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The Confraternity of Embroiderers in Salamanca during the Sixteenth century: Its Members and Their Work

Marta Newman-Laguardia

I. Introduction

The city of Salamanca, capital of the province of the same name, is situated in western Spain. Salamanca was famous during the Renaissance due to its prestigious University founded by King Alphonse IX in the Thirteenth century. The city of Salamanca is also known for its famous architectural and historical landmarks, especially its characteristic Plateresque Style, a decorative technique of shallow relief and intricate detail named for its resemblance to the art of the *platero* (silversmith). The most representative building is the entrance to the University, which symbolize the great renown of Salamanca in the Sixteenth century. Moreover, Salamanca has an exceptional ecclesiastical architectural heritage, represented by the many churches and convents built during the Renaissance¹.

Embroiderers were the Renaissance artists who decorated liturgical vestments. Liturgical embroidery was a form of art in high demand during the Sixteenth century, not only because of the great number of churches built but also because of the number of liturgical vestments required for each specific ceremony and individually for each participant of the ceremony, as well. Liturgical vestments observed a very precise dress code specific in colors, fabrics, embroidery, and iconography. Therefore, the number of embroiderers in Salamanca during the Renaissance was very high and the quality of ecclesiastical embroidery was at its highest point. Salamanca's liturgical vestments were embellished with the highest quality silk and gold threads. Massive use of gold threads for the background is characteristic of these embroideries².

Today, some of Salamanca's churches and convents still hold magnificent examples of ecclesiastical vestments made in local workshops³. Besides the embroidered vestments found in the churches, the main source of information for the study of artistic embroidery is the historical documentation preserved in the archives⁴. The extraordinary amount of artistic documents that can be found in Salamanca's local ecclesiastical and civil archives confirms the high quality and richness that this art achieved in Salamanca; and the important role played, both artistically and socially, by the embroiderers.

II. The Confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y San Ildefonso*

The confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y San Ildefonso* is particularly interesting because many of its members were embroiderers. Ecclesiastical embroidery in Salamanca during the Sixteenth century was organized and controlled by this confraternity whose ordinances regulated many aspects of the production. The confraternity's name refers to the two patron saints, who were the spiritual guardians of the confraternity, *Nuestra Señora de la Paz* (Our Lady of Peace) and *San Ildefonso* (Saint Ildephonse, known for his devotion to the Virgin Mary). The name of the confraternity varies from time to time. For instance, in 1564 the name was Cofraternity of Embroiderers and Engravers; in 1569 the name was Brotherhood of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz*; in 1574 the name was Confraternity of Embroiderers and Painters; in 1581 the name was Confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz* of embroiderers of the church of *San Bernardo*; and in 1606 the name was *Hospital de Nuestra Señora de la Paz of Señor San Bernardo extramuros*.

The existence of the organization is registered in the Book of Meetings and Accounts of the confraternity⁵. The document is the only archival source remaining from the original set of ordinances and records mentioned in the inventories of the confraternity. The missing volumes are the Book of Old Ordinances, the Book of New Ordinances and the Old Book of Meetings and Entries⁶. The confraternity's Book of Meetings and Accounts spanned from 1564-1682. The manuscript has a total of 68 pages, which do not follow a chronological order. The document is written in Old Spanish and I have transcribed it into modern Spanish as part of my doctoral work⁷.

The Book of Meetings and Accounts records the meetings of the confraternity, the new ordinances and the names of the members including their occupation. The document also registers annual elections to the board of the confraternity, inventories of the confraternity's belongings, funerals of late members, and book keeping, such as: new members, enrollment fees, embroiderers' exam fees, etc.

Meetings and new ordinances of the Confraternity

The confraternity held meetings the day of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz*, and sometimes the day of Saint Ildefonso⁸. The meeting was always preceded by a mass celebrated at the church of *San Bernardo*, which was often the meeting place, as well⁹. Occasionally, the members met at the house of the head of the board¹⁰. Attendance to the mass and the meeting were mandatory. The confraternity was very concerned about absenteeism. High penalties were at effect for missing the mass and meetings, and the penalty was even higher for the elected officers. Absentees will be penalized a half-silver coin and officers of the confraternity one and a half-silver coins¹¹. The penalty was only voided when the member was sick or out of town¹².

