



When Michael Sittow (circa 1469-1525) created his painting of "Mary Magdalene," a woman whose story appears in the Bible, historians believe he used the youthful Catherine of Aragon as his model.

The oil-on-panel is from the late-15th or early-16th century, when Catalina of Aragon—as she was originally known—was in her late teens or early twenties.

Who was Catherine of Aragon?

Born in December of 1485—the same year [Thomas Cromwell](#) (her future nemesis) came into the world—the young princess was born in Madrid. Her parents were King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (whose match, as a married couple, had united Spain).

When she was only three years old, Catalina became engaged to Arthur, Britain's Prince of Wales (son of King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York). Arthur was a year younger than Catalina.

The Princess had an excellent education. Her tutor was Alessandro Geraldini, a clerk in Holy Orders, and he taught the young girl about religion and the classics. Schooled in the Catholic faith, Catherine of Aragon remained a devout Catholic throughout her life.

When she was 16 years old, Catherine left her family and traveled by sea to England. She endured an extremely difficult three-month voyage. At this point in her life, she had not-yet met her future husband.

In fact, following the royal customs of the time, neither Arthur nor Catherine (who wore a veil during the marriage ceremony) physically laid eyes on each other until after they spoke their marriage vows in 1501.

After their wedding, the future king and his future queen moved to Ludlow Castle, near the Welsh border. It was there that Arthur died, about six months later.

Credits:

The painting, described above, is currently owned by the Detroit Institute of Arts. It is online via [Wikimedia Commons](#).

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