

Pedro Orrente (Murcia, 1580 – Valencia, 1645)

JOSÉ GÓMEZ FRECHINA

Calvary

Circa 1520

Oil on canvas

132 x 102 cm

Provenance / Juan Díaz de Chavarría (1679); Madrid, private collection; Madrid, Granados Collection.

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On the baptismal certificate of painter Pedro Orrente – baptized at the church of St Catherine in Murcia on April 18, 1580 – we can read details about his parents: Jaime Orrente, French, born in Marseille, a merchant, and Isabel Jumilla.¹ Orrente contributed like few others in the first decades of the 17th century to developing and spreading naturalism in Castile and, particularly, in the Kingdom of Valencia.

Orrente's painting production and style was highly enriched by a documented stay in Venice. Jusepe Martínez, a court painter to Philip IV and treatise writer, refers to the Venetian education of the painter from Murcia in his *Practicable Discourses on the Most Noble Art of Painting*:

“After a few years, a highly ingenious painter arrived in this same city (Valencia), called Pedro Orrente; they say he was born in Murcia, he stayed in Italy for a long time and in Venice, he was taught by Leandro Bassano, catching with great diligence his way of working; while Bassano practiced more middle-sized figures, our Orrente adopted the larger manner, whereby he made his great spirit known; and although Bassano was so excellent and superior in the way he made animals, our Pedro Orrente was not less remarkable.”²

The Aragonese Jusepe Martínez himself tells about Orrente's trips and execution of series from the Old Testament:

“In Spain, and especially in Madrid, he emulated the best painters of that court, and he was not less acclaimed than the others; he made many works, and in particular paintings for decorating great lords' rooms, such as stories from the Old and New Testaments, and arranging landscapes in them with such union in the figures that he was hardly matched in this genre. He had some disciples who, however good, failed to reach his height: he was a much esteemed man; he was in touch with grandees of all sorts and he earned many ducats; he was variable in changing places; after some years he took Valencia as his home, where he lived some years with high reputation and great esteem.”³

Within the context of Spanish painting in the first half of the 17th century under the rule of Philip III and the initial years of the Hispanic monarchy of Philip IV, the itinerant painter Pedro Orrente stood out because of his excellent story-telling ability, executing major pictorial ensembles where he put his superb talent for creation and invention to the test. In some cases, literature and painting are intertwined in a perfect match between print, with its multiple messages, and the painting colors and lines with their suggestive beauty. This is, for instance, the case of the stories about Jacob (*Jacob's Dream, The Blessing of Jacob, Jacob's Departure with His Flock, Sale of Primogeniture, Jacob at the Well, Jacob Watering Laban's Sheep Before Peeled Branches*), Moses (*Moses and the Brazen Serpent, Moses and the Water from the Rock, Moses and the Passage Through the Red Sea...*), Noah (*The Construction of Noah's Ark, The Animals Boarding Noah's Ark, The Great Flood...*) or patriarch Abraham (*Departure of Abraham and Lot from Haran, Separation of Abraham and Lot, Abraham Refuses the Gifts by the King of Sodom, Abraham and Isaac on the Way to Sacrifice, Abraham and the Three Angels, The Banishment of Hagar, Abraham Sends Eliezer to Find a Wife for Isaac and Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*).

Other stories portrayed by Orrente have an evangelical theme (*Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man, Jesus and Mary Magdalene at the House of Simon, Feeding the Multitude, the Marriage at Cana, The Supper at Emmaus...*); they tell parables (*The Parable of the Tares, The Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus...*); they revolve around classical mythology (*Daphne...*), or they arise out of medieval literature (*The Nine Worthies*).

Based on various documentary sources – where he is mentioned on different inventories of privately owned paintings – and on many works that have survived to this day, we know that Orrente made many series with landscapes from the Old Testament. Fernando Marías discusses in an article the problem of converted artists in the Spanish Golden Age, pointing out to Orrente himself in spite of being a familiar (lay collaborator) of the Inquisition.⁴ The artist from Murcia repeatedly and successfully throughout his long artistic career practiced the Old Testament theme, which offers signs and accounts of the complex world of converts on the Peninsula.

Another biographical portrait of the artist from Murcia is given by painter and treatise writer José García Hidalgo, who was born in Villena (Alicante) the same year in which Orrente died, and died in Madrid in 1717. He praises Orrente after staying in Rome and returning to Valencia in his *Principles for Studying the Sovereign and Royal Art of Painting* (1691):

“Natural affection and convenience for my health have made me return to my Fatherland, and upon landing in Alicante, I stopped by to see the beautiful and pleasant city of Valencia, where I laid to rest my wandering nature and satisfied my curious enthusiasm, by looking at works made by such great artisans as the famous Spanish Pedro Orrente, a second Bassano and first draftsman and historian in skills and heroic deeds; and the dexterous Francisco Ribalta, Spanish Correggio; and no less so was, although with greater courage, Juan Ribalta, his son, whose wings, never seen before in anyone else, were clipped by early death; and some Juanes, a second Raphael from the same school, a wonder of his time concerning speculative, correct and beautiful undertaking.”⁵

As early as September 11, 1600, Orrente is known to be commissioned in Toledo to paint an altarpiece for the shrine of the Virgen del Saz.

Thanks to a document dated August 27, 1605 it has been possible to verify the Italian whereabouts of the painter from Murcia, as specified by the Spanish treatise writers. Orrente granted in Venice an authorization in favor of Gasparo Manart, from Rome, to collect a sum as advance payment for a bill of exchange signed in Alicante on October 25, 1602 before Giovanni Battista Paravicino.⁶

The educational trip taken by the young Pedro Orrente to the Italian peninsula in late 1602, his possible visit to Rome and his sure stay in Venice explain the style of his pieces and his large and certain acquaintance with the paintings by Leandro da Ponte (Bassano del Grappa, 1557 – Venice, 1622), better known as Bassano because of his birthplace.

Pedro Orrente's debt to the painting universe of the Bassanos' artistic saga is not limited to the characteristics of his style or his preferred subject matters. It should be noted that Orrente confidently applied – upon returning to the Iberian Peninsula after his formative time in Italy – the Bassanos' Venetian workshop systems focused on profiting from the strong demand for commissions through autograph copies or copies made by superior disciples. This systematization of work is articulated with the master's sketches and the later careful and exquisite execution of the paintings qualified as first of series, which, through direct viewing, made their repetition and reproduction possible either by the master's own hand or by his disciples. The rigor usually seen in the versions of the same composition thoroughly following the folds in clothes, the atmosphere effects, the woody masses and the position of figures makes us assume a strict control of workshop production by Orrente.

The stay of Tuscan painter Angelo Nardi (Vaglia de Mugello, 1584 – Madrid, 1664) in Venice in as early as 1600 and his later presence in Spain after 1607 certainly was not unknown to painter Pedro Orrente, as he is documented to have been in Murcia that year. In fact, there is a service and compensation charter dated September 22, 1607 from Lucía Hernández, whereby she agrees with Pedro Orrente, a neighbor of this city, for the term of one year and for twelve ducats, one per month, “that I shall cook and serve you meals and rolls and I shall sew and mend for you as necessary and I shall attend to silkworm rearing if said Pedro Orrente should keep silkworms, so that I may serve in anything that is good and honest.”⁷

The similarities between some works by Nardi and Orrente can be explained by a personal deal between them, referred to on a letter of authority dated January 31, 1612 on behalf of the Tuscan painter living at the court in Madrid so that he might recover from Pedro Pérez de Carrión, a Madrid silversmith, a painting of Saint Catherine or else its price, twenty ducats.

