The passion according to Berruguete: painting the Auto-da-fé and the establishment of the inquisition in early modern Spain

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Abstract
My paper examines the complex relationship between the visual arts and inquisitorial power in early modern Spain through the analysis of Pedro Berruguete’s Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé (circa 1490). As the first and most emblematic Spanish painting to depict the public ceremony in which the Inquisition announced its sentences, this work has always been interpreted as a propagandistic image aimed at celebrating the Holy Office. The institutional nature of its commission and exhibition – closely connected with the Dominicans – encourages this reading. However, by anchoring my interpretation in the turbulent historical context surrounding the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain, I argue instead that Berruguete produced a multi-layered painting that also echoed the misgivings of many of his contemporaries about the new institution’s methods.

Keywords: Spanish inquisition, Pedro Berruguete, Auto-da-fé, Spanish painting, inquisition & painting, Jews in Spanish painting

In memoriam Francisco Márquez Villanueva.

Celebrating the Inquisition?
Sometime in the early 1490s, during the years of unrest surrounding the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition, Pedro Berruguete (1445/1450–1503) painted a fictional auto-da-fé we know as Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé (figure 1). The famous image, modest in size, offers a comprehensive scene of inquisitorial justice.

The painting is divided in two halves. The upper part, loosely linked to a legendary event from the thirteenth century, depicts an Inquisition tribunal presided over by Saint Dominic, who is pardoning the Albigensian heretic Raimundo de Corsi from his death sentence. Sitting on a throne, Saint Dominic is portrayed as both saint and inquisitor. It was not historical accuracy, however, that guided Berruguete’s hand. Domingo de Guzmán, later canonized as Saint Dominic, had died in 1221. Although Guzmán had been a fierce opponent of the Catharist heresy in Southern France and was the founder of the Order of Preachers (as the Dominicans were called), he died a few years before the medieval inquisitorial tribunals were instituted. Thus, in his rendering of the Saint, Berruguete was exploiting a medieval tradition that exalted Saint Dominic as inquisitor, while at the same time legitimizing the Inquisition through the celebration of the Saint (Albarèt 440–5; Ames chapter 3). In the painting, the platform where Saint Dominic is seated also includes several lay and religious authorities involved in the inquisitorial process, underscoring the institution’s comprehensive character. The role of the
Figure 1. Pedro Berruguete, *Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé*. ©Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado
Dominicans in the Inquisition is further emphasized; the Saint is resting his hand on the shoulder of a man, possibly the prosecutor, who holds a banner topped with the Dominican fleur-de-lis (Caballero Escamilla, “Los gestos” 7). At the far left, overlooking the inquisitorial platform (cadalso), we get a glimpse of another platform (tablado) crowded with more victims and inquisitorial officers. In the middle level of the painting, a pardoned Raimundo de Corsi stands at the foot of a staircase leading up toward the Saint, while a Dominican friar next to him points upward. According to legend, the Albigensian youth was set free by Domingo de Guzmán. Unique among the convicts on the platform, he seems to stand as a sign of the converted soul’s upward movement from the depths of heresy to the heights of faith.

The lower half stands in stark opposition with the rest. Immediately perceptible to the eye, its somber tints and lack of embellishment contrast with the chromatic richness of the upper inquisitorial platform. In the sordid realm of punishment below, we find the battery of officers in charge of carrying out the sentences, the confessor, the executioner and the crowd of spectators under the platform. Singled out by their luminous nudity, two victims burn at the stake. Two others, herded toward the scaffold, await their turn to die.

Berruguete’s Auto-da-fé (as we will call Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé for the sake of brevity), one of the few Spanish paintings on the inquisitorial ceremony, has always been perceived as a propagandistic work, wholly “consistent with the self-image of the Spanish Inquisition” (Peters, Inquisition 223; Bethencourt, L’Inquisition 405). Critics have historically agreed that the image sought to legitimize the Inquisition through a link with a prestigious past, as well as celebrate the Dominican Order’s role during this initial period, when the newly implemented persecution of heresy found itself in great need of recognition.

The circumstances of the image’s production and display seem to support the unanimous celebratory interpretation. Berruguete executed this work following a commission almost certainly from the General Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada (1420–98) to adorn the Dominican convent of Santo Tomás in Ávila, where the painting, now at the Prado Museum, was displayed for a long time (Caballero Escamilla, “Los gestos” 1–2). This convent was no ordinary building. It held particularly strong ties to the Inquisition, which established its headquarters there between 1490 and 1496 (Scholz-Hänsel, “Propaganda” 68–9). The convent was also closely connected to the monarchy. It had been founded by a provision in the Royal treasurer’s will, and Fernando included it in his own will in 1510. Moreover, Fernando and Isabel were patrons of the monastery, where they built a summer residence and, in 1497, buried their son Juan. Torquemada, a hands-on commissioner who perceived – like many others at the time – the invaluable contribution that images could make to his project, was careful to stress the building’s connection with the Crown (Caballero Escamilla, “Fray Tomás de Torquemada” 22; “El códice medieval”). Symbols associated with the monarchs were carved everywhere: the imposing coat of arms of the Catholic Kings on the façade, the numerous yokes, arrows and pomegranates garnishing staircases, cloisters and the choir. As a prior of the convent of Santa Cruz of Segovia, Torquemada had used iconography to advertise the royal involvement with the Inquisition (Carrero Santamaría). The convent of Ávila, located in a city well known for its historically tolerant attitude toward the Jews and conversos, provided an even better setting to proclaim that alliance.

Critics of Spanish art feel uncomfortable with this work by Berruguete. He was one of the shining stars of pre-Velázquez Spanish painting, and his name was associated with the prestigious court of Urbino and with pivotal figures of Italian Renaissance art. In the
Auto-da-fé, the modern viewer senses a disturbing disconnect between means and ends, where pictorial dexterity seems to be at the service of an institution we find reprehensible. This might explain why modern critics mostly limited themselves to describing the technical novelties or to identifying figures of the time in the characters on the platform.

Some critics have in fact noticed certain elements slightly out of place within the celebratory interpretive frame. Jonathan Brown and Marvin Lunenfeld, for example, have perceived the almost satirical force underlying certain characters in this Auto-da-fé and seemed puzzled by a painting about Saint Dominic that “seems to compromise his dignity” (Lunenfeld 83; Brown 21–2). Yet, perhaps out of interpretative inertia or because their interest in this painting was tangential, they did not inquire into the meaning of satire within an otherwise very serious scene, nor were they intrigued by what I see as significant elements that caution us against a quick acceptance of the celebratory interpretation. Why, for example, did Berruguete choose not to use the widespread anti-Jewish pictorial imagery for the heretics, so useful for awaking animosity against the inquisitorial victims, when more than 99% of those burnt by the Inquisition in the initial years were accused of Judaizing? Also, why did his rendering of the burnings evoke so dangerously Christ’s Passion with the nakedness of the victims at the stake, with the Calvary-like officers holding lances so similar to those that pierced Christ’s body in the Calvary, with the almost invisible fire that makes the burning look like a Crucifixion, and with the confessor in a hooded habit who is made to resemble Mary at the foot of the Cross? And more surprisingly, what was the purpose of featuring a friar sound asleep on the main platform, right below Saint Dominic, at the very center of the image? (figure 2). Berruguete’s rendering of the heretics without the available pictorial codes of vilification, his visual likening of the auto-da-fé with Christ’s Passion, the element of boredom at the center of the inquisitorial enterprise embodied in the sleeping friar, among others, are curious choices if we believe that this work stands in full consonance with the inquisitorial ideology. They become less curious, however, if we consider the controversies surrounding the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain, which were much more tumultuous and widespread than is generally thought. And they also make sense if we take into account the remarkably “wide spectrum of religious practices and attitudes towards the church” that New and Old Christians alike, including friars, exhibited in this period of religious turmoil (Starr-Lebeau, In the Shadow of the Virgin 5).

