The Holy Supper of Solsona, model for the Cenacolo Da Vinci

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El quadre de P.Teixidor de 1430, trobat per l'Espejo (POSSIBLE MUSA DE lLEONARD) és molt més clar.. MAGDALENA RECOLZADA SOBRE JESUS (COMPTEU COMENSALS)
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The Holy Supper of Solsona, model for the Last Supper of Leonardo?

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In my book Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci I present to the public a theory that may seem far-fetched: Leonardo was inspired by a dark work of rural catalan gothic art to conceive the Last Supper in Santa Maria delle Grazie, in Milan (about 1495).

In this article I pretend to prove that Leonardo had taken notes of the Holy Supper of Pere Teixidor (about 1430), today in the Diocesan Museum of Solsona, but until the beginning of the 20th century in a chapel, in Santa Constança de Linya, near Navès (province of Barcelona). Is it possible that Leonardo could have known personally this example of catalan rural art, located in a remote place of central Catalonia? Below I present a hypothesis that makes reasonable this possibility.

Comparison between the Holy Supper of Solsona (1430) and the Last Supper of Leonardo (1495).

Some analogies in the iconography
In Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci I develop this topic in detail. Among other things, I say:

[The Holy Supper of Solsona] It's a predella, which lacks a rectangular piece in the middle. In this image, two different

gospel scenes are mixed. On the one hand the celebration of the sacrament, at Easter, and on the other, the washing by Maria Magdalena of the feet of Christ; event that would have had place in the house of Simon, according to Luke 7:36-50.

Let us continue. Judas, with jewish appearance, reproaches the attitude of Maria Magdalena. John (with a look very similar to the Magdalena) is lying in front of Christ, which maintains a pose of Pantocrator (or Cosmocrator, since His left hand is holding a terrestrial globe, and the right hand is blessing to the people). Auras are only visible in the case of Magdalena, Saint John and Christ. These are lined up, with almost equidistant distances. The rest of the apostles have not a visible aura.

Christ is seated in a chair; but, something strange, this features two windows (one to each side). The table is elongated, and is supported by two easels. (White) tablecloth has borders on the ends. The dishes are glazed with Marian messages (reportedly belonged to the series of Sainte Mary within the group of ceramics of Manises). The apostles are aligned at the bottom of the table, except Judas (who is standing). Under the table we see two cats and a dog.

The Holy Supper of Solsona is not different from other cenacles inside and outside Catalonia. According to the official catalogue of the Museo Diocesano y Comarcal de Solsona, the scene of the Magdalena in the Last Supper can be found in the Church of San Juan de Daroca, in the tympanum of Neully (Dojon) or in the manuscript of the hours of Turin (page 58), from the Master of the Baptist.

What is special in this predella is that is too similar to the Last Supper of Leonardo! Let's make a comparison: 1) As in the Holy Supper of Solsona, the Leonardo's Cenacle lacks a rectangular piece, with the same relative size and in the same position; (2) the table is elongated and is holding also on two easels; (3) the tablecloth has a virtually identical fretwork (chessboards and lines); (4) Magdalena appears in the Cenacle of Leonardo, but confused with saint John the Evangelist; (5) tableware is very similar (is even more evident in the large plate in front of Jesus); (6) beside Christ there are two windows (and one back), as in the Holy supper of Solsona; (7) the two Judas are dark, showing their judaism; (8) in both cases, we see two apostles who turn their backs on Christ, in the penultimate position to the right. and (9) as in the Last Supper of Leonardo, the figure of Jesus form a triangle, although in the Solsona's painting it is based on the ripped piece of the predella, with Maria Magdalena and John on the left, and Judas on the right (the writer Jesús Ávila Granados has made me this observation).

One will say that, unlike the Solsona's painting, in the Last Supper of Leonardo Jude is on the same side of the table as the rest of the apostles, and that John is not lying. To this I answer that in a prior study of his Cenacle, Judas was in the opposite side of the table, and John is sleeping (Francesc Manzanera, degree in history of the art, has made me this observation).

Comparation between the Holy Supper of Solsona (1430) and the Last Supper of Leonardo (1495). Detail.

