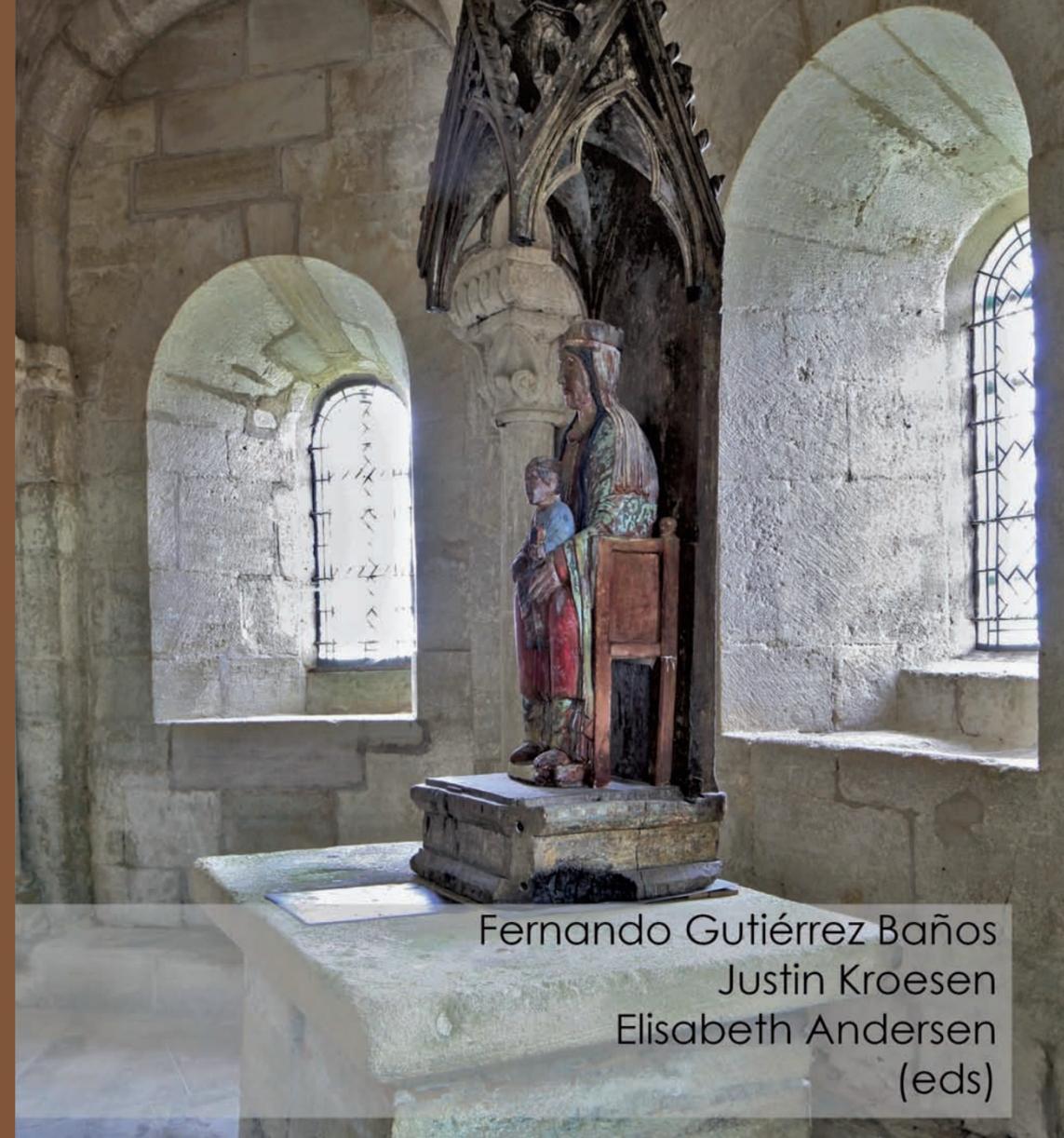


Altarpieces are among the most outstanding and celebrated achievements of medieval art. They continuously grew larger and more magnificent. However, the road that led to them was a complex, multi-path process in which different object types were combined, mixed and merged in a variety of innovative ways. In this process, tabernacle-altarpieces (also known as tabernacle shrines) played a remarkable role. Tabernacle-altarpieces can be defined as more or less architecturally shaped enclosures containing one single figure that could be closed off with movable wings. The present volume aims to explore such altarpieces as a European object type on the road leading to late medieval altarpieces. Tabernacle-altarpieces were fashionable across Western Europe between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, from Finland to Spain and from Iceland to Italy. Despite their often (but not always!) modest size, tabernacle-altarpieces heralded essential aspects of later altarpieces, such as the combination of media (sculpture and painting), the juxtaposition of representational and narrative iconography, and the possibility to conceal and disclose holy figures inside. Moreover, they were by no means superseded by 'fully-fledged' altarpieces, since the phenomenon lived on during the Late Middle Ages.



THE SAINT ENSHRINED

European Tabernacle-altarpieces, c. 1150-1400



Fernando Gutiérrez Baños
Justin Kroesen
Elisabeth Andersen
(eds)

Institut d'Estudis Medievals

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INTRODUCTION





TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES: VARIETY WITHIN UNITY

LOS RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO: VARIEDAD DENTRO DE LA UNIDAD

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Altarpieces are among the most outstanding and celebrated achievements of medieval art. They were the fruits of the joint efforts, skills and ambitions of artists and patrons. Often combining different media, they reflected a great deal of the faith, ideals, hopes, anxieties and devotions of Christian communities. Altarpieces were erected in churches of all ranks, from cathedrals and monumental abbeys down to modest country churches. Over the ages, medieval altarpieces continuously grew larger and more magnificent. They became symbols of the identity and pride of communities and individuals, for whom they sometimes even became the object of emulation. Altarpieces are at the core of Western art history; one only needs to think about Duccio's *Maestà* that was erected on the high altar in Siena Cathedral (Italy), Veit Stof's high altarpiece in St Mary's church in Cracow (Poland) or Gil de Siloe's high altarpiece in the Carthusian monastery of Miraflores, in the vicinity of Burgos (Spain).

Given their eminent status as art works, it is hardly surprising that altarpieces have received the attention of art history since it became an academic discipline. The pioneering study by Joseph Braun, *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtli-*

chen Entwicklung (1924), remains one of the very few European surveys of the evolution of altarpieces, and a starting point for many later research projects. In southern Europe, most research focused on the splendid art works of the Late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Baroque. In central and northern Europe, more attention was paid to the early history of altarpieces. This led to a more thorough understanding of their emergence process, especially since the 1980s. It has become clear that the road to the altarpiece was a complex, multi-path process in which different object types were combined, mixed and merged in a variety of innovative ways. In 1999, Verena Fuchß coined the term ‘altar ensemble’ to express the intrinsic composite character of many early altar decorations. Several recent exhibition projects reached out beyond scholarly circles, including *Les premiers retables (XII^e-début du XV^e siècle)*. *Une mise en scène du sacré*, shown in the Louvre in Paris in 2009, and *North & South: Medieval Art from Norway and Catalonia 1100-1350*, held in the Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht (the Netherlands) and the Museu Episcopal de Vic (Catalonia, Spain) in 2019-20.

New and wider perspectives have increasingly been adopted in the study of altarpieces, with scholars looking beyond their form and iconography into their purpose as backgrounds to the ritual, creating a stage for the liturgy. This has led to a growing awareness that the meaning and impact of these art works can only be thoroughly understood if they are studied in relationship to the altars to which they belonged, the interior spaces they adorned, with their associated architecture and imagery, and in conjunction with the variety of objects used on and around the altar, including liturgical vessels, books, chandeliers, cloths, vestments, and so on. In addition, altarpieces are more often analysed in their religious context, in relationship to the theology of the Mass, and developments in spirituality and devotion. What has generally remained, however, is the limited geographical scope of most studies, with a focus on specific countries or regions, the oeuvre of individual artists or even individual art works. This means that, with all the progress made in altarpiece research, Braun’s European perspective has gradually faded away.

Despite its wide scope, Braun’s *magnum opus* from 1924 fully ignored the tabernacle-altarpiece (also known as tabernacle shrine) as a category of early medieval altar decorations. These can be defined as more or less architecturally shaped enclosures containing one single figure that could be closed off with movable wings. After pioneering articles on this subject by Mojmir Frinta (1967) and Claude Lapaire (1969 and 1972), tabernacle shrines in Sweden were further studied by Peter Tångeberg (1986), while Klaus Krüger researched examples in Italy (1992). The present volume aims to tie into these publications by exploring the tabernacle-altarpiece as a European object type on the road toward the late me-

dieval altarpiece. Tabernacle-altarpieces were fashionable across Western Europe between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, from Finland to Spain and from Iceland to Italy. Despite their often (but not always!) modest size, tabernacle-altarpieces heralded essential aspects of later altarpieces, such as the combination of media (sculpture and painting), the juxtaposition of representational and narrative iconography, and the possibility to conceal and disclose holy figures inside. Moreover, they were by no means superseded by 'fully-fledged' altarpieces, since the phenomenon lived on during the Late Middle Ages.

Due to their age and fragility, most tabernacle-altarpieces from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries are now lost. Surviving examples are often fragmented, overpainted or reassembled. Almost all have lost their original context, even if they have remained in the churches to which they belonged (Figs 1-2). Many others are now kept in museums, where they are often presented as a curiosity or misunderstood as 'portable altars', and mainly neglected by visitors. Most are now in museum storage places, waiting for decades for the rare interested scholar to come and study them. Another factor that has contributed to tabernacle-altarpieces remaining largely unnoticed is the fact that most examples are preserved in the 'periphery' of Europe, in Scandinavia, some parts of Italy and of the Iberian Peninsula. Several rare examples in the heart of Europe, however, clearly confirm their European spread. Today, in France and England, countries that were core innovators in medieval art, practically no examples remain, but iconographic sources prove their existence there too.

The wealth preserved in the periphery of the continent still provides a good impression of the many lost treasures in all the countries that lie in between. As a pan-European phenomenon, surviving tabernacle-altarpieces are outstanding indicators of the religious and cultural unity that characterised the medieval Latin West, particularly between 1150 and 1350. Several aspects, such as the decoration of the insides of wings with reliefs, an iconographical focus on the Infancy of Christ, and the rise of architecturally designed baldachins around and after 1300, all spread over the continent about the same time. On the other hand, the pluriformity of European tabernacle shrines also stands out, in terms of details in their construction, style and iconographical peculiarities. No two examples are identical, as sculptors, painters, joiners and commissioners constantly searched for tailor-made solutions for specific situations in churches and on altars. This volume aims to explore and celebrate both the unity and variety of medieval tabernacle-altarpieces in Europe by focussing on such aspects as technical and stylistic features, provenance and patronage, as well as the function and role of early tabernacle-altarpieces in liturgical ritual and devotional practice.

The first two of the essays contained in this volume address general issues. Justin Kroesen and Peter Tångeberg distinguish and define three types of European tabernacle shrines based on the rich Swedish stock. Elisabeth Andersen scrutinises the appearance of closed tabernacle-altarpieces in order to gain a better understanding of how they were used. Stephan Kuhn focuses on Norwegian examples to challenge the assumption that Marian tabernacles generally occupied the northern side altar in medieval churches. Two subsequent essays explore tabernacle-altarpieces in the German-speaking countries of Central Europe. Stephan Kemperdick offers a wide panorama based on tabernacle-altarpieces in these lands, where testimonies are today scarce. Pavla Ralcheva concentrates on examples from the Rhineland, studying their construction, placement and use. Cristiana Pasqualetti discusses tabernacle-altarpieces in Italy, where the variety of types and their long existence in some regions are the most distinctive features. The last four contributions investigate tabernacle-altarpieces in the Iberian kingdoms. Fernando Gutiérrez Baños explores the origins and characteristics of Castilian specimens, while Teresa Laguna Paúl focuses on one of the most outstanding examples, the silver altar of the *Virgen de los Reyes* in Seville Cathedral. Moving to the Crown of Aragon, Alberto Velasco González provides a survey of tabernacle-altarpieces from these realms, introducing several hitherto neglected examples, and finally, Jordi Camps i Sòria studies the early development of Catalan tabernacle-altarpieces in relation to other altar structures.

This volume is published as part of the research project *Retablos-tabernáculo castellanos de la Baja Edad Media: estudio, documentación y difusión* (*Tabernacle-altarpieces of the Late Middle Ages: Study, Documentation, Spread*), reference HAR2017-82949-P (MINECO/AEI/FEDER, UE), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitivity with the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund. The contributions originated from an international symposium held in Valladolid on 7-8 June 2019, with support from the University of Valladolid (Instituto Universitario de Historia Simancas, G.I.R. IDINTAR, and Departamento de Historia del Arte), and the Spanish Committee of Art History. During a field trip on 8 June, seven Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces preserved in Burgos and in the Basque Country were visited and examined with the help of the Diocese of Vitoria. However, this publication is fundamentally the result of the generous efforts made by all those colleague-researchers to shed light on one of the most fascinating yet underrepresented chapters of the history of medieval art, as well as by the blind reviewers who contributed to improve the overall volume.



Fig. 1. Björketorp (Västergötland, Sweden), a Marian tabernacle (left), wings missing, hanging from the north wall of the nave of the church.

Photo: Justin Kroesen.



Fig. 2. Yurre/Ihurre (Basque Country, Spain), wings from a Marian tabernacle grouped at a side altar of the church, condition by the mid-twentieth century.

Photo: ATHA-DAF-LÓPEZ DE GUEREÑU-4615-Foto Gerardo López de Guereñu.

The ensemble has been subsequently restored.

ESSAYS





TABERNACLE SHRINES (1180–1400)
AS A EUROPEAN PHENOMENON: TYPES, SPREAD, SURVIVAL

LOS RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO (1180-1400),
UN FENÓMENO EUROPEO: TIPOS, DIFUSIÓN, SUPERVIVENCIA

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Abstract

Tabernacle shrines from the period 1180–1400 are rare today, and not a single one is entirely preserved with its original polychromy and in the context for which it was made. Most examples are found in Scandinavia, Italy, and the Iberian Peninsula, which indicates that such shrines were a European phenomenon. This is confirmed by isolated survivals found in intermediate locations in France, Germany, and Slovakia. The similarities between these objects from the north, center, and south of Europe enable us to follow their Europe-wide development. The one country that possesses by far the largest number of preserved tabernacle shrines is Sweden. This is why the present study refers to Swedish examples to identify European types. The first type is the ‘Appuna-type’ shrines, dating from *c.* 1200, that contain an early sculpture of the *Sedes Sapientiae*. The second group are shrines of the Fröskog-type, which are characterized by the presence of reliefs on the interiors of their wings. The third type, more vertical and of architectural character, is called the ‘Kil-type’ and had its largest spread during the fourteenth century. It was in the relative periphery of the continent, and in modest churches

in isolated locations, that tabernacle shrines had the best chances of surviving. The fact that academic art history was not invented precisely there has largely prevented tabernacle shrines from making it into our art-historical handbooks to date.

Keywords

Medieval art, liturgy, altar, altarpiece, tabernacle, sculpture, reliefs, panel painting, Sweden.

Resumen

Los retablos-tabernáculo del período 1180-1400 son raros hoy en día, y ninguno se conserva entero, con su policromía original y en el contexto para el que fue producido. La mayoría de ejemplos se encuentran en Escandinavia, Italia y la península ibérica, lo que pone de manifiesto que se trataba de un fenómeno europeo. Esta dimensión viene confirmada por algunos ejemplos aislados en territorios intermedios, en Francia, Alemania y Eslovaquia. La similitud de las obras en el norte, centro y sur de Europa es tal que permite esbozar su desarrollo en términos generales. El país europeo que posee la mayor cantidad de retablos-tabernáculo conservados, es, con diferencia, Suecia. Es por esta razón que, en este estudio, nos referimos a ejemplos suecos para identificar tipologías europeas. El primero es el “tipo Appuna”, de alrededor de 1200, que contiene una escultura temprana de la *Sedes Sapientiae*. El segundo es el “tipo Fröskog”, que se caracteriza sobre todo por la presencia de relieves en el interior de las alas. El tercer tipo, más vertical y con marcado carácter arquitectónico, se denomina el “tipo Kil” y tuvo su mayor difusión en el siglo XIV. Fue en la relativa periferia del continente, y en iglesias modestas en localidades aisladas, donde los retablos-tabernáculo tuvieron las mayores probabilidades de sobrevivir. El hecho de que la Historia del Arte como disciplina académica no fuese escrita precisamente allí ha influido en que hayan permanecido poco estudiados hasta hoy en día.

Palabras clave

Arte medieval, liturgia, altar, retablo, tabernáculo, escultura, relieves, pintura sobre tabla, Suecia.

I. AN OVERLOOKED OBJECT TYPE

Existing literature on medieval altars and their decorations focuses almost exclusively on altarpieces or ‘retables’. This object type has come to dominate the aspect of the medieval altar to such an extent that ‘altar’ and ‘retable’ are often used as synonyms in various languages, particularly German. Altarpieces, including the widespread Antwerp triptychs, the imposing late Gothic carved *Flügelaltäre* of Germany and Austria, and the fine painted polyptychs of central Italy, have thus become part of the inner canon of medieval art history. Altar retables fill the medieval sections of some of the world’s greatest art galleries, including Berlin’s Gemäldegalerie, London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, and Florence’s Galleria degli Uffizi, and many beautiful books have been published about them (Limentani Viridis/Pietrogiiovanna, 2002; Kahsnitz/Bunz, 2006; Boodt/Schäfer, 2007).¹

Other categories of altar decoration have remained conspicuously under-represented. An example is the oldest continuous form of altar furnishings, the canopy or baldachin, which has hardly been studied on a European level since the publication of Joseph Braun’s seminal work *Der christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* in 1924.² The same is true of altar frontals, among which the painted ones were the object of a more recent multi-disciplinary Norwegian research project (Plahter/Hohler/Morgan/Wichstrøm, eds, 2004). A common aspect of research in the above-mentioned categories is that they have generally been regarded as mere forerunners to the altar retable; canopies and frontals would have been replaced by tryptychs or polyptychs as if these were the natural outcome of all developments (Kroesen, 2014a; Kroesen, 2014b). It has been suggested that canopies were physically ousted by the growing dimensions of altarpieces, while some frontals might have ‘jumped up’ to the top of the altar to be reused as retables (Kroesen/Schmidt, 2009, with bibliography).

Much in this rendering of things is problematic, for a number of reasons. First, canopies and baldachins were much more widespread than is often assumed, and they were sometimes successfully combined with fully-fledged altarpieces. Second, it is impossible to distinguish altar frontals formally from early altar retables, and it is almost always uncertain exactly if, why and when the former may have been moved. Moreover, frontals remained in vogue long after the retable had emerged, and a considerable number of cases are known where both were com-

¹ The spectacular Iberian ‘wall retables’ (such as in Toledo, Sevilla, and Oviedo cathedrals) have received conspicuously less attention. See Berg Sobré, 1989 and Kroesen, 2009.

² Chapters on canopies and baldachins in vol. 2, pp. 185–275. See now also: Kroesen, 2019a.

bined (Schmidt, 2009). Third, retables themselves show a great variety of forms and types; for example, altarpieces without wings may have been much more common in Central and Northern Europe than is often acknowledged.³ Even more problematic is the fact that the pluriformity and multi-mediality of altar decorations is hardly ever taken into account. In many churches, it was wall paintings, stained glass windows and textiles rather than painted and sculptured panels that served as visual backgrounds to high- and side altars (Kroesen, 2014a).

Another category that, despite its European spread, has remained largely overlooked is the so-called tabernacle shrine. This is the most common name to designate a saint's sculpture standing inside a cupboard that is equipped with a baldachin and moveable wings. Scandinavian authors including Karl Meinander in Finland (Meinander, 1908), Harry Fett in Norway (Fett, 1911) and Evert Wrangel in Sweden (Wrangel, 1915) were the first to study this object type in their respective countries. However, it was fully ignored in Joseph Braun's earlier mentioned 1924 European survey. In 1967, Mojmir Frinta published a short but seminal article on what he called 'the closing tabernacle', followed by two pieces by Claude Lapaire on 'retables à baldaquin' and 'retables à tabernacle polygonal' in 1969 and 1972, respectively (Frinta, 1967; Lapaire, 1969; Lapaire, 1972). Over the last three decades, the most valuable contributions to the study of the subject have been on tabernacle shrines in Sweden (Tångeberg, 1989) and central Italy (Krüger, 1992), on their role as constituents in composite 'altar ensembles' (Fuchß, 1999), their relationship with early (winged) altarpieces in Germany (Wolf, 2002) and France (Le Pogam/Vivet-Pequet, eds, 2009), on Marian tabernacles in Scandinavia (Andersen, 2015), and, most recently, on tabernacle shrines in medieval Castile (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018).⁴

There are various reasons for the relative silence about this type of medieval altar decoration. The first is the fact that scholarship never developed a proper technical term to designate such objects. In medieval texts, the object type cannot be easily retrieved, since the word *tabernaculum* could have more than one meaning, including that of 'Sacrament house' – the receptacle in which the Host was stored. The medieval Icelandic description of sculptures standing 'in husi oc hurðum' (in

³ This is best evidenced by stone retables in France whose study remains a *desideratum* to date, as well as by fourteenth-century altarpieces preserved in Sweden, see Tångeberg, 2005.

⁴ It was in the framework of Gutiérrez Baños's research project entitled 'Retablos-tabernáculo de la Baja Edad Media en la Corona de Castilla: estudio, documentación y difusión' that the international symposium *The Saint Enshrined: European Tabernacle-altarpieces, c. 1150–1400* took place in Valladolid on 7–8 June, 2019, the fruits of which are published in the present volume.

a little house with doors) found in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century *måldagar* inventories is perhaps the most explicit and clearest of all (Wallem, 1910, p. 44). For medievals, the shrine was certainly the least interesting since it was its holy contents that mattered most. ‘Tabernacle shrine’ is the most commonly used term in scholarly literature, along with ‘closing tabernacle’; ‘Tabernakelschrein’ and ‘Baldachinretabel’ in German, while in that language ‘Turmretabel’ (tower retable) has also been proposed (Steinmetz, 1995). The French usually speak of ‘retablo à baldaquin’, while Spanish uses ‘retablo-tabernáculo’ and also has the term ‘retablo-templete’. Most Scandinavian authors use the short but accurate terms ‘helgonskåp’ (Swedish) and ‘helgenskap’ (Norwegian, Danish) meaning ‘saint’s cupboard’. For the sake of clarity, this article will use the most widespread term ‘tabernacle shrine’.

Another reason for the oblivion surrounding medieval tabernacle shrines as altar decorations is their relatively poor survival. Today, most medieval shrines survive in a severely damaged or even fragmentary state. Many wings are lost, as well as their original carved or painted decorations; many crownings are now missing; and figures and shrines have often been moved or overpainted. Almost none of the over seventy Italian Marian shrines listed by Klaus Krüger in his pioneering study of 1992 has retained its wings (Krüger, 1992, pp. 219–230). While the situation is somewhat less dramatic in Scandinavia and Spain, there too, hardly a single tabernacle shrine is preserved in its entirety. This is aptly expressed by the title of Fernando Gutiérrez Baños’s recent survey of medieval tabernacle shrines in Castile: ‘pasear entre ruinas’ (walking among ruins [of what once was]) (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018).

In addition, not a single tabernacle shrine from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries is preserved entirely *in situ* inside a medieval church anywhere in Europe. Perhaps the closest is the Marian shrine from around 1290–1300 in the crypt of the church of Notre-Dame de l’Assomption at Mont-devant-Sassey on the river Meuse in northern France (Fig. 1). Here, the height of the shrine perfectly matches its spatial setting under the vaults and the base fits precisely behind the removable stone slab (*ara*) to fill the depth of the altar *mensa*. However, the wings are now lost, although they can still be recognized on old photographs (Locatelli/Pousset, 2014). By far the most tabernacle shrines are decontextualized as a result of them having been moved around, hidden and rediscovered. In Sweden, for example, most tabernacle shrines are now in churches that were rebuilt after the Middle Ages, while many others were transferred to museums.⁵

⁵ The collections of the State Historical Museum (Statens Historiska Museet) in Stockholm include more tabernacle shrines than any other European museum.

Another aspect that has caused the oblivion of this category of altar decorations is the uneven spread of examples across the continent. Most early tabernacle shrines are preserved in central Italy (Tuscany, Umbria, Latium, Abruzzo), northern Spain (Castile, the Basque Country and Catalonia) and Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden and Finland). It was here, in the relative periphery of the continent, that they clearly had the best chances to survive, sheltered, in many instances, by mountainous environments. The seclusion of places that are remote and hard to access, a certain degree of poverty, and, by consequence, the low turnover of artistic renewal have, together, resulted in the over-average survival of tabernacles in these regions. The relative rarity of extant tabernacle shrines in the countries where academic art history was largely written – Germany, France and Britain – has certainly also contributed to the research bias of largely ignoring tabernacle shrines as medieval altar decorations.⁶

The European country that preserves by far the richest stock of medieval tabernacle shrines is Sweden, which possesses about 35 per cent of all extant examples in Europe: in an ongoing research project we have been able to register 495 medieval tabernacle shrines (up until around 1530) in all of Western Europe, of which *c.* 170 are found in Sweden.⁷ This means that, contrary to what is often believed, many shrines were maintained in churches through the Lutheran Reformation.⁸ Moreover, the Nordic country possesses some of the best specimens of all types of shrines that can be distinguished based on their date, number of doors, ground plans, etc. For these reasons, it can be stated that Swedish tabernacle shrines are a European phenomenon, and this is why in our project we have named each type after its best Swedish representative. Among the early shrines from the period between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, we distinguish the ‘Appuna type’, the ‘Fröskog type’ and the ‘Kil type’. Common aspects to all three types are a more or less square ground plan and the presence of four hinged doors, of which the two narrow outer ones together covered the front of the shrine.⁹

⁶ Typically, an early researcher of medieval altar decorations, Eberhard Hempel, considered the tabernacle shrine as a ‘nordisches Gebilde’ (a nordic phenomenon), see Hempel, 1938, p. 140. On their survival in the north and south, see now Sureda i Jubany, 2019, pp. 53–55.

⁷ Our research project, which is funded by the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation (San Francisco, USA) and the Böckler-Mare-Balticum-Stiftung (Bad Homburg, Germany), was started in 2015. The book with the results will be published in 2021.

⁸ For this topic, see Kroesen, 2018.

⁹ In this article only those shrines are discussed that are completely preserved or can be reconstructed. A small number of Italian shrines from the fourteenth century with only two doors or polygonal groundplans have not been taken into account.

2. THE APPUNA TYPE

The Appuna type, the earliest of the three mentioned types, was in vogue between *c.* 1180 and *c.* 1250. It is named after the enthroned Virgin and Child from *c.* 1180–1200 that originates from Appuna (Östergötland) and is now preserved in the State Historical Museum in Stockholm (Fig. 2).¹⁰ Characteristic features include the strictly frontal pose of the Mother and Child and the shape of the throne with rounded posts and knobs (Andersson, 1975, p. 11). Behind the throne is a 117 cm tall back panel or ‘dossal’ that ends in a pointed gable. Preserved paint fragments on the sculpture and the panel clearly indicate that both originally belonged together, as is further confirmed by the fact that the back posts of the throne are flattened in order to make them fit better to the dossal (Tångeberg, 1989, p. 33).¹¹ At the backside of the panel are four rectangular notches, two on each side, that remind one of the presence of hinges. This indicates the former existence of a shrine with folding doors, two wider shutters covering the sides and two narrower ones that together covered the front.¹² Wooden pins at the top of the dossal indicate that there was originally a baldachin. While its shape is unknown, the pointed back gable would suggest a saddle roof or perhaps a composite form of two crossing saddle roofs. Traces of nails at the bottom of the throne indicate that it rested on a pedestal.

The tabernacle shrine from Appuna is the earliest of its kind in Sweden and one of the oldest examples in Europe. By far the most and the closest parallels are found in Italy, but none is better preserved; therefore, the shape of the baldachins of the Appuna type must remain unclear. Of some seventy-three Italian Madonna shrines listed by Klaus Krüger, around sixty-five are dated to around 1200 or the first half of the thirteenth century.¹³ These Italian shrines show a number of striking similarities to the example from Appuna, including the four hinges that are mostly fixed at the backside of the dossal. Only about 10 per cent of the Italian Appuna shrines are preserved to a degree that allows for a general reconstruction. Among the best survivals is a Marian shrine of Umbrian origins from

¹⁰ Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museum, inv. nr SHM 7890.

¹¹ The same feature is also found in other contemporary Virgins including the famous Viklau Madonna in the same museum, inv. nr SHM 18951.

¹² Aron Andersson (Andersson, 1975, p. 11) described these features without concluding that this makes the Appuna shrine the oldest known example of a tabernacle shrine, a fact that was first acknowledged by Norberg, 1939, pp. 85–86.

¹³ Krüger highlighted the fact that the Italian shrines represent a type that was spread over large parts of Europe, see Krüger, 1992, p. 19.

1200–1220, now preserved in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich (Fig. 3) (Krüger, 1992, p. 225).¹⁴ The Virgin sits before a dossal (h. 147 cm), the front of which is decorated with a painted pattern of yellow circles filled with birds and fantastic creatures on a reddish background. Traces of a saddle roof along the upper rim show that the sculpture was originally protected by a baldachin.

The Virgin and Child from Appuna represent a type of the Mother of God enthroned that is found throughout Scandinavia, all the way up to Finland and Iceland, as well as in western Germany and in the southern Netherlands (Kunz, 2007). There are no reasons to believe that Appuna should have been an exception, so that tabernacle shrines may be assumed to have known a considerable spread as early as the late twelfth century.¹⁵ In Sweden, besides Appuna, the only contemporary Virgins that preserve parts of their back panels are found in Tvetå (Södermanland) and Hillesjö (Uppland). In Norway, a late-twelfth-century wing, now kept at the University Museum in Bergen, belonged to a shrine that probably contained the Virgin from Urnes (Vestland) from around the same date preserved in the same museum.¹⁶ Arches in low relief divide its surface (h. 129 cm) into four fields that seem to have been filled with a combination of paintings (above) and reliefs (below) (Blindheim, 1993; Andersen, 2015, p. 171).

Although most Appuna shrines hold (or held) a sculpture of the Virgin and Child, some contain other saints. In Näsby (Småland, Sweden) we find an enthroned bishop (St Nicholas?) with a hinged dossal (h. 92 cm) of the same type as in Appuna. Another enshrined bishop, originally from Edestad (Blekinge, Sweden) and now kept at the Blekinge Museum in Karlskrona, marks the transition to the second type (Fröskog, see below) and can be dated to *c.* 1230 (Fig. 4).¹⁷ The pointed ending of the back panel (h. 143 cm) corresponds to the shrine from Appuna; its saddle roof with a trefoil arch spared out from the gabled front and round arches from the sides may provide an impression of what the baldachins of many other Appuna shrines could have looked like. The Edestad shrine has preserved one of its doors that ends in a round arch, corresponding to the side of the baldachin. Carved out from the inside of the door are two trefoil-arched niches

¹⁴ Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. nr MA 4054.

¹⁵ See Tångeberg, 1989, p. 32: 'Es ist ungewiss, inwieweit es schon im 12. und im 13. Jahrhundert allgemein üblich war, dass Skulpturen in Schreinen mit verschliessbaren Türen (sog. Heiligenschreinen) aufgestellt waren. (...) Einige Beobachtungen scheinen jedoch dafür zu sprechen, dass die Heiligenschreine bereits in dieser Zeit gewöhnlich waren.'

¹⁶ Bergen, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen, inv. nrs MA 297b (shrine door), MA 46 (Virgin), and several smaller fragments.

¹⁷ Karlskrona, Blekinge museum, inv. nr 1246.

that once held relief scenes, now lost; at the top sits a lunette. Other than in Ap-puna, the hinges are attached not at the back but to the edges of the dossal.

3. THE FRÖSKOG TYPE

The (original) presence of reliefs on the insides of the door of the Edestad shrine constitutes the most characteristic feature of the second type, called the Fröskog type after the Marian shrine (h. 170 cm) from that village in Dalsland, western Sweden, now preserved in the State Historical Museum in Stockholm (Fig. 5) (Andersson, 1975, p. 28).¹⁸ Another shared feature of the Edestad and Fröskog shrines is the incised decoration of the dossal with carved rhombs and often also a halo. The Fröskog shrine originated in the second half of the thirteenth century; apart from the vanished left outer door, all elements are preserved; the present polychromy is Baroque. The insides of the doors contain reliefs showing five scenes from the life of the Virgin and the youth of Christ: the Annunciation, Visitation, Adoration of the Magi, the Announcement to the Shepherds and the Presentation in the Temple. All figures are framed by trefoil arches with architectural crownings. The equally trefoil-shaped lunettes at the top, filled with angels' busts, correspond with the sides of the flat-topped baldachin that is supported at the front by two (renewed) slender columns. The throne stands on a pedestal decorated with arched openings resting on a square base.

Shrines and shrine parts with similar characteristics – origins in the second half of the thirteenth century, square ground plans, flat-topped baldachins, dossals with carved rhombs, four doors with reliefs set in niches – are preserved from twenty-three churches in Sweden. Of these, only four are more or less entirely preserved. The Marian shrine in Jällby (Västergötland) is remarkable for its small dimensions, measuring only 85 cm in height; the only lacking element here is the pedestal. In Norra Ny (Värmland), carved rhombs are not only found on the dossal (h. 152 cm) but also inside the niches on the only preserved wing, the narrow outer shutter on the left side (the one on the right is a modern copy). The baldachin was originally crowned by a painted church model kept in the same church (Lange, 1994).

From the shrine in Dädesjö (Småland), only the reliefs from the trefoil-arched niches inside the doors are missing (Fig. 6). The shrine contains an older sculp-

¹⁸ Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museet, inv. nr SHM 14965.

ture of St Olaf enthroned from *c.* 1200. The baldachin with trefoil arches on all sides is crowned by attached slats with (damaged) crenellations; the dossal (h. 162 cm) does not feature the usual chequered decorations. The shrine stands on the southern side altar in the nave of the church, which may well be its original setting. The Marian shrine in Glava (Värmland), now without wings and with a renewed baldachin, is remarkable for its size: it measures over two meters in height and must have spanned a width of *c.* 215 cm when opened, which leaves the high altar in the chancel of the vanished medieval church to which it most probably belonged as the shrine's only plausible location.¹⁹

Tabernacle shrines of the Fröskog type have been preserved in all Nordic countries. Strikingly similar to the Fröskog shrine is the one from Urjala (Tavastia, Finland) which is now preserved at the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki (Fig. 7).²⁰ Dating from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, it survives intact except for the right outer door.²¹ As in Norra Ny, the back panel (h. 121 cm) and the niches inside the wings are all decorated with carved rhombs. The sides of the flat-topped baldachin are filled with coarsely carved decorations in architectural shapes. When opened, the Urjala shrine largely featured the same iconographical programme as the Fröskog shrine.²² The same is true of the tabernacle shrine in Kumlinge (Åland, Finland) from 1250–1275, of which only the dossal and the four doors are preserved. The insides of the doors have trefoil niches containing inserted reliefs, the placement of which has been altered over time. Like the shrine from Fröskog, the decorative pattern of incised rhombs has remained limited to the front of the dossal.

In Iceland, one Marian shrine has been preserved, from the (demolished) church at Múli on the north coast and now kept at the National Museum in Copenhagen. It has a height of 145 cm and can be dated to the second half of the thirteenth century (Fig. 8).²³ Since there is no suitable wood found in Iceland, the shrine was probably imported ready-made from elsewhere, most likely Norway (Trondheim?), to which the island belonged politically, culturally and ecclesi-

¹⁹ The small medieval wooden church of Glava was demolished in the eighteenth century but excavated in 1941. On the question of Marian tabernacle shrines on high altars, see the chapter by Stephan Kuhn in this volume.

²⁰ Helsinki, Suomen kansallismuseo, inv. nr KM 4563:1.

²¹ The Virgin and Child were restyled as St Anne and the Virgin during the late Middle Ages. The similarities between the Fröskog and Urjala shrines were already observed by Meinander, 1908, pp. 95–97.

²² Some individual figures are now missing.

²³ Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet, inv. nr 19014. Kuhn, 2019.

atically during this period. The Virgin and Child are seated under a flat-topped canopy with a trefoil arch at the front and round arches on the sides to which the upper endings of the four wings correspond. The shutters are filled with niches built up from small columns and arches, all of the reliefs from which have been lost. Although the use of pinewood for the sculpture and the tabernacle makes a Norwegian origin most plausible, the Virgin shows a strong resemblance to other contemporary Marian figures around the North Sea, including examples from the Low Countries, France and England.

A rich stock of tabernacle shrines of the Fröskog type is found in Norway, where fifteen examples have survived, although nowhere in their entirety (Andersen, in this volume).²⁴ The shrines in Hedalen and Reinli (Oppland), both dating from 1250–1275, can be more or less reconstructed (Stein, 2010, pp. 58–90). In Hedalen, the Virgin is preserved together with the back panel (h. 162 cm), four wings with trefoil niches and a painted church model that served as a crowning (Fig. 4 Kuhn, in this volume). While the Virgin and Child and the church model have kept their original polychromy, the wings were deprived of their relief scenes, repainted in the Baroque style and used as a fixed retable together with a large crucifix. The Virgin and the church model are kept separately in the church. From the shrine in Reinli only the four wings and the painted church model survive.²⁵ As in Hedalen, the wings have lost their reliefs and were repainted to be used as an altarpiece. The church models from Hedalen and Reinli are strikingly elaborate and greatly contributed to the monumentality of the shrines; the total height of the Hedalen shrine is estimated to have been *c.* 3.5 m (Kollandsrud, 2018, p. 25). When opened, both structures must have dominated the chancel of the modestly-sized stave churches (Kuhn, in this volume).

A third Norwegian Marian shrine of the same type, originally from Hove/Vik (Vestland) and now preserved at the University Museum of Bergen, has been dated to 1230–1240 (Fig. 7 Kuhn, in this volume) (Kaland, 1973; Blindheim, 2004, pp. 48–49).²⁶ The lower part of the Virgin and the shrine (including the pedestal) were sawn off (the actual height is 125 cm), and the wings are now missing. Remarkably, not only are the Virgin and Child largely gilded, but the baldachin is also entirely covered with ‘imitation gold’ (silver with a glaze). Unn Plahter has pointed at the striking similarity between the precious Hove Virgin

²⁴ For a recent survey, see Andersen, 2015.

²⁵ The church model is now kept at the Kulturhistorisk Museum of the University of Oslo, inv. nr C 7292.

²⁶ Bergen, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen, inv. nr MA 27.

and the contemporary sculpture known as *Notre-Dame des Miracles* in the cathedral of Saint-Omer in northern France (Pas-de-Calais), which is historically a part of Flanders (Plahter, 2014). It may be assumed that this sculpture, whose present polychromy dates from the nineteenth century, was also set in a tabernacle shrine that was subsequently lost. Although it cannot be ruled out that the enshrined ‘Hove Madonna’ originated in Norway, it seems more likely that she was produced in northern France or Flanders and then exported to Norway (Kroesen, 2019b).

Other Norwegian shrines have been connected to England on stylistic grounds. An example is the enshrined Virgin from Dal (Telemark) that dates from *c.* 1260. The small shrine, with a height of only 87 cm (to which a crowning church model should possibly be added), has a flat canopy and has lost its wings. Under the canopy sits a remarkably shallow sculpture of the Virgin and Child, in which Unn Plahter and David Park observed ‘unmistakably English features’ (Plahter/Park, 2002, p. 63). Similar characteristics are found in a Virgin and Child from Giske (Møre og Romsdal) from the end of the thirteenth century, now preserved at the University Museum of Bergen; that museum also holds a sizeable shrine (h. 165 cm) from the same church, now without wings, to which the sculpture probably belonged (Bendixen, 1911, p. 11).²⁷ The partially preserved ceiling under the baldachin features a circle with a sun and moon; similar motifs are found in the earlier mentioned shrines from Hove (a crescent and ten stars) and Dal (a five-pointed sun or star in a circle) (Kollandsrud, 2018, pp. 234–235). If these Norwegian examples were indeed imported from overseas, this would provide a rare glimpse of tabernacle shrines in their respective countries of origin, where no contemporary parallels survive. The same is true should they have been made in Norway; in that case, they clearly reflect the reception of foreign stylistic influences.

Examples found further south, in Italy and Spain, illustrate the spread of the Fröskog type across the European continent. The church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Alatri (Latium, Italy) possesses a seated Madonna and four large wings (h. 155 cm) with twelve relief scenes shown on the insides (Fig. 1 Pasqualetti, in this volume). These shrine parts are generally dated to 1225–1250 (Krüger, 1992, p. 219). Strikingly, the iconographical programme largely follows the same pattern as in the Nordic examples, with the Annunciation, Visitation and the Adoration of the Magi shown on the left wings. The enthroned Virgin and Child rest on a

²⁷ Sculpture and shrine: Bergen, Universitetsmuseet i Bergen, inv. nr MA 334 a-b.

pedestal with openings at the bottom that are reminiscent of the same element in Fröskog. Of a second Italian tabernacle shrine of the Fröskog type, originating from St Stephen's church in Aosta (Valle d'Aosta) and now in the Turin City Museum of Art, only the four relief wings (h. 100 cm) survive.²⁸ However, the style of these carvings suggests later origins, possibly during the first half of the fourteenth century (Andersen, 2015, p. 182).

The best preserved tabernacle shrine of the Fröskog type in the Iberian Peninsula is the imposing example from Castildelgado (Burgos province) preserved in the Frederic Marès Museum in Barcelona, while the Virgin and Child are still *in situ* in the parish church of this Castilian village (Fig. 10 Gutiérrez Baños, in this volume) (Lapaire, 1969, pp. 174–175, 187; Krüger, 1992, p. 19; Yarza Luaces, 1991, pp. 393–394). The shrine measures 203 cm from the base to the top and can be dated to around 1300. The baldachin is composed of three pointed gables decorated with crockets and openwork rose windows. Below are wide openings filled with trefoil arches carved in the round. On the insides of the four wings are twelve relief niches showing scenes from the Nativity cycle with the left wings again featuring the Visitation (above) and the Adoration of the Magi (bottom).²⁹ A striking feature is that the niches and reliefs are monolithically carved from the wooden planks. Four surviving wings of a Marian shrine in Yurre/Ihurre (Álava province, the Basque Country) are similar in size (h. 191 cm), style and iconography to those from Castildelgado. However, here the reliefs are carved separately and inserted in the niches (Franco Mata, 2007).

Of a number of Castilian Marian shrines of the Fröskog type, only the wings survive (Gutiérrez Baños, in this volume). These include three panels (h. 105 cm) from the so-called Wildenstein altarpiece dating from *c.* 1300 and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Cloisters), from which all reliefs are lost from the insides (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018).³⁰ These do survive inside four shrine wings (h. 139 cm) dating from *c.* 1320 that were formerly part of the John D. Rockefeller collection and are now known as the 'Chiale altarpiece' (Mor, 2016). Both the Wildenstein and the Chiale wings carry paintings on the outsides, showing Passion scenes (Wildenstein) and portraits of Sts Peter and Paul (Chiale), and both with castles and lions (the heraldry of the kingdom of Castile-León) on the edges.

²⁸ Turin, Museo civico d'arte antica, inv. nr 1050/L.

²⁹ The parallel between Fröskog, Urjala and Castildelgado is also observed in Kroesen/Leeflang/Sureda, 2019a, p. 13.

³⁰ Wildenstein: New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. nrs 55.62 a,b, 1977.94.

Further east, in Catalonia, in 2014, important parts of a tabernacle shrine of the Fröskog type were discovered in Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran in Tredòs, in the Pyrenean Aran Valley. These include a dossal, a wing and a number of microarchitecture fragments (Velasco González/Ros Barbosa/Gràcia Tarragona, 2013–14; Velasco González, in this volume).³¹ The reconstruction of this Catalan shrine was carried out with the help of Scandinavian parallels, which is illustrative of the similarities between all Fröskog shrines found across Europe. Four further wings (h. 145 cm) with similar characteristics from an unknown church in Catalonia are now preserved in the National Museum of Catalan Art in Barcelona.³² These originated around 1330–1340 and feature a combination of carved (below) and painted (above) representations perhaps similar to the above-mentioned shrine door from Norwegian Urnes.

Two thirteenth-century shrines have baldachins that are carved from a single piece of wood. The first one is a tabernacle shrine (h. 180 cm) from Högsrum (Öland, Sweden) that dates from *c.* 1250 and is now preserved in the State Historical Museum in Stockholm (Fig. 9).³³ The raised centre is surrounded by crocketed arches and finials at the corners. The second example, the earlier mentioned Marian shrine in Mont-devant-Sassey near Verdun (Meuse, France), is even entirely carved out of one piece of oak; the base, back panel and baldachin together possess a height of 214 cm (Fig. 1). While the Virgin and Child may date back to the mid-twelfth century, this enclosure has been dendrochronologically dated to 1290–1300 (Locatelli/Pousset, 2014).³⁴ The baldachin (h. 108 cm) is covered by two crossed saddleback roofs supporting a square tower with a groin vault beneath. Applied elements include corner turrets and crocketed openwork traceries at the front and side gables. A historical photograph from the beginning of the twentieth century shows the shrine still in possession of two of its wings with niches for carved scenes under trefoil arches on the insides.

³¹ The shrine is believed to have held a seated deacon preserved in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya in Barcelona, inv. nr MNAC 3925.

³² Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. nrs MNAC 9780–9783.

³³ Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museet, inv. nr SHM 19663.

³⁴ It was established that the tree (with a diameter of *c.* 75 cm) from which the shrine was carved had fallen east of Paris between 1272 and 1281. The Virgin and Child are a copy of the original now in the Musée de la Prinerie in nearby Verdun. On this figure, see Forsyth, 1972, p. 51 (and footnote 68).

4. THE KIL TYPE

The baldachins of the youngest Fröskog shrines discussed, including Castildelgado and Mont-devant-Sassey, stand out for their architectural appearance. This feature would become a characteristic aspect of tabernacle shrines after 1300. They thus announce the rise of a new, more slender type of tabernacle shrine that would remain in vogue during much of the fourteenth century. It usually houses a standing figure and is mostly equipped with wings in the shape of flat painted panels. In Sweden, this type is epitomized by the shrine in Kil (Närke) from *c.* 1350 (Fig. 10) (Tångeberg, 1989, p. 37). Measuring 202 cm in height, it contains an unidentified standing apostle and is marked by a strong vertical thrust. Of the four wings only the wider one on the right side survives, decorated with (heavily worn-off) secondary paintings divided over two registers.³⁵ The baldachin is composed of four pointed gables lined with crocketed decorative slats and round arches at the bottom.

The baldachin gables of Castildelgado and Mont-devant-Sassey are pierced through with traceries – rose windows in the first and openwork wimpergs in the latter – and both have round-carved trefoil arches inside the openings below. The same characteristics recur in several Swedish shrines from the first half of the fourteenth century. An example containing the enthroned St Olaf in Tidersrum (Östergötland) has a height of 209 cm and was dated by dendrochronology to 1320–1330.³⁶ The construction of this shrine is strongly reminiscent of Mont-devant-Sassey, with its cross-saddle roof carrying a painted square tower at the crossing and inserted corner turrets. A Marian shrine of the same type from *c.* 1340–1350 originally belonged to the church at Ny (Värmland) and is now preserved in the Säguddens museum in Arvika.³⁷ Its back panel (h. 162 cm) ends in a pointed gable, the form of which corresponds with those at the front and sides.³⁸ All gables except for the one at the rear are pierced with rose windows containing quatrefoils on the sides (the one at the front is damaged).

Similar characteristics are found in the shrine from Vanaja (Tavastia, Finland), which houses a sculpture of St Olaf enthroned. It dates from around 1320

³⁵ The painted rosettes on the base and the baldachin, the rhombs and nimbus on the dossal and the angels with banderoles on the gables were all added in the late Middle Ages.

³⁶ Research conducted by the Östergötlands museum in Linköping (Sweden). It is not entirely certain if the shrine and the figure originally belonged together.

³⁷ Arvika, Säguddens museum, inv. nr 385.

³⁸ The fact that the front gable is higher and the back gable lower than those on the sides makes it unlikely that the baldachin ever had a roof.

and is now preserved in the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki (Fig. 11).³⁹ The shrine, with a height of 170 cm, has a cross-shaped baldachin covered with saddle roofs with crocketed slats at the front gable. Its front rests on two slender columns with finely carved bases and capitals and inside is an elaborate eight-part ribbed vault with a round disc at the apex. Three sides of the shrine have lancet openings lined with round-carved pointed trefoil arches that reinforce its architectural appearance. The shrine from Vanaja still possesses the inner pair of originally four wings; as in Swedish Kil, these are carried out as flat wooden panels and here too, the paintings have almost fully vanished.

The European spread of the Kil type is illustrated by examples from Slovakia and Germany. The first one, dating from *c.* 1300, originally belonged to the church of Vojňany (Spiš, Slovakia) and is now preserved in the National Gallery of Slovakia in Bratislava (Fig. 12).⁴⁰ It measures 148 cm in height; the figure it contained – probably representing the Virgin and Child – is now lost. The front and side gables of the baldachin are decorated with crocketed slats and their architectural appearance is reinforced by painted black windows on a white background, a motif that is also found on several thirteenth-century shrines from Norway. The baldachin is supported at the front by two (renewed) thin columns. The relief decorations on the insides of the doors – standing figures of two unidentified female saints on the inner doors (St Agnes on the left?) and Sts Peter and Paul on the outer ones – are still reminiscent of the Fröskog type, although here they represent individual saints rather than narrative scenes.

A now wingless shrine with a statue of St Pancras from Steinkirchen (Brandenburg, Germany) dating from *c.* 1300 is preserved in the Bode Museum in Berlin (Fig. 1 Kemperdick, in this volume) (Kunz, 2014, pp. 219–227).⁴¹ It measures 175 cm in height and has a baldachin that rests on two slender columns with bases and capitals at the front. While there are trefoil arches in the openings on the sides, the round-arched opening at the front is filled with a round-carved trefoil arch, as in the above-mentioned contemporary examples from Tidarsrum, Vanaja, Mont-devant-Sassey and Castildelgado. Other than in those cases, however, the ground plan of the German shrine is not more or less square but rectangular,

³⁹ Helsinki, Suomen kansallismuseo, inv. nr KM 5039:1.

⁴⁰ Bratislava, Slovenská Národná Galéria, inv. nr P 131–134. Dates suggested for this object vary from *c.* 1260 to the first half of the fourteenth century. Comparison with other shrines of a similar type makes the mentioned date around 1300 most plausible.

⁴¹ Berlin, Bodemuseum, inv. nr 3198. The actual paintings found on the shrine and figure are late medieval.

and its baldachin is flat-topped. An architectural feature is added by the crenellations that line the top of the shrine.

A similarly shaped baldachin is found in a shrine from an unknown church in the province of Huesca (Aragon, Spain), now preserved in the National Museum of Catalan Art in Barcelona (Fig. 17 Velasco González, in this volume) (Frinta, 1967, p. 100; Krüger, 1992, p. 24; Favà Monllau, 2019; Velasco González, in this volume).⁴² It is relatively small (h. 122 cm) and can be dated to the second quarter of the fourteenth century. As in Steinkirchen, this shrine also holds a standing figure – in this case St Nicholas – and here too the front of the baldachin is supported by two slender columns while the top is decorated with crenellations. The arches are filled with round-carved traceries of five-lobed arches at the front and three-lobed ones on both sides. The painted rhomb pattern on the back panel reminds of the Fröskog shrines, while the flat painted wings correspond with the Kil type. Only the two wide inner shutters are preserved, showing four scenes from the life of St Nicholas, separated by text bands.

Two fourteenth-century examples from the Basque Country, both now without wings, show that tabernacle shrines with a vertical thrust and gabled baldachins also spread further west on the Iberian Peninsula. The example in Villamanca (Álava province), dating from *c.* 1330, is relatively high (h. 174 cm) and narrow and holds a figure of the standing apostle James the Greater (Fig. 13) (Portilla Vitoria, 1995, p. 855; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 46). The three gables of the baldachin, which rests on slim round columns at the front, are decorated with rosettes on a red background and crowned with pointed crockets. Of a contemporary shrine from Gazeta in the same province and now kept in the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art in Vitoria/Gasteiz, only the baldachin and part of the back panel survive (López de Ocáriz/Sáenz Pascual/García Maudes, 2006; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 51).⁴³ The Gazeta shrine closely resembles the one in Villamanca, but here only one of the rosetted side gables is preserved while the front carries the Face of Christ. The ceiling features a painted star, a motif that is also found in the above-mentioned shrine from Norwegian Dal.

The Diocesan Museum in Donostia/San Sebastián possesses a fourteenth-century shrine from Arrasate/Mondragón (Gipuzkoa province) containing a

⁴² Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. nr MNAC 24041.

⁴³ Vitoria, Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro/Elizbarrutiko Arte Sakratuaren Museoa, inv. nr 619.

standing figure of an unidentified male (probably Dominican) saint.⁴⁴ The box-shaped baldachin that rests on slender columns at the front has three gables lined with coarsely shaped crocketed slats.⁴⁵ Five painted panels from *c.* 1400 originating from Zuazo de Cuartango/Zuhatzu Kuartango (Álava province), now kept in a private collection, can be interpreted as the back panel (h. 109 cm) and four wings of a tabernacle shrine of the same type. They feature scenes from the life of St Peter on the insides and portraits of two standing saints on the outsides of the outer wings. These panels are an important indication that such fourteenth-century Basque-Castilian shrines were usually equipped with flat painted wings, as was common with shrines of the Kil type also elsewhere.

Some Italian shrines may also be classified as Kil type; although their four painted wings do correspond with the Swedish namesake, the architectural shape of the canopies is much less pronounced. The best preserved example is a Marian shrine from *c.* 1330 now kept in the Diocesan Museum of Foligno that originally belonged to the chapel of Santa Maria Giacobbe in Pale di Foligno (Umbria) (Fig. 14) (Krüger, 1992, p. 226; Pasqualetti, in this volume). The back panel (h. 147 cm) is crowned by a simple rectangular baldachin in the shape of a flat panel painted with stylized stars; of the four hinged shutters in the shape of painted panels only six fragments returned after repeated thefts. Of two similar shrines only the central figure and the four wings survive. The first one, containing a standing image of St Eustace, originated around the same date and belonged to the church at Campo di Giove (Abruzzo) (Krüger, 1992, pp. 23, 33, 83; Nicoletti, 2014). A further example with roughly the same characteristics from *c.* 1330 featured St Christina and originally stood in the church of the same name in Caso (Abruzzo) (Krüger, 1992, p. 23; Delpriori, 2015, p. 138). Both shrines were equipped with four wings of equal width, as in Pale di Foligno, which indicates that these shrines must also have had a rectangular ground plan. The wings all feature painted scenes from the life and martyrdom of the titular saints.

In Germany, the only surviving tabernacle shrine that belongs to the Kil type is the so-called 'Kleiner Dom' (little cathedral) from 1360–1370. It originally belonged to the convent of the Poor Clares in Cologne and is now preserved in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich (Ringer, 2001; Ralcheva, in this volume).⁴⁶ The conspicuously wide rectangular shrine (h. 148 cm) has a marked

⁴⁴ Donostia/San Sebastián, Elizbarrutiko museoa, s.n. Thanks to Jesús Muñoz Petralanda who brought this shrine to our attention.

⁴⁵ The current paintings are post-medieval.

⁴⁶ Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. nr L MA 1968 a-d.

architectural appearance caused by its crowning in the shape of two openwork buttressed spires. It contains a sculpture group showing the Annunciation under a baldachin decorated with pointed gables at the sides and a wide ogee arch at the front, all with intricate traceries. The shrine has four hinged doors that carry painted figures and scenes from the life of the Virgin on a golden background on the insides and – again – the Annunciation on the outsides. Stephan Kemperdick has identified a number of panels carrying paintings from *c.* 1360–1370 on both sides now preserved in various German museums as the remnants of another four tabernacle shrines of the same type (Kemperdick, 2002a; Kemperdick, 2002b; Kemperdick, in this volume).

Two tabernacle shrines of exquisite execution from Burgundian-Netherlandish origins show that similar characteristics – architectural canopies, painted wings – were also common in these regions around 1390–1400. The first is a narrow Marian shrine (figure lost), possibly from around the Burgundian ducal court at Dijon and now in the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp, which has a height of 137 cm (Deneffe/Peters/Fremout, eds, 2009, pp. 83–124).⁴⁷ The gabled canopy rests on slender columns and is crowned by a soaring openwork buttressed spire; the wings show four scenes from the Life of the Virgin on a golden background. The small, so-called ‘Chapelle Cardon’ (h. 99 cm), now in the Louvre Museum in Paris, was probably produced around the Lower Rhine around 1400 (Fig. 15) (Le Pogam/Vivet-Pecllet, eds, 2009, p. 171; Ralcheva, in this volume).⁴⁸ The enthroned Virgin is crowned by an intricate baldachin with traceries under crocketed ogee arches that surround a openwork buttressed spire ending in an elegant finial. The insides of the wings show six scenes from the Birth and Infancy of Christ, all against a golden background. Both shrines may have served as crowning elements for winged altarpieces (Kroesen, 2017, pp. 241–244).

5. SOME CONCLUSIONS

It is not easy to gain a comprehensive understanding of the development and spread of tabernacle shrines between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in Western Europe. Preserved examples are scattered out and mostly preserved in

⁴⁷ Antwerpen, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, inv. nr MMB 0002.

⁴⁸ Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. nr. RF 2314.

an incomplete state. When plotted on the map of Europe, three clear concentrations come to light: in Scandinavia (across Sweden, Norway and Finland as well as in Iceland), on the Iberian Peninsula (especially in northern Castile, the Basque Country and Catalonia) and in central Italy (Umbria, Abruzzo) (Fig. 16). The shrines show a considerable variety in size, design, refinement and use of materials. Although most tabernacle shrines contain a figure of the Virgin and Child, they were also used to display other saints.

Much more striking than their variety, however, is the remarkable degree of similarity found in shrines from the north and south (Kroesen/Leeflang/Sureda, 2019a, pp. 13–14). All examples are (or were) equipped with four wings, of which the outer pair together covered the front. They all consist(ed) of a plinth, back wall and canopy with arched openings on three sides. In their painted decorations, several motifs, including black windows on a white background and celestial bodies on the ceiling under the baldachins, are found across Europe. Moreover, the formal development of the shrines roughly followed the same lines from north to south. In Scandinavia, Spain, Italy and elsewhere they evolved from a Romanesque model in the twelfth century to an early Gothic one with relief scenes inside the wings during the thirteenth century to a more vertical, more architectural structure with painted panel doors in the fourteenth. These three models – called Appuna, Fröskog and Kil after their best representatives among the rich Swedish material – appeared on the scene around the same time in all parts of Europe.

Since no direct connections existed between Scandinavia, Spain and Italy during the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries – at least none more specific than those between all parts of the continent – these shrines in the north and south must be regarded as the rare surviving examples of what was once a common type of early altarpiece throughout the Latin West, from Iceland to Italy and from Spain to Slovakia. This is confirmed by the discussed ‘lone survivors’ found in countries that lie in between: Mont-devant-Sasse (France), Steinkirchen (Germany) and Vojňany (Slovakia). It was in the periphery of the continent, mostly in small and modest country churches and often helped by a certain degree of isolation and economic stagnation, that such examples had the best chances of survival.⁴⁹ The fact that academic art history was not invented precisely there

⁴⁹ Europe’s ‘empty centre’ may be explained by the ravages of iconoclasm, wars and revolutions, as well as by large-scale artistic renewal, especially during the Baroque period.

has largely prevented tabernacle shrines from making it into our art-historical handbooks.

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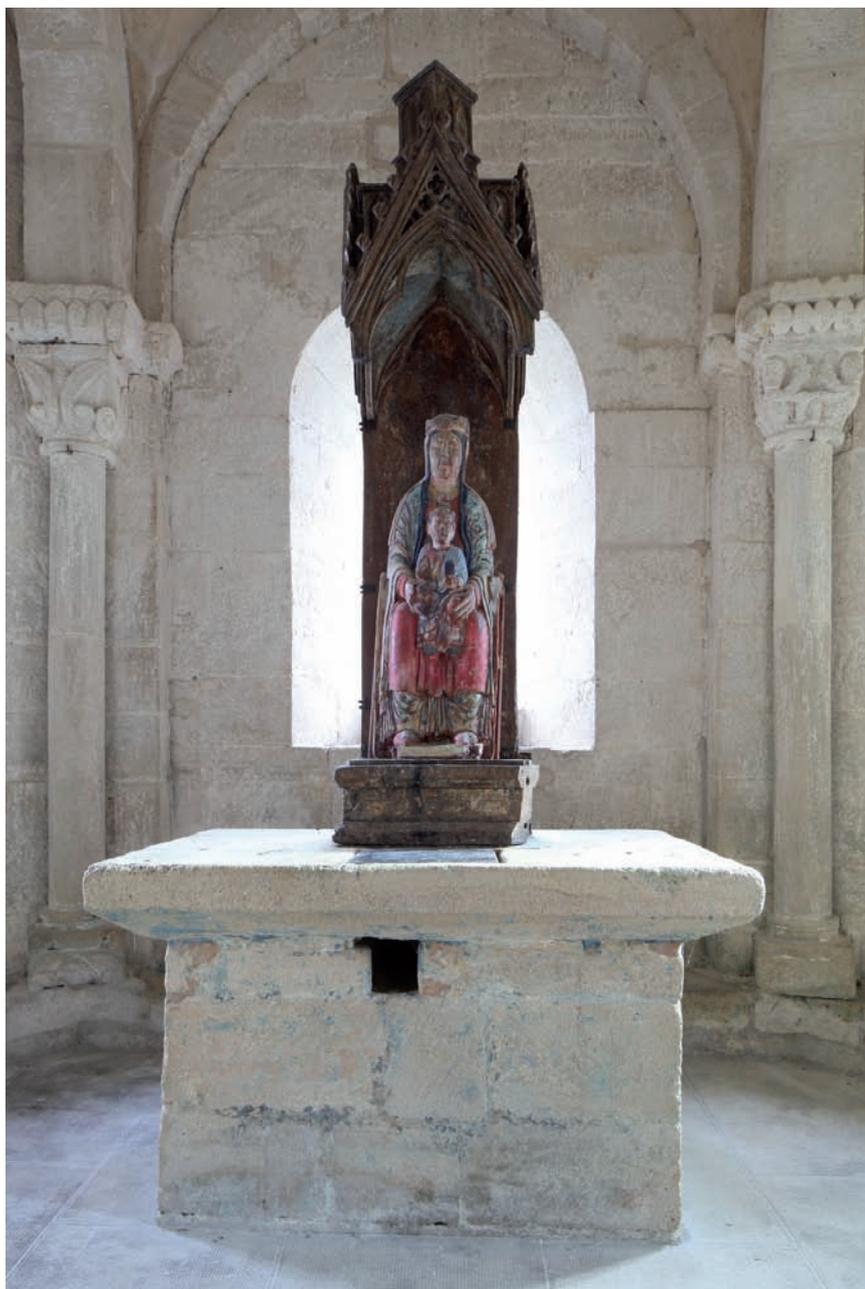


Fig. 1. Mont-devant-Sassey (France), church of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption (crypt), Marian tabernacle shrine, 1290–1300; the figure is a copy of the twelfth-century original (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 2. Virgin and Child with dossal from Appuna (Sweden), elements of a tabernacle shrine from 1180–1200, now in Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museet (photo Peter Tångeberg).



Fig. 3. Virgin and Child with dossal from an unknown church in Umbria (Italy), elements of a tabernacle shrine from 1200–1220, now in Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 4. Tabernacle shrine with a holy bishop from Edestad (Sweden), *c.* 1230, now in Karlskrona, Blekinge museum (photo Ebbe Nyborg).

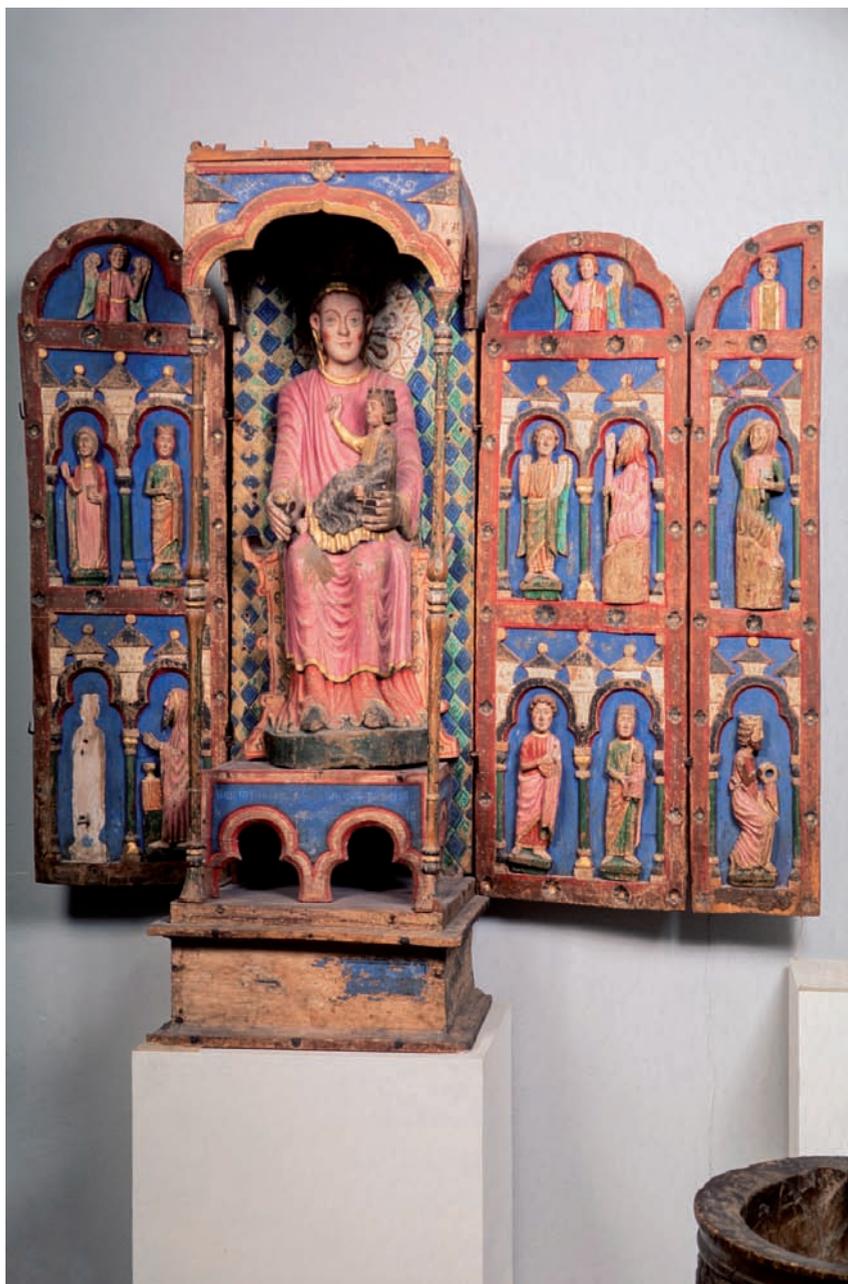


Fig. 5. Marian tabernacle shrine from Fröskog (Sweden), 1250–1300, now in Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museet (photo Statens Historiska Museet).



Fig. 6. Dädesjö (Sweden), parish church, tabernacle shrine with St Olaf, 1250–1300; figure c. 1200 (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 7. Marian tabernacle shrine from Urjala (Finland), 1275–1300, now in Helsinki, Suomen kansallismuseo (photo Suomen kansallismuseo).



Fig. 8. Marian tabernacle shrine from Múli (Iceland), 1250–1300, now in Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 9. Tabernacle shrine from Högsrum (Sweden), *c.* 1250,
now in Stockholm, Statens Historiska Museet
(photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 10. Kil (Sweden), parish church, tabernacle shrine with an unidentified standing apostle, *c.* 1350 (photo Peter Tångeberg).



Fig. 11. Tabernacle shrine with St Olaf from Vanaja (Finland), *c.* 1320, now in Helsinki, Suomen kansallismuseo (photo Suomen kansallismuseo).



Fig. 12. Tabernacle shrine from Vojňany (Slovakia), c. 1300,
now in Bratislava, Slovenská Národná Galéria
(photo Slovenská Národná Galéria).



Fig. 13. Villamanca (Spain), parish church,
tabernacle shrine with St James de Greater, c. 1330
(photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 14. Marian tabernacle shrine from Pale di Foligno (Italy), c. 1330,
now in Foligno, Museo Diocesano
(photo Kasya Popova).



Fig. 15. The so-called 'Chapelle Cardon', Lower Rhine (?), c. 1400, now in Paris, Musée du Louvre (photo Musée du Louvre).

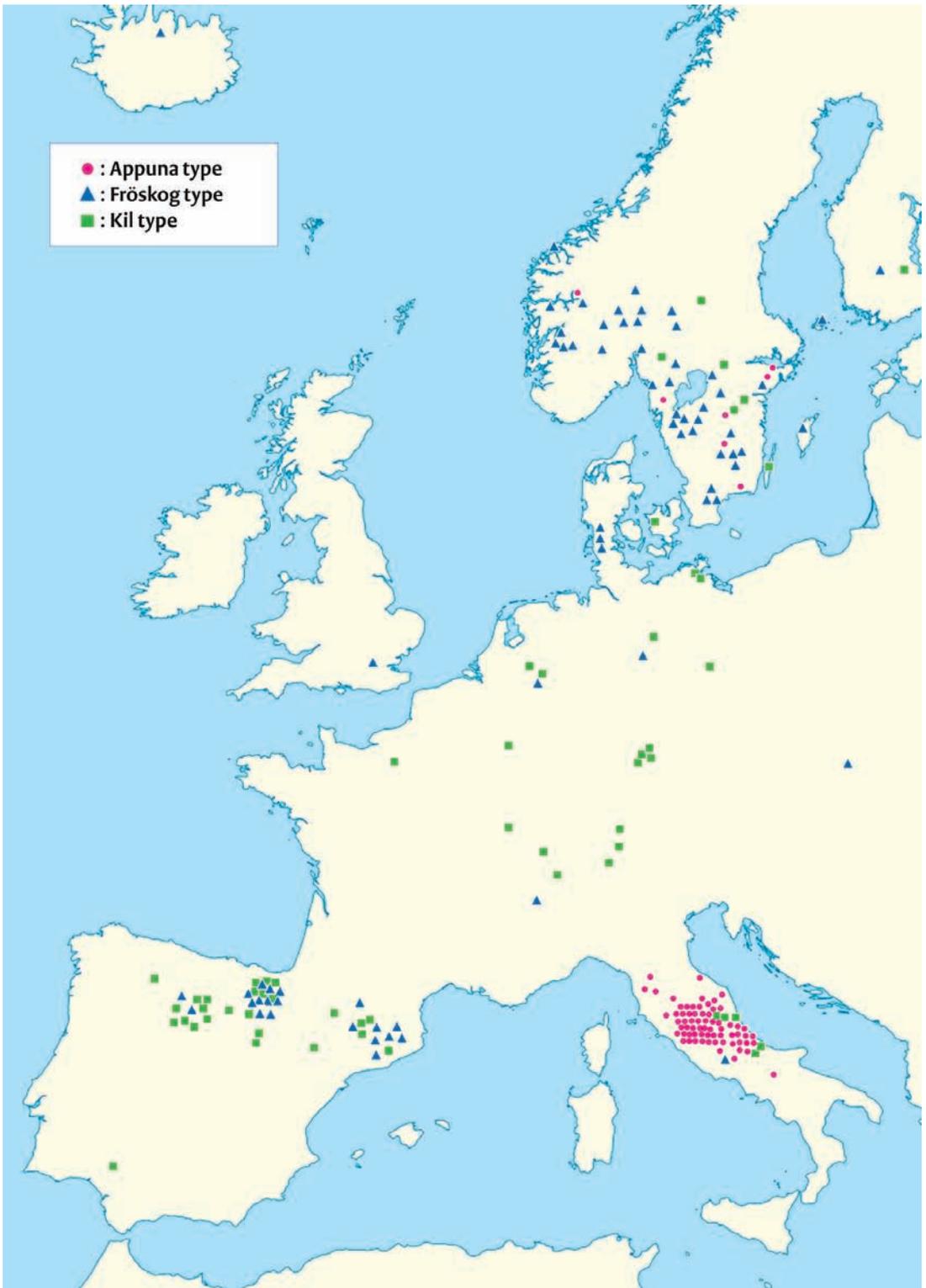


Fig. 16. Map of Europe with the spread of tabernacle shrines from c. 1180–1400 (drawing Justin Kroesen & Meindert Spek).



**CLOSING THE TABERNACLE:
EUROPEAN MADONNA TABERNACLES c. 1150–c. 1350**

**CERRANDO EL TABERNÁCULO:
RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO MARIANOS EN EUROPA c. 1150-c. 1350**

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Abstract

There are at least twenty-nine Madonna tabernacles from 1150–1350 with one or more wings preserved, most of them in Scandinavia and Spain. These tabernacles housed a sculpture of the Virgin and Child. In the open position, the central sculpture would be revealed, surrounded by scenes from the Incarnation story, depicted in relief, paint, or a combination of both. The aim of this paper is to explore these Madonna tabernacle in its closed position; What decoration and motifs are found on the exteriors? Can a closer examination of the exteriors of these works provide a greater understanding of their function and later development? And, finally, is there a difference between a closed Madonna tabernacle and a closed tabernacle that houses other saints? Most of the surviving tabernacles have wings with monochrome exteriors, often red, but also green and black or a combination of red and green. There are also examples of tabernacles with patterns or foliage. Only six tabernacles have traces of figural decoration on the exterior. Here we find St Peter and St Paul, sometimes together with St John. One tabernacle has the Passion of Christ on the exterior wings. Tabernacles housing saints other than a Madonna figure have also had monochrome exteriors, often red, although several of them, at least in Scandinavia, have lost most of their original color. Only two examples have figural decorations on the exterior and they would probably have had depictions of St Paul and St Peter (both of the tabernacles have only one of the two half-wings preserved with a depiction of St Paul on the exterior, so that St Peter would probably be on the other, lost,

half-wings, see paragraph ‘Tabernacles housing other saints’). This leads us to the conclusion that in a closed position there was little that distinguished a Madonna tabernacle from tabernacles housing other saints.

Keywords

Tabernacle, Madonna sculpture, Scandinavia, Middle Ages, wooden sculpture, medieval studies, medieval art, altarpiece, saints.

Resumen

Existen al menos veintinueve retablos-tabernáculo marianos del periodo comprendido entre 1150 y 1350 que conservan uno o más de sus paneles de cierre. La mayoría de ellos se encuentran en Escandinavia y en España. Estos retablos albergaban una imagen de la Virgen con el Niño. Cuando se encontraban abiertos, la escultura central se mostraría rodeada por escenas relativas al misterio de la Encarnación, representadas en relieve, en pintura o en una combinación de ambas técnicas. El propósito de este estudio es indagar cómo eran esos retablos-tabernáculo marianos cuando se encontraban cerrados. ¿Qué decoración y motivos se encontraban en su parte exterior? ¿Podría un estudio más profundo de su exterior proporcionarnos un mejor entendimiento de su función y de su desarrollo posterior? Y, por último, ¿existen diferencias entre los tabernáculos cerrados de tipo mariano y los que albergaron otros santos? La mayoría de los tabernáculos que se conservan tienen paneles de cierre con exteriores monocromos, frecuentemente en rojo, pero también en verde, en negro o en una combinación de rojo y de verde. También hay ejemplos de tabernáculos decorados a base de patrones o a base de motivos vegetales. Solo seis retablos-tabernáculo tienen restos de decoración figurativa en el exterior de sus paneles. En ellos encontramos a San Pedro y a San Pablo, acompañados a veces por San Juan. Uno de ellos muestra en el exterior de sus paneles la pasión de Cristo. Los tabernáculos que cobijan la figura de un santo distinto de la Virgen también presentan exteriores monocromos, a menudo rojos, aunque varios de ellos, al menos en Escandinavia, han perdido gran parte de su color original. Solo dos ejemplos presentan decoración figurativa en el exterior y probablemente en su momento tuvieron representaciones de San Pablo y de San Pedro (los dos conservan solo uno de los paneles que cerraban su frente, donde, en su cara exterior, se representa a San Pablo, por lo que San Pedro se encontraría probablemente en el panel perdido, véase el apartado ‘Tabernacles housing other saints’). Esto nos lleva a la conclusión de que en posición cerrada había poca diferencia entre un retablo-tabernáculo mariano y aquellos que albergaron otros santos.

