

PIETY AND THE MERCHANT PATRON: A CASE STUDY OF MERCHANT
PATRONAGE IN EARLY SIXTEENTH-CENTURY BURGOS

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Beginning in the late Middle Ages and continuing into the early modern period, merchants throughout western Europe became influential members of the growing middle class, and with this growing wealth and influence also came artistic patronage. Although the patronage of merchants from other areas of the western world, specifically Italy and Northern Europe, has been studied in some detail, the examination of merchant patrons from Iberia, and specifically Castile, has been largely neglected. Accordingly, this study offers unprecedented analysis of the funerary altarpiece commissioned at the turn of the sixteenth century by the Castilian merchant Gonzalo López de Polanco for the high altar of the parish church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos, Spain. Through the analysis of this altarpiece, this project examines the devotional life and social aspirations of the merchant patron as well as the function of the altarpiece in its original location, doing so through the consideration of contemporary liturgical and devotional texts as well as the patron's testament. Moreover, this study addresses how this altarpiece compares to others commissioned by merchant, noble, ecclesiastical and royal patrons in Burgos around the turn of the sixteenth century, a time when Castilian attitudes toward religious devotion were changing due to increased contact with the rest of Europe and the importation of various religious texts under Ferdinand and Isabel. By centering this project on an object commissioned by a member of the merchant class, analysis of this altarpiece offers an initial study of the religious life and artistic patronage of early sixteenth-century Castilian merchants.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emily Kelley was born in Flint, Michigan. In 2002, she obtained a B.A. with honors from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and received her M.A. from Cornell University in 2007. She has presented papers at the College Art Association Annual Conference; International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan; and the Medieval Studies Graduate Student Colloquium at Cornell University. In the fall of 2010, she will begin a position as an assistant professor of Art History in the Art Department at Saginaw Valley State University in University Center, Michigan.

To Mom and Aaron for their steadfast support of this project and to Catalina for her
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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Case Study of Merchant Patronage in Late Medieval Castile

From the ninth century through the end of the fifteenth century, trade flourished in Europe and the Mediterranean, and by the later Middle Ages, it had altered the intellectual and economic climate of these regions.¹ During the late medieval period, which in Spain spanned the thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries and ended following the reign of Isabel and Ferdinand, merchants formed a significant part of urban society and were influential members of the growing middle class. The role of the merchant class and the development of mercantile culture have been examined at length in some areas of the late medieval world, specifically Italy, with recent studies of the mercantile societies of Venice and Amalfi.² In the art historical scholarship of both Italy and Flanders, there are numerous studies that address objects commissioned by merchant families, with some of the more renowned examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries including the Medici, the Scrovegni, and the

¹ On trade in general: *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol. 2, eds. M. M. Postan and Edward Miller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert S. Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1971); Robert S. Lopez and Irving W. Raymond, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.: 1955; Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origin and the Revival of Trade*, trans. Frank D. Halsey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969). On trade in specific regions: Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain: The Commercial Realignment of the Iberian Peninsula, 900-1500* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gunnar Dahl, *Trade, Trust, and Networks: Commercial Culture in Late Medieval Italy* (Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998); James Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants, and Markets: Inland Trade in Medieval England, 1150-1350* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); James M. Murray, *Bruges, Cradle of Capitalism, 1280-1390* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

² Jill Caskey, *Art and Patronage in the Medieval Mediterranean: Merchant Culture in the Region of Amalfi* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

Arnolfini.³ However, although a number of studies address merchant culture and patronage in Italy and northern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, particularly the region of Castile, has been relatively absent from scholarly inquiry into the cultural and intellectual life of the merchant class despite a number of studies that examine Castilian merchants from a historical and economic perspective.⁴

Because of the dearth of scholarship examining the patronage and culture of merchants in late medieval Castile,⁵ this dissertation is one of the first forays into the contextual analysis of an object commissioned by a merchant in this region. It is a study of the patronage of Gonzalo López de Polanco, a merchant from the city of Burgos, Spain, who commissioned a high altarpiece for the parish church of San Nicolás de Bari between the years 1503 and 1505 (Figure 1-1). Through consideration of Polanco's will, devotional and liturgical texts, and contemporary objects, this dissertation offers analysis of Polanco's religious life and social aspirations through

³ Margaret D. Carroll, "'In the Name of God and Profit': Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait," *Representations* 44 (1993): 96-132; Charles Harrison, "The Arena Chapel: Patronage and Authorship," in Siena, *Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion, 1280-1400*, ed. Diana Norman (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1995), 2:83-104; Dale V. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: the Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Michelle O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its 'Invisible Skein of Relations,'" *Art History* 28, no. 4 (2005): 417-441. In addition to these sources, two recent studies give brief overviews of the connection between artistic patronage and the merchant class in Italy and Florence: Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 16-20; Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 3-17.

⁴ One notable exception to this is the city of Barcelona where there has been significant scholarly work focused on the city's merchant culture. For example: Jaume Aurell i Cardona and Alfonso Puigarnau, *La cultura del mercader en la Barcelona del siglo XV* (Barcelona: Ediciones Omega, 1998).

⁵ A few of these studies are: Hilario Casado Alonso, *Señores, mercaderes y campesinos: la comarca de Burgos a fines de la Edad Media* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1987); Castilla y Europa: *Comercio y mercaderes en los siglos XIV, XV y XVI*, ed. Hilario Casado Alonso (Burgos: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1995); Wendy Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the later Middle Ages* (Bath: Pitman Press, 1978); *Comercio y hombres de negocios en Castilla y Europa en tiempos del Isabel la Católica*, ed. Hilario Casado Alonso and Antonio García-Baquero (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales, 2007); Carla Rahn Phillips and William D. Phillips, Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Crisis and Continuity: Land and Town in Late Medieval Castile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).



Figure 1-1: High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos, Spain (photo: author).

detailed examination of his funerary altarpiece. Although many more studies of individual merchant patrons in Castile are necessary before we will have a comprehensive understanding of merchant culture in that region, it is my hope that this work offers a significant initial step toward the inclusion of the Iberian world in the dialogue regarding the artistic commissions of this important social group.

Although a variety of merchant commissioned objects from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Iberia have remained relatively unexamined,⁶ the Polanco altarpiece provides an ideal starting point for the study of merchant commissioned objects in late medieval Castile because of its well documented history. First, unlike many contemporary objects, the retable at the Church of San Nicolás de Bari remains *in situ*, and only minor alterations have been made to it since its original construction at the beginning of the sixteenth-century making it easier to analyze the function of the altarpiece in its original location and to interpret its iconographic program. Moreover, although the commission record for the retable has not been preserved, the will of Gonzalo López de Polanco and that of his son Gregorio de Polanco provide substantial information about the altarpiece as well as the social interactions, religious affiliations and business practices of the Polanco family.⁷ These documents detail Polanco's

⁶ For example, in Burgos the altarpieces in the Chapel of the Buena Mañana and Chapel of the Kings from the Church of San Gil and the altarpiece commissioned by the Salamanca family in the Church of San Lesmes have all been addressed in terms of their iconographic programs: Gregorio Betolaza and María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "Una escultura perteneciente al maestro del retablo de nuestra señora en la capilla de la Buena Mañana de la Iglesia de San Gil, de Burgos" *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* 52 (1986): 369-371; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "Escultura gótica de importación en Burgos: el retablo de la Santa Cruz en la iglesia de San Lesmes," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 2 (1994): 279-296; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "El retablo de Nuestra Señora de la Iglesia de San Gil de Burgos," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar* 23 (1986): 59-92. However, no detailed analyses of the patron's roles in altarpiece design or the ways in which these programs reflect mercantile culture have been performed.

⁷ Matías Martínez Burgos has published a complete transcription of Gonzalo López de Polanco's testament, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos: Los Colonia y Gil de Siloe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 138, no 2 (1956): 153-227. The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos (hereafter ADB), "Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco," San Nicolás, signatura 23. Gregorio de Polanco's testament is reproduced in Ismael García Ramila, "Testamento ortogado en la ciudad de Burgos y en el año 1546, por el matrimonio integrado por Gregorio de

provisions for the upkeep of the altarpiece, his requests for the types of masses that should be said following his death, and his devotion to specific holy personages, all information that is crucial to the analysis of his funerary commission. Finally, a number of contemporary altarpieces from the cathedral, parish churches, and monasteries of Burgos are indicative of trends in the style, location and iconographic content of carved retables during this period, and comparisons with these enable further analysis of Polanco's commission. All of these sources permit the type of contextual analysis of the altarpiece's iconographic program that is undertaken in this study.

In addition to the above, Polanco's altarpiece was commissioned at a time when significant political and cultural change was occurring in Castile. Within Polanco's lifetime, Castile and Aragon were united under the rule of Isabel and Ferdinand; the Nasrid kingdom in Granada was defeated; and Jews and Muslims, who had lived in Iberia for centuries, were forced into exile. As a result, Iberia eventually lost many of the traits that set it apart from the rest of Europe throughout most of the medieval period, and the united Christian kingdom formed under Isabel and Ferdinand "laid the foundation for the modern Spanish state."⁸ Aside from this political transformation, changes to Castilian culture also occurred at the end of the fifteenth century that resulted in a more learned, well-traveled merchant class. By the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel, though beginning during the rule of Enrique IV at mid-century, many cities in Castile were becoming European powers and were increasingly in contact with important metropolitan centers elsewhere in Europe.⁹ At the end of the fifteenth century, Burgos was one of these powers, and merchants in the city had

Polanco, regidor y vecino de Burgos y su esposa Doña María de Salinas," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 47 (1969): 1-29.

⁸ Alison Caplan, "The World of Isabel la Católica," in *Isabel la Católica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays*, ed. David A. Boruchoff (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 38.

⁹ Caplan, "The World of Isabel la Católica," 31-34.

connections to a variety of other centers of European trade including those in England, Flanders, and Italy. In addition, and most important for this study of Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece, printed book production was introduced to Spain during the final quarter of the fifteenth century, and as a result, the merchant class had greater access to both secular and religious texts, creating a better educated mercantile society and permitting new modes of devotional practice. This new aspect of book culture is particularly important to Polanco's commission since evidence that he read and contemplated both the *Ars moriendi* and the *Golden Legend* is apparent in his altarpiece. Polanco's funerary commission developed out of this late fifteenth-century society that was characterized by political change, increased contact with the rest of Europe, and the advent of printed books. Therefore, although Polanco's altarpiece is strongly rooted in medieval style, some aspects of its design, most notably its relationship to printed devotional texts, suggests a connection to emerging early modern culture in Spain.

The High Altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos

Occupying the entire east wall of the central nave of the Church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos, the altarpiece dedicated to St. Nicholas is an imposing retable that is unique among its contemporaries in terms of its size and its materials. It is both the largest lay commissioned carved retable from late medieval Burgos and the only altarpiece made from stone that survives from the city's late medieval period. This altarpiece, which was commissioned by the merchant Gonzalo López de Polanco prior to his death in 1505 in order to serve as a funerary monument for his family, measures 15.55 by 9.04 meters. The work is made of a porous limestone from Hontoria de Cantera, a small town in the province of Burgos. This type of stone was often used in

the construction of buildings, including the Cathedral of Burgos and the Monasteries of San Pablo and San Gregorio in Valladolid,¹⁰ but was seldom used for altarpieces.

Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece is a testament to his concern for the afterlife, containing representations of over 300 holy personages, all of whom Polanco hoped would assist in his salvation. These figures are divided into more than 50 individual scenes that are arranged into three vertical components—a central aisle, or *calle*, and two side aisles. At the bottom of the central *calle*, the *banco*¹¹ includes images of the donors at prayer and two scenes from the Passion of Christ, which are related to the celebration of the Eucharist that occurred at the altar below. Above the *banco*, a two-register narrative of the life of St. Nicholas, which is framed by an arch and accompanied by angels holding the crests of the Polanco family, depicts selected scenes from the legend of Polanco's patron saint (Figure 1-2). Finally, at the top of the central *calle*, a scene of the Virgin being crowned by the Holy Trinity, which is circled by a ring of 163 angels with St. Michael at its base, represents the center of the Celestial Court (Figure 1-3). This depiction of the Heavenly Kingdom is completed by the two side aisles that are each divided into 18 sections, with one or two holy figures in each area (Figures 1-4 to 1-7). Below the side aisles, on either side of the high altar, are the Polanco family tombs: that of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his wife Leonor de Miranda is on the right and that of Alfonso de Polanco, Gonzalo López de Polanco's brother, and his brother's wife, Constanza de Maluenda, is on the left. Both sepulchers occupy a space measuring 2.2 by 4.12 meters and are ornamented at the top with a scene from Christ's Infancy (Figures 1-8 and 1-9). The incorporation of these

¹⁰ Petra S. Coop., "Estudio y propuesta de intervención para la restauración del retablo mayor de la iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari (Burgos)," unpublished report, November 2005 (Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, Dirección General de Patrimonio y Bienes Culturales), 5, 18, 27. On limestone from Hontoria de Cantera: José Ignacio García de los Ríos Cobo and Juan Manuel Báez Mezquita, *La piedra en Castilla y León* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1994), 220-222.

¹¹ The *banco* is the lowest register of an altarpiece. This area is often referred to as the *predella*.



Figure 1-2: Narrative of St. Nicholas and *Banco*, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás, (photo: author).



Figure 1-3: Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás, (photo: author).



Figure 1-4: Rows 1-2 of Saints, Left Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-5: Rows 3-6 of Saints, Left Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-6: Rows 1-2 of Saints, Right Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-7: Rows 3-6 of Saints, Right Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-8: Tomb of Gonzalo López de Polanco and Leonor de Miranda, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-9: Tomb of Alfonso de Polanco and Constanza de Maluenda, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

sarcophagi into the retable ensured that Polanco, his brother, and their wives would remain in the privileged location behind the main altar of the church so long as the massive stone retable was intact.

Because of the size and detail of this retable, some of the scenes and figures represented are easily viewed from any point in the church, while others are so small that they are barely visible to a viewer standing near the altar. This arrangement signifies the importance of some of the holy persons that Polanco considered most critical to his redemption in the afterlife. In the central *calle*, the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity and the statue of St. Nicholas are the most prominent figures in the retable, reflecting the crucial role that Polanco believed St. Nicholas, the Virgin and Christ would play in his salvation. Similarly, the episodes from the life of St. Nicholas in the center and the life of Christ in the *banco* are also highly visible, each occupying a distinct space and framed by elaborate architectural ornamentation. In the side aisles, many of the figures are not as pronounced as those in the St. Nicholas narrative and in the *banco*, and, of these holy personages, some are more distinct than others. For example, due to their nudity, Adam, Eve and St. Sebastian are readily recognizable (Figure 1-7), and, likewise, others, including St. Francis, St. Gregory, St. Martin, and the Virgin of Mercy (Figures 1-4 to 1-6), have unique attributes that mark their identities. Even less visible than the saints in the side aisles, small figures of saints and prophets are included in the vertical bars that separate individual scenes in the altarpiece (these are similar in appearance to the *guardapolvos*, or dust guard, found on painted retables of the same period). Whether easily visible or not, most of the saints in the vertical bars and the side aisles were individually significant to Polanco (as I will discuss in chapter four). They were also important because Polanco desired the collective presence of a multitude of saints who would serve as his intercessors in the afterlife. Therefore, even those saints who are

not readily distinguishable were crucial to Polanco's overall conception of his altarpiece.

Although the majority of the altarpiece dates to the early sixteenth century and was the commission of Gonzalo López de Polanco, there have been some modifications to the original work since its construction over 500 years ago and these have impacted the current appearance of the retable. The most notable of these are the Baroque tabernacle at the center of the *banco* and the semicircle of architectural ornamentation at the top of the altarpiece that contains a depiction of God the Father (Figures 1-2 and 1-10). Both of these areas are made of wood rather than limestone and date to the eighteenth century; they were most likely added as part of the cleaning of the retable that occurred in 1778.¹² Although I have not located any documentation connecting these eighteenth-century additions to the Polanco family, the sixteenth-century modifications to the altarpiece demonstrate that it was considered an enduring family monument in the decades immediately following Polanco's death.

Most notably, Gonzalo López de Polanco's son, Gregorio de Polanco, arranged for his own burial at the church in the middle of the sixteenth century. Gregorio expanded the right side of the retable by adding a representation of Santiago Matamoros (St. James as conqueror of the Moors), which was probably in reference to Gregorio's membership in the confraternity of St. James (Figure 1-11).¹³ Below this image, Gregorio included a plaque detailing some aspects of his lineage; the inscription on this plaque states, "Beneath this jasper are the bodies of Gregorio Polanco, *regidor* of Burgos, and María de Salinas, his wife; he died on November 3, 1552 and she on May 22, 1564. Gregorio de Polanco was the son of Gonzalo López

¹² Petra S. Coop., "Estudio y propuesta," 6 and 19.

¹³ Gregorio de Polanco is listed as one of the confraternity members on folio 78r of the book that lists the confraternity members. F. Menéndez Pidal de Navascués, *Caballería medieval burgalesa: El libro de la cofradía de Santiago* (Madrid, 1996); *Libro de la Real Cofradía de los Caballeros del Santísimo y Santiago*, ed. Matías Vicario Santamaría, et. al. (Burgos: Gil de Siloé, 2000-2002).



Figure 1-10: Eighteenth-Century Addition Depicting God the Father, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 1-11: Sixteenth-Century Addition Depicting Santiago Matamoros, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

de Polanco, who was founder of this high altar, and grandson of Gonzalo López de Polanco, both of whom are buried here in the sepulcher along with [Gregorio de Polanco]....”¹⁴ Both the sixteenth- and eighteenth-century changes are important to this study because they altered the original appearance of Gonzalo López de Polanco’s commission. Moreover, Gregorio’s addition proves that during the sixteenth century the altarpiece was maintained as a family funerary monument.

Style and Layout

The altarpiece at San Nicolás belongs to a wider tradition of sculpted and painted retables produced in Castile during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and these altarpieces share clear stylistic connections to the late medieval modes of retable production and architectural sculpture that began in Castile during the thirteenth century. In Burgos, these sculpted altarpieces became popular during the final third of the fifteenth century, and, within twenty-five years, they could be found in local monasteries and parish churches as well as in several of the cathedral chapels. The earliest of these carved retables was commissioned by Bishop Luis Acuña for his funerary chapel in the Cathedral of Burgos and was completed by the artist Gil Siloe around the year 1477.¹⁵ Other late fifteenth-century altarpieces in Burgos include that from the Monastery at Miraflores,¹⁶ those from the chapels of the Kings and the Buena

¹⁴ “Debajo de la piedra de jaspe que es en este suelo, yacen los cuerpos de Gregorio Polanco, regidor de Burgos y de doña María de Salinas, su mujer; falleció él á tres de noviembre de 1552 y ella, á 22 de mayo de 1564; fué el dicho Gregorio de Polanco, hijo de Gonzalo López de Polanco, fundador de este altar mayor y nieto de Gonzalo López de Polanco, que están enterrados en este arco, y en la sepultura junto á él, como aparece por los letreros, y biznieto de Juan López de Polanco, que está sepultado en el lugar de Polanco, que es en Asturias de Santillana, donde es su naturaleza, en un arco de sus antepasados, en la capilla mayor de la iglesia de Sant Elices.” Luciano Huidobro Serna, *Descripción arqueológica de la iglesia de San Nicolás de Burgos* (Valladolid: Colegio Santiago, 1911), 40.

¹⁵ Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Gil Siloe. El retablo de la Concepción en la capilla del Obispo Acuña* (Burgos, 2000).

¹⁶ Francisco Tarín y Juaneda, *La real cartuja de Miraflores (Burgos) su historia y descripción* (Burgos, 1896), 146-147; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, “El retablo mayor de la Cartuja de Miraflores,” in *Actas del Congreso internacional sobre Gil Siloe y la escultura de su época: Burgos 13-16 octubre de 1999* (Burgos: Institución Fernán González, 2001), 207-238; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *La Cartuja de Miraflores: II El Retablo* (Iberdrola, 2007).

Mañana at the parish church of San Gil,¹⁷ that commissioned by the noblewoman Mencía de Mendoza for the Chapel of the Condestables in the Cathedral,¹⁸ and those made for the high altars of the Church of San Esteban and the Chapel of the Condestables, both of which no longer exist.¹⁹ Of course, this emerging style was also popular throughout Castile, and there were a number of other carved retables produced in this region around the turn of the sixteenth century such as the high altarpieces from the Cathedral of Toledo (c. 1498-1504),²⁰ the Cathedral of Seville (c. 1482-1492),²¹ the Carthusian Monastery of El Paular (c. 1490-1500),²² and the Cathedral of Oviedo (c. 1500-1505),²³ all of which were similar in scale to Polanco's retablo if not larger.

Most of these sculpted Castilian retables share a common format and materials, although their iconographic components are more diverse.²⁴ With a few exceptions,

¹⁷ Betolaza and Gómez Bárcena, "Una escultura perteneciente," 369-371; Antonia Fernández Casla, "La capilla de los Reyes de la iglesia de San Gil de Burgos: Un ejemplo de fundación privada a fines de la Edad Media," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar* 75-76 (1999): 125-156.

¹⁸ Francisco Crosas, "Las lecturas de doña Mencía: la iconografía del retablo de Santa Ana de la capilla del Condestable en la Catedral de Burgos," *Scriptura* 13 (1997): 207-216; Felipe Pereda, "Mencía de Mendoza (1500): Mujer del I Condestable de Castilla. El significado del patronazgo femenino en la Castilla del siglo XV," in *Patronos y coleccionistas: Los Condestables de Castilla y el arte (siglos XV-XVII)*, ed. Begoña Alonso et. al. (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2005), 10-119.

¹⁹ Celmentina Julia Ara Gil, "Los retables de talla góticos en el territorio burgalés," in *El arte gótico en el territorio burgalés*, ed. Emilio Jesús Rodríguez Pajares and María Isabel Bringas López (Burgos: Rico Andradós, S. L., 2006), 201 and 210.

²⁰ Teresa Gómez Espinosa, "Policromía del gótico final. Retablo mayor de la catedral de Toledo y obras burgalesas de Gil Siloe," in *Actas del congreso internacional sobre Gil Siloe y la escultura de su época* (Burgos: Institución Fernán González, 2001), 573-582; María Teresa Pérez Higuera, "El retablo mayor y el primer transparente de la catedral de Toledo," *Anales de historia del arte* 4 (1993-1994): 471-480; Dorothee Heim, "El retablo mayor de la catedral de Toledo: nuevos datos sobre la predella," in *Actas del congreso internacional sobre Gil Siloe*, 521-538.

²¹ José Hernández Díaz, *El retablo mayor de la Catedral de Sevilla. Iconografía y arte* (Seville: Monte de Piedad y Caja de Ahorros de Sevilla 1981).

²² María Rodríguez Velasco, "El retablo del monasterio de Santa María del Paular," in *Monjes y monasterios españoles*, ed. Francisco Javier Campos and Fernández de Sevilla (Madrid: Estudios superiores del Escorial, 1995) 1:247-274.

²³ Julia María Barroso Villar, "En torno al retablo mayor de la catedral de Oviedo," *Imafrontera* 3-5 (1987-1989): 1-16; Francisco de Caso Fernández, "Historia del retablo mayor de la Catedral de Oviedo," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* 74 (1992): 415-444; Francisco José Portela Sandoval discusses these examples and others: "La escultura española en el reinado de Isabel I," in *Isabel la Católica: Reina de Castilla*, ed. Pedro Navascués Palacio (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 2002), 171-246.

²⁴ I address the variations in the iconographic programs of fifteenth-century carved retables from Burgos in Chapter Four.

including the altarpiece at San Nicolás, which was made of limestone, and that at El Paular, which was constructed of alabaster, the majority of these works were carved from wood and then polychromed.²⁵ Moreover, they were all designed with a similar format that featured a wide central *calle*, with the main narrative episodes or figures; narrow side aisles, with additional scenes and/or holy figures; a lower register, or *banco*, that stretched across the expanse of the retable; and small statuettes framing the outer edges of the work. In addition, some of these retables, like the one commissioned by Luis de Acuña, contain further architectural and/or sculptural ornamentation above the frame, though in most cases this is minimal. In their format, these carved altarpieces closely resembled their painted Castilian counterparts, most of which also featured a *banco* across the lower level, a wide central *calle* accompanied by two or more side aisles, and a *guardapolvos* around the outer edges.²⁶

Altarpieces produced in late medieval Castile, whether carved or painted, are often referred to as being “Hispano-Flemish” in style, and, particularly with regard to sculpted retables, many have argued that this style was imported from Germany and the Netherlands.²⁷ However, although these works share some similarities with those from northern Europe, they do not conform precisely in format or iconography to those made in any one region. Altarpieces produced in the Netherlands, for example, tended to combine a sculpted center with painted wings and usually formed a “T-

²⁵ There is some discussion of early polychromed sculpture and technique in *Spanish Polychrome Sculpture 1500-1800 in United States Collections*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton (New York: Spanish Institute, 1993).

²⁶ Judith Berg Sobré offers the most comprehensive overview of painted altarpiece design in late medieval Castile: *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350-1500* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 133-158.

²⁷ A number of works refer to the Hispano-Flemish style. For example: Jan Brans, *Isabel la Católica y el arte hispano-flamenca* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1952); María Pilar Silva Maroto *Pintura hispanoflamenco castellana, Burgos y Palencia : obras en tabla y sarga*, 3 vols (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de cultura y bienestar social, 1990); Eric Young, *Bartolome Bermejo: The Great Hispano-Flemish Master* (London: Elek, 1975).

shape,” with the main portion of the object taller than its sides.²⁸ German retables were more akin to their Castilian counterparts in layout, although many included extensive architectural ornamentation above the top of the frame. Moreover, as in the Netherlands, most German examples featured folding wings, which were rare in Castilian sculpted retables. Also, by the end of the fifteenth century, the practice of polychroming, which was generally employed in Castile, was no longer commonplace in Germany.²⁹ Thus, rather than a case of imitation, as the term “Hispano-Flemish” might imply, the style of the sculpted retables produced in late fifteenth-century Castile is an amalgamation of different features adopted and adapted from already-existing trends in altarpiece design.

The Artist

It is not surprising, given that artists in northern Europe had been constructing carved altarpieces for generations before they became popular in Castile, that many of the sculptors producing this type of work in Castile originally came from regions of Germany and the Netherlands bringing some of their techniques and adapting them to Castilian norms. In Burgos at the end of the fifteenth century, the two main workshops of sculptural production were those of Gil Siloe and the Colonia family. Gil Siloe, who came to Spain from the Netherlands around 1477, was responsible for many of the carved wooden altarpieces made in the region of Burgos, including those commissioned by Luis de Acuña and Mencía de Mendoza for the cathedral, that ordered by Isabel I for Miraflores, and that contracted for the Chapel of the Buena

²⁸ Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces, 1380-1550. Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially 1-2 and 239; Lynn Jacobs, “The Inverted ‘T’-Shape in Early Netherlandish Altarpieces: Studies in the Relation Between Painting and Sculpture,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 57 (1991): 33-65.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*, 239-244; Rainer Kahsnitz, *Carved Altarpieces: Masterpieces of the Late Gothic* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), entire, especially 9-37.

Mañana in the parish church of San Gil.³⁰ In contrast, the Colonia family, who had come to Burgos from Germany in the mid-fifteenth century, specialized in stonework, and one of the artists from this family was responsible for the construction of Polanco's high altarpiece at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

With the exclusion of the wooden components added in the eighteenth century, the high altarpiece of San Nicolás was the work of the sculptor Francisco de Colonia, and his involvement in its production was documented in a passage of Polanco's testament, which indicates that Colonia should be paid upon completion of the retable.³¹ Francisco de Colonia was the grandson of the German sculptor and architect, Juan de Colonia, who came to Burgos around the year 1440 and became the master builder at the Cathedral of Burgos. Among his achievements, Juan was responsible for the Chapel of the Visitation at the cathedral, the towers of the cathedral facade, and the architectural design of the Monastery of Miraflores.³² Following Juan de Colonia, his son, Simón de Colonia, became the master builder at the cathedral in 1480, and, during the course of his life, he oversaw a variety of projects in both the provinces of Burgos and Valladolid, including the construction of the Chapel of the Constables at the cathedral, the Monastery of San Pablo in Valladolid, and the Monastery of San Salvador in Oña as well as the completion of the Monastery of Miraflores, which was started by his father.³³ Francisco's own career began under the

³⁰ See notes 15 to 18 above. For a recent overview of Siloe's work: Ara Gil, "Los retablos de talla góticos," 198-209. For a more general survey of sculpture in late medieval Burgos: Harold E. Wethey, *Gil Siloe and His School: A Study of Late Gothic Sculpture in Burgos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

³¹ Unfortunately, Polanco's testament does not specify the amount that he owed to Francisco de Colonia (Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 184).

³² Beatrice Gilman Proske, *Castilian Sculpture Gothic to Renaissance* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1951), 2-9; Teófilo López Mata, *La catedral de Burgos* (Burgos: Instituto Municipal de Cultura y Turismo, 2008), 417-419.

³³ Filemón Arribas, "Simón de Colonia en Valladolid," *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* 2 (1933): 153-166; Isidro Gonzalo Bango Torviso, "Simón de Colonia y la ciudad de Burgos. Sobre la definición estilística de las segundas generaciones de familias de artistas extranjeros en los siglos XV y XVI," in *Actas del Congreso Internacional sobre Gil Siloe y la Escultura de su época* (Burgos: Institución Fernán González, 2001), 51-69; Isabel Fuentes Rebollo, "El Maestro Simón

mentorship of his father Simón, and there is evidence that the two men collaborated on the construction of the Monastery of San Pablo in Valladolid.³⁴ After this project, the altarpiece at the Church of San Nicolás was Francisco's first independent commission, and, although some have suggested Simón de Colonia's collaboration, there is no documented evidence proving his involvement.³⁵

The Patron

Much of what is known about Gonzalo López de Polanco and his family comes from his testament and from that of his only son, Gregorio de Polanco.³⁶ Gonzalo López de Polanco, was a merchant who lived in Burgos "at the entrance to Pozo Seco,"³⁷ a small street adjacent to the Church of San Nicolás. He was the eldest child and was named after his father who had come to Burgos from Asturias de Santillana, where Gonzalo's grandfather, Juan López de Polanco, was entombed in the Church of Sant Elices.³⁸ In his will, Gonzalo López de Polanco specifically mentions four siblings: Juan de Polanco, also a parishioner at San Nicolás; Francisco de Polanco, a monk in the Monastery of Santa María in Guadalupe; Alonso de Polanco, who was married to Constança de Maluenda and entombed below the high altarpiece of San

de Colonia en San Pablo y San Gregorio (nueva lectura documental)," *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Escultura* 3 (1998-1999), 6-10; Gilman Proske, *Castilian Sculpture*, 22-25, 36-47; López Mata, *La catedral de Burgos*, 419-421; Luis Vasallo Toranzo, "El convento de San Pablo de Valladolid contra Simón y Francisco de Colonia," *Boletín del Museo Nacional de Escultura* 4 (2000): 7-10.

³⁴ Nicolás López Martínez, "Evolución y declive de Francisco de Colonia," in *Estudios de historia y arte : homenaje al profesor Alberto C. Ibáñez Pérez*, ed. Lena Saladina Iglesias Rouco, René Jesús Payo Hernanz, and María Pilar Alonso Abad (Burgos, Universidad de Burgos, 2005), 297-300; Gilman Proske, *Castilian Sculpture*, 99, 259-263; López Mata, *La catedral de Burgos*, 421-423; Vasallo Toranzo, "El convento de San Pablo," 7-10.

³⁵ Martínez Burgos suggests the possibility of Simón de Colonia's involvement ("La iglesia de San Nicolás, 224-227), and Jesús López Sobrino also supports this idea: *La iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari* (Burgos: AMABAR S.L., 2000), 55-56.

³⁶ Gonzalo López de Polanco's testament is transcribed in Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 154-227. The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos (hereafter ADB), "Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco," San Nicolás, signatura 23. Gregorio de Polanco's testament is reproduced in García Ramila, "Testamento ortogado en la ciudad de Burgos," 1-29.

³⁷ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

³⁸ Gonzalo's son, Gregorio de Polanco, provides information about his ancestors on his burial plaque in the Church of San Nicolás. The entire plaque is transcribed in note 12 above.

Nicolás; and Juana de Polanco, who was married to Alvaro de Lerma.³⁹ In addition, although Polanco likely had many nephews, he only listed two in his testament, Gonçalo de Polanco and Juan de Salamanca, who worked for his company and were living in Florence.⁴⁰

Aside from his ancestors, siblings and nephews, Gonzalo López de Polanco also had a sizable number of descendants. Polanco and his wife, Leonor de Miranda, had eleven children, ten daughters and one son, before their respective deaths on July 29, 1505 and December 21, 1503.⁴¹ Providing for ten daughters would have been a substantial undertaking, even for a merchant of considerable means, and this was one of the reasons for Polanco's devotion to St. Nicholas, who was revered in part for his protection of young maidens. Of their ten daughters, documents indicate that at least four, Leonor, Casylda, Beatriz, and Loysa, became nuns at the Convent of San Ildefonso in Burgos, while two of the daughters married men from other merchant families: Mencía de Polanco to Antonio de Castro and Mari Rodríguez de Polanco to Rodrigo de Carrion.⁴² The other four daughters must have been too young to marry or to join the convent when Polanco wrote his will. After Polanco's death, his only son, Gregorio de Polanco, maintained the altarpiece, and he too was interred near the high altar of San Nicolás after his death in 1552. Like his father, Gregorio de Polanco, who married María de Salinas, had a large family with a total of nine children. Five of these were daughters, and four, Leonor, Catalina, Ana and Beatriz, like their aunts, became nuns at San Ildefonso. Gregorio also had four sons: Gregorio de Polanco, who was the eldest and married Mariana de Polanco; Luis and Gonzalo de Polanco, who

³⁹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 182, 186, 189-190.

⁴⁰ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 188-190.

⁴¹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 174-177.

⁴² Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 178, 193-203, 218-220. Gregorio de Polanco's testament also mentions his four sisters at San Ildefonso and indicates Leonor had become the Mother Superior (García Ramila, "Testamento otorgado en la ciudad de Burgos," 15).

were merchants in Florence; and Juan Alonso de Polanco, who became a Jesuit and eventually the secretary to St. Ignatius.⁴³

During his life, Gonzalo López de Polanco was well connected within the mercantile community of late fifteenth-century Burgos. First, the Polanco family held marital alliances with many of the city's elite including the Miranda, Maluenda, Lerma, Salamanca, Carrion and Castro families.⁴⁴ In addition, Gonzalo López de Polanco was a member of two of Burgos's most important organizations for merchants: the *Real Confradía de los Caballeros del Santísimo y Santiago*,⁴⁵ a confraternity comprised mainly of non-noble merchants, and the *Consulado del Mar*,⁴⁶ an institution that regulated mercantile practices and law and that was part of the emerging early modern culture of Burgos. Despite his connections with other merchants in the community, Polanco's business transactions took him primarily to Florence, unlike many of his contemporaries who traded in England, Flanders and Andalucía. Although many sources have suggested that the Polanco family were bankers, moneylenders, or *conversos* (false converts from Judaism to Christianity who continued to practice some aspects of Judaism in secret),⁴⁷ none of these claims are

⁴³ García Ramila, "Testamento ortogado en la ciudad de Burgos," 14-18. Several sources on the early Jesuits mention Juan Alonso de Polanco: Jean Lacouture, *Jesuits a Multibiography*, trans. Jeremy Leggett (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 173-174 and 438; John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), especially 9-11. There is also a recent translation of Polanco's chronicle of the early Jesuits: Juan Alfonso de Polanco, *Year by Year with the Early Jesuits (1537-1556): Selections from the "Chronicon" of Juan de Polanco, S.J.*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004).

⁴⁴ For the frequent intermarriages between merchant families in late medieval Burgos: Carlos Estepa Díez et. al., *Burgos en la Edad Media* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1984), 321.

⁴⁵ *Libro de la Real Cofradía de los Caballeros del Santísimo y Santiago. Estudios y transcripción de la edición facsimilar*, ed. Matías Vicario Santamaría (Burgos: Siloé arte y bibliofilia, 2002).

⁴⁶ Manuel Basas Fernández, *El Consulado de Burgos en el siglo XVI* (Burgos: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1994). Polanco is named among the members in: Manuel Basas Fernández, "Priores y cónsules de la Universidad de Mercaderes y Consulado de Burgos en el siglo XVI," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 42, (1963): 689.

⁴⁷ Manuel Martínez Añibarro y Rives, *Intento de un diccionario biográfico y bibliográfico de autores de la provincia de Burgos* (Madrid: Fundación de Manuel Tello, 1889), 402; López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 52. In his brief introduction to Juan Alonso de Polanco's life, John W. O'Malley indicates that claims regarding the Polanco family's status as *conversos* are longstanding but have not been substantiated (*The First Jesuits*, 10).

supported by documentation. Instead, later records that reference the trading practices of Gregorio de Polanco, Gonzalo López de Polanco's son, and Juan de Salamanca, Polanco's nephew, indicate that the family traded in a variety of goods including wool, silk and gold.⁴⁸ Whatever the specific focus of Polanco's trade, it is clear that his business ventures were sufficiently successful that he was able to afford to commission an opulent funerary altarpiece for the high altar of his parish church of San Nicolás.

The Church of San Nicolás de Bari

Because the Church of San Nicolás de Bari was constructed around the middle of the fifteenth century and Polanco's altarpiece was not added to the structure until the turn of the sixteenth century, a number of features of the edifice and its ornamentation predate Polanco's commission. The parish church is situated on the Way of St. James, the pilgrimage route to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, adjacent to the Cathedral of Burgos and near the city center. During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, this area, which was close to the city market, was mainly inhabited by merchants, including the Polanco family who lived on the nearby street of Pozo Seco.⁴⁹ Although there is evidence that this parish existed as early as the twelfth century,⁵⁰ the current edifice dates to the middle of the fifteenth⁵¹ and the earliest document detailing the administration of the church dates to

⁴⁸ Bruno Dini, "Mercaderes españoles en Florencia (1480-1530), *Actas del V Centenario del Consulado de Burgos (1494-1994)*, ed. Floriano Ballesteros Caballero, et. al. (Excma. Diputacion Provincial de Burgos, 1994), 1:339-343. There is also a reference to Polanco working in the wool trade with Juan and Alfonso de Lerma: Natalia Palenzuela, *Los mercaderes burgaleses en Sevilla a fines de la Edad Media* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2003), 136; and another to Polanco selling wool in Cordoba in 1494: Margarita Cabrera Sánchez, *Nobleza, Oligarquía y Poder en Córdoba al Final de la Edad Media* (Córdoba: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Córdoba: 1998), 209.

⁴⁹ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 9-10; Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 205.

⁵⁰ Enrique Flórez, *España Sagrada*, 2nd ed. (D. José del Colado, 1824), 27: 336-337; Huidobro Serna, *Descripción arqueológica de la iglesia*, 7; López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 6.

⁵¹ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 7; Carlos Sanz Valesco, "Estudio de la piedra en la iglesia de San Nicolás. Burgos," unpublished report, October 2005 (Ayuntamiento de Burgos, Reformas, file 357/06), 3. As López Sobrino explains, historians have often mis-dated the construction of the Gothic structure to 1408 because this was the date of one of the earliest documents relating to the church.

1408.⁵² The church itself is a Gothic-style structure, with two entrances, one on the south and the other on the west wall. The interior is divided into three aisles, each of which is three bays long. In the eighteenth century, reinforcements were added to the interior structure, altering its appearance most notably by partially obstructing the view of Polanco's retable through the addition of a stone arch that stretches across the central nave.⁵³

The portals of the west and south facades were also completed in the fifteenth century. Of these, the west entrance contains simple vegetal ornamentation while the south portal is the most heavily ornamented portion of the church's exterior, and, located along the Way of St. James and in view of the west facade of the cathedral, it has traditionally served as the main entrance to the church (Figure 1-12).⁵⁴ In the tympanum, the enthroned St. Nicholas is depicted in the center flanked by St. Sebastian and St. Victor, and the entire composition is framed by several archivolt covered with vegetal ornamentation. Above the tympanum, figures of Mary and the Angel Gabriel form a scene of the Annunciation. The entire south portal is generally believed to have been the work of Juan or Simón de Colonia,⁵⁵ the grandfather and father of Francisco de Colonia,⁵⁶ although no documents survive to confirm this.

Following the completion of the Gothic structure, although possibly not before the portal ornamentation was completed, several other works were commissioned for

María Jesús Gómez Barcena's *Escultura gótica funeraria en Burgos* (Burgos: Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1988) is one of the more recent publications to do so (page 149), although she is citing from Luciano Huidobro's 1910 publication on the church, "El templo de San Nicolás en Burgos," *Boletín de la Sociedad Castellana de Excursiones* v. 8, no. 95 (1910): 546.

⁵² A transcription and comprehensive study of this document was recently published by Jesús Peñalva Gil, "Las iglesias patrimoniales en la Castilla medieval: la iglesia parroquial de San Nicolás de Burgos: institución, ordenanzas y regla de 1408," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 38, no. 1 (2008): 301-366. The original document is held by ABD, *Institución y fundación de la iglesia de San Nicolás, convertida de prestamero en parroquial en 1408*, Sección: Burgos, Parroquia de San Nicolás, no. 34, 1408, 2r-11r.

⁵³ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 16-18.

⁵⁴ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 14-16; Sanz Velasco, *Estudio de la piedra*, 4.

⁵⁵ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 14.

⁵⁶ See above, notes 33 to 35 for sources on the Colonia family.



Figure 1-12: South Portal, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos, Spain (photo: author).

the interior of the Church of San Nicolás, two of which depict the church's titular saint and likely impacted the appearance and content of Polanco's funerary commission. First, three tombs from the last quarter of the fifteenth century are those of the Maluenda family, with whom the Polanco family had an alliance through the marriage of Alfonso de Polanco, Gonzalo's brother, to Constanza de Maluenda (Figure 1-13). Located on the north wall of the church, the sepulchers of Alonso de Maluenda and his wife Inés de Miranda, Martín Rodríguez de Maleunda and his wife Leonor Alvarez de Castro, and Pedro de Maluenda, followed the typical design of late medieval funerary monuments in Burgos. With an effigy of the deceased on the sarcophagus, depictions of Biblical scenes and saints along with heraldic crests at the base, and an inscription above the tomb,⁵⁷ the Maluenda sarcophagi were similar in form to those of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother Alfonso de Polanco suggesting continuity in the design of tombs commissioned for the church. A second fifteenth-century object from the church, a life-sized Crucifix, which was found in the walls of the structure during the restoration in 1907,⁵⁸ may also have been ordered by the Maluenda family since a late seventeenth-century source mentions that this family was responsible for an altar dedicated to Christ.⁵⁹ If this is correct, it would suggest that, like the Polanco family, the Maluenda commissioned other objects for the church in addition to their tombs. Finally, aside from the patronage of the Maluenda family, another commission prior to Polanco's retable was a set of eight painted panels that most scholars believe were completed around the year 1480 to form an earlier high altarpiece for the Church of

⁵⁷ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 11-42, 149-151; López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 22-25.

⁵⁸ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 26-27.

⁵⁹ Francisco Antonio del Castillo Pesquera, *Breve compendio de la historia de la Cuidad de Burgos, fundación de esta Ciudad, de su iglesia mayor, parroquias y conventos hasta el año 1697*, reprinted in *Boletín de estadística e información del Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Burgos* 25 (1946): 28-30.



Figure 1-13: Maluenda Family Tombs, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

San Nicolás in Burgos.⁶⁰ Today, the panels survive as part of a Baroque retablo dedicated to St. Michael that occupies the left side aisle of the church.⁶¹ Two of the eight panels depict St. Anthony of Padua and St. Andrew along with the donors of the work, who have not been identified. The other six depict four episodes from the life of St. Nicholas.⁶² Although the patron of these panels is not known, they are an important source for this study because they provide an example of the manner in which the narrative of St. Nicholas's life would have been perceived by the parishioners of San Nicolás, including Polanco, prior to Polanco's early sixteenth-century commission of a new altarpiece for the church.

Following the construction of Gonzalo López de Polanco's high altarpiece, two additional commissions, like Polanco's retablo, honored the miracles of St. Nicholas. The first is a small, round stained glass window located above the west entrance that depicts St. Nicholas resurrecting three scholars who had been slaughtered by an innkeeper. Nothing is known about the patron or artist responsible for the construction of this window, which is the only one to survive from this early period of the church's history.⁶³ The second sixteenth-century commission that includes events from the life of St. Nicholas is the two wooden doors of the south entrance, which are thought to have been the work of Francisco de Colonia,⁶⁴ and these were likely completed after

⁶⁰ María Pilar Silva Maroto and Chandler Rathfon Post have both dated these panels to a period between 1480 and 1490: Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, 14 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930-1966), IV: 252-254; Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispano-flamenca castellana*, 273-283. López Sobrino cites these dates and agrees that these panels formed the original high altarpiece (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 33). A recent restoration of the eight panels in 1988 revealed further details about the condition of the panels, their original dimensions, etc.: *Conservación y restauración en la iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari Burgos* (Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 1990).

⁶¹ Images of the individual panels are included in chapter 3.

⁶² Both the Maluenda tombs and the St. Nicholas panels will be examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

⁶³ Enrique Barrio Solórzano, "Vidrieras de la Iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari," unpublished report, March 2006 (Ayuntamiento de Burgos, Reformas, file 357/06).

