Gothic painting in the Catalan-speaking lands between the 14th and 15th centuries

Rosa Alcoy*
Universitat de Barcelona

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Abstract

Gothic painting in the Catalan-speaking lands evolved over a dense fabric left by 13th century art, which had gradually shed its Byzantine legacies. By the year 1300, the Byzantine model had clearly become a thing of the past, murals were still the primary technique and panel and miniature paintings were beginning to gain ground. Over the magnificent backdrop of the reign of Jaume II, the second quarter of the 14th century became a golden age for the Catalan Gothic and a foundational period for the subsequent painting tradition. The workshop of Ferrer Bassa, who was cognizant of the culture of Giotto and his Tuscan colleagues, received commissions from the court, while the art cultivated in Pisa and Siena was being interpreted by several studios of extraordinary interest in the Kingdom of Mallorca. The Italianising profile of painting survived the bubonic plague (1348), although painters like Destorrents, the Serra brothers, Valldebriga and Llorenç Saragossa were taking numerous of its aspects in new directions. In the last few decades of the 14th century, the expectations of local studios grew and the number of centres capable of producing quality painting multiplied. Barcelona remained prominent with Lluís Borrassà, Guerau Gener, Joan Mates and Jaume Cabrera, but it lost its hegemony as Valencia summoned an indisputable series of leading figures, including Pere Nicolau, Gherardo Starnina, Marzal de Sax, the Gonçal Perises, Miquel Alcanyís and Jaume Mateu, who gave prominence to the international Gothic, which was also practised by the schools and studios in Castellón, Morella, Tortosa, Tarragona, Lleida, Girona, Perpignan and Mallorca. Based on the latest and most significant contributions to the subject, this article will survey the most famous painting from a highly creative period, which takes us from 1300 until the early decades of the 15th century.

Keywords: Gothic painting, altarpiece, mural, manuscript illustration, Catalonia, Valencia, Mallorca, 14th century painting

Just as happened with Romanesque painting, Catalan Gothic painting converged with the new European artistic trends without too much delay. After a trial period when the old traditions remained in place, a solid tradition would coalesce with a rather original personality which would branch out into different schools and embark upon its own pathways in Valencian and Mallorcan painting. To highlight the most important moments in Gothic painting in these lands, its history has traditionally been divided into four main stages: linear Gothic or Franco-Gothic (13th to 14th centuries), Italo-Gothic or the Italianising period (14th century), international Gothic (14th to 15th centuries) and Flemish Gothic, or Gothic with generically Flemish roots (15th century). This is not the ideal place to review the suitability and content of each of these descriptions, nor is it the moment to more deeply explore how the styles are broken down into periods despite the clear complexity found in the major centres in the Catalan-Aragon Crown. However, it is important to appreciate the huge significance of the painting projects during the reign of Alfonso the Chaste in order to understand the subsequent dynamics. The works like those coming from the ateliers of the Masters of Avià or Sixena ushered in the great 12th century Anglo-Byzantine creations while also paving the way for new Roman, Germanic and Franco-Flemish painting models. Upon the groundwork laid by the different tendencies with Byzantine roots, a new stage took shape which was described as linear because of certain stylistic predispositions which stress the contour of the figures and colour in isolation.

Given the time period chosen for this article, we shall focus on the paintings from the second linear Gothic, defined as a specific orientation of the style in 1300 and later. Yet we should not ignore the fact that, within the second quarter of the 14th century, Ferrer Bassa, a painter trained in the new 14th century painting methods created by Giotto and other Italian masters, demonstrated his esteem of the art of 1200, which he displayed at least in the minia-
tures of the Saltiri anglocatalà de París, a work he completed and enhanced. After focusing on the Italianising Bassian and post-Bassian stages and examining their Mallorcan and Valencian alternatives, we shall primarily examine the early international Gothic, a sophisticated art form that absorbed the preceding formulas yet also, in clear confluence with more northern traditions, would spread unbridled within the geographic sphere encompassed by this article. Bearing in mind the earlier tradition, it is not surprising that the Catalan-speaking lands would be fertile ground for welcoming, adapting and showcasing the prime values of this courtly current, which favoured the stylisation of reality and striking chromatic forms.

The linear gothic of 1300

The first stage which fell fully within the Gothic, which was open to all sorts of outside influences, took root in Catalonia, the kingdom of Mallorca and Valencia in different episodes. At that time, the ties were solidifying with northern Europe, where some of the more attractive solutions to the new Gothic would leave their mark, as were the ties with the Occitanian lands, Aragón and Navarra. The linear Gothic shows us a rich, variegated artistic reality which fills most of the 13th century and even stretches into the early decades of the 14th century. Despite certain continuities, the timespan assigned to the linear Gothic enables us to distinguish between the early episodes (early linear Gothic) linked to a gradual abandonment of the Byzantine formulas and the development of an epic subject matter reflecting recent historical events, clearly up-to-date and from the 13th century, and a later period (the second linear Gothic), which after around 1300 fluctuated between courtly stylisations very common to the northern Gothic and a new narrative and formal density which, especially in the Italian centres, led to a purposeful reconquest of the volume of figures and the creation of new concepts of space, with a concomitant adaptation and updating of the preceding painting techniques. Catalonia would remain in dialogue with the southern world, but in those early years of the 1300s, the new developments from the north were what truly came to the fore.

The experiments with the more advanced linear Gothic, or the 14th century linear Gothic, offer us a wide range of significant works in all spheres of painting, although what truly stand out are murals, a creative sphere which had been quite prominently present in the preceding periods but had lost prominence as the 14th century progressed and large altarpieces took over the walls of churches. The painting from the first half of the century shows a highly dynamic scenario in which royal commissions led to the introduction of the major new currents. During the reign of Jaume II (1291-1327), whose first marriage was to Blanca of Anjou, some of the northern formulas which had shaped the avant-garde in the kingdoms of France and England clearly started to penetrate, although one could also note that their expression had been adapted to the Mediterranean setting, where they competed with other models. These trends were visible in multiple productions that help us to understand the importance not only of the major mendicant centres but also of the royal monasteries like Sixena, the world of the Benedictines and Cistercians and the canonical sees. Important remains of a mural still exist in Sant Domènec church in Puigcerdà; with its sophistications and expressive stylisations, it engenders very notable pictorial creations that could be classified within this second linear Gothic. However, they may be nothing other than a vestige of other similar undertakings, most of them lost, in the majority of the Franciscan and Dominican foundations in Catalonia, Valencia and Mallorca. A series of quality creations related to the world of Languedoc and Provence also lead us to the magnificent stained glass windows in the chancel of the cathedral of Barcelona, which were rendered during the time of the Bishop Ponç de Gualba (1303-1334) and show fascinating commonalities with the art of Toulouse.

