



Fig 1 Alonso Berruguete, *pair of sculptures, Saint Peter and Saint Paul*, polychrome walnut wood, circa 1529-1532, IOMR Collection.

## ALONSO BERRUGUETE: SYMBIOSIS OF DESIGN, CARVING AND POLYCHROMY

### *Polychromy in Saint Peter and Saint Paul*

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The pair of sculptures representing Saint Peter and Saint Paul (54 cm high) from the IOMR Collection, is a magnificent example of Spanish Renaissance art which, thanks to their extraordinarily shaped design and the way they are carved, can be assigned to Alonso Berruguete's gouge. Furthermore, their splendid polychromy, which has reached us in such an outstanding condition,<sup>1</sup> is directly connected with other works polychromed by the master. A careful observation of their pictorial devices would contribute to confirm their attribution, as will be analysed in the following text.<sup>(Fig 1)</sup>

Bearing in mind that this pair of sculptures represents a unique repertoire of Spanish XVI<sup>th</sup> century polychrome technique, a deep study of their features would certainly increase our knowledge of the creative process of this particular artistic expression of Spanish art, which blends pictorial and sculptural talent.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF POLYCHROMY IN SCULPTURE

In a pioneering study of the outset of the XX<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>2</sup> Marcel Dieulafoy indicated that one of the great contributions of Spanish art to European art has been polychrome wood sculpture, since no other area has achieved such a perfect fusion between the sculptured figure and polychrome techniques, acting to intensify their striking power of communication and manifest Hispanic genius in an absolutely new way.<sup>3</sup> As María Elena Gomez Moreno<sup>4</sup> and Juan José Martín Gonzalez<sup>5</sup> have correctly indicated, the participation of master polychromers in the finishing of a sculpture usually would considerably improve the artistic piece produced, provided that these professionals were qualified craftsmen or alternatively would not harm the work if they were not sufficiently skilled. It is thus not strange that the great wood sculptors, "imageros", would be anxious regarding who would polychrome their sculptures. On some occasions they would recommend a particular trusted polychromer who would carry out this work in the proper surroundings, bearing in mind they were not usually undertaken by the same artist.<sup>6</sup> Thus, fruitful connections were established between both artistic fields, such as between the XVII<sup>th</sup>



Fig. 2 **Alonso Berruguete**, detail *Saint Peter*, polychrome, walnut wood , circa 1529-1532,IOMR collection.

century sculptor, Gregorio Fernandez, and Diego Valentín Díaz, polychromer, or between Juan Martínez Montañés and Francisco Pacheco, polychromer. In spite of the modern stereotyped image we have of the masters in polychromy as that of being professionals subordinate to the sculptors, we must admit that on many occasions, at least during the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, these craftsmen were considered of the same level from an economic point of view. We must remember that it was sometimes more expensive to have an image polychromed than to have it sculptured according to the standpoint of their importance in the contract.<sup>7</sup> A good example of all this is the figure of the great polychromer León Picardo<sup>8</sup>. We should, therefore, not be surprised at the high cost of gilding and polychromy and at the noteworthy consideration enjoyed by the masters responsible for carrying out the polychrome work, which signified a long complicated process including much technique but no less artistic creativity.<sup>9</sup>

As we have previously indicated, it was a habitual practice in Hispanic polychromed sculpture that the art of sculpture and of polychromy should each be carried out independently. Very few were the masters who affected both tasks. One of these exceptional cases is Alonso Berruguete, perhaps the most important artist of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, due to his particular educational process, which was essentially pictorial. In this sense the transcendental quality of Berruguete's works arises in conceiving the work of art as whole, originating in the idea developed in the artist's mind until it reached completion. His works, through the carving and polychromy processes, are extraordinary examples of the creative nature and absolute genius of the author.<sup>(Fig 2) (Fig 3)</sup>



Fig. 3 Alonso Berruguete, detail Saint Paul, polychrome, walnut wood, circa 1529-1532, IOMR Collection.

## ALONSO BERRUGUETE AND POLYCHROMY

Although we know with fairly adequate precision the types of shapes, sources and models employed by Alonso Berruguete when he crafted his altarpieces and sculptures, his polychromed works still remain insufficiently studied, particularly in terms of its technique and the ornamental models employed by the master. However, when we initiate an analysis of his polychromies we are convinced by the special transcendence of these artistic tasks, executed without interruption during the specific sculptural operations.<sup>(Fig2) (Fig3)</sup>

We must bear in mind that Alonso Berruguete initially trained in the workshop of his father Pedro where, besides working on narrative painting, polychromy was also undertaken in collaboration with the sculptor Alejo de Vahía. Alonso Berruguete goes to Italy as a painter where he trains from 1504 onwards surrounded by the great painters of the Quattrocento<sup>11</sup> and of the new generation who will mark out the modern aesthetic paths of Italian Cinquecento art. In fact, Alonso Berruguete participates actively in the movement of the "comprimari", who contributed to establish the aesthetics of the first Mannerism.<sup>12</sup> During his time in Italy (1504-1518), Berruguete undertook a powerful change in his art following the most "advanced currents". In Italy he came into contact with Michelangelo, Bramante and some of the great Florentine masters, acquiring training in painting, sculpture and architecture. On his return to Spain in 1518 he was essentially involved in sculptural work, though some of his first activities are connected with the pictorial medium, such as the mural paintings of the Capilla Real of Granada and later in his narrative paintings effected for the altarpieces of the monastery of San Benito in Valladolid or at the college of Santiago de Fonseca in Salamanca.<sup>(Fig 4)</sup>

In accordance with Berruguete's consideration as an artist "a la italiana" his great altarpiece productions were viewed as works r  
styles into Spanish art. Berruguete conceiv  
creations. His work, including architectural de  
Bramante and the "Cinquecentistas", which w  
1529.  
observe traces of classical art like the Laoconte.<sup>(Fig 4)</sup> He also echoed artists of the "Quattrocento" like the painting of Donatello, whose fluid, nervous and perpetually moving style clearly reveal Roman, but above all Florentine echoes. In this process of conceiving the work as a whole, we should consider that the artist could not fail to initially wonder how polychrome designs would look like in the overall structure of the altarpiece and how appear the skin of the sculptural work would appear, since polychromy is an essential element in determining the overall presence of a work of art. We must underline that Berruguete considered himself skilled at all the tasks involved in polychromy, since in 1522, shortly after settling down in Spain, he was commissioned by contract to polychrome the altarpiece of Oviedo Cathedral. However, in the end, for economic reasons and for problems encountered with the "Cabildo Ovetense", the work was given to León Picardo, painter and gilder of French origin, who settled in Burgos<sup>13</sup> and whose style as polychromer differed noticeably from that of Berruguete's productions.



Fig 4 Alonso Berruguete, the circumcison, detail of the altarpiece of the Chapel of the Colegio de Santiago de Fonseca Salamanca. Circa 1529.

