

# **FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN**

(Fuente de Cantos, 1598 - Madrid, 1664)

**« THE FOUNDING OF THE ORDER OF MERCY »**

by

**ODILE DELENDÀ**

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To Charles, Louis and Pauline

I would like to thank Odile DELENDÀ, who is preparing the catalogue raisonné and critics of Francisco de Zurbarán at the Wildenstein Institute, for this fascinating text which not only restitutes the artistic, political and religious context in Seville around 1625, but also explains very clearly the historical importance of this commission for this artist, who at the age of thirty, was already one of the greatest painters of the Spanish Golden Age.

Only Jan Stephan ORTMANN could have restored this magnificent canvas with so much sensitivity, patience, even self-sacrifice. His knowledge and understanding of Francisco de Zurbarán's art and technique enabled the discovery, under previous restorations, of whole areas by the master himself. There are not enough words to thank him and congratulate him.

Many thanks also to all those who helped me : Mary Jo Landeira Brisson, Henry de Crouy Chanel, Jean-François Delenda, Elisabeth Dyèvre, Yvan Farin, Gilles de Fayet, la maison Grosvallet, Alexandre Marguet, Manuela de Paladines, Séverin Racenet, Jean Max Tassel, Florence Thieblot, Enrique Valdivieso and the Wildenstein Institute.

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English and Spanish translations : Mary Jo Landeira Brisson.



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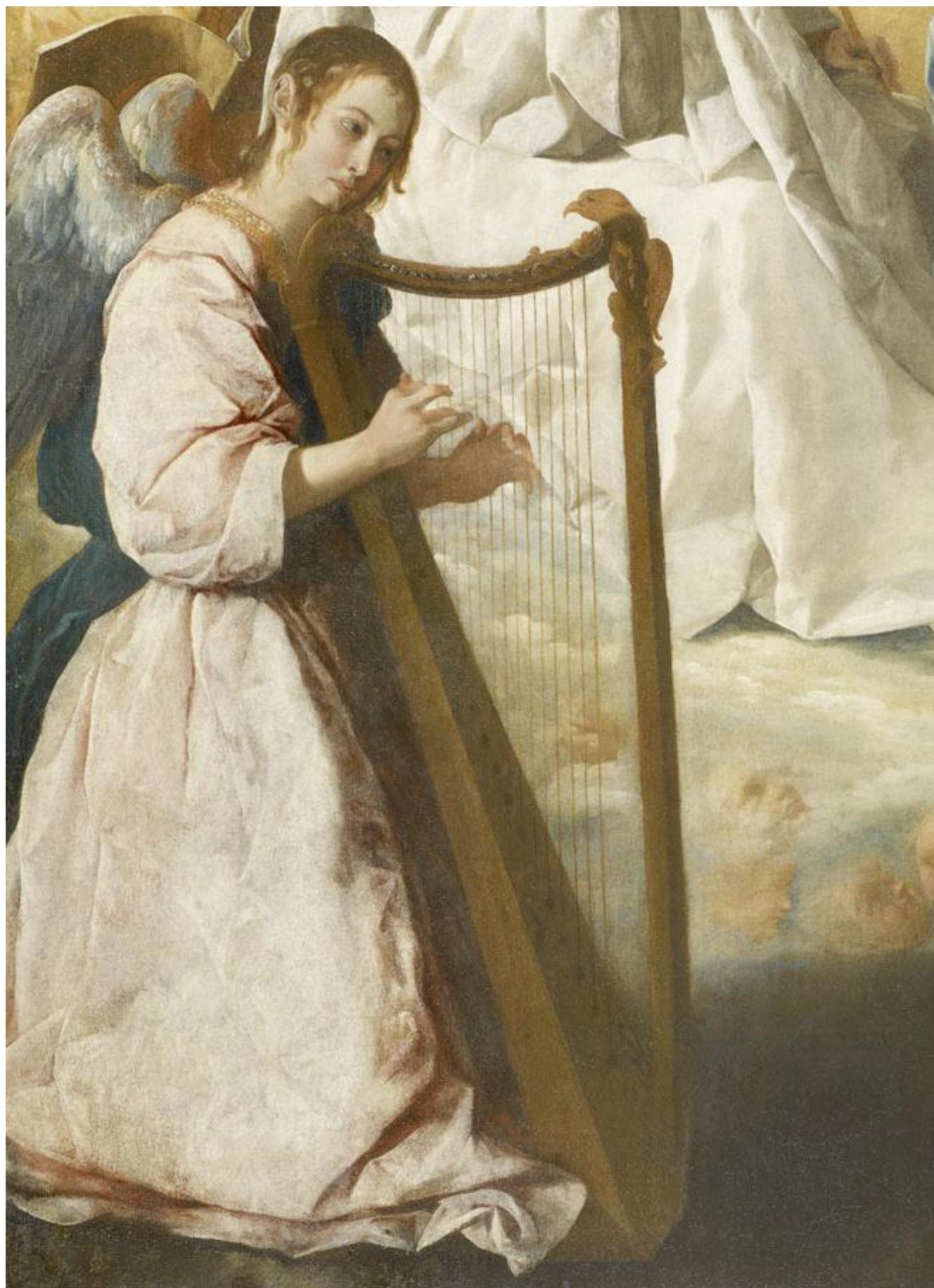


*The Founding of the Order of Mercy*

Oil on its original canvas, H. 165 cm ; L. 204 cm

Monogram barely legible bottom centre.

Provenance: ordered, in 1628, by Fray Juan de Herrera for the Convent of the Merced Calzada, Buis cloister, Seville ; private collection.



In Seville, the festivities to honor the canonization of the founder began on Sunday 27 May 1629. When Fray Juan de Herrera commissioned twenty-two scenes in the life of Saint Peter Nolasco from Zurbarán, without waiting for the end of the trial which had opened on 29 July 1628, giving him a one year delay, no doubt with the festivities in mind, he probably entrusted the artist with the series of engravings done by Cornelius Cobrador to use as models, as we'll explain further. It seems clear that Zurbarán used some of the engravings as inspiration in executing these paintings as they have no other iconographic precedent. The eighth notebook comprising the documentation which was assembled for the canonization cause, held at the University of Seville, has turned out to be of major importance in understanding the iconography of the holy founder who had been rarely represented before sainthood. It indeed describes all of the scenes from the *Vie de saint Pierre Nolasque en estampes* made up of twenty-five engravings although the illustrations no longer accompany the text.

Some plates have been found and these “*modern engravings*”, executed one year before the canonization and mentioned in the *Sumario* of the trial, provide most of the episodes from the life of Saint Peter Nolasco in a chronological order adopted by a majority of biographers. The sources come mainly from the major historical accounts of the Order of Mercy<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, engraving n. 6, probably given to Zurbarán as a model, has not been discovered, but a very detailed description of it appears in the Seville notebook. As usual, it contains the quote found in the cartouche in the upper part of the engraving. This is the Latin inscription “*SVADEO TIBI EMERE A ME AURUM PROBATUM ET VESTIMENTIS ALBIS INDUARIS*” (Apoc. 3). This partially quoted verse from chapter III of the *Apocalypse of Saint John* (III, 18) refers to the scene represented here: “I advise you to buy me gold tested by fire [...] and white vestments to dress yourself”. This is followed by the description of the image in Italian, translated as: “*The B.[lessed] V.[irgin] appears to the Saint and hands him the habit of the Order and the Saint receives it kneeling down. Far off, a king on a bed and S. Raymond from the Dominican Order praying. Both receive the same revelation.*” Finally, a third text in Latin probably appeared under the engraving ; this text specifies that the scene took place one night in 1218 and gives the literary source used for the representation: an excerpt from Pope Clement VIII’s bull for the canonization of Saint Raymond of Peñaforte (1601). This episode can indeed be found in the *Vita S. Raimundi de Pennaforti* by the highly erudite Bollandists<sup>2</sup>.

This theme of handing over the habit, an important act for the Order, obviously figured in the series commissioned from Zurbarán. The Virgin’s intervention in the founding of the Order, described in old chronicles and acknowledged by the Church, meant that the Order of Mercy was essentially a Marian institution. Most monastic establishments claimed Mary’s role in their foundation. Two years earlier the Dominicans of San Pablo in Seville had also commissioned the representation of *The Dominican Scapular is Handed over to the Blessed Réginald d’Orléans* (Seville, Church of the Magdalena) from the artist. Zurbarán’s workshop would again paint *The Virgin Handing over the Habit of the Order of Mercy to Saint Peter Nolasco* (Spain, private collection, fig. 1) for the convent of San José de la Merced Descalza.

As always, the artist follows the text and no doubt the engraving suggested to him. The dark blue sky seen through the arched window on the right tells us that this is a night scene. The young saint dressed in an ample brown robe with deep folds, is based on the same model as the one in *Saint Peter Apostle Appearing to Saint Peter Nolasco* in the Prado (see

<sup>1</sup> Mainly in the fundamental *Historia General de la Orden N.S. de la Merced* [2 vols. Madrid 1618 and 1633] by Fray Alonso Remón.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Sanctorum*, ed. Venice 1734, t. I, p. 408-409.

p.32), when he was younger, no doubt Sebastián de Zurbarán, the artist's nephew, who entered the convent of Mercy in Seville as a teenager and took his vows at the age of 17 in 1630. His attitude, hands joined together in prayer with his face looking up to the Virgin, is very close to that of *Saint Bonaventure in Prayer* from the Dresden museum, a contemporary painting (fig. 2). Zurbarán excelled at representing these young men in ecstasy.

Just like in the Prado painting, the heavenly apparition takes up the left side of the canvas. The Virgin, surrounded by four angels playing instruments, is seated on a luminous cloud which lights the scene. Behind the clouds and through the varied gold tones of the nimbus encircling them, one glimpses small angel heads painted in an extremely delicate manner. Dressed in a long, very pale pink robe, the angel in the foreground is playing the harp, while to the left of Mary another angel, in subtle blue, accompanies the scene with a lute. The heads and yellow draped busts of two young singers appear behind the Virgin. The type of the Queen of heaven and her accompanists prefigures *The Apparition to Saint Alonso Rodriguez* in 1631 (Madrid, Academia de San Fernando).

