

In the Name of the *Lord*: The Affirmation of the Cult of the Blessed Sacrament and the Liturgical Objects in the Late Medieval Period in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to demonstrate the relationship between the affirmation of the cult of the Blessed Sacrament starting at the late twelfth century, and the characteristics of the objects directly related to the Body of Our Lord: chalices and patens, Host boxes, ciboria and monstrances. The privileged sources for this research relate to the *Visitations Books* conducted between the last quarter of the fifteenth century and about 1571 to the churches under the jurisdiction of the Military Orders of Christ, Avis and Santiago, in Portugal. The results of this study demonstrate the survival of Gothic forms in Portuguese sacred jewellery during the first quarter of the sixteenth century (and even second), despite the introduction of the “Roman-style” decorative elements since the early days of this same century.

Key words: Blessed Sacrament, Late Medieval Period, Chalices and Patens, Monstrances, Ciboria, Host Boxes, Portugal.

En el nombre del Señor: la afirmación del culto al Santísimo Sacramento y los objetos litúrgicos de finales de la Edad Media en Portugal

RESUMEN

El principal propósito de este estudio es demostrar la relación entre la afirmación del culto a la Eucaristía iniciado a finales del siglo XII y las características de los objetos directamente vinculados con el cuerpo de Cristo: cálices y patenas, porta hostias, copones y custodias. Las fuentes privilegiadas para esta investigación son los *Libros de Visitas* llevadas a cabo entre el último cuarto del siglo XV y hacia 1571 en las iglesias bajo la jurisdicción de los órdenes militares de Cristo, Avis y Santiago en Portugal. Los resultados de este estudio demuestran la persistencia de las formas góticas en la orfebrería sacra portuguesa durante el primer cuarto del siglo XVI (e incluso el segundo) pese a la introducción de elementos decorativos “a la romana” desde comienzos de la misma centuria.

Palabras clave: Santísimo Sacramento, época tardomedieval, cálices y patenas, custodias, copones, porta hostias, Portugal.

Introduction

The affirmation of the cult of the Blessed Sacrament throughout the medieval period was reflected in the organization of the sacred space and, hence, in the liturgical objects directly related to the Lord. Believers came to churches or participated in solemn processions to see Christ, believing that this view entailed prophylactic and healthy benefits. During the Mass, the moment of Elevation acquired a very special meaning, imposing the opening of walls, the widening of the arches of the main chapel, the construction of steps to raise the altar and a special attention to liturgical objects in direct contact with the *Body of the Lord*: chalices and patens, Host boxes, ciboria and monstrances.

In Portugal, the concerns with the zeal and safeguard of the *Blessed Sacrament* are well reflected in the documentation of the late fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century, namely in *Visitations* conducted by the Military Orders of Christ, Santiago and Avis (1478-1571). Over nearly a century, thanks to the instructions of the visitors and registered pieces' inventories, the concerns with the acquisition of new liturgical objects or repair of existing ones can be thus understood. Because of the role such items had at the time of Consecration, the chalices and patens deserved a very particular attention, namely with their consecration by the Bishop, the replacement of old lead or tin items for new silver ones, or the purchase of heavier and more elaborate silver chalices for a festive use. As for monstrances, until mid-fourteenth century their existence is well identified in richer parishes, while their acquisition from this period on, already in a full Counter-Reformation spirit, imposed a model that would persist until the late seventeenth century. The ciboria, very abundant in Spain, were not highly disseminated in Portugal during the late medieval period, and were very often mingled in documents with the monstrances or other objects designed to guard the Sacred Host: chests, boxes, safes, small coffers.

The descriptive nature of the sources also enables an analysis of the formal and decorative evolution of these objects, a reality that can be tested by comparing with objects of the same nature that reached our time, preferably those which were found in their original space. To illustrate this text and since those objects are little known and studied in academia, four pieces that currently belong to two Portuguese parish churches were chosen, one situated south of the Tagus –the parish of Our Lady of Anunciada of Setúbal– and the second south of the Douro –Santiago de Rio Meão, in the municipality of Santa Maria da Feira (Aveiro District)–. The first church has a sixteenth century chalice and a paten that are not a set, and the second has a chalice and a monstrance from the same period. These four objects are a good example of pieces reported in the *Visitations Books* that have been the basis of our research and confirm the permanence of gothic forms and decorative elements in sixteenth-century pieces, mixed with others belonging to a Renaissance time.

