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ART & ANTIQUES

Jaume Cabrera
(doc. 1394-1432)

**VERONICA OF
THE VIRGIN MARY**

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Veronica of the Virgin Mary

ca. 1397-1414
Oil paint on panel
40 x 29.6 cm

Provenance: Paris, private collection; Florence, on sale (Stefano Piacenti, 2008); New York, on sale (Richard Feigen, 2013); New York, private collection.



The work we are studying here, along with others of highly similar appearance, have been linked in recent years to the Catalan painter Jaume Cabrera (doc. 1394-1432), or at least to his immediate circle. What we have before us is a pictorial example of a peculiar model that does not invite too many parallels with other pieces from the Crown of Aragon, although recent studies have shown that these sorts of images, with their heightened devotional charge, were more common than one might infer from the number of surviving works. The popularisation of this sort of Marian portrait, known in the Medieval period as “Veronicas”, as they were considered to be authentic depictions of the Mother of God, was of particular note in Catalonia from the reign of King Martin the Humane (1396-1410) onwards. The monarch became a major driving force behind worship of the “Purísima”, and at the end of the 14th century he promoted the undertaking of a reliquary intended to house a Veronica of this kind, an image which, furthermore, was linked to worship of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. This work, now preserved in the Cathedral of Valencia, is considered the starting point for a series of reliquaries with round bases displaying very similar images, which were particularly widespread in Catalonia, Valencia and Mallorca. At the same time, small-scale paintings with identical representations also became popular, such as the one we are examining here. These are portraits of the Virgin which were thought to possess supernatural properties, and they tell us about how society in the Late Middle Ages related to certain holy images.

DESCRIPTION

The first art history scholars to mention the portrait before us here were Josep Gudiol Ricart and Santiago Alcolea Blanch, in a work published in 1986.¹ This reference came about in large part due to the fact that the Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic in Barcelona had an undated photo of the portrait in its archives (cliché GI-67809), which recorded it as belonging to a private collection in Paris (fig. 1). Once it had become known to the public, a number of different researchers mentioned the work in their studies of the painter to whom it was attributed, Jaume Cabrera,² as well as in works examining the popularisation of Marian Veronicas in the Crown of Aragon,³ with the result that the painting

1 GUDIOL-ALCOLEA 1986, p. 96, cat. 260, fig. 464

2 JOSÉ 1989; RUIZ 2005a, pp. 107 and 111; PIÑOL 2011, pp. 29, 37, 144, 146 and 307, fig. 233.

3 CRISPÍ 1996, p. 98; CRISPÍ 1996, pp. 89 and 95; ESPAÑOL 2001, pp. 149-152; SUREDA 2017, p. 196.

acquired a historiographic pedigree of some note.⁴ In any case, until fairly recently it was not possible to gain direct access to the work, an issue that was resolved when it came on the market a few years ago, firstly in Florence (Stefano Piacenti, 2008) and then in New York (Richard Feigen, 2013). It subsequently became part of a private collection in the North American city, until it was once again put up for sale in Buenos Aires (Jaime Eguiguren).

The painting presents an iconic depiction of the bust of the Virgin Mary, with attention focussed on her face, which is tilted towards the left as we look at it (fig. 2). Mary appears alone in the image, without the Infant Jesus, in contrast to what was most common for Marian images from the medieval period. She is wearing a robe reminiscent of verdaccio and a double veil covering her head, meaning all we can see is her face. The outer veil, which also covers the part of her body on view, presents a series of parallel folds arranged vertically from top to bottom, opens up lower down revealing the neck, and is elegantly pulled back over the Virgin's right shoulder. Along its entire edge it is decorated with an extremely delicate gilt border featuring gold leaf pseudo-kufic motifs.

This decorative element invites parallels with the hieratic Byzantine-style features presented by the Virgin's face, as if we look at them together they combine to reinforce the orientalisising aspect of this



Fig. 1 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica of the Virgin Mary.



Fig. 2 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica of the Virgin Mary.

⁴ Also see references to the work in ALANYÀ 2005-2006, p. 234; VELASCO 2015-2016, p. 38, fig. 2; CASTELLÓ 2019, pp. 211 and 601.

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Veronica. What we have here is a face with extremely odd and well-defined characteristics which, as we will see, reproduce the original model on which it draws. Of particular note are the eyes, bulging and slightly elongated, with highly-pronounced eyelids and bags under them. Consisting of brown irises and black pupils, they stare out at the viewer with something of a squint, a feature we see repeated in other works from the series. The eyebrows are thin and arched, while the nose is elongated, stylised and pointed. The mouth is small, though the lips, of an intense red hue, appear to be fleshy. The groove under the nose, or philtrum, is highly pronounced. The carnation of the cheeks has been particularly heightened with a blush effect which, along with the red of the lips, stands out against the marble-white of the Virgin's skin, which reaches as far as the neck.

Mary's figure is depicted entirely against a gold leaf background applied by water gilding on top of a bole base, the orange colour of which appears in numerous parts of the surface. Meticulous punchwork decoration was applied to the gold leaf, perfectly framing the Virgin, and arranged in various areas. Firstly, the perimeter of the flat surface features a border acting like a frame, delimited by two outer lines of dots, inside of which there is a dense pattern of punchwork in a grid formation presided over by decorative buttons. The two side borders meet the upper one at the top, and these points of intersection form little squares featuring floral motifs. The entire area included inside the outer borders and the Marian figure is decorated with phytomorphic motifs executed in great detail, bearing witness to the skill and sensitivity of the artist behind them. What we have are highly stylised plant stems that culminate in a range of shapes and forms, some with petals, others more fleshy, full of punch marks.

Just below the Marian bust we observe a lower area which repeats the structure and decoration we have just mentioned, though in landscape format (fig. 3). The link between the main area and this lower section is made through the upper border of the lower area, which becomes the edge closing off the

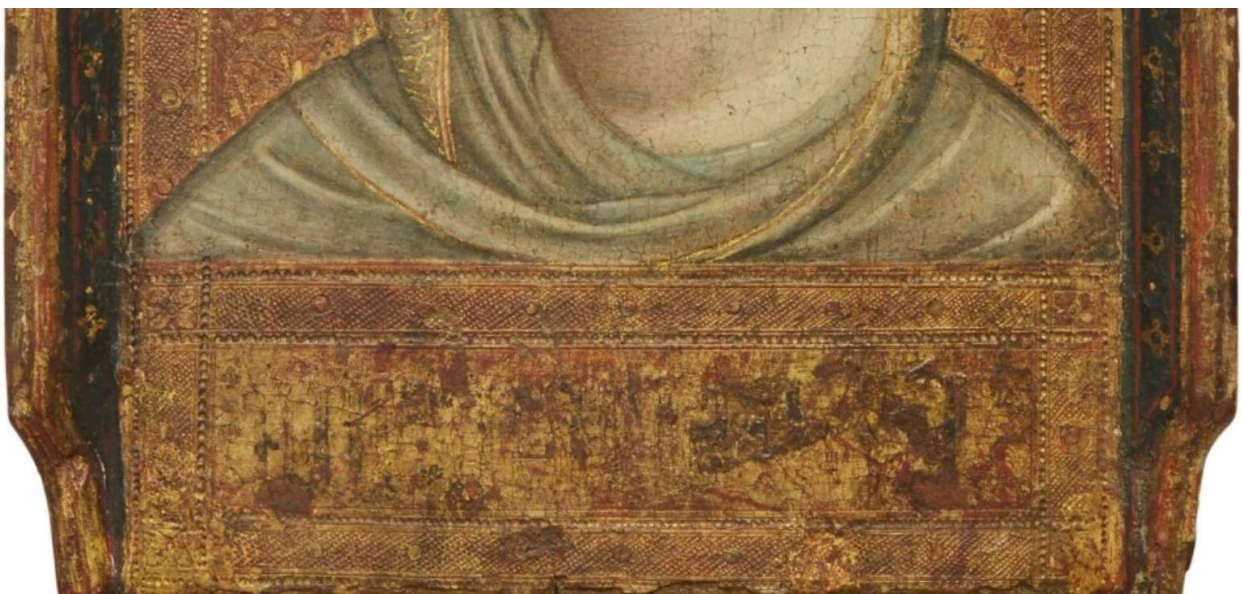


Fig. 3 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica of the Virgin Mary (detail).

