

Fernando Gutiérrez Baños

“Like a Wolf Takes a Sheep”

The Wall Paintings of the Chapel of St Barbara in the Old Cathedral of Salamanca

In 2019 a cycle of wall paintings depicting the story of St Barbara was brought to light in the chapel dedicated to her in the Old Cathedral of Salamanca (Crown of Castile, Spain). They were painted c. 1350-1360, at the time the chapel was constructed and decorated by Bishop Juan Lucero, and, upon their discovery, they were found to be very well preserved. Following their immediate restoration, this article explores their significance in the hagiographic and iconographic tradition of St Barbara, a controversial, yet, very popular female saint whose story required successive adaptations in the West to keep her within the boundaries of the orthodoxy of sacramental practices. The special interest of the Salamanca wall paintings is predicated on their relatively early date and on their coherence with the development of the hagiographic tradition of St Barbara in the Crown of Castile, where, in contrast to other European regions, the account numbered 915 in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* was preferred until the 16th century in both Latin and vernacular versions, thereby ignoring the aforementioned adaptations. This led to the creation of striking scenes, especially that of St Barbara's self-baptising, which, according to this research, is a unique scene, unparalleled in other cycles.