The fifteenth and sixteenth century *Visitations Books* are a prime source for the study of silver in a period when there weren't many documents. The high cost of noble metals and the symbolic importance attributed to these objects in a direct contact

with the body of *Our Lord* explain the care with their protection and preservation, namely the acquisition of boxes or bags and their registration in inventories.

The affirmation of the cult of the Blessed Sacrament

The celebration of the Mass took an enormous importance during the medieval period, with a special emphasis on the affirmation of the cult of the Holy Eucharist. The will to approach the Divine, the desire to observe and touch Him explain the importance of this devotion during the Late Middle Ages. From the twelfth century, the Church sustained the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist when bread becomes “real meat” and wine the “true Blood of Christ”. Up to this point, believers rarely watched closely the Sacred Host. It happened only when they received the Viaticum and in the few communions they participated throughout their lives¹. The ritual of Elevation was regulated in the early thirteenth century², due to the abuses seen in various parishes where believers forced priests to show three times the Sacred Host during Mass or made them extend for too long the moment of Consecration³. Believers flocked to Mass especially to watch the miracle of Transubstantiation: through the symbols of bread and wine, Christ feeds believers with His body and His blood and whoever receives those “will live eternally and will resurrect on the last day”⁴. The gestural ritual of Elevation was established in the late twelfth century and the Synod of Paris of 1198/1203, convened by Bishop Odo of Sully, included one of the first texts to establish the rules for such ritual:

“It is ordained to priests that, when they begin the canon of the mass, at *Qui pridie*, holding the host, they should not immediately raise it too high so that it can be seen by the people; rather, only keep it in front of their chests while they say *hoc est corpus meum* and then they should elevate it so that it can be seen by all”⁵.

The 4th Lateran Council, convened by Innocent III and concluded in November 1215, established the doctrine of Transmutation, which demanded that priests should internalize the principle that, during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, they would represent Christ offering to God their own Sacrifice and, therefore, should have a pure soul, full of love and devotion.

The theatricality of gestures and the scenic character of the act of Elevation were emphasized over the centuries, with a direct reflection on the lives of the believers. *Visitations* determined that priests had to say the Mass early in the morning so that workers could “see God” before starting their crafts⁶ or compelled the believers to

¹ S. SEBASTIÁN, *Mensaje simbólico del arte medieval. Arquitectura, iconografía, liturgia*, Madrid, 1994, p. 388.

² A. VAUCHEZ, *La spiritualité du Moyen Âge Occidental. VIIIe-XIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1994, p. 171.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ John, 6, 53-59.

⁵ Quoted by M. RUBIN, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 55.

⁶ P. DIAS, *Visitações da Ordem de Cristo de 1507 a 1510. Aspectos artísticos*, Coimbra, 1979, p. 36.

attend the whole Mass and not just enter the church during the time of Elevation, because they normally remained outside talking and disturbing the religious ceremony⁷. Believers awaited for the descent of the Holy during the moment of “Raising to God” “the living bread come down from Heaven” (John 6, 53-59), and this became the most important act of the religious ceremony, with clear reflections on the spiritual life of the believers and on religious rituals: the moment of Elevation extended itself, the Sacred Species were shown to all sides, songs and prayers were sang, candles were lit to better see the miraculous instant, incense was avoided not to hinder observation, bells were rung at the proper moment and the church bells were tolled as an invitation for the believers to enter the temple and worship the Sacred Host⁸. Guillaume II of Seignelay, bishop of Paris (1219-24), explains the importance of ringing the bells to announce consecration:

“At that elevation, or just before it, a bell should be rung, as has been previously decreed and thus the minds of believers will be turned towards prayer”⁹.

Other texts of the thirteenth century are a reflection of the same rules. In many places, the Elevation was performed before the Consecration, turning this ritual into idolatry or exaggerating the ceremonial, and raising the species over the priest’s head¹⁰. Believers flocked to see and live this stage of the ceremony, believing that the direct observation of the Consecrated Host would bring them healthy and prophylactic effects.

