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# DOSSIER

## NECESSARY ACCOMPLICES

BY CARLOS REYERO (GUEST-EDITOR)

# PERFORMING DOUBT: THE ART OF BELIEVING IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

## EL EJERCICIO DE LA DUDA: EL ARTE DE CREER EN LA ESPAÑA ALTO MODERNA

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Guest Author

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### Abstract

If it is true that works of art belong to a context, it is also important to bear in mind that they also help to define it. This dialogic relation, this complicity, as it were, between art and reality, between the object of art and their agents —patrons, potential public and censors— does not always receive the attention it deserves. The present article proposes a model of analysis for one of the most representative aspects of material and figurative culture in early modern Spain: the sacred image. The article problematizes the definition of religious imagery as devotional, and investigates the narrative elements with which images define the religious experience. Placing the medium and not the message in the center of attention —as it is argued in this text— offers an alternative to those explanation models in which the work of art is presented as the reflection (be it spontaneous or censored) of its context.

### Keywords

work of art context; relation between art and reality; religious imagery in Early Modern Spain

### Resumen

Las obras de arte pertenecen a un contexto, pero también son productoras del mismo. Esta relación dialógica, o si se prefiere cómplice, entre el arte y la realidad, entre los artefactos y sus agentes —ya sean sus patronos, su potencial público o sus censores— no siempre recibe la atención que merece. El presente artículo propone un modelo de análisis para uno de los aspectos más representativos de la cultura material y figurativa de la España altomoderna: la imagen sacra. El artículo problematiza la definición de la imagería religiosa como arte devocional,

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investigando en su lugar los recursos narrativos con los que las imágenes definen dicha experiencia religiosa. Poner el medio (y no el mensaje) en el centro de análisis —se argumenta en este trabajo— ofrece una alternativa a aquellos modelos de explicación en los que la obra de arte aparece como el reflejo (ya sea espontáneo o censurado) de su contexto.

### **Palabras clave**

Contexto de la obra de arte; relación entre arte y realidad; imagen sacra en la España altomoderna

CREER — *Latine* credere, asentir con lo que no entendemos o sentimos, propio acto de la fe. 2. En las cosas humanas los que se fían poco de los demás tienen este refrán: «Ver y creer», que en rigor es no creer.

Sebastián DE COVARRUBIAS (1611)

**A VISITOR WALKING DOWN** the northern nave of Segovia Cathedral encounters the life-sized polychrome sculpture of a Roman soldier who directs his attention to the interior of the chapel. The soldier holds a spear in his right hand, while his outstretched left arm guides our eyes to the central scene of the altarpiece of which he is a part and a disquieting smile, almost a grimace, stretches across his face. Even more disturbing, his eyes are half-open, his falling eyelids impeding his complete vision. If we are to follow his advice and look through the grill and into the chapel, we will find a massive relief of Christ's entombment and realize that this soldier jailed between two massive Corinthian columns is none other than Longinus. But what is he smiling at? Is he laughing at Christ? Is this a parody, a self-inflicted moral condemnation? Although neglected by art historians, Longinus' gesture would have been perfectly understood by a sixteenth-century Castilian audience. According to an old medieval legend still popular in the Renaissance, Longinus was blind when he attended the Crucifixion, but when he pierced Christ's chest with a spear to be sure that he was dead, blood and water miraculously poured out of Christ's body and Longinus was healed of his blindness. His aggression produced unexpected evidence: not of Christ's death but of his triumph over it. There is therefore nothing parodic in the soldier's gesture. On the contrary, his half-open eyes and laughter illustrate his graceful recovery of sight and thankful recognition of the blessing that he has received. Longinus' gesture can now be perfectly read as an invitation to follow his own experience: 'Look and see; see and be converted!' he seems to state. Conversion is here dramatized as the performative act of seeing, but seeing is also imagined as evidence of the viewer's conversion. Before moving forward: it is not that the viewer confronts in Longinus a visual example of virtuous conversion, it is that when moving into the chapel, the viewer finds himself in front of a polychrome life-sized representation of Christ's body, a characteristic of Spanish early modern art in front of which he can (at least hypothetically) experience his own conversion.

Since at least the nineteenth century, historians of early modern Spanish art and visual culture have repeatedly emphasized its deep religiosity. These analyses, employing what I would call a 'representational explanatory model,' reduce early modern Spanish painting, sculpture, and especially the hybrid language of polychrome sculpture into simple expressions of belief<sup>2</sup>. According to these studies, images either represent what people believed in the sixteenth century or—in a more

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2. See catalogues from the two important recent exhibitions, BRAY, Xavier (ed.): *The Sacred Made Real. Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700* (London: National Gallery of Art). London, 2009; and KASL, Ronda (ed.): *Sacred Spain. Art and Belief in the Spanish World*, (Indianapolis Museum of Art). Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2009.

sophisticated but still limited paradigm— images were used to educate or discipline religious behavior<sup>3</sup>. Either way, however— whether belief preexists the image, or if it is ‘infused’ with its help in the mind of the viewer— art remains external to the act of belief, becoming either a visual expression of interior (and collective) states of mind, or the vehicle through which other ideological forces control the individual. Paradoxical as it may seem, images are in this model only media for external forces, fluid channels through which religion and power circulate. The possibility that images (and artists) could articulate and therefore intervene in this process, or that the whole process could be jeopardized is ignored. That the process could be manipulated either by the artist or the patron or fail to infuse belief as it was supposed, becoming an empty sign, or as it was put at the time, a sign of hypocrisy, is therefore never considered.

