

# Two Fifteenth-Century Aragonese Retables and Painters of the Calatayud Group

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART possesses a small but representative collection of fifteenth-century Spanish paintings. Two of these, both now at The Cloisters, are a retable dedicated to St. John the Baptist (Figure 1) and a *banco*, the Spanish equivalent of a predella, depicting six scenes from the Passion of Christ (Figure 4). Their provenance is unknown, but they were attributed by Chandler R. Post to two artists who painted in related styles: the *St. John the Baptist* retable to Francesc Solibes, a Catalan painter, and the *banco* to an unknown Aragonese follower of Solibes whom Post christened the Bonnat Master.<sup>1</sup> Scholarship concerning Solibes was always problematic: his only documented retable was painted in Catalonia, but a large undocumented group of paintings attributed to him, as well as to several prolific followers, all came from western Aragon.

The publication of Aragonese documents discovered within the last two decades has significantly clarified this problem. At least two of the Aragonese works formerly attributed to Solibes are now proved to be by local artists working in and around the city of Calatayud in the western sector of the province of Saragossa. A careful study of these documents and a reevaluation of some published earlier in this century help to shed new light on the two works at The Cloisters, for they provide clues to their region of origin, and if not to the specific authors, to the group of artists who probably produced them. The Aragonese documents give elaborate specifications as to size, components, content, and even colors for each re-

table, enabling us to reconstruct the probable original appearance of altarpieces for which contracts no longer exist, such as the *St. John the Baptist* retable.

## THE ALTARPIECES

The retable of *St. John the Baptist, with Scenes from His Life* is important because it is nearly, though not completely, intact. It is now dismantled but was formerly exhibited at The Cloisters in a simple modern frame (Figure 1). The format is typical of Aragonese altarpieces of the second half of the fifteenth century. The figure of the Baptist occupies the largest panel in the center (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup> He is seated on a gilded throne

A list of frequently cited sources is given after the appendix to this article.

1. Post, VII, pp. 366ff., and VIII, p. 431.

2. Because the original frame is lost, it is impossible to give the correct dimensions of the retable as a whole, but the dimensions of each panel are as follows: central effigy of St. John the Baptist Enthroned, 135.9 × 103.2 cm.; Visitation, 76.4 × 97.9 cm.; Crucifixion, 70.0 × 103.2 cm.; Annunciation to Zacharias, 95.8 × 72.4 cm.; Birth of St. John, 96.4 × 72.4 cm.; St. John Preaching in the Wilderness, 74.0 × 72.4 cm.; Baptism of Christ, 73.1 × 72.4 cm.; St. John Reproving Herod and Herodias, 73.7 × 72.4 cm.; Banquet of Herod with the Beheading of the Baptist, 73.7 × 72.4 cm. *Banco* panels: St. Martial, 48.3 × 31.2 cm.; St. Sebastian, 48.3 × 30.7 cm.; St. Mary Magdalen, 48.3 × 31.2 cm.; St. Bridget, 48.3 × 31.2 cm.; St. Christopher, 48.3 × 32.1 cm.; and St. William, 48.3 × 31.2 cm. Minor discrepancies would have been masked by the original frame.



1. Domingo Ram (active between 1464 and 1507), Retable of *St. John the Baptist*, with *Scenes from His Life*. Tempera on wood. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 25.120.668–671,673, 674, 927–929

2. Ram, *St. John the Baptist* retable: central panel, *St. John the Baptist Enthroned*

rendered in raised and modeled gesso (a technique called *embutido* in contemporary documents). In his left hand he holds a book on which rests a small image of the Lamb of God, with a staff surmounted by a cross and banner. He points to the Lamb with his right index finger. The saint's wine-colored cloak is lined with green, and its gold *embutido* border and his halo of gilded concentric rings are set off from the gold of the throne by a painted cloth, once a vivid azure with a brocaded pattern, but now faded to a dull Prussian blue. The panel may originally have been larger, as the top of the halo and throne is now missing.

Above the seated image is a smaller panel depicting the Visitation, and above that in turn the Crucifixion.



3. Ram, *St. John the Baptist* retable: *banco*, *St. Bridget*, *St. Christopher*, and *St. William*



Flanking the center section are six scenes from the life of St. John. The registers read from the top, left to right, as follows: the Annunciation to Zacharias, the Birth of St. John, John Preaching in the Wilderness, the Baptism of Christ, John Reproving Herod and Herodias, and the Banquet of Herod with the Beheading of the Baptist.

Below is the *banco*, which now consists of six small images of saints. To the left are St. Martial, St. Sebastian, and the Magdalen, all shown seated on benches in front of a garden of cypress and lemon trees. Their names are inscribed on the backs of the benches. To the right we find St. Bridget, St. Christopher, and St. William (Figure 3),<sup>3</sup> Bridget and William in the identical setting as the three already mentioned, while Christopher carries the Christ Child through a river in a landscape setting. In the modern frame at The Cloisters, the space in the center of the *banco* was occupied by a label panel.

Style and color are homogeneous throughout the retable. The interior scenes are all in Gothic settings, with such details as capitals, chairs, and shrines as well as halos picked out in the ubiquitous gilded *embutido*. The landscapes show trees arranged in regimental file, lemon trees depicted with a strict sense of pattern reminiscent of an oriental rug, while cypresses and pines are brushed in somewhat more softly. Conical hills mark the horizon. The figures are rather stiff

and formal, their faces heavy and expressionless, with strongly outlined eyes. The garments are draped in heavy folds, and brocaded fabrics are picked out in flat patterns of black and red over punched gold with pleats brushed in over them.

Colors are restricted mostly to greens, reds, wine tones, and blacks. Originally, these hues were brighter, and there was also considerable use of blue, but it was an inferior grade of the pigment for many of the blue areas have now darkened virtually to black. In the case of St. Christopher's tunic, most of the blue has been lost and the garment now reads as tan with a few traces of Prussian blue. Shading is fairly heavy, particularly in the faces and in the drapery folds, with the exception of the scarlet garments where pleats and creases are indicated by incisions and thin black hatching.

The retable in its present state gives an overall impression of a harmony of elements, with a predominating tendency toward flat decorative pattern. The

3. Post, VII, p. 366 n. 1, wishes to identify the last saint in the row as St. Kilian, since the figure lacks William of Aquitaine's attribute of a helmet. This is the name given to the saint in the modern label formerly set into the *banco* (Figure 1). The inscription behind the figure reads "Quilen." The obscure Irish St. Kilian would seem to be an odd choice for an Aragonese retable. A reasonable case can be made for the identification of William, even if there is a shift in the attribute: Spanish artists often depicted knightly saints dressed as nobles in civilian garb. This is true of St. Sebastian, and the "William" figure is dressed almost identically. In addition, the spelling of William, normally Guillermo or Guillén in Spanish texts, occurs at least sometimes in Aragon as Quillén, and we have an example of it among the painters of Calatayud whom we will study below: Quillén Dolzina. The fact that the name with that spelling is found in the region where the retable was produced suggests that it would have been sufficiently popular to have been inspired by the popularity of St. William in western Aragon. I have found no one in this region at this time who was named Kilian, nor any Aragonese representation of him.

4. Bonnat Master, *Six Scenes from the Passion*, late 15th century. Tempera on wood. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William M. Laffan, 10.12



compositions are simple, drama is conveyed by gesture rather than expression. The figures are monumental, the painting is large in scale and broadly, even coarsely executed. The altarpiece is meant to be seen from a distance and projects its message clearly rather than subtly.

This patterned quality must originally have been even stronger. Gone are the *polseras* (or *guardapolvos*), the slightly tilted “dust guards” that would have surrounded the body of the altarpiece. These would have been gilded with rich *embutido* and painted with images of angels or of saints, or possibly with the coats of arms of the donor—or a combination of these. Missing also is the tabernacle, or *custodia*, that probably occupied the center of the *banco*—a three- to five-sided box to house reserve hosts, which would have been adorned with images of the Man of Sorrows, the mourning Virgin, and John the Evangelist, and possibly weeping angels.<sup>4</sup> Since space is reserved for a tabernacle, the *St. John the Baptist* retable would

have originally adorned the high altar of a church rather than a side chapel. Lastly, the decorative pillars and canopies and lanterns of Gothic gilded tracery, which would have flanked and capped each painted scene and given the retable its sense of architectural unity, have vanished, except in the *banco*.

The second, related work in *The Cloisters*, the *banco* of *Six Scenes from the Passion* (Figure 4) is far less complete. The six surviving paintings are all that remain of what must have been a large and important altarpiece. The dimensions provide one indication,

4. The argument that the center of the *St. John* retable contained a tabernacle is further reinforced by the structure of the remaining parts of its *banco*. The three saints to the left and the three to the right are painted on two large single panels, with the dividing frames laid over them. By custom, the *bancos* of Aragonese retables always consisted of an odd number of panels, or if there was a tabernacle, by an even number plus the tabernacle, which would have substituted for the odd-numbered panel in the middle. When there was no tabernacle, all of the *banco* paintings were customarily painted on a single



5. Bonnat Master, *Six Scenes from the Passion: The Agony in the Garden*

6. Bonnat Master, *Six Scenes from the Passion: The Arrest of Christ and Christ Before Caiaphas*

for the total height of the *banco* is over 142 centimeters, or more than twice the height of the *banco* of the *St. John the Baptist* retable. The six scenes represent, left to right: the Agony in the Garden, the Arrest of Christ, Christ Before Caiaphas, the Crowning with Thorns, the Flagellation, and Pilate Washing His Hands. Below these images, which constitute the *banco* proper, is the *sotabanco*, which contains roundels decorated with heads of six of the apostles, and banneroles bearing inscriptions from the Creed.<sup>5</sup> From left to right the passages quoted are: 1. "Credo in Deum, Patrem omnipotentem Creatorem caeli et terrae"; 2. "Et in Jesum Christum, Filium eius unicum Dominum nostrum"; 3. "Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine"; 4. "... inde venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos"; 5. "Credo in Spiritum Sanctum"; and 6. "Sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam. . . ." Only one apostle is identifiable: St. James the Great, third from the left, wears a cockle shell in his pilgrim's hat (Figure 6). *Banco* and *sotabanco* are unified by shared pillars and similar tracery in the arches above and the *sotabanco* below.

The six scenes are actually painted three each on two large horizontal panels, and these panels are slightly cut on the right side of Christ Before Caiaphas (Figure 6) and on the left side of the Crowning

wooden panel, or if the retable was of large size, the images would have been divided asymmetrically over two panels, e.g., three paintings on one panel and four on the other. The fact that the paintings of the *St. John banco* are divided three and three suggests that a separate unit was originally inserted between them.

