



GABRIEL JOLY

Study of a sculpture newly revealed by the IOMR

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Some artists express the spirit of their epoch so well that their work shines out to show us the various and frequently antagonistic artistic currents of the day. No doubt Gabriel Joly is one of those with a particularly masterful skill in expressing the international characteristics of the first European Renaissance. Joly's work shows us Franco-Gothic features, certainly due to his origins in Picardie; Florentine traces, thanks to his unmistakable devotion to Italian Art; and Aragonese influences, since Aragon was the land of his adoption and where his most important works were created.

Due to the spiritual force it transmits, its elegant design, all imbued with a controlled sense of movement and a highly refined sculptural technique revealing a strongly impressionistic mood, the sculpture we are now studying – recently rediscovered by the IOMR – represents a magnificent example of the artistic genius of a sculptor and designer of altarpieces who deserves deeper research.^(Fig. A2) In this work lies the fusion of Alonso Berruguete's expressivity, spread throughout Aragon from the 1530's onwards and, the "gravitas formentiana". Overflowing it all is the majesty and the pathos that only the finest works of Joly can produce; like the high altarpiece of Teruel Cathedral, one of the most significant masterpieces of the Spanish Renaissance.^(Fig. 1)

Fig. 1 **Gabriel Joly**. High Altarpiece of the Cathedral of Teruel. 1532-1536 (Pág 3-4)





The artist Gabriel Joly arrived in Aragon during the first fortnight of the XVIth century, bearing a clearly marked style of French origin rooted in a naturalistic but rather mannered gothic style, which he moderates with an essentially Florentine classicism. Armed with these solid qualifications, Joly makes contact with the sculptural tradition of Aragon, at that time dominated by Damián Forment. There is documentation of this contact in 1514. It is most probable that they collaborated in the larger altarpiece of the San Miguel de los Navarros Church in Zaragoza (1518),^(Fig. 2) which presents a fluid composition revealing strong Italian tradition, no doubt greater than what Forment was accustomed to doing at that time.

Fig. A2 **Gabriel Joly** – *Apostle, Prophet or Saint Joseph*, circa 1536, Pine Wood, 95 x 35 cm, XVI century Spanish School. IOMR Collection.



Fig. 2 **Damián Forment and Gabriel Joly**. *Altarpiece of the Church of San Miguel de los Navarros*.

Joly certainly also participated in the altarpiece of the Pilar, which was effected by Forment between 1508 and 1519 and where certain stylistic touches of Joly's are outstanding,^(Fig.3) ^(Fig.4) especially in the figures of the Apostles, who surround the central composition of the main body of the work.^(Fig. 5) The interplay between these two great masters constitutes one of the most rewarding artistic collaborations of the Spanish Renaissance. On the one hand, it propitiates in Forment a lighter representation in his compositions, a refinement which softens the rather sturdy shapes of his sculptures, and, on the other hand, Joly's works acquire an assurance, a corporal presence that will turn them into fundamental elements to confront, during the final years of his career, the impetuous mannerism of Alonso Berruguete.

If we view Forment as a colossal force that surges up from a unique genius, reminiscent of both Sluter and Michelangelo, endowed with a certain trace of a rural "tardo gothic" personality, and who carves his sculptures in solid blocks and crowds his compositions with many figures all together,^(Fig. 5) Joly stand out due to the refinement and elegance of his style, which is imbued with a subtle pathos that calls to mind soft memories of "la douce France". The altarpiece of San Agustín at the Cathedral Metropolitana de La Seo (1520) and the altarpiece of Tauste, executed between 1520 and 1524, in which Joly collaborated with Gil Morlanes, are where Joly's principal characteristic and contribution as designer of altarpieces is firmly established: his clear composition. Also outstanding in all his sculptural groups, this leaves a lasting mark in Aragon, a region that maintained strong tardo-gothic roots.



Fig. 3 Gabriel Joly and Damián Forment. *Apostle*, Altarpiece of the Cathedral of Zaragoza, El Pilar.