The confraternity's council was elected every year at the annual meeting. The confraternity had four officers: the administrator called the *mayordomo*, who was also the treasurer of the confraternity, two assistants called the *contadores*, *acompañados* or *oficiales* and the actuary called the *escribano*. New officers were elected using a nominative lottery system. Four names will be placed in a box, the first name picked from the box will be elected the administrator, the second name picked will be elected the actuary and the third and fourth names will be elected the assistants. The nomination of the four candidates was control by three families of embroiderers, who were members of the confraternity for generations. These dynasties were the family of *Pedro del Burgo*, the family of *Cristobal de Guadalupe* and the family of *Bartolome Rodriguez*, who owned three of the main embroidery workshops in Salamanca during the Sixteenth century.

Moreover, the members attending the meeting voted new ordinances and reviewed old regulations. The confraternity had two types of regulations: general regulations that applied to all the members and regulations that only affected the embroiderers. Among the general regulations were the obligation to attend the annual mass and the meeting, attend funerals for former members, and help other members in need of work. For instance, in 1609 the Book of Meetings and Accounts records the establishing of aid for a young man who needed work¹³.

The confraternity clearly controlled who could become a master embroiderer. The examination committee was elected among the members who had the status of master embroiderers. Among the regulations that only affected the embroiderers was the ordinance that did not allow unexamined embroiderers to join the association¹⁴. In 1587 the confraternity passed three new ordinances that protected the already established families of embroiderers: "new applicants must be married, must be the son of a member of the confraternity and must be at least 18 years old"¹⁵.

Members of the Confraternity

The confraternity of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y San Ildefonso* was clearly an artist's association. In the Sixteenth century the majority of the members were embroiderers, although other groups of artists joined the confraternity, as well. For instance, in 1572, the confraternity consisted of 17 embroiderers, 5 painters, 1 sculptor, 1 engraver, 1 organist and 1 writer of books; a total of 27 members. The predominance of embroiderers lasted until the second quarter of the Seventeenth century. The last entry recorded in the Book of Meetings and Accounts, which is dated 1682, does not mention any embroiderers.

The members of the confraternity were primarily men. The Book of Meetings and Accounts only records two entries that mentioned female members. In 1581 the list of members included two women¹⁶ and in 1595 the confraternity had five female members who were widows of associated embroiderers¹⁷. Applications for membership were also discussed at the annual meeting. A candidate needed to be sponsored by an active member of the confraternity in order to apply for membership¹⁸. The new member

was required to pay an enrollment fee, which in 1573 was one ducat¹⁹ and to swear to obey the ordinances of the confraternity²⁰. The money collected from new memberships was divided among the confraternity's associates.

III. Salamanca's Embroiderers and their work

Additional historical documents in Salamanca's local ecclesiastical and civil archives provide information about Salamanca's embroiderers. The documents, which are dated from 1500 to 1635, are embroiderers' commissions, embroiderers' exams, apprenticeships' contracts, embroiderers' wills, and workshops' inventories. The names of 88 embroiderers that lived and worked in Salamanca have emerged from those documents.

The Workshop

The structure of the embroiderer's workshop was clearly hierarchic. At the head of the workshop was the master embroiderer who owned the working place. The workshop was both the working and the learning place, where apprentices received training under the instruction and supervision of the master embroiderer. The embroiderers' association regulated the learning process. A contract of apprenticeships, called in Spanish *contrato de aprendizaje*²¹, was obligatory to become an apprentice in a master's workshop. Several apprenticeships' contracts have survived in Salamanca's archives. From the examination of these documents, we know the course of becoming an embroiderer in Salamanca in the Sixteenth century.

