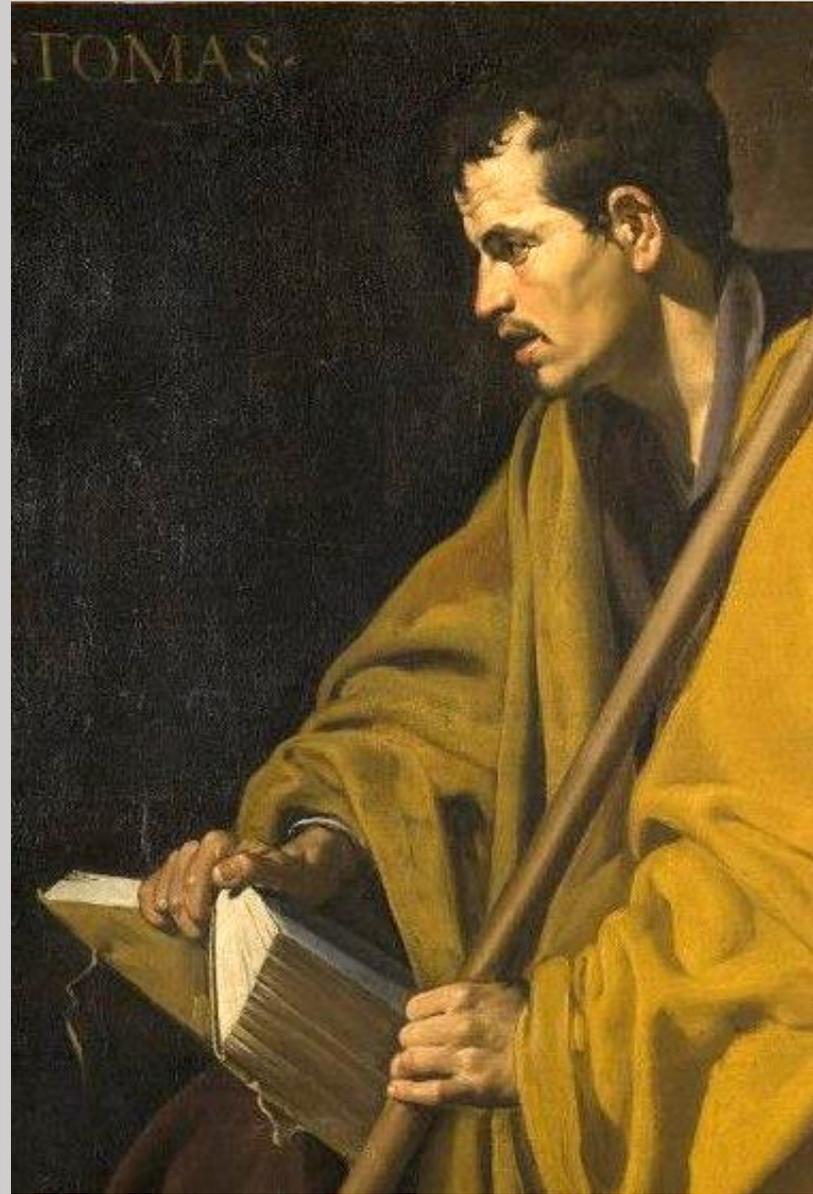


AN APOSTLE BY LUIS TRISTAN:
RELATIONSHIP WITH VELAZQUEZ'S SAINT
THOMAS, EL GRECO, RIBERA AND THE NEW
ITALIAN NATURALISTIC CURRENTS.



CARLOS HERRERO STARKIE



Fig. 1 Luis Tristan, *Saint Mathews?*, 1613. Private collection.

AN APOSTLE BY LUIS TRISTAN: RELATIONSHIP WITH VELAZQUEZ'S SAINT THOMAS, EL GRECO, RIBERA AND THE NEW ITALIAN NATURALISTIC CURRENTS.

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This essay was written in May 2014 and extended in September 2021 on the occasion of the exhibition "Sur las traces du Saint Thomas de Velazquez", Musée des Beaux Arts d'Orléans.

The work we are studying (Fig. 1) represents an apostle in all his splendour and monumentality, whose iconographic identification is doubtful since the only attribute appearing is the halberd which is common to various apostles. Saint Matthews, creator of the first Gospel and Saint Jude Thaddeus, also represented by El Greco with a halberd, are the most probable; Saint Matthias is less probable due to having been martyred with an axe¹; The painter certainly did not wish to centre his attention on an individualized identification of the saint, but rather on his general symbology as apostle: the halberd with regard to his martyrdom as a form of death, the heavy tunic, with imposing folds, referring to his mighty task of spreading the Gospel continuously for the Church and the strong expression on his face in allusion to his tenacious character and indomitable conviction needed to accomplish his mission.

