

# Spanish Nazarenes Artists in Rome

Pavel Štěpánek

## Abstract

ŠTĚPÁNEK, Pavel: Spanish Nazarenes Artists in Rome.

In Spain, the Nazarene movement was represented by a group of painters who worked in Rome: Luis de Madrazo, Eduardo Rosales, Alejo Vera and Domingo Valdivieso, but after all (known as the Catalans/all of them Catalans) the Catalans. The most important figure in this group was Pelegrí Clavé, who went on to become a professor at the Academy of San Carlo in Mexico. His Mexican students there included such names as José S. Pina, Santiago Rebull, Eugenio Landesio and José María Velasco. The work of one of them, Rebull, can be found in Prague, because a Czech pharmacist named František Kaska put together a collection of art that he decided to send to the National Museum in Prague in 1906. In this we can observe the persistence of Nazarene painting in time and geography that runs in a line from Spain to Rome to Mexico and finally to Prague.

**Keywords:** Spain, Nazarenes, Rome, Mexico, Prague

From time immemorial Spanish artists normally went to study to Rome. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rome was one of the principal centres of Spanish art, alongside Madrid and Paris. By that time, however, the period spent in Rome was considered the final phase in an artist's academic training and marked the start of professional maturity. The Spanish Royal Academy of Rome (La Real Academia de España en Roma) was founded in 1873.<sup>1</sup> The artists who went to Rome were generally the recipients of official study grants and were thus obliged to produce a large narrative composition as the outcome for their funding. The Spanish Bourbons supported the Nazarene tradition, as did the Viennese Habsburgs.

From 1852 onwards, and following the discovery of the original burial place of Saint Cecilia and of the papal crypt in the catacombs on the Via Appia at that time, there was a frenzy of interest in subjects from biblical history. Religious paintings with scenes featuring the early martyrs were therefore particularly popular and were one of the principal areas of interest for Spanish painters in Rome. Such compositions allowed them to comply with the requirement that they produce work with erudite content and the degree of historical accuracy demanded in academic exercises, but at the same time to depict scenes deeply imbued with the religious sentiment pervasive in the European mindset in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The religious paintings produced by Spanish artists in Rome marked the highpoint of this genre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Artists thus included a wide array of archaeological details in their work which they drew from sources believed at the time to be absolutely reliable and this added a high degree of realism to their religious scenes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the period spent in the Spanish Academy in Rome was considered the final phase in an artist's academic training and marked the start of

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<sup>1</sup> See the official pages of the The Spanish Royal Academy of Rome: <http://www.raer.it/folders/inicio/inicio.php>.

professional maturity. Spanish artists usually spent three years studying in Rome. In the first year the students copied Greek and Roman sculpture to learn anatomy and classical architecture to learn ideal proportion, and they also copied old master paintings. In the second year they worked on the human figure. In the third year they utilised all the skills they had acquired from practice, travel, and observation into one large historical painting drawn from either religious, classical, or historical texts. What were the results?



1 Luis de Madrazo (1825-1897), Burial of Saint Cecilia in the Catacombs in Rome, 1852. Oil, canvas, 300 x 252 cm.

## Sacred Stories. Religious Paintings by Spanish Artists in Rome (1852 – 1864)

The kind of work that was produced by Spanish artists studying in Rome in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be illustrated through the example of some little-known paintings that until recently (2012) were located in the depositories of the museums to which they were lent (the 19<sup>th</sup>-century holdings in the Prado Museum make up the largest section of its collection). Five enormous paintings (from this time/of this type) were restored and exhibited in a temporary exhibition entitled *Sacred Stories. Religious Paintings by Spanish Artists in Rome (1852 – 1864)*. This exhibition was prepared by the conservator José Luis Díez.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Alejo Vera (1834-1923), *Burial of St. Lawrence in the Catacombs in Rome*, 1862, Oil, canvas, 224 x 233 cm. Prado P0 6750

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<sup>2</sup> I take some phrases from the video (in Spanish and translation) : <http://revistaatticus.es/2012/01/26/historias-sagradas-pinturas-religiosas-de-artistas-espanoles-en-roma-1852-1864> (4. 10. 2015). See: 17<sup>th</sup> May – 27<sup>th</sup> January 2013. See too: RIAÑO, H. Peio, *La pintura sagrada del XIX sale de su olvido*. 24/01/2012: <http://www.publico.es/culturas/418365/la-pintura-sagrada-del-xix-sale-de-su-olvido>.



