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The Tuili Altarpiece's Tabernacle-Niche: Theology, Science and Religious Practices in a Late-Medieval Sardinian *Retablo*

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a cura di
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Corona d'Aragona e Sardegna

A cura di
Esther Martí Sentañes

È con grande piacere che presentiamo questo focus dedicato a diverse attuali linee di ricerca attorno alla presenza della Corona d'Aragona nel Regno di Sardegna.

Vale a dire che questo focus è erede di un precedente dossier pubblicato nel numero 10 di RiMe, che, con il titolo "Le identità nella Corona d'Aragona. Nuove linee di ricerca**",** inglobava gli studi di diversi giovani ricercatori che si occupavano di tematiche relative alla Corona d'Aragona.

Entrambe le iniziative rispondono alla volontà degli studiosi di favorire una ripresa degli studi iberici, per un po' di tempo rarefatti sia per la difficoltà di portare avanti gran parte delle ricerche per via della grave crisi economica che attraversiamo sia per un progressivo disinteresse dei nuovi dottorandi ad affrontare come argomento di studio i legami istituzionali, culturali ed economici tra i territori italiani e la madrepatria catalano-aragonese.

Con tale spirito di "riscoperta" questo focus propone diversi studi che percorrono il Medioevo e l'Età Moderna, sottolineando con un rinnovato sguardo la presenza della Corona d'Aragona in Sardegna attraverso tre contributi di Storia e uno di Storia dell'Arte. Fabrizio Alias affronta l'argomento della fiscalità municipale nella Cagliari del XIV sec.; Aldo Aveni Cirino e Giovanni Serreli affrontano un inedito *Componiment* del 1353 relativo al feudo di Gherardo Donoratico; Luciano Gallinari, propone una nuova visione dei vincoli familiari tra Brancaleone Doria e il futuro giudice Mariano V d'Arborea; e Alberto Virdis realizza uno studio del tabernacolo del noto Retablo di Tuili del Maestro di Castelsardo.

Infine, non voglio concludere senza ringraziare tutti coloro che hanno reso possibile questo focus: a tutti i referee per i preziosi consigli e a tutti gli autori, ai tecnici e assegnisti della Redazione per l'arduo lavoro realizzato con passione e professionalità.

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The Tuili Altarpiece's Tabernacle-Niche: Theology, Science and Religious Practices in a Late-Medieval Sardinian *Retablo*

Alberto Virdis

Alla memoria del mio maestro
Roberto Coroneo

Abstract
Two paintings in the altarpiece of St. Peter's church in the Sardinian village of Tuili, made around the year 1500 and traditionally attributed to the *Master of Castelsardo*, reveal important information about the artist's cultural background.
The aim of this study is to show how these paintings reflect the theological debates generated by the controversies involving Jews and Christians in Castile and Aragon in the second half of the fifteenth century, the theories on the status and importance of the sacred images, the practice of the ocular communion and the theories of vision diffused by Peter of Limoges' treatise *De Oculo Morali*.

Key words
Tuili Altarpiece; Master of Castelsardo; fifteenth century; Catalan-Gothic painting; Sardinia, Ocular Communion; Mass of St. Gregory; *Fortalitium Fidei*; Espina, Alonso de; Peter of Limoges; *De oculo morali*; Jewish-Christian Disputations.

Riassunto
Lo studio di due tavole della predella del retablo della parrocchiale di San Pietro a Tuili, realizzato attorno all'anno 1500 e tradizionalmente attribuito al Maestro di Castelsardo, rivelano importanti informazioni sul contesto culturale di riferimento dell'artista. Si cercherà di ricollegare queste immagini al dibattito teologico ebreo-cristiano in corso in Castiglia e Aragona nella seconda metà del '400, alle teorizzazioni sul ruolo e sulla funzione delle immagini sacre, all'importanza della pratica della "Comunione oculare"e alle teorie sulla visione diffuse in Europa dal trattato *De oculo morali* di Pietro di Limoges.

Parole chiave
Retablo di Tuili; Maestro di Castelsardo; XV secolo; pittura gotico-catalana; Sardegna; Comunione oculare; Messa di S. Gregorio; *Fortalitium Fidei*; Espina, Alonso de; Pietro di Limoges; *De oculo morali*; dispute ebreo-cristiane.

Alberto Virdis

1. Introduction

On June 4, 1500, with a notarial deed promulgated in the town of Cagliari in the presence of the notary Joan Carniçer, Joan and his wife Violante de Santa Cruz, barons of Tuili (a small center in southern Sardinia), started an annual payment for the altarpiece they had painted in the parish church of their village, dedicated to St. Peter. This altarpiece, currently in a lateral chapel of the church, was formerly placed behind the main altar. It has been attributed to a painter known by the fictive name of *Maestro di Castelsardo* (from the name of the village of Castelsardo where he painted another altarpiece considered his most remarkable work) whose *corpus* has been created by the gathering of a number of painted altarpieces and single panels now in churches and museums[1]. The *retablo* of Tuili is the only work that can be securely dated and thus scholars have arranged the painter's entire production either before or after it, following a notion of evolution from the Catalan-gothic style to the coeval southern-Italian Renaissance painting or vice-versa. The opposed reading of the artist's *corpus* sought to highlight the influence of the local Sardinian painting as the reason of the artist's supposed switching from a "perspective" Italian style to an anticlassical, more autochthonous style[2].

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* I would like to thank Prof. Herbert L. Kessler for his guidance and advices and for encouraging me to look at medieval art from a new perspective.

[1] C. Aru, "Il 'Maestro di Castelsardo'", pp. 27-54.

[2] For the Gothic-to-Renaissance reading see C. Aru, "Il 'Maestro di Castelsardo'", pp. 27-54 and R. Serra, *Pittura e scultura*, pp. 114-134. For the opposite reading see J. Ainaud De Lasarte, "La pittura sardo-catalana", pp. 111-123. For a reading of the painters' production in the frame of the Mediterranean culture between Spain and Italy see C. Limentani Virdis, "Dipinti fiamminghi e sardo-catalani in Sardegna", pp. 147-156 and also A. Pasolini (a cura di), *I retabli sardo-catalani*.

