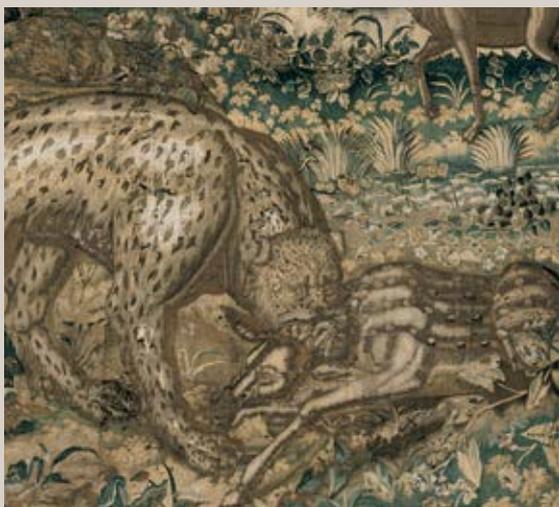


Tapestries of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

New pieces of Francisco Tons' workshop in Pastrana



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum owns three tapestries. They were donated in 1953 by Mercedes Basabe y Cotoner, widow of Manuel de Taramona. In her will, following the known wish of her husband, she gave the museum an important legacy of works of art and artistic objects. The donation was carried through by the brother of the deceased, Luis Basabe y Cotoner.

Two of the tapestries were woven in Pastrana (Guadalajara), in the workshop that the 3rd Duke of Pastrana Ruy Gómez de Silva de Mendoza y de la Cerda (1596-1626) sponsored in the Village of the Alcarria, putting the Flemish François Tons, who soon make his name Spanish, in charge of the workshop¹. He was born in Brussels, belonging to a family of weavers and designers of cartoons since the first half of the 17th century; he is quoted in the year 1613 as one of the most important weavers of the village². From his production in Brussels, some examples are kept, like three tapestries of a *Life of Saint Paul* (Pinacoteca Fabriano) or one of a scene of an ancient battle (The Detroit Institute of Arts). He decided to migrate to Spain by unknown reasons and he asked King Phillip IV for permission to settle down in Pastrana; request suggested by Ruy Gómez. We don't know how those two men got to know each other.

Those two tapestries made in Pastrana belong to a series that is nowadays scattered and incomplete, known as *Animals in the Forest*. We will name them, the same that the others belonging to the series, by the action taking place in the middle of the piece: *Lion at the River Bank* [fig. 1] and *Leopard Killing a Deer* [fig. 2]. As well as its artistic value they are very interesting for the lack of examples of the manufacture of the Alcarria found until this moment: seven pieces that carry the mark of the workshop of Tons and/or of Pastrana, plus another ascribed to it, to which we might add those two "new" tapestries, both with the marks of the city and the workshop.

1 For the foundation and the activity of this factory in Pastrana see Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985; García Calvo 1995, pp. 130-171 and 182-291.

2 Delmarcel 1999, p. 369



1. *Lion at the River bank*
Mark of Pastrana and monogram of Francisco Tons, c. 1622-1626
415 x 455 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



2. *Leopard Killing a Deer*

Mark of Pastrana and monogram of Francisco Tons, c. 1622-1626

421 x 504 cm

Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

The third, probably woven in the last quarter of the 17th century in Flemish workshop, represents an Episode of the War of Troy: *Flight of Aeneas from Troy with his Father Anchises and Ascanio* [fig. 11].

Foundation and production of the manufacture of Pastrana

As it has been said before, the 3rd Duke of Pastrana was the promoter of this workshop, of which there are very interesting literary evidences, like the one provided by the chronicler Andrés de Almansa Mendoza, where he points out that being the Corpus Christi in Madrid, in 1623, the Duke of Pastrana “hizo exponer un dosel nuevo, de seda, plata y oro, el mejor que desta calidad se ha visto, hecho en el nuevo obraje que ha traído a su villa de Pastrana el duque, para emulación de chinos y flamencos, pues se han hecho allí algunas tapicerías, las mejores que dicen se hallan en Europa”³.

The documents studied in the archives show that is the duke the one who subsidised the workshop, who put in advance the money for the buying of the raw materials to weave the tapestries and the one who pay the wages of Tons and the Flemish working with him, as well as providing them with lodgings in the village.

