

# Two panels by the Master of Cervera de la Cañada in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



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**S***aint Joachim and Saint Anne at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem* and *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* are the titles of two panels from the parish church of Cervera de la Cañada now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [figs. 1 and 2]. The two panels were most likely part of an ample set of works of Marian devotion today dispersed in a number of museums and collections. These works provide the starting point for a profile of an anonymous artist, the Master of Cervera de la Cañada, probably active in what is now the province of Zaragoza in the late 15th century. Although for the moment we do not know his name and virtually nothing about his life and career, which means it is hard to pin down where exactly he trained and worked as an artist, the style of the panels from Cervera de la Cañada, and of several other works that, in my view, may be attributed to him, provides a link with the movement of painting in Aragon led by the Master of Saint George and the Princess, this being the artist responsible for the iconic panel featuring the knight-saint and his lady now in the MNAC, the national museum of art of Catalonia [fig. 3]. Both this superbly rendered panel and the two from Cervera de la Cañada, more modest perhaps but just as interesting, were attributed by many 20th-century historians to the leading Catalan painter of the second half of the 15th century, Jaume Huguet. However, recent stylistic revisions of *Saint George and the Princess* and works from Aragon traditionally associated with it, together with greater knowledge and understanding of the art scene in Aragon and Huguet's body of work (all made possible largely by the discovery of new works and documents) have led to a major rethink with respect to these attributions.

## From Jaume Huguet to the Master of Cervera de la Cañada

In 1941 Post referred briefly to a series of panels in an altarpiece which, to judge by the wording, he would seem to have seen still in place at the parish church of Cervera de la Cañada, in Zaragoza province. The compartments showed the scenes of the Embrace between Saints Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate, the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, the Annunciation, the Nativity and the Calvary<sup>1</sup>. Post linked the style of these scenes closely to the *Retable of Saint Michael* from Barillas (Navarra), and attributed them to Martín de Soria<sup>2</sup>. The artist was one of the first Aragon painters to be identified, thanks in large part to

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1 Post 1941, p. 332, fig. 146. In this recount Post left out a fragment of the Pentecost scene, later in the Gudiol Collection.

2 Ibid.



1. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Saint Joachim and Saint Anne at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem*,  
compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
Tempera on panel, 90 x 92 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 69/131





2. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*,  
compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
Tempera on panel, 90 x 91 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 69/132

his appearing in notarial documents unearthed in the early 20th century, and the survival of a signed work, the huge *Retable of the Saviour* from Pallaruelo de Monegros<sup>3</sup>. Post drew up a most extensive and varied catalogue for the artist, certainly in terms of the quality of the works included and the styles employed; understandably, the list was extensively qualified and subsequently expurgated, after a number of documentary and stylistic contributions. Although there was no question about the connection between the Barillas altarpiece paintings and what was being done in Aragon at the time, I really do not think they can be directly attributed to Martín de Soria; nor are the connections between this piece and the one at Cervera de la Cañada evident<sup>4</sup>. However that may be, the latter group is among the works Gudiol and Ainaud withdrew from Post's Martín de Soria catalogue to include in Catalan painter Jaume Huguet's own catalogue. Indeed, it was held to be the earliest surviving work of the artist from Valls.

In the mid- to late-20th century historiographers finally began to take a closer look at painting in Aragon in the second half of the 15th century. Their object was to construct a general explanatory model and outline the main artistic schools and movements to which they could then ascribe the names and works that had gradually come to light since the late 19th century. Pioneering, wide-ranging essays like the ones by Ch. R. Post and Josep Gudiol Ricart<sup>5</sup>, among others, insisted that the art world in 1450 had been clearly divided into two camps. Both Post and Gudiol were of the opinion that painting in Aragon in the second half of the century was stimulated by outside influences that had given rise to two major movements dominated by the powerful artistic personalities of Jaume Huguet and Bartolomé Bermejo respectively. As Post saw it, one of the leading, if not the main, followers of Huguet in Aragon had been Martín de Soria, to whom he attributed, among other works, the group comprising the panel of the MNAC's *Saint George and the Princess* and a further two works with the figures of a pair of donors accompanied by their protector saints which were in Berlin's Kaiser Friedrich Museum until 1946<sup>6</sup>. Post's attributions provoked no little controversy and gained him few supporters, particularly as, since 1908, Émile Bertaux's studies<sup>7</sup> had placed this group of panels more or less firmly with Huguet, then seen as late Gothic's foremost practitioner in Catalonia<sup>8</sup>.

Without abandoning the Huguet attribution, Josep Gudiol Ricart and Joan Ainaud de Lasarte would, some years after Post's proposal, also link *Saint George and the Princess* with art circles in Aragon, although in a very different sense. Gudiol and Ainaud acknowledged the connection between the MNAC painting and the ones in Berlin and some of the works Post had brought together in the Martín de Soria catalogue, and used them to suggest a hypothetical period spent in Aragon in the young Huguet's career. The two insisted

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3 The Pallaruelo altarpiece was reviewed by Arco y Garay 1913, pp. 345-346, fig. p. 343. However, the signature was finally discovered by the Albareda brothers (Albareda/Albareda 1933). Post published the date in 1941, pp. 316-317.

4 García Gainza 1980, pp. 23-25, plates I, 20 and Alcoy 2004, pp. 173-174, note 256 have both addressed this group.

5 Post 1941; Gudiol 1971.

6 The two panels, with a gentleman accompanied by St. John the Baptist and a lady presented by St. Louis of Toulouse respectively, apparently disappeared in a fire caused by bombing raids in World War 2; today all that is left of them are some (thankfully excellent) black and white photographs. The link between these two paintings and *Saint George and the Princess* was appreciated by Émile Bertaux, who noted the close stylistic and compositional unity, as well as a perfectly acceptable thematic match. See Bertaux 1909. Bertaux suggests the three works were originally a triptych, in which the *Saint George and the Princess* panel was most probably the centre piece, flanked by the donors and their patron saints. However, the work's original arrangement remains something of an incognito. Among others, Sureda 1994, pp. 124-131 has discussed this point.

