

Jorge Filipe de Almeida *and* Maria Manuela Barroso de Albuquerque

Os Painéis de Nuno Gonçalves

(Verbo, Lisbon, 2003).

For the small fraternity of world scholars who appreciate Portugal and its history the publication of a new, Verbo, edition of *Os Painéis de Nuno Gonçalves* brought a real thrill. The picture, magnificently reproduced, is of course well known but its history has only now been convincingly written by Jorge Filipe de Almeida and Maria Manuela Barroso de Albuquerque. Each detail of their analysis rings with conviction. The identification of the Henrique figure, hitherto a matter of patriotic speculation, is now firmly documented, the princely 'Navigator' standing as he does symbolically opposite his sister, the Duchess of Burgundy. Once a dating that is more accurate than the previously received one is accepted it becomes possible to identify many of the figures in the tableaux, both those alive at the time of composition and those already deceased. One of the more striking members of the assembly is the figure of the Rabbi of Santarem (a key negotiator in seeking the ransom of the martyred Infante Fernando) leaning backward – a one must – through his Jewish Bible. The double portrait of the beatified prince is symbolically surrounded – twice – by the power-seekers and the power-brokers of 1445. And herein is to be found one of the keys to the reinterpretation of the six panels. Not only do the authors categorically affirm the authorship of Nuno Gonçalves, they also convincingly date the work to the year 1445. The dendrochronological analysis of the Baltic oak planks on which the work was executed are wholly compatible with such a date. The context within the Flemish artistic tradition is also convincingly demonstrated. But above all Jorge Almeida and Maria Barroso have deciphered the stitching on the boot of the child-king, Afonso V (1432-1481). The deciphering shows that S N G s means the Sign of Nuno Gonçalves and that A for Anno is followed by C C C C R b - the Roman 445 (AD 1445). The time has come to include these fascinating new findings into the relevant museum documentation of Nuno Gonçalves and his works.

