

Two Spanish Terracotta Reliefs in the Collection of Sir Brinsley Ford ¹

Dos relieves de terracota españoles en la colección de Sir Brinsley Ford

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BIBLID [0210-962-X(1997); 28; 77-85]

ABSTRACT

This paper describes two terracotta reliefs now in the collection of Sir Brinsley Ford which were originally bought in Seville in 1832 by his great-grandfather, the famous traveller and writer Richard Ford. The two reliefs depict *St. Catherine of Siena* and the *Christ Child and the Infant John the Baptist* respectively. The style shows clear influences of the work of Juan Martínez Montañés, and they are likely to have been made in Seville, and to date from about 1620-50. These two pieces are also the first works of Spanish sculpture to be reproduced in early photographs or Talbotypes (named after William Henry Fox Talbot) and were among the first photographs to be included in a book of art history, the fourth volume of William Stirling's *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, published in London in 1847.

Key words: Terracotta reliefs; Sculpture-baroque; Reliefs-terracotta.

Toponyms: Andalusia; Seville.

Identifiers: Martínez Montañés, Juan; Ford, Richard; Bravo Collection; Sir Brinsley Ford.

Centuries: 17th.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza dos relieves de terracota de la colección de Sir Brinsley Ford, adquiridos en Sevilla en 1832 por su bisabuelo el famoso viajero y escritor Richard Ford. Los dos relieves representan a *Santa Catalina de Siena* y al *Niño Jesús con San Juanito*, respectivamente. Su estilo muestra claramente influencias de la obra de Juan Martínez Montañés, y verosimilmente fueron realizados en Sevilla hacia 1620-50. Estas dos piezas son también las primeras obras de escultura española reproducidas en fotografías antiguas o Talbotipos (así llamadas por William Henry Fox Talbot) contándose entre las primeras ilustraciones incluidas en un libro de Historia del Arte, el cuarto volumen de los *Annals of the Artists of Spain* de William Stirling, publicado en Londres en 1847.

Palabras clave: Relieves en terracota; Escultura barroca.

Topónimos: Andalucía; Sevilla.

Identificadores: Martínez Montañés, Juan; Ford, Richard; Colección Bravo; Colección Sir Brinsley Ford.

Siglos: 17.

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In 1832, during his sojourn in Spain (1830-1833) the eminent English traveller Richard Ford (1796-1858) purchased in Seville two small painted terracotta reliefs in elaborate wood frames². These are now in the collection of his great-grandson, Sir Brinsley Ford. One shows a kneeling female saint in a white habit with a black veil, holding a lily in the left hand; she receives a rosary from the Christ child, who is shown with the Virgin in a vision floating on clouds above the saint's head (fig. 1). Although identified by Richard Ford as Santa Clara (see below), and by William Stirling (later Sir William Stirling-Maxwell) as Santa Teresa de Jesús³, the black and white Dominican habit indicates that the subject is in fact *St Catherine of Siena receiving the rosary from the Virgin and Child*⁴. The other relief, less problematic in subject, is *The Christ Child and the Infant St John the Baptist* (fig. 2). On the back of each Richard Ford describes the material and provenance as follows:

«a rare specimen was bought by me at Seville ex-Collection Bravo in 1832» and «Richard Ford en Sevilla 1832 Barro Pintado por el Montanes», preceded in each case by a note of their respective subjects, and the artist: «Santa Clara receiving the Rosario from the Virgin by Montanes» and «Christ and St John by Montanes»⁵.

