The Dormition of the Virgin and *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child*

Two Late Gothic artworks from Germany
at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

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German retables

In 1996, the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum acquired a German relief depicting *The Dormition of the Virgin* [fig. 1][1] on the art market in Madrid. The work was originally part of a German Late Gothic retable, as was the sculpture known as *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* [fig. 2] that became part of the Museum collection in 1957[2]. German retables tended to be built differently from their Spanish counterparts, as most of the latter were made with fixed structures, in which reliefs or paintings alternated with rounded figures[3]. In Germany, however, they were almost all exclusively variable, and thus adaptable to the needs of the ecclesiastical year. This was true above all in the hundred years preceding Luther's reformation; from that time on, the production of large retables came to an abrupt and almost complete stop, even in areas faithful to the Catholic religion[4]. Some fixed structures from the early 15th century and before have survived, particularly retables in stone[5]. They made something of a comeback a few years before the Reformation, with clear Renaissance influences and a return to the use of stone. However, at that late stage, examples remained scarce.

Such exceptions apart, German retables usually comprised a table (in painted retables) or a rectangular shrine in the centre. They had doors that were usually kept closed, being opened only for the most important feast days in the liturgical year. In the earliest surviving examples of this kind of retable, from the late 13th century, retable makers were still experimenting with different construction methods[6]; from the 14th century onwards, however, two side doors were generally used to close them[7]. Any sculptures (normally three figures of saints, carved more or less in the round) would be placed in the shrines [fig. 3]. Some retables are known to have only a single figure in their shrines[8]. The shrines in the largest retables could

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1   Ana Sánchez-Lassa in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 2006, p. 23 and *Maestros antiguos y modernos...* 2001, p. 24.

2   Ana Sánchez-Lassa in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 2006, p. 22 and *Maestros antiguos y modernos...* 2001, p. 25.

3   One of the few exceptions is to be found in the Cathedral of Tortosa, Catalonia. Weniger 2001.

4   In Bavaria, for instance, no major retable was commissioned until 1560 when Hans Mielich began to paint the new high altarpiece in the Our Lady's Church at Ingolstadt.

5   A good example is the high retable at the church of St. Martin in Landshut, from 1424, which was completed with doors at a much later date. See Friedrich Kobler in Landshut 2001, pp. 256-271, cats. 17-18; also Kahsnitz 2005, p. 19, figs. 19-20.

6   There are isolated examples where the retable cover could be lowered to be hidden inside the mensa of the altar, as is the case with the late 13th-century high retable at the church of St. Elizabeth in Marburg. See Köstler 2001, pp. 51-59.

7   For the early history of the retable with moveable doors, see Wolf 2002. For a general history of retables with doors, see Bachmann... [et al.] 2003.

8   Some retables with two figures have also survived, several of them in Bavaria (Weniger 2008, pp. 35-44), while others can be seen in regions like Carinthia. See Demus 1991, p. 345, fig. 416; p. 171, fig. 189 for a retable from Carinthia now in Berlin (inv. 2770).

1. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Lime-wood bas-relief, 106.5 x 100 x 4 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 96/6

2. Circle of Niklaus Weckmann (documented between 1481 and 1528)
Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child, c. 1510-1520
Polychrome wood, 151 x 43 x 30 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/387

3. Studio of Niklaus Weckmann (documented in Ulm, Swabia, between 1481 and 1528)
Anne flanked by Saints Sebastian and Roque
Betzisried retable, St. Anne's chapel, c. 1515-1529
Betzisried (near Ottobeuren)

4. Veit Stoss (documented in 1476-1533)
High retable, the Church of the Assumption, 1477-1489
1285 x 1068 cm (open)
Krakow

house more than three figures[9]. Other retables have a narrative scene in the centre, but these are less frequent than the other model [fig. 4]. The saints were normally depicted standing up, although some seated figures have also survived, particularly when images of the Madonna with the Child are involved[10]. Retable doors often had paintings outside and inside or reliefs inside [figs. 5 and 6][11] and paintings on the outside [fig. 7]. Artists usually chose standing figures of saints or story scenes for the reliefs. In large retables, if story scenes were favoured, two superimposed stories normally appeared in more or less square shaped areas, so four scenes in all were visible when the retable was open [figs. 5 and 6]. The Bilbao relief would seem to come from a retable of this type. Other retables are known to have had doors showing just one story, with slimmer proportions [fig. 8] and, exceptionally, others could even depict up to three superimposed scenes [fig. 4][12].

Major retables could be fitted with a second pair of doors, painted inside and out, and there were some retables painted in their entirety, with a central panel instead of one of the shrines described above. The earliest examples date from before the first known retables with sculptures. Painted retables are known to have existed in Franconia and Bavaria as well as Cologne and Westphalia. In the neighbouring Low Countries, the Van Eyck brothers and Rogier van der Weyden produced prominent works of this kind.

9   Examples of this could be seen in the main church in Ulm (Our Lady's Church, Ulmer Münster), the monastery at Blaubeuren and the parish church of Ersingen, where the retables had five figures. On the Ulm retable (now lost, with only a preliminary sketch surviving), see essays by David Gropp and Anja Schneckenburger-Broschek in Ulm 2002, pp. 66-75 and pp. 76-85. With regard to the Blaubeuren retable, see Stuttgart 1993, p. 333, fig. 486; Moraht-Fromm/Schürle 2002; Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 180-207. For the Ersingen retable, see Stuttgart 1993, p. 331, fig. 483.

10 For some other examples, in particular depictions of St. James and other saintly clerics, see Weniger 2008.

11 The retable by Veit Stoss in Krakow [fig. 4] also has, exceptionally, reliefs on the outer doors, i.e. on both sides of the doors. Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 134-163.

12 This system is only found in important retables, like the one of the *Death of the Virgin*, by Veit Stoss, in Krakow (Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 134-163), and the one in the church of St. Peter in Munich, by Erasmus Grasser and Jan Polack (Freising/Munich 2004). They are so rare that it seems unlikely that the Bilbao relief comes from a similar grouping.

5. Hans Klocker (documented between 1474 and 1498)
Bozen retable, completed in 1500
314 x 353 x 43 cm (original crown lost)
Church of the Franciscans, Bozen

6. Veit Stoss (documented in 1476-1533)
High retable, Schwabach, 1505-1508
1350 x 631 x 86 cm
Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Martin,
Schwabach (near Nuremberg)

Under the shrine or central panel, German retables usually had a predella, a platform or step on which the altar rests, which often housed relics, sculptures or paintings. Later the Monstrance could also be stored there, mirroring developments in the retable in Spain. Although some early retables are known to have been used to house the Monstrance[13], in general it was kept in cabinets, often placed inside the walls of the choir, or in freestanding structures, like the famous Tabernacle towers that have survived in a number of regions in Germany. The fact that some primitive retables were used to keep relics or the Monstrance was probably one of the factors that led to the first retables with shrines that could be closed, although this has been the subject of much discussion[14].

