



JUAN BAUTISTA VÁZQUEZ the elder
Pelayos c.1525–1588 Sevilla

Our Lady and the Child

Carlos Herrero Starkie

The sculpture representing *Our Lady with the Infant Child Jesus* (fig. 1) that we are now studying, an autograph work by Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder, is a magnificent example of the level of refinement attained by Spanish Art in the mid XVIth century, and especially of the later Renaissance style which flourished in Seville from the 1550s onwards, as a result of the migration of Toledo artists trained in the Avila school, stamped with the genius of Alonso Berruguete.

Juan Bautista Vazquez the Elder is the most purely Italianate artist of the Spanish XVIth century whose work originates, not fortuitously, in the technical skill of the Avila school, established by the great artist who introduced the Italian Renaissance to Spain, Vasco de Zarza; he was followed by Isidro de Villoldo, Alonso Berruguete's

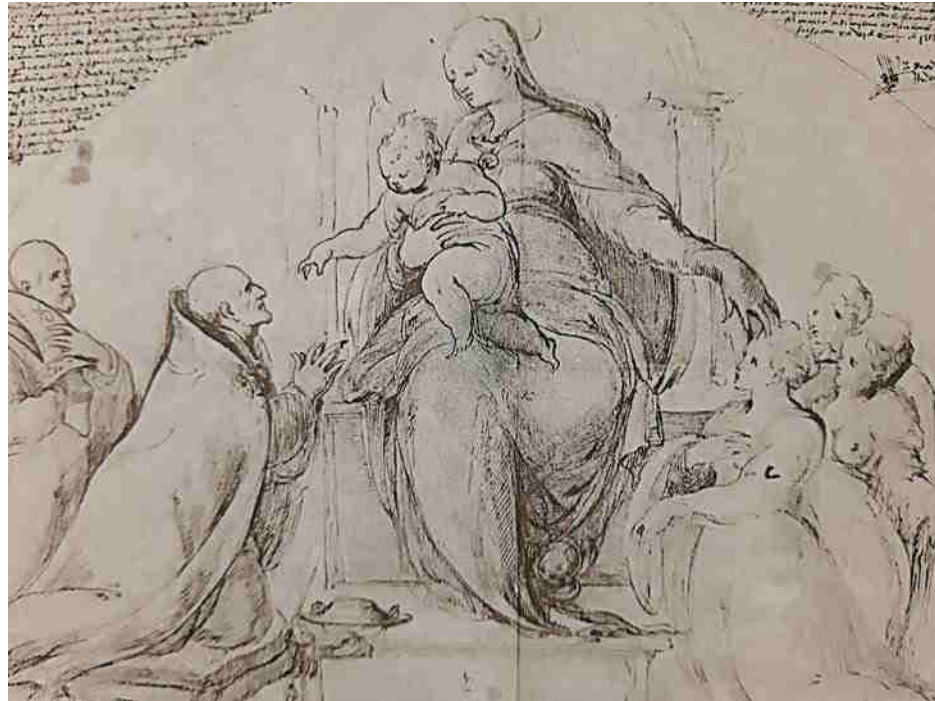


most outstanding student. We know that Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder was born at Pelayos, in the province of Avila, in around 1525, although we lack documentation and hence information relating to his training during this period. The magnificent replica of Michelangelo's *Pietà* (fig. 2), which is in the chapel of Nuestra Señora la Blanca, in Avila Cathedral, gives us an idea of his skill. As indicated by Margarita Estella, this work is of greater quality than the other copies by Baggio di Biggio and Montorsoli, although its attribution is based solely on similarities with his work in Toledo, which is infused with Italian calmness. The absence of information relating to his early years with the exception of a documented work of great technical ability dating from 1554 (the skill of which finding confirmation in the fact that Juan Bautista Vazquez the Elder was treated at this time in Toledo as an independent master), leads us to think that on some earlier occasion he must have travelled to Italy, as is suggested by the reference found by Margarita Estella in the Encyclopaedia of Artists by Zani (published in Parma in 1820). In this he is referred to as an engraver *a bulino* in Parma. His recognized skill in the carving of marble, together with his fluent drawing technique, profoundly Florentine in style as can be seen in his splendid preparatory drawing for the *Pórtico de las doncellas* (fig. 3), as well as his renowned engravings, confirm that he must certainly have made a journey to Italy before his installation in Toledo.

