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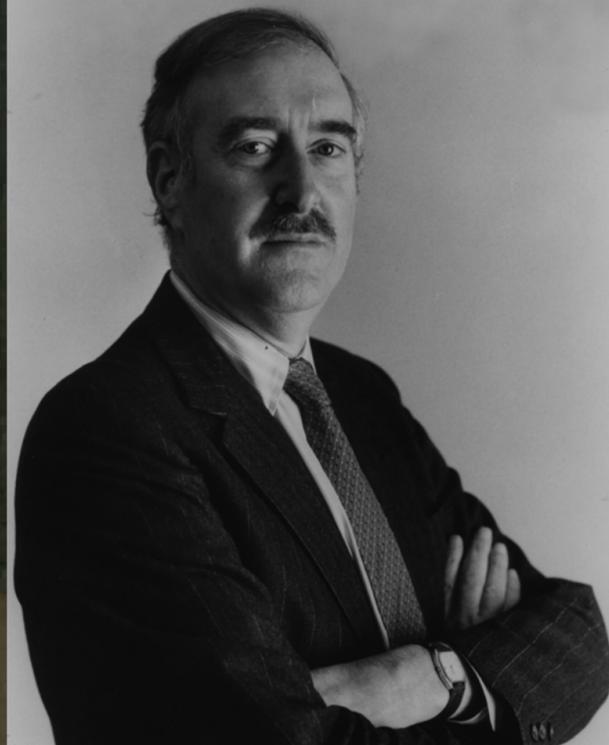
Collected Writings on Velázquez

JONATHAN BROWN

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VELÁZQUEZ



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JONATHAN BROWN

Jonathan Brown is regarded as a leading specialist on Spanish painting of the Golden Age and on the Spanish master Diego Velázquez. Among his many books are *Velázquez, Painter and Courtier* (1986) and *Velázquez. The Technique of Genius* (1998), with Carmen Garrido. His studies of art at the European courts include *A Palace for a King. The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, with John H. Elliott (rev. ed. 2003). Brown is Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