The Tuili altarpiece comprises six main panels, organized in two superimposed groups of three, a *predella* or *banco* with six small panels in the lower level, and a set of long and narrow *guardapols*, or panels put askew along three sides of the altarpiece to protect the main panels from dust. The main panels do not present narrative scenes, except for the Crucifixion in the second row; the other panels show standing figures of saints: Peter and Paul, the Archangel Michael, James the Greater and the Virgin enthroned with the baby Jesus among playing angels in the central panel (fig. 1).The *predella* hosts the only narrative part of the altarpiece, a set of scenes of the life of St. Peter, patron saint of the church: *The Delivery of the keys*, *the Fall of Simon Magus*, *Vocation, Crucifixion*. This narrative is interrupted in the middle by a protruding tabernacle-niche with three panels depicting communion and host-related images: the Mass of Saint Gregory, a standing figure of Pope Clement, and in the middle, in the actual door of the niche where the pyx with the hosts was stored, Christ resurrected (figs. 2-4).

The aim of this study is to show how the paintings in the tabernacle-niche are closely linked to analogous works of art produced in Spain in the same period and how they share the same cultural background defined by theological debates focusing on the status and the importance of sacred images generated by controversies involving Jews and Christians in all the kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon and Castile. At the same time, it will reveal how in the Sardinian artwork, the image in the host painted in the panel with the Mass of St. Gregory – real focus of the scene – is depicted in a way that suggests to the Christian beholders that they are seeing the divine prototype behind the image, that is, Christ present in the transubstantiated host. This feature is not detected in coeval Spanish depictions and marks an important difference from the Sardinian example. The sociocultural background of fifteenth century Spain will be investigated to establish the specificity of the Spanish context and the importance given to the act of seeing the Eucharist in the kingdom of Spain and in the Spanish-influenced areas.

2. The Mass of Saint Gregory

The left panel of the tabernacle-niche depicts the Mass of Saint Gregory. Against a brick-wall, Pope Gregory the Great is portrayed raising the host in front of the altar; in that moment he has the vision of the Man of Sorrows emerging from the sarcophagus with the arms crossed and bearing the wounds; behind him the wooden cross is the only *arma Christi* present. Christ's torso appears vertically and unnaturally cut, probably because of an incorrect over-painting. A bishop, a cardinal standing on the background and a young helper who lifts the pope's vestment with one hand and holds a lighted candle on the other, complete the scene. The iconographical elements fit very well with the known variants of the depiction of this scene throughout Europe[3].

The altar is empty; no object suggests that a liturgical service is going on, except for a lighted candle enlightening the host that Pope Gregory raises. This is not a novelty of this depiction. In several representations of the Mass of St. Gregory, in fact, it is not clear at all whether a Mass is in fact taking place or not, given a similar paucity of liturgical objects in the altar. Usually, the vision unfolding before St. Gregory was the main focus of the painted scene. But this is not the effect sought by the painter of the Sardinian *retablo*: the Man of Sorrows in this depiction is peripheral, almost askew, it does not dominate the space of the painted scene and only St. Gregory is really seeing him. This was a current feature of this subject's depiction: in some cases is difficult to trace the line of sight of the bystanders, but in many others it is clear that nobody else but St. Gregory is looking at the Man of Sorrows.

[3] For an iconographical overview of the Mass of St. Gregory, see the recent project by the University of Münster <http://gregorsmesse.uni-muenster.de/home.html> that provides a rich iconographical *corpus*. However, this *corpus* does not include works from Southern Europe (with only some exception): neither Italy, nor Catalonia or Castile – more important for what concern this article – are included. On the diffusion of the Mass of St. Gregory in Spain see M. A. Ibáñez García, "La Misa de San Gregorio", pp. 7-18.

The line of sight of the characters in the tabernacle niche makes clear in this example, that Gregory alone can see the Man of Sorrows; all the others look at the host that Gregory raises. The role of the host is emphatically enhanced by its size, which offered the surface for painting the Crucifixion; here, the cross on the Golgotha and the figures of the Virgin and St. John are clearly visible. The Calvary is depicted in monochrome: a grayish hue resembling a shadow. The only place where such an emphasis to the host is found is, unsurprisingly, Spain.

Sardinia strengthened its relationship with the Iberian Peninsula after 1409, when the entire island's territory, with the name of Kingdom of Sardinia, became part of the Crown of Aragon; the Santa Cruz family, who commissioned the altarpiece, had recently come to Sardinia from Spain. In 1479, the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragon with Isabel of Castile laid the foundations for the future union of the two Iberian crowns. The culture and the art produced in Sardinia in the late fifteenth century were thus strongly linked with the Castilian-Aragonese culture, a fact that marked a decisive separation from the previous century, when the island's production was linked to that of the Italian peninsula. The rich production of Catalan *retables*, much appreciated for the ornamentation of Sardinian churches, is a phenomenon imported from abroad and not originated *in loco*. Therefore, it is logical to look for comparisons in the Iberian culture of the second half of the century, whatever the actual origin of the unknown painter may be, and to search for the reasons behind the importance accorded in the visual arts to the raising of the sacred host[4]. It will suffice to introduce a number of works of art showing this feature to identify both an important visual landmark for our altarpiece and to mark the difference from the coeval production of Northern Europe (France, Germany and the Netherlands)[5]: the panel

[4] The raising of the host was depicted mainly in scenes of the Mass of St. Gregory but also in other depiction of miraculous masses such as the mass of St. Martin.

[5] M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*. Among the examples from outside Spain showing the Mass of Saint Gregory with a particular emphasis on the raising of the host, there is the panel by Henning Van der Heide from Lubeck and the panel from the Champmol (Dijon), now at the Louvre Museum.

of the Mass of Saint Gregory painted by the Castilian Diego de la Cruz around 1490 and currently in the Philadelphia Museum of Art[6]; the *predella* of the altarpiece in Tarazona (Aragon) with the same subject (fig. 5); the *predella* of the *retablo* of Nuestra Señora de los Milagros in Agreda (Soria); the *retablo* by the Maestro de Manzanillo now in the Collección Galdiano (Madrid); the *retablo* of Don Sancho de Roja now at the Prado Museum; and the Mass of Saint Gregory by Pedro Berruguete, now in the Museum of Burgos. Even if the same theme was not unknown in the rest of Western Europe, the large number of examples pertaining to a Spanish context still needs to be fully explained[7].