⁶⁴ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 16.

the Polanco retable. The doors depict two of the more popular legends of St. Nicholas, both of which are also part of the St. Nicholas narrative on Polanco's altarpiece.⁶⁵

In addition to the sixteenth-century commissions honoring St. Nicholas, the church continued to function as a burial place for the city's elite, and two other sepulchers were constructed at the Church of St. Nicolás during the first quarter of the sixteenth century. The first of these, the sarcophagus of Juan Embito and María de Guimel, is no longer intact, but the ornamentation that was once above the tomb survives. Depicting the Annunciation, this sepulchral arch, which López Sobrino attributes to the work of either Francisco de Colonia or Nicolás de Vergara,⁶⁶ is located on the west wall of the church. The second tomb, located to the side of the church's south entrance, is that of Fernando de Mena and Mari Saens de Oña, who died in 1505 and 1526. The arch above is ornamented with an image of St. Jerome at the top and the Virgin and Child flanked by Saints Juan de Ortega and Nicholas at the bottom. López Sobrino also attributes this to the workshop of Francisco de Colonia or Nicolás de Vergara.⁶⁷

Aside from these sixteenth-century commissions, alterations and restorations to the church and the retable that occurred from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries have impacted the present appearance of the structure and the altarpiece. Following the cleaning of the retable in 1778,⁶⁸ the Church of San Nicolás underwent many changes in the nineteenth century during Napoleon's occupation of Spain. At this time, San Nicolás was merged with several other parishes, and, in two separate instances, the church was closed and the parish moved to alternate locations, which included the Chapel of Santa Tecla in the Cathedral of Burgos and the Church of Santa

⁶⁵ These will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three.

⁶⁶ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 25.

⁶⁷ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 19.

⁶⁸ Petra S. Coop., "Estudio y propuesta," 6 and 19.

Águeda. It was at this time, when the parish was merged with others, that two sets of panel paintings dating to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century were moved to the Church of San Nicolás from other churches in the city. Two of these panels, which are now part of the Baroque retable dedicated to St. Michael, depict the *Annunciation* and the *Massacre of the Innocents*. They have been attributed to the “Mastro de las Grandes Figuras,” and most agree that they were originally part of a retable of the life of Christ dating to the end of the fifteenth century.⁶⁹ In addition, a second set of panels representing the *Last Judgment*, which have been attributed to the “Master of Balbases,” also became property of the parish during the nineteenth century. As these panels, which together measure 750 by 420 centimeters, were too large to have been made for the Church of San Nicolás, they are believed to have originated at the Church of Santa María la Blanca in Burgos.⁷⁰ By the early twentieth century, after all of the modifications to the church during the Napoleonic period, the structure and high altarpiece were in a state of disrepair that led to a restoration of the retable, which was financed through the aid of Don Segundo Murga.⁷¹ Most recently, the Church of San Nicolás and the high altarpiece underwent another extensive restoration that began in 2005 and ended in 2009; this focused on cleaning and making minor repairs to both the edifice and the altarpiece.⁷²

⁶⁹ *Conservación y restauración*, 19-20; López Sobrino, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 37-38; Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana*, 207-211; Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, IV: 280-282.

⁷⁰ *Conservación y restauración*, 109-114; Alberto C. Ibáñez Pérez, “Anónimo, Pinturas del juicio final,” in *Las Edades del Hombre* (Salamanca: Europa Artes Gráficas, 1988), 338-345; Juan José Calzada Toledano, “El juicio final de San Nicolás,” *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 86, no. 234 (2007): 139-157; López Sobrino, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 39-49; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, “El juicio final del Maestro de los Balbases en S. Nicolás (Burgos),” in *Estudios de Historia y Arte. Homenaje al Profesor D. Alberto C. Ibáñez Pérez* (Burgos: Universidad de Burgos, 2005), 233-237.

⁷¹ Archivo Municipal de Burgos, “M. Excimo Señor Ministro de construcción publica,” sección 15, signatura 632, January 18, 1911; Luciano Huidobro Serna’s 1911 publication on the Church of San Nicolás discusses this restoration.

⁷² Sanz Valesco, “Estudio de la piedra,” Petra S. Coop., “Estudio y propuesta.”

The aspects of the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás discussed above, including its layout, its relationship to other retables, its artist, its patron, and its placement inside the parish church, are all important elements that contribute to an understanding of the object's original context. Later chapters return to many of these themes, specifically considering the ways in which Polanco, as patron of the retable, affected its design and theological content. As is demonstrated in the next section of this chapter, this particular association between the patron and the object is a matter of growing importance in the scholarship of late medieval art.

Methodology and the Altarpiece

Approaching the European Altarpiece

As the first study to examine the altarpiece of San Nicolás de Bari in terms of the motivations and devotional concerns of its patron, Gonzalo López de Polanco, my dissertation contributes to the growing number of investigations into retable production in the later Middle Ages. To date, these publications have concentrated on individual regions,⁷³ with focused surveys of production in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain.⁷⁴ Each of these offers analysis of the stylistic and iconographic trends alongside, to varying degrees, consideration of the patronage and function of the objects within their original contexts. In addition to these studies, several essays and edited collections address the development and function of the late medieval altarpiece. The first of these, *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, is a compilation of papers originally presented at the Society for Renaissance Studies in

⁷³ Beth Williamson, "Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion," *Speculum* 79 (2004): 342.

⁷⁴ *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1550: Function and Design*, ed. Eve Borsook and Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table*; Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces*; Kahsnitz, *Carved Altarpieces*; Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); In addition to these sources, a translation of Jacob Burckhardt's "Das Altarbild" in *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte von Italien* (Basel, 1898) was published in 1988: *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Italy*, ed. and trans. Peter Humfrey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

1987. These examine fifteenth- and sixteenth-century retables from the German, Italian, Netherlandish, and Spanish contexts and collectively offer new insights into the means by which these objects should be studied.⁷⁵ A second set of essays, published in 1994, is also a collection of papers presented at a symposium devoted to the subject of altarpieces. This conference, held at the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence in 1988, examined exclusively Italian objects, but the papers considered the broader ideas of the origins of the retable and the manner in which altarpieces should be understood.⁷⁶ Of the essays in these texts, that by Henk van Os titled, “Some Thoughts on Writing a History of Sienese Altarpieces,” written after he had compiled a two-volume monograph on the subject, offers some of the most insightful observations regarding the important role of patron and context in the study of late medieval altarpieces. In addition, a recent essay published in 2004 by Beth Williamson presents an overview of scholarship addressing retables and suggests an approach to the analysis of these objects that incorporates interpretation of their liturgical and devotional functions.⁷⁷

These studies present a variety of opposing viewpoints regarding the origins and function of the retable in late medieval Europe. The development of the altarpiece as an object to adorn the altar is often associated with modifications to liturgical ritual that were implemented following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Most significantly, after 1215, priests began to perform Mass with their backs to the congregation, and many scholars have concluded that the altarpiece emerged as a backdrop to this event, believing that worshippers would have desired something to

⁷⁵ *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, ed. Peter Humfrey and Martin Kemp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷⁶ *Italian Altarpieces 1250-1550*.

⁷⁷ Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion.”

contemplate during the ceremony.⁷⁸ Recently, scholars including Beth Williamson and Paul Binski have begun to question the relationship between the emerging use of altarpieces and the Fourth Lateran Council, arguing that retables were both present before 1215 and absent after 1215. As Binski indicates, this meant that the change in “the Priest’s position was thus a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the introduction of the retable.”⁷⁹ Regardless of its origins, the widespread use of the altarpiece by the end of the Middle Ages suggests the overwhelming importance placed on the ornamentation of the altar during the late medieval period.

Likewise, the function of altarpieces, whether they are related to the celebration of the liturgy, the practice of religious devotion, or, more likely, some combination thereof, has been a subject of debate in scholarship addressing these objects. First and foremost, scholars have tended to search for connections between the retable and the celebration of the Eucharist. Henk van Os, for example, argues that the altarpiece provided a “physical framework” for the raising of the Host, suggesting an intrinsic tie between the sacrament and its backdrop.⁸⁰ Others have focused more on the iconographic associations between the Eucharist and the scenes of Christ’s Infancy and Passion that reference his demise. For example, in her study of Eucharistic symbolism in fifteenth-century Netherlandish altarpieces, Barbara Lane finds that the “recurrent scenes of Christ’s birth and sacrifice” present in these retables provide a consistent link between the iconography and “the most basic themes of the Catholic liturgy.”⁸¹ Likewise, although Beth Williamson rejects the notion that all

⁷⁸ Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table*, 4-5; Henk van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215-1460: Form, Content, Function* (Gronigen: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1984-1990), 1:13 (cited in Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 344). Julian Gardner provides one of the more detailed examinations of the relationship between canon law and the use of altarpieces in the period surrounding the Fourth Lateran Council: “Altars, Altarpieces, and Art History: Legislation and Usage,” in *Italian Altarpieces*, 5-39.

⁷⁹ Paul Binski, “The Thirteenth-Century English Altarpiece,” in *Norwegian Medieval Altar Frontals and Related Material: Papers from the Conference in Oslo 16th-19th December 1989* (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1995), 48; Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 347.

⁸⁰ van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces*, 1:13 (quoted in Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 344).

⁸¹ Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*, 9.

altarpieces were related only to Eucharistic themes, she does argue that “much of altarpiece imagery was at least capable of being understood in light of the Eucharist.”⁸²

Despite the intrinsic tie between altarpieces and the celebration of the liturgy and the Eucharist, which is due to their placement behind the altar, most believe that retables should not be interpreted solely in these terms. As Henk van Os argues, “altarpieces contain Eucharistic symbolism as a matter of course. There is nothing special about this, because they were made for this purpose.”⁸³ He suggests that studying these objects only with regard to their Eucharistic or liturgical significance is an antiquated approach that ignores some of their more interesting aspects. Instead, retables should be considered in terms of their use by clergymen, their reception by the faithful, and their conception by the patron.⁸⁴ Like Henk van Os, Beth Williamson acknowledges the multifunctional nature of the altarpiece stating that, “many, if not most, altarpieces were intended to be understood in connection *both* with the liturgy and the theology of the Eucharist *and* with the cult of saints, the Virgin, and other objects of devotion.”⁸⁵ Thus, while altarpieces were fundamentally linked to the ceremonies that occurred in the church and the celebration of the Eucharist on the altar, they had a broader range of functions relating to the devotional activities of the faithful, which may or may not have been tied to the liturgical service, and the messages that the patron wished to convey through his or her commission.

This approach to the late medieval altarpiece, taking into account its circumstances of use, its patron, and its audience, is consistent with broader currents in the scholarship concerned with fifteenth-century art, which began to focus on the

⁸² Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 348.

⁸³ “Some Thoughts on Writing a History of Sienese Altarpieces,” in *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, 27.

⁸⁴ van Os, “Some Thoughts on Writing,” 21-33.

⁸⁵ Williamson, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 377.

importance of context more than twenty years ago. As Larry Silver indicates in his article “The State of the Research in Northern European Art of the Renaissance Era” published in *The Art Bulletin* in 1986, by the 1980s art historical scholarship had shifted away from a focus on style and attribution toward an emphasis on the use, display, and commission of works of art. Here, using Michael Baxandall’s study *Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, Silver notes that scholars were placing a reduced emphasis on the artist and were increasingly interested in the role of the audience.⁸⁶ Moreover, Silver suggests that this shift created a “new art history” more focused on the “functions of art in society” but not “fully abandoning the study of materials and techniques, the visual traditions and subject-matter, or the generic conventions for any work of art....”⁸⁷ Likewise, in his 1987 essay “The State of the Research in Italian Renaissance Art,” William Hood indicates that a similar tendency to emphasize the use and patronage of an object over its style and means of production was present in the scholarship of fifteenth-century Italian art by the 1980s.⁸⁸

More recently, in their introduction to *Renaissance Florence: a Social History*, published in 2006, Roger Crum and John Paoletti demonstrate that this contextual approach is still fashionable among scholars of fifteenth-century art, who the authors indicate are increasingly interested in the reception and the patronage of works of art.⁸⁹ As part of this approach, Crum and Paoletti acknowledge that there is a place for more traditionally studied aspects of art, such as style and iconography, since these functioned as instruments that “carried messages from the object to the viewer,” but

⁸⁶ Larry Silver, “The State of the Research in Northern European Art of the Renaissance Era,” *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 4 (1986): 519.

⁸⁷ Silver, “The State of the Research,” 535.

⁸⁸ William Hood, “The State of Research in Italian Renaissance Art,” *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 2 (1987): 174-186, particularly 183-185.

⁸⁹ Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, “Introduction: Florence—The Dynamics of Space in a Renaissance City,” in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

they suggest that these elements be considered alongside contextual analysis rather than in place of it.⁹⁰

While analysis of patron and reception continue to be popular among scholars of fifteenth-century art, recent approaches have also built on these conventions to include more complex analysis of patronage as well as devotional practice. For example, some current studies not only shift the focus from the artist to the patron but also examine the network of relationships that led the patron to make the choices that he or she made. Michelle O'Malley's article, "Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its 'Invisible Skein of Relations'" demonstrates the complexities of analyzing patronage as it examines the Purification altarpiece commissioned by the Confraternity of the Purification in 1461.⁹¹ Her article shows the direct and indirect impact that a variety of groups, individuals, and objects, including the Medici family, the Dominican order, the Virgin Mary, the San Marco altarpiece, and Fra Angelico, had in the selections that the patron and artist, Benozzo Gozzoli, made in their design of the altarpiece.⁹² My own study of Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary retable similarly considers his relationship to different individuals and organizations as well as his knowledge of various printed texts and other altarpieces in order to address the manner in which these impact the design of his commission.

⁹⁰ Crum and Paoletti, "Introduction: Florence," 10.

⁹¹ Michelle O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its 'Invisible Skein of Relations,'" *Art History* 28, no. 4 (2005): 417-441.

⁹² Although O'Malley's work is unique in specifically calling attention to this phenomenon of patronage networks, many other recent publications similarly focus on the complexities of patronage. Some examples include: Helen S. Ettlinger, "The Sepulchre on the Facade: A Re-Evaluation of Sigismondo Malatesta's Rebuilding of San Francesco in Rimini," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 133-143; Sherry C. M. Lindquist, "The Will of a Princely Patron" and Artists at the Burgundian Court," in *Artists at Court: Image-Making and Identity: 1300-1550*, ed. Stephen J. Campbell (Chicago, Dist. by University of Chicago Press, 2004), 46-56; Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "The Practical Logistics of Art: Thoughts on the Commissioning, Displaying, and Storing of Art at the Burgundian Court," in *In Detail: New Studies of Northern Renaissance Art in Honor of Walter S. Gibson*, ed. Laurinda S. Dixon (Brepolis, 1998), 27-48.

Also developing out of an increased focus on the patron and the function of works of art, many recent, art historical studies have examined objects in terms of their use in devotional practice. Millard Meiss defined the devotional image as any image that creates “a direct sympathetic, and intimate emotional relationship between the spectator and the sacred figures.”⁹³ Although this definition and the idea of the devotional image have existed for sometime, over the last twenty years scholars have increasingly focused on the ways in which these images enhanced religious experiences for the individual in a variety of settings.⁹⁴ These personal religious practices could occur in both the private and public realms, through privately owned objects and texts as well as public altarpieces. Therefore, along with considering Gonzalo López de Polanco’s patronage of his funerary retable, this dissertation also addresses the concept of devotional practice as it relates to both the reception of the altarpiece by the congregation of San Nicolás and the impact of the devotional texts that shaped Polanco’s ideas of the afterlife and his religious beliefs.

⁹³ Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 145.

⁹⁴ A selection of texts that address the devotional use of images include: Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1989); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); James Clifton, *The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150-1800* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1997); Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “The Use of the Images in the Pastoral Care of Nuns: The Case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans,” *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (1989): 20-46; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kathryn A. Smith, “The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion,” *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 72-92. Most significantly, Beth Williamson, whose 2004 study of altarpieces is addressed in greater detail above, specifically examines the devotional function of altarpieces within a variety of late medieval contexts (“Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” 341-406).

Approaching the Spanish Altarpiece

Publications on the Polanco altarpiece, to date, have not adopted the type of contextual approach that Silver and Hood demonstrated was common twenty years ago, and subsequently these studies also have not considered the altarpiece as a devotional object or in terms of Gonzalo López de Polanco's network of relationships within the city of Burgos. The two most notable studies that include examinations of the high altarpiece of San Nicolás de Bari, Jesús López Sobrino's *La iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari* and Luciano Huidobro Serna's *Descripción arqueológica de la iglesia de San Nicolás de Burgos*, are both studies of the church, not the altarpiece.⁹⁵ Therefore, their discussion of Polanco's commission is brief and focused mainly on iconographic identification, with only short introductions to the artist and patron. Another study, by Salvador Andrés Ordax, presents a slightly more nuanced view of the retable, as he compares its style and format to that of other carved altarpieces produced in Burgos at the turn of the sixteenth century.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, much of his essay remains focused on the iconographic elements with minimal discussion of their significance to either patron or audience.

The absence of prior analytical approaches to Polanco's funerary altarpiece is not surprising since scholars of late medieval Spanish art have been slower to adopt the more contemporary approaches to art historical scholarship, which favor the examination of patron, audience and function over iconographic analysis and attribution. In fact, to date, most texts on late medieval Spanish altarpieces are overviews of retable production, either throughout the entire peninsula or in a specific region, or discrete studies of individual retables, most of which focus on iconographic

⁹⁵ See notes 12 and 35 above.

⁹⁶ "El torno a la morfología e iconografía del retablo castellano de fines del medioevo: el retablo mayor de San Nicolás de Burgos," in *El Retablo: tipología, iconografía y restauración*, ed. María Dolores Vila Jato (Santiago de Compostela: EuroGráficas pichel, sl., 2002), 21-37.

and stylistic analysis. Only a few, recent publications include the type of detailed, contextual analysis that had become common in art historical scholarship addressing northern European and Italian objects twenty years ago, and even fewer include the type of careful analysis of the patron and/or devotional function of the object that is often found in scholarship today.

Of those studies offering an overview of retable production, Judith Berg Sobre's 1989 publication, *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350-1500*, is the most comprehensive, offering an introduction to style, layout and iconography of altarpieces produced in each of the regions of Spain during the last 150 years of the medieval period.⁹⁷ Due to the broad nature of the book, detailed, contextual analysis of any single object is beyond the scope of the study, but the work does address, in a general sense, the ways in which retables were made and commissioned. In particular, Berg Sobre characterizes the variety of patrons who ordered these objects and the types of surviving records that document these commissions.⁹⁸ Moreover, the study examines at length the materials and techniques used in altarpiece construction as well as the structure of artist workshops in late medieval Iberia.⁹⁹

Other studies, such as María Pilar Silva Maroto's *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana, Burgos y Palencia* or Marisa Melero-Moneo's *La pintura sobre tabla del gótico lineal: Frontales, laterales de altar y retablos en el reino de Mallorca y los condados catalanas*, provide overviews of altarpieces produced in specific regions of Spain.¹⁰⁰ Silva Maroto's book, for example, is a three-volume study offering a survey

⁹⁷ Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table*, 75-261

⁹⁸ Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table*, 27-48 and 267-337.

⁹⁹ Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table*, 49-71.

¹⁰⁰ Marisa Melero-Moneo, *La pintura sobre tabla del gótico lineal: Frontales, laterales de altar y retablos en el reino de Mallorca y los condados catalanas* (Barcelona: Pulicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2005); Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana*.

of painted panel production in Burgos and Palencia during the fifteenth century. In this text, Silva Maroto focuses her discussion of each group of objects primarily on attribution, dating, and iconographic identification, while addressing patronage and function only minimally. While these texts provide a detailed review of the large number of retables commissioned in each of these contexts, and they are a valuable reference for scholars seeking an overview of works produced in a specific region, further monographic studies of individual altarpieces are necessary in order to fully understand their original function and meaning.

In fact, it is difficult for these broader surveys of late medieval Spanish altarpieces to discuss specific details of patronage and function for each of the various objects that they address primarily because there are so few comprehensive, contextual studies of these retables. This, however, is changing, and recently some scholars of late medieval Spanish art have published monographs and articles devoted to single retables that consider the manner in which these objects were used and the motivation behind their commission. For example, Felipe Pereda's study of the patronage of noblewoman Mencía de Mendoza examines her devotional practices along with her relationship to local religious officials and organizations in order to analyze the works that she commissioned.¹⁰¹ Although Pereda refers to Mendoza's patronage of some of the most important artists in fifteenth-century Castile, including Gil Siloe and Simón de Colonia, he does not discuss attribution or the artists at length. Rather, Pereda focuses on the devotional life and patronage of this noblewoman and interprets her various commissions, one of which is an altarpiece that she ordered for her funerary chapel at the Cathedral of Burgos, in terms of their significance to her as patron.

Likewise, in his study of several late medieval altarpieces from Catalunya, Joan Molina uses a similar contextual approach, placing considerations of patronage

¹⁰¹ Pereda, "Mencía de Mendoza (1500)," entire.

and function at the forefront of his study. One chapter of his monograph, which is entitled *Arte, devoción y poder en la pintura tardogótica catalana*, offers analysis of a retable commissioned by King Pedro IV of Catalunya that takes into account the monarch's devotional interest in both the Virgin of Montserrat and the Joys of the Virgin.¹⁰² Another chapter of the same text addresses the Pietà ordered by Lluís Desplà, a powerful church official in fifteenth-century Barcelona. Here, Molina discusses the role that Desplà played in determining the content of the composition and demonstrates that various components of the scene related closely to the patron's devotional practices.¹⁰³

Joan Molina and Felipe Pereda are, of course, not alone in adopting more contextualized approaches to medieval Spanish objects, but their studies, published in 1999 and 2005, are representative of this developing trend in the scholarship of late medieval Spanish art. Both not only use a contextual approach in their work, but also they consider the complex set of relationships that each patron had within his or her community as well as the devotional function of the objects commissioned. Aside from their work, articles and monographs by scholars including Lynette F. M. Bosch, Chiyo Ishikawa, Cynthia Robinson, and Joaquín Yarza Luaces, contribute, to varying degrees, to the growing corpus of studies offering analysis of late medieval Spanish altarpieces that includes consideration of patron, reception, original location, and contemporary devotional trends.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Joan Molina i Figueras, *Arte, devoción y poder en la pintura tardogótica catalana* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1999), 156-171.

¹⁰³ Molina i Figueras, *Arte, devoción y poder*, 117-146.

¹⁰⁴ Lynette F. M. Bosch, *Art, Liturgy, and Legend in Renaissance Toledo: The Mendoza and the Iglesia primada* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); Chiyo Ishikawa, *The 'Retablo de Isabel la Católica' by Juan de Flandes and Michel Sittow* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2004); Cynthia Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted: Valladolid's *Cristianos nuevos* and the *Retablo de don Sancho de Rojas* (1415)," *Speculum* 83 (2008): 112-163; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *El Retablo de la Flagelación de Leonor de Velasco* (Madrid: El visó ediciones, 1999); Yarza Luaces, *Gil Siloé: El Retablo de la Concepción*. Of these works, Robinson's adopts the most thorough contextualized approach.

Because studies like those by Pereda and Molina are necessary before broader works, like those by Berg Sobre and Silva Maroto, can become more nuanced, it is my hope that my own analysis of Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece will add to the expanding number of works investigating the patronage and function of individual altarpieces in late medieval Iberia. To this end, my dissertation addresses the means by which Polanco's retable is a reflection of his religious life and his social aspirations as well as the manner in which aspects of it would have been perceived by the parishioners of San Nicolás. In doing so, this dissertation considers contemporary devotional texts, such as a printed copy of the *Golden Legend*, a book of saints' lives from late fifteenth-century Burgos, and the *Art of Dying Well*, a treatise on death printed in Zaragoza around 1485; both texts were part of the new culture of printed books in late fifteenth-century Castile. Using these sources and others, the subsequent chapters explore the role that they would have played in shaping Polanco's understanding of divine authority and in impacting his attitude toward the afterlife. Furthermore, this study examines images and funerary monuments that Polanco would have seen both as a citizen of Burgos and as a merchant engaged in trade with Florence in order both to establish the degree to which Polanco personalized his own commission and to demonstrate the means by which his funerary commission served as a marker of his social status. Finally, this dissertation also addresses the network of relationships that Polanco had and the manner in which these impacted the iconographic content of his altarpiece.

In the next chapter, my analysis of this funerary commission considers the manner in which Polanco worked to ensure that his death would be the type of "good death" outlined in the late fifteenth-century text, the *Art of Dying Well*. To address this matter, this chapter details the types of masses that Polanco requested and the variety of pious bequests that he made in his testament, comparing them to those

found in contemporary wills and concluding that Polanco's requests were unique for their time in both volume and nature. Likewise, I note that, in comparison to other fifteenth-century lay sarcophagi from Burgos, the format of the two Polanco tombs is standard, but their placement as part of the high altarpiece of a parish church suggests prominence and prestige that is unique to Polanco's commission.

Chapter three shifts the focus to the altarpiece itself, and, beginning with the eight narrative scenes of the life of St. Nicholas that are at the center of the altarpiece, it considers the ways in which the work demonstrates Polanco's desire to ensure his own salvation through the intercession of saints. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates that Polanco deliberately chose scenes of St. Nicholas's life that were intended to celebrate his personal connection to the saint. Using several sources, including Polanco's testament, a copy of the *Golden Legend* printed in Burgos, liturgical texts from late medieval Burgos, and contemporary images of St. Nicholas from both the Iberian and the Florentine contexts, the chapter's analysis of the eight narrative scenes of St. Nicholas's life addresses the ways in which Polanco guaranteed that specific aspects of his legacy would be honored through his selection of these particular episodes. In addition, this portion of the dissertation considers the manner in which these scenes would have promoted the saint's cult and engaged the parishioners of the Church of San Nicolás in devotion to him while simultaneously reinforcing ideas of Polanco's piety.

Finally, chapter four examines Polanco's broader devotion to the cult of saints and his belief that the entire celestial court, not just St. Nicholas, would aid in his salvation. Through analysis of his testament, this portion of my study demonstrates that Polanco had a personal connection to many of the more than forty saints who represent the celestial court on his retablo and that many of these figures were represented in order to affirm his affiliation with various confraternities, monasteries,

and churches within the city of Burgos. This conclusion reveals not only that Polanco was actively involved in selecting these holy personages for his altarpiece but also that he believed their intercession would aid in his salvation. Moreover, through comparisons to contemporary commissions by Isabel I, the bishops of Burgos, and the laity of Burgos, my conclusions indicate that Polanco's focus on hagiographic rather than Christological themes is representative of a larger trend in lay patronage and devotion in Burgos at the turn of the sixteenth century.

By examining Polanco's solicitation of saintly aid both in his testament on his funerary retable, this dissertation considers the protective nature of saints and their capabilities as intercessors, attributes that André Vauchez indicates became increasingly significant to the laity after the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Through analysis of the representations of the life of St. Nicholas and the saints of the celestial court on the retable of San Nicolás in terms of their relationship to the patron who commissioned them and the context in which they were viewed, this study addresses not only *how* the saints were represented but also considers *why* specific saints were selected. Scholarship addressing the depiction of saints in late medieval Castilian art has traditionally focused primarily on iconographic identification, though recently there have been a few more contextual studies including Felipe Pereda's analysis of the saints on Mencía de Mendoza's retable, Suzanne Stratton's examination of representations of St. Anne and their relationship to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, as well as essays by Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, Elizabeth Valdez del Álamo and Francesca Español in *Decorations for the Holy Dead: Visual Embellishment on Tombs and Shrines of Saints*.¹⁰⁶ However, studies of the visual

¹⁰⁵ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 452-466, 530-531.

¹⁰⁶ Felipe Pereda, "Mencía de Mendoza," 10-119; Suzanne L. Stratton. *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *Decorations for the Holy Dead: Visual*

representation of saints in narrative and iconic form from the Iberian context do not rival the plethora of texts examining the depiction of saints from the broader European context, which include, for example, work by Barbara Abou-El-Haj, George Bent, Sarah Blake Mcham, Joanna Cannon, Diane Cole Ahl, Cynthia Hahn, and Jeryldene Wood,¹⁰⁷ nor are they sufficient to compliment the extensive scholarship regarding hagiographic texts from late medieval Castile.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, much as this study is one of many necessary investigations into the tradition of mercantile commissions in late medieval Iberia, it also adds to the few contextual considerations of the representations of saints' lives in late medieval Castile.

Embellishment on Tombs and Shrines of Saints, ed. Stephen Lamia and Elizabeth Valdez del Álamo (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2002).

¹⁰⁷ Barbara Abou-El-Haj, *The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); George R. Bent, *Monastic Art in Lorenzo Monaco's Florence: Painting and Patronage in Santa Maria degli Angeli, 1300-1415* (Lewiston: The Edward Mellen Press, 2006), particularly 329-414; Sarah Blake McHam, "The Cult of St. Anthony of Padua," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), 215-232; Joanna Cannon, "Dominic alter Christus? Representations of the Founder in and after the *Arca di San Domenico*," in *Christ among the Medieval Dominicans*, ed. Kent Emery Jr. and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 26-48; Diane Cole Ahl, "Benozzo Gozzoli's Cycle of the Life of St. Francis in Montefalco: Hagiography and Homily," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, 191-214; Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁸ Fernando Baños Vallejo offers a summary of this scholarship in "El conocimiento de la hagiografía medieval Castellana. Estado de la cuestión," in *Homenaje a Henri Guerreiro. La hagiografía entre historia y literatura en la España de la Edad Media y del Siglo de Oro*, ed. Marc Viste (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), 65-96. A few of the many monographs and articles addressing this topic include: Fernando Baños Vallejo, *La hagiografía como género literario en la Edad Media: tipología de doce vidas individuales castellanas* (Oviedo: Departamento de Filología Español, 1989); Fernando Baños Vallejo, *Las vidas de santos en la literatura medieval española* (Madrid: Ediciones del laberinto, 2003); Alan D. Deyermond, "Lost Hagiography in Medieval Spanish: A Tentative Catalogue" in *Saints and their Authors. Studies in Medieval Hispanic Hagiography in Honor of John K. Walsh*, ed. Jane E. Connolly, et. al. (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1990), 139-148; José Simón Díaz, "Hagiografías individuales publicadas en español de 1480 a 1700," *Hispania sacra* 30 (1977): 421-480; Billy Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh, "Old Spanish Manuscripts of Prose Lives of the Saints and their Affiliations. I: Compilation A (The *Gran Flos Sanctorum*)," *La Coronica* 15, no. 1 (1986): 17-28; Billy Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh, *La vida de Santa María Egipciana: A Fourteenth-Century Translation of a Work by Paul the Deacon* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1977).

As a whole, this dissertation presents a funerary retablo that was constructed by the merchant patron Gonzalo López de Polanco as both a symbol of his status on earth and an aid to his salvation in the afterlife. Through the focused, contextual analysis of Polanco's early sixteenth-century funerary altarpiece, this study is the first to address the devotional life and social aspirations of a merchant patron in late medieval Castile. It offers not only analysis of the single altarpiece made for Gonzalo López de Polanco, but also marks an important first step toward understanding the devotional concerns and social aspirations of merchants as these are reflected by their artistic patronage. In this manner, this dissertation expands on the growing corpus of studies that, thus far, have only examined royal, noble, and ecclesiastical patrons in late medieval Castile. In addition, these chapters also address Polanco's connections to the changing culture of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Castile by addressing his use of printed texts, his relationship to communities outside of Castile, and his awareness of emerging devotional trends during the period. By introducing a case study of mercantile patronage in Castile, my study also contributes to the understanding of this group of patrons and their growing importance during the transition from the medieval to the early modern period.

Chapter 2

Tomb and Testament: Gonzalo López de Polanco's "Good Death"

In both late medieval and early modern Burgos, the dying endeavored to preserve the legacy of their families on earth and to assist their souls in the pursuit of salvation through both the composition of testaments and the commission of tombs. Like his contemporaries, Gonzalo López de Polanco used these tools in order to elevate himself and his family in the eyes of the citizens of Burgos as well as of God. First, his testament, a thirty-folio document written over the course of two years prior to his death, demonstrates that the type of aid Polanco sought for his salvation was, in comparison with other wills from sixteenth-century Burgos, quite unprecedented. Polanco's requests for numerous masses and prayers as well as his solicitation of intercession from a variety of holy personages far exceeded those of his contemporaries. Second, while the sarcophagi of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother Alfonso de Polanco, located at the base of the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás (Figures 1-8 and 1-9), followed many of the norms of sepulchral design, their location behind the altar of a parish church and their incorporation into a retable were costly measures that were exceptional among the laity of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgos.

Dying Well in Late Medieval Castile

Fifteenth-century Castilians believed that the majority of souls went to purgatory and that only saints and a few others of exceptional purity, like those who had just been baptized, could advance directly to heaven.¹ Thus, following judgment,

¹ Fernando Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida. Muerte y sociedad en Castilla durante la baja edad media* (Toledo: Diputación Provincial, 1996), 116; Laura Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004), 94-125. Jacques Le Goff addresses the

which occurred immediately after death, the souls of all but the most pious individuals were sent to purgatory, “neither a place of eternal joy nor eternal damnation,”² in order to be purified and made ready for entry into heaven. While avoiding this intermediary place was nearly impossible, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Castilians believed that an individual could reduce the time spent there through certain actions taken at the time of death, such as confessing sins and receiving communion, as well as through advanced preparations that included meditating on death and composing a will.³ Likewise, the living could aid their departed loved ones through prayer since souls could benefit from prayers and masses said in their honor even after they had entered purgatory.⁴

Developing out of late medieval concern for the soul’s fate in the afterlife, the *Ars moriendi* was a fifteenth-century instructional and devotional manual that encouraged “deliberate effort and preparation”⁵ by an individual prior to his or her demise and educated the layperson regarding the different steps that s/he should undertake to ensure that s/he died a “good death.”⁶ As part of the new culture of printed books, this manual on dying became an important resource for individuals not

emergence of the concept of purgatory during the Middle Ages and indicates this belief was in place by the end of the twelfth century. *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 1-14.

² Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile*, 125-126.

³ Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34; Carlos Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad en Burgos en el siglo XVI* (Burgos: Diputación de Burgos, 2001), 51-53 and 109.

⁴ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 34 and 169-174; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 124-125; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 201-238; Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile*, 125.

⁵ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 25.

⁶ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 39-42; Francisco Gago Jover ed., *Arte de bien morir y breve confesionario (Zaragoza, Pablo Hurus c. 1479-1484): según el incunable de la Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial*. (Barcelona: Liberduplex, 1999), 26-34; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 133-148; Mary Catherine O’Connor, *The Art of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars moriendi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 9; Adeline Rucquoi, “De la resignación al miedo: la muerte en Castilla en el s. XV,” in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la edad media*, ed. M. Núñez and E. Portela (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1988), 54.

only at the end of the fifteenth century but also well into Spain's early modern period.⁷ During the fifteenth century, this text enjoyed wide circulation in both Latin and the vernacular, with over 100 printed editions produced by the year 1500,⁸ four of which were from late medieval Iberia.⁹ Because of its extensive distribution, the ideas in the *Ars moriendi* were familiar to Christians in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, impacting the manner in which many planned for this inevitable event.¹⁰ Thus, even if Polanco had not owned a copy of the text,¹¹ he would have been familiar with the ideas that it contained and with the importance of making preparations prior to death.

A published Castilian translation of the *Ars moriendi*, which was printed in Zaragoza between 1479 and 1484 and was similar to other editions of the text found throughout Europe, illustrates the ways in which the treatise aided the laity in their preparations for death.¹² The text features five lessons that the dying man, *Moriens*, learned as he experienced a spiritual crisis at the time of his demise. It begins as the devil tries to tempt *Moriens* to abandon his faith by drawing attention to his suffering. However, as in each of the subsequent lessons, an angel, who came to *Moriens*

⁷ Both Eire and Polanco Melero document the popularity of this text in sixteenth-century Spain. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 24-34; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 43-45;

⁸ O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well*, 1-2 and 113-171.

⁹ One of these printed texts was the longer version of *Ars moriendi*, the CP, or *Cum de presentis exili miseria mortis*.... The other three, including the one from Zaragoza that is analyzed here, are the shorter adaptation of the treatise, the QS, or *Quamvis secundum philosophum tercio ethicorum*.... O'Connor addresses the differences between these two versions of the *Ars moriendi* in greater detail (*The Art of Dying Well*, 7). In addition to the printed editions, there are also six surviving CP manuscripts, four in Castilian and two in Catalan. Gago Jover provides details regarding the present location of each surviving manuscript (*Arte de bien morir*, 31-34).

¹⁰ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 24-34; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 133-134; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 43-45; Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile*, 32-54.

¹¹ Polanco Melero discusses the importance of this text in late medieval Burgos, but he does not offer any evidence that copies of it were present there (*Muerte y sociedad*, 43-44).

¹² This text was printed by Pablo Hurus in Zaragoza and is now located in the Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial (call number 32-v-19). There is no evidence that the *Ars moriendi* was printed in Burgos during the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Gago Jover reproduces the entire text (*Arte de bien morir*, 81-151), and he indicates that it was a "faithful translation" of the original Latin text (36).

offering spiritual guidance, thwarts the devil's plans. In this case, the angel reminds the dying man of the many holy people, including Adam and Eve, Job, St. Gregory, St. Paul, and the Virgin Mary, who also endured pain during their lives but remained steadfast in their faith.¹³

Each of *Moriens*' subsequent encounters with the devil and the angel follows the same format. In the second of these, the devil tries to destroy *Moriens*' hope of salvation,¹⁴ but the angel restores it by telling *Moriens* that he will receive forgiveness through penitence and reminding him of the many saints who sinned but still received God's pardon. The angel asks that he

Take for example St. Peter, who denied Jesus Christ; and St. Paul, who persecuted the church; and St. Matthew and Zacchaeus, who were public sinners; and the Magdalene, the adulterous woman; and the thief, who was [crucified] alongside Jesus Christ, and Mary the Egyptian; and many other sinners who have the mercy of Our Lord and were saints.¹⁵

Next, *Moriens* becomes impatient as he awaits death,¹⁶ but then the angel reminds him that "Jesus Christ and his saints were very patient [in the face of] death," suggesting that they serve as models for *Moriens*.¹⁷ Finally, *Moriens*' last trials were intended for specific audiences, with the first designed to help the clergy have humility before God, and the second intended to prepare the laity for salvation.¹⁸ In the passage designed for the laity, the devil reminds *Moriens* of his early life and riches and causes him to feel that he is unprepared for salvation. Once again, the angel helps *Moriens* to feel

¹³ Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 87-92.

¹⁴ Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 93-94.

¹⁵ "toma exemplo de Sant Pedro que negó a Ihesu Cristo, e en Sant Paulo que perseguía la Iglesia, e en Sant Matheo e Zacheo, que eran públicos pecadores, e en la Magdalena e en la muger tomada en adulterio, e en el ladrón que fue colgado cerca de Ihesu Cristo, e en María Egipcíaca, e en otros muchos pecadores de los quales uvo misericordia Nuestro Señor e fueron santos," Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 96-97.

¹⁶ Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 99-100.

¹⁷ "Ihesu Cristo e sus sanctos fueron muy pacientes fasta la muerte." Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 102.

¹⁸ Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 105-115.

more at ease by assuring him that he must simply renounce his worldly goods in order to make himself ready for judgment.

Following the five lessons, two additional sections of the *Ars moriendi* contain advice for the dying and instructions for proper confession. First, a chapter informs the dying and their loved ones as to the manner in which they should pray, suggesting that they “diligently invoke the name of the glorious and holy Virgin Mary, begging that she be their advocate and mediator. And pray to all the angels, particularly to the head angel, for their protection, and likewise [pray] to all of the saints: apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins.” Furthermore, the text recommends that those attending to the deceased offer prayers in order to aid in the salvation of the soul.¹⁹ Following this chapter, the *Ars moriendi* also contains a section titled the *breve confessorario*, which was intended both as a guide for the confessor and a manual for the penitent. This part of the text demonstrates the importance of confession and details various aspects of it for the layperson while also providing the confessor with instruction on the rituals of the process and the qualities that he should possess.²⁰

While the *Ars moriendi* places a clear emphasis on the importance of confession, faith, and belief in salvation, it is within the introduction to the text that the elements needed to achieve the ideal “good death” are outlined most clearly. According to this chapter, there are several beliefs and activities that are important for a dying individual. They are,

First, that he believe the articles of the faith like a good Christian, according to the Holy Mother Church. Second that he be happy that he is dying in the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ and under the obedience and unity of the Holy Church. Third, that he promise in his heart to mend his life, if he should

¹⁹ “diligentemente invoque e llame a la Gloriosa e Sacratísima Virgen Señora Santa María, suplicándola que sea su abogada e medianera. E dende, ruegue a todos los ángeles, e especialmente al ángel deutado por su guarda, a assí mesmo a todos los santos apóstoles, mártires, confessores e vírgenes.” Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 117.

²⁰ Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 121-144.

continue to live, and no longer sin nor offend God and his servants. Fourth, that he pardon, for the love of God, those that have offended him and that he ask for pardon from those whom he has injured. Fifth, that he should return borrowed things. Sixth, that he know and believe that Jesus Christ died to save us, and that there was no other way to salvation other than through the merit of his Holy Passion for which he [the dying] should give thanks to God.²¹

Many of these recommended paths to salvation were incorporated into fifteenth- and sixteenth-century testaments through passages indicating the testator's acceptance of death, belief in the Christian faith, and forgiveness of sins and debts. In this sense, the will became a document intended not only to settle worldly affairs, which was viewed as a necessary step toward preparations for salvation in the afterlife, but also it became a venue for the dying individual to publicly attest to his faith and to accept death.²²

The Testament of Gonzalo López de Polanco

Gonzalo López de Polanco's testament included the various components common to late medieval wills: it settled his worldly affairs, contained his declaration of faith and established the means by which his soul would be supported in its pursuit of heaven.²³ However, far from simply meeting these standard requirements,

²¹ Primeramente, que crea assí como buen cristiano los artículos de la fe, segund que la Santa Madre Iglesia los tiene e cree. Segundo, que sea alegre porque muere en la fe de Nuestro Señor Ihesu Cristo e en la obediencia e unidad de su Santa Iglesia. Tercero, que proponga en su corazón de emendar su vida, si más viviere, e de non pecar más, ni offender a Dios ni a sus próximos. Quarto, que perdone por amor de Dios a los que le han offendido e pida perdón de aquellos que él ha injuriado. Quinto, que torne las cosas ajenas. Sesto, que conosca e crea que Ihesu Cristo murió por salvar a nosotros e por él, e que de otra manera non puede ser salvo, sino por mérito de la su Santa Passión, por lo qual faga gracias a Dios en quanto puede. Gago Jover, *Arte de bien morir*, 83-84. This introductory text, including the attestation to the Christian faith, is typical of the QS version of the *Ars moriendi*. For example, similar passages are also found in a French translation of the text from Paris and dating to 1492 and a Latin edition of the text that is probably from Cologne, Germany and dates to the middle of the fifteenth-century: *Ars moriendi (1492) ou L'art de bien mourir*, ed. Pierre Girard-Augry (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1986), 40-41; *Ars moriendi (editio princeps, circa 1450). A Reproduction of the Copy in the British Museum*, ed. W. Harry Rylands (London: Wyman and Sons, 1881), 23-24.

²² Ildefonso Aveda Martín, "Ars bene moriendi. La muerte amiga," in *Ante la muerte: Actitudes, espacios y formas en la España medieval*, eds. Jaume Aurell and Julia Pavón (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2002), 311-313; Binski, *Medieval Death*, 33-36; Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 20-23; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 31-34; Susana Royer de Cardinal, *Morir en España* (Buenos Aires: Universitas S.R.L., 1992), 62-66.

²³ Matías Martínez Burgos has published a complete transcription of the testament, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos: Los Colonia y Gil de Siloe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 138, no 2 (1956): 153-227. The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos (hereafter ADB), "Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco," San Nicolás, signatura 23.

Polanco's testament reflects preparations for the afterlife that exceeded those of most of his contemporaries, and these are apparent when the document is compared to sixteenth-century wills from Burgos and Madrid, which have been studied by Carlos Polanco Melero and Carlos M.N. Eire.²⁴ These comparisons suggest, for example, that Polanco's pleas for saintly intercession are far more detailed than was typically the case. Furthermore, his requests regarding the masses and prayers to be said in his name following his death and the charitable foundation for the poor that he established at the Church of San Nicolás were atypically extensive for the period. Overall, the document demonstrates Polanco's concern with orchestrating a "good death" and ensuring his own salvation.²⁵

First, the circumstances in which Polanco authored his testament were unusual since it appears that he created it while still in good health. In the sixteenth century, it was rare for an individual to compose a will when he or she was not either extremely ill or preparing for war, and in Burgos only 16.1% of the documents in Polanco Melero's study lacked a reference to an immediate risk of death.²⁶ Although Polanco's will makes no specific statement concerning his health, it does state that he authored it "in order to live and die catholically,"²⁷ suggesting that Polanco did not believe his own death to be imminent. Indicative of his preparedness and piety, the length of the thirty-folio document and the amount of detail it contains would also indicate that Polanco did not draft the testament with the haste and brevity that were typical just prior to death.²⁸ In fact, the demise of Polanco's wife, Leonor de Miranda,

²⁴ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*.

²⁵ There is no clear evidence as to why Polanco was so concerned with the afterlife. As was indicated in the previous chapter, some have suggested that he was a convert to Christianity or a money lender, both of which might account for his preoccupation with salvation. However, as was indicated in Chapter 1, neither of these assumptions are supported by documentation. In particular, John W. O'Malley indicates that claims regarding the Polanco family's status as *conversos* are longstanding but have not been substantiated: *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10.

²⁶ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 64; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 41.

²⁷ "para beber e morir católicamente" Martínez Burgos "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

²⁸ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 64.

three months earlier may have been the occasion that prompted him to prepare the will, which serves as a testament for both Polanco and his wife.

In the first pages of his testament, Polanco included certain identifying information that was typical of contemporary wills. Here, Polanco identified himself as “a resident of the city of Burgos” living at “the entrance of Pozo Seco,” a street near the Church of San Nicolás; as the husband of Leonor de Miranda, who died on December 21, 1503; and as the father of eleven legitimate children.²⁹ In addition, he incorporated a passage indicating that he believed “like a faithful and catholic Christian... in the holy Catholic faith.”³⁰ This element of the document “was necessary in order to publicly reaffirm the sincere belief of the testator”³¹ and, in fifteenth-century Castile, it was common to about 60% of all testaments.³²

Aside from these passages, other aspects of the introduction to Polanco’s testament exceed the standards of most contemporary wills. Even the opening of Polanco’s document is unusual, as it begins with an invocation of God that is far more elaborate than most, seeking the assistance of several divine intercessors. It reads,

²⁹ “vezino desta cibdad de Burgos” and “la entrada del Pozo Seco.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 177.

