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Series editor **Ashok Roy**

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Sebastiano del Piombo, *The Raising of Lazarus*, detail

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Velázquez's *Christ after the Flagellation*: Technique in Context

LARRY KEITH AND DAWSON W. CARR

Velázquez's *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul* (PLATE 1) has always been a difficult picture to place within the narrative of his artistic development – in particular, whether it was produced before, during, or even after his first trip to Italy, which took place in 1629–30. The discussion of the problem is usually framed by several different kinds of evidence, both the more objective criteria of iconography, materials and painting technique, and the more elusive influences provided by the examples of Italian art (whether seen in Madrid or Italy) and Rubens – who arrived in Madrid in 1628 and was instrumental to Velázquez's subsequent Italian journey.

The painting includes a particularly Spanish subject matter and painting materials – specifically, a brightly coloured red ground – strongly associated with Velázquez's activity in Madrid before his departure to Italy. The nature of the paint handling, however, shows dramatic advances such as the assured, classicising body of Christ, and economical, almost Caravaggesque, manipulation of light and dark tones within his flesh. For some scholars, this development can be explained by the example set by Rubens in Madrid, both in his own painting and in his critical responses to the Italian pictures present in the Spanish Royal Collection. But for others, such rapid growth would be inconceivable without the direct experience of Italian art, ancient and modern, in Italy itself.

Placing the picture during or after his first trip to Italy, however, would violate what has become something of an axiom of recent Velázquez scholarship, which has tended to categorise discrete periods of his activity by the grounds he employed. The *terra de sevilla* of his early years in Seville, the red grounds of his first period at court in Madrid, and (after some experimentation) the paler grey grounds of his maturity have become signifiers of rather fixed chronological chapters, and have been used as important evidence for the dating of other pictures within his oeuvre. Allowing for all the possible dates for the *Flagellation* would therefore call for something of a reassessment of this methodological approach, and an open reappraisal of the uses and limitations of the available technical evidence.

It is unquestionably true that the overwhelming majority of works generally attributed to Velázquez follow the association of the use of a particular ground within a specific timeframe of activity, beginning with his first active years in Seville. His earliest works all use the local Seville clay, a greenish-brown ochre (*barro* or *terra de sevilla*), as recommended and described by his father-in-law and teacher, Francesco Pacheco.¹ It is something of an open question as to whether the use of the *terra de sevilla* was the product of a considered artistic choice, or was simply employed as the most easily obtained local material.

Velázquez's early work is generally categorised by its emphatically thick paint handling in keeping with his general tendency to 'fill in' colour onto compositions that were for the most part carefully worked out in advance through the use of precisely drawn preparatory studies.² Colours are mixed directly across the whole tonal range from light to dark, and glazes are more or less restricted to single, often very thick, applications, as for example in the darkest areas of draperies. In general, the specific colour of the ground played little part in either the execution or the final look of the principal areas of the painting beyond increasing the opacity of the generally lighter colours applied over it – as was the case with numerous darker grounds employed through much of Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Nonetheless, Velázquez did occasionally exploit the colour of the ground in parts of the finished painting; not in a systematic way, but for isolated details of varying importance. The shadowed parts of the lower jaw and neck of *Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos* (NG 6264; PLATE 2) are mixed and directly applied thick layers of dark brown paint – yet the shadows within the mouth or just below the eyebrows are created by leaving the brown colour of the ground exposed (PLATE 4).³ The darker flesh paint is at least as thickly applied in the face and neck of the Virgin in the *Immaculate Conception* (NG 6424; PLATE 3), but the original colour of large parts of her cascading hair was provided by little else than the brown ground – just as it provided much of the basic colour of the foreground of the *Saint John*.⁴



PLATE 1 Diego Velázquez, *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul* (NG 1148), c.1628. Oil on canvas, 165.1 × 206.4 cm.



PLATE 2 Diego Velázquez, *Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos* (NG 6264), 1618–19. Oil on canvas, 135.5 × 102.2 cm.



PLATE 4 Diego Velázquez, *Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos* (NG 6264), detail showing exposed and blanching ground colour within the mouth.



PLATE 3 Diego Velázquez, *The Immaculate Conception* (NG 6424), 1618–19. Oil on canvas, 135 × 101.6 cm.



PLATE 5 Caravaggio, *Boy bitten by a Lizard* (NG 6405), 1595–1600. Oil on canvas, 66 × 49.5 cm.

It is instructive to compare this inconsistent use of the ground colour with the techniques evolved some decades earlier by Caravaggio, particularly as so many of Velázquez's Seville paintings have a superficially Caravaggesque appearance, an outward similarity largely provided by the strong lighting effects and relatively humble settings, whether in his religious paintings or genre-like *bodegón* scenes. Caravaggio developed a relatively systematic method of painting flesh which incorporated the brown colour of his priming within the modelling, using it in an ever more economical way to provide the middle values. In the National Gallery Collection this practice can most readily be seen in the *Boy bitten by a Lizard* (NG 6504; PLATE 5). Its warm brown ground (comprising calcite, earth pigments, and a little lead white) was left relatively unexposed to provide the basic half-shadow of shoulder, shadowed cheek, and collarbone; its dark tone allowed lighter colours applied over it to achieve a ready opacity, while the ground colour was also easily darkened with a thin wash of translucent brown-black to make the deepest shadows (PLATE 6). This basic method, employed ever more economically as his career unfolded, was characteristic enough of Caravaggio's painting to have been noticed and commented upon by seventeenth-century critics such as Bellori ('lasciò in mezze tinte l'imprimatura della tela'), and is a fundamental aspect of the rather unappreciated craft of his art.⁵

Such a systematic approach to flesh modelling is not present in the head of the Virgin of the *Immaculate Conception*, or of the *Saint John on Patmos*, or of the maid of the *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (NG 1375). Velázquez probably never saw a painting by Caravaggio in Seville – though he may have seen copies and works by followers – and it is not surprising therefore that the Spaniard's techniques seem to have evolved in relative isolation, although there may be some background influence in terms of general lighting effects or naturalistic appearance.⁶ It was not until he established himself in Madrid that he painted his most technically Caravaggesque picture – *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul* – though his use of these techniques is characteristically considered, selective, and elusive in origin.