3. The debate around the Transubstantiation

The religious debate around the Transubstantiation, the actual presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist began in the early Middle Ages, but it reached its apex in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Even before, the discussion was heated in the thirteenth century by the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215 that lay people had to take communion on Easter Day, after proper preparation and confession. The annual communion was considered mandatory but also sufficient for the whole year. The formulation of the Eucharist as the very body of Christ complicated the rite of the Communion. The raising of the host made by the priest, the

[6] See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jcapaldi/6814646388/sizes/l/in/photostream/>; for a detail of the host held by St. Gregory see <http://www.flickr.com/photos/2324-7302@N07/4606339630/lightbox/>.

[7] Most studies on this theme have focused, until recently, on iconographic aspects, especially on the ways through which the theme could arrive in Spain from Northern Europe (M. Trens, *La Eucaristía en el arte español*; M. A. Ibáñez García, "Misa de San Gregorio"). See also P. Del Pozo Coll, "La devoción a la hostia consagrada", which provides new material about the liturgical context of the host during the Mass and about the actual images impressed in the host: this article, however, does not explore the connections between these aspects and the theological debate going on in Spain in the second half of the fifteenth century that will be analyzed in the next pages.

only person who actually consumed the host during the Mass (except on Easter day), became thus a sort of substitute for the real communion: the host was received by seeing, in what has been called a "sacramental viewing" or an "ocular communion".

The moment of the elevation of the host was stressed by means of liturgical changes aimed at involving all the senses: the peal of bells, the burning of incense, the lighting of candles and clasping of the hands were all tools devised to focus the attention of the faithful on the moment of the consecration.

The Fourth Lateran Council did not state the dogma of the Transubstantiation: the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the host has been assumed as the orthodox position since the eleventh century but the dogma has never been stated by the Church until the Council of Trent[8].

In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, the heretical ideas of Wyclif and the Hussites on Transubstantiation had generated the specific nuance assumed by the debate around this topic in the various regions of Europe. The analysis of the Spanish situation will show how the faithful's behavior towards the Communion rite could easily be considered as driven by popular superstition, but the peculiarity of this context and the diatribes between Christians, Jews and *conversos* in the fifteenth century will also show what led to this.

4. The devotion to the raising of the host in late medieval Spain

The importance the faithful gave to the moment of the host's elevation affected the importance accorded to the Mass as the whole liturgical service; this fact can explain some abuses attested in several churches where priests were accused of raising the host even before the consecration, thereby conferring a sort of miraculous power onto the elevation itself[9]. A fifteenth century text by Alfonso Madrigal

[8] See for instance, C. Walker Bynum, "Seeing and Seeing Beyond", pp. 208-240; see also G. Macy, "The Dogma of Transubstantiation in the Middle Ages", pp. 11-41.

[9] See V. Lorne Kennedy, "The Moment of the Consecration and Elevation of the Host", pp. 121-150.

Tostado clearly affirms that popular superstition assigned curative power to the host; it became common for people gathering in one church to attend the elevation of the host and then suddenly move to another church if the bells signaled that an elevation was going on there[10]. The Mass of Saint Gregory painted on the side of the predella of the Tarazona *retablo* clearly illustrates this custom, showing on the right side of the panel a group of people gathering at the door of the church just to assist to the elevation of the host (fig. 5).

The stress on the host is also documented in the late medieval devotional literature about the preparation of wafers with unleavened bread. In the second half of the fifteenth century the Chartusian Juan de Padilla wrote a Christological poem entitled *Retablo de la vida de Christo fecho en metro* in which some verses are devoted to the hosts: «Los acimos panes que son amasados / Sin levaduras y otras mistiones / Porque huyamos las conversaciones / De los judíos herejes damnados»[11].

The unleavened bread was curiously seen as a way to avoid contamination by heretical Jews (*los judíos herejes*). This poem illustrates the penetration in the devotional literature of the harsh debate between Christians and Jews in Spain. The disputes between Jews and Christians in Europe and the Mediterranean date back to the first centuries of the Christian era but the issues related to the idolatry, which involve also the question of the sacred images and the adora-

[10] Alfonso de Madrigal Tostado, "Tratado compuesto por el muy reuerendo señor el Tostado obispo de Avila insigne theologo al illustre señor el conde don Alvaro de Stuñiga sobre la forma que avie de tener en el oyr de la missa", published in Alcalà de Henares in 1511, quoted in F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, p. 122, n. 183: «Oyendo una missa no la dexeys hasta ser acabada para yr a oyr otra como acontesce a muchas personas simples que quieren alçar en otra dexan la missa que estaban oyendo y van a ver como alçan» (transl.: When you are attending Mass, do not leave before it ends only to go to attend to another one as it occurs to many simple people who like to see the elevation of the host; for this reason they abandon the Mass they are attending and they go to see the elevation of the host in another Mass).

[11] The unleavened bread are kneaded / without leaven or other mixtures / so that we can avoid accusations /of the damned heretical Jews. See Del Pozo Coll, "La devoción a la hostia", p. 37, n. 38.

tion of them by Christians, intensified all over western Europe from the twelfth century onward[12]. Also Spain (both Castile and Catalonia-Aragon) was engaged in such debates, since the early twelfth century *Dialogus contra iudaeos* by the converted Jew Pedro Alfonso. The Jews' accusation of idolatry was countered essentially by two different answers: the first considering images as simple tools for memory, deprived of any spiritual value and with minimized importance; according to the second, the spiritual value of the sacred images reproducing the divinity was extremely important and any attack to a sacred image had to be considered a direct attack to the divinity itself included in the images[13]. This kind of disputes did not characterize only the main cultural centers of Spain, but also the minor ones; the dispute held in 1286 in Mallorca between the Genoese merchant Inghetto Contardo and a Jew who accused him of idolatry (to whom Inghetto answers using the first of the two mentioned apologies of images) attests to this kind of problem and the tensions between the two religious communities, often involving the sacred images, that were diffused even outside the capital and the main center of the Iberian kingdoms. Another important dispute, closer to the time when the altarpiece was produced, is the famous *Disputa de Tortosa* (1413-1414) between Christian theologians and rabbis. St. Vincent Ferrer, one of the participant at this dispute, defended images saying they actually kept in themselves something of the divine they represented. The controversies between Jews and Christians flared up around the fourth decade of the fifteenth century when Jews radicalized their position against images and gave origin to several disputes against Christians (for example the *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, written by the converted Jew Pablo de Santa Marìa in 1434, or the Jewish side attack against images made by Maimónides in his *Guía de Perplejos*, translated into Spanish between 1419 and 1432).