In this vein, I would like to qualify the belief that Berruguete’s Auto-da-fé can be understood exclusively as an encomiastic work. Even though the circumstances of its commission and display would suggest a laudatory portrayal of the Inquisition, I believe that formal and thematic elements in the painting reveal the celebratory interpretation as insufficient. This is not altogether unusual. It has been shown that in particularly tense historical moments, certain works produced under official patronage echo – when asked to reflect on current issues – the tensions and historical complexities that official representations often seek to buffer. Deliberately ambiguous objects, they purposefully lend themselves to different understandings depending on the varied experiences, backgrounds or ideas of the viewers. While allowing for an orthodox interpretation that most surely accounts for their institutional approval, these works also make room for a variety of alternative readings. Along these lines, I believe that the Auto-da-fé can be, and most probably was, interpreted as both supporting and questioning certain practices of the Inquisition, depending on the interpreter. The ambiguity of the painting was, as a matter of fact, in step with the wide array of social experiences and religious beliefs circulating at the time, in which there was space for inconclusiveness,
sundry interpretations and contestation. It was also in tune with a society that, according to recent scholarship, appears as more heterogeneous than previously thought, where the triumph of religious orthodoxy was the result of an arduous process, much more contested than we are used to thinking (Schwartz; García-Arenal). What I suggest, therefore, is not an anachronistic interpretation. I am not projecting our rejection of the Inquisition onto the painting. Instead, I aim to return this work to the interplay of forces and conflicts of its original context.

Advent of the Inquisition in Spain

Propagandistic understandings of the Auto-da-fé partly rely on some misguided assumptions about its historical context. When dealing with this image, art historians...
think of an unquestioned and well-established Inquisition that Berruguete would be
celebrating. That Inquisition, however, if it ever took that form, belongs to a later period,
when the Holy Office – be it out of consensus, fear or a mix of both – finally gained
wider acceptance. The Auto-da-fé was painted earlier, during the years surrounding the
establishment of the Spanish Inquisition, a time marked by a turbulent social climate
saturated with controversy. Before diving farther into the painting, then, let us start by
recovering the discussions and objections to the Holy Office that made up an important
part of daily exchanges in Berruguete’s early modern Spain.

We tend to forget that the Spanish Inquisition was established in the different Iberian
kingdoms amid intense resistance, not only from New Christians who feared for their
lives and property, but also from many Old Christians and a significant group of secular
and ecclesiastic authorities. Discussions about the Inquisition, moreover, were not
exclusive to the lettered circles: daily exchanges between neighbors and acquaintances
commonly provided the occasion to criticize the Inquisition at the popular level
(Schwartz; Baer 2:337–8). The resistance to the Holy Office was also not just domestic.
The Pope, Sixtus IV, was hesitant to issue the 1478 bull appointing the first inquisitors; a
few years later, in 1482, he responded to complaints of Spanish churchmen about
inquisitorial abuses in Seville by allowing the inquisitorial activity to continue only under
the bishop’s surveillance. Papal distrust vis-à-vis the Spanish Holy Office was not short-
lived; during the first half of the sixteenth century, Rome tried to intervene on several
occasions over questions of jurisdiction as well as over abuses by inquisitorial officials
(Pastore 65–84; Kamen 44–50; Tellechea Idígoras; Lea 103–60; Gil).

More importantly for our purposes, the introduction of the Inquisition came as a
shock within the Iberian kingdoms. The frantic pace of the new Inquisition’s early
activity was a source of deep concern; the number of relajados (those condemned to
death) was remarkably high in the first years. It is said that in Spain more people were
punished during the first 37 years of inquisitorial activity than in the following three
centuries (Bennassar 114; Maqueda Abreu 72–3). Also, it was immediately evident to all
that the inquisitorial policy on confiscations, its only source of funding during the initial
period, encouraged economically motivated prosecutions. The edictos de fe (edicts of
faith) – lists of suspicious behaviors that should be denounced – quickly became a
malicious source of information, useful for those (including Jews, before they were
expelled in 1492) who found in the inquisitorial tribunals an easy outlet for their personal,
even intra-family enmities.7 Moreover, resistance within the Church was also harsh.
Many churchmen, following in the steps of the Hieronymite Alonso de Oropesa, favored
an educational approach to theological correction and also believed that the Inquisition
corrupted Christian charity and opposed the evangelical commitment to forgiveness.
Furthermore, the bishops resisted giving up their old jurisdiction over issues of faith
(Pastore).

Different kingdoms were sensitive to different issues. The Castilians had never
institutionalized the persecution of heresy before. In the rare instances when Judaizers
had been condemned, the Episcopal courts – unlike the Inquisition – had conducted the
process following existing local laws. As the prestigious historian Juan de Mariana
recounted more than a century later, Castilians were reluctant to accept a tribunal that
introduced the death penalty for Judaizers, that made children pay “for the crimes of their
parents” in trials where the “accusers were not named or made known, nor confronted by
the accused, nor was there publication of witnesses” (Kamen 67). It was also clear that
the new way of proceeding was often arbitrary, thus creating a general atmosphere of fear
and unrest. Moreover, local officials resisted its introduction because they saw it as a political tool that Fernando and Isabel were implementing with the sole aim of increasing their control over local domains. Others, such as the Aragonese, rejected the Holy Office because they thought of it as a Castilian institution motivated by Castilian problems that threatened a much cherished administrative and legal independence. And although a certain malaise with the Holy Office would persist everywhere in an intermittent but consistent fashion for at least the first half of the sixteenth century, it was during the decades following its establishment that a patent discomfort was regularly manifested at all levels of the Spanish society.8

The virulence of this early hostility can be best illustrated by the murder of Aragon’s Head Inquisitor, Pedro de Arbués, attacked by a group of hired Old and New Christians in Saragossa’s cathedral in 1485.9 The consequences of the Arbués incident were enormous: it awakened animosity toward the conversos and provided the Inquisition, as well as King Fernando, with a justification for silencing opponents. Even if this murder did not totally extinguish opposition in Aragon – as Ángel Alcalá affirms, every meeting of the Cortes of Aragón during the sixteenth century sparked protests against inquisitorial abuses – it changed the attitude of many Old Christians toward the conversos and strengthened inquisitorial power (76–9).

The impact of this case in Ávila, where Berruguete’s painting was executed around the same time, was neither minor nor unintended. It was in this town where those judged responsible for Arbués’ assassination were burned in public autos-da-fé in 1485. And a few years later, in 1491, the supposed murderers in the “innocent Child of La Guardia” affair, a fabricated incident in which Jews were accused of the ritual murder of a Christian child, met with the same fate also in Ávila.10 These two cases were interconnected. Torquemada used the affair of the Child of La Guardia to address the Aragonese opposition manifested in Arbués’ assassination. Soon after the conclusion of the La Guardia trial in Ávila, the Inquisition dictated that its proceedings should be sent out to other kingdoms and ordered that those destined for Barcelona should be translated into Catalan in a clear attempt to address the more radical focus of opposition (Edwards, The Spanish Inquisition 83; Edwards, Torquemada & the Inquisitors 30–1). Both cases – turned by the Inquisition into examples of the real threat of heresy – show the institution’s efforts in its early stages to persuade a still unconvinced population of the pressing need for its existence.

This need was particularly strong in places like Ávila, a city that until 1492 had a large Jewish population (in 1474 more than half of its residents were still Jewish) and was well known for its relatively tolerant attitude toward the Jews (León Tello 21; Caballero Escamilla, “El convento”). In fact, the Jews had lived intermingled with the Christians there for an unusually long time; the city had been reluctant to comply with the 1412 Royal ordinance according to which Jews and Muslims had to live in isolated quarters. Only in 1481, after the Cortes of Toledo reinstated the 1412 law, a judería was established in Ávila (León Tello 16).

This atmosphere was the immediate context of Berruguete’s Auto-da-fé. Was he aware of it? Even in the unlikely case that the painter did not know about lettered debates or popular conversations about the Inquisition, he met with Torquemada many times. And Torquemada was a walking testimony to the hostilities toward the Inquisition. Obsessed with being poisoned or attacked, “he was the only general inquisitor allowed to carry an armed guard of fifty individuals and on his table there always was a unicorn horn, the universal antidote against poison” (my translation; García Cárcel and Moreno
Martínez 35). The celebratory interpretation of the painting ignores this atmosphere. Taking into account this historical background, then, lost to us as spectators but not to the painter and his contemporary viewers, I propose we return to the *Auto de fé*. We may conclude that the turbulence around Berruguete altered the expected course of his paintbrush.