Velázquez was able to secure a position at court in Madrid by 1623, largely on the basis of his expertise in portraiture – a skill he developed in Seville through the making of carefully drawn studies, from life. These were the basis of genre and religious pictures whose protagonists are remarkably lifelike and highly individualised. Paintings such as the full-length portraits of Philip IV or Count Olivares made an immediate impact at court, while existing replica versions,



PLATE 6 *The Boy bitten by a Lizard*, detail showing Caravaggio's systematic use of the brown ground colour within the modelling of the flesh tones.

presumably made with studio assistance, already suggest something of the scale of his activity from the earliest phases of his long court career.⁷

These pictures also share a new common technical feature, one which has been found on every picture thought to have been painted by Velázquez and his workshop between 1624 and 1628 which has been thoroughly examined: the use of a red ground, the main component of which invariably consists of the local red earth (*tierra de Esquivias*) combined with smaller quantities of other pigments including some carbon black.⁸ The choice of this ground was presumably driven by the ready availability of the main material; it was widely used by other painters at court, and Velázquez seems to have adopted it more or less immediately.⁹ It also seems to have been used almost in spite of its strong colour, as Velázquez continued to thoroughly cover the ground with thickly applied paint, in both the lighter and the darker tones. The red ground is rarely evident to the observer, apart from the occasional uncovered streak that sometimes occurs along contours formed by abutting colours, or in red fabrics such as the table cloth of the two full-length versions of *Don Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares* (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, and Brazil, Museu de Arte de São Paulo; PLATES 7 and 8), where the ground provides much

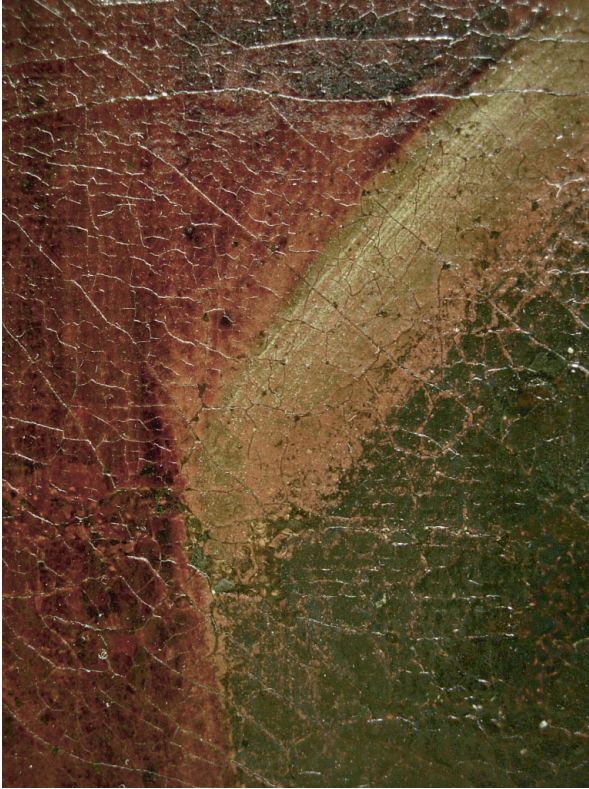


PLATE 7 Diego Velázquez, *Don Gaspar de Guzman, Count-Duke of Olivares*, detail from PLATE 8 showing use of red ground in well-preserved red tablecloth fabric.

of the depth and intensity of the colour of the material.¹⁰

Christ after the Flagellation uses this same red ground, although it is, as one would expect, almost entirely covered by subsequently applied paint. Its red colour is now only apparent in areas where the picture has been abraded along the tops of the canvas weave, or where colour has been applied imprecisely along a contour, such as the (proper) left sleeve of the guardian angel (PLATE 9). The ground's physical composition, largely of a natural red ochre, is entirely in keeping with other pictures from the mid and late 1620s, as has been shown by comparisons with a sample from *The Feast of Bacchus* (*Los Borrachos*; PLATE 10), which was paid for in 1629 (see PLATES 11 and 12).

While the *Flagellation* shares the same priming as *Los Borrachos*, it also shares a much more important feature, one of prime critical concern for the young artist in the late 1620s – the expansion of his subject matter beyond portraiture into the areas of ambitious, multi-figural history or narrative compositions. Intellectual circles within courts throughout Europe favoured history painting in the hierarchy of subject matter; the mimetic demands of portraiture allowed no scope for portraying the complex figural groupings and psychological



PLATE 8 Diego Velázquez, *Don Gaspar de Guzman, Count-Duke of Olivares*, 1624. Oil on canvas, 203 × 106 cm. São Paulo, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

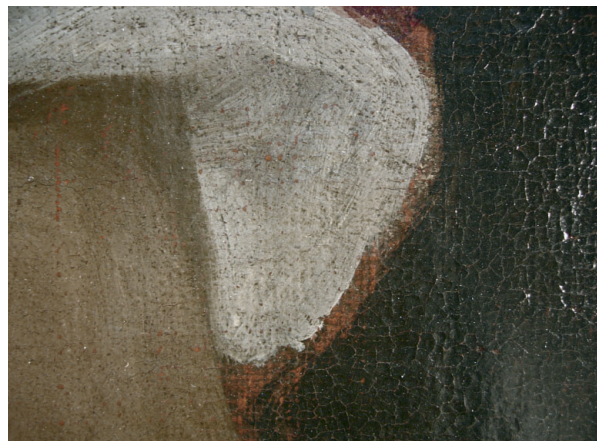


PLATE 9 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail showing the red ground left uncovered along the contour between the guardian angel's sleeve and background.



