

Elodie JEANNEST DE GYVES

Trained at the Sorbonne and the Ecole du Louvre, Elodie Jeannest de Gyvès is a specialist of medieval and Renaissance sculpture. She started her career at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine in 2002 and then worked for the Agence France-Muséums on the Louvre museum in Abu Dhabi. Her responsibilities on this project included the programming, the research and the pre-selection of acquisitions for the medieval period as well as the physical management of the collection. She thus developed a fine understanding of the relationship between institutions and the art market, at an international level.



SAINT ANNE TRINITY GROUP

First quarter of the 17th century

Constance Lake region (South Bavaria)

High-relief sculpture, lime wood, polychromed with traces of gold and silver

Dimensions: Height: 1,55 m; Width: 0,41 m; Depth: 0,27 m

Ancient restorations from two distinct campaigns. Recent restoration by Juliette Lévy carried out in Spring 2017¹.

Missing parts (original crown of the Virgin replaced by a later, silver crown; rays or halos around the heads of Saint Anne and Christ; pearls from the Virgin's necklace; some fingers)

Provenance: Art market, Paris and Dijon. Private collection, Paris.

This group of three figures sculpted in very high relief is an exceptional example of the artistic production of the first quarter of the 17th century in southern Germany, between the South Swabia and Tyrol regions, more specifically in the workshops active on the northern shore of Constance Lake. Carved in a half-log of lime wood to which were assembled other elements - such as the arms whose treatment is characteristic of Mannerist artists - the protagonists present a rich polychromy, a traditional particularity of Swabian sculpture², that even previous cleansings of the work were thankfully not able to erase. A precise and non-invasive restoration has given a new spark to the golds and the silvers covered by a translucent green, blue or red glaze which enliven the clothes of Saint Anne and of the Virgin by a knowledgeable game of lights and shadows³. Having become an isolated sculpted ensemble, the group must originally have been a part of a most ambitious iconographic programme, set in a niche in an altarpiece or a tabernacle, such as those that still ornate the baroque choirs of a number of German churches.

1. An iconography stemming from the medieval tradition, in accordance with the new directives of the Council of Trent.

The sculpted group illustrates an iconographic theme which appeared as early as the 13th century and which remained very popular throughout the entire late medieval period. Later, adapting to the new dogmatic requirements of the Council of Trent, this subject was once again widely reproduced, particularly in Germanic regions. The group is called a "Saint Anne Trinity". The Mother of the Virgin carries the Child Jesus in her arms and is accompanied by her daughter Mary represented with the traits of a young girl.

Even though it does not feature in the Scriptures, the life of Saint Anne appears in the Protoevangelium of James written in the second half of the 2nd century of our era⁴: the decisive episode corresponds to her late fertility and the miraculous apparition of an angel. The saint will be at the origin of an extremely popular cult based on a version of the text integrated in the Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine. Following the visions of

¹ See the technical study which includes the report on the restoration

² See Sophie Guillot de Suduiraut, *Devotion et séduction. Sculptures souabes des musées de France, vers 1450-1530*, Louvre publications and Somogy art publications, 2015.

³ See the technical report of Juliette Lévy, conservator of sculpted works.

⁴ Albert Frey (intr., trad.), *Protévangile de Jacques in Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens*, t.1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, pp.73-104.

Colette de Corbie in the 15th century, representations of her multiply and particularly those from which our work is inspired: the *Trinita Humanissima* in a very hieratic relationship⁵.

Indeed, Jesus's grand-mother plays a fundamental role in the conception of the Trinity: grouped with the Virgin and the Child Jesus, Anne establishes a counterweight to the divine Trinity composed of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. She also conveys a very feminine trinitarian conception of the Holy Family, in which she acts as a substitute to Joseph. The first representations showed the Mother of the Virgin carrying her daughter, either sitting on her lap or in her arms, as if mirroring the iconography of the Virgin and Child. The Virgin herself carried the Child in her arms or established a relationship with him - if he were sitting on the other knee of Anne or held in her other arm - creating with this gesture an intimate link between them (gift of a bunch of grapes, an apple, a book, etc.)⁶.

The matriarchal dimension of Saint Anne as well as her protective role was later crystallized during the 16th century by way of several variants in which the image of the saint dominates the figures of Mary and of Christ, particularly in terms of size.

Here, the iconographic and compositional scheme is of a later date and reveals a transition between the traditional medieval representation of the saint and one dictated by the new directives of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) which advises to "keep a legitimate use of images in conformity with the doctrine of the Church"⁷. In 1584, Pope Gregory XIII reestablishes the saint's day of celebration on the 26th of July and Gregory XV will make it a compulsory holiday in 1622⁸.