After around 1300, Mallorca and Catalonia were receptive to artistic expressions linked to Italian painting from the same period. On the island of Mallorca, there is a prominent panel with stories from the Passion of Christ and Franciscan themes linked to Santa Clara convent of Mallorca (Museu de Mallorca); this work has Roman stylistic roots reminiscent of some of the murals in the basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, among other sources. On the other hand, the works and models rendered by the powerful crafters of illuminated manuscripts from the city of Bologna spread in a highly peculiar artistic context. Therefore, the linear period brought to life an art form that pleases us with varied experiments which often give rise to hybridisation, either stylistic or iconographic, based on its main referents. Thus, we cannot fail to mention the Italianising styles, alternative to the discoveries of Giotto and his colleagues, which were manifested in Tuscan art from the studios and schools of Cimabue, Memmi di Filippuccio and Duccio di Buoninsegna. This must be one of the reasons the Giottesque model reached here late and conquered our land, as we shall see, throughout the third decade of the 14th century.

The great books of the Usatges i Constitucions de Catalunya, which outlined the Corts Catalanes (Catalan Courts) and the customs and laws in force, shaped a unique legal discourse which was illustrated by the top miniaturists in the linear and Italianising Gothic. The Golden Haggadah at the British Library in London is one of the richest manuscripts from the period, a Hebrew commission that expands the perspective on the courtly context in which some of the copies of the Usatges were promoted. They shape an exceptional corpus of noble and royal codices which includes books like the one commissioned by the Montcada family, a work which came to be owned by the city of Lleida and is held at its ‘Paeria’ town hall; or the rich example of ms. Lat. 4670 A at the BHF in Paris, with three significant interventions by illustrators,
one of which has been associated with the main master behind the *Golden Haggadah*. In this context, it is appropriate to speak about the linear Gothic workshop of the Montcada family in Lleida, which had an original style that featured freehand drawing, created soft figures and took an interest in borders. After all, over the course of the 1330s and 1340s the new Italian culture was being imposed on the family’s commissions, as well as on the miniatures of the other great legal manuscripts, such as the *Llibre verd de Barcelona* and Gratiam’s *Decretum* of London. We should not forget that Elisenda of Montcada married Jaume II and in her widowhood was in charge of the Clarissan monastery in Pedralbes, founded in 1326, a key point of reference for understanding the development of painting with Italian roots.

The handful of altarpieces that can be dated from the first 25 years of the century are small in size, such as the fragments from Sant Jaume de Frontanyà or the altarpiece of Santa Margarida in Vilobi d’Onyar, which was actually rendered for the cathedral of Girona. We should stress the importance conferred upon murals during this entire period, as can clearly be seen in the ‘Seu Vella’ or Old Cathedral of Lleida and the cathedral of Tarragona, or in towns like Valencia, Perpignan, Puigcerdà, L’Arboç or Terrassa, and as also documented in the palaces and monasteries of Barcelona. Some paintings on wooden panels, including notably the prior’s chair from Síxena (Museu Diocesà de Lleida), also remind us of the versatility of the studios which, in this case, point to some mural remains from the cloister of the monastery of Pedralbes. The panels from Vallbona de les Monges (MNAC), which can be dated from sometime after the 1330s, are the outcome of a controversial commission which gave rise to a two-sided work, despite other viable hypotheses for reconstructing the whole, and a style that reflects the linear Gothic tinged with a rich Italian-Byzantine culture with Tuscan roots that was well-known in Mallorca and quite plausibly in Valencia as well. This current is represented by the stained-glass windows in the leading cathedrals of Catalonia (Barcelona, Girona, Tarragona) and can also be found in the murals in the chapel of the Onze Mil Verges (Eleven Thousand Virgins) in the cathedral of Tarragona. The willows on the Sant Thecla reliquary in the cathedral of Tarragona and the panel depicting the Virgin Mary in Sant Llorenç church in Lleida pose unique problems which lead us first to two wonderful paintings on canvas and secondly to an image of the Virgin Mary which can also be associated with the world of the stained-glass window makers and muralists working in Avignon or Navarra, including Juan Oliver.

**The Bassas and the New Styles with Italian Roots**

The painting that is the most similar to the Pisan and Sienese models, and not foreign to the Franco-Flemish world either, reveals a rich artistic vein in Mallorca, but in this case what predominates is the Italian imprint. A new world of painting unfolded on the island thanks to the productions emanating from the *Mestre dels Privilegis* (Master of the Privileges), an old name that described the prime painting school on Mallorca in the 14th century which encompassed the activity of numerous masters. Even though these artists are difficult to single out given the multiple problems inherent in distinguishing their individual contributions, the Sienese stained-glass window maker Matteo di Giovanni and other painters were working on Mallorca, including primarily the figure of Joan Loert or Lloert (Johannes de Luerts), the author of numerous altarpieces meant for the cathedral of Mallorca. Regardless of whether or not Joan Lloert was the most outstanding of the possible Masters of the Privileges, the fact is that we can witness the development of a fairly coherent style which characterises the second quarter of the century on the island kingdom, with more than one remarkable personality. This world can be seen in stained-glass windows, panel painting, murals and manuscripts, or on several of them together. This style, represented by the Santa Eulàlia and Santa Quitèria altarpieces in the cathedral of Mallorca, must presumably have reflected the centres on the continent, as we can see in some mural fragments from the cathedral of Narbonne and assume for Perpignan and Montpellier as well. The double chapel in the palace of the kings of Mallorca still conserves traces of murals with architectural, calligraphic and plant motifs that prove the magnitude of the lost mural schemes from earlier periods. They may be similar to the ones in the royal chapel of Mallorca or Bellver castle painted by Francesc Cavaller and other masters which the documentation also mentions. The productions from 1300, either murals or painted ceiling beams, must have been preceded by creations similar to works like the ones in Barcelona by the workshop called the *Mestre de la Conquesta de Mallorca* (Master of the Conquest of Mallorca), applied to both religious and civilian themes, which evolved from Anglo-Byzantine forms to forms that are more closely similar to the northern culture developed in around 1300.

