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Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

The Apostle James and his disciples worshipping Our Lady of the Pillar, c. 1775-1780

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FRANCISCO DE GOYA Y LUCIENTES

(Fuendetodos 1746 – Bordeaux 1828)

THE APOSTLE JAMES AND HIS DISCIPLES WORSHIPPING OUR LADY OF THE PILLAR

c. 1775-1780

oil on canvas

107 x 80 cm.; 42 1/8 x 31 1/2 in.

Provenance

Fernando Rosillo Ortiz Cañabate (1883-1951), Madrid (acquired by the first third of the 20th century);

Thence in the Rosillo collection, Madrid;

By descent to the present private owners, Madrid.

Literature

Marqués de Lozoya, "Dos Goyas inéditos de tema religioso", *Archivo Español de Arte*, Madrid 1951, pp. 5-10.

J. Gudiol, *Goya 1746-1828, Biography, Analytical Study and Catalogue of his Paintings*, New York 1970, cat. no. 115, p. 245, reproduced p. 156.

P. Gassier and J. Wilson, *Goya. His Life and Work*, London 1970, cat. no. 175, p. 91.

R. de Angelis, *L'Opera Completa Pittorica di Goya*, Milano 1974, cat. no. 150, p. 98.

F Calvo Serraller (ed.), *Goya y el Infante Don Luis: el exilio y el reino. Arte y ciencia en la época de la Ilustración española*, exh cat. Madrid, Palacio Real, 2012, cat. no. 49.

Exhibition History

Madrid, Palacio Real, *Goya y el Infante Don Luis: el exilio y el reino. Arte y ciencia en la época de la Ilustración española*, 30 October 2012 - January 2013 (no. 49).

Zaragoza, Museo de Zaragoza, long-term loan, 4 March 2013 - December 2018.

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Executed in *circa* 1775-1780, the *Venida de la Virgen del Pilar* marks a decisive point in Goya's emergence as an independent painter. Exceptional in preservation and luminous handling, it ranks among the most complete and expressive surviving depictions of the *Pilar* theme outside institutional collections. With its distinguished exhibition history and clear assertion of Goya's early artistic autonomy, this painting represents a rare opportunity to acquire a museum-level work from the artist's formative decade.

This depiction of the *Venida de la Virgen del Pilar* belongs to the cluster of religious inventions with which the young Goya, newly returned from Italy, forged an independent pictorial language in the later 1770s.¹ The subject, traditionally the apparition of the Virgin 'in mortal flesh' to Saint James at Caesaraugusta on the night of 2 January in the year 40 AD, is here recast with deliberate specificity: Goya represents the revered Gothic image of the *Virgen del Pilar* - a gilded wooden statue on its column, associated with Juan de la Huerta (1413-1462) (Figs. 1-2) - surrounded by a radiant nimbus that floods the nocturnal scene. The narrative relates that the apparition exhorted the Apostle to continue preaching in Spain and to found a church dedicated to her.

The composition, set on the banks of the Ebro river, is organised centrifugally around that incandescent disc. Saint James, monumental and in three-quarter back view, kneels to the right of centre with arms extended in a cruciform 'orante', his apostolic mantle a saturated crimson drapery cascading across a green tunic. His attributes, the pilgrim's staff in the right hand and the scallop shells affixed to the left shoulder, are clearly visible. Seven disciples complete the semicircle of witnesses (in reality, there are only six visible). According to tradition, their names were: Torcuato, Tesifón, Cecilio, Iscario, Segundo, Indalecio and Eufasio. On the left, four heads, intensely characterised and caught at staggered heights, register a spectrum of devotion from awe to fervent prayer; on the right, two figures melt into penumbra. The foliage mass beyond, gathered in concave sweeps around the halo, stabilises the stage, while the riverine setting alludes to the banks of the Ebro. A youthful figure at the extreme left has long been read, plausibly, as a discreet self-quotation by the painter. There is also a close relationship between the two bearded old men with white robes and the apostles of the dome of *Regina Martyrum* in the Basilica of Pilar, Zaragoza (1780-1781).

The picture represents a critical phase in Goya's evolving conception of the *Pilar* subject. Its iconography looks back to the artist's Italian sketchbook drawings (*c.* 1770, Fig. 3) and

¹ See Gassier and Wilson, *Goya. His Life and Work*, London 1970, pp. 51-57, for Goya's early religious paintings.

