

POTESTAS

RELIGIÓN, PODER Y MONARQUÍA



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SORROWS FOR A DEVOUT AMBASSADOR. A NETHERLANDISH ALTARPIECE IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY CASTILE

ROSARIO INÉS GRANADOS SALINAS
Universidad de Harvard

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to determine when and why the *Our Lady of Compassion* altarpiece was located at the *trascoro* of the Palencia Cathedral. In order to understand the function it played from such location during the beginning of sixteenth century, emphasis is placed on the political and devotional context in which the production of the painting occurred. This article presents for the first time unpublished evidence related to the triptych's donor, Bishop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, such as his endowment signed in 1513 and his membership to a Netherlandish confraternity responsible for the rise of the devotion to this particular cult.

Keywords: Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, Lady of Compassion, Seven Sorrows Mary, Charles V, confraternity.

RESUMEN: El presente artículo discute el contexto religioso y político en el que fue realizado el altar de *Nuestra Señora de la Compasión*, ubicado en el trascoro de la Catedral de Palencia, haciendo hincapié tanto en la intencionalidad como en la función del artefacto. Para ello se presenta por primera vez evidencia documental referente al patrono de la obra, el obispo Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, tal como el acta de donación del tríptico, firmada en 1513, y el escudo de armas que lo afirma como miembro de una importante cofradía establecida en los Países Bajos responsable de la diseminación de dicho culto.

Palabras clave: Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, Señora de la Compasión, Siete Dolores de la Virgen, Carlos V, cofradías.

Today, when it seems almost normal to look at religious paintings within the pristine white walls of museums, indeed it is good fortune to be able to enjoy such an artifact in the original ritual setting where it has been displayed nearly from the moment of its creation. The triptych dedicated to *Our Lady of Compassion* at Palencia Cathedral, in central Spain, is one of those rare, but luckily not unique, works of art that still function in their devotional context. The altarpiece comprises a central section formed by eight panels and two wings that contain a text written in golden gothic calligraphy. From its place in the middle of the *trascoro* or choir's west wall,¹ it is indeed an object at which the spectator marvels (Figure 1). Its visual weight is increased because it stands above the entrance of a cave associated with *San Antolín*, patron saint of the cathedral.² Its importance becomes even more remarkable when one considers that a complex program of display, which included the use of music and tapestries, was to enhance the devotional experience attached to it.

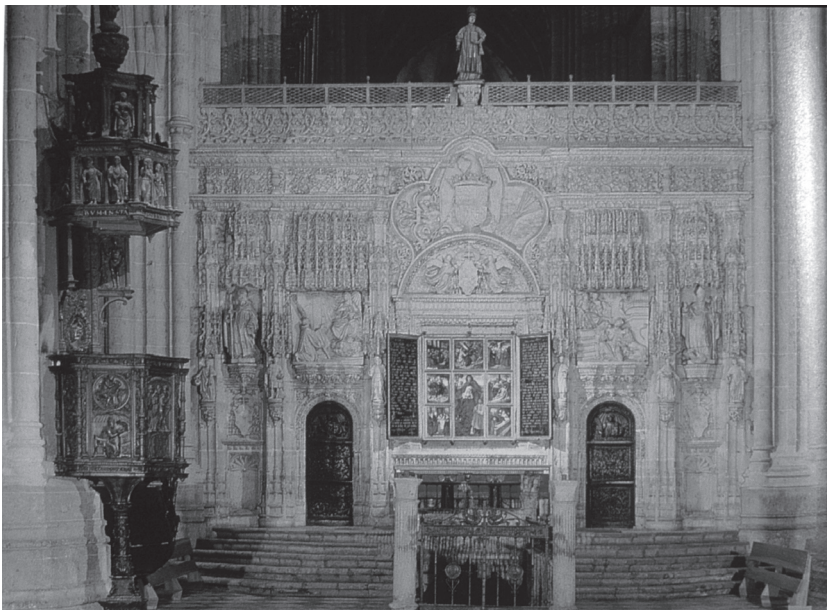


Fig. 1. Bartolomé Solórzano and Juan de Ruesga (sculptors), Pedro de Manzo and Juan de Torres (carpenters), Painting attributed to Jan Joost van Kalkar
Cathedral of Palencia's Trascoro, 1513-1520 ca. Palencia Cathedral

1. This article is based in the 2003 MA thesis I presented at the Courtauld Institute of Art. A longer version of this paper was written in 2006, during my doctoral studies at Harvard University, when I revisited the topic for my Qualification Paper.

The choir stalls are in the middle of the vast nave of the Palencia cathedral, as is common in all Spanish Gothic cathedrals. Juan Centillas and Juan de Lille designed the choir at Palencia's cathedral, between 1415 and 1432 when the bishop was Sancho de Rojas. ÁNGEL SANCHO CAMPO: *La Catedral de Palencia. Un lecho de catedrales*, León, Edilesa, 1996.

2. *San Antolín* has been identified with Anthony of Panniers, a French martyr beheaded in

The purpose of this paper is to determine when and why the altarpiece was located at that specific place and the function it played there. In order to clarify that function, emphasis is placed on the political and devotional context in which the production of the painting occurred. Attention is given to the donor, Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, the man in charge of the policy towards the New World at its earliest stage, ambassador of the Catholic Monarchs to the Low Countries on two occasions, and bishop of Palencia between 1505 and 1514.

This paper emphasizes the relations between all the different elements that compose the artifact, including the inscriptions on the wings and the way they load the images.³ I start by addressing the text on the left panel and the seven narrative scenes of the middle area that illustrate such lettering, since both recount the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary. Recent literature has extensively addressed the development of the iconography related to this cult, reason why I only perfunctorily review it.⁴ Afterwards, I examine in detail the inscription on the right wing that locates in time and space the commissioning of the altarpiece, thus providing its connotation. According to the text, Bishop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca ordered this artifact to be made while present in the Brussels court of Philip the Fair and Juana de Castilla. It was in the context of his visits, most likely during his second one, that he became acquainted both with the painter of the altarpiece and with the devotion of the *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows*. Since some art historians still debate the altarpiece's

Apania, Aquitaine, in 674. The saint supposedly lived in the cave above which the cathedral was built, before being imprisoned. The legend tells that the cave proved to be a holy space when the saint appeared to King Sancho de Navarra while he was hunting a wild boar and the animal sought refuge inside. The cave contains Visigothic ruins from the seventh century. The Romanesque church was consecrated in 1305; on top of that temple the Gothic cathedral started to be built in 1321, although the final plan was not established until 1425. PEDRO FERNÁNDEZ DEL PULGAR: *Teatro clerical apostólico y secular de las Iglesias catedrales de España. Parte primera, tomo segundo: historia secular y eclesiástica de Palencia*, Madrid, viuda de Francisco Nieto, 1680, p. 4.

3. The decision to consider the altarpiece of Palencia Cathedral as a whole and not simply as a religious image surrounded by text is based in my personal need to conceive this kind of «works of art» as cultural artifacts in a broader sense. My understanding of the existent relationship between text and images within the altarpiece of Palencia owes much to Roland Barthes' study on photography. His article «The Photographic Message» provided me with important elements to analyze the altarpiece, even if it addresses a really different topic: the modern use of images in newspapers and the way they relate with their captions. My own analysis of the artifact, however, is certainly not based in a semiotic model. ROLAND BARTHES: «The Photographic Message» in *Image, Music, Text*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1978, p. 15-31.

4. On the iconography of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, see CAROL MONICA SCHULER: *The Sword of Compassion: Images of the Sorrowing Virgin in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1987; CAROL MONICA SCHULER: «The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in pre-Reformation Europe», *Simiolus* XXI (1992), pp. 5-28. On the iconography of the Palencia altarpiece, see ULRIKE WOLFF-THOMSEN: *Jan Joest von Kalkar. Ein niederlaendischer Maler um 1500*, Bielefeld, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1997.

authorship, I reflect on that question only briefly.⁵ I am more interested in contemplating the cult itself and its development in the Low Countries, where a confraternity crucial for its expansion was founded. The artifact's connection with that brotherhood becomes manifest through a definitive proof, presented here for the first time, that Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was one of its members.

This paper also ponders the triptych's function, having the endowment signed by Bishop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca in 1513 as the core of the analysis.⁶ This document, provided as an appendix to this paper and published here for the first time, provides enough information to justify an approximate dating of when the altarpiece was placed in the *trascoro*. In the light of this document, it becomes appropriate to consider important issues concerning the physical transformation in the artifact's life and its reception. As a result, the ways in which politics and devotional practices intermingled during the early modern period will become evident.

THE ICONOGRAPHICAL FRAME

The plateresque decoration *trascoro* of the Palencia cathedral is arranged in five vertical sections.⁷ The *Our Lady of Compassion* altarpiece is at its center, underneath the donor's coat of arms (held by sculpted angels), the coat of arms of the Catholic monarchs (with the traditional yokes and arrows at both sides), and the image of *San Antolín* (patron saint of the cathedral). Two square-shaped scenes and two big niches, in which sculptures of Agustin and Ambrosius stand as exemplary bishops, make up each of the side sections. The big relief on the right depicts St Bernard having a vision of the Virgin Mary. Its counterpart on the left side shows St Ignatius of Antioch at the moment of his martyrdom. The *trascoro* has in the lower section a series of six niches with unidentified saints and two wooden doors that add a final touch of color to the altarpiece's stone frame.

5. See LIOPA SCHOLLMAYER: *Jan Joest: ein Beitrag zur Kunstgeschichte des Rheinlandes um 1500*, Bielefeld, Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2004.

6. 1513, Acervo Histórico: Documento 1248, Archivo Histórico de la Catedral de Palencia (hereafter, AHCP). Surprisingly, the endowment is not included in a set of documents related to Juan Rodríguez Fonseca published some forty years ago. TOMÁS TERESA LEÓN: «El Obispo D. Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, diplomático, mecenas y ministro de Indias», *Hispania Sacra*, 13 (1960), pp. 251-304. I am thankful to Santiago Francia Lorenzo, canon of the Chapter of Palencia Cathedral and director of the Historical Archive, for all the help he provided me with during my visits to the Archive in January 2006 in order to find the document.

