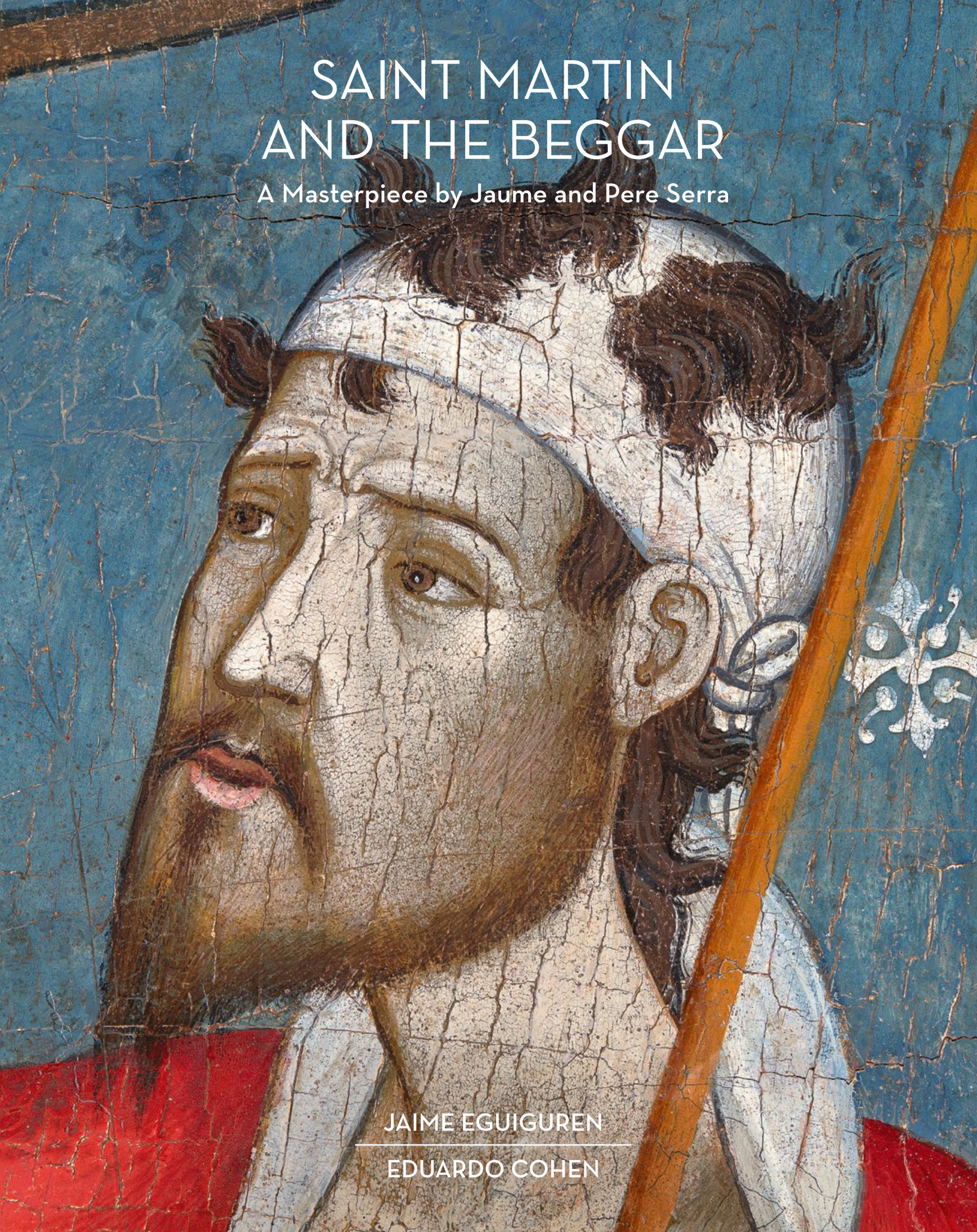

SAINT MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR

A Masterpiece by Jaume and Pere Serra

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Cover. Jaume and Pere Serra. The face of the beggar. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar.*

Frontendsheets. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar.*

Backendsheets. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar.*

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

SAINT MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR

A Masterpiece by Jaume and Pere Serra

ALBERTO VELASCO GONZÁLEZ

FOREWORD

The work I am presenting in this publication, *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, is an impressive compartment from a Gothic altarpiece painted in Barcelona in the second half of the 14th century. It is an extraordinary painting on a number of levels. Firstly, because it is the work of Jaume and Pere Serra, two of the most prominent painters in Catalan Gothic art. Secondly, because it stands as a unique and previously unseen work in traditional historiography. And finally, it is of particular note due to the great visual impact it creates when looked upon, due to the forcefulness and elegance of its figures, the plasticity of the subject depicted and the striking effect of the decorative devices used.

The work is also exceptional on account of some of the pictorial processes that Jaume and Pere used in its execution, as highlighted by Rafael Romero and Adelina Illán's magnificent technical study, which concludes this book in the form of an appendix. This is the first piece of research of its kind into the painting of the Serra brothers, and one of its achievements is to have successfully demonstrated that the completion of the work involved the use of mosaic gold, a material that was by no means common in the painting of altarpieces during the Hispanic Gothic period.

The book you have before you is, without doubt, the foremost publication to date on the Serra brothers, who ran the most important altarpiece workshop in the Crown of Aragon during the second half of the 14th century. And it is as such that I would like to offer my congratulations to Dr. Alberto Velasco Gonzàlez, who apart from carrying out an extremely detailed study from multiple points of view, including the work's attribution and a stylistic and iconographic analysis, has also taken the opportunity to present a new vision of the artistic output of the Serra brothers, putting forward new suggestions that constitute a major contribution to the history of Medieval Hispanic painting.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

CONTENTS

JAUME SERRA AND PERE SERRA

Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain), around 1375-85

SAINT MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR

Egg-based tempera over pinewood panel
134 x 145,5 cm

Provenance
Laurent Horny Collection (2018); heirs of Laurent Horny.
Jaime Eguiguren, Art & Antiques Gallery

INTRODUCTION

The altarpiece compartment we are studying here is a singular work of genius from one of the most prominent pictorial workshops of the second half of the 14th century in Catalonia (fig. 1), run by the brothers Jaume and Pere Serra. Having belonged to the Laurent Horny collection for years, the work is now being publically revealed for the first time, and it does so accompanied by a study that attempts to shed light on its authorship and historical-artistic relevance in the context of 14th-century Catalan painting. The saga of the Serra brothers is, without any doubt whatsoever, the most important chapter in Gothic Catalan painting during the second half of the 14th century, and so the public uncovering of a previously unseen work by these painters is most certainly cause for celebration and for making further advances in research.

There were four Serra brothers working in Barcelona from approximately 1350 until 1405. Together, they represent a fairly atypical case in the history of medieval painting in the Crown of Aragon, given they were four sons of the Barcelona-based tailor, Berenguer Serra, married to a certain Suana, who devoted themselves to the same trade, the painting of altarpieces. Serra senior is recorded as having died on 17 July 1350, according to a document in which Francesc claims to be his son and sole heir.[1] Of the four sibling painters, Francesc was the oldest, and there are documentary references to him between 1350 and 1362, dying in February of the latter year. Four years earlier we find records relating to his brother Jaume, for whom we have documentary references up until 1389, the year he drew up his will. As we shall see, he must have died that same year.

Pere was the third brother about whom we have recorded information, spanning the period from 1357, when he started his apprenticeship in the workshop of the painter Ramon Destorrents, until 1405. The date of his death much have been between that year and 1408, when he is recorded

as deceased. The last of the brothers was Joan, about whom we have limited information between 1365 and 1386. He was without doubt the least prominent painter in the family, to judge by the documents. He worked with his brothers, but never played a major role contracting works.[2] A fifth member needs to be added to the painterly dynasty, Francesc Serra II, the son of the eldest brother, for whom we have documentary records between 1362, just before his father died, and 1396. In any case, despite being initially active in Barcelona, by 1379 he is recorded as residing in Valencia, where he lived and worked for the rest of his life.[3]

Who, then, is the author of the panel we are examining here? Its style corresponds to a phase in the Serra brothers' activity in which Jaume and Pere were working together in the same workshop. Since the first studies into the Serras started to appear in the early 20th century, it has become generally accepted that the four sibling painters worked in what we could describe as a family workshop. In other words, a business that was managed in turn by each member of the clan. However, in this book we are going to attempt to show that this was not the case, and that in the 1350-62 period, the initial stage dominated by Francesc and Jaume Serra, both brothers ran different workshops, despite the fact that they might have worked together on individual projects, with each one remaining independent. The style of the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel does not tally with the works the Serras were carrying out at that time, so we must assume that it was not undertaken during that period.

However, and as we will be analyzing in the relevant section, the style of the panel does match that of works we shall be presenting here as joint works by Jaume and Pere, who started to work together after 1362, when Francesc, the oldest brother, died. Their working relationship would certainly last until Jaume's death, around 1389. It is during this period of time that the altarpiece to which the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel belongs must have been painted. These were 27 years of combined work by the two brothers which, judging by the works that have survived today, allow for a multitude of wide-ranging readings and interpretations that are not always definitive. At times it is easy to intuit the styles of both artists working side by side on the same altarpiece, but on many occasions differentiating which work corresponds to which brother is a challenging task.

