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CHAPTER NINE

Choices and Consequences: The Construction of Isabel de Portugal's Image

Jorge Sebastián Lozano

'Muito isenta da sua condiçam': fully conscious of her condition, so was described Isabel de Portugal (1503–39) by her contemporaries.[1] Born in Portugal, married to Charles V in 1526 and therefore, queen of Spain and empress, she was above all a Habsburg woman, one that contributed to shape the feminine models ruling within that dynasty during the following decades.

This study aims to provide some references for the visual and material expressions of her high condition. Her role as regent of Spain—during the long absences of her husband from the Iberian Peninsula—gave her ample occasion to leave an imprint on the artistic realizations of her time, although she did so only to a small extent, in terms of artists' patronage. Of greater relevance were her collecting activities, more centered on costly and rare objects than in pieces of solely aesthetic value. These elements were essential for the self-fashioning of her queenly image. Nonetheless, such image was displaced since very early times by a posthumous one, made for Charles V by Titian. The following pages are an attempt to understand the different strategies adopted by each imperial partner for the construction of Isabel's image, as well as the consequences of those choices, both within the larger historical context and in the particular field of art historical enquiry.[2]

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1 Damião de Gois, *Crónica do felicíssimo Rei D. Manuel*, quoted in Vasco Graça Moura, *Retratos de Isabel e outras tentativas* (Lisbon: Quetzal Editores, 1994), 152.

2 The author wishes to acknowledge the following individuals for their guidance and support in pursuing this research: Dagmar Eichberger, Miguel Falomir, David Freedberg, Fernando Marías, Paul Matthews, María José Redondo Cantera, David Rosand, and Karl Schütz. I am particularly indebted to Annemarie Jordan for her continuous help, generosity, and encouragement. This essay draws upon material gathered for my doctoral dissertation on the representation of Habsburg royal women through the arts in sixteenth-century Spain. For the sake of brevity, the critical apparatus has been reduced here to the minimum. A fuller development is available in the dissertation.

Figure 9.1 Titian. *Portrait of Empress Isabel de Portugal*, 1548, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Figure 9.2 *Portrait of Empress Isabel de Portugal*, undated, oil on wood, 87.5 x 66.5 cm. National Museum, Poznań (Poland).

Absent Majesty: Isabel between Charles V and Titian

Today, our main visual reference of Empress Isabel is Titian's magnificent portrait hanging in the Prado Museum (Figure 9.1). He painted it nine years after the death of a woman he had known through the exchange of some gifts, but never met in person. Other painters had portrayed her during her lifetime, or shortly thereafter. Those portraits have been strenuously examined in the search for the one that Titian reportedly used as a model.[3] In overview, four main typologies can be established among those portraits. The main one consists of bust or half-length portraits showing Isabel in three quarters, over a neutral background (Figure 9.2).[4] A second type is formed by a profusion of small-size diptychs of the imperial couple, something quite common for illustrious couples at that time.[5] These first two varieties could sometimes be synonymous, since originally separated portraits may be joined to form a diptych, or vice versa. Moreover, completely separate paintings of the imperial couple are sometimes inventoried one next to the other, meaning that they may have been seen as pendant pieces. Miniature portraits, on

[3] See Anne Cloulas, 'Les portraits de l'Impératrice Isabelle de Portugal,' *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 93 (1979): 58–68, for an excellent summary of all previous research. According to her, Titian's model was a portrait by Guillim Scrots, very similar to the one today in Poznań (Poland). The similarity between that painting and the first executed by Titian, as well as the fact that, in 1556, both Mary of Hungary, his patron, and Charles V owned portraits of Isabel by Scrots seem to account for him as the author of the model. Maria Kusche, 'Der christliche Ritter und seine Dame, das Repräsentationsbildnis in ganzer Figur: zur Entstehung, Entwicklung und Bedeutung des weltlichen Bildnisses von der karolingischen Buchmalerei über die Augsburger Schule bis zu Seisenegger, Tizian, Anthonis Moor und der Spanischen Hofmalerschule des 16. und 17. Jahrunderts', *Pantheon* 49 (1991): 4–35; quote on 27. Nonetheless, it remains an open question. See notes 14, 17, and 21 below. On the other hand, Miguel Falomir has insightfully commented upon this particular portrait in various recent exhibitions: see note 14 for some remarks.

[4] For example, the one formerly in Peter Jones's collection and currently in William Merton collection, Thatcham (Paul Matthews kindly provided me with updated provenance information for this work), attributed to Jan Vermeyen or his workshop. Gustav Glück, 'Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg I: Kaiserin Isabella', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* N. F. 7 (1933): 183–210, especially 198; Hendrik J. Horn, *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen, Painter of Charles V and His Conquest of Tunis: paintings, etchings, drawings, cartoons & tapestries* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1989), 61 n. 50. Also, two portraits, one today in the National Museum, Poznań, the other formerly in the Gavet collection, both dubiously attributed to Guillim Scrots. Jan Bialostocki, 'The Empress Isabella, Titian and Guillim Scrots (Notes on the Flemish Portrait of Isabella in Poznań)', *Oud Holland* 69: 1 (1954): 109–15; Wilhelm Suida, 'Titian's portraits. Originals and reconstructions', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 29 (March 1946): 139–52. Finally, the drawing by Jacques le Boeucq in the *Recueil d'Arras*, very similar to the latter. Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 58.