In 1622, Tons, likewise many other fellow countrymen weavers who decided to migrate abroad at that time⁴, is already established in Pastrana with his officials and living in the houses provided by the duke, where he has come to introduce in Spain “el arte de hacer tapicerías de todas suertes [...]”. This is the reason, among others, that he had alleged to settle in Pastrana in the document of petition to Phillip IV, in January 1621. In this petition⁵ he justifies his election of the village “[...] tiene noticia que en la villa de Pastrana en el reyno de Toledo cerca de la corte de V. Magd. ay comodidades de buenos tintes, por las aguas, que halli se labra la seda que es lo mas necesario para su arte, demas de otras comodidades que tiene la tierra”, and he specifies the conditions under which he comes to work to the kingdoms of Spain: that in thirty years nobody but he himself or his officials could weave tapestries in Spain and that this introduction “de labor de tapizerías de Bruselas y de otras partes” only would be done in Pastrana; they would not pay taxes and they would be given houses to live and work in the village; they would be sold wool from Segovia and other materials at the usual price; that after twelve years of work and having left the process of manufacture settled he could return to their country if they wish so, etc. Conditions very similar to the privileges granted to the Flemish Coomans and Van der Plancken when they establish their workshop in Paris⁶.

The period of greatest activity was between 1622 and 1626, according to the plentiful news on the production of these years. The tapestries from those looms end up in the possession of the Duke. He not only subsidised the manufacture but he also promotes it. In June 1624 his efforts are acknowledged in the Court, and King Phillip IV orders the payment of a allowance of 5,000 ducats for the setting of a workshop in Pastrana for Francisco Tons “maestro mejor de hazer tapicerías que trabaja en Pastrana, y ha introducido alli esta obra, de que se espera resultara mucho beneficio á estos regnos [...]”. Again, in September 1625, the King orders the Infanta Isabel the payment of seven thousand ducats to Tons and the Flemish weavers “[...] que vinieron con él y trabajan en lo mismo, he hecho merced en consideración desto y de lo que gastaron en el viaje que hizieron de esos payses aca, y de la necesidad en que he entendido se hallan, y para que puedan continuar su asistencia en la misma ocupación con mas comodidad y descanso, de siete mil ducados por una vez librados en lo que me pertenece de las presas que han hecho, o hizieron los navios de esa Armada [...]”⁷.

3 Almansa y Mendoza 1886.

4 Delmarcel 2002.

5 Archivo de Simancas, Cámara de Castilla, legajo 1112. Published by Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985, pp. 92 and 116.

6 Reyniès 2002, p. 204.

7 Muntz 1878-1885, p. 27, notes 1-2.

The archives supply us with plentiful documentation on those years⁸. Thanks to them we know that a great amount of the tapestries became a part of the splendid collection of Ruy Gómez de Silva, as may have happened to the series of *Animals in the Forest*, from which two pieces are now in the hands of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. Other tapestries may have gone to the collections of his family and friends.

In December 23rd 1626 the 3rd Duke of Pastrana passed away. In 1627 the news about Tons and his workshop decrease, to disappear from the notarial archives of Pastrana in 1628, but the Flemish weaver is still living in the village until his death in 1633⁹ and still in the year 1638 in the parochial archives, it is cited a “maestro de flamencos” who pay the funeral of a Flemish woman¹⁰. This make us think that the manufacture was still working throughout those years even though we don’t have documents that support our theory.

The workshop of the Alcarria showed a great activity. We don’t have news of a great part of the tapestries woven there, and the ones known are ten, including the two belonging to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum that are added now as it is stated in the introduction. Of those, three are *Tapestries of Arms*. One bearing the arms of Diego de Guzmán y Benavides (Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire, Bruxelles), another those of Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares (Parador Hostal de San Marcos, Leon) and a third bears the arms of Silva, Mendoza and de la Cerda (Museo Cerralbo, Madrid). Of a *Story of Latona* two pieces are kept: *Juno pursuing Latona* (whereabouts actually unknown) and *Latona watching the inhabitants of Lacio changed into frogs* (Collection Axel Vervoordt, Antwerp), from the Collection of the Duke of Berwick and Alba. Finally, the five pieces belonging to the series *Animals in the Forest*, that we are going to talk next¹¹.