What lies behind this approach is an unproblematic understanding of belief, or, to put it in other terms, a simple and anachronistic identification of faith with belief that precludes images from being anything but reflections of inner feelings. Images in this historiographical model are redundant when not historically unnecessary<sup>4</sup>. This is on at least two different levels. First, it ignores any tension between the act of personal belief and the collective/institutional dimension of Faith as a doctrinal *corpus* deposited in the church, thus discounting its political implications. Second, it blurs the distinction between the cognitive aspect of belief as the acquisition of—or conformity with—a proposition of faith (that Jesus was the son of God, for example), and the individual’s attitude of trust or fidelity towards an object of faith (trust *in* Christ himself). Here this approach simplifies the act of believing. Finally it ignores that, since at least the Middle Ages, Faith had been defined as a virtue. Consequently, Faith had to be formed through practice and because of this, at least as an object of historical research, cannot be analysed in separation of it<sup>5</sup>. While these elements had been central to the theological discussion of Faith since the Scholastic period, they were subjected to new and evolving tensions during the Reformation. Because I would not like to keep the discussion on this theoretical level, I will offer one example.

In 1582, just a few years after the Burgundian sculptor Juan de Juni finished the *retablo* in the Cathedral of Segovia that we have just seen<sup>6</sup>, the Inquisition interrogated another artisan with the same northern provenance for expressing unorthodox opinions regarding the nature of faith. The scene took place in a tavern in Madrid, where a certain Anton Duay—the culprit— was with one Andrés de Marquina

3. Cfr. *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Rome, 1981.

4. For a distinction between faith and belief I rely on SMITH, Wilfred C.: *Belief in History*. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1977; *The Meaning and End of Religion*. New York, 1991 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1962]. I do not follow him however in this conclusion, vid. *infra*.

5. For a strong claim in this sense, see ASAD, Talal: ‘Religion as an Anthropological Concept’, in *Genealogies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 27–54.

6. The altarpiece is dated 1571. The chapel belonged to the Cathedral’s canon Juan Rodríguez. See the updated monograph of the artist of FERNÁNDEZ DEL HOYO, M.<sup>a</sup> Antonia: *Juan de Juni, escultor*. Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, 2012, pp. 162–164.



(we'll call him 'Andrés'). Andrés recommended that a group of unoccupied women pray with their rosary; for every prayer, he claimed, one soul would be freed from purgatory, as the pope had conceded in a recent bull. Hearing this, Anton Duay expressed his skepticism, invoking on his side none other than doubting Thomas. This is the way the Inquisitor recorded his testimony:

[...] e un onbre que alli estava que le paresçio en el hablar ser françes dijo que el no creia tal que avia menester vello para creello. Y este declarante le replico que en el ospital de la corte avia cuentas de perdones e se publicava y este lo crehia como la santa madre yglesia lo manda y el dicho hombre dijo que si no lo viese que no lo crehia, que dios no avria echo pontifices mas de san pedro e san pablo y este le reprehendio lo susodicho diziendole que estavamos obligados a creher e cumplir lo que el sumo pontifice mandava conforme a la fe catolica y el dicho hombre dijo que este no savia lo que dezia y que tambien le dijo este que quando alçavan la hostia consagrada este la adorava como a dios y hombre verdadero que hera fe catolica que se avia de tener e creher ansi y el dicho hombre franzes dijo heso es otra cosa, mas lo que yo no veo no lo creo que santo tomas es preste juan de las yndias y este le dijo luego querreys dezir ver y creher como santo thomas e dijo el dicho hombre que si que lo que el no ve no lo cree<sup>7</sup>.

[...] and a man who was there, and seemed to be French for the way he was speaking, said that he needed to see it to believe it. And this witness responded saying that in the court's hospital there were accounts of the sins forgiven, and these were published, and that he believed in it as the Holy Mother the Church prescribes. And the above-mentioned man said that if he did not see it he would not believe it, that God had made no other popes than Saint Peter and Saint Paul. And he [the witness] responded that we were obliged to believe and comply with what the Pope ordered according to the [Roman] Catholic Faith. And I also told him that he did not know what he was saying, and that in the elevation of the consecrated host we adore [Him] as God and real man, and this was [part of] the Catholic Faith and had to be accepted and believed this way. And then the French man said [to me]: 'That's another thing [!] But what I don't see I don't believe. That Saint Thomas is Prester John of the Indies'. And then I [Andrés] said to him: 'I imagine that what you want to say is *see and believe like Saint Thomas*'. And then that man [Anton] responded: 'Exactly, that whoever does not see, does not believe'.

This dialogue reveals some of the tensions and paradoxes inherent in the concept of 'belief' in sixteenth-century Spain, some of which are more apparent than others. It might be worth beginning by noticing the unquestionable fact that here belief and faith were discontinuous religious experiences, and thus elements we should consider separately. At least one of the interlocutors (Anton) thought that he could have faith in the Church and still have reasonable doubts in its teachings. In fact, both Anton and Andrés expressed no reservations regarding the Eucharist (for which they used the term 'faith'), but still had very different understandings of how they should believe in it, or, to put it in more general terms, of the relationship

7. AHN, Inq. Leg. 206, 18. Anton de Duay, flamenco, entallador, vecino de Madrid. [Madrid, 7/5/1582]

between personal belief as an act of will and the faith of the Church to which they belonged as baptised Catholics.