PLATE 10 Diego Velázquez, *The Feast of Bacchus (Los Borrachos)*, c.1629. Oil on canvas, 165.5 × 227.5 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

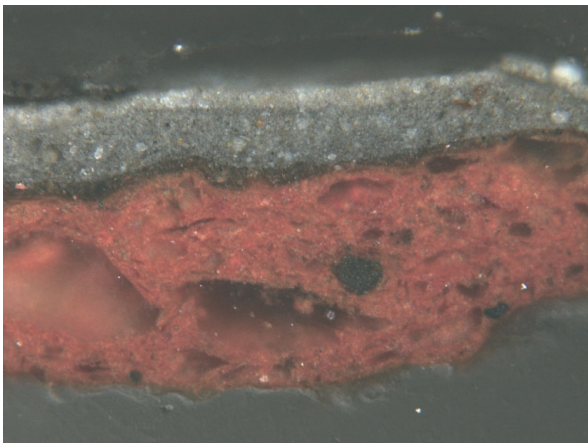


PLATE 11 Paint cross-section from *Christ after Flagellation* (NG 1148), showing the thick red-brown ground on canvas, closely comparable in colour and constitution (by analysis) to that used by Velázquez for *Los Borrachos* (see PLATES 10 and 12). The grey paint layers above are from the foreground of the picture. Original magnification 260×; actual magnification 200×.

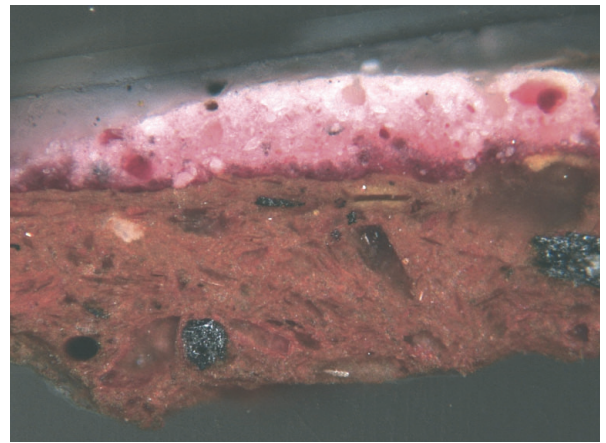


PLATE 12 Paint cross-section from *Los Borrachos* (PLATE 10) showing thick red-brown ground on the canvas for comparison with the National Gallery *Christ after Flagellation* (PLATE 11). The pinkish-red paint above, containing red lake pigment, is from Bacchus' drapery at the right of the picture. Original magnification 260×; actual magnification 200×. Sample courtesy of Dr Carmen Garrido.



PLATE 13 Diego Velázquez, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1629. Oil on canvas, 203 × 125 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



PLATE 14 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail showing exposed ground along the contours of the column base, suggesting a charcoal preliminary drawing later brushed away.

interactions necessary for a convincing depiction of narrative (at least until *Las Meninas* some forty years later), and was accordingly seen as demanding more from craft than intellect. In the court of Philip IV this view was most strongly expounded by Vicente Carducho, a long-established court painter whose Tuscan heritage inclined him further to theorising about the primacy of historical painting over the efforts of his talented younger colleague.

Velázquez dedicated himself to history painting as early as 1627, when he entered into a contest with other court painters to paint a picture of the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain by Philip III.¹² Although he won the competition, the painting was subsequently destroyed, leaving *Los Borrachos* as the earliest surviving example of a multi-figured composition from his time at court. As such it is interesting to consider its arrangement of figures compared to both late Seville compositions like the *Adoration of the Magi* (PLATE 13) and to the *Flagellation* itself. Whereas the depiction of space suggested by the overlapping figures of the *Adoration* was also somewhat negated by their odd, uncomfortable vertical stacking, those of *Los Borrachos* inhabit the admittedly shallow horizontal composition in a more believable manner. Velázquez's old habit of combining figures and still-life elements, each one carefully studied and planned in isolation, does lead to some awkwardnesses – the reclining figure at the left, though beautifully conceived and drawn, is not convincingly placed within the landscape, and the dark contour around the central terracotta ewer effectively collapses the recession of the space immediately around it. However, the *repoussoir* effect of the figure at the near left¹³ does fulfil its space-creating function, and the skilful foreshortening used in Bacchus' complex pose, accentuated by the unifying light which rakes across the scene, all represent significant advances in Velázquez's ability to create more ambitious compositions.

Christ after the Flagellation is organised in a much more open and pared-down manner, although it has much in common with *Los Borrachos* in its layout. It too spreads across the picture plane, and relies heavily on the arrangement and foreshortening of its figures to suggest the space they inhabit. Its composition is also set off by a dark *repoussoir* element at the lower left – this time the bundle of Christ's discarded garments. The column, the orthogonal-creating scourge, and the ambiguously located horizon line, however, are clearly functional as spatial markers within the minimalist setting, and the general effect is much more organised, controlled and effective.

