

Painting, devotion and piety in Toledo in the early 15th century



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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"Friends you who gave birth
see my different grief,
you who husbands lost
whom you loved and cared for
weep my ill with me;
look if my ill is great,
look what joy is mine,
look what captive luck,
for they are visiting death
on a Son of mine."

Alonso del Campo, *Auto de la Pasión*
Toledo Cathedral, c. 1485-1486, verses 542-551

In 1959 the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum acquired two paintings in tempera from the Espinal Collection in Barcelona. One was of a Nativity scene, the other showing Christ tied to the column next to a Pietà, both originally from a monastery in Toledo. The two works were almost certainly part of a single group devoted to Christ's Passion, put together in the early 15th century for the convent and most likely to be used as the principal image in a particular chapel, or as a curtain to screen off a retable set aside for use on certain feast days¹. For a long time, the works were referred to as *sargas*, a kind of serge, but they should really be called canvases, as a ground was applied prior to painting. This means they cannot be *sargas* and dissipates any suggestion of poorer quality or that they should be considered cheaper.

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1 These painted canvases could well have acted as the main image of a church or chapel, or to provide screen curtains in Lent and Holy Week, eventually being relocated to another part of the building. The Paramento, or ornamental covering at Narbonne [fig. 17], fulfilled a similar function. See Markschiefs 2009, especially pp. 111-113.



1. Master of Horcajo
Nativity, early 15th century
Tempera on canvas, 101 x 195.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/128



2. Master of the Pietà
Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà, late 14th century-early 15th century
Tempera on canvas, 84.8 x 125.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/129

The Nativity piece [fig. 1] shows the Madonna kneeling opposite the crib. As He gently strokes the mule's muzzle, the Child is warmed by the breath of both mule and ox. From the Madonna's mouth comes the inscription: "Ille est deus meus et filius meus et dominus meus" (This is my God, my Son and my Lord). To the right, St. Joseph looks on, sitting on the ground, hand moving towards his face. The artist has chosen to give priority to and reinforce his main subjects by removing the customary allusions to the manger, the star and the angels announcing the good news, and by placing the figures against a slightly blueish neutral background, with the silhouette of low hills just about visible in the lower part. Although the characters portrayed are complete, the work seems to have been cut off, suggesting slightly larger original measurements.

Restored in 1989, the slightly smaller hemp canvas [fig. 2] comprises two scenes framed and separated by a red and black geometrical decorative border and an inscription above each one. To the left, a monumental Christ kneels, tied by the neck and hands to a column with a base in the shape of a capital. He wears a cloth of purity, but what really strikes us is the nakedness of the body and the eyes looking out from a bearded face, pained, tired and saddened by the humiliations and torture undergone. The inscription above comes from the Book of Isaiah. As if prefiguring the events of Christ's martyrdom, it says: "Vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter accelera nostra" (But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities)². To the right, slightly larger in size, is a tearful, sorrowing Madonna in a black tunic, with the inert body of her Son in her lap, after His death on the Cross. While the background in the picture showing Christ tied to the column is a neutral blue, in the Pietà the figures stand out against the sombre black night and the grey of low hills that, like mute onlookers, accompany the mother's suffering. The play of contrasts between Mary's beauty, her dark cloak and the pale nakedness of the dead Christ defines the poignancy and pain of the scene, which is also accompanied by the words from the Book of Lamentations, attributed to Jeremiah, and which the Madonna could well have recalled, as was done in Tenebrae on Easter Saturday: "O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte; si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus" (Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow)³.

In historiographical terms, José Gudiol was the first to refer to these paintings, when in 1955 he linked them to a Spanish painter responsible for the incomplete retable at Horcajo de Santiago, today in the chapel of the Council Seminary in Cuenca; he also suggested they might be associated with Italian painting of the late *Trecento*⁴. In her doctoral thesis on the *Trecento*-inspired school at Toledo, Professor M^a Ángeles Piquero confirmed the artist as being the Master of Horcajo (or Cuenca), although she acknowledged the hand of another master, possibly aware of the latest developments in international Gothic, at work in the figure of the Madonna featured in the Pietà⁵. With certain reservations, Juan J. Luna accepted Gudiol's proposal in 1989, while also adding comments drawing attention to the existence of two artists and the connections of the Toledo diocese with the area around Cuenca⁶. In his overview of Gothic art in Spain, José M^a de Azcárate likened the style of the paintings to Rodríguez de Toledo, dating them to around 1430-1440⁷. More recently Joan Sureda clearly distinguished the Master of the Pietà, author of *Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà*, from the painter of *The Nativity*, which painting he effectively associated with the Master of Horcajo, as had

2 Old Testament, Book of Isaiah 53: 5.

3 Old Testament, Book of Lamentations 1: 12. Used as a prayer on Easter Saturday.

4 Gudiol 1955, pp. 211-213. Subsequent bibliographical references are to the Museum catalogues: Lasterra 1969, nos. 128 (Nativity) and 129 (Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà); Bengoechea 1978, p. 42.

5 Piquero 1984, pp. 313-324.

6 Luna 1989.

7 Azcárate 1990, pp. 311-313.

been argued until then. The Master of the Pietà he considered an Italian painter trained under the influence of the Neapolitan school of followers of Giotto in the second half of the 14th century, or perhaps a Spanish artist with Franco-Gothic leanings who might have worked in southern Italy. Sureda placed the Bilbao Pietà close to the set of works attributed to the Neapolitan Master of the Franciscan Temperas (possibly identifiable as Pietro Orimina), and defined the Master of the Pietà as a product of the expansion of the Mediterranean branch of Giotto's followers in Naples, subsequently establishing himself in the Iberian peninsula, where his influence was felt and the seed planted for the creation of the Italianate school of Toledo. In his inspiring and eloquent catalogue entry, Sureda dated the works to c. 1350-1360, despite acknowledging the artist in question was active around 1400⁸.

