

Juan de Borgoña the Younger (Toledo c. 1500 – Ciudad Rodrigo, 1565)
Saint James the Moor Killer
 c. 1530s



99.4 x 81.2 cm; Oil on panel

Provenance

Private collection, Madrid.

Description and Iconography

The figure of Saint James the Moor Killer (also known as *Santiago Matamoros* in Spanish) is shown before a mountainous landscape as a mounted cavalryman clothed in gleaming plated armour and a long red cape trimmed with metal-thread embroidery, which billows out behind him in flying swags of material. He rides a rearing white stallion emblematic of his miraculous appearance at the Battle of Clavijo, and of his Christian purity, with a red saddle and horse trappings adorned with the letter 's' for Santiago. Having unsheathed his sword from the grey sheath at his waist, he wields it high in his right hand while charging in profile towards the left, and has evidently just decapitated a fleeing Moorish soldier, since a turbaned head is shown rolling on the ground below. In his right hand he clutches the reins of his steed along with a slender flagstaff terminating in a cross picked out in a flash of bronze against a brooding, cloudy sky. At the left-hand edge of the panel the rear ends of two horses are just visible as if fleeing the saint's wrath, one of them bearing its rider who cowers behind his shield and attempts to protect himself with a steel-tipped lance.

There are many differing stories surrounding Saint James, who appears in the gospels as one of Christ's disciples and is sometimes said to have founded the Christian church in Spain. An increasingly popular aspect of his vita following the *Reconquista* of 1492 was the myth that, long

after his death, he miraculously appeared at the battle of Clavijo in 844. There he supposedly helped the Christian King Ramiro I of Asturias to gain victory over the Islamic Moors of mixed Berber and Arab descent who ruled Spain between 711 and 1492. This led to the rise of both painted and sculpted images in which the saint is shown in the guise of a Moor Killer - 'Matamoros' (see in particular *Santiago de Compostela: 1000 ans de pèlerinage eruopéen*, exh. cat., Abbaye de Saint-Pierre, Ghent, 1985, pp. 143-5, 362-5; *Santiago, camino de Europa: culto y cultura en la peregrinación a Compostela*, exh. cat., Monasterio de San Martin Pinario, Santiago de Compostela, 1993, cat nos. 60, 116-20; Paul Williamson, *The Wyvern Collection: Medieval and Renaissance Sculpture and Metalwork*, London, 2018, p. 298, no. 156).

Biography

Little is known of Juan de Borgoña the Younger's life, save that he seems to have worked as a follower and disciple of his father (also called Juan de Borgoña), first in the elder painter's workshop and then when his father died (leaving him his painter's materials alongside his mother's dowry) in a prosperous atelier of his own. He seems to have completed commissions left unfinished on his father's death (including the paintings of the Sala Capitular in Toledo Cathedral; figs. 1a-b), and is documented as an independent master in Toledo by 1533, remaining active during a long career that saw him move between Toledo, Zamora and Ciudad Rodrigo until his own death in 1565.

Casaseca was the first to publish documents elucidating Borgoña's activities in the Zamora area, establishing in the process the tentative outlines of the relationship between the work of father and son. While this relationship has recently been questioned due to a succinctly worded document stating that Juan de Borgoña arrived from "outside" Spain, his work is so stylistically indebted to the influence of Borgoña the Elder, as well as having strong links with the work of the Toledan painters Francisco de Comontes and Correa de Vivar, that he must have been active for some years in that centre. Most recently, and following earlier analyses by Angulo Iñiguez, Matías Díaz Padrón has convincingly drawn together the artist's corpus to encompass panels formerly attributed by other scholars to the Master of Pozuelo and the Master of Toro (whose work had already been highlighted by Gómez Moreno as a cornerstone of the Zamoran school) reconstructing Borgoña's career and pulling him out of obscurity.

Attribution

While absorbing the same Italian – and particularly Raphaellesque – influences that exerted themselves on the work of his close contemporaries, including Francisco de Comontes and Correa de Vivar, Borgoña does not appear to have taken an active part in the move towards realism practiced by other Castilian artists in his time, instead remaining faithful to the formal ideal of cool colours and the supremacy of drawing.¹ The linearity of the landscape and figure style on the present panel and the use of warm brown-black pigments as a form of surface drawing is particularly indicative of this attitude. Also characteristic of his approach is the pared back colour palette, prioritising earth tones and cool blues and grey-blacks alongside pinks and a single fiery red (which has the appearance of pure vermillion). An almost identical palette was utilised on a panel depicting Saints Gregory, Sebastian and Tirso which Matías Díaz Padrón uses to reconstruct Borgoña the Younger's oeuvre, and which is now preserved in the Museo del Prado (fig. 2a). This choice palette is typically combined with a cool approach to lighting effects and shadow. For

¹ M. Diaz Padron, "Una tabla restituida a Juan de Borgoña el Joven, en el Museo del Prado", in *Boletín del Museo del Prado*, 1985, p. 16.

instance, the clouds aligned across the present composition's upper register (with highlights composed of pure lead white defining the nebulous upper surfaces and, in a finer application, the horizontal lower extremities of the clouds) are given a cool *chiaroscuro* effect that also defines the appearance of the airborne draperies fluttering up behind the saint. The same hard, bold style of lighting can be found deployed in a markedly similar manner on a Virgin and Child with Saint Anne (fig. 3; whereabouts unknown) and on the Prado's panel of three saints (fig. 2a). The latter also showcases our painter's approach to physiognomy, with eyes delineated by gently curling upper eyelids blending seamlessly into the lashes, and projecting unfeasibly far forward from the eyeball within (fig. 2b) – these are dominating principles in the depiction of Saint George on the present panel. So too is the warped, compressed perspectival foreshortening of three-dimensional objects, which cling to linearity; the same manipulation of perspective informed the cross staff held by Saint Gregory on the Prado's panel and that held by Saint George on ours. Just as characteristic of the Prado panel is the use of overlapping planes that define the background landscape, the directed lighting from somewhere over the viewer's left shoulder – casting short but strong shadows that recede away from the figures to the right – and the wispy, unbound hair of the saint (cf. Saint Sebastian in the Prado panel), which flies up in places in smoke-like clumps away from the main, brown coif.