It is evident that Berruguete conceived art as an idea, as a comprehensive project, in line with the Italian conception of an artistic creation.<sup>14</sup> But there is no doubt that the master also bore in mind huge artistic projects as business companies in which the economic factor was always present. Consequently it was much more profitable for him to carry out all the production processes, including the polychromy, which was by no means the least costly.<sup>15</sup> The frustrated project of Oviedo demonstrates the fact that, since his return to Spain, Berruguete was ready to undertake polychrome tasks on a large scale. There is no information in contracts with other professionals who, once the sculpture work was designed and carved by Berruguete, would have independently contracted polychrome work. For this reason, we must think that the master acted in the polychrome processes of his altarpieces directly or through his workshop and that he would receive notable consideration not only as a narrative painter but also as a polychromer.<sup>16, 17</sup>

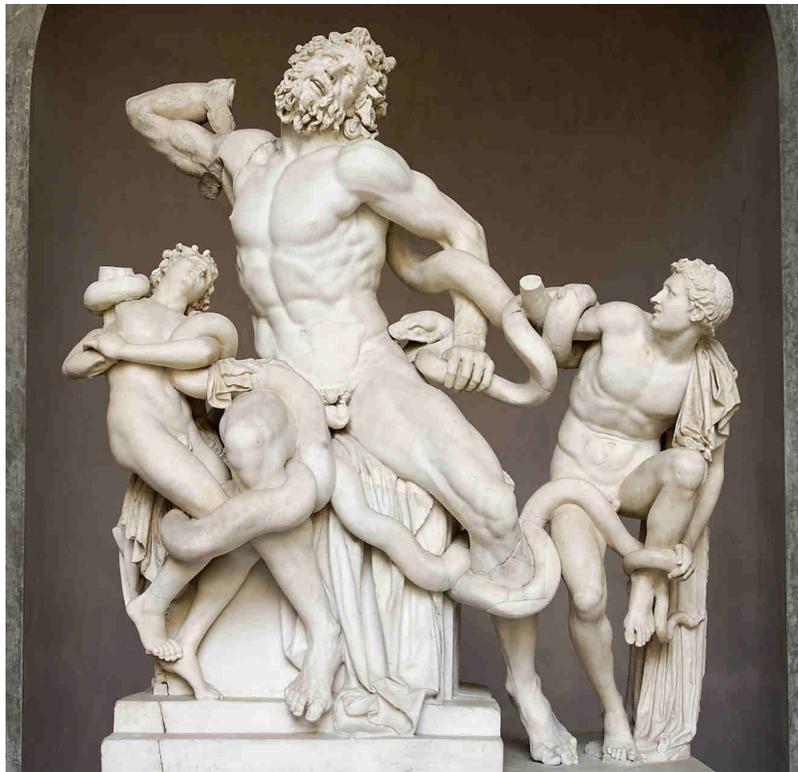


Fig. 5. *Laocoön*, 40- 300 BC, Marble, Musei Vaticani

#### THE POLYCHROMY OF SAINT PETER AND SAINT PAUL

The two sculptures we are now studying are assigned to Alonso Berruguete's gouge. I consider the hypothesis studied by Prof. Jesús María Parrado del Olmo<sup>(17)</sup> to be very relevant here. It argues that the sculptures could have proceeded from the original niches situated at the now lost "predella" of the Colegio Santiago de Fonseca altarpiece in Salamanca, made in about 1529, during the same period of the big altarpiece of San Benito of Valladolid.<sup>(Fig 6)</sup> We do not know exactly when these two sculptures could have disappeared from the Santiago de Fonseca altarpiece, but they were certainly not present in 1832 when Pedro Micó undertook to restore the altarpiece and was commissioned to make two sculptures of San Pedro and San Pablo for the first body of the altarpiece.<sup>18</sup> The similarity in shape that the pair of sculptures presents to the rest of the Salamanca altarpieces persuades us to firmly assign them to Berruguete who, according to Pons, was contracted to personally undertake the carving of the sculptures of this "retablo". On the other hand, regarding the details and elements of the polychromy of this pair of sculptures, its extraordinary similarity in quality to the most outstanding and well-preserved polychromies at the Fonseca altarpiece, mainly the "estofados" of the Pietà, reinforces the attribution of both sculptures to Berruguete.



Fig 6 Alonso Berruguete, altarpiece of the Chapel of Santiago de Fonseca College, Salamanca. 1529-1532

The sculpture of Saint Peter presents ample and swirling vestments that have remained magnificently polychromed.<sup>(Fig. 7)</sup> The cloak, which is elegantly gathered, is golden on its outward side. Here we see die-cast designs making an ornamental network that creates a perfectly balanced drawing adapted to the different folds on the cloth. We have observed in these folds at least three different “punzones” (punches). One of them has a larger diameter and is composed of a central circle around which are gathered small circles, as well as other simpler circles, each of which has a different size, distinguishing it from the rest. The care given to this geometric play of die-cast punches seems to point to the proof that we are dealing with a piece of sculpture made to be seen at a lower level. The above-mentioned geometric details were not usually observed in altitude since the high altitude would precisely render these designs invisible. For this reason the polychrome treatment was carefully employed, and this special care also serves to confirm the direct intervention of the master in these tasks, as he would naturally reserve his time for the objects which would attract special scrutiny by interested observers.<sup>(Fig. 8) (Fig. 9)</sup>



Fig 7 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, polychrome walnut wood, circa 1529-1532, IOMR Collection.



Fig. 8 Alonso Berruguete, *detail Saint Paul*, polychrome, walnut wood, circa 1529-1532, IOMR Collection.

A very exceptional and unique aspect of this sculpture of Saint Peter is that, in some areas, the inside of his cloak appears to be turned out and presents “corladuras” with golden designs and “estofados esgrafiados”, which are a contrast to the external area of the gilded cloak.<sup>(Fig 9)(Fig 12)</sup> These “corlas” were made with “colofonia”,<sup>19</sup> as indicated in the studies made after restoration.<sup>20</sup> Although the use of “corlas” was not common in Hispanic polychromy, it was even more unusual to observe sophisticated decorations (“esgrafiados”) on them, in gold upon a reddish background, which appears to be bald (first imprimatura applied to sculpture before been polychromed). Furthermore, what is most exceptional is that these “esgrafiados” placed on “corlas” could have resisted time and even survive, as they frequently have disappeared.<sup>21(Fig 10)</sup> In this case, the “esgrafiados” represent a geometric cross-shaped design indicating a kind of vegetable motif that is easily adapted to the swaying gathering of the cloak. These “corlas” with the decorative motifs are connected to the polychrome designs in some of the sculptures at the altarpiece of San Benito of Valladolid, like the “Sibilas”, where we find similar ornamental elements – though in this case their poor state of condition has ruined the “corlas”, which could have enriched the polychromy of these figures.<sup>(Fig 12)</sup> The contrast in colour shown in Saint Peter’s vestments are even more striking in the sashes of his cloak, where a magnificent decoration with “esgrafiado” is achieved. That is, applying a coat of blue paint (“azurita”) upon the gold, which is carefully taken out and removed thanks to this exquisite technique, creating simple stylised vegetal decorations arranged horizontally to shine forth (Fig. 13).