Within the total surviving oeuvre, we shall see that some of the Serra brothers' paintings stand apart from other works we must consider as being strictly contemporary. It is as such that the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel presents a style that does not entirely fit in with other works such as the altarpiece that Fontaner de Glera commissioned for the monastery of Sijena (Huesca) towards the end of the 1370s, or the one that Martín de Alpartir commissioned Jaume Serra to make for the monastery of the Santo Sepulcro (Holy Sepulcher) in the city of Zaragoza around 1381. Nor does it share quite the same style as the *Altarpiece of Saint Julian and Saint Lucy* ordered by Oria and Sancho de la Foz in around 1384 for their family chapel in the cloisters of the abovementioned monastery in Zaragoza. The same also goes for other works of great quality that have been ascribed to the Serra brothers, as is the case with an *Adoration of the Shepherds* housed at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, whose particularly monumental format could also serve to explain these differences.[4] It is as such that the depiction of figures of large dimensions in compartments whose measurements stray from the norm, as with this panel and that of the *Saint Martin* altarpieces, may act as an element that ultimately shows us a different Jaume and Pere Serra. There is no doubt that these works were made in their workshop, under their supervision and with their involvement, but the end result provides a contrast with works of a smaller format.

What reason could there be for altarpieces undertaken within more or less the same timeframe to present such marked stylistic differences? The most likely reason is that the workshop managed by Jaume and Pere Serra, the most important one in the Crown of Aragon of the day, received more than its fair share of commissions which needed to be carried out with due diligence. Time constraints and the need to comply with contractual terms and conditions agreed with

clients meant the brothers had to surround themselves with collaborators and workshop employees, whose work would ensure deadlines were met to optimal standards of quality. The involvement of these hired workers is without doubt one of the elements lending different stylistic nuances to different works coming out of one single workshop receiving commissions not just in Barcelona, but from different towns across Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia. We have precise documentary records for some of these, as is the case with Bartomeu Franch, who we know was working for Jaume Serra in 1386. On other occasions we can intuit the involvement of relatively unknown artists who appear on the documentary fringes of the family. In this context, it is necessary to understand the way the workshop functioned, at full steam and at its height, in order to comprehend the stylistic incongruences that appear from one work to the next. This is a key aspect for understanding not just the nature of the work that concerns us here, but also Jaume and Pere Serra's entire professional careers.

What do we know about the altarpiece that included the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel? The truth is we know hardly anything at all. This panel is, today, the sole known proof of the existence of said altarpiece, as it cannot be associated with any other ensemble work attributed to the Serra brothers. We can rule out the idea the panel may have been an autonomous item, given all the signs are that it must have been part of an altarpiece made up of different compartments. Its system of construction, moreover, is characteristic of this kind of work, as explained in the

Fig. 1. Catalan Atlas, by Cresques Abraham. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Fig. 2. Laurent Horny, collector.

technical study by Rafael Romero and Adelina Illán (Icono I&R), which readers can find at the end of this book as an appendix. Its almost square format is not odd for a Serra brothers' altarpiece, as we shall attempt to demonstrate, and its iconography may point to its belonging to an ensemble including other scenes from the life of Saint Martin of Tours. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this work is that, today, it is one of the few examples of gothic panel paintings in Catalonia with this sort of iconography and, without doubt, its emergence makes it the oldest one known. As we will see in the section devoted to iconography, the episode involving the beggar at the gates of Amiens was already present in Catalan works from the Romanesque period (sculpture and mural painting), but no examples of 14th-century panel paintings were known. This is therefore an added value that the work has, and which we should bear in mind.

The *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel cannot be linked to any of the numerous Serra commissions for which we have documentary records thanks to the research of historians such as Josep Maria Madurell who, in the mid-20th century, published the great documentary body of work that now enables us to be fairly confident in tracing the trajectory of each member of the family. In any case, it is probable that the altarpiece it belonged to was painted for a church in Catalonia, the region in which the Serra brothers preferred to work, although we cannot rule out the possibility it came from a church in Aragon or Valencia, where we have documentary evidence that Jaume and Pere Serra also worked in that period. One clue shedding light on who may have been behind the commission is found in the heraldic emblems that feature at the top of the panel. This, as we shall see, included a canting coat of arms, or a graphic representation of the surname of its owner, a fountain in this case. Whoever paid for the work clearly wanted his/her personal escutcheon to be depicted in a particularly visible place, but was also interested in the subject represented (a saintly act of charity par excellence) being associated with his/her personage and family through heraldry.

Until recently, the work we are studying was part of an important French collection; that of the heirs of the French doctor Laurent Horny (1922-2000) (fig. 2). Passionate about linguistics, he gave papers on the French language across the globe, while building up a wide-ranging collection including some Hispanic medieval paintings, such as the one we are introducing here. In his lifetime he purchased a number of castles throughout France and then changed tack, devoting himself to the world of interior decorating and antiques, moving between Paris and Cannes, thereby satisfying his numerous portfolio of clients from all over the world. In the mid-70s he settled on the Côte d'Azur, in a house he bought from none other than Max Ernst. His last acquisition was a medieval *chateau* in the Périgord, which became famous, appearing in numerous home decor magazines. He was a man of exquisite tastes, with a particular weakness for the Renaissance and classicism.[5]

SAINT MARTIN AND THE BEGGAR. DESCRIPTION

The depiction portrays the most famous episode from the life of Saint Martin of Tours, being the moment that he cut his cloak (in Latin *paludamentum*) in half to share it with a beggar at the gates to the French city of Amiens (fig. 3). Martin has a golden halo outlined in black, with lobed shapes on the inside, and is seen just in the act of cutting his cloak. The saint's face is delicate and a tad effeminate. His raised position, on horseback, means he is looking down, where the center of the action described in the scene is located. His eyes are half-closed, but we can see his brown irises and delicate black pupils perfectly. Their rounded shape can be made out despite the somewhat almond-shaped form they present. His eyebrows are perfectly arched, the right one joining the nose through an aesthetic and expressive device that was common to medieval painting. His nose is large, yet delicate. His mouth has been simply rendered using two well-defined smudges of crimson, separated by a black line. His chin is not pronounced, but shading lends it volume and presence. Carnation brings out the cheeks. The fact his head tilts to one side allows us to see one side of his face perfectly and how it connects to his neck, executed with simple and plain continuity giving an excellent result. The saint's hair is blond, shoulder-length with a center parting, contrasting with the golden halo. The hair parting creates a triangular shape at the height of his forehead, leaving it mostly visible. The hair that is pulled back behind his ear is equally well executed, forming an undulation that prolongs his ear.

One of the panel's main focuses of attention is the cloak that Martin is about to cut in half and share with the beggar. The outside of the cloak is a particularly vivid and intense red, while the inside presents a whitish, greyish hue, with numerous deep folds. The Saint, who appears in three-quarter pose, turning round, is delicately holding the cloak he intends to share with the beggar in his left hand, while his right hand is holding the sword with which he will cut the fabric. The cloak unfurls generously in parallel to the pictorial plane, already covering part of the beggar's body.

Fig. 3. Jaume and Pere Serra. *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 4 Jaume and Pere Serra. The belt and the scabbard of Saint Martin. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 5. Jaume and Pere Serra. Foot and stirrup of Saint Martin. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Martin of Tours, who according to the sources was a Roman soldier, is hereby transformed into a Gothic-period nobleman presenting a number of attributes that identify him as such. The first is his clothing, which though sober is clearly that of a medieval knight. Martin is wearing a sort of short tunic like a cassock, also red, buttoned from top to bottom at the front. All of its trimming are finely and delicately adorned with gold leaf stuck with mordant. His blue stockings, which appear to be silk, help to heighten the figure's highly slim and stylized image. This type of dress was typical of the style of the Crown of Aragon during the 14th century, originating from the court of the Duke of Berry.[6] The subject's nobility and elegance are highlighted by other *pro ornatu persone* elements worth noting. Just below the waist he wears a black leather belt, fastened by a gold buckle crowned by a sort of rivet, also gold (fig. 4). His scabbard, also leather, hangs from his belt. At the top of the scabbard, just next to its locket, there is a gilt trim. The sword has a long blade decorated with silver leaf with gold effect finish, as are its rounded pommel and cross-guards. The saint's black leather boots are equally elegant, with their pointed toes and laced with little red cords with studs. Although we can only see the one on the left, the saint's foot sits in a stirrup made of polished metal leaf (fig. 5).

The imposing horse that Martin is riding is one of the most striking elements of the whole composition, and it also helps to raise the social condition of his persona. It is depicted passant, in movement, with its front right foot raised. Its proportions are accurately executed, transmitting a sense of *verismo*, in spite of the rigidity of the front left leg. Its mane is perfectly combed and arranged, as is its tail, which falls gently down the back. The painter placed painstaking emphasis on his depiction of the harnesses that embellish the saddle, imitating the cordovan leather with which these accessories were made, clearly drawing on real objects that he was used to seeing (fig. 6). The saddle is olive green with lobed edges, which is repeated in similar fashion on the inside to mark the seat. It is held in place by a breast girth, which we can see at the back, and which is plaited and grey. The saddle cloth covering the chest also presents lobed shapes and is in the same green color as the reins, which are joined to the bit, which the rider uses to control his steed (fig. 7). This is a structure of metallic appearance thanks to being gilded

Fig. 6. Jaume and Pere Serra. Riding saddle. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 7. Jaume and Pere Serra. Horse's bit. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 8. Jaume and Pere Serra. One of the side rods of the horse's bit. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

with mordant. Coming down from the bit are two straight parallel rods joined by a lower rod, from which a double chain hangs with a series of links leading to the reins. All of the abovementioned structure is outlined in black. The bit, which is inside the horse's mouth and not visible, is joined to two side bars which are also gilded, with only the left one being visible (fig. 8). It is decorated with geometric motifs painted in black and seems to be joined to the chinstrap, the leather strap that goes around the jaw of the horse and then up until it joins the horse collar and frentera. These are decorated elements with gilt overlay and the occasional harness pendant, such as the one hanging from the frentera above the horse's forehead (fig. 9).

