

*A Catalan Tapestry in New York?\**

Jacobo Vidal Franquet, Universitat de Barcelona

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In 1928, after visiting an exhibition of tapestries in the Manufacture des Gobelins, Marthe Crick-Kuntziger could not resist the “pleasure” of posing the following hypothesis: that an altar frontispiece with the instruments of the Passion aligned over a flowery background, completely woven in gold and silver thread, was produced in Spain, specifically in Barcelona. As it turns out, this appraisal had already been made by Lluís Tramoyeres, who had contemplated the work eighteen years previously in a retrospective exhibition of Valencian art, and who considered that it must be of Catalan manufacture.<sup>1</sup> In any case, this suggestive conjecture has been widely refuted. The objective of this short paper is to recuperate it and refine it: the tapestry, currently preserved in the MMA (acc. no. 52.34), must have been manufactured in the Crown of Aragon around 1480-1510, perhaps in the workshop of the master weaver Joan Marroquí.<sup>2</sup>

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In the MMA catalogue of Medieval tapestries, Adolfo S. Cavallo amply describes and explains the known history of the piece.<sup>3</sup> It is not really clear whether it concerns an antependium or a fragment of a dossal for an altar—a hypothesis that seems more plausible to us both—since the tapestry is cut and contains additions. It is not known with certainty in which building it was originally used, nor the place where it was fabricated. In its 1928 exhibition in Paris, the work was considered Franco-Flemish, although it was then that Crick-Kuntziger credited its origin as Spanish, an extreme view only subscribed to, up to this moment, by

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<sup>1</sup>Tramoyeres 1909-10; Crick-Kuntziger 1928, pp. 215-16.

<sup>2</sup>I posed this question in Vidal 2016 and 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Cavallo 1993.

Rudolph Berliner.<sup>4</sup> When it was acquired by the MMA in the 1950s, James Rorimer attributed it to Northern European provenance once again, concretely to a Brussels workshop, without explaining the reasoning that led him to make this proposition, as Cavallo points out.<sup>5</sup>

This last author makes explicit what has been implicitly believed by a seeming majority of those who have preoccupied themselves with the piece, even if only briefly. The general consensus is that the 1928 attribution to a Barcelonese artisan is ingenious but unsustainable. Crick-Kuntziger, basing herself on documentary studies by J. Puig i Cadafalch and J. Miret i Sans on the Palace of the Generalitat of Catalonia, discusses master tapestry makers in Barcelona such as Bernat Campins or Joan Albareda.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as Cavallo indicates, the aspect of the manufactured products coming from the looms of these artisans is unknown; artisans who, incidentally, were specialized in the manufacture of heraldic and not figurative tapestries.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, this study is a reminder that the resettlement of master tapestry makers from Northern to Southern Europe was more or less frequent, and that, above all, it was habitual to send designs from all over Europe to France and the Low Countries so that they could be woven in the specialized workshops that were flourishing there. Indeed, the Catalan documents indicate that in the 1440s—a very early date concerning the work in question—diverse French tapestry makers resettled in Barcelona, although it seems these workshops never became established.<sup>8</sup> Historical documents also confirm that toward the end of the century, the Generalitat commissioned the largest workshops of Arras and Bruges to manufacture a sizable order of cloths designed by local painters.<sup>9</sup> This is to say that in the 1990s—and still today—it is considered natural to doubt the hypothesis posited by Marthe Crick-Kuntziger in 1928. Yet, there are still some facts that allow us to accept the Catalan origin of this tapestry, not with complete certainty, but nevertheless as a completely sustainable possibility.

The figure of the donor turns out to be key in proposing that the production of the tapestry was in fact Catalan; a factor that the historiography could not account for until the arrival of the piece in New York. In both the 1928 exhibition as well as the auction at Christie's, in London, ten years later, the shield that appears in duplicate in the lower part of the work was identified as that of the Catholic Kings; before, Tramoyeres associated it with King Martin,

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<sup>4</sup>Berliner 1955, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>Rorimer 1953, pp. 276, 281.