Animals in the Forest (1622-1626)

This is the temporary title given to the three tapestries known on this theme until this moment and that we will widen to five. Of those initial three, two bear the marks of Pastrana and of Francisco Tons: *The Monkeys* [fig. 3], sold in Milan in 1969 and *Panthers Attacking a Horse* [fig. 4], sold at auction in New York in 1983¹². The third tapestry of this series bears no mark, we know it for its copy kept in the Marillier Subject of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and that is the one we have titled *Eagle Catching a Fish* [fig. 5]¹³.

The two “new” tapestries: *Lion on the River Bank* and *Leopard Killing a Deer* carry on the cast off of the left border the mark of the village, although is quite difficult see it due to the damage of the fabric in that area: a capital P in the middle of a tower (heraldic emblem of Castile) symbolises Pastrana in Castile [fig. 6]. In the cast off of the right border we can see the monogram of Francisco Tons, made by the letters F, S, and T

8 The “cartas de pago” from this period in the “Archivo de Protocolos” of Pastrana amount to more than 180. The first dates back from May 1622. In it, Tons gets from the Duke of Pastrana, through his administrator, 5,000 *reales* since April that same year for him and his officials that work in the tapestries. In successive letters of that same year, “el maestro de la nueva obra de tapicerías”, resident in the village of Pastrana and native of Brussels, receive different amount of money as salary and to pay rentals, pay the dyer, to whiten worsted yarn... In one of the letters, dated May 23rd, he is paid 5,180 *reales* for his and his officials’ expenses. June 14th he received, again, 6,000 *reales* for the rations of his people; in July he is given 11,711 *reales* for the silk that is dyed, the whiten of worsted yarn, the making of combs; and two months later 9,262 *reales* for the buying of silk, “canillas” and “rodetes”. These are some of the sums of money given to him the first year of his stay in the village. 1625 was the year of the workshop greatest height, as it is testified by the greatest number of letters, almost 70, and the great amount of money he received, in which are detailed the buying of the materials, the wages, the tapestries that are being woven ordered by the Duke, etc. 1626 it was also a year of great activity, decreasing the following year the flow of letters and disappearing in 1628. García Calvo 1995, pp. 130-171 and 182-291.

9 Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985, p. 98.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 103-114.

12 Viale Ferrero 1973, p. 111, fig. 16, published the tapestry of “The Monkeys”. The tapestry of “The Panthers” appeared in a sales catalogue *Fine French and Continental Furniture*, New York, Christie’s, 30 April 1983, p. 62, no. 136.

13 *Marillier subject catalogue of tapestries*, vol. Animals; 40; previously known as the Collection Earl of Iveagh, London.



3. *The Monkeys*
Mark of Pastrana and monogram of Francisco Tons
c. 1622-1626
Whereabouts unknown



4. *Panthers Attacking a Horse*
Mark of Pastrana and monogram of Francisco Tons
c. 1622-1626
Whereabouts unknown



5. *Eagle Catching a Fish*
 Probably woven in Pastrana, in the workshop of
 Francisco Tons, c. 1622-1626
 Previously in the Collection of the Earl of Iveagh,
 London
 Whereabouts unknown

crowned by the number 4 [fig. 7]. Sometimes to this monogram it is added the name of the weaver on the cast off of the bottom border.

Originally they would have been owned by their promoter Ruy Gómez de Silva. The inventories of possessions, of the 3rd Duke and his heirs, have been basic for knowing the production. Through them we have known of the existence of series woven in Pastrana and actually their whereabouts unknown as the one of “cinco panos de la Ystoria de Alexandro [...]”, that of “los centauros de cuatro panos y seis entrebentanas [...]”, another of “fabulas y Ranas [...]”¹⁴.

They used the same border for the five tapestries, something usual. It consists of a strip of leaves of acanthus that go round the border. Canes with figureheads broke the monotony, as well as the medallions with well-known figures inside, that we see in the corners and the middle of the borders [fig. 8].