³⁰ “creo firmemente como fiel y católico cristiano... en la santa fee católica e en todos los artículos della.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 177. Unlike many aspects of Polanco’s will, this statement of faith was similar to those found in 58.1% of testaments studied by Polanco Melero from 1520 to 1540 (*Muerte y sociedad*, 96).

³¹ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 95.

³² Rucquoi, “De la resignación al miedo,” 62-63. It might be expected, given that the instructions for dying well in the *Ars moriendi* required a statement of faith (see note 20), that even those wills composed outside of Iberia would include this component. However, studies of late medieval testaments from both Italy and England suggest that these testaments focused primarily on the allocation of wealth. Moreover, none of these studies mention the attestation of faith as a crucial aspect of the testament: Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *Death and Property in Siena, 1205-1800. Strategies for the Afterlife* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), particularly 58-60; Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 32-33; Richard C. Trexler, “Death and Testament in the Episcopal Constitutions of Florence (1327),” in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 49-51. This lends additional support to Rucquoi’s hypothesis that the attestation of faith was used in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Castile to indicate that the testator was a true Christian and not a false convert (Rucquoi, “De la resignación al miedo,” 62-63).

In the name of our all-powerful Father and of our Lady the Virgin Mary, his mother, and the glorious St. Michael, archangel of the holy Church, with all the angels, and the very holy St. Peter and St. Paul, and St. Nicholas, with all the saints of the celestial court, in order that they would be my advocates before the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons, one single true God.³³

While sixteenth-century testaments typically began by invoking God, their introductions were generally much simpler, consisting only of the Latin phrase “in dei nomine, amen” or its Castilian translation “en el nombre de Dios, amén.”³⁴ Polanco Melero’s study indicates that in Burgos between 1520 and 1545, nearly 70% of wills began with this phrase,³⁵ and during this same period only 1.2% of these documents opened, as Gonzalo López de Polanco’s did, by soliciting aid from the Virgin, the celestial court and specific saints.³⁶ Even taking into account the entire text, testators in Burgos only called upon the saints in about 30% of the wills composed between 1520 and 1545, and in the majority of these cases no specific intercessors were named, but rather the dying requested the help of “the saints of the celestial court.”³⁷

In this regard, Gonzalo López de Polanco’s testament more closely resembles testaments from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Castile. As Adeline Rucquoi indicates, appeals to the Virgin in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were much more common, occurring in approximately 60% of all testaments, and evocations of the Celestial Court as well as specific saints—particularly St. Michael, St. Francis, St. Lazarus, St. Bartholomew, St. John the Evangelist and St. Dominic—were also

³³ “En el nombre del nuestro Sennor Dios Todopoderoso y de nuestra Sennora la Virgen María su madre, e del glorioso sennor San Miguel, Angel Príncipe de la santa madre Yglesia con toda la gerarchía angélica, e de los bien abenturados sennores San Pedro y San Pablo, y sennor Sanicolás, con todos los Santos y Santas de la corte celestyal, para que sean mis Abogados ante la Santa Trenidad, Padre, Hijo e Espíritu Santo, tres personas, un solo Dios verdadero.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 177.

³⁴ “in the name of God.” Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 62-63; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 92-93.

³⁵ When this opening phrase was used, it appeared in Latin in 94.7% of the cases. Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 92-93.

³⁶ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 92.

³⁷ “los santos y santas de la corte celestial.” Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 101. The intercessory roles of these saints will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

frequent. However, even during this period, solicitations for divine aid tended to be much more concise than Polanco's.³⁸ Thus, both the length of this introductory statement and Polanco's plea for the assistance of multiple intercessory powers, including the Virgin, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Nicholas, and St. Michael as well as all the saints and angels, make this aspect of his testament unique.

Moreover, Gonzalo López de Polanco's inclusion of St. Nicholas among the saints named as his advocates suggests that these intercessors were selected based on Polanco's devotion to each holy person rather than out of convention.³⁹ Polanco Melero does not catalogue a single example in which the aid of St. Nicholas is requested,⁴⁰ this suggests the unique nature of Polanco's invocation. Furthermore, images of this saint are prevalent on Polanco's tomb and altarpiece, with representations of him appearing twice on the sarcophagus in addition to the statue of the saint and eight narrative scenes of his life located at the center of the retable.⁴¹

While his connection to St. Nicholas was very personal, Polanco's solicitation of aid from Saints Peter, Paul and Michael was somewhat more customary. As Polanco Melero indicates, assistance from Peter and Paul was frequently sought in cases where testators called on individual intercessors,⁴² and this suggests that that they were included in Polanco's testament out of convention. Similarly, the support of the Archangel Michael was often invoked because of his role in the process of

³⁸ Adeline Rucquoi, "De la resignación al miedo," 60-61. For a brief synopsis of the shifts that occurred in the solicitation of intercessory aid from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries see: Royer de Cardinal, *Morir en España*, 62-72; and Rafael Sánchez Sesa, "Los testamentos entre las élites castellanas de la segunda mitad del siglo XIV a la segunda del XV," *Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 5 (2000): 163-178, particularly page 173.

³⁹ Polanco's devotion to the saints and his choice of intercessors will be examined in Chapter Three and Four.

⁴⁰ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 352-367.

⁴¹ These representations of St. Nicholas are the subject of Chapter Three, and Polanco's devotion to the saint will be considered there.

⁴² Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 102

judgment.⁴³ Therefore, while the saints Peter, Paul and Michael may have been named in the testament in accordance with tradition, perhaps even at the suggestion of the notary, St. Nicholas was clearly selected because of Polanco's personal devotion to the saint.

Next, Polanco's will detailed the location in which he wished to be interred as well as the preparations and ceremonies that he desired be part of the process.⁴⁴ Here, he stated that his body should be buried "in the Church of Señor San Nicolás of this city of Burgos, where I am a parishioner, in my sepulcher and that of my wife Leonor de Miranda."⁴⁵ Although some testators did include specific information regarding the manner in which they wanted their bodies prepared, the type of procession they desired, and the people who should be present at the funeral, many of these practices were standardized and therefore these details were sometimes omitted.⁴⁶ Polanco did not choose to include much of this information, but he did specify that he should be buried in "a habit of St. Francis,"⁴⁷ a request that was fairly common in sixteenth-century Castile because it ensured St. Francis's intercession on behalf of the deceased and served as a sign of humility.⁴⁸ In addition, Polanco paid for two or three mourning

⁴³ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 102. Issues concerning the role of St. Michael as intercessor will be considered more fully in Chapter Four.

⁴⁴ Few testators omit these details from their testaments or leave the final decision about them to their heirs. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 91; María Jesús Gómez Barcena, "La liturgias de los funerales y su repercusión en la escultura gótica funeraria en Castilla," in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la edad media*, eds. M. Núñez and E. Portela (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1988), 35 and 40-46; Royer de Cardinal, *Morir en España*, 76 and 156-164; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 122-146.

⁴⁵ "en la yglesia de sennor Sanicolás desta cibdad de Burgos, donde yo so perrochano, en la sepoltura mía e de mi amada muger Leonor de Miranda," Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 179.

⁴⁶ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 114-121; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 118-122.

⁴⁷ "un ábito de sennor sant Francisco," Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 179.

⁴⁸ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 106-111; Gómez Barcena, "La liturgias de los funerales," 37; Manuel Núñez Rodríguez, "La indumentaria como símbolo en la iconografía funeraria," in *La idea y el sentimiento*, 9-15; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 167-168. Adeline Rucquoi indicates that in Valladolid the Franciscan habit was so popular that it was even worn when the deceased was interred in a monastery of another order. "De la resignación al miedo: La muerte en Castilla en el s. XV," in *La idea y el sentimiento*, 55-56.

women to be present at his funeral and requested that one of them come to San Nicolás every Sunday to distribute alms to the poor.⁴⁹

Along with their other funerary preparations, sixteenth-century testators often desired spiritual aid in the days immediately following death and sought this from the clergy of local churches, the members of confraternities, the poor, and other groups.⁵⁰ Polanco included extensive requests for prayers, many of which he solicited from institutions that he supported during his life. For example, he petitioned the priests of San Nicolás; the parishioners and poor of San Nicolás, whom he compensated with 3 *maravedis* each; the Confraternity of St. James, to which Polanco belonged; and the Convent of St. Ildefonso, where his daughters were cloistered. However, Polanco's appeals extended beyond these establishments, and he asked that all the parishes in Burgos "say their prayers and responses", giving each parish two silver *reales*.⁵¹ In addition, Polanco's solicitations included three confraternities, nine monasteries, a poor house, a jail, and a hospital.⁵² All totaled, Polanco had arranged for over thirty-two religious institutions throughout the city of Burgos to pray for his soul in the hours and days after his demise,⁵³ a number that far exceeded the norm.⁵⁴

Aside from requesting prayers, Polanco also arranged that requiem masses be said in his honor in the days, months and years following his death, and once again this aspect of his testament exceeded typical sixteenth-century standards. When he initially authored his will, Polanco requested that the Church of San Nicolás perform

⁴⁹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 187.

⁵⁰ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 121-145; Gómez Barcena, "La liturgias de los funerales," 35-36; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 122-141; Royer de Cardinal, *Morir en España*, 72-75.

⁵¹ He also gave several of the parishes oil and candles. Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 180 and 182.

⁵² Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 180-183.

⁵³ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 180-183. There were 17 parishes in the city of Burgos during the 15th century.

⁵⁴ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 121-145; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 122-141.

500 “low requiem masses”⁵⁵ for his soul, stipulating that these should celebrate specific holy persons and stating the number of each type of mass that he desired: “on St. Francis 100, on the Trinity 50, on the Mercy [of the Virgin] 20, on St. Stephen of the Friars 50, on St. Paul 70, on St. John 60,” and giving the church “the offering for each mass that is customary.”⁵⁶ In addition to those ceremonies performed at San Nicolás, Polanco also asked that his brother, Father Francisco de Polanco, who was housed in the monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe, recite 100 low requiem masses,⁵⁷ and that his “spiritual advisor Father Matías or a cleric or clerics of the house of St. Francis or St. Stephen” say thirty masses per year.⁵⁸ Polanco’s solicitation of 630 masses is remarkable since in sixteenth-century Burgos only 5% of testaments included petitions for more than 500 masses, with the average number during the first half of the century remaining as low as 177 per person.⁵⁹ In studies of wills that included mass requests from both Burgos and Madrid, there is a documented increase in the number of desired ceremonies as the sixteenth century progressed, but it was not until between 1580 and 1590 that the average number of these exceeded 500, with a more typical number of masses during the first half of the sixteenth century remaining below 200.⁶⁰

In addition to the services that he requested for the days immediately following his death, Polanco also ordered perpetual masses. Polanco’s first request was for “a sung mass with two deacons, or one at the least,” to be held “each Wednesday of

⁵⁵ Low requiem masses were liturgical ceremonies held in honor of the deceased that involved minimal ceremony.

⁵⁶ “en sant Francisco ciento, en la Trenidad cinquenta, en la Merced veynte, en sant Esteban de los Frayles ciento, en santo Agostín ciento, en sant Pablo setenta, en san Juan sesenta; y les den la ofrenda de cada misa acostunbrada.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 180

⁵⁷ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 182.

⁵⁸ “Padre espiritual Fray Matías, o el Religioso o Religiosos de la casa de San Francisco o de Santesteban.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 183.

⁵⁹ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 201-204.

⁶⁰ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 176-180, especially 176; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 201-204.

every week all year [and on] Tuesday in the afternoon, after vespers, [there should be] two sung responses.” In the event that these weekly services were not performed, Polanco stipulated that his heirs should revoke the yearly donation of 2,500 *maravedis* that he made to the church prior to his death.⁶¹ In addition to ceremonies held on Tuesday and Wednesday, he also asked that “a low requiem mass and a response at vespers and at mass” be said daily, and that the priests ensure that two candles were lit and that the cross was placed on his sepulcher along with these daily masses.⁶² In February of 1505, about six months before his death, he further clarified his request, stating that the mass should be said “in winter at 9:00 in the morning and in summer at 8:00, and each day at vespers there should be a sung response,” and indicating that his son and heirs would oversee the payment of 4,000 *maravedis* per year to the church to ensure that the daily masses continued “forever and ever.”⁶³ Thus, by the time his testament was complete, Polanco had requested 630 ceremonies immediately following his death as well as daily low masses, sung services on Wednesdays, and responses each Tuesday.

For those who could afford them, perpetual masses were an ideal way to ensure a rapid ascent to heaven since they provided consistent assistance to the soul, an important consideration as it was believed that the majority of souls went immediately to purgatory, rather than heaven or hell, and could reside there for over 1,000 years.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, because of their cost, only 7.3% of wills written in Burgos between 1520 and 1545 included requests for perpetual masses, and their

⁶¹ “misa cantada con dos Diáconos, o a lo menos con uno” “en cada miércoles de cada semana de todo el año; martes en la tarde, después de bísperas, dos resposos cantados.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 186.

⁶² Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 187.

⁶³ “en ynbierno, a las nueve horas; en verano, a las ocho; e a las bísperas antes digan un responso cantado.” In each of the additions to his testament, made on August 23, 1504 and February 24, 1505, Polanco restates and clarifies his requests for perpetual masses. Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás,” 215, and 221-222.

⁶⁴ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 171-174; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 116; Vivanco, *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile*, 94-125.

exclusive nature meant that they also served as a marker of the testator's status and wealth since for most this type of endowment for the soul was too expensive.⁶⁵

Polanco's perpetual masses would have therefore served two purposes: elevating his family's status on earth and protecting the fate of his soul in the afterlife.

In addition to the daily and weekly masses, Polanco also established a substantial yearly endowment that provided for the poor of the Parish of San Nicolás. He stipulated in his testament that "each Sunday of the year... the priest [of San Nicolás] would have 100 *maravedis* in coins to distribute to the poor orphans [and the poor] men and women who are parishioners of the parish of San Nicolás."⁶⁶ Beyond this bequest, Polanco also left 200 *maravedis* per year to the Hospital of St. John in Burgos, indicating that this donation should be "written in the records of the hospital" to ensure that his grandfather Alonso López was remembered and that prayers were said in his name.⁶⁷ While almsgiving was mandatory in late medieval Castile, Polanco's provisions for the poor far exceeded the standard small gifts that were typically given out of obligation.⁶⁸ His lavish generosity was likely intended as much for the benefit of Polanco's soul as it was to assist those receiving his funds since giving alms was believed to aid in salvation. Furthermore, his charity brought prestige and honor to Polanco and his family.

A final component of Polanco's pious bequests are those objects that he donated to the Church of San Nicolás. In addition to his commission of the carved funerary altarpiece, Polanco also specifically mentioned in his will that he funded stained glass windows, paintings and textiles as well as a set of nine painted cloths

⁶⁵ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 202; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 220-221.

⁶⁶ "todos los Domingos del anno... tengan, el Prior que fuere, cien maravedía en moneda, para repartir a los pobres enbergonzados, onbres e mugeres, que sean perrochanos de la perrocha de sennor san Nicolás." Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 185.

⁶⁷ "se escriban en el libro del Ospital" Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 183.

⁶⁸ Eire indicates that the majority of testators only gave the alms mandated by law or *madras forzosas* (*From Madrid to Purgatory*, 234-237).

depicting scenes of the Passion. Although the testament does not include substantial information about these objects, it does indicate that the Passion paintings were intended exclusively for use during Holy Week.⁶⁹ As Alberto C. Ibañez Perez indicates in his study of merchant patronage in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Burgos, merchant families often donated a variety of objects to their parish church when establishing a family burial site; occasionally they also commissioned a retable.⁷⁰

From his commission of objects for the Church of San Nicolás, his establishment of weekly alms giving to the poor, his requests for prayers and masses and his solicitation of assistance from the saints and the Virgin, most of Gonzalo López de Polanco's preparations surpassed those of his contemporaries, providing evidence that he was particularly concerned with his fate in the afterlife and desired a "good death." Beyond authoring a testament, the tomb and place of burial were the foremost concerns for a pious Christian at the time of his or her death, and, throughout Europe beginning in the fifteenth century, there was "a growing desire on the part of the deceased or his heirs and relatives to use the tomb in order to perpetuate the memory of his life and deeds."⁷¹ In Burgos from the thirteenth century through the beginning of the sixteenth century, those who had the means to do so secured a burial site in a church or monastery and arranged for the construction of a sepulcher that was identifiable through an inscription and/or a family crest; these also included various saints and Biblical scenes of particular significance to the deceased.⁷² The design and

⁶⁹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 184 and 221. The significance of these Passion paintings is discussed more extensively in Chapter Four.

⁷⁰ "El mecenazgo de los mercaderes burgaleses," in *Actas del V Centenario del Consulado de Burgos (1494-1994)*, eds. Floriano Ballesteros Caballero et. al. (Burgos: Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1994), 281-284.

⁷¹ Phillippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 229.

⁷² María Jesús Gómez Bárcena has catalogued those surviving examples from the cathedral, parish churches and monasteries of Burgos. *Escultura gótica funeraria en Burgos* (Burgos: Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1988).

ornamentation of Polanco's sarcophagus was similar to other merchant commissioned sepulchers, but it was also unique because of its placement behind the high altar of San Nicolás and because of its incorporation into the design of the high altarpiece.

The Polanco Tombs and Sepulcher Design in Fifteenth- and Early Sixteenth-Century Burgos

The sarcophagi of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother Alfonso de Polanco, located at the base of the high altarpiece in the Church of San Nicolás, were in many ways conventional funerary commissions, using typical materials and a format standard to fifteenth-century sepulchers in Burgos, which included the effigies of the deceased, a base ornamented with heraldic crests and religious imagery, and an arch with pinnacles containing Biblical scenes (Figures 1-8 and 1-9). In this way, the Polanco tombs resemble others designed for the laity of fifteenth-century Burgos, such as that of the knight Alonso de Cartagena (c.1468) from the Chapel of the Visitation in the Cathedral of Burgos and that of the merchant Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda and his wife Leonor Alvarez de Castro (c. 1476) from the Church of San Nicolás, as well as the early sixteenth-century sepulcher of the merchant Hernando de Castro and Juana García de Castro in the Chapel of the Kings from the parish church of San Gil (Figures 2-1, 1-13 and 2-2).⁷³ These sarcophagi all functioned as recognizable tributes

⁷³ Thirteenth and fourteenth century sepulchral sculpture is addressed in studies by María Angela Franco Mata and Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras. Those by Franco Mata include: "El Arzobispo Pedro Tenorio: Vida y Obra: Su Capilla Funeraria en el Claustro de la Catedral de Toledo," in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la Edad Media (II) : ciclo de conferencias celebrado del 15 al 19 de abril de 1991* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1992), 73-94; "Iconografía funeraria gótica en Castilla y León (siglos XIII y XIV)," *De arte: revista de historia del arte* 2 (2003): 47-86; "Relaciones hispano-italianas de la escultura funeraria del siglo XIV" in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la edad media*, eds. M. Núñez and E. Portela (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1988), 99-125. Studies by Sánchez Ameijeiras include: "Un espectáculo urbano en la Castilla medieval: las honras fúnebres del caballero," *El rostro y el discurso de la fiesta*, ed. Manuel Núñez Rodríguez (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1994), 141-158; "Investigaciones iconográficas sobre la escultura funeraria del siglo XIII en Castilla y León" (Ph.D. diss., Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1993); "*Monumenta et memoriae*: the thirteenth-century episcopal pantheon of León Cathedral," in *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, eds. Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 269-299.



Figure 2-1: Tomb of Knight Alonso de Cartagena, Chapel of the Visitation, Cathedral of Burgos (photo: author).



Figure 2-2: Tomb of Hernando de Castro and Juana García de Castro, Chapel of the Kings, Church of San Gil, Burgos (photo: author).

to the individual, and, at the same time, shared conventions of style and layout that standardized the appearance of the multiple burial sites within a single church or chapel. In this section, I demonstrate that the Polanco sepulchers both follow and exceed these norms of funerary ornamentation. By placing his family tombs behind the main altar, by incorporating them into a larger retable, and by using Latin inscriptions and intricate ornamentation, Polanco made his sepulcher more opulent than other merchant tombs thereby conveying the status and wealth of his family.

It is particularly when considered alongside other lay sepulchers from the city of Burgos that the unique aspects of Polanco's funerary commission become apparent. First, the tomb of Alonso de Cartagena provides an example in which a layperson was interred in a chapel of the cathedral, a privilege that Cartagena was likely afforded because he was the nephew and namesake of Bishop Alonso de Cartagena, who founded the Chapel of the Visitation between 1440 and 1442 (Figure 2-1).⁷⁴ The younger Alonso de Cartagena, who served as one of the king's bodyguards prior to his death,⁷⁵ was the only layperson entombed in the chapel, which included several other members of Bishop Cartagena's family. Next, the sepulcher of Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda and his wife Leonor Alvarez de Castro is part of a set of three family tombs that are located on the north wall of the Church of San Nicolás,⁷⁶ and like the first tomb commissioned in this group, it enjoys a favored location placed nearest to the altar (Figure 1-13).⁷⁷ The center sepulcher holds Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda's son, Alonso de Maluenda (d.1494), and Alonso's wife, Inés de Miranda, while the

⁷⁴ Teófilo López Mata, "La capilla de la Visitación y el obispo don Alonso de Cartagena," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* (1947): 632-643; Johannes Röhl, "Dilectus deo et hominibus: The Tomb of Bishop Don Alonso de Cartagena," In *Actas del Congreso Internacional sobre Gil Siloe y la escultura de su época*, eds. Joaquín Yarza Luaces and Alberto C. Ibáñez Pérez (Burgos, 2001), 381-388.

⁷⁵ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 57-58.

⁷⁶ The inclusion of an effigy of the wife alongside her husband became popular among the middle class during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 15.

⁷⁷ As this would have been the most privileged location of the three tombs, being closest to the altar, the founder of the burial plot was interred here. Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 289 and 304.

final tomb, on the right, is that of Pedro de Maluenda (d.1500), the second son of Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda and a canon at the Cathedral of Burgos. Like the Polanco family, the Maluenda were prominent merchants in late medieval Burgos, and various members of this family held government positions while others became high-ranking church officials.⁷⁸ Finally, the sepulcher of Hernando de Castro and Juana García de Castro is located in this family's chapel, the Chapel of the Three Kings, in the parish Church of San Gil (Figure 2-2).⁷⁹ Like Polanco and Maluenda, Castro belonged to one of Burgos's wealthy merchant families, and the Castro family engaged in wool trade and banking with both England and Andalusia.⁸⁰

Both the Polanco sarcophagi and these other fifteenth century lay tombs belong to the tradition of funerary sculpture in Burgos, which included, as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the sepulchers of the royal family for the pantheon at Las Huelgas,⁸¹ the tombs of bishops and clerics in the Cathedral of Burgos,⁸² and, at the turn of the sixteenth century, the funerary monument to Juan II at the Carthusian monastery of Miraflores.⁸³ By the final quarter of the fifteenth century, merchants like Polanco began to arrange for their own interment in the parish churches of Burgos.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Jesús López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari* (Burgos: AMABAR S.L., 2000), 22-23. F. Cantera Burgos discusses the genealogy of the Maluenda family and the various occupations of its members; he briefly mentions Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda. *Alvar García de Santa María y su familia de conversos* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1952), 385-408.

⁷⁹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 140-141; G. Bertolaza y Esparta, *La Iglesia de San Gil en Burgos. Breve reseña de sus monumentos e historia* (Burgos 1914- 1915), 66-73; D. Antonio Buitrago y Romero, *Guía general de Burgos* (Madrid: 1876), 293.

⁸⁰ Betsabé Caunedo del Potro, "Operaciones comerciales del grupo familiar Castro a finales del siglo XV," in *La España Medieval, V Estudios en memoria de Profesor D. Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz*, ed. Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1986), 289-298; Wendy Childs, *Anglo-Castilian Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 224.

⁸¹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 187-203; Valentín de la Cruz, *El monasterio de Las Huelgas de Burgos* (León: Everest, 1998), 25-34; M. Gómez Moreno, *El Panteón Real de las Huelgas de Burgos* (Madrid, 1946), 9-39.

⁸² Gómez Bárcena offers the most comprehensive overview of all of these tombs (*Escultura gótica funeraria*, 44-130).

⁸³ Felipe Pereda Espeso, "El cuerpo muerto del rey Juan II, Gil de Siloé, y la imagina," *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte* 13 (2001): 53-86.

⁸⁴ Gómez Bárcena indicates that the Church of San Esteban was one of the more popular locations for these tombs, with several dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth century (*Escultura gótica funeraria*, 14);

Regardless of the social status of the patron or the location of the tomb, the majority of these late medieval sepulchers shared a set of common features that included a reclining effigy of the deceased, heraldic crests, identifying inscriptions, and the depiction of saints and/or Biblical scenes displaying the “most intimate and profound religious and social sentiments” of the departed.⁸⁵

Materials

Stone, alabaster and slate were the most common materials used in creating the sculpted funerary monuments that occupied the churches and monasteries of late medieval Burgos, and each served a distinct function in the creation of these sepulchers.⁸⁶ Gómez Bárcena indicates that the most basic of these sarcophagi, like that of Alonso de Cartagena, were made only of stone, while more elaborate tombs, like that of Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda and Leonor Alvarez de Castro, augmented the stone base of the sarcophagus with slate, which was used to depict the bodies of the deceased, as well as their beds and pillows. Other sepulchers combined all three materials, using stone for the base, slate for the majority of the effigy and alabaster to accent the hands and face.⁸⁷ The sarcophagi of Hernando de Castro and Juana García de Castro in the Church of San Gil as well as those of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his wife Leonor de Miranda and Alfonso de Polanco and his wife Constanza de Maluenda were all constructed with this combination of materials.⁸⁸

Teófilo López Mata, *El barrio e iglesia de San Esteban de Burgos* (Burgos: Hijos de S. Rodríguez, 1946), 81-100. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, merchant funerary commissions were most prevalent in the Churches of San Gil and San Lesmes (Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica*, 21); Gregorio Betolaza y Esparta, *Parroquia de San Gil de Burgos* (Burgos, 1914); Jaime Vargas Vivar, *Vida de San Lesmes Abad. Patrón de Burgos y Descripción Histórico-Artística de su Iglesia* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1985), 67-85.

⁸⁵ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 9.

⁸⁶ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 16; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 374.

⁸⁷ *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 24-25.

⁸⁸ Gonzalo López de Polanco's effigy is in poor condition rendering the alabaster no longer visible.

Effigies of the Deceased

Beginning in the thirteenth century, effigies, whether in alabaster, slate or a more basic stone, were designed to depict the deceased in a recognizable manner with distinguishable facial features and accompanied by objects and clothing that reflected their status in life.⁸⁹ The manner in which the face was depicted was, in many cases, dictated by the testament, with the dying often having used this document to request that the carved visage have a close resemblance to his or her appearance in life.⁹⁰ The youthful features and smooth skin of Alonso de Cartagena, who died in battle at a young age, and the more aged countenance of Hernando de Castro, with wrinkles emphasizing his cheekbones and framing his mouth, demonstrate the veracity with which many of these faces were carved (Figures 2-1 and 2-2).

The dress of the deceased further personalized the effigies. For the most part, sculpted figures of the dead wore attire appropriate to the person's rank while alive; thus, although many requested burial in monastic robes, the garments of their effigies more often reflected their earthly station.⁹¹ For example, Alonso de Cartagena is depicted in a complete suite of armor, while his uncle, the Bishop of Burgos, is displayed with a bishop's robe and miter (Figures 2-1 and 2-3). Similarly, Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda, Hernando de Castro, Gonzalo López de Polanco and Alfonso

⁸⁹ This was the case not only in Spain but also throughout Europe. For discussion of the changing depiction of the effigy during the Middle Ages: Julian Gardner, *The Tomb and the Tiara. Curial Tomb Sculpture in Rome and Avignon in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 13-14; Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death. A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 85; Henriette s'Jacob, *Idealism and Realism: a Study of Sepulchral Symbolism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 9-44. For specific examples from France and Italy: Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "The Tomb of Anne of Burgundy, Duchess of Bedford, in the Musée du Louvre." *Gesta* 23, no. 1 (1984): 39-42; Geraldine A. Johnson, "Activating the Effigy: Donatello's Pecci Tomb in Siena Cathedral," in *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, ed. Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 101-103; Ann M. Roberts, "The Chronology and Political Significance of the Tomb of Mary of Burgundy," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 3 (1989): 377 and 390; Sharon Strocchia, "Burials in Renaissance Florence, 1350-1500" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 379-381; Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press, 1992), 197-200.

⁹⁰ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 27-28.

⁹¹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 28.



Figure 2-3: Tomb of Bishop Alonso de Cartagena, Chapel of the Visitation, Cathedral of Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-3206).

de Polanco all are attired in caps and robes befitting their station (Figures 2-2, 2-4, 2-5 and 2-6). In contrast to their husbands' secular dress, the merchants' wives— Leonor Álvarez de Castro, Juana García de Castro, Leonor de Miranda and Constanza de Maluenda— are clad in monastic robes and wimples, probably identical to those in which they were interred, in order to emphasize their piety (Figures 2-2, 2-4, 2-5 and 2-6).⁹²

The hands of the deceased also conveyed piety and social status, as did the various objects placed alongside the depictions of the deceased. The knight Alonso de Cartagena, for example, clutches a sword, a clear symbol of his role as a soldier as well as a mark of his rank (Figure 2-1),⁹³ while, his uncle, the Bishop of Burgos, holds a bishop's scepter. Hernando de Castro, Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda and Alfonso de Polanco each clasp a book in one hand, suggesting piety, and gloves in the other, demonstrating their roles as knights (Figures 2-2, 2-4 and 2-6).⁹⁴ Similarly indicating his rank as a knight, Gonzalo López de Polanco holds a sword (Figure 2-5).⁹⁵ The wives of the merchants show their piety through clasped hands, in the case of Juana García de Castro and Leonor de Miranda, or by clutching a book, in the case of Leonor Alvarez de Castro and Constanza de Maluenda (Figures 2-2, 2-4, 2-5 and 2-6). Beyond these markers of piety and status, the pageboy and servant woman depicted at the feet of Alfonso de Polanco and his wife imply their status and wealth.⁹⁶

⁹² Monastic robes, particularly those of the Franciscan order, were a mark of piety and humility. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 106-111; Gómez Bárcena, "La liturgias de los funerales," 37; Núñez Rodríguez, "La indumentaria como símbolo," 9-15; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 167-168. Rucquoi "De la resignación al miedo," 55-56.

⁹³ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 28; Bonifacio Palacios Martín, "Los símbolos de la soberanía en la edad media española. El simbolismo de la espada," in *VII Centenario del infante Don Fernando de la Cerda* (Cuidad Real: Instituto de Estudios Manchegos, 1976), 283-288.

⁹⁴ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 28.

⁹⁵ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 152.

⁹⁶ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 29 and 151-152.



Figure 2-4: Detail, Tomb of Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos (photo, author).



Figure 2-5: Detail, Tomb of Gonzalo López de Polanco, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos (photo: author).



Figure 2-6: Detail, Tomb of Alfonso de Polanco, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos (photo: author).

Epigraphy

While the effigies indicated the social standing of the deceased, inscriptions provided more complete identifying information, including the name of the person interred and his or her date of death. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these texts had become fairly formulaic in both their appearance and content. They were typically written in Castilian, framed by a rectangular border that was often supported by angels, and located on the wall somewhere in the vicinity of the tomb, in many cases just above the effigy of the deceased.⁹⁷ Often, as is the case for the sepulchers of Alonso de Cartagena and Hernando de Castro, this identifying text does not survive, or is partially obscured due to deterioration, like the text accompanying the Maluenda tomb. Although Maluenda's inscription is not legible, that of his son, Alonso de Maluenda, demonstrates the content and format of a typical Castilian epigraph. It reads:

Here are entombed the bodies of the honored citizen Alonso de Maluenda, who died on the 23rd of October in the year 1494 and the virtuous Ynes de Miranda, his wife, who died in the year 1500 and whose souls God has, amen.⁹⁸

Occasionally, these epigraphs were slightly longer and included additional information concerning the occupation of the deceased, his family, or his specific requests with regard to the preservation of his memory.

The inscriptions that accompany the tombs of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother, Alfonso de Polanco, follow a standard format in terms of the information that they provide, but are unique in that they are written in Latin rather than Castilian (Figures 2-7 and 2-8). That of Alfonso de Polanco and his wife reads, "The noble baron Alfonso de Polanco with his wife Constanza de Maluenda, freed from earthly

⁹⁷ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 41; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 316.

⁹⁸ aquí estan sepultados los cuer[pos] del honrado ciudadano alonso de [ma]lue[n]da que fallescio a XXIII de o[c]tobre de M e CCCC e XCIII años y de la virtuosa ynes de miranda su mujer que fallescio a año de M e D e [illegible] años e cuyas animas dios haya ame[n]. Both Gómez Bárcena (*Escultura gótica funeraria*, 150) and López Sobrino (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 24) reproduce this inscription.

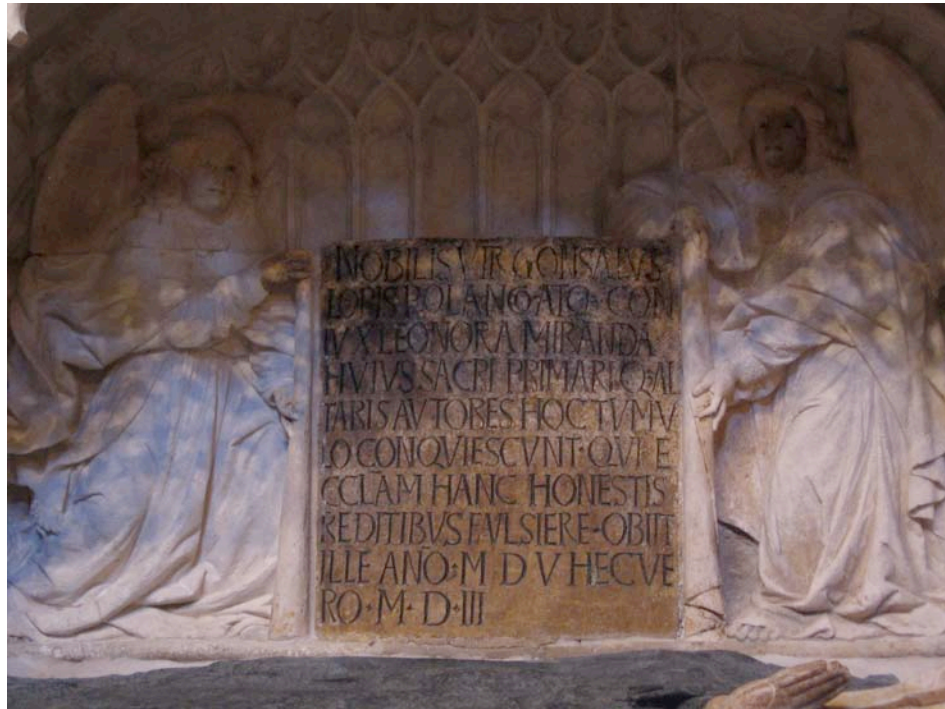


Figure 2-7: Detail, Inscription above Tomb of Gonzalo López de Polanco, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos (photo: author).

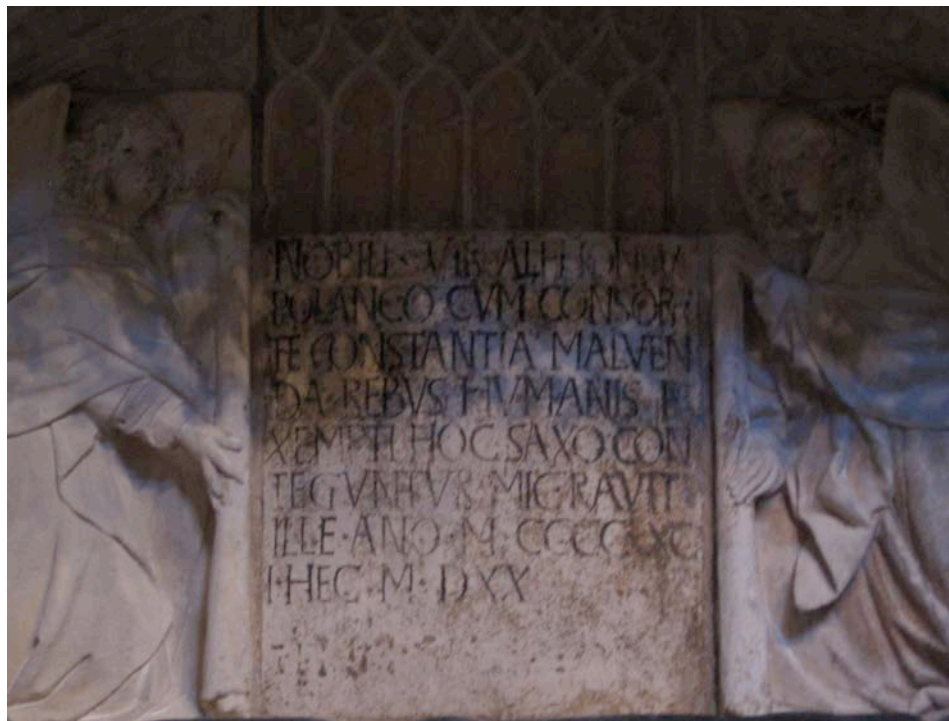


Figure 2-8: Detail, Inscription above Tomb of Alfonso de Polanco, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos (photo: author).

things, are interred under this stone. He died in the year 1491 and she in 1520.”⁹⁹

Gonzalo López de Polanco’s epigraph is slightly more detailed and publicly honors his gift to the church, “The noble baron Gonzalo López de Polanco and his wife Leonor de Miranda, who gave this church honest donations and were founders of this sacred main altar, rest in this tomb. He died in the year 1505 and she in 1503.”¹⁰⁰ While the content of these inscriptions is typical of those that accompany other lay tombs, the use of Latin rather than Castilian possibly reflects Polanco’s desire to be viewed as an educated individual of high status since Latin was a language of the pious, the learned, and the elite. Moreover, the Latin inscriptions suggest his awareness of Italian Renaissance styles of tomb decoration since, although Latin inscriptions never became common on lay tombs in Spain,¹⁰¹ they were typical features of lay sarcophagi in Florence during the fifteenth century.¹⁰²

Tomb Ornamentation

The ornamentation of the tombs also honored the lineage and piety of the departed through the use of heraldic crests, Biblical scenes and images of saints. Coats of arms were an integral part of sepulchral ornamentation, and on wall tombs, these were typically placed on the base of the sarcophagus in two squares flanking a central Biblical scene or saint. The funerary monuments of Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda, Alfonso de Polanco and Gonzalo López de Polanco each display the family’s emblems in this manner, with the individual crests supported by angels

⁹⁹ López Sobrino includes a transcription of the inscription in the original Latin, “Nobilis vir Alphonsus Polanco cum consorte Constantia Maluenda rebus humanis exempti hoc saxo conteguntur, Migravit ille ano MCCCCXCI, hec MDXX” (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 67).

¹⁰⁰ López Sobrino also transcribes this inscription, “Nobilis vir Gonsalus Lopis Polanco Atq. coniux Leonora Miranda huius sacri primariq. altaris autores hoc tumulo conquiescunt qui ecclesiam hanc honestis rebus faulsiere obiit ille ano MDV hec vero MDIII” (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 69).

¹⁰¹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 41; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 36.

¹⁰² Andrew Butterfield, “Social Structure and the Typology of Funerary Monuments in Early Renaissance Florence,” *RES* 26 (1994): 47-59.

(Figures 1-8, 1-9 and 1-13).¹⁰³ Alonso de Cartagena's sarcophagus contains the most heraldic ornamentation of any of these examples since, in addition to the two large insignia on the base of his tomb, other smaller heraldic symbols surround his effigy, resulting in a strong emphasis on his lineage (Figure 2-1). Particularly by 1475, coats of arms were a standard and important feature of funerary commissions since by this date most of the new nobility had acquired them.¹⁰⁴

Alongside these heraldic crests, patrons typically included within the ornament of their funerary monuments a selection of Biblical scenes and saints, some adopted out of convention and others reflecting the personal piety of the deceased. Episodes from the New Testament, particularly those referencing Christ's salvation of man, were favored in the funerary sculpture of fifteenth-century Burgos.¹⁰⁵ Several examples of these scenes are included on the Cartagena, Maluenda and Polanco sarcophagi. At their bases, both Alonso de Cartagena and Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda's tombs depict Christ's Crucifixion, clearly referencing his salvation of man (Figure 1-13 and 2-1). The representation of the event is relatively basic in both instances, with only the Virgin Mary and St. John on either side of the crucified Christ,¹⁰⁶ drawing attention to Christ's sacrifice at the center of the composition. Also celebrating Christ's life, two scenes of the Infancy are located above the Polanco sepulchers, supported by pinnacles. The Annunciation, on top of Alonso de Polanco's tomb, features the Angel Gabriel on the left and the Virgin Mary on the right, with Mary shown reading (Figure 2-9). Angels playing musical instruments flank Mary and

¹⁰³The sepulcher of Hernando de Castro and Juana García de Castro does not contain their crests, perhaps because it does not have a substantial base and because their crests are included elsewhere within the chapel.

¹⁰⁴ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 39; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 316.

¹⁰⁵ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 31-32; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "La Visitación y el Nacimiento en los sepulcros góticos burgaleses," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 199 (1982): 307-316.

¹⁰⁶ As Gómez Bárcena indicates, more complex portrayals of this event might include the three Maries, angels or other figures (*Escultura gótica funeraria*, 32).



Figure 2-9: Annunciation from the Tomb of Alfonso de Polanco, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

Gabriel, and a vase of lilies, supported by the central pinnacle, symbolizes the purity of the Virgin. Above Gonzalo López de Polanco's tomb, the Epiphany occupies the five pinnacles with the Virgin and Child at the center, two magi on the left, and another king and Joseph on the right (Figure 2-10). Such scenes of Christ's infancy were often depicted in the funerary sculpture of late medieval Burgos,¹⁰⁷ and the Annunciation was particularly popular, possibly, as Gómez Bárcena has argued, because it marked the beginning of Christ's life and therefore the first step in redemption.¹⁰⁸

While these Biblical scenes seem to have been selected based both on convention and on their reference to Christ's salvation of man, several of the saints represented on the Polanco tombs were of special significance to the deceased. Depicting saints on tombs had become common practice by the fifteenth century, marking a change from the practices of sepulchral ornamentation in Burgos during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁰⁹ Carlos Polanco Melero notes that the representations of holy figures on sarcophagi often reflected the specific devotions of the patrons, which are documented in their wills, indicating that this aspect of the ornamentation was a result of specific beliefs.¹¹⁰ Of the examples considered here, saints are most prevalent on the two Polanco tombs. In contrast, Martín Rodríguez de Maluenda's tomb has only a depiction of John the Baptist,¹¹¹ and Cartagena's sepulchral ornamentation does not include saints. However, Gonzalo López de

¹⁰⁷ María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "La Anunciación en los sepulcros góticos burgaleses," *Reales Sitios* 78 (1985): 29-37; Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 31-33; Gómez Bárcena, "La Visitación y el Nacimiento," 307-316; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 345-346 and 349-350.

¹⁰⁸ Gómez Bárcena, "La Anunciación en los sepulcros," 29-37; Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 31-33; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 350.

¹⁰⁹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 33; Polanco Melero also notes the popularity of representing saints during the fifteenth century but indicates that this does not continue through the end of the sixteenth century as they are typically not included on sepulchers made in the classical style (*Muerte y sociedad*, 371-372).

¹¹⁰ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 371.

¹¹¹ Originally a statue of second saint must have accompanied this figure, but it was likely removed when the arch was constructed around the three Maluenda tombs.



Figure 2-10: Epiphany from the Tomb of Gonzalo López de Polanco, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

Polanco's sarcophagus depicts St. Nicholas enthroned on the base, one of many images of this saint who Polanco viewed as his personal protector before the Holy Trinity that are present on the tomb and altarpiece,¹¹² and it also includes several small sculpted figures of saints adjacent to his effigy (Figure 1-8). Similarly, Alfonso de Polanco's sepulcher portrays St. Andrew, suggesting his personal affinity for this saint, though his devotion cannot be confirmed by his testament since this document has not been preserved (Figure 1-9).¹¹³ The presence of these two holy figures provides an indication as to the crucial role that Gonzalo López de Polanco believed that the saints would play in his salvation, acting as his intercessors before God and aiding him in his pursuit of heavenly salvation.¹¹⁴

Although most wall sepulchers are ornamented above and below the effigy of the deceased, few include the small figures of saints positioned along the sides of each sarcophagus such as those present on Polanco's tomb. These figures provide additional evidence of Polanco's devotion to the saints, a theme that continues throughout the retable.¹¹⁵ Unlike the images of St. Nicholas and St. Andrew depicted on the base of the sarcophagi, the saints adjacent to the effigies of the deceased would have only been recognizable to a viewer positioned near the tomb, suggesting that the Polanco brothers primarily included these representations of St. Nicholas, Mary Magdalene, St. Lawrence, St. Clare, and St. Catherine (as well as a female martyr, a monk, and a male saint holding a book) for their private devotions. Once again, Gonzalo López de Polanco's personal affinity for these saints is easiest to discern

¹¹² Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177. Other images of St. Nicholas include the statue of the saint and the narrative scenes of his life at the center of the altarpiece. I offer detailed consideration of this portion of the retable in Chapter Three.

¹¹³ The will of Alfonso de Polanco does not appear in the records of the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos with the other testaments of the Polanco family.

¹¹⁴ The role of saintly intercession in Gonzalo López de Polanco's salvation will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapters Three and Four.