A contract of apprenticeship always indicates the length of training, the city where the training will take place, and the names of the master embroiderer, the sponsor of the trainee and the apprentice²². The length of training varies during the Sixteenth century. In 1522 Luis Fernandez, well-established master embroiderer, took Diego Garcia as an apprentice for a period of three and half years to "show him the art of pictorial embroidery in silks and shaded gold"²³. In 1547 Francisco Zurdo, master embroiderer, took on Cristobal de Guadalupe as an apprentice for five years²⁴. In 1571 Cristobal de Guadalupe, already master embroiderer, took Guillermo de San Juan as an apprentice for four years to learn the "art of the embroiderer"²⁵.

Among the terms of the contract was, for instance, the stipulation that the apprentice "sat to embroider at the wooden frame from the first day". Another condition was that after one year of training the apprentice "sat to embroider silk and shaded gold". When the training was completed the apprentice "must have learned six figures of each type or he will have to stay in the workshop until he had learned them, receiving the same salary that the journeyman earned"²⁶. The sponsor of the apprentice, usually a close relative, will have to pay to the master embroiderer for the training. The apprentice lived in the home of the master during the whole training period and he will not be allowed to leave the home of the master embroiderer until all the contract's terms were completed²⁷.

When an embroiderer was fully trained and experienced, he would take an exam to become a master embroiderer²⁸ and start his own workshop with apprentices and non-examined embroiderers. The embroiderer exam became mandatory in Salamanca in the Sixteenth century. The applicant would request permission to the city's council to be examined, then the council would name two master embroiderers as examiners²⁹. The earliest exam that I have found in the archives so far, is from 1560 and it explains in detail the course of the examination: the examinee will "embroider silks and shaded gold, and a face in shaded silks, and flat and in relief (cord) laid and couched gold. And he was also given paper and ink to draw several roman architectonic ornaments. And he was also given velvet to measure and cut a chasuble and the two dalmatics and a cope. And he was examined about everything else related to the art of embroidery"³⁰.

After the exam was passed, the new embroiderer received a license called *carta de examen*³¹ (letter of exam), which would allow him to work as a master embroiderer in the "city of Salamanca [...] and all the other villages, cities [...] Kingdoms and lordships of the king"³². The license would also allow the new master embroiderer to open his own embroidery workshop with its own apprentices. At the same time, the new master embroiderer would be able to obtain commissions, appraise piece and examine other applicants, which were the main sources of revenue for the workshop. As mentioned earlier, the confraternity of embroiderers determined what would be the fee to be charged for taking the embroiderer's exam.

Commissions and Patronage

The embroiderer's work involved the creation of the whole liturgical vestment: first, cutting out the shape of the vestment and then, embroidering the panels that adorn specific areas of the liturgical vestments. Each type of vestment had an unique shape which determines the form and the name of the embroidered panel to be attached to the ecclesiastical garment, as well. For instance, the chasuble has a longitudinal center band -back and front-, called *orfre* (orphrey). The cope is also decorated with an orphrey along the sides; and the hood is embroidered, as well. The dalmatic is ornamented with four different shapes of embroidery panels: a rectangular embroidered panel in the front and back of the dalmatic, called *redropie* or *faldón*; a smaller rectangular piece at the end of each sleeve called *bocamanga* (sleeves band); two narrow bands, called *jabastrós* which are pending from the shoulders to the *redropie*; and another narrow band, called *collar* which delineates the neck of the vestment. An embroidered accessory of the dalmatic is the *collarino* (amice), which is a decorative neckpiece, tied with a tassel.

Artistic embroidery was commissioned through a legal contract, which is known as *contrato artístico* (artistic contract)³³. The master of the shop obtained the commissions. A notary would write up the contract indicating the names of the two parties: the church's representative and the embroiderer; several witnesses signed the contract, as well. The detailed terms of the contract describes the liturgical vestment, indicating the type of textiles used to make the vestment. Only woven textiles made out of silk, such as velvet, damask, brocade and brocatelle were used to make liturgical

vestments in Salamanca during the Sixteenth century³⁴. The color of the fabric follows the liturgical calendar, which is represented in Spain by six different colors³⁵.