The second person in the scene is the beggar with whom the Saint shares his cloak, a figure that Martin of Tours' hagiographic legend has identified with Christ (fig.10). The Beggar/Christ is carrying a large staff or cane to help him walk, which he is holding in his left hand. He is completely naked and, until the appearance of the saint, his body was only covered with undergarments or short breeches. He wears a bandage on his head, tied at the back, although not particularly tightly, given that various locks of wild, unkempt hair can be seen sticking out between the folds (fig. 11). This way of depicting the head and hair reinforce the subject's wretched state and denote a certain realism. His brow is furrowed and his eyes half open. His nose is long and in proportion, as is his ear, rounded and well structured. It presents the same characteristics as that of Saint Martin, with the cartilage depicting the parts with great similitude. One prominent feature in the middle of the bowl of the outer ear is a curious motif in the shape of a fixed wrench making up the anti-helix and its two branches, the upper and lower. This approach to depicting such a specific element may be observed in other painters of the day, as a sort of period signature motif.

Furthermore, the Christ/Beggar's face presents extremely powerful shading to great visual effect. This is aimed at highlighting certain parts and encouraging a specific perception of the face; in particular the eye sockets and the beard area. The idea, in short, is to show a pained man in the midst of his suffering. His beard, in contrast, is by no means unkempt. It is outlined from the sideburns area and closely-trimmed, going down the side of the face until it reaches his chin, where it forks into two. His mouth is pictured half open and presents thin, not particularly fleshy lips. Just above them a rectilinear mandarin-style moustache droops over the sides of his mouth.

The Christ/Beggar's anatomy has been excellently executed. The fact that his left arm is under the cloak denotes a certain representational skill on the part of the painter, in that he uses it to raise the cloak and, thereby, enable Martin to cut it more easily. The beggar's body is neither muscly nor wiry, but that of a man suffering severe hunger, cold and the lack of all comforts. This is reinforced by the use of slight shading in certain areas. The rib cage is not highly pronounced, but marks have been traced out to suggest the pectorals and abdominal area. His stomach is flat but his belly button has been included. It is

Fig. 9. Jaume and Pere Serra. Harness pendant. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 10. Jaume and Pere Serra. The Beggar. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 11. Jaume and Pere Serra. The face of the beggar. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

worth assessing the execution of the hand holding the staff or cane, as thanks to the more pronounced profile and thickness with which it has been sketched, it stands out perfectly on top of the subject's chest. The Christ/Beggar's legs, partially covered by undergarments, are also lacking in muscle tone, looking straight and bony, with scant calves. As a finishing touch, the figure's poverty is heightened by his going barefoot.

The figures of both subjects and the horse take up the entire height and breadth of the compartment. It is a composition in which the monumental figures take all the limelight, positioned in the foreground and on top of two highly-contrasting bands of color which serve to highlight them further. The lower band is of a peculiar hue, a sort of brownish pink, depicting the ground. This has an arid and steppe-like appearance with few natural elements. All we see are a few simply-depicted rocks, and some sprouts of vegetation rendered in black that are also highly schematic (fig. 12). From the line marking the end of the ground starts the area given over to the composition background. The painter chose a blue tone that

inundates three quarters of the surface, allowing the figures to stand out. The choice of said color allows, for instance, the red of Martin's clothing, his cloak in particular, to stand out strongly against the rest of the elements of the composition, monopolizing all of the viewer's attention. An interesting contrast is also attained between the white of the horse and the inside of the Saint's cloak, which demonstrates that the painter was well aware of the effects he was looking for with his choice and the combination of said colors. The flat and uniform nature of the background also helps to lend the figures an almost uniquely leading role, given that the fact that the painter eschewed all the usual gilt background motifs or the depiction of any distant landscape allowed the figures to take center-stage.

Said background is solely decorated with two types of star pattern of differing technical characteristics featuring cruciform rosette motifs (fig. 13). The first are white and executed using pigment. They are made of up a central dot out of which plant stems emerge in the shape of fleurs-de-lis. Some of these include four dots from which curved appendices emerge ending in smaller dots. The second type is identical to the first, only it was executed using a different technical procedure, that of gilt on mordant. Due to the physical characteristics of the materials and their enormous fragility, these other rosettes have been all but lost. Be that is it may, the application of these elements onto the blue background enabled the artist to create a false appearance of a starry sky in an extremely simple manner and yet to marked decorative effect, reminiscent of the neutral backgrounds with geometric elements we often find in manuscript illumination.

In the upper section, cut out against the blue background, we find two identical heraldic escutcheons, which we can only associate with the person who commissioned the altarpiece to which this compartment belonged (fig. 14). The shield in question is of a pointed, rectangular shape, typical of the Crown of Aragon in the medieval era, and is outlined with an outer white line adorning its lobed perimeter. It is reinforced on the inside by a black line. The emblem presiding over the coat of arms is a water fountain with two spouts, and from the bottom of which we can see a jet of water emerge. The golden background of the escutcheon was executed using orpiment, a technical procedure that contrasts with the one used for Saint Martin's halo, mosaic gold, and the gold leaf applied with mordant used for the horse's bit. This combination of different types of gilding was, no doubt, a conscious choice on

Fig. 12. Jaume and Pere Serra. Floral elements. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 13. Jaume and Pere Serra. Rosette star motifs. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

Fig. 14. Jaume and Pere Serra. Heraldic escutcheon. Detail of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*.

the part of the painter, with which he set out to differentiate the three elements, lending each one its own appearance in order to attain a marked visual contrast. It is also worth highlighting that the use of mosaic gold is absolutely exceptional in panel painting from the Hispanic kingdoms' Gothic period, as noted in the study by Rafael Romero and Adelina Illán included in this book.

On the outside, the compartment presents an unoriginal molding that was almost certainly added when the panel was put on the art and antiques market. As is also explained in the aforementioned technical study, said molding covers the panel's entire perimeter border, which is unpainted, confirming that the compartment has not been sawn along any of its sides. This margin was originally covered by the altarpiece's gilt framework, now lost. It has been possible to confirm all of the above thanks to the physical analysis carried out by said specialists, and the radiographic (RX) images obtained, which have also confirmed the position of the nails that held the bars, arranged in the form of a crosspiece at the back, which gave it stability. These bars have not survived, either, being replaced at some undefined point during the 20th century using cradling, in accordance with previous restauration techniques.

MARTIN OF TOURS. CULT AND ICONOGRAPHY

The various pilgrim routes that crossed Spain during the Middle Ages were the principal means of disseminating the cult of a number of foreign saints, particularly French ones of whom the most notable is Saint Martin of Tours (316-397). Although devotion to Saint Martin spread particularly during the Carolingian period, his cult was documented in the Iberian Peninsula as early as the Visigothic era. Its increasing popularity and dissemination can be located in the context of specific political-historical factors with the Benedictine Order playing a key role.[7]

Saint Martin was a born in Savaria in the diocese of Pannonia (present-day Hungary), but was educated in Ticino in Italy. He was the son of a Roman soldier, and as such was obliged to join the army at the age of 15, serving in Italy and in Gaul. Three years after this an event took place that changed his life. One winter's day in the city of Amiens, Martin saw a poor man asking for alms to protect himself from the cold. Martin took pity on him and cut his cloak in half in order to help the man.[8] The following night Christ appeared to him in a dream, dressed in the same cloak. This vision led Martin to convert to Christianity and to be baptized. He left the army and established a close relationship with Bishop Hilary of Poitiers, who made him his assistant and appointed him an acolyte. Around 370-71, Martin was made Bishop of Tours. He died in 397 in Candes (Indre-et-Loire).

Martin has gone down in history as one of most important evangelizers and opponents of paganism in France, the latter activity associated with his labors as a *Miles Christi* (soldier of Christ). He was considered to have great powers as a healer and exorcist given his notable ability to unmask the devil. For all these reasons, and with the spreading of his cult, he came to be considered an exemplary figure, not just by the faithful but also by subsequent bishops of Tours.[9] The dissemination of the cult of Saint Martin in the medieval period can be partly explained by the devotion to

Fig. 15. Monastery of Sant Martí del Canigó.

Fig. 16. Door of the chapel of the palace of the Aljafería in Zaragoza.

Fig. 17. The chapel of Saint Martin in the Charterhouse of Valldecrist.

him of the humblest sectors of society. He also became the patron saint of knights, riders and pilgrims. In addition, the royal Frankish house adopted him as its patron saint, starting with King Clovis. The relic of Martin's cloak entered the possession of that royal family, who kept it closely guarded in Paris, after which Charlemagne took it to the Palatine Chapel in Aachen. It was exhibited on major festivals and the monarchs swore oaths on it. Until the period of the early Capetians, French monarchs habitually carried it as a standard in battles.[10]

With regard to Catalonia, the cult of the Saint started to become particularly evident during the Carolingian period, with the Benedictine Order playing a key role in its dissemination. Other factors were central to this process of dissemination, such as the considerable French presence throughout the population, which fostered the widespread worship of a number of saints that had become popular on the other side of the Pyrenees, such as Saint Saturnin, Saint Hilary, Saint Mary Magdalene, Saint Gilles and Saint Martin himself. As has been highlighted on numerous occasions, there is no doubt that one of the reasons behind the influence of the Gallic book of saints in Catalonia is the fact that the region once belonged to the Archbishopric of Narbonne, despite the fact that, in the case of Saint Martin, his presence was already documented beforehand. The pilgrim routes running through Catalan territory also played their part, and this is borne out, for instance, in the area's hagionymy, with a large number of places taking their names from saints in locations close to pilgrim routes. Be that as it may, it would appear that the majority of parishes dedicated to Saint Martin had already been founded by the 9th to 11th centuries.[11]