The dating of the present panel early in the artist's career is suggested on the basis of strong residual links to the work of the artist's father (and his own early work) at Toledo Cathedral. Especially close is the saint's strong pointed nasal ridge (which is employed in an identical manner on the figure of the old priest in the scene of the Presentation in the Temple in the Sala Capitular, painted by the elder Borgoña in or shortly after 1508; fig. 1a) and the approach to his flying red draperies, which reprise the same idea visible on Christ's mantle in the scene of the *Resurrection* (also Sala Capitular).

Related Literature

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Fig. 1a
Juan de Borgoña the Elder, with the assistance of Juan de Borgoña the Younger
The Presentation in the Temple
c. 1508-1511
Toledo cathedral, Sala Capitular

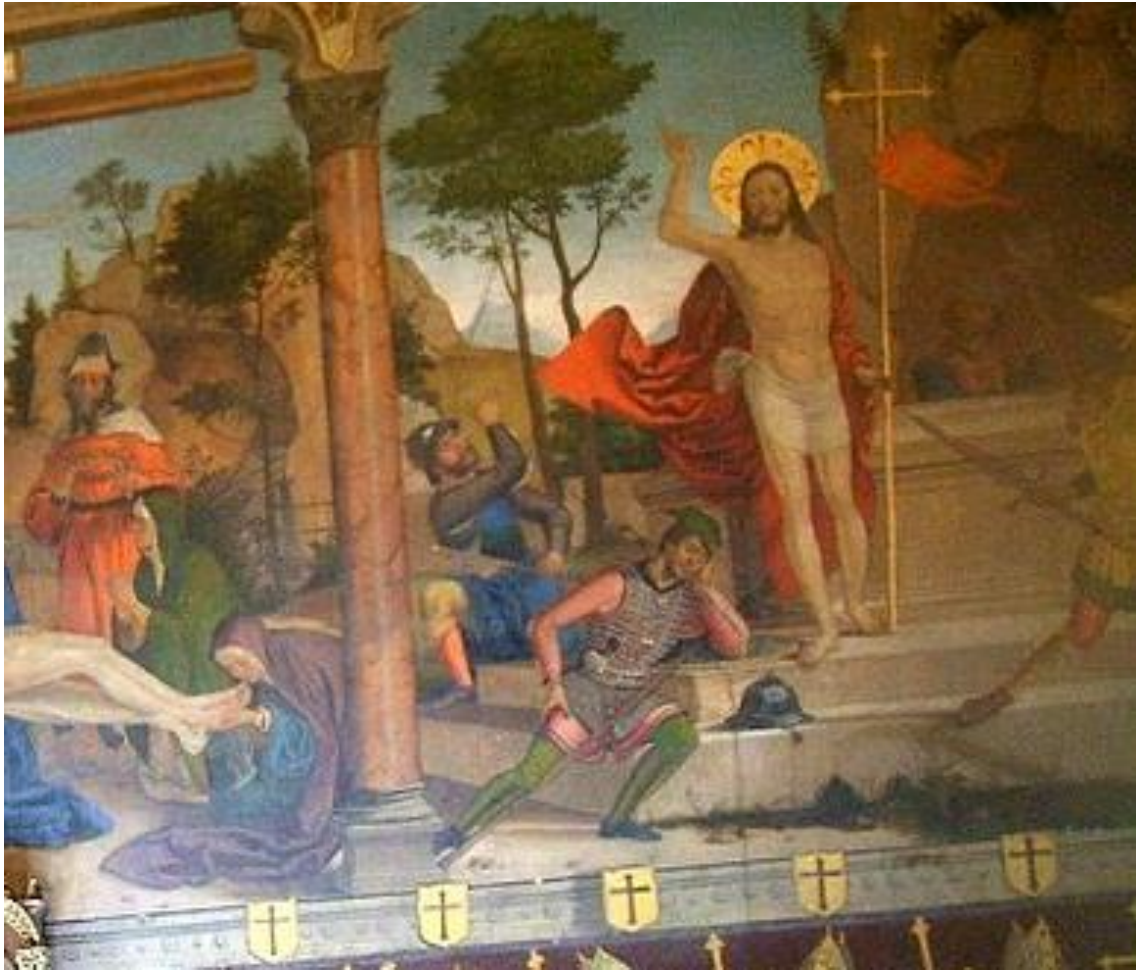


Fig. 1b
Juan de Borgoña the Elder, with the assistance of Juan de Borgoña the Younger
The Resurrection
c. 1508-1511
Toledo cathedral, Sala Capitular



Fig. 2a
Juan de Borgoña
Saints Gregory, Sebastian and Tirso
Second quarter 16th century
147 x 124 cm; oil on panel
Madrid, Museo del Prado, inv. P003112



Fig. 2b
Detail showing the construction of the eye on Saint Gregory in the Prado panel and Saint George in the present panel, as well as the use of brown earth pigments for outlines and shadows on both.



Fig. 2c
Detail showing the warped and compressed perspectival foreshortening of the cross staff held by Saint Gregory in the Prado panel and by Saint George in the present panel



Fig. 3
Juan de Borgoña the Younger
The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, detail
Current location unknown, photo: Hulton Fine Art Collection