When reading the old and numerous biographies of Saint Peter Nolasco, his life seems to have been well known. In fact, many of the incidents are not based on any serious documentation. The vision of 1218 which Zurbarán represented according to Fray Juan de Herrera's demands refers obviously to the foundation of the Order of Mercy attributing the sole honor to Peter Nolasco, illustrated here praying before Mary. According to old sources, the Virgin appeared to the young man and asked him to establish an order devoted to the redemption of captives. The same night she invited Raymond de Peñaforte and the king James I of Aragon to come to the help of the person whom she had designated as the founder. As early as on 10 August 1218 the bishop of Barcelona thus handed over the white habit of the Order of Mercy to Peter Nolasco. Why did Zurbarán not represent Mary's two other apparitions as narrated in the description for engraving n. 6 in the Seville notebook? A controversy had already arisen between Dominicans and Mercedarians : while the date of 1218 was exact, Saint Raymond had not yet entered the Preaching Friars (he did so in 1622). This provided the perfect reason for the Mercy friars to contest the influence of the Dominicans in the founding of their order. If the more credible date of 1223, already chosen by the Bollandists, were accepted, the difficulties disappeared, Raymond de Peñafort could have been Peter Nolasco's confessor and James I born in 1206 would have been more inclined to support a new, and particularly useful, endeavor at the time of the Reconquista<sup>3</sup>.

It seems that Fray Juan de Herrera was not alone in wishing to recognize Saint Peter Nolasco as the only founder. On the same date, around 1630, the convent of Mercy in Murcia commissioned the same subject from Cristobal de Acevedo: here the apparition to the king of Aragon appears in the foreground while the Virgin hands the white scapular to Peter Nolasco in the background. There is no trace of the simultaneous vision of Raymond de Peñafort : the role of the Dominicans is totally overlooked (fig. 3).

Clearly, the series executed by Zurbarán for the convent of the Merced Calzada in Seville constitutes the most beautiful ensemble of works inspired by the canonization of Saint Peter Nolasco. The young master knew how to interpret the models suggested by his patrons and this power of adaptation reveals itself particularly in this cycle. What is most striking is not so much the miraculous aspect as the refined realism of the portraits, the treatment of the fabrics and the objects represented here. Thanks to a knowledgeable use of lighting, the miracle seems incredibly natural : Zurbarán's spirituality resides in the light which he knows is that of ecstasy. The understatement and the symmetry of his compositions, the limited chromatic range and the simplicity, even absence of any décor endows this monastic series with unequalled poetic force.

<sup>3</sup> Yves Dossat, "les Ordres de rachat, les Mercédaires", *Les Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 13, 1978, p. 375-376.

The discovery of this new piece in the Merced series, whose composition both for its colored refinement and the power of the saint's sculptural silhouette is characteristic of Zurbaran's first manner, seems of capital importance to us, not only in the painter's oeuvre, but also for the theme which reveals the controversies between the Dominicans and the Order of Mercy. The date of 1218 although seriously brought into question allowed the Fathers of the Order of Mercy to eliminate any Dominican intervention in the founding of their Order since at that date Raymond de Peñafort was, besides, away from Barcelona. This position led the Mercy Order to bestow the favor of the apparition exclusively to Peter Nolasco to the detriment of the rival order of the Preaching Friars.



Fig. 1 Zurbaràn workshop, *The Virgin Handing over the Habit of the Order of Mercy to Saint Peter Nolasco*, Spain, private collection.

Fig. 2 : Zurbaràn, *Saint Bonaventure in Prayer*, Dresden, Gemäldegalerie





Fig. 3 : Cristobal de Acevedo  
*Apparition of the Virgin to Jaime I*  
Murcie, convent of Mercy

## The Founding of the Order of Mercy

### *The Order of Mercy*

The complete name of this religious family which is relatively unknown in France is : *Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives*. When studying the founding of mendicant orders in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the essential factor is the very quick development of the Preaching Friars founded by Saint Dominic and the Minor Friars founded by Saint Francis. Besides these events which modified the makeup of the Medieval Church profoundly, two original movements took up a specific goal : the ransom of Christian slaves which the Muslims, especially those in Northern Africa, constantly captured either by raids into Christian territory or by attacking vessels in the Mediterranean. The Trinity Fathers founded in 1198 by Saint Jean de Matha, from Provence, were known in Paris as the “Mathurins” from the name of their Parisian convent. Today, the Order of the Trinity has adapted its apostolate to the Church’s new needs and is still present in France, particularly in prisons. The Order of Mercy, founded at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Barcelona by Saint Peter Nolasco, helped by the Dominican Saint Raymond de Peñafort and supported by James I of Aragon developed primarily in Spain<sup>4</sup>. Starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Mercedarians took on a major role in the mission work throughout Latin America. Unfortunately, there are very few serious studies about the beginning of the Order of Mercy ; in particular the real life of Saint Peter Nolasco, when rid of the legends surrounding it, leaves us with few verifiable facts<sup>5</sup>.

The originality of the founding of the Order of Mercy consists in a very particular vow. Without neglecting the required works of charity, such as the upkeep of hospitals, the Order of Mercy devoted the greatest part of its activity, not only to the ransom but also the redemption of prisoners held by heretics. Along with the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the Mercedarians added a fourth very special vow by which they committed themselves to taking the place of a captive who was about to renounce his faith if there was not enough money for the ransom. This fourth vow has gone far to bestow a special character on the Order of Mercy, and is a source of great pride to the Mercedarians.

Founded in 1218, as we wrote, according to old chronicles<sup>6</sup>, the Order of Our Lady of Mercy was made up originally of religious members and knights who stood out for their valor during the *Reconquista*<sup>7</sup> in Spain. Its founder, Saint Peter Nolasco, had accompanied the king of Aragón, James I “*the Conqueror*” during the taking of Valencia from the Moors (1238). He was also alongside Fernando III “*the Saint*” (the future Saint Ferdinand canonized in 1671), king of Castille and León, who was progressively reconquering southern Spain. After seizing Córdoba in 1236, Ferdinand captured Jaén and took over the Moorish kingdom of Murcia then marched on Seville which he regained from the Saracens after a sixteen-month siege. During these long periods of combat James I of Aragón joined Ferdinand accompanied by Saint Peter Nolasco along with many friars and knights from the Order of Mercy. On 22

<sup>4</sup> The Order was active in France only from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the Revolution (see Hugues Cocard, *L’Ordre de la Merci en France 1574-1792*, Paris, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Yves Dossat, 1978, p. 365-387.

<sup>6</sup> The date of the founding remains a controversy. According to the most reliable studies the Order would date back to only 1223 (Dossat, *op. cit.* p. 374-375).

<sup>7</sup> The name of *Reconquista* designates the period lasting from 718 (Battle of Covadonga) to 1492 (conquest of Granada by the Catholic Kings) during which the Spaniards reconquered the large parts of the Iberian Peninsula which had been occupied by the Muslim invaders.

December 1248 the Christian armies finally entered the city<sup>8</sup>; soon after in the following year the royal convent of Casa Grande de la Merced was founded in the Andalusian capital. From 1317 on the Order of Mercy became strictly clerical and was assimilated into the new mendicant orders of Franciscans and Dominicans.

### ***The Convent of Mercy in Seville***

After the discovery of America and throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Seville developed according to the new social, urban and institutional constraints. Thanks to the trading monopoly with the West Indies the city became the most important economic center in Spain: the churches and aristocratic homes were filled with art works. Religious orders and their convents developed and grew depending on their needs to better adapt to the renewed liturgy imposed by theologians after the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The Order of Mercy, one of the most remarkable institutions in the religious life of Golden Age Spain, could no longer remain in the primitive buildings dating from the Middle Ages and now too confining despite the recent separation into two branches. Much as in many of the religious orders at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century or beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, a part of the Mercedarian Fathers decided in fact, under Carmelite influence, to reform in 1603 and to create a distinct order from the “Merced Calzada” (Calced Mercy). This new order took the name of “Merced Descalza” (Discalced Mercy) in 1621 and was approved by Pope Innocent X in 1648. However, the members of the “Merced Calzada” in Seville, from the “Convento Casa Grande de Merced Calzada” continued to grow and were in need of a larger building. Thus the Calced Mercedarians had a new site erected to house their convent in Seville at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Shortly before 1647, Fray Juan de Guerrero, O. de M.<sup>9</sup>, described the layout as well as the perfect architectural and decorative unity of the different parts of the new monastery started around 1602 according to the plans of the architect Juan de Oviedo y de la Bandera<sup>10</sup> and finished in its basic outline by 1612. The decoration was carried out during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. After various upheavals at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (a partial fire in 1810 and the elimination of the male orders in 1835) the original convent of the Merced Calzada of Seville was remodeled starting in 1840 to house one of Spain’s most prestigious art museums: the Museo de Bellas Artes (fig. 4). Just like when it was first created, the former convent is organized around three patios, filled with flowers, trees and *azulejos* (enameled ceramic tiles) (fig. 5). The imposing collection of paintings and sculptures ranges from the Middle Ages to the modern era, with special attention devoted to works from the Golden Age of the Sevillian School : Herrera the Elder, Murillo and Valdés Leal, with the most beautiful group of canvases by Francisco de Zurbarán to be found anywhere today.

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<sup>8</sup>Salmerón, O. de M., *Recuerdos históricos y políticos de los servicios de los generales y varones ilustres de la religión de Nuestra Señora de la Merced redención de los cautivos*, Valencia, 1646, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup>O. de M., Order of Mercy

<sup>10</sup>*Relación de la fundación y antiguedad del Real convento de Ntra. Sra. de la Merced en la noble ciudad de Sevilla por el Maestro Fray Juan Guerrero*, manuscript from the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (Victor Pérez Escolano, “El Convento de la Merced Calzada de Sevilla a la luz de la Relación de Fray Juan Guerrero (mediados del siglo XVII) y la planta aproximada de 1835”, 1982, p. 555, note 1).