If the cult of the saints and their representations is generally recognized, the role of the Mother of God, particularly through the idea of the Immaculate Conception, and that of the mother of Mary is revised. The theme of the Education of the Virgin which seems to be highly popular, presents new characteristics: according to an erudite interpretation, Anne is teaching Mary about "her destiny as mother of God"⁹. This interpretation also influences the representation of the Saint Anne Trinity which multiplies in southern Germany in the 17th century on the territories defended or regained by catholic princes and where are imposed the new rules of the Counter-Reformation.

⁵ Ermioni Iliana Syrou, « L'iconographie de Sainte Anne Trinitaire dans l'art de Toscane (XVe-XVIe siècle) », Master 1, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, under the direction of Professor Philippe Morel, *Genre et Histoire* [online], 11, Autumn 2012, online from 26th July 2013, checked on 8th May 2017. URL : <http://genrehistoire.revues.org/1718>

⁶ Marlies Buchholz, *Anna selbdritt. Bilder einer wirkungsmächtigen Heiligen*, Königsten, 2005 and Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother. Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europa*, The Penn. State University, 2005.

⁷ *BilderSturm : Wahsinn oder Gottes Wille ? Bernisches Historisches Museum- Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame*, 2000, p.378-379 and Emile Mâle, *L'Art religieux après le Concile de Trente*, Paris, A.Colin, 1932, p.346.

⁸ Jean Barrauol, *Sainte-Anne d'Apt, d'après une documentation nouvelle*, Apt, Reboulin publications, 1964, p.7

⁹ Géraldine Patigny, « Sainte Anne et la Vierge de Jérôme Du Quesnoy le Jeune (1602-1654): de la genèse de l'œuvre à la création d'un type iconographique », in *Oud Holland*, 2013 volume 126 - 4, pp.63 -177.

From the beginning of the 16th century this theme had been largely exploited by Swabian artists¹⁰, such as the famous Veit Stoss and Hans Leinberger at the beginning of the century, or Jog Lederer and Stephan Rotteler. The impressive Saint Anne by the latter seems to completely ignore her daughter, arms stretched towards the Child held by her grand-mother (Frauenkirche, Munich). As equally illustrated by the trinity group executed by Michael Zeynsler (active between 1515 and 1559) and visible from as early as 1515 in the church of Biberach, the feminine triad had already, in this region, evolved towards an authoritative Saint Anne in her role as protector of the Child, and an isolated Virgin, standing beside her as if cast aside from the scene.

The sculpted group reflects the weight of the iconographic tradition as well as opening up to doctrinal and stylistic novelties. With her gesture of tenderness (she rests her hand on the shoulder of her daughter), Anne seems to carry the weight of Passion on her own shoulders: without establishing a visual relationship between each other - while Jesus, on the other hand, strokes his grand-mother's face looking towards her at the same time - the two women become precursors of the Passion. In order to exacerbate the extreme polysemy of the figure of Anne and of the group as much in its humanity as in the representation of the sacred, the artist was very much inspired by the Mannerist trend, at the same time as by new techniques of the emerging early baroque.

2. A polysemic work produced by a workshop from the surroundings of Constance Lake: the appearance of a German baroque style

Even though it appears in Italy from as early as the 1520's, the sophisticated art of Mannerism is adopted much later in countries north of the Alps. Confronted with the permanence of Gothic art, it infiltrates German and Flemish workshops only in the last quarter of the 16th century and will durably influence artists from Southern Germany¹¹. It is here clearly manifest in the representation of movement, in the complex and contrite positions of the figures, in the richness of their clothing, and in the attention to detail.

The Virgin and Child, in particular, are characterized by a liveliness due to expressive attitudes: Mary seems to advance her right leg forward, as if to engage with an audience. Both her arms are stretched forward, the right one in direction of the faithful, the left one towards her son, guiding the eye of the viewer onto the chubby Child whose four members project in four different directions. The drapery is an essential component of this liveliness; it accentuates the postures and reinforces the tension thanks to a number of agitated folds, as well as fitting closely round the bodies of Saint Anne and of the Virgin. The gestures of the hands of the Virgin seem very affected, her wrists turned in an exaggerated manner and her fingers either elongated or foreshortened. The suppleness of the bodies and the undulation of the draperies with waves of folds create several contrasted games of light and shadow, further enhanced by the polychrome treatment as by the touches of gold and silver. The clothes are characterized by an extreme refinement; a predilection for ornament appears in the details of overcoat of the Virgin's dress and the