Of course this was nothing new. Doubt in itself was probably as much a human experience in the Middle Ages as it was in post-Reformation Europe. It was the consideration of faith that was changing, as religious belief was subject to new intellectual, political and social challenges<sup>8</sup>. While philosophical distinctions between faith and religious belief might be condemned to failure<sup>9</sup>, it is out of the question that in post-Reformation Europe belief was progressively redefined in terms of doctrinal confession. As religious conflicts dismembered Christianity's unity, the 'formal, official, public, and binding statement of what is believed and professed by the Church' acquired a new relevance<sup>10</sup>. This brought an increasing strain between religious belief as a subjective state of conviction (what in scholastic jargon received the name of *fides explicita*) and the expression of religious belief in the adherence to a communal Faith (*fides implicita*). As the example we are now considering proves, the gap between the two was not only institutionally intervened, but, at least in the territory of the so-called Catholic Monarchy, also closely policed<sup>11</sup>.

A good example of these tensions comes from the same dialogue we have been considering. For as much as Andrés and Anton might have coincided in their unquestionable submission to the Catholic Faith, they completely disagreed in their understanding of how faith was related to personal belief. Interestingly enough, the two protagonists of our story expressed their views through the same narrative available: the story of Doubting Thomas from the Gospel of John. At the same time, they interpreted this episode in two very different and incompatible ways. Moreover, as we will see, Andrés and Anton's understandings of the story represent only two of three possible interpretations ventured in this age of 'uncertainty', defined, as one recent author puts it, by an anxious quest for 'certainty' that took place across confessional borders<sup>12</sup>.

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8. FLANAGAN, Sabina: *Doubt in an Age of Faith. Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century*. Turnhout, Brepols, 2008. See also the material collected in ARNOLD, John H.: *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*. Oxford UP, 2005. For Spain, only particular studies exist. See for example, EDWARD, John: 'Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria circa 1450–1500', *Past & Present*, 120 (1988), pp. 3–25.

9. A recent and clarifying review of the conflicting positions of NEEDHAM, Rodney: *Belief, Language and Experience*. 1972; and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, is Malcom Ruel, *Belief, Ritual and the Securing of Life. Reflexive Essays in a Bantu Religion*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 36–59. I thank Yonatan Glazer-Eytan for the reference.

10. This is oftentimes defined as a 'propositional' dimension of belief, *fides quae*, belief 'in' something, as opposed to the more intrapersonal aspect of Christian faith as trust (*fides qua*). For the quotation, Jaroslav PELIKAN offered an impressive account of this in his latest *Credo. Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. Yale UP, 2003. See especially, pp. 53–92.

11. The distinction between *fides explicita* and *fides implicita* to which we are now referring is in urgent need of a non-confessional study for the Early Modern period. For the Middle Ages I have found especially helpful, VAN ENGEN, John: 'Faith as a concept in Medieval Christendom', in *Belief in History*, Th. Kselman (ed.), London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1991 (19–67), pp. 36–ss. And JUSTICE, Steven: 'Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?', *Representations* 103, 1 (2008), pp. 1–29. This is a major division between Catholic and Reformed understanding of Faith, as illustrated in WÜSTENBERG, Ralph K.: 'Fides implicita revisited – Versuch eines evangelischen Zugangs', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49 (2007), pp. 71–85.

12. SCHREINER, Susan E.: *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*. Oxford UP, 2012.

## DOUBTING THOMASES

With this shifting historical scenario as our context, the two positions expressed by Anton and Andrés can be related to conflicting positions in the understanding of the relationship of belief to faith. In order to make sense of the dialogue, first of all, one must acknowledge Andrés and Anton's complete misunderstanding of each other: while they both evoked the famous Doubting Thomas episode, the story meant two quite different (at some points even opposite) things to them. One of the two might sound more familiar to the reader. For the 'rabelaisque' Anton Duay, Thomas' act of introducing his fingers into Christ's wound signified that only if he/they had a sensible piece of evidence, he/they would be willing to accept a statement as true. For this reason, he asked to see the bull to which Andrés was referring. Anton amplified his observation with some drops of irony, remembering the popular association of Thomas with the legendary Prester John of the Indies<sup>13</sup>. According to a well-known medieval legend the relic of Thomas' hand was kept in his mythical kingdom, where it periodically 'flourished' but, what is more important, every time a successor of Prester John had to be elected, the relic would designate the new candidate by stretching his finger and pointing to him<sup>14</sup>. Not any more a credulous man, only facts would make this artisan believe in such a fabulous story. We could say that Anton Duay thought of himself as being as 'skeptical' as the apostle. Like Rabelais —whose Pantagruel ironically marries the mythical Prêtre Jean's daughter— Anton thought that if something was not self-evident, a proof should be provided if he was to believe it<sup>15</sup>.

