

Son of the Laocoön

Alonso Berruguete

AND PAGAN ANTIQUITY



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Left: *Laocoön*. 40–30 B.C. (detail of fig. 1)

Right: *Nativity*. Altarpiece of the Epiphany. 1537 (detail of cat. 30)

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The artist's (self-)discovery

Foreword

María Bolaños

“Don’t take away the Renaissance from us. We cannot live without it. It has become the expression of an attitude of life for us. We want to live in it and from it whenever we feel the urge to do so,” rhetorically begged a chorus of *idealists* imagined by Johan Huizinga in 1920 to ironize about the mystification of this moment in European culture. Nearly a hundred years on, the word continues to arouse the same retrospective enthusiasm in our cultural unconscious, conjuring up a serene beauty, an atmosphere of harmony where bodies move with dignified elegance, unconcerned by the ravages of time. It is not only an artistic style: it is the awakening of knowledge and human dignity, a desirable way of being and thinking. Therefore, in humankind’s consciousness, the term “Renaissance” is more a war cry than a technical concept for scholarly use.

But such a notion of the Renaissance as a timeless haven of order and beauty does not paint a fair and complete picture of that civilization. Not only the “tranquil greatness” and “classical calm” conveyed by eighteenth-century scholars like Winckelmann prevailed. There were other gazes that were brilliantly creative, granted, but considerably less placid; and this exhibition on the first Spanish Renaissance sculptor, which revolves around the *Laocoön*, largely explores this latter avenue.

The studies and articles contained in this catalogue explain the problems and consequences of the enthusiasm for *Laocoön* intelligently and at length. It is sufficient for the time being to recall that the scene of the agony and death of the Trojan priest and his sons ensnared by the serpents’ coils has become ingrained on our memory as an icon of the theory of the emotions and the personification par excellence of human suffering. The work, which dates from the Hellenistic period, expresses a concern with the problems of the individual and twists of fate, in a theatrically spectacular climate. Its striking originality therefore lies not so much in the image of the victims of a tragic episode—a common theme in sculpture—but in the fact that it freezes the very moment of their death and the unusual emergence of the serpents that strangle and devour their bodies, sinking their fangs into their flesh. That is why the *Laocoön* is not only a superb masterpiece of Hellenistic art but has a universal psychological appeal. The serpent is an irrational animal force, a destructive and feared demon. For Christianity, it represents Evil and determines human destiny, whether in the account of Paradise or at the foot of the cross, as a satanic force that sums up the tragedy

← Room during the Berruguete exhibition (Museo Nacional de Escultura of Valladolid, July 5 – November 11, 2017). On the left, *Sarcophagus of the Oresteia* (cat. 21); in the background, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* by Juan de Villoldo (cat. 24)



The *Paragone* with Antiquity in early sixteenth-century Italian art

Vincenzo Farinella

Around the middle of the 1510s, at the start of the third book of the *Prose della volgar lingua* (published in 1525), Pietro Bembo expressed his thoughts on the “ancient” attitude that united countless artists active in Leo X’s Rome, giving equal praise to Raphael and Michelangelo, whom he identified as the most prominent figures at that decisive time of the Renaissance of Antiquity:

This city has been spared the ravages of enemy nations and time, a by no means inconsiderable enemy, on account of its many and revered relics rather than the seven hills on which it still stands; through them Rome shows itself to the beholder as it is. Because every day it witnesses how many artists arrive from places near and far, to observe and appreciate the beautiful ancient sculptures of marble or metal which can be found in public and private places, as well as arches, baths, theaters, and other ruins, seeking them out with the intention of studying them and taking them away in the small space of their sketchbooks or their wax models; and then, when they design a new work, they look at those examples and, seeking a likeness through their artifice, liken their new works to the old ones; because they know and see that the old ones are closer to the perfection of art than those made since then and until today. This has been done more than anything by Monsignor Giulio [Giulio de’ Medici, who was still a cardinal at the time in which the work is set, and had become Pope Clement VII by the time it was published], your Florentine Michelangelo and Raphael of Urbino, the former a painter, sculptor and architect [the classification of Michelangelo as architect was added only in the 1549 edition], the latter also a painter and architect; and so diligently have they have done so that they are both now so excellent and so illustrious that it is easier to say how close they both are to the ancient masters than which of the two is the greater and better master.¹

At the time this memorable passage was written (around 1515), Michelangelo had survived the titanic feat of painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and was challenging the excellence of antique models in both sculpture (the designs and the first marble sculptures for Julius II’s tomb)² and architecture (Bernardo della Volpaia’s copies of the *Coner Codex*, preparation for the design of the façade of San Lorenzo).³ And Raphael, after completing Cardinal Bibbiena’s bathroom (*Stufetta*)—the first philologically correct visual revival of an interior *all’antica*, in which he emulated the preciousity and luxury of imperial painting—was about to embark on what would

← [fig. 1]

Hagesander, Polydorus,
and Athenodorus of Rhodes

Laocoön. 40–30 B.C. Marble,
245 cm. Musei Vaticani



[fig. 2]

Michelangelo

Tondo Doni. 1506–08.
Tempera and oil on wood,
120 cm. Florence,
Gallerie degli Uffizi

In his *Tondo Doni* [fig. 2], which, by the same reasoning, was painted after January 1506 (at any rate most likely during that year, by late November at the latest, when he traveled to Bologna to obtain pardon from the pope and remained there until March 1508 to work on the colossal bronze portrait of Julius II), the first nude figure on the right of the holy group ripping off his companion's cloak appears to reveal an original reflection on the pose of Laocoön, albeit devoid of any pathos.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it was the twenty *ignudi* for the Sistine Chapel ceiling (1508–12) that offered Michelangelo the possibility of displaying a series of variations on the theme of the *all'antica* nude in action (in this case holding the festoons with their oak leaves and acorns, which celebrate the commission from Julius II) in a veritable anthology of *recherché* anatomical poses. As well as the *Laocoön*, which is never literally quoted but constantly emulated and modified with an elusive



ROMAE · IN · HOR
TIS · PONTIFICVM ·
DIGNISSIMA · SIMVLACRA · LAO
QVEHONTIS · REPERTA · IN · DOMO · TITI · V.

