

VASARI FINE ART

ATTRIBUTED TO NICOLAS VAN DER VEKEN (ACTIVE CIRCA 1637 – CIRCA 1709)

Material: Boxwood

Dimensions:

19,5 cm incl. base

17 cm excl. base

Provenance:

private German collection, unknown.

The represented figure is that of a young and graceful woman (Fig. 1) wearing a long cloth down to the tip of her shoes. Her sleeves are covering half the length of her arms and are narrowed down by a small wristband. From her shoulders on and further downwards, the rest of her body is covered by a graceful toga. The back of her slightly wavy hair, neatly split in the middle, is held together by a fine piece of cloth and of which both extensions are fluttering over her left shoulder. Waist high and next to her hip, the lady is holding an infant with her both hands and which is, on his turn, trampling a serpent like creature with his left foot. The body of the infant is strongly built for his age and his head is covered by curly hair.

First of all, the neat and ease of execution by which this sculpture was made indicates that this is not a piece of mass production but is a work by an individual and talented sculptor.

Whilst looking for comparative pieces, this item shows striking similarities to other works by 17th century Flemish sculptor Nicolas Van der Veken. First and foremost we draw attention to a similar figure of a female saint (fig. 7), from a private collection which most certainly represents Saint Agnes as suggested by Salomonson

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in his essay on Van der Veken. We recognize the same inclination of the head rendering the typical s composition to the group. But also the treatment of facial features such as semi-closed eyes, slightly swollen eyebrows and finally the same treatment of the wavy hair held back by a fluttering piece of cloth. Next we refer to an oak bust of Saint Catherine (fig. 8) given by Van der Verken to the Saint Catherine church of Mechelen around 1680. Again we are confronted to the same treatment of the facial features so typical to the hand of Nicolas Van der Veken. Other works bearing strong similarities are the eyes and eyebrows of the angels from the confessional chair which Van der Veken produced around 1681 for the Jesuit church of Mechelen (Fig. 9 and fig. 10). And finally we refer to the two figures of the sinners Maria Magdalena and Maria Aegyptiaca (fig. 11) also from a confessional chair made by Van der Veken for the Catharina church of Mechelen.

According to these similarities as established by J.W. Salomonson in 1996 and as suggested by dr. Frits Scholten of the Rijksmuseum in later, private correspondence, we can conclude on the ground of these stylistical similarities that our group belongs to the same group of works that can be attributed to Nicolas Van der Veken. The quality of this work also suggests that this is not a work by his study but by the artist himself and / of with the help of a close assistant.

Based on the comparisons made by Salomonson in his article we would suggest a similar date for our group to the figure of Saint Agnes (fig. 7.) now in a private collection.

Sold to the M Museum, Leuven, Belgium.

Bibliography:

- SALOMONSON, J.W., *Koninklijke kring voor oudheidkunde, letteren en kunst van Mechelen*, 1996, p. 113 – 120.



Fig. 1. Virgin and child, frontal view

Fig. 2. Female Saint, Saint Agnes (?), J.W. SALOMONSON, Koninklijke kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en kunst van Mechelen, 1996, p. 113.



Fig. 3. Saint Catherine, J.W. SALOMONSON, Koninklijke kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en kunst van Mechelen, 1996, p. 116.



Fig. 4. Angel from confessional chair, Saint Peter-and-Paul church, Mechelen, J.W. SALOMONSON, Koninklijke kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en kunst van Mechelen, 1996, p. 118.



Fig. 5. Angel from confessional chair, Saint Peter-and-Paul church, Mechelen, J.W. SALOMONSON, Koninklijke kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en kunst van Mechelen, 1996, p. 118.



Fig. 6. Mary Magdalen (left) and Mary of Egypt, Confessional chair, Saint Catherine Church, Mechelen, J.W. SALOMONSON, Koninklijke kring voor Oudheidkunde, Letteren en kunst van Mechelen, 1996, p. 120.