

REFLEXOS DIRIGE CALLES. THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM OF THE MONASTERY OF SANTA MARIA LA REAL DE NIEVA'S ECCLESIA FRATRUM (1414-1432)¹

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In 1399, Queen Catherine of Lancaster founded the Monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva (Segovia, Spain). The present paper aims to highlight the relevance of the apparently profane scenes and representations of Friars Preachers that decorate this former Dominican convent's ecclesia fratrum, as they constitute a message through which the religious community, and especially its novices, could be instructed in regular observance at a time when the Order of Preachers was undergoing a profound spiritual reform.

Key words: Santa Maria la Real de Nieva, Order of Preachers, Queenship, Observant reform, ecclesia fratrum, medieval iconography.

According to the chronicles, in 1392 the Virgin Mary appeared to a shepherd called Pedro Amador while he was watching over his flock in a slate quarry near the village of Nieva, in the current Spanish province of Segovia. The Marian apparition asked him to go to Segovia and beg Bishop Alonso de Frias to unearth her effigy, which had remained hidden in that exact place for a long time.

Later that same year, thanks to the support of Henry III of Castile (1390-1406) and his wife, Catherine of Lancaster (†1418), a church dedicated to the recently discovered Marian image, known as *Nuestra Señora de la Soterraña*, was built. Three years later, the Castilian sovereigns founded a *villa*, independent of Nieva, which received the name of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva.²

In 1399, Catherine of Lancaster donated the church to her beloved Order of Preachers, and in 1414 she ordered the convent's enlargement. As the inscriptions preserved on three of the crossing piers indicate, the three apses, the transept and the north portal would have been built between 1414 and 1432 (figs. 1, 2 and 3).

In spite of its iconographic richness, the sculptural reliefs preserved inside the church have been buried in oblivion for many centuries. The representations of diligent as well as lazy Dominican friars that decorate the capitals and corbels inside the sanctuary have been relegated to the background as a consequence of the interest aroused not only by the cloister's ornamental variety (1434-1445), but also by the north portal's iconographic program, which constitute two of the most relevant examples of Castilian architectural sculpture from the first half of the 15th century.³

This article aims to claim the existence of an iconographic program inside this Segovian church, ignored so far, which constitutes a valuable stone testimony of the reaction against one of the darkest periods in the history of the Order of Preachers: the *Claustra*. Contrary to what other scholars have said, the reliefs carved around the figurative margins of the church of the former Dominican monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva should not be considered mere ornamental elements or drolleries, product of the inventiveness and sense of humour of the sculptors,⁴ but

¹ I am grateful for the assistance provided by Javier Martínez de Aguirre, my PhD supervisor. I would also like to acknowledge Eduardo Carrero Santamaría for his confidence in my work and his support. This work has been developed in the framework of the research project *Arte y reformas religiosas en la España Medieval* - HAR2012-38037, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

² The long stays of the monarchs in Segovia would have favoured the establishment, about 30 km away, of both the new *villa* and the Marian sanctuary. Henry III of Castile (1390-1406) visited Segovia in 1391, 1392, 1395, 1396, 1398, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1402, 1402, 1404, 1405, and 1406. His wife, Catherine of Lancaster, usually visited the church of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva when travelling to Cuellar. John II (1406-1454), son of Henry III and Catherine of Lancaster, resided in the Alcazar of Segovia in 1419, 1424-1428, 1430, 1433, 1434, and 1435. See F. de A. VEAS ARTESEROS, *Itinerario de Enrique III*, Murcia, 2003, p. 35, and F. de P. CAÑAS GÁLVEZ, *El itinerario de la corte de Juan II de Castilla (1418-1454)*, Madrid, 2007, pp. 365, 366 y 390.

³ E. SERRANO FATIGATI, *Santa María de Nieva. Recuerdos de una excursión*, in *La Ilustración española y americana* XXVIII, 30 July 1898, pp. 61-62; J. LÓPEZ DE AYALA Y ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO, *El Claustro del ex monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, in *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* LXXVI, 1920, pp. 385-390; *Idem*, *Desde la Casona. Paseos y excursiones por tierra segoviana*, Madrid, 1931, pp. 53-82; J. de CONTRERAS Y LÓPEZ DE AYALA, *La vida en Castilla en el siglo XV, según los capiteles de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, in *España en las Crisis del Arte Europeo*, Madrid, 1968, pp. 111-119; P. MARTÍN, *Los trabajos y los días en el calendario del claustro de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, Segovia, 1982; A. SÁNCHEZ SIERRA, *El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, Segovia, 1992; A. SÁNCHEZ SIERRA, Á. RAMÓN ESTEBAN, *Guía del Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva (Segovia)*, Madrid, 2004; S. CABALLERO ESCAMILLA, *Palacios y conventos a finales de la Edad Media: la reina Catalina de Lancaster y Santa María la Real de Nieva*, in *Anales de Historia del Arte* 22, 2012, pp. 267-283, and *Idem*, *Réflexions sur la prédication médiévale, l'antijudaïsme et l'art*, in *Revue de l'art* 178, 2012, pp. 9-18.

⁴ A. SÁNCHEZ SIERRA, *El Monasterio de Santa Maria la Real de Nieva...op. cit.*, p. 78, and A. SÁNCHEZ SIERRA, Á. RAMÓN ESTEBAN, *Guía del Monasterio...op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

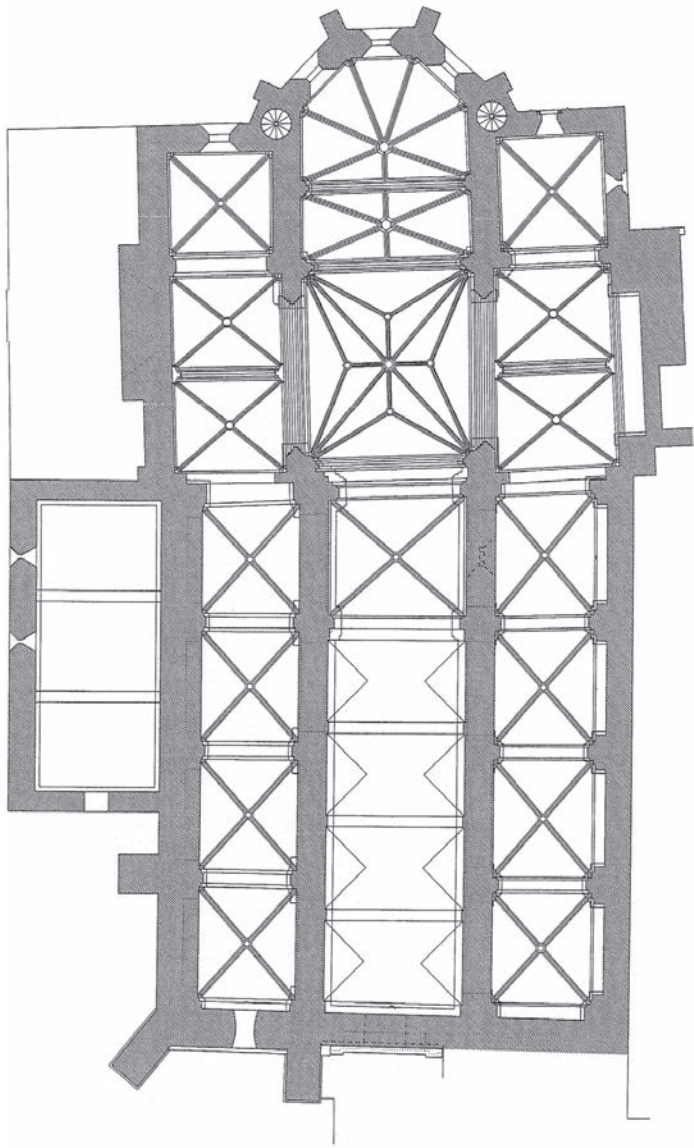


Fig. 1. Plan of the church (A. Moreno Yuste).

a visual and spiritual instrument, created at a moment in which serious internal conflicts menaced the survival of the Order, and through which the new brethren would have been instructed.