Alonso Berruguete and the *Laocoön*

Archaeological scholarship and sentiment of sculpture
in early sixteenth-century Rome

Tommaso Mozzati

During a long stay in Rome with the Portuguese ambassador Dom Pedro Mascarenhas, Francisco de Holanda became acquainted with the most innovative aspects of the city's cultural life and, at the same time, enjoyed the complex discussions on the famous archeological treasures of its heritage. Between 1538 and 1540, he not only took the opportunity to familiarize himself with the latest novelties in pictorial and sculptural language that arose following the "Sack" of Rome but also penned a number of thoughts on Antiquity that were later compiled in the "livre d'apparat" of the *Antigualhas* [fig. 7], a collection of visual studies of great philological precision that is housed in the Royal Library of San Lorenzo de El Escorial.¹

These pages include a study of the *Laocoön* group, an illustrious marble sculpture executed by three artists of Rhodes—Hagesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus—according to Pliny's testimony in his *Natural History*. Francisco de Holanda had the chance to draw it when it had already been placed in its permanent location—at least until the second half of the eighteenth century—inside the Belvedere Courtyard under the supervision of Jacopo Melegghino, who was appointed as the Vatican's "custodian of antiquities" at the behest of Paul III.²

The artist's detailed analysis has been hailed for its distinctive nature. Hans Henrik Brummer and Sylvie Deswarte-Rosa³ have underlined the importance of this reproduction as the "best testament" to how the sculpture was displayed while in the pope's care.

Both scholars have also underlined that the drawing is the "only one [...] that shows the restoration of the sculpture group", that is, the work carried out by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli in 1532–33 to fully integrate the elements that make up the group of figures.⁴

It is curious yet fully understandable that it should have been a foreign eye that painstakingly recorded the state of an artwork identified from the time of its discovery in early 1506 as a classical masterpiece. More striking is the fact that, due to an enigmatic coincidence, the hand of a traveler born on the Iberian Peninsula who ventured to Italy in search of new intellectual horizons should have been responsible for passing on its memory in such a cultivated manner: another traveler, precisely from the western part of the continent, whose own creative vicissitudes became inextricably entwined with the fortunes of the newly unearthed *Laocoön* during a long period spent studying and working in Italy.

We are referring, of course, to Alonso Berruguete, who is remembered in a passage in the second edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (published in 1568) among the participants in

← [fig. 7]

Francisco de Holanda

Laocoön. Drawing in *Os desenhos das Antigualhas...*, by the same author. Manuscript, 1538–41, 460 × 350 mm. Royal Library of the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Madrid)



[fig. 10]

Marteen van Heemskerck

Study of the Spinario.
Ca. 1530–40. Pen and brown
ink on paper, 237 × 132 mm.
Oxford, Ashmolean Museum



[fig. 11]

Raphael

Study of David. 1505–08. Pen
and brown ink over traces of
leadpoint on paper, 396 × 219 mm.
London, British Museum

Investing effort and funds in amassing classical sculptures. Concerning a few collectors of antiquities in sixteenth-century Spain

Miguel Morán Turina

Cardinal Granvelle could not imagine the courtyards and galleries of the Escorial as a setting for the collection of antiquities that another cardinal, Fulvio Orsini, thought of offering the King of Spain at one point along with his books and valuable manuscripts, to enhance its library.¹ Philip II would not have known what to do with those statues. Or perhaps he would: place them in storage in one of the basements of the Alcázar in Madrid, for them to gather dust alongside those he had inherited from his son, the Prince Don Carlos, and those bequeathed to him by Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.

Evidently Orsini did not know the king and was unaware of the spirit which had inspired that huge Counter-Reformation monument that was nearing completion on the foothills of the Guadarrama mountains; but Cardinal Granvelle did. He knew that the only antiquities that truly interested Philip II were Christian and Visigothic insofar as they dated back to the origins of the monarchy and of religion itself in Spain. Therefore, he knew in advance that such an offer was likely to arouse little interest from the king at the best—the books and manuscripts were a different matter, of course, but they were part of the same deal—and none at all if they were for the Escorial. And so, when his friend asked him to make the necessary arrangements, Granvelle managed to convince him to reconsider his plans and to wait for an offer from the pope, which Granvelle would negotiate himself; and this is what happened. Granvelle was driven by two different, albeit complementary, motives: love of Rome and a personal conviction that only there would the city's huge treasures be properly appreciated.

In one of the many letters he exchanged with Orsini on this matter, Granvelle wrote that “I am saddened that statues and so many other antiquities have been taken out of Rome and are scattered about the world, many of them in places where they are neither understood nor appreciated.”² And although men like Benito Arias Montano and Ambrosio de Morales were involved, the cardinal included the Spanish court among those places. For although—as he again wrote slightly later, stressing the same idea—“I wish to be as useful as I can to the designs of the king, my lord, for the Escorial [...] I believe that your library and its ornaments should remain in Rome: there they are appreciated more than they would be here, where few people enjoy such things and where those capable of appreciating them are rarer still.”³

Although Granvelle was close to Pedro Chacón, Antonio Agustín, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, and the Duke of Villahermosa, among others, the cardinal had a very poor opinion

← Anton van der Wyngaerde,
Dis Man. 1563. Pen and brown
ink on paper, 143 × 98 mm.
London, Victoria & Albert
Museum



[fig. 19]

Anonymous

Martín de Aragón, Duke of Villahermosa. 1556–58. Bronze, 59 mm (diameter). Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional

and very little is known of the layout of that place which Arias Montano had “adorned [...] with great decorum and curiosities, as befitted such a great host.”³² But most of the inscriptions, antiquities, and copies of classical and bronze sculptures he had assembled throughout his lifetime and those he had inherited from his painter friend Pedro Villegas Marmolejo would have been there—though unfortunately we do not know whether placed inside the house or scattered around the garden.³³

After long years of unceasing wars and many unheeded requests to his king, the Duke of Alba longed for permission to at last abandon the governorship of the Netherlands and retire to his property in Abadía, because, with his advanced age and ailing health, the time had come to “do as [he] pleased” amid “the green fields and trees, even if they do not laugh”³⁴ and surrounded by the fountains and sculptures of his garden. The same desire was harbored by the Duke of Alcalá, who, like Alba, by the middle of 1560 was weary of governing and in constant pain from gout. However, as occurred with Don Fernando—who returned from Flanders only to be banished to Uceda (Guadalajara) before ending his days in Lisbon—he never received the longed-for permission and died in Naples without having been able to enjoy his well-deserved rest in the archaeological garden he was building with such care in his Sevillian properties.

The Duke of Alba, the Duke of Alcalá, and the Marquis of Mirabel dreamed of enjoying their last years in peace, of spending their time engaging in cultured leisure pursuits in “a pleasant place amid nature”³⁵ and the beauty of the collections they had spent their life assembling and of which their antiquities were an important part.