The iconography embroidered on the vestment is also mentioned in the contracts. The embroidery had to be based on a design that the embroiderer would submit it to the church's representative for approval. Three distinctive decorative themes are depicted in Salamanca's liturgical embroidery. First, the religious imagery that depicts central figures of Christianity: the Virgin, the Saints, and the Apostles. Second, the "*al romano*" ornamental design which motifs are the scrolling foliage, *candelieri* and grotesque decorations. Third, the coat of arms that is usually combined with one of the other two designs. Sometimes, the embroidery was based on a vestment from another church³⁶.

Moreover, the embroidery techniques were also indicated in the contracts. Salamanca's embroiderers worked in various embroidery techniques during the Sixteenth century: shaded gold, which consisted on placing gold threads, laid two by two, covered by colored silk wefts; laid and couched gold, shaded silks and applique³⁷. The type of metallic and silk thread applied to the embroidery was also stipulated in the contracts. These reveal that the embroiderer generally had to supply the costly metal threads himself³⁸. Overseers appointed by the embroiderers association controlled the quality of the materials and final product. That meant that an embroidered vestment will not be ready for the patron until the piece was appraised and approved by the two master embroiderers named by the church's representative and the embroiderer, respectively³⁹. The artistic contract included other information related to the commission, such as the price of the liturgical vestments, the payment arrangements -money paid up front and money due upon completion-, and date of finish, which was usually a year later.

In 1595 Simon de Torrecilla, master embroiderer made a set of vestments for the church of Saint Martin in Salamanca. The vestments are described in the contract as follows: "purple damask set of vestments, and purple velvet ground for the embroidered panels, which are the orphreys of the chasuble, *redropies*, *bocamangas*, *collares*, *collarejos* y *jabastros*; with "*al romano*" designs embroidered in appliqued embroidery: satin cut outs outlined with three Milan gold threads. The decoration will follow an original drawing signed and own by the embroiderer. The drawing's motifs will be used to decorate the orphreys. And the panels of the dalmatic, *faldones* and *bocamangas* will have a JHS and Mary embroidered and the orphrey of the chasuble will have a JHS embroidered on the back and Mary embroidered on the front"⁴⁰.

The following artistic contract includes the dimensions of the embroidered panels of the vestment. In 1580 Cristobal de Guadalupe, master embroiderer was commissioned to embroider the "orphreys and hood of a cope on fine shaded gold depicting the following gold embroidered figures, the scene of the Assumption of the Virgin on the hood. The orphreys will have seven apostles and Saint Michel that will be a total of eight figures; each figure standing in a niche. The orphreys of the cope should be 1,67 centimeters long (two *baras*); the hood should be 0.453 centimeters high ($\frac{1}{2}$ *bara* and two *dedos*) and 0.435 centimeters wide, and round at the bottom. The galloon, called *retorcha*, will be embroidered in fine Milan gold and the architectural niches will be

embroidered in gold thread of Seville. The embroiderer, Cristobal de Guadalupe, has to present two faces for each of the twelve apostles; and two faces of the following saints: Saint Domingo, Saint Michel, Saint Lucy and Saint Catherine; so, it will be a total of 36 faces which have to be done in fine shaded silks. The silk threads used for the faces, and the satin, and cartoons are submitted by the embroiderer who will receive four ducats for each one and for the orphreys and hood, and silks and gold threads will receive one hundred ducats⁴¹.

Moreover, a considerable amount of work will involve the restoration of existing embroidery. In 1654 the University of Salamanca's board of deans approved the restoration of a chasuble which had a very lavish embroidered orphrey⁴².

The documentation indicates that most of the embroidery was made to decorate ecclesiastical vestments; private commissions of civil embroidery were rare. The commission of a liturgical vestment was dictated by the needs of a church and its resources. A representative of the Church called the *visitador*⁴³ periodically visited the churches of the city and diocesan province of Salamanca reviewing which vestments were in need of repair or were missing from the church's sacristy. The *visitador* gave the final approval to the church to spend money on a liturgical vestment. The most requested pieces were copes, chasubles, dalmatics, altar frontals, banners and cross covers, known as *manga de cruz*⁴⁴. The churches and confraternities of Salamanca's province were the main patrons of the embroiderers, although Salamanca's embroiderers obtained commissions in other provinces of Spain, such as Caceres, Granada and Zamora; outside Spain, Salamanca's embroiderers produced liturgical embroidery for the Portuguese market⁴⁵.