Fig. 4 Damián Forment Gabriel Joly. *Apostles*. Altarpiece of the Cathedral of Zaragoza, El Pilar.



Fig. 5 Damián Forment. Altarpiece of the Cathedral of Zaragoza, El Pilar. (Pág 10)

Joly's style does not reach its culmination until the outset of the 1530's when the influence of the Spanish Renaissance Eagles penetrates the artistic world of Aragon. We can hear echoes of the most Italian of our sculptors, the unfortunate Bartolomé Ordoñez, who died at Carrara in 1520 and of Diego de Siloé, having recently arrived in Burgos after his time in Naples where, with Felipe Bigarni and Juan de Valmaseda, they finish their work on the altars of the Capilla del Condestable,^(Fig 6) which bears the true stamp of Spanish Renaissance identity.



Fig. 6 Diego de Siloé, *Christ between the angels*, Altarpiece of Saint Ana, Cathedral of Burgos.



Fig. 7 Alonso Berruguete *Relief the conversion of Totila*, altarpiece of Monastery of San Benito currently in Museo Nacional de Escultura de Valladolid.

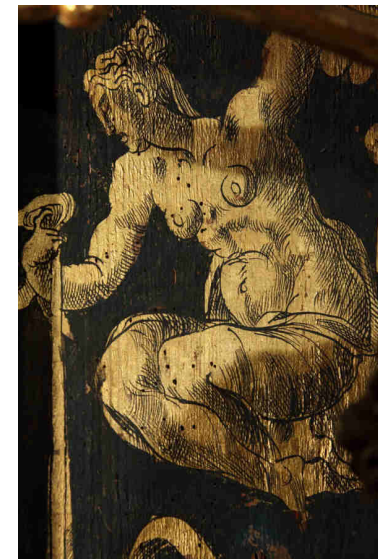


Fig. 8 Andrés de Melgar, polychromy, High Altarpiece of Santo Domingo la Calzada

But it is Alonso Berruguete^(Fig. 7) who has the greatest influence in the region. He appears in Aragon and La Rioja not only thanks to the fame of his compositions but also due to the polychromes of his collaborator, Andrés Melgar,^(Fig. 8) whose designs for the sculptures of the principal altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada had a great influence in the region. At that time Joly blossoms forth with passion and vigor and this is reflected in his art, which is more powerful than in his previous works. His sculpture groups of the church of San Pedro – in its principal altarpiece (1533) and, to a lesser degree, in the altarpiece of Cosme and San Damián (1537) – and especially all the sculpture work effected for the principal altarpiece of Teruel Cathedral (contracted in 1532 according to the documents found by Cesar Tomas Laguía in 1959 and installed in 1536) indicate a strongly marked stylistic transformation, which is characteristic of a genius in a state of artistic spontaneity. His creations are full of Berruguetesque explosions, which does not detract from the beauty and elegance of his forms. His personages have fiery expressions, ruffled hair, windswept beards, grasping hands and feet – all rendered in a much more agitated manner than usual, caused by a sudden impulse.^(Fig 9)



Fig. 9 Gabriel Yoly. *The holy family*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel.



Fig. 10 Gabriel Yoly, *Ascension of the Virgin*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel, 1532-1536.

Joly, even in this fleeting moment of creativity, cannot abandon his Italo-French artistic tradition, nor renounce his devotion to beauty, moderation and balance. The faces continue to be classical and the bodies are in accordance with stylised shapes, carved most skilfully by his gouge, and they adopt attitudes with measured steady movement. Clothing is treated in a simple, rhythmical, almost impressionistic manner. This had nothing to do with Berruguete, whose saints and biblical personages dart out from their niches like flames and whose compositions do not have any rational sequence but that conceived by his exaggerated genius. In Joly, on the contrary, control remains triumphant, even at the moment of the greatest exaltation of his creative spirit. This control is absolutely his own and acts as a defensive barrier against Berruguete's stormy influences, which, however, enrages his genius beyond all possible limits. (Fig10)(Fig 11)

