

ATTRIBUTIONS FOR SEVERAL PAINTINGS IN VALLADOLID AND ITS REGION

1. Nicolás Francés

In coming upon such a work of the international style as the much injured panel of the Madonna and musical angels in the church of S. Pedro at Olmedo, south of Valladolid (Fig. 1), we think forthwith of the possibility of the authorship of Nicolás Francés, who has left us an important cycle at nearlyng Tordesillas¹, and our first thought is eventually substantiated by careful analysis which reveals his hand or, if we wish to be captious, at least that of a very faithful pupil. The evidence provided by the Tordesillas retable would seem sufficient in itself. The Olmedo Virgin has counterparts in the compartment of the Purification (Fig. 2); the Child in type and dress is the same little fellow who captivates us in the early scenes of the New Testament at Tordesillas; the angel who has not been obliterated resembles the highest one at the right in the group serenading Our Lady and her Infant in the home at Nazareth; and the haloes are of like abnormally large size. The analogies in other productions of Nicolás Francés are perhaps still more convincing, for instance the similarity of the Madonna, non only in head but also in massively spreading draperies, to the St. Scholastica (Fig. 3) in the fragments built into the episcopal throne in the cathedral or León or the resemblance of the angel to the Gabriel (Fig. 4) in the same León assemblage and to the uppermost adoring angel in the Nativity in the retable from La Bañeza in the province of León

¹ Vol. III of my *History of Spanish Painting*, pp. 282 ff.

that is now in the Prado². The treatment of the Madonna and angels in the main compartment of this retable differs rather widely, but the reason is that Nicolás seems, somewhat oddly, to have left the principal piece to an assistant.³

2. The Segovia Master

The scant corpus of the preserved works of the Hispano-Flemish painter for whom I have coined the name of the Segovia Master⁴ has received an interesting accretion in two panels dealing with the life of St. Ildefonso that, washed up in the disturbances of the Spanish civil war and, like many another corresponding piece of flotsam, no longer possessing an ascertainable provenience, whether from a church or private collection, have been deposited in the Museo Arqueológico at Valladolid. In a thorough-going and scholarly article⁵, Señor Rivera Manescau has published them, without discerning their author but otherwise making a number of keen conjectures in regard to their content and affiliations. He has succeeded in the rather difficult task of recognizing their themes, St. Ildefonso defending from a pulpit to a congregation the virginity of Our Lady (upon which he actually wrote an extant treatise) (Fig. 5), and verifying at an altar his enjoyment of the supernatural appearance of St. Leocadia by taking a sword from the pious King Receswinth to cut off a bit of her wimple (Fig. 6). With his passion for massing crowds in his pictures, the Segovia Master has introduced in the left half of the

¹ See my vol. VIII, p. 683, and the description of the retable in the recent Catalogues of the Prado.

² See my vol. III, p. 289, written when the retable belonged to Don Raimundo Rulz of Madrid.

³ In his recent, brilliant book, *Pintura gótica* (pp. 351-352), vol. IX of the series *Ars Hispaniae*, Don José Gudiol has given the name of the Master of the Eleven Thousand Virgins to the personality whom I call the Segovia Master (vols. IV, p. 451, and IX, p. 709, n. 4), and he reserves the title, the Segovia Master, for the artist whom I have denominated the Master of El Parral (vol. XI, p. 418).

⁴ BOLETÍN DEL SEMINARIO DE ESTUDIOS DE ARTE Y ARQUEOLOGÍA, Universidad de Valladolid, Fascículos LV-LVII (1951), 85-95.

second panel the procession of St. Ildefonso, the clergy, Receswinth, and the laity to the church of Sta. Leocadia at Toledo on the day of her feast, namely to the place where the miracle occurred and at the time of its happening. Rivera has observed that among the clergy and again in the congregation of the saint's homily are included the bishops of the four sees suffragan to Toledo. In the scene of the sermon Ildefonso's words are materialized in a banderole, «Dominatrix domina mea» (my sovereign lady), and in the other panel St. Leocadia's scroll carries the statement, «Gratias ago tibi, presul» (for *praesul*) (I give thanks to thee, protector), a sentiment that I do not find put into her mouth in any of the several accounts, ancient and modern, of the event through which I have searched⁶.

