

# *Possessing the Sacred: Monarchy and Identity in Philip II's Relic Collection at the Escorial\**

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*Traditionally, Philip II's massive relic collection preserved in the palace-monastery of the Escorial has been interpreted as a testimony to the Spanish king's devotion to the cult of saints, and a proof of his support for the principles of the Tridentine Church. This essay explores some of Philip II's more political and symbolic uses of relics, and studies their role in the construction of a monarchical, spiritual, and national identity in sixteenth-century Spain.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The most famous anecdote about King Philip II (1527–98) and his passion for relics is the one told by the Hieronymite friar José de Sigüenza (1544–1606) in his famous history of the foundation of the Escorial, included in his monumental *Historia de la Orden de San Jerónimo* (1605).<sup>1</sup> Sitting up day and night at her father's bedside during his never-ending agony, the Infanta Isabela Clara Eugenia had devised a trick to keep him awake and lucid so he could fight off the forces of evil and welcome death with open eyes and a cleansed soul. Knowing his love for

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<sup>1</sup>A new edition of parts 2 and 3 of this history of the Hieronymite order was published in 2000. Sigüenza's account of the foundation of the Escorial takes up books 3–4 of the third part (Sigüenza, 2:429–726). All further references will be made to this third part, citing each time the page number of the most recent edition, along with the book and chapter number(s) in parenthesis. On Sigüenza, see Blasco Castiñeyra, 1988 and 1999; Lazure, 1996; Olivari; Rubio González; Campos y Fernández de Sevilla's introduction to Sigüenza, 1:7–43.

relics, whenever she sensed that pain was overtaking him and saw that he was losing consciousness, she would take a severe tone and shout: “Don’t touch the relics!”, as if someone had entered the room and approached the collection kept on his bedside table. Immediately the dying monarch would open his eyes and look around to see if anyone threatened his cherished treasures.<sup>2</sup>

As the official chronicler and theoretician of the Escorial, Sigüenza is the person who perhaps best captures the essence of Philip II’s political and religious project. He conveys the building’s profound symbolic nature in a powerful and evocative narrative which gradually established itself as the canonical interpretation of the Escorial. According to Sigüenza, the king knew his relic collection so well that, when the keeper of the relics (Sigüenza himself) came to present him with small reliquary altars during his final illness, Philip knew when the monk had omitted to have him kiss every single relic and immediately called him to task. According to Sigüenza’s testimony, when the king went to the Escorial in his healthier years he would frequently inspect his relics and jealously watch over them, harassing the keeper with questions and taking pleasure in constantly reordering them.<sup>3</sup> The sovereign’s love for this collection went so far that, in an effort to imitate the holy martyrs and transfer their thaumaturgic power to his own person, he asked, during his final days, to have relics corresponding to his aching limbs directly applied to his open wounds. He claimed that the presence as well as the contact with a part of Saint Sebastian’s knee, one of Saint Alban’s ribs, or the arm of Saint Vincent Ferrer, soothed his pains and helped him prepare for the sufferings to come.<sup>4</sup> Thus it could be said that, while mapping a geography of royal suffering, the relics of the Escorial were thought to contribute to the regeneration of the king’s body.

The obvious apologetic and hagiographic intentions that lay behind these stories should not stop us from believing that Philip II’s passion for relics reflected his genuine belief in their efficacy. He did, after all, credit the relics of the monk San Diego de Alcalá with saving his heir don Carlos from a nearly fatal head injury, and he did resort to what we would call today “clinically tested and proven” relics to cure his bouts of gout.<sup>5</sup> But this does not necessarily mean that Philip II was uncritical when it came to

<sup>2</sup>Sigüenza, 541 (3.20).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 513 (3.16), 519 (3.17), 534, 536–37 (3.19), 543 (3.20).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 542–43 (3.20); see also *ibid.*, 534 (3.19).

<sup>5</sup>On San Diego de Alcalá, see Case; Recio Venganzones; Villalon, 1995 and 1997. On the relics sent to the Escorial for the king’s ailments, see Archivo del Palacio Real (APR), leg. 1816, entrega 6, testimonio 22, pages 391–92; 6.24.392. The main archival source for studying the Escorial relics is twofold. On the one hand are the entry volumes, divided up

relics. He knew full well that a good number of the relics that were sent to him were probably fake. When one day his secretary Cristóbal de Moura suggested manufacturing relics in order to bribe a courtier, the king answered: “there shouldn’t be any shortage of relics and head bones there [in the Escorial] or anywhere else, so that it won’t be necessary to forge some, something I found quite amusing even if I do believe that those that are brought from Germany, or at least a good number of them, are indeed counterfeit.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Philip II himself contended, it was not so much the authenticity of the relic that mattered as it was the devotion that one had for the saint represented by it: “They won’t fool us; we don’t lose our merit before God by revering his saints in bones, even if they are not theirs.”<sup>7</sup> Such circumspection forces us to search beyond the simplistic portrayal of Philip as an obsessively pious and devout Catholic king. In view of the considerable amount of time, energy, and money invested over the course of his life in building up his collection, we cannot help but

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into seven *entregas* (deliveries), that span the years 1571 to 1611; on the other are the *testimonios*, a collection of all the correspondence surrounding the acquisition of relics and the certificates of authenticity which accompanied them. The original books of *entregas* are preserved in the Archivo del Palacio Real of Madrid, while the recently edited *testimonios* (see Mediavilla Martín and Rodríguez Díez) are still held at the Escorial: however, I have used an early seventeenth-century copy from the Royal Palace, which provides both the seven entry books and virtually all of the 224 epistolary documents kept in the Escorial in a single volume (APR, Patronato San Lorenzo, legajo 1816). Estal, 1970 and 1998b, describes all this in great detail, but somewhat confusingly. For the study of a seventeenth-century *entrega*, see Rodríguez Díez. To this wealth of official information on the history of the Escorial relics, a series of letters exchanged between Philip II, his secretaries, and donors sheds a different, more informal light on the negotiations and transactions that led to the relics’ repatriation. Preserved in Madrid’s Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (IVDJ), they unveil the hidden intentions of the monarch and his agents.

<sup>6</sup>Morán and Checa, 177: “Aunque no sé si se puedan sacar las reliquias ya de Sanct Lorenzo, pero que de alli o de otra parte no le faltaran reliquias y cabeças de manera que no sea menester componer las que dice, que me ha caydo muy en gracia aunque yo creo que las que traen de Alemania o muchas dellas son asi.” I thank Fernando Bouza for bringing this striking quotation to my attention. Another example of the king’s suspicious attitude toward relics is in Sigüenza, 534 (3.19): in a plea against the flood of dubious relics pouring into Spain from the Roman catacombs, the famous Jesuit Juan de Mariana warned Philip II against his compatriots’ recent “extraordinary desire for finding and even on occasion inventing new names of relics.” In this 1597 pamphlet Mariana advises the king to proceed with discernment and circumspection in a matter as capital as the cult of saints, by adding prudence to devotion and knowing how to stay away from deception, superstition, and heresy. Cirot, 51–63, examines Mariana’s attitude toward relics, and edits the pamphlet (now in the British Library, with a copy in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid [BNM], mss. 12968, no. 12); Bouza Álvarez, 59–71, merely summarizes the Jesuit’s argument.

<sup>7</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 4: “No nos engañaran, pues no perderemos nuestro merecimiento delante de Dios reverenciando a sus Sanctos en los Huesos, aunque no sean suyos.”

question the role played by relics and the place given to them in the conceptual architecture of his monarchy's most emblematic monument.

The image of Philip II dying in the Escorial in 1598 while surrounded by an army of relics has powerfully shaped our perception of the monarch as a zealous defender of Catholicism and as a champion of the Counter-Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Claimed by his advocates as well as by his detractors — either to illustrate his devotion to the saints or to prove his idolatry and his superstition — this aspect of the Spanish king's already complex and mysterious personality has persistently puzzled historians for the past four centuries. So far, the few studies dedicated to the king's impressive collection of nearly 7,500 relics, gathered (starting in the 1570s) from the four corners of Europe, have only served to demonstrate and reaffirm his profound respect for the Catholic Church and the cult of saints, as well as his wholehearted support for the principles of the Council of Trent.<sup>9</sup> Even by those who have pondered the signification of the immense *ex voto* that is the Escorial, and who have tried to understand the motivations underlying its construction, the theme of relics has been treated in a rather conventional way: as the epitome of the Counter-Reformist or Tridentine nature of the monument and its builder.<sup>10</sup>

This article will demonstrate how the acquisition, display, and use of these sacred objects expressed not just religious and devotional, but also specifically royal, needs. Its aim is to sketch some of the functions Philip II attributed to relics, and to study their role in the construction of a monarchical, spiritual, and national identity in sixteenth-century Spain: first as a foundation for the legitimacy of the Spanish monarchy, and second, as a tool for the formation of a collective identity through the Christian past. Through each of these representations, or incarnations, the King of Spain manifested his desire to sacralize the three pillars upon which his temporal power rested: dynasty, faith, and knowledge. Such a concentration of sanctity in a single space leads us to envision the Escorial as the ultimate

<sup>8</sup>Kagan, 1998a.

<sup>9</sup>The vast majority of these works are the product of a single author, Juan Manuel del Estal: see Estal, 1958a and b, 1961, 1964, 1970, 1981, 1998a and b, 1999.