As early as the 11th century, one of the most important Catalan monasteries under the patronage of the Saint from Tours was that of San Martín del Canigó (fig. 15), founded in 1009 by a monk named Sclua, who had arrived from Sant Miquel de Cuixà, and who would become the first abbot, directly appointed in 1014 by Abbot Oliba.[12] It is also worth highlighting Pope Urban II's 1097 papal bull confirming the dependence of the church of Sant Martí de Cervera (Lleida) on the monastery of Ripoll. This church was the predecessor of the current church of Santa María de Cervera, of which there is documentary evidence going back to 1147. Of the original construction it would seem that the tympanum of the door of the church leading onto the cemetery is the only thing that has survived, where we can observe the episode of the dividing of the cloak, dating to the first quarter of the 13th century.[13] This subject was particularly suitable for depiction on church doors given it encouraged charity among the flock for the poor, who used to beg for alms at the doors of places of worship.[14]

With regard to the Late Middle Ages, although worship of the Saint remained fairly strong in parishes and collectives,

Moreu-Rey has emphasized the setback it suffered from the 13th century onwards, when the Saint lost a great part of his image as national symbol with other saints on the rise.[15] However, the aforementioned expert also documented a new resurgence around the middle of the 14th century, for instance, through the celebration of certain festivities and the introduction of benefices in a number of different Catalan cathedrals and parishes.[16] As an example, Villanueva read in a *Consueta* belonging to the cathedral of Girona dated 1360 that, during Lent, the Eucharist of Maundy Thursday was kept "*in armario Sancti Martini cum Sindone munda*", and four candles were placed in front of said wardrobe (armario). Furthermore, in the same cathedral's chapel of Saint Martin, on Good Friday a cross was placed on the pavement so that the faithful could worship it.[17]

The re-emergence of the Saint's cult that took place in the 14th century was also encouraged by the worship of the monarchs, especially Pere the Ceremonious, although there were already appreciable signs in the reign of Pere II, who died in 1285, coincidentally on the day of the feast of Saint Martin.[18] Pere the Ceremonious paid him particular devotion. Apart from the fact that in 1536 he christened his second son Martin, he took the saint as one of his principal defenders and patron saints. This was immediately reflected in the region, and in 1354 Pere placed the Estudio General de Huesca under the protection of San Martín de Valdonsera and Santa María de Salas, "*quem protectorem nostrum in Regnorum*" (our protector in our kingdoms).[19] In Zaragoza the chapel of the Aljafería palace was dedicated to Martin, the Virgin and Saint Nicholas and was remodeled during his reign (fig. 16). Coinciding with the building works, a number of payments are documented in 1339 for painting projects, including around 400 *solidi* paid to the painter Ferrer Bassa for two altarpieces of the Virgin and Saint Martin.[20] Numerous legends also locate Martin in the region of Aragon, including a supposed trip to Spain on the occasion of the Council of Zaragoza, or his presence in the above-mentioned monastery of San Martín de Valdonsera, of which he had been the abbot before he was made Bishop of Tours, according to local legend.[21]

The altarpiece to which the *Saint Martin and the Beggar* panel belonged was painted at a time at which the Saint was highly revered throughout Catalonia. A tradition from Barcelona states that Catalan prisoners liberated by Pedro the Cruel after the war with Pere the Ceremonious had their hands cut off so that they could not defend themselves or work, and were thereby forced to become beggars in order to survive. They formed a confraternity under the protection of Saint Martin, the patron saint of knighthood and of soldiers. The confraternity was founded by the monarch in 1339 and gradually incorporated all beggars with physical deformities or amputations.[22] Pere's devotion for Martin meant that for the rest of the century and until the early years of the 15th century the Saint's cult continued to grow, particularly under Martin the Humane, who adopted Martin as his particular saint and dedicated a chapel to him in the Charterhouse of Valldecrist (Altura, Castellón) (fig. 17), which houses the important relic of the Saint's head.[23]

Not many relics of Martin are mentioned as being present in the Crown of Aragon.[24] Among the most important was his cloak, given that this was the key element in the most celebrated episode in his life, depicted in the present panel. It is known that in 1408 one of the relics of Martin's cloak was housed in the royal treasury of the Aragonese monarchs.[25] A fabric relic (possibly from the cloak) is documented from the 11th century in the monastery of Santa María de Ripoll, although it is not clear if this is the same one that was present in the act of consecration of 1302, when a piece of Martin's cloak that was considered to have performed numerous miracles was present.[26]

Aside from the cloak, another iconic object of Martin's cult was his sword, which explains the fact that King Martin the Humane placed one of his – traditionally said to be the one used for his coronation – under the saint's protection. It is referred to in his will of 1370, which states that a number of swords in his armory should never be separated from the royal treasure, including this one, revealing that he considered them to be more than just a sign of authority. Rather, he considered them an important part of the royal possessions, given that some of them had been used in the defense and conquest of territories. In addition, they were considered to have supernatural powers. The so-called "sword of Saint Martin" is now in the Musée de l'Armée in Paris,[27] and it is significant that the throat of the scabbard should include a depiction of the episode involving the cutting in half of the cloak.

With regard to written sources on the saint's life, the most important is the *Vita Martini* by Sulpicius Severus (ca.360-425),[28] a eulogistic and propagandistic text that inspired subsequent accounts, such as that of Paulinus of Péregueux (ca. 463), Gregory of Tours (538-594), and Venantius Fortunatus (ca.530-600).[29] Various Spanish compilations of *Flos*

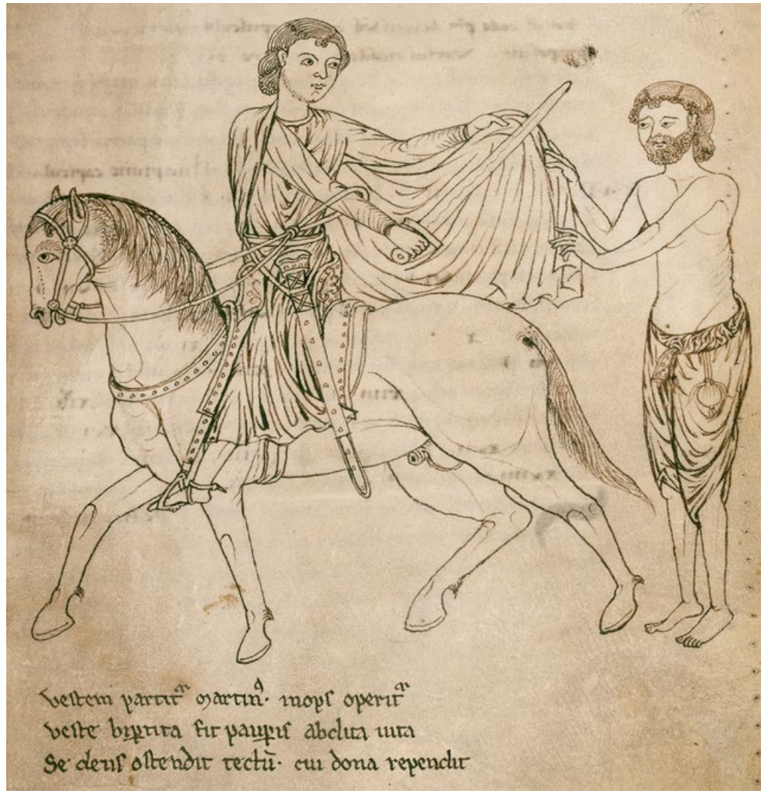

Fig. 18. *Saint Martin and the Beggar*. Manuscript originating from the Tournai area. London, British Library.

Sanctorum should also be mentioned, based on the *Golden Legend* by Iacopo da Varazze,[30] in addition to local works derived from Severus's text. Of all these sources the most important is the last, given that it is one of the earliest known hagiographies.[31] It was used as the basis for accounts of the lives of other saints, particularly bishops, as it presented an ideal synthesis of monastic perfection and pastoral action, resulting in the creation of a prototype that would enjoy enormous subsequent success.[32]

As noted above, the most celebrated scene within the hagiographic cycle of Saint Martin is that of the dividing of the cloak, the *partitio chlamydis*, as it provided the basis for the construction of an iconographic paradigm of charity. As an action in itself, it was not seen as a miracle until the so-called Dream or Vision of Saint Martin took place, the moment when Christ appeared to him dressed in the part of the cloak that he had given to the beggar, who was in fact the Son of God.[33]

With regard to the iconographic development of this episode,[34] the oldest known example is the one included in the *Fuldaer Sakramentar* (University Library of Göttingen, co. theol. 231, fol. 113v, ca.975),[35] from the 10th century, which simultaneously depicts the dividing of the cloak and the subsequent dream. By the Romanesque period there was already a tendency to separate them

despite the unity they required, given that they complemented each other in terms of meaning. There is a codex housed in the British Library (ms. Add MS 15219, fol. 12r), thought to be from the second half of the 12th century, and originating from the Tournai area,[36] in which we find a depiction of the scene that is compositionally similar and including comparable iconography to that of the Serra brothers' panel (fig. 18). That means that certain models that were current during the Romanesque period remained invariably intact during subsequent centuries. This trend became particularly pronounced with the popularization of the episode from the 13th century onwards and reflects the interpretations of the texts by Fortunatus and Paulinus of Périgueux as, according to Sulpicius Severus, Saint Martin should be depicted standing and without his horse. This led Sauvel to establish three iconographic types for this episode: Saint Martin standing, Saint Martin on horseback, and Saint Martin dividing the cloak while standing but accompanied by his horse.[37] Among the earliest examples of the presence of this iconography in the Crown of Aragon are the Romanesque frontals from Sant Martí de Puigbò (Museu Episcopal, Vic), Sant Martí d'Ix (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya) (fig. 19), and Sant Martí de Gia (or Chía) (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya) in the Ribagorza region of Aragon (fig. 20).[38]

In general, the most widely disseminated formula is the depiction of the saint on horseback, with the animal usually shown with rich trappings, as in the *Saint Martin with Beggar* we are studying. The horse is generally one of the principal motifs in the composition, which is organized around it. It is depicted in movement, at a walking gait and with one or more leg raised, as we can see in our painting. This episode is always set outdoors in a reflection of the early hagiographic accounts, which allowed Gothic painters to focus on the depiction of buildings and landscapes with a greater or lesser indication of depth, but this is not our case. Martin is generally richly dressed as a noble or prince, which according to the pictorial convention of the time indicates that he belonged to the Roman army. The same key elements of the account are always emphasized, such as the cloak and sword with which he divided it. The beggar is shown as such; worn and fragile, with few clothes and in some cases with the pilgrim's attributes of a staff, bundle and cockleshell. He is sometimes depicted as a cripple who has had one of his limbs amputated and he may have a cruciform halo that identifies him as Christ, but not always. His tattered appearance powerfully contrasts with the sensation of wealth and luxury conveyed by the Saint's clothing, as we can see in our painting. The action that takes place is always the same, with only minor variations. Martin is shown in action, turning his upper body over his saddle and preparing to cut the cloak in two, as seen in the present work.