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[12] See J. C. Schmitt, "L'Occident, Nicée II et les Images du VIII^{e} au XIII^{e}", pp. 271-311. Among the several writings *adverus iudaeos* produced in Europe in the twelfth century, and mostly pertaining to a monastic culture, there are the ones by Gilbert Crispin, Guibert de Nogent and Rupert von Deutz.

[13] See F. Pereda, "El debate sobre la imagen en la España del siglo XV", p. 62.

The *Fortalitium Fidei* written in 1459 by the Franciscan friar Alonso de Espina is one of the most articulate treatises of this kind, even if it cannot be simply reduced to a Christian-Jew dispute. The work by Espina – who is considered one of the fore-runners of the tribunal of the Inquisition – is actually a treatise for preachers to be used against the enemies of the Christian faith; and the third of its five chapters is a direct attack against Jews and *conversos*. This work, which had a broad fortune in Spain and was printed five times between 1471 and 1494 and even translated into French and German, contains an elaborate theory of the religious image, which is helpful for understanding the iconography of the Eucharist widely diffused in the Spanish art of that era. As Felipe Pereda has pointed out in a recent study, Espina combines the Thomistic theory of the cult of images (which reserved the highest degree of the cult to Christ, called *latría*) and religious practices and legends, which gave to some images a sort of privileged status close to that of relics[14]. For Espina, images are a part of the presence of Christ in the militant Church, not just a decoration or a spur for the private devotion; furthermore, in his opinion, the highest degree of the cult, the *latría*, was indisputably associated with the adoration of the Eucharist. This defense of the cult of the Eucharist was an answer to the Jews' attack and it appears to be the friar's main concern; he said that Jews accused Christians of being idolatrous «because they adore Christ as man and as God» and because «they also adore the host that they themselves have prepared as if it was God»; Espina replied that Christians do not adore the bread but its substance, converted into the substance of Christ's body by means of the divine virtue, after the words of the consecration[15]. Espina,

[14] See F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, pp. 114-144.

[15] I am following here and in the notes below the Spanish translation of the *Fortalitium Fidei*, book 3, supplied by Felipe Pereda in *Las imágenes de la discordia*, Apéndice 3, pp. 410-417. «El vigésimo cuarto y último argumento de los judíos es contra la adoración de Cristo y el Sacramento del altar y también contra la adoración de las imágenes. (...) Lo mismo en Ex.20: "No te harás escultura ni ninguna similitud de lo que hay arriba en el cielo o abajo en la tierra, ni lo que hay en el agua o bajo la tierra, no la adorarás ni darás honra"». Then in the following paragraphs: «Y consecuentemente Jesús Nazareno debe ser adorado con latría y no por ello son idólatras los Cristianos que adoran al verdadero Dios. Pero con respecto a esto de

then, goes on stating the transubstantiation of the substance of Christ's body in the Eucharist to affirm that Christians do not adore the visible *species* of the bread as if it was God, but the invisible Christ existing in the *species* or *accidentes*[16]. Espina, in his defense of the Eucharist, then looks for the grounds of sacrament's institution in the Mosaic law: the burning bush becomes an anticipation of the adoration of the invisible God under a visible aspect[17]. With his Thomistic defense of the image (*latria* for the Eucharist and the images that represented the divinity, *hyperdulía* for the Virgin and *dulía* for the saints) Espina creates a strong statement in defense of images saying that they should be adored.

In a culture where the power attributed to the act of seeing the host was so strong that it even led to superstition, the pairing of religious images with the Eucharist, placed by Espina under the same category of things subject to *latría*, led to the development of images in the host. The depiction of images in the hosts was not just an invention of the artists but corresponded to the actual aspect of the wafers produced at the time. A number of iron molds and tongs used to make hosts, produced in France and Catalonia between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, confirm this (fig. 7). These molds clearly show that they were used to create hosts of two different

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la adoración de la eucaristía, dicen que allí hay idolatría. Pues no se adora el pan, porqué no está allí, sino su sustancia, convertida en la sustancia del cuerpo de Cristo por virtud divina según la mención de las palabras de la consagración, que son del mismo Cristo, verdadero Dios, efectiva o principalmente. Sin embargo son del sacerdote delegada o ministerialmente».

[16] F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, pp. 411-412: «Pero que puede convertirse una sostancia en otra, permaneciendo los accidentes, se prueba porque Dios no llega la sustancia por medio de los accidentes, como hace el agente natural, sino que la alcanza inmediatamente, y por esto puede cambiar la sustancia en otra, permaneciendo los accidentes con la misma eficacia. (...) Pues no se adora la especie de pan visible como dios, sino al mismo Cristo invisible existente en las especies».

[17] F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, p. 412: «Algo similar se encuentra en cierto modo en Ex.3, donde se dice que Cristo se apareció a Moisés en la llama de fuego en medio de la zarza y no hay duda que Moisés adoró a Dios (...) y sin embargo no adoró el fuego o la llama como dios (...) sino que adoró a Dios invisible que aparecía bajo la similitud visible».

kinds and dimensions: a smaller type for the Easter hosts, for the faithful, and a bigger one for the sacerdotal host. One of the few collection of molds studied so far, that in the Episcopal Museum in Vic (Catalonia), suggests that in the fifteenth century the difference in dimension between the hosts for the priests and the hosts for the faithful increased and the iconographic repertoire grew to include small narrative scenes, sometimes rich in details[18]. Among the images impressed in the hosts were the Crucifixion (simple or as the Calvary with St. John and the Virgin), the Man of Sorrows, the Flagellation, the Mystic Lamb, and Christ monograms. The circular form also came to be outlined by a decorative frame, sometimes lobed, sometimes provided with inscriptions as in the painting by Diego De la Cruz, now in Philadelphia.