<sup>6</sup>Puig i Cadafalch, Miret i Sans 1909-10, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup>Cavallo 1993. According to Junquera 1985, the Baptism of Christ tapestry of the Cathedral of Barcelona could be an exception, although his proposition has been generally discredited; in this regard, see Martín 2008.

<sup>8</sup>I am referring here to the brothers Thomas and Jacquet de la Lebra and Joan Falsison. The latter, after his Barcelona business activity never developed to any extent, resettled with various helpers in Tortosa during twenty years, between 1444 and 1464, probably weaving the tapestry of the Last Supper which is preserved in Tortosa's cathedral (Vidal 2003, 2007, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>Puig i Cadafalch, Miret i Sans 1909-10, *passim*; Vidal 2015.

who died in 1410, which is too long a chronology for the piece. Yet, when Rorimer gave account of the acquisition by the Museum in 1953, he correctly identified the heraldry as that of the dukes of Segorbe, a feudal domain in the northeast of the Kingdom of Valencia.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the *infante* Enrique, cousin of Ferdinand the Catholic of Aragon and first duke of Segorbe, who died in 1522, or his son Alfonso, who lived until 1562, are the only persons who could have possibly commissioned the tapestry.<sup>11</sup> Although Rorimer was certain that the shield belonged to Enrique of Aragon, probably because he believed the piece to have been woven in the late 15th century, Cavallo believed that the tapestry could also be a later piece, and that it therefore could correspond with Alfonso of Aragon. I cannot demonstrate without a doubt that Rorimer was correct, but I think that the *infante*'s testament (1522) and his documented acquaintance with a tapestry weaver in the late 15th century point in this direction and render this the most likely of options.<sup>12</sup>

The information about the *Arma Christi* cloth that is contained in the catalogue of the exhibition held in Valencia in 1910 is problematic, mistaken, and confusing. During this period, the work was the property of the marquise of Dos Aguas, and the text states that before her, it belonged to Berenguer Martí de Torres y Aguilar, *señor* of Alaquàs, although a native of Segorbe, according to an inventory dated April 30th, 1507. Yet, I must point out that it makes no sense that a piece containing the heraldry of the *infante* Enrique, deceased in 1522, could form a part of the inventory of the Torres Aguilas in 1507.<sup>13</sup> Another drawback is the supposed origin of the piece from the Valldecris monastery, situated in the municipality of Altura, adjacent to Segorbe. Cavallo provides this information based on a letter and an antique photograph that the Catalan erudite Joan Ainaud de Lasarte sent to Rorimer in 1955. I have been able to inspect both documents—the letter and the photograph—and in reality no mention whatsoever is made of Valldecris, although it's not impossible for the work to have formed part of the monastery as of the latter half of the 16th century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Rorimer 1953, pp. 276, 281.

<sup>11</sup>The fondness of the Crown of Aragon for collecting and commissioning carpets is well known. On this subject see, among others, Olivier 1986; Cornudella 2010; Zalama, Pascual 2012; Vidal 2015.

<sup>12</sup>Rorimer 1953, pp. 276, 281; Cavallo 1993.

<sup>13</sup>Cavallo 1993; Valencia 1910, n. 1073. However, what is certain is that the will of *infante* Enrique cites the existence of a tapestry that had been purchased from the "*Treasurer of Valencia*" (Berenguer Martí de Torres and Aguilar) in order to match three other pieces with figures of prophets and stories of creed, works that were donated to the monastery of Poblet along with other objects (Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Barcelona, 257/63, f. 122v).

