

## Shorter Notices

*Sources for two early reliefs by Puget*

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TWO damaged wooden relief carvings of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* and the *Adoration of the Magi* by Pierre Puget (Figs. 30 and 31), recently exhibited in the monographic exhibition at Marseille, are among the earliest known sculptures by the artist. The carved inscription 'P. Puget 1653' appears on the recto of both panels, while the versos are inscribed in ink (probably not in Puget's own hand) 'PETRUS PUGET DEL SCULP FECIT AQUAE SEXTIUS A.D. 1653'. Although the circumstances of their creation have yet to be established – it is not known for whom they were made or if they formed part of a larger cycle of sculpted decoration – they do provide hitherto overlooked evidence of the interests and working methods of the young artist.<sup>1</sup>

There has been a tendency among scholars to trace influences on Puget's early work more from the available biographical data than from direct visual evidence. The name of Pietro da Cortona, in whose Roman workshop Puget is said to have worked in 1641, is often invoked in this context,<sup>2</sup> and Klaus Herding has detected what he terms 'lingering Italian reminiscences' in the two *Adoration* reliefs under consideration here, citing François Duquesnoy and Alessandro Algardi as possible models in addition to Cortona.<sup>3</sup> But although Puget's technique may well have been affected by his Roman experiences, both these reliefs in fact show him copying directly from other sources.

The *Adoration of the shepherds* looks back to the Cinquecento for inspiration, being based on a composition by Polidoro da Caravaggio which was widely available through sixteenth-century copies and engravings. Polidoro's autograph drawing survives in Madrid (Fig. 29), but it is clear that Puget must have depended on an engraving in the reverse sense, such as that by Gerardo Fredo Fontana of 1579 (Fig. 28).<sup>4</sup> Despite the composition's popularity in the Cinquecento, it is most unusual, if not unique, to find it used by an artist in the following century. Puget transcribed the two-dimensional image faithfully, if somewhat awkwardly, into his relief, taking over, with one exception, the poses and gestures of the shepherds with their fluttering drapery, as well as such details from Fontana's engraving as the plant behind the foot of the hurrying shepherd at the right and the voussoirs of the arch behind, though only the legs of the figure kneeling above now survive in the mutilated relief.

In the *Adoration of the Magi* on the other hand the 'Italian reminiscences' take on a slightly different form for, although the composition is ultimately derived from a work executed in Rome in 1633 (Fig. 33), the artist was Puget's compatriot Poussin, and Henri d'Avic's print which served as Puget's primary source was published in Paris (Fig. 32).<sup>5</sup> In adapting this composition as a relief, Puget took



28. *Adoration of the shepherds*, by Gerardo Fredo Fontana after Polidoro da Caravaggio. 1579. Engraving, 34 by 44.3 cm. (Pinacoteca Tosio-Martinengo, Brescia).



29. *Adoration of the shepherds*, by Polidoro da Caravaggio. c. 1520–23. Pen, pencil, brown wash and white lead, 43.5 by 57 cm. (Real Academia de S. Fernando, Madrid).

rather greater liberties than he had in the *Adoration of the shepherds*, where on the whole he respected the relative spatial locations of the figures, although the nature of the three-dimensional plastic relief encouraged him to show the foreground figure at centre-right more in profile than in the print, strengthening the implicit grouping of these two figures at the right to balance the single kneeling figure on the left. When adapting Poussin's *Adoration of the Magi*, however, he considerably simplified the more complicated spatial relationships between the figures in the print, particularly at the left, where he

<sup>1</sup>See M.-P. VIAL and L. GEORGET: *Pierre Puget – Peintre, Sculpteur, Architecte 1620–1694*, exh. cat., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille [1994–95], pp.100ff., nos.22 and 23. Both this catalogue and K. HERDING: *Pierre Puget – Das bildnerische Werk*, Berlin [1970], pp.35 and 141, speculate on the possible original destination of these reliefs. See also *idem*: 'Pierre Puget: l'état des recherches', in *Pierre Puget et son temps, Actes du Colloque 1971 (Provence Historique II)* [1972], p.22 for a report of Jean Boyers's discovery of a small fragment said to come from one of the *Adoration* panels.

<sup>2</sup>See H. VOLLMER's entry in Thieme-Becker (XXVII, Leipzig [1933], p.451), and VIAL and GEORGET, *op. cit.* above, pp.31ff.

<sup>3</sup>HERDING, *op. cit.* above [1970], pp.35ff.: 'wirken in diesen Reliefs italienische Erinnerungen nach'. See also G.E. WALTON: *The sculptures of Pierre Puget*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1967, p.10, and *idem*: 'Puget et l'Italie', in *Pierre Puget Marseille* [1971], pp.61ff. WALTON [1971], p.64 considers that influence from Cor-

tona would have been largely technical; in his thesis he discusses (pp.15, 21, 39) Duquesnoy's impact on Puget.