¹¹⁵ Fuller consideration of Polanco's devotion to the saints is provided in Chapters Three and Four.

since his testament and altarpiece demonstrate his devotion to them. First, his connection to St. Nicholas is documented both in his will and elsewhere on the retable.¹¹⁶ In addition, St. Lawrence, St. Clare and St. Catherine are also included on the altarpiece, indicating that they, too, were specifically important to the patron and his wife as guardians and intercessors in the afterlife.

While Polanco's devotion to specific holy persons and to the cult of saints in general will be the focus of subsequent chapters of this dissertation, at this stage it is most significant to note the substantial emphasis that Polanco placed on the ornamentation of his sarcophagus. In designing a memorial to himself and his family that exceeded the level of ornate detail found in fifteenth-century lay tombs from the churches of Burgos, such as those belonging to Maluenda and Cartagena, Polanco sought to create an opulent resting place that would assert the social rank of his family.¹¹⁷ The embellishment of both Gonzalo López de Polanco and Alfonso de Polanco's sepulchers included many careful details such as the small figures of saints on either side of the effigies and the delicate tracery extending from the arch that frames each tomb, which contains small cherubs and vegetal designs. These intricacies demonstrate that substantial thought and labor went into the design and execution of this funerary monument. Beyond the intricate ornamentation, it was also through the placement of his mortal remains that Polanco sought to enhance his prestige and piety in an ultimate effort to achieve his own salvation and to better his family's status.

¹¹⁶ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

¹¹⁷ Wall tombs commissioned by the laity during the first quarter of the sixteenth century seem to have continued this trend toward more embellished sepulchers. These include those tombs belonging to Alonso Ortega in the Church of Santa Dorotea, Francisco Garcia de Burgos and Juan Garcia de Burgos in the Church of San Gil, and Fernando Medina in the Church of San Lesmes (Gomez Barcena, 133-134, 142-145).

Places of Burial

Throughout the medieval period in the West, entombment within a church was considered to be far superior to burial in an outdoor cemetery, due both to the spiritual benefits and the social connotations of interment within a religious structure.¹¹⁸ Spiritually, this resting place would provide the deceased with an additional advantage in the afterlife since he or she would benefit from the prayers said inside the building as well as the proximity to the images and the relics of the saints, Christ and the Virgin that were present in religious institutions.¹¹⁹ Until the thirteenth century, however, church burial was mainly restricted to those of royal or noble birth and the highest ranking ecclesiastics. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both in Burgos and throughout Europe, this had changed, and burial within church walls became a privilege of the economic elite, open to anyone who could afford it, as well as a mark of status due to its expense. Accordingly, the prestige associated with interment inside the church was substantial, particularly for those of the rising merchant class during the late medieval period, placing them as equals alongside nobles, royalty and high-ranking church officials.¹²⁰

In Burgos, even after burial within a religious structure became more dependent on financial means than on title, social status still dictated the type of religious institutions in which one might be entombed. For the most part, merchants requested that they be buried inside Burgos's many parish churches, with San Esteban, San Gil and San Lesmes each housing multiple tombs that range in date from the final

¹¹⁸ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 45-51 and 78-92; Binski, *Medieval Death*, 55-58; Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini*, ed. H. W. Janson (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 46.

¹¹⁹ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 270 and 293.

¹²⁰ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 57; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 83-97; Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, 46-47; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 267 and 303; Sánchez Ameijeiras, "Escultura funeraria en Galicia," 141. This shift is particularly well documented in England and Italy: Butterfield, "Social Structure and the Typology," 47-59; Cohn, Jr. *Death and Property in Siena*, 105-109; Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England*, 97-103; Sharon Strocchia, "Burials in Renaissance Florence," 234-329.

quarter of the fifteenth century to the first quarter of the sixteenth century.¹²¹ Cathedral chapels were reserved for higher ranking officials and were most often the final resting place of nobles and bishops, with examples from the fifteenth century including the Chapel of the Constables,¹²² which housed the remains of Pedro Fernández de Velasco and Mencía de Mendoza; the Chapel of the Conception,¹²³ with the tomb of Bishop Acuña; and the Chapel of the Visitation,¹²⁴ in which Bishop Alonso de Cartagena was interred.

Inside a consecrated structure, some locations were more ideal than others, and in general, the closer one could be to the celebration of the Eucharist the better, meaning that spaces near the altar or central nave were the most desirable. Following this location, the walls to the left and right of the altar were preferable, and burial in the floor of the church was considered least prestigious.¹²⁵ Because substantial sums of money were “donated” to the church in order to receive the privilege of burial there,¹²⁶ and because these contributions were certainly adjusted based on the desirability of the location within the church, the precise place of interment could be, if it were favorable, a substantial mark of social status in addition to the aid it would provide

¹²¹ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 14-15, 21; López Mata, *El barrio e iglesia de San Esteban*, 81-100; Betolaza y Esparta, *Parroquia de San Gil*; Vargas Vivar, *Vida de San Lesmes*, 67-85. Monasteries were another popular location for this group throughout the sixteenth century (Polanco Melero, 273-275).

¹²² The sepulchers were completed after the chapel and date to c.1534. Construction of the chapel began during the final quarter of the fifteenth century under the oversight of Mencía de Mendoza. Carlos G. Villacampa, “La Capilla del Condestable de la Catedral de Burgos. Documentos para su historia,” *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología* 4 (1928): 25-44; Felipe Pereda, “Mencía de Mendoza, Mujer del I Condestable de Castilla: El significado del patronazgo femenino en la Castilla del Siglo XV,” in *Patronos y Coleccionistas: Los Condestables de Castilla y El Arte* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2005), 11-116; María José Redondo Cantera, “El sepulcro del IV Condestable de Castilla,” *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología de Valladolid* (1984): 261-271.

¹²³ Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Gil Siloe El retablo de la concepción en la capilla del obispo Acuña* (Burgos, 2000).

¹²⁴ López Mata, “La capilla de la Visitación,” 632-643; Röhl, “Dilectus deo et hominibus,” 381-388.

¹²⁵ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, 79; Martínez Gil, *La muerte vivida*, 94; Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, 46; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 285, 292-294. Regardless of their precise location of burial, all those entombed within the church oriented their tombs toward the altar (Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 26).

¹²⁶ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 267.

toward achieving salvation. Nevertheless, while many made specific plans for their resting places, others were simply content to be entombed in a holy structure; for this reason, many testators requested burial in a church or monastery.¹²⁷

By locating his funerary monument behind the altar of the Church of San Nicolás, Gonzalo López de Polanco secured for himself and his family the most desired resting place in a parish church, one that carried with it both prestige and greater opportunity for salvation. Although interment near the high altar was reasonably common, with examples including the fifteenth-century tomb of Alfonso Pardo and the late fourteenth-century sarcophagus of Sancho García de Medina de Pomar in the Church of San Gil, as well as the early sixteenth-century sepulchers of Fernando de Medina, Diego del Campo, and the Valladolid family in the Church of San Lesmes,¹²⁸ in each of these instances, the tombs are situated on the side walls of the apse, flanking the high altar rather than placed behind it. The patronage of a tomb located behind the altar and incorporated into the high altarpiece was unprecedented in late medieval Burgos, and the rarity of this type of resting place would have drawn attention to Polanco's commission, indicating that it required a substantial sum of money and acting as proof of Polanco's piety.

While the Polanco sepulchers followed a traditional design for fifteenth-century funerary commissions in Burgos, they were also unique in several regards. First, they were more elaborately ornamented than most of their contemporaries, with the many images of holy figures, the elaborate tracery, and the Latin inscriptions all suggesting the elite status of the Polanco family. Second, the placement of the Polanco sepulchers behind the altar and below the high altarpiece marked an

¹²⁷ Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 292.

¹²⁸ Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 137-139 and 144-148. Betolaza y Esparta, *Parroquia de San Gil*; Vargas Vivar, *Vida de San Lesmes Abad*, 75-78.

unprecedented display of wealth and piety not found among the other merchant tombs of late medieval Burgos. When compared with the sarcophagi designed for contemporary laypersons such as those of the Maluenda family in San Nicolás, that of the Castro family in San Gil, and that of Alonso de Cartagena in the Cathedral, it is clear that Polanco desired an opulent funerary monument with the potential to elevate the status of his family on earth and to aid in the salvation of his soul.

Conclusion: Gonzalo López de Polanco's "Good Death"

Together, the content of Polanco's testament and the design of his tomb suggest a patron who was sufficiently concerned with his fate in the afterlife that he endeavored to exceed the normal requests made by persons of his stature in order to achieve the type of "good death" that was desirable in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Castile, hoping to ensure through these commissions a more rapid ascent from purgatory to heaven. Simultaneously, the opulent nature of his funerary commission, the number of perpetual masses said on his behalf, and his establishment of a pious foundation for the poor all would have served to enhance the status of his family on earth. As the next two chapters demonstrate, the requests in Polanco's will and the ornamentation and placement of the sarcophagi were not the sole markers of Polanco's status and devotional life. The high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás similarly serves as a personal yet public display of his hope for salvation and his faith in the intercession of saints.

Chapter 3

Servant of God and Protector of the Faithful: St. Nicholas as Saint and Redeemer

From just above the altar of the Church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos, the figure of St. Nicholas gazes out at the viewer, one hand raised in benediction and the other holding his miter (Figure 3-1). He is visible from almost any point in the church, watching over the congregation, inviting them to engage in contemplation of his life and promising his protection in exchange for their devotion. This statue of St. Nicholas and the eight narrative scenes of his life that surround it comprise one of the main focal points of the funerary altarpiece commissioned by Gonzalo López de Polanco, a wealthy merchant of late fifteenth-century Burgos (Figure 3-2). Like the statue of St. Nicholas, the narrative of the saint's life would have been clearly visible from most points in the church. As these scenes were in a prime position to be viewed during each celebration of the liturgy and were clearly visible from the nave of the church, parishioners of San Nicolás would have countless opportunities to contemplate the scenes, their referents, and their implications.

The eight episodes of St. Nicholas's life appear in roughly the same chronological order as they do in the *Golden Legend*, a book of saints' lives that enjoyed wide circulation during the late medieval period.¹ Read from left to right, the top register includes the baptism of St. Nicholas, St. Nicholas taking part in the mass, St. Nicholas providing a dowry to the destitute father of three maidens, and St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor. The narrative continues on the lower register with

¹ Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 3-4 and 197-209; Robert F. Seybolt, "Fifteenth-Century Editions of the *Legenda aurea*," *Speculum* 21 (1946): 327-338, and "The *Legenda aurea*, Bible, and *Historia scholastica*," *Speculum* 21 (1946): 339-342; *Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993): 1:xiii.



Figure 3-1: Narrative of St. Nicholas, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 3-2: High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás, Burgos, Spain (photo: author).

St. Nicholas rescuing sailors from a storm, St. Nicholas resurrecting three scholars, St. Nicholas entombed, and St. Nicholas saving a boy from drowning. Far from narrating the complete legend of the saint, these scenes include specific moments from St. Nicholas's life that were most significant to Polanco, and together with the iconic statue of the saint, they honor St. Nicholas's piety and miraculous works while also stressing his intercessory role and engaging the parishioners in contemplation of his life. Moreover, it is through this selection of scenes, all of which are easily visible from the nave of the church, that the merchant Polanco publicly demonstrated his personal connection to St. Nicholas.

Polanco's choice of St. Nicholas coincides with other evidence of Polanco's personal and public devotion to the saint. First, the three balls on the family coat of arms allude to the attribute of St. Nicholas, which is the three mounds of gold that St. Nicholas gave as a gift to the destitute father of three maidens in order to prevent the man from selling his daughters as prostitutes (Figure 3-3). Scholars have suggested that this symbol is present in the crests of other merchant families such as the Medici from Florence and the van der Beurse from Bruges.² While the ties between these latter two crests do not necessarily reflect either family's devotion to St. Nicholas, the three golden balls that appear clearly in the coat of arms of the Polanco family do serve this function, suggesting that Polanco allied himself closely with St. Nicholas and sought his protection.³ Other evidence of Polanco's devotion to the saint is apparent in his choice of parish and in the text of his testament. In late medieval

² Edward G. Clare, *St. Nicholas: His Legends and Iconography* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1985), 76; Raymond de Roover, "The Three Golden Balls of the Pawnbrokers," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, 20, n. 4 (1946): 117-124.

³ There is no documentation indicating when the Polanco family first began using their coat of arms, but it is probable that this occurred during the fifteenth century since it was during this period that the merchants of fifteenth-century Burgos began to adopt various "customs of the aristocracy." Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Los Reyes Católicos: Paisaje artístico de una monarquía* (Madrid: Nerea, 1993), 286.



Figure 3-3: Polanco Family Crest, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

Burgos, worshippers were permitted to select their own parish,⁴ meaning that the Polanco family chose the Church of San Nicolás as their place of worship, possibly indicating a specific devotion to the saint. Finally and most definitively, Polanco confirmed the important role that St. Nicholas played in his life when, in his testament, he named St. Nicholas as one of his “advocates before the Holy Trinity,”⁵ an intercessory role that is clearly reflected by the placement of the St. Nicholas narrative just below the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity (Figure 3-4).

The Legend of St. Nicholas

St. Nicholas is associated with both Myra and Bari since he was born in Myra, a city which is today located in Turkey, during the fourth century and became bishop there, but later his remains were transferred to Bari, Italy during the Crusades. Throughout western Europe, the cult of St. Nicholas grew from the time his bones arrived in Italy in the year 1087, and the saint was revered for his miraculous conversion of Jews as well as his protection of young men and women, merchants, and sailors. By the time of Polanco’s commission at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the life of St. Nicholas would have been best known to the laity of Burgos through an edition of the *Golden Legend* that was printed in that city by Juan de Burgos around the year 1500.⁶ The *Golden Legend* was a compilation of saints’ lives, written by the Italian Dominican Jacopo de Voragine (more commonly known by his Latin name Jacobus) in the thirteenth century, that was organized according to the order of the saints’ feast days in the liturgical calendar and that included the lives of all saints

⁴ César Alonso de Porres, *Las parroquias en la ciudad de Burgos* (Burgos: Caja de Ahorros Municipal, 1981), 15.

⁵ “Abogados ante la Santa Trinidad” (unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own). Matías Martínez Burgos has published a complete transcription of the testament, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos: Los Colonia y Gil de Siloe,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 138, no 2 (1956): 153-227 (see page 117 for the passage on the Holy Trinity). The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos (hereafter ADB), “Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco,” San Nicolás, signatura 23.

⁶ London: British Library (hereafter BL), “Comienca la leyendo delos sactos,” IB53312, fols. 12v-14v.



Figure 3-4 Narrative of St. Nicholas and Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

celebrated in the liturgy. Although it was originally written in Latin, translations of the text into various vernacular languages could be found throughout western Europe by the mid-fifteenth century. By this time, the text enjoyed wide circulation thanks largely to the printing press. In fact, a survey of fifteenth-century printed editions of the *Golden Legend* by Robert Seybolt shows that during the last thirty years of the fifteenth century alone there were 173 printed copies of the text.⁷ Given its extensive circulation, by the end of the fifteenth century there were a number of different versions of the *Golden Legend*, some with regionally specific modifications that could include the addition of local saints, alterations to the stories, or the omission of certain saints.⁸ The legend of St. Nicholas included in the *Golden Legend* from Burgos was similar to that found in other versions of the *Golden Legend* from late fifteenth-century Castile,⁹ suggesting that although specific wording varied from text to text there was some general uniformity to the miracles celebrated throughout the region.¹⁰

The account of the saint's life that follows is from the version of the *Golden Legend* printed in Burgos around the year 1500. Examination of this text demonstrates the way in which St. Nicholas was revered in Burgos at the end of the fifteenth century. Not all of the miracles included in this copy of the *Golden Legend*

⁷ As Seybolt's study includes no printed versions of the *Golden Legend* from Iberia, we know that these statistics are incomplete. Nevertheless, they provide us with a tangible starting point from which we can imagine the number of texts that were actually produced. "Fifteenth-Century Editions," 327-338; "The *Legenda aurea*," 339-342.

⁸ Some scholars have suggested that the popularity of the *Golden Legend* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries made it a type of "medieval best-seller." Reames, *The Legenda*, 3-4 and 197-209; Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, xiii.

⁹ BL, IB53312, fols. 12v-14v. The Castilian copies of the *Golden Legend* that I used for comparison include: El Escorial: Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial (hereafter SLE), "Legenda aurea," MS h-III-22, fols. 20v-27v; Madrid: Biblioteca de Lazaro Galdiano (hereafter BLG), "Estoria de los santos," no. 15001, fols. 5v-8v; Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress (Hereafter LC), "Flos Sanctorum," F59, fols. 283v-285r.

¹⁰ Not all Castilian versions of the *Golden Legend* include the legend of St. Nicholas. For example, MS 12688, MS 12689, and MS 780 (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional) and MS h-II-18 (SLE) do not include this legend. Billy Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh, "Old Spanish Manuscripts of Prose Lives of the Saints and their Affiliations. I: Compilation A (The *Gran Flos Sanctorum*)," *La Corónica* 15, no. 1 (1986-1987): 17-28.

are depicted on Polanco's altarpiece. Therefore, although I address Polanco's selected scenes more fully later in this chapter, here I identify the portions of the St. Nicholas legend present in the altarpiece in order to suggest the selective nature of Polanco's own narrative.

Pious from the time of his birth, "St. Nicholas was the son of a rich and holy father and mother."¹¹ His piety was evident even during his childhood when he "raised himself up in the basin"¹² during his own baptism and modestly "did not nurse from his mother's breast more than once on Wednesday and Friday."¹³ In his youth, St. Nicholas devoted himself, and the considerable wealth that he inherited from his merchant parents, to performing good deeds and miracles, wanting to do all that he could "in the service of God."¹⁴ To this end, when "his mother and father were dead, he began to think in what manner he could give away the riches that they left him, not in service of the city, but rather in service of God."¹⁵ Soon after, St. Nicholas learned of

A nobleman who had three virgin daughters and because he was destitute, he wanted [his daughters] to become bad women so that he would be able to manage and subsist on the evil earnings of them. And after St. Nicholas learned of this [man's] horrid sin, at night in hiding he took a mound of gold, wrapped it in a cloth, threw it into the house through a window, and fled. The good man rose the next morning, found the gold, gave thanks to God, and arranged for his eldest daughter to marry. After a little time, the servant of God repeated the act. And after that man saw it [the mound of gold] he began to cry a lot and marveled at God.¹⁶

¹¹ "fue fijo de padre y madre ricos y santos" BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹² "alco se derecho en el bacin." BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹³ "el miercoles y el viernes non mamaba mas de una vez." BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹⁴ "enel servicio de dios." BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹⁵ "el padre y la madre fuero muertos comenco de pensar en qual manera desp[r]e[n]deria las riqzas que le dejaro: no en alabamiento del pueblo mas a servicio de dios." BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹⁶ "vecino asaz fijo dalgo havia tres fijas do[n]zellas virines: y por razon de la me[n]gua en q[ue] era: queria las fazer malas mugeres porq[ue] se pudiese[n] gobernar y sostener con la mala gana[n]cia dellas. E despues q[ue] lo supo sant nicolas aborescio este peccado: y de noche en ascondido tomo una massa de oro e[n]buelta en un paño y eschoge la en casa: por una finiestra y fuese. El [h]ombre bueno leva[n]tose de mañana y fallo el oro: y dio gracias a dios: y caso la mayor fija. E despuesa poco t[iem]po el sirvo d' dios fizo otro tanto como la primera vez. E despues q[ue] aq[ue]l [h]ombre esto vio comenco de loar mucho a dios y a maravillarse. BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

Eventually the nobleman became curious as to who was bestowing such good fortune on his family, but when the man encountered St. Nicholas, the saint requested that his generosity remain anonymous.

It was after his charity to the three maidens that, through the intervention of God, Nicholas became the Bishop of Myra, an Anatolian town that was once part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Soon after, he performed his first miracle as bishop when “one day some sailors had a very big storm and with many tears they said, ‘Oh St. Nicholas, servant of God, if what they say of you is true, permit us to bring you offerings and to come to your house.’”¹⁷ Hearing the sailors’ prayers, St. Nicholas went to their ship and helped them to secure it. When the sailors came later to St. Nicholas’s church in order to repay their debt, the saint insisted instead that they give thanks and prayers to “our Lord Jesus Christ, to he who freed them, and he tells them that [it was] the mercy of God and their good faith that saved them.”¹⁸ These first two acts, the charity to the three maidens and the rescue of the sailors, are those that led St. Nicholas to become the patron saint of young women and seafarers, and it was likely due to these miracles, both depicted in the narrative of the saint’s life on the altarpiece (Figures 3-5 and 3-6), that Polanco, as the father of ten daughters and as a seafaring merchant, sought the protection of St. Nicholas.

Of course, not all of St. Nicholas’s accomplishments were portrayed on Polanco’s retablo, and the following two tales in the *Golden Legend* from Burgos were not included in Polanco’s narrative of the saint, suggesting that Polanco opted to represent those episodes of St. Nicholas’s life that best reflected his personal devotion to the saint. In the next story from Voragine’s text, St. Nicholas rescues another group

¹⁷ “Ay sant nicolas siervo de dios si es asi lo que dizen de ti: p[er]metemos te q[ue] te e[n]biaremos ofrendas y estaremos e[n] la tu casa.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

¹⁸ “a n[ues]tro señor ihu xpo: y a el q[ue] los libro: y el dixo les q[ue] la misericordia de dios los librara y la buena fe.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.



Figure 3-5: St. Nicholas Rescuing Sailors from a Storm, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 3-6: St. Nicholas and the Three Maidens, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

of seafarers from the tricks of the devil. According to this legend, there was “a village that honored an idol of Diana,”¹⁹ and seeing this St. Nicholas destroyed the idol, making the devil very angry. The devil then “took the disguise of a religious woman, went to one [of the ships] that went by sea to [visit] St. Nicholas, and spoke to them...[saying], I would like to go with you to this holy man, but I cannot. I beg you to take this oil to his church and to spread the walls with it.”²⁰ Once the devil left, St. Nicholas appeared to the seafarers explaining to them that this was a trick, “and in order to prove what he said true, he told them to throw the oil into the sea.”²¹ When those aboard the ship followed St. Nicholas’s instructions, the sea caught fire, and the sailors went to St. Nicholas and said to him “truly, you are he who appeared to us at sea and he who liberated us from the lies of the devil.”²²

St. Nicholas’s next acts, which are also omitted from Polanco’s narrative of the saint, occurred when a group of soldiers led by three princes came to Myra to fight an uprising against the Roman Empire. When they arrived in Myra, St. Nicholas immediately invited the princes “to eat with him so that they would not rob his people who were at market,”²³ and while they were dining, “the [corrupt] leader of the city ordered that three soldiers be killed.”²⁴ When St. Nicholas learned of this, he and the princes went to the site where the soldiers were to be executed, and upon their arrival, “St. Nicholas in an effort with the princes went boldly to [the man] who was about to cut the throats [of the soldiers], took the sword very far from his hand, and loosened

¹⁹ “un pueblo honrraua a un ydolo de diana” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²⁰ “E tomo figura de muger religiosa: y fuese para unos que yba[n] por la mar a sant nicolas: y fablo les en [e]sta manera...yría co[n] vos a este sancto [h]onbre: mas no puedo. Porende vos ruego q[ue] me leveys este olio a la su yglesia y acordad: vos d’ untar las paredes conello...” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²¹ “E por que proueyes si os digo verdad: echad deste olio en la mar” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²² “verdad’rame[n]te tu eres aquel que nos apareciste en la mar: y el que nos libro d’la celada q[ue] nos armo el diablo.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²³ “comiensen con el por tal que no robasen su ge[n]te que estaba enesa sazón en feria.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²⁴ “el alcalde d’l lugar mando matar tres caballeros...” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

them because they did not deserve to die.”²⁵ St. Nicholas then went to chastise the mayor of the city for nearly executing three innocent men, but granted the mayor forgiveness when he repented.

Sometime later, the princes found themselves falsely imprisoned and accused of murder by the Emperor Constantine and his prefect, and having witnessed St. Nicholas’s defense of the soldiers, they remembered him and prayed to the saint for assistance. Hearing their prayers, St. Nicholas appeared to Constantine that night in a dream threatening that, if the princes were not freed, he would “pray to God that he [Constantine] fight with and be killed by beasts.”²⁶ Nicholas then went to confront the prefect, again appearing in a dream, ordering that the princes be released, and telling the prefect that should this not happen his “whole body would be filled with rotten worms.”²⁷ Later, the Emperor and the prefect visited the princes believing them to have performed some type of spell, but the princes pled with Constantine saying, “Sir, we are not sorcerers, nor do we deserve to die,”²⁸ and they told Constantine how they had prayed to Nicholas. “The Emperor, who heard [them] tell [St. Nicholas’s] life and miracles, told them to go and give thanks to God who freed them through the prayers of [St. Nicholas].”²⁹

St. Nicholas’s release of the princes was the last of the saint’s miracles before his own death, and an account of St. Nicholas’s demise is also included in the *Golden Legend*. According to the this text, “At the time when God wanted to bring St. Nicholas to paradise the angels came to him and said the psalm: *In te domine speravi*

²⁵ “Sa[n]t Nicolas e[n] effuerco d’aq[ue]llos pri[n]cipes fue atrvidame[n]te p[ar]a aq[ue]l que los [h]abia de degollar y [h]echo le el espada dela mano muy alexos y solto los por q[ue] nunca merecieron muerte...” BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

²⁶ “regare a dios q[ue] te de lid en q[ue] mueras y te maten bestias.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13v.

²⁷ “todo el cuerpo te sera lleno de gusanos podridos...” BL, IB53312, fol. 13v.

²⁸ “Señor nosotros no somos enca[n]tadores ni merecemos muerte.” BL, IB53312, fol. 13v.

²⁹ “E el emperador quando oyo contar su vida y sus miraglos dixo les yd vos y grad’ced a dios que vos libro por ruego del...” BL, IB53312, fol. 13v.

until the spot where it reads *In manus tuas domine comendo spiritum meum*. And at this point the soul [of St. Nicholas] left his body in the year of our lord 224.”³⁰

Following his death, St. Nicholas was placed in a marble tomb and “later a fountain of oil that healed many ailments came [from the tomb]. And a fountain of water poured from his head. And another fountain of oil poured from his feet...”³¹ It was because of these secretions that pilgrims would travel to the site of St. Nicholas’s tomb, first in Myra and then in Bari, in order to collect the healing liquids of St. Nicholas.³² This pilgrimage site was clearly important to Polanco as the pilgrims are depicted on Polanco’s altarpiece alongside a portrayal of St. Nicholas entombed (Figure 3-7).

St. Nicholas’s miracles by no means ended with his death. In fact, he performed six posthumous miracles, four of which are included in the versions of the *Golden Legend* that I have examined from Castile and two of which are included in Polanco’s narrative. The first tale, which is not depicted on Polanco’s retablo, begins with a man who borrowed money from a Jew and “swore on the altar of St. Nicholas that he would repay it as quickly as possible.”³³ However, the man did not uphold his promise, and when the Jew confronted him to reclaim the debt, the man lied before a judge, and tricked the Jew by asking him to hold a cane filled with gold while swearing that the debt had been repaid. On the way home “a cart ran over the man and

³⁰ En el tiempo q[ue] dios queria levar a sant nicolas a p[ar]ayso vio que los angeles vinero[n] a el y dixo este psalmo: In te domine speravi: fasta aq[ue]l lugar do[n]de dize: In manus tuas domine come[n]do spiritum meu[m]. E a esta sazón le salio el alma del cuerpo e[n] el año dela encarnación de ccxxiii años. BL IB53312, fol. 13v. St. Nicholas is now believed to have lived in the fourth century. The Latin is from Psalm 30, which reads “In thee Lord, I have hoped... into your hands I give my spirit.

³¹ “luego salio una fuente de olio que sana muchas dolencias. E mana otra fuente de agua a su cabeça y otra fuente a sus pies que mana olio fasta oy.” BL IB53312, fol. 13v. This substance was often referred to as St. Nicholas’s holy manna.

³² None of the Spanish versions of Voragine’s text that I examined address why the saint’s bones were transferred from Myra to Bari, but most believe that this transfer occurred in the late eleventh century when soldiers from Bari came to Myra and took the bones to Bari. Myra continued to be an active site of pilgrimage even after this transfer occurred. Clive Foss, “Pilgrimage in Medieval Asia Minor,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 132.

³³ “juro sobre el altar de señor sant nicolas que el gelos daria lo mas presto que el pudiese” BL, IB53312, fol. 13v.



Figure 3-7: St. Nicholas Entombed, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás
(photo: author).

killed him... [and] the cane that was filled with gold broke, and the gold appeared.”³⁴ Although the Jew witnessed the accident and saw the money that he was owed, he refused to take the gold but instead bargained with St. Nicholas, asking the saint to save the man who had cheated him and vowing that if St. Nicholas did so he “would [renounce Judaism and] become Christian.” Hearing this vow, “St. Nicholas revived the Christian man. And once that dead man was alive, the Jew converted to Christianity.”³⁵

Another posthumous miracle also recounts St. Nicholas’s conversion of a Jewish man. This tale begins with a Jew who had commissioned an image of St. Nicholas to guard over his substantial wealth. One day when the Jew was robbed, he became very angry at the image for not having offered adequate protection of his goods and he “began to very cruelly hurt and cut it.”³⁶ Meanwhile, St. Nicholas went to the thieves and said to them, “I am wounded for you and, so cruelly, that I have been cut, and look how I am bruised and covered with blood. Consequently, I tell you that you must return what you have taken, if not the anger of God will come upon you, and [your] sin will be made public, and you will hang.”³⁷ When the thieves questioned St. Nicholas’s authority, the saint responded, “I am St. Nicholas, vassal of Jesus Christ, who was cruelly beaten by the Jew whose store you robbed.”³⁸ Hearing this, the thieves returned all of the Jew’s belongings, and the Jew converted to Christianity. These two conversion tales were not included in Polanco’s narrative of

³⁴ “paso sobre el un carro y mato lo...q[ue]brantole el blago que era lleno de oro y parecio el oro.” BL, IB53312, fol. 14r.

³⁵ “se tornaria cristiano. E entonce fue resucitado este muerto y el judio torno se cristiano.” BL, IB53312, fol. 14r.

³⁶ “comenco de ferir la muy cruelmente y acortar la” BL, IB53312, fol. 14r.

³⁷ soy ferido por vosotros y tan cruelmente q[ue] esto acotado y mirad como esto e[n] cardenio y cubierto d’sangre. Porende yd presto y tornad lo q[ue] tomastes: si non la yra de dios verna sobre vosotros y el pecado sera publicado y sereys puestos de un palo.” BL, IB53312, fol. 14r.

³⁸ “... yo soy sant nicolas vasallo de ihu xpo, a quien firio tan cruelmente el judio de quien vosotros robastes la tienda.” BL, IB53312, fol. 14r.

the saint's life, suggesting that St. Nicholas's power to convert Jews to Christianity was not personally important to Polanco.

Two additional posthumous miracles included in the Burgos *Golden Legend* each celebrate St. Nicholas's protection of young men. The first begins at a party given by one of St. Nicholas's devotees each year on the saint's feast day. During the party, the devil disguised as a beggar came to the door requesting charity, and in response the devotee sent his son to provide alms. When the child met the beggar at the door, the devil revealed himself and killed the boy. Then the father saw his son, and "he began to cry with great pain and said, 'my sweet son, how did this happen,'"³⁹ and then he exclaimed, "oh, Saint Nicholas is this the mercy that you give me [in exchange] for the honor that we have given you for such a long time. And while he was saying this, the boy rose just like someone waking up from sleep and opened his eyes."⁴⁰ After the boy was resurrected, the father and his companions "gave much thanks to God and to the blessed St. Nicholas."⁴¹

Similarly, the next miracle in the Burgos *Golden Legend*, narrates St. Nicholas's rescue of a devotee's son. The event is depicted on the Polanco altarpiece (Figure 3-8), and the story is as follows:

A nobleman prayed to St. Nicholas to give him a son and promised that he would bring a cup of gold as an offering to St. Nicholas's church. The son was born and after this the cup was made, and because the cup was very lovely it pleased them to drink with it and they made another of equal value. And [then] they went by sea to complete their promise to St. Nicholas [and the man] asked his son to bring him some water in the first cup. The boy, wanting to drink the water, fell into the sea and could not be seen. And His father, crying

³⁹ "comenco de loorar co[n] grand dolor y dezia asi: Mi fijo dulce como vos va" BL IB53312, fols. 14r

⁴⁰ "o sa[n]t nicolas esta es la merced q[ue] me fazeys por la [hon]orra q[ue] os fago tan gra[nde] t[iem]po ha y mie[n]tra q[ue] esto d[e]zia leva[n]tose el moço como q[ui]en se leva[n]ta d[e] dormir y abrio los ojos..." BL IB53312, fols. 14r.

⁴¹ "diero[n] muchas gra[cia]s a dios y al bienaventurado sant nicolas." BL IB53312, fols. 14r-14v.



Figure 3-8: St. Nicholas Rescuing a Boy from Drowning, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

bitterly, completed his pledge and brought the second cup to St. Nicholas's altar.⁴²

However, each time the man presented the second cup to the altar, he was thrown to the ground until finally the boy appeared holding the original golden cup. He told his father that “when he fell in the sea that St. Nicholas came and rescued him and took him to safety. For this, the father was very happy, and he lovingly offered the [two] cups to St. Nicholas.”⁴³

Although these two miraculous rescues of young boys were the last of St. Nicholas's achievements included in the Burgos *Golden Legend*, surviving images indicate that, in late fifteenth-century Burgos, St. Nicholas was associated with two other miracles, even though they were not part of the text of any of the Castilian copies of the *Golden Legend* examined as part of this study.⁴⁴ The first of these acts is similar to the final miracle from the *Golden Legend* in that it celebrates St. Nicholas's protection of a young boy who was the son of his devotee. In Burgos, the event is depicted in two painted panels that were once part of a fifteenth-century altarpiece from the Church of San Nicolás de Bari (Figures 3-9 and 3-10). The first shows the boy, Adeodatus, after he had been abducted by a pagan king and made to serve the in king's court. Adeodatus, kneeling in the foreground and clutching a golden cup, is depicted in the moment when, while serving at the pagan king's banquet, he expressed his distress to his captor at being so far from his parents. In the next composition, the boy is shown restored to his home through the miraculous

⁴² Un [h]o[m]bre muy noble rogo a sant nicolas que le diesse fijo y p[ro]metiole que lo levaria a su yglesia y que lo offresceria una copa de oro. E nasciole un fijo y desque fue criado mando fazer un vaso y porq[ue] era muy fermoso plugo le p[ar]a beber con el y mando fazer otro q[ue] valiese ta[n]to como aq[ue]l. E vinie[n]do se por el mar a co[n]plir su promsea a sant nicolas mando a su fijo q[ue] truziese del agua en el vaso primero. E el moco querie[n]do tomar del agua cayo en la mar y no parescio y el padre llora[n]do amargosamente cu[m]plio su voto y vino a sannicolas y ofrecio le el vaso segu[n]do y cayo del altar a tierro. BL IB53312, fol. 14v.

⁴³ “qua[n]do cayera en la mar q[ue] luego vino a el sant nicolas y q[ue] lo guardo y saco sano por lo q[ua]l el padre fue muy alegre y ofrecio amos los vasos a señor sant nicolas.” BL IB53312, fol. 14v.

⁴⁴ The text of this legend is included in a Latin edition of the *Golden Legend* produced in 1845 and recently translated into English. Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 28-29.



Figure 3-9: First Panel from the Story of Adeodatus, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11726).

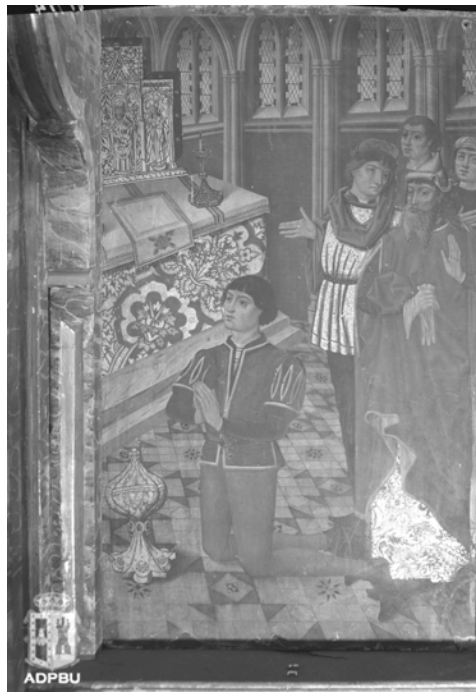


Figure 3-10: Second Panel from the Story of Adeodatus, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11714).

intervention of St. Nicholas and praying before the altar that his father built in the saint's honor.

The second legend that was known in Burgos but was not included in the text of the Burgos *Golden Legend* is that of St. Nicholas's resurrection of three scholars who had been killed by an innkeeper. This miracle is depicted on Polanco's altarpiece (Figure 3-11), and Polanco likely selected this image for his narrative of the saint because of its popularity in Burgos. Local regard for the tale is obvious since a small printed image of the scene was added to the beginning of the life of St. Nicholas in the Burgos *Golden Legend* (Figure 3-12), even though, as was customary, the text of that tale was not included.⁴⁵ The manner in which this miracle became popular in Burgos is not clear, although other depictions of this scene and the possibility of its performance as a liturgical play will be addressed later in this chapter.

Together, the selection of miracles found both in the Burgos *Golden Legend* and in contemporary images reveals that the saint was revered in Burgos for his piety, his prevention of idol worship, his conversion of Jews, and his protection of the innocent, specifically soldiers, young boys, maidens, and sailors. Before considering in greater detail the specific scenes of Polanco's narrative and the manner in which they reflect Polanco's personal devotion to the saint, an examination of the development of his cult in the medieval West makes apparent some of the ways in which his life and acts were celebrated during the medieval period.

The Cult of St. Nicholas in the Medieval West

Devotion to St. Nicholas began in Byzantium during the fifth century and became wide spread by the eleventh century. The earliest church honoring the saint in Byzantium, built on the site of his tomb in Myra (modern Turkey), dates to the middle

⁴⁵ BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.



Figure 3-11: St. Nicholas Reviving Three Scholars, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 3-12: St. Nicholas Reviving Three Scholars from “Comienca la leyenda delos sactos,” Printed in Burgos by Juan de Burgos, fol. 12v (Reproduced with Permission of the British Library, © The British Library Board, IB53312).

of the sixth century,⁴⁶ but western devotion to St. Nicholas developed later, with an altar for the saint in the Church of Santa Maria in Rome by the eighth century and with altars and churches dedicated to Nicholas in northern Europe by the tenth century.⁴⁷ During the end of the eleventh century, an increasing interest in the saint throughout Italy and the West emerged as a result of the transfer of St. Nicholas's tomb from Myra, in Byzantium, to Bari, in southern Italy. After this date, pilgrims began to travel to Bari in order to collect the healing liquid that St. Nicholas secreted from his bones. Also following the eleventh-century transfer of relics, a growing number of churches were dedicated to St. Nicholas, resulting in over 2,550 religious institutions consecrated in his name throughout northern Europe by the year 1500.⁴⁸

As the number of churches dedicated to St. Nicholas grew, so did the number of images depicting him. Windows honoring St. Nicholas, often featuring narrative sequences, can be found in a number of French cathedrals including those at Chartres and Auxerre. In each of these cities, the stained glass features the story of the money lending Jew, and according to Anne Harris, these were commissioned by the bishop in response to tensions that existed between the clergy and the laity, particularly those lay people involved in trade and money lending.⁴⁹ Scenes of St. Nicholas also are included in private devotional texts such as the two early fifteenth-century books of hours that contain single images representing St. Nicholas's miracles. One book, belonging to Duc de Berry, shows the saint saving the sailors from a storm, and

⁴⁶ Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 12-13. For an overview of images of St. Nicholas in Byzantine art: Nancy P. Sevcenko, *The Life of St. Nicholas in Byzantine Art* (Toino: Bottega D'Erasmus, 1983).

⁴⁷ Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 51 and 103.

⁴⁸ Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 115; Karl Meisen lists 2,550 northern European religious institutions founded in honor of St. Nicholas during the medieval period. *Nikolauskult und Nikolausbrauch im Abendlande. Eine kultgeographisch-volkskundliche Untersuchung* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1981), 126-176. As his study does not include Italy, Spain or England, it only begins to give an idea of the full scope of St. Nicholas's cult in the medieval period.

⁴⁹ Anne F. Harris, "St. Nicholas in Context: Stained Glass and Liturgical Drama in the Archbishopric of Sens," in *Glasmalerei im Kontext: Bildprogramme und Raumfunktionen* (Nuremberg: 2004), 89-99.

another, Maréchal de Boucicaut's Book of Hours, includes an image of St. Nicholas resurrecting the three scholars.⁵⁰

In Italy, there are several narrative frescoes of St. Nicholas's life such as those in the Chapel of the Sacrament in the early fourteenth-century Church of Saint Frances at Assisi and those that form part of an altarpiece attributed to Agnolo Gaddi now in Alte Pinakothek in Munich. Of particular interest are those St. Nicholas narratives found in the Florentine context since Polanco's business took him to that area. In the Church of Santa Croce, the frescoes in the Chapel of the Florentine banker Michele Castellani that were completed during the last quarter of the fourteenth century offer a parallel to Polanco's commission in that they too were intended for a merchant's funerary chapel. These scenes include the legend of the Jew and the debtor, St. Nicholas gifting the dowry, St. Nicholas rescuing a boy from drowning, St. Nicholas halting the execution of three innocents, and St. Nicholas reviving three scholars.⁵¹ Another Florentine altarpiece, painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti for the Church of San Procolo, contains four scenes of St. Nicholas's life depicting the saint's investiture, his gift to the three maidens, his resurrection of the boy who was tricked by the devil, and his protection of Myra from famine.⁵² A final example, the Quaratesi altarpiece by Gentile da Fabriano, features an iconic image of St. Nicholas accompanied by five narrative scenes of the saint's baptism, charity to the maidens, resurrection of the scholars, and rescue of a ship as well as a depiction of pilgrims visiting his tomb. The altarpiece was commissioned around the year 1425 for the funerary chapel of Bernardo di Castello in the Church of St. Niccolò Oltrarno.⁵³

⁵⁰ Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 118-125.

⁵¹ Bruce Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 9-10; John T. Paoletti and Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Lawrence King Publishing, 2005), 168-169.

⁵² George Rowley, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 42.

⁵³ Francesco di Andrea di Castello was responsible for the commission for his father's funerary chapel. Alessandro Cecchi, "Gentile da Fabriano: Quaratesi Polyptych," in *Gentile da Fabriano and the Other*

The Cult of St. Nicholas in Iberia and Burgos

Although the cult of St. Nicholas and images of him have been studied in terms of the Byzantine, Italian and northern European contexts, most of these examinations do not extend to the Iberian Peninsula, resulting in little information about the spread of devotion to St. Nicholas within this region. Although I have not attempted to catalogue every dedication to the saint or every depiction of him, my own examination of various documents, texts and museum collections proves that St. Nicholas was recognized and celebrated throughout Iberia. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century, parish churches dedicated to St. Nicholas were founded in many Iberian cities including Burgos, Valladolid, Ávila, Pamplona, Madrid and Segovia.⁵⁴ This indicates not only that St. Nicholas was celebrated in Spain, but also that he was sufficiently revered to have structures consecrated in his name throughout the peninsula. While these churches suggest that devotion to St. Nicholas was prevalent, surviving paintings and sculptures depicting St. Nicholas are somewhat more limited. For example, in Chandler Rathfon Post's survey of Spanish painting, there are only eighteen representations of St. Nicholas dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries out of the 3,219 images included in the text.⁵⁵ Although certainly Post's survey does not include all of the images that once existed, since many could have been lost,

Renaissance, ed. Laura Laureati and Lorenza Mochi Onori (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2006), 256-263; Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 84.

⁵⁴ Agustín Gómez Iglesias, *La edad media en Madrid* (Madrid: Delegación Municipal de Turismo, 1962); 47-48; Martín González, Juan José and Jesús Urrea Fernández, *Monumentos religiosos de la ciudad de Valladolid (Catedral, Parroquias, Cofradías y santuarios)* (Valladolid: Institución Cultural Simancas, 1985) 140-144; José Luís Gutiérrez Robledo, *Enciclopedia del Románico en Castilla y León: Ávila*, v. 7 (Aguilar de Campoo: Fundación Santa María la Real Centro de Estudios del Románico, 2002) 193-198; Vicente Herbosa, *El Románico en Segovia* (León: Ediciones Lancia, 1999), 86-87; *Historia de las diócesis españolas: Iglesias de Palencia, Valladolid y Segovia*, ed. Teófanés Egido (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2004), 244; Carlos J. Martínez Álava, *Del Románico al gótico en la arquitectura de Navarra: monasterios, iglesias y palacios* (Pamplona: Ona Industria Gráfica, 2007), 377-390.

⁵⁵ Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol 1-14 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930-66).

destroyed, or simply never catalogued by Post,⁵⁶ these numbers imply that depictions of St. Nicholas were not extremely prevalent on the peninsula during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

While the popularity of St. Nicholas in Spain and in the rest of the medieval West is of some concern for this study, his cult in Burgos during the late medieval period is of far greater importance. St. Nicholas was a significant holy figure in Burgos by the beginning of the thirteenth century. By this time, the parish Church of San Nicolás was already standing, and the newly built gothic cathedral included a chapel dedicated to the saint; the first chapel founded after the cathedral was constructed.⁵⁷ The specific objects that would have adorned the parish church and cathedral chapel during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are lost to us, but it is probable that images of St. Nicholas were present in both locations.