This painting can be attributed to the best work of Luis Tristan, and due to its quality may be considered a masterpiece carried out just on his return from his journey to Italy, in about 1613 when his spirit was still teeming excitedly with the ideas gathered in El Greco's workshop and his contact with the modern Roman naturalistic currents shared with the young Jose de Ribera². We are, in fact, facing a picture which surpasses by a long way the historical credit as a painter which Luis Tristan has enjoyed up to now and can raise him, in this case, to the level of the great masters, to the point of considering him the vertex of various currents to some extent antagonistic, but which, nevertheless, in this work combine exceedingly well. These currents run from El Greco to the new Italian naturalistic currents, passing by the Caravaggism of the young Ribera and culminating in the Sevillian Velazquez. In this sense, the work deserves a detailed study of its intrinsic qualities which surprises us for not showing errors in its execution, an uncommon question even in the most prestigious works.

True to our consideration of Tristan as a great draughtsman, the work displays a drawing which is exact and correct and which follows to a great extent that of El Greco, above all in the shaping and movement of the robe whose folds follow a similar design as those of the Cretan Master, but which also receive the influence of the Escorialense masters and late Roman Michaelangelesque artists. In this respect, the drawing is mannerist in the sense that the folds are not at all naturalistic, but rather respond to a symbolic and artistic intention; the hands are rather out of proportion, above all in relation to the head; the right hand is powerful^(Fig. 2), sculptural and reminds us of the hands of the Moses^(Fig. 3) of Michelangelo; the left hand^(Fig. 4) is supremely beautiful, elongated and fine, reminding us of the apostle Saint Andrew's right hand^(Fig. 5) by El Greco (El Greco Museum, Toledo) and of those painted by Titian in his portrait of Cardinal Paul III^(Fig. 6) (Museum of Capodimonte, Naples)³; the head is surprisingly small, due to the elongation of the figure, so characteristic of the mannerists and of their Master El Greco, but tremendously powerful.



Fig 2 Luis Tristan, *Saint Mathews?* 1613, detail, hand. Private collection



Fig 3 Michelangelo, *Moses* detail, hand, 1513-1515, Church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.



Fig 4 Luis Tristan, *Saint Mathews?*, detail, hand. Private collection.



Fig 5 El Greco, *Saint Andrew*, detail, hand, 1610, El Greco Museum, Toledo.



Fig 6 Titian, *portrait of Cardinal Paulus III*, detail, hand, 1543, Capodimonte Museum, Naples.

The composition is perhaps one of the most valuable elements of the picture; its significance is due to its influence on Velazquez and specially on his "Saint Thomas" (Museum of Beaux Arts d ' Orléans) ⁴. A diagonal line, formed by the halberd, runs obliquely across the picture, linking up its fundamental parts: the head of the apostle in profile showing his ear, sign of authenticity in Tristan^(Fig. 7), has an irate expression, reminding us of Michelangelo's prophets^(Fig. 8) in the Sistine Chapel; his tremendously powerful right hand, which symbolizes his mighty evangelizing strength and his extremely elongated left hand which merely rests on the lance, evokes moderation, prudence and sensitivity, virtues equally necessary for the Church. This diagonal connects and separates elements of opposing symbolical importance and visually gives a sensation of symmetry, separating the two chains of folds which constitute the sleeves of the robe endowing, as a whole, the apostle with a greatness fundamentally Michelangelesque. These three elements, head, right hand and left hand, treated in an exceptional manner, together with the monumental folds of the robe, constitute altogether the personality of the work.

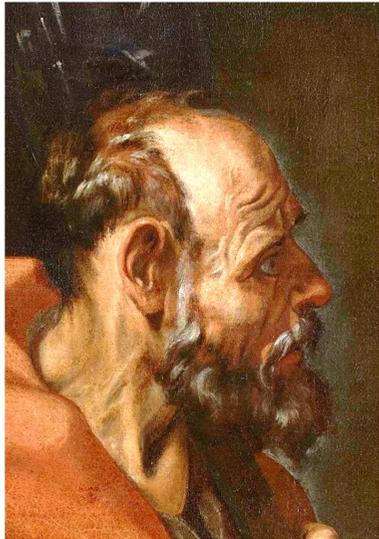


Fig 7 Luis Tristan, *Saint Mathews?* detail, head, 1613. Private collection.