5. The inscriptions on the scrolls actually present only a portion of the Apostles' Creed. The artist abbreviated as follows: 1. "Credo in deū prem om̄potetēm creatorem et ter"; 2. "Et in ih̄m x̄r̄m filium eius unīcū d̄m n̄r̄m"; 3. "Q̄i cōceptus ē de sp̄u sc̄o natus ex maria virgin"; 4. "S̄ inde venturus ē judicare vivos et moos"; 5. "S̄ credo in in sp̄m scantum"; and 6. "S̄ scam eccham catholicā sc."

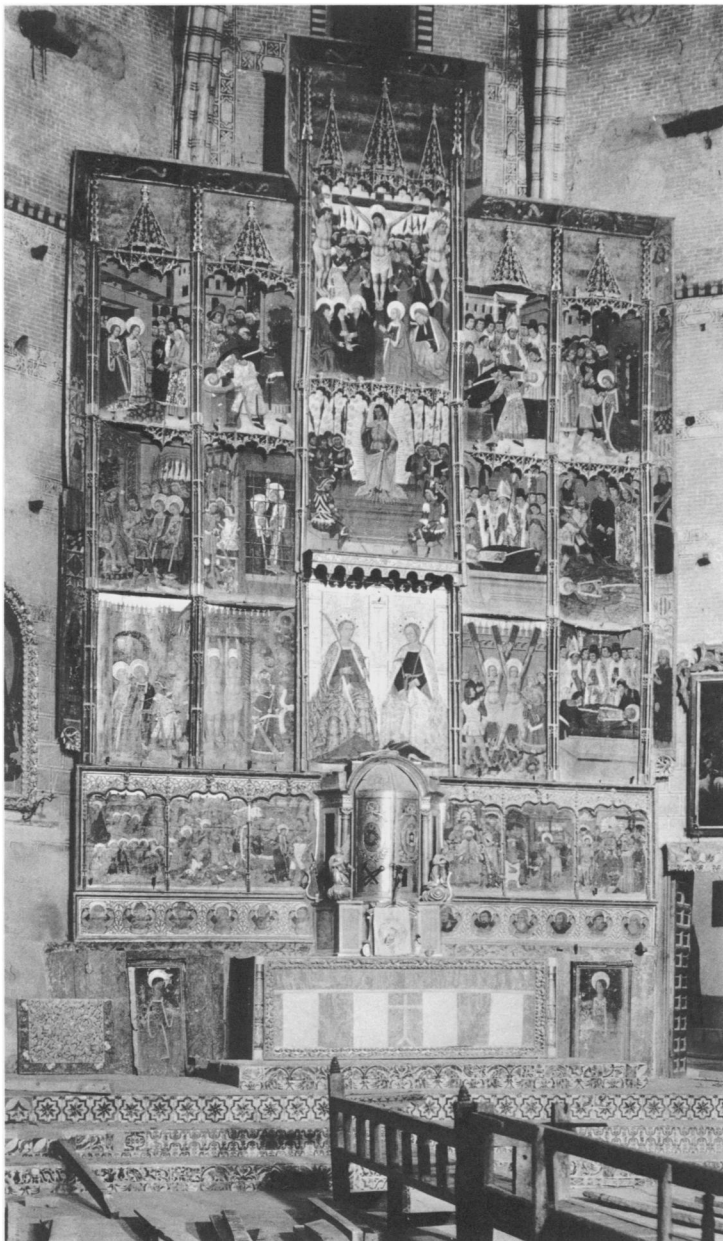




with Thorns (the pillar on the left of the Crowning with Thorns is a modern one, superimposed on the panel to mask the join when the two halves are displayed together). As in the *St. John the Baptist* retable, there was probably a tabernacle between these two scenes.<sup>6</sup>

The style here is less schematic than that of the retable of *St. John the Baptist*. The figures are represented in a sketchier manner, with softer outlines than were used in the retable. The shading of the garments is less schematic, too, and, for the same reason,

7. Domingo Ram and Juan Rius, Retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina*. Maluenda, Santas Justa y Rufina (photo: Mas)



landscapes appear more confused and crowded. This artist used some Italianate architectural detail, such as the shell niche, columns with Corinthian-style capitals, and pediments, although these elements are scarcely classical in proportion or combination. Aside from its larger dimensions, the greater importance of the retable from which the *banco* came is reinforced by the fact that it was painted with better-quality colors. The surface is covered by a discolored varnish, but where this has nicked or worn off, a brilliant rich blue shines through, as well as indications of vivid reds and yellows. This artist used *embutido* touches more sparingly than the *St. John* painter; they are confined to halos and soldiers' armor. Some gold was also employed in interior architectural details.

The *banco* and the retable are the work of two different artists, but they share certain devices that painters in the same atelier or in association might pick up from one another. Both artists used an identical lemon tree motif—it occurs in the Agony in the Garden of the *Passion banco* (Figure 5) and in all of the *banco* panels of the *St. John the Baptist* retable (Figure 3)—and painted other species of trees in the same loose, “furry” manner. They used the same technique for shading red garments: incision and black hatching rather than tonal variation. The artist of the *banco* used this technique also for yellow draperies.

#### THE RETABLE OF SS. *JUSTA AND RUFINA*

Even more significant is the connection between the two works in The Cloisters and the large retable dedicated to SS. Justa and Rufina (Figure 7) which is still in place over the high altar of the church of Santas Justa y Rufina in Maluenda, a small town about seven kilometers south of Calatayud in western Aragon. This retable shows twelve episodes from the lives of two woman ceramists who were martyred in Seville for refusing to worship pagan idols. Though they were Andalusian, they were worshiped in Maluenda because of the importance of the ceramics industry there. The twelve narratives flank a large rectangular

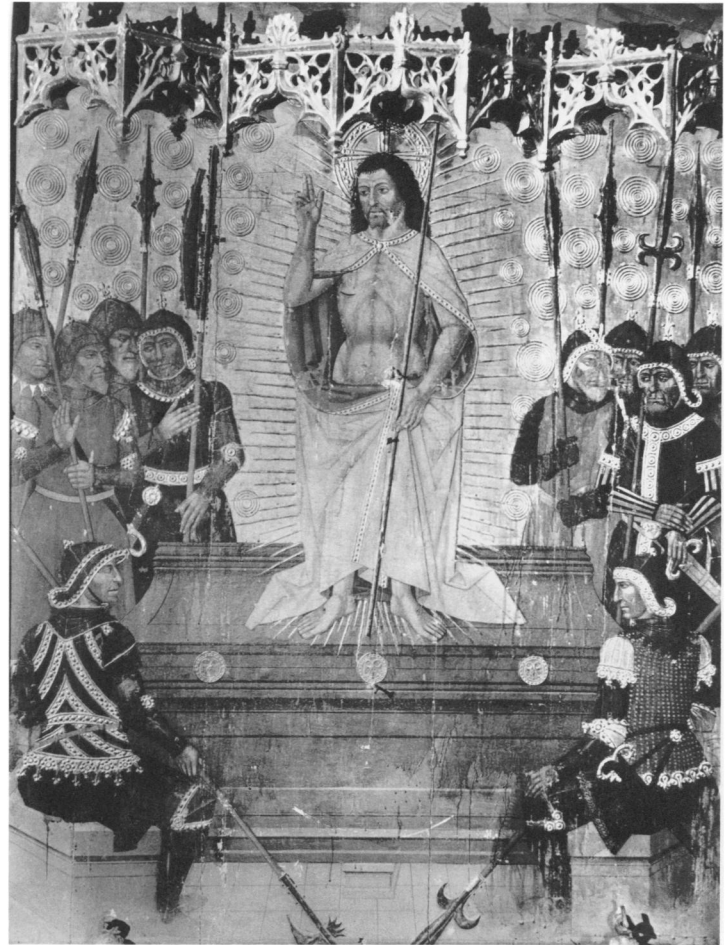
6. It is also possible that the tabernacle of the *banco* of the *Passion* was removed at a much earlier date, for the majority of Aragonese 15th-century *retablos mayores* had their contemporary wooden tabernacles removed and replaced by more elaborate Baroque ones during the 17th and 18th centuries.



8. Ram and Rius, SS. *Justa and Rufina* retablo: SS. Justa and Rufina Enthroned (photo: Mas)

panel of Justa and Rufina, richly dressed in brocades and seated on a throne liberally adorned with *embutido* patterns (Figure 8). In their hands they hold carding rakes, instruments of their martyrdom. Above these effigies is the Resurrection, and above that, the Crucifixion. In the *banco*, six scenes from the Passion flank a tabernacle of Baroque design that replaced the original fifteenth-century one, and below in the *sotabanco* are roundels of the twelve apostles with scrolls that show verses of the Creed. *Polseras* with prophet figures complete the arrangement. Some of the framing moldings are still in place over the narratives, the Resurrection, and the Crucifixion, as are all of the pillars that divide the retablo vertically.

Chandler Post noticed the connection between the Maluenda retablo and that of *St. John the Baptist* (though not the *Passion banco*) many years ago, and

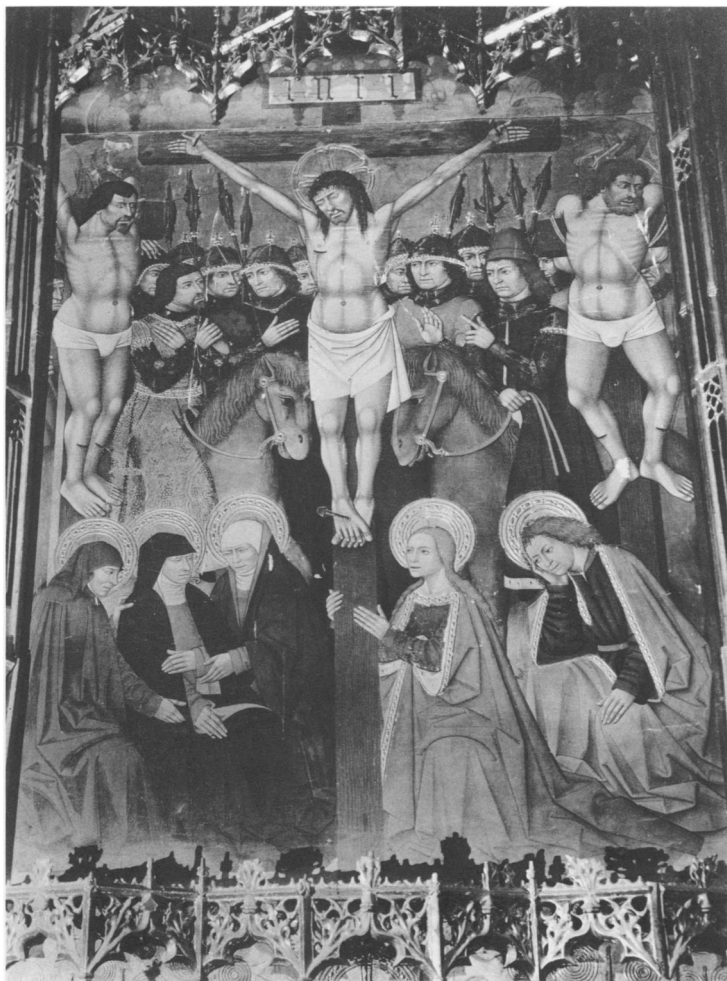


9. Ram and Rius, SS. *Justa and Rufina* retablo: The Resurrection (photo: Mas)

his observation has been confirmed since by other art historians.<sup>7</sup> If we examine the central images of both retables, the affinities are clear. Both are broadly painted with a strong sense of outline, heavy shading in the draperies, and the same masklike faces. Certain patterns used in the thrones are similar, such as running spirals and the four-petal flower within a circle. The same flat decorative schematic quality dominates both works.