14 Inventory made in 1686 at the death of Catalina Gómez de Sandoval y Mendoza. Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985, p. 120, appendix 11.



6. *Lion at the River Bank*
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Mark of the village of Pastrana



7. *Lion at the River Bank*
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Monogram of Francisco Tons

Very similar borders can be seen in tapestries woven in French workshops of the first quarter of the 17th century, the *Story of Artemisa* and the *Story of Coriolanus*, from the manufacture of Francois de la Planche, weaver native of Audenarde that migrated to France as Tons did it to Spain, as well as in tapestries from Brussels of the same time. Some examples of the last ones are *Sceneries of Palaces and Gardens* of Jean Raes and Jacques Geubels II, that belonged to Patrimonio Nacional and disappeared in the fire of the Spanish Embassy in Lisbon¹⁵; the *Neuf Preux* of the same signature or a *Story of Troy*, also woven in the workshop of Jean Raes, Jacques Geubels II and Nicaise Aerts¹⁶.

These borders that Tons uses in *Animals in the Forest* are, on the other hand, the same that those of the two tapestries of Arms of Diego de Guzmán and of the Count-Duke of Olivares [fig. 9].

The flora as well as the fauna are inspired in models of the 16th century¹⁷. *The Monkeys* is the left side of the famous drawing of the rhinoceros from the workshop of Van Aelst from Antwerp. *Eagle Catching a Fish* is a reversed copy of the right part of one of the seven tapestries of the series known as *La Licorne*, owned by the Prince Borromeo and kept in the island Isola Bella. Woven in Brussels in the middle of the 16th century, Guillermo Tons, great-uncle of Francisco Tons, is considered the author of the scenery¹⁸. Parallel to that it is the most important series on that theme of *Scenery with Animals*, that of the Castle of Wawel in Krakow¹⁹. Forty-four pieces, where animals fighting can be seen, and that are interpreted to have an

15 Junquera 1976, pp. 14-17.

16 Viale Ferrero 1981.

17 Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985, pp. 107-108.

18 Delmarcel 1999, p. 369.

19 Szablowski 1972, pp. 191-286.



8. *Lion at the River Bank*
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Medallion with popular figure



9. *Arms of Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares*
Mark of Pastrana and monogram of Francisco Tons, c. 1622
Parador Hostal de San Marcos, León

allegoric meaning related to Christ or the human soul. This is also what happens with the *Pugnae Ferarum* or of the *Fighting of wild Animals* belonging to the Prince Borromeo²⁰.

Guy Delmarcel suggested the possibility that Tons, for this series of *Animals in the Forest* of Pastrana, had available designs coming from his ancestors, like his great-uncle Guillermo or his great-grandfather Jean Tons²¹. Taking into account those two tapestries of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum it seems to prove the close relation that has been previously seen in the known ones with the ones of Isola Bella and those of Wawel.

The model used in *Lion at the River Bank* (the best preserved of the two) is very similar to the first tapestry of *La Licorne*, reputed to be the representation of the goodness creator of Nature²², but reversed and reduced in its width, at the same time that there are some changes in the animals that appear. In a lush scenery, in which stands out a palm tree, are placed the different animals in apparent harmony, standing out in the middle of the scene the lion by the riverbank [fig. 10]. In the river there are fish and ducks swimming, and they do not seem disturbed either by the feline or the sort of lizard that is on the left. The same happens with the herons on the shore.

The other tapestry, *Leopard Killing a Deer*, also reminds, in the treatment of the animals and its placement in the tapestry, to *Leopard Fighting with a Bear*, of the *Scenery with Animals* of Wawel²³. While in the right side of the composition a leopard kills a deer, in the left side another nurses her cubs, at the same time that watches the scene. At the back, we see a llama, that is very similar to that which appears on the right side of *Llama and Cattle Grazing* of that same collection of Wawel in Krakow²⁴.