The creation of a series of coherent painting schools, grounded upon the activity of powerful studios led by local masters or painters from other places with their own characteristic output, is one of the milestones which would gradually gain visibility in different Catalan-speaking lands after the second quarter of the 14th century, when the arrival of Giottesque Italian styles was the primary phenomenon worth noting. Yet this does not mean to deny that this trend had been anticipated by previous periods, when the limited documentary references do not support the equally scant works that have reached us today.

In this new period, the policy of the Crown of Catalonia-Aragón in the Mediterranean served the process of updating the pictorial language based on direct dialogue with the Italian centres. The relationship was intense and had particular repercussions in the Catalan-speaking
lands within a process that also promoted the trade routes and ties with the kingdom of Naples, without forgetting the Catalans’ opposition to the Genovese and Pisan interests in the most important island locations. Mallorca, Sardinia and Sicily all served as bridges consolidating the traditional artistic ties with the Italian world or creating new ones, especially with Pisa and Naples. At this time of change, plentiful documentation reveals the names of the most brilliant painters and enables us to situate and name a long series of productions either conserved or lost. We learn that the ateliers accepted all sorts of commissions and thus produced murals, altarpieces or illustrated books in the same workshops.

This trend, which still existed in the early Italianising period, shifted after the second half of the 14th century, when the commissions to great altarpiece specialists increased and the world of the miniaturists began to become a more exclusive, closed realm (Arnau de la Pena) which would serve or lost. We learn that the ateliers accepted all sorts of commissions and thus produced murals, altarpieces or illustrated books in the same workshops. This trend, which still existed in the early Italianising period, shifted after the second half of the 14th century, when the commissions to great altarpiece specialists increased and the world of the miniaturists began to become a more exclusive, closed realm (Arnau de la Pena) which would produce interesting works yet ones that were less ambitious than the major commissions from the previous period.

As is logical, a highly relevant exception which reveals multiple activities should be taken into account, namely king’s painter Ramon Destorrents, a miniaturist as well who in 1361 was even commissioned to paint a sphere constructed by Ramon de Planes with the themes of the zodiac, the planets and the constellations. In its late stages, the modalities of the linear Gothic, which still adhered to the world of the parishes and some canonical worlds, tended to coexist with the creations generated by the art derived from Giotto and other Tuscan painters, which the court promoted with its commissions. The Italian model might have been a hallmark for the shoemakers’ chapel in the cathedral of Barcelona, for the shoemakers’ chapel in the cathedral of Barcelona, the stylistic relationship with the panels in the Almudaina and the Barcelona set clearly demonstrate that the Bassas’ intervention in the Mallorcan altarpiece was not negligible. Therefore, in the design and facture of the Mallorcan altarpiece, we can detect the Bassas’ intervention and corroborate the fame that Arnau earned in his father’s studio as a painter of altarpieces and illuminator. What is more, the quality of the set on Mallorca is added proof of the acknowledged importance of Ferrer Bassa’s workshop during the early years of the reign of Peter the Ceremonious.

However, for many years the only documented work by Ferrer Bassa was the murals in the Saint Michael chapel in Pedralbes, commissioned for the first time in 1343 but not finished until 1346, after the contract was renewed and signed the same year. The particularities of these paintings, which came at the end of the painter’s career, had distanced the expert critics from the main codices illuminated by the workshop, with which no strict correspondence had been established, not even a chronological one.

Fortunately, the discoveries made in the last few decades have enabled us to reconsider this point of view and tend to integrate the Bassas’ works into a diversified range of options within a dynamic atelier, from which we cannot exclude the commission from the Clarissans or illuminated books either. There are clear ties between the murals and the panel depicting the Coronation in Bellpuig, a dense work in its Italian referents and only known today through black and white photographs, despite the fluctuations in facture due to the workshop. Even though it had given rise to the invention of an anonymous artist,
the Coronation can be regarded as a crucial item in Ferrer Bassa’s catalogue of works, just like his miniatures in the Saltiri anglocatalà de París, the Maimònides de Copenhaguen and part of the Llibre d’hores de Maria de Navarra, in addition to the severely damaged remains of an altarpiece of Saint Paul, plausibly identifiable as a commission from the Montcada family, a Man of Sorrows known by photographs and several other fragmentary expressions which remain today.

The Llibre d’hores de Maria de Navarra is doubly interesting because it interplays the art of Ferrer Bassa with that of his workshop and shows us the personal pathways he traversed, without ignoring his coordination of complex works. The same can be said of the Morgan Polyptych in New York, a portable altarpiece devoted to the joys and sorrows of Mary in which Jesus is the main figure, which shows the subtleties of which these masters were capable in around 1340-1345.

Analysing Ferrer Bassa’s training leads us to the main Tuscan and Adriatic schools. We should not lose sight of the fact that the resemblances with the Coronation of Bellpuig led works by Urbino or in the Mombaroccio sanctuary to be attributed to him. In the painter’s history, which is ridden with uncertainties, we cannot omit the fact that Giotto and his colleagues were active in Naples in around 1328-1332, a city that might plausibly have been a stage in Ferrer Bassa’s journey around Italy at a time near his return. Alternatively, it is fairly clear that his younger collaborators also necessitate an analysis of eve-

Figure 1. One of the images of the Saltiri-anglocatalà de París. It is a work by Ferrer Bassa, the Catalan representative of post-Giotto art with a northern influence as well.