Fig. 4 : Exterior of the Museo de Bellas Artes in Seville  
(former convent of the Merced Calzada)



Fig. 5 : Groundplan for the museum

### *The choice of a painter*

Following his little-known beginnings in Llerena, a relatively modest town in the province where he was born, Extremadura, the young painter Francisco de Zurbarán (Fuente de Cantos, 1598 - Madrid, 1664) sought contracts in Seville so as to make a name for himself in the large Andalusian city where he had worked as an apprentice, some ten years earlier (1614-1617) under a certain Pedro Díaz de Villanueva, *pintor de imagenería*, about whom almost nothing is known. At this time he had met two adolescents of about the same age who would also become two of the greatest masters of the Spanish Golden Age and who were both learning their trade alongside the theoretician and painter Francisco Pacheco : Diego de Velázquez, born in 1599, and Alonso Cano, born in 1602. Zurbarán had settled in Llerena in 1618 without taking the final exam for the corporation of Sevillian painters. After Velázquez left Sevilla permanently to go to the Court in 1623, Zurbarán was able to embark on an extraordinary career as a religious painter – he painted few secular subjects – in that metropolis, a very rich one at the time where monasteries and convents proved to be important patrons.

No doubt with the support of Don Lorenzo de Cárdenas, 9<sup>th</sup> count of Puebla de Maestre, an aristocrat from a noble family in Extremadura which governed Seville at the time<sup>11</sup>, Francisco de Zurbarán finally signed a considerable contract for twenty-one paintings for the Dominican convent of San Pablo el Real in January 1626. In order to obtain this commission in a city dominated by Herrera the Elder and where Alonso Cano was becoming well-known, the young provincial painter accepted a relatively modest payment of 4000 reales and committed himself to providing full satisfaction to the Father Superior<sup>12</sup>. Most of the canvases intended for San Pablo and executed in 1626 have unfortunately disappeared, a regrettable loss as they were behind Zurbarán's first success as a religious painter in the Andalusian capital.



Fig. 6 : Zurbarán, *Christ on the Cross*, Chicago, The Art Institute

<sup>11</sup> See Odile Delenda, *Francisco de Zurbarán*, Madrid, 2007, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Contract published by José Hernández Díaz, *Documentos para la historia del arte en Andalucía*, Seville, 1928, p. 182.

However, he delivered to the Dominicans a *Christ on the Cross*, not in the commission, signed and dated 1627 which today is held at the Art Institute of Chicago (fig. 6). This remarkable masterpiece, in perfect accord with the iconographic guidelines prevalent then<sup>13</sup>, but in a resolutely modern style, offered the ideal synthesis between new artistic trends and the profound spirituality demanded by the religious communities in Seville following the Council of Trent. Zurbarán succeeded in capturing and assimilating in this first dated work a popular movement which the Church wished to adopt after the overly intellectual passage of International Mannerism. This irruption of the supernatural in the everyday, this surprising ability of transforming the sacred into familiar terms endows Francisco de Zurbarán's early paintings with unequalled force. It is in this context and after this first success, that the young painter, still living in Llerena, received his second major commission from a convent in Seville, that of the Casa Grande de la Merced Calzada.

### ***The contract of 1628***

According to a contract dated on 29 August 1628 and signed in front of a notary in Seville, Zurbarán committed himself to Fray Juan de Herrera, superior of the great convent of the Calced Mercy, to complete for end of August of the following year, twenty-two large paintings of horizontal format on the life of Saint Peter Nolasco to decorate the second cloister<sup>14</sup>. The young painter was to receive the sum of 1500 ducats, that is 16,500 reales, four times more than for the Dominican cycle of San Pablo. As he was still living in Llerena, he asked to be lodged with his assistants inside the convent itself and to be supplied with the materials needed for executing the paintings. The very terms of the contract for this important commission, which had in fact been turned down in 1626 by Alonso Cano for its difficulty<sup>15</sup>, reveal the overpowering influence of the patrons on the artist:

*"I, Francisco de Zurbarán Salazar, painter of images living in Llerena, now staying in the city of Seville, acknowledge having decided and concluded an agreement with master Fray Juan de Herrera, Father Superior of the Great Convent of Mercy of said city of Seville, in such a way that I commit myself to making twenty-two paintings of the history of Saint Peter Nolasco to cover the second cloister containing the refectory of said convent. [These paintings] should measure two varas in height by two and half varas wide<sup>16</sup> with each one containing the figures and other things which Father Superior shall order as being a little or a lot. To do this, I as well as the other necessary persons will come to this city in the month of September of this year and I will begin to do this work in a steady manner until its completion which should be effective at the end of the month of August of 1629. The convent must supply me as well as my assistants and anyone who participates in anything necessary for the duration of the work, food, table, drink, bed, and anything necessary for said painting, that is canvases, colours, oil, etc...because I should only have to supply my hands. As payment I should be given 2000 ducats, payable in this city in three times : the first at the beginning of the work, the second when eleven paintings have been finished and the rest when everything has been completed"<sup>17</sup>.* On the same day, the clerk stipulates in another document

<sup>13</sup> See Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la Pintura*, ed. Bassegoda, 1990, p. 713-749; selected excerpts in French, ed. Lauriane Fallay d'Este, 1986, p. 258-261.

<sup>14</sup> The first cloister or *Claustro Grande* had been decorated between 1600 and 1611 by Alonso Vázquez and Francisco Pacheco with a series of paintings on the founding of the Order and its activity of redeeming captives.

<sup>15</sup> Lázaro Díaz del Valle (Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, *Fuentes literarias para la historia del Arte Español*, II, Madrid, 1933, p. 388).

<sup>16</sup> That is paintings of 168 cm. by 210 cm. The *vara* is a measuring unit corresponding to a little less than 85 cm.

<sup>17</sup> Seville, Archivo Histórico Provincial, sección de Protocolos notariales, oficio II (López Martínez, *Desde Martínez Montañés hasta Pedro Roldán*, Sevilla, 1932, p. 221).

that the allocated amount will not be 2000 ducats but only 1500 ducats: “*although the price of 2000 ducats was inscribed, the truth is that we agreed on 1500 ducats which should be payed to me and if 2000 ducats was written it was because I insisted*”.

The religious patrons had very tight control over the iconographic program: orthodoxy and *decorum* (understood in its original sense of “that which is fitting”) were not only appreciated but demanded in contracts. For example, in the one Zurbarán had signed previously on 26 January 1626: “*In case some [of these paintings] would not be satisfactory to said Father Superior, they can be returned to me and I will consent to accept [the return] of two or three paintings which I agree to redo over*”,<sup>18</sup>. Even though accepting a lower payment from the Order of Mercy, the painter from Extremadura had still negotiated an amount which was over three times higher than the equivalent commission for the Dominicans of San Pablo. Furthermore, the contract stipulating that the convent of Casa Grande de la Merced Calzada would provide room and board for the painter and his team for almost one year proves that he was already at the head of a large workshop in Llerena. They were to supply him besides with whatever he needed for executing the cycle and we will see that these materials were to be of exceptional quality.

The moving *Martyrdom of Saint Serapion* (Hartford, U.S.A., Conn., Wadsworth Atheneum), signed and dated 1628 on a cartellino (fig. 7), is not mentioned in the commission from 29 April 1628. This painting, the oldest date of all the canvases from the convent of the Merced Calzada in Seville, constitutes an essential landmark in understanding Zurbarán’s sudden breakthrough in the Andalusian capital. It was no doubt commissioned from the young painter in order to judge his ability in accomplishing such an important cycle. Faced with this gripping masterpiece, the Fathers of Mercy could not help but be convinced. The work comes from the room “De Profundis” adjacent to the Buis cloister, used to expose the bodies of the friars before burial. An example of suffering which is accepted and then offered up, Saint Serapion perishes in an atrocious martyrdom at the hands of the Barbary pirates around 1240. Zurbarán eliminates, as always in his subsequent work, the horrible details of the torture hiding them under the full vestments and the wool scapular in an ivory colour of the beautiful Mercedarian habit, all rendered with perfect illusion. At the center of the canvas, the vermillion and gold coat of Mercedarian escutcheon is fastened to the monk’s robe with a long pin. The upper part shows the emblem of the cathedral of Barcelona, the white cross of Saint John of Jerusalem on a field of gules and, below the arms of the House of Aragón, four pales of gules on a field of gold (fig. 8). These arms were bestowed by James I and the bishop of Barcelona on the day the Order was founded, the 10<sup>th</sup> of April of 1218 (or 1623?), worn by the monks as well as by the knights of Our Lady of Mercy.

### ***The Buis Cloister***

The choice of a painted cycle on the life of Saint Peter Nolasco corresponds obviously to his late canonization, in 1628. The Fathers of Mercy wished to decorate their second cloister to glorify their holy founder and approached this young provincial painter, both ambitious and reconciling, who had succeeded so finely in the case of the Dominican cycle.

Built between 1602 and 1612 by Luis de Oviedo, the Buis cloister (*Claustro de los Bojes* or Second cloister or also Refectory cloister) still retains its original structure today (fig. 9). Of a rather irregular rectangular form : 17 and 18 meters wide by 25 long, it includes five arches in the width and seven lengthwise supported by élégant Tuscan columns of white

<sup>18</sup> Hernández Díaz, see *supra*, note 12.



Fig. 7 : Zurbarà, *Saint Serapion*,  
Hartford (CT) The Wadsworth Atheneum



Fig. 8 : 17th century engraving  
representing the coat of arms of  
the Order of Mercy

marble<sup>19</sup>. The upper level is closed off by a windowed tier decorated with green and gold balconies. Although its pictorial décor was unfortunately dispersed at the very beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cloister must have originally resembled a veritable jewel within the larger ensemble of convent buildings. However, the twenty-two paintings commissioned from Zurbarán in 1628 were probably never all executed. Swamped in work, as he had accepted to complete the painted décor in the new church of San Buenaventura started by Herrera the Elder<sup>20</sup> at the same time, the young master surely did not complete the cycle stipulated in his contract by the agreed deadline. The reconstitution of this beautiful décor, incomplete and carried out with extensive participation by the workshop, turned out to be particularly complex.