All these data show that the host was something to be seen, not only because of its sacramental power, but also for the image depicted in it. The information we have about the rite of the consecration stresses the importance of having a candle lighted behind the priest; the light illuminated the host once it was raised and the image contained in it could be seen by the faithful[19]. In a society where the religious debate and the Jewish accusations of idolatry were common, the adoration of a figurative host unsurprisingly led to further problems.

But what did the faithful see and adore during the elevation of the host? The records of the tribunal of the *Santo Oficio* reveal that the assimilation of the Eucharist to sacred images was not just an erudite question, but betrays an actual correspondence to images impressed in the hosts and that this engendered incomprehension among the lay illiterate people. In 1502, a woman from Roa, a converted Jew, was accused because she had said that «what is raised in the altar is not God, but his figure»[20]. The *conversos* were accused of avoiding to

[18] The museum website provides photos and detailed descriptions of this kind of objects. <http://www.museuepiscopalvic.com/coleccions_more.asp?id=249&s=&r=> See also L. Amenòs, "Hostiers i Neulers medievals", p. 98.

[19] M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 61.

[20] "Aquel que alçan el altar no es Dios, sino su figurança", cit. in F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, p. 123.

see the host by moving the gaze elsewhere during the elevation. Even from the Catholic side, the Franciscan friar Hernando de Talavera expressed doubt on the reliability of sight and stated that real faith moves *ex auditu*, «sight is misleading – says the friar – it makes us see just a piece of bread instead of the body of Christ». The strong, even excessive, emphasis given to the power of seeing, thus led to a reaction even within Catholicism. The words of the Franciscan friar Iñigo de Mendoza in his *Sacerdotales instructio circa missam* dating 1499, explain this position:

> Pues el alçar la hostia representa el subir y crucificar a Jesu Cristo en la cruz: claro es que tu contemplación ha de ser contemplar la passion y muerte de nuestro Jesu Cristo y debes (...) començar a contemplar y trae en tu memoria la passion, como si verdaderamente allí pasase delante de tus ojos aquella muy preciosa muerte y passion suya[21].

Depictions of the Crucifixion and the Calvary in the hosts can help to effect the desired result of a tool for memory.

5. The image in the host

Most of the hosts in the Spanish paintings present images of the Crucifix or the Calvary, but these differ from the Sardinian example in the way the subject is depicted. In all the Spanish examples, the image is rendered as if it was in relief, while in the Tuili altarpiece is depicted as a shaded image. In other words, while Spanish examples depict actual hosts impressed from carved moulds, the Tuili altarpiece refers to the divine prototype existing in the sacred images, in the under-drawing. Dark drawing, σκιαγραφὶα (literally shadow-painting) in Greek, was considered simultaneously an essential part of a painting and the divinity; color, in turn, was human intervention

[21] Quoted in E. M. Vetter, "Iconografía del Varón de Dolores. Su significado y origen", p. 226, n. 173.

and human nature[22]. This formulation made in the fifth century by the theologian Cyril of Alexandria was developed in theories of the icon elaborated by Greek theologians during and after the Iconoclasm. John of Damascus in his *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tre* associated the icon with an image reflected in a mirror or painted with wax and pigments on a wood board[23]. According to him, the incarnation is what makes it possible to portray the invisible and un-circumscribed God[24]; as we look *through a glass darkly*, as St. Paul famously said, so the icon is the dark glass, something that allows us to see God according to our physical, earthly limits[25]. In another passage of the same treatise, John of Damascus makes a classification of the different kinds of images. The fourth of these

> consists of the shadows and forms and types of invisible and bodiless things which are described by the Scriptures in physical terms. These give us a faint apprehension of God and the angels where otherwise we would have none, because it is impossible for us to think immaterial things unless we can envision analogous shapes, as the great and holy Dionysius the Aeropagite has said. Anyone would say that our inability immediately to direct our thoughts to contemplation of higher things makes it necessary that familiar every-day media be utilized to give suitable form to what is formless, and make visible what cannot be depicted[26].

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[22] For an overview of this problem see H. L. Kessler, "Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face", pp. 129-151. See also H. L. Kessler, " 'Pictures Fertile with Truth' ", pp. 53-65 and H. L. Kessler, "Christ's Dazzling Face", pp. 231-246.

[23] See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*.

[24] «We are not mistaken if we make the image of God incarnate, who was seen on earth in the flesh, associated with men. (...) For we yearn to see how He looked as the apostle says, 'Now we see through a glass darkly'. Now the icon is also a dark glass, fashioned according to the limitations of our physical nature» *Ibi*, II, 5.

[25] St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 13:12. The Greek text actually has «βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι» corresponding to the Latin Vulgata version, «nunc per speculum et in aenigmate»; the mirror referred to in this passage should be intended as an ancient kind of mirror, a highly polished brass mirror, reflecting a weakened, imperfect, mirrored image.

[26] *Ibi*, III, 21.

Every-day media, thus, can be used to make visible what is invisible; John of Damascus also put a particular stress on images seen as shadows and forms of the invisible. But his icon-theory also offers a model of the icon which is different than the already mentioned painting made with wax pigments on wood. In the third *Oratione*, John of Damascus defines the icon as an impression or an imprint of a pattern. When he discusses the *acheiropoietic* image left by Christ on a cloth, the Mandylion of Edessa, he links the resulting image to a real imprint, not a metaphorical one[27]. The same concepts are repeated also in *De fide Orthodoxa*[28], another work by John of Damascus known by friar Espina, who mentions it several times in his *Fortalitium Fidei*. In chapters IV and XVI of the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, which are devoted to images, John of Damascus identifies the Incarnation as the center of the religious images and stresses the tight relationship existing between the image (icon) and its prototype, completing thus the question that he began to set up in the previous *Orationes*.

