”, *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar*, volume XXXIV, 1988, pp. 167-171 (p. 168, note 4). The author points out the importance of the relationship between the Bigarnys and Damián Forment, essential figures in the Castilian and Aragon sculpture circles; see M. Estella Marcos as well, “Algunas observaciones sobre la formación aragonesa de Gregorio Vigarny”, *Actas del V Coloquio de Arte Aragonés*, Zaragoza, 1989, pp. 233-244. In the case of Damián Forment, see M. C. Morte’s monograph, *Damián Forment. Un escultor del Renacimiento*, Zaragoza, 2009.
3. I. del Río de la Hoz, *El escultor Felipe Bigarny (c. 1470- 1542)*, Valladolid, 2001.
4. J. A. Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España*, Madrid, 1800, facsimile edition, Madrid, 1965, vol. IV, pp. 48-49. However, he is not identified by Ceán as Bigarny’s son. It is discovered later in a document that refers to him as the author of the cupboard placed at the Chapter House of Toledo Cathedral, which had been first attributed to Alonso Berruguete.
5. J. M. Azcárate, *La Escultura del siglo XVI*, Ars Hispaniae, Madrid, 1958, p. 227.
6. M. E. Gómez Moreno, *Breve historia de la escultura española*, Madrid, 1935 (reprinted in 1951, 2001), pp. 79 y 93.
7. J. Camón Aznar, *La escultura y la rejería española del siglo XVI*, *Summa Artis*, XVIII, Madrid, 1961, reprinted in 1981, p. 207.
8. There is no monograph about Gregorio Pardo. M. Carbonell Buades recent article is the most complete work so far, and it compiles all previous bibliography: “Gregorio Pardo, Burgensi sculptori clarissimo: una hipótesis italiana para el hijo de Maestre Felipe”, *Napoli e la Spagna nel Cinquecento. Le Opere gli Artisti la Storiografia*, L. Gaeta (Ed.), Naples, 2017, pp. 127-143.
9. A. Arellano Córdoba, “Vivar, Pardo y el retablo Mayor de San Nicolás”, *Toletum*, II, 1981, pp. 39-47.
10. R. Hernández Nieves, *Retablística de la Baja Extremadura (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, Badajoz, 2004 (second edition), pp. 69-73.
11. M. Estella Marcos, “El convento de Santo Domingo el Real de Madrid”, *Villa de Madrid*, XVI, II, 1976, pp. 72-73; idem, “Los artistas de las obras realizadas en Santo Domingo el Real de Madrid y otros monumentos madrileños de la primera mitad del siglo XVI”, *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Madrileños*, XVIII, 1980, pp. 41-65. Bustamante García, 1988, quote pp. 169-171.
12. Carbonell Buades, 2017, quote p.139, image 18, is the author of the new attribution and date the work around the beginning of the 1540’s.
13. Pérez Sedano, *Notas del Archivo de la Catedral de Toledo*, Madrid, 1914, p. 70; M. R. Zarco del Valle, *Datos documentales para la historia del arte español*, II, *Documentos de la catedral de Toledo*, Madrid, 1916, pp. 48-51; E. Orduña Viguera, *La talla ornamental en madera. Estudio histórico descriptivo*, Valladolid, 1930, (reprinted in 2003), p. 216, image 142; Carbonell Buades, 2017, quote, pp. 135-136, images 7-11.
14. Carbonell Buades, 2017 (quote), does not stop to analyze the reliefs since he considers the complexity of the heterogeneous group they make. However, Redondo Cantera, in “La obra burgalesa de Diego Siloe (1519-1528)”, *Napoli e la Spagna nel Cinquecento. Le Opere gli Artisti la Storiografia*, L. Gaeta (Ed.), Naples, 2017, pp. 44-91, recognizes Gregorio Pardo may be the author of the Burgos version (Quote on p. 70, images 27a, 27b and 27c).
15. M. A. Zalama, “Medallón de la Virgen con el Niño” in the exhibition catalogue *Reyes y Mecenas. Los Reyes Católicos-Maximiliano I y los inicios de la casa de Austria en España*, F. Checa Cremades and R. Díez del Corral Garnica (eds.), Toledo, Santa Cruz Museum, 1992, pp. 340-341, no. 72; Del Río, 2001, quote ,image 3.
16. Inventory number 31.33.7, it measures 28.6 x 21.6 cm.
17. It measures 26.98 x 19.36 cm, and there is no cape fastened by a clasp. H. Wethey, “A Madonna and Child by Diego de Siloe”, *Art Bulletin*, XXII, 1940, pp. 190-196 (see comment on previous pages).
18. M. Trusted, *Spanish Sculpture: catalogue of the post-medieval Spanish sculpture in wood, terracotta, alabaster, marble, stone, lead and jet in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1996, pp. 31-34, no. 7.
19. J. Bialostocki, “A Madonna and Child from Felipe Vigarni workshop”, *Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie*, vol. XII, 1973, no. 3, pp. 49-53.
20. J. Nicolau, “Dos relieves del círculo de Gregorio Pardo en la Parroquia de Santa Leocadia y en el monasterio de Santa Clara de Toledo”, *Archivo Español de Arte*, 56/224, 1983, pp. 416-418; R. Takkenberg-Krohn, *Tesoros artísticos de Toledo*, Madrid, 2010, II, p. 300.
21. It measures 29.5 x 23 cm. Sotheby’s, New York, November 24th, 1987. I want to thank Margarita Estella for telling me about this piece.
22. It was part of Matthiesen’s collection in 2009. I del Río de la Hoz, exhibition catalogue *The Mystery of Faith. An eye on Spanish sculpture, 1550-1750*, Matthiesen Fine Art LTD and Coll & Cortés Fine Art, Madrid, London, 2009, pp. 206-213, no. 21.



Fig. 11. Back of *Madonna and Child* by Gregorio Pardo (attr.), Buenos Aires, Jaime Eguiguren.





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In the collection