A screen with turrets, pinnacles and baldachins, often with carved images, usually rose up above the case of the retable. The screen could be as high as, or even higher than, the rest of the retable[15]. On many occasions it contained the Crucifixion scene, which also topped off many Spanish retables. Some times, the retables had carved figures on both sides of the shrine, which were only visible when the doors were closed [fig. 7]. In German these figures were known as *Schreinwächter*, i.e. "guardians of the retable."

With or without sculptures, the models described were widely employed in central Europe, predominating from Scandinavia, in the north, to the Tyrol [fig. 5] and Carinthia in the south; and from Alsace and part of France in the west[16] to the Baltic and some regions of what is now Hungary in the east. In other words, up

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13 One of the very few examples is to be found in the retable of Landshut, from 1424. See note 5. In one of the earliest surviving retables, in the Cistercian church at Bad Doberan, there is a Madonna in the central space that could, apparently, hold a pyx with the Monstrance. See Laabs 2001.

14 The origin of these discussions was an essay by Harald Keller (Keller 1965). See also Weniger 2001; Wolf 2002; Bachmann... [et al.] 2003. Today there is something of a consensus accepting that the phenomenon of the retable with doors must have been the result of several parallel processes, and that there is no single explanation for its appearance.

15 For Spain and Portugal, see the retable in Tortosa mentioned above.

16 On the early history of the retable in France, see the catalogue of the Paris exhibition 2009.

7. Michael Pacher (documented in 1465-1498)
High retable, St. Wolfgang (commissioned 1471, finished 1481)
1088 x 330 x 97 cm
Parish church of St. Wolfgang, Salzkammergut, Austria

8. Studio of Niklaus Weckmann (documented between 1481 and 1528)
Death of the Virgin
Retable, Reutti, 1498 (inscription on box)
Parish church of St. Margaret, Reutti (Neu-Ulm)

to the places under Byzantine influence in the southeast and east, and where Italian and Mediterranean models prevailed in the south and southwest. Similar models were not unknown in the Low Countries either. However, there and in some neighbouring regions of northwest Germany, the retable shrines that contained sculptures usually showed narrative scenes featuring figures that rarely exceed 60 centimetres in height, while the images in the shrines of retables in the rest of Germany normally measured more than a metre, some even being life-size or larger. In the *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child,* in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, the figures are as much as 151 centimetres tall.

Retables consisting of a shrine containing a single figure with a more or less square base are a different case altogether. They opened from the front and at both sides, so the central image was visible from three sides. Such works were also called "baldachins with figures." In these graceful retables, the doors generally bore paintings on both sides, although some had reliefs on the inside. In truth, we are dealing with the same schema, on a monumental scale, found in the small 14th-century French Madonnas in ivory. There are examples in wooden retables of the 13th century, before the more monumental ones made their appearance, and the model enjoyed a renaissance in the 15th century in southern Germany, particularly Franconia [fig. 9][17].

The figures in German retables stand usually on solid ground, carved as part of the same piece to imitate grass or even stone. Following a widespread system, in *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* [fig. 11] the surface of the wood has clearly been worked on with an iron in zigzag to imitate grass. The images in the boxes could only be seen from the front, which is why they were almost always hollowed out at the back, to reduce the weight and to

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17 A whole series of retables of this type came from Weissenburg, in central Franconia, to the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (inv. MA 1959, MA 1960 and MA 1961). See Hack 2004, which has details on the latest treatments applied to one of the retables.

9. Anonymous, central Franconia
Retable, Weissenburg, c. 1477. 410 x 315 cm
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
Inv. no. MA 1961

prevent the wood from deforming. Being an organic material, wood continues to dilate in damp surroundings and contract in the dry, which leads to cracks that, generally speaking, move radially outwards from the centre of the trunk. For this reason, the sculptor tried to reduce volume as much as possible. In this respect, *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* is no exception. Indeed, the work owes its admirable state of conservation partly to this procedure [fig. 10].

The models of retables described were adapted to smaller works for private devotional use, and to the major retables installed in the larger churches. The latter tended to be less monumental than Spanish retables, but even so they could still be up to 20 metres high in all. The most important churches could have anything up to fifty altars, and many of them had carved and/or painted retables[18]. Although the literature refers to more than three thousand Gothic retables surviving to the 20th century in Germany, only part of the total number existing around 1520 have come down to us. The retables were decimated first by Luther's Reformation, later, by the urge to

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18 Murals also served as retables. Weilandt 2007 provides a reconstruction and a superb analysis of the inventory of a German Late church, its functions and uses.

10. Circle of Niklaus Weckmann (documented between 1481 and 1528)
Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child, c. 1510-1520
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Reverse

11. Circle of Niklaus Weckmann (documented between 1481 and 1528)
Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child, c. 1510-1520
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

modernize that characterised the Baroque period, and finally by the excesses related to the secularisation in Napoleonic times. Some calculations put the original number of Gothic retables in the Tyrol alone, which accounted for a small part of the German-speaking regions at the time, at around two thousand[19]. But it should not be forgotten that, from mediaeval times, church furniture has usually been renewed with each passing generation. This explains why the huge majority of German retables that have survived in their integrity or in part come from the thirty years prior to the Lutheran Reformation, while relatively few examples survive from previous decades or from the 13th and 14th centuries. *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* and the relief of *The Dormition of the Virgin* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum form part of this last generation of German retables before the Reformation.

Retables with sculptures were usually commissioned from sculptors or painters, or occasionally from the carpenters who built the shrines. Some artists, like Michael Pacher [fig. 7], were painters and sculptors at the same time, but in general, the artist receiving the commission subcontracted work on retables out to representatives of the other crafts involved. To facilitate the division of work, the reliefs were normally carved separately and were fixed on the doors (the other sides of which had been painted beforehand) at the end of the process, using wooden spigots. On the back of many individual paintings from the Gothic

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19 For all these figures, see Kahsnitz 2005, p. 10.

12. Anonymous, German
Panels from a retable of the Virgin, c. 1500
Backs bearing traces of lost reliefs apparently showing scenes
from the life of Saint Anne, St. Joachim or the childhood of Jesus
Tempera on fir-tree panel, 122 x 79 cm (each one)
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
Inv. no. MA3203; MA3204

period that originally belonged to retables, one can see the preparation or the paint applied in the zones not covered by the reliefs, silhouetting their contours, which enables us to guess fairly accurately which themes were depicted there [fig. 12]. Sometimes words written in Gothic characters, which actually name the saint or the story to be fixed in the place reserved for it, are visible. Only in a few isolated cases were reliefs and paintings executed on the same piece of wood, testimony to a particularly close cooperation between the two professions[20].