The fact that the analysed representations decorate the area where the primitive choir would have originally been – *ecclesia fratrum* – reinforces the hypothesis that the religious community would have been the iconographic program’s audience, as the images analysed are not visible from the naves, a space reserved for the faithful (fig. 1).

* * *

Inside the church, images of Dominican friars coexist with hagiographic, hunting and war scenes. In the frieze on the west side of the royal oratory, a friar is trying to read a book while another of the brethren is offering him a double-handled container (fig. 4). Next to them, a friar, who is being fanned by one of his brothers, has fallen asleep and rests his head on a book (fig. 5). In the opposite frieze, we can see a male face, probably a friar, whose left ear sprouts a plant stem.

In the south arm of the transept, we find possible representations of badly behaved Friars Preachers. In the south-

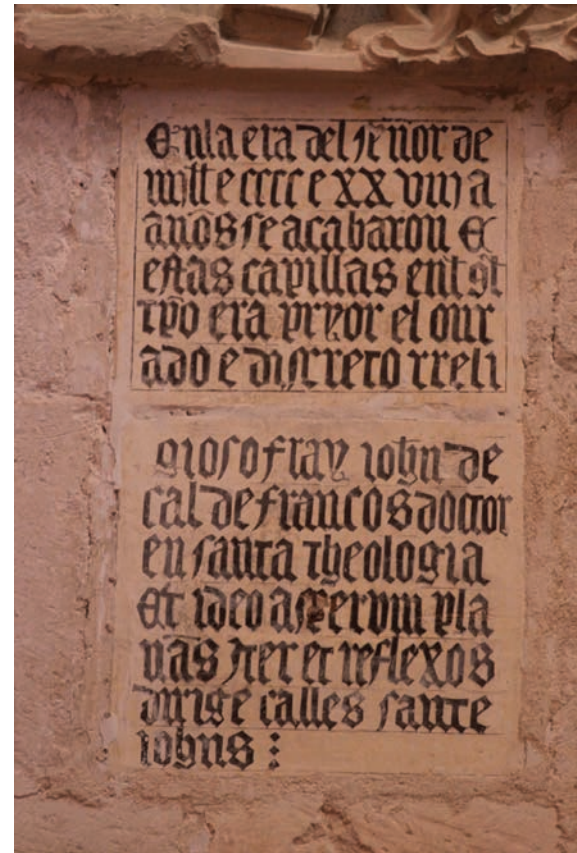


Fig. 2. Inscription in the southeast pier of the crossing.



Fig. 3. Inscription in the southwest pier of the crossing.

west corner, an absorbed Dominican friar picks his ear while resting his head on his right hand. Next to him, another male face with animal traits is preserved, quite similar to the one sculpted just above it, in the cornice of the capital (fig. 6). Furthermore, another capital in the southeast corner is decorated with a mouth-puller, probably tonsured, while in the northwest corner of the crossing, a male figure bites a bone next to a hybrid that covers its human head with a cowl.

In contrast to these depictions of disrespectful and lazy brethren, various images of diligent and devout friars were



Fig. 4. Friar trying to read a book while another of the brethren is offering him a double-handed container. Frieze on the west side of the royal oratory.



Fig. 5. Friar fanned by one of his brothers. Frieze on the west side of the royal oratory.



Fig. 6. Absorbed Dominican friar picks his ear while resting his head on his right hand. Southwest corner of the south arm of the transept.



Fig. 7. Two Dominican friars reading. Southeast corner of the crossing.

also included in the iconographic program developed inside the church. In the southeast corner of the crossing, two Dominican friars carefully read the codices sculpted in front of them (fig. 7), unaware of the presence of a half-human and half-quadruped hybrid, and of a beast with its head covered with a cowl, whose main objective seems to be the spiritual corruption of both religious men.

The capital frieze in the north side entrance to the main chapel shows a group of Friars Preachers singing around an organ while one of them clasps an open book to his chest. In the capitals standing in front of these, four Dominican friars are represented: the first one is reading a book, the third one scourging his back and the fourth one has his right arm raised with thumb pointing up, while gently placing his left hand on a closed book. However, the second friar rests his head on his left hand as a sign of boredom and straightens out his left leg, which appears naked under the habit (fig. 8)

Finally, images of the life and death of St. Peter of Verona decorate the capital frieze in the southwest corner of the chapel in the Gospel side, once dedicated to the Dominican saint, protomartyr of the Order of Friars Preachers, and currently used as sacristy.⁵



Fig. 8. Friars Preachers. Capital frieze in the south side entrance to the main chapel.

SPIRITUAL CRISIS AND DOMINICAN REFORM BETWEEN 1380 AND 1454

The Order of Friars Preachers was founded by St. Dominic of Guzman and confirmed by Innocent III on the 22nd

⁵ The cloister preserves nine scenes of perfect and ideal *conventual* life. The absence of references to the *Claustra* may allude to the fact that the iconographic program devised for the Dominican cloister was different, although not independent, from the one developed inside the church. D. LUCÍA GÓMEZ-CHACÓN, *Contemplata aliis tradere. Carisma dominicano y reforma espiritual en el claustro de Santa María la Real de Nieva (1432-1445)*, in Goya. *Revista de Arte* [in press].

of December 1216. In spite of having been created as an Order dedicated to the cure of souls through preaching, the increasing failure in the observance of the Rule of St. Augustine, adopted by the founder and his brethren as their religious way of life, added to the non-compliance with the *Liber Consuetudinum* that affected many European convents from the mid-14th century, ended up with regular discipline being devoured by the terrible *monster of the Claustra*.⁶ That was the name given by the Dominican historian Father Manuel Joseph de Medrano in his *Historia de la Provincia de España de la Orden de Predicadores* dated 1725, to this dreadful spiritual crisis.⁷

In 1599, Father Diago had already identified the principal cause of the devotional crisis that threatened the survival of the Order: the Black Death. He affirmed that the spiritual pestilence had been even more lethal among religious communities than the corporeal one that preceded it.⁸ Because of this devastating situation, plenty of cells remained empty, making many superiors fear for the Order's survival. Owing to the imminent necessity of increasing the number of friars to inhabit the deserted convents, the survivors were obliged to permit entry to youths with a deficient intellectual ambition and fragile devotion, whose permanence in the Order would be guaranteed thanks to the privileges that their superiors offered them during their trial period. The prelates thought that these new friars, once they had finished their novitiate, would embrace faith as well as their vows with complete conviction. However, contrary to all predictions, these young friars refused to abandon the comforts to which they had already become accustomed.⁹

In 1380, St. Catherine of Siena, in her *Dialogo della divina provvidenza*, clearly identified the problem's root cause:

“All these and many other evils are caused by worthless superiors, who have not kept their eye on their subjects, but have rather let them go loose, and themselves pushed them into sin [...] They have become the arms of the Devil, and with their stench they poison everything within, that is, in their monastery, and without among secular [...] They have promised to observe the rule of their order, and they break it, and not only do they not observe the rule themselves but they fall like hungry wolves upon the lambs, who wish to observe it, mocking them and jeering at them. These wretches think to cover their own sins with the persecutions, mockery and insult that they deal out to good religious who observe the rule, but doing so they expose themselves much more.”¹⁰