Eight painted panels that were originally part of the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás and that date to the last half of the fifteenth century provide us with a narrative of St. Nicholas's life commissioned in Burgos prior to the Polanco retablo. They survive today as part of a Baroque altarpiece occupying the left side aisle of the Church of San Nicolás. Two of the eight panels depict St. Anthony of Padua and St. Andrew along with the altarpiece's donors (Figures 3-13 and 3-14). The other six show four scenes from the life of St. Nicholas. The investiture of St. Nicholas as bishop and St. Nicholas saving three young men from execution each appear as single narrative scenes (Figures 3-15 and 3-16). The legends of St. Nicholas gifting a dowry to the poor father of three maidens (Figures 3-17 and 3-18) and of St. Nicholas's

⁵⁶ For example, a fresco from the Church of Sant Fructous de Bierge in Osca, dating to the thirteenth century and now in the MNAC, and two Catalan retables in the Museu de Lleida, dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, are each dedicated to St. Nicholas but are not included in Post's survey of Spanish painting.

⁵⁷ Teófilo López Mata, *La Catedral de Burgos* (Burgos: Instituto Municipal de Cultura y Turismo, 2008), 138-140; Jesús López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari* (Burgos: AMABAR, S. L., 2000), 7.



Figure 3-13: St. Anthony of Padua and Donors, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11711).



Figure 3-14: St. Andrew and Donors, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11731).



Figure 3-15: Investiture of St. Nicholas, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11721).



Figure 3-16: St. Nicholas Saving Three Young Men from Execution, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11716).



Figure 3-17: St. Nicholas and the Three Maidens, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11718).



Figure 3-18: St. Nicholas and the Three Maidens, Painted Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo de la Diputación Provincial de Burgos, ADPBU-PH-11712).

miraculous rescue Adeodatus from captivity (Figures 3-9 and 3-10), which was discussed earlier, are each afforded two panels and more complex narratives.

Although no specific documentation about the panels has been recovered, most scholars agree that they once formed part of the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás and that they were displaced by the Polanco retablo a little before 1505.⁵⁸ Aside from the donor portraits, we know little about the patrons of the original high altarpiece or the circumstances of the commission. María Pilar Silva Maroto has speculated that this work was ordered by one of Gonzalo López de Polanco's ancestors, possibly Juan López de Polanco (Gonzalo's grandfather), since the Polanco family was later involved in patronage to the church.⁵⁹ However, such a scenario seems unlikely since it would be unusual for Polanco to replace an altarpiece so recently commissioned by his own ancestors. Furthermore, if Silva Maroto's assessment were correct, the date of the altarpiece would make Polanco's father the likely patron from his immediate family, meaning that Gonzalo López de Polanco and his siblings would be pictured in the donor portrait. Since Polanco had at least three brothers, and two boys not four are depicted with their father in the male donor portrait,⁶⁰ the most logical conclusion again is that the Polanco family was not

⁵⁸ María Pilar Silva Maroto, Chandler Rathfon Post have both dated these panels to a period between 1480 and 1490. Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, IV: 252-254. María Pilar Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana, Burgos y Palencia : obras en tabla y sarga*, 3 vols (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de cultura y bienestar social, 1990), 273-283. López Sobrino cites these dates and agrees that these panels formed the original high altarpiece (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 33). In addition to these resources, which address the panels specifically, several early publications on Spanish painting discuss the style of the Saint Nicholas Master and other works attributed to him. Jose Camón Aznar, *Summa Artis: Historia general del arte*, vol. XXII, *Pintura medieval Español* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1966), 609-611; José Guidol Ricart, *Ars Hispaniae* IX (Madrid: Plus-Ultra, 1955), 374-379; Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, *Breve historia de la pintura española* (Madrid, 1946), 78; and Augusto L. Mayer, *Historia de la Pintura Española*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1942), 168-169. A recent restoration of the eight panels in 1988 revealed further details about the condition of the panels, their original dimensions, etc. *Conservación y restauración en la iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari Burgos* (Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 1990).

⁵⁹ Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana*, 274-277.

⁶⁰ Polanco mentions three brothers and one sister in his testament. "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 153-227.

responsible for the patronage of this earlier retable. All of this evidence makes it seem probable that the original high altarpiece was the commission of another local family. Therefore, the differences that are addressed later in this chapter between the narratives of St. Nicholas depicted in the two San Nicolás altarpieces may have been deliberate efforts by Gonzalo López de Polanco to reflect his own family's devotion to St. Nicholas and to differentiate his commission from that of another wealthy Burgos family.

While, for the most part, the two altarpieces represent distinct aspects of St. Nicholas's legend, some scenes do overlap, and given the prominent placement of the original painted altarpiece on the main altar of the Church of San Nicolás, it is worth considering what role, if any, this retable played in shaping the process of scene selection for Polanco's St. Nicholas narrative. In order to do so, we must not overlook the possibility that there were originally more panels than the eight that survive. The conservationists who restored the panels in 1988 argued that this was the case, believing that there would have been between four and eight additional scenes. Their assessment was based on the assumption that the surviving eight panels could not have comprised a complete altarpiece and that the donor portraits must have been placed in the *banco* of the retable.⁶¹ In fact, it is certain that additional panels once accompanied these, forming the *banco*, *guardapolvos* and central aisle of the retable. However, the St. Nicholas narrative and the two donor portraits, all of which have approximately the same dimensions,⁶² could have easily formed the sides of the original altarpiece, flanking the central aisle.⁶³

⁶¹ *Conservación y restauración*, 17.

⁶² Each panel measures approximately 104 by 64 centimeters. López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 34.

⁶³ The missing portions of the altarpiece, the central aisle, banco, and guardapolvos, would have included other religious figures. Images of Mary and/or Christ were common for the central aisle, and depictions of various saints and prophets were most often found in the banco and guardapolvos. Judith Berg Sobré's survey of Spanish retables includes many examples of this type of configuration, for

If the existing scenes comprised the complete narrative of St. Nicholas on the painted retable, this would mean that there is very little overlap between the scenes included in the painted panels and those on the carved altarpiece. Only the narrative of St. Nicholas gifting a dowry to the poor father of three maidens is repeated in both instances, and the means by which the legend is depicted differs substantially. Likewise, St. Nicholas is portrayed in his role as bishop in both sequences, but the painted panel shows his investiture while the Polanco retable shows him taking part in liturgical ceremony. The few overlapping scenes and the marked differences between those legends depicted in both retables suggests that Polanco was by no means trying to emulate the painted altarpiece with his own commission. In fact, if anything, Polanco might have been hoping to differentiate his portrayal of St. Nicholas from that in the painted retable, personalizing his own narrative of the saint's life.

Aside from this painted altarpiece, the printed copy of the *Golden Legend* from Burgos, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, was a likely source for much of Polanco's knowledge regarding the saint since it was a recent publication that was printed locally in the vernacular and that included the life of St. Nicholas. The printer responsible for producing this edition, Juan de Burgos (active 1489-1499), was one of two printers working in Burgos at the end of the fifteenth century. He and his rival, Friedrich Biel, produced fifty-eight texts in Castilian and thirty-three in Latin.⁶⁴ As one of his Castilian texts, the copy of the Burgos *Golden Legend* was intended for a lay audience, and this book, along with others printed in the vernacular such as the religious text *Infancia del Salvador* and the secular texts *Cronica Troyana*, the

example, the high altarpiece from the Church of the Virgin in Alanís and the altarpiece of St. Thomas and Christ from Pampolona. Judith Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350 – 1500* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 156 and 164.

⁶⁴ James David Ramer, "Fifteenth-century Spanish Printing" (PhD diss. Columbia University, 1969), 439-442.

Doctrinal de los Caballeros, and *Los Doze Trabajos de Hercules*,⁶⁵ would have been destined for a lay audience that likely included both merchants and the nobility.

Although there are no records listing the books owned by the Polanco family, studies of other families show that merchants often owned a selection of texts, mainly written in the vernacular, used to educate their children and enhance their devotional lives.⁶⁶

The availability of printed books such as these at the end of the fifteenth century drastically transformed the culture of the merchant class, making both learning and private devotion more accessible. Polanco's altarpiece at San Nicolás is one of the early Castilian examples that demonstrate the impact of these printed texts on lay devotional life.

While Polanco surely contemplated St. Nicholas's life as part of his private devotions and likely used the text and printed images of the *Golden Legend* as he did so, he also would have undoubtedly attended masses and ceremonies in honor of St. Nicholas's feast day on the sixth of December each year. Most of our knowledge about the manner in which this feast day was celebrated in fifteenth-century Burgos comes from a breviary that dates to the second quarter of the century and that was from Burgos, but most likely not from the Church of San Nicolás.⁶⁷ To begin, the cannon table indicates that, with nine readings, St. Nicholas's feast day was one of the

⁶⁵ This is a partial list of the texts printed by Juan de Burgos at the end of the fifteenth century. Some of these like the *Cronica Troyana* (Trojan Chronicle) and *Los Doze Trabajos de Hercules* (The Twelve Labors of Hercules) were Castilian translations of Greek myths. Konrad Haebler and Francisco Vindel have more complete studies of Juan de Burgos's printing activity. Konrad Haebler, *Bibliografía ibérica de siglo XV* (La Haya: M. Nijhoff, 1903-1917); Francisco Vindel, *El arte tipográfico en España durante el siglo XV*, vol 7-8 (Madrid: Dirección general de relaciones culturales, 1951).

⁶⁶ Claude Carrère, "La vie privée du marchand barcelonais dans la première moitié du XVe siècle" *Anuario de estudios medievales* 3 (1966), 284-289; Diego Navarro Bonilla, "Breve aproximación al libro manuscrito del siglo XV en Zaragoza: la biblioteca del mercader Jaime Pérez de Villarreal," *Rev. Zurita* 72 (1997): 153-184.

⁶⁷ Burgos: Archivo Histórico Catedral de Burgos (hereafter ACB), "Breviarium Ecclesiae Burgensis," no. 29, fols. 381v-384v; Nicolás López Martínez, "Rubricas generales del breviario burgense en el siglo XV," *Burgense* 16, no. 1 (1975): 297-303.

more important saint feast days celebrated during the year.⁶⁸ Based on the number of readings, the significance of this day surely would not go unnoticed by the laity since it would result in a longer service and possibly other accompanying celebrations of which we have no record.

The majority of the actual texts read as part of this celebration would have had a limited impact on Polanco's conception of his altarpiece and on the way that the parishioners of San Nicolás related to the St. Nicholas narrative present there.⁶⁹ While the clergy would have had a clear understanding of these liturgical ceremonies and full access to the texts, the laity, Polanco included, would have experienced the ceremony once a year on St. Nicholas's feast day. Therefore, the liturgical celebrations preserved in the breviary would not necessarily serve as the main means by which the laity would have learned stories of St. Nicholas's life or related to the St. Nicholas narrative on the retable. The passages in the breviary include prayers, readings and responses referencing various miracles St. Nicholas performed as well as his pious roots, with St. Nicholas's selection as bishop specifically mentioned on numerous occasions. In addition, the text also calls attention to his pious childhood and his miracles, which include the instances where he rescued the citizens of Myra from starvation, protected

⁶⁸ ACB, no. 29, fol. 12r. Some of the other saint feast days with an equal number of readings during the month of December were those of St. Barbara, St. Lucy, St. Eulalia of Merida, and St. Stephen.

⁶⁹ A number of sources indicate that the laity would have had difficulty understanding most of the readings in the Mass since these were in Latin: John Bossy, "The Mass as Social Institution 1200-1700," *Past and Present* no. 100 (1983): 29-61; Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 98-102; James F. Mc. Cue, "Liturgy and the Eucharist, II. West," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 427-438; Virginia Reinburg, "Liturgy and the Laity in Late Medieval and Reformation France," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, no. 3 (1992): 526-547. Virginia Reinburg specifically suggests that although the laity would not comprehend the readings, they would understand the Mass as "a series of collective devotions and ritual actions" (531). She also discusses the expositions of the mass that were written by clerics in the vernacular in order to help the laity participate in and understand the liturgy. There is evidence that such texts were printed in Burgos by the end of the fifteenth century, suggesting that a similar system was in place. The "Respuesta sobre la exposición de la misa," printed c. 1500 by Friedrich Biel, is one example of this type of text. J.C.T. Oates, *A Catalogue of the Fifteenth Century Printed Books in the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 669.

a group of sailors from a storm, and saved three maidens from prostitution.

Furthermore, the readings celebrate the miraculous healing liquid that is excreted from St. Nicholas's corpse. Through the text of the breviary, St. Nicholas is portrayed as a man of piety who served (both during his life and after his death) as a protector of sailors as well as young men and women.⁷⁰ In this way, the attributes and miracles of St. Nicholas included in the liturgical celebration parallel those that are honored in the *Golden Legend*.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the St. Nicholas liturgy recorded in the breviary is the frequently repeated prayer: "God, who glorified the Blessed Nicholas your Bishop with countless miracles, grant to us that through his service and prayer, joined together, we be released from the fires of hell."⁷¹ This prayer's prominent position in the breviary and in a fourteenth-century missal believed to come from the Church of San Nicolás,⁷² as well as its inclusion in at least one Castilian Book of Hours, indicates its important role in celebrating the saint's feast day and also suggests that the prayer was recited in private devotions.⁷³ Furthermore, its prominent position in the missal suggests that this prayer might have been said frequently during services at the parish church and not just reserved for the saint's feast day.⁷⁴ Thus, it is likely that even those parishioners of San Nicolás who could not understand the Latin would have been informed of the words, or at least the basic premise, of this prayer and through it would have viewed St. Nicholas as their protector and intercessor.

⁷⁰ ACB, 29, fols. 381v-384v.

⁷¹ "Deus qui beatum nicholaum confessorem tui [atrp] pontificem innumeris decorast tribue nobis quesumus ut euis meritis et percibus apidis cunctis et a gehenne incendiis libemur." ACB, no. 29, fol. 382r.

⁷² ACB, "Missale Ecclesiae Burgensis," no. 17, fols. 2r- 2v. José Janini believes that the manuscript must have come from that church based on the repeated presence of this prayer in the initial pages of the manuscript, *Manuscritos litúrgicos de las bibliotecas de España* (Burgos: Aldecoa, 1977), 49.

⁷³ The Castilian Book of Hours that dates to c. 1485-1490. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Library, MS Typ 443, 443.1, fol. 101r.

⁷⁴ In the missal, the prayer occurs alongside text honoring God, Christ and the Virgin. ACB, no. 17, 2r-4r.

A final aspect of St. Nicholas's feast day celebrations, and one that would have been much more accessible to the laity because it contained a visual component, were the plays that were likely performed in celebration of the saint's miracles. Performances of this type were common elsewhere in Europe, specifically in Germany, France and England by the beginning of the twelfth century. Here, the Hildesheim manuscript, the Fleury playbook, Wace's *Life of St. Nicholas*, and Jean Bodel's *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* provide the Latin and vernacular texts for public celebrations of St. Nicholas's miracles.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, no texts of St. Nicholas plays dating to the late medieval period have been located in the Iberian context.⁷⁶ Given the nature of theatrical texts and that much of the theatrical history of late medieval Iberia has yet to be studied, we must assume that legends of the life of St. Nicholas may have been performed in late medieval Burgos, even without any record of these performances. In fact, the absence of surviving records may not be surprising given that, as Charlotte Stern discusses, unlike prose or vernacular religious texts, the texts of plays were not designed for a widespread audience. As she explains, since plays were sometimes written on loose folio pages intended only for the actors, the texts are difficult to piece together. She contrasts this with the situation in France, where plays were viewed as literary texts in their own right and therefore had a much higher survival rate.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Karl Young reproduces portions of the Hildesheim and Fleury texts in his *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1933), 307-360; Otto E. Albrecht also studies the Fleury texts: *Four Latin Plays of St. Nicholas from the Twelfth Century Fleury Play-Book: Text and Commentary* (Ph.D. diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1935), 25-43; Joel Fredell examines Wace's *The Life of Saint Nicholas* in his article "The Three Clerks and St. Nicholas in Medieval England," *Studies in Philology* 92, no. 2 (1995): 181-202; Jean Bodel's *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas* has been published both in the original French and in translation. Jean Bodel, *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 2005); Jean Bodel, *Le Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, trans. Richard Axton and John Stevens (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971).

⁷⁶ Richard B. Donovan, *The Liturgical Drama in Medieval Spain* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1958), 18. Charlotte Stern also indicates the absence of St. Nicholas plays in Iberia as she discusses the development of this tradition elsewhere in Europe. *The Medieval Theater in Castile* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), 35-50.

⁷⁷ Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile*, 20-22.

If they existed, plays of St. Nicholas's legend would likely have reinforced the importance of St. Nicholas in medieval Burgos and made more people familiar with the saint through public performances on St. Nicholas's feast day. Furthermore, St. Nicholas plays also might have introduced new miracles not present in the text of the *Golden Legend*, such as St. Nicholas's resurrection of the three boys who had been murdered by an innkeeper. As is addressed later in this chapter, the presence of this story on Polanco's altarpiece combined with the inclusion of an image representing this tale in the Burgos *Golden Legend* indicates a growing interest in the miracle at the turn of the sixteenth century, which was perhaps prompted by the introduction of this theatrical performance in Burgos. These plays, along with the painted retablo from San Nicolás, the *Golden Legend*, and liturgical ceremony, impacted Polanco's conception of his patron saint, and the effects of each are evident to varying degrees in the narrative that Polanco designed for his funerary altarpiece.

St. Nicholas: Intercessor and Patron Saint

Returning to the representation of St. Nicholas and his life at the center of the retablo, we begin with the statue of St. Nicholas standing prominently between the eight narrative scenes (Figure 3-1). John T. Paoletti analyzes an altarpiece with a similar configuration of an iconic image of a saint surrounded by narrative scenes in his examination of the thirteenth-century Santa Chiara Altarpiece, made for the Convent of Santa Chiara in Assisi. Paoletti argues that the image of a saint standing in a frontal pose with his or her eyes directed out at the viewer "is an appropriate stylistic device for the devotional image," noting that this arrangement suggests "the imminent presence of the saint."⁷⁸ Furthering Paoletti's claim, Jeryldene Wood demonstrates that this same depiction of St. Clare "commands attention" both through its size

⁷⁸ John T. Paoletti, "Wooden Sculpture in Italy and Sacral Presence," *Artibus et Historiae* 13, no. 26 (1992): 90-91.

relative to the surrounding scenes and through the figure's direct gaze at the viewer.⁷⁹ On the Polanco altarpiece, St. Nicholas's gaze and his placement above the altar are similar, and, in this way, he would have engaged the congregation and invited them to contemplate his sanctity.

St. Nicholas's direct gaze not only engages the viewer in contemplation but it also solidifies the saint's role as intercessor,⁸⁰ an attribute of the saint that is further emphasized by his placement on the altarpiece. In the center of the vertical plane between the parishioners, in the nave of the church, and the Holy Trinity, at the top of the altarpiece, St. Nicholas becomes an intermediary between the faithful and God.⁸¹ Late medieval texts from Burgos demonstrate that St. Nicholas was often celebrated for his intercessory powers. Most notably, a common prayer from the period, which appears in both the missal and the breviary, reads, "God, who glorified the Blessed Nicholas your Bishop with countless miracles, grant to us that through his service and prayer, joined together, we be released from the fires of hell."⁸² This prayer, like the

⁷⁹ Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.

⁸⁰ Hayden B. J. Magginis, *Painting in the Age of Giotto: A Historical Reevaluation* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 68; Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 146. André Vauchez indicates that the laity would often solicit the help of a saint in front of images similar to this image of St. Nicholas. *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 452.

⁸¹ The placement of a saint or the Virgin below an image of Christ or the Trinity is a common arrangement for altarpieces in medieval Iberia, and it typically signifies the intercessory nature of the lower figure. André Vauchez suggests that the laity might have viewed this type of intercessory relationship as akin to that between vassal and lord. *Sainthood*, 461.

⁸² "Deus qui beatum nicholaum confessorem tui [atrp] pontificem innumeris decorasti tribue nobis quesumus ut euis meritis et percibus apidis cunctis et a gehenne incendiis liberemur" (unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own). ACB, no. 29, fol. 382r; ACB, no. 17, fols. 2r- 2v. In his study of the readings and Mass of the St. Nicholas liturgy, Charles W. Jones indicates that this prayer was present, without great variation, in the thirteen medieval copies of the St. Nicholas liturgy that he studies. As the manuscripts studied by Jones come from several locations throughout northern Europe, including Brussels, England, and France, they demonstrate a consistent use of this prayer throughout late medieval Christendom. Furthermore, he notes that this prayer "was said at some point in almost every hour of the proper Office and at other occasions." *The Saint Nicholas Liturgy and Its Literary Relationships (Ninth to Twelfth Centuries)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 39. We recall that the same prayer is included in a Castilian Book of Hours, indicating its use during private devotion. Cambridge, MA: MS Typ 443, 443.1, fol. 101r.

figure on the altarpiece, places St. Nicholas between man and God. Therefore, the parishioner would not only be able to form an intimate connection with the figure of St. Nicholas through the saint's prominence on the altarpiece and direct gaze, but he or she would also view St. Nicholas's direct placement below the Holy Trinity as a visual manifestation of his abilities as intercessor.

Most significantly, the placement of the St. Nicholas statue and scenes relative to the Holy Trinity provide visual evidence of Polanco's wish as expressed in the opening of his testament that St. Nicholas would serve as one of his "advocates before the Holy Trinity."⁸³ Studies of sixteenth-century Spanish wills indicate that it was common for testators to call on the intercessory powers of specific holy personages at the time of their death. The Virgin along with saints and angels closest to the seat of God were the most common advocates, but saints with whom the dying had a special bond were also often evoked.⁸⁴ In this case, Polanco not only requested St. Nicholas's assistance in his testament, but he also ensured that his perpetual prayers to the saint were heard by including the two kneeling figures of himself and his wife Leonor de Miranda just below the scenes of St. Nicholas's life. In doing so, Polanco created on his altarpiece a visual manifestation of his written request, placing St. Nicholas directly between his own effigy and the Holy Trinity

By serving as an intermediary both for Polanco and for the faithful parishioners, the figure of St. Nicholas demonstrates the dual roles of the saint on this altarpiece. On the one hand, this iconic figure functioned as a means to focus parishioners' prayers and to encourage their devotion to St. Nicholas. On the other, it served as a personal yet public manifestation of Polanco's own devotion to the saint.

⁸³ "Abogados ante la Santa Trinidad." Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

⁸⁴ Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 68-69; Carlos Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad en Burgos en el siglo XVI* (Burgos: Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 2001), 101-102.

The St. Nicholas narrative, like the iconic figure of St. Nicholas, was both a devotional aid and a memorial. Analysis of the eight scenes of St. Nicholas's life demonstrates that Polanco carefully orchestrated the narrative not only to honor St. Nicholas, presenting him as a pious and worthy intercessor,⁸⁵ but also to publicly celebrate his own personal connection to the saint. In this regard, the episodes that form the St. Nicholas narrative are selective, stressing the saint's piety and his role as protector of mariners, young men, and maidens as well as echoing many of Polanco's concerns for his own afterlife.⁸⁶

A Pious Saint for Personal Salvation: The St. Nicholas Narrative on the Polanco Retable

Much as the iconic figure of St. Nicholas engages the viewer, the scenes in the St. Nicholas narrative also foster a connection with the viewer through the direct gaze of several of the figures and through the use of contemporary dress as well as the presence of recognizable objects and settings (Figure 3-1). In the top register of the narrative, three of the four scenes (St. Nicholas's baptism, procession and giving of alms to the poor) occur in a church setting and each includes figures with their backs turned to the congregation, effectively making the parishioners part of the scene by placing them at the same vantage point as these figures. Furthermore, each of these three episodes of St. Nicholas's life depicts events that also took place within the parish church, allowing the viewer to relate these scenes to their own experiences at the Church of San Nicolás. Other details, such as the contemporary dress of the figures and the small book held by the three monks who are singing in the scene of St.

⁸⁵ André Vauchez indicates that during the later Middle Ages many believed that "God performed miracles *for* the saints, that is, in consideration of their own merits." *Sainthood*, 461. Based on this, it would be logical for a patron to emphasize the good deeds of his or her intercessor in the hopes that he or she would assist the intercessor in winning God's favor.

⁸⁶ Jeryldene Wood notes a similar selective nature of the scenes chosen for the Santa Chiara altarpiece. *Women Art and Spirituality*, 12.

Nicholas's procession, also connect the episodes to contemporary society by incorporating objects and clothing that would have been familiar to the early sixteenth-century viewer. In particular, the dress of the laypeople in the St. Nicholas narrative reflects contemporary norms. For example, the three maidens (in the third scene on the top register) wear long chemises and loose hair, the type of garment and hairstyle that women would have typically worn at night in the privacy of their own homes.⁸⁷ Likewise in the lower register, the pilgrims visiting the tomb of St. Nicholas wear short tunics and hose, which were typical of middle class clothing.⁸⁸ Thus, while Polanco commissioned a narrative of St. Nicholas's life that reflected his personal connection to the saint, at the same time he created a sequence of episodes that were intended to be more accessible to the viewer through the incorporation of recognizable events, objects, and attire.

The first episode of the St. Nicholas narrative is his baptism (Figure 3-19), which shows St. Nicholas as a small, naked child being lifted out of the baptismal font. Various aspects of the scene give it local and contemporary relevance. First, the inclusion of the font combined with the presence of the priest standing next to St. Nicholas makes an overt reference to the setting in which the biannual celebration of the sacrament took place,⁸⁹ evoking a familiar event that would have occurred in the Church of San Nicolás. Moreover, with their backs to the congregation, the two men in the foreground help the viewer to engage in the scene by assuming the same vantage point that a parishioner would have while contemplating the composition or while viewing a baptism in the parish church. Emphasizing the connection between

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting 1460-1500* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1975), 37-42 and 80-84.

⁸⁸ Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting*, 43-47; Carol Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes & Fine Clothing* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 149-157.

⁸⁹ Easter and Pentecost were traditional times of year for baptism to be celebrated. Martin R. Dudley, "Sacramental Liturgies in the Middle Ages" in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), 199-200.



Figure 3-19: St. Nicholas's Baptism, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

the viewer and the narrative sequence, the man on the left turns his head, gazing back at the congregation and inviting them to take part in the scene. Finally, the figures in the scene wear attire that would have been familiar to the early sixteenth-century viewer such as the liturgical vestments of the priest, to the left of St. Nicholas, or the covered head of St. Nicholas's mother, in the background.⁹⁰

Beyond these more direct associations between the image and the viewer, the scene of St. Nicholas's baptism also serves to highlight the pious conditions under which the saint's life began. As André Vauchez has indicated, during the late medieval period it was considered ideal for a saint to be of noble birth and to be born into a pious family. To this end, saints' lives often offer some sign of the saint's heritage and his or her piety during childhood.⁹¹ St. Nicholas's legend is no exception to this rule. In the copy of the *Golden Legend* printed in Burgos around the year 1500, the legend of St. Nicholas begins with a statement that St. Nicholas was born to "a rich and holy father and mother," and this source continues to describe St. Nicholas's baptism and his piety as a child.⁹² The scene of St. Nicholas's baptism on the altarpiece becomes a visual manifestation of these pious roots, thereby serving to reinforce St. Nicholas's legitimacy and abilities as a saint.

It becomes even more apparent that Polanco wished to emphasize St. Nicholas's piety when we consider that not all versions of the *Golden Legend* refer directly to St. Nicholas's baptism nor were images of this event terribly common. By comparing this scene to textual accounts of St. Nicholas's baptism, specifically those from copies of the *Golden Legend* printed in Spain, it is evident that stories of the saint's infancy often include him being bathed, but only sometimes specified the

⁹⁰ Both Birbari and Frick indicate that fifteenth-century married women typically wore hoods over their hair and neck (*Dress in Italian Painting*, 80-84; *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 152-157).

⁹¹ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 507-508.

⁹² "fue fijo de padre & madre ricos & santos" BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

sacrament of baptism. This discrepancy is apparent in a late fifteenth-century printed copy of the *Golden Legend*, also from Castile, that simply uses the verb “bañar” (to bathe) rather than the verb “bautizar” (to baptize) found in the Burgos copy of the *Golden Legend*.⁹³ Likewise, Gentile de Fabriano’s *St. Nicholas’s Birth*, one of the only depictions of St. Nicholas’s infancy from Castilian and Florentine contexts,⁹⁴ shows a domestic scene of St. Nicholas being bathed by his mother (Figure 3-20).⁹⁵ By representing St. Nicholas receiving the sacrament of baptism instead of a mere bath from his mother, Polanco was clearly connecting the scene to the sacrament, emphasizing St. Nicholas’s pious roots, reinforcing the saint’s efficacy as an intercessor, and forging a connection between the first scene of the legend and liturgical ceremonies that occurred at the Church of San Nicolás.

The second episode of the narrative depicts the saint taking part in a liturgical procession, and it is equally important in establishing St. Nicholas’s piety and engaging the viewer (Figure 3-21). At the left side of the composition, three monks sing while holding a small open book, and, in the foreground, two men kneel at prayer. St. Nicholas is the tallest figure and stands at the center of the group; his arms are outstretched as if he once held a processional cross in his hands, although these are no longer intact. Like the episode of St. Nicholas’s baptism, this scene depicts figures in contemporary liturgical dress taking part in a ceremony that would have been familiar to the parishioners of San Nicolás. Moreover, the presence of the book, being held by the three monks who are singing on the left side of the composition, clearly connects the scene to the changing culture of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Castile, in which printed books were becoming more readily available. This link to the new

⁹³ BLG, 15001, fol. 5v; BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

⁹⁴ As Polanco lived in Castile and was engaged in trade with Florence, these contexts are the most logical sources for comparanda.

⁹⁵ Cecchi, “Gentile da Fabriano,” 256-263; Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 84.



Figure 3-20: Gentile de Fabriano (1385-1427), *The Birth of St. Nicholas of Bari*, Quaratesi Polyptych. Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, Vatican State (Photo reproduced with permission: Scala/ Art Resource, NY, ART386563).



Figure 3-21: St. Nicholas Liturgical Procession, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

printed book culture of Castile would have not only been familiar to the parishioners of San Nicolás, but also it would have reflected the new availability of these texts, making the scene seem more modern and relevant.

This portrayal of St. Nicholas actively participating in the mass contrasts with more traditional representations of the saint's vocation that tend to depict him during his investiture as Bishop of Myra or simply as an iconic figure dressed in bishops' robes, similar to the figure of St. Nicholas at the center of Polanco's altarpiece.⁹⁶ An earlier panel that was part of the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás in Burgos prior to Polanco's commission shows St. Nicholas during his investiture (Figure 3-15).⁹⁷ In this panel, the saint is seated with his hand raised in benediction. Six men surround his throne, one placing the miter on his head and the other presenting him with a crosier. Since most images of St. Nicholas as bishop within the Florentine and Spanish contexts show him either as an iconic figure or during his investiture, it is apparent that this image of St. Nicholas performing mass was unique, and it connects both to liturgical ceremonies at the Church of San Nicolás and to the requests that Polanco made in his testament for masses following his death.

Based on the lack of precedent for this particular scene both in the *Golden Legend* and in other images of the saint as bishop,⁹⁸ it is clear that Polanco's depiction

⁹⁶ St. Nicholas is often depicted this way both in Iberia and in Florence. Images of this type dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries appear in 13 of the 18 scenes of St. Nicholas included in Post's *A History of Spanish Painting*. Likewise one of the Florentine panels by Ambrogio Lorenzetti once believed to have been housed in the Florentine church of San Procolo, also depicts the investiture of St. Nicholas. Rowley, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, 42. Iconic images of St. Nicholas are also common in Italy. For example, one appears above the five predella scenes in the Quaratesi Polyptych from the Church of St. Niccolò Orlarno in Florence. Cecchi, "Gentile da Fabriano," 256-257. I have not encountered any additional images of St. Nicholas performing mass from either context.

⁹⁷ *Conservación y restauración*, entire; Camón Aznar, *Summa Artis*, 609-611; Guidol Ricart, *Ars Hispaniae*, 374-379; Lafuente Ferrari, *Breve historia*, 78; López Sobrino *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 33; Mayer, *Historia de la Pintura*, 168-169; Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana*, 273-283.

⁹⁸ St. Nicholas's celebration of the liturgy is not present in any of the four versions of the *Golden Legend* that I consulted from fifteenth century Castile. BL, IB53312, fols. 12v-14v; BLG, 15001, fols. 5v-8v; SLE, MS h-III-22, fols. 20v-27v; LC, F59, fols. 283v-285r. I also have not encountered any other images of this type of scene from late medieval Iberia.

of the saint performing mass has particular significance. In fact, it serves as both a representation of St. Nicholas's piety, like in the scene of St. Nicholas's baptism, and a reminder of Polanco's request that the priests of San Nicolás say masses perpetually on his behalf. Since for bishop-saints the performance of the liturgy was one of the principal ways that they could display their faith,⁹⁹ Polanco was reinforcing the piety of his chosen patron by combining the initial scene of St. Nicholas's baptism and the portrayal of St. Nicholas performing mass, perhaps in an effort to remind God of the saint's worthiness. Moreover, this scene would serve as a reminder of the daily requiem masses that Polanco wanted the priests of San Nicolás to perform.¹⁰⁰ It is not surprising, given that Polanco's requests regarding these requiem masses were far beyond those made by most of his contemporaries,¹⁰¹ that he would include a reference to these requests as part of his altarpiece. In fact, the scene could even be viewed as an "insurance policy" of sorts, guaranteeing that St. Nicholas himself would perpetually say mass in Polanco's memory even if the priests of San Nicolás did not. Thus, while this scene certainly serves to enhance St. Nicholas's status as a pious saint, it most importantly would have functioned as a reminder to the clergy of their daily obligation to Polanco.

In addition to referencing both liturgical ceremony and Polanco's requests for masses, certain elements of the composition would help Polanco to ensure that the parishioners of San Nicolás would be properly engaged in prayer and contemplation during the daily masses that were said on his behalf. Here, as in the scene of St.

⁹⁹ Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 510.

¹⁰⁰ Polanco orders that the priests of San Nicolás perform a high requiem mass in his honor each Wednesday and requests that they sing two responses on Tuesday afternoon. Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 186.

¹⁰¹ In his study of testaments written between 1520 and 1600 in Burgos, Polanco Melero finds that only 7.3% of the testaments studied from the first half of the sixteenth century included a request for perpetual masses and only 4.1% of the testaments dating to this period included requests for a high mass. *Muerte y sociedad*, 220-221.

Nicholas's baptism, three figures are in the foreground with their backs to the congregation. Kneeling before the liturgical procession, these three young men serve as models of proper piety for the parishioners of San Nicolás to follow during mass.¹⁰² In this way, these figures were meant to ensure that the parishioners participated properly in the mass, bringing greater honor to Polanco's memory. Moreover, by referencing the role of the parishioners in the celebration of the mass, these three worshipers also solidify the connection between liturgical ceremony in the Church of San Nicolás and the scene as depicted on the altarpiece.

The episode of St. Nicholas performing mass is not the only direct reference to the stipulations that Polanco made in his testament regarding ceremonies that were to be held at the church. Another scene, the fourth on the top register, depicts St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor (Figure 3-22).¹⁰³ St. Nicholas is in the center of the composition placing a small object in the hand of a man before him. Once again, St. Nicholas is the largest figure in the scene, rendering him readily recognizable, and his exchange with the poor man before him is framed by the six other men clustered around them, all of whom are attired in contemporary dress. Architectural details in the background place this event in a church suggesting that this composition also relates to one of the ceremonies conducted at the Church of San Nicolás. Moreover, as with the depiction of St. Nicholas performing mass, there is no precedent for the

¹⁰² Models of this type are found in both the lay and monastic settings. For example, in her article on the Neville of Hornby Book of Hours Kathryn A. Smith notes that the book's patron, Isabel de Byron, is depicted in prayer twice, once kneeling before the crucifix and again at her prie-dieu. Such images would have served as models for Isabel's piety. Kathryn A. Smith, "The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 72-92. Images as models for prayer have been more thoroughly examined in the monastic context. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "The Use of Images in the Pastoral Care of Nuns: The Case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans," *The Art Bulletin* 71 no. 1 (1989): 21-46; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 197-210; William Hood, "St. Dominic's Manners of Praying: Gestures in Fra Angelico's Cell Frescoes at S. Marco," *Art Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (1986): 195-206.

¹⁰³ My own iconographic reading is supported by López Sobrino's assessment of the same scene, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 66.



Figure 3-22: St. Nicholas Giving Alms to the Poor, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

scene of St. Nicholas giving alms in the *Golden Legend* or in other narratives of St. Nicholas's life. Rather, this composition is linked to the pious bequests that Polanco made to the poor of the parish of San Nicolás as part of his testament.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the acts of giving alms to the poor and requesting perpetual masses were frequently concerns of the dying and were employed to ensure entry into heaven.¹⁰⁴ In his testament, Polanco specifically allocated 5,200 *maravedis* a year to be administered to the poor of the parish of San Nicolás, indicating that 100 *maravedis* should be distributed to those in need each Sunday. According to Polanco's specifications, not only were these charitable donations to be managed by the parish, they were also to be administered in conjunction with the Sunday service.¹⁰⁵ By depicting St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor as part of the altarpiece, Polanco guaranteed that his wishes were upheld, in much the same way that he made certain that requiem masses were said in his honor by representing St. Nicholas's liturgical procession. Moreover, by including this scene as part of the narrative sequence, Polanco also ensured that the poor parishioners of the Church of San Nicolás associated the gift that they received each Sunday with his generosity, and at the same time, he created a link between his own pious acts and those of St. Nicholas.

Thus far, the narrative scenes examined have demonstrated St. Nicholas's piety while forging a connection between ceremonies that occurred at the Church of San Nicolás and the episodes of St. Nicholas's life on the altarpiece. The arrangement of the figures in each composition, the dress of each figure, and the architectural details in the background assist in forming these associations. Moreover, two of the scenes,

¹⁰⁴ Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 232-246; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 239-262.

¹⁰⁵ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 185. We know from later documents that this was the beginning of a foundation to the poor that lasted until at least 1700. ADB, "Libros de Obra Pía de Pobres: 1588-1727," San Nicolás, signatura 12.

St. Nicholas performing mass and St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor, relate directly to the requests for daily requiem masses and for the establishment of a pious foundation for the poor that Polanco made in his testament. Notably, none of these events are common in other pictorial or textual accounts of St. Nicholas's life, with the baptism included only occasionally and the other episodes entirely absent. The remaining scenes of Polanco's St. Nicholas narrative differ from the first three in that they have greater precedent in representations of the saint's life. Nevertheless, these next episodes continue to feature personalized depictions of the saint that reflected the nature of Polanco's devotion.

The third narrative on the upper register honors St. Nicholas's charity to the poor and presents a scene of the saint's life that would have been particularly significant to Polanco (Figure 3-6). In one of St. Nicholas's earliest pious acts, which led to the association between St. Nicholas and his attribute of the three golden balls that appears on the Polanco family crest, the saint uses the inheritance that he received from his wealthy parents to provide a poor, nobleman with a dowry for his three daughters in order to prevent the man from selling the girls as prostitutes.¹⁰⁶ As the legend is depicted on the altarpiece, St. Nicholas stands outside, poised to toss one of the mounds of gold through the window while the father sleeps and the three daughters are clustered in the foreground. Like the other scenes, the figures wear contemporary clothing, with St. Nicholas clad in the robe and miter of a bishop and the three maiden daughters wearing the long chemises and loose hair that women would only display in the privacy of their own homes.¹⁰⁷

Again, St. Nicholas is the largest figure in the composition, and he and the three maiden daughters are readily visible from any point in the church, making this

¹⁰⁶ BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹⁰⁷ Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting*, 80-84; Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 152-157

famous story from the legend of St. Nicholas easily recognizable. The simplicity of this composition is apparent when it is compared to the elaborate two-panel representation of this story as depicted in the painted altarpiece for San Nicolás that occupied the high altar of the church prior to Polanco's commission (Figures 3-17 and 3-18). In this more complex example, the first scene is similar to that on the carved altarpiece, showing St. Nicholas tossing gold through the window. The second panel of the painted retable continues the narrative by including a portion of the tale omitted from Polanco's commission. It depicts the encounter between St. Nicholas and the destitute father. By excluding this second scene from his carved altarpiece, Polanco offered a clear focus on St. Nicholas's charitable act and emphasized the three innocent maidens who St. Nicholas saved.¹⁰⁸ In this way, this composition resulted in another allusion to charitable donations, creating a link to the neighboring scene of St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor and also referencing Polanco's concerns about his own family.

While the story of the three maidens is normally included in narratives of the saint's life,¹⁰⁹ and therefore would likely be included here if only out of convention, the legend would have held special relevance to Gonzalo López de Polanco as the father of ten daughters. At a time when properly placing one's daughters in either a convent or a marriage required a substantial sum of money, his many daughters must

¹⁰⁸ In this regard, the scene on the Polanco retable is similar to a panel depicting St. Nicholas's charity to the maidens that Creighton Gilbert believes was once part of an alms box from Siena. "Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Charitable Appeal" *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (1997): 30-41.

¹⁰⁹ Several parallel narrative sequences of St. Nicholas's life from both Spain and Florence include the legend of the three maidens. Chandler Rathfon Post's *A History of Spanish Painting* includes five examples of this scene dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Only one of the images, a fifteenth century panel that once occupied the high altar of the Church of Acebedo in the province of León, comes from the Castilian context (2:243, 8:422-423, 9:532-533, 11:387-389, 12: 572-573). Because of the remote location of this Leonese altarpiece, it is far more likely that Polanco might have encountered an image of the three maidens during his time in Florence. Both the Castellani chapel (c. 1383) and the Quaratesi altarpiece (c. 1425) include single-scene representations of this legend. Cecchi, "Gentile da Fabriano," 256-261; Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi*, 9-10; Paoletti and Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 168-169.

have posed a financial burden, even for a merchant of considerable wealth. Although Polanco never specified that providing for his daughters' dowries caused him financial hardship, it is clear from his testament that he was concerned with making proper arrangements for their futures. From the time that Polanco began his testament in March of 1504 to his final addition in February of 1505, he made preparations for two of his daughters, Loisa and Beatriz, to enter the Convent of San Ildefonso, arrangements which the testament describes as requiring substantial negotiation and money.¹¹⁰ Less specific financial information is given regarding the marriage between his daughter, Mari Rodriguez, and the merchant, Rodrigo de Carrión, but certainly a generous sum of money was exchanged in that instance as well.¹¹¹ Therefore, the incorporation of this episode of St. Nicholas's charity to the three maidens into Polanco's narrative of the saint's life was not only intended to emphasize one of St. Nicholas's most charitable acts but it was also included because of the resonance that the tale would have held with Polanco as the father of ten daughters.

Other scenes on the lower register of the altarpiece continue to celebrate St. Nicholas's pious acts and to serve as a reminder of his effectiveness while also emphasizing the miracles that were most important to Polanco much like the episode of the saint gifting the dowry to the three maidens. Two scenes on either side of the lower register depict St. Nicholas's protection of maritime travelers. Although the two episodes represent different aspects of the St. Nicholas legend, from afar they appear

¹¹⁰ As part of the arrangements for Loisa's entry into the convent, Gonzalo donated 300,000 *maravedis* for a new building at the convent. He also made a promise that money would be donated each summer for upkeep of the gardens and farms owned by the convent. Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 200-203. He made similar guarantees to the convent when his daughter Beatriz entered, vowing to provide money for a new walkway and for the enclosure of a garden as well as pledging an additional sum of money each year. Regarding Beatriz's entrance into the convent, he also mentions substantial negotiations with the abbess, who was against having four sisters in the same convent. Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 218-219.

¹¹¹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 200. Later in the testament, he makes reference to both of his married daughters having received dowries.

similar—both depicting ships at sea with St. Nicholas on the left side of each composition (Figures 3-5 and 3-8). The final scene of the lower register (Figure 3-8), which shows St. Nicholas saving the son of one of his devotees from drowning,¹¹² relates to Polanco's devotion to St. Nicholas, celebrating both the saint's role as maritime guardian and his protection of young men. In the foreground, a young boy is falling over the edge of the ship while St. Nicholas, the largest figure in the composition, raises his hand to intervene on the boy's behalf. Meanwhile, in the background, the boy's father and another figure clutch each other, their mouths open in apparent horror as devils tamper with the mast of the ship. This scene portrays a single event from one of St. Nicholas's miracles. According to this legend, the boy's father had made a golden cup to thank St. Nicholas for granting him a son. However, the father liked the cup so much that he decided to keep it and make a second for the saint. After both cups were made, the boy and his father departed to take the second cup to St. Nicholas's tomb. Despite the father's original intent to keep one of the cups for himself, he presented both to St. Nicholas after the saint rescued his son from nearly drowning.

Since this scene represents only a small part of the legend, showing the portion of the tale that takes place on the ship, it is clear that Polanco intended to emphasize that the miraculous rescue occurred at sea. This link to Polanco's interests is more apparent when we consider another depiction of this event, commissioned for the chapel of Michele Castellani in the Florentine church of Santa Croce (Figure 3-23).¹¹³ Here, rather than focusing on St. Nicholas's maritime rescue, the ship is relegated to the background and the focus is on St. Nicholas presenting the rescued boy to his father. In Polanco's retable, the choice to depict the moment when the boy falls from

¹¹² BL, IB53312, fol. 14v.

¹¹³ Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi*, 9-10; Paoletti and Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 168-169.



Figure 3-23: St. Nicholas Rescuing a Boy, Chapel of Michele Castellani, Church of Santa Croce, Florence. © Bruce Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi* (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1977), plate 17. Reproduced with permission of the Oxford University Press.

the boat links the composition both to Polanco's role as father and to his role as a seafaring merchant who was engaged in trade with Florence.¹¹⁴

Moreover, St. Nicholas's rescue of a young drowning boy, who was born to his parents after they prayed to St. Nicholas for a son, would resonate with Polanco as the father of a single, long-awaited son. Like the father in this legend, Polanco may have wished for a male heir for some time and worked to protect his only son once he was born. Based on Polanco's statements in his testament, we can gather that his son Gregorio was born only after the birth of several daughters. With two of his daughters married or betrothed and four others cloistered in a local convent, there is no mention in Polanco's testament of Gregorio's betrothal, only the hope that he one day will marry and have children.¹¹⁵ Given the arrangements that had already been made for several of his sisters, it is unlikely that Gregorio was old enough when the testament was written to be thinking of marriage, otherwise he too would have been betrothed. Therefore, as with the legend of the three maiden daughters, Polanco might have identified with this legend based on his familial circumstances.