¹⁰ Rainer Kahsnitz, *Carved Splendor: Late Gothic Altarpieces in Southern Germany, Austria and South Tirol*, Getty Publications, 2006

¹¹ See Gisela Koch, *Georg Petel (1601/02 - 1634). Zwei unbekannte Frühwerke aus St. Michael*, p. 2-3 ; Adolf Schahl, « Beiträge zur Plastik des Manierismus in Oberschwaben. Jakob Brendel - David Weiss - Hans Dürner - Georg Grassender », in *Das Münster* 14, 1961, pp. 361-367.

belts worn by both women. This richness of the clothing and the exuberance of the folds of drapery contrast with the faces with interiorized expressions. The solemn calmness and serenity of the faces is due to their wide rounded foreheads and in particular to their smooth surfaces, in perfect opposition to the restless movements of the clothing.

All these details show an assimilation of the Mannerist style, but they also reveal the premises of a new art, the baroque, in its most accomplished German manifestations at the beginning of the 17th century, carried in particular by the workshops of Swabian sculptors¹².

The work is characteristic of the particular style which propagated on the shores of Constance Lake, part of Bavaria - ancient Swabia bordering the Tyrol - where sculptors benefitted from numerous commissions supported by the Counter-Reformation. This favorable context contributed to the expansion of Mannerist art, soon deviating towards innovative pre-baroque forms. The years around 1600 saw the execution of huge altarpieces, majestic scenes with a number of sculpted groups in high relief¹³. The tragic period of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) somewhat spared the superior Swabia region, Bavaria and Tyrol, so that a number of talented artists found refuge in these regions where the leaders still encouraged the production of monumental devout images¹⁴.

The sculpted group seems to have benefitted from the influence of stylistic and technical innovations of the most outstanding artists and workshops of the beginning of the 17th century, such as members of the Zürn family, Hans Krumpers, Georg Petel or Hans Degler¹⁵. Even if still influenced by the Mannerist current and wishing to be in harmony with traditional gothic values, the works of the Zürn family, in particular the altarpiece of the cathedral of Saint-Nicholas in Überlingen executed towards 1613-16, show an energy, diagonals and other dynamic visual effects which characterize the baroque style which is then being defined.

There is a precision in the execution, a sharp sense of detail which recalls the interest shared by these artists for silversmiths' and goldsmiths' work: the half-log of lime wood was sculpted with virtuosity, revealing the new possibilities offered by the wood thanks to its flexibility and its tenderness; the surfaces are structured, chiseled and made to shine like metal. This concordance of our work with the "art of metal" which influenced the artists of the beginning of the century, just like Hans Krumpers whose bronze works synthesize his mastery of both techniques, appears clearly in the execution of the reliquary representing a Saint Anne Trinity made by the goldsmith Hans Rossheil in

¹² See in particular : *Die Renaissance im deutschen Südwesten zwischen Reformation und Dreißigjährigem Krieg*. Ausstellungskatalog, Karlsruhe, 1986 ; Léon Krempel, *Georg Petel - Bildhauer im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*. Ausstellungskatalog, München 2007.

¹³ *Skulptur in Süddeutschland 1400-1770*, Deutscher Kunstverlag, Festschrift für Alferd Schädler, 1998.

¹⁴ Claus Zoege von Manteuffel, *Die Bildhauerfamilie Zürn*, Weissenhorn, Konrad, 1969, p.137.

¹⁵ Hilde Bauer, « Neue Beiträge zur Zürnforschung », in *Münchner Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst Zeitschriftenband*, 1924, pp. 96 - 112 ; Adolf Schahl, « Beiträge zur Plastik des Manierismus in Oberschwaben. Jakob Brendel - David Weiss - Hans Dürner - Georg Grassender », in *das Münster* 14 (1961), pp. 361-367; *Die Waldseer Bildhauer Zürn*, Catalogue of the exhibition held from the 18 April to 1st June 1998, Museum in Kornhaus, BadWaldsee.

1611-1615, after a model by Martin Zürn (Saint-Nicolas cathedral, Überlingen)¹⁶: the three figures represented up to their knees present the same expressive attitudes, the same richness of clothing, in opposition to the serious and almost impassive faces. This same search for preciousness, in a fragile balance with the desire to interiorize the emotions of the protagonists can be found in works of other contemporary sculptors, such as the Saint Anne Trinity executed by Veit Lang towards 1609 (Jesuiten Kirche, Heilberge)¹⁷. The polychrome treatment and the gilded clothing with several folds vivify the preciousness of the scene, whilst the almost frozen face of Saint Anne counterbalances the contradictory emotions that emerge from this composition. The Virgin, in the same attitude as our young Mary, her arms turned in an exaggerated “dancing” attitude, looks however towards the Child Jesus clothed with a long golden tunic, and hands him a globe.