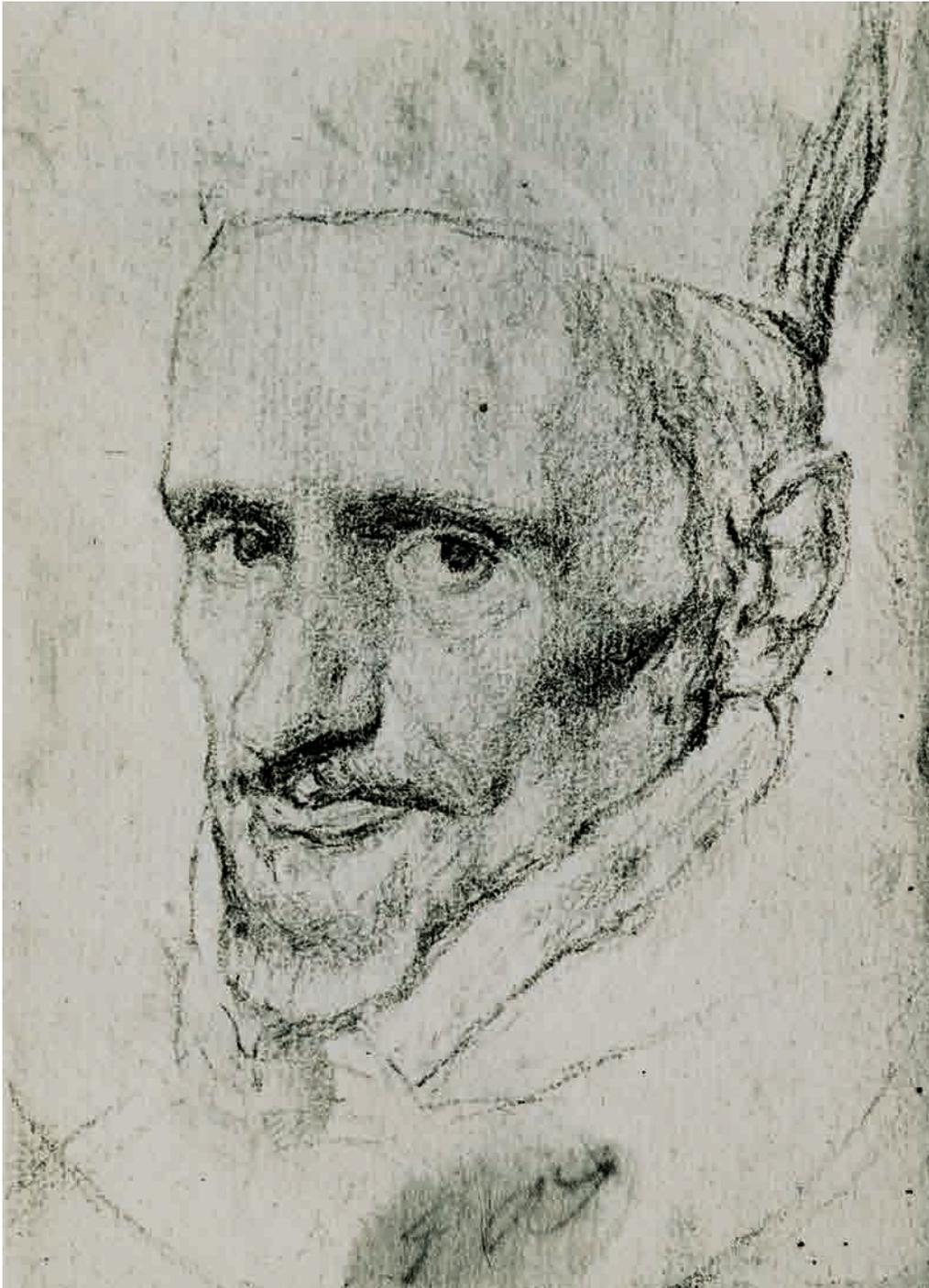
This book is a collection of 32 articles about Velázquez which appeared in scholarly journals, exhibition catalogues and newspapers and magazines between 1964 and 2006. Several are published in English for the first time. The text is the record of a lifelong engagement with the life and works of this enigmatic artist and evaluates many of the numerous attempts to solve the mysteries presented by the Spaniard's paintings. These questions are considered in the final essay, 'Velázquez, today and tomorrow', which is published here for the first time.

Two themes unite the essays. Velázquez was the court painter to Philip IV, and the changing relationship between painter and patron provides the framework for interpreting the artist's career. The centerpiece of this relationship is Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, which is the subject of two long articles, the now-classic 'On the meaning of *Las Meninas*' (1978) and '*Las Meninas* as a masterpiece' (1999).

The second theme is the problem of attributions and the related question of Velázquez's innovative technique. Velázquez was not a prolific painter. As the supply of securely attributed works is now mostly in museums, and as the price of great pictures continues to reach new heights, questions of authenticity become increasingly contentious. In this book, Brown considers the problem in its widest dimensions and participates in the debate about individual attributions.



3. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau*, oil on canvas, 328 x 279 cm. Ca. 1624. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.



1. *Cardinal Gaspar de Borja*, black chalk on paper, 186 x 117 mm. Ca. 1643-45. Madrid, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando.

A PORTRAIT DRAWING BY VELÁZQUEZ*

1976

Velázquez the draughtsman is an enigmatic figure. Despite contemporary testimony that he made drawings, there is now almost no evidence of the fact. Attributions abound of course, but the vast majority have been based more on hope than reason. This is not the moment to open the complex question of Velázquez's drawings, which still awaits a detailed critical study. Indeed, it may even appear injudicious to propose another attribution until this study has been completed. But a recently discovered sheet seems to be so unmistakably in the orbit of the great master that it requires discussion.

