RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

RACAR
Revue d'art canadienne | Canadian Art Review

Riccio, Bellano or Severo da Ravenna? A Bronze Statuette of St. Jerome

K. Corey Keeble

Volume 8, Number 1, 1981

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075362ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1075362ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this note

Keeble, K. (1981). Riccio, Bellano or Severo da Ravenna? A Bronze Statuette of St. Jerome. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *8*(1), 55–59. https://doi.org/10.7202/1075362ar

Riccio, Bellano or Severo da Ravenna? A Bronze Statuette of St. Jerome

K. COREY KEEBLE
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

Until 1960, the Renaissance bronze played no significant role among the holdings of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. The European Department possessed a small number of mortars and inkwells, for the most part of rather indifferent quality, and two displayable statuettes, one of which proved to be a forgery. In that same year, however, this state of affairs was greatly altered by the addition of seven bronzes – six statuettes and one Crucifix figure – which formed an integral part of the important Lee of Fareham collection. Subsequently, the department was able to acquire during the 1960s additional, isolated examples of both Renaissance and Baroque bronze statuettes which were to form the nucleus of a body of small sculpture in bronze which, upon further expansion in the 1970s, has assumed international significance. Many of the major acquisitions since 1970 were made possible through the unstinting support of private donors. It was largely through their efforts that the museum was in a position, in 1975, to hold its first exhibition of Florentine Baroque bronzes,[1] and, in 1978, to lend a Susini bronze *Christ* to the Giambologna exhibition held in Edinburgh, London and Vienna.[2]

One of the earliest of the museum's Renaissance bronzes is a small kneeling *St. Jerome* purchased on the New York art market in 1961 (Fig. 1 a-b). Although a mere 14.5 cm in height, it is visually compelling: the saint, his torso bared, is seen in an attitude of extreme abnegation: his head is raised heavenward and his arms are outstretched, with an angular block of stone held in the right hand for the mortification of the flesh. (He holds in his left hand a short, angular shaft, pierced at the top with a threaded hole for the attachment of some object now missing.) While his body is neither lean nor haggard, his muscles, notably those of the chest, are shown tensed and strained in a manner that communicates some sense of intense psychological struggle. Spiritual conflict expressed by means of such obvious outward and physical signs is a striking manifestation of that particular quality in Quattrocento sculpture once characterised by Leo Planiscig as 'der Paduanische nachdonatelleske Naturalismus.'[3]

The *St. Jerome* was, at the time of its purchase, mounted on a plain cube-shaped modern base. Nonetheless, the statuette is so similar to one illustrated in Bode's catalogue of the bronzes formerly in the New York collection of J.P. Morgan (Fig. 2) that there is every reason to suppose that it is the same statuette.[4] While all of the photographs in the Bode catalogue show evidence of partial retouching, those of the St. Jerome inkstand still give in their untouched areas precise information as to the chipping and flaking of the statuette's patination. Areas in the upper folds of the drapery over the right hip, for example, correspond exactly with the flaking in the same areas of drapery in the R.O.M.'s figure. While conclusive documentation is lacking, the precise correspondence of visual evidence strongly suggests that the Toronto piece is indeed the one from the Morgan collection, but without its original base. Even in the best of circumstances, such evidence would now be hard to come by since, after

1 Charles Avery and K. Corey Keeble, *Florentine Baroque Bronzes and Other Objects of Art* (Toronto, 1975).
2 *Giambologna, 1529-1608: Sculptor to the Medici* (Arts Council of Great Britain, Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, 19 August – 10 September 1978), p. 146, cat. 111.
3 Leo Planiscig, 'Der Paduanische nachdonatelleske Naturalismus,' *Venezianische Bildhauer* (Vienna, 1921), p. 81-152.
4 Wilhelm Bode, *Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan. Bronzes of the Renaissance and Subsequent Periods* (Paris, 1910), I, pp. xvi, 14, cat. 47 (Pl. xxxiv).

a

b

FIGURE 1. a) Bronze statuette of St. Jerome, hollow cast, traces of black lacquer; H. 14,5 cm. Italian, early 16th century; here attributed to the Workshop of Severo da Ravenna.