José Luis Morales y Marín documented Orrente's position as a familiar of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Murcia.⁸ The negotiations between the Supreme Court and the court of Murcia started in 1624 and lasted until February 28, 1633, when Orrente finally obtained by his firm persistence the affirmative judgment that granted him the status of familiar.



This status of familiar of the Holy Office was mentioned long ago by Lázaro Díaz del Valle in the brief portrait devoted to Orrente, which would later be taken up by Palomino:

“Born in Murcia, a familiar of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, a well-known painter, he stayed in this town of Madrid, where he made famous works, and in the Buen Retiro there are many paintings made by his hand that were collected by order of Count-Duke of Olivares Gaspar de Guzmán, prime minister to Our Lord King Philip IV for decorating that palace. Similarly, he executed in his country many and renowned works, particularly the altarpiece dedicated to Our Lady of the Conception for that church as well as a painting of the Good Shepherd for the porter’s lodge of Saint Francis in the city of Murcia and another altarpiece in La Murta for monks of the order of the Hieronymites, depicting different stories of Christ and Our Lady, and he also painted in Valencia a Martyrdom of James the Less following the Venetian school imitating Bassano. He was a great draftsman and colorist. He died leaving behind high renown around the year 1644.”⁹

Pedro Orrente’s expertise and observation skills as a painter of animals – in the naturalistic vein – had already been noticed by Francisco Pacheco in his *Arte de la Pintura* in the chapter entitled: *De la pintura de animales i aves, pescaderías i bodegones, i de la ingeniosa invención de los Retratos del Natural:*

“Our Pedro Orrente has gained credit in Spain for this genre of painting, although he differs from Bassano’s manner and makes popular his own, with the same inclination, with new praise and glory, for it has benefited not only himself but also many painters that rely on his copies, using valuable landscapes in the Italian style, so natural....”¹⁰

Orrente, then known as the “Spanish Bassano”, was documented in Murcia by 1612, the year in which his father died, he signed a painting

of *The Blessing of Jacob* held in the Contini Bonacossi collection, and he married María Matamoros. In 1617, already in Toledo, Orrente received payment for painting *The Miracle of Saint Leocadia* for the cathedral by order of Cardinal Sandoval. During this period, Orrente frequently comes and goes from Murcia to Toledo. Various reports relate him with other fellow painters such as Alexandro Loarte, Eugenio Caxés and El Greco’s son, Jorge Manuel Theotocópuli.

To Orrente’s presence in Valencia in the second decade of the 17th century and the remarkable envies from painters born or living in the city of the Turia, Marcos Antonio de Orellana refers in a contest between Francisco Ribalta and Orrente:

“There was (as some say) our Ribalta working in his workshop one day, when led by his fondness for painting, and attracted by the fame of such a renowned Professor, a man (they say a foreigner) went to visit him to see him work, and among the mutual statements of their conversation, he asked Ribalta whether he knew Orrente. He replied (with an indifferent tone, or air, so cool that resembled scorn, as if remotely recalling his name): *Oh, yes, that is the wool painter*, thereby expressing that he had only muse or grace for painting livestock (an ability at which he excelled). Such was the state of affairs then, but after the other told Orrente (or tattled) about that conversation and Ribalta’s scornful reply, the gossip operated as a small spark, causing a large fire: *Scintilla é minima quam magnus nascitur ignis!*

And since controversies over ingenuity are the ones that most hurt one’s soul, Orrente’s mood became inflamed with an honorable resentment, deeming it an outrage and dishonor to his ability to be treated as only skillful and dexterous in one painting genre, and for that matter in the limited kind of wools, and livestock. And thus, as in a contest of ingenuity and ability nobody would easily stoop to giving advantages.

Qui velit ingenio cedere rarus erit. The matter became a formal challenge, and committing themselves to a competition, they commissioned each other to paint historical events. Ribalta directed Orrente to paint a Saint Sebastian being martyred, and (some say) Orrente told Ribalta to paint, also in the act of martyrdom, a Saint Lawrence. Hence the competition, hence the tenacity, ingenuity sweated, each one aspired to the laurels, the term expired, and both works were finished. And who won? I will tell you borrowing Marcial’s words. *Pugnare ambo... Victor uterque fuit.* The triumph was for both of them, undivided, whole, because once the works had been completed, and submitted to the most rigorous examination, no genius proved so discerning as to be able to declare any preference in the comparison.

This event has been reported as commonly referred to by the Professors; but I am more than convinced that the competition was arranged differently, and as stated by Canon Henrique Castellví, who had at home the painting of Saint Vincent Martyr, referred to below. Orrente had painted the picture of Saint Sebastian, kept at the cathedral church. And after Ribalta went to see it, being questioned about what he thought, he answered: *Good, there is no doubt*, and he went on to say: *But it is just one figure...*, suggesting that it was not the culmination of the ability, but the historical event was missing. This *but* or expression of debasement of the integrity value of the painting reached the ears of some Canon, also of this Church (they say it was... Monsoriu), very fond of Orrente, and he commissioned him to paint a Saint Vincent Martyr, and upon this Canon’s later visit to Ribalta, and speaking about what he had said, seeing him ratify his statement, the Canon said to him, Would he like to paint a Saint Lawrence being martyred?, since Orrente had already been commissioned to paint (also in the act of martyrdom) a Saint Vincent Martyr. Ribalta accepted the commission, and hence the commitment, finally completing a work by

his own hand. Said Saint Vincent Martyr (which, according to this account was Orrente’s performance in the suggested competition) exists still today in the house of the Count of Castellar (commonly called ‘of the Castellar’), who owns it as entailed, since said Canon that commissioned the painting was related to that house, and he or his successor caused it to be entailed, and that painting showing the Saint in the act of martyrdom, besides perfectly depicting this, is signed by Pedro Orrente with these words: *Petr. Orrent faciebat anno 1616.* This painting of the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence was taken by the King upon coming to Valencia in November 1802 or 1803.”¹¹

Thanks to reliable documentation found, we know today that actually the Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian by Orrente in the Valencia cathedral was not made by the painter in the city of the Turia in 1616, but rather purchased in Murcia two years before from the Marquis of Caracena by María Díez de Covarrubias, the widow of the vice-chancellor of the Council of Aragon, Diego de Covarrubias.¹²

The latest developments and news about Orrente date to a previous time, namely 1632, the painter’s return to Valencia, where he apparently lived, with some brief interval in Murcia, until his death in 1645, his burial place being the church of Saint Martin.

Orrente’s trace and influence in Valencia was widespread, since he left many altar paintings and series of a Biblical theme. He made a strong impact on the works by Juan Ribalta, Vicente Castelló or Jerónimo Jacinto de Espinosa. To a greater or lesser extent, he was involved in the training of other painters, including Mateo Gilarte, Pablo Pontons, Esteve March, his son Miguel March or Cristóbal García Salmerón, who worked in Cuenca.