20 Roethlisberger 1967.

21 Asselberghs/Delmarcel/García Calvo 1985, p. 108.

22 Roethlisberger 1967, pp. 86-88; Viale Ferrero 1973, pp. 77-81.

23 Szablowski 1972, pp. 214-218.

24 Ibid., pp. 244-248.



10. *Lion at the River Bank*
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail

War of Troy: Flight of Aeneas from Troy with his Father Anchises and Ascanio

Aeneas, born of the relationship between the goddess Aphrodite and Anchises and shepherd in Ida, was brought up in the mountains and taken when he was five years old by his father to Troy, where he grew up to become one of the Trojan leaders. During the war of Troy he fought against the most important Greek heroes. When the city fell, he ran away with his father Anchises, his son Ascanio and the Penate gods, which gave him the epithet of Aeneas the "pious".

This circumstance of the life of Aeneas has served of emblem to show the filial piety²⁵, and in the tapestry this is shown accurately: in the middle of the scene Aeneas carries on his back his old father. By his side his son Ascanio and all those who decided to follow him in his flight of Troy that is burning on the left side, devastated by the Greeks. His wife Creusa, who disappeared in this dramatic way out of the city, is missing in this entourage. Virgil, in the Aeneid, describes in great detail this flight (Book II, 704-805), in which he is accompanied by those who has come from every place with spirit and resources ready to follow him where the sea would carry them (Book II, 798-800).

The Trojan legend was very popular in the art of the last centuries. That also happened with the tapestries. There are several known series, some very widespread on their time, as it may be the case of the tapestries of Troy, maybe woven in Tournai around 1470 and that are actually in the Catedral de Zamora, among other places, and from which countless editions were made²⁶. During the next centuries, different Flemish centres like Brussels or Audenarde, produced series on this theme. Workshops of people like Frans Geubels, Jean Raes and Catherine van den Eynde, Martin Reynbouts, were the ones who weave them.

²⁵ Alciato (1531) 1985, p. 238, emblem 194.

²⁶ Asselberghs 1999, pp. 43-218.



11. *Flight of Aeneas from Troy with his Father Anchises and Ascanio*
Flemish tapestry woven around the last quarter of the 17th century, 329 x 503 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

The episode represented in this tapestry of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum has been reproduced in painting as well as in sculpture in different times, finding examples more widely known in the sculpture. We have a group of sculptures from the 2nd century in the Forum of Augustus in Rome showing Aeneas in his flight of Troy carrying on his shoulders his father Anchises and his son Ascanio holding his hand. Another known example is the one of Bernini (Galleria Borghese, Rome). In the 17th century, an illustration of the engraver Antonio Tempesta and a painting by Gian Francesco Romanelli (Galerie Mazarine, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris) also capture this scene. In the tapestries that same chapter and with a very similar composition, although with a different cartoon, is found in a piece from Brussels of the end of the 16th century belonging to a private collection in Madrid²⁷. It was woven in Aubusson in the 17th century a *Story of Dido and Aeneas* that included a tapestry with the same theme. The cartoons used were made by the famous painter Isaac Moillon (1614-1673), he was the author of many of the tapestries made by the famous French manufacture²⁸.

The tapestry is Flemish, as it has been said before, but in absence of marks of the city or the workshop it cannot be attributed to any specific centre of manufactures. The lack of marks of the place of making or weaver can be due to the fact that the cast off of the border that surround the tapestry and where these marks could be was added later, except for the right border. Many tapestries have reached nowadays in that conditions, not only from that period but also from others.

The borders are, on the other hand, a very important element to locate them chronologically since each period favoured a fixed pattern. The eye-catching border of this tapestry [fig. 12], made by different kinds

27 Ibid., p. 216.

28 Aubusson 2005, pp. 202-204.



12. *Flight of Aeneas from Troy with his Father Anchises and Ascanio*
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Detail of the cast

of flowers (roses, daisies, tulips) that stand out of a red background in some parts and with many ribbons tied, is found in tapestries with a theme of scenery woven in the last quarter of the 17th century ascribed to Audenarde²⁹, important Flemish producing centre from the 15th to the 18th centuries, time in which started its decline. But the use of a fixed pattern of borders is not enough reason to allocate a piece to a specific place, and talking about Audenarde, where many tapestries on biblical themes, Ancient times and those known as “verduras” were woven, only the mark of the city would be the only safe criterion to allocate them.

29 Van De Meüter/Vanwelden 1999, pp. 204-207.

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