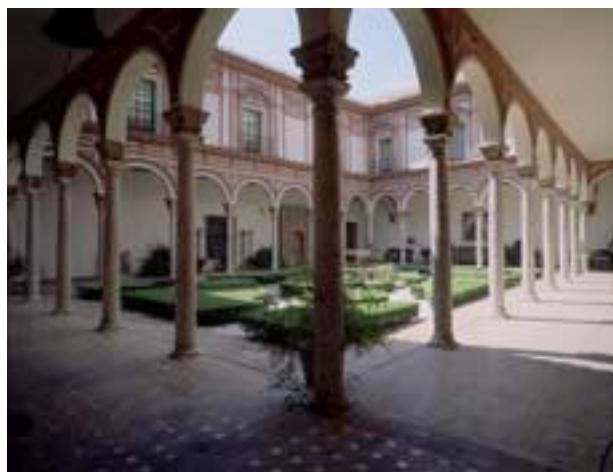


Fig. 9 : Buis Cloister or Small Cloister

<sup>19</sup> Matilde Fernández Rojas, *El convento de la Merced Calzada de Sevilla*, Seville, 2000, p. 59-60.

<sup>20</sup> See Odile Delenda, Benito Navarrete, "El conjunto de San Buenaventura de Sevilla como exponente del naturalismo", *cat. exp.* Sevilla-Bilbao, 2005-06, p. 99-122.

Recently, the Mercedarian father Fray Luis Vázquez published a *Memoria de la Pintura y Escultura de este Real Convento Casa Grande de la Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, Rendición de Cautivos, de la Ciudad de Sevilla*, written in 1730 by Fray Pedro Vázquez “very cautious and a connoisseur of Painting”<sup>21</sup>. As this friar had taken his vows at the convent of Mercy in Seville in 1679, he must have been quite old in 1730. His testimony, a major contribution in understanding the remarkable artistic patrimony of the Calced Mercedarians in Seville in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has been known since 1922 thanks to the publication of a slightly incomplete copy of this *Memoria* held at the Biblioteca Colombina<sup>22</sup>: the old monk had thus seen the treasures in his convent at the height of their glory when they included an extensive quantity of works by the greatest artists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The old descriptions of the convent do not give the number of scenes from the life of the founder to ornate the Buis cloister. In 1724 the painter and critic Antonio Palomino simply referred to the series painted by Zurbarán for the Refectory Cloister of the Calced Mercy<sup>23</sup>. Unfortunately, this first testimony from the 18<sup>th</sup> century does not offer any information either on the exact number of paintings actually hanging there. In the same way, the *Memoria* of 1730 is not any more explicit : “*The large paintings of the life of our very holy patriarch are by the same [Zurbarán] except for the first one which had to be changed within the story and others which are : the Handing over of our statue of the Very Holy Virgin Mary by Saint Ferdinand to our Father, that of the Fishing Boat, that of the Burial of Saint Raymond and the Miracle of the Choir which are by Francisco de la Reina, a fellow artist of Zurbarán’s*”<sup>24</sup>. In 1780 the abbot Antonio Ponz only saw fifteen paintings in the Buis cloister<sup>25</sup>, Fermín Arana de Valflora in 1789 also counted “*fifteen made by Zurbarán and Francisco de Reyna, but many of them are touched up by Professors with little knowledge (de mui distante inteligencia)*”<sup>26</sup>. Nonetheless Ceán Bermúdez in 1800<sup>27</sup> and Justino Matute (1764-1830) corrected the number given by Ponz to only twelve<sup>28</sup>.

Although the number of paintings does not seem clear, all of these authors agree nonetheless on the fact that Zurbarán’s workshop contributed extensively in the cycle of the life of Saint Peter Nolasco. Without stating his sources, Félix González de León in 1844 mentions a trial won by the Dominicans against the Mercedarians concerning three paintings from the series in which Saint Raymond de Peñafort, Preaching Friar and confessor to Saint Peter Nolasco was not represented properly in his Dominican habit but rather as a “regular cleric”. Having been sentenced to changing these canvases, the Fathers of Mercy preferred to hide them and “*we do not know what has become of them*”<sup>29</sup>. This added information, which further complicates the whole affair, is very likely given the wish to exalt the role of Saint

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<sup>21</sup> Fray Luis Vázquez, “Pintura y escultura del Convento Grande de la Merced de Sevilla en 1730”, *Estudios*, n<sup>os</sup>.200-201, January-June 1998, p. 191-208.

<sup>22</sup> Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, “La Vida de San Pedro Nolasco: Pinturas del claustro del refectorio de la Merced Calzada de Sevilla”, *La Merced*, V, n.42, 14 January 1922.

<sup>23</sup> Antonio Palomino y Velasco, *El Museo Pictórico y Escala Óptica*, 3 vols., Madrid, [1724], 1988, III, p. 274-275.

<sup>24</sup> Vázquez, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España*, 18 vols., Madrid, [1772-1794], 1972, IX, p. 106-107.

<sup>26</sup> Fermín Araña de Valflora, *Compendio histórico descriptivo de la muy noble y leal ciudad de Sevilla*, Seville, [1766] 1789, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Juan Augustín Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España*, Madrid, 1800, VI, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Justino Matute y Gaviria, “Adiciones y correcciones de D...al tomo IX del Viaje de España por D. Antonio Ponz anotadas nuevamente por D. Gestoso y Pérez”, *Archivo Hispalense*, 1887, III, p. 376.

<sup>29</sup> Félix González de León, *Noticia artística, histórica y curiosa de todos los edificios públicos, sagrados y profanos de esta muy noble, muy leal, muy heróica e invicta ciudad de Sevilla y de muchas casas particulares*, 2 vols., Seville, [1844], 1973, II, p. 370.



Raymond de Peñafort's contribution in helping to create it. Paul Guinard has suggested that this trial lost by the Mercedarians might even have caused the work on the Buis cloister to stop : Fray Juan de Herrera might have then asked Zurbarán to replace the works still to be done by paintings for other parts of the convent<sup>30</sup>.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the 1628 contract was not totally finished by Zurbarán. Before 1998, a year of many celebrations for the four hundredth anniversary of Francisco de Zurbarán's birth, only ten works corresponding to the criteria of the scattered décor from the cloister were known of. Furthermore, for a reason we are unaware of – financial need, poor condition of the canvases, or even a change in taste for this art – the paintings had disappeared from the convent before the Napoleonic invasion in Seville. It is known that on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1810 the French entered the city : in the ensuing disorder of the occupation a violent fire broke out in the convent on the following 6 February<sup>31</sup>. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of the same month, Frédéric Quillet, a curator for the Fine-Arts in the government of the intruding king Joseph Bonaparte, was put in charge of collecting the convent paintings for the rooms at the Alcázar and deplored in talking with the Marquis of Almenara, Minister of the Interior, that “the Mercy had sold everything”<sup>32</sup>.

Half of the ten works known until 1998 are in all evidence by Zurbarán. Two of them are currently held at the Prado : *The Apparition of Saint Peter Crucified to Saint Peter Nolasco* (see p.32), signed and dated 1629, and the *Vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem* (see p.34), monogrammed. *The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco for Barcelona* (see p.31) from the Franz Mayer museum in Mexico, very worn, was no doubt executed with help from the workshop. The *Surrender of Seville* (see p.37) from the Duke of Westminster's collection is also signed and dated 1629 whereas the *Handing over of the Virgin of Puig to King James I* (see p.35) from the Cincinnati museum, dated 1630, was thus painted after the agreed deadline of August 1629. The four canvases currently held at the cathedral in Seville in the San Pedro chapel although of fine quality are in no way by the master himself. As for the first painting in the series, *The Miracle of the Bees at the Birth of Saint Peter Nolasco* (see p.39) from the museum in Bordeaux, “which had to be changed within the story”<sup>33</sup>, it was painted by an anonymous follower to replace the Zurbarán work. In 1998 the beautiful *Apparition of the Virgin to Saint Peter Nolasco*, the subject of this study, reappeared once more.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Guinard, “Los Conjuntos dispersos o desaparecidos de Zurbarán: anotaciones a Ceán Bermúdez, I, II, III”, *Archivo Español de Arte*, 1947, XX, p. 166-167.

<sup>31</sup> José Gestoso y Pérez, *Sevilla monumental y artística*, 3 vols., Seville [1890] 1984, II, p. 292

<sup>32</sup> Saltillo, Miguel Lasso de la Vega, marqués de, M. Frédéric Quillet, curator of Fine Arts in the intruding Government (1809-1814), Madrid, 1933, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Vázquez [1730], 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

### *The engravings of the Life of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Saint Peter Nolasco (around 1180-1182-died probably in 1249 and not in 1256), founder of the Order of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives was canonized on 30 September 1628 by “way of immemorial cult” or “equipollent” under Pope Urban VIII, after a complicated process of seventy days whose outcome was far from certain and which had taken almost six years to prepare. The Protestant Reforms and their followers, preceded by Erasmus, had criticized the Catholics for behaving like “pagans” by replacing the ancient gods with the saints. The Council of Trent, in its 25<sup>th</sup> session (December 1563) maintained the traditional doctrine of the Roman church on the worship of saints, but condemned the abuses surrounding it, notably as concerned images. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a legal rule prevailed in the Church which applied to all canonizations and admitted no exceptions. Applicants for sainthood who lived in early times could fall under an “equipollent” canonization, by which the sovereign pontiff ordered that the saint be honored in the universal Church, having been a servant of God who had not been able to benefit from a rigorous process but who had been the object of public worship since time immemorial<sup>34</sup>.

The attorneys sent to Rome to plead before the pope were two illustrious Mercedarians: Fray Luis de Aparicio for the Fathers of the Calced Mercy and Fray Diego de San Ramón for the Discalced. Urban VIII officially recognized the sainthood of the founder of the Order on 30 September 1628 and delivered the confirmation Bull the following 11 October. The copy of the bull arrived in Spain at the end of the year. In Madrid the Discalced Mercedarians gave a magnificent celebration in honor of the event around 29 January 1629 while *Las Fiestas solemnes y grandiosas de San Pedro Nolasco*, published in 1630 by Fray Alonso Remón, relates the grandiose public solemnities organized by the Calced Mercedarians on their part from 21 to 30 April 1629. Sumptuous religious ceremonies and festivities also took place in Seville in May of the same year<sup>35</sup>.