<sup>10</sup>See Osten Sacken, 27–42; Checa, 1993, especially 284–90. Checa suggests some of the avenues explored in this article without, however, drawing conclusions from his insights. He sees Philip's relic collecting as a symbol of his Counter-Reformist piety and of his desire to recover, through the archaeology of Spain's Catholic past, a Christian antiquity (one of Checa's leitmotifs) in order to restore a theocratic monarchy. Unfortunately, in his analysis of the phenomenon Checa does not go much beyond listing and describing some of sixteenth-century Spain's more famous relic entries. For a more political and symbolic interpretation of the Escorial relics as one of the pillars of Philip II's imperial rhetoric, and indeed of his entire system of (self-)representation, see Édouard, 2005, 302–10.

synthesis and grandiose embodiment of Philip's combined religious and political aims, in keeping with traditional historiography — though for altogether different reasons. Thus, if we consider the relic no longer as a mere object or vessel to express one's devotion, but rather as an active instrument of a broader rhetoric of power, as a tool for shaping the king's image and that of the (relatively new) Habsburg dynasty, the incredible thirst for the sacred that animated the Catholic monarch throughout his life and pushed him to erect such a gigantic dynastic reliquary suddenly takes on an entirely different meaning. Indeed, Philip II's collection of relics — a term that did not exclusively refer to bones of saints, but which could also apply to a variety of sacralized objects — served to establish his authority as a Christian ruler, and helped him project a coherent image of himself and his monarchy to contemporaries and to posterity.

## 2. MONARCHY AND RELICS: THE FOUNDATIONS OF A NEW POWER

When he came to power in 1556, Philip II inherited an empire exhausted by incessant wars. Although no one challenged his succession to the crown, it seemed natural that after as decisive a reign as that of his father, the new sovereign would have to establish a certain credibility, inside as well as outside of Spain. His victory in 1557 over the French at Saint Quentin gave him the military legitimacy necessary to build his own reputation. This was essential for the son of an emperor who, in good medieval fashion, had earned his glory on the battlefields of Europe. Yet Philip II never became a great warrior himself. The young king quickly adopted a governing style different from that of his father, looking for new weapons with which to establish his authority. Print was one such tool available to Renaissance princes for their rhetorical arsenals. Relics were another. Brought up in a textual and visual culture filled with emblems and allegories, Philip II quickly showed himself extremely receptive to the impact of symbols and images. The collecting of relics thus fit perfectly within such an elaborate system of propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>On the princely education of Philip II, see Checa, 1993, 19–199; Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, 1999. On Philip II's skillful use of texts and images as propaganda, see Civil; Bouza, 1994a and b (both found in Spanish in Bouza, 1998, 58–94, 134–52); Lazure, 2000; Édouard, 2005, 367: "The question of the nature of Philip II's power can be answered by suggesting that he was first and foremost a 'power in images.' His reign can be best understood through the imaginary and through the metadiscourse on majesty, rather than through a reading of institutions, which amounts to no more than a discourse on order and monarchical right. In this reconstruction of discourse through images, the notion of empire was part of an imaginative world of reference . . . Philip II did not actually hold the title of emperor. He nevertheless managed to impose the idea of a distinctive empire thanks to the discourses of images."

Relics first served as a foundation for the symbolic legitimacy of the new ruler. The palace-monastery of the Escorial, created to commemorate the Saint Quentin victory and the resulting peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), was quite naturally founded under the patronage of Saint Lawrence, whose feast day was celebrated on the day of the battle. Another reason for such a dedication, which is noted by Sigüenza but appears to have escaped the attention of historians, is that the Escorial was first and foremost meant to be a “temple of peace,” with Philip II as its prince. Indeed, we learn from Sigüenza that Saint Lawrence has been considered the patron of peace between Christians ever since the Emperor Constantine sealed the union of Rome with Christianity by constructing a temple dedicated to him.<sup>12</sup> Thus, if the king strove to gather every relic of the Spanish-born saint in an effort to piece together Saint Lawrence’s entire body, it was not only to show gratitude for his military victory, but also to appropriate the saint’s pacifying and unifying virtues.

Sigüenza notes yet another reason for the construction of the Escorial: Philip II’s desire to erect a mausoleum where his body and those of the other Spanish Habsburgs could rest for all eternity.<sup>13</sup> In Spain as in many other European countries, a dynasty often derived its legitimacy from sacralization through the physical juxtaposition of royal and holy bodies in a genuine communion of saints. As royal secretary Antonio Gracián writes in the case of the Escorial, “Saints and kings rest in this church or, to put it best, both saints and kings. Because the saint reigns with God and the king, who serves him in his office, is himself a saint.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, by treating the bodies of his father and family as holy relics to be transferred to the pantheon of the Escorial and placed directly under the basilica’s main altar — a space usually reserved for saints — Philip II wished to appropriate the entire spiritual legacy of the Habsburgs as a cornerstone for his

<sup>12</sup>Sigüenza, 433–34 (3.1). In feudal times, relics were displayed at the signing of peace treaties and at the settlement of territorial disputes, as tangible proof that divine virtue ultimately prevailed over sheer human might. Their role was so important that, according to Bozoky, 1999, 272, they became “genuine substitutes and/or guarantees of sovereignty.” See also Bozoky, 1996.

<sup>13</sup>Sigüenza, 434–35 (3.1). Eire, 341, gives a good sense of the Escorial’s dual nature: “The supreme function of the Escorial was to assert the coincidence of opposites through ritual: not just between the visible and invisible, or the sacred and the profane, but between the temporal character of the kingship embodied by the monarch who resided there and its eternal nature embodied in the royal corpses that lay in such close proximity to the body of Christ (the Eucharist) and the bodies of the saints (the relics).”

<sup>14</sup>Gracián, 1970, 67: “Santos y reyes son los que en esta santa iglesia reposan, o, por mejor decir, todos santos y todos reyes. Porque el santo reina con Dios y el rey, que le sirve en su oficio, santo es.”

still somewhat precarious authority.<sup>15</sup> According to Stephanie Schrader, “Philip’s treatment of Charles as a relic further enables him to co-opt Charles’s life for his own glory. With Charles’s sacred remains under his dominion, Philip capitalized on Charles’s religious sanctity to strengthen his reign as the King of Spain.”<sup>16</sup>

As one of Spain’s first sedentary kings since the beginning of the Reconquista and the heir to a recently established dynasty, the young monarch sought to materialize his authority by carving it in stone. Moreover, after all the upheaval and discontent caused by the arrival of a foreign prince — Charles of Ghent (later Charles V: 1500–58) — and his repeated absences from Iberian soil, his son badly needed to be recognized, not so much as King of Spain, but as a Spanish king. By crafting a new Spanish dynastic ideal, Philip sought to bring his subjects to embrace his

<sup>15</sup>Wilkinson Zerner: I owe this reference to Mindy Nancarrow. The language of Sigüenza’s detailed description of the transfer of royal remains to the Escorial (458–61 [3.7]) likens these long-planned and long-discussed ceremonies to the reunion of holy relics. During the negotiations for their transfer, *guardajoyas* (literally, “keeper of the jewels”: that is, of the royal collections) Hernando de Virviesca, in charge of gathering and ordering the treasures of the Escorial, explicitly referred to the royal bodies as relics (IVDJ, envío 61(II), 59r). In his *diurnal* (daybook), royal secretary Antonio Gracián (Gracián, 1962, 24) speaks of the “Emperor’s relics.”

<sup>16</sup>Schrader, 90. Various elements further attest to the Escorial’s status as dynastic reliquary: Philip II’s intention to turn his palace into a cemetery for his ancestors, one like those created by the early Church for the first martyrs (Sigüenza, 501–03 [3.14]); his boundless devotion to family heirlooms such as his father’s crucifix, which he held on his deathbed and passed on to his son in a symbolic transfer of power (ibid., 547–48 [3.21]); and his addition of the relics brought by his wives and other members of the Habsburg family to his collection. The majority of Philip II’s family relics came from his fourth wife, Ana of Austria, and his sister, Empress María of Austria: see APR, leg. 1816, 1.40–43.293–94, 2.1–4.317–29, 4.15.354–55, 5.4–6.367–69, 6.13.382, 7.10–11.424–25, 7.52.474–75. For the study of the circulation of relics within the Habsburg family, see Jordan Gschwend. Jordan Gschwend and Pérez de Tudela, 14, note that “Relics were viewed as spiritual assets which reconfirmed the family’s identity, especially those associated with legendary owners of the dynasty, such as the emperors Maximilian I, or Charles V. Relics, by their association with former illustrious owners, were thus charged with quasi-mythical significance. . . . Family identity, especially among Habsburg women, focused on the cult of the Habsburg dynasty. Both the presentation and the accumulation of such representative relics, with highly charged associations, professed both a family member’s connection and devotion” — a statement that obviously applies to Philip II as well. The feminine equivalent of the Escorial is the royal monastery of the Descalzas in Madrid, founded by the king’s sister Joanna of Portugal around the same time as the Escorial. The Carmelite convent came to house the relics gathered by the various women of the family, most notably those of the Austrian branch of the Habsburgs, serving also as their pantheon. On this, see Checa, 1997, 101–20 (especially 104–08). In view of all this, the cult of relics can be said to be part and parcel of a certain *pietas habsburgica* that mixed religious piety with dynastic devotion.

rule, to cultivate reverence for his father, and, most important of all, to increase acceptance of his dynasty by inscribing it within a local monarchical tradition. For all these reasons, and in order to express the particular symbiosis between politics and a religion associated with a theocentric notion of monarchy upon which Spanish kings had grounded their power for centuries, Philip II favored continuity and, like many of his predecessors on the throne, chose to build a palace-monastery in which relics, royal household, and dynastic pantheon came together.<sup>17</sup>