Episcopal Visitations register these facts as well as the concerns of believers who requested solutions for the “holy sacrifice” to be seen by all the people who went into churches. Such solutions might be the use of black or brown cloths behind the altar so that the Sacred Host could stand out on a dark background¹¹, or buy new holy hosts moulds¹² that could make larger hosts so that at the moment of “raising to God” the Sacred Host could easily be seen by believers¹³. The changes that occurred in the structure of the altar during this period, namely its construction with stone, preferably against the wall, with a larger size and towering over several platforms and / or one or more steps, were also a reflection of the importance given to Liturgy during that peri-

⁷ J.M. DE M.L. DA S. MENDONÇA, *A Ordem de Avis revisitada (1515-1538). Um entardecer alheado*, Ph.D. Thesis, Lisbon, 2007, pp. 241 and 472.

⁸ S. SEBASTIÁN, *op. cit.*, 1994, pp. 388-389.

⁹ M. RUBIN, *op. cit.*, 1991, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ P.S. 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*, 16 (2006), pp. 27 and 29; M. RUBIN, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 54.

¹¹ As an example it must be considered the request made by the believers during the *Visitation* to the Archbishop of Lisbon, at the end of the fifteenth century. A.C.B. DE FIGUEIREDO, “Visitação do Arcebispo de Lisboa (século XV)”, *Revista Archeologica*, II (1888), pp. 29-30.

¹² The holy host moulds or host-irons are the tools used in churches to make holy hosts.

¹³ Request made in the *Visitation* of 1538 to the church of São Brás de Figueiroa, Military Order of Avis. J.M. DE M.L. DA S. MENDONÇA, *op. cit.*, 2007, pp. 499 and 502.

od¹⁴. Also many of the transformations of architectural spaces registered during early sixteenth century expressed the same concerns: churches were rebuilt or extended so that all believers could have a place inside the sacred space and could “see God”, and the arches that separated the body of the church from the chancel were pulled down, extended or raised, so that the moment of Elevation could be easily seen by all¹⁵.

This growing appreciation of the devotion to the Divine Eucharist in late medieval period explains the symbolic importance attached to the liturgical objects that are in direct contact with bread and wine, i.e. with both Consecrated Species.

Chalices and patens

Chalices and patens occupy a prominent place among the liturgical objects, because they are indispensable to the Eucharist and are also used to prepare, administer, carry, keep, or simply expose the Consecrated Species. Since they were considered the first among liturgical vessels, chalices and patens used in the Elevation were consecrated with the oil of the Holy Chrism by bishops or priests duly authorized by the Holy See¹⁶. The sixteenth century *Visitations* show us that these pieces were sacred in the diocese to which the parish that was the owner of the object belonged, and in many cases, according to the provisions of the visitors to customers, they could be used for some time in churches without being properly sacred¹⁷. The symbolic importance of chalices and patens explains the care granted to them by the Church for centuries, expressing very specific concerns regarding the materials employed in their production. From the year 1000 onwards, and reaffirming provisions of previous Councils, the Church prohibited the use of wood, glass, copper and lead in the manufacture of such pieces, recommending instead the use of noble metals. These pieces could not be made of wood because this material absorbed wine, nor of glass because it risked breaking. But they could not also be of iron because it would oxidize wine. Lead is a black metal and would dye the liquid therefore it could not be used too. Only the poorest communities were allowed to use tin or golden copper in these liturgical tools.

The symbolic value of gold and silver served sacred objects because, according to Abbot Suger, “all that is most precious has to serve, first, in the celebration of the Eucharist”¹⁸. The beauty of colour, of the light radiating from these metals and gemstones, and granted to these pieces constituted a path of ascent to the deity and of

¹⁴ L.M.C. ROSAS, “Arquitetura Religiosa tardo-medieval e pintura mural: relações litúrgicas e espaciais”, *Revista da Faculdade de Letras, “Ciências e Técnicas do Património”*, 2 (2003), p. 434; M.R. DE S. CUNHA, (...) *visitando nós ora pessoalmente o dito meestrado de Santiago (...). As igrejas da Ordem Militar de Santiago. Arquitetura e Materiais*, Ph.D. Thesis, Porto, 2013, pp. 180-182.

¹⁵ As an example see the following references: J.J.M. HORMIGO, *Visitações da Ordem de Cristo em 1505 e 1537*, N/A, 1981, p. 29; A.C. DE D.A. DE BASTO, *A Vila do Torrão segundo as Visitações de 1510 e 1534 da Ordem de Santiago*, Porto, 2003, p. 190.

¹⁶ A. COELHO, *Curso de Liturgia Romana*, 3ª ed. Singeverga, 1950, p. 257.

