

**Carved by a member of the close circle of Rodrigo Alemán (1470-1542)
A group of misericords carved with fantastical beasts and jesters' masks, from the
choir stalls of the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid
Spain, Valladolid
c. 1490 - 1500**

Each one c. 25/26 x 65/66 x 15 cm; walnut with some sporadic woodworm holes and minor chip losses in places. Otherwise in excellent condition.

Provenance

Commissioned by Alonso de Burgos for the Colegio de San Gregorio, c. 1490-1500
Private collection, Spain

Following a rule introduced to medieval liturgy by Saint Benedict in the 6th century, prayers recited daily by monastic communities at each of the eight divine offices were said standing with uplifted hands. Congregations found relief from the hours of painful endurance this occasioned by adding small ledges to the underside of hinged choir stalls. When tilted up during the long periods spent on foot, these ledges, which are more commonly known as misericords, offered at least a modicum of respite to weary monastic legs.

The choir stalls from which these four walnut misericords originate were a monumental commission. They were made as part of a scheme of at least 34 seats carved by associates of the master sculptor Rodrigo Aleman in the last decade of the fifteenth century for the choir of the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid, which flourished for over 300 years as one of the greatest centres of religious learning in the kingdom of Castile.¹ Closed in 1821 and partially demolished shortly after, the colegio's choir stalls were removed for safe keeping at least two decades before its appointment as a national monument in 1884. Ten are now in the Bode Museum in Berlin, twelve are in the Diocesan Museum in Valladolid, and a further twelve have been dispersed on the art market over the course of the past century and a half. Our group shares with all of the other known stalls from the Colegio de San Gregorio their material, proportions, structure and stylistic treatment, as well as the cusped 'abacus' around their seat ledges and the five ball-like ornaments that encircle their bases.

They were carved by an artist (or artists) clearly acquainted with the work of the master sculptor Rodrigo Alemán, who was responsible for the banks of choirstalls erected at the Cathedrals of Plasencia and Toledo between 1495 and 1508 (figs. 1-3).² Their profane

¹ We are very grateful to Christel Theunissen for kindly sharing her research on the Valladolid choirstalls with us, on which the localisation and reconstruction of the present group is based. See C. Theunissen, 'Putting the pieces together: a medieval choir stall scattered around Europe: Choir Stalls in Architecture and Architecture', in *Choir Stalls in Architecture and Architecture in Choir Stalls*, Cambridge, 2015.

² Dorothee Heim, *Rodrigo Alemán und die Toledaner Skulptur um 1500: studien zum künstlerischen Dialog in Europa*, Kiel, 2006, fig. 19, p. 74.

and humorous carvings of dogs, dragons, wild men and grimacing jesters find parallels on the Colegio de San Gregorio's façade, which reprises similar themes in several places (figs. 4-5). Their re-emergence is thus of vital importance for our understanding both of the original scheme (and how it slotted into the wider visual program of the Colegio's decoration), and of the development of late-medieval sculpture in the Kingdom of Castile at a moment of extraordinary efflorescence.



Fig. 1
Rodrigo Alemán
Confessional stool from Plasencia Cathedral
c. 1500
Valladolid, Museo Nacional de Escultura

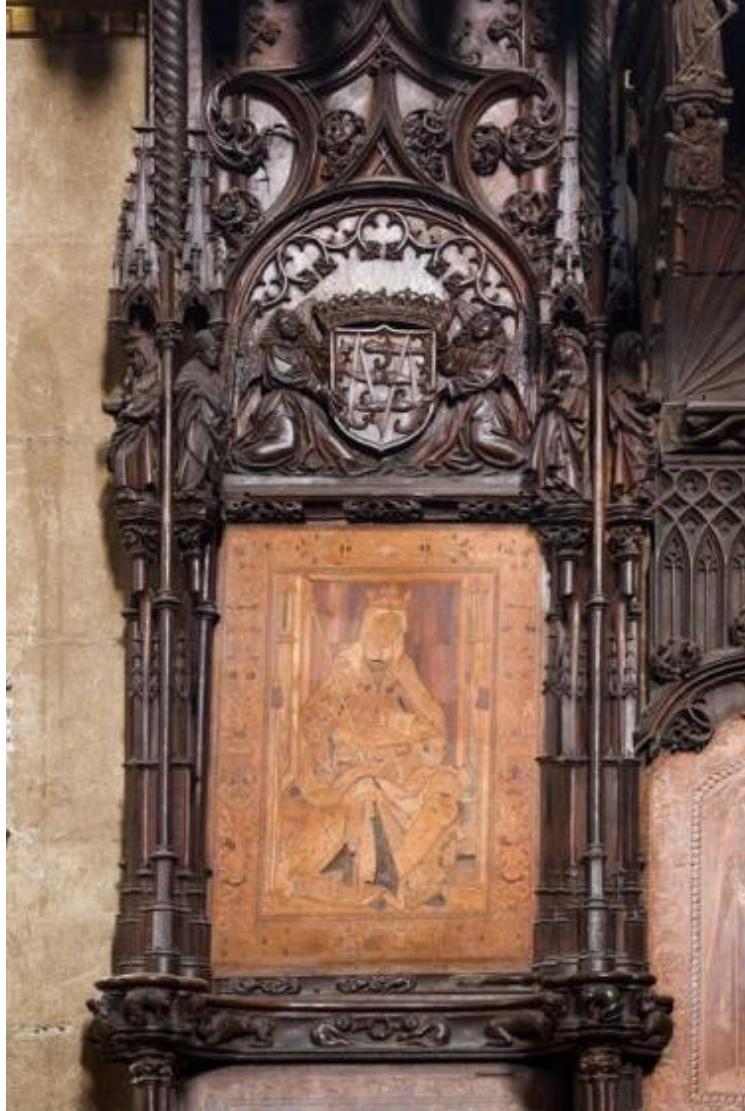


Fig. 2
Rodrigo Alemán and Associates
Catedra from Choir Stalls with articulated column-figures
1497-1500
Plasencia, Cathedral



Fig. 3a (above) and b (below)
Rodrigo Alemán and Associates
Scene from Choir Stall Surround
1495-98
Toledo, Cathedral





Fig. 4
Sculptors working under the direction of Juan Guas (c.1430-c.1496)
A man wrestling with a dragon, on the façade of the Colegio de San Gregorio, Valladolid



Fig. 5
Sculptors working under the direction of Juan Guas (c.1430-c.1496)
Wild men bearing shields, on the façade of the Colegio de San Gregorio, Valladolid