



2008.002
Unidentified Artist
Peru or Spain
Saint James the Moor-Slayer (Santiago Matamoros)
Seventeenth century
Oil on canvas, 57 ½ x 39 inches

Saint James the Greater is known throughout the Hispanic world as Santiago (San Diego), and his remains are said to be in Santiago de Compostela in the Galician region of Spain. Santiago de Compostela is, with Jerusalem and Rome, one of the three great pilgrimage sites for Western European Catholics from the early Middle Ages until today.

According to the legend of Saint James, he preached the gospel in both the Iberian Peninsula and the Holy Land. Following his martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa, his disciples carried his body over the sea, landing on the coast of Galicia, Spain and from there to Santiago de Compostela (“field of stars”) where he was buried.

There are two principal images of Santiago in Hispanic art. One is reflected in the painting of the Virgin of the Pillar in the Thoma Collection (2003.003). According to local

tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint James on the bank of the Ebro River at Zaragoza (*Caesaraugusta*) in the year 40 C.E. She appeared standing on a pillar, asking the saint and his followers to build a church there in her honor. The highly venerated pillar is conserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza.

According to a later tradition, Santiago appeared miraculously at the battle of El Clavijo, pictured in another painting in the Thoma Collection (1994.018), leading a victory of the Christian forces over the Moors. This image of Saint James as Santiago Matamoros ("Saint James the Moor-Slayer") rapidly become codified as an armed warrior on his white steed rearing over the bodies of slain Moors, an iconographical symbol of Christianity overcoming heresy.

There are many paintings of Santiago Matamoros by both Spanish and Spanish American artists. It is possible that this painting was created by a provincial artist in Spain. It is also possible that it is by a Spanish artist working in Peru during the seventeenth century. Although we know that there were painters from Spain working in South America, few of their names are known and very few paintings can be attributed to them. The Thoma painting is distinguished by its style, an assertive, unapologetic blend of artistic naiveté and sophistication. On the one hand, the impossible pose of the horse's front legs and his camelid head expose the artist's incomplete mastery. On the other hand, the horse's lush mane, the handling of paint in the landscape, and the figure of Santiago himself suggest an artist who has studied European paintings. The saint's costume connects all the elements of the Santiago legend: his robe and bare feet remind us of the wandering disciple of Christ carrying the gospel from Judea to Iberia, and the pilgrim's hat decorated with the scallop shells (symbols of Saint James) recall his relics in Santiago de Compostela.

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