The X-radiograph suggests a high degree of compositional planning, in accordance with Velázquez's



PLATE 15 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail showing brushed underdrawing of the eye and nostril.

normal practice of preliminary drawn studies, though this time put to a more unified purpose. He may well have used chalk or charcoal to sketch in some of the composition, particularly the architecture of the column; the paint of the elements of the base seems to run up to the various straight edges of their contours without crossing them, yet there is no sign of any drawn line, just an uncovered streak of red ground; a ruled line in charcoal would have allowed him to paint the element correctly, yet later could have been rubbed away (PLATE 14). The figures, however, were sketched in with a brown-black paint which normally would be barely discernible under his typically thick paint application;¹⁴ here, however, the thinness of the painting of the shadowed parts of Christ's face has allowed much of the drawing to be seen with the naked eye, given enough light. The drawing can be seen describing Christ's proper left eye, the nose, mouth, chin and Adam's apple; it is fluid and assured, and reminds us of Velázquez's tremendous facility in draughtsmanship (PLATE 15).¹⁵

If the drawing is itself extraordinary, the reason it remains visible is also noteworthy, for the head of Christ has been painted in a manner that was very unusual, if not unique, in Velázquez's work. Since the colour of

the ground itself was too strongly red to provide any plausible half-tones or shadows for the flesh of Christ's face, it was modified with a preliminary application of a very thin brown paint layer, laid just over the drawing and providing a kind of localised brown priming, a sort of dead-colour that Velázquez could exploit in an almost Caravaggesque technique. Opaque lighter tones were built up over the ground at least up to the edges of the initial brown application, leaving the darker paint to provide the mid-tones and shadows. The technique is all the more remarkable for the fact that it has not been employed in the rest of the painting; the body of Christ, the shadowed parts of the faces of both the Christian Soul and its guardian angel are painted with more opaque, white-containing grey-brown mixtures broadly similar to the type seen in the earlier Seville paintings, a difference which can readily be seen in X-ray details (PLATES 16 and 17 and FIGS 2 and 3). Most of the drapery painting throughout the picture is painted in the older, thick and almost deliberate manner, although the picture still manages to incorporate at least three significant pentimenti – the positioning of the loincloth, the tilt of the Christian Soul's head, and the placement of the bundled garments at the lower left.



PLATE 16 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail of the Christian Soul. The shadows are glazed down over relatively opaque underpaint, which is particularly evident in the jaw.



FIG. 2 *Christ after the Flagellation*, X-ray detail of the Christian Soul.



PLATE 17 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail of Christ's head showing the thinner overall build-up of flesh highlights, and the relatively greater use of darker underpainting.