The Reform project proposed by Blessed Raymond of Capua, Master General in the obedience to Rome since 1380 and spiritual director of the abovementioned Sieneze saint, was based on the creation of a reformed convent in each of the Dominican provinces, governed by an equally reformed superior, in which observant friars, responsible for disseminating regular observance among the rest of the convents, would be instructed.¹¹ The Raymondian reform was respected and continued by his successors Tommaso Paccaroni di Fermo (1401-1414), and Leonardo Dati (1414-1425).¹² Although the reforming spirit was already present in the Province of Spain during the first decades of the 15th century among certain ecclesiastics, these were still isolated examples, one of which was the monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva's own reformation process, in which both Catherine of Lancaster, patroness of the villa and monastery, and her successor, Mary of Aragon, would have played an important role.¹³

⁶ Despite the fact that scholarship pointed at the Black Death as the main cause of the spiritual crisis that menaced the Order of Preachers, Michael Vargas has proved that, at least in the Province of Aragon, created in 1301, the failure in the observance of the Rule and primitive Constitutions was already a problem that affected many convents since the beginning of the 14th century. According to this author, the existence of *conventual* friars would have been one of the main difficulties that the Order would have had to deal with since its foundation. However, the situation would have got worse throughout the 14th century because of the critical historical and social European situation. M. VARGAS, *Taming a Brood of Vipers. Conflict and Change in Fourteenth-Century Dominican Convents*, Leiden-Boston, 2011, p. 38. See also *Idem*, *Weak Obedience, Undisciplined Friars, and Failed Reforms in the Medieval Order or Preachers*, in *Viator* 42-1, 2011, pp. 283-307, and *Idem*, *How a 'Brood of Vipers' Survived the Black Death: Recovery and Dysfunction in the Fourteenth-Century Dominican Order*, in *Speculum* 86, 2011, pp. 688-714.

⁷ M. J. DE MEDRANO, *Historia de la Provincia de España de la Orden de Predicadores, Primera parte. Tomo primero. Vida de su esclarecido patriarca S. Domingo de Guzmán*, Madrid, 1725, p. 641. See also H. DEL CASTILLO, *Segunda parte de la Historia general de Santo Domingo, y de su Orden de Predicadores*, Valladolid, 1612, fols. 93v-95r.

⁸ F. DIAGO, *Historia de la Provincia de Aragón de la Orden de Predicadores, desde su origen y principio hasta el año de mil y seiscientos*, Barcelona, 1599, p. 40.

⁹ H. DEL CASTILLO, *Segunda parte de la Historia general de Santo Domingo...op. cit.*, fols. 94v-95r. See also W. HINNEBUSCH, *How the Dominican Order Faced its Crises*, in *Review for Religious* 32, 1973, pp. 1307-1321; *Idem*, *The Dominicans: A Short History*, New York, 1975, pp. 39-71; A. BONNER, *Ramon Llull and the Dominicans*, in *Catalan Review* 4, 1990, pp. 377-392; M. D. BAILEY, *Battling Demons. Witchcraft, Heresy and Reform in Later Middle Ages*, Pennsylvania, 2003, pp. 75-89; *Idem*, *Religious Poverty, Mendicancy and Reform in Late Middle Ages*, in *Church History* 72, 2003, pp. 457-483; R. LERNER, *Ornithological Propaganda: The Fourteenth-Century Denigration of Dominicans*, in *Politische Reflexion in der Welt des späten Mittelalters/Political Thought in the Age of Scholasticism*, Leiden, 2004, pp. 171-191, and G. GELTNER, *Brethren Behaving Badly: A Deviant Approach to Medieval Antifraternalism*, in *Speculum* 85, 2012, pp. 47-64.

¹⁰ SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA, *The Dialogue of the Seraphic Virgin Catherine of Siena*, trans. Algar Thorold, London, 1896, p. 275, and Á. MORTA, *Obras de Santa Catalina de Siena. El Diálogo*, Madrid, 1955, pp. 429-430. This fervent desire for reform was already latent in some of the letters sent by the Sieneze saint to her spiritual director, Blessed Raymond of Capua, between 1376 and 1378. See J. SALVADOR Y CONDE, *Epistolario de Santa Catalina de Siena. Espíritu y doctrina*, 2 vols., Salamanca, 1982, I, pp. 485-486, and II, pp. 773-774.

¹¹ V. BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA, *Historia de la Reforma de la Provincia de España (1450-1550)*, Rome, 1939, p. 1. In 1399, at the end of Blessed Raymond of Capua's generalship, there were already eight reformed convents in Germany (three male convents and five female ones). The first reformed convent was established in Colmar (currently in France) and its first prior was fray Conrado of Prusia, who was appointed to the post by the Master General himself.

¹² B. M. REICHERT, *Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Rome, 1900, vol. III, pp. 161-163, 196, 203, 211, 255 and ff; R. HERNÁNDEZ, *La reforma dominicana entre los concilios de Constanza y Basilea*, in *Archivo dominicano. Anuario VIII*, 1987, pp. 28, 29, 33 and 36-37; T. M. IZBICKI, *Reform and Obedience in Four Conciliar Sermons by Leonardo Dati, O.P.*, in *Reform and Renewal in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Louis Pascoe*, eds. Thomas M. Izbicki and Christopher M. Bellitto, Leiden, 2000, pp. 174-192, and V. ROMANO, *Il domenicano palermitano. Pietro Geremia (1399-1452), nello sviluppo della cultura europea del XV secolo*, Palermo, 2002, pp. 141-142.

¹³ As V. Beltrán de Heredia has already pointed out, the majority of the convents that formed part of the Province of Spain were reformed between 1450 and 1550, a fact that shows that the Monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva was one of the first convents to re-establish the strict observance of the Rule and

The Trastámara monarch's spiritual interests sometimes mixed up with their political aspirations.¹⁴ Indeed, the close relationship between Dominican reform and royal confessors must be highlighted.¹⁵ Castilian monarchs manifested a special tendency to entrust their souls' health to observant ecclesiastics, a fact that would have favoured the foundation of reformed monasteries by the royal family. The monastery of Santa María la Real de Nieva would have been one of these reformed houses, where observant friars would have been instructed in the defence of the original charisma of the Order and the spreading of reform.

CONVENTUAL AND OBSERVANT FRIARS INSIDE THE CHURCH

The cohabitation of badly behaved or *conventual* brethren and observant friars in the capitals and corbels inside the church would be the stone testimony of the situation undergone at the time in many European Dominican convents, described in the sermon preached by Leonard Dati during the General Chapter held in 1421:

“In these days of ours there is no order in our Order; religion is corrupt; obedience has fallen into disdain; the virtue of poverty has turned into the vice of ownership; chastity is violated in many ways; abstinence is rejected with banquets and feasts; loquacity is humorous: the example, perverse; the conversation, scandalous; the manner of walking, ungainly; the habit, irregular; the face, shameless; discipline has become worthless, and correction, useless...we have arrogance in our devotion, intemperance in our words; in our passion, lack of control; our gluttony is insatiable; rebellion is continuous; disdain includes contempt of our elders; we are ignorant of the Scriptures; we have such ambition for honors and such craving for accolades that there is no concern about distinguishing the well-disposed from the ill-prepared, and those preferred for Teachers and Doctors are those who ignore the old requirements.”¹⁶

In 1439, Master General Bartholomew Texier ordered the monastery of Santa María la Real de Nieva's reform,¹⁷ seven years after building work on the church had already concluded. This would mean that the iconographic program developed inside the church would be prior to the official observant reform of the Segovian monastery. Nonetheless,

the lag between the monastery's material reform and its spiritual one would not have prevented the inclusion of an iconographic program inside the sanctuary, through which the obedience to the Rule as well as to the primitive Constitutions of the Order would have been encouraged, especially among the younger friars.