Fig 10 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, detail, IOMR Collection

Under the cloak appears the tunic on which is the coat of paint laid over the gold – in this case, green (cardenillo) – and a decoration is formed by means of the “esgrafiado” technique, creating motives which remind us of “a candelieri” decorations, due to their vertical symmetry in “moresca” style (also formed by stylised vegetation).(Fig 12) The inner sides of the sleeves of the tunic appear at the edges turned out and are also “estofado” (quilted) this time in a blue (azurita) colour and line-shaped “esgrafiados” that allow the underlying gold to be seen in circular shapes.(Fig 10) These simple motifs, presented by linear “esgrafiados”, also appear in many sculptures of the Fonseca high altarpiece at Salamanca, in the high altarpiece of San Benito. Above all, we have to point out the similarities in execution with that of the cloak of the Virgin at the altarpiece of the wise kings in the church of Santiago in Valladolid.(Fig 13) (Fig 14) (Fig 15) The contrast between blue, green, and gold allows the creation of an outstanding high quality interplay of light, which we believe would be intensified by the use of candles. Since this sculpture would have been situated at the “predella” of the altarpiece, the beams of light would converge on it. In this sense, in the restorer’s report it is indicated that one of the most outstanding alterations achieved during the restoration process was the cleaning of the dirt accumulated on the sculptures, produced by the smoke of the burning candles and chandeliers placed at the base of the altarpiece. The sculptures were appreciably darkened by all this and even stained with wax from the sputtering candles. This evidence confirms the fact that we are confronting two sculptures which were situated at the “predella” of the altarpiece and therefore the master was extremely careful to enhance the beams of light on the gold contrasting with the blue and green of the “estofados”.

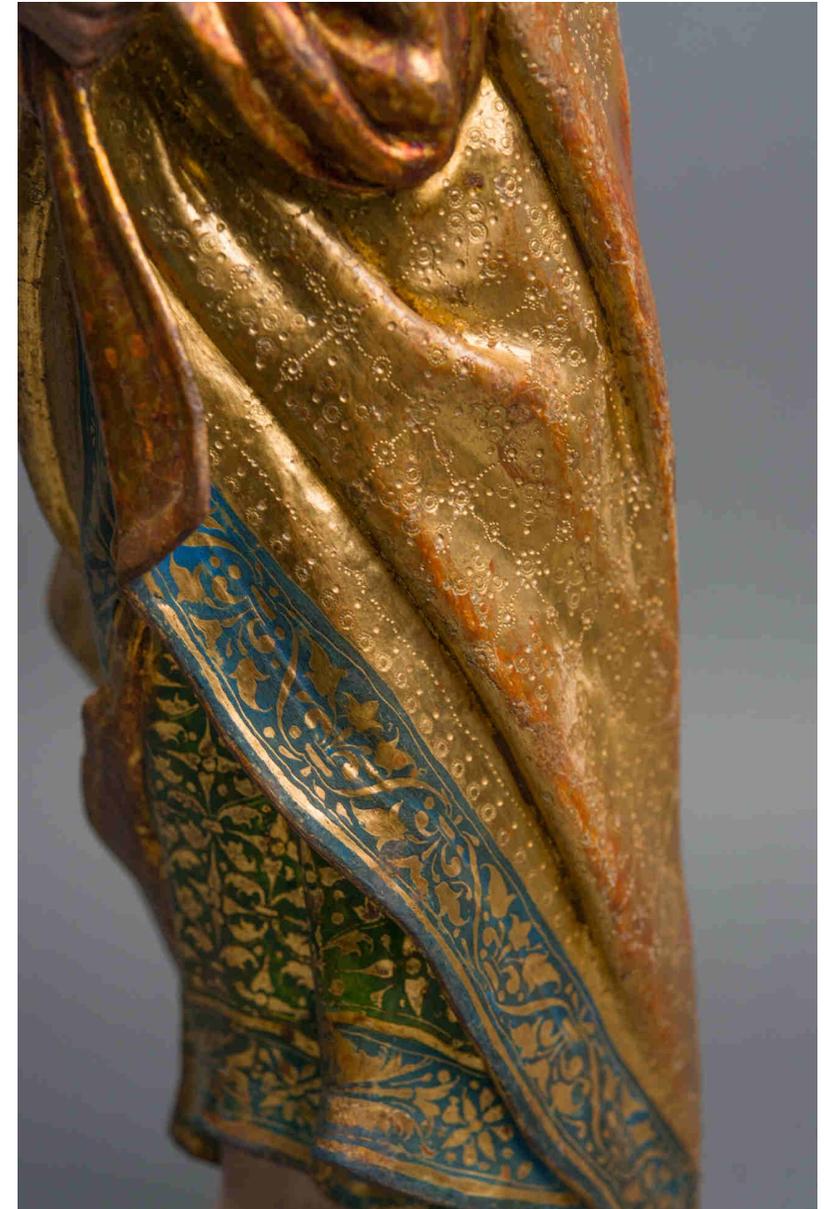


Fig 11 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, detail of sash, IOMR Collection



Fig 12 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter, detail*, IOMR Collection



Fig 13



Fig 14



Fig 15



Fig 12

Alonso Berruguete. Comparison of polychromies, *Pietà* of the Chapel of Santiago de Fonseca College, Salamanca, *Holly family*, altarpiece *Wise Kings* of Church of Santiago, Valladolid; *figure* of altarpiece of the *Monastery of San Benito*, Valladolid. *detail of Saint Peter*, IOMR Collection.



Fig 16 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter, detail*, IOMR Collection

The flesh tones in this sculpture of Saint Peter's feet, arms, hands and head were affected in an incipient polishing technique, "técnica a pulimento con vejiga", which is quite exceptional since in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century matt flesh tones were more frequent.<sup>(Fig 16)</sup> They were produced on the saint's body with subtle shades of colour that tend to indicate from a volumetric standpoint the different zones of the body. Again, light is used to emphasize shape in a most skilled polychrome technique.<sup>22</sup> According to the restorer's report, unpolished traces of brush strokes of oil paint between the toes and between the fingers still persist, probably due to the difficult access of the "vejiga" to these small hollow spaces or to the particular way of finishing his works, which we can see in many of Berruguete's polychrome sculptures.<sup>(Fig 17) (Fig 18)</sup>



Fig 17 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter, detail, hands*, IOMR Collection.



Fig 18 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter, detail, feet*, IOMR Collection.

The process of polychroming reached a special virtuosity in the treatment of hair, where the relief work carved in the wood was visibly enhanced by pictorial technique effected by paint brush.<sup>(Fig 16)(Fig 21)</sup> This was especially visible in the eyebrows, but above all in the beard and hair, where some locks are carved and others are just polychromed, creating a symbiosis between pictorial and sculptural techniques. The ones only painted on a flat surface without any carving create a notably naturalistic sensation just as it appears in other works by the master, specifically in the beard and hair of the principal figures of the high altarpiece of San Benito and those of the wise kings at Santiago Church in Valladolid. Saint Peter's head of hair and beard have grey and ash-grey tones, although to enliven the effect, small touches of light were added with the tip of the paintbrush on the polychromy of the beard, which not only contribute divinely to enhance the rays of light, but also to create the sensation of greater space. This can only be appreciated in works well preserved and where the hand of the master appears, as in the above-mentioned altarpiece of the Church of Santiago.<sup>(Fig 20) (Fig 21)</sup>