The great retable in the Primate Cathedral and the beginnings of the Toledo school

One of the difficulties with regard to the Italianate-international school of painting at Toledo is the sheer complexity of distinguishing the artistic personality of its masters. Today, with works partially conserved and records scarce, differentiating the activity of one or several painters, their main works and establishing their a time sequence is no easy task. One known fact, published in 1920, is the commission, made on 17 July 1387, by Bishop Pedro Tenorio for the great retable at Toledo Cathedral to the painter Esteve Rovira, from Cyprus, then in Brihuega, Guadalajara. Although the actual contract is not archived, the request made on 14 April 1388 to the artist, in Valencia at the time, to return to Toledo and finish the work, provides a treasure trove of data. Esteve Rovira had to produce a retable of 66 spans wide by 20 high, i.e. an oblong structure thirteen metres wide by four metres high, consisting of two blocks with eight lanes plus a central one, to which he was to add eight crowning panels each with an image and dust cover [fig. 3]. The master's obligations included working exclusively on the commission until it was completed, providing everything needed to create fine figures, using lapis lazuli blue and fine gold; above all he had to remain in Toledo the time the work required, although with certain licences to return to his "home" on a maximum of twenty feast days. Bishop Tenorio undertook to provide already made the work in relief for the retable and to pay him the exorbitant amount of 1,500 gold florins from Aragon⁹.

It is not known if the great retable was finally made by Esteve Rovira, as the records say nothing about his move to Toledo; Rovira seems to have been very reluctant to fulfil his part of the agreement, even with the demand issued. However, we need to remember that on 4 September 1389 he issued two apprenticeship contracts in Valencia with two young men, Arnau de Camprodón and Alfonso de Córdoba, sons respectively of the painters Bernat de Camprodón and Alfonso de Córdoba, who were at once subjected to the workshop's intense workload, although only written records would confirm whether the backlog anything had to do with the production of this large retable or not¹⁰. The fact that the covenant with the young men was for a year and not for four, the norm in apprenticeships, and that they were sons of painters, points to an official's

8 Sureda 1991.

9 Almarche 1920; Sanchis 1928, pp. 20-21. Information on the Cypriot's period in Valencia, with new, revised contributions and the full text of the demand that he return to Toledo, may be read in Company... [et al.] 2005, pp. 289, 302-306 (Toledo), 322-323. In 1387 he still had contacts in Barcelona, as Madurell 1949 notes, p. 58. Other items about the painter in Barcelona are to be found in Madurell 1950, p. 77. Miquel (in press)_a contains the identification of the retable group and a proposal for its reconstruction.

10 Company... [et al.] 2005, pp. 322-323. See Miquel 2008, pp. 166-182 on officials' contracts. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that official Alfonso came from Cordoba, which would coincide with the origins of other contemporary painters on record, like Alonso Martínez (Laguna 2005). On Gothic painting in Cordoba, see Medianero 1989, specifically pp. 15-57; Laguna 1992, pp. 77-79, 243. Attempts to re-read the badly damaged register recording the officials' contracts between Esteve Rovira and Alfonso de Córdoba and Arnau de Camprodón, in search of further information clarifying their identification, proved unsuccessful.



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3. Esteve Rovira and workshop (attributed to)
High retable at Toledo Cathedral, c. 1387-1418 (reconstruction)

1. Saint Mary Magdalene
2. Saint Lawrence
3. Annunciation or Meeting at the Golden Gate
4. Nativity
5. Adoration of the Magi
6. Flight Into Egypt

7. Crucifixion
8. Circumcision
9. Jesus amongst the Doctors
10. Baptism of Christ
11. The Wedding at Canaan
12. Prayer in the Garden
13. The Arrest

14. Washing of the Feet
15. The Road to Calvary
16. Madonna with Child
17. Denial of Saint Peter
18. Pentecost
19. Ascension
20. Descent to Limbo



4. Rodríguez de Toledo and workshop
Retable of Archbishop Sancho de Rojas, 1415-1420
 Tempera on panel, 532 x 618 cm
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
 Inv. no. P01321

contract and to work that would involve activities of higher responsibility, for instance the production of a retable of the kind in question. No other information about Esteve Rovira has come down to us, neither of a contract in Valencia that would dissipate doubts nor of his presence in Toledo.

Some of the original panels of the great retable at Toledo Cathedral were identified in a recent study as the ones conserved in the retable of St. Eugene, in the same cathedral¹¹. The works have been much repainted, and distinguishing their possible authors is today a major problem. Despite this, it remains likely that Esteve Rovira defined the beginning of the school of painting in Toledo, that he transmitted his mastery and personality as he trained painters, and that his Italianate idiom was continued in the paintings under discussion here. From the work done by researcher M^a Ángeles Blanca Piquero, it has been possible to identify a body of works by the early 15th-century school of painting in Toledo, including this *Nativity* and *Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà*. The others are mural paintings of the St. Blaise chapel in Toledo Cathedral, the retable of Sancho de Rojas [fig. 4], the panel of the Madonna with St. Catherine and donors (Museum of Valladolid), the imposition of the chasuble on St. Ildephonsus and the portrait of donor Friar Hernando de Illescas (parish

11 Miquel (in press)_a.



5. Master of Horcajo
Christ on the Road to Calvary with Donors Protected by Saint Peter Martyr, 1407-1410
Tempera on canvas, 156 x 73 cm
Collection of Fernando Chueca Aguinaga

church of Illescas, Toledo), the mural decoration for the *Concepción Francisca* convent in Toledo and the retable of the Madonna at Horcajo de Santiago (Council Seminary, Cuenca)¹². Carmen Rebollo's work has led to the addition to this repertoire of the mural paintings in the presbytery of the church of *Santa María la Mayor* in Piedrahíta (Ávila)¹³ and, from the work done for the present essay, a painting of Christ on the road to Calvary with donors from the private collection of Fernando Chueca, which we shall look at in a little more detail [fig. 5]. The main reason for this direct link is the stylistic affinities of Italianate origin between the surviving panels of the Toledo great retable and the paintings just mentioned, in details such as the taste for architectural backgrounds, the monumental nature of the figures, the folds of the robes and the repetition of geometric designs, faces and characters.