Figure 2. Miniature work by the Mestre de l’Escribà (Master of the Scribe), Usatges of the ‘Paeria’, or town hall, of Lleida. Alfonso the Magnanimous opened the Courts called in Monblanc in 1333.
rything that happened in the non-Florentine Tuscan style by Duccio, Simone Martini and the Memmis and the workshops active in Pisa. Pisan painting and illuminated manuscripts, not to mention the crucial importance of its sculpture, explain the oeuvre of the Mestre de l’Escrivà (Master of the Scribe) of Lleida and, based on the creations of this wonderful painter, the output of the Catalan Master of Baltimore, who is directly linked to the Bassas for more than one reason.35

The 1340s must have been the time when these new directions were gaining momentum, which requires us to consider the proximity of Avignon, where Simone Martini and his more talented colleagues, including the Mestre dels Angels Rebels (Master of the Rebel Angels), beckon us to survey the discoveries from one of the top workshops of the period. The school we refer to as Bassian created a powerful, unique image for Catalan painting in the second quarter of the 14th century. Works like the Saint James altarpiece at the Jonqueres monastery in Barcelona (Museu Diocesà de Barcelona), or the Saint Mark or Saint Anianus altarpiece, or the Saint Anne and the Virgin Child panels from the Almudaina altarpiece (Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga of Lisbon) give us a sense of the models of courtly extraction that were the most highly valued and followed by subsequent ateliers. The Catalan triptych by the Master of Baltimore reveals a master similar to the Bassas who might plausibly have taken over finishing the main altarpiece in Santa Maria de Poblet, a great work from which panels are conserved in Barcelona (MNAC) and the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge. This project must have coloured the royal pantheon that Peter the Ceremonious promoted, which took shape in the 14th century Cistercian monastery.36

The death of Ferrer and Arnau Bassa, probably because of the bubonic plague, left a major void that would primarily affect the discourse of court painting. Nonetheless, the Bassas had created a school of their own and left several working disciples, which prevents us from positing a radical break. In any event, we should not underestimate the interpretative problems posed by the fact that royal commissions and other types of orders merged whose stylistic and iconographic schemas were adapted to new needs and context. After 1350, we can imagine a renewal of the spheres and destinations of the orders, which pivoted around two main areas: Ramon Destorrents’s atelier and the Serra brothers.

**Painting after the black death**

The Black Death of 1348 affected Europe and European art in general: the death of the leading masters is one unquestionably important reason, but we should also note in affairs of change the suffocation of some trends and the imposition of a different view of reality. Some of the previous formal experimentations regarding space were halted, and there was a tendency to create more synthetic, abstract episodes articulated so that they would quickly

**Figure 3.** Mural from St. Miquel chapel in the Monastery of Pedralbes (Barcelona) by Jaume Ferrer Bassa (1346). Jesus is being abused after being condemned by Caiaphas and before his death on the cross.
reach a public that was supposed to be able to easily appreciate the essential meaning of the images. This process arose without sacrificing the symbolism and the articulation of several complex programmes that enabled worship to grow and resized and expanded the circles devoted to the main figures in the parade of saints. This is a pathway not bereft of exceptions, and yet nonetheless it conferred more density on liturgical and symbolic parameters at the expense of narrative aspects or the cumulative experience in other dimensions of the system of representation.

Ramon Destorrents’ atelier took off where the Bassas’ left off, and we already know that he was commissioned to complete several royal altarpieces that had been left unfinished. As a master skilled in all fields of painting, it is difficult to define Destorrents’ art, and his pictorial language tended to resemble that of the early Serras, given that Pere Serra was indeed an apprentice in his workshop between 1357 and 1360. His intervention in the Almudaina altarpiece, the predella or the panel devoted to Saint Onuphrius and the hermitages, conserved in the cathedral of Barcelona, perhaps a work begun by the Bassas and finished in Destorrents’ atelier, in addition to several richly illustrated manuscripts such as the *Breviarí d’amor de Londres* and some miniatures in the *Pontifical de Narbona*, are all key factors in connecting his output with the catalogue of the so-called *Mestre de Rubió* (Master of Rubió), the author of the large altarpiece depicting the Coronation in Mare de Déu de Santa Maria in Rubió (*in situ* and the Museu Episcopal de Vic). Destorrents’ painting and that of his workshop, as complex as the facture of the London *Breviari*, shapes an original stylistic profile that can be distinguished from that of the Serras without entirely giving up the Bassian propositions which ground- that can be distinguished from that of the Serras without certain powerful French currents. 41 In his creations, we closeness with Avignon and again the rising influence of the century. However, Destorrents also shows glimpses of his openness to Avignon and again the rising influence of certain powerful French currents. 41 In his creations, we can detect the attraction he felt towards Matteo Giovannetti from the city of the Popes, without losing sight of the brilliant school of painters and miniaturists in Paris. These Parisian works, as they headed towards Normandy or the English-speaking world, also recommend a comparative study of the creations of the stained-glass window maker Guillem de Letumgard, visible in Tarragona and especially in the cathedral of Girona.

The courtly milieu must have been the core of the Serras’ inspirations when they took the younger brother, Pere, to the workshop of the king’s painter, Ramon Destorrents. The start of the workshop that took shape in the atelier of Francesc Serra (1350-1361) is not at all clear; numerous theories coexist regarding its personality, but beyond these issues we must posit a progression of his ambitions and reach over the land which diverge from the initial discourse. 42 The fact that Francesc Serra’s atelier could plausibly accept a commission from Henry of Trastámara, the bastard brother of Peter I of Castile, is also one way of re...

leasing Destorrents and concentrating him on the commissions from Peter the Ceremonious. 44 The development of the atelier, despite occasional connections with the world of the court and the enigmatic Bartomeu Bassa, did not end up being centred around the court, and its work was instead more prodigious in the context of the cathedrals, parishes, canonical churches and monasteries, creating altarpieces of renowned sweep and interest. 45 Jaume Serra and (1358-1390) Pere Serra (1357-1406) were the most famous of the brothers, with an attractive personal output that can be established based on large documented works. The Resurrection altarpiece in Sant Sepulcre in Zaragoza (1381) by Jaume, and the altarpieces depicting the Holy Spirit and Saints Bernard and Bartholomew in Manresa by Pere (1394-1395) enable us to discern the individual contributions of these painters in a later era beyond the output of an atelier which encompassed all of Catalonia and other areas within the Crown. Altarpieces like the ones in Sixena monastery (MNAC), the ones devoted to Stephen in Castellar del Vallès and in Gualter (MNAC), and productions like the ones meant for Tortosa, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Abella de la Conca, Sant Llorenç de Morunys and once again Sant Sepulcre in Zaragoza shape a vast catalogue which must be joined by a series of important fragments conserved in different museums and collections, such as the panels in Palermo, Syracuse and the Annunciation in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, in addition to vestiges of a large altarpiece of Christ and the Virgin Mary found in Curullada (Museu Diocesà i Comarcal de Solsona) 47 and an admirable panel devoted to Christ before Pontius Pilate conserved in the Museu de Vic, in addition to other remarkable panels in the Museu Maricel of Sitges. We are able to reconstruct the scenario because enough works are conserved, and those that remain reveal the coherence and desires of the period. However, we must still undertake a study of the whole and a critical revision of the established catalogues.