Palabras clave

Tabernáculo, imagen de la Virgen con el Niño, Escandinavia, Edad Media, escultura en madera, estudios medievales, arte medieval, retablo, santos.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most medieval wooden sculpture, aside from the special case of rood crosses, was generally placed in altar niches, on pedestals, directly on altars, or in tabernacles.¹ The oldest preserved group of wooden tabernacles dates from c. 1150–c. 1350, but these are scarce, and it is therefore difficult to compile a full understanding of their original appearance and variations. Nevertheless, there are still at least twenty-nine extant Madonna tabernacles in Europe with one or more wings preserved, making them the largest group of pre-1350 preserved wooden tabernacles housing a saint (Andersen 2015).

A Madonna tabernacle is a three-dimensional construction embellished with brilliant color and movable wings, with a figure of the Virgin and Child affixed inside. When the tabernacle is open, the Madonna figure is revealed, with the story of the Incarnation – painted, carved, or in combination – in the niches on the tabernacle's wings. Nearly always when these tabernacles are exhibited in museums or reproduced in print it is their interiors that are displayed or illustrated. The reason is obvious: the sculpture and the decorative wings are on the inside of the tabernacle. Another logical explanation is that there is seemingly nothing of interest on the exteriors, i.e., no figural painting.

The aim of this paper is to explore the Madonna tabernacle in Europe in its closed position. What decoration and motifs are found on the exteriors? Can a closer examination of the exteriors of these works provide a greater understanding of their function and later development? And, finally, is there a difference between a closed Madonna tabernacle and a closed tabernacle that houses other saints?

In Scandinavia (including Iceland and Finland) there are seventeen extant Madonna tabernacles, or fragments of them, with one or more wings preserved. There are also several examples in southern Europe dating from before 1350, with at least nine from Spain and three in Italy.² There are also many Madonna sculp-

¹ *Baldachinaltar* in German, *Retable à baldaquin* in French. See: Norberg, 1969, cols 80–89.

² The material is often fragmented: several pieces have been sold, today in private collections, and/or later rebuilt or lost. It is therefore possible that the number of preserved wings from Italian and Spanish Madonna tabernacles could be more.

tures that are preserved with their original back panel (some with the canopy) but which have lost their doors. These are not included in this study.

I will first present the construction and iconography of Madonna tabernacles. I will then 'close' them and divide them into three groups: exteriors with figural decoration; monochrome exteriors; and exteriors with foliage/pattern decoration. Furthermore, I will discuss parallels between these tabernacle exteriors and Lenten veils, and how the observance of Lent could complicate the celebration of the most important Marian feast day: the Annunciation. This problem was solved in the fourteenth century by altering the exterior decoration of Madonna tabernacles.

2. CONSTRUCTION

A tabernacle consists of seven elements: a plinth on which the sculpture is placed; a back panel; a canopy; and four wings attached by hinges, that is, two side-wings and two half-wings. And some may have had an eighth element: a church-model (Fig. 1). The canopy was intended to rest on four posts and shelter the image of the saint. Around this rectangular space were four wings hinged together, enclosing the sculpture when the tabernacle was closed; and they were often surmounted by a church model, usually with a spire pinnacle. The wider side-wings formed the lateral walls, while the narrower half-wings composed the front of the tabernacle when it was closed. The wings generally terminated at the top in gable forms, often in the shape of trefoils. The wings could be swung to open positions with all four wings – the half-wings plus the side-wings – opened, revealing the Virgin and Child and the interior of the side-wings, decorated with scenes in the niches.

The wings of the tabernacles were composed of one, two, or three butt-jointed vertical oak or pine boards reinforced on the reverse by horizontal battens pegged through the vertical boards. Often the pegged framing had a trefoil profile running around the edge of the reverse side. All extant examples have three tiers on the reverse side except for two, from Hedalen, Norway, and Nässinge, Sweden, which have four tiers.³ Each tabernacle would have had eight, twelve, or eighteen trefoil or arched niches on the interior of the half- and side-wings. Those from southern Europe would originally have had two or three tiers, and eight

³ See table at the end of this article for information about the Madonna tabernacles discussed here: date, location, size, number of preserved wings, material, and exterior decoration.

or twelve trefoil, cinquefoil, or squared niches. The niches were divided by horizontal battens and architectural or foliage decorations. The scenes in the niches were executed in wooden relief figures (Fig. 2), or painted, or created through a combination of painting and relief.

The back panel had a canopy that could be flat, arched, or angular. The top of the canopy could have carved crenellations or gables. The sides of the canopy were often carved as trefoils or rounded arches (or a combination). The Madonna figure, sitting on a throne with a plinth underneath her feet, was nailed to the back panel.

For many tabernacles in Scandinavia the uppermost component has survived, which had the form of a church, as seen in Hedalen, Reinli, and Urnes in Norway, and Norra Ny in Sweden, but there are also church-form canopies preserved where the tabernacles are lost, such as those from Borgund, Kinsarvik, and Tuft in Norway. Most of these were once thought to be tabernacles for storing the host, but a study by Bernt C. Lange has shed new light on the tabernacles' appearance. Lange suggests that the five well-preserved Norwegian wooden church models from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Reinli, Hedalen, Borgund, Kinsarvik, and Tuft) were not made for housing the host as a 'sacrament-house', but were the crowning architectural feature on Madonna tabernacles (Lange, 1994, pp. 23–36).

The overall sizes of these tabernacles were from *c.* 1.4 m. to over 2 m., and even higher if they were capped by a church-model, which could measure up to 1.5 m. In the open position, they would be wider in proportion to their height.

3. ICONOGRAPHY

Madonna tabernacles and Madonna frontals, as well as small-scale ivories in the form of triptychs or polyptychs, share common features of composition and iconography, but, of course, they did not necessarily have the same function. In the extant wings from Scandinavia, there is little variation in terms of the scenes included in the decoration as well as their placement in the wings. Regarding the order of the scenes, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions given that so many reliefs are lost, and the preserved reliefs have often been replaced into positions they didn't originally fill.⁴

⁴ For example, in the tabernacles from Fröskog (Sweden), Yurre (Spain), and Marès I altarpiece (Spain). The latter has reliefs that did not originally belong to it, see Melero Moneo, 1991, pp. 432–433.

In some of the southern European tabernacles, however, there is greater variety and several additional scenes (Andersen, 2015, pp. 170–171). At least two scenes were always included in the story of the Incarnation: the Annunciation, often followed by the Visitation and the Adoration of the Magi. The first scene had a fixed place in the composition, at the bottom, on the right side, near the foot of the Madonna sculpture. The other most common scenes included are the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Nativity, and the Presentation in the Temple. In addition, there is the occasional inclusion of the Flight into Egypt, Joseph's dream, and the Massacre of the Innocents. In tabernacles from Italy and Spain can be found the Dream of the Three Magi, the Magi questioning Herod, Herod's feast, the Baptism of Christ, the Death of the Virgin, and the Coronation of the Virgin, none of which is present in the tabernacles from Scandinavia. What is interesting is that there are no traces of scenes from the Childhood of the Virgin or the Miracles of the Virgin on the tabernacles' wings, as are commonly included on other works such as altar frontals.

4. FIGURAL PAINTING ON EXTERIORS

Tabernacles dating from the second half of the fourteenth century and forward usually have figural paintings on the exterior. Often a representation of the Annunciation appeared on the exterior of the half-wings, forming the front of the tabernacle when closed. Later, during the fifteenth century, painted saints started to appear on the exteriors. Tabernacles preserved from *c.* 1150–*c.* 1350, on the other hand, seldom have traces of figures on the exterior; most of them have monochrome exteriors. A closer examination shows that only six of the twenty-nine pre-1350 Madonna tabernacles – two from Norway and four from Spain – have figural painting, or traces of figures, on the exterior. Of these, all represent St Peter, St Paul, or St John the Evangelist save one, which portrays the Passion of Christ.

4.1. *St Peter and St Paul*

Four out of the six tabernacles with painted figures on the exterior depict St Peter and/or St Paul, who were the two pillars of the church, *principes apostolorum*. St Peter, whose symbol is one or two keys, declared Jesus to be the Messiah, was appointed by God to be the foundation of the Church, and was given the key to

heaven (Matthew 16: 13–19). Paul brought the Gospel to the Gentiles, after he had converted and become a well-known missionary. Both died as martyrs on the same day. Paul was beheaded in Rome, hence his attribute the sword. The two saints, who are often depicted together, flank Christ in *Traditio Legis*, or Christ Enthroned images, and they can be seen accompanying other figures and scenes such as the Madonna, the Transfiguration, the Man of Sorrows, and the Coronation of the Virgin. They are also on altar frontals, for example, in Kinsarvik, Norway, on either side of Christ in the Crucifixion,⁵ or on the Barnabas altarpiece, flanking an enthroned Maria Lactans.⁶ On the murals in Birkerød Church, Denmark, St Peter and St Paul are in attendance at the Coronation of the Virgin.⁷

The tabernacle from Fåberg, Norway, has one side-wing preserved: the left wing, once hinged to the tabernacle's back and closing to cover its side (Fig. 3). On the exterior, St Peter stands facing frontally, holding up two keys in his right hand and a book in his left. The apostle is tonsured and his hair and beard are short and curly. He is dressed in a white belted tunic patterned with small triplets of orange dots (Kollandsrud, 2018, pp. 231–232; Binski/Sauerberg, 2006, pp. 230–244; Blindheim, 2004, p. 114). His mantle is yellow, dulled today towards gray, and he is presented against a red background. The figure fills the length of the door and is framed by horizontal bands of acanthus vine along the top and bottom. One can assume that the Fåberg tabernacle had St Paul as a pendant on the other side-wing. Unfortunately, it is not possible to say what would have been the motifs on the half-wings.

The two preserved wings of the Sant Martí Sarroca tabernacle depict St Peter on one half-wing and St Paul on the other, and thus they faced each other when the wings were closed (Fig. 4 Velasco González, in this volume). They are both dressed in white tunics and green cloaks on a red background. St Peter holds a double key in his right hand and a book in the other. The pigment describing his

⁵ Today in the University Museum of Bergen (BM MA 10), Norway.

⁶ Today at Kimbell Art Museum, Texas, USA.

⁷ Often in representations of St Peter and St Paul, where they are flanking a scene, St Peter is seen on the left and St Paul on the right. On tabernacles there are variations. On the preserved wings, St Peter and St Paul are painted on the half-wings, composing the front of the tabernacle when it was closed. The figures are painted in profile or half-profile, facing each other, as seen in the examples from Sant Martí Sarroca, Arana I, and the so-called 'Chiale altarpiece'. On Arana I, Peter is on the right side and Paul on the left, as on the wing from Sant Martí Sarroca. On the Chiale altarpiece, Paul is on the right and Peter is on the left, as is their more common placement, such as on frontals.

head is fragmented but his eyes are still visible, looking to his right, half facing the viewer. Traces of his curly beard are still preserved. St Paul, standing to the left, has a sword in his right hand and his left hand is effaced, but clearly it was raised; perhaps he was holding a book or pointing his finger. Sections of his long, straight hair and beard are still visible.

The four wings of the Spanish tabernacle Arana I were taken apart and reused in several eighteenth-century altarpieces,⁸ today in Treviño, Spain, in the Church of St Peter (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 64–68). The exteriors of the four wings were painted over once with a red background decorated with stars. This layer of paint was later removed. Today the exterior of the medieval tabernacle constitutes the back of the altarpieces, and therefore these panels are not visible to the viewer. The two half-wings once composing the front of a Madonna tabernacle when closed have paintings of St Peter and St Paul (Fig. 4). One of the side-wings portrays John the Evangelist. The paint on the fourth side-wing has vanished. St Peter is in three-quarter profile, looking to his right towards St Paul on the other half-wing. His beard is short and curly as is his tonsured hair. He holds one large key in his right hand and a book in the other. St Paul, facing the opposite direction, towards St Peter, holds his attribute, a sword, in his left hand and a book in the other. Both saints are dressed in blue robes and red mantles and are set against a yellow background.

Another Madonna tabernacle from Spain, the so-called ‘Chiale altarpiece’,⁹ today kept at Killua Castle, Ireland, has all four wings preserved (Mor, 2016) (Fig. 5). The exteriors of the side wings are red, decorated with a lighter red pattern of dots. The half-wings, composing the front when closed, have figural decoration. The paint on the left half-wing is very damaged, with only traces of the figure’s blue mantle and red cloak remaining. The image on the other half-wing is also fragmented, but the upper part of the figure is preserved and portrays St Paul, who is presented in profile, looking towards the vanished saint on the other half-wing, who was probably St Peter. St Paul is dressed in a red mantle and blue cloak and wields a sword in his right hand and points upwards with the other. Both figures on the half-wings are set against a yellow background.

⁸ In two altarpieces and in a sacrament box for the main altarpiece.

⁹ Chiale is an Italian surname designating the art dealer based in Racconigi and Brussels who brought this altarpiece to light in 2016.

4.2. *St John*

As mentioned above, a side-wing from the Arana I tabernacle portrays John the Evangelist (Fig. 6). Like St Peter and St Paul from the same tabernacle, he is dressed in a blue tunic and red cloak. St John's hair is long and curly, and he is beardless. St John is typically represented in art as a beautiful, young, beardless man, with the poisoned cup or a book in his hand.¹⁰ St John from Arana I holds an open book in his left hand, and his right hand is raised, with one finger pointing towards the book. This panel was probably the left side-wing (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 67).

The tabernacle from Urnes, Norway, has a preserved left side-wing.¹¹ It has lost significant amounts of paint, with only traces of pigment on the interior and exterior. The figure on the exterior is very damaged (Fig. 6), but it is still possible to detect a beardless face and part of a raised arm, set against a red background. The hand is very fragmented, but there is a pointing finger. Blindheim suggests that the figure depicts an angel (Blindheim, 1993; 1998, p. 61). However, a closer study of the painting shows that what Blindheim assumed were the angel's wings are, in fact, part of a frame that runs around the side-wing. It could be this is also St John, as seen in Arana I. A comparison of these two wings reveals similarities in pose: they both face in the same direction, and both have the same pointing finger and beardless face.

This side-wing from Urnes reveals further close stylistic connections between tabernacles from Norway and Spain. It is the only preserved tabernacle wing in Scandinavia that has a combination of painted and carved figural scenes on the interior. The upper tier has painted figures, such as the angels in the upper gable and traces of an angel (Gabriel) in one of the niches. The lower tier has probably had carved figures; one magus is preserved that fits the side-wing from Urnes.¹² A Spanish tabernacle, from Vallbona de les Monges, also has this same combination on the interior. And we can assume that it was not only a single wing on the Urnes tabernacle that was decorated with a figure on its exterior, but that there

¹⁰ St John belonged to the inner circle of Jesus' disciples; and on the cross, Jesus gave his mother into John's care. John was the first apostle brought to the dying Mary.

¹¹ The Urnes tabernacle also had an identical half-wing; this was still in the church in 1953, but lost by 1955. Published drawings by Blix of the half-wing and the roof of the church-model exist (Blix, 1895, p. 17, fig. 10), but they do not provide any information about the exterior.

¹² Thanks to Stephan Kuhn and Justin Kroesen for this information.

was a matching, pendant, figure on the other side-wing, or, like the Spanish tabernacle of Arana I, that all four wings had figural decoration.

4.3. *The Passion of Christ*

The last of these six examples of tabernacles with figures on the exterior is also the most elaborately decorated: the three wings from the Spanish Madonna tabernacle, called Wildenstein altarpiece (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018), today in the Met Cloisters Museum in New York (Fig. 7).¹³ The interior, now lost, displayed figures in relief against a gold ground. The edges of the gabled exterior panels bear the arms of Castile and León, and the three wings are decorated with scenes from the Life of Christ. The scenes of the side-wing are (top to bottom): the Betrayal of Christ and the Payment of Judas; Christ's Descent into Limbo and *Noli Me Tangere* combined in one scene, together with Mary Magdalene kissing Christ's feet. The right half-wing (top to bottom): Disrobing Youths from the Entry into Jerusalem; the Flagellation; and Angel at the Sepulchre. The other half-wing: the Deposition; and the Entombment, with Nicodemus, Mary, and St John. The painted figures are dressed in alternating red and blue tunics and cloaks and set against a yellow background.

5. MONOCHROME EXTERIORS

Even if the decoration on the various Madonna tabernacles are damaged or have been painted over, or the wings have been reconstructed, we often find original paint preserved on the exterior of the wings. A closer examination of the exteriors of these European Madonna tabernacles shows that the majority have had monochrome exteriors, often in red, green, or black, sometimes with a decoration of foliage or patterns.

In Oppland County, Norway, there are two neighboring stave churches, Hedalen and Reinli, with two altarpieces composed of a medieval corpus of a tabernacle that once housed a Madonna figure. The pair are very good examples of the appearance of these early tabernacles when closed, because they both have

¹³ Two of the panels were purchased in 1955 (accession number 55.62a,b), and the third panel was a bequest from Carl Otto von Kienbusch in 1977. See: Baetjer, 1995, p. 146.

all four wings preserved. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they were both remodeled and painted over, but the exteriors of the wings, today the backs of the altarpieces, were not (Andersen, 2015, pp. 165–185). In the middle of the eighteenth century the Hedalen tabernacle was remodeled to become an altarpiece consisting of a medieval crucifix attached to the overpainted corpus of the tabernacle. The Madonna figure and the church-model that once sat atop the tabernacle were placed elsewhere in the church. The figures previously positioned in the niches are today lost. The interior has been covered with ‘rose-painting’, but the wings have their original paint preserved on the exterior (Fig. 8). Red and green sections on the wings create a checkerboard pattern in all six squares (two half-squares in the half-wings form two squares when closed), and, additionally, the spaces within the trefoils at the top of the wings alternate red and green (Stein, 2010, pp. 58–91; Andersen 2015, pp. 165–185) (Fig. 10).

The altarpiece in Reinli was originally the corpus of a medieval Madonna tabernacle (of the same shape as Hedalen’s). In the late nineteenth century, the two half-wings were placed side by side to form the middle section of the altarpiece, and the side-wings were made into the side sections of the new composition. The Ascension of Christ was painted on the middle section of the interior in the 1890s and scenes from the Old and New Testaments were added in the side sections in the 1920s. The back panel of the tabernacle was still in the church in 1885, but was later removed, probably already during the restoration of the church in the late 1880s. The church model that once surmounted the tabernacle was sent to the University Museum of Bergen in the 1870s. The exterior of the tabernacle is still preserved in its original condition, with the half-wings green and the side-wings red (Fig. 9). When closed, the half-wings in front of the tabernacle would have been green and the side-wings red (Stein, 2010, pp. 58–91; Andersen 2015, pp. 165–185) (Fig. 10).

For some tabernacles all four wings were decorated in a single color. There are multiple examples that support this conclusion. The Madonna tabernacle from Fröskog, Sweden, has three preserved wings. Today the outsides of them are red with white foliage, but the foliage seems to have been added later, perhaps in connection with the re-painting of the interior in the eighteenth century. (Fig. 11). There are traces of later renovations that have the same foliage pattern, which indicates that the exterior of all four wings was initially red. Other examples in Sweden are found at Östra Vram Church, where there are two tabernacles, one with a central Madonna figure and the other with a St Olaf figure. The Madonna tabernacle has three extant wings, and while the interior has been painted over, the exterior retains its original color: red (Fig. 11). Also, at Näss-

inge, Sweden, there are two preserved wings that were originally red.¹⁴ Outside of Sweden, there are examples in the north: the tabernacle from Múli, Iceland, has four wings painted red.¹⁵ And in the south, in Spain, we find the same: the four wings of the tabernacle from Vallbona de les Monges are all red (Fig. 11). And there are further instances of wings from Spain and Scandinavia that are red or have traces of red.¹⁶

In addition to red exteriors, we also find wings painted green or dark green or black. The Madonna tabernacle in Norra Ny Church, Sweden, has one preserved half-wing (Fig. 12).¹⁷ The polychrome on the interior is probably from the fifteenth century, and the exterior is in a dark (black?) color. Another Spanish tabernacle with all four wings preserved is that of Castildelgado in Burgos, today exhibited at the Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona (Fig. 12). The interior has been painted over and gilded, while the exteriors of the four wings have been preserved in what appears to be the original black paint. The tabernacle from Urjala, Finland, has three preserved wings that are also covered in a dark color (black?) (Fig. 12).¹⁸

6. FOLIAGE AND PATTERN DECORATION

Some wings have foliage or patterns painted on the exterior. A number of these decorations could be secondary additions, but others are harder to determine and need technical examination by a conservator. It is possible that in the case of a preserved left side-wing from a tabernacle in Røldal II,¹⁹ decorated with a red background and yellow foliage, that the foliage was part of the original ornamentation (Fig. 13). Foliage decorations can be found incised on the golden

¹⁴ Foliage patterns, as stencils, were later added to the wings. See in this paper 'Foliage and Pattern Decoration'.

¹⁵ According to a conservation report from 1956 (N. J. Termansen), there are some traces of ornament with a thin glaze; this need to be further examined.

¹⁶ One wing from Marès I altarpiece, Spain; one wing from Fet, Norway.

¹⁷ In 1928 one other half-wing was reconstructed.

¹⁸ Most of the exteriors of these tabernacles have not been thoroughly examined by conservators.

¹⁹ Røldal II is in some publications referred to as 'Odda' (Kollandsrud, 2018, p. 230; Plahter *et alii*, 2004, p. 198), without explanation. When it arrived at Bergen Museum it was written that it was from Røldal church. A lot of inventory was labeled 'Røldal' and may not all be from the same church, but as long as there is, to my knowledge, no indication why it may be from Odda, I choose to refer to it as 'Røldal II'.

background of the figures scenes as well as painted or carved on the upper part of the niches, above the trefoil gable, on the interior. A preserved fragment from a canopy from Eidsborg, Norway, also displays this kind of foliage decoration (Kollandsrud, 2018, p. 230).²⁰

The only extant wings, a half-wing and a side-wing, from a Madonna tabernacle with a pattern on the exterior are from Røldal I, Norway, but the half-wing has lost all its paint. The side-wing, however, has a zigzag pattern on the exterior (Fig. 13). The painting technique consists of ‘daubs’ in red and yellow on a black background. Perhaps it suggests a pattern of woven fabrics.

7. ALTERED EXTERIORS

7.1. *Later overpainted exteriors*

The non-figural exterior of tabernacles has seldom been scrutinized, and when works are restored, the exteriors are often left untouched or unexamined.

Only a handful of tabernacle wings have been painted over, either during the late Middle Ages or in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. And only one known example has later been painted with figural decoration on the exterior: the Madonna tabernacle from Aosta, Italy (Rossetti Brezzi, 2001, p. 40). It has all four wings preserved, and in 1510–1520 they were re-painted with the Annunciation scene in front (when closed, thus on the backs of the half-wings) and two saint bishops on backs of the side-wings. The surface of the two wings on the left side have since been destroyed.

The Madonna tabernacle from Nässjö, Sweden, today has only one original wing preserved, with one relief figure: one of the Three Magi. The interior of the wing has lost its original niches and only fragments of initial paint are preserved. Both the Madonna figure and the wing were remodeled during the sixteenth century, and later they were integrated into a new tabernacle along with the preserved medieval wing on the left side and a new wing on the right side. On the exterior of the medieval wing there are traces of foliage decoration, maybe from the remodeling of the tabernacle in the sixteenth century, or they could be later painted additions, possibly from the seventeenth century. The same light green

²⁰ Madonna tabernacles from the middle of the fourteenth century through the sixteenth often have foliage decoration on side-wings, while the half-wings could have the Annunciation scene.

color is also painted over the original decorated niches in the interior. Traces of red pigment under the light green overpaint suggest that the wing once was red or partly red.²¹

Two tabernacles have later been decorated with a painted pattern of flowers (stencil): The tabernacles in Yurre, Álava, Spain, and in Nässinge, Sweden (Fig. 14). The tabernacle from Yurre has small blue flowers patterned on a red ground. The examples from Nässinge have red-orange flowers/leaves patterned on a brownish-red background. As mentioned above, foliage decoration was subsequently added to the Fröskog tabernacle. Because there are no conservation reports regarding the examination of the original pigments, one can presume that the tabernacles would have been monochrome, at least the two from Fröskog and Nässinge.

7.2. *Lost colors*

There is also a group of tabernacles that has lost most or all of their color on the exterior of the wings. Tabernacles from Jällby, Sweden, and Kumlinge in Finland are such examples, as is a wing from the so-called 'Marès I altarpiece' (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018), currently in the Museu Frederic Marès of Barcelona (Fig. 15).²²

Some tabernacles have traces of color that may suggest that there has been a pattern or foliage, such as those in Jällby and Svinhult, Sweden (Fig. 16).²³ The colors that are found on the fragments are red, green, or black, that is, the same colors found on the monochrome wings with preserved surfaces. None of these fragments are traces of figures.

For a tabernacle from Vojňany, Slovakia, it is uncertain which saint it originally housed.²⁴ It has been suggested that it held a Madonna sculpture (Buran/Müllerová, eds, 2008, p. 1) (Fig. 16). This tabernacle differs from others of the same 1150–1350 period when opened. Rather than depicting scenes of the saint's life on the interior, it offers four figures: St Peter and St Paul on the half wings, and two saints with uncertain identification on the side wings. One figure may be St John pointing towards the central saint sculpture. The other figure holds

²¹ This need to be confirmed through a chemical analysis of paint samples.

²² These have traces of ground and/or small pigments that shows that the wings once have been painted.

²³ It is unclear, though, if the foliage was a later addition.

²⁴ Today at Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

what seems to be a red piece of fruit or a globe in his/her left hand and a palm branch in the other. The exterior of the wings (visible when the tabernacle is closed) have lost all of their pigment. This last tabernacle may indicate that some tabernacles never have had paintings on the exterior?²⁵

8. TABERNACLES HOUSING OTHER SAINTS

In Scandinavia, surprisingly the only examples of preserved wings from tabernacles dedicated to saints other than the Madonna are in Sweden (dating *c.* 1150–*c.* 1350). Three of the tabernacles housed the famous Norwegian saint King Olaf and two tabernacles a bishop saint.

In Östra Vram Church there are two tabernacles, as mentioned above, one of them with a Madonna figure and the other St Olaf. The St Olaf tabernacle has two preserved wings: one half-wing with traces of red paint; and one side-wing, where the exterior is red. From Berg Church, today at Historiska Museet in Stockholm, there are four wings that once were part of a St Olaf tabernacle. The exterior of these wings has also lost its original paint, save some small fragments of red on a white priming. The third St Olaf tabernacle is in Dädesjö Old Church; all four wings are extant, but all traces of color on the exterior are gone (Fig. 17).

One of the two bishop tabernacles is from Edestad Church but today is kept in the Blekinge Museum. It has one preserved side-wing, the exterior of which has traces of red foliage on a white background (Fig. 17). The tabernacle in Närkes Kil Church has one preserved side-wing with no remaining pigment on the exterior.

There are several examples of Spanish tabernacles housing various saints that have had monochrome exteriors; most of them had red wings, or decorations of diamond-shape patterns (Fig. 17), as Alberto Velasco explains in his article in this publication.

Nevertheless, there are remnants of at least two Castilian tabernacles with figural paintings on the exterior: 'Haupt I and II', presently in the National Museum in Warsaw, that have figural paintings on their preserved wings (Ratkowska, 1970, pp. 1–18; Dobrzeniecki, 1977, pp. 335–338, no 115). Haupt I is dedicated

²⁵ As Fernando Gutiérrez Baños made me aware of is the case of a Castilian hagiographical tabernacle in Covarrubias.

to St John the Baptist and has three preserved wings; Two side-wings and one half-wing. The half-wing once composing the left side of the tabernacle when closed has a depiction of St Paul on the exterior, probably facing St Peter on the now lost right half-wing. The Haupt II tabernacle, belonging to an unidentified saint, only has one wing preserved, the left half-wing, also with the depiction of St Paul.

What is interesting is that tabernacles housing saints from this period, have either monochrome exteriors, often red, or representations of St Paul (and St Peter). This means that in a closed position there was little that distinguished the tabernacles from each other, as demonstrated by the two tabernacles in Östra Vram. When the tabernacles of St Olaf and Madonna were closed, they would have probably looked nearly identical: red wings with a red-and-green canopy with crenelation.²⁶

9. CLOSED TABERNACLES AS A VISUAL 'FASTING'

We know little about the use of these early tabernacles within their churches. What we can assume is that, at a minimum, they were opened on major feast days, such as Epiphany, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Ascension, Trinity Sunday, All Saints' Day, and the Feast of Corpus Christi (Kaspersen, 2003, pp. 39–41). During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, devotion to the Virgin Mary intensified and more Marian feast days were introduced, and as a result the tabernacles were likely open during these days as well.

We can also assume that tabernacles were closed during Lent, a period during which altars, tabernacles, and images were covered with cloths.²⁷ Veiling sacred images gave material expression to the somber mood of penance and mourning that characterized Lent. Lenten veils were known in medieval times as *velum quadragesimale*, or the 'veil of 40 days', and were later called *Fastentuch* or *Hungertuch* in German-speaking regions (Hotchin, 2018). There were liturgical regulations in the thirteenth century for covering all ornaments, panels, and sculptures in a church. For instance, in William Durandus's *Rationale* of 1286 it is written:

²⁶ The canopy of the Madonna tabernacle is today constructed with parts of two tabernacles. It is the left side that is the original.

²⁷ For further information about the act of concealing with cloths, see Wallem, 1910, pp. 25–28.

Now all things which pertain to the ornament of a church must be removed or covered over in the season of Lent: which according to some taketh place on Passion Sunday, because after that time the Divinity of Christ was hidden and concealed in Him. [...] Others do this the first Sunday of Lent (Smith, 1959, p. 47).

White linen was often used for the veils that covered crosses, images, reliquaries, etc., but there were also those made of silk. And there are descriptions of Lenten veils that deviate from white cloth with red crosses, especially in English documents, where they are recorded as red or black cloths.²⁸ And according to Durandus, four colors were used in church hangings: white, red, black, and green (Neale/Webb, eds, 1893, Appendix E, pp. 189–195): a white curtain representing pureness of living; red for charity; green for contemplation; and black for mortification of the flesh, a livid-colored tribulation (Neale/Webb, eds, 1893, pp. 64–65). It seems that during Lent there were a variety of visual expressions. Many of the Lenten cloths had decorations embroidered on them in printed patterns, such as foliage, or red crosses; more exclusive cloths could have various scenes from the Passion of Christ, as were popular in the late medieval period (Braun, 1924, p. 233). One example of an exceptional altar cloth used during Lent is the *Narbonne Altar Cloth* made for King Charles V in 1364 (Fig. 18).²⁹ On it are scenes from the Passion: the Kiss of Judas, the Flagellation, the Carrying of the Cross, the Entombment, the Descent into Limbo and Noli Me Tangere – some of which are also found on the exterior of the Spanish Madonna tabernacle in New York (Fig. 19).

The exteriors of tabernacle wings, with their monochrome matte surfaces, often applied in red, green or black water-based paint (Kollandsrud, 2018, p. 229), create an illusion of Lenten cloths and could be understood as a form of visual ‘fasting’.

The contrast of the open and closed tabernacle would be as great at the removal of the cloths on Easter Sunday; the opening of the wings of the tabernacle enabled the priest to perform the ‘tearing of the veil’ on feast days (e.g., compare the Castildelgado tabernacle closed, Fig. 12, left, and open, Fig. 11 Gutiérrez Baños, in this volume).

²⁸ I am grateful for information about Lenten veils from Ingrid Lunnan Nødseth, Ph.D. Candidate, ‘Wrapping the Sacred: A Study of the Materiality and Religious Significance of Ecclesiastical Textiles from Late Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1400–1550’, Institutt for kunst- og medievitenskap, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway.

²⁹ Today in the Louvre, Paris. Gray wash on fluted silk imitating samite. H. 0.78 m.; W. 2.08 m. (MI 1121).

As the hanging and removing of Lenten veils signaled the start or conclusion of a period of penance, grief, and mourning, the dramatic lifting of the sanctuary veil contributed to expressions of awe and hope in anticipation of Christ's triumph over death. And the same effect could have been achieved by opening a closed tabernacle.

9.1. *Feast of the Annunciation*

The veiling of objects or the closing of the tabernacles during Lent could cause a problem for the most important Marian feast day, the Annunciation. This day is celebrated on March 25, which falls during Lent or, on rare occasions, the early days of Easter week.³⁰

A manuscript by Adam of Orlando in the ordinances of the Cathedral Notre-Dame de Laon dating from the late twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century says that the *tabule altaris* were opened or revealed only on feast days, except on the annual feast of the Annunciation (Smith, 1959, p. 45). The reason for this must have been that the Annunciation celebration fell during Lent. No wings were to be opened, nor covers removed; the only act of veneration allowed was the lighting a candle in front of the tabernacle. This complication regarding the celebration of the most important Marian feast day was solved in some churches by switching the veiling cloth with one that was decorated with Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, either in paint or embroidery (Kaspersen, 2003, p. 40). At the end of thirteenth century it appears that in France an exception was made to rules governing bans on ecclesiastical decoration during Lent, and gradually the feast of the Annunciation was again celebrated (Smith, 1959, p. 49). The Sarum rites allowed two exceptions: the Virgin on the main altar, which was unveiled only to celebrate the feast of the Annunciation; and the principal crosses in the church, unveiled on Palm Sunday (Smith, 1959, p. 47).

³⁰ 'Feast of the Annunciation' was solved in a different way in Spain: since the Late Antiquity, the feast of the Annunciation was transferred to the 18th of December. Maybe this explains why there are no Spanish Madonna tabernacles with the Annunciation on the exterior of the half-wings? The exception is one Castilian example (the Suma II altarpiece, from the second half of the fourteenth century), but it is uncertain if the Annunciation corresponds to the time these panels were part of a tabernacle-altarpiece or to a later re-use of the panels. I thank Fernando Gutiérrez Baños for bringing this to my attention.

From the middle of the fourteenth century we can trace a change in several Madonna tabernacles (Fig. 20). On the exterior of the half-wings, which create the front when the tabernacle is closed, the angel Gabriel and the Virgin are depicted in an Annunciation scene. This could be a solution to the Annunciation day problem: by removing the Lenten cloth, the Annunciation would be visible, but the tabernacle would remain closed.³¹

10. CONCLUSION

There are at least twenty-nine Madonna tabernacles from 1150–1350 with one or more wings preserved, most of them in Scandinavia and Spain. These tabernacles housed a sculpture of the Virgin and Child. In the open position, the central sculpture would be revealed, surrounded by scenes from the Incarnation story and, in Spanish and Italian tabernacles, some additional scenes depicted in relief, paint, or a combination of both.

The tabernacles' original shapes and intended locations and purposes are for the most part lost today. The decorations on the works are damaged, often painted over, or remodeled. But the exteriors of these tabernacles, the wings, frequently retain their original colors (or traces of them), indicating that in addition to the many monochrome surfaces, they were decorated with figures or patterns. Only six tabernacles have traces of figural decoration on the exterior. Here we find St Peter and St Paul, sometimes together with St John. Obviously, there must also have been variations unknown today, owing to the small number of works preserved and the lack of written sources describing the appearance of tabernacles from this period. One tabernacle with the Passion of Christ on the exterior wings offers an example of how elaborate the decorations could have been. But most of the surviving tabernacles have wings with monochrome surfaces, often red, but also green and black or a combination of red and green. There are also examples of tabernacles with patterns or foliage.

Tabernacles housing saints other than the Madonna have often no preserved traces of figural decorations. Most of these wings were red, although several of them, at least in Scandinavia, have lost their original color. The few

³¹ From the second half of the fourteenth century, decoration – figural and non-figural – was more common on the exterior of Madonna tabernacles, so one can assume that these works would have been covered during Lent.

examples that are preserved with figural decoration on the exterior have St Paul on one half-wing, whereas the other is lost; although we can assume it would have had St Peter. This leads us to the conclusion that in a closed position there was little that distinguished a Madonna tabernacle from tabernacles housing other saints.

When the tabernacles were closed, they hid and sheltered the image of a saint. As Lenten veils concealed objects during Easter, the four wings of the tabernacle hid the Madonna figure or other saint. And the contrast between the open and closed positions would have nearly the same effect as the ‘tearing of the veil’ on Easter Sunday. When the monochrome and matte surfaces on the exterior of the tabernacle were swung open, the figure of the Virgin and Child was revealed in bright colors and gold leaf, surrounded by niches filled with painted or carved scenes, embellished with colors and shining metals.

Opening the tabernacle wings must have been a great revelation and a moving event within medieval devotional experiences (Fig. 21).

II. MADONNA TABERNACLES c. 1150–c. 1350

Madonna tabernacles c. 1150–c. 1350						
Located in the churches, except when a museum location is indicated						
	Region	Date	Location	Size	Material	Exterior
Norway						
Fet (one wing)	Sogn og Fjordane	c.1275–1300	Universitetsmuseet, Bergen MA 219	H: 0.615 m W: 0.22 m	Pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>)	Red
Fåberg (one wing)	Oppland	c.1250	Universitetet i Oslo, Kulturhistorisk museum, Oslo C 3006	H: 1.84 m W: 0.74 m	Oak	Figure (St Peter) on a red background
Hedalen (four wings)	Oppland	c.1250–1275		H: 1.60 m W: 0.52/0.32 m	Oak	Red and green
Reinli (four wings)	Oppland	c.1250–1275		H: 1.96 m W (all four wings): 2.58 m	Pine?	Red and green
Røldal I (two wings)	Hordaland	c.1250	Universitetsmuseet, Bergen MA 297a-b	H: 1.42 m W: 0.39 m	Pine	Red and green zigzag on a black? background

Røldal II (one wing)	Hordaland	c.1250–1300	Universitetsmuseet, Bergen MA 512	H: 1.14 m W: 0.36 (0.42) m	Not identified	Yellow foliage on a red background
Urnes (one wing)	Sogn og Fjordane	c.1150–1200	Universitetsmuseet, Bergen MA 510	H: 1.29 m W: 0.45 m	Oak	Figure (St John?) on a red background
Sweden						
Fröskog (three wings)	Västergötland	c.1250–1275	Historiska museet, Stockholm SHM 14965	H: 1.70 m (wings: 1.42m) W: 0.45/ 0.41/0.27 m	Oak	Red (with secondary light [white?] foliage)
Jällby (four wings)	Västergötland	c.1250–1275		H: 0.90 m W: 0.29 m	Oak	Lost (fragments of red, patterns?)
Norra Ny (one wing)	Värmland	c.1250–1275		H: 1.71 m / 1.31 m W: 0.29 m	Not identified	Dark (black?)
Nässinge (two wings)	Bohuslän	c.1250–1275	Göteborgs stadsmuseum, Gothenburg GM 173	H: 1.43 m	Oak	Red (with secondary stencils)
Nässjö (one wing)	Småland	c.1250-1275?		H: 1.36 m W: 0.36 m		Traces of secondary foliage/leafs
Svinhult (two wings)	Östergötland	c. 1250		H: 1.22 m / 1.18 m W: 0.30/0.23 m		Lost (traces of foliage of unknown date)
Östra Vram (three wings)	Skåne	c.1300		H: 1.04 m W: 0.62 m	Oak	Red
Finland						
Kumlinge (four wings)	Åland	c.1250–1275		H: 1.19 m	Oak	Original colors lost. Red
Urjala (Urdiala) (three wings)	Birkaland	c.1250	Kansallismuseo, Helsinki KM 4563:1	H: 1.18 m	Poplar?	Dark (black?)

Iceland						
Múli (four wings)		c.1275–1300	Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen 19014	H: 1.40/1.45 m W: 0.52 m	Pine (newer details in oak)	Red with traces of ornamentation
Italy						
Alatri (four wings)	Lazio	c.1250		H: 1.57 m W: 0.44/0.55 m	Beech	Overpainted in 1745
Aosta (four wings)	Aosta Valley	c.1300–1350	Museo Civico, Turin	H: 1.00 m W (all four wings): 2.64 m	Not identified	Overpainted in 1510–1520
Pale di Foligno (six fragments from four wings)	Umbria	c.1320–1330	Museo Diocesano, Foligno	H: 1.47 m	Not identified	Not identified
Spain						
Arana I (four wings, but fragmented and incomplete)	Castile-León	c.1275–1300	Church of St Peter, Treviño		Not identified	Figures (St Peter, St Paul and St John) on a yellow background
Castildelgdo (four wings)	Castile-León	c.1300–1350	Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona MFMB 814	H: 2.08 m W (all four wings): 2.22 m	Not identified	Black
Sant Martí Sarrocà (two wings)	Catalonia	c.1275–1300	Museu Nacional d' Art de Catalunya, Barcelona MNAC 15924, 15925		Not identified	Figures (St Peter and St Paul)
Vallbona de les Monges (four wings)	Catalonia	c.1335–1350	Museu Nacional d' Art de Catalunya, Barcelona MNAC/MAC 9780, 9781, 9782, 9783	H: 1.45m W: 0.41m	Not identified	Red
Yurre (Ihurre) (four wings)	Basque Country	c.1300–1350		H: 1.73 m W: 1.91 m	Not identified	Red (with secondary stencils)

Chiale altarpiece (four wings)	Castile-León	c.1300–1350	Killua Castle, Ireland		Not identified	Half-wings: figures (St Paul and maybe St Peter?). Side- wings: orange dots on red background
Marès I altarpiece (one wing)	Castile-León	c.1300	Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona MFMB 2225	H: 1.66 m W: 0.70 m	Not identified	Lost (traces of red)
Marès II altarpiece (one wing)	Castile-León	c.1300–1350	Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona MFMB 711	H: 1.44 m W: 0.45 m	Not identified	Dark grey-blue (fragmented)
Wildenstein altarpiece (three wings)	Castile-León	c.1275–1300	Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters, New York 55.62a-b, 1977.94	H: 1.05 m W: 0.41/0.39 m	Not identified	Painted figures (Passion of Christ), red, green and blue on a yellow and black background

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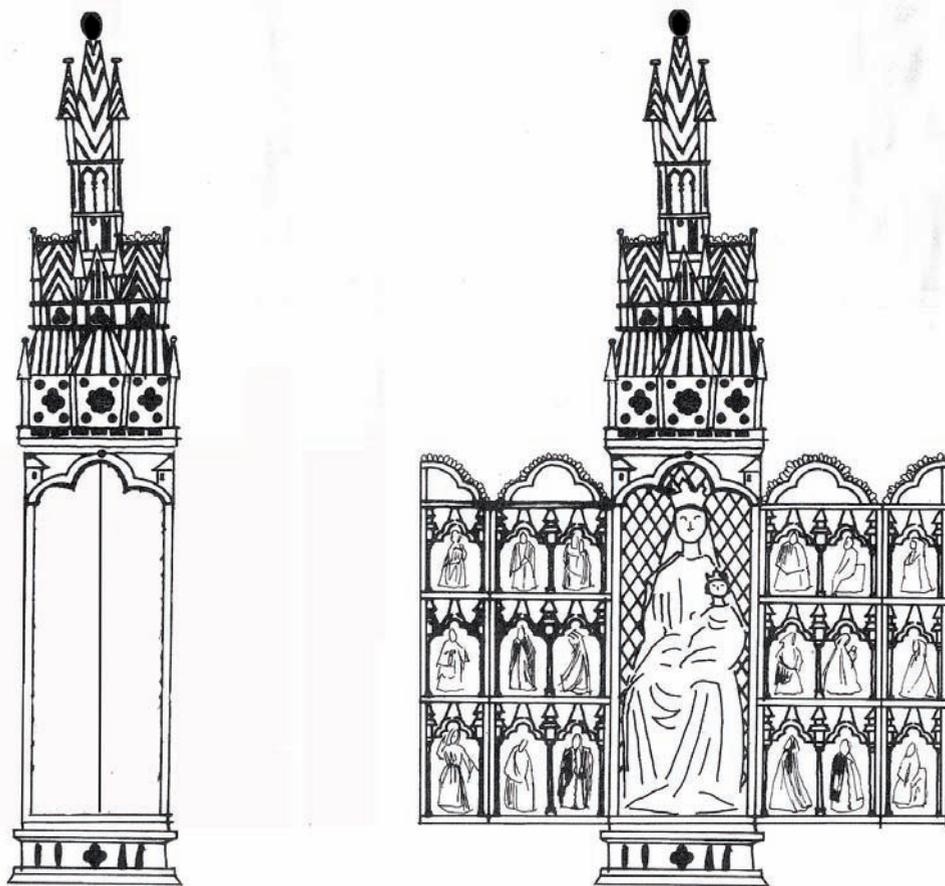


Fig. 1. Tabernacle in closed and opened position.
Drawings by S. Holm, edited by E. Andersen.



Fig. 2. Left: Madonna tabernacle in Kumlinge, Finland. Only the four wings and the reliefs on them are original from the thirteenth century (the interior has been overpainted). Right: Detail of the beautifully carved relief of the Visitation, from the lower right half-wing.
Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 3. St Peter on the exterior of the left side-wing of the tabernacle from Fåberg, Norway.
Photo: Kulturhistorisk museum, Universitetet i Oslo.



Fig. 4. Details of St Paul (left) and St Peter (right)
on the exterior of the half-wings from the Arana I tabernacle, Spain.
Photo: Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales de Castilla y León.

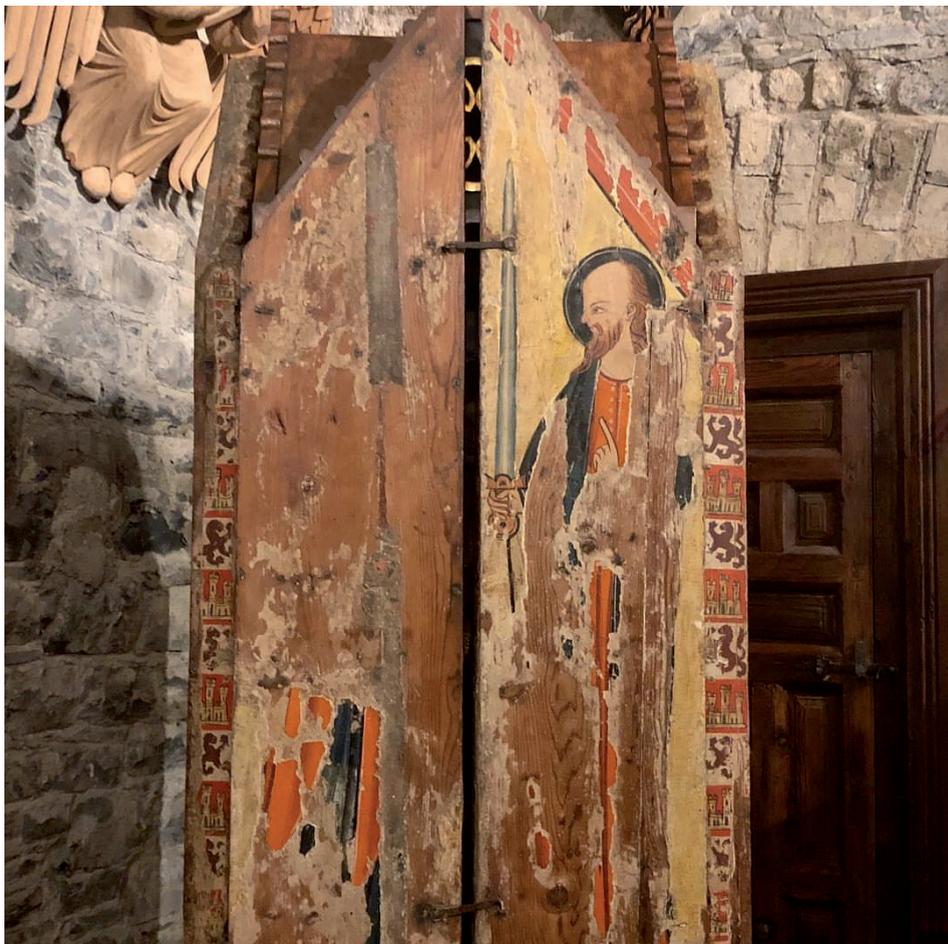


Fig. 5. St Paul on the exterior of the right half-wing of a Madonna tabernacle from Spain (called 'Chiale altarpiece').
Photo: Killua Castle, Ireland.



Fig. 6. Left: St John. Detail from the exterior of the left side-wing from Arana I, Spain. Photo: Centro de Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales de Castilla y León. Right: St John (?). Detail from the exterior of the left side-wing from Urnes, Norway. Photo: E. Andersen.

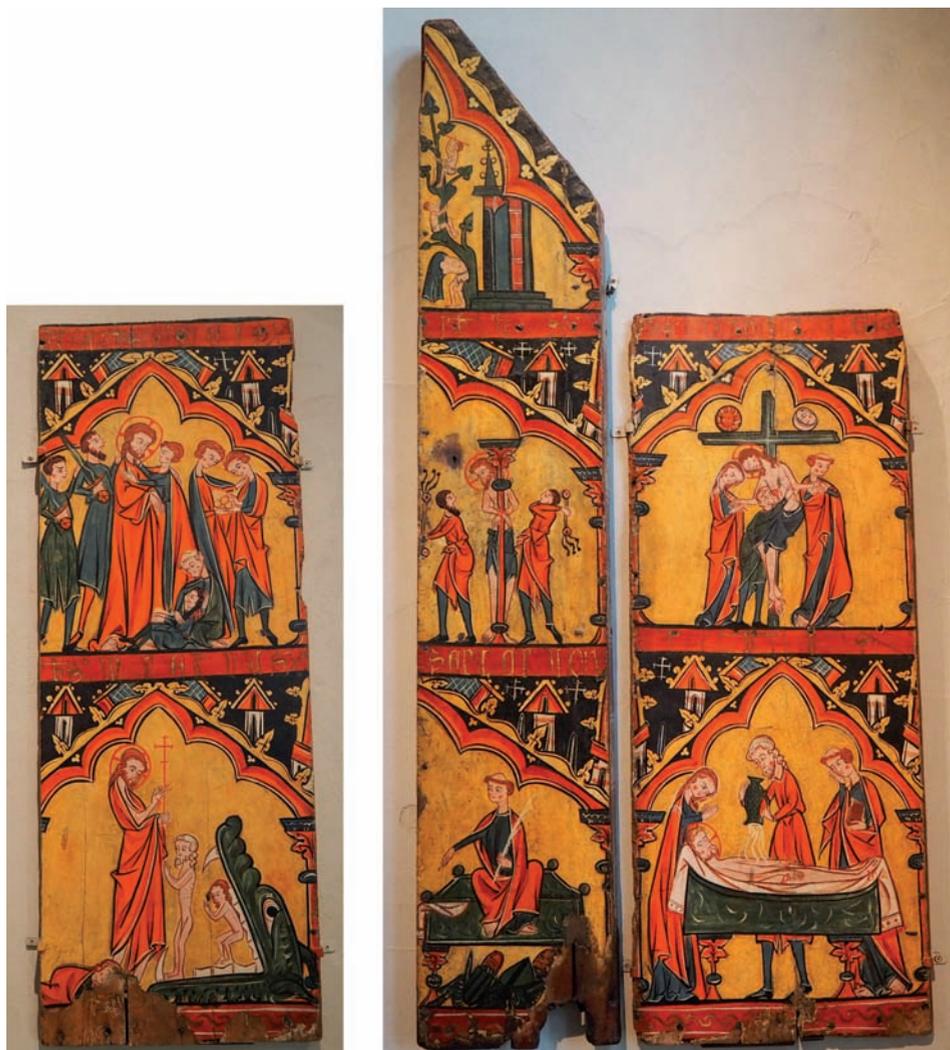


Fig. 7. Wings of a tabernacle from the region of Castile-León, Spain (called 'Wildenstein altarpiece') with painted scenes on the exterior (New York, Cloisters Museum). Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 8. Left: The overpainted interior of the Hedalen tabernacle.

Right: The exterior of the Hedalen tabernacle.

Photo: B. Lindstad.



Fig. 9. Left: The overpainted interior of the Reinli tabernacle.

Right: The exterior of the Reinli tabernacle.

Photo: M. Pettersen, Riksantikvaren.



Fig. 10. Left and left-center: Reconstruction of the Madonna tabernacle from Hedalen in closed and open positions. Right-center and right: Reconstruction of the Madonna tabernacle from Reinli in closed and open positions. Based on M. Stein. Drawings by O. Storsletten, digitised by E. Andersen.



Fig. 11. Left: Fröskog tabernacle with (probably) secondary foliage decoration. Center: Östra Vram tabernacle. Photo: F. Berg. Right: Exterior of the four wings from the Vallbona de les Monges tabernacle (Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya). Photo: Calveras/Mérida/Sagristà.



Fig. 12. Left: Castildelgado tabernacle, Spain (Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès).
Photo: Museu Frederic Marès, Institut de Cultura, Ajuntament de Barcelona.
Center: Norra Ny tabernacle, Sweden.
Right: Urjala tabernacle, Finland.
Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 13. Left: Tabernacle wing from Røldal I.
Right: Tabernacle wing from Røldal II.
To the left the interior and to the right the exterior.
Photo: Univeristetsmuseet i Bergen.



Fig. 14. Left: Exterior of the tabernacle from Nässinge, Sweden.
Photo: Göteborgs Stadsmuseum.
Right: Exterior of the tabernacle from Yurre, Spain.
Photo: E. Andersen.



Fig. 15. Left: Jällby, Sweden. Center: Kumlinge, Finland.
Right: the so-called 'Marès I altarpiece' (Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès).
Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 16. Left: One of the two wings from Svinhult, Sweden, interior and exterior.

Photo: F. Berg.

Right: Tabernacle from Vojňany, Slovakia.

Photo: Slovak National Gallery.



Fig. 17. Tabernacles housing saints. Left: Dädesjö, Sweden.
Center left: Östra Vram, Sweden.
Center right: Edestad, Sweden.
Right: Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran, Spain.
Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 18. The *Narbonne Altar Cloth* (Paris, Musée du Louvre).
Lenten cloth made for Charles V in 1364.
Photo: Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 19. The scenes of the *Narbonne Altar Cloth* and a tabernacle from the region of Castile-León, Spain (called 'Wildenstein altarpiece').



Fig 20. Norra Fågelås, c. 1400, in open (left: seen from the front; center left and center right: seen from the sides) and closed positions (Stockholm, Historiska Museet).

Photo: F. Berg.



Fig. 21.
Madonna tabernacle
in Jällby Church,
Sweden.

Photo: E. Andersen.



**MARIAN TABERNACLES ON MAIN ALTARS:
NORWEGIAN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ALTAR DECORATIONS
IN THEIR EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

**RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO MARIANOS
EN LOS ALTARES MAYORES:
LAS DECORACIONES DE ALTAR NORUEGAS DEL SIGLO XIII
EN SU CONTEXTO EUROPEO**

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Abstract

Art historical research often assumes that sculptures of the Virgin Mary originally stood on the northern nave altar in Scandinavian parish churches. However, evidence suggests that several enshrined Marian sculptures actually had their place on the main altar in the chancel. This claim can be reconstructed with regard to the surviving tabernacle shrines in (and from) the small Norwegian parish churches of Hedalen, Reinli, and Hove. In addition to the shrines, a number of altar frontals with Marian imagery also probably belonged to main altars. Seen in their wider European context, these Norwegian altar decorations follow a homogenous pattern, common to large parts of Western Europe, that may be explained by the rise of a unified religious culture in aspects such as liturgy and theology. On the main altar, the Virgin and Child constituted the focal point of the church interior. This prominent position reflects the central role of the Mother of God in the history of salvation as an instrument of the Incarnation. On the main altar, Mary refers to this Christian mystery through her image as well as in the narrative scenes shown on the inside of the wings that surrounded the sculpture.

Keywords

Norway, medieval art, altar decorations, saints' sculptures, Marian sculptures, tabernacle shrines, altar frontals.

Resumen

La investigación histórico-artística asume a menudo que en las iglesias parroquiales escandinavas las esculturas de la Virgen María se encontraban originalmente en el altar norte de la nave. Sin embargo, las evidencias sugieren que varias esculturas marianas dotadas de un tabernáculo se localizaban en realidad en el altar mayor del presbiterio. Esta hipótesis puede ser reconstituida si miramos los retablos-tabernáculo que han sobrevivido en (o proceden de) las pequeñas parroquias noruegas de Hedalen, Reinli y Hove. Además de estos retablos, un cierto número de frontales de altar con imaginería mariana probablemente también pertenecieron a los altares mayores. Vistas en un contexto europeo más amplio, estas decoraciones de altar noruegas siguen un patrón homogéneo, común a amplias zonas de Europa Occidental, que pueden ser explicado por el surgimiento de una cultura religiosa unificada en aspectos tales como la liturgia y la teología. En el altar mayor, la Virgen y el Niño constituían el punto focal del interior del templo. Esta prominente posición refleja el papel central de la Madre de Dios en la historia de la salvación en tanto que instrumento de la Encarnación. En el altar mayor, María remite a este misterio cristiano a través de su imagen, al igual que lo hace en las escenas narrativas mostradas en el interior de los paneles que rodean la escultura.

Palabras clave

Noruega, arte medieval, decoraciones de altar, esculturas de santos, esculturas marianas, retablos-tabernáculo, frontales de altar.

I. INTRODUCTION

Several scholars have highlighted the presence of sculptures and panel paintings of the Virgin and Child on main altars throughout Europe and in all kinds of medieval churches around 1300. Few authors seem to be aware that their appearance on the high altar did not occur suddenly, but rather followed an existing tradition. There is indication that sculptures of the Virgin with Child set in tabernacle shrines were located on the main altar as early as the thirteenth century, in parish churches in Norway as well as elsewhere in Europe. In research history

this is often ignored in favor of the prevailing assumption that images of the Virgin and Child in medieval parish churches in Scandinavia stood on one of the side altars, while the main altar only had a frontal, cross, and chandeliers.¹ It is generally believed that images of Mary were located on the northern side altar, while images of Saint Olav or other saints stood on the southern side altar (Anker, 1981, p. 205).

The present paper challenges this assumption by discussing several Norwegian tabernacle shrines and frontals with images of the Virgin and Child, dating from around the middle of the thirteenth century, that can be directly or indirectly connected to main altars. The paper also addresses the importance of tabernacle shrines for our understanding of the early development of Marian altarpieces. I discuss the different locations of Marian imagery inside the medieval church, followed by an account of the central role of Mary in medieval theology. I will depart from the assumption that Norwegian medieval altar decorations followed a general Western-European pattern. Contrary to many parts of Europe, where high medieval altar decorations are now very rare, the Scandinavian countries, especially Norway, can boast a considerable number of surviving examples. This rich Norwegian material provides a good impression of how altars were decorated in all parts of Europe during the high middle ages.

2. THE LOCATION OF MARIAN IMAGES IN THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

There is no doubt that sculptures of the Virgin Mary stood on one of the side altars in many Scandinavian churches. A great deal of evidence for this can be found in Danish country churches, such as wall paintings that served as a permanent form of altar decoration. It can be inferred from Marian imagery where

¹ With regard to Norway, for example, Peter Anker stated that the altar of Mary had 'sin faste plass i alle kirker, til venstre for koråpningen. Av og til var det en egen alternisje i skipets østmur, som i Værnes kirke, eller til og med et eget kapell for Maria-alteret, som i Gamle Aker kirke, på nordsiden av koret. Men i de aller fleste kirker har Maria-alteret stått rett inn mot østmuren eller østveggen, med bildet stående oppå, ofte med en baldakin over, eller senere, plassert i et alterskap der dørene bare ble åpnet på de særlige Mariafestdager' (Mary has a permanent place in all churches to the left in front of the chancel opening. Occasionally there was an altar niche in the nave's east wall, for example in Værnes, or even a separate chapel for the Marian altar, as in Gamle Aker church on the north side of the chancel. But in most churches, the altar of Mary has stood directly in front of the east wall [of the nave], with the image standing on top, often with a canopy above, or later, placed in a shrine where the doors were only opened on the special Marian feast days). See: Anker, 1981, p. 205.

Marian veneration took place inside the church interior. The Danish art historian Ebbe Nyborg was among the first to point out that wall paintings depicting the Madonna are commonly located on the north side of the triumphal arch in Danish parish churches (Nyborg, 1977, pp. 165–166); for example, in Måløv church on Zealand. Here we find niches on either side of the arch containing paintings that can be dated to 1150–1175. The northern niche depicts the Virgin Mary and Child in the Byzantine scheme of *Hodegetria* (‘showing the way’), while the southern niche features a bishop (Kunz, 2007, p. 266). In the churches of Råsted and Bindslev, both in northern Jutland, mural paintings preserved on the place of the former northern side altar show Mary as the enthroned Mother of God.

The same pattern can be observed in several Swedish parish churches, such as in Hall on the island of Gotland. Here, above the vanished northern side altar, we find a protruding console that probably held an image of Mary and Child. The fourteenth-century wall painting under the console shows the coronation of the Virgin between two angels swinging censers between Peter (left) and Paul (right). Three saints are depicted on the northern wall; these can be identified as St Catherine, a holy bishop, and St Olav (Kroesen, 2019, pp. 20–21). In Mästerby (Gotland) a painted image of Mary from the twelfth century is preserved in a niche in the northeast corner of the nave (Fig. 1). Compared to Denmark and Sweden, the survival rate of wall paintings in Norway is generally low. Here, however, we sometimes find other forms of altar decorations that indicate the place of a former altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In Hopperstad stave church on the Sognefjord, a baldachin from the twelfth or thirteenth century standing in the northeast corner is reminiscent of a vanished Marian altar that once stood below (Fig. 2). The roof of the baldachin holds a painted Marian cycle and a sculpture of the Virgin most probably stood on the altar.

In churches where two sculptures survive as a pair, art historians have traditionally relocated these on the side altars standing on both sides of the triumphal arch. In some cases, such as in the church of Dädesjö (Småland, Sweden) (Fig. 3), there are convincing arguments for doing this. This twelfth-century church was abandoned in 1794 when it was converted into a storage facility and the chancel was demolished. However, a description written by the vicar Sven Laurén in 1758 mentions the images of St Olav in a tabernacle shrine and a Madonna, both standing on top of a side altar (Ullén, 1969, p. 210). After the church was abandoned, the sculptures were kept in the tower of the new church building and returned to the side altars in 1922 (Ullén, 1969, p. 216), where they had probably stood since the thirteenth century. The church of Östra Vram (Skåne, Sweden) possesses two tabernacle shrines containing sculptures of the Virgin and Child

and St Olav, both dating from *c.* 1300 and probably made as a pair. The side altars themselves have not survived and the tabernacle shrines are now placed on pedestals before the side walls of the nave after their return from the University Museum in Lund. Based on their relatively small dimensions, the images of Mary and a holy bishop in the church of Näsby (Småland, Sweden) can also be supposed to have belonged to side altars.

Norwegian examples of churches where more than one altar sculpture is preserved include Røldal, where both a Virgin and Child and a St Olav survive from the same stave church; both are now kept at the University Museum in Bergen (UM MA 295; MA 294). Both sculptures were probably made in the same workshop, as a pair. Belonging to the Marian sculpture is a carved wing, the only surviving element of a tabernacle shrine (UM MA 297a). St Olav stands before a back panel on a plinth that is surrounded by narrow slats that served to support the now lost doors – indicating that this figure also stood in a tabernacle shrine. Although the area between chancel and nave of Røldal church was modified during a refurbishment in the seventeenth century, traces on the wooden chancel arch allow for a reconstruction of a much narrower entrance to the chancel.² The sections on either side would have provided enough space for two altars, with the enshrined images standing on top.

3. THE TABERNACLE SHRINE ON THE MAIN ALTAR

Some Norwegian tabernacle shrines are of such monumental dimensions that a placement on a side altar is hard to imagine, especially in smaller parish churches, which leaves the main altar as the only possible location. However, this raises the question of whether it is theologically and liturgically conceivable that at least some of these tabernacle shrines were located on the high altar in the chancel rather than a side altar in the nave. A case in point is the stave church of Hedalen (Valdres, Norway) where the wings and the back panel of a tabernacle shrine from the mid-thirteenth century now form a retable on the main altar, together with a medieval cross that stands in front of it (Fig. 4). These elements originally belonged to a Marian tabernacle shrine that contained the Virgin and Child still kept in the church and for which a painted church model preserved in the same

² The wooden planks were reused after the arch was enlarged. Fragments of an arch survived and, based on its measurement, it is possible to reconstruct the original opening.

church served as a crowning. The relief figures from the inner side of the wings are lost and their backgrounds were painted with floral ornaments in the mid-eighteenth century.³ Bernt C. Lange proposed a reconstruction of the medieval tabernacle shrine at Hedalen (Lange, 1994, p. 23–36). When opened, the shrine possessed a size of no less than 320 cm by 235 cm. The medieval stave church of Hedalen was dendrochronologically dated to the middle of the twelfth century. The church was expanded and heavily renovated during the seventeenth century, but traces and a reconstruction drawing published by Lorentz Dietrichson in 1892 made it possible to reconstruct the church as a small single nave building with a chancel that was narrower than the nave, providing space for two side altars in the eastern corners of the nave (Dietrichson, 1892, p. 355). All this leaves the main altar as the only convincing location for the Marian shrine. Elisabeth Andersen pointed out that if it would be placed on one of the side altars in the nave, one wing would lean against the side wall, meaning that the shrine could not be fully opened (Andersen/Stein, 2008, p. 59). It cannot be fully ruled out that an arrangement where the tabernacle shrine could not be fully opened existed in the middle ages. However, the richly decorated tabernacle shrine may be considered as the main devotional object in the small parish church. A position of the shrine without the space to unfold all four wings can be considered as an unsatisfactory solution. On the main altar, however, the shrine dominated the chancel and served as the central focus of the entire church interior (Fig. 5).

A parallel situation is found in the stave church of nearby Reinli, where the wings of a tabernacle shrine dating from the late thirteenth century survive. These were reused as a fixed altarpiece and placed on the main altar in 1885. The half wings that once together covered the front of the shrine were assembled to form the central part, while the wider side wings now serve as side sections. The figure, probably a Virgin and Child, are now lost. The Cultural History Museum of the University of Oslo possesses a painted church model that probably served to crown the Reinli shrine (KHM C7292). Regarding its size and architectural shape, this shrine can be compared with the one from Hedalen; just as that one, it must have dominated the interior of the stave church, a single-nave building with a chancel of the same width as the nave (Fig. 6).⁴ Originally, there was a chancel screen separating the nave and the chancel, fragments of which were discovered in storage near the church in 1853. A reconstruction by the architect

³ The cross on the main altar probably served as a triumphal cross originally. On Hedalen, see: Andersen/Stein, 2008.

⁴ On the shrine in Reinli see: Stein, 2010.

Georg Andreas Bull shows a screen with a narrow entrance and small arcades that provided a view of the chancel interior.⁵ When opened, the monumental shrine on the main altar must have had an overwhelming effect for the believers who looked at it through the openings in the screen.

A third Norwegian Marian shrine from roughly the same period of which the Virgin and Child, back panel and canopy survive, is the one from the church at Hove on the Sognefjord, now preserved in the University Museum of Bergen (Fig. 7). The small but carefully built stone church holds two medieval altars: one in the chancel and a side altar in the northeastern corner on the nave. While the main altar is freestanding, the northern side altar is backed by a round-arched wall niche. If we ask ourselves where the Marian shrine could have been placed in the church interior, the only convincing answer is the main altar in the chancel (Fig. 8).

The above-mentioned examples from Hedalen, Reinli, and Hove seem to suggest that main altars decorated with monumental Marian shrines were quite common during the thirteenth century in Norway. However, this can hardly be substantiated by contemporary written sources, which are quite contradictory regarding the pictorial decoration of main altars in Western Europe. The *Liber ritualis* of the diocese of Magdeburg, which originally dates to the thirteenth century, but has only survived in a copy from the fifteenth century, mentions that only a cross, precious books, and chandeliers are allowed to be placed there (Braun, 1924, vol. 2, pp. 280–281). However, the rejection of painted and carved decorations strengthens the assumption that such decorations on main altars were not unknown at the time and may even have been quite common. Durandus, on the other hand, writes explicitly about the benefits of altar decorations in his *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* written for the diocese of Mende (France). However, material survivals that could provide insights into the nature of altar decorations during the thirteenth century are scarce, especially outside the Nordic countries. All this leads to the question of the extent to which it was usual for main altars to have been permanently decorated with sculptures as early as the thirteenth century. Possible answers to this question should be considered in the light of the often ambivalent and restrictive stance towards images in theological writings of the twelfth century. How can we explain a decoration of the main altar with an image of Mary, both liturgically and theologically? Are there other examples of a Marian iconography in the context of main altar decorations in Scandinavia?

⁵ The fragments are now lost. A reconstruction is published in Dietrichson, 1892, p. 402.

A complicating factor is that, in written sources, altar decorations are usually referred to without mentioning their imagery.

A further complicating factor is the fact that medieval sculptures have mostly survived without their original context, such as tabernacle shrines, which means it is often uncertain where they were located inside the church. The oldest preserved sculptures of the Virgin Mary and other saints date back to the ninth century. These wooden images were clad with precious gold, such as the Madonna from Essen Minster (Germany) or the St Fides in Conques (France). Due to their material value – in addition to the fear of idolatry, which is often expressed in theological writings – art historical research has traditionally assumed that such images were not permanently displayed on altars.⁶ They would have been set up on the main altar on special occasions only, while usually being kept in the treasury (Pawlik, 2013, pp. 139–140).⁷ The *Liber miracolorum sancte Fidis*, written by Bernhard of Angers mentions that the image of Fides was displayed in a separate space inside the church, which was usually closed and was only opened on special occasions: ‘Quibus monasterium intramibus forte fortuna accidit, ut locus ille secrebus in quo venerabilis imago servatur, fuerit patefactus’ (Bouillet, 1897, pp. 47–48). (When we had entered the monastery, fate brought it about, quite by chance, that the separate place where the revered image is preserved had been opened up (Sheingorn, 1995, p. 78). It is uncertain whether this separate place was a crypt, as Ilene H. Forsyth has assumed, or a chapel (Forsyth, 1972, p. 39).

In her study on wooden Madonnas from the twelfth century in France, Forsyth mentions damage on the throne and feet of several seated wooden Madonnas, which she explains as consequences of their use and location. She concludes that the Madonnas were not displayed permanently on the main altar and were therefore mobile elements of altar decoration. Moreover, the images were often kept in the crypt, where moisture caused damage to them (Forsyth 1972, p. 39). Some French sculptures may be assumed to have stood in a crypt. According to the writings of Hugh of Poitiers, for example, the Madonna from Ste Madeleine in Vézelay was displayed on an altar in the crypt. The sculpture survived a great fire between 1161 and 1165 and was then temporarily displayed on the main altar before it was moved back to the crypt (Forsyth, 1972, pp. 32–35). Likewise, in Châtillon-sur-Loire, sources attest to the location of the Madonna in the crypt during the twelfth century, a location that is also recorded for figures in Chartres,

⁶ Recently: Pawlik, 2013.

⁷ This can be assumed for example for the sculptures from Essen and Paderborn. See: Pawlik, 2013, pp. 139–140.

Cambrai, Coutances and Le Puy (Forsyth, 1972, p. 39). In his *Dialogus miracolorum*, Caesarius of Heisterbach mentions a sculpture of Mary standing in the crypt of the church in Münstereifel (Germany) (Wolf, 2002, p. 371).

In Mont-devant-Sassey (Meuse, France) a tabernacle shrine (now without wings) with a Marian sculpture from the thirteenth century can still be found on top of the altar in the crypt (Fig. 1 Kroesen/Tängeberg, in this volume).⁸ This is probably its original location given that the socle fits perfectly behind the *ara* in the altar mensa and that the shrine fits naturally in the space under the vaults. In addition to such (enshrined) sculptures, mention can also be made of stone retables with Marian iconography dating from the same period. In the case of the example from Carrières-sur-Seine, now kept in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Inv. R.F.1612), any reference to its former location is missing (Le Pogam, 2009, p. 173). However, for two early retables with Marian iconography preserved in the German Rhineland, a location in the crypt may be assumed (Kunz, 2007, pp. 276–280). The retable in the abbey church of Brauweiler was located on the altar in the crypt until the nineteenth century, when it was transferred to the main altar (Budde, 1979, p. 68; Legner, 1982, p. 169; Wolf, 2002, p. 277); while Bernd Rieden assumed a location of the retable from Oberpleis on the main altar, Tobias Kunz suggested a position on an altar in the crypt. A similar location has also been assumed for the retable from Echternach, now in the National Museum of History and Art in Luxembourg (Rieden, 1995, p. 107; Kunz, 2007, p. 278).

Iconological interpretations of crypts often refer to these spaces as the true foundations of churches and as the preferred place of Marian devotion. In the light of St Peter Damian's sermons, Günter Bandmann interpreted the Marian altar in the crypt as the womb of Mary from which Christ ascended to the main altar,⁹ the altar of the cross where Christ's sacrificial death is repeated during Eucharist. Thus, the crypt altar can be interpreted as the true foundation of the main altar, which is reinforced by the fact that it was often located directly beneath. Crypts were not always accessible, which meant that these spaces could adopt a function similar to that of the tabernacle shrine: by closing of the crypt the image could be withdrawn from the views of the faithful. Although records such as those already mentioned clearly refer to a location of Marian images in crypts, this was not

⁸ The Virgin and Child are a copy of the original now kept in the Musée de la Prinerie in nearby Verdun.

⁹ 'De hoc altari (utero Mariae) ad aram crucis ascendes, proprio cruore tamquam alterius generis oleo perfusus, iam non solus consecratus totum, corpus machinae mundialis largiori ligamine copulavit'. Sermon by St Peter Damian, quoted after Bandmann, 1962, pp. 401–402.

necessarily the preferred place of Marian devotion everywhere. As Almuth Klein pointed out, the crypt was rather the traditional place of devotion for local saints (Klein, 2011, p. 66). All of the above-mentioned churches where a position of the Marian image on crypt altars is assumed are cathedrals, monasteries, or important pilgrims' churches. However, the tabernacle shrines that survive in Norway are or were all located in rural parish churches without crypts.

Several sources explicitly mention Marian sculptures standing on main altars during the thirteenth century. The testament of Abbot Theobald from the monastery of Chiesi (Italy) mentions an ivory image of the Virgin Mary surrounded by two saints that was placed on the main altar as early as 1019 (Braun, 1924, vol. 2, p. 279). However, it is not certain whether this ivory panel was permanently displayed on the altar or only on feast days. Reading the text, one naturally thinks of several preserved examples of ivory panels with the images of the Virgin that came from Byzantium to the West. However, the relatively small dimensions of these panels, as well as the precious material they were made of, suggests that they were not permanently displayed on the altar.

William, the Earl of Sussex, and his wife Gundrada are known to have knelt before an image of St Peter standing on the main altar of the abbey church of Cluny (France); and in the church of Clermont-Ferrand, the Madonna allegedly stood on a socle behind the main altar (Forsyth, 1972, pp. 38–40). Forsyth concluded that the Romanesque Madonnas of France were generally placed in an altar context from as early as the twelfth century. In some cases, there seems to be indication that the altar in question was the main altar. However, it remains uncertain if the display was permanent or temporary. Apart from the above-mentioned records, church inventories also yield important details about the location of images and how main altars were decorated in Norway and Scandinavia during the thirteenth century. In Norway, however, only two medieval inventories are preserved, both from the first quarter of the fourteenth century and thus after the period under scrutiny here. The inventory from Hålandsdalen (Holdhus) from 1306 mentions a Marian sculpture (Bing, 1909, pp. 3–5; *Diplomatorium Norvegicum* XXI, p. 6). In addition, a large cross with Saint Mary and John is mentioned, probably a triumphal cross. The second preserved inventory, from Ylmheim and dated to 1320–1321, mentions sculptures of the Virgin Mary and Olav, a frontal and a cross with silver decorations (*Diplomatorium Norvegicum* XV, p. 10). Both inventories are silent about the location of these objects in church space.

Additional indications can be gleaned from written sources from places that had strong cultural and ecclesiastical ties with medieval Norway, primarily Iceland and Britain. In Iceland, which formed a union with the Norwegian king-

dom in 1262, more than 1200 church inventories (the so-called *máldagar*) are preserved from between the thirteenth until the sixteenth centuries, mostly from small parish churches. Fredrik Wallem analyzed these inventories in his thesis from 1909 and made these extraordinary sources accessible for research. Sculptures of the Virgin and other saints sometimes described as standing in a tabernacle are mentioned frequently, but the location in the church remains uncertain (Wallem, 1910). Panel paintings are mostly mentioned in the inventories in an altar context simply with the terms *tabulum*, *tabula*, or the Icelandic words *skript*, *blað*, *bilati*, or *brík* (Wallem, 1910, pp. 40 and 52). It is not possible to establish with certainty whether this refers to altar frontals or retables. Another aspect not mentioned in the inventories, as mentioned above, is the iconography of these panels. It was not until 1318 that a panel in the church of Ás í Kelduhverfi in northern Iceland was described in detail as *toflu yfir alltare* – ‘a panel above the altar’ (Morgan, 2004, p. 9).