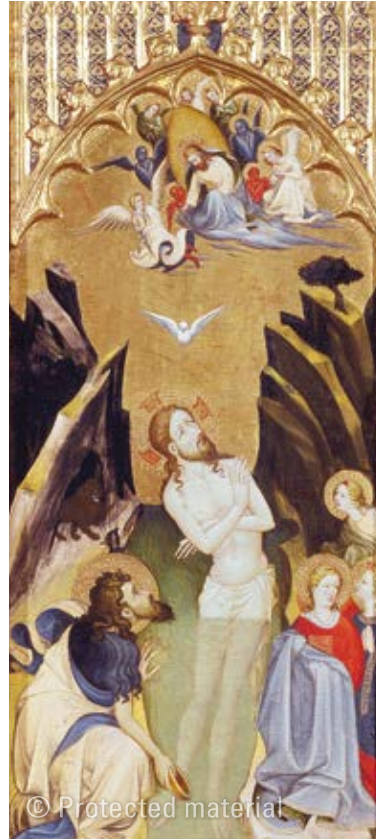
In terms of stylistic characteristics, the works are undoubtedly redolent of post-Giotto painting. As noted above, in his essay on the Pietà in Bilbao, Joan Sureda suggested links to Neapolitan painting between 1350 and 1360 or possible ties with the Master of the Franciscan Temperas. Even so, chronologically, painting in the city of Toledo must have begun from 1388 at the earliest, when Esteve Rovira was ordered to return to Toledo, or from 1395, when Starnina is known to have been there, to collect payment for a painted cloth. Sureda's hypothesis linking the Pietà with post-Giotto painting in southern Italy is only feasible through

¹² See the essential work by Piquero 1984.

¹³ Elvira-Hernández 1991; Rebollo 2008. Researcher Carmen Rebollo's excellent study adds the mural paintings in the parish church of Laguna de Negrillos (León), where she sees the Italian influence, the stylistic and formal similarities with painting in Toledo and connections with the Álvarez of Toledo family.



6. Esteve Rovira and workshop
Baptism of Christ
Retable of Saint Eugene, Toledo Cathedral



7. Starnina (c. 1360-before 1413)
Baptism of Christ
Retable of the Seven Sacraments or of Bonifacio Ferrer, c. 1397-1399
 Tempera on panel
 Valencia Fine Arts Museum
 Inv. no. 246

its attribution to a painter from Cyprus who, trained in southern Italy some time in the third quarter of the 14th century, must have moved to, and worked in, Crown of Aragon territory, as did Esteve Rovira. The first reference to Rovira places him in Zaragoza; he is then known to have been in Barcelona in 1384 and 1385; and from January 1387 he is recorded as living in Valencia. In July 1387 he signed the contract for the great Toledo Cathedral retable in Brihuega, and the notification dated 1388 was issued in Valencia. The document was read in the house of Florentine merchant Joan Esteve, who then ensured the information reached the painter.

The Toledo school of painting in the early 15th century

Besides Esteve Rovira's possible activity, the Florentine Gerardo di Jacopo, or Starnina, was known in Toledo, as were his two disciples, Nicolao d'Antonio, from Pisa, and Simone di Francesco, from Siena¹⁴. There are no records connecting d'Antonio or di Francesco with any surviving work or accurately dating their time in Spain, while Starnina's movements can be traced through his Italian paintings and associate him in Valencia principally with the retable of the Seven Sacraments in the city's Fine Arts Museum, the predella with scenes from the Passion on the retable at Collado de Alpuente (Valencia) and the panel of the Last Judgement in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. While most essays on Starnina establish he was in Spain between 1395

¹⁴ Fernández Vallejo 1785, fol. 133. For Nicolao d'Antonio and Simone di Francesco, see Torroja 1974; Cerveró 1964, p. 111. Their names are cited in Italian documents in Concioni/Ferri/Ghilarducci 1994, pp. 334, 367-368, 374-375; Lazzareschi 1938; Paoli 1986, p. 176. For a review, see Miquel 2007.



8. Rodríguez de Toledo and workshop
Views of the chapel of Saint Blaise, Toledo Cathedral, c. 1400-1420

and 1401, the most recent contribution from Alberto Lenza does not consider the possibility of attributing works of Toledo painting to him¹⁵. Further, in comparing the composition of the Baptism of Christ in the great retablo in Toledo Cathedral (now in the retablo of St. Eugene) with the same scene in the polyptych of the Seven Sacraments in Valencia, he sees a different formal and compositional idiom [figs. 6 and 7].

After these four Italianate masters, Esteve Rovira, Starnina, Simone di Francesco and Nicolao d'Antonio, who may have been the first group of painters settled in Toledo, came other artists who followed the stylistic dictates learnt, and maintained artistic production from 1400 onwards. The best known of these is Rodríguez de Toledo, author of some of the paintings in the chapel of St. Blaise in Toledo Cathedral [fig. 8]. But from the records it is also possible to distinguish the painters Alfonso González, who appears renting a house from the town council in 1395¹⁶; Juan García, who rented vineyards from the town council in 1403¹⁷; Juan Alfonso, son of the artist of the same name and the man who painted a lectern and made and painted the doors and retablo for the sacarium, both for Toledo Cathedral, in 1418; and finally, Pedro García, who helped Juan Alfonso in 1424 to paint some parts of the Door of Pardon¹⁸. In the last instance, Esteve Rovira may well have

15 Although citing the complete bibliography on Starnina is impossible here, mention should be made of the latest essays summing up both his career and the previous references: Strehlke 2004, Lenza 2010 (my sincere thanks to doctor Alberto Lenza for his generosity in sending me his research). On Starnina's presence in Valencia, see Strehlke 2002.

16 Archive, Toledo Cathedral (=ACT), protocol 1071, fol. IXv-Xv, 2 September 1395. He would seem to have still been in Toledo in 1403 when the contract was renewed, although the relevant folios of the same register have not survived (fol. CXXXVI).

17 ACT, protocol 1071, fol. 4r.

18 ACT, Book of Works, sign. 761 (1418), fol. CLVr (in June 1418 Juan Alfonso painted two panels of a lectern); fol. 155v (on 20 July the painter Juan Alfonso was paid 5333 maravedies for painting the cabinet and the retablo of the relics of the sacarium); Book of Works, sign. 762 (1424), fol. 73v (Juan Alfonso painted the spire behind the Archbishop's Seat in the choir and with Pedro García painted parts of the Portal of Pardon).



9. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
 Tempera and gold on panel
 Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca (from Horcajo de Santiago)
 Panels with Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi and Flight Into Egypt

travelled to Toledo with his disciples Alfonso de Córdoba and Arnau de Camprodón. We do not know what work the masters might have done, but the important thing here is, at least, to acknowledge their presence and their undoubted ability as painters, as cited in the records. Furthermore, in the last century historians have also identified, by laboratory names, two painters of the school, possibly one or other of the artists known as the Master of Horcajo (or Cuenca) and the Master of the Pietà.

In most of the surviving paintings of the school of Toledo the hand of more than one master is appreciable. For instance, Rodríguez de Toledo, considered the author of the paintings in the chapel of St. Blaise after his name was identified in an inscription¹⁹, is the painter with most attributions, but several artists must have been involved in the St. Blaise chapel. He could not himself have produced the lower part with scenes from the lives of St. Peter and St. Paul and at the same time the Evangelists John and Matthew, together with some of the upper scenes of the Apostles' Creed²⁰. Several masters worked on the Sancho de Rojas retable [fig. 4], as is clear from the different typologies used for the characters in the central panel and the adjoining ones, with the Ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. In the Horcajo de Santiago retable [fig. 9] Rodríguez de Toledo has been recognized as the author of the panel portraying the Flight into Egypt, and the Master of Horcajo, to whom the best works are attributed, i.e. the Annunciation, the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi. The Master of Horcajo and the Master of the Pietà, however, both worked on the Bilbao paintings.

Although earlier historians had noted the higher quality of the painting in *Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà*, it was Joan Sureda who roundly defined the Master of the Pietà as a painter of Italian background, or at least fully aware of this tendency; he refers to a creator of refined eyes, who moulded forms from the use of colour and composed more idealized, stylized and finer figures. Although allusions to the work of Giotto are clear in the monumental nature of the characters, and in the robes or the background of blue, some mention must be made of how Italian painting developed throughout the 14th century, which finds in this one of its last manifestations beyond its borders. No conclusive identification of the Master of the Pietà is possible. He may have been Esteve Rovira or a disciple of his who closely and correctly reproduced the most direct Neapolitan Giottoist influence. But it must be said that the presence of Rovira, of Cypriot origin, almost certainly trained in southern Italy and subsequently active in the mainland possessions of the Crown of Aragon, facilitates greater understanding of the origins of the Toledo school of painting in the early 15th century and its works.

The essays of professor M^a Ángeles Blanca Piquero have left their mark on the study of the Toledo school of painters and have facilitated the identification of a series of works in which there is undoubtedly a common source of learning and training repeated in differing degrees of quality. All share a range of stylistic and for-

19 Polo 1925. In his induction speech to the Fine Arts Academy, José Polo Benito referred to the inscription he had discovered when the high altar was removed: "[...] Rodrigez, of Toledo, painter, painted it". The author interpreted the word prior to Rodríguez as Joan or Maestro. In 1930, Chandler R. Post thought "maestro" was a more accurate reading (Post 1930, p. 226). In the repertoire of data in the archive at Toledo Cathedral, Pérez Sedano located a miniaturist called Juan Rodríguez, who was then identified with the author named in the inscription. But the miniaturist is dated in 1459 (Pérez Sedano 1914, pp. 13-14) and the paintings are considered subsequent to the completion of the chapel (according to the records, in 1399-1400). Furthermore, Juan Rodríguez was a miniaturist and the other painter of that surname specialized in paintings on panel and wall. The surviving work does not help towards establishing such a direct line between two artists who may share the same name but lived at different times and worked in different specialities. The inscription has now disappeared, which means the best course is to call this painter simply "Rodríguez".

20 Most historians have noticed the differences, as did Castañón... [et al.] 2005 after its restoration. The main bibliography on the chapel is: Vegue and Goldoni 1930, note 3 (attributing it to Starnina); Angulo 1931 (which relates the Last Judgement to the one in the Camposanto Monumentale at Pisa); Tormo 1910 (Starnina); Bertaux 1908 (Starnina); Almarche 1920 (Esteve Rovira); Piquero 1984, chap. 1 (Starnina the upper part and Rodríguez de Toledo the lower); Waadenoijen 1983 (Starnina); Post 1930, pp. 221-228 (Rodríguez de Toledo); Miquel 2007 (suggests the participation of Nicolao d'Antonio and Simone di Francesco); Nickson 2010.



10. Anonymous
Apostle Saint Jude Thaddeus, c. 1387-1418
 Tempera and gold on panel, 170.2 x 87.3 cm
 The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
 Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
 Gift of Frank L. Babbott, 1922.1

mal characteristics, such as the balance between narrative discourse and symbolic content, rich decoration, the amplitude of the iconographic programme and of the sources used, as well as similar spatial resources. But other common details are also appreciable, like the similarity of figurative types, exemplified in the repetition of the figure of St. Joseph in the Bilbao Nativity and in the polyptych in Horcajo; the use of geometric borders in white, red and black as decorative framing features, also employed in the Bilbao Pietà and in the St. Blaise chapel in Toledo Cathedral (and even in the temple of the Adoration of the Magi in the St. Eugene retable); the abundant inscriptions and headings in most of the groups; the figures seated on thrones on the crowning retable panels; or the preference for golden haloes with an inscribed red cross. Even the remains of original relief work in some of the surviving panels are done to a single pattern, which may suggest the same carpenter at work on the panel of the *Baptism of Christ* in the retable of St. Eugene (formerly the great retable at Toledo Cathedral), on the *St. Judas* in the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center [fig. 10] and on the panel of the *Madonna with the Child, St. Catherine and Donors* in the Museum of Valladolid.