From Barcelona, the Serras dominated the second half of the 14th century as the most productive and influential atelier of the period. In fact, the workshop left an important mark on Valencia and Roussillon as well, where the members of the Baró family worked, 49 as well as on masters who, like Jaubert Gaucelm, had been trained with Pere Serra according to an apprenticeship contract from 1393. Yet we should not lose sight of other painters working in Catalonia in the 14th century, including the authors of the Our Lady of the Star altarpiece in the cathedral of Tortosa, Joan de Tarragona and the so-called *Mestre de Santa Coloma de Queralt* (Master of Santa Coloma de Queralt). 50 In Valencia, figures as disputed as Llorenç Saragossa and Francesc Serra II reveal a particular Italianism with offshoots from the Barcelona school, which left room for other painters and after 1400 must have featured in a prolific, different end of an era en route to a revamping that stormed onto the scene with undeniable force.
Despite this, the Serras were not the only prominent masters in 14th century Barcelona. In addition to the painters who furthered their careers in Valencia and Castellón, we should also mention Pere de Valldebriga, originally from Aragón and possibly the author of the Annunciation altarpiece or the Saint Gabriel altarpiece in the cathedral of Barcelona,\(^52\) which is sometimes attributed to Lluís Borrassà. We should also mention Francesc Comes, who was working in Mallorca\(^53\) and may plausibly have been from Valencia, and we can trace other Mallorcan creations whose facture is not always identical, such as the world shaped by the Master of Bishop Galiana, resembling Pere Marçol (1362-1410),\(^54\) whose activity should be joined by that of yet other painters working in Girona such as Joan Filell, Miquel Font, Ramon Gilabert and Joan Daurer,\(^55\) who signed various altarpieces. Valldebriga, who had an atelier in Barcelona and hailed from Montsó, became prominent on the Catalan scene after 1368 and remained active until 1406. His painting, which took shape in contributions alien to the Serras’ school, reached as far as Lleida and Aragón and once again leads us to look to the Italian centres until a effortless convergence with the early international Gothic, as the work of Pere Serra would also achieve.

**A Glimpse at the First International Gothic**

While the demand rose and the works multiplied following the schemas of a 14th century Italianism that was drawing close to its end, Pere Nicolau (doc. 1390-1408) became one of the spearheads of the new painting cultivated in Valencia, where his stylised, evanescent shapes created a school. The city became a prime centre for altarpieces\(^56\) where masters of diverse orientations and origins congregated, including the Florentine Gherardo Starnina, the creator of reflective, ponderous art over a fabric of Giottesque roots, and the German-Flemish Marzal de Sax, or Sas, who was expressive, bold in his approaches and masterful with colour.\(^57\) They were joined by Jaume Mateu, the nephew of Pere Nicolau, the presumptive Gonçal Peris and Gonçal Peris Sarrià,\(^58\) Miquel Alcanyís and Guerau Gener, with their own, always multi-coloured, impetuous styles suggestive of fantastical worlds, limited to subjects related to religiosity and to the demands of the day, yet with an admirable potential and artistic brilliance. They were joined by a powerful Italian tradition with a spirit more similar to what we find once again in the great French-Flemish and Germanic courts.\(^59\)
The international Gothic created fascinating artistic currents that were articulated by the different workshops within the Catalan-Aragonese Crown in a profitable dialogue that took place both on the continent and at different sites around the islands. Paradoxically, given the plethora of local workshops, the international Gothic is one of the times of strongest cohesion among the different painting schools in the Catalan-speaking lands. This sense of unity emerged over the backdrop of affinity with the different European schools, which obligates us to consider the major contributions to painting visible in the best illuminated manuscripts from the period. For example, it is easy to see the exchanges between the world of the Valencia and Barcelona illustrators in a record of connections that confirms what can also be seen in the world of altarpieces. The proposals from the second Trecento, still heavily borne by the Italian stylistic model, were left behind as the often shocking or unexpected approaches of the great international paintings gained ground. In Barcelona, the Trecento cycle concluded without an acute stylistic crisis, especially if we bear in mind the prime role of Lluís Borrassà and the message of continuity promoted by some of the collaborators in Pere Serra’s atelier, such as Pere Vall and Jaume Cabrera, who became famous heads of ateliers in this new period of the Gothic. Joan Mates, too, seems to have been trained in this context, but his career led him to cultivate a more intrepid style in his shapes which resembles that of some Valencian masters and the stained-glass maker Nicolau de Marai.

Having survived the destruction wrought by the Black Death (1348-1350), and after a period of partial changes, the international Gothic reinforced the separation of specialities yet intensified collaborations between artists and led to a stage known for its brilliant, spectacular results which gives total priority to the altarpiece in all its possible formulations: painting, sculpture or mixed. Regardless of whether it was through the Catalan, Valencian or Mallorcan schools, these structures serving religious needs came to the fore as the preferred medium for Gothic painting, although we should not forget the prime role of Lluís Borrassà and the message of continuity promoted by some of the collaborators in Pere Serra’s atelier, such as Pere Vall and Jaume Cabrera, who became famous heads of ateliers in this new period of the Gothic. Joan Mates, too, seems to have been trained in this context, but his career led him to cultivate a more intrepid style in his shapes which resembles that of some Valencian masters and the stained-glass maker Nicolau de Marai.