The painting of the *Calvary* discussed here, representing the core subject matter in the Christian iconography with the crucifixion of Jesus on the Golgotha hill, testifies, along with other examples made by Orrente with this same theme – which we will see later on when dealing with his evolution

– to the special and detailed study undertaken by the painter from Murcia to recreate with dramatic effects through light, figurative and emotional means the search for appropriate solutions for this passage of the Passion, in order to encourage prayer and empathetic meditation among the faithful.

The size of this autograph *Calvary* by Orrente (132 x 102 cm) leads us to consider it a devotional painting for a private oratory. In this sense, we should also note that this outstanding painting might plausibly be associated because of its similar size and description with the *Calvary* cited as part of the dotal property of Juan Díaz de Chavarría, an officer of King Charles II, connected with the city of Toledo, made known by José Luis Barrio Moya.¹³

Among the eight works by Orrente – six scenes from the Old Testament, a canvas depicting Jacob at the Well and the Calvary – held by Díaz de Chavarría according to the inventory dated April 20, 1679 the Calvary is cited as follows: “A saint Christ on mount Calvary with Our Lady, the Marys and the thieves, executed by Orrente, with gilt and black frame, one and a half yard high and one and a quarter yard wide, 660 rs.”¹⁴

In a well-thought-out composition, undoubtedly the product of previous preliminary sketches, Orrente focuses on Jesus with the crown of thorns nailed to the cross with three nails without a *suppedaneum*. Created from a low viewpoint, the figure of Christ stands out because of its closeness, his body bathed by a strong source of light to the left of the viewer. The body of Christ, full of blood from the wound in his side, the crown of thorns and the nails, appears fainted, with his head hanging down and his knee bent. The cross is topped by the text “INRI” (*Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudeorum*).

The two thieves – their bodies twisted and their muscles tight – appear tied with ropes around their limbs to crosses made of two non-debarked tree logs, contrasting with Christ’s squared cross. Besides this difference, the criminals also have darker flesh colors compared with the Savior’s whitish skin tone, substantially enhanced by the pitch-black background. The horizontal bars of the thieves’ crosses mark diagonals with vanishing lines in depth, reinforcing the sensation of space and hierarchically stressing the Redeemer, with his frontal position in the middle of the canvas.

Fig. 2 / Angelo Nardi, *Christ Crucified*, Archivo Moreno, Inv. 04111_A, Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute.

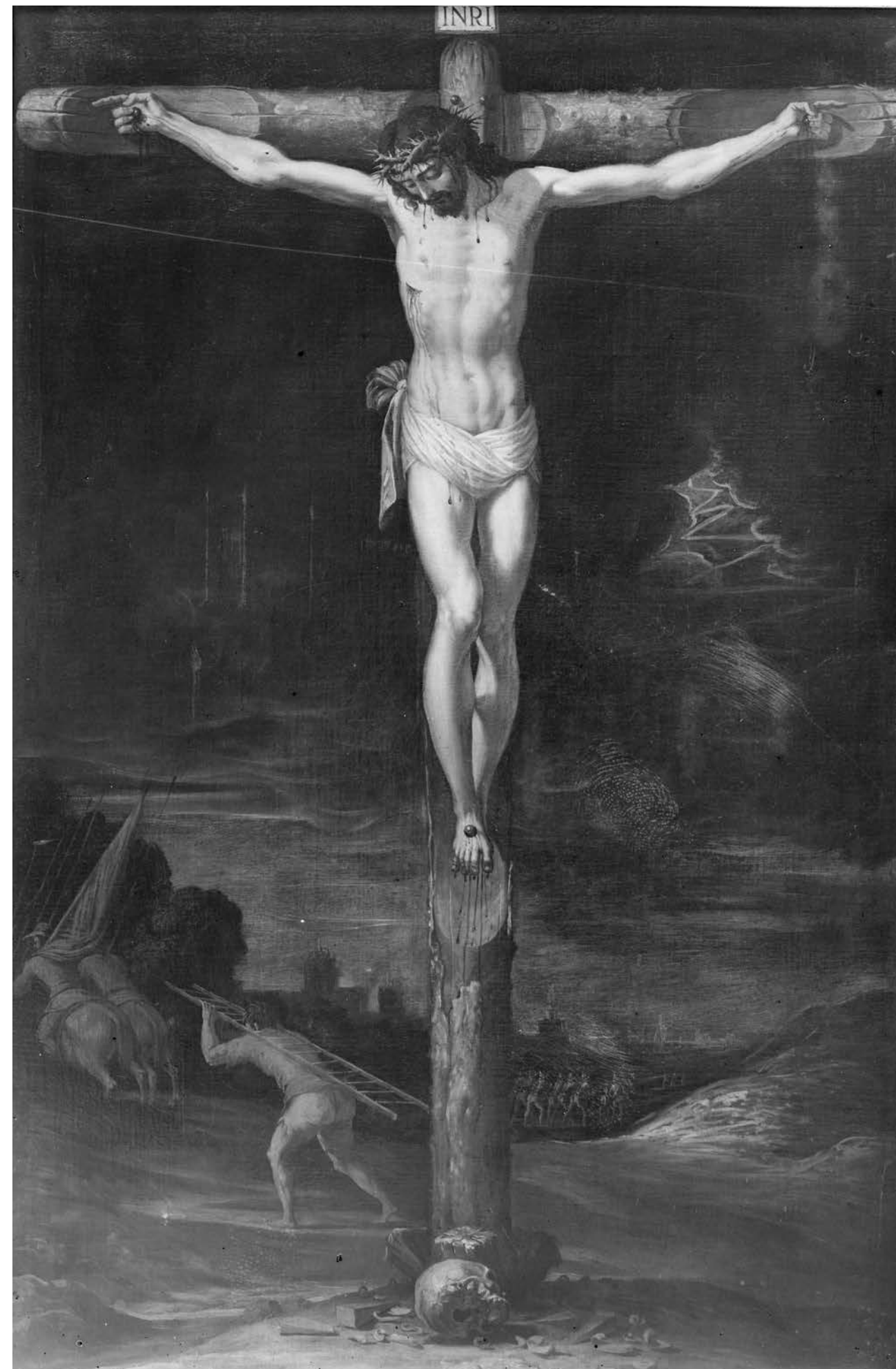
To the right of Christ, kneeling down with her hands together and her fingers interlaced, the Virgin raises her sorrowful eyes to her Son, letting some tears fall down on her cheeks. Behind, John, the favorite disciple, appears equally afflicted, wrapped in a red cloak. Mary Magdalene, in profile in the foreground – kneeling down and barefoot – desperately opens her arms at the foot of the cross. Next to the log there is Adam’s skull, for the purpose, as stated by some theologians, of establishing a relationship between the original sin and Christ’s redemptive death.

To the left of the Savior, we can see one of the executioners going away in the darkness carrying a long ladder on his back. It is interesting to compare Orrente’s Christ with another one in a canvas (Fig. 2) made by Angelo Nardi, a Tuscan painter who was active in Spain and had some relationship with the painter from Murcia. They show some parallelisms: the sunken abdomen, the nails in the middle of the palms of his hands, the overlapping feet fastened by a nail, the knee bent and the same type of lateral light, with identical shades. In Nardi’s canvas we also find the executioner with the ladder on his back (just identical but in an inverted position).