In spite of these similarities, the retables of *St. John the Baptist* and SS. *Justa and Rufina* also show certain stylistic differences. The Resurrection (Figure 9) and some of the narrative panels such as the Burial of St. Justa use such a heavy outline for shading that the

7. Post, VII, pp. 354ff. See also James J. Rorimer, "A Spanish Retablo of the Fifteenth Century," *MMAB* 28 (1933) p. 10.



10. Ram and Rius, SS. *Justa and Rufina* retablo: The Crucifixion (photo: Mas)

features have an almost Byzantine cast.<sup>8</sup> The figures of Christ and the two thieves in the Maluenda Crucifixion (Figure 10) display heavier bodies than the corresponding Christ in the retablo of *St. John the Baptist*. In this work there is a greater sense of decorative design, less crowding, than in the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina*. But in general, the style of the two works is close enough to postulate that they came from the same circle of artists, if not the same workshop.

8. Some of the heavy shading in the faces may be due to overpainting. The face of St. Justa in the panel of the Burial of St. Justa was restored in the 17th or 18th century, and the restorer may have taken the opportunity to modernize the panel a bit.



11. Ram and Rius, SS. *Justa and Rufina* retablo: Pilate Washing His Hands (photo: Mas)

The connection between the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina* and the *banco* of the *Passion* is less one of style than of content. The six compositions in the *banco* are replicas, even to architecture and landscape, of those at Maluenda. If we compare any of the scenes, such as Pilate Washing His Hands (Figures 11 and 12), we can see that virtually the same figures in the same poses were depicted by both artists. They also used the same Italianate architectural details, with apparently the same kind of misunderstanding of proportion and function. The degree of stylistic difference between these two *bancos* is approximately the same as the one we saw between the *banco* of the *Passion* and the *St. John* retablo.

In the *Passion banco* the apostle busts are in roun-



12. Bonnat Master, *Six Scenes from the Passion: Pilate Washing His Hands*

dels just as in the Maluenda *sotabanco* (Figure 13), but there are differences. The most obvious is that the *banco* has only six apostles to Maluenda's twelve (Figures 4 and 7). The sequence of the twelve apostles and their scrolls with the Creed is also more understandable, since we get a paraphrasing of the whole Creed from left to right across the Maluenda *sotabanco*. The artist of the *banco* of the *Passion* repeated the first three lines as at Maluenda, but then skipped three, repeated the next three, and omitted the last three, making the sequence of the inscriptions jumpy and fragmentary. The Maluenda artist included the names of each of the apostles on his scroll while the artist of the *banco* omitted the names but added hands to the figures.

Fortunately, the contract for the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina* was discovered in the Archivo de Protocolos of Calatayud by the Aragonese scholar and archivist Fabián Mañas Ballestin and published by him.<sup>9</sup>

9. Mañas Ballestin, pp. 215ff. Unfortunately, Mañas did not publish the text of the retablo contract in full, instead paraphrasing most of it and quoting only the excerpts he considered significant. This is also true of the other documents in the article.



13. Ram and Rius, SS. *Justa and Rufina* retablo: detail of *sotabanco*, St. James the Great (photo: Mas)

The contract not only identifies the two painters, Domingo Ram and Juan Rius, but also supplies valuable information about the construction, composition sources, and techniques used by the artists.

The contract was made in 1475. As in most Aragonese retable agreements of the period, the subject matter and the format of the altarpiece were carefully spelled out, down to the colors of the gowns of the two saints. Not only were specifications made for the paintings, but for the framing elements as well. Significant, but not unusual, is the fact that two already completed altarpieces were cited as examples and sources: the tabernacle in the center of the Maluenda *banco* was to duplicate in scale, frame, and figures one set into the high altar retable of San Pedro de los Francos in Calatayud. The rest of the *banco* and the *sotabanco* were to be a replica of those of the high altar retable of Santo Sepulcro, also in Calatayud, with one modification: there were apparently only ten apostles in the Santo Sepulcro *sotabanco*, and the contract for the Maluenda retable specifically mentions that this number be expanded to twelve.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Santo Sepulcro retable was to serve as a model for the framing elements and measurements—as well as an example of what *not* to do:

Item—it is agreed [that the artists] will make the said retable of wood, nails, framing, colors, size [the same as] the *retablo mayor* of the church . . . of Santo Sepulcro of Calatayud. But the said central panel [is to be] two *palmos* [about 20 cm.] wider than the said central panel of the said retable of the said Sepulcro. Since in the said retable of the Sepulcro there are some poor and imperfect colors, the said master Johan and master Domingo are obligated to put in the said retable good and perfect colors. Similarly, the enframements of gold and silver leaf, pillars, *bancos*, and lanterns are to have all of the completeness and perfection as has the said retable of the Sepulcro.<sup>11</sup>

Neither the high altar retable of San Pedro de los Francos nor that of Santo Sepulcro has survived, but the contract indicates how much borrowing went on from previous models.<sup>12</sup> The retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina* would itself serve as a model for another retable painted by Domingo Ram, again in Maluenda, this time for the high altar of the church of Santa María in 1477. For that altarpiece, the subcontract between Ram and the carpenter-craftsman Franci Gomar stipulated:

[Gomar] is to make the whole body of the retable, that is: the carpentry work, all of the flower-tracery pillars and enframements and lanterns . . . like those of the retable of St. Justa; to make some beautiful *polseras*, worked with carpentry with leaf patterns at their lower edges, with the spaces like those that are in [the *polseras* of] St. Justa, and to make a *sotabanco*. . . .<sup>13</sup>

## THE ORIGINAL APPEARANCE OF THE RETABLE OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

The contract for the retable of *St. John the Baptist* has either been destroyed or awaits discovery, but the contracts we have cited, the surviving retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina*, and clues within the panels themselves can help to reconstruct the original frame and other missing elements (Figure 14).

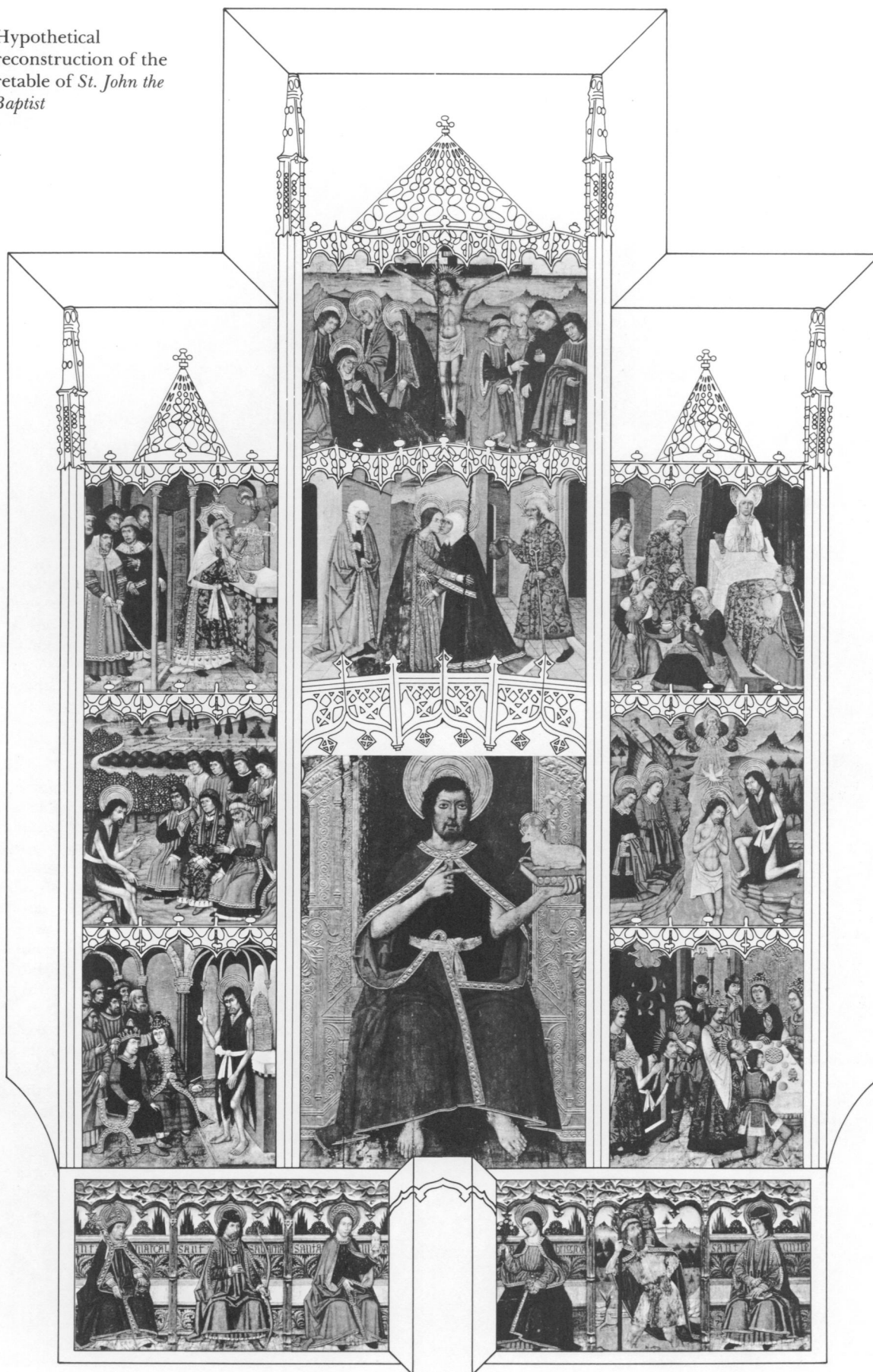
10. The fact that the *banco* and *sotabanco* of the SS. *Justa and Rufina* altarpiece was based on the one at Santo Sepulcro raises the question as to which of these two works (if either) provided the source for the *banco* of the *Passion* in The Cloisters. The question is probably unanswerable, as the Santo Sepulcro retable no longer exists. However, the difference in the number of apostles in the Santo Sepulcro and SS. *Justa and Rufina sotabancos* seems to imply that their number was not strictly fixed within the *sotabanco* function, and may help to explain the seemingly arbitrary reduction of apostles and Creed excerpts to six in the *banco* of the *Passion*.