Starting in the waning decades of the 14th century, there was an intense proliferation of local painting schools with considerable artistic importance. After 1400, some of the major Barcelona and Valencia ateliers had created unique profiles within the new current and even managed to project themselves all over the land, but we cannot deny the competition from the ateliers that cropped up in other places. New individuals with character sprang up, and painters and stained-glass makers from elsewhere in Europe, marked by the milieu from which they hailed, even reached the main centres. Nicolau de Marai and his workshop updated trends within the Barcelona school and then projected their output to other places around Catalonia. Even though it did not lose importance, Barcelona did lose its hegemony in a period when Valencia became the nerve centre of Gothic painting, while other workshops active in the archbishopric of Tarragona or the bishoprics of Lleida, Girona, Tortosa, Castellón, Perpignan, Elna and the City of Mallorca accepted important commissions. Each zone had its own masters and workshops with characteristic circles that interacted with each other and multiplied, and even sometimes linked up with the worlds of sculpture and gold-work as well. While the Borrassà clan remained active in Girona and a school was created in Lleida with two key figures, Pere Teixidor and Jaume Ferrer, the painting workshops along Spain’s entire Mediterranean coast kept up intense correspondence which did not marginalise inland centres and workshops but did reveal the preponderant currents and sources throughout the entire vast coastal and island region. Painters like Guerau Gener and Bernat Despuig concatenated different Valencian and Catalan workshops during a stage when Valencia was germinating one of the most powerful painting schools in the international Gothic. Altarpieces were still the main output of the ateliers, and the bishoprics of Barcelona, Lleida and Tortosa and the archbishopric of Tarragona were fed with local and foreign commissions.

Lluís Borrassà reached Barcelona from Girona in the 1480s in the midst of a second Italianising period. He left behind his family workshop, which would remain active in Girona until the end of the international Gothic, where the personality of Francesc Borrassà is also prominent. Lluís’ first stage of activity may have filled the void left by Ramon Desorrents and Llorenç Saragossa, although the Serras’ workshop still continued to operate full speed. The first Borrassà is known thanks to the altarpieces meant for Vilafranca del Penedès in a context which provided him with commissions from the mendicant orders, which were favoured by the monarchs. The altarpiece of the Virgin Mary and Saint George in the Sant Francesc convent in Vilafranca dates from this time, and it fostered contacts with Mallorca and led the freed slave Lluc Borrassà to join the atelier after he had finished his stint on the island upon the death of the head of the atelier. The most famous creations from the Barcelona atelier date from a period which brings us into the 1400s, and they primarily include large hagiographic altarpieces with complex iconography; one of the best-conserved ones is the Saint Claire altarpiece in Vic (Museu Episcopal de Vic), a work that brings us back to the mendicant orders. We should also note the predella from the set meant for Sant Domènec in Manresa and the Saint Peter altarpiece in Terrassa, without forgetting the painter’s notable series of creations for the dioceses of Barcelona, Girona and Tarragona. Borrassà’s oeuvre filled the first quarter of the century while the painter oversaw a complex atelier with an intricate web of relationships with other paintings and workers behind it. A skilled master of colour, Lluís Bor-
rassà stood out for being an effective painter who combined a sound Italianising base with the fresh ideas characteristic of the art of 1400. The quality of Guerau Gener’s mature output is on par; this painter had a short biography and was probably trained in Valencia in the 1390s and momentarily returned to Catalonia in around 1400 to paint the Saint Bartholomew and Saint Isabel altarpiece in the cathedral of Barcelona. His renewed collaboration with the best Valencian painters largely explains the style of the large Marian altarpiece on the main altar in Santes Creus, whose primary parts are conserved in Tarragona and Barcelona.

Barcelona was the home to other ateliers, including the one owned by Joan Mates, a painter who shifted between the glorification of material wealth and an elegant mysticism that can be glimpsed in the commissions received from some nobles and especially the canons associated with cathedrals like the ones in Barcelona and Huesca. Jaume Cabrera was a bit more conventional, but his catalogue is extensive and serves as proof of his success. In Tarragona, the core made up of the circle of Mateu and Pasqual Ortoneda and their family clan is represented by numerous Marian altarpieces, including the large altarpiece in the chapel of Solivella castle and the set conserved in Cabassers. With a radius of action that reached La Segarra and Urgell, Ramon de Mur gained prominence as the author of the large altarpiece in Santa Maria de Guimerà and a panel depicting the Virgin Mary nursing Jesus from Cervera (MNAC). He was a fan of a fairly peculiar colour range that he applied in a highly personal style.

We know that in the last phase of his career, Lluç Borrasà returned to Mallorca, where he was commissioned to paint the central panel in the vision of the deceased Christ in Pollença. After around 1400, the island was revealing different artistic realities articulated within the international Gothic, represented by anonymous painters like the Mestres de Montsió and Santa Eulàlia (Masters of Montsió and Santa Eulàlia). These painters were faithful to the patterns of the new current yet showed a strong Italian dimension that softened some of the harsher dimensions of their style.

Despite the importance of the multiple centres located in the Principality and the islands, when we speak about the international Gothic, Valencia deserves to be spotlighted because of the discoveries by a series of painters who were capable of rendering extraordinarily high-quality works. Indeed, they revived the artistic scene of that city and other places, since their influence can be perceived around the Crown and they received very important commissions from centres outside of Valencia. The larger Virgin Mary altarpiece for the cathedral in El Burgo de Osma and others around Aragón on the borderlands evinced the potential of these painters. With Pere Nicolau at the helm, who was known for being the author of the altarpiece documented in Mare de Déu de Sarrión (Teruel), they broke the moulds of 14th century art still appearing on some of the altarpieces from the late 14th century in centres like Villahermosa del Río. Despite its flaws, the altarpiece in Sarrión, which dates from 1404, shows the sophistication of Nicolau’s art as the indisputable master of contrasting tones and precisely executed details. This art spread to royal productions such as the recently-reconstructed polyptych of the Seven Joys of Mary meant for the monastery of Valdecrist. He was also a creator of surprising looks and attitudes and was capable of extracting the materiality of his figures in order to integrate them into a highly personal world without diluting the visual and narrative efficacy of the scenes, which often show sweeping landscapes. By the late 14th century, the altarpiece of the Joys of Mary, now conserved in the Museo de Bellas Artes of Bilbao, shows episodes of exceptional quality which proved to have a wide radius of influence and revamped the iconographic schemes of the day. The standard depiction of the Virgin of Humility changed patterns after 1400 based on the proposals by Nicolau and other masters working around him. Jaume Mateu (1402-1453) was his nephew and the heir to his workshop, but his figure still remains too obscure, even though he has been associated with a panel in an altarpiece that the painter had contracted in 1430 for the parish church of Cortes de Arenoso in Castellón, and despite the fact that several altarpieces have been attributed to him, such as the Saint Michael altarpiece in the Museu de Belles Arts de Valencia or the Saint Valery altarpiece in the parish church of Vell d’Almonés.