We thus find ourselves in the mid 1550s with an artist who is already technically mature and able to sign a contract of collaboration with a recognized Toledo sculptor, Nicolás Vergara el Viejo. His first documented work, the altarpiece of *La Concepción de Al-*

p. 2
Fig. 1 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
Our Lady and the Child
 Polychrome wood
 Height, 148 cm
 Private collection

Fig. 2 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
 Replica of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo
 Avila, Cathedral, chapel of Nuestra
 Señora la Blanca



quez the Elder
de las doncellas
doncellas

monacid de Zorita, executed in 1554, whose *Virgen de la Paz* (fig. 6) is carved in a style close to that of Jacopo Sansovino and the school of Parma, demonstrates better than anything else a consummately formed artistic personality, and one captivated by Italian forms in all their splendour. We see a sculptor with a staunch intellect able to confront on an equal footing the strong personality of Alonso Berruguete who - paradoxically - is his other great influence, and who after the death of Felipe Bigarni and his son, Gregorio Pardo, would dominate the artistic world of Toledo. Proof of this influence can already be seen in 1554 in the sculptural group *El Abrazo delante la puerta Dorada*, and also in the *Almonacid de Zorita* altarpiece (fig. 6) which has evident similarities with the group of the *Visitation* in the altarpiece in the Saint Ursula convent by Alonso Berruguete (1546) (fig. 4) and in his probable collaboration in the execution of the tomb of Cardinal Tavera (1554-1556) (figs. 7, 8, 11) when Berruguete encountered difficulties in the carving of the marble due to his old age, in 1561 close to death. This close collaboration has been recognized by almost all scholars after Manuel Gomez Moreno



Fig. 4 Juan Bautista Vazquez the Elder, circa 1560, relief of flight to Egypt, high altarpiece of Cathedral of Sevilla .

firmly argued it in his book 'The Spanish Renaissance', although Manuel Arias currently opposes this hypothesis in his book 'Alonso Berruguete. Prometeo de la escultura'.*

As a result of the fortunate interaction between these influences, an exceptional and autonomous 'Corpus' of sculptures - displaying a typically Parmigianesque Mannerism - will come into being in the Hispanic world. This turning point will mark the decline of the prevailing influence wielded by Alonso Berruguete, towards the triumphal rise of the purest Italian canon which can already be seen developing in the Roman Mannerism Romanism of Gaspar Becerra in Castille, before soon appearing also with Anchieta in the Vasco Navarro Aragonese region, although following a style much closer to Michelangelo.