Fig. 10 : J.F. Greuter  
*The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*



Fig. 11: C. Cobrador, after Jusepe Martinez  
*The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*

<sup>34</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Histoire des saints*, Paris, 1988, VIII, p. 24-26.

<sup>35</sup> Francisco Morales Padrón, *Memorias de Sevilla (1600-1678)*, Cordoba, 1981, p. 63.



An Italian compilation of documents which had been assembled for the canonization cause, in the form of ten sewn manuscript notebooks, is held at the library of the University of Seville with the title of *Memoriales sobre la santidad, oficio y vida de N.P.* (that is Nuestro Padre – our father – Saint Peter Nolasco). The eighth notebook has turned out to be of major importance for the iconography of the holy founder, rarely represented before being canonized. It describes in fact a *Vie de Saint Pierre Nolasque en estampes* made up of twenty-five engravings, but unfortunately the illustrations no longer accompany the text<sup>36</sup>. Seven of the engraved illustrations were discovered and donated by Valentín Carderera (1796-1880) to the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (fig. 10). The R.P. Delgado Varela, O. de M., who published the manuscript and the engravings in 1956<sup>37</sup> points out four engravings in a smaller format from another series, less finely engraved, by Corn. (Cornelius) “Cobrador”, apparently imitating the first one exactly with the legend in Spanish and not in Latin as in the first series (fig. 11). Three of them appear in reverse compared to the original series. In 1956, a replica of these engravings belonged to R.P. Sancho Blanco, O. de M., The Aragonese painter Jusepe Martínez (Zaragoza 1601-1682) was in Rome in 1620 and no doubt still in 1627, the date of the two engravings held today ; he provided the drawings for the engravings which were then entrusted to various artists (Johan Friedrich Greuter, Matthaus Greuter and Lucas Ciamberlano).

Father Delgado Varela’s discovery was the starting point for María Elena Manrique when writing her Bachelor’s thesis on the complete process for the elaboration of the *Vie de saint Pierre Nolasque*. According to the author, Fray Alonso de Molina, Attorney General of the Order of Mercy in 1622 chose this very young Aragonese artist, no doubt more malleable in following out orders, to produce the twenty-five preparatory drawings for the *Vita* printed in Rome on suggestion of Cardinal Gaspar de Borja y Velasco<sup>38</sup>. Unfortunately, when investigating Jusepe Martínez’ stay in the Italian capital, Elena Manrique was not able to find the original tract of this illustrated life despite the fact that it was reedited in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The engravings at the Biblioteca Nacional belong to this second printing<sup>39</sup>. When transactions for the canonization of Saint Peter Nolasco ended, his engraved *Vita* from 1627 became a magnificent tool for underscoring the *Memoriales* of his cause. After playing their role in the documentation for the process it seems that these engravings were totally forgotten : this is the only explanation for the complete absence of any copies in the houses belonging to the Order.

María Elena Manrique pursued her research on Jusepe Martínez for her doctoral dissertation. It contains a very complete study of the iconographic and iconological interpretation of these engravings which show an obvious parallel with the complex world of emblems. The 18<sup>th</sup> century religious community was made up of erudite humanists who accepted as evident that “Beauty”, “Truth” and “Good” were divine attributes. The scholarly illustrations of the life of the holy founder assimilated his figure to the famous examples of the Just Ones from the Old Testament. They also wanted to show that his life was a perfect model of Christian virtue and provided at last a story of Salvation which could be easily imitated<sup>40</sup>. The different episodes in the life of the founder were represented there in chronological order like in the most widely spread biographies. The sources come from the major historians of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy who wrote in Latin such as Nadal Graver

<sup>36</sup> Cote 331/142. We thank Professor José Fernández López for having provided us with a copy of this text.

<sup>37</sup> José María Delgado, O. de M., “Sobre la canonización de San Pedro Nolasco”, *Estudios*, XII, ns. 35-36, 1956, pp. 265-295.

<sup>38</sup> Manrique, *Jusepe Martínez, un pintor zaragozano en la Roma del Seicento*, Zaragoza, 2000, p. 95-98.

<sup>39</sup> María Elena Manrique Ara, “Jusepe Martínez, un ilustrador del siglo XVII. Estudio de sus estampas romanas para una *Vida de san Pedro Nolasco*”, (*Memoria de Licenciatura*), *Artigrama*, n. 12, 1997, p. 711-712.

<sup>40</sup> Manrique, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

(1445)<sup>41</sup>, Francisco Zumel (1588)<sup>42</sup> and Bernardo de Vargas (1619)<sup>43</sup>. However, all of the scenes could be found perfectly described in Castilian in the fundamental history of the Order of the Mercedarian Father Fray Alonso Remón, published in Madrid in 1618 and 1633<sup>44</sup>. Fray Juan de Herrera who supervised the production of Zurbarán's commission in 1628 most likely supplied the series of engravings done in 1627 after Jusepe Martínez' drawings to the painter and his team to use as models. In order to execute these paintings which had no iconographic precedent, the young master from Extremadura did indeed turn for inspiration to these engravings on several occasions. But we shall see as concerns the work we are presenting here that the patron made him change these models at times. The small notebook from the University of Seville although devoid of illustrations does however retain the Latin inscriptions appearing on the few images which have been recovered. The first one, written in capital letters inside a cartouche at the top of the engraving, can be summarized in a brief sentence on the subject taken from Holy Scripture. The second, in lower case, serves as a legend for each of the episodes represented and indicates the literary source with the title "S. PETRUS NOLASCO FUND.".

The cycle painted by Zurbarán and his workshop on the life of Saint Peter Nolasco constituted a very complete narrative sequence whose "reading" in the Buis cloister was supposed to reflect a didactic program which would be clear to the novices and visitors. It is easy to understand Fray Juan de Herrera's reasons for also choosing a young master, probably more compliant, to interpret to the letter the texts and engravings he supplied to the artist for executing the paintings. Alonso Cano, another young master, a painter as well as sculptor and architect who was well-known in Seville, had refused (in 1626) at the age of twenty-four this same commission for the cloister saying he was incapable of doing it because of his lack of "*knowledge in the art of perspective*"<sup>45</sup>. Cano's aspiration was to dominate all fields of knowledge, which was certainly not the case for Zurbarán who had not taken the exam that was supposed to crown his apprenticeship in Seville. On the other hand, his scrupulous obedience to his patrons' demands, his diligence in responding so exactly to their wishes along with his very personal way of capturing the divine presence in the everyday make him undoubtedly the best interpreter of the Catholic Reformation in Spain<sup>46</sup>. There is no question that Francisco de Zurbarán fulfills all of the required conditions here. We have proof in Palomino's praise of 1724 where he describes the series in these terms: "*He acquired the reputation of being an excellent painter [in Seville] with the many works he did there and particularly those by his hand which can be found in the second cloister of the Calced Mercy, of Saint Peter Nolasco, which is a famous work and truly excellent ; where the habits of the monks draw great admiration, because although they are all white, they are different from each other depending on their degree of development ; with such an admirable perfection in the strokes, the color and the way they belie nature itself ; as this artist worked so studiously that he painted all the fabrics on a mannequin and the flesh from a live model ; and he thus did marvelous things inspiring himself in the Caravaggesque school*"<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Nadal Gaver, *Speculum fratrum Ordinis B.M.V. de Mercede redemptionis captivorum*, 1445, Valladolid, 1533.

<sup>42</sup> Francisco Zumel, *De Vitis Patrum et Magistrorum generalium, Ordinis redemptorum B/M/ de Mercede*, in *Regula et Constitutiones Fratrum...*, Salamanca, 1588.

<sup>43</sup> Bernardo de Vargas, *Chronica sacri et militaris Ordinis B.M. de Mercede redemptionis captivorum*, I, Palermo, 1619 and 1622.

<sup>44</sup> Fray Alonso Remón, *Historia de la Orden de N.S. de la Merced*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1618 and 1633.

<sup>45</sup> Díaz de Valle, see *supra* note 15

<sup>46</sup> Odile Delenda, "Zurbarán, intérprète idéal de la Contre-Réforme espagnole", *Revue du Louvre et des musées de France*, n. 2, 1988, p. 117-126.

<sup>47</sup> Palomino, op. cit., p. 274-275.

## The consequences of his success: his arrival in Seville

The quality of the paintings executed by Francisco de Zurbarán in Seville between 1626 and 1629 for the Dominicans of the San Pablo convent, the observant Franciscans of the Colegio San Buenaventura and for the Casa Grande de la Merced Calzada, enables us to understand the success of the young master from Extremadura in the Andalusian capital. Neither Juan de Roelas, the most important painter of the first quarter of the century, who died in 1625, nor Pacheco, master and father-in-law of the young prodigy, Velázquez, who had left for the Court, nor Juan de Uceda could compete with the new arrival in the prosperous city. Herrera, known as the Elder, far superior to the last two, had gained a lot of enemies for his violent character. Only Alonso Cano, three years younger and who had become a “master” in 1626, was on a level with him, could even surpass him thanks to his triple training as a painter, sculptor and architect. One can easily imagine the latter’s resentment when he saw that the commission he had turned down gained Zurbarán a position as official painter to the city when he in fact had not taken the traditional corporation exam after finishing his apprenticeship.

Indeed, on 27 June 1629, the city of Seville presided by Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, vice count of Corzana, offered for the young provincial artist to settle permanently in Seville in order to practice his trade as “master painter”, for the city’s further glory. Moreover, the municipality promised to favor him and aid him in any circumstance. This unusual gesture proves to what extent Zurbarán had imposed himself both by his talent and his submission to the demanding religious patrons. The petition presented by the Knight Rodrigo Suárez in the name of the Municipal Council clearly refers to the paintings in the Mercy cloister : *“Rodrigo Suárez informs the city that the convent of Mercy has summoned the painter, Francisco de Zurbarán, from Llerena to do the paintings which are to be placed in the new cloister which has just been built. Judging by those he has finished, like the Christ which is in the sacristy of San Pablo, it can be seen that he is a consummate artist in such a matter[...]. It seems that our city should make an effort so that the said Francisco de Zurbarán remain here to live”*<sup>48</sup>. Zurbarán of course accepted the flattering invitation since on 26 September he signed a contract as “master painter of this city of Seville” for a side altarpiece for the church in the convent of the Trinidad Calzada<sup>49</sup>.