But the use of relics as a tool of government was neither new nor specific to Spain. Political strife between medieval rulers often took the form of struggles for relics, and European princes, whether lay or ecclesiastical, constantly sought to secure the assistance of the holy by concentrating relics in often-new centers of political and religious power. This practice not only represented an effective way of increasing personal prestige and asserting one's authority and legitimacy: with time it came to constitute for kings a perfectly natural, and absolutely essential, means of exercising power. The geographic transfer of relics, therefore, came to represent the symbolic transfer of sovereignty, which allowed for the consolidation and sacralization of dynasties, especially new or recent ones.<sup>18</sup> Great medieval relic-holders, such as King Louis IX of France or Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia, fused royalty with religion in a single architectural space to create their monarchy's *locus sanctus*, the most important spiritual and political location in the kingdom.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, the collection of relics and the construction of a chapel directly inside the royal palace to house them — respectively, the Palais de la Cité's Sainte-Chapelle (itself in the shape of a giant reliquary) and Karlstejn Castle — played a central role in sanctifying recently established capitals such as Paris and Prague, and in affirming, consolidating, and reinforcing royal authority.<sup>20</sup> Along with Saint-Denis Abbey and Saint-Vitus Cathedral, these palatial chapels also

<sup>17</sup>These reflections are inspired by Chueca Goitia. For medieval Spanish monarchs, see Édouard, 2005, 289: "The proximity or even the integration of the space of power to the time of prayer had given a sacred dimension to the king's authority, by ensuring the supervision of the Reconquest through the presence of religious orders." Philip II was the first to actually build one of these palace-monastery-pantheons from scratch, since all previous Spanish rulers either built on, renovated, or converted preexisting structures. He was also the first monarch to move bodies in order to erect a royal necropolis.

<sup>18</sup>See Bozoky, 1999 and 2000; Lifshitz; Rollason; Wagner; Wagner and Goulet; Webb, 216–31.

<sup>19</sup>On Saint Louis, see Billot; Jordan; Leniaud and Perrot; Weiss, 11–77. On Charles IV, see Rosario, 1–46; Lugli, 68–70.

<sup>20</sup>As founder of a new dynasty in Bohemia, Charles IV's power was at first quite weak.



functioned as sanctuaries for monarchical glorification and dynastic devotion, as relics — bones as well as personal belongings, or *regalia* — of previous rulers were displayed as part of the crown's inalienable treasure.<sup>21</sup> Relics therefore acted as a tangible sign of the divine approbation of these monarchs' rule, justifying their claims to sacral kingship and providing them with both political continuity and legitimacy. By choosing to house his collection of holy bodies in the Escorial, near the newly created capital of Madrid, Philip II fit perfectly into this age-old tradition.<sup>22</sup> It is tempting to believe that by reactivating this medieval symbolism the Catholic king meant to present himself as the true heir to the imperial idea, as the defender of the faith and the promoter of a *renovatio imperii*, a legacy which had escaped him when the title of emperor officially passed from his father to his uncle in 1556.

Philip II, sensing that a solely temporal power remained all too terrestrial — and therefore incomplete — aspired to capture the sacred energy emanating from his relics to consolidate his own personal power.<sup>23</sup> Within the Escorial itself, relics were placed right at the symbolic junction of the

<sup>21</sup>In the Western tradition, Charlemagne's politico-religious complex at Aachen (which itself took its cue from the Byzantine tradition) remained the original model and the ultimate source of inspiration for any ruler who claimed some form of universal power. Another medieval example, perhaps the next link in this long line of sacred court architecture, is that of Westminster Abbey. On all this, see Chueca Goitia, 21–34; Weiss, 22–25. For early modern examples of Saint-Denis and Westminster's dynastic functions, see LeGall; Ruggiu.

<sup>22</sup>Philip II further proved himself heir to medieval kings when he used relics to reaffirm his political hold over the newly annexed Portugal (1580). He had the body of Saint Mancio, first Bishop of Evora — which was, incidentally, the seat of the Aviz dynasty to which the Habsburg succeeded — brought to the Escorial, on the pretence that he had been born on the Portuguese saint's feast day. In fact, the Bishop of Evora suffered the humiliation of having to travel all the way to the Escorial and beg for a relic of the saint for his own church (APR, leg. 1816, 6.18.387–89). Indulgences were also granted for the worship of an image brought back from the conquest of Portugal and placed in the king's relic collection (*ibid.*, 4.21.361).

<sup>23</sup>For a discussion of the varying notions of sacrality and sanctity in the Holy Roman Empire, see Rothkrug. An anecdote illustrates the close bond that united the Spanish monarchy with its relics: in 1571 Francisco de Borja presented Philip II with a piece of the true cross found during renovations to Jerusalem's Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher. The General of the Jesuits claimed that the relic could prove useful to the king's rule, since it could soothe him and bring him the necessary strength to face the “crosses” that come with government. The monarch accepted the offering and acknowledged the piece of the *lignum crucis*'s alleged efficacy by setting it in the cross used to swear in the princes of Spain: see Estal, 1958a. From the time of Emperor Constantine all the way down to Saint Louis and his successors, the Sainte-Chapelle's most precious relics — the crown of thorns and the pieces of the holy cross — were inextricably associated with monarchy: see Weiss, 11–15.

religious and the monarchical, the devotional and the ceremonial, the private and the public. Indeed, a great number of them were embedded in a giant two-sided reliquary altarpiece that faced both a passageway leading to the royal apartments and the basilica choir.<sup>24</sup> Even in the discursive architecture of José de Sigüenza's history of the Escorial, the description of relics marks the high point of a spiritual itinerary within the walls of the palace-monastery, a physical and spiritual journey that encouraged the visitor-reader to purify his soul as he was progressively lead towards more and more private, sanctified, and inaccessible places.<sup>25</sup> Philip II's personal collection of relics was never meant to be seen by his subjects, except on Saint Lawrence's feast day, during which they were on display for the public. The rest of the year, only members of the extended Habsburg family, as well as princes, grandees, courtiers, bishops, ambassadors, and other foreign dignitaries, were allowed to see them.<sup>26</sup> The primary value of such a collection is therefore to be sought on a more symbolic level, not unlike the function Philip II and his successors ascribed to works of art. In this regard, relics served as an effective instrument of a no-less-powerful rhetoric of majesty and royal authority that found its most accomplished expression in the Escorial. Also, by once again playing upon properties attributed to relics for centuries, Philip II seized another unique opportunity they offered him: the chance to grant new unity to his realms.

### 3. HISTORY, BOOKS, AND RELICS: COMMUNITY AND COLLECTION IN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT

Scholars such as Peter Brown and Patrick Geary have convincingly demonstrated how relics could take on different meanings in different communities, and how they reflected the values that a given society invested in them. Through their presence, relics strengthened the bonds uniting communities, watched over the interests of their owners, guaranteed law and order, and, above all, provided identity and cohesion. When dispossessed of their relics, local populations literally felt powerless and

<sup>24</sup>Checa, 1993, 287; Mulcahy, 1987. For a detailed study of the over forty reliquary altars dispersed within the basilica of the Escorial, see Mulcahy, 1994; Sigüenza, 526, 531 (3.18).

<sup>25</sup>This idea, akin to Teresa of Avila's *camino de perfección*, is further developed in Lazure, 1996, 140–43.

<sup>26</sup>At least this is what can be inferred from San Jerónimo, 123, 140, 167, 267, 337, 352, 393 (for private visits), 423 (for a public exhibition). On San Jerónimo, the Escorial's first chronicler and keeper of the books, see Sáenz de Miera, 233–63; for further mentions of visitors to the Escorial, see *ibid.*, 215–21.

abandoned.<sup>27</sup> In Spain, where the recent political union of the crowns of Castile and Aragon in 1474 had not ended deep-rooted regional allegiances, relics would serve as a powerful instrument of Philip II's ultimately frustrated attempt to fashion a collective identity through a common Christian past. Just as they could help heal the king's material body, they could also contribute to the formation of the monarchy's spiritual body. Already in the 1520s, the identity-giving function of relics had been at play in the conflict that most seriously challenged the authority of the recently-crowned Charles V, the revolt of Castile's *comuneros*.<sup>28</sup> In an isolated episode of this brief but harrowing power struggle between imperial state and municipal government, the custody of a set of relics turned into a significant political issue between the cities of Zamora and Oviedo (which possessed the relics) and the Archbishop of Toledo (who wanted them). Through the control and display of holy bodies, this incident highlights the resistance of cities and local authorities to a centralization of the sacred, in this case to the benefit of Toledo, the crown's largest and most powerful Episcopal see.<sup>29</sup>

Aware of his father's difficulties when it came to dealing with such tensions between center and periphery, Philip II strove to redefine loyalties and to reconfigure the often conflicting relations between town and crown by fostering a new sense of belonging, organized around two interrelated poles: religion and history. Grasping very early on the binding role that relics could play in the construction of his monarchy, the king strove to achieve the spiritual unification of Spain through the systematic repatriation of every saint that shaped the country's religious history.<sup>30</sup> Combined with this relocation of Spanish saints, Philip II also used history to attempt to create a feeling of national unity and to stimulate the sense of divine election already present in sixteenth-century Spanish society.<sup>31</sup> For this, he singled out the two elements of Spain's past — faith and the struggle against heresy, the language and discourse of which could be shared by all

<sup>27</sup>Brown, 86–105; Geary, especially 3–27.

<sup>28</sup>Recent assessments of this crucial, yet relatively understudied moment in Spanish history are in Sánchez León; Diago Hernando; Martínez Gil.