<sup>14</sup>Cavallo 1993. Joan Ainaud's letter, contained in the file belonging to the tapestry in question, is preserved at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1952 (acc. no. 52.34) (I am grateful to C. Brennan for providing me with a copy). In it he tells Rorimer that in the exhibition of 1910, the Marquise de Dos Aguas also exhibited a portrait of Saint Bruno attributed to Petrus Christus. Maybe this is where the idea of the work

In my estimation, it is most probable that the tapestry belonged to the private chapel of the first duke, whose goods are diligently itemized in his will. It is known that his liturgical regalia was bequeathed to the monasteries of Poblet, Montserrat, and Esperanza of Segorbe, which was founded by Enrique of Aragon in 1494-95 and was bequeathed with, among many other precious objects, “*quatre peçes de cortines de draps de ras per empaliar lo altar*” (that is to say, four curtains of tapestry to ornament the altar).<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the work at the MMA is one of the four parts of the frontal of the duke’s altar, a frontal that should have been used in the aforementioned monastic foundation but which never made it to the church of this community. The last wishes of the *infante* clearly specify that his donation should only take effect once the monastery housed monks permanently, but it turned out to have been irregularly inhabited until 1573, when it was definitively settled by the Hieronymites.<sup>16</sup> Construction work on the monastery was stopped and the site nearly abandoned during Alfonso’s dukeship (1522-62), so that the pieces that were destined for it must have remained in the hands of Enrique’s widow, as the will stipulated, and it is not impossible for them to have ended up in Valldecrist, the most prestigious monastery of the county. From here, after exclaustation, the tapestry would have ended up in the Dos Aguas collection in Valencia. It was probably not the only work to have run a similar course. In the Cathedral of Segorbe’s museum, a rich chasuble of unknown origin embroidered with stories was later linked through its heraldry to the same patron.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, toward the end of the 15th century, the *infante* Enrique, duke of Segorbe, count of Ampurias and lieutenant of Catalonia, had dealings with a “*mestre de draps de ras*”, which is to say, with a master tapestry maker. This artist was named Joan Marroquí and we know of his activity because during diverse moments between 1480 and 1513, he was at the service of the municipality and of the chapter of the Cathedral of Tortosa, an important city in southern Catalonia whose ecclesiastic dominions reached the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, which is to say they bordered the bishopric of Segorbe. The documents that currently interest us refer to a labour conflict, around 1490, between the artist and the municipal government. Marroquí was to weave, as stipulated by his contract, a tapestry every year, in addition to carrying out necessary maintenance duties. However, he did not always seemingly comply with his obligations, absenting himself constantly from the city and failing to deliver all the cloths expected, for which the *Consell* decided not to pay his salary. At this point, Enrique

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belonging to the monastery of Valldecrist comes from. The photograph is preserved in Barcelona, Arxiu Mas, Z-4652.

<sup>15</sup>Arxiu Històric de Protocols de Barcelona, 257/63, f. 123r.

<sup>16</sup>Mateos, López-Yarto, Prados 1999, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup>See also La Luz de las Imágenes 2001, *passim*, and Borja, Ruiz 2015 for more on Segorbe’s artistic context in the Gothic period. These authors include, in their study, several news reports on the patronship of Berenguer Martí de Torres Aguilar. On the chasuble, see Sanjosé 2001.

of Aragon intervened from Barcelona, writing to the Tortosan authorities and exhorting them to pay “*en Johan Marroquí*”, who approached him with “great clamour”. On this occasion, the Tortosan authorities were required to pay the invoice they were presented with, but in the end Marroquí disappears from the list of municipal service providers at the beginning of the 1490s, and doesn’t return to be seen in Tortosa until the second decade of the next century. We don’t know where he was based during these years, but he is mentioned as a citizen of Barcelona in the will of his daughter Sebastiana.<sup>18</sup>

At this point, we should ask ourselves whether Joan Marroquí was capable of creating a piece such as the one being preserved in New York. And we can respond that he was, without a doubt. Although none of his works are known to us in all certainty, we know that in 1485 he started to weave a tapestry with the representation of the Virgin and Child in the centre, accompanied by the guardian angel and the *Procuradors* —which is to say the representatives of municipal power— of Tortosa kneeling at his feet, a composition that is undoubtedly derivative of the celebrated portraits of the *Consellers* of Barcelona and of the *Paers* of Lleida.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the documents testify that Marroquí produced several works for the cathedral, namely representations of the saints Peter and Paul. These commissions, then, prove that he was able to weave figurative tapestries, even though the results of his labour may not have been at par with that of the best Franco-Flemish artisans of the period.<sup>20</sup>