3 3 Domingo Valdivieso y Henarejos, Descent from the Cross, 1864, Oil, canvas, 254 x 343 cm, Prado, P0 4667

The paintings were created by five Spanish artists who were living in Rome at the time: Luis de Madrazo, Eduardo Rosales, Alejo Vera and Domingo Valdivieso. These artists achieved enormous fame in their day, steering genre painting away from the refined late Romanticism that was derived from Nazarene painting towards the new pictorial realism. The rediscovery of the Roman catacombs and the publication of numerous writings on them in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, was the work of two men: Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822 – 1894), who contributed writings to more than two hundred publications and is generally regarded as the father of modern scientific Christian archaeology, and his close friend, the Jesuit scholar Father Giuseppe Marchi (1795 – 1860), a pioneer in the study of early Christian monuments.<sup>3</sup> G. B. de Rossi, who owned the land around the catacombs of Saint Callixtus, discovered the exact location where the main Christian Martyrs of Ancient Rome had been buried. This discovery caused nothing less than a revolution in painting at the time, because depicting the lives and deaths of the early martyrs artists would no longer have to invent or reconstruct them solely on the basis of their imagination. Painters in this period enthusiastically set

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<sup>3</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> C. saw a steady stream of books and articles which sought to interpret the evidence of the Roman catacombs in an aid to "uncover" the early years of Christianity. In England, for example, there were *Hypatia, or New Foes With an Old Face* (1852 – 1853), by KINGSLEY, Charles; *Fabiola, or The Church of the Catacombs* (1854), by WISEMAN, Nicholas; and *Callista : A Tale of the Third Century*, by Blessed NEWMAN, John Henry (1855).

about creating scenes capturing the deaths of the great Christian martyrs in ancient Rome and set their depictions in the catacombs, and Spanish artists in Rome were equally fascinated by this new artistic challenge.

The title reflects how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century religious painting was necessarily historical painting in the sense that it portrayed historical episodes and tales from the lives of the great figures of early Christianity. The objective was to evoke the way in which these monumental and almost timeless paintings would have been shown at exhibitions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the actual title of the work. With this aim in mind, next to the paintings the conservators displayed the original texts that inspired the artists to create their compositions (e.g. texts from the Bible or legends). The artistic quality of the paintings, a product of the rigorous academic training these artists received, was as important in these works as the artists' ability to represent or evoke the spirituality of the action portrayed.

The first important example of this type of work produced by a Spanish painter in this period is the monumental *Burial of Saint Cecilia in the Catacombs in Rome* by L. de Madraza (1825-1897).<sup>4</sup> Elements of academic painting are evident in the work and reflect the artist's great enthusiasm about the recent discovery of this archaeological site. Madraza had arrived in Rome in 1848 and it was just two years later that G. B. de Rossi discovered the Catacombs of St. Callixtus where Saint Cecilia was buried.<sup>5</sup> Madraza was, however, very familiar with Rome because his father, José Madraza, had spent twelve years there (1806-1818).

In 1852 Madraza painted what can undoubtedly be considered his masterpiece, a work that has been hidden from sight in the storerooms of the Museum of History in Madrid for many, many years. It has now been returned to the Prado and dominates this space as the earliest and art-historically the most important work in this group. Madraza used *The Golden Legend* by Jacob de Voragine as the source for his depiction of the funeral of Saint Cecilia.<sup>6</sup> From this interest in the early Christian history, Madraza was led to an interest in painting Biblical scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Among the paintings on display at the Prado, which reflects the enormous enthusiasm aroused by the recent discovery of the famous archaeological remains referred to above and which is the first painting of its type in this new genre, the triumph of academic purism is evident. Madraza's canvas led on to inspire other, increasingly realist, academic compositions, such as Alejo Vera's delicate composition *The Burial of Saint Lawrence in the Catacombs in Rome*, which takes Madraza's painting as its point of inspiration, but deploys a greater degree of realism.

From this point onwards the younger generation of Spanish artists focused their attention on the discovering the martyrs' tombs and the catacombs, and ten years later Alejo Vera<sup>7</sup> painted his

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<sup>4</sup> Madraza, Luis de, *Burial of Saint Cecilia in the Catacombs in Rome*. Oil on canvas 300 x 252cm. Madrid, Prado.

<sup>5</sup> According to KIRSCH, Johann Peter, in 1908, "De Rossi located the burial-place of Cecilia in the Catacomb of Callistus in a crypt immediately adjoining the crypt or chapel of the popes" For Johann P. Kirsch see the official pages: <http://www.goesres-gesellschaft-rom.de/das-institut/institutsgeschichte/die-direktoren/51-johann-peter-kirsch>.