The stylistic correspondence with the Segovia Master's other achievements is complete. In addition to the identity in general manner and particularly in the seizure upon every opportunity to fill his paintings with closely packed throngs, there should be noted such convincing analogies in types as between the preaching St. Ildefonso and the prelate at the extreme right in the Prado representation of St. Ursula and her companions (Fig. 7), between the youths in caps, particularly the one emphasized at the front of both scenes, and the male spectators at the right in the Prado compartment of St. Ildefonso's reception of the chasuble (Fig. 8), or between the St. Leocadia and the Master's endlessly reiterated, moonfaced standard for depicting women.

Curiously enough, in his two other assured achievements there occurs the subject of the Virgin bestowing upon St. Ildefonso the heavenly chasuble. The panels now at Valladolid cannot derive from the same altarpiece as the example in S. Martín at Segovia, which constitutes a whole retable by itself, but nothing really stands in the way of the hypothesis that they may have belonged to the altarpiece of which sections are in the Prado, iconographically heterogeneous in subjects but including the delivery of the chasuble to St. Ildefonso and therefore originally perhaps other episodes of his life. The hallowed bishop looks rather different in the Prado compartment, but this is largely because he is vested only in an alb in contrast to the pontificals

⁶ *Presul* is followed by a word or the beginning of a word that Rivera interprets as *qua*.

of the Valladolid scenes. There are more than one agreements in detail, such as the similarity of the mitres in these scenes and those of the bishops with St. Ursula or the absence of haloes in both sets of pictures. Sentenach had merely guessed the Prado series to have come from Toledo, perhaps only because one of them depicted an episode in the life of the city's sainted metropolitan, Ildefonso, and Rivera follows suit, probably for this reason but also because, dubiously in my opinion, he wishes to detect in the setting of the vision the walls of Toledo, its Puerta del Cambrón, and its church of Sta. Leocadia as they then appeared; but Tormo seems to have known definitely that the provenience of the Prado cycle was Uclés⁷, southeast of Madrid. Dedication of paintings to St. Ildefonso, who was generally popular in Spain, by no means creates a presumption of provenience from Toledo, and Rivera should have noted that his vision of St. Leocadia is comprised within the events of his story represented in Fernando Gallego's retable in the cathedral of Zamora, an assemblage of compartments that, like the Prado cycle, extends to various themes besides those in which Ildefonso is the protagonist⁸. Actually the sole point that argues for Toledo as the source of the pictures is that here especially it would be proudly stressed that four bishoprics were dependent on the see.

On the left edge of the fabric of the frontal on the altar at which St. Ildefonso is vouchsafed the vision of St. Leocadia, an inscription is so featured that it seems as if it must have a very definite intent, and Rivera has elicited from the customarily capricious Gothic letters what he believes to be the painter's signature and the date. The most persuasive item in his deciphering is his discernment of the year 1519 at the end of the inscription (and yet it is very hard for me to believe that the Master would have maintained until so late a moment a style that belongs essentially to the end of the fifteenth century, and other interpretations could be put upon the Gothic characters). Out of the rest he gets a name Ian Adelbwx or Adelbogen, which he thinks might be the appellation of a Fleming who had emigrated to the peninsula or of one of his descendants, but, as in the case of so many other inscriptions of the sort in Spanish

⁷ See my vol. IX, p. 709, n. 4.

⁸ Vol. IV, p. 89.

paintings of the period, where the letters assume arbitrary, decorative forms, it appears to me impossible to detect with surety any clear sense. Certainly I find it more than difficult to wrest from the letters the name Juan Martínez, by which I have wildly guessed that the Segovia Master might have been called⁹.