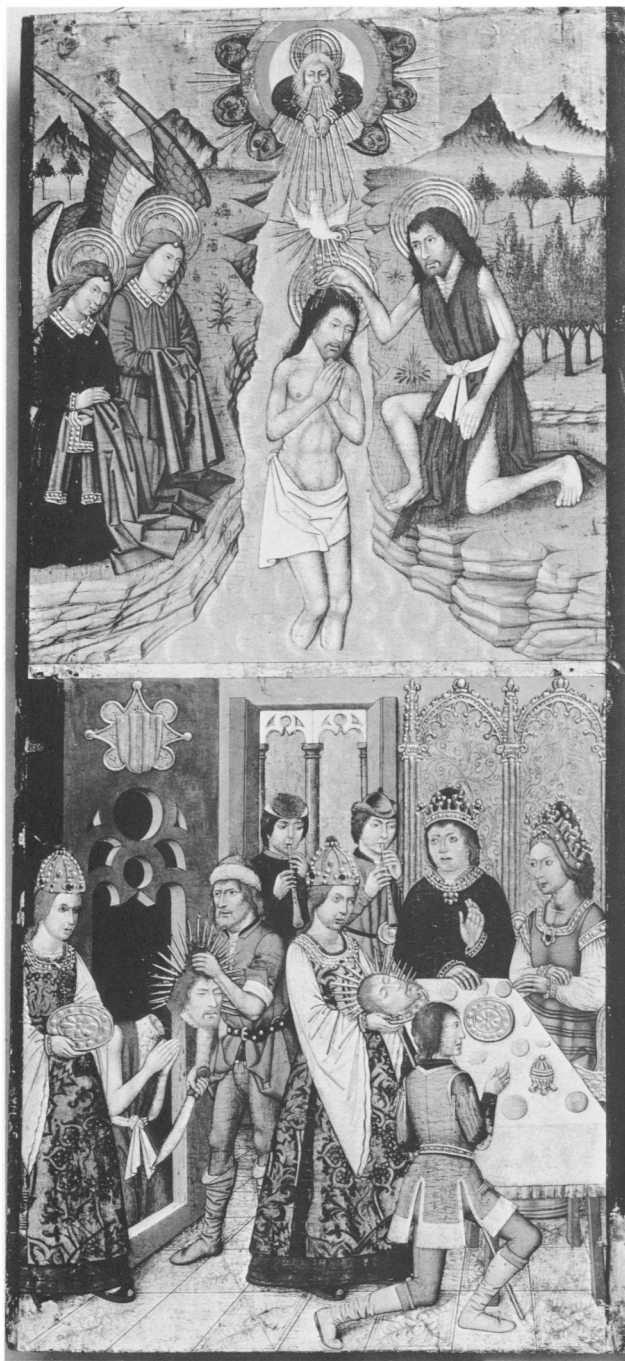
11. Mañas Ballestin, p. 220: "Item es pactado [que los pintores] fagan el dito retaulo de fusta, clavazon, mazoneria, colores, grandezza [lo mismo] que es el retaulo mayor de la iglesia . . . del Santo Sepulcro de Calatayut. Empero que la dita taula mediana sea dos palmos mas ampla que la dita taula mediana del dito retaulo del dito sepulcre. Empero por quanto en el dito retaulo del Sepulcre ay algunas colores mortificadas e imperfectas, los ditos mastre Johan e mastre Domingo sean tenidos poner en el dito retaulo colores buenas e perfectas. E asi de tubas como de oro, azoques, pilares, bancos e esmortinos tengan toda aquella perfeccion e complimento que tiene el dito retaulo del Sepulcre." (Author's translation of this and other documents quoted.)

12. The medieval church of Santo Sepulcro was replaced by a new structure with the same dedication in the 17th century. At the same time, the retables that adorned the old structure were replaced by Baroque examples, and none of the old retables is known to survive. See F. Abbad Rios, *Catálogo monumental de España: Zaragoza* (Madrid, 1955) p. 347.

13. Mañas Ballestin, p. 227: "Fazer todo el cuerpo del retablo, es a saber: la maçoneria, todos los pilares trasflores e tubas e esmortimientos . . . segunt estan en el retablo de Santa Justa; fazer unas bellas polseras, obrades de mazoneria con sendas fullas a los cabos baxos, con aquellas espacios que estan en las de Santa Justa, e faga un sotabanco. . . ."

14. Hypothetical  
reconstruction of the  
retable of *St. John the  
Baptist*





15. Ram, *St. John the Baptist* retable: The Baptism of Christ and the Banquet of Herod with the Beheading of the Baptist

16. Ram, *St. John the Baptist* retable: The Annunciation to Zacharias

On the sides of the central panels (St. John, the Visitation, the Crucifixion), approximately 5 centimeters were left as black vertical strips. Similar vertical strips extend along the narrative panels; they are about 7 centimeters on the outer sides and 2 centimeters on the inner sides (Figure 15). These strips were painted black to set off the pillars of gilded open tracery (referred to as “*pilares trasflorios*,” or “flower-tracery pillars,” in contemporary documents). Since the panels were customarily joined closely together and the pillars placed over the joints to mask them, we can assume that there were four sets of pillars, each about 9 centimeters wide, framing the three main divisions of narrative and didactic episodes in the body of the retable.

Each panel would have also been capped by some kind of framing device. In smaller retables, there might have been an *archet*, a frame of relatively flat tracery in wood and gesso, which was applied to the



panel before it was painted, to be gilded along with portions of the background (as in the *banco* panels of the retable of *St. John the Baptist*), or placed over the panel after it was painted. The space where the frame was to be placed was usually marked out on the panel and either painted black or with a brocade pattern. This type of frame was apparently not used in the body of the *St. John* altarpiece, because if it had been, the upper part of each panel would have an area of no paint, of overpaint, or of brocade in a curvilinear pattern to correspond with the intended overlay. Instead, the two lower narratives on each side were painted on a single panel, divided by a strip only about 2 centimeters in height (Figure 15). A more elaborate type of framing device, a length of Gothic openwork tracery which usually stood away from the panel like a small canopy (*tuba*), can be seen over the second and third tiers of narrative panels in the Maluenda retable. Similar ones were probably used in the *St. John* retable.

A different sort of frame was employed for the uppermost panels, as the Annunciation to Zacharias (Figure 16), the Crucifixion, and the Birth of St. John (Figure 25) all show quite clearly: above each scene are the remains of a green brocade strip with a black triangle in the center. This triangle would have formed the background for a lantern or *esmortino*, a cone of tracery which would have been placed above the *tuba* to serve as a pinnacle. The one above the Crucifixion was probably less acute in angle than those over the other narratives, since its triangle projected higher to start with, and was wider. Similar lanterns are again found over the upper panels of the retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina* (Figure 7), and were also specified in the carpentry contract for the retable of Santa María.

The other missing elements of the *St. John the Baptist* altarpiece can be reconstructed from contemporary examples. There is no way of knowing the width of the *polseras*, since these varied from retable to retable, nor is there a way to guess what actually adorned them. But we can speculate with greater certainty about the missing tabernacle. If we examine any of the few surviving ones in Aragon, such as the high altar retable in the parish church of Velilla del Cinca (Figure 17), we can see that the framing elements are virtually the same as the rest of the retable. The images on that tabernacle are standard: the Man of Sorrows on the door at center, and the mourning

Virgin and St. John the Evangelist on the left and right sides. Since the *St. John the Baptist* retable is a fairly small one, its tabernacle probably had only three sides rather than the five or even seven sides specified by contracts for larger altarpieces of the period.

## THE PAINTERS OF THE CALATAYUD GROUP

Identification of the artists of the retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina* makes it tempting to speculate whether Domingo Ram and Juan Rius were also responsible for one or both of the works in The Cloisters. Like the *St. John the Baptist* retable, the retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina* had previously been attributed to Francesc

17. High altar retable, Velilla del Cinca (Huesca), Ermita de San Valero (photo: Mas)



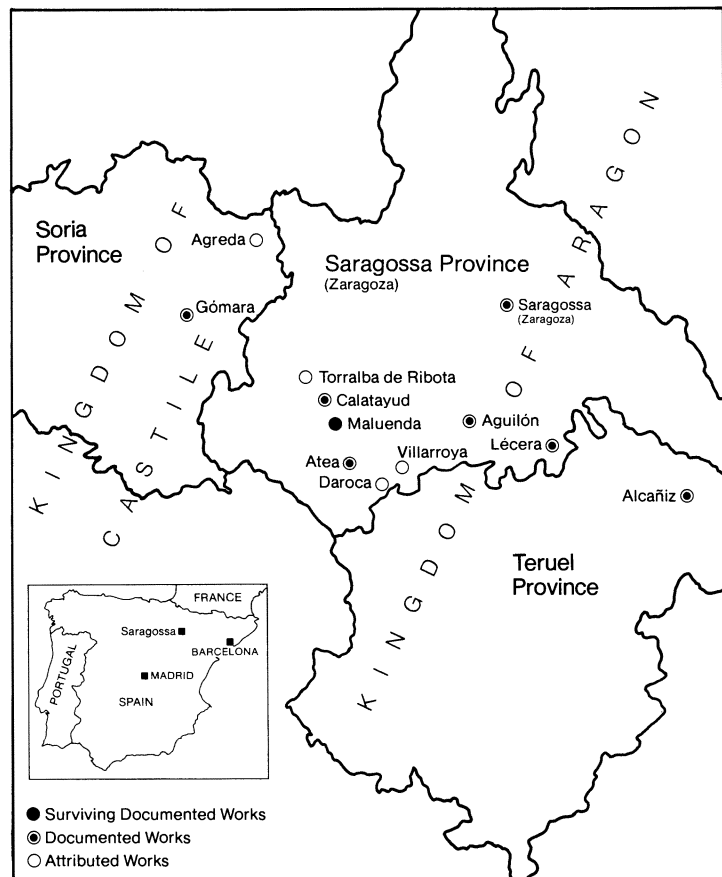
Solibes, whose only documented work, the retable dedicated to the Man of Sorrows in the Ermita de la Piedat at Sant Llorenç de Morunys, in Catalonia, dates to 1480. Chandler Post ascribed a sizable number of Aragonese works to Solibes.<sup>14</sup> But he was bothered by the fact that although the majority of works of known provenance attributed to the artist came from western Aragon, there was no documentary trace of Solibes in that region. Discovery of the contract for the retable of *SS. Justa and Rufina* has disproved the Solibes attributions and shifted the Aragonese works into the orbit of Domingo Ram and Juan Rius. At the same time it has raised other questions, for the additional documentation published by Mañas Ballestin and others reveals a group of at least seven artists working in and around Calatayud, who were constantly in collaboration with one another and involved in relationships that sometimes extended to marriage.