In England, a panel on the main altar is mentioned in Oxney in Northamptonshire (Lehmann-Brockhaus, 1956, nr. 3425). This chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, belonged to a cell under the Benedictine monastery of Peterborough and no more than six monks lived here permanently. It is mentioned that Robert de Lindesey, abbot of Peterborough, ordered the chancel of the chapel to be built around 1214–1222, and that a panel with the image of the Virgin was placed *on* the altar (Lehmann-Brockhaus, 1956, nr. 3425). Both the chapel and the image are now lost.¹⁰

It is in England, which had strong ties with Norway during the high Middle Ages that one finds indication for the location of sculptures in the context of the main altar. Roman regulations required a dedication of every altar. The patron of the altar had to be visible either on written or visual manner in the direct environment of the altar. This led – according to Paul Binski – to a visual representation of the saint or the Virgin Mary on the altar by the late thirteenth century. The synodal statutes of Exeter from 1287 require an image of the patron saint in the respective church, and – according to Binski – the preferred place for display was the chancel altar (Binski, 1995, p. 53). This regulation was repeated during the Synod of Trier in 1310 and in the fourteenth-century statutes of the bishop of Exeter for the collegiate church of St Mary in Devon (Binski, 1995, p. 53). A location of a Marian image in context of the main altar preserved in the St Mary’s Church of Great Canfield in Essex (Marks, 2004, p. 44). A mid-thirteenth century mu-

¹⁰ No traces of the chapel were found in 1845: Dugdale, 1846, p. 663.

ral painting of the *Maria Lactans* is placed above the chancel altar between two windows. The Virgin Mary was by far the most popular patron of English parish churches (Marks, 2004, p. 64) which makes it possible that an image on or in the environment of the main altar was quite common. Although records on church dedications in Norway are scarce there are several churches where the dedication is known. From the 364 church dedications known in Norway in total sixty referring to the Virgin Mary (Dietrichson, 1888, pp. 130–133), which in turn, indicate a consecration of the main altar to her, that was marked by a written or figural notation. If one can draw some results of the scarce records, Mary was the most popular patron of Norwegian churches. A comparable pattern can be observed in church dedications on Iceland and in Denmark (Wallem, 1910, p. 15). Likewise, it has been common in other parts of Europe to mark the altar with an image of the patron. This can be observed by a rare example from the church of Steinkirchen in Brandenburg (Germany). Here, a shrine with the image of Saint Pancrate, the patron saint of the church, survived and is now on display in the Bodemuseum in Berlin (c. 1300, inv. 3198). The shrine from around 1300 lost its wings but originally had a width of approximate two meters, which corresponds exactly with the dimension of the main altar. The shrine with the image of the patron saint was most probably located on the main altar (Kunz, 2014, p. 226).

A record from the Cistercian monastery of Walkenried in northern Germany refers to a sculpture of the Virgin Mary displayed on the main altar. This is a legal act between the Counts of Scharzfeld, Burchard and Sigebodo, and the knight Thudo dating from 1265. The source mentions an image of Mary on an altar: ‘[...] Walkenride monachorum in altari et super ymaginem beatae Mariae virginis’ (Hettling, 1852–55, pp. 245–246). Since such legal oaths were usually sworn before the main altar, Bernd Nicolai assumed that there was an image of the Virgin Mary standing on the main altar of this monastery church. He connected this Madonna with one of the two extant sculptures from Walkenried dated c. 1250 (Nicolai, 1994, pp. 33–34). The material (limestone) and the dimension suggest that the sculpture was permanently located on the main altar. This would imply that in Walkenried we have proof of a permanent image of the Virgin Mary on the high altar of a Cistercian church as early as 1250.

However, it is not always certain if sculptures were placed direct on or behind the altar. According to an English document from around 1250, a Marian image in a tabernacle was placed in the chancel of Aldbury church in Herfordshire without mentioning explicitly the altar (Marks, 2004, p. 62). Traces in several chancels of English churches indicate a display of such sculptures and shrines in niches and on consoles on the walls in the environment of the altar

(Marks, 2004, pp. 73–76). Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that sculptures and tabernacle shrines were displayed in parish churches without a direct altar connection.

It may be concluded that written sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are generally scarce with regard to the iconography or location of objects inside churches. The few written sources that survive from medieval Norway do not explicitly mention the location of Marian images on main altars. However, indication may be drawn from important material survivals, including the tabernacle shrines from Reinli, Hedalen, and Hove, in relation to the spatial context from which they originate, in addition to other indications found here and there in other parts of Europe. All these indications make it highly plausible that sculptures of the Virgin Mary were placed on and in the environment of main altars from at least as early as the middle of the thirteenth century.

4. MARIAN FRONTALS

Beside the tabernacle shrines discussed above, another element of altar decoration common with Marian iconography that should also be taken into account is that of altar frontals. In Norway, thirty-one altar frontals have survived, fifteen of which show the seated Madonna with the Christ Child in the center, surrounded by narrative scenes from the birth of Christ or scenes from Marian miracles. These panels resemble the aspect of contemporary Norwegian tabernacle shrines when opened, as observed by Bernt C. Lange (1957, pp. 194–196). The strong similarities in form and content lead one to assume that there was no principal difference between choosing a painted or a carved image, nor between its position at the front or on top of an altar, which makes these Norwegian painted altar frontals highly relevant to our discussion of Marian sculptures in altar contexts.

The frontal in Skaun (Trøndelag) is one of the few medieval frontals that is still located in the original position for which it was made around the middle of the thirteenth century (Fig. 9). It perfectly matches the dimensions of the front of the medieval main altar in the chancel (height 97 cm, width 166 cm). From Tingelstad (Oppland), three frontals are preserved that now all belong to the collection of the Cultural History Museum at the University of Oslo. The church of Tingelstad was built during the thirteenth century and preserves its medieval main altar block; here, too, the frontal showing Mary and Child fits perfectly to its front (height 98.5 cm, width 160 cm). Both Marian frontals from Skaun and

Tingelstad have a similar width of about 160–166 cm, which is also the case with three other frontals with Mariological iconography preserved in Norway – the frontals from Dale II (165 cm), Hamre (167 cm), and Odda (165.5 cm) – and it is most likely that these frontals have also served as frontals of main altars.

In the wider European context, I should mention the small village church of Saint-Fructueux in Iravals/Yravals in French Catalonia (Pyrénées-Orientales), which contains a painted frontal with a central depiction of the Virgin Mary that is still located on the front of the altar in the apse.¹¹ From the monastery from Santa Maria de Lluçà in Spanish Catalonia originates a frontal with Marian iconography now preserved in the Museu Episcopal at Vic (inv. MEV 4). It belonged to the main altar of the church of the Augustinian convent in Lluçà (Trullén, 2007, p. 103) where the front of the high altar is now adorned with a painted copy. Similarly, the provenance of four Marian frontals preserved in the Museu Nacional d'Art Catalunya in Barcelona is also known. The frontals from Avia (inv. 1578), Mosoll (inv. 15788), Alós d'Isil (inv. 15834) and Rigatell (inv. 35701) probably belonged to the decorations of the main altars in the respective churches.¹²

Most of the cases discussed are small rural parishes that were hardly at the forefront of artistic developments and where radical innovations are not likely to have occurred. The rare material survivals, of which the original spatial context is known, together with scarce written sources where the iconography of altar decorations is precisely mentioned, allow us to conclude that images of the Virgin and Child, either as sculptures or as panel paintings, must have been considerably widespread as decorations of main altars throughout Western Europe during the thirteenth century.

5. THE VIRGIN MARY IN MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

Placing the Virgin and Child on the main altar puts the Mother of God in the center of the church building as a focal point of liturgy and devotion. The central role of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation is directly related to her role as an instrument in the Incarnation of the Savior. During the twelfth century especially, an increase in Mariological piety and veneration can be observed in texts

¹¹ Géraldine Mallet assumed an origin of the frontal from the neighboring church of Saint-Étienne de Latour-de-Carol, see: Mallet, 2003, p. 246.

¹² I thank Gemma Ylla-Català for kindly providing me with this information.

from all parts of Europe. It is often assumed that the Cistercians functioned as catalyzers in the spreading of Marian piety. All Cistercian churches were dedicated to the Virgin, and a special attitude towards Mary can be observed in Cistercian texts from the thirteenth century, such as the mentioned miracle collection written by Caesarius of Heisterbach. Mary also played an extraordinary role in other monastic orders, and a strong Marian veneration certainly did not remain constrained to monastic congregations in medieval Europe (Kupferschmied, 2017, pp. 19–31; Kjesrud, 2015, p. 103).

The most important sources for the study of Marian veneration in thirteenth-century Scandinavia are written in Old Norse. Two important collections of texts survive: the *Gammelnorsk Homiliebok*, a collection of sermons, and the so-called *Mariu Saga*, a saga text on the Virgin including a collection of Marian miracles. In the *Mariu Saga*, which is preserved in forty-two editions from the twelfth century until the sixteenth century, the Virgin plays an important role as an intermediary between Christ and humankind. Irene Kupferschmied, who analyzed the sources of the saga and the miracle texts, has been able to identify the Latin sources for nearly all miracles; only three texts seem to have an Old Norse origin. Based on the common source texts of Central European origin, Kupferschmied assumed that the Mariological piety in medieval Iceland and Norway followed the common European pattern (Kupferschmied, 2017, p. 29). In these texts, Mary is directly involved in the faith of ordinary believers.

The outstanding position of the Virgin in the salvation of humankind is even more explicitly expressed in the Marian sermon of the Old Norse *Homiliebok*:

En þo er ein hennar iartæin hægare oc øðre en allar iartæinir hæilagra manna, su er hon bar drotin várn, þann er allar irtæinir oc alla miscum væitir hægum maonnum. Oc þat allt er guð hefir os væit til miscunnar í hingatqvaomo sonar síns, þa haofum vér af henne þvi at hon gerðisc værð at høyra ængils orð oc boðan, sva sem í dag er, at hon scyldi bera þann í hæim, er ós løysti með sinu bloðe fra hælvitis qvaolum (Unger, 1864, p. 170).

(And yet Her only prophecy is more holy and exalted than all the prophecies of the Saints; for she bore our Lord, the One who grants grace to all Saints to perform these prophecies. And all mercy that we experience through the Son of God, which we have received through Her. She made herself worthy to hear the voice of the angel. She bear him into the world, which he shall salvage from the torment of hell by his blood).¹³

¹³ Translation by author with help from Zuzana Stankovitsová.

This quote makes a direct reference to the Incarnation of Christ through Mary and his ensuing sacrificial death as an act of salvation to humankind. According to the doctrine of Transubstantiation, Christ's redeeming death was repeated every time the sacrament of the Eucharist was performed – not just symbolically, but in reality. The sermon explains that it was only through Mary who gave birth to the savior that humankind could receive salvation. Thus, this source attributes an outstanding position in salvation history to Mary and placed her far above all other saints. The veneration of the Virgin was always inextricably connected to the Incarnation of the Savior, an event to which the Marian type of the Throne of Wisdom (*Sedes sapientiae*) makes explicit reference. The narrative scenes found on the inside of the wings of tabernacle shrines embed the Mother of God into a narrative context surrounding the Birth of Christ. The extraordinary position granted to Mary, which is reflected in Old Norse and Icelandic texts, follows an overall European pattern.

6. CONCLUSION

The Norwegian tabernacle shrines from Hedalen, Reinli, and Hove, as well as a number of Norwegian painted altar frontals, make it clear that Mariological iconography must have been quite common on high altars, at least from the second half of the thirteenth century onward. The close stylistic and iconographic similarities between these Norwegian medieval art works and objects found elsewhere in Europe make it likely that the same was true for all of Western Europe. Moreover, the fact that most examples originated from remote churches in the Norwegian mountains shows that sculpted and painted depictions of the Virgin Mary did not remain restricted to the context of certain religious orders, but also spread to modest parish churches. Thus, it is no great surprise that several of the earliest preserved winged altarpieces, including for example those in Doberan (c. 1300) and Altenberg (c. 1330), both in Germany, should hold the figure of Mary prominently in the center. This feature was by no means a Cistercian invention, as has been suggested, but rather seems to carry forward an existing tradition of displaying images of saints, and particularly of the Mother of God, on the main altar. The study of early tabernacle shrines is fundamental to our understanding of these developments. Furthermore, these hitherto largely ignored art works from the North of Europe invite to rethink the precise relationship between tabernacle shrines, on one hand, and winged altarpieces, on the other.

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Fig. 1. Niche serving as a background to the former northern side altar, with a depiction of the enthroned Virgin and Child, in the church of Mästerby, Gotland, Sweden, *c.* 1150–1175 (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 2. Canopy above the northern side altar in the stave church of Hopperstad, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway, thirteenth century (photo Stephan Kuhn).



Fig. 3. The interior of the church
in Dädesjö, Småland, Sweden, twelfth century
(photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 4. The chancel of the stave church at Hedalen, Valdres, Norway, with several elements from a tabernacle shrine (sculpture, back panel and wings, crowning church model), thirteenth century (photo Justin Kroesen).

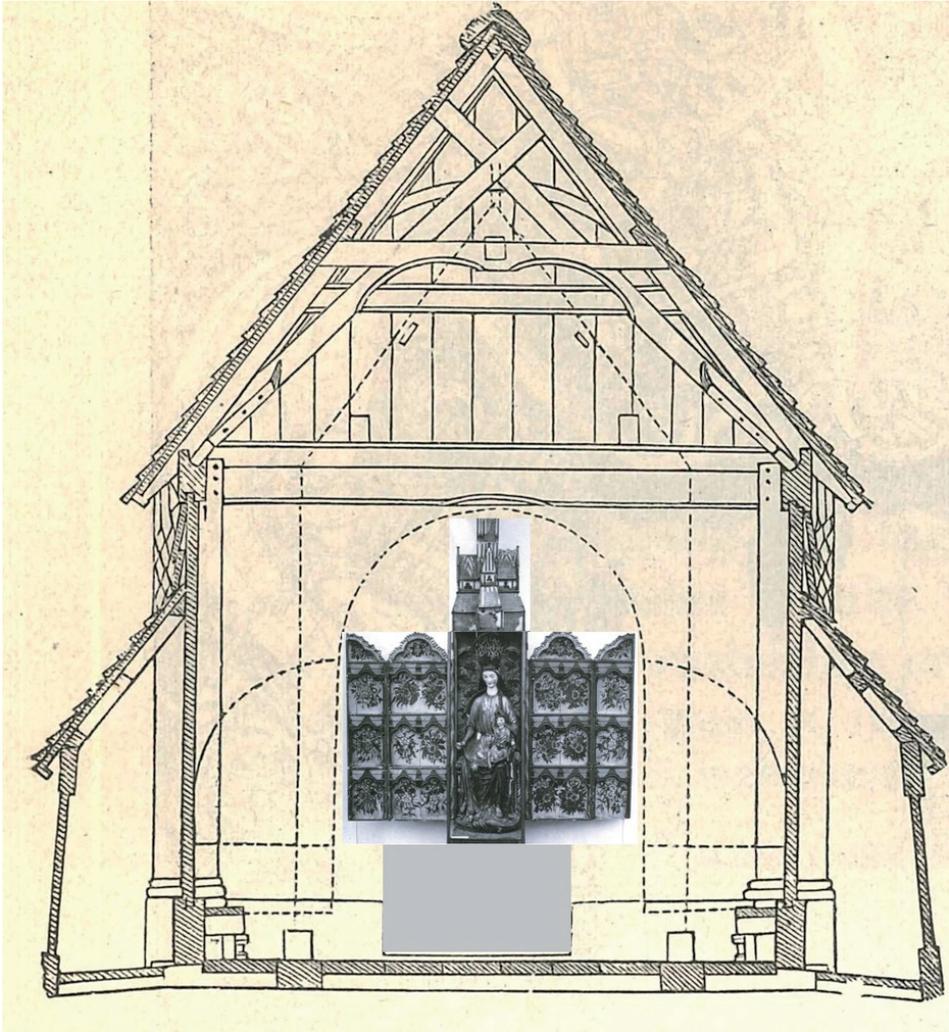


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the tabernacle shrine in the medieval stave church of Hedalen, Valdres, Norway (reconstruction Stephan Kuhn).



Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the tabernacle shrine in the stave church of Reinli, Valdres, Norway (reconstruction by Stephan Kuhn).



Fig. 7. Madonna with back panel and canopy from Hove, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway, c. 1230–1240, now University Museum of Bergen, MA 27 (photo Svein Skare, University Museum of Bergen).



Fig. 8. Reconstruction of the canopy of the tabernacle shrine from Hove, Sogn og Fjordane, Norway, located on the main altar in the church at Hove 2016 (photo Justin Kroesen).



Fig. 9. Main altar with a Marian altar frontal from *c.* 1250, Skaun, Trøndelag, Norway (photo Justin Kroesen).



**TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES IN CENTRAL EUROPE:
EXAMPLES, TYPES, ICONOGRAPHY**

**RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO EN EUROPA CENTRAL:
EJEMPLOS, TIPOS, ICONOGRAFÍA**

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Abstract

A first survey of tabernacle-altarpieces in the German-speaking countries reveals that probably less than 20 specimens can be traced from the time before c. 1450; most of them are only preserved in fragments. They can be found in the north (Stralsund) as well as in middle and southern Germany and the Alpine region. Among them are large, sumptuous works like the former high altar retable of Stams monastery in Tyrol or the life-size ‘Madonna with the Stags’ in Erfurt, both from around 1370–80. The only coherent group in the corpus, however, is formed by four smaller tabernacles that probably were made for the Nuremberg convent of the Poor Clares around 1360–70. In terms of iconography, the Virgin as the Apocalyptic Woman appears remarkably often at the centre of tabernacle-altarpieces, starting with the Erfurt Madonna. A later example of this type is the large Virgin in the Sun on a pier of St Sebaldus church in Nuremberg, donated by the Imhoff-family around 1440. Originally the centre of a tabernacle with wings, it stood next to and above an altar with a painted retable; thus the two works must have formed a kind of ensemble. Most of the known tabernacle-altarpieces were designed as a kind of vertical cabinet or as a tower; in the latter case, ground-plans vary between rectangle, pentagon and T-shape. Starting around mid-14th century, there are also some retables with scenic arrangements of sculptures in broad shrines that basically follow the construction of tabernacle-altarpieces.

Keywords

Tabernacle-altarpieces, Germany *c.* 1300–1440, St Clare altarpieces of Nuremberg, Apocalyptic Woman, construction of altarpieces, placement of altarpieces, retable.

Resumen

Una primera valoración de los retablos-tabernáculo en los territorios de lengua alemana revela que probablemente solo se pueden rastrear menos de veinte ejemplares anteriores a 1450, la mayoría de ellos conservados de manera fragmentaria. Se pueden encontrar en el norte (Stralsund), así como en el centro y sur de Alemania y en la región alpina. Entre ellos hay obras grandes y suntuosas, como el antiguo retablo mayor del monasterio de Stams, en el Tirol, o la Virgen de los Ciervos de Erfurt, de tamaño natural (ambos se fechan hacia 1370-80). En cualquier caso, el único grupo coherente dentro de este *corpus* es el formado por cuatro retablos-tabernáculos de menor tamaño que probablemente fueron hechos para el convento de las clarisas de Núremberg hacia 1360-70. Desde el punto de vista iconográfico, resulta significativa la frecuente aparición de la Virgen como mujer apocalíptica en el centro de los retablos-tabernáculo, empezando por la mencionada Virgen de Erfurt. Un ejemplo posterior de este tipo es la gran Virgen ceñida por el sol que se encuentra en un pilar de la iglesia de San Sebald de Núremberg, donada por la familia Imhoff hacia 1440. En origen fue la imagen titular de un tabernáculo con alas que se situó cerca y por encima de un altar con un retablo pintado, de manera que ambas obras pudieron haber formado una especie de conjunto. La mayor parte de los retablos-tabernáculo conocidos fueron diseñados como a modo de cajón vertical o de torre (en este último caso, la forma de la planta varía entre el rectángulo, el pentágono y la forma de T). A partir de mediados del siglo XIV, también hay algunos retablos con figuras formando escenas dentro de amplios tabernáculos que siguen básicamente la estructura de los retablos-tabernáculo.

Palabras clave

Retablos-tabernáculo, Alemania *c.* 1300-1400, retablos de Santa Clara de Núremberg, mujer apocalíptica, construcción de retablos, emplazamiento de retablos, retablo.

All over Europe, the number of tabernacle-altarpieces that have come down to us from the later middle ages is limited, and their distribution among different regions is extremely uneven. The majority of the material can be found in Scandi-

navia, and numerous works are known from the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, there are also some specimens preserved from Central Europe. The works that will be mentioned here were created in the regions between the south coast of the Baltic Sea in the North and Tyrol in the South, between the Rhineland in the West and Franconia, Bohemia and the former Prussian territories in the East – in short, from the German-speaking or partly German-speaking countries of the Holy Roman Empire. Just a few tabernacle-altarpieces from these regions are preserved completely, while the majority only survived in fragments, sometimes small ones. In all probability, there are remains of more, maybe even many more tabernacle-altarpieces preserved, but if so, they cannot be identified: It is impossible to tell if a carved sculpture of a standing or sitting saint was originally placed in a tabernacle with foldable wings. The following essay will discuss undisputable tabernacle-altarpieces (or their fragments) from Central Europe. This is a first survey, and an attempt to list all relevant works from the regions defined above from the time before 1450. Even if some works have in all likelihood been overlooked, the modest number of only 17 specimens presented here could probably not be raised significantly. Furthermore, this essay will discuss the different types of constructions encountered as well as the possible original placements of the works.

I. RECTANGULAR SHRINES

Besides a 13th-century Madonna, originally housed in a tabernacle, in Humptrup in Schleswig-Holstein which is closely related to Scandinavian works (Albrecht, ed., 2020, pp. 293–296) the arguably oldest surviving example of a tabernacle with foldable wings from Germany is a construction of c. 175 cm height, made around 1300 in Saxony (Fig. 1; Kunz, 2014, cat. 62). Shown today in the Bode-Museum in Berlin, it once stood on the main altar of St Pancras' church in Steinkirchen (Lausitz, Brandenburg), and presents a figure of the titular saint; the wings are unfortunately lost. It consists of a cabinet-like construction above a rectangular ground plan, with a closed back side and two thin columns at the front edges. This type continued to be used for a long time; more than a century and a half later, around 1470, pretty much the same construction was used for an altarpiece in Darsberg near Heidelberg (Figs 9–10 Ralcheva, in this volume; Stange, 1970, no 459). It is smaller than the one from Steinkirchen, the shrine being 125 cm high, and there is a standing Virgin and Child at its centre, surrounded by four saints, each one painted on the inside of one of the wings; the outsides of the

outermost wings show an Annunciation. We do not know where the Darsberg tabernacle stood originally, yet in all probability it also was a retable, placed on an altar. The same seems to be true for a tabernacle of very similar dimensions, made around 1420/30 (Figs 7–8 Ralcheva, in this volume), that comes from Our Lady's Church in Friedberg, Hesse (Woelk, 1999, cat. 16; Foerster, 2018, pp. 252–253). In this case, the figure of the seated Madonna is markedly older than the shrine and its wings, on whose insides scenes from the life of the Virgin are painted. The sculpture was made and polychromed around 1330/50, and it seems that it was first kept and venerated in the chapel of Friedberg Castle. Probably only after a number of relics had been inserted in the corpus of the sculpture and its veneration grew, it was transferred to the church and installed in a tabernacle. This would have served both to underline the dignity of the work, and to keep the relics safe.

A similar kind of tabernacle-altarpiece from around 1410–20 has survived in Stralsund, a Hanse city on the border of the Baltic Sea. It belonged to the altar of the *Bergenfahrer*, merchants travelling to Bergen in Norway, in the major parish church of the town, St Nicholas (Weitzel, 2011, pp. 195–196 and 204–206). The shrine of the altarpiece houses a seated figure of St Olaf, while the inner sides of the wings are adorned with painted scenes from the life of the holy Norwegian king (Fig. 2). On the exterior are standing saints, Olaf, Bridget of Sweden, and Sunniva, a saintly princess widely venerated in Norway; the iconography thus clearly reflects the patronage of the *Bergenfahrer*. The original shrine of the ensemble was destroyed in World War II, but it was reconstructed in a stylized modern form in 1999/2000. Unfortunately, the original placement of the tabernacle is not known, for the altar of the Bergen merchants itself has disappeared. However, the original tabernacle rested on a kind of corbel pointing downwards, and thus it could not have stood on the mensa of an altar in the way the Steinkirchen and Darsberg shrines did. Instead the St Olaf tabernacle might have been attached above the mensa to a wall or a pier. As the work did not show any image of Christ or the Virgin, which we should expect on an early 15th-century altarpiece, it might be that there was a rectangular retable with such representations placed on the altar of the *Bergenfahrer*, with the tabernacle hanging on the wall or pier above it. If this assumption is correct, it would have been an ensemble not unlike those that are often shown in early Netherlandish paintings, where flat altarpieces, with or without wings, are often crowned by a tabernacle with the sculpture of a saint and wings showing scenes from the life of that saint: good examples are for instance the high altar with retable and tabernacle depicted in Rogier van der Weyden's *Exhumation of St Hubert* of c. 1440 – where the figure

in the tabernacle represents St Peter, the patron saint of the cathedral where the event depicted took place – or in a painting by the Brussels Master of Sopetrán of c. 1470 (Fig. 3).¹ If the *Bergensfabrer* altar in St Nicholas in Stralsund was dedicated to St Olaf, as it is likely, its tabernacle would have presented the patron saint just as in Rogier's picture.

2. TOWER-LIKE CONSTRUCTIONS

A different type of tabernacle-altarpiece, with a pentagon-shaped ground plan, and resembling a tower rather than a cabinet, can be traced in the Germanic countries from the middle of the 14th century onward. An obviously tall construction of that kind once existed in the Cistercian monastery of Stams in Tyrol (Fig. 4), but is lost since a long time and only known through a drawing in the monastery's chronicle by pater Wolfgang Lebersorg from around 1630 (Oberhammer, 1948, pp. 28–31; Egg, 1985, pp. 53 and 57; Wolf, 2002, p. 296). According to his notes, the tabernacle stood on the main altar of the monastery church. It was probably made in 1376, as indicated on the drawing,² and although the latter is a somewhat amateurish work, it gives a fairly good idea of the structure and appearance of the lost altarpiece. Basically, it followed the same design as the one painted by the Master of Sopetrán a hundred years later, yet with one remarkable difference: The central section of the work in Stams had two storeys, united by a solid back panel. The lower storey consisted of the high, pentagonal foot, and the upper one of the likewise pentagonal shrine for the statue of the Virgin and Child. This shrine sported a canopy with gothic tracery around its four gables; two thin columns were supporting the canopy. The wings too were divided horizontally in two sections, and it seems that the upper and the lower ones could be moved separately. Thus the lower set of wings, containing images of St Peter and St Paul and a considerable number of small niches for relics, could for example stay close while the upper register, showing a standing saint on each of its panels, could be opened or vice versa. The construction thus offered the possibility to show three different stages of opening, i.e. three different levels of splendour. The

¹ Rogier's work in London, National Gallery, see Campbell, 1998, pp. 407–427. The Sopetrán panels in Madrid, Prado, see Jover/Alba/Gayo, 2016. A survey in Kroesen, 2017.

² However, at the same time Lebersorg quoted an inscription that purportedly was located on the back of the work, according to which it was made by the then abbot Heinrich Grussit himself between 1386 and 1388. We are ignorant whether this inscription was reliable or not.

centre section, finally, was crowned by a tower, a gothic spire of the same height as the tabernacle including its foot. With respect to its structure as well as its individual forms, the lost work from Stams has been rightly compared to a retable with a rectangular central section from the chapel of Tyrol Castle (Innsbruck, Landesmuseum; Wolf, 2002, pp. 152–165) that was made slightly earlier, in or around 1370; when open, it is about 278 cm wide and 249 cm high including its central tower (Fig. 5). This work too has two storeys, and it also comprises a large compartment for relics. However, this compartment is located in the lower section of the central panel while the wings contain only flat paintings.

A most unusual element in the long-lost Stams tabernacle was certainly its function as a container for a large quantity of relics – at least 92, if the 17th-century drawing is correct. Actually, the lower set of wings was in the first place a kind of reliquary, and this was in all probability the reason for the likewise very unusual design with two storeys. Allegedly, Emperor Charles IV had given a number of important relics to Stams after 1360, and if that is true, there can be no doubt that the tabernacle-altarpiece was made especially for them. Unfortunately, we do not know why the patrons at Stams opted for the complicated form of a tabernacle instead of a more common construction for the safekeeping of relics, namely an altarpiece like the one from Tyrol Castle with a rectangular shrine. In all probability, both altarpieces were made in the same workshop, and the craftsmen might have followed the two-storey structure of the Tyrol Castle retable when designing the tabernacle. However, the decision for such a structure and for the insertion of the relics in the lower set of wings had certainly been taken by the patrons. At any rate, the fully-opened tabernacle-altarpiece would have given a general aspect not so very different from that of the altarpiece from Tyrol Castle: A wide, golden panel with a sculpture of the Virgin in the centre, painted wings, ending in gables, and on top of it a spire as high as the shrine itself.

Another high and slender tabernacle on a pentagonal base comes from the hospital church in Erfurt (Fig. 6), and is today kept in the city's Angermuseum (Legner, ed., 1978, vol. 2, p. 565). It was made around 1370 and contains a first-class sculpture of the Virgin and Child, carved in lime wood and *c.* 1.5 m high. Other than in the Stams or Sopetrán specimens, the shrine is closed at the top by a heavy, protruding canopy instead of a spire. The wings are lost without a trace, but it is obvious that their inner sides would have shown the golden rays emanating from the sun behind the Virgin, and little else – at most some flying angels at the outer edges. The Erfurt Virgin is wearing a precious white cloak, ornamented with golden stags – hence its common name 'Madonna with the Stags'. She is standing on the Moon and clad with the Sun, and she might have

had a crown with twelve stars originally: We are dealing with one of the earliest known examples of a sculpture of the Apocalyptic Woman. This iconography, based on chapter 12 of the Revelation of St John, became popular in northern Europe from the second half of the 14th century on; with its cosmic associations, it underlined the role of the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven.

At the same time, the Erfurt Virgin was at the front of a remarkable series of tabernacle-altarpieces of similar iconography. Indeed, the Apocalyptic Woman seems to have been a preferred iconography for such constructions, at least in the German-speaking regions. Besides the 'Madonna with the Stags' there is a Virgin and Child from around 1410 in Danzig (Gdańsk) that might or might not be the work of a Netherlandish sculptor (Geelen, 2017, pp. 69–71); around 1500 it was placed in a tabernacle whose inner side is covered with the sun rays of the Apocalyptic Woman – it is again unclear if this iconography repeats an earlier one. In a tabernacle-altarpiece from Raron (Valais, Switzerland) that was probably made around 1420 in Swabia, the Virgin in the central shrine is encircled by the rays of the sun and standing on the moon, while the wings are occupied by flat reliefs of the Three Magi in adoration and St Romanus, the patron saint of the church it was destined for.³ The well-known Virgin in the Sun of *c.* 1440 in St Sebaldus in Nuremberg, to which we will come back below, was also at the centre of a large folding tabernacle (Fig. 13). In the already mentioned altarpiece at Darsberg, the central Virgin is likewise conceived as the Apocalyptic Woman as the rays emanating from behind her reveal, and the same applies to some comparatively late tabernacle-altarpieces like the high altar retable of Velden near Nuremberg of *c.* 1470 (Strieder, 1993, cat. 29) where the insides of the wings are again completely filled with rays and some angels, or a tabernacle of 302 cm high and 287 cm wide when open that was made around 1477 for Weissenburg church in Franconia (today Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum).⁴ Thus it becomes obvious that tabernacles were considered to be perfect surroundings for images of the Virgin as Apocalyptic Woman. The reasons for this predilection are obvious: Tabernacles offered the best possibility to show a single sculpture in an architectural setting – and Apocalyptic Women are frequently conceived as single figures, both in sculpture and painting; furthermore, the interior of the wings provided plenty of space for a large, impressive halo of rays around a Virgin in the Sun.

³ Height 185 cm; Zurich, Schweizerisches Landesmuseum; Lapaire, 1969, pp. 171–172.

⁴ http://www.bayerisches-nationalmuseum.de/webgos/bnm_online.php?seite=5&fld_o=00212341.

3. A GROUP OF NUREMBERG TABERNACLES FOR THE CONVENT OF ST CLARE

While all the works discussed so far are more or less isolated objects from different places, an outstanding group of four tabernacle-altarpieces was created around 1360 in Nuremberg, all of which were obviously destined for the local convent of the Poor Clares. All of them were dismantled 200 or more years ago, and nothing but fragments of their wings survived. Therefore, they have only recently been recognized as remnants of tabernacle-altarpieces. Of the most elaborate work among them, five fragments of the wings have come down to us, dispersed between different collections.⁵ One of those fragments, today in the Gemäldegalerie Berlin, was in the collection of Edward Solly already before 1819 and thus gives a *terminus ante quem* for the destruction of the original ensemble. In 2002, four of the fragments could be re-united in an exhibition at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt (Kemperdick, 2002). They once formed the wider, inner set of wings that was attached to the central shrine. The original construction must have been based on a rectangular ground plan not unlike, for instance, the Steinkirchen shrine, but it was of slender proportions, and in all probability its wings ended in gables at the top (Fig. 7); there might also have been a spire above the central shrine. Its height would have been about 1–1.2 m (without a possible spire), and its width when open around 1 m. On the inside of the inner pair of wings, two scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary are combined with two scenes from the lives of St Francis and St Clare (Fig. 8), and it is of course the parallel between the major Franciscan saints on the one hand, and the Virgin and Christ on the other that is intended. From this we can conclude that a carved statue of the standing Virgin with Child was at the centre of the tabernacle. Of the smaller outer set of wings, only one fragment survives; it shows two standing saints, the two SS Johns, on the inside, and a partially cropped Crucifixion on the outside. On the former outsides of the larger wings there are images of the Man of Sorrows and Christ Carrying the Cross, each accompanied by the small kneeling figure of a Poor Clare nun in prayer (Fig. 9). Stylistically, the work can be closely linked to Nuremberg paintings of around 1360, and thus the place for which this altarpiece was destined was in all probability the church of the St Clare's convent

⁵ The individual scenes of the inner sides of the wings had been cut out; one is in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt, one in the Gemäldegalerie Berlin, one in a British private collection, one in the Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, and one, showing the two SS Johns, was in the Harry Fuld collection in Berlin before World War II; it recently surfaced on the art market. See Brinkmann/Kemperdick, 2002, pp. 33–54; Kemperdick, 2010, pp. 88–97.

of that city – it is not completely ruled out, however, that it was destined for the house of the same order in neighbouring Bamberg.

Ten other preserved fragments of wing panels are artistically close to the ones just mentioned, although they reveal a somewhat less refined style with doll-like faces for the figures (Strieder, 1993, cat. 4–5; Kemperdick, 2002). This style recurs identically in the illumination of a charter from St Clare's convent in Nuremberg, dated August 1362, which gives a firm ground for dating and locating the fragmented wings. These ten fragments must have belonged to three tabernacle-altarpieces of more or less the same design and size as the one just discussed. Six scenes from the life of St Clare were obviously once on the inside of two pairs of wings (Fig. 10); the narrow ones formed, according to the chronological sequence of the scenes, the outer pair of wings, while the wider ones were attached to the back of the central shrine as the inner pair. The structure was exactly the same as in the specimen reconstructed above. As all the scenes are centred on St Clare, the lost sculpture in the middle, i.e. in the tabernacle itself, was probably a standing figure of that holy founder of the female Franciscan order. Here the outsides of the wings were adorned with ornaments instead of figural images. Of another similar construction, only fragments of the two left wings are preserved (Fig. 11): They present three scenes from the life of Mary Magdalene on the inside; the Magdalene and Christ in the *Noli me tangere* are painted on the outside of the smaller wing, and wine leaves and birds on the outside of the wider one. As the Magdalene was especially venerated in the Nuremberg St Clare convent, which was first dedicated to the repentant sinner herself, it seems highly likely that this work was also destined for that institution. The same applies to the fourth tabernacle of which only one small fragment has survived: Its inside depicts the appearance of the Christ Child to St Clare in the presence of St Francis; its outside shows the lower half of a Man of Sorrows (Kemperdick, 2002, p. 32). Thus the iconography corresponds to images in two of the other works just discussed, and the presence of both St Clare and St Francis makes it clear that this almost completely lost tabernacle-altarpiece must also have been installed in a church of one of the Franciscan orders – probably likewise in the Nuremberg church of St Clare.

All four tabernacle-altarpieces reconstructed here were of approximately the same size, with a height of not much more than one meter. Assuming that they do indeed all come from St Clare's church in Nuremberg, we can conclude that they stood on four different altars, and, as none of the tabernacles is significantly larger than the others, that the main altar was not among them. It has to remain an open question whether these tabernacles were part of an ensemble, with a

rectangular retable below as in the Netherlandish examples mentioned above. However, as there are no remnants of other altarpieces of around 1360 known from the Nuremberg convent, it seems more likely that the tabernacles served as the sole decorations of the altars.

4. A LARGE VIRGIN IN THE SUN, ITS TABERNACLE AND AN ALTARPIECE

Contrary to these works, the exact location of another, much larger tabernacle in Nuremberg is known to us: The famous Madonna as the Apocalyptic Woman in St Sebaldus (Fig. 12), the most important parish church of the city, is still in its original place where it was installed around 1440 (Weilandt, 2007, pp. 196–205 and 682–687). We are dealing with a life-size figure of the Virgin, measuring 185 cm in height including its plinth; the tabernacle is formed of a heavy base and a likewise heavy canopy, both adorned with gothic tracery and made of stone. The ground plan of this tabernacle has a T-shape – like the one in the above-mentioned painting by Rogier van der Weyden (Fig. 3). This type of construction requires four separate wings on each side, i.e. double the number that is found in tabernacles with a square or a pentagonal base. The T-shaped base thus meant a more complicated and more elaborate structure, it provided more space for images on its eight wings and was, no doubt, more expensive than a common four-wing-construction. Thus it might not be pure chance that the tabernacle above the retable in Rogier's painting is meant to adorn the high altar of a cathedral (that of Liège): It is a sumptuous type of tabernacle for the most important altar. In Nuremberg, the Imhoff family might have intended to demonstrate their importance and their generosity not only by an exceptionally large tabernacle of the Virgin, but also by its elaborate construction. Today, the Nuremberg Virgin has lost the wings, but in 1450 there is mention of a gilding of the original wings which in turn were replaced in 1517 by a new set of panels, painted by Hans Süß von Kulmbach with angels on the inside and the Annunciation and the Visitation on the outside.⁶

The impressive tabernacle was a donation of the wealthy Imhoff family. It is fixed to the northern pier at the former entrance to the liturgical choir of the church, and is set, at about 2 m height, slantwise into the pier so that the

⁶ Remnants are preserved in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum at Nuremberg, see Weilandt, 2007, pp. 683–687.

figure is turned halfway towards the main altar. Originally, an altar stood at the foot of the pier on the southern side, below and just a little bit more eastwards than the tabernacle. On this altar, dedicated to the Twelve Apostles, an altarpiece had been erected already around 1415 by the same Imhoff family. The triptych is still preserved; it presents the Coronation of the Virgin on its centre panel, and apostles with small donor figures on its wings (Weilandt, 2007, pp. 189–196 and 671–677). Thus, the tabernacle and the triptych formed a kind of ensemble which placed the triumphant Apocalyptic Woman above the humble Virgin of the Coronation, as if the latter had ascended (Fig. 13). This structure clearly resembles what we can see in the Netherlandish paintings already cited: a tabernacle with a single figure is placed above a flat retable. However, the differences are likewise obvious: the tabernacle is neither standing on top of the retable itself nor are the two works arranged on the same axis. Obviously, the Netherlandish way of combining these elements was not common in Franconia. Instead, it seems that the superposition of retable and tabernacle was a possibility there – and maybe also in other parts of Germany –, but not an established tradition which would have provided standard solutions.

5. SCENIC RETABLES OF TABERNACLE-LIKE CONSTRUCTION

To close this essay, a distinct kind of tabernacle-altarpiece should be discussed briefly. It is represented in a monumental form by the former high altarpiece of Brandenburg cathedral (Fig. 14), a carved and painted import from Bohemia that was erected at its destination in the year 1375 (Wolf, 2002, pp. 166–177; Fajt, 2008, pp. 214–218). Although it looks at first sight like a large winged retable of the usual type, with a central shrine and carved reliefs and paintings on the inside of the wings, it is in fact a tabernacle construction for there are two sets of wings (in two storeys) that can be folded around the shrine – the much narrower inner wings are attached to the back of the shrine and would close it at the sides. In this work, the lower wings would cover a special compartment for relics and could be moved separately, just as it can be assumed of the lost Stams altarpiece (Fig. 4). However, the aspect of the Brandenburg retable is very different from that of the Stams tabernacle or the Steinkirchen (Fig. 1) and Darsberg type. In contrast to what we normally perceive as a tabernacle-altarpiece, the work in Brandenburg is extremely wide, and its shrine contains a scene and several figures instead of one dominating sculpture.

More or less the same is true for some other works. The so-called *Kleiner Dom*, i.e. ‘Little Cathedral’ (Figs 1–2 Ralcheva, in this volume), is a Cologne

work from the middle of the 14th century and shows the Annunciation on a small stage in its centre. Due to its double spire and the resulting vertical proportions, it has more resemblance to the typical tabernacles, but at the same time it is very close to the more conventional triptychs of the time which feature a shrine closed on three sides. In the early 15th century, we find similar constructions in the middle Rhine region used by a workshop that was specialized in sculptures made from clay. At least two works of the group were originally set into shrines that are rectangular at their back but protrude in a trapezoid shape at the front. One of these works is in the church at Kronberg near Frankfurt, and presents the Death of the Virgin with the apostles, angels, Christ, and a pair of kneeling donors (now lost) as on a theatre stage (Fig. 15); its four wings, whose insides were completely overpainted in the 19th century, show the Madonna of Mercy with the donor family on the outside (Schütte *et alii*, eds, 2019, vol. 1, pp. 182–187). The corbel under the shrine and many other details seem to be modern additions, and it is not clear whether this work was a retable placed on an altar. From the same workshop comes another, famous work, the Bearing of the Cross from Lorch on the Rhine (today Berlin, Bode-Museum), which originally was placed in a shrine of a similar ground plan as in the Kronberg work (Buczyński/von Fircks, 2015). We are ignorant, however, if it had wings or not: It may have been an epitaph fixed to the wall without wings, or an epitaph that served at the same time as an altarpiece, and that might have had wings, or as a simple retable with wings. Again, in both cases it is not obvious that the tabernacle-construction does make a substantial difference to a work with a rectangular shrine with closed side walls. Such a work is also preserved from the same artistic circle, where the figures are also executed in clay and are more or less of the same scale as in the two works just mentioned; it shows the Annunciation in a chamber (Cologne, Kolumba Museum). Basically, the whole object looks very similar to the Kronberg Death of the Virgin, including the (likewise renewed) painted curtains on the inside of the wings. The distinguishing factor of the Kronberg and Lorch works, the tabernacle construction, seems to serve primarily aesthetic aspects: the open sides of the shrine allow different, interesting looks at the figures, and indeed some of their faces can only be fully seen in a view from the side.

To conclude: In Central Europe, tabernacle-altarpieces were known at least since the 13th century. They could reach impressive dimensions, and such large constructions could serve as sole altarpieces, even for main altars. A placement of tabernacles above painted or sculpted retables, as can regularly be seen in early Netherlandish paintings, was unusual in German-speaking countries, although

partially comparable combinations of tabernacle and retable can be found here and there. Three major types of tabernacles – and some mixed forms – might be distinguished among the German examples: simple, cabinet-like shrine on a rectangular ground plan, slender, tower-like constructions, and broad cases with scenic representations.

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Fig. 1. Tabernacle from St Pancras, Steinkirchen, c. 1300;
Berlin, Bodemuseum, Skulpturensammlung SMB.



Fig. 2. St Olaf tabernacle, *c.* 1420
(pre-war photo of original shrine, and reconstruction made in 1999-2000);
Stralsund, St Nicholas.



Fig. 3. Details from Rogier van der Weyden, *Exhumation of St Hubert*, c. 1440, London, National Gallery, and Master of Sopetrán, *Donor before an Altar*, c. 1470, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

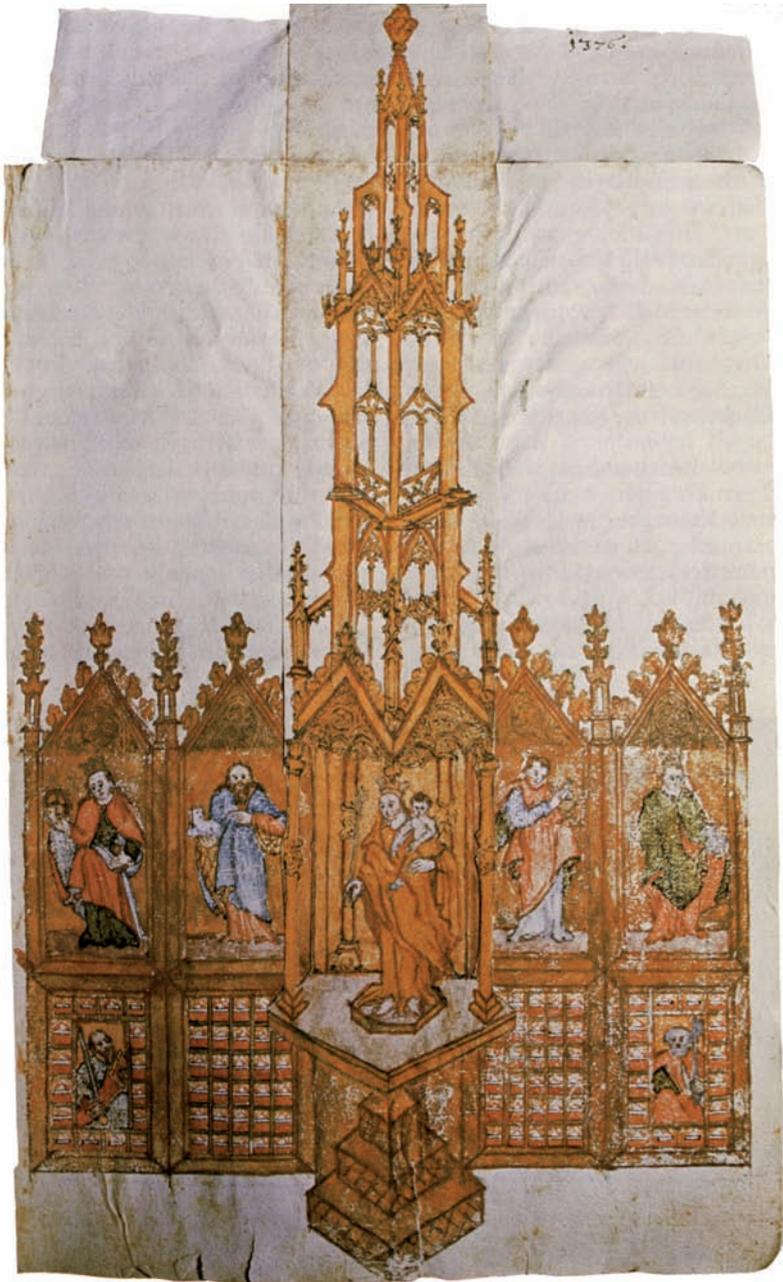


Fig. 4. The lost tabernacle-altarpiece at Stams, *c.* 1376;
drawing by Wolfgang Lebersorg, *c.* 1630;
Stams (Tyrol), Stiftsarchiv.



Fig. 5. Altarpiece from Tyrol Castle, *c.* 1370;
Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum.



Fig. 6. 'Madonna with the Stags', c. 1370;
Erfurt, Angermuseum.



Fig. 7. Reconstruction of a Nuremberg tabernacle-altarpiece of *c.* 1360.



Fig. 8. Reconstructed set of wings of a Nuremberg tabernacle-altarpiece, c. 1360, inside; left: a) Berlin, Gemäldegalerie SMB, b) Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum; right: c) Frankfurt, Städel Museum, d) private collection UK.



Fig. 9. Reconstructed set of wings of a Nuremberg tabernacle-altarpiece, *c.* 1360, outside; left: a) Berlin, Gemäldegalerie SMB, b) Berlin, Deutsches Historisches Museum; right: c) Frankfurt, Städel Museum, d) private collection UK.

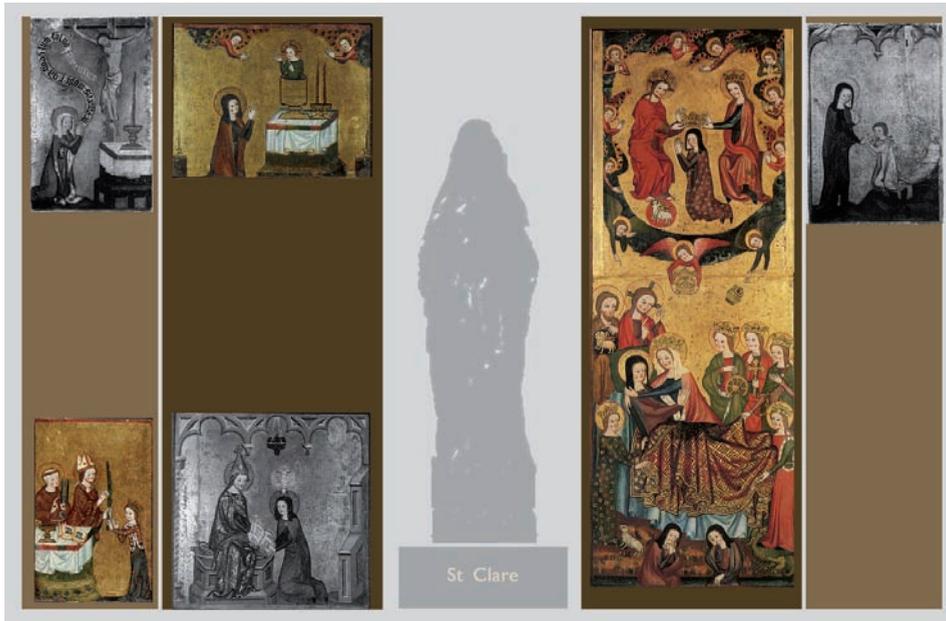


Fig. 10. Reconstructed inside of a St Clare's tabernacle, c. 1360; Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

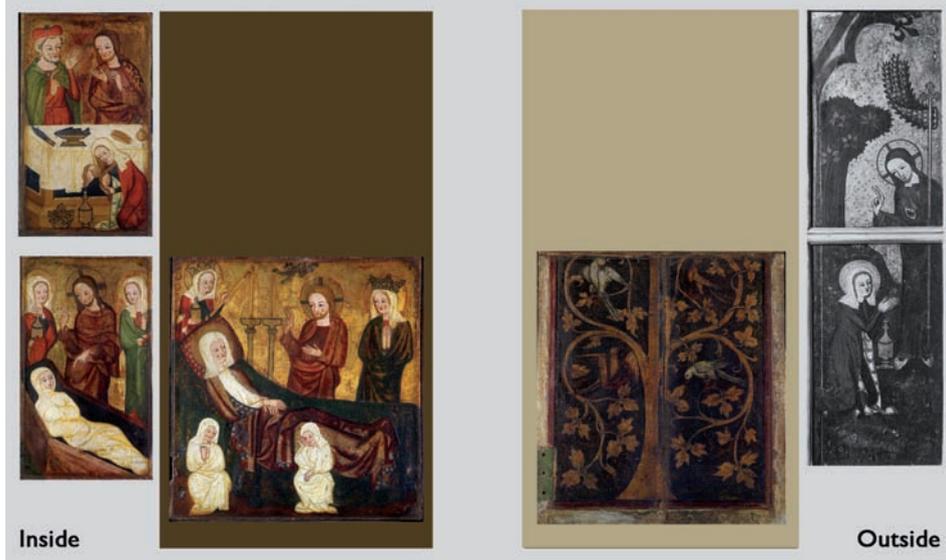


Fig. 11. Reconstructed wing, inside and outside, of a Mary Magdalene tabernacle, c. 1360; Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum.



Fig. 12. Madonna clad with the Sun of the Imhoff family, *c.* 1440;
Nuremberg, St Sebaldus.



Fig. 13. Reconstruction of ensemble of the Imhoff Madonna and the Imhoff altar in St Sebaldus, Nuremberg.



Fig. 14. Former high altarpiece, Bohemia, c. 1375; Brandenburg, cathedral.



Fig. 15. Tabernacle with the Death of the Virgin, c. 1430/40; Kronberg im Taunus, parish church.



(DIS)CLOSED: TABERNACLE ALTARPIECES IN THE RHINELAND

(DES)VELADO: RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO EN RENANIA

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Abstract

Most of the tabernacle altarpieces preserved throughout Europe are fragmented, overpainted, and reconstructed, thus impeding a closer analysis of their image program. A detailed study of the earliest fully preserved representatives of this altarpiece type originating from the Lower and Middle Rhine as well as some other little-known late medieval examples from this region will cast some light upon topics such as the construction and evolution of the form as well as the iconography and media used in its creation and its possible impact on the spectator. This study concentrates on a small group of almost completely preserved tabernacle altarpieces, which allows detailed observation of their all-around design. This enables an examination of the ensemble of sculpture and painting, the strategies of emphasizing the venerated sculpture as well as points of reference between the images on the interior and on the exterior. Another aspect of this survey addresses questions regarding the different ways an altar could be adjusted and displayed spatially (with the wings fully open or partially closed) and the perception of these objects, most of which are designed to be viewed from all sides – issues that have received little attention in the research on tabernacle altarpieces so far. The results of this brief survey will also serve as groundwork for answering questions about the long durability of the tabernacle altarpieces alongside new forms such as winged altarpieces.

Keywords

Tabernacle altarpiece, altar, Rhineland, Germany, sculpture, painting, Later Middle Ages.

Resumen

La mayoría de los retablos-tabernáculo conservados por toda Europa presentan un carácter fragmentario o están repintados y reutilizados, lo que impide un análisis profundo de su programa iconográfico. Un estudio detallado de los ejemplares más antiguos conservados en su integridad procedentes del Bajo y Medio Rin, así como de algún ejemplo tardomedieval de esta región, arrojará algo de luz sobre asuntos tales como la construcción y evolución de sus formas, así como la iconografía y las técnicas empleadas en su creación y su posible impacto en el espectador. Este estudio se centra en un pequeño grupo de retablos-tabernáculo preservados casi por completo, lo que permite una observación detallada de todos los aspectos de su diseño. Esto posibilita un examen del conjunto de la escultura y de la pintura, de las estrategias desplegadas para resaltar la imagen de culto en su interior, así como de los puntos de conexión entre las imágenes en el interior y en el exterior. Otro aspecto de este estudio apunta a cuestiones relativas a los diferentes modos en que un altar puede adaptarse y mostrarse en un espacio (con los paneles laterales completamente abiertos o parcialmente cerrados) y a la percepción de estos artefactos, la mayoría de los cuales están diseñados para ser vistos desde todos sus lados —aspectos que hasta ahora han recibido escasa atención en los estudios sobre retablos-tabernáculos—. Los resultados de este breve estudio servirán también como trabajo preliminar para responder cuestiones acerca de la larga persistencia de los retablos-tabernáculo junto a nuevos tipos como los retablos con alas.

Palabras clave

Retablo-tabernáculo, altar, Renania, Alemania, escultura, pintura, Baja Edad Media.

A comparatively large number of tabernacle altarpieces have been preserved in their entirety from the region of the Lower and Middle Rhine with the earliest preserved example dating from *c.* 1360 and a series of examples created after 1400. This study presents them in three sections. The first two parts concentrate primarily on the oldest preserved examples: the so-called *Kleiner Dom* (*c.* 1360), the *Chapelle Cardon* (*c.* 1400), and the ‘small’ Friedberg altarpiece (1325/1350 and 1420). In the first section, the analysis concentrates on the dialectic between the two-dimensional surface of the painting and the spatial plasticity of the sculpture, which characterizes this altarpiece type in particular. Special attention will be given to a conspicuous occurrence: the double ‘presence’ of the central group

of veneration in the interior as a sculpture and on the exterior as a painting, which is a frequently occurring cross-regional phenomenon. By including further examples with this peculiarity, the question is raised whether this strategy of emphasizing the venerated image can be associated with the altarpiece genre. The second section concentrates on the examples which hold statues of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child, and analyzes further strategies of harmonious connection between the painting and sculpture, which are manifest mostly in the interior of the altarpieces. The third, closing, section will travel further into the 15th century and examine the potential for adjusting the tabernacle wings in different ways for communicating different messages. The tendency to configure the side views of the shrines with figurative images in the Later Middle Ages is a question that has received little attention so far, and speaks for an attentive study and awareness of the tabernacle shrine as a three-dimensional structure.¹

I. THE *KLEINER DOM* AND THE DUPLICATED IMAGE

The so-called *Kleiner Dom* (translated literally: small cathedral), now in the collection of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich, is among the best-known examples of carved altarpieces produced in Cologne in the 14th century and is at the same time an early representative of the type of altarpiece examined in this survey (Figs 1–2). In many respects, the *Kleiner Dom* displays specific features of construction, design, and iconography. It originated from the Franciscan convent of St Clare in Cologne, abrogated in 1802. This wealthy convent was the center of an intense relic cult, from which only a small number of items have survived (Hilger/Goldberg/Ringer, 1985, p. 43).² Unlike most tabernacle altarpieces, which hold a sculpture of the Virgin and Child or another saint, in the center of this example a kneeling Mary and Gabriel depict the Annunciation.³ A half-length sculpture of God the Father and two angels float above them

¹ In recent years, the space behind the altar and the design of the shrines' back sides have received increasing attention. On this topic see Wittekind, 2016, pp. 23–37, and Sander, ed., 2016.

² The Altar of the Poor Clares (c. 1340), kept now in Cologne Cathedral as well as a sculpture of Mary (c. 1340) from the collection of the Museum Schnütgen (Inv. A 773) are items originating from the Franciscan convent alongside with the *Kleiner Dom*.

³ Plurifigural scenes in tabernacle altarpieces are rare. Another example is the tabernacle altarpiece of St. Johann in Kronberg in Hessen (c. 1420/30), showing in the center a plurifigural scene of the Death of the Virgin. An art technological peculiarity is the manufacture of the central group of veneration in clay. Further on this object see Droste, 2018, pp. 10, note 24, 27 and 366, Droste,

in reduced scale. When swung open, the panels reveal scenes from the childhood of Christ – the Adoration of the Magi, the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple – separated from the central scene by depictions of St Peter and St Paul on the left side and St Agnes and St Gertrude of Nivelles on the right (Hilger/Goldberg/Ringer, 1990, p. 26). A peculiar compositional detail is the arrangement of the saints' figures. While Peter and Paul are aligned with the central scene of the Annunciation, the female saints devote their attention to the depictions on the side wings. Considering that the provenance of the canopy altar is a Franciscan monastery, the figure of the holy abbess is of particular importance. She witnesses the scene of Nativity, the iconography of which is somewhat unusual: Mary and Joseph kneel before the crib of the holy child, their hands raised in prayer to the newborn. The shape of the crib itself resembles an altar, emphasizing the sacral character of the scene and at the same time evoking reminiscence of the sacrifice of Christ and his presence in the Eucharist (Hilger/Goldberg/Ringer, 1990, p. 38). The side wings of the altarpiece are presented fully open due to their exhibition in a museum. If one imagines the side wings of the altarpiece inclined slightly inwards then meaningful connections between the individual scenes would merge into a harmonious unit.⁴ The apostles Peter and Paul as propagators of the teachings of Christ witness the Incarnation directly. Mary is kneeling with her back to Gabriel, her gaze directed to the scene of the Nativity and the abbess, underlining her role as a mediator for the spiritual community of the convent. A number of paintings from the 15th century depicting altar ensembles containing baldachin altarpieces confirm this interpretation.⁵ They contain picturesque depictions of baldachin altarpieces with angled side wings that thus outline the architectonic character of the canopy and allow the sculpture to appear to be exhibited in an architectonic niche.

The interior of the tabernacle altarpiece is abundantly adorned with gold leaf and the background of the canopy area is additionally embellished with punched floral motifs. When closed, the panels show a painted depiction of the Annunciation, repeating the topic of the sculpted scene in the center. The name *Kleiner*

2019, pp. 182–188, and Dänekamp, 2019, p. 196). For an image of the artifact see Fig. 15 Kemperdick, in this volume.

⁴ The question of the different modes of presentation of the wings is examined in the concluding section.

⁵ Two well-known examples of paintings which depict tabernacle altarpieces are works of Rogier van der Weyden (and workshop): The Exhumation of Saint Hubert (c. 1430), National Gallery in London, and the Seven Sacraments altarpiece (c. 1440), Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

Dom emerged in the 19th century and is related to the architectural roof superstructure, which has two spires and is adorned with gothic tracery resembling the towers of the Cologne Cathedral, that were only finished in the 19th century but whose design was known from architectural plans as early as the 14th century.⁶ The distinctive shape and suspiciously perfect execution of the altarpiece wood-carving led to a temporary conclusion that the whole roof superstructure was designed in neogothic style, which was proven wrong by a technological survey of the layers of paint (Ringer, 2001, p. 209). The two spires can be dismantled. Some traces of parchment in the interior of the tracery base prove the former existence of a closed compartment, probably serving for the preservation of relics (nowadays lost), which thus remained invisible (Hilger/Goldberg/Ringer, 1985, p. 50). The vertically accentuated shape of the crest and its architectural ornamentation including flying buttresses, finials, and tracery windows resembles the architectural ornamentation of contemporary large carved altarpieces such as the one in Oberwesel or the Altar of the Poor Clares, now in the Cologne Cathedral (Wolf, 2002, pp. 84–95 and 95–112). The latter also originating from the Franciscan convent in Cologne, shares a number of technological and stylistical analogies with the *Kleiner Dom*. Both altarpieces are made of oak wood felled close to the same date. The punched-leaf ornament on the shrine's interior wall is identical to the decoration on the backgrounds on the exterior of the second pair of folding wings of the Altar of the Poor Clares. There is also a resemblance in the technique of joining the separate carved segments (Ringer, 2001, p. 213). Despite the similarities in the art technology and style, a decisive difference lies in how the relics are presented. While these were displayed visibly in the base zone of the Altar of the Poor Clares, they were concealed inside the *Kleiner Dom*. Consequently, the iconographic program comes to the fore, leaving less room for relics, a development that can be observed in late medieval winged altarpieces (Ringer, 2001, p. 211). The *Kleiner Dom* is similar to some goldsmith work from the region, such as the reliquary of Charlemagne or the reliquary with three spires, both from the Aachen cathedral treasury (Ringer, 2001, p. 210).⁷ An art-technological survey of the object showed that not only do the appearance of the matte and gloss gilded surfaces (resembling hammered or cast gilded parts) support this relationship,

⁶ The so-called 'Plan F' dates from c. 1320 and depicts the west front of the cathedral on a scale of 1:42. Nowadays exhibited in the chapel of John in the cathedral. (Friese, 2013, p. 149).

⁷ For the Aachen Cathedral treasury see also Grimme, 1972. On the topic of micro-architecture as an instrument in the dissemination of style and form and also as a carrier of the ideological dimension of gothic architecture as symbol of Heavenly Jerusalem see Bucher, 1976, and Belghaus, 2008.

but also the manufacture and attachment of the individual elements, especially those of the tracery architecture (Hilger/Goldberg/Ringer, 1985, pp. 49–50).

The exact function of the altarpiece remains unclear. Due to its small dimensions it may have been intended for a side chapel in a church interior. The altarpiece is designed to be viewed from a slightly upward perspective. Only through an elevated staging of the object or through kneeling can the spectator have a view of all the details of the interior. Additionally, from this point of view the architectural superstructure gains plasticity.⁸

The twofold representation of the Annunciation in the interior and on the exterior is unusual and has so far been addressed in only a few studies.⁹ Although both scenes share the same iconography, there are a number of differences between them. The protagonists' robes on the outside are depicted in saturated colors, Gabriel's wings display a splendid interplay of colors. The background, in comparison, is simple: gold stars on a green background. Upon opening the altarpiece, the pictorial representation becomes more detailed and more splendid. The differentiated use of color recedes before an all-encompassing use of gold leaf, which covers the garments of the protagonists and the punched background. At the same time, the scene enters a new, third, dimension and thus reflects the theme of the Annunciation on a media level through a metaphorical act of Incarnation (Krischel, 2008, p. 105). The three-dimensional depiction is vivid, but appears more ethereal owing to the gilding. Although a hierarchy between the two depictions is clearly established and the higher position of the interior is undisputed, the masterful execution of the painted Annunciation on the exterior also shows great diligence and quality.

The remarkable duplication of the image program is not a single phenomenon, but a frequently occurring cross-regional iconographic peculiarity that reaches into the Later Middle Ages, lacking a systematic analysis so far. The outer side of the panels of the so-called Bosserode altarpiece (*c.* 1470–1480), now in the evangelical parish church of Bosserode (Wildeck) display a fairly exact effigy of the pietà inside, only in more restrained colors (Figs 3–4). The altarpiece is not intact; at some unknown time, the wings were dismantled and placed together

⁸ A similar point of view is presented in the Nativity scene on the interior of the wings: The Christ Child lies in an elevated position on the 'crib-altar' and looks downwards at Mary and Joseph as they kneel before him.

⁹ Roland Krischel has devoted particular attention to this question, see Krischel, 2008, pp. 102–109, and Krischel, 2014, pp. 83–86.

with the sculpture above the triumphal arch of the church.¹⁰ Since the painted depiction of the pietà came in direct contact with the humid wall, it has suffered the greatest loss of substance. As part of an extensive restoration, a simple wooden shrine was created and the painting was restored. Even with the panels severely damaged, the parallels between the depictions on the inside and on the outside are apparent. These are expressed above all in the posture of Christ and in the careful reproduction of the folds of Mary's veil. Similar to the *Kleiner Dom*, the visual impact increases when the altarpiece is open and enters the third dimension. Along with numerous similarities, both depictions display a number of evocative differences: for example, Mary's dark vestment on the exterior transforms into a vestment of golden tones when the altarpiece opens, and the wound in Christ's side gains plasticity. Painted depictions of the pietà are absolutely exceptional, which is why the image on the Bosserode altarpiece is a rarity and should be interpreted in light of this tabernacle altarpiece type.

Another example from the Later Middle Ages, the Holy Kinship altarpiece produced in Lübeck and now in St. Annen-Museum in that city, is an additional example that features a duplicate image (Figs 5–6) (Albrecht, ed., 2005, pp. 234–237). The shrine houses a sculpture of St Anne holding the holy child, who is handing an apple to the Virgin, standing to St Anne's right. When opened, the panels flanking the sculpture reveal images of the Holy Kinship.¹¹ When closed, they depict, in the already described manner of duplication, the Virgin and Child with St Anne – Mary and the holy child have interchanged positions. This time Mary hands the Christ Child a flower, a gesture that appears many times in the scenes on the inside of the panels.¹²

An explanation for this re-occurring déjà-vu effect in the context of tabernacle altarpieces may be found in the desire for a permanent visual presence of the venerated image, even outside the high holidays and local church feasts (Kemp, ed., 1989, p. 33). The literal repetition of images has been addressed only marginally by researchers. In his profound study, Wolfgang Kemp referred to its function as a 'painted substitute' of the venerated image within the ensemble

¹⁰ For an image of this presentation, see: <https://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20243348?medium=fm1501410&part=5> (retrieved September 2019). Dänekamp, 2019, p. 196.

¹¹ The upper left side shows Salomas and Joseph, the top right Joachim and Cleophas, the lower left side shows Zebedeus and Mary Salome with her children, James the Greater and John the Evangelist, the lower right side shows Alphaeus and Mary of Cleopas with her children: James the Less, Simon, Jude and Josephus Justus.

¹² The flowers are the red carnation (lat. *carnatio*), a symbol of the incarnation (Kuhn, 2018, p. 45, p. 142), and probably a white anemone, attributed to Mary.

(Kemp, ed., 1989, p. 33). The act of opening creates a special effect in which the plain two-dimensional painted surface of the image is literally ‘burst open’, letting it emerge in a three-dimensional shape. Its tangible plasticity and more abundant decoration, visible frontally and laterally, move closer to the reality of the spectator.

This raises the question of who witnessed the immediate transformation of the painting into a three-dimensional sculpture. If the altarpieces were designed for the church interior, in most cases it was the task of the sacristan to prepare them for the liturgy and, depending on the significance of the church feast, to additionally decorate them with candles and textiles. The opening and closing of the winged altarpieces was also amongst his tasks in the daily routine. A sacristan book dating from 1493, originating from the St. Lorenz parish church in Nuremberg, provides a vivid idea of the various alterations of the altarpieces (Gümbel, 1928). Precise instructions are given as to which state of transformation of the numerous altars of the church were prepared in advance and on which holidays.¹³ It can therefore be assumed that the priest and the religious community were confronted with an actual state – that is, either open or closed – of the altarpiece. A direct witnessing of the opening and closing of the altarpiece related to its veneration can only be assumed in the context of personal devotion.¹⁴ Even though the majority of viewers, primarily the religious community, were not present as the altar was opened and closed, they were certainly aware of the repetition of the image program, being much more familiar with the appearance of the closed shrine. Heike Schlie and Valerie Möhle examined the relationship between the mechanisms of veiling and unveiling using the example of the winged altarpiece and the complex associative relations among the differing layers of images (Schlie, 2004, pp. 23–43; Möhle, 2006, pp. 54–73). In this context, Möhle states that exact repetitions are rather exceptional in the case of winged altarpieces (Möhle 2006, p. 59). Analogies, parallels, and one view as a secondary version

¹³ Similar instructions are found in the sacristan book of the parish church St. Sebald in Nuremberg dating from 1482 (Gümbel, 1929).

¹⁴ In his analysis of the twofold depiction of the Annunciation on the interior and on the exterior of the *Kleiner Dom*, Roland Krischel assumes that the altarpiece was designated for personal devotion and pays special attention to the changed posture of the figures: when the altarpiece is open the standing Mary and Gabriel appear kneeling. Krischel interprets this occurrence as an instruction for the observer (a Franciscan nun) who is at the same time the operator of the opening and closing of the altarpiece to move in unison with the characters depicted (Krischel, 2014, p. 83), although a lack of information about the primary context and use of the object make it impossible to confirm this assumption.

of the other are much more common. This feature is one of the main differences of the winged altarpieces from the tabernacle altarpieces: repetitions are per se extrinsic to its system. Following the reflections of Schlie and Möhle, Dänekamp emphasizes the role of the viewer's memory in perceiving not only the similarities but mainly the differences between the duplicated images (Dänekamp, 2019, p. 199). Thus, she recognizes the potential of the object to intensify the contemplative immersion of the spectator. The more splendid appearance of an altarpiece's interior added to the interchanging of the figure's position or recurring motifs are seen precisely through comparative vision. Finally, it should be considered whether the repetition is a phenomenon that came to be associated increasingly with the genus of the tabernacle altarpiece over time.

2. THE 'SMALL' FRIEDBERG ALTARPIECE AND THE STAGING OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD

Another prominent example from the Rhine region are the so-called *Chapelle Cardon* and the 'small' Friedberg altarpiece, which house the enthroned Virgin and Child. The *Chapelle Cardon* (Fig. 16 Kroesen/Tångeberg, in this volume) dates from around 1400 and is named after the artist and collector Charles-Léon Cardon (1850–1920).¹⁵ Similar to the *Kleiner Dom*, this tabernacle altarpiece has a superstructure in the shape of a tower, which, however, is a later addition that may have been made by Cardon himself. It remains an open question whether a damaged former structure was integrated into a new one or whether a completely new design was created. Nevertheless, due to its proportions, the square base preserved from the original architectonic model suggests that the original tower had more slender proportions than those of the present form. The painting is the oeuvre of an artist who worked on the Lower Rhine, possibly in the region of Geldern or in the Duchy of Kleve, where the influence of Cologne and Flemish masters was noticeable.¹⁶ Cologne's influence can also be seen in the statue of the Virgin. Due to its small size, it is assumed that the altarpiece was designed as a

¹⁵ 0.99 x 0.59 cm, Louvre Paris, Inv. R.F. 1343. For the *Chapelle Cardon* see: *Vor Stefan Lochner...*, 1974, cat. 46, pp. 108–109; Foucart-Walter/Guillot de Suduiraut, 1990, pp. 73–75; Guillot de Suduiraut, 1992, pp. 65–68.

¹⁶ Another tabernacle altarpiece with similar dimensions in the collection of the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp (Inv. 359) shows stylistically comparable depictions on the interior wings, so that a provenance from the Meuse/Lower Rhine region can be assumed. The sculpture of the altarpiece ensemble is missing (*Vor Stefan Lochner...*, 1974, p. 109, cat. 48).

mobile object, to serve for personal devotion.¹⁷ On the inside of the panels scenes from the life of Mary are depicted, each scene extending over the area of both the inner and outer wings: the Annunciation and Visitation, the Nativity, and the Adoration of the Magi on the left side; and on the right the Flight into Egypt, the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple, the Massacre of the Innocents. The scene in the uppermost register of the outer right wing is difficult to interpret; currently only a solitary altar is depicted, perhaps originally the Fall of the Idols or the Circumcision. Most of the scenes extend over both segments of the wings, joining them like hinges and inviting an angled presentation of the wings in order to emphasize the connection between the protagonists. The symbiotic relationship between painting and sculpture is manifested in this example by integrating the sculpture into the plain level of painting. The Magi to the left side venerate the Virgin Mary directly; the sculpture is related to the back panel of the canopy by the punched halo and thus oscillates between the levels of painted and three-dimensional reality. When closed, the exterior of the wings picks up the compositional layout of the inner ones, although the images are lost today.¹⁸

The iconographic tradition of the *Chapelle Cardon* is reflected in the so-called 'small' Friedberg altarpiece from the Middle Rhine region (Figs 7–8). The shrine, dating from around 1420, is approximately a hundred years younger than the statue of the virgin. The question of whether sculpture and shrine originally belonged together is much-discussed in the research as described below. The ensemble was not documented until 1806 (Kappeler-Meyer, 2015, p. 4). Although there are no sources that would provide explicit information about the fabrication of the sculpture of the Virgin, the coherence of the figures seems natural. The differing dimensions of the two segments raised doubts at first; some authors explained them by the fact that the ensemble was created to be viewed from a

¹⁷ An interesting question to verify is whether the small compartments with tracery lattices in the base zone were used for the safekeeping and presentation of relics, analogous to the compartments in the previous example from Cologne.

¹⁸ A neglected aspect of tabernacle altarpieces is their appearance on the exterior. Only a small number of early tabernacle altarpieces are extant with objective painting on the exterior. Mostly they show non-figural decoration. For an examination of the exterior of early tabernacle altarpieces (1150–1350) see the pioneering study of Elisabeth Andersen (Andersen, 2015) and her study in the present publication. Andersen presents an altarpiece from Castile and León (c. 1275–1300, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, New York, Inv. 55.62 a, b, and 1977.94) which displays scenes from the Passion of Christ on its exterior. A similar iconography can be assumed for the missing depictions of the *Chapelle Cardon*, correlating with the mariological connotation of the interior design. Another possible interpretation is that a depiction of standing saints adorned the exterior.

strongly upward perspective (Woelk, ed., 1995, p. 29, and Gast 1998, p. 58); from this point of view the differences would vanish. Since the exhibition *Beschaffenheit des Himmels* (24 April to 22 July 2018) at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, there can no longer be doubts about the conceptual unity of shrine and sculpture. The museum team recognized and restored the foundation of the altar shrine and the pedestal for the sculpture (see Fig. 7).¹⁹ By thus raising the sculpture, it returned to its original position in the tabernacle shrine, with the head of the Virgin Mary matching the shape of the halo. The contours of the figure also correspond in the main to the recessed surface in the color of the shrine's back wall. Matters are quite different with the provenance of the ensemble from the parish church of Friedberg – a question which remains open. Friedrich Back related a venerated sculpture of Mary in the chapel of the Friedberg castle, described in the castle's chronicle, to the sculpture of the Virgin (Back, 1932, p. 213, note 17).²⁰ In this scenario the statue would have been exhibited without a tabernacle altarpiece in the chapel of the Friedberg castle. In 1383, the new choir of the castle's church, the main altar, other altars as well as a statue of Mary and Georg were inaugurated (Dieffenbach, 1857, p. 64) and relics were added to the sculpture of Mary, installed behind a round glass compartment in the chest (Gast, 1998, p. 58). Thomas Foerster assumes that this led to an increased flow of pilgrims, which resulted in the translation of the venerated sculpture to the city parish church and in 'equipping' it with a tabernacle shrine as a measure of better protection and richer presentation (Foerster, 2018, p. 252). Although his assumption is plausible, there is a lack of sources which would confirm an immediate connection between the translation of the sculpture and the creation of the tabernacle shrine. Irrespective of the exact date, however, enclosing the sculpture in the tabernacle shrine is an approach that makes explicit the suitability of such altarpieces for the preservation and veneration of a single sculpture. Traditionally, scenes from the life of Mary adorn the inner surface of the panels. Several representations of Christ's childhood appear on the inside of the shrine wings; they depict the Annunciation, the Visitation, Christ in the Temple, the Nativity and the Flight into Egypt in reverse order. Like other cases, most of the depictions stretch over both wing segments and gain plasticity if the outer wings are slightly

¹⁹ I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Foerster for this explanation.