Finally the second maritime scene on Polanco's retable, located on the far left of the bottom register, depicts St. Nicholas's protection of seamen by representing his rescue of a group of sailors from a storm (Figure 3-5).¹¹⁶ In doing so, it further supports the idea that Polanco's devotion to St. Nicholas was linked to the saint's role as maritime protector. Although three of St. Nicholas's miracles take place on boats, certain aspects of this composition clarify the identity of the miracle by depicting

¹¹⁴ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 188-190. Scholars have speculated that Gonzalo López de Polanco was engaged in maritime commerce and banking, both common occupations of those who traded with Florence. Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 52; Manuel Basas Fernández, *Relaciones económicas entre Burgos y Florencia en el siglo XVI* (Burgos: Imprenta Provincial, 1965), 1-2 and 7.

¹¹⁵ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 195-197 and 220.

¹¹⁶ BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

sailors struggling to maintain their ship during a storm.¹¹⁷ In front of the ship, there are various objects that had fallen overboard, including a barrel and a package. Meanwhile, the vessel itself is filled with sailors scrambling to secure their cargo and to control the ship. In the foreground, one man ties an object down while another climbs the mast; other men push a barrel into place. St. Nicholas stands at the left side of the composition with his hand partially raised denoting his intervention.¹¹⁸ By celebrating two instances of St. Nicholas's assistance to those at sea, Polanco demonstrated that this aspect of St. Nicholas's protection was important to him, and this becomes even more evident when we note that the inclusion of two maritime miracles in a single sequence depicting the narrative of St. Nicholas is rare.¹¹⁹

Through these initial six scenes, it is apparent that Polanco's selection of miracles for his narrative of St. Nicholas's life was intended to ensure Polanco's salvation, to mark his personal connection to the saint, and to celebrate the saint's piety. First, Polanco's deliberate manipulation of the St. Nicholas legend to include the scenes of St. Nicholas taking part in liturgical procession and of St. Nicholas giving alms to the poor relates specifically to the requests for masses and charitable bequests that Polanco made in his testament, thereby aiding in his salvation by reminding the clergy of their obligations to him. Second, using the scenes of St. Nicholas and the three maidens, St. Nicholas rescuing the drowning boy and St.

¹¹⁷ There is one other St. Nicholas legend involving a boat that is not depicted in this altarpiece. In this legend, St. Nicholas appears to a group of sailors in order to prevent them from worshipping the idol of Diana. BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

¹¹⁸ This legend is also represented in the Quaresimi altarpiece though scholars have not yet explored the connections between its representation there and the patron's maritime travel. Cecchi, "Gentile da Fabriano," 256-261.

¹¹⁹ The frescoes in the Castellani Chapel and the Quaresimi Polyptych each contain only a single scene representing St. Nicholas's maritime miracles. Cecchi, "Gentile da Fabriano," 256-261; Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi*, 9-10. Once again, while Polanco would have been more likely to encounter additional examples of this scene during his time in Florence, there are other examples from the Iberian context. Four narrative sequences included in Chandler Rathfon Post's *A History of Spanish Painting* contain one of St. Nicholas's maritime miracles. In this case, none of the images are from Castile (2:243 and 362-363, 11:387-389, 12: 572-573).

Nicholas rescuing the sailors, Polanco emphasized the saint's protection of young people and maritime travelers both through the selection of these episodes and through the manner in which they were depicted. These along with Polanco's choice of parish, his inclusion of St. Nicholas's attribute on his crest, and the request in his testament that St. Nicholas serve as one of his "advocates before the Holy Trinity,"¹²⁰ prove a strong, documented connection between Polanco and St. Nicholas.

It is with this connection in mind that we examine the final two episodes of the narrative that represent St. Nicholas entombed and St. Nicholas resurrecting three scholars (Figures 3-7 and 3-11). Located on the lower register, these two scenes, along with the legend of the three maidens in the row above (Figure 3-6), contain the largest and most easily discernable figures, and together they clearly mark the narrative sequence as one honoring St. Nicholas. Moreover, as is demonstrated below, the two scenes on the lower register relate to locally celebrated, recognizable aspects of the saint's life, thereby rendering the entire sequence identifiable even to those not thoroughly acquainted with the St. Nicholas legend.

In the third scene from the left on the lower register, St. Nicholas's sarcophagus occupies the central portion of the composition with St. Nicholas, who is recognizable by his miter and vestments, resting inside (Figure 3-7). The tomb is surrounded by pilgrims, each dressed in the hose and the belted knee length tunics often worn by middle class men.¹²¹ They have come to the tomb in order to collect the sacred secretion emitted from the saint's bones, a liquid that is described in the *Golden Legend* as having been present from the time of St. Nicholas's burial¹²² and that was believed to have healing powers. Here, the healing substance is best visible on St. Nicholas's leg, which extends out of the tomb and is framed by two figures in the

¹²⁰ "Abogados ante la Santa Trinidad." Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

¹²¹ Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting*, 43-47; Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence*, 149-152.

¹²² BL, IB53312, fol. 13r.

foreground, one of whom collects the liquid in a cup. Other men, representing the pilgrims who would travel to Bari, cluster around the sarcophagus, holding their cups and awaiting their chance to collect the holy liquid.

Given that the other scenes that Polanco selected for his altarpiece had personal and/or liturgical significance, the question remains as to why this particular scene was important to Polanco. First, the scene is likely a reference to a relic of St. Nicholas's holy manna that the Church of St. Nicholas possessed, which is documented in the year 1639, but certainly may have been owned by the church prior to that date.¹²³ In this way, like the scenes of the Baptism of St. Nicholas, the liturgical procession, and the giving of alms, this episode connected to contemporary events at the Church of San Nicolás, in this case by honoring the church's sacred relic. In addition, this scene could have secondary importance to Polanco, perhaps relating to his own pilgrimage to Bari or possibly even indicating that he was responsible for obtaining the church's relic. As a man with the means to travel and with a clear devotion to St. Nicholas, Polanco may have made the pilgrimage to St. Nicholas's tomb in Bari at some point in his life, or at least have intended to do so.¹²⁴ This scenario is made more likely by the fact that Polanco's business transactions in Florence would have regularly placed him a little over 400 miles from the pilgrimage site, making it far more accessible than it would have been from Burgos. Furthermore, if we consider that this scene might mark a pilgrimage that Polanco already made, it would also serve to honor Polanco's piety in much the same way as the depiction of St. Nicholas giving alms reflects Polanco's pious bequests. Therefore, this episode,

¹²³ Melchor Prieto lists the relic of the Holy Manna of St. Nicholas as one of the relics owned by the Church of San Nicolás in his *Chronica y historia de la Real ciudad de Burgos, cabeça de Casilla, Cámara de su magestad*, Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, MS 22097, fol 166v.

¹²⁴ In her study *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in the Medieval West*, Diana Webb cites examples of pilgrims traveling to Bari for a variety of reasons including as part of a penance or to solicit the protection of St. Nicholas (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 54-55 and 93.

like the others examined here, continues to reflect Polanco's devotion to and connection with the saint.

The final scene of St. Nicholas's legend included in Polanco's narrative of the saint's life is located second from the left on the lower register and depicts St. Nicholas resurrecting three scholars who were murdered by an innkeeper while traveling (Figure 3-11).¹²⁵ St. Nicholas and the three young, male scholars are positioned prominently in the foreground,¹²⁶ and they render the scene readily recognizable from any point in the church. The saint is dressed in his bishop's robe with one hand holding his crosier and the other positioned over the boys. Since this miracle depicts St. Nicholas's protection of the young and his defense of travelers, Polanco likely felt a personal connection to it as the father of eleven and as a merchant who traveled frequently.

However, when we consider the popularity of this image in late fifteenth-century Burgos, it becomes apparent that while Polanco's personal connection to the tale certainly played a role in his selection of it, he also may have included a depiction of this legend of St. Nicholas's life because it was highly recognizable. Within the Church of San Nicolás alone, there are two images of this miracle, aside from the one that is part of the St. Nicholas narrative. Depictions of St. Nicholas resurrecting the three scholars are present on the early sixteenth-century door of the south facade (Figure 3-24); on the base of the Polanco retablo, just below Gonzalo López de Polanco's tomb (Figure 3-25); and in a sixteenth-century stained glass window over

¹²⁵ Most believe that this tale of St. Nicholas was developed in northern France during the twelfth century as a way to expand St. Nicholas's role to include the protection of young men. It then circulated through theatrical performances of St. Nicholas's miracles. Clare, *St. Nicholas*, 59; Fredell, "The Three Clerks and St. Nicholas," 181-186. The text of this legend is not typically included in the *Golden Legend*, and it is not included in any of the four copies of the *Golden Legend* that I consulted from Castile: BL, IB53312, fols. 12v-14v; BLG, 15001, fols. 5v-8v; SLE, MS h-III-22, fols. 20v-27v; LC, F59, fols. 283v-285r.

¹²⁶ The boys are depicted in a tub because, according to the legend, the innkeeper had planned to boil or pickle them to serve to her guests. Joel Fredell, "The Three Clerks," 183-184.



Figure 3-24: Detail of Sixteenth-Century Doors, Church of San Nicolás de Bari, Burgos (photo: author).



Figure 3-25: Detail of Gonzalo López de Polanco's Tomb, Church of San Nicolás de Bari, Burgos (photo: author).

the west entrance. Furthermore, although this miracle is not typically included in the *Golden Legend*, a printed image of the scene is included above the text of St. Nicholas's legend in the copy of the *Golden Legend* that was printed in Burgos (Figure 3-12).¹²⁷ The presence of this image in the Burgos *Golden Legend*, even though the story is not included in the text, together with its repeated representation in the Church of San Nicolás, suggests that it was a familiar and important tale to those living in late fifteenth century Burgos. Thus, it was perhaps because of the popularity of the legend, as much as any personal connection that Polanco had to the miracle, that the scene was included in the altarpiece.

Unlike the other St. Nicholas miracles, this tale, which was not included in the *Golden Legend*, was principally known as a play performed both in the vernacular and as part of liturgical ceremony on St. Nicholas's feast day.¹²⁸ Because this legend was most often celebrated through theatrical performance, the prominence of it in Burgos in the early sixteenth century offers preliminary evidence that the play was performed there. The print representing this tale in the Burgos copy of the *Golden Legend* further supports the presence of theatrical performance in Burgos as prints of this scene were added to copies of the *Golden Legend* made in regions with documented evidence of the play's popularity.¹²⁹ Furthermore, although no texts of this play survive from late medieval Burgos, Charlotte Stern has argued that plays were likely performed in late medieval Castile even though the texts of many of these have either not yet been

¹²⁷ BL, IB53312, fol. 12v.

¹²⁸ Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile*, 35-37. Karl Young reproduces three different Latin texts of this play and one vernacular version of the story all dating the eleventh and twelfth centuries (*The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 324-337). Although these were originally in Latin, Donavan's study *The Liturgical Drama in Medieval Spain* suggests that religious plays were also performed in the vernacular by the end of the twelfth century (73). Both Donavan and Stern agree that vernacular texts of this type were seldom preserved (Donavan, 73; Stern, 3-21).

¹²⁹ In at least two other instances, woodcut images of this legend appear in copies of the *Golden Legend*, one from Lyon dating to 1488 and another from England dating to 1493. Fredell, "The Three Clerks," 190.

discovered or do not survive.¹³⁰ This observation, coupled with both documented evidence of a growing popularity of theater in Castile during the last quarter of the fifteenth century¹³¹ and the multiple depictions of St. Nicholas reviving the scholars present in Burgos around the turn of the sixteenth century, would make it reasonable to assume that the St. Nicholas play might have been one of many performed. Were this the case, the Church of San Nicolás, as a church dedicated to the saint, or the nearby cathedral, as the seat of the diocese, would have been probable venues for the performance.¹³² Therefore, to the early sixteenth-century viewer, the scene of St. Nicholas reviving the scholars would have been one of the most familiar legends of St. Nicholas on Polanco's altarpiece since even the illiterate would have seen the play performed each year on the saint's feast day. Its familiarity would both mandate its inclusion in the narrative sequence and ensure that viewers could recognize the narrative.

The eight scenes of the St. Nicholas legend depicted on Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece, along with the accompanying statue of the saint, represented a personal and public manifestation of Polanco's devotion to St. Nicholas. Each of these narrative scenes served to honor the link between the patron and the saint, visually reflecting Polanco's request that St. Nicholas serve as one of his "advocates before the Holy Trinity."¹³³ In an effort to secure his own salvation, Polanco included within this narrative sequence not only those scenes that would best honor his own dying wishes and connections to the saint but also those that would enhance the status of St. Nicholas by honoring his piety and those that would stimulate the viewer's devotion to the saint in order to enhance the saint's status before God.

¹³⁰ Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile*, 3-6 and 21-25.

¹³¹ Ronald E. Surtz, "Spain: Catalan and Castilian Drama," in *The Theatre of Medieval Europe: New Research in Early Drama*, ed. Eckhard Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 189.

¹³² Stern, *The Medieval Theater in Castile*, 58.

¹³³ "Abogados ante la Santa Trinidad." Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

Chapter 4

Saintly Intercession and the Merchant Patron

While the statue of St. Nicholas and the narrative of his life occupy a prominent space on the funerary retable that Gonzalo López de Polanco commissioned for the high altar of the Church of San Nicolás in Burgos, the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity and the accompanying Celestial Court are equally important to interpreting the altarpiece (Figure 1-1). Located at the center of this work, above the episodes of the life of St. Nicholas, the Coronation of the Virgin is framed by a ring of angels, St. Michael, and the four Evangelists (Figure 4-1). At either side of this composition, six registers contain portrayals of individual saints, together comprising the Heavenly Kingdom (Figure 1-1). As a whole, the representation of Mary and the saints before the Trinity is a visual manifestation of Polanco's request that they should serve as his "advocates before the Holy Trinity."¹ Moreover, much as the narrative of St. Nicholas reflected Polanco's personal devotional practices as well as aspects of his life and charitable work, the individual saints depicted as part of the Celestial Court also echo these elements of Polanco's life.

In addition to considering the manner in which the representation of the Celestial Court and the portrayals of the individual saints reflect Polanco's piety and his concerns for the afterlife, this chapter also seeks to place the altarpiece in the context of other Castilian works commissioned at the turn of the sixteenth century. Despite widespread devotion to the life and Passion of Christ in late medieval

¹ "todos los Santos y Santas de la corte celestyal, para que sean mis Abogados ante la Santa Trenidad." (unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own). Matías Martínez Burgos has published a complete transcription of the testament, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos: Los Colonia y Gil de Siloe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 138, no 2 (1956): 153-227 (see page 177 for the passage on the Holy Trinity). The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos (hereafter ADB), "Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco," San Nicolás, signatura 23.



Figure 4-1: Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

Europe,² this subject did not become one of significant interest in Castile until the end of the fifteenth century.³ As this chapter will demonstrate, even once texts and images celebrating Christ's life and Passion reached Iberia, they did not permeate the religious lives of all social classes simultaneously. Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece is one of several carved retables commissioned in Burgos at the turn of the sixteenth century that focuses almost entirely on the representation of saints' effigies and lives, virtually ignoring the life of Christ and his Passion, which in Polanco's retable are limited to two scenes of the Passion in the *banco* (with clear Eucharistic significance due to their placement just above the altar) and two episodes of Christ's Infancy above the tombs.⁴ Thus, along with contemporary funerary altarpieces commissioned by lay patrons in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgos,

² Many studies address devotion to the life of Christ and the Passion in late medieval Europe. Some include: Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1989); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); James Clifton, *The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150-1800* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 1997); Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies and the Levant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "The Use of the Images in the Pastoral Care of Nuns: The Case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (1989): 20-46; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death. The Arts, Religion and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kathryn A. Smith, "The Neville of Hornby Hours and the Design of Literate Devotion," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 1 (1999): 72-92.

³ Chiyo Ishikawa, "La Llave de Palo: Isabel La Católica as Patron of Religious Literature and Painting," in *Isabel la Católica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays*, ed. David A. Boruchoff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 113; Cynthia Robinson, *Imag(in)ing Passions: Christ, the Virgin, Images and Devotion in a Multi-Confessional Castile (14th-15th c.)* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, forthcoming 2011); Cynthia Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted: Valladolid's *Cristianos nuevos* and the *Retablo de don Sancho de Rojas* (1415)," *Speculum* 83, no.1 (2008): 113; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Los Reyes Católicos: Paisaje artístico de una monarquía* (Madrid: Nerea, 1993), 146-147.

⁴ The *banco* is the lowest horizontal register on the retable. This space can also be called the *predella*.

which include altarpieces from the Salamanca Chapel at the Church of San Lesmes (Figure 4-2), the Chapel of the Condestables in the Cathedral of Burgos (Figure 4-3) as well as the Chapel of the Kings and the Chapel of the Buena Mañana at the Church of San Gil (Figures 4-4 and 4-5), Polanco's commission demonstrates a continued trend toward lay devotion to the saints, marking the subject of these retables as distinct in comparison to the emerging depictions of Christ's life and Passion that were particularly popular among the royalty and ecclesiastical elite during the reign of Isabel I.

Devotion to Christ and the Passion during the Reign of Isabel I

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, during the final years of the reign of Queen Isabel I, Spain was transitioning from a medieval to an early modern society as it became a unified nation that was increasingly engaged in interchange with the rest of Europe. Among the changes that occurred during this period, Christ's life and Passion were becoming prominent subjects in devotional literature and artistic commissions, a movement that was coupled with the Queen's reforms of the secular clergy and monasteries as well as her efforts toward achieving religious unity in Spain.⁵ Isabel's interest in the life of Christ and his Passion is evident in the many books and manuscripts that were produced in Castile and Aragon at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. Among these, five original texts recounting the life of Christ and/or his Passion were published in Castile between 1490 and 1505. As part of wider efforts by Isabel and Ferdinand to promote religious

⁵ Numerous sources address Isabel's religious reforms and goal of religious unity. A selection of these include: Tariscio de Azcona, *La elección y reforma del episcopado español en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1960); Tarsicio de Azcona, *Isabel la Católica: Estudio crítico de su vida y su reinado* (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 1993), 475-809; José García Oro, *La reforma de los religiosos españoles en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Valladolid, 1969); Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen. Life and Times*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 359-362; Luis Suárez Fernández, "Dimensiones religiosas en Isabel la Católica," in *Isabel la Católica. La magnificencia de un reinado* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2004), 49-62.

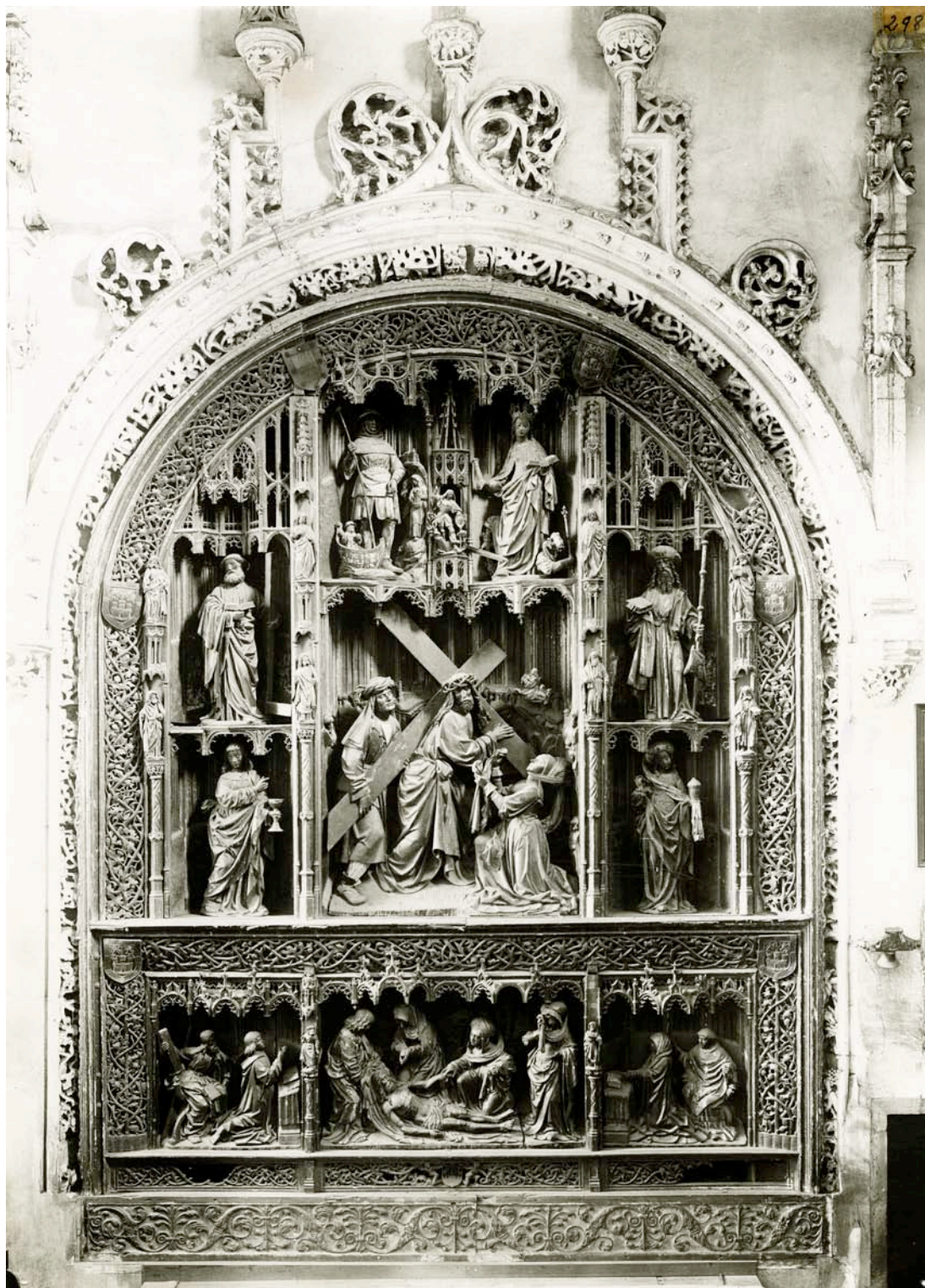


Figure 4-2: Altarpiece Commissioned by García de Salamanca, Church of San Lesmes, Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-2988).

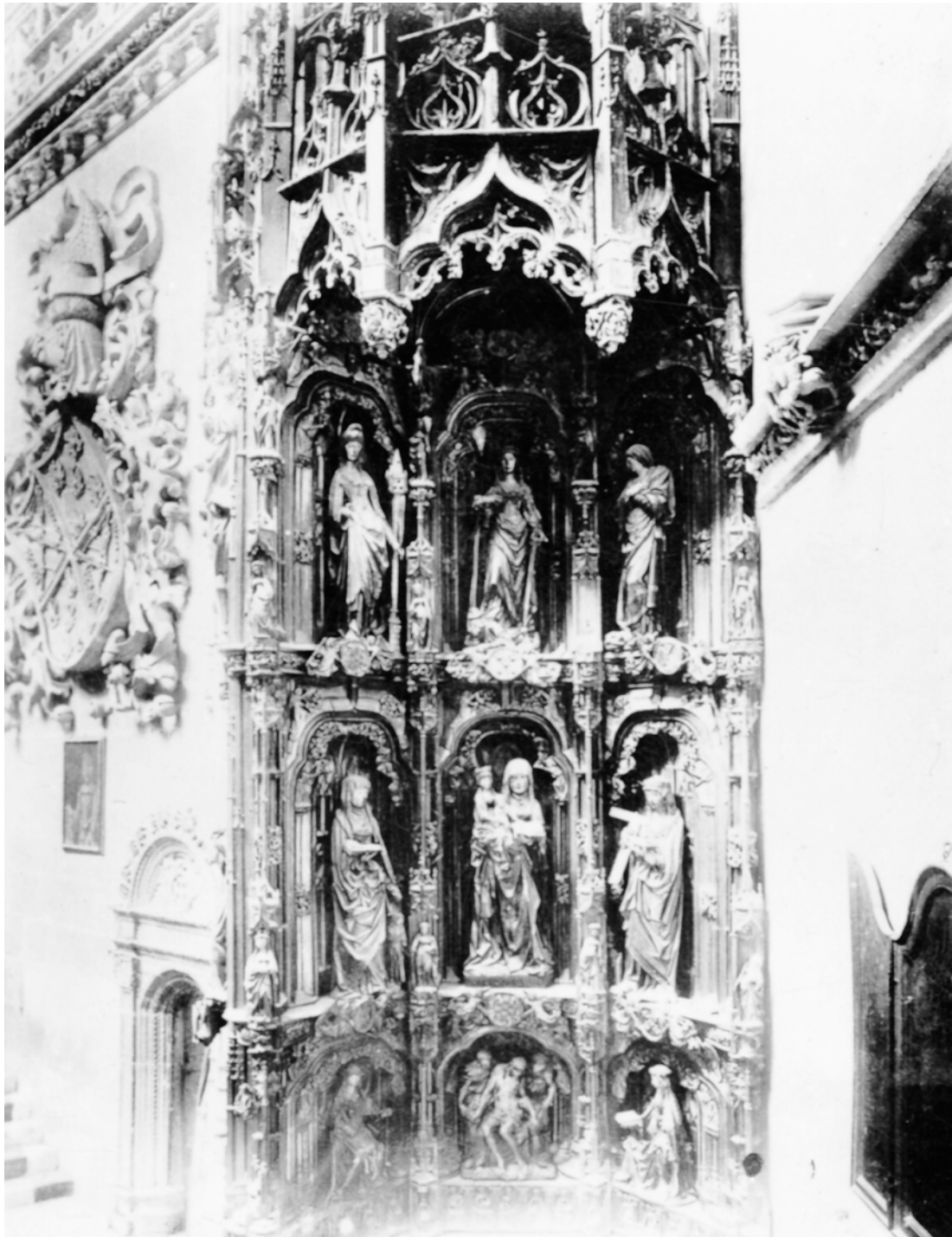


Figure 4-3: Altarpiece Commissioned by Mencía de Mendoza, Chapel of the Condestables, Burgos Cathedral (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-7007).

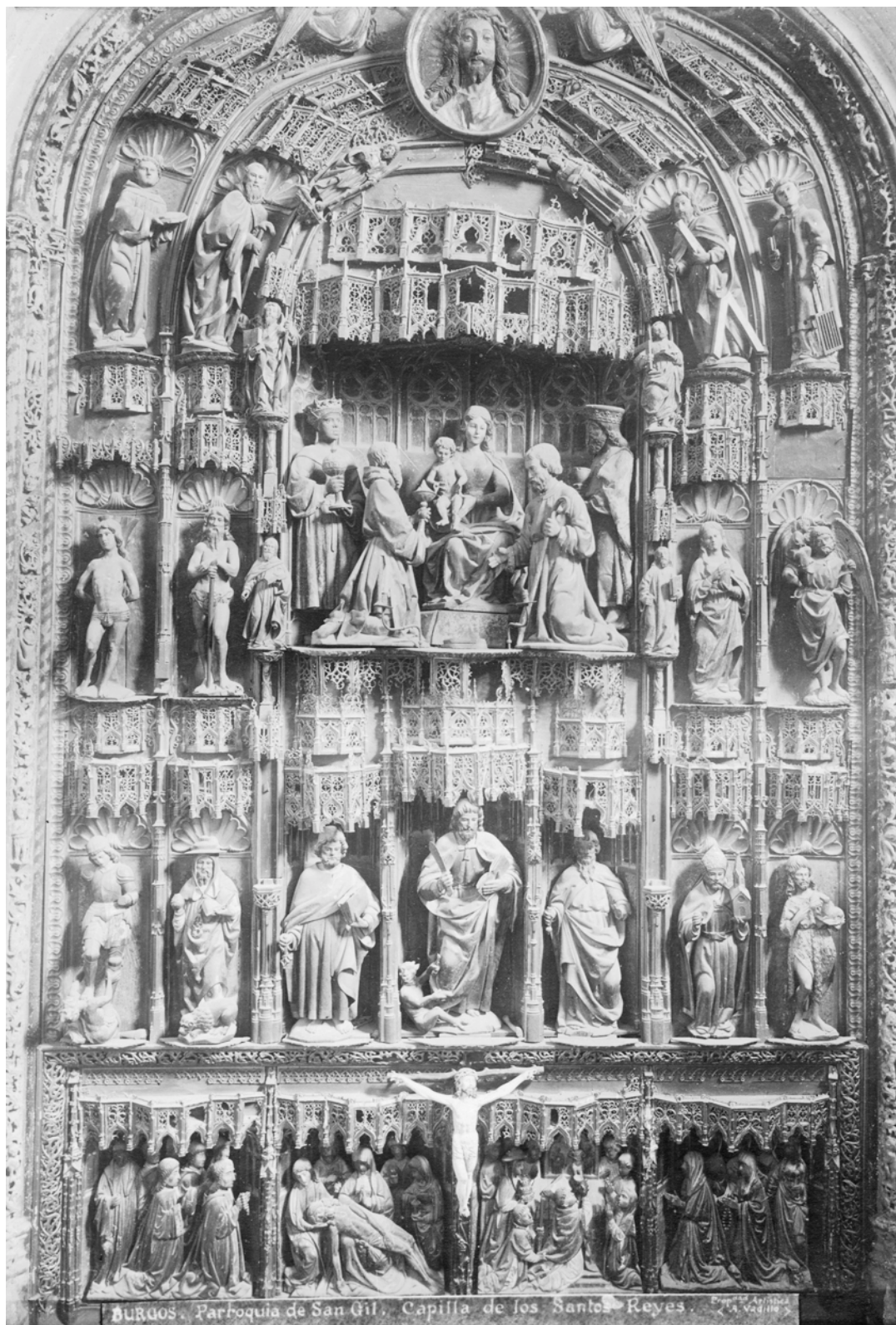


Figure 4-4: High altarpiece, Chapel of the Kings, Church of San Gil, Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-7413).

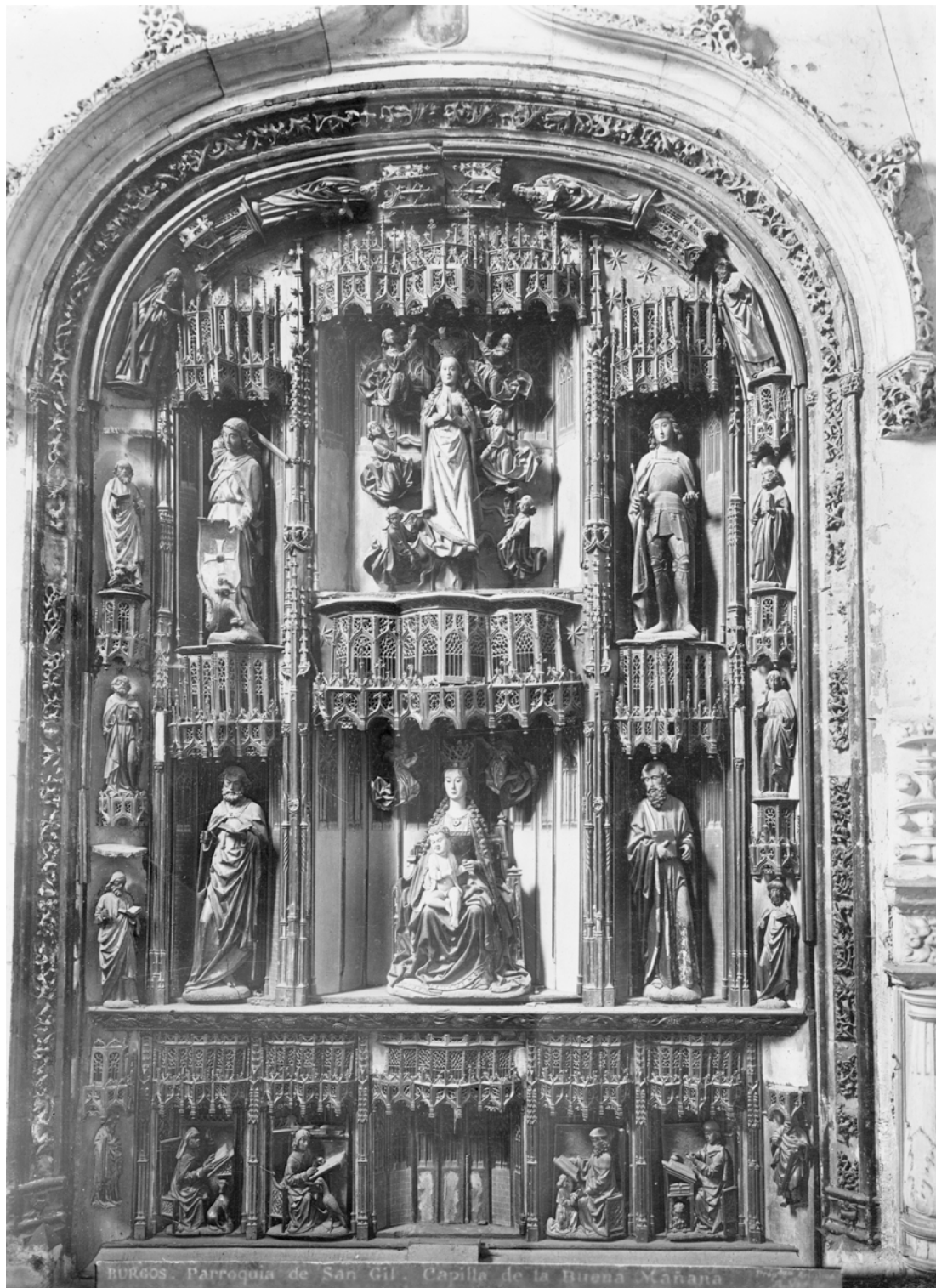


Figure 4-5 High Altarpiece, Chapel of the Buena Mañana, Church of San Gil, Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-7416).

uniformity throughout the peninsula, these treatises were conservative in their approach and “they embod[ied] the restrained religious temperament of Isabel and her advisors.”⁶ The newly published original works, all written in the vernacular, included Juan de Padilla’s *Retablo de la Vida de Cristo*, Comendador Román’s *Coplas de la Pasión con la Resurrección*, Diego de San Pedro’s *La Pasión Trobada*, Pedro Ximenes de Prexano’s *Luzero de la Vida Cristiana*, and Andrés de Li’s *Tesoro de la Pasión*.⁷ In addition to these new publications, Isabel also encouraged Castilian translations of certain religious texts that had been popular elsewhere in Europe. The most notable of this group was Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita Christi*, which Isabel had translated into Castilian between 1499 and 1501; it became available in print by 1503,⁸ more than 100 years after it had been circulating in Italy and northern Europe.

Along with these texts, Isabel’s devotion to Christ’s life and Passion is also evident in two of the altarpieces commissioned by the Queen, one for her private use and the other to accompany the tomb of her father, Juan II, in the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores, located in Burgos. The first of these retables originally consisted of at least forty-seven panels, although only twenty-seven of these can be

⁶ Ishikawa, *The “Retablo de Isabel la Católica,”* 29.

⁷ Ishikawa, *The “Retablo de Isabel la Católica,”* 29. There are modern editions of several of these texts: Cartuxano, “Canticos entresacados de las tres tablas del retablo de la vida de Cristo,” in *Colección de obras poéticas españolas dividida en tres partes* (London: Carlos Wood, 1843), 1-24; El Comendador Román, *Coplas de la pasión con la resurrección* (London: British Museum, 1936); Diego de San Pedro, *La pasión trobada*, ed. Dorothy Sherman Severin (Napoli, 1973). Secondary sources that address the remaining texts include: Laura Delbrugge, “Text as Faith in Andrés de Li’s *Thesoro de la Passion*,” *Catalan Review* 20, no.1 (2006): 263-272; Laura Delbrugge “Ties that Bind (and Print): Pablo Hurus and Andrés de Li,” *La Corónica* 31, no 1 (2002): 41-47; Dorothy S. Severin, “Diego de San Pedro from Manuscript to Print: The Curious Case of ‘La Pasión Trobada’, ‘Las Siete Angustias’, and *Arnalte y Lucenda*,” *La Corónica* 29, no. 1 (2000): 187-191. Conrad Haebler provides details about the original printed texts: *Bibliografía Ibérica del Siglo XV: Enumeración de todos los libros impresos en España y Portugal hasta el año de 1500* (Madrid, Julio Ollero, 1992), 91, 280-281, 291-292, 347-349.

⁸ Ishikawa, *The “Retablo de Isabel la Católica,”* 42 n. 58. A copy of the manuscript is documented in Isabel’s personal collection as early as 1493. Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, *Libros, tapices y cuadros que coleccionó Isabel la Católica* (Madrid, Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1950), 60. A printed copy was not commissioned until 1502-03 and was translated by Ambrosio Montesino. Rogelio García Mateo, *El misterio de la vida de Cristo en los ‘Ejercicios’ ignacianos y en el ‘Vita Christi Cartujano.’ Antología de textos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores cristianos, 2002).

accounted for today.⁹ Chiyo Ishikawa, who has authored one of the most recent studies of the panels, believes that Isabel had intended that these panels be assembled into a retable.¹⁰ However, each panel is small, measuring approximately 21 by 15 centimeters, making it probable that they were intended for Isabel's private, devotional use rather than for public display.¹¹ Of the forty-seven panels inventoried, forty-five represent episodes from the life of Christ,¹² demonstrating that the devotional aid was dedicated to this theme. Moreover, the majority of the scenes of Christ's life depict moments from his Passion and Resurrection with a remarkable number of scenes from his Ministry and few from his Infancy. Although the Infancy of Christ and portrayals of the Virgin had been components of Castilian altarpieces throughout the late medieval period, so much so that in her study of late medieval Spanish altarpieces Judith Berg Sobré states that their presence was "always assured" even when the subject of the retable was hagiographic rather than Christological,¹³ Christ's Passion was not frequently represented until the final twenty-five years of the fifteenth century, during the reign of Isabel I.¹⁴ Moreover, as Cynthia Robinson demonstrates in her forthcoming book, *Imag(in)ing Passions: Christ, the Virgin, Images and Devotion in a Multi-Confessional Castile (14th-15th c.)*, many earlier life of Christ retables were intended as didactic tools for recent converts rather than as devotional aids.¹⁵ In this regard, Isabel's small panels of the life of Christ demonstrate the

⁹ Ishikawa discusses the sale of these panels in detail. *The "Retablo de Isabel la Católica,"* 5-15.

¹⁰ Ishikawa, *The "Retablo de Isabel la Católica,"* 24-25.

¹¹ Cynthia Robinson also makes this observation in her forthcoming book: *Imag(in)ing Passions*, chapter 5.

¹² The other two panels depict the St. Michael, the Angel Gabriel, St. John, St. James Major, St. Peter and St. Paul. Ishikawa reproduces and transcribes the inventory of painted panels (*The "Retablo de Isabel la Católica,"* 6-10). The original is held in the Archivo General de Simancas. CMC 1ª época, leg. 192, fol. 20.

¹³ *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350-1500* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 141 and 197.

¹⁴ Ishikawa, "*La Llave de Palo*," 113; Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted," 113; Yarza Luaces, *Los Reyes Católicos*, 146-147.

¹⁵ Chapter 1.

Queen's desire to use life of Christ images for private contemplation, and the presence of multiple Passion scenes within this group suggests that these episodes were, at least for Isabel, a subject of devotional interest.

The second altarpiece commissioned by Isabel with a similar Christological focus was the stone retablo made for the high altar of the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores in Burgos.¹⁶ This altarpiece, which was the work of Gil Siloe and Diego de la Cruz, was completed between 1496 and 1499 and accompanied the tomb of Isabel's father, Juan II. Episodes of Christ's Passion, dominate the iconographic program of this retablo. The Crucified Christ is at the center and scenes of the Passion, which include the *Agony in the Garden*, the *Flagellation*, *Christ Bearing the Cross* and the *Pietà*, are enclosed within a circle of angels surrounding the *Crucifixion*. Below this central composition, four other episodes from the life of Christ: the *Annunciation*, the *Epiphany*, the *Last Supper*, and the *Betrayal* are present in the *banco* of the retablo, with the latter two scenes alluding to Christ's sacrifice for man and thereby offering a connection to the celebration of the Eucharist that occurred on the altar below the retablo. Accompanying these scenes, several saints are also represented prominently on the retablo; they include: St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, St. James, St. Peter and St. Paul. Although more saints are present here than in the retablo commissioned for Isabel's private use, both works, with their undeniable focus on Christ's life and Passion, demonstrate Isabel's devotion to Christ in much the same way as the many Christological texts commissioned by the Queen.

Aside from Isabel's interest in Christ's life and Passion, two Passion sequences commissioned in Burgos during the late fifteenth century demonstrate a similar focus

¹⁶ Francisco Tarín y Juaneda, *La real cartuja de Miraflores (Burgos) su historia y descripción* (Burgos, 1896), 146-147; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, "El retablo mayor de la Cartuja de Miraflores," in *Actas del Congreso internacional sobre Gil Siloe y la escultura de su época: Burgos 13-16 octubre de 1999* (Burgos: Institución Fernán González, 2001), 207-238; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *La Cartuja de Miraflores: II El Retablo* (Iberdrola, 2007).

on these themes among ecclesiastical patrons, showing that these new trends in devotional practice extended beyond the royal court. The first of these is a series of eleven panels, each measuring approximately 1.5 by 1.5 meters, representing the life and Passion of Christ that were once part of a reliquary cabinet made for Burgos Cathedral at the request of the cathedral chapter.¹⁷ According to a document dated to 1509, Alonso de Sedano completed the panels (likely with the help of the Master of Balbases, though no second artist is mentioned in the document) between 1495 and 1496.¹⁸ The series includes four scenes from the Infancy of Christ, the *Annunciation*, the *Nativity*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, and the *Presentation in the Temple*, as well as seven scenes of Christ's Passion, the *Betrayal*, the *Flagellation*, the *Crowning with Thorns*, *Ecce Homo*, the *Road to Calvary*, the *Crucifixion on the Ground*, and the *Entombment*.

The second ecclesiastical commission consists of a series of sculpted scenes of the Passion of Christ that Felipe Vigarny made for the ambulatory of the Cathedral of Burgos beginning in 1498.¹⁹ According to documentation in the Cathedral Archive, in July of 1498, Simón de Colonia, the master builder of the Cathedral of Burgos, commissioned “maestre Felipe” on behalf of the cathedral chapter to complete four sculpted scenes of the Passion.²⁰ Carved of limestone from Hontoria, the same material used for Polanco's retable, the Passion episodes of the ambulatory sequence include the *Road to Calvary*, the *Crucifixion*, the *Decent from the Cross*, and the *Resurrection*, with images of the Apostles and figures from the Old Testament

¹⁷ María Pilar Silva Maroto, “La pintura española sobre tabla de los siglos XV y XVI en la catedral de Burgos,” in *Las pinturas sobre tabla de los siglos XV y XVI de la Catedral de Burgos*, ed. Juan Carlos Elorza (Burgos: Fundación para el apoyo de la cultura, 1994), 96-220; María Pilar Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana, Burgos y Palencia: obras en tabla y sarga* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1990), 596-611 and 740-764.

¹⁸ Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca*, 609.

¹⁹ Beatrice Gilman Proske, *Castilian Sculpture: Gothic to Renaissance* (New York, 1951), 223-233; Isabel del Río de la Hoz, *El escultor Felipe Bigarny (h. 1470-1542)* (Salamanca: Junta de Castilla y León, 2001), 39-53.

²⁰ Río de la Hoz, *El escultor Felipe Bigarny*, 39.

positioned above and below these scenes. Because of their location at eye-level, the scale of each image (all measuring more than 1.5 by 1.5 meters), and the precision used in each relief, the details of the Passion scenes are highly visible and would have been easily contemplated by viewers. Based on the iconographic content of these two commissions at the Cathedral of Burgos, it is clear that Christ's life and Passion played an important role in the devotional lives of the ecclesiastical elite in late fifteenth-century Burgos.

The heightened attention to Christ's life and Passion at the end of the fifteenth-century, through the texts produced at the court of the Catholic Kings as well as commissions featuring the life of Christ and his Passion by royal and ecclesiastical patrons, would have made it difficult for a wealthy, educated lay person like Polanco to be ignorant of the new developments in Christian devotion. However, examination of Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece at San Nicolás provides preliminary evidence that, while the laity might have been aware of the popularity of images and texts honoring Christ's Passion, they nonetheless remained devoted to the saints, representing hagiographic themes in their commissions and seeking saintly protection. In this regard, the Castilian laity also had devotional practices distinct from those of the laity elsewhere in Europe, where devotion to Christ's Passion had become more popular.²¹ In this chapter, I analyze the depictions of the life of Christ, the Coronation of the Virgin, and the Celestial Court on Gonzalo López de Polanco's funerary altarpiece, demonstrating Polanco's devotion to the cult of saints and his belief that their intercession would be crucial to his own salvation. First, I address the sparse treatment of the life of Christ by examining the four narrative scenes of his life at the base of the retable. Then, I consider the significance of the Coronation of the Virgin and the Celestial Court, focusing specifically on Polanco's devotion to many of

²¹ See note 2 above.

the individual saints depicted as part of this composition. Finally, by examining the altarpiece alongside contemporary lay commissioned retables from Burgos, I suggest that Polanco's retable reflects a larger trend in lay devotion.