According to William Hood, who studied Fra Angelico's frescoes at the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence, not only the spiritual crisis but also the subsequent reforming spirit would have fostered the development of Dominican iconographic programs whose principal aim would have been the permanent remembrance of the original charisma of the Order. Moreover, in both Dominican monasteries, Santa María la Real de Nieva and San Marco, the existence of a Novitiate could have encouraged the reformation spirit that characterizes their iconographic programs. In addition, despite the fact that Fra Angelico painted San Marco's fresco cycle between 1439 and 1445, the monastery was not officially reformed until the late 15th century, during the priory of Girolamo Savonarola (1491-1498).¹⁸

Like the Florentine cycle, the Segovian iconographic program does not have a narrative character. It is formed by a series of apparently unconnected motifs and scenes whose overall comprehension requires from its audience specific intellectual and spiritual training. This fact would reinforce my hypothesis, as the only viewers able to decode and assimilate the message behind these images would have been the friars and novices who inhabited the monastery, and not the faithful.

As William Hood has pointed out, whilst Franciscan friars preferred narrative cycles for the decoration of their monasteries, Friars Preachers showed a complete disinterest towards this type of ornamentation. Furthermore, William Hood claims that the pictorial cycle decorating San Domenico di Prato's chapter house, which narrates the founder's life, should be considered as nothing but the exception that proves the rule.¹⁹

Some of the representations preserved inside the Segovian church make direct reference to faults, none of them considered too grave, included in the *Liber Consuetudinum*, such as trying to make the rest of the brethren laugh, falling asleep while studying, being distracted during the Mass or showing a disrespectful attitude inside the choir. Accord-

early Constitutions within its walls. V. BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA, *Los comienzos de la reforma dominicana en Castilla. Particularmente en el convento de S. Esteban de Salamanca y su irradiación a la Provincia de Portugal*, in *Miscelánea Beltrán de Heredia. Colección de artículos sobre Historia de la Teología española*, Salamanca, 1971, vol. I, p. 403.

¹⁴ J. M. NIETO SORIA, *Iglesia y génesis del Estado moderno en Castilla (1369-1480)*, Madrid, 1993, pp. 381-382 and 397-406.

¹⁵ L. G. ALONSO GETINO, *Dominicos españoles confesores de reyes*, in *Ciencia Tomista* 14, 1916, pp. 403-409, and G. NIEVA OCAMPO, *Monarquía y clero regular: los dominicos de Castilla durante el reinado de Enrique III y la minoría de Juan II*, in *Cuadernos de Historia de España* 85-86, 2012, pp. 525-541.

¹⁶ J. M. MIURA ANDRADES, *Franciscanos y dominicos. El desarrollo de las órdenes religiosas en Portugal y Castilla durante los siglos XIII al XV*, p. 10. Paper presented at the *2as Jornadas História dos impérios ibéricos. Investigações em curso*. Organised by CHAM-UNL & AUç. Universidad Pablo de Olavide and celebrated at the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2-4 de Março de 2010 (www.cham.fcsh.unl.pt/files/activities/miura_andrade.pdf). See also B. M. REICHERT, *Acta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum...op. cit.*, pp. 161-163.

¹⁷ B. M. REICHERT, *Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum...op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹⁸ W. HOOD, *Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying: Gestures in Fra Angelico's Frescoes at St. Marco*, in *The Art Bulletin* 68, 1986, pp. 195-206; *Idem*, *Fra Angelico at San Marco. Art and the Liturgy of a Cloistered Life*, in *Christianity and the Renaissance. Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, Syracuse, 1990, pp. 108-131; *Idem*, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, New Haven, 1993, pp. 15-27 and 147-236, and L. M. DE LOJENDIO, *Savonarola (estudio biográfico)*, Madrid, 1960, pp. 109-119.

¹⁹ W. HOOD, *Fra Angelico at San Marco...op. cit.*, pp. 175-176: “The comparison of the Franciscan chapter room in Siena with the Dominican one in Florence again reminds one of the former order's habitual use of narrative for all kinds of metaphorical and symbolic ends, and of the latter's preference for allegory and analytical schemata in similar situations. A recently discovered cycle of the life of Saint Dominic in the Dominican chapter room at Prato is the exception that proves this rule of the Dominican's general lack of interest in the use of narrative painting for conventual decoration.”

ing to the primitive Constitutions of the Order, these faults were expiated with the recitation of one or two psalms, or by fulfilling a penitence imposed by the monastery's prelate.²⁰

Moreover, in one of his sermons, John Tauler (1290-1361), disciple of Meister Eckhart, warned his brethren about the spiritual harm that these small faults can cause to the friars' souls:

"And, again, it may happen that when the big hounds are shaken off, then the hart is attacked by little ones, which snap off little pieces of flesh; and if their attacks are neglected they may cause serious hurt; that is to say, a spiritual beginner, having overcome heavy and grievous temptations, must be watchful against trilling faults, for venial sins can mislead him to interior life. These hindrances are such things as idle recreations, vain companionship, vanity in dress, human solace and comfort. Unless he carefully abstain from them, soon his devout way of living grows less earnest, and he loses grace and the spirit of recollection. It often happens that this petty warfare injures a soul, as far as perfection goes, more than did the heavier conflict; in the latter he was energetic in his resistance, for he knew that his enemies directly sought his life; whereas now he fancies he may disregard his lesser foes, because they allure him only to venial faults. Under cover of this delusion they assail him unawares, and we know that a disguised enemy is more dangerous than an open one, though the former be much weaker than the latter."²¹

As I have already pointed out, next to the friar represented in the southwest corner of the south arm of the transept, there is a male face with animal features similar to the one carved in the cornice, right on top of it (fig. 6). John Cassian in his *Conferences*, one of St. Dominic's favourite books that Humbert of Romans recommended to the Dominican novices in his *Instruktionen de officiis ordinis*,²² affirmed that not being conscious of the soul's vices or trying to hide them causes the soul's withdrawal from the carnal state and its degeneration into an animal condition. In addition, Cassian indicates that the Divine Grace prevents ecclesiastics from wandering away from the path of regular observance. However, not being attacked by temptation and sin for a long time can make monks relax, since they believe that they are immune to carnal concupiscence. Unfortunately, this spiritual relaxation makes them fall again into temptation.²³

Probably these images of badly behaved brethren warned the Dominican friars, especially the younger ones, not only about their weak nature but also about the necessity of always being prepared to fight against the voracious *monster of the Claustra*.

A sculpture of a friar gnawing a bone, thus infringing the prohibition against eating meat also included in the primitive Constitutions of the Order, decorates the capital frieze in the northwest corner of the crossing.²⁴ St. Vincent Ferrer, in one of his Castilian sermons, explains that the ecclesiastic's "roots" were chastity, apostolic poverty, obedience and the observance of the Order's ceremonies, that is to say, the three Dominican vows and regular observance. Additionally, when the Valencian preacher analyses the fourth "root", he mentions the prohibition against eating meat as one of the Order's customs that Dominican friars must observe:

"The fourth root is to observe the ceremonies of the order; not to make clothing longer or shorter than what the order prescribes and to wear cloth of the colour and amount prescribed by the order, and not to wear linen, nor eat meat, and maintain silence in the choir and in the cloister and in the refectory at mealtime; and at the time of performing all the obeisances and reverences that the order prescribes."²⁵

Furthermore, St. Vincent Ferrer in chapter VII of his *Treatise on Spiritual Life* points out the mortification of appetite as a requisite for becoming virtuous and observant friars. He also indicates that over-feeding the body could hinder both prayer and study.²⁶ St. Catherine of Siena agrees with St. Vincent Ferrer and points out gluttony as a sin committed by friars who were victims of the *Claustra*.²⁷ This sin could even incite friars to violate the vow of chastity.²⁸ As Michael Vargas has recently explained, meat consumption was one of the most common problems in the Province of Aragon among *conventual* friars.²⁹ Later on, the reform's defenders reaffirmed the condemnation of this fault during the provincial chapters of Toro and Piedrahita, celebrated in 1493 and 1495, respectively.³⁰

The friar represented in the west frieze of the royal oratory, who tries to distract his brother by offering him the double-handled container he is holding in his hands (fig. 4), could be related to the following words written by St. Vincent Ferrer in his previously mentioned *Treatise on Spiritual Life*:

²⁰ L. GALMÉS, V. T. GÓMEZ, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán. Fuentes para su conocimiento*, Madrid, 1987, pp. 742-743, and HUMBERTO DE ROMANS, *Carta a los religiosos sobre los tres votos y algunas virtudes*, Caleruega, 1984, p. 81.