The vibrant colors of the clothes in the foreground, the careful anatomical study of male nudes, the stark contrasts of light and shade of Caravaggesque influence, the interrelation of the characters in the drama together with the naturalism and the keen characterization of emotions make this Calvary by Orrente one of the most interesting pieces in his production.

There is a clear intention in Orrente to differentiate the Good Thief from the Bad Thief through a concise type of gestures that would not go unnoticed among the faithful. Dismas, the Good Thief, appears characterized as a beardless young man to the right of Jesus, whom he acknowledged as the Son of God, sharing his suffering and directing his eyes toward the Redeemer. In contrast, Gestas – the Bad Thief –, shown with a beard on the opposite side, scornfully rejects Christ turning his eyes away from him.

In the New Testament the thieves are respectively referred to as the Good and the Bad Thief (without specifying their names) accompanying Christ in his torment on the cross:



“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots. And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, ‘If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.’ And an inscription also was written over Him: ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save Yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”¹⁵

The accounts in the Apocryphal Gospels detail, instead, the thieves’ names as well as some events of their lives until Christ’s Passion on the Golgotha.

The *Arabic Infancy Gospel* recounts the meeting of the Sacred Family with the two thieves (here called Titus and Dumachus, instead of Dismas and Gestas) on the occasion of the Flight to Egypt:

“From there Joseph and the lady Mary departed and came to a desert place, and when they heard that it was infested with raids by robbers, they decided to pass through this region by night. On the way they saw two robbers lying on the road, and with them a crowd of robbers, who belonged to them, likewise sleeping. Now those two robbers, into whose hands they had fallen, were Titus and Dumachus. And Titus said to Dumachus: ‘I ask you to let these people go free, and in

such a way that our companions do not observe them.’ But Dumachus refused and Titus said again: ‘Take from me forty drachmae and have them as a pledge.’ At the same time he reached him the girdle which he wore round him, that he might hold his tongue and not speak. When the noble lady Mary saw that this robber had shown kindness to them, she said to him: ‘The Lord God will uphold you with his right hand and grant you forgiveness of sins.’ And the Lord Jesus answered and said to his mother: ‘In thirty years, mother, the Jews will crucify me in Jerusalem, and those two robbers will be fastened to the cross with me, Titus on my right hand and Dumachus on my left, and after that day Titus will go before me into paradise.’ And she said: ‘God preserve you from that, my son!’”¹⁶

More accounts of the Good and the Bad Thief can be found in the *Apocryphal Gospel by Joseph of Arimathea*:

“I:1. I am Joseph of Arimathæa, who begged from Pilate the body of the Lord Jesus for burial, and who for this cause was kept close in prison by the murderous and God-fighting Jews, who also, keeping to the law, have by Moses himself become partakers in tribulation and having provoked their Lawgiver to anger, and not knowing that He was God, crucified Him and made Him manifest to those that knew God. In those days in which they condemned the Son of God to be crucified, seven days before Christ suffered, two condemned robbers were sent from Jericho to the procurator Pilate; and their case was as follows:

2. The first, his name Gestas, put travelers to death, murdering them with the sword, and others he exposed naked. And he hung up women by the heels, head down, and cut off their breasts, and drank the blood of infants’ limbs, never having known God, not obeying the laws, being violent from the beginning, and doing such deeds.

And the case of the other was as follows: He was called Demas, and was by birth a Galilæan, and kept an inn. He made attacks upon the rich, but was good to the poor – a thief like Tobit (Tobias), for he buried the bodies of the poor. And he set his hand to robbing the multitude of the Jews, and stole the law itself in Jerusalem, and stripped naked the daughter of Caiaphas, who was priestess of the sanctuary, and took away from its place the mysterious deposit itself placed there by Solomon. Such were his doings.

(...)

III:1. Having therefore done many and dreadful things against Jesus that night, they gave Him up to Pilate the procurator at the dawn of the preparation, that he might crucify Him; and for this purpose they all came together. After a trial, therefore, Pilate the procurator ordered Him to be nailed to the cross, along with the two robbers. And they were nailed up along with Jesus, Gestas on the left, and Demas on the right.

2. And he that was on the left began to cry out, saying to Jesus: ‘See how many evil deeds I have done in the earth; and if I had known that you were the king, I should have cut off you also. And why do you call yourself Son of God, and cannot help yourself in necessity? How can you afford it to another one praying for help? If you are the Christ, come down from the cross, that I may believe in you. But now I see you perishing along with me, not like a man, but like a wild beast.’ And many other things he began to say against Jesus, blaspheming and gnashing his teeth upon Him. For the robber was taken alive in the snare of the devil.

3. But the robber on the right hand, whose name was Demas, seeing the Godlike grace of Jesus, thus cried out: ‘I know You, Jesus Christ, that You are the Son of God. I see

You, Christ, adored by myriads of angels. Pardon me my sins which I have done. Do not in my trial make the stars come against me, or the moon, when You shall judge all the world; because in the night I have accomplished my wicked purposes. Do not urge the sun, which is now darkened on account of You, to tell the evils of my heart, for no gift can I give You for the remission of my sins. Already death is coming upon me because of my sins; but Yours is the propitiation. Deliver me, O Lord of all, from Your fearful judgment. Do not give the enemy power to swallow me up, and to become heir of my soul, as of that of him who is hanging on the left; for I see how the devil joyfully takes his soul, and his body disappears. Do not even order me to go away into the portion of the Jews; for I see Moses and the patriarchs in great weeping, and the devil rejoicing over them. Before, then, O Lord, my spirit departs, order my sins to be washed away, and remember me the sinner in Your kingdom, when upon the great most lofty throne you shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel. For You have prepared great punishment for Your world on account of Yourself.’

4. And the robber having thus spoken, Jesus says to him: ‘I say to you, Demas, that today you shall be with me in paradise. And the sons of the kingdom, the children of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And you alone shall dwell in paradise until my second appearing, when I am to judge those who do not confess my name.’ And He said to the robber: ‘Go away, and tell the cherubim and the powers, that turn the flaming sword, that guard paradise from the time that Adam, the first created, was in paradise, and sinned, and kept not my commandments: And none of the first shall see paradise until I am to come the second time to judge living and dead. And He wrote thus: Jesus Christ the Son of God, who have come down from the heights of the heavens, who



Fig. 3 / Juan Ribalta, *Saint Dismas*, Madrid, private collection.

