



GABRIEL YOLY

*Study of a Prophet or Saint Joseph sculpture*

Jesús María Parrado del Olmo





## GABRIEL YOLY Varipont (France);–Teruel, March 19, 1538

### *Study of a Prophet or Saint Joseph sculpture*

Jesús María Parrado del Olmo  
Universidad de Valladolid

The Renaissance in Aragón was a very fertile artistic movement for the field of sculpture. Together with the great figure Damián Forment, through whose workshop the majority of sculptors of this period passed, there appear other masters of high artistic quality who complete the panorama. They all tend towards a similar style, which is the result of the extensive collaboration amongst the Aragón artists. Complex contracts were drawn up accordingly.

Gabriel Yoly is worthy of being considered amongst the most distinguished of Renaissance sculptors and he already appears documented in Aragón in 1514 when he is mentioned as a sculptor of religious images. He also appears in several contracts of “compañía” collaborating with Juan de Moreto, Gil de Morlanes the Younger and above all, with the sculptor Juan de Salas in various works contracted between 1520 and 1530. From 1525 onwards, Yoly has become a very sought-after sculptor and his style begins to evolve from a state in which Gothic reminiscences mingle with Forment’s sculptoric concept of figures pressed together. This leads towards a clearer and more proportionate composition, as well as to a more directly human sensitivity in the personages sculpted. This development appears in the altarpiece at Tauste (fig. 2), in which he collaborates with Morlanes and Salas. The work was carried out between 1520 and 1526.

Fig. 1 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Prophet or Saint Joseph?*  
c.1532–1538, pine wood, without  
polychromy, 95 x 35.5 cm  
Helmond, IOMR Collection





However, Yoly reaches his maturity in his artistic development after the decade of the 1530s during which he executes various works in Teruel, the most significant of which is his great masterpiece of the altarpiece of Teruel cathedral, effected between 1532–1536 (figs. 3, 10–12).

This altarpiece, which is not polychromed, strikes us in an outstanding way through its original purity. In this work, Yoly moves definitively away from the models of Forment and strengthens his own personal style to the point that we may consider Yoly as shining amongst the principal Spanish sculptors of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. He imposes here great expressivity with his elegant and vigorous gestures, and to this he adds a stylised ruling whereby he shows considerable interest for beauty in itself. This is especially noticeable in his groups and isolated figures, which are endowed with supple or calm movements that elicit sentimental emotion in the spectator.

Fig. 2 **Gabriel Yoly, Gil Morlanes the Younger, Juan de Salas and Juan de Moreto**  
*Retablo mayor*, 1520–1526  
 Tauste (Saragossa), Parish church of Santa María

pp. 6–7

Fig. 3 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Nativity*, detail of the *retablo mayor*, 1532–1536  
 Teruel, Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción









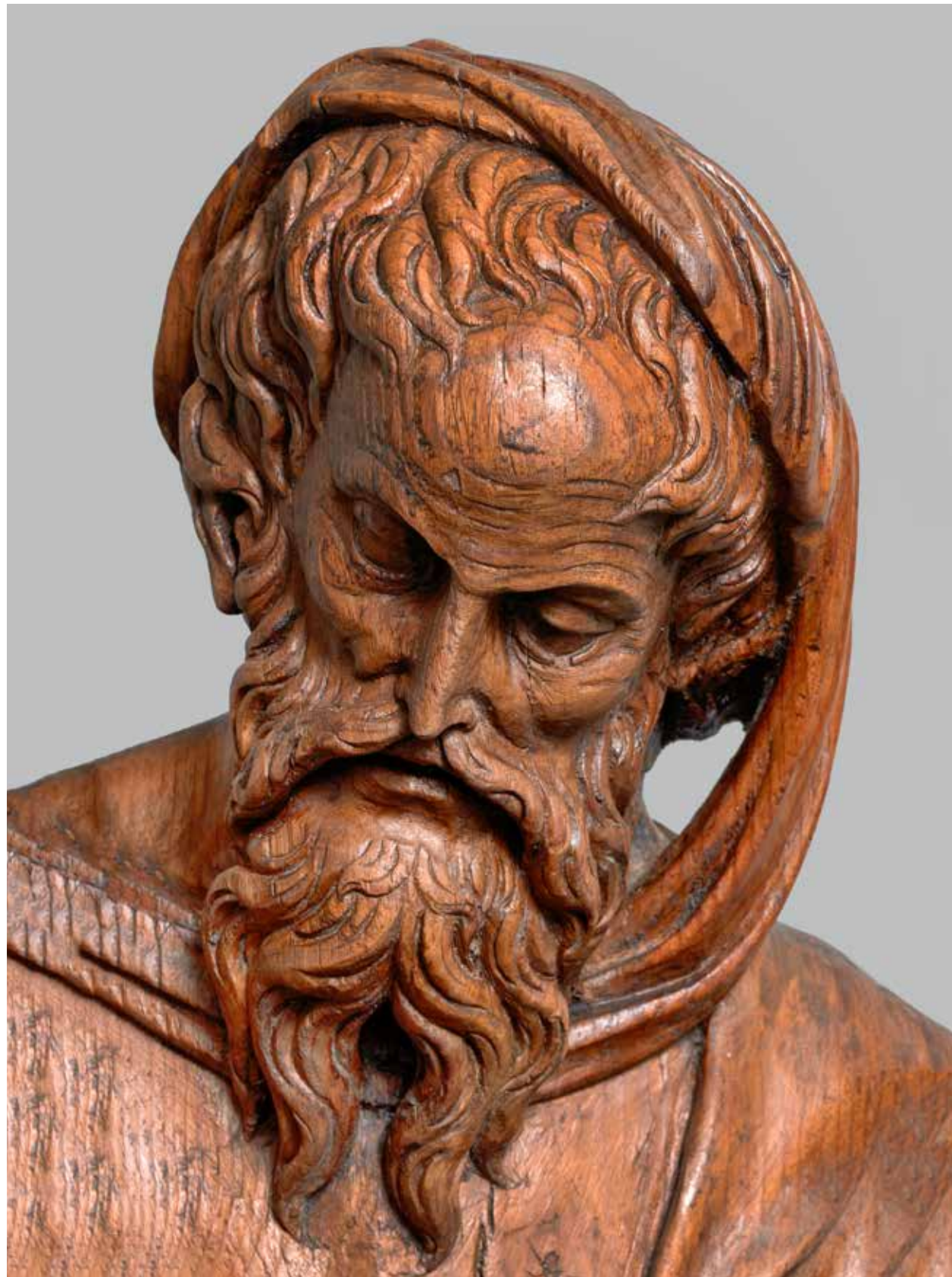
It is essential to analyse the whole corpus of Yoly's Teruel period in order to understand the work we are studying (figs. 1, 4) as it is clearly related to his last period. The sculpture, which also is not polychromed, represents an aged person and does not bear any attributes. Thus it is difficult to indicate specifically whom it represents. It could be a prophet, but the discovery of a circular hollow in its pedestal (fig. 5) makes us wonder if this hollow were not made to hold a stick or rod, which would be held up by a left hand. In that case, the statue could represent Saint Joseph (fig. 5).



Fig. 4 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Prophet or Saint Joseph?*  
c.1532–1538  
Helmond, IOMR Collection

Fig. 5 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Prophet or Saint Joseph?*  
c.1532–1538, detail  
Helmond, IOMR Collection





The sculpture presents a slightly stylised ruling and appears wrapped in robes that reveal only hands and feet. Space is taken up by the posture of legs and arms, which point in opposite directions and offer many different perspectives. The left leg steps forward while the right leg is bent and ends with its foot raised, standing only on its toes; it turns around so that it remains at right angles to the position of the other foot. In a similar fashion, the arms branch out from the body (fig. 4). The head turns in the opposite direction, thus avoiding the rigid appearance of someone facing frontwards and gives a natural liveliness to the group. This is an interpretation in which we capture the dominating attitude of the personage, though veiled by an intelligent and self-absorbed look (fig. 6). His softly coiled yet tangled beard gives greater emphasis to the elegant expressionism of his finely wrinkled face. This type of model reaffirms a humanistic concept, which is characteristic of a Renaissance mentality (fig. 6).

The clothes are close-fitting and allow one to recognise the shape of legs, but it is above all the cloak, which is laid in coiling, with heavy folds in some places, such that it seems to be alive, and able to rouse solid surfaces with its expressiveness. We notice that the artist is seeking to strengthen the contrast between nearly flat surfaces upon which light slides freely, and other surfaces, which have been carved deeply and contain more shadow (figs. 9–12). All this gains a wealth of expressive shades. We must point out Yoly's characteristic touch, typical of the Teruel period, of setting turbans here and there on people's heads to give an Oriental note to the scene (fig. 6).