[5] One extant example is reproduced by Glück, 'Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg I', 199. They were abundant, however, as Charles himself had five in Brussels (painted by Scrots and, probably, Lucas Cranach the Elder), and Mary of Hungary another one. Glück, notes 52 and 51. Fernando Checa Cremades, *Carlos V: La imagen del poder en el Renacimiento* (Madrid: El Viso, 1999), 186.

vellum or wood, constituted another class, although they share the same basic compositional features as the previous two.[6] Finally, donor portraits, although showing full-length figures, are subordinated to the overall, predetermined composition.[7] Apart from these categories, very few pieces can be singled out.[8]

This outline of Isabel's portraits by artists other than Titian can be summarized as perfectly coherent with the hesitating imperial image prior to the decade of 1540, mostly shaped by Northern models. The vast majority of these portraits were carried out by Flemish artists, all of them formerly under the patronage of Margaret of Austria or Mary of Hungary, who would provide them with chances to work for the Emperor. It is interesting, in this regard, to learn about Lope de Salinas's 1534 report to Ferdinand I on the possibility of obtaining a portrait of the Empress: 'I will search for it, though it will be hard to find, since, as you know, it is not something usual here . . . and there is great need of painters in Burgos; in Miraflores there seems to be one portrait, albeit from her youth'.[9]

Thus, a lack of qualified painters in Castile during the regency of Isabel was undoubtedly another reason to bestow the task of her portrayal on foreign artists,[10] in spite of the fact that she never left the peninsula. Here we first touch on the central problem of Isabel's portraiture: her absence from the painters' scope of action. In other words, how to portray the spouse to the most powerful ruler of the time, without ever having seen her?

Titian had to address this problem, too, compounded with the sitter's death years before. Charles first commissioned from him a portrait of Isabel in 1543, during a week-long meeting between the Emperor and Pope Paul III in Busseto (21–25 June). Charles supplied the painter with the unknown model portrait, which he described as 'very much lifelike, although by a trifle painter' ('molto

[6] See note 44. To the same genre belonged the four miniature portraits that Philip II commissioned to Diego de Arroyo shortly after Isabel's demise. Glück, 'Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg I', 203; Cloulas, 'Les portraits'.

[7] As in Orley's *Fons Vitae* altarpiece in Porto, and the vitrals he designed for Saints Michael and Gudule's church, Brussels. Glück, 'Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg I', 186 ff; Moura, *Retratos de Isabel*, 157; Checa Cremades, *Carlos V*, 172, 177.

[8] Jean Mone carved an alabaster relief with an atypical depiction of the imperial couple in affectionate embrace. Although it bears the date of 1526, the year of Charles's and Isabel's marriage, it probably dates from 1529 or later, since the emperor appears in the short haircut he had not adopted before that time. Carmen Bernis, *Indumentaria española en tiempos de Carlos V* (Madrid: Instituto Diego Velázquez del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1962), 64–5. It was probably made without actual knowledge of Isabel's appearance.

[9] Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 66, note 11: 'Yo la buscaré, aunque creo que será mala de haber; porque, como V. M. sabe, acá son poco amigos de tal cosa . . . y hay muy gran falta de oficiales en Burgos; en Miraflores creo que tienen un retrato, aunque es del tiempo de mocedad' (all translations into English are mine). As will be mentioned, Titian had promised Ferdinand a portrait of the Empress at about the same time (see note 41 below).

[10] It was also due to the long-standing preference of Spanish rulers (since at least the reign of the Catholic Kings) for foreign artists, either Flemish or Italian.

simile al vero, benché di trivial pennello'.[11] Titian's painting was lost in the 1604 fire at El Pardo, but its appearance is known through some copies and an engraving.[12] Isabel, her lap full of roses, is shown at half-length, sitting by a windowsill on which her imperial crown rests.[13]

Charles reportedly liked this portrait, and in their next meeting (at Augsburg, from January to September, 1548) had Titian paint some others. One was the portrait currently in the Prado, which maintains the three-quarters, half-length composition of the first painting, removing the crown and the roses and introducing some changes in props and clothing. A third, lost version, is known through a copy by Rubens (now in Duke of Alba's collection, Madrid). In it, Titian represented the imperial couple sitting at a table. For Isabel, he took elements from both of the previous portraits, whereas for Charles's image he mostly used the same composition as in the portrait of the Emperor seated, now in Munich. Finally, recent scholarship has convincingly argued the existence of a fourth, full-length portrait of the Empress by Titian, as the common source for a number of very similar portraits in Austria and Spain.[14]

Whatever the number of portraits finally accomplished by Titian, it is clear that their being truthful likenesses was a main factor for their commission. The Emperor used these and other portraits to keep his dead spouse alive in his memory. One month after her death, he wrote to his sister Mary, and begged her to search the portrait gallery that had belonged to their aunt Margaret of Austria. A portrait of Isabel was found and sent to Charles, only to his disappointment at its lack of likeness.[15]

Regarding Titian's portraits themselves, the Emperor showed concern for the

[11] Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, edited by Paolo Procaccioli, *Edizione nazionale delle opere di Pietro Aretino*, vol. 4 (Rome, Salerno: 1997), III: 42, July 1543.

[12] The engraving was made by Pieter de Jode the Younger after a (lost, too) copy by Rubens. Extant copies in the collection of the Marquis de Santo Domingo (Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 67 n. 25), in Charlecote Park (Warwickshire), and in the Hispanic Society in New York. Harold E. Wethey, *The paintings of Titian. I: The religious paintings. II: The portraits. III: The mythological and historical paintings*. 3 volumes (London: Phaidon, 1969–75), II: 200, III, 268).