7. *Plateresque* is a quite conflictive stylistic label characterized by its rich decorative elements, a blend of Northern European, Moorish, Gothic and Renaissance motives. See FERNANDO CHECA: *Pintura y escultura del Renacimiento en España*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1999; and FERNANDO MARÍAS: *El largo Siglo XVI. Los usos artísticos del renacimiento español*, Madrid, Taurus, 1989.

The altarpiece has on the left wing a Latin text, written in the first person, that addresses the viewer directly (Figure 2). This powerful feature makes immediate the Virgin Mary's voice, while referring to her passion, lived along with her son's. More than a prayer, it functions as a strong invitation for compassion:



Fig. 2. Jan Joost van Kalkar, attribution *Altar de Nuestra Señora de la Compasión*, ca. 1505
200 x 140 cm main section, 200 x ca. 70 cm each wing.
Palencia Cathedral

Learn, visitor, to remember *Our Seven Sorrows*, that they may benefit *you* every day. Simeon predicted that the Mother's soul would be struck with a sword and she would bear the wounds of her Son. Then, when a crowd of pious boys was slaughtered *I*, unsafe, brought *my* Son into Egypt. And *I* suffered pain seeking the son teaching divine things in the temple. When *I* saw Him captured, to bear the burden of the Cross, Fixed on wood, then rendered senseless by death. Then taken down to be left in the rock, *I* was struck. Therefore *each one of you* meditate on *our* sorrows; *You* feel that my Son bears the strength of salvation.⁸

8. «Disce, salvator, nostros meminisse dolores/Septenos, prosint ut tibi quaque die./ Praedixit Simeon pectus mucrone feriri,/Et matrem nati vulnera ferre sui./Hinc cum cesa fuit puerorum turba priorum,/Pertuli in Egiptum non bene tuta meum,/Et dolui quaerens puerum divina docentem/In templo, hinc captum pondera ferre crucis/Cum vidi et ligno fixum, tum morte sopitum/Deponi, inque petra linquere pulsa fui./Nos igitur nostros quisquis meditare

The text directly corresponds to each of the seven secondary scenes that surround the central panel. The first one, on the bottom left, depicts the prophecy of Simeon, as related in the Gospel of Luke 2:21-35. Directly above, the next image is *The Flight into Egypt*, based on Matthew 11:13-14. The third scene is *The Loss of Jesus in the Temple*, based on Luke 2:41-52: Mary appears as a tiny figure in the background, standing at the door besides Joseph. The fourth panel in the series is the *Way to Calvary*, and follows a model by Martin Schongauer: Mary appears in the background with St John the Evangelist comforting her. The fifth panel shows the scene of *Calvary*: Mary is pointing to Adam's skull underneath the cross. The *Descent from the Cross* is in the following panel, while the last scene depicts the *Entombment of Jesus*, based on Luke 23: 53.⁹

The narrative chosen to depict the seven sorrows of Mary in this altarpiece was not unique. Similar images describing the Virgin's misery during her life, placed around her figure, were already common by mid-fifteenth century, although in most cases the mother of God appeared seated and with at least one sword piercing her heart.¹⁰ In Palencia, however, the central panel shows a full-length

dolores/Percipies Natum ferre salutis opem.» I am using the transcription from WOLFF-THOMSEN: *Jan Joest von Kalkar*, p. 134; the translation is from SCHULER: «The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in pre-Reformation Europe», p. 19.

9. These particular seven scenes were determined after a long theological debate at Louvain University at the end of the fifteenth century. The two main arguments followed views by Saint Vicente Ferrer and Alain de la Roche, who believed that it was necessary to consider at least fifty sorrows, and by Saint Buenaventura, who only believed in one single, big, and constant pain. PÉRÉGRIN-MARIE SOULIER: *La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs dans les Flanders, 1491-1519*, Brussels, Pères Servites de Marie, 1912, pp. 17 and 36-40. As Schuler points out, the process of deciding the number of sorrows was parallel to the development of the Rosary prayer, perhaps the most important one in Marian devotion. SCHULER: «The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in pre-Reformation Europe» pp. 13-18.

10. One of the earliest examples that illustrates this composition is an engraving by Memmingen from c. 1440-1450. Closely related to this engraving, although it was made some years later, is the miniature by Simon Benning from the Prayer Book of Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg, now at the *J. Paul Getty Museum* (see <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=4329>). The other main example of square-shaped images that surround Mary is a diptych by Albrecht Dürer; it includes the *Seven Joys of the Virgin* in the other wing. It was commissioned by Frederick the Wise for his palace church at Wittenberg. The wing that showed the sorrows is now divided: the central panel is at the *Alte Pinakothek*, Munich, while the side panels are at the *Gemaldegalerie*, Dresden (see PETER STRIEDER: *Dürer*, New York, Rizzoli, 1980, pp. 290-291). Around 1509 Quentyn Massys painted an altarpiece with the same compositive structure as that by Dürer and the one at Palencia. It is now at the *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga* in Lisbon (see MAX FRIEDLANDER: *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Leyden, A. W. Sijthof, 1972, volume VIII, pp. 29 and 30, plate 4). Opposed to the use of squares, another iconography appeared years later showing the scenes of the sorrows in circles, also around the seated –and pierced– figure of Mary. Of this model, perhaps the most important example is the altarpiece by Bernaert van Orley, now at *Museum d'Art Beçançon* (see FRIEDLANDER: *Early Netherlandish Painting*, volume x, plate 87). The *Museo de la Catedral de Badajoz* also has a painting showing this model. Some scholars have tried to link the painting to Rodríguez Fonseca, which now

Mary, presumably standing on the ground. John the Evangelist embraces her with a tender gesture. Both figures, Mary and John, are shaped following models established by Rogier van der Weyden. However, in those models, John is holding Mary, who is fainting in almost all cases, but never embraces her in a similar way.¹¹ Hence, the most distinctive feature of the altarpiece is the gesture with which St John the Evangelist is comforting the Virgin.

In the larger corpus of the *Seven Sorrows* imagery, St John is never in such a prominent position. The evangelist's significant role within the composition is due to his function as patron saint of the donor, Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, whose portrait appears at the bottom right corner of the central panel. The Bishop is depicted with both hands in front of him, in a clear gesture of prayer. The rochet he wears is almost touching the ground; thus, it is likely to think he is on his knees.¹² The rich mitre near his body, decorated with pearls and precious stones, and the crozier held against his shoulder, establish his ecclesiastical status.¹³

THE POLITICAL FRAME

The inscription on the triptych's left panel opens with the year in which the commissioning of the painting took place, which happens to be also the same year Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was appointed bishop of Palencia. The message is presented first in Latin, followed by a Castilian translation.¹⁴ Both versions describe the situation in which the making of the artifact took place and instruct the beholder in the rewards of praying to the Virgin Mary in front of this particular altarpiece. It is worth presenting to the reader both texts since they have small but important differences. Emphasis in the transcription is made to draw attention to those aspects that will be discussed in detail in this paper.

seems unlikely, given the evidence provided in this paper about the dates in which the Bishop became acquainted with the cult of the seven sorrows –ten years after he left Badajoz. I am grateful to Jesús Jiménez González, from the Cathedral Museum, for all the information he provided me with on January 2006 regarding this painting.

11. See DIRK DE VOS: *Rogier van der Weyden. The complete works*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1999.

12. This rochet was part of all bishops' robes and it is characterized by its length (up to the knees) and the sleeves that are always tight fitting. See JANET MAYO: *A history of ecclesiastical dress*, New York, Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1984, p. 167.

13. There is a long tradition of representing kneeling donors on votive paintings like this one (see HUGO VAN DER VELDEN: *The Donor's image. Gerard Loret and the votive images of Charles the Bold*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2000). However, in the case of Fonseca's kneeling portrait, the posture seems to be related also to a family legend. See BERNARD THOMAS POOLE: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca and the Maintenance of Royal Authority in Spain and the Indies*, PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1976, p. 2.

14. I prefer the term *Castilian* as opposed to *Spanish*, since that was the label used at the time to refer to the language of Castile, the most powerful kingdom of the Iberian Peninsula.

(from Latin) Year 1505 after the nativity of Jesus Christ. The magnificent Juan de Fonseca, by God's grace bishop of Palencia, being in *Brussels in Brabant* within the court of *Philip, king of Castile*, commissioned this sacred image to honor *the history of the Passion of the Holy Virgin*. Everyone who prays in its presence, *on his knees* and with true devotion, *seven prayers*, will obtain forgiveness; the brothers and sisters of the confraternity who say these prayers will also obtain the *indulgences* referred to in the bull of that *confraternity*.¹⁵

(from Castilian) Year of 1505. The reverend and magnificent Don Juan de Fonseca, bishop of Palencia, count of Pernía, by God's grace, *asked this image of Our Lady of Compassion to be painted* while he was *in Flanders* acting as an ambassador to *King Philip and Queen Joanna, our Lords*. Everyone who prays *on his knees seven Ave Marias and seven times the Pater Noster* in front of it, will obtain forgiveness; the members of the confraternity while praying will obtain not only these but the *indulgencies referred to in the bull of that brotherhood*.¹⁶

The most significant differences between the two versions are three in number. The first one is the name given to the altarpiece: while the triptych is *in honorem passionis beate Marie Virginis* in the Latin text, it is clearly called *Nuestra Señora de la Compasión* in its Castilian counterpart. The second is of geographic nature: Brussels is correctly located in the province of Brabant in the Latin version, while the Castilian text prefers the generic Flanders to identify the place where the commission took place. The third one is perhaps the most relevant because it makes reference to a complex political context: the Latin version uses the title of *King* only in relation to Philip the Fair, duke of Burgundy, while the Castilian prefers to mention both Philip and Juana de Castilla, flaunting them as *Nuestros Señores*.