The altarpiece by Bonifaci Ferrer, or the Seven Sacraments (1396-1398), helps us to recall Gherardo Starnina’s presence on the Iberian Peninsula and his ties to Valencia, even though the authorship of this unique altarpiece is somewhat confused as it involves art sources from diverse origins and requires us to consider the Italian’s relationship with local painters, including most importantly Miquel Alcanyis. Starnina’s workshop was also involved in other works, like the predella depicting topics from the Passion of Christ in El Collado d’Alpont, and especially the facture of the panel of the Final Judgement in Munich, whose origin has been the subject of inquiry in many recent studies.

Andrés Marzal de Sax, in clear contact with Germanic painting, was active in around 1390 to 1410 and must have been the main painter of the Saint George altarpiece in the chapel of the confraternity of Centenar de la Ploma (Victoria & Albert Museum, London). This exceptionally ambitious work, in which some of his fellow painters in his atelier also participated, shows all his expressive capacities with a vivid sense of shapes and movement which range from the harsher, more grotesque, tense registers of the martyr to other scenes with the formal softness of the faces of the princess, Saint George and the angels surrounding the no less mild figures of the Virgin Mary and Child. This expressive flexibility characterises the master who, despite his taste for stylised forms, did not dilute volumes and endowed the bodies of his figures with life-
like density. His collaboration with the Catalan Guerau Gener is a fascinating question that affects how we can interpret the Doubt of Saint Thomas in the cathedral of Valencia, a documented panel which should point to the results of the altarpiece that Guerau Gener painted later for the main altar in Santes Creus and which Lluís Borrassà must have concluded after his death. The Saint George altarpiece in Xàtiva, which follows some of his stylistic patterns, has been documented in a recent study.\(^8\) Marzal would remain in touch with the Perises, Gonçal Peris and Gonçal Peris Sarrià (or Peris de Sarrià), and he could not have been unaware of the work of Pere Nicolau or Starnina, although his profile remained independent and confident, influencing Valencian painting and even some Aragonese painters, including the one known as the Mestre de Restacón (Master of Restacón, Zaragoza).

The Holy Cross altarpiece at Sant Domènec church in Valencia (Museu de Belles Arts de València), recognised as the work of Miquel Alcanyís, once again stands out for its precise factura, extraordinary drawing skill and pleasant colouring, which dovetails perfectly with much of what remains visible of the altarpiece of Centenar de la Ploma. Starnina’s echoes are also clear, and allusion to this is necessary when analysing works like the Saint Giles altarpiece and its fabulous fragments conserved at the Hispanic Society of America. Alcanyís was an integrative painter capable of merging a variety of teachings in a technically refined oeuvre with highly original iconographic and stylistic approaches.

The problem of Gonçal Peris has been reframed in recent decades, until the existence of two different painters with the same name has been established. The first was the author of the Saint Mary and Saint Clement altarpiece promoted in 1412 by Bishop Sapera (Museu de la Catedral de València) and it was identified as being by Gonçal Peris. His art seems to be indebted to the ribbing and shadings that emerged from Marzal de Sax’s atelier, although this work achieves a dense, striking majesty that is common to its later counterparts. This stands in clear contrast to the culture and refinement of the Veronica or the Annunciation, a panel with two painted sides attributed to Gonçal Peris Sarrià, who is also attributed the authorship of the Saint Barbara altarpiece (MNAC),\(^8\) a work of extraordinary sophistication and iconographic interest. However, it does lead us directly to the epicentre of the same circle and core painting complex that must have acted in coordination, if needed. The town of Puertomingalvo, which had ties with the bishopric of Turell, takes on particular prominence, as proven by multiple commissions for altarpieces painted by the top Valencian masters of that period.

Antoni Peris, the author of the Virgin Mary nursing Jesus in Santa Maria in El Pego (1400-1405), among other works, cultivated an Italianising style whose Tuscan-rooted values contrast with the output of the Mestre de Cincorres (Master of Cincorres), whose characteristics make his work comparable to Lombardy and the Franco-Flemish world that it harboured. The creamy density of his painting and the clean projection of the sculptural depictions give them a series of specific values that reveal his sources. The debate on the identity of Pere Lembri led this painter to be associated with the wonderful paintings rediscovered in Cincorres, the direct relatives of a lovely altarpiece devoted to the Virgin Mary and Child conserved in the Museu de la Catedral de Barcelona.\(^8\) Later, this identification was revised in favour of the author of the lost altarpiece of the church of Moquerola (Teruel), but the importance of the Master of Cincorres seems to be clear within a framework in which it makes particular sense to recognise the ascendant role of Pere Lembri, a painter who worked in Morella from 1399 to 1412 and then moved to Tortosa, thus expanding the territorial conquests of the first and best international Gothic.

The art that was produced after 1425-1430, which is described as the second international Gothic, had quite a different figurative scene in the Catalan-speaking lands than in the initial years of this style.\(^8\) Bernat Martorell and Joan Antigó stand out in these new times as the protagonists of an international current that was transformed, and despite the excellence of some painters, they were not always able to emulate the great milestones achieved in the decades around 1400. This seems more obvious in Valencia than in Barcelona, which could be explained by the pressure exerted by new models, fundamentally derived from the experiments of the Flemish school, which reached Valencia with great vitality and then radiated out to the entire Peninsula. This, then, showcases the importance of the old tendencies...
which, partially anticipated by some of the best creators in the second generations of the style, introduced the new perspectives that would describe the last era of Gothic painting.