According to Espina, such *acheiropoietic* images as the Mandylion, Veronica, or the Holy Shroud testified that images enclosed something of the prototype and were part of the prototype, not merely a sign of it[29]. John of Damascus' theories were not a "new" rediscovery by Espina after centuries of oblivion, but they were diffused in the medieval West through Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas who studied John of Damascus' works focusing on what he wrote about worship of the sacred image and the distinction between *latría* (the highest kind of adoration, reserved to Christ and to the images of Christ, in Aquinas's opinion) and *doulía* (reserved to the Vir-

[27] These aspects have been pointed out by Bissera Pentcheva, according to whom, this interpretation of the icon by John of Damascus - together with the metaphor of the seal and the matrix made later by Theodore of Studios - represents the grounds upon which, after Iconoclasm, will stand the preference for the metal relief icons, rather than for the painted icons. See B. V. Pentcheva, "Painting or Relief", pp. 7-14.

[28] «The Lord Himself put a garment over His own divine and life-giving face and impressed on it an image of Himself and sent this to Abgarus, to satisfy thus his desire». John of Damascus, *De Fide orthodoxa*, PG, XVI.

[29] See F. Pereda, *Las imágenes de la discordia*, p. 131.

gin)[30]. Quoting Thomas Aquinas, friar Espina also explains that the adoration addressed to the images is referred to the prototype[31].

This long digression shows how the fifteenth-century elaboration of the defense of images such as that by Espina was grounded on older theoretical elaborations constructed in Byzantium during Iconoclasm by an author that the Spanish Franciscan well knew. The legend of the *acheiropoietic* images, linked to the idea of the divine prototype, that is, the impression of the face or body of Christ on a cloth, presented several Eucharistic connections[32]. The holy face impressed in the cloth was independent of its physical matrix, and its divine essence did not consist in the materials; this allowed its miraculous duplication. The same could be said for the hosts: the actual wafer, mechanically made through a mold, was reproduced for every Mass, but it received the divine impression only during the consecration, actually becoming Christ's body independent of the wafer's physical nature.

At the same time, the divine prototype needed to be expressed (in cloth, wax, clay, etc.) in order to be seen and this is how the copies of the Holy face were made. According to the legend of the Keramion, when Ananias, the painter sent by the King Abgar to make a portrait of Christ, hid the Mandylion under a tile, on his way back to Edessa, the image of the Holy face transferred from the cloth to the ceramic. In the Tuili altarpiece, the idea of the divine prototype in the image in the host has been pushed forward; the shaded scene of the Calvary with both St. Mary and St. John at either side of the cross, shows Mary on the right side and John on the left (for the beholders): the opposite of the traditional arrangement, displayed in several painted Crucifixion scenes, as the Crucifixion panel on the top of the Tuili al-

[30] For an overview of the Medieval theories on the adoration of the images see J. Wirth, "Faut-il adorer les images?", pp. 28-37.

[31] «Ita Crux Christi et eius imago venerari debet adoratione latrie imago autem Virginis Mariae aliorumque sanctorum venerari debent veneratione duliae quia totus hono refertur ad prototypum»; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III p., q.25, a.3.

[32] See H. L. Kessler, "Configuring the Invisible by Copying the Holy Face", pp. 129-151; see also H. L. Kessler, "Il Mandylion", pp. 67-75.

tarpiece itself (fig. 6). The traditional arrangement, with the Virgin on the left of the Cross and St. John on the right predominates in the hosts depicted in many Spanish panel paintings: by using the opposite arrangement, that is, the same of the matrices of the Eucharistic molds (fig. 7), the Master of Castelsardo suggested that, while looking at the host, the beholder was looking at the prototype.

Seeing the host was thus a way of seeing Christ and the image impressed in the host could help to accomplish this by attracting the gaze of the faithful. But even if the host was the real body of Christ, it was not possible to see God directly during the earthly existence. The Franciscan Peter of Limoges, in his *Liber de oculo morali* written around 1280, an *exemplum*-book for preachers widely circulated throughout Europe, explains this aspect[33]. Peter of Limoges described three types of vision: direct, oblique, and reflected. Similarly, the man's spiritual eye had a triple vision; the first and most perfect vision comes after the final resurrection, when one is in a state of glory; the second, less perfect vision, occurs after death, when the souls are separated from their bodies; the third and the weakest of the three spiritual modes is what one has during his/her earthly life. In the depiction of the Mass of St. Gregory, the way the pope holds the host, rapt in his personal vision of the Man of Sorrows, and the way he turns the host slightly from his line of sight, can be considered an attempt of showing the sought-after direct vision of Christ, a kind of vision that is not possible in this life and not even available to the faithful in the church, who had to look at the Mass of St. Gregory from an oblique point of view.

The fifteenth century saw a strong increase of the cult of the *acheiropoietic* images in Spain, such as the *Sacro Rostro* in Jaén, a copy of the Mandylion, attested in the city in 1453. In late medieval Castile, the importance of seeing the host straight on was stressed by the accusation, sometimes made against priests suspected of being heretics, to hold the host inclined over their heads so that the faithful could not look directly at it. The latter, once again, is linked to controversies between Christians and Jews. Representing an image in the host

[33] See Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise on the Eye*.

was thus a tool for reinforcing the claim that if both Jews and Christians could look at the host with carnal eyes, the Jews remained at the level of the physical image, while the Christians could move beyond the physical image to gaze at the passion and death of Christ with the spiritual eyes[34].

6. The Tabernacle Door

The choice of pairing the host with the blood of Christ on the door of the tabernacle-niche showing a Resurrected Christ with the blood gushing from the side wound stressed further the value of the act of the communion as the real presence of bread and blood in the Eucharist. The blood of Christ spurts out of his wound directly into the chalice where a host containing a figure is depicted, now barely legible (probably again a Calvary).

One of the most remarkable and sinister aspects of blood libel in the late Middle Ages is that it often paralleled accusations that Jews violated consecrated hosts, devotional objects, or Christ himself. A common claim was that Jews burned hosts and crucifixes, again confirming the view that Jews could not see beyond the physical presence to the divine archetype. The question of Christ's blood after his death and especially after his resurrection was highly debated from the thirteenth century on. Innocent III in his sermon *De sacro altari misterio* raised the question, without taking a position, as to whether Christ «took back that blood which he poured out on the cross» and Thomas Aquinas argued that the blood flowing from Christ's heart at his death was an essential part of his human nature and it remained united with his divinity during the three days between death and resurrection and rose with him again on the day of Resurrection. The image in the door of the tabernacle thus shows that Christ's divine blood, material symbol of his incarnation was an integral part of

[34] «Corpus Christi secundum modum essendi quem habet in hoc sacramento, neque sensu neque imaginatione perceptibile est, sed solo intellectu, qui dicitur oculus spiritualis», Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* III p., q.76, a.7.

the Eucharist, maybe not fully perceived in the ritual of the ocular Communion.