Technical procedures

Despite the differences in the construction of the retables in Germany with regard to the models known in Spain, similar procedures were in fact followed in the execution of paintings and sculptures. One partial explanation for this might be the sheer number of artists from the north who had come to work in Spain.

In many cases, painters did not just execute the paintings of the retable, taking responsibility as well for gilding and painting on the sculptures. Only then was the work considered to be completely finished, as many sculptors tended to gloss over some surface features, including the eyes, which they left to the painters to work on in detail. Some decorative elements were not carved in wood, but were modelled directly on the ground, acting as a base for the painting. As in Spain, retables shone with gold. However, in Germany gold was reserved for the interior of the retable, which was only visible a few times a year. This means that the opening of the retables must have had an enormous impact on the spectator. The saints' cloaks and the

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20 Good examples are the panels painted by Wolf Huber, which have reliefs of the Master of Irrsdorf on the back. On these and similar works, see Kobler 2006 and Kobler 2007.

backgrounds in the boxes and the inner sides of the doors were usually covered in gold. The architectural structure of the retables was also usually gilded. All these gilt areas on the inside of the retables reminded the faithful of a reality beyond this world, giving them a vision of heaven and future glory. The radiant effect of the gold at Masses said at night to mark the most important feasts, like Christmas Eve or Midnight Mass at Easter, with the entire church lit by candle, must have made a remarkably powerful impression. According to from books with annotations on the functions of sacristans that have survived in several areas of Germany, one of their tasks was to open the retables on the eve of major feast days[21]. Meanwhile, the external parts of the retable, the only ones visible most of the year, almost always lacked gold adornment or embellishment. Even the frames were often painted black or red.

One of the most sophisticated features of German polychromy of the time was the imitation of brocade with gold thread. To capture the effect of these luxury fabrics, a subtle relief was embossed on wafer-thin sheets of metal. Next, filler paste was applied to the relief from behind to stabilize it. After the sheets had been painted and gilded, they were finally applied to the surface of the images, retable shrines or the paintings themselves. Artists from the north introduced this applied brocade technique also in Spain. At times, other techniques were employed to enhance the illusionism of the surface, using other materials, including glass, textile, leather, paper and hair. Curiously, the *estofado* technique, so popular among Spanish sculptors, was unknown in Germany.

Given the complex nature of the work and the price of gold and a number of the more expensive colours, it is not surprising that in some surviving contracts the polychromy was on occasions valued higher than the work done by the actual sculptor. This appreciation is in powerful contrast with attitudes widespread in the 19th century. Without understanding the workshop practiques that led to the execution of gothic retables, in the 19th century it was felt that greater justice would be done to a sculpture if it were seen without additional adornments. One factor in this view was the widely shared admiration for the works of Tilman Riemenschneider and other carvings that had never been painted, or which had at least been conceived by the artists to be complete without the addition of paint. However, the polychromy on many sculptures that do not belong to this small group was also removed mechanically or by treating the works with dissolvents. On other Gothic sculptures, the original polychromy was replaced during the Baroque —either because of its parlous state of conservation or because of a change in aesthetic preferences— and, in some cases, this practice can still be observed even today[22]. As some details and embellishments had been executed exclusively during the painting phase, some works undergoing this kind of treatment simply are no longer complete.

One may also add that such aggressive "restorations" even harmed the precious few works that had not been conceived for polychrome. Early non-painted retables of this kind appeared towards the end of the 15th century. For works such as these, much more care had to be taken in selecting the wood and a much more delicate surface treatment was required. Instead of painted decorations, certain details, like the selvage on clothing, were frequently defined or decorated with incisions or punches. Also in these cases, the carved surfaces were not left "bare," as a layer was applied to protect them and achieve a warmer tone. Furthermore, some details, such as eyes and mouths, were painted. Despite all the care taken in the treatment of the surface, many of these sculptures were subsequently painted in the traditional manner, in line with current taste. In several cases, records show that polychrome was added just a few years after the sculptor had finished the job. One well-documented case involves the retable at Münnerstadt, carved

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21 Some cases are quoted by Friedrich Kobler in Bachmann... [et al.] 2003, col. 1475-1478. See also Wolf 2002, pp. 341-342. Remember also that, during feast day celebrations at Cluny a golden cloth, originally covered by other fabrics, was unveiled on the altar (ibid., p. 343).

22 For a relatively recent treatment of this kind, see Hubel 1979.

by Tilman Riemenschneider and painted a few years later by Veit Stoss. The later history of this group may point to the fate in store for many German Gothic sculptures, as the Veit Stoss polychrome was later replaced by one of Baroque taste, which has also disappeared. The catalogue of an auction held in 1901 shows some pieces from the retable with polychrome still in place and, when this was eliminated shortly after, the remains of the original monochrome layer, which may have survived until then, may have been damaged at the same time[23].

Polychrome in the German works in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

Of the two retable fragments acquired by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* still retains a fine polychromy. The gilt visible was probably redone in more modern times, as occurred with many Gothic pieces, although the effect must in any case be very similar to the original. More interesting still are the remains of the imitations of the gold brocade of the type mentioned above, appreciable in the tunic the saint wears beneath her cloak of gold [fig. 11]. Although these brocades were so delicate that they, over the centuries, inevitably suffered greater damage than the rest of the painted areas, the remains on view give a fair idea of the original decoration. Finally, some mention is required of the subtle treatment of the flesh tones, with delicate reds on the cheeks of all three characters portrayed.

In contrast, *The Dormition of the Virgin* has no polychrome, although it most likely did so originally[24]. Criss-crossing lines can be seen on the surface [fig. 13] around the joints of the relief's five lime wood panels (*tilia sp.*)[25]. This procedure is usually observed in zones where other elements had to be fixed on. In this case these were almost certainly strips of cloth or fabric, i.e. textiles as also found in Spanish works, applied to provide a more homogeneous surface, on which the ground and the polychrome would then be applied. These strips of cloth as support, applied at the joints of the wood panels, were designed to reduce the risk of the paint cracking and lifting as the joints moved. Without polychrome, there is no reason for the strips to be there. Similar strips were applied more recently on the back of the Bilbao relief to cover and stabilize the joints and cracks in the wood [fig. 14].