Domingo Ram has been designated the head of the Calatayud group, for he is the only artist by whom surely documented works survive. (Rius, as we shall

see, presents problems in this respect.) Ram is mentioned in documents from 1464 to 1507. Almost as important, if the number of surviving retable contracts can be taken as a measure of prominence, was Pedro de Aranda, active from 1464 to 1496. The other artists in this circle include Domingo Ram's brothers Tomás (fl. 1480–89) and Juan (fl. 1488); his son, also named Juan (fl. 1496–1507); Juan Rius (fl. 1457–82); Antón de Santorquat (fl. 1464–82); Quillén Dolzina (fl. 1472); and Bartolomé de Berdesco or Verdesco (fl. 1507). Most of them lived and worked in Calatayud, but their activity extended at various times to Maluenda, Alcañiz, and Saragossa (Figure 18).<sup>15</sup>

The names of these painters, such as Tomás Ram and Quillén Dolzina, are recorded only in minor legal documents.<sup>16</sup> The other artists are known from the documents to have executed retables for Calatayud and the surrounding area, but these do not survive. Their relationships are made even harder to untangle as they frequently collaborated on these lost works with other, equally unidentifiable members of the group. Pedro de Aranda is a good example: he teamed twice with Juan Rius, once in 1470 on a retable dedicated to St. Mamas for the monastery of San Agustín in Calatayud, and four years later on an altarpiece for the parish church of Gómara (in the adjoining Castilian province of Soria). In the interim, in 1472, he signed an agreement with Rius and Domingo Ram to collaborate on retables and share the income from them for a period of one year.<sup>17</sup> Previously, in 1464, he and Ram had been associated with

18. Map showing area of activity of painters of the Calatayud group



14. Post, VII, pp. 354ff. See also Rorimer, "A Spanish Retable," pp. 10–11.

15. See the appendix for a list of their activities. There were also other artists at work in Calatayud at this period who were apparently unaffiliated with the group mentioned here, including Juan and Pedro Vazquez and a family of painters named Arnaldin. See Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, pp. 185, 195.

16. Tomás Ram, who apparently resided in Maluenda, is cited in only two agreements made in connection with his brother Domingo (Mañas Ballestin, p. 228). Quillén Dolzina, a resident of Maluenda in 1472, witnessed, along with Domingo Ram, the purchase of a house by Juan Rius in that year (Mañas Ballestin, p. 224).

17. Mañas Ballestin, pp. 223–224. Such agreements were common in Aragon during this period, and they have interesting implications for a study of 15th-century painting in the region. Sometimes, as in the case of the Saragossa painters Miguel Ximenez and Martín Bernat, these arrangements were long and fruitful, but the three-way partnership of Ram, Rius, and

Antón de Santorquat.<sup>18</sup> But Pedro de Aranda also worked alone. He seems to have enjoyed considerable prestige in Calatayud, where he painted several retables during the last two decades of the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

The members of Domingo Ram's family maintained strong professional connections. His brother Juan joined him in painting a retable (now lost) for the high altar of the parish church of Alcañiz, some time before 1488.<sup>20</sup> In 1496, Domingo Ram apprenticed his son Juan to Pedro de Aranda. The younger Juan Ram subsequently married the daughter of yet another of his father's associates, Bartolomé de Berdesco.<sup>21</sup>

Given the rich and complex picture of artistic activity indicated by these documents, it is a pity that the only known stylistic personality is Domingo Ram.<sup>22</sup>

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Aranda was dissolved in 1473. Collaboration among the three artists did not stop, however, for Rius and Aranda worked jointly in 1474, and Ram and Rius teamed up for the retable of *SS. Justa and Rufina* in 1475–76.

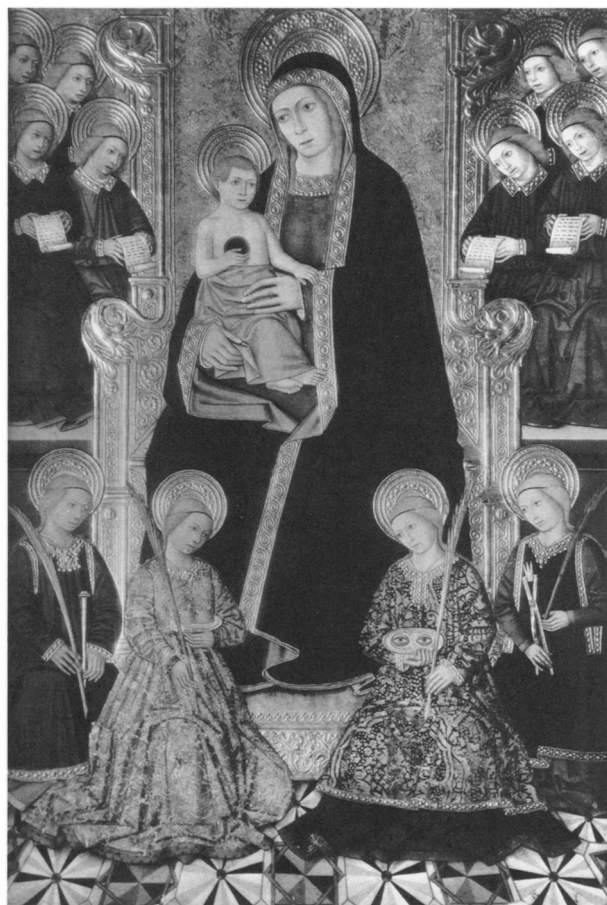
18. Antón de Santorquat signed a document of reconciliation with Domingo Ram and Pedro de Aranda in 1464 (Mañas Ballestin, p. 226). In 1480, he painted a retable of *St. Michael* for the church of San Francisco in Calatayud (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, p. 188).

19. Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, pp. 183, 193–194. Pedro de Aranda's independently executed retables include one dedicated to St. Cecilia for the church of El Salvador (1486), the retable of the *Virgin of the Rosary* for the chapter house of San Pedro Mártir in 1488, and in 1493, an altarpiece whose central panel depicted the Holy Trinity for the high altar of Santo Domingo de Silos. All these churches were in Calatayud.

20. Serrano y Sanz, 1915, pp. 427–428. In 1488, Juan Ram resided in Saragossa, having already finished his stint in Alcañiz, and made a solicitation for final payment, implying that the altarpiece was complete by that date.

21. Mañas Ballestin, pp. 228–229. Domingo Ram was with the elder Juan Ram in Alcañiz before 1488, and he apparently returned there in 1496, because Mañas states that he sent his son Juan back to Calatayud from Alcañiz in 1496 to begin his apprenticeship with Pedro de Aranda. The younger Juan subsequently collaborated with his father on a set of organ doors for the church of San Juan de Vallupié in Calatayud in 1503. In the same year that the younger Juan married Bartolomé de Berdesco's daughter (1507), Berdesco collaborated with Domingo Ram on a retable dedicated to St. Anne (Mañas Ballestin, p. 229). Mañas does not cite the church for which this retable was intended, but presumably it was in Calatayud.

22. More than half the churches flourishing in 15th-century Calatayud have been destroyed. Of the large number of retables produced in the 15th century for the city, only a handful survive. All are meticulously catalogued by Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro.



19. Domingo Ram, Retable of the *Virgin* from Santa María, Maluenda: central panel, Virgin and Child with Choir of Angels and Virgin Martyrs. Barcelona, Torelló Collection (photo: Mas)

We have already examined his style in the retable of *SS. Justa and Rufina*, and if there are any doubts about Ram's contribution to the retable, we can look at the one surviving work that is documented as his alone: the retable of the *Virgin* for the church of Santa María, in Maluenda. Though the retable is no longer in place, Post saw fragments of it in the sacristy of Santa María during a visit to the town in 1926.<sup>23</sup> Sections of the *polseras* with angels bearing symbols of the Passion are still in the sacristy at Santa María. The central panel has surfaced in the Torelló collection in Barcelona (Figure 19), and the subject, the Virgin and Child with a choir of angels and virgin martyrs,

23. Post, VII, p. 360. Post attributed this retable to Solibes.

fits the specifications of the contract of 1477.<sup>24</sup> In this panel, we see the same type of throne as that in the retables of SS. *Justa and Rufina* and *St. John the Baptist* (Figures 8 and 2), the same heavy folds, the same masklike faces: the style of the work that Ram painted by himself is virtually the same as that of the retablo that he painted with Rius.

If this is the case, what about Juan Rius? Mañas Ballestin dismissed him as a minor figure.<sup>25</sup> His strongest case for this assertion rests on an agreement of 1472 signed by Domingo Ram, Pedro de Aranda, and Rius, whose part was specifically spelled out: he was to do all of the underdrawing required in work taken on by the group, and he would receive a small percentage of the total payment for this task.<sup>26</sup> He was also to model in gesso all of the crowns and accessories in all panels.<sup>27</sup> This breakdown of tasks is also indicated in one other contract that Rius made jointly with Salvador Roig years before in Saragossa.<sup>28</sup>

If we examine documents covering the career of Juan Rius in greater detail, he emerges as a more complex personality than Mañas's conclusions indicate, even though he remains an enigma. Unlike other artists in the group, Rius apparently came originally from Saragossa. We hear of him there in 1459, when he collaborated with Martín de Soria on a retablo for the parish church of Aguilón.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, he signed a contract with Salvador Roig to paint a retablo for the Roldán family in San Pablo, also in Saragossa. Still in the same city in 1466, Rius collaborated with yet another artist, Jaime Romeu, on a retablo dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen, St. George, and St. Michael for the parish church of Lécera. According to the contract for this work, Rius's contribution here was precisely the opposite of his work for the Roldán retablo: Jaime Romeu was to draw all of the figures in the *banco* and finish all of the faces in color in the body of the altarpiece, while Rius was responsible for the gesso ornamentation, gilding the grounds, and then painting with color all parts of the compositions *except* the faces, which were Romeu's task.<sup>30</sup> By 1469, Rius had moved to Maluenda.<sup>31</sup> But there is an interesting postscript to the Lécera retablo, for a second document, dated 1470, made by Jaime Romeu's son Felipe, stated that his father was now dead and that the retablo was left unfinished. Felipe agreed to complete it, and declared that Juan Rius had renounced all part and rights that he had had to the retablo in favor of Romeu.<sup>32</sup> Does this imply that

Rius perhaps found that he was not able to produce all of that illusionistic painting of figures, brocades, etc., or does it merely indicate that he opted out of his contract with Romeu so that he could leave Saragossa for Maluenda?

At any rate, in 1470, Rius signed a contract jointly with Pedro de Aranda to paint the retablo of *St. Matías* in Calatayud, in which the participation of each artist was not specified.<sup>33</sup> Two years later, he entered into the three-way agreement with Domingo Ram and Aranda. In 1474, he contracted jointly with Pedro de Aranda for the Gómara retablo. For that work, Rius was given three specific tasks: to do all of the underdrawing for the retablo, to help Pedro de Aranda in finishing the color (in other words, to do the sort of fine brushwork typically performed by a master), and to execute the decorative details in

24. Mañas Ballestin, pp. 228–229.

25. Ibid., pp. 223ff.

26. Ibid., p. 224: “que aya de deboxar qualquiere obra que los ditos pintores habran de necesario.” This amount was worked out on a sliding scale.