7 See previous note.

8 Huguet was gradually discovered during the first half of the 20th century in several studies, including Sanpere 1906, vol. II, pp. 16-65; Folch i Torres 1925-1926; and particularly Bertaux 1908. The high critical esteem in which the artist was held was confirmed in 1932 in a first major essay by Benjamin Rowland (Rowland 1932), a follower of Post. In 1938, Post devoted much of volume 7 of his *A History of Spanish Painting* to Huguet (pp. 46-171), including opinions that did not always coincide with Rowland's own views. Further, in the early decades of the 20th century, documents had been discovered that were vital to the process of piecing together Huguet's catalogue and understanding his style: in 1913 López Zamora discovered documents referring to the *Retable of St. Augustine "dels Blanquers"* and, in 1922, further documents also attributed the *Retable of the Epiphany* in the royal chapel to him. See Pallejà 1922.





3. Master of Saint George and the Princess  
 (active around the third quarter of 15th  
 century)  
*Saint George and the Princess*  
 Tempera, stucco reliefs, gold leaf and  
 remains of foil on panel, 90 x 58.5 cm  
 MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya,  
 Barcelona  
 Inv. no. 015868-000

that the artist's entire output catalogued to that time was his mature work, while nothing was known of his youthful period<sup>9</sup>. Both proposed to put an end to this situation by arguing that "in his early years Huguet may have run a workshop in Aragon, eventually settling, after a brief period in Tarragona, in Barcelona in 1448, when he was already over thirty years old"<sup>10</sup>. The paintings Gudiol and Ainaud clustered around *Saint George and the Princess* were the panels of the Cervera de la Cañada altarpiece (the subject of the present essay), the panels of the Annunciation and the Epiphany from Alloza (Zaragoza Fine Arts Museum), two panels possibly from an altarpiece devoted to Saint Lawrence or Saint Vincent (formerly in the Román Vicente Collection, Zaragoza, later in the Torelló Collection in Barcelona), the canvas entitled *Madonna and Guardian Angel* in the Museum of Zaragoza and a *Head of the Prophet Daniel* in the Prado Museum.

9 Gudiol/Ainaud 1948, p. 6.

10 Ibid., p. 7.

At the time Gudiol and Ainaud were writing, there was no documentary proof available concerning the artist's career immediately before 1448, a situation that undoubtedly favoured their hypothesis, which had a major impact on subsequent work, despite some as yet unresolved issues. Besides solving the question of Huguet's early years, their theory meant they could attribute a considerable body of works and justify the influence of the artist from Valls on Aragon; however, it failed to explain how a young painter, still in training, could have exercised such a powerful influence over such a large area, particularly as he only lived there for a few short years. Furthermore, the *Saint George and the Princess* panel is a work of great maturity, full of technical devices that suggest the hand of an expert painter, not that of an artist who has yet to finish his training. Furthermore, there are considerable differences between *Saint George and the Princess* and Huguet's mature work, differences that are also appreciable regarding works from a supposedly later phase of the artist's career, including *Madonna with Child and Angels* and the Annunciation from the Vallmoll altarpiece<sup>11</sup>. The recent discovery of documents certifying Huguet's presence in the Valencia region in 1445 and 1447 makes the likelihood of the young artist journeying to Aragon rather more remote. It also provides a far more plausible explanation for the strong Van Eyckian influences appreciable in his early works<sup>12</sup>.

In recent years, several historians, including Rosa Alcoy, María del Carmen Lacarra and myself, have tried to redefine the relations between the Barcelona and Aragon schools of painting throughout the 15th century and judge the real impact of Huguet and other Catalanian painters and the international substratum in Aragon on the schools of the second half of the century<sup>13</sup>. Rosa Alcoy suggested the possible existence of a Master from Aragon who, with his workshop or circle, might have produced both the *Saint George and the Princess* panel and the rest of the works in the group put together by Gudiol and Ainaud, which, despite their obvious close connections, also vary greatly in quality<sup>14</sup>. In the last few years I have added two panels to the catalogue of the Master of Saint George and the Princess that are probably still in their original setting, the church of the monastery of San Pedro de Siresa. These are a *Saint James* and a *Saint John the Baptist*, both beautifully executed, mounted in an altarpiece next to a *Saint Fabian* from a later period<sup>15</sup>. Despite some losses and obvious restoration, in, for example, Saint James's dignified, melancholic face, we can appreciate the expert hand that painted Saint George and the Princess. The fact of the panel's presence in this Pyrenean monastery strengthens the Master's links with Aragon and lends him consistency and solidity as a person, while broadening a catalogue that, in my opinion, includes the MNAC panel, the two in Siresa, the two lost Berlin panels and the *Head of the Prophet Daniel* in the Prado Museum.

The Cervera de la Cañada panels are not by the same painter, probably not even from the same studio workshop. But it seems clear to me that, with the debunking of the fictitious group of Huguet's youth, these works do associate with many others in the catalogue of known masters, like Martín de Soria, Arnau de Castelnuou, Tomás Giner and Bernardo de Aras, and to others as yet anonymous, such as the Master of Saint Bartholomew or the Master of Morata, to outline a panorama where the panels of the supposed triptych of Saint George, the *Head of the Prophet Daniel* or the paintings of Siresa actually become the finest works

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11 Diocesan Museum of Tarragona and MNAC (inv. no. 64066).

12 Ferre 2003; Papell 2006, pp. 324-325.

13 Alcoy 2003; Alcoy 2004. Lacarra 2006 also explored the subject. Finally, one of the main objectives of my thesis was to re-evaluate the "bipartition" in two movements of painting in Aragon in the second half of the 15th century as proposed by the classic historiography, and to judge the importance of late international Aragon Gothic and the figure of the Master of Saint George and the Princess. See Macías 2013.

