



1997.018

Unidentified Artist

Peru

Santiago at the Battle of Clavijo

1653

Oil on canvas with gold embellishment added in the eighteenth century, 30 x 36 inches

Inscribed: *O santiago, Defensor de la España, vengador de los enemigos a quien Cristo Hijo de Dios [..]mo hijo del terreno, Vuelve aqui favorablis tus ojos desde los altos asientos de la gloria; y oye los debidos agradecimientos, que alegres te pagarnos. España te vuelve los agradecimientos, lo que dichosa con tu patrocinio, continua [. . .], enriquecid con tus sagrados hesos [i.e., huesos]. [. . .]nos lograr la deseosa noche de la idolatria y la [cruel?] vanidad, año 1653.*

The inscription is not wholly legible, but its content is clear: “Oh, Santiago, Defender of Spain, vanquisher of enemies who Christ called the son of thunder, look upon us from the heights of glory, and hear the due thanks that we happily pay you. Spain thanks you for the blessing of your continuing patronage and, enriched with your sacred bones, sends you thanks for keeping us together during this dark night of idolatry and cruel vanity, year of 1653.”ⁱ In their efforts to convert the native Americans to Catholicism, the missionaries frequently used the term “idolatry” to describe the persistence of indigenous religious traditions, so the term transferred seamlessly to the Americas.

According to legend, Saint James Major, called Santiago, lent his aid to the Christian forces in Spain in their crusade against the Moors. The caliph of Córdoba, Abderraman, required an annual tribute of 100 maidens from his Christian subjects. In 834 King Ramiro I resisted that demand, so the caliph attacked Ramiro’s forces with a huge army. It was a catastrophe for the Christian troops, and very demoralizing. The king and his battered legions camped at Laturce, then called Monte Clavijo. That night Santiago appeared to Ramiro in a dream, encouraging the king to have confidence in his ultimate victory. The saint ordered that the king and his troops confess, hear Mass and take Communion at daybreak, and bravely enter battle against the Moors with assured of victory. The saint appeared as promised, riding a magnificent white horse and bearing a white standard, and the Moors were routed.ⁱⁱ

The Thoma painting represents Santiago at the battle of Clavijo, but there are other iconographical representations of the saint in both Spanish and Spanish Colonial art: as James the Apostle, in series called *apostolados*; as the Virgin of the Pillar appeared to him at Zaragoza (2003.003); as a pilgrim on the way to Santiago de Compostela, wearing the symbol of the scallop shell on his hat; and as Santiago Matamoros, trampling a Moor beneath his horse’s hooves (2008.002 and 2019.085), or, occasionally in Spanish Colonial art, as Santiago Mataindios, trampling an Indian (2012.024).

The role of Santiago in the battle of the Church militant against heresy in Europe was handily transferred to the battles for territories and souls in America, where conquest by both soldiers and missionaries, was equally a process of political and religious importance. “Since the main role assigned to James during the colonial period was that of controlling the native rebellions, his figure must have been perceived by the natives as the conquistador with invincible arms and supernatural power.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The popularity of Saint James in Spanish America is reflected in the names of churches and colleges, rivers and valleys, but is especially evident in the names of cities, including Santiago de Cuba (established 1514), Santiago de Chile (1541) and Santiago de Quito (1534).^{iv}

The composition of the Thoma *Santiago at the Battle of Clavijo* is very similar to another version in the Museo de Pedro de Osma, Lima, for both rely on the same print source. This composition is based on a generic battle scene of the sort that was represented in many Flemish prints created during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The multi-figured composition, with legions of Christian and Moorish troops diminishing in scale into the great distance, is arranged on a tipped-up plane of the battlefield so that we have a clear view of everything. There are two moments pictured: in the foreground the battle is engaged, and in the distance the battle ensues and the caliph is unhorsed. In the center foreground, Santiago

wields his sword as he charges forward on his white horse. Behind him, Ramiro rides forward with a banner emblazoned with the cross of the Order of Santiago. As the villain, the caliph naturally rides a black horse, and his red standard bears the crescent, symbol of the followers of Islam. Some important details in the Thoma painting have been decorated with gold paint, probably added much later when such embellishment was a popular and prized characteristic of Cuzco school painting.

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ⁱ Many thanks to Kate Weinstein, who found the text. The wording is published later than the painting on which the inscription is found. See Antonio Lobera y Abio, *El por qué de todas la Ceremonias de la Iglesia y sus Misterios...* (Madrid: Imp. De Antonio Moreno, 1846), 636.

ⁱⁱ Ana María Roteta de la Maza, *La ilustración del libro en la España de la Contrarreforma: grabados de Pedro Angel y Diego de Astor (1588-1637)* (Toledo: Instituto Provincial de Investigaciones y Estudios Toledanos, 1985), 194-96.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gustavo Navarro Castro, "Latin American Iconography of Saint James the Killer of Moors," in *America, Bride of the Sun. 500 Years Latin America and the Low Countries*, exh. cat. (Antwerp: Flemish Community, Administration of External Relations, 1992), 190.

^{iv} *Ibidem*, note 14.