<sup>4</sup>For Polidoro's drawing, see A.E. PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ: *Catalogo de los Dibujos. Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando*, Madrid [1967], pp.120ff., and for Fontana's print I. OLIVIERI and A. VICINI MASTRANGELI: *In presepio – Immagini della Natività nelle incisioni dei secoli XVI–XIX*, exh. cat., Bibliotheca Casanatense, Rome [1987–88], pp.88ff., no.141.

<sup>5</sup>For the painting, which is signed and dated Rome 1633, see most recently J. THUILIER: *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris [1994], p.252, no.93, and for the print, see G. WILDENSTEIN: 'Les graveurs de Poussin au XVIIIe siècle', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1040/43 [1955], p.151, no.39, and A. BLUNT and M. DAVIES: 'Some corrections and additions to M. Wildenstein's "Graveurs de Poussin au XVIIIe siècle"', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, II [1962], p.210, no.39.

30. *Adoration of the shepherds*. By Pierre Puget. 1653. Limewood, 43.3 by 88.6 cm. (Private collection, Vienna).



31. *Adoration of the magi*, by Pierre Puget. 1653. Limewood, 51.2 by 96.5 cm. (Private collection).



32. *Adoration of the Magi*, by Henri d'Avicé after Nicolas Poussin. 1653. Engraving. (Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris).



33. *Adoration of the Magi*, by Nicolas Poussin. 1633. 160 by 182 cm. (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden).

omitted two figures, perhaps finding this closely intertwined group too difficult to translate into the new medium.

It is worth remarking that Puget seems to be the earliest sculptor to adapt a composition by Poussin into a carved relief: the other known examples – those after Poussin's Hartford *Crucifixion*, the Copenhagen *Eudamidas* and the Richmond *Achilles*<sup>6</sup> – all date from after the French painter's death in 1665. When Puget carved his panel in 1653, Poussin was not only still alive, but Henri d'Avic's print must have been hot off the press.<sup>7</sup> Puget is also most unusual in making use of an early composition by Poussin, other sculptors tending to prefer works dating from after 1640.<sup>8</sup>

Until the patronage and original destination of the two panels is known, we can only speculate about the precise reasons for Puget's pairing of these two *Adorations* after Poussin and Polidoro, which have similar settings within a framework of ruined classical architecture. It may be that Puget, who was a habitual borrower when working as a painter,<sup>9</sup> simply chose prints which were to hand, but it is a pleasing coincidence that Polidoro should have been an artist much admired by Poussin<sup>10</sup> and that Poussin and Puget would later be linked within the French academic tradition as the founders of the true French style in their respective media.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup>See, respectively, J. MONTAGU: *Roman Baroque Sculpture – The Industry of Art*, New Haven and London [1992], p.13; R. VERDI: 'Poussin's "Eudamidas": eighteenth-century criticism and copies', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, CXIII [1971], pp. 513–24; and B. CONTARDI in *Intorno a Poussin – Dipinti romani a confronto*, exh. cat., Palazzo Barberini, Rome [1994–95].

<sup>7</sup>D'Avic's engraving is dated 1653–55 by WILDENSTEIN, *loc.cit.* at note 5 above, and the Puget panel now enables us to narrow this down to 1653.

<sup>8</sup>For some examples, see the references in note 6 above.

<sup>9</sup>See WALTON [1967], cited at note 3 above, p.11: 'there is considerable evidence to suggest that throughout his career as a painter he frequently, if not always, borrowed details or whole compositions from others, taking a minimum of trouble to disguise his borrowings'.

<sup>10</sup>For Poussin's praise of Polidoro see M. BEAL: 'Richard Symonds in Italy: his meeting with Nicolas Poussin', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE*, CXXVI [1984], pp.141–44, esp. p.143; for his Polidoro copies and their use in his paintings, see P. ROSENBERG and L.-A. PRAT: *Les dessins de Poussin*, Milan [1994], I, pp.338ff., nos.178ff., and H. KEAZOR: 'Zu zwei Zeichnungen Nicolas Poussins', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 57, 2 [1994], pp.268–75.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, the busts of Poussin and Puget by Michel-Louis Victor Mercier of 1838 flanking the entrance of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris (the present examples were recarved after 1890 following the ruined originals); W. BOULEAU-RABAUD: *Inventaire des sculptures décoratives et éléments d'architecture de l'Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts*, Paris [1973], p.11, no.1.