

# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**French Burgundian School Late 14th century**

**St John the Baptist**

58 cm high

c. 1360-1380

This particularly fine example of Burgundian late gothic carving is a highly original and accomplished rendering of St John the Baptist. Depicted bare foot, clothed in a camel-skin tunic and wrapped in a cloak, St John cradles in his left arm a lamb, whilst pointing to it with his right. His expressive hand gesture is echoed by his gaze as his head is turned downwards and to the side.

The complex and realistic representation of the subject, the sensitive rendering of the folds of the clothes, the lithe hand gestures, and the empathy and psychological awareness in the physiognomy, all contribute to a highly sophisticated and naturalistic sculpture by a skilled hand. The locks of St John's hair, beard and moustache are especially beautiful and stylised, and quite particular - as is the carver's rendering of the the lamb's woollen coat, represented in tight whorls. There is also a wonderfully observed contrast between the smooth polished finish of the adeptly carved drapery and the coarser camel-skin tunic underneath. Indeed, for a carving that was likely part of a larger schema - such as an altarpiece or tomb - there is a surprising level of attention to detail, implying a carver of consummate ability. Examples of the sculptor's great consideration to detail are seen in the tunic-tie just visible at the waist, in the soft modelling of the bone structure of the hands and wrists, and the fine rendering of the fingers and nails. The scene is highly animated as the hooves of the lamb spill out over the arm of St

John, suggesting its struggle.

The high degree of naturalism apparent in the present sculpture is a characteristic of the Tournasian school of Burgundian art and comparison can be drawn between our sculpture and a carving in alabaster of Saint Bartholomew from Hainaut, Tournai, dated to circa 1400 and now in the Musée Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels. However, the sculpture shows even more striking similarities to a renowned late 14th century sculpture of the highest quality, The Presentation in the Temple, given to an artist active in Paris and possibly associated with André Beauneveu (who worked in the service of Jean de Berry). Particularly comparable is the surface quality of the marble and the soft yet complex drapery, and notably, the figure of Simeon with his strongly incised eyelids and stylised beard and hair.

Stylistic comparisons have been drawn with stone carved representations of St John the Baptist from the Veneto given to the brothers Jacobello and Pierpaolo Dalle Masegne, working at the end of the fourteenth century. However, the present carving is not only more slender in appearance it is also more resolved compositionally and more competent in the rendering of the elaborate and inventive drapery. We can therefore attribute this moving and elegant statue to a sculptor of the Burgundian School in the late 14th century.

We are grateful to Dr Paul Williamson for suggesting that this work is indeed of Burgundian origin, and dating to c. 1360-1380.

### **Provenance**

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R. von Passavant-Gontard collection, Frankfurt

His sale, Berlin, 1929, Lot 81

E.S. Goldschmidt collection, Frankfurt

Private collection, Europe to 2016