Evidently they were not the only ones to do so in a century that had witnessed the retirement of an emperor and in which it was possible to praise village life and despise the court: the Count of Portalegre too, having retired to his “very lovely village” of Condeixa, near Conímbriga, spent



Classical Antiquity in Spain in Berruguete's day: gazing into the mirror of the past

Carlos Morán Sanchez

Twelfth-century medieval Italy saw the emergence in Rome of the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*. Attributed to the monk Benedetto, it was a compilation of the city's legends and traditions and acted as a veritable guidebook in which the remnants of the Roman Empire were present, as is only logical.¹ The text was widely disseminated and was successively reworked and enlarged, incorporating new traditions and legendary elements. The descriptions of ruins in the *Mirabilia* conveyed the desolation and abandonment of the archeological remains. Although it was evident that the remnants of the Roman past held great fascination in some contexts, the fact they were pagan elements had made people somewhat wary of them.² Nevertheless, centuries earlier Gregory the Great and Charlemagne had fostered an attitude that allowed a balance to be struck between abhorrence of paganism and enjoyment of the beauty of classical monuments or texts. At the end of the twelfth century this attitude sparked a keen curiosity and wish to interpret the remnants of the past, which led to the reuse of ancient elements in churches and the consecration of ancient places and objects for Christian worship.³ This curiosity about the past precisely explains the success and widespread dissemination of the *Mirabilia*.

Later on, the emergence of humanism in fifteenth-century Italy led ruins to begin to be regarded as symbols of former greatness and of a past which could not be recovered but could be emulated. Thenceforward the expression *Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet* would be the leitmotiv: "What Rome once was can even be seen in decay" [fig. 20]. This concept was widely



[fig. 20]

Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet. Engraving from *Tercero y cuarto libro de Architectura*, by Sebastiano Serlio (Toledo, Iván de Ayala, 1552). Private collection

← Detail of fig. 21

Catalogue

Alonso Berruguete and Pagan Antiquity

Manuel Arias Martínez



The marvelous interplay between classical rules and freedom of forms

“In the history of our arts Alonso Berruguete plays the same role as Prometheus does in the fables of the gentiles, meaning that just as Prometheus in the fable was the one who brought fire from heaven to earth, so in the history of the renaissance of the arts in Spain did Berruguete shine as the first and wisest artist who brought the light of Italy to our land.”

Isidoro Bosarte, *Viage artístico
a varios pueblos de España...*,
Madrid, 1804

Fables, gentiles, Prometheus, fire, Italy, and light... terms laden with meaning and substance to describe one of the most outstanding names in the history of Spanish art and show how Alonso Berruguete (ca. 1489–1561) was inarguably a personality whose critical fortunes have always shone with a special light in historical literature.¹

Amid the inexplicable silence regarding Spanish sculpture, which always lagged behind painting, his multidisciplinary talents and his bold, innovative works earned him the esteem of his own contemporaries. Berruguete became the sixteenth-century sculptor par excellence, the best expression of Spanish genius, and the introducer of the new forms and learning methods and of the new Renaissance language—essentially Spain's own Prometheus (cat. 1), as Bosarte stated.²

His connection with the great masters in Italy and his contact with the monarchy on returning to his homeland—two key points which undoubtedly helped establish his fame—were coupled with a third aspect that set him apart from the rest. This third circumstance is by no means a quantifiable value because it entails his ability to imbibe the newly discovered world of glorious Antiquity in early sixteenth-century Rome and to carefully study and assimilate it to give rise to an absolutely unique output.

Berruguete's singularity did not consist in drawing from the sources of Roman archaeology and simply producing imitations without further consideration. His corpus is not made up of a collection of mimetic replicas; rather, keenly aware of what was going on in an environment in which he played an active role, he steeped himself in everything that was being done in Italy in order

to take it back to Spain, where he borrowed from it but contravening the rules.³ As can be seen in the colossal oeuvre of Michelangelo (1475–1564), it was a case of learning the vocabulary, of mastering the rules that provided the basis only to break them in order to convert the classical into anticlassical and create something new that cannot be understood without bearing in mind the process whereby it was hatched.⁴

This is why we are now returning to a subject we have been examining for years, in order to show some of the existing ties between Berruguete's work and his sources.⁵ This aspect is by no means new: it has been intrinsically linked to the man and his work since early times.⁶ In fact, the influence of the ancient world in his formative process is evident from the earliest documented references, and his participation in the competition to copy the recently discovered *Laocoön*, recounted by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), has always been an essential point of departure for grasping the importance of this background and for assessing the consequences it would have on his subsequent production.

The *Laocoön* is therefore an exceptional guide in our argument, because it is not possible to understand Berruguete without taking into account the backdrop of the sculptural group as a tangible embodiment of the values of the ancient world. For from the very moment of its discovery the *Laocoön* became a beacon that illuminated the way, lent veracity to the written sources, and put before men's eyes the accomplishments achieved by those pagan peoples by providing tangible resources that could be harnessed to serve new interests, backed by the authority of centuries.

I

The light of Antiquity in Rome

“The fact is that Berruguete and Becerra should be credited with having banished from Spain the darkness of that barbarian, uncouth ancient manner which had been introduced many years ago, and for igniting the true light of art, allowing inventiveness to advance, cultivating it through study, speculation, and practice.”

Antonio Palomino, *El parnaso
español pintoresco laureado*,
Madrid, 1724

This well-known comment that marks the start of this chapter no doubt stems from what Juan de Arfe (1535–1600) had stated about Berruguete's uniqueness many years earlier in 1585 when discussing the topical issue of proportions, which he regarded both as a sign of distinction and as a statement of Italian provenance more than of personal tastes.¹³ Berruguete had brought to Spain from Italy the use of the Vitruvian canon of ten face-lengths, also used by Diego de Siloe (†1563) and Bartolomé Ordóñez (†1520), in contrast to the medieval legacy of the so-called *moderns*.¹⁴

The sense of classical proportion gives the artist a distinctive identity over and above the subjective interpretation of reality conveyed in his works. He established its primacy despite all the perils of grasping a language that was formally difficult to understand owing to its innovative nature.

Arfe himself provided further keys to understanding this role, by naming as Berruguete's heir—just as Antonio Palomino (1655–1726) would—another Spaniard with an Italian training, Gaspar Becerra (1520–1568). He described these “two famous natives of this country / both leading names in sculpture” as the two sculptural beacons of the sixteenth century, very different in the expression of their achievements but with many elements in common when it came to banishing the “barbarity there was in Spain.”¹⁵

Becerra, who died prematurely in 1568, belonged to the following generation and both he and Berruguete had drawn from the same glorious sources of Antiquity, from Italian masterworks, and from the undisputable and long-lived star, Michelangelo Buonarroti. Oversimplifying, it could be said that Berruguete fixed his gaze on the ceiling

of the Sistine Chapel whereas Becerra was drawn to the Final Judgment—two phases linked in time from which they each obtained their own particular fruits.

Indeed, starting from the same point of departure, they arrived at different sensibilities and personal styles, which, stemming from painting as a technical and theoretical discipline, developed into three-dimensional expression in the image of the great Buonarroti, albeit with the past ever-present in the background as a pleasant, kindly shadow.