FIGURE 1. b) Bronze statuette of St. Jerome, another view.

Morgan's death, his collection was turned over to the dealer Duveen for sale. Some of the Morgan bronzes were acquired by Henry Clay Frick and Huntington Hartford, but others have been so widely dispersed by subsequent dealers and collections that they are by no means easy to trace.

St. Jerome was a popular saint in 15th and 16th century Europe, and depictions of him abound, although he is perhaps more frequently represented in painting than in sculpture. Since the Toronto *St. Jerome* has been generally regarded as Paduan, it is not surprising that parallels should be most evident in the works of artists active in the region of Venice and the Veneto. One example is provided by a wooden panel of the early 16th century from the National Gallery, London, attributed to Cima da Conegliano.[5] Here are found the same type of balding pate, long pointed beard and dramatic pose with outstretched arms that are so powerfully captured in the statuette. While Cima's saint serves as a compositional paraphrase of the Toronto bronze, earlier and perhaps more intriguing iconographical parallels exist in panels of the late Quattrocento. The flat disc halo of the statuette has its painted counterpart in the magnificent panel of St. Jerome, also in the National Gallery, London,

5 Martin Davies, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Earlier Italian Schools*, 2nd ed. (London, 1961), p. 145, Inv. 1120.

FIGURE 2. Bronze inkstand with statuette of St. Jerome; from Wilhelm Bode: *Collection of J. Pierpont Morgan: Bronzes of the Renaissance and Subsequent Periods* (Paris 1910), I, Pl. XXXIV.

FIGURE 3. St. Jerome (Fragment), panel. Italian, Ferrarese, by Cosimo Tura; National Gallery, London, Inv. 773.

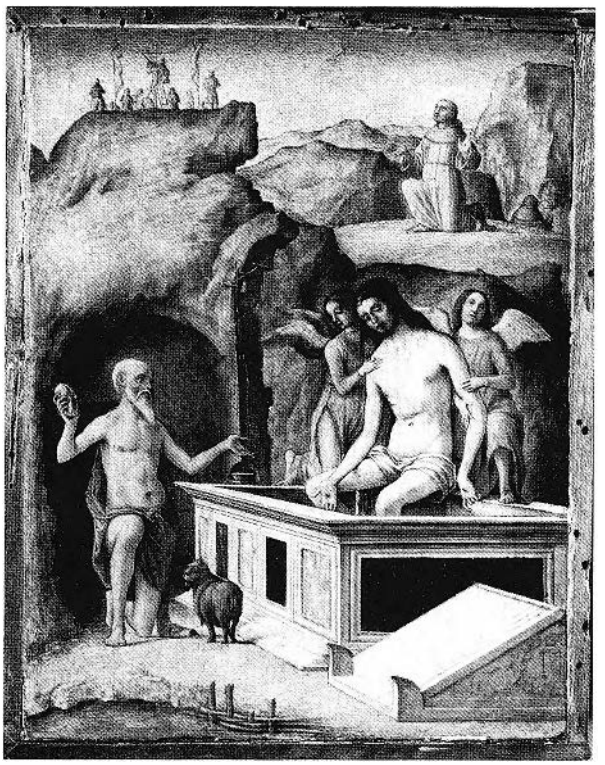

FIGURE 4. Dead Christ with St. Jerome, R. panel from a group of two. Italian, Ferrarese, attributed to Ercole de Roberti; National Gallery, London, Inv. 1411.

which is given to Cosimo Tura.[6] One also notices the expressional motif of the parted lips and, though different in particulars, there is a broad similarity in the tension of the musculature (Fig. 3) to suggest an intense psychological state. Some analogous features appear in an Ercole de Roberti panel also in the National Gallery, London[7] (Fig. 4), depicting a kneeling Jerome of the same general type as that of the statuette, although the head is tilted forward and not back and the arms, though spread, are less fully extended than in the bronze. Both these paintings and the statuette nonetheless conform to what may be interpreted as the same regional iconographic convention current in the late 15th and early 16th centuries throughout the Italian peninsula, particularly around Padua, Venice, Ravenna and Ferrara.