Fig. 4 / Pedro Orrente, *Calvary*, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Fig. 5 / Pedro Orrente (Workshop), *Calvary*, Saragossa, Saragossa Museum.

have come forth out of the bosom of the invisible Father without being separated from Him, and who have come down into the world to be made flesh, and to be nailed to a cross, in order that I might save Adam, whom I fashioned – to my archangelic powers, the gatekeepers of paradise, to the officers of my Father: I will and order that he who has been crucified along with me should go in, should receive remission of sins through me; and that he, having put on an incorruptible body, should go in to paradise, and dwell where no one has ever been able to dwell.”¹⁷

The figure of Saint Dismas, the first saint of the Church, was promoted by the Counter-Reformation by showing his repentance on the cross. Dismas, together with Mary Magdalene, Saint Peter, King David or the Prodigal Son became an exemplary figure because of his conversion and repentance. He has rarely been represented in isolation, but we are familiar with some examples by the painter from Valencia Juan Ribalta¹⁸ (Fig. 3), occasionally showing his admiration for master Orrente. Among the paintings owned by Diego Vich y Valterra held at the Hieronymite Monastery in La Murta, an original Saint Dismas is cited, made by the young Juan Ribalta.¹⁹

Finally, in this selective compilation of texts referring to Dismas and Gestas, we quote the account from the *Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus*:

“Then Pilate commanded Jesus to be brought before him, and spake to him in the following words: ‘Thy own nation hath charged thee as making thyself a king; wherefore I, Pilate, sentence thee to be whipped according to the laws of former governors; and that thou be first bound, then hanged upon a cross in that place where thou art now a prisoner; and also two criminals with thee, whose names are Dismas and Gestas.’ Then Jesus went out of the hall, and the two thieves with him. And when they came to the place which is called Golgotha, they stript him of his raiment, and girt him about with a linen cloth, and put a crown of thorns upon



his head, and put a reed in his hand. And in like manner did they to the two thieves who were crucified with him, Dismas on his right hand and Gestas on his left. But Jesus said, ‘My Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.’ And they divided his garments, and upon his vesture they cast lots. The people in the mean time stood by, and the chief priests and elders of the Jews mocked him, saying, ‘he saved others, let him now save himself if he can; if he be the son of God, let him now come down from the cross.’ The soldiers also mocked him, and taking vinegar and gall offered it to him to drink, and said to him, ‘If thou art king of the Jews deliver thyself.’ Then Longinus, a certain soldier, taking a spear, pierced his side, and presently there came forth blood and water. And Pilate wrote the title upon the cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek letters, viz. This is the king of the Jews. But one of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus, whose name was Gestas, said to Jesus, ‘If thou art the Christ, deliver thyself and us.’ But the thief who was crucified on his right hand, whose name was Dismas, answering, rebuked him, and said, ‘Dost not thou fear God, who art condemned to this punishment? We indeed



receive rightly and justly the demerit of our actions; but this Jesus, what evil hath he done?’ After this groaning, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.’ Jesus answering, said to him, ‘Verily I say unto thee, that this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.’”²⁰

The fate of this composition of the *Calvary* is evidenced by the canvas regarding the same theme (Fig. 4) by Orrente held at the *Museo Nacional del Prado* (inv. P.001016), known to have come from the Buen Retiro Palace in Madrid, where there are also other Biblical passages painted by the master from Murcia.

This canvas (153 x 128 cm) at the Prado has 18 cm bends added to it and the number 967, which stands for the testamentary inventory of Charles III, Buen Retiro 1794, no. 967: “Another [painting] by Horrente, with Christ Crucified with the two Thieves, the Virgin, St John and the Magdalene at the foot, two yards high and seven spans wide, with golden frame... 500.”²¹

A lower-quality workshop replica (Fig. 5) is kept at the Saragossa Museum (125 x 103 cm; NIG 10112), whose only significant variation is the slight turn of Christ’s head toward the Good Thief.



Fig. 6 / Pedro Orrente, *Crucifixion*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 2014.228, Purchase, Charles and Jessie Price and Fern and George Wachter Gifts, 2014.

Another example by Pedro Orrente apparently with identical composition, signed in this case, was kept at the Calvary hermitage in the Albacete village of Hellín, according to Emiliano Martínez.²²

At this point, for the purpose of further illustrating Orrente's ingenuity and production, below we will discuss another two original compositions by Pedro Orrente depicting Christ's Crucifixion amid the two thieves on the Golgotha.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has recently purchased a *Crucifixion* (Fig. 6; oil on canvas, 123.8 x 102.9 cm) by Pedro Orrente (inv. 2014.228; Purchase, Charles and Jessie Price and Fern and George Wachter Gifts, 2014), which is closely connected with the *Calvary* studied above.

The composition at the Metropolitan was well-known because of a workshop replica at the convent of Santa Isabel, in Madrid (167 x 132 cm), attributed to Orrente by Elías Tormo²³, and because of another similar canvas also of rather poor quality at the Cathedral Museum in Badajoz (126 x 103 cm).²⁴ Another similar canvas (131 x 126 cm) has recently become known, which should be considered a workshop copy or replica at the church of Saint James Apostle in the village of Los Realejos in the Canary Islands,²⁵ which differs from the others in the figure of God the Father in an opening of the heavens and a soldier on horseback.

The *Crucifixion* at the Metropolitan in New York narrates the passage from the Gospel of Matthew: "Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This Man is calling for Elijah!' Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink."²⁶

Orrente repeats in this painting, with some variation in the figure of the Bad Thief to the left of Christ, the character of Dismas from the *Calvary* discussed above. We should note, then, a reutilization of his designs in order to vary his compositions on the same subject matter. Another example of



Fig. 7 / Pedro Orrente (Workshop), *Calvary*, Madrid, Convent of the Carboneras del Corpus Christi

this reutilization of models is the canvas (140 x 127 cm) kept in the inner recess of the convent of the Carboneras del Corpus Christi in Madrid²⁷ (Fig. 7) – most certainly made at Orrente's workshop – where he mixes elements from the composition of the first *Calvary* with the *Crucifixion* held at the Metropolitan. Thus, we can see how to the figure of Christ crucified with the thieves in the first *Calvary* the painter has added the characters that appear instead in the *Crucifixion* in New York: the group of three soldiers drawing lots for Jesus' robe, Saint John standing next to the cross, the group made up of the Virgin and the Marys, and a dog at the front.