fictitious frame around the Marian representation. This lower section, which does not present the plant motifs described earlier, takes on the form of a cartouche which once featured an inscription, of which little remains today. Towards the left we can make out an “M”, which leads us to posit that it might be a similar inscription to the one featured on another work from the same series, the Veronica from the Museu Episcopal in Vic, as we shall see shortly.

On the outside there is a little dust guard running around the painting, the inside of which features blue polychromy with an inner border delimited by two highly-pronounced red lines. Inside, we find a pattern of quatrefoil shapes separated by dots, executed in gold leaf. The outside of the dust guard, meanwhile, is moulded and appears to be giltwork, which generates an interesting contrast lending a

certain rhythm to the work’s visualisation. The lower section of the dust guard has been carved into a quarter circle, emulating the shape these complementary items had in the altarpieces of the period. As such, the work follows the model of a single-panel altarpiece at a smaller scale.

The back is interesting in that it permits us to observe the way the work was constructed, with its single panel onto which the dust guard was attached (fig. 4). The latter was carved with mitre joints and was fixed to the panel with wrought iron nails, the heads of which are visible in certain areas. We can also see the existence of holes relating to a later fixing system. Traces of plaster may also be observed in various areas, which would certainly suggest that the back originally had some kind of polychrome decoration applied to it.

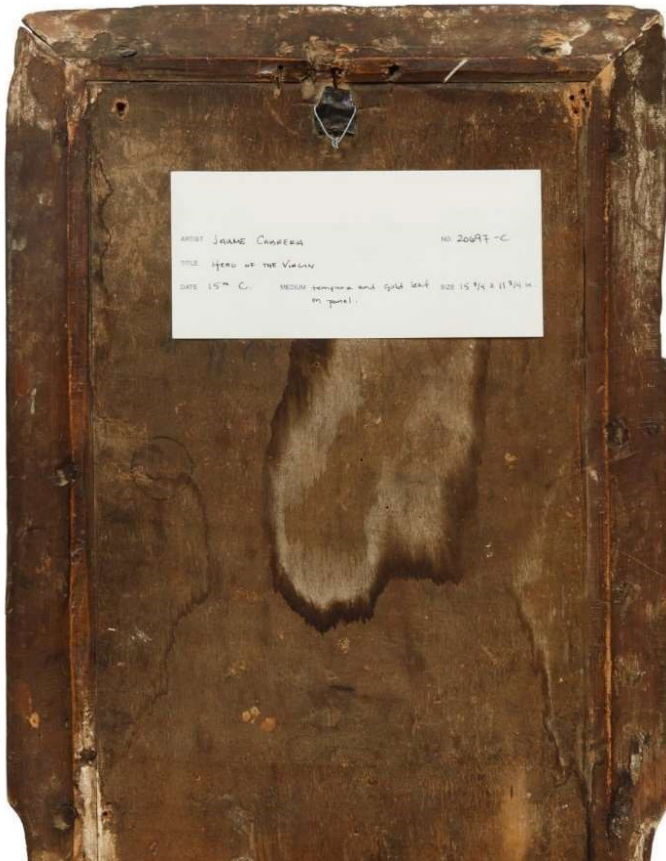


Fig. 4 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica of the Virgin Mary, verso.

MARIAN VERONICAS IN THE CROWN OF ARAGON

What we have here is a type of Marian portrait with extremely specific and well-defined characteristics, particularly widespread in the Crown of Aragon from 1400 onwards, coinciding with the arrival of International Gothic and the reign of King Martin the Humane (1396-1410), who played a special role in popularising these Marian portraits taken *ipsius facie*. In all the pieces related to the one we are dealing with here, and to which we will return shortly, the Virgin is depicted in bust format, and we would add that there are certain shared features that suggest the repeated production of a specific model including the following characteristics: Mary is consistently turned to one side, with rectilinear folds in the garments and the same facial features, including details as specific as the slightly squinting left eye.



Fig. 5 Bartomeu Coscollà. Reliquary with the Veronica belonging to Martin the Humane. Valencia, cathedral treasury.

These common features are due to the fact that this sort of image spread through the Crown of Aragon following a highly precise process of codified imitation of an image belonging to none other than the king. What is most significant here is that the original image has survived. We are referring to the reliquary of the Veronica housed in the treasury of Valencia Cathedral, a piece of “footed” silverware Martin the Humane commissioned from the Valencian silversmith Bartomeu Coscollà (fig. 5). The reliquary includes an elaborate round base featuring the enamelled royal coat of arms and, at the top, a frame containing the Marian portrait, decorated with a border full of plant motifs. The Virgin’s face was depicted on a piece of parchment that is perfectly framed within said border, which shows that the reliquary was made expressly to hold the portrait/relic, and which is particularly interesting in that it presents a Marian face that shares many of the same characteristics as the painting we are studying here.⁵

There is one document certifying that King Martin had already taken possession of the relic by 1397, when he agreed to lend it out for use in the procession of the feast day of the “Purísima” being

⁵ From the extensive bibliography dealing with the reliquary, see GUDIOL 1921; SALAS 1936; CRISPÍ 1996a, pp. 91-94; CRISPÍ 1996b; ESPAÑOL 2001; SUREDA 2017, pp. 195-196; CASTELLÓ 2019, pp. 592-605.

held on 8 December in Barcelona:

“La primera, la prometença que'l senyor rey ha feta als consellers de Barcelona, de prestar cascun any per honrar la dita solemnitat la molt devota Verónica de Madona Santa Maria, en manera que cascun any ne sia supplicat per ells lo dit senyor”.⁶

Said document contained the decree issued by King Martin that very year regarding the holding of the liturgical feast to celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, which was sent to the members of the brotherhood of the Purísima in Barcelona (founded in 1333 with its headquarters in the Palau Reial Major and closely linked to the royal household⁷), giving detailed instructions about the nature of the acts to be carried out as part of the festivities. As such, to grant the event greater pomp and solemnity, the king agreed to lend out, from that time forwards, the portrait/relic, which belonged to his private chapel and was for his own personal use.⁸ That King Martin owned the relic can therefore be understood in a highly singular devotional context revolving around the interest that both the monarch and his brother who ruled before him, King John I (1387-1396), professed for both the Purísima and the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, which explains why both monarchs promoted the celebration of the feast day. In the light of the above, we can concur with Crispí in concluding that there was a close bond between the relic, which was one of the king's favourites, and the holding of the feast of the Purísima in Barcelona.⁹