Resentful and jealous, Alonso Cano found the favor bestowed on this provincial artist who had never finished his studies indecent. He led a group of Sevillian painters in May 1630 demanding that Zurbarán submit himself to the law and take the corporate exam. Knowing he had powerful supporters, Zurbarán addressed the Municipal Council to subtly underscore that *“the approval of Your Lords who declare me a distinguished man”* holds much more value than the petition *“by painters jealous of the favor you have bestowed on me”*<sup>50</sup>. The question of the exam would never come up again : Zurbaran remained in Seville and during the second quarter of the Golden Age became the most sought after painter in the city!

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<sup>48</sup> José Gestoso y Pérez, *Ensayo de un diccionario de los artífices que florecieron en esta ciudad de Sevilla desde el siglo XIII hasta el XVIII inclusive*, Sevilla, 1900, II, p. 124-125.

<sup>49</sup> Celestino López Martínez, *Arquitectos, escultores y pintores vecinos de Sevilla*, Seville, 1928.

<sup>50</sup> Gestoso, *op. cit.*, p. 125 and 126.

## **T E C H N I C A L   A S P E C T S**



(our canvas)

## *The original support*<sup>50bis</sup>

During the restoration of our Zurbarán painting representing the *Founding of the Order of Mercy*, the original support was luckily revealed. This is a beautiful damask fabric with a complex design (photograph), an expensive material used rarely by painters<sup>51</sup>. It would seem that this unusual support appears mostly in Spain at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the large religious paintings commissioned by Philip II for the basilica of the Escorial. The use of this damasked fabric is also found frequently in El Greco's works in Toledo. For example, the famous *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586, Toledo, Santo Tomé) is painted on a canvas with a complicated diamond design<sup>52</sup> which is very similar to that of Zurbarán's painting, studied here. This type of fabric has been known in Spain since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the misnomer of "mantelillo veneciano" (Venetian doily).

The popularity of linen, hemp or cotton canvas as a support for painted works is related to transportation problems : assembled wooden panels were heavy and cumbersome when travelling, whereas rolled-up canvases were both light and easy to handle. Painting on fabric had been practiced since antiquity, notably for standards, but it began to spread towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, notably in Venice, as a support for the large paintings which were progressively replacing the frescoes, altarpiece panels and portraits. The first easel paintings on canvas were produced by Mantegna and the Bellinis on linen fabrics which were still very thin<sup>53</sup>. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the use of fitted but rough canvases with a herring-bone pattern became widespread in the city of the Doges. These heavy and solid materials, also known as serge or twill were shown to be perfect for the immense Venetian compositions.

The introduction of damask fabric or *mantel*<sup>54</sup> in Spain for oil painting is probably due to the influence of the Venetian school which generalized the use of this support as in the large *Portrait of Charles V in Muhlberg* by Titian (1548, Madrid, Prado). The arrival of an extensive number of Venetian paintings, highly appreciated both by Charles V and Philip II, familiarized Spanish painters with this canvas as a support for their works. Generally, the choice and preparation of the fabrics for the paintings was done by the artists themselves, with old theorists like Pacheco<sup>55</sup> or Palomino<sup>56</sup> recommending their use. Here, Zurbarán uses a damask which is obviously very expensive. The price of the canvases found in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century inventories vary extremely and are clearly related to the quality of the fabric. Right after the *manteles reales de Flandes*, particularly costly, come the *manteles admascados* or *alemaniscos* (damasked fabrics) with prices which are three, even four times higher than the simple *sargas* (or serge) used for inexpensive paintings. These highly priced damask materials were valued for their solidity, sometimes also for their pattern which could be used in relief by the artist, but above all for their greater width thus avoiding unsightly and

<sup>50bis</sup> We wish to thank José Antonio Buces and Paloma Renard, Restauradores de Pintura de Caballete, Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España in Madrid and Pierre Curie, conservateur en chef du Patrimoine, responsable de la filière peinture, Centre de recherché et de restauration des musées de France.

<sup>51</sup> Damask is a fabric where the motifs on the front, found in the woof, are identical on the back where they appear in the warp.

<sup>52</sup> M.S. de los Ríos y Rojas, "Análisis del tejido de dos muestras procedentes de la tela y el forro del cuadro de El Greco, *Entierro del conde de Orgaz*, conservado en la iglesia de Santo Tomé de Toledo", *Informes y Trabajos del Instituto de Restauración de Obras de Arte*, 1977, n.13.

<sup>53</sup> Ana Calvo, *Conservación y Restauración*, Barcelona, 1997, *ad vocem* "lienzo", p. 132.

<sup>54</sup> Today the word means tablecloth but in old documents this term was used for all household linens.

<sup>55</sup> Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura. Su antiguedad y grandeza* (ms.1638), Seville, 1649, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda I Hugas, Madrid, 1990, p. 480-481.

<sup>56</sup> Antonio Palomino y Velasco, *El Museo Pictórico y Escala Óptica*, 3 vols., Madrid, 1724; ed. 1988, II, p. 126-127.

fragile<sup>57</sup>. Most painters could not afford these and they were reserved for important commissions. Velázquez used damask in his early works in Seville<sup>58</sup> and Zurbarán for important contracts like the one for the sacristy of Guadalupe (1638-1639)<sup>59</sup>. Strangely enough, Miguel Guelles, a painter in Seville who produced only works for export to the American colonies used it in 1608 in a large commission for the Dominicans in Lima<sup>60</sup>.

Like most fabrics, damask takes its name from the city where it originated : Damascus. This refined cloth however was soon taken up in Europe : Italy was an early patron of beautiful fabrics and Italian textile art was from its inception strongly influenced by oriental traditions. After the Spanish Reconquista over the Moors, the Catholic Kings and their successors took pride in preserving and developing the famous textiles left by their occupiers thus encouraging a prosperous industry which flourished in Spain during the 16<sup>th</sup> century in direct competition with that of other European countries, notably Italy. In fact, the Mercy fathers who supplied Zurbarán with all the necessary materials for producing the cycle of paintings on Saint Peter Nolasco's life could purchase the beautiful damask fabric used by the master either in France, England, Germany or the Netherlands. It seems likely that the damask used in this series came from a Spanish factory in Galicia, Bierzo or even Medina de Rioseco<sup>61</sup>. Besides the very beautiful quality of the fabric, the main concern of the painter and his patrons was to avoid the presence of seams in these paintings of large format.



( Cleaning )

<sup>57</sup> See Rocio Bruquetas Galán, *Técnicas y Materiales de la Pintura Española en los Siglos de Oro*, Madrid, 2002, p. 232-247.

<sup>58</sup> Carmen Garrido, *Velázquez. Técnica y evolución*, Madrid, 1992, p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Bruquetas, *op. cit.*, p. 242-243.

<sup>60</sup> Francisco Stasny, "Las pinturas de Santo Domingo", *Revista Iconos*, Lima, n.1, 1999, p. 8-21.

<sup>61</sup> Bruquetas, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

« The work came to us in a “transient” state, having already been treated a few years ago. A poorly executed relining of the canvas, now frail and altered, as well as an attempt at cleaning made the painting barely legible in its present condition. Various troubled areas, darkened and irregular, deprived the work of some of its unity. After examining it, we determined on a procedure which, although modified later because of the support, began with the cleaning itself.

This facilitated as much as possible the recovery of the support, by clearing the surface of the successive varnishes, glues and touch-ups, in some places older, hardened and darkened. The continuous observation of how the original or added materials reacted, allowed us to understand that several old restorations on the support and the pictorial layer, along with partial cleanings, had left extensive amounts of residue. It became imperative to treat the entire painting, with solvents or by hand, fragment by fragment, as the old touch-ups and glues got in each other’s way. This allowed the discovery of enormous original parts which had been covered up, especially around the edges.

This was followed by the dismantling of the last relining, done by Jean Joyerot, thus allowing us to remove the recent canvas lining which was not appropriate but, above all, to discover the back of a seamless canvas, which revealed a particularly rich and elaborate weft and weaving. This canvas, identified as a “mantelillo de Venecia” (literally, Venetian doily), excluded the possibility of a new relining, as it presents valuable information on Zurbarán’s technique, as well as being an important event for the work, its history and should be left accessible. We decided to consolidate it and fix it more firmly, both front and back, and then stretch it on a new, appropriate support by means of tension strips, as it did not show any rips (except for some very minor lacks, only in limited places). We thus stretched it over a transparent polycarbonate sheet, itself placed on a flat frame, in order to prevent the canvas from being ripped by any kind of shock or unwanted contact and allowing visual access to the back of the canvas, therefore avoiding the need to reline it.

Some observations on the execution technique are worth mentioning: the work was painted over a dark, almost black, preparation, typical of that period, particularly for Zurbarán. This allowed him to obtain very “efficient” pictorial effects thanks to idiosyncratic gestures and ductility, with this background colour contributing to the chromatic enhancement of the matter and the strokes themselves. These strokes, by means of their pictorial effects, associate the more or less perceptible background to variations in gestures, amplitude and thickness, noticeable particularly in the Virgin’s gown. Several “repentirs” can be discerned here, underscored and “betrayed” by the increased transparency and immediate touch-ups (with glazes which differ in coverage and opacity) but which in no way hamper the viewing.

The pictorial effects are varied and reveal areas reflecting very careful and smooth work (the faces, certain details in the clothing, the orange background with the cherubs) as well as very free and immediate, almost modern, parts (the blue robe of the musician angel where the trace of the brush is visible).

The volumes, particularly the clothing, are first worked on as sculptural mass, then gone over with many minuscule and fine details. The hands of the angel with the harp (where imperceptible incisions showing the strings are visible), the chin and the robe of the kneeling monk, as well as the base of the column, also contain “repentirs”.