Life of Christ on the Polanco Retable

Representations of the life of Christ on the Polanco retable, though not entirely neglected, are limited to only four scenes at the base of the altarpiece, by no means forming a cohesive narrative and differing greatly from contemporary depictions of the theme in royal and ecclesiastical commissions. The first two of these scenes, located on the pinnacles above the sepulchers of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother, depict the Annunciation and the Epiphany (Figures 4-6 and 4-7). These, along with two episodes of Christ's Passion, the *Last Supper* and the *Agony in the Garden*, positioned in the *banco* between figures of the donors at prayer, would have been clearly visible from most areas of the church (Figures 4-8 and 4-9). Together, the two depictions of Christ's Infancy and the two portrayals of his Passion, refer to Christ's sacrifice for the redemption of man and his role in eternal salvation, fitting themes for a funerary altarpiece. Furthermore, the *Last Supper* references the celebration of the Eucharist, which occurred at the altar just below the retable.

The first two scenes of Christ's life, the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Magi*, are located above the tombs of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother Alfonso de Polanco. The placement of these episodes above the two Polanco sepulchers is not surprising since episodes of Christ's Infancy were common in the ornamentation of funerary monuments in late medieval Burgos.²² In Eiximenis' *Vida*

²² María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "La Anunciación en los sepulcros góticos burgaleses," *Reales Sitios* 78 (1985): 29-37; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria en Burgos* (Burgos: Diputación Provincial de Burgos, 1988), 31-33; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "La Visitación y el Nacimiento en los sepulcros góticos burgaleses," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 199 (1982): 307-316; Carlos Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad en Burgos en el siglo XVI* (Burgos: Diputación de Burgos, 2001), 345-346 and 349-350.



Figure 4-6: Annunciation from the Tomb of Alfonso de Polanco, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 4-7: Epiphany from the Tomb of Gonzalo López de Polanco, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

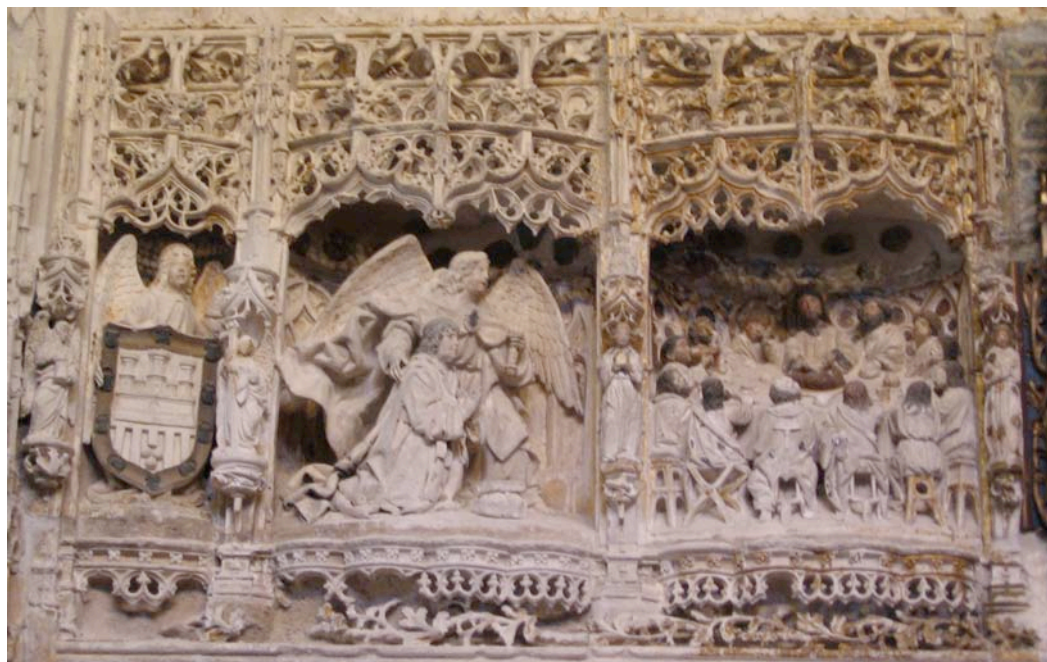


Figure 4-8: *Banco* with Gonzalo López de Polanco and the Last Supper, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

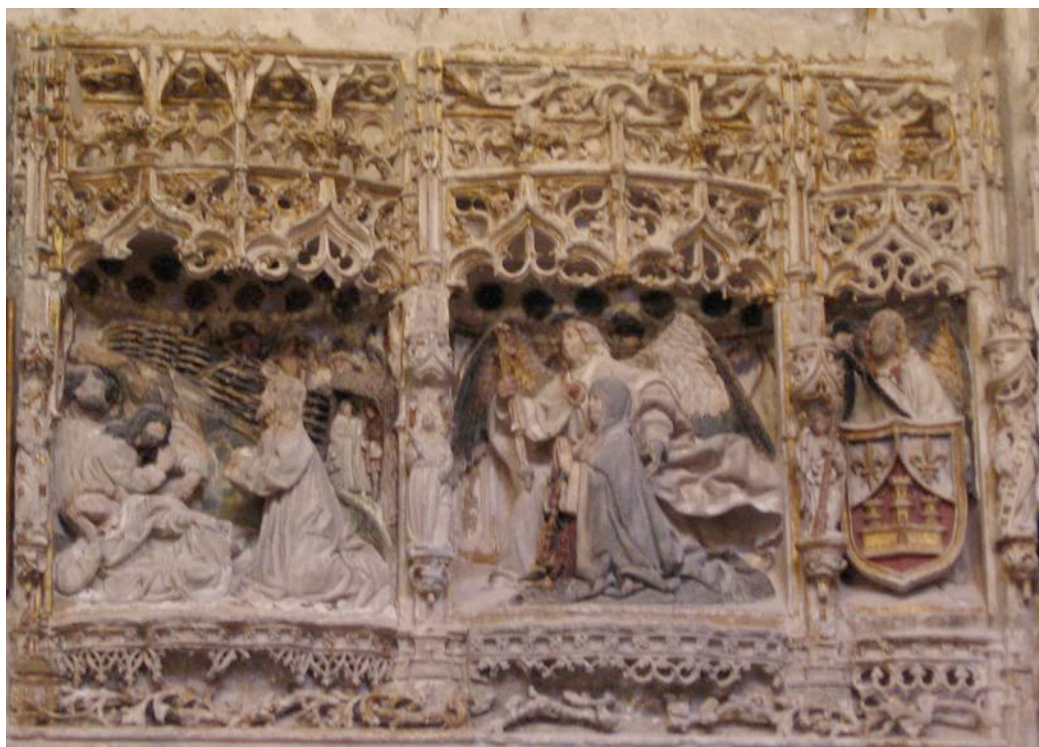


Figure 4-9: *Banco* with Leonor de Miranda and the Agony in the Garden, High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

de Cristo, which was circulating in Castilian by 1430, Christ's Infancy was associated with his divinity,²³ and in the funerary context this would have referenced his role in the salvation of man. The *Annunciation*, which is depicted on the pinnacles over the sarcophagus of Alfonso de Polanco, was one of the Infancy scenes most frequently represented in funerary sculpture, possibly because of an association between this initial event in Christ's life and his ultimate redemption of man.²⁴ A passage celebrating the feast of the Annunciation from the *Golden Legend* printed in Burgos (c. 1500) connects this event to human salvation by stating that Christ came to earth "to repair the fall of man... [and] to mend the damages..."²⁵ and that Mary was crucial to this process since her "grace makes peace between God and man and [leads to] the destruction of death and the restoration of life."²⁶ On the altarpiece, the adjacent *Adoration of the Magi*, located on the pinnacles above Gonzalo López de Polanco's sepulcher, further alludes to redemption by displaying "God's manifestation in the flesh."²⁷

Between the tombs of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his brother Alfonso, the *banco* of the altarpiece contains two scenes of Christ's Passion separated today by a Baroque Crucifix and flanked by portraits of the donors at prayer.²⁸ The first of these episodes, the *Last Supper*, has a particularly clear function in that it references the

²³ Cynthia Robinson, *Imag(in)ing Passions*, chapter 1.

²⁴ Gómez Bárcena, "La Anunciación en los sepulcros," 29-37; Gómez Bárcena, *Escultura gótica funeraria*, 31-33; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 350.

²⁵ "por reparar la cayda delos o[m]bres...por e[n]me[n]dar el daño" London: British Library (hereafter BL), "Comienca la leyendo delos sactos," IB53312, fol. 70v.

²⁶ "la gracia faze paz entre dios y los ombres y la destuycion de la muerte y la reparacion de la vida." BL IB53312, fol. 71r.

²⁷ Gertrude Schiller, *The Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 1: 106.

²⁸ We do not know what originally occupied the central space between the *Last Supper* and the *Agony in the Garden*, but the original object was likely freestanding since it is no longer intact. It may have been an earlier version of the Crucified Christ, but could also have been a statue of the Virgin and Child or a container to hold the Eucharist. Jesús López Sobrino mentions that the Baroque niche at the center and the enclosed Crucifix are the work of Saturnino López. *La iglesia de San Nicolás de Bari* (Burgos: AMABAR, S. L., 2000), 67.

celebration of the Eucharist, which would have occurred at the altar just below the retable (Figure 4-8). The iconography of this scene is simpler than that of many of its contemporaries. Here, Christ is at the center of the group of twelve Apostles who are equally spaced around the table, some with their backs to the viewer, and the table itself holds the paschal lamb in the center. In Burgos, two other contemporary images of the Last Supper, one in the *banco* of the Miraflores retable and the other a panel from the Church of San Esteban (c. 1490-1495), have more complex iconography.²⁹ In each of these examples, the Apostles are more individualized through various details. For example, the two scenes show John with his head inclined toward Christ and Judas with a bag of money in his hand. Likewise, the Miraflores retable includes a depiction of Mary Magdalene bathing Christ's feet in the foreground, a reference to her penitence at the house of Simon the Pharisee.³⁰ With all of these additional details absent from the *Last Supper* on Polanco's retable, what remains is a simple composition referencing the celebration of the Eucharist.

Opposite the *Last Supper*, and also in the *banco*, the second episode of Christ's Passion, the *Agony in the Garden*, has more complex associations and alludes to the entire Passion sequence and to a set of Passion paintings commissioned by the Polanco family for the Church of San Nicolás (Figure 4-9). Although this scene is included in several contemporary retables, its presence here alongside only a scene of the Last Supper is unusual as it most often appears at the start to a longer sequence of Christ's Passion. For example, the *Agony in the Garden* is the first of eight episodes of the Passion painted by Fray Alonso de Zamora between 1500 and 1510 for the Monastery of Oña.³¹ Likewise, at Miraflores the scene is part of a central portion of

²⁹ On the *Last Supper* at San Esteban: Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenco*, 836-838; on the *Last Supper* at Miraflores: Yarza Luaces, *La Cartuja de Miraflores*, 41-43.

³⁰ Yarza Luaces, *La Cartuja de Miraflores*, 41-43.

³¹ These panels are now housed in the Museo Arqueológico de Burgos (Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenco*, 869-883).

the retable depicting five episodes of the Passion and is followed by the *Flagellation*, the *Carrying of the Cross*, the *Crucifixion* and the *Pietà*, which Joaquín Yarza Luaces indicates together form the five sorrows of the Passion meditated during recitation of the rosary.³² Because Christ's Agony in the Garden is often represented at the start of Passion narratives, it could serve as a reminder of the entire Passion sequence, inviting the viewer to privately contemplate those episodes that are not displayed on the retable. Moreover, by alluding to Christ's Passion, the single scene also serves as a reminder of the Polanco family's piety and generosity to their parish since, by referencing the Passion cycle, the *Agony in the Garden* alludes to the nine paintings of the Passion that the family had donated to the Church of San Nicolás for use during Holy Week.³³

Through these four scenes of the Infancy and Passion of Christ, Polanco celebrated Christ's sacrifice for man, doing so through selected, significant episodes rather than by depicting the type of complete, detailed narrative found in contemporary commissions by royal and ecclesiastical patrons, such as those at the Monastery of Miraflores and the Cathedral of Burgos. The reduced emphasis on the life of Christ in Polanco's retable and his specification that the Passion paintings were only for use during Holy Week are particularly indicative of his limited devotion to Christ's suffering, and this evidence indicates that he did not engage in frequent, fervent contemplation of the Passion. Instead, Polanco's altarpiece and testament indicate that he was most devoted to the saints and the Virgin, believing that they would be his most powerful intercessors in the afterlife. Therefore, rather than focusing on the Life of Christ, the majority of the altarpiece depicts the heavenly kingdom, honoring the saints and visually reflecting Polanco's desire that "the

³² Yarza Luaces, "El retablo mayor de la Cartuja," 211-214.

³³ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 221.

Virgin... and all of the saints of the Celestial Court [serve as his] advocates before the Holy Trinity.”³⁴

Intercession and Salvation: The Queen of Heaven

As the most powerful mediator between man and God, the Virgin occupies an honored and prominent space on Polanco’s retable, located at the center of the altarpiece above the statue of St. Nicholas and the narrative scenes of his life (Figure 4-1). As the Trinity crowns her, she kneels with her hands clasped in prayer and the Holy Spirit hovers above her; Christ and God are enthroned on either side. Eighteen rows of angels circle Mary and the Trinity with the Archangel St. Michael depicted at the base of the ring. On either side of the ring of angels, six rows of saints complete the representation of the Celestial Court (Figure 1-1).

Polanco’s depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin belongs to a tradition of representing the Virgin as the Queen of Heaven and as a mediator for mankind that emerged in France during the thirteenth century and spread throughout western Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³⁵ Beginning in the thirteenth century, the Coronation of the Virgin was featured on the tympana of a number of French cathedrals including those at Amiens (c.1220-1235), Chartres (c.1205-1210), and Paris (c. 1210).³⁶ These earliest portrayals of the scene show Christ crowning the Virgin, with Mary seated alongside Christ, often with her head bowed slightly. In some

³⁴ “todos los Santos y Santas de la corte celestyal, para que sean mis Abogados ante la Santa Trenidad.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 177. It is not clear what happened to these paintings after the sixteenth century, but they are no longer owned by the Church of San Nicolás.

³⁵ Eve Borsook, “Cults and Imagery at Sant’Ambrogio in Florence,” *Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz Mitteilungen* 25, no. 2 (1981): 167; Jill Dunkerton, et. al, *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in The National Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 45.

³⁶ M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, “The King of France and the Queen of Heaven: the Iconography of the Porte Rouge of Notre-Dame of Paris,” *Gesta* 39, no. 1 (2000): 58-72; Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral: Christ, Mary, Ecclesia* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1959), 56-65; Marcia R. Rickard, “The Iconography of the Virgin Portal at Amiens,” *Gesta* 22, no. 2 (1983): 147-157; Philippe Verdier, *Le couronnement de la Vierge. Les origines et les premiers développements d’un thème iconographique* (Montréal: Institut d’études médiévales, 1980), 113-152. Other cathedrals such as those at Laon (c. 1195-1205) and Senlis (c. 1170) depict the Virgin reigning alongside Christ without including the act of her Coronation.

variations, such as those at Chartres and Paris, an angel places a crown on the Virgin's head while Christ raises his hand to bless her. Most of these thirteenth-century Coronation scenes do not include the extensive Celestial Court found in later works, such as that commissioned by Polanco. Instead, in these thirteenth-century examples two or four angels flank the central composition with additional rows of angels and other holy personages in the archivolts.

The popularity of the Coronation of the Virgin in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain and Italy suggests that Gonzalo López de Polanco would have encountered images of this scene in both Florence and Burgos prior to commissioning his own retable.³⁷ In Spain, a number of representations of the Coronation date to this period and most were part of larger altarpieces, either occurring as part of a narrative cycle of the life of the Virgin or as one of the panels in the central *calle* of the retable.³⁸ In instances when the Coronation is part of the narrative sequence, it is afforded no more prominence than the other episodes of the Virgin's life.³⁹ For example, in the Chapel of St. Michael at the Clarisan convent of Pedralbes in Barcelona, the Coronation of the Virgin appears as part of a fresco cycle of the Joys and Sorrows of the Virgin that was completed by Ferrer Bassa between 1343 and 1346 and was intended for private devotional use by the nuns of the convent.⁴⁰ In this

³⁷ Polanco's testament indicates that his business involved travel to Florence. Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 188-190.

³⁸ The *calle* is the vertical arrangements of panels in a retable. Typically the panels in the central *calle* are largest and represent the most important scenes in the altarpiece.

³⁹ The *Coronation of the Virgin* is represented as an episode from the life of Christ in other instances as well. These include a panel of the Coronation by Martín de Soria now in the MNAC, Barcelona and a panel of the Coronation that was part of a retable of the Life of the Virgin by Juan de Nalda from the convent of Santa Clara in Palencia (this panel is now in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Lyon, France). Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol 1-14 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930-1966), 8: 362-363; Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca*, 815-816.

⁴⁰ Mojmír Svatopluk Frinta, "Evidence of the Italian Influence on Catalan Panel Painting of the Fourteenth Century," in *Actas del XXIII Congreso Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1976), 1: 361-371; Georgiana Goddard King, "The Journey of Ferrer Bassa," *Art Bulletin* 16, no. 2 (1934): 116-122; Millard Meiss, "Italian Style in Catalonia and a 14th century Catalan Workshop," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 4 (1941): 45-87; Post, *A History of Spanish*

instance, the Coronation is one of the Joys of the Virgin and is equal in size to the other episodes of her life. The iconography here is typical: she is crowned by Christ and accompanied by a ring of angels who mark the event as occurring within the celestial sphere. In other instances, Spanish retables include Mary's coronation as part of the central *calle*, indicating that the scene is one of greater importance than other events in the Virgin's life.⁴¹ For example, a fifteenth-century retablo of the life of the Virgin from the Cathedral of Teruel includes the *Coronation* at the center of the retablo; its placement just below the *Crucifixion* suggesting the Virgin's intercessory role.⁴²

While the Coronation of the Virgin was prevalent in Spanish altarpieces, those representations of this theme that Polanco would have most likely encountered came directly from Burgos and Florence, both cities where Polanco conducted business,⁴³ and these images of the Coronation also provide the closest parallels for the appearance and function of Polanco's altarpiece. A single example from Burgos, a depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin by the Holy Trinity from a fifteenth-century stained glass window at the Church of San Estaban, the parish adjacent to San Nicolás, has a similar format to Polanco's *Coronation*, with the Virgin kneeling in prayer at the center and the Trinity surrounding her as they place the crown on her head.⁴⁴ In Florence, the Coronation of the Virgin was frequently featured in altarpieces during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Fourteenth-century examples include a work by Jacopo di Cione for the Church of San Pier Maggiore, completed during the second

Painting, 2:175-220; Manuel Trens, *Ferrer Bassa i les Pintures de Pedralbes* (Barcelona: Institut D'Estudis Catalans, 1936).

⁴¹ Further examples include the *Coronation of the Virgin* in a Valencian retablo of the Life of Christ by Pedro Nicoláu (Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, 7:788-789) and the *Coronation* in the retablo of the Life of the Virgin by Martin Torner for the Cathedral of Segorbe (Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, 8: 484)

⁴² Post attributes this retablo to the Florida Master (*A History of Spanish Painting*, 8: 474-475).

⁴³ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos, 188-190.

⁴⁴ German de Pamplona, *Iconografía de la santísima trinidad en el arte medieval español* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1970), 166.

half of the century, and Giotto's *Coronation of the Virgin* for the Baroncelli Chapel in the Church of Santa Croce (c.1332-1338).⁴⁵ Popularity of the theme in Florence clearly continued into the fifteenth century with commissions including two depictions of the scene by Filippo Lippi, one for the high altar of Sant' Ambrogio (c. 1439-1447) and the other for the Marsuppini chapel in San Sernardo (c. 1444),⁴⁶ as well as two altarpieces by Lorenzo Monaco, one for the Camaldolese Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli and the other for the Church of San Benedetto fuori della Porta a Pinti (c.1414).⁴⁷ The Florentine images offer the most significant parallels to Polanco's *Coronation of the Virgin* because, in addition to the angels that typically accompany the Coronation, they also include a substantial number of saints and prophets representing the Celestial Court.

Most all images of the Coronation of the Virgin honor the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, a role that makes her a valuable intercessor. In addition, representations of the Coronation also reference the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception,⁴⁸ a belief that Mary had no beginning or end but rather had always existed and was therefore free of original sin. The relationship between the Coronation of the Virgin and the Immaculate Conception developed because the Virgin's Coronation was celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption, a day that commemorates the ascension of Mary's body and soul into heaven and celebrates the timelessness of her existence. The doctrine of

⁴⁵ Dunkerton, *Giotto to Dürer*, 232; Margaret Finch, "Petrine Landmarks in Two Predella Panels by Jacopo di Cione," *Artibus et Historiae* 12, no. 23 (1991): 67-82; H. D. Gronau, "The San Pier Maggiore Altarpiece," *The Burlington Magazine* LXXXVII (1945): 139-44.

⁴⁶ Borsook, "Cults and Imagery at Sant' Ambrogio," 147-202; Jeffrey Ruda, "Style and Patronage in the 1440s: Two Altarpieces of the Coronation of the Virgin by Filippo Lippi," *Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz Mitteilungen* 28, no. 3 (1984): 363-384.

⁴⁷ George Bent, "A Patron for Lorenzo Monaco's Uffizi Coronation of the Virgin," *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 2 (2000): 348-354; George R. Bent, *Monastic Art in Lorenzo Monaco's Florence: Painting and Patronage in Santa Maria degli Angeli, 1300-1415* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 329-414; Dunkerton, *Giotto to Dürer*, 240-241; Dillian Gordon, "The Altarpiece by Lorenzo Monaco in the National Gallery, London," *The Burlington Magazine* 137, no. 1112 (1995): 723-727.

⁴⁸ Borsook, "Cults and Imagery at Sant' Ambrogio," 167-168; Dunkerton, *Giotto to Dürer*, 46-48; Mirella Levi D'Ancona, *The Iconography of the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: The College Art Association of America, 1957), 28-30.

the Immaculate Conception, which was initially promoted by the Franciscan Order during the twelfth century, enjoyed renewed interest during the fifteenth century and became a popular devotional theme in Castile during this period.⁴⁹ As a result, a number of altarpieces and sculptures commissioned in late fifteenth-century Castile featured iconography associated with the doctrine, including a retable celebrating the Infancy of the Virgin and the life of St. Anne that was commissioned by Archbishop Luis de Acuña for his funerary chapel in Burgos Cathedral.⁵⁰ On Polanco's retable, both the Coronation and the depiction of St. Anne with the Virgin and Child, located on the right side of the altarpiece in the fourth register of the Celestial Court, allude to the Immaculate Conception, and they relate to Polanco's desire to celebrate Mary's purity, a trait which was crucial to her honored role as the Queen of Heaven.⁵¹ However, although this reference to the Virgin's timeless existence is present, it is her heavenly authority as intercessor, which is brought about due to her purity and proximity to Christ, that is most significant to Polanco and that is evident in his request that she serve as one of his "advocates before the Holy Trinity."⁵² Further supporting this reading of the Virgin's role in Polanco's altarpiece is Véronique Plesch's observation that when the Virgin is crowned by the entire Trinity, she cannot be viewed as the "Bride of Christ," but she may still be understood as a powerful protector.⁵³ The organization of the Celestial Court on the San Nicolás retable

⁴⁹ Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 18 and 76; Felipe Pereda, "Mencia de Mendoza, Mujer del I Condestable de Castilla: El significado del patronazgo femenino en la Castilla del Siglo XV," in *Patronos y Coleccionistas: Los Condestables de Castilla y El Arte* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2005), 86; Suzanne L. Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 29-31.

⁵⁰ Joaquín Yarza Luaces, *Gil Siloe. El retablo de la Concepción en la capilla del Obispo Acuña* (Burgos, 2000), 77-122.

⁵¹ The Virgin as Queen of Heaven is not addressed in the Bible, but is developed in later exegetical texts. Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *The Sculptural Programs*, 56-65; Verdier, *Le couronnement de la Vierge*, 81-112.

⁵² Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 177.

⁵³ "Enguerrand Quarton's *Coronation of the Virgin*: This World and the Next, the Dogma and the Devotion, the Individual and the Community." *Historical Reflections* 26, no. 2 (2000): 198-199.

confirms that Polanco hoped Mary would serve as one of his intercessors in the afterlife since, on the altarpiece, she is positioned between Polanco's tomb and the Holy Trinity.

Intercession and Salvation: The Heavenly Court

Along with the Virgin as mediator, Polanco also desired the support of the entire Celestial Court. He identified specific saints from whom he wanted the greatest protection, and he made his wishes apparent both in his testament, by dedicating masses to them and donating money to associated monasteries and confraternities,⁵⁴ and on his altarpiece, by depicting them as his intercessors before the Holy Trinity. Thus, the saints portrayed in the six rows of Polanco's retable have two functions. First, the various members of the Celestial Court—martyrs, Apostles, virgins, confessors, prophets and patriarchs—are all included in the altarpiece. Along with Mary, the Trinity and the angels at the center of the retable, they collectively represent the entire Celestial Court present both for the spiritual benefit of the congregation and as Polanco's advocates.⁵⁵ Moreover, among this group of holy personages, many have a clear connection to Polanco and his family, suggesting that Polanco designed his own vision of the Celestial Court to include those saints who he thought would best serve as his intercessors in the afterlife.

By selecting saints for his altarpiece that he believed would best intercede on his behalf, Polanco was by no means the first patron to manipulate the makeup of the Celestial Court in order to favor selected saints of personal or local importance. For example, Lorenzo Monaco's *Coronation of the Virgin*, made for the Church of Santa

⁵⁴ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 177-183.

⁵⁵ Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 214-216; Peter Rolfe Monks, "A Focused View of All Saints and Enhanced Perspectives of the Court of Heaven in Select Fifteenth-Century French Miniatures," *Mediaevistik* 9 (1996): 105. The *Golden Legend* specifically honors four types of saints on the feast of All Saints (Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, and Virgins); all are included within the six rows of Polanco's Celestial Court. BL IB53312, fol. 199v-200v.

Maria degli Angeli in Florence (c. 1413), includes a large grouping of saints who collectively served as intermediaries “between the material world of Quattrocento Florence and the spiritual realm of the Celestine Paradise.”⁵⁶ In addition, the majority of the individual saints in the Florentine altarpiece referenced aspects of religious life as it was celebrated at the monastic church by representing nearby chapels and local feast days as well as the interests of individual patrons.⁵⁷ Moreover, as was often the case in portrayals of the Celestial Court, the saints in Monaco’s altarpiece were arranged hierarchically, with those saints who were most important to the patrons located in the foreground of the composition.⁵⁸

Similarly, the saints that form the Celestial Court in the high altarpiece that Polanco commissioned for the Church of San Nicolás are also arranged hierarchically, with those saints who Polanco considered most crucial to his salvation placed in the first two rows. Each of the six rows of the Polanco’s Celestial Court contains six rectangular spaces, three on the left side of the altarpiece and three on the right (Figure 1-1). One or two saints are portrayed in each rectangular space. As saints of particular significance in Polanco’s Celestial Court, St. Nicholas and St. John the Baptist are honored in the first row alongside the heraldic crests of the Polanco family (Figures 4-10 and 4-11). Above this, St. Lazarus, St. Jerome, St. Francis, San Isidoro, St. Gregory and St. Martin of Tours are each afforded their own spaces in the second register. The next four rows contain a variety of holy personages including the twelve Apostles as well as martyrs, virgins, and lay saints, many of whom can be linked specifically to Polanco’s devotional life and to his preparations for the afterlife

⁵⁶ Bent, *Monastic Art*, 402-403.

⁵⁷ Bent, *Monastic Art*, 329-414.

⁵⁸ Bent, *Monastic Art*, 382-383; Dunkerton, *Giotto to Dürer*, 48; Helen Geddes, “Altarpieces and Contracts: The Marble High Altarpiece for S. Francesco, Bologna (1388-1392),” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 67, no. 2 (2004): 155-170; Plesch, “Enguerrand Quarton’s *Coronation*,” 200-205; Ruda, “Style and Patronage in the 1440s,” 368-378.



Figure 4-10: Rows 1-2 of Saints, Left Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).



Figure 4-11: Rows 1-2 of Saints, Right Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

(Figures 4-12 and 4-13). Analysis of these individual saints not only demonstrates that Polanco had an active role in selecting those who would comprise his Celestial Court but also shows that the saints represented on the altarpiece reflected the extensive preparations that Polanco made prior to his death.

Finally, although the individual saints depicted on Polanco's altarpiece were intended primarily for Polanco's spiritual gain, the manner in which they were portrayed and the range of saints included would have also enhanced the congregation's religious experience by providing numerous individual scenes for spiritual contemplation. First, collectively, the saints correspond to a range of feast days, with every month of the year represented (except for March and April when Holy Week was celebrated). In this regard, Polanco created an altarpiece that, while reflecting his own interest in spiritual salvation, would have also provided a devotional aid to the congregation for much of the year. Moreover, the format in which these saints were portrayed paralleled the images of saints in devotional texts such as the *Golden Legend* that was printed in Burgos. On the altarpiece, as in the *Golden Legend*, each saint is represented either in a full-length portrait and accompanied by an attribute or in a simplified narrative scene that depicts one of his or her most notable miracles.⁵⁹ Therefore, the parishioners of San Nicolás could relate to the individual portraits of saints in the Celestial Court in much the same way that they could connect to the printed images of saints in devotional texts, using them to contemplate the lives and virtues of the saint on the appropriate feast day or anytime they felt so inclined.

St. Nicholas and St. John the Baptist

St. Nicholas and St. John the Baptist have the most prominent positions in Polanco's hierarchically arranged Celestial Court (Figures 4-10 and 4-11). By referencing both saints in the first row, Polanco indicated his hope that they would be

⁵⁹ BL IB53312.

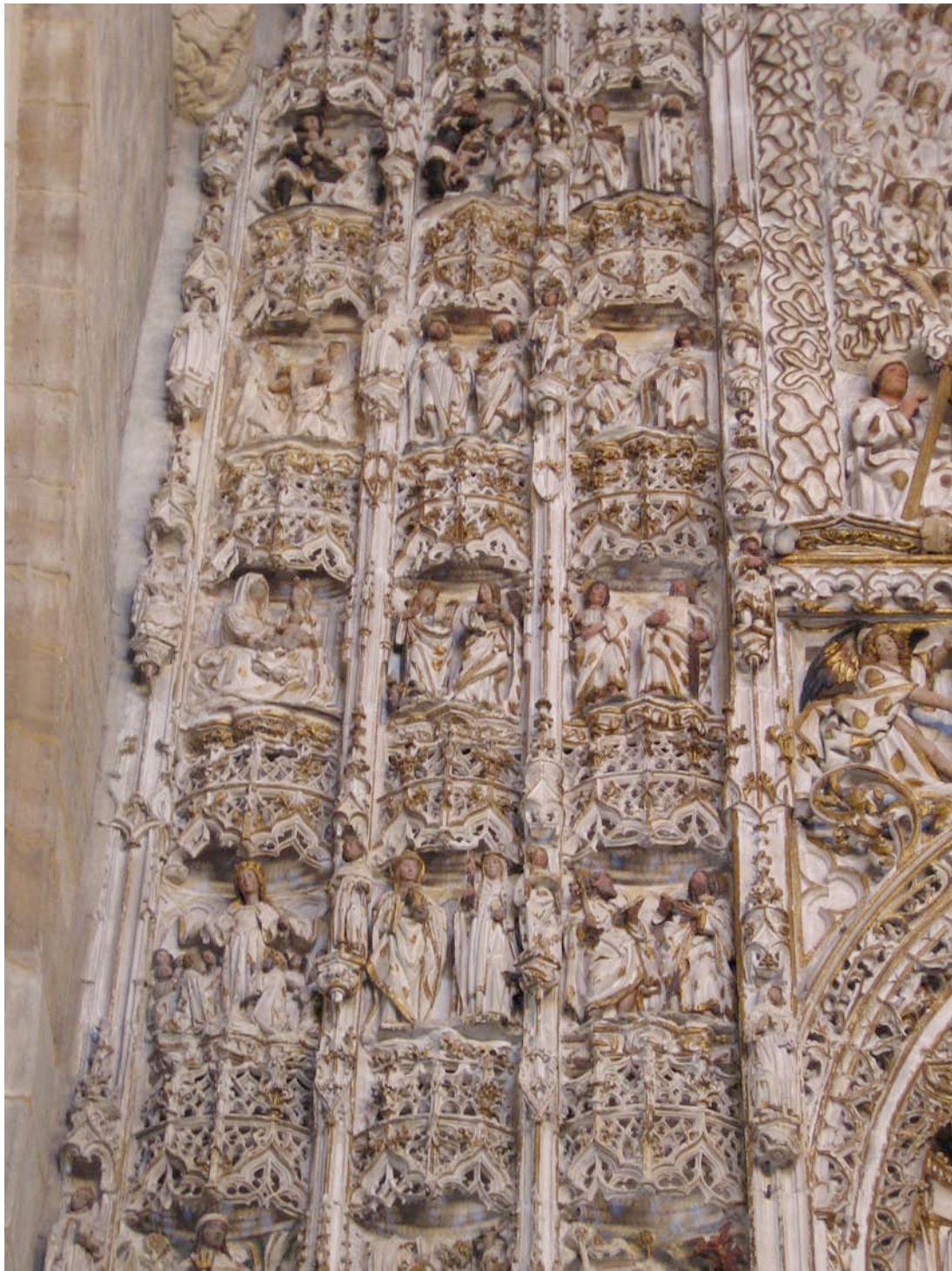


Figure 4-12: Rows 3-6 of Saints, Left Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

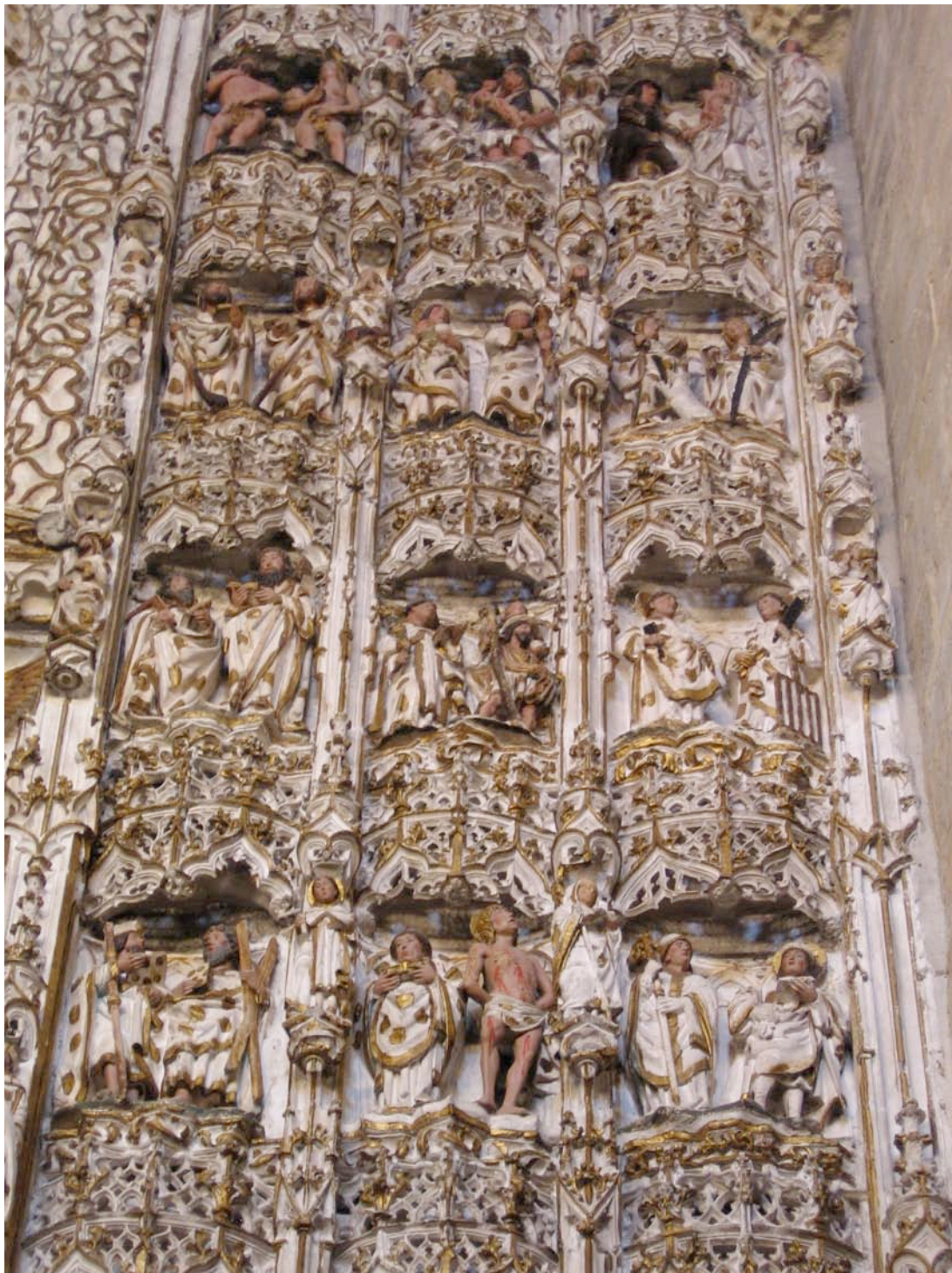


Figure 4-13: Rows 3-6 of Saints, Right Side of High Altarpiece, Church of San Nicolás (photo: author).

powerful intercessors and help him to achieve salvation.⁶⁰ On the left, the space honoring St. Nicholas includes four figures from one of his most important miracles. The three young women and older man represented here are the young maidens, who St. Nicholas saved from being sold into prostitution by providing them with a dowry, shown alongside their grateful father. To Polanco, as the father of ten girls, the burden and expense of wedding daughters surely would have been familiar, making this episode of the saint's life, which is depicted more fully in the eight narrative scenes at the center of Polanco's retable (Figure 3-1), a fitting way for Polanco to reference his revered patron.⁶¹ Moreover, this particular aspect of the St. Nicholas legend is appropriate because it celebrates both St. Nicholas's charitable acts and his protection of young women, two qualities of the saint that most appealed to Polanco as a father of ten daughters and the founder of a charitable foundation to the poor.

Across from the space celebrating St. Nicholas, the first row of the heavenly court also includes a representation of St. John the Baptist (Figure 4-11). The honored rank of John the Baptist is proclaimed in a passage from the *Golden Legend* celebrating the feast of all saints and acknowledging Mary and John as leaders of the heavenly court. According to this text, as the saints entered God's presence, the Virgin came followed by "a countless number of virgins... And after this another [saint] came dressed in the hair of camels and followed by a company of ancient men and after came more and more dressed as bishops and in many other types of dress."⁶² The man clad in camel hair is later identified as St. John the Baptist, and his role in the Court of Heaven is parallel to that of the Virgin, both of whom are considered "leaders of the Blessed." As a result, the two are often afforded prominent positions among

⁶⁰ See chapter three for extensive discussion of Polanco's devotion to St. Nicholas.

⁶¹ See chapter three for more on these eight narrative scenes.

⁶² "sin cuenta de virgines... E despues vino otro vesido d'cabellos de camellos y yuan empos del gra[n] co[n]pañia de [h]ombres ancianos y d'spues vino otrosi otro vestido como obispo y otros muchos [t]epos del vestidos en esa misma manera" BL IB53312, 200v.

groupings of the saints.⁶³ On Polanco's retable, St. John is placed in an honored location within the hierarchy of saints, adjacent to Polanco's primary patron, St. Nicholas, and in this regard he is celebrated, like he is in the *Golden Legend*, as one of the leaders of the heavenly court of saints. The position of St. John the Baptist on the retable together with Polanco's request that sixty of his requiem masses be dedicated to the saint demonstrates that Polanco believed the intercession of St. John would be crucial to his salvation.⁶⁴

St. Lazarus and St. Martin

The second row of saints within Polanco's portrayal of the Celestial Court includes six additional holy men who reflect the piety of Polanco and his family and who Polanco believed would be powerful advocates for his salvation. Among those depicted here, St. Lazarus and St. Martin of Tours occupy the outermost spaces (Figures 4-10 and 4-11). Their prominence on the retable reflects Polanco's desire to highlight his own charitable donations—pious actions that were an important part of his provisions for redemption, that were documented in his testament, and that included numerous donations to local churches, monasteries and hospitals as well as the establishment of a foundation for the poor at the Church of San Nicolás.⁶⁵ Relating to the importance of charity, the story of Lazarus,⁶⁶ a parable told as part of the Gospel of Luke, is the tale of a poor beggar riddled with sores who knew an affluent man and desired “the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table” but was given nothing. When both men died, Lazarus ascended to heaven while the wealthy man was doomed to suffer in hell. Later, as the rich man begged for mercy, Abraham

⁶³ Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 212-213; Rolfe Monks, “A Focused View of All Saints,” 99.

⁶⁴ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 180.

⁶⁵ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 186-187. See chapter two for more extensive discussion of Polanco's charitable bequests.

⁶⁶ The Lazarus discussed here should not be confused with Lazarus the brother of Mary Magdalene who Christ resurrected from the dead.

spoke to him saying, “Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented” (Luke 16: 19-25). The depiction of Lazarus on the retablo references this parable, showing the saint with the dogs who were said to have licked his sores (Figure 4-10). By including an image of St. Lazarus in the altarpiece, Polanco contrasted his own generosity with the miserly nature of the wealthy man in the parable.

Likewise, the figure of St. Martin, shown on horseback in the act of splitting his coat in order to give it to the beggar who stands in the foreground, also relates to the theme of charity to the poor (Figure 4-11). According to his legend, “One day, passing by the city gate, [St. Martin] met a naked, poor man and no one was giving him alms. And St. Martin...took out his sword and divided his cloak into two parts. Then, not having anything else to give, he gave the half of his cloak to the poor man and covered himself with the other half.” Later, in St. Martin’s dream, Christ revealed himself to have been the poor man to whom Martin had given his cloak.⁶⁷ Thus, the depictions of St. Martin and St. Lazarus demonstrate the rewards given to those who openly share their wealth, something that Polanco did generously through various bequests in his testament and by establishing a foundation to the poor.

St. Ildefonso and St. Jerome

While St. Lazarus and St. Martin appear on the altarpiece in recognition of Gonzalo López de Polanco’s acts of charity, St. Jerome and St. Ildefonso, also located

⁶⁷ “un dia pasa[n]do por la puerta d’la cibdad e[n]co[n]tro co[n] un pobre d’esnudo y nigu[n]o le dava limosna y sa[n]t martin e[n]te[n]die[n]do q[ue] pa (with line on p) el lo guardara dios saco su espada y ptio (line on p) su manto por medio. Entonces non tenia otra cosa que le dar y dando le la meytad del manto al pobre cubriose el conla otra meytad” (BL IB53312, fol. 216r). St. Martin is also celebrated for having resurrected a young boy, for having rescued a merchant ship and for giving his tunic to a beggar (BL IB53312, 210v-213r). His protection of children and sailors as well as his generosity to the poor would have made St. Martin an attractive protector to Polanco, a seafaring merchant and father of eleven who made extensive charitable donations as part of his will.

in the second row with St. Jerome on the left side of the retable and San Isidoro on the right, are present on the altarpiece in honor of two monasteries that house Polanco's brother and daughters, respectively, and to which he had donated substantial funds (Figures 4-10 and 4-11). First, Polanco's brother, Francisco de Polanco, was a monk at the monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe,⁶⁸ which was part of the Jeronymite order.⁶⁹ Thus the depiction of St. Jerome would publicly establish Polanco's familial ties to the order. Moreover, the image of the saint also reflects Polanco's bequest of 2,000 maravedies to the monastery as well as his request that his brother, Francisco de Polanco, recite 100 requiem masses following his death.⁷⁰ Likewise, the inclusion of St. Ildefonso demonstrates Gonzalo López de Polanco's association with the Convent of San Ildefonso in Burgos, an Augustinian establishment where four of his daughters were cloistered. Again, beyond referencing the sacred occupation of his four daughters, the presence of St. Ildefonso on the altarpiece also alludes to Polanco's many financial gifts to the convent, which included substantial contributions when each daughter entered as well as a gift of 700 maravedies at the time of his death.⁷¹

St. Gregory and St. Francis

Finally, the two saints depicted on the innermost sections of the second row, St. Gregory and St. Francis, continue to relate specifically to honored members of Polanco's family while also serving important roles relating to the function of the altarpiece (Figures 4-10 and 4-11). The small scene representing the Mass of St. Gregory, located on the right side of the second row of saints (Figure 4-11), shows

⁶⁸ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 182-183.

⁶⁹ J. Antonio Ruiz Hernando, *Los monasterios jerónimos españoles* (Segovia: Gráficas Ceyde, 1997), 221-241; Isabel Mateos Gómez, et. al. *El Arte de la orden jerónima: historia y mecenazgo* (Madrid: Iberdrola, 1999), 118-141.

⁷⁰ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 182-183.

⁷¹ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 201-203 and 218-219. The donation of 700 maravedies was accompanied by Polanco's request that the nuns pray for his soul (Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 181).

Gregory raising the Host in his hands as Christ appears before him on the altar. St. Gregory is venerated here in part because he was the namesake of Gonzalo López de Polanco's son, Gregorio, who, as Polanco's only male heir, was a favored member of the family. In addition, because the Mass of St. Gregory was associated with the celebration of the mass and the Eucharist, showing Christ's "real presence" as the Host is raised,⁷² and the saint himself was revered for interceding on the behalf of condemned souls,⁷³ the inclusion of the Mass of St. Gregory is fitting for a high altarpiece and funerary monument and marks Polanco's hope that Gregory will assist him in the afterlife.