**Reflecting on the present**

Let us go back to the painting and how it calls forth the turmoil of its time. Because, although the *Auto-da-fé* evokes a legendary past through the anecdote about Raimundo de Corsi and willfully distorts how *autos-da-fé* were conducted in reality, it also calls forth its present by featuring an *auto-da-fé* in many ways similar to the ones Berruguete and his audience saw or heard about. The painter “makes the connection with the contemporary world practically inevitable by clothing the figures in the costume of his time,” as Jonathan Brown affirms (21). But using contemporary clothes for figures of the past was, after all, a common feature of early modern painting. However, he also depicts older times with late fifteenth-century paraphernalia (Scholz-Hänsel, “¿La inquisición como mecenas?” 306). And he continues to push into the present by locating the scene in an open, still unleveled plaza, just like the plaza Mercado Grande in Ávila, where several *autos-da-fé* had been taking place in Berruguete’s time (Silva Maroto, “Auto de fé”).

The association of past and present was not unique to this painting. It was frequent in Torquemada’s commissions. Most of the images in both the exterior and interior of the two buildings decorated under Torquemada’s direction – the monastery of Santa Cruz in Segovia and the convent of Santo Tomás in Ávila – attempted to establish a dignifying link between former and current times (Caballero Escamilla, “Fray Tomás de Torquemada” 26–34; “El convento”). However, the present was usually suggested but not shown. Berruguete’s *Death of Saint Peter Martyr*, from one of the altarpieces of the convent of Ávila, for instance, alluded to the murder of Aragón’s Head Inquisitor, which I mentioned a few pages before, but nothing in the image pointed to any particularity of the Saragossa event (figure 3). Likewise, *The Proof of Fire*, centered on a miracle in which Saint Dominic’s books were saved from the fire while those of the Albigensian were burned (figure 4), provided an antecedent for the inquisitorial burning of heretical books. But Berruguete located the scene in a stripped interior devoid of any reference to fifteenth-century book burnings by the Inquisition. More importantly, the central painting of this altarpiece depicts a monumental Saint Dominic piercing an unusual animal with a Cross. As it was surely obvious to the original viewers, according to Caballero Escamilla the animal related to the *alboraique*, a hybrid creature with the mouth of a wolf and the ears of a greyhound that was identified with the *marranos* or false Christians of Jewish origin in the widely circulated anti-Jewish literature of the time (Netanyahu 848–54; Caballero Escamilla, “Fray Tomás de Torquemada” 27–32). The image, thus, offered a powerful visual glorification of the inquisitorial enterprise, with the Dominicans triumphing over the Jews, but it did so symbolically, with figures that reached out to the viewer’s present from a considerable distance.

Berruguete’s *Auto-da-fé* proceeded differently, conjuring up a familiar scene and confronting the audience bluntly with a thorny issue of its time. Perhaps this was related to its original location, which might have been –as Caballero Escamilla suggests – one of the rooms of the convent where the Inquisition had its headquarters (“Los gestos” 3). It is now generally accepted that the *Auto-da-fé* was not part of the Saint Dominic altarpiece –
from which it differs both in size and format – and that it was not meant to be displayed at the church (Silva Maroto, “Auto de fe presidido por Santo Domingo de Guzmán”; Caballero Escamilla, “Los santos dominicos” 373). Rather, it was commissioned as an independent piece to be paired with a rendition of a supposed auto-da-fé celebrated by Saint Dominic in Palencia in 1236 with the presence of the then King Fernando. If the two paintings were meant to hang in the Inquisition’s headquarters, we would have to imagine an original audience immediately immersed in the tensions of the first years of inquisitorial activity, as well as a painter drawn to ponder his conflictive present in a way no other commission would have demanded before or since. Then, pausing to consider how Berruguete distributes the figures in the painting, how he represents the punishing scene, what he chooses to accentuate and to deemphasize, and with whom he calls us to identify may give us access to how the Auto-da-fé allowed to view its own time.

Let us start with the binary scheme of the Auto-da-fé, with its patent contraposition between the authorities of the Holy Office above and the realm of the heretics below. In Christian theology and art, the pairs above/below as well as right/left had clear connotations. The same was true for the autos-da-fé as ceremonies, which were conceived and

Figure 3. Pedro Berrueguete, Death of Saint Peter Martyr. ©Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado
staged as reenactments of the Last Judgment (Flynn). Related to the Ascent to Heaven and Descent to Hell often mentioned in the Scriptures, Hell was usually placed at the lower edge of Last Judgment images. And following Matthew 25:33, “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left,” painters also began to organize Last Judgment images according to a right and left division (Schrimplin 83, 87). Such coordinates assigned a moral value to spatial dimensions. Above and right corresponded to virtue, salvation and Heaven. Below and left corresponded to vice, damnation and Hell. Berruguete made a tricky use of this conceptualization. His painting, as we saw, is
starkly divided into two halves, with the Inquisitorial authorities occupying the upper half and the heretics the lower. Furthermore, the heretics at the stake are dutifully placed at Saint Dominic’s left. Many of Berruguete’s contemporaries – especially those who assumed that Berruguete and his commissioners coincided ideologically in full – would not have been totally unjustified in interpreting this spatial distribution as assigning Good to the inquisitorial authorities and Evil to the heretics, as at least one modern critic also does (Tucci Carneiro 464).

Yet, the artist’s choice of the point of view known as “di sotto in sù” (from below upward) for this painting warrants our attention. He had used it before and would use it again, always with the purpose of organizing the composition in a particular way. Here it is combined with an oblique orientation that, as a result, places the viewer in a corner, twice as close to the victims as to the judges; the judges are now farther up and away. The choice of this unusual perspective also attests to a voluntary alteration of traditional representational practices, in which the scene would face the viewer straight on. It thus encourages the beholder to look at what is being shown from an unfamiliar angle. In the case of this image, additionally, the oblique approach curiously reorganizes the composition. As an effect of this atypical view, the conventional distribution of space (above/below) is replaced by another binary opposition, now of front and back, less orthodox but in this context more productive. In this way, the preeminent position of the above gets deflated when the above becomes the back and, as an effect of this shift, the below gains attention by coming to foreground. As a result, the stake is no longer perceived in connection to Saint Dominic (below, to his left) but in connection to the viewer. The painting places the beholder closer to the condemned men both spatially and emotionally and, by the same token, it lessens the importance of the figure of Saint Dominic and the other inquisitorial officers.

Spectators, then, as it happens almost invariably in this painting, were allowed to choose the interpretation that best suited their own inclinations. Some could stick to more traditional ways of signifying and conclude that the Auto-da-fé was a glorification of Saint Dominic, higher and bigger than all the rest. But others, more attentive to the shift in the point of view, could also conclude that the image was in fact about the two men burning at the stake, whose pathos was being displayed in front of everything else and close to the viewer.

Eschewing vilification and the representation of the Jews

But Berruguete’s choice of an unusual point of view for this painting was by no means his only departure from the expected. The scene of burning, in fact, also presents conspicuous oddities. As Scholz-HänSEL and others already noted, Berruguete completely avoids the widespread negative iconography of the Jews in the representation of the heretics (“¿La inquisición como mecenas?” 307). And his shunning of anti-Jewish imagery is curious given the particular period in which he painted the Auto-da-fé, since during the first years of the Inquisition, from its creation to around 1525, the institution concerned itself almost exclusively with the persecution of Crypto-Jews. According to Jean-Pierre Dedieu, 99.18% of those arraigned during the fifteenth century were tried under the charge of Judaizing (23). In these early years, it was understood that when the Inquisition said “heretics” it almost exclusively meant “Jews”.