After filling in missing gaps, aligning and doing surface work in order to recover the texture and the aspect of the material, the painting was varnished, the missing spots put back and the “repentirs” were slightly attenuated without hiding them. »

T H E   K N O W N   P A I N T I N G S

O N   T H E   L I F E   O F

S A I N T   P E T E R   N O L A S C O

## AUTOGRAPH PAINTINGS BY ZURBARAN

### *The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Oil on canvas, H. 171 cm ; L. 212 cm  
Mexico D.F., Museo Franz Mayer



The episode shown here is drawn from the history of the Order of Mercy by Alonso Remón<sup>62</sup>. According to his oldest biographers, the saint seems to have left his native Languedoc while still a teenager because of the spread of the Cathare heresy and settled in Barcelona. Some of his young companions are trying unsuccessfully to dissuade him from leaving. For this scene from Saint Peter Nolasco's youth, Zurbarán found direct inspiration in Cornelius Cobrador's engraving on the same subject. This is however not a literal copy : the painter transcends the engraved model by instilling it with deeply personal reality and vitality.

The figure of the young man stands out from the rest of the composition by his presence and density. The three other young persons were probably executed by an assistant. The wear on the canvas prevents us from judging the quality of the original work, the first open-air scene we know of by Zurbarán. The very accomplished landscape evokes the rocky region, the scrub brush and the groves of evergreen oaks of his native Extremadura.

<sup>62</sup> Remón, *Historia de la Orden de N.S. de la Merced*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1618 and 1633, fol. 39.

**Saint Peter Nolasco's Vision of the Crucified Saint Peter**

Oil on canvas, H. 179 cm ; L. 223 cm

Signed and dated 1629

Madrid, Museo del Prado (Inv. n° 1237)



After the apparition of Mary when she handed over the beautiful white habit of the Order he would found, Saint Peter Nolasco was favored, it is said, with several consoling visions which are recounted in old chronicles. Two of these miraculous episodes were represented by Zurbarán in works held today at the Prado. They had been illustrated shortly before that in the 25 engravings of the *Vie gravée* after the drawings by Jusepe Martínez. Alonso Remón described in detail the *Apparition of Saint Peter Crucified to Saint Peter Nolasco* dated 1629. The young founder of the Order of Mercy wished fervently to go to Rome and visit the tomb of his illustrious patron. The head of the Apostles appeared to him in a dream on three consecutive nights. On the third one, while Peter Nolasco was praying on his knees, the Apostle Peter appeared on a crucifix with his head upside down advising him to remain in Spain where his work was so effective.

Zurbarán undoubtedly used the striking oblique composition by Jusepe Martínez as a model following the Spanish version engraved by Cobrador in the same direction as the painting. Thanks to the horizontal composition, the painter suggests in a masterful way the miraculous intrusion in the dark cell of the amazed young monk. The nude body of the crucified apostle is totally realistic, the blood flows to the old man's face marked by his

wrinkled forehead. He is wearing a “chaste loin cloth” in luminous white which contrasts sharply with the thick folds of the heavy ivory robe of the Mercedarian. The total absence of details which might distract attention gives the apparition a concrete reality, a sublime natural quality.



J.F. Greuter, *Saint Peter Nolasco's Vision of the Crucified Saint Peter*  
( Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional )

*The Vision of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Oil on canvas, H. 179 cm ; L. 223 cm

Monogram bottom right : "Fco. De Z. F."  
Madrid, Museo del Prado (Inv. n° 1236)



Like the other painting from the series held at the Prado, *The Vision of Heavenly Jerusalem* comes from an exchange made in 1821 between Ferdinand VII and the canon López Cepero who owned several paintings from the Merced Calzada. The subject is drawn from the old chronicles of the Order and was also treated by Jusepe Martínez for the *Vie gravée de saint Pierre Nolasque* (1627). Unfortunately, the engraving corresponding to this episode has not been recovered. In this infinitely poetic work, Zurbarán bestows a dense reality on the mystery. A very beautiful adolescent angel, dressed in a long pale pink tunic with violet and pearly reflections, summons up behind the old monk's back the vision of a celestial city, the new Jerusalem, symbolizing the salvation of virtuous souls. The boy who posed for the angel was a real model as was the figure of the saint which must be a portrait of one of the monks in the convent, perhaps even the patron himself, Fray Juan de Herrera.

The two visions in the Prado, like the painting we are presenting here, correspond to the early years of Zurbarán's career in Seville. The works of a still young painter, they are nonetheless absolutely masterful and already quite personal. In these paintings, the artist already achieves a high level of spirituality while remaining perfectly natural. He reveals his stunning ability to use a pictorial language of the everyday to evoke a supernatural event

without any superfluous rhetoric thus making it appear believable. His simple compositions are, however, instilled with an intense spiritual force. The process, in fact quite simple, of enveloping his apparitions in an aura of clouds with subtle colours, is treated by Zurbarán with a sensitivity and quality of execution which explains the success of his production in the atmosphere of mystical renewal which then reigned in Seville during the Catholic Reformation.

***The Handing of the Image of the Virgin of El Puig to King James I of Aragon***

Oil on canvas, H. 164 cm ; L. 208 cm

Signed and dated 1630

Cincinnati (OH), Art Museum (Inv. n° 1917-58)



Between the time of its founding in 1218 (or 1223?) and 1317, the Order of Mercy retained a military and lay character. The scene represented here depicts a miracle which happened during the conquest of Valencia by James I of Aragón in 1238. The incident took place shortly before the city was taken, as prophesied by Saint Peter Nolasco who was alongside the king during the siege. One evening the guards at the Puig castle saw seven stars fall from the sky into the ground three different times. When alerted, the king and Saint Peter Nolasco had the spot where the stars fell dug up. First, they discovered a huge, very old bell engraved with the pictures of the apostles Peter, Paul and James. Buried under the bell there was a stone

relief representing a Virgin with Child<sup>63</sup>. The legend says that this image “sculpted by the angels” on the stone from the Virgin’s tomb in Jerusalem had been brought to Puig by the Benedictines who founded a convent there. After being hidden from the Goths so that they would not desecrate it during the Muslim invasion, it was “revealed” to the Christians at the time of the *Reconquista*.

To represent this episode, the superior of the Merced Calzada did not provide Zurbarán with the engraving on the subject after the drawings by Jusepe Martínez. The young painter was thus faced with a story which had no iconographic precedent. By means of a very rigorously geometric composition, he divided the scene into two groups separated by a landscape where the viewer glimpses the Puig castle. On the left one can see a rather lively group of military persons with bright costumes under their shiny armour, at their feet the kneeling figure who discovered the bell and the sculpted stone presents the latter to the king and to the Mercedarian. The figures on the right, standing, pose more solemnly. The central character of James I of Aragón, in 16<sup>th</sup> century period costume (to underscore the fact that this is not a contemporary scene) is turning towards the large white silhouette of Saint Peter Nolasco who has joined his hands in prayer and admires Mary’s image. Between these two monumental figures, there is a young page who is turned toward the viewer and who might be Zurbarán’s son, Juan, then ten. The painter has succeeded in rendering an admirable gallery of male portraits, contrasting the popular faces of the soldiers with the more distinguished semblances of the king and the saint. The muted twilight imbues the scene and heightens the reflections of the armour. The contrast between the reds or brownish yellows of the soldiers, the metal of the coats of armour and the remarkable ivory white of the monk’s cape are the promise of a great colourist painter.

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<sup>63</sup> Remón, *op. cit.*, lib. II, fol. 62.

*The Surrender of Seville*

Oil on canvas, H. 160 cm ; L. 207.8 cm

Signed and dated 1629

Eccleston (Great Britain), the Duke of Westminster



The episode of the surrender of Seville does not appear in the engravings illustrating the life of Saint Peter Nolasco after the drawings by Jusepe Martínez. It seems obvious that the Mercedarians in Seville chose to insert it in the decoration of their cloister so as to enhance the relation of their holy founder with the famous Ferdinand III, canonized in 1671. The Mercedarians, being a Military Order, had in fact participated in the reconquest of Spain over the Muslims, not only alongside James I of Aragon, but also with Ferdinand III, king of Castille and León, who had slowly gained back Andalusia. After taking over Córdoba in 1236, Ferdinand captured Jaén and then reconquered the kingdom of Murcia. He finally marched on Seville which he took back from the Moors after a long siege of sixteen months at which time James I of Aragón had joined him, along with Saint Peter Nolasco and monks and knights of the Order of Mercy. On 22 December 1248, the Christians entered the city<sup>64</sup>.

Zurbarán represents here the moment when the Moorish governor of Seville, Achacaf, on his knees, presents the key to the city on a platter to Ferdinand III, dressed in armour and

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<sup>64</sup> Salmerón, 1646, p. 37.

leaning on his commander's staff. To the right of the monarch, there are three knights also wearing armour with one holding the shield of the Order. This coat of arms which was bestowed by James I and the bishop of Barcelona the day the Order was founded, was also worn as a shield over the monks' white habits. To the left of the king, Saint Peter Nolasco, seen as an old man (he was to die the following year), is surrounded by a Mercedarian friar and a Dominican to recall the close ties between the two orders and the constant support of Saint Raymond de Peñafort, who had once been the master general of the Preaching Friars and was considered by the Dominicans to be the cofounder of the Order of Mercy. Behind the Moorish governor, Ferdinand III's standard reveals the heraldic figures of his kingdom – the tower of Castile and the lion of León in gold, quartered on a field of silver. In the background, we see the enemy camp before the walls of Seville, dominated by the Giralda. Like in all of the other paintings known today of the story of Saint Peter Nolasco, there is no attempt at archeological precision. Dressed in almost contemporary costumes, the figures are placed there to underscore the relevancy of the events and incite the viewers to imitate the exemplary life suggested to them.

The date of 1629, which reappeared during a recent restoration (2000), has modified commentaries by specialists: it was not Zurbarán who found inspiration in the elderly Pacheco, author of a painting of the same subject in Seville's cathedral, Velázquez' master, but just the opposite (see figure below). By lining the figures standing up in a frieze on the right and placing a kneeling character in the foreground, the composition resembles the Cincinnati painting, signed in 1630. The lighting from the left, evenly distributed over the entire scene heightens the blue reflections on the armour, the contrast between the dark uniforms and the luminous white habit of the monk. The rich clothing of the victors and the vanquished are particularly remarkable and prefigure Zurbarán's taste for theater costumes for which he lovingly studied the different fabrics.