²⁰ The so-called castle's chronik of Krafft von Rockenberg is only preserved in a transcription from Johann Philipp Dieffenbach dating from 1851. The transcription is nowadays kept in the university and regional library in Darmstadt (Hs. 3337). The Virgin is addressed as: *ymago beate Marie virginis*, quoted in Gast, 1998, p. 58.

closed (see Fig. 7). The scene of the Annunciation is well executed and appears on both the outer and inner surfaces of the wings. A notable detail on the exterior image is the canopy structure which adorns the throne of the virgin and at the same time resembles the three-dimensional architectonic structure of the interior. Further iconographic motifs connect the canopy shrine with the sculpture of Mary. A special art technological feature of the altar shrine is the high quality execution of the background.²¹ In a dense tendril mesh at the sides of the nimbus, birds are depicted that appear to be eagles holding pigeons. Below them, angels and hares grasping lions can be seen (Foerster 2018, p. 253). The microcosm of floral and animal motifs complements the depiction of the holy child, who is presented holding a bird in his hand (incompletely preserved).

The dialectic of plain surface and plasticity became more cultivated during the Early Modern age. A tabernacle altarpiece from c. 1510–1520 from the Lower Rhein or Flanders in the Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago depicts the Crucifixion of Christ as an illusionistic combination of plastic figures with deep spatial scenery painting (Krischel, 2008, p. 103). In contrast to the objects examined so far, painting and sculpture are not two related counterpoints but parts of the same layer of depiction, merging and forming different components of the same image.

3. CONCLUDING NOTES: THE FOLDING OF SPACE

This study was dedicated to the analysis of tabernacle altarpieces preserved in their entirety from the region of the Lower and Middle Rhine with the earliest preserved example dating from c. 1360 and a series of examples created after 1400. Tabernacle altarpieces were customary for a long time in the region of Middle Rhine, as the altarpiece in the chapel of Darsberg, dating from around 1460, shows (Figs 9–10) (Hartwig/Lüdke, 1994, p. 57; Droste, 2018, pp. 110 and 176–183).²² When opened like the previous examples, the inside of this well pre-

²¹ The back wall of the shrine is covered with *zwichgold* (a mixture of gold and silver) and decorated with complex brocade patterns. The animal motifs on the imitated fabric were repeated almost identically using templates. They were engraved in the primer layer before the *zwichgold* was applied; the spaces between them were additionally decorated with zigzag cuts. As a result, the patterns appear smooth and the background imitates the textile structure of fabric (Foerster, 2018, p. 261, note 65).

²² Form and motif intersections can be seen on an altarpiece from the end of the 15th century from Wachenheim an der Pfrimm. The altarpiece represents a hybrid form, a combination of a tabernacle

served altarpiece does not show scenes from the life of Mary but standing saints against a golden background,²³ with the Annunciation on the outside panels. Standing figures of saints can also be seen on the exterior face sides: Saints Valentin and Wendelin. Compared to earlier examples, the size is larger, probably also arising from the fact that large-scale tabernacle altarpieces from the thirteenth and fourteenth century are rarely preserved in their entity. A further peculiarity is the accent on all the sides of the outer shell, where the depiction emphasizes the three-dimensional structure of the shrine and invites the viewer to multiple points of view. Similarly, representations of SS Peter and Paul adorn the sides of the Bosserode altarpiece. In order to see all the images on the outside, the viewer would have to explore the space around the object. Only then can the viewer see the apostles witnessing the lamentation of Mary.

Furthermore, one should consider the multiple variations on the opening of the panels. They are normally perceived according to their museum presentation: fully opened and resembling the plain surface of a retable. Yet their construction allows for a broader range of possibilities. Less attention has been given to the variations of angled openings and the resulting new connections between scenes from the iconographic programs. For example, if we imagine the tabernacle altarpiece from Darsberg with the side wings angled in, we would be witnessing an interesting variation of a *sacra conversazione*: the saints would encircle the sculpture of Mary. For the *Chapelle Cardon* and for the *Kleiner Dom* it was already noted above that the context of the image program unfolds completely with the wings angled slightly closed.

At the conclusion of this brief study the question remains as to the reasons for the long durability of tabernacle altarpieces alongside newer forms such as winged altarpieces. The abundant number of preserved examples up until the end of the 15th century, also beyond the Rhineland and particularly in Sweden, shows explicitly that this was still a popular altarpiece type. The elegant open construction of a canopy is perfectly suitable to establishing a border between the framed object and its surrounding environment, at the same time emphasizing its prominence and allowing its three dimensionality to stay visible and tangible. Therefore, the shell of a tabernacle served as a primary motif of cult presentation

and a winged altarpiece; its shrine features only one pair of wings. It was probably created for the former parish church of St. Remigius by a master from the nearest art center – Worms (Schedl, 2016, pp. 64–69). For an image see: <https://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20327267?part=3&medium=fm1456179> (retrieved September 2019).

²³ On the left side are St Nicolaus and St Catherine, on the right side St Barbara and St Sebastian.

throughout the centuries (Fuchß, 1999, p. 140). On the one side, the convenient format of tabernacle altarpieces made them perfect for exhibition in side chapels, as a segment of multipart altarpiece ensembles or for private meditation; on the other hand, their specific form allowed the presentation and concentration of devotion on one single venerated sculpture, whose value, as the examples have shown, was additionally occasionally underlined by the effect of duplication of the iconographic program. Modes of concealing or displaying objects were central among the strategies of medieval art. This enhanced and controlled the sacredness of these objects by preventing the permanent visual accessibility. Tabernacle altarpieces also embody the potential of transformation inherent in every winged altarpiece, yet some of them offering a different approach by applying the effect of duplication. Thus a modified image of the venerated sculpture implied its presence at all times in the closed tabernacle.

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Fig. 1. The so-called *Kleiner Dom*, Cologne, c. 1360, 147.5 x 123.5 cm, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, on loan from Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfond, Inv. L-MA 1968 a-d, opened, © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, Fotos: Haberland, Walter.



Fig. 2. The so-called *Kleiner Dom*, Cologne, c. 1360, 147.5 x 123.5 cm, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, on loan from Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfond, Inv. L-MA 1968 a-d, closed, © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, Fotos: Haberland, Walter.



Fig. 3. Bosserode altarpiece, c. 1470-1480, 121.5 x 101 x 29 cm (sculpture), 178 x 96 cm (left double wing), 178 x 92 cm (right double wing), parish church of Bosserode, Wildeck (Kreis Hersfeld-Rotenburg), opened, © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Dagmar Peil.



Fig. 4. Bosserode altarpiece, *c.* 1470-1480, 121.5 x 101 x 29 cm (sculpture), 178 x 96 cm (left double wing), 178 x 92 cm (right double wing), parish church of Bosserode, Wildeck (Kreis Hersfeld-Rotenburg), closed, © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Uwe Gaasch.



Fig. 5. Holy Kinship altarpiece, late 15th century, 131 x 57.5 x 29 cm (shrine), 118 x 20 cm (wings), St. Annen-Museum Lübeck, Inv. 20, opened, © St. Annen-Museum Lübeck/Fotoarchiv.



Fig. 6. Holy Kinship altarpiece, late 15th century,
131 x 57.5 x 29 cm (shrine), 118 x 20 cm (wings),
St. Annen-Museum Lübeck, Inv. 20, closed,
© St. Annen-Museum Lübeck/Fotoarchiv.



Fig. 7. The so-called 'small' Friedberg altarpiece, Middle Rhine (probably Frankfurt), *c.* 1325/50 (sculpture) and *c.* 1420 (shrine), 78.5 x 34.5 x 25.5 cm (sculpture), 120 x 240 cm (shrine when opened), Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Inv. GK 2, opened, © Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Foto: Wolfgang Fuhrmannek.



Fig. 8. The so-called 'small' Friedberg altarpiece, Middle Rhine (probably Frankfurt), c. 1325/50 (sculpture) and c. 1420 (shrine), 78.5 x 34.5 x 25.5 cm (sculpture), 120 x 240 cm (shrine when opened), Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Inv. GK 2, closed, © Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Foto: Wolfgang Fuhrmannek.



Fig. 9. Darsberg altarpiece, Middle Rhine, *c.* 1460,
 105 x 33 x 25 cm (sculpture), 141 x 60 x 30 cm (shrine), 124 x 30 cm (wings),
 chapel of Darsberg, Neckarsteinach, opened
 © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Christian Stein.



Fig. 10. Darsberg altarpiece, Middle Rhine, c. 1460,
 105 x 33 x 25 cm (sculpture), 141 x 60 x 30 cm (shrine), 124 x 30 cm (wings),
 chapel of Darsberg, Neckarsteinach, closed
 © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg/Christian Stein.



CENTRAL ITALIAN ‘TABERNACULA’: A SURVEY*

ESTUDIO DE LOS “TABERNACULA” DE LA ITALIA CENTRAL

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide an in-depth survey of grand-scale medieval Italian tabernacles and other types of closing altarpieces with all of their wings – or substantial parts thereof – still preserved (1200–1435). Most such altarpieces, enclosing a statue of the Virgin Mary or a Saint, come from the culturally homogeneous and generally conservative regions of the Central Apennines, in particular from Abruzzo. Structure, provenance, original location, function, patronage, iconography are only a few of the many questions raised by the surviving examples here discussed within a broader European frame. Notwithstanding the great variety and composite character of medieval altar furnishings, three major types of medieval Italian closing retables will be here described – according to Claude Lapaire’s formal classification (1969 and 1972): the tabernacle-altarpiece in the strict sense of the word, i.e. an open ciborium with the pedestal, rear wall, and canopy, equipped with carved or painted bi-fold wings; the polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece (‘le retable à tabernacle polygonal’); and the cupboard-altarpiece (‘le retable en forme d’armoire’). In Central Apennine regions all of these types coexisted throughout the fourteenth century at least, resisting the spread of Tuscan polyptychs.

Keywords

Tabernacle-altarpieces, polygonal tabernacle-altarpieces, cupboard-altarpieces, Medieval Italy, Central Apennine, Abruzzo, Umbria, sculpture, painting

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Resumen

Este trabajo pretende ofrecer un estudio en profundidad de los retablos-tabernáculo medievales italianos de gran tamaño y de otro tipo de retablos cerraderos que aún conservan todos sus paneles o partes sustanciales de los mismos (1200-1435). La mayor parte de estos retablos, que albergaban una imagen de la Virgen María o de algún santo, proceden de las regiones culturalmente homogéneas y, por lo general, conservadoras de los Apeninos Centrales, en particular de los Abruzos. Estructura, procedencia, localización original, función, promoción, iconografía... son solo algunas de las muchas cuestiones que suscitan los ejemplos conservados, que aquí se planterán en un contexto europeo más amplio. A pesar de la gran variedad y del carácter compuesto del mobiliario de altar medieval, aquí se describirán tres tipos principales de retablos medievales italianos cerraderos, de acuerdo con la clasificación formal de Claude Lapaire (1969 y 1972): el retablo-tabernáculo en el sentido estricto de la expresión (esto es, un baldaquino abierto con pedestal, panel posterior y dosel que está dotado de alas abatibles talladas o pintadas); el retablo-tabernáculo poligonal (“le retable à tabernacle polygonal”); y el retablo en forma de armario (“le retable en forme d’armoire”). En las regiones de los Apeninos Centrales todos estos tipos coexistieron al menos a lo largo del siglo XIV, resistiendo frente a la difusión de los polípticos toscanos.

Palabras clave

Retablo-tabernáculo, retablo-tabernáculo poligonal, retablo en forma de armario, Italia medieval, Apeninos Centrales, Abruzos, Umbría, escultura, pintura

I. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘tabernacle-altarpiece’ usually refers to a combination of a wooden sculpture of a Madonna or Saint, an architecturally-structured receptacle, equipped with movable wings, and relief or painted figures and scenes. Precious pigments and metallic foils glazed to simulate brocade, freehand incision and punching of gilded surfaces often embellish the most ambitious examples; arising from the intersection of different materials and techniques, tabernacles are, thus, a highly eloquent example of the composite character of medieval art.¹

¹ On tabernacles and closing altarpieces in general: Frinta, 1967; Lapaire, 1969; Lapaire, 1972; Krüger, 1992, pp. 17–24; Le Pogam/Vivet-Pecllet, eds, 2009, pp. 54 and 60–62; Kroesen, 2014a, pp.

The description of the intermedial nature of these objects would be incomplete without mentioning the liturgical and paraliturgical function of closing altarpieces – the so-called *tabernacula* in medieval European and early modern sources.² But this is exactly the most elusive aspect of such artifacts. Written and visual documents are mostly silent on this matter, perhaps because ritual practices focused on this kind of objects were so common that there was no need to codify them.³

Since most tabernacles have been fragmented and dispersed, and almost all surviving sculptures removed from their original context, it is extremely difficult to establish where and how these complexes were once located. Not always intended for the main altar,⁴ tabernacles and other closing altarpieces are supposed to have been constantly closed during Lent and opened on major feast days. The presence of wings also painted on the exterior suggests that the image-shrine was not considered a temporary liturgical and devotional object to be removed from the altar at the end of the feast, but a permanent element of the altar furnishings (Andersen, 2015).

Madonna and Saints tabernacles existed in all parts of Europe, but very few intact examples are still preserved, mostly concentrated in peripheral regions of the continent – Scandinavia, Castile and Central Apennine Italy.⁵

2. STUDIES

Italian medieval tabernacle-altarpieces or substantial parts of them are scarce today and often situated in a context very different from the original one. Only in

23–26; Kroesen, 2014b, pp. 162–164. On the multimedial nature of tabernacles: Kroesen/Schmidt, 2009b, pp. 6–7.

² The 1360 inventory of the Papal treasure in Avignon mentions 'Tabernaculum beate Marie cum ymagine beate Marie et quibusdam ymaginibus de ligno': Hoberg, ed., 1944, p. 385. In 1416 the Apostolic Visitor Gillaren sees on the main altar of the parish church of La Salle (Valle d'Aosta, Italy) 'pulchra ymago Beatae Marie in presepio cum pluribus ymaginibus et tabernaculo clauso': Rossetti Brezzi, 2003, p. 41. See also below, fn. 41. The tabernacle-altarpiece must not to be confused with the Eucharistic 'tabernaculum'.

³ On origin, typology, and liturgical-functional issues of the medieval altarpieces: Fuchß, 1999; Schmidt, 2006; De Marchi, 2009; *Les premiers retables*, 2009; Kroesen/Schmidt, eds, 2009a.

⁴ On side-altars: Kroesen, 2010; Kroesen, 2014a; Kroesen, 2014b.

⁵ On Scandinavian tabernacles-altarpieces: Tångeberg, 1989, 32–41, 130–135; Tångeberg 2009; Andersen, 2015. On Castilian tabernacles: Kroesen, 2009; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018. On Italian tabernacles see below, § 2.

extremely rare cases documents and sources mention the structure of these complex objects, which are presumed to have existed in a much larger number than the surviving examples. In most cases, the statue, once placed inside the architectural receptacle, is now separated from the wings, and displayed in churches or museums as an isolated piece of art.

Italian tabernacles as a part of this specific category of medieval altar furnishings appear first in a 1967 article by Mojmir Frinta, who discusses southern European examples from the thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century. The Czech scholar defines them as ‘wooden tabernacles with movable walls formed by panels painted on both sides, or provided with polychromed reliefs on their interior faces. Their principle is a combination of devotional sculpture with narrative painting disposed on hinged panels’ (Frinta, 1967, p. 104).

Italian image-shrines are more extensively discussed in 1969 article by Claude Lapaire, who defines tabernacles as ‘retables en bois consistant en un baldaquin qui abrite une statue et est muni de quatre à six volets pouvant l’envelopper entièrement’ (Lapaire, 1969, p. 69). The Swiss scholar’s article points out that the most ancient and complete ‘retable à baldaquin’ in Europe is the tabernacle of Alatri, in Southern Lazio. In a second 1972 article he describes the Madonna altarpiece of Fossa (L’Aquila) as the most ancient example of a polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece surviving in Europe (Lapaire, 1972, pp. 46–47).

A first systematic approach to form and function of Italian Madonna or Saint shrines comes from Klaus Krüger’s 1992 book on the first cult images of St Francis of Assisi in Italy, in which he includes a chapter specifically focused on tabernacle-altarpieces. In the appendix to this study, the German scholar provides a catalogue of 73 Italian Marian shrines, most of which with only the wooden statue and the rear wall – often gabled – preserved.

After Krüger’s study, though, research on Italian medieval tabernacles as a part of a specific genre of medieval altarpieces has remained scarce – apart from the recent methodological notes of Andrea De Marchi (2018) –,⁶ while wooden sculptures of Madonnas and Saints as isolated artworks have been increasingly become the object of scholarly debate. Following suggestions from Italian schol-

⁶ De Marchi, 2018, pp. 43 and 46, expresses skepticism about the origin of Franciscan hagiographical altarpieces from Marian tabernacles; he hypothesizes that Byzantine hagiographical icons of the thirteenth century on the one hand, monumental twelfth-century triptychs with closeable doors from Lazio on the other may have favored the rise of tabernacle-altarpieces.

ars Giovanni Previtali and Corrado Fratini (Previtali, 1965, 1966, 1970, 1976, 1984 and 1986; Fratini, 1998 and 1999), Alessandro Delpriori has recently provided a detailed survey of wooden Madonnas and Saints produced between the second half of thirteenth century and the fourteenth century in the territory of Spoleto (Umbria) and other parts of Central Apennine Italy – southern Marche and northern Abruzzi especially (Delpriori, 2015). He has gathered most of them in stylistically homogeneous groups, emphasizing how tabernacles with a Madonna or Saint statue enclosed and narrative scenes painted on hinged wings may have been produced in workshops able to provide both painting and sculpture.⁷

As a matter of fact, no Italian tabernacle has remained intact, except the Marian shrine from Alatri; substantial fragments of tabernacles from Aosta, Pale, and Fossa (the last two documented in their entirety only through photos) survive together with a few other examples discussed here or even presented for the first time.

In the following pages I will concentrate on early grand-scale tabernacles, most of which come from Abruzzo, a region on the northern boundaries of the Kingdom of Sicily. I will not only discuss 'tabernacles' *stricto sensu* (*retables à baldaquin* in French; *Baldachinaltäre* in German), but also lesser-known Italian examples of 'retables à tabernacle polygonal' and 'retables en forme d'armoire' – to use Lapaire's words. In fact, these three early types of receptacles (all with a single statue and a pair of bi-fold wings or doors) seem to have coexisted in fourteenth-century Central Apennine regions.

Especially by virtue of Previtali's studies, current Italian scholarship generally considers the adjective 'Umbrian' or 'Umbro-Abruzzese' applicable to the whole geographic area, with no distinctions of medieval and modern political boundaries (Previtali, 1976 and 1984, 1986). In fact, linguistic and cultural homogeneity is peculiar to those territories that lie 'at the left of the Tiber river' (Previtali, 1984), including the upper Tiber valley, Assisi, Spoleto, southern Marche, northern Abruzzo, and inland parts of Lazio. For a long time, this area resisted the spread of polyptychs, which were instead common in Umbria 'at the right of the Tiber river' (i.e. Perugia and Orvieto), a territory much more receptive to Tuscan models.

⁷ In this regard, see also the catalogue entries of the 2018 exhibition in Montefalco, Spoleto, and Trevi: Garibaldi/Delpriori, eds, 2018, nos 32–33, 57 and 59.

3. MARIAN TABERNACLES WITH A PAIR OF BI-FOLD WINGS AND RELIEF SCENES

3.1. *The Madonna di Costantinopoli in Alatri (first half of the thirteenth century)*

So far, the altarpiece in the collegiate church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Alatri (southern Lazio) is the oldest European tabernacle with the Marian sculpture (c. 155 x 47 x 36 cm) and all four wings (c. 169 x 42 x 3 cm each) conserved (Fig. 1).⁸ On stylistic grounds, the whole altarpiece has been dated to the first decades of thirteenth century.⁹ Written sources do not predate the 1685 pastoral visit, which does not mention the artefact on the main altar of the church (Salvadori, 2016, p. 23). At that time the Madonna shrine was probably already placed inside the seventeenth-century chapel – the first in the left aisle – where it remains today. On the exterior of the wings is a late baroque decoration with monograms of the Virgin Mary, most likely painted over a previous decoration. In fact, the Madonna was ‘restaurata’ (restored) in 1745, as is legible in the inscription on the pedestal of the throne.¹⁰

As in many Scandinavian and Spanish tabernacles with figures in relief, the narrative scenes of the Alatri wings appear in niches (Andersen, 2015, p. 171); more precisely, in quadrangular compartments arranged in three lines on each panel. Only three of the six inscriptions still visible on the horizontal battens dividing the scenes are legible. The reliefs comprise not only eleven episodes of the *Infancy of Christ*, but also the *Baptism of Christ* on the top of the right side-wing and the *Dormitio Virginis* at the bottom of the same panel. The two scenes interrupt the chronological sequence of the gospel narration (vertical, from top to bottom, left to right) to introduce a second thematic sequence (horizontal, in three rows overlapped by reliefs, from left to right). The first row focuses on the action of the Holy Spirit, the second on the humanity of Jesus Christ, the third on his regality (Salvadori, 2016, 112–113). Exactly for this purpose, great emphasis is attributed to the *Journey and Adoration of the Magi*, which occupy the two lower consecutive panels of the left wing, as well as to the *Dream of the Magi*, on the right side-wing.

⁸ Fogolari, 1903; Della Pergola, 1949; Salvadori, 2016. Curzi, 2014a, pp. 27–30, dates the Madonna of Alatri in the last two decades of the twelfth century.

⁹ De Fràncovich, 1943, pp. 12–13; Della Pergola, 1949; Salvadori, 2016, pp. 127–128.

¹⁰ Salvadori, 2016, p. 124, is of the opinion that the wings were originally fixed; they would have become movable only in the eighteenth century. Such a conclusion hardly fits to what is generally known about the history of conservation of this kind of artefacts.

The placement of *Adoration of the Magi* at the base of the left side-wing, in direct dialogue with the three-dimensional effigy of the Virgin and Child, will become customary throughout Europe (Lapaire, 1969, p. 181; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 60). Episodes from the apocryphal tradition of *Dormitio-Coronatio Virginis* appear in later Castilian Madonna-shrines of Castildegado, Yurre, and so-called Chiale.¹¹

3.2. Aosta tabernacle wings (second quarter of the fourteenth century)

The Madonna shrine of Alatri is the only surviving Italian tabernacle with relief scenes on the interior of the wings along with the Marian altarpiece from Santo Stefano in Aosta (Turin, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, 139 x 175 cm), which, however, is much later than the Alatri retable; on stylistic grounds, in fact, it is dated about mid-fourteenth century (Rossetti Brezzi, 2003) (Fig. 2).

All four panels of the wings must have been originally cusped, as can be inferred from the shape of their cut-off top. Similarly to the Alatri altarpiece, the evangelic episodes are placed in niches – two rows of double pointed arches, decorated with quatrefoils – and the adoring Magi are represented at the bottom of the left side-wing while offering their gifts directly to the lost three-dimensional effigy of the Virgin (Lapaire, 1969, p. 181).¹² Differently from the Alatri shrine, the Aosta wings include only scenes of the *Infancy of Christ*.

In the second decade of the sixteenth century the exterior of the Aosta wings was repainted with the figures of the Archangel Gabriel and Virgin Annunciate on the half-wings, a Saint Bishop on both side-wings; today only the Virgin and the Saint on the right wing panels are still visible (Rossetti Brezzi, 2003, p. 43). The repainting demonstrates that the panels still continued to function as the foldable wings of a tabernacle-altarpiece on the eve of the Lutheran Reformation.

¹¹ Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 58–64, discusses the unusual iconography of the aforesaid tabernacles with the *Annunciation* represented after the *Adoration of the Magi*.

¹² The small-scale Madonna-shrine in the Moravská Galerie of Brno (c. 49 cm in height), produced in the first half of the fourteenth century within the context of the Neapolitan Franciscan devotion (Lucherini, 2014), has a pair of bi-fold wings; images of saints and two episodes from Bonaventura's *Legenda Maior* (*St Francis receiving the Stigmata* and *St Francis Preaching to the Birds*) are painted inside trefoil niches. *St Francis Preaching to the Birds* occupies two upper consecutive panels of the left wing. In addition, the adoring Magi are painted one each inside the niches at the bottom of the same wing.

4. MADONNA OR SAINT TABERNACLES WITH PAINTED BI-FOLD-WINGS

4.1. *The Marian tabernacle of the Museo Diocesano in Foligno (1320–1330)*

The Aosta tabernacle remains wholly isolated in fourteenth-century Italy, because all closeable coeval tabernacles – surviving intact or in parts – are concentrated in Central Apennine regions.

The tabernacle of the Museo Diocesano in Foligno comes from the hermitage church of Santa Maria Giacobbe in the village of Pale di Foligno, Umbria (Fig. 14 Kroesen/Tångeberg, in this volume). The image shrine remained there until 1964, when it was transferred to the parish church of San Biagio. Unfortunately, on March 27th 1974, the wings were stolen; only six fragments thereof (35 x 22 cm each) have been retrieved (Garibaldi/Delpriori, eds, 2018, p. 336, no 57: entry by Veronica Picchiarelli), and just one photo taken before the theft shows the tabernacle in its entirety (Fig. 3).

The artefact consisted of a rear wall with a flat canopy, a plinth on which the wooden Madonna (147 x 44 cm) was placed, and a pair of bi-fold wings attached by hinges. The obsessively repeated couple of birds on the background of the three-dimensional Marian effigy as well as on the painted tablets with the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Magi* is most probably a heraldic allusion to the donor of the altarpiece.

The interior of the wings had tempera figures on a gold background arranged in four tiers: on the left wing, from top to bottom, *St Peter the Apostle* and an Angel with a censer, the *Annunciation*, the *Nativity of Christ*, and the *Adoration of the Magi*; on the right wing, from top to bottom, *St Paul the Apostle* and an Angel with a censer, the *Arrest of Christ*, the *Flagellation*, and the *Crucifixion*. Each evangelical episode occupied both boards of the wing; therefore only one open position was probably expected, i.e. with the wings completely unfolded. Of course, also another position was possible, i.e. only with the front wings folded to the side; in this case, the focus would have been concentrated exclusively on the Marian statue.

The cycle of the Passion of Christ on the right wing suggests that the altar shrine may have been somehow involved in the Holy Week rites, in addition to the liturgical season of Christmas. The union of the Mother and the Son in the work of redemption of humanity is explicated through the painted panels emphasizing Christ's virginal conception on one side, and his death, on the other side. At the same time, the dogma is also summarized by the enthroned Marian effigy at the center of the complex. Outside Italy, the late thirteenth-

century Wildenstein retable from Castile-León (New York, The Cloisters) is the only early tabernacle-altarpiece to display episodes of the Passion (and Resurrection) of Christ, which significantly are painted on the exterior of the wings as a complement to the now-lost inner reliefs of the Infancy of Christ.¹³

On stylistic grounds, both the wooden Madonna and painted evangelical episodes have been convincingly attributed to the Umbran 'Cesi Master', also responsible for the St Christina tabernacle in the Museo Diocesano of Spoleto (Delpriori, 2015, pp. 133–134).

4.2. *The St Christina tabernacle in the Museo Diocesano at Spoleto (c. 1330)*

The wooden statue of the martyr Christina of Bolsena, nailed to the back panel (127 x 44 x 22 cm) painted with quadrangles enclosing geometric and phytomorphic motifs (Fig. 4), was found in the cave church dedicated to the saint near the village of Caso, in Umbria (Fratini, 1999, pp. 44–47). In the 1712 pastoral visit of Carlo Giacinto Lascaris, bishop of Spoleto, the three-dimensional effigy is described as enclosed in a tabernacle shrine with scenes from the life of the saint (Fratini, 1999, p. 46). Five panels painted with episodes of the hagiographical legend, stylistically compatible with the polychrome surface of the statue, were recently retraced.¹⁴ Each scene extends over a couple of boards; which allows us to conclude that the back panel must have once been equipped with a canopy and a pair of bi-fold wings, like the Marian tabernacle of Pale. It is also probably in this case, then, that only one open position was expected, i.e. with the wings completely unfolded.

4.3. *The Pinacoteca Capitolina Wings (1376–1378)*

As in the case of the St Christina altarpiece, a crucial aid for reconstructing a dismembered tabernacle comes from a stylistic and iconographic analysis of the surviving fragments of the painted wings. Five of the six fourteenth-century tem-

¹³ Frinta, 1967, pp. III–III2; Andersen, 2015, p. 172; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 56.

¹⁴ The inscriptions on two tempera panels, which once were a part of the left wing, bear the names of Urbanus, the father of Christina, and of the Saint herself, respectively: Delpriori, 2015, pp. 135–136.

pera panels in the Pinacoteca Capitolina, belonging to a pair of bi-fold wings were acquired in the 1930s from the Sterbini collection in Rome (Guarino, ed., 2006). The sixth panel with the *Adoration of the Magi* is in a private collection and known only through a photograph (Nimmo, 1975, fig. 6; Bologna, 1996, fig. 499).

Different from most surviving central Italian Marian tabernacles, the wings show episodes only from the infancy of Christ. On the left wing, from top to bottom, the *Annunciation* (59 x 52 cm), the *Nativity* (53 x 52 cm), and the *Adoration of Magi*; on the right, from top to bottom, the *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* (59 x 52 cm), the *Flight into Egypt* (50 x 53 cm), and the *Massacre of the Innocents* (53 x 53 cm) (Fig. 5). The top of the half-wings is shaped like a right triangle so that the front of the tabernacle appeared gabled when closed.

A painted fragmentary inscription running through the reverse of the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* and the *Flight into Egypt* bears the date ‘an(n)o. D(omi)nj m.ccc.lxxv.i’,¹⁵ with some space enough for other two letters ‘ii’. The evangelic scenes have been convincingly attributed to the anonymous ‘Master of Campli’ (Teramo, Abruzzo), who in the third quarter of fourteenth-century executed the mural paintings in the crypt of the collegiate church in Campli and the stone baldachin of a side-altar ciborium placed at the right of the counter-façade of the church of San Francesco in the same town.¹⁶

Campli lies on the east side of the Laga Mountains; on the opposite side, at Amatrice, the church of San Francesco hosted until the 2016 earthquake a vast fresco cycle painted by the same Master. The painter’s activity was effectively confined to this territory at the northern boundaries of the Angevin Kingdom of Sicily, so the Capitolini wings may come from one of the altars of the aforementioned churches, two of which belong to Franciscans.

The stylistic similarities between the Capitolini tempera panels and the polychrome surface of the Madonnas and Saints carved and painted in the *atelier* of the ‘Master of the Gualino St Catherine’¹⁷ suggest the hypothesis that Capitolini wings may have enclosed one of the many three-dimensional Marian effigies by

¹⁵ See the photo of the reverse of the *Nativity* panel in Nimmo, 1975, p. 13, fig. 3; Nimmo erroneously transcribes ‘DM’, instead of ‘DNI’ (*ibid.*, p. 15).

¹⁶ Bologna, 1996; Tartuferi, 2000; Pasqualetti, 2003, pp. 2–6.

¹⁷ Previtali (1965, 1966, 1970 and 1984) has repeatedly emphasized the interaction between wood carving, preparation coat, and painting in the effigies attributed to the ‘Master of the Gualino St Catherine’.

the anonymous artist; for example, something similar to the *Madonna* from the Cathedral of Teramo.¹⁸

4.4. *The St Eustace tabernacle from Campo di Giove (c. 1380)*

Abundant information is available on the image shrine from the parish church of Sant'Eustachio in Campo di Giove, a village in the vast province of L'Aquila, south of Sulmona. The couple of bi-fold wings of the altarpiece were stolen in 1902, then dismembered into panels as the sixteen painted scenes of the life of Eustace, the patron saint of Campo di Giove. Only the wooden statue remained in the original church; today, it is on deposit at the Episcopal Palace of Sulmona (Nicoletti, 2008 and 2014). Three of the sixteen tablets are in the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila;¹⁹ all of the other scenes are currently in different private collections. On stylistic grounds, the tempera panels of the wings have been dated to c. 1380, and attributed to the same painter of the *Stories of St Francis of Assisi* depicted around 1394 on the walls of the chapel of the noble Celano family in the church of the Minorites in Castelvechio Subequo, L'Aquila (Pasqualetti, 2008 and 2014).

According to the reports of Abruzzese art historians, the tabernacle was an aedicula-shaped shrine (c. 191 x 65 x 24 cm) crowned by a flat canopy (De Nino, 1902; Piccirilli, 1903). The top of the front and sides of the canopy were carved in the shape of trefoil arches. On the canopy, a triangular gable (h. 26 cm) painted with the Eternal Father was carved with ascending leaves. A 1890 black and white photo by Piccirilli shows only the wings (Piccirilli, 1903, p. 216) (Fig. 6). Each wing (side-wings: 33 cm in width; half-wings: 26 cm in width) had four tiers of four scenes; every scene was framed by a round arch, except for the upper scenes, which were taller and framed by trefoil pointed-arches. Differently from the hagiographical tabernacle from Caso, the scenes of the life of St Eustace did not extend over both panels of a wing, but each episode was limited by the width of the single panel. Antonio De Nino specified that the tabernacle was 'at left of the high altar, placed into a sixteenth-century altar' (Nicoletti, 2014, p. 76). Unfortunately, it remains unknown whether this was the original location of the tabernacle.

¹⁸ At present the Marian effigy is preserved in the Episcopal Palace chapel of Teramo: Arbace, 2010.

¹⁹ At present on display at the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Sacra della Marsica, Celano (L'Aquila).

4.5. *The tabernacle with the Infancy of Christ from Sant'Orante in Ortucchio (Avezzano) (1435)*

In 1876, the tabernacle enclosing a terracotta *Vesperbild* was mentioned for the first time by the historian Angelo Leosini, who was an inspector of the *Commissione Conservatrice* of L'Aquila (Nardecchia, 2006, pp. 105–106). Before 1892, the *aedicula* alone was transferred to the church of San Rocco in Ortucchio, then to the town hall (Nardecchia, 2006, pp. 108–109 and 129), while the sculpture remained in Sant'Orante until the 1915 Marsica earthquake, that reduced the fragile artefact to pieces (Nardecchia, 2006, p. 108, fn. 79). Instead, the *aedicula* was transported in 1916 to the Museo Civico of Sulmona, where it is still today. The artefact, which is only 115 x 75 x 40 cm, is probably the best-preserved grand-scale Italian tabernacle structure; it is also the only with both the date and signature of the author on the wings (Figs 7–9). In fact, on the exterior of the left half-wing there is a painted inscription: 'hoc · opus · pins[it] · johannes · pictor · d[e] · sulmona · anno · domini · millesimo · [cccc · xxx · v ·]'.²⁰ The painter is one of the *petit-mâîtres* of the flourishing Abruzzese late-gothic art, whose *corpus* includes a second tabernacle unfortunately lost, but described by nineteenth-century local authors.²¹

The Ortucchio altarpiece has a rectangular base and a rear wall closed on three sides, equipped with a pair of bi-fold wings. The top of the half-wings is right-triangle shaped, so the front of the tabernacle appears gabled when closed. The front of the canopy is carved in the shape of a trefoil pointed arch; its top has non-original carved crenellations, probably as a substitute for a deteriorated crowning element (Molinari, 1987, p. 134). The sides of the canopy are carved into rounded arches with gables on the top (non-original on the right side) (*ibid.*). The interior of the back panel, which consists of two vertical boards, is painted with a *double-face* red and blue drape; the lateral walls of the *aedicula* are

²⁰ The complete date was read by De Nino, 1887, pp. 33–34.

²¹ At the end of the nineteenth century the now-lost tabernacle was on the altar of the second chapel on the right aisle of the church. The chapel still had a medieval structure with mural paintings. The altar shrine enclosed a wooden statue of St John the Baptist, now in the Museo Civico of Sulmona. On the semi-octagonal base of the statue there was an inscription with the name '[Johanne] de Sulmona' and the year 'MCCCCXXXX' (both vanished). The *aedicula* was 168 cm in height, 54 cm in width (closed). The interior of the bi-fold wings was painted with four *Stories of St John the Baptist*. Immediately after the 1915 earthquake, the right wing with the *Herod's Banquet* and the *Decollation of the Baptist* was found among the debris of the church, but it never arrived at the Museo Civico in Sulmona: Nardecchia, 2006, pp. 106–108 and 129–135.

decorated with vegetal volutes; a starry blue sky is painted on the flat ceiling of the canopy. The folding wings are painted on both sides: the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Annunciate are depicted on the reverse of the half-wings; traces of geometric motifs are still visible on the exterior of the side-wings. The *Infancy of Christ* is painted on the interior of the wings: the *Nativity* on the left wing and the *Adoration of the Magi* on the right one. Since each scene extends over both panels of the wing, in this case the expected open position may have also been with the wings completely unfolded.

5. PENTAGONAL TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES

In his 1969 and 1972 articles Claude Lapaire was the first to remark that the Madonna altarpiece from Fossa (L'Aquila) is the oldest surviving example of a polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, an intermediate form between the 'retable à baldaquin', with four or six wings, and the 'retable en forme d'armoire', a cupboard-like altarpiece enclosing a statue (Lapaire, 1969, p. 180; Lapaire, 1972, pp. 46–49). The scholar considers the pentagonal tabernacle-altarpiece a kind of adaptation of the 'static' tabernacle-altarpiece to the fourteenth-century search for perspective and visual depth. The polygonal base, with an angle acute pointed towards the viewer, and the divergence of the side walls of the wide-open niche conform with the illusionistic painting of the Fossa tabernacle in order to evoke a three-dimensional space. This is a key issue, since to the best of my knowledge the Madonna of Fossa and the preceding tabernacle from Scurcola (L'Aquila) are the only surviving examples of this typology from fourteenth-century Italy. Might the polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece be considered a sort of response of the artists active in conservative Central Apennine territories to the difficult challenge represented by illusionistic painting of Giotto and Simone Martini in the Lower Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi?

5.1. *The Madonna tabernacle from the abbey church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Scurcola Marsicana (c. 1335)*

According to a legend passed on by local historians, the Marian tabernacle (Figs 10–11) was found in 1525 in the ruins of the cistercian abbey church, founded in 1274 by Charles I d'Anjou to commemorate his victory against Conradin of Swabia in the 1268 battle of Tagliacozzo (Febonio, 1678, p. 183; Corsignani, 1738, pp. 332–34). Corsignani specifies that at the moment of discovery the wooden sculp-

ture of the Blessed Virgin was enclosed in a walnut box decorated with Angevin lilies. The box was ‘fatta a forma di triangolo’ (triangle-shaped) and enclosed in a larger wooden chest. Both boxes and the Madonna statue were transferred into a newly founded church of the same name in the village of Scurcola, where the chests were recorded still in the eighteenth century.²²

Separated from the tabernacle after the 1915 Marsica earthquake, the Madonna sculpture (c. 152 cm) has been returned to the high altar of the sixteenth-century church, where it still stands (Fig. 11). The borders of the mantle of the Virgin bear heraldic shields that I was recently able to connect with to the noble Abruzzese Mareri family.²³ This identification sheds new light on the patronage of the earliest examples of tabernacle-altarpieces, that almost always remains unknown.

The tabernacle ‘a forma di triangolo’ – not mentioned in the appendix to 1972 Lapaire’s article – is today preserved in the Museo d’Arte Sacra della Marsica in Celano (L’Aquila) (Fig. 10). The back panel has a tempera decoration with gilded fleurs-de-lis of France on a blue background. Decoration is absent in the area behind the seated Madonna. The original parts of the tabernacle are made of poplar wood; the rectangular molded base, horizontal battens on the reverse and molded top of the chest – except for the pentagonal ceiling therein – are late additions in walnut wood (Mezzoprete, 1987, pp. 138–140).

Also, the evangelical episodes depicted on the interior of the wings (173 x 43 x 2 cm each) are not the original paintings, dating back to the time of the discovery of the statue. Nevertheless, they correspond to the scenes painted on the wings of the Fossa tabernacle. The reading order is also the same. Thus, they may have replaced an identical subject either because of the original paintings’ poor condition or a change of taste.

The blue sky with stars and anthropomorphic sun painted on the pentagonal ceiling seems to have been painted in the first half of the twentieth century.²⁴

²² Corsignani, 1738, p. 332: ‘E [...] finalmente trovarono la detta SS. Immagine, bella e intatta senza macola alcuna nella forma, che oggi si vede, come se mai fosse stata sotterrata, dentro una Cassa di noce, che stava dentro un’altra cassa più grande, quali casse presentemente ancora si ritrovano, e stanno dentro la detta Chiesa [*the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria*]’.

²³ Pasqualetti, 2020a.

²⁴ Immediately after the 1915 earthquake, the chest was sent to Tivoli (Rome) to be restored by Vincenzo Colleoni; a photo in the archives of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio dell’Abruzzo (SABAP-ABR) shows the post-seismic condition of the tabernacle: Pennazza, 2019, pp. 69 and 70, no 201.

However, the possibility that the iconography follows the original decoration somehow cannot be excluded.

Scholarship has grouped the *Madonna* of Scurcola together with other polychrome Marian effigies distributed throughout Umbria and Abruzzo under the conventional name, 'Master of the Madonna of Spoleto' (Previtali, 1976, 1984 and 1986). They were most probably produced in the same atelier, responsible for both sculpture and painting. Delpriori prefers to name this group of wooden Madonnas after the 'Master of Fossa' (Delpriori, 2015, pp. 256–262), based on the fact that the tempera panels of the Abruzzese tabernacle allow for conclusive comparisons between the painted scenes and the polychrome surface of the statue.

5.2. *The Madonna tabernacle from Santa Maria ad Cryptas in Fossa (1345–1350)*

The gorgeous artefact is the name-piece of a sophisticated and prolific anonymous painter, who was the most talented Spoletan popularizer of Giotto, Simone Martini, and Pietro Lorenzetti's models in the Lower Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi.²⁵

The wooden receptacle of the *Madonna di Fossa* (225 x 71 x 50 cm; 155 cm the statue) consists of a back panel and two narrow, fixed, and divergent side panels (Fig. 12). The back panel is made of two vertical boards reinforced on the back by horizontal battens. Geometrical floral motifs alternating with intertwined patterns are painted on the rear side of the back panel.²⁶ The base and the flat ceiling of the shrine are both pentagonally shaped; the statue rests on a polygonal pedestal (Fig. 13). The lavish painting of the back panel creates the illusion of a three-dimensional throne plated with precious metal with a splendid red tapestry covering the backrest. At the top, an airy loggia made of silver intertwined pointed arches is open to the starry blue sky. God the Father Blessing is depicted on the ceiling, while episodes of the Infancy and Passion of Christ are painted on the interior of the wings ([2]15 x 50 cm: Serra, 1934, p. 147) – today mostly dispersed –, hinged to the side-panels of the shrine. On the left wing, from top to

²⁵ On the 'Master of Fossa' there is an abundant bibliography; for an updated review see: Delpriori, 2015, and the entries of the exhibition's catalogue Garibaldi/Delpriori, eds, 2018, pp. 252–253, no 25, and pp. 256–278, nos 27–34.

²⁶ See the report of Laboratorio di Restauro s.n.c at <http://www.labrestauro.it/lavori.php?a=2<10.31.2019>>.

bottom: *Annunciation*, *Adoration of the Magi*, and *Presentation in the Temple*. On the right wing, from bottom to top: *Arrest of Christ*, *Flagellation* and *Crucifixion*. When closed, the wings hid the statue and its pedestal, but not the base of the tabernacle.

Where was the altarpiece placed? In seventeenth-century pastoral visits, two altars dedicated to the Blessed Virgin are recorded: on the left (looking at the high altar), the altar *in cornu evangelii* equipped with an ‘*imaginem dicte Beate Marie Virginis*’; on the right, the altar *in cornu epistule*.²⁷ The wall to the left of the triumphal arch separating the nave from the sanctuary is wide and high enough to house the fourteenth-century tabernacle,²⁸ even when open – the present Renaissance *aedicula* most probably replaced a medieval altar. Almost-contemporary mural paintings illustrating episodes from the apocryphal tradition of *Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* on the left wall of the nave invite us to imagine that a Marian liturgy was specifically reserved to this side of the church. In addition, it is improbable that the view of the *Crucifixion* painted on the wall behind the high altar was obstructed by a huge Marian tabernacle. However, the painted decoration on the reverse of the rear wall of tabernacle seems to indicate that the chest was also visible from the back.

In the autumn of 1838 Heinrich W. Schulz saw the ‘Triptychon’ with the wooden effigy of the Virgin and Child in the apsis.²⁹ In 1889 Vincenzo Bindi specified that the tabernacle was placed on the high altar, and described the scenes painted on the interior of the wings.³⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century the tabernacle stood on a high wooden podium on the left side of the nave, ‘in close proximity’³¹ to the first bay from the entrance. Having been transferred to the parish church of Santa Maria Assunta in Fossa,³² the tabernacle was unfortunately deprived of its shutters in 1979 due to a theft. Only the panel with the

²⁷ L’Aquila, Archivio diocesano, *Vescovi e Arcivescovi, Visite pastorali*, vols. 1146 (De Angelis, 1670), fol. 4r, and 1171 (Della Zerda, 1683–1691), fols. 28r–v. On this topic: Pasqualetti, 2020b (forthcoming).

²⁸ However, a photo from the 1930s (Carli, 1998, p. 47, fig. 9) shows the Renaissance altar ‘in cornu evangelii’ housing the painted triptych with movable wings signed by Gentile da Rocca and dated 1283 (now in the Museo Nazionale d’Abruzzo, L’Aquila). On the relation between Italian painted tabernacle-triptychs and tabernacle-altarpieces: Krüger, 1992, pp. 25–30.

²⁹ Schulz, 1860, vol. 2, pp. 78–79.

³⁰ Bindi, 1889, p. 860: ‘Nella seconda parte, in cui la Chiesa resta divisa, si ammira sull’altare l’immagine della Vergine sedente col Bambino tra le braccia scolpita in legno, entro un tabernacolo’.

³¹ Piccirilli, 1900, p. 46: ‘A ridosso di questa campata’.

³² Costa, 1912, pp. 49–50; Serra, 1934, pp. 148–149.

Presentation of Christ in the Temple (65.5 x 47.5 cm) was recovered in Rome and acquired by the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo together with the Marian *aedicula*.

5.3. *The tabernacle wings with episodes from the Life of St Catherine of Alexandria in the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo (third quarter of the fourteenth century)*

The pair of tempera panels (173 x 33 cm each) from the convent of the Saint in L'Aquila may have also belonged to a polygonal tabernacle with a wooden effigy of the Christian martyr (Fig. 14). Six scenes from the life of the Saint are represented: on the left wing, from top to bottom: *St Catherine of Alexandria refuses to worship the idols*, the *Martyrdom of the philosophers converted by St Catherine*, and the *Scourging of St Catherine in prison*; on the right wing, from top to bottom: *St Catherine in prison converts the Roman Empress*, *St Catherine tortured on two spiked wheels*, and the *Martyrdom of St Catherine*. The Museo Nazionale of Abruzzo also contains a polychrome statue of St Catherine (h. 138 cm) from the collection of the noble Rivera family of L'Aquila (Moretti, 1968, p. 26); but a connection between these wings and the Rivera statue has neither been transmitted through written sources nor supported by stylistic evidence (Delpriori, in Nicosia, ed. 2009, p. 203).

5.4. *The St John the Baptist pentagonal tabernacle-altarpiece in Caporciano (1417)*

Surprisingly enough, the church of San Benedetto in Caporciano (L'Aquila) preserves an as yet unpublished pentagonal tabernacle-altarpiece with a statue of St John the Baptist (c. 74.5 x 25 cm) inside. It comes from the church of San Pietro in Valle in Caporciano, possibly a dependency of the abbey of Bominaco. On the right wing, the date of completion is still perfectly readable: 1417 (Figs 15–16). Along with the tabernacle from Ortucchio, this artefact is the smallest of all Italian altarpieces discussed here, just 120 cm in height (including the base), and one of the most complete. It has an ascending ceiling made of two pieces; the larger is pentagonal in shape, the smaller triangular. This recalls the late-thirteenth century altarpiece in the Museo del Bargello, Florence, maybe from Umbria, which has a similar ceiling (Lapaire, 1969, pp. 183–184, 188; Krüger, 1992, fig. 210). The absence of colonnettes calls into question whether the Florentine image-shrine was a tabernacle-altarpiece with a pair of bi-fold wings or a pentagonal tabernacle-altarpiece.

The pedestal of the Caporciano altarpiece – which seems to be original – is not pentagonally-shaped, although the statue's supporting surface shows lines traced to cut the base in this exact shape. The St Olaf tabernacle from Överenhörna (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, end of fourteenth century) is a similar variant of the pentagonal model (Lapaire, 1972, pp. 56–57).

The exterior of the back panel – made of two boards – and side-panels have no traces of painting. The exterior of the wings (24 cm in width), instead, is decorated with floral volutes (Fig. 15), while the interior of the niche is ornamented with quatrefoil patterns. On the interior of the wings, traces of pigments are so scarce that it is impossible to determine if it was decorated with figurative paintings (Fig. 16). However, if this is not a serious misunderstanding, the Caporciano altarpiece is at least a very simplified version of the Fossa and Scurcola examples.

6. CUPBOARD-ALTARPIECES

In his 1972 article, Lapaire also mentions another type of closing altarpiece, the 'retable en forme d'armoire' (*Schreinaltar* in German), that consists of a wooden parallelepiped with two of doors that allow the faithful to see only the front of the enclosed statue. However, the grand-scale tabernacle in the Basilica of Santa Maria dell'Impruneta (Florence), c. 1350–1360, was designed for enshrining and carrying in procession to Florence a much venerated Marian icon believed to have been painted by Luke the Evangelist, instead of a statue (Caneva, ed., 2005, pp. 89–90).³³

6.1. *The cupboard-altarpiece from Santa Lucia in Rocca di Cambio (c. 1350)*

The wooden statue of the virgin and martyr Lucy from the abbey church of Santa Lucia in Rocca di Cambio (L'Aquila) was once placed inside a wooden

³³ Attributed to a follower of Maso di Banco, the tabernacle is crowned by a cusped canopy carved in the shape of trefoil arch. The doors (147 x 33 cm) are painted on both sides: on the exterior, from top to bottom, left to right, the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Annunciate, St Zanobi and St Philip, St John the Baptist and St Christopher; on the interior, St Catherine of Alexandria and St Luke on the top, musician Angels at the bottom. The tabernacle is now in the Museo del Tesoro di Santa Maria dell'Impruneta, the Marian icon in a marble aedicule in the church. The first recorded procession of the icon was held in 1354: Caneva, ed., 2005, pp. 26–27.

cupboard with a cusped rear panel (h. 155 cm), as shown in an old postcard (before 1915), which also allows us to see the painted doors (151 x 24 cm) (Fig. 17) (Tropea, 2001, I, p. 305). The altarpiece remained in its original site until 1914, when it was transferred into the parish church of Santissima Annunziata in the village of Rocca di Cambio. After 1934, there is no longer any mention of the doors,³⁴ today in a private Florentine collection and, consequently, known only through photos (Todini, 1989, I, pp. 405–406) (Fig. 18). The statue of the Saint (h. 134 cm, including the base) is still in the parish church, placed inside a modern architectural frame, gilded and painted, in the right aisle of the building.

The altarpiece was not hagiographical, because the figures painted on the interior of the doors are not apparently related to the legend of St Lucy. Unfortunately, the exterior is not known. In the color photo published by Filippo Todini, the original position of the doors appears inverted. On the left door (originally the right one), from top to bottom, there is a Prophet, a saint bishop – probably Nicholas of Bari – and St Lawrence; on the right one (originally the left) a second Prophet, St Paul the Apostle and a female Saint martyr – probably Catherine of Alexandria (Fig. 18). On stylistic grounds, this artefact has been attributed to the fascinating Umbro-Abruzzese 'Master of the Silver Crucifix' (Todini, 1989, I, pp. 404–405; Delpriori, 2014, pp. 64–65).

Nothing is known about the original location of the altarpiece in the church of Santa Lucia; the very identity of the Saint is under discussion (Delpriori, 2014, pp. 64–65). I have only found one relatively recent, but interesting notice: a prohibition to carry the statue in processions issued in 1926 (Tropea, 2001, I, p. 305).

A preceding Italian example of this structure is a small-scale cupboard-altarpiece in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, from the collection of Prince Leon Ouroussoff, attributed to Taddeo Gaddi, early 1330s (Norlander Eliasson *et alii*, eds, 2015, no 126) (Fig. 19). It is only 58 cm in height; the three-dimensional Marian effigy once enclosed in the niche is missing. In the upper register of the left wing there is the *Announcement of the Virgin's death*, a subject frequently represented in Franciscan contexts. In fact, an intriguing synthesis of two different episodes from Bonaventura's *Legenda maior* is represented in the lower register of the left wing: St Francis is simultaneously depicted on the chariot of fire and stigmatized. Represented as an 'alter Christus', St Francis is significantly

³⁴ They are described in Serra, 1934.

flanked by the Precursor of Christ, St John the Baptist. On the right wing of the tabernacle-altarpiece there is the *Crucifixion* only. Four couples of saints are represented on both sides of the niche: on the upper register, from left to right, a bishop saint and St Louis of Toulouse, St Anthony of Padua and a male saint (St Ranieri of Pisa?); on the lower register, from left to right, St Elizabeth of Hungary and a princess saint (Agnes of Bohemia?),³⁵ Catherine of Alexandria and Chiara of Assisi. As in a small-scale tabernacle-altarpiece now in Brno,³⁶ all Saints of the Minorite Order are represented, confirming a Franciscan devotion related to the Stockholm artefact.

6.2. *The St Peter cupboard-altarpiece in Caporciano*

A black and white image in the Zeri Photo Archive (*c.* 1920–*c.* 1950) shows a now-lost cupboard, identical in structure to the Rocca di Cambio altarpiece, placed in a late fifteenth-century wall niche in the above-mentioned church of San Pietro in Caporciano (L'Aquila).³⁷ The receptacle enclosed a fourteenth-century wooden statue of St Peter as Pope (since the 1960s in the church of San Benedetto in Caporciano),³⁸ possibly not designed for such a narrow shrine. The interior of the wings had painted figures arranged in two tiers: a blessing Angel (Gabriel) at the top of the left wing and an unidentified male Saint at the bottom (St Anthony the Abbot?); the Virgin Annunciate at the top of the right door and an unidentified saint at the bottom. The tabernacle might have hosted a statue of the Virgin and Child, instead of St Peter. A Max Hutzel's photo (*c.* 1960–*c.* 1990) shows the same cupboard-altarpiece deprived of the statue and doors.³⁹

³⁵ As is known, Agnes was venerated as a saint much before her beatification (1874) and canonization (1989).

³⁶ See above, fn. 12.

³⁷ Fondazione Federico Zeri, Catalogo Fototeca, Fondo Zeri – Scultura italiana, busta 010, fascicolo 6, SI_010/6/27: <http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda/opera/81968/Anonimo%20ombro%20sec.%20XIV%2C%20San%20Pietro%2C%20Santi%20%28%3F%29%2C%20Annunciazione>.

³⁸ Even though the Zeri Fototeca catalogue entry mentions the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, the statue has never been in there.

³⁹ Getty Research Institute Photo Archive, Foto Arte Minore / Max Hutzel (accession number 86.P8), <http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cat340573>. See also Krüger, p. 23.

6.3. *The St Pellegrino cupboard-altarpiece from Bominaco (third quarter of the fourteenth century)*

The 'nicchia' (niche) and statue of St Pellegrino from the oratory of the same name annexed to the Benedictine abbey church of Santa Maria Assunta in Bominaco was restored in 2007 (Sonnino, 2012; Tropea, 2012) (Fig. 20).⁴⁰ It is a cupboard-altarpiece with fixed side panels and a pair of doors. The rear wall and the left panel consist of a single board each, while the right panel consists of two boards. Both doors consist of a single board fitted to the parallelepiped niche with antique, although non-original, hinges. On the interior of the doors, removal of a modern floral overpainting revealed poor fourteenth-century fragments of saints: a blessing Angel (Gabriel) at the top of the left wing and Saint John the Baptist at the bottom; the Virgin Annunciate at the top of the right door and an unidentified saint with a blue mantle at the bottom. The exterior of the doors was repainted with an Angel in the upper part of each door and polychrome diamond shapes at the bottom. The back side of the rear wall has been repainted with geometrical and floral motifs on the lower part of the board, and the trigram of the Holy Name of Jesus at the top.

This extensive repainting demonstrates a continuity in the liturgical use of the artefact. In fact, in 1701 Clemente Righi, emissary of abbot Tommaso Ruffo di Bagnara, reported that the statue of the saint rested on the only altar in the oratory: 'Visitavit unicum altare in medio ipsius ecclesiae collocatum sub titulo Sancti Pellegrini, cuius imago existit super idem altare et est ex ligno, collocata in nicchia pariter lignea picta'.⁴¹ A picture in the book of architect and art historian Ignazio Carlo Gavini, *Storia dell'architettura in Abruzzo* (1927–28, fig. 475) shows that at the beginning of twentieth century, the cupboard and statue inside were still in the same position. The altarpiece stood on a completely furnished altar and was protected with a large, suspended baldachin made of textile. All of these written and visual sources confirm that from the eighteenth century at least, closing altarpieces may have been on the high altar of small churches, especially if it was the only altar in the sacred space.

⁴⁰ At present the altarpiece is on deposit at the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo (L'Aquila).

⁴¹ Lucherini, 2016, p. 135. The medieval inscription on the base of the wooden statue of St Cesidius in the collegiate church of Trasacco (L'Aquila) refers to the three-dimensional effigy with the term 'imago'; the relics of SS. Cesidius and Rufinus were enshrined in the statue: Curzi, 2014b, p. 56.

7. CONCLUSION

In summary, grand-scale Italian medieval closing altarpieces can be reduced to three main types, from a formal and structural point of view.

1.- The tabernacle-altarpiece in the strictest sense of the word. The first Italian tabernacle-altarpieces include at least two main subtypes: 1.a with carved scenes (Alatri, Aosta); 1.b with painted scenes and figures. Subtype 1.b can be expressed in two further subtypes: 1.b.1 with the scenes confined to a single board of the bi-fold wing (Campo di Giove); 1.b.2 with evangelical or hagiographical episodes extending over both boards of the bi-fold wing (Pale di Foligno, Caso, Pinacoteca Capitolina, Ortucchio).

2.- The polygonal tabernacle, represented by the rarest and most elaborate Marian examples of Fossa and Scurcola. Precisely because of the sophisticated integration between painting, sculpture, and architecture, this type of tabernacle was easily destined for banalization and misunderstanding of illusionistic ambitions, as the St John the Baptist tabernacle in Caporciano demonstrates.

3.- The cupboard-altarpiece – the least ambitious of all three types. In the altarpiece of Rocca di Cambio and the now-lost St Peter altarpiece in Caporciano there is neither a deep interaction between architectural structure, sculpture, and painting, nor a combination of the iconic dimension with a narrative counterpart. The St Pellegrino of Bominaco altarpiece is an even more modest example of the same type. No grand-scale Marian altarpieces belonging to this typology seem to have survived.

With current knowledge, such a classification seems not to correspond to a substantial difference in function. However, tabernacles and other closing altarpieces of whatever form and structure were a phenomenon of *longue durée* in Central Apennine regions. In fifteenth-century Abruzzo, especially, they coexisted with polyptychs. Between 1476–1478, at the height of L'Aquila's economic and artistic flourishing, Silvestro di Giacomo – the best Renaissance sculptor in L'Aquila, in all likelihood trained in Florence – was still commissioned for two *tabernacula*.⁴²

⁴² 'Magister Silvester Iacobi de Sulmona sponte promisit [...] facere et laborare ymaginem Beati Iacobi de relievo incarnatam ad similitudinem cum ymagine Sancti Iacobi de Porta de Paganica, cum tabernaculo storiato de storiis spectantibus et pertinentibus ad dictam ymaginem'; '[...] magister Silvester Iacobi de Sulmona civis aquilanus promisit laborare ymaginem sancti Sebastiani [...] cum tabernaculo, portis et suis historiis': Chini, 1929, pp. 47–48, nos 1–2.

The repainting of the interiors and/or exteriors of closing altarpieces (Scurcola, Bominaco, along with Alatri and Aosta) demonstrates that they continued to be objects of liturgy and devotion over the centuries in peripheral areas of the Peninsula.

Could the deep-rooted and widespread mystical and pauperistic tendencies of Central Italy from the thirteenth to fifteenth century – between eremitical experiences, Spiritual Franciscanism, Celestinian monastic revival, and Franciscan Observance – play a role in the preference given to this type of altarpiece? Unfortunately, reliable information about the provenance of most Marian sculptures is scarce (Krüger, 1992, pp. 219–230). As for the altarpieces or fragments thereof here examined, two of them come from an abbey church and a monastic oratory (Scurcola and Bominaco); the rest from collegiate churches, parish churches, and oratories. Only for the panels in the Pinacoteca Capitolina can a Franciscan origin not be excluded, though provenance from the collegiate church of Campi remains the most plausible, while the small-scale Marian tabernacles of Stockholm and Brno – from Tuscany and Naples respectively – are both related to the Franciscan devotion.⁴³

From a chronological point of view, only one Marian tabernacle-altarpiece (Alatri) survives from the thirteenth century. From the fourteenth century onwards, different types of closing altarpieces with the statue of a Saint appear, even though they do not surpass Madonna shrines in number.

The donors of tabernacles and other closing altarpieces are typically unknown. Nevertheless, the example of Scurcola demonstrates – if proof were needed – that tabernacles are not always, or not exclusively, an expression of unpretentious laical devotion. An heraldic allusion might be also recognized in the tabernacle of Pale di Foligno.

The original location in the church of all these artefacts also remains mostly unknown. Only late documents sometimes mention them on side-altars or in side-chapels (Alatri, Campo di Giove, Ortucchio, maybe Fossa), apart from the altarpiece of San Pellegrino in Bominaco, which is a small oratory with only one altar.

Further research on written and visual sources on the one hand, on archaeological and architectural context on the other, may hopefully bring new data to light.

⁴³ See above 6.1.

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Fig. 1. Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, first half of the 13th century. Alatri (Frosinone, Italy), Santa Maria Maggiore [per concessione della Soprintendenza archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per le province di Frosinone, Latina e Rieti – divieto di ulteriore riproduzione o duplicazione con qualsiasi mezzo].



Fig. 2. Aostan sculptor: *Infancy of Christ*, wings from a Marian tabernacle-altarpiece (Swiss pine, carved, gilded and painted, 139 x 175 x 4 cm), 1330-1340. Torino (Italy), Palazzo Madama, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, inv. 1044/L, from Santo Stefano in Aosta (Italy)
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Fig. 3. Master of Cesi: Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, 1320-1330.
Pale di Foligno (Perugia, Italy), San Biagio
(previously in Santa Maria Giacobbe in Pale di Foligno),
before 1974 [from Delpriori, 2015, fig. V.62].



Fig. 4. Master of Cesi: St Christina tabernacle-altarpiece, c. 1330, scheme. Spoleto (Perugia, Italy), Museo Diocesano, from *Santa Cristina in Caso di Sant'Anatolia di Narco* (Perugia, Italy)

[from Delpriori, 2015, p. 138, fig. V.71].



Fig. 5. Master of Campli: *Infancy of Christ*, wings from a Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, 1376-1378, scheme. Roma, Pinacoteca Capitolina (unknown provenance) [photos Antonello Idini, Roma; scheme Cristiana Pasqualetti].



Fig. 6. Master of Campo di Giove: *The Legend of St Eustace*,
wings from a tabernacle-altarpiece, c. 1380.
Campo di Giove (L'Aquila, Italy),
Sant'Eustachio, before 1902
[photo Pietro Piccirilli, family archive, Sulmona].



Fig. 7. Giovanni da Sulmona: Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, 1435, closed.
Sulmona (L'Aquila, Italy),
Museo Civico, from Sant'Orante in Ortucchio (L'Aquila, Italy)
[photo Giovanni Lattanzi, Giulianova].



Fig. 8. Giovanni da Sulmona: Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, 1435, opened.
Sulmona, Museo Civico, from Sant'Orante in Ortucchio
[photo Giovanni Lattanzi, Giulianova].



Fig. 9. Giovanni da Sulmona: Marian tabernacle-altarpiece, 1435, side view. Sulmona, Museo Civico, from Sant'Orante in Ortucchio [photo Giovanni Lattanzi, Giulianova].



Fig. 10. Marian polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, c. 1335
 (on the wings, 16th-century paintings with the *Infancy and Passion of Christ*).
 Celano (L'Aquila, Italy), Museo Nazionale d'Arte Sacra della Marsica,
 from Santa Maria della Vittoria in Scurcola Marsicana
 (L'Aquila, Italy; previously in the former abbey church of Santa Maria della Vittoria)
 [photo Gino Di Paolo, Pescara].



Fig. II. Master of Fossa: *Madonna and Child*,
from a Marian polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, c. 1335.
Scurcola Marsicana, Santa Maria della Vittoria,
(previously in the former abbey church of Santa Maria della Vittoria)
[photo Alessandro Delpriori].



Fig. 12. Master of Fossa: Marian polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, 1345-1350.
 Fossa (L'Aquila, Italy), Santa Maria Assunta
 (previously in Santa Maria *ad Cryptas* in Fossa), before 1979
 [from Carli, 1998, p. 110, fig. 37].



Fig. 13. Master of Fossa: *Madonna and Child*,
from a Marian polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, 1345-1350.
L'Aquila (Italy), Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, from Santa Maria Assunta in Fossa
(previously in Santa Maria *ad Cryptas* in Fossa)
[photo Gino Di Paolo, Pescara].



Fig. 14. Abruzzese Follower of the Master of the Silver Crucifix:
Stories of St Catherine of Alexandria, wings from a polygonal (?) tabernacle-altarpiece,
 third quarter of 14th century.
 L'Aquila (Italy), Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo,
 from Santa Caterina d'Alessandria in L'Aquila
 [photo Gino Di Paolo, Pescara].



Fig. 15. Abruzzese Master: St John the Baptist polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, 1417, closed. Caporciano (L'Aquila, Italy), San Benedetto [photo Cristiana Pasqualetti].



Fig. 16. Abruzzese Master: St John the Baptist polygonal tabernacle-altarpiece, 1417, opened. Caporciano, San Benedetto [photo Cristiana Pasqualetti].



Fig. 17. Master of the Silver Crucifix: St Lucy cupboard-altarpiece, c. 1350.
Rocca di Cambio (L'Aquila, Italy), Santa Lucia, before 1915
[from Tropea, 2001, 1, p. 302, fig. 388].

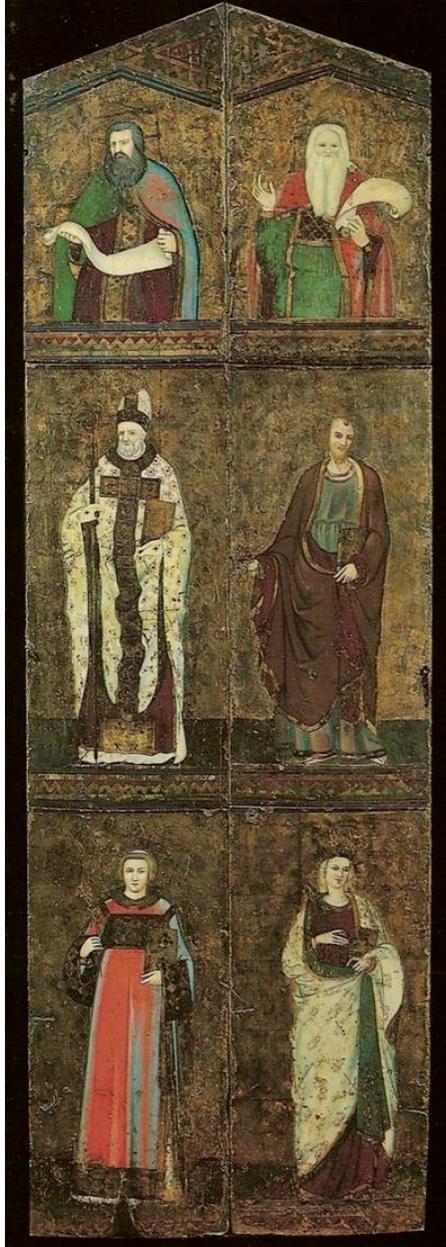


Fig. 18. Master of the Silver Crucifix: *Prophets and Saints*, c. 1350.
Florentine private collection,
from the cupboard-altarpiece of Santa Lucia in Rocca di Cambio
[from Todini, 1986, I, plate XIII].



Fig. 19. Taddeo Gaddi: Shrine with the *Crucifixion, Saints and Angels*, early 1330s.
Stockholm, Nationalmuseum (unknown provenance)
[Photo: Erik Cornelius, Nationalmuseum (CC BY-SA)].



Fig. 20. Abruzzese Master: St Pellegrino cupboard-altarpiece, third quarter of the 14th century.

Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, from the oratory church of San Pellegrino in Bominaco (L'Aquila, Italy)

[from Sonnino, 2012, p. 75, fig. 10].



MINOR OR MAJOR? CASTILIAN TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES AND THE MONUMENTAL ARTS*

¿ARTES MENORES O ARTES MAYORES?
LOS RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO CASTELLANOS
Y LAS ARTES MONUMENTALES

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Abstract

This article explores the origins and distinctive features of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces. Less attention will be paid to the well-known examples of the fourteenth century (as for example the Castildelgado and Yurre altarpieces) and the focus will be on a number of poorly preserved, fragmented and altered examples of the late thirteenth century, for which proposals of reconstruction are provided in some instances. To investigate the origins of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, this study centres on several thirteenth-century sculptures that were made prominent by being placed either before back panels or within baldachins. These displays are usually regarded as the forerunners of genuine tabernacle-altarpieces. In this context, special attention is paid to the images of the Virgin and Child in the church of Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia). Concerning the distinctive features of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, the text points out the relationship between the earliest tabernacle-altarpieces and the locally produced monumental and tomb sculpture, which in all likelihood served as a model for these early altarpieces.

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Keywords

Altarpiece, tabernacle-altarpiece, Gothic art, Gothic sculpture, Gothic painting, Crown of Castile, Contrasta, Santa María de Mave, Toledo cathedral, Villalcázar de Sirga.

Resumen

Este artículo indaga en el origen y en los rasgos distintivos de los retablos-tabernáculo castellanos. Por ello se presta especial atención no tanto a los ejemplares bien conocidos del siglo XIV (como, por ejemplo, los retablos de Castildelgado y de Yurre) como a algunos ejemplares de finales del siglo XIII pobremente conservados, fragmentados y manipulados, para algunos de los cuales se ofrecen propuestas de reconstrucción. Con respecto al origen de los retablos-tabernáculo castellanos, el estudio se centra en algunas esculturas del siglo XIII que fueron dotadas, o bien de un respaldo que las destacaba, o bien de un baldaquino que las albergaba, pues se suele considerar a estos dispositivos como precursores de los genuinos retablos-tabernáculo. En este contexto, se presta especial atención a las imágenes de la Virgen con el Niño de la iglesia de Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia). Con respecto a los rasgos distintivos de los retablos-tabernáculo castellanos, el texto destaca la relación existente entre los ejemplares más antiguos y la escultura monumental y funeraria de producción local, que con toda probabilidad sirvió como modelo para estos retablos primitivos.

Palabras clave

Retablo, retablo-tabernáculo, arte gótico, escultura gótica, pintura gótica, Corona de Castilla, Contrasta, Santa María de Mave, catedral de Toledo, Villalcázar de Sirga.

I. INTRODUCTION

By the mid-thirteenth century, the Crown of Castile extended over about two thirds of the Iberian Peninsula, almost completely covering its middle section and a significant portion to the west. Following the victory in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) by King Alfonso VIII (r. 1158–1214) and the subsequent campaigns throughout Andalusia by his grandson, King Fernando III (r. 1217–52), Castile became not only the leading force against the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, but also the dominant power in the whole peninsula, offset only to

the east by the rising power of the Crown of Aragon. Moreover, since the 1220s, Castile was open to receiving Northern French Gothic art, and artists from this region produced works on Castilian soil that rivalled the great monuments of the French *domaine royal*. In this context, tabernacle-altarpieces, a type of early altarpiece that became fashionable in the medieval West *c.* 1200, were also created in Castile. The aim of this article is to present an overview of the origins of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces and to explore the extent to which they were a part of an overall European phenomenon or whether they developed their own distinctive features.

In 2018, I published an article on Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces that included a working list of thirty-three tabernacle-altarpieces (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 78–79). Certainly, some of them are dubious, and many of them are so poorly preserved or altered that they can be considered little more than faint witnesses of the type. However, this list also included five tabernacle-altarpieces in which all four panels of their wings are fully or almost fully preserved: those from Castildelgado, Fuentes de Nava, Yurre, Zuazo de Cuartango and the so-called Chiale altarpiece of unknown provenance.¹ There are also two tabernacle-altarpieces in which all four panels of their wings are partially preserved: those from Arana (two altarpieces, named Arana I and Arana II).² And there are also three tabernacle-altarpieces in which at least three panels of their wings are partially preserved: those from Contrasta (?) and the so-called Wildenstein and Haupt I altarpieces of unknown provenance.³ Most of these altarpieces come from average parish churches, but at least one of them is a royal commission: the taber-

¹ Those of Fuentes de Nava and Yurre are still *in situ* in the parish churches to which they belong, while the Castildelgado altarpiece is now in Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès (inv. no 814), and the Chiale altarpiece is in a private collection. The whereabouts of the Zuazo de Cuartango altarpiece is unknown. The Castildelgado altarpiece is the only one that preserves not only its four panels, but also its baldachin and even its titular image. The latter remains in the village to which it belongs. Throughout the article, cities and villages of the provinces of the Basque Country are mentioned through their widespread Spanish forms (e.g., Yurre or Zuazo de Cuartango). The Basque place names, when existing and different from the Spanish place names, are provided for reference in the appendix, following the Spanish ones after / (e.g., Yurre/Ihurre or Zuazo de Cuartango/Zuhatzu Kuartango).

² The Arana altarpieces, which correspond to two successive arrangements made on the very same panels, were fragmented to be re-used in the Baroque altarpieces of the local parish church. These altarpieces have been transferred to the nearby parish church of Treviño.

³ The Wildenstein and Haupt I altarpieces are in New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. nos 55.62a, 55.62b and 1977.94), and in Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (inv. no Śr. 218), respectively. The whereabouts of the presumed Contrasta altarpiece is unknown.

nacle-altarpiece of the *Virgen de los Reyes* that has been presiding over the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville since the time of its creation. Beyond surviving examples, the former Crown of Castile offers plenty of information about tabernacle-altarpieces in the form of documentary references⁴ or depictions of them in other media (Fig. 1).⁵ Moreover, pictorial transpositions that are loosely inspired by tabernacle-altarpieces also exist, as shown by the wall paintings of the chapel of San Martín or the recently discovered wall paintings of the chapel of Santa Bárbara,⁶ both in the Old Cathedral of Salamanca. In addition, a contract for the fabrication of such an altarpiece has been preserved. It was signed in 1366 between the goldsmith Sancho Martínez and the cathedral chapter of Seville to create a tabernacle-altarpiece that was associated in the past with the *Virgen de la Sede*, the image of the Virgin and Child that still presides over the high altarpiece of the cathedral of Seville.⁷ In other instances, a space left blank in wall paintings provides clues about the former existence and position of a tabernacle-altarpiece (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 57, fig. 3).

Even though my survey of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces is as recent as 2018, five more specimens have to be added to the working list offered then (a full, updated list is here provided in § 5). Two of them became known to me thanks to Jesús Muñiz Petralanda: a panel in the parish church of Olano, which had already been studied by Raquel Sáenz Pascual before its restoration allowed its recognition as a panel from a tabernacle-altarpiece,⁸ and a baldachin from Mondragón, nowadays kept in the Museo Diocesano de San Sebastián (Fig. 2). The third one (two large unpublished panels in the parish church of Santiago el Real

⁴ Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 43. They are mentioned as *capillas de fuste/madera* (wooden chapels).

⁵ Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 45. The thirteenth-century examples listed in this article must be supplemented with some fifteenth-century examples to be found in altarpieces by the Master of Los Balbases (a panel of the high altarpiece of the parish church of San Esteban of Los Balbases) and by Pedro Berruguete (a panel of the St Dominic altarpiece of the church of the Dominican convent of Santo Tomás of Ávila, now in the Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. no 615), just to mention works of genuine Castilian manufacture. In all these instances the side wings were simplified, as Verena Fuchß already observed in some early depictions of tabernacle-altarpieces (Fuchß, 1999, p. 150).