The resurrected Christ-door of the tabernacle (cf. John 10,9) can be read along with the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 9,12) in a way that strengthens the claims of the Christianity against Judaism.

> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption[35].

Peter of Limoges referred directly to the side wound of Christ in a way that calls to mind the painting of the tabernacle door. Citing Alhazen's *Perspective*, he noted that, after looking at the sky in the daylight through an aperture and then shutting the eyes or turning to a dark place, the eyes still perceive the form of that opening because its *species* have entered the eyes and are stored in the visual memory. The wound attracted the gaze of the faithful, but it was also in turn a sort of eye: Peter of Limoges referring to both the pupil of the eye and the wound with the same word '*foramen*' put the eye in direct connection with the sacred heart through the wound, in a visual relationship enhanced, in the case of the tabernacle painting, by a similar depiction of Christ's eyelids and the side wounds' rim[36].

> The opening that we ought to gaze upon most frequently is the wound of Christ who was pierced at the cross. (...) Anyone can enter into the interior of his conscience and meditate in his mind's eye on Christ's wound, so that he conforms to Christ's sufferings through his model[37].

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[35] Heb. 9: 11-12.

[36] See S. Biernhoff, *Sight and embodiment in the Middle Ages*.

[37] Peter of Limoges, *Liber de oculo morali*, chapter 5.

7. Bleeding images and bleeding hosts

The unity of body and blood alluded to in the host set on the chalice catching the blood of the resurrected Christ, as shown in the painting of the tabernacle-door, can be linked to contemporary Eucharistic miracles involving bleeding hosts or bleeding statues, and it has been interpreted in correlation with the need of seeing and touching Christ's blood. This need was probably emerged by the withdrawal of the chalice from the laity, due to preventive measures applied for fear of spillage of the wine if given to the people[38]. Espina himself affirmed in his *Fortalitium Fidei* that the transubstantiation can be proven by miraculous events that could be attested by ocular witnesses. Among the proofs he draws, there are several images – icons or statues, all coming from Constantinople[39] – recorded as having poured blood (or water in some cases), as well as bleeding hosts that in several alleged cases involved Spanish Jews, accused of having stolen and tortured consecrated hosts from which, unfailingly, blood began to pour, or which even turned into the baby Jesus. The first accusations against Jews related to a host profanation dates to the middle of the thirteenth century, around the time when the Church established the Feast of the Corpus Christi (1264); similar cases increased in the following century. Accusations of host profanation were lodged against Jews in the Kingdom of Catalonia and Aragon in the second half of the fourteenth century[40]; and scenes of Jews profaning the host using a knife or boiling it in hot water appear in Cata-

[38] C. Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages".

[39] These examples given by Espina, together with his pairing of sacred images with Eucharist, seem to fade, at least partially, J. L. Schefer's vision, according to which the cross-over between Eastern and Western practices and legends about the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist can be found in Byzantium in legends of bleeding icons profaned by the iconoclasts, and in the West in consecrated hosts profaned by heretics or Jews. In Schefer's opinion the origin of this difference traces back to the Carolingian times and to the choice of founding the Western Empire theology upon the real presence of Christ in the consecrated host. See J. L. Schefer, *L'Hostie profanée*.

[40] For a deep analysis of this phenomenon see M. Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, especially pp. 154-161 and 109-116.

lan retables dating fifteenth century , among these, a pair of altar-frontals from the parish church of Vallbona de les Monges (Lérida) and Jaime Serra's altarpiece from Sijena (Huesca). The latter depicts a Jew cutting a host on a table with a knife; the host bleeds and Christ appears as a wounded child in a boiling pot.

Besides these depictions of Jews as defilers of hosts, also actual hosts were reported to have bled. In 1433, for example, in Dijon, Pope Eugenius IV gave a miraculous host to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, allegedly the product of a Jewish profanation. The host, described in the papal bull and depicted in some miniatures, displayed Christ the Judge on a throne and, at his side, the Calvary. The host is red-stained (believed to be blood-stained). A book of hours from Poitiers, produced around 1475[41], shows the host of Dijon as well as the so-called book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy (1465) does[42].

The legends of bleeding statues (mainly Crucifixes), reported by Espina, offer further examples of the close relationship that the Franciscan wanted to establish between hosts and images. Bleeding hosts and bleeding crucifixes served the same purpose: showing the real presence of Christ both in the Eucharist and in the sacred images. The case of the Beirut crucifix is probably the best known example among those mentioned by Espina; the legend tells of a Crucifix, fashioned by Nicodemus, found by a group of Jews in a house in Beirut where a Christian used to live before them. When the Jews discover the Crucifix, they decide to violate it by hitting it with a spear in a re-enactment of the crucifixion. The Crucifix started to bleed; and the blood mixed with water that flowed from his wounds had curative powers: the Jews of Beirut converted to Christianity. A wooden Crucifix, the *Cristo de Burgos*, in the fifteenth century considered to be a work by Nicodemus, was a miraculous Crucifix too and

[41] Ms. 1001, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, f.17v.

[42] This Book of Hours received around 1505 the addition of a bi-folio showing the bleeding host in a monstrance paired to the prayer *O salutaris ostia*. Cod.Vindobonensis 1857, Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, f.1*verso. For a deep analysis of the depiction of the bleeding host of Dijon in Books of Hours see R. Wieck, "The Sacred Bleeding Host of Dijon in Book of Hours", pp. 392-404.

it is associated with a similar legend. An altarpiece in Felanitx on the island of Mallorca features the *Passio imagines*[43]. The Mallorcan example shows that in the provincial and peripheral areas of the Crown of Aragon, too, anti-Semitic feeling was visualized in art.