The anti-Jewish iconography, then, would have been perfect to relate the painting to the peculiar Spanish context while also making a more general statement. After all, such
imagery had served the purpose of signifying all the enemies of Christianity in Spain and elsewhere in Europe many times before (Lipton, *Images of Intolerance* 118–21; Caro Baroja 1:95). Powerfully documented in Northern European art from the twelfth century onward, usually in the context of Passion scenes, derogatory images of Jews and their faith “did begin to emerge in Christian Iberia, in tandem with other social transformations” by the end of the thirteenth century (Patton 233). Fully entrenched by the fifteenth century as a powerful “pictorial code or rejection,” a massive repertoire of caricatured, stereotypical traits (freakish profiles, hooked noses, enlarged eyes, long beards, skin blemishes, reddish hair) was assigned to Jewish figures in Christian art and used to indicate their spiritual wickedness (Strickland, quote from 96 but see 95–155).17 Even if the use of this code was never as pervasive and uniform in Iberia as it was in the North, local as well as Northern European painters working in the peninsula in the fifteenth century were familiar with it and willing to use it. For instance, an anonymous painting about the alleged murder of the Child of La Guardia, very close to the *Auto-da-fé* in time and subject matter, and probably also commissioned by Torquemada, made full use of this repository: the seven evil men who surround the crucified boy in the image are unmistakably identified as Jews by their noses and beards (Scholz-Hänsel, “¿La inquisición como mecenas?” 304).18

Those in close contact with the Spanish Dominicans were familiar with anti-Jewish Northern imagery and were already aware of its usefulness by the time Berruguete painted his *Auto-da-fé*. Northern art’s approach to the Passion provided the Dominicans with the perfect visual complement to their own mindset as well as concrete pictorial support for their anti-Jewish sermons. The “graphic evocations of the Passion’s most abject moments” as well as the stigmatization of Jews as murderers, almost a trademark of Northern art at this time, were central to the Dominican religious discourse in Castile and served as a powerful inflammatory device against the Jews from at least the times of the preacher Vicente Ferrer (Robinson 126). For a long time, however, this discourse had lacked the adequate iconographic company. Until the last decades of the fifteenth century, Castilian visual arts were notorious for their reticence to display Christ’s human affliction or the loathsome Jews around the Cross. In this, Iberian art had followed in the steps of most Spanish churchmen, who believed in conversion without violence, and therefore chose to avoid any gruesome visualization of the Passion that might cause discomfort to those recently converted to Catholicism or incite hostility against them.19 When the winds changed in Spain around the end of the fifteenth century and persuasion lost the game to coercion, people like Torquemada and his fellow Dominicans looked to the North, to a tradition fully equipped to stir the spirits against Judaism, in search of visual support for their campaign against a heresy that they mainly understood as Crypto-Judaism.20

In this context, Berruguete’s avoidance of such an effective battery of tools for representing heretics acquires significant relevance. By refusing to feature those burned by the Inquisition as poisonous Jews Berruguete offered a painting that also spoke to those in search of more charitable means of spiritual correction for the mistaken souls that they considered the inquisitorial victims to be. At the same time, it allowed any viewer – not only crypto-Jews and *conversos* but also Old Christians – to compassionately identify more easily with these “unmarked” heretics in the image.
The challenge of painting the stake: burning as Crucifixion

Berruguete’s way of representing the heretics was indeed unusual. But his very decision to include the burning of the heretics within this scene was already odd. During this period, high art balked at representing rituals of public executions as artists were “repelled by association with such matters” (Puppi 59). In fact, the execution would not be depicted in later Spanish renderings of autos-da-fé at all, although it would almost infallibly figure as an emblem of inquisitorial barbarism in later anti-Spanish images. In this, then, Berruguete’s painting would remain an exception in the Inquisition’s triumphant iconography (Peters, Inquisition 225). 21

This tendency to omit the burning in Spanish works is not so surprising. There is ample evidence that the execution was a point of contention during the first years of inquisitorial activity, as it had also been elsewhere in Europe in the Middle Ages (Ames chapter 5). Writing to King Fernando in 1484, for example, the Counselors of Barcelona focused on this issue as they expressed their alarm: “We are all aghast at the news we receive of the executions and proceedings that they say are taking place in Castile” (Quoted in Kamen 69). Imposing the death penalty for Judaizing, as I said, was a departure from customary judicial procedure that Spaniards were not willing to accept. It was even alien compared to inquisitorial precedents. When the Hieronymite Oropesa led an inquisitorial court in Toledo in 1461, he punished those found guilty of religious misconduct, but he did not issue a single death sentence. He thought that an Inquisition was necessary, but it had to be more educational than punitive (Baer 2:290–1; Netanyahu 734–40; Starr-Lebeau, In the Shadow of the Virgin 112–7). Fernando del Pulgar, who decades later also favored the evangelization of the conversos through example and teaching, accepted the use of force but not the death penalty (Kamen 69).

Furthermore, besides the opinions against the stake as a solution for heresy, there was also the repulsion caused by actual executions at the first autos-da-fé. During “the horror of the terrible first twenty of so years,” as Kamen calls the first period of inquisitorial activity, death penalties were particularly high in number (Kamen 203). And people – who were accustomed neither to the autos-da-fé nor to this new kind of executions – did not welcome them. Even foreigners from other European places, used to the public execution of criminals, expressed their consternation in journals and letters sent to their compatriots. Perhaps because “(i)t was no doubt unpleasant to see clergy presiding over the killing of condemned persons,” as Kamen remarks, the inquisitorial pyre was revolting in a way regular executions were not (Kamen 204).

Execution, therefore, although considered an act of piety by the inquisitorial mind, was a source of understandable unease for the early modern Holy Office in Spain, even more so than it had been for the medieval tribunals (Ames, “Does Inquisition Belong” 22–3; Righteous Persecution 4–5; “The Deserved Punishment” 182–227). One cannot overlook the pains that the Inquisition took to distance itself from the gory concreteness of punishment even if, as Henry Charles Lea does, one considers it a hypocritical concern. In the first place, as I mentioned before, it kept the quemadero separated from the main ceremony. Technically, the Inquisition did not condemn its victims to the fire. It declared them to be irredeemable heretics, separated them from the Church and abandoned them (relaxed them) to the “secular arm,” which in turn took charge of the execution. This was done in this manner mainly to circumvent the ban on bloodshed by clerics. But there seems to be more to it. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the declaration urging mercy that the Suprema made sure to include once it took full control
of the ceremony, designed to be uttered every time the inquisitorial officers handed over a heretic to the secular arm. These words were addressed to the civil officers, “whom we ask, and charge most affectionately, as by law we best can, – the officer said – to treat him benignly and mercifully” (Lea’s translation with my additions following the Spanish original 3:188; Maqueda Abreu 416). This charge was not yet officially in use in Berruguete’s time, but it expressed a preexisting concern. The will to mitigate the negative effects that the execution could have on the Inquisition’s image was already there during the first period, when the number of death verdicts was so strikingly high and so shocking for the audience (Kamen 203). Inquisitorial executions at the stake were meant to elicit terror. But it had to be a distancing terror, leading to repugnance rather than pity. The pronouncement, then, was probably a vivid manifestation of unease about the execution on the part of an institution that understood and exploited the usefulness of pain in many ways but also knew of its dangers and did not want to appear uncharitable in front of the public.22 Such perception could not only undermine its legitimacy but also induce spectators to an unwelcome sympathy for the heretics.