⁶ <https://www.salamanca24horas.com/texto-diario/mostrar/1341920/obras-restauracion-capilla-santa-barbara-catedral-sacan-luz-pinturas-murales-ocultas-durante-cinco-siglos> (accessed 28 June 2019).

⁷ Gestoso y Pérez, 1889–92, t. 2, pp. 191–192, note 1. See the contribution by Teresa Laguna Paúl in this volume for further details about this contract.

⁸ Sáenz Pascual, 1997, pp. 253–258 (it had been previously mentioned by Portilla Vitoria, 1995, p. 717). The panel was subsequently restored and identified as part of such a structure, see Galdós Martínez de Osaba *et alii*, 2001, pp. 72–74; Sáenz Pascual, 2007, p. 350.

of Logroño) was brought to my attention by María Teresa and Pedro Álvarez Clavijo, while the fourth and fifth were brought to my attention by Alberto Velasco González: two panels that were auctioned as Aragonese by Alcalá Subastas in 2018 and two panels that were identified by him through a photograph in the Arxiu Mas of Barcelona.⁹ The panel in Olano and those auctioned by Alcalá Subastas and known through the Arxiu Mas are significant as they prove the persistence of tabernacle-altarpieces in the fifteenth century, and the baldachin from Mondragón is significant as it provides an additional example of this rarely preserved structure.¹⁰ But the panels in Logroño, that have been restored by the Government of La Rioja in 2019, are especially important as they challenge some of our assumptions regarding tabernacle-altarpieces: they are in a major city and church, they belonged to its medieval high altarpiece, from which its original titular image is still preserved in its present-day Baroque high altarpiece, and their size and weight defy the idea that tabernacle-altarpieces were always relatively modest structures: when opened, it could measure 362 x 406.6 cm (including the canopy). Even though they have lost the reliefs they once displayed, they are important testimonies of the early development of altarpieces in Castile (Fig. 3).

However, if a few months have enriched the working list of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, a few months have also questioned one of the examples included in it, at least in the form I published it in 2018 (pp. 60–61, fig. 5). Indeed, the *Contrasta* altarpiece has proved to be a fake. I became aware of this work, whose whereabouts is unknown, through some photographs in the Arxiu Mas taken in 1956 in the Barcelona shop of the antiques dealer Ignacio Martínez.¹¹ In the notes accompanying the photographs, this work is identified as a triptych from *Contrasta* (mistakenly placed in Navarre instead of Álava). Even though, as I commented (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 50), it was clear that this work had been altered, I gave credit to this information as the *catálogo monumental* of the province of Álava written by Cristóbal de Castro in 1912–13 registered *un notabilísimo tríptico* (a most notable triptych) in the hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Elizmendi of *Contrasta* originally from either the hermitage of San Salvador or the hermitage of San Adrián, which both no longer existed at that stage (Castro,

⁹ Arxiu Mas, 47406. The notes accompanying the photograph identify them as Castilian panels of the fifteenth century and locate them in the Barcelona art market in 1963.

¹⁰ Despite a list now comprising thirty-eight tabernacle-altarpieces, only six baldachins are known: Castildelgado, Gáceta, Garray, Mondragón, Seville and Villamanca (Fig. 13 Kroesen/Tängeberg, in this volume). To these the back panel of the baldachin of the Zuazo de Cuartango altarpiece could be added, even though it has been altered.

¹¹ Arxiu Mas, Gudiol-37227–37229.

1915, p. 192, pl. 53). Castro, whose work was severely criticised,¹² illustrated this reference with a photograph of the Yurre altarpiece, which is not mentioned in his text. I interpreted this as a mistake, justified by the poor quality of his work and by the presumable similitude of the altarpieces of *Contrasta* and *Yurre*, and I assumed that the reference to ‘a most notable triptych’ in *Contrasta* in 1912–13 and the existence of a triptych from *Contrasta* in Barcelona in 1956 were enough to accept this work. Following a close examination of the photographs in the *Arxiu Mas*, I must now say that it is possible that the panels come from *Contrasta* (even though I think it is unlikely that the panels alone could encourage Castro’s enthusiastic words), but the reliefs on them never belonged to them: they are actually the missing reliefs from another altarpiece, originally in the Benedictine priory of Santa María de Mave, which is another outstanding Castilian example of an early altarpiece, but of the panel type rather than the tabernacle type (Fig. 4).¹³ The Santa María de Mave altarpiece was transferred to the cathedral of Burgos some time before 1931, and it was barbarously plundered at some point (whether in Santa María de Mave, in Burgos, or in between, is uncertain), losing almost all its reliefs. Little more than a bare panel, it is now exhibited in the chapel of San Nicolás of the cathedral of Burgos. We have information on its original condition thanks to a photograph published in 1939,¹⁴ and it is easy to recognise in it all the reliefs shown on the presumed *Contrasta* panels in 1956. In short, I now consider that the panels may be from *Contrasta*, but only the panels, devoid of all the figures and reliefs shown in the 1956 photograph (Fig. 5). I also believe that the date of *c.* 1300 I proposed for the ensemble in 2018 is still acceptable judging from the architectural features evidenced by the panels.

Despite the revision of the *Contrasta* altarpiece, the additions to the working list of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces and the remaining evidence concerning them provide plenty of material to explore some of the many questions posed by this widespread type of early altarpiece. These questions include: When and where did tabernacle-altarpieces originate? What sources inspired their creation? How did they spread? What was their legacy? Were they all originally Marian? Who commissioned them? Who produced them? Where were they displayed? How were they used? It lies beyond the scope of this article, and possibly beyond

¹² http://biblioteca.cchs.csic.es/digitalizacion_tnt/index_interior_alava2.html (accessed 28 June 2019).

¹³ On this altarpiece, see Cook/Gudiol Ricart, 1950, p. 370, fig. 410; Ara Gil, 1999, pp. 65–67; Ara Gil, 2002, pp. 12–13, fig. 5; Ara Gil, 2006, pp. 180–181, fig. 1.

¹⁴ Navarro García, 1939, pl. 157. Another photograph in *Arxiu Mas*, not numbered.

my abilities, to answer all these questions, but I want to discuss at least some issues concerning their origins and their specific features in Castile.

2. THE SOURCES OF THE CASTILIAN TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECE

In 1967 Mojmír S. Frinta published the first major survey on tabernacle shrines, following his experience restoring the panels of a Castilian tabernacle-altarpiece in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York (the aforementioned Wildenstein altarpiece). In the opinion of the Czech art historian and restorer, tabernacle-altarpieces originated in small-scale sumptuous objects with the same features. This caused the damage and, ultimately, the loss of almost all medieval tabernacle-altarpieces, as features such as hinges and movable elements were adequate for small-scale pieces, but not for larger ones (Frinta, 1967, pp. 104–106). His hypothesis did not gain too much support. Shortly afterwards, Claude Lapaire published another major survey on tabernacle shrines where he considered that tabernacle-altarpieces originated in standard panel-altarpieces whose central section became emphasised by a baldachin (Lapaire, 1969, pp. 183–186), and three decades later Verena Fuchß maintained that tabernacle-altarpieces emerged from the custom of highlighting cult images placed above or behind altars, recorded since the High Middle Ages, and that precious objects in ivory or in enamelled gold or silver with their very same features actually imitated them (Fuchß, 1999, pp. 140, 145–146 and 153–154; in similar terms, Kroesen, 2014, pp. 160–164, and Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 45). Certainly, none of these objects predates the earliest tabernacle-altarpieces, even though precious objects with movable elements existed long before and could have served as an inspiration for them.

This type of precious object, which accurately echoes tabernacle-altarpieces, also existed in Castile, but only in very limited numbers (though many may have been lost over the course of time). Moreover, they are not dated earlier than genuine tabernacle-altarpieces and their features are related to foreign models rather than local ones, which suggests that the development of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces was independent from the development of such precious objects, without excluding the possibility of occasional influences. Probably the best-known example of a precious object of this type in Castile is the reliquary of the *Virgen del Cabello* (Virgin of the Hair), an Avignonese silversmith's work made in the 1330s for the Castilian cardinal Pedro Gómez Barroso, donated to the Dominican convent of San Juan Bautista of Quejana by his nephew Fernán Pérez de Ayala on

the occasion of its foundation in 1378 (Cruz Valdovinos, 2007a, pp. 318–319) (Fig. 6).¹⁵ Even though it shows the Virgin and Child enthroned (instead of standing, as was customary in France), the arrangement of the scenes displayed on its wings adheres to standard French models, with the Annunciation in the upper left compartment/s of the left wing, which did not influence Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, where, as we shall explain, the arrangement and the choice of scenes differed (this even considering that the reliquary could have reached Castile shortly after the death of the cardinal in 1348 and that it could have influenced tabernacle-altarpieces produced in the area around Quejana by this date, such as, for example, the Castildelgado and Yurre altarpieces). Another outstanding work of this type, the reliquary of King Philip V of France (r. 1316–22) and his wife Queen Joan of Burgundy that is currently in the cathedral of Seville, reached this church only in the seventeenth century, so it is not relevant for the purpose of this research (Cruz Valdovinos, 2007b, pp. 319–320). Evidence of ivory objects of this type in Castile is also scarce, and, in this case, particularly controversial due to the presence of forgeries. The Gothic Ivories Project at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, registers only three specimens of this type from the territory of the former Crown of Castile.¹⁶ The first one, in the cathedral of Burgos, is an early sixteenth-century Portuguese specimen that, due to its date and Renaissance style, is not relevant for the purpose of this research (Estella Marcos, 1984, pp. 221–222, fig. 52). The second and third ones, in the Museo Lázaro Galdiano of Madrid (inv. nos 2551 and 5704), testify to modern collecting, not to medieval imports and influences, and at least one of them is now considered a nineteenth-century fake.¹⁷

In spite of this, a Spanish (but not necessarily Castilian) origin has been proposed for some fragmentary ivory tabernacle shrines in international collections, such as two panels with scenes of the passion of Christ in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (inv. nos 71.175 and 71.176)¹⁸ and one panel with scenes of the infancy of Christ in the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia (inv. no 01.04.51).¹⁹ Whatever their origins (i.e., even considering the possibility that they are Span-

¹⁵ It is nowadays exhibited in the Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro of Vitoria.

¹⁶ <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/> (accessed 2 July 2019).

¹⁷ <http://catalogo.museolazarogaldiano.es/mlgm/search/pages/Main> (accessed 2 July 2019). The statement about the non-genuine condition of inv. no 2551 in <http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/> (accessed 2 July 2019).

¹⁸ <https://art.thewalters.org/browse/> (accessed 2 July 2019).

¹⁹ <https://collection.barnesfoundation.org/> (accessed 2 July 2019). Considering the arrangement of the scenes and their development, I am in doubt about the genuine condition of this work.

ish), they show no connections with Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, which underscores the separate development in this territory of precious objects of this type and tabernacle-altarpieces. However, their presence in Castile was undoubtedly more abundant than extant examples suggest. An inventory of the cathedral of Toledo dated 1338 registers at least five related objects (Pérez de Guzmán, 1926, pp. 390, 395 414 and 415)²⁰ and many ivory images (Pérez de Guzmán, 1926, pp. 390, 398, 409, 414 and 415). Even more important is that this very same inventory provides information that is more likely linked to the purpose of this research, as it deals with a tabernacle placed at the high altar, thus moving the focus to what seems to be the real origin of tabernacle-altarpieces, according to Verena Fuchs: the desire to emphasise cult images placed above or behind altars.

Unfortunately, Toledo's inventory of 1338 is not as clear as we would like, but it mentions a great tabernacle at the altar of the Holy Saviour (i.e., the high altar of the cathedral), to which five small ivory images apparently belonged, specifying, moreover, that a black cloth was placed before it during Lent (Pérez de Guzmán, 1926, pp. 398 and 414).²¹ These entries illustrate the placement, size, richness and use of this great tabernacle, but its purpose remains unclear: was it a tabernacle for the Holy Sacrament or was it a tabernacle for an image, and, as such, an altarpiece? Tom Nickson asked himself this very same question (Nickson, 2015, p. 162). I would go as far as saying that it housed an image, and, more precisely,

²⁰ 1.- 'Item una arqueta de ffaya en que auie un tabernaculo pequenno de marfil con un crucifixo ençima e dos ymagenes que estan arrancadas e de dentro una ymagen de ssanta maria con su fijo e a cada parte dellas tablas sendas figuras de angeles' (Also a beech casket where there was a small ivory tabernacle, a Crucifix atop of it and two images that are torn off, and inside it an image of St Mary with her Son and to each side panels [and] corresponding figures of angels); 2.- 'Item un tabernaculo grande de marfil' (Also a great ivory tabernacle); 3.- 'Item un tabernaculo [rotura] do está la ymagen de marfil' (Also a [missing] tabernacle where the ivory image is); 4.- 'Item tabernaculo pequenno de madera cubierto de laton esmaltado a ymagenes e menguan la una parte del chapitel de encima' (Also small wooden tabernacle covered with enamelled brass with images; a portion of the spire above it is missing); 5.- 'Item un tabernaculo pequenuelo de madero con sus puertas en que ha una cruseta pequenna cubierta de plata dorada et en el tabernaculo ay dos casiellas en que ay en la una un poquiello de *lignum domini* et en la otra un pedaço tamanno como un garuanço del sepulcro de santa maria' (Also a very small wooden tabernacle with doors, in which there is a small cross covered with silver-gilt, and inside the tabernacle there are two small cases where there is a small amount of *lignum Domini* in the one and a portion of the tomb of St Mary of the size of a chickpea in the other).

²¹ 'Item çinco ymagenes pequennas de marfil que semejan del tabernaculo grande que esta al altar de ssant saluador' (Also five small ivory images that seem from the great tabernacle that is at the altar of the Holy Saviour); 'Item un panno prieto para antel tabernaculo de sant saluador en quaresma' (Also a black cloth to [be placed] before the tabernacle of the Holy Saviour during Lent).

that it housed the image of the Virgin and Child that remains at the Late Gothic altarpiece presiding over the high altar of Toledo cathedral (the so-called *Virgen del Retablo*).²² This would be an example of a phenomenon recorded also in Seville and probably in many other great churches too: the permanence throughout the centuries, despite successive rearrangements, of old and prestigious images traditionally associated with high altars. The image itself is not recorded in the 1338 inventory, and nor can the tabernacle itself be found there (it is recorded only through objects associated with it). However, following the entry detailing the black cloth to be placed before the tabernacle during Lent are two entries of additional black cloths for Christ and for the Virgin during Lent, thus suggesting that the tabernacle housed an image of the Virgin and Child (Pérez de Guzmán, 1926, p. 398).²³ The oldest reference to the arrangement of the high altar of the cathedral of Toledo in or before 1274, which is also the *terminus ante quem* for the completion of the high chapel, only mentions a Crucifixion (Nickson, 2015, p. 78). The *Virgen del Retablo* could have been made and placed there shortly afterwards, as it is apparently evoked, framed by a schematic tabernacle-altarpiece, in the miniature illustrating the royal privilege dated 1285 through which King Sancho IV (r. 1284–95) ordered his burial in Toledo cathedral (Fig. 7).²⁴ This miniature is thought to show the liturgical arrangement of Toledo cathedral including the royal chapel, with a Crucifix on its altar marking its dedication to the Holy Cross, and the high altar, dedicated to the Saviour, with a Virgin and Child on it.²⁵ Both the 1338 inventory and the 1285 miniature point to the pos-

²² On this image, see Durán Sanpere/Ainaud de Lasarte, 1956, p. 113, fig. 100; Pérez Grande, 2005, pp. 391–394. Contrary to the opinion of Durán Sanpere/Ainaud de Lasarte, who date it in the thirteenth century, Pérez Grande considers that it dates from the second half of the fourteenth century. Nickson adheres to the traditional opinion, admitting later alterations, which is also my opinion. Even more, Nickson believes that the silver flower that the Virgin holds in her right hand could be the one mentioned in a 1277 inventory (Nickson, 2015, p. 137).

²³ ‘Item un panno prieto para ante jhesu xpo.’ (Also a black cloth for before Jesus Christ); ‘Item un rredondel prieto que viste a ssanta maria en quaresma’ (Also a black short round cloak dressing St Mary during Lent).

²⁴ On this miniature, see Gutiérrez Baños, 1997, pp. 209–214. The resemblance between the Virgin and Child of the miniature and the *Virgen del Retablo* was noted by Nickson (2015, p. 137).

²⁵ The ‘blueprint’ condition of the 1285 miniature regarding the east end of the nave of Toledo cathedral was underlined by Nickson (2015, pp. 78–80). This is strengthened by the possibility of its Toledo production, considered very likely by Rodríguez Porto (2012, t. 1, p. 10). Nickson, however, considers that the altar with a Virgin and Child is not the altar of the Saviour, but the altar of the Virgin, which was situated in the choir: archbishop Gonzalo Pérez Gudiel, who is represented close to it in the miniature, was particularly devoted to it. But the *Virgen Blanca* extant on this altar is a standing image.

sible existence since the thirteenth century of an image of the Virgin and Child on the high altar of Toledo cathedral, an image housed in a tabernacle that, if we credit the 1285 miniature, had movable wings and that, at least in 1338, included ivory figures. This clearly underlines the role of cult images in the emergence of tabernacle-altarpieces.

3. THE ROAD TO THE CASTILIAN TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECE

The earliest Castilian tabernacle-altarpiece for which a precise date can be given is the one that presides over the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville, created *c.* 1278.²⁶ Some other specimens can be dated to the late thirteenth century, or *c.* 1300, based on stylistic grounds. These include the Arana I and Contrasta altarpieces and the so-called Marès I (Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès, inv. no 2225) and Wildenstein altarpieces of unknown provenance.²⁷ However, textual and visual evidence suggests that this type of altarpiece already existed by the mid-thirteenth century.

The *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (*Miracles of Our Lady*), a collection of Marian miracles in Castilian narrative verse written by the priest Gonzalo de Berceo *c.* 1250, describes as follows the altar of the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel when recounting the story of an image of the Virgin and Child, which was not damaged by a fire that ravaged the church (miracle XIV):

Estava la imagen	en su trono posada,
so fijo en sus brazos,	cosa es costumada,
los reís redor ella,	sedié bien compañada,
como rica reína	de Dios santificada. ²⁸

The reference to kings ‘around the Virgin’ does not appear in the versions of this very same miracle in other major collections of Marian miracles composed

²⁶ See the contribution by Teresa Laguna Paúl in this volume.

²⁷ A panel formerly in the Gudiol collection should be added to these if it was really part of a tabernacle-altarpiece. On this panel, see Cook/Gudiol Ricart, 1950, p. 268, fig. 262; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 54–55.

²⁸ Stanza 319, see Gonzalo de Berceo, 1985, p. 126 (English translation: ‘The image was placed on her throne, her Child in her arms, as is customary; kings were around her: she was well accompanied, as is fitting to a rich queen sanctified by God’). A reference to bishop Tello Téllez de Meneses situates the composition of this particular poem before 1246.

in Castile in the thirteenth century,²⁹ nor in the Latin account that is regarded as the source for Gonzalo de Berceo's text.³⁰ When adapting his sources, the Castilian poet did not merely translate them, he also expanded them, making them suitable for Castilian verse and endowing them with a dramatic accent and local colour to make them accessible to his Castilian audience. Considering this, we can assume that the description he provides of the interior of the abbey church of Mont-Saint-Michel reflects Castilian contemporary churches, and that an image of the Virgin and Child surrounded by the kings was familiar to him. We can interpret this as a reference to an early type of altarpiece comparable to that in Oberpleis, Germany (although, to date, there is no known altarpiece of this type in Castile),³¹ or, more accurately, to a tabernacle-altarpiece, where, in Castile and elsewhere, the kings were usually placed in the lower register of the left wing, thus completing a representation of the *Adoration of the Magi*.³²

By visual evidence regarding the existence of tabernacle-altarpieces by the mid-thirteenth century, I do not mean direct representations of them: I mean images apparently influenced by them, especially the portrait of King Fernando III in the so-called *Tumbo A* of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which is a cartulary collecting royal grants to the cathedral up to the thirteenth century where, as was customary, the portraits of the monarchs are placed at the beginning of the transcription of those documents issued by them. The portrait of King Fernando III on fol. 66v (Fig. 8), painted *c.* 1255, which is the date of the last document copied in the cartulary, shortly after his death in 1252, shows the monarch seated on his throne under a trefoil arch flanked on both sides by half trefoil arches that house the heraldry of Castile (to the left) and León (to the right).³³ As already noted by Serafin Moralejo, this creates the effect of an open triptych or, more accurately, of an open tabernacle-altarpiece, considering the

²⁹ These are the well-known *Cantigas de Santa María*, a collection of Galician-Portuguese poems in praise of the Virgin composed at the request of King Alfonso X (r. 1252–84), where this miracle is narrated in *cantiga* 39, see Alfonso X el Sabio, 1986–89, vol. 1, p. 156, and the *Liber Mariae*, a Latin treatise about the Virgin written by the Franciscan friar Juan Gil de Zamora, where this miracle is included in treatise XVI, treatise VI, miracle I, see Bohdziewicz, 2014, p. 432. In both versions, as in their ultimate Latin source, emphasis is on the fact that not even the cloth veil of the image was damaged during a fire that actually took place in 1112, see Delisle, ed., 1872, p. 142. This is mentioned by Gonzalo de Berceo in stanza 329 (Gonzalo de Berceo, 1985, p. 128).

³⁰ Published in Gonzalo de Berceo, 1985, p. 236.

³¹ Fuchß, 1999, pp. 110–111, ill. 63; Le Pogam (dir.), 2009, pp. 24 and 29, fig. 11.

³² On the possible origin of this arrangement in liturgical drama, see Forsyth, 1972, pp. 49–59.

³³ Sicart, 1981, pp. 99–100, pl. VIIa; Moralejo Álvarez, 2004 [originally published 1985], pp. 326–327; Rebollo Matías, 2019, pp. 139–143.

usual simplification of these complex structures in their pictorial renderings. This way of representing the now-deceased monarch is notable, as it is quite different from that in which all other monarchs had been depicted in this manuscript since the middle of the twelfth century. While all other monarchs, including his successor and current monarch Alfonso X, were depicted as warriors on horseback, Fernando III was depicted according to a visual strategy characteristic of religious imagery, a device that, in my opinion, has to be linked to the promotion of his sanctity, undertaken since the very moment of his death, even though it was not formally acknowledged until 1671 (Chamberlin, 2000, pp. 389–417). This way of presenting King Fernando III was echoed in another Galician cartulary, the *Tumbo de Toxos Outos*, ordered for the eponymous Benedictine abbey in 1289.³⁴ What is important for us in this context is that these miniatures suggest a well-established tradition of tabernacle-altarpieces by the mid-thirteenth century. Moreover, the miniature in the *Tumbo A* anticipates the display of heraldry in the side wings of the tabernacle-altarpiece of the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville, as well as the installation of the royal effigy below a baldachin in it.

How this tradition became well established is more difficult to ascertain through actual artefacts. Following Verena Fuchß (1999, p. 147), a starting point could have been the placement of a panel at the back of an image located over an altar in order to provide it with greater emphasis. To the best of my knowledge, evidence of this is scarce and controversial in the former Crown of Castile, comprising the Romanesque wooden image of the Virgin and Child in the Galician church of Santa María de Pontellas and the Gothic stone image of the Virgin and Child that presides over the high altarpiece of the church of Villalcázar de Sirga (Fig. 9).³⁵

The former was included by Cook and Gudiol Ricart in their well-known repertoire of Spanish Romanesque sculpture.³⁶ According to María del Pilar Carrillo Lista (1997, pp. 198–199, fig. 6), its back panel is a later addition, but this does not rule out a medieval origin.

Regarding the latter, there is no room for doubt, as its back panel, which was necessary so that censuring angels could be placed flanking the head of the Virgin,

³⁴ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Códices, L. 1002, fol. 18r. On this miniature, see Fernández-Pousa, 1944, pp. 416–417; Sicart, 1981, pp. 118–128, ill. 99; Gutiérrez Baños, 2019, pp. 86–88.

³⁵ The paragraphs about Villalcázar de Sirga have been written in a constant and fruitful dialogue with my colleague and friend Clara Fernández-Ladreda, from the Universidad de Navarra, to whom I express my gratitude. Any mistake is my own responsibility.

³⁶ Cook/Gudiol Ricart, 1950, p. 380, fig. 431. According to Castillo López, 1925–26, p. 269, its height is about 80 cm.

was carved in the same stone block as the image itself. The church of Villalcázar de Sirga that it presides over was a popular Marian sanctuary favoured by the Castilian royal family in the thirteenth century. Miracles performed there by the Virgin were included in Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa María*,³⁷ and it has been widely debated whether this image or any other Marian image within this temple was the *Magestade* mentioned and praised in the *Cantigas*.³⁸ Concerning this, it must be noted that its installation in the high altarpiece is modern: it dates back only to the questionable restoration of the ensemble completed in 1946 (Rubio Salán, 1952, p. 38).³⁹ Before this, the image was located by a pier at the entrance to the chapel of Santiago, in the south transept (as shown in several photographs), but this was also a modern arrangement.⁴⁰ We thus have no reliable information about its original position and function, especially whether it was actually a cult image, and, if so, the titular image of this very important Marian sanctuary. Evidence is so poor that any statement is problematic. This image has been related to the workshop that carved the monumental south portal of the church, which, in turn, has been connected to the workshop operating in the jambs of the south transept of the cathedral of León since c. 1260.⁴¹ This implies that, even if we were ready to accept that this was the titular image of this sanctuary, we should consider that at least three of the miracles recorded in the *Cantigas de Santa María*

³⁷ *Cantigas* 31, 217, 218, 227, 229, 232, 234, 243, 253, 268, 278, 301, 313 and 355, see Alfonso X el Sabio, 1986–89. Some of these *cantigas* were illustrated in the *Códices de las Historias*: in the *Códice Rico* (San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, ms. T-I-1, fol. 46v, which corresponds to *cantiga* 31) and in the *Códice de Florencia* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. B.R. 20, fols 18r, 37v, 96r, 105r and 111r, which correspond to *cantigas* 313, 253, 278, 301 and 227, respectively). Images depicted in these illustrations cannot be considered actual representations of the *Virgen de Villasirga*. On this sanctuary, see Fernández-Ladreda Aguadé, 2019, pp. 175–183.

³⁸ The reference to the *Magestade* in *cantiga* 253, verse 54. Other references to the titular image, explicit or implicit, are found in *cantigas* 31 and 355. References to its altar in *cantigas* 234, 268, 278, 301 and 355. Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2004, pp. 249–250, thinks that the image we are now discussing was the titular image of the sanctuary.

³⁹ As proven by a photograph by Luis Rodríguez Alonso in Arxiu Mas, Gudiol-39937 (a copy by the author in Archivo Histórico Provincial de Palencia). The image that was previously in the high altarpiece was a late medieval gesso sculpture of the Virgin and Child, now in the chapel of Santiago.

⁴⁰ As proven by a photograph by Luis Rodríguez Alonso in Arxiu Mas, Gudiol-39749 (a copy by the author in Archivo Histórico Provincial de Palencia), published by Navarro García, 1932, pl. 193, showing a previous location by the north wall of the bay preceding the northernmost apse of the church. This location also seems modern, as it looks intended for display, not with a liturgical or devotional purpose. In the picture this image is accompanied by others.

⁴¹ Ara Gil, 1988b, pp. 53–54; Ara Gil, 1995, pp. 256 and 282. On the workshop of the jambs of the south transept of León cathedral, see Franco Mata, 1998, pp. 338–343.

took place before its creation.⁴² Furthermore, its back panel, beyond providing support for the censing angels flanking the head of the Virgin, seems intended to facilitate the installation of the image in an architectural setting, which becomes clear when we compare this device with the one present in the images placed against the crossing piers, crowned by canopies carved in separate pieces. In short, I do not think that this image was created as an altar image, or that its back panel was created to provide emphasis to the sacred figures, but rather merely for practical reasons. I consider that this image was created for an architectural setting, but of what kind is uncertain.⁴³ In any case, its close iconographic relationship with the image carved in the south portal of the church⁴⁴ and with the one now in the chapel of Santiago,⁴⁵ to be discussed shortly, together with its probable influence in others, such as the presumed former titular image of the convent of Santa María de Belvís in Santiago de Compostela (Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2011, pp. 71–73, figs. 2–3), suggest that all these images refer to a common prototype, quite probably the genuine and now lost *Virgen de Villasirga* that was the object of widespread veneration during the thirteenth century.

Setting aside these problematic examples, a step forward in the development that led to tabernacle-altarpieces was the presentation of altar images within baldachins (Fuchß, 1999, p. 148). According to Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, from this stage on we could actually speak of tabernacle-altarpieces, even if movable wings did not exist yet (Le Pogam [dir.], 2009, p. 18). In the former Crown of Castile, if evidence of images with back panels is scarce and controversial, evidence of images within baldachins is, if not abundant, at least undisputed and magnificent, and includes two stone sculptures and at least one literary reference. Together with these, I would like to introduce a Portuguese example that accounts for a parallel development in Castile's neighbouring country, where, to the best of my knowledge, no other evidence of tabernacle-altarpieces is recorded (Fig. 10).

⁴² Those narrated in *cantiga* 229, which took place in the late twelfth century, and in *cantigas* 227 and 234, which took place during the reign of King Fernando III. It could be argued that this image was created as a renewal of the original one, keeping some of its features.

⁴³ Was it perhaps created as a 'copy' of the titular image of the sanctuary to be placed in a location more easily accessible to the pilgrims visiting the sanctuary?

⁴⁴ Both show the Virgin seated on a lions throne, which is a reference to Solomon's throne, a type of the Virgin herself.

⁴⁵ Both show the head of the Virgin flanked by censing angels. The image now in the chapel of Santiago shares with the image carved in the south portal the presence of an evil creature at the feet of the Virgin, underlining her role as the new Eve.

The Castilian specimens are the titular image of St Andrew of the female Cistercian abbey of San Andrés de Arroyo and the aforementioned Virgin and Child now in the chapel of Santiago in the church of Villalcázar de Sirga, both in the province of Palencia.

The former shows the seated effigy of the apostle holding the cross that identifies him under a canopy formed by trefoil arches. It was carved in a single stone block in the mid-thirteenth century, probably by the workshop responsible for the completion of the monastery (i.e., a workshop producing monumental sculpture), and it is outstanding as an early example of Castilian Gothic sculpture.⁴⁶

The second one is regarded by the most recent scholarship as a copy of the image at Villalcázar de Sirga discussed above, which is in the high altarpiece of the church. As commented above, we should consider the possibility that both refer to a common prototype: the genuine and now-lost *Virgen de Villasirga*. In this instance, the image of the Virgin and Child is presented under a canopy formed by gabled trefoil arches and crowned by a truncated octagonal spire flanked by turrets (some of them missing).⁴⁷ This image was carved in a single stone block c. 1270–80, and its close stylistic relationship to the much-acclaimed tombs that in the very same church house the remains of the *infante* Felipe (a son of King Fernando III who died in 1274) and a woman of disputed identity (in my opinion, the second wife of the *infante*, who died before 1265)⁴⁸ suggests that it was carved by the same workshop (i.e., one producing tomb sculpture). This workshop is linked to the one working at a later date in Aguilar de Campoo, to which Antón Pérez de Carrión belonged, and whom we can identify through his signature. This image is now in the chapel of Santiago accompanying the aforementioned tombs, which were transferred here from the second bay of the church in 1926 (Andrés Ordax, 1993, p. 39), but its original setting is unknown.⁴⁹ Considering its

⁴⁶ Ara Gil, 1988b, p. 183. This image was known to Verena Fuchß (1999, p. 148, ill. 116). It measures 129 x 43 x 43 cm.

⁴⁷ Ara Gil, 1988b, pp. 54–54; Ara Gil, 1995, pp. 256 and 282; Ara Gil, 1991, pp. 62–64; Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2004, pp. 249–250, fig. 6. It measures 174 x 60 x 38 cm.

⁴⁸ Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2004, pp. 246–248, identifies her as Beatriz Fernández, an illegitimate daughter of the *infante*, and considers that this woman was the patron of the ensemble. In my opinion, it is very unlikely that a woman in her 20s that should expect to marry commissioned her own tomb side by side with her father's tomb (in fact, she was still alive in 1321). Moreover, the heraldry displayed on the female tomb fits the lineage of the second wife of the *infante*, Inés de Guevara, see Menéndez Pidal, 2011, pp. 138–140.

⁴⁹ Its first recorded location, through a photograph by Luis Rodríguez Alonso presented above (see note 40), was by the north wall of the bay preceding the northernmost apse of the church. As commented above, this location seems modern.

technique (carved stone) and the presence of a canopy, some authors supposed that it belonged to the west portal of the church, either as a trumeau or as a tympanum image. This portal, mentioned in the records as the *puerta del Ángel*, was destroyed when the west front of the church collapsed in the eighteenth century. However, I think that we must consider it an altar image: an outstanding example of the evolution that led to the genuine tabernacle-altarpiece by emphasising a cult image placed above or behind an altar.⁵⁰ In this respect, I believe that the hypothesis put forward by Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras is very thought-provoking: she suggests that the sculpture may have formed an ensemble with the tombs of *infante* Felipe and his second wife (his daughter in her opinion), and that this ensemble echoed in some way the arrangement of the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville, where the *infante's* parents were buried, their effigies in front of the tabernacle-altarpiece of the *Virgen de los Reyes* (Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2004, pp. 249–250). Whatever its original setting may have been, this image is undoubtedly a landmark in the development of the altarpiece in Castile and in the whole Iberian Peninsula.

Even though only two such images are known to us today, the existence of further examples of this type in the former Crown of Castile is suggested by at least one literary reference. In *cantiga* 4, which tells of the miracle of the Jewish boy from Bourges who went to the church accompanying his schoolmates and received Communion from the image of the Virgin, the boy refers to it as the one *que vi so o chapitel* (I saw under the canopy),⁵¹ so suggesting a display similar to those extant in San Andrés de Arroyo and in Villalcázar de Sirga.

The Portuguese example of this type of monumental canopied image carved in a single stone block is the Virgin and Child known as *Nossa Senhora da Consolação* from the church of the Misericórdia of Guarda, but probably ultimately from the former cathedral of the same town, where it could have served as the

⁵⁰ I rule out the possibility of a trumeau image, as I know no other example of a seated Virgin and Child as a trumeau image, and also the possibility of a tympanum image (for which an example is provided by the portal of the Navarrese church of Santa María la Real in Olite), as its polychromy proves it was a free-standing image.

⁵¹ Alfonso X el Sabio, 1986–89, vol. 1, p. 64. This does not appear in the versions of the same miracle provided by Gonzalo de Berceo (miracle XVI, see Gonzalo de Berceo, 1985, pp. 132–136) and by Juan Gil de Zamora (treatise XVI, treatise I, miracle VII, see Bohdziewicz, 2014, pp. 376–377), nor in their ultimate Latin source (Gonzalo de Berceo, 1985, pp. 237–238), and, as argued above about Gonzalo de Berceo's miracle XIV, it can be considered a development of the local poet based on his/her own experience of church interiors. The illustration of *cantiga* 4 in the *Códice Rico* (fol. 9v) presents the whole altar ensemble under a baldachin.

titular image. It is now exhibited in the Museu da Guarda (inv. no D-23), where it is catalogued as a Romanesque sculpture from no later than the first half of the thirteenth century.⁵² However, in spite of its archaic appearance, prompted by the difficulties of granite carving, it is, in my opinion, a Gothic sculpture from no earlier than the late thirteenth century: the intimacy and affective gesture of the Child, who extends his right arm to touch the shoulder of the Virgin, as if He were about to embrace her,⁵³ suggest such a late chronology, in accordance with the architectural design of the canopy, with gabled pointed horseshoe arches resting on columns.

4. DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE CASTILIAN TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECE

The images discussed so far show no traces of hinges, so they could not have had the movable wings that distinguish genuine tabernacle-altarpieces, even though they are related to such pieces. Setting aside their probable existence by the middle of the thirteenth century, the earliest examples of known or preserved movable wings are the aforementioned panels of the Arana I and Contrasta altarpieces and of the so-called Marès I and Wildenstein altarpieces of unknown provenance, datable, as stated before, to the late thirteenth century, or *c.* 1300.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, none of these altarpieces is fully known or preserved, but putting them side by side and comparing them with later examples and with related structures proves useful for investigating the origins and distinctive features of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces.

From Arana I (all four panels partially preserved, but fragmented), only its reverse is known, painted with full-length figures of apostles; as its obverse was

⁵² Rodrigues, 1977, pp. 66–67; Ferrão, 2004, pp. 62–64, fig. 1. It measures 174 x 56 cm. The Virgin is seated on a lions throne. My thanks to the Museu da Guarda for providing information about this image, and to my colleague Carla Varela Fernandes, from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, for generously sharing with me her knowledge about Portuguese medieval sculpture.

⁵³ Such a gesture is known to me only through the Virgin and Child of Tolbaños de Arriba (Burgos), see Martínez Martínez, 2016, p. 654. Martínez Martínez dates it to the second third of the fourteenth century and relates it to those high-quality images in which the Child catches the veil of the Virgin.

⁵⁴ The tabernacle-altarpiece of the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville is not considered here since its panels, known through old descriptions and depictions, displayed no figures, but only heraldry.

completely reworked in the fifteenth century.⁵⁵ From *Contrasta* (three panels known through old photographs), only its obverse is known, but, as explained before, it is mystified by the addition of reliefs from elsewhere. From *Marès I* (one panel preserved, but barbarously altered, and another panel known through an old photograph) and *Wildenstein* (three panels preserved, two of them partially), both their obverses and reverses are known, but their obverses lack the reliefs they once displayed, while their reverses show traces of colour originally imitating jasper in *Marès I* and, extraordinarily, scenes of the passion of Christ in *Wildenstein*.⁵⁶ Considering the arrangement of their obverses and the spaces left there for reliefs, *Contrasta*, *Marès I* and *Wildenstein* were in all likelihood Marian altarpieces, and the way *Arana I* was reworked in the fifteenth century allows us to surmise that it was also a Marian altarpiece. If we accept this, all of the earliest extant panels from Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces correspond to Marian altarpieces, which is not extraordinary, as their leading role in the development of this type of early altarpiece is assumed. Their precise features can be determined by examining widely preserved fourteenth-century Castilian Marian tabernacle-altarpieces. These include the well-known *Castildelgado* and *Yurre* altarpieces⁵⁷ and also the *Chiale* altarpiece, recently brought to light and of unknown provenance.⁵⁸ The *Castildelgado* altarpiece (Fig. 11) is especially important for our

⁵⁵ On this altarpiece, see Sáenz Pascual, 2012, pp. 245–247 and 253–259, fig. 6; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 64–68, fig. 7.

⁵⁶ On the *Marès I* altarpiece, see Melero Moneo, 1991, pp. 432–433; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 48–49, fig. 2. On the *Wildenstein* altarpiece, see Post, 1938, pp. 733–734, fig. 276; Post, 1941, pp. 547–550, fig. 253; Gudiol, 1941, p. 12, fig. 10; Cook/Gudiol Ricart, 1950, p. 271, fig. 263; Frinta, 1967, pp. 111–112, figs 9–13; Krüger, 1992, p. 19, ills 170–171; Baetjer, 1995, p. 146; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471722> (accessed 15 July 2019); <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471999> (accessed 15 July 2019).

⁵⁷ On the *Castildelgado* altarpiece, see Frinta, 1967, p. 106, fig. 4; Lapaire, 1969, pp. 175 and 187, fig. 9; Yarza Luaces, 1991, pp. 393–394; Krüger, 1992, p. 19, ill. 172; Fuchß, 1999, p. 143, ill. 102; Ara Gil, 2006, pp. 185–188, figs 4–5; Kroesen, 2009, pp. 47–48, fig. 21; Muñoz Párraga, 2009, pp. 354–355; Bango Torviso, 2010, pp. 188–189 and 193–200, figs 145–156; O'Donnell, 2018, pp. 81–84, figs 9–11 and 13. On the *Yurre* altarpiece, see Enciso Viana *et alii*, 1975, pp. 60 and 621, photographs 906–913; López de Ocariz Alzola, 1989, pp. 188–191; Echeverría Goñi, dir. and coord., t. 1, pp. 125–126, t. 2, pp. 439–444; Franco Mata, 2007, pp. 254–255; Lahoz, 2013, pp. 175–178, fig. 58.

⁵⁸ On this altarpiece, see Mor, 2016, pp. 44–53; O'Donnell, 2018, pp. 75–113. O'Donnell designates this altarpiece 'The Saint Catherine panels', but I cannot agree with this proposal, as I consider that the figure of St Catherine nowadays displayed on one of the panels is a spurious addition. Therefore, I prefer designating this altarpiece after the art dealer who brought it to light in 2016.

purposes, as the scenes on its obverse were carved on the same wing panels, while the Yurre and Chiale altarpieces were made by fixing the independently carved scenes of their obverses on the wing panels. In the course of time, this led to restorations or alterations that placed erroneously some of the scenes. By comparing them with the Castildelgado altarpiece, it is possible to reconstruct their original appearance: Yurre was identical to Castildelgado,⁵⁹ and Chiale almost identical.⁶⁰ Further evidence is provided by the panel-altarpiece of Santa María de Mave in its original condition, as it showed an arrangement of figures almost identical to that of Marian tabernacle-altarpieces when opened.

The most distinctive feature of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces is the arrangement of the lower register of their obverses, as it is systematically repeated in all these examples: to the left, the three Magi adoring the Christ Child of the sculpture of the Virgin and Child presiding over the ensemble; to the right, Joseph (accompanying the Virgin and Child and so completing the scene of the *Adoration of the Magi*) and the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin forming the scene of the *Annunciation*. Each figure is presented on its own, under its own arch. Moreover, the oldest altarpieces, despite their poor condition, show another outstanding feature: their lower registers are significantly taller than their middle and upper registers (the tendency in the coming decades was to make them equal, as proved by the Castildelgado and Yurre altarpieces) (Fig. 12). In short, Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces emphasised the lower register, giving it more prominence through its height and through its iconographic choice, as the most important scenes were reserved for it, without considering their displacement from their 'logical' order in the overall narrative or even their sequence, as the *Adoration of the Magi* precedes the *Annunciation* (given that, as expected, we read from left to right). The placement of the Magi to the left of the presiding sculpture of the Virgin and Child was customary in other countries (Lapaire,

⁵⁹ Their arrangement includes, from bottom to top and from left to right: the *Adoration of the Magi* and the *Annunciation* (lower register); the *Magi before Herod*, the *Massacre of the Innocents*, the *Dormition of the Virgin* and the *Coronation of the Virgin* (middle register); the *Visitation*, the *Nativity of Christ*, the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* and the *Announcement to the Shepherds* (upper register).

⁶⁰ In Chiale the order of the *Magi before Herod* and the *Massacre of the Innocents* is reversed, and the *Dormition of the Virgin* is substituted by the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*. This permits placing in the space of the last one in the upper register the *Announcement to the Shepherds*, whose space, in turn, is occupied by the *Flight into Egypt*, not represented in Castildelgado and Yurre. In its original condition the lower register remained unchanged.

1969, p. 181), but the placement of the *Annunciation* following the *Adoration of the Magi* was not, and caused some discomfort, as the Virgin in isolation was relegated to the right panel of the right wing. This sometimes led to an alteration of the order of the figures of the right-hand side, placing the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin together on the left panel of the right wing and Joseph in isolation on the right panel of the right wing (but this caused another anomaly: Joseph witnessing the *Annunciation*). In the most modern examples of Castilian Marian tabernacle-altarpieces (those of Arana II, Olano, Alcalá and known through the Arxiu Mas, just painted and already corresponding to the fifteenth century), this arrangement was forgotten altogether and the *Annunciation* was placed at the beginning of the iconographic program, at the upper left of the altarpiece. This, finally, caused the Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces to lose their distinctiveness.

The arrangement of the lower register of the obverse of genuine Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces was heralded by Castilian tomb sculpture since the first half of the thirteenth century, as shown by several sepulchres from Palencia and Valladolid that popularised a scheme that was adopted by the earliest tabernacle-altarpieces and that culminated brilliantly in the friezes over the main portal of the church of Villalcázar de Sirga (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 62–63) (Fig. 13).

In the absence of evidence about the possible role played by foreign influences in the emergence of Castilian tabernacle-altarpieces, it seems clear that major, not minor arts, played the most outstanding part in this process, which started by emphasising cult images placed above or behind altars and continued by adopting schemes previously tested in tomb and monumental sculpture.

5. APPENDIX: UPDATED LIST OF CASTILIAN TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES

This list updates and, when necessary, amends, the one I published in 2018 (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 78–79). For every tabernacle-altarpiece the following information is provided: city or village of origin and building of origin (or, if this information is unknown, the conventional name, between quotation marks, through which it is designated in this research); present-day location (if different of its place of origin or if the latter information is unknown); preserved elements; dedicatee; decoration of the obverse, specifying its technique; decoration of the reverse (this is always painted, with the exception of the interior set of wings of the tabernacle-altarpiece of the royal chapel of the cathedral of Seville); date. If

several tabernacle-altarpieces come from the same city of village or are designated through the same conventional name, they are differentiated through Roman numerals.

5.1. *Tabernacle-altarpieces of known provenance*

1.- Almazán (Soria), church of San Vicente (Almazán [Soria], Ayuntamiento): one panel. DEDICATEE: St Vincent. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Vincent (painting). REVERSE: without decoration. DATE: fifteenth century.

2.- Arana I (Burgos), church of the Asunción de Nuestra Señora (Treviño [Burgos], church of San Pedro): four incomplete panels, fragmented. DEDICATEE: presumably Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: without information (concealed or destroyed by the reuse of the panels for the creation of Arana II). REVERSE: St John the Evangelist, St Paul, St Peter and an unidentified apostle. DATE: thirteenth century.

3.- Arana II (Burgos), church of the Asunción de Nuestra Señora (Treviño [Burgos], church of San Pedro): four incomplete panels, fragmented. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (painting). REVERSE: pattern of stars (removed during restoration to make visible Arana I's reverse). DATE: fifteenth century.

4.- Astudillo I (Palencia), convent of Santa Clara (private collection): two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: St Mary Magdalen. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Mary Magdalen (painting). REVERSE: St Peter (concealed or destroyed by modern overpainting) and jasper imitation. DATE: fourteenth century.

5.- Astudillo II (Palencia), convent of Santa Clara (private collection): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: an unidentified Dominican saint. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of an unidentified Dominican saint (painting). REVERSE: jasper imitation. DATE: fourteenth century.

6.- Astudillo III (Palencia), convent of Santa Clara (private collection): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: an unidentified saint. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of an unidentified saint (painting). REVERSE: jasper imitation. DATE: fourteenth century.

7.- Castildelgado (Burgos), hermitage of Nuestra Señora la Real del Campo (Castildelgado [Burgos], church of San Pedro y San Esteban – the titular image –, and Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès, inv. no 814 – the remaining elements –): titular image, baldachin and all four panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child (*Nuestra Señora la Real del Campo*). OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ

and of the death and glorification of the Virgin (reliefs). REVERSE: plain black (overpainted). DATE: fourteenth century.

8.- Contrasta/Kontrasta (Álava/Araba) (?), hermitage of Nuestra Señora de Elizmendi, but ultimately either the hermitage of San Salvador or the hermitage of San Adrián (whereabouts unknown): three panels. DEDICATEE: presumably Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes lost, presumably at least scenes of the infancy of Christ (reliefs). REVERSE: without information. DATE: thirteenth century. N.B.: the reliefs displayed on the panels in old photographs do not belong to the presumed Contrasta altarpiece, but to the Santa María de Mave altarpiece, which is not a tabernacle-altarpiece.

9.- Covarrubias (Burgos), collegiate church of San Cosme y San Damián: titular image and one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: St James the Greater. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St James the Greater (painting). REVERSE: without decoration. DATE: fourteenth century.

10.- Fuentes de Nava (Palencia), church of Santa María: all four panels. DEDICATEE: an unidentified bishop saint. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of an unidentified bishop saint (painting). REVERSE: plain red. DATE: fourteenth or fifteenth century.

11.- Gáceta/Gazeta (Álava/Araba), church of San Martín (Vitoria/Gasteiz [Álava/Araba], Elizbarrutiko Arte Sakratuaren Museoa – Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro, inv. nos 617 and 619): titular image and baldachin, incomplete (canopy and part of the back panel). DEDICATEE: St Michael. OBVERSE: no panels preserved. REVERSE: *idem*. DATE: fourteenth or fifteenth century. N.B.: there is no conclusive evidence about this being originally a tabernacle-altarpiece, as only the upper section of the baldachin is preserved, but this is the most likely.

12.- Garray (Soria), hermitage of the Mártires (Garray [Soria], church of San Juan Bautista – the supposed titular image –, and whereabouts unknown – the baldachin –): titular image? (it is unlikely that the one presiding over the ensemble known through an old photograph is the original one) and baldachin. DEDICATEE: uncertain, Virgin and Child? OBVERSE: no panels preserved. REVERSE: *idem*. DATE: thirteenth or fourteenth century. N.B.: there is no conclusive evidence about this being originally a tabernacle-altarpiece, as the configuration of the ensemble known through an old photograph shows the altarpiece in a late medieval alteration, but this is the most likely.

13.- Heredia (Álava/Araba), hermitage of San Bartolomé (Vitoria/Gasteiz [Álava/Araba], Elizbarrutiko Arte Sakratuaren Museoa – Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro, inv. nos 423, 424, 425 and 426): two incomplete panels, fragmented.

DEDICATEE: St Christopher. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Christopher (painting). REVERSE: plain red. DATE: fifteenth century.

14.- Jócano/Jokano (Álava/Araba), church of San Martín (Vitoria/Gasteiz [Álava/Araba], Elizbarrutiko Arte Sakratuaren Museoa – Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro, inv. no 6): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: St George? OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St George? (painting). REVERSE: pattern of flowers. DATE: fifteenth century.

15.- León, cathedral (?) (León, Museo de León, inv. no 14): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: uncertain, St Catherine? OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Catherine (painting). REVERSE: plain red. DATE: fifteenth century.

16.- Logroño (La Rioja), church of Santiago el Real: titular image and two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: St James the Greater. OBVERSE: scenes lost, presumably scenes of the life of St James the Greater (reliefs). REVERSE: plain red. DATE: fourteenth century.

17.- Los Balbases (Burgos), church of San Esteban (Burgos, Taller Diocesano de Restauración): two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: an unidentified saint. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of an unidentified saint (painting). REVERSE: St Paul and plain red. DATE: fifteenth century.

18.- Medrano (La Rioja), church of the Natividad de Nuestra Señora (Calahorra [La Rioja], cathedral museum): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: uncertain. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Fabian (painting). REVERSE: St Fabian. DATE: fourteenth or fifteenth century.

19.- Mondragón/Arrasate (Guipúzcoa/Gipuzkoa), church of San Juan Bautista (San Sebastián/Donostia [Guipúzcoa/Gipuzkoa], Donostiako Elizbarrutiko Museoa – Museo Diocesano de San Sebastián, no inv. no): titular image and baldachin, incomplete (canopy and back panel). DEDICATEE: an unidentified Cistercian saint. OBVERSE: no panels preserved. REVERSE: *idem*. DATE: fourteenth century.

20.- Olano (Álava/Araba), church of San Bartolomé: one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (painting). REVERSE: St Peter. DATE: fifteenth century.

21.- Pangua (Burgos), church of San Cornelio y San Cipriano (whereabouts unknown): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: unknown. OBVERSE: without information. REVERSE: St Peter. DATE: fourteenth century.

22.- Quintanar de Rioja (La Rioja), church of San Román (Santo Domingo de la Calzada [La Rioja], cathedral museum): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: uncertain, St Romanus? OBVERSE: St Romanus and scenes of his life? (reliefs). REVERSE: without decoration. DATE: fourteenth century.

23.- Seville, cathedral, royal chapel: titular image and exterior baldachin, incomplete (canopy, altered). DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child (*Virgen de los Reyes*). OBVERSE: no panels preserved, but known through records and representations in different media; interior panels, pattern of actual precious stones (silverwork); exterior panels, heraldry of Castile and León (silverwork). REVERSE: *idem*; interior panels, heraldry of Castile and León (silverwork); exterior panels, heraldry of Castile and León. DATE: thirteenth century.

24.- Villamanca (Álava/Araba), church of Santiago: titular image and baldachin. DEDICATEE: St James the Greater. OBVERSE: no panels preserved. REVERSE: *idem*. DATE: fourteenth century.

25.- Yurre/Ihurre (Álava/Araba), church of Santiago: titular image? (it is unlikely that the one presiding over the ensemble at present is the original one) and all four panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ and of the death and glorification of the Virgin (reliefs). REVERSE: pattern of flowers (overpainted). DATE: fourteenth century.

26.- Zuazo de Cuartango/Zuhatzu Kuartango (Álava/Araba), church of San Pedro (whereabouts unknown): baldachin, incomplete (back panel, altered), and four incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: St Peter. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Peter (painting). REVERSE: St Fabian, St Sebastian and pattern of stars. DATE: fifteenth century.

5.2. *Tabernacle-altarpiece of unknown provenance, but known whereabouts*

27.- ‘Marès I altarpiece’ (Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès, inv. no 2225 – one panel –, and whereabouts unknown – one panel –): two panels, the one in the Museu Frederic Marès altered. DEDICATEE: presumably Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes lost, presumably at least scenes of the infancy of Christ (reliefs). REVERSE: jasper imitation. DATE: thirteenth century. N.B.: the reliefs displayed on the panel in the Museu Frederic Marès do not belong to this altarpiece.

28.- ‘Marès II altarpiece’ (Barcelona, Museu Frederic Marès, inv. no 711): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (reliefs). REVERSE: plain blue-gray. DATE: fourteenth century.

29.- ‘Suma I altarpiece’ (Madrid, Museo Cerralbo, inv. no 31051): two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: St Clare. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Clare (painting). REVERSE: Jeremiah, an unidentified prophet and jasper imitation. DATE: fourteenth century.

30.- 'Suma II altarpiece' (Madrid, Museo Cerralbo, inv. no 31051): two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (painting). REVERSE: *Annunciation*. DATE: fourteenth century.

31.- 'Wildenstein altarpiece' (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cloisters Collection, inv. nos 55.62a, 55.62b and 1977.94): three panels, two of them incomplete. DEDICATEE: presumably Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes lost, presumably at least scenes of the infancy of Christ (reliefs). REVERSE: scenes of the passion and resurrection of Christ. DATE: thirteenth century.

32.- 'Haupt I altarpiece' (Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, inv. no Śr. 218): three incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: St John the Baptist. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St John the Baptist. REVERSE: St Paul and pattern of stars. DATE: fourteenth century.

33.- 'Haupt II altarpiece' (Warsaw, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, inv. Śr. 219): one panel. DEDICATEE: an unidentified saint. OBVERSE: scenes of the life of an unidentified saint. REVERSE: St Paul. DATE: fourteenth century.

34.- 'Chiale altarpiece' (private collection): all four panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ and of the glorification of the Virgin (reliefs). REVERSE: St Peter, St Paul and jasper imitation. DATE: fourteenth century.

35.- 'Alcalá altarpiece' (private collection): two panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (painting). REVERSE: destroyed by modern cradling. DATE: fifteenth century.

5.3. *Tabernacle-altarpiece of unknown provenance and whereabouts*

36.- 'Gudiol altarpiece' (whereabouts unknown): one incomplete panel. DEDICATEE: uncertain, St Giles? OBVERSE: scenes of the life of St Giles (painting). REVERSE: without information. DATE: thirteenth century.

37.- 'Mas 47406 altarpiece' (whereabouts unknown): two incomplete panels. DEDICATEE: Virgin and Child. OBVERSE: scenes of the infancy of Christ (painting). REVERSE: without information. DATE: fifteenth century.

38.- 'Mas C-93779 altarpiece' (whereabouts unknown): two panels. DEDICATEE: uncertain, Virgin and Child? OBVERSE: scenes of the death and glorification of the Virgin? (reliefs). REVERSE: without information. DATE: fourteenth century.

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Fig. 1. *Royal privilege issued by King Sancho IV in 1285.*
 Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid.



Fig. 2. *Obverse and reverse of the panel of Olano*
(photos: Servicio de Restauración de la Diputación Foral de Álava).

Church of San Bartolomé, Olano (Álava).

Baldachin of Mondragón

(photo: Jesús Muñiz Petralanda). Museo Diocesano de San Sebastián, San Sebastián.

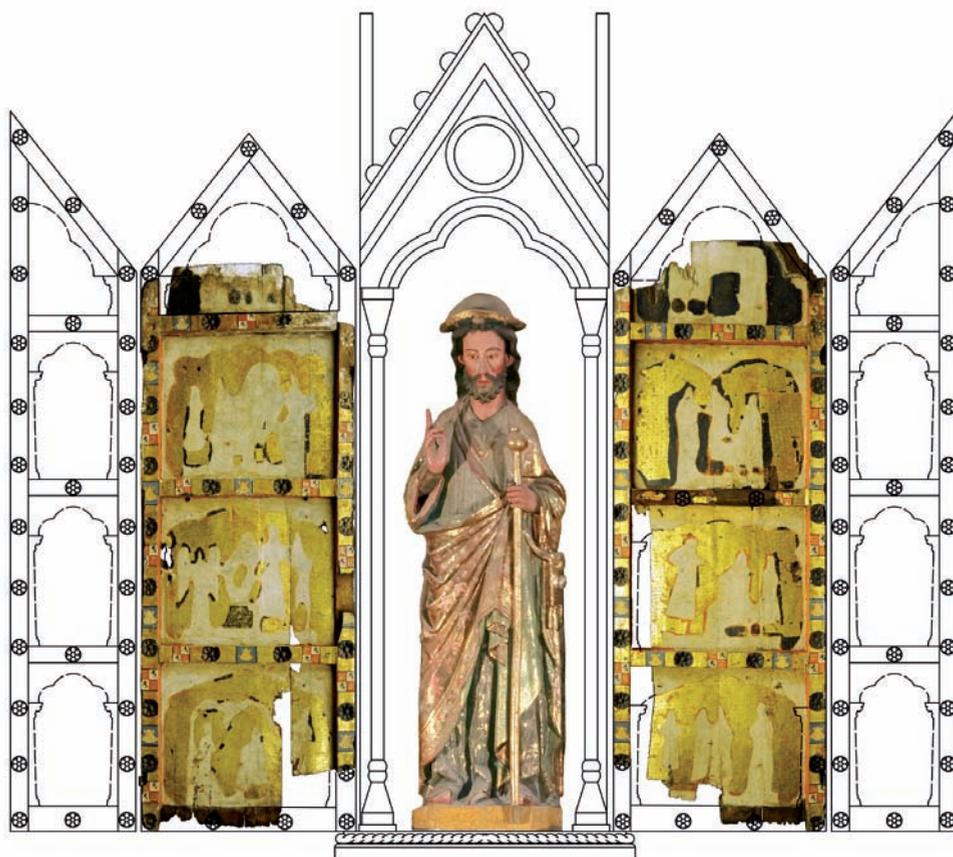


Fig. 3. *Reconstruction of the Logroño altarpiece*
(graphics: Francisco M. Morillo).

Church of Santiago el Real (high altarpiece – image – and nave – panels –), Logroño.

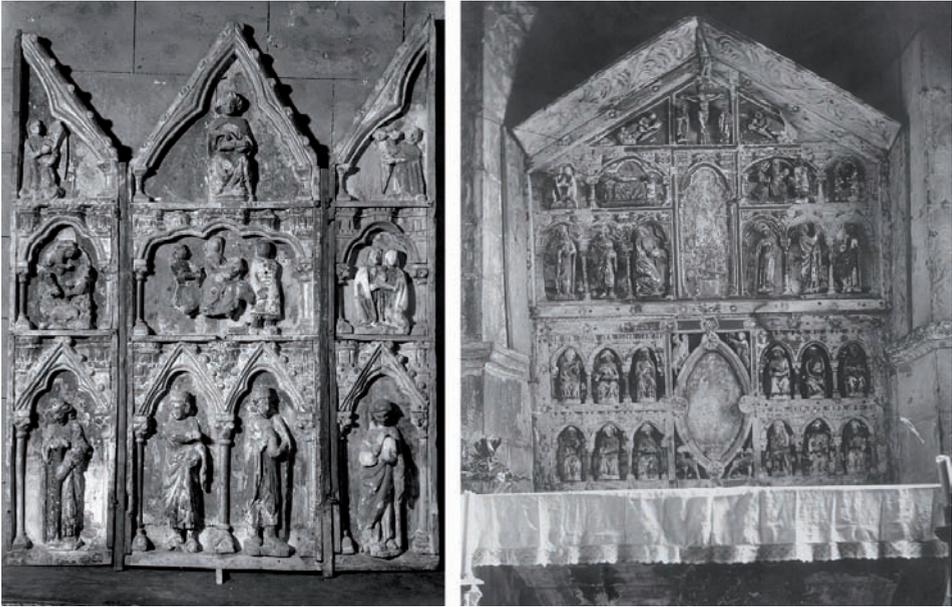


Fig. 4. *The presumed Contrasta altarpiece, condition in 1956*
(photo: © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, Gudiol-37227).
Whereabouts unknown.

The Santa María de Mave altarpiece, condition before 1931
(photo: © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, not numbered).
Cathedral (chapel of San Nicolás), Burgos.

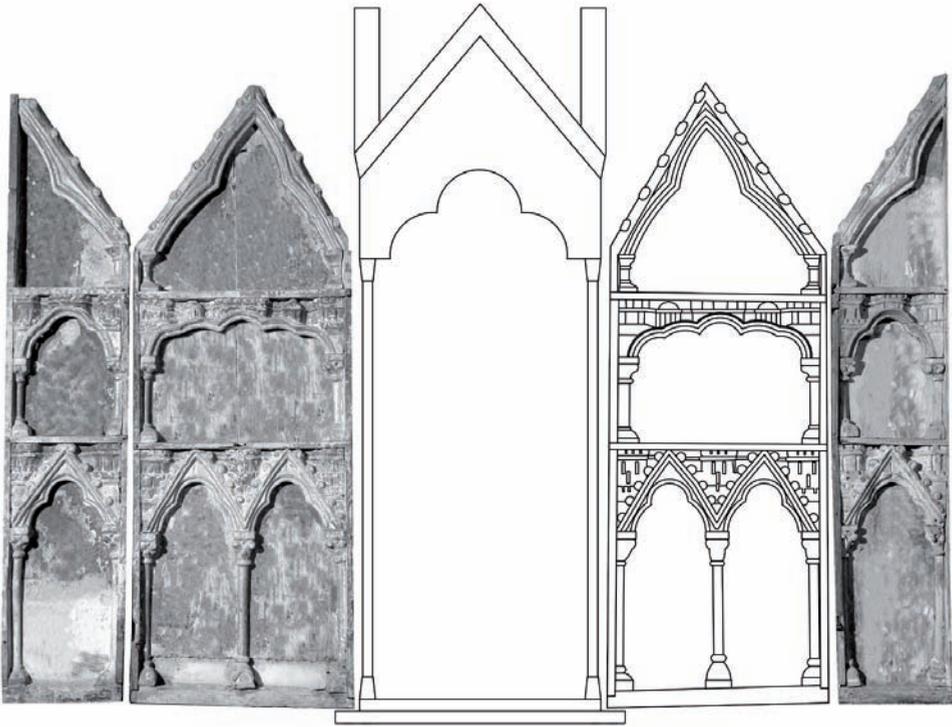


Fig. 5. *Reconstruction of the presumed Contrasta altarpiece* (graphics: Francisco M. Morillo). Whereabouts unknown.



Fig. 6. *Reliquary of the 'Virgen del Cabello' (Virgin of the Hair).*
Museo Diocesano de Arte Sacro, Vitoria.

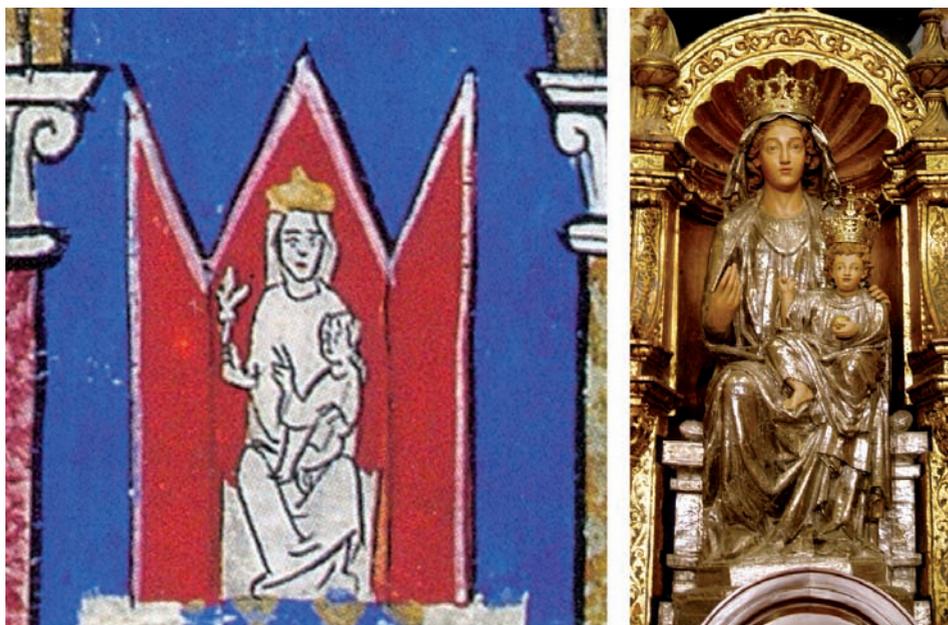


Fig. 7. *Detail of the royal privilege issued by King Sancho IV in 1285.*
Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid.
Virgin and Child, called 'Virgen del Retablo'.
Cathedral (high altarpiece), Toledo.



Fig. 8. *Portrait of King Fernando III on fol. 66v of the Tumbo A.*
Cathedral archive and library, Santiago de Compostela (La Coruña).



Fig. 9. *Virgin and Child*

(photo: © Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas, C-31909).

Church of Santa María de Pontellas, O Castro de San Fiz (La Coruña).

Virgin and Child, condition before 1946 (photo: © ADPBU-PH-10777).

Church of Santa María la Blanca (currently high altarpiece), Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia).



Fig. 10. *St Andrew*. Cistercian abbey, San Andrés de Arroyo (Palencia).
Virgin and Child. Church of Santa María la Blanca (chapel of Santiago),
Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia).
Virgin and Child, called 'Nossa Senhora da Consolação'. Museu da Guarda, Guarda.



Fig. II. *Reconstruction of the Castildelgado altarpiece* (graphics: Francisco M. Morillo). Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona (altarpiece), and church of San Pedro y San Esteban, Castildelgado (Burgos) (Virgin and Child, called 'Nuestra Señora la Real del Campo').

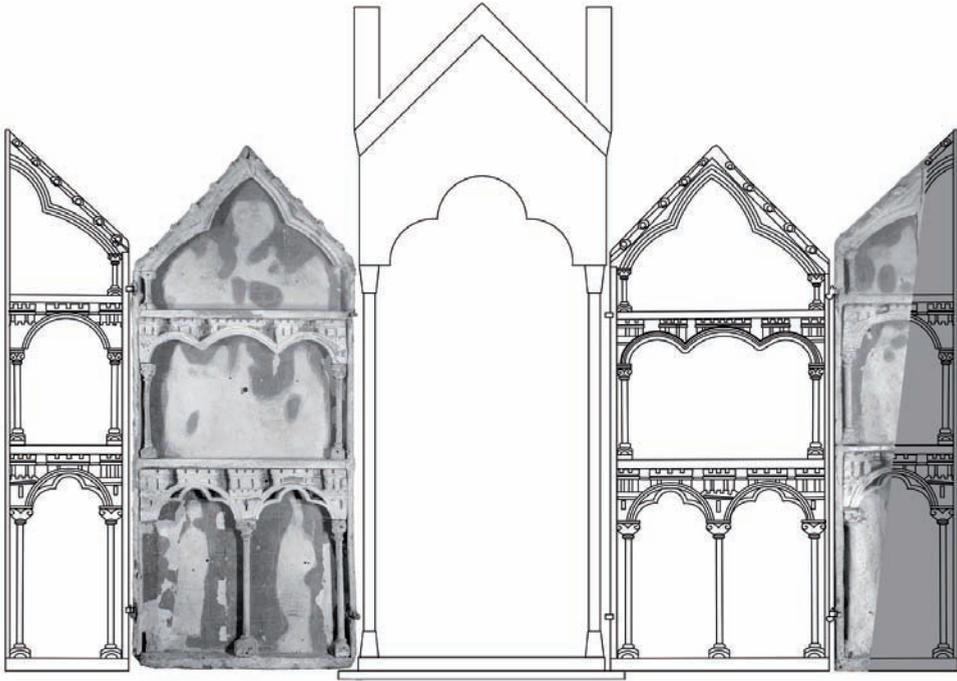


Fig. 12. *Reconstruction of the Marès I altarpiece* (graphics: Francisco M. Morillo). Museu Frederic Marès, Barcelona (right panel of the left wing: nowadays altered), and whereabouts unknown (right panel of the right wing).



Fig. 13. *South portal.*
Church of Santa María la Blanca, Villalcázar de Sirga (Palencia).



**EL TABERNÁCULO DE LA VIRGEN DE LOS REYES
Y LA MEMORIA DOCUMENTAL
DE OTROS TABERNÁCULOS GÓTICOS
DE LA CATEDRAL DE SEVILLA***

THE TABERNACLE OF THE ‘VIRGEN DE LOS REYES’
AND THE DOCUMENTARY MEMORY OF OTHER GOTHIC
TABERNACLES OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SEVILLE

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Resumen

Estudio del tabernáculo de la Virgen de los Reyes (h. 1278) y su instalación en la capilla Real renacentista (1579). Revisión y noticias documentales del tabernáculo encargado al orfebre Sancho Martínez (1366), aportaciones al conocimiento del tabernáculo de la Virgen de la Sede y al tardogótico de la Virgen de la Antigua (1497-1499) de la catedral de Sevilla.

Palabras clave

Catedral de Sevilla, tabernáculo gótico, tabernáculo de plata, pintura gótica, escultura gótica, orfebrería gótica, microarquitectura.

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Abstract

Study of the tabernacle of the 'Virgen de los Reyes' (Virgin of the Monarchs, c. 1278) and its installation in the Renaissance royal chapel (1579). Review and documentary information of the tabernacle entrusted to the silversmith Sancho Martínez (1366), and contributions to the knowledge of the tabernacle of the 'Virgen de la Sede' (Virgin of the See) and to the Late Gothic one of the 'Virgen de la Antigua' (Virgin of the Old One [Cathedral], 1497-1499) of the cathedral of Seville.

Keywords

Seville cathedral, Gothic tabernacle, silver tabernacle, Gothic painting, Gothic sculpture, Gothic silverwork, microarchitecture.

La veneración y culto debido a las imágenes requiere de un espacio y de un mobiliario litúrgico que sacralice su disposición en el altar, y conforma en la topografía de los templos medievales escenografías litúrgicas bajo ciborios, tabernáculos, retablos o, incluso, doseletes de piedra, madera o metal. El doselete o el chapitel acoge la imagen y le da un espacio propio, un lugar donde realizarla para sensibilizar, preparar y evocar en el fiel la memoria de aquellos valores eternos que le impulsaban, desde una mentalidad medieval, a apoyarse en María como su intercesora y en los santos como sus protectores.

La conquista e incorporación de Sevilla al reino de Castilla determinaron la consagración de su mezquita aljama como catedral de santa María en 1248, y un proceso continuo de adaptación de su espacio a las necesidades del culto cristiano y de la corona, a la devoción de los fieles y a los compromisos funerarios adquiridos. La recuperación gráfica de aquel recinto monumental en continua transformación nos permite contextualizar el espacio de sus capillas y la disposición de sus altares antes de su derribo y de la construcción del templo gótico actual, igualmente modificado por las actuaciones renacentistas y barrocas, las renovaciones académicas, las restauraciones y las campañas de conservación posteriores.¹ En ese recinto medieval recibieron culto tres de las imágenes marianas más arraigadas en la religiosidad medieval sevillana: la Virgen de los Reyes, la Virgen de la Antigua y la Virgen de la Sede.

¹ Jiménez Martín/Pérez Peñaranda, 1997, pp. 22-31, fig. 3. Laguna Paúl, 1998, pp. 43-66, fig. 11; 2019, pp. 204-209, fig. 2. Almagro Gorbea, 2007, pp. 14-42, fig. 14 (esta reconstrucción, actualizada en 2009, fue publicada en Laguna Paúl, 2019, fig. 2).

La revisión de las fuentes documentales junto con la arqueología, entendida como un método de recuperación de obras perdidas o transformadas, nos guió en una investigación interdisciplinaria de la topografía y las escenografías litúrgicas de la capilla Real y del presbiterio de la capilla mayor de la catedral de Sevilla, cuyos altares presiden desde mediados del siglo XIII la Virgen de los Reyes y la Virgen de la Sede. La disposición de estos altares produjo cambios significativos en la catedral mudéjar, en las sucesivas etapas de la construcción del edificio gótico actual y de la capilla Real renacentista. La configuración espacial de la catedral mudéjar y las pautas artísticas de mediados del siglo XIII facilitaron la instalación en estos altares de tabernáculos con las alas de sus puertas abatibles cobijando ambas esculturas, y sus batientes permitían hacer visible u ocultar la imagen de culto sin recurrir a cortinas ni otras complejas instalaciones. El ritual de descubrimiento y ocultamiento de las imágenes marianas en la catedral hispalense está constatado, igualmente, en el altar de la Virgen de la Antigua, cuya arraigada devoción lo mantuvo exento después del derribo de la capilla mudéjar de san Pedro, y en otras imágenes encargadas para los nuevos altares góticos (Fig. 1).

La mayoría de estos tabernáculos góticos no alcanzaron las últimas décadas del siglo XVI, pero su rastro permanece en el archivo de la catedral de Sevilla y podemos conocer sus características artísticas o adentrarnos en sus programas figurativos. Recuperar o reconstruir la información de la materialidad de estos tabernáculos constituye una investigación constante que revaloriza y actualiza el trabajo de cuantos nos precedieron o comparten todavía nuestras tareas académicas e historiadoras desde que el cabildo de la catedral de Sevilla organizó la gestión administrativa y económica anual del templo, elaboró el curso de los aniversarios, de sus libros blancos y documentación que custodian sus archiveros y consultan incansablemente los investigadores desde el siglo XVII.

I. LA VIRGEN DE LOS REYES “EN UN TABERNÁCULO QUE ESTÁ MÁS ALTO QUE EL DE LOS REYES, MUY GRANDE, CUBIERTO TODO DE PLATA”

En la capilla Real de la primitiva catedral de Sevilla, Alfonso X llevó a cabo una empresa artística innovadora que aunó su ideario de exaltación mariana y su ideología del poder real desarrollada en las *Partidas* (1252-1288) y en el *Espéculo* (1255-1260), materializada en este recinto en la veneración a la Virgen de los Reyes y en el constante recuerdo a la figura de su progenitor Fernando III el Santo. La magnitud del proyecto, de las obras encargadas y terminadas antes de 1279 cuan-

do consta el traslado de los restos de la reina Beatriz de Suabia desde el monasterio y panteón de las Huelgas de Burgos, quedaron justificadas en la redacción de la cantiga CCXCII donde en una aparición *post mortem* Fernando III expone al orfebre Jorge de Toledo que comunique a su hijo cierta disconformidad en la topografía sacra preestablecida y, además, le indique la necesidad de trasladar y colocar su escultura arrodillada a los pies de la Virgen y de su Hijo, a quienes debía su reino.²

El carácter y singularidad de esta capilla fueron señalados en una *Memoria descriptiva* del año 1345 conocida a partir de algunas copias manuscritas existentes en las bibliotecas sevillanas del siglo XVII, como la que perteneció a Hernán Pérez de Guzmán († 1460) que transcribió Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga en la librería del conde de Villaumbrosa y publicó en 1677.³ Este texto, reeditado en varias ocasiones, constituye una información capital para comprender la configuración del recinto antes de que, en el mes de febrero de 1433, el rey Juan II cediera su emplazamiento al cabildo para que este pudiera alojar provisionalmente en ella el presbiterio de la capilla mayor, derribar la mitad occidental del templo mudéjar e iniciar las obras del templo gótico actual.⁴ La cantiga CCXCII señala al orfebre Jorge de Toledo como el autor de las piezas y del mobiliario de plata encargado por Alfonso X, mencionados en la descripción publicada por Ortiz de Zúñiga, que situó a la “imagen de Santa María, que semeja que esta viva con su Fijo en el braço, en un tabernáculo que está más alto que los Reyes, muy grande, cubierto todo de plata”, vestida con las mismas ropas regias que los simulacros mayestáticos de los reyes, los cuales estaban sentados en una sedilia triple a la izquierda de la Virgen y frente a sus sepulturas. La Virgen llevaba una corona “de oro en que están muchas piedras granadas” y “un anillo en el dedo, de oro en que está una piedra rubí, tamaño como de una nuez e dizen que hay de plata en el tabernáculo y en la Imagen de Santa María y de el su Fijo, más de diez mil marcos de plata, en que están engastadas dos mil piedras zafiros e rubíes e esmeraldas e topacios e de todas piedras preciosas, menudas muchas de ellas”. En el chapitel del tabernáculo, sobre la cabeza de la Señora, había “quatro piedras esmeraldas en los cuartos que son tamañas cada una como una castaña. E estaua somo de el chapitel un rubí tamaño como de una nuez e

² Florencia, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, ms. B.R. 20, ff. 10v-11v.