Also outstanding is the sculptor's superb technique when he sets about carving the sculpture in a way we may consider impressionist. In some zones, like the chest and the legs, a few light touches of the gouge indicate the shape of the body and the folds of drapery. The same treatment occurs with hair and beard and especially in the wrinkles of the face, which are scarcely suggested (fig. 6) with fine, parallel, barely noticeable lines. Here we observe the link with the Saint Joseph of the *Holy Family* exhibited in the National Museum of Sculpture at Valladolid (attributed to Gabriel Yoly by Javier Ibañez; fig. 7). Instead, as we have mentioned previously, the volume of the swaying draperies is stressed, showing movement and life. We may say that Yoly is a great sculptor because he contributes a fusion of technique with many subtle shades of meaning. In this work, he offers us a vision full of life and physical reality.

Fig. 6 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Prophet or Saint Joseph?*  
c.1532–1538, detail  
Helmond, IOMR Collection





Although on a few occasions Berruguete's influence on this period of Yoly has been mentioned, the sculptural concept of both artists is different. In Yoly the convulsed movement of the Castilian master is lacking, but there is a rather more measured movement with a greater classical content. Berruguete's violent foreshortenings and his instability are not apparent, but we observe a more balanced composition. Similarly, we appreciate less interest in the nude or in draperies flapping in the wind, but rather a preference for expressive interpretation consistent with an elegance in attitudes and composition. In this elegance we find the trace of Yoly's French origins.