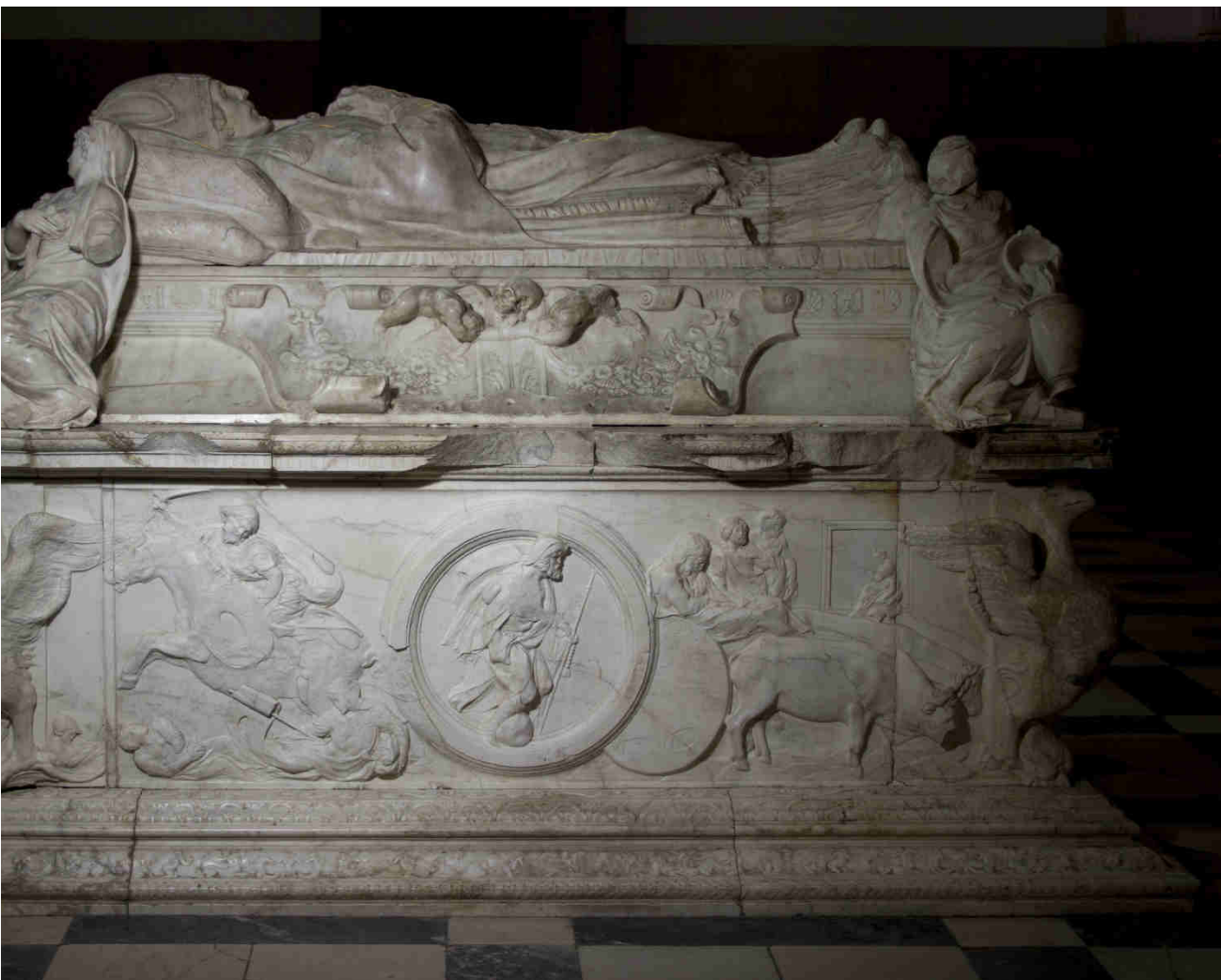
The use of the purest and refined sculptural technique, combined with designs which bear the stamp of the depth of feeling derived from the influence of Alonso Berruguete, all of these con-



tribute to forming a master sculptor with the skill and technique best able to render woman's beauty, as can be seen in the sublime expressions of his deeply melancholic Madonnas. In 1557, after his journey to Seville, Juan Bautista Vázquez continued working on the sculptures of the Cartuja de las Cuevas which were left unfinished as a result of the Death of Isidro de Villoldo (1556). This achievement would open doors leading to a highly successful career as a sculptor, one who would create the canon of the image of the Andalusian Madonna which would raise him to the position of patriarch of the School of Seville, leading directly to the great Martínez Montañés.

Fig. 5 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
Our Lady and the Child
Private collection

Fig. 6 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
Anunciación de Lucena, polychrome relief, high altarpiece of the church of San Mateo, Lucena, Córdoba



The work we are now studying is of special interest as it represents the fusion of these two influences. On the one hand, it shows the striking Italian artistic personality of Juan Bautista Vázquez' art, on the other, the clear evidence of Berruguete's influence. Indeed, the softness and simplicity of the design of the folds which fall heavily, the subtle *contraposto* of their position, the majestic stance of *Our Lady* who appears like a Roman matron (fig. 1), with

her large, rather rough hands, her broad face, straight nose and thin lips, all of which are features characteristic of the work of J. Bautista Vázquez, observed in other undoubtedly autograph works such as the *Virgin of the Fevers* (fig. 9), the *Virgen of Fascitol* in the Cathedral of Seville (fig. 10) and the reliefs of the parish churches of Santa Maria di Carmona (1563) and San Mateo di Lucena (1572), all of them documented. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to be surprised by