³ Ortiz de Zúñiga, 1795-96 [ed. original 1677], t. 2, pp. 143-145.

⁴ Jiménez Martín/Pérez Peñaranda, 1997, pp. 35-42. Laguna Paúl, 2001, pp. 235-251. Jiménez Martín, 2013, pp. 120-124.

quando abren aquel tabernáculo de noche oscuro relumbran aquellas piedras como candelas”.⁵

La descripción expone la suntuosidad de los elementos más emblemáticos de este recinto, representados en dos sellos de placa góticos de la capilla Real que insertó Alonso Muñiz en su *Insinuación apologetica* de 1686 y perpetuó el cabildo de capellanes reales posteriormente (Fig. 2). Estos sellos sintetizan, además, otras partes fundamentales del espacio arquitectónico, como fueron las rejas perimetrales que acotaron el espacio de siete naves de profundidad y ocho arcadas de anchura de la aljama almohade (440 m²) y los escalones de acceso a la parte alta de la capilla que, implícitos en la *Crónica de Juan II*, confirman la existencia de la doble altura del recinto omitida en esta descripción y capital para la organización de la topografía cultural, para la percepción de los ceremoniales litúrgicos y de los aniversarios regios.⁶ La arquitectura de la aljama almohade, cuyos aliceres y tablas del artesonado se situaban a unos 12,10 m de altura, facilitó la doble altura de esta capilla con la construcción de una plataforma abovedada que configuró el espacio cultural superior, presidido por la Virgen de los Reyes con unos 6,5 o 7 m de alto hasta el límite del artesonado.⁷ La monumentalidad de su doble altura y su topografía sacra marcaban unos planos jerárquicos ascendentes que, percibidos desde las naves exteriores, impactaban y sobrecogían a los fieles no solo por el tamaño natural de los simulacros reales y las características de la imagen mariana, sino también por la disposición y envergadura del mobiliario (Fig. 1). Las cotas establecidas permiten suponer que la mesa del altar, dispuesta sobre tres escalones, tendría 1 m de altura y bastante profundidad para instalar detrás y por encima de ella el tabernáculo con la escultura de la Virgen de los Reyes sedente y de tamaño natural, que pudo superar con sus chapiteles los dos metros de altura; una obra calificada de “muy grande” en la *Memoria descriptiva* de 1345.

La concesión de Juan II dio viabilidad a la construcción de la catedral gótica y determinó en el transcurso de 1433 el traslado de la Virgen, de los ataúdes de los cuerpos reales y sus simulacros, del mobiliario y de todo el ajuar litúrgico a un espacio cultural provisional habilitado en el ángulo noreste del patio de los Naranjos, en una estancia alta de la nave del Lagarto. Las condiciones de con-

⁵ Ortiz de Zúñiga, 1795-96 [ed. original 1677], t. 2, pp. 143-145. *Memoria...*, 1345, f. 6r-v. Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, p. 329. Laguna Paúl, 2013a, pp. 53-77.

⁶ Muñiz, 1686, ff. 60r-61v. Laguna Paúl, 1998, pp. 58-61; 2001, pp. 235-251; 2009b, pp. 116-133; 2012, pp. 175-231; 2013a, pp. 53-77; 2013b, p. 8; 2018b, pp. 230-240; 2019, pp. 218-225. Sanz Serrano, 1998, figs. 1-4.

⁷ Laguna Paúl, 2009, fig. p. 121; 2018b, pp. 232-236; 2019, pp. 209-214 y 220-225. Jiménez Sancho/Jiménez Martín, 2019, p. 6.

servación de este lugar obligaron a otra mudanza en 1543 a la parte baja en la nave de los Caballeros, junto a la capilla del Sagrario viejo, hasta que concluyó la dilatada construcción de la nueva capilla Real. En junio de 1579 trasladaron e instalaron solemnemente en el altar mayor del nuevo recinto renacentista a la Virgen de los Reyes con su tabernáculo, depositaron el relicario del cuerpo de san Leandro en la alacena interior de la mesa del altar y los ataúdes con los cuerpos del Fernando III, su mujer Beatriz de Suabia y su hijo Alfonso X en un lugar preferente, sobre un amplio basamento de piedra decorado con los epitafios del monumento funerario erigido por el rey Sabio a su padre. Este basamento muestra en el frente las inscripciones conmemorativas de la terminación de la capilla en época de Felipe II, separadas por cuatro relieves de virtudes.⁸

En el transcurso de estos ciento cuarenta y seis años, los monarcas encargaron varias inspecciones y visitas a su capilla que generaron una información concreta del estado de sus enseres, alhajas y cuerpos reales, con independencia de los inventarios puntuales que desde 1393 tenía obligación de realizar anualmente y conservar por escrito el Tesorero de la capilla. La documentación de las ocho visitas realizadas entre los años 1500 y 1567 estaba encuadrada en dos libros del archivo de esta capilla Real que no han sido localizados todavía, pero consultaron en su día Joaquín J. Rodríguez de Quesada para redactar su *Fundación de la capilla Real* (1756-75) y Alonso Muñiz, quien transcribió parcialmente las informaciones de 1535 y 1563 en su *Insinuación apologética* (1686), cuyo extracto publicó José Gestoso.⁹ La localización de unas transcripciones completas de la visita de 1500, que publiqué hace una década junto con su estudio,¹⁰ permitieron investigar y dar a conocer la riqueza de la llamada corona de las águilas, que perteneció a la reina Beatriz de Suabia y conservó la Virgen de los Reyes hasta primeros de abril de 1873, y las características materiales del mobiliario encargado por Alfonso X a Jorge de Toledo antes de 1279, sus modelos de inspiración en la arquitectura francesa de la primera mitad del siglo XIII y sus relaciones con otras microarquitecturas en plata y marfil contemporáneas, que ampliaré en esta investigación con nuevas informaciones relativas a las transformaciones documentadas al instalarlo en la capilla renacentista en 1579.¹¹

⁸ Sigüenza, 1996 [1579]. Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, pp. 316-320. García Bernal, 2008, pp. 186-193. Morales, 2012, pp. 237-242.

⁹ González Ferrín, 2012, pp. 62-64 y 73. Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, pp. 331-332.

¹⁰ Laguna Paúl, 2009a, pp. 219 y 231-237. Existe un original conservado en AGS, RGS, 15001,25.

¹¹ Laguna Paúl, 2009a, pp. 217-237; 2013a, pp. 53-77; 2015, pp. 345-361.

A comienzos del año 1500, cuando Don Luis de Castilla visitó, por orden de los Reyes Católicos, la capilla Real reubicada entonces en una dependencia alta de la nave del Lagarto, apenas pudo señalar la disposición del mobiliario, ataúdes y simulacros, enseres y ornamentos litúrgicos. El sábado 27 de enero, aproximadamente a las cinco de la tarde, este capellán real y Prior de Aroche describió el tabernáculo como un templete de cuatro columnas cubierto con placas de plata blasonadas con las armas de Castilla y León, al igual que las bóvedas pintadas de época alfonsí en el monasterio y mausoleo real de las Huelgas de Burgos. Sus puertas tenían en la parte interior alineaciones cromáticas con piedras verdes, moradas y azules. Sobre este mueble había “otro chapitel” de madera, o tabernáculo, enchapado de plata con las alas abatibles y sus paneles de madera pintados con los mismos emblemas heráldicos, que podían cerrarse con una llave.¹²

Las referencias de los libros de visita de 1535 y 1563, que Alonso Muñiz incorporó en los puntos 27 y 28 de su obra, aportan mayor información de ambos tabernáculos, cuyos chapiteles tenían gabletes en los frentes y torres en los ángulos, que apoyaban en columnas de madera chapadas en plata con los blasones de Castilla y León. El mueble interior presentaba el anverso de sus alas abatibles forradas con las indicadas láminas argénteas y piedras de diversos colores, mientras que el reverso de las puertas o alas abatibles del mueble exterior eran paneles de madera pintados con las mismas armas reales; las chapas de plata heráldicas cubrían, por tanto, el reverso del tabernáculo interior y el anverso del exterior. El diseño general de la obra evocaba el tabernáculo representado en la cantiga XXXIV del *Códice Rico* de las *Cantigas de Santa María* (San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, ms. T-I-1, fol. 50r) y el templete del gran relicario de la Sainte-Chapelle parisina de Luis IX dibujado por François Roger Gaignières a comienzos del siglo XVIII (París, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Gaignières, 78). La arquitectura de este se encuentra omnipresente en la orfebrería y marfiles del siglo XIII, y el rosetón de plata dorada que aún se conserva en la capilla Real de Sevilla sintetiza elementos de la rosa del crucero meridional de Laon (h. 1180-1190) con el cierre de la balaustrada de la fachada occidental de Notre Dame de Paris (h. 1235-1245). Esta disposición dúplice del tabernáculo de la Virgen de los Reyes no fue excepcional, ya que fue representada en las pinturas firmadas por Antón Sánchez de Segovia en el muro oriental de la capilla de san Martín de la catedral vieja de Salamanca en 1262, cuya tipología relacionó Fernando Gutiérrez

¹² Laguna Paúl, 2009a, pp. 222-223 y 236. AGS, RGS, 15001,25.

Baños con una “capiella de fuste pyntada” inventariada en 1275 en esta misma catedral (Fig. 3).¹³

La instalación de tabernáculos dobles en algunos altares puede obedecer a la necesidad de ocultar el interior, el que sacraliza la imagen, con otro mueble-tabernáculo exterior de protección cuyos batientes abiertos podrían, o no, mostrar un programa iconográfico en los oficios y celebraciones litúrgicas. En Salamanca el tabernáculo pintado interior, dispuesto alrededor de una ventana, convertida por el desarrollo figurativo en una hornacina, presenta una retícula bicolor de lises que parece anticipar las chapas metálicas de este sevillano, mientras las pinturas del plano del muro evocan los batientes o alas abatibles del otro tabernáculo mayor que cobija visualmente al anterior y despliega su iconografía como posteriormente la desarrollarán los retablos esculpidos o pintados. El planteamiento iconográfico y la suntuosa riqueza material de los tabernáculos de la Virgen de los Reyes omiten cualquier representación de la vida de María o de su Hijo. Por el contrario, exaltan la riqueza de los valores de la Virgen como reina del universo mediante gemas y perlas, y de la monarquía castellano-leonesa como su defensora, promotora y súbdita de Ella. Sus emblemas heráldicos testimoniaban no solo su vinculación a un recinto real, sino que también, en este caso, reforzaban la legitimidad dinástica y la sacralidad del poder expuestas por Alfonso X en sus *Partidas*: “vicarios son de Dios los reyes cada uno en su reino...”, ya que “así puso Dios al rey, en medio del pueblo, para dar igualdad e justicia a todos comunamente, porque puedan vivir en paz” (Fig. 4).¹⁴

Los traslados y el paso del tiempo incidieron en el estado de conservación de estos tabernáculos de la Virgen de los Reyes. La documentación conocida y las citas de los libros de las visitas recogidas por Alonso Muñiz indican desprendimientos en los revestimientos argénteos de ambos y de las piedras del tabernáculo interior, reflejados en los informes de los oficiales encargados de las inspecciones y en los inventarios del Tesorero de la capilla, ya que algunos elementos caídos y placas heráldicas los guardaban en una caja y su estructura apenas tuvo alteraciones hasta su instalación en la capilla renacentista en 1579.

La Virgen, sentada en una cadira de madera enchapada en plata con castillos y leones y con los brazales terminados en manzanas redondas, estaba cobijada bajo un chapitel de planta cuadrada apoyado en cuatro columnas. El chapitel estaba completamente forrado con placas heráldicas en plata dorada y presentaba un

¹³ Laguna Paúl, 2013a, pp. 66-72. Gutiérrez Baños, 2005a, t. 2, pp. 143-153; 2005b, pp. 13-64; 2011b, p. 398.

¹⁴ *Partidas*, 2.1. Laguna Paúl, 2009, p. 123. Fernández-Viagas Escudero, 2017, pp. 61-80.

gablete en cada uno de los frentes exteriores y una torre sobre cuatro pilares en cada ángulo, rematada con un elemento floral. En 1563 este tabernáculo interno tenía su bóveda cubierta por ciento cuarenta placas y, en esta, engarzadas cuatro piedras medianas, un doblete grande y ocho piedras grandes sobre la cabeza de la Señora. Los enchapados del interior de las alas abatibles y la pared del fondo eran unas placas de plata dorada de mayor tamaño que las del chapitel y en su anverso contabilizaron trescientas setenta y tres piedras verdes, azules, coloradas y numerosas “berucas mayores y menores” (perlas barrocas o imperfectas), que conformaban un halo brillante alrededor de la Señora, alternando con “figuras chiquitas de imagen” acopladas a la retícula cuadrada del enchapado argénteo. Había además otros cuarenta y siete “engastes” de piedras, lo que confirma la existencia de dos técnicas en el montaje de las gemas. Testimonio de estos engarces son los tres dragones góticos que todavía forman parte de la montura de una gran piedra verde descrita en un auto capitular de 1670, cuya ubicación evoca la posición de una clave, como ya destacó José Gestoso.¹⁵ El autor de la *Memoria descriptiva* de 1345 menciona que cuando abrían el tabernáculo por la noche estas piedras “relumbraban como candelas”, y dicho resplandor fue esquematizado mediante seis estrellas en el fondo del tabernáculo de uno de los sellos medievales de la capilla Real, que hasta la fecha son las únicas representaciones de este altar anteriores a los cuadros de caballete del siglo xvii (Fig. 2).¹⁶

Este tabernáculo interno permanecía dentro de otro mayor armado sobre “quatro varas de plata”, con un chapitel recubierto con placas del mismo material que presentaba otros “quatro torreones” en los ángulos y “tres claraboyas redondas”, en el frente y en las caras laterales, semejantes a los pintados en Salamanca y tallados en el tríptico de Palma (Madrid, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, inv. I.4874),¹⁷ entre otras piezas de marfil del siglo xiii. Las alas abatibles del tabernáculo exterior estaban articuladas mediante “tres barretas con sus goznes”, el anverso enchapado con láminas de plata heráldicas y el reverso con los mismos castillos y leones pintados sobre la madera, según la visita realizada en enero de 1500. El tamaño y perfil de estas puertas se acoplaba a la geometría de los gabletes del chapitel. Las puertas presentaban varios *crochets* y un elemento floral en el vértice (“remates y una flor”).¹⁸

¹⁵ ACS, FCR, caja 3, exp.9, f. 3r-v. ACS, FCR, libro 6(78), f. 1r. Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, p. 333.

¹⁶ Muñiz, 1686, f. 61r-v. Laguna Paúl 2013a, pp. 59 y 63-65; 2018b, p. 232, fig.4. Sanz Serrano, 1998, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷ Estella Marcos, 1984, pp. 167-169.

¹⁸ Muñiz, 1686, f. 60r-v. Laguna Paúl, 2009a, pp. 221 y 236; 2013a, pp. 66-71.

En 1563 este tabernáculo exterior tenía una “repisa” decorada con cincuenta y nueve “figuras de san Leandro y san Isidoro y el santo Rey y ángeles” y apoyaba en la llamada “la peana de abajo” con un “follaje cincelado” que lo elevaría sobre la mesa del altar.¹⁹ Ambas decoraciones habían sido omitidas en la visita del año 1500 porque su iconografía debe de obedecer a una modificación del siglo XVI anterior a los traslados a la capilla Real renacentista en 1579, ya que en origen su peana tendría un carácter heráldico equiparable al de la llamada “Madonna” de Madrid, donada por Sancho IV al monasterio de Santo Domingo el Real,²⁰ o a la Virgen de la Barda del antiguo monasterio cisterciense de Santa María la Real de Fitero, entre otras.²¹ Los cambios en la peana serían, por tanto, anteriores al traslado a la capilla Real renacentista en 1579, cuando consta que el tabernáculo tuvo una intervención importante para acondicionarlo a las necesidades del nuevo altar, que daré a conocer junto con la noticia de otra actuación efectuada en 1614 de cuyo alcance únicamente consta que el tabernáculo fue “renovado” en el domicilio de Don Antonio de Bobadilla, jurado y guarda de la capilla, quien sufragó esta actuación con un importe superior a 10.000 ducados.²²

Al diseñar el espacio del altar de la Virgen de los Reyes en la capilla renacentista, el cabildo y los sucesivos maestros mayores que estuvieron a cargo de esta obra establecieron las necesidades relativas a la topografía sacra del nuevo espacio, como expuso ya Alonso Rodríguez en su informe de 1513 al señalar que el ábside de la capilla tendría un retablo de madera dorado que alojaría en medio a Nuestra Señora de los Reyes “con su tabernáculo que agora tiene”. Con esta finalidad, abrieron en el muro oriental del ábside una amplia hornacina de arco de medio punto, construida antes de 1552, cuando la obra había superado la altura de la cornisa y Pedro de Campaña diseñó el relieve de la vocación de Isaías que talló Lorenzo del Bao, el cual remata el medio punto sobre este altar.²³ Este nicho de 22 pies de altura, 13,5 de anchura y 4,5 de fondo plano (670,56 cm x 411,48 cm x 137,16 cm),²⁴ fue pensado o diseñado para instalar el tabernáculo gótico de la Virgen y su peana por encima del altar, que avanza desde el fondo flanqueado por dos columnas renacentistas y tiene un gran depósito en el centro para alojar en origen el relicario del cuerpo de san Leandro.

¹⁹ Muñiz, 1686, ff. 60r-61r. Laguna Paúl, 2013a, pp. 67-68.

²⁰ Lucía Gómez-Chacón, 2018, pp. 343-346.

²¹ Fernández-Ladreda, 1989, pp. 141, 146 y 151-15.4

²² AGS, PEC, 281, 1/4, ff. 12r-21v.

²³ Morales, 1979, pp. 39-50 y 43. Guerrero Vega, 2010, p. 63, nº 34.

²⁴ AGAS, FA, legajo 9783, exp. nº 8.

La medida de la base del conjunto del tabernáculo alfonsí, sin contar las alas abatibles desplegadas, sería de aproximadamente un metro de lado. Su altura superaría con creces los dos metros, a tenor de las reconstrucciones de la capilla mudéjar que sitúan el altar centrado en el fondo de un intercolumnio, del tamaño de la mesa de altar actual de 3,70 m de largo, del fondo de la hornacina renacentista de la capilla Real, de algunos cuadros de este altar fechados en la primera mitad del siglo XVII que analizaré, y de las proporciones del cuerpo inferior del retablo-tabernáculo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas (1644-1649). Este artista dejó un fondo libre de 120 cm hasta la línea del cierre de las puertas barrocas de 371 cm de alto con cuatro batientes plegados de 89 cm cada hoja, incorporó en el baldaquino de la Virgen algunas partes del chapitel medieval exterior de plata dorada, que tiene actualmente 109 cm de frente y 78 cm de fondo, y situó la bóveda interna de plata prácticamente a 210 cm por encima de la tapa de la peana, sostenida esta por ángeles y decorada con el medallón en altorrelieve de san José.

El largo y laborioso proceso constructivo de la nueva capilla Real concluyó en 1575, pero los traslados y la inauguración solemne se realizaron en la primavera de 1579. Durante estos cuatro años los mayordomos y contadores de la catedral prepararon, encargaron y abonaron a diversos artistas, proveedores y profesionales vinculados con el templo numerosas obras de ajuar litúrgico, altares y mobiliario, indicados, quizás, en la “traça” del informe que el cabildo envió a Felipe II en otoño de 1575, previo a los acuerdos, especificaciones y aprobación del protocolo a seguir en la traslación de los cuerpos reales, reliquias de san Leandro y Virgen de los Reyes en el mes de junio de 1579. En el transcurso de 1575 consta la realización de las puertas de madera de las sacristías y en el año siguiente la instalación de las vidrieras y cruz de hierro de la linterna, de las rejas de hierro que protegen los vanos de la sacristías, los pagos a Luis Hernández por los retablos pintados en los altares secundarios, acotados litúrgicamente con las barandillas de madera torneada entregadas por Bañares y Antón de Luque, que el pintor de la catedral Antón Pérez con sus colaboradores doraron y pintaron en color azul en los meses siguientes.²⁵

Al terminar estos trabajos, comenzaron los encargos relacionados con el altar de la Virgen, cuyos primeros pagos atañen a los herrajes del “caxón del altar mayor” en julio de 1577²⁶ y a la terminación de dos lámparas de bronce y hierro abonadas a Francisco López en enero de 1578, cuyo dorado y color llevó a cabo

²⁵ Morales, 1979, pp. 49-50 y 96-98.

²⁶ ACS, FC, 9624(284), f. 56r.

nuevamente el pintor de la catedral con sus colaboradores en el mes de marzo.²⁷ Simultáneamente, el tornero Bañares entregó “cuatro remates y seis florones para la silla y el tabernáculo” de la Virgen,²⁸ en marzo y abril el herrero Juan Barba alargó “veintiocho visagras abrazaderas” y realizó el herraje de la “caja de madera” de la Virgen,²⁹ cuyas puertas habían terminado de pintar el mismo Antón Pérez y sus ayudantes en la primera semana de mayo.³⁰

Estos últimos pagos atañen a la confección de un cajón de madera nuevo, realizado por el maestro de carpintería Alonso Ruiz y los carpinteros de la catedral con cargo a sus nóminas semanales, sin demasías ni horas trabajadas a destajo. Este estuche fue descrito en un inventario posterior como una caja que cubría el tabernáculo “por los lados con unas puertas de madera pintada, con su chapitel ençima, teñidas de azul por dentro con unas estrellas y por de fuera pintadas con sus castillos y leones, y en la delantera una ymagen de la salutación de nuestra señora con el ángel con un candado y un cerrojo sin seradura y dos aldavillas”.³¹ La iconografía de este gran estuche protector presenta vínculos con otras puertas pintadas o esculpidas en algunos tabernáculos góticos, y su estructura protegía la integridad y la conservación del tabernáculo de plata e, incluso, pudo sustituir a las cortinas que habitualmente cubrían los altares, cuyas imágenes únicamente se mostraban para la celebración de las misas, en los oficios de las horas, en las funciones solemnes y en los actos extraordinarios. La confección de esta caja estuvo determinada porque, con motivo del traslado a la nueva capilla Real, consideraron, por causas desconocidas todavía, retirar uno de los dos tabernáculos de plata que conformaban el altar medieval de la Virgen de los Reyes e instalar en la hornacina renacentista únicamente el primitivo tabernáculo exterior, que, como destacaré, es el representado en todas las pinturas del primer tercio del siglo XVII.

Concluidos estos trabajos, los contadores y mayordomo de la fábrica programaron los pagos destinados a cubrir el fondo de la hornacina renacentista, realizando artística e iconográficamente el tabernáculo de la Virgen. Estos trabajos conformaron el primer retablo de madera dorada de este altar con numerosas piezas de plata y otros elementos pintados. Los primeros pagos de telas y ma-

²⁷ ACS, FC, 9431(97), f. 7r. ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 27r, 27v y 28v. Sobre Antón Pérez, véase Serrera Contreras, 1977; 1984, pp. 361-363 y 400-401.

²⁸ ACS, FC, 9431(97), f. 30v.

²⁹ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 27v, 38v y 40v.

³⁰ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 40v y 41v.

³¹ ACS, FCR, caja 3, exp. 9, ff. 3v.

teriales de la “capa”³² comenzaron la primera semana de mayo de 1578 y desde entonces hasta mediados de octubre el batihoja Montedoy proporcionó 11.950 panes de oro y 600 de plata, cuyo número indica que los emplearían en cubrir la hornacina de 6,70 m de altura y 4,11 m de anchura con una estructura de madera dorada, en el “caxón del altar mayor” y en la “caxa de madera” de la Virgen, ya que los panes de oro habitualmente eran cuadrados y medían 20 cm de lado.³³ Las sucesivas entregas de este material fueron simultáneas con los trabajos de dorado y pintura desarrollados ininterrumpidamente por Antón Pérez con tres o seis de sus colaboradores durante catorce semanas.³⁴ A primeros del mes de agosto, el cabildo relevó al pintor de la catedral de este encargo y se comprometió con los pintores Luis Hernández y Vasco de Pereira para llevar a cabo por un importe 260 ducados “lo que falta del tabernáculo y pintar ciento y quatro cuadros del mesmo tabernáculo las diez historias y los otros de otras cosas” que estaban concluidos a finales de octubre del mismo año.³⁵ Un mes antes, el 12 de septiembre, abonaron 56.003 maravedís al platero Hernando de Ballesteros el Viejo por “la plata y hechura de cosas del tabernáculo de Nra. Sra. de los Reyes”, cuyo importe hace pensar en una intervención en profundidad, ya que, además, en junio del año siguiente su hijo recibió los “pedaços de plata que sobraron del tabernáculo [...] con cuatro engastitos de plata” y una “patena dorada con unas armas esmaltadas con dos castillos y un león”, entre otras piezas a enajenar.³⁶

La sucinta descripción de estos asientos contables sugiere que el fondo del renacentista quedaría cubierto por una estructura reticular de madera dorada con pinturas decorativas y los casetones con las placas de plata heráldicas de las alas de las puertas abatibles del tabernáculo interior del conjunto alfonsí retirado entonces y otras realizadas por Hernando de Ballesteros el Viejo. Algunos marcos cobijarían las “historias” y “las otras cosas” encargadas a Luis Hernández y a Vasco Pereira, y la dimensión de los de menor tamaño estuvo condicionada por el tamaño de las placas de plata, de 9,5 x 9,5 cm, ya que parte de estas las incorporó Luis Ortiz de Vargas al retablo-tabernáculo barroco. La hornacina del primer retablo-tabernáculo renacentista de la Virgen de los Reyes debió de quedar cerrada, por tanto, con unas puertas o “caxón del altar mayor”, el cual ocultó el altar don-

³² ACS, FC, 9625(285), f. 42r.

³³ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 41v, 42r, 43r, 44v, 48v, 50v, 51r, 52r, 55r, 56r, 57r, 59v, 61r y 63r. Echeverría Goñi, 1988, p. 183.

³⁴ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 41v, 42r, 43r, 44v, 48v, 50v, 51r, 52r, 55r, 56r, 57r, 59v, 61r y 63r.

³⁵ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 65r, 66v, 68r, 69r, 72v, 74v, 76r, 77r y 81v.

³⁶ ACS, FC, 9625(285), ff. 138v. ACS, FC, 90627(287), ff. 136v y 138v. Santos Márquez, 2007, pp. 87 y 127.

de instalaron la nueva “caxa” de madera pintada protegiendo el tabernáculo de plata gótico, pero las únicas referencias conocidas de estas puertas son posteriores a la terminación del retablo-tabernáculo barroco. Estas noticias confirman que Luis Ortiz de Vargas desmontó los batientes renacentistas que cerraban el altar mayor y la “caxa de la virgen” con las pinturas de Antón Pérez cuando instaló las nuevas puertas en 1649. Las hojas renacentistas debieron alojar algunas de las diez “historias” abonadas a Luis Hernández y a Vasco de Pereira, ya que en junio de 1652 los pintores Francisco López y Bartolomé E. Murillo declararon haber visto en enero de 1649, en una de las tribunas altas de la capilla Real, un retrato pintado de Fernando III arrodillado en “una de las puertas del tauernaculo antiguo” que ellos habían conocido.³⁷

En las semanas inmediatas al traslado e inauguración de la capilla en 1579 constan reparaciones o incorporaciones de elementos perdidos en el tabernáculo de plata, donde Antón Pérez doró cinco remates “de la caxa de plata” de la Virgen, algunas de las piezas de madera torneadas y entregadas por Bañares meses antes y terminó el dorado del relieve y columnas del nicho arquitectónico de este altar.³⁸

Con anterioridad y para la organización de este acto la catedral encargó la confección de numerosos enseres, solicitó préstamos de andas procesionales al cabildo de la ciudad y, entre otros, reparó varios de los ataúdes reales que se encontraban en mal estado. Felipe II comisionó la organización al Asistente de Sevilla, Don Fernando de Torres y Portugal, al arzobispo Don Cristóbal de Rojas y Sandoval y al presidente de la Real Audiencia Don Juan Fernández Cogollos.³⁹ Existen varias descripciones de esta ceremonia, las actuaciones previas e informes elaborados para el monarca, como el redactado por Joseph Maldonado de Saavedra que da cumplida cuenta de las instrucciones recibidas y de cómo llevaron a cabo todos los preparativos necesarios en la capilla vieja de la nave de los Caballeros, del traslado, de la celebración en la capilla mayor de la catedral y de la instalación de la Virgen, las reliquias de san Leandro y cuerpos reales en la nueva renacentista. La Virgen de los Reyes fue trasladada solemnemente en su tabernáculo de plata, instalado en unas “andas grandes con sus doseles de brocado de tresados y aguas carmesí labrados” a modo de palio cubierto de terciopelo carmesí bordado con las armas del cabildo y montado sobre los varales realizados

³⁷ ACS, FC, libro 10733(31) n.º 1, ff. 481v-482r. Quiles, 1999, p. 228.

³⁸ ACS, FC, 9627(287), f. 54r.

³⁹ Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, p. 312. Morales, 1979, pp. 37-50 y 88-91; 2012, pp. 237-242. García Bernal, 2008, pp. 171-197.

por Hernando de Ballesteros en 1560. Al llegar a la catedral, la Virgen presidió los actos y pontifical oficiado en el altar mayor y el gran túmulo para los cuerpos reales quedó instalado en el crucero. Concluidas las ceremonias y actos, organizaron otra procesión por el interior de la catedral para llevar los cuerpos reales, las reliquias y las imágenes a la nueva capilla Real, donde la Virgen y el cuerpo de san Leandro fueron colocados en su altar mayor el 15 de junio de 1579.⁴⁰

Esta relación confirma el traslado de la imagen bajo el chapitel de uno de sus tabernáculos medievales, sostenido por las cuatro columnas y desprovisto de los batientes de cierre. El recuerdo de este traslado y andas procesionales quedó en la memoria del cabildo y de los historiadores sevillanos del siglo XVII y XVIII, quienes, en muchas ocasiones, identificaron el tabernáculo de plata conservado como perteneciente a Fernando III, no a Alfonso X, y por esta razón lo mencionan como la “tienda” delante de la que oraba el santo rey durante el asedio de Sevilla y bajo la cual la Virgen de los Reyes formó parte de la entrada victoriosa de los castellanos en la ciudad de Sevilla en 1248, y así lo representó con algunas licencias Lucas Valdés en una de las pinturas al fresco de la iglesia de la Magdalena (1709-1715).⁴¹

La devoción a los santos, a la Virgen y a su Hijo estimuló desde la Baja Edad Media numerosas reproducciones de las imágenes de mayor veneración para cubrir las necesidades espirituales de los fieles, quienes demandaron reproducciones esculpidas de las advocaciones de gran devoción, copias pintadas, estampas o incluso medallas seriadas que no solo colgaban de su cuello sino que podían coser entre sus ropas o insertar en las encuadernaciones de sus libros de oración. Muestras artísticas de este profundo sentimiento mariano en la catedral de Sevilla son numerosos cuadros de caballete que reproducen los rasgos y características de la Virgen de los Reyes y de la Virgen de la Antigua, realizados para recibir culto en otros templos o para la piedad privada tanto en España como en América. Las copias de la Virgen de la Antigua constan desde el reinado de los Reyes Católicos⁴² y las primeras pinturas sobre cobre, tabla o lienzo conservadas de la Virgen de los Reyes están fechadas en el primer tercio del siglo XVII, después del traslado y apertura de la capilla renacentista.

Estas pinturas reproducen el altar de la Virgen de los Reyes antes y después de la terminación del retablo-tabernáculo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas y pueden in-

⁴⁰ Maldonado de Saavedra, 1579, f. 16r-v. ACS, FC, 6380(488), f. 42v. Santos Márquez, 2007, p. 79.

⁴¹ Muñiz, 1686, nº 29. Fernández López, 2003, pp. 79-80.

⁴² Medianero Hernández, 2008, pp. 57-60 y 92-103. Pereda, 2007, pp. 177-190.

cluir retratos de los particulares que encargaron la obra o de san Fernando. Estas pinturas sobre cobre, tabla o lienzo tienden a recrear la ilusión del altar con sus elementos accesorios, con mayor o menor realismo, constituyen testimonios de la religiosidad y manifestaciones artísticas posteriores al concilio de Trento incardinadas en el género pictórico denominado “trampantojos a lo divino”, que, definido por Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, sugiere en el espectador una tercera dimensión inexistente, para que el fiel pueda contemplar la imagen representada en su espacio de culto, aunque las estampas también sustituyeron devocionalmente a las obras de este género.⁴³

Dos de estos trampantojos del altar de la Virgen de los Reyes pueden fecharse con precisión antes de la terminación del retablo-tabernáculo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas en 1649 y documentan algunas de las transformaciones del tabernáculo medieval: un pequeño cobre con donantes firmado por el sevillano Francisco de Varela en 1644, hoy en el Museo Pedro de Osma de Lima (Fig. 5),⁴⁴ y un lienzo de gran formato donado al convento de san José del Carmen de Sevilla por su capellán Juan Francisco de Prada en 1649.⁴⁵ El primero obedece, seguramente, al encargo de unos devotos que solicitaron incluir su retrato orante y el segundo, por sus dimensiones, pudo estar en el oratorio de este sacerdote. En ambas obras la Virgen preside el altar dentro del tabernáculo exterior alfonsí con su rosetón gótico en el frente, sus columnas de plata y las alas abatibles de sus puertas medievales completamente desplegadas, con su agudo perfil adaptado a la geometría del mueble medieval. Estos dos cuadros omiten la terminación de los gabletes, los torreones medievales o, incluso, alguna actuación o reparación de las realizadas en 1578 ya señaladas en los trabajos de terminación de la nueva capilla Real, previos al traslado de 1579. Los paneles de sus alas con sus casetones de castillos y leones descansan directamente sobre el fondo de la hornacina de la mesa del altar. Cerrados ocultarían la repisa con roleos y la peana de gallones cuya decoración difiere de la inventariada en la visita de 1563, ya que estas pinturas podrían reproducir algún cambio realizado después del traslado a la capilla renacentista en 1579, de la citada actuación de 1614 o de alguna otra no documentada cuando ya estaba retirado el tabernáculo de plata interior cuya dimensión era, evidentemente, menor que la del exterior que lo alojaba.

⁴³ Pérez Sánchez, 1992. Stoichita, 1996, pp. 56-57 y 65-74. Rodríguez G. de Ceballos, 2010. Peña Velasco, 2014. Vicent-Cassy, 2018.

⁴⁴ O/L, 25,4 x 16,4 cm. Ramos Sosa, 1998, pp. 32-33. López Guzmán/Montes González, 2017, p. 521.

⁴⁵ O/L, 225 x 135 cm. Cano Navas, 1984, p. 145.

El tabernáculo interior tampoco fue representado en otros trampantojos anónimos anteriores a 1649: un lienzo de gran formato donado por la marquesa de la Mota al monasterio de la Concepción del Carmen de Valladolid (Fig. 6),⁴⁶ otro adaptado al remate de un retablo de mediados del siglo XX en la capilla de san Francisco de la catedral de Baeza,⁴⁷ los lienzos de las hermandades sevillanas de la Sacramental del Sagrario⁴⁸ y de la Santa Caridad,⁴⁹ el del monasterio de santa María del Valle de Zafra, restaurado en 2012,⁵⁰ el de la sacristía de la ermita de la Vera Cruz de Nava del Rey (Valladolid), cuya peana presenta un anagrama mariano,⁵¹ y el de la parroquia de la Inmaculada Concepción de Castilleja de la Cuesta (Sevilla).⁵² Estos trampantojos reproducen las alas de las puertas medievales del tabernáculo y diferencian con un tamaño mayor sus planchas de plata de las planchas pequeñas del chapitel, que todavía permanecen en la bóveda y cubren los frentes exteriores (6 x 6 cm), donde son evidentes las reparaciones y readaptaciones. Los daños ocasionados por el transcurso del tiempo también se detectan en las dos planchas sueltas de mayor dimensión (9,5 x 9,5 cm) que encontró José Gestoso en 1888 y que tradicionalmente se asocian con elementos perdidos del tabernáculo medieval (Fig. 7).⁵³

Estas pinturas de caballete testimonian además otras actuaciones en el presbiterio de la capilla Real, documentadas a partir de 1634, cuando el arquitecto Pedro Sánchez Falconete y el carpintero Alonso de Cuéllar plantearon unos diseños para la renovación de la capilla y el escultor Luis Ortiz de Vargas elaboró el primer boceto o “rasguño” del proyecto del nuevo retablo de la Virgen, sufragado con la fortuna personal del canónigo y arcediano de Carmona Mateo Vázquez de Leca (Sevilla, 1573-1649).⁵⁴ Para esta obra contratada a mediados del mes de diciembre de 1644, se estableció un periodo de ejecución de seis meses y cambios iconográficos significativos con respecto a un primer “rasguño” entregado en 1637, motivados fundamentalmente por las devociones del promotor, quien sus-

⁴⁶ O/L, 248 x 166 cm. Martín González/Plaza Santiago, 1987, p. 224, fig. 881.

⁴⁷ O/L, 95 x 80 cm. Sánchez Concha, 2003, pp. 135-136, lo fecha en el siglo XVIII.

⁴⁸ O/L, 168 x 96 cm. Cintas del Bot, 1991, p. 64. *La Virgen de los Reyes...*, 2004, p. 152.

⁴⁹ *La Virgen de los Reyes...*, 2004, p. 151.

⁵⁰ O/L, 106 x 89,5 cm. <http://museosantaclara.blogspot.com/2014/01/> (marzo 2019).

⁵¹ Castán Lanaspá, 2006, p. 113, fig. 663.

⁵² O/L, 71 x 50 cm. <https://guiadigital.iaph.es/bien/mueble/214741/sevilla/castilleja-de-la-cuesta/virgen-de-los-reyes> (mayo 2018).

⁵³ Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, pp. 334-339. Hernández Núñez, 1998, p. 276. Laguna Paúl, 2009a, p. 132; 2013a, pp. 69-70.

⁵⁴ Cruz Isidoro, 1991, p. 41. Quiles, 1999, pp. 217-218 y 226. Gámez Martín, 2010, pp. 659-660.

tituyó, entre otras, las imágenes de san Leandro, san Isidoro y la figura y escenas de la vida del santo rey por las de san Joaquín, santa Ana y san José. Al parecer, las modificaciones continuaron y ocasionaron el incumplimiento de los plazos establecidos al escultor, quien en marzo de 1647 alegó que había sido presionado para reformar el proyecto contratado, acometiendo una considerable ampliación consensuada verbalmente con el mismo arcediano y con el canónigo Cristóbal Muñoz de Escobar. El nuevo acuerdo, formalizado en esta fecha, pormenoriza los elementos pendientes de realizar y los acrecentamientos e incorporaciones acordadas, puntualiza las características de las bisagras y piezas de hierro de los batientes de cierre con su decoración, establece el incremento crematístico por estos cambios y los plazos de entrega e instalación en el presbiterio de la capilla Real en 1649.⁵⁵ Estos documentos, publicados por Celestino López Martínez, reflejan las características del retablo-tabernáculo actual, pero omiten cualquier mención al fondo reticular del cuerpo inferior que cobija en el centro el camarín-tabernáculo, limitado por unos ángeles atlantes de talla que sostienen la “repisa” alta o entablamento superior y separan las calles laterales con las hornacinas de los padres de la Virgen y los medallones de las santas patronas con otras parejas de niños con frutas, cabezas de ángeles y tarjas con símbolos de la letanía lauretana pintados.

Luis de Ortiz de Vargas acopló en el reducido espacio de la hornacina renacentista la mayor parte del tabernáculo exterior alfonsí y de la trama reticular del fondo de madera dorada con las planchas de plata de las alas reestructuradas en la actuación de 1578-1579. Las dimensiones del chapitel gótico adoptaron la planta rectangular actual de 109 cm de ancho por 78 cm de fondo, forrado completamente con las chapas de plata pequeñas e incorporó en la bóveda gótica una gran piedra verde, reutilizando tres dragones de un engarce medieval; en el hastial frontal del chapitel clavó un rosetón gótico bajo unos listeles de plata en su color, que evocan las líneas de un inexistente gablete, y mantuvo las cuatro columnas según los trampantojos y representaciones pintadas de este altar anteriores a 1649, indicadas anteriormente. En el fondo del retablo-tabernáculo incluyó la mayor parte de retícula de madera dorada con las planchas de plata de 9,5 cm de lado que, prácticamente, llenó toda la superficie libre detrás de las hornacinas laterales y de la espalda de la Virgen, cuyas uniones todavía son perfectamente detectables y proceden de las puertas del tabernáculo según el inventario de 1655.⁵⁶ Estas

⁵⁵ López Martínez, 1932, pp. 108-112. Quiles, 1999, p. 226. Halcón, 2009, p. 200.

⁵⁶ ACS, FCR, caja 3, exp. 3, f. 1r.

chapas de plata dorada estaban clavadas con cuatro puntillas y rosas a la malla de casetones con entrepaños de madera que, fijados a unos tableros de 6 cm de espesor, permanecieron con ciertas transformaciones en la actuación renacentista y están representadas en los trampantojos de la segunda mitad del siglo XVII y XVIII (Fig. 8).

El retablo tabernáculo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas salvaguardó materialmente la mayor parte del chapitel exterior medieval con uno de sus rosetones, sus cuatro columnas de apoyo y alguna sección de la estructura reticular y alas abatibles con sus chapas de plata heráldicas, cuyo número inventariaron en 1670 cuando el platero Luis de Acosta se comprometió a sufragar, desclavar y “limpiar dicha plata y darle color y bruñirlas y blanquecer la plata blanca de las molduras y volverlo a clavar y forrar”. Los canónigos Gabriel de Fontaner y Lorenzo de la Puente, encargados de supervisar el desmontaje, contabilizaron 75 “chapas de plata de castillos y leones dorados con sus interpaños y rosas” situadas en el lado izquierdo del tabernáculo desde la cabeza de san Joaquín hasta el cierre, 71 del lado izquierdo y 76 clavadas a las espaldas de la Virgen, que suponen, aproximadamente, una tercera parte de las reflejadas en los inventarios anteriores al traslado a la capilla renacentista en 1579. En la parte interior y exterior de la tumbilla o chapitel contabilizaron 350 chapas pequeñas, “clavadas con tachuelas de plata”, “con molduras de plata blanca y bruñida”, una “celosía” o rosetón de plata dorada y calada en el frente y en la parte interna “un engaste de plata dorada con una piedra grande a modo de esmeralda”, mas cuatro columnas o “baras” de plata “con sus cañones, capiteles y pedestales dorados y cincelados”.⁵⁷ Este recuento excluye la existencia de otras piezas deterioradas o desprendidas y confirma la pérdida o eliminación de los rosetones laterales del chapitel reflejados en el inventario de 1563 y, sin duda, eliminados en la actuación de Luis Ortiz de Vargas.⁵⁸ Se desconoce el alcance exacto de la intervención de 1670, pero la información reflejada en los inventarios de la década siguiente contabiliza menos planchas y constan, asimismo, reposiciones de otras con una lámina de hojalata.⁵⁹

El desclavado y eliminación posterior de las planchas del respaldar de la Virgen y cuerpos laterales permite conocer el montaje de estas planchas de 9,5 x 9,5 cm en el fondo de cada casetón, el carácter de la red o trama reguladora de 2,5 cm de madera dorada y que sus paneles responden a la dimensión de las alas abatibles góticas sin los remates originales y parte de las hojas frontales de cierre.

⁵⁷ ACS, FCR, Autos 5, f. 292r. ACS, FCR, Autos 6, f. 1r. García Baeza, 2016, p. 154, nota 11.

⁵⁸ Muñiz, 1686, f. 60r-v. Laguna, 2009a, pp. 67-68.

⁵⁹ Laguna Paúl, en prensa.

Las huellas de estas fijaciones son perceptibles aún en las fotografías anteriores a la polémica restauración impulsada en 1926 por el capellán real José Sebastián y Bandarán (Sevilla, 1885-1972) y detrás del nuevo fondo o respaldar de la Virgen realizado por el orfebre Manuel Seco Velasco en 1935, quien reprodujo esta trama compositiva con las mismas dimensiones y, seguramente, utilizó para sus réplicas las dos planchas que encontró José Gestoso en 1888. Estas piezas testimonian el desclavado de los cuerpos laterales quizás en el siglo XIX, las huellas de su fijación al soporte y, en el león conservado, las reparaciones con láminas de hojalata (Fig. 7).⁶⁰

2. EL ALTAR DE LA VIRGEN DE LA SEDE Y LAS NOTICIAS DE UN TABERNÁCULO CONTRATADO CON EL ORFEBRE SANCHO MARTÍNEZ EN 1366

El día 15 de septiembre de 1366 el cabildo de la catedral de Sevilla concertó y firmó con el orfebre Sancho Martínez ante Martín González, notario público de esta ciudad, la realización de “una ymagen de santa maria con su fijo en braços et el tabernaculo de la dha imagen todo esto de labor de plata e dorado e esmaltado cada cosa segunt conuiene a la obra que se fisiese”. José Gestoso vinculó este contrato con la factura de la Virgen de la Sede y su revestimiento de plata. La ignota documentación consultada por el mismo investigador en el archivo de la catedral de Sevilla ha generado en la historiografía dudas relativas al origen del revestimiento argénteo de la imagen de la Virgen de la Sede, que es de época alfonsí, así como la hipótesis de un tabernáculo de plata y esmaltes encargado para el altar mayor de la primitiva catedral de Sevilla y una duda respecto al nombre exacto del orfebre, al que llamó en sus publicaciones “Sancho Muñoz” mientras que en el contenido del documento lo transcribió como “Sancho Martínez”.⁶¹

La conquista de Sevilla y la consagración de su aljama en catedral en 1248 requirieron después de su dotación en 1258 reorganizar el espacio cultural de la capilla mayor, por lo que Alfonso X acordó con el arzobispo Don Raimundo de Losaña y el cabildo reservar una amplia superficie en la mitad oriental del templo mudéjar para la capilla de los Reyes y destinar el resto del edificio a las necesidades de la catedral, de sus capillas y altares dotados. A partir de este momento, hacia 1268, la capilla mayor quedó organizada en las naves centrales de la mitad

⁶⁰ Laguna Paúl, 2013a, pp. 69-70. Fototeca Laboratorio de Arte, Universidad Sevilla, nº 4-1043 y 4-1042.

⁶¹ Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, pp. 190-192. Gestoso y Pérez, 1899-1908, t. 2, p. 264.

occidental de aquella catedral mudéjar, ocupando una superficie aproximada de 162 m² que, prácticamente, equivale al espacio actual de la parroquia del Sagrario. Esta capilla mayor, con su altar y coro catedralicio, estuvo cerrada con un tabique o muro bajo y rejas que aislaron seis naves de profundidad y tres arcadas de anchura de la primitiva aljama. Sus accesos se situaron en los lados norte y sur, cerca de las pilas del agua bendita instaladas en la “nave de los órganos” y en la nave del “Corpus Christi”. Los sitiales del coro ocupaban aproximadamente la longitud de dos arcadas de las naves almohades en el lado occidental y en el cierre oriental estaba el altar mayor presidido por la Virgen de la Sede, imagen de la capilla privada de Alfonso X donada por este monarca a la catedral después de su vuelta a Sevilla en 1279, según testimonia la cantiga CCCXXIV.⁶²

La Virgen es una talla sedente con el Niño sobre su rodilla izquierda, con rostros y manos policromados y sus vestiduras cubiertas por finas láminas de plata con motivos de losanges con flores cuadrifolias y florenzadas alternantes, las cuales corresponden al revestimiento originario, como señaló Cayetano Sánchez y Pineda, quien supervisó la restauración realizada en 1924 y adscribió su cronología al tercer cuarto del siglo XIII.⁶³ Las características de esta imagen de tamaño académico llevan a pensar en una factura próxima al grupo denominado “vasconavarro-riojano”, cuyo modelo, que tuvo amplia difusión en el período alfonsí, parte de los talleres burgaleses y leoneses de mediados del siglo XIII.⁶⁴ Las láminas de plata, dispuestas sobre una preparación de estuco y cola orgánica, han tenido intervenciones documentadas desde el siglo XIV y en el XVI Hernando de Ballesteros forró con nuevas láminas de plata el banco de la Virgen e hizo la poma del Niño. En 1370 la catedral abonó varios pagos para la “renovación” de esta imagen, que tuvo aportaciones crematísticas de varias personas y realizaría alguno de los orfebres que trabajaron aquel año en el soporte del arca del Corpus Christi y en el pie de una cruz: Juan García y Manuel Pérez.⁶⁵

La topografía cultural del presbiterio del altar mayor tenía una amplia plataforma escalonada, con la mesa dispuesta en la arcada central y presidida por la Virgen de la Sede, cobijada, seguramente, en el interior de un tabernáculo que solemnizaba y sacralizaba su imagen. La falta de noticias relacionadas con

⁶² Hernández Díaz, 1948, pp. 13-18. Laguna Paúl, 1998, pp. 53-56; 2001, p. 436, n° 180; 2018b, fig. 1; 2019, pp. 214-218. Martínez de Aguirre, 1998, pp. 129-130. Cómez Ramos, 2016-17, p. 126.

⁶³ Sánchez y Pineda, 1935, pp. 39-42.

⁶⁴ Hernández Díaz, 1971, pp.16-17. Fernández-Ladreda, 1989, pp. 146. Martínez de Aguirre, 1998, pp. 129-130. Laguna Paúl, 2001, p. 436, n° 180. Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2009, pp. 357-365. Cómez Ramos, 2016-17, pp. 127-129.

⁶⁵ ACS, FC, libro 9333(1-A), fol. 7r y 12r-v. Sánchez y Pineda, 1935, p. 44.

este mueble hace pensar en una obra menos suntuosa que la de la Virgen de los Reyes: acaso un sencillo tabernáculo de madera con la alas abatibles pintadas, como el que aparece representado en el privilegio rodado de Sancho IV cuando dispuso ser enterrado en la catedral de Toledo en 1285,⁶⁶ en las cantigas XXXIV y XLVI del *Códice Rico* de la Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, en otras obras pintadas de los siglos XIV y XV o como el realizado por el carpintero Bartolomé Sánchez y el pintor Alonso López para la Virgen del Madroño de la capilla de san Hermenegildo de la catedral de Sevilla en 1454.⁶⁷ Las dimensiones de este tabernáculo, de líneas sencillas, provisto de chapitel, columnas y puertas con paneles articulados, estarían adaptadas a esta escultura de 122 cm de altura y 59 cm de anchura y su volumen lo considero equiparable al del tabernáculo de Castildelgado (Museu Frederic Marés, núm. inv. 814), cuya medida máxima abierta es de 221,1 cm de largo y el baldaquino tiene 204,6 cm de la altura según el último estudio de Fernando Gutiérrez Baños, quien pormenoriza también las de cada papel, de izquierda a derecha, en 28,6 x 142,3 cm, 50,2 x 138,4 cm, 51,6 x 140 cm y 28,9 x 143,5 cm.⁶⁸

La silueta del tabernáculo de la Virgen de la Sede podría ser la representada en un sello de placa del cabildo de la catedral de Sevilla que pende todavía de una bula de indulgencias conservada en el archivo de la catedral de León (Fig. 9), cuya matriz de latón realizó en 1440 maestro Martín Guillemín, orfebre de la catedral.⁶⁹ El sello, de forma biojival, rodeado por la leyenda “+ Sigillum indulgencie ecclesie ispalensis”, reproduce el escudo del cabildo sevillano a mediados del siglo XV. En el registro inferior la torre campanario de la catedral, el alminar de la aljama coronado por una espadaña que aloja la llamada campana del reloj fundida por Alonso Domínguez en 1400 durante el episcopado de Don Gonzalo de Mena,⁷⁰ y en el superior la silueta de la imagen que preside su capilla mayor, sedente en un banco con respaldo de arquerías góticas y situada en el interior de un sumario tabernáculo cuyos batientes o paneles interiores tienen arcos del mismo carácter; por encima de la imagen un remate triangular evoca el chapitel. La esquemática representación de este mueble podría interpretarse, incluso, en sus líneas básicas como un gran trono gótico en perspectiva coronado por un

⁶⁶ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Clero, carp. 3022/5bis.

⁶⁷ Gutiérrez Baños, 1997, pp. 209-214; 2011b, pp. 398-399. Laguna Paúl, 2018a, pp. 99-102.

⁶⁸ Yarza Luaces, 1991, pp. 393-394. Muñoz Párraga, 2009, p. 354. Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 50-53. Debo y agradezco a Fdo. Gutiérrez Baños estas medidas.

⁶⁹ Camino Martínez, 2007, pp. 382-383.

⁷⁰ Para esta espadaña y campana véanse: Ortiz de Zúñiga, 1795-96 [ed. original 1677], t. 2, pp. 473-475, y Jiménez Martín/Cabeza Méndez, 1988, pp. 116 y 205.

chapitel de mediados del siglo xv. El sello sintetiza los elementos identificadores del cabildo sevillano en aquellas fechas, al igual que la iconografía de otros sellos realizados para cabildos y preladados hispanos evocan las siluetas de algún retablo, altar o la iconografía característica de cada templo, como la Descensión o la imposición de la casulla a san Ildefonso en la catedral de Toledo, el tabernáculo de santa María de Albarracín en su catedral, el sello de la vicaría de Tarazona (h. 1355) cuya arquitectura alude a la restauración de este templo después de la guerra entre Pedro I de Castilla y Pedro IV de Aragón, o el del obispo de Salamanca Alfonso de Barrasa (1374), entre otros ejemplos de los siglos XIII, XIV y XV.⁷¹

Este tabernáculo quizás presidiera o formara parte de alguna composición iconográfica de mayor entidad, ya que la existencia de pinturas monumentales y tabernáculos pintados, como el realizado por Antón Sánchez de Segovia (1262) en la capilla de san Martín de la catedral vieja de Salamanca, induce a suponer que el primitivo altar mayor de la aljama cristianizada pudiera tener alguna composición similar no documentada y posteriormente perdida en los derribos góticos. En la catedral mudéjar de Sevilla existen noticias de numerosas pinturas en los pilares que hacen pensar en la existencia de otras de mayor entidad realizadas ocupando paramentos de mayor extensión en las capillas como nos constan en la capilla mayor de la catedral de Córdoba en el siglo XIV, aunque la mayoría de los testimonios conservados de retablos pintados en Andalucía son posteriores: el ábside de la iglesia de santa María de Arcos de la Frontera (Cádiz), de la parroquia de la O de Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz) y de santa María Magdalena de Cala (Huelva).⁷²

La redacción y condiciones del contrato publicado por José Gestoso en 1890 plantean, actualmente, otros interrogantes en relación con el nombre exacto del orfebre que suscribió los acuerdos de 1366, porque ya indiqué que este investigador lo llamó Sancho Muñoz y lo transcribió como Sancho Martínez en el documento. Este contrato continúa sin estar localizado entre los fondos del archivo de la catedral de Sevilla y en los protocolos notariales del Archivo Histórico Provincial, pero existe otro documento fechado el 11 de septiembre de 1363 que menciona expresamente a un Sancho Martínez como orfebre de la catedral de Sevilla, vecino de la calle Génova en la collación de Santa María. Este Sancho Martínez debe ser el mismo artífice con quien el cabildo contrató el tabernáculo de plata y esmaltes y en 1363 le había concedido una sepultura cerca de la capilla

⁷¹ Fuentes Isla, 1922-23.

⁷² Laguna Paúl, 2006, pp. 77-88; 2019, p. 224. Herrera García, 1993, pp. 103-104. Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 76-77.

de santa Cruz con la condición y contraprestación de “adobar” o reparar las piezas de orfebrería y los ornamentos que le dieran mientras viviere, cuyos materiales le entregaría dicha institución.⁷³

El contrato de 1366 omite también el lugar donde el cabildo de la catedral de Sevilla deseaba dar culto a la nueva imagen mariana chapada en plata en un tabernáculo del mismo material, que tendría los paneles internos en plata dorada y esmaltes con figuras en relieve (“imágenes enleuadas”) ateniéndose a una “muestra” presentada por dicho orfebre. El proyecto de esta obra contemplaba, por tanto, unas alas abatibles cuya iconografía mostraría en “la primera puerta de a mano derecha [...] la salutación del angel e santa maria e santa ysabel conmo se abraçan et los pastores e los ynocentes e el parto e el rey herodes e conmo va santa maria cauallera a egipto Et los tres Reyes conmo ofrecen”. Los temas previstos para los batientes izquierdos eran “conmo ofreçio santa maria a su hijo e conmo se disputa con los sabios et conmo esta a las bodas de archetedino Et conmo sube santa maria a los çielos e como la coronan”.⁷⁴ Este planteamiento dispone ocho escenas de la vida de la Virgen e infancia de Cristo, representadas a la derecha de la imagen, que correspondería a la izquierda del espectador, y cinco en el opuesto donde destacan las primeras manifestaciones de la labor mesiánica de Cristo —la circuncisión para acatar la ley mosaica, el debate del Niño con los rabinos en la sinagoga y la petición de su Madre en las bodas de Caná— junto con la ascensión y coronación de María en el cielo, culminación de su vida mortal y expresión de su inmortalidad y labor como intercesora perpetua de los fieles. La diferencia en el número de los asuntos seleccionados en cada lado parece corresponder a temas que figurativamente aparecen representados, en los tabernáculos conservados tallados o pintados, en dos casetones inmediatos sin que los relatos obedezcan a una secuencia cronológica, como destacan los estudios de Claude Lapaire, Elisabeth Andersen o Fernando Gutiérrez Baños entre otros.⁷⁵

Este contrato concertado entre el orfebre Sancho Martínez y el cabildo de la catedral de Sevilla en 1366 confirma una presencia en esta ciudad de talleres especializados en la técnica del esmalte y relieves en plata a mediados del siglo XIV, cuando constan las primeras referencias de la cofradía de san Eloy entre los años 1344 y 1376, y las ordenanzas de Enrique II que desarrollaron, propiamente, la primera legislación corporativa del gremio de plateros, extendida a todo el antiguo

⁷³ ACS, FC, libro 10908(20), nº 4.

⁷⁴ Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, p. 191.

⁷⁵ Lapaire, 1969, pp. 173-180; 1972, pp. 40-74. Andersen, 2015, pp. 165-185. Kroesen, 2014, pp. 164-167 y 170. Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 53-68. Belting, 2009 [ed. original 1990], pp. 595-602.

reino de Sevilla a partir de 1376.⁷⁶ Lamentablemente, al no ser posible revisar el contrato y los datos consultados por José Gestoso tampoco se puede aportar mayor información sobre esta obra inconclusa y sus dimensiones, aunque su programa iconográfico y materiales confirman que el cabildo deseaba, indudablemente, una obra equiparable a otros encargos de la misma cronología en España, Italia y Centroeuropa. Las referencias y testimonios más remotos de obras conservadas de este carácter parten del siglo XI, y desde mediados del siglo XIV son numerosas las noticias de frontales, retablos de plata con paneles o con alas abatibles y retablos-tabernáculos, caso, por ejemplo, del retablo y frontal de san Iacopo de la capilla del Crucifijo de la catedral de Pistoia (1287-1456), el del altar mayor de la catedral de Grado (h. 1372) o el de la catedral de Pola en la península de Istria. Entre los peninsulares cabe destacar numerosas obras desaparecidas y los restos del realizado por el barcelonés Bartomeu de Tutxó en 1367 para el monasterio de santa María de Salas (Huesca), el del monasterio de Guadalupe (1364-1367) y el conjunto de frontal, ciborio y retablo encargado para la cabecera de la catedral de Gerona en 1347, obra de carácter italianizante enriquecida con los trabajos de Pere Bernés.⁷⁷

3. LA VIRGEN DE LA ANTIGUA “CERCADA DE UN DORADO TABERNÁCULO DE MARAVILLOSO ARTIFICIO Y MUY ALTA ALTURA Y DEVOTA IMAGINERÍA”

La *Primera Crónica General* describe ampliamente el asedio y cerco de Ysbilia, su capitulación y la entrada solemne de Fernando III en el contexto de una ceremonia que concluyó con un pontifical en la “yglesia de Santa María”, pero omite cualquier mención a la intervención de la Virgen y, consecuentemente, a las imágenes de la Virgen de los Reyes y de la Virgen de la Antigua.⁷⁸ A finales de la Edad Media la fama de santidad de Fernando III era un hecho, recogido en el *De rebus Hispaniae memorabilibus* de Lucio Marineo Sículo, pero cualquier detalle relativo a su vida y milagros únicamente pueden encontrarse en la historiografía forjada en la Edad Moderna, como señala acertadamente Juan Luis Carriazo. Los historiadores del siglo XVI recogieron por escrito algunos de los episodios de

⁷⁶ Sanz Serrano, 1991, pp. 16-25.

⁷⁷ Dalmases, 1992, vol. I, pp. 79-86 y 161-167. Kroesen, 2004, pp. 243-261. Español Bertran, 2005, pp. 213-232; 2009, pp. 89-91. Caillet, 2006, pp. 3-20. De Marchi, 2009, pp. 65-68, 72-76 y 82-86. Nyborg, 2009, pp. 183-191.

⁷⁸ *Primera Crónica General...*, 1906, pp. 766-767. Peraza, 1997 [h. 1535], vol. I, pp. 230-232.

su vida que tuvieron mayor difusión en el periodo barroco, en sintonía con la elaboración del expediente de canonización enviado a Roma y con la aprobación de su culto el día tres de marzo de 1671.⁷⁹

El bachiller Luis de Peraza (h. 1535) recogió algunas de estas tradiciones en su *Tratado de la Fundación y milagros de esta Santa Capilla del Antigua* y en la *Historia de Sevilla* cuyas copias consultaron los historiadores Alonso Morgado, Rodrigo Caro, Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga y Nicolás Antonio entre otros. La primera obra no ha llegado a nuestros días y en la segunda leemos que la imagen de la Virgen de los Reyes estaba en la tienda de campaña de Fernando III y que después de orar ante ella el rey entró en Sevilla sin ser visto y penetró de noche en la mezquita “hacia aquella parte donde estaba y está nuestra Señora de la Antigua”.⁸⁰ Los episodios legendarios de esta icona mariana —la aparición de la Virgen a los musulmanes, la caída del muro que ocultaba la imagen y la visita nocturna de Fernando III a la Virgen—, y el traslado del pilar donde estaba pintada los citó Francisco Ortiz en su *Discurso historial de la Antigüedad y Milagros de N. Sra. De la Antigua* (1687) y fundamentaron las obras de Alonso Carrillo de Aguilar (1762) y de Antonio Solís (1739) cuando sus leyendas alcanzaron el máximo apogeo y el arzobispo Luis de Salcedo promovió la reforma barroca de la capilla en el siglo XVIII. En su leyenda existen similitudes con otras hagiografías medievales, como los *Miráculos romanzados de santo Domingo de Silos*, escritos por Pedro Marín (h. 1232-1293), que describen la aparición nocturna de este santo a los cautivos, su invisibilidad ante los enemigos o la facilidad para penetrar en edificios sin ser percibido por nadie. También la narración de la cantiga XXIX (San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Real Biblioteca, ms. T-I-1, fol. 44r), contemporánea al *Liber Mariae* de Fray Juan Gil de Zamora (h. 1240-1318), habla del carácter refulgente de cuatro imágenes de la Virgen *acheiropoietai* —no realizadas por manos humanas— vistas por los peregrinos en las columnas de la basílica de Getsemaní, que sugeridas por las vetas de estos soportes muchas veces se completaban con pintura.⁸¹

La imagen de la Antigua fue pintada en el frente interior de un pilar almohade situado a la entrada de la capilla de san Pedro de la catedral mudéjar, frente al antiguo mihrab, que la construcción de la catedral gótica no derribó y mantuvo exento hasta que el arzobispo Cristóbal de Sandoval encargó al arquitecto Asen-

⁷⁹ Carriazo Rubio, 2000, pp. 747-748.

⁸⁰ Peraza, 1997 [h. 1535], Lib. X, cap. XXII, vol. 2, pp. 230-231. Ortiz de Zúñiga, 1795-96 [ed. original 1677], t. 1, p. 28.

⁸¹ Laguna Paúl, 1997, pp. 64 y 67; 2013b, pp. 179-137. Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2002, pp. 515-525. Pereda, 2007, pp. 169-173. Gutiérrez Baños, 2011a, pp. 391-393; 2011b, pp. 387 y 391-395.

sio de Maeda su traslado e instalación en el frente de la capilla en un “tabernáculo” manierista donde recibe culto desde 1578, incorporado después al retablo de mármol contratado con Pedro Duque Cornejo en 1734.⁸² La pintura medieval, enmarcada hoy en este retablo barroco, supera el tamaño natural, pues alcanza actualmente 321 cm de altura por 116 cm de anchura. Este carácter monumental quedó predeterminado, en origen, por la superficie libre del pilar almohade después de eliminar su imposta y las yeserías islámicas del arco donde fue pintada, lo que pudo generar la tradición del “rompimiento del muro”. Su devoción y pervivencia en el edificio gótico forjó un halo de misterio en torno a esta Virgen con el Niño, coronada por ángeles en vuelo con una donante a los pies contemporánea de la realización de la pintura actual, según constataron los restauradores Silvia Martínez García-Otero y Juan Abad Gutiérrez en la intervención de mayo de 1991.⁸³

El eclecticismo de la imagen conservada se constata en el hecho de que deriva iconográficamente de la Hodegetria y sigue, al tiempo, los prototipos elaborados en la imaginería gótica occidental del siglo XIII con influencias de la pintura italiana, fundamentalmente sienesa. Tiene, asimismo, ciertas características presentes en otros murales sevillanos cuyo tamaño quedó siempre condicionado por el espacio murario libre de sus altares: la Virgen de Rocamador de la parroquia de San Lorenzo y la Virgen del Coral de la iglesia de San Ildefonso.⁸⁴

Los investigadores detectaron en su carácter trecentista e iconografía un prototipo bizantino, cuyos rasgos fundamentales mantuvo el pintor que realizó la actual imagen a finales del siglo XIV. La conquista de Constantinopla en 1204 y las peregrinaciones, embajadas y relaciones familiares con los emperadores bizantinos favorecieron la llegada y devoción de iconos a los reinos peninsulares en la primera mitad del siglo XIII, cuando surgieron nuevas tradiciones relacionadas con obras llegadas desde Bizancio o desde la península italiana, como atestiguan las cantigas XIX, XXXIV, XLVI, CXXXV o CLXXIX.⁸⁵ Estas circunstancias facilitaron la presencia de iconos en la corte castellana y son significativas en la

⁸² Para la reforma de la capilla y ciclo pictórico: Valdivieso, 1990, pp. 109-121. Recio Mir, 1998, pp. 51-67; 2000, pp. 176-190. Pereda, 2007, pp. 152-158. Jiménez Martín, 2007, pp. 401-420.

⁸³ Debo y agradezco esta información a dichos restauradores. Medianero Hernández, 2008, p. 60, lám. 6.

⁸⁴ Laguna Paúl, 1997, pp. 69-70. Medianero Hernández, 2008, p. 52. Sánchez Ramos/Gutiérrez Núñez, 2016, pp. 522-536.

⁸⁵ Gutiérrez Baños, 2011b, pp. 391-395. Molina López, 2011, p. 326. Corti, 1998, pp. 8-12. Benito Ruano, 1952, pp. 3-36. Laguna Paúl, 2013b, pp. 133-135. Belting, 2009 [ed. original 1990], pp. 407-412.

búsqueda de referentes para los antecedentes figurativos de la primitiva pintura mural de la Antigua.⁸⁶

En la catedral mudéjar de Sevilla el espacio de la antigua maqsura conformó la capilla de san Pedro, que acogió los enterramientos familiares del noble Ruy López de Mendoza, uno de los cinco partidores de Sevilla, y en 1338 pasó a Ruy González de Manzanedo, viudo de una nieta de este, a quien el cabildo permitió utilizar el antiguo mihrab como sacristía, cerrar la comunicación con el corral posterior mediante una puerta y, entre otras obras, acotar todo el espacio con un tabique que llegaba hasta el pilar donde estaba pintada una imagen de san Crisóbal. Esta mención verifica la existencia del santo pintado en la cara norte del pilar 1-J de la aljama cristianizada, pero omite a la Virgen de la Antigua, pintada en el lado sur del mismo pilar, y la memoria de otros altares por el carácter del documento y las obras comprometidas para los nuevos accesos al corral posterior.⁸⁷ No obstante, el *Libro Blanco de los aniversarios* indica expresamente que el deán Don Pedro Manuel († 1393) fue enterrado delante del altar de Santa María de la Antigua y que en esta capilla existía otro altar de “Sancta María de la Alcobilla” asociado a la sepultura del canónigo Pero Alfonso, Tesorero de la catedral en 1392.⁸⁸

Esta mención confirma la existencia de la pintura actual y del altar de la Virgen de la Antigua antes de la última década del siglo XIV, pero se desconoce quién la realizó o, incluso, el promotor del encargo, que, sin duda, tuvo relación con la figura orante pintada en la parte inferior derecha. La identidad de esta mujer permanece sin desvelar, pero desde el siglo XVII una tradición recogida por el jesuita Gabriel de Aranda la asoció con Doña Leonor de Albuquerque, viuda desde 1416 de Fernando de Antequera, gran devoto de esta imagen, primer monarca de su estirpe en el reino de Aragón y abuelo de Fernando el Católico, aunque esta historia ha sido investigada y su identificación rebatida en los estudios de Gutiérrez Baños.⁸⁹ La factura técnica y unitaria del mural conservado ha corroborado la realización de la donante en sincronía con la imagen mariana que, pintada aproximadamente a 100 cm del suelo, presidió un altar cuyo frente, adaptado a la dimensión del pilar, estaría cubierto por azulejos o alguna composición geomé-

⁸⁶ Guerrero Lovillo, 1980, p. 327. Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2002, pp. 515-525. Pereda, 2007, pp. 169-173. Laguna Paúl, 2013b, pp. 133-136.

⁸⁷ Sánchez Saus, 1989, p. 305. Laguna Paúl, 1998, p. 55; 2018a, pp. 93-94. Jiménez Martín, 2013, pp. 276-280.

⁸⁸ ACS, FC, 9138(1), ff. 27v-28v; Reg. N° 83, 84, 85, 86 y 89.

⁸⁹ Aranda, 1692, pp. 383-386. Medianero Hernández, 2008, pp. 25-28. Gutiérrez Baños, 2011a, pp. 391-393; 2011b, pp. 393-396. Laguna Paúl, 2013b, pp. 135-136.

trica realizada al fresco, semejante a la descubierta en el altar de Nuestra Señora de Rocamador en la parroquia de San Lorenzo en 2011, a los representados en los altares miniados en las Cantigas y al del Bautismo de Cristo en la mezquita-catedral de Córdoba.⁹⁰

Los derribos góticos salvaron esta imagen, su culto no tuvo interrupciones durante la obra de la nueva capilla (h. 1440-1454) y su devoción aumentó en el transcurso de esta centuria, pues concentró importantes dotaciones y en 1449 ya contaba con una cofradía cuyos actos se solemnizaban con música de órgano. A mediados del siglo xv, el canónigo Ruy González de Bolante († 1450) dotó la misa cantada en este altar el día de santa María de las Nieves y después el racionero Pedro Martínez de la Caridad el ritual de la Salve, que tenía una primera dotación del Tesorero Ruy Gutiérrez de Villapadierna en 1362 y obtuvo el impulso definitivo con las del deán Pedro Díaz de Palacios en 1480. El modelo de este ritual, ampliado a todos los miércoles y a nueve festividades de la Virgen, generó la necesidad de un repertorio musical específico, concretado en cinco volúmenes de polifonía en uso en 1517.⁹¹ El pilar de ladrillo permaneció inamovible y el incremento de donaciones y misas votivas hizo necesario derivar muchas de estas al altar de la Virgen de los Remedios, que es sufragáneo a cargo directo de los capellanes de la Antigua y lo preside una pintura sobre tabla de principios del siglo xv, anterior también a la construcción gótica.⁹²

La terminación de la capilla gótica incentivó otras actuaciones en el altar de la Antigua cuyo pilar almohade quedó exento en el lado derecho de ésta, inmediato a la entrada y a un pilar gótico, y salvaguardado por un cancel documentado, al menos, desde 1458. Este resguardaba el altar y su imagen rodeada de numerosas lámparas y exvotos de plata, cuya limpieza competía puntualmente al platero de la catedral y a los sacristanes.⁹³ Para realzar los cultos los órganos pequeños ya estaban reinstalados en 1454 en la tribuna de la capilla y entre algunas adquisiciones de bienes muebles destaca la compra de una alfombra turca para utilizar en los salmos penitenciales de cuaresma en 1468.⁹⁴

El progresivo aumento de su devoción se incrementó durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos, cuando, además, las predicaciones de Fray Hernando de

⁹⁰ Laguna Paúl, 2013b, pp. 135-136.

⁹¹ Ruiz Jiménez, 2014, pp. 69-71.

⁹² Laguna Paúl, 2019, pp. 226-228.

⁹³ ACS, FC, libro 9339(5), ff. 13v. ACS, FC, libro 9342(8), ff. 13r. ACS, FC, libro 9343(9), ff. 33v, 29v y 41r. ACS, FC, 9345(11), ff. 28r y 36r.

⁹⁴ ACS, FC, libro 9339(5), f. 13v. ACS, FC, libro 9347(13), f. 32v.

Talavera y las medidas impuestas por las autoridades religiosas en Sevilla para controlar la religiosidad de su población conversa en 1478 hicieron de la Virgen de la Antigua un referente de las devociones de los cristianos viejos y de su factura unas leyendas equiparables a las de algunos iconos bizantinos o al milagro de las imágenes aparentes e incisas en las columnas de la basílica de la Getsemaní, recogida e ilustrada en la cantiga XXIX del código Rico de la Real Biblioteca del monasterio del Escorial (ms. T.I.1, fol. 44v), que retoma una tradición anterior del siglo XII presente en diversas obras del siglo XIII.⁹⁵ Los monarcas de la dinastía Trastámara demostraron gran fervor mariano y la reina Isabel durante sus estancias en Sevilla rezaba todos los sábados ante su efigie, a la que donó en 1478 una lámpara grande de plata en agradecimiento por el alumbramiento del príncipe heredero. Después dio otras limosnas en metálico, envió un exvoto de cera plateada del príncipe Don Juan por la sanación de este en 1490 y concedió otras mercedes para promover y dignificar su culto, regulado conjuntamente con el cabildo en sus misas votivas en 1486 y a cuyo altar otorgó ciertas exenciones en 1495.⁹⁶

Durante este reinado están documentadas varias actuaciones importantes en la capilla y el altar de la Antigua, iniciadas durante el episcopado de Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (1486-1502). El maestro mayor dirigió las obras de apertura de la “puerta del jubileo de la Antigua” en la pared oriental de la capilla y de otro acceso menor en el lado opuesto que comunicaba con un “canuto” o pasillo cubierto de conexión directa terminado en 1496 que facilitó el acceso de los sacerdotes desde la sacristía hasta el altar de la Virgen, por debajo del altar de la capilla de san Hermenegildo.⁹⁷ En el mes de abril del año siguiente, después de cerrar la ventana de la capilla con telas encoladas, el pintor Gonzalo Rodríguez terminó ciertos encargos en la puerta, en las paredes laterales de la capilla y en su bóveda alta⁹⁸ y a primeros de mayo el cabildo comisionó a los canónigos Diego de Santillán y Pedro Sánchez de Santo Domingo para supervisar y pagar la terminación del “tabernáculo de la Antigua” por lo que abonaron al mismo pintor sus trabajos en éste y en el “pabellón” con parte de los 30.000 mrs. que recibieron.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Sánchez Ameijeiras, 2002, pp. 522-525. Pereda, 2007, pp. 29-31 y 145-248. Gutiérrez Baños, 2011a, pp. 391-393; 2011b, pp. 391-395.

⁹⁶ Ortiz de Zúñiga, 1795-96 [ed. original 1677], t. 3, p. 102. Pereda, 2007, pp. 179-180 y 182. Laguna Paúl 2009a, pp. 225 y 233-235.