14 Alcoy 2004. The author suggests several possibilities when naming the anonymous Master, the strongest candidate being Bernardo Ortoneda. Ortoneda was son of Pascual Ortoneda, a painter from Tarragona settled in Huesca. At the instigation of Archbishop Dalmau de Mur, Bernardo trained in Barcelona, in Bernat Martorell's workshop, undoubtedly the most important Catalanian painter in the years leading up to the mid-15th century.

15 Macías 2010; Macías 2013, in particular vol. I, pp. 171-188.



of an extraordinarily prolific school or movement that expanded, was linked to and hybridized with other movements in Aragon in the second half of the 15th century.

We therefore need now to relocate the works from Cervera de la Cañada and look at them from a new angle, which is the connection with the style represented by the Master of Saint George and the Princess and his circle. In Rosa Alcoy's view, of the group of works Gudiol and Ainaud gathered around the panel of *Saint George and the Princess*, those from Cervera de la Cañada are the ones most distant "from the Alloza group, to be the work of a close but different workshop"<sup>16</sup>, an opinion I fully endorse. Some other works, now in a variety of museums and collections, may be aligned with these panels to provide us with a somewhat more complete image of their creator, whom we can I think name using the location of the only work whose origin is known. Among the works that we may add to the catalogue of the Master of Cervera de la Cañada are a *Retable of Saint Sebastian* and two panels from another group devoted to the Madonna.

## The Madonna altarpiece from Cervera de la Cañada

Now in a variety of museums and private collections, the six surviving panels have made it to the present day by very different routes. The group involved scenes depicting Mary's conception and infancy and others habitually found in the programmes of the Joys of the Virgin. The two scenes now in the permanent collection of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, *Saint Joachim and Saint Anne at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem* and *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, must have been in the first part of the cycle. The panels had previously belonged to the Espinal Collection in Barcelona and entered the Museum in 1959<sup>17</sup>. The part devoted to the Joys must have opened with the Annunciation now in the Amatller Collection [fig. 4]. This would have been followed by the Nativity [fig. 5], formerly in the Valls Volart Collection in Barcelona, although, according to the information in files at the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, it was circulating in the antiques trade in 1947<sup>18</sup>. The story also included the Pentecost scene, a fragment of which was in the Gudiol Collection [fig. 6], although it was up for sale in December 2009<sup>19</sup>. The Calvary [fig. 7], which probably crowned the altarpiece's central lane, was part of another private Barcelona collection, according to information provided by Gudiol and Ainaud, who identify it only with the initials "D. V."<sup>20</sup>.

It is highly likely that the conservation of all the works in Barcelona in the 1940s, which enabled Gudiol and Ainaud to analyze them directly, had something to do with them giving more importance to this set of paintings than to others located in Aragon, which might also have been taken into consideration when they were trying to piece together Huguet's Aragon phase. Both considered that "The author of the Saint George triptych may proclaim his authorship with regard to the surviving six panels"<sup>21</sup> adding that the group from Cervera de la Cañada was the first work attributable to Huguet's activity in Aragon, painted around 1440. This would therefore make it the earliest surviving work in Huguet's oeuvre. In the panels of this altarpiece they saw the transition from the international-tinged colouring of Martorell to a new way of painting, and

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16 Alcoy 2004, p. 130.

17 According to information provided by the Museum. The actual purchase is recorded in the Minutes of the meetings of the Board of Trustees of the Bilbao Fine Arts and Modern Art Museums on 13 July 1959 and 23 October 1959. In all, the Museum acquired 25 works from the Espinal Collection. See also Galilea 1994.

18 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, file C-95520.

19 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, file C-95801. According to information made available by Artprice the panel was sold on 17 December 2009 at the Subarna gallery of Barcelona for 8,000 euros and was in Lot 573. It measured 68 x 37 cm.

20 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, file C-95879. Gudiol/Ainaud 1948, p. 37.

21 Ibid., p. 36.



4. Master of Cervera de la Cañada (active in second half of 15th century)  
*Annunciation of the Virgin*, compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
 Tempera on panel, 83 x 83 cm  
 Amatller Collection, Barcelona

underscored the intense Flemish influence of the Annunciation scene at a remarkably early date. Gudiol and Ainaud declared that there were clear parallels between various characters and compositions, such as the Calvary and the fragment of the Pentecost, and Huguet's mature works like the *Retable of the Constable*<sup>22</sup>. Gudiol and Ainaud's opinion was shared by Crisanto Lasterra<sup>23</sup> and Santiago Alcolea<sup>24</sup>, who accepted a date around 1435-1440 and the attribution to Jaume Huguet. Although Francesc Ruiz Quesada did not attribute the altarpiece at Cervera to Jaume Huguet, he did think that, despite some archaism and lack of skill, the artist responsible was familiar with Huguet's mature work<sup>25</sup>.

Camón Aznar was not impressed by the attribution to Huguet. Indeed he thought the *Retable of the Virgin* at Cervera de la Cañada should be dated to around 1460<sup>26</sup>. As early as 1978, Fabián Mañas Ballestín also questioned Huguet's presence in Aragon in the 1440s, and suggested the panels from Cervera de la Cañada