While Anton's understanding of the story of Doubting Thomas seems to be in harmony with an emerging scepticism, an erosion of belief that we usually identify as part of a secularizing process<sup>16</sup>, Andrés, did not read Thomas' doubt as existing in contradiction to his faith. This does not mean that he misread the passage<sup>17</sup>, but because he wouldn't take 'doubt' as an independent form of inquiry, he only emphasized the outcome of the apostle's gesture —his acquisition of faith through evidence—, considering doubt as an element intrinsically dependent of faith. Andrés' interpretation of the Gospel of John is crystal clear: '*see and believe* as Saint Thomas' ('*ver y creher como Santo Tomás*'), were his words.

Andrés' understanding of doubting Thomas' gesture will most probably be doubly alien to the modern reader, whether religious or not. If the reader is not

13. This is of course an ironic remark: Saint Thomas' body was supposed to be buried in the Kingdom of Prester John. According to a Medieval legend, each new 'Prester John' was appointed after a ceremony in which a procession of candidates was made around the relic of his body until Thomas' hand (the same one that had been introduced into Christ's wound), opened to point to the elected. See SÁNCHEZ LASMARÍAS, Elena: 'Edición del Libro del Infante don Pedro de Portugal de Gómez de Santisteban', *Memorabilia* 11 (2008), pp. 1–30. The book was very popular in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, and was published in 1515, 1547, 1563 and 1596.

14. Cfr. n. 6.

15. Cfr. FEBVRE, Lucien: *Le problem de l'incroyance au 16e siècle. La religion de Rabelais*. Paris, Albin Michel [1942], 1968.

16. Not certainly leading to a secular world, as the context of our story proves.

17. See for the problematic historical interpretation of the passage, MOST, Glenn W.: *Doubting Thomas*. Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass., 2005.

religious, he would likely agree with Anton; if religious, he might be puzzled by Andrés' assumption that Thomas' gesture of doubt did not compromise his faith, but supported or confirmed his belief. He might also be confused by the accompanying implication that faith is not the object of an interior act of belief —one whose reasons do not go beyond those of the heart, as Pascal most famously put it— but, instead, that the dynamics of faith imply finding evidence for belief, as in this specific case through sensorial experience<sup>18</sup>.

If we are to accept that Andrés' position was not completely irrational or inconsistent, it is necessary to read it first through the eyes of the understanding of faith that had been inherited from the Middle Ages. First of all, it is important to consider that, since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, theologians had brought faith as close as possible to reason, defining it in cognitive terms as an act of the intellect. Faith preserved its status between opinion and science; it could not achieve certitude of particulars (one's own salvation, for example, was beyond its reach), but it was also the intellectual act by which the individual had access to Truth through revelation<sup>19</sup>. This gave faith, as well as the act of Christian belief, an objective quality. There could not be such things as different faiths: if it was Faith, it was true<sup>20</sup>.

In fact, this is often the way that scholastic theologians interpreted the Doubting Thomas story. For Thomas Aquinas, for example, the apostle's gesture illustrated the discontinuity of 'vision' and faith<sup>21</sup>, and, consequently, of faith and science (whether he did or did not touch Him is another story; what is out of the question is that he saw Christ resurrected). In agreement with what St. Augustine had said before him, the important thing in this story, at least for Aquinas, was that Thomas 'saw' one thing, but 'believed' another<sup>22</sup>. This is the formula against which inquisitors would have most probably tested Antón's error: considering doubt as something that would not have questioned the quality of Thomas' faith but had it fortified instead. Diego de Simancas' popular Inquisitorial guide (first published in 1552) might have helped resolve this specific case:

and in this way Our Redeemer said to Thomas, as he was not willing to believe [*credere*]: because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed be those who did not see and believed. As if he had said: So you believe. [But] because you have seen and have touched

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18. On this process of 'privatization' of faith I am indebted here to WIRTH, Jean: 'La naissance du concept de croyance (XII<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles), *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 45, 1 (1983), pp. 7–58. For reflections on his proposal see for example, CAVAILLÉ, Jean-Pierre: 'Les frontières de l'inacceptable. Pour un réexamen de l'histoire de l'incrédulité', *Les Dossiers du Grihl*, misse-en-ligne 9/11/2011, consulted 26/12/2011. MOTHU, Alain: 'De la foi du charbonnier à celle du héros (et retour)', *Les Dossiers du Grihl*, misse-en-ligne 6/12/2010, consulted 29/12/2011.

19. My understanding of Medieval concept of 'faith' comes fundamentally from DULLES, Avery: *The Assurance of Things Hoped for*. Oxford UP, 1994, esp. pp. 33–ss. VAN ENGEN, John: *op. cit.*, pp. 19–67. WIRTH, Jean: *op. cit.* HAMM, Berndt: *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety*. Leiden, Brill, 2004, especially, 'Why did 'Faith' Become for Luther the Central Concept of the Christian Life?', pp. 153–178.

20. *Summa Theologiae* 2.<sup>a</sup> 2.<sup>a</sup>, q. 1, art. 3.

21. The Gospel's words, it should be remembered here, refer to sight but not to touch: Jn 20, 29, 'Quia vidisti me Thomae, credidisti!'

22. *Summa Theologiae*, 2.<sup>a</sup> 2.<sup>a</sup>, q. 2, art. 4.

[*palpasti*], you're doing nothing extraordinary. Blessed be those, and be their faith remunerated and prized, who have not yet seen me but still believe in me<sup>23</sup>.