«Montanes» is of course Juan Martínez Montañés (1568-1649)⁶. No documentary or other external evidence survives for the attributions on Ford's labels, but the reliefs are stylistically closely connected with the known work of Martínez Montañés. The faces and proportions of the two children are similar to those of the young St John the Baptist and two angels in one of the reliefs on the altarpiece of St John the Baptist at the University of Seville of c. 1610-20⁷, while the embrace of the two children, with the young St John the Baptist kneeling and gazing upwards towards the Christ child echoes that of the Virgin and St Elizabeth in the Visitation scene from the altar of St John the Baptist at Lima, dating from 1607⁸. Although St Catherine of Siena, and not St Clare is the saint represented in the terracotta, the fall of the drapery, the facial type, and pose of the kneeling figure in the terracotta relief resemble features of two of the representations of St Clare in reliefs on the high altar of the Convento de Santa Clara in Seville of 1621-5⁹. Because Martínez Montañés's known works are all altarpieces, or standing figures of polychromed wood, often carved with exquisite sensitivity and in a highly naturalistic mode, he was called «*El Dios de la Madera*» by his contemporaries¹⁰. The exact relationship of these reliefs to this autograph work is therefore problematic. Being in terracotta, and on a relatively small scale, they are without direct parallel in his oeuvre, although documentary and circumstantial evidence suggests that Martínez Montañés did model in clay¹¹. Figures and reliefs executed in wood in 1604 by one of his assistants, Francisco de Ocampo, for the Convento de Santa Clara at Cazalla de la Sierra (Seville) were based on clay models produced «*de mano*» (by hand) by Montañés¹². A painting by Francisco Varela dating from 1616, shows Montañés holding what appears to be a clay model for his *St Jerome*¹³. It is not evident whether the reliefs in the Ford collection are modelled or cast, as the frames conceal the backs, which might reveal the method of facture; however they are evidently not preliminary models, but finished pieces, perhaps unique. Certainly no other versions of the compositions on a larger scale or in a different material have come to light¹⁴.

Small-scale devotional works in terracotta were produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for convents, as well as for domestic settings¹⁵. These two terracottas are identical in size, implying that they were intended as pendants¹⁶. Although they may have come from a domestic context, the subject of each— a Dominican saint, and the representation of Christ and St John as two infants— could indicate that they were owned by a Dominican convent. Spanish convents frequently owned representations of child-saints, particularly the infant Christ¹⁷. Although it is difficult to attribute them precisely, they clearly have close stylistic parallels with the works by Martínez Montañés suggested above, and must have been produced in Seville, probably around 1620-50. They are likely to date from the first half of the century, since after that time his work seems not to have been emulated¹⁸. Such small scale pieces are unlikely to have been specially commissioned, and if they are cast, it is possible that other variants of the same compositions were produced at the same time, although no others are known to date¹⁹.

The frames are more problematic, and almost certainly did not originally belong with the terracottas. They too are approximately the same size, and their shape and decorative carving are highly unusual²⁰. The main body of each is a irregular quatrefoil made of pinewood painted black carved with designs, with a narrower brass frame of stylised leaves, and a plain inner wood frame painted gold. The wings of the quatrefoil have what appear to be small semicircular hollows approximately (though not exactly) in the centre of each side; these have apparently been filled in with wood also painted black. The designs carved on the frames are stylised foliate tendrils, reminiscent of hispano-moresque work. Their date is even less certain than that of the reliefs, but without doubt they have been taken from another context (as is implied by the filled-in semicircular shapes), perhaps a piece of furniture, and adapted as frames, probably shortly before Richard Ford bought them in 1832.

Apart from their association with the works of Martínez Montañés, the reliefs are important for a number of reasons. As far as is known, they are the only surviving pieces of Spanish sculpture in England whose provenance can be definitively traced back to the early nineteenth century, as well as being the first to have been acquired as works of art by an Englishman²¹. The Bravo Collection in Seville mentioned on Richard Ford's labels was that of a noted Spanish dealer, don Aniceto Bravo, and was housed at his residence at 10, calle Catalanes in Seville. Consisting predominantly of paintings, it was said to be perhaps the best private collection of paintings in the city in a guidebook published in Seville in 1844²². Another British writer on Spain, George Dennis, who had travelled in Andalucía in 1836, commented:

«A draper named Bravo, boasts a fine collection of pictures, amongst them some choice Murillos»²³.

Ford also referred to the Bravo collection, and scathingly of the dealer himself, remarking in his chapter on Seville in his *Handbook for Spain*, published the following year:

«The amateur will visit the gallery of Maestre, in the *Pajería* of the Canons Cepero, Pereira, and of an ignorant cloth-dealer, named Bravo. As all these collections are dayly changing, the contents cannot be described»²⁴.

Ford formed a collection of Spanish paintings, and wrote enthusiastically of a number of Spanish painters, notably Velázquez and Murillo. He subsequently sold his pictures²⁵, but these two sculptures—seemingly the only Spanish sculpture he acquired—remained in his collection. This must have been due to their comparatively small size, rather than because he thought they were intrinsically superior. Stirling Maxwell's obituary of Ford noted that, «Among the Spanish pictures which he brought from Spain, and which want of house-room compelled him to part with, were several of the gems of the late exhibition at Manchester»²⁶.