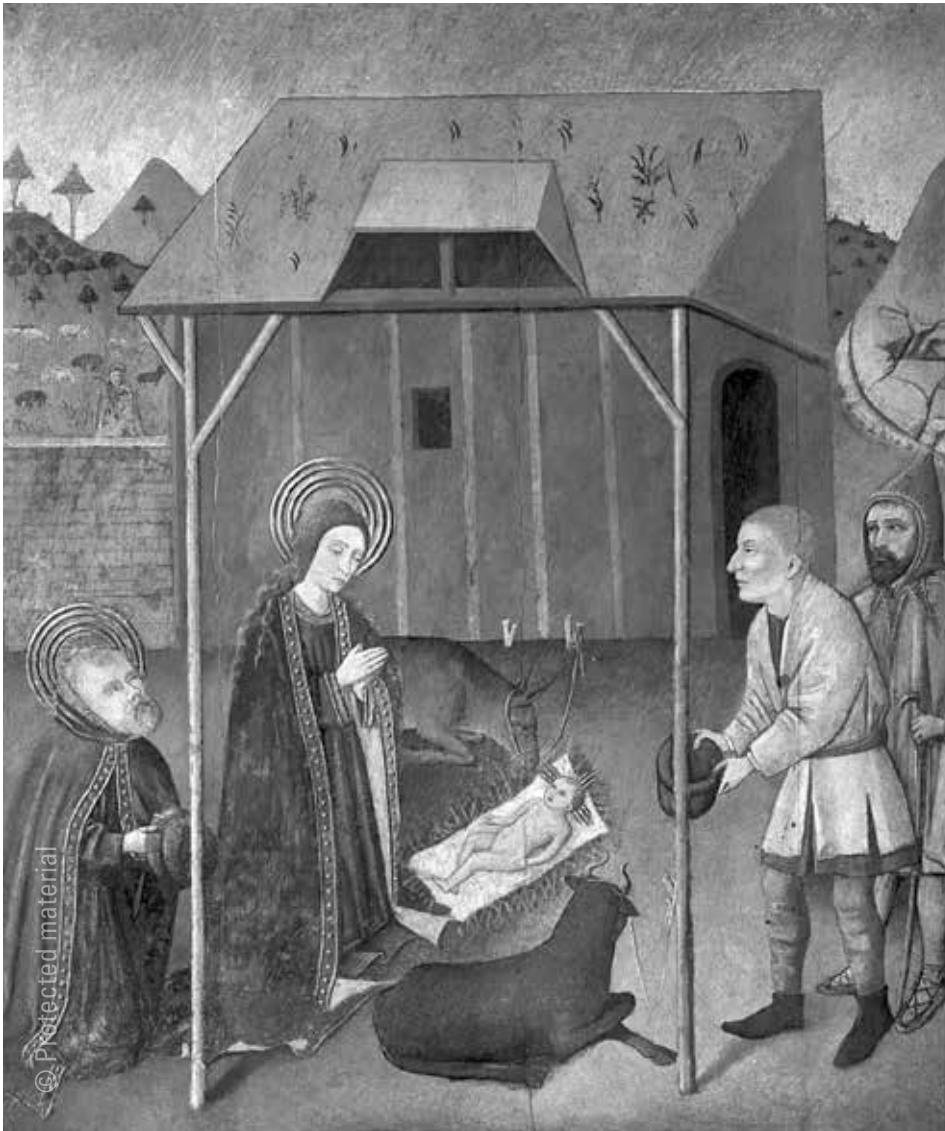
22 Ibid., p. 38.

23 Lasterra 1967, pp. 47-53.

24 Santiago Alcolea i Blanch in Zaragoza 1980, p. 116.

25 Ruiz Quesada 1993.

26 Camón Aznar 1966, p. 392.



5. Master of Cervera de la Cañada (active in second half of 15th century)  
*Nativity*, compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
Tempera on panel, 93 x 83 cm  
Private collection

could have come from Pedro de Aranda's workshop<sup>27</sup>. Cervera de la Cañada is relatively close to Calatayud, Aranda's area of activity, and therefore could have come within the influence of the painter and his group. However, there is nothing sure or certain about the identification of Pedro de Aranda's style; a large group of works has been attributed to Aranda that I would prefer to classify as being by the Morata de Jiloca group<sup>28</sup>. Although they share some ingredients, it is simply indefensible to argue stylistic unity with any of them. Like Mañas Ballestín before her, Ana Galilea Antón rejected both the attribution to Huguet of the Cervera panels and any strict dependence on his circle or school. In her opinion they are the work of an artist from Aragon active around 1450-1460 and the features common to the Huguetian style can be explained by his belonging to the "naturalist movement of the second half of the 15th century"<sup>29</sup>.

27 Mañas 1979, p. 139.

28 Macías 2013, vol. I, pp. 383-437; vol. II, figs. 269-333.

29 Galilea 1993, t. I, p. 244. The author maintains this opinion in the entries in the Museum catalogue. See Galilea 1995, pp. 154-163 and 164-165.





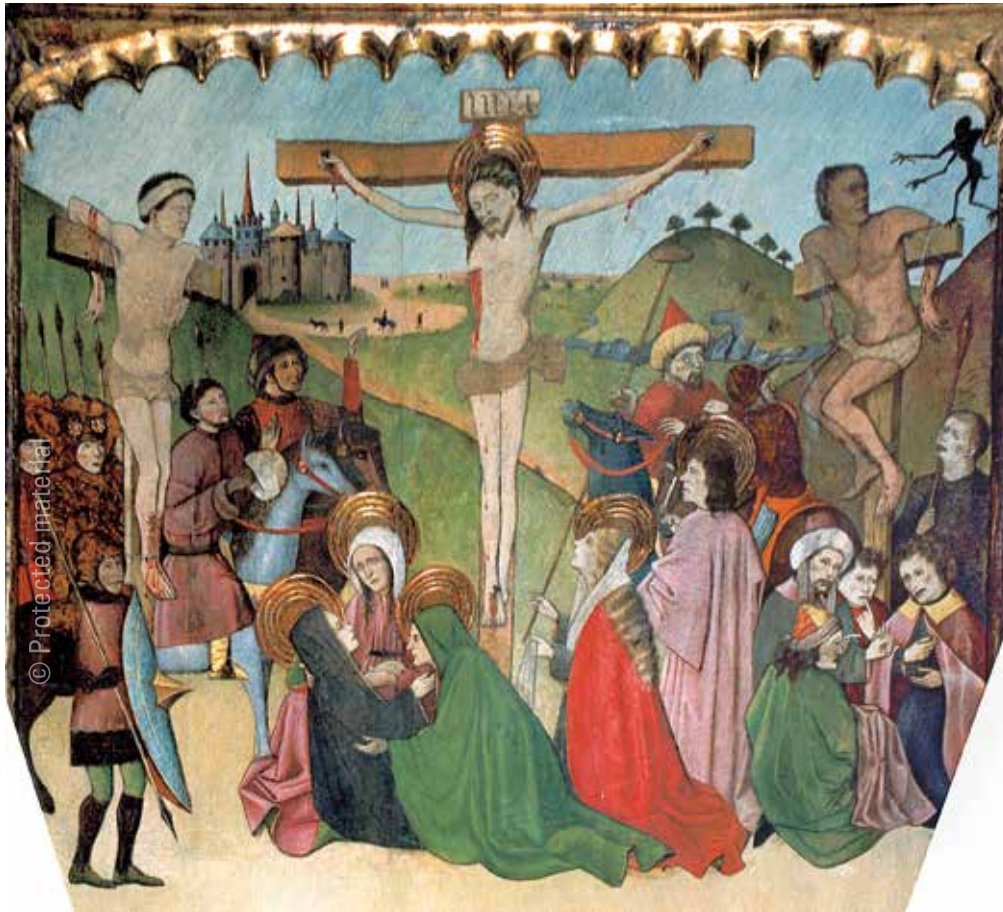
6. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Pentecost*, compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
Tempera on panel, 68 x 37 cm  
Private collection