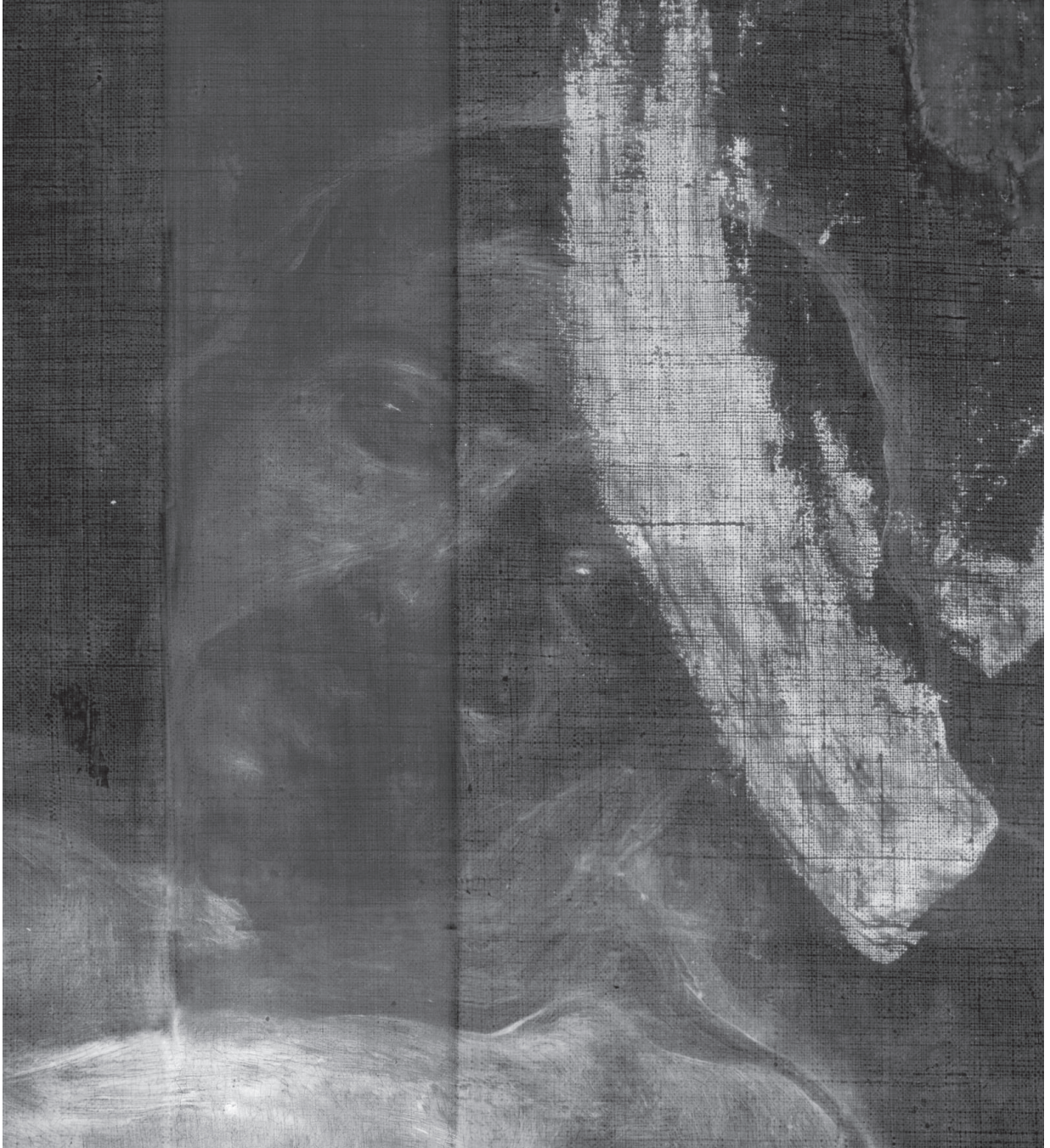


FIG. 3 *Christ after the Flagellation*, X-ray detail. The broad light upward stroke at the right of the image is not part of Velázquez's paint application, but is material which has been subsequently added to the reverse of the canvas during an old conservation treatment.



PLATE 18 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail showing Christ's blurred hands.

It is tantalising to speculate that the painting of that head is a deliberate, considered attempt to come to a more informed understanding of Caravaggesque technique, as it is nearer to his method than the more superficial similarities sometimes present in Velázquez's earlier work. He never truly mimicked the technique of other painters and in this work he does not closely follow Caravaggio's example nor that of any of his close followers, including Ribera.¹⁶ However, it is nonetheless possible that Velázquez's exposure to some tenebrist painting, or even to the description of Caravaggio's technique, might have inspired him to seek his own method of using a darker underlayer to increase his ability to define the play of light across flesh.

One of the main factors that distinguishes this painting from those that had come before is the great variety of its brushwork. While Velázquez had explored the possibilities of differences in paint handling throughout his career, here the range is increased far beyond that seen in *Los Borrachos*. Alongside the thick Seville-like loading of the white paint of Christ's loincloth are passages that are much freer and less resolved, such as the open brushwork of the instruments of the Passion and the deliberately blurred depiction of Christ's bound hands, which contrast with the sharp focus of the head (PLATE 18). The more detailed handling

of the head does not solely reflect the artist's respect for his subject. In the whole composition he seems to be exploring the relationship between the quality of his brushwork and the principal visual focus. This aspect of his technique found ultimate expression in works like *The Rokeby Venus* (NG 2057), in which the goddess's form becomes less defined towards her feet. In *Christ after the Flagellation*, Velázquez experiments with relative definition of form by clearly differentiating the handling of the head, hands and body. He uses this not only to define the form relative to its position in space and the light falling upon it, but also to achieve a subtle focus on the head of Christ.

Both *Los Borrachos* and *Christ after the Flagellation* demonstrate a relatively more assured command of anatomy, and the confident classicising idealisation of Christ's torso (PLATE 19) is nascent in the mythological figures. However, the leap between the two paintings seems so great that it is tempting to find the cause in Velázquez's direct experience of recent Central Italian art. The *Flagellation* would thus represent the first example in Velázquez's work of the transformative powers of his Italian experience. Indeed, in the recent Velázquez exhibitions at the National Gallery and the Prado, the painting seemed far closer to the works made in Italy than it did to *Los Borrachos*.¹⁷ A key component



PLATE 19 *Christ after the Flagellation*, detail of Christ's classicising torso.



PLATE 20 Juan de Roelas, *Christ after the Flagellation contemplated by the Christian Soul*, 1616. Oil on canvas, 121 × 100.5 cm. Madrid, Real Monasterio de la Encarnación (Patrimonio Nacional).

of the argument for dating the *Flagellation* to early in his Italian sojourn is the document of payment for *Los Borrachos* in 1629, just before his departure.¹⁸ It has been assumed that *Los Borrachos* was made in the period immediately before, which would leave too little time for the development between it and *the Flagellation* to occur in Madrid. However, the Crown was notorious for being late in making payments, so it is possible that *Los Borrachos* could have been made somewhat earlier.¹⁹ An earlier date would also better suit the particular naturalism and handling of the gallery of inebriated faces, which has greater affinity with Velázquez's Sevillian works than with the works that come later.

If the *Flagellation* was made in Italy, one would have to assume that it was commissioned before his sojourn because the subject is virtually unknown outside Spain. While images of Christ at the Column and of Guardian Angels existed independently in Italy, their conflation occurs almost exclusively in Andalusian art of the mid-seventeenth century.²⁰ Velázquez's subject was surely suggested by a painting made in 1616 by the Sevillian painter-priest Juan de Roelas for Philip III, who presented it to the Convento de la Encarnación (PLATE 20). It is one of the earliest combinations of the flagellated Christ with a Guardian Angel in Spanish art, and Roelas's source is not fully understood. He might have seen fifteenth-century German prints of the subject, but it seems equally possible that he



PLATE 21 Diego Velázquez, *El Infante Don Carlos*, c.1628–9. Oil on canvas, 210.5 × 126.5 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

‘invented’ it in response to contemporary devotional culture and perhaps the need to instruct novices at the Encarnación.²¹ Although the literature of devotion does not provide a specific source for this representation, meditation on the Passion and the cult of Guardian Angels were popular in Catholic Reformation Spain. Roelas's painting provided clear evidence as to its intent because it bore an inscription that read: ‘Alma duélete de mi, puesto que tú me pusiste así’ (‘O Soul, take pity on me for you have reduced me to this state’), which potently expresses that the image should stir compassion and sorrow for sin.²²