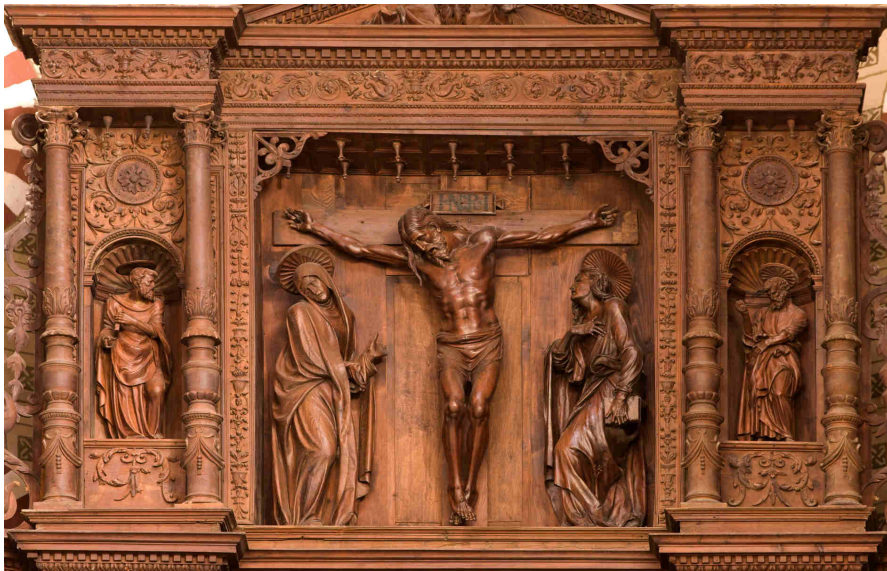


Fig. 11 Gabriel Joly, *Calvary*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel.

The work, recently studied by Carmen Morte and Jesús María Parrado del Olmo, represents a biblical personage who, on account of his turban – typical in Joly – could easily represent a prophet. Such was suggested by Carmen Morte, but the discovery by our restorer of a hole in the base of the sculpture (Fig A4) has induced JM Parrado to believe that it might be a Saint Joseph holding his stick, belonging to a bigger composition, probably a nativity. (Fig 12) The position of his head, leaning slightly downwards and to his right, as well as his noble features viewed in profile, with classical cheekbones and brow, all correspond to the canon of Italian beauty that Joly prefers to select when representing major figures of biblical iconography. (Fig A5)