**Notes and references**

[1] There is still the need for a general work that surveys the painting contributions of the Catalan-speaking lands as a whole. Several publications with overviews of the different regions are available, but we have no systematic study that provides a holistic view of the evolution of Gothic painting in these countries within the Catalan-Aragonese Crown, the framework which also reveals constant relations with the Aragonese centres.


[12] A compilation can be found in Marisa Melero Moneo.
Gothic painting in the Catalan-speaking lands between the 14th and 15th centuries


[18] These spaces were richly adorned with paintings which are now lost. See the book: Un palais dans la ville. Colloque international, Perpignan 2013.


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Instituto Camón Aznar (Zaragoza), no. xc (2003), pp. 7-37 and 309-334, among other contributions to a topic to which the author devoted her doctoral thesis (UB, 1988).


[34] G. Goddard King’s theories are surveyed in Rosa Alcoy. "Los referentes de Ferrer y Arnau Bassa en la pintura italiana: hipótesis sobre sus viajes de formación”. In: 20th Annual International Scientific Symposium of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages University of Zagreb, 2nd to 6th of October, 2013.


[37] On this point, we should mention the theories of Millard Meiss, a scholar who closely examined the Catalan painting with more convergences with the Italian styles: M. Meiss. "Italian Style in Catalonia...”, op. cit.


[39] Known thanks to the major contributions of F.-P. Verrié in numerous articles in the 1940s.

[40] In December 2013, the following doctoral thesis was read at the University of Toulouse: Émilie NADAL. Le miroir d’un Archevêque. Etude autor du Pontifical de Pierre de la Jugie (Narbonne, Trésor de la cathédrale, ms. 2).


[50] Each of them has generated a specific body of literature. We refer to the general works already cited.

[51] Within this context, the painter Guillaume Ferrer enables us to establish ties between Ferrer and Teixidor and the Lleida School. See the studies on this topic included in Francesc Ruiz i Quesada (coord.), Pintura II., op. cit.


[54] T. Sabater, La pintura mallorquina..., op. cit., p. 41.


[56] Amadeo Serra Desfilis and Matilde Miquel Juan. “La madera del retablo y sus maestros. Talla y soporte en los retablos medievales valencianos”. Archivo de Arte Valen-
The recent exhibitions that have surveyed different aspects of international painting in the Catalan-speaking lands are important. In addition to the catalogues already mentioned, we should now add: Una memoria concreta. Pere Lembrí. Pintura de Morella y Tortosa (1399-1421), (Castellón, 2004); La luz de las imágenes, Tortosa-Sant Mateu (Castellón, 2005); La impronta florentina y influencia en Valencia. Pintura de los siglos xv-xvi (Valencia, 2007); Espais de llum (Valencia, 2008); La edad de oro del arte valenciano. Rememoración de un centenario (Valencia, 2009); Camins d’art (Alcoy, 2011); Catalunya 1400. El gòtic internacional (Barcelona, 2012).


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[58] Joan Alliaga Morell. Els Peris i la pintura..., op. cit.

[59] A wide repertoire of images can be viewed in the synthesis by Ximo Company. La época dorada de la pintura valenciana (siglos xv y xvi). Generalitat Valenciana, València 2007.

[60] The recent exhibitions that have surveyed different aspects of international painting in the Catalan-speaking lands are important. In addition to the catalogues already mentioned, we should now add: Una memoria concreta. Pere Lembrí. Pintura de Morella y Tortosa (1399-1421), (Castellón, 2004); La luz de las imágenes, Tortosa-Sant Mateu (Castellón, 2005); La impronta florentina y influencia en Valencia. Pintura de los siglos xv-xvi (Valencia, 2007); Espais de llum (Valencia, 2008); La edad de oro del arte valenciano. Rememoración de un centenario (Valencia, 2009); Camins d’art (Alcoy, 2011); Catalunya 1400. El gòtic internacional (Barcelona, 2012).


[66] Francesc Ruiz i Quesada. “Repercussions i incidències del periple pictòric mallorquí per terres catalanes i valencianes”. In: Mallorca gòtica..., op. cit., pp. 21-43.


[75] Tina Sabater. La pintura mallorquina..., op. cit.


[82] The literature on Starnina is quite extensive through other references: Maria Laura Palumbo. “Una tavola miste-
riosamente: il Giudizio Finale di Monaco attribuito a Gherardo Starnina”. In: Rosa Alcoy (ed.). Art Fugitiu..., op. cit., pp. 87-108.


[85] Carmen Nicolau Domingo. L’obrador de Pere Nicolau..., op. cit.


[88] See the bibliography and the contributions in the cat-
alogue: Catalunya 1400..., op. cit.

Biographical note

Rosa Alcoy is a full professor of Art History at the Universitat de Barcelona, the director of the “Grup EMAC. Romànic i Gòtic” since 1997 and the lead researcher in numerous R&D projects. She has served as the Head of Studies in teaching art history (2008-2012) and is currently a member of the Doctoral and Master’s committees in advanced art history degrees in the same department. She was the director of the journal Matèria. Revista d’Art from 2003 to 2009 and once again since 2012. She has been a member of the editorial team and has contributed to numerous journals and scholarly publications. She has been a coordinator of Spain-Italy Integrated Actions (2010-2011) and the network for teaching mediaeval art in Catalonia (MQD 2006-2008). She won the extraordinary doctoral prize (1989) and a grant (FPI), and she worked at the National Art Museum of Catalonia from 1991 to 1993. She is an expert in medi-
eaval painting. In this field, she has curated exhibitions and published books like Pintures del gòtic a Lleida (1990), Joan Mates, pintor del gòtic internacional (1997), El retaule de Santa Anna de la capella del castell reial de Mallorca i els seus mestres (2000) and Sant Jordi i la princesa (2004), and she coordinated the volume Pintura I. Dels inicis a l’italianisme (2005) from the “L’Art Gòtic a Catalunya” collection. She is the co-author of the book of studies published by M. Moleiro on the Saltiri-anglocatalà de París (2006). She has over-
seen the editing of publications including El Trecento en obres (2009), Contextos 1200 i 1400 (2012) and Art Fugitiu (2014), and has contributed to the project and latest volumes of the Corpus Virtrearum Medii Aevi of Catalonia (IEC).