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to the small Zaragoza canvas (c. 1771-75, Fig. 4), where the image is presented with almost emblematic frontality; yet here Goya expands the schema into a more architectonic and theatrical ensemble. The emphatic *chiaroscuro* modelling, the disciplined semicircle of protagonists, and the measured, classical clarity of the staging relate this work to Goya's contemporary mural cycles, most pertinently the Cartuja de Aula Dei narratives (1774), and anticipate the orchestration of grouped figures in the tapestry cartoons for the Prince and Princess of Asturias at El Pardo (c. 1778). The chromatic vitality and the rhetorical lift of the apostle's gesture also find later resonance in *The Preaching of Saint Bernardino of Siena* (1781-82, San Francisco el Grande, Madrid, Fig. 5). As stressed by José Gudiol, "the effect of dazzling light irradiating from this image is one of the first examples of painting against the light that we find in Goya, who was later to use this device rather for the accentuation of dramatic and realistic effects than for mystical ends, as in this picture".²

Scholars since the mid-twentieth century have regarded the present canvas as an important step in the painter's emancipation from the orbit of Ramón Bayeu (1744-1793) (who also painted this same subject, Fig. 6) and the Venetian precedent of Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770), signalling the emergence of an independent voice defined by its psychological presence and a luminism bent on narrative clarity. On stylistic grounds, the work is generally placed within the decade 1772-82, with a narrower preference for 1775-80. It is closely related in composition, character grouping and vivid colourism to the later version formerly in the Muñoz Ramonet collection (now on judicial deposit at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Fig. 7), while preserving the more concentrated, devotional register of the Zaragoza exemplar.

Already by the mid-twentieth century it was known to art historians from the Madrid collection of Fernando Rosillo, and it has since been the subject of repeated endorsements by scholars. Period photographs in the Fototeca of the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España (Casa Moreno and Otto Wunderlich archives) confirm its presence in that collection by the 1940s. Following a study deposit at the Museo del Prado, where cleaning was recommended and authorship reaffirmed, the canvas featured prominently in the exhibition *Goya y el Infante don Luis: el exilio y el reino* (Palacio Real, Madrid, 2012) and was later on long-term loan to the Museo de Zaragoza (2013-2018), displayed among the museum's core holdings of Goya.

² J. Gudiol, *Goya 1746-1828, Biography, Analytical Study and Catalogue of his Paintings*, New York 1970, cat. no. 115, p. 245.

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Fig. 1-2. Juan de la Huerta, *Virgen del Pilar*, gilded wooden statue on its column.
Zaragoza, Cathedral-Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar.



Fig. 3. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Virgen del Pilar with angels*, 1771-1774, black chalk on paper.
Madrid, Museo del Prado.

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Fig. 4. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Virgen del Pilar*, c. 1772 - 1775, oil on canvas. Museum of Zaragoza.

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Fig. 5. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Preaching of San Bernardino de Siena*, 1781 - 1783, oil on canvas. Royal Basilica of San Francisco el Grande, Madrid.

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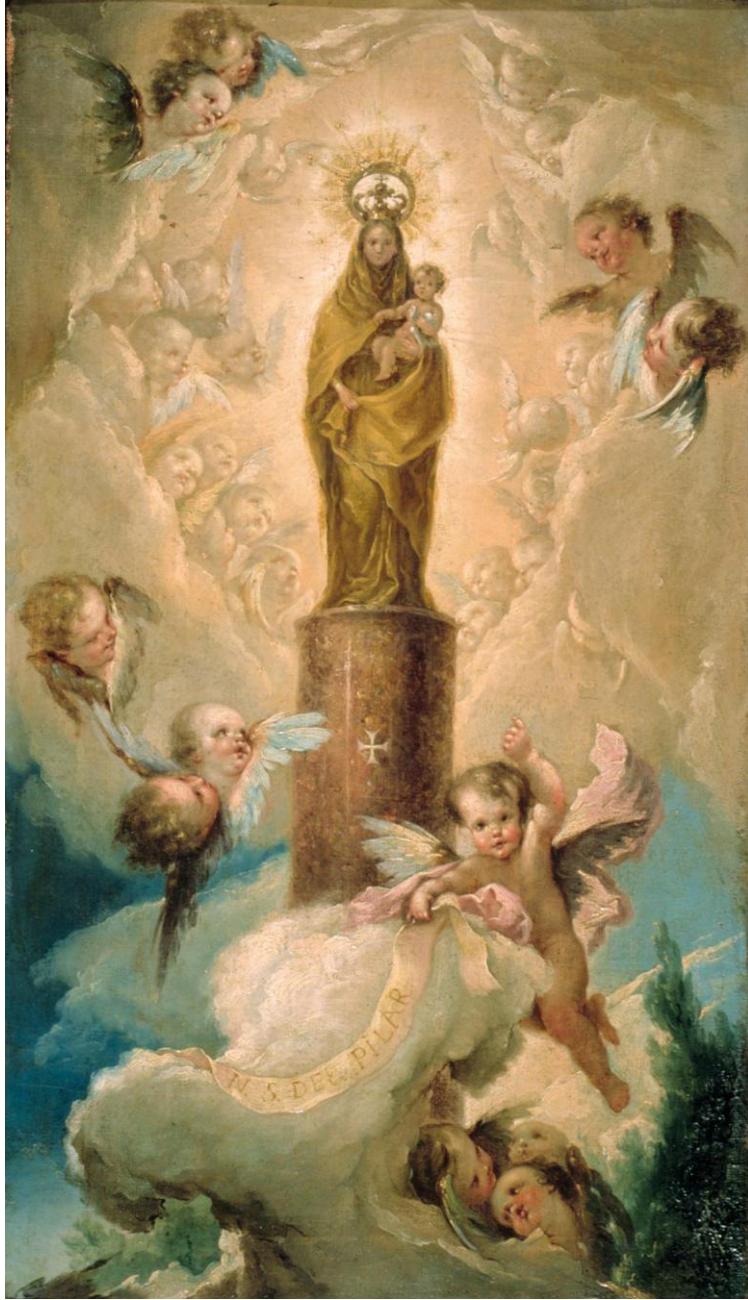