Among the dozen or so drawings that have been given repeatedly to Velázquez, only one has found unanimous, unequivocal acceptance. This is the superb black chalk *Portrait of Cardinal Gaspar de Borja* in the Academia de San Fernando (fig. 1).¹ The drawing is related to a painted portrait of the Cardinal that was done by Velázquez between January 3, 1643, when Borja was elevated to the archbishopric of Toledo, and December 28, 1645, when he died.² With its sharp psychological insight and subtle technique, the *Portrait of Cardinal Borja* fulfills our expectations of how a drawing by Velázquez ought to look. Using soft black chalk as the medium, Velázquez modulates light and shadow with remarkable control and sensitivity. The modeling of the side of the Cardinal's face is especially fine. By varying the pressure applied to the chalk, Velázquez creates beautiful half-shadows that trail away from the strongly accented cheekbone. The vertical laid lines of the paper, which are revealed by the chalk,

* I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the valuable help of Professor John H. Elliott, Institute for Advanced Study, in preparing this article. Professor Elliott, who is writing a political biography of Count-Duke Olivares, generously made available his knowledge of the man and his times, as well as unpublished documents that are important to my discussion.

¹ The drawing is described and discussed by D. Angulo Íñiguez, *Cuarenta dibujos españoles*, Madrid,

1966, pp. 34-35 [reprinted in D. Angulo, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez*, Madrid, 2007, pp. 325-28]. See also J. López-Rey, 'On Velázquez's Portrait of Cardinal Borja', *The Art Bulletin*, XXVIII (1946), pp. 270-74.

² Several versions of the portrait exist, but opinion is divided on the identity of the original. Among the leading candidates are the paintings in the Städelsches Institut, Frankfurt, and the collection of Ralph Bankes, Kingston Lacy.

subtly contribute to the filmy quality of the shadow. The keen sensitivity to light and texture, a hallmark of the artist, is apparent everywhere in the drawing. But richness of technique has not been bartered for psychological penetration. The image of a shrewd and willful man is conveyed by the Cardinal's features.

A portrait drawing in the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, shows many of the stylistic traits found in the *Portrait of Cardinal Borja*. The subject is Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares, prime minister of Spain from 1621-43, and protector of Velázquez (fig. 2).³ The *Portrait of Olivares* is also in an oval, but it is bust-length whereas the *Portrait of Cardinal Borja* shows only the head. Consequently, Olivares's expression seems to lack the intensity of Cardinal Borja, although the Cardinal's gaze tends to be exaggerated in photographs which normally overemphasize the contrasts. But there is another reason why the *Portrait of Olivares* is psychologically muted, which will be discussed at the conclusion of the note. In the matter of technique, the two drawings are closely related. The similarity resides, above all, in the richness and subtlety of the effects of light and texture. Olivares's face, though less dramatically lit, is no less skillfully rendered. Velázquez takes advantage of the horizontal laid lines of the paper to create the soft, warm shadow on the right side of the face, just as he uses the grain of the canvas to achieve comparable effects in his paintings. More remarkable still is the treatment of the moustache and beard which are rendered almost without the aid of lines. Here the technique is very close to the *Portrait of Cardinal Borja*, as it is again in the representation of the eyes, with their well-defined pupils, and the mouth, with its thin, set lines.

But perhaps the principal glory of the Olivares portrait lies in the sash that is draped from his right shoulder. The shape of the sash is suggested only by indefinite outlines. But we can immediately perceive this distinction between the sash and the armor worn beneath it by means of the reflection and absorption of light. The metal reflects the light in rather an even fashion. The sash, however, is alive with flickering shadows and highlights. Along the upper edge, zigzag strokes dance over the surface, simulating the brilliant play of light that Velázquez often reproduced in his paintings, even at the relatively early date of this drawing (for example, see the *Portrait of Philip IV in Armor*, Prado). This passage is not only important for supporting the attribution, but also may be used to enlarge the frame of reference for Velázquez's drawings. In sum, the *Portrait of Olivares* is what is commonly called a 'painter's' drawing, meaning that the draughtsman has rendered his subject in terms of light and color rather than light and structure, even though a monochromatic medium is being used. The

³ The drawing, number M315, is done with black chalk on white paper and measures 193 x 159 mm (7⁵/₈ x 6¹/₄ in). It comes from the collection of J. Masson, whose

mark is in the lower left (Lugt S. 1494a). The composition was originally inscribed in an oval border, which has been partially trimmed on all four sides.

particular vision of color and light and the incomparable mastery of execution seem to support the attribution to Velázquez.