Fig 8 Michelangelo, *Ezekiel prophet*, 1513. Sistine chapel. Rome

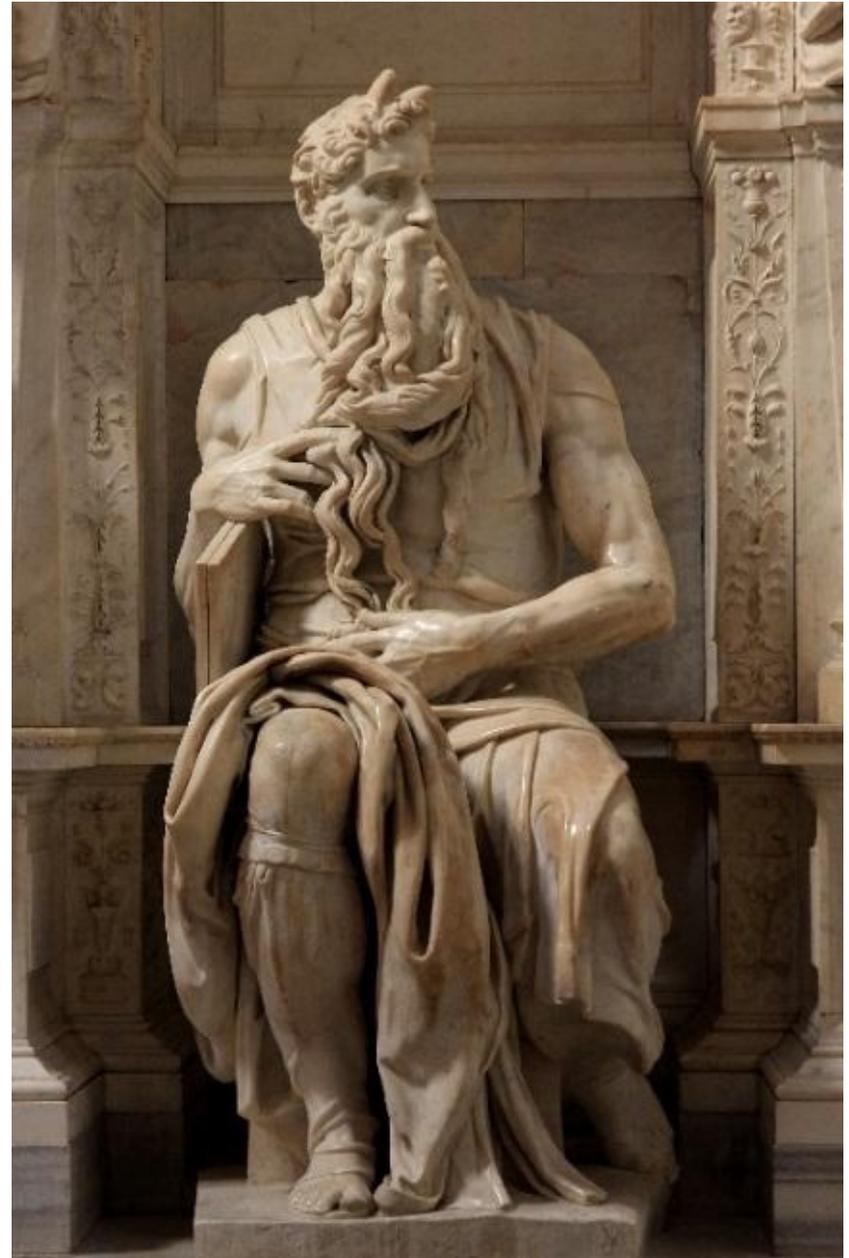


Fig 9 Michelangelo, *Moses*, 1513-1515, Church of San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