Fig. 6. Ramón Bayeu, *Virgen del Pilar*, 1780, oil on canvas.
Madrid, Lázaro Galdiano Museum.

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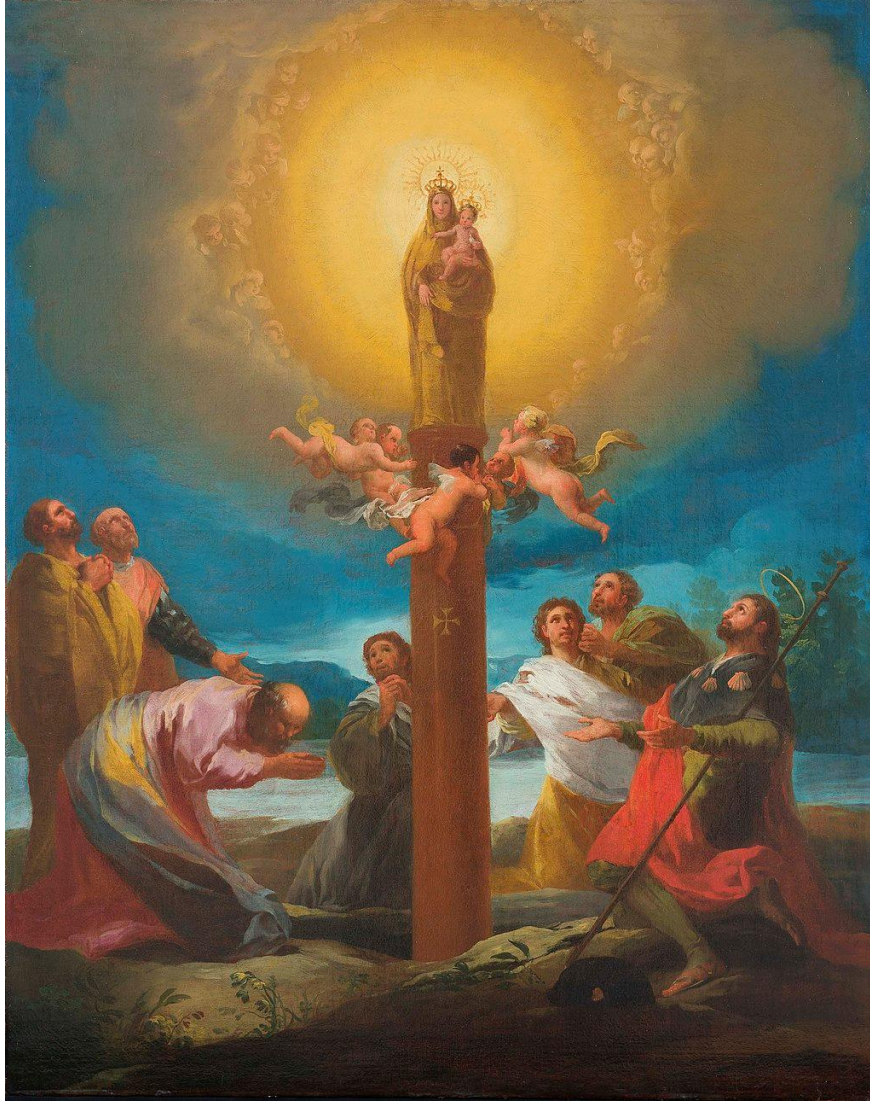


Fig. 7. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Apparition of the Virgen del Pilar to Saint James the Apostle*, c.1775 - 1785, oil on canvas. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

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