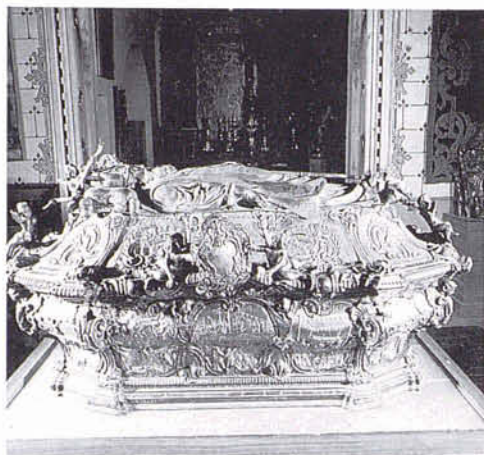




ALTARPIECE OF ARENYS DE MAR

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THE SUMPTUOUS ART OF THE SILVERSMITH



URN OF ST. ERMENGOL. LA SEU D'URGELL

THE CROWNING MOMENT OF CATALAN BAROQUE SILVERWARE CORRESPONDS TO THE SECOND GENERATION OF BARCELONA SILVERSMITHS. JOAN MATONS WAS AN OUTSTANDING SILVERSMITH WHO PRODUCED THE TWO MOST SPECTACULAR WORKS OF CATALAN BAROQUE SILVERWARE: THE URN OF SANT BERNAT CALVÓ, IN VIC CATHEDRAL, AND THE TWO CANDELABRAS IN THE CATHEDRAL OF MALLORCA.

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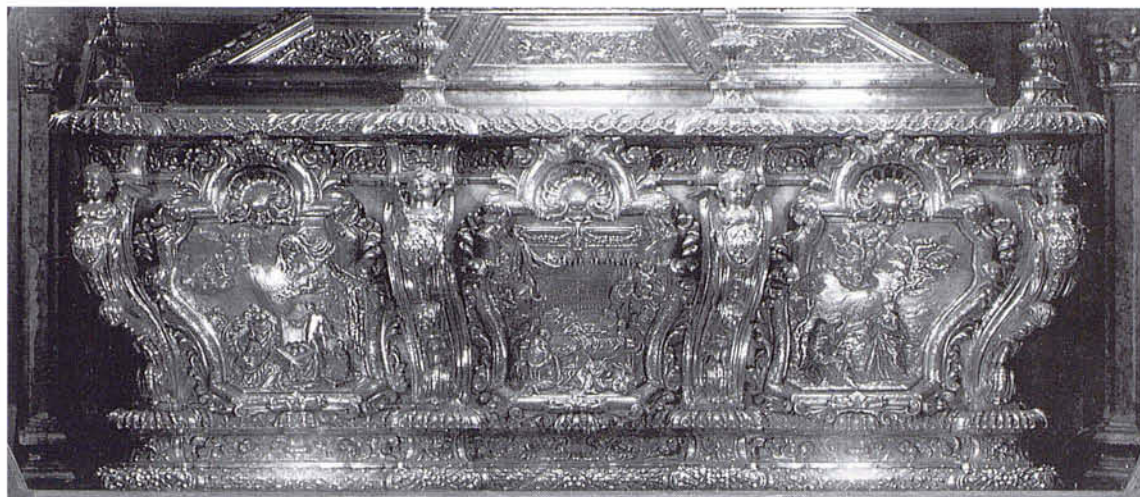
Catalan baroque silverware is still not widely known for a series of reasons: the lack of research into monographic or general subjects (leaving aside analyses appearing from time to time in some catalogues, there are the texts of J. Mainar, J. Gudiol, S. Alcolea and N. de Dalmases); the disappearance of items unfortunately resulting from military conflicts (the religious silverware is almost all that has survived, though the treasure of Montserrat, for example, was lost in the nineteenth century); a lack of knowledge of existing works, which are gradually coming to light, and the qualitative disproportion between the *proves de passantia* –that is, the master's exams, which we know of thanks to the *Llibres de passantia* in the Museum of History of Barcelona– and the items preserved, often in favour of the former.

In addition, it is easy to foresee that during a period of decadence, even if only relative, like the baroque period in our country, the sumptuous arts are the most affected, in part because commissions diminish and in part because items made from precious materials are the first to be melted down and disappear. Even so, we can speak of a steady rate of production in our silversmith's

workshops during the seventeenth century (especially in Barcelona, but also to a great extent in Reus, Mataró and Montserrat) and of an increase in production, also qualitative, after the "Guerra dels Segadors". In fact, it doesn't seem mistaken to speak of an abundance in eighteenth century silverware, though this is less clear in the general quality than in some particularly outstanding items.