²¹ J. TAULER, *Obras*, Madrid, 1984, p. 260.

²² Pedro Ferrando, as well as Jacopo da Varazze, affirm that St. Dominic always carried with him a copy of Cassian's *Conferences*. See L. GALMÉS and V. T. GÓMEZ, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán...op. cit.*, p. 225; SANTIAGO DE LA VORÁGINE, *La leyenda dorada*, 2 vols. Madrid, 2004, I, p. 441, and M. M. MULCHAHEY, *First the Bow is Bent in Study. Dominican Education before 1350*, Toronto, 1998, pp. 109-110.

²³ J. CASIANO *Colaciones*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1998, I, pp. 199-200.

²⁴ However, eating meat was permitted to those friars who were preaching outside the convent, in order to avoid offending their hosts, as well as to all infirm brethren. See L. GALMÉS, V. T. GÓMEZ, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán...op. cit.*, pp. 734 and 736.

²⁵ P. M. CÁTEDRA, *Sermón, sociedad y literatura en la Edad Media. San Vicente Ferrer en Castilla (1411-1412)*, Salamanca, 1994, p. 339.

²⁶ J. M. DE GARGANTA, V. FORCADA, *Biografía y escritos de San Vicente Ferrer*, Madrid, 1956, pp. 494-496.

²⁷ The presence of Saint Catherine of Siena in the sepulchre of Queen Beatrice of Portugal (†ca.1420) in the Dominican convent of the *Sancti Spiritus* in Toro (Zamora) would prove that the saint's writings were already known in Castile during the first half of the 15th century: D. LUCÍA GÓMEZ-CHACÓN, *Religiosidad femenina y reforma dominicana: el sepulcro de Beatriz de Portugal en el Sancti Spiritus de Toro*, in *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* (accepted for its publication in 2018).

²⁸ Á. MORTA, *Obras de Santa Catalina de Siena...op. cit.*, pp. 429-430.

²⁹ M. VARGAS, *Taming a Brood of Vipers...op. cit.*, pp. 154-159, 219, 224, 228 and 296.

³⁰ R. HERNÁNDEZ, *La reforma dominicana...op. cit.*, pp. 88 and 118.

“Ordinarily you should drink the wine so watery it loses its strength, and if it still maintains some of it, you must add more or less water, just as the Lord inspires you.”³¹

St. Dominic of Guzman himself refused to drink wine since he believed that it severely altered his studying capacity:

“And so that his soul might assimilate wisdom more completely, he decided to deprive his body of wine. And he did this for ten years, until ill with a stomach ailment, he was obliged by Diego, bishop of Osma, of happy memory, to have a small dose of wine, but he added so much water that very few would have wanted to drink from his glass.”³²

As stated in a Castilian sermon collection from the late 14th or early 15th century preserved in the University Library of Salamanca (Ms. 1854), which Manuel Ambrosio Sánchez Sánchez has attributed to the Order of Preachers, wine was considered a source of sin that induced ecclesiastics to commit lust,³³ another temptation to be fought against at every turn by friars who desired to be observant members of their Order.

Another sermon included in Ms. 1854 makes reference to the deafness suffered by those people who pursue and enjoy earthly things, in detriment to heavenly ones, an idea that could be connected with the friar from whose ear sprouts a plant stem, preserved on the opposite frieze:

“...others are avid, because they are deaf, for whatever they are not allowed to hear. These are the ones who devote themselves to temporal things and are absorbed with them, so that they disdain to hear the word of God; and not only do they disdain it, I furthermore say that they cannot hear it, because they have the ears of their hearts occupied and closed and benumbed and filled with terrestrial things.”³⁴

However, *conventual* friars are not the only ecclesiastics represented inside the church. Badly behaved brethren cohabit with observant friars, decorating capitals and corbels in this Dominican *ecclesia fratrum*. Several friars are represented studying, an intellectual activity highly important for the adequate instruction of the members of the Order of Preachers. Study not only conditioned the brevity of both Canon Hours and Chapter but was also considered one of

the *Nine Manners of Prayer of Saint Dominic*.³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas became one of the most relevant defenders of study as this activity, according to the Dominican theologian, refrains from lust, avoids desires for riches, and is especially useful for training in obedience.³⁶

In the southeast corner of the crossing, two friars are seen concentrating on reading their codices (fig. 7), unaware of the presence of the hybrid with a bearded human face and quadruped body and of the beast covering its head with a cowl standing next to them. St. Catherine of Siena had already warned her brothers about the spiritual harm that cohabitation with *conventual* friars could cause to observant ecclesiastics. Badly behaved brethren would always try to humiliate their brothers, since they believed that this was the only way of covering up their own faults.³⁷

However, study might not be the only allusion to *Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying* preserved inside the church. We must not forget that William Hood identified clear references to this Dominican text in the frescoes that decorate the novice's dormitory in the convent of San Marco of Florence. This would not only prove that this iconography was used for reformation purposes, but also for the spiritual edification of the younger friars.³⁸

The frieze capital on the south side of the entrance to the main chapel shows a friar using a scourge (fig. 8). We must remember that mortification had been established as St. Dominic's third manner of praying.³⁹ Moreover, as Guillermo Nieva Ocampo has already pointed out, penitence and mortification became usual practices among observant friars.⁴⁰ Indeed, flagellation was finally incorporated into the Dominican liturgy of Compline, to which all members of the religious community were summoned. After singing the *Salve Regina* while processioning towards the high altar, the friars returned to the choir where they knelt down and recited the *Confiteor*. Immediately afterwards the *Misereatur* psalm was sung whilst the hebdomedarian passed among his brothers administering discipline to each one.⁴¹

Vine leaves and bunches of grapes ornament part of the cornice of the capital depicting the friar holding the scourge. Although it could be considered a Eucharistic symbol due to its location in the main chapel, it is worth pointing out

³¹ J. M. DE GARGANTA, V. FORCADA, *Biografía y escritos de San Vicente Ferrer...op. cit.*, pp. 496-497.

³² Fragment from the *Leyenda de Santo Domingo* de Pedro Ferrando written between 1235 and 1239. See M. GELABERT, J. M. MILAGRO, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán visto por sus contemporáneos*, Madrid, 1966, pp. 58, 288 and 296, and J. M. de GARGANTA, V. FORCADA, José, *Biografía y escritos de San Vicente Ferrer...op. cit.*, p. 223.

³³ M. A. SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Un sermonario castellano medieval. El Ms. 1854 de la Biblioteca Universitaria de Salamanca*, 2 vols., Salamanca, 1999, I, pp. 235 and 295-296.

³⁴ M. A. SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Un sermonario castellano medieval...op. cit.*, II, p. 502.

³⁵ It has been consulted the 14th-century Castilian version of the *Nueve modos de orar de Santo Domingo*, written around 1280, preserved in the convent of Santo Domingo el Real de Toledo. See B. FUEYO SUÁREZ, *En casa, fuera de casa, en el camino...Los modos de orar de Santo Domingo*, Salamanca, 2006, pp. 152-153.

³⁶ SANTO TOMÁS DE AQUINO, *Suma Teológica II-II (b)*, tomo IV, Madrid, 1994, p. 726.

³⁷ Á. MORTA, *Obras de Santa Catalina de Siena...op. cit.*, pp. 429-430.