The date and purpose of the drawing are related, if vexing, questions. As many writers have noted, Olivares's appearance underwent notable changes during his mature life.⁴ The transformation is vividly apparent in two portraits by Velázquez, one of 1625 in the Hispanic Society of America, the other in the Hermitage, generally agreed to have been done around 1640.⁵ In the space of fifteen years, Olivares, though never a slender man, had become obese, and his face, once alert and expressive, had become puffy and dull. He had also changed the style of his beard from one that covered his entire chin to one that covered only its center.⁶ Finally, he had lost most of his hair and commonly wore a wig that went straight across the brow and covered the ear, lying flat against them. In the portrait drawing, Olivares still has the thinner face, the fuller beard, and most of his hair. Although his ears cannot be seen, the hair protrudes from his head, especially on his right side. These facts indicate that the drawing was done in the period roughly between 1624-35, and more probably around the earlier date for reasons soon to be explained.

The reason why the drawing was made is really a matter of speculation. It may even be asked whether the drawing had any purpose beyond the obvious one — namely, to make an informal, intimate record of the sitter. But one fact immediately contradicts this assumption, the costume worn by Olivares. A suit of armor and the sash of command are the stuff of a formal portrait. Furthermore, the military garb is meant to promote the image of Olivares as a field commander (something he never was), a propagandistic aim that presupposes an audience. It is logical to think that the drawing is related to a public image of Olivares by Velázquez. No picture in this format is now known to exist, but there is positive evidence that Velázquez painted a portrait that may have resemble this drawing.

In 1970, Enriqueta Harris published an excerpt from a diary kept by Cassiano dal Pozzo during his visit in 1626 to Madrid, where he went as a member of Cardinal Francesco Barberini's entourage.⁷ In the course of the stay, the Cardinal and Olivares exchanged portraits

⁴ For the portraits of Olivares by Velázquez and others, see A.L. Mayer, *Kleine Velázquez-Studien*, Munich, 1918, pp. 7-36; G. Marañón, *El Conde-Duque de Olivares (La pasión de mandar)*, Madrid, 1936, pp. 61-69, and E. Lafuente Ferrari, 'Velázquez y los retratos del Conde-Duque de Olivares', *Goya*, 37-38 (1960), pp. 64-73.

⁵ E. du Gué Trapier, 'Velázquez: New Data on a Group of Portraits', *Notes Hispanic*, IV (1944), p. 40, interpreted a numerical inscription on the painting in the Hispanic Society of America as the date 1625. However, as Dr. Priscilla Muller of the Hispanic Society has pointed out to me, the ciphers are clearly readable as '462', and thus may be understood as an inventory numeration. Nevertheless, the painting could not have been done

before March 1624, when Olivares renounced membership in the Order of Calatrava and joined the Order of Alcántara, whose green cross he wears in this picture. On stylistic grounds, a date c. 1625 is plausible for reasons stated below.

⁶ The portrait of Olivares in the background on J.B. Maíno's *Surrender of Bahía*, painted in 1634, still shows the fuller beard. In Velázquez's *Equestrian Portrait of Olivares* in the Prado, probably done around 1635, the style of beard has changed.

⁷ E. Harris, 'Cassiano dal Pozzo on Diego Velázquez', *Burlington Magazine*, CXII (1970), pp. 364-73 [reprinted in E. Harris, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez / Complete Studies on Velázquez*, Madrid, 2006, pp. 97-112].



2. *The Count-Duke of Olivares*, black chalk on paper, 193 x 159 mm. Paris, École des Beaux-Arts.