When the St. Jerome statuette was purchased in 1961, it was ascribed to Bartolommeo Bellano on the basis of a statement from Dr. Simon Meller, former Director of the Budapest Museum. In the Morgan catalogue, the *St. Jerome* had been attributed to the workshop of Riccio.[8] Neither of these attributions seems satisfactory now. Even considered as a workshop bronze rather than as an autograph model, the figure stands at a considerable distance from what nowadays would be considered acceptable for inclusion in Riccio's œuvre. The attribution to Bellano must also be rejected on the basis of obvious and considerable discrepancies between the figure and the small body of bronze statuettes having stylistic affinities with Bellano's bronze reliefs of 1484-88 in the Santo, Padua. Among these are the seated *St. Jerome* in the Louvre and the *David* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, both of which show the drapery folds rendered as flat, geometric planes separated or broken by deep and sharply cut angular channels, a treatment which Bode once likened to the appearance of crumpled paper. This distinctive handling, one of the hallmarks of the Bellano bronzes, is conspicuously absent from the drapery details of the R.O.M. *St. Jerome*.

This drapery, with its long, streaming parallel folds, is stylistically closer to that of bronzes now more generally attributed to Severo da Ravenna,

6 Ibid., pp. 516-17, Inv. 773.
7 Ibid., p. 462, Inv. 1411.
8 Bode, p. 14.

more properly known as Severo di Domenico Calzetta di Ravenna.[9] The possibility that the statuette might in some way be related to Severo's workshop was, in fact, suggested in conversation in 1970 by Anthony Radcliffe of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington. There are similarities of modelling and casting between the *St. Jerome* and the bronze *John the Baptist* in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, attributed to Severo by John Pope-Hennessy in 1963.[10] These similarities however are the general stylistic affinities of a workshop piece to a possible autograph work having more highly refined modelling. The bulging eyes of the Oxford *St. John*, the delicate and somewhat nervous rendering of the locks of the hair and beard, and the narrow, parallel furrows of some of the drapery, all seem to be reflected in the coarser, derivative features and details of the *St. Jerome*.

The Toronto bronze also seems to have some characteristics, such as the simplified modelling of the limbs, common to the numerous Neptune figures attributed to Severo di Ravenna. The best among these is that from the Frick Collection in New York (Fig. 5).[11] Its boneless forearms and smooth untextured hands appear in an even more summary manner in the *St. Jerome* and in the workshop Neptunes such as the one from the Museo Nazionale, Florence, referred to in a recent article by Bertrand Jestaz.[12] There are some further points of comparison between the *St. Jerome* and a bronze *St. Christopher* in the Louvre which Jestaz attributed to Severo in the same article. These are most evident in the treatment of details of hair and beard, the modelling of limbs and, to a certain degree, the drapery styles. Such generic similarities are normal to the style of a given workshop, but when individual bronzes are examined in terms of the specifics of their modelling and casting, one sees slight differences and variations which may indicate different

FIGURE 5. Neptune on a Sea Monster, bronze, hollow cast, H. to top of figure 33.9 cm. Italian, early 16th century, by Severo da Ravenna, The Frick Collection, New York, Inv. 16.2.12.

craftsmen, each with his own idiosyncrasies. Thus, although Jestaz attributed the Louvre *St. Christopher* to Severo di Ravenna, Ulrich Middeldorf has indicated the possibility that it may indeed be by another hand.[13]

Also among the bronzes discussed by Jestaz was an inkstand in the Museo Nazionale, Florence (Inv. 320).[14] Jestaz associated it with Severo, despite Hans Weihrauch's placement of it among those bronzes he considered to have come from the Riccio workshop.[15] The inkstand consists of an urn at one corner, and a cat pawing at a catch of fish held by a boy. The urn, with acanthus leaf decoration and a low domed lid with a finial of pinecone shape, is identical to one seen on the base of the *St. Jerome* illustrated in Bode's Morgan catalogue. Whatever else one may posit about workshops and styles, it is at least reasonable to assume that both stands were the product of the same shop or foundry.