It was against this backdrop that King Martin commissioned Bartomeu Coscollà to make the silver receptacle that would protect the relic and facilitate its participation in the aforementioned festivities, and which involved the public display of the portrait, being paraded through the streets of Barcelona. The reliquary must have been executed shortly after the king's decree was issued, given two letters from 1398 bear witness to the monarch's impatience with the silversmith Coscollà, who was yet to complete the commission.¹⁰ This reference has been widely interpreted as a circumstance allowing us to link the relic and the reliquary in a more or less conclusive manner,¹¹ though there have also been those voicing the opinion that this link is not beyond all doubt.¹² In any case, the object features the royal coat of arms on the base and the frame, which taken alongside the facts mentioned above, ought to dispel any doubts in this regard.¹³ The work ended up being housed in the treasury of the Cathedral of Valencia

6 Translation: “First, the promise that our Lord King made to the councillors of Barcelona to lend, each year, in order to honour said solemnity, the most devote Veronica of Our Lady Saint Mary, in such a way that said Lord was required by them to do so each year”. See MADURELL 1968, pp. 466-467; cfr. CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 86.

7 PLANAS 1995.

8 The earliest record of the relic being taken out on procession is from 1402. See GAZULLA, pp. 38-39, doc. XXII and CRISPÍ 1996a, pp. 91-92.

9 For more on these matters, see CRISPÍ 1996a, pp. 86-87.

10 GIRONA 1911, p. 110, doc. 10; GIRONA 1918, p. 385. Cfr. CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 91; CRISPÍ 1996b, pp. 93-94.

11 The first to posit this link were GUDIOL 1921 and SALAS 1936.

12 ESPAÑOL 2001, p. 149.

13 We should bear in mind that an inventory from 1410 refers to the Veronica in the following terms: “Item

in 1437 as guarantee against a loan, where it continues to be venerated to this day.¹⁴ In Valencia there is also a reliquary of royal provenance containing a comb and a lock of hair from the Virgin, which was originally linked with the Veronica reliquary, as recorded by an inventory drafted on the death of King Martin in 1410.¹⁵

It cannot have been the only piece of this type belonging to the royal family during this period, given Violant de Bar, the widow of King John I, Martin the Humane's brother, is recorded in 1415 as having pawned a round-based reliquary with an image of the Marian Veronica, which she recovered 14 years later.¹⁶ This was a work executed in precious materials such as silver, gold, pearls and gemstones, undoubtedly a more lavish piece than the reliquary Coscollà crafted some years earlier for King Martin.

As Marta Crispí pointed out at the time, although there were images of the Virgin attributed to Saint Luke in other locations, these portraits were more widespread in the Crown of Aragon at the start of the 15th century than anywhere else in Europe.¹⁷ The fame enjoyed by the effigy/relic housed today in Valencia must have been considerable, given Veronica images that draw clearly on this model are preserved in various locations throughout the Crown of Aragon. This would appear to indicate that following Martin the Humane's involvement in the celebration of the feast of the Purísima in Barcelona, and particularly once the relic had been publicly displayed, other Veronicas spread throughout his lands, either in the form of "footed" reliquaries or as little panel works for private worship, such as those undoubtedly carried out by the painter Jaume Cabrera, including the work we

un reliquiari ab son peu d'argent daurat on ha VIII senyals ab corones en que es encastada la Veronica de la Verge Maria orlada de argent smeltat de diversos fullatges en la qual orla ha. VIII senyals reyal's" (Massó 1905, quoted by CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 92) (translation: "Also a reliquary with its base of gilt silver where there are VIII marks with crowns in which the Veronica of the Virgin Mary is mounted with an enamelled silver border with a range of foliage motifs and with VIII royal marks on the border"). The reliquary preserved today in Valencia presents four enamels on the stand and eight on the frame containing the relic (four on the front and four more on the back), matching the description provided by the document in question.

14 An inventory from that year, 1437, describes the reliquary as "[...] la veremta de la sagrada verge Maria la qual Sent Lluch obra de les dues mans la qual sta engastada als caps d'argent daurat de petites rosetes blanques ab petits smalts de armes Darago ab la corona" (translation: "[...] the true image of the holy Virgin Mary that Saint Luke worked with his own hands, and which is mounted above with gilt silver with little white rosettes with little enamels featuring the coat of arms of Aragon with the crown"). See LLORENS 1964, p. 184

15 MASSO 1905, p. 562.

16 "Item unum aliud reliquarium cunn pede fustis cohopto de plata auri cum foleis in quibus sunt aliqui perule grossetes, e manudes et in medio ipsius reliquarii est himago virginis Marie, et in capite ipsius ymaginis est unus lapis vermilibus, vocatus balaix, et in manu eiusdem imaginis est unus lapis vocatus saffre, et in pede dicti [sic] unus lapis modicus vocatus balaix" (CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 98). Translation: "Also another reliquary with a wooden base covered in gilt silver with leaves, on which there are large and small pearls, and in the middle of this reliquary there is an image of the Virgin Mary, in the upper section of this image there is a red gemstone known as 'balaix' [ruby], and in the hand of said image there is a gemstone known as 'saffre', and on the aforementioned base a medium-size gemstone known as 'balaix'".

17 CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 85.

are dealing with here. We have already seen how King Martin's relic was taken on procession through the streets of Barcelona, being subjected to public worship on 8 December as part of the feast of the Immaculate Conception,¹⁸ which must have helped to popularise the Marian portrait, fostering interest in acquiring copies of it, such as those recorded (some of which have survived) in Tortosa, Vic, Huesca, Barcelona, Alcover, or the one we have before us here.



Fig. 6 Anonymous. Veronica. Huesca Cathedral treasury.

Some of these faithfully followed the model of the image belonging to the King, and were drawn in graphite on parchment, such as the one from Huesca (fig. 6); whereas others, such as the one we are studying here, were painted on wood in many colours. One should not forget that the image belonging to King Martin was considered the Vera Effigies of the Mother of God, either copied or derived from the one painted by Saint Luke, in all likelihood executed based on one of the copies preserved in a number of churches in Rome and known as depictions of Madonna Avvocata. These were, then, portraits rendered *ipsius facie*, from the very face considered the true and authentic image of the Virgin. Of the best-known examples it is worth mentioning those from the churches of San Sisto, Santa Maria in Via Lata, Santa Maria in Ara Coeli or Santa Maria del Rosario in Monte Mario (fig.