3. Paul Pontius after Peter Paul Rubens, *Allegorical Portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares*, engraving, 61.1 x 44 cm. 1626. San Francisco, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, California Palace of the Legion of Honor.



4. Paul Pontius, *Study for the Allegorical Portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares*, pen and ink on paper, 325 x 225 mm. 1626. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.



5. Peter Paul Rubens, *Study for the Allegorical Portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares*, oil on panel, 63 x 44 cm. 1625 (?). Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts.

VELÁZQUEZ AND ITALY*

2002

For a non-Italian painter of the seventeenth century a trip to Italy was considered desirable if not obligatory. By 1600, Italian artistic culture had acquired unrivaled prestige, which meant that its precepts and practices had to be mastered by any painter aspiring to achieve fame and fortune. The virtues of Italian painting had been proclaimed by the artistic theorists of Italy and validated by princely collectors, who competed with each other to acquire the best works by the most renowned painters. The Italianization of western European painting is so widely recognized as to require no further discussion. However, the parallel phenomenon, what might be called the naturalization of Italian painting in other parts of Europe, is now only beginning to be considered.

As every student of the period knows, the ideas and practices of Italian art were considerably transformed as they spread northward and westward across the subcontinent. Yet this process varied from place to place and even from painter to painter. Indeed, it is only through case-by-case studies that it is possible to understand these processes. None is more fascinating or dramatic than that of Diego Velázquez, whose encounter with the art of Italy is surely one of the most singular in the history of seventeenth-century art.

The subject of Velázquez and Italy seems to grow richer as the years go by. At first glance, this phenomenon is difficult to explain because the number of paintings definitely ascribable to one or the other of his two trips to Italy has remained stable. However, the documentation has been steadily increasing, although virtually all the newly published material concerns the second trip of 1649-50, the so-called mission to Italy, during which

* This essay was originally read at the symposium *L'Europa e l'arte italiana*, held on the occasion of the centennial of the founding of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, September 22-27, 1997, and was published in Max Seidel (ed.), *L'Europa e l'arte italiana*.

Collana del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (Venice, 2000), 307-19. This version [2002] has been slightly revised and the bibliography has been brought up to date to include articles published in connection with the four hundredth anniversary (1999) of Velázquez's birth.

Velázquez sought to purchase objects for the royal collection.¹ (As a matter of fact, for a brief moment there appeared to be evidence of a third trip, which supposedly occurred in 1637, although it has now been proved that the documents in question refer to a homonym of the Spanish painter.²) By contrast, knowledge of the first trip has expanded at a much slower pace. It may seem perverse, then, or at least ill advised, to limit the present discussion to the first sojourn. Yet this is not entirely arbitrary, because it was during the first trip that Velázquez experienced the full impact of Italian, and specifically central Italian, art. By utilizing the Geertzian technique of ‘thick description’, I hope to provide a densely textured account of the encounter between a highly perceptive non-Italian painter with Italian conventions of pictorial representation. Obviously this account cannot be paradigmatic — Velázquez is too unusual an artist — but perhaps it can offer a way of understanding how a painter born and bred within a powerful regional tradition confronted the exemplary art of Italy.

On or about 1 August 1629, Diego Velázquez left Madrid en route to Italy. The motive for the trip, as described by the Parmesan ambassador, Flavio Atti, was to perfect his art.³ By January 1632, he had returned to Madrid, having spent approximately sixteen months making his tour of the principal cities. These relatively short *Wanderjahre* are unusual, and possibly unique, in the history of seventeenth-century art, as was Velázquez’s response to the visual culture of Italy.