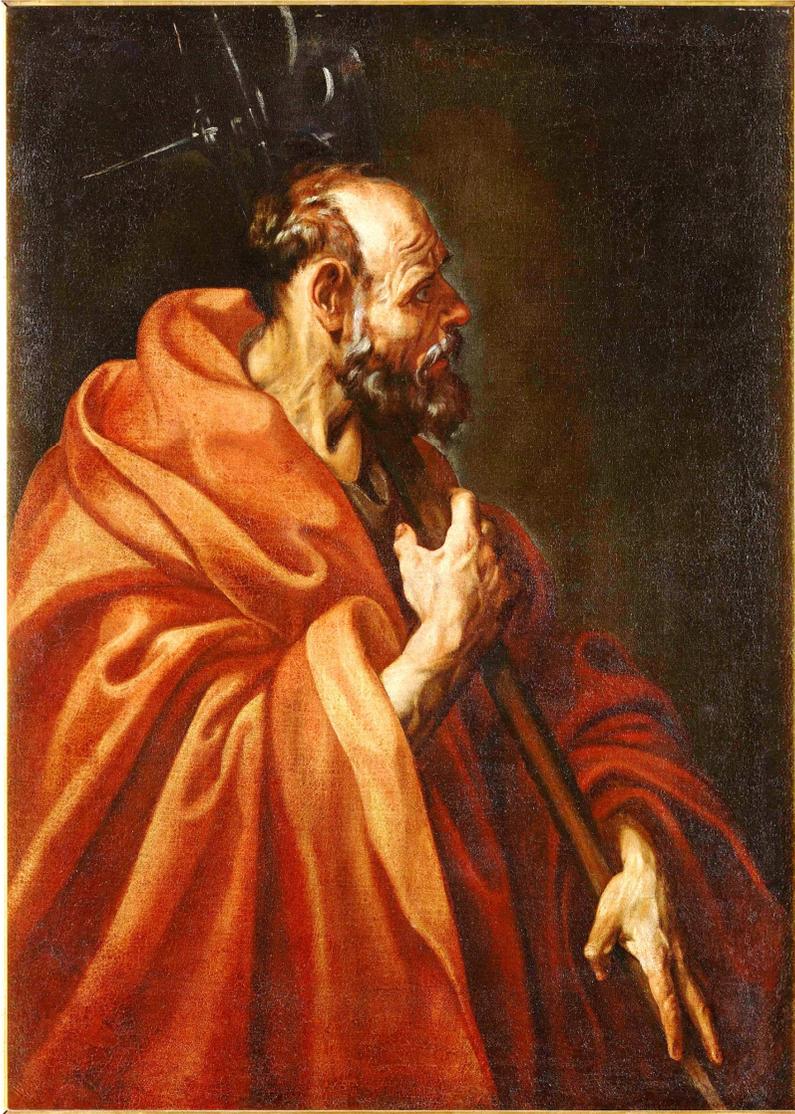


Fig 10 Luis Tristan, *Saint Mathews?*, 1613. Private collection.