The fact the sculptor knew the work would be painted also explains why the treatment of some zones is, in sculptural terms, somewhat less refined, left for completion in polychrome —now lost— by the painter. The lack of separation between the hair and beard and skin in the faces of some of the apostles would seem to point in this direction [fig. 15], as does the lack of decoration in the selvage on their robes.

Despite everything, the relief demonstrates that the main concern of German artists of the time was to provide as varied as possible a delineation of the folds in robes. In some surviving preliminary German drawings on paper, the greatest attention is given to the folds, unlike the faces, which are scarcely treated at all. The interest in drawing, decoration and the "calligraphy" of line was a feature of German art of the time, an observation that may even be applied to the paintings of Dürer. In his famous book, Michael Baxandall studies these aesthetic concerns in German Late gothic sculpture[26].

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23 Rudolf Göbel tried to reconstruct, as far as possible, the original effect in one of the retable's reliefs. See Göbel/Fischer 2001 and Göbel/Fischer 2004. The 1901 auction was held at the Rudolph Lepke art auction house in Berlin: "Kunstschätze aus Schloss Mainberg [...], Öffentliche Versteigerung [...] 29. October, bis (...) 2. November 1901, Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin S.W. [...]" (Lepke-Katalog no. 1280).

24 Contrary to what it is said in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 1999, p. 72. Subsequently, in 2006, the possibility of it having been polychromed at origin was mentioned. See Ana Sánchez-Lassa in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 2006, p. 23.

25 Analysis by Andrés Sánchez Ledesma and Marcos del Mazo Valentín at Arte-Lab S.L., Madrid, 2008 (sample taken from the last panel on the right).

26 Baxandall 1980.

13. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail, joint between two panels

14. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Reverse

In the oldest known photograph of the work in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, the relief still has a deteriorated polychromy, although this is unlikely to be the original [fig. 16]. The photograph is reproduced in an unpublished album from around 1930, which displayed the collection of Dr. Karl Krüger, of Hanover, then up for sale[27]. From the photograph, the painting would appear subsequently to have been heavily retouched, if not totally renovated, possibly in the 18th century. An X-ray produced at the Museum [fig. 17][28] shows some remains of the ground that have survived to the present day and which, owing to the lead content, provide a strong contrast on the image. When, in February 1972, the relief came to light again with one of Munich's most famous gallery owners, Julius Böhler, it no longer had the polychrome, looking then much as it does today [fig. 19].

The inset work of the five windows opened at the back must have produced a special effect when the relief was placed in its retable. One needs to imagine a layer of colour or perhaps gold leaf behind. Such effects can be seen in retables in a number of regions in Germany[29], and there are even cases where the actual retable box opens at the back, letting light in from the large windows in the choir. In some cases, panes of real glass were placed in the gaps in the retable itself[30].

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27 The author used the copy from the archive of the Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Additional documentation is held at the Zentralarchiv at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. See below.

28 Taken at the facilities of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum by the Bilbao firm SGS Tecnos S.A., using portable equipment and Agfa D4 X-ray plate.

29 Good examples are the reliefs of *The Entry into Jerusalem* and *The Visitation* from the retables in Creglingen and Rothenburg, by Riemenschneider (Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 234, 252), and, among others, the reliefs on the side doors of the retables at Kefermarkt, near Passau, for instance, the one of the *Death of the Virgin* (ibid., p. 173), or the reliefs at Blaubeuren in Swabia (ibid., pp. 196-197, figs. 97-98). The practice was widespread and examples from other regions could also be adduced. See below.

30 The most famous case involves the retables with the *Assumption of the Virgin* in Creglingen and, with authentic glass windows, the *Last Supper* in Rothenburg, both by Tilman Riemenschneider (Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 238-239, 245-248 and 250, and also 224-225 and 229-232). Previously, this idea had been put into practice in the retable at Lautenbach, which was conceived in Strasburg, a hugely important artistic centre at the time, which also influenced the young Riemenschneider (ibid., pp. 111-117). From the same zone, see the retable at Kippenheim, the box of which is now lost (ibid., p. 26, fig. 29) and the one at Oberndorf, with glass windows (ibid., p. 33, fig. 38). The box of the retable at Niederlana has doors that can be opened backwards to create special effects (ibid., pp. 277-279, figs. 119-120).

15. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

The original context of the works at Bilbao

In the photograph from 1930 or so, the work was already independent, with no other components from the same group identifiable in the Krüger collection. The collection also boasted a graceful carving of a youth holding a container in his hand, possibly the youngest of the Magi, from the shrine of a retable. The face is similar to the ones of the characters in the relief, but the hair is given a much freer treatment and the clothes hardly have any of the characteristic angular folds of the relief, which means it would be very risky indeed to link the two, particularly on the sole evidence of a photograph[31]. In the album nothing is said about the origin of the relief, its history prior to coming into Krüger's possession, or about other fragments that might have been saved from the same retable. The collection was offered in Neustadt, not far from Hanover, by Fritz Kollmeyer, a businessman and collector who, according to one of his descendants, was also active as an art dealer[32]. In his letter of presentation, Kollmeyer only mentioned Krüger's knowledge of art history, commenting that the latter had built up his collection, fundamentally sculptures, over sixty years. In a report commissioned in 1929, Theodor Demmler, director of the collection of sculptures in Berlin, declared that he had known Dr. Karl Krüger for some fifteen years[33]. Little more is known on Krüger. Some of the works in the album —although not the relief we are interested in here— came to light again in 1941 (from 26 to 29 November) in a sale at Lempertz in Cologne, where they were described as belonging to the collection of a Dr. Krüger of Meran, in southern Tyrol.

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31 Number 51 in the Berlin album; according to this, from the Lower Eno, gilt; with an attribution to Grasser and identified as Saint Cosmas. The figure's measurement is given as 135 cm, which could indeed fit the measures of the relief (for the probable organization of the retable from which the *Death of the Virgin* comes, see below).

32 For some details on Kollmeyer, born in 1858, see http://dupres-kollmeyer.de/de/Unternehmen/Historie.php.

33 As Krüger put his entire collection up for sale (at a very high price, 420.000 German marks), the Ministry of Agriculture requested a report from the Ministry of Culture. The director general of Berlin's museums eventually passed the commission to Demmler. The letter from the Ministry refers to one of the largest private collections of Gothic sculptures in wood in Germany. Demmler wrote that the Museum of Berlin had bought works from Krüger in the past, but doubted the remaining collection was of such high value. Max J. Friedländer produced another report, now kept at the Zentralarchiv of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (SKS60, ff. 320-321).

16. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Old photograph, c. 1930
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturen Sammlung

17. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
X-ray

18. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Old photograph, c. 1972
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich

So any further information will have to be gleaned from the work itself. Judging by its structure, it must have been placed on the inside of a retable door. Although there are still traces of the spigots used to fix the relief to the structure of the retable, they are not easy to see, as they are hidden by the strips of fabric on the back [fig. 14]. It is highly likely that the retable's lost door had a painting on the back. The information provided by the X-ray goes some way to giving an idea of the primitive set-up [fig. 17].

As I have noted above, the relief's more or less square format means it was almost certainly part of a retable in which two reliefs were superimposed on both side doors, which was the usual system for large retables [figs. 5 and 6]. Given the theme, we may suppose that it comes from a cycle dealing with events in the life of the Virgin. Although the Death of the Virgin was frequently depicted in these cycles, the themes dealt with in the other reliefs, with which it alternated, could vary considerably. Among the complete cycles surviving today, it is most often combined with depictions of themes ranging from the Annunciation to the adoration of the Magi[34]. In these sequences, chronology dictated that the Death of the Virgin would almost always be last, i.e. on the lower right. To get an idea of the role the Bilbao relief might have played in such context, one should compare it with, for instance, the Schwabach retable near Nuremberg, by Veit Stoss and his studio [fig. 6][35].

Judging by its size (106.5 x 100 x 4 cm), the relief could well have belonged to the high retable of some mid-sized parish church. The dimentions of in the main retables of very large churches are in general slightly larger[36]. However, the theme of the Dormition or Death of the Virgin was also dealt with in much smaller, rectangular shaped reliefs[37]. It is hard to tell whether these smaller reliefs were conceived for a predella[38] or if they were meant for private devotion. The latter possibility is valid, at least, for some highly sophisticated Renaissance-style examples[39]. However, the relief of *The Dormition of the Virgin* in Bilbao was surely conceived to be seen from a certain distance and only from the front. One only has to look closely at the highly realistic chain on the censer of the apostle on the left, exact when seen from the front but blurred when seen from the side.

The image of *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child* is hollowed out at the back, which means it was certainly not meant to be seen from the back. Judging by its graceful outline, it could well come from a figure baldachin, although it may also have been part of one of the figures of saints fixed into a traditional retable structure. As the baldachin type of retable does not seem to have proliferated in the region the figure originates from,

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34 Retable of St. Stephen in Wiener Neustadt, Vienna, first half of the 15th century: *Birth, Adoration of the Magi* and *Coronation of the Virgin* (Kahsnitz 2005, p. 277, fig. 118); high retable at Kefermarkt: *Annunciation, Birth* and *Adoration of the Magi* (ibid., pp. 164-179); Hans Klocker, high retable in the church of the Franciscans in Bozen [fig. 5]: *Annunciation, Presentation* and *Circumcision* (ibid., pp. 208-221); Mauer bei Melk: *Annunciation, Visitation* and *Birth* (ibid., pp. 332-333); Diocesan Museum, Freising, four reliefs from the high retable at Maria Thalkirchen, Munich: *Annunciation, Birth* and *Adoration of the Magi* (Freising 1999, pp. 136-142, cat. 13, text by Peter B. Steiner and Erwin Emmerling); high retable at St. Wolfgang ob Grades, Carinthia: *Annunciation, Birth* and *Coronation of the Virgin* (Demus 1991, p. 363, figs. 441-444); high retable at the parish church, Hallstadt, Austria: *Birth of the Virgin, Annunciation* and *Presentation in the Temple* (*Gotik Schätze Oberösterreich* 2002, p. 320, fig. 6); high retable, Schwabach [fig. 6]: *Birth, Resurrection* and *Pentecost* (Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 254-275); four reliefs from the retable at the castle of Grünwald, Munich: *Annunciation, Birth* and *Adoration of the Magi* (Müller 1959, pp. 54-58, nos. 48-51).

35 Kahsnitz 2005, pp. 264-265.

36 The Kefermarkt and Schwabach reliefs measure around 150 cm; the Münnerstadt reliefs are some 145 cm high; the Maria Thalkirchen reliefs are 134 x 113 cm. The four reliefs from the Marian retable in the chapel at Grünwald castle, near Munich, are also slightly larger (between 115 and 119 cm). For these works, see references in note 34.

37 A relief by a disciple of Tilman Riemenschneider in the Bollert collection measures 44.5 x 96 cm. See Weniger/Burk 2005, p. 305, cat. A9. At the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, there are several even smaller depictions of the theme from around 1500: inv. MA 1242, MA 1850, MA 1851 (40 x 48.5 cm), etc.

38 The theme of the Death of the Virgin was chosen for the predellas of retables in the chapel at Neuenstadt, in the cathedral of Halberstadt (Marburg Photo Archive, no. 88,196), in Friesach, Austria (Demus 1991, pp. 41 and 47) and at Gelbersdorf, near Landshut (Schultes 2005, p. 97, fig. 199).

39 However, even works like the relief by Veit Stoss in the Oetker collection (now on loan to the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum; inv. L 2004/268; 55 x 32 x 8 cm) could have been part of small retables. Weniger 2007, pp. 36-37.

Swabia (see below), this second hypothesis seems more probable. Indeed, there are retables from the same artistic milieu in which a Saint Anne is depicted standing with the Virgin and the Child Jesus in Her arms amid other saints in an altar shrine. In a retable of relatively modest size in Betzisried, near Ottobeuren, Saint Anne is flanked by Saints Sebastian and Roque [fig. 3][40].

The themes of the works in Bilbao and their popularity in contemporary Germany

Although the episode of the Death of the Virgin is not actually mentioned in the Bible, it was one of the most popular themes in 15th century art, and, as we shall see, not just in Germany. Apart from the hundreds of known reliefs depicting this theme, some retables have survived in which the Death of the Virgin is the central theme of the shrine. The most famous example is to be found in the retable by Veit Stoss in Krakow [fig. 4]. One could also quote a retable from 1434 in the cathedral at Frankfurt[41], others from the studio of Niklaus Weckmann in Reutti [fig. 8] and, from 1517, in Tauberbischofsheim[42], or a retable from the Hospital of the Holy Ghost at Ingolstadt [fig. 19][43]. However, in this latter case, the shrine and other features of the retable are missing, the relief is lacking in depth and the measurements are similar (142 x 138 cm) to reliefs from the doors of large retables, which suggests that more research is required into its original refunction.