It began to be common practice for artists, including Spaniards, to make the initiatory journey to Italy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Alonso Berruguete was among those who benefited the most from this formative stay, which involved becoming fully immersed in a cutting-edge scene completely different from that of their place of origin.

The very young artist—he had been born in Paredes de Nava (Palencia) around 1490 and reached Rome around 1506 as a member of the retinue of the bishop of Burgos, Fray Pascual de Ampudia—arrived in the city where the most groundbreaking innovations of Europe were taking place.¹⁶ And he did not come simply to be taught and to make the most of his learning as a fortunate spectator but to take part in it from a privileged frontline position, as a veritable *supporting player* as Longhi aptly put it,¹⁷ and to an extent this explains the role he would play on returning to his home country.

Foreign artists in Italy came across a unique art scene in which everything revolved around the rediscovery of Antiquity, and this must have been particularly conducive to the pooling and unification of ideas.¹⁸ A well-known text written

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Las Antigüidades

En el patio se halla la cabeça del Coloso de Commodo Emperador hecho en cobre, de la qual se ha hablado tratando de los Colossos.

Laocoonte de Belueder.

EN Belueder hay hermosas estatuas, pero en particular se halla el Laocoonte con dos hijos suyos, hechos de vn marmol, obra digna de ser vista, y hecha con acuerdo de tres Sculptores famosissimos, Agefandro, Polidoro, y Artemidoro Rodiottos, la qual se halló en las siete Salas.

HAy tambien entre las otras vna Cleopatra bellissima, y vn Hercule asientado, sin cabeça, braços, y piernas, que entre todas las estatuas tiene muy grande excellencia en artificio, y assi el excellentissimo Pintor Michel Angelo Buonarotta dezia, que su mas principal estudio que hauiá hecho assi en pintura, como en esculptura hauiá sido sobre aquella estatua maltratada de Hercules, que por esto se llama tronco de Belueder.

Figu-

once characterized him and is portrayed here as a serene and calm sage, a philosopher of the ancient school—a far cry from his reckless political career.

Books on the wonders of Rome were published from very early on. Their main aim was often to serve as a guide for pilgrims by pointing out the spiritual benefits of visiting the basilicas or learning about their relics. An example is featured in the exhibition: *Tratado nuevo de las cosas maravillosas de la alma ciudad de Roma*, an edition of 1610 belonging to the Biblioteca Nacional de España (cat. 8). But aspects of the art treasures housed in temples found their way into religious itineraries from the outset in the form of information about prestigious authorships or materials. The treasures of the Belvedere were the most prized trophies of that valuable *raccolta*, which marked the culmination of the living presence of the best of Antiquity.

The gardens of Cardinal della Valle, Galli, and many other prominent people of papal Rome were enriched with archaeological collections.²⁹ It is very interesting in this connection to recall what Franzoni says about the concept of the panel painted by Maarten van Heemskerck (1498–1574) around 1550 showing Saint Luke painting the Virgin in the Roman *cortile* of the Palazzo Sassi, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes, as a perfect metaphor of the image of the artist.

Portrayed among fragments of pagan statues and reliefs, the contemporary artist was conveyed as accustomed to surrounding himself with pieces of this kind to use them in his compositions as the active ingredients of a new language.³⁰ And faithfulness in archaeological depictions was not questioned. It mattered not if the remains were headless, if a torso was shown without arms, or if a relief was split into two, because their fragments embodied the full force of the past. That teaching was espoused and assimilated by Berruguete, who also incorporated it into his oeuvre as far as possible.

The iconographical episode of Mary having her portrait painted abandoned the sacred setting of Flemish painting, in which had usually been depicted, albeit with a few exceptions.³¹ The temple

← cat. 7

Copy of Raphael

Pope Julius II. Ca. 1520. Oil on canvas, 55 × 47.5 cm. El Burgo de Osma (Soria), Museo de la Catedral

cat. 8

Laocoön. Engraving in *Tratado nuevo de las cosas maravillosas de la alma ciudad de Roma*, by Pietro Martire Felini (Rome, Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1610, in-8°). Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España







← cat. 15

Alonso Berruguete

Ecce Homo. Ca. 1525.
Polychromed wood,
146 × 49 × 37 cm. Olmedo
(Valladolid), monastery of
Nuestra Señora de la Mejorada.
Currently at Valladolid, Museo
Nacional de Escultura

cat. 16

Anonymous, Rome

*Young Pan with Transverse
Flute*. 150–75 A.D. Marble,
137 × 48 × 36 cm. Madrid,
Museo Nacional del Prado



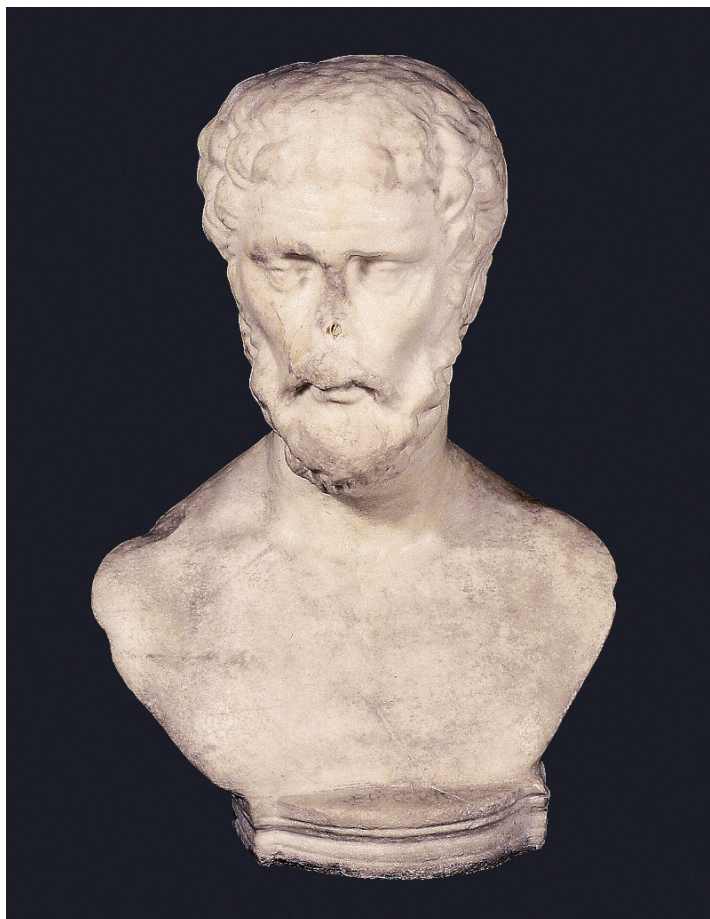
drawn by Michelangelo and engraved by Antonio de Salamanca.⁷¹

And the most obvious example is the series of heads on the backs of the Toledo choirstalls [fig. 35], which make up the most fascinating collection of *teste divine* in Spanish statuary, perhaps of all times. They are all imbued with a lively gestural quality, frowning and with open mouths, and have a tangible plasticity which can no doubt be identified as the highest and also the freest stage in the artist's output, based on a brilliant reinterpretation of Roman portraits.