The Toronto *St. Jerome* is patently a workshop piece, albeit one of unusual sculptural strength; this observation only adds to the complexities of locating it stylistically within the orbit of a particular sculptor (or founder) and his workshop. On the basis of present assumptions about Bellano, Riccio and Severo, it is still evident that the

9 Cf. Ulrich Middeldorf, 'Glosses on Thieme-Becker,' *Festschrift für Otto von Simson zum 65. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977), p. 290.

10 John Pope-Hennessy, 'Italian Bronze Statuettes: I,' *Burlington Magazine*, CV (January 1963), pp. 15, 22, fig. 19.

11 John Pope-Hennessy and Anthony Radcliffe, *The Frick Collection. An Illustrated Catalogue, III: Sculpture* (New York, 1970), pp. 126-135.

12 Bertrand Jestaz, 'Une statuette de bronze: le Saint Christophe de Severo da Ravenna', *La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France*, XXII (1972), pp. 67-78, particularly pp. 73-74 and figs. 6, 8.

13 Middeldorf, p. 290.

14 Jestaz, pp. 77-78, fig. 16.

15 Hans R. Weihrauch, *Europäische Bronzestatuetten* (Braunschweig, 1967), p. 474, fig. 563.

FIGURE 6. a) Atlas Supporting the Globe of Heaven, bronze, hollow cast, H. 34.6 cm. Normally attributed to the Workshop of Riccio, but possibly connected to the Workshop of Severo da Ravenna. The Frick Collection, New York, Inv. 15.2.24.

FIGURE 6. b) Atlas Supporting the Globe of Heaven (Detail of Figure 6 a).

R.O.M.'s figure is more comfortably accommodated among those bronzes which are now generally, though as yet by no means conclusively, grouped around Severo di Ravenna. It is possible of course that some works among them may be related to a distinguishable if anonymous workshop hand. It is interesting in this light to be aware of some similarities apparent between the *St. Jerome* and a group of Atlas figures supporting the globe of heaven, which, although considered to derive from a Riccio model, could equally well have been cast in another workshop.[16] The tension in the pectoralis major muscles of the Atlas figures, as well as the ridge-like stylisations of the latissimus dorsi muscles find an echo in the coarser musculature of the torso of the *St. Jerome*. The protruding eyeballs of the Atlas bronzes, the stylisation of anatomical features within the arms, hands, chest and back are all perhaps as close to bronzes now attributed to the Severo workshop as to Riccio's. This is seen in the details of the Frick *Atlas* (Fig. 6 a-b) whose stand, for example, has ornamental details of the same form and style as those associated with writing caskets, such as that in the Cleveland Museum of Art, now attributed to Severo.[17] What is equally important is that the lid of the urn on the base of the Frick piece is of the same type as that appearing with the Museo Nazionale 'boy-with-fish' inkstand and that of the Morgan *St. Jerome*. And, if anything, some of the other little Atlas figures are even closer to the Severo types than the one in the Frick. For instance, a gilt one in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan, has forearms and hands like those on Severo's Neptunes – the same kind of 'boneless' anatomical modelling that is a conspicuous trait in the Toronto *St. Jerome*.

Whether the Atlas statuettes and the *St. Jerome* should continue to be grouped around Severo remains a moot point. That they share common aspects is evident, notably the occurrence of the same decorative features associated with their bases and the display of certain similarities in anatomical detail. In sum, the Toronto *St. Jerome* is an extremely interesting workshop bronze because of its strong sculptural qualities and its stylistic links with bronzes now increasingly associated with the workshop of Severo di Ravenna. Some of these may themselves be subgrouped around a definable studio associate or assistant, but, regardless of further reorganisation in attributions to Severo and his circle, it may be assumed that this statuette will play a significant role.

16 Pope-Hennessy and Radcliffe, pp. 106-111.

17 Cleveland Museum of Art, J.H. Wade Fund, Inv. 41.63 (William D. Wixom, *The Cleveland Museum of Art: Renaissance Bronzes from Ohio Collections* [Cleveland, 1975], cat. 95).