Moreu-Rey observed that, around the 11th century, a mystification process took shape around the figure of Saint Martin, leaving to one side the image of him as a fighter who used prayer as his most powerful weapon. Later he would be associated with the image of Saint James the Moor-slayer or, in other words, a champion warrior. This had much to do with the fact that the cavalry adopted him as their patron saint, clearly due to his past as a soldier. It is as such that he has been considered a successor to the Roman protector of the city. At one point all of this would change, with these functions being taken over by other saints, such as Michael or James the Great.[39]

Although Martin of Tours lived in France in the 4th century, in the panel we are studying he is depicted as a refined nobleman of the 14th century. He wears rich clothing and is mounted on a white charger with ornate trappings, while even his expression and gaze transmit magnanimity. Images of this type convey all the splendor and ostentatious finery displayed by the knightly class of

Fig. 19. Altar frontal, originally from Sant Martí d'Ix (detail). Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

this period. These are elegant depictions that idealize the image of the saint as a knight and an authentic medieval prince, albeit without a crown. These images also convey complex and ambivalent messages. Firstly, this is the depiction of a hagiographic episode that focuses on an individual who performed an act of charity by sharing his sumptuous cloak with a beggar. For this reason, and for his numerous other virtues, Martin became an exemplum for medieval knights, offering a model of conduct to be followed. This explains why images of him dressed as a nobleman represent a direct appeal to other members of that social class. Paintings such as the Serras' panel thereby became a type of reflective mirror, projecting not only an image that functioned as a model of behaviour, but also values that should be upheld and respected, such as charity. In addition, the image's moralizing message of a religious type should be considered separately, aiming as it did to convey to society that the knight was a good man who was concerned for the unfortunate and needy. As Carmen Vallejo has observed, the aim was to transform the knight into "[…] an icon, a human prototype who possessed his own ethics and aesthetic, a commitment to an enduring model of behaviour and to the knighthood as an institution that upheld the finest and most commendable virtues […].[40]

The fact that the image of Saint Martin sharing his cloak with a poor man was representative of love for one's fellow man and of charity was decisive in determining its location in specific places, such as the entrance to churches where alms were

Fig. 20. Altar frontal, originally from Sant Martí de Gia. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

habitually given to the poor. It is also to be found at the entrances to charitable institutions and to churches dedicated to the Saint, such as the above-mentioned chapel in the royal palace in Zaragoza. Furthermore, given that Martin was also the patron saint of pilgrims and walkers, sculptures and reliefs on this subject were commonly found on the gateways of cities and villages. These locations serve to remind us that the episode in question took place *ad limina*; before a city gateway.[41]

Although the saint is seen in our painting exercising a type of virtue, depictions of these knightly saints were always associated with the fight against evil, hence the fact that Martin is considered a *Miles Christi* together with Saint George, who defeated the dragon, and Saint Michael, who is usually depicted fighting the devil.[42] In the case of Martin, the different acts of charity recorded in his hagiographic legend mitigated the violent image projected by knightly saints in some of their heroic deeds, for which reason the depiction of the cloak being cut into two is a representation of the altruistic intention behind said action. By giving away his cloak he was institutionalizing a Christian model of behaviour to be followed by ordinary people.[43] In addition, it should be remembered that images in which a saint removes "mortal and transient" clothing in order to be subsequently rewarded with a vision (such as Saint Martin's) promising eternal life is a *topos* in medieval hagiographic literature.[44]

Catalan documentation provides certain information regarding altarpieces dedicated to Saint Martin that were carried out during the medieval period, although the references we have are all from later than the time at which our Serra brothers' panel was being completed. On 4 May 1394 Jaume Cabrera was commissioned to paint an altarpiece dedicated to the Saint for the church of Sant Martí de Calonge (Girona), with the work being completed two years later.[45] At the same time, in 1396 to be exact, Lluís Borrassà signed a contract with the priest Joan Humiach to complete an altarpiece dedicated to the Saints Michael and Martin for Sant Joan de Valls (Tarragona). Apart from the central scene featuring the two Saints, where Martin was to appear "*com a bisba, ab la crossa en la una mà, e son mitra al cap*" (as a bishop, with the crozier in one hand and the miter on his head), these were to include three episodes from each of the subjects' lives. While those of the archangel were specified

Fig. 21. Workshop of Blasco de Grañén. *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, originally from the altarpiece of the hermitage of San Martín de Riglos. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

in the commission, those of the life of Saint Martin were left to the painter's discretion.[46] We also lack information concerning the scenes to be included in the aforementioned altarpiece painted by Pere Serra in around 1400-01 for the monastery of Santa María de las Puel·les, dedicated to the Saint from Tours and Saint Catherine,[47] along with those of the main altarpiece of San Martí de Palafrugell (Girona), commissioned from Lluís Borrassà on 11 December 1414 for 135 florins. Regarding the latter commission we do know what was to be depicted in the central section: "*la image de sanct Mertí, assegut en sa cadira, vestit com a bisbe, ab alguns bisbes que'l leven bisbe*" (the image of Saint Martin, sat on his throne, dressed as a bishop, with a number of bishops consecrating him).[48] Nor do we have any information on the scenes of the altarpiece dedicated to Saint Martin that the executors of Francisco Almena commissioned from Jaume Cabrera, also in 1414, for the church of Sant Just in Barcelona.[49]

On 2 August 1469 the painter from La Seu d'Urgell, Bartomeu Bassa, was asked to finish an altarpiece dedicated to the Saint that had been contracted with the judge from the viscountcy of Castellbó,[50] while ten years later we find documentary records of Miquel Torell, a painter from Girona, signing an agreement to carry out the main altarpiece of Cassà de la Selva (Girona). For the central compartment he was asked to paint a Saint Martin "(…) *qui stara com a bisbe, stant en son pontifical* (…)" (who looked like a Bishop, in pontifical dress). Once again, we know nothing about the side wings, for which he was commissioned "(…) *vuyt istories, ultra quella del mig, dels miracles de sent Merti e de la sua vida* (…)" (eight stories, in addition to the central one, with the miracles of Saint Martin and his life).[51] Although in an Aragonese context, and quite a lot later than the Serra brothers' panel that we are studying here, it is worth mentioning a contract from 18 February 1445, in which Blasco de Grañén was commissioned to complete an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Martin for the church of Santa María de la Puebla in Albortón.

The contract specifies that "*Said altarpiece's main section feature Saint Martin on horseback, showing, with those at the side depicting images of Saint Martin (...) Also, that over said images of Saint Fabian and Saint Sebastian, there be other episodes from the life of Saint Martin. Also, in the lower bench, that there be five stories from the life of Saint Martin.*" The document reveals a widely developed iconographic cycle where on this occasion we do indeed find that the painter has been asked to depict the cloak story.[52]

With regard to surviving Gothic Catalan works that depict the story of *Saint Martin and the Beggar*, there is one question we should highlight from the outset. The aforementioned crisis experienced by the cult of the Saint as recorded in the 13th century must have had an impact on his iconography, which would go to explain why not many examples have survived from the period. We have also seen how, during the 14th century, worship of the saint underwent a significant resurgence thanks, in part, to the devotion professed for Saint Martin by the royal house. It is as such that the aforementioned altarpiece dedicated to the saint that Pere the Ceremonious commissioned from Ferrer Bassa just before 1339 for the chapel of the Aljafería palace could be an example of what we are talking about.[53] All the same, no examples have survived of panel paintings from that period, whether Catalan or Aragonese, that could shed light on the development of the iconography of the cloak episode, meaning that the Serra brothers' panel we are examining here is a genuinely rare and priceless discovery enabling us to assess the terms in which the Amiens episode was being depicted at the time.

The closest example in chronological terms would be one of the compartments from the *Altarpiece of Saint Martin and Saint Ambrose* in Barcelona cathedral, a piece by Joan Mates from around 1411-1414.[54] Another work we might mention, this time from Aragon, is the *Altarpiece of Saint Martin* from the church in Torralba de Ribota (Zaragoza), a piece signed by Benito Arnaldín from around the same time as the previous one.[55] However, the differences between these and the Serra brothers' panel are significant, given the two altarpieces mentioned above were adapted to what would be commonplace in the 15th century; a type of depiction in which the walled city of Amiens now appears in the background of the composition, and where the luxury and sophistication of Martin's attire are far more obvious, both in the clothing worn by the Saint and in the horse's trappings. This sort of image would proliferate during the 15th century, and it is in Aragon that we can find the most prominent examples, among which it is worth noting the central section from the *Altarpiece of Saint Martin* from the church in Riglos (Huesca) (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya), executed around 1440 in the workshop of Blasco de Grañén (fig. 21).[56] These are images seeking a marked contrast between the luxury surrounding Martin and the poverty and plight of the beggar, in order to highlight the charitable and magnanimous nature of the saint.