Rivera is more persuasive when he describes portraits in the two men listening in the front, right corner to St. Ildefonso's address, who are repeated at the head of the procession that winds its way to St. Leocadia's church. He acutely points out that they are given a disproportionately large size, except the more inwardly placed member of the twain in the procession, and this figure in both panels has the physical peculiarity of the eyebrows continuing above the nose in an unbroken line, indicative of the desire for a portrait. We perhaps ought to follow the Spanish scholar even in the proposition that the foremost and more handsomely dressed of the pair is the man who ordered the and his companion, the painter rather than someone in the pictures, donor's family; but, since the Segovia Master had not achieved accurate portraiture any more than the majority of his Hispano-Flemish rivals, we must not expect an incisive likeness of the artist, and indeed, save for the eyebrows, the countenance is scarcely the same in both panels.

3. The School of Pedro Berruguete

Hung in the sacristy of S. Pedro at Olmedo but presumably deriving from the ruined church of S. Andrés in the town, there are five panels of a retable of St. Andrew executed by so servile a follower of Pedro Berruguete that they force upon us, much to the disadvantage of their countrified author, a comparison with the types and methods that they so slavishly imitate. The central compartment exhibits the Apostle seated upon one of Berruguete's characteristic luxuriant thrones, and the four narrative panels depict the saint's preaching, flagellation, martyrdom upon the cross (Fig. 9), and interment. The endeavor

⁹ Vol. IX, p 709.

to reproduce Berruguete's modes is far more unrelieved than in the case of any others influenced by him, raising the question whether the Olmedo painter may have been one of the master's actual assistants; but I have failed to perceive the hand with surety in any of Berruguete's extant productions, although I should not be surprised if it turned out that he helped here and there in the retable of Frechilla¹⁰.

4. Antonio de Comontes

The evidence is accumulating for the popularity of this very faithful imitator of Juan de Borgoña in the region just south of Valladolid. Among the proofs we have already recorded a Crucifixion of his in the Valladolid Museum coming from the monastery of La Mejorada at Olmedo¹¹; and there has recently become known to scholars another work indisputably attributable to him, a Last Supper still actually at Olmedo, now in the sacristy of the church of S. Pedro but not impossibly once in La Mejorada and a part of the retable to which the Crucifixion belonged (Fig. 10). The composition is repeated in his several other treatments of the theme¹², and the human types are found constantly in his productions.

Somewhat further south in the district the convent of Poor Clares at Rapariegos has provided the Museum of Segovia with one of his triptychs (Fig. 11). In the centre, he placed the stigmatization of St. Francis; in the lower compartment of the right wing the Mass of St. Gregory, and in the upper the two St. Johns; and in the lower division of the left wing St. Clara and, above her, a rather unusual theme, the effigy of the Madonna, with the Child, in the *standing* position of Gothic sculpture. Although the composition for the Franciscan subject is somewhat varied from the treatment in one of Antonio's retables in

¹⁰ See my vol. IX, p. 96.

¹¹ My vol. IX, p. 289.

¹² Cf., for instance, vol. IX, fig. 86.

S. Andrés, Toledo¹³, and although the execution is so far superior to the general run of his attainments as almost to deceive one into an ascription to Juan de Borgoña himself, yet a careful examination brings to light the follower's slight modifications of his inspirer's style. The triptych was not a common form of altarpiece among Spanish artists of the period but with Antonio a favorite ¹⁴.

¹³ Vol. IX, p. 280.

¹⁴ Vol. X, p. 406.

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FIG. 1. Nicolás Francés or an Immediate Follower. Madonna and Angels S. Pedro, Olmedo. (Photo. Archivo Mas).