Other relevant documents

Several embroiderers' inventories and wills have survived in Salamanca's archives. These documents provide written information about the appearance of the workshop. The inventories describe the tools and materials used including the number of wooden frames, which could help to determine the size of the workshop⁴⁶. The master embroiderer who owned the workshop overviewed all the work selecting the designs, the type of threads and the type of stitches to be applied to the liturgical vestments⁴⁷. The threads used to embroider liturgical vestments were very expensive and the quality of the gold and silk threads was carefully controlled⁴⁸. High quality of gold and silk threads is characteristic of Salamanca's workshops. The threads mentioned in the inventories and artistic contracts were gold of Milan, gold of Seville, silk of Seville and silk of Granada⁴⁹.

Moreover, the inventories described the decorative sources used for liturgical embroidery found in the workshops. For instance, the workshop of Bartolomé Rodríguez, master embroiderer had several types of designs, such as prints, "three dimensional figures made out of clay" and "drawings on paper or board"⁵⁰; designs that the master embroiderer owned. The inventories also gave accounts of current commissions and also completed embroideries waiting to be paid for or delivered to the church.

Furthermore, the embroiderers' wills and workshops' inventories provide information about the embroiderers' families, marriages, possessions, residence, etc. For instance, the will of Bartolomé Rodríguez, master embroiderer tells us that he was married twice and survived both wives⁵¹. He had four children from the first marriage to Catalina de Torrecilla. Two of his sons Simon Rodríguez de Torrecilla and Ambrosio de Torrecilla became embroiderers, as well. Dynasties of embroiderers existed in Salamanca during the Sixteenth century, although some of them are better document than others. Bartolomé Rodríguez's second wife, Isabel de Barcenas was the daughter of Pedro de Bárcenas, master embroiderer, and the niece of Bartolomé de Bárcenas, business associate of her husband, Bartolomé Rodríguez. Arranged marriages between families of embroiderers were customary in Salamanca in the Sixteenth century, as well. These marriages helped to enforce artistic and economic relations between members of the same art.

Salamanca's embroiderers did not live gathered in the same area of the city. The demographic census of 1561 shows the distribution of the embroiderers through out the whole city⁵². Embroiderers who worked for the Cathedral's workshop lived in houses own by the Cathedral's chapter on the street called *del Desafiadero*, which was near the Episcopal Palace⁵³. Rich embroiderers, and their families, had the privilege of being buried at the Cathedral of Salamanca⁵⁴. Many of Salamanca's master embroiderers were educated people who knew how to read and write and did the bookkeeping of the workshops themselves.

Conclusion

While there are a number of surviving examples of liturgical embroidery in many churches and convents of Salamanca and its province, account-books, artistic contracts and inventories indicate that many more were produced. In spite of the importance of this art, and their creators, today Renaissance ecclesiastical vestments are one of the least known forms of Salamanca's decorative arts. One factor against the identification of embroidered ecclesiastical vestments is their anonymous character. Another factor is the non-existence of this art today. The art of embroidering ecclesiastical vestments as it was during the Renaissance was lost by the middle of the Seventeenth century. The reason for the disappearance was that by the middle of that century the art of embroidering liturgical vestments-and consequently the embroiderers' commissions-, lost its demand when Baroque ideas overcome the esthetics of the Renaissance.