PAINTING IN BARCELONA AFTER THE BLACK DEATH

What was the situation of painting in the Barcelona of the Serra brothers? Following one of the most important epidemics to ravage Europe in the Middle Ages, the Black Death of 1348, the pictorial workshops of the Crown of Aragon were reorganized and painting changed. The hardships resulting from the increased level of mortality brought with them major socio-economic changes at European level, and all of this combined to necessitate a paradigm shift in aesthetic that affected a large part of the continent. Important master artists disappeared while others arrived on the scene. A certain kind of painting came to an end, while another was born, dependent on its predecessor and yet profoundly renovated.[57]

These were years of change and, as we were saying, they did not only affect matters concerning people, but also the artistic language. The Italianizing style of Ferrer Bassa and his son Arnau, deeply influenced by the painting of Sienna from the early 1300s of Simone Martini and company, lost its dominance over the Barcelona panorama, which shifted towards different approaches, equally Italianate, but influenced from 1350 onwards by the art of painters active in the Papal court of Avignon, such as Matteo Giovanetti. The Papal environment became a focus for a highly significant avant-garde pictorial renovation, which saw the synthesis of previous Italianizing trends and new emerging ones. The Italian influence persisted, but now focussed from a different point of view that would hold firm until the end of the 14th century and the arrival of the International Style.[58]

In Catalonian territories, which had moved towards the absolute avant-garde under the Crown of Aragon during the 1330s and 1340s thanks to the Sienna-influenced Italianism

Fig. 22 . Ferrer Bassa, Arnau Bassa and Ramon Destorrents. Compartments from the altarpiece of the chapel of the palace of La Almudaina, Palma. Right, *Saint Anna and the Virgin* (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga). Left, *Calvary* (Palma, Museu de Mallorca).

Fig. 23 . Master of Villahermosa (Francesc Serra II? Llorenç Saragossa?). *Virgin with Child and Angels* originating from the hermitage of Santa Caterina de Torroella de Montgrí. Barcelona, Fundación Francisco Godia.

of the Bassas, the rupture came as a result of the sudden and brusque disappearance of these two artistic bastions, in all probability as a result of the plague. Ferrer Bassa and his son Arnau stood at the head of Barcelona's most successful pictorial workshop of the day. They worked for the king on major commissions as well as for civil and religious clients of high social standing. Just at that moment the painter Ramon Destorrents (doc. 1351-1362) arrived on the scene, taking over some of the royal projects that Ferrer and Arnau has left unfinished, becoming the favorite painter of the Royal Catalan-Aragonese house. Pere the Ceremonious turned to him for major artistic enterprises, such as completing a number of altarpieces for royal chapels that the Bassas had not finished (Lleida, Valencia and Palma), a psaltery (1351) or the depiction of zodiac symbols on a celestial sphere (1362). It is therefore clear that he took on the role of official court painter that Ferrer Bassa had occupied until 1348.[59] Almost none of Pere the Ceremonious' commissioned works have survived, except for a few fragments of the *Altarpiece of Saint Anna and the Virgen* that the Bassas had started for the chapel of the castle of the Almudaina de Palma, and which was concluded by Destorrents between 1353 and 1358 (fig. 22).[60] Contrary to Destorrents, who must have had some kind of exclusivity, the Serras did not work on the execution of major altarpieces for the royal house. They did, however, receive one important commission from Enrique II of Castile, for whom they made three altarpieces for the church of Tobed (Zaragoza) in an extremely complex historical context which we will address when the time comes.

Barcelona continued to be the main pictorial hub of the entire Crown of Aragon, and its importance spread across the Iberian Peninsula from 1350 onwards. The city of Valencia became a major nucleus of production for altarpieces thanks to the installation there of a reputed artist by the name of Llorenç Saragossa (ca. 1358-1406), born in Aragon but of whom we have documentary records in Valencia in 1358.[61] Also settling in the city was the aforementioned Francesc Serra II, a member of the family of painters we are analyzing here, being the son of the older brother, Francesc, and nephew of Jaume and Pere Serra. We have documentary records of his activity in Valencia between 1379 and 1396.[62] His figure has been the subject of intense historiographic debate, given that some experts have suggested identifying him with the Master of Villahermosa, the artist behind the altarpieces of Villahermosa del Río (Castellón) and other works in Valencia. He was one of the benchmarks of the Italian Gothic style in the Valencian region, and his art presents undeniable similarities with that of the Serra brothers. Others, meanwhile, prefer to identify this anonymous painter with the aforementioned Saragossa.[63] This debate affects one of the main works in the Master of Villahermosa's portfolio, a *Virgin with Child and Angels* originally from the hermitage of Santa Caterina in Torroella de Montgrí (Girona) and now housed at the Fundación Francisco Godia (Barcelona), which has been attributed by turns to Llorenç Saragossa and Francesc Serra II (fig. 23). The model depicted clearly bears a connection to the works of the Serra brothers, such as the main compartment of the altarpiece of Tobed (fig. 31) or with the one that presides over the altarpiece of the chapel of the Palau de Cerdanya (fig. 36), which has been used by some researchers as grounds for attributing it to Francesc Serra II.[64] Links to the Valencia region have also been established with the author of *Virgin with Child and Angels playing Instruments* which came up for sale recently in Barcelona (Galeria Bernat, 2017) (fig. 24). Although this work presents a different Marian prototype, the connection with the models made by the Serra brothers are still beyond dispute.[65] Gudiol attributed it to Ramon Destorrents who, according to said researcher, worked in its execution alongside the so-called "Maestro del Misal de Reus" (Master of the Reus Missal), the author of a missal housed at the Museu de Reus, which was completed in 1363.[66] The panel would ultimately end up being attributed to the latter alone.[67]

The city of Zaragoza, meanwhile, kept on the fringes, with no local workshops with any great commercial success. That explains why the Serra brothers' Barcelona workshop was, on more than one occasion, hired to carry out altarpieces for important churches or monasteries in the Aragonese capital. Later artists would arrive such as Enrique de Estencop, with a workshop in Zaragoza, who in his 1391 altarpiece for the town of Longares (Zaragoza) displayed a great debt to the artistic language of the Serras (fig. 25).[68] Cities such as Lleida, with a great school producing altarpieces sculpted in stone, and also Girona, took on completely secondary roles, without pictorial workshops of any prominence. Meanwhile, in places such as Tarragona there was a proliferation of independent workshops that were clearly dependent on the art of the Serra brothers, as we see if we observe the painting carried out at the time by the Master of Santa Coloma de Queralt.[69] Something similar occurred in Mallorca, where, during the 1370s, Joan Daurer carried out works that owed a direct debt to the Serra brothers;[70] and also in the area of Elne-Perpignan, at that time under Catalan rule, and today under French administration, which produced works such as the reliquary box of the Cathedral of Elne, clearly influenced by the way of understanding painting that had been popularized by the Serras, who also worked in *Catalunya Nord*.[71]

Fig. 24. Master of the Reus Missal (?), *Virgin with Child and Angels playing Instruments*. Private collection.

These were years in which artisans documented as altarpiece painters did not appear exclusively as such, but tended to be recorded as having carried out the illumination of books, mural paintings or polychromatic sculptures. This is widely recorded in the case of the Bassas and also in that of Ramon Destorrents, who shared this profile of multi-disciplinary artist working for the royal family on altarpieces and illuminated manuscripts. This universality and versatility, despite having much to do with the pictorial trade itself, would disappear with the arrival of the Serra brothers, who specialised in painting altarpieces on wood, and would come to run the most important workshop in the entire Crown of Aragon during the second half of the 14th century.

Furthermore, and as we commented earlier, there is no documentary evidence that Francesc, Jaume or Pere Serra ever undertook important commissions for the royal family. They specialised, and preferred to focus their business, on a specific area in which they were successful, but it is both remarkable and surprising that the king should never have called on them for major works, but only small commissions, such as a tryptic with silver hinges that Pere Serra made for Pere the Ceremonious in 1368.[72] And it was a Catalan tradition for Barcelona's major pictorial workshops to do so, as the documents record in the cases of the Bassas or Ramon Destorrents. This undoubtedly has a lot to do with the activities of the aforementioned Llorenç Saragossa in Barcelona, where he lived between 1363 and 1374, executing a number of different altarpieces for Pere the Ceremonious — and other members of the court — who described him as "*lo millor pintor que en aquesta ciutat sia*" (the best painter there is in this city).[73]

The resurgence in Italian influence presented by the Serra brothers' art does not exhibit the level of expressionism and daring of the Italianism of the Bassas, but it meant the consolidation of pictorial forms, models, human subjects and extremely coherent compositions, often repeated, that provided the foundations for their great commercial success. Different members of the same family were dedicated to consolidating a language that would work with their clientele, and they did so by codifying their own style, a personal brand or exclusive stamp that set them apart and which was imitated by other workshops from different towns and cities across the Crown of Aragon. This must have had a defining effect on the internal working of the workshops (yes, workshops, plural, as we shall see shortly) of the Serra brothers, their way of understanding painting and their way of presenting themselves to the world.