<sup>6</sup> Czech edition: VORAGINE de, Jakub, *Legenda Aurea*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2012, p. 330-333.

<sup>7</sup> Vera, Alejo y Estaca, *The Burial of Saint Lawrence in the Catacombs in Rome*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 224 x 233 cm. Madrid, Prado.



4 Eduardo Rosales (1836-1873), Saint Catherina of Sienna receives the stigmata, copy of Il Sodoma, 1862. Oil, canvas, 214 x 134 mm, Prado, P0 6608



5 Eduardo Rosales (1836-1873), *Tobias and the angel*, 1858-1863. Oil, canvas, 198 x 118 mm, Prado, P0 4620

moving and intimate *Burial of St. Lawrence*, a work that represents a step forward in the symbolic perception of the early Christian martyrs. Vera's work originated much later. His painting was obviously influenced by the earlier paintings of Saint Cecilia, but has given way to a more realistic style. Vera and Madrazo both drew strong inspiration from the same religious source and produced paintings that show that even in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century religion was still a vital impetus in Spanish art and Christian evangelization. Two years later, in 1864, the painter D. Valdivieso executed what would be his great masterpiece, *The Descent from the Cross*,<sup>8</sup> in which painter Eduardo Rosales served as the model for the figure of Christ. In Valdivieso's work we see an emerging realism that was in fact encouraged and promoted by Rosales. This evolution culminates in Valdivieso's moving painting of *The Descent from the Cross*, with its powerful echoes of Italian

sources.

Rosales created two early religious paintings executed in Italy, *Tobias and the Angel* and *Saint Catherine of Siena Receives the Stigmata*, by Rosales<sup>9</sup> represents the end of purist painting and

<sup>8</sup> Valdivieso, Domingo, *The Descent from the Cross*. Oil on canvas, 254 x 343 cm, 1864. Madrid, Prado.

<sup>9</sup> Rosales, Eduardo, *Saint Catherina of Sienna receives the stigmata*, copy of Il Sodoma, 1862. Oil on canvas, 214 x 134 cm, Madrid, Prado.

points the way towards the formulation of a realist style in Spain that essentially looks back to Velázquez. The late style is clearly evident in the two works by Rosales on display here. *Saint Catherina of Sienna Receives the Stigmata*, which is a copy of Sodoma's famous fresco. In the basilica of St Catherina that Rosales undertook as an obligatory grant student project and his most famous painting, *Tobias and the Angel*. In the letter he broke away from the precise draughtsmanship characteristic of the romantic era of Nazarene painting, thereby portending the onset of modernism and the emergence of a style that would culminate in his celebrated painting of *Isabella the Catholic Dictating Her Will* in Medina del Campo.<sup>10</sup> This painting of a historical theme exhibits outstanding draughtsmanship, a textural quality, and mastery of composition. The painting recalls the evocative realism of the works of Velázquez, which gives it a somewhat tenuous atmosphere (giving it a rather delicate quality).



6 Eduardo Rosales, Queen Isabella 'la Católica' dictating her last will and testament, in 1504, 1864. Oil, canvas, 290 cm x 400 cm. Prado.

Catalan Nazarenes were the first to reconnect with contemporary trends in European art that had been lost since the days of the last Catalan Medieval masters many centuries before.<sup>11</sup> Pelegrí Clavé Roquer,<sup>12</sup> an accomplished painter from Barcelona, is a key name in Nazarene circles, and the exquisite craftsmanship of this painting shows why. His work is also important because it shows how

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<sup>10</sup> Rosales, Eduardo. *Isabella the Catholic Dictating Her Will* (on 12 October 1504, days before she died), 1864, oil on canvas, 290 x 400 cm, Madrid, Prado.

<sup>11</sup> For Catalonia, see: FONTBONA, Francesc, *Del neoclassicisme a la restauració (1808 – 1888) : Historia de l'art català : Volum VI*. Barcelona : Edicions 62, 1983, pp. 99, and Etapa post-romana dels natzarens catalans, see: *Acadèmia y natzarenisme*, p. 107. All the artists have their items in FONTBONA, Francesc, *Gran Enciclopèdia catalana*. Barcelona : Grup Enciclopèdia Catalana, 1976, and in the official pages of the Academy see: [http://www.racba.org/es/\\_Fontbona](http://www.racba.org/es/_Fontbona) is conservator of paintings there.