15. The Latin inscription read as follows (the first line is actually on the left panel): «Anno a nativitate ihesuxristi 1505 reverendud ac magnificus reoster dominus Joanness de Fonseca dei graci palentinus / presul ac perme comes dominum oratoris erga serenissimum Philippum regem Castillie etcetera legacionem Bruxellis in Brabanciam fungeretur devocione motus suis expensibus hanc historiam in honorem passionis beate Marie Virginis fieri iussit ut qui cumque flexis genibus coram hac ymaginem sepcies oraciones donicam todideris vicibus salutacionem angelicam devote recitaverit ibi plures indulgencias praeveniri valeant fratres et sorores huius confraternitatis supradictae orones recitantes praefatas indulgencias et alias in bulla huius confraternitatis contentas acquirere possunt». The transcription is taken from WOLFF-THOMSEN: *Jan Joest von Kalkar*, p. 45, but I am responsible for the translation into English of both the Latin and Castilian texts.

16. «Anno de MDV el reverendo e magnífico señor Don Juan de Fonseca, por la gracia de Dios, obispo de Palencia, conde de Pernía, mandó hacer esta imagen de nostra Señora de la Compasión, estando en Flandes por embajador con el señor rey don Felipe de Castilla e con la reina doña Juana nuestros señores. Todos los que rezaren siete Ave Marias et siete veces el Pater Noster de rodillas delante de ella gana muchos perdones; et los cofrades de esta cofradía rezándolos ganan los dichos perdones e otras indulgencias contenidas en la bula de esa cofradía.» The title of Count of Pernía was given to all Palentine bishops from 1171 on, when Bishop Raimundo III received that privilege from King Alfonso VIII. ADELAI DA SAGARRA GAMAZO: «Don Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Obispo de Palencia» in *Actas del II Congreso de Historia de Palencia*, Palencia, Diputación Provincial de Palencia, 1990, p. 489, n. 1.

In 1505 Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was indeed present at the Brussels court as ambassador of Isabel de Castilla y Fernando de Aragón, the Catholic Monarchs. He was there to reinforce the power of Fernando the Catholic during politically complex circumstances. Considering that, it is startling that Philip was described as king in a public artifact. The answer to this puzzle is to be found later in this paper. In the meantime, in order to understand the intricacies of the political context and the problems posed by the text, I mention first the political role played by the altarpiece's donor.

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was born in Toro in 1451 and died in Burgos in 1524. He studied at Salamanca University. After that, he went to Seville, where he was appointed dean of the cathedral. Before becoming a priest in 1493, he worked closely in Granada with Bishop Talavera, famous inquisitor and confessor of Queen Isabel the Catholic. In 1497, Rodríguez Fonseca was appointed bishop of Badajoz, two years later of Cordoba, and six years later assigned by the queen to the bishopric of Palencia.¹⁷ In 1514 he was appointed bishop of Burgos, the Castilian capital and second most important ecclesiastical see in the peninsula. In accordance with his will, signed on December 22, 1523, he was buried at the family chapel in the *Santa María* church, *villa* of Coca.¹⁸

As shown, Rodríguez Fonseca had an ascendant ecclesiastical career. However, his place in Castilian history is, above anything else, linked to his performance as first *Ministro de Indias*:¹⁹ he was in charge of all the policy towards the New World from 1493, when Christopher Columbus presented the report of his first trip to the Indies in Barcelona, up to 1503 when the foundation of the *Casa de Contratación* took place.²⁰ The Bishop was known for his great knowledge of geography and cosmography, but also for getting into intense struggles with relevant protagonists of the colonization process, such

17. In 1512 he obtained the archbishopric of Rossanno in Naples, a title of symbolic nature; Bishop Fonseca never even visited the city.

18. For more biographical notes, see MARIANO ALCOCER MARTÍNEZ: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca. Estudio crítico-biográfico*, Valladolid, Valentin Franco, 1926; POOLE: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca*; and SAGARRA GAMAZO: «Don Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca».

19. For more on the role of Rodríguez Fonseca as «Ministro de Indias», see SANTIAGO FRANCIA LORENZO: *Aportación palentina a la gesta Indiana*, Palencia, Imprenta Provincial, 1992; and ADELAIDA SARRAGA GAMAZO: *La otra versión de la historia Indiana: Colón y Fonseca*, Valladolid, Secretariado de Publicaciones e Intercambio Científico-Universidad de Valladolid, 1997.

20. The «House of Trade» was organized in order to control the commodities' transit between the Metropolis and the Americas. It did not established a monopoly of the Crown, but it provided a powerful legal framework for the Crown in order to obtain important benefits from all the commercial activity, without having to pay completely for the infrastructure that was required for it. In 1717 «la Casa de Contratación» was moved to Cadiz, where it finally ceased activities in 1793. See among other sources *España y América. Un océano de negocios. Quinto Centenario de la Casa de Contratación 1503-2003. Catálogo de la exposición*, Madrid, Sociedad estatal de Conmemoraciones estatales, 2003, pp. 47-64.

as Columbus, the discoverer, Hernán Cortez, the conqueror of the Mexica Empire, and Bartolomé de las Casas, the friar who defended Indians' rights most fiercely.²¹

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was ambassador to the Low Countries on two different occasions, both related to the role that Philip of Burgundy and Juana de Castilla were to play in the succession to the Castilian crown. The couple married on October 20, 1496, as part of the double wedding that, in order to limit French expansion, brought together the son and daughter of Maximilian of Austria with those of the Catholic monarchs.²² At the moment of her marriage, Juana, being Isabel and Fernando's second daughter, was only fourth in line to have the right to rule, but when her eldest brother Juan and her eldest sister Isabel unexpectedly died in 1498, followed by Isabel's baby boy in 1500, Juana reached a position that had never been considered by the Catholic monarchs. Juana's growing mental problems were the main reason why Isabel and Fernando were concerned about what would be the best option to perpetuate the power of their recently united and powerful kingdom. The occasion was delicate, since other European sovereigns coveted the Castilian crown. In 1500, the duchess gave birth to her first son, the emperor-to-be Charles. He was immediately recognized as the only means by which Castilian blood could keep ruling over the Castilian realm. Hence, in 1501 the Catholic monarchs encouraged Juana and Philip to travel to Spain with the young prince so he could be proclaimed *Príncipe de Asturias*.

It was in this context that Rodríguez Fonseca first traveled north, where he was to help the permanent ambassador at the court, Gutierre Gómez de Fuensalida, in the organization of the voyage. Fonseca arrived on July 9²³ and stayed until the beginning of November, when the retinue left the Netherlands, traveling across France.²⁴ The ducal family finally arrived in Spain in 1502, where they immediately met the *Cortes* in Toledo to complete the legal proclamation.²⁵

21. POOLE: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca*, p. 373.

22. LORENZO DE PADILLA: «Crónica de Felipe I» in *Documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, Tomo VIII, Madrid, Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1846.

23. It is not clear from the documentary evidence, but it seems that Rodríguez Fonseca made the trip in a ship of his own, which Poole thinks might imply that he was an active merchant. This is important considering the active trade relations between Castile and the Netherlands (see POOLE: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca*, pp. 141 and 165). For more on Rodríguez Fonseca's commercial activities see ADELAIDA SAGARRA GAMAZO: *Burgos y el gobierno indiano: la clientela del obispo Fonseca*, Burgos, Caja de Burgos, 1998.

24. During the trip Rodríguez Fonseca was really close to Juana, providing her with advice regarding the correct way to demonstrate her Royal stature to the French nobility. See BETHANY ARAM: *La reina Juana. Gobierno, piedad y dinastía*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2001, p. 107-109. (The book was published in English in 2005. Both versions are based on her doctoral dissertation, *Governing a queen: Juana «The Mad» and royal authority in early Habsburg Spain*, presented in 2001 at The Johns Hopkins University.)

25. PADILLA: «Crónica de Felipe I.» See also *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*, Volume 1, Bruxelles, F. Hayez, 1876.

Two years later, in 1504, Queen Isabel died and the tension about the succession increased. In her testament, signed October 12, 1504, her decision regarding the future of the kingdom was clearly stated: Juana and Charles were the successors, but because of Juana's growing mental incapacities, during Charles' childhood it was only Fernando who had the right to rule Castile. Queen Isabel was clear in refusing Philip as king: she found unbearable both his religious tolerance and his close relation to the French crown, the principal and oldest Castilian enemy.

Philip, however, was obsessed with power. Rodríguez Fonseca traveled for the second time to the Netherlands when the death of the queen was imminent in order to negotiate with him: if Philip was not to resign, he should at least make a strong commitment to include none but Castilians in his government's inner circle. The Bishop left Castile sometime between October 28 and November 12, 1504, arriving in Brussels a month later. He learned about the death of Isabel while he was traveling, and was he who conveyed the sad news to Philip and Juana. In the days that followed, Rodríguez Fonseca tried, along with Ambassador Gómez de Fuensalida and Secretary Lope de Conchillos, to convince Juana to support her father's interests.²⁶ So crucial was Rodríguez Fonseca's commission, that in the codicil to the Queen's will, he received the Palentine bishopric –with its large funds– as his reward.²⁷

The three men loyal to Fernando induced Juana to sign a letter renouncing power in favor of her father. The document, however, never left Brussels; the plot against Philip was discovered, and Lope de Conchillos was imprisoned and tortured. When the negotiations failed, Fernando asked the Bishop to return to Castile as promptly as possible. For unknown reasons, Bishop Fonseca stayed at the court after being recalled, for which reason he was accused of accepting bribes to support the duke of Burgundy. In order to avoid further problems, he finally left in the first days of April 1505.²⁸

At the end of that same year, Philip decided to travel by sea back to Castile in order to take control of a realm he believed he had the right to rule.²⁹ Philip and his family arrived in the peninsula in April 1506,³⁰ whereupon they immediately received the support of some local nobles. At that point, Fernando left for Naples,

26. See GUTIERRE GÓMEZ DE FUENSALIDA: *Correspondencia*, Madrid, Duque de Alba, 1907, p. 318.

27. ARAM: *La reina Juana*, p. 143.

28. The Royal request for Fonseca to return was more likely to be part of a strategy by which the Spanish ambassador Juan Manuel, who was openly working intensively for Philip's cause, was also to return to Castile. According to this version, the loyalty of Rodríguez Fonseca was never in doubt. ROGELIO PÉREZ BUSTAMANTE AND JOSÉ MANUEL CALDERÓN ORTEGA: *Felipe I*, Palencia, Diputación Provincial, 1995, p. 165.

