



Panel With The Head Of Saint John The Baptist. Southern Italy, 17th Century.



4 550 EUR

Period : 17th century

Condition : Etat d'usage

Description

Devotional Panel of the Severed Head of Saint John the Baptist. Southern Italy, probably Apulia, 17th century. Polychrome painting on wood panel. Measurements: approx. 33.5 × 25.5 cm. A vernacular devotional painting depicting the severed head of Saint John the Baptist, rendered directly onto a wood panel. The saint's head is shown inclined, eyes closed and mouth slightly open, with a cropped beard and shoulder-length hair tucked beneath a cloth headdress. The neck is exposed and marked with red pigment to denote the site of execution. The image is set within a circular field, bordered by a painted ochre-yellow band bearing a Latin apotropaic inscription in black capitals: "DAEMONES ET MORBOSQUE GRAVANDOS A ME FUGANDO" ("May demons and grievous illnesses flee from me").

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Beneath the medallion is a painted cartouche with further devotional text, now partially abraded, which appears to invoke divine mercy through the intercession of Saint John. The corners of the panel are decorated with stylised foliate elements in ochre and grey tones. The overall execution is direct and expressive, characteristic of southern Italian devotional art made for domestic veneration during the Counter-Reformation. The use of bold linear patterning and limited palette reflects the visual language of local workshop or lay production rather than formal ecclesiastical commission. The reverse bears an ink inscription in Italian recording the panel's provenance. It notes that the piece belonged to Irene Ricca, reputed to have lived over one hundred years, and was passed down to Italia Giuseppina Gigliobianco. The dedication is dated Taranto, 25 Aprile 1921, and signed by Don Michele Carluccio, suggesting a priestly endorsement of its devotional value and familial transmission.

Comparisons
Depictions of San Giovanni Decollato in this format are attested across southern Italy, particularly in Apulia and Basilicata, where the saint was invoked for protection against disease, plague, and spiritual affliction. A closely related painted example is held by the Museo Diocesano of Matera. See also:- Luigi S. De Donato, *Culto e iconografia di San Giovanni Decollato nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, Bari, 1998.- Franco Cardini, *Immagini sacre e magia popolare*, Florence, 2003, pp. 45-47.