Fig. 8 Alonso Berruguete
Tomb of Cardinal Tavera, detail
Toledo, Hospital of St. John the Baptist



the delicate tenderness expressed by *Our Lady* in the intimacy of her communion with the Infant Jesus lying submissively in her arms, combined with the tremendously mannered gesture and disproportionate muscles very similar to the angels surrounding the sepulchre of Cardinal Tavera (figs. 11, 12) almost identical to those we see in a drawing by Alonso Berruguete which is now in the Academia de San Fernando, Madrid. The aura of Berruguete is not so easily and obviously discernible in J. B. Vázquez' work, above all in his female figures, who are rendered in a totally Italianate style which avoids strong human expressiveness in favour of a more divine appearance.

For this reason, Prof. Jesús María Parrado del Olmo suggests that the work must have been executed at a date close to the conclusion of work on the tomb of Cardinal Tavera at the beginning of his sojourn in Seville during the 1560s because, although it contains these strong elements deriving from Berruguete, it is faithful to the typology of the Sevillian Madonnas created by Juan Bautista Vázquez. Furthermore, Prof. Parrado del Olmo has made an in-depth study of the similarities between this newly discovered work with one of the most outstanding and well known masterpieces of the Sevillian Renaissance: the *Giraldillo*' (fig. 15), the Bronze stat-

Fig. 9 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
Virgen de las Fiebres
Sevilla, church of Santa Maria Magdalena