[13] This painting is the source for Leone Leoni's first depictions of the Empress: two medals cast in 1546 and 1549, and a cameo today in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. Another early portrait by him is a profile bas-relief in a richly decorated frame, today in El Prado. Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 65.

[14] Kusche, 'Der christliche Ritter', 27. The Kunsthistorisches Museum holds four copies in its various collections. The best is on permanent show at Schloss Ambras (inv. no. 3999); a miniature, belonging to Archduke Ferdinand II's collection, can be seen at the Kunsthistorisches Museum's Münzsammlung (inv. no. 4665); two other minor copies in storage (nn. 3436 and 8116). There is another full-length copy in Salzburg, Städtisches Museum. In Madrid, the two versions of the Leonis' sculpture of Isabel, first in bronze (1555–64) and then in marble (1555–72; both in El Prado). Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 65. All of them share basic features in clothing and coiffure, as well as the pose (Isabel holds in her right hand an extreme of her girdle).

[15] Checa Cremades, *Carlos V*, 275.

delays in the completion of the first. He felt very attached to the model he had sent, so much so as to ask for it to be returned to him since the painter no longer needed it.[16] The fact that the model was a very good likeness (probably the best, since he sent it for Titian to copy) is the obvious reason for Charles's affection for it. He also liked Titian's first portrait, although he found it wanting in that particular respect: likeness. He deemed it important enough to keep the painting for more than two years until Titian himself could repaint the nose.[17]

Further proof of the personal use of those portraits by Charles is found in the weeks prior to his death in Yuste. At one point, the Emperor had his servants bring him Isabel's portrait,[18] which he contemplated in silence for some time, and then did the same with the *Prayer in the Garden* and the *Glory* (which, incidentally, shows Titian's last portrait of Isabel). All this evidence confirms what may seem obvious; her portraits by Titian lent themselves to a private use, as reminders of the deceased Empress.

Nonetheless, in Yuste we also find some of the traces that tell us a fairly different story. Charles showed there an unforeseen predilection for the commission of new portraits of Isabel. Shortly before his death, he commanded some Flemish painters visiting Yuste to copy portraits from him and the Empress.[19] He also wished to have two sculpture portraits made for the tabernacle of the church. They should represent the imperial couple as they appear in Titian's *Glory*, re-enacting the presence of the king's eternal body. Evidently, he conceived of those images as his memorial for future generations, and wanted to make Isabel part of that eternal image.

This impersonal view of Isabel's portraits is easily applied to those carried out

[16] Matteo Mancini, *Tiziano e le corti d'Asburgo: nei documenti degli archivi spagnoli* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1998), 159.

[17] Writing about Titian's portrait, Falomir has seen Isabel's portraits by Titian as an idealized re-creation of her image. According to him, this would have involved the 'correction' of Isabel's countenance, eliminating her aquiline nose. While finding it difficult to arrive at a positive conclusion on that particular detail, I fully agree with his overall interpretation of these portraits as 'el proceso ideal de aprehensión de la imagen de Isabel por parte de Carlos'. Miguel Falomir Faus, 'Imágenes de poder y evocaciones de la memoria. Usos y funciones del retrato en la corte de Felipe II', In *Felipe II, un monarca y su época. Un príncipe del Renacimiento* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1998), 202–27, esp. 203–4; idem, 'En busca de Apeles. Decoro y verosimilitud en el retrato de Carlos V', in *Carlos V. Retratos de familia*, edited by Fernando Checa Cremades, Javier Portús, and Miguel Falomir Faus (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000), 157–79, quote on 177.

[18] Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 68 n. 47. The frequent assertion that Charles looked to Isabel's portrait as he lay in his deathbed is somewhat inexact, since this happened on 31 August, right before he said he was feeling unwell. In fact, he lived for another three weeks, until 21 September. Domingo Sánchez Loro, *La inquietud postrimera. Vol I. Tránsito ejemplar de Carlos V, desde la fastuosidad cortesana de Bruselas al retiro monacal de Yuste*, 1st edition (Cáceres: Jefatura Provincial del Movimiento, 1957), 335, 349, 364.

[19] Quoted in Fernando.Checa Cremades, *Felipe II: mecenas de las artes* (Madrid: Nerea, 1992), 470, n. 28. Notice the customary preference for Flemish artists, even at this late date.

by Titian. It was by no means the only time the Venetian painter portrayed an absent sitter. In fact, he took pride in his ability to recognize the characteristic features of any person merely judging from another artist's portrait. He portrayed Francis I from a medal, and Isabella d'Este from a two decades old portrait.[20] Such creative power was not exclusive to Titian: in fact, it was a quite common requirement for painters. Of all the Flemish artists who portrayed Isabel, only Antonio de Holanda is reported beyond doubt to have done so from life. Bernard Orley and Joos van Cleve painted portraits of her without ever traveling to the Iberian Peninsula.[21] In brief, it was common practice to portray a remote sitter. This opens ample room for the painter's creative power, but also for idealization. In Titian's case, however, this talent was far more marked. He made it part of his artistic persona, in his own motto. *Natura potentior ars* meant, among other things, that even the dead could be risen again to life. He was applying himself a classical *topos*, formulated before by Alberti: 'the face of the dead lives through painting a lasting life'.[22] This challenge to death is ill-fated, of course, and the inevitable end is indirectly acknowledged by some 'reminder': a clock, in the double portrait of the imperial couple.