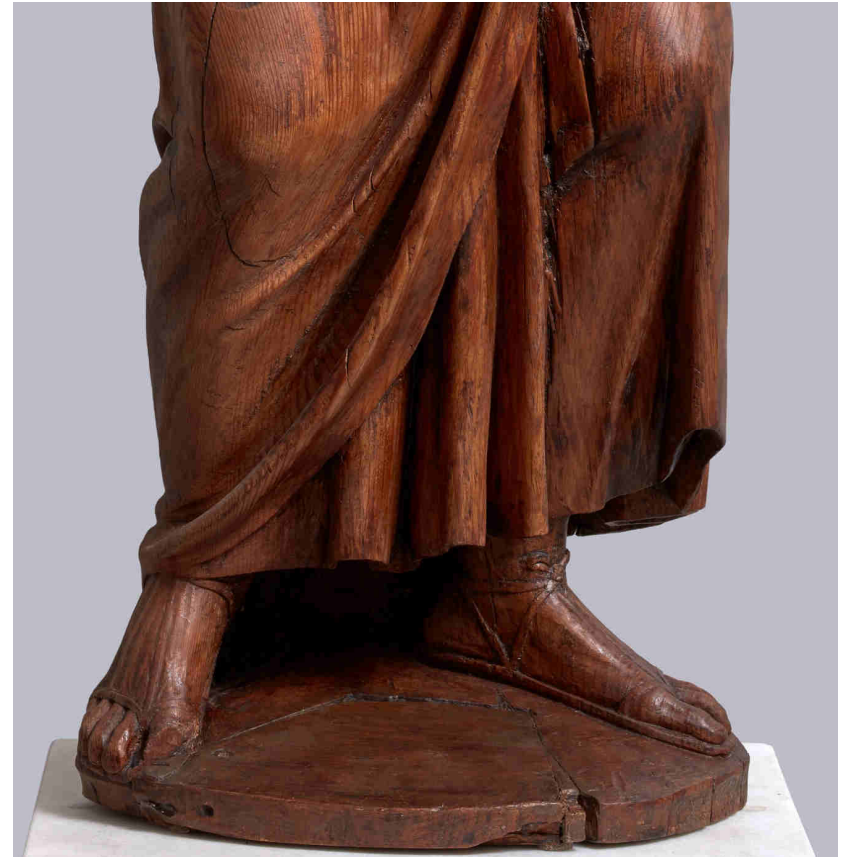


Fig. A4 Gabriel Joly – *Detail of Apostle*, IOMR Collection.

Fig. 12 Gabriel Yoly, *Nativity*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel. (Pág 17- 18)



Its attribution to Joly's best works is justified by the excellent skills it reveals which clearly correspond to the sculpture groups of the principal altarpiece of the Cathedral of Teruel. The master presents the saint concentrated in self-absorbed contemplation, blending admiration with a certain perplexity the artist knows how to suggest by a slight shrug of laden shoulders.^(Fig A5) All this no doubt suggests analogies to Michelangelo, typical of Joly in his Teruel period, now much more Roman than Florentine, which recall attitudes of personages of the Capella Sistina.^(Fig 17) St. Joseph's meticulously rendered hair and beard frame a countenance of great classical beauty that inspires respect and majesty. On his clear brow we observe a knot in the pine wood that has not been polychromed, which reveals one of Joly's important characteristics: his capacity to make the veining of the wood synchronize with his sense of aesthetics and with the artistic message his sculptures transmit. In this case, he gives to the Saint's face a force and an aura of divinity, which Joly stresses even more by making a series of grooves that surround the forehead like a whirlpool



Fig. A6 **Gabriel Joly** – *Apostle*, IOMR Collection



Fig. 13 **Gabriel Joly**, detail of *Apostol*, High altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel

The eye sockets frame a Greek nose, sharpened by the sculptor's gouge that is the touchstone of his autograph works, along with long "mostachos", or whiskers, which

hang down covering a half-open mouth and a swishing two-pronged beard. Yet all this is supremely classical! However, the carving effected by his gouge indicates spirit, vigour and courage, which deepens the pathos of the work and carries us off to the models of the ancient Greeks. That is the reason why this work moves us so much. Fundamentally, this is due to its eternal beauty, which is inscribed in our memory like a canon fusing for ever-spiritual and human beauty.^{(Fig A6) (Fig 13)}



Fig. A5 **Gabriel Joly** – *Apostle*, IOMR Collection.

Joly accompanies the movement of the head with a slight “contraposto” of the shoulders, followed by another forward movement of the legs in the opposite direction to the face.^(Fig A7) This design becomes homogeneous on covering the body with a tunic and cloak, which reveal folds rendered in a sketchy, almost impressionistic manner. This correctly marks the “tempo” of the sculpture. We do not see any scrolls except for the one hanging from his left shoulder and two “cordilleras” of a cloak that hang down from both arms and fall into lengthy and swaying folds, giving a stylised appearance to the saint’s figure.^(Fig A13) All this flows between the legs of the saint, who reveals strong muscles behind a tight-fitting tunic. Here we encounter another of Joly’s special characteristic features, observed in many of his saints, especially those who crowd the altarpiece of Teruel: the master, on making the saint’s legs move forward, makes the tunic cling to his body to take advantage of the grain in the wood and of the light that draws attention to the exposed knees.^(Fig A14) The soft folds of the cloak, which hang down due to their weight, give the sculpture the sense of “gravitas formentiana”, which Joly never fails show us, even in his final works.^{(Fig A8)(Figs 14-16)}





Comparison between the *Apostle* by **Gabriel Joly**, IOMR Collection (Fig. A8) and the *Apostle* by **Gabriel Joly** High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel (Fig. 15).