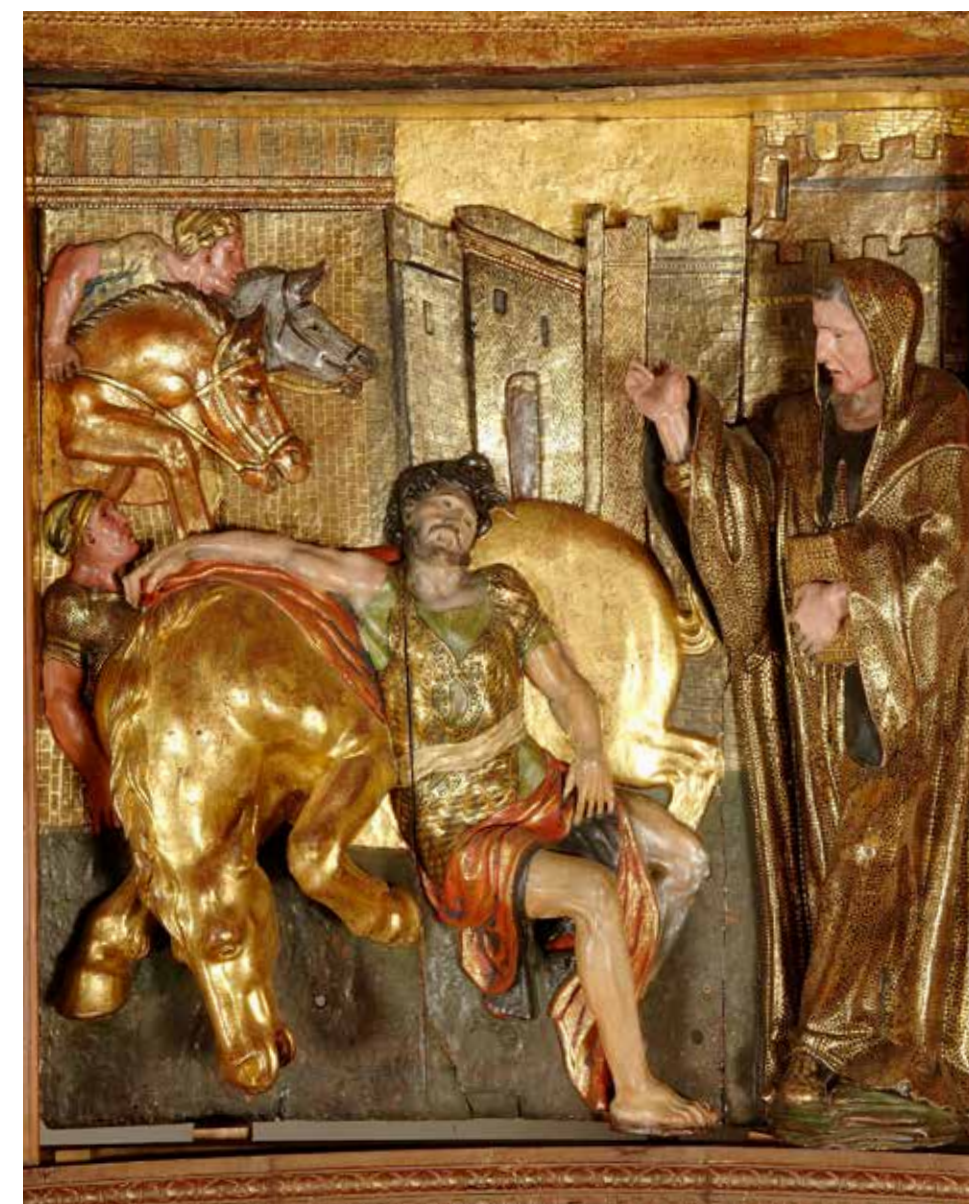


Fig. 7 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist*, 1532–1536  
Valladolid, Museo Nacional de Escultura

Fig. 8 **Alonso Berruguete**  
*The conversion of Totila*  
1526–1532, Monastery of San Benito, currently Valladolid, Museo Nacional de Escultura





Fig. 9 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Prophet or Saint Joseph?* c.1532–1538  
 Helmond, IOMR Collection



Fig. 10 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Apostle*, detail of the *retablo mayor*, 1532–1536  
 Teruel, Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción



Fig. 11 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Apostle*, detail of the *retablo mayor*, 1532–1536  
 Teruel, Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción



Fig. 12 **Gabriel Yoly**  
*Apostle*, detail of the *retablo mayor*, 1532–1536  
 Teruel, Cathedral of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción



## BIBLIOGRAPHY on the *Prophet* or *Saint Joseph*?

MORTE GARCÍA, Carmen: *The Art of the Aragonese Renaissance as a center of new artistic trends in sculpture*, in: *Treasures of Spanish Renaissance Sculpture. The origin of the Spanish Manner*, ed. by Carlos Herrero Starkie, IOMR Helmond, 2019, pp. 168–173.

HERRERO STARKIE, Carlos: *Gabriel Joly - Study of a Sculpture newly revealed by the IOMR*, in: *Treasures of Spanish Renaissance Sculpture. The origin of the Spanish Manner*, ed. by Carlos Herrero Starkie, IOMR Helmond, 2019, p. 260–287.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABIZANDA Y BROTO, Manuel: *Documentos para la historia artística y literaria de Aragón*; I and II, Zaragoza, La Editorial, 1915 and 1917.

CHAMOSO, Manuel: *El servicio de recuperación y defensa del patrimonio nacional (Datos sobre retablos de Teruel)*; IR.S.E.E., 1943, p. 174.

ABBAD, Francisco: *Estudios del renacimiento aragonés...*; A.E.A., 69, 1945, pp. 162–177; 72, 1945, pp. 317–346; y 75, 1946, pp. 217–227.

ABBAD, Francisco: *Seis retablos aragoneses de la época del Renacimiento*; A.E.A., tomo XXIII, 1950, pp. 55–59.

IBÁÑEZ MARTÍN, Jose: *Gabriel Yoly*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956.

NOVELLA MATEO, Angel and SOLAZ VILLANUEVA, Angel: *La obra de Gabriel Yoly en Teruel*, in *Seminario de Arte Aragonés*, n. 34 (1981), pp. 83–93.

VARIOS AUTORES: *La escultura del Renacimiento en Aragón*. Zaragoza, 1993.

IBÁÑEZ FERNÁNDEZ, Javier: *Nuevas aportaciones documentales sobre el retablo mayor de la catedral de Teruel (1532–1536)*. *Artigrama*, n. 16, 2001, pp. 297–327.

MORTE GARCÍA, Carmen (dir.) and CASTILLO MONTOLAR, Margarita: *El esplendor del Renacimiento en Aragón*, Zaragoza, Gobierno de Aragón; Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao; Generalitat Valenciana, 2009.