



PROANTIC
LE PLUS BEAU CATALOGUE D'ANTIQUITES

Saint Apollonia. Oil On Panel. Spanish School. 15th Century



5 000 EUR

Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Etat d'usage

Material : Oil painting on wood

Width : 50,5

Height : 72,5

Description

Dimensions: 72.5 cm high x 50.5 cm wide Saint Apollonia is traditionally venerated as the patron saint of dentists and the protector against pain and dental diseases. Her story dates back to the 3rd century A.D., in Alexandria, Egypt, during the persecutions of Christians under Emperor Decius. According to hagiographic tradition, Apollonia was a young Christian, a consecrated virgin, known for her deep devotion to Christ and the steadfastness of her faith. During the persecution, she was arrested and subjected to various forms of torture in an attempt to make her renounce her beliefs. However, Apollonia remained faithful to her faith until the very end. The best-known episode of her martyrdom was the violent extraction of her teeth. Despite the suffering she endured, the saint refused to

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Calle Conde de Aranda, 20, bajo derecha A

Madrid 28001

renounce Christianity and died a martyr. It is precisely this episode that led to her later association with dentistry, becoming, over the centuries, her principal iconographic attribute. Saint Apollonia was thus invoked as a protector against toothaches and dental ailments. Although her martyrdom took place in the 3rd century, the depiction of Saint Apollonia experienced a particular surge in popularity in the 14th and 15th centuries, coinciding with the heyday of theatrical performances of hagiographic episodes. These theatrical productions helped establish an iconography in which, in addition to the saint, other figures associated with her martyrdom might appear, such as the executioners or Emperor Decius himself. This oil on panel depicts precisely the most dramatic moment of her martyrdom. Saint Apollonia appears at the center of the composition, as one of her executioners--dressed in a velvety green costume--is pulling out her teeth. While he carries out the torture, another figure standing behind the saint holds her back to prevent her from escaping. The scene thus takes on a distinctly narrative and dramatic character, directly depicting the martyr's suffering. Witnessing the torture, Emperor Decius appears, seated on the throne, identified as the authority who ordered her torture. His presence not only situates the scene within the historical context of the persecutions but also introduces a clear contrast between earthly power and the saint's spiritual steadfastness. Thus, the work presents Apollonia as an example of strength and fidelity to her beliefs, making the episode of her martyrdom the central element of her depiction.