***Fig. 10 Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder
Virgin of Fascitol
Sevilla, Cathedral

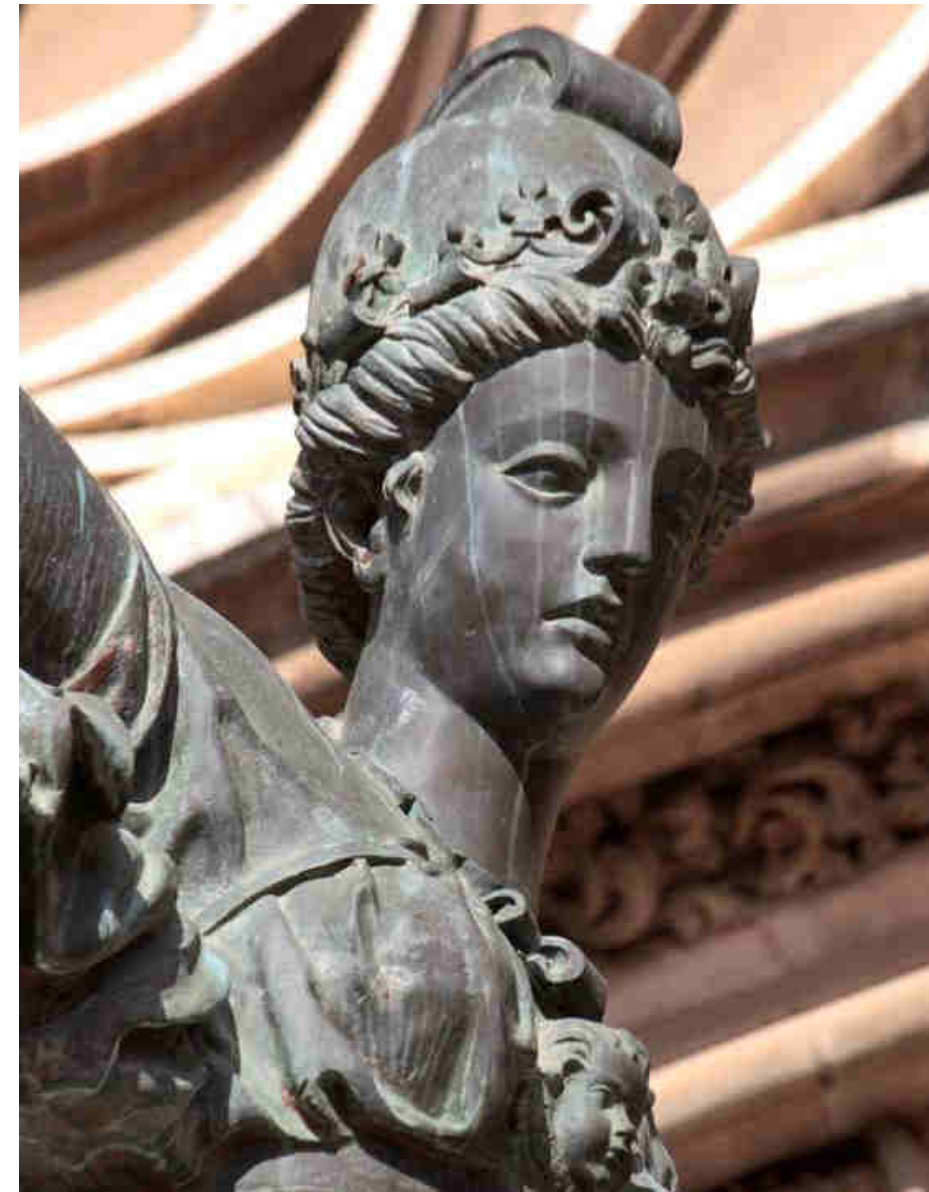


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John the Baptist
Vázquez the Elder
etails

ue which crowns the *Giralda*; a sculpture executed by Juan Bautis- ta Vázquez the Elder, based on a design by the Italianate Sevillian painter, Luis de Vargas, cast in bronze in 1568 by the most impor- tant Sevillian XVIth century bronze-smith, Bartolomé Morel.

Margarita Estella declares that there are analogies between our sculpture and the relief of the *Epiphany* and the *Annunciation* in the Church of San Mateo di Lucena (1572) because of the similarities in the physiognomies of *Our Lady*, her straight nose and small lips, espe- cially when observed in profile (fig. 13), which are just as they are in the relief in Lucena; the details of the folds of the garments are also similar in design. Together with the 'Berrugetesque' elements in *Our Lady's* expression and the even more evident stylistic and corporeal similarities with the *Virgin of Fascitol* in Seville Cathedral (fig.10), (for which there exists documented evidence of payment to