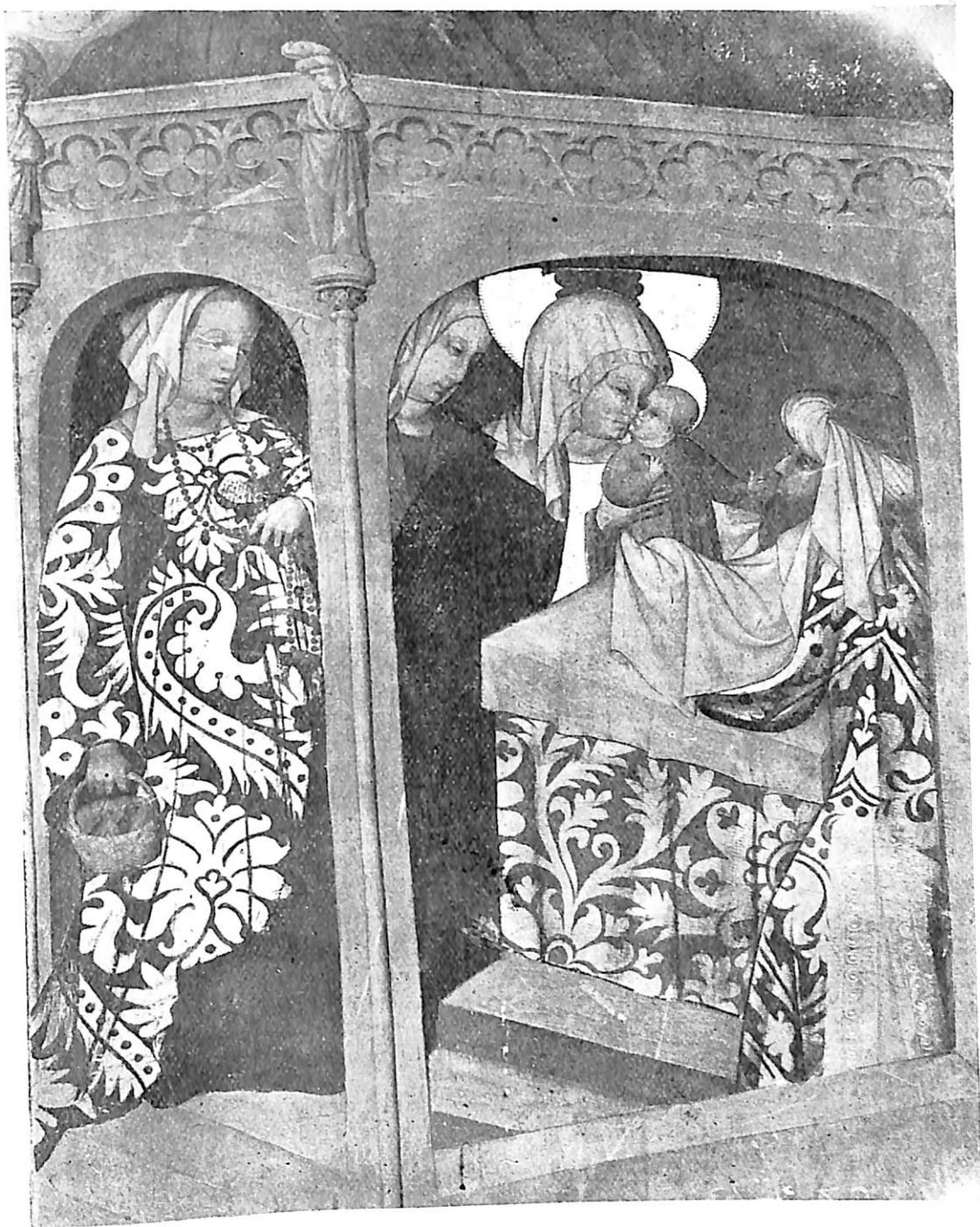


FIG. 2. Nicolás Francés. Purification, Section of Retable. Church of Poor Clares, Tordesillas. (Photo Archivo Mas)



FIG. 3. Nicolás Francés. St. Scholastica, Built into Episcopal Throne. Cathedral, León (Photo. Moreno).



FIG. 4. Nicolás Francés. Gabriel, Built into Episcopal Throne. Cathedral, León (Photo. Winocio).