7).¹⁹ The latter is the one that bears the closest resemblance with the model that spread through the Crown of Aragon thanks to Martin the Humane's icon and, of these, the one with the squinting left eye. It is therefore likely that the portrait/relic belonging to the Aragonese king came into his possession during his years in Sicily, though it may also have been a present that came directly from Rome or Avignon, the latter being a city he passed through on his return to Barcelona.²⁰ Furthermore, another link between these Roman images and King Martin's Veronica is the fact that they were also taken out on procession through the streets within the context of specific feast days linked to the Virgin, such as the Assumption.²¹

18 The religious epicentre of the celebration took place in the noble hall and in the chapel of Santa María at the Palau Reial Major. In addition, the streets of Barcelona witnessed a procession presided over by the king's Veronica, which was subjected to public and urban display. See ESPAÑOL 2009-2010, p. 41

19 For more on these matters, see Crispí 1996a, pp. 89-90; CRISPÍ 1996b, ESPAÑOL 2001 and SUREDA 2017.

20 CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 93.

21 CRISPÍ 1996a, pp. 88-90.



Fig. 7 On the left, anonymous Madonna Avvocata, Rome, monastery of Santa Maria del Rosario in Monte Mario. On the right, Jaume Cabrera, Veronica, Buenos Aires, Jaime Eguiguren.

These Roman images were a derivation of the Byzantine Hagiosoritissa, characterised by presenting Mary half-length with her arms raised in supplication, without the Infant Jesus and turned slightly to one side. We see, then, that there are both similarities and contrasts with the Valencian portrait/relic and the rest of the paintings that came later, including the one we are studying here.²² It is thus that the Byzantine overtones we can detect in our painting are fully justified, as we are dealing with images of clearly Oriental inspiration which, both in their small-scale square format and in Mary's facial features and the type of veil she wears, are evidently reminiscent of Oriental icons.

This aesthetic choice was by no means fortuitous, given the intention was to present the faithful with images that were markedly different from those they were accustomed to seeing. In the case of Catalonia, the region from which the Veronica we are dealing with here originated, the artistic language the faithful were used to was the Italianising style that dominated the painting carried out there during the second half of the 14th century. By about 1400, just when these Veronicas were becoming widespread throughout the Crown of Aragon, the new prevailing lexicon was International Gothic,

²² For example, none of them features Mary with her arms raised. See CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 99.

characterised by a sweetness, dynamism and affectation that were also quite at odds with the artistic language shown in the Marian images we are addressing here, characterised by their old-fashioned, hieratic, rough features not prone to sophistication. These Marian portraits with their Byzantine appearance, which showed little more than Mary's face against a gilt background, focussed the attention of the faithful on the penetrating gaze of the Mother of God, and as such the relationship established with the image was profound and direct, generating an almost physical and particularly emotive dialogue.

The Oriental and Byzantine connection of these Veronicas influenced by Martin the Humane's relic suggests a direct link with the legend concealed behind this sort of representation, a story whose first documented record is to be found in Oriental texts from the 6th century, whereby Saint Luke painted a portrait of Mary in remembrance of her. This account reached the West and became widespread from the 12th century, meaning the popular imagination quickly transformed the evangelist into a celebrated and skilful painter of icons.²³ The Crown of Aragon played a central role in this process, where there are even some altarpieces including scenes in which Luke is seen to be painting the Virgin, such as the one from Valencia's guild of painters and carpenters, housed today at the city's Museo de Bellas Artes, and dated to about 1370. This piece stands as the oldest reference to, and depiction of, a Marian Veronica in the Crown of Aragon.²⁴ This brings us to the chronological period immediately preceding the emergence of the Marian Veronicas based on King Martin's relic.

By the year it arrived in Valencia (1437), the Humane monarch's Veronica was already considered to have come directly from the hand of Saint Luke,²⁵ though by the end of that century the legend had simmered down somewhat and the work was deemed to have been directly copied from a Roman image, though that image would indeed have been painted by the evangelist.²⁶ This therefore shows that the copies of the Roman Veronicas arriving in the Crown of Aragon were quick to acquire fame and prestige due to their faithfully reproducing an original *acheiropoietos* (Greek term referring to an icon made without hands), meaning of divine origin, which explains why these paintings were attributed the same supernatural powers the Roman images were said to have.

It is also worth noting at this juncture that these depictions bore a close resemblance to the various Marian icons of Oriental provenance recorded in the Crown of Aragon from the 13th century onward, some of which had been gifted to major shrines by monarchs prior to Martin the Humane, as was the case with the one James I the Conqueror donated to the Cathedral, or Seo, of Valencia. Other works include the one recorded in the shrine of Santa María de Valdonzella (Barcelona), still preserved, or the one formally venerated in Barcelona's Augustinian monastery, since lost. Both would be taken out

23 BACCI 1998; BACCI 2004; MOLINA 2014.

24 CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 96, fig. 5.

25 "[...] la qual Sent Luch obra de les sues mans" (LLORENS 1964, pp. 4; cfr. CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 88). Translation: "[...] which St. Luke worked with his own hands".

26 GUDIOL 1921, p. 71; SUREDA 2017, p. 199

on procession at times of natural disaster or calamity. Martin the Humane also made donations of this nature, such as icon he gifted to the church of Tobed (Zaragoza) in 1400.²⁷ This array of information allows us to deduce that a section of the public was more or less familiar with the Byzantine-style aesthetic represented in these miraculous images, and that their miraculous properties may have been associated with their Oriental appearance. Or, at the very least, that the faithful felt its peculiar appearance pointed to the authenticity of the relic in question.²⁸

King Martin's Veronica was the point of departure for the popularisation of a model of the Virgin's face that took either the form of a round-based reliquary or a small devotional painting on a wooden support like miniature altarpieces, as is the case for the work before us here. Josep Gudiol Cunill classified the first generation of Crown of Aragon Veronicas into two more or less simultaneous types. The first, which is the one that interests us, are represented by Martin the Humane's relic, identified as the Veronica preserved at Valencia Cathedral, which was the inspiration for the icons from Tortosa, Vic, Alcover, the Soler y Rovirosa collection, and the one we are studying here. The aforementioned piece from the Cathedral of Huesca should also be added to the list, although it may be a later, 16th-century, copy. The second type Gudiol identified, and particularly widespread throughout the Valencian region, presents an image of the Virgin with a sad facial expression, reminiscent of a Mater Dolorosa, and linked to various works by Valencian painters of the International Gothic style such as Pere Nicolau or Gonçal Peris. This category dates from some years after the first type, with the oldest examples also being from the reign of Martin the Humane. In any case, these are less old-fashioned and by no means Byzantine-looking depictions, in sharp contrast to the Roman models we are dealing with.²⁹

On the other hand, there were also pieces that would not have tallied with either of the two types,³⁰ being new interpretations of the Marian Vera Effigies, such as the one housed in a private collection in Barcelona, and unpublished to date (fig. 8). There are also two-sided Veronicas with the image of the Virgin on one face and that of Christ on the other, along with pairs of panels, each with one of the

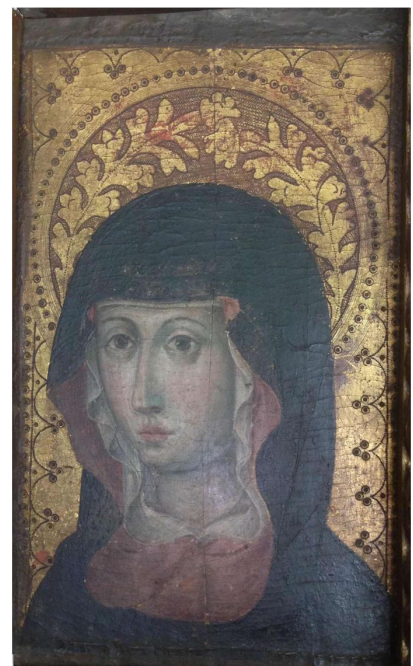


Fig. 8 Anonymous. Veronica. Barcelona, private collection.