Moreover, these images played a public role, as made clear by their insertion in portrait galleries. Although quite probably they were neither commissioned nor conceived as pendants for specific images of Charles,[23] they were certainly paired in most collections during the Emperor's lifetime and afterwards. Once more, the portraits of the Dukes of Urbino were Titian's own models. Conceived separately, they 'complement each other [in] a union of polarities': the warrior, and the lady of the dukedom.[24] The same dialectic between active masculinity and passive femininity is present in Titian's portraits of Charles and Isabel.

Conventions and traditions were constantly at play, therefore, and Titian was most creative within them. He departed from the Northern, late medieval models for the image of the ruler, and created what is usually known as the state portrait. For his first portrait of Isabel, that meant maintaining the bust figure in three

[20] Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, II: 95–6.

[21] It is a matter of contention whether Scrots or Vermeyen met her between 1526 and 1530. Glück, 'Bildnisse aus dem Hause Habsburg I', 190–91, 200; Suida, 'Titian's Portraits', 149; Bialostocki, 'The Empress Isabella', 109; Horn, *Jan Cornelisz Vermeyen*, 60 n. 48. Taking Scrots as author of the model for Titian implies acceptance of an undocumented (in spite of Glück and Suida's claims on the contrary) journey to Spain. Regarding Mone, during 1526 and 1527 he did not receive his usual stipend from the city of Malines, which supports an otherwise undocumented travel to the Emperor's wedding in Seville.

[22] 'Il viso di chi già sia morto, per la pittura vive lunga vita'. David Rosand, 'Alcuni pensieri sul ritratto e la morte', in *Giorgione e l'umanesimo veneziano*, edited by Rodolfo Pallucchini (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1981), 293–308, esp. 296.

[23] There are different hypotheses concerning the pairing of these portraits in Charles's and Mary of Hungary's collections. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, II: 85–7, 110–11, 193–4, 200–203; Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 67–8, n. 30 and 33; Kusche, 'Der christliche Ritter', 24–7.

[24] Luba Freedman, *Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 89–90.

quarters (as in the Poznań painting), and adding some representational elements: the chair, the brocade tablecloth and cloth of honor, the roses on her lap, and the imperial crown on the windowsill. In later versions, he suppressed the roses and the crown, incorporating a landscape through the mirror, as well as an occasional book of hours.[25] Titian also appropriated a previous, Italian tradition, 'a *topos* of beautiful, virtuous brides' established by Raphael's celebrated *Joanna of Aragon*.[26] This ideal was strong enough to shape not only Titian's portraits of Isabel, but also a later bridal portrait of Mary Tudor by Antonis Mor. It also succeeded in characterizing the sitters as beautiful, whatever their actual physical appearance.

Which leads us to the rather important matter of beauty. In this context, what made a woman look beautiful?[27] Ideal, even if physical, beauty was connected to moral virtue. For Renaissance culture, 'all good women are beautiful', since outward appearance was but a manifestation of inner character.[28] For example, Aretino wrote a letter to Isabel, praising her beauty in such traits as 'la semplicità de la fronte', 'i vostri occhi girati da vergognosi movimenti', 'le vostre guancie fiorite', and the like.[29] Needless to say, he had never seen her. Aretino knew the expectations of his readers, and adapted his writing to them. What really mattered was the moral effect that her countenance was supposed to have on the viewers in real life.[30] In the process, the links to her real appearance became so tenuous as to almost disappear, but that did not prevent his message from getting to the readers. The same thing happened when the model was not 'real', but a painted portrait. Aretino composed encomiastic descriptions of portraits not already begun,[31] or, in the case of Isabel's first portrait, when it was still one year away from completion.[32] In fact, the poet applied the same rhetorical language to many of Titian's feminine portraits regardless of the actual character or look of the sitter.[33]

Rhetoric supplied a convenient substitute for appearance. The effect the portrait should have on the viewers was far more important than its actual look; the ideal, rather than the real; convention, rather than likeness. Nonetheless, it served

[25] The roses conveyed a specific allusion to conjugal love, as well as to Isabel's name-saint Elizabeth of Portugal. Joanna Woodall, 'An exemplary consort: Antonis Mor's portrait of Mary Tudor', *Art History* 14: 2 (June 1991): 193–224, esp. 210.

[26] Woodall, 'An exemplary consort', 208.

[27] See Rona Goffen's excellent analysis of this question. *Titian's Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 81–103.

[28] Goffen, *Titian's Women*, 64.

[29] Aretino, *Lettere*, I: 174, 20 August 1537.

[30] The same indifferentiation of physical and moral traits can be found in Santa Cruz's description of Isabel, quoted in Cloulas, 'Les portraits', 67 n. 27.

[31] Freedman, *Titian's Portraits*, 88.

[32] A close analysis of Aretino's letter III, 102 (October 1544), regarding his description of Isabel's portrait, although very fruitful, would take us too far. Let me just point to the main issues: a minimal knowledge of the painting's appearance (the flowers in her lap); the constant moral overtones to her physical features; the open awareness of the 'second-hand' character of Titian's portrait.

[33] Freedman, *Titian's Portraits*, 87.

its purpose. Charles affirmed[34] that he had obtained consolation from Aretino's funeral letter for Isabel, written in his usual, overblown style.[35] Is it strange that Titian could be equally conventional in portraying her?