The most frequent techniques of the period are the same as in the preceeding period (casting, embossing, engraving), as well as the recuperation of varnish and filigree, absent since the Gothic. The absence of a court and of potential lay clients with high purchasing power made for a clientele made up mainly of ecclesiastics, so that the most frequent type of articles are those that have a liturgical use: chalices and pyxes, monstrances (often in the form of a building, but also of the sun), candelabras, sacramentaries, reliquaries (particularly those in the form of a bust) and, especially, the urns. As far as morphologies and stylistic evolution are concerned, the period can be divided into three stages. In the first half of the seventeenth century we have to speak of a Renaissance silverware, though the grotesque decorations gave way to ornamental ele-

ments that tend to be described as "mannerist", as in the production of P. Farell and F. Ros of Barcelona, A. Llorreda of Manresa, or M. Ferret of Reus. Not until the second half of the seventeenth century was the lush baroque ornamentation incorporated, with its plant and floral motifs (garlands, foliage, etc.), with its origin in Roman, French (for example, the engravings of G. Légaré) and nordic (after Dietterlin) models, as well as the proliferation of angels, cherub heads and occasionally other figures (even satyrs) and historical reliefs, always following sinuous, curvilinear patterns that disguise the structure of the article. It is important to remember that silversmiths and sculptors often worked together, at least in the elaboration of important works, and that our sculptors constantly resorted to illustrations and engravings. It is more difficult to speak of rococo silverware, marked by a change in the ornamental repertory (pebbles, shells, etc.) which did not however change typologies nor entirely replace earlier decorative forms. However, a few examples can be mentioned, all of them dating from the mid-eighteenth century on. At the end of that same century there are hints at the assimilation of Neo-Classical aesthetics (for example, Ignasi Julià's piece



URN OF ST. BERNAT CALVÓ, CATHEDRAL OF VIC

for his master's exam), to a large extent adopted by the silversmiths trained in Madrid, such as J. Rovira, J. Martí, P. Sala and the Altets.

In spite of the lack of information and the proliferation of anonymous, undocumented or unmarked works, there are some figures of interest among the Catalan baroque silversmiths. In the Barcelona workshop, by far the most important, we can comfortably distinguish three generations of silversmiths. Of the first, we can pick out Bonaventura Fornaguera and Francesc Via the younger, both also engravers. All that has been preserved by Fornaguera are a few items (sacramentaries, candelabras, lamps) from the Chapel of the Conception in the Cathedral of Tarragona and, perhaps, the design for a monstrance for Santa Maria del Mar –perhaps in collaboration with the sculptor D. Rovirat. F. Via, son of a Barcelona silversmith of the same name, was responsible for the Maundy Thursday Monument, the Verge de la Cinta and an altar crucifix for the Cathedral of Tortosa; the bust-reliquary of Sant Pere de la Prioral in Reus and the maces of Reus Town Hall.

The high point of Catalan baroque silverware corresponds to the second generation of Barcelona silversmiths. While not wishing to forget the less well known artists, two of Fornaguera's sons-in-law stand out: Francesc Tramulles (who worked with his brother Josep) and Joan Matons, as well as Antoni Mateu (who sometimes collaborated with Matons). The reliquary of Sant Francesc Xavier in the parish church of Montblanc is an example of his fine technique. A similar degree of skill and

taste for decorative profusion is shown by the Tramulles, as can be seen in the urn of the reliquary of the Verge de la Cinta in the Cathedral by Tortosa. However, the most outstanding of these silversmiths was Joan Matons, who, working from the designs of the sculptor Joan Roig, produced two of the most spectacular works of Catalan baroque silverware and without doubt amongst the best of all the silverware of the Peninsula: the urn of Sant Bernat Calvó, in Vic Cathedral, and the two candelabras in Mallorca Cathedral. Finally, a third generation consisted, amongst others, of Joan Braver, resident at court from 1758, Francesc Martorell, responsible for the reliquary of Sant Bernat Calvó in the Prioral Church of Reus, and the most outstanding, Pere Llopart, who produced the urn of Sant Ermengol in the Diocesan Museum of La Seu d'Urgell, similar to Matons's in its monumental size, structure (incorporating historical reliefs on the sides), technical quality and ornamental exuberance.

It is impossible to list the production of other Catalan workshops, though we must not overlook the sustained rate of creation of those in the Tarragona area, of a competence similar to that of the Barcelona workshops. It is worth mentioning the Arandes family, especially Gaspar Arandes (the Ark for the Maundy Thursday monument in the Cathedral of Tarragona), and the Quinsà family of Tortosa, the best of which was Innocenci Quinsà (several silver chalices with gold-plating and varnish and stained glass in the Cathedral of Tortosa, dating from the mid-eighteenth century). Equally outstanding

were some of the silversmiths of Reus, where a college of silversmiths was set up in 1774: Josep Albarado and Joan B. Ferrando. The last third of the eighteenth century is characterized by the splendid production of silversmiths who are still little-known, largely because their work is to be found outside the Principality, and who incorporate a decorative repertory that can be described as rococo. This is the line taken by the work of Antoni Riera, responsible for the chalice of Piedrahita (Ávila) and of some items of civil silverware (a dish in a private collection in Pamplona and a fruit-bowl in a private collection in Barcelona); Salvador Peradaltés, responsible for the chalices of the Cathedral of Jaén and of the Parish Church of Cebolla (Toledo) and for a fruit-bowl (private collection, Madrid); Pau Cot, with his memorable chalice of the Conception in Santa Cruz de Tenerife; Francesc Pintó, who qualified as a master craftsman in Madrid and moved to Barcelona in 1784, responsible for a tray in the Archaeological Museum in Madrid and a fruit-bowl (private collection) for the Duke of Frías's table service. Some of the pieces presented for the master's exam show a similar taste, like that of Anton Marlet (1765), which reveals a knowledge of French models in the manner of F. Gillot. However, the rococo trend gave way, also at the end of the eighteenth century, to the new Neo-Classical aesthetics that accompanied a radical change in outlook and training, which was to lead to the disappearance of the guilds and the master's exams and to the definitive crisis of baroque silverware. ●