If we compare the pantocrator of the Holy Supper of Solsona with a work of Leonardo's workshop, the Salvator Mundi, we shall find even more coincidences:

If we compare the Jesus-Pantocrator of the Holy Supper of Solsona with the Salvator Mundi attributed to Leonardo, we will find some similarities certainly striking. In the first place, the gestures: the Salvator Mundi of Leonardo holds a sphere of crystal with His left hand and blesses with the right. But let us look primarily at His beard: as in the Holy Supper of Solsona, is double. This is a characteristic of the catalonian gothic art: both in the profane as evangelicals

subjects, the men have double beard. The expressionless look of Christ, and especially the grimace of the mouth of the Salvator Mundi, are very similar to the Jesus of the Holy Supper of Solsona. If all these similarities were product of the coincidence, the situation would be very disconcerting.

Comparison of the pantocrator of Santa Constança de Linya and the Salvator Mundi from the workshop of Leonardo.

A detail of the Holy Supper of Solsona called especially the attention. Under the table we see two cats and a dog. From my point of view, these animals leave glimpses of a hidden message that I explain with more detail in my book Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci. Here I would simply say that, from my point of view, this iconographic ruse hides an allusion to the persecution of the cathars (the two cats) by the Dominican (domini cani, the dog). The rest of the iconographic and symbolic reading of the painting of Solsona reinforces this thesis, but now I'm not ready to develop this topic. Except in one respect:

Note that the cat of the left has in the mouth what seems a rope (the one of the right seems being gnawing a rib, although in the table there are not remains of meat). What meaning can have a cord in a cathar context? Ramón Hervás, in his Historia secreta del Grial (page 278), makes it clear: "In the processes of the Inquisition was evident that the pure ones had, hung around the neck or waist, a rope of hemp, named camelot [because it was originally made with camel leather], and, even though its purpose was never clear to the inquisitors, for the faithful, however, this piece of string that 'tied' to the cathar was what prevented that his luminosity could dazzle to the others". This is a question that I mentioned in my book Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci.

At the end of this article I have quoted some text in relation to this subject (in Spanish).

Whatever it is, the detail of the cat of the Holy Supper of Solsona (which is gnawing on a cord), and the religious iconography, certainly heterodox (presence of Magdalena; John primacy over the rest of the apostles), make us think in a context influenced by catharism. So, in answer to the question: what would have drawn the attention of Leonardo in relation to the Holy Supper of Solsona? From my point of view, the key is its heretical content. Perhaps is difficult to see beauty in the Cenacle of Solsona, but it is possible that Leonardo found a message that considered true. A message that wanted to proclaim (hidding the hretical details by means of the use of symbols).

Ultimately, the painter of the Holy Supper of Solsona wanted to put on record, two centuries after the supposed disappearance of this heresy, that the cathars were still present in Catalonia -closely monitored by the Inquisition, symbolized here by the Domini Cani, the dogs-. This is an supplementary evidence in favor of the thesis that the predella hides an heretical message, that Leonardo would recover in the Last Supper of Milan.

Cat on the right, beset by a dog. Seems to crack a rib.

The left cat. Seems to gnaw at a rope.

Details of the furnishing of the table
It is possible that Leonardo had access to works inspired by the catalan gothic style similar to the Holy Supper of Solsona, or to the Salvator Mundi of Pere Teixidor. Or instead, to Italian works of the XIV century that could have inspired to the mentioned catalan artists. But as much I have searched, I have not found them. Details such as the shape of the table, easels, tablecloth and the piece of table missing in the Cenacle of Solsona make it a unique case.

The article by Rosa Carretero Peña, Elisenda Casanova i Querol, and Maribel González i Llobet, intitled "El parament de la taula a la pintura gòtica de retaules" (edited in Primer Col.loqui d'Història de l'Alimentació a la Corona d'Aragó), can give us an idea of the level of equivalence of the fresco of Leonardo, as compared to the predella of the Diocesan Museum of Solsona.

Let's start by the table. This is elongated, and is supported by easels. In the catalan gothic painting elongated tables represent 76 percent of the studied cases. The easels (called "borriquetas") are very frequent. They are found in the 64 percent of the representations, and are independent of the table. By what is refers to the tablecloth, in the catalan painting this is decorated, in practically the whole of the cases, by borders of different designs, as so happens in the mural of Leonardo, as well as in the painting of Solsona. In both cases we can see that these decorations are made at both ends of the table, following parallel lines.