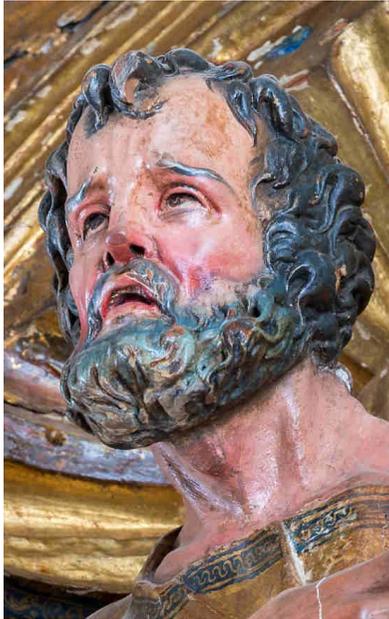


Fig 19

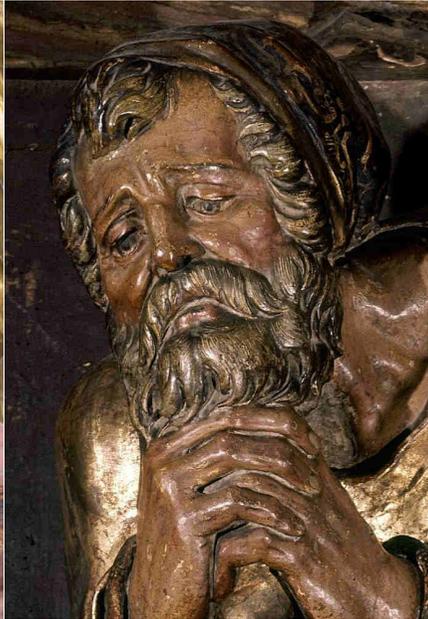
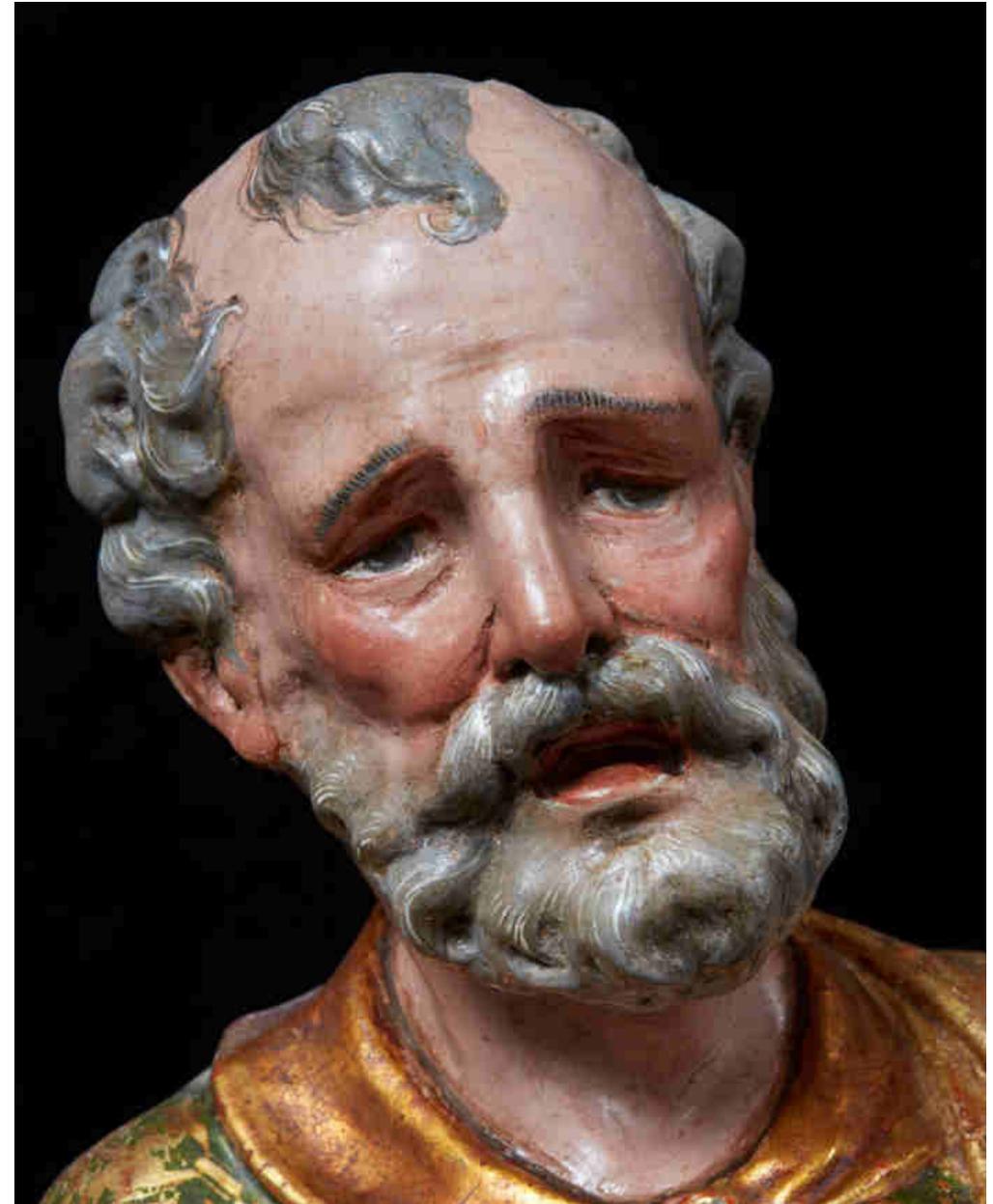


Fig 20



Comparison, *detail face of Saint Peter*, IOMR collection (Fig 21) / *Saint Joseph, Epiphany*, of the Church of Santiago, Valladolid.1539 (Fig 20). / *Apostle*, Altarpiece of the Chapel of the Santiago de Fonseca College (Fig 19).

Where polychrome manages to exalt the aesthetic and psychological elements of this work to a maximum degree is, without doubt, in the treatment of facial features, where shades of colour are employed in the flesh tones of the forehead, cheek bones and nose. The wood carving shows a tendency towards pathos (Fig 26)(Fig 27) with echoes of Laocoonte. The master emphasises the profound sentiments of the protagonist with a wise use of the pictorial resources of the eyes, in which the master uses blue tones similar to those of the San Sebastian of San Benito in Valladolid, (Fig 22) (Fig 23) the half-open mouth, in which the red tones of lips contrast with the white colour of teeth, and the wrinkles, where the sculpture is enhanced by the pictorial work of the paintbrush. All this contributes to the external manifestation of the internal life of the Apostle, which Berruguete so brilliantly achieves in most of his creations, fusing together the pictorial and sculptural effects, of which this pair of sculptures is a magnificent example. (Fig 24) (Fig 25) (Fig 26) (Fig 27)

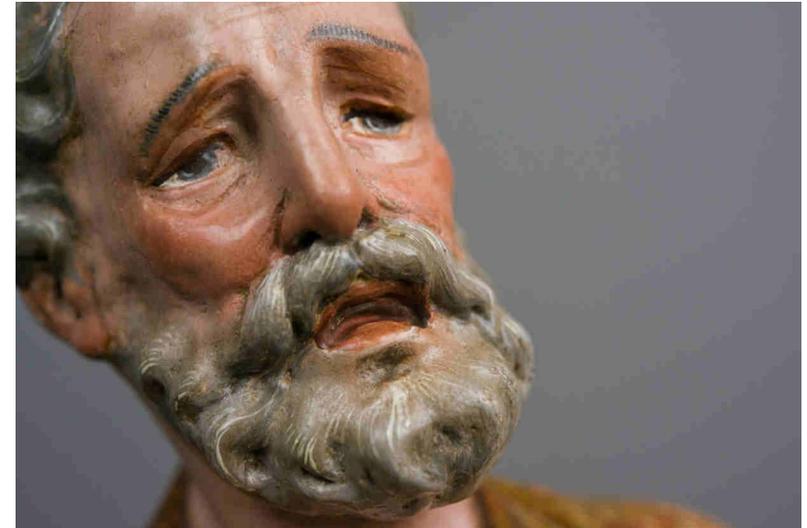


Fig 24 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, detail mouth, IOMR Collection.