However: are we to identify Andrés' wording with Aquinas' thought? I think not. What Andrés said was not that Thomas faced the paradox of having his faith contradict his senses; what he said is that the sense of sight provided him with external evidence of the object of his belief. This of course did not make him a heterodox. On the contrary, Andrés just limited himself to acknowledging that while the testimony of the senses could not offer him certitude, it did offer credibility. This space of credibility was not only consistent with the cognitive dimension of faith mentioned above, it was also destined to be one of permanent negotiation with reason as we will soon see. Just as the stories in the Gospels were made by eye-witness accounts, Thomas' personal experience of seeing and maybe even touching Christ's resurrected body reinforced the authority of Scripture. Of course, this understanding of the story was not just the most popular way of telling the story in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain;<sup>24</sup> it was the message implicit in a large part of the visual illustrations of this passage<sup>25</sup>. Again, in the words of the same Diego de Simancas: Catholic Faith is infallible; it is rooted in divine revelation and cannot fail, but it is also confirmed [*confirmata*] by innumerable miracles, by Scripture, as well as by the testimonies of Scripture and sacred witnesses<sup>26</sup>.

Once placed in this perspective, it becomes clear that 'doubt' played an important role in the reasoning of both the sceptical Antón de Duay and the Catholic Andrés. But doubt appears at different moments in their arguments: for one of them, before belief, for the other, as a way to support or complement a faith that, even if rooted in perfect revelation, had been given to human's imperfect understanding. Both their attitudes express complementary poles in the complex and gradual undermining of the medieval concept of *fides*, in which Faith came to be defined in terms of revelatory certitude and, paradoxical as it may seem, belief entered the realm of uncertainty and 'doubt'<sup>27</sup>. Anton de Duay's use of the Doubting Thomas episode illustrates this point perfectly; Sebastián de Covarrubias' (1611) definition of *creer* introducing this article is also self-explanatory: '*seeing is believing*, which, strictly speaking, means *to disbelieve*' [*Ver y creer*, que en rigor es *no creer*']. Finally,

23. SIMANCAS, Diego de: *Institutiones Catholicae*. Valladolid, 1552, xxviii, 'De Fide Catholica', ff. 16–16v. For faith's 'imperfection of knowledge', see *Summa Theologiae*, 1.<sup>a</sup>-2.<sup>a</sup>, q. 67. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, III, d. 23 (PL 192).

24. Alonso de Villegas' very popular *Flos Sanctorum* (1588) for example explicitly interprets the passage in relation to John's first Epistle: 'Lo que vimos y lo que tocaron nuestras manos, de esto damos testimonio y anunciamos' (1 John 1). I cite from the edition of Barcelona, 1794, p. 72.

25. The pre-caravaggiesque material put together by Glenn W. Most (*Doubting Thomas*, pp. 155–214) seems to offer though a double way of visualizing the passage. If some Late Medieval and Early Renaissance artists made Thomas look to the wound where he inserts his finger—therefore insisting on the phenomenal experience—others put his eyes in His radiant spiritual face as his finger sticks into his carnal body (Dürer, for example, in the *kleine Passion*, 1511). This I would argue, dissociates sight from touch identifying the former with faith, and the latter with sensorial experience.

26. *Institutiones Catholicae*, f. 96 v.

27. Wilfred C. Smith: *op. cit.*, p. 60.

it is important to remember, that these different positions did not only clash in the intellectual minds of educated readers, they did so in the midst of the taverns.

## FAITH AS EVIDENCE

There were therefore at least three possible interpretations of the same story, two articulated by the participants in the discussion, and a third one that we have identified in more scholarly (in this case inquisitorial) sources. With this in mind let us now return to our altarpiece. To which of these models does the story of Longinus belong? To both Antón and Andrés, I would argue. The story of Longinus is one of faith, the drama of the conversion of an unbeliever. According to sixteenth-century Spanish devotional literature, Jews forced Longinus to pierce Christ's breast with his lance so that they could be assured of his death. Longinus' act had an unexpected outcome, however. It did not prove Christ's death, but his miraculous triumph over it: as the lance entered into his body, blood and water flowed out of the wound<sup>28</sup>. The legend existed in a continuous tradition since at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century in both texts and images. Both visual and textual accounts agreed that Longinus was blind, sometimes only partially blind, and that he was cured at the foot of the Cross. Literary tradition attributes Longinus' healing to drops of blood that sprinkled into his eyes or flowed down the staff of his lance to reach his hands and later his eyes. Visual tradition instead presented his experience of seeing the blood and water pouring out of Christ's dead body as the cause of his healing. Each follows the conditions of its own medium: the texts respect the order of events, with Longinus' healing resulting from his physical contact with Christ's blood (he could not have seen the miracle if he was blind); images, for their part, simultaneously present the miracle and the healing, turning instead to the viewer to connect the two through his own experience of the image itself. Unlike texts, they invite the viewer —at least potentially— to reenact in the picture Longinus' experience of his conversion.

The 'visual' nature of the miracle was made eloquent in many different ways. In one 15<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish manuscript, for example, Longinus' recovery of sight is equated to that of the brazen serpent that Moses erected in the dessert so that anyone bitten by a serpent, just by looking at the sculpture, would be healed (Nm 21)<sup>29</sup>. The comparison equates conversion with a process of spiritual healing and frequently appeared in Spanish literary and visual sources at the time our *retablo* was carved. But in order to fully understand the structure of these specific set of images we need to look into the history of how they originated.