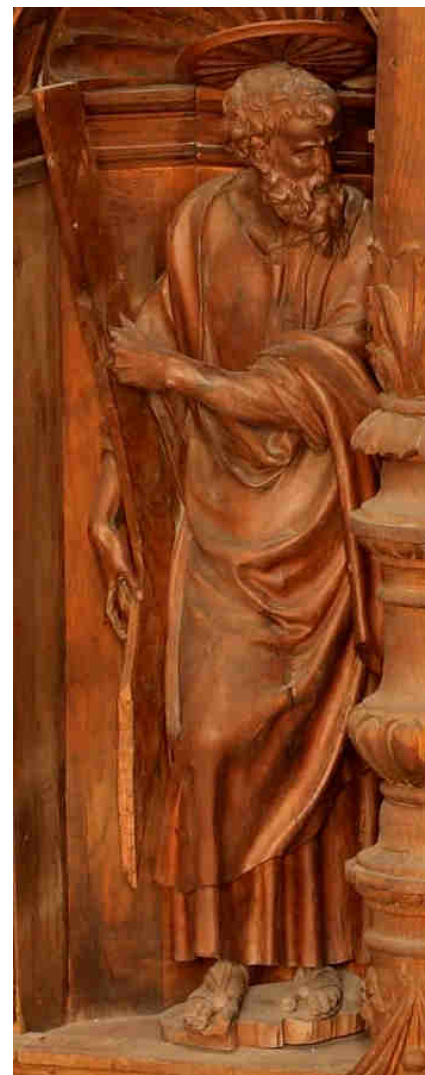


Fig. 14 **Gabriel Joly**, *Apostle*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel.

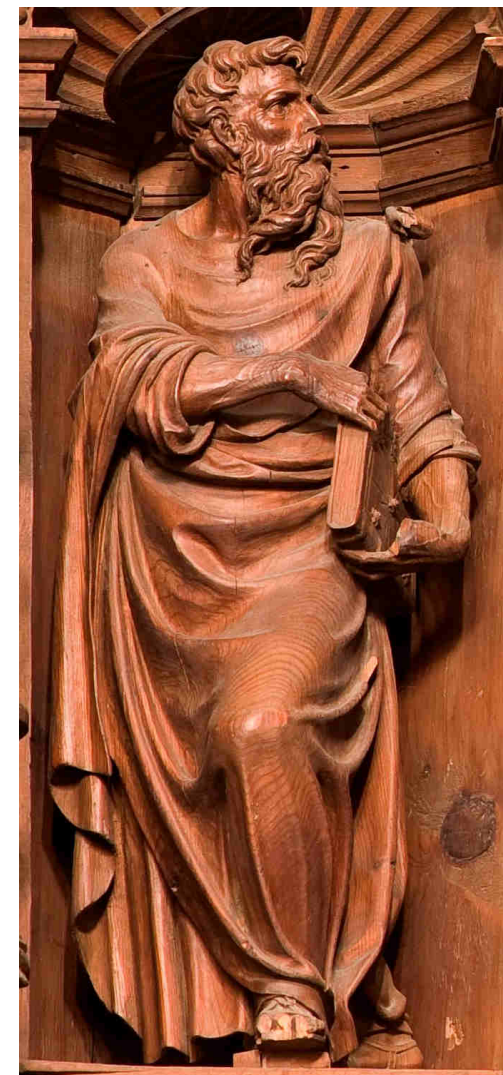


Fig. 16 **Gabriel Joly**, *Apostle*, High Altarpiece, Cathedral of Teruel.

