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ART & ANTIQUES



Saint Ferdinand

Unknown artist
 Ayacucho (Peru), late 17th century
 Carved *Huamanga stone*, encaustic polychrome, gold leaf *estofado*
 Inscriptions: upper left side "DÑS MIHI A DIVTOR", left side "SANCTUS
 FERDINANDUS HISPANIAE REXSARA CENORV MATER RORA CRELIGIO"
 30 x 24 cm
 Provenance: Private collection, Netherlands

St. Ferdinand is depicted standing in the middle of the relief, gazing upwards. A ray of divine light is emerging out of the clouds, flanked by heads of winged angels. The phylactery, which is portrayed like a divine apparition, bears the following inscription: "DÑS MIHI A DIVTOR" (taken from Psalm 118 [117]), thereby showing Ferdinand III's gratitude to God for the help received in the fight against the infidels.

The saint king appears wearing anachronistic clothing. A delicate halo surrounds his crowned head, and he is dressed in armor, ruff, closed crown and flowing ermine cloak. His beautiful face presents delicate features, a long mane of hair, moustache and thick beard. His right hand bears a sword, and he holds the orb in his left. Around his neck he is wearing a thick gold chain with a medal that probably represents the Virgin of the Kings, from Seville Cathedral, linked to the monarch in his defense against infidel heresy. A golden scepter is lying on a table. On the wall we can read the following inscription in Latin: "SANCTUS FERDINANDUS HISPANIAE REXSARA CENORV MATER RORA CRELIGIO", which once again alludes to divine aid and the canonized king's victory over the Saracens. On the left-hand side, a heavy, green-colored curtain is hung around a large column. On the base of the column, we observe a crowned shield framing the *Giralda*, flanked by two vases of lilies, which identify the piece as belonging to the Chapterhouse of the Cathedral of Seville, with which those emblems are associated. In the lower border of the scene, over which the victorious St. Ferdinand stands tall, we can observe the coat of arms and, to the sides, flags with symbols alluding to Islam, defeated by the action of the king with the help of God, as indicated by the Latin inscriptions mentioned earlier. Elements from the struggle against the infidels are depicted in great detail: flags with Islamic symbols, arrows, helmets and a quiver with arrows.

It is worth highlighting the great quality of the *fattura* of this exceptional relief depicting St. Ferdinand. The artist who executed it had the skills to represent volume through carving, as well as various levels in the low, half and high relief to produce the sensation of depth and the search for harmony in the proportions. The sculptor sought to depict the varying textures of the materials with the greatest authenticity: stone, marble, varying fabrics and jewels, revealing a great capacity for imagination and skill in execution. In the same way that the Flemish engravings and prints that were circulating in the Viceroyalty of Peru served as a source of inspiration for the execution of a range of artistic works, one may also point to the importance of Spanish sculpture in the undertaking of fantastic pieces carved in *piedra de Huamanga* (Huamanga stone). The sgraffito and *estofado*

techniques,⁴ as well as the encaustic method, were highly valued by the sculptors of Huamanga stone. In the relief before us here, we can appreciate the application of gold leaf and the subtle sgraffito work which aims at imitating the abovementioned materials. In the same way, the clothes of the King are highlighted using the encaustic technique, which consisted in binding pigments using wax, and applying this paint to varying areas in order to hierarchize them. The beautiful characteristics of Huamanga stone, its softness, translucence and opalescence, come through in a number of areas, creating an attractive contrast.⁵

This exceptional relief is of particular interest for a number of reasons. Of these, one might mention its superb state of preservation, given the dearth of surviving Huamanga reliefs, as well as the unusual subject being depicted. The most popular were scenes from the life of Christ or specific Saints, Marian subjects or ones that would foster the kind and sentimental sort of piety that served to facilitate the arduous road to evangelization. Our relief depicting Ferdinand III, a medieval Saint King who was canonized in the 17th century, transforms into an example of, and metaphor for, the struggle against heresy and the infidels, a model to follow in the Americas, constituting a symbol of evangelization and a Counter-Reformation prototype.

We can deduce that this beautiful huamanga stone relief was based on a painting by Ignacio de Ries (Fig. 1), a disciple of Francisco de Zurbarán, housed at Seville City Hall. De Ries' painting, in turn, was inspired by the engraving of Claude Audran the Elder (1597–1675), which established Ferdinand's iconography in around 1630. This is one of the first iconographies of the saint king, which in turn drew on the series of saint kings and nobles that had been executed by Giovanni Battista Crespi for the general of the Franciscan order, Francesco Gonzaga, in 1587. Its imagery is therefore based on other models, such as St. Louis of France and St. Leopold of Austria.



Fig. 1 Attributed to Ignacio de Ries, *Ferdinand III the Saint*, c. 1650, oil on canvas. Seville City Hall