According to information in possession of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, the original location of these works was a convent in Toledo. Although painted *sargas*, or twill serges, are quite often mentioned in the records of the time as household furnishings and religious goods belonging to members of the clergy, nobles and burghers²¹, the fine quality of the works, the religious context of Toledo, which records the abundant use of this kind of curtain screen, and finally the information concerning their provenance from a convent suggest

²¹ To cite a case in Toledo close to the subject in question, Alonso del Campo, a clergyman at the Primate Cathedral and author of *Auto de la Pasión*, had at home "two canvases of images of the Holy Trinity and a crucifix" (Torroja/Rivas 1977, p. 194).



11. Circle of Rodríguez de Toledo
Madonna with Child and Donor Friar Hernando de Illescas, 15th century
 Tempera on panel, 70 x 45 cm
 Parish church of Illescas, Toledo

a public use. A highly significant document has been conserved referring to a commission in 1395 for a cloth of the Passion for the Cathedral's high altar, a cloth that could also be used as one of the curtain screens. The document is considered valuable largely because Starnina from Florence was the painter hired²². The prebend Juan Chaves de Arcayos reminds us in his book of ceremonies written between 1589 and 1643 that ceremonies required the use of curtains and cloths that covered and revealed the retables and images with great precision depending on the feast, the timetable and the day²³, and could well have been similar to the works in the museum. An interesting point here is the existence of a work that had gone almost unnoticed by the critics after Francisco Oliván Bayle attributed it to the painter Bonanat Zahortiga in his 1978 essay on the Aragon master²⁴. I refer to a painting of *Christ on the Road to Calvary* with a married couple of donors kneeling under the protection of St. Peter the Martyr, in Fernando Chueca Aguinaga's private collection, which I hereby suggest should be included as one of the group of works of the Toledo school of painting in the early 15th century and within the circle of the master Rodríguez de Toledo [fig. 5]. The painting was discovered when restoration work was being undertaken on a small Baroque retable, whose main *Ecce homo* image actually hid this Gothic one. Like the others in Bilbao, the work has been cut and, despite its different

22 Torroja 1974; Vegue and Goldoni 1930, pp. 277-279. The document states: "I, Gerardo Jacopo, painter from Florence, proxy of Nicolai de Antonio, also a painter from Florence, grant and know that I received from you, Pero Ferrandez de Burgos, treasure of the archbishop of Toledo, forty gold florins, from the mint of Aragon, which said forty florins you gave me and I from you received so that I and the aforesaid Nicolai de Antonio should paint for you a cloth of the Passion of Jesus Christ that you have placed in your chapel of Saint Salvador, which you made inside the cathedral church of Saint Mary here in Toledo [...]"

23 ACT, Chapter Secretariat, Copy of Arcayos, fols. 39r, 416v-417, 295 (on the feast of Maundy Thursday if there is no bishop, for example, neither the altar nor the images shall be revealed); fol. 390v-391 (feast of All Saints); fol. 405v (San Nicolás), fol. 405v-406 (St. Ambrose), fol. 409v-410 (St. Leocadia).

24 Oliván 1978, pp. 64-67.



12. Rodríguez de Toledo
Madonna with Child and Saint Catherine with Donors, early 15th century
 Tempera on panel, 59 x 37 cm
 Museum of Valladolid

execution and quality, they share the same stylistic features linking them to the earliest painting produced in Toledo and specifically to the paintings of the St. Blaise chapel, in details like the figurative types or the geometrical frieze framing the scenes.

Fernando Chueca Goitia recalled that someone in his father's family had acquired it in the *Madre de Dios* (Mother of God) convent in Toledo. The fact that the convent was founded in the late 15th century makes it very difficult to prove the possibility of this beginning-of-the-century work actually coming from there. It is true, however, that the convent was next to the convent of *San Pedro el Real*, and that in 1846-1847, when church lands were being sold off, the Dominican monastery of *San Pedro* was taken over for use as a General Military College, personal property being grouped together and the monastery's own works of devotion unified with those from the adjoining *Madre de Dios* convent, when it could have been sold and its real place of origin thus mistaken²⁵. In support of this second possibility, we should return to the figure of St. Peter the Martyr who protects the two patrons in the painting in the Chueca Collection, who may usefully be identified as the main donors of the monastery: Guiomar de Meneses and her husband Alfonso Tenorio de Silva, who founded it in 1407 thanks to the transfer of a number of plots of land²⁶. Guiomar de Meneses was a leading noblewoman in Toledo circles and Alfonso Tenorio de Silva the *adelantado* or designated governor of Cazorla. As promoters of the Dominican monastery they might well have commissioned this painting recording their patronage for posterity. To reinforce this association, we must also bear in mind that Alfonso Tenorio de Silva's uncle was the Archbishop of Toledo, Pedro Tenorio²⁷, who, some years before, in 1387, had

²⁵ Lorente 2002, pp. 103-104.

²⁶ Martínez Caviro 1980, pp. 275-281; Izquierdo 1997; Cerro 1997; Lorente 2002.

²⁷ This Guiomar de Meneses, wife to Alfonso Tenorio de Silva, should not be confused with the noblewoman of the same name, founder of the Hospital de la Misericordia, but wedded to Lope Gaitán (Porres/Cruz 1992). Balbina Martínez Caviro thinks they were probably cousins, living at the same time and granddaughters of Guiomar de Leyva (Martínez Caviro 1980, pp. 295-281). Although we cannot be absolutely sure, it seems that Alfonso Tenorio de Silva's mother was Urraca Tenorio, sister of the Archbishop Pedro Tenorio.

contracted Esteve Rovira to produce the great retable in Toledo Cathedral, today identified as the polyptych of St. Eugene and considered the group that marked the beginning of the school of painting in Toledo, with which certain connections may be glimpsed.

In line with this, one essential characteristic of the Toledo school of painting is the ability of its masters to portray donors before the main images, generally protected by an interceding saint. Possibly as a reflection of the growing individualism in society, with more people seeking an intimate, private space for devotion, such worthies began to feel the need to have their portraits done and demonstrate their religious power, their devotion to the Madonna or their political authority. Archbishop Sancho de Rojas, the monarch Fernando de Antequera and Juan II appear in the main panel of the Sancho de Rojas group, designed for the Church of San Benito in Valladolid [fig. 4]²⁸; in a small devotional panel in the parish church of Illescas [fig. 11], friar Hernando de Illescas is kneeling before the scene of the imposition of the chasuble on St. Ildephonsus²⁹; a pair of donors, who have been thought to be the married couple formed by Catalina, sister of Juan II, and the *infante* or prince Enrique, son of Fernando de Antequera, protected by St. Catherine, were portrayed before the Madonna and the Child in a painting in the Museum of Valladolid [fig. 12]³⁰; furthermore, the retable, now disappeared, in the chapel of St. Blaise, which portrayed Bishop Pedro Tenorio kneeling next to the saint, could also be included in this roll call³¹.