In 181 the reliefs were lent by Richard Ford's widow to the important loan exhibition of Spanish and Portuguese art organised by John Charles Robinson, and held at the South Kensington Museum²⁷. At a later date they were to leave the Ford collection for over twenty years, for they were sold by the then owner Mrs Richard Ford (the wife of the original purchaser's grandson and namesake) in 1947²⁸. They were bought by Marcus Cheke, a friend of Brinsley Ford, and Marcus Cheke's widow gave them back to Brinsley Ford in 1971²⁹.

In addition to having a known early provenance, the reliefs are also without question the first pieces of Spanish sculpture to be reproduced in early photographs or Talbotypes (named after William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), one of the pioneers of photography), and these were amongst the first photographs to form part of an art history book³⁰. This was the fourth volume of William Stirling's *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, published in 1847, although not distributed until 1848. The terracottas were reproduced as plates 13 and 14 respectively (figs. 3 and 4), and were described in the contents as «Our Lord and St John the Baptist, and St Teresa de Jesus by Juan Martinez Montañes» (*sic.*), with an additional note by Stirling: «From two bas-reliefs in *barro*, painted clay or terracotta, each 5 inches high by 4 inches wide, in the possession of Richard Ford, Esq.»³¹.

The works of art for Stirling's book were photographed by Nicolaas Henneman (1813-1875), the Dutch assistant of William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), under Stirling's supervision³². In his preface Stirling remarked, «... the bas-reliefs of Martinez Montañes, ... perhaps the sole specimens of the national Spanish sculpture in England, are probably the first which have as yet been reproduced by a mechanical process»³³.

Only twenty-five copies of this volume were produced, and Stirling's preface implied that the books were intended for his friends, rather than for wider distribution: «for the following illustrations my friends are indebted to the beautiful photographic process invented by Mr. Fox Talbot»³⁴.

Some of the photographs used for this volume were later collected in an album compiled during the 1840s by Sir David Brewster (1781-1868), a close friend of Talbot³⁵. Like Brewster, Stirling was clearly fascinated by this new process, and hoped that his example would induce others to illustrate their books with works produced «by the pencil of nature»³⁶.

The photography probably took place in Regent Street, London, where Henneman had set up a studio³⁷. Richard Ford must have been linked with the publication, since, as well as the terracottas, other works from his collection, including a sketch by himself, were

reproduced. Unfortunately because so few copies of this volume were originally published, only a small number survive³⁸.

In his review of Stirling's publication written for the *Quarterly Review* of 1848, Ford commented rather waspishly:

«Mr Stirling has prepared some large paper copies for private circulation, which are illustrated with rare prints and typographical ornaments, actually reproduced by Mr Henneman of Regent Street, after the process of Mr Talbot, whose 'Sun Pictures' are no less bright and true than his Etymologies are false»³⁹.

These reliefs are then exceptional terracottas related to the work of Montañés, originally acquired by the greatest nineteenth-century English writer on Spain, and remaining in the family collection ever since, interrupted only by their brief absence in the middle of this century. They are also the first pieces of Spanish sculpture to be photographed and published within a few years of the process having been invented.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Sir Brinsley Ford for kindly allowing me access to the terracotta reliefs, and for his help and advice on their provenance, to Anthony Hamber for originally alerting me to the early photographs of them, and to Caroline Elam and Paul Williamson for comments on the text.

2. Ford's most famous publication is his modestly titled *Handbook for Travellers in Spain*, London, 1845, an extensive, witty and profoundly informed book about Spain. See also W. STIRLING MAXWELL. «Obituary of the late Richard Ford». *The Times*, September 4th, 1858, p. 6, reprinted (in two versions) in W. STIRLING MAXWELL. *Miscellaneous Essays and Addresses*. London, 1891, pp. 101-117; S. LEE and L. STEPHEN. *Dictionary of National Biography*, VII. Oxford, 1973, pp. 421-422; and D. SUTTON. «Don Ricardo: A Witty Hispanophile», *Richard Ford in Spain*, Loan Exhibition in aid of the National Art-Collections Fund (catalogue by B. Ford). Wildenstein, London, 1974, pp. 9-29.

3. W. STIRLING. *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, IV. London, 1847 (issued 1848), pl. 14.

4. Jane Dowling has pointed out to Sir Brinsley Ford that it is St. Catherine of Siena who is in fact represented. For St Catherine of Siena, see W. BRAUNFELS (ed.). *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, VII. Freiburg in Breisgau, 1974 (reprinted 1990), pp. 299-306, and *ibid.*, pp. 314-318 for the entry on St Clare. See also L. RÉAU. *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, III, 1. Paris, 1958, pp. 272-277 (St Catherine), and *ibid.*, pp. 316-319 for St. Clare.

