Music automaton - male saint

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	11254.a-b
Artist/Maker:	Turriano, Juanelo (1510 - 1585)
Materials:	iron; limewood; silk damask
Techniques:	carved; painted
Dimensions:	height: 41 cm base diameter: 14 cm

A saint with a beard his head, hands and feet elaborately carved. The case of the mechanism (the figure's body) is turned. It is made of iron, steel and wood, with some copper parts (e.g. the gilt halo in the head). The bells are cast bronze. The wooden harmony cylinder has steel prickles. The key-wound spring mechanism can be started by pushing the right foot of the figure. During the glockenspiel it moves the whole arm, shaking the bell in the hand, turns the head from right to left and back, moves the eyes and lips, finally, at the end of the programme, causes the head to nod. The melody and the movements are repeated twice per programme. The figure's beige silk damask shirt and blue silk damask robe with braids of metal thread were both added in the 18th century. The unfitted grooves on the cylinder mean that the figure's movements were accompanied by another melody. The harmony we can hear today is considered a secular rather than a religious one by Éva Ferenczy, a Hungarian music historian. There are only three automata of the same age discovered so far: one is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, "A Lady Playing the Lute" the other is in a private collection, "A Lady Playing Music" and the third is in the Washington National Museum of History and Technology, representing a Franciscan monk. The movement of the head and the moving techniques of the latter one are almost identical with the piece described above.

We only have knowledge of two other automata of praying (Franciscan) monks that are nearly contemporaneous with the Budapest figure: one in the Deutsches Museum in Munich, the other in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution – National Museum of American History in Washington, DC. Their clockworks are closely analogous to that of the Budapest piece, and they are sized almost identically. Also of similar size and construction is the musical automaton known as the Lute Playing Lady in the Kunstkammer of the Viennese Kunsthistorisches Museum, believed to be the work of Giovanni Torriano/Juanelo Turriano (c. 1510–1585), from around 1570. Turriano, who was born in Italy, served first as court clock master to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and then to his son, King Philip II of Spain.

Given the similarities, it is likely that both the Washington and Munich figures were made by Turriano. Based on the structural similarities, Maros Donka attributed the Budapest automaton to the Spanish master, with reason to believe that a sculpture of such high quality and special design was commissioned by the Spanish court.

Ancient man already tried to imitate the movement of living beings with different machines, but they were very large and immobile. Small and portable automata like this were made possible by the invention of the key-wound clockwork mechanism and the fusee.

During the periods of mannerism and baroque, automata—moving mechanical figures—were cherished items in the collections of princely courts. Like so many microcosms, these cabinets of curiosities represented the world in miniature, equally highlighting the endless metamorphosis of nature, divine creative power, and the playful imagination of humans. Mechanical toys and human-shaped automata were special manifestations of the latter, and in a sense imitated divine creation. Inventors have striven to create a perpetuum mobile since ancient times. In addition to the jealously guarded original works in princely collections, the Jesuits also used automata, especially in the nativity plays and other theatrical performances. This piece may be a case in point, being the representation of a Jesuit saint.

Literature

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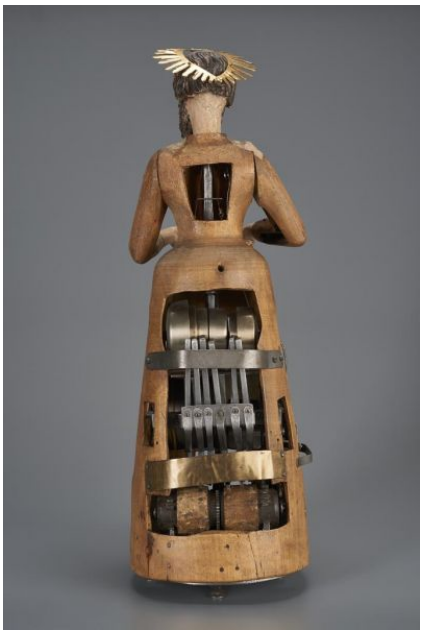












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