The highly popular theme of the Immaculate Conception left its mark in countless depictions of the Death of the Virgin in paintings and engravings. In this rich, wide-ranging material two different iconographic traditions can be distinguished. One of them depicts the Virgin kneeling, at prayer, in the moment of her death, with the apostles standing by to help and attend in a variety of ways. Although the best-known example is the retable by Veit Stoss in Krakow, the antecedents go back to the late 14th century[44]. Some areas in the south and southeast remained faithful to this pattern until the end of the Gothic period [fig. 5][45], while in other places examples began to reappear just a few years before the Reformation[46]. The other model, to which the Bilbao relief belongs, spread more widely and was prefigured by the Byzantine ivories that go back to the end of the first Millennium. It shows the Virgin on her deathbed, depicted as a relatively young woman with no evident signs of approaching death. Some apostles attend on Her, others contemplate their books, open for prayers, or go about the tasks and duties involved in assisting the dying. Saint Peter is often depicted in liturgical apparel, and others bear candles, censers, fonts or bowls of unguents to the Virgin. The bed and cushions are usually depicted in great detail, conveying an image of the comfortable domestic surroundings of the time. This iconography is also to be found in the early Flemish artists[47] or in the engraving by Martin Schongauer [fig. 20]. In Spain, artists of the stature of Bartolomé Bermejo made use of the northern models [fig. 21][48].

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40 The sculptures are by a disciple of Niklaus Weckmann. Stuttgart 1993, p. 366, fig. 528 (Albrecht Miller). See, also from the Weckmann studio, a *Saint Anne* in stone, in the west door of the cathedral at Ulm (ibid., pp. 96-97). In the centre of another retable from the same studio there was a *trinitarian Saint Anne* seated, now in the Dominikaner-Museum, Rottweil (ibid., p. 134, fig. 171). In several retables in Ulm, a standing trinitarian *Saint Anne* is painted on one of the doors (ibid., p. 182, fig. 240; p. 228, fig. 321).

41 Kahsnitz 2005, fig. 77. One of the very few stone retables and, therefore, with no doors.

42 Stuttgart 1993, p. 339, fig. 492 and p. 487, and p. 54, fig. 41 and p. 488.

43 See Müller 1959, pp. 66-67, cat. 59.

44 Above all in Bohemia and neighbouring zones. See Kahsnitz 2005, p. 137.

45 All the depictions of the Death of the Virgin in retables in Carinthia illustrated in a monograph published by Demus (Demus 1991) are of this type.

46 For preference, Niklaus Weckmann's circle chose the formula of the Virgin on Her bed (see note 34 and Stuttgart 1993, p. 111, fig. 134; p. 115, fig. 141). However, there is also a *Death of the Virgin* that follows the other pattern (San Cyriak, Eggingen).For Swabiar painting of that period, see the *Death of the Virgin* by Hans Holbein the Elder, in Basle (ibid., p. 216, fig. 299).

47 See, for instance, the painting by Hugo van der Goes in the Groeningemuseum, Bruges. The model van der Goes used was spread via 15th century Flemish miniatures.

48 For the Berlin painting, see Barcelona/Bilbao 2003, pp. 136-141, cat. 5 (essay by Francesc Ruiz i Quesada).

19. Anonymous, Bavaria
Retable, church at the Hospital of the Holy Ghost, Ingolstadt, c. 1490-1500
(box from 19th century)
Lime-wood relief. 142 x 138 cm
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
Deposited at the Liebfrauenmünster, Ingolstadt

Save for exceptions like the relief in the Augustinermuseum in Freiburg, which depends heavily on the Schongauer model [fig. 22][49], German wood carvers treating the theme of the Death or Dormition of the Virgin, followed the example found in engravings less directly than with other subject matters. Although similar features and motifs abound, each artist combined and interpreted them in his own way. What the majority of Late Gothic reliefs depicting the Death of the Virgin have in common is that the Virgin's deathbed is shown obliquely, rather than parallel to the frame, a feature seen, above all, in the earliest images. However, space and perspective are hardly ever convincingly resolved, and the work in Bilbao is no exception. As here, the majority of the Apostles tend to be grouped and ordered more or less in a parallel plane, with only a few figures acting independently. Thanks to their well-defined types, it is generally possible to identify Saint Peter and Saint John, and Saint James, who usually sports a hat with the pilgrim's shell, as we see in the Bilbao relief. Somewhat unusual, both in terms of type and attitude, is the figure of the middle-aged, clean-shaven Apostle with a hat and a glass in his hand [fig. 23]. This may be an allusion to Saint Luke, the doctor saint also known as the portraitist of the Madonna. The type of hat worn identified portraits of professionals, like painters. In some occasions, Saint Luke may be included amongst the twelve Apostles and he is also known from depictions of the disciples at Emmaus. Finally, two oblong wooden boxes visible beneath the Virgin's bed provide a detail of daily life frequent in paintings of this theme[50].

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49 Zinke 1995, pp. 87-89.
50 By way of example, see the image painted for the Albrechtsaltar, now in Klosterneuburg (Röhrig 1981, p. 49, plate 7).

20. Martin Schongauer (documented in 1465-1491)
The Death of the Virgin, c. 1470-1475
Engraving. 254 x 169 mm

21. Bartolomé Bermejo (active between 1468 and 1501)
The Death of the Virgin, c. 1470-1475
Oil on oak wood. 63 x 41 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin
Kat. 552

22. Anonymous, Franconia
The Death of the Virgin, c. 1500
Wood relief on a composition by Martin Schongauer. 104.5 x 100 x 9 cm
Augustinermuseum, Freiburg
Inv. no. S 59/2

23. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

As Ana Sánchez-Lassa has already pointed out in the guide to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Saint Anne was one of the most popular saints in the late Middle Ages. Like the Death of the Virgin, Saint Anne is not actually mentioned in the Bible. While her function as a member of an exemplary family also comes into play, part of her popularity (like that of the Death of the Virgin episode) is due to the idea of the Immaculate Conception of her daughter Mary. At the centre of the Saint Anne retable in Burgos Cathedral, one of the finest devoted to the saint anywhere in Spain, is the scene of the conception of the Virgin symbolized by the meeting of Anne and Joachim at the Golden Gate. In Germany, however, the saint is usually depicted without any narrative context. Images of Saint Anne with the Virgin and Jesus in Her arms, or with both of them sitting on Her knees, appeared as early as the 13th century[51]. Depictions of Saint Anne seated and standing exist side by side [fig. 3]. An old German word, "Anna Selbdritt," the trinitarian Anne, is generally used to identify them. Apart from the hundreds – perhaps thousands – of painted or carved images of trinitarian Saint Anne, there are also dozens with a similar, but even more complex, iconography, known as the Holy Kinship: An expanded Holy Family depicting St. Anne with her three successive legendary husbands and their respective descendants, the Virgin and Jesus and six of the twelve Apostles[52].

