Finch & Co



AN ENGLISH NOTTINGHAM ALABASTER OF ST ERASMUS

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ALABASTER, POLYCHROME

ENGLAND

15TH CENTURY

SIZE: 14CM HIGH, 12CM WIDE, 5.5CM DEEP - 5½ INS HIGH, 4¾ INS WIDE, 2¼ INS DEEP

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LITERATURE

FROM THE LATE 1300'S UNTIL THE REFORMATION ALABASTER CARVING WAS A MAJOR ARTISTIC ACTIVITY AND INDUSTRY IN THE ENGLISH MIDLANDS IN AN AREA CENTRED ON NOTTINGHAM. SMALL IN SCALE, ALTARPIECES AND PANELS WERE PRODUCED FOR THE HOME MARKET AS WELL AS FOR EXPORT.

ALABASTER IS HYDROUS CALCIUM SULPHATE, ALSO KNOWN AS GYPSUM, AND WAS EXTRACTED IN THE MIDDLE AGES FROM A COMPARATIVELY SMALL AREA OF SOUTH DERBYSHIRE AND THE ADJOINING CORNER OF STAFFORDSHIRE. NOTTINGHAM ALABASTER SCULPTURES HAVE A DISTINCTIVE ALMOST 'ENGLISH' STYLE. DEPICTING RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS THEY WERE USUALLY PAINTED AND GILDED, ALTHOUGH AREAS OF UNPAINTED ALABASTER WERE ALMOST ALWAYS LEFT TO CONTRAST WITH THE COLOURFUL PAINTED DETAILS. THE CARVING OF IMAGES OF SAINTS EXPANDED DURING THE 15TH CENTURY REFLECTING THE DEVELOPING CULT OF SAINTS.

AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION MANY OF THE CARVINGS WERE DESTROYED OR HIDDEN, BUT THE SURVIVAL OF FRAGMENTS AND THOSE IN THE CHURCHES AND CATHEDRALS OF FRANCE ARE PROOF OF THEIR POPULARITY IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE. TODAY THERE ARE MORE ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ALABASTER CARVINGS IN NORMANDY THAN ANYWHERE ELSE.

ST ERASMUS, ALSO KNOWN AS ST ELMO (DIED CIRCA 303 AD) WAS A CHRISTIAN ST AND MARTYR VENERATED AS THE PATRON SAINT OF SAILORS. HE WAS ALSO ONE OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS. BISHOP OF FORMIA, ITALY, DURING THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS UNDER THE EMPERORS DIOCLETIAN (284 - 305) AND MAXIMIAN HERCULES (286 - 305), HE WENT INTO HIDING ON MOUNT LIBANUS FOR SEVEN YEARS. HOWEVER, AFTER AN ANGEL APPEARED BEFORE HIM, COUNSELLING HIM, HE RETURNED TO HIS CITY.

PROVENANCE

EX PRIVATE COLLECTION JONATHAN HORNE

THENCE BY DESCENT