To my mind, the *Retable of the Virgin* from Cervera de la Cañada should be located at the periphery of the circle defined by the activity of the Master of Saint George and the Princess and his workshop. It is an artistic movement that hybridizes the tradition of the fertile international Gothic in Aragon with numerous ingredients of the new Flemish realism and which also seems to include some familiarity with the art world in Barcelona in the mid-15th century.

Camón Aznar had already pointed out quite perceptively the mixed nature of the *Retable of the Virgin* from Cervera de la Cañada, hovering between the international style and new Flemish realism. But, more than the survival of international values regarding style (i.e. character conception, surroundings or colour), I think what we have is the persistence of certain compositions. We can see this, for example, in the general ordering of *Saint Joachim and Saint Anne at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem*, although the landscape distances itself from the international conventions of fantastically-shaped, tapered mountains, and instead portrays plant-covered hills and narrow rocky profiles rooted in Van Eyck. In the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, the master employs a schema used by painters active in the second quarter of the 15th century, like Blasco de Grañén and the Master of Riglos<sup>30</sup>. The Virgin's parents and other attendees are arranged on both sides of the stairway the Virgin ascends to access the temple door, where the priest awaits her, in a composition that would remain pretty much unchanged until the last decade of the 15th century.

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30 On the Master of Riglos, see Macías 2013, vol. I, pp. 43-168; vol. II, figs. 1-124.



7. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
 (active in second half of 15th century)  
*Calvary*, compartment of the *Retable of Cervera de la Cañada*  
 Tempera on panel, 112 x 97 cm  
 Private collection

In the crowded Crucifixion, Christ is nailed to the cross between two thieves: Dimas, the good thief, serene in death; and Gestas, who turns his head in horror at the sight of the approaching demon come to take his soul to hell. The mounted soldiers are distributed in two groups between the crosses and, in the foreground, are the women who help the fainting Virgin, Mary Magdalene, Saint John the Evangelist and the soldiers who gamble for Christ's tunic, in this case using the short stick game rather than dice, sticks being popular in iconography in the Aragon of the second half of the 15th century<sup>31</sup>. The background is enlivened by tiny figures entirely remote from the drama being played out in the foreground, including a donkey, a knight and other characters who seem to be heading towards the city shown in the far background.

Of these more or less traditional scenes, the Annunciation [fig. 4] comes as something of a surprise because of the modernity of the composition. The panel powerfully calls to mind some of the annunciations attributed to Robert Campin, like the *Mérode Altarpiece* [fig. 8], the one in Brussels<sup>32</sup> and the *Annunciation in a Church* in the Prado Museum (inv. no. P01915)<sup>33</sup>, as well as other compositions of the master, such as the *Saint Barbara* [fig. 9] from the *Werl Triptych*, also in the Prado Museum<sup>34</sup>. One of the features that reminds to

31 They are used, for instance, in the *Calvary* of the *Retable of Saint Vincent* from Huesca, by Bernardo de Aras, now in the Huesca Museum.

32 Dijkstra 1996.

33 The panel is not attributed unanimously to Robert Campin. Those who do accept it as his date it before 1427 (when Van der Weyden entered Campin's workshop). The work was acquired by Philip II from Italian sculptor Jacome Trezzo and in 1584 it was kept at El Escorial.

34 The panel with Saint Barbara comes from the royal collections and was originally one of the folding doors of a triptych, painted around 1438. Also surviving from this triptych is a Saint John the Baptist accompanying the donor Henry of Werl, Provincial of the Franciscan Order of Cologne. The central panel has been lost. See Garrido 1996.



8. Robert Campin (c. 1375-1444)  
*Annunciation*, central compartment of the *Mérode Triptych*, c. 1425  
 Oil on panel, 64.1 x 63.2 cm  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
 Inv. no. 1956 (56.70)

the works of Campin's circle is the elongated bench the Virgin is seated on. Although in the *Mérode Altarpiece*, the Brussels *Annunciation* and *Annunciation in a Church*, the Virgin sits directly on the floor, adopting the old iconography of the Virgin of humility, both in these works and in the compartment devoted to Saint Barbara, the long bench, partially covered with fabric and cushions, is an essential part of the composition. The Master of Cervera de la Cañada, however, organizes the elements differently and places the bench so the Virgin is seated facing the spectator. The bench is in fact almost entirely concealed by a green fabric that generates a complex play of folds. Like Campin's Virgins, the Master of Cervera de la Cañada's Mary holds a book in her hands, thus eschewing the gesture of prayer more usually found in the Annunciations of the kingdom of Aragon. Distracted for a moment from her reading by the presence of an angel, the Virgin lifts her gaze from the book to give her attention to the messenger who arrives, as is habitual in Aragon, unfolding a large phylactery or speech scroll bearing the words "ave gratia plena, dominus tecum". In some annunciations from Campin's circle, the Virgin's room has a window with wooden shutters that opens on to the outside world; this is also used by the Master of Cervera. Here, the shutters are open and he avoids the complex play of open and closed frames to be found in the Mérode and Brussels annunciations.