In some respects, the events of the trip are known, thanks to the brief account of Francisco Pacheco, the artist’s father-in-law, published in his treatise *Arte de la pintura*.⁴ There is also a certain amount of information to be gleaned from the letters of introduction written by the ambassadors of Parma, Venice, and Tuscany as Velázquez was about to commence his voyage.⁵ Unfortunately, the artist does not seem to have kept a journal or even written to Madrid during his absence, which leaves us in the dark about what interests us most, his

¹ The fundamental article on the 1649-50 trip is E. Harris, ‘La misión de Velázquez en Italia’, *Archivo Español de Arte*, 33 (1960), 109-36 [reprinted in E. Harris, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez / Complete studies on Velázquez*, Madrid, 2006, pp. 45-77]. For recently published information, see the following (listed in chronological order): J. Montagu, ‘Velázquez *Marginalia*: His Slave Juan de Pareja and His Illegitimate Son Antonio’, *Burlington Magazine*, 125 (1983), pp. 683-85; J.L. Colomer, “‘*Dar a Su Magestad algo bueno*’”: Four Letters from Velázquez to Virgilio Malvezzi”, *Burlington Magazine*, 135 (1993), pp. 67-72; E. Goldberg, ‘Diego Velázquez’s Visit to Florence in 1650’, *Paragone*, 45 (1993), pp. 92-96; E. Harris and J.L. Colomer, ‘Two Letters from Camillo Massimi to Diego Velázquez’, *Burlington Magazine*, 136 (1994), pp. 545-48 [reprinted in E. Harris, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez / Complete studies on*

Velázquez, Madrid, 2006, pp. 279-86], and S. Salort, ‘La misión de Velázquez y sus agentes en Roma y Venecia: 1649-1653’, *Archivo Español de Arte*, 72 (1999), pp. 415-68.

² For the hypothesis of the 1637 trip, see J.M. Pita Andrade, ‘Del Buen Retiro a la Torre de la Parada pasando por Italia: El posible viaje de 1636’, in *Velázquez y el arte de su tiempo*, Madrid, 1991, pp. 119-26, and *idem*, ‘Velázquez en Italia’, in *Reflexiones sobre Velázquez*, Madrid, 1992, pp. 58-62. The hypothesis is refuted by F. Marías, ‘Sobre el número de viajes de Velázquez en Italia’, *Archivo Español de Arte*, 65 (1992), pp. 218-21.

³ See note 5.

⁴ F. Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, Seville, 1649; ed. B. Bassegoda i Hugas, Madrid, 1990, pp. 206-9.

⁵ The letters are assembled in *Varia velazqueña*, Madrid, 1960, vol. II, pp. 230-33.



1. *The Tunic of Joseph*, oil on canvas, 213.5 x 284 cm. 1630. Patrimonio Nacional, Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial.

Velázquez left Rome in the autumn, traveling to Naples, the port of embarkation for the journey home. One more encounter with the highborn awaited him, the king's sister Mary of Hungary, then en route to Austria to marry the emperor Ferdinand III. If Velázquez met Jusepe de Ribera, which he almost certainly did, Pacheco fails to mention it.

Velázquez's production during his time in Italy is almost incredibly small — four paintings done in Rome have survived and perhaps one done in Naples, if the *Portrait of Mary of Hungary* (Madrid, Prado) is assigned to this period and not to 1628-29, as has been suggested.⁹ Although the latter is limited in scope and ambition, and thus will be omitted from

⁹ The earlier date is proposed by E. Harris and J.H. Elliott, 'Velázquez and the Queen of Hungary', *Burlington Magazine*, 138 (1976), pp. 24-26 [reprinted in E. Harris, *Estudios completos sobre Velázquez / Complete studies on Velázquez*, Madrid, 2006, pp. 119-25]. The recent attempt to revive the attribution to Velázquez of the so-called *Quarrel at the Spanish Embassy* (Rome, Collezione

Pallavicini) seems misguided. I continue to believe that it was executed by one of the *bamboccianti*. See the entry by S. Salort Pons in the exhibition catalogue *Velázquez a Roma, Velázquez en Roma*, Rome, 1999, pp. 84-85. This exhibition, by the way, is one of the strangest ever devoted to the artist.