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28. See for example, *Vita Christi Cartuxano*, trad. Ambrosio Montesino, Salamanca, 1623, pp. 313–314. The legend appears first in Spanish literature at the *Poema de Mio Cid*. See FRADEJAS LEBRERO, José: *Los evangelios apócrifos en la literatura española*. Madrid, BAC, 2005, pp. 405–442. For the trope of his blindness and its artistic consequences, PREIMESBERGER, Rudolf: 'Berninis Statue des Longinus in St. Peter', in *Antikenrezeption im Hochbarock*, Gebr. Mann Verlag, Berlin, 1989, pp. 143–153.

29. Cfr. John 3, 14. I refer to Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. 649. *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, Belgium 1435–45.

Despite the inflation of Christian imagery in Western Europe since the Late Middle Ages, Faith was still consistently defined in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as belief in something for which there was no (visual) evidence<sup>30</sup>. The major source for this was Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb II, 3): 'Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not' (*Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*). According to Martin Buber in this double formula 'the Jewish and Greek concepts of faith are joined together'<sup>31</sup>, but without finding any possible synthesis: Paul brought the latter dimension of 'proof' or 'demonstration' (ἔλεγχος 'argument,' in the Vulgate translation) to complement the trust in God for salvation which Buber identified as the major component of the Jewish faith<sup>32</sup>. It was, however, this latter cognitive —and therefore confessional— element of recognition or obedient acceptance of truth that would shape a distinctive understanding of the Christian faith from the time of Paul until the present. Faith had not only its object in Christ as revealed in Scripture, but also in Scripture itself as the primary historical testimony that made this same faith 'credible'.

It is interesting how little art history has explored the connections between Christian iconography and this dimension of the Gospels as testimony for faith, remaining in this way completely blinded to the significance of such images as the one we are now trying to understand<sup>33</sup>. Testimony designates the act of testifying, but it is not limited to reporting what is seen or heard. In Paul Ricoeur's words:

The eyewitness character of testimony ... never suffices to constitute its meaning as testimony. It is necessary that there be not only a statement but an account of a fact serving to prove an opinion or a truth. Even in the case of the so called 'testimony of the senses' this counts as 'testimony' only if it is used to support a judgment which goes beyond the mere recording of facts. In this regard testimony gives rise to what Eric Weil calls the 'judiciary' [David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan trans.]

I do not have the time here to explore this 'judiciary' element in all its complexity. For the moment, let me just emphasize that it was this testimonial dimension of the Gospels —the most important source for Christian iconography— that is at the root of such images as the one that we are now considering. As Ricoeur makes clear, one of the peculiar dimensions of the act of witnessing in the Gospels is its close relationship to the public act of confession. If the language of the Gospels

30. Most famously in Augustine: 'Quid enim est fides, nisi credere quod non vides?'

31. BUBER, Martin: *Two Types of Faith*. New York, MacMillan, 1951, p. 37.

32. Analysis of 'Faith' in the New Testament, necessarily inflects the Catholic/Reformed perspective of the writers. See for a more 'fiducial' reading, Rudolf Bultmann & Arthur Weiser, *Faith*, Bible Key Words from KITTEL, Gerhard: *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*. London, Adam & Charles Black, 1961. Catholic analysis emphasizes instead the cognitive component of New Testament's faith. I rely on the excellent summary of PIÉ-NINOT, Salvador: *La teología fundamental*. Salamanca, 2002, pp. 175–192.

33. For the semantics of 'testimony' and the rest of my discussion I am indebted to RICOEUR, Paul: 'L'herméneutique du témoignage', *Archivio di Filosofia (La Testimonianza)*, 42 (1972), pp. 35–61. English translation by David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan. There is Spanish translation in *Fé y Filosofía. Problemas de lenguaje religioso*, Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2008, pp. 109–136.

depends on witnessing as it had been used in both the medical and historiographical realms of the Greek tradition<sup>34</sup> —insisting on the reliability of something that is being testified with the experience of the sense of sight— Scripture reformulated this same trope by providing it with a new prophetic and eschatological meaning<sup>35</sup>. In order to understand its artistic consequences, it is important to emphasize that this did not mean giving up on the forensic and ‘autoptic’ roots that testimony had in that tradition but to amplify its semantic content.

In the Gospel of Luke, witnessing takes on a narrational emphasis, famously introduced as the narration of those who had seen with their own eyes. In the Gospel of John, however, this same trope is pushed in a confessional direction. Here, testimony is understood simultaneously as an act of witnessing and confessing<sup>36</sup>. It is therefore not a coincidence that it is in the Gospel of John that we find the source for the iconography of Longinus, and also for the very same words that Andrés captured in the inquisitorial trial that we have been examining. Eye-witnessing in John uses the Greek term μάρτυς/μαρτύρια. This term appears in the fourth gospel far more frequently than in the Synoptic Gospels (47/77 and 30/37 times, respectively), an indication of the importance the author gave to instilling belief in his readers. In some cases, testimony comes from those who witness Christ’s Passion, while in other cases it comes from the Beloved disciple himself. This use of testimony in John’s gospel uses the logic that ‘seeing’ is frequently continuous or synonymous with ‘believing’<sup>37</sup>. In one case, the author goes so far as to use the miraculous narrative of the blind man who recovers his sight as a paradigmatic metaphor for conversion (John 9:39). The importance of these narrative strategies has not been the object of any consistent research, but, as I am about to explore, they became extremely important in the construction of the visual discourse of *belief* in early modern Spain.

