



 CATALOGUE ENTRY

**St. Michael and St. Amador
St. Stephen and St. Mary Magdalene**

about 1410

Pere Vall

Spanish, active 1405–1411

egg tempera, oil, and gilding on pine panel

35-1/4 × 25-9/16 in. (89.5 × 65 cm)

35-1/16 × 25-13/16 in. (89.1 × 65.5 cm)

The Clowes Collection

2014.83.1

2014.83.2

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

Pronounced horizontal ridges along joins in panels at approximately one-third and two-thirds up the composition. Partial/damaged inscription on left shoulder of the figure on the right (St. Amador): S AMAD[O]R. Vertical burn above and to the right of St. Amador's head. (2014.83.1)

Horizontal ridges along joins in panels at approximately one-third and two-thirds up the composition (2014.83.2)

Entry

1 These paintings are two of six extant panels that once formed part of a predella (or *banco*, the bottom row of an altarpiece) likely created for a chapel within one of the many churches in the Catalan town of Cardona (fig. 1), perhaps one dedicated to St. Michael Archangel. In *St. Michael and St. Amador*, the archangel at left is shown as is typical of his iconography, which was well codified by the fifteenth century. He has light hair; elaborate, colorful wings; and wears armor. Despite his serene countenance, he has pierced a dragon clean through with his spear, and blood drips from the wound. Michael's bright red and elaborately patterned shield points to armor more ceremonial and celestial than functional, and contrasts with the muted earth tones of his companion's attire. At right, St. Amador is named in the inscription, and his garments, such as the scapular, and bare feet identify him as a hermit saint. Like Michael, he has a prominent forehead; small, round eyes; rosy cheeks; a little mouth with red lips; a distinctively contoured nose and eyebrows; and highly stylized, elongated hands typical of Pere Vall and his circle. Dark contouring lines of deep brown contrast with bright whites used for modeling within the skin tones, especially in the forehead, hair, and hands of the figures. These stylistic qualities remain consistent in *St. Stephen and St. Mary Magdalene*, which depicts the fair, curly-haired Stephen on the left and the veiled Magdalene on the right. Stephen is tonsured and easily identified by the stone lodged in his scalp, the method of his martyrdom, which is readily visible thanks to the blood gushing from the wound. Subtleties in the modeling of St. Stephen's patterned drapery would once have been much more visible, but the blue-green pigment has darkened over time. The reds and whites of Mary Magdalene's habit and veil have fared better, and indicate the artist's careful attention to contours and the details of textiles. The reflections and pooling folds of the robes are surprisingly dynamic for such otherwise static, iconic, two-dimensional figures. All four saints are grounded and unified across panels by the running frieze of uniformly square tiles, rendered in earth tones with a simple geometric decoration. The horizontality is reinforced by the blue-gray bench, decorated with floral vine scrolls, niches, and finials typical of late Gothic architecture. The structural device would have served to unify the panels and ground the altarpiece as a whole. Finally, the upper register of the panels was adorned with punched gold leaf, which now appears orange in color thanks to the exposure of the clay bole ground used to adhere the gold leaf to the surface of the panel. Even so, fine punches create elaborate decorative and floral patterns, including on the saints' haloes, which are set apart by borders and internal patterns. The scalloped frames with columns on either side are also gilded, thus uniting painted image and frame. These qualities are typical of late medieval altarpiece painting, even while the patterns of punching are unique to the workshop.



Figure 1: View of the medieval city of Cardona. Photo by curoicurto / iStock.

2 Pere Vall is known to us from references in contracts that document his career in Barcelona and Cardona during the early decades of the fifteenth century.¹ His distinctive painting style, of which these panels are excellent examples, had long made it easy to associate the artist with the characteristic craft of early fifteenth-century Cataluña.² Similarly, the wealth of material associated with the artist that remains in situ in the town of Cardona, about 100 kilometers northwest of Barcelona, ensured ample comparanda for use in attribution even before the discovery of contracts that made it possible to associate this master painter with the name Pere Vall. From the turn of the twentieth century, other panels had begun making their way from Cardona to private collections and eventually prominent museums in the United States and Europe, including, in addition to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, the Museu Episcopal de Vic, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. The wide dispersal of his work in modern times has contributed to Vall's status as one of the most distinctive documented artists active in the environs of Barcelona during the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The Indianapolis panels are prime examples of the large, gilded retables that so commonly furnished the altars of Spain's sacred spaces. Even though these panels are nearly a meter high, they were part of the predella, which comprised the smallest panels of the ensemble.³