In this context, where execution was so discussed and contested, one can understand why Berruguete might have deemed it inconceivable to omit the stake. For early witnesses of inquisitorial activity – our painter among them – it was impossible to consider the inquisitorial solution without taking into account the instance of burning. Yet including the execution, it seems, created problems for the painter in this case since the stake stood in opposition to repentance and forgiveness, the two pillars of the anecdote about Raimundo de Corsi that served as basis for the Auto-da-fé. In the legendary episode informing the Auto-da-fé, Saint Dominic frees a young Albigensian, convinced that the heretic will turn to Christianity through example and persuasion. After 20 years, so the legend goes, “he left the darkness and came to the light, and became a preaching friar” (my translation; Caballero Escamilla, “Los gestos” 8–9). The anecdote is included in a Castilian codex, a Latin version of which is thought to have been the textual basis for Berruguete’s paintings in the convent of Santo Tomás.23 It is probable that Torquemada, as he was used to doing, chose this passage for the painter and made it available to him (Caballero Escamilla, “El códice medieval” 155). The choice was risky. The anecdote about de Corsi advocated merciful methods of evangelization. In this, then, the episode cut straight to the heart of ongoing debates and sided with those arguing for patience and education rather than punishment. This was probably not the message Torquemada wanted to convey, and it seems strange, in fact, that an episode from the life of Saint Thomas, who figures prominently in all of the General Inquisitor’s iconographical projects, was not chosen over this one. Saint Thomas, whose life was the central theme of the codex in question, was well known for approving of death in cases of heretical obstinacy, while Saint Dominic – as medieval biographies emphasized – was firm in his preference for dialectical methods of conversion.24 Torquemada probably picked this episode more concerned with repositioning Saint Dominic as Inquisitor than with the events involved in the anecdote. Identifying the Inquisition with the Saint had been a consistent Dominican strategy to address criticism and doubts ever since the high Middle Ages. Dominicans used the Saint’s holy model to encourage hesitant brothers to join the Inquisition, and also offered it to the laity (most probably with less success) “as another argument of inquisition’s pious and salvific character” (Ames, Righteous Persecution 19). But how could Berruguete include the most recognizable elements of contemporary autos-da-fé when depicting an anecdote that rejected the inquisitorial punishment? For him, the path from text to image must have not only presented concrete problems, but
also offered unexpected potential. This might explain why he ended up producing such a bizarre scene of burning, where the stake is made reminiscent of Christ’s Crucifixion and, through it, of a martyrdom scene.

An astonishing accumulation of elements around the stake in this painting, as we shall see, were susceptible to be interpreted as “mnemonic pointers” to the Crucifixion – to borrow Esther Cross’s words – and this in turn could be understood as an invitation to take the scene of punishment as a martyrdom scene (Cross 233). Let us not forget that the evocation of Christ’s suffering was a common feature of martyrdom narratives, widely circulated in sermons and collections of stories during this period. And also that by suggesting the possibility of taking heretics as martyrs Berruguete was exploiting a perception not uncommon in his time, one that theologians and lawyers disputed but others, especially those opposing the Inquisition, embraced (Cross 52–86, 227–60).

What are the elements in the Auto-da-fé that purposely recalled the Crucifixion? First, the two heretics burning at the stake appear almost naked, when we know that this was not the way people were displayed as they burned. Their semi-nakedness, moreover, is represented in identical terms as that of the thieves on the cross in Berruguete’s The Crucifixion (also known as Christ and the Two Thieves), painted for the Cathedral of Palencia (figure 5). Nearby, the officers who herd the victims to the stake hold long lances like those that threaten and sometimes even pierce Christ’s body in images of the Calvary. More surprising still, we know that the stridency of red and yellow was available for Berruguete in his palette. He used it for other parts of the painting. But when it came to the stake, the painter chose to downplay the flames (and omit the smoke) to the point of almost erasing them, as if he merely wanted to give us men nailed to wooden sticks, making the inquisitorial pyre – also totally smokeless – look like a crucifixion (figure 6). And also he made the confessor in a hooded habit by the stake resemble a woman, very similar in garb and countenance to the Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross in pictorial images of the Crucifixion? (figure 7). As an isolated site of empathy, this understated Marian figure seems to offer itself for the audience to imitate, inviting viewers to identify through emotional involvement with the human agony of those about to die.

This striking accumulation of choices that spur the audience to associate the torment of those condemned by the Inquisition with the Crucifixion of Christ is further suggested by Berruguete in a move that unexpectedly links the lower with the upper part of the painting. It is true that, unlike Christ (but not unlike some martyrs, in fact, and the resemblance of these victims of the Inquisition with the Saint Sebastian attributed to Berruguete should not pass unnoticed), Berruguete’s burning heretics are not nailed or tied to a cross but to a single stick, and they do not contort in the standardized ways of crucified bodies in painting. However, the Auto-da-fé turns these sticks into crosses through their contiguity with the understated Cross, not covered by the canopy, that is part of the stage construction in the upper part of the painting (figure 8). This half-hidden Cross subtly frames the heretics in a fashion that recalls Berruguete’s symbolic use of the Cross in his two works Lamentation over the Body of Christ, at least one of which was painted around the same years than his Auto-da-fé (figure 9). The man who stands by the Cross, the only one on the upper platform who looks downward and takes an interest in the stake (figure 8), seems estranged from his surroundings, more in tune with the compassionate mood of this embedded Crucifixion scene below. The dramatic gesture of his hands recalls the sorrowful expression of characters usually found grieving around Christ’s body. Such a gesture often corresponds to the Virgin Mary (Rubin, Mother of
but it also resembles that of Mary Magdalene and Saint John the Baptist in another image by Berruguete, *The Crucifixion of Christ* (figure 10).

This identification of the inquisitorial victims with the crucified Christ and not, as one would expect, with the deicidal Jews at the foot of the Cross in Passion iconography is one of this work’s more daring choices because it made room for an unsettling understanding of the *auto-da-fé*, an event that was meant to be received differently. It is known that any association of the gallows with the Cross, turning heretics into martyrs, was disquieting for the Church in general but very especially for the Inquisition that worried a
lot about this unwelcome analogy. The Spanish Inquisition, moreover, knew that the burnings at the autos-da-fé were giving origin to crypto-Jewish notions of martyrdom, particularly during the first years of inquisitorial activity. And it also knew that such notions extended beyond crypto-Jews. Those burned at the stake for judaizing were often seen as martyrs “even if they had never actually judaized” (Bodian 16). Early evidence in this respect abounds. Inés de Herrera, for instance, a very popular young “prophetess” from Extremadura active at the end of the fifteenth century, went as far as including “the burnt ones” seated in golden thrones in her heavenly revelation (Bodian 18; Beinart, “Inés de Herrera”; Melammed 45–72). Inés was not the only one to get into trouble with the Inquisition for matters related to this issue. Around 1487–8, a prebendary of the Cathedral of Toledo responded to an accusation made against him by affirming: “I did not say that those burned for being heretics were martyrs” (my translation; Rabade Obradó 471). Many other cases, not restricted to the early years, show how dangerous
it was in the inquisitorial context to suggest any parallel between those burnt at the stake and the Crucifixion. Berruguete, however, made room for such parallel, welcoming interpretations that were well known to exist in his time and that questioned the inquisitorial understanding of the \textit{auto-da-fé}.

However, like almost everywhere else in this painting, here Berruguete again avoided an exclusively polemical stance by opening up his analogy to diverse understandings. To be sure, the parallel between the suffering Christ and criminals on the verge of capital punishment was a key trait of the public execution spectacle in this period (Puppi 54–5). As Mitchell Merback affirms, “the salvific promise of Christ’s self-abasing death on the Cross was nowhere more fully realized than in the redemption of the criminal who confessed, atoned and suffered his pains steadfastly” (149). This may partly explain why Berruguete took care to suggest, through the iron collar around their necks, that the convicted in his painting had been \textit{garroted} (strangled) before being submitted to the flames, a “privilege” saved for those who recanted after their sentences had been read.

Figure 7. Pedro Berruguete. \textit{Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé}. (Detail)
Figure 8. Pedro Berruguete, *Saint Dominic Presiding over an Auto-da-fé*. (Detail)
The iron collars, nonetheless, are subtly painted and purposefully difficult to tell. Technically, therefore, those at the stake were not impenitent heretics; their souls had managed to escape eternal damnation. With the garrote, then, Berruguete made room for an acceptable interpretation of the heretics as Christ-like figures. And he also avoided conveying the misleading impression of sympathy for unrepentant Crypto-Jews, a sympathy he most surely did not have. But he did it subtly enough as to also habilitate other possible and less admissible interpretations.