Turning now to the paintings in Bilbao, we should first note the difference in quality between the two: they are not by the same artist. The painter who produced the (as yet unrestored) *Nativity* is a lesser hand, possibly a member of the workshop run by the master, something also suggested by *Christ on the Road to Calvary* in the Chueca Collection, which could well be linked to the spatial creativity and the marked facial features found in Rodríguez de Toledo. *Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà*, however, retains its colour intact, conveys great expressive force and points to a master with great artistic ability. The difference between the two paintings is surely due to the painters who executed them and has to do with mediaeval workshop practice, where there was a master and officials who took a full part daily in workshop commissions [figs. 13-16]³². Very possibly, the three masters identified stylistically (Rodríguez de Toledo, the Master of Horcajo and the Master of the Pietà) must have trained and gained experience working on the first major commission in Toledo, the great retable at Toledo Cathedral. Their activity may be traced from the year 1400, when work on the paintings for the St. Blaise chapel must have begun. The *sarga* or *serge* for *Christ on the Road to Calvary* was probably produced between 1407 and 1410, when Guiomar de Meneses and her husband made their donation of plots of land for the convent of St. Peter the Martyr. The Sancho de Rojas retable is dated to between 1415 and 1419. Work on the great retable in the Cathedral may have been finished in 1418; some parts of the sculpture of the Madonna with the Child that presided over the polyptych were gilded that year. And, to end, the Horcajo de Santiago group has been dated to the 1430s. So we have a time span running from 1400 to 1430 or just after, during which time the painters recorded and known from references in the archive of Toledo Cathedral coincided.

28 The most recent study of the Sancho de Rojas retable, with updated bibliography, is Herráez 2011. A new opening for work on the retable was found by Robinson 2008 and Nickson 2010.

29 Post 1933, p. 469; Tormo 1950, p. 53; Gudíol 1955, pp. 205-211; Azcárate 1982-1983, vol. I, p. 201; Piquero 1984, pp. 41-52; Puig/Seguí 2005. The Franciscan friar Hernando de Illescas was confessor and ambassador of King Juan I of Castile, and close to the circle of Archbishop Pedro Tenorio. It would seem unlikely to be Juan de Illescas, successor to Juan Serrano as Bishop of the diocese of Sigüenza-Guadalajara.

30 Rebollo 2009. The author includes the previous bibliography on the panel.

31 Piquero 1984, pp. 53-54; Lahoz 2012, pp. 259-260.

32 This habitual practice had also been appreciated, by Pérez Higuera 1997, in the sculpture produced for Toledo Cathedral itself, p. 43.



a



b



c



d



e



f

13. The Madonna, face (details)

a. Master of Horcajo
Nativity, early 15th century
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

b. Master of the Pietà
Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà, early 15th century
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

c. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca

d. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca

e. Rodríguez de Toledo
Madonna with Child and Saint Catherine with Donors,
early 15th century
Museum of Valladolid

f. Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of Archbishop Sancho de Rojas, 1415-1420
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
Panel of the Pietà



a



b

14. Saint Joseph, face (details)

a. Master of Horcajo
Nativity, early 15th century
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

b. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca
Panel of the Nativity



a



b



c



d

15. Child Jesus (details)

a. Master of Horcajo
Nativity, early 15th century
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

b. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
 Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca
 Panel of the Adoration of the Magi

c. Rodríguez de Toledo
Madonna with Child and Saint Catherine with Donors, early 15th century
 Museum of Valladolid

d. Master of Horcajo and Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of the Infancy of Christ, c. 1430
 Chapel of the Council Seminary of Saint Julian, Cuenca
 Panel of the Flight Into Egypt



a



b



c



d

16. Christ, face (details)

a and b. Master of the Pietà
Christ Tied to the Column and Pietà, early 15th century
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

c. Rodríguez de Toledo
Retable of Archbishop Sancho de Rojas, 1415-1420
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
 Panel of the Pietà

d. Master of Horcajo
Christ on the Road to Calvary with Donors Protected by Saint Peter Martyr, 1407-1410
 Collection of Fernando Chueca Aguinaga

"After you were whipped
and your body torn,
to give you more hurt,
according to such my reason,
on your head was placed
sharp crown of thorns.
Oh, the pain!"

Alonso del Campo, *Auto de la Pasión*
Toledo Cathedral, c. 1485-1486, verses 374-380

Liturgical ceremonies, Christ's Passion and the Pietà of the Madonna

Fourteenth century Christian Europe saw a number of spiritualist and contemplative tendencies that led to what was known as the *devotio moderna*³³, a Christian movement that defended intimate, pious prayer by laymen and women in private settings. This current of thought was accompanied by a host of devotional texts, like *Vita Christi*, which gave detailed accounts of the life of Christ. These narrations alluded to the apparent contraries, i.e. to the juxtaposition of images, such as the tenderness of a Mother with her newborn son and her sorrow and pain at the son's death. Parallel to these spiritual tendencies, in certain regions of Europe nativity and Easter cycles proliferated and these gradually converged in liturgical representations of Christ's Passion. Although evolution was slow, philologists have established a continuity between the prose texts of the Easter cycle and theatrical representations. Indeed, the first three great surviving theatrical works in the Crown lands of Aragon date from the late 15th century, are associated with the city of Toledo and focus on the theme of the Passion: Gómez Manrique's *Lamentaciones* and the *Autos de la Pasión* produced by Alonso del Campo and Lucas Fernández³⁴. In his Primate Cathedral manuscript on Cathedral ceremonies, Fernández Vallejo underscored the importance of the celebrations of the Easter Vigil inspired in the Holy Places, where people imagined the leading events in Christ's Passion, and how solidly established were the theatrical representations (the ceremony of the shepherds, the representation of the Sibyl or the Feast of Fools)³⁵. But he also noted that "sacred farces" had been performed since the 13th century, introduced by the fraternity of the Brothers of the Passion whose object was to represent Christ's Passion in churches and that the Play of the Piety (also known as the Fifth Sorrow or the Descent from the Cross) had been performed since at least 1495³⁶. As is done today with the stages of the *via crucis*, this most likely involved the use of images that recalled each incident as phases in mankind's journey towards salvation through Christ's sacrifice. The two paintings in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum may have been made under the auspices of these liturgical celebrations. Both works seem to refer to a larger group of images recalling the