Other significant aspects are the large center plate and the vessels. The plate receives a name very characteristic in this period: "servidora", or "tàbach". We find it in a 53 percent of cases of gothic catalán art. It was generally highly decorated, and used to serve cooked or sweet food. In the Last Supper of Leonardo and in the Holy Supper of Solsona are placed in the same place. Another aspect that draws attention is the absence of cups in the work of Leonardo (the translucent glasses were used specially when there was some risk of poisoning). In the Catalan gothic painting we find few examples in which the drink is served in glasses (10 per cent of the cases). However, in the Holy Supper of Solsona the wine is served in goblets. This is an important differential detail.

Maria Magdalena versus John the Evangelist
One of the aspects that has generated more controversy in the Last Supper of Leonardo is the confusion -from my point of view deliberate– of Saint John the Evangelist with Maria Magdalena. This one, from any point of view, has the figure and the outline of a woman. Very probably, as explained above, intended to represent to Maria Magdalena, that here assumes a protagonist role: first apostle of Christ, author of her own gospel (the gospel of Maria Magdalena).

Detail of the Last Supper. Maria Magdalena instead of Saint John the Evangelist.

There is a very convincing proof that Leonardo painted a woman in the place occupied by "Juan Evangelista". See the following image, extracted from the Leo-E Desk page:

Codex Forster II, sheet 3 Recto. On the right we can read Cristo; Giovan Conte, quello del Cardinale del Mortaro; Giovannina, viso fantástico, sta a Santa Caterina all'ospedale.

Given that, according to Jean Paul Richter, Count Giovanni would be among the faces chosen by Leonardo to portray the physiognomy of Christ (passage 667 of the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci), since the appointment of such Giovannina is immediately afterwards (JP Richter , passage 1404), and also alludes to her face, this could represent the only woman in this fresco, which can not be other than Mary Magdalene, personifying John "the virginal" as we have seen above. This finding would end the long controversy about this particular.

This scene is notable for two reasons. Firstly, because the Magdalena usurps the function of the "beloved disciple of Jesus", John the Evangelist. Is notorious the fact that in the catalan iconography Maria Magdalena is represented on many occasions reading her own gospel. As in this painting in the Cathedral of Girona:

Magdalena Leggente in Girona. She is reading her own gospel.

The gnostic gospel of Maria Magdalena was used regularly by "beguinos" (lay followers of Saint Francis of Assissi) and catalan and occitan cathars. But another fact draws our attention. In the painting of Leonardo, Peter is threatening to Maria Magdalena; another gnostic tradition, that can be found in the gospel of Thomas, in the one of Maria Magdalena, or in the Pistis Sophia:

"[Peter:] Maria [Magdalena] be away from us, as women are not worthy of life" (Gospel of Thomas).

[Peter says]: "But is that, asked the Lord by these issues, was going to talk to a woman secretly for we all listen to her?" "Would perhaps want to present her as more dignified than us?" (Gospel of Maria Magdalena).

"My Lord, my mind is always willing to listen, and in all time to advance to give the solution of the words that You have pronounced; but I have fear of Peter, because he has threatened me and hates our sex" (Pistis Sophia).

In the Pistis Sophia John is second in the preferences of Jesus. This says: "John, the pure, that rule in the realm of the light". On John and the Magdalena, Jesus says at one point: "where I am, there will be also my twelve Ministers, but Maria Magdalena and John the virginal will protrude among all my disciples and all who receive the mysteries in the ineffable. And they will be to my right and to my left. And I am them, and they are Me". Remember that in the Last Supper John and the Magdalena are confused, and are placed to the right of Jesus.

In the catalan iconography there are numerous examples in which John Evangelist and Maria Magdalena are practically confused (if not identified). Here I present two:

Santes Creus, Tarragona.

Santa Anna, Barcelona.

In some cases, the figure of the Magdalena appears pregnant of which would be the son of Jesus (or her daughter: Sara, according to the tradition):

Santes Creus, Tarragona.