⁹⁷ ACS, FC, libro 9350(16), f. 43r. Recio Mir, 2000, pp. 183-184. Jiménez Martín, 2013, pp. 291-293. Mora Vicente/Guerrero Vega, 2016, pp. 601-605. Laguna Paúl, 2018a, p. 93.

⁹⁸ ACS, FC, libro 9349(15), ff. 49r y 66v. ACS, FC, libro 9350(16), f. 67r-v.

⁹⁹ ACS, FC, libro 9350(16), f. 43v.

Este pabellón era un recinto acotado con rejas de hierro que rodeaba el pilar de la Antigua y de san Cristóbal y, semejante al que todavía acota el altar barroco del Cristo del Perdón en el zaguán del mismo nombre en la catedral de Sevilla, sustituyó a la mencionada reja o cancel documentado desde 1458, que quedó evidentemente obsoleta por la apertura de la puerta de comunicación con la sacristía y la realización del tabernáculo. El herrero Antón de Cuenca realizó las setenta y ocho barras de hierro de este pabellón, que estañó el campanero Luis Caldera y doró y policromó el mismo Pedro Rodríguez.¹⁰⁰ Los trabajos del tabernáculo estaban completamente concluidos en octubre de 1497 y a mediados de 1499 el limosnero de la capilla, micer Pedro Sánchez de Santo Domingo, gastó 7.000 mrs. en la “peana” de Nuestra Señora de la Antigua o mesa del altar de poca profundidad (Fig. 10).¹⁰¹

Desconocemos el diseño y carácter formal de este tabernáculo, del que José María Medianero propuso una reconstrucción, omitiendo este chapitel y la escala proporcional del altar en el pilar.¹⁰² Las dimensiones de este tabernáculo tardogótico estuvieron predeterminadas por el propio pilar de la Antigua, tanto en la anchura como en la altura de sus puertas, y lo describió Luis de Peraza (h. 1535) “de maravilloso artificio y muy alta altura y devota imaginera”.¹⁰³ El chapitel de madera dorada se acomodaría a los 116 cm de anchura de la pintura mural y sus batientes o paneles laterales, ensamblados en los extremos, tendrían unos 65 cm de ancho. El tabernáculo abierto conformaría un tríptico con las escenas del Nacimiento y la Epifanía pintadas en el anverso de los paneles laterales, y desplegado sobre la mesa del altar alcanzaría aproximadamente entre 350 y 380 cm de altura máxima hasta la cima del chapitel y unos 140 o 160 cm de anchura; ocuparía prácticamente el frente de la mesa y apenas dejaría espacio libre entre este y la reja del pabellón, que protegía el restringido espacio del altar. Las *Instrucciones* de esta capilla, elaboradas durante el episcopado de Fray Diego de Deza (1504-1523), prohíben expresamente a los seglares permanecer dentro del recinto acotado durante la misa porque “la peana del altar de nuestra señora del Antigua de dentro de la reja tiene estrecho lugar y aquel es necesario para los ministros del altar”. Estos estatutos de 1513 regulan su culto, las funciones del personal adscrito a él y señalan, entre las competencias del sacristán, limpiar no solo las lámparas y exvotos colgados delante de la imagen, sino también desho-

¹⁰⁰ ACS, FC, libro 9350(16), ff. 43r y 69v. ACS, FC, caja 10978(89), nº8/14, f. 3r.

¹⁰¹ ACS, FC, libro 9352(18), f. 29r.

¹⁰² Medianero Hernández, 2008, lám. 7.

¹⁰³ Peraza, 1997 [h. 1535], vol. 2, p. 323.

llinar el chapitel del tabernáculo y las imágenes “de las paredes del nacimiento y de los reyes”, cuya noticia rebate las atribuciones de estas puertas a los trabajos posteriores de Antón Pérez (1547-1458).¹⁰⁴ Los trabajos anuales de mantenimiento de los sacristanes se completaban con otras intervenciones encargadas a un pintor, habitualmente el de este cargo en la catedral. El clérigo y pintor Andrés Mexía llevó a cabo una actuación documentada en agosto de 1518 cuando recibió 500 mrs. por “pintar y dorar la historia de los reyes con la puerta de dentro de la capilla” y cuatro años después doró la mitad de una de las rejas laterales del altar mayor.¹⁰⁵

Las tareas anuales de limpieza, realizadas antes de la víspera del día de la Asunción, comprendían también la reja dorada del pabellón, la reja de plata y las numerosas lámparas y exvotos que colgaban de una barra de hierro plateada delante de la imagen. La segunda reja a la que acabamos de referirnos era una reja de hierro plateado donada por Juan Alonso de Guzmán, “duque de Medina Sidonia y padre del muy excelente señor Don Juan Alonso de Guzmán, que en el nombre le sucedió y en el estado”, en palabras de Luis de Peraza, cuya nuera Ana de Aragón regaló una lámpara de plata en 1519.¹⁰⁶ Esta reja interior formaba una celosía de protección de la imagen que tenía “cuarenta y seis barras con florones encima” con las armas de su promotor.¹⁰⁷ Su profundidad condicionaría la disposición de los paneles laterales del tabernáculo y el ensamblaje, toda la arquitectura y molduras líneas concluidas en 1497, que debían permitir el cierre de las alas abatibles, pues cuando la imagen permanecía oculta a los ojos de los fieles las puertas del tabernáculo mostraban un cielo azul estrellado en oro (Fig. 10).

Las noticias de este tabernáculo continúan a raíz de la restauración integral realizada por Antón Pérez entre julio de 1547 y marzo de 1548, que fue tasada en 28.125 mrs. y dio a conocer Juan Miguel Serrera. En esta intervención el pintor de la catedral actuó en profundidad en las escenas del nacimiento y epifanía del anverso de los paneles laterales “con sus molduras y letreros dorados”, y en las estrellas doradas sobre fondo azul del reverso de estos, que conformaban la indicada decoración de los batientes exteriores cerrados. Igualmente “aderezó” la

¹⁰⁴ ACS, FC, caja 10978(89) n° 8/1, ff. 9r y 14r. Atribución de Medianero Hernández, 2008, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁵ ACS, FC, libro 9372(38), ff. 12r, 3v, y 9v. Gestoso y Pérez, 1890, p. 500. Gestoso y Pérez, 1899-1908, t. 2, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ ACS, FC, caja 10978(89), n° 8/1, f. 19v. Peraza, 1997 [h. 1535], vol. 2, pp. 323-324.

¹⁰⁷ ACS, FC, caja 10978(89), n° 8/14, f. 3r. Pereda, 2007, p. 184, omite esta celosía y adscribe la reja a Rodrigo Ponce de León e Isabel Pacheco.

imagen de san Cristóbal y, entre otras cosas, añadió un tercer ángel y corona a la Virgen.¹⁰⁸ La realización de estos elementos modificó su iconografía, ya que las copias más antiguas únicamente presentan dos ángeles, como atestiguan la donada por el obispo Juan Rodríguez Fonseca a la catedral de Badajoz, la de la sacristía del monasterio de San Isidoro del Campo y la tabla pintada a finales del siglo xv por Francisco de Burgos;¹⁰⁹ la atribuida a Pablo de Céspedes de la catedral de Córdoba¹¹⁰ debe estar inspirada directamente en una obra anterior a la indicada actuación de Antón Pérez.

La posición de este tabernáculo está perfectamente señalada en un contrato firmado el 16 de junio de 1565 con el rejero granadino Juan López para realizar la nueva reja de la capilla “a las espaldas del tabernáculo de la ymagen de nuestra señora donde está pintado el bienaventurado san christoval de la manera que la reja esté entera proporcionada cubriendo todo lo hueco de todo el arco como si el dicho tabernáculo no estuuiera en el dicho arco”.¹¹¹ Este contrato evidencia que, inicialmente, el cabildo pensaría mantener el altar de la Antigua en su emplazamiento original durante algunos años, con su pabellón de hierro, separado a una distancia prudencial de la nueva reja, hasta que una década más tarde decidió acometer la reforma completa de esta capilla encargada al arquitecto Asencio de Maeda en 1576. Este nuevo proyecto obligaba a ubicar la imagen y altar de la Antigua en el muro meridional de la capilla, donde reorganizaron completamente la disposición de su altar y realizaron un nuevo acceso a la sacristía, entre otros trabajos estudiados por Álvaro Recio.¹¹²

La importancia y complejidad del traslado del pilar quedó recogida en el *Discurso historial de la Antigüedad y Milagros de N. Sra. De la Antigua* de Francisco Ortiz (1687) y representadas por Domingo Martínez en un lienzo de la serie encargada por el arzobispo Delgado Venegas cuando acometió más tarde la reforma barroca de la capilla. A mediados de noviembre de 1578, el pilar quedó centrado y empotrado en el centro de la pared del nuevo presbiterio y la Virgen colocada con un giro de 180° respecto a su posición originaria, pero la documentación omite cualquier referencia a la reinstalación o reutilización de su tabernáculo tardogótico en otro lugar. La pérdida del san Cristóbal del frente posterior del mismo pilar determinó que el cabildo acordara pintar nuevamente “su historia”

¹⁰⁸ Serrera Contreras, 1977, pp. 361, 363 y 399; 1990, pp. 171-176.

¹⁰⁹ Poleró, 1896, pp. 56-58. Medianero Hernández, 2008, p. 59.

¹¹⁰ Martínez Lara, 2015, pp. 15-31.

¹¹¹ Hernández Díaz, 1937, p. 86. Morales, 1984, pp. 563-564. Mata Torres, 2001, pp. 267-268.

¹¹² Recio Mir, 1998, pp. 51-61.

en la capilla de igual titulación localizada entonces junto a la puerta del Lagarto, en el espacio actual de la capilla de la Granada. Esta pintura abonada a los pintores Luis Hernández y Vasco de Pereira a finales del año siguiente canalizó esta devoción en la catedral de Sevilla hasta la realización del mural monumental de Mateo Pérez de Alesio (1583-1584) frente al acceso oriental o puerta del jubileo de la capilla de la Antigua.¹¹³

Antes del traslado, la imagen de la Antigua fue protegida con lienzos y al concluir la instalación tendría alguna intervención previa a la colocación de un marco o bastidor de madera y lienzos dorados que, realizado por el pintor Luis Hernández, colocaron “alrededor del tabernáculo” de la Virgen, que ocultaban con unas cortinas de lienzo azul. Estas últimas corresponden a un montaje litúrgico previo a la terminación del retablo manierista trazado por Asencio de Maeda que se demoró hasta la tercera década del siglo XVII cuando retomaron sus trabajos y fue representado en la estampa grabada por Pedro Rodríguez (h. 1640), que muestra en el ático un busto del Salvador atribuido a Pablo de Céspedes (h. 1580), donde permaneció hasta la realización del retablo actual de Pedro Duque Cornejo y Lorenzo Fernández Iglesias (1734-1738).¹¹⁴ El mismo arquitecto diseñó un pasamanos de hierro para separar el presbiterio del espacio de los fieles y los nuevos soportes de varios lampadarios destinados a colgar las numerosas lámparas y exvotos de la Virgen, realizados por el herrero Juan Barba durante dos años.

4. CONCLUSIÓN

El estudio de estos tabernáculos medievales de la catedral de Sevilla ha permitido adentrarnos por vez primera en la realidad e historia material de dos obras prácticamente desconocidas hasta la fecha que solemnizaron el culto de la Virgen de la Sede en el altar mayor y el altar de la Virgen de la Antigua, que acaparó la mayor parte de las devociones sevillanas en la Baja Edad Media. La riqueza, singularidad y escala monumental de los tabernáculos de la Virgen de los Reyes quedó manifiesta en las descripciones medievales, permaneció sin apenas cambios hasta la inauguración de la capilla Real renacentista en 1579 que hemos dado a conocer junto con algunas transformaciones inéditas de

¹¹³ ACS, FC, libro 9432(98), f. 14r. ACS, FC, libro 7083(33), f. 142r.

¹¹⁴ Espinosa de los Monteros, 1635, p. 67. Recio Mir, 1998, pp. 55-58. Reyes de la Carrera, 2013, pp. 887-900. Martínez Lara, 2015, pp. 16-23.

época barroca. Estas últimas salvaguardaron la mayor parte de uno de sus chapiteles medievales de plata que desde entonces permanece, indisolublemente, incorporado al retablo-tabernáculo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas (1644-1649) y al largo proceso de canonización del santo rey Fernando III, cuyo nuevo culto fue aprobado en 1671.

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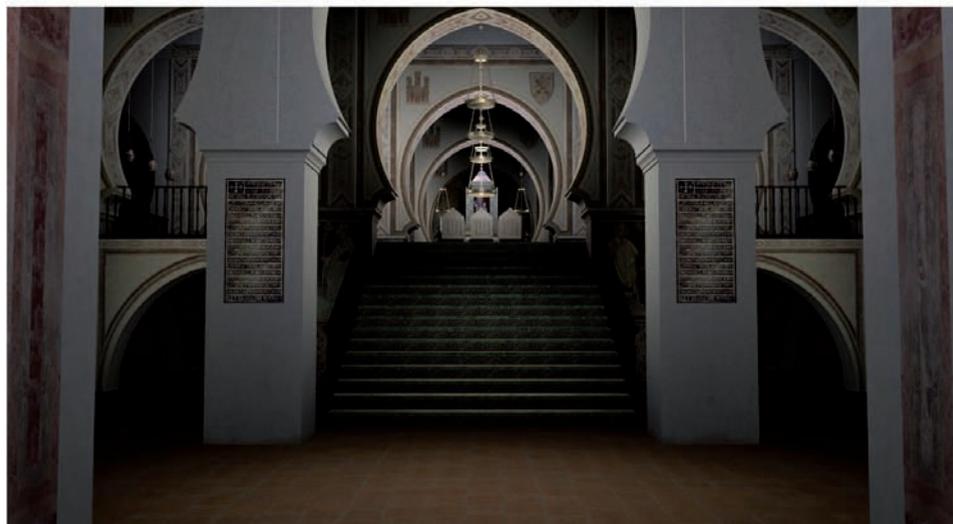
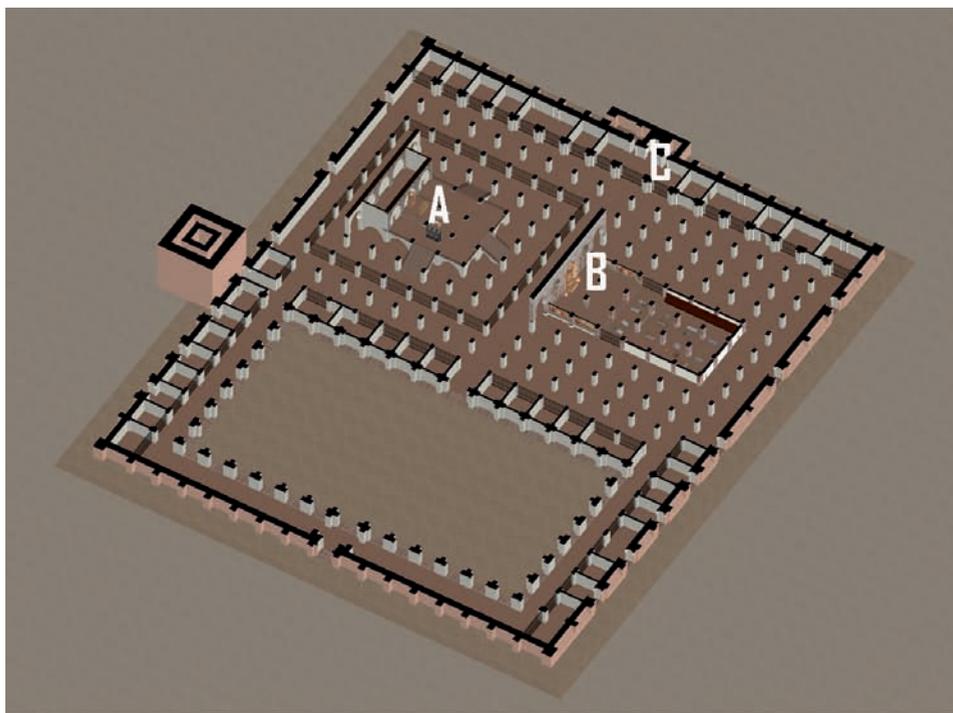


Fig. 1. Restitución de la primitiva catedral de Sevilla hacia 1430 con la localización de los altares de la Virgen de los Reyes (A), de la Sede (B) y de la Antigua (C).

Reconstrucción de la doble altura de la capilla de los Reyes.

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Fig. 2. Sellos de placa de la capilla Real de Sevilla
insertos en la *Insinuación apologética* de Alonso Muñiz (1686).

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Fig. 3. Antón Sánchez de Segovia, 1262: tabernáculos pintados de la capilla de san Martín de la catedral vieja de Salamanca.

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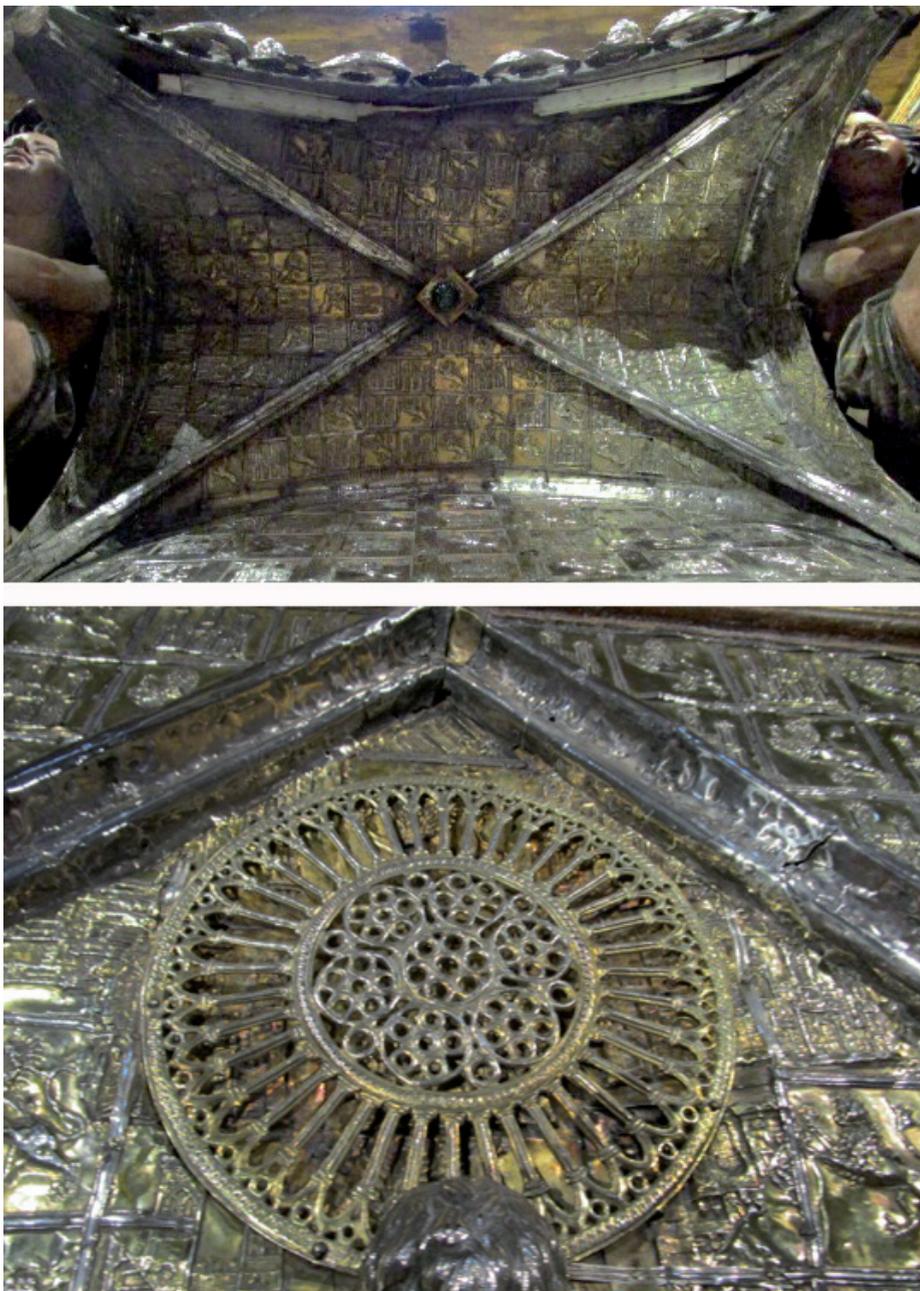


Fig. 4. Jorge de Toledo, h. 1278: bóveda y rosetón del tabernáculo de la Virgen de los Reyes incorporado al retablo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas (1644-1649).
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Fig. 5. Francisco de Varela, 1644: *Virgen de los Reyes*.
© Museo Pedro de Osma (Lima).



Fig. 6. Anónimo, h. 1630: *Virgen de los Reyes*.
Monasterio de la Concepción del Carmen (Valladolid).
© Ramón Pérez de Castro.



Fig. 7. Jorge de Toledo, h. 1278: anverso de dos placas sueltas de 9,5 x 9,5 cm de los batientes del tabernáculo de la Virgen de los Reyes.

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Fig. 8.
Chapitel exterior del tabernáculo de la Virgen de los Reyes incorporado al retablo de Luis Ortiz de Vargas (1644-1649).
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Fig. 9.
Sello de placa del cabildo catedral
de Sevilla inserto en una bula
de indulgencia conservada en la
catedral de León.
Virgen de la Sede de la catedral de
Sevilla.
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León y TLP.



Fig. 10.

Propuesta de restitución del tabernáculo de la Virgen de la Antigua hacia 1497-1499.

Virgen de la Antigua enmarcada en el cuerpo central del retablo de 1734.

Altar barroco del Cristo del Perdón de la catedral de Sevilla.

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**MOVEMENT ON THE ALTAR:
GOTHIC TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES
IN THE CROWN OF ARAGON (AND THEIR CONTEXT)***

**MOVIMIENTO SOBRE EL ALTAR:
LOS RETABLOS-TABERNÁCULO GÓTICOS
EN LA CORONA DE ARAGÓN (Y SU CONTEXTO)**

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Abstract

The arrival of tabernacle-altarpieces in regions under the Crown of Aragon makes up part of a complex context revolving around the evolution of altar furnishings from the late Romanesque to the early Gothic period. The late 13th century and first half of the 14th century saw a series of fundamental movements – changes – prior to the verticalization of altarpieces. All of this took place at the same time that specific types of altar furnishing that already existed during the Romanesque, such as those presenting a sculptural image inside a tabernacle, became steeped in new features, and evolved by taking on movable wings at the sides which could be ritually opened up. This lent them a certain theatricality and the ability to conceal and reveal, while also allowing for processes activating the central image presiding over them. These, specifically, are some of the main contributions of tabernacle-altarpieces to the history of Christian altar furnishing. In the Crown

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of Aragon, this type of furnishing does not appear to have become very widespread, given that we only have documentary evidence of it in Catalonia and Aragon. All the same, the exemplars that have survived respond to models and types that exactly match those found throughout the kingdom of Castile and the rest of Europe, both those presenting sculptural reliefs on their wings and those with pictorial representations. Finally, we should point out that their chronological presence spanned practically the entire Gothic period, from the early Linear Gothic years until well into the 15th century.

Keywords

Tabernacle-altarpieces, Gothic art, Gothic sculpture, Gothic painting, art and liturgy, Crown of Aragon, Catalonia, Aragon, Pyrenees.

Resumen

La llegada de los retablos-tabernáculo a los territorios de la Corona de Aragón forma parte de un complejo contexto que gira en torno a la evolución del mobiliario de altar desde el último románico hasta la llegada del primer gótico. Desde finales del siglo XIII y durante la primera mitad del XIV asistiremos a una serie de movimientos —cambios— trascendentales que fueron anteriores a la verticalización de los retablos. Todo ello se produjo al mismo tiempo que determinadas tipologías de muebles de altar ya existentes durante el románico, como aquellas que presentaban una imagen escultórica dentro de un tabernáculo, se empapaban de las novedades y evolucionaban al incorporar alas móviles en los extremos que permitían aperturas rituales. Ello las dotaba de teatralidad y de la capacidad de velar y desvelar, a la vez que permitía procesos de activación de la imagen central que las presidía. Estas son, precisamente, algunas de las principales aportaciones de los retablos-tabernáculo a la historia del mobiliario del altar cristiano. En la Corona de Aragón, este tipo de muebles parece ser que no tuvieron una difusión generalizada, puesto que solamente los documentamos en Cataluña y Aragón. Los ejemplares conservados, con todo, responden a modelos y tipologías plenamente afines a las difundidas en el reino de Castilla y en el resto de Europa, tanto aquellos que presentaban relieves escultóricos en sus alas, como los que mostraban decoraciones pictóricas en ellas. Hay que señalar, finalmente, que su presencia cronológica abarca casi todo el período gótico, desde los primeros tiempos del gótico lineal, hasta bien entrado el siglo XV.

Palabras clave

Retablos-tabernáculo, arte gótico, escultura gótica, pintura gótica, arte y liturgia, Corona de Aragón, Cataluña, Aragón, Pirineos.

In this article, we will be analysing a type of altar furnishing broadly known across Europe as 'tabernacle-altarpieces'. As is known, these pieces included a central tabernacle crowned by a canopy housing a sculptural image over which four movable side wings would normally close, either painted or with polychrome sculptural reliefs (Frinta, 1967; Lapaire, 1969; Andersen, 2015; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018). One of the most marked aspects of this type of furnishing is how widespread it became in a large portion of the European continent, with documented works in countries such as Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Slovakia and Denmark as of the 12th and 13th centuries (Kroesen, 2014a, p. 163). The most representative surviving ensemble is from Sweden (Tångeberg, 2009), where examples from the 14th century predominate, some of which are extremely similar to the few exemplars that have survived from the old Crown of Aragon. The fact that no sufficiently representative group has come down to us from the latter region may be due to two causes. Firstly, the structural fragility of these pieces and, moreover, their being replaced as a result of changing tastes and the advent of large-scale altarpieces in the 14th and 15th centuries, as was also the case in other parts of Europe (Frinta, 1967, p. 105).

One of the questions we should be asking ourselves today is whether these tabernacle-altarpieces were equally present in Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia and Mallorca; that is to say, the different regions making up the old Crown of Aragon. Judging by the surviving exemplars and what we can glean from the documentation, we can conclude that this was not the case. One of the conclusions of the study we are putting forward here is that their presence in Valencia and Mallorca must have been at most residual, or even non-existent.¹ Not a single work has survived from those areas, and we know of no clear documentary reference alluding to tabernacle-altarpieces with movable wings from either location.² And we ought to be asking ourselves why that should be the case, as recent studies have shown that in areas such as Valencia Linear Gothic mural painting was more

¹ Even though it has not been possible for us to carry out a physical inspection of a set of two panels kept in the monastery of Santa Clara of Palma, on the island of Mallorca, to determine if they have traces of hinges, we should at least mention them as possible wings from a tabernacle-altarpiece of the middle of the 14th century. They show episodes of the Passion on the interior and stars and two heraldic shields (not identified) on the exterior. See Gaita, 1999.

² References do exist that are difficult to interpret due to the polysemy of the term 'tabernacle' during the middle ages in the Crown of Aragon, and we will return to this matter later. For example, in 1348 the painter Beló charged 18 *sueldos* 'per lo tabernacle que fo on estava lo retaule de madona Senta Maria a la salla', from the house in the city of Palma (Llompart, 1977–80, vol. 4, p. 52, doc. 70).

widely present than we had supposed until recently (Rubio/Zalbidea, 2019). As is known, this is a pictorial style developed between the late 13th century and the first third of the 14th century, at a time when the type of furnishing we are studying here was emerging, and as such both the Crown of Aragon and that of Castile produced a range of tabernacle-altarpieces executed in said style. If that artistic language was present in the churches of Valencia, and was adapted for mural painting and a number of wooden ceilings, why is it that there is no surviving trace of tabernacle-altarpieces in said area? This may be the result of the vicissitudes of history or the twists of fate, but it is possible that this sort of furnishing never became equally widespread across all the territories under the Crown of Aragon.

I. MOVEMENT ON THE ALTAR AND ALTAR FURNISHINGS IN MOVEMENT

One of the theories we will be arguing in this article is that the dissemination of tabernacle-altarpieces in specific areas of the Crown of Aragon was due to a series of innovations introduced as early as the 13th century, and which continued to bloom throughout the 14th century, in the context of the altar. In broad terms, this process underwent a succession of changes involving, for instance, the proliferation of free-standing Eucharistic tabernacles and their subsequent inclusion in the lower section of altarpieces, or the transferral of structural features between differing types of altar furnishing. The former meant the inclusion of Eucharistic chambers in the middle of the predella, which might include doors painted with Eucharistic subjects such as the Man of Sorrows. These movable features, which had an eminently practical and utilitarian function, were without doubt seen as elements encouraging not just the physical dynamism of the works, but also the devotional practices associated with them. This inclusion as part of the altar furnishing of elements that opened and closed, revealing and concealing, should be perceived as a not unambiguous phenomenon informing the choice of one type of furnishing or another depending on varying requirements, from the tastes of the patrons to worship necessities or the level of knowledge of innovative types of furnishing such as tabernacle-altarpieces.

Specifically, one of the main characteristics of the tabernacle-altarpiece was the ritual act of opening made possible by the movable wings. This gesture of revelation of whatever was contained inside is something it shares with other pieces of furnishing linked to worship, such as polyptychs, tabernacles and free-standing Eucharistic cabinets or shrines built into altarpieces. As Braun once com-

mented, the movement of the wings or doors facilitated a change in the physical appearance of these furnishings (Braun, 1924, II, pp. 355–357). In Catalonia this was an innovation with regard to the Romanesque period, as the few examples of known altar furnishings tended to have fixed wings, as seen in the aedicule of Sant Martí d'Envalles (Angostrina, Western Pyrenees, France), preserved today at the Centre d'Art Sacré d'Île-sur-Tet (Folch, 1925; Delcor, 1995; Le Pogam, 2009; Sureda, 2012, pp. 76–78; Kroesen, 2014a, pp. 161–162, fig. 3). This furnishing including two fixed, painted side compartments as wings. What we have here, then, is clearly a forerunner of the Gothic tabernacle-altarpiece with movable panels. Judging by surviving pieces, one might conclude that the use of movable wings in the Crown of Aragon was a feature introduced on works linked with the Gothic style,³ given that its advent united different types of altar furnishings. All the same, one must bear in mind the fact that in certain European regions movement was already present in works from the Romanesque period.⁴

From a given moment onwards, the novelty of including doors or wings that allowed for performative movement and dynamic actions altering the perception of the work, concealing and then revealing its interior, must have constituted a boost to the conception and design of furnishing elements associated with altars. It is as such that the emergence, in the Crown of Aragon, of tabernacle-altarpieces, Eucharistic tabernacles and cabinets, or the inclusion of a shrine into the lower part of altarpieces may be considered part of a phenomenon whose goal was to inject dynamism into the actions of the celebrant, to go beyond the static furnishing of Romanesque period altars and present the *sancta sanctorum* of the presbytery as a place of liturgical and devotional experiences based on movement. All of these innovations took place within a timespan starting in the late 13th century and going into the 14th century, coinciding with the popularisation of tabernacle-altarpieces in regions such as Catalonia and Aragon.

³ With regards to the two wings of the tabernacle-altarpiece with depictions of the Virgin and Saint Joseph from the old Alexandre Soler i March collection (Barrachina, 1997), as well as the four from the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (inv. 66051–66054) with the Epiphany Magi and the Virgin, from the Bosch i Catarineu collection (Llarás/Carabasa, 1994, pp. 444–445), both being of the movable type, these have been dated to between the 12th and 13th centuries, but we have serious doubts concerning their authenticity. We would argue the need for a technical study to certify their degree of originality. With regard to the two wings from Sant Martí Sarroca preserved at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, these have also been dated to the Romanesque period (13th century) (Alcoy, 1994, pp. 308–310), but in our opinion they are later works and should be considered Gothic, as we will see shortly.

⁴ For more on this matter, see Justin Kroesen's article in this volume.

In the case of the tabernacle-altarpiece, what we are dealing with are devices that allowed for visual interaction with the image in the central tabernacle through the process of opening and closing movable panels, encouraging revelations linked to the exaltation, veneration and unveiling of what was contained within. This anthropically-generated performative movement stood, therefore, as a trigger leading to meanings linked to divinity.⁵ One can even argue that the opening of the wings of a tabernacle-altarpiece generated the activation of the main image in the eyes of the faithful or the celebrant. And all of this thanks to movement acting like a light switch.

As we have already mentioned, the opening of the side wings is an action, a gesture, that tabernacle-altarpieces shared with furnishings of relatively similar structure, but given over to different worship-oriented purposes, such as Eucharistic cabinets. Be that as it may, the interior decoration presented by the cabinets still surviving today from Catalan parishes places us before a type of furnishing that goes beyond the mere function of receptacle or Eucharistic chamber. As such, the narrative provided by the interior scenes, with episodes linked to the Passion in some cases, was complemented with the presence of full-length saints on the doors.⁶ It would appear that, on occasions, decorative canopies may be included similar to those we find at the top of the central tabernacle of tabernacle-altarpieces, or those topped by spires from the tabernacles presiding over certain altarpieces.⁷ One contrasting variation on this sort of cabinet is the one we find in the impressive reliquary-cabinet from the monastery of Piedra (Zaragoza), preserved today in the Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid), which in its dimensions, doors and format is reminiscent of the altarpieces and, even more so, triptychs, of the time. This is a Eucharistic container dating from 1390, containing a truly exceptional inscription on its panels, identifying the furnishing as ‘Tabernaculo hoc vocabitur aula Deo [...]’ (González Zymła, 2013).

⁵ There is more on this subject in the works included in Zchomelidse/Freni, eds, 2011. *Cfr.* Kessler, 2014.

⁶ The known and documented exemplars show that they were especially common in *Northern Catalonia*, as we can observe in the piece preserved at the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, which originated from Perpignan; in the work from Elna Cathedral, in the one purchased by Meadows Museum in Dallas, or in the remains preserve in Illa (Alcoy 2003; Domenge 2005; Favà, 2017, p. 130, figs 12–15).

⁷ We can observe this in the inventory of the assets of the painter Pere Baró (1388), from Perpignan, which mentions ‘Un armari del corpus que’s stat d’Eune ab una lanterna en sus’ (Gudiol Cunill, [n. d.], p. 117).

Much the same can be said for the shrine Madonnas which, on being opened, revealed holy stories and broadened the very image's panoply of meanings, with an interplay on what could, and could not, be seen (Katz, 2011). It is doubtless significant that this sort of Marian image originated in the region of Castile towards the end of the 13th century and that, from there, it spread to the other side of the Pyrenees, as Melissa Katz observed (2010). With regards to the Crown of Aragon, there are no surviving works from said area,⁸ but we do know that in 1325 the painter and sculptor Ramón Torrent, who was residing in Zaragoza, had in his workshop 'Una ymagen de Santa Maria con la historia de figuras y la ymagen abierta' (Serrano Sanz, 1918, p. 107).⁹ The document mentioning this sculpture is an inventory referring to multiple images that the artist was working on or had concluded, from which we can only conclude that his workshop was producing shrine Madonnas. The advent of this sort of sculpture with movable panels revealing its interior may therefore be dated to the same period we are discussing, when a process of interaction and exchange was taking place between different types of liturgical altar furnishings.

The context of the late 13th and start of the next century is core to the panorama we are attempting to describe, and as such the leading role taken on by folding doors in different elements from liturgical furnishing should be conceived of as part of a more or less generalised phenomenon. The opening methods differed in each case, due to nuances conditioned by the nature of the work, but in essence the nature of the process was the same. The idea was to make a revelation and to interact visually, intimately and, even, physically with the work.¹⁰ It is therefore significant that some of the changes introduced into altar furnishing in the Crown of Aragon at that time saw folding doors or panels take centre stage, with movement being core to their *raison d'être*.

⁸ On the other hand, the so-called 'Virgenes-sagrario' are preserved in Mallorca, sculptures normally made of wood presenting a closed cavity with a door containing consecrated forms. See Llompart, 1963, and Llompart, 2006.

⁹ 'An image of the Virgin Mary with the story of figures and the image open'.

¹⁰ With regard to shrine Madonnas, Melissa Katz, claimed that these images have parallels with a range of containers of the holy which '[...] similarly enclose and disclose hallowed subject matter. A series of analogous objects, when compared to triptych Virgins, enhances our understanding of the theological and theoretical implications of a sculpted body of the Virgin fashioned with a set of doors. This in turn illuminates the dialectic established between the sculpture's exterior and interior, two spaces mediated by the gesture of opening and closing the image, a paraliturgical movement that approximates, for the person effecting the transformation, the passage between the mundane realm and the divine, crossing thresholds of augmented sanctity' (Katz, 2011, p. 70).

2. DOCUMENTATION AND TERMINOLOGY

In contrast to what we mentioned earlier with regard to Valencia and Mallorca, exemplars have survived from Aragon and Catalonia, and there are documentary references explicitly mentioning the execution of tabernacle-altarpieces with movable wings. All the same, drawing on the sources, and with the exception of a contract from 1298 which we will be coming to later, the main problem we encounter is that certain documents that might refer to works of this type are not sufficiently explicit or descriptive. This is the case for a pastoral visit to Girona Cathedral in 1417, where there is reference, with regard to the altar of the Holy Cross, which reads ‘quedam postis fustea coram dicto altari posita et in qua sedet quedam imago virginis Marie lapidea’ (Sureda, 2013, p. 44). It would appear that it is referring to something akin to a tabernacle-altarpiece, but the document just isn’t specific enough.

To this we should also add the complex polysemy of the term ‘tabernacle’ in the Hispanic context, which comes into particularly sharp focus in Crown of Aragon documentary testimonies. It is as such that the word appears rather too rich in meanings that might allude to different sorts of altar furnishings (Español, 2002, p. 103; Español, 2009b, pp. 87–89).¹¹ Be that as it may, on many occasions we encounter sparing and generic references to ‘tabernacles’, where it is not clear whether the works being alluded to had moving panels or not. On other occasions, the documents mention sculptures with their respective tabernacles, but we cannot tell if these were just images with a simple canopy above them, like a coronation, a more complex tabernacle-altarpiece with mobile wings, or a structure with a base and four columns supporting a canopy, but without folding wings.¹²

¹¹ The term may also allude to different elements associated with the silver and goldsmithing world, such as the Eucharistic monstrances where the host was kept, or the niches presented by some processional crosses, as the documentation makes abundantly clear (Dalmases, 1992). The varying meanings of the term are rooted in a fairly clear and widespread basic semantic sparsity in the middle ages, with the assimilation of the Virgin as Christ’s tabernacle. In other words, the Virgin as vessel. The Christ-centric literature produced under the Crown of Aragon allows us to reach this conclusion, with authors such as Romeu Lull or Sor Isabel de Villena (Torró, 1992, p. 95, n. 71).

¹² This type of furnishing bears parallels with the central part of a tabernacle-altarpiece, but few exemplars have survived other than the aforementioned Sant Martí d’Envalls one or the one from Sant Climent de Taüll, dating from the first half of the 13th century (Folch, 1925; Llarás, 1996). All the same, doubts have recently been raised as to whether the latter might not be the result of intervention subsequent to the date at which the image it contains was executed (Camps, 2008, p. 136).

The above-mentioned polysemy, along with the inaccuracy of the descriptions provided in the documentation, are important handicaps when it comes to interpreting the nature of some of the many works mentioned in the major inventory drafted in Zaragoza in 1325 on the death of the painter and sculptor Ramón Torrent. Some were half-completed. An example of those that raise doubts would be, for instance, ‘Una ymagen de Santa Maria, enjesada, de tres palmos, con su tabernaculo’;¹³ ‘Un tabernaculo chico enjessado’,¹⁴ or ‘Dos ymagines de Santa Maria con sus tabernaculos, enjessadas, y la una començada d’argentar’.¹⁵ On another occasion there is mention of ‘Una taula d’alçar [altar?], plegariça, enjesada’¹⁶ (Serrano Sanz, 1918, pp. 108 and 110). Torrent’s widow, María Ximénez de Ribas, is an interesting figure who continued to run her deceased husband’s workshop. As such, in 1327 she accepted a commission for Bartolomea Ximénez for ‘dos ymagines, la una de Sant Bicent y la otra de Sant Martín, que ayan cada una dos palmos y dos dedos [...] con sus tabernáculos, y un otro tabernáculo que sia la historia de Sant Climent’.¹⁷ The dimensions (two hand spans and two fingers) and the price for the batch of images, 50 *sueldos*, relate no doubt to images intended for private worship, to the intimate piety of the home of the client. The one of most interest to us is the image of the story of Saint Clement, which could be interpreted as a tabernacle-altarpiece with movable wings, either painted or with sculptured relief work.

According to known models going back years, these elements with four columns and a canopy could take on greater dimensions, transforming into structures standing over the entire altar, with the mission of lending it dignity and protection. These are so-called *ciboria*, which, furthermore, sometimes crop up in the documentation as synonymous with ‘tabernacle’.¹⁸ As such, we have re-

¹³ ‘An image of the Virgin Mary, in plaster, measuring three hand spans, with its tabernacle’.

¹⁴ ‘A little plaster tabernacle’.

¹⁵ ‘Two images of the Virgin Mary with their plaster tabernacles and one whose silver gilding has been started’.

¹⁶ ‘A folding, plaster altar [?] panel’.

¹⁷ ‘two images, one of Saint Vincent and the other of Saint Martin, each measuring two hand spans and two fingers [...] with their tabernacles, and another tabernacle depicting the story of Saint Clement’. See Serrano Sanz, 1918, p. 115. The series of images had to be delivered ‘daquia Pascua florida’ (Easter Sunday), which shows that they had to be executed in the workshop and it was not a case of selling her dead husband’s workshop stock.

¹⁸ Regarding *ciboria*, see Kroesen, 2014b, pp. 19–22. There are, however, cases, where the document mentions ‘cimbori’ and where it proves absolutely obvious that the reference is to what is known today as a ceiling baldachin (*baldaquino-plafón*, in Spanish). This is the case for a 1370 reference to a painter from Perpignan, Pere Baró, who was commissioned to paint a ‘cobertz os cimbori

corded proof that in 1398 the painter Gaucelm Paulet agreed to paint ‘quoddam cimbori sive tabernacle’ for the chapel of Corpus Christi at the church of Santa Maria del Pont in Perpignan (Gudiol Cunill, [n. d.], p. 173).¹⁹

Exactly the same is the case for the term ‘altarpiece’ (*retablo, retable*), which on numerous occasions would be replaced by ‘tabernacle’ (*tabernacle*), especially during the second half of the 14th century.²⁰ By the descriptions provided in the documentation, we see these were altar furnishings normally presided over by a large tabernacle housing a sculpture, accompanied by painted side compartments. The great pre-eminence of the central element over the rest of the ensemble led on many occasions to it lending its name to said ensemble – a part standing for the whole. We observe this, for example, in a document from 1406 concerning dealings between Jaume Brot, a painter and sculptor, and the parish council of the Corpus Christi chapel of the church of Sant Jaume in Perpignan, who were involved in legal proceedings due to ‘quoddam tabernaculum, et omnes picturas et ymaginem in ipso tabernaculo, factas et depictas [...]’ (Madurell, 1949–52, 10, pp. 179–183, doc. 617).

Equally, some documents appear to show that the term ‘tabernacle’ might also refer to both little wooden triptychs with reliefs sculptured in ivory, and to

que es sobre l’artar de blau ab steles e ab la luna e solel’ (‘canopy or cimbori over the altar in blue with stars and the moon and sun’) for the church of Santa Eugenia de Ortafà (Roussillon, France) (Gudiol Cunill, [n. d.], p. 116). It would appear that there is another reference to this sort of furnishing in the mention of a ciborium that existed at the high altar of the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses (Girona). According to said monastery’s necrology, it was paid for by the sacristan, Bernat de Castelló. Proceedings from 1458 reveal it had a dome with seraphs, held up by four columns sheltering the altar, which included images of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist (Parasols, 1859, p. 141).

¹⁹ It may be that this identification between ciborium and tabernacle (as synonymous with altarpiece) was common in Northern Catalonia, given in 1308 Joan, a master painter from Perpignan, signed a contract with Dalmau de Fornells, chaplain of the parish church of San Juan y San Pablo de Sant Joan de les Abadesses, for the execution of three ‘cimboris’ for said church. One of these was for the high altar, dedicated to the patron saints of the temple, another for the altar of Saint Mary and another for that of Saint Gabriel. Each was to include three sculpted or inlaid images, two thurifer angels, one on each side of the ‘sede majestatis’. These reliefs were to measure four hand spans high on the high altar ensemble, and three hand spans on the other two. The document also comments that silver leaf with mecca varnish (*corladura*) should be used where appropriate (Gudiol Cunill, 1929, p. 361).

²⁰ We see this in a contract from 1358 concerning the painter Jaume Serra, which mentions a ‘tabernaculi sive reetaula’ for the altar of San Miguel in Girona Cathedral (Madurell, 1949–52, 10, pp. 28–30, doc. 404). In a document from two years later, the painter Francesc Serra, brother of the former, admits having received a sum of money from Romeu Ferrer, beneficiary of Barcelona Cathedral, in payment for a ‘tabernaculi sive reetaule’ (Madurell, 1949–52, 10, pp. 39–40, doc. 416).

those we find in a royal inventory from the period of Jaume II;²¹ triptychs or little altarpieces worked in metal, such as the one that existed in the personal chapel of King Pere III in 1344;²² or polyptychs with folding wings, such as the one Jaume II donated to Valencia Cathedral in 1319.²³

Furthermore, when accompanied by the term 'retablo' (tabernacle-retables), the word has taken on a historiographic significance when it comes to designating a type of altar furnishing that was extremely characteristic of the Crown of Aragon (especially Catalonia), which has been studied by Francesca Español, where it is worth highlighting its use as a display cabinet for the Eucharist or holy relics. These were aniconic structures that embellished the altar without painted compartments, with varying levels and normally executed with lavish fretwork or gilt decoration. We know of pieces executed for the cathedrals of Barcelona, Mallorca, or Santa Maria de Manresa, among others (Español, 2009b; *cf.* Pons/Molina, 2012, and Favà, 2017, pp. 132–134). It would seem that we can trace the origin of these furnishings to the second half of the 14th century, coinciding with a series of contemporary movements and changes that led to enriching the diversity of altar furnishings. Their historiographic labelling as 'tabernacle-retables' may give rise to confusion with the altar furnishings we are studying here, especially as the term for the latter is earlier, and well established, so perhaps

²¹ The document is dated 1315 and relates to a series of gifts made by the monarch to individuals in his immediate surroundings. Of the works mentioned we find: 'unum tabernaculum de ligno cum imaginibus eburneis'; 'aliud tabernaculum ligni cum imaginibus eburneis', and 'item posuistis in altari sancti Nicholay, quod est in Palacio nostro Barchinone, aliud tabernaculum de ligno cum ymaginibus eburneis' (Martínez Ferrando, 1962, p. 99, doc. 68).

²² The 1344 ordinances of the Royal Residence in Barcelona that said monarch ordered to be issued, speak of the need for his private chapel to include, among other things 'reretaula dargent daurat ab la imatge de la incorrupte verge Maria en lo mig loch daquel posada mostrantse dins tabernacle per tal que en les festes e en les altres covinents dies memoria d'ella no sia relaxada' (Gudiol Cunill, 1929, p. 401). In 1354 we know that the same monarch had commissioned the goldsmith Pere Berneç to make a 'retrotabulum' dedicated to the Virgin 'cum tabernaculo argenteo esmaltato' (Gudiol Cunill, 1929, p. 399).

²³ 'Item altari predicto sancti Iacobi Sedis Valencie quasdam tabulas que clauduntur et intus est crucifixus cum cohoptis rubeis' (Martínez Ferrando, 1962, p. 144, doc. 105). It would seem that this is the same work that appears mentioned in an inventory of items from the Templar castle of Peñíscola (Castellón), from the same year: 'Item quasdam tabulas que clauduntur et intus est crucifixus cum cohoptis rubeis' (Martínez Ferrando, 1962, p. 146, doc. 106). A 1315 inventory commissioned by Jaume II includes a range of silver objects from the royal chambers which had to be cast in order to execute an image of the Virgin the king intended to offer to Montserrat monastery. These objects included a 'tabernaculum argenti cum imagine argenti beate Marie, ponderis viginti marcarum et duarum unciarum argenti' (Vilar, 2000, pp. 185–186, doc. 68; this is also included in Sanjosé, 2017, p. 149, doc. 317).

it would be appropriate to define the former as ‘monstrance-retables’ or ‘monstrance-tabernacles’.

Finally, the term ‘tabernacle’ may refer to the type of cabinet used to hold the Eucharist. This is what we have come to know today as a Eucharistic tabernacle, which in the Crown of Aragon took on a range of formats in the medieval period.²⁴ One such was the tower-shaped variety, which gave rise to free-standing works that could be placed above the altar (or towards the rear), and have folding doors.²⁵ This is the case of the one preserved in the church of Codalet, in Northern Catalonia (Reynal, 2005, pp. 102–103; Favà, 2017, pp. 129–130, figs 7–9). The introduction of this type of furnishing would appear to be a response, in Catalonia at least, to the varying ecclesiastical guidelines that started to be issued in the 13th century, becoming consolidated in the second half of the 14th century. As such, a synod ruling from the Vic bishopric in 1348, speaks of ‘Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi in aliquo armario juxta altare mundo et vicino ad id tantummodo diputato, sub clave devote et fideliter servetur’ (Gudiol Cunill, 1916, p. 72). Ten years later, Ramon de Bellera, bishop of Vic, banned the storage of the sacramental bread in the boxes normally used for keeping the silver, asking for it to be kept ‘in aliquo eminenti et decenti loco juxta altare, adhibitis tamen clavibus’ (Gudiol Cunill, 1916, p. 72; Español, 2009b, p. 87).²⁶ In 1372 Pere de Clasquerí, archbishop of Tarragona, ordered the *jurats* of Alforja to build a tabernacle behind the high altar which should be located under the main image, as existed in L’Aleixar. From that moment, and for the next few decades, we know of similar cases in a range of locations throughout said archbishopric, such as Albi, Belianes, Montbrió del Camp, Montagut, Conesa, Les Piles or Pon-

²⁴ Regarding the emergence of the Eucharistic tabernacle as an element of altar furnishing, its different types and the episcopal dispositions encouraging its popularisation, see Favà, 2017, pp. 127–134.

²⁵ Another well-known type of tabernacle, though less widespread in the Crown of Aragon, and also tower-shaped, might present its base on the ground and rise upwards, as is the case with the piece from the chapel of Mas Roig (Miramar, Mallorca) (Español, 2009b, p. 89, fig. 2).

²⁶ An earlier ruling by the archbishop of Tarragona set the tone, where in 1242 he requested ‘in media parte altaris cum summa diligentia et honestate, sub clave si fieri potest, corpus domini custodiantur’, although his request was clearly ignored in subsequent years (Español, 2009b, p. 87). These sorts of regulations were included in treatises that were disseminated internationally, such as the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* by Guillaume Durand, drafted in Italy prior to 1286, including the stipulation for the altar to include a ‘capsa in qua hostiae consecratae servantur’. Elsewhere in the same treatise he claimed that it should be arranged ‘super altare’ and, also that ‘in quibusdam ecclesiis super altare collocatur arca seu tabernaculum’ (Gudiol Cunill, 1916, p. 69).

tils (Capdevila, 1925; Duran i Sanpere, 1932–34, vol. 1, pp. 105–106).²⁷ We also know of works commissioned from the sculptor Jordi de Déu for El Vilosell and Vinaixa (Beseran, 2009). Certain works showing this fervour have survived from the archbishopric, as can be seen in the undocumented free-standing stone tabernacle from El Vilet (Lleida) (Duran i Sanpere, 1932–34, vol. 1, figs 118–119).²⁸

3. TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES AND ALTAR FURNISHINGS: A CONTEXT OF TRANSFERRALS AND DEVIATIONS

This phenomenon that was widespread throughout Tarragona coincided with the rise of the construction of stone altarpieces in the neighbouring area of Lleida,²⁹ giving rise to a series of works that are grouped together under the title ‘Lleida School of 14th-century sculpture’, and which give an indication of the strides made in including the Eucharistic tabernacle within the altarpiece structure (Español, 1995, p. 53 and 112).³⁰ From its free-standing arrangement at the back of the altar, serving as a base for the sculpture standing over it, as we saw in the

²⁷ There are records of tabernacles fashioned in metal commissioned at a prior date for the monasteries of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Barcelona) (1314) and Poblet (Tarragona) (1332). See Español, 2009b, p. 88, n. 8.

²⁸ Also originating from a church in the Tarragona archbishopric, one surviving work is the one from Maldà (Lleida) (Museu Diocesà of Tarragona), although in this case it does not follow the free-standing tabernacle model, being a part of the altarpiece predella. See Duran i Sanpere, 1932–34, vol. 1, fig. 118.

²⁹ As with our earlier comments regarding the archbishopric of Tarragona, we know of an episcopal ruling by the bishop of Lleida, Ramon de Ciscar (1238–1247), stipulating that ‘in pulchriori parte altaris cum summa reverentia et diligentia et honestate, si fieri potest, Corpus Domini custodiatur’ (Gudiol Cunill, 1916, p. 70). A prior reference exists in the canonical corpus from the Lleida provincial in 1229, which has clear echoes of the Fourth Lateran Council (Favà, 2017, p. 77).

³⁰ For more on the Lleida School, see Velasco/Yeguas, 2010. One noteworthy example of Lleida stone altarpieces with an integrated Eucharistic tabernacle is found on the high altar of the church of Sant Llorenç de Lleida, or the one currently presiding over the church of Sant Miquel de Castelló de Farfanya (Lleida). The phenomenon may be extrapolated to stone altarpieces executed for other regions of Catalonia. This is the case of the Passion altarpiece originating from the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses (Girona), undertaken by the sculptor Bernat Saulet in 1341 (Museu Episcopal de Vic). Having undergone considerable transformation over the years, it has been suggested that it might have been one of the first examples where the Eucharistic tabernacle was included as a central part of the predella (Español, 2002, p. 103). Something similar occurs with the silver altarpiece from Girona Cathedral, also affected by varying transformations, but which in around 1349–58, to coincide with its expansion, may have been fitted with a Eucharistic tabernacle (Español, 2005, pp. 221–227). For more on the inclusion of such tabernacles in altarpieces, also see Favà, 2017, pp. 130–132.

Vilet example, it started to be placed at the centre of the altarpiece, continuing to serve its purpose in supporting the main sculpture. These works are indicative of a model of receptacle without doors in the frontal area, but with a cavity to the rear allowing access. According to Kroesen (2009, p. 75), it was at this rear area that a sort of opening could be arranged, sculpted with angel or saint figures, and which could indeed be closed using a simple hinged wooden door, as is the case in Bellver de Cinca (Huesca) (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya).³¹

The series of *retauls* from the Lleida School are characterised by the monumentalisation of the altarpiece, with few precedents in contemporary Catalonia. In this context of the second half of the 14th century, the incorporation of the Eucharistic tabernacle with folding doors towards the bottom of the altarpiece may have been part of a phenomenon whose core mission was to focus worshippers' attention on the furnishing presiding over the altar (Español, 2009b, p. 90). One might say much the same for the painted panel altarpieces which, among others, the Serra brothers did much to help popularise at the time. This is the sort of commission that would normally be associated with that of a tabernacle (and the documentation clearly bears this out) which would have to stand over it, and which provided shelter for the sculpture inside.³² When these ensembles took on greater dimensions they tended to be crowned by towering spires (*agulles*), which could stand more than 10 metres tall, making it easier to capture worshippers' attention and focussing the spotlight on the church's main altarpiece.³³ On

³¹ The origin traditionally posited for this work was Albalat de Cinca (Huesca), but documentation come to light in recent years has demonstrated that its real origin was the neighbouring town of Bellver de Cinca (Berlabé, 2009, vol. 1, p. 116 and 148–150, II, pp. 418–426, III, pp. 330–366 and pp. 367–405, and Velasco/Yeguas, 2010, pp. 186–187). According to Kroesen, there is a second work that might belong to the same model, although in this case not from the Lleida School. This is the frontal of the tabernacle from Vilafortuny (Tarragona), preserved today in the Museu Frederic Marès (Barcelona). Español, on the other hand, argues the possibility that these square-shaped framings might be used as the frontal of Eucharistic tabernacles sunk into the presbytery wall (Español, 2009b, p. 89, n. 11).

³² One might mention the case of the altarpiece commissioned from the painter Joan de Tarragona on 8 April 1359, who had to complete the miraculous image of the venerated Virgin for the sanctuary of Paretdelgada (Tarragona). The altarpiece was to be a triptych with the image in the middle, which the painter promised to take home in order to repaint it. The subjects of the paintings, two to each side, were to be the Annunciation, Nativity, Epiphany and Purification. He also undertook to paint a predella dedicated to the Passion. See Pié, 1930 [1896], pp. 32–36. Two sections from the altarpiece are preserved in Tarragona's Museu Diocesà, which for many years were thought lost (Martí, 2008, pp. 22–25).

³³ This is the case of the lost altarpieces that presided over the churches of Santa Maria del Pi (Barcelona) and the monastery of Santa Maria in Pedralbes (Barcelona). In the case of the former,

occasions, altarpiece and tabernacle were commissioned separately, as occurred when the brothers Francesc and Jaume Serra were, respectively, commissioned to undertake the painted compartments and main altarpiece for the monastery of Sant Pere de les Puel·les (Barcelona) in 1360 (Madurell 1949–52, 10, pp. 35–38, doc. 412–413).³⁴ These altar furnishings maintained major structural parallels with tabernacle-altarpieces, given apart from the leading role of the central tabernacle with its respective sculpture, they were surrounded by a number of side sections in vertical format that were symbolically equivalent to movable wings.

This volumetric and visual differentiation between the central element and the paintings surrounding it, characteristic of tabernacle-altarpieces, may be discerned from certain altarpiece contracts. Such is the case of one signed by the painters Jaume Serra and Bartomeu Bassa on 14 December 1358 with Ramon Sa Noguera and Guillem Vinyoles, residents of the town of Cardona. They agreed the polychromy of an image of Saint Michael as well as the execution of two altarpieces and a large tabernacle to house said sculpture (Madurell 1949–52, 10, p. 32, doc. 406).³⁵ According to the documents, the tabernacle was to measure three hand spans wide by 20 high, and should include two superimposed levels, a lower one for the image of Saint Michael, and an upper one to house the Eucharistic receptacle. The central tabernacle should be in between ‘unum reetaula ab utrumque latus’ (one altarpiece on each side), and it is as such that the commission speaks of ‘two altarpieces’. The differentiation between the elements is quite

the height of the central tabernacle reached 11 metres, as can be concluded from the documentation (Ruiz, 2009, p. 290).

³⁴ Separate commissions for the pictorial altarpiece and the tabernacle housing a sculpture were extremely common during the second half of the 14th century. Among documented examples, we might also mention a couple of commissions associated with Llorenç Saragossa, a painter from Barcelona. On 9 December 1363 he signed a receipt for 11 and a half Barcelonese *lliures* in payment for an altarpiece painting and tabernacle he had undertaken to complete for the church of Castellanou de Bages (Barcelona) (Madurell, 1949–52, 8, p. 24, doc. 12). Furthermore, on 18 March 1370 he signed a payment receipt for carrying out ‘cuiusdam tabernaculi et reetaule et su[i] scanni, sive banch’ dedicated to Saint Eulalia for the high altar of the church of Santa Eulàlia in Provencana (L’Hospitalet de Llobregat) (Madurell, 1949–52, 8, p. 33, doc. 24). This second document shows that, when commissioning an altarpiece, the term did not always refer to the entire ensemble, as a single furnishing, but that it was broken down into parts: central tabernacle, painted side compartments and predella, as in this case. Two years later, the Sallent parish council agreed on the execution of a tabernacle, an altarpiece and ‘un rotllo d’esquelles’, for whose completion they were still collecting alms in 1388 (Solà, 1920, p. 240; Sitges, 2003, p. 42).

³⁵ Bernat Roca, *mestre d’obra* at Barcelona Cathedral at the time, was in charge of the carving and sculpting of the elements described (Madurell, 1949–52, 10, pp. 30–31, doc. 405).

clear, as we can see, given the whole ensemble was not conceived of as a single organic unit when it came to commissioning it.³⁶

The lay-out of the large central tabernacle with scenes painted on both sides is what we can see in a work that has fortunately survived, the altarpiece presiding over the high altar of Tortosa Cathedral. Saying that, this impressive ensemble includes one innovative feature regarding what we have commented thus far; the movement of the side panels, something that makes it absolutely unique in the context of major surviving altarpieces in Catalonia, and which links it with central European altarpieces such as the one in Doberan (Germany) (Weniger, 2001, pp. 193–204). The Tortosa altarpiece must have been executed in around 1351,³⁷ at just the time that polyptychs were beginning to emerge in Catalonia.³⁸ The Tortosa piece presents certain peculiarities that draw parallels with tabernacle-altarpieces, such as its horizontality, only broken up by the prominent and raised pinnacle at the top of the central tabernacle; its gabled tops, or the fact it presented scenes in bas-relief (with appliqué figures) on the inside of the wings and painted scenes on the outside. Liturgically, the movement allowed by the wings helped generate effects similar to those of tabernacle-altarpieces, beyond the scope of static altarpieces. We know that the Tortosa work remained closed for most of the liturgical calendar, but for major events or feast days it could be opened up. As such, worshippers were no longer restricted to seeing the outside painting, and

³⁶ We see something similar in the contract the abovementioned Bernat Roca signed three years later for the church of the convent of Mercè in Barcelona, when he was asked for 'Et eciam faciam ibidem unum rerataula [...] de tribus puntis, utriusque partis'. On this occasion, it was for a tabernacle measuring 54 hand spans high that was to house an image of Mary measuring seven hand spans. The painter Jaume Serra signed on this occasion as guarantor, along with the sculptor Pere Moragues (Madurell, 1949–52, 8, pp. 17–20, doc. 10).

³⁷ On 23 August 1351, the Chapter of Tortosa Cathedral agreed on the building of a 'tabernaculum' dedicated to the Virgin Mary and intended for the high altar (Matamoros, 1932, pp. 137–139). We therefore see that the same term was used as when referring to other types of completely different altar furnishings. For more on the Tortosa polyptych, see Conejo, 1997; Beseran, 1997; Alcoy/Buttà, 2005, pp. 221–224.

³⁸ It is worth highlighting the Morgan polyptych, of a far smaller size (57 x 105 cm), preserved today in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, attributed to the Bassas (Alcoy, 2005a, pp. 165–168). Without a central tabernacle, it presents four panels with scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary. It should be dated to a little before the Tortosa ensemble, and both its structure and the crown of its different sections could be compared to those of tabernacle-altarpieces. Another example of a contemporary polyptych is the one the Serra brothers executed for the monastery of Santa Maria in Pedralbes (Barcelona), preserved today, though broken up and scattered among different museums in Barcelona, Lille and Krakow (Español, 2002, p. 70; Alcoy, 2005b, pp. 268–269; Velasco, 2019, pp. 82–85). It would have been completed shortly after the Tortosa altarpiece.

could revel in the sculpted reliefs on the inside. The visual enhancement of the interior iconography thereby transformed into yet another means of expressing the solemnity of the occasion. This was the case, for instance, on the day that the keystone of the dome of the main apse was laid, in 1438, according to one source: ‘E vuy Diumenge quis compta XXVII de Setembre MCCCCXXXVIII lo dit retaule de la Seu sia ésser ubert e ben empaliat, sonen tots los senys e campanes, los quals ja la nit passada havien sonat’ (Español, 2002, p. 190).³⁹

Another example of a piece of altar furnishing with connections to the tabernacle-altarpiece is the one commissioned in 1337 from Guillem Ginebrer for the high altar of the church of Santa Coloma in Queralt (Tarragona) (Segura, 1885, pp. 190–191; Español, 2002, pp. 188–189; Fuguet, 2008). The document does not mention the word ‘altarpiece’ (*retaule*) at any point, using the term ‘tabernacle’ to refer to the ensemble. It also notes that the project should include a total of three tabernacles, and that the central one should be presided over by an image of the patron saint, Saint Columba, sculpted in stone, measuring eight hand spans. Two images of angels were to be installed in the auxiliary tabernacles, ‘dezà e delà’, or either side of the central one. The most interesting thing is that each one of these tabernacles opened up with two doors. The outside of the doors (‘los caps de les portes’) was to be adorned with carved decoration of a floral nature, while the inside was to depict three stories (*istòries*). The sum total then was six doors and 18 scenes, quite possibly of a Marian nature. As far as the execution technique of the scenes on these panels was concerned, the document notes that ‘la obra dels camps de les istòries que sie obra plana’ (the work on the fields of the stories should be flat).⁴⁰ This probably meant bas-relief, appliqué sculptures, which would tie up with what we have seen regarding the Tortosa altarpiece and what was common in certain tabernacle-altarpieces, as we shall see when turning to the Santa Maria de Cap d’Aran ensemble. There is no doubt that the description provided by the documents presents us with an exceptional piece of Crown of Aragon altar furnishing, which shares internal structural features with

³⁹ ‘And today, Sunday, 27 September MCCCCXXXVIII, may said cathedral altarpiece open and be decorated with tapestries, and may all the bells ring that rang out last night’.

⁴⁰ ‘[...] e la obra del tabernacle que sie ab tres tabernacles, e en lo tabernacle miyà stigue la ymaya de santa Coloma e los àngels dezà e delà; et los tabernacles que s’obren ab VI portes, que axí és per son dret, e los caps de les portes que sien entaylades ab suplatges, e els fuylatges e les orles que tot sie embotit de bela obra d’entayl: sobre les portes, i dich en les portes, aye XVIII istòries, e la obra dels camps de les istòries que sie obra plana [...]’. See complete transcription in Manote/Terés, 2007, p. 254.

tabernacle-altarpieces. In fact, what we have here is a sort of integration of three tabernacle-altarpieces within one single more complex structure.

Another matter that needs to be addressed in this context of the transferrals and deviations we are tracing out here is the profound similarity to be found between the tabernacle-altarpieces with movable wings and certain primitive altarpieces that appear to bear a great resemblance to them. We are referring to a sort of altarpiece that was common in the first half of the 14th century, which did not reach a great height, having a horizontal format with a central tabernacle and two or more side sections. This was a sort of transmutation of the tabernacle-altarpiece with movable wings into a two-dimensional static screen-altarpiece, while maintaining the same structure. We do not mean to claim that these primitive altarpieces were the consequence or next stage in the evolution of the tabernacle-altarpiece, but we are witness to works that owed a great debt to the Romanesque frontal structure which, quite simply, shared certain internal organisational features with the altar furnishing we are examining here. It is as such that, in spite of the flat and two-dimensional appearance, the structure of these primitive altarpieces was equivalent to that of a tabernacle-altarpiece with its wings unfolded.⁴¹ The vision provided to worshippers was similar, as both works were equally presided over by a main space in the form of a tabernacle, often crowned by an architectural canopy, with the full-length image of the Virgin or the patron saint.⁴² On both sides of this two-dimensional tabernacle there would normally be two or four auxiliary sections like fixed side wings with two (or more) levels of narrative scenes on top of each other. We see this in works such as the painted altarpiece from the monastery of Santa María de Casbas (Huesca), dedicated to Saint Ursula (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya) (Gudiol Ricart, 1971, p. 175, cat. 53, fig. 86), the one that disappeared from the church of Vilobí d'Onyar in 1936 (Girona, *circa* 1317), and originally from Girona Cathedral (Español, 1992–93;

⁴¹ These primitive altarpieces are mere transpositions of a frontal that would be arranged on top of the altar, as occurs with the Anglesola stone altarpiece (Lleida) (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, US), or the Vallbona de les Monges ensemble of two painted panels, one of which served as a frontal and the other as an altarpiece (Español, 2002, p. 184). These two latter pieces present a format that is highly reminiscent of the Saint Peter frontal preserved in the Musée Art & Histoire in Brussels (Melero, 1997).

⁴² We can already identify two-dimensional central tabernacle features on certain late Romanesque altar frontals. We see this, for instance, in the frontals from the Ribagorza workshop originating from the Aragonese towns of Treserra (Museu de Lleida: diocesà i comarcal), Chía (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya) and Rigatell (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya), all being from the second half of the 13th century. For more on these works, see Bertran, 2008.

Español, 2002, p. 183), or the one preserved in the church of Marinyans, dated to 1342 and preserved today in Serdinyà church (Conflent, France) (Freixas, 2005, p. 111). One sculptural altarpiece worth mentioning is that of Saint Augustine preserved in the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses (Girona) (Bracons, 2007, p. 149), where we observe that, on both sides of the central tabernacle, there are two side sections, at the narrower ends. These could be equated with the folding sections that tended to be used to close the central space at the front of the tabernacle-altarpiece. Finally, when it comes to works in metal, we find a number of altarpieces that present a similar structural arrangement, such as the one presiding over the presbytery of Girona Cathedral, completed in the mid-14th century (Español, 2002, pp. 179–183).

The works mentioned are a sort of immobilised or static development on the tabernacle-altarpiece, as they stick to an extremely similar structure. For example, many of them have compartments with pointed or gabled tops, as seen in certain Castilian and European tabernacle-altarpieces. There are also parallels with the gablet-shaped canopy crowning the central tabernacle, as seen in two altarpieces from Mallorca attributed to Joan Loert, the Santa Quiteria one (Museu de Mallorca) and the Santa Eulalia one (Museu de la Catedral de Mallorca) (Llompart, 1977–80, vol. 3, pp. 26–28, nos 15–16); and we even find identical decorative motifs with turreted shapes or fantastic beasts in the spandrels of said gablets, as seen in the stone altarpiece in the church of Santa Maria in Montblanc (Tarragona) (Liaño, 2007, pp. 133–135). In the two aforementioned pieces from Mallorca, we also observe that the saints in the main space are depicted on a polygonal pedestal base. With this element, the painter aimed to recreate a three-dimensional space reminiscent of a tabernacle presided over by a sculpture in tabernacle-altarpieces with movable wings.⁴³

4. TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES WITH SCULPTURAL DECORATION ON THE WINGS

On 1 September 1298, Master Nicolau, the sculptor, and three residents of the town of Santa Maria de Castelló de Empúries (Girona), the cleric Bartomeu de

⁴³ In fact, some period documents already bear witness to these transferrals between different artistic disciplines, as made clear by an inventory drafted in 1364 at Pedralbes monastery by order of Sister Sibila de Caixans, which mentions ‘una taula [pintada] feta a manera de tabernacla, en que ha una ymage de madona sancta Maria’ (‘a [painted] panel done in the fashion of a tabernacle, including an image of Madonna the Virgin Mary’) (Gudiol Cunill, 1902, p. 448).

Puig, Jaume Ciricer and Berenguer Duran, signed a contract for the execution, within a period of one month, of a sculpture of Saint James measuring five hand spans high, and a tabernacle measuring seven spans high and between five and eight wide. The sculpture was to be polychromed in blue and white, while for the other parts of the work silver gilt should be used, along with a technique called ‘embotit’ (embossed plaster decorations with water gilding). The price agreed for the work was 200 *sueudos* (Pujol, 2004, pp. 196–197, doc. 3). What is most striking about the document is its comment that the tabernacle ‘possit aperiri et claudi’; in other words, that it could be opened and closed with movable wings. It does not specify how said wings should be decorated, but it is important to bear in mind that the commission was granted to a sculptor, and that it was he who was charged with painting the central image and the tabernacle.

The first thing one notices in the document is something we have already mentioned; that there is no specific term to differentiate this type of furnishing. It is equally significant that the height of the tabernacle-altarpiece commissioned from Master Nicolau should match that of other examples of this type that have survived within a Hispanic context. The same cannot be said of the width, where the sculptor is asked to make the tabernacle between ‘V et VIII palmos in amplitudinem’, which is rather confusing. Perhaps we should interpret this to mean that the narrower wings, the outside ones closing the tabernacle at the front, should measure five hand spans, while the inside ones, which closed off the sides, should be wider. The chronology is also important, as the date takes us to the end of the 13th century, just when the Linear Gothic language originating from France was taking hold in the Crown of Aragon, and as such we can conclude that the painting of the work’s wings would have reflected those aesthetic parameters.

It says a lot that the commission should have gone to a sculptor who, judging by the document, not only took charge of the joinery, but also executed the sculpture’s polychromy and the painting of the work. This is indicative of an issue that was commonplace in the Crown of Aragon in the 14th century, with regard to the versatility of artisan-artists. It was therefore quite common to find artists appear in documentation as both sculptors and painters (Español, 1997; Español, 2016).⁴⁴ Commissions such as the Castelló de Empúries one show that they had to be versatile and skilled in both artistic disciplines, to thereby undertake commissions such as the one we have just mentioned. We could enumerate

⁴⁴ Much the same was the case for Castile. For more on this, see Gutiérrez Baños, 2015, and Gutiérrez Baños, 2016.

countless examples of this,⁴⁵ but we will highlight just the one. Guillem Timor, who had settled in the Tarragona town of Montblanc, was recorded in January 1345 as a painter commissioned to execute an alabaster sculpture of Saint Andrew for the parish of Selva del Camp (Tarragona) (Pié, 1897, pp. 157–158, doc. 1). The document makes no mention of whether the image should be accompanied by a tabernacle. All the same, a little later, in February the next year, Timor accepted a commission for the execution of a series of painted panels to accompany the sculpture (Liaño, 1991, p. 287, doc. 2). What we have there, then, is something of a mixed altarpiece, but we do not know how the central image and the painted compartments came together, or whether the latter were movable, like wings.

The versatility of these artists leads us to the case of a tabernacle-altarpiece that was discovered not long ago in the Val d'Aran in the Pyrenees. This is a partially-preserved work that presided over one of the altars in the church of Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran (Lleida) (Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14; Velasco/Ros, 2019) (Fig. 1). Its side wings presented sculptured relief work which has sadly not survived. Executed in around 1300, its morphology and sculpture draw parallels with numerous known European exemplars, such as the Dädesjö tabernacle-altarpiece (Småland, Sweden) (Tångeberg, 2009, p. 224, fig. 1), or the one in Fröskogs church (Dalsland, Sweden), housed today in Stockholm's Statens Historiska Museet (Lapaire, 1969, p. 177, fig. 12), to mention just two. Among Castilian pieces, we should mention the one from Castildelgado (Burgos), preserved today in the Museu Frederic Marès in Barcelona (inv. 814) (Frinta, 1967, p. 106, fig. 4; Lapaire, 1969, p. 175, fig. 9; Yarza, 1991, pp. 393–394; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, pp. 58–60, fig. 4).

⁴⁵ Without attempting to provide a complete list, we ought once again to mention Ramón Torrent, from Zaragoza, given both the documentation regarding his work, as well as the inventory drafted after his death in 1325, mention images 'de bulto' ('with volume'), tabernacles and painted panels (Serrano Sanz, 1918, pp. 103–113). Previously, in 1260, the painter Bernat, his wife and Master Pere Martí de Burgos, with regard to a sculptural commission for a Descent from the Cross for the church of Santa Maria del Mar (Barcelona), promised not only to carve the wood, but also to polychrome it ('operabimus atque pingemus') (Gudiol Cunill, 1929, p. 453). In 1378 Bernat Pintor was living in Manresa, an expert in stone and wooden images, as those 'de pinzell' (done by brush) (Gudiol Cunill, [n. d.], p. 186), while in around 1400, the assets inventory of the Perpignan painter Pere Baró, tells us that the artist worked as both a painter and a sculptor (Gudiol Cunill, [n. d.], p. 118). One of the paradigms of multi-skilled 14th century Crown of Aragon artists is Guillem Seguer, who is recorded as an architect, a sculptor specialising in stonework, a master of stained glass windows and a painter (Español, 1994; Español 2007). We leave him to the end of our list because, as we shall see shortly, Seguer has been associated with what remains of a tabernacle-altarpiece housed today at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

Although in Catalonia and Aragon other examples of tabernacle-altarpieces are still preserved that enable us to talk about this sort of liturgical furnishing taking root in the churches of said regions, none of these bears such close parallels as the Nordic ones. That may be due to the fact that in the first quarter of the 13th century the area of the Pyrenees became an important hub for pictorial experimentation and for the production of liturgical furnishing, including ciboria or the so-called ‘baldaquinos-plafón’ (ceiling baldachins) (Castiñeiras, 2008; Castiñeiras, 2011; Kroesen, 2013). With regard to the latter, workshops linked to La Seu d’Urgell, the episcopal seat, produced the oldest surviving ones in Europe, which may be explained by the dynamism of the region’s artists and workshops. The output of these sorts of works in this area in around 1220–30 meant that, years later, the adjacent region of La Cerdanya became particularly receptive to the Linear Gothic innovations arriving from France, including such major works as the Soriguerola or Toses altarpieces (Melero, 2005). All this helped to mean that, in around 1300, the northern part of the Urgell bishopric as well as the neighbouring French bishopric of Comminges, to which the Aran Valley belonged, became entry channels for types of liturgical furnishings not so well known in Catalan regions, such as the tabernacle-altarpiece.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the tabernacle-altarpiece of Santa Maria de Cap d’Aran was presided over by a deacon saint carved in wood housed today at the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya (inv. 3925) (Fig. 2). Research carried out as a consequence of the discovery of the remains of this tabernacle-altarpiece has demonstrated as much (Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14, pp. 156–159). This sculpture had been known of for a long time (it became part of the museum collection in 1932), and had been associated with an active sculpture workshop from the old bishopric of Comminges, possibly linked to the important religious hub formed around the cathedral of Saint-Bertrand (Batlle, 1965; pp. 509–510, fig. 2; Manote, 2007, pp. 45–46; Valle/Ros, 2018, pp. 35–38, fig. 2). The workshop’s link to the episcopal seat was made based on the inscription found on the base of one of the sculptures making up the group, an image of a saint preserved in the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya (inv. 64015), reading ‘Hoc opus fuit factum apud sanctum Bertrandum Convenarum magistrum ubus [?] Doramaimus’. The inscription refers to where it was made, given the carving was from the church of Santa Eulàlia d’Unha, also in the Val d’Aran, along with a second saint belonging to the same workshop (inv. 64013) (Barrachina, 2013, pp. 20–21). Other works surviving today confirm that the Comminges workshops worked for other parishes in the Aran region (Valle/Ros 2018). Meanwhile, it has been possible to calibrate the enormous repercussions their output had

throughout the entire Comminges bishopric, of which the Aran Vale was a part in the early 14th century. As such, the widespread dissemination of these images is reflected in the large number of works it has been possible to identify in numerous museums and, in particular, churches from the area of the old diocese, not just in the Val d'Aran but also in the modern French départements of Haute-Garonne and Hautes-Pyrénées (Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14, p. 152; Valle/Ros 2018). What we have here, then, is an extremely numerous group of sculptures produced by workshops that may have played a prominent role in introducing Gothic sculpture into Catalonia from France, between the 13th and 14th centuries (Manote, 2007, pp. 45–46).

