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Miguel Jacinto Meléndez
Portrait of Philip V, King of Spain (1683-1746)

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MIGUEL JACINTO MELÉNDEZ

(Oviedo 1679 - 1734 Madrid)

PORTRAIT OF PHILIP V, KING OF SPAIN (1683-1746)

Oil on canvas, in a painted oval.

126 x 103.5 cm;
49 5/8 x 40 3/4 in.

Provenance

Van Tilt Collection, Brussels;

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, sale, 29 April 1935, lot 109 (as "Hyacinthe Rigaud");

Private collection;

Anonymous sale, Paul Martin, Versailles, 21 November 1971, lot 34 (as "Attribué à Giuseppe Maria Crespi");

Private collection, France.

Reference Literature

E. M. Santiago Páez, *Miguel Jacinto Meléndez: Pintor de Felipe V*, Oviedo 1989.

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We are grateful to Elena María Santiago Páez for having confirmed the attribution of the present painting to Miguel Jacinto Meléndez (1679 – 1734).

This imposing portrait depicts King Philip V of Spain (1683-1746) at half-length, turned in three-quarter view, within a painted marble oval whose lower spandrels are carved with scrolls. He wears a full-bottomed wig in the French style and a lace cravat, with a steel cuirass and a dark coat with deep cuffs of gold brocade; a mantle of silvery satin is thrown over his right shoulder. His chest bears the blue silk sash of the French *Ordre du Saint-Esprit* and the insignia of the Spanish *Orden del Toisón de Oro*. In his gloved right hand he holds a baton of command, while his extended left hand gestures towards a cavalry battle in the distance. The King's head is turned to engage the viewer with a steady, regal gaze, and the whole composition projects an aura of martial authority.

The recent cleaning and restoration of the painting have recovered much of its original setting. Examination under ultraviolet light showed that the entire background and the painted marble frame had been covered by later repainting. Further retouchings, spreading beyond the damage they were meant to hide, covered the cracks in the face and reinforced the blue areas of the costume. After the yellowed and uneven varnish was removed, these overpaints were taken off, revealing the painted marble oval, the landscape with its cavalry battle and the two figures at the left. None of these is visible in the reproduction of the picture in the 1935 Van Tilt sale catalogue, where the King appears against an undifferentiated dark ground, suggesting the repainting was done before that sale.

In the portrait, the King's figure dominates the canvas. A shaft of light plays across Philip's face and upper body, employing pronounced chiaroscuro in the Baroque manner to model his features and attire in relief against the deep reds and browns of the background. Within the oval, Meléndez leaves room for a narrative setting. Behind the King are the heavy drapings of what appears to be a campaign tent; to the right, a cavalry engagement, lit by flashes of gunfire, unfolds in an open landscape; and to the left, beyond his shoulder, two figures emerge from the shadow: a man in strict profile, wearing a dark hat, and beside him, a second, younger face. The man in profile, with his prominent aquiline nose, is characterised with an individuality unusual for a subsidiary figure, which suggests a portrait of a particular individual rather than a stock attendant. Philip's extended left hand directs the viewer's attention to the battle, implicitly crediting him with the victory.

No inscription or identifiable topography names the battle. Philip V, however, took the field in person more than once during the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714), and the victory most closely identified with him was one at Villaviciosa de Tajuña, near Guadalajara, on 10 December 1710, when the Franco-Spanish army under the

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Duc de Vendôme defeated the allied forces of Count Guido von Starhemberg, the day after the surrender of General James Stanhope's British corps at nearby Brihuega. The King was present on the field, and the double victory turned the war in Spain decisively in his favour.¹

In France, the victory was celebrated with a medal by Jean Mauger (1648–1712) and Jean Le Blanc (1676/77–1749), which bears the portrait of Louis XIV and, on the reverse, Spain rising at the approach of Victory (VICTORIA REDUX), with the exergue HOSTES DELETI AD VILLAM VICIOSAM X. DECEMBRIS M.DCC.X (fig. 1). Later images of the victory centre on the King and his general. Jacques Couché's engraving after Louis-François-Sébastien Fauvel, *Le Lit de la Victoire*, shows Philip sleeping on the night of the battle on a bed of captured enemy flags prepared for him by Vendôme (fig. 2), and Jean Alaux's (1786–1864) canvas of 1836 for the Galerie des Batailles at Versailles shows the general with the King on the field. The same pairing runs through the history of the campaign, where Philip honoured Vendôme with the style of Highness and, on the general's death in 1712, had him buried in the Escorial among the Infantes of Spain. It is therefore likely that the man in profile at the King's shoulder in the present portrait is Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme (1654–1712) himself.

Broad, confident strokes applied in distinctive zigzag touches in areas such as the drapery enliven the surface with a textural energy typical of the Madrid Baroque school, yet the overall finish remains meticulous, as details like the lace cravat, armour and fabrics are still rendered with fine precision, showing the influence of the Flemish School, especially Van Dyck. Meléndez pays keen attention to varied textures: the smooth, porcelain-like skin of Philip's face is subtly contrasted with the lively mass of the full-bottomed wig, whose curls catch the light. At the crossroads of two stylistic eras, the artist's use of strong luminous contrasts and sober tonality links him to the Late Baroque tradition, even as the elegance and idealising polish of the work look forward to the beginnings of the Spanish Rococo style. The work attests to Meléndez's maturity (1679–1734) and appears to postdate creations of this kind by Michel-Ange Houasse (1680–1730), who arrived in Madrid in 1715, while predating the canvases of Jean Ranc (1674–1735), who entered royal service in late 1722.²

Meléndez portrayed Philip V more than twenty times, continually refining the monarch's image. Early portraits (for instance, around 1707) still recorded the King's Habsburg facial traits, such as the prominent jaw and aquiline nose, but over time the

¹ On the campaign of 1710, see H. Kamen, *Philip V of Spain: The King Who Reigned Twice*, New Haven 2001.