According to the tradition in Catalonia and Occitania, the animosity -when no hate- of Peter towards Maria Magdalena, expressed by Leonardo in the Last Supper on the threat that makes him, forced her into exile in the South of France. There are three places that pride themselves on having received the sainte: Saintes Maries de la Mer, Leucate (near Perpignan) and Marseille. In the following altarpiece, of Pere Mas (1526), in the Cathedral of Girona, is seen the arrival of Maria Magdalena, pregnant, to the port of Marseille. This tradition would be inherited by the cathar movement in the área (remember the detail of the cats in the Holy Supper of Solsona).

Maria Magdalena arrives to the port of Marseille. Table by Pere Mas (1526). Cathedral of Girona.

How could have known Leonardo the Holy Supper of Solsona?¿
In my book Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci I develop a hypothesis that would explain how Leonardo might have come to this remote point of Catalonia.

In short, we could explain it in the following way. If we look in his famous Allegory of Navigation, Leonardo presents us a pictogram with a hidden message. Here we can see a bull or a wolf. It sails on a boat from one shore (Italy?) to another (catalan coast?). But it strikes me a concrete detail. The mast of the ship is an uprooted olive tree. There it hangs the sail. If we unite both words we have "olive-vela" (olive-sail); i.e., Olivela. The Olivella are an ancient catalan family that have as coat of arms, precisely, an uprooted olive tree. Sometimes appears with the name Solivella (being the "s" an ancient form of the article "el-la" (the); so we would have "the Olivella").

Leonard's Allegory of Navigation.

The fact is that in the monastery of Montserrat, in the year 1484 (according to the Annals of Montserrat, by Benet Ribas i Calaf), there was a monk named Benedictus Solivella.

Benedictus Solivella in the Annals of Montserrat (year 1484).

I had the occasion of investigate this old last name, and I found that there is a catalan lineage that inhabits a house with the name "mas Olivella", in a place not very far of the city of Solsona. To little distance of this farmhouse we can find the chapel of Santa Constança de Linya, where was exposed the Holy Supper of Solsona.

Santa Constança de Linya. Still can be presumed the ancient presence of the Holy Supper in this place.

Inside the residence of the Olivella, farmhouse of the X century, we can see two windows, in the old dining room, that are extremely similar to the ones of the Last Supper of Leonardo:

Windows in mas Olivella, similar to the ones of the Last Supper by Leonardo.

In short, in his first (or second) trip to Montserrat, Leonardo da Vinci would have sftablished friendship with Benedictus Solivella, who would have invited him to know his family in the vicinity of Solsona. There Leonardo would have known this example of gothic catalan art. With an heterodox (even heretical) symbolic and iconographic message, such predella would have been held in a small chapel, away from the centres of population. For Leonardo, the Holy Supper of Solsona would have been an important discovery, that would have influenced his life and his work.

Leonardo could have learnt in Catalonia a secret knowledge which would explain some of his specificities, such as androgyny, which reflected again and again in his paintings. The identification John/Magdalena is an example. The pregnancy of the Magdalena, a typical topic in Catalonia and in the South of France, could inspire the iconography of his work of reference: la Gioconda, allusive to the great fertility mother (Goddess), and hence the feminin principle of nature. See to this respect my work Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci.

The triangle
One of the most defining aspects of the Last Supper by Leonardo is the triangle that makes up the figure of Jesus Christ. From my point of view, this could have been inspired by one of the main attractions of the mountain of Montserrat: the rock Foradada:

Roca Foradada, in Montserrat. Look its perfect triangle form.

Its iconic value in the work of Leonardo is well known. It is less known, however, the symbolic value that has and has had among the monks of Montserrat. An example of this is found in the article "Un ambiciós projecte d'Història eclesiàstica i natural de Montserrat" (Xavier Altés i Aguiló, Francesc Galobart i Soler). In a passage it is said, about the collection of information of Francisco of Zamora:

"In an effort to complete the work, it included everything: from banal news, comments on the passage of the Sun through the eye of the Roca Foradada, until montserratine bibliography".