<sup>12</sup> Clavé, Pelegrí. *Jacob Receives the Bloodied Tunic of His Son Joseph*, 1842, oil on canvas, 99 x 136 cm, Museu d'Art de Girona.

Clavé tried to come to terms with the best work of the Nazarenes, which he encountered when he went to Rome in 1834. In a painting titled *Jacob Receives the Bloodied Tunic of His Son Joseph*,<sup>13</sup> he revisited a very specific biblical subject and, quoting directly from one of the paintings in the original project, Clavé paid tribute to the pioneers of the movement and claimed for himself the role of their true successor.<sup>14</sup> The importance of Clavé is that later, in 1846, he became a professor of painting at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>



7 Claudio Lorenzale i Sugrañes, *Origin of the Barcelona county coat* (1843-1844), oil, 121 x 164 cm, (inv. 277), realized in Rome, Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi

Clavé's Mexican students included such names as José Salomé Pina, Santiago Rebull Gordillo,<sup>16</sup> Eugenio Landesio and José María Velasco Gómez, all four of them famous 19th-century Mexican artists. J. S. Pina (1830 – 1909)<sup>17</sup> became well known after 1852 for his painting *Hagar and Ismael*. A year later he gained more renown when he produced *Samson and Delilah* (1853). In 1854, he

<sup>13</sup> For details see: NADAL, Jordi de, *Fine Arts*, [http://jordidenadal.com/references\\_eng.php](http://jordidenadal.com/references_eng.php)

<sup>14</sup> More details on the work and its background can be found in the essay: NADAL de, Jordi, "*Pelegrí Clavé, 1811 – 1880 : Jacob rep la túnica ensagonada del seu fill Josep. La darrera adquisició del Museu d'Art de Girona*". Girona : Museu d'Art de Girona, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> MANZANO, Salvador Moreno, *El pintor Pelegrín Clavé*. México : Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1966.

<sup>16</sup> FERNÁNDEZ, Justino, *El Arte del s. XIX en México*. México : UNAM, 1967, p. 76-80.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.biographies.net/bio/m/0vnnd39>; FERNÁNDEZ 1967, p. 56.

competed for a pension in Rome, which he won with his painting *San Carlos Borromeo Giving Alms to the Poor during the Plague*. Later, in 1856, he was awarded a grant to study in Paris, where he painted two works: *Abraham and Isaac* and *Dante and Virgil*. Both of these paintings from 1856, were sent by Pina to be displayed at the Academy of San Carlos.<sup>18</sup> In 1859, he exhibited his painting *La Piedad (The Virgin of Piety)* for which he received an honourable mention. In 1860, Pina moved from Paris back to Rome to complete his study of the classics under the tutelage of Consoni. In 1865, he was commissioned to make a painting commemorating the visit to Rome of Archduke Maximilian to see Pope Pius IX. Pina was unable to finish this work, but there are sketches of the painting on display at the Museo Nacional de Historia of Mexico. These sketches support the theory that Pina based his work on photographs. In 1869, Pina (died in 1909) became a professor at the Academy of San Carlos. At the time of his death (in 1909), his works had largely become unpopular with his students (including the future muralist Diego Rivera) as contemporary Mexican art had trended away from religious art. But in the modern day, he is remembered as an important art figure in Mexican history.

Eleven paintings by Santiago Rebull Gordillo and José María Velasco Gómez can be found in the National Museum in Prague, one of which was conceived as a Nazarene painting: this painting was of the Savior and came from the Kaska collection (Kaska was Maximilian's pharmacist and after the execution of the Mexican Emperor; he created a collection that he decided send to the National Museum in Prague in 1906.).<sup>19</sup> So we can observe the persistence of the Nazarene painting in time and geography, a circle that goes in the line Spain – Rome – Mexico – Prague.

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<sup>18</sup> Today they are in the MUNAL (National Museum) in Mexico City.

<sup>19</sup> See more in: ŠTĚPÁNEK, Pavel, František Kaska,, pharmacien de l'Empereur Maximilien au Mexique et sa collection au Musée National de Prague- In FARRÉ, M. Josph – MARTINEZ, Françoise – OLIVARES, Itamar (eds.) *Hommes de sciences et intellectuels euroéens en Amérique latine (XIX–XXe siècles) : Actes du colloque international et interdisciplinaire 18, 19, 20 novembre 2004 : Université Paris X* Paris : Éditions Le Manuscrit, 2005.

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