9. Robert Campin (c. 1375-1444)  
*Saint Barbara*, lateral panel of the *Werl Triptych*, 1438  
 Oil on panel, 101 x 47 cm  
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid  
 Inv. no. P01514

The elements hanging on the wall to the right of Mary also evoke Flemish models. In a niche opened in the wall, held in place by an iron chain, is what looks to be a copper pot or pan, judging by the yellowy metal sheen. Next to the niche is a white cloth decorated with blue lines. Both objects feature in a similar arrangement in the *Mérode Altarpiece*. We know the pot alludes to Mary as a pure repository within which Christ became flesh. In the panel devoted to Saint Barbara the white cloth, hanging from the ceiling, is repeated, although the copper pot has been replaced by a metal ewer. The receptacle containing the lilies in the Cervera Annunciation is also metal.

Some of the elements in this Annunciation feature in two panels attributed to the Master of the Holy Kinship [fig. 10], active in Cologne around the last quarter of the 15th century<sup>35</sup>. In these paintings, sold at Sotheby's in 2001, the bench on which Mary, shown reading, is seated, is set facing the spectator and covered in a green fabric. At the back, in a niche, hangs the copper pot, with a metal vase in the foreground containing

<sup>35</sup> His name comes from the *Retable of the Holy Kinship* in Cologne, held at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum. Some of the works powerfully reflect the influence of Rogier van der Weyden. See Martens 1996, pp. 29-33.

the lilies. Although the work is clearly too late to have been a model for the Master of Cervera de la Cañada, and includes other features that the painter from Aragon dispenses with, it probably harks back to other, earlier paintings that may well have provided a model for ours.

However that may be, the reference in this particular painting from Aragon to the circle of Tournai, and specifically to Campin's work, goes with others that point to a link between Aragon in the second and third quarter of the 15th century to the new Flemish realism, against the preponderance of Jan van Eyck in Catalonia or Valencia. Didier Martens established that the group of Mary with the Child from Pompién's *Retable of the Virgin, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Sebastian* reinterpreted the *Durán Madonna* in the Prado Museum, by Rogier van der Weyden<sup>36</sup>. As I recently established, one of the earliest and most exact references to Campin in Aragonese painting is without doubt the main compartment of the *Trinity, Saint Fabian and Saint Sebastian Altarpiece* in the monastery of Siresa, which copies the group of the Trinity from the famed *Saint Petersburg Diptych*, now in the Hermitage Museum<sup>37</sup>. Tomás Giner is another of the artists who used models associated with Van der Weyden in reformulating, in the *Retable of the Epiphany* from Calatayud, the *Adoration of the Child* from the *Miraflores Triptych*<sup>38</sup>.

Despite links with the formulas of new Flemish realism, in general terms the Master of Cervera is a modest draughtsman: the composition and the way scenes fit together depends, as we just saw, on the model available, but all the figures are slightly rough-hewn, short in modelling, the hands inexpressive (with the little finger almost always separated from the others) and the faces with a slightly absent air about them. Noses are usually thin and long, eyebrows thin and arched and the lips narrow and slightly blurred. The compartments I have been able to analyze directly, and the ones of which there are colour reproductions, show how the painter orchestrates with no little success and realism the ranges of greys, greens, yellows and reds characteristic of his palette. It would seem fair to see this realist urge, which avoids the more decorative use of colour prevalent in the preceding phase, as the cause of the high praise Gudiol and Ainaud reserved for this particular aspect when they examined the panels<sup>39</sup>.

Any hypothesis concerning the reconstruction of the altarpiece is inevitably hindered by the fact that the group is only partly conserved; nor do the various carpentry remodellings aid such a process<sup>40</sup>. Even so, the iconographic cycle includes scenes from the life of Mary and scenes of the Joys, so it connects with the tradition of the great Aragonese Marian altarpieces of the second quarter of the 15th century<sup>41</sup>. The programme might well originally have been rounded off with a scene or two more from the life of Mary, perhaps her birth, or with another scene that habitually appeared in the cycle of the Joys, such as the Epiphany or the Resurrection, and perhaps with another compartment devoted to the end of the Virgin's life, such as the Dormition.

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36 Martens 2008.

37 Macías 2013, vol. I, pp. 46-51.

38 Ibid., pp. 303-306.

39 Gudiol/Ainaud 1948, p. 39.

40 On examining *Saint Joachim and Saint Anne at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem* and *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* I could clearly make out a number of paint retouches and major work done on the carpentry. Narrow strips have been added to both panels in the upper, lower and left lateral areas, from the viewer's viewpoint, and were rejoined in an almost illusionist manner. The Presentation has also lost all its original crosspieces and has three additions. The Embrace still has one of the original crosspieces, but another has been added to it. These modifications make it much more complicated to work out how the panels fitted together and to suggest an assembly sequence. Here, my thanks are due to the kind welcome I received from Javier Novo, head of the Collections Department, and José Luis Merino Gorospe, technician of the Conservation & Restoration Department at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, both of whom facilitated my examination of these works.

41 Macías 2013, vol. I, pp. 75-90.



10. Master of the Holy Kinship  
(active in Cologne c. 1475-1510)  
*Annunciation*, c. 1490  
Oil on panel, 134 x 94 cm (each panel)  
Private collection



## The Retable of Saint Sebastian

In my view, the Master of Cervera de la Cañada must also be the artist responsible for a *Retable of Saint Sebastian* supposedly of Sardinian origin and now in a private collection [fig. 11]<sup>42</sup>. This very small work (160 x 115 cm) is centred by the standing figure of the saint, placed (as was fairly standard practice in mid-15th Aragonese painting) against a wall behind which can be seen the tops of two cypresses. This central compartment is crowned by a Trinity represented according to the Throne of Grace formula: God the Father holds the cross of Christ and between the two flies the dove of the Holy Spirit. The left lateral lane starts the story off with *Saint Sebastian Preaching*. In the lower compartment, the saint is taken before the judge, in this case the Emperor Diocletian<sup>43</sup>. In the right lateral lane Saint Sebastian visits Mark and Marcellian in prison to bring them comfort and to urge them to remain firm in their faith. In other cases, the saints are shown at the prison window, while in the street their aged parents and their wives lament and hold up their children for them to see. Here, however, possibly because the compartment is so narrow, the artist decided to portray Mark and Marcellian seated, handcuffed and with their feet in stocks. Added to the scene is the miraculous cure of Zoe, wife of Nicostratus, their jailer, who despite being a mute was able to speak when she converted to Christianity, after listening to Saint Sebastian's exhortations addressed to the two prisoners and their families<sup>44</sup>. The lower compartment includes one of the episodes most often portrayed from the life of the saint, his martyrdom with arrows.