The first Serra to arrive on the scene was Francesc, the oldest brother, being joined in 1358 by Jaume. Francesc died in 1362, which opened the way for Jaume to increase his standing on the Barcelona scene. That very year, the painter Bartomeu Bassa, who had worked with Francesc and Jaume since 1358, stopped doing so, in all probability dying in 1363. Meanwhile, Pere, the third brother, had learnt and perfected the trade from 1357 to 1361 in the workshop of Ramon Destorrents, the king's favorite painter, and this proved a good investment. Following the death of Francesc, the moment had arrived to shake up the family's professional dynamic and it would appear that Pere joined his brother Jaume. A new scene was set, as the two brothers were undoubtedly well aware, and from the outset of their collaboration Pere put into practice everything he had learnt under Destorrents, which smoothed their progress, with both brothers making great strides in their respective careers.

The manner in which the Serra brothers' art spread and gained popularity throughout much of the Crown of Aragon meant the dissemination of a certain stylistic uniformity across the different areas and regions, in such a way that it is no easy task to differentiate styles, distinguish authorship or classify paintings by specific production centers or workshops. For example, we can clearly identify the use of period signature motifs by geographically-distant artists such as the Master of Rubió in Catalonia, the Master of Villahermosa, in Valencia, the Mallorca-born Joan Daurer, or a number of painters from the Roussillon area, then belonging to Catalonia and now a part of France. It is obvious that each one of these had characteristics that made them unique and distinctive, but when one makes an overall reading of their works one finds oneself remarking on a confluence of formal aspects that was not normal in other Aragonese Gothic periods. The conclusion to be drawn here is that there have been few times in art history when the region has presented so many similarities between works by different painters.

Fig. 25. Enrique de Estencop. *Virgin with Child*, *Angels and a donor*. Main compartment of the altarpiece of the church of Longares. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

THE SERRA BROTHERS AND PAINTING IN BARCELONA IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 14TH CENTURY

The early Serra brothers and their context

It is unusual to come across a family of painters who dominated the pictorial panorama of their native city for 50 years, and even more so for that success to spread to areas quite a long way from their most immediate area of influence. This was the case of the Serras, a dynasty of painters that is well recorded in documentation from Barcelona, of whom moreover many important works have survived to the present day, preserved either in their place of origin or in Spanish museums, with just a few in international museums and some others in the hands of private collectors. Overall, these works constitute a fundamental corpus for understanding the Italian-influenced painting of the Crown of Aragon, which we should situate between the first wave of Italianate art pioneered by Ferrer and Arnau Bassa, interrupted by the Black Death in 1348, and the international style which arrived in around 1400.

However, this dynasty of painters' surviving works present a series of problems arising from their reading and stylistic analysis. To start with, of the four Serra brothers, Francesc, Jaume, Pere and Joan, we are only familiar with the styles of two of them, Jaume and Pere. Francesc is the most problematic one, for a range of reasons. It was he who started the dynasty, but his figure did not emerge in historiography until the mid-20th century with the publication of the documentary catalogues of Josep Maria Madurell,[74] in other words, a long time after the first works by Jaume and Pere were documented. Certain theories have been put forward concerning Francesc, and a considerable body of works have even been attributed to him but, as we will attempt to demonstrate in this volume, these are no more than hypotheses built on extremely fragile arguments which do not stand up. With regard to Joan, the last brother in the group, the fact is that we know next to nothing about him, other than that he must have played a secondary role next to his brothers Jaume and Pere. Of the latter two there are perfectly documented surviving works, which has helped in the cataloguing of their oeuvre, but many doubts exist today concerning a series of works they may have carried out in collaboration during a period for which there is clear documentary evidence that they shared a workshop. This circumstance, which may be considered normal in a family where the different brothers work within the same trade, was not always the case for the more than 50 years for which we have documentary records of them all executing altarpieces. And this is one of the theses we are going to be arguing in this text, contrary to the traditional historiographic line which, since the earliest published records alluding to Francesc, has always argued the existence of a single workshop run, successively, by Francesc, Jaume and then Pere.[75] Our position, based on documentary analysis, is that this was not the case during Francesc Serra's lifetime, and we will confirm, moreover, as indeed all the experts have emphasized, that Jaume and Pere Serra managed a painting workshop for approximately 25 years during which they would work together on numerous commissions.

The earliest documentary mention of Francesc Serra (doc. 1350-1362) is from 17 July 1350, when he is recorded as the son and sole heir of Berenguer Serra, a now-deceased tailor, in whose name he received a number of indebted sums.[76] The very next year he married Elisenda Moreres.[77] The first document mentioning him as a painter dates from 1352, just when he was commissioned to paint an altarpiece for the altar of Saint James and Saint Francis in the Barcelona monastery of Sant Pere de les Puel·les. Serra was commissioned for this work by Arnau Gombau, an incumbent of Barcelona cathedral, and he was instructed to use as his model the altarpiece of Saint Bartholomew in the church of Santa María del Pi, also in Barcelona.[78] The Serra brothers' relationship with Sant Pere de les Puel·les was to prove longstanding. After this first contract came a commission for the main altarpiece of the church of the monastery (which we will analyze later), with further commissions continuing until the early 15th century when Pere Serra painted two altarpieces dedicated to Saint Michael and Saint Barbara, and to Saint Martin and Saint Catherine.[79]

In 1355 Francesc Serra received a commission from Constança de Valls, a nun from the monastery of Santa María de Jonqueres in Barcelona, to execute an altarpiece measuring 12 hand spans wide and 16 high. The ensemble was to include three compartments in each of the three *carrers* (sections), depicting two scenes from the life of Saint Peter of Verona and one third scene, on the main panel, with a full-length depiction of the Saint and, just above it, the Crucifixion. The lower area was to be completed with a predella including five more scenes from the hagiographic cycle of the Dominican saint. The price agreed for the work was 33 Barcelonese *lliures*, of which eight were paid on signing the contract.[80] It is quite possible that this altarpiece had not been started, or at least not completed, on the death of Francesc in 1362, given in 1367 Jaume entered into a signed agreement of unknown content with the same Constança de Valls and which may have had something to do with the termination of the work.[81] That being so, this would be a similar case to that of the altarpiece that Francesc Serra was commissioned to paint in 1359 by Guerau d'Ardèvol for his chapel in Barcelona cathedral, and to which we will return shortly.

It seems that in 1355 Francesc also received another commission from the *obrers* (church wardens) of the church of Santa María del Pi in Barcelona, one of the city's most important parishes, although we know no details about it. What is certain is that on 24 December 1356 the church dean summoned him to appear before a notary, and in the presence of the *obrers*, due to the failure to complete certain designated tasks. The fact was that Francesc Serra had failed to deliver a number of painted panels that should have already been finished, resulting in the summons. The painter promised to deliver the works in the next few days, claiming he had not yet done so due to health reasons, "*et eciam quare fuit tempus pluviosum*" (and also because the weather has been rainy).[82] The *obrers* recorded in the document were Guerau Julià and Arnau Codonya, the same ones that feature in two unfinished notary documents from 10 January and 27 March 1355, also uncovered by Josep Maria Madurell. We can only suppose that both legal documents had something to do with the same commission.[83]

And it was at that point that the second of the brothers, Jaume Serra (doc. 1358-1389) came onto the scene when, on 11 May 1358, he took on a commission for an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Michael for one of the chapels of Girona cathedral. It is significant that this should be the first documented commission we have for a member of the Serra family outside the city of Barcelona. The document asks the painter to follow as a model an altarpiece from Barcelona cathedral, also dedicated to Saint Michael, without doubt the one presiding over said Saint's chapel in the ambulatory.[84] One significant matter is the fact that Jaume should be the main commissioned artist in contracting the project, while his brother Francesc acted as a guarantor, along with the Barcelona miniaturist Arnau de la Pena (doc. 1356-1410).[85] Was this the result of some professional strategy between the two brothers in managing the same workshop, or was theirs more of a free working relationship, with each one taking on his own commissions and managing different workshops? This is by no means a trivial matter, as the answer is crucial to much of the structure on which the current historiographic paradigm had been constructed with regard to the style and differentiation of the artists working in the early Serra workshop, that is to say up until the death of Francesc in 1362.

On 14 December that year, Jaume received another major commission with similar iconography, consisting of painting a sculpture of Saint Michael and two altarpieces and a tabernacle for Ramon Sa Noguera and Guillem Vinyoles, residents of the town of Cardona.[86] We once again find ourselves dealing with a commission that Jaume has to complete outside of the city of Barcelona. Furthermore, his brother Francesc does not appear anywhere on the document. A name that does appear, however, is that of the painter Bartomeu Bassa, who shared the commission with Jaume. Does this prove that Bassa was an important figure in making up a workshop in which Francesc Serra was also a major player? Or was Jaume perhaps simply taking on commissions on his own, and independent of Francesc because they ran different workshops? Is it significant that most of the first commissions taken on by Jaume Serra came from outside the city of Barcelona, and that it was not until the death of his brother Francesc that he would start to take on regular contracts in the Catalan capital? Did Francesc control the market in Barcelona, thereby forcing Jaume to look for work elsewhere, or was this a commercial strategy arising from the context of one single family workshop?

It is my belief that these questions and the analysis of the two Girona and Cardona contracts form the point of departure and core argument for understanding the tricky stylistic issue surrounding the works of the Serra brothers at the end of the 1350s and beginning of the following decade. Other documents from shortly afterwards appear to indicate that the connection between the Serras and Bartomeu Bassa was not that of an exclusive partnership, but a free and open working relationship that occasionally led them to work on commissions together. Here we are referring to a document from 21 January 1360 in which Bassa appears as Jaume Serra's guarantor when the latter accepted a commission for 50 Barcelonese *lliures* for the main altarpiece of the monastery of Sant Pere de Galligants, in Girona.[87] Jaume's second guarantor is his mother, Suana, which rather underlines the closeness of Bassa to the Serra family.