Charles V succeeded in developing a coherent imperial portraiture only during the 1540s.[36] For that process, Titian was a key element in that, although he was not the only portraitist to the Emperor, he was by far his favorite. Interestingly enough, Charles chose to include Isabel in this project, even posthumously. As Fernando Marías insightfully remarked, it was precisely the Empress's first portrait that initiated Charles's properly imperial iconography, which was to be culminated by his equestrian portrait in memory of Mühlberg, and later by Pompeo Leoni's sculptures of Charles and Isabel for El Escorial.[37]

Paraphrasing Aretino, one could say that Titian showed 'Isabel herself to Charles'.[38] It was him who supplied the image of Isabel that the Emperor wanted, even though he had not known her. Thus, Charles ensured that she was perpetually remembered by his side, as a feminine paradigm that, although highly ideal, was at the same time convincingly real. In Renaissance artistic theory, the *concetto* of the portrait was the vehicle to solve this tension. It worked to accommodate an individual within his socially representative type. No contradiction was perceived between both extremes, and the artist was expected to reconcile them.[39] In fact, it is probably our own biased preference for an allegedly 'pure' or 'direct' description of reality that makes us wary of ideals, conventions, or models, which, whether we notice them or not, are always at work in our representations.

The Empress's (Self-)Fashioning

Let us now examine the degree to which Isabel played an active role in the fashioning of her image, and, in fact, of her own person. Her efforts were conceived within the larger context of the imperial image, and therefore subordinated to Charles's self-promotion through the arts. Nonetheless, she was also able to characterize herself as the center of the peninsular court, through an unparalleled display of magnificence and lavish consumption. In this regard, she was following previous queenly models, both Castilian and Portuguese, while at the same time articulating practices with great later resonance.

Concerning Titian's role as the main imperial portraitist, it is clear that it was the Emperor's personal taste that gave the Venetian painter precedence over all the other artists who had portrayed him. Nonetheless, an attentive reading of the

[34] Aretino, *Lettere*, III: 42, July 1543.
[35] Aretino, *Lettere*, II: 104, 31 May 31 1539.
[36] Checa Cremades, *Carlos V*, 273.
[37] Fernando Marías, *El largo siglo XVI: los usos artísticos del Renacimiento español* (Madrid: Taurus, 1989), 357–8.
[38] As in Aretino's claim about Titian's portraits showing 'Cesare istesso a Cesare proprio'. Aretino, *Lettere*, I: 307, 18 December 1537.
[39] Freedman, *Titian's Portraits*, 27, 33.

correspondence of the Spanish ambassadors to the Venetian republic shows the involvement of the Empress in the efforts to bring the painter to Spain. These sustained efforts proved to be useless, as they conflicted with the painter's desire to remain in his city, continually concealed in various excuses. Lope de Soria was obliged to remind the Senate that any other painter could take charge of the completion of the decorations in Palazzo Ducale, unlike Titian, 'to whom the Majesties of the Emperor and Empress want for nothing else but painting portraits'.[40] One year later, the same ambassador wrote in haste to Ferdinand I, begging him to help Titian's younger brother resolve as soon as possible his rights to the proceeds from woodcutting in some Tyrolese forests, 'because the Emperor and Empress wish Titian to depart as soon as possible, which I urge him to do, but he says he cannot leave until his brother's return'[41]. This insistence that both the Emperor *and* the Empress want Titian as portraitist in residence does not appear in any of the other imperial commissions to the Venetian master.

There is further evidence of Isabel's direct knowledge of it Titian's work. The painter, following Aretino's advice, made a gift of an *Annunciation* to the Empress. Isabel responded to the gift with a very generous payment, and the present of a golden chain for Aretino.[42] The chain was perceived as only a beginning, since Aretino commented at about the same time that it had been given to him 'with prospects of better things'.[43]

A second painter to have seemingly enjoyed a privileged position in Isabel's entourage was Antonio de Holanda. She summoned this Portuguese miniature painter to Toledo in 1529, to portray the Emperor before departing for his coronation in Bologna.[44] On that occasion he also depicted the Empress with prince Philip (aged two at that time) in her arms, in a clear parallel of Virgin Mary's images with the Child. It must have been one of the first cases of 'divine portraits'

[40] 'Al qual las Magestades del Emperador y Emperatriz no quieren sino para hazer retratos', as Lope de Soria recounts to Francisco de los Cobos in his September 3, 1533 letter. Mancini, *Tiziano*, 136.
[41] 'Porque el Emperador y la Emperatriz desean, que vaya presto el dicho Ticiano, e yo le doy priessa para que se parta y el dize que no puede partir hasta que vuelva el dicho su hermano': Lope de Soria to Ferdinand I, 8 October 1534. Shortly afterwards (4 November 1534), Soria mentioned some portraits of the Empress and the prince that Titian would supposedly send to Ferdinand after traveling to Spain. Mancini, *Tiziano*, 140–41.
[42] Isabel took the Annunciation to the chapel in the palace at Aranjuez. Freedman, *Titian's Portraits*, 16; Mancini, *Tiziano*, 1998, 146ff. The painting is lost, but we know its composition through an engraving by Caraglio.
[43] Aretino, *Lettere*, I:168, 25 July 1537.
[44] Jorge Segurado, *Francisco d'Ollanda: da sua vida e obras: arquitecto da renascença ao serviço de D. Joao III: pintor, desenhador, escritor, humanista: 'fac-simile' da carta a Miguel Ângelo, 1553 e dos seus tratados sobre Lisboa e desenho* [1571] (Lisbon: Ediçoes Excelsior, 1970), 504–5; María José Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios al servicio de la emperatriz Isabel de Portugal', paper presented at the 2nd Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Historiadores del Arte de Portugal, Porto, 2001 (publication forthcoming). Prof. Redondo has definitely assigned this trip to 1529. My knowledge of Isabel's portrait 'a lo divino' is also due to her kindness.