Even in Sardinia, communities of Jews are attested in all the main cities (Cagliari, Alghero, Sassari) since the fourteenth century; as in Spain, these communities had co-existed peacefully with the local community until the mid-fifteenth century; the restriction imposed by the Catalan and Castilian kings after the second half of the fifteenth century gave life to the phenomenon of the crypto-Judaism in Sardinia[44]. In the year 1492, Ferdinand the Catholic gave the order to the general lieutenant in Sardinia to expel Jews from the island, as he did in all the dominions subject to his jurisdiction. Jews had to convert or go into exile: the majority left and went to Naples; others converted, and a certain number were accused of being *cripto-judíos* and continuing to practice their old religion[45].

It is not easy to reconstruct the cultural situation of fifteenth-century Sardinia and, thus, it is not possible to state that the same cultural issues, the same polemics against Jews about the images apply to the island's context. Furthermore, the lack of a university or important monastic cultural center does not allow us to draw any secure conclusion. The records of the Inquisition tribunal referring to processes against *conversos* accused to practice their old religion in a hidden way, all date to the sixteenth century; unfortunately no records related to the fifteenth century is preserved[46]. Given these premises, it is not possible to link the depiction in the tabernacle-

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[43] C. Espí Forcén, *Recrucificando a Cristo*; H. L. Kessler, "Shaded with Dust. Jewish Eyes on Christian Art".

[44] On this topic see *Uneasy Communion*, catalogue of the exhibition, Mobia, New York, 2010. About Jews communities in Sardinia see C. Tasca, *Gli ebrei in Sardegna nel XIV secolo*. Eadem, "Una nota sulla presenza ebraica in Sardegna", pp. 881-892, especially pp. 886-888.

[45] See M. A. Motis Dolader, "Diáspora de los judíos del reino de Aragón en Italia", pp. 291-313.

[46] See A. Rundine, *Inquisizione spagnola, censura e libri proibiti*; A. Borromeo, "Inquisizione e 'Conversos' nella Sardegna Spagnola", pp. 197-216; R. Turtas, *Storia della Chiesa in Sardegna*, pp. 240-242.

niche of the Tuili altarpiece to any specific historical episode; indeed, it is likely that the Spanish patron family just asked to the most famous painter working in Sardinia at the time to paint something close to what they knew and saw in Spain in the same moment. Nonetheless, it is also true that the painter gave his personal and original interpretation of the image in the host, an interpretation that cannot be found in any of the Castilian and Catalan altarpieces known to me. This said, the Maestro di Castelsardo's version finds its cultural background in the religious debates of Spain in the second half of the fifteenth century.

8. Conclusion

Altarpieces and other artworks produced in Spain or in such culturally-related areas as Sardinia, in the second half of the fifteenth century, emphasize the elevation of the host and the importance of looking at the Sacrament. This phenomenon can be related to the polemics against the Jews and to the theological debate taking place in Spain as exemplified in the treatise *Fortalitium fidei* by the Franciscan Alonso de Espina, where the sacred images are paired to the Eucharist and to the *acheiropoietic* images.

The way the image in the host in the Tuili altarpiece is depicted can be read as a reference to the divine prototype and to the Byzantine theory of the icon elaborated by John of Damascus in the eighth century. The prototype was depicted as a σκιαγραφὶα, literally a "shadow painting", an underdrawing beneath the colored image, dark as the dark face of Christ in the Mandylion or in the Veronica.

By looking at the image-matrix depicted in the host, beholders were led to "see" the prototype; but the reversal of the positions of the Virgin and St. John would have suggested that they were only gazing at a matrix. These visual strategies were tools used against the Jewish accusations to Christians, charged to be idolatrous. The application of the icon theory and *acheiropoieta*-parallels to the images depicted in the hosts was a way to show that the Jews could only see the physical form of the sacred images, not the archetype behind them.

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The panel with the Resurrection of Christ, actual door of the tabernacle-niche, stresses again the importance of the incarnation, showing Christ's blood gushing out from the side wound directly onto the chalice with a host, painted at the bottom of the panel in a frontal position, in order to guarantee the faithful a full vision of the Eucharistic image. The pairing of the blood and the host with the chalice is another reference to the corporeal essence of Christ in the Eucharist, but Christ is now resurrected, standing victorious before his empty sepulcher, showing in this way also his divinity.

Fig .1 Tuili , St. Peter's church, altarpiece.

Fig. 2 Tuili, altarpiece, detail of the tabernacle niche

Fig. 3 Tuili, altarpiece, detail of The Mass of St. Gregory in the tabernacle niche.

Fig. 4 Tuili, altarpiece, door of the tabernacle niche, Christ resurrected showing his wound.

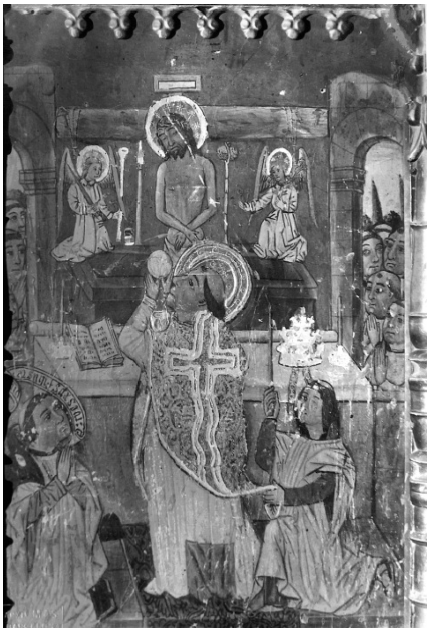

Fig. 5 Tarazona (Aragon) cathedral. Central panel of the altarpiece's *predella* (from Patricia Sela del Pozo Coll, "La Devoción a la Hostia Consagrada en la Baja Edad Media Castellana: Fuentes textuales, materiales e iconográficas para su estudio", *Anales de Historia del Arte (ISSN 0214-6452),* vol. 16 (2006), pp. (25-58), p. 30).

Fig. 6 Tuili altarpiece, upper part, Crucifixion scene.

Fig. 7 Iron mold for hosts from France, fifteenth century (from Patricia Sela del Pozo Coll, "La Devoción a la Hostia Consagrada en la Baja Edad Media Castellana: Fuentes textuales, materiales e iconográficas para su estudio", *Anales de Historia del Arte (ISSN 0214-6452),* vol. 16 (2006), pp. (25-58), p. 41).

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