Crick-Kuntziger attributes the work to a Spanish weaver precisely because of the “barbaric roughness” of its design, a coarseness that contrasts with the richness of the fabric and the particularity of flowers that are different from those that appear in typical *mille-fleurs* woven in Flanders.<sup>21</sup> Rorimer affirms that the composition is similar to that of an altar relief, which he doesn’t specify, of the Cathedral of Barcelona, but which we should identify as the frontal sculpted by Llorenç Reixac for bishop Sopera at the beginning of the 15th century. Although proposed by one who considered the work to have been woven in Brabant, this could be seen as another argument in favour of the cloth having been woven in Barcelona: a Barcelonese sculptural model correlates better with a Barcelonese production. In any case, this correlation is not absolutely secure. Cavallo, for his part, affirms that the model could just as easily have been a drawing, a painting, or an engraving with the iconography of the symbols of the Passion, which is what Crick-Kuntziger points out, perhaps correctly.

Unfortunately, very few of the primitive prints that circulated in the Crown of Aragon during the 15th and early 16th century have been preserved, but —aside from their religious

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<sup>18</sup>Vidal 2007, pp. 34-36.

<sup>19</sup>On these works see, among others, Puig 2005; Salvadó, Buti, Ruiz 2008.

<sup>20</sup>Vidal 2015.

<sup>21</sup>Crick-Kuntziger 1928, pp. 215-16.

function— their presence in artistic workshops at least since 1450 is known. This is the case, for example, with the workshop of the painter Joan Reixac or that of the illuminator Pere Bonora, both from the city of Valencia.<sup>22</sup> It should also be pointed out that, despite the great losses, some of these prints have been preserved as criminal evidence in trials of people who destroyed them or who made bad usage of them. In Tortosa, in the 1460s, a jew who scratched a “*paper pintat*” with the representation of the Descent from the Cross was judged. Ninety years later (1556), in Valencia, a Christian grocer, Diego de Sevilla, was tried for having partially destroyed some prints with a representation of the *Arma Christi*, which appear to have been fairly common since the late 1400s. Joan Marroquí would doubtlessly have had “papers” of this kind among his professional items.<sup>23</sup>

To summarize, the tapestry acquired in the 1950s by the MMA of New York was likely commissioned by duke Enrique of Aragon and woven in the workshop of master tapestry maker Joan Marroquí, whether in Tortosa, where he was based more or less regularly since 1480, or in Barcelona, where Marroquí was a citizen. This is only a hypothesis, but knowing these reports about the person who most likely commissioned the piece, about his acquaintance with one of the only local masters who dominated the technique of weaving figurative works, and about the special characteristics of the cloth, which has not been associated with any specific Franco-Flemish centre, it is legitimate to propose its origin as being Catalan, as had already been proposed independently by Marthe Crick-Kuntziger and Lluís Tramoyeres.

[Translation by Rafael Gomez-Moriana]

## Notes

\* Project “Barcelona en el contexto del gótico meridional: arquitectura y ornamentación”, PGC2018-094265-B-I00 (MCIU/AEI/FEDER,UE).

[a different and longer catalan version was published in “*Matèria. Revista Internacional d’Art*”, 12, 2017]

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<sup>22</sup>Cerveró 1964, pp. 93-94; Montero 2013, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup>The Tortosa engraving, preserved in the diocesan historical archive of this city, was first published in Vidal 2005, pp. 223-26. Franco, Elsworth 2013 have studied the Valencian case. Sebastián 1992, has highlighted the relevance of this iconography in 15th and 16th century Spain, which must have become popularized through engravings.

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