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51 A very early example is to be found in the church of St. Nicholas in Stralsund. See Fircks/Herre 1999.

52 Representations can comprise more than 20 figures, although there were much smaller groups as well. Among the output of Niklaus Weckmann's studio (see below) one should mention the retable of Haldenwang (Stuttgart 1993, p. 78, fig. 72) and the Hutz retable in Ulm itself (ibid., p. 224, fig. 315).

Attributing the two works in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

Of the two works in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, the one showing Saint Anne can be pinpointed with relative certainty. Until now, the Museum attributed it to the studio of Michel Erhart, in Ulm[53], and it does indeed come from the school of that city. Until the late 15th century, Ulm was Swabia's most important focal point for art and one of the busiest and most refined artistic centres in southern Germany. The city's influence was at its peak during the second half of the century, when works from Ulm were exported to Bavaria in the east, north to Franconia and to zones of Switzerland and the Tyrol to the south. The faces of the three figures [fig. 24] are clearly in the tradition of Michel Erhart and his circle. The Child could be compared, for instance, to the one at Maria Thalkirchen [fig. 25][54]. However, they recall perhaps even more strongly the work produced by Niklaus Weckmann's studio, the most active in Ulm in the early 16th century [figs. 3 and 8][55]. This Saint Anne, practically unknown in Germany, would seem to be by an artist close to this latter workshop[56].

It is much more difficult to emit a judgement on *The Dormition of the Virgin*, carved in all probability around 1500 at a workshop in southern Germany. Judging by the fine technique, it must have been produced at a place where the artists had plenty of experience in executing such reliefs. Identifying the area in question exactly is, however, an enormously arduous task, for two main reasons. It is relatively easy to recognize works from the principal workshops of major centres of art like Ulm (Hans Multscher, Michel Erhart, Niklaus Weckmann, Daniel Mauch), Strasburg (Nikolaus Gerhaert van Leyden and his followers), Würzburg (Tilman Riemenschneider) or Nuremberg (Veit Stoss). But there were also workshops producing sculptures in less important cities. So many works have been lost that at times it is simply not possible to relate any surviving work to the output of these local wokshops. This is valid even for some of the major centres, such as Passau, or some regions like northern Switzerland, about which, for a number of historical circumstances, including wars, fires and iconoclastic violence, very little is known. A large percentage of the surviving works was only discovered once on the market or in private collections, with little or no information available on origins or past history. The relief in Bilbao is one of these rootless works, and although it would seem fairly easy to recognize the artist's hand, particularly with the stylized heads of the bearded elders viewed in profile, with their long noses prolonging the line of the forehead [figs. 15, 26 and 27], to date no work at all has been identified that can be attributed to him with any certainty.

The second problem lies in the fact that relations between the major centres were very intense. Apprentices and masters travelled from one place to another, artists from Ulm worked in Nuremberg, Passau and Basle. Works from Swabia were exported to Bavaria, the Tyrol or parts of present day Switzerland. Take, for instance, the retable by the workshop of Michel Erhart for Maria Thalkirchen, on the outskirts of Munich [fig. 25]. Such works would influence local artists, while emigrant artists often adapted to local traditions and practices. This exchange of artists, works and ideas explains the relative technical and stylistic homogeneity of sculptures carved in southern Germany. Furthermore, comparing works with and without polychrome is by no means easy.

All this goes to explain why the attribution of a single sculpture can vary considerably. The few experts in this field regularly give out very different opinions on the same work. Such confusion may even arise

53 In 1999, it was attributed to Erhart in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 1999, p. 73.

54 Ulm 2002, p. 100, fig. 80.

55 On this artist, see the catalogue of the major exhibition of his works held a few years back (Stuttgart 1993).

56 Opinion confirmed by three experts in this subject: Claudia Lichte, from Würzburg, Manuel Teget-Welz, from Nuremberg and Stefan Roller, from Frankfurt. I am most grateful to all three for sharing their opinions about the *Saint Anne* in Bilbao with me. It would be interesting to compare the exact patterns of the imitation of brocade with works from the Weckmann studio (Stuttgart 1993, p. 291, fig. 442) or with the well-conserved brocade on a Virgin in Stuttgart (ibid., p. 296, fig. 447).

24. Circle of Niklaus Weckmann
(documented between 1481 and 1528)
Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child, c. 1510-1520
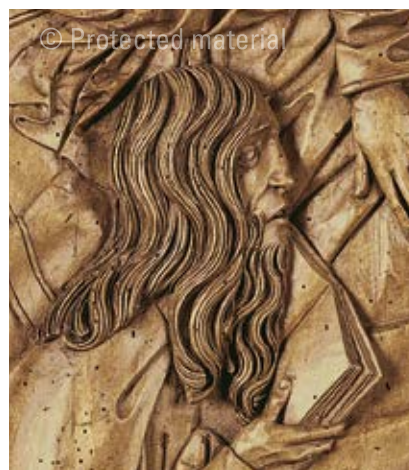Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

25. Michel Erhart and workshop (c. 1440/1445-after 1522)
Virgin and Child, c. 1485
Central imagen from the altarpiece of the Church of the
Assumption of Maria Thalkirchen, Munich
(Now part of a Baroque retable)

26. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

27. Anonymous, German (Eastern Bavaria?)
The Dormition of the Virgin, c. 1500
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

between the three most important regions in southern Germany, Swabia, Bavaria and Franconia, and not just with third-class works, but also with second or even top class sculptures[57]. With regard to *The Dormition of the Virgin* in Bilbao, connoisseurs consulted by the autor or those who had already expressed their opinions, proposed Franconia, Swabia, Bavaria, northern Austria, the Alps and other regions as its place of origin[58]. The only name suggested to date is Riemenschneider's[59], but the relief shares only the general characteristics of sculpture produced in southern Germany with this artist's school, based in Würzburg, in lower Franconia. If the relief has a certain air of Franconia about it, analogies would be easiest to find in centres in upper or central Franconia. Actually, already the 1930 album classified it as a work from Franconia. However, Alfred Schädler, one of the leading experts in German sculpture, noted "Oberösterreich?" (an Austrian region bordering east Bavaria), on the 1972 photograph in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum. The most important artistic centre in that border region was Passau (in present-day Bavaria), historically a major ecclesiastical centre. Indeed, Passau, where the Gothic inventory has been decimated, and the adjacent zones of Bavaria and Austria are the most secure candidates for the origin of the piece. The energetic attitude and strong characterization of the figures would fit well with this area. Expression, rather than perfection in the drawing, is what most interests the artist, who has favoured strong vertical features, a little forced in some places, as in the case of the folds of the Apostle's robe set furthest to the right. Hair is depicted as a compact, voluminous mass, well differentiated from the faces; something that is also found in sculptures definitely from this area.