27. Ibid.: “cubrir todos los abellimentes de diademas e las cosas necesarias en la pieza.”

28. In this retablo, commissioned by the heirs of Juan Roldán for the cloister of San Pablo in Saragossa, Rius was to draw and color the heads of all figures in all of the altarpiece panels (Serrano y Sanz, 1915, p. 159: “diboxar, pintar et encarnar todas las testas de todas las historias qu'en el dito retaulo sean contenidas, y no hotro alguno . . .”). Chandler Post (VIII, pp. 249 ff.) erroneously identified the Roldán retablo with one dedicated to SS. Catherine, John, and Mary Magdalen still in San Pablo. Since the style of that retablo is very different from that of the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina* (the surviving altarpiece reflects the influence of the painter Bartolomé Bermejo), Mañas Ballestin (p. 226) concluded that Rius's role in both works was quite subsidiary, as befits someone doing mere preparatory work. But Post's identification of the Roldán retablo with the one still in San Pablo is incorrect. Even he pointed out that neither subject nor location of the retablo of SS. *Catherine, John, and Mary Magdalen* exactly matches the description of the altarpiece in the contract. Actually both painting and costume style of the retablo indicate a date toward 1490 rather than the year of the Roldán contract, 1459.

29. Cabezudo Astrain, p. 68.

30. Serrano y Sanz, 1921, p. 139: “el Johan Rius aya de enbotir, daurar los planos, pisar e vestir e fazer de colores fasta fazer las caras. . . .”

31. Mañas Ballestin, p. 223. Rius rented a vineyard in Maluenda in this year.

32. Cabezudo Astrain, p. 78: “el dito Juan Rius, pintor, haver renunciado toda la part e dretyo que el havia en la dita factura del dito retaulo, en poder del dito mi padre, e apries el dito padre haver sido finado. . . .”

33. Mañas Ballestin, p. 224.

molded gesso (*embutido*) which Aranda would then gild.<sup>34</sup>

The last known mention of Rius in Maluenda is the contract and documents of payment for the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina*, where references are constantly made to Ram and Rius together, with no specific division of tasks indicated. Rius apparently left the Calatayud area after this, for in 1482 he was back in Saragossa, where he received money from his stepson, Jaime Serrat.<sup>35</sup> All together, the documentary evidence depicts Juan Rius as an artist whose greatest strengths lay in his talents as a draughtsman and a gilder and decorator.<sup>36</sup> Yet he also seems to have been called upon at times for his skills as a painter.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from Domingo Ram, the only other artist with whom Rius worked whose style is known at all is Martín de Soria. His oeuvre has not been sufficiently defined for identification of characteristics in it that are *not* his, however, and the jointly executed retablo does not survive.<sup>38</sup> It can, however, be asserted that the styles of Martín de Soria and Domingo Ram both reflect distant influences of the Catalan painter Jaume Huguet, who evidently spent some of his early years at Saragossa. Rius would thus have been working with men who painted in vaguely similar styles—at least in these two instances.

Any attempt to delineate Rius's style has to take into account one final consideration: judging from the extent of collaboration that the documents suggest went on among Aragonese artists at this time (and those cited here are only a small proportion) it would seem that the prevailing aim of both artist and patron was a good corporate product rather than a unique manifestation, a product in which the artists would have tried to look as much *alike* as possible, rather than letting individual talents shine forth.<sup>39</sup> Given this corporate character, we can easily imagine each artist in the "company" using his special skill in a given project, and then working with his partner or partners on the finishing of the piece, as at Gómara. It must also be remembered that other artisans within the workshop of the two masters probably did much of the preparatory and rough work.

The temptation is to look for different characteristics and to pick out different hands within a given stylistic group. While it is futile to try to distinguish Rius's hand from Ram's in the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina*, there are at least three distinct but related groups of paintings, all roughly from the area of Ca-

latayud, which seem to stem from the group of artists we have discussed.

#### DOMINGO RAM, THE BONNAT MASTER, AND THE ST. VINCENT MASTER

The first and easiest works to identify are those that come closest to the known production of Domingo Ram. These are the works that used to be ascribed to Solibes by Post and others. They include the Cloisters retablo of *St. John the Baptist*; a retablo dedicated to SS. Isidore, Ambrose, and Nicholas in the Museo de Arte Sacra, Calatayud; a single panel of St. Barbara in the Museo de la Colegiata de Santa María, Daroca; a *banco* of seated saints with the dead Christ in its center that now adorns the high altar of the parish

34. Ibid., p. 225: "El dito Pedro de Aranda aya de dar al dito Joan per debuxar el dicho retaulo . . . asi mesmo tiene de ayudar ad acabar de colores aquel dito Pedro. E el dito Pedro le aya de dar por istorias vint y dos sueldos, empero el dito Juan Rius se les aya de embotir, e el dicho Pedro se les aya de dorar. . . ."

35. Serrano y Sanz, 1917, p. 452.

36. Mañas Ballestín, p. 223. In 1470, Rius made an agreement with two goldsmiths of Medina del Campo to educate them in methods of separating gold from silver by the use of certain acids.

37. Other artists of considerable talent were often specifically asked to execute underdrawing of a given retablo. A case in point was Bartolomé Bermejo, who was asked in the second contract of 1477 to draw and paint with his own hand the faces for the *retablo mayor* of Santo Domingo de Silos in Daroca.

38. Post (VIII, pp. 312 ff.) sought to attribute a vast number of works of widely differing styles to Martín de Soria. This has been challenged by José Gudiol Ricart, in *Pintura medieval en Aragón* (Saragossa, 1971) pp. 49ff. A careful reevaluation of Martín de Soria has still to be made.

39. There is documentary and stylistic evidence to support this theory in 15th-century Aragonese painting. A key document is the joint agreement in 1466, between Tomás Giner and Arnaut de Castellnau de Navalles, in which they formed a company ("companyia") for five years, agreeing to share execution of all commissions (Serrano y Sanz, 1915, p. 419). Documentary and stylistic proof can be found in the association between Martín Bernat and Miguel Ximenez: though both painted independently, they executed numerous retables together between 1482 and 1496. One, the retablo of the *True Cross* from Blesa (1486) survives (now in the Museo de Bellas Artes, Saragossa). The contributions of the two masters in the various panels of this altarpiece are distinguishable, but barely so, for their style is closely linked. The same similarity of style characterizes their independent commissions, for example Bernat's *Virgin of Mercy* from the Talavera Chapel of Tarazona Cathedral (now in the Museo de la Colegiata de Santa María, Daroca), documented to 1493, and Ximenez's signed Resurrection from the retablo of SS. *Michael and Catherine* from Egea de los Cabeleros (now in the Prado, Madrid).

church of Villarroya del Campo; another *banco* with the unusual center theme of the Epiphany in the church of San Felix at Torralba de Ribota; and parts of an altarpiece—a panel depicting Mary Magdalen, as well as a *banco* with St. James, St. Michael, the Mass of St. Gregory, St. Paul, and the Virgin of the Rosary—now in the parish church of Alcañiz. The figure of the Magdalen (Figure 20) is quite close to other figures by Domingo Ram discussed here, but those of the *banco* show a slightly stiffer style (Figure 21).<sup>40</sup> This might possibly reflect participation by the elder Juan Ram, active with his brother at Alcañiz.

The works belonging to the second hand include the *banco* of the *Passion* in The Cloisters. Post called

the artist the Bonnat Master after panels from a retable dedicated to St. Martin in the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne (Figure 22).<sup>41</sup> These panels and a small

40. Post, VII, p. 361, n. 1. Post hesitated to attribute the Alcañiz *Magdalen* and *banco* to the Rams, but he did mention the pertinent documentation of Domingo and Juan Ram in Alcañiz. He also remarked that the specifications for a high altar retable in the request for payment published by Serrano y Sanz (see note 20) were too large for identification with the pieces found in Alcañiz. Another candidate for the authorship of the Alcañiz retable was Jaime Serrat, stepson of Juan Rius, who painted a retable dedicated to the Magdalen for Alcañiz in 1506 (Abizanda y Brotó, "Documentos para la historia artística y literaria de Aragón, siglo XVI," *Zaragoza* [1917] pp. 10ff.). This too was for a larger retable, and it was destined for the castle, not the parish church. Mañas Ballestin (p. 233) assumes that Serrat did the Alcañiz panels, without presenting any new proof.

41. Post, VIII, p. 428. Gudiol Ricart (*Pintura medieval en Aragón*, p. 68) for some reason attributes both works in The Cloisters to the same hand—the Bonnat Master.

20. Domingo Ram and Juan Ram the Elder (?), *The Magdalen*. Alcañiz, Parish Church (photo: Mas)



21. Domingo Ram and Juan Ram the Elder (?), *banco*: St. Michael. Alcañiz, Parish Church (photo: Mas)

22. Bonnat Master, Retable of *St. Martin*: central panel, St. Martin Dividing His Cloak. Bayonne, Musée Bonnat (photo: © Arch. Phot. Paris/SPADEM)

23. St. Vincent Master, Retable of SS. Vincent, John, and Mary Magdalen. Calatayud, Museo de Arte Sacra (photo: Mas)



group of other works, including a single panel of the Temptation of St. Anthony (Museo de Pinturas, Bilbao), a *St. Christopher* in Santa María, Calatayud, and three panels of prophets in the Museu d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona), display the same rather cursive style as the Cloisters *banco*. The close relationship between the *banco* of the *Passion* and the *banco* from the retable of SS. *Justa and Rufina* certainly suggests that the Bonnat Master is a painter of the Calatayud group, but in the absence of concrete documentary evidence, he may as well keep this rather unsatisfactory title.

A third master shares some characteristics with Domingo Ram and the Bonnat Master. This is the

painter of a retable dedicated to St. Vincent, St. John, and St. Mary Magdalen in the Museo de Arte Sacra, Calatayud, reputed to have come from the Granadas family chapel in the now-destroyed church of San Torcuato (Figure 23).<sup>42</sup> Post christened him the St. Vincent Master.<sup>43</sup> This artist's style is heavier, with strong outlines and shading and rather rigid, blocky figures—a stiff version of Domingo Ram's style. There are also compositional affinities with Ram. The St. John in the Calatayud retable has the same device of a cloak tucked into his belt, while the Magdalen

42. Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, p. 70.