Renata Serra linked this altarpiece to the activity of Bernat Martorell's posthumous workshop<sup>45</sup>. Shortly before he died, on 17 October 1452, the painter had received payment of 40 pounds as an advance on the altarpiece destined for Sardinia<sup>46</sup>. On 8 March 1455, Miquel Nadal, who was managing the late Martorell's workshop at the time (largely because Bernat Martorell II, the painter's son and heir, was still too young), also received 10 pounds as the first payment for an altarpiece for Sardinia, possibly the same one that had been left unpainted owing the master's death<sup>47</sup>. Miquel Nadal would be replaced as the Martorell workshop manager by Pere Garcia, as recorded in the agreement signed with the artist's widow and her son in December 1455<sup>48</sup>. Serra reckoned that the *Retable of Saint Sebastian* could have been produced while Miquel Nadal or Pere Garcia were in charge, and she was convinced that these two painters were connected with the visual artistic culture of the altarpiece's maker, who, in her opinion, reveals "atraverso i Vergós, un determinante influo di Huguet"<sup>49</sup>. Among the arguments Serra mentions to support her suggestion the altarpiece was in Cagliari in the 15th century, is the possible influence of the solution used in the central compartment (with the saint flanked by the tops of the cypress trees) on 16th-century paintings such as Sanluri's 1576 *Retable of Saint Anne* and Sorredile's *Polyptych of the Visitation*, works of a "pittore stampacino". Serra also thinks a 1659 inventory entry at the Collegiate Church of Saint Giacomo (Saint James) in Cagliari's Villanueva district might actually refer to the *Retable of Saint Sebastian*. The church is known to have had a chapel devoted to Saint Sebastian with an old altarpiece dedicated to the saint. The inventory noted that the scenes were painted on paper adhered to the wood, which suggested

42 The work was catalogued in Serra 1989; Serra 1990, pp. 108-109, file card 45.

43 Jacobus de Voragine. *La leyenda dorada* (The Golden Legend) (ed., Madrid : Alianza, 2004, pp. 111-116).

44 The episode was also portrayed thus in a compartment of the *San Sebastian's visit to Mark and Marcellian* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (inv. no. 69/179), which has some, though by no means all, visual points in common with the Sardinian altarpiece.

45 Serra 1989, pp. 88-90; Serra 1990, p. 108.

46 Durán i Sanpere 1975, p. 126, doc. 70.

47 Ibid., pp. 128-129, docs. 87-88.

48 Ibid., p. 127, note 27; p. 129, doc. 89.

49 "Through Vergós, a decisive influence of Huguet". Serra 1989, p. 89.



11. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Retable of Saint Sebastian*  
Tempera on panel, 160 x 115 cm  
Private collection





12. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
 (active in second half of 15th century)  
*Retable of Saint Sebastian*  
 Private collection  
 Detail



13. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
 (active in second half of 15th century)  
*Annunciation of the Virgin*  
 Amatller Collection, Barcelona  
 Detail

to Serra a retable originally painted on panel and which had subsequently been totally or partially remodelled. Agreeing with the essentials of Renata Serra's conclusions, Joan Sureda also stated that in this work, among others, the "presence of Huguetian conceptions in Sardinian painting in the second half of the 15th century" are clear to see<sup>50</sup>. In my view, however, the style of the *Retable of Saint Sebastian* is neither Pere Garcia's nor Miquel Nadal's, but is rather that of an Aragonese master from the third quarter of the 15th century close to the circle of the Master of Saint George and the Princess.

There are some marked affinities between the Saint Sebastian occupying the central compartment of the group and the characters in the Cervera de la Cañada altarpiece. The configuration of the saint's face, with the long, narrow nose, thin lips and curly hair, recalls the archangel Gabriel of the Annunciation [figs. 12 and 13]. In both, the hands are inexpressive, largely unjointed and with long fingers. One of the apostles of the fragmentary Pentecost panel from Cervera is also quite similar, his youthful features making him identifiable perhaps with Saint John the Evangelist. The simple, schematic features of the characters in the narrative scenes are echoed in many of the secondary figures of the Cervera compartments. Furthermore, the predominant colours in the *Retable of Saint Sebastian* are the same as in Cervera de la Cañada: the yellows, reds and greens are unquestionably the stars of the show. Both the blue of the sky, done in clearly visible diagonal brushstrokes, and the cypresses or the posture of the saint and the gesture of the hands holding the instruments of martyrdom recall the posture, if not the melancholy dignity, of the Saint George in the MNAC panel.

<sup>50</sup> Sureda 1994, p. 85, note 157.





14. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Coronation of the Virgin*  
Tempera on panel, 129 x 69 cm  
MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art  
de Catalunya, Barcelona  
Inv. no. 15852

15. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*  
Tempera and oil on panel, 116.8 x 47 cm  
The Beaverbrook Art Gallery,  
Fredericton, Canada  
Inv. no. 1996-05

## Two compartments from a Marian altarpiece: the Presentation in the Temple and the Coronation of the Virgin

Amongst the works he attributed to Martín de Soria, Post included two compartments which, in his view, came from the same altarpiece: a Coronation [fig. 14] and a Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple [fig. 15]<sup>51</sup>. The first is in the MNAC<sup>52</sup>, while the second was in the collection of Thomas Harris, a London gallery owner specialized in Spanish art<sup>53</sup>. Post established the connection between the two compartments on the basis of style and the two works' identical wooden frames. The frames do indeed coincide, although one should remember that the formula used, a round arch adorned with smaller trefoil round arches, was very popular in altarpieces of the time in Aragon. Even so, the style of the two compartments is very similar. On a slightly more dubious note, Post linked these two panels with a third showing a Nativity or Adoration of the Child, in the Conde de Casal Collection in Madrid<sup>54</sup>, which, in my opinion, would be better added to the until now rather meagre catalogue of Arnau de Castelnuou<sup>55</sup>.

