



Thorvaldsen: John the Baptist preaching in the desert

The miniature relief of John the Baptist preaching in the desert, hanging on the west wall beside the door to the narthex, is by the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844).

The original of this work is found above the entrance to Copenhagen Cathedral (Vor Frue Kirke). Thorvaldsen used his experience from restoring an original temple end wall of the Agina temple (in Greece) when he created the group around John the Baptist. The figures, depicted as actively listening, are intended to represent a broad cross-section of people – young and old, men, women and children, the shepherd, the Pharisee and the teacher of the law.

The commission was agreed in November 1819 and completed in October 1822. It was originally designed as a relief, but Thorvaldsen changed it to freestanding sculptures. Thorvaldsen had hoped that the sculptures would be cast in bronze but, this proving too expensive, they were made of clay. The weather immediately took its toll, to the point where, in 1878, the statues were carved in marble. Finally, in 1928, the entire group was moulded in bronze.

The miniature version in St Alban's Church was a gift from Baroness C.S. Dæring Rosenkrantz, who was a staunch supporter of the church for over twenty years up to her death in 1919. It is made of biscuit (bisque, from biscoctus, fired twice): porcelain which has been fired (once) but not glazed.