It is in the Passion narrative that we find the passages most relevant for visual iconography. The first example of the intersection between visual testimony and belief in John happens at the foot of the cross, when they break Christ’s legs and then assure themselves that he is dead by having a soldier insert a lance into his body:

...but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. And *the one who saw has testified, and his testimony is true, and that one knows that he tells the truth, so that you may believe* (John 19:35).

34. LOVEDAY, Alexander: *The Preface to Luke’s Gospel. Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1–4 and Acts 1.1*, Cambridge UP, 1993. The term αὐτόπτης appears 90 times in Greek literature before the Gospel of Luke, 30 in Galen, specifically referring to anatomical dissections, and 22 only in Polybius.

35. Basic reference is here RAHNER, Karl: ‘Theologische Bemerkungen zum Begriff ‘Zeugnis’, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 10. Zürich, Benziger, 1972, pp. 164–181.

36. We are only concerned here with the problem of the literary device. See however LINCOLN, Andrew T.: ‘The Beloved Disciple as Eyewitness and the Fourth Gospel as Witness’, *Journal of the Study of the New Testament*, 85 (2002), pp. 3–26. BYRSKOG, Samuel: *Story as History. History as Story. The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*. Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 229–242. BAUCKHAM, Richard: *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2006, pp. 384–411.

37. PHILIPS, G.L.: ‘Faith and Vision in the Fourth Gospel’, in *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, London, A.R. Mowbray, 1957, pp. 83–96. KOESTER, Craig: ‘Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John’, *Biblica*, 70 (1989), pp. 327–348. BAUCKHAM, Richard: *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 403–405.



Without explicitly identifying the witness with the Beloved Disciple, the text establishes a solid link between the testimony that comes from the experience of eye-witnessing ('et qui vidit testimonium perhibuit') and the resulting act of believing ('... ut et vos credatis'). A famous 8<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Mount Sinai —the earliest known representation of Christ dead on the cross<sup>38</sup>— is the first visual example I know of that highlights this element of the narrative. From the side of Christ's dead body, two clear lines —one red for the blood, another white for the water— flow down in the direction of the Virgin Mary who is standing at the foot of the Cross. John stands at the other side of the Cross, looking in the same direction. Mary's wide-open eyes look to the miraculous stream in dramatic contrast to those of her son, which are completely closed. With her left hand, she unequivocally points to her own eyes, redundantly presenting herself as a witness to the miracle. It is not clear when the act of witnessing transferred to Longinus, whose name is a translation of the Greek word for 'lance,' but he was not first imagined as blind and only in the Late Middle Ages was he dramatically turned into a narrative subject of conversion. At least since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, images present a blind Longinus pointing to his own half-closed eyes as a thin line of blood sprinkles into them. The image invites the viewer to connect the act of seeing with his experience of faith and then reflect on their relation. There is however an important shift in the invention of the blind Longinus: by identifying the Gospel's anonymous witness with a converted soldier images made their own pictorial exegesis. It is in this tradition that we have to understand Juan de Juni's development of the trope in the dramatic *medium* of polychrome sculpture.

John's narrative of the Crucifixion is followed by two more episodes in which seeing and believing are again problematically connected, both of them with dramatic consequences in the visual tradition to be investigated in this study. In John 20:8, John and Peter, having heard from Mary Magdalene that Jesus was resurrected, rushed into the tomb to see it with their own eyes, only to discover that it was empty, the body having disappeared. Only his burial shroud provided proof that the tomb had once been occupied by the Savior. Just a few lines later (20:29), after inviting Thomas to look at his pierced hands and touch his wounded body, Jesus admonished the apostle with the formula that, as we have seen before, would stir so many different interpretations: 'Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'.

Returning now for the last time to the strange dialogue that took place between the French Anton and the Spaniard Andrés in a tavern in Madrid in 1582, it is interesting to note that Andrés used not Thomas' words, but those proclaimed by John at the tomb —'vidit et credidit', 'ver y creher', he 'saw and believed'— to explain the doubting apostle's reaction. It is reasonable to suggest that for Andrés, Thomas' visual witnessing of Christ's resurrected body and John's encounter with the abandoned shroud at the empty tomb had not undermined either apostle's faith, but,

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38. See with updated bibliography, Katherine Corrignan, in *Byzantium and Islam. Age of Transition 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> Century*, EVANS, Helen C. & RATLIFF, Brandie (eds.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2012, pp. 55-56.

on the contrary, strengthened it with the power of those visual signs with which Christians were invited to make their faith ‘credible’.