29. ANTOINE DE LALAING: «Voyage de Philippe le Beau en Espagne en 1505» in *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*.

30. The court traveled on that occasion by sea, suffering a shipwreck that took them to England, where queen Catalina, Juana's sister and wife of Henry VIII, welcomed them. See LALAING: «Voyage de Philippe le Beau en Espagne, en 1505.»

thus admitting his defeat by the duke: Philip was recognized as king of Castile in July of that year. His rulership was not to last, though: he died suddenly three months later, in September, after catching a cold.³¹ Juana tried to rule for a while, but she surrendered to Fernando and agreed to confine herself in the convent of Tordesillas in 1509, already shrouded by the reputation of suffering complete madness.³²

THE DEVOTIONAL FRAME

It was during Juan Rodríguez Fonseca's two brief but politically intense visits to the Brussels household that he became familiar with the cult of the *Seven Sorrows of Our Lady*. A confraternity established in 1498 in the Church of St James, next to the ducal palace, promoted such devotion. Philip of Burgundy, Juana de Castilla, and their son Charles were the most prominent members.

Jean de Coudenberg, who later became Charles V's secretary, first established the brotherhood in 1492 in the cities of Bruges, Abbenbrouck, and Reymervael. He explained that his desire to promote the cult of the sorrows of Mary responded to the sorrowful times that the Netherlands were going through in the 1490s after duchess Mary of Burgundy's death, and a period of serious political conflicts began when her widower Maximilian of Austria claimed his rights to retain authority over the Burgundian territory.³³ The cult, based on the premise that Mary was the co-redeemer of humanity, was not new at all by the time of the confraternity's foundation, but this brotherhood played a central role in its development and subsequent acceptance by ecclesiastical authorities.³⁴

Philip the Fair, Archduke of Burgundy and son of Mary and Maximilian, became a member in 1494, only two years after the confraternity was first

31. See ARAM: *La reina Juana*, p. 157. The Palentine Chapter mourned Philip's death, as did many in Spain. See 1506, Actas Capitulares: Libro 34, f. 179 v., AHCP.

32. Aram considers that Juana's obsession to take the dead body of her husband all the way to Granada, in the south of the peninsula, was not the result of her madness but a strategy to magnify her presence among the local nobility. ARAM: *La reina Juana*, p. 160.

33. This is mentioned in *Ortus, progressus et impedimenta fraternitatis Beatissime Virginis Marie de Passione, quae dicitur de Septem Doloribus*, the chronicle that Coudenberg himself published in 1519 following the mandate of Charles V and his aunt Margaret of Austria, members of the brotherhood. See AD DUCLOS: *Handboeksken van de godvruchtigheid tot de Zeven Weedommen van de heilige moeder Gods Maria*, Brugge, Karel van de Vijvere-Petyt, 1897; and SOULIER: *La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*.

34. The cult of the Sorrows of Mary is related to the foundation of the Servite Order. According to the legend, the Virgin Mary appeared in 1233 to seven renowned young Florentine men, asking them to dedicate their lives to think and pray on her sorrows. Following what they assumed was a divine commandment they established in 1240 the first convent of the Servite order or Servants of Mary at the Monte Senario in Italy. However, the feast dedicated to the *Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary* was not enacted until 1413. See AUGUST LÉPICIER: *Mater Dolorosa. Notes d'histoire, de liturgie et d'iconographie sur le culte de Notre Dame des Douleurs*. Spa: w/p, 1948, pp. 20 to 35.

established. The close relation with the young duke fostered the presence of the brotherhood in cities as important as Haarlem, Antwerp, and Brussels.³⁵ Pope Alexander VI gave his apostolic confirmation to the confraternity's statutes that same year of 1494.³⁶ This pontifical document also established the feast of *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows* on the Saturday before Palm Sunday.³⁷ However, one of the most significant moments in the confraternity's history did not occur until April 1517, when Pope Leo XI granted forty days of indulgences to all who prayed seven *Ave Marias* and seven *Pater Noster* to the sorrows of Mary.³⁸

Devotional images were used to strengthen this new cult. Coudenberg himself donated those used at the first three cult sites. In an evident effort to associate the cult with already famous miraculous images, he chose copies of icons venerated in Rome, thought to have been painted by St Luke the Evangelist.³⁹ Those first images did not show narrative scenes of the sorrows of

35. Juana and Charles became members in 1500. Their coats of arms were included on that year at the front of the confraternity book in Brussels, along with all the other members' insignia. The date of Juana's inscription appears also next to her name in the record list on f. 227r. Charles' coat of arms –he at the time was only a few months old– shows the nobility titles he had at the moment: archduke of Austria and prince of Castile. The record book, although part of the city's archive, is now on exhibition at the *Musée de la Ville, Maison du Roi*. See *Liber authenticus sacratissime utriusque. Sexus Christi fidelium. Confraternitatis Septem Dolorum Beate Mariae Virginis Nuncupatae*, Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles, nr. 3413.

36. The bishop of Utrecht, David of Burgundy, had given the first ecclesiastical approval to the cult as early as 1492. It is noteworthy that in all the chronicles and letters sent to the Holy See, Philip appeared as the founder of the confraternity in order to increase its importance. The name used for the dissemination of the cult was vague: on some occasions it was referenced as *Our Lady of Seven Sorrows*, and on others as *Our Lady of Mercy* or *Compassion*.

37. SOULIER (*La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*, p. 21) quotes Friar Michel de Lille, who wrote in 1494 a full dissertation on the cult: «Le Samedi qui precede le dimanche des Rameaux, on fait la fête solennelle de cette fraternité». The feast moved years after to the Friday before Palm Sunday, but it was not until 1727 that Pope Benedict XIII extended it to the entire Latin Church, under the title *Septem dolorum B.M.V.* For more on the feast of the Seven Sorrows, see Schuler's PhD Dissertation, especially chapter three, where the author discusses the process by which the virgin became the focus of private and public devotion.

38. Indulgences were granted following a petition of Charles, when he was not yet crowned King of Castile. The petition was presented in a document signed not only by the bishops of Utrecht, Liege, Tournai, Arras, and Cambrai, but also by the heads of various bishoprics outside the Netherlands: Chiety, Ruvo, Bisignano, Paris, Tuy, Macon, and even Haiti and Syria, which shows how extensive the presence of the cult already was at that time (SOULIER: *La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*, p. 58-59). The number of days granted, and the requirement of seven prayers was common at the time. See INGALLIL PEGELOW: «Pictures of Cult and Letters of Indulgence» in *Images of cult and devotion: function and reception of Christian images of medieval and post-medieval Europe*, Soeren Kaspersen, editor, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum Press-University of Copenhagen, 2004, pp. 33-46.

39. Evidence of the images used in the original sites include a narrative description written by the Franciscan Pierre Mansio (SOULIER: *La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*, p. 11) and images published in an early devotional treatise made for the confraternity *Devote ghedenckenisse van den seven weeden*, published in Antwerp, 1492 and reproduced in SCHULER: «The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Popular Culture and Cultic Imagery in pre-Reformation

Mary; the link to the cult was made through a Latin inscription added to the bottom of the paintings. The text, more than the images themselves, directed the observer towards reflection on Marian grief: it was written in the first person, addressing the viewer directly.

Such a text indeed corresponds to the one present on the left panel of the Palencia altarpiece. This is not surprising, considering that Bishop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca himself was a member of the brotherhood and familiar with it. His coat of arms in the confraternity's records in Brussels, first published on this occasion, clearly states 1504 as the year when he became a member (Figure 3).⁴⁰ Fonseca arrived in Brussels for the second time around December 12 of that year, which would imply that he joined the brotherhood upon arrival. However, it should be considered that at this time, the reforms to the calendar were yet to be made and the year 1504 extended until March of «our Gregorian» 1505. Rodríguez Fonseca learned about his appointment to the Palencia bishopric about the same time he was becoming a member of the confraternity of the seven sorrows of Mary. Thus, it is reasonable to link both events and accept 1505 as the year of the commissioning of the painting, as the inscription in the altarpiece clearly states.⁴¹

Europe», *op. cit.*, p. 20. The image used in Abbenbroeck depicted the Virgin holding the baby Jesus; the ones at Reymerwael and Bruges were copies of the one at the *Ara Coeli* church in Rome, which follows the *Eleusa* type set in Byzantium to refer to *Our Lady of Mercy*. I am using the term *Eleusa* even though Hans Belting has correctly pointed out that this iconographical type «does not match a fixed image» at all. See HANS BELTING: *Likeness and Presence. A history of the image before the era of art*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, especially, p. 30.

40. See *Liber authenticus sacratissime utriusque. Sexus Christi fidelium. Confraternitatis Septem Dolorum Beate Mariae Virginis Nuncupatae, doc. cit.* I am grateful to Professor Hugo van der Velden for providing me with this picture of Bishop Fonseca's coat of arms, with which his membership to the confraternity can be finally proved. This idea was first suggested by JESÚS SÁENZ DE MIERA in the altarpiece entry in *Reyes y mecenas: los Reyes Católicos, Maximiliano I y los inicios de la casa de Austria en España, Catálogo de la exposición*, Madrid, Electa, 1992, p. 326. In the confraternity book there are other Spanish men recorded as well. Among them, perhaps the most famous is Diego de Guevara, trader, member of the Burgundian court, and *contador mayor* of Castile since 1516.

41. In her attempts to link the triptych with Jan Joest, Wolf-Thompsen considered the possibility that the year corresponded to the year when the altarpiece was finished, which has no evidential basis (WOLFF-THOMSEN: *Jan Joest von Kalkar*, pp. 349-353). Schollmeyer suggested that the year could refer to the year Fonseca established the endowment, but the document at AHCP clearly states that this mandate was signed only in 1513 (see SCHOLLMAYER: *Jan Joest*, p. 319).