('retratos a lo divino'), a genre that proliferated in the Spanish court during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She owned two altarpieces by the same artist, and paid him for various services during that year of 1529.

So close was this relationship, that it was later continued with Francisco de Holanda, Antonio's son. In 1537, on his way from Portugal to Rome, the young Francisco visited the Empress in Valladolid. She asked him to make secretly ('como furtado') a portrait of the Emperor, then in Barcelona, and have it sent back to her. On his visit to Barcelona, he requested from Charles a chance to portray him, but the Emperor courteously refused, claiming to be too old to be portrayed as the Empress wanted.[45]

Another foreign painter to work for Isabel was Seisenegger. He stayed at the Spanish court in 1538–39, portraying the imperial family for his master, Ferdinand I of Austria. New documentary evidence shows what was to be supposed: that Isabel commissioned him portraits of her children, Philip, María and Juana.[46] These were part of her painted portraits' collection. It consisted of a few portraits of her husband and children, as well as of her closest Habsburg and Aviz relatives.[47] While it seems safe to suppose that most of the Habsburg portraits could be attributed to Seisenegger, and the Portuguese to Antonio de Holanda, no archival proof has been found so far.

These three foreigners carried out particular works for Isabel, at specific times, never entering her personal service. A fourth character was a Spaniard, Diego de Arroyo, who did belong to Isabel's large household, even if only as a chapel servant. In fact, he was the only visual artist at her permanent service, authoring miniature decorations for books, small portraits, and other heraldic decorations.[48]

All this shows us a princely woman who is quite aware of the formalities involved in the patronage of artists. Nevertheless, this should not lead us to take her as a great patron of painters, nor an art collector: the individual who undoubtedly played that role in the imperial entourage was Mary of Hungary, the

[45] In Holanda's words: the Emperor 'se me tornou a desculpar dizendo: que era já velho para me consentir que o Retratasse como a Imperatriz pedia.' He recounts the event in the seventh chapter of his *Da sciencia do desegno*. Segurado, *Francisco d'Ollanda*, 243.

[46] Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Casa Real, legajo 67–4, f. 127: 29 July 1539, payment 'a Jacob Sais Niguer [of] CCL ducados que se le devian por seis rretratos que hizo del príncipe y de las señoras infantas por mandado de su magestad.' It is one of Isabel's posthumous debts. See also Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios', note 31.

[47] In addition to two portraits of Charles, she had others of Ferdinand and Anna of Austria, the prince Philip, the infantas María and Juana, as well as the children of Ferdinand. From Portugal, portraits of João III, the queen Catherine, princes Luís and Fernando (Isabel's brothers) and princess Maria or Beatriz. Annemarie Jordan, 'O Retrato no Renascimento Português', in *Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga*, edited by José Luís Gordo Porfirio (Lisbon: Edições Inapa, 1999), 177–9; Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios'.

[48] She must have kept him very active. AGS CR, leg. 67–4, f. 135 (25 April 1540): 'Otro [mandato] para que el tesorero pagasse a Diego de Arroyo Cmil [maravedís] por las yluminaciones que hizo por mandado de su Magestad'; this meant a higher amount than that owed to Seisenegger, a famed, international court artist. See also Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios', note 33.

Emperor's sister. The question, however, could be another: why did she have to be a collector of 'art' in the first place?

As María José Redondo's research has already made clear, painting played a very small role in her possessions. These were extraordinary, truly outstanding, in other fields, such as jewelry, clothing, and furnishing. Her dowry included an impressive array of gold and silver work, amounting 64,500 of the dowry's total 900,000 *doblas*. The sheer opulence of this ensemble marveled the Spanish court.[49] It was later increased by further presents and acquisitions, as well as by the continuous production of Isabel's gold- and silversmiths: Luis Fernández, Hernán Pérez, Francisco de León, Alejo Ortiz, and especially Jerónimo González.[50] In this way, Isabel kept a Portuguese flair in her queenly identity, since the Portuguese court was renowned for its luxury. In the same sense can be understood her leaning for exotic objects, mostly Asian, whose best examples were distributed in Europe through Lisbon.

What I would like to stress, however, is the extraordinary importance she attached to costumes.[51] Although they cannot be compared, in strict monetary terms, to the value of her jewels, those were her most cherished belongings. Moreover, while her jewels usually left the royal collection as required by Charles's many military enterprises, clothes or fabric were seldom pawned, and thus formed a more permanent, though changing possession. They were important enough to deserve a separate, detailed inventory, containing all clothes that she brought from Portugal, as well as the transformations made to them.[52] This is totally exceptional in the documentation given to us about Spanish queens of early modern times, and shows the careful control of her wardrobe.

Costumes were not universal: chroniclers observed the slight differences

[49] AGS, Patronato Real, leg. 14–193. See José Martínez Millán, editor, *La corte de Carlos V*, 5 volumes (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000), I: 236, n. 528, for a summary of its parts and relative worth by Félix Labrador, who is currently researching the Empress's household. María José Redondo Cantera, 'Formación y gusto de la colección de la Emperatriz Doña Isabel de Portugal', in *El arte en las cortes de Carlos V y Felipe II*, edited by Centro de Estudios Históricos Departamento de Historia del Arte 'Diego Velázquez', Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Madrid: Alpuerto, 1999), 225–36. esp. 226–8, offers a stylistic and functional overview.