3 Vall is thought to have trained with another pair of well-known artists of the period: the Serra brothers, Pere and Jaume, who were active in Barcelona at about the same time and betray a similar affinity for flat figures with strong contours.⁴ Such stylistic qualities would have made these artists and their circle attractive to patrons in search of large, readable images for use in a liturgical context, whether behind a church's high altar or that of a side chapel. Therefore, Vall must be understood within the context of the broader stylistic trends of his time and place, and part of an active industry fueling the demand for devotional images fitting a common aesthetic and function. The subjects of these panel paintings—the archangel Michael and St. Amador, and Saints Stephen and Mary Magdalene—are typical of the subjects that Vall and his contemporaries would have been asked to paint, especially for the bottom row of an altarpiece. These holy men and women enjoyed active cults in Spain throughout the medieval period and beyond. Their depiction here, in the *banco* of an altarpiece from Cardona, reveals much about contemporary devotional practice while reflecting the personal piety of their patron, about whom little more than his or her place of residence, relative wealth, and desired intercessors is known.

4 Vall's characteristically static and highly stylized figures represent the public faces of personal piety. It was out of devotion that their patron selected these saints, together with the others in the predella, which may once have included nine or ten panels.⁵ Although these often did not depict the primary saint to which the retablo (and its chapel) was dedicated, the predella was a place of privilege within the carefully planned group of images owing to its proximity to the altar, its visibility, and its function as a tabernacle for storage of the reserve Host. The choice of saint to be included therein often depended on the popularity of local cults, the availability of relics, and the association of a saint with a particular profession or confraternity. All were evidence of personal as well as communal piety, as they were expected to act as powerful intercessors between the individual and God.

5 Modern photographs confirm that these two panels and at least four (known) others, when intact, would have belonged to the predella of the same altarpiece. The saints in the above panels would have therefore once been seen within the context of other paired and individual saints, including *Saints Benedict and Onuphrius* (figs. 2, 3), as well as the *Madonna Dolorosa* and *Saints Anne and Lawrence* (whereabouts unknown). In situ and illuminated by candlelight—the vertical burn mark on the upper right of *St. Michael and St. Amador* is perhaps the result of such a lighting scheme—the saints would have glowed within their reflective gold celestial frames, adding a dramatic visual component to the Mass. The inclusion of extensive punching throughout the gilding above the saints (made by way of metal punches pressed into the soft gold leaf and bole) would have enhanced the twinkling effect.



Figure 3: Pere Vall (Spanish, active 1405–1411), *Six predella panels of an altarpiece*, as reproduced in Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), fig. 112.

Figure 2: Pere Vall (Spanish, active 1405–1411), *Saints Benedict and Onuphrius*, about 1410, tempera and gold on softwood panel, 35 × 26-3/8 in. Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Museum purchase with funds generously provided by Richard and Luba Barrett, MM.2017.02. Photography by Kevin Todora.



Figure 4: Example of a larger panel (central panel of an altarpiece) by Pere Vall (Spanish, active 1405–1411), *Saint Anne with the Virgin and the Christ Child*, about 1408, tempera and gold on wood 59-1/16 × 37-19/32 in. Szépművészeti Múzeum/ Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 2021, Inv. 84.6.

⁶ Although the patron would have stipulated the visual content of a commission, the particular style of the figures was dependent on the the artist. The faces of Pere Vall's figures bear strong, dark contours, which are especially notable in the noses rendered in profile. Given the similarity between these and other works attributed to Pere Vall in Cardona, these panels may come from one of the many churches in that city, which benefited from a growing merchant class in the late medieval period.⁶ Anna Orríols i Alsina and others have convincingly suggested that the panels were part of an altarpiece of a chapel in Cardona's church of Sant Miquel (fig. 5), where documents attest to Vall's successful business among members of the nobility there.⁷



Figure 5: Façade of the church of Sant Miquel of Cardona in the medieval city of Cardona in Catalonia, Spain. Photo by J2R / iStock.