<sup>29</sup>Cooper brilliantly reconstructs the entire episode.

<sup>30</sup>It is interesting to note that in the fourteenth century Emperor Charles IV of Bohemia also strove to gather relics of all the saints culturally and geographically linked with his new territories, in an attempt to integrate the eastern Slavic lands to his western Latin possessions.

<sup>31</sup>Brown, 92: in antiquity, the discovery, acquisition, and accumulation of relics literally sanctified a territory and turned its inhabitants into a chosen people. On messianism in sixteenth-century Spain, see Milhou; Haran, 73–88. On providentialism as the main religious foundation of Philip II's imperial rhetoric, see Édouard, 2005.

Spaniards — most amenable to fashioning a common and unifying identity. And so, after a long period of so-called darkness that had only recently come to a close with the 1492 expulsion of the Muslim invader, history was ripe for rewriting. The reinvention of the Spanish past began with a return to the glorious origins of the country's first evangelization, the Visigothic *Hispania Christiana*, and to the heroic actions of the saints that had preserved this faith across the centuries.<sup>32</sup> Combining religion and history, Christianity and the Spanish character, the antiquities of Spain were, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, chiefly those of its saints. As a tangible link with the past, relics therefore provided an evocative, compelling means of reshaping the Spanish monarchy's relationship to its history and of reweaving a coherent social fabric. As one chronicler puts it, relics had become all the more important since the written memory of Spain's Christian antiquity had all but been lost with the "destruction" wrought by the Moors.<sup>33</sup> In such a context, it is easy to see how the recovery of these precious remnants of Spain's unshakable faith could become a priority for Philip II.

If the (re)discovery in the second half of the sixteenth century of relics from the Iberian peninsula's early Christian era tied into a European-wide interest in history and archaeology, it also formed part of the broader context of Catholic responses to the Protestant appropriation of the Christian past.<sup>34</sup> This Paleochristian revival was perhaps best illustrated by Cesare Baronio's ambitious *Annales ecclesiastici* (1588–1607), whose avowed goal was to establish a direct filiation between the primitive and the Tridentine Church, in which the bodies of saints held pride of place as mirrors of the first Christians' sincerity, purity, and perfection.<sup>35</sup> According to Trevor Johnson, relics, the "silent symbols of post-Tridentine universalism," then became "invested with multiple meanings as new identities and functions were grafted on to them, representing a process of fabrication of sanctity which satisfied the needs of both Tridentine universalism and

<sup>32</sup>On the writing of history in sixteenth-century Spain, see Kagan 1995, 1999, 2004, 2005. See also Fernández Albaladejo, especially 142–59, who argues that in Spain, unlike France, lineage and not dynasty was at the root of the nation. In the eyes of sixteenth-century chroniclers, the Visigoths were the ones who had given Spain its religion, its political system, its unity and continuity, and ultimately its identity. Claiming their heritage was a way to smooth out regional differences and distinctions and give the new Habsburg dynasty (itself of gothic origin) a certain historical legitimacy.

<sup>33</sup>Checa, 1993, 288.

<sup>34</sup>In France, according to Joblin, 138, "relics would above all feed and fuel a genuine spirit of anti-Protestant reconquest. The repossession by Catholics of a space formerly under Huguenot control was almost always marked by a procession and an exhibition of relics." Orella y Unzué is an excellent introduction to the highly polemical context of the time.

<sup>35</sup>Sigüenza, 532 (3.19): "these relics are from saints so old and from that time in which the sincerity and poverty of Christians shined so bright within the Church."

local popular religion.”<sup>36</sup> As Johnson cogently argues for the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Bavaria, relics were primarily used as powerful propaganda tools, essentially to two ends: the refutation of heretics and the construction of a local and national identity. In this spirit, Bavarian princes commissioned an encyclopedia of regional saints that restored what they considered to be historical truth, and created a specific *pietas bavarica* by tying the cult of saints to their own dynastic pantheon.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond its obvious religious and militant motivations, Philip II’s relic collecting can also be related to the formation of early modern princely cabinets of curiosities.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Catholic king’s collections at the Escorial were formed around the same time as those of some of his Habsburg relatives — such as Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, Archduke Ferdinand II in Innsbruck, and Duke Albert V in Munich — who possessed some of Europe’s most impressive *Wunderkammern*.<sup>39</sup> Apart from all

<sup>36</sup>Johnson, 275.

<sup>37</sup>For the informative example of seventeenth-century Sardinia, see Ditchfield. Likewise, images, which were at the very heart of the controversy over the cult of saints, were elevated to the status of relics. Hence, faithful reproductions of the Holy Shroud sent to the Escorial from Savoy and the town of Besançon were worshipped in the same way as holy remains. The distinction between image and relic was further blurred when Bishop Carlo Borromeo had a painting of a miraculous relic executed for Philip II, so that the King of Spain could also benefit from its effectiveness: see APR, leg. 1816, 1.36–37.291–92; 1.51.313–14; 4.19.360. For a brilliant study of painting as *vera imago* (and even as relic), see Koerner.

<sup>38</sup>Relics were, after all, at the heart of medieval ecclesiastical treasures, which have been considered by many scholars as direct ancestors of the early modern collections of *naturalia* and *mirabilia*: see Lugli, 37–72.

<sup>39</sup>Rudolf II was Philip’s nephew, Ferdinand II his cousin, and Albert V (although he belonged to the Wittelsbach family) was married to his cousin Anna, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand I and sister of Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol. Philip II’s collecting practices therefore comprised an added dimension of dynastic competition and emulation. For an overview of the relationship between the Spanish and Austrian branch of the Habsburgs with regards to collecting, see Jiménez Díaz. On Philip’s collections, see Checa, 1997; Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero, 1998; McDonald. On those of his relatives, see DaCosta Kaufmann, 1993 and 1994; Distelberger; Falguières (especially 67–109); Findlen, 1997; Fučíková; Hertel; McCrory; Parshall; Scheicher, 1985 and 1990; Schlosser (chiefly on Ferdinand of Tyrol); Seelig; Toorians. On the collection and circulation of another kind of relics — namely, exotica from the Americas, Africa, Asia, and India — within the extended Habsburg family network, see the exhibition catalogue by Trnek and Vassallo e Silva, and the proceedings of the conference, published in the *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums Wien* 3 (2001), most notably the outstanding essay by Jordan Gschwend and Pérez de Tudela. For this list of great Habsburg and Habsburg-related collectors to be complete, the name of Grand Duke Francesco I de’ Medici, also married to a daughter of Ferdinand I, should be added. On his famous *studiolo*, see Berti; Feinberg; Hamburg; Schaefer. The sixteenth-century Habsburg passion for collecting certainly found one of its main sources of inspiration in the figure of Emperor Maximilian I: see the recent article by Wood.

having been gathered between the 1560s and 1580s, these collections shared a similar universalizing, encyclopedic spirit that aimed to encompass the whole of nature's manifestations, covering all areas of human knowledge in order to better understand, master, and order the universe. As art historian Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann persuasively argues, power and collection were intimately linked in early modern Europe, as the latter embodied or materialized the former. And despite that a collection was only meant to be seen by a chosen few — or perhaps for this very reason — it was precisely from such a display that its owner derived his greatness, reputation, and renown.<sup>40</sup> According to Peter Parshall, it is clear that aspirations of power lay behind the acquisitive drive of the great Renaissance collections: “To bring the world symbolically under control by accumulating art, artifacts, and *naturalia* can be understood as a consistent extension of imperial ambition. This motive is implicit in the idea that founding a great collection enhances the magnificence of the collector, expands the realm of his persona, indeed extends his power over the world by drawing it to him.”<sup>41</sup> In many ways, Philip II's tireless quest for relics of every Spanish saint paralleled the quest for an exhaustive inventory of the world.<sup>42</sup> As an encyclopedia of the sacred and a cartography of the early Spanish Church, the king's relic collection at the Escorial resembled various other projects housed in the palace-monastery, most notably its library.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup>DaCosta Kaufmann, 1993 and 1995. Falguières, 89, refers to Rudolf's *Wunderkammer* in Prague as the “exegetical workshop of majesty.”

<sup>41</sup>Parshall, 183–84.

<sup>42</sup>The inventory established by José de Sigüenza in his chapter devoted to the description of the Escorial relics (662–69 [4.16]) partakes of the same encyclopedic spirit, going beyond mere enumeration, as he himself acknowledges. What he undertakes in this *discurso* is a veritable “saintly anatomy,” literally breaking down and deconstructing the mystical body of the Church according to the rank of each of its members: Christ, the Virgin Mary, the complete bodies of saints, their heads, arms, thighs, knees, and so on. In this spiritual building, Sigüenza assures, each saint played a specific role and each relic represented one of the Church's building stones, the sum total of which, much like the four great pillars of the Escorial basilica, gave “the entire temple an eternal foundation and firmness” (*ibid.*, 536 [3.19]). Sigüenza makes this remark upon noticing that the last relics to enter the Escorial arrived on the feast of Saint Basil, the exact same day as the laying of the base of the basilica's four main columns.