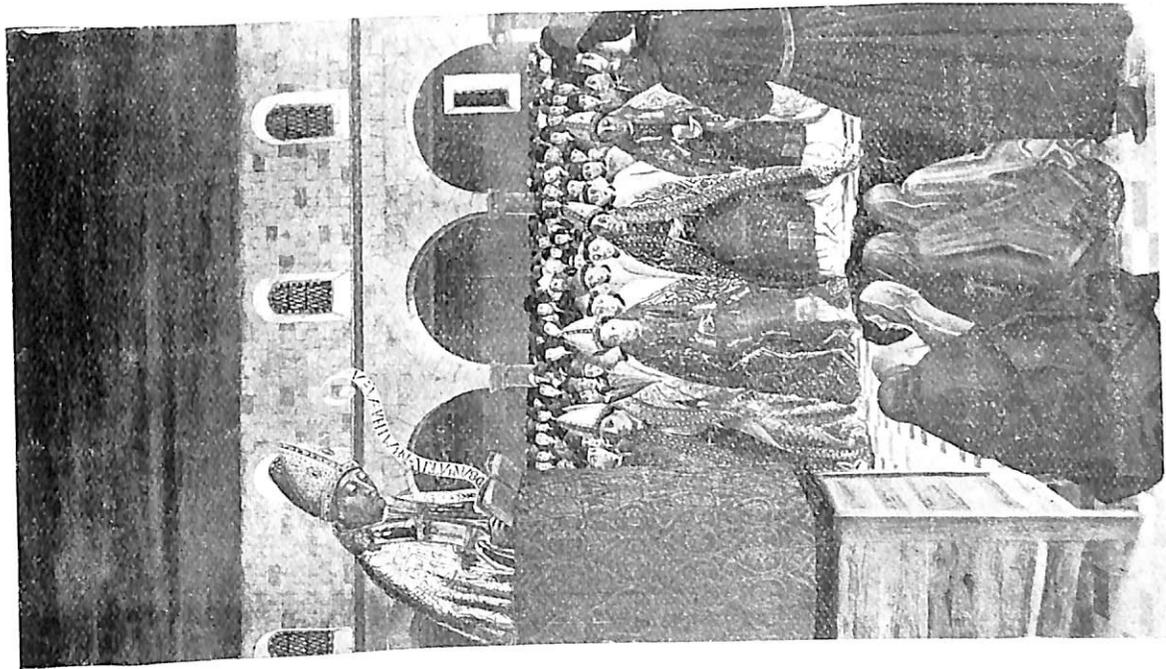


FIG. 5. The Segovia Master. St. Ildefonso Preaching. Museo Arqueológico, Valladolid. (Photo Archivo Mas)

