The Choir Stalls of the Cathedral of Astorga
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Of the choir stalls known as the “group of León”, (León, Oviedo, Zamora and Astorga), the ensemble at Astorga are the most recent and the least similar to the model created at León. Their late date, and their relationship to the Zamora stalls, where the León model had been only slightly modified, resulted in some important peculiarities and contradictions. Their construction in several stages during the sixteenth century places these stalls between the Gothic and the Renaissance periods. They therefore introduced the León model into the more Modern Age adapting it to the iconographic and stylistic traditions of the new era.

The work was carried out in two phases.4

The first phase was probably during the first third of the sixteenth century, when most of the carving was completed. We do not know the names of the artists who worked on the stalls because no contract or document survives from this period. Traditionally the authorship has been attributed to a sculptor, Juan de Colonia, who worked in Astorga at this time. He came from León and was familiar with the stalls in that cathedral.

The second period is better known because the contract for this part of the work, dated July 2, 1547, survives. It was signed by the cathedral chapter and the carvers Nicolas de Colonia, Tomás Mitata, Roberto Memorancy, and Pedro del Camino. The work specified was for a small number of stalls, no more than six upper and six lower stalls, the bishop’s throne and some functional elements such as doors, stairs, corners, and ends. They were also required to make necessary repairs and to install the ensemble in the choir. The contract stated that they must match the new elements to the style of the old ones, so we understand from this contract that this phase was the completion of an unfinished work.

The Astorga ensemble consists of ninety-seven stalls on three sides to form a U-shape and on two levels (fifty-five stalls in the high level and forty-two in the lower one). The newer stalls are very similar to the older ones in the ensemble but there are some differences: large panels took the place of the canopies and the desk ends were high and with open carvings, as on the Zamora stalls.

The iconographic program as well follows the Zamora stalls with the same order of prophets on the low level, and the use on the upper level of saints related to the ecclesiastical world instead of the martyrs and healing saints that are more abundant on the León stalls (Figs. 3 and 4). This change permitted the continued use of this model in more modern choir stalls of cathedrals, monasteries and convents in Spain.

The most important iconographic changes are in the profane carvings. The Renaissance motifs focused on new subjects, especially a variety of grotesques and ornamental motifs.

![Two Apes Drink](image)

Two Apes Drink

Astorga
FIGURE 3
ASTORGA CHOIR STALLS. HIGH LEVEL
FIGURE 4
ASTORGA CHOIR STALLS. LOW LEVEL
Apes Play Cards

Prophet

Astorga

Astorga