<sup>43</sup>Others included the questionnaires of the *Relaciones topográficas y geográficas*, the botanical expeditions of Francisco Hernández to Mexico, the *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias* by royal cosmographer Juan López de Velasco, the city views of Flemish artist Anton van den Wyngaerde, the triangulation of the Iberian Peninsula by mathematician Diego Esquivel, the so-called Escorial atlas of Spain and Portugal, and the numerous histories of the New World undertaken by various chroniclers. Philip II commissioned this series of ambitious projects in order to assess the full measure his vast possessions. To this end, he ordered his territories inventoried and portrayed, their fauna and flora catalogued,

Located at the heart of Philip II's empire, the Escorial, with its relics and its books, was considered by some to be a true "museum of Christendom."<sup>44</sup> Clearly the king wanted to unite these two meaningful symbols of power — knowledge and religion — within the walls of his palace and the confines of his monarchy. Just as it appeared vitally important to amass relics to protect them from desecration by the heretics (this was the rationale originally used to bring them into Spain from France, Germany, and Flanders), it seemed equally urgent to accumulate as many books and manuscripts as possible to save them from the Protestants. Actually, Philip II's agents responsible for the purchase and acquisition of relics in Spain and throughout the continent were often the same people who simultaneously hunted down manuscripts and bought rare books for the king's library.<sup>45</sup> Already, in the words of secretary Antonio Gracián, a kind of "Noah's Ark" for relics, the Escorial became for court historian Luis Cabrera de Córdoba a "refuge for these books that have fled the countries where Faith and Knowledge are threatened."<sup>46</sup> In an implicit parallel with the role attributed to relics, humanist Alonso Chacón told the Catholic king that manuscripts entering the Escorial came to "swell the arsenal of arms and instruments in his struggle for the defense of the Faith."<sup>47</sup> The analogy between books and relics would be pushed even further when Philip II conducted a countrywide survey of the holdings of Spain's churches and monasteries to form the treasure of the Escorial, in which he asked his bishops for information about books as well as relics. Even the way books intended for the royal library were referred to was reminiscent of the vocabulary used to describe relics. For instance, in his daybook secretary Antonio Gracián, in charge of overseeing the formation of the

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their potential sources of wealth surveyed, and their populations numbered and described. See Berthe; Bustamante García, 1992 and 1998; Goodman, 65–72; Kagan, 1986 and 1989; Mundy (especially 1–27); Parker; and the essays collected in Varey, Chabrán, and Weiner. See also Sigüenza's mention of Hernández's natural history of the Indies (628–29 [4.11]). Shelton, 198, notes (without any further detail or reference) that the famous viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, apparently suggested in 1572 that Philip create a museum of the Americas in the royal palace. For similar initiatives, prior to Philip II's reign, see Bustamante García, 2000.

<sup>44</sup>Findlen, 1989, 68, quoting its seventeenth-century librarian, French Jesuit Jean-Marie Clément.

<sup>45</sup>This was the case with Guzmán de Silva, Philip II's ambassador in Venice, who once sent to the Escorial an astounding shipment of close to 800 relics, along with numerous Greek and Latin manuscripts: IVDJ, envío 61(II), 53–56, 72, 74–77, 268–71, 297–98. See Levin, 189–95; Llamas Martínez, 1998, 893–909.

<sup>46</sup>Gracián, 1970, 67; Bouza, 1988, 97 (also in Bouza, 1998, 184).

<sup>47</sup>Bouza, 1988, 85 (also in Bouza, 1998, 172).

Escorial collections, often discussed both topics jointly, speaking once of “the relics of Saint Isidore’s books.”<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, something in the treatment of the Escorial books indicates that their very nature approximated that of relics. Indeed, for many years Philip II kept four precious manuscripts directly within the Escorial’s great reliquary, venerating them not only for their great antiquity, but also as family heirlooms, since they had been handed down to him from his aunt, Mary of Hungary, sister of Charles V.<sup>49</sup> He did the same with the autograph manuscripts Teresa of Avila bequeathed him upon her death, preserving them in a private relic cabinet (*camarín*) alongside his father’s portable altar and a Roman amphora that was said to have come from the Wedding at Cana.<sup>50</sup> In this same *camarín* the king also kept a lead box with a copy of the texts and a fragment of the relics found at the Sacromonte in Granada, as well as a reliquary in the shape of a book, the ultimate conflation of books and relics.<sup>51</sup> It is therefore no coincidence that Philip II’s two final undertakings at the Escorial were to visit, one last time, his relics and then his books.<sup>52</sup> But to associate the power and authority of the written (or printed) word with relics was not a novelty. Already in Anglo-Saxon England, as David Rollason points out, royal documents were preserved in the same place as relics and the person in charge of writing these texts, the *cancellarius* (chancellor), was also often the keeper of the relics.<sup>53</sup> In this as in other matters, Philip II did not invent new meanings

<sup>48</sup>Gracián, 1962, 23. On this key figure in the history of the Escorial’s library and relic collection, see Llamas Martínez, 1995, 1997, and 1998; see also, Sáenz de Miera, 285–317.

<sup>49</sup>Sigüenza, 626–27 (4.11); see also APR, Patronato San Lorenzo, leg. 1995, 11v–12r. These four manuscripts, which still count among the Escorial’s treasures, are Augustine’s *De baptismo parvulorum*, the famous *Codex Aureum* (Emperor Henry II’s Bible), an illuminated Apocalypse, and Gospels by Saint John Chrysostom.

<sup>50</sup>This last artifact, which had come from Philip’s cousin, Emperor Maximilian II, is the perfect symbol of the overlap of dynastic relic and archaeological curiosity: see Checa, 1993, 287; APR, leg. 1816, 4.18.355–60.

<sup>51</sup>On the *camarín*, see Andrés; García-Frías Checa. On the body of Santa Teresa, which would itself become a relic, see Eire, 425–71. As Jansen, 182, points out, this intrinsic affinity between books and relics led Francis Bacon to later claim that “libraries are the shrines where all the relics of the ancient saints, full of true virtue, and that without delusion or imposture, are preserved and reposed.”

<sup>52</sup>Sigüenza, 536–37 (3.19). According to San Jerónimo, 123, 167, 267, 337, 352, in the tours of the Escorial given to members of the royal family, special guests, and dignitaries, the visit of the library immediately followed that of the reliquaries.

<sup>53</sup>Rollason, 98. A similar physical proximity of relics with state papers, libraries, and crown treasures can be observed in Paris’s Palais de la Cité, Prague’s Karlstejn Castle, as well as in many medieval Spanish palace-monasteries.



and new functions for relics: he relied on those already existing and available to him. Books and relics in sixteenth-century Spain both spoke to the same glorious past; both could only be seen on very rare occasions and exclusively by distinguished figures. They both touched upon the sacred — that is to say, that which is forbidden to men, to use one of the meanings of the Latin term *sacer*.<sup>54</sup>

Books, especially those written by saints, could therefore qualify as relics and perform the same functions. The writings of Isidore of Seville, glory of the Spanish Visigothic Church, represent perhaps the most eloquent example of this. The projected edition of the saint's complete works, undertaken in the 1570s in conjunction with the Escorial collections, represents one of the three great typographical endeavors sponsored by Philip II, along with the Antwerp Polyglot Bible (1569–72) edited by the great humanist, and later chief organizer of the Escorial library, Benito Arias Montano (ca. 1525–98), and the printed reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon modeled on the Escorial by Jesuits Jerónimo Prado and Juan Bautista Villalpando (1596–1605).<sup>55</sup> In different respects and to varying degrees, these colossal projects were all conceived as Catholic responses to the Protestant efforts to reclaim sacred and ecclesiastical history, in the same manner that collecting relics raised a protective barrier of sanctity against heresy. Rediscovering the relics of the Christian past in the Peninsula, whether as ancient manuscripts or printed texts, thus helped establish a direct link with Spain's past and with the primitive faith of its first Christians, in a way that served similar rhetorical and symbolic ends as did holy bodies.

#### 4. RESCUING RELICS: TOWARD A NEW IDENTITY?

Initially, the Escorial's relic collection was intended as a way to safeguard the remains of various saints from an assured desecration at the hands of Protestants, who, according to José de Sigüenza, waged a “bloody war”

<sup>54</sup>In the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (P. G. W. Clare, ed., 1982), 1674, the word *sacer* has the connotation of inviolability (n. 5), and therefore forbidden because of a sacred and divine nature. This might in turn explain the notorious difficulties that accompanied visiting and using the Escorial library, which annoyed scholars then and has bothered historians ever since. They have read in this gesture the Catholic king's desire to hold knowledge captive, and have ultimately ascribed it as one of the causes for the frustrated ambitions of Spanish letters. This view became so generalized that in the eighteenth century the French Bollandist monks, feeding on Philip II's black legend, disparagingly called the Escorial library a monumental “bibliothaph,” a reliquary for books, a “great tomb of books where manuscripts rot away like corpses”: Bouza, 1988, 81 (also in Bouza, 1998, 168).

<sup>55</sup>On Isidore, see Dávila Pérez and Lazure. On the Polyglot Bible, see Sáenz Badillos; Sánchez Salor, 1998a and 1998b. On the Temple of Solomon, see Lazure, 2000.

against them. Talking about the monarch's "saintly zeal" and "pious covetousness" which allowed for the entry of relics at the Escorial, Sigüenza recounts in martial language the miraculous events surrounding the first transfer of holy remains, during which the active participation of relics and the true presence of saints greatly contributed to the sacred shipment's safe arrival.<sup>56</sup> But the confessional tension truly comes to the fore in Sigüenza's vivid account of the epic odyssey of four relic chests traveling across snowy mountains and enemy valleys. After a series of incredible adventures and miraculous ploys, the holy convoy finally managed to leave Protestant territory, escaping "a thousand dangerous encounters with heretics" over the course of its journey and the circling of a "squadron of Calvinist heretics," to triumphally reach the Escorial a few months later.<sup>57</sup> By then, relics had transformed into actual spoils of war, tokens of the Catholic victory over heretics.<sup>58</sup>

The same can be said about one of the first relics to enter the Escorial, the thigh of Saint Lawrence, which Sigüenza called the "foundation upon which rests this house."<sup>59</sup> The relic had been bought at great cost by the Spanish ambassador in Paris, Francés de Álava. Indeed, the chapter of the Church of Saint Peter in Montpellier, where it was jealously kept, had twice denied the ambassador the trophy, the sole survivor of the church's pillage by the Huguenots. However much the diplomat warned them that the heretics could come back any time to destroy whatever was left, and however much he tried to convince them that the relic would be safer at the Escorial, the church's canons would not part with their treasure. After waging a protracted battle in a city reputed for its rebellious nature (both political and religious), it was only thanks to Álava's influential friends at court, the aid of an archdeacon of the parish (whom he suspected of Protestant sympathies), and a considerable sum of money, that he finally managed to lay his hands on the coveted bone.