[50] Redondo Cantera, 'Formación y gusto', 230; Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios'; AGS CR leg. 67–4, f. 130.

[51] María del Carmen Mazario Coleto, Isabel's best biographer so far, already remarked her passion for clothing and rich fabrics. *Isabel de Portugal: Emperatriz y Reina de España* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1951), 88–92. Such preference cannot be said to include the tapestries in her collection, certainly noteworthy, but not extraordinary. Redondo Cantera. 'Formación y gusto', 229, 234.

[52] AGS, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, 1ª época, leg. 465: 'Relacion y quenta que dio gil sanchez de bazan escribano de camara de la enperatriz nra sa de las rropas que se truxeron de portugal quando su magd vino a castilla y de las que se hicieron en ella hasta principio del año de MDXXIX que se começo el libro de la camara y de las ropas que se hizieron y de lo que se hizo dellas'. Further information about clothes is contained in legajo 464 of the same series, and also in AGS CR leg. 67–3.

between Portuguese and Spanish fashion and, although Isabel quickly adapted herself to Spanish and Flemish ways, she also kept Portuguese traits in her clothing.[53] Far from being only a matter of personal likings and taste, dowries and costumes had clear political overtones.[54] Attention was paid to this particular in her very marriage agreements.[55]

Isabel was herself an avid buyer of rich fabrics, mostly Venetian. Her orders in 1532 included damask, satin, velvet, many times in the most expensive crimson dye; various types of brocades, some of them spun with gold or silver; pure gold thread.[56] The ambassadors and her merchants reported on the negotiations and searches for the best quality available in the market.[57] She even paid some painters in Lucca and Florence for their designs for heraldic decorations in brocades that were later produced in Genoa.[58] As regards complete clothes, the aforementioned inventories describe an overwhelming variety of clothes, in abundance of rich textiles, in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and Flemish fashions, whose transformations were often recorded in detail.[59]

After her death, her possessions were mostly divided among her son and daughters. Costumes received the usual attention from her. In her will, she gave great importance to her wish to donate three of her best clothes and a golden bracelet to the monastery of Guadalupe (Figure 9.3), as well as other pieces to two Portuguese convents.[60] That is almost her only explicit, material legacy (leaving aside those within the royal family). In this way, what had been her bodily adornment in life was transformed into a sacred vestment after her death, returning to God some of the secular glory that had been temporarily diverted from him. She

[53] Bernis, *Indumentaria española*, 24; Ruth Matilda Anderson, *Hispanic Costume 1480–1530* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1979), 182.

[54] 'The size of dowries and the sartorial splendour of weddings and trousseaus was at this time one of the politically measurable signs of status, and that conspicuous spending was a sign of liberality, one of the cardinal virtues of successful rulers'. Ivana Elbl, '"The Elect, the Fortunate, and the Prudent": Charles V and the Portuguese Royal House, 1500–1529', in *Young Charles V, 1500–1531*, edited by Alain Saint-Saëns (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2000), 87–111, esp. 108–9.

[55] *Corpus documental de Carlos V*, edited by Manuel Fernández Álvarez (Salamanca, 1973), I: 108: 'Otrosí es concordado y asentado que el dicho señor rey de Portugal y de los Algarbes, etc., nuestro señor, haya de atauiar y adereçar a la dicha señora Ynfanta de vestidos y atauíos de su persona y cámara y casa, segund cuya hermana es, y con quien casa'.

[56] See especially AGS, Estado, leg. 25–72 and 73. The orders here gathered, extraordinary even for her, amounted to 4440 *ducados* and 3250 Genoese *scudi*.

[57] AGS, Estado, leg. 25–94, also from 1532.

[58] Redondo Cantera, 'Artistas y otros oficios suntuarios'; AGS, Estado, leg. 25–72. The first notice of these orders was given in Mazarío Coleto, *Isabel de Portugal*, 88.

[59] AGS CMC I 465 and 464; AGS CR 67–3: ff. 96–146.

[60] Her testamentaries chose which pieces to send to Guadalupe: two *mongiles* (of gold and silver cloth each) and a *faldrilla* (underskirt) in gold cloth (AGS CR 67–4: 107; AGS CMC1 464: 257, 240). Although their price is not given, the detailed descriptions and the precious materials indicate they must have been truly outstanding.

Figure 9.3 Dalmatic made from the Empress's gift of clothes to the monastery of Guadalupe in 1539, gold brocade. Monastery of Guadalupe.

also had some nuns in Madrigal prepare extraordinarily rich ornaments, to be sent to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. She carried out herself a piece of sacral clothing, the alb that her husband wore at his coronation in Bologna. [61]

It seems clear that Isabel invested costumes and textiles with a personal significance, to a greater extent than jewels or other precious and rare objects.[62] She was not alone in this regard: Charles himself made a habit of presenting high-rank women with the best Spanish brocades, in what almost became a Habsburg feminine hallmark.[63] In the already amazingly rich fashions used by European aristocracy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Spaniards and Portuguese stood out by their own merit. The formation of a dazzling appearance for the royal person and her surroundings was an art mastered in the Iberian courts.[64] In part, previous queens had set the model for Isabel. In Spain, Isabel la Católica had formed the most powerful image of a ruling woman for the coming centuries. She also had a taste for sumptuous costumes, and she bequeathed some of the best to the monastery of Guadalupe, too.[65] Both queen and empress could spin, and did occasionally so with their maids, fulfilling biblical roles of wifely virtue.