The *chlamys* is visible in the busts of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, but the attention is focused on their emaciated faces with marked features, sunken eyes, and finely sculpted hair, even though they were to be placed at a distance from spectators. This was not the first time Berruguete used this formal device. The figures identified as the major prophets in the upper tier of the altarpiece of San Benito el Real are designed in the same way, looking out powerfully from the highest part of the structure, with very pronounced features, combining *estofado* with painting with the tip of the brush. And the same is true of the upper section of the Fonseca altarpiece in Salamanca, which features two male busts framed in roundels flanking the Crucified Christ.

Berruguete furthermore chose a circular frame for all of them—another borrowing from classical art reminiscent of the *imago clipeata*, which was particularly popular for sarcophaguses and became common in palace portrait galleries where ancient ornamentation was revived. And the evocation is even greater as he uses laurel leaves of the same provenance, which had been adopted as a widespread decorative element, on a sort of candelabrum like those employed by Pinturicchio (1454–1513)⁷² in the Basso della Rovere chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo, where we find many other ornamental similarities with Berruguete's oeuvre.

Circular garlands were then being employed in Italy in an absolutely natural manner, and the glazed ceramic compositions of Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) are palpable proof of their



cat. 20

Anonymous, Rome

Male Portrait (Epicure). Late second century A.D. Marble, 50 × 34 cm. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional

II

Sarcophaguses and lessons

“The excellence of the sculpture of the sarcophagus of Husillos can be coupled with what Berruguete said after gazing at it in astonishment for a long time: I saw nothing better in Italy, he said with admiration, and few things as good.”

Ambrosio de Morales,
*Viaje por orden del rey D. Felipe II
a los reinos de Castilla, León, Galicia
y Principado de Asturias*, Madrid, 1574

The shortage of written testimonies in sixteenth-century Spanish historiography is very considerable and makes it difficult to gain a more natural insight into many artists' lives, their perceptions of the environment they lived in, and their mindset. Therefore, the few surviving opinions that do exist and pieces of information which, although sparing, help fill these gaps, enable us to read between the lines and gain a more precise understanding of how they behaved and how they learned.

One such example is Alonso Berruguete's often repeated opinion of the Roman sarcophagus in the abbey of Husillos in Palencia.⁷⁶ Although his comment is possibly inflated by patriotic sentiment, it illustrates the learning process and its application: viewing and studying ancient works as sources of new devices. Berruguete's growing knowledge of recovered ancient artworks, gained through the discovery and careful studying of superb examples such as the *Laocoön*, allowed him to take his learning beyond rhetorical devices and make specific borrowings.

And in this respect his comment is linked to a central aspect of his formative environment: appreciation of the reliefs on sarcophaguses as a precious legacy, as a veritable academy in which the skills of the ancient artists speak for themselves. It is true that sculptures in the round were unquestionable points of reference, but reliefs provided a knowledge of space and composition that made up for the absence of the painting—which, for obvious reasons, was less well preserved.

Speaking of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1448–1494) for the Sasseti chapel in Santa Trinita, Florence, in which a Roman sarcophagus plays a huge role, André Jolles made a famous comment to Huizinga

in 1921 that “the Renaissance had its cradle in a tomb.”⁷⁷ The reflection, as Settis has stressed, is by no means gratuitous. Sarcophaguses were talking pages of history where artists found formal repertoires, compositional solutions, and above all the possibility of assimilating powers of evocation that transported them back to this idealized past. In this connection there is a well-known anecdote that is mentioned by Vasari in his biography of Filippo Brunelleschi:

Filippo [...] was standing one morning in the Piazza di S. Maria del Fiore with Donato and other craftsmen, when they began to talk of antiquities in connection with sculpture, and Donato related how, when he was returning from Rome [...], in passing afterwards by Cortona, he entered the Pieve and saw a very beautiful ancient sarcophagus, whereon there was a scene in marble—a rare thing then, when there had not been unearthed that abundance which has been found in our own day. And as Donato went on to describe the method that the master of that work had used in its execution, and the finish that was to be seen therein, together with the perfection and the excellence of the workmanship, Filippo became fired with an ardent desire to see it, and went off on foot just as he was, in his mantle, cap, and wooden shoes, without saying where he was going, and allowed himself to be carried to Cortona by the devotion and love that he bore to art. And having seen the sarcophagus, and being pleased with it, he made a drawing of it with the pen, and returned with that to Florence.⁷⁸

The news has all the ingredients needed to take us back to a very particular place and time and provides very precise keys to artists' training, to



[fig. 37]

Detail of cat. 21

[fig. 38]

Artemisia Gentileschi

Susannah and the Elders

(detail). 1610. Oil on

canvas, 170 × 121 cm.

Pommersfelden, Graf

von Schönborn collection

The use of these formal devices, for example in compositions similar to those employed here, can be seen directly in Berruguete's oeuvre, such as in the figure of Shem concealing Noah's drunkenness in one of the alabaster reliefs of the Toledo choirstalls. It is not a literal borrowing, but we can see how the artist takes as his point of departure figures like Orestes's friend Pylades, who helps Orestes wreak vengeance by murdering Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and is portrayed in a violently twisted pose full of force, converting him into the main figure.

The validity of these expressive gestures with a clear message transmitted through the living lesson provided by Roman sarcophaguses, from which so many artists drew inspiration, can be seen in the pictorial compositions that Berruguete and his circle produced. Their use can be detected in both painting and sculpture and the exhibition accordingly brings together a few closely related examples to illustrate this connection.

The panel of the *Entombment*, reused in the altarpiece of the parish church of Fuentes de Nava

(Palencia; cat. 22),⁸³ is evident proof of this presence. The arrangement of the group attests to Berruguete's skills and particular pictorial language inherited from the most deeply rooted classical tradition, but transformed by his overwhelming personality. The powerful contrasts of light, the minimal references to the landscape, and the vibrant colors play an essential role in a scene whose drama is heightened by suggestion, with bold details such as the concealment of the face of Christ, who turns his back on the spectator to hide from his gaze in an unsettling semidarkness.

