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AN ASTONISHING AND IMPORTANT 13TH CENTURY ENGLISH OAK AND POLYCHROME SCULPTURE OF A MONARCH SAINT. WESTMINSTER. CIRCA 1260.

A MUSEUM QUALITY 13TH CENTURY ENGLISH SCULPTURE OF EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY, HIS EXQUISITELY CARVED FACE HAS THE MOST WONDERFUL SERENE EXPRESSION AND DETAIL WITH THE CROWN SO DELICATELY CARVED UPON HIS HEAD.

BASIS OF ATTRIBUTION: This elegant little statue of a monarch counts among the highest quality pieces of thirteenth-century English figure sculpture extant. It is also one of the best preserved examples of medieval wood sculpture and provides the clearest link to the finest of London/Westminster Gothic manuscript painting. The statue's exaggerated, swan-like neck, close-fitting, ankle-length tunic tightly belted at the waist, and mantle draped about the shoulders in a series of plate-like folds and fastened with a round brooch invite immediate comparisons to the 'Queen Mary Psalter' of c. 1320. Even the colour scheme



(White, gold and azurite blue) and the manner in which the now mostly lost scepter is clasped, delicately between thumb and forefinger, may be seen in that manuscript. Other features – the blunt-tipped shoes and ‘stiff leaf’ fleurons of the crown – belong to the previous century.

The closest comparisons are to be made with the courtly figures of the ‘Douce Apocalypse’ (Bodelian Library, MS Diuice 180) and the now lost Palace murals – the product of artists associated with Westminster Abbey, working in the 1270s and 80s. Shared features include a tunic with unnaturally high and tightly synched waist as the primary garment and a mantel draped with a voluminous v-fold beneath the left arm and cascading into a series of broad , zigzagging folds below. At the right shoulder of the royal saint, as on many of the figures in the Apocalypse, the mantel is arranged into a long and sharp v-shaped pleat. Also, the abdomens of the statue and the figure of the manuscript are rounded, almost feminine, in profile. Further evidence of the statue’s later thirteenth-century date can be found in the distinctive form of stiff leaf that forms the fleurons of the

crown: a trefid comprised of pad-like leaves with nodules at their centers, a form which may also be seen on the Exeter cathedral misericords (c. 1270-1290) - a crown of the same design may be seen in the coronation of David miniature of the c. 1230, London-produced, 'Glazier Psalter' (Pierpont Morgan Library, Glazier 25, f. 4r). The facial type - classicizing with silted eyes, prominent arching brow ridges, a long, aquiline nose and delicate mouth and chin - is closely matched on the famous mid twelfth-century sculpted oak image of St Michael from Mosvik (Inderøy, Norway), which is widely thought to be an English import and associated with the Westminster Annunciation group.

CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS: Carved in the round and fully finished on all sides. Composed from a piece of a single piece of heavy and very dense deep brown coloured oak. The left hand (now clasping a book) originally composed of a separate piece tenoned at the wrist. The source of the timber appears to have been a branch or coppiced pole (oriented vertically for carving), as the full radial cross-section is visible on the underside of the socle. Two former knot-holes on the lower portion of

the statue's right side filled with plugs composed of the same type of timber.

Surface: Extensive remains of apparently original polychrome and mordent gilding: gold and white for the mantle; blue for the tunic; gold, red and green for the crown; brown for the hair; red shoes. flesh tones lost from face and hands.

CONDITION: Left hand clasping book (originally tenoned at the wrist) replaces. Head of sceptre.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

□ Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200 – 1400*, an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1987 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1984), pp. 32-321, 341-343, 351.

□ Aaron Anderson, *English Influence in Norwegian and Swedish Figuresculpture in wood, 1220-1270* (Stockhold: Wahlström & Widestrand, 1950), pp. 129-134

□ Marion Glasscoe, Mediaeval Woodwork in Exeter Cathedral (Exeter: Exeter Cathedral, 1978)

□ C. M. Kauffmann, Biblical Imagery in Medieval England 700-1500 (London: Harvey Miller, 2003), pp. 194-206.

□ Marie Louise Sauerberg (ed.), The Westminster Retable History, technique, conservation (Painting)

PROVENANCE-

Provenance: 1900 Paris Exposition Universal, British Section; Richard Philp; 'The Ronald A. Lee Collection' Thence to present owner.

FULL DETAILS AND FURTHER IMAGES-

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A TRULY EXCEPTIONAL ENGLISH MEDIEVAL WORK OF ART.

STOCK NO 1752.

SOLD

Dimensions:

Height: 21 inches (53.3 cms)

Width: 7.5 inches (19.1 cms)

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