27 CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 95; MOLINA 2014, with both reproduced in figs. 4 and 6. For more on the Valdonzella icon also see GÜELL-ALBACETE 2016.

28 For more on this matter, see BELTING 1990, pp. 483-496.

29 GUDIOL 1921, pp. 67-76. It is to Gudiol, in fact, that we owe what is without doubt the first perfectly-contextualised reference to this sort of work in the historiography of the Spanish peninsula (GUDIOL 1902, p. 468). An updating of the two groups of Veronicas may be found in CRISPÍ 1996b, pp. 87-93. Also see CRISPÍ 1996a and SUREDA 2017.

30 For more on these, see CRISPÍ 1996b, pp. 92-93.

aforementioned images. There are also recorded diptychs with the two Veronicas, like the one Martin the Humane gave to his confessor Pere Despujol, the prior of the Carthusian monastery of Valldemossa (Mallorca),³¹ which once again places said monarch at the centre of the popularisation of Veronicas throughout his lands.

As the 15th century progressed, it is possible the Marian Veronicas gradually took on decorative elements, more complex inscriptions or innovative iconographical details that contributed to a more complex visualisation of the works when they were publicly displayed. This is the case of the Marian Veronica recorded at the church of Santa María del Mar in Barcelona, which had a partner piece with the face of Christ. A complete and detailed 16th-century description of both still survives today. In the case of the Marian icon, it tells us that it was a reliquary with a round base, that it featured enamel decorations and included an inscription on the base that in all likelihood referred to the year it was executed:

“Item una Veronica de nostra dona de argent daurat ab una stela al front ab una diadema en que ha un títol que diu Monstra te esse Matrem ab deu steles y al mig de dites steles una creueta he en los pits hi ha tres esmalts blans ab fullatges he una stela al muscho dret e dos esmalts rodons verts quatre angels ab ales la hu dels quals no te res e laltre ab llansa, e laltre no te res, e l’altre te lo mon en la ma, ab una creuheta, y en laltre senya, e en les spalles de dits angels ha [?] gerretes he tres esmalts de carmesí ab un títol que diu [?]. E mes cinch cherubins ab dotze esmalts verts he blans [?] fulles ab sengles cascavells de argent llarchs ab ses abelletes e quatre cascavells rodons entre fulla y fulla he seu sobre un peu de fust daurat ho peanya en que ha un títol que diu lany 1482 [...]”.³²

Returning to the first type of Veronica categorised by Gudiol, the one matching Martin the Humane’s relic and the painting we are examining here, this is the oldest type, always presenting the image of the Virgin on just one side.³³ Apart from the Veronica that has come to stand as the head of the series (fig. 5), the one that is most similar to this original model is the work preserved in the Cathedral of Huesca (fig. 6), as it faithfully reproduces all the formal aspects and, furthermore, was executed on paper and

31 CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 95; MOLINA 2014, p. 215.

32 Arxiu Diocesà de Barcelona, Visites Pastorals, vol. 43, fol. 230 (year 1596). Translation: “Also a Veronica of Our Lady, made of silver with a star on her forehead, with a diadem bearing a legend that reads Monstra te esse Matrem with ten stars and in the middle of these stars a little cross and on her breast there are three white enamel decorations with plant motifs and a star on her right shoulder and two round green pieces of enamelware four angels with wings one of which has nothing and the other a spear, and the other has nothing, and the other has the world in his hand, with a little cross, and is making the sign of benediction with the other hand, and on the backs of said angels there are [?] jugs and three crimson pieces of enamel with a legend reading [?]. And in addition five cherubs with twelve pieces of green and white enamel [?] leaves both with long silver bells with their “abelletes” and four round bells between one leaf and the next, and this sits on top of a gilt wooden base or pedestal where there is a legend with the year 1482 [...]”.

33 SUREDA 2017, pp. 195-198.



Fig. 9 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica from Vic Cathedral.
Museu Episcopal, Vic.

without polychromy, directly imitating the support and technique presented by King Martin's relic. All the same, it has been argued that this copy may have been carried out in the 16th century, meaning it falls outside the chronological period of interest to us here.³⁴

The Veronica bearing the closest similarities with the one we are studying here is the work preserved at the Museu Episcopal in Vic, as revealed by Josep Gudiol Cunill (fig. 9).³⁵ There are various things that make this image of particular interest, such as the fact that we know its provenance, the Cathedral of Vic, due to it being recorded in an inventory from 1414,³⁶ and furthermore, the fact that it is the one that resembles ours most in terms of the morphology of the support.

It is thus that both take on the form of miniature altarpieces, including dust guard. Towards the bottom

they also present a horizontal frieze on which the Marian bust sits, almost like a predella, intended to include an inscription. In the piece from the Museu Episcopal in Vic we read the words "Mater Dei" (Mother of God),³⁷ on marble-style decoration. The gilt background of the Vic panel presents punch mark decoration that is quite different to the Veronica we are studying here, based on less delicate motifs and reminiscent of estampillado stamp work, while the Virgin does not feature the gilt backstitch border on the veil. What can be said about both works, however, is that the contour of the figure is outlined using a thick black brushstroke perfectly defining it against the gold leaf background. The dust guard on the Vic portrait also invites comparison with the one from our work, despite no longer being complete. The only original section is the lefthand one, but it presents similar decoration on its inner side, with blue polychromy, though here the motifs are gold stars. The outsides of the dust guards from both works are moulded and gilt, which constitutes yet another link between the two. Finally, it is worth noting that the Vic Veronica's base with its central orifice was added at a later date, in all likelihood to adapt it to some change in location within the cathedral.³⁸

34 For more on the Huesca Veronica, see SUREDA 2017, p. 196

35 GUDIOL 1921, p. 70, fig. 3; SUREDA 2017, pp. 214-15, fig. 2

36 CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 98; CRISPÍ 1996b, pp. 83 and 94

37 Gudiol, on the other hand, transcribed it as "Maria virgo" (GUDIOL 1921, p. 70). Crispí interpreted these inscriptions as possibly being linked to the Immaculate Conception (CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 100). The inscriptions appeared in other Veronicas that have not survived, such as the one recorded in 1522 in Barcelona Cathedral, which read "Purissima Maria Mater Dei" (CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 84).

38 As commented by SUREDA 2017, p. 215, n. 114.

Another Veronica belonging to the same category as ours is preserved in the Cathedral of Tortosa (fig. 10).³⁹ As with the Vic work, it originated in a church that presided over a diocese, which lends it even greater significance. In this case what we have before us is an example of a round-based piece, like the relic belonging to King Martin and preserved in Valencia. Yet it serves as very much a poor cousin, given the entire structure is made of polychromed wood, suggesting the Marian portrait was completely painted, like our painting and the Vic one. As with those two, this Veronica is depicted on a background decorated with metallic leaf and punched motifs, and also includes an inscription toward the bottom (“Ane [sic] Maria gra[tia] plena dominus”), although here the format is different, with a much narrower cartouche than in the Vic Veronica or the one we are studying here. Another parallel between the



Fig. 10 Veronica. Tortosa, cathedral treasury.