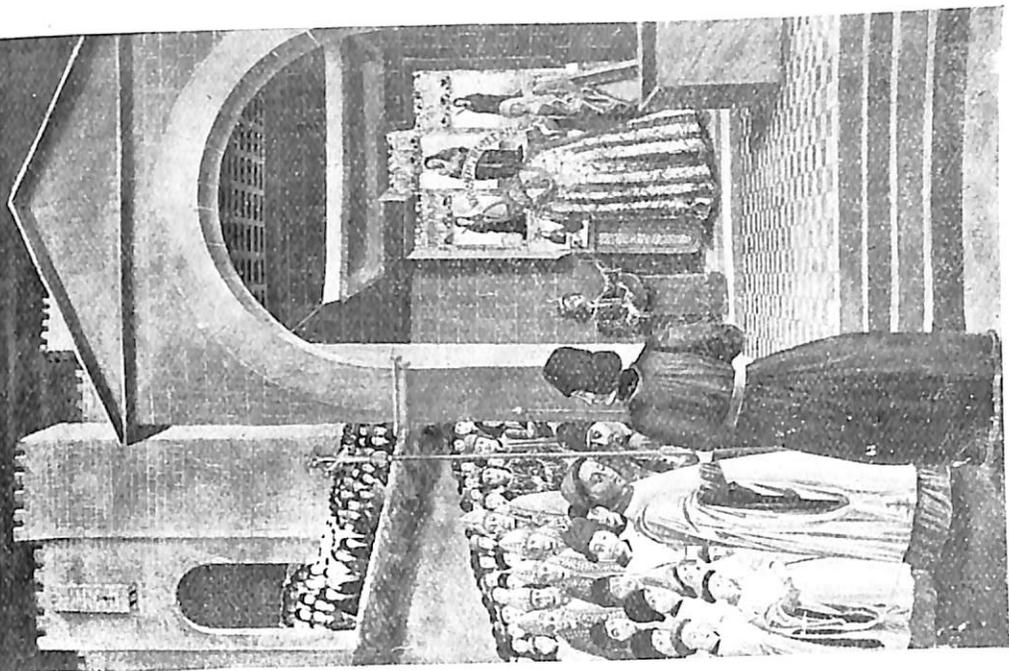


FIG. 6. The Segovia Master. St. Ildefonso's Visión of S. Leocadia. Museo Arqueológico, Valladolid. (Photo. Archivo Mas)

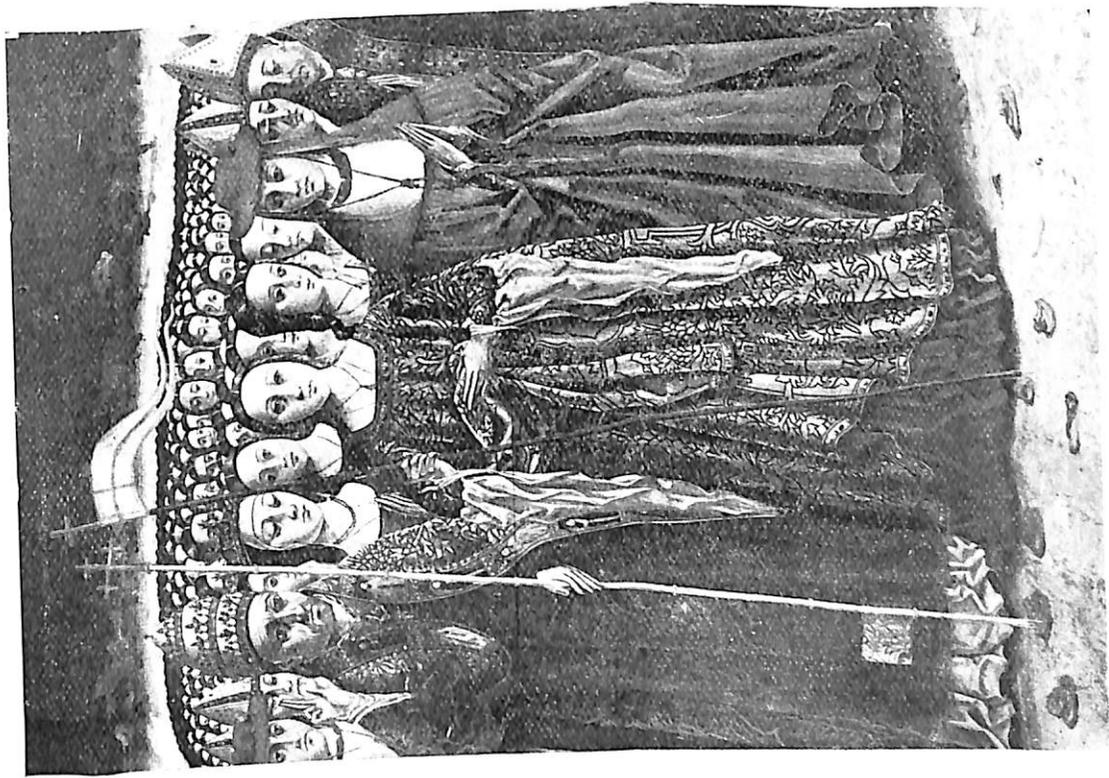


FIG. 7. The Segovia Master St. Ursula and her Companions. Prado, Madrid. (Photo. Ruiz Vernacchi).



FIG. 8. The Segovia Master. St. Ildefonso's Reception of the Chasuble Prado, Madrid. (Photo. Ruiz Vernacchi).