We know nothing about the history of *Christ after the Flagellation* before it was bought in Madrid in 1858 by John Savile Lumley from a ‘poor old artist’.²³ However, the size and content imply that it was made for a small chapel, perhaps for a conventual setting, where it could have served for personal devotion and the teaching of novices. Roelas's painting may have been made principally for didactic purposes because it is much smaller. One can imagine the effect of

Velázquez's painting, with its nearly lifesize figures in a small, dark chapel. Presumably inspired by the different levels of reality posed by the subject, Velázquez endowed his scene with a sense of actuality to heighten viewer involvement and thus fulfil the objective of the allegory: bringing the individual soul to the appropriate response before the suffering Christ.

To what extent is Velázquez's increasingly sophisticated technique simply explainable by the responses of a growing, prodigious talent to the treasures within the Spanish Royal Collection? The figure of Rubens is often invoked in this context, as he seems to have befriended Velázquez during an extended diplomatic visit he made to Madrid in 1628. Both artists clearly shared a deep and lifelong appreciation for Venetian painting, and the example of Rubens's energetic and free copying of Titians from the Royal Collection, some examples of which remain in the Prado, must have made an impression on Velázquez. Yet there is no obvious stylistic relationship between the two artists – the impact of Rubens's brushwork or draughtsmanship on Velázquez is negligible – and the nature of their artistic relationship remains fundamentally elusive, apart from certain broad similarities in approach. The eclectically sourced (almost literally) assembled way of creating images that Velázquez had learned from Pacheco had a much more accomplished expression in Rubens's manner of absorbing the achievements of an enormous range of sculpture and painting, ancient and modern, and still transforming them into something that was wholly his own.²⁴ It was an approach that Velázquez had already taken before he met Rubens, however, and one he used for his own ends – particularly after his travels in Italy.

With a talent as prodigious as Velázquez's, the development between *Los Borrachos* and *Christ after the Flagellation* could have resulted from the simple three-figure cast and the artist's understanding that, for this allegory, his greatest tool would be his ability to record objective reality. It seems completely plausible that in the *Flagellation* he posed the figures and recorded them as he had always done, only here the simplicity of the composition led him to realise that less is more in creating a sense of space. The picture's space is actually not much more sophisticated than that found in portraits, such as *El Infante Don Carlos* (PLATE 21), where space is created principally by the figure and a simple line marking the intersection of the floor with the wall behind.

Velázquez's use of the red ground is also in keeping with the idea that all the ingredients necessary for the developments seen in the *Flagellation* were already present in Madrid. While there can be no absolute

scientific 'fingerprinting' of the exact source of the earth pigments used, their relative amounts and characteristic trace elements are distinctive enough to make it most likely that the ground of the *Flagellation* shares a common source with the pictures known to have been produced in Madrid. It is very difficult to imagine that Velázquez would have brought supplies of the Madrid red ground with him to Italy; it was not itself a precious material, and more important, he never made any significant use of its specific colour in any of the paintings he produced there. The various earth pigments available to him in Italy would have been among the least expensive and most readily available colours anywhere he would have travelled, and he certainly began his documented activity in Italy with a canvas and ground locally sourced: the coarse open weave canvas and brown ground of *Joseph's Bloody Coat* (PLATE 22).

His subsequent adoption of a pale grey ground in *Apollo at the Forge of Vulcan* (PLATE 23), a ground he would use with little variation for the rest of his career, has been extensively studied. The cooler tonality and lighter value of the grey ground allowed a much wider tonal range, particularly as his painting technique contained more and more passages of dilute application. Such a ground could be exploited for its inherent colour or made warmer with local initial 'washes' of translucent brown colours, much like a washed drawing writ large.²⁵ Velázquez had finally arrived at a ground designed for his artistic intent, rather than making do with the local material.

The localised manipulation of the ground within the *Flagellation* becomes very significant in the context of his evolving understanding of its potential use. The thin brown 'dead-colour' used in the construction of Christ's head was evidently considered successful enough to attempt painting an entire picture on such a hue, as was done in *Joseph's Bloody Coat* (PLATE 22), where its colour was used extensively for the mid-tones of flesh painting, if not so systematically as was done by Caravaggio. The subsequent shift to grey is the logical extension of this practice; its cooler colour could be easily modified with a warm glaze, allowing him to locally exploit the use of brown underlayers within an overall tonality that was cooler and more luminous.²⁶

If the closer examination of the evolution of Velázquez's grounds gives further weight to the generally accepted idea that the *Flagellation* was painted between *Los Borrachos* and *Joseph's Bloody Coat*, its red colour suggests that the date of its execution should be placed before his departure from Madrid. The inherent artistic limitations of the red ground must have become problematic to Velázquez while he was still in Madrid;



PLATE 22 Diego Velázquez, *Joseph's Bloody Coat brought to Jacob*, 1629–30. Oil on canvas, 213.5 × 284 cm. Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Patrimonio Nacional).



PLATE 23 Diego Velázquez, *Apollo at the Forge of Vulcan*, c.1630. Oil on canvas, 223 × 290 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



PLATE 24 *Joseph's Bloody Coat brought to Jacob*, detail showing use of brown ground in flesh painting of leg.



