

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



Attributed to Willem van den Broecke, called Guilielmus Paladanus (Mechelen 1430 - Antwerp 1580)

Hercules

Circa: Circa 1550s/60s

Willem van der Broecke was a prominent northern Renaissance sculptor or Cleynsteker (carver in small), hailing from Mechelen, the Flemish capital of alabaster production and it is this medium with which he is most associated. Van der Broecke stands out from the Mechelen alabaster school on account of his classical formal language all antica and a familiarity with the antique and of Italian art which was most likely the result of a trip to Italy with his brother. Indeed, van den Broecke styled himself 'Paladanus' the Latinised version of his name, to denote his erudition and humanist interest in classical antiquity.

Alabaster was well suited to small statuette's for Kunstkammer's and in 1587 Gabriel Kaltemarckt expressly mentioned Paladanus' name in a list of artists and works he had drawn up as being essential to have in any cabinet of curiosities.[1]The "prince of sculptors'" success is reflected in his international clientele and he is both credited with introducing the Italian genre of all'antica to Low Country connoisseurs whilst simultaneously and conversely creating a taste for alabaster in Italy, where there was no domestic market for the medium hitherto.

The present work can convincingly be attributed to van der Broecke in respect of its strong stylistic and technical resemblances to known works by the artist including the Sleeping Nymph (c.1560, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), a signed Kypris and Eros (1559, Private Collection, Belgium), an Allegory of Melancholy (c.1560, Private Collection, previously Hoffstater Collection, Vienna) and a Bathing Venus (Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan).

Their modest size and classical subject matter suited their function as additions to the private studioli or Kunstkammer of connoisseurs who like Paladanus, were of a humanist disposition. Furthermore, the soft, milky alabaster was well suited to such statuettes which were intended to be tactile, and to be handled and held up to the light, allowing for the full effect of the translucent stone to be witnessed.

Stylistically notable in all of the comparable works, (as has been proposed by Frits Scholten) is Paladanus' interest in representing drapery to great effect and in presenting masks (derived from antique theatre masks). It is therefore interesting to note the comparison that can be made between the lion skin drapery in the present work and the drapery in both Kypri and Eros and that rendered in the Sleeping Nymph. Furthermore, the head of the lion so brilliantly portrayed in our statuette takes on a mask-like appearance, much like those in Sleeping Nymph and that in the Allegory of Melancholy.

Such antique-inspired masks or 'grotesques' known as Mascarons were probably derived from those used by Michelangelo in his personification of Night in the Medici Chapel. Indeed, there is an overall feel in many of the elements of Paladanus' sculpture that suggests he is someone who has studied the great master's work closely, at first hand. It is in fact quite possible that van den Broecke had seen the Medici Chapel with his own eyes, as his brother was active in Florence working on the Palazzo Vecchio under Vasari, becoming known as "Arrigo Fiammingo". And, although its occurrence has not been confirmed, it has been suggested that van den Broecke made a trip to Italy with his brother between 1555 and 1557 (see Duverger).

It is interesting to note that Frits Scholten has highlighted the unbecoming 'bulging muscles and athletic body' of the child in the Allegory of Melancholy, which he says is not coincidentally reminiscent of the Farnese Hercules. Van der Broecke would have known the celebrated Farnese Hercules, either from his own time in Italy or at the very least from prints. The imposing sculpture had been discovered in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome in 1546 and installed in the courtyard of the Farnese family residence for all to admire.

On closer inspection however, it becomes apparent that the present alabaster has some subtle differences with the Farnese Hercules, now in Naples, and in fact conforms more with an interpretation of Hercules of a less monumental size, now held in the Uffizi gallery, Florence, but executed in Rome in the 2nd century AD. It is clear that the Uffizi version is the source of inspiration for the present work which is not only comparable in pose but also in scale. Given that it was much less widely known, it would corroborate the suggestion that Paladanus spent time in Florence where his brother was based, and where he would have been able to see the sculpture first hand as we know it was on display as early as the 16th century.

The present alabaster is of the highest quality and its small size means that it would have been intended for a powerful patron's studiolo. Miniature reductions of the over life-size Roman statue of Hercules were enormously popular and this testified by the detail of a sculptor making a modello of a copy of Hercules resting in the famous Cesi family garden in Rome from the painting by Van Cleve of 1584, based on his first-hand visit. The subject was particularly fitting for Renaissance rulers, and in particular for the d'Este in Ferrara where many members bear the name of Ercole. However, Paladanus had an international clientele and this work would have been suitable for any number of them plausibly for a Netherlandish or German collector as much as for an Italian patron. His known patrons include work in Lubeck Cathedral for clerical clients, for Spanish dignitaries including Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, for Protestant territorial lords in German lands such as Duke Johann Albrecht I of

Mecklenburg-Schewrin and for patricians like the May and Rembold families in Augsburg.[2]

Of particular interest is Willem van der Broecke's work for Duke Johann Albrecht I of Mecklenburg-Schewrin. Schewrin had seen Count Philip of Hesse-Kassel's recently finished Alabaster Chamber in Kassel [3] in 1559 and himself engaged a group of Netherlandish sculptors including Van der Broecke to furnish some new rooms in his castle in Schwerin with alabaster works. In the inventory of the Schwerin residence drawn up in 1576 it is noted that along with other alabaster items listed such as alabaster door surrounds, figurative reliefs, and so-called "histories of alabaster" an alabaster figure of Hercules is mentioned.[4]

[1]V. Spenle, in *Shadows of Time*, p.185.

[2]V. Spenle, in *Shadows of Time*, p. 185.

[3]A project which was instigated by Hesse-Kassel on account of his time in Mechelen, where he had been kept as the emperor's prisoner of war, and which resulted in him employing Mechelen alabaster sculptors to undertake the chamber's decoration, see A. Jolly, 'Netherlandish sculptors in sixteenth-century northern Germany and their patrons',

[4]Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, Vormundschaftsakten No. 1, Inventarium der Vestungen, Heuser und Ambter Schewrin etc 1576, fol. 11r, as quoted in, A. Jolly, 'Netherlandish sculptors in sixteenth-century northern Germany and their patrons', p. 125

Provenance

Private collection, Italy

Exhibitions

Literature:

Th. Muchall-Viebrook, 'Alabasterreliefs von Wilhelm van den Broeck im Maximiliansmuseum in Augsburg', *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 12 (1919), p. 57-65, no. 2-3

J. Duverger/M.J. Onghena, 'Enkele nieuwe gegevens betreffende beeldhouwer W. van den Broecke alias Paludanus (1530-1580)', *Gentsche bijdragen tot de kunstgeschiedenis* 8 (1942), p. 173-204.

A. Jolly, 'Netherlandish sculptors in sixteenth-century northern Germany and their patrons', *Simiolus* 27 (1999), p. 119-141.

A. Lipinska, 'Ein tafell von Alabaster zu Antorff bestellen': Southern Netherlandish alabaster sculpture in

central Europe', *Simiolus* 32 (2006), no. 4, p. 234

A. Lipinska, 'Alabastrum, id est, corpus hominis: Alabaster in the Low Countries, a cultural history', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 62 (2012), p. 84-115

F. Scholten, *Rijksmuseum: 1100-1600*, Rijksmuseum, 2017.

S. Koja and, C. Kryza-Gersch (Ed);with,R. Rosenberg, A. Lipinska, F. Scholten, M. Heisterberg, 'Shadows of Time: Giambologna, Michelangelo and the Medici Chapel', *Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden*, 2019.