Fig. 3. Unknown author *Coat of Arms of Bishop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca*, 1504
 In the registry book of the *Confraternity of the Seven Sorrows of Mary* in Brussels
 Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles- Musée de la Ville, Maison du Roi
 Photo: Hugo van der Velden

The decision to offer a devotional painting with his likeness in it was not without precedent in Rodríguez Fonseca's life. After accepting his appointment to Badajoz,⁴² he offered to the Cathedral an image of *Nuestra Señora de la Antigua*, a highly appreciated cult image in Seville.⁴³ This Fonseca painting,

42. Evidence about a similar offering for his appointment as bishop of Cordoba in 1499 has not yet been found. It is known, though, that he donated a set of Choir books, but they do not include his portrait. He also made donations of Choir books to Badajoz, which have his coat of arms and are now on display at the museum of the Cathedral.

43. The image of *Nuestra Señora de la Antigua* in Seville is a fresco, 321 cm x 116 cm, dated around the last quarter of the fourteenth century. The small figure of a donor who appears at the bottom is Leonor de Alburquerque, wife of Fernando de Antequera. The name of the devotion refers to the fact that the image was venerated for years at the old Cathedral, which before 1492 was established in the ancient mosque. The image was moved to the current cathedral in 1578, which implies that Fonseca saw it in its old setting during those years he lived in the Andalusian capital. See CHANDLER POST: *A History of Spanish Painting*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1933, volume III, p. 298; and ENRIQUE VALDIVIESO: *Catálogo de las pinturas de la Catedral de Sevilla*, Sevilla, published by the author, 1978, p. 13.

attributed recently to Antonio Monreal, is fortunately also *in situ* in one of the secondary chapels.⁴⁴ In the case of Burgos, Fonseca's last diocese, he proceeded likewise, asking architect Francisco de Colonia to include his kneeling portrait praying to the Virgin within the decoration of *Puerta de la Pellejería*.⁴⁵

THE FRAME OF MANUFACTURE

The author of Rodríguez Fonseca's second known portrait remains unidentified. In 1908 the German art historian Carl Justi claimed that a certain «Juan de Holanda» was mentioned in the Chapter Records in Palencia in 1505 in relation to the painting. Justi identified that painter with Jan Mostaert, the only painter with the first name of Juan who was active at that time in the Brussels court.⁴⁶

In 1932 art historian Max Friedlander attributed the Palencia triptych to the Wesel-born painter Jan Joest, based on stylistic similarities with the *Altarpiece of the Life of Jesus* at the Church of St Nikolas in Kalkar, Germany.⁴⁷ Jan Joest von Kalkar's work has been extensively considered, mainly by German historiography,⁴⁸ but no scholar has been able to say a final word regarding his connection with Rodríguez Fonseca's altarpiece. Art historian Lioba Schollmeyer has recently disputed the attribution, arguing that the Bishop's portrait quality simply does not match Jan Joest's skills.⁴⁹ Schollmeyer suggests the possibility that Fonseca had not commissioned the painting directly, buying the panels in the open market instead. The painting would thus be the production of a secondary master and the Bishop's likeness would have been added later, when the triptych was already in Palencia. Rodríguez Fonseca was accustomed to buying objects in the open market and having his coat of arms added later. There is evidence that he proceeded in this way in the

44. The painting includes a Latin inscription that read as follows «Pacencis populi presul Fonseca Joannes/ Ex veteri quam nunc Hispalis alia Coeli». Transcription taken from ALCOCER MARTÍNEZ: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca*, p. 17.

45. In the Cathedral of the Castilian capital Rodríguez Fonseca also contributed to the construction of the *Escalera Alta*, which stands along with the *Cimborrio* and the *Capilla del Condestable* as the defining elements of the building. See MANUEL MARTÍNEZ Y SANZ: *Historia del templo catedral de Burgos: escrita con arreglo en documentos de su archivo*, Burgos, Institución Fernán Gonzalez, 1983.

46. See CARL JUSTI: *Miscellaneen aus drei Jahrhunderten Spanischen Kunst Lebens*, Berlin, G. Grote, 1908, volume I., pp. 329 to 331. The author did not question why Mostaert's name was mentioned in the Castilian archives if he was mainly active in the Netherlands. During my visits to the archive, I was unable to find Juan de Holanda's name while reviewing the chapter records.

47. FRIEDLANDER: *Early Netherlandish Painting*, volume IX, first part, pp. 11 to 16.

48. See the bibliography in Schollmeyer's book for a full account of the most recent literature.

49. SCHOLLMAYER: *Jan Joest*, pp. 321-323.

case of a Book of Hours he owned, now at the *Seminario de San Carlos* in Zaragoza,⁵⁰ and with a set of four tapestries, currently at the chapter room of Palencia Cathedral.⁵¹ Schollmeyer's suggestion of the open market is thus completely plausible. However, I strongly disagree with her regarding the «low quality» of the portrait as evidence to prove the painter's origin: to say that it cannot be Netherlandish because of its aesthetic features seems to me a statement that grows more out of her own aesthetic prejudices against the Castilian art production at the time. Even more importantly, when the portrait in Palencia is compared with those in Badajoz and Burgos, it matches perfectly the facial features that the Bishop might have had around 1505, hence being a high quality portrait in the sense of being a realistic copy of the sitter.⁵² It is reasonable to assert, based on the figure's style, that the triptych was painted in the Netherlands, but the exact conditions in which the Bishop acquired it remain unclear, and the topic demands more research in order to be resolved. A technical study of the panels, for instance, would be helpful to determine their provenance.

50. It is possible that this devotional item was made by the same master from Ghent who also painted the Book of Hours owned by Juana de Castilla and that of James IV of Scotland. JOAQUÍN YARZA LAUCES: «Dos mentalidades, dos actitudes ante las formas estéticas: Diego Deza y Juan Rodríguez Fonseca» in *Jornadas sobre la Catedral de Palencia*, Valladolid, Diputación Provincial de Palencia, 1989, p. 123. The Spanish art historian refers in his article to Georges Dogaer's dissertation, *Het getijdenboek van bisschop Juan Rodríguez Fonseca met een inleidende studie over de z.g. Gents-Bruge School*, presented at Leuven University in 1969, which considers at length this book of hours.

51. That set included scenes of the Bible and arrived in Palencia in 1527, following his will. All four tapestries have Fonseca's coat of arms added in the corners, embroidered after the design was finished, which makes clear that he did not commission them. ELOÍSA GARCÍA: «Los tapices de Fonseca en la catedral de Palencia. Tapices de la Historia Sagrada» *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* XIII (1946-1947), pp. 173-196. The Spanish scholar suggested that Pierre de Engheim made this set of tapestries; he was a master embroider who worked on several occasions for the Catholic Monarchs. In Yarza Lauces' view, Fonseca purchased the tapestries in the open market either in the Netherlands, or at the commercial fair at Medina del Campo, which was already important by the end of the fifteenth century.

52. It is worth comparing the three portraits with two other paintings in which Fonseca is depicted and which, indeed, are bad portraits of the Bishop. The first one is *La virgen de los Navegantes* by Alejo Fernández, which used to be on display in the main hall of the *Casa de la Contratación* and is now at the Alcázar de Sevilla. The second one is part of a series that depicts all bishops of the Burgos dioceses, kept at the *Museo de la Catedral de Burgos* in the old chapter room. In this one, Fonseca appears slim, with a long face and white hair, while he was fat and almost bald by the time he died, as he is shown in the *Puerta de la Pellejería*. See TERESA LEÓN: «El Obispo D. Juan Rodríguez Fonseca» p. 284.

THE SYMBOLIC FRAME

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca did more than only offer a painting to Palencia cathedral: he created a full shrine for his *Our Lady of Compassion* altarpiece, making evident the function he wanted it to fulfill. Such intentionality was already clear in 1988 to the Spanish art historian Joaquín Yarza Luaces,⁵³ but it is only with regard to some documentary evidence that it is now possible to reconstruct the creation process of this complex program of display.

After acquiring the paintings and joining the brotherhood, the next action in this course that Rodríguez Fonseca took was his decision to officially enter Palencia on April 4, 1506, the Saturday before Palm Sunday, the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary.⁵⁴ The Bishop had come back to Castile from his second trip to the Low Countries around May 1505, so it was certainly not by coincidence that he decided to wait almost a year to enter the city on that specific date in order to link his appointment forever to the cult with which he became acquainted during his travels to Brussels.⁵⁵

The decision to place the triptych at the *trascoro* is recorded on November 3, 1513. On that day Bishop Rodríguez Fonseca and the Cathedral Chapter agreed to set an altar at the back of the choir and place *his* altarpiece in the wall behind it.⁵⁶ Only a few days later, the Bishop established an endowment of thirty thousand *maravadíes* a year from which masses should be celebrated in front of this specific altarpiece for the salvation of his soul (see Appendix for a full transcription of the endowment).⁵⁷ This evidence makes clear the real

53. «Pocas cosas parecen haberle preocupado más en Palencia que la ubicación y culto de este retablo... la intervención de Fonseca fue definitiva en la temática y la distribución... indica una voluntad devota de participación amorosa que va más allá de la fórmula. (So it seems that there were few things that mattered more to Fonseca than the location of this altarpiece and the cult attached to it... Fonseca's intervention was of utmost importance regarding the topic and distribution [of the *trascoro*]... all this implies a clear intentionality, which far from being a mere repetition of a formula, had its main source in his personal devotion to the cult).» YARZA LUACES: «Dos mentalidades», p. 128.

54. 1505, Actas Capitulares: Libro 34, f. 137, AHCP. See also ALONSO FERNÁNDEZ DE MADRID: *Silva Palentina*, Palencia, Impresiones de «El Diario Palentino» de la Viuda de J. Alonso, 1932 (the manuscript is from the late sixteenth century), p. 527. In January 11, 1505 the official document of Rodríguez Fonseca's appointment was included in the Chapter records, although the Bishop was still in the Low Countries. On that same day Antonio Fonseca, the Bishop's brother, entered the city in his name. 1505, Actas Capitulares: Libro 34, f. 105-106r, AHCP.