The same idea only even more expressionistic and violent and much more exaggerated in the handling of the light can be seen in the panel of the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, the moment prior to the Entombment, which was acquired in 2015 for the Museo Nacional de Escultura (cat. 23).⁸⁴ The work, which would have been part of the predella of a small altarpiece, displays all the characteristics of Berruguete's painting. Despite its darkness, it is painted in an exquisitely nuanced palette with

III

Under the influence of the *Laocoön*

“Alonso Berruguete is not
the son of Pedro Berruguete,
but of the Laocoön”

José Moreno Villa, “Diurnales,”
*España. Semanario de la vida
nacional*, Madrid, 1924

There is no need to stress again the impact that the unearthing of the sculptural group of Laocoön and his sons attacked by the serpent, on January 14, 1506, had on the history of western art.¹⁰⁵ In an environment characterized by archaeological appreciation of Antiquity taken to an extreme, the discovery of this fascinating piece that recounted the gruesome episode from Virgil's *Aeneid*, telling of the tragic punishment inflicted on the Trojan priest's family, marked the culmination of the merging of material and literary culture.

News that the statue really existed, provided by the reliable Pliny—who gives his opinion of it in the *Natural History* and physically locates it in the palace of the Emperor Titus—underlined its superior nature, as it was judged to be finer than any painting or any bronze. The discovery established a prodigious connection with artists' knowledge of literary sources of this kind, as it not only confirmed the truthfulness of the news but attested to the exceptional nature of the sculpture.

From the very moment of its discovery, the sculpture raised many issues. It became a living page of history that put the teaching of the classics to the test and sparked an artistic revival that began in Italy. Everything about it was the object of attention and studies: from the admiring and continually repeated praise of its idealized execution from a single block to its fragmented nature as an archaeological find, its comparison with other disciplines, and the possibility of sensing through the imagination the sounds uttered by the priest, more or less muffled by suffering.¹⁰⁶ Francesco da Sangallo (1494–1576) reported on the moment of its discovery as follows:

The Pope was told about the discovery of some very beautiful statues in a vineyard near Santa Maria Maggiore [...] The pope ordered one of his officers to run and tell Giuliano da Sangallo to go and see them. He set off immediately. Since Michelangelo Buonarroti was always to be found at our house, my father having summoned him and having assigned him the commission of the Pope's tomb, my father wanted him to come along too. I joined up with my father and off we went. I had climbed down to where the statues were, when immediately my father said, "That is the Laocoön, which Pliny mentions." Then they dug the hole wider so that that they could pull the statue out. As soon as it was visible everyone started to draw, all the while discoursing on ancient things, chatting about the ones [ancient statues owned by the Medici] in Florence.¹⁰⁷

The sequence of events recounted so graphically by such a reliable witness provides very valuable information. Julius II received the news of the discovery in a context of appreciation of archaeological remains in which the papacy played a direct part. Therefore, the first aspect to be borne in mind is that it was the pope himself who entrusted his right-hand man on artistic matters, Giuliano da Sangallo (†1516), with going to the site and examining the remains in order to assess their importance.

But there is a second crucial aspect of the process: the presence of Michelangelo as a member of that special party, sharing the excitement of that crucial discovery that Sangallo rapidly identified using Pliny's reference. Knowledge of literary sources was thus an essential element in the shaping of an artistic culture imbued with the essence of those texts which were confirmed by the objects.



[fig. 56]

Marco Dente

Laocoön. Ca. 1517–27.
Engraving, 443 × 329 mm.
New York, The Metropolitan
Museum of Art

secure him advantages, especially face-to-face, on a privileged scene, most likely with a certain amount of protection from Michelangelo. It is worth recalling that the contest was organized by Bramante and that it was Raphael who decided that Sansovino's copy was the best, in order to realize the importance of the competition and the people involved.

As we have seen, Berruguete's move to Rome was temporary, and he returned to Florence. The next piece of information is gleaned from the correspondence of Michelangelo, and is much less doubtful.¹¹⁰ The date is early April 1512 and the master states in a letter to his father that he has been asked in Rome about a Spanish boy called Alonso who is a painter (*garzone spagnuolo che à nome Alonso, che è pittore*) and is ill. Michelangelo asks his father or his brother Buonarroto to inquire about him through Granacci (ca. 1469–1543), who was acquainted with him. Once again, Michelangelo appears in his life, exercising a sort of protection from afar. We do not know who was inquiring about Berruguete's health in Rome. Perhaps it was a Dominican, who was aware that Fray Pedro Berruguete would be setting out for Rome that month with the bishop of Burgos, Fray Pascual de Ampudia, to take part in the 4th Lateran Council, and wished to be able to give him up-to-date news about his painter nephew on arriving.

We do not, however, intend to trace Berruguete's first footsteps in Italy, but rather to examine to what extent the *Laocoön*, as an essential element of the newly discovered Antiquity, left a lasting mark on his career, considering that barely four years after it was unearthed the young sculptor from Palencia took part alongside the cutting-edge artists of the day in an event centered on the sculpture as an object of study and reflection of the highest level. So far no surviving evidence has been found of this firsthand contact. Dacos attributed to Berruguete a drawing now in Düsseldorf, together with a long list of others in various European collections.¹¹¹ However,





after the altarpiece was carved, making prominent use of gilt and a simple ornamental design. However, it is sometimes completed with different devices, such as the application of glued fabrics and, as in this case, paint to create the illusion of Roman-style footwear in accordance with classical statuary which can be seen, for example, in essential works such as the *Apollo Belvedere*.

Berruguete's use of the *Laocoön* goes beyond such literal borrowings as these and is based on a very thorough study of the group and a volumetric approach that transcends a merely frontal view. This can be seen in his use of the composition in other works of his, such as the crowded procession of the Magi in the central scene of the Epiphany altarpiece. Other borrowings from Italian art have been pointed out previously: the evocations of Leonardo or Raphael in the Vatican Stanza in which Berruguete's possible participation has rightly been suggested.¹²⁵

Apart from the contrast between the serenity of the Holy Family and the brilliantly executed crowds at the sides, the direct influence of ancient culture in a novel collage-like composition can be detected in the overall conception of the central group. The bold arrangement of some figures, such as Balthazar and his dance step in the foreground, is merely a transposition of the attitude of Laocoön himself, studied closely and fully assimilated by Berruguete [figs. 64, 65]. The huddled figure beside the king in the entourage (cat. 32) resembles one of the Trojan priest's sons, the one on the right [fig. 66]. It is as if the artist had taken as his basis a side view of the group and achieved a surprising formal blend from an innovative multiple perspective. The striking nature of this perspective would account for his famous assertion reported by Pacheco:

When others looked at his figures, finding them not to be equally satisfactory in all parts and making

[fig. 64]
Detail of cat. 27

[fig. 65]
Alonso Berruguete
Procession of the Magi.
Altarpiece of the Epiphany
(detail). 1537. Polychromed
wood, 120 cm. Valladolid,
parish church of Santiago
Apóstol

[fig. 66]
Detail of fig. 1

cat. 32 →
Alonso Berruguete
Patriarch. High altarpiece.
1526–32. Polychromed wood,
93 × 29 × 33 cm. Valladolid,
monastery of San Benito
el Real. Currently at Valladolid,
Museo Nacional de Escultura

IV

Reinterpreting models

“The adornments Berruguete brought from Italy have enjoyed such fortune that all those which are seen in others’ works are described as being from his school and it is now proverbially said of them: these adornments are of the school of Berruguete, adornments in the taste of Berruguete, this recalls Berruguete’s style.”