## CREDIBILITY, DOUBT AND THE ROLE OF IMAGES

In early modern Catholic Europe, and certainly in Spain, images were important sites of *credibility* in the different categories *credibilitas* was understood by theologians: beyond their most obvious capacity to visually translate—or we might better say, interpret—Scripture, images were sites for miraculous occurrences—when they did not become themselves ‘miraculous’; also they could represent, even re-enact ‘relics’—like for example the famous ‘Verónica’; and finally they could become relics themselves if their cult could be traced back to the time of the primitive church—the brushes of one privileged witness, like the apostle Luke, or the gouge of one inspired sculptor like Nicodemus. All of these themes were important ones in the artistic production of Golden Age Spain and frequent tropes of its art theory. Tradition was certainly one of the important sources for the reformation of the Tridentine church and the interest of 17<sup>th</sup>-century artists and patrons in these models went far beyond the acquisition of iconographic *decorum* that has limited current scholarly discussions. Artists intentionally reenacted many of these traditions, either by exploring ideas of authorship inherited from the past or—and this has received almost no attention—by considering medieval cultic images as models for their own production of artistic wonders. In the most interesting cases, however, images involved both issues of cult and authorship simultaneously. The importance of these images can be measured by the increasing expansion of their cult as well as by resistance to them, both in Spain—as for example Inquisitorial evidence tells—or when their cult transcended Spain’s political borders. Against a historiographic tendency that separates the history of images and the history of art as two opposed poles in a segmented teleology, I would argue that an urgency to reconsider art’s primordial goal as one of creating (saintly) images is a defining characteristic of seventeenth-century Spanish art<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, it was in the effort to define art as ‘image-making’ that some of the most interesting self-reflective experiments in art theory were elaborated<sup>40</sup>.

At the same time, however, this is just half of the story. As the example of Andrés and Anton demonstrates, ‘credibility’ in post-Reformation Europe increasingly depended on the quality of evidence provided. As much recent scholarship has demonstrated, in such realms as the defense of relics and canonization processes<sup>41</sup>,

39. BELTING, Hans: *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*. Munich, Beck, 1990.

40. PEREDA, Felipe: ‘The Veronica According to Zurbarán: Painting as *figura*, and Image as *vestigio*’, in Ch. Götler & S. Dupré (eds.), *Artificii Occulti: Knowledge and Discernment in the Artistic and Scientific Cultures of Early Modern Europe*. Brill, 2014; also as, ‘La Verónica según Zurbarán: La pintura como *figura*, la imagen como *vestigio*’, en TAUSIET, María (ed.): *Naturalezas Figuradas*. 2014.

41. See for example for the case of relics the studies collected in BOUTRY, Philippe, FABRE, Pierre Antoine & JULIA, Dominique (eds), *Reliques modernes. Cultes et usages chrétiens des corps saints des Réformes aux révolutions*, 2 Vols., Paris, EHESS, 2009. For the use of autopsies in canonizations, VIDAL, Fernando: ‘Miracles, Science, and

the Catholic Church did not only look for arguments in the authority provided by Tradition but also stepped forward. To meet the challenges presented by critics, whether those of Reformed or dissenting minorities, they looked to historical textual criticism, from archaeology to biblical exegesis, and turned to the support offered by experimental procedures in the natural sciences, such as medical autopsies. It is interesting to remember, for example, that Counter-Reformation exegesis on the Doubting Thomas episode responded to Calvinist condemnations of Thomas' 'epistemic faith' by paradoxically insisting in the certainty that the apostle acquired through his senses<sup>42</sup>. One of the consequences of this was, for example, a new attention given to modern relics like the Holy Shroud in Turin that could better respond to new epistemic criteria. Whether by looking to the tradition and history of the Church, or by supporting and testing their reliability with new forms of evidence, the truth of relics, of miracles and of images in between them remained always limited to 'moral certainty'<sup>43</sup>. The object of faith and the act of belief were still beyond the certitude that could be provided by the senses. For this reason, I would argue, images' Baroque potential for credibility and its artistic persuasiveness is as much a testimony of faith as it is, at least obliquely, one of doubt. The works of art that we have considered here can be seen as responses to doubt, not only as affirmations of faith. By being dramatized as a reply to a lack of belief, they recognize its own existence; implicitly, but also explicitly. Returning for the last time to the Deposition at the Cathedral of Segovia, it is only by looking at the whole range of reactions to the scene that we arrive at a complete understanding of the artist's intention. Opposite the laughing Longinus, also struggling to escape from between two Corinthian columns, is another soldier. Modeled on the Classical Laocoön, this last soldier twists in anguish, his mouth deformed in a grotesque expression of pain, his eyes open. This second soldier, like Longinus, witnessed the miracle at the foot of the cross<sup>44</sup>. Unlike Longinus, however, he failed to believe.

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Testimony in Post-Tridentine Saint-Making', *Science in Context*, 20, 3 (2007), pp. 481–508. PARK, Katharine: 'Holy Autopsies. Sainly Bodies and Medical Expertise, 1300–1600', in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, HAIRSTON, Julia L. & STEPHENS, Walter (eds.), Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, pp. 61–73. POMATA, Gianna: 'Malpighi and the holy body: medical experts and miraculous evidence in seventeenth-century Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 21/4 (2007), pp. 568–586. See for a more general description, CERUTTI, Simona & POMATA, Gianna: 'Premessa', apud *Fatti: Storie dell'Evidenza Empirica, Quaderni Storici*, 108/3 (2001), pp. 647–663.

42. MOST, Glenn: *op. cit.*, pp. 149–154.

43. Cfr. DEAR, Peter: 'From Truth to Disinterestedness in the Seventeenth Century', *Social Studies of Science*, 22 (1992), pp. 619–631. SERJEANTSON, R.W.: 'Proof and Persuasion', in *The Cambridge History of Science*, 3. *Early Modern Science*, PARK, Katharine & DASTON, Lorraine (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 132–175.

44. Just like Peter, for example, had accompanied John to the empty tomb having a very different experience.





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