55. On the last days of April, a few members of the chapter traveled to the north of the peninsula, outside Castile, to welcome the Bishop, who had just arrived from his travels. 1505, Actas Capitulares: Libro 34, f. 119, AHCP.

56. «...y que en aquella pared a espaldas del coro haga allí un rico altar y ponga allí *su* retablo (...and that in that wall behind the choir, he should place a rich altar and *his* altarpiece).» Bishop Fonseca was at that moment at the Convent of Calabanzos, outside Palencia. 1513, Actas Capitulares: Libro 35, ff. 113v-114, AHCP.

57. 1513, Acervo Histórico: Documento1248, AHCP.

purpose that the *trascoro*, with the Netherlandish altarpiece at its center, was to serve: to be the main scenery for Fonseca's redemption.

The endowment reveals the Bishop's wish to be buried in *San Antolín* cave, which ultimately did not happen.⁵⁸ More importantly, the document includes a detailed description of the masses, in terms of how frequent they should be, the distribution of the chapter members along the nave while performing the mass, and the amount of money they would receive for performing his mandate. Rodríguez Fonseca even made clear what kind of robes he wanted them to wear:

[...] the reverend dean and all the other members of the chapter, our brothers, must sing there [in front of the altarpiece] a mass every Saturday morning, played along with the organs [...] they also must sing a *Salve Regina* [...] and all the priests who receive the benefits [of this foundation] *must be dressed with their rochets and must be on their knees*, grouped in two choirs along the nave that is in front of the altar of Our Lady, having between them the entrance to San Antolín's cave.⁵⁹

The endowment is only a page-and-a-half long, but it has been preserved with a long series of clarifications directed to and by the chapter. Evidently, it was of utmost importance for the canons to clarify the conditions in which they would receive the payment – or *pitança* – for performing these special masses. It is possible to perceive through their comments how wearisome they found the detailed requirements asked by Rodríguez Fonseca. The dialogue between the chapter and the Bishop was active from the end of November 1513 to February 15, 1514, when he sent from Madrid a three-page-long version of the endowment, trying to be as definitive as possible. Fonseca acknowledged then that the masses were already taking place in front of his altarpiece.⁶⁰

58. Rodríguez Fonseca is buried at Coca, at the family chapel, following his own will. However, the endowment is clear: «Contando que la entrada de la cueva del glorioso martir santo Antolin antes del escalera y baxa a la cueva sea para sepultura y enterramientos de la persona que nosotros quisieramos si que desde agora los reverendos nuestros hermanos dean y cabildo de la dicha nuestra Santa Iglesia lo hayan por bien (we would like the reverend Dean and other members of the chapter to consider the possibility of burying the person of our choice in the cave of the glorious St Antolin)». 1513, Acervo Histórico: Documento 1248, f. 1, AHCP.

59. «los reverendos dean y cabildo nuestros hermanos han de dezir ally cada sabado de mañana una mysa cantada con sus organos [...] han de decir en el mysmo altar ...una *Salve* cantada y los beneficiados han de estar bestidos con sus sobrepellizes hechos dos coros de rodillas delante de nuestra señora por la nave queesta delante del altar (the reverend Dean and other member of the chapter must sing mass in such location every Saturday along with the organs [...] those who are going to benefit [from this endowment] must sing a *Salve* on their knees, dressed with their robes, and divided in two choirs along the vestibule in front of the altarpiece)». *Ibid.*

60. «avemos avido plazzer que seaya comencado a desir la missa y salve Regina como lo ordenamos (we are very pleased after learning that the mass and the *Salve Regina* have begun to be performed as we have mandated)». *Ibidem*, f. 5. The chapter kept having problems with certain details, to the extent that in 1530 the dialogue needed to be reactivated. In that year,

Rodríguez Fonseca made a strong commitment in the endowment to finish the decoration of the *trascoro* that was to frame his altarpiece. He took this promise seriously not only after he was elevated to the Burgos bishopric, but even beyond his own death, through a special clause in his will.⁶¹ Accordingly, four tapestries arrived from Brussels in 1529 –four years after the Bishop’s death– to be hung near the altarpiece. Fonseca’s coat of arms is embroidered in all of them, making explicit his commission.⁶² The four textiles depicted the enthroned Virgin Mary with scrolls showing fragments of the *Salve Regina*, the same antiphon that was to be included in the Saturday masses according to the endowment.⁶³ If this prayer was chosen to complement the display of the triptych, both in the sung service and in the tapestries, it was precisely to enhance the role of Mary as advocate and co-redeemer. Therefore, it is worth reconsidering the scene depicted in the central area in hope of further insights.

Fonseca’s brother Antonio had the original document partially transcribed, complaining in an extensive commentary –no less than fifty pages!– about the chapter’s deficient performance in fulfilling the conditions of the endowment. The transcription that was made for Antonio Fonseca is preserved at the AHCP, sharing the same classification number (1248) as the endowment signed by Juan Rodríguez Fonseca, but they are in two different booklets with strong differences in handwriting and quality of ink and paper. See 1530, Acervo Histórico: Document 1248-1, AHCP. In spite of all the controversies caused by the endowment, it is indeed impressive to know that in order to preserve Fonseca’s memory, masses were still celebrated under that same protocol, in that very same place, every Saturday approximately up to the year 1990 (!!!). I thank Don Santiago Francia Lorenzo, AHCP’s director, for this comment.

61. «Asy mismo dezimos que porque asy plaze a nuestro señor que aunque dexemos la posesion de la Nuestra Santa Iglesia de Palencia, tenemos voluntad de acabar el trascoro que haremos la dicha memoria y acabaremos el trascoro (We also say that –since it is what pleases our Lord– it is our intention to finish the choir wall)». 1513, Acervo Histórico: Documento 1248, f. 1, AHCP. The fulfillment of this compromise is clear by the information regarding the payments received by Pedro de Manzo and Juan de Torres for the making of the wooden doors of the *trascoro*. 1519, Libro de Cuentas: f. CXL r, AHCP.

62. All four tapestries also included the symbol BB (Brussels in Brabant), which identifies the city where they were made. Such marks were added in all Netherlandish tapestries after 1528, which allow dating this set after that year. Two of the tapestries have an embroiderer’s mark that has not yet been clearly identified, but as they are similar to those later used by Martin Reymbouts, it seems that it was one of his ancestors who made this set. According to García, Bishop Fonseca made the contract through the trader from Burgos Juan López de Calatayud. ELOÍSA GARCÍA: «Los tapices de Fonseca en la catedral de Palencia. Tapices de la Salve,» *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* XIV (1947-1948), pp. 173-196.

63. The *Salve Regina* became a popular prayer in the fourteenth century, when it was included to end the exercise of *Compline*, the last of the day. The English version of the prayer says: Hail holy queen, mother of mercy. Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate thine eyes of mercy toward us. And after this, our exile, show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.» For the Latin version of this antiphon, and a brief account of its development, which includes an account of the authorship debate, see the entry in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13409a.htm>; and the *Treasury of Latin Prayers*, <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/BVM/SalveRegina.html>, first consulted on April 16, 2004.

In the main panel St John is embracing the Virgin, almost presenting her to the viewer. The way John holds Mary –forming a sort of triangular frame with his red robe that magnifies her figure– is an invitation for the beholder to pity Mary as he does himself. The Virgin deserves this pity because she was more than just a simple spectator during Christ's passion: this explains the use of the *pluralis majestatis*, referring to *Our Sorrows*, in the inscription on the triptych's left panel. The painting depicts her precisely in this active role: she is indeed *Nuestra Señora de la Com-pasión* as the right-hand inscription calls her.

This idea is reinforced by a visual trick: in the panel showing the *Way to Calvary*, just above the central panel, John is comforting Mary in the background, almost in the same position in which they appear in the main section. One might consider the main scene as a sort of close-up of that detail. Such an idea would allow the interpretation that in the central panel John is comforting Mary in the actual moment of her passion, when she is suffering in her soul what her son was suffering in his flesh. It also could be that the Palencia altarpiece is showing Mary's mourning as a pure emotion, more than any particular moment in her life. This uncertainty regarding the time finds its counterpart in the vagueness of the space, since there is no clarity about where John and Mary are standing. Through this double ambiguity, temporal and spatial, it would be possible to interpret the image as a mental picture, one that the kneeling donor is experiencing while praying, as some scholars of Netherlandish painting have suggested for similar scenes.⁶⁴ That interpretation, though, might be a bit hazardous to argue for.

It is more plausible to assume that the main panel, Bishop Fonseca is depicted in the central panel of his altarpiece giving thanks for the divine grace granted to him, as occurs in votive images.⁶⁵ Indeed, he appears praying and gaining indulgences for all eternity, following what the inscription on the right panel clearly states. This may be one of the reasons why he was so obsessed with giving details about which garments and positions the chapter should adopt during the Saturday celebrations, not by coincidence the same ones in which he is depicted. Hence, the donor's likeness, located in a public cultic space with solemn masses taking place in front of it at least every Saturday, was also serving as a mirror example for the community that converged before the altarpiece.

64. See CRAIG HARBISON: «Visions and meditations in early Flemish painting,» *Simiolus* xv (1985).

65. See VAN DER VELDEN: *The Donor's image*, especially chapter 8: The significance of likeness, pp. 223-245.

THE SPATIAL FRAME

When Juan Rodríguez Fonseca arrived in Palencia in 1506, the cathedral was not yet complete and he made a big effort to finish it. He was responsible for the construction of the last three sections of the church— the cloister, the new chapter room, and the so-called Bishop's gate —which is the reason his coat of arms is located in all of those spaces.⁶⁶ The most relevant donations he made to the cathedral, however, were for the refurbishment of the cave so closely attached to *San Antolín* and the completion of the main altarpiece for which he hired Juan de Flandes, former court painter of Queen Isabel.⁶⁷ Once the building was finished, the *trascoro* turned out to be of utmost significance within the internal space of the building.⁶⁸ Having placed his painting precisely in that area, the Bishop succeeded in linking the devotion to *Our Lady of Compassion* to that of *San Antolín*, establishing between the two cults a relation of complementarity —or even one of competition.