² J. J. Luna, *El retrato español en el Prado. Del Greco a Goya*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid 2006, pp. 140–141.

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artist progressively softened and regularised those features into a more idealised visage.³ By the 1720s, official images of Philip present a more composed and harmonious countenance, downplaying any more ungainly attributes. Both the present portrait and a similar example in the Museo del Prado (dated 1718-1722, inv. P007603, fig. 5) exemplify this trend. The Prado's *Philip V*, presumably the prime version of this likeness, is considerably smaller (82 x 62 cm). It repeats the features, wig, and costume of the present portrait, but is cut at the chest, without the hands or any background. In 1727, Meléndez produced a further variant of Philip's portrait for the new Royal Library (now in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, inv. BNEM CE0102, fig. 6).⁴ In that half-length painting, Philip wears the same wig, armour, and orders, but instead of pointing to a battle he rests his left hand on a book, the published Statutes of the Library, to signify his role as a cultured patron and founder of that institution. The backdrop in the Biblioteca portrait is accordingly plain, with no martial scene, shifting the emphasis from military glory to enlightened peace. Among the earlier portraits, the oval bust of 1712-1714 in the Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, likewise has no narrative background. Another comparable portrait is the circular one now at the museum of the El Burgo de Osma Cathedral. Significantly, our composition is the most expansive of the group, the only version in which the monarch grasps the baton of command, pointing at the battlefield legibly set in the background.

Portraits of this kind were common and were intended for dispatch to civil and military institutions, with the aim of disseminating the likenesses of the sovereigns across the full extent of the territories that made up the vast Spanish empire; they were also sent to relatives or personages connected with the monarchy, and even to various European courts, as part of ongoing diplomatic exchanges with other states.

Philip V, a French-born Bourbon, grandson of Louis XIV, ascended the throne upon the death of Charles II of Spain in 1700 and the consequent extinction of the Habsburg line, an event that led to the War of the Spanish Succession. In its aftermath, Meléndez's portraits were enlisted in a propaganda campaign to solidify the new dynasty's legitimacy by blending French and Spanish imagery. French elements, such as the Versailles-style wig and the blue *Saint-Esprit* sash, emphasise Philip's Bourbon heritage, while the inclusion of the Golden Fleece roots him firmly in the lineage of Spain's kings. Philip's total reign (45 years and 16 days) is the longest in the history of the Spanish monarchy.⁵

The painting's author, Miguel Jacinto Meléndez (1679 – 1734), lived through a key transitional phase in Spanish history: between two centuries and between the

³ E. M. Santiago Páez, *Miguel Jacinto Meléndez: Pintor de Felipe V*, Oviedo 1989, pp. 33-35.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 80-82

⁵ See Kamen, *Philip V of Spain*, 2001.

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Habsburg and Bourbon courts. Leaving Oviedo and the Asturian milieu for Madrid, he quickly established himself as a painter of *retablos* and religious compositions for churches and convents, working in the idiom of the late-Baroque Madrid school. In 1712 he was appointed Painter to the King, and through his state portraits of Philip V and Isabella Farnese he effectively fixed the new dynasty's official image, at least until the arrival of Jean Ranc in 1724. He was also the uncle of Luis Egidio Meléndez, renowned for his still lifes in the second third of the eighteenth century.

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Fig. 1: Jean Mauger (obverse) and Jean Le Blanc (reverse), *Bataille de Villaviciosa*, medal, later strike, bronze, diam. 41 mm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Objets d'art, inv. OAP 1431



Fig. 2: Jacques Couché after Louis-François-Sébastien Fauvel, *Le Lit de la Victoire*, late eighteenth century, engraving, 19.5 x 23.4 cm (7 5/8 x 9 1/4 in.), Vendôme, Musée de Vendôme, inv. 1882.5.1

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Fig. 3: Jean Alaux, *Bataille de Villaviciosa, 10 décembre 1710*, 1836, oil on canvas, 465 x 543 cm (183 1/8 x 213 3/4 in.), Versailles, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Galerie des Batailles, inv. MV 2740

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Fig. 4: Pierre Dupin (engraver) and Michel Odieuvre (publisher), *Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme*, 1735, engraving, 14.9 x 10.7 cm (5 7/8 x 4 1/4 in.), Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, INV.GRAV.LP 30.56.2

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Fig. 5: Miguel Jacinto Meléndez, *Portrait of Philip V, King of Spain*, 1718-1722, oil on canvas, 82 x 62 cm (32 ¼ x 32 ¼ in.), Madrid, Museo del Prado

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Fig. 6: Miguel Jacinto Meléndez, *Portrait of Philip V, King of Spain*, 1727, oil on canvas, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España

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