



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ARTS & ANTIQUES

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**ALTAR  
CROSS**

Palencia, ca 1535-1559

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## *Altar Cross*

Palencia, ca 1535-1559

Silver gilt, partially preserving its color. Cast, lathed, molded, engraved, embossed, and chiseled

Dimensions: Height: 37 cm (14.57 inches); width: 24 cm (9.45 inches)  
and 15 cm (5.91 inches) on the base side

Very incomplete marks on the base inner edge: Greek eur-de-lys cross, PA/-- and ---/VM (?).

Long, zigzag burin engraving.

Weight: 1,406 g (49.60 oz)

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The base is triangular and stepped, supported by three clawed feet with a winged human head; the outbound angle is decorated with engraved leaves while the plinth has embossed and chiseled canes. After a flat area comes the node, an oval jar supported by three satyr figures, the neck presenting three cast serpents forming an S, and on the crowning plate, cherub heads hanging from pieces of cloth and garlands with fruits. The cross is Greek, and it has three baluster-shaped arms with circular expansions on their ends coming from a central circular medal; lathed knobs give movement to its outline being applied to the four angles of the cross and the finishing of the arms.

Their surface is decorated with grotesque motifs based on plant scrolls on bearded heads, dragons, and other hybrid beings, as well as male torsos, little cherub heads, and *candelieri* motifs, all with reflection symmetry. The front is dominated by the image of Crucified Christ (silver colored, except the loincloth, which is golden in color), carrying three nails, a prominent crown of thorns, and the skull at the foot of the tree; the back has no central figure.

The inner edge of the base has the three obligatory marks (although they are very incomplete), as well as the burin engraving indicating that the silver grade has been analyzed. The locality stamp, as usual, refers to the arms of the city, but since it was stamped right on the edge of the angle, the stamping only left the mark of a Greek fleur-de-lys cross with an outlined contoured, the bottom part without the castle with three battlements that completed it.

These arms<sup>1</sup> correspond to the Castilian city of Palencia, so this is where the piece was marked and carved.

The other two marks are nominal, corresponding to the author stamp and the hallmark. But due to their incomplete stamping, we could only interpret the syllable PA, corresponding to the beginning of the legend Paredes, which is the last name of the silversmith *Cristóbal de Paredes*, who indeed uses PA/REDS as his personal stamp. Active during the second half of the sixteenth century,<sup>2</sup> it is known that, in addition to being an author, he was a gold and silver hallmark stamper between November 20, 1535 and November, 1559.<sup>3</sup> But this time we believe that his intervention was not as the author of the piece, but as a hallmark stamper, since the sign of his stamp is near the one of the locality stamp, which is what is recommended for marking. Therefore, if we are right, the cross must have been carved before November 1559, and, due to the style used, both in form and decorations, we should date it in the middle years of the century.

