



Johanes Woutersz llamado "Stap"

(Amsterdam 1599 – 1663 ca.)

Potius Pilate washing his hands

Oil on Panel

106,6 cm. x 75,1 cm.

1630 ca.

For the month of December we have chosen this great panel by the important seventeenth century Dutch painter Johannes Woutersz, also known as "Stap" specializing in portraits and biblical scenes. Represents "Pontius Pilate washing his hands." Thanks to the documentation of the time, we know that practically all develop his artistic activity in the city of Amsterdam, where born in 1599 and died at about age 64. He was a passionate student of different capture techniques of realism of objects in the still life, creating works strongly influenced by the "first" painters of the Netherlands as Massys, Van Roemerswaele and Van Hemessen is why it is says that Johannes Woutersz could be considered a Flemish artist of the sixteenth century, and that at no time follows the guidelines leading Dutch painting of the seventeenth century.

Initially painted religious subjects, but later will make genre scenes with the representation offices of notaries and treasurers, bankers weighing gold, poultry vendors and old professors with their students. All made with half-length figures with serious expressions, even harsh, with highly marked features in all his works that convey great strength hands.

In the case of our picture it is a masterpiece, high collection. Stap performed in the full maturity of his artistic activity, using a pyramidal composition in which the three characters locked within a monochromatic background which emphasizes more the figure. The protagonists are the tonalities brown, white and red, within a strong chiaroscuro. Striking brushstrokes loaded stuff white turban Pilate.

Only are cataloged about 25 pictures by Stap in different collections and museums around the world. In our case the work has been studied by Professor Dr. Fred G. Meijer and included within the files of the RKD of The Hague.

We are facing to a work that scholars have titled as "Pontius Pilate washing his hands," but we find several details that make us doubt this. First, Pontius Pilate was the Prefect of Judea that must try to execute Christ for blasphemy, because only the Romans could apply the death penalty. But never a Roman Prefect appears wearing a turban, this makes us think that it is probably Herod, as it appears in Bible, Luke 23 (6-12), Pilate at first to be a prisoner of Galilee Jesus sends it to Herod, but he gives it back saying it was not his matter to judge him.



Maybe Stap reinterpreted the "wash their hands like Pontius Pilate" and portrayed Herod, that it is common to represent him with a turban. Also found in the work a double-headed eagle over his head, when the Roman Empire had only one. In this sense it may refer to Herod as tetrarch of Judea.



We must emphasize the realism with which represents Woutersz hands of Pontius Pilate, in which can clearly see the veins. Furthermore, metal bowl with water which highlight the different shades and glosses splashes and reflections.





According to Professor Dr. Fred G. Meijer, the character depicted in the background by the (false) hebrew appears in the letters of his hat, could be one of the Jews who had pressured Pilate to proclaim his verdict. But really a Roman Prefect, is rare that is made accompanied by a Jew, it is much more probable that it be one of the advisers of Herod, who also advised him to "wash their hands" as to the destiny of Jesus. In his face we can see that this is an older man, which highlight wrinkles and gray hair. But it is his gesture meditative and wan gesture so striking, perhaps foreshadowing what will be happen next.

The third figure is the assistant young man who pours water on the hands of "Pilate", with a gesture of deep concentration and wearing a cloak of brown and the features of her face perfectly made, showing his bare knee in the lower left corner of the table.

We have to see how in other paintings of different artists with the same subject as the protagonist, usually includes the figure of Jesus arrested, but in our case it is not, perhaps to reflect with one of the most crucial moments of Christian history, and we must ask what would have happened if Pilate or Herod, in this case it does not matter, would have delivered Christ and had not washed their hands.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Registered y published in RKD of The Hague, with inventory n. 67281.
- Walther Bernt, *The Netherlandish Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, 1969, Vol. 3, pg. 141, plates 1421, 1422 y 1423.
- A. van Schendel, Jr., “Johannes Woutersz Stap”, *Oud Holland*, LIV, 1937, pág. 269-282, cat.nr.1, fig.1.
- E. Benezit, *Dictionnaire des peintres ...*, Tomo 14 pg. 722.

PROVENANCE

Spiridon Collection, Rome

Sold in Amsterdam, F. Muller & Co., 19 June of 1928, lot 53

Kurt Rheinheld, Berlin (as stated on label found on the back of painting)

Private Collection, England.

EXHIBITIONS

TurIn, Luigi Caretto Gallery, November 2012.

Moscow, Moscow World Fine Art Fair, December 2012.

Madrid, Feriarte 2013, Soraya Cartategui Gallery.

MUSEUMS

Johannes Woutersz's works can be found in many museums around the world including: Aix-la-Chapelle- Fine Arts Museum, Amsterdam- Rijksmuseum, Leipzig- Leipzig Museum, Athens- National Gallery, Basel- Kunstmuseum, Geneva- Fine Arts Museum, Munich- Staatsgemäldesamml.