Isidoro Bosarte, *Viage artístico
a varios pueblos de España...*,
Madrid, 1804

In the first book of the *Discourse on the First Decade of Titus Livy*, written in 1513, Niccolò Machiavelli provides a very concise explanation of the reasons for recording those archaeological testimonies of Antiquity which became prestigious treasures in his day. He puts into words a shared intention that helps us gain a clear understanding of a common environment and is particularly useful in this case considering that his reflection was made while Berruguete was also in Italy, breathing in the same air:

When I see Antiquity held in such reverence, that to omit other instances, the mere fragment of some ancient statue is often bought at a great price, in order that the purchaser may keep it by him to adorn his house, or to have it copied by those who take delight in this art.¹³⁶

Objects from the ancient world were highly valued because collectors derived enjoyment from their presence and ennobled their homes with their evocations and significance. But they were also particularly interesting insofar as they set a standard and their language could be imitated by borrowing gestures and motifs. Remains provided an array of formal devices that could be imitated and offered a valid vocabulary that broke away from previous art and linked up with that glorious past which was now coming to life again.

The world of ornamentation, based on those catalogues of Antiquity, took shape through firsthand contact—such as that of Berruguete in Italy, who drew directly from the sources—and not through third parties, the intermediate and limited use of prints, or remote knowledge of what was

really happening. Italian historiography, especially the information provided by Vasari, is full of specific data that relates this learning in close contact to the remnants of imperial Rome.

We could cite many written references to all of these remains, from the Coliseum to Trajan's Column, but with respect to decoration special mention should be made of the Domus Aurea, one of the main shrines visited by artistic pilgrims as an essential source of motifs. Fascination for grotesques, which Berruguete incorporated into the secondary language of his wooden altarpieces, sprang from direct contact with the decoration of those dark and slightly magical spaces whose surprising decoration combined plant and animal motifs to recreate a whole fantastical dream universe among the ruins of Rome.¹³⁷

It was essentially a question of taking ideas, reinterpreting them, and devising variations on those common bases. Indeed, as we have seen in many cases, these borrowings were not always completely literal and in order to appreciate them it is necessary to study the gestures in depth, reverse the compositions, or observe them closely, "dissecting" the execution.

Sometimes, however, it is very simple to establish similarities between schemes taken from archaeological remains and their use in Berruguete's decorative devices, and a full catalogue of motifs can be found both in the secondary carving and in the polychrome. There are specific examples in the altarpiece of Nuestra Señora de la Mejorada in Olmedo, such as in the pairs of ornamental reliefs of nude recumbent female creatures accompanied by a winged cherub (cat. 37).¹³⁸ The motif has archaeological precedents and a list could be





gardens; it is as if the artist had in mind an attitude which he conveyed with the speed of improvisation, not intending to be precise [figs. 74, 75].

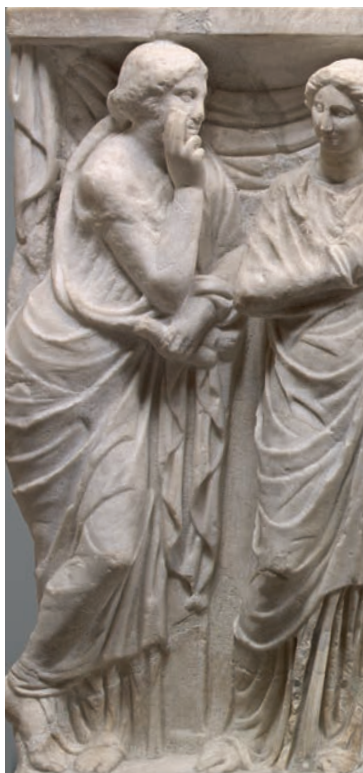
The sculpture of Apollo is one of the most exquisite parameters of beauty of the statuary of all times, a model repeatedly used and a constant allusion to the perfect recreation of the human anatomy since it first became fashionable. Berruguete must have studied it and it is plausible to think that there are traces of it in two of the patriarchs crafted for the San Benito predella, one of which is housed in London's Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁵⁷

The works all display the artist's own idiom and the unmistakable mark of an active workshop that was translating the master's designs into wood, though it is possible to detect a subtle hint of ancient art in the heroic position, the tilt of the head, and the asymmetry of the extremities. The transformation is complete and it is here where we can speak of this core presence mentioned by the early treatise writers, an inner evocation that becomes diluted in the outer form of the work, resulting in a creation full of personality, though

undoubtedly based on essential contributions from studying.

These formative origins are perceptible in the panel painting of the *Evangelist Saint Mark* accompanied by the figure of Divine Inspiration which he painted for the altarpiece of San Benito el Real. The gilt surfaces, the monochrome handling, and above all the mosaic hinted at in the upper part of the background, which is unfinished for some unknown reason, have often been commented on. The use of this ancient device in the works of so many Italian painters ranging from Pinturicchio to Raphael on the ceiling of the Vatican Segnatura—which, once again, was completed during Berruguete's Italian sojourn—and in the no longer extant works for the Royal Chapel of Granada, where it was specified that Berruguete was to execute "mosaic works in the manner of Italy," attests to the evident transmission of influences.¹⁵⁸

Roman mosaics and the significant knowledge their discovery brought of composition and color in the classical world made them keys to piecing together the puzzle of an idealized past (cat. 50). Small colored tesserae were a repeated reference in



[fig. 71]

Anonymous, Rome

Sarcophagus of the Nine Muses (detail). 180–200 A.D. Marble, 67 × 224 × 67 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

[fig. 72]

Detail of cat. 62

[fig. 73]

Polidoro da Caravaggio and Maturino

Muse or Poetess (detail of a fresco of the Casino del Bufalo in Rome). Ca. 1524–25. Fresco taken from the wall and transferred to canvas, 148 × 285 cm. Museo di Roma a Palazzo Braschi

V

In the shadow of a great scallop shell

“Here in Valladolid lives Berruguete, all that is lacking in the men he paints is for Nature to give them a spirit with which to talk; he has made an altarpiece in San Benito which you have seen many times; if princes Philip and Alexander, who thought highly of the works of those of their time, were alive today, there would be no treasures they would not pay him; and as the men of today surpass those of old with their sharpness of mind, they would appreciate him all the more.”