In the Ingolstadt relief [fig. 19], one Apostle assumes a stance at least slightly similar to the one taken by the hypothetical Saint Luke in Bilbao. A series of late 15th-century reliefs with types related in some way to the Bilbao Saint John, particularly with respect to the prominent jaw, or to the supposed Saint Luke of the same relief, is said to come from Landshut, capital of Lower Bavaria and at this time still head of a thriving state [figs. 27, 28 and 29][60]. Although the treatment of the folds and hair differs, these reliefs could bear witness to

57 There is much less confusion about the painting of the time.

58 My thanks to Claudia Lichte, Bernhard Decker, Norbert Jopek, Albrecht Miller, Stephan Roller and Lother Schultes for sharing their opinions with me. Miller suggested taking into account zones of Bohemia bordering on northern Bavaria. Schultes drew my attention to a relief in the Knabenseminarstiftung in Passau, an interesting comparison, despite the treatment of the folds and hair not being identical. See Passau 2002, p. 59, cat. 4/4. Sophie Guillot from Suduiraut, who had previously been consulted by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, now also favours the location proposed here. For Alfred Schädler's opinion, see below.

59 Burgos 1994, no. 148 (by an artist close to Riemenschneider); *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 1999, p. 72 (by an artist "very close" to Riemenschneider); Ana Sánchez-Lassa in *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao...* 2006, p. 23.

60 Today in Munich, in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (inv. MA 1243, MA 1244 and MA 1245). However, the drawing of the folds and the treatment of hair are quite different.

28. Anonymous, Bavaria
Annunciation, c. 1500
Lime-wood relief from Landshut, 120 x 121 cm
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
In deposit at the Church of St. Martin, Landshut
Inv. no. MA 1244
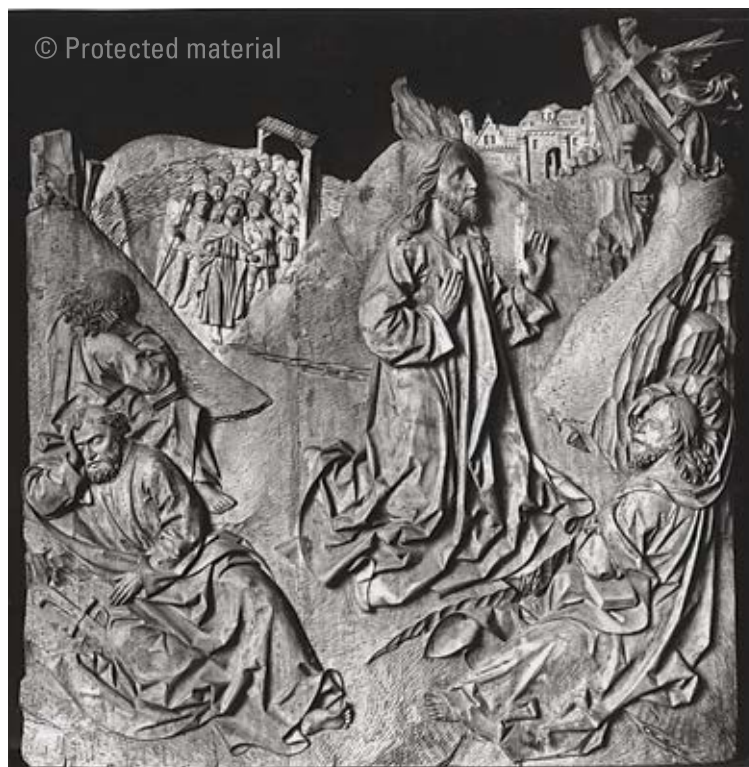
29. Anonymous, Bavaria
Christ in the Garden, c. 1500
Lime-wood relief from Landshut, 127 x 122 cm
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich
Inv. no. MA 1245

30. Anonymous, Bavaria
Resurrection of Lazarus, c. 1510
Wood relief from Haigermoos, 68.5 x 67 cm
Diözesanmuseum, Freising
Inv. no. P 103

the atmosphere in which the Bilbao relief was created. The work that comes closest to *The Dormition of the Virgin* in Bilbao has also been connected with Landshut, originating from the village of Haigermoos, about a hundred kilometres to the south east of Landshut, in upper Austria, to the north of Laufen and near the river Eno[61]. It is a much smaller relief depicting the resurrection of Lazarus [fig. 30]. The difference in size and the polychromy make a judgement more difficult, but the strong vertical features, the drawing of the folds, the treatment of several other details and even the human types, invite comparison. These analogies[62] provide further backing for the attribution of the Bilbao relief to a studio active in the area in the triangle defined by the cities of Landshut, Salzburg and Passau, close to the Eno, a river that runs between lower Bavaria and upper Austria. Support for this conjecture may be gleaned from the fact that many —although not all— the works on offer in 1930 by the Krüger collection came from Bavaria, the Tyrol and the Alps[63]. Although the support, lime wood, confirms the general classification, it unfortunately does not authorize us to make a more specific attribution. Lime wood was preferred throughout southern Germany, also being used in the Alps and, exceptionally, even in the Baltic area[64]. It has a relatively homogeneous structure, is reasonably easy to carve and is more durable than poplar.

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61 Today in the Diocesan Museum, Freising (inv. P 103). See the essay by Lothar Schultes in *Gotik Schätze Oberösterreich*, p. 291, cat. 1/13/1 (68.5 x 67 cm).

62 Lothar Schultes based his location of the Freising relief on a comparison with the reliefs from the chapel at the Eggendorf palace, now in the Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Linz (ibid., pp. 290-291, cat. 1/13/10). Schultes considers they could be attributed to the same studio. The similarities between the Eggendorf reliefs and the one in Bilbao are less obvious, but it is worth noting that the Eggendorf reliefs also have windows open at the back.

63 Remember also the Holy King in the Krüger collection, related, at least stylistically, with the Bilbao relief and, as noted, from the lower Eno.

64 For example, in the Bollnäs retable. See Tångeberg 1986, p. 145.

Despite the persistent doubts over the exact attribution of the two German international Gothic sculptures in Bilbao, both, coming from two different regions in southern Germany, give the Spanish public an excellent idea of the way German retables were organized and looked, how the artists who created them worked and what their aesthetic concerns were. They are far removed from the Spanish experiences in this field of artistic endeavour. Nevertheless, this kind of work was a major influence on much of the artistic inventory created in the Iberian Peninsula in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The fascinating collection at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum bears witness to the extent of this influence; these two German sculptures are important pieces in this particular mosaic.

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