Undoubtedly, avenging and rescuing this "hostage" of the French Wars of Religion in such "heroic" fashion represented a great victory for the King

<sup>56</sup>Sigüenza, 452–53 (3.5).

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 532–37 (3.19). Estal, 1964, edits the complete *relación* of the second entry, which served as a basis for Sigüenza's account.

<sup>58</sup>As was often the case during the Middle Ages: see Lifshitz; Rollason, 95–96. The use of a martial vocabulary for relics is characteristic of Ottavio Panciroli's treatise *I tesori nascoti nell'alma città di Roma* (Rome, 1600), in which the bodies of saints, like armies of Christian soldiers, lay siege to and take by storm the city of Rome to Christianize it, while cemeteries become encampments and churches turn into triumphal arches; Palumbo studies this wonderful treatise, of Tridentine inspiration. I owe this reference to Dominique Julia.

<sup>59</sup>Sigüenza, 667 (4.16).

of Spain.<sup>60</sup> A few years later, more relics came in from France, this time from the city of Tours, where Huguenot insurgents were allegedly burning the bones of saints. In a narrative steeped in the climate of struggle for the defense of the Catholic faith, Francés de Álava draws eloquent parallels between the Arab occupation of the Iberian Peninsula, Reformed iconoclasm, and the Ottoman threat. According to him, there existed a centuries-old kinship between the churches of Toledo and Tours, since the canons of the former had sought refuge in the latter after the Muslim invasion of Spain. In memory of this ancient solidarity, it seemed only natural for Toledo to support its historical ally in the face of the Protestant scourge. In return for this (presumably financial) assistance, the canons of Tours agreed to send to Toledo the recently discovered relics of a disciple of Saint Rémi, said to have brought about several conversions in the course of his ministry in pagan Spain. The ambassador had hopes that this present, received in the midst of the great Morisco uprising in Granada (1568–70), would help Philip II tame the Alpujarras rebels and defeat the Turks.<sup>61</sup>

The 1572 expedition of the humanist Ambrosio de Morales (1513–91) encapsulates the return to origins through history and archaeology that was taking place in the Spain of Philip II. As royal chronicler, Morales contributed to the long-standing project of the *Cronica General de España* by writing a dozen chapters on antiquity and the early Middle Ages. As an antiquarian fascinated by the remains of the pagan as well as by the Christian past of his country, Morales would publish a book, entitled *Las Antigüedades de las Ciudades de Españas* (1575), that made an inventory of ancient inscriptions and monuments, mostly found in his native Andalucía. This work would help secure his authority within the learned community while establishing him as a canonical reference in the field.<sup>62</sup> In 1572, Philip II called on Morales, both as an official historian and as an experienced scholar, to travel to northern Spain in order to draw up a list and

<sup>60</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 1.7–8.255–59.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 1.16.270. It is also worth noting the highly politically and religiously charged 1579 arrival of the famous *Sagrada forma*, a desecrated host saved from the hands of Dutch Calvinists and sent to Philip II by his nephew Emperor Rudolf II, whose worship was immortalized in Claudio Coello's monumental seventeenth-century painting that still hangs today in the sacristy of the Escorial basilica (ibid., 7.1–2.413–15, 7.189–90): on this episode, see Vroom. The close relationship between devotion to the Eucharist and the cult of relics has been thoroughly examined by Snoek. As forming part of a similar framework of late sixteenth-century confessional dispute and set in the context of Spain's bitter rivalry with England, the shirt of an English Jesuit martyr and one of Mary Queen of Scots's diamond rings (a symbol of her pure and steadfast faith) also figured prominently in Philip II's relic collection: APR, leg. 1816, 7.22.430; Sigüenza, 504 (3.15).

<sup>62</sup>On this fascinating character, see Sánchez Madrid.

determine the authenticity of the relics, royal tombs, and manuscript books kept in the region's churches and monasteries.<sup>63</sup> With this mission, the king reaffirmed the three symbolic foundations of his monarchy: faith, dynasty, and knowledge. Upon his return to court, Morales submitted a detailed report followed by a series of recommendations regarding the collection of relics in the Escorial, advising the king, among other things, to respect local devotion and not to dispossess communities of their holy bodies. This, he said, was an injustice that could prove to be a source of great distress, even political upheaval.<sup>64</sup> As we shall see shortly, Philip II was not always as scrupulous as his councilor would have wished. Despite this, Ambrosio de Morales's journey serves to remind us of the crucial role relics played in the process of (re)shaping local and collective identity in sixteenth-century Spain.

The king's efforts to centralize the sacred, however, met with serious resistance from the local authorities — city councils, archbishops, and monasteries — who owned the relics and who had drawn a considerable amount of prestige and income from them.<sup>65</sup> A striking example is the conflict that arose around a relic of the head of Saint Lawrence. Philip II wanted to acquire this relic for obvious reasons, but it was jealously guarded by cloistered nuns in the Santiago de Compostela area, and knowingly concealed by the local archbishop in his account to the king of his diocese's relics. It was only thanks to Ambrosio de Morales's visit to the monastery that the monarch learned of the existence of this literally capital piece for his collection. Determined to purchase it, Philip first had to confront the pious but obstinate refusal of the nuns and their special devotion to the saint and its relic, which had turned the monastery into an important site of regional pilgrimage, with all the economic benefits that this entailed. Swayed by their tears, the prince agreed to leave them a piece or two of the relic so that they might continue their worship, while offering them generous financial compensations for their loss and assuring them that he would always hold the affairs of their house close to his heart. Did the monastery need any repairs, he inquired solicitously? Does it not often ask

<sup>63</sup>Back in the eighth century, practically all the important relics and manuscripts that could be saved from the Moors had been transferred from the south to the north of Spain, which included the kingdoms of León, Galicia, and, especially, Asturias. Asturias was the mythical starting point of the Spanish Reconquista, a land that claimed never to have known Arab domination, and therefore a place where Spanish Christianity was said to have been preserved in its original, pure form.

<sup>64</sup>Morales's account, which remained in manuscript form for over two centuries, was only printed in 1765 in an edition by father Enrique Flórez: see Morales, 1985, 205–13. For a study of this "holy voyage," see Édouard, 2003.

<sup>65</sup>Christian; Rollason, 101–03.

for a license to transport wood from the Kingdom of Castile? Surely, this could be granted for several years and for unlimited quantities. Philip II tried everything, but the sisters simply would not budge. It was only through the intervention of the Archbishop of Santiago and after many months of negotiation that the king finally managed to convince the nuns to take the money and give up the relic.<sup>66</sup>

The discussions that led to the acquisition of the head of Saint Hermenegildo from a female abbey in the province of Huesca (Aragon) proved to be just as laborious and required as much caution, flattery, and gift-giving.<sup>67</sup> Spain's first ruler to convert to Christianity, martyred for having refused to return to his former Arian beliefs and for holding strong in his new faith, the Visigothic King Hermenegildo had become over the ages the patron saint of the Spanish monarchy. Furthermore, Philip II's heir, the future Philip III, was born on the Day of Saint Hermenegildo (14 April). Thus, in the king's mind Hermenegildo was the perfect emblem for his projected unification of Spain through history, religion, and dynasty: relics of the saint were essential to the mausoleum of the Escorial. "God has preserved this relic so that it may end up in your hands," claimed the Bishop of Vich, who acted as the crown's go-between in this transaction, "it is yours by right since it belongs to one of your ancestors; it is the testimony of Spain's continuous Christian kingship."<sup>68</sup> Beneath the obse-

<sup>66</sup>IVDJ, envío 63, 80–81, 92v–94; APR, leg. 1816, 6.7.385–87. For the original list of relics from the Santiago de Compostela diocese, see IVDJ, envío 37, 77. A few years later Cardinal Medici, who headed the Spanish faction at the Roman Curia, encountered similar difficulties in obtaining a fragment of Saint Lawrence's back from the canons of Saint John Lateran. Arguing that Philip II had already solicited their contribution by asking for a piece of this same relic through Cardinal Granvelle, the obviously outraged ecclesiastics were inflexible. It was only thanks to the weight of his authority and of his purse that Medici finally managed to wrest their consent: see IVDJ, envío 61(II), 144; the documents edited in Alonso, 1999. On Granvelle's mission, see APR, leg. 1816, 2.7.330–33.

<sup>67</sup>The documents regarding this transfer are published in Estal, 1961; Alonso, 2001. See also, APR, leg. 1816, 5.3.365–67; BNM, mss. 1761, 209–10. Women had the reputation of being particularly uncompromising and adamant; at least, Cardinal Medici thought so (Alonso, 1999, 699). Also, negotiating with isolated communities apparently required a great deal of tact and dissimulation. As one of the king's agents said about a monastery in Lérida (Catalonia) that held a piece of the grill on which Saint Lawrence was martyred, "since they live in harsh mountains, they are impossible to govern other than with great meekness and gentleness" (APR, leg. 1816, 6.9.379). For an example of how relics could be used as an instrument for asserting female power and agency, see Strasser: I am grateful to Jodi Bilinkoff for this reference.