Taking into consideration what has been said in the last pages, my former question about collecting might now be answered. If we search for paintings and sculptures, Isabel's possessions are completely secondary. If we rather take into account the context of her times, other practices appear in which she did excel among her generation; practices not mainly linked to ideals of aesthetic value, but rather to those of majesty, wealth, and magnificence. In that regard, the question about her status as an 'art' collector may just be out of focus, and slightly unfair. It may be more balanced to say that she followed some traditions and reshaped them according to her own circumstances and ability, but not necessarily in the direction that the future would favor.

Choices and Consequences

I have consciously emphasized here the importance of her costumes, since that of her jewelry had already been remarked upon. Returning to a broader context, it will seem clear by now that both were Isabel's main resources for the adornment of her own person, resources complemented with the elaboration of a luxurious environment, through precious devotional jewels, tapestries, and lavish fabrics.

Such features correspond quite logically with the character of the Empress's

61 Anderson, *Hispanic Costume*, 28.

62 She used to give some of her own clothes to her maids upon their marriage. For instance, the posthumous gift to doña Mencía de Mendoza, in AGS CR leg. 67–4, fol. 126.

63 Florence Lewis May, 'Spanish brocade for royal ladies', *Pantheon* 23 (1965): 8–15. (1965, 12–13) mentions Eleonora de Toledo and Mary Tudor.

64 See Bernis, *Indumentaria española*, 7–8, and Anderson, *Hispanic Costume*, 28, for some comments on the lavish appearance of Spanish aristocrats at Charles's crowning in Bologna.

65 Diego Angulo Íñiguez, *Isabel la Católica, sus retratos, sus vestidos y sus joyas* (Santander: 1951), 16–26; May 1965, 8)

itinerant court. She was the first acting queen in Spain (or Castile, at least) for twenty years, in the wake of Isabel la Católica's strong authority She shaped her image, during the 1520s and 1530s, along the lines of magnificence and luxury predominant in early Renaissance courts. She formed a certainly large household, in accordance with her position as regent, through a peculiar mixture of Castilian and Portuguese traditions.[66] Nonetheless, she did not have a fixed residence during her thirteen years as imperial consort, during half of which she ruled the peninsular kingdoms on behalf of the absent Emperor.[67] In those circumstances, the formation of large collections, or the decoration of great palace ensembles, was hardly feasible. Isabel's preferences thus follow the pattern of some late medieval and early Renaissance collecting, keen on lavish and precious objects rather than on works of artistic worth (although the latter were not absent from such collections).[68] Her sister-in-law Catherine, queen of Portugal, made a similar choice based on the availability of exotic wares from overseas.[69] On these accounts, extreme luxury and conspicuous appearance were the most useful alternatives in order to serve Isabel's representational needs, and the ones that Charles V initially adopted for himself. Had she lived longer, she may (or may not) have participated too in the 'painterly turn' taking place at the imperial court during the 1540s. Nevertheless, her case shows that the options were far from obvious, and signals the importance of fields so far less documented and studied: material and visual culture at large.

Some later circumstances have contributed to darken and dismiss the results of her choice. First, the unstable nature of costumes and jewels, easily subject to deterioration and further transformations, thus making difficult their conservation. Second, the evolution of early modern collecting, with its preference for painting and what we call art, as exemplified by Mary of Hungary, the best known of Isabel's sisters-in-law. Finally, the cult to the artist-genius (Titian, in this case) which we art historians so frequently indulge in, to the detriment of anonymous artisanship that built most of the visual and material environment of Renaissance courts, thus perpetuating a view of their culture that is radically incomplete and biased.

The best proof of the early triumph of the model based in the artistic image comes to us in the words of Prudencio de Sandoval, as he recounted Isabel's first appearance at the Spanish court: 'The Empress seemed to all one of the most beautiful women on earth, as she was according to those who saw her, and is

66 Martínez Millán, *La corte de Carlos V*, II: 97.

67 Mazarío Coleto, *Isabel de Portugal*, 167–8.

68 As opposed to the stable reign of Philip II, or to Mary of Hungary's regency in the Netherlands. Checa Cremades describes the coexistence of these two models of collecting during the first half of the sixteenth century. *Carlos V*, 188.

69 See Annemarie Jordan, 'Portuguese Royal Collecting after 1521: The Choice between Flanders and Italy', in *Cultural links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance*, edited by K. J. P. Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 265–93, esp. 283–6, for an excellent balance of her collecting activity.

shown in her portraits'.[70] Paradoxically, Titian's posthumous, real and rhetorical portraits had come to be seen as the truth standard of Isabel's image—and her beauty—only 65 years after her death. That it happened in this way is a sign of the changing nature of historical perception, but also a tribute to the power of the imperial image constructed by Charles V and Titian.

[70] 'La Emperatriz pareció a todos una de las más hermosas del mundo, como a juicio de los que la vieron lo era, y se muestra en sus retratos.' Quoted in Moura, *Retratos de Isabel*, 151. Prudencio de Sandoval lived between 1553 and 1620. His *Crónica del Emperador Carlos V* was published in Valladolid in 1604–6.