Another painting in the same series, attributed to a follower of Zurbarán (perhaps Juan Luis Zambrano) is held in the cathedral of Seville and completes the story of the reconquest of the city. King Ferdinand is represented offering Saint Peter Nolasco a statue of Our Lady of Mercy for the Mercedarian monastery founded in Seville immediately after the Reconquista. This episode, related by Alonso Remón<sup>65</sup> takes place in the Christian camp.



F. Pacheco, *The Surrender of Seville*, 1634, Seville, cathedral

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<sup>65</sup> Remón, bk. II, fol. 74

## THE WORKSHOP PAINTINGS

### *The Miracle of the Bees at the Birth of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Oil on canvas, H. 166 cm ; L. 212 cm

Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts (Inv. n° 1967.4.1)



Very few things are certain concerning the family and geographical origins of Peter Nolasco who according to unverifiable traditions seems to have been born in Languedoc or in Catalonia. As for his birth, it would have to date back to 1180-1182 rather than 1189 as usually quoted. He was probably not from a noble family but one of wealthy merchants<sup>66</sup>. Legend attributes the *Miracle of the Bees* to him, represented here: “[Peter Nolasco] distinguished himself above all for his charity towards his neighbor. A forewarning of this virtue came on a day when Peter was still an infant crying in his crib, and a swarm of bees flew toward him and built a honeycomb in his right hand”<sup>67</sup>. This first subject “which had to be changed within the story”<sup>68</sup> does not appear in the engraved life of the holy founder. We do not know which painter in Seville was commissioned by the Mercedarians for this scene to replace Zurbarán’s first painting.

## THE PAINTINGS OF THE CATHEDRAL

The four paintings of the cycle in the life of Saint Peter Nolasco which are currently held in the cathedral of Seville (*The Apparition of the Virgin to the Choir of the Convent in Barcelona*, *Saint Ferdinand Handing over a Statue of the Virgin to Saint Peter Nolasco*, *The Miracle of the Fishing Boat* and *The Death of Saint Peter Nolasco*) are obviously not by Zurbarán. We do not know how or when they arrived there. A great number of works taken

<sup>66</sup> Hugues Cocard, *L’Ordre de la Merci en France, 1574-1792*, Paris, 2007, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Dom Guéranger, “XXXI Janvier, Saint Pierre Nolasque Confesseur”, *Année Liturgique, 1902, Temps de Noel*, II, p. 563.

<sup>68</sup> See supra Vázquez, op. cit., p. 199.

from the convents after Mendizabal's *Desamortización* (1835) were placed on deposit in the immense cathedral before being transferred to the new museum of Fine Arts, founded precisely in the former buildings of the Casa Grande de la Merced of Seville<sup>69</sup> but some of the paintings remained in the cathedral. Although the sizes are similar and the subjects treat the life of Saint Peter Nolasco, it is obvious that these four canvases in the series, with colours which are less expertly suited, were executed by someone else, in a more agitated manner. In the *Memoria* of 1730, Fray Pedro Vázquez attributed these paintings to Francisco Reyna. Except for Matute who suggests Polanco's name, all of the previous authors attributed the works to Reyna, although with reservations at times. However, in 1977 Enrique Valdivieso saw on *The Death of Saint Peter Nolasco* a very fragmented signature which he thought was Juan de Zurbarán's, the painter's son who was born in 1620. After the work was restored in 1982, the signature seemed to be that of Juan Luis Zambrano, an artist from Córdoba who settled in Seville in 1634 and whose style is similar to that of the four paintings in the cathedral ; he might very well be the painter.

***The Appearance of the Virgin to Saint Peter Nolasco in the choir of the Cathedral of Barcelona***

Oil on canvas, H. 170 cm ; L. 210 cm  
Seville, cathedral (San Pedro Chapel)



Blessed with the gift of prophecy, Saint Peter Nolasco was also helped in his work by frequent apparitions of his guardian angel and Mary, Protectress of the Order. The miracle represented here, mentioned in all of the old chronicles, seems to have taken place in the convent of Saint Eulalia in Barcelona. Fearing that he had forgotten to sing the night service, the founder hurried to the choir in the convent church where he discovered the Virgin sitting in the stall, wearing the Mercy habit. Around her, two rows of very young angels, also wearing the white vestment of the Order, are seen lined up in the rows of stalls. On the left, an older angel, in profile, seems to be reciting the canon hours. The amazed saint, facing him, has his arms open in surprise. Although it is in a more archaic style and less understated than the paintings by Zurbarán, this work nevertheless retains a certain charm.

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<sup>69</sup> The painting and sculpture museum located in 1820 in the former convent of Saint Bonaventure became too small in 1835 to house all the works of art that had been seized. In 1839 the Junta de Andalucía decided to remodel the convent of Mercy into the Museo de Bellas Artes (See Gestoso *op. cit.*, *supra* note 22, p. 294-295)

***The Miracle of the Barque***

Oil on canvas, H. 170 cm ; L. 210 cm  
Seville, cathedral (San Pedro Chapel)



The other miracle represented here was also meant to exalt the founder's holiness at the time of his canonization. Again, according to old accounts, Saint Peter Nolasco, sent back from Algiers by the Moors in a fishing boat with no sail, gear, or oars managed to reach Valencia. The already elderly saint, is seen standing with his staff held like a mast to which he has tied his ample white robe billowing in the wind. To create this very accomplished scene, with the vast stormy sea and golden sky, the painter undoubtedly used as a model the same episode supplied by the patron and drawn from the *Vie de saint Pierre Nolasque* engraved from the drawings of Jusepe Martínez.



J.F. Greuter  
*The Miracle of the Barque*, engraving

*Saint Ferdinand Presenting the Image of the Virgin of Mercy to Saint Peter Nolasco*

Oil on canvas, H. 170 cm ; L. 210 cm

Seville, cathedral (San Pedro Chapel)



No doubt the one most resembling Zurbarán and the finest of the four paintings in the series held in the cathedral of Seville, this offering of the statue of the Virgin evokes a little-known episode from the life of Saint Peter Nolasco. We saw that this work is related to the takeover of Seville by King Ferdinand III of Castille and León, represented by Zurbarán in 1629 in the *Surrender of Seville*. The action seems to be taking place in the Christian camp and emphasizes the lengthy ties linking the Order with the Castillian monarchy and its part in the first founding of the great convent of Mercy in the Andalusian capital. The patron, Fray Juan de Herrera, had a vested interest in underscoring the Order's very old origins to maintain royal support. The composition in form of a frieze, the gallery of knights' portraits with some of them bearing the Mercy coat of arms as well as the kneeling figure in the foreground evoke Zurbarán's two paintings with scenes of the Reconquista of the cities held by the Saracens. Nonetheless, the agitation seen in the figures, the silhouettes on the left – still Mannerist, the draped fabrics with more movement differentiate the style of this excellent follower of the master from Extremadura.

***The Death of Saint Peter Nolasco***

Oil on canvas, H. 170 cm ; L. 210 cm

Fragments of the signature in bottom left corner (Juan de Zambrano?)

Seville, cathedral (San Pedro Chapel)



The subject, misunderstood in the *Memoria* of 1730 where it is entitled *Le Sepulcre de Saint Raymond*, refers obviously to the death of Saint Peter Nolasco which probably occurred in 1249. Worn out by old age and having been reassured by heaven that he would soon die, he received the last sacraments and began to recite Psalm CX : “Lord, I will praise you with all my heart...” and having arrived at verse 8: “He sent a redeemer to his people”, he gave up his spirit. This touching account enabled the Mercedarians to recall the role played by their Order.

In a bare cell, the old dying monk, surrounded by several others in varying poses, is held by a very young novice. Behind him, a beautiful blonde angel with widespread wings, dressed in pale pink, shows him the apparition of Christ and of his patron saint Peter Apostle who await him in heaven. On the left, two other figures close the composition, a lay person in a very light blue robe and a cleric holding a red barette. Inspired by the austere *Exposition of the Body of Saint Bonaventure*, recently painted by Zurbarán for the Franciscans, this painting which no doubt can be attributed to Zambrano reveals a different spirit and does not have the same plastic and sculptural force.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS ON LOAN

### FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÀN

*The Christ on the cross*  
Chicago, The Art Institute

*Saint Bonaventure Praying*  
Dresde, Gemäldegalerie

*Saint Peter Nolasco's Vision of the Crucified Saint Peter*  
Madrid, Museo del Prado

*Saint Peter Nolasco's Vision of the Crucified Saint Peter*  
Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional

*The Surrender of Seville*  
Eccleston (Great Britain), The Duke of Westminster

*Saint Serapion*  
Hartford (CT), The Wadsworth Atheneum

*The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*  
México D.F., Museo Franz Mayer

*The Handing of the Image of the Virgin of El Puig to King James I of Aragon*  
Cincinnati (OH), Art Museum

### ZURBARÀN'S WORKSHOP

*The Founding of the Order of Mercy*  
Spain, private collection

Cristóbal de ACEVEDO  
*Apparition of the Virgin to James I of Aragón*  
Murcia, Convento de la Merced

*Groundplan of the Monastery of the Merced Calzada, Seville*

*The Coat of Arms of the Order of Mercy*

Johan Friedrich GREUTER after Jusepe MARTINEZ  
*The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Cornelius COBRADOR  
*The Departure of Saint Peter Nolasco*

Johan Friedrich GREUTER after Jusepe MARTINEZ  
Saint Peter Nolasco's Vision of the crucified Saint Peter

17<sup>th</sup> century anonymous Spanish artist  
*The Miracle of the Bees*  
Bordeaux, Musée des Beaux-Arts

Juan Luis ZAMBRANO  
*The Appearance of the Virgin to Saint Peter Nolasco in the choir of the Cathedral of Barcelona*  
Seville, Cathedral

Juan Luis ZAMBRANO ?  
*The Miracle of the Barque*  
Seville, Cathedral

Johan Friedrich GREUTER after Jusepe MARTINEZ  
*The Miracle of the Barque*

Juan Luis ZAMBRANO ?  
*Saint Ferdinand Presenting the Image of the Virgin of Mercy to Saint Peter Nolasco*  
Seville, Cathedral

Juan Luis ZAMBRANO ?  
*The Death of Saint Peter Nolasco*, Seville, Cathedral