51 Post 1941, pp. 362-365, figs. 157-158.

52 Acquired in 1912 from Josep Soler Vila.

53 On this collector, see Penacho/Ortego 2013, pp. 138-140.

54 Post 1941, p. 365, fig. 160.

55 Macías 2013, vol. I, pp. 350-356. The Adoration features the work of a master more technically skilled than the Master of Cervera de la Cañada, who tended to create volumetric characters with serious, expressive faces, dressed in ample robes with rather rough folds.



16. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Coronation of the Virgin*  
MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona  
God the Father (detail)



17. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Saint Joachim (detail)

Gudiol included the MNAC Coronation, the compartment from the Harris Collection and the Nativity from the Conde de Casal Collection with the works that should be ascribed to the masters of Huguet's circle in Aragon. He insisted on the particularly Huguetian character of God the Father in the Coronation, and the similarities between the Virgin of the Conde de Casal Nativity and the Virgin of the Alloza Epiphany, one of the works he attributed directly to Huguet's youthful activity in Aragon<sup>56</sup>.

As the remains of the frame show, the Coronation is not now as wide as it originally was. This is corroborated by the fact that the two figures, particularly God the Father, are incomplete. The lower edge of the compartment may also have been manipulated, as the characters' robes are cut short. With a halo decorated with three concentric rings and rays outlining the cross, God the Father sits on a semicircular bench, holding a crown with a pearly base and high fleur-de-lis topped by crosses in His two hands over the head of the Virgin kneeling before Him. Enveloping the two characters is a double mandorla, formed by a circle of blue seraphs and another featuring red cherubs, portrayed as small suns with faces. God is portrayed in a blue tunic and pink cloak with a green lining, and wears the triple Papal crown. The Madonna's robes reverse the colours of the masculine character: she is wearing a pink tunic and a blue cloak.

God the Father's solemn visage, with narrow eyes, large nose and a dense moustache bristling over the upper lip, reproduces a very characteristic type of male of advanced years that we have already seen in the *Retable of the Virgin* from Cervera de la Cañada. It is close, for example, to the Saint Joachim portrayed talking to his wife while he attends Mary's presentation in the temple, in the compartment at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [figs. 16 and 17]; it is also reminiscent of the priest with the long grey beard who receives the Virgin in the same compartment, and of the apostles from the Pentecost fragment. The handling of the gold-

<sup>56</sup> Gudiol 1971, pp. 53, 80, cat. 198, figs. 158-159.





18. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Coronation of the Virgin*  
MNAC-Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona  
The Virgin (detail)



19. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Saint Anne (detail)



20. Master of Cervera de la Cañada  
(active in second half of 15th century)  
*Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
The Virgin (detail)

en strip decorating God the Father's cloak, with motifs in plaster relief simulating pearls or precious stones, is similar to the border of the Archangel Gabriel's cape in the Annunciation.

Portrayed three-quarter length, the Virgin of the MNAC Coronation is also very close to the Saint Anne in the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* from Cervera de la Cañada, principally in the delicate arched eyebrows, the narrow eyes, the long nose and the lips closed in a thin line [figs. 18 and 19]. The structure of the face is also similar to the Gabriel of the Annunciation in the Amatller Collection [fig. 13], where the handling of the characters' slightly lax hands, largely unjointed with elongated fingers, is identical to the compartment of the Coronation and the ones from the altarpiece from Cervera de la Cañada [figs. 18, 19 and 20].

Post emphasized the link in composition between the MNAC Coronation and the one painted by Pere Garcia de Benabarre around 1450 for his home town<sup>57</sup>. There certainly are points of contact, such as the posture of the kneeling Virgin, hands joined in prayer, or the fact that it is the divine figure who takes the crown with both hands to place it on Mary's head. The handling of the cloak that covers Christ at the Coronation from Benabarre is also similar, as is God the Father in the MNAC panel. But, while these connections suggest interests in common and similar atmospheres, they are still too generic for us to be able to establish a direct link between the Master of Cervera de la Cañada and Pere Garcia.

Like the Coronation, the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* in the Harris Collection in London seems to have been cut slightly on the right-hand side from the viewer's position. The wooden frame has only been

57 Post 1941, p. 365.

partially conserved; for a start, one of the small trefoil arches and part of the upper tracery are missing. The composition of the scene uses the same patterns as the one from Cervera de la Cañada, although, as already noted, the latter interprets a traditional model highly popular throughout Aragon. There are, however, some coincidences in details that particularly link the two: the lively gestures of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim as they talk, ornamental features like the oculus with tracery (a sort of small fleuron) decorating the walls of the temple and, naturally, the way the characters' faces are drawn. Both Saint Joachim and the aged priest of the temple coincide with their counterparts in the Cervera panel and with the God the Father in the MNAC Coronation, and the same goes for Saint Anne, whose face is framed by the headcloth covering her head, and the Virgin, with her tunic of brocade and her hair down. The style of this compartment is sufficiently similar for us to accept attribution to the Master of Cervera de la Cañada, despite the understandable caution prompted by the poor quality of the photographs.

In short, the reattribution of this small body of work enables us to clarify the profile of a master from Aragon to whom we shall for now give the conventional title of Master of Cervera de la Cañada, active around the mid-15th century and probably throughout the subsequent twenty years or so. Although a secondary figure, defining his personality as a painter helps to bring order to the fertile universe of painting in Aragon in the second half of the 15th century, and stands as a further piece in the fragmentary mosaic that is, for now at least, the art movement deriving from the Master of Saint George and the Princess.



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