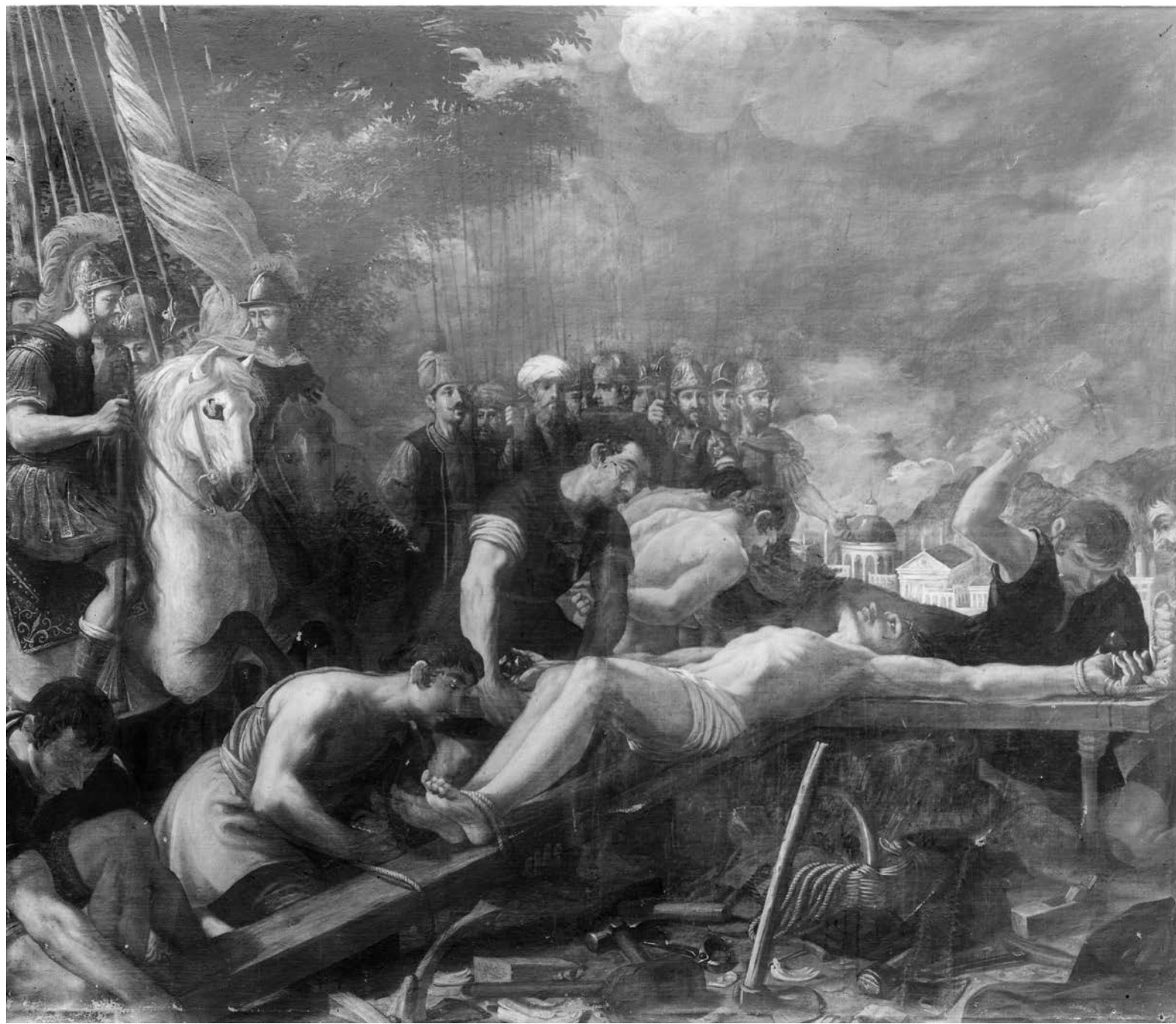


Fig. 8 / Angelo Nardi, Preparations for the *Crucifixion*, former Jesuit church in Alcalá de Henares, Archivo Moreno, inv. 37678_B, Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute.



Fig. 9 / Paolo Caliari, Veronese, *Crucifixion*, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

We have already referred to the relationship between Angelo Nardi and Pedro Orrente, which finds a fresh unifying aspect in the way that the figurative view of Jerusalem in the *Crucifixion* in New York – with the central-plan, domed church and a classical building with a gable roof and buildings with columns – is identically repeated in the canvas of the *Preparations for the Crucifixion* by Nardi, owned by the Jesuit church in Alcalá de Henares and known only through a photograph after it disappeared (Fig. 8). In the first *Calvary* discussed there is also a round building with columns topped by a dome that appears in the dark. These central-plan buildings with columns and domes recalling Palladian architecture are included by Pedro Orrente in the *Marriage at Cana* at the church of La Guardia in Toledo, in the *Ecce Homo* at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and in the painting of *Christ on the Way to the Calvary* at the Althorp House chapel in England.

The canvas at the Metropolitan also portrays Christ crucified on a squared cross and the two thieves on crosses made of non-debarked tree logs. In this case, he adopts an even lower viewpoint, creating a bold composition with



Fig. 10 / Pedro Orrente, *Crucifixion*, Atlanta, High Museum of Art, inv. K-2105, Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

the horizontal logs of the three crosses drawing a diagonal. Christ, alive, lifts his supplicant eyes toward the sky. In the foreground, on the left, a group of soldiers are playing dice for Christ's robe before the attentive eyes of a dog, which illustrates Orrente's fame as an animal painter. The figures of Saint John, the Virgin and the Marys are silhouetted against a dramatically colored cloudscape. Orrente's ability and expertise in representing small still life fragments in some of his paintings can be identified in the basket containing the tools used by the executioners for the *Crucifixion*.

In this subject of the *Crucifixion* by Orrente we note the Venetian influence, since a source of inspiration for this painting has been the canvas (102 x 102 cm) by Paolo Caliari, known as Veronese (Verona, 1528–Venice, 1588), kept at the Musée du Louvre. This painting by Veronese (Fig. 9) appears off-centered and with the same diagonal laid out by Orrente. The painter from Murcia has also copied the position of the high ladder behind Christ's back and repeated Veronese's figure with the head covered by a cloak closing the group of the Marys in the painting in New York.



Fig. 11 / Pedro Orrente & Workshop, *Crucifixion*, private collection.



Fig. 12 / Jacopo Robusti, Tintoretto, *Crucifixion*, Venice, church of Saint Cassian.



Fig. 13 / Francisco Ribalta, *Crucifixion of Christ with the Thieves*, Valencia, church of Saint Andrew.

The other Orrente's composition of the Crucifixion is kept at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta (Fig. 10; inv. K-2105; Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation). For a long time it was believed to be a work by Annibale Carracci until Longhi reasonably ascribed the canvas (167.5 x 111 cm) to the painter from Murcia.²⁸

Another version by Orrente (167.5 x 111 cm) has recently reappeared in Balclis (lot 2056) with a certificate by Gudiol as made by Orrente and assistant, whose quality is lower than that of the American version (Fig. 11).

This time, Orrente has inverted the sense of the diagonal in the painting in Atlanta, maintaining the distinction between the cross of Christ and those of the thieves. Dismas, to the right of Christ, turns his head toward the Savior, as opposed to Gestas, the Bad Thief. At the foot of the cross, the faint Virgin is attended to by Saint John and Mary Magdalene. A young man wearing a red cap hands the cartouche bearing the *titulus* to one of

the executioners so that he may fasten it to the end of the squared cross.

The source of inspiration for this painting can be found in the great canvas of the Crucifixion of Christ painted in 1568 by Jacopo Robusti, Tintoretto (Venice, 1518-1594) for the chancel of the church of Saint Cassian in Venice (Fig. 12). Orrente changes the landscape format used by Tintoretto into a portrait one, placing the crosses at one end, while also bringing forward the figure of Christ with respect to the thieves. He follows Tintoretto's composition in the frontal position of the ladder resting on the bar of the cross with two figures with the *titulus*.

Luis Tristán (Toledo, ca 1586-1624), a contemporary of Pedro Orrente, painted a Calvary for the shrine of the Virgen de la Cabeza in Toledo²⁹ where Christ is shown crucified on the Golgotha between the two thieves, who are also nailed to their crosses, unlike the examples painted by Orrente, where they appear tied by ropes.



Fig. 14 / Francisco Ribalta, *Calvary*, Valencia, private collection.

