

Velázquez and the last portrait of Philip IV (on the painting in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum)



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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In 1927 a bust portrait of a mature Philip IV arrived at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [fig. 1]. The work was acquired through the mediation of Francisco Durrio on the Paris art market, where it arrived after being rescued from Russia after the 1917 Revolution¹. Although a report issued prior to the acquisition by Juan Allende-Salazar suggested Juan Carreño de Miranda as the possible artist², the specialists consulted since then in a bid to classify the work correctly have unanimously considered it the product of Velázquez's "workshop" or his circle³.

After recent restoration work on the portrait, the actual restoration process and the accompanying technical reports have given us an insight into the work's original values and characteristics⁴. In the following pages I describe the historical and artistic context in which it appeared, adding new data from the technical study and restoration.

1 It was then the property of Prince Cheremetieff. For this information, see Lasterra 1969, pp. 111-112; or Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao... 1999, p. 112.

2 At that time (1925) Allende-Salazar had published the revised edition of the volume on Velázquez in the *Klassiker der Kunst* series, which was the most recent review of the artist's catalogue raisonné. Although Carreño's documented activity as a court portrait artist came after Philip IV's death (1665), some critics continue to use analyses of style to attribute portraits of the monarch to him. This is the case of the privately-owned work recorded in López Vizcaíno/Carreño 2007, p. 348.

3 See Mayer 1936, no. 242 (who considers it to be a workshop copy of the painting in Cincinnati Museum); Pantorba 1955, no. 176; Camón Aznar 1964, vol. II, p. 795 (echoes the attribution to Carreño); López-Rey 1963, no. 279 (draws attention to the similarities with the Cincinnati painting).

4 Restoration and technical reports were directed by José Luis Merino Gorospe, technician of the Department of Conservation & Restoration at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. The present essay is based on the Department's report.



1. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), circle of
Portrait of Philip IV (fragment), c. 1657
Oil on canvas, 40.5 x 32.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/237

This painting has always been considered a fragment of a larger one. The x-ray [fig. 2] shows that, in its present state, it is indeed a "cut out" to which was added at some unknown date a wide, 5 centimetre-plus strip around its entire perimeter. The fragmentary nature of the painting is confirmed by the report on what are known as the "tension lines" [fig. 3], i.e. on the undulations produced in the canvas due to the tensions generated when mounted on a stretcher. When canvases preserve their original measurements, these undulations are more evident around the perimeter than in the central zone. In this case, these "tension lines" are only to be seen in the upper part of the original canvas, which suggests that not much was cut from there. Contrariwise, in the lower part and sides, the lack of "tension lines" indicates that much more was removed.

Although other similar small portraits of Philip IV have survived (like the ones in museums in Vienna, Edinburgh and Turin)⁵, they are also fragments. Originally, the painting in Bilbao in all likelihood measured between 65-70 centimetres high and around 55 wide.

We can estimate with some degree of certainty the painting's original measurements thanks to one of its main characteristics, namely that it is a portrait based on a model repeated on numerous occasions. We know of some twenty similar works⁶, and the measurements of the ones that have not been cut tend to be in the range I have just mentioned. That there are so many similar works has to do with three related circumstances. For one thing, it is a portrait of a living, active monarch and demand was higher for this kind of image. For another, it was made at a time when controlling the royal image was a matter of great import, and meant that the court painter enjoyed a genuine monopoly. Furthermore, a series of specific historical and personal circumstances go a long way to explain the proliferation of similar images.

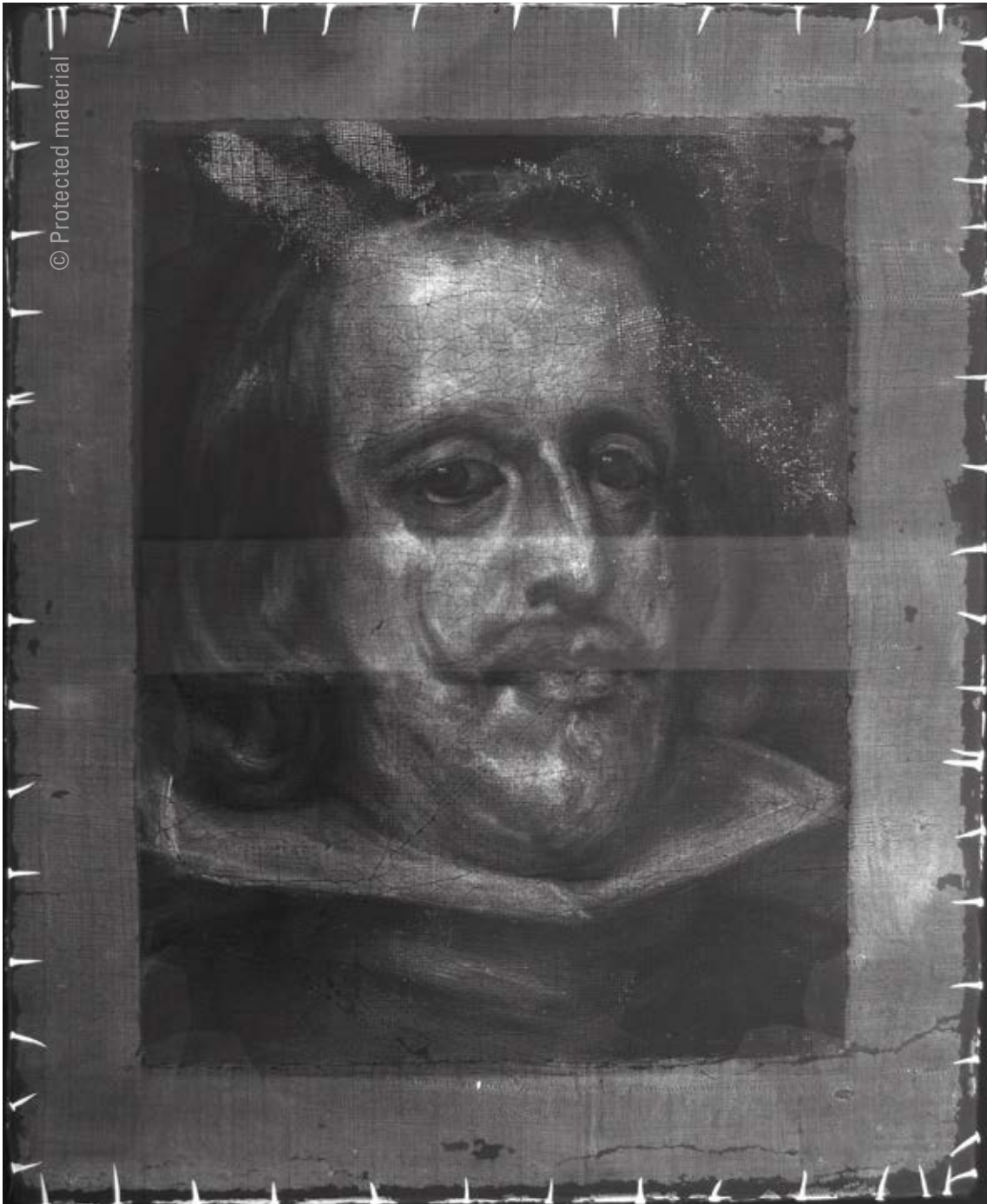
Philip IV is the man portrayed in all of them. Born in 1605, he died sixty years later; his features here and in comparison with other portraits from the 1630s and '40s strongly suggest a date for these works from the 1650s on, in the last decade and a half of his life. Documents discovered in recent decades have enabled historians to situate these works chronologically with no little precision and to reconstruct the circumstances in which they originated, some of the uses they were put to and the people they were destined for.

These works were generally dated after 1651, i.e. after Velázquez had returned from his second stay in Italy. But the publication, in 1986, of Philip IV's letters to the Countess of Paredes de Nava clarified many issues. The countess had been governess to the *infanta* María Teresa, and in 1648 entered the Carmelite convent of Saint Joseph, in Malagón (Ciudad Real), under the name of sister Luisa Magdalena of Jesus. The correspondence is intimate in tone and full of news about the king's closest circle. From what we may infer from the monarch's letters, the nun's petitions often involved portraits, which she asked for from 1648. Having been so close to María Teresa, it was natural the countess should want images to see how the *infanta* was developing, rather than relying solely on the news her royal father sent. Another circumstance that encouraged the requests for portraits was the fact that the Royal household was then in full transformation: the king had been a widower since 1644 and had lost his only male heir (Baltasar Carlos) in 1646, which meant a new marriage was urgently required that would provide masculine descendants. In 1649 Philip IV married Mariana, his Austrian niece, and in 1651 the *infanta* Margarita was born.

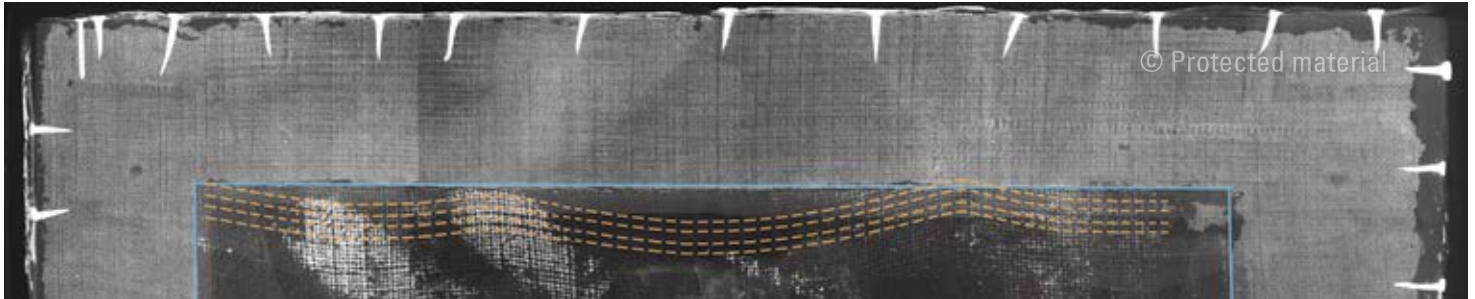
As the royal family grew, sister Luisa stepped up the pressure for portraits; perhaps surprisingly, the biggest obstacle to her wants being satisfied was Velázquez himself. In several letters from 1651 the king

5 López-Rey 1963, nos. 267, 277 and 280. They measure 47 x 37 cm, 50.9 x 45.7 cm and 42 x 33 cm respectively.

6 Maclaren 1988, pp. 108-113.



2. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), circle of
Portrait of Philip IV (fragment), c. 1657
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
X-ray



3. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), circle of
Portrait of Philip IV (fragmento), c. 1657
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 X-ray showing tension lines (fragment)

promises to send her portraits; and on 13 August 1652 writes: “The portraits will go off very soon, although one can’t assure anything, what with Velázquez’s coolness”⁷. Ten months later they were still waiting, as the painter, in the monarch’s words “has tricked me a thousand times”⁸. The portraits arrived some time later, as a letter of 8 July 1653 makes clear. Here the king says how pleased he is at the reception in the convent of the portraits “of my relatives”. He explains the absence of his own portrait with this well-known comment: “My portrait was not sent because it is nine years since the last was made, and I am not inclined to suffer Velázquez’s coolness, or to see how I’m ageing”⁹.

Philip IV is extraordinarily accurate in his calculations, as the last portrait he had sat for was the one known as “the Fraga portrait” (Frick Collection, New York), painted in June 1644, during the Catalonia campaign. The remark also helps us to place the portraits of the mature Philip IV at a date after July 1653. To further delimit the chronology of the portraits we have two prints engraved by Pedro de Villafranca, which were brought into the discussion about these works some time ago. One is the portrait of the king featured on the cover of the *Rule and Establishment of the Order of Santiago*, published in Madrid in 1655 [fig. 4]; and the other is the one in a book by Friar Francisco de los Santos, *Brief Description of San Lorenzo el Real de El Escorial* [fig. 5], published in 1657, also in Madrid¹⁰. The images of Philip IV in the two prints are very similar, although there are subtle differences, particularly in the way his hair is portrayed. The differences are exactly the same as the ones observed in the two types found in the portraits of the mature king and whose “prototypes” are the paintings in the Prado Museum [fig. 6] and London’s National Gallery [fig. 7], respectively. In the Madrid portrait and the 1655 print the king’s hair is less compact, more natural and rather more complex in the distribution of the lights. In the London painting and the 1667 print the lights are more concentrated, making for a more formalized image. This concentration would make copying in other paintings and prints that much easier.

These are not the only differences between the two paintings; there are others as regards clothing, space and style. The Prado painting is one of the masterworks of Spanish court portraiture, and in it Velázquez shows off his ability to get the most out of a deliberately limited colour range and sparse compositional resources. Velázquez’s signature mode of painting is stamped all over this work; the radiography shows [fig. 8] how the artist gradually put the head into place, especially the neck, where several rectifications are appre-

7 Pérez Villanueva 1986, p. 173.

8 Ibid., p. 2000, letter dated 9-VI-1653.

9 Ibid., p. 204.

10 López Serrano 1960.



4. Pedro de Villafra[n]ca (c. 1615-1684)
 Cover from *Rule and Establishment of the Order of Santiago*,
 Madrid, 1655
 National Library of Spain



5. Pedro de Villafra[n]ca (c. 1615-1684)
 Cover from *Brief Description of San Lorenzo el Real de El Escorial*,
 by Friar Francisco de los Santos, Madrid, 1657
 National Library of Spain

ciable¹¹. In its apparent simplicity, this is one of the portraits by Velázquez where the play of space is at its subtlest. Unlike his other bust portraits, projected onto a flat background, here he introduced a subtle spatial reference in the two vertical strips of light on the right of the painting which anticipate the windows of *Las meninas*, a work he produced one or perhaps two years after this. Likewise, although some parts of the trunk are just sketched in, they are sufficiently precise to build a solid sensation of volume, and the painter plays with the contrast between the inclination of the king's body to his left and the opposite direction of the strips of light to complete the spatial play.

Apart from its sheer quality, this portrait of Philip IV is distinguished by the way the artist has resolved the actual portrayal of the monarch. Although, from his entry in the king's service in 1623 Velázquez had often shown a taste for a kind of rhetorical sobriety, it is true to say that in no other portrait of Philip IV did he take that taste to such an extreme as here, where there is no visible element pointing to the sitter's true condition, beyond his actual face. His clothes are completely unadorned and even the otherwise omnipresent Golden Fleece is missing. Such a stripped-down version suggests the image was not made for "official" use; this and the stark execution, and the fact that some zones are simply sketched in, suggests it was meant for use as a "prototype", as a work the king sat for, and which could then be used as

¹¹ Garrido 1992, pp. 576-577.



6. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)
Philip IV, c. 1654
Oil on canvas, 69.3 x 56.5 cm
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
Inv. no. P1185

a starting point to multiply (in the workshop) the images of the monarch¹². The work has been in the royal collections since its first confirmed mention in 1745¹³.

Several images verify such a use. For one thing, there is the 1655 print referred to above. The portrait in the Vienna museum [fig. 9] (which in 1659 belonged to Archduke Leopold William) also follows this model, although with the addition of buttons and a gold chain¹⁴; at the court of Madrid it was used in the transformation of *Philip IV in Armour, with a Lion at his Feet* (Prado Museum). The changes in this work were made in 1665¹⁵, when the painting was earmarked for the monastery of El Escorial, which confirms the early presence of the bust portrait in the royal collections.

Curiously, the most widespread portrait model of Philip IV was not the splendid Prado portrait, but the other version referred to above, the finest example of which is the one in the National Gallery. As noted, it is the starting point for the 1657 Villafranca print, which establishes a *terminus ante quem* with which to fix chronology. The date is also corroborated by the fact that the Golden Fleece hangs from a gold chain, the same metal used for buttons and embroidery. A proclamation of 11 September 1657 prohibited its use in clothing,

12 Pantorba 1955, p. 194.

13 First sure mention dates from 1745, when it was named in the *quinta* or country house of the Duke of the Arch, a royal property even then.

14 G. Swoboda in Vienna 2014, no. 34.

15 Javier Portús in Madrid 2013, pp. 108-113.



7. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), attributed to *Philip IV*, c. 1656
Oil on canvas, 64.1 x 53.7 cm
The National Gallery, London
Inv. no. NG745

which establishes a time limit for the portrait¹⁶. This version became the “official image” of the later years of Philip IV’s reign. It was the one Villafraña chose as his starting point for the covers and preliminary pages of books (several linked to the monarchy), and we find it in publications of 1660, 1662 (twice), 1664, 1666 and 1667. The portraits are all very similar; what changes is the rhetorical context that surrounds them.

Something similar to what happened in the publishing world can also be seen in painting. The vast majority of the portraits of the king in those years follow the London rather than the Madrid model. This is the case with, among others, the examples in Edinburgh, Cincinnati [fig. 10], Glasgow, St. Petersburg, Turin, the San Fernando Academy in Madrid [fig. 11], Geneva or the one in a private collection in Madrid¹⁷. In all of them the morphology of the hair and the distribution of lights conform to the same pattern.

The main problem with the panorama I have just expounded has to do with the attributional status of the London painting. Although its quality has never been called into question (it is considered the best of its series), from the late 19th century on, many critics (for instance, Beruete¹⁸) have noted some weaknesses in its

16 *Proclamation that his majesty orders to be published on the conservation of contraband, withdrawal of permissions, prohibition of the use of merchandise and produce of the Kingdoms of France, England, Portugal, and the mending of clothes and dresses and other things* (Madrid, 11 September 1657), Madrid, Pablo del Val, 1657.

17 For this latter, Pérez Sánchez 1999.

18 Beruete 1906, p. 108.

construction. The very high degree of assurance Velázquez achieved in the portraits of the final years of his career simply underscores these problems; certainly, comparison with the *Philip IV* in the Prado Museum has always been to the detriment of the English painting. Recently, in late 2013 and early 2014, a real, physical comparison was made, as both works were hung near each other. In the same and adjacent rooms portraits by Velázquez and his workshop from the 1650s were also on display. Comparison of the two portraits of Philip IV revealed some major differences, as well as some notable similarities. The Prado painting astounds the eye with its combination of rhetorical starkness, technical spontaneity, economy of means and spatial complexity, all of which gives the painting huge communicative immediacy. Rather than helping to define the trunk of the king's body clearly, the addition in the London portrait of buttons, chain, Fleece and embroidery creates a notable confusion, as there are zones (where the right arm starts, for instance) which are not easy to comprehend. The background hardly assists in defining a three-dimensional space. At the same time, the hair is handled more synthetically, in a more formalized manner, as is in general the entire portrait. This, however, besides offering some rectifications, is also furnished with the kind of spontaneity of handling so characteristic of Velázquez, as in the description of the cape that falls on king's left shoulder.

Both images have some striking similarities. In the Prado painting the brush touch under the edge of the left eye is rather conspicuous. This apparently anomalous detail in fact fulfills a precise function in the construction of the face, as it frames the eye orbit or socket. A similar feature is appreciable in the London painting. Furthermore, the way the chin is handled is similar in both paintings, with an unresolved, confused zone which in the London work suggests a greying goatee. This lack of definition is similar in the two paintings, and strengthens the idea of a great degree of dependence of one on the other.

To sum up, we have, on one hand, a painting (in the Prado Museum) of extraordinary quality, which is however not apt for use as an "official" image, in view of the lack of the insignias of royalty. The painting remained in the royal collections, where it was used in 1665 to update another portrait. And there is another work (in London) with all the trappings of an "official" image, with enough of the right features for us to consider it an "original" painting (not just a copy), of undoubtedly inferior quality to the painting in the Prado Museum, and which is clearly indebted to the Madrid work. A painting that had, through its sequels, an extraordinary life as an official image of the monarch in the last years of his reign. And all this has to be seen in the context of a very specific model fashioned in response to the type of difficulties associated with making the king's portrait. Difficulties deriving from the king's own psychological problems and Velázquez's personal and professional methods, circumstances that made it less and less likely that the ageing king would ever sit for another portrait.

Though the above considerations may be combined in different ways, the most probable course of events, in my view at least, is as follows: given the pressing need for an updated image of the king, Philip IV and Velázquez finally got down to work in the last few months of 1653 and continued until 1655. The result was the Prado portrait, taken directly from the life, as suggested by the immediacy and its non-official nature. Some of the main characteristics of this work (the lack of insignias, the deliberately sketchy nature of some zones, the remarkably subtle spatial references and the mastery and complexity with which the hair is handled, impeded its use as a "multipliable" image and made some kind of transformation necessary. This led to the image whose finest example is the painting in the National Gallery, where the necessary insignias have been added and the space and the handling of the hair has all been simplified, thus making it easier to copy. The painting's general quality, together with a number of details, suggest that it was executed with the Prado painting present and under the personal supervision of Velázquez, who probably did some of the work himself. Although some critics have drawn attention to the difference in the monarch's age from one painting into the other, this sensation probably has more to do with the actual process of "translation" of



8. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)
Philip IV, c. 1654
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
X-ray

one painting to the other, and with the differing degree of “vivacity” of a portrait done from the life and its studio adaptation, rather than as a result of a long interval between the two. The Prado portrait was a way of establishing the image of Philip IV in his maturity, and once it had been painted there was no need to exaggerate the marks of the passage of time in a monarch who had already made it clear that he had no desire to “see how I’m ageing”.

And, of course, the fact that the London painting is the finest known version does not mean that a better one was never painted. It is not in fact registered in the royal collections, as its proven provenance goes back no further than 1862, when it was owned by Prince Demidoff, in Florence¹⁹. The only work of this type undeniably registered in a medium directly linked to the royal collections is the portrait that appears on the wall in the background of Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo’s *The Painter’s Family* [fig. 12], in which a necklace and a fleece can be seen on the king’s chest.

In any case, a whole “family” of portraits that satisfied the demand for images of the king until his death in 1665 was spawned from the London work or one very similar to it. There are nearly twenty known remakes, although the actual number of copies made was probably far greater. The one in the San Fernando Academy in Madrid has a companion portrait of similar measurements of Mariana of Austria²⁰, and there is a similar pair in Geneva. This multiplication was quite normal where royal portraits were concerned, which were basically utilitarian images, conceived as a way of taking the image of the members of the royal family out of the private realm. When Velázquez was working on the last portrait of Philip IV, and his workshop was reproducing it, the same thing was happening with the queen and the *infantas* María Teresa and Margarita, although obviously on a lesser scale, given their subordinate rank within the hierarchy of the royal family.

One of the striking things about these latter portraits of Philip IV is how repetitive they are. If we exclude the ones that have been manipulated over time and concentrate on those that are still the original size, it becomes obvious that they very closely follow the London portrait: the same grey goatee which almost blends with the chin, the gold embroidery, in the area where the arms and shoulder coincide, distributed in exactly the same way, the similarly arranged buttons and exactly the same kind of earring to unite the gold necklace with the golden fleece. All this suggests that production of this extensive series of works was closely linked to the court painters’ workshop, which in the last part of Philip IV’s reign was under the direction of Velázquez until 1660, and of Martínez del Mazo from then until 1665. The arrival of Velázquez in Madrid in 1623 was the starting point for strict control of the royal image²¹; a progressive process not without its ups and downs and which came to an end in this series of late portraits of Philip IV.

From direct observation of some of these works and the graphic material available of them as a whole one can appreciate that the only noticeable differences are to be found in the way they are painted. Some are of greater or lesser quality, more or less inspired in their descriptions and exhibit different degrees of precision in the definition of the monarch’s features. Thus the vivacity with which the gold ornaments are painted in the London version, where the play of metal lights is effectively recreated, becomes rather more formulaic and repetitive in the versions in Edinburgh, Glasgow or St. Petersburg; and the skill and spontaneity employed in the profile of the cape in the London painting simply does not appear in any other version.

The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum portrait partakes fully of this practice. It is completely in line with the model headed by the London painting, as is clear from the way the hair is constructed and the lights distributed.

19 Maclaren 1988, pp. 108-113.

20 López-Rey 1963, no. 368.

21 Martínez Ripoll 2008.



9. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), workshop of *Philip IV*, 1654
Oil on canvas, 47 x 37.5 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien,
Gemäldegalerie
Inv. no. GG 324

Something similar occurs with the face, which follows the English model very closely: the goatee is also lightly suggested and the lights are dotted in the same way: for instance, at the right-hand corner of the lips, between the moustache and the nose flap, beside the right tear duct and so on. Any differences in the look of the two portraits are to be found in the lives the works have had and in differences in the way the actual paint is handled. The way the Bilbao painting was cut makes us concentrate all our attention on the face, and there is virtually no space around it, which generally tends to harden the features. This effect is also heightened by the disappearance of the hair falling over the left-hand side of the king's head, which is there to view in several other copies and which was also there in the Bilbao portrait, as the x-ray shows. This makes the left profile of the king's face more abrupt and bereft of the transitions to be found in the London portrait. Also contributing to this general sensation of hardened features is the way the work is painted; the transitions are rather more brusque. This is appreciable, for instance, when one compares the right side of the heads, from the eye to the chin: the changes in the colouring are more marked in the Bilbao version than in the London work, so that if in the latter it subtly underscores the continuity of the group and the skin preserves a certain smoothness, the former conveys the impression of a face more lined by age. This is clear in the zone of the chin, where, in the Bilbao painting there would seem to be a hint of jowl. Although all this might suggest that the work in Bilbao is in fact an update of the Philip IV portrait done to adapt it to the ageing process, it really does seem that what we are looking at are the inevitable changes that occur when the works in question are by different artists.



10. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), workshop of *Philip IV*, c. 1656
Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 50.2 cm
Cincinnati Museum of Art, bequeathed by Mary M. Emery
Inv. no. 1927.425



11. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), workshop of *Portrait of Philip IV*, c. 1656
Oil on canvas, 66 x 40 cm
San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Madrid



12. Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo (c. 1611-1667)
The Painter's Family, 1664-1665
Oil on canvas, 149.5 x 174.5 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie
Inv. no. GG 320

As I mentioned above, there is very little specific information available about the way Velázquez's workshop operated in the last years of his career or about how the artists went about multiplying portraits. The existence of so many almost identical portraits of Philip IV is proof that they were tightly controlled, but we do not know the channels by which such control was exerted: whether there was a single workshop, productive enough to deal with all the replicas needed, or if work was subcontracted to other workshops. Although the comparison of some portraits with others might help in establishing filiation in some cases, the fact is that the differences in their states of conservation, the impossibility of a direct comparison of these works (unless by the use of images) and the lack of technical analyses make this a difficult task. All cases involve mimetic replications, the only noticeable differences being ones of handling. Comparison, for instance, of the technical material of the Bilbao painting with the one in the Prado Museum shows different methods. These are appreciable, among other things, in their x-ray images, which show different levels of contrast, in turn linked to notable discrepancies in the ground layer: white-greyish in the Madrid painting²² and reddish in the Bilbao painting. The version in Cincinnati also seems to have been painted on a reddish ground.

22 Garrido 1992, p. 577

Beyond the currently unanswerable question of who actually painted it, the portrait of Philip IV in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum is a high quality replica of a type created by Velázquez in the last years of his career. The starting point for this type was the Prado painting, one of the peak achievements of the artist as a portraitist; the Prado painting subsequently led to the one in London's National Gallery and to a good number of other versions. These images provide a window onto the physical and psychological makeup of one of the most important characters in European history in the 17th century and of one of the most cultivated and knowledgeable connoisseurs of painting the continent has ever known. In their multiplicity, these works illustrate a conception of painting markedly at odds with the one we have today. Inseparable from its definition as a "work of art" was its status as an object to be used, a facet that almost always took priority, and which, where portraits were concerned, led to their multiplication. All this gives these works a value beyond that of being simple "copies". In themselves they suggest an explanation of what they were for and the expectations generated by the portraits Velázquez made from the life.

As Velázquez's main task on entering the Court was to produce royal portraits, over the years he produced a large number of works that were multiplied in versions, copies and the like. More details about the way his workshop operated are gradually coming to light, and the use of tracings, for instance, can now be documented. But the task is forbidding, largely because of the huge number of works involved. The task is not made any easier by the scarcity of documents, as the way the workshop functioned left few administrative traces; it is impossible to tell, for the moment at least, how many people were employed in the workrooms over time, the scale of production, the procedures in use or how involved the master himself was in the work done there. Statistics and comparisons are the main channel now for future studies: detailed individual analysis of each work, and comparison of the results, which would allow the paintings to be grouped in series or sequences. In the preceding pages I have tried to draw attention to one of these works and help to divulge the data accumulated during the technical studies, so as to facilitate the task of preparing a corpus that would in future provide a better understanding of the methods used at the Velázquez workshop.

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