Joly dies in 1538 and Forment in 1541, both recognised as great artists of the Aragonese Renaissance. Aragon might have remained an orphan if it were not for the genius of another sculptor who had come from the north, Arnao de Bruselas, whose sense of majesty still pervades among the sculptures of the altarpieces of La Población, Genevilla, St María del Palacio or the “trascoro” of the “Cathedral Metropolitana de la Seo” (Fig 18)(Fig 19) in Zaragoza. The art of these masters will only be surpassed, though not in greatness, when Aragonese sculpture acquires, a mid-century later, a more dignified, rhetorical and dramatic tone, following the rulings of the Councilio de Trento – the so-called “Romanismo” – which unified everything, with Ancheta and Becerra as its greatest exponents. The latter artists, each in a different way, were strongly influenced by Michelangelo’s work during their respective sojourns in Italy.

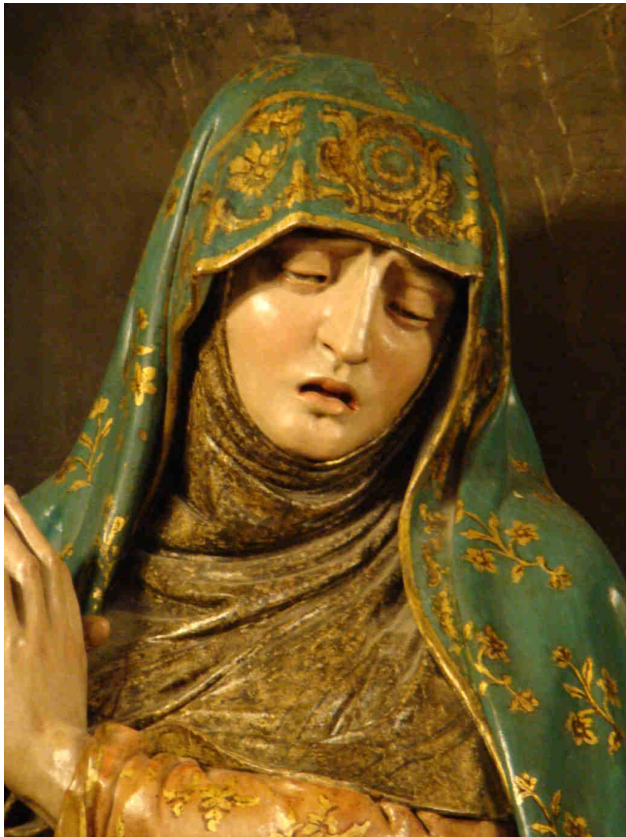


Fig. 18 Arnao de Bruselas. *Our Lady*, trascoro of the Cathedral Metropolitana de la Seo, Zaragoza.



Fig. 19 Arnao de Bruselas, *Calvary*, trascoro of la Cathedral Metropolitana de La Seo, Zaragoza

Viewed from a perspective enabled by the passage of time, we note that Joly and Forment convey a mood of melancholy true of sensitive, good and humble souls, of non-conflictive personalities, which is a stark contrast to the stormy temperament of Castilian artists like Berruguete or Bigarni, who were continually involved in lawsuits and anxious to gain social recognition. Their art, in both cases, is the faithful reflection of these divergent sensitivities and, in Joly's case, of a deeply spiritual sentiment.

Proof of the love and gratitude that the inhabitants of Teruel must have felt for Joly, is their decision to bury him at the entrance to the choir of the cathedral. His tomb was covered by a simple but dignified stone tablet, which represents him wearing a cloak and with his head resting on pillows. Engraved on the tablet is "Que Dios perdone el cual hizo el retablo mayor de la presente" (May God forgive the one who made this altarpiece).

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Fig. 17 Michelangelo Buonarroti. *The Holy Father*, Sistine Chapel, Saint Peter Basilica .Vaticano