¹⁷ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *Tytolo da prata (...), do arame, estanho e ferro (...), latam cobre e cousas meudas... Objectos litúrgicos em Portugal (1478-1571)*, Porto, 2010, pp. 309-310.

¹⁸ G. DUBY, *São Bernardo e a arte cisterciense*, Porto, 1997, p. 8.

contemplating the transcendent, in the opinion of Suger. Also Alfonso X, the Wise, determined that when honouring the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Sacrifice should be made only in chalices of gold or silver¹⁹, also with the exception of tin in those poor churches that couldn't acquire silver chalices. The *Visitations* of the Military Orders tell us that, in Portugal and in the first decades of the sixteenth century, some parish churches continued to use tin chalices for the Sacrifice, but also lead chalices, despite the canonical provisions. We believe that the use of these metals in the manufacture of chalices for churches and chapels must have been common in Portugal during the Middle Ages, resulting from the scarcity and hence from the high price that nobler metals reached in the European market²⁰.

The increase of precious metals during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as a result of new flows of wealth by the Portuguese and Spaniards in the Expansion and Discoveries Period, provided a general wealth that was reflected in the wealth of churches and particularly in liturgical tools. Throughout the first quarter of the sixteenth century in Portugal there was a widespread effort for artistic renewal, and the art of metals benefited much from this reformist zeal, forcing visitors to exchange the chalices of lead and tin by new silver ones.

The careful choice of materials is also shown in the morphology of objects, and the structure that has reached our days was defined in the late thirteenth century: foot, stem and bowl, while this one needed to be manufactured with a non-absorbent and non-oxidizing material. If it was produced with white silver, at least the interior should be golden. The material value of the metals should also be enriched, in the case of chalices and patens with carved decoration, engravings, filigree and the application of enamels and gemstones. The decorative themes also had to be related to the Eucharistic symbols. Documents state, however, a distinction between the chalices for everyday usage –less heavy and usually plain– and those destined for festive occasions –bigger, heavier and with a rich technical and iconographic decoration–. These were usually made with gilded silver and with bells, elements which are also present in the monstrances and procession crosses, whose sound attracted the eyes of the believers at the Elevation and also symbolized the moment of Christ's Resurrection²¹. According to what was reported in the sixteenth-century documents, festive chalices usually had six bells, but also four or even two. These small objects could be removable, which justified the care put into the inventories when registering them. The richest chalices and patens also presented Latin inscriptions with informative purposes but, in the opinion of Luengo Ugidos, they also had a decorative function, taking into account the interrupted sentences or words when there was no more space, the obvious little grammatical accuracy, but the great care in their design²². The inventory of all applications listed in the analysed *Visitations* of the

¹⁹ In the *Primeyra Partida*, devoted to the metals used in the manufacture of chalices. C.A.F. DE ALMEIDA and M. BARROCA, *História da Arte em Portugal. O Gótico*, Lisbon, 2002, p. 249.

²⁰ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 313-319.

²¹ *Inventário do Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga. A Coleção de Ourivesaria. Do Românico ao Manuelino*, Lisbon, 1995, p. 225; J.S. GUERREIRO, "Alfaias litúrgicas" (glossário), C.M. AZEVEDO (dir.), *Dicionário de História Religiosa de Portugal*, N/A, 2000, p. 39.

²² J.V. LUENGO UGIDOS, *La orfebrería de la Diócesis de Astorga en la Provincia de León. Del Gótico al Neoclasicismo*, Salamanca, 1987, I, pp. 373-374.

Military Orders concerning chalices, allows their organization into two major groups: informative inscriptions, showing the name of the donor, usually linked to the hierarchy of Orders, churches of Commendations or offerings of devotees; and inscriptions with a devotional character that register Marian and Christological invocations, phrases alluding to the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of Christ and common prayers, such as the first words of “Our Father” and “Creed”²³. Inscriptions of the same nature and with the same effect can be seen in pieces of Leon, Castile, Extremadura and Galicia, a sign that reinforces the formal and aesthetical uniformity of these objects during the late medieval period in the Iberian Peninsula.



Fig. 1. Chalice of the Mother Church of Santiago de Rio Meão, late 15th century or early 16th. Golden silver. Rio Meão, Town council of Santa Maria da Feira, Aveiro District.