5. The original labels were torn, but they had been transcribed prior to damage onto other labels affixed to the backs.

6. For full-length studies of the artist, see B. GILMAN PROSKE. *Juan Martínez Montañés*. New York, 1959, and J. HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ. *Juan Martínez Montañés*. Seville, 1990, where further bibliography is quoted.

7. *Ibid.*, in note 6, p. 176, fig. 188.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 130, fig. 117.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 203, figs. 225-226.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 29, and GILMAN PROSKE. *Juan...*, in note 6, p. 1.

11. Hernández Díaz mentions his modelling in clay or wax (HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ. *Juan...*, in note 6, p. 77). See also D. SÁNCHEZ-MESA MARTÍN. *El Arte de Barroco*. Seville, 1991, p. 64.

12. HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ. *Juan...*, in note 6, pp. 90-91.

13. The painting is owned by the Ayuntamiento, Seville; see *ibid.*, p. 24, fig. 8.

14. For a discussion of the uses of terracotta in Spanish sculpture, see M. TRUSTED. «Three Spanish Terracottas in the Victoria and Albert Museum». *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arts y Arqueología*, LIX, 1993, pp. 321-330.

15. Analogous examples are the slightly larger terracotta reliefs of the *Lamentation* by Juan de Juni (c. 1507-1577), of which four surviving versions are known. TRUSTED. «Three spanish...», in note 14, pp. 323-327 and pl. II. Three of these measure approximately 30cm (ht) by 39cm (width); the fourth 25cm (ht) by 35cm (width).

16. The measurements of each of the reliefs (without frames) are: Ht 13.2cm; Width 10.3cm.

17. Doll-like figures of the sleeping Christ child are commonly found in many convents in Andalusia and Castile. Cf. the five figures of the sleeping Christ Child in the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales in Madrid; see M. T. RUIZ ALCÓN. «Imágenes del Niño Jesús del Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales». *Reales Sitios*, no. 6, 1965, pp. 28-36. For slightly earlier Italian examples of such figures in domestic contexts, see C. KLAPISCH-ZUBER. «Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento». In *Ibid.*, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*. Chicago, 1985, pp. 310-29.

18. Cf. the lead figure of the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* after Martínez Montañés in the Victoria and Albert Museum (M. TRUSTED. *Spanish Sculpture: a Catalogue of the Post-Medieval Spanish Sculpture in Wood, terracotta, Alabaster, Marble, Stone, Lead and Jet in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London, 1966, pp. 89-90, cat. no. 37).

19. Cf. M. TRUSTED. «Art for the Masses: Spanish Sculpture of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries». In *Sculpture and its Reproduction* (ed. E. Ranfft and A. Hughes). London, 1997 (forthcoming).

20. The measurements of the frame of *The Christ Child and St. John* are: Ht 28.9cm; W 28.7cm. Those of the frame of *St. Catherine of Siena* are: Ht 28.5cm; W 26.4cm. The differences between these two sets of measurements are partly due to the irregular shapes of the frames, and the inevitable consequent difficulties of measuring accurately by hand.

21. The parents of John Ruskin (1819-1890) had purchased terracotta figurines made on the southern coast of Spain in the early nineteenth century, but these were primarily seen as souvenirs. Ruskin recalled playing with them as a child, presumably during the 1820s. See J. RUSKIN. *Praeterita* II, (1886-71). In E. T. COOK and A. WEDDERBURN (eds.). *The Works of John Ruskin*. XXXV, London, 1908, p. 348. I am grateful to Xanthe Brooke for his reference. During the second half of the nineteenth century some Catholic families in England purchased Spanish sculpture to function as religious images, such as the crucifixes acquired probably in the 1860s by the 15th Duke of Norfolk for the Fitzalan Chapel at Arundel Castle, Sussex. See *Arundel Castle* (Pitkin Pictorial Guide). London, 1973, illustration on p. 21. I am grateful to Sara Rodger and Clive Wainwright for confirming this. A Spanish ivory crucifix was also acquired by the de Lisle family of Leicestershire, probably in the 1830s; see E. DE LISLE. *Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillips de Lisle*. II, London, 1900, p. 289. I am grateful to the Squire de Lisle for this reference.