The Sun in the middle of the triangle -void- of the rock Foradada: the Delta of Light of the Masons. Another example of the relevance of the rock Foradada to the monks and the lay in the environment of this monastery is the intention of Antoni Gaudí of hanging a bell in this precise site, as explained in El viaje secreto de Leonardo da Vinci:

"Antoni Gaudi intended to place in the Foradada of Montserrat a monumental bell, made by subscription popular, to touch the Angelus three times to the day. In the Cavall Bernat, ... , he wanted to finish the huge mole with a big crown, on which he would fix a monumental star (in allusion to the Virgin). This crown would be affordable and would make the function of viewpoint".

In definitive, the detail of the rock Foradada could have been for Leonardo an element of inspiration, to conform his peculiar iconographic doctrine, by which is well known.

Appendix: "Un gato y una cuerda" (Los mensajes ocultos de Leonardo da Vinci).
Tal vez la clave la encontremos en dos detalles casi imperceptibles de la predela del Museo Diocesano de Solsona. Aquí vemos dos gatos y un perro. Este último parece desfilar; tal vez por ello los gatos se esconden. No puedo dejar de pensar que el perro simbolizaría a los Domini Cani (los perros de Cristo, inquisidores de la orden Dominicana), y los gatos a los indefensos cátaros, que se apartan de su presencia. Fijémonos en un detalle: el gato de la izquierda parece estar royendo una costilla (no hay carne en la mesa). ¿O se trata de una cuerda?

En el Comentario del Padre Nuestro, documento cátaro fechado en torno al siglo xiv (con origen en Florencia), encontramos el siguiente párrafo: «Se ha de saber que también las visitaciones extranjeras son llamadas cuerdecillas y vínculos, como dice el Salmista: “Y me tendieron las cuerdas como un lazo”. Y dice además: “Las cuerdas de los pecadores me ataron”... Este mismo Profeta, dando gracias a su Dios porque había roto las cuerdas antedichas, exclama: “Señor, tú rompiste mis cadenas; te ofreceré un sacrificio de alabanzas”». Más adelante añade: «También has de saber que el espíritu es cuerda de la vida, que atrae la vida y la ata... Pero la vida es también cuerdecilla del alma que, ayudada por la visitación, la atrae y la une a sí».

¿Podría representar la imagen del gato que roe la cuerda una alusión a estos textos cátaros tardíos (del siglo xiv)? ¿Podría expresar la presencia de la Magdalena en ambos cenáculos un sentimiento de rechazo a la Iglesia oficial? Hemos de recordar que en la Santa Cena de Solsona sólo la Magdalena, Juan y Cristo ostentan un halo, con lo cual se indica que éstos son los tres actores principales del drama eucarístico representado en la tabla.

Francisco Manzanera, ya citado, me hizo el siguiente comentario: «Se podría pensar que Leonardo hubiese visto el cuadro de Ferrer [la Santa Cena de Solsona] e incluso lo tuviese presente a la hora de pintar su Cenáculo». Y Javier Sierra, buen conocedor de la figura de Leonardo, me dijo esto: «Confieso que en un primer momento no vi mucho las semejanzas, pero prestando atención hay cosas curiosas, como Judas metiendo la mano en el mismo plato que Jesús, o el discípulo que le da la espalda en el extremo derecho de la mesa. Ambos detalles se suman a la gran semejanza del mantel, con las mismas grecas, o los caballetes. Pero entiendo que una obra así, de esa factura, no impresionaría demasiado a Leonardo. ¿Por qué crees [porque supongo que piensas en eso] que Leonardo se fijó en ella? ¿Qué le llamó la atención tanto como para [especulemos] copiar algunos detalles?».

Aquí está mi respuesta. Creo que Leonardo visitó la zona donde estaba el original de la Santa Cena de Solsona (Santa Constança de Linya, cerca de Navès, en la comarca del Solsonès). La presencia de Leonardo en este remoto lugar del centro de Cataluña, no lejos de los primeros contrafuertes pirenaicos, tiene sentido si tenemos en cuenta que el florentino podría haber seguido la ruta del Llobregat al menos hasta Navàs. Desde allí habría llegado al paraje donde Benedictus de Solivella (presbítero de Montserrat) le presentaría —quizá— a su familia (¿Mas l'Olivella, cerca de Navès?); o al enclave donde tal vez sus primos lejanos, los Vinçà (o Covinçà) de Cataluña, residirían, en pleno núcleo herético de Berga. Quién sabe.

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