7 The choice of saints in that altarpiece represents a balance between the different kinds of holy figures that populated contemporary devotional practice, from biblical figures to early Christian martyrs, to hermits and monastic and ecclesiastical saints. The well-rounded offering of Mary Magdalene, St. Peter, St. Michael the Archangel, St. Amador, St. Stephen, St. Lawrence, St. Onuphrius, and an unknown bishop saint were not entirely unusual for a Spanish aristocrat and in step with early fifteenth-century popular devotion. The familiar biblical figures include, in a nun's habit, Mary Magdalene, the reformed sinner identified by her ointment jar; the apostle Peter, the first pope, depicted with the keys to heaven; St. Michael, perhaps the titular saint of the church and commonly invoked against plague; and Saint Benedict (d. 543), the influential founder of the monastic order that bears his name. Benedict's black habit and tonsure identify him as a monk, while the book he holds is the Rule, or code, by which Benedictine monks live. Also depicted are St. Amador, a Portuguese hermit whose clothing identifies him as such, and the unclothed Saint Onuphrius, a more obscure third-century Egyptian hermit. Onuphrius was known for his miracle-working and became the object of an active cult in medieval Iberia. It is not Onuphrius's miracles but his body—covered only with a strap of branches and his own flowing hair—that visually identify him. St. Amador, on the other hand, was a saint indigenous to Iberia whose cult became particularly associated with the intercession for souls in Purgatory.⁸

8 *St. Michael and St. Amador and St. Stephen and St. Mary Magdalene* represent important examples of the artistic production of early fifteenth-century Catalonia and are a key part of the medieval holdings of the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Author

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Provenance

From the predella (*banco*) of an altarpiece, likely commissioned for the church of San Miguel or church of San Vicente in Cardona (Barcelona) and dismantled in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

James W. Barney (1878–1948), New York;⁹

Collection of Ricardo Viñas, Barcelona by at least 1952.¹⁰

(Newhouse Galleries, New York) by 1957;¹¹

Edith Whitehill Clowes, Indianapolis, in 1959;¹²

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1959–2014, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (CI0078A-B);

Given to Indianapolis Museum of Art, now Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2014.

Exhibitions

Salón de Tinell y Real Capilla de Santa Àgueda, Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, Barcelona, 1952, *Exposición de Primitivos Mediterráneos*, nos. 162 and 163, as Maestro del Pentecostés de Cardona, Dos fragmentos de una misma predela. Tres santos, San Miguel y la Virgen (no. 162). En el otro: San Esteban, Maria Magdalena, San Benito, San Onofre, un santo obispo y San Pedro (Two fragments of the same predella. Three saints, Saint Michael and the Virgin (no. 162). In the other: Saint Stephen, Mary Magdalene, Saint Benedict, Saint Onuphrius, a bishop saint and Saint Peter), Colección Ricardo Viñas, Barcelona;

John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, IN, 1960, *Indiana Collects*, nos. 10 and 11;

Indiana University Museum of Art, Bloomington, IN, 1962, *Italian and Spanish Paintings from the Clowes Fund Collection*, nos. 25a and 25b;

References

Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 298–299, fig. 112 (reproduced);

Exposición de Primitivos Mediterráneos (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1952), 62–63, nos. 162 and 163;

Advertisement for Newhouse Galleries, *The Connoisseur* 140, no. 566 (January 1958): lxxi, (reproduced 2014.83.2 only);

Archivo Español de Arte 31 (1958): 165, no. 36, ill. (reproduction of second panel);

Italian and Spanish Paintings from the Clowes Collection (Bloomington: Indiana University Art Museum, 1962), nos. 25a and 25b;

Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968);

A. Ian Fraser, *A Catalogue of the Clowes Collection* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973), 48–49;

Josep Gudiol Ricart and Santiago Alcolea *Blanch, Pintura gòtica catalana* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1986), 99, no. 271, figs. 473 and 473 (reproduced);

Sotheby's New York, Thursday, 28 January 1999, Property of a Charitable Organization, Pere Vall (Master of the Cardona Pentacost), active 1400–1425, *The Madonna Dolorosa and Saints Anne and Lawrence: A Pair of Panels from a Retable*, both tempera on panel [lot 00426], mentions IMA's panels in write up for sale of two other panels from the same predella.

Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 131–193, esp. 176–178, figs. 25c and 25f, as private collection, USA (reproduced);

Anna Orriols, "Vall, Pere," *Magistri Cataloniae*, accessed 20 December 2019, <http://www.magjstricataloniae.org/en/indexmceng/codumentedart/item/vall-pere.html>, as "seis compartamentos de la predela de un retablo (EEUU, col. part)."

Mark A. Roglán, ed., *Meadows Museum: A Handbook of the Collection* (Dallas: Scala Arts in association with Meadows Museum, 2021).

Notes

1. The most extensive outline of Pere Vall's life is in Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 131–193.
2. Chandler Rathfon Post referred to the works now attributed to Pere Vall, whom he called The Master of the Cardona Pentecost, in his monumental *A History of Spanish Painting*, beginning in the second volume, published in 1930. It was not until the appendix of the tenth volume that he associated the predella of the Indianapolis panels with the artist. See Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 282–88, and vol. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 298–299, fig. 112, where he cites previous mentions of the The Master of the Cardona Pentecost. See also Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 136–137, nn.19–21.
3. Judith Berg Sobre, *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350–1500* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), especially 184–195.
4. Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 138–140.
5. The total potential number of panels in the predella was suggested by both Post and Orriols i Alsina based on the six panels (in two groups of three) that were still intact in the 1950s (see below) in addition to the content of the panels, which include one image of a single saint, probably Mary (a Mater Dolorosa) and the likely existence of a tabernacle in the center of the predella as was typical in late medieval Catalan retables. Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 298. Judith Berg Sobre, *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350–1500* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989). Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 176–178. For proposed reconstructions of some of the other altarpieces from the church of Sant Miquel in Cardona, see *ibid.*, appendices 2 and 3, 183–184.
6. Andreu Galera i Pedrosa records the sponsorship of 29 chapels in the church of St. Miquel in Cardona between 1300 and 1556. See Andreu Galera i Pedrosa "L'Església dels prohoms. La fundació de beneficis eclesiàstics eimplés a Sant Miquel de Cardona (Segles XIII–XVI)," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 119–120.

7. Ana Orriols i Alsina, "La pintura gòtica a Sant Miquel de Cardona," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 176–178. Note that Orriols i Alsina lists all six panels as in a private U.S. collection. The suggestion that the panels come from the church of Sant Miquel in Cardona was picked up by María Cruz de Carlos in an unpublished text in curatorial files of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. All authors, including the present one, note that it is impossible at this time to prove the exact origin of the altarpiece but agree that Sant Miquel is certainly likely owing to the fact that each of the saints represented were known to have been venerated at that church. For a list of chapel dedications at Sant Miquel de Cardona and their locations within the church, see Andreu Galera i Pedrosa "L'església dels prohoms. La fundació de beneficis eclesiàstics eimplés a Sant Miquel de Cardona (Segles XIII–XVI)," in *L'església parroquial de San Miquel de Cardona: El gòtic al mig Cardener*, ed. Mercedes Juan i Verdejo et al. (Manresa: Centre d'Estudis del Bages, 2003), 119–120.
8. Unpublished study by María Cruz de Carlos, File C10078, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. For the life of Saint Amador and his iconography in context, see Paulino Rodríguez Barral, *La justicia del más allá: Iconografía en la Corona de Aragón en la baja Edad Media* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2007), 195–197.
9. See Chandler Rathfon Post, *A History of Spanish Painting*, vol. 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 298.
10. See *Exposición de Primitivos Mediterráneos* (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1952), 62–63, nos. 162–163.
11. It seems to be at this point that the panels of the *banco* were further broken up for sale. See advertisement, *The Connoisseur* 140, no. 566 (January 1958), lxvi (C10078B is reproduced).
12. Purchase agreement, 10 April 1959, File C10078A-B, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.