Similarly, St. Francis is included here both as the namesake of Francisco de Polanco, Gonzalo's brother, and because of the saint's valuable role as an intercessor. On the retable, St. Francis kneels as he receives the stigmata, a "unique sign of divine favor" that made him a "living image of Christ" or *alter Christus* and brought him closer to God (Figure 4-10).⁷⁴ By representing this defining episode, Polanco

⁷² Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 4 (2002): 711; Caroline Walker Bynum, "Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 208-233; Patricia DeLeeuw, "Unde et Memores, Domine: Memory and the Mass of St. Gregory," in *Memory and the Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy Netzer and Virginia Reinburg (Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College Museum of Art, 1995), 35-36; Brigitte D'Hainaut-Zveny, "Les messes de saint Grégoire dans les retables des Pays Bas. Mise en perspective historique d'une image polémique, dogmatique et utilitariste," *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique* 41-42 (1992): 35-61; F. Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images," in *The Church and the Arts*, ed. D. Wood (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1992) 183-187; H. Thurston, "The Mass of St. Gregory," *The Month* 112 (1908): 303-319. In their studies of funerary sculpture in Burgos, both María Jesús Gómez Barcena and Carlos Polanco Melero note the presence of this scene on other fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tombs in Burgos (*Escultura gótica*, 34; *Muerte y sociedad*, 358-359). Polanco Melero specifically connects this to the belief in St. Gregory's abilities to intercede on behalf of the soul (*Muerte y sociedad*, 358-359).

⁷³ Gregory's intercessory powers were so strong that he was even able to rescue the soul of the Emperor Trajan from the tortures of hell (BL IB53312, 66v-67r).

⁷⁴ Eamon Duffy, "Finding St. Francis: Early Images, Early Lives," in *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (Rochester, NY: York Medieval Press, 1997), 202-206; Chiara Frugoni, "Saint Francis, a Saint in Progress" in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Text and Studies, 1996), 161-190; Michael Robson, *St. Francis of Assisi: The Legend and the Life* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997), 262-264; André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 336-338; André Vauchez, "Les stigmates de saint François et leurs détracteurs

celebrates the aspect of the saint's life that renders him a particularly effective mediator since the stigmata creates an exceptional bond between Francis and Christ. In addition, aside from honoring the saint on his funerary altarpiece, Polanco expressed his devotion by asking that he be buried in "a habit of St. Francis,"⁷⁵ a request that was often made in fifteenth-century Castile in order to ensure St. Francis's intercession.⁷⁶ Finally, Polanco also dedicated 100 requiem masses to the saint and solicited prayers from the monks of the Monastery of San Francisco in Burgos.⁷⁷

All together, the eight individual saints included in the first two rows of Polanco's Celestial Court represent those holy personages with whom Polanco felt an intimate connection and whose intercession he viewed as most crucial to his salvation. The first row celebrates St. Nicholas, Polanco's primary patron and the dedicatee of the altarpiece, and St. John the Baptist, one of the leaders of the heavenly court. In the second row, Polanco appeals to Saints Lazarus and Martin, saints who might have been more sympathetic to Polanco because of his sizable charitable bequests. Likewise, Polanco had reason to hope for the intercession of St. Jerome and St. Ildefonso, because of his donations to the Monasteries of Santa María de Guadalupe and San Ildefonso as well as his familial associations with these two institutions. Lastly, St. Francis and St. Gregory were honored due to their established roles as

dans les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 80, no. 2 (1968): 595-625; Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78-79.

⁷⁵ "un ábito de sennor sant Francisco." Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 179.

⁷⁶ Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 106-111; María Jesús Gómez Barcena, "La liturgias de los funerales y su repercusión en la escultura gótica funeraria en Castilla," in *La idea y el sentimiento de la muerte en la historia y en el arte de la edad media*, eds. Manuel Núñez and E. Portela (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1988), 37; Manuel Núñez Rodríguez, "La indumentaria como símbolo en la iconografía funeraria," in *La idea y el sentimiento*, 9-15; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 167-168. Adeline Rucquoi indicates that in Valladolid the Franciscan habit was so popular that it was even worn when the deceased was interred in a monastery of another order. "De la resignación al miedo: La muerte en Castilla en el s. XV," in *La idea y el sentimiento*, 55-56.

⁷⁷ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 180-182.

intercessors for the deceased. As saints that were so personally significant to Polanco, these figures were highly visible from the nave of the church, and they were afforded individual scenes with brief narratives unlike the figures in the registers above, which were primarily depicted in full-length portraits.

In the four rows comprising the remainder of the Celestial Court, few of the holy personages are depicted alone, but rather most are paired with another saint and are distinguished by their attributes rather than their role in a narrative scene. Like the scenes in the first and second rows, the saints above continue to represent those who Polanco believed would best aid him in the afterlife, simultaneously honoring Polanco's many charitable donations as well as his affiliations with various religious institutions.⁷⁸ First, each of the monasteries and confraternities to which Polanco bequeathed money are represented on the altarpiece through a portrayal of their patron saint. In addition, many of the saints included in this portion of the retable were knights, lay people and holy women who the Polanco family viewed as devotional models. Together, these saints, along with those in the first and second rows, demonstrate Polanco's desire that the saints depicted in the *Celestial Court* publicly reflect the personal piety of his family and assist in the salvation of his soul.

The Apostles

In the innermost sections of the third to fifth rows, Polanco included effigies of the twelve Apostles, saints who were considered to have strong abilities as intercessors because they were close to Christ (Figures 4-12 and 4-13). Reflecting this belief, the *Golden Legend* praises the Apostles as "the most noble of all because they were shepherds of the flock of Jesus Christ and are with him to judge on the day of judgment and they were the most powerful, because they heal the wretched, move the

⁷⁸ Some of the saints in rows three through six of the retable do not have sufficiently discernable characteristics to be identifiable.

elements and save the souls of the sinners....”⁷⁹ Twelve Apostles appear in Polanco’s retable with St. Peter, St. Paul, St. James Major and St. Andrew in row three and St. Bartholomew, St. Simon, St. Matthew, and St. Thomas in row four.⁸⁰ The fifth row includes, in the rectangle to the right of the *Coronation*, St. James the Lesser holding a fuller’s club and St. Philip holding a crosier. López Sobrino has not identified the two saints in the adjacent space to the left of the *Coronation* but has suggested that they are likely Apostles based on their location in the altarpiece.⁸¹ This positioning coupled with the fact that, as bearded men wearing long robes, the two figures occupying this rectangle fit the profile of the other Apostles suggests that the two men probably represent the remaining Apostles: St. John and St. Jude.

For Polanco, the four Apostles depicted in the third row, Saints Peter and Paul on the left side of the altarpiece and Saints James Major and Andrew on the right, held the greatest personal significance because each had a role in protecting Polanco and his family and in providing for their salvation in the afterlife. This role is evident in the text of Polanco’s testament. Here, he called on Saints Peter and Paul to serve as his “advocates before the Holy Trinity,”⁸² and he requested that, in honor of his soul, seventy requiem masses dedicated to St. Paul be said at the Church of San Nicolás following his death. In addition, Polanco asked that the confraternities of St. Peter and St. James Major perform customary rituals on the day of his interment.⁸³ Likewise, both St. James Major and St. Andrew, the two Apostles on the right, had personal significance for Polanco and his family. Gonzalo López de Polanco and his son, Gregorio, were members of the Confraternity of St. James Major in Burgos, a

⁷⁹ “mas nobles q[ue] los otros ca fuero[n] pastores d’las ovejas de ihu xpo y sera[n] co[n] el a juzgar en el dia del juyzio y por q[ue] fueron mas poderosos ca sanava[n] los demoniados mudava[n] los elementos y sanavan las animas de los peccos...” BL IB53312, fol. 200r

⁸⁰ López Sobrino has identified each of these saints (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 67-71).

⁸¹ López Sobrino, *La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 69.

⁸² Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 177.

⁸³ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 181.

confraternity founded in the fourteenth century and comprised of non-nobles, many of whom were merchants.⁸⁴ Accordingly Polanco would have desired that the image of the saint be placed in a more prominent position among the groupings of saints on the altarpiece.⁸⁵ Finally, St. Andrew's inclusion in the third row is likely due to the saint's importance to Alfonso de Polanco, Gonzalo's brother, whose resting place, on the left side of the altarpiece, features a representation of St. Andrew (Figure 1-9).

Massacre of the Innocents

A second group of scenes, in the top register of the altarpiece, depicts the massacre of the innocent children who King Herod had murdered as he sought to destroy the prophesized "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2: 1-18) (Figures 4-12 and 4-13). On the left side of the sixth row, the two outermost compositions show Herod enthroned and the soldiers killing the innocents; the sequence is continued on the right side of the retable with two additional sections portraying the massacre. Although the Massacre of the Innocents could be incorporated into a narrative sequence and was sometimes included in portrayals of the life of Christ,⁸⁶ the innocent children or Holy Innocents were celebrated as the youngest martyrs and were considered saints who died "for the love of Jesus Christ,"⁸⁷ thus making a depiction of them within the heavenly court equally appropriate. Moreover, the Holy Innocents were represented here in recognition of Polanco's involvement with their feast day, which is documented in his will. In his testament, in addition to asking that his son Gregorio

⁸⁴ *Libro de la Real Cofradía de los Caballeros del Santísimo y Santiago. Estudios y transcripción de la edición facsimilar*, ed. Matías Vicario Santamaría (Burgos: Siloé arte y bibliofilia, 2002).

⁸⁵ F. Menéndez Pidal de Navascués, *Caballería medieval burgalesa: El libro de la cofradía de Santiago* (Madrid, 1996). Gonzalo López de Polanco is included on folio 70v of this text. His son Gregorio de Polanco is depicted on folio 78v.

⁸⁶ For example both the high altarpiece from the Church of Santa María del Castillo in Frómista (Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca*, 429-446) and a Retable of the Life of Christ now in the Rojo and Sojo collection in Barcelona (Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca*, 642-644).

⁸⁷ "por amor d'ihu xpo" BL IB53312, fol. 25r. There is documentation indicating that this feast was celebrated in Burgos as early as the fourteenth century: Ignacio Javier de Miguel Gallo, *Teatro y Parateatro en las fiestas religiosas y civiles de Burgos (1550-1752). Estudio y documentos* (Burgos: Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Burgos, 1994), 59-61.

manage his pious foundation for the poor and ensure that the priests of San Nicolás perform requiem masses, Polanco also called for his son to oversee “the feast on the day of the Innocents.”⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the testament does not provide further details about Polanco’s provisions for the feast, but even this brief statement makes it evident that Polanco valued the day since two of the requests most instrumental to Polanco’s salvation, the establishment of a foundation for the poor and the recitation of requiem masses, are in the same statement.⁸⁹ Thus, the representation of the Holy Innocents on the altarpiece serves both as a means for Polanco to include the youngest martyrs among those saints in his heavenly court and as a way for him to reference his sponsorship of the feast day.

Rows Three through Six—Patrons of Confraternities and Monasteries

Aside from the groups of scenes depicting the Apostles and the Holy Innocents, a number of the other individual saints portrayed in the top four rows of the altarpiece are those to whom Polanco appealed for intercession, either directly by dedicating masses to them or indirectly by petitioning prayers from monasteries and confraternities (Figures 4-12 and 4-13). In his testament, Polanco requested that requiem masses be offered to a number of holy persons who he viewed as crucial to his salvation, including St. Francis, the Holy Trinity, St. Paul, St. John, the Virgin of Mercy, St. Stephen, and St. Augustine.⁹⁰ Several of these entities are featured in more prominent areas of the retablo, with the Holy Trinity in the most honored space at the center (Figure 4-1). For example, St. Francis is positioned in the second row and Saints John and Paul are among the group of Apostles (Figures 4-10 and 4-12).

⁸⁸ “la yantar en el día de los Ynocentes.” Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 186.

⁸⁹ This day was often important to parents whose children had died while very young, and it is possible that Polanco’s devotion to the feast related to the death of a child, though there is no documentation of this in his testament. David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 233-234.

⁹⁰ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 180.

Representations of the other dedicatees are in the third and fourth rows of the Celestial Court with the Virgin of Mercy on the far left side of the third row, sheltering the faithful under her cloak, and St. Stephen standing with St. Lawrence on the right side of the fourth row (Figures 4-12 and 4-13). Just below St. Stephen, the bishop, who may be identified by his miter and crosier, is likely St. Augustine (Figure 4-13).⁹¹ By including depictions of each of these divine entities on his altarpiece, Polanco not only honored those to whom he had dedicated requiem masses, but he also enhanced the liturgical celebrations that he had requested by providing a visual focal point for the congregation's prayers.

Likewise, the patron saints of the many confraternities and monasteries from which Polanco had requested prayers and masses were also included among the rows of saints that comprise the Celestial Court. As part of his provisions for the salvation of his soul, Polanco asked that the brotherhoods of the Creation, St. Peter, St. James, St. Sebastian, St. Victor, St. Stephen, and St. Nicholas perform customary rituals honoring his memory in the days following his death.⁹² Of the saints affiliated with these brotherhoods, St. Peter and St. James are depicted among the Apostles and St. Nicholas is celebrated at the center of the altarpiece (Figures 4-12, 4-13 and 3-1). St. Sebastian and St. Victor, both knights and martyrs, are portrayed together in the third row, and St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is above them in the fourth register (Figure 4-13). The Confraternity of the Creation is also referenced through the representation of Adam and Eve, located to the right of the Coronation of the Virgin in

⁹¹ López Sobrino discusses the appearance of this figure but does not speculate about his identity (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 70). The miter and crosier are the most common attributes of St. Augustine. George Kaftal, *Saints in Italian Art: Iconography of the Saints in the Painting of North East Italy* (Florence: Stabilimento Grafico Commerciale, 1978), 97-102.

⁹² Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 181. Some of these customary rituals might have included assisting in the preparation of the body, participating in the funerary procession, praying for the deceased, and attending funerary masses. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 134-141; Polanco Melero, *Muerte y sociedad*, 136-141.

the top row. By including the patron saint of each brotherhood from whom he solicited posthumous aid, Polanco paid homage to both the confraternities' members and associated saints in exchange for their assistance in his salvation.

Similarly, saints representing the various monasteries from which Polanco solicited aid are also present throughout the altarpiece. He made these requests for prayers and masses from a number of institutions including the monasteries of the Trinity, St. Stephen, St. Francis, St. John, Mary of Mercy, Mary of Guadalupe, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Clare, St. Dorothy, St. Ildefonso, St. Lawrence, St. Peter, St. Giles and St. Andrew.⁹³ Once again, several of the personages affiliated with these monastic establishments are represented in distinctive areas of the altarpiece. The Trinity, St. Francis, St. Ildefonso and St. Jerome, representing the Monastery of Mary of Guadalupe, are all afforded special prominence (Figures 4-1, 4-10 and 4-11). Of the others, St. Clare, for the convent of Santa Clara, is in row five; St. Stephen and St. Lawrence, representing their respective monasteries, are in row four; the Virgin of Mercy, for the Monastery of Santa María de la Merced, is at the left side of the third row; and Saints Peter, John, Andrew, and Paul are among the group of Apostles (Figures 4-12 and 4-13).

In addition to the aforementioned representations, figures of Saints Augustine, Giles and Dorothy, corresponding to the monasteries of San Augustin, San Gil and Santa Dorotea, are likely among those saints depicted on Polanco's retable, although previous studies of the altarpiece have not resulted in their identification.⁹⁴ I have already suggested that St. Augustine, who was one of the saints to whom Polanco had dedicated requiem masses, is portrayed on the right side of the third row (Figure 4-13). His attributes of a miter and crosier render him indistinguishable from most other

⁹³ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos," 181-182.

⁹⁴ López Sobrino, who has identified the majority of the saints on the altarpiece, notes several figures that do not have sufficient distinguishing characteristics to be associated with a particular saint (67-71).

bishop-saints, but Polanco's patronage of both the saint and his monastery necessitates Augustine's inclusion on the retable and also allows for the identification of this figure. Likewise, given that all of the other holy personages from whom Polanco solicited intercession, either directly through prayers and masses or indirectly through a confraternity or monastery, are represented here, St. Giles and St. Dorothy must also be among those few saints on the altarpiece with ambiguous attributes. St. Dorothy, who is typically identified by her basket of flowers and fruit,⁹⁵ is possibly the female carrying flowers who accompanies St. Gertrude on the left side of the third row (Figure 4-12). Finally, St. Giles, who was a monk during his life, is likely the tonsured man in a monastic robe positioned alongside St. Christopher in the fourth row.⁹⁶ With the identification of these final three figures, it is clear that Polanco desired that the patron saint of each of the institutions from which he requested intercessory prayers and masses be included among those holy persons represented on his altarpiece (Figure 4-13).

Knights and Maidens

Aside from Polanco's selection of those saints who represented the confraternities and monastic institutions from which he requested aid, the many representations of holy women and lay saints included in the retable also reflect the personal devotional concerns of Polanco and his family. Among the holy personages portrayed on the retable, Polanco incorporated a number of models of female piety. First, the Virgin Mary, in her role as Mother of God (in the scene of the Epiphany), as Queen of Heaven (at her Coronation) and as merciful protector (portrayed as the Virgin of Mercy on the left side of the third row),⁹⁷ is found throughout the retable

⁹⁵ Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 136; Kaftal, *Saints in Italian Art*, 267-270.

⁹⁶ Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 205-206; Kaftal, *Saints in Italian Art*, 378-380.

⁹⁷ The Virgin of Mercy is a standard iconographic depiction of the Virgin in her role as protector. Nancy J. Hubbard, "Sub Pallio: The Sources and Development of the Iconography of the Virgin of Mercy" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. 1984); William Robert Levin,

(Figure 1-1). Likewise, St. Anne is depicted in the fourth row, reinforcing the Virgin's purity by referencing her Immaculate Conception while simultaneously serving as a model for laywomen (Figure 4-12).⁹⁸ Moreover, the rows of saints include multiple virgin martyrs and monastic women: St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Lucy, St. Gertrude, St. Dorothy, St. Clare, St. Apollonia, and St. Agnes as well as an unidentified woman in monastic dress who accompanies St. Clare (Figures 4-12 and 4-13). As female saints were particularly important to the devotional lives of women,⁹⁹ it is reasonable to conclude that Polanco included them not only with the hope that they would play a role in his own salvation but also so that they would serve as protectors and models of piety for his ten daughters. Likewise, within his representation of the Celestial Court, Polanco portrayed a group of male lay saints: St. Sebastian, St. Victor, and St. Christopher, who were knights, as well as St. Cosme and St. Damien, for whom Polanco likely felt a particular affinity due to his status as a layman and as a knight in the Brotherhood of St. James (Figures 4-12 and 4-13).¹⁰⁰

Angels and St. Michael

The 163 angels, which form a ring around the Virgin and Trinity, are the final component of the Celestial Court, and one typical of depictions of the *Coronation of*

"Studies in the Imagery of Mercy in Late Medieval Italian Art" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983), 435-545; Lousie Marshall, "Confraternity and Community: Mobilizing the Sacred in Times of Plague," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy, Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, ed. D. Cole Ahl and Barbara Wisch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-45; Lousie Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 485-532; Barbara Wollesen-Wisch, "The Madonna of Mercy," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 4 (1986): 674-676.

⁹⁸ Nixon, *Mary's Mother*, 55-78; Felipe Pereda, "Mencia de Mendoza," 86; Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception*, 29-31.

⁹⁹ Brigitte Cazelles, *Lady as Saint: a Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 15 and 78; Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 90-93; Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 17; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991): 314-332.

¹⁰⁰ Menéndez Pidal de Navascués, *Caballería medieval burgalesa*, fol. 70v.

the Virgin (Figure 4-1). Even in the earliest Coronation scenes, like that at the Cathedral of Amiens, at least two angels flanked Christ and the Virgin. Likewise, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century representations, such as the altarpiece commissioned for the Baroncelli Chapel at the Church of Santa Croce in Florence, larger groups of angels were often included among the celestial entourage. While this aspect of the iconography was typical of Coronation scenes, its format on Polanco's retable bears a striking resemblance to the ring of angels at the center of the high altarpiece from the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores in Burgos, which was commissioned by Isabel I and completed in 1499, not long before Polanco commissioned his own retable (Figure 4-14). Although the altarpiece at Miraflores depicts the Passion of Christ at the center of the ring rather than the Coronation of the Virgin,¹⁰¹ the dress, hand positions, and circular arrangement of the angels show a clear association between the two altarpieces. Given these similarities, it is certain that Polanco was emulating the appearance of the retable at Miraflores when he included the ring of angels in his own altarpiece in order to create, in the minds of its viewers, a link between his own altarpiece and the opulent commission of the pious Catholic Kings,¹⁰² while he simultaneously portrayed those themes that reflected his personal devotional practices.

Although Polanco's *Coronation of the Virgin* would necessitate the presence of angels, they, like the saints in the Celestial Court, were also represented here because of the assistance that Polanco believed that they would provide to his soul. In his testament, the angels are among those who Polanco asks to intercede on his behalf though, unlike the saints, he does not request that they serve as his "advocates before

¹⁰¹ In the case of the Miraflores retable, the ring of angels relates to the celebration of the Eucharist and to the work of Ambrosio Montesino, a Franciscan and a member of Isabel's court who, in a set of verses dedicated to the host, praised the host for its similarities to a ring of angels (Yarza, *La Cartuja de Miraflores*, 12-20).

¹⁰² López Sobrino has also noted this parallel (*La iglesia de San Nicolás*, 61).



7209 BURGOS. Cartuja. Interior de la Iglesia.

Figure 4-14: High Altarpiece, Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores, Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-7209).

the Holy Trinity.”¹⁰³ Polanco’s knowledge of the nature of angels and his awareness of the protection and aid that they would give must have come from Francesc Eiximenis’ *Libro de los Angeles* since this popular text, which was a 145 folio treatise examining the nature and role of angels, was translated into Castilian and printed in Burgos by Fadrique de Basilea in 1490.¹⁰⁴ Within the characteristics of angels that Eiximenis addressed, he stated in the opening of the treatise that, “by divine mandate they are guarding [our souls] at all times...,”¹⁰⁵ indicating their importance as intermediaries in the salvation of man. It was this role that made their inclusion among Polanco’s intercessors appropriate.

Among the angels represented on the retablo, the Archangel St. Michael has the most prominent position at the base of the circle of angels, portrayed in the act of slaying the dragon, which symbolizes his defeat of the devil. St. Michael was revered for his role in helping man to achieve salvation, an aspect of the saint’s life that was celebrated in the *Libro de los Angeles* when Eiximenis praised Michael as the angel who “receives the souls that leave this life.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, he honored the assistance that St. Michael provides in the afterlife instructing the reader that, “Our Father will have mercy for you because of St. Michael’s pleas that he save you.”¹⁰⁷ This knowledge of St. Michael’s intercessory role would have impacted Polanco’s decision to name the saint as one of his “advocates before the Holy Trinity,” and it would have also resulted in his placement of St. Michael in an honored position on his retablo, directly below the Virgin and the Trinity and above Polanco’s patron, St. Nicholas.

¹⁰³ Martínez Burgos, “La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos,” 177-179.

¹⁰⁴ Marie Gillette has authored a transcription of this text. “A Paleographic Transcription and Edition of Francesc Eiximenis’ *Libro delos Angeles* (Castilian Translation)” (Ph.D. diss. The Pennsylvania State University, 1996). Her transcription is based on incunable 620 from the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.

¹⁰⁵ salud de n<uest>ras a<n>i<m>as. las quales por mandamie<n>to diuinal han ellos todos t<iemp>os en guarda... Gillette, “A Paleographic Transcription,” 70.

¹⁰⁶ “rrescebir las animas que salieren desta vida” Gillette, “A Paleographic Transcription,” 541.

¹⁰⁷ “n<uest>ro señor te fara misericordia por los sus rruegos del sancto angel q<ue> te guarda” Gillette, “A Paleographic Transcription,” 556-557.

As has been discussed, Polanco's representation of the Celestial Court was comprised of 163 angels as well as more than 50 saints and other holy personages, all included because of the role that Polanco hoped they would serve in helping him to achieve salvation in the afterlife. Many of these saints, such as St. Nicholas, St. Jerome, St. Ildefonso, St. Martin, and the Virgin Martyrs, were those with whom Polanco and his family had a particular, personal connection. Others, including St. James, St. Clare, St. Stephen, the Virgin of Mercy, and St. Augustine, represented those confraternities and monasteries to which Polanco had donated substantial funds in exchange for masses and prayers being said in his name; and some, such as St. Gregory, St. Francis, St. Michael, the Apostles, and John the Baptist, offered particular protection in the afterlife because of their established association with the salvation of souls and/or their proximity to God. Overall, the selection of saints and angels indicates the importance of these holy personages for Polanco, and their prominence proves the primary role that Polanco believed saintly intercession would play in his salvation. Finally, in addition to serving this important role in Polanco's salvation, the saints in Polanco's Celestial Court were depicted in a manner that paralleled the small portraits of saints in printed devotional texts, and they represented a range of feast days throughout the year, making the altarpiece a more effective devotional tool for the congregation.

The Cult of Saints and Lay Funerary Altarpieces in Late Medieval Burgos

The comparative emphasis on hagiographic representations over depictions of the life of Christ in Polanco's retable is indicative of a trend common to the carved altarpieces made for lay funerary chapels in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgos. Despite the growing popularity of Christ's Passion during this period, these funerary altarpieces feature effigies of saints favored by the lay patrons rather than narratives of Christ's life or Passion. Two of the earliest examples of this phenomenon

come from the Chapel of the Kings and the Chapel of the Buena Mañana at the parish church of San Gil (Figures 4-4 and 4-5).¹⁰⁸ The high altarpiece of the Chapel of the Kings, like Polanco's retablo, does not completely omit scenes from the life of Christ as it includes the *Adoration of the Magi* in the center of the altarpiece and features the *Pietà* in the *banco*. However, these two episodes are celebrated alongside the effigies of twenty-one saints, who are an equally prominent part of the altarpiece. Moreover, the second retablo from the Chapel of the Buena Mañana includes no narrative scenes from the life of Christ. Instead, the central *calle* is dedicated to Mary and features the *Assumption of the Virgin* and the Virgin and Child enthroned, with four saints, the Apostles and the Evangelists occupying the remaining areas of the altarpiece.

In addition to the retables from San Gil, two other carved altarpieces in Burgos further demonstrate consistent devotion to the saints in lay funerary commissions and a failure to follow new trends in devotion to Christ's Passion. First, the commission of the noblewoman Mencía de Mendoza for the Chapel of the Condestables in Burgos Cathedral features a group of female saints (Figure 4-3).¹⁰⁹ At the center, St. Anne is represented along with the Virgin and Child, and images of Saints Isabel, Helen, Barbara, Catherine, and Margaret surround them. The *banco* contains an isolated

¹⁰⁸ G. Bertolaza y Esparta, *La Iglesia de San Gil en Burgos. Breve reseña de sus monumentos e historia* (Burgos 1914); Gregorio Betolaza y María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "Una escultura perteneciente al maestro del retablo de nuestra señora en la capilla de la Buena Mañana de la Iglesia de San Gil, de Burgos" *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología* LII (1986): 369-371; Antonia Fernández Casla, "La capilla de los Reyes de la iglesia de San Gil de Burgos: Un ejemplo de fundación privada a fines de la Edad Media," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar* 75-76 (1999): 125-156; Ismael García Ramila, "Iglesia de San Gil—Sus grandes reformas del siglo XVI," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 30 (1951): 675-709; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "El retablo de Nuestra Señora de la Iglesia de San Gil de Burgos," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto Camon Aznar* 23 (1986): 59-92; Martínez Burgos, M. "El siglo de oro de Burgos." *Boletín de la Insitución Fernán González*. 28, no. 110 (1950): 8-24.

¹⁰⁹ Francisco Crosas, "Las lecturas de doña Mencía: la iconografía del retablo de Santa Ana de la capilla del Condestable en la Catedral de Burgos," *Scriptura* 13 (1997): 207-216; Felipe Pereda, "Mencía de Mendoza (1500): Mujer del I Condestable de Castilla. El significado del patronazgo femenino en la Castilla del siglo XV" in *Patronos y coleccionistas: Los Condestables de Castilla y el arte (siglos XV-XVII)*, ed. Begoña Alonso et. al. (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2005), 10-119; Carlos G. Villacampa, "La Capilla del Condestable de la Catedral de Burgos. Documentos para su historia," *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología* 4 (1928): 25-44.

image of Christ as the Man of Sorrows, the only reference to his Passion on the altarpiece, along with a depiction of St. Dorothy and either Mary the Egyptian or Mary Magdalene. Felipe Pereda demonstrated that by portraying these holy women, Mencía de Mendoza designed a funerary altarpiece that featured those saints with whom she felt the most significant personal connection.¹¹⁰

Finally, the retable for García de Salamanca's chapel in the Church of San Lesmes, dating to around 1510, has the strongest focus on the life of Christ, with a depiction of the *Road to Calvary* at the center and an image of the Pietà in the *banco* (Figure 4-2).¹¹¹ Despite the focus on Christ's Passion in the main scene, the altarpiece, which was imported from Antwerp, honors the cult of the saints by representing the effigies of fifteen saints. Because this retable differs greatly from the style of other contemporary altarpieces made in Antwerp, it is evident that García de Salamanca was involved in its design,¹¹² and therefore the saints included in this retable represent a personal selection akin to those of Mencía de Mendoza and Gonzalo López de Polanco.

Together, these four lay commissioned funerary altarpieces demonstrate that Gonzalo López de Polanco's devotion to the cult of saints and his belief that the saints were a crucial component to his salvation were part of a larger devotional trend among the laity of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgos. This group relied on the saints for intercession and chose to depict these mediators in the ornamentation of their funerary chapels in order to express their piety. Thus, while the laity certainly

¹¹⁰ "Mencía de Mendoza (1500)," 85-89.

¹¹¹ I. García Ramila, "La capilla de la Cruz o de los Salamanca en la Iglesia de San Lesmes," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* (1955): 217-249; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "Escultura gótica de importación en Burgos: el retablo de la Santa Cruz en la iglesia de San Lesmes," *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 2 (1994): 279-296; María Jesús Gómez Bárcena, "Revisión de algunos aspectos del retablo de la Santa Cruz en la iglesia de San Lesmes de Burgos," in *Homenaje al Profesor Hernández Perera* (Madrid, 1992), 549-560; Jaime Vargas Vivar, *Vida de San Lesmes Abad. Patrón de Burgos y descripción histórico-artística de su iglesia* (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 1985), 79-81.

¹¹² Lynn Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces: Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191.

would have been aware of the developing trends in Passion devotion through the new availability of texts examining the Passion and the emerging prevalence of images of the Passion, and while they likely would have contemplated the Passion on specific holy days, laypeople continued to believe that the saints were the most accessible mode of salvation and therefore featured these holy personages in their funerary commissions.¹¹³

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates not only that Polanco had faith in the intercessory role that saints would play in his salvation but also shows that, although his commission did not embrace new currents toward devotion to Christ's life and Passion, it was typical of lay funerary altarpieces in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgos. By considering Polanco's commission in terms of its connection to his wishes as expressed in his will, it is evident that Polanco considered saintly intercession to be a crucial component in the salvation of his soul. His altarpiece reflects his perception of the Celestial Court as it is represented in his testament, and the saints selected for his altarpiece were those who he deemed most likely to intercede on his behalf. Furthermore, Polanco's altarpiece is indicative of a larger trend in lay funerary commissions and devotional practice, demonstrating that even while contemplation of Christ's life and Passion were becoming popular among the royalty and ecclesiastical elite, the laity maintained a strong connection to the cult of saints.

¹¹³ This trend merits further study and is one that I hope to address in my future work.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As one of the first studies of an object commissioned by a merchant patron in late medieval Iberia, this dissertation not only contributes to the number of much-needed contextual studies of late medieval Spanish art, but also it creates a broader understanding of the social concerns, societal networks, and devotional lives of this important social group. As was explained in the introduction, the scholarship of late medieval Iberian art has consisted mainly of peninsular and regional overviews as well as studies of individual objects that focus on iconographic and stylistic analysis. Among these, only a few recent studies, including this dissertation, provide the type of contextualized approach that is now typical among studies of northern European and Italian art. Moreover, because analytical approaches to merchant patronage are almost entirely absent from the scholarship of late medieval Iberian art, this dissertation provides one of many necessary studies of individual merchant commissions in this region that, in turn, will result in a more complete understanding of the broader panorama of artistic patronage in late medieval Iberia and mercantile culture in late medieval Europe.

The High Altarpiece of San Nicolás—An Earthly Legacy and a Plea for Divine Intervention

Placed above the high altar of the parish church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos, the imposing retablo commissioned by the merchant Gonzalo López de Polanco just prior to his death in July of 1505 demonstrates his desire for a lasting legacy on earth and for divine intervention in the afterlife (Figure 1-1). First, a variety of factors, such as the placement of Polanco's tomb and retablo behind the high altar of the church, its size relative to other merchant-commissioned altarpieces, and its

material, all marked the retable as unique among its contemporaries and alluded to the status of the Polanco family. Moreover, Polanco's depiction of his "advocates before the Holy Trinity," which included not only his primary patron, St. Nicholas, but also "all the saints of the celestial court,"¹ was a visual manifestation of the intervention that Polanco petitioned from his intercessors, and it illustrated his need to ensure his own salvation. In addition, as my analysis in chapter four suggests, when considered alongside other retables made in Burgos around the turn of the sixteenth century, Polanco's altarpiece is indicative of a wider trend in lay commissions that tended away from narratives of the life and Passion of Christ and instead consisted primarily of representations of the saints.

Polanco's commission was one of the most elaborate and opulent of the several carved altarpieces made at the turn of the sixteenth century to accompany the sarcophagi of the city's elite. These retables, most of which were produced in the workshops of Gil Siloe or Simón and Francisco de Colonia, included those made for the Chapel of Luis de Acuña and the Chapel of the Condestables in the Cathedral, that commissioned for by Isabel I for the tomb of Juan II at the Monastery of Miraflores, and those ordered by other merchant families for their chapels in the parish churches of San Gil, San Lesmes and San Esteban. Relative to these contemporaries, it is evident that Polanco's funerary commission would have served as a symbol of his wealth and status. Of the retables listed above, Polanco's most resembled, in its scale and complexity, those commissioned by Queen Isabel I for the Carthusian Monastery of Miraflores and Bishop Luis de Acuña for his chapel in the Cathedral of Burgos

¹ "todos los Santos y Santas de la corte celestyal, para que sean mis Abogados ante la Santa Trenidad." Matías Martínez Burgos has published a complete transcription of the testament, "La iglesia de San Nicolás en Burgos: Los Colonia y Gil de Siloe," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 138, no 2 (1956): 153-227 (see page 177 for the passage on the Holy Trinity). The original document is held by the Archivo Diocesano de Burgos, "Testamento de Gonzalo López de Polanco," San Nicolás, signatura 23.

(Figures 4-14 and 5-1). In this regard, the Polanco altarpiece would have appeared most like those retables made for two of the city's most affluent and powerful patrons. Moreover, aside from its comparable dimensions, the presence of a ring of angels in the upper level of the central *calle* of Polanco's altarpiece creates a distinct visual parallel to the Miraflores retable, certainly a deliberate reference to the commission of the Catholic Kings that was completed in 1499, just before work began on Polanco's retable. By emulating the altarpieces made for these distinguished members of society, Polanco differentiated his own funerary altarpiece from those of other merchant families, like those in the Chapel of the Buena Mañana and the Chapel of the Kings in the Church of San Gil (Figures 4-4 and 4-5), which tended to be less imposing and to contain a simpler iconographic program.

Likewise, the unique combination of tomb and retable, as well as the placement of Polanco's sarcophagus behind the main altar of the church, also suggest the prestige and affluence of the patron and his family. As was explained in chapter two, the apse of a church was considered the most esteemed location for burial because it placed the sepulcher close to the site of the celebration of the Eucharist. However, not all patrons could afford to be entombed in this area of the church, and, in late medieval Burgos, while many merchants were able to finance burial within a parish church, few had the power or money required to secure a place behind the high altar. The result was that the placement of Polanco's funerary monument was an indication of his significant ties to the church as well as his ability to fund such a prestigious burial, elevating his status among his contemporaries.

Similarly, while some merchants, including García de Salamanca at San Lesmes and the Castro, Mazuelo and Lerma families at San Gil, commissioned altarpieces to be placed alongside their sarcophagi, there are no surviving examples from fifteenth and early sixteenth century Burgos, aside from Polanco's altarpiece, in



Figure 5-1: High Altarpiece, Chapel of the Visitation, Cathedral of Burgos (Photo reproduced with permission: Archivo Municipal de Burgos, FO-3215).

which the tomb and retable are combined to create a single funerary monument. By joining these two elements, Polanco created a unique commission ensuring that his sepulcher would remain behind the high altar, so long as the massive stone retable to which it was attached was not moved. Moreover, by unifying his sepulcher and altarpiece, Polanco also guaranteed that, due to the inscription above his tomb, the retable would always be identified as his commission and that he and his family would be remembered for generations to come.

In addition to the imposing presence of his funerary monument, Gonzalo López de Polanco also ensured that his memory would be consistently celebrated by requesting that the parish priests say a requiem mass on his behalf each day and by establishing a pious foundation for the poor at the Church of San Nicolás. As was demonstrated in chapter two, Polanco solicited an unusually large number of masses in his testament, and especially the daily ceremonies held at San Nicolás would have seemed a remarkable and expensive extravagance, particularly when compared to similar arrangements made in contemporary wills. Moreover, in addition to bequests to many religious institutions throughout the city of Burgos, Polanco's foundation for the poor would have resulted in a public acknowledgement of the family's affluence and generosity since the weekly distributions of alms occurred during the Sunday service.

The daily requiem masses and the foundation for the poor at San Nicolás were two aspects of Polanco's dying wishes that, as was addressed in chapter three, Polanco considered sufficiently important to his legacy that he altered the legend of St. Nicholas presented on his altarpiece so that it alluded to them. First, the episode of St. Nicholas performing mass was, due to its rarity in other sequences of the saint's life, indicative of Polanco's desire that the daily requiem masses in his honor not be forgotten. Likewise, the scene of St. Nicholas's almsgiving, also absent from other St.

Nicholas narratives, was a clear reference to the money distributed by Polanco's foundation for the poor each Sunday. This direct association between the saint's life and Polanco's own almsgiving created a visual parallel between the his own virtue and that of his patron saint.²

Of course, the primary motivation of Polanco's dying requests was not as much a desire to establish the prestige of his family as it was a need to ensure his own salvation in the afterlife. As was demonstrated in the second chapter of this dissertation, facilitating a "good death" was a preoccupation of Christians throughout the late medieval world since it was one of the means by which a person could shorten the time that his or her soul would spend in purgatory. In order to ensure a "good death," a person was required to engage in substantial preparation during life; writing a testament, requesting posthumous prayers and masses, and donating money to charitable causes were all part of this process. Therefore, by arranging for prayers and masses to be said in the days and weeks following his death and by establishing a pious foundation for the poor in addition to his many other bequests to local religious institutions, Polanco attempted to organize his own "good death" and to guarantee that his time in purgatory would be as brief as possible.

In addition to these arrangements, through which Polanco made provisions for the earthly assistance, Polanco's testament and retablo also indicate that he sought the aid of many heavenly intercessors including St. Nicholas, whose narrative is featured in the central *calle* (Figure 3-1); the Virgin Mary, who is depicted during her coronation by the Holy Trinity (Figure 4-1); and all of the "saints in the celestial court,"³ who are represented collectively in the side aisles of the retablo (Figures 4-10

² Although in so openly alluding to his own piety, Polanco seemingly missed the message in one of St. Nicholas's other legends, that of the three maidens, in which the saint modestly refused recognition for the gifts that he bestowed upon the destitute father (Thanks to Ronald Surtz for suggesting the irony of this).

³ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

to 4-13). Of these saints, Polanco celebrated St. Nicholas above all others not only because he was the patron of the church but also, and more importantly, because he was Polanco's "advocate before the Holy Trinity,"⁴ a role that is illustrated by the saint's placement below the Holy Trinity in the central *calle* of the retable. As a father of eleven and a seafaring merchant, St. Nicholas's protection of young men, maidens, and mariners appealed to Polanco and made the saint his ideal patron. Honoring this personal connection to the saint, Polanco opted to highlight several scenes from the saint's legend that were of personal significance: these included St. Nicholas providing the dowry for the three maidens, St. Nicholas rescuing the sailors from a storm, and the saint saving a drowning boy. Moreover, desiring that his depiction of the saint's life be recognizable to the community and that the saint be viewed as worthy of devotion, Polanco's narrative of St. Nicholas also included a selection of episodes from the saint's life that celebrated the holy man's piety and efficacy as a defender and that rendered the sequence identifiable even to those only acquainted with the most basic miracles of St. Nicholas. Functioning in this manner, the episode of the saint's Baptism, which demonstrated that St. Nicholas was pious from the time of his childhood; the portrayals of his gift of the dowry to the destitute father of three maidens and his resurrection of the three dead scholars, which were two of the saint's most important miracles; and the display of his secretion of the Holy Manna, which was the healing substance that came from the saint's bones and was the main relic owned by the parish church, were all crucial aspects to Polanco's narrative of St. Nicholas.

Although his position on the retable certainly indicates that St. Nicholas was Polanco's primary advocate, Polanco also sought the protection of "all of the saints in the celestial court," and both the text of his testament and the design of his retable

⁴ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177.

reflect this.⁵ Polanco's depiction of the celestial court on his altarpiece consists of the Virgin and Holy Trinity surrounded by a ring of angels in the central *calle* and six registers of saints in the two side aisles (Figure 1-1). These six rows contain over 50 holy personages arranged hierarchically, with those whom Polanco believed would be his most powerful intercessors in the afterlife portrayed in the lowest registers. The majority of these figures directly reflect the piety of Polanco and his family, while others represent Polanco's desire to affiliate himself with many of the city's parishes, monasteries, and confraternities. For example, among those in the second row, St. Lazarus and St. Martin relate to Polanco's charitable donations to the poor, San Ildefonso and St. Jerome represent the monasteries where Polanco's daughters and brother resided, and St. Gregory and St. Francis are the namesakes of Polanco's son, Gregorio, and his brother, Francisco, as well as being powerful advocates in the afterlife. Other saints depicted in Polanco's celestial court include St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Lawrence, St. Clare, and St. Dorothy, who were among those associated with the confraternities and monasteries in the city of Burgos to which Polanco made donations as part of his will. Likewise, the many lay saints and Virgin martyrs, who would have appealed to Polanco since he was both a layman and the father to many daughters, are also portrayed within the six rows. All totaled, Polanco represented over 50 saints and other holy personages in the celestial court on his retable, undoubtedly reflecting the assistance that he hoped they would provide in the next world.

Together, Polanco's retable and testament demonstrate his extensive efforts to ensure that he would have a "good death" and that his time in purgatory would be shortened by both earthly and divine assistance. As they are documented in his will, Polanco's arrangements for requiem masses and charitable donations as well as his

⁵ Martínez Burgos, "La iglesia de San Nicolás," 177-183.

solicitation of aid from St. Nicholas and the other saints of the celestial court all were intended to facilitate his salvation. Moreover, Polanco's retable visually documents his desire for saintly intercession while also reflecting the contributions that he made to various ecclesiastical institutions. Finally, while making these preparations for the afterlife, Polanco simultaneously guaranteed that he would have a lasting legacy on earth by soliciting perpetual masses, creating a pious foundation for the poor, and commissioning a grandiose altarpiece for his parish church.

The Polanco Altarpiece—A Model of Merchant Devotional Practice in Late Medieval Castile?

Aside from conveying details of Gonzalo López de Polanco's religious life and his concerns for the afterlife, the high altarpiece of the Church of San Nicolás is indicative of broader trends in the devotional and funerary practices of the laity in Burgos at the turn of the sixteenth century. First, the emerging book culture in Castile had a profound impact on Polanco's commission, and in this regard, Polanco's retable belongs to a new tradition of late fifteenth and early sixteenth century lay altarpieces that, while appear in style to be medieval, look ahead to the early modern period through their relationship to printed texts. At the same time, however, Polanco and his contemporaries rejected some of the new trends in devotion to the life of Christ that had been common elsewhere in Europe during the fifteenth century and that were becoming popular among the royalty and ecclesiastical elite in Castile under Ferdinand and Isabel. Like Polanco, a number of merchant families commissioned retables to complete their funerary chapels in the various parish churches of the city of Burgos, and many of these altarpieces, though smaller in scale than Polanco's and not located behind the high altar, shared its hagiographic focus. Thus, although there were personal reasons for the portrayals of the many saints on Polanco's retable, it also appears, as was demonstrated in chapter four, to have been part of a larger trend in lay

devotional practices in late medieval Burgos, showing that laypeople favored depictions of the saints over narrative scenes of the life of Christ.

This pattern in lay commissions is most significant in light of the changes to Castilian devotional culture that occurred during the reign of Isabel I, which resulted in a shift toward the depiction of the Passion of Christ in the artistic patronage of the royalty and the ecclesiastical elite. In contrast, funerary retables commissioned by the laity of late medieval Burgos demonstrate a clear tendency to minimize depictions of Christ's suffering, and often include only one or two scenes of this type, which are usually found in the *banco* and were intended to reference the celebration of the Eucharist. Instead, these retables, which include those commissioned by the Castro, Lerma and Mazuelo families for the Church of San Gil, that ordered by the Salamanca family for the Church of San Lesmes, and that made for Mencía de Mendoza and placed in the Chapel of the Condestables at the Cathedral (Figures 4-2 to 4-5), all suggest a strong devotion to the cult of saints among the laity and a belief that these holy personages would be their most important advocates before God in the afterlife.

Of course, these observations concerning lay devotional culture in late medieval Burgos merit further consideration and comparative research should be conducted with regard to other cities in Castile, as well as other areas of the European and Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, as I indicated in the opening chapter of this dissertation, studies focused on the analysis of individual instances of mercantile patronage are necessary in the art historical scholarship of late medieval Castile before definitive conclusions regarding the broader trends in lay patronage can be made and before extensive comparative work with other regions is possible. It is my hope that this contextual study of Gonzalo López de Polanco and his funerary altarpiece at the parish church of San Nicolás de Bari in Burgos will eventually be one of many studies addressing the patronage of the merchant class in late medieval Castile. Once this is

accomplished, these lesser-known merchant families from the Iberian Peninsula might finally be able to join the ranks of those more famous merchant patrons from Italy and northern Europe like the Medici, the Scrovegni, and the Arnolfini.

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