My reading suggests, then, that Berruguete gave his audience at least two paintings in one. The celebratory inflection coexisted with a different view that linked those sentenced to the stake to the notion of martyrdom through the figure of the crucified Christ, and therefore turned Saint Dominic and his men into figures associated ironically with the Jews who always appeared as instigators of suffering and agents of injustice in the scenes of the Passion. In sum, the conjunction of two risky choices for representing the victims (the rejection of the anti-Jewish code and the connection with the Crucifixion) created an unusual amount of room for unorthodox interpretations. If the inclusion of stereotyped

Figure 9. Pedro Berruguete, *Lamentation over the Body of Christ*. ©ARL. Museo Catedralicio Palencia. (Forms a diptych figure 5)
Jews in medieval Passion paintings served the purpose of reinforcing existing prejudices, Berruguete seems to be doing the opposite. By distancing himself from any pictorial vilification of the victims, Berruguete allowed his audience to see the iconography of the Passion not as a tool to denigrate those deemed incorrigible by the Holy Office but as one to awake compassion. Thus, he challenged, or at least downplayed, contemporary ideas and attitudes toward either the conversos or, most probably, toward the inquisitorial way.

Figure 10. Pedro Berruguete, *The Crucifixion of Christ*. ©ARL.Museo Diocesano Palencia
of handling its victims. This interpretation is risky, but it is in no way foreign to the perception of a significant number of people in Spain at the time.

**Inquisitorial authorities and the public in the eye of the painter**

All of this, I believe, is consistent with the way in which Berruguete endowed the burning scene with an emotional intensity absent from the inquisitorial tribunal. Pathos is the defining trait of almost all the figures in the lower half, while the upper part is devoid of emotion. Below, the helpless pair at the stake, the piteous confessor, the next man to be burned looking down in resigned despair all called upon the viewer’s compassion (figure 11). In contrast, most of the institutional authorities on the upper platform display a complete lack of interest in the event, which can be interpreted as impregnating the institution in general. The only two exceptions are Saint Dominic – who could be seen as connected by ties of mercy to de Corsi – and the man directly above the burning victims who is looking down on the heretics. The rest reveal an ostentatious indifference. Their attitudes, not devoid of some satirical humor, range from the idle chat of the two pairs of clergyman on either side of Saint Dominic (figure 12) to the priest who sits shamelessly sleeping right below the Saint, in an attitude that in a sense cancels out or at
least questions the figure of Saint Dominic itself (figure 2). Although the eye-catching majesty of the platform—highlighted by the brightness of the throne and the imposing golden canopy, as well as by the rich colors of clothes and carpet—could have been taken by contemporary spectators as indications of grandeur and therefore favored a celebratory interpretation of the painting, there must have also been those for whom the patent callousness of most inquisitorial authorities (probably as disconcerting to contemporary viewers as to present day critics) took away from the triumphant mood and insinuated some criticism, the reach of which is difficult to grasp.

Lastly, I would like to point out the way in which this painting seems to reflect on the relationship between victims and spectators in the *autos-da-fé*. First, it is worth noting that Berruguete’s image does not include any representation of the masses in connection with this ceremony, as will be the rule in later paintings on the subject (Scholz-Hänsel, “Propaganda de imágenes” 71). The crowds strolling around Madrid’s Plaza Mayor in Rizi’s 1683 image (figure 13), for example, have no place in this painting, partly for historical reasons (*autos-da-fé* were much smaller at the beginning) but also because of Berruguete’s artistic choice to focus on individuality as a way to enhance his work’s emotional power. The entire composition relies on personal relationships or small clusters of people, such as the almost insignificant group to the left (insignificant, if judging by its size and the lack of individualization of its figures), slightly above the official platform and symmetrically opposite from the viewpoint of the beholder (Scholz-Hänsel, “Propaganda de imágenes” 71). What is the role of this marginal group? It is composed in fact by convicts whose sentences have not yet been read but who are represented in such a way as to confuse the viewer as they appear to be part of the enthusiastic public that used to attend the *autos-da-fé*. In a very disturbing way, the difference between victims and spectators is blurred. Berruguete represents the group as simultaneously public and heretics, audaciously encouraging identification, and then turning...
identification into identity. (The public, in turn, is represented underneath the platform, as if in line to be burned.)

This arrangement could be seen as reversing the antagonistic relation between spectators and convicts that was encouraged by the official discourse in real *autos-da-fé*. After all, the inquisitorial trials ending in these ceremonies demanded the people’s participation, from the denunciation that opened the case to the approving witnessing of the punishment. The trial and the burning at the stake were designed as parts of a collective act by the entire society purging itself of its impurities. What, then, could such daring and deliberate confusion be expressing? Perhaps, the disorienting conflation of spectators with heretics was meant to enact an existing anxiety. Part of Berruguete’s audience (some of it “unconvinced of the accusations imputed to the Jews”, as Caballero Escamilla characterizes it) was painfully aware of the prominent role played by arbitrariness and personal grudges in inquisitorial cases (“El convento” 1293). It could be, then, that Berruguete’s representation of the public as indiscernible from the heretics was expressing a widespread fear, similar in nature to the one Cervantes would later exploit in his “The Marvellous Puppet Show,” that nobody was safe in the inquisitorial context, that any spectator could arbitrarily be turned into a convict on any given day. Within the painting, the suggested identification between spectators and victims disrupts the expected alliance between spectators and Inquisition, turning the public – an alleged source of legitimacy and support for the newly established institution – into a pool of widespread fear and mistrust.

**Conclusion**

I have offered an interpretation of the *Auto-da-fé* that is at odds with its traditional understanding. I have argued that Berruguete responded to an inquisitorial commission by
producing a multilayered image. Certain viewers, assuredly helped by the small size of the painting, could have easily overlooked uncomfortable details and found the expected visual endorsement of the Inquisition. More attentive viewers, though, or viewers with a different experience or sensitivity would have encountered room for a more distant stance.

That said, a few probably unanswerable questions that I have dodged so far cannot be avoided any longer. What was the target and extent of Berruguete’s criticism? Was he a veiled, albeit wholehearted, detractor of the Inquisition? Or was he just expressing discomfort with certain ways of dealing with heresy in Spain, a discomfort also felt by many Old Christians? As far as we know, Berruguete’s biography and other works by him eschew any sign of dissidence, and he was certainly well liked by Torquemada. He had requested his services before. And he later chose Berruguete again to paint the main altarpiece in the church of the convent of Santo Tomás, dedicated to St. Thomas, two subsidiary altars devoted to St. Peter Martyr and St. Dominic, and probably also a few sargas for the organ doors.30

Berruguete also had a family connection to the Order of Preachers. He was the protegé of his Dominican uncle Fray Pedro González Berruguete. In addition, Berruguete’s will bequeathed the considerable sum of 10,000 maravedís to the convent of Saint Thomas in Ávila, the building for which his Auto-da-fé and other important paintings were originally produced during the last years of his life. This was the place where he wanted prayers to be said for his soul. The money was received by the convent on 23 July 1505 (Berruguete had died at the end of 1503), and it most surely testifies to the painter’s attachment to a place and a religious Order with which he established strong ties that he wished to maintain even after his death.

Moreover, beyond this biographical data, there is no record of friction while working for the convent. Indeed, even the nature of the paintings he made for the decoration of its walls speaks of a general agreement with many of the Order’s ideas. He had no qualms about following Torquemada’s instructions to glorify Saint Thomas, a figure much contested by the humanists in Spain and abroad. In one of his portraits of the Saint, he included an uncommon chalice with a host suspended above it that most probably referred to the aforementioned episode of the child of La Guardia. Allegedly, the Catholic Kings had given Torquemada the uncorrupt host involved in the event, which he kept at the convent. It seems, then, that Berruguete had no particular sympathy for the Jews, and that he could in many cases easily follow instructions to include anti-Jewish elements in his paintings. He did not appear to sympathize with any other type of heresy either. In the already mentioned The Proof of Fire (figure 4), for instance, he did not feel any qualms about the burning of heretical books. He obviously endorsed a stark distinction – fundamental to the inquisitorial mentality – between good and bad doctrines, between good and bad books. (He might have distinguished, however, as many did in his time, between burning a book and burning a human being.)