Fig 22 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, detail of eyes, IOMR Collection.

Fig 23 Alonso Berruguete. *Saint Sebastián*, San Benito Monastery, Valladolid, currently at the Museo Nacional de Escultura



Fig 25 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint John*, detail mouth, Monastery of San Benito currently at Museo Nacional de Escultura.

Fig 26 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Peter*, IOMR Collection.

Fig 27 Alonso Berruguete. *Saint Sebastián*, San Benito Monastery, Valladolid, currently at the Museo Nacional de Escultura



If the work of polychromy in the sculpture of Saint Peter manifests great quality, no less interest is claimed for the sculpture of Saint Paul which, although at first sight seems a simpler work, it presents noteworthy peculiarities.<sup>(Fig.27)</sup> The Saint Paul is covered by an ample cloak, gathered at his shoulders and arms and also decorated with “corlas” and “esgrafiado” details. If the sculpture of Saint Peter presents cruciformed design, in Saint Paul’s “corlas” the esgrafiado motifs are enriched with small circular designs surrounding larger circles, which form groups that seem to represent the shapes of vegetables set up in the same “boll” background. The problem is that these “corlas esgrafiadas” are even more complex than those carried out in Saint Peter’s case, both using colofonia in matt “boll background” to create an incredible sensation of depth and of a nearly kaleidoscopic effect that magically changes according to the different angles from which one can view the sculpture. No doubt this is the best testimony of the masterly skill needed to create such decorations entailing supremely subtle contrasts as well as complex designs.<sup>(Fig.28)</sup>

The tunic appears here golden, adorned with decorative geometric “troquelados”, forming an ornamental network with many similarities to Saint Peter’s cloak, although the “retícula”, which is perfectly adapted to the material, is not exactly the same as that of the sculpture. The visible parts of the inside of the cloak are decorated with “esgrafiado” quilting (estofado), in which only lines are developed and in which the blue paint “azurita”, once it has been partly removed, allows the underlying gold to be seen. The same occurs with the waistband (cíngulo), which ties the tunic.(Fig. 29) The ornamental motifs in this girdle and on the inside of the cloak are very simple and are limited to merely lines. Quite different is the case of the sash, which surrounds the bottom of the tunic, next to the feet, where a quilting (estofado) adornment arranged with “esgrafiado” technique is developed and where the underlying green paint shows the extremely rich gold designs, which draws a collection of stylised “gruteschi” arranged horizontally. There is a striking similarity in design, carving and polychromy with the San Benito Altarpiece.(Fig. 30) (Fig. 31)

Fig 27 **Alonso Berruguete, Saint Paul,**  
IOMR Collection.





Fig 28 **Alonso Berruguete**, *Saint Paul*, detail  
"Corla", IOMR Collection



Fig 30 **Alonso Berruguete**, *Saint Paul*, detail of sash, IOMR Collection.



Fig 29 **Alonso Berruguete**. *Saint Paul*, detail of  
the "cinculo", IOMR Collection.



Fig 31 **Alonso Berruguete**, *Levi*, Monastery of San Benito Valladolid currently at  
the Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid, IOMR Collection-

The sculpture of Saint Paul offers less contrast in colour than the San Pedro, because it does not show with equal strength the “esgrafiados” on top of such potent colours as the blues and greens, which in San Pablo’s sculpture take up much less space. The latter sculpture also remained covered by a thick layer of dirt coming from the smoke of candles and stains of wax from sputtering candles. All this served to prove that both sculptures were situated in the “predella” or bench below the high altarpiece of San Benito. The sword, the attribute that identifies Saint Paul, was silver-plated but, as the restorer’s report indicates, the oxidation and decay were irreversible. In its original state, the contrast between the gold dominating the vestments and the silver beams of the sword must have been remarkable.



Fig 32 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Paul*, detail, IOMR Collection.

Just like in San Pedro’s case, in this sculpture the flesh tones are polished up at the extremities of hands and feet as well as the face. Here we also notice that the “vejiga” (the instrument used to polish) has difficulty reaching certain zones situated between toes and fingers. The strength that the master has given in this sculpture to the carving of arms, hands<sup>(Fig 32)</sup> and feet<sup>(Fig 33)</sup> is a remarkable “tour de force” making vigorous and nervous shapes. It is brought out by the colour given to realistic flesh tones, where various shades of colour draw attention to certain zones like the fingers, which are beautifully rendered with nails indicated in white from the tip of a paintbrush. The extremely expressive nature of the feet, derived from their violent and Manneristic posture, is also empowered by polychromy. In this area sandals and their straps are painted.<sup>(Fig 33)</sup>



Fig 33 Alonso Berruguete, *Saint Paul*, IOMR Collection.

The remarkable expressivity of this image lies above all in the face, which is not only due to the strength of the sculpture work. Here the polychromy plays an important role. Skin is satisfactorily represented by various flesh tones, painting cheekbones darker, which helps to create a noteworthy sensation realism. The treatment of the long beard and hair is especially virtuosic and in greyish tones. A few locks of hair stand out thanks to very accurate colour treatment made with a very thin paintbrush, enhancing the difference between darker and lighter tones.<sup>(Fig 34)</sup> <sup>(Fig 35)</sup> We also see parts of the beard and hair extended through pictorial finishing in plain areas, which creates a clear sensation of naturalistic realism such as that we can see in some of the figures of the altarpiece of San Benito.<sup>(Fig 30)</sup> <sup>(Fig 34)</sup> Eyebrows, eyes and mouth also stand out due to brushwork that gives the figure great psychological strength. The asymmetric character with which the sculptor shows us a face, so as to give a different sensation depending on the spectator’s angle of vision, emerges in an exceptional way due to the action of the polychromy. If the expressive force and the manifestation of pathos in the sculpture of Saint Peter were evident, these values are no less outstanding in this image of Saint Paul.<sup>(Fig 34)</sup> <sup>(Fig 36)</sup>



Fig 34 Alonso Berruguete , *Saint Paul , profile*, IOMR Collection.