Going back to the Cardona commission, another interesting issue mentioned in the document is that Bernat Roca was responsible for carving and sculpting the elements described.[88] Roca was in charge of works at Barcelona cathedral, a building where the Serra brothers would work on different occasions during the period. Said document, along with others we know of, lead us to conclude that the Serras must have maintained a free-flowing professional relationship with Roca, which would have enabled them to work on a range of projects. Furthermore, during that time Roca became specialised in constructing a type of altar furniture, so-called "tabernacle-altarpieces", which were characterized by their many display functions, relating to the exhibiting of reliquaries and Eucharist monstrances. In short, these were display cases where gilt casement and framing work was predominant and which, on the whole, did not include painted compartments.[89] All the same, the Cardona commission shows that this was not always the case. On this occasion, the project involved a painted altarpiece presided over by a central tabernacle measuring three hand spans wide by 20 tall, split into two levels reserved for one image of Saint Michael (measuring four hand spans high) in the lower part, and the Eucharist monstrance in the upper space. The central tabernacle was to be flanked by "*unum reetaula ab utrumque latus*" (one altarpiece on each side), which explains why the Serra and Bassa commission mentions "two altarpieces". Each of these was six and a half hand spans wide and 13 tall, allowing us to conclude that the central tabernacle stood well over them. The ensemble also included a predella measuring two and a half hand spans high.

In 1361 Bernat Roca would receive another very similar commission, this time for the church of the convent of the Mercè in Barcelona. It involved a 54-hand span high tabernacle which needed to house an image of the Virgin measuring seven hand spans high. The tabernacle would once again be flanked on both sides by altarpieces "*de tribus puntis*" (three-pointed).[90] Jaume Serra was not involved on this occasion, but he did act as guarantor, along with the sculptor Pere Moragues, thereby illustrating that the roles had reversed since the Cardona commission of 1358. Roca would then once again act as guarantor for Jaume and Pere Serra in 1362, when they accepted the commission for the main altarpiece of Sant Pere de les Puel·les, as we will see shortly. Three years later, it was the Serra brothers who would act as guarantors for Roca on a contract the latter signed with the executor of the Cardinal of Aragon for the commissioning of a number of works not set out in the document.[91]

Let us leave, for one moment, the subject of documents to one side, and focus on other matters. Some years ago, and with his habitual sagacity, Joaquín Yarza drew attention to one fact that historiography had thus far not noticed. In the opinion of Yarza, a reading of known documents made it quite clear that Francesc and Jaume Serra each accepted commissions independently of the other, and did not work together.[92] And historiography has still to evaluate this suggestion in the depth and detail it deserves, because if we follow the path marked out by Yarza we draw conclusions that might change our perception of the two brothers' working relations.

Analyzing subsequent documents, after Francesc's death it is true that one observes a change in situation, whereby Jaume and Pere took on joint commissions. This fact, and the analysis of surviving works, leads us to one clear conclusion: in certain altarpieces it is not possible to differentiate between the style of Jaume and Pere. Their joint work, as a team, in the same workshop, means that their styles meld together and intertwine, making it extremely difficult to separate one from the other in their workshop output. This was the conclusion reached by Alexandre Soler i March[93] in his day, and shares much with Frederic Pau Verrié's thinking:

> *"As we currently understand it, the Serra brothers' problem regarding technical and artistic precedents is rather more complex that it appears at first sight. All of the pieces with established precedence (the Iravals group) match both each other and the works of Pere Serra (and on occasions those of Jaume) in terms of certain details of execution or drawing and coloring. That said, without taking away the value of these similarities, the conclusion we must reach is that many of them are more characteristic of a period than of a workshop, and more of a workshop than of a single artist."* [94]

This position was taken up more recently by Rosa Alcoy:

> *"This ability to share responsibility for some of the commissions, the custom and obligation of finishing off what others had started, which was extremely widespread after the Black Death due to the sudden demise of many artists, and the effective collaboration between brothers and various members of an expanding workshop, justifies the difficulties faced in compiling the individual catalogues of the Serra brothers."*[95]

And both Cèsar Favà and Rafael Cornudella speculate in much the same vein: "It is clear that the individual work of the Serra brothers and that of their workshop made it extremely difficult to identify one artist's brush from the next when in many cases there were more than one of them collaborating

Fig. 26. Jaume Serra. *Altarpiece of Saint Martha*. Iravals, parish church.

on the same work (…)."[96] We can therefore see that historiography has reached a unanimous verdict on this matter, as was inevitable given the difficulties involved in the stylistic differentiation and attribution of works between the painters of the Serra dynasty.

The issue of differentiating the styles of one brush from another in the works of the Serra brothers has been one of the great historiographic obsessions since they became a leading focus of widespread studies. And it continues to be so to this day, giving rise to a series of stylistic studies which have progressively added and accumulated hypothesis in this regard, some of which are hard to verify due to the lack of confirmed proof. This has led to the historiographic outlook becoming extremely complicated. In our opinion, historians who have paid attention to the Serra brothers' evolution and output have, in general terms, been overly concerned with the differentiation of authorship, showing insufficient regard for one reality the works make abundantly clear. This reality is none other than the fact that we are, at specific times, dealing with a body of ensemble works where individualism takes a back seat. This occurs in the interest of collaborative projects where the style of each member of the workshop fuses with all of the others. Things being as such, and in our opinion, the Serra brothers represent one of the key moments in the notion of the workshop as a nucleus for the production of altarpieces going far beyond individual personalities.

The above statement could easily be misinterpreted by readers, who might conclude that it is our intention to present the Serra workshop as a stable family workshop created in around 1350 with the elder brother, Francesc, remaining in business until the death of Pere in around 1405-08. Nothing could be further from our intention. This is the vision traditionally put forward by historiography, founded on a logical and simple fact: we are dealing with different brothers who share in the same profession, leading to the deduction that they ran a business whose helm was successively taken by the different members of the dynasty. But the detailed and close inspection of what the documents tell us takes us in a different direction, as in spite of the fact that some members of the family worked side by side together at different points in their careers, as is the case with Jaume and Pere, there were periods in which each one took on individual commissions, as autonomous agents, as we have seen with Francesc and Jaume. That rather leads us to surmise that they might have managed different and independent workshops.

As a rebuttal of this interpretation one might well argue that, although a particular work might be commissioned from one specific family member, its execution could quite easily end up being undertaken in a workshop run by the entire family ensemble, with the involvement of different members thereof. However, this reading is not based on the stylistic evidence of the surviving works, as the shared authorship suggested for many of the Serra works are attributions founded on deductions; in other words, because there is documentation claiming that Jaume and Pere worked together during that period, and not because each one's style could be perfectly differentiated in those works.[97]

To all of this we should add the different issues associated with major painters working in the same context and at the same time as the Serra brothers, such as Ramon Destorrents. There was an attempt to differentiate his style when Frederic-Pau Verrié revealed a 1353 document identifying him as the painter who finally executed the aforementioned altarpiece at the royal castle of Palma, the Almudaina, commissioned by Pere the Ceremonious and installed in 1358.[98] The compartments that have survived from that ensemble work, distributed between the Museu de Mallorca (*Calvary*) and the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (*Saint Anna*) (fig. 22), give an indication of his involvement, but also that of the painters who started the work in 1345, the Bassas. As such, their styles mix together in these panels, as historiography has explained.[99] The style of execution presented by those compartments is very similar to that of the Serra brothers, although obvious differences may be detected. Furthermore, we should not forget that Destorrents was Pere Serra's mentor and that Bartomeu Bassa, whose relation to Ferrer and Arnau Bassa is unknown, collaborated with Francesc and Jaume Serra in around 1362. As such, the documents and works combine to weave a complicated network of connections between the members of three families of painters about whom much is known, and yet quite a lot is also unknown.

Based on the appearance of the documents from 1353-58 dealing with Destorrents' involvement in the Mallorca altarpiece, Verrié drew up a preliminary catalogue of the painter's works, including a group of pieces the most important of which was the Iravals group *Altarpiece of Saint Martha* (La Tor de Querol, Haute Cerdagne, France) (fig. 26). Up to that point, the author of the ensemble had been christened by Post as the "Master from Iravals",[100] while other authors, such as Verrié himself, chose to speak of the "Serras Master".[101] The group of works executed by the painter identified by Verrié was made up of the following pieces: the aforementioned Iravals altarpiece; an altarpiece compartment with Saint Martha and Eulalia (and another saints on the side mullions) housed today in the Archive of the Cathedral of Barcelona; the compartments of a polyptych with images of saints, kept in museums in Barcelona, Lille and Krakow (fig. 38); the *Predella of Saint Onophrius* from the Cathedral of Barcelona; a deacon saint originating from the town of Sant Celoni (Barcelona); a panel with the Pentecost; an altarpiece central section from Sant Vicenç dels Horts (Barcelona); some altarpiece compartments from Santa Oliva del Penedès (Barcelona), the last three all housed at the Museu Diocesà in Barcelona; and, finally the Lisbon *Saint Anna*, originally from the palace of La Almudaina in Palma (fig. 22).[102] Verrié himself admitted the possibility that they were not all the fruit of the same artist, while more recently Alcoy argued that up to three different painters could have been involved in their execution.[103]

That this prolific artist should be Ramon Destorrents helped to reorganize a highly disordered family of altarpieces. It made it possible to frame him as the perfect link between the Bassas, who had started the altarpiece at the Palma castle and whose unfinished works Destorrents went on to finish, and the Serra brothers, one of whom, Pere, had learnt his craft in his workshop. All the same, the historiographic panorama has changed radically since then, in particular based on the studies of Rosa Alcoy, who traced out Destorrents' stylistic profile in a completely different fashion.[104]