Within this panorama, then, the Auto-da-fé seems oddly discordant. Could it be that I am misreading the painting, projecting ambiguity onto a straightforward celebratory work? That is, of course, a possibility; albeit one that in my view simplifies the work and its historical context. First, even if certain elements in the Auto-da-fé may be interpreted in a solely celebratory key, others unequivocally may not. Berruguete’s refusal to represent the inquisitorial victims according to pictorial stereotypes of the Jews, as well as his choice to render the burning as an almost fireless punishment, could perhaps be viewed as mere expressions of what Silva Maroto calls the painter’s “zeal to avoid the
repugnant or ugly” (my translation, Pedro Berruguete 165). Similarly, the visual identification of the garroted victims at the stake with Christ could be understood as a conventional analogy; in this view, Berruguete would be emphasizing – rather than blurring, as I argued – the difference between contrite and impenitent heretics, and the suffering of the contrite would be made to recall the redemptive character of Christ’s Passion. But what about the striking indifference of the inquisitorial officers on the main platform, or – more markedly – the shameless, quasi-comical attitude of the man sleeping at Saint Dominic’s feet? This last element is particularly telling. Placed at the exact center of the image, this figure attracts the viewer’s attention in a disturbing way. His callousness and disinterest, so prominently displayed and so visibly out of place within the context of an auto-da-fé, qualify the supposedly triumphant, dignifying impulse of the image in a brutal way. Conspicuous in his location and nature, this man is left unaccounted for by any celebratory interpretation of the painting.31

And there is also, as I stated before, the issue of history. Propagandistic interpretations of the Auto-da-fé disregard that the Inquisition was not always the all-powerful institution it later became. In the beginning, as it knew well, it was widely contested and distrusted. This context, which should not be overlooked, demands a reappraisal of the image. Even if one sees in it a strong endorsement of inquisitorial justice, one would have to grant that such an endorsement was made in the midst of bitter bickering over the fairness of the death penalty for individuals imperfectly Christianized. It therefore cannot be taken – as it has been – as the celebratory expression of a general consensus but rather, if anything, as a polemical statement aimed at rebutting widespread anti-inquisitorial opinions.

More plausible, though, judging from the peculiarities of the painting, is that this conflictive background had a profound and complex effect on Berruguete. I believe that he was neither a dissident nor an endorser of heresy. On the contrary, most surely a sympathizer of the Inquisition and doubtlessly close to the Dominicans, he nonetheless must have been aware of the protests against the actions of the Holy Office, which in early modern Spain – as well as in the medieval period – most often came from people who had little or no sympathy for heresy (Ames, “Does Inquisition Belong?” 27). Even in the unlikely case that the public voices of dissidence did not reach his ears, he must have talked to ordinary people in the streets of Ávila, most probably concerned about heresy but still in shock at the novel and disturbing sight of neighbors and acquaintances being burned in the streets, a punishment that threw a cloak of present and future infamy and poverty over entire families.32 He himself must have attended one or more autos-da-fé in Ávila while conceiving this image, as witnessing events similar to what they were about to paint was a common practice among artists. Perhaps this close contact with the “cruel punishment of fire” – as Fernando del Pulgar called it – and its far-reaching consequences gave him the peculiar perspective I find in the image (440).

The ambivalence manifest in Berruguete’s painting, moreover, was not his alone. It is, in fact, in full agreement with the many sincere Catholics in the Spanish society at the end of the fifteenth century who favored the Inquisition in general terms but were receptive of criticism around. Many other Spaniards of the time agreed with the need for inquisitorial intervention while feeling uncomfortable with the tangible shape that such intervention was taking. In this sense, we can attempt to advance a tentative and necessarily conjectural answer to the questions underlying this essay. Was Berruguete a fearful but determined opponent to the Inquisition or was he something else? His life seems to rule out the first possibility entirely. Close to people and places attached to the Inquisition, the
subtle criticisms and unexpected sympathies manifest in his Auto-da-fé seem to speak, rather, of an artist who either partly shared or else could not avoid expressing in his work the apprehension of many of his contemporaries about the concrete ways in which the issue of heresy was being tackled in early modern Spain.

Notes
1. Besides Berruguete’s, I can list a few other Spanish paintings on autos-da-fé: (i) a painting contemporary to Berruguete’s Auto-da-fé, with which it was paired in the convent of Santo Tomás in Ávila, to which I will refer later; (ii) a work presumably by Juan Chirinos dated at the end of the sixteenth century, painted for Nuestra Señora de Atocha in Madrid; (iii) a painting known as Auto-da-fé in Toledo’s Plaza de Zocodover, done in 1656, and attributed to the circle of Juan Rizi, now in the Casa Museo del Greco in Toledo; (iv) a painting from the second half of the seventeenth century and attributed to Herrera el Mozo on the Sevilian general auto-da-fé in the Plaza de San Francisco in April of 1660, now kept in the collection of the marquis of Salvatierra; (v) Francisco Rizi’s 1683 Auto-da-fé in the Plaza Mayor, Madrid, now in the Museo del Prado (Figure 13); (vi) a fresco by Lucas Valdés known as Diego Duro’s Ordeal, probably executed between 1703 and 1719, depicting a heretic about to be burnt at an auto-da-fé traditionally identified with the Sevilian merchant of Portuguese origin Diego López Duro, burnt at the stake under charges of Judaizing on 28 October 1703; and (vii) Francisco Goya’s Inquisitorial Auto-da-fé, now at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid. For the visual representations of the autos-da-fé see González de Caldas; Peters (221–9); Bethencourt, “The Auto da Fé” (162–7); and Bethencourt, L’Inquisition (405–13). The scholarship on the Inquisition’s relationship to the production of images both in Spain and abroad has been growing significantly in the last few years. See, for example Villaseñor Black; Pereda; Franceschini; Aron-Beller.
2. For the history of the convent see Caballero Escamilla “El convento” 2; Caballero Escamilla “Iconografía del prestigio”.
3. For the place of images in theological debates connected to the conversion of non-Christians to Christianity in the Spain of the time, see Pereda.
4. For a recent reassessment of Berruguete’s standing within the Spanish painting scene, see Marías and Pereda, “Petrus Hispanus en Urbino”.
5. For the complexity of religious identities in the period, also see Starr-Lebeau, In the Shadow of the Virgin chapter 2. She provides bibliography on the topic on pages 4–5. Also indispensable are Schwartz and Dadson.
6. For works aiming at plural audiences in the context of censorship in the early modern period, see Patterson.
7. For Jews who made denunciations, see Yitzhak Baer (2: 339–40). For denunciations motivated by intra-family conflicts see Starr-Lebeau, especially “Mari Sánchez and Inés González” (32–6). Albeit for a later period, Contreras is indispensable for this topic.
8. For the opposition to the establishment of the Inquisition see Monter; Lea; Kamen (48–56) and (66–82); Pastore; and Moreno Martínez (61–94 and 95–124). For resistance in Castile, see Beinart (34–43). Netanyahu provides ample evidence of the fierce animosity that the Inquisition faced in important cities, such as Toledo and Seville (1147–64). For the Aragonese hostility, see Sesma Muñoz. Blázquez Miguel gives details about the resistance in Catalonia. For opposition to the Inquisition at the popular level see Nalle and Schwartz.
9. For the Arbués assassination and its context, see Alcalá and Netanyahu (1164–72).
10. For the legend of the Child of La Guardia see Baer (398–23); and Edwards, The Spanish Inquisition (81–4). For this type of stories in Europe see Rubin, Gentile Tales. Láinez Alcalá, Scholz Hänzel, and Silva Maroto believe that the auto-da-fé in Ávila punishing the alleged murderers of the Child of La Guardia was most likely attended by Berruguete and acted as inspiration for his Auto-da-fé (100; “¿La Inquisición como mecenas?” 303–4; Pedro Berruguete 227).
11. The painting’s spatial arrangement did not conform to reality but to a pictorial convention aimed to show different episodes of a ritual in a single composition (Bethencourt, “The Auto da Fé” 162). In actual public autos-da-fé, the reading of the sentences and the burning of the
heretics happened in different places, often on different days (Bethencourt, “The Auto da Fé” 155–60).

12. For other critics who saw the painting as a chronicle of its time, see Silva Maroto, Pedro Berruguete (240); Edgerton (33); Brown (23). The 1867 acquisition dossier by the Museo Nacional de Pintura y Escultura shares this impression and describes the painting as a depiction of “one of the first autos-de-fé that took place in Ávila” (Caballero Escamilla, “Los gestos” 2).