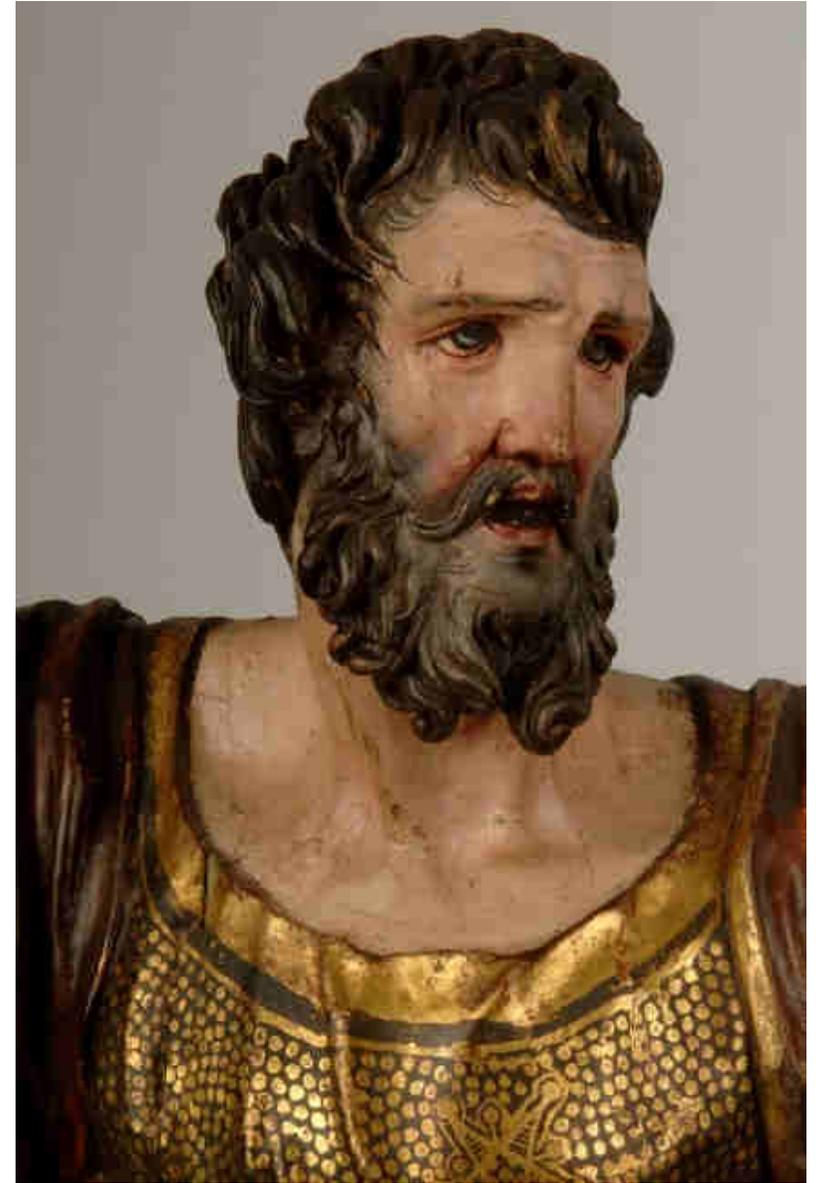


Fig 35. Alonso Berruguete, detail , *Apostol/ Patriarch*, Monastery of San Benito currently at the Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid, IOMR Collection



Fig 36 Alonso Berruguete, *Detail of Saint Andrew*, high choir stalls ,Cathedral of Toledo.

The ornamental motifs correspond to models in fashion at the time, many of them of Italian origin, with which Berruguete could have been familiar during his stay in Italy and could have introduced in Spain by means of printed plates he may have bought or from drawings he could have made.<sup>23</sup> It seems that these “esgrafiado” designs are taken from essays accompanied by decorative models that served as a source of inspiration to weavers and textile manufacturers. Thus we find many similarities between the sashes and “estofados esgrafiados” of San Pedro’s vestment and some of the plates included in the book by Francesco di Pellegrino<sup>24</sup> in which “morescos” appear that are similar to the decorations on the sculptures. There are also parallels occurring with those we find in the book by Alessandro Paganino or in the one by Domenico da Sera il Franciosino, both published in 1532, but whose printed editions must have circulated previously during the time when the master was active in Italy.<sup>25</sup>



Fig 37 Andrés de Melgar , detail polychromy, Altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, La Rioja.

#### POLYCHROMY IN THE SCULPTURES OF SAINT PETER AND SAINT PAUL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCULPTURAL POLYCHROMY OF CASTILE DURING THE XVI<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: AN INTERPRETATION.

If we analyse the polychromy of these sculptures, as well as of the rest of the altarpiece of the Colegio de Fonseca and even of the altarpiece of the Monastery of San Benito in Valladolid, and we compare them with other important polychrome activities during this time carried out in other great sculptural collections, we may extract the main feature of Berruguete’s polychromes: his greater simplicity in the “estofados” designs – compared with the production of other workshops – combined with an extraordinary use of golden surfaces. But this greater simplicity in what is merely ornamental – which is not to be confused with the treatment of the flesh tones – in no sense diminishes its value, as that is the result of a conscious and premeditated decision, which tends to create a correspondingly homogeneous final result.

In fact, if we compare the pictorial work on these two sculptures with the polychromes by León Picardo, Andrés de Espinosa and Andrés Melgar – to cite three great polychromers who work in the Castilian zones around 1530 – we will understand the great differences between the workshops

León Picardo was a Frenchman settled in Burgos who substituted Berruguete in the tasks of gilding and polychroming the altarpiece of the Cathedral of Oviedo in 1529.<sup>26</sup> The work of this master, who was also a noteworthy painter of history, stands out due to his use of “troquelados”, “corlas” and very realistic matt flesh tones. His “esgrafiado” design was characterised by geometric lines and wide bands of striking quality and complexity.<sup>27</sup> The supremely virtuosic polychrome work of Picardo stands out, above all, in polychrome works for the great patrons of art, such as the high altarpiece of San Pedro in the Capilla del Condestable in Burgos, where Picardo had to adapt his skill to the gouges of Diego de Siloé and Felipe Bigarny, which forced him to craft a supremely virtuosic work that would not clash with his work on wood.



Fig 38 **Andrés de Melgar** , detail polychromy, Altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, La Rioja.

On the other hand, the co-citizen of Burgos, Andrés de Espinosa, was also a great polychromer, among whose standout creations are the altarpiece of the “Piedad” of the church of San Miguel de Oñate and the altarpieces of the Capilla Mayor and the Capilla del Sagrario of Palencia Cathedral, in which Espinosa worked in association with other collaborators such as his brother Alonso de Espinosa and Cristobal de Herrera. All these works were carried out between 1525 and 1540.<sup>28</sup> Among the more important of these productions are the “estofado” (quilting), whether “esgrafiado” or executed with paintbrush, which was a very complicated operation, occasionally

employing “grutescos”, a kind of decoration which never appears in the work of Leon Picardo.

Andrés Melgar was reared in Berruguete’s workshop, from whom Melgar learned his craft between 1523 and 1526. He also developed great skill as an independent painter both in narrative scenes painted on wood panel and in work in gilding and in “estofados”.<sup>29</sup> When he was installed in Santo Domingo de la Calzada, he carried out intensive professional work in the mid-1530 decade. Without any doubt, his first important operation was to carry out the polychromy of the high altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, carved by Damián Forment since 1537,<sup>30</sup> and whose polychromy was initiated in 1539.<sup>31</sup> In the same way as Picardo with the altarpieces of the Capilla del Condestable, Melgar armed himself with his best talent at that moment so as to collaborate with Forment, one of the giants of Spanish sculpture of the day.<sup>32</sup>



Fig 39 **Andrés de Melgar** , detail polychromy, altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, La Rioja.