Francisco Ribalta (Solsona, Lleida 1565 – Valencia, 1628), who during his lifetime competed with Orrente, as stated above, also essayed the theme of the Crucifixion of Christ with the thieves (Fig. 13) in a canvas (220 x 180 cm) we attributed to the painter in 2012, kept at the church of St Andrew in Valencia.³⁰ It introduces in the Golgotha scene the characters of Saint John, the Virgin and the Marys. The layout of Dismas and Gestas on an inclined plane recalls Orrente's solutions. In another canvas (58 x 46 cm) painted by Francisco Ribalta,³¹ typical of a private oratory (Fig. 14), Christ is nailed to the cross by four nails, laying his feet on a *suppedaneum* as argued by painter and treatise writer Francisco Pacheco, just like the Calvary made by his son Juan Ribalta (Madrid, ca 1596/97 – Valencia, 1628), kept at the Valencia Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 15), of which an autograph replica is known, held in Sanz de Bremond's collection. This canvas (107 x 83 cm) painted by Juan Ribalta shows the strong impact made on the Levantine area by Orrente's *Calvaries*.³² Ponz identified a *Crucifix with St Jerome and*



Fig. 15 / Juan Ribalta, *Calvary*, Valencia, Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia.

a Bishop Saint at the Templar Church in Valencia (lost today): "Other rich jewelry is kept in the vestry, and there are also decorative paintings, among which one of a crucifix with St Jerome and a bishop saint on his knees at one side should be noted for its beauty; all these full-scale figures are in my opinion among the best creations by Pedro Orrente."³³

We conclude this review of Orrente's *Calvaries* by mentioning a Calvary apparently made by him of which no image is available (canvas, 282 x 321 cm), which disappeared in the 1915 fire at the Supreme Court in Madrid. The description of this painting leads us also to infer that Orrente gradually modified the compositions of his Crucifixions by adding new characters: "In the middle of the picture, Our Lord Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, next to him the two thieves tied to their crosses; on the right the Virgin and the Marys on their knees, behind St John and, on the left, three soldiers playing dice for the Lord's robe; behind these, people on foot and on horseback."³⁴





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Technical review

ICONO

Pedro Orrente (Murcia, 1580 – Valencia, 1645)

Calvary

Circa 1520

Fact Sheet

Studying this painting from a technical point of view offers us a valuable opportunity to extend the field of knowledge concerning the artistic techniques and materials that were in use in Valencia in the 17th century. Comparatively few investigations have been undertaken in this area, which might seem paradoxical given the considerable amount of scholarly attention that artists and artworks of the 15th and 16th centuries receive. During this time, the region of Valencia also experienced an extraordinary outburst of creativity that merits attention.

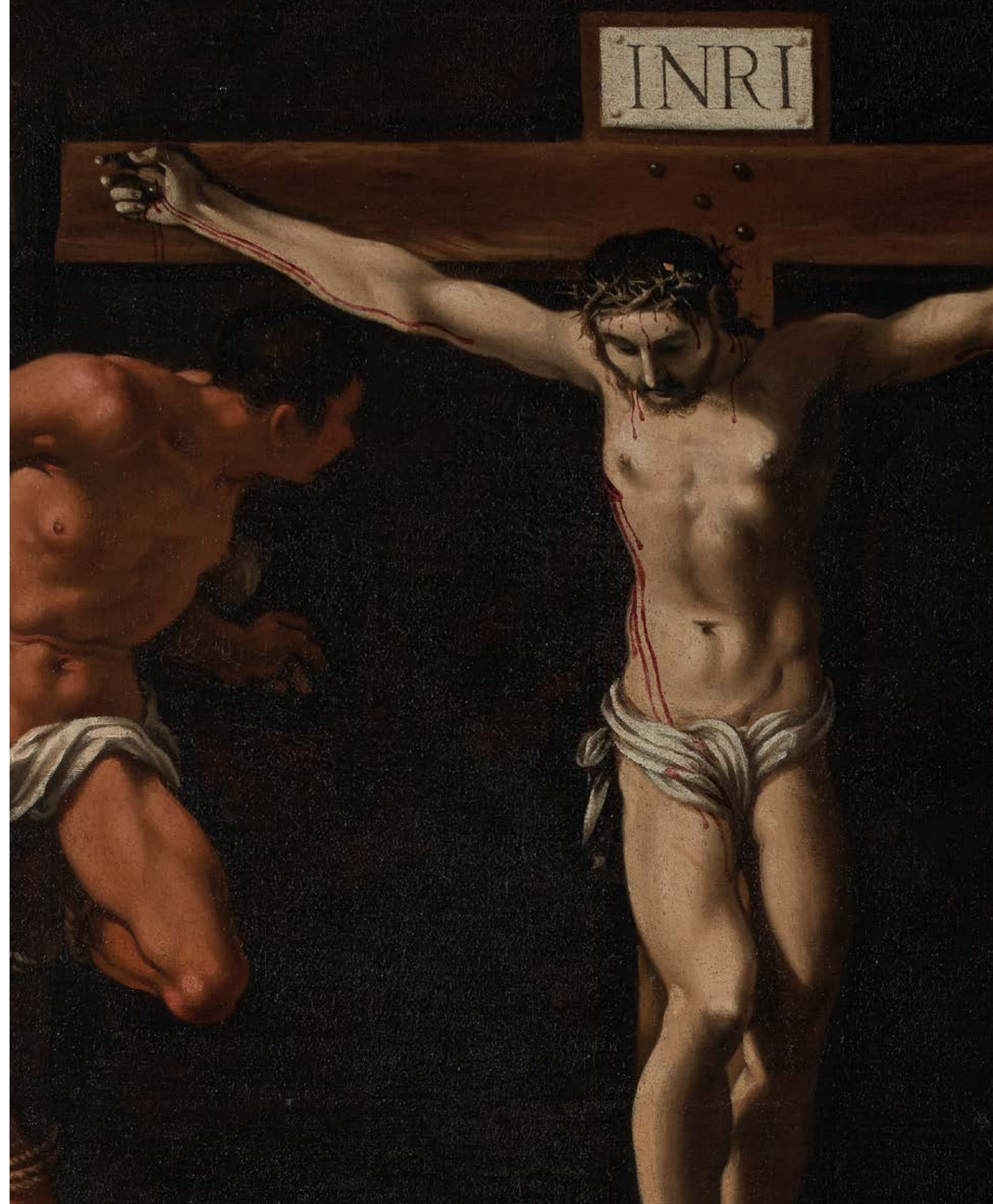
Pedro de Orrente was a prolific artist who furthermore oversaw the running of an active workshop. For this reason, it is important to analyse the painting techniques in artworks that can be unambiguously attributed to him. This is the case with the *Calvary* that we will focus on.¹

For this painting, Orrente painted onto linen canvas (*Linum usitatissimum*) of high quality and average density (8 x 11 threads cm² warp and woof), made of a single piece of fabric measuring the standard width of manual looms of the time: around 105-110 cm. On the two lateral borders, remains of the selvages of the linen canvas are visible.²

A certain complexity is apparent in the ground of the canvas, which is probably due to the nature of the scene depicted. The first layer corresponds exactly to the typical Valencian grounds of the 17th and 18th centuries: an intense, earthy red that is almost orange, composed of red earth rich in iron oxides, micas, pyrites, calcites, carbon black and lead white, added probably as a drying agent. Interestingly, as other investigations have found, analysis of this ground reveals traces of rutile, a titanium mineral that is usually associated with red earths. This mineral can always be found in contemporary grounds from Madrid, which could suggest important insights into where this earth was extracted from and be used for identification purposes.³

The second coat, which was most probably applied by the artist himself, noticeably darkens the appearance of the canvas, as a large quantity of umber and carbon black is present, as well as red earths, micas, quartz and calcite. There are no traces of lead white in this coat.⁴ It is likely the artist wanted a ground that would allow for the darker shades necessary for the nocturnal scene.

After the application and spreading of the ground, an initial design or sketch must have been made which is no longer detectable.





Figs. 1 & 2 / X-ray details of the artwork.