<sup>68</sup>The Visigothic period was central to Philip II's mythical reconstruction of the Spanish past through relics. Indeed, a few years later the archbishop of Braga (Portugal) presented Philip II with the relics of the confessor of another converted Visigothic king who had also fought Arianism (APR, leg. 1816, 7.15.426–27). A miracle was also reported

quious language that ran through the correspondence between the king and the abbess surrounding the transfer of the relic, all the weight of obligation showed through. Certain that serving him was the community's dearest wish, Philip II subtly pointed out that this would be the perfect occasion for its members to show their zeal, and assured them that he would show himself most grateful for their sacrifice.<sup>69</sup> The nuns repeatedly reminded their sovereign that by taking the head of Hermenegildo he deprived them of their most precious jewel, and that without this relic — a gift from their founder, which had brought them rain in time of drought for centuries — they would be left with nothing. But in the end the sisters had no choice but to yield to the monarch's will, thus granting his request and thereby placing themselves under his protection. Nevertheless, they still managed to guarantee that a fraction of the relic would remain in their possession so they could carry on with their devotion and continue to celebrate the saint's feast.

Curiously, when Philip II demanded the foot of Saint Lawrence from the collegiate church of Husillos near Valladolid, he met with absolutely no opposition. On the contrary, the abbot was delighted to be able to grant him this favor, and spoke only of the "natural obligation one owes to his king and lord," hastening to specify that the gift was made without coercion — further proof that this was not the king's customary procedure.<sup>70</sup> Thus Philip II turned the "spontaneous and voluntary" handover of relics — which, in certain cases, resembled extortion more than anything else — into a veritable act of allegiance to the royal person. One of his subjects stated this in rather explicit terms, feeling "obliged by the loyalty of the vassal" to inform the king of the existence in Rome of a relic likely to interest him.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, the communities compelled to relinquish their trophies knew how to command royal gratitude and how to profit from their gift by deftly manipulating the rhetoric of loyalty and favor. As for the monarch, he saw to it that the donors were always decently compensated, since failing to do so would be tantamount to theft and would indicate, as one of his emissaries once opportunely reminded him, a "lack

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during the transfer of a Visigothic martyr's relics from Valladolid to the Escorial (*ibid.*, 7.51.473).

<sup>69</sup>Which he did, since three years after the transfer of the relic he obtained from Rome the lifting of the strict enclosure for the monastery: Alonso, 2001, 453, n. 11.

<sup>70</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 6.37–38.396–99. Philip II, however, was willing to exchange relics. He did so once to lay his hands on a bone of Saint Vincent he had noticed in a Benedictine abbey of Nájera (Navarre), trading it for a relic of Saint Scholastic, sister of Saint Benedict (*ibid.*, 6.39.399). See Checa, 1993, 286, on the exchange of a finger of Saint Lawrence for a bone of Saint Jerome with his sister Juana, Princess of Portugal.

<sup>71</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 6.51.410.

of respect and devotion” on his part.<sup>72</sup> Each of these relics, then, created a bond between the king and his subjects. Thus the collection of the Escorial can also be seen as the product of a network of obligations based on patronage and clientelism. The long list of princes, cardinals, bishops, and convents which offered relics to the King of Spain — whether as diplomatic gifts, signs of gratitude, tools of social promotion, or simply out of duty — therefore represents nothing less than the threads of the web of favor that Philip II wove throughout Catholic Europe.<sup>73</sup>

Despite his voracious appetite for holiness and his desire to create a centralized state, whenever Philip II felt that relics were necessary to stimulate a city’s devotion, he did not hesitate to share his sacred bones. For instance, he gave the city of Cartagena some relics of local saints that he had purchased on another occasion. In the Andalucian town of Andújar, he enjoined the abbey that held the relics of Saint Eufrasio, first bishop of the city and a disciple of Saint James, to turn over to the city the treasure that was rightfully hers.<sup>74</sup> Provided, of course, this process remained under his close supervision and direct control, the king intended relics to play an active part in the formation of civic identities and was encouraged to turn this potent source of symbolic power over to the cities and their bishops, two pillars of the new Tridentine organization whose role he clearly recognized. Indeed, whenever relics tied to a city’s history were discovered, or

<sup>72</sup>IVDJ, envío 61(II), 144v. Likewise, upon sending a relic of Saint Lawrence’s arm, the loss of which had apparently “greatly affected” the abbey who donated it, the Duke of Savoy recommended that it be granted a pension for its needs and that the abbot’s candidacy to a vacant position be favored (APR, leg. 1816, 1.4–5.253–54).

<sup>73</sup>Already in late antiquity relics had circulated as gifts in order to bridge distances and mark friendship, *gratia*, and concord, creating a social as well as geographical network of solidarity, interdependence, and obligation: Brown, 89–90. During the Middle Ages relics were used as diplomatic gifts, either to establish networks of military alliances or to improve relations between princes: Rollason, 93. An episode of the rather stormy late sixteenth-century Franco-Spanish relations illustrates the eminently political role of relics. At the height of Philip II’s claims on the French throne, the Duke of Mercoeur, then Governor of Brittany, looked to form a strategic alliance with the King of Spain. As proof of his commitment and good faith, he had a relic of Saint Vincent Ferrer’s body (kept in Vannes) sent to the Escorial: APR, leg. 1816, 7.62.484. In all likelihood, the transfer of a relic of Saint Yvon from St-Brieuc, for which Philip II showed a special devotion during his agony, is related to this: *ibid.*, 6.40–41.399–400; Sigüenza, 543 (3.20). On the whole affair, see Tenace. Another example is the case of the Bishop of Cracow, who wished to seal his country’s friendship with Spain by donating to its monarch a relic of the Polish Dominican, Saint Hyacinth: APR, leg. 1816, 7.63.485. See also Cornelison for yet another early modern example.

<sup>74</sup>Respectively APR, leg. 1816, 6.52.412, and 7.16.427–28.

recovered and brought back to Spain, Philip II demanded a type of tax or duty in the form of samples for his collection at the Escorial.

But the relics belonged first and foremost to the king: it was he who graciously agreed to turn over the holy body to a city or to its prelates, not they who offered their monarch a piece of what was theirs. This becomes quite clear from many ceremonies of relic translations, most notably in Ávila, where the body of Saint Segundo, the town's first bishop, had been found in the course of renovating a small hermitage. Years later, when it was decided to celebrate this fortunate discovery that marked the community's spiritual renewal and move the relics to the cathedral, the king commissioned his *corregidor* (the city's royal representative) to hand over the holy body to the bishop in his name, to reserve one of the three keys to the relics chest for him, and to put aside one of the saint's "main bones" — arm, leg, or thigh — for the Escorial.<sup>75</sup> The same scenario repeated itself on numerous occasions: when Philip II passed through Córdoba, where he took a sample of the recently discovered relics of the martyrs who were to preside over the reconstruction of the local religious identity;<sup>76</sup> in Alcalá de Henares, for the canonization of Diego de Alcalá, to which the king contributed politically as well as financially;<sup>77</sup> in Alcalá, yet again, during the festivities honoring Saints Justo and Pastor, in which triumphal arches and poetry celebrated the return of their relics by comparing it to that of good government;<sup>78</sup> and in Toledo, finally, for the arrival of the body of Saint Leocadia, patron saint of the city, brought back from a Flanders set ablaze and beset by heresy, where the monarch personally took part in the ceremony by acting as one of the pallbearers.<sup>79</sup>

On another occasion, Philip II personally traveled to Toledo for the triumphal entrance of the body of Saint Eugenio, first archbishop of the

<sup>75</sup>IVDJ, envío 63, 236v–238r; APR, leg. 1816, 7.4–6.417–20. See also Cianca; Bilinkoff, 173–79.

<sup>76</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 1.19–20.275–77.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 6.15.383–84.

<sup>78</sup>Alastrué Campo, 134; Morales, 1568.

<sup>79</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 6.10.380–81; Sigüenza, 504 (3.15); Hernández; Depluvrez. Esteban de Garibay, another of Philip II's royal chroniclers, was instrumental in repatriating Leocadia's body to Toledo: see Garibay, 169–74, 196–99, 293–99, and, particularly, 198, his invocation of the saint's will (an old medieval *topos*) to justify its return to Spain: "I told him many times that saints followed the Catholic faith in death just as in life, and that the lack of it in Spain, caused by the arrival of the Moors, had been the reason for her [Leocadia's] departure to the north, where the Christian religion flourished at the time. And so, now that it was lacking over there, the saint wanted to be returned to her natural land where faith now flourished." Like Ambrosio de Morales, Garibay, 236–37, 298, was called upon by Philip II to authenticate the "relics" of former Spanish kings.



city, second evangelist of the Iberian Peninsula after Saint James, and one of the founders of the Spanish Church. His return was supposed to sanctify and give new life to the entire community. However, the circumstances surrounding this translation were somewhat exceptional, since the Kings of Spain had long demanded that the French monarchs return the saint's remains to his native land. It was only with the signing of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 and the simultaneous wedding of Philip II with Isabelle de Valois, daughter of the King of France, that an agreement became possible. Once again, the operation succeeded thanks to the tireless efforts of the Spanish ambassador, Francés de Álava, despite the firm opposition of the Parlement of Paris and of the powerful abbey of Saint-Denis, where the body was preserved. In the end, the French ruler declared that it was only out of "love for the King of Spain and for the sake of affinity and concord between the two kingdoms" that he fulfilled his promise and agreed to return the saint's body. But this was a binding gift. Not only did the King of France demand the head of Saint Quentin from Spanish Flanders in exchange — should we read into this a fit of pride, since the French defeat that led to the signing of the peace treaty occurred precisely in the city bearing the saint's name? — but he also forced the canons of Toledo to pray publicly for the Kingdom of France in the cathedral, in memory of its liberality.<sup>80</sup>

Two final examples demonstrate Philip II's success at capturing to his advantage the unifying strength of local identities, as well as his inability to transcend regional idiosyncrasies. More than indicating the limits of Philip's great universal project, these striking symbols shed light on the breadth of his ambitions.