22. «...Tal vez sea esta la mejor colección de pinturas de casas particulares de esta ciudad. Consta de unos setecientos cuadros todos de mérito. Hay infinitos de la escuela española; muchos de la francesa, holandesa, alemana, flamenca, florentina, lombarda, napolitana, y autores desconocidos. Es imposible decir cual sea el cuadro de punta de esta galería... Basta decir que es un museo riquísimo». F. GONZÁLEZ DE LEÓN. *Noticia Artística Histórica y Curiosa de Todos los Edificios Públicos, Sagrados y Profanos de esta muy Noble, muy Leal, muy Heroica e Invicta Ciudad de Sevilla...* Sevilla, 1844, I, p. 204.

23. G. DENNIS. *A Summer in Andalusia*. London, 1839, I, p. 211.

24. R. FORD. *Handbook for Spain*. London (1845), reprinted 1966, I, p. 397. *Pajería* means literally straw-dealer, and may be a pejorative term for premises.

25. See T. BEAN. «Richard Ford as Picture Collector and Patron in Spain». *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXVII, February 1995, pp. 96-107.

26. STIRLING MAXWELL. «Obivary...» The «late exhibition at Manchester» was the Manchester Art-Treasures Exhibition held in 1857, to which many works of art from private British collections were lent.

27. *Loan Exhibition of Spanish and Portuguese Art*, South Kensington Museum, London. 1881, p. 96, cat. nos. 569 and 570. Robinson (1824-1913) had been curator at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) during the 1850s and 1860s, and was responsible for acquiring a large number of important Spanish works of art. See TRUSTED. *Spanish Sculpture...*, pp. 3-8.

28. Sotheby's, London, 13 March, 1947, lot 88. The two reliefs were in the same lot, which also included an Italian marble relief of Jupiter, Venus and Cupid. The lot sold for £8. The marble relief was likewise eventually returned to Sir Brinsley Ford.

29. Information supplied by Sir Brinsley Ford. In 1971 they were cleaned and conserved. The *St. Catherine of Siena* was shown at an exhibition on Richard Ford in Spain at the Wildenstein Gallery in 1974. *Richard Ford in Spain...*, p. 78, cat. no. 156.

30. See E. HARRIS. «Sir William Stirling-Maxwell and the History of Spanish Art» *Apollo*, LXXIX, 1964, p. 74, and A. H. HAMBER. «A Higher Branch of the Art»: *Photographing the Fine Arts in England 1839-1880*. Amsterdam, 1996, p. 74. I am grateful fo Anthony Hamber for letting me read some fo the draft typescript of his book prior to publication. See also D. ROBERTSON. *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*. Princeton, 1978, pp. 436-7. I am grateful fo Luke Herrmann for this last reference.

31. STIRLING. *Annals...*, p. x.

32. *Ibid.*, p. vi.

33. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

34. *Ibid.*, p. v. See also HAMBER. «A Highes...», p. 75.

35. See G. SMITH. *Disciples of Light: Photographs in the Brewster Album*. Malibu, 1990, figs. on p. 153 and p. 154. I am Grateful to Larry Schaaf for this reference.

36. STIRLING. *Annals...*, p. viii. The «pencil of nature» is a reference to Fox Talbot's publishing venture, *The Pencil of Nature*, which was produced in six parts between June 1844 and April 1846, combining Talbotypes and text. See HAMBER. «A Higher...», pp. 89-90.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

38. I was able to consult the copy at Pollok House, Glasgow. I am grateful to Rosemary Watt for kindly giving me access to this.

39. (R. FORD), Review of Sir Edmund Head's *Handbook of the History of the Spanish and French schools of Painting* and W. STIRLING's *Annals of Spanish Painters (sic.)*. *The Quarterly Review*, LXXXIII, 1848, p. 11 (footnote). See also HAMBER. «A Higher...», p. 74.



Fig. 1.—*St Catherine of Siena receiving the rosary from the Virgin and Child*. Terracotta in later wood frame. Here attributed to an artist working in the circle of Juan Martínez Montañés. Seville; about 1620-50. Collection of Sir Brinsley Ford, London. Reproduced by kind permission of the owner.



Fig. 2.—*The Christ Child and the Infant St John the Baptist*. Terracotta in later wood frame. Here attributed to an artist working in the circle of Juan Martínez Montañés. Seville; about 1620-50. Collection of Sir Brinsley Ford, London. Reproduced by kind permission of the owner.