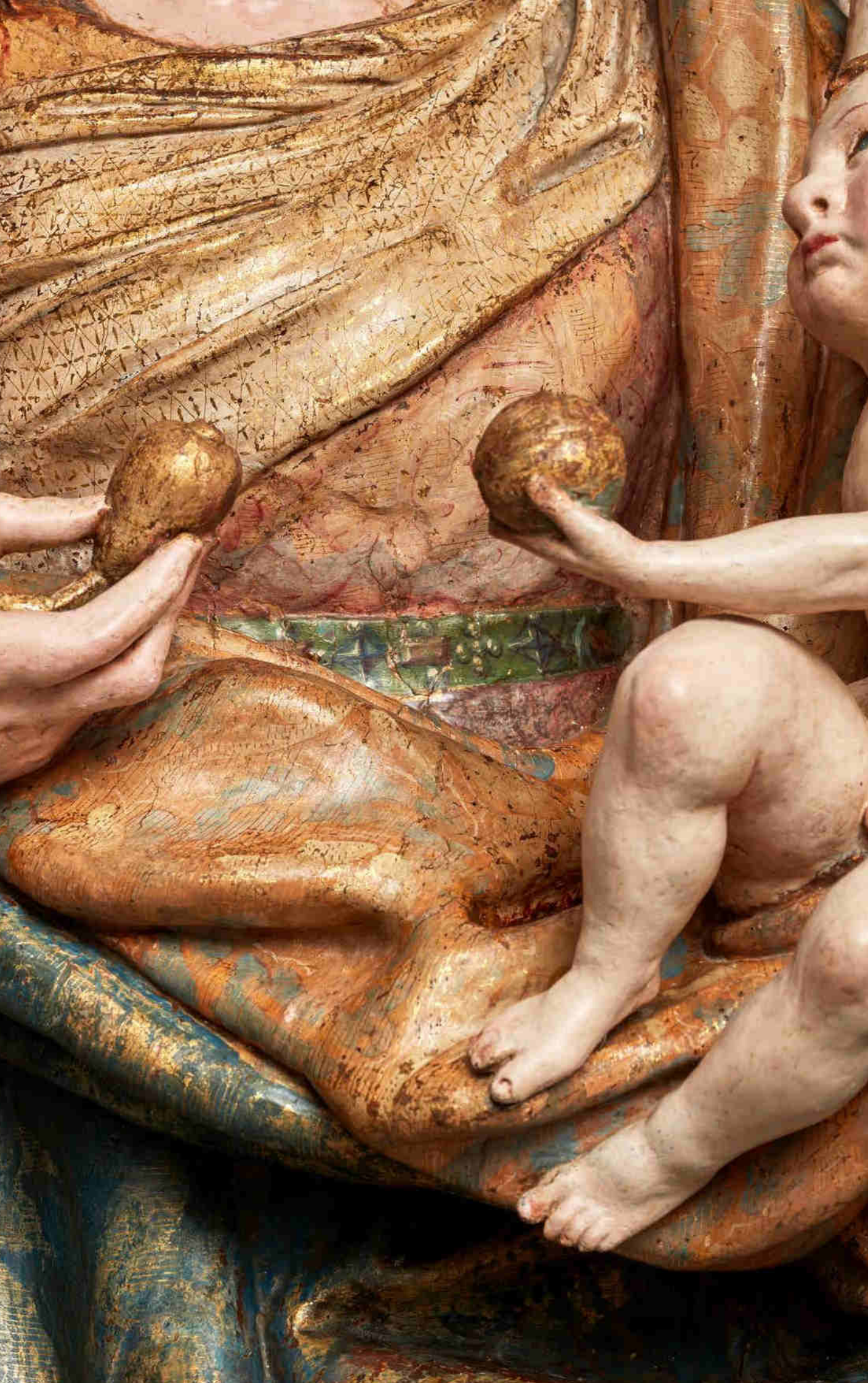
Juan Bautista Vázquez in 1565), all of this evidence leads Prof. Par-rado del Olmo to argue that around 1560 is the most probable date of execution of our work.

The polichromy of the sculpture has a subtle elegance, both in the harmonious design of branches contained within a balanced composition, and in her soft-toned rather sugar-plum colouring, which is in close accord with the practice in Seville at the end of the XVIth century. The *estofado* and *esgrafiados*, though lavish do not seek to captivate nor impress the spectator, but rather to in- duce a deeper understanding of the sculpture as a whole. The flesh, however, particularly that on *Our Lady's* face, carried out with an exquisite polishing technique, is absolutely essential to the work as it enhances her beauty and feminine nature, as well as giving her an expression in which poignancy blends with reverie, imbuing the scene with a premonitory element (figs. 13, 14, 16).

Fig. 14 **Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder**
Our Lady and the Child, detail
Private collection

Fig. 15 **Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder**
Giraldillo, detail
Sevilla, from the belfry of the cathedral

p. 18
Fig. 16 **Juan Bautista Vázquez the Elder**
Our Lady and the Child, detail
Private collection



We are grateful for the studies carried out by Jesús María Parado del Olmo and Margarita Estella which confirm in their respective cataloguing cards the attribution to Juan Bautista Vázquez of this work and its date around 1560 after having examined the piece in the original.

(*) It is documented that Juan Bautista Vázquez participated as an expert organizer, appointed by Alonso Berruguete for the evaluation of the work in the sepulchre of Cardinal Tavera. Therefore, Manuel Arias thinks he could not participate in its execution as it is not normal to be a judge and interested part in the process of valuation of the work of Berruguete.

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