Thanks to the descriptions of the pieces in the documentation, it can be inferred that during the first half of the sixteenth century chalices still had a Gothic structure. The feet present complex and indented contours, with various profiles often supported by a protruding foot which ensures the stability of the piece. The hexagonal profile

²³ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 402-408.

(and some eightfold profiles) was the most frequent in Portuguese chalices of the last quarter of the fifteenth century and first quarter of the sixteenth century, with plain surfaces or mostly decorated with plant motifs, such as branches, *foliage*, *leaves*, to use the expressions of quoted sources, an hexagonal stem, a spherical knop and a plain bowl. The chalice of the mother church of Santiago de Rio Meão is a good example of this description, “not very rich, practical, but already subject to a careful treatment”²⁴, which probably dates from the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth (Fig. 1).



Fig. 2. Chalice of the Mother Church of Our Lady of Anunciada, second quarter of the 16th century. Golden silver and enamels. Setúbal.

Some of these pieces had alternately triangular and round feet, with contour curves or simply round, with the shape of a spoon. Pérez Hernández believes that these hexagonal feet, very common in the region of Salamanca in the early days of the sixteenth century, already show signs of change from Gothic to Renaissance forms, marked by the influences that came from Italy²⁵. Chalices with identical feet can in-

²⁴ P. DIAS, *No Tempo das Feitorias. A arte portuguesa na Época dos Descobrimentos*, Lisbon, 1992, p. 254.

²⁵ M. PÉREZ HERNÁNDEZ and E. AZOFRA AGUSTÍN, “Cáliz”, *Kyrios. Las Edades del Hombre*, Ciudad Rodrigo, 2006, pp. 253-254.

deed be found in Italy since the beginning of the fifteenth century²⁶. But we can see these forms as a simplification of the Gothic multi-lobed feet and *Visitations* suggest their use in the Portuguese territory in the last quarter of the fifteenth century²⁷. This lobed model and polygonal stem were common in the Iberian Peninsula between the late fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and can be found in Castile, Leon, Extremadura, Andalusia, Aragon, Galicia and Portugal as is shown in the existing pieces in parish churches and museums. From the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the feet tend to be circular, whilst lobes still have a “spoon” shape inserted on their surface. It is, in our view, a simplified evolution of hexagonal feet with an indented profile that will evolve into Renaissance circular shapes²⁸. López-Yarto Elizalde is of the same opinion in the study that she developed on the Cuenca silver²⁹. This finding is further supported by the introduction in these pieces of *Roman-style* decorative elements because, as noted by Cruz Valdovinos concerning Leon’s reality³⁰, we can conclude that in Portuguese jewellery the Renaissance art entered first through ornaments and only afterwards through forms.



Fig. 3. Chalice of the Mother Church of Our Lady of Anunciada, second quarter of the 16th century. Golden silver and enamels. Setúbal. Foot and stem details.

²⁶ B. MONTEVECHI and S.V. ROCCA, *Suppellattile ecclesiastica. Dizionari terminologici*, Florence, 1988, p. 103.

²⁷ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 353.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

²⁹ A. LÓPEZ-YARTO ELIZALDE, *La orfebrería del siglo XVI en la provincia de Cuenca*, Cuenca, 1998, p. 44.

³⁰ J.M. CRUZ VALDOVINOS, *Museo Arqueológico Nacional. Catálogo de platería*, Madrid, 1982, p. 18.

The chalice that is preserved today in the church of Our Lady of Anunciada, Setúbal, materializes the findings presented here (Figs. 2-3). The foot is multi-lobed, twofold and has round and triangular contours that frame images of Our Lady, figures of the Apostles and Martyrs, interspersed with plant motifs with a balanced and symmetrical Renaissance design. The stem is hexagonal, filled with blue, green and white enamels, with decorative elements taken from late Gothic Portuguese architecture in the lower body and knop. Small rings welded on the lower body were intended for the suspension of six small bells that have not reached present days. The bowl rests on a hexagonal and enamelled blue and green ring, keeping the conical shape characteristic of the Gothic, with a false cup decorated with angels who uphold the symbols of passion framed in perfectly round arcades. Small winged cherubs fill the voids between the arches. The upper part of the bowl has the usual description: *CALICE-M: SALUTARIS: ACIPIAM: ET* ["I will raise the Chalice of Salvation"]³¹. According to the formal and iconographic characteristics it must date from the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