³⁸ W. HOOD, *Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying...op. cit.*, pp. 195-206, and *Idem, Fra Angelico at San Marco...op. cit.*, pp. 195-207.

³⁹ B. FUEYO SUÁREZ, *En casa, fuera de casa, en el camino...op. cit.*, pp. 145-146. On the eighth day of novitiate, the master of novices taught his disciples how to use the scourge as a disciplinary instrument. M. M. MULCHAHEY, *First the Bow is Bent in Study...op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ G. NIEVA OCAMPO, *Reformatio in membris: conventualidad y resistencia a la reforma entre los dominicos de Castilla en el siglo XVI*, in *En la España Medieval* 32, 2009, pp. 297-341, and *Idem, Incorporarse a Jesucristo: prácticas sacramentales y penitenciales entre los dominicos castellanos del siglo XVI*, in *Hispania Sacra* 58:117, 2006, pp. 39-67.

⁴¹ W. HOOD, *Fra Angelico at San Marco...op. cit.*, p. 168.

that this same plant decoration appears in the north portal's frieze, in which scenes from the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ are represented.⁴²

The imitation of the *Passio Christi* through mortification seems to have been promoted by the defenders of the Order's reform. An example of this would be the creation of the first European *Via Crucis* in the convent of Escalaceli by order of Blessed Alvaro of Cordoba, after visiting the Holy Land.⁴³

The first member of the Order of Preachers awarded martyrdom was St. Peter of Verona. As I have already pointed out, several episodes from the saint's life decorate the frieze in the southwest corner of the Gospel side chapel.⁴⁴ However, they are not the only representations of the martyr preserved in a Spanish Dominican convent. Depictions of St. Peter Martyr are found in Santo Domingo de Bonaval (ca. 1330) in Santiago de Compostela,⁴⁵ Santo Domingo de Puigcerdà (1340-1360) in Gerona,⁴⁶ Santo Domingo de Tui (ca. 1415-1424) in Pontevedra,⁴⁷ as well as in the sepulchre of Beatrice of Portugal in the convent of Sancti Spiritus de Toro (ca. 1420) in Zamora.^{48, 49}

St. Catherine of Siena in her abovementioned *Dialogo della divina provvidenza* refers to the protomartyr as a role model to be imitated:

“Look at My Peter, virgin and martyr, who by his blood gave light among the darkness of many heresies, and the heretics hated him so that at last they took his life; yet while he lived he applied himself to nothing but prayer, preaching, and disputation with heretics, hearing confessions, announcing the truth, and spreading the faith without any fear, to such an extent that he not only confessed it in his life but even at the moment of his death, for when he was at the last extremity, having neither voice nor ink left, having received his death-blow, he dipped his finger in his blood, and this glorious martyr, having not paper on which to write, leaned over confessing the faith and wrote the Credo on the ground. His heart burnt in the furnace of My charity, so

that he never slackened his pace nor turned his head back, though he knew that he was to die, for I had revealed to him his death, but like a true knight he fearlessly came forth on the battle-field...”⁵⁰

Moreover, the hunting scenes preserved inside the church are distributed around St. Peter Martyr's cycle.⁵¹ However, one of these representations has been wrongly interpreted. Contrary to what was thought, the knight depicted on the corbel underneath the pilaster whose frieze narrates the protomartyr's life, is not a hunter but St. George on horseback killing the dragon, while the princess, who seems to be kneeling in prayer, witnesses the execution of the beast from her castle.⁵²

Having both saints represented in the same corner of the chapel could show an attempt to establish a symbolic parallelism between the two. Both St. George and Peter of Verona were gallant, chaste and virtuous Christian knights who died for the Faith.⁵³

On the capital in the northwest corner of the Gospel side chapel, there is a deer and a lion-hunting scene, the latter being repeated in the corbel underneath the pilaster. Furthermore, the inferior register of the pilaster in the southwest corner of the same chapel, whose frieze is ornamented with St. Peter Martyr's cycle, is decorated with another hunting episode that has been interpreted as a boar-hunting scene in which two dogs are catching the prey.

The rest of the hunting scenes conserved inside the church are in the frieze in the northeast corner of the crossing, next to St. Peter Martyr's chapel. They show a hunting episode in which two preys, a bear and a lion, fight against each other, while surrounded by a group of hunters and their pack of dogs. In the next scene, the hunters return to their castle with the dead bear on the back of a horse.⁵⁴

According to Christiania Whitehead, the use of the castle as an allegorical image was quite common in medieval literature.⁵⁵ In a sermon for the feast of St. Dominic written by

⁴² Humbert of Romans points out the remembrance of the *Passio Christi* will always help his brothers fight against adversities. HUBERT OF ROMANS, *Carta a los religiosos...op. cit.*, p. 76. In addition, St. Vincent Ferrer recommends his brothers to recall Christ's Passion as a spiritual exercise through which self-love would be mortified. J. M. DE GARGANTA, *Biografía y escritos de San Vicente Ferrer...op. cit.*, p. 484.

⁴³ J. L. GAGO, *Estampas de místicos*, Salamanca, 1986, pp. 144-145. See also J. de RIBAS, *Vida y milagros de el B. fray Álvaro de Córdoba*, Córdoba, 1687, and Á. HUERGA, *Escalaceli*, Madrid, 1981.

⁴⁴ SANTIAGO DE LA VORÁGINE, *Leyenda dorada...op. cit.*, I, pp. 265-276. See also S. DE SALANIACO, B. GUIDONIS, *De quatuor in quibus Deus Praedicatorum Ordinem igrignivit*, in *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, Rome, 1949, vol. 22.

⁴⁵ C. MANSO PORTO, *Arte gótico en Galicia: los dominicos*, 2 vols., La Coruña, 1993, I, pp. 137 and 172.

⁴⁶ C. CID PRIEGO, *Las pinturas murales de la iglesia Santo Domingo de Puigcerdà*, in *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 15, 1962, pp. 5-101, especially 17-20 and 49-59, and M. MACIÀ, *Els murals de Sant Domènec de Puigcerdà*, in *L'art gòtic a Catalunya: Pintura: De l'inici a l'italianisme*, Barcelona, 2005, vol. I, pp. 115-118.

⁴⁷ C. MANSO PORTO, *Arte gótico en Galicia*, I, pp. 139 and 348.

⁴⁸ M. RUIZ MALDONADO, *El sepulcro de Beatriz de Portugal en Sancti Spiritus (Toro)*, in *Goya. Revista de arte* 237, 1993, p. 148.

⁴⁹ In St. Dominic's biography written by Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the second Master General of the Order of Preachers (1222-1237) refers to the continuous desire of the founder of the Order to die in martyrdom. L. GALMÉS, V. T. GÓMEZ, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán...op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁰ SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA, *The Dialogue...op. cit.*, p. 329, and Á. MORTA, *Obras de Catalina de Siena...op. cit.*, p. 528.

⁵¹ In the cloister, the 11.5% of the preserved capitals are decorated with cynegetic episodes, a percentage only surpassed by heraldic motifs (13.8%).

⁵² We must not forget the English origin of Queen Catherine of Lancaster which could have encouraged the inclusion of St. George in the Segovian iconographic program.

⁵³ SANTIAGO DE LA VORÁGINE, *Leyenda dorada...op. cit.*, I, pp. 248-253. See also St. Vincent Ferrer's sermon for the feast of St. George in which the Valencian preacher highlights the main virtues of the saint, presented as a model Soldier of Christ, as well as all the spiritual battles he fought. SAN VICENTE FERRER, *Sermons*, Barcelona, 1988, vol. 6, pp. 77-82, especially pp. 78-79: “La primera batalla fo contra l'enteniment natural, e hac victoria per simple creença; la 2ª batalla fo contra la voluntat natural, e hac victoria per santa obediencia; la 3ª batalla fo contra la carn, e hac victoria per neta continència; la 4ª batalla fo contra l'enemich spiritual, e hac victoria per vera sapiencia. La 5ª batalla fo contra lo món temporal, e hac victoria per ferma paciencia.”