PLATE 25 Rubens after Titian, *Rape of Europa*, 1628–9. Oil on canvas, 181 × 200 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



PLATE 26 Rubens, *Rape of Europa*, detail of PLATE 25, showing his use of the grey ground. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

interestingly enough, he might have first become aware of the possibilities offered by a pale grey ground from Rubens's considered use of it in his copy of Titian's *Rape of Europa* (PLATES 25 and 26),²⁷ which is still in the Prado. The *Flagellation*'s red ground provides only one part of the argument in favour of it being painted in Madrid, of course – albeit a relatively objective one. It would be methodologically problematic to suggest a dating solely on this basis, as any artist's choices and growth are unlikely to be so absolutely and rigidly divisible into fixed chapters, and the question will probably never be considered proven without the discovery of new documentary evidence.²⁸ Luckily, in this case the technical evidence combines happily enough with other interpretive approaches based on considerations of its iconography, composition, and paint handling.²⁹ The suggestion that the picture was painted during his first period in Madrid, sometime just before his departure in 1629, can be supported by any of these methods; that the different ways of thinking about the problem tend to reinforce one another only strengthens that argument.

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Notes

- 1 Samples analysed by the National Gallery Scientific Department indicate that the material is essentially iron oxide in composition, with significant calcium carbonate and silicon inclusions bound in linseed oil. See F. Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura, su antigüedad y grandezas*, Seville 1649, Book III, chaps 1–3 and 5–8, in *Artists' Techniques in Golden Age Spain: Six Treatises in Translation*, ed. and trans. Z. Veliz, Cambridge 1986, pp. 68–9, for his description, and C. Garrido Pérez, *Velázquez: técnica y evolución*, Madrid 1992, pp. 15 and 67–87; J. Brown and C. Garrido, *Velázquez: The Technique of Genius*, New Haven and London 1998, p. 25; C. Hale, 'Dating Velázquez's "The Supper at Emmaus"', pp. 67–78, and G. McKim-Smith, I. Fielder, R. MacBeth, R. Newman and F. Zuccari, 'Velázquez: Painting from Life', both in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 40, 2005, pp. 79–92, and Richard Newman, 'Preparaciones' in McKim-Smith and Newman, *Velázquez en el Prado: Ciencia e historia del arte*, Madrid 1993, pp. 129–38, for other similar examples.
- 2 L. Keith, 'Velázquez's Painting Technique' in D. Carr et al., *Velázquez*, exh. cat., The National Gallery, London 2006, pp. 71–2, Pacheco 1649 (cited in note 1) p. 35; F. Pacheco, *El arte de la pintura*, Seville 1649, lib.I, chap. VIII, trans. E.