Patens always come up in the documents alongside with chalices, and are consecrated along with these. The dish-shaped, flat and circular, like a household plate, was defined since the early days of Christianity, since it was intended first to receive the bread and then the Sacred Host. Like the chalice, both enter the ceremony of Elevation, during the breaking of the Holy Sacrament and to collect particles of the consecrated Host, which are then transferred to the chalice. Until the imposition of the ciborium in the period after the Council of Trent, they were also used as a vessel for the distribution of Communion. Patens registered in late medieval documents were mostly plain, with a silvery colour, preferably golden (since they were in direct contact with the Sacred Species) or white with golden parts. Those accompanying chalices intended for festive use could also have some inscriptions on the rim, with the same content referred to in the chalices, decorative motifs with a symbolic nature at the centre (the "cross of the Saviour", crosses –alone or flanked by St. John and Our Lady–, crosses of the Military Orders, heraldic motifs, laces, sun and moon symbolizing the beginning and the end, Veronica), technically engraved, with a relief or enamelled green or blue.

From the third decade of the sixteenth century, patens associated with Renaissance chalices still show the same characteristics as those of the late medieval pieces: plain, white or golden, with inscriptions on the rim and some with incised crosses in the centre. However, the Renaissance patens tend to decrease in size in relation to the Gothic ones, keeping the concave shape in the centre to receive the Blessed Sacrament³². The paten which currently belongs to the church of Our Lady of Anunciada, Setúbal, is a good example of those types described here (Fig. 4). Silver-gilt, with a cross incised in the centre and three nails of the Martyrdom, the rim shows a very frequent inscription for this period, especially in patens³³, which refers directly to the

³¹ "I will raise the Chalice of Salvation and call upon the name of the Lord" (Sl., 116-13).

³² A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 408-412.

³³ According to J. COUTO, "Os Cálices na Ourivesaria Portuguesa do Século XII ao Século XVIII", *Esmeralda*, 24 (1927), p. 5. However, the collection of sentences present in the inventories that were studied,

Sacrifice of Christ: *ECE AGNVS DEI: CHI TOLIS PECATA MUNDI MI [MISERERE] +*, a phrase which is associated to the ceremony preceding the Communion of the believers.



Fig. 4. Paten of the Mother Church of Our Lady of Anunciada. Golden silver. Setúbal.

The growing appreciation of the devotion to the Divine Eucharist at the end of the Middle Ages justified, in our view, the fact that believers preferred to offer chalices and patens to churches. When they had to choose the gifts to bequeath the house of God, offerers elected those pieces that would be in direct contact with the Body and Blood of the Redeemer³⁴.

Monstrances

The affirmation of the cult of the Blessed Sacrament, visible in the importance of the Feast of *Corpus Christi* from the fourteenth century onwards³⁵, also explains the interest granted to the monstrance, the liturgical tool designed to expose the Blessed

also tells us that they were commonly used in the bowls of chalices.

³⁴ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 412-425.

³⁵ A festivity instituted by Pope Urban IV through the papal bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo*, August 11th, 1264. It was determined that the feast would take place on the Thursday following the octave of Pentecost. M.C. HEREDIA MORENO, "De arte y devociones eucarísticas: las custodias portátiles", *Estudios de Platería. San Eloy 2002*, Murcia, 2002, pp. 198 and 201.

Sacrament to the believers. We witness the humanization of Jesus, the awareness of His Suffering and believers seek to participate in the Redemptive Death and in the Resurrection of the Lord. According to Iria Gonçalves, believers needed to “feel” the divinity, get close to Him, reaching God through His Son³⁶. In Portugal, despite these festivities became a great fanfare from the fourteenth century onwards (similar to what happened in other European cities), the cult of *Corpus Christi* grew significantly in the reign of King Manuel I (1495-1521), driven by a court that fed devotions with a strong spiritual burden, which physically and emotionally involved the whole society. A court guided by Emmanuel, the “God with us”, born on the day of *Corpus Christi*, considered by his subjects as the Chosen one and who granted special devotion to the mystery of the Consecrated Host³⁷.

The liturgical tool intended for the exhibition of the Blessed Sacrament evolved due to the growth of its worship. The believers wishing to contemplate the Blessed Sacrament made it necessary to replace small coffers or boxes of the early period by objects with glass or rock crystal faces. The reliquaries served as a model, establishing immediately the analogy between the sacred relics and the Consecrated Host. But despite the great devotion it achieved in Portugal, the pomp of these objects never achieved what could be seen in Italy and Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And, in the documents of this period, there was some confusion with other objects destined to guard the Blessed Sacrament, such as the ciboria used to take the Sacred Host.

In Portugal the hand monstrances were more widely spread, although their generalization in churches occurred only in the second half of the sixteenth century. Those pieces were relatively small and functional, easily transportable, lighter and consequently cheaper, and therefore accessible to most churches. Through the descriptions on the *Visitation Books* it is possible to trace the model that prevailed in the late fifteenth century and first half of the sixteenth century. Such pieces were composed of a foot, stem and an upper body with a metallic structure where the glass plates could be fit. Like the chalices, they were made with white, white and gold or fully silver-gilt, with enamel or gemstones applications. The feet were predominantly multi-lobed and indented and, as well as chalices, hexagonal (sometimes eightfold), and could combine round with triangular shapes, and a circular, square or rectangular structure. The surfaces were decorated with plant motifs or filled with religious figures worked with a chisel. The stems were round or polygonal, plain or enamelled. Like the chalices and also to facilitate their transportation, they had a knob with different profiles. These were also decorated with plant, floral and architectural motifs, and sometimes were enamelled. The canopies could be of different types: small structures in the form of a small temple, closed and with glass, formed by architectural Gothic elements; in the shape of a lantern, also closed by four panes and supported by Gothic

³⁶ I. GONÇALVES, “As festas do *Corpus Christi* do Porto na segunda metade do século XV: a participação do concelho”, *Um olhar sobre a cidade medieval*, Cascais, 1996, pp. 154-155.

³⁷ J.P.O. E COSTA, *D. Manuel I. 1461-1521. Um príncipe do Renascimento*, N/A, 2005, p. 139; M. DE L.P. ROSA, “*As Almas Herdeiras*”: *Fundação de capelas fúnebres e afirmação da alma como sujeito de direito (Portugal, 1400-1521)*, Lisbon, 2005, p. 193.

crasteria; and round-shaped, like a mirror, with two panes. All types were topped by a removable crucifix that could be removed for the sick to kiss it³⁸. The presence of bells was also common in these objects and the intention was to capture the attention of believers.



Fig. 5. Monstrance of the Mother Church of Santiago de Rio Meão, first quarter of the 16th century and mid-16th century. Golden silver. Rio Meão, Town council of Santa Maria da Feira, Aveiro District.

From the second quarter of the sixteenth century, these pieces were subject to slight structural and decorative changes, mostly imposed after mid-fifteenth century. The sources consulted describe a circular foot, knops decorated with winged angels and an upper body lantern-shaped, with round panes. However, references to architectural structures still mention the Gothic style. It is also important to note that these

³⁸ J.V. LUENGO UGIDOS, *op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 402-403.

objects were subject to many changes over time, as it was well demonstrated in the *Visitations*. The monstrance of the mother church of Santiago de Rio Meão is a good example (Fig. 5). The circular foot is decorated with winged and beaded angels (the *seraphs* announced in the sources), and classic foliage. The knop in the middle is urn-shaped and bears the same motifs and a circular monstrance, with two faces, supported by a flat surface decorated with winged angels and incised acanthus leaves. All these formal and decorative elements point to a renaissance piece. However, the upper body has a castellated foot and is enclosed by two buttresses topped by pinnacles, joined together by a flaming body that supports the movable cross. The hybrid features of this piece may be due to two factors. Firstly, the attachment of artisans and clientele to traditional Gothic models, which made the old ways coexist with the new “*Roman-style*” ones. Secondly, in our view the main one for this piece, the need to restore the objects, as is evident when reading the sources. Feet and monstrances are, in fact, autonomous bodies, and can be easily replaced because of repair or aesthetic needs. The architectural elements that can be seen in the monstrance of Santiago de Rio Meão can match the reuse of elements from an older piece that were reused in a *new fashion*, which must date from mid-sixteenth century.

Ciboria and Host Boxes

Until mid-sixteenth century, the term ciborium is used in documents to refer to the different objects formally and functionally. In general, it is a piece used to save the Sacred Host and that was taken to the sick people. But in Portugal the provisions for the purchase of objects with this designation became more visible from mid-sixteenth century onwards, with a specific function and typology, gaining thereby greater autonomy from monstrances and other liturgical vessels. Structurally they have a shape that is identical to that of the chalice, with a foot, a stem with a knop and a large covered cup surmounted by a cross. The *Visitations* of the sixth decade of the sixteenth century suggest they are used for the distribution of Communion to believers and to save the leftover Sacred Hosts, and that this piece is placed in the tabernacle of the altar.

Contrary to what is seen in Castile and Leon, Extremadura, Andalusia and Catalonia, in Portugal these pieces were not widely known before the last quarter of the sixteenth century and, for this reason, very few have survived the late-medieval period and can be seen nowadays³⁹. On the other hand, there are plenty of references in the sources consulted, throughout the first half of the sixteenth century, to acquisitions of wooden boxes lined with fabric to save the Blessed Sacrament or take Him to sick people. The Tridentine Reform imposed new rules regarding safety and transportation of the Sacred Host. Because it is a sacred vessel, in direct contact with the Blessed Sacrament, St. Charles Borromeo prescribed that these pieces were to be made in gold or silver-gilt inside⁴⁰.

³⁹ A.C.C. DE SOUSA, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 438-441.

⁴⁰ B. MONTEVECHI and S.V. ROCCA, *op. cit.*, 1988, pp. 127-128.

Conclusion

The *Visitations* started by the Military Orders of Christ, Santiago and Avis, between 1478 and 1571, in the vast territories of central and southern Portugal constitute a prime source for the study of the sacred jewellery in Portugal, given the scarcity of sources on the topic that have reached present days. Through these accurate registers it is possible to understand the project of material and spiritual renovation that occurred during this period, clearly visible in the indications for the transformation of religious buildings, the internal organization of space and the functioning of the liturgical service, changes that may also be seen in the update of sacred tools or repairing of existing ones. The content of *Visitations* also reflects the provisions of the Synod Constitutions and the new Rules and Statutes published by these Military Orders during the period under study.

These sources allow us, in some cases, to follow the life of an object from its entry in the church, to the wear and tear it suffered due to its use and consequent repair or replacement with a new one. These “renovations” could mean the total disappearance of the existing piece, and the fact that its metal would be used in a new piece. But they could also mean the partial transformation of such an object with the introduction of a new foot, vessel or finish, among several other possibilities, reusing parts of the previous piece, as we think must have happened to the monstrance of the parish church of Santiago de Rio Meão. The analysis of silver objects that reached our days must take into account these natural transformations suffered by pieces during their existence, and the need to assess such changes in each part.

Thanks to the symbolic value recognized by the Church and believers in the pieces that were in direct contact with the Consecrated Species, they were subject to a special attention that determined several aspects: the choice of noble materials for their manufacturing; the existence and quantity of such pieces in sacred temples; their formal and decorative characteristics; the care devoted to their handling and protection (stored in boxes or leather bags) and hence their durability. Visitors imposed on all the churches, even the poorest, the acquisition of a silver chalice, distinguishing current use chalices of festive ones. The number of monstrances grew over the first half of the sixteenth century (and their existence became quite effective after the Council of Trent), and the same happened with ciboria.

In Portugal, the structure of the pieces remains mainly Gothic during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, despite the timid introduction of the *Roman-style* motifs. The chalice from the church of Anunciada, Setúbal, reflects very well this confluence of tastes and forms, perpetuating, on one hand, Gothic shapes and technical features but framing the *Roman-style* decorative elements. From the third decade of the sixteenth century onwards, the structures tend to show Renaissance features although, in many churches, Gothic objects coexist with new ones, more of a *Roman liking*. Chalices, because they were quite numerous and most frequently registered in documents, allow us to establish a formal and stylistic evolution of sacred silverware since the last quarter of the fifteenth century and the first three of quarters of the sixteenth century, making it possible to see the same formal and decorative development in

other typologies, such as monstrances and ciboria. In the first phase, the feet were predominantly multi-lobed, with hexagonal stems, circular knops or with architectural elements, while bell cases and plant decoration were predominant, evolving from Gothic asymmetric and bulky compositions to a smoother relief and balanced renaissance design. From the third decade of the sixteenth century onwards, the feet became circular, the stems plain and smooth, and curved with egg or urn-shaped knops (as seen at the foot of the monstrance of the Church of Santiago de Rio Meão), with cylindrical or bell-shaped bowls.