⁵⁴ This same scene is repeated on the east face of capital 54 and on the north face of capital 68, in the south and west galleries of the cloister, respectively.

⁵⁵ C. WHITEHEAD, *Castles of the Mind. A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory*, Cardiff, 2003, pp. 87-116.



Fig. 9. War scene. Northwest corner of the crossing.

St. Vincent Ferrer, the Dominican preacher makes reference to the foundation of the Order of Preachers by the saint, as well as to all the “castles” that had been “conquered for Christ” by Blackfriars:

“The Saint requested a special status, very elevated and very plain. Very elevated because of the contemplative life of study and prayer; and very plain because of the active life, as in it were performed the works of mercy through preaching, by means of which the starving would be full with the word of God, the ignorant would be instructed in the faith, the dead, that is, the sinners, would be buried in the wounds of Christ, the captives of Satan would be redeemed; in a word, an Order of soldiers to give battle to the devil was founded. How many castles have been conquered for Christ by the preachers! They were humble, mendicants.”⁵⁶

This idea would be reinforced by the war scene in the northwest corner of the crossing, in which an army is attacking a castle just in front of the hunting episode described above (fig. 9).

Despite the fact that hunting scenes in numerous works from the Late Middle Ages have been interpreted as scenes of everyday life through which devoutness was taken to the people, bringing warnings and reinforcement for the Christian knight to battle against sin and demons, or even as a pastime used to combat idleness, on this occasion they could carry a message related to the original charisma of the Order of Preachers.⁵⁷

Humbert of Romans, in his previously mentioned treatise *De eruditione praedicatorum*, compares Friars Preachers to the hunters alluded to in Jeremiah 16:16: “Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith Jehovah, and they shall fish them up; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks.”⁵⁸

St. Catherine of Siena in her *Dialogo* rescued this simile from oblivion, but on this occasion, it reawakens with reforming zeal. The saint laments that her brothers, infected by the spiritual pestilence, are no longer hunters of souls but hunters of beasts:

“Thou shouldst hunt and snare souls to the glory and praise of My name in the garden of the holy church, instead of wandering round the woods; but because thou hast become an animal, thy soul being filled with the animals of many mortal sins, hast thou made thyself a

hunter and a snarer of animals; because the garden of thy soul has grown wild and full of thorns, thou takest delight in wandering through desert places hunting wild beasts.”⁵⁹

This idea is also present in Ms. 1854:

“...every day God sends out his preachers and his criers to convert the sinners, just as hunters are sent out to take and capture wild animals and bring them to the table of their master as a noble and delicate dish. And such is Our Lord God, like those noble and powerful men who value meat from the hunt for their table more than three or four other meats: marvellously, God takes very great pleasure when he can incorporate and bring the sinner to himself...”⁶⁰

To sum up, St. Peter of Verona would have been included in the Castilian iconographic program not only as a perfect model of behaviour but also as an excellent “soul hunter”.⁶¹ Those who devised the scenes that were to decorate the *eclesia fratrum* would have wanted to show the two faces of the spiritual crisis. This would be the reason why they did not only include badly behaved brethren in the church’s decoration, but also observant friars who, together with St. Peter Martyr and St. George, would have provided a perfect model of observant life for the religious community. Therefore, the iconographic program shows the two monastic lifestyles that coexisted within the Order of Preachers while the Monastery of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva was being enlarged.

Two of the three inscriptions preserved in the crossing piers (figs. 2 and 3)⁶² include the following Latin verse,

⁵⁶ J. M. DE GARGANTA, V. FORCADA, *Biografía y escritos de San Vicente Ferrer...op. cit.*, p. 690.

⁵⁷ In 1982, Pompeyo Martín already identified the scenes of everyday life that decorate the cloister as part of a transcendental message. P. MARTÍN, *Los trabajos y los días...op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁸ HUMBERT OF ROMANS, *Treatise on Preaching*, Westminster Md., 1951, pp. 8-10, and S. TUGWELL, *Early Dominicans. Selected Writings*, Londres, 1982, p. 191.

⁵⁹ SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA, *The Dialogue...op. cit.*, p. 297, and Á. MORTA, *Obras de Catalina de Siena...op. cit.*, p. 448.

⁶⁰ Fragment from the sermon for the third Sunday of Advent. M. A. SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Un sermonario castellano medieval*, I, pp. 254-255. Blessed Jordan of Saxony already pointed out the zeal for souls as one of the Order’s main pillars. L. GALMÉS, V. T. GÓMEZ, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán...op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁶¹ Next to the representation of St. Peter of Verona’s martyrdom (ca. 1415-1424) in the Gospel-side chapel of Santo Domingo de Tui (ca. 1415-1424) there is also a boar-hunting scene. However, Carmen Manso Porto interpreted cynegetic scenes preserved in Dominican convents as a way of approximating religious communities to the faithful’s daily life. C. MANSO PORTO, *Arte gótico en Galicia...op. cit.*, I, pp. 139 and 348.

⁶² Inscription in the southeast crossing pier: “En la era del señor de mill e cccc e xxviii años se acabaron estas capillas en este tiempo era pryor el onrado e discreto religioso fray johan de caldefrancos doctor en Santa theologia et ideo asperum planans iter et reflexos dirige calles Sancte Johan<ni>s.” Inscription



Fig. 10. Relief preserved above the inscription in the southwest corner of the crossing.

practically ignored up to this date, which could confirm the reforming spirit present in the Segovian monastery at that time: *et ideo asperum planans iter et reflexos dirige calles Sancte Johan<ni>s*.⁶³

The second half of the verse, *et reflexos dirige calles Sancte Johan<ni>s*,⁶⁴ is repeated in the phylactery that the Dominican friar kneeling in front of St. John the Baptist, represented in the reliefs preserved above both inscriptions, is holding in his hands (fig. 10). This verse forms part of the third stanza of the *Ad Laudes (O Nimis Felix)* from the *Ut queant laxis* or *Hymn to Saint John the Baptist*, attributed to Paul the Deacon (c. 720-800).⁶⁵ It seems that the choice of this particular verse, as well as the fact that it belongs to a hymn dedicated to the model preacher par excellence, are not mere coincidence.

Humbert of Romans in his *De eruditione praedicatorum* already refers to St. John the Baptist as a biblical figure that Friars Preachers should imitate because of his austerity, his defence of penitence and, above all, his undisputed role as a preacher,⁶⁶ with the latter reason being mentioned once again in Ms. 1854.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the text selected for inclusion in the inscriptions on the crossing piers, as well as in the sculpted phylacteries, asks the saint to smooth out the rough road and straighten the crooked paths.⁶⁸ Therefore, the presence of this verse, added to the fact that it is repeated four times, could indicate that those who devised the Segovian

iconographic program would not have been unaware of the desire for reform present during those years within the Order of Preachers. The reforming zeal of the ideologues behind this program would have led them to commend themselves to St. John the Baptist, asking him for help to carry out their difficult task.

In John Tauler's second sermon for the feast of St. John the Baptist's nativity, Meister Eckhart's disciple includes the following commentary on Matthew 3:3 ("Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for Him"):

"Whosoever would go to the Lord in his deeper consciousness by the short cut through the fields, must take up his mind to suffer much; and furthermore he may easily go astray; yet this way is indeed much shorter than that of the open and common highway. If one will but study his deeper soul carefully, his journey will be safer. Let him be absorbed in his own faults to correct them, in God's guidance to follow it, difficult though it may seem, and dark and strange. Whosoever behaves thus shall not be overwhelmed when opposition comes, nor altogether oppressed with anguish of soul. Nor shall he break out into the defects to which men are liable in this journey. But God will now lead and again drive him forward, until he has reached the depths of the interior life.