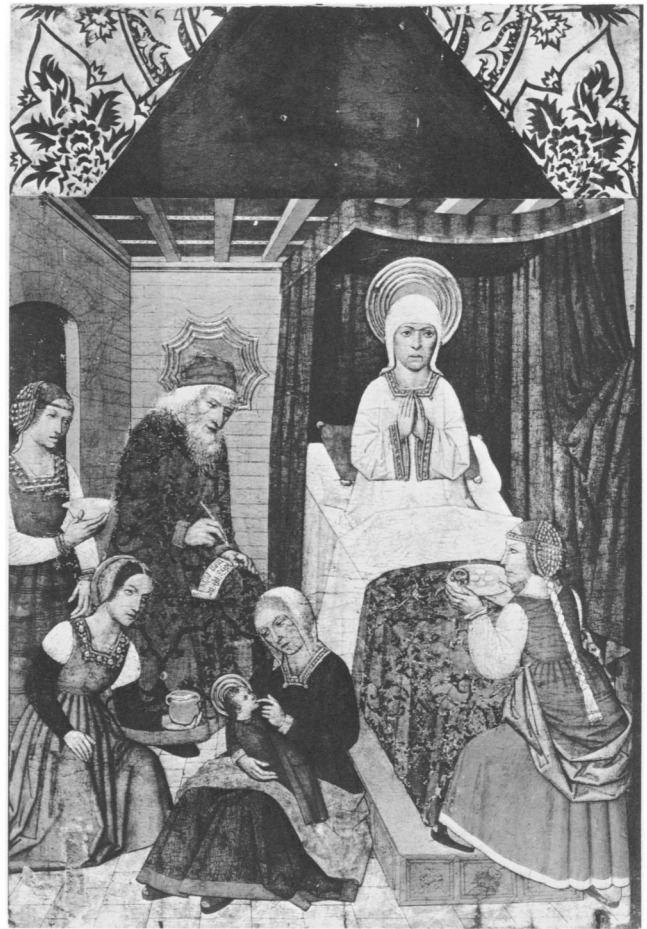
43. Post, VIII, p. 439.



24. St. Vincent Master, *Birth of the Virgin*. Maluenda, Santa María (photo: Mas)

resembles Ram's version of the same saint at Alcañiz. The composition of another work attributed to the St. Vincent Master, the center panel from the *Birth of the Virgin* retable in Santa María, Maluenda (Figure 24), has affinities with the Cloisters Birth of St. John the Baptist (Figure 25), particularly in the foreground group. Other works attributed to this artist include the retable of SS. *Anne, Valerius, and Vincent* in Santa María, Maluenda, and panels of St. Nicholas and St. Bartholomew in the Muntadas collection, Barcelona.

Several attempts have been made to identify the St. Vincent Master with one or another of the artists documented in Calatayud. In an elaborate but unconvincing argument, Mañas Ballestin sought to identify part of the retable of SS. *Vincent, John, and Mary Magdalen* with the retable of *St. Anne* painted by Domingo Ram and Bartolomé de Berdesco in 1507. It involved



25. Ram, *St. John the Baptist* retable: Birth of St. John

taking the panels of St. John and the Magdalen (admittedly reversed the way the retable is presently set up), and combining them with the *banco* from the retable of SS. *Isidore, Ambrose, and Nicholas*, attributed to Domingo Ram. Mañas contended that these, plus the missing central panel of St. Anne, constituted the original Ram–Berdesco altarpiece.<sup>44</sup> Part of his argument was based on the fact that the 1507 contract specifies that the center of the *banco* be occupied by the “*piedat*,” and the center of the St. Isidore *banco* has as its subject the Pietà, the dead Christ on the Virgin's lap. But in fifteenth-century Aragonese documents, the term *piedat* refers to the Man of Sorrows, not to the theme now known as the Pietà, which was called the *trasfixo*. Thus, like the Bonnat Master, the

44. Mañas Ballestin, p. 231.



St. Vincent Master, though surely a member of the Calatayud group, remains unidentified.<sup>45</sup>

At least one more work by yet a different hand echoes closely one of the compositions in the retablo of *St. John the Baptist*. This is the *Birth of the Virgin*, one of a series of four panels formerly in the Parcent collection, Madrid, reputed to have come from Agreda in Soria (Figure 26).<sup>46</sup> The other three panels depict the Visitation, the Nativity, and the Epiphany.<sup>47</sup> The last two are interesting because their compositions appear to have been based on prints by Martin Schongauer, an artist widely copied in Spain, but the panel showing the Birth of the Virgin is practically a replica of the Cloisters Birth of St. John (Figure 25). Stylistically, the two works differ, and the Parcent panel is of a later date, judging from the costumes of the female figures. Did the author of the Parcent panels somehow have contact with the Calatayud group? Or did both artists have access to the same cartoon? From the

26. *Birth of the Virgin*. Formerly Madrid, Parcent Collection (photo: after *Catálogo de las tablas de primitivos españoles . . .*, 1911)

evidence of what has survived, the Calatayud artists do not seem to have been aware of the works of Schongauer.

We are thus left with a fairly common art-historical dilemma. A set of documents shows extensive activity and interaction among a group of artists working around Calatayud, and a number of paintings were done by several closely related artists also working around Calatayud, but only one artist named in the documents, Domingo Ram, can be linked to surviving documented works, the retables of SS. *Justa and Rufina* and of the *Virgin*. It is fairly safe to guess that the

45. Other scholars have suggested that the St. Vincent Master might actually have been two artists, unrelated to the group we have been discussing: Juan and Pedro Vazquez (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, p. 185). These painters contracted in 1493 for a retablo dedicated to St. Mary of Egypt for the church of San Pedro Mártir in Calatayud. The *banco* of this retablo was to have five compartments depicting SS. Sebastian, Fabian, Cosmas, and Damian, with the figure of St. Peter Martyr, patron of the church, occupying the important central position usually filled by the Man of Sorrows or a eucharistic theme. It was thought that only the *banco* survived, and that it was the one formerly placed below the retablo of SS. *Vincent, John, and Mary Magdalen* and now attached to another retablo of an earlier date in the Museo de Arte Sacra, Calatayud. This *banco*, closer in style to the retablo of SS. *Vincent, John, and Mary Magdalen* than the earlier retablo, includes images of SS. Fabian, Sebastian, Cosmas, and Damian, but its center is occupied by St. Anthony Abbot, not St. Peter Martyr. One explanation for this discrepancy is that since St. Peter Martyr was already so often represented in this church, the artist or patron decided to change the subject of the center panel. However, given the importance of the *banco* in Aragonese retables, and particularly the center panel, it seems highly unlikely that the saint deleted from this one would be the patron of the church. Also no provenance for the piece is known.

46. Elías Tormo y Monzó, *Catálogo de las tablas de primitivos españoles de la colección de la excma. Señora Doña Trinidad Scholtz Hermensdorff Viuda de Iturbe* [duchess of Parcent], Exposición de la Real Academia de San Fernando, May 1911 (Madrid, 1911). The four panels are reproduced in the catalogue as nos. 9–12. The provenance is hazily reported as “quizá de tierra de Agreda, o de Aragón, donde se negociaron” (no. 9).

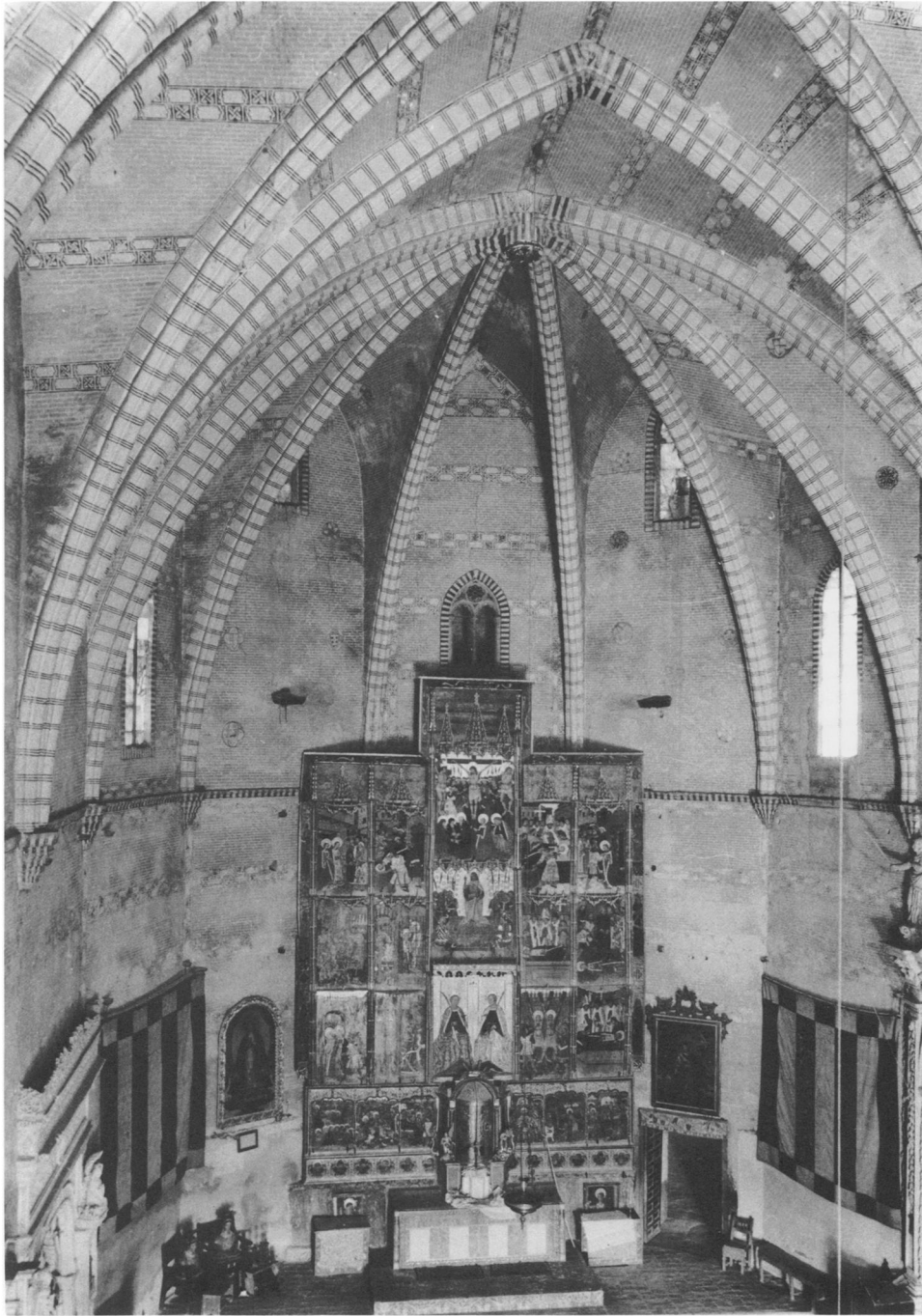
47. Post, VIII, pp. 281ff. He attributed these panels to Jaime Lana. Subsequent scholars have convincingly proved that these panels were not the work of Lana, but they have come up with no new attribution (see Gudiol Ricart, *Pintura medieval en Aragón*, p. 67).

retable of *St. John the Baptist* reflects the hand of Domingo Ram, but we can only speculate about the identity of the Bonnat Master, the author of the *banco* of the *Passion*. It is tempting to connect him with Juan Rius, if only because of his reputation as a draughtsman and because the *banco* of the *Passion* is executed in such a cursory style, but since Rius is not known to have worked alone, there seems no way of proving this theory.<sup>48</sup>

The *St. John* altarpiece and the *banco* of the *Passion* together demonstrate well how a regional style works. The paintings share a similar aesthetic even though they show individual differences. Both the retable and the *banco* were conceived and carried out as decorative entities. With their structure and frames complete, they would have formed half-architectural, half-painterly totalities and would have blended very well into their settings. We can understand this if we

look at the retable in Santas Justa y Rufina (Figure 27), the only *retablo mayor* still occupying its original position above the high altar in an Aragonese church which retains its fifteenth-century decoration. The majority of fifteenth-century village churches in western Aragon were single naved and decorated in the Mudéjar style. They afforded an unimpeded view from nave entry to altar, and the interior of the church was richly decorated with abstract painted, carved, and inlaid designs. The high altar retable contributed to this decorative scheme with its scintillating gold frame and its brightly colored paintings. Lack of perspective and the de-emphasis of narrative in favor of symbolic content were offset by a large-scale schematic sense and a harmony of two-dimensional surface design, as both the retable of *St. John the Baptist* and the *banco* of the *Passion* admirably demonstrate.

