

ISIDRO DE VILLOLDO (¿- Sevilla, circa 1556).

Apostle.

83 cms. High.

Circa 1550

Wood without polichromy.

We are facing an elegant sculpture representing Saint Paul, prince of the apostles. As is habitual in his iconography, he appears with a book, symbol of a holy writer, and a sword due to his martyrdom. The figure makes a sharp twisting movement of the position of the feet where the right foot only seems to move its heel to a similar slanting position as the left foot which is visible in the foreground. And yet the general sensation the sculpture offers is a soft swaying movement towards the sword where the tunic and full cloak envelop the figure in a voluminous mass which hides the twisted position of legs.

The clothes appear alive and dynamic, as we observe in the arrogant layout of the afore-mentioned cloak which falls down from the left shoulder like a Roman toga and joins the other part which crosses at the waist in a gathering of folds around his left hand holding a book. The tunic likewise presents broad folds which cross down over his chest. The way he grasps his sword, with his shoulder raised up, so that his delicately fingered hand presses down upon the pommel, is very theatrical. This gesture and the gathering of the clothes give a certain overwhelming majesty to the composition.

The work offers us an outstanding head, a striking example of Spanish expressionist mannerism; the way he turns his head gives greater vitality to the movement in the sculpture. He is represented according to the usual interpretations of Saint Paul, with a bald head and a thick beard full of vigorous locks coiling like a living serpent. His face is lean, with high cheekbones and slanting deep-set eyes suggesting the melancholic expressionism habitual in mid XVIth century Castilian Sculpture, which, at the same time, creates a humanistic interpretation, full of existentialism.

Under this work there lie traces of Berruguete's art both in the general composition, which we have already indicated, and in the sudden twisting legs and head which rise from the Master's interpretation of the Laoconte or from Michelangelo. The clothes, however, and the voluminous masses of drapery are more emphatically reaffirmed than what is usual in Berruguete and, in any case, bring us close to link up with the figures on the walnut panels of the choir-stalls of Toledo Cathedral, although they are lacking in the burning intensity of expression of these panels.

This blending in with the composition, this greater strengthening of the volume of drapery represented and the general air of elegance which pervades this work, indicate the evolution in Berruguete's circle in Toledo towards a milder mannerism, which places them on a similar level as the international mannerism of mid XVIth century. Following along that tendency, Villoldo evolves in his works in alabaster for Avila Cathedral, but above all, I find very close links with the figures of the bench of the

altar-piece of San Bernabé, situated in the present day sacristy of Avila Cathedral, that is to say, with Saint Paul, San Bernabé and San Andrés. These works were initiated by our sculptor and by Juan de Frías in 1549 and were basically finished in 1553 when Isidro de Villoldo goes to Sevilla to carry out the important commission of the altar-piece for the Cartuja de las Cuevas which he left unfinished due to his death in 1556.

It is in this altar-piece, and specially in the figures mentioned, that Villoldo creates an elegant vision, endowed with swaying movement and greater emphasis given to volume, and this is where we find a close link in style with the sculpture of Saint Paul which we are now studying.

The sculpture is presented without polychromy, and it is possible that originally it had no polychromy, either because it was thus conceived, or because it was never painted, and therefore we are given a pure sculpture, free of any polychromic mystifications, and for this reason we can appreciate the essentially sculptoric quality of the work. The type of pedestal is very simple since it is a prism in shape and only has a notch at the front which makes one think that it was conceived to stand alone and not in an altar-piece or other liturgical setting.

Essential Bibliography.

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JESÚS MARÍA PARRADO DEL OLMO