13. See Fita (306).

14. For this second panel see Scholz-Hänsel, “¿La inquisición como mecenas?” 307. For where the paintings were seen and discussions about their original location, see Scholz-Hänsel, “Propaganda de imágenes” (70–3); Scholz-Hänsel “¿La inquisición como mecenas?” (307–8).

15. The most notable example would be his portrait of Federigo da Montefeltro and his son, painted in Urbino and now in Windsor Castle, although its authorship is still debated. As for the function of this point of view in paintings like The Flagellation in the Ávila Cathedral and The Prayer in the Orchard, see Silva Maroto, Pedro Berruguete (222).

16. Geoffrey Parker confirms this picture: only 2 out of the 352 persons that fell into the hands of the Toledo Inquisition between 1481 and 1505 were accused of a crime other than Judaizing; 91% of those tried in Valencia during the same period were also charged with Crypto-Judaism (522). Kamen calls the first years of inquisitorial activity “the period of anti-Jewish hysteria” (176).

17. Also see Mellinkoff (127–9 and 234); Patton (239). The bibliography on anti-Jewish representations in Christian art is vast. The works that inform my understanding on the topic, besides those just mentioned, are Blumenkranz; Lipton, Images of Intolerance; Lipton, “The Jew’s Face”; Katz; the edited volume Beyond the Yellow Badge, from which I particularly used Patton.

18. See V.V.A.A., La Inquisición. Catálogo de la exposición (14). Pereda also identifies a strong Northern influence in one of the two basic currents of Sevillian painting during the last third of the fifteenth century (32–33).

19. Cynthia Robinson explains that Christ’s Passion was “without a doubt the article of the Christian faith that occasioned the most discomfort among the population of Iberian conversos as well as among non-Christians”; believers coming from the Jewish or Muslim faith refused to accept that their God could be hurt or killed (133).

20. For the presence of anti-Jewish Passion scenes in the Northern style in the convent of Santa Cruz in Segovia and Santo Tomás in Ávila, see Caballero Escamilla, “El convento” (1286–7).

21. According to Peters, inquisitorial iconography avoided the scene of burning because the Holy Office was more concerned with “repentance, the concession to legitimate authority, the assertion of truth” than with “the mechanics of physical punishment or execution” (226). On the Catholic side, Bethencourt points out the engraving of an auto-da-fé in Palermo made in 1724 by François Chiché where the execution scene is included (Bethencourt, L’Inquisition 406).

22. For a thorough study of the positive valuation of pain in the late medieval period, see Cross.

23. For the textual sources for the paintings commissioned by Torquemada, see Caballero Escamilla, “El códice medieval”.

24. For emphasis on charity rather than punishment in Dominic of Guzmán’s medieval biographies see Sullivan (53–74). She dwells on the anecdote involved in this painting on pages 56 and especially 60.

25. Berruguete evokes Mary’s role of “chief mediator of Christ’s pain” whose “empathetic suffering was offered for the imitation of [their] audiences,” so prevalent in the North (Rubin, “Gestures of Pain” 88). For the Virgin Mary see Graef; Warner; Bestul chapter 4; and Fulton. For the particularities of Mary in Castile during this period, partly because of the converso situation, see Boon; Robinson; and Rubin, Mother of God (379–85). I understand that Robinson’s forthcoming book Imag(in)ing Passions: Christ, the Virgin, Images and Devotion in a Multi-Confessional Castile, 14th-15th c. will treat the topic extensively.

26. This concern was evident at the burning of Fra Girolamo Savonarola and his two Dominican aids in Florence in 1498. Luca Landucci’s Florentine Diary, a contemporary account of the event, reports that the authorities were so worried about how strikingly like a cross the gallows built for the occasion looked that they ordered the top part sawed off to avoid any resemblance between the friars and Christian martyrs. More faithful to himself than to any official
ordinance, an anonymous artist of the time left for us a painting of the execution in which his sympathy for Savonarola is partly betrayed by his obstinate preservation of a visible cross at the top of the bonfire (Edgerton 137–8).

27. See Bodian (17); Gracia Boix (45); Olmo (112–13 and 298).

28. The only exception is the executioner sitting on the stairs of the scaffold (Figure 11). This figure has elicited divergent interpretations. Scholz-Hänzel sees him as a melancholic character whose demeanor symbolizes the weight of responsibility (“¿La Inquisición como mecenas?” 307). Brown takes his gesture as a sign “of boredom and stifled impatience” (21). In this view, which I share, the executioner would stand alone in dissonance with the surrounding mood, maybe fulfilling the function of highlighting, by way of contrast, the condolatory attitude that links the Marian figure to the future victims. It should be noted that Berruguete includes a similar figure in his Miracle of the Cloud, sleeping on the stairs while Saint Peter performs a miracle. Láinez Alcalá was the first to remark on the bizarreness of the sleeping man, and characterized him as a “Sanchopantian fellow” of Saint Peter (my translation). Láinez Alcalá adds that “if [he] is meditating on the saint’s words, we rather believe that he sleeps in all tranquility” (my translation; all quotes from 90). Recently, Silva Maroto interpreted him as a “human note” inserted in a saintly image (my translation, Pedro Berruguete 192).

29. This mistake is actually also made by Peters, who includes “at the far left, the approving witnesses” in his description of Berruguete’s painting (223). As for public attendance at autos-da-fé, one should be careful of how to interpret the multitudinous participation. Taking it as proof of a general consensus on the Inquisition and its methods could be misleading. The documents that stress such consensus were the relaciones, official records with a propagandistic aim. Also we know that there were incentives to attend such as indulgences, as well as threats to those who did not attend. For this topic see Maqueda Abreu (19–20); González de Caldas (245); Bethencourt, “The Auto da Fé” (158); Lea (3: 214–5); and Vegazo Palacios (79).

30. For Torquemada’s fondness of Berruguete, see Silva Maroto, Pedro Berruguete (136). Alcolea Blanch also refers to the longstanding relationship of patronage between Berruguete and Torquemada in “Pedro Berruguete. Sagrada Familia/Llanto sobre el cuerpo de Cristo” (3). For Torquemada’s later commissions to Berruguete, see Brown (21); Caballero Escamilla, “El convento” (1294–306); Caballero Escamilla, “Las sargas de Pedro Berruguete.” Scholz-Hänzel affirms that the decoration of the building was done between 1482 and 1493, when the church was finished (“Propaganda de imágenes” 67). The altarpieces for the church were probably made between 1493 and 1498, certainly no later than 1499, when Berruguete started working for the Cathedral of Ávila. For the dates of Berruguete’s commissions for the convent of Ávila, see Alcolea Blanch, Pedro Berruguete (3); and Alcolea Blanch, “Pedro Berruguete, pintor en solitario” (122); Silva Maroto, Pedro Berruguete (128); and Marias and Pereda, “Pedro Berruguete en Toledo” (162).

31. For a different view, see Caballero Escamilla, “Los gestos” (11–12). She affirms that this figure (she calls it “a humoristic appendix”) appears regularly in images related to predication. For her, it serves as warning to the friars while also humanizing the scene and drawing the viewer closer. In my view, such inclusion in the context of an auto-da-fé (different in many ways from scenes of predication) completely changes the value of this sleeping figure, even though its appearance in other paintings might have mitigated for some the force of its presence. In this particular case, I believe, it dehumanizes the characters around him and emphasizes the emotional distance between the viewers and the inquisitorial platform. In any case, I believe that Caballero Escamilla’s remarks should be related to the figure discussed in note 28, and not to this sleeping figure at the center of the image.

32. From the first days of inquisitorial activity in the Convent of Santo Tomás de Ávila until 1500, more than 100 people were burned. See Scholz-Hänzel, “Propaganda de imágenes” (71). Miguel Jiménez Monteserín shares my belief about the impact that the first autos-da-fé must have had on the public: the executions – he says – strike our sensitivity and “no doubt must have also shocked those who attended those massive ceremonies, unusual until then.” He also refers to the loss of reputation by the convict’s entire family (565).
Notes on contributor

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Works Cited