Picardo, like Espinosa and Melgar, found himself in the critical situation of intervening in works undertaken by great master sculptors. They did not belong to their workshops so they were not subject to their decisions, and, in any case, they wished their production to be marked with a stamp of their own. Yet, both these sculptures of San Pedro and San Pablo – like the rest of the altarpiece of the Colegio de Fonseca in Salamanca and the sculptures included in the altarpieces of San Benito and of the church of Santiago in Valladolid – were works executed by Berruguete himself or under his direction during all the phases of their work. It is therefore normal that the master should strive from the beginning to establish a clear balance between the carving and polychrome operations. The relatively greater simplicity presented by these sculptures compared with the work of the other polychromers mentioned is not due to an attempt to economise resources and time, but instead to make the final result constitute a balanced work. This objective, undoubtedly, would sometimes not be achieved if the polychromer worked on carvings by another artist. Perhaps excessive pictorial adornment of a merely virtuosic nature could partly hide the true value of the sculpturing as, in fact, occurs in some sculptures polychromed by Picardo, Espinosa and Melgar, though never observed in the works polychromed by Berruguete. Therefore it is not correct to declare that the polychromies executed by Berruguete were of less quality, solely by virtue of his having broadly accepted the profuse decorations employed by other polychromy professionals. On the contrary, the characteristics of the pictorial treatment of many of Berruguete's productions, to which class these sculptures precisely belong, is not due to Berruguete's technical incapacity nor to his ignorance of the complicated repertoire of decorative ornaments that were being employed in many workshops specialised in polychromy at that time, and which Berruguete, with his broad artistic training, knew perfectly well, but to his clear intention to undertake a symbiosis between design, carving and pictorial features, interpreting, as we have said, the work as a whole. Consequently this simplicity in "gruteschi", "candelieri", "zoomorphic" and "anthropomorphic" figures and in the vestments represented is due to a conscious intention to control ab initio, when the idea was conceived by the master, the creative process, so that neither of the two operations – the carving and the polychroming – should impose itself on the other. (Fig 37) (Fig 38) (Fig 39) (Fig 40)



Fig 40 **Andrés de Melgar**, detail polychromy, altarpiece of Santo Domingo de la Calzada, La Rioja.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The magnificent polychromy of these sculptures, which is in an excellent state of condition due to the restoration process carried out by the Empresa Arte Valladolid which has consisted of cleaning, strengthening of the pictorial material and of a few cracks, and with the help of short treatment have integrated the structure into a whole piece again.

<sup>2</sup> Dieulafoy, Marcel: *La statuaire polychrome en Espagne du xlle au xv ° siècle*. Aragon et Castille. (Extrait de Monuments et mémoires publiés par l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, t. X, fasc. 2.) Paris, Leroux, 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Although this artistic genre was not only developed in the Iberian zone and the American continent – as France, Italy and other European countries crafted polychromed wooden sculptures – in fact, the Spanish territories were the areas where, from the Early Middle Ages onwards, an incredible development arose and wooden polychromed sculptures of remarkably high quality were produced on a great scale. The high quality achieved in the production was to a great extent, due to the fine skill of the sculptor who must have been endowed with outstanding plastic and naturalistic talents to be able to infuse in his sculptures the living and realistic representation of his models; but it is no less true that in the final result the elaborate task of polychromy played a fundamental role.

<sup>4</sup> GÓMEZ MORENO, María Elena: *La policromía en la escultura española*, Escuela de Artes y Oficios, Madrid, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ, Juan José: “La policromía en la escultura castellana”, *Archivo español de Arte*, Nº 104, 1953, pág. 205 y ss.

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, there existed noteworthy exceptions, like in Berruguete’s workshop which included, besides professional sculptors in wood, also professionals in painting and polychromy.

<sup>7</sup> We think that in the complex process of contracting great groups of polychromed sculptures – as, for instance, in the case of altarpieces – that it would usually be a master gilder-polychromer who would contract the work. Bearing in mind that, in many instances, these professionals were also painters of historical subjects, it would not be surprising to us that they would collaborate on equal footing with sculptors and carvers and even that they would draw up the designs and contract the task which might lead later to subcontracting the tasks connected with carving the wood.

<sup>8</sup> He attained the honour of appearing as one of the speakers in the work of Diego de Sagredo, *Medidas del Romano*, the first artistic treaty on the Spanish Renaissance.

<sup>9</sup> After finishing the task of carving, a precautionary lapse of time was allowed to pass, which could vary from a few months to years, before the beginning of the polychroming process could start. This method was followed so that the wood would settle down, as frequently cracks might appear in the sculpture. For this reason, before initiating the task of priming, the small cracks which might have occurred were filled with size or with rags steeped in size, if the cracks were deep. So everything was ready to receive a coat of white size which was mixed with cooked and minced garlic to stimulate adherence and applied hot. Later, various coats of plaster were applied – usually between four and eight coats were applied – and it was considered essential to have a complete dry-out between each application of coating. Nearly all the treaties on polychromy point out that good painters do not need to use big priming

equipment to carry out these tasks as the latter tools tended to produce a contrary effect and to make the reliefs blunt, though occasionally they made them appear more outstanding. Once the priming was done, the sandpapering and polishing operations were effected by means of corresponding files. Various coats of “bol” were applied (following the above-mentioned method of applying coats of size) to the areas which were going to be gilt; this process, referring to the application of “bol”, was named “embolado” and ensured perfect adherence and also the outstanding gleam of the gold leaf which was applied with the utmost care in another phase of the process and later stretched out and polished up. Usually, the instructions, which were included in the contracts, contained prescriptions requiring that the gold, which was provided by “batihojas” should be of high quality. It was a common occurrence that at the last coat of plaster, before the “embolado” and the gilding processes, that decorations would be carved in relief and, above all, from the Baroque period onwards (though there were previous examples to the contrary during the XVth century) that “elementos adventicios”, like jewellery, might be applied. The parts that remained golden could be decorated with designs stamped by “troqueles”. Normally, as soon as one part of the surface had been gilt, the process would continue with the “estofado”, which consisted of imitating sewing tasks on fabric or material. On the gold surface could be applied a delicate coat of oil or tempera painting and afterwards with a sharp-pointed instrument of wood or bone the “esgrafiado” process would be executed, or the precise removal of painting in certain previously selected places would occur, thus revealing the gold underneath. Both decorative operations were usually carried out at the same time. All this created a noteworthy quality well appreciated by spectators.

The technique of the “corladura” was commonly used. Various types of varnish were applied on silver-plate with the purpose of imitating gold; this also led to the production of series of “esgrafiados”. Special care was given to the process of obtaining flesh tones (carnación). The parts of human anatomy which were visible were normally pointed out in oil painting, though sometimes in tempera painting. Francisco Pacheco pointed out that this was one of the most delicate tasks of the whole process. These flesh tones could be produced “matt” or after polishing. When the intention was to manifest reality, decorum and gravity were best rendered in the matt flesh tones which in any case were predominant during the first half of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. With infinite care and with the use of the tip of the paintbrush, anatomical features such as lips, eyes, ears, wrinkles, nails, etc... were made to stand out, as well as beards, eye-brows and eye-lashes which created expressions and realistic aspects as appear in the sculptures we are now studying which are fine examples of the synthesis of all these techniques. (GONZÁLEZ ALONSO MARTÍNEZ, Enriqueta: *Tratado del dorado, plateado y su policromía*, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Servicio de Publicaciones, 1997; BARTOLOMÉ GARCÍA, Fernando: “Terminología básica de técnicas y materiales de la policromía”. *Akobe*, Nº 5, 2004, págs. 12-20).

