



2019.085

Unidentified Artist

*Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the Moor-slayer)*

Ecuador, Quito

Late seventeenth century, with gold embellishment added later

Oil on canvas, 75 x 59 inches

Saint James the Greater is known throughout the Hispanic world as Santiago (San Diego). His remains are said to be in Santiago de Compostela in the Galician region of Spain, 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 on both the Iberian Peninsula and in the Holy Land. Following James's martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa, his disciples carried his body over the sea, landing on the coast of Galicia, and from there to Santiago de Compostela ("field of stars") where he was buried.

According to tradition, Santiago appeared miraculously at the battle of El Clavijo, pictured in another painting in the Thoma Collection (1997.018)., leading a victory of the

Christian forces over the Moors. Saint James the Greater was a patron saint of Spain, where he was believed to have come directly to the aid of the Christians in their “Reconquest” of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors. At the Battle of Clavijo in 824, the Christian King Ramiro I led his forces to victory over the forces of Abderraman, the caliph of Cordoba, inspired by the appearance of Santiago riding a white steed. Paintings of Santiago on his horse trampling the enemy beneath its hooves depict “*Santiago Matamoros*” (“Saint James the Moor-slayer”), an armed warrior on his white steed rearing over the bodies of slain Moors, emblematic of Christianity overcoming heresy. The composition is iconic (see also 2008.002). The popularity of Saint James in Spanish America is especially evident in the names of cities, including Santiago de Cuba (established 1514), Santiago de Chile (1541) and Santiago de Quito (1534), and his image is often found in country churches.

In the Thoma painting the saint is dressed in armor, pictured at the height of battle. Beneath his horse is a fallen Moor, pictured as a generic “Oriental” identifiable in colonial art by his peaked cap. At a distance from the flowering landscape is a snow-covered mountain. It is perhaps symbolic of the Andes, perhaps even a specific reference to Mount Chimborazo that rises behind Quito. Although the authorship of the painting is attributed to Miguel de Santiago in the catalogue of the exhibition published by the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in 1983, there is no reason given for the attribution. The meaning of the anagram that appears on the horse’s flank is unknown. The artist’s realistic style and the fairly dark palette place the work in the second half of the seventeenth century. It is probable that, as in so many cases, the gold was added in the eighteenth century to enhance the value of the painting. The geographical origins of this painting would be difficult to assess without the Ecuadorian provenance of the former Filanbanco collection.

There are a number of Quito paintings from the eighteenth century in the Thoma collection, with which this earlier creation offers a clear stylistic contrast.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt