

Jordaens: *Satyr Playing the Pipe* (*Jupiter's Childhood*)



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

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Jacob Jordaens's *Satyr Playing the Pipe* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [fig. 1], added to the collection of Old Master paintings relatively recently (1989), was a wise acquisition on a number of counts: the painting's quality, its longstanding links with art collecting in Spain, the scarcity of imported works and the most unusual treatment meted out to it, which I shall discuss later. I am encouraged to offer some suggestions before dealing with this painting by Jordaens, an artist somewhat less relevant than his contemporaries in art collecting in this country, where Rubens and Van Dyck enjoyed limitless prestige in royal, noble and ecclesiastical patronage. Although Jordaens was undeniably famous in Europe, his liking for local and popular tradition limited his acceptance by the dynastical elites. His rustic exuberance, ripe with vulgarity and crude realism, did not attract the kind of Spanish patronage his artistic status merited. Rooted in popular culture, moderate and a long way from the pedantic ostentation of monarchic absolutism, his art did not complement the courtly magnificence the Austrias and their minions demanded. His work only reached the Crown by an indirect route, when he worked with Rubens on the decoration for the Torre de la Parada hunting lodge (1634)¹, where he was employed as a copyist of the Master's sketches. Previously he had worked on the triumphal arches to commemorate the entry of the Cardinal-*infante* into Antwerp and subsequently on the paintings that were left unfinished at Rubens's death in 1640. Few of his works have come down to us via the nobility or the Church, although *Satyr Playing the Pipe* (*Jupiter's Childhood*) most likely arrived by the former route.

But this is by no means a rigid thesis, largely because it is not in fact unusual to find works by Jordaens in the collections of nobles, most of what is in Spain being on devotional themes, in line with national sentiment. However, his mythological paintings, like *Satyr Playing the Pipe*, are scarce here. Nevertheless, the first

¹ It was Philip IV who gave Rubens the major commission to decorate the Torre de la Parada hunting lodge, situated on the hill at El Pardo on the outskirts of Madrid. Rubens was asked to produce a series of large-scale paintings. To finish what was a major undertaking in a relatively short time, from 1636 to 1638, Rubens asked several other Flemish artists to help, Jordaens being the best known of these.



1. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Satyr Playing the Pipe (Jupiter's Childhood) (fragment), c. 1639
Oil on canvas, 99 x 150.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 89/48



2. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Satyr, Nymph and Children, 1639
 Wash, black stone, sanguine and gouache on paper, 20.7 x 20.8 cm
 Musée des beaux-arts et d'archéologie, Besançon, France

owner, assumed to be someone from the 17th century, was clearly not repelled by the poetry of the flesh and the life-affirming, Epicurean gluttony that impregnates Jordaens's entire aesthetic.

Jordaens produced the drawing in the museum in Besançon [fig. 2], on which the painting is based, and the actual painting in 1639, as the career of Rubens, who was to die the following year, was coming to an end. This was the most prolific phase of Jacob Jordaens's career, as corroborated in Baltasar Gerbier's correspondence²; from that moment on, Gerbier, then in England, hailed Jordaens as unquestionably the finest living painter from Antwerp.

Style

Thus the date shown on the drawing vouches for the painting's timeline, around the time of the Master's death and coinciding with the blossoming of Jordaens's studio, where the levels of activity were so high Jordaens had to seek help from his disciples, a move that adversely affected the overall quality of the studio's production. Fortunately, this was not the case as far as the painting discussed in this essay is concerned. Technically *Satyr Playing the Pipe* is a work of quality; and, despite what I have just said, quality was certainly not lacking in the mature period. In it the artist is aware he is of the effect of the light coming from the

² Sir Baltasar Gerbier (Middelburg, Zeeland, 1592-Hampstead Marshall, Berkshire, 1663) was a miniaturist painter and an architect. A friend of Rubens', Gerbier also served as a diplomat and royal adviser. For his correspondence, see Carpenter 1845, Howarth 2001.



3. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Cadmus and Minerva
Oil on canvas. 181 x 300 cm
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
Inv. no. P01713

left-hand side, contrasting with the goats and trees in the shade. Although Jordaens remained faithful to the tenebrist aesthetic that Antwerp had by then abandoned, he did not renounce the colouring of the northern tradition, remote from Rubens's hedonism or the grace of Van Dyck. The golden light of approaching dusk filters to the depths of the forest and the waterlogged meadows. This merging of bodies in a sort of osmosis with the surrounding space is similar to what Rubens had done in his mature period.

As I noted above, in 1639 Jordaens, like so many other painters close to the Antwerp school, made use of sketches by Rubens for the paintings he was commissioned to produce in the Torre de la Parada (11 March 1638). In commenting on the background of the drawing in Besançon, R.-A. d'Hulst, with good reason, associates it with the history of the *Cadmus and Minerva* by Jordaens in the Prado [fig. 3], which is a literal copy of the Master's sketch³. For the Bilbao painting, Jordaens was freed from following the sketch too closely, preferring to repeat the Besançon one. Hulst thus underlines Jordaens's independence in the landscape backgrounds of his narrative paintings. This he did with equal success in the painting. The drawing in question *Satyr, nymph and children* (the work's traditional title, also known, on account of the iconography used, as *Jupiter's Childhood*) in the Besançon Fine Arts Museum and the painting under discussion here—mutilated, as we shall soon see—give an idea of the beauty and harmony of the complete work in origin.

The smooth rendering of the early decades has by now become rougher, and the composition looser. His paintings from the decades when he produced the work in Bilbao are valued as highly as those by Rubens and Van Dyck⁴. With the satyr exemplifying the vitality of Jordaens's genius in his mature phase, the painting breaks with the compact formulation of the figures in pictorial space; the narrative breadth is no hindrance to the solidity of figures that are full of life. Intermediate tones show the influence of the way Rubens had evolved, the colours merging in tonal gradients, traditional technique being displaced.

Finally throwing off the dichotomy of dark and luminous tones, Jordaens here seeks a softer, fatter technique. The painting in Bilbao is the product of the years from 1634 to 1645, a period when what Jordaens produced was enormously valuable. In it Hulst finds colour at its most vigorous, the execution much less harsh and the modelling more relaxed. The paintings from these eleven or so years are also much more personal. All of

3 Hulst 1982, p. 155.

4 Puyvelde 1953, p. 102.



4. Photograph of 1956 showing the complete work



5. Photomontage of the painting and the photograph of the same work published in 1956

this is subsumed in the Bilbao painting. A uniform tonality and earthy ochre tones predominate. To the vigour and daring of the execution he adds notes of vitality and a certain tendency towards the monochrome. Like Hulst at a later stage, Leo van Puyvelde also reckoned this to be the artist's most inspired phase. Although scholars tend to see his style as evolving in fits and starts, all the expressive and technical media are there, fully achieved in this period, when his attention veered away from fixing details towards a more expansive monochrome vision featuring warm ochres, a more relaxed execution and a highly expressive vivacity.

Drawing

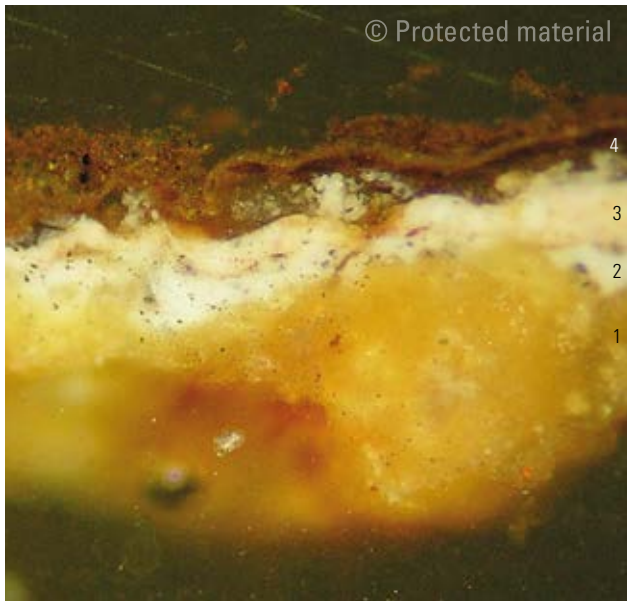
In the *corpus* of Jordaens's drawings, d'Hulst reproduces and studies the one for *Jupiter's Childhood* in the Besançon Fine Arts Museum, which, as noted above, dates from 1639⁵, and also includes a black-and-white photograph published in 1956, with the complete painting [fig. 4]. What we have today on view at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum is the fragmented half with the satyr⁶; I should add that this is the upper part of the painting, as the photograph makes clear [fig. 5]. What is missing is the lower part, with a sleeping nymph and two boys, one also asleep, and a fragment on the left-hand side⁷. The painting, long held to have been lost, was owned by Bernardo de Iriarte in the 18th century. This detail is important for establishing that the work was mutilated subsequently. The composition was prefigured in the drawing and that is how it appears in the old photograph. Nobody was aware of this when the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum acquired the work, of the mutilation or of it having originally been in Iriarte's prestigious collection. It is not surprising therefore to find the real theme of the painting being omitted from the current title, given here in a kind of subtitle as *Jupiter's Childhood*, in line with the evidence discussed.

Apart from a more ample background, and greater deployment of branches and leaves on the tree, there are no significant variations from drawing to canvas. Even so, the drawing portrays a single goat, transfixed by

5 An annotation in Jordaens's own hand reads: "1639 6 August JJ —".

6 Hulst 1974, vol. I, p. 238, no. A145, fig. 158; vol. II, plate II. Previously in Hulst 1956, pp. 189, 347, no. 69.

7 Calculations put the fragment missing from the left-hand side of the painting at around 18 cm, and the lower part at roughly 80 x 169 cm, which means that the painting originally measured approximately 179.5 by 169 cm.



6. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Satyr Playing the Pipe (Jupiter's Childhood) (fragment)
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Stratigraphy of a sample taken from the lower edge
 with remains of the sleeping nymph's flesh tone
 1. Whitish ground
 2. White priming
 3. Remains of flesh tone
 4. Brown repaint

the sound of the pipe. The satyr, facing the spectator, comes into the foreground with his billy-goat legs featured at the centre. His fingers correctly pick out the soul-entrancing chords, as in so many other paintings by Jordaens⁸. In the painting, the artist substitutes the legs, in the same place in this foreground but in shadow, for a variety of fruit. The old photograph does not permit further clarification. The painting must have been mutilated relatively recently. Despite the success obtained by this theme in Flanders, Jordaens is not known to have repeated this particular composition.

Alteration

What we have today, then, is practically half the original painting. The painting was probably mutilated to make two paintings out of one. No one realized this when the work was offered first to the Board of Trustees at the Prado and, months later, to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum⁹. I examined the already fragmented work, and reported on its quality and authenticity, my opinion coinciding with the views of Professor Nora de Poorter some years later, in a note drafted for the 1993 Antwerp exhibition, where she referred to the hypothesis, which I have since confirmed, that it was indeed a fragmented work: "on peut même se demander si la peinture de Bilbao ne serait pas la même oeuvre, fortement réduite"¹⁰.

One cannot help wondering why the work was subjected to such unjustifiable mutilation. Judging by the measurements, the cut was made lengthwise below the nymph's forehead, and this fragment, as well as part of her arm, were painted over to prolong the landscape on the lower left hand side [figs. 5 and 6]. Photograph and drawing both alert us to the way the mutilation extends from the left border, where a vertical strip with part of the sky and of a tree located in this area is clearly missing. All with a view to centring the satyr on the composition's axis and thus avoiding disproportion in the width. Portrayals of satyrs in isolation are not unusual in 17th-century Flemish painting; Jordaens himself frequently used this motif in drawings and paintings alike¹¹.

8 Mirimonde 1969, p. 203. Fauns Playing the Pipes in solitude were a common theme. Ibid, p. 213.

9 Gallery owner Juan Agustí Juncá proposed this in around 1980. In a note to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Juncá said this painting "had formerly belonged to the (now late) antique dealer Francisco Vasco Antigüedades."

10 Hulst/Poorter/Vandeven 1993, p. 150, note 3, no. A43.

11 Max Rooses records ten or so examples (Rooses 1906, p. 277).



7. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
The Child Jupiter Suckled by the Goat Amaltheia,
 early 1630s
 Oil on canvas, 14.7 x 20.3 cm
 Musée du Louvre, Paris
 Inv. no. 1405



8. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Jupiter's Childhood, c. 1640-1649
 Oil on canvas, 219 x 247 cm
 Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel,
 Germany. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister

Serious deterioration in the lower part of the painting might account for the mutilation¹². It may of course be that the perpetrators simply thought there was more money to be had from two fragments, one with the satyr and the other with the nymph and the two children, than from a single painting. However that may be, by separating it into two parts the original message was lost. The other part of the work may some day be located, as happened with the legs of El Greco's *San Sebastian* in the Prado (inv. nos. P03002 and P07186), which are now displayed together with the rest of the painting.

Iconography

Besides such technical considerations, something needs to be said about the actual content. The story tells the episode of the nymph Amaltheia, wet-nurse to the child Jupiter, who milks Aix, the goat that suckled Jupiter (the name Amaltheia is occasionally associated with the goat)¹³. Jordaens took the story from Book V, lines 115-124 of Ovid's *Fasti* ("The Festivals"):

She has Heaven as reward for the milk she gave. They say that Nais Amaltheia, famed in the Ides of Crete, hid Jupiter in the forests. She kept the handsome mother of two small kids, worthy of all attention from amongst the flocks, with horns up and curled towards the back, and udders worthy of one that was to act as wet-nurse to Jupiter. She gave her milk to the God. But she broke one of her horns against the tree and thus lost half of her beauty. The nymph took it and applied it to the face of Jupiter, adorned with herbs and full of fruit. He, when he had the rule of the heavens [...] transformed his wet-nurse into a star, making the horn fertile, which even now bears the name of his spouse.

The episode narrates how the nymph Amaltheia cared for the child Jupiter, nourished on the milk from the goat, which I assume to be one of the two on the hillock (only one appears in the drawing). Facing Jupiter is another, curly-haired child of roughly the same age, who could be his brother Aegipan (a god who was half-man, half-goat and Jupiter's foster brother). Most artists, including Jordaens himself, tended to prefer as a theme the part of the story where the nymph milks the goat. The versions in both the Louvre and the museum in Kassel [figs. 7 and 8] narrate this particular moment; in the latter painting, the satyr plays the pipe on a

¹² Years ago I spotted alterations made to a painting in the work *Love Sleeping* in the Prado (inv. no. P01718), eventually locating artist and theme by comparing it with a sketch by Rubens in the Museum of Bayonne (see Díaz Padrón 1969, p. 99).

¹³ Grimal 1965, p. 24.



9. Doidalsas of Bithynia (copy)
Crouching Venus
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



10. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
The Dream of Venus
Oil on canvas, 169.8 x 260.8 cm
Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp
Inv. no. 5023

rugged hillock, and in the version in the Louvre, dated to the early 1630s, the goat is seen from behind, as in the work in Bilbao. In the most common versions, the child Jupiter is ready to receive the goat's milk, but here, like the nymph, he is fast asleep, while his brother is awake. His white flesh makes a startling contrast with the ruddy ochre of the satyr's rough skin.

Catalogues frequently confuse the figure of the satyr with the god Pan¹⁴. Indeed, until now the painting in Bilbao had gone by the title *The God Pan Playing the Pipe*. Satyrs had the task of protecting nature and the countryside, and here we certainly do not see him possessed by the god's trademark libido and passion. It is likely too that the fruit scattered on the ground before the mutilation had to do with the Horn of Plenty. One day, when the child Jupiter was playing, he broke one of the goat's horns and presented it to Amaltheia, promising her that it would miraculously fill up with all the fruit she desired (*Metamorphoses*, Ovid, Book IX, 85-88). An engraving by Schelte A. Bolswert (1586-1659) tells us in its literary register that it was the goat's milk which prompted Jupiter's sempiternal lust, the goat being portrayed in mythology as a lecherous beast¹⁵.

Doidalsas of Bithynia's sculpture *Crouching Venus*, widely known in the 16th and 17th centuries [fig. 9]¹⁶ and now in the Uffizi gallery in Florence, provided the model for the nymph seen from the back. Jordaens included an identical one in his *The Dream Of Venus* in the museum in Antwerp [fig. 10], in the drawing *Allegory of Fertility* in the Metropolitan Museum, New York [fig. 11] and in the study for *Sine Baccho et Cerere Friget Venus* in the Art Institute of Chicago [fig. 12]¹⁷. He returned to the satyr, pictured in the jovial company of country folk, in a painting in the Royal Museum in Brussels [fig. 13], and the goat seen from behind is also to be found in an isolated drawing in the Yale University Art Gallery [fig. 14]¹⁸. The goat most attentive to the satyr is the same as the one in *Two Nymphs, a Goat and a Bull* in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam [fig. 15]¹⁹.

14 Madrid 1989, no. 12; Padua/Rome 1991, p. 48, no. 22; Castañer 1995, pp. 178-180, no. 631995.

15 The New Hollstein... 1993-, III, p. 85, IX, no. 227.

16 Haskell/Penny 1981, p. 321.

17 Hulst 1974, vol. I, p. 239, nos. A146 and A46.

18 Ibid, no. A321; Hulst 1982, p. 246.

19 Hulst 1974, no. A243.



11. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Allegory of Fertility, c. 1640
 Pen and brush and brown ink, watercolour, over traces of preliminary drawing in black chalk, 23 x 20.3 cm
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
 Inv. no. 1975.1.836



12. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
 Study for *Sine Baccho et Cerere friget Venus*, 1619-1627
 Pen and black ink with brush and brown wash, over chalk, on ivory laid paper, 20.5 x 32.4 cm
 The Art Institute of Chicago
 Inv. no. 1922.2315r



13. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
The Satyr and the Peasant, c. 1640-1645
 Oil on canvas, 130 x 172 cm
 Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels
 Inv. no. 588



14. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Goat, c. 1657
 Red, black, and yellow chalk, with touches of red and brown wash heightened with white, 25.4 x 19.9 cm
 Yale University Art Gallery. Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
 Inv. no. 1963.9.39



15. Jacob Jordaens (1593-1678)
Two Nymphs, a Goat and a Bull, 1649
 Black and red chalk, brown wash, water colour (probably added later), 27 x 42 cm
 Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands



16. Francisco de Goya (1746-1828)
Portrait of Bernardo Iriarte, 1797
 Oil on canvas, 108 x 86 cm
 Musée des Beaux-Arts de Strasbourg, France

Provenance

As I said at the beginning, today we know the painting, before the mutilation, came from the collection of Bernardo de Iriarte. Iriarte, a leading minister of the *Consejo de Indias* (Council of the Indies) and *vice-protector* of the *Real Academia de San Fernando* in Madrid, built up a major collection of paintings that Antonio Ponz, Ceán Bermúdez and Nicolás de la Cruz of the time, knew well. Ponz was a witness to the increase in Iriarte's collection in his final years (1772-1782)²⁰ and Ceán Bermúdez deemed it the only important collection in Madrid at the time²¹. Nicolás de la Cruz y Bahamonde, Count Maule, an exceptional connoisseur of Spanish collectors in the Age of Enlightenment, was particularly enthusiastic²².

Nevertheless, there is no mention of Jordaens's painting in the treatises these scholars produced, nor in the sale of the collection in Paris after Iriarte's death (1841-1842), nor in the collections of José de Madrazo (1856) of the Marquis of Salamanca (1861, 1867, 1875), both of whom acquired part of Iriarte's collection. However, this is not a reason to exclude it, as the collection was never fully inventoried. Ceán Bermúdez mentions only the works that most caught his eye when he saw the collection in Madrid. The Royal Academy excluded paintings in private collections from its *Diccionario Histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las Bellas Artes en España* (Dictionary of the Most Illustrious Professors of the Fine Arts in Spain), a ruling his friend José de Vargas Ponce criticised, describing it as an "absurd reaction", as the works in private collections "are the most likely to disappear or change hands, and are the very works that with most justice need to be known and advertised, both in recompense to their owners and as a stimulant to their conserva-

20 "La citada colección del sr. D. Bernardo Iriarte, actual Vice-Protector de la Real Academia de San Fernando, ha crecido mucho desde la última vez que se imprimió este libro, de suerte que su casa está hecha una galería de las Bellas Artes" (Ponz 1787-1793, vol. V (1793), p. 322). Quoted in Rose Wagner 1983, vol. I, fols. 77 and 110; Glendinning 1992, pp. 53, 92, 136.

21 Ceán Bermúdez 1800, vol. I, p. XXIV, note 10, p. 48; Rose Wagner 1983, vol. I, p. 79.

22 Cruz y Bahamonde 1806-1813, vol. X, pp. 568-571.

tion, and as guide, warning and governance for watching *aficionados* interested in the comings and goings and upheavals in different households, and when one and the other were in vain, to safeguard at least their memory from oblivion. How much the collection belonging to Iriarte detailed in your work might have contributed now on its dispersal to the good of the arts, of the owner and lovers of fine things!" To which Ceán Bermúdez replied: "It is hardly my fault that there is no word in my Dictionary of domestic or private paintings, nor of living artists: that was the pleasure of the sainted *Academia de San Fernando*, which determined thus²³."

Like the man himself, Iriarte's collection has been analysed most attentively, although as yet it has failed to reach the wider audience it deserves. María Rosa Alonso's essay²⁴ does not neglect thus illustrious member of the Enlightenment. Ceán Bermúdez not only praises the quality of the collection, but also admires the generosity of its owner, who opened the doors of his residence to the general public so it could share his pleasure in what he had collected with so much intelligence, pulchritude and sensibility. A generosity, indeed, unrivalled in our day. Iriarte's collection of paintings (including, I believe, the one now in Bilbao) was housed in the calle de la Cruzada de Madrid, a street not far from the *Palacio Real*, or Royal Palace.

Born in Orotava, in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (1735-1814), Bernardo de Iriarte died in Bordeaux, forced into exile there by the politics and policies of the absolutist Spanish monarch Fernando VII. The portrait of him painted by Goya now in the Strasbourg Fine Arts Museum [fig. 16] is well worth reproducing here, "a testimony to the mutual admiration and friendship" between the two men²⁵.

Goya must have known of the Jordaens painting now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, as he was well acquainted with his friends' collections, including, for instance, the one owned by the intellectual Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, one of Iriarte's regular companions in the *tertulia*, that quintessentially Spanish institution in which a group of conversationalists meet regularly to exchange ideas and opinions, and Anton Raphael Mengs, who was largely responsible for Iriarte's interest in classical Antiquity. His regulations for the Real Academia and the protection of Spain's artistic and cultural heritage played a major role in preventing the removal from the country of many works during the Napoleonic invasion. Ambassador in London and Paris with Charles III, Iriarte was in Valladolid, representing the *Consejo de Indias*, at the meeting with Napoleon en Valladolid. After seeing Iriarte's collection in Madrid, the philologist F. H. A. van Humboldt described it as a "good collection of paintings." In his diary he had this to say about Iriarte: "Don Bernardo, one of those arid people of the species *magister lipsiano* (*magister* or teacher from Leipzig, a major centre of learning in the 17th century), the sort of person who only understands the external elements of art, very affected, meanly proud but is hard working and by no means useless in his field of activity²⁶."

Bernardo de Iriarte is the first known owner of the painting in its complete original form. It is interesting to find a painting by Jordaens in an 18th-century collection and the premonitory intuition of the good opinion of this Flemish master in Spanish patronage. It is a positive appraisal of his artistic genius well in advance of the eventual recognition of the true dimensions of his art that came with major exhibitions in Ottawa (1968-1969) and Antwerp (1993). Jordaens now stands alongside Rubens and Van Dyck in the Baroque galaxy of the Low Countries under the Austrias²⁷.

23 Vargas Ponce 1900, pp. 200 (letter XLVI, 3 December 1802), 209 (letter XL-VIII, reply by Ceán Bermúdez, 18 December 1802). Quoted in Jordán de Urríes y de la Colina 2007, p. 259, note 1. If Ceán Bermúdez had followed this sound advice, the painting would be in the pages citing the names of Rubens, Van Dyck and many others supervised by his friend Goya.

24 Alonso 1951; Beerman 1992.

25 Sánchez Cantón 1928; Gassier/Wilson 1970, pp. 108-110, 188, no. 669 (records the complete bibliography on the portrait).

26 Humboldt 1998, p. 120. Quoted in Jordán de Urríes y de la Colina 2007, p. 266.

27 Ottawa 1968, p. XIII; Hulst/Poorter/Vandenvan 1993, p. 2.

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