We also recognize in the works of the artists of Constance Lake a predilection for antagonistic games, not only of light and shadow, but also between nude parts of the body and densely clothed ones. As for the group of the Mother of God on a moon crescent (*Muttergottes auf des Mondsichel*) executed by Hans Degler in 1619 in Aldersbach, the profusion of rich clothing details offers an almost tangible materiality, in perfect opposition with the nudity of Christ’s body. Not only his humanity, through this nudity, seems even more glaring than all this profusion of gold and draperies, but it also renders meaningless, in reverse, all this material evidence of richness. This work whose pathetic expression emanates from this knowledgeable game of contrasts between opulence and bareness confirm its belonging to the group of sculptures from the region of Constance Lake in the first quarter of the 17th century. The fusion between a princely Mannerism and a popular art still tied to the gothic tradition seems here perfectly harmonious.

3. A work isolated from its architectural context and precursory of a baroque current

While the tabernacle executed by Hans Morinck in 1594 (Sakramenthaus, Konstanz) presents a composition of still relatively modest size, the altarpieces of this region become progressively more imposing behind the altar. The Nativity altarpiece executed in 1604 by Hans Degler (Church of Saint Ulrich and Afra, Augsburg) is a vast screen animated by sculptures in the centre of the apse; this example is representative of the function of sculpture in this specific context: every statue is thought out as an essential element to the understanding of the devotional message carried by the altarpiece. If it is difficult to ascertain for which commissioner and for which space this group of Saint Anne Trinity was executed, it is still possible to interpret its spatial functioning: the simplified treatment of its back suggests that it was set against a flat surface. The size of the base, abruptly interrupted, suggests it was resting on a larger base or terrace. Other evidence seems to indicate a high, theatrical positioning of the group. More present and vivid thanks to the suppleness of their postures, the figures interact in the space of the faithful: foreshortenings of the hands, the right arm of the Virgin slightly leaning forwards, the interiorized look of Saint Anne plunging downwards, all these details invite the viewer to

¹⁶ Mane Hering-Mitgau, *Barocke Silberplastik in Südwestdeutschland*, Anton H. Konrad Verlag, 1973, the author insists on the mutual sources of inspiration as well as the numerous exchanges in terms of technique between sculptors and goldsmiths.

¹⁷ Christian Theurkauff, « Veit Lang Weithern ein Unbekannter », in *Skulptur in Süddeutschland, 1400-1770*, Festschrift für Alfred Schädler, München, Berlin, 1998, pp.220-240

participate in the scene. The sculpted group appears like an early example¹⁸ of an iconographic type which later spread, as a complement to other sculpted groups. It is often found on a console or in a niche flanking the monumental structure of baroque altarpieces. These numerous groups of Saint Anne Trinity multiply in the middle of the 17th century, after the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Is it because of the conspicuous movement of the triumphant Counter-Reformation, or, more precisely, is it a consequence of the re-establishment of the official saint's day which became a holiday from 1622? The cult of Christ's grand-mother is important everywhere in southern Germany: in Langenargen (Zürn, 1630), Einsiedeln (group executed by Daniel Schenck towards 1680), Fulda (towards 1700), Gemünden-am-Main, Schönau (1725), or even Konstanz-Dettingen and Konstanz Dingelsdorf, to mention only a few examples.

This work is exceptional by its state of conservation, the devout message that it transmits and the harmonious synthesis of the different styles sought for by its artist. Preserving the unchanging message transmitted by the gothic tradition, it presents the preciousness of a well-assimilated Mannerist style as well as presenting innovative techniques - virtuosity in the use of polychromy and in the vivid carving of the drapery conveying life to the figures - which define an emerging baroque style. This symbiosis successfully serves the new message advocated by the Catholic Church through the triumphant cult of its saints in the context of the altarpiece. Executed in the first quarter of the 17th century, this Saint Anne Trinity appears like the rare prototype of a production which will increase and expand in the regions of southern Germany, promoting the iconography of Saint Anne in a definitely baroque style.

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¹⁸ In the church of Saint-Martin in Aulendorf, the artist Georg Grassender (before 1609 - 1671) executed a trinity group of the same type, but merging the theme of the Education of the Virgin with a Saint Anne Trinity.