33 Ragusa/Green 1977. Essays on this theme in Spain include: Hauf 1990; Gabardón de la Banda 2005, pp. 23-89, 111-148; Robinson 2012 (my grateful thanks to Professor Robinson for her kindness and generosity in allowing me to see some of the chapters of her work before publication). Broader in sweep, see Pereda 2007; Molina 1999 on the use and functions of the mediaeval image. See, among others, Belting 2007 and 2009; Ringbom 1995; Freedberg 1992; Bynum 2007; Hamburger 1990, 1997 and 1998; Schmitt 2002; Wirth 2008; Kamerick 2002 on the same theme in a European context.

34 The bibliography on mediaeval Spanish theatre is extensive. Below are cited the most recent essays that refer back to previous works: Torroja/Rivas 1977; Castro 1997; Grande 2002. Although other paratheatrical traditions have been recorded in the liturgy of the Passion in Castile, also extended to Europe, including the Depositio and the Elevatio Crucis, or, more in the Spanish tradition, like the procession of the Banner, historians and philologists alike have tended to focus on the city of Toledo because of the importance given to its religious celebrations and the solidity of its entrenched tradition.

35 Fernández Vallejo 1785, fol. 590 ff., note 41, 604-605.

36 Torroja/Rivas 1977, pp. 60-61.



17. Master of the Ornamental Covering, Narbonne (Jean de Orleans?)
Ornamental Covering, Narbonne, Paris, c. 1375-1378
 Black ink on canvas, 286 x 775 cm
 Musée du Louvre, Paris
 Inv. no. MI112

most important events in the life of Christ and may have been used as the principal images or as curtains screening the retable of a chapel or church in Toledo on specific feasts like the Nativity or Easter, as occurred with other significant mediaeval paintings [fig. 17]. This would explain the size of the works and the group as a whole, and the quality of technique and painterly rendering.

Research by Carmen Torroja and María Rivas into mediaeval theatre in Toledo has shown that at least from 1418 onwards records exist of a dramatized paraliturgical performance about the Crucifixion of Good Friday, which would presumably have been associated with the *Planctus Mariae* or lamentations of Mary over the death of her son. The oldest surviving text is Alonso del Campo's *Auto de la Pasión*, an analysis of which shows that the two versions of the lament, the liturgical in Latin, the paraliturgical in Spanish, were combined. Starting from a lyrical-narrative perspective, it is possible to organize the narration of the *Auto de la Pasión* into the following scenes: the Prayer in the garden, the Arrest, St. Peter's denial, St. Peter's lament, St. John's lament, Pilate's sentence, Our Lady and St. John, and the Madonna's lament. These events largely coincide with some of the panels in the predella of the St. Eugene retable and, therefore, with the original great retable in Toledo Cathedral. Known to be directly linked with the great retable are the Adoration of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, the Presentation in the Temple, Jesus amongst the Doctors, the Baptism of Christ and, in the predella, the Prayer in the Garden, the Arrest, the betrayal by St. Peter, the washing of hands before Pilate and the road to Calvary. But it would also have included scenes such as the Birth, Christ tied to the column and the Pietà, which are indeed to be found in the Sancho de Rojas group³⁷. Although most of these scenes would be part of a retable devoted to Christ's Passion, the scene of St. Peter's denial is a major peculiarity, one that might well be due to the influence of the theatrical representations by the high altar of Toledo Cathedral itself. This detail and others such as Del Campo's description of Christ flagellated—"A rope tied at the throat / like a thief they placed on you, / and very tightly drawn / to the hands they tied you, /

37 The lack of data on the iconography and the narrative discourse of the primitive great retable at Toledo Cathedral hinders greater precision concerning the ideological presuppositions used in their creation, but some elements in the Sancho de Rojas retable suggest that the initial model was the great Toledo group: the oblong that was then beginning to fall into disuse, the devotion to the life of Christ, the commission of both polyptychs by people associated with Toledo Cathedral, namely the Archbishop Pedro Tenorio and the Bishop of Palencia, Sancho de Rojas (subsequently also of Toledo), and, finally, the preference for a painters' workshop in Toledo with links to the Primate Cathedral.



18. Gonçal Peris Sarrià (active c. 1404-1451)
Pietà, c. 1420-1430
 Tempera and gold on panel, 48.1 x 34.6 cm
 Private Collection

and with many a slap and buffet / contused your face. / Oh, the pain!³⁸—seem to demonstrate a degree of mutual influence of staging and painting exerted in figurative representation. And we find the compositions that do not appear, such as the Madonna and St. John at the foot of the cross and the Madonna's lamentation, or *Pietà*, in the Sancho de Rojas retable, executed by the same school of painting, very possibly taking the great polyptych in Toledo as model.

The theme of the Madonna's *Pietà* appears in the early 14th century particularly in Germany, and by the end of the century was associated with the mystical writings of St. Bonaventure and the preaching of Franciscans mostly in Germany and France, being used within European spiritual and contemplative tendencies. Variations on the theme include Mary Magdalene at Christ's feet and St. John by His head. This iconography derives from the Lamentation, a compositional schema Byzantine in origin that shows Christ dead on the ground, accompanied by the Madonna, and which has a parallel in the Madonna of Humility³⁹. The represen-

38 Torroja/Rivas 1977, p. 172 (fol. 23v.a., verse 340). Alonso del Campo, *Auto de la Pasión*, Toledo Cathedral, c. 1485-1486.