Cristóbal de Villalón, *Ingeniosa
comparación entre lo antiguo
y lo moderno*, Valladolid, 1539

The high altarpiece of the church of the monastery of San Benito el Real in Valladolid occupies an outstanding place in Spanish altarpiece art and is a crucial work in Berruguete's corpus, comparable only to his magnum opus, the Toledo choirstalls.

Berruguete's role as *supporting player* in the unfolding of Florentine Mannerism is a milestone aspect to which insufficient consideration has been given, perhaps because it is a spatial, less tangible concept than what is conveyed by a painting or sculpture, or because the consideration of altarpieces as architecture still has a long way to go. However, it should be realized that Berruguete received inspiration and applied his knowledge based not only on the work of the architects who used similar designs but on the very ancient references with which he came into direct contact while in Italy.

The Benedictine order's wish for modernity, by commissioning its execution from an artist who had arrived from Italy only a few years previously, points to a mentality and concerns by no means set on conventional models. The order was undergoing an internal reform that called for designs which were full of energy and powerfully propagandistic, as Valladolid was spearheading a process of bringing the various abbeys under a common system of authority.

As a result, the fame of the altarpiece (1526–39) very soon spread and it was considered an excellent work worthy of great literary praise. For example, Cristóbal Villalón compared it to the glory of the Greco-Latin past—the feats of Alexander the Great and Philip of Macedonia no less, using a widespread *topos* linked to the artist's reputation and his direct contact with the powerful, curiously attributing to his sculpture virtues of naturalism that could not be further from the truth.

It is interesting that Berruguete's production, characterized by a distortion of forms, should have been applauded for something which it did not have but which established a link with that idealized world. In fact, this aspect was repeated without variation in the praise of Fernández de Oviedo, when he stated that “while in painting he is excellent, in sculpture he is absolutely perfect,”¹⁷³ comparing him to Phidias or Praxiteles, and to Apelles or Protogenes. Leaving aside the substantial issue of the *paragone*, the stress on the perfection of his work seems to be more of a rhetorical device than a precise judgement. Similarly, the scheme devised for San Benito also had repercussions among practitioners of the art, impressed by something so different to what they were used to, which made it worthy of being viewed and studied.

Nevertheless—and this is where difficulties have arisen in understanding the iconography—the sight of this marvelous creation was reserved to a very specific sector of the public: the community of monks and representatives of the houses that made up the Benedictine congregation of Castile, who sat in the monastery's splendid choirstalls in front of the altarpiece, which were completed around that time, during the periodic General Chapter meetings.¹⁷⁴ The altarpiece was far from meeting more popular devotional needs, as it was well beyond the grasp of the faithful. The scholarly message of the program was devised for monastic use, and dispensed with communicational devices that appealed to the majority.

The information we now have, which provides guidelines for comparing and analyzing the carefully constructed ideological underpinnings, has made it possible to study and understand the altarpiece and



← [fig. 79]

*Reconstruction of the
Altarpiece of San Benito
el Real.* Valladolid, Museo
Nacional de Escultura

cat. 58

Alonso Berruguete

Scallop Shell. High altarpiece.
1526–32. Polychromed
wood, 230 × 545 × 222 cm.
Valladolid, monastery of San
Benito el Real. Currently at
Valladolid, Museo Nacional
de Escultura

its components as the embodiment of an elaborate messianic message [fig. 79]. It conveys the image of celestial Jerusalem—Saint Augustine’s *City of God* where the Old and New Testaments coexist—from the perspective of the arrival of the Messiah. In this context the exaltation of Saint Benedict as a universal figure and bridge between the Old and New Laws was a perfect vehicle for the propaganda of the order.¹⁷⁵

This helps understand why the commission was given to an artist who had come from Italy, preceded by his fame: the artist best equipped to carry out the assignment with an innovative approach, and with the necessary formative background; an artist who was familiar with the devices of the great masters

and their aesthetic inclinations, and who returned to Spain laden with the most glorious archaeological references to put to use by combining substance and form harmoniously to create a new type of product.

In accordance with a very widespread trend, the contract for the construction of the altarpiece, signed in 1526, granted the artist huge freedom of action.¹⁷⁶ Measurements, dates, materials, payments, and strictly legal questions were established to avoid problems that might arise from the agreement between the two parties. However, the statement on the arrangement of the altarpiece, based on what was called a *rasguño*—an outline as opposed to a perfectly finished drawing—subsequently developed into a design which caused Berruguete major



cat. 59

Alonso Berruguete

Virgin. High altarpiece.
1526–32. Polychromed wood,
190 × 96 × 56 cm. Valladolid,
monastery of San Benito el
Real. Currently at Valladolid,
Museo Nacional de Escultura

secondary figures and the Child and the changes in the face of Mary, who was initially conceived with a sharp profile, round face, and serene beauty reminiscent of Siloe's more idealized models and was finally portrayed in a more frontal position in the relief [figs. 87, 88].

The information provided by the Chancery drawing, which would of course not have been the only one made during the elaborate preparatory process, does not end here, as it is the starting point for other compositions Berruguete produced on the same subject. For this purpose, the exhibition also features a panel painting of the *Circumcision* from the altarpiece of the Colegio Mayor Fonseca of the University of Salamanca (cat. 66), on which Berruguete was working a few years later, as he signed the contract on November 3, 1529, though we know it was being put in place in 1535.¹⁹¹

Although the altarpiece may have undergone alterations immediately after its execution, its design unmistakably displays the language of Berruguete. The triangular pediment above the middle section and the medallions in the lower part, mentioned earlier, once again clearly attest to a reinterpretation of a classical vocabulary that is the basis of his

repertoire and is a further development of one of the side modules of the San Benito altarpiece in which he likewise employs a combination of painting and sculpture together with a varied array of secondary ornamental motifs.

The chromatic similarities between the paintings of both altarpieces—including the reversal of compositions, such as the Flight into Egypt—are considerable, though as a result of various interventions they lack the hazy appearance of the Valladolid panels and no longer convey the idea of capturing the atmosphere that is now even more evident in the Valladolid paintings following their recent restoration.

It is significant that Berruguete should have reproduced the episodes depicted in San Benito, where he had combined painting and relief work to compose a sequence containing the same scenes. In the reliefs, now transformed so to speak into the panels of the Epiphany and Circumcision, he uses the same models and only slight variations can be seen.¹⁹²

Berruguete uses the same basis for the panel painting of the *Circumcision* and a compositional scheme linked to the San Benito relief, eloquently merging painting and sculpture to show his prowess

[fig. 87]
Detail of cat. 64



[fig. 88]
Detail of cat. 65