The fact that the Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran tabernacle-altarpiece was presided over by a sculpture from said stylistic environment led us at the time to wonder whether the piece of furnishing housing said image was also produced by these workshops. The answer is it was, given the polychrome decorative motifs found on the remains of the tabernacle-altarpiece are a perfect match for those on numerous works from the same workshop (Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14, pp. 152–154). From all of the above we can conclude that the sculptural workshops in the Comminges area were not only given over to producing wooden carvings, but also examples of liturgical furnishings such as the one we are examining here. The obvious link between the Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran tabernacle-altarpiece and the Nordic and Castilian models also shows that said artisans were perfectly familiar with the nature and type of this altar furnishing, and one may suppose they specialised in their execution. Another aspect to be considered is that the advent of this sort of furnishing in the Catalonian region took place within the context of the stylistic Gallic influence characteristic of early Gothic sculpture. Numerous French sculptors settled in Catalonia during that period, so perhaps the arrival of these sorts of works should be considered in terms of innovations brought by artists. It is probable artists arriving from beyond the Pyrenees imported models of liturgical furnishing in the same way they also contributed specific visual artistic features. One might therefore almost speak in terms of a phenomenon of artistic colonialism specific to the reign of Jaume II (1291–1327) and for which there is documentary evidence in other spheres, such as miniatures and goldsmithing, where we also observe the arrival of numerous foreign artists, many of whom were French (Español, 2002, pp. 76 *et seq.*; Español, 2009a).

The type of tabernacle-altarpiece we find in Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran belongs to a very specific type, with panels decorated in sculptural bas-relief (inlaid or carved directly onto the thickness of the wings), of which no others are

known in the Crown of Aragon. It is clear that in areas such as Catalonia there was a certain tradition for executing similar works, as demonstrated by pieces such as the aforementioned Sant Martí d'Envalles ensemble and others from the Romanesque period,⁴⁶ but we do not know to what degree the type represented by Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran and comparable works from Castile such as the one from Castildelgado were successful models of altar decoration. One similar example, although it presents contrasting visual features and structural aspects, may be seen in the remains of the tabernacle-altarpiece once located in the church of Sant Martí Sarroca (Barcelona) (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. 15924–15925) (Fig. 3). All that survives are two panels depicting Our Lady of the Annunciation and one Magus from the Epiphany on the inside, while the outsides depict painted figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul (Fig. 4). When the tabernacle was closed, these latter two acted as guardians and protectors of the Virgin inside, who disappeared during the Spanish Civil War and is only known by old photographs (Fig. 4 Camps i Sòria, in this volume). It is quite possible that we are missing two further panels with other depictions, one with the other two Magi and the other with the Angel of the Annunciation, according to the reconstruction proposal put forward by Folch i Torres (1956, p. 46, fig. XXI). The ensemble is of interest because it is a clear indication of sculpture's importance in this kind of piece, although now with far more prominent relief work than in Castilian and Nordic examples. From a chronological point of view, both panels have been dated to around 1200 (Alcoy, 1994; Camps, 2008, pp. 134–135), although in our opinion they should probably be placed at a slightly later date, towards the end of the 13th century, in the same context as the outside paintings, which may be clearly ascribed to the Linear Gothic.⁴⁷ The presence of large-scale and full-length sculpted figures is reminiscent of European models, as we can see from a tabernacle-altarpiece originating from Vojňany (Slovakia) preserved today in the National Gallery of Bratislava (Frinta, 1967, p. 108, fig. 8; Cidlinská, 1989, p. 97).

Although they are slightly later works, much the same can be said for the four wings of the tabernacle-altarpiece housed at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (inv. 9780–9783), dated to around 1335–45 (Favà, 2009, pp. 69 *et seq.*) (Fig. 5). In this case, each panel presents a scene painted in the upper section and inlaid high-relief figures in the lower section. As such, the gable-shaped

⁴⁶ See the article by Jordi Camps in this volume.

⁴⁷ We suggested as such in Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14, p. 139.

upper parts include painted depictions of the Visitation, Nativity, Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, whereas in the lower parts we find sculpted figures representing the Epiphany (split across two wings), the Annunciation and a Saint Joseph. The mixed nature of the execution lends the work added interest, and forces us to ask whether the entire ensemble was carried out at the same workshop, as seen in the case of Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran. As such, the painting of the wings has been associated with the same painting workshop that completed the frontal and altarpiece from Vallbona de les Monges (Lleida) (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. 9919 and 9920), along with the altarpiece of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Margaret originally from Alcover (Museu Diocesà of Tarragona, inv. 2970) (Favà, 2009, p. 71). The grouping together of these works has interesting implications, given the aforementioned frontal and altarpiece had been attributed to Guillem Seguer (Español, 1994, pp. 18, 99 *et seq.*), a multi-talented artist living in Montblanc (Tarragona), who is recorded as being an architect, painter and sculptor. His versatility in wide-ranging artistic disciplines might justify his being the author of this tabernacle-altarpiece combining varying techniques. That would mean we are dealing with another multi-disciplinary artist as observed earlier when we referred to the sculptor Nicolau and his 1298 tabernacle-altarpiece commission for Santa Maria de Castelló de Empúries, which also combined painting and sculpture.

5. TABERNACLE-ALTARPIECES WITH PAINTED PANELS

The painted scenes on these four tabernacle-altarpiece panels housed at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya serve to introduce a second and different type of piece to those we have seen thus far. We are referring to works completely lacking in sculpture on their wings, these being completely painted. The surviving ones we know of are all incomplete other than one, with only the wings having survived in the majority of cases. We should first mention one side wing from a tabernacle-altarpiece preserved at the church of Sant Andreu in València d'Àneu (Lleida), in the Pyrenees (Velasco, 2011, pp. 37–44) (Fig. 6). The existence of this work in the north of Catalonia reinforces the presence of this type of furnishing in the Pyrenean region, which is complemented by the case of Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran, and which we will be seeing again shortly when we deal with the panels from Santa Llúcia de Mur (Lleida). The panel from València d'Àneu (89.5 x 15.5 cm) corresponds to one of the two that closed off the front of the ensemble.

ble's central tabernacle. This is confirmed by the fact that the wing is shaped like a quarter circle at the top. In terms of what is represented, we see three images of female saints in vertical-shaped compartments on top of each other. The figures stand out against a neutral-toned gilt background which is reminiscent of the one we can see in the backgrounds of the compartments of the Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran tabernacle-altarpiece. The spaces housing the figures are bordered by red polychromy from which a motif of six points surrounding a central one stands out. Of the three female saints we can only identify the lower one, Saint Catherine, remains of whose martyrdom attribute, spiked wheels, may still be made out, as well as the two executioners who lie vanquished at her feet.⁴⁸ Just above the saint one can still identify a trace of the incised drawing of the angel about to break the wheels asunder with a sort of axe. The three saints look to the left, which no doubt indicates that in the second wing closing off the tabernacle the figures would be looking in the opposite direction in order to maintain symmetry. This arrangement matches what we observe on the back of the panel (Fig. 7), where we find the marks of two cross-pieces or hinges; a sloping one at the top and a second horizontal one towards the bottom. We also observe that the back was covered in a plaster-based preparation, undoubtedly decorated with blue or red polychromy to judge by the preserved remains. Reddish tones tend to appear on the back of the wings of tabernacle-altarpieces from Hispanic regions and other areas of Europe, as Andersen demonstrated in a recent study (Andersen, 2015, pp. 172 and 181–182). At one time, the València d'Àneu panel was dated to the second half of the 13th century due to its stylistic similarity with a range of works from the period (Velasco, 2011, pp. 42–43), although that date could certainly be pushed forward to the end of the century.

Also linked to the Linear Gothic, though somewhat later, are two panels from the Pyrenean church of Santa Llúcia de Mur (Lleida), which depict varying scenes from the hagiography of Saint Lucy (68.3 x 25.3 x 1 cm / 66 x 25.8 x 2 cm, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, inv. 35073) (Fig. 8). This ensemble of works has a considerable historiographic background,⁴⁹ although it is only today that they have been identified as wings forming part of a tabernacle-altarpiece. There are a number of elements backing up this theory, such as the hinge marks

⁴⁸ The church in València d'Àneu belongs to the Urgell bishopric, whose cathedral (La Seu d'Urgell) was given over to the worship of the saint from the mid-13th century on (Castiñeiras, 2010).

⁴⁹ See the bibliography included in Melero, 2005, pp. 80–83. *Cfr.* Buttà, 2005a, p. 71.

on the edges,⁵⁰ or the red polychromy on the back (Fig. 9), which link up with what we have just seen with the València d'Àneu exemplar. Apart from what we have mentioned, the vertical format, with one scene pictured above the other in each panel, and the arrangement of the narrative, also lead us to the same conclusion. With regard to said narrative, the sequence starts with the episode of the saint brought before Paschasius, Governor of Syracuse, while just underneath we see the attempt by two soldiers to drag the saint away with ropes. The story continues on the other wing with a rather odd martyrdom scene in which two executioners try to cut off her breasts, an episode taken from the hagiographic legend of Saint Agatha.⁵¹ Underneath that, the cycle concludes with the saint's decapitation. Judging by the sequence, it seems fairly clear that this was part of a tabernacle-altarpiece presiding over the high altar of its church of origin, dedicated to Saint Lucy, and that the central element standing over it must have been a tabernacle with a sculpture of said patron saint. The surviving wings must have been those closing off the central aedicule at the two sides, whereas two smaller panels would have done the same at the front. This explains the hinge marks we mentioned visible on both edges of the panels, both the inner edge, which linked up to the central tabernacle, and the outer one, which was where they were joined to the smaller wings that have not survived. We do not know what scenes would have been depicted on the inside of these outer panels, but they may well not have been from the life of the patron saint, given the cycle on the surviving wings is fairly complete. Stylistically, Melero linked the panels to Barcelona workshops active in the execution of varying known mural ensembles, although she also detected parallels with the frontal from Santa Perpètua de Mogoda (Barcelona). She dated them to the second quarter of the 14th century (Melero, 2005, p. 82), whereas Buttà preferred to date them as being from the late 13th century or start of the following century (Buttà, 2005a, p. 71).

Also housed in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, and still to be published as being what they are, we find two wings from a tabernacle-altarpiece dedicated to the infancy of Christ (95.5 x 24.7 cm / 88.3 x 24.3 cm, inv. 35705) (Fig. 10). They were loaned to the museum by Ròmul Bosch i Catarineu and were subsequently (1950) donated to it by Julio Muñoz Ramonet when he acquired

⁵⁰ We are grateful for the physical inspection carried out by Núria Prat, conservator at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, who confirmed the existence of the marks left by the hinges.

⁵¹ As Melero already commented, we should take into account that St Lucy made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St Agatha along with her mother (Melero, 2005, p. 81), which might explain the confusion.

the Bosch collection. A 1979 photo preserved at the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic in Barcelona (ref. number E-3720) confirms that a third wing from the same ensemble existed in a private collection in Barcelona,⁵² with scenes from the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Flight into Egypt (Fig. 11). They had, to date, been identified as fragments of a hypothetical altarpiece (Gudiol-Alcolea, 1986, p. 35, cat. 59; Melero, 2005, pp. 191–194), but it is obvious that they are the folding wings of a tabernacle-altarpiece.⁵³ This appears to be borne out by their format with two scenes, one on top of the other, as well as the red polychromy we find on the back (Fig. 12), which we have become used to seeing in this sort of altar furnishing. A substantial margin on the upper part of the back seems to have been decorated in blue polychromy, along with another narrower strip towards the bottom. At the back we also observe clear marks of cross-pieces arranged at top and bottom, as was seen in the wing from Sant Andreu in València d'Àneu. All of the above leads us to conclude that these are two of an original four wings from a tabernacle-altarpiece dedicated to the Infancy of Christ, in all probability presided over by a sculpture of the Virgin with Child in the central tabernacle.

With regard to said ensemble's iconographic reading and scene arrangement, we would agree with Melero's suggestion, in spite of the fact that she thought of it in terms of a landscape-format altarpiece akin to the Marinyans one.⁵⁴ She thereby posited a depiction of the Virgin with child in the central position. The iconographic narrative, from the viewer's left to right, would start with the Annunciation in the upper section of the wing that has not survived, continuing in the second (surviving) wing, with the Visitation, and would continue on the other side of the tabernacle with the third wing (also surviving), with the Nativity. The second wing on the right-hand side of the tabernacle-altarpiece would be the one preserved in a private collection, the upper section of which showed the Annunciation to the Shepherds. The reading would continue in the lower sections, meaning we have to go back to the outside wing of the left-hand side (not surviving), where we would find one of the Magi. This can be confirmed by the second wing, one of those preserved at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya,

⁵² The information associated with the photograph includes the measurements of said wing: 84.5 x 22.5 cm. The image confirms that it was trimmed slightly on the upper and right-hand edges.

⁵³ According to Melero, in the museum's internal documentation the two wings preserved there are identified as 'movable panels, showing that the altarpiece ensemble of which they were part was made up of four folding wings accompanied by a central image of the Virgin' (Melero, 2005, p. 192).

⁵⁴ See the sketch published by said author (Melero, 2005, p. 192).

the lower section of which depicts two of the Magi offering gifts in the central image, looking to the right (that is to say towards the central tabernacle). The cycle continues in the third wing with the Massacre of the Innocents and concludes in the outside wing on the right-hand side with the Flight into Egypt.

The origin of this ensemble is unknown, although the presence of gilt stucco relief led some to speculate that it may have been from Lleida (Gudiol-Alcolea, 1986, p. 35, cat. 59, fig. 157). Said decoration also appears in the four wings from the museum that we have already analysed, combining painting and sculpture (Fig. 5), and which were linked to the author of the frontal and altarpiece from Vallbona de les Monges. The fact that the name of Guillem Seguer has been put forward as the author of said works allows one to speculate on its origin in Lleida, as it is well-known that Seguer preferred to work in the areas of Tarragona and Lleida (Español, 1994). Be that as it may, in both cases the decorative motifs are extremely similar, based on a lattice made up of rhomboid shapes. Nor do the pictorial styles vary greatly from one ensemble to the other, although they were clearly by different painters. The Catalan origin of the wings we are dealing with here does, as such, seem quite clear. Gudiol and Alcolea dated both ensembles to the second quarter of the 14th century (Gudiol-Alcolea, 1986, p. 34). Melero, meanwhile, put them as being from the middle of the century (Melero, 2005, p. 193), whereas Favà dated the second works to the second third of the 14th century (Favà, 2009, p. 79).

One particularly significant and little-known tabernacle-altarpiece was in the Mateu collection in Barcelona in the first half of the 20th century (Fig. 13). It was published by Manuel Trens in 1947, and it is known through a decent photo-reportage with numerous details preserved in the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic in Barcelona (ref. number G B-II23/B-II37). The information associated with said images catalogues the work as being 14th-century Italian. At the time of publication, Trens did not venture to say much about it, other than publishing the photo and commenting on the movable wings (Trens, 1947, pp. 684–685, fig. 398). It was unusual structurally in that it had a polygonal tabernacle in the shape of a half-hexagon whose three sides were crowned by quatrefoil roundels and gablets, which meant its format was unheard of in a Hispanic context. Said painted roundels included depictions of *Christus Patiens* (the middle one) (Fig. 14), and the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist (to the sides). Furthermore, the tabernacle was supported on four free-standing helix-shaped columns with extremely prominent capitals, also reflecting a style unknown in the Iberian Peninsula.

In terms of the wings, the outer ones were narrower than the inner ones, and had painted decoration both on the inside and outside. All of the wings had a

gabled at the top with a painted roundel in the middle. The two inner ones presented full roundels, both with angels depicted inside, while the outer ones, being narrower, had half roundels each with a symbol inside that we have not been able to identify. With regard to what is represented on the wings, here we find individual male and female saints, as well as the occasional hagiographic episode not part of any specific cycle. If we start our description with the inside (what was on show when the panels were open), on the wings closer to the central tabernacle we find the Baptism of Christ (Fig. 15), and the Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, Saint Martin cutting his cloak in two with the beggar, and the Stigmata of Saint Francis. As for the narrower wings, the upper section of the one at the far left has a friar in Franciscan habits with a three-knotted belt associated with the Order and holding a book. We must surely identify him as Anthony of Padua. In the lower section we find a female saint with a palm frond of martyrdom, crown and book. The fact that she appears just next to the scene depicting the Mystic Marriage of Catherine leads us to identify her with said saint. On the upper section of the outer wing of the opposite side we find Saint Louis of Toulouse, another of the Order's saints par excellence. In the lower section there is a female saint we have not been able to identify, dressed in Franciscan habit, the corded rope with three knots, a book and a rosary.

If we move on to the external decoration (what was visible when the wings were closed), the panel to the immediate right of the central tabernacle presents a full-length depiction of Saint Francis of Assisi with stigmata on his hands and side. He is also holding a book, from which we can read a fragment from Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians, emphasizing the statement 'I bear the marks of Jesus on my body' (Galatians 6:17). With regard to the narrow wing on the right-hand side, the old photos show that not much remained of the depiction of the figure from the upper section, although we will come back to that later. In the lower section we find another Franciscan saint, with habit and knotted corded rope, who is difficult to identify. If we move on to the other side of the tabernacle-altarpiece, the wing next to the central tabernacle shows a depiction of Saint Clare of Assisi that is in quite bad condition, although it is perfectly identifiable because the saint is seen bearing her crosier. Finally, the lower section of the wing to the far left presents a female saint whose identification is difficult due to the state of preservation and the lack of clarity of the images at our disposal. In the upper section meanwhile, we can clearly make out an angel, despite its poor condition when the photo was taken, because we can definitely identify the presence of a pair of wings. This figure is the *pendant* of the corresponding image in the upper section of the outer right-hand wing, of which very little remained

as we mentioned earlier. Given that both complemented each other in discursive terms, we might suppose that the image that has all but disappeared was of the Virgin. The two images would thereby make up an Annunciation scene, quite suited to the front of a closed tabernacle-altarpiece.

The identification of the saints depicted on the inside and outside of the wings makes it quite clear that what we have here is an ensemble exalting the Franciscan Order, and as such we should not rule out it having originated from one of the Order's monasteries. It is harder to establish a geographic origin for the work given, as mentioned earlier, its type does not match any exemplars known in the Hispanic world. The polygonal structure and presence of roundels in the upper section of the inside of the wings is reminiscent of Italian works such as that of the Oratory of Mazzo di Valtellina, although that piece is from much later, the end of the 15th century.⁵⁵

The Italianate style of the painting of the ensemble being studied here is quite clear, reminiscent of Catalan paintings from the second half of the 14th century, such as those of the Serra brothers or the Master of Rubió. We see it, for instance, in the roundel at the top of the central tabernacle, where Christ (Fig. 14), Mary and Saint John the Evangelist are reminiscent of the same figures to be found in other works by the artists mentioned.⁵⁶ Equally, the Saint Louis of Toulouse is similar to the one presiding a panel from Barcelona Cathedral, today preserved in a private collection, which we attributed to Jaume Serra (Velasco, 2019, p. 56, fig. 27).⁵⁷ Furthermore, the saint that we suggest identifying as Anthony of Padua, as well as the possible Saint Catherine, share general visible similarities with the Saint Olive and Saint Benedict from a panel originating from Santa Oliva (Tarragona) (Museu Diocesà de Barcelona) (Gudiol-Alcolea, 1986, p. 68, cat. 170, fig. 319). We are dealing with a painter of a profoundly Italianate style sharing a figurative culture similar to that of another master artist working in the Catalan region, the author of an altarpiece from Castelló de Farfanya (Lleida), preserved today in the Museu de Lleida, an ensemble transmitting a message with equally powerful Franciscan overtones (Gudiol-Alcolea, 1986, p. 66, cat. 160, fig. 305; Alcoy, 1990, pp. 99–100; Buttà, 2005b, pp. 311–312; Nieddu, 2004–06).

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Justin Kroesen who drew my attention to the existence of this parallel. See Lapaire, 1972, p. 53.

⁵⁶ See, for example, the central part of the Abella de la Conca altarpiece, a work by Jaume and Pere Serra (Velasco, 2019, p. 107, fig. 51). Furthermore, this Christ is comparable to the one we find in the Museu Municipal de Moià (Barcelona), with similar forked beard and wrinkled brow (Velasco, 2019, p. 125, fig. 61).

⁵⁷ This panel had previously been attributed by Rosa Alcoy to Francesc Serra (Alcoy, 1993).

The different depicted saints from the Order are highly reminiscent of those of our tabernacle-altarpiece, and one could say the same for the Stigmata of Saint Francis that appears at the top. It is important to bear in mind that the format and structure of the Castelló de Farfanya altarpiece are completely at odds with known works in Catalonia from the period and this, along with the markedly Italianate style of the painter, has led to suggestions that said artist may have been from Italy. That might also go for the tabernacle-altarpiece we are studying here. The punch marks on the saints' golden halos, however, seem more in line with local Catalonian tradition from the second half of the 14th century, which could indicate a degree of cultural crossover in the painter. As such, the artist appears familiar with the Italianate style of the Bassas and pictorial features popularised by the Serra brothers, so it seems advisable to date the work to some unspecified point during the third quarter of the century.

In Aragonese regions, the few known tabernacle-altarpieces also seem to draw on the model of painted panels with no sculptural decoration. The first example has only partially survived, with just one wing remaining. It is preserved in the Museu de Terrassa (Barcelona) (106 x 24.5 cm, inv. MT 37), and is dedicated to Saint Bartholomew (Fig. 16).⁵⁸ The work was part of the Soler i Palet collection, and its exact origin is unknown. As with some of the pieces mentioned above, historiography had previously been unable to identify correctly the function and nature of the altar furnishing to which it belonged, with it having been considered part of a traditional altarpiece (Ruiz, 1999, p. 19; Melero, 2005, pp. 162–167). Saying that, and as recently commented by Favà (2019, p. 125), there is no doubt that it was part of a tabernacle-altarpiece, in terms of its morphology, the arrangement of scenes and, also, due to its presenting polychrome decoration on the back with rhomboid motifs similar to those seen in the Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran work, and to others we shall be turning to shortly in another Aragonese tabernacle-altarpiece, dedicated to Saint Nicholas. A reading of the inscriptions to be found in the margins separating one scene from another led Post to suggest the work as being of Aragonese origin (Post, 1930, vol. 2, p. 463), which was recently confirmed by Favà (2019, p. 125). Both the presence of informative inscriptions and the wing format are reminiscent of certain Castilian exemplars, such as the so-called 'Suma I altarpiece', preserved at Madrid's Museo Cerralbo, dedicated to Saint Clare and dated to around 1360–70 (Gutiérrez Baños, 2018,

⁵⁸ For an identification of the scenes and their iconography, see Post, 1930, vol. 2, p. 463; Ruiz, 1999, p. 19; Melero, 2005, pp. 162–167.

pp. 68–74, fig. 8), or the ‘Wildenstein altarpiece’ housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the late 13th century (Frinta, 1967, figs 9–13; Andersen, 2015, p. 180, fig. 15; Gutiérrez Baños, 2018, p. 68). Post dated our work to the late 13th or early 14th centuries (Post, 1930, vol. 2, p. 463), although more recent suggestions place it as from a slightly later date, the second quarter of the 14th century (Melero, 2005, p. 165).

The second of the known Aragonese tabernacle-altarpieces is preserved at the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya (inv. 24001) and is dedicated to Saint Nicholas the bishop of Myra (Fig. 17). It is of particular note because its central tabernacle has survived, with sculpture, supported on two columns with a castellated canopy, as well as the two wings that closed it off at the sides (Frinta, 1967, p. 106, fig. 7; Velasco/Ros/Gràcia, 2013–14, pp. 140–142, fig. 14; Favà, 2019). It has, however, lost the two wings that closed it off at the front. The Aragonese origin of the ensemble has been supposed for some time (Frinta, 1967, p. 106), given the museum’s internal records have it as originating from Huesca (Favà, 2019, p. 125). The four painted scenes from the life of the saint may be read from the top down, and from left to right, and the cycle would have continued on the lost wings. The work’s identification is reinforced by the inscription that appears on the central frieze separating the upper and lower sections: ‘istor/ia de/seino/r sa nic[olas]’ (the story of lord St Nic[holas]) (Favà, 2019, p. 124). Decoratively, it is worth highlighting the rhomboid-shaped base decorating the panel behind the central sculpture, with a motif we find once again on the outside of one of the wings of the Santa Maria de Cap d’Aran tabernacle-altarpiece, and in the aforementioned Aragonese ensemble from the Museu de Terrassa, along with other European works such as the aforementioned one from Graubünden (Switzerland). The outside of the wings is painted red, which we have already seen in other works examined. Stylistically, both the central sculpture and the paintings indicate the second half of the 14th century (Favà, 2019, p. 125). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the family to which the seven heraldic shields at the base of the central tabernacle belonged, all bearing the same coat of arms (gilt, four barry wavy fess azure).

The last Aragonese work we shall mention is, in fact, one of the most interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, because until its disappearance in the Spanish Civil War it had survived intact. Secondly, because we know the name of the painter who painted it. And lastly, because we also know the names of the patrons who commissioned it and its date of execution. This combination of factors makes the ensemble a pretty exceptional example, within Europe, given it enables us to pinpoint its context of production. The work we are referring to is the

tabernacle-altarpiece preserved until 1936 in the church of Belchite (Zaragoza) (Fig. 18). We can make up for its disappearance through a number of old photographs that give us a fairly accurate indication of its appearance.

The first thing we should note is that this piece of altar furnishing had not previously been identified with the tabernacle-altarpiece model we are studying here, given its cataloguing as a 'trptych' (Lacarra, 2004, pp. 171–173), or 'polypptych' (Gudiol Ricart, 1971, pp. 45 and 78, cat. 136). It is clear that it is neither one nor the other. The ensemble is structured around a main central tabernacle crowned by a canopy supported without columns at the front. This lack of support elements at the front is a structural simplification typical of later tabernacle-altarpieces, as Frinta commented (1967, p. 113).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, we know several European works extremely similar to the Belchite ensemble, and from a similar period (15th century), with also a gabled canopy, but which do have columns. This is the case for one piece from Tronsberg (Germany), housed today at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich; for a second ensemble originating from Leiggern (Switzerland), today in the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum in Zurich (Frinta, 1967, p. 110, figs 14–15); and for a third example from the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Fribourg (Switzerland) (Lapaire, 1969, p. 176, fig. 11). This shows that later tabernacle-altarpiece models were widely circulated around Europe, as was the case for the older works we have been examining, and goes to explain the major similarities between the Belchite work and those from Germany and Switzerland.

Furthermore, the panel at the back of the central tabernacle from Belchite was decorated with round painted motifs executed using trimming, imitating contemporary silk fabrics. That space was originally presided over by a sculpture of the Virgin with Child, popularly known as the 'Virgen del Pueyo', as in 1725 it was moved to the neighbouring 'Del Pueyo' hermitage. This was an image dating from the second half of the 14th century, measuring some 90 cm high and which survived the ravages of 1936, but was sadly stolen in 1985. The tabernacle-altarpiece, however, remained in the parish church, although it was subsequently moved to the same hermitage.⁶⁰ The four wings of the ensemble, each of a similar width, present scenes from the Joys of Mary in each of their two compartments.

⁵⁹ This lack of columns is repeated, for example, in an exemplar from Friedberg (Germany), and in another from Västra Ed (Sweden) (Lapaire, 1969, fig. 13), both from the 15th century.

⁶⁰ It would seem that after the image and the furnishing were split up, the latter was occasionally taken to the church to be temporarily installed in the tabernacle-altarpiece and be worshipped by the locals. This information comes from Martín, 2009.

The reading of the iconographic cycle started in the upper section of the wing on the far left, with the Annunciation. It continued with the second left-hand wing's upper image with the Visitation, and the reading continued underneath with the Nativity, thereby skipping the lower section of the wing on its left, where a kneeling donor is depicted dressed as a knight in arms. The sequence continued on the upper compartment of the inner right-hand wing with the Epiphany, carrying on with the upper compartment of the far-right wing with the Purification of the Virgin. The final scene, the Circumcision, appeared on the lower section of inner right-hand wing and to its right, on the final wing on that side, there is a second donor, kneeling once again and with a shield, helmet and military armour. The upper compartments are crowned with gables decorated with flamboyant tracery, whereas the lower ones have semi-circular, poly-lobed arches on the inside. The outer wings were fitted with the typical triangular appendices which, when the ensemble was closed, secured the canopy at the front. It was to the side of said appendices that the heraldic symbols of the patrons depicted in the lower compartments were to be found, surrounded by starred decorations. In this case a rounded escutcheon, undoubtedly gilt, with a cross, gules, in the field.⁶¹

The first description we have of the ensemble comes from a local Belchite publication from 1901, which reads: 'At the centre of this altarpiece there is a little canopy with Gothic gilt decoration, under which the Holy Image [of Our Lady of El Pueyo] was arranged, and two closing doors at the sides, the inside of which was painted with the mysteries of the life of the Holy Virgin and the portraits of the donors... devotees from Belchite to judge by the surname...' (Pintaned, 1901; *cf.* Martín, 2009). The allusion to the surnames of the donors refers to an inscription at the back of the ensemble, reading: 'Este retaulo han fecho facer // los hondrados Pascual Bernat y Pedro Bernat // a onor e reverençya de Sancta Marya // anno de MCCCCXXXVIII'.⁶² It is significant that the word 'retaulo' give us an indication of the term being used for this sort of altar furnishing at that time. Furthermore, thanks to the text, we have a confirmed date for the execu-

⁶¹ We know about the enamel on the cross thanks to the description in Tormo, 1909, p. 63.

⁶² 'This altarpiece was commissioned // by the honourable Pascual Bernat and Pedro Bernat // in honour of and reverence for the Holy Virgin Mary // In the Year MCCCCXXXVIII'. Transcribed in Bertaux, 1910, p. 49; *cf.* Tormo, 1909, pp. 62–63. These publications appeared as a consequence of the Retrospective Exhibition held in Zaragoza in 1909, including a section dedicated to Gothic painting and featuring the work we are examining here. Only the tabernacle-altarpiece was taken to the show, and not the Del Pueyo Virgin, so that in the photos taken by Hauser y Menet to illustrate the texts by Bertaux and Monzó what we see presiding over the ensemble is a different sculpture, from the Mariano de Pano collection.

tion of the work, 1439, along with the names of those who paid for it, Pascual and Pedro Bernat, in all likelihood brothers. One would imagine they must have been members of an important Belchite family, given the sumptuous and noble attire with which they are depicted in the two compartments where they appear as donors, and taking into account that in 1449 there is a documented record of a local notary, Pedro Bernat, who could be identified as one of them (Cárcel, 2008, p. 178).⁶³

The style of the paintings immerses the viewer in the International Style, and should be associated with the painter Blasco de Grañén (doc. 1422–1459), previously known as the Master of Lanaja.⁶⁴ This attribution dates the work to a fairly late period compared to the earliest examples of known tabernacle-altarpieces with movable wings in the Crown of Aragon, which first started to appear at the end of the 13th century. The Belchite ensemble shows us that, almost 150 years later, this sort of altar furnishing was still being produced. In any case, the fact that we have been able to attribute the work to an artist such as Blasco de Grañén is of great significance, as that makes it one of the few European tabernacle-altarpieces for which we know all of the people involved, from its patrons to the painter who executed it. This is something that should be taken particularly into account given it is far more normal to be dealing with anonymous works that are difficult to associate with any specific patron.⁶⁵ It is also important to highlight the fact that the presence of the heraldic emblems of the men who paid for the work, their depiction as donors, as well as the inclusion of an inscription referring to the commission on the outside of the wings, had a very specific goal; that

⁶³ We also have a 1390 record mentioning a ‘Pedro Bernart’ as a local resident (Contel, 1974–75, p. 381).

⁶⁴ Post was able to see the work in person, although he never attributed it to the author of the Lanaja altarpiece (Zaragoza). He did however place it within the same context (Post, 1930, vol. 3, p. 210). It was Gudiol who came up with a definitive attribution for the Belchite tabernacle-altarpiece to the Master of Lanaja, also positing and arguing that the man behind said artistic figure was the painter Blasco de Grañén (Gudiol Ricart, 1955, p. 176; Gudiol Ricart, 1971, pp. 45 and 78, cat. 136). Final confirmation of this came when María del Carmen Lacarra identified a number of documents that certified that Blasco de Grañén was the true identity of the aforementioned anonymous master (Lacarra, 1988). For more on the painter, see Lacarra’s monograph on him (2004, *passim*), as well as subsequent contributions by Macías, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 43–62, and Velasco, 2015.

⁶⁵ With regard to tabernacle-altarpieces that can be attributed to a specific named painter and with accurate dating, we could mention the Mazzo di Valtellina (Italy) work referred to earlier, which includes the signature of Giovanni Pietro Malacridis and a date of 1489. See Lapaire, 1972, p. 53.

of identifying the Belchite ensemble with those who had commissioned it, an aspect that reinforces the work's unique and exceptional nature.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL QUESTIONS

In this article we have attempted to illustrate how the phenomenon of the emergence of the tabernacle-altarpiece in the Crown of Aragon came about within the context of change and transformation affecting altar furnishing as the Romanesque gave way to the Gothic. Although during the Romanesque period we have found evidence of altar furnishing models structured around a central tabernacle, and some such ensembles might have even had side wings, as was the case with the Sant Martí d'Envals aedicule, it would appear that the mobility of these wings was an aspect introduced at a later date, coinciding with the advent of the Gothic. Although the documentation is sparing in its illustrative references, and in spite of few exemplars having survived, what we know about triptychs, Eucharistic tabernacles and other similar works characterised primarily by this moving aspect would appear to support the above hypothesis.

It is harder, however, to resolve the issue of what motivations led specific patrons or customers to choose a tabernacle-altarpiece or polyptych over a traditional altarpiece. There is no doubt that the movement of their wings and the ritualistic possibilities of the opening and closing process were incentives, in certain contexts, for their being commissioned and executed rather than either frontals or traditional altarpieces. The theatricality of the act of opening and closing doors, the ability to reveal the image contained inside the central tabernacle, and then conceal it once more, was something not provided by the two-dimensional screens of frontals and traditional altarpieces. These movable elements acted like light switches, activating the sculpture presiding over the central tabernacle, and their inclusion in furnishings of this kind could be compared to what it meant to include Eucharistic tabernacles with doors as a central part of altarpiece predellas.

This needs to be understood within the framework of a phenomenon where movement takes hold of the altar in different ways, also including the proliferation of liturgical cabinets in specific parts of Catalonia, the occasional advent of altarpiece models with moving panels such as the one presiding over the Cathedral of Tortosa, or the execution of reliquary-cabinets with doors such as in the monastery of Piedra (Real Academia de la Historia). It is as such that, in the context of the Crown of Aragon, the tabernacle-altarpiece was part of a progressive

process whereby altar furnishings became increasingly monumental, where altar frontals, free-standing Eucharistic tabernacles, ciboria and altarpieces interacted with each other. There were structural and morphological transferrals from one type to the other, and that explains the existence, for example, of altarpieces that look like altar frontals or, even, altarpieces where we cannot be sure that they weren't altar frontals.⁶⁶ In any case, some of these works present aesthetic features, in terms of internal arrangement or structural configuration, reminiscent of the tabernacle-altarpieces with which they co-existed. This is something we have seen, for example, in the case of certain primitive altarpieces from Mallorca, such as the two painted by Joan Loert, which in spite of being made up of two-dimensional horizontal screens, include a flat image in the central tabernacle on a polygonal pedestal base, which clearly evokes the third dimension of sculpture. Here we should also add the four side sections crowned by gablets we find in both works, which are also highly reminiscent of the four movable wings that open and close tabernacle-altarpieces.

The case of these two altarpieces from Mallorca leads us to raise the question of why there are no tabernacle-altarpieces in Mallorca or in Valencian regions. This could either be due to the twists of fate or simply because there never were any. Other questions that we might raise include the reason behind the leading role of the Pyrenees in the dissemination of this sort of altar furnishing, which might be a reflection of the fact that said region continued to be a hub for pictorial experimentation into the early 14th century, a legacy going back to the 13th century when the workshops around La Seu d'Urgell started making major contributions to the consolidation of certain types of altar furnishing, such as the ceiling baldachin. The adjoining region of Cerdanya also played a key role in the introduction of the Linear Gothic, so that the arrival of new artistic models from France may have come hand in hand with innovations including the introduction of types of tabernacle-altarpieces with close similarities to Nordic models. We see this in Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran, where we find an ensemble with appliqué sculptural relief on its wings almost identical to works to be found in lands as remote as Sweden, Germany or Switzerland. Those without sculpture on their wings were also similar to models that were widespread in the Europe of the day. We can identify close parallels between works that were divided by many miles and yet may even share in aspects such as red polychromy on the back of the panels, or rhomboid latticework decorating the front or back of the wings. These

⁶⁶ For more on this issue, see Bautista 2015.

similarities enable us to establish direct comparisons between Catalan-Aragonese and Castilian exemplars, and between others from a wide range of European regions, within the framework of a coming together that is incredibly suggestive and full of nuances.

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Fig. 1. Tabernacle-altarpiece preserved in Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran, Lleida.
Photo: A. Velasco.



Fig. 2. Deacon Saint originating from Santa Maria de Cap d'Aran, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 3. Inside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels originating from Sant Martí Sarroca, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 4. Outside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels originating from Sant Martí Sarroca, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 5. Guillem Seguer (?), panels from a tabernacle-altarpiece, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 6.
 Inside of a tabernacle-altarpiece
 panel preserved in Sant Andreu de
 València d'Àneu, Lleida.
 Photo: Joan Blanco.



Fig. 7.
 Outside of a tabernacle-altarpiece
 panel preserved in Sant Andreu de
 València d'Àneu, Lleida.
 Photo: Centre de Restauració
 de Béns Mobles, Generalitat de
 Catalunya (Carles Aymerich).



Fig. 8. Inside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels originating from Santa Llúcia de Mur, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 9. Outside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels
originating from Santa Llúcia de Mur,
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 10. Inside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels,
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. II.
Inside of a tabernacle-altarpiece panel,
private collection.
Photo: © 2020 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic.



Fig. 12. Outside of two tabernacle-altarpiece panels,
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.
Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 13. Tabernacle-altarpiece
previously preserved in the Mateu collection, Barcelona.
Photo: © 2020 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic.



Fig. 14. *Christus Patiens*.

Detail of a tabernacle-altarpiece previously preserved in the Mateu collection, Barcelona.

Photo: © 2020 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic.



Fig. 15. Baptism of Christ. Detail of a tabernacle-altarpiece previously preserved in the Mateu collection, Barcelona.

Photo: © 2020 Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic.



Fig. 16. Inside and outside of a tabernacle-altarpiece panel,
 Museu de Terrassa, Terrassa.
 Photo: Museu de Terrassa.



Fig. 17. Saint Nicholas tabernacle-altarpiece, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. Photo: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2020).



Fig. 18. Graphic reconstruction of the Belchite tabernacle-altarpiece (according to Martín, 2009).



**IMAGES AND ALTAR STRUCTURES
IN ROMANESQUE CATALONIA:
A RESTORED VIRGIN AND CHILD SCULPTURE
IN THE MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA**

IMÁGENES Y ESTRUCTURAS DE ALTAR
EN LA CATALUÑA DEL ROMÁNICO:
A PROPÓSITO DE UNA TALLA DE LA VIRGEN CON EL NIÑO
RESTAURADA EN EL MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

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Abstract

Medieval images that have survived to the present time are known to be decontextualised, and very often appear as isolated or free-standing objects, as is the case with statues of the Virgin and Child. Those still preserved in churches have been adapted to structures built subsequent to their creation, and quite often have been transferred to different locations, but many statues held in museums and collections lack their corresponding base or surrounding structure. In Catalonia, the example of Sant Martí d'Envalls (Angoustrine, Cerdanya, Pyrénées Orientales), which dates to the early 13th century, clearly shows that many sculptures were integrated into larger altar ensembles in combination with highly elaborate imagery. The restoration of a sculpture of the Virgin in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC 15926) carried out in 2018 has allowed us to review some of these issues. The position of the Child, leaning purposefully to his right, suggests that the carving was part of an ensemble that depicted the Adoration of the Magi and some other scene – similar to the ensemble from Sant Martí Sar-

roca, where the image was centred in an edicule, flanked by the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi. The image is also interesting from a museological perspective, since during the first half of the 20th century it was exhibited under a custom-made structure. We will discuss the relationship between the sculpture under study and other images of the Virgin dating from the 12th and 13th centuries in Catalonia that could have formed part of altar ensembles.

Keywords

Catalonia, medieval art, Romanesque art, tabernacle, altarpiece, Virgin and Child, Museology.

Resumen

Es bien sabido que las imágenes medievales han llegado a la actualidad descontextualizadas y muy a menudo como objetos aislados o totalmente exentos, tal como sucede con las tallas de la Virgen con el Niño. Mientras que las que todavía son objeto de culto han sido adaptadas a estructuras posteriores al momento de su creación y cambiadas de emplazamiento, hay una gran cantidad de piezas conservadas en museos y colecciones que no han preservado el soporte o la estructura correspondiente. En Cataluña, el ejemplo de Sant Martí d'Envalls (Angoustrine, Cerdaña francesa), fechable poco después del 1200, es la muestra más evidente de que muchas tallas se integraban en estructuras de altar más amplias, en combinación con representaciones historiadadas. La restauración de una talla de la Virgen en el Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC 15926) llevada a cabo en 2018 ha permitido revisar algunas de estas cuestiones. La posición del Niño, inclinado y orientado explícitamente hacia su derecha, hace pensar que la talla se integraba en un conjunto donde se representaría la Adoración de los Magos y alguna otra escena, como sucedía en Sant Martí Sarroca, donde la imagen se situaba en el centro en un edículo flanqueado por la Anunciación y la Adoración de los Magos. La imagen también interesa desde la vertiente museográfica, ya que durante la primera mitad del siglo xx fue expuesta bajo una estructura construida expresamente. Partiendo de la talla del museo trataremos la relación de este y otros ejemplos de imágenes de la Virgen de los siglos XII y XIII en Cataluña con posibles estructuras de altar.

Palabras clave

Cataluña, arte medieval, arte románico, tabernáculo, retablo, Virgen con el Niño, Museología.

I. INTRODUCTION

As others have observed, it is difficult or well-nigh impossible to reconstruct the original context of sacred images dating from the Romanesque period. They hardly ever survive in the space for which they were created, and the vast majority of them only survive as isolated objects, decontextualised from the altar settings to which they belonged.

Romanesque sculptures of the Virgin and Child still venerated in churches have been relocated over time and housed in new spaces of worship built in the style of subsequent periods. A typical case in Catalonia is that of the statue of the Virgin in Girona Cathedral that dates to the second half of the 12th century, formerly coated in silver (Treasury, Girona Cathedral). At the time it was made it must have formed part of the altar with the 11th century altar frontal commissioned by a patron as significant as Countess Ermessenda (and later, apparently, by Guisla), which was subsequently adapted to accommodate later additions.¹ However, Romanesque sculptures have generally survived as free-standing single objects in altar constructions dating to the modern era or even to contemporary times. Countless sculptures now held in museums have been transformed over time, and in many cases their origins are unknown. Even so, using data from different sources, and studying their composition and iconographic elements, and their proportions and dimensions can help us form a hypothesis.

Between 2017 and 2018, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya undertook the study and restoration of a wood sculpture assigned to the Romanesque art collection (MNAC 15926), in order to display it again in the exhibition galleries. It is a rather small figure of the Virgin and Child (66 x 32 x 24.5 cm), considered to be of unknown origin but associated, according to some sources, with the western Catalan Pyrenees, and dated to the first third of the 13th century. It was acquired from the antique dealer José Valenciano in 1920 (Fig. 1)² and displayed in the permanent exhibition galleries for decades, as it is mentioned in the catalogues and guidebooks published by the museum in 1926, 1936 and 1973.³ The sculpture was kept in storage when the museum's Romanesque art galleries were dismantled at the end of the 1980s during the refurbishment of the

¹ Español, 2005; Sureda, 2013, pp. 51–59.

² Boronat, 1999, p. 662 and note 324.

³ Folch i Torres, 1926, pp. 44–45, fig. 44, n. 2; *Catàleg...*, 1936, p. 62, n. 12; Ainaud, 1973, p. 142, fig. p. 140, top right. It was also on display in the great exhibition of Romanesque art held in 1961 in Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela. See *El arte románico...*, 1962, p. 186.

Palau Nacional (the museum's headquarters). It remained there until 2018, when it was re-installed in the galleries after the aforementioned restoration. From a museological point of view, the aim was to present a Virgin and Child that differs from the frontal depiction known as a *Sedes Sapientiae*, well represented by such images as those from Ger, All or Gósol, among others.⁴ We will discuss the interesting museological and museographical aspects of the history of the sculpture now under discussion further on, but for now we will focus on its compositional, iconographic, functional and stylistic components.

The sculpture MNAC 15926 does indeed differ from the conventional *Sedes Sapientiae* composition insofar it does not show the usual frontality found in so many examples from the 12th and 13th centuries. Mary is wearing a crown, and is dressed in a veil, tunic and cloak, with her body turned slightly to the right; the right hand, palm up, would have held or shown some kind of attribute, while the left hand makes the gesture of holding or resting on the figure of the Child. The Child, part of the same wood block, is sitting sideways, with his body facing to his right (to the left of the viewer). Even though the hands are missing – they were carved separately and attached to the arms – he is clearly gesturing towards a person or a group of people standing on his right. The back of image was partially hollowed out, and still shows the holes that must have served to attach it to a panel (Fig. 2).

The position and gesture of the Child, despite the losses, are the main features that set this figure apart from other similar carvings, and suggests that he was originally facing a person or a group of people, as would be the case in compositions showing the Adoration of the Magi. From the perspective of architectural sculpture, the obvious significant position and gesture of the Child bring to mind sculptures that are located as far apart as those found on a capital in Saint-Lazare in Autun, from the first third of the 12th century, or in Catalonia on a capital of the cloister of the cathedral of Tarragona, from the first third of the 13th century (Fig. 3), not to mention many other chronologically, stylistically or geographically unrelated examples.

Either way, the composition strongly suggests that the sculpture in question was part of a larger altar ensemble in which it would have been coordinated with other figures or scenes, one of which would most likely be the Adoration of the Magi. However, it is important to bear in mind that this association between

⁴ On the exhibition of this type of images, see Carbonell, dir., 1997, pp. 105–110; Camps, 2008a, pp. 140–145. On the restoration and new 2018 presentation of MNAC 15926, see Camps/Comella, 2018.

Mary and the Magi also occurs in other settings, such as altar frontals, vaulted apses or tympana, often involving frontality, and often centralised in the style of a *Maiestas Mariae*, where the Virgin and Child are displayed within a mandorla. In terms of liturgical furniture, there are also clear indications of the use of this association, which involved a mixture of techniques – sculpture, either free-standing or attached to a back panel, reliefs, and paintings on flat panels. Actually, the majority of the extant wood sculptures from Romanesque Catalonia combine Marian or Christological episodes with an image of the Virgin and Child as *Sedes Sapientiae*.

2. IN SEARCH OF THE TYPOLOGICAL AND ICONOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF THE IMAGE

The most widely known example of this sort of combinations is probably the wooden altarpiece, sometimes called edicule or shrine, of Sant Martí d'Envalles (Angoustrine, Cerdanya, Pyrénées Orientales), currently in the Centre d'Art Sacré of Ille-sur-Têt (Roussillon, Pyrénées Orientales), following the robbery of the Virgin and Child in late 1975 (Fig. 4).⁵ It is a shrine-like structure attached to a panel that is supported by columns and topped with stepped crenellations. It originally housed the now lost figure of the Virgin and Child, which was flanked on both sides by paintings of the Annunciation and Visitation.⁶ The ensemble is usually dated to the first half of the 13th century, based on the style of the paintings, which is consistent with the Byzantinising trends of that period found in compositions in Cerdanya and in Roussillon.⁷ The Virgin and Child showed Mary in a full frontal pose with the Child sitting in her lap, both with crowns, depicted as *Sedes Sapientiae*. This is a good example of a tripartite altarpiece where the motifs are created using various techniques. The formula employed for the architectural structure has not been preserved in other examples. There was only one similar structure, narrower than that of Envalles, housing the Virgin and Child of Sant Climent de Taüll dated to the mid-13th century.⁸ However, all that remains of it is a collection of photographs taken in the early 20th century,

⁵ Folch i Torres, 1925; Delcor, 1970, pp. 92–93; Le Pogam/Vivet-Pecllet, eds, 2009, pp. 60–62; Dalmau-Rogé-Bonneau, 2013, pp. 188–189; Kroesen, 2014, p.161, fig. 3.

⁶ It measures 72 x 102 x 33 cm.

⁷ Durliat, 1988, p. 363. On the impact of the 1200 trends on Catalan panel painting, see Castiñeiras, 2015.

⁸ Albert Sierra brought to my knowledge the photographs of this structure. On the sculpture, exhibited in the church of Sant Climent de Taüll, see Llarás, 1996, p. 255.

since the structure subsequently disappeared. For this reason, we cannot directly analyse the work or establish a date, even though it is morphologically typical of a medieval work. However, it could be a much more modern example, like that found in the church of Santa Maria de Oreilla (Conflent, Pyrénées Orientales).

A slightly later date than that of Envalls has been suggested for the ensemble of Sant Martí Sarroca (Alt Penedès, Barcelona), which is the other widely known example of this sort of combinations (Fig. 5 and Figs 3–4 Velasco González, in this volume). It was housed in an important church belonging to a castle that was consecrated in 1204 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It was published by Puig i Cadafalch in 1906 following the discovery of two panels and their association with the image of the Virgin and Child of the church, which disappeared in 1936.⁹ The image, of considerable size, is one of a series of examples noticeable for their frontality, monumentality, and large throne.¹⁰ The panels, now preserved in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC 15924–15925) are significant as they are decorated on both sides. The first panel shows the relief figure of a king on one side, which would have formed part of the Adoration of the Magi, and a painting of St Paul on the opposite face. The second panel shows the relief figure of Mary on one side, which is therefore thought to be part of a scene of the Annunciation, and a painting of St Peter on the other. Puig i Cadafalch, and later Folch i Torres, both believed the image and panels were related, and suggested they could be part of an altar ensemble, a hypothesis that was accepted by all the authors who subsequently studied the group.¹¹ Over time, following the contributions made by Joan Ainaud and particularly by Jaume Barrachina,¹² the notion of an altarpiece with hinged doors has gradually taken shape. We would add that the Virgin of Sarroca is very similar to that found in El Pla del Penedès (Alt Penedès, Barcelona), where there is, however, no evidence of a broader structure.¹³ Sarroca in Catalonia, in the early decades of the 13th century, is the only example of a tabernacle-altarpiece featuring a Virgin and Child in the middle flanked by depictions of the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi. This helps us establish our hypothesis surrounding the iconographic and structural context of the sculpture under study, even though the composition of Sarroca,

⁹ Puig i Cadafalch, 1906.

¹⁰ Cook/Gudiol Ricart, 1950, pp. 307 and 317, figs 309 and 315.

¹¹ Folch i Torres, 1956, p. 46, pl. XXI; Alcoy, 1992, pp. 181–183.

¹² Barrachina, 1997d, pp. 351–352.

¹³ Museu Episcopal de Vic (MEV 828). When compared with average Catalan sculptures of the 12th and 13th centuries, the image of El Pla del Penedès stands out for its considerable size (83 x 41 x 27 cm).

like the one from Sant Martí d'Envalles, shows the Virgin and Child in a frontal pose, with no movement by the Child towards the groups on either side.

While on the subject, we should mention the controversial Virgin of the Cloister of Santa Maria de Solsona, even though it is a stone sculpture.¹⁴ Aside from its style, which has caused it to be attributed to either Gilabertus of Toulouse or to another school, some consider it to be originally a cult image. Others, however, suggest it served an architectural purpose, as part of the colonnade of the cloister, and part of an Epiphany in this context. Another example of this in stone is the exceptional relief of the Virgin and Child from Notre-Dame de la Daurade in Toulouse, from the façade of the chapter house of this famous Marian priory, which was also alongside an Adoration of the Magi.¹⁵ Moreover, the group is framed by an architectural structure that can be considered a stone and relief equivalent of those wood examples discussed so far.

We believe the foregoing examples support our hypothesis that the sculpture of the Virgin and Child under study could have originated in a similar, though not identical, context to that of the groups found in Envalles and Sarroca. In both these groups, the Virgin and Child are frontal, with the Child looking at the viewer, with one hand making the gesture of blessing and the other holding a book, in stark contrast to the Child's gestures in the image under discussion. For this we can imagine a similar structure, where the Child leans towards the Magi, making a gesture of accepting or perhaps taking their offerings, but we cannot entirely rule out other possibilities. We should also bear in mind that, according to expert consensus, some apparently isolated figures of the Virgin and Child were in fact placed under a kind of canopy, as is known to have been the case of the figure in Clermont-Ferrand.¹⁶

Surviving material from the mid-12th century in other European countries, such as the stone altarpieces in Carrières-sur-Seine (France)¹⁷ and Oberpleis (Germany),¹⁸ or others made of wood, provide a framework for understanding the logic behind the sculpture under study, as they prove that such solutions were relatively frequent, despite, we repeat, the compositional differences regarding the

¹⁴ See, specially, Moralejo, 1988, pp. 104–119. More recently: Camps, 1994, pp. 63–71; Lorés i Otzet, 2006, p. 101.

¹⁵ Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, inv. 452A. On the ensemble, see Moralejo, 1983.

¹⁶ Forsyth, 1972, p. 99; Schmitt, 2002, pp. 182–188.

¹⁷ Musée du Louvre, Département des Sculptures, inv. RF 1612. See: Le Pogam, 2009; Le Pogam/Vivet-Pecllet, eds, 2009, pp. 34–37.

¹⁸ Illustration in Le Pogam/Vivet-Pecllet, eds, 2009, p. 27, fig. 11.

Barcelona Virgin and Child.¹⁹ Additional examples can be found in later, Gothic tabernacles. A typical example from a structural, though not iconographic, perspective is the tabernacle of Dädesjö (Sweden), which is not, however, centred around the Virgin and Child, but around St Olaf.²⁰ Representations of the Virgin and Child can be found in some tabernacles from Scandinavia, such as Múli (Iceland), now in the National Museum in Copenhagen, among others produced in Norway.²¹ This raises the question, therefore, of the extent to which statues of this and other types were placed in the centre of altar ensembles including reliefs and/or combining different techniques. In connection with this, certain shallow wood reliefs of the Virgin and Child that were intended to be applied to a panel, mainly from churches in the Eastern Pyrenees, have to be mentioned. These include *Nostra Senyora de Belloch* (Dorres, Cerdanya, Pyrénées Orientales),²² *Nostra Senyora de Pena* (Cases-de-Pène, Roussillon, Pyrénées Orientales)²³ and *Quadres* (Isòvol, Cerdanya, Girona), the latter lost in 1936 (Fig. 6).²⁴ While the Dorres image has sometimes been dated to the 11th century, we believe that all the foregoing images can be dated to the 13th century. These figures were housed in what were originally modest churches that undoubtedly could have imitated more prominent examples or models, and which would have reflected the typological and compositional diversity determined by the requirements and possibilities of each work, of each commission, and the importance of the church. Also interesting are the sculptures, also shallow in depth, from *Santa Maria de Solsona*²⁵ and *Santa Maria la Rodona* in the episcopal complex of Vic.²⁶ Both figures are extremely shallow, and exhibit the remains of the holes drilled on their backs for the purpose of attaching them to a panel. Elsewhere, we find several similar examples, such as from the church at Högsrum (Sweden), in which both the panel and plinth that held the statue (not a Marian statue in this instance) are preserved.²⁷ We cannot, of course, speculate on the context of these shallow

¹⁹ On this topic, beyond the essays gathered in this volume, those by Sureda and Kroesen in the catalogue of an exhibition held in 2019–20 in Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent, and Vic, Museu Episcopal de Vic, are also relevant. See: Sureda, 2019b; Kroesen/Sureda, 2019.

²⁰ Tångeberg, 2009, p. 224, fig. 1, pl. 71.

²¹ Kuhn, 2019.

²² Dalmau/Rogé-Bonneau, 2013c, pp. 268–269.

²³ Dalmau/Rogé-Bonneau, 2013b, pp. 198–199.

²⁴ Delcor, 1970, pp. 83–84; Noguera, 1977, pp. 57–59.

²⁵ Museu Diocesà i Comarcal de Solsona (MDCS 275). See: Camps, 1989.

²⁶ Museu Episcopal de Vic (MEV 17143). It measures 75 x 27 x 12 cm. It was first published by Gros, 1991, pp. 88–89. More recently: Sureda 2019a.

²⁷ Tångeberg, 2009, p. 225, fig. 2, pl. 72.

carvings, as they could belong to either retables or altar frontals. It should be noted that similar compositions, with the Child in profile or facing the viewer, occur between the 12th and 13th centuries in Catalonia in altar frontals, where the Adoration of the Magi is sometimes one of the scenes flanking the central figure. This is why it is worth considering another sculpture of unknown provenance preserved in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya that shows the Child sitting sideways and facing his right (Fig. 7).²⁸ Some of these examples could well have been integrated into flatter altarpiece ensembles, with no tabernacle or movable wings, where the figure of the Virgin and Child could be the centre of two scenes containing figures in relief. An interesting example of this is an altarpiece of unknown origin, also in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, consisting of a panel on which all that remains is the Virgin and Child, the latter facing to one side, flanked on both sides by three arches that would have housed other relief figures.²⁹

Sculptures featuring the Child making a prominent gesture, though uncommon, are not exceptional, and should not always be associated with an iconographic context based on the Adoration of the Magi and other Marian or Christological episodes. In fact, in a Catalan milieu, one of the works that most closely resembles the sculpture under study is the Virgin and Child of Santa Coloma d'Andorra. This image has at times been used to draw a parallel with our sculpture, even though some details of the composition differ considerably.

3. MORE EXAMPLES OF EARLY ALTARPIECES WITH SCULPTURES IN CATALONIA

From the perspective of narrative ensembles with a free-standing (or applied) figure situated in their centre, it is important to mention the existence of several groups of statuettes in Catalonia that could be associated with altar ensembles arranged around a central sculpture, possibly framed by a canopy. All these groups are now decontextualised, incomplete, in varying states of conservation, and are of modest or unknown origin. They can be dated in the 13th century. It is also interesting to note that most of these groups originate from the region between Lleida and Solsona, from churches from the former bishopric of Urgell. The first

²⁸ MNAC 4397. Camps, 1994, p. 68, note 52.

²⁹ MNAC 22997. See: Camps, 2008b, p. 136, fig. 4 [1]. This work is under study, the same as an ensemble of panels with heads in relief representing Magi and a female figure (MNAC 66051–66054). The purpose is determining an accurate classification of each item.

of these groups, consisting of three figures measuring between 52 and 54 centimetres in height, comes from the church of Santa Maria de les Omedes (Vilanova de l'Aguda, Noguera, Lleida), and is now preserved in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC 3933 and 3938–3939) (Fig. 8).³⁰ Two of them undoubtedly depict the archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, whereas the third can be considered to depict St Joseph, all probably part of an Annunciation. Iconographically speaking, these figures correlate with those in Sant Martí Sarroca. In this case, moreover, the Gothic altarpiece that survived in the church up to the beginning of the 20th century was presided by an image of the Virgin and Child that could have formed the centre of the original ensemble, based on a stylistic comparison between the image and the statuettes, two of which were also in use at that time.³¹

A second group of statuettes comes from the church of Sant Jaume de Cas (Àger, Noguera, Lleida), a church near a castle that, according to historical records, belonged to the important monastery of Sant Pere d'Àger. In addition, records from 1190 describing a local pilgrimage place the building along a pilgrimage route. This group consists of three figures that were acquired long ago by the Lleida museum (Figs 9–10).³² Although the figures were thought to be of unknown origin, Francesc Fité and later Celina Llarás published studies that associated them with the aforementioned church.³³ The figures, which retain some traces of polychromy, measure about 60 centimetres in height, and are slender and show a frontal pose. Nowadays, only the head and part of the trunk are preserved in the first, which presented a gesture similar to that of Mary in the Annunciation, as indicated by Llarás. The second displays an inscription on a scroll identifying it as St Joseph. Judging by the position of his hand under his long beard, this could be the same figure sometimes depicted by the Annunciation. Although it is currently difficult to identify the third, beardless figure, the group as a whole can be considered similar to that found in Les Omedes, and could have been part of a larger altar display featuring a central figure.

³⁰ Ainaud, 1973, pp. 166 and 168; Llarás/Carabasa, 1994. There are no historical records about this church.

³¹ On the history of the Gothic altarpiece of Santa Maria de les Omedes, nowadays preserved in the Museu de Maricel, Sitges, inv. 92–94, as part of the works of art acquired by Dr Pérez-Rosales, see Costafreda, 2015.

³² Museu de Lleida. Diocesà i Comarcal, inv. 1251–1253. In their present condition, they measure 28.5 x 10.5 x 7.5 cm (only its head and part of its trunk is preserved), 69 x 12.5 x 5.5 cm and 59.5 x 12 x 7 cm, respectively.

³³ Fité, 1985, pp. 388–390; Llarás, 1994a, pp. 156–158; 1994b, p. 102.

The Cas group, however, may have an additional element. The Lleida museum preserves two sculptures of the Virgin and Child thought to have come from the church of Sant Jaume de Cas or, according to other sources, from Àger, the town associated with this church.³⁴ The sculptures differ in terms of style and quality, and may date from different periods, between the first third of the 13th century and c. 1300. Either way, the existence of the statuettes and the sculptures of the Virgin and Child suggest the possibility of a canopy with movable wings with carved figures on them, such as those presented above. The reconstruction of this ensemble, however, requires a discussion of the dimensions of the panels of the wings, since the two sculptures of the Virgin and Child are smaller than the carved figures presumed to have occupied the wings.

We have recently been able to make a similar association with two statuettes of unknown origin in the Solsona museum measuring between 44 and 45 cm in height. One of them is traditionally identified as one of the Magi pointing to the star, namely, Gaspar or Balthasar, while the other is thought to be either a shepherd or Nicodemus.³⁵ However, the traces of slots on the back of the figure suggest that it might have had wings, and could therefore be the archangel Gabriel. As in the case of Sant Martí Sarroca, this suggests the presence of an Annunciation and an Adoration of the Magi. Finally, we can mention three statuettes published by Jaime Barrachina in Santa Maria de Palau de Rialb (La Baronia de Rialb, Noguera, Lleida), in the vicinity of some of the examples discussed above, as well as two statuettes from Santa Magdalena de l'Astor (Pujalt, Anoia, Barcelona) in the Museu Episcopal de Vic. The figures of Palau de Rialb were discovered buried in 1995. One has been identified as a Magus, another is possibly another Magus, and the third is St Joseph.³⁶ The figures from l'Astor, traditionally identified as SS Cosmas and Damian, could also be regarded as one of the Three Magi and, possibly, an apostle.³⁷

As discussed previously by various authors, this series of examples show the existence of small altarpieces with statuettes on either side, probably with a struc-

³⁴ Museu de Lleida. Diocèsà i Comarcal, inv. 327 and 1250. They measure 47 x 15 x 11 cm and 51 x 15 x 12 cm, respectively. My thanks to the Lleida museum, and especially to the curator Carmen Berlabé, for the information about these sculptures.

³⁵ Museu Diocèsà i Comarcal de Solsona (MDCS 293–294). See: Orriols, 1986a; 1986b; Terés, 1989a; 1989b; Camps, forthcoming. They measure 45 x 9.5 x 6.5 cm (Magus) and 44.5 x 9 x 6.5 cm (archangel Gabriel).

³⁶ Barrachina, 1997b, pp. 353–354.

³⁷ Barrachina, 1997b, p. 354, already suggested changes in the identification of the personages. A detailed study in Niñá, 2014.

ture similar to those found in Envalls or Sarroca in the centre. These ensembles would most likely have contained scenes of the Adoration of the Magi, with all three characters, and probably the Annunciation, which would have included Joseph in addition to the archangel Gabriel and Mary, figures that are widely represented in ensembles made using different materials and techniques. Barrachina mentions the important stone relief of the portal of Santa Maria de Agramunt, dated to 1287, as a parallel to these structures at an iconographic level. The figure of Joseph in the context of the Annunciation also appears in other stone ensembles, such as the colonnade of the cloister of Santa Maria de Solsona.³⁸

All of these examples provide sufficient evidence to defend the hypothesis that the sculpture of the Virgin and Child in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, the focus of this article, would have been part of a larger ensemble, which would therefore include the scene of the Adoration of the Magi on the left. The sculpture could also have been housed under some sort of canopy. It is harder to pinpoint the scene on the right, although there are sufficient examples of the presence, painted or carved, of the Annunciation. Little can be said about the origin of the figure. The relative compositional proximity with the Virgin of Santa Coloma d'Andorra is too weak an argument to place it in a Pyrenean context, although given the existence of other examples we cannot categorically rule out this possibility.³⁹ A stylistic analysis of the figure could place it in the early 13th century, considering the series of well-defined folds of the garments.

The classification of this sculpture is primarily based on the existence of comparable examples in Catalonia from the first decades of the 13th century. As we have no documentary evidence and are unable, at least for the moment, to ascertain the origin of the figure, only stylistic analysis provides further arguments. The way the folds of the garments are treated, especially around the shoulders of the figure of Mary, shows the repetitive trend consistent with a date in the first third of the 13th century. However, the rather schematised facial features, made up of planes and angles, could also be associated with earlier works, from the 12th century. The relative agility and fluidity of the gestures would again place the figure in an artistic context closer to the innovative trends of 1200. For all these reasons, we suggest that the statue could date, with a wide margin, to the first third of the 13th century.

³⁸ Moralejo, 1986, pp. 71–72.

³⁹ *El arte románico...*, 1962, p. 186. An origin in Andorra itself has been suggested, a fact we interpret as based on the supposed parallels between the two sculptures. See: Ainaud, 1973, p. 142.

This sculpture, together with the ensembles found in Envalls and Sarroca, shows the increasing presence of altar ensembles featuring free-standing figures and reliefs in Catalonia, at least starting in 1200. Obviously, these examples exhibit structural differences, and the panels from Sarroca are the only ones that retain clear signs of the presence of hinged wings around the central body.⁴⁰

Any future analysis of these groups must also include an in-depth study of their iconography and integration into the liturgical space, but these aspects are beyond the scope of this study. Generally speaking, it is important to bear in mind the theophanic significance of the Adoration of the Magi, or the allusion to the Incarnation present in scenes such as the Annunciation. On a separate issue, we also should consider the extent to which, these groups – or free-standing figures – could have been influenced by liturgical drama, featuring as participants in the dramatization of the *Officium Stellae* for the feast of the Epiphany, as discussed by several authors.⁴¹ These, however, are topics we hope to explore in another study.

4. THE SCULPTURE IN THE MUSEUM: AN EXAMPLE OF INTERACTION BETWEEN ART HISTORY AND MUSEOLOGY

From another perspective, in terms of Museology, it is interesting that in the 1920s and 1930s the sculpture here discussed was exhibited inside a custom-made shrine-like wooden structure that was inspired by a drawing of the Sant Martí d'Envalls ensemble made by the artist Sebastià Junyent (Fig. 11).⁴² Thus, digressing slightly from the aim of this study, our sculpture is also interesting from a museographical point of view, given that for some years the museum attempted to display it within what was presumed to be its original setting on the basis of an apparently similar work recently studied. For the moment, however, there was no indication that it might have belonged to a broader altarpiece ensemble. On the contrary, it was displayed in combination with altar frontals from other churches in an attempt to recreate for the viewers a possible original context, as

⁴⁰ The museum is committed with a thorough study of this ensemble in order to determine its date and its history in the material, structural and technical levels. A similar solution was adopted in two panels whose present-day whereabouts is unknown. See: Barrachina, 1997a, pp. 354–355.

⁴¹ Forsyth, 1968; 1972; Morandi, 2006.

⁴² Folch i Torres, 1925; 1926, pp. 44–45, fig. 44, n. 2. The importance conferred in this text to the sculpture under discussion is highly significant.

part of an altar decoration of the Romanesque period (Fig. 12).⁴³ The only parallel known to historiography was the image of Santa Coloma d'Andorra, where the figure of the Child also appears in a sideways pose, albeit with obvious gestural and stylistic differences with respect to the statue under study.

When the sculpture was acquired by the museum in 1920, it showed signs of deterioration due to woodworms, particularly in the hands. This distorted its shape. It also presented a surface layer of polychromy that is usually dated to the 18th century. It was treated at the museum by replacing volume losses with stucco and gesso, and by restoring part of the polychrome layer. It remained in this restored condition between the 1920s and the 1980s, during which time it was exhibited in the galleries, adapted to successive museological settings, and affected by the museum's own vicissitudes, including the transfer and protective measures implemented during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the subsequent return of the exhibits.

On this basis, the figure was examined and restored in 2018 by Àngels Comella, restorer of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, under the supervision of Mireia Mestre, head of the museum's Restoration and Preventive Conservation Department. Chemical analysis of the pigments confirmed that the paints used for the surface layer of polychromy were oil-based. Some remains of previous polychromies were identified under this layer. Most consisted of oil-based paints, but some were vestiges of egg-tempera paints that could date to the time the statue was carved (specifically, in the Virgin's throne and under the tunic of the Child). Examination of a sample taken from the Virgin's crown showed the presence of tin foil under the visible layer of orpiment, suggesting that the crown could originally have been rendered in mecca-gilded tin, and that subsequently it was repainted yellow.

The statue was restored in several phases, following a radiographic examination. First, both the inpainting and part of the stucco and gesso restoration carried out in the first third of the 20th century were removed to return the statue to its original form; then the extant polychromy was cleaned and the surface was evened out with stucco where necessary. Finally, inpainting was performed to blend the white stucco into the surrounding colours, and *tratteggio* was used on extensive areas of stucco.⁴⁴

⁴³ First, together with the frontal from Farrera (Pallars Sobirà, Lleida), MNAC 15808. Later (1934), with the frontal from Planès (Ripollès, Girona), MNAC 15882.

⁴⁴ Camps/Comella, 2018.

In 2018, the statue was returned to the museum galleries after an absence of nearly forty years, and placed in the Romanesque art room dedicated to wood sculpture, where it enters into a dialogue with a series of statues of the *Sedes Sapientiae*, providing an example of a different approach to the iconography of the Virgin and Child.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing paragraphs we have presented an example of how research and museography, based on the state of the art at a particular point in history, in this case the first third of the 20th century, determined the presentation of an object in the museum galleries. Approximately one hundred years later, knowledge of other examples and the international context, together with historiographical contributions, enables us to show a much broader context. The sculpture in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and the altar setting proposed for it in this study bring our attention to altar furniture comprising sculptures, not only due to the presence of a central image, but also because of the existence of lateral structures, either winged or not.

The sculpture under study is thus situated in the context of the evolution of altar structures, more specifically altarpieces, in Catalonia in the 12th and 13th centuries, and is also associated with the incorporation of sculptures in these ensembles, although it is difficult to establish signs of a linear evolution. In the case of carved altar frontals, some examples, such as the altar frontal from Sant Pere de Ripoll preserved in the Museu Episcopal de Vic, can be dated to shortly before 1150. In terms of composition, the similarities between carved altar frontals and painted altar frontals have been widely documented. When considering structures placed above the altar, diversity also becomes evident if we consider examples such as the panel retable from Obarra (Ribagorza, Huesca),⁴⁵ now lost, or the aforementioned panel retable of unknown origin once with applied bas-relief figures, now kept in Barcelona (MNAC 22997). We have also discussed the existence of numerous shallow carvings of the Virgin and Child that would have been attached or applied to a panel, although this does not always mean that the figure would have been covered by a canopy-like arrangement. Some of these carvings, moreover, come from important centres, such as Vic. To this we must add the

⁴⁵ Barrachina, 1997c, pp. 355–356.

difficulty of establishing criteria to date the examples, which are often based on stylistic grounds. Further detailed technical studies would clarify certain aspects of some works, particularly the Sant Martí Sarroca panels, which are striking for the stylistic contrast between the carved and the painted faces. One of the most reliable sources in this regard could be the Sant Martí d'Envalles ensemble, where the painted elements are consistent with the artistic trends prevalent in 1200.

In any event, evidence points to the emergence in the 13th century of solutions involving wood sculptures or reliefs attached to panels, forming scenes of the Annunciation or the Adoration of the Magi, arranged around an image, most likely as part of a winged altarpiece, such as that from Sarroca. Most of the examples mentioned are located in central and western Catalonia, in locations that were historically part of the bishoprics of Urgell and Vic. This, of course, is based on surviving examples. Apart from Sarroca, a number of statuettes can also be associated with an image of the Virgin and Child, as in the case of Sant Jaume de Cas and Santa Maria de les Omedes. We believe the sculpture under study can be situated in this context. Folch i Torres to some extent anticipated this when he had the statue displayed under an architectural structure. Of unknown origin, some say Pyrenean, the statue is striking for its composition, which can be best understood in the context of an Adoration of the Magi, as is the case with many stone examples.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ Obviously, the development of both Marian sculptures and this type of structures is a response to symbolic ideals and to the function of the altar, as is to the cult to Mary and to the broader liturgical frame. This has been widely commented in connection with numerous examples, e.g., regarding Catalonia, Sureda, 2012; 2013; 2019b. We hope to discuss all these issues in future occasions.

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Fig. 1. Virgin and Child (MNAC 15926),
condition at the time it entered the museum, before its first restoration.



Fig. 2. Virgin and Child (MNAC 15926),
condition after the 2017-18 restoration (front and back).



Fig. 3. Adoration of the Magi,
capital of the cloister of the cathedral of Tarragona.



Fig. 4. Altarpiece of Sant Martí d'Envals
(Angoustrine, Cerdanya, Pyrénées Orientales), *in situ* condition before 1975.



Fig. 5. Virgin and Child of Sant Martí Sarroca (Alt Penedès, Barcelona).
Lost in 1936.



Fig. 6. Virgin and Child of Quadres (Isòvol, Cerdanya, Girona).
Lost in 1936.



Fig. 7. Virgin and Child (MNAC 4397).



Fig. 8. Archangel St Gabriel, St Mary and St Joseph from Santa Maria de les Omedes (MNAC 3933, 3938 and 3939).



Fig. 9. Figures from Sant Jaume de Cas, condition in 1918.



Fig. 10. Figures from Sant Jaume de Cas, present condition (Museu de Lleida. Diocèsà i Comarcal).



Fig. II. Virgin and Child (MNAC 15926),
1934 display in the at the moment called Museu d'Art de Catalunya.



Fig. 12. Virgin and Child (MNAC 15926) at the back of the 1934 display in the at the moment called Museu d'Art de Catalunya, placed above the altar frontal from Planès.