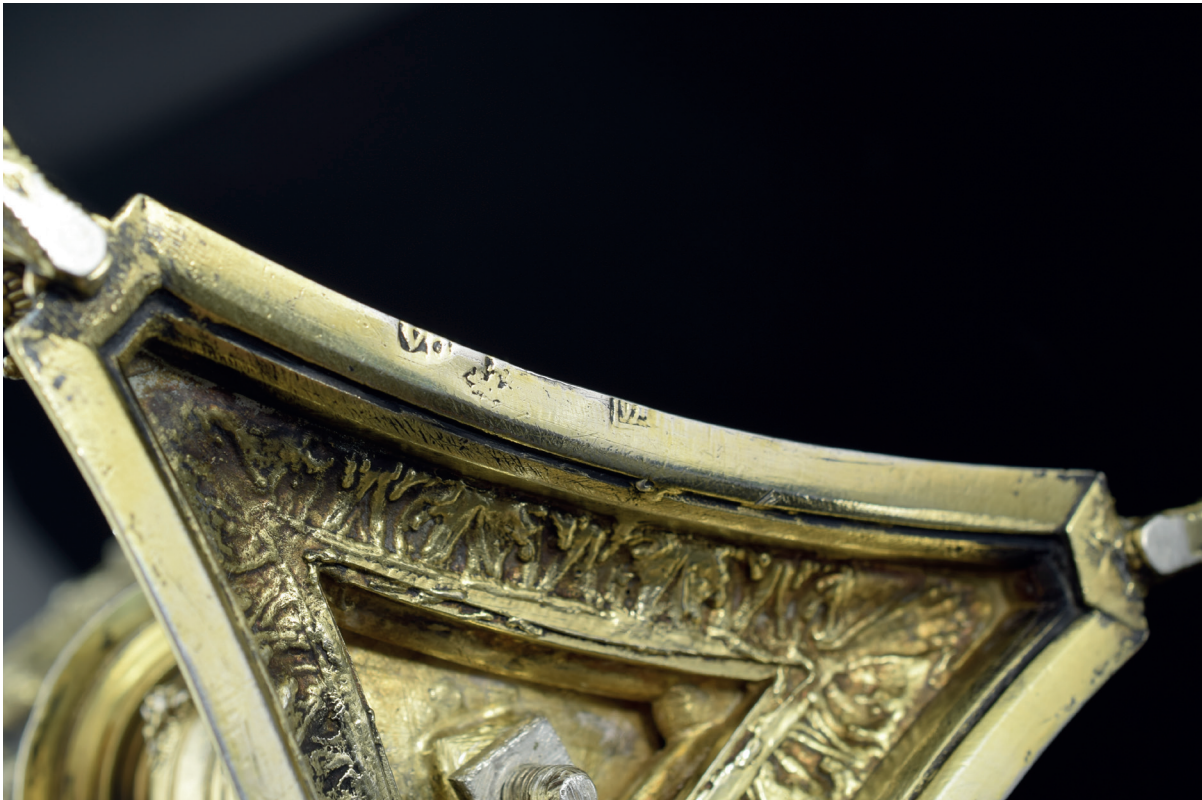
We have made unsuccessful attempts to find out to whom the third of the marks belongs, because the letters, which are difficult to read (maybe VM or UM, stamped on a thick square frame, outlined outwards), do not match any of the names of silversmiths who were working in Palencia by then. If we had succeeded, now we would know the author of this exquisite artwork, which should undoubtedly be related to the processional cross of the church Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, in Antigüedad de Cerrato (Palencia).<sup>4</sup> They are related not only because of their baluster-shaped perimeter, but also because of their ornamental decorations, highly influenced by the engravings of the time and the drawings of Perugino's workshop.

The fineness of the work and the original creation of the piece confirm the brilliant development of silverwork in Palencia in the middle decade of the sixteenth century, when this wonderful artwork should undoubtedly be dated. Its state of preservation is excellent, and it also stands out because it is one of the few known altar crosses that were made in these workshops in Palencia. In sum, this artwork is brilliant.

Dr. Cristina Esteras Martín

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## NOTES

1. The shield of this city is quartered: 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, on a field *azure*, a gold *leur-de-lys* cross; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, on a field *gules*, a crenellated castle with three battlements.
2. For more information about this silversmith and Palencia silverwork, see José Carlos Brasas Egido: *La platería palentina*. Palencia, 1992, and Aurelio Barrón García: “La platería en Castilla y León,” in *El Arte de la Plata y de las Joyas en la España de Carlos V*, La Coruña, 2000, pp. 51 y 52.
3. On the third day of 1735, he brought to the regiment his stamp PA/REDS and the city stamp --“una cruz hueca que son las armas de la çiuudad e bajo della un castillo”: a hollow cross which is the coat of arms of the city, and a castle below it--, which was used until 1591 (see Aurelio Barrón: “El marcaje de la plata en Palencia durante los siglos XVI y XVII,” in *Estudios de Platería. San Eloy, 2009*, University of Murcia, 2009, pp. 174-175.
4. It has the marks of the hallmark stamper (*Cristóbal de Paredes*: PA/REDS) and the author *Domingo Medina de Mondragón* (M/DINA) (*Ibidem*, pp. 192-193).