Tortosa icon and our panel is the backstitched gilt border on the veil, which also features pseudo-kufic motifs, which alongside the Byzantine features of the portrait reinforces the orientalisng appearance of the image. With regard to structure, the Tortosa Veronica clearly emulates King Martin’s reliquary. We see the same sort of base, with its mixtilinear profile, from which a much simpler shaft emerges linking up with the upper section which, once again, presents exactly the same format. This is a rectangular frame decorated with a wavy line around the Marian portrait, though without the decorative profusion or the heraldic escutcheons of the royal piece. As Molina commented, the function of the silver frame in the Valencian work was to emphasize the Marian portrait’s character as a relic. It contributed to underlining its sacred nature in much the same way as when remains of holy bodies were deposited in chests and other containers executed in precious materials.⁴⁰

We can identify the same kind of frame as the Tortosa work in two independent, round-based Veronicas preserved at one time in the church of Alcover (Tarragona), one depicting the Virgin and the other Christ, whose whereabouts are currently unknown (fig. 11). Gudiol once commented that the one with the Virgin was adapted to a round-based structure that could be easily disassembled,⁴¹ which along with the different, somewhat odd, style we can see in the surviving photo of it, might suggest that it was

39 GUDIOL 1921, p. 71, fig. 4; JOSE 1989; DOMENGE-VIDAL 2010, pp. 128-129.

40 MOLINA 2014, p. 212.

41 These were uncovered by GUDIOL 1921, p. 71, though without graphically reproducing them. We know of them through the photo that appears in VIDAL 1973, p. 56.

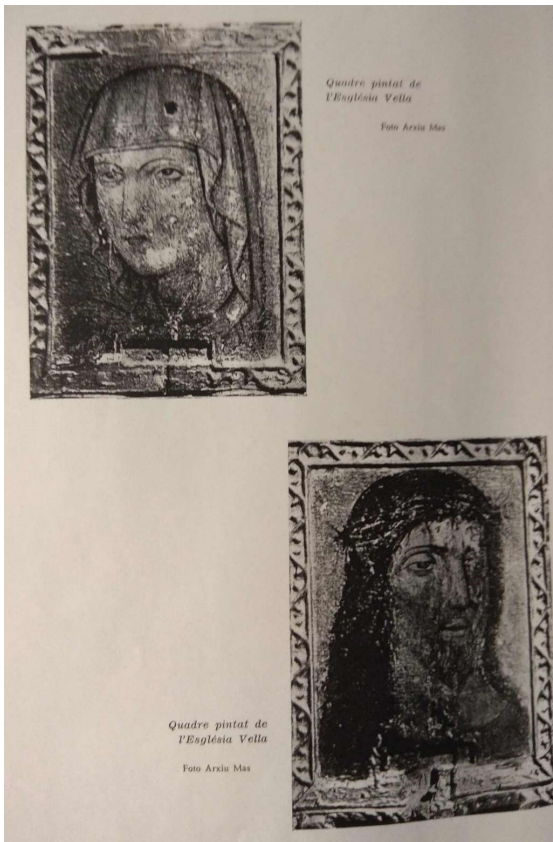


Fig. 11 Anonymous. Veronicas previously preserved in the church of Alcover. Whereabouts unknown.

subjected to varying modifications.⁴² In fact, and in contrast to the Marian images we have examined thus far, the Virgin does not meet the viewer's eye directly, but looks to her right. Meanwhile, one of this Veronica's more interesting aspects is the fact that the way the frame is decorated is a close match for the Tortosa work, though rather more elaborate here with its vesica piscis motives, typical of the Flamboyant Gothic style. This match in terms of type of frame and material is by no means fortuitous, suggesting the works were probably produced in the same context even if the styles of painting are different. Be that as it may, another interesting similarity, and something also shared with the Veronica we are studying here, is the presence of gilt decoration along the border of the Virgin's veil.

Although in the work we are studying here there is no wooden frame like in the Tortosa or Alcover Veronicas, what we do find is a decorative element that would appear to originate from the square shape framing King Martin's relic. We are referring to the punched border

around the perimeter of the gilt background, which acts as a sort of transposition of the silver frame housing the Marian image preserved in Valencia and the wooden ones from the Tortosa and Alcover ones. In our work we even observe a pattern of large dots standing out against a grid-like background, which could be interpreted as a simplification of the decoration on King Martin's Veronica, with its flowers and petals and circles in the middle. These flowers with their petals also invite parallels with the squares formed where the vertical and horizontal borders meet in our Veronica. This leads us to conclude that our Veronica, like the Tortosa and Alcover ones, are using less valuable materials to imitate the silver frame of the original model. This is more obvious in the pieces from Tortosa and Alcover, as they do reproduce the entire structure of the royal reliquary, but in the Veronica we are studying here, the different format and support result in a subtle transformation of that structure.

The last Veronica included in this homogeneous group is the one formerly preserved in the Soler y Rovirosa collection (Barcelona), of which we only have photographic evidence, and whose provenance is unknown (fig. 12).⁴³ It is interesting in that it presents a shift in design from the ones we have

⁴² Crispí considered it to be of inferior quality and possibly painted at a later date (CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 95, n. 55).

⁴³ GUDIOL-ALCOLEA 1986, p. 96, cat. 259, figs. 462-463. The photographs are preserved in the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic in Barcelona. The one that corresponds to the Marian face is Mas C-95957.



Fig. 12 Veronica previously preserved in the Soler y Rovirosa collection, (Barcelona).

examined thus far, being a two-faced painting with a Christ, Man of Sorrows with the Arma Christi opposite the Virgin. Stylistically, it is a perfect match both for the Tortosa and Vic Veronicas and the one we are studying here. Saying that, the surviving photos suggest that it may have been repainted at some point, at least on the face with the Virgin, as in addition to a lacuna on the surface of the painting, the border on Mary's veil is different to those we have seen so far. Unfortunately, the photo does not allow us to tell what the structure of the work was like, whether it was a "footed" round-based piece or if it had a frame.

Finally, with regard to the chronology of the Veronicas we have been examining, the fact that they all originated from Martin the Humane's relic, along with other documented

records, means we can date them to a perfectly-defined period spanning 1397-1414. The first of these dates is based on the earliest mention of Martin's Veronica which, as we have seen, is considered the origin of this series, while the concluding date comes from an inventory from Vic Cathedral mentioning the work currently housed in the town's Museu Episcopal. As commented by Crispí, this period coincides with the reign of Martin the Humane, which leads us to identify the earliest popularisation of Veronicas in the Crown of Aragon as having taken place during the monarch's years on the throne, and all the more so given he was directly involved in the process.⁴⁴

44 CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 98; CRISPÍ 1996b, pp. 94-95.

THE REAL FACE OF MARY

One of the main reasons why King Martin's Veronica became so widespread, not to mention its transposition onto a more popular and easily-reproduced format, was the fact that the relic was considered a true portrait, a Vera Effigies, of the Virgin. Regardless of whether it was thought to have been directly painted by St. Luke or was simply a faithful copy of the evangelist's portrait, we need to bear in mind that, in contrast to the residents of Rome, where a number of images attributed to St. Luke were preserved, the early-15th-century population of the Crown of Aragon did not have too many opportunities to contemplate first-hand the true face of the Mother of God. This would surely have generated interest in copying the king's Marian portrait and, in all likelihood, he took charge of promoting the production of copies made directly from it. These, despite being executed in a more economical format and painted on wood, and without themselves being relics, were imbued with the aura and virtus of the original portrait from the royal chapel. These copies were therefore interpreted in the same sense as the original relic, because they displayed the real physiognomy and proportions of the face of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁵

It is perhaps from this perspective that we should also view the Veronica painted on wood that was preserved in the Carthusian monastery of Valdecrist (Valencia), founded and funded by King Martin himself, where he was patron to a number of artistic projects. According to a 17th-century inventory, at the monastery "[...] is venerated, on the portable Altar of Our King Don Martin, measuring one and a half palms high, more or less, a panel painting depicting an exquisite image of Our Lady Mary the Most Holy, of whom our King was a great devotee; a copy of the one painted by St. Luke, which is venerated in Rome".⁴⁶ Records such as this would therefore suggest that Martin encouraged the production of wood panel painted copies of his own Marian effigy. From there, thanks to the popularisation of the image by taking it out on procession through the streets of Barcelona, combined with the fascination it would have elicited among the common people, other copies must have been made, intended for both large and small churches or even for private worship. The Vic and Tortosa Veronicas are proof of this, and the one we are studying here ought to be seen in the same light, as it is highly likely to have come from some Catalanian church.

With regard to their use, the surviving records reveal that the Veronicas were displayed on top of altars during certain feast days in the liturgical calendar, but we also find them hanging in sacristies, as was the case for the Vic portrait,⁴⁷ or on pillars in church naves, as recorded in Lleida Cathedral, although in the latter we do not know whether the image was of the Virgin or Christ.⁴⁸ The morphology of both the Vic Veronica and the one we are studying here, with no base to support them, would not have made

45 ESPAÑOL 2002-2003, p. 90; ESPAÑOL 2013, p. 122.

46 PÉREZ 1936, p. 254; CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 93.

47 SUREDA 2017, p. 215, n. 116.

48 VELASCO 2008, p. 468.

them altogether suited to being displayed on an altar or being taken out on procession, so we ought to consider them as images that would have been displayed in a relatively permanent setting, as the various holes located on the top of the back of our Veronica would seem to confirm (fig. 4). Their small-scale format and location in specific areas of the church, such as pillars, may have contributed to reinforcing the visual effect of structural elements which, due to their nature and morphology, were not easy to imbue with a sense of holiness. In the event of being displayed in sacristies, they would have added to the beauty of a part of the church that was not easy to access, which also housed altars and relics. There, only select individuals would have been able to see and interact with them.

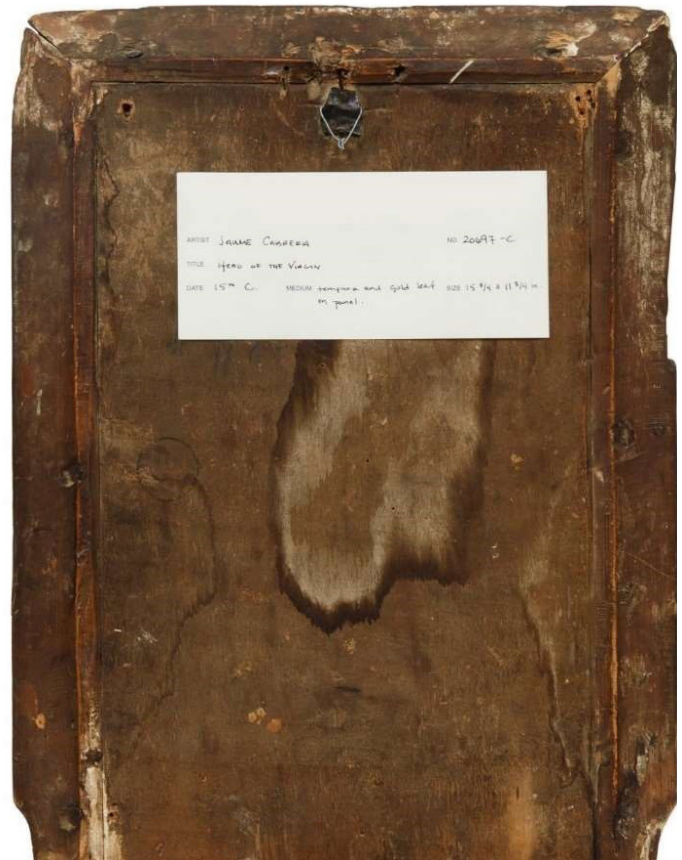


Fig. 4 Jaume Cabrera. Veronica of the Virgin Mary, verso.

The inclusion of Veronicas on round-based or “footed” reliquaries intended for display on the top of altars or on public procession is unique to the Crown of Aragon,⁴⁹ as was the transposition of this original model into the miniaturised altarpiece format, as observed in the work we are studying here or in the one from the Museu Episcopal in Vic. In both cases they are faithful images of the relic transposed onto a new support involving substantial changes in the nature of the piece. As such, we see how the original image that was displayed on the altar or taken out on procession through the streets transformed into a different sort of representation, intended for permanent display inside, whether in a public church or private, personal chapel.

In this transformative process we see that both our Veronica and the Vic one become small pieces of furniture including dust guards, a structural element added in order to convert it into a reduced-scale version of the altarpieces that presided over presbyteries and side chapels in churches. This evolution in the original reliquary model is significant, as it constituted a shift from an image considered a relic in itself to another that became a reflection of it as a form of liturgical furniture. And most important of all, despite the latter not essentially being relics, they were held in the same esteem and considered equally authentic due to the faithfulness with which they reproduced the original model.

From a devotional point of view, the series of Veronicas we have been examining should be included in

⁴⁹ CRISPÍ 1996a, p. 99; CRISPÍ 1996b, p. 95.

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the category of artworks conceived of specifically to incentivise private and empathic piety, given these were small-scale objects the faithful could interact with on a personal level, in direct visual and spiritual dialogue. This category would also include other sacred artworks of great devotional charge, such as the images of the Pietà or Christ, Man of Sorrows, as well as those associated during the Quattrocento with religious practices linked to modern devotio which, among other functions, were intended to make the faithful experience the pain that Christ and the Virgin underwent during the Passion.

Although of a different nature, these highly-emotive sentiments could also be experienced on contemplating the faithful, true images of the faces of Mary and Jesus, given worshippers were not particularly familiar with portraits thought to depict just that, thereby explaining their great powers of suggestion. All the more so taking into account that some of them stood out in terms of their extraordinary nature as acheiropoietos, or divine images not made by human hand. The group of works to which the one we are studying here belongs also includes some in which the image of the Virgin is depicted against a gilt background, as seen in both ours and the Vic and Tortosa versions. That decoration contributed to heightening the divine sense of the image, and increasing the degree of fascination generated by contemplating the true portrait of Mary, further compounded by certain orientalising features that stood out against the gold leaf. To gaze upon these Veronicas in a half-light illuminated by nothing more than flickering candle flames must have inspired the faithful with extremely suggestive feelings and sentiments.