Despite its visual hierarchy, the triptych remains slightly small for the *trascoro*. The issue of the painting's size —200 cm x 140 cm in the main section without the wings— lead us now to question whether or not it was originally conceived for this location. Fonseca's altarpiece is similar to those small devotional triptychs that became popular in the Netherlands at the beginning of the sixteenth century, in which antiphons written on the wings were to complement images of Mary or Jesus. The purpose of these kinds of

66. «Por todas partes campea el escudo de cinco estrellas, blasón de la casa Fonseca, testimoniando su desprendimiento... y tal es la profusión de estos que parece como si la catedral entera debiera su fundación a este magnánimo prelado (the five star coat of arms of the prelate is everywhere, silent witness of his generosity... and it is present so widely along the whole Cathedral that it is as if the whole building was his commission),» wrote the Spanish scholar MARIANO ALCOCER MARTÍNEZ: *Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca*, p. 23. Fonseca's emblem should not be confused with that of Sancho de Rojas, bishop appointed in 1403, which is visible on the first constructive stages of the cathedral. Even if on stone they could look the same because they both have five stars, the difference in dates and color (Rojas' coat of arms includes blue stars, whereas Fonseca's presents five red stars against a yellow background) allows us to identify correctly the two different men involved. The cloister was built by Juan Gil de Hontañón, who received the first payment for 70,000 *maravadíes* in November 1505 (1505, Actas de cabildo: Libro 34, 129r, AHCP). The Chapter Room was first used in November 11, 1510 (1510, Actas de Cabildo: Libro 35, 262r, AHCP).

67. The Netherlandish painter arrived in Palencia in 1509. The contract, which includes a diagram of the whole iconographic program, is preserved. See 1509, Acervo Histórico: Documento 89, AHCP.

68. The *trascoro*, and thus, the altarpiece, face the west portal of the cathedral, known as the *San Antolín* gate of the cathedral that opens to the square of similar name. The decoration of this entrance was finished just recently, one reason why it is unlikely that it was used during sixteenth-century ceremonies, despite the fact that the bishop's palace is just in front. The most important portal of the cathedral is that of *Santa María*, also known as the Bishop's gate, that opens south to the *Immaculate* Square. The gate that is more commonly used, even today, however, is that of *San Salvador*, also opening to the south. See SANCHO CAMPO: *La Catedral de Palencia*, p. 18-19.

objects, not larger than 30 cm x 20 cm on average, was to serve for personal devotional practices, complementing the oral prayer by looking at the holy figure represented in the central panel. Even if some of these prayers were popular because of the indulgences attached to them, the artifacts themselves never alluded to such privileges. Many of the examples I have been able to compile are now in Spain, which allows me to consider that this inclusion of «texted wings» was a feature specially made to fit Castilian taste, despite its Netherlandish origin.⁶⁹

The triptych at Palencia is, however, too large for such personal purposes. It seems more likely that the Bishop commissioned the painting while envisioning its use in a private –and small– chapel. This is a feasible possibility, bearing in mind that the artifact is mentioned as *his*, Fonseca's, altarpiece in the discussions with the chapter regarding his final location.⁷⁰ If that were the case, however, in the Bishop's private rooms it would not have been necessary to include a text explaining the indulgences granted to the viewer. Hence, it is worth considering the possibility that the wings –with the inscriptions– were added after the painting was installed in the choir wall in 1513.

Three key elements confirm this hypothesis. First: the triptych's shutters are painted black on the reverse, which is rare for a triptych that was to play a liturgical function and could not be closed at any time during the year.⁷¹ Second: the shutters conceal two of the four small niches of the *trascoro* decoration, leaving them almost invisible. The frame, finely crafted in stone by the workshops of Bartolomé Solorzano and Juan de Ruesga,⁷² seems to have been made only for the central area of the triptych, without the wings (Figure 4). The third and definitive element that reinforces the hypothesis of the addition

69. See ROSARIO INÉS GRANADOS SALINAS: «Oraciones Tangibles. Relación de texto e imagen en las prácticas devocionales en torno a diez trípticos neerlandeses» in *La Imagen Sagrada y Sacralizada. Memorias del XXVIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, México, UNAM, 2008. In that paper I considered in detail three triptychs with inscriptions on the wings preserved at the *Museo de la Catedral de Burgos* (with no evident connection to Rodríguez Fonseca), and others belonging to *Museo Lázaro Galdiano* (Madrid), *The National Gallery* (London), *The State Hermitage Museum* (St Petersburg), *Musée des Beaux-Arts* (Tournai), *Musée des Beaux-Arts* (Lyon), a private collection in Valencia, and *Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales* (Madrid). After delivering that paper, I found another triptych in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which is the only one that does not have a Marian or Christological image in the mid area; instead, it has an image of Salome receiving the head of St John the Baptist. Most recently, I found another triptych of this kind on top of a lateral altarpiece within the shrine of *Our Lady of La Calle*, patroness of Palencia City. I am grateful to Amparo López Redondo from *Museo Lázaro Galdiano* for all her attention during my visit to the Museum during the summer of 2004.

70. Yarza Luaces suggested that the painting was painted for Rodríguez Fonseca's private devotion and that the altarpiece might have been kept in his palace several years, but he did not consider the implications of the inscription relating the triptych to its public cult. See YARZA LUACES: «Dos mentalidades,» p. 129.

71. See DONALD L. EHRESMANN: «Some Observations on the Role of Liturgy in the Early Winged Altarpiece,» *The Art Bulletin* 64:3 (1982), pp. 359-369.

72. YARZA LUACES: «Dos mentalidades,» p. 126.

of the wings is that the text on the right panel, both in its Latin and Castilian versions, clearly states that indulgences would be granted for those who pray on their knees in front of the altarpiece. Pope Leo XI did not grant forty days of indulgences to the cult and the members of the confraternity of *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows* until 1517.



Fig. 4. Bartolomé Solórzano and Juan de Ruesga (sculptors), painting attributed to Jan Joost van Kalkar, *Cathedral of Palencia's Trascoro*, (detail), 1513-1520 ca.
Palencia Cathedral

Photo: Rosario Inés Granados Salinas

Therefore, if the addition of the text and the wings actually took place, it must have occurred sometime after the indulgences were granted, and probably not much after the *trascoro* decoration was finally finished. Dating the text within that period of time (ca. 1517-1520) would solve the problem, described previously in this paper, about the royal title applied to the archduke Philip the Fair. At that time, it would have been politically acceptable to keep a faithful record of the context of the commission or acquisition of the panels, while praising all rulers in despite of those conflicts they had had more than ten years earlier. At the end, the political struggle between Philip and Fernando de Aragón was nothing but a memory of the past by the time Charles V was already Emperor. The inclusion of Philip's name with his royal title might have

been a grateful reference to the person who was the inspirational model for the Bishop's own devotion to the sorrows of Mary.⁷³

The authorship of the inscription on the left panel remains unclear, and yet it is almost obvious to link it to Rodríguez Fonseca. Even though the text is difficult to read from the nave due its small scale, and even considering the low literacy level among the population, it is clear that the inscription was intended to be intelligible for local audiences.⁷⁴ This purpose is also evident in the reference to *Flandes* as the place of the commissioning of the painting, since this was the name commonly used in Castilian when referring to the Low Countries. The reference to Philip and Juana as *Nuestros Señores* implies that the Castilian version was intended for a Spanish audience, since it is more inclusive and historically accurate.

THE RECEPTION FRAME

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca built a shrine for the cult image he brought with him from the Netherlands. His intention has become clear through the documentary evidence provided by this paper. The cult's acceptance within the Palencia population, however, remains uncertain.⁷⁵ There is no indication of any confraternity explicitly dedicated either to *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows* or to *Nuestra Señora de la Compasión* at the beginning of the sixteenth century, neither in Palencia nor in any other place in Castile. Devotion to the Virgin Mary, though, has been present for a long time in the city, even under other names: the earliest brotherhood dedicated to *Santa María* was established in Palencia as early as 1371.⁷⁶ Despite this lack of evidence, it has been accepted

73. Philip was indeed an inspirational model also in regard to the endowment, since it is known that the archduke established a similar mandate just before leaving for Spain in 1505 in the church of Saint-Sauveur, where the confraternity of *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows* was established in Brussels. He bequeathed some lands and other gifts in exchange for a daily mass that should be sung by children «afin, dit Jean de Coudenberg, que ces voix innocentes ...inclinassent le coeur de cette douce Reine... à intercéder auprès de Dieu en faveur du prince fondateur de cette messe, pour lui obtenir d'être avec toute sa suite protégé contre les vents et les tempêtes et d'arriver sain et sauf au port où il tendait» (SOULIER: *La Confrérie de Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*, p. 44).

74. The inclusion of a Castilian text in a public space is of utmost importance, especially when considering that Antonio Nebrija published the first Castilian Grammar in 1505, the same year mentioned in the right panel.

75. Palencia's population was mainly dedicated to commerce and crafts activities. In the first census made in 1530, of the 7,370 inhabitants it is estimated that around 65% were involved in those activities while only 20% were dedicated to agriculture. LUIS FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍN, S.J. «Palencia en tiempos de Carlos V» in *Historia de Palencia*, Palencia, Excelentísima Diputación Provincial de Palencia, 1990, p. 28.