This is because it was certainly made with a dry medium such as charcoal or chalk, which was absorbed into the oil paints that were later painted on. Because there are no corrections and alterations in the figures of the composition, we might speculate that the painting is the result of having been copied from an initial card template (Figs. 1 and 2). This could then be reused for other similar compositions by the same artist and his workshop, as José Gómez Frechina describes in the catalogue text preceding this study.

Orrente's working style becomes perfectly visible when micro-samples, taken from the surface of the painting, are submitted to X-Ray analysis. These reveal an artist who painted with skill and mastery of pictorial techniques, combined with an impressive economy in using his materials. Never more than one or two coats of colour are used, with a precise

combination of pigmentation. The fluidity of his brushstrokes are clear in the radiographic images, though less pronounced on visual examination (Figs. 3 and 4).

Orrente was furthermore conscious that such a dark ground, though ideal for the execution of a night-time scene, was ill-suited to painting certain elements of deep and intense colour: for example, the robes of the Virgin or of Mary Magdalene. These require a light base, which then serves to intensify the principal colour applied on top of it. For the Virgin's robe, a white yellowish primer made of lead white – *albayalde* – with high levels of silica and calcite was applied to the area.⁵ The main blue colour derives from a layer of high-quality azurite that contains granules of intense colour, with traces of red and ochre earth, and lead white (Fig. 5).⁶



Figs. 3 & 4 / Detail of Christ's torso and X-ray image of Christ's torso.



Fig. 5 / Stratigraphy of a sample taken from the blue robe of the Virgin.

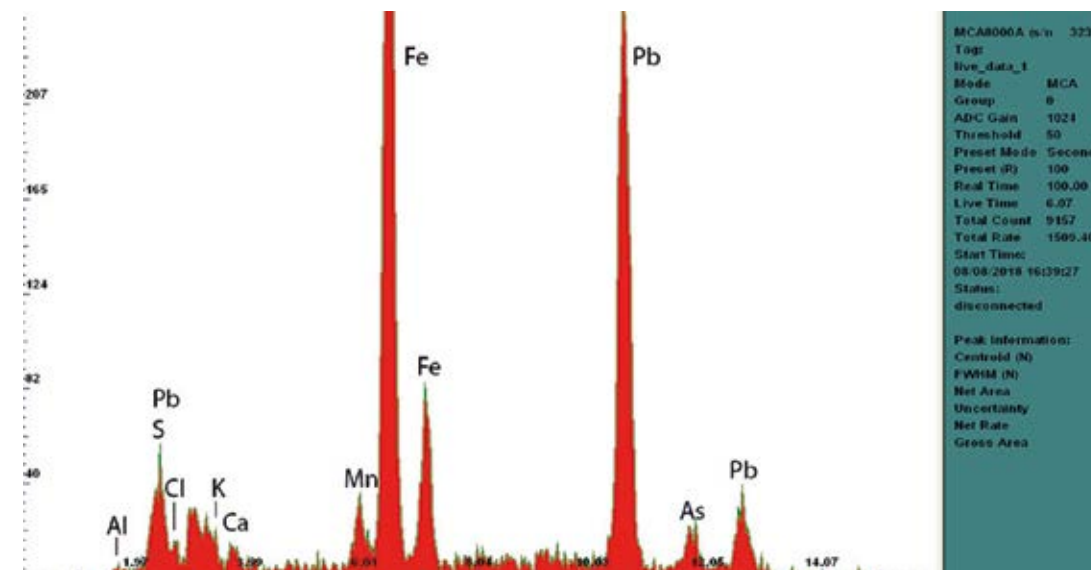
Fig. 6 / Spectrograph of X-ray fluorescence (EDXRF) from the yellow orange area of the robe of Mary Magdalene.

This is also the case for the deep orange that has been used to paint the robe of Mary Magdalene. Here, a primer of orange ochre has been applied, composed principally of red and ochre earth, with traces of carbon black. This provides the base colour of the clothing, yet the light areas are highlighted by brushstrokes of bright yellow deriving from orpiment. At the time, this pigment was called *jalde* and though highly unstable and prone to degradation, provides vibrance and intensity similar to gold (Fig. 6).⁷ Valencia has a well-established tradition of using this yellow pigment since the 15th century, although in the 17th century it was already in decline due to its toxicity and unstable nature. Artistic treaties such as that by Palomino (1715-1724) expressly rejected it.

The red mantle of St John appears not to have needed such a light base. Instead, a glaze of natural red lacquer with some azurite has been applied directly to the darkened surface of the canvas. Though also painted on in red lacquer, the Virgin's robes have been painted onto a white base, in layers of red lacquer which depict the dark folds of her clothing.⁸ It is worth highlighting here how the artist has used different methods to achieve different colour schemes for components of the same colour.

This last feature of the painting is crucial for studying the flesh tones of the figures in the composition, who strike the viewer with considerable visual impact. The orange complexions of the two thieves are based on a combination of vermilion with ochre earth and lead white, with minute quantities of azurite. The greenish grey skin of Christ contains no vermilion, based instead on earths, azurite and lead white. The pink complexions of the Virgin and Mary Magdalene show a more common combination of lead white, vermilion and azurite.

As we can observe through such a study of technical elements, Pedro de Orrente is a painter who made use of a wide variety of resources and painted with accomplished, methodical hand. In contrast to the simplicity of his paintings' execution, his mastery of technical skill and his precision achieves effects that are rich and complex.



The pigments that are used are high quality and show an intense chromaticity, and a wide range of tone. For example, on the same canvas, blue ranges from the use of smalt, which creates the blue of the altered skies so typical of the painter; high quality azurite; and indigo. Further investigation is needed to look into whether his workshop exhibited such quality and variety in the pigments and colourings of his works.

This study, and another forthcoming study of other works by the Valencian artist, puts forward key new insights into the painting techniques of 17th century in Valencia. We are confident that this contribution will inspire new lines of investigation, which the artistic richness that emerged on Spain's east coast in the Golden Age more than deserves.

NOTES

1. At *Icono I&R* we are currently carrying out a study pertaining to this, which will be published shortly in a work on the artist.
2. The fibres have been analysed under microscope in order to determine their type. The canvas retains its original dimensions and fastening nails. Though the artwork has been relined recently using the gacha technique, it is mounted on a fixed stretcher that may be the original, with narrow wooden strips (width 3,3 cm) and crosspiece.
3. For more on the characteristics of canvas preparation in Valencia in the 17th century, see Romero, R. *El bodegón español en el siglo 17th: desvelando su naturaleza oculta*, Madrid 2009, pp. 166-167
4. The consistently high levels of magnesium found in the EDXRF spectral analyses correspond to the presence of umber in this second layer. The selective dyeing tests carried out with Rhodamina B and Amido Black show the two preparatory coats are oil-based.
5. This primer includes numerous sizeable granules of silicon, calcite and traces of vermilion and ochre earth, in addition to a majority of lead white.
6. The EDXRF analyses register a minor spike of cobalt in the KeV, which indicates that the azurite has been mixed with a small proportion of blue smalt.
7. Orpiment was identified done by microscopic analysis and by the detection of a marked spike of arsenic in the KeV.
8. All the clothing of deep dark red, based on the use of red lacquer, contains large quantities of azurite. This is a traditional technique that is used to darken and correct the colour scheme of paint layers.