<sup>10</sup> The recent book by Manuel Arias Martínez is a magnificent study which synthesizes and extends the knowledge we have up to now on Alonso Berruguete. (ARIAS MARTÍNEZ, Manuel: *Alonso Berruguete. Prometeo de la escultura*, Diputación de Palencia, Basauri (Vizcaya), 2011.)

<sup>11</sup> VASARI, G.: *Le vite de’ Piv eccellenti pittori, scvltori et architettori*, Milano, 1928-1930, vol. I, pp. 1267 y 469 n23.

<sup>12</sup> LONGHI, Roberto: *Comprimari spagnoli della maniera italiana*, 1953, págs. 3-8.

<sup>13</sup> FRONTÓN SIMÓN, Isabel María; PURAS HIGUERAS, Jesús María; PÉREZ CARRASCO, Francisco Javier: *Retablo Mayor de la Catedral de Oviedo*, Hidroeléctrica del Cantábrico, Oviedo, 1993, págs. 126-128

<sup>14</sup> Francisco de Holanda, in 1546, put in Michelangelo's mouth words which could refer to Berruguete: *Así afirmo que ninguna nación, ni gente (dejo estar uno o dos españoles) puede perfectamente hurtar ni imitar el modo de pintar de Italia, que es lo griego antiguo, que luego no sea conocido fácilmente por ajeno, por más que en eso se esfuerce y trabaje. Y si por algún grande milagro, alguno viniere a pintar bien, entonces, aunque no lo hiciese por remedar a Italia, se podrá decir que solamente pintó como italiano. Así que no se llama pintura de Italia cualquier pintura hecha en Italia, sino cualquiera que fuere buena y cierta... la cual aunque se hiciese en Flandes o en España (que más se aproxima con nosotros), si fuere buena, pintura será de Italia, porque esta nobilísima ciencia no es de tierra alguna, que del cielo vino, empero del antiguo Imperio quedó en nuestra Italia más que en otro reino del mundo...* (citado por ARIAS, Manuel: "Alonso de Berruguete en Italia y el sueño de un cuaderno de viaje", *Isimu. Revista sobre Oriente Próximo y Egipto en la Antigüedad*, Vol. 14-15, 2011, pág. 220).

<sup>15</sup>PARRADO DEL OLMO, Jesús María: *Talleres escultóricos del siglo XVI en Castilla y León. Arte como idea. Arte como empresa comercial*, Universidad de Valladolid, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> He would obviously be assisted in these tasks by apprentices and officials at his service. We know some masters who belonged to this entourage like the painter of historical events, Juan de Villoldo, or Andrés Melgar who worked with Berruguete between 1523 and 1526.

Many more were the painters-polychromers who permanently belonged to Berruguete's workshop. Thus, in 1535, a youth called Jerónimo, son of the apothecary Iñigo de Santiago, was an apprentice at his service, with whom Berruguete encountered some problems. Besides, at that time various other apprentices and officials of this artistic group were working in the workshop.(ALONSO CORTÉS, Narciso: *Datos para la biografía artística de los siglos XVI y XVII*, Madrid, 1922, págs. 24-25).

<sup>17</sup> Some of the scholars studying Berruguete's work have mentioned how he directly involves himself in the polychromy tasks in his well organised and specialised workshop, in which the dominating Master participates in the tasks with a numerous, active and well organised group of collaborators. (ARIAS, Manuel: *Las claves iconográficas del retablo de San Benito el Real, de Alonso Berruguete*, *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Escultura*, 205, págs. 14-27).

<sup>18</sup> SENDÍN CALABUIG, Manuel: *El Colegio Mayor del Arzobispo Fonseca en Salamanca*. Salamanca, 1977, pp. 127-172.

<sup>19</sup> "Colofonia" is a solid, translucent, brownish or yellowish resin which is obtained by distilling turpentine sourced in a pine tree. This was applied on top of the coat of paint and was removed with great care in certain spots, thus creating designs based on subtle contrasts in colour. This coat might gradually lose its effect with the passage of time and then the designs "esgrafiados" would also be lost.

<sup>20</sup> AVA, Arte Valladolid: *Memoria final. Restauración de dos tallas de San Pedro y San Pablo*; Valladolid, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> FUENTE, Luis de la: *Los metales plateados como policromía: Análisis, experimentación y restauración*. Tesis Doctoral, Universidad del País Vasco, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> CARRASSÓN LÓPEZ DE LETONA, Ana: "Las encarnaciones y algunas reflexiones sobre sus tratamientos", *Revista Pátina*. Nº 13-14, 2006, págs. 87-94.

<sup>23</sup> In the decorations of Saint Peter's tunic and in its borders we found some similarities to Italian engravings containing decorative designs which were in fashion, with a variety of models, throughout the first quarter of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century. (BERLINER, Rudolf: *Modelos ornamentales de los siglos XV al XVIII*, Editorial Labor, Barcelona, láminas 79-83).

<sup>24</sup> Although this book *La Fleur de la science de portraiture. Patrons de broderie, façon arabicque et ytaliqye par Francisque Pellegrin*, was published in Paris in 1530, copies circulated in Italy years previously.

<sup>25</sup> BYRNE, Janner: "Patterns by Master F", *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 14. 1979.

<sup>26</sup> BARROSO VILLAR, Julia: "En torno al retablo mayor de la Catedral de Oviedo", *Imafronte*, Nº 3,4 y 4, 1987, 1988, 1989, págs. 5.7.

<sup>27</sup> CUESTA, José y ARRIBAS, Filemón.: "El retablo de Oviedo II. La documentación del retablo", *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*, Nº 25, 1933, págs. 7-20 y ESTELLA MARCOS, Margarita: *La imaginería de los retablos de la Capilla del Condestable*, Asociación de Amigos de la Catedral de Burgos, Burgos, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> ECHEVERRÍA GOÑI, Pedro Luis y MARTIAARENA LASA, Xabier: *Retablo de la Capilla de la Universidad de Oñati*, Diputación Foral de Guipuzcoa, San Sebastián 2006.

<sup>29</sup> IBÁÑEZ PÉREZ, Alberto C. y PAYO HERNANZ; René Jesús: "Andrés de Melgar y las corrientes pictóricas en la primera mitad del siglo XVI", en *Gonzalo Martínez Díaz. Un sabio humanista castellano*. Homenaje de la Academia Burgense de Historia y Bellas Artes al P. Gonzalo Martínez Díez S. J. Premio Castilla y León de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades 2005, Burgos, págs. 97-116; MOYA VALGAÑÓN, José Gabriel: *Alonso Gallego y Andrés de Melgar, pintores*, Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, Logroño, 2013.

<sup>30</sup>MORTE GARCÍA, Carmen: *Damián Forment*, Caja de la Inmaculada, Zaragoza, 2009, págs. 368-390.

<sup>31</sup> ECHEVERRÍA GOÑI, Pedro Luis: "La policromía del retablo calceatense", en *Damián Forment. Escultor Renacentista*, Valencia, 1995, págs.214-239.

<sup>32</sup> In these Works we observe the most complex designs in the vestments where appear not only conventional "gruteschi" and "candelieri" but on many occasions spectacular vegetal, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs, creating a vast repertoire of real and fantastic beings. Cornucopias, "bucráneos", trophies and other classical designs typical of the polychromy of the 1530 and 1540 decades appear in plenty on the surface of the vestments, as corresponding to the aesthetic change which begins to be manifested in polychromy in mid XVI<sup>th</sup> century.