76. According to a will signed in 1516, there was another confraternity dedicated to *Santa María de la Misericordia* and a third one, known as *Los Sábados*. MIGUEL ÁNGEL LADINO QUESADA: «La época de los Reyes Católicos» in *Historia de Palencia*, p. 11.

that the number of images representing the mourning Mary –known in Spain as *Dolorosa*, *Nuestra Señora de las Angustias*, or *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*– greatly increased in the early modern period.⁷⁷

Little has been determined regarding the reception of the altarpiece.⁷⁸ However, the *trascoro* is so impressive that it is worth imagining the reaction that such a devotional program, which appeals to the full range of senses –through painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and later, tapestries– might have inspired in the visitors to the cathedral. It is worth considering also the reaction that it could have produced in Charles V, not only for the references to his parents and grandparents, but mainly because the painting was linked to a confraternity of which the Emperor was also a member since his earliest youth.⁷⁹

There is no evidence of the Emperor's opinion of the altarpiece, but it is known that he visited the city on at least two occasions, making it likely that he admired the Netherlandish artifact during those times. The first visit took place in August 1522,⁸⁰ when Charles V was in Palencia to judge the leaders of a revolt organized by members of the nobility who perceived him as a foreign ruler with no right to govern them. Rodríguez Fonseca was part of the Royal Council in charge of the public judgment, so it is plausible that they attended Saturday mass at the Cathedral, probably together, at least once during one of the twenty days the trial lasted.⁸¹ Five years later, Charles arrived in Palencia for

77. The devotion to the Seven Sorrows was closely related to that of the Seven Joys of Mary, of which much more evidence survives in Spain. I appreciate the comments that Professor Luis Girón Negrón made to me on this matter. See WILLIAM A. CHRISTIAN: *Apparitions in late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981; and MANUEL TRENS: *María. Iconografía de la Virgen en el arte español*, Madrid, Plus-Ultra, 1946, especially pp. 191 to 241). F. G. Holweck, in the entry to the «Seven Sorrows' feasts» in the electronic version of the Catholic Encyclopedia, suggested the possibility that the devotion grew in relation to the sadness of Juana de Castilla, crazy indeed after the death of her husband Philip the Fair in 1506. The interpretation is simply too beautiful to be taken seriously. See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14151b.htm>, first consulted on May 1, 2003.

78. Perhaps one of the most vivid reactions is Antonio Ponz' recorded in his *Viaje de España*, where he describes the triptych as follows: «[es] un cuadro del que se hace mucho aprecio. El asunto es *Nuestra Señora Dolorosa* y san Juan consolándola...alrededor se ven pintados siete asuntos de la pasión...es cierto que según el estilo de la época, es cosa acabadísima y muy devota (it is a painting that is highly valuable. The topic is *Our Lady of Sorrows* with St John comforting her. It has around it seven scenes of the passion. It is true that according to the style of the time, it is a well made and devout painting).» ANTONIO PONZ: *Viaje de España*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1947 (first published in 1772), p. 992.

79. Bear in mind that those indulgences mentioned on the triptych's right panel were actually granted only after Charles personally asked the Pope for them.

80. 1522, *Actas de Cabildo*: Libro 36, 63r, AHCP.

81. Charles stayed in Palencia from August 5 until the 24th (see JEAN DE VANDENESSE: «Chronicle of Charles V» in *Collection des voyages des souverains des Pays-Bas*, p. 33). For more on the conditions of the revolt, which began the last week of May, 1520, and ended with the battle of Villalar on April 23, 1521, see J. H. ELLIOTT: *Imperial Spain 1469-1716*, London, Penguin Books, 1990 (first published 1963), pp. 135-149, and LUIS FERNÁNDEZ MARTIN S.J.: «Palencia en tiempos de Carlos V,» pp. 23-36.

the second time. That year of 1527 is when the Emperor and his court stayed longer in the city, escaping from the plague that was devastating Valladolid, where he was then living.⁸² Charles was in Palencia for a third time in 1534, but only briefly, thus making it less likely that he paused once again to admire the artifact, that object linked to the Netherlands in so many ways, as was the Emperor himself.

CONCLUSION

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca acquired the *Nuestra Señora de la Compasión* devotion and painting in the Netherlands, while he was acting as ambassador of the Catholic monarchs. It is not known when or exactly how he commissioned the panels, but there is no doubt about their place of manufacture, after judging their style. He acquired the image in order to honor the seven sorrows of Mary, just after he joined a most important confraternity closely linked to the court and the man responsible for the cult's dissemination.

Juan Rodríguez Fonseca was appointed bishop of Palencia while he was in Brussels for the second time. Hence, it is feasible to link both events in his life –the assignment to the rich bishopric and his devotion to *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows*. This connection is shown in the decision to officially enter the city on the feast day of the cult, but more importantly in his creation in 1513 of an endowment also linked to the cult. Accordingly, in that year he determined that this Castilian cathedral was to be the final setting for his altarpiece. When Bishop Rodríguez Fonseca decided that the location of both the altarpiece and the endowment was to be the *trascoro*, a most central area within the building, it was with a clear intention of creating a shrine for that devotion with which he became acquainted in the Low Countries.

It is likely that the two wings that now complete the triptych were added to the altarpiece at some point between 1517 and 1520. The inscriptions made manifest the close relation that the triptych had with the Netherlandish confraternity founded by Jean de Coudenberg, while preserving the memory of the donor and explaining to local audiences the conditions in which its commissioning took place. More importantly, the text written on the shutters allows the viewer to understand the triptych's public function and thus its making and meaning. Art historians have normally taken the information inscribed on it as a starting point for their research, without considering the ways the image interacts with the text and the ways it informs us about the life of the object itself. My aim in this paper has been to understand the triptych

82. For the royal entry, see 1527, *Actas de Cabildo*: libro 36, 258r, AHCP. The exact days of his sojourn were August 26-28 and 30-31, September 1-25 and 27-30, October 1-9. See VANDENESSE: «Chronicle of Charles V.»

as a whole, as a combination of two different structures –text and image– that complement each other. A full comprehension of the altarpiece also needs to take into account the full program of display that was built around it. Considering all the above-mentioned elements around the triptych finally allows us to recreate the magnificent way in which it was used and perceived in order to create a powerful religious experience that was to remove all sorrows from Bishop Fonseca's eternal life. ●

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION, ENDOWMENT OF JUAN RODRÍGUEZ FONSECA
ARCHIVO HISTÓRICO DE LA CIUDAD DE PALENCIA, DOCUMENTO 1248
NOVEMBER, 1513

Porque se ha de acentar por virtud del poder que yo os doy para las memoryas que yo quiero hazer/en las espladas del coro de my iglesia de Palencia es lo siguiente/Que lo primero es q *se ha de hazer un altar en las espaldas/del coro nuevo* de la dicha nuestra santa iglesia y *en el tengo yo/de poner un retablo a mi costa de la historia de nuestra/ señora de la compasión y esta ha de ser el nombre y vocacion del altar/Yten* los reverendos dean y cabildo nuestros hermanos/han de *dezir ally cada sabado de mañana una mysa/cantada* con sus organos a nuestra señora y *han de estar/a ella con sus habitos* los beneficiados según el tipo/y la pitanca que de ella se repartiese an de gozar/los presentes ynteresentes y no otro alguno/Yten han de decir en el mysmo altar los dichos reverendos/dean y cabildo nuestros hermanos *una salve cantada/solemne* con sus organos y los beneficiados han de *estar bestidos con sus sobrepellizes hechos dos coros /de rodillas delante de nuestra señora por la nave que esta adelante del altar y han de tener en medyo/la escalera que descende a la cueva del byenaventurado martir señor san antolin* y de dezir el/ARCHIpreste con su capa una oración de nuestra señora/en la conmemorazion de señor san antolin

+parecio repartir a estas dos memoryas *nos. les ave/mos de dar treinta mil maravadies de renta* cada año/en prestamos en anexados o en otra manera de renta/o ytem en uno o parte en otro de manera que valgan los/dichos treinta mil maravadies los quales se han de re/partir a las dichas dos memoryas con tiempo que para/lo de la salve repartan 3 maravadies cada una y en/cada una doscientos que son veynte y mil maravadies/y los Maravadies se repartan en las vigalias de las /fiestas de nuestra señora porque han de ser mas/que en esas por que todas vengan (Foja 1)

+ ntra señora de la O	iiii
+ purificación	iiii
+anunciación	iiii
+visitación	iiii
+ asunción	iiii
+natividad	iiii
+presentación	iiii
+concepción	iiii

En tanto que se les da la renta an de librarse a dicho/en a nuestros oficiales y han de ser a voluntad del cabildo/sy quisieren que se les pague cada sabado lo que mora/o por meses o por tercios y hase de decir a tal /hora que la tañan antes un rato y la digan y dicha /se acabe a la hora que tengan al ave marya acabada/la salve de mañana que ha de ser quando se ponga el sol/Juan Episcopus COMIS palentinus

Asy mismo dezimos que *porque asy plaze a nuestro señor/aunque dexemos la posesion de la Nuestra Santa Iglesia de Palencia/tenemos voluntad de acabar el trascoro, que hazemos /la dicha/memoria y acabaremos el trascoro.* Contando que el/entrada de la cueva del glorioso martir santo Antolin/antes del escalera y baxa a *la cueva sea para sepultura y enterramientos/de la persona que nosotros quisieramos* si que desde agora /los reverendos nuestros hermanos dean y cabildo de la dicha nuestra Santa /Iglesia lo hayan por bien.

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f Foja 5 (added page to the booklet)

Reverendos nuestros muy caros y mados hermanos Rescebimos la letra y me/mo-rial que con el maestrescuela nuestro criado nos imbiates y *avemos/avido plazer que seaya comencado a desir la missa y salve Regina como/lo ordenamos* y esperamos plaziendo a dios de acabar mas cumplida/mente y cerca de las dubdas que teneis en la manera del dezirle y sobre/el gasto de la cera y otras cossas contenidas en el dicho memorial muy/presto embiaremos la determinación dello al canonigo carvajo para que/la platique con vosotros y se asiente lo que en todo se ha de hazer y por/quel maestrescuela esta ocupado en cosas de nuestro servicio y no puede/yr a complir su residencia mucho cargo y plazer rescibiremos que le/prorroguéis la licencia que le distes por algunos dias nuestro señor vuestras/reverendas personas aya en su guarda de *Madrid xv de hebrero mdxiiii*

Juan Episcopus COMIS palentinus