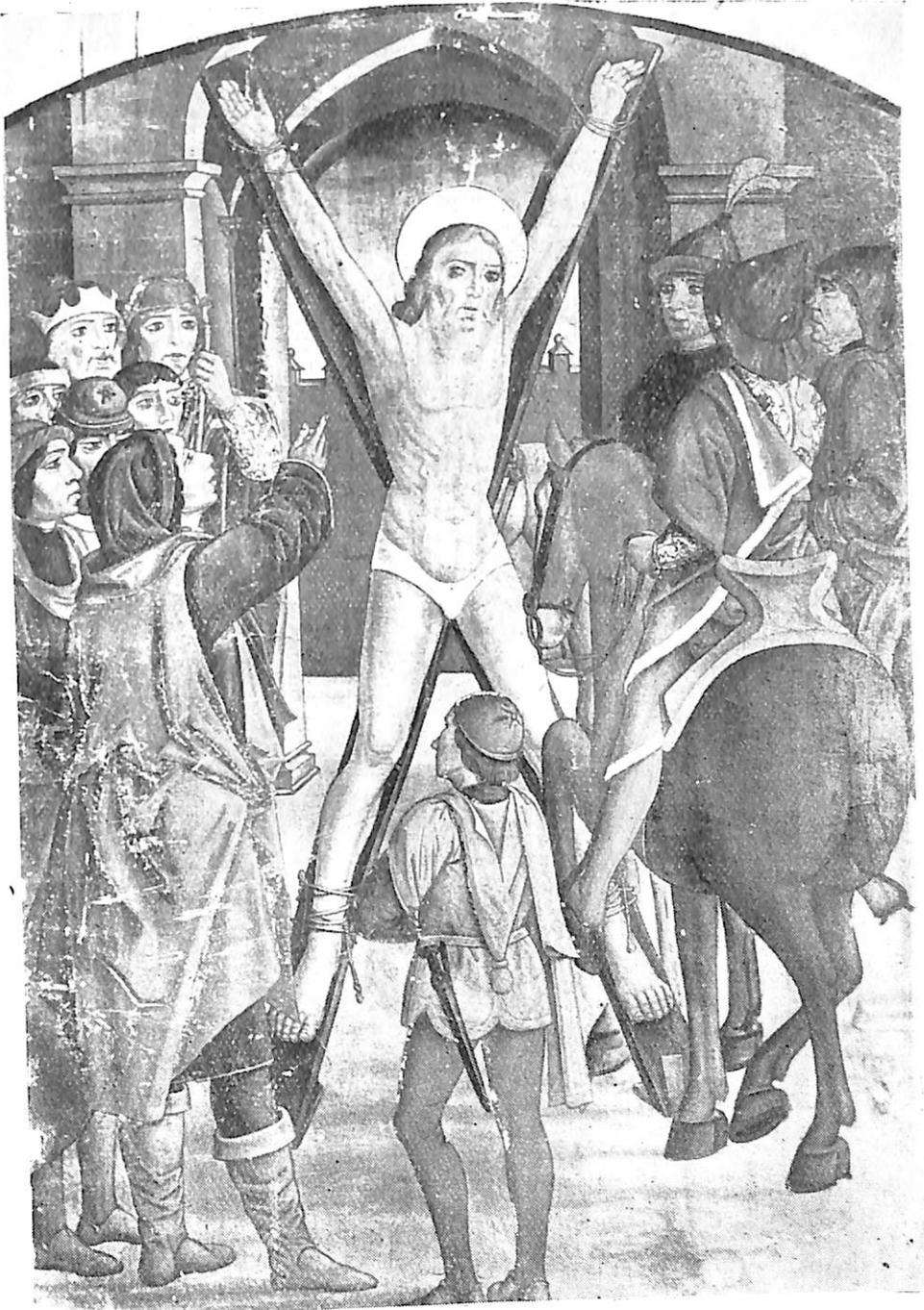


FIG 9. School of Pedro Berruguete. Martyrdom of St Andrew. Sections of Retable. S. Pedro. Olmedo. (Photo. Archivo Mas)



FIG. 10. Antonio de Comontes. Last Supper. S. Pedro, Olmedo. (Photo Archivo Mas).



FIG. 11. Antonio de Comontes. Triptych. Provincial Museum, Segovia. (Photo. Archivo Mas).