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- ¹ GOMEZ-MORENO, M.: *Catálogo Monumental de España. Provincia de Salamanca*. (Valencia, 1967).
- ² LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, M.: *Los Ornamentos Sagrados en la Universidad, las Catedrales y el Convento de San Esteban de Salamanca* (Salamanca, 1996).
- ³ The presentation of this paper was illustrated with examples of liturgical embroidery from various churches and convents in the city of Salamanca. That photographic material is part of my research in progress for my Ph. D. thesis on Renaissance and Baroque liturgical vestment collections in the churches and convents of Salamanca.
- ⁴ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, pp. 93-156.
- ⁵ ARCHIVO DE SAN ELOY. Libro Nuevo de la Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Paz. Fondos del Archivo de la Caja de Ahorros de Salamanca-Soria.
- ⁶ *Ibidem*. The *Livro de ordenanzas viejas y nuevas y el libro viejo de los cavildos y entradas* are mentioned in the confraternity's inventories until the first half of the Seventeenth century.
- ⁷ Dr. Antonio Casaseca, Art History professor at the University of Salamanca who suggested me to study the manuscript for its relation to Salamanca's artistic embroidery, discovered the document in the Archivo de San Eloy few years ago.
- ⁸ *Ibidem*, 1572.
- ⁹ *Ibidem*, 1581.
- ¹⁰ *Ibidem*, *llamar a cabildo en casa del mayordomo*, 1573.
- ¹¹ *Ibidem*.
- ¹² *Ibidem*.
- ¹³ *Ibidem*, *ayudarle a que se le de de hacer ente los de su facultad*, 1609.
- ¹⁴ *Ibidem*, *desaminarse del redondo de oro matizado como es uso y costumbre*, 1587.
- ¹⁵ *Ibidem*, *no pudieren entrar por cofrades ningun masebo soltero [...] que no fueran hijos de cofrades y los que fueren hijos de cofrades siendo de edad de diez y ocho años para arriba*, 1587.
- ¹⁶ *Ibidem*. The confraternity had 23 male and 2 female members in 1581.
- ¹⁷ *Ibidem*. In 1595 the confraternity had 5 female members who were the widows of Cristóbal de Guadalupe(embroiderer), Diego Hernández(embroiderer), Tomé Garcia(embroiderer), Diego Gutiérrez(painter) y Francisco Tamayo(embroiderer).
- ¹⁸ *Ibidem*, *cofrade nuevo necesita fiador*, 1573.
- ¹⁹ *Ibidem*, *un ducado de plata*.
- ²⁰ *Ibidem*, *juramento de guardar y cumplir las ordenanzas*, 1615.
- ²¹ HEREDIA MORENO, M. del C.: *Estudio de los contratos de aprendizaje en Sevilla a comienzos del siglo XVIII*, (Sevilla 1974), p. 15.
- ²² *Ibidem*.
- ²³ ARCHIVO HISTÓRICO PROVINCIAL DE SALAMANCA (AHPSa). Documentary research in progress for my Ph. D. thesis.
- ²⁴ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁵ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p146-147.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁸ MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ, J. J.: *La Vida de los Artistas en Castilla la Vieja y León durante el Siglo de Oro*, Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos (Madrid), LXVII 1959, p. 402.
- ²⁹ BELTRÁN DE HEREDIA, V.: *Cartulario de la Universidad, La Universidad del Siglo de Oro*. Tomo III (Salamanca 1971), pp. 50-51.
- ³⁰ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
- ³¹ HEREDIA MORENO, p. 16.
- ³² LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 24.
- ³³ MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ, pp. 410-413.
- ³⁴ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 21.
- ³⁵ JUNGSMANN, J. A., *El Sacrificio de la Misa*. (Madrid, 1959), pp. 138-139.
- ³⁶ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
- ³⁷ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 20.
- ³⁸ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
- ³⁹ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 142.

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- ⁴⁰ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, pp. 143-144.
⁴¹ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, pp. 144-146.
⁴² LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 94.
⁴³ CASASECA CASASECA, A. & NIETO GONZÁLEZ, J.R.: *Libro de Lugares y aldeas del obispado de Salamanca*, (Salamanca 1982).
⁴⁴ FLORIANO CUMBREÑO, A.C.: *El Bordado*, (Barcelona 1942), pp. 120-121
⁴⁵ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.
⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.
⁴⁸ LAGUARDIA ALVAREZ, p. 24.
⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 22.
⁵⁰ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
⁵¹ *Ibidem*.
⁵² DÍAZ MEDINA, A.: *Estructura demográfica y socio-profesional de Salamanca en 1561*, Revista Provincial de Salamanca (Salamanca, 1982), pp. 76-77.
⁵³ AHPSa, *Ibidem*.
⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.