THE ATTRIBUTION AND THE PAINTER: JAUME CABRERA

It was Josep Gudiol Ricart and Santiago Alcolea Blanch who attributed the Tortosa Cathedral Veronica to Jaume Cabrera, while claiming the ones from the Soler y Rovirosa collection, the Museu Episcopal in Vic and the one we are studying here were from his circle.⁵⁰ Antoni José Pitarch supported this assertion, noting that the Tortosa work was more refined than the others.⁵¹ Subsequently, Francesc Ruiz attributed them all to the Cabrera circle, including the Tortosa one,⁵² while Marta Piñol opted to attribute the Soler y Rovirosa one to the master's workshop and the rest to his circle. She argued that the series of Veronicas were not up to the standard of other works by Jaume Cabrera and his workshop, but failed to justify the arguments that led her to that conclusion.⁵³ On the other hand, more recent publications that have not focussed so closely on stylistic questions simply present works such as the Vic Veronica as being by Jaume Cabrera.⁵⁴

Personally, we struggle to see the differences others claim to have identified separating the Tortosa Veronica from the rest. And it is hard to see what stylistic aspects would allow one to put the Soler y Rovirosa collection work above the rest, as one of the aforementioned scholars did, especially given the surviving photo seems to suggest the panel may have been repainted, a matter that certainly needs to be cleared up as soon as it appears on the market once more. To all of this we should add that we are dealing with a group of works that are faithfully copying a specific model, and as such the painter's own personal style is relegated to a secondary level, camouflaged as it is among the direct, hieratic and orientalising forms of the original Veronica, which ultimately determine the expressive language of any subsequent versions.

On these grounds we would argue that it is not appropriate to separate one image from another due to differences which, in essence, do not allow us to establish differentiating spaces or margins of attribution. Even if we accept that the modelling and brushwork of the Tortosa Veronica is somewhat different, less severe, we would still argue that they could all have come out of the same painter's workshop specialising in copying and popularising King Martin's Veronica. Said workshop may, as commented by Gudiol y Alcolea, have been Jaume Cabrera's, and it was thus that Antoni José identified stylistic links between the Tortosa Veronica and the altarpiece Cabrera executed for the brotherhood of San Nicolás from the church of Santa María in Manresa (ca. 1406-1412), which is still preserved in situ (fig. 13).⁵⁵

50 GUDIOL-ALCOLEA 1986, pp. 95-96, cat. 244 and pp. 259-261.

51 JOSÉ 1989.

52 RUIZ 2005a, pp. 107 and 111.

53 PIÑOL 2011, p. 58, pp. 130-131 and 146.

54 SUREDA 2017, p. 196.

55 JOSÉ 1989.



Fig. 13 Altarpiece of St. Nicholas. Manresa, church of Santa María.

Jaume Cabrera was a painter belonging to the first Gothic International generation in the Catalan region.⁵⁶ The earliest records we have mentioning him date from 1394, when he appears already in charge of his own workshop and signing a contract for an altarpiece for the church of Sant Martí de Calonge (Girona), which had been completed by 1396. In the known documentation detailing the commissions received in subsequent years, he appears as a master painter living in Barcelona with a workshop on a street referred to as “dels Vigatans”. We know that he married Joana who, curiously, is mentioned as the painter’s guarantor in some of his commissions. They had two children together, one that died as a child in 1412 and another, Gabriela, who ended up secretly marrying another artist, the painter Jaume Cirera, who had worked in her father’s workshop. This incident gave rise

to the intervention of no lesser figure than the king himself, Alphonse the Magnanimous (1430). The last record we have of his professional activity is from 1432, when he received final payment for an altarpiece he had executed for the monastery of Santa María in Pedralbes (Barcelona).

Jaume Cabrera did not work much in the Catalan capital, most likely on account of the fierce competition that existed in the city with painters such as Lluís Borrassà and Joan Mates controlling the art market. That is why he is more extensively documented in the city’s outlying towns such as Sarrià, Pedralbes, Alella, Canovelles, Esparreguera or Sant Martí Sarroca; in the Girona area, both in the city itself and in outlying towns including Olot, Calonge, Torroella de Montgrí, Sant Feliu de Guíxols or La Bisbal; and also in a number of locations within the Vic bishopric, such as Sant Joan de les Abadesses, Vallfogona, Sant Julià de Sassorba, Vic, Rajadell, Castelltallat, Manresa or Solsona. As we can see, this is a painter the records from the time mention with regard to a good number of commissions and other details.

On the question of his training, it has been supposed that he was apprenticed in Barcelona, perhaps at the workshop of Lluís Borrassà, though there is only one record mentioning them together, and that dates from 1401, when the latter acted for him in a legal capacity to collect on a debt owed to him.

⁵⁶ These varying biographical details can be found in GUDIOL-ALCOLEA 1986, pp. 92-94 and RUIZ 2005.

This hypothetical connection, only supported by the aforementioned reference and certain stylistic parallels, has allowed some scholars to argue that Cabrera may have taken over Borrassà's workshop, the most important one in Barcelona at the time, when the latter died in 1424-25. This theory also goes on to suggest that Cabrera, along with some other painter such as Pere Sarreal, undertook to complete the works that Borrassà had left unfinished, such as the altarpiece of Santa Marta, Santo Domingo y San Pedro Mártir, intended for Barcelona Cathedral, preserved today though broken up, the compartments of which may or may not have been the work of Cabrera.⁵⁷ It is our opinion that the altarpiece is a perfect match for late Borrassà, and we see no reason to attribute its compartments to Cabrera.⁵⁸

This matter still awaits historiographic clarification, requiring further attention in the future. Also pending resolution are certain issues affecting the corpus of works attributed to Cabrera, such as for example the clear stylistic discrepancies between the only documented work by Cabrera, the San Nicolás altarpiece from the Manresa Seo, executed in about 1406, or the altarpiece from the church of Santa María de Sant Martí Sarroca (fig. 14), which links up perfectly with the former; and other works included in the painter's catalogue, such as the San Salvador altarpiece from Alzina de Ribelles (Lleida), housed today in the Museu Maricel in Sitges (fig. 15) (except the predella, which was broken up), or a



Fig. 14 Altarpiece of the Virgin Mary. Sant Martí Sarroca, church of Santa María.



Fig. 15 Jaume Cabrera. Altarpiece of the Holy Saviour from Alzina de Ribelles (Lleida). Sitges, Museu Maricel.

57 RUIZ 1996, RUIZ 1997 and RUIZ 2005b, pp. 81-82. Cfr. PIÑOL 2011, pp. 135-139 and 339-340, fig. 209. The first person to link said altarpiece with Cabrera was GUDIOL 1953, p. 60

58 VELASCO, awaiting publication.

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Fig. 16 Triptych. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional.

triptych from the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid (fig. 16).⁵⁹ These are just a few examples, and other works could be added to the debate, such as the Holy Burial preserved in the Museu d'Art in Girona (fig. 17), originally from Torroella de Montgrí, one of the master's most striking works. All of this is a clear indication that, despite having been expurgated and modified relatively recently, the current catalogue of paintings attributed to Jaume Cabrera is anything but homogeneous.



Fig. 17 Jaume Cabrera. Holy Burial, from Torroella de Montgrí (Girona). Museu d'Art, Girona.

Alberto Velasco González
PhD in History of Art

Lleida, 6 June 2021

⁵⁹ For the catalogue of works currently attributed to Cabrera, see GUDIOL-ALCOLEA 1986, pp. 95-96, RUIZ 2005 and PIÑOL 2011.

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