2. *The Triumph of Bacchus*, oil on canvas, 165 x 225 cm. 1628-29. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

discussion, the four paintings executed in Rome are milestones in the artist's career. Two of these are history paintings, the so-called *Tunic of Joseph* (fig. 1) and the *Forge of Vulcan* (see fig. on p. 290).

The most efficient way to assess the impact of Italian art on these paintings is to look at another famous painting, the *Triumph of Bacchus* (fig. 2), completed shortly before Velázquez's departure for Italy.¹⁰ The *Triumph of Bacchus* may be considered a triumph of imagination over technique. The invention is unforgettable, as the painter juxtaposes the group of ruddy rustics, flushed with drink, to the marmoreal Bacchus, who turns away from the merry company, as if looking for the cue that will terminate the encounter. However, Velázquez clearly has difficulty with the composition. The group of six peasants is crammed into a space too small to accommodate their bodies, leading to the arbitrary truncation of the four figures at the rear. A notional background, comprised of rolling hills and a patch of sky

¹⁰ The final payment to Velázquez for this work was made on 22 July 1629 at just about the time he was

preparing to leave for Italy. For the document, see *Varia velazqueña*, *op. cit.* (note 5), vol. II, p. 231.

(now turned gray with the discoloring of the smalt) is wedged behind the foreground, almost as an afterthought.

By contrast, the *Tunic of Joseph* is a fully, almost ostentatiously Italianate picture.¹¹ The technical analysis of Carmen Garrido indicates that the execution of the painting preceded the *Forge of Vulcan*, principally because it has a reddish ground that was routinely employed by the artist during his first Madrid period but never used again after the execution of this work.¹² The *Tunic of Joseph* systematically solves the problems of the *Triumph of Bacchus*. The space between the figures, established by a perspective grid, is ample, and no one is cut off at the shoulders or waist. A marked influence of classicizing figure drawing is readily observable in the chiseled, half-naked forms of the two brothers at the left, and gestures and expressions are carefully calculated to communicate the emotional impact of the revelation of Joseph's supposed death. The illumination of the scene is notably more subtle, ranging from the highlights on the left to the transparent shadow that envelops the two figures in the middleground. Velázquez has proved to be a quick study; within a short period of time, he has mastered the canons and conventions of the grand manner of Roman history painting, as well as the subtleties of Venetian *colore*, without surrendering his individuality. While the picture is Italianate, it is difficult to detect the predominant influence of any given Italian painter of the time.

In the *Forge of Vulcan*, Velázquez is no longer merely content to rehearse these lessons.¹³ Although the dramatic composition and the figure style are attributable to Italian sources, the predominant brown tonality and the sharp-eyed realism of the inanimate objects harken back to ingrained practices of Spanish naturalism. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect is the method of elaboration, as revealed in a radiograph.¹⁴ Changes in composition, some as important as the position of Vulcan's head, others as small as the alteration of the contours of the bodies of the Cyclops, are easily seen. Most surprising is the enlargement of the lateral dimensions of the canvas, which were widened by the addition of narrow strips of cloth on either side, probably the result of the desire to 'deepen' the illusion of space. This 'paint-as-you-go' method becomes a standard procedure and is important because it suggests that Velázquez, however much he learned in Rome, was not convinced by the sovereignty of *disegno* in the realm of artistic practice.

¹¹ For the recent bibliography on this painting, see J.L. Colomer, 'Roma 1630: *La Túnica de José* y el estudio de las "pasiones"', *Reales Sitios*, 36 (1999), pp. 39-49, and F. Marías, "'La túnica de José': La historia al margen de lo humano', in *Velázquez*, Madrid, 1999, pp. 277-96, a searching examination of Velázquez's interpretation of the subject and his response to Italian sources for the

painting.

¹² See C. Garrido Pérez, *Velázquez: Técnica y evolución*, Madrid, 1992, pp. 219-33.

¹³ For a recent survey of the main currents of scholarship on this painting, see T. de Antonio, 'La fragua de Vulcano', in *Velázquez*, Madrid, 1999, pp. 25-41.

¹⁴ See Garrido Pérez, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp. 235-45.