48. Since it seems certain that the retable of *St. John the Baptist* was made for the high altar of a church, it was logical to search in the area of Calatayud for churches dedicated to St. John the Baptist. There are a number of these which might have had a 15th-century retable over the high altar, including Illueca, Valdeorna, Torrijo de la Cañada, and Campillo de Aragón, though there is no way to know if the Cloisters altarpiece came from one of these. In addition, there was the church of San Juan de Vallupié in Calatayud, which was torn down in 1769 (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, pp. 195–196). We know that Domingo Ram and his son Juan painted organ doors for that church with themes similar to the *St. John* retable (Mañas Ballestín, p. 228), but it seems unlikely that they would have repeated the same themes in a retable. The old *retablo mayor* of this church does survive, in fact, but it is a Baroque sculpted object, now split between Sediles and the church of San Juan el Real. One other interesting thought presents itself: the parish church of Gómara, for which Pedro de Aranda and Juan Rius contracted to execute a retable of unknown theme, is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. If the Cloisters retable *did* come from Gómara, then we would be faced with the possibility that Aranda and Rius in collaboration painted in a style that is virtually indistinguishable from that of Domingo Ram.



27. Interior of Santos Justa y Rufina, Maluenda, showing the high altar and retablo (photo: Mas)

# Appendix

## THE CALATAYUD GROUP, 1459–1507: CHRONOLOGY

### 1459 Saragossa (November 4)

JUAN RIUS is working on a retable for the parish church of Aguilón with MARTÍN DE SORIA. The latter receives a payment of 500 *sueldos* for work in progress. (Cabezudo Astrain, ref. p. 68 and doc. p. 76.)

#### Saragossa (n.d.)

JUAN RIUS and SALVADOR ROIG make a contract with the heirs of Juan Roldán for a retable dedicated to St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. John the Baptist for the Roldán Chapel in San Pablo, Saragossa. Rius is to draw, paint, and color all the heads in all panels of the retable. (Serrano y Sanz, 1915, doc. pp. 159–160.)

### 1464 Calatayud (October 19)

DOMINGO RAM, PEDRO DE ARANDA, and ANTÓN DE SANTORQUAT sign a peace agreement, resolving a quarrel between them. They also fix prices for the painting of household articles such as chests and curtains. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 226 and n. 31.)

### 1466 Saragossa (March 14)

JUAN RIUS and JAIME ROMEU sign a contract for a retable of *St. Mary Magdalen* for the parish church of Lécera. Rius is to gesso, gild, and paint everything except the faces, which will be executed by Romeu. (Serrano y Sanz, 1921, doc. pp. 136–139.)

### 1469 Calatayud (February 8)

JUAN RIUS, inhabitant of Maluenda, rents a vineyard belonging to himself and his wife at La Ornella, to Johan Rodriz. DOMINGO RAM witnesses the document. (Serrano y Sanz, 1916, doc. p. 475.)

### 1470 Saragossa (May 14)

JUAN RIUS has renounced his part in the retable of *St. Mary Magdalen* at Lécera in favor of JAIME ROMEU, who has just died, leaving the retable in a state of unsatisfactory completion. FELIPE ROMEU, son of Jaime, agrees to complete it to the satisfaction of the patrons. (Cabezudo Astrain, ref. p. 71 and n. 3; doc. p. 78.)

### Calatayud (August 16)

JUAN RIUS undertakes to teach gold- and silver-separation methods to two goldbeaters from Medina del Campo, Yfach Avienzut and Mosé Bezudo. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 223 and n. 20.)

### Calatayud (October 18)

JUAN RIUS and PEDRO DE ARANDA sign a contract with the brotherhood of St. Mamas to paint a retable dedicated to the saint for the monastery of San Agustín, Calatayud. (Mañas Ballestin, partial citation of doc. pp. 223–224 and n. 22.)

### 1471 Calatayud (February 5)

JUAN RIUS and PEDRO DE ARANDA receive two-thirds of the total price of the retable of *St. Mamas*. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 224 and n. 22.)

### 1472 Maluenda (January 12)

JUAN RIUS buys a residence at Noguera Muerta (near Maluenda). DOMINGO RAM and QUILLÉN DOLZINA are witnesses. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 224 and n. 23.)

### Maluenda (June 30)

DOMINGO RAM and PEDRO DE ARANDA sign a contract of association to share retable commissions for the space of five years. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 227 and n. 32.)

### Maluenda (August 16)

DOMINGO RAM and PEDRO DE ARANDA sign an agreement with JUAN RIUS, to give Rius the underdrawing and the modeling of adornments for whatever retables they undertake, for the period of one year. Rius is to accept no other work during this period. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 224, partial citation of doc. n. 24.)

### Maluenda (September 27)

DOMINGO RAM, inhabitant of Maluenda, sells his furniture to his mother for 300 florins. JUAN RIUS witnesses the document. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 227 and n. 35.)

**1474 Calatayud** (May 4)

DOMINGO RAM, inhabitant of Calatayud, receives a payment of 800 *sueldos* for a retablo he is painting for the parish church of Atea. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 227 and n. 36.)

**Calatayud** (October 30)

JUAN RIUS and PEDRO DE ARANDA sign a contract to execute a retablo for the parish church of Gómara of unspecified dedication. PEDRO DE ARANDA is to paint and gild the retablo, JUAN RIUS will execute the underdrawing and modeled gesso ornamentation and assist Aranda with the painting. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. and partial citation of doc. p. 225 and n. 25.)

**1475 Maluenda** (April 25)

DOMINGO RAM and JUAN RIUS contract for the high altar retablo (*retablo mayor*) of the church of Santas Justa y Rufina, Maluenda. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. and partial citation of doc. pp. 216–222.)

**Maluenda** (October 3)

DOMINGO RAM and JUAN RIUS receive the second payment of 2000 *sueldos* for the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina*. (Mañas Ballestin, partial citation of doc. p. 221, nn. 9–11.)

**1476 Calatayud** (January 27)

JUAN RIUS, residing in Calatayud, owes Gabriel de Santa Cruz 10 gold florins. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 225 and n. 27.)

**Maluenda** (February 15)

Council of Maluenda lends DOMINGO RAM and JUAN RIUS 2000 *sueldos*. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 222 and n. 12.)

**1477 Maluenda** (June 8)

DOMINGO RAM and JUAN RIUS receive final payment for the retablo of SS. *Justa and Rufina*. They also repay their debt of February 15, 1476. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 222 and n. 13.)

**Maluenda** (November 16)

DOMINGO RAM signs a contract with the city of Maluenda to execute the *retablo mayor* of the church of Santa María, Maluenda. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. and partial citation of doc. p. 222 and n. 14; p. 227 and n. 38; pp. 229–231.)

**1480 Maluenda** (July 22)

DOMINGO RAM signs an agreement with TOMÁS

RAM, his brother, to resolve a dispute. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 228 and n. 39.)

**Calatayud** (n.d.)

ANTÓN DE SANTORQUAT contracts for a retablo dedicated to St. Michael for the church of San Francisco, Calatayud. (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, ref. p. 188.)

**1482 Saragossa** (July 22)

JUAN RIUS receives 450 *sueldos* from JAIME SERRAT, painter (his stepson). (Serrano y Sanz, 1917, doc. p. 452.)

**Calatayud** (n.d.)

ANTÓN DE SANTORQUAT completes the *St. Michael* altarpiece for San Francisco, Calatayud. (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, ref. p. 188.)

**1486 Calatayud** (n.d.)

PEDRO DE ARANDA contracts for a retablo of *St. Cecilia* for the church of El Salvador, Calatayud. (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, ref. p. 194.)

**1488 Alcañiz** (January 4)

DOMINGO RAM and his brother JUAN RAM have completed the *retablo mayor* of Santa María la Mayor in Alcañiz, and solicit final payment. (Serrano y Sanz, 1915, doc. pp. 427–428.)

**Calatayud** (n.d.)

PEDRO DE ARANDA contracts for a retablo dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary for the chapter house of San Pedro Mártir, Calatayud. (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, ref. p. 183.)

**1489 Maluenda** (May 24)

DOMINGO and TOMÁS RAM, inhabitants of Maluenda, conduct a financial transaction with Juan Daza. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 228 and n. 40.)

**1493 Calatayud** (September 8)

PEDRO DE ARANDA contracts for the *retablo mayor* of Santo Domingo de Silos, Calatayud, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. (Borrás Gualis and López Sampedro, ref. p. 193.)

**1496 Alcañiz** (October 16)

DOMINGO RAM, resident in Alcañiz, sends his son JUAN to Calatayud for apprenticeship to PEDRO DE ARANDA for two years. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 228 and n. 41.)

**1503 Calatayud** (July 20)

DOMINGO RAM and his son JUAN RAM contract for organ doors with scenes from the lives of the two St. Johns, for the church of San Juan de Vallupié, Calatayud. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. and partial citation of doc. p. 228 and n. 42.)

**1507 Calatayud** (July 13)

DOMINGO RAM and BARTOLOMÉ DE BERDESCO sign a contract to paint a retablo of *St. Anne* (church unspecified), presumably in Calatayud, commissioned by Juan Fernández de Moros. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. and partial citation of doc. p. 229 and n. 43.)

**Calatayud** (n.d.)

The younger JUAN RAM marries the daughter of BARTOLOMÉ DE BERDESCO. (Mañas Ballestin, ref. p. 235.)

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