- Harris in E. Harris, *Velázquez*, London 1982 pp. 194–5, and Z. Veliz, 'Velázquez's early technique' in *Velázquez in Seville*, exh. cat., The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh 1996, p. 80, fig. 9.4; the latter, *Saint John on Patmos* (Uffizi, Florence) is suggested as an example of such a compositional study drawing by Pacheco.
- 3 These areas of exposed ground are now blanched in appearance, although they would have had a much darker value. See Keith 2006 (cited in note 2), p. 74.
 - 4 An indication of the original colour of the now blanched paint is given by Velázquez's own revision in the foreground of the *Saint John*, where he touched out his initial brush-wiping marks with ground-coloured paint, the colour of which has remained unchanged. See Keith 2006 (cited in note 2), p. 74.
 - 5 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, et architetti moderni*, Rome 1672, p. 209.
 - 6 See D. Davies, 'Velázquez's Bodegones' in Edinburgh 1996 (cited in note 2), pp. 53–7.
 - 7 For more on the context of painting at court, see J. Brown and J.H. Elliot, *A Palace for a King. The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, revised and expanded edn, New Haven and London 2003.
 - 8 Garrido Pérez 1992, pp. 113–95; Brown and Garrido 1998 (both cited in note 1), p. 30.
 - 9 The switch to the red ground can be followed in two surviving versions of the portrait of *Don Luis de Góngora y Argote*. The principal version, which is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, dates from Velázquez's first trip to Madrid in 1622, and was painted on the typical greenish-brown earth ground typical of his Seville paintings. Measuring approximately 50.2 x 40.6 cm, the canvas is small enough for him to have brought it with him to Madrid for use during his first, unsuccessful attempt to secure a position at court. However, a copy of the picture which was made (with studio assistance) in Madrid soon after achieving his position as *pintor del rey* adopts the red ground. See Garrido Pérez 1992 (cited in note 1), pp. 145–9; McKim et al. (cited in note 1), pp. 86–7 and Appendix, p. 91, and Carr et al. 2006 (cited in note 2), pp. 144–5.
 - 10 The darker value and relative stability of the inorganic red pigments of the ground, which act as underpainting of such tablecloths, etc, has left the colour much better preserved than in broadly similar passages in later paintings such as *Philip IV in Brown and Silver* (NG 1129), where the colour of the tablecloth is created principally by the red lake glazes applied over the grey ground – glazes which have faded badly. See Garrido Pérez 1992 (cited in note 1) pp. 156–65; Carr et al. 2006 (cited in note 2), pp. 164–6, 172–5, and Keith 2006 (cited in note 2), pp. 79–80.
 - 11 Carmen Garrido Pérez at the Museo del Prado was the first to publish detailed analyses of red grounds from this period of Velázquez's career; see numerous examples in Garrido Pérez 1992 (cited in note 1), pp. 113–95. She very kindly supplied samples of red ground from *Los Borrachos* to compare analytically, by EDX, with samples from *Christ after the Flagellation*. The elemental analyses: Fe (s); Ca (s); Si (m); Al (m-w); K (w); Ti (w) show a closely similar distribution of elements and spectral peak heights recorded for similar quantities of samples of calcite, aluminosilicate particles, silica, and some very fine needle-like crystallites containing titanium, possible titanium oxide, or ilmenite. It is interesting that these red grounds contain carbon black pigment, since this must be a deliberate addition, although its role in determining the influence of the colour of the ground is less certain since, as discussed, the surface of the ground is generally completely concealed beneath opaque layers of paint.
 - 12 For more on the context of painting and painters at court in the 1620s, including Carducho, Cajés, and Nardi, see *Paintings for the Planet King: Philip IV and the Buen Retiro Palace*, exh. cat., ed. Andrés Úbeda de los Cobos, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid 2005, pp. 45–6.
 - 13 Brown and Garrido 1998 (cited in note 1), pp. 34–6, propose that this figure was worked into the painting late in the painting process; however, the X-radiograph suggests that the other principal elements of the composition were painted around a reserve held for that figure, implying that it was part of the earliest planning of the composition.
 - 14 This 'drawing paint' is not revealed with infrared or X-radiographic techniques because of its lack of contrast with the relatively dark ground colour and its relatively low atomic density respectively.
 - 15 This sort of initial sketching is best appreciated in unfinished sections of such works as the *Portrait of a Young Man* of about 1625–9 in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, or the *Sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés*, 1635–6, in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.
 - 16 Archival research has suggested that Caravaggio's *Salome receiving the Head of John the Baptist*, now in the Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid, which had previously been thought to have entered the Spanish Royal Collection in the 1650s, may in fact be described in a 1636 inventory of pictures in the Alcazar, which raises the chance of it being there some years before. But, however tantalising the possibility, there is no obvious demonstrable reference to the painting in any works of Velázquez, and while the *Salome* is described in the earlier inventories, the first recorded attribution to Caravaggio himself dates from 1666. See *Canavaggio: The Final Years*, exh. cat., The National Gallery, London 2005, pp. 131–2.
 - 17 Carr et al. 2006 (cited in note 2), pp. 148–51, cat. 16, and Javier Portús et al., *Velázquez's Fables: Mythology and Sacred History in the Golden Age*, exh. cat., Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid 2007, pp. 180–2, 315–16, cat. 17.
 - 18 *Corpus Velazqueño: Documentos y Textos*, Madrid 2000, vol. 1, p. 76, no. 67.
 - 19 Although the situation was somewhat different, the paintings made by Velázquez in Rome (*Joseph's Bloody Coat*, now in El Escorial and *Apollo at the Forge of Vulcan*, now in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid) were purchased only in 1634, three years after his return from Italy. See *Corpus Velazqueño* (cited in note 18), vol. 1, p. 107, no. 108.
 - 20 On the subject, see J.F. Moffitt, 'The Meaning of "Christ After the Flagellation" in Siglo de Oro Sevillian Painting', *Wallraf-Richartz Jahrbuch*, vol. 53, 1992, pp. 139–54.
 - 21 E. Valdivieso and J.M. Serrera, *Historia de la pintura española. Escuela sevillana, primer tercio del siglo XVII*, Madrid 1985, p. 158, no. 83, fig. 97.
 - 22 *Ibid.*, p. 158.
 - 23 N. Glendinning, 'Nineteenth-century British envoys in Spain and the taste for Spanish art in England', *Burlington Magazine*, 131, 1989, pp. 123, 126 (Appendix II D).
 - 24 See A. Palomino, *El Museo Pictórico Escala Óptica*, Madrid 1715–24, vol. 3, *El Parnaso Español Pintoresco Lareado* (1724), trans. E. Harris in E. Harris, *Velázquez*, London 1982, p. 201, and A. Vergara, 'Velázquez and the North' in *The Cambridge Companion to Velázquez*, ed. S.L. Stratton-Pruitt, Cambridge 2002, pp. 62–7. Rubens's Titian copies have an 'editorial' streak; his copy of the *Rape of Europa* has a strongly coloured grey ground, while his version of the *Temptation of Adam* includes a brightly coloured red parrot not found in the original (both copies are now in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid).
 - 25 This is quite visible in the unfinished section of the *Sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés*; see Keith 2006 (cited in note 2), pp. 78–9.
 - 26 A brown ground cannot so easily be made into a light grey from a simple optical point of view; the scumble is less easy to control, and the transitions more abrupt, whereas a light grey ground is much more easily glazed down with a transparent brown.
 - 27 Velázquez's *Sibyl*, now in the Prado, raises very interesting questions regarding the process and timing of his adoption of the grey ground. The picture has a red ground common to the Madrid paintings of the 1620s, but has been given a second pale grey 'priming', but only under background and flesh tones (roughly two-thirds of the area of the picture) – precisely the areas where its luminous properties could be most advantageously exploited. The red ground remained as a basis for the warmer tones of the drapery over the torso. The picture has been variously dated between 1630 and 1632. See Garrido Pérez 1992 (cited in note 1), pp. 196–203.
 - 28 The provenance of the *Flagellation* before 1858 remains unknown; see Neil McLaren, *National Gallery Catalogues: The Spanish School*, London 1970, pp. 119–21, and Carr et al. 2006 (cited in note 17), pp. 148–50.
 - 29 This is unlike the apparent situation of the *Kitchen Scene with Christ at Emmaus* of about 1616 in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, where technical evidence and critical tradition appear somewhat contradictory; to the naked eye the picture appears to have a very red ground unlike all the other examined Seville works, yet the painting has a very strong critical tradition of unquestioned attribution.