The royal undertaking of building a national history around a renewed sense of local spiritual identity found its most outstanding expression in Granada, emblem of the victorious reconquest over the Moors and site of the longest-lasting Muslim presence on Iberian soil.<sup>81</sup> Granada recovered its virginity in 1492 after centuries of infidelity, making this city the ideal

<sup>80</sup>APR, leg. 1816, 1.12–13.262–68; the *relación* of the Toledan canon who went to retrieve the body in France in IVDJ, envío 89, 220; another *relación* is in BNM, mss. 10250. See also Depluvrez, 113–20. According to *ibid.*, 129, there was also a political dimension to the arrival of the relics: "In 1561 the court had just abandoned Toledo and was about to settle permanently in Madrid. Toledo remained the seat of the Spanish Church but other cathedral towns expressed their ambitions on the matter. The first city of the kingdom could not resign itself to abandon its prerogatives. The repatriation of the holy remains fell within the framework of a safeguarding policy and a strategy for the reconquest of lost power. The actual possession of the relics in a way justified Toledo's claims."

<sup>81</sup>On Granada, see Coleman. On chorographies in Golden Age Spain, see Kagan, 1995, 84–99.

place to erect — or, rather, to restore — the model of a Christian republic. At the root of this (re)foundation lay the discovery of a true goldmine of relics, supposedly buried at the time of the Arab invasion. In early modern times, such quasi-miraculous findings always took place in the symbolically-charged context of a community's spiritual renewal, and almost invariably occurred when a church underwent repair.<sup>82</sup> Granada is a case in point, with the invention of the Torre Turpiana relics and the Sacromonte lead books.<sup>83</sup>

These famous forgeries, alleged to be the bones of the city's first Christian martyrs, appeared between 1588 and 1595 along with texts engraved on lead tablets that proved, among other things, the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, the coming of the apostle James to Spain, and the survival of a Christian community in Granada throughout the period of Arab occupation. According to one of the most recent historians of this key moment in Spanish religious history, "Rather than merely falsify the past, the *plomos* [lead books] recast the history of the city of Granada into a Christian mold, create links to a mythical Christian past, and transform centuries of Muslim rule into a historical parenthesis."<sup>84</sup> For Granadans, the revelation of the existence of these relics allowed for the construction of an imagined community united by faith. By giving them their own local saints, relics therefore became the locus of their civic identity, the tangible link that enabled them to rewrite the past by filling in the gaps of a distant time period, for which documents and registers of a Christian presence in the city were seriously lacking. As we can well imagine, an initiative such as this one, designed to confirm the antiquity of the introduction of Christianity on Spanish soil, could only appeal to Philip II. Nevertheless, if the king gladly accepted the municipal council's gift of relics from the Sacromonte, whose sight and worship apparently brought him "great spiritual solace," he categorically refused to keep the entire package sent to him, on the pretense that he did not want to put a curb on the people of Granada's devotion. By doing so, Philip II showed

<sup>82</sup>In sixteenth-century Spain, similar situations occurred, among other places, in Cordoba, Toledo, Avila, and Saragossa: on this last city, see APR, leg. 1816, 6.16.384–85.

<sup>83</sup>The use of the term *invención* — which comes from the Latin *inventio* (finding) — is reminiscent of the skillfully orchestrated medieval discoveries of relics.

<sup>84</sup>Harris, 949. Recent assessments of the Sacromonte's lead books and relics include the late Gaspar Morocho Gayo's voluminous introduction to humanist Pedro de Valencia's (1555–1620) *Discurso sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada*, 145–426; the studies collected in two issues of the journal *Al-Qantara* 23, no. 2 (2002), 24, no. 2 (2003); Coleman, 188–201; Harvey, 264–90, 382–98, which includes an edition and English translation of some of the Sacromonte texts; and, most recently, the collection of essays edited by Barrios Aguilera and García Arenal.

that he had perfectly understood the mission of relics in the process of identity formation.<sup>85</sup>

This brings us to the second example. As he himself openly recognized, Philip II's lifelong ambition was to gather in the Escorial a relic of every Spanish saint. And yet a major lacuna in his collection was the absence of a bone of Saint James the Greater, the famous Santiago apostle and patron saint of Spain, whose body is still to this day said to be preserved whole in the Galician town of Compostela. There seemed little chance of acquiring a relic from Santiago, for all of Christendom had been traveling its *camino* for centuries and its pilgrimage was profoundly ingrained in Europe's history. Yet we know that the king planned the transfer of the corpse to the Escorial. A curious undated document addressed to Cardinal Diego de Espinosa, Philip II's chief minister at the time, informs us of the reasons put forward for such a move.<sup>86</sup> The first and foremost advantage to seeing the remains of Saint James go to the Escorial, the anonymous author argues, would be to protect it from French and English — that is to say, Protestant — attacks, considering the Galician coastline's vulnerability to pirate raids. Secondly, in his new resting place the saint would be more fittingly venerated, better cared for, and generally more accessible to the king and to Spanish pilgrims who did not want to travel to such a remote land. What is more, the author continues, it seemed only fitting that the house of Jacob (in Latin *James* is *Jacobus*), supposed to be at the head of the twelve tribes of Israel, would be found at the heart of the Spanish monarchy, and not isolated in this "Finisterre" — literally, the ends of the earth, as this region of Galicia is also known. Finally, the transfer would encourage and stimulate the devotion to James, patron saint of Spain, which, according to the author, was flagging.

As for the inconveniences that would be caused by such a major change, they were summarily contradicted and dismissed as insignificant. To those who claimed that such a loss would lead to economic disaster for the Kingdom of Galicia, the author of the *memorial* replies that, in fact, only a few innkeepers actually profited from the visitors and that, thanks to the ports, the region would always thrive and prosper. In any event, he goes on to say, the pilgrimage would not cease overnight, since there would

<sup>85</sup>IVDJ, envío 63, 66v–67r, 74v, 87v; APR, leg. 1816, 6.14.382–83. See also Alonso, 1979, a study, based on the analysis of the correspondence with the Holy See, that gives an idea of the different reactions to the discoveries, including that of Philip II. Upon the arrival of the Granadino envoy at the Escorial, the king eagerly showed him in to his private oratory and, in the presence of his children and Grand Almoner García de Loaysa, placed the relics on the altar to worship them, kissing them and pressing them against his head and his eyes. For other such manifestations of piety and devotion upon receiving relics, see Checa, 1993, 288.

<sup>86</sup>IVDJ, envío 61(II), 197–98: this document is briefly mentioned by Eire, 266–67.

always be many relics in the city. The tradition, too deeply rooted to really disappear, would be maintained and the crowds would continue to flock to Santiago. Finally, to the presumably weighty argument that the body had miraculously arrived in Compostela and that it was therefore the saint's will to stay there, the author answers that if the ship that carried the body stopped there, it was only because it could not go any further inland, where the saint would have been safer. In any case, he categorically concludes, at that time the Kings of Spain were Kings of Galicia, whereas today they were monarchs of the entire country. Saint James therefore had to follow them. Even if this outrageous project failed — we can only imagine the fierce opposition that it would have met — its very conception demonstrates Philip II's profound interest in harnessing the universality that relics represented, by moving the greatest and most famous one of them all to the center of his collection. This, he thought, could be a symbol around which to unite the entire country.

In the end, reserving rights to relics from every church in his kingdom for his own private collection was a way for Philip II to assert his personal authority and, to a certain extent, his control over the entire Spanish Church. The king both claimed and shared his sovereignty by only symbolically dispossessing cities of their sacred treasures, by agreeing to leave monasteries pieces of the bones that he took from them, and by making sure that local communities could benefit as well from the protection of holy bodies.<sup>87</sup> Thus relics also reflected the division and the balance of power within the Spanish monarchy; they marked a chapter of the long-standing contest between church and state, center and periphery.<sup>88</sup> Yet for all the aggressive affirmation of royal prerogatives, these only partial transfers of relics signaled Philip's failure to forge a cohesive national identity based on a common faith and a common history, such as relics offered. That the repatriated relics were often those of a city's first bishop or first martyrs, and that the first histories written focused on local antiquities, confirmed the cities and their spiritual leaders in their strategic position of mediators between the king and his people. Ultimately they, and not the monarchy, would be the center of all allegiances, acting as the main agents in the construction of a Christian identity and in the definition of *patria*.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Yet another example of this attitude, this time with a relic of Saint Bartholomew, in APR, leg. 1816, 6.47.407.

<sup>88</sup>Since the Middle Ages, relics have been a constant source of rivalry between church and state in the fight for legitimacy and the control of territory: see Cooper; Picard, 40; Rollason, 96.

<sup>89</sup>Thompson. For a construction of civic identity through image, see Kagan, 1998b.

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