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The polyptych by Nuno Goncalves presently in the collection of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisboa is without doubt the most important example of Portuguese painting in the fifteenth century. The traditional dating of the polyptych to the second half of the fifteenth century, however, poses problems in terms of an evolutionary history of Portuguese art which I have always found extremely disturbing.

On one hand, the traditional dating seems to imply a discontinuation of the achievements of Nuno Gonçaves in Portuguese panel paintings dating from the turn of the century, and the first decades of the sixteenth century. On the other hand, some of the achievements of the polyptych are so closely related to Flemish innovations of the first generation of painters (Van Eyck, Van der Weyden) which were circulating on the Iberian Peninsula from about 1440 on (Lluís Dalmau, for example), and that exerted a continuous influence in Valencian, Catalan and Castilian painting up to 1500 and beyond, that the situation in Portugal – in my view – deserves further explanation.

The proposal of Jorge Filipe de Almeida of dating the famous polyptych by Nuno Gonçaves to the mid-1440's – backed up by dendrochronological examination of the wooden boards of the panels – seems – in terms of the global artistic evolution on the Iberian Peninsula – to solve the discrepancy formulated above.

On one hand, the early dating of the polyptych would link Gonçaves work more closely to the first wave of reception of Eyckian painting in Portugal and Spain (Dalmau,

Master of Porciuncula, Rexach]. On the other hand, the Martyrdom scenes, from the fragmented altarpiece of Saint Vincent (by the Gonçaves workshop), would provide proof of a continuation of impact of Eyckian art into the 1460's and 1470's – a time when many of the later lusitano-flemish masters received their training.

I therefore strongly recommend to take the hypothesis by professor Jorge Filipe de Almeida very seriously, and plead for a reexamination of the evidence – technical, documentary, artistic – by an international group of specialists. If any work of fifteenth century art in Portugal deserves scrutiny at such a level, it is, without doubt, the famous polyptych of Nuno Gonçaves.

Yours sincerely



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