39 The best classic analysis of this iconography is to be found in Panofsky 1997. On the evolution of Christ, the Man of Sorrows, see Vetter 1963. See Gabardón de la Banda 2005, pp. 116-148 for a discussion of the influence of popular religious sentiment.

tation of the Pietà in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, dated in the late 14th or early 15th century, may be considered one of the first examples of large format paintings on Spanish soil, as the most significant are from the late Gothic period at the end of the 15th century, as is the case of Bartolomé Bermejo's *Piedad Desplà* (Cathedral Museum, Barcelona) and Fernando Gallego's version (Prado, Madrid)⁴⁰. The first known example of this type is the Pietà by Ferrer Basa in St. Michael's chapel at the monastery of Pedralbes (1346); from the beginning of the following century are the Pietàs in the small centre panels of retable predellas in Valencia from the international period. From 1400 records exist of some small devotional works⁴¹, although surviving examples of this more private, intimate use are from a later date, c. 1420-1430, like the one by Gonçal Peris Sarrià, now in a private collection in the United States [fig. 18]⁴². This is why the creation of the Bilbao Pietà could very well have been prompted by the liturgical representations of the Passion in Toledo. The eighth scene of Del Campo's *Auto de la Pasión*, devoted to the lamentation of the Madonna, begins with the words quoted earlier in this essay⁴³, the very ones spoken by Mary in an anonymous popular Spanish play from the 16th century included in the *Código de Autos Viejos* (Code of Ancient Plays) and which are repeated over the scene of the Pietà in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!"⁴⁴.

Although, as the 15th century wore on, devotion for this Pietà scene grew, we need to bear in mind how important it was at the beginning of that century to Spanish monarchs and prelates alike. From 1397, in Crown of Aragon territory, the day of the *Passio Ymaginis Domini* was celebrated every November 9 in Barcelona, where the relics from the *Casa Condal* associated with Christ and the Madonna were shown in procession. Royal inventories show that in 1347 Maria of Navarra, first wife of Peter IV the Ceremonious, kept in her chapel a triptych showing Christ with the Madonna, with Mary Magdalene and St. John featuring in the other panels⁴⁵. Until 1424, queen Margarita de Prades, widow of king Martin I, also kept a foldable and very probably portable gold diptych, with angels and saints shown on the outer part and the Pietà of Jesus Christ on the inside, together with other images⁴⁶. Meanwhile, in the Crown of Castile the fervour inspired by this iconography was embodied in sculptures, like the one John II seems to have gifted to the Bishop of Palencia, Sancho de Rojas, who had it presiding over the retable in the chapel of Our Lady of the Fifth Sorrow, which he had founded in around 1407⁴⁷. Admiration for this dedication would seem to be one of the motives for the existence of almost life-size sculptures of the Pietà donated by important prelates and members of religious orders to their favourite chapels, including the ones now in Toledo Cathedral, the convent of Santo Domingo el Real also in Toledo, the royal monastery of Santa Clara in Carrión de los Condes (Palencia), the charterhouse of Aniago (Villanueva de Duero, Valladolid) and the monastery of San Benito in Valladolid⁴⁸.

40 Gómez Frechina 2001; Valero 2009; Miquel (in press)_b.

41 On artistic culture in Valencia, see García Marsilla 2001, Terés 1998. Other similar examples for Europe as a whole are in Didier 2009.

42 Miquel (in press)_b.

43 Torroja/Rivas 1977, p. 178 (fol. 27v.a., verse 545).

44 Gabardón de la Banda 2005, pp. 136-138.

45 Idoate 1947, p. 433: "Item unes taules de oratori, e son per tot tres taules, en la una de les quals es la figura de Jhesu Xrist e de santa Maria, e en l'altra la figura de santa Maria Magdalena, e en l'altra de Sent Johan, e l'estoig de l'oratori". The portrayal of these three characters must have alluded to the death of Christ and to the figures of Mary and Jesus, i.e. a Pietà.

46 This may be the work that the Duc de Berry gifted to John I or perhaps to Martin I and which queen Margarita de Prades recovered from the councillors of Catalonia and sold to Alphonse the Magnanimous in 1424. This description tallies with the deed of sale. However, professor Domenge considers it to be a different work (Cornudella 2009-2010, p. 43; Domenge 2009, pp. 361-362).

47 Herráez 2011.

48 Ara Gil 1977, pp. 184-188. More recently, and with an overview of works from Castile, I hope the essay Matthias Weniger is currently preparing (Weniger 2012) will soon be available for consultation.

Conclusion

Toledo Cathedral was one of the major artistic reference points in mediaeval and modern Spain. Its ornamentation and ceremonies were copied in other churches as the very image of splendour and saintliness; and the activity shown by its archbishops, clergy and even by the monarchs of Castile was imitated as representative of the ideals of power and magnificence. The stylistic bond uniting all the works discussed here with the painters from the school of Toledo, the preference for the theme of the Pietà, whose first representations on Spanish soil are the Bilbao painting and the retablo of Sancho de Rojas, and the predilection for a group that narrated the life and Passion of Christ are sufficient reason for appraising the possible influence of late mediaeval devotional tendencies in Castile, which spread, to differing degrees, to the rest of Spain, and the importance of the liturgical representations in Toledo Cathedral, where the commemoration of the life and Passion of Christ achieved one of the highest artistic levels anywhere in the kingdom. The two phenomena (liturgical staging and devotional image) through which the holy texts were expressed in combination demonstrate mutual interference and their adaptation to changes and religious requirements. The works of art and the surviving records from the early 15th century open onto a rich liturgical and artistic landscape, in which paintings accompanied religious celebrations to indoctrinate the faithful and to recall the principal moments of the life and Passion of Christ, thus stimulating devotion and piety.

"My son, you expired;
alas, I cannot help you!
I, my dear, die to see you;
How different you have become,
I do not know you!
Your sorrows are over
And mine have begun
My eyes that saw them
weep plentiful tears, for they lost
all the good they desired."

Fray Íñigo de Mendoza
Lamentation for the Fifth Sorrow, when Our Lady held Our Lord in her arms,
early 16th century

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