In this manner let a man smooth the way of the Lord in his spirit's relation to God and God to him. The difficulties are serious, and they are unexpected and hidden. Many souls for the sake of relief are misled into outward exercises of religion and charitable good works – holy themselves, but unless imposed by duty, they are not now opportune. To go deeper into the interior spirit is now the task, and for this one should not go outward. That is like a man starting for Rome and taking the road to Holland; the faster he walks the farther he is from his journey's end. So does a man act who travels into external devotions instead of absorbing himself in interior meditation: - if he is to attain a deep state of peace and recollection he must devote himself to his interior life. Perhaps after growing old in this misdirected way, this souls at last turn into the right one. But then they are weak and nerveless, and their heads cannot stand the stress of love's storm in the final trial."⁶⁹

The fact of being a royal foundation, added to the strong influence that royal confessors would have exerted on the monarchs, might have promoted the restoration of fidelity to regular observance in the Segovian monastery, as well as its early reformation. As shown in a charter dated 8th of Au-

in the southwest crossing pier: "Estas capillas deste crosero fueron fechas e acabadas en el año del señor de mill e cccc e xxx e ii años en el qual tempo e sazón el muy onrado e discreto religioso fray johan de caldefrancos era prior provincial desta orden destos predicadores en la provincia de España: era prior fray juan de simancas dotor *et ideo asperum planans iter et reflexos dirige calles Sancte Johan<ni>s*."

⁶³ Lorenzo Martínez Ángel could not see the verse included in the inscription in the southeast crossing pier since it had been covered up by one of the Stations of the Cross so he uses the transcription of Jerónimo López de Ayala y Álvarez de Toledo, who copies "sante iogus" instead of "Sancte johans". Moreover, in the other *monumentum aedificationis*, Lorenzo Martínez Ángel reads: "ideo asper reflexos d[i]rige [calles Sanc]te [e]s[jus]". However, I think that the correct transcription of the text would be: "*et ideo asperum planans iter et reflexos dirige calles Sancte Johan<ni>s*". See J. LÓPEZ DE AYALA y ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO, *Desde la Casona...op. cit.*, p. 64, and Á. MARTÍNEZ ÁNGEL, *Inscripciones medievales de la provincia de Segovia*, León, 2000, pp. 123-124 and 126-127 (from the epigraphic collection).

⁶⁴ The last part of the verse, "*Sancte Johan<ni>s*", is not included in the original hymn.

⁶⁵ J. MARTÍNEZ GÁZQUEZ, R. FLORIO, *Antología del Latín Cristiano y Medieval. Introducción y textos*, Bahía Blanca, 2006, p. 48.

⁶⁶ HUMBERTO OF ROMANS, *Treatise on Preaching...op. cit.*, pp. 3, 7, 28, 54 and 121, and S. TUGWELL, *Early Dominicans...op. cit.*, pp. 186, 190, 215-216, 248 and 311.

⁶⁷ M. A. SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ, *Un sermonario castellano medieval...op. cit.*, II, p. 563.

⁶⁸ See Isaiah 40: 3-4 y Luke 7:27. HUMBERTO DE ROMANS, *Carta a los religiosos...op. cit.*, p. 95

⁶⁹ J. TAULER, *The sermons and Conferences of John Tauler of the Order of Preachers*, Washington, 1910, pp. 660-661, and *Idem, Obras*, pp. 363-364.

gust, 1432, Queen Mary of Aragon,⁷⁰ depicted on the capital in the southeast corner of the north arm of the transept, not only granted the monastery the privilege of being the first to make purchases in the town's market, but also reminded her friars to always be observant, especially when leaving the monastery grounds.⁷¹

In addition, on the 11th of June 1449, Queen Elisabeth of Portugal, John II's second wife, took possession of the manor of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva. This act was confirmed on the 9th of January 1470. Both documents indicate that the manor as well patronage of the monastery were privileges which belonged to queens, since Catherine of Lancaster was the founder of both at the end of the 14th century, a fact that reinforces the relationship between the monarchs and the Segovian monastery.⁷²

Moreover, according to Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, Archpriest of Talavera, royal chaplain and owner of a prebend in the church of Santa Maria la Real de Nieva, in 1445 Queen Mary of Aragon's body was deposited in the monastery,⁷³ being transferred years later to the Monastery of Guadalupe, where she currently rests next to her son, Henry IV.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the message transmitted by the analysed capitals and corbels preserved in Santa Maria la Real de

Nieva's *ecclesia fratrum* was neither created with a humorous bent nor devised by the masons and sculptors, who would have lacked the intellectual education necessary for developing this complex iconographic program.

Contrary to the idealised scenes depicted in the fresco cycle in San Marco of Florence, the inclusion of representations of not only observant friars but also *conventual* brethren inside the Segovian church would refer to the cohabitation of both types of Friars Preachers in European monasteries from the mid-14th century.

However, the larger number of observant friars than *conventual* brethren depicted inside this mendicant church⁷⁴ would suggest an attempt by the ideologue or ideologues of the iconographic program to include a hopeful and reformist message in the church's decoration, through which the religious community would have been instructed in regular observance, since it was the only way of regaining the original Dominican charisma.

After all, those who devised these sculptural reliefs would have been doing nothing but following the wise teachings of St. Catherine of Siena, who in a letter sent to Blessed Raymond of Capua, urgently asked her beloved brethren to "never complain or run away in time of darkness, because out of the darkness is born the light".⁷⁵

⁷⁰ See A. RODRÍGUEZ FERNÁNDEZ, *Toma de posesión del señorío de la villa de Santa María la Real de Nieva*, in *Estudios segovianos* XIII, 37-38, 1961, pp. 305-316.

⁷¹ *Real cédula de María de Aragón para que los frailes de Santa María la Real de Nieva sean los primeros en comprar en el mercado de la villa*, 8 de agosto de 1432, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (AHN), Clero-secular_regular, legajo 6285. A. M. YURAMI, *Historia de la aparición de la taumaturga ymagen de Nuestra Señora la Soterraña de Nieva*, Madrid, 1995, p. 211. Queen Mary of Aragon is represented in the north arm of the transept (southeast corner), underneath her coat of arms.

⁷² A. RODRÍGUEZ FERNÁNDEZ, *Toma de posesión...op.cit.*, pp. 305-316; D. LUCÍA GÓMEZ-CHACÓN, *Reinas y Predicadores. El Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Nieva en tiempos de Catalina de Lancaster y María de Aragón (1390-1445)*, in *Reyes y prelados: la creación artística en los reinos de León y Castilla (1050-1500)*, Madrid, 2014, pp. 325-340.

⁷³ A. MARTÍNEZ DE TOLEDO, *Atalaya de las Coronicas*, ed. J. B. Larkin, Madison, 1983, p. 128: "E en este año [1445] fino la rreyna doña Maria, muger del rrey don Juan, en Villacastin, e fue enterrada en Santa Maria de Nieua". See also M. SALVÁ, P. SAINZ DE BARANDA, *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, Madrid, 1851, p. 427: "Murió Doña María en el lugar de Villacastin á quince días de marzo, año de cuarenta y cinco. Estuvo mucho tiempo sepultada en el monasterio de Santa María de Nieva, y despues fue trasladada al monasterio de Santa María de Guadalupe, donde yace también el dicho Rey D. Enrique su hijo, que murió en Madrid á once de diciembre de mil y cuatrocientos y setenta y cuatro."

⁷⁴ While there are only eight representations of *conventual* friars, there have been preserved ten images of observant brethren to which we must add St. Peter Martyr's cycle.

⁷⁵ J. SALVADOR Y CONDE, *Epistolario...op. cit.*, II, p. 772.