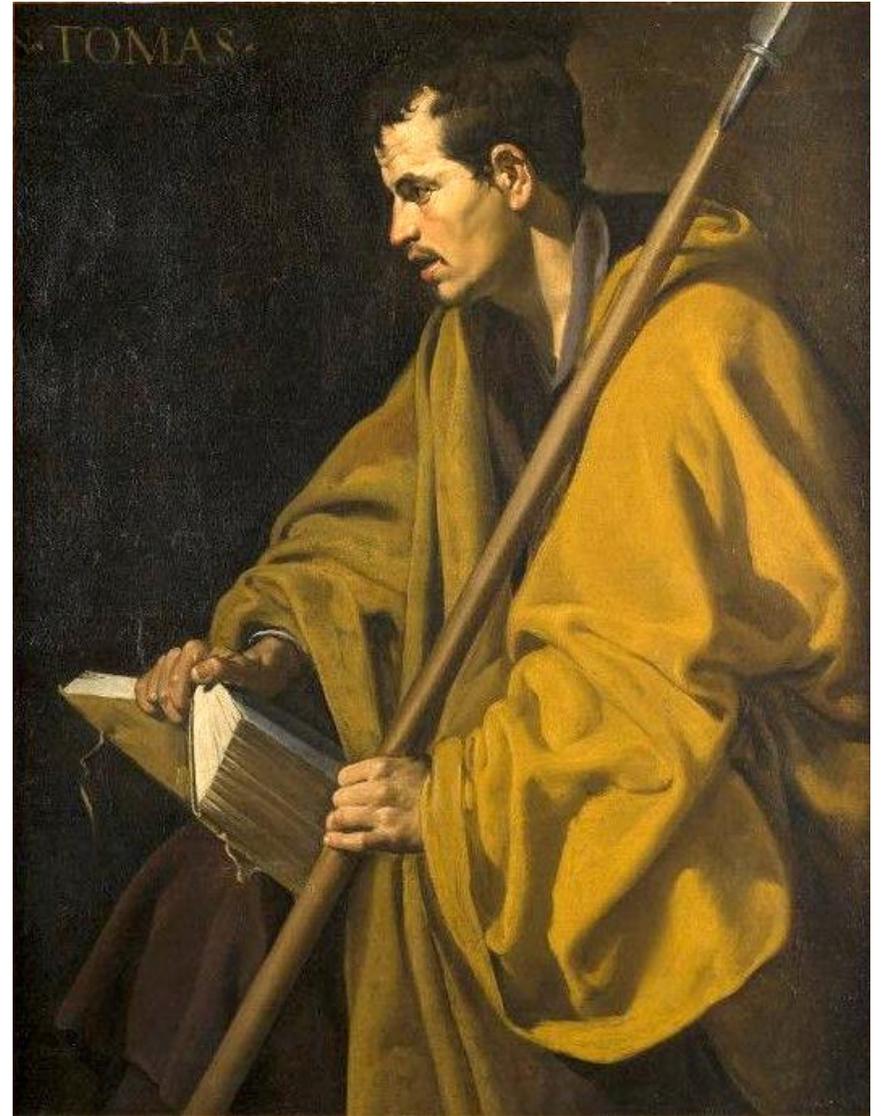


Fig 11 Diego Velazquez, *Saint Thomas*, 1618- 1622, Musée des Beaux- Arts d'Orléans.

This composition, which is essentially an original conception of Tristan, has its antecedents in the Moses and the prophets of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel and in the Saint Thomas by El Greco^(Fig. 12) where the hands, without the need of a lance, represent the diagonal. Although Tristan could hardly have known, the Apostle Saint James^(Fig. 13) the Greater (in the Prado Museum), painted by Rubens in 1613 for the Duke of Lerma, this work has also the hands in a similar position.

The significance of this new way of conceiving a work is great as it converts the diagonal line in one of the signs of identity of Velazquez's compositions in his Sevillian period. The connection between this picture and Velazquez's Saint Thomas is specially evident to everyone who knows how Velazquez, on occasions, uses other pictures by great Masters as a source of creative inspiration. As Palomino indicates⁵ "the paintings which seemed most harmonious to Velazquez were those by Luis Tristan because they were similar to his Velazquez's spirit, strange thoughts and lively concepts and, for this reason, Velazquez declared himself imitator of Tristan and ceased to follow the manner of his Master Pacheco". Our Apostol and the Apostol St Thomas by Ribera^(Fig. 14) have an important influence in the "Aguador" of the Wellington Museum^(Fig. 15) (London) where from the tall patrician figure of the water-carrier, represented in profile in the Roman style, there rises a diagonal line which links the fragile glass goblet to a smaller pitcher on which rests a smooth white glazed cup. Crossing it, there is a second diagonal linking a rough youth of vague introspective expression to the bigger pitcher made of rough material which stands out due to its three-dimensional nature. Here again the diagonals form axes which unite subtly, through opposing, tactile sensations, with assuredly symbolic references, and closely follow the academic taste of his Master Pacheco and contemporary collectors.



Fig 12 El Greco, *Saint Thomas*, 1610, El Greco Museum, Toledo.



Fig 13 Peter Paul Rubens, *Apostle Saint James*, 1613, El Prado Museum.



Fig 14 Jose de Ribera, *Saint Thomas*, 1612. Longhi Foundation, Florence.



Fig 15 Diego Velazquez, *El aguador*. (1618-1622). Wellington Museum, Londres.

Regarding the composition, it is worth while devoting special attention to the masterly way Tristan displays the Apostle in space. The figure forms an integral part of this space in a more classical way than do the Apostles painted approximately in 1606-1613 by his travelling companion Jose de Ribera (Apostles of Cussida – Roberto Longhi Foundation)^(Fig. 17), the magnificent Santiago (110 x 77,5 cm – Rome, private collection) and the Prophet (Catania, Museo Civico of Castello Ursino)^(Fig. 16). These figures dominate almost all the space and address the viewer in a more Caravaggesque and decidedly Baroque manner. In our Apostle, the pictorial space is shared in a well-balanced way by the figure and the space, and the latter acquires a special prominence as occurs in many of Velazquez's works after his journey to Italy. Here Tristan, as does subsequently Velazquez, creates a sensation of air which fixes the figure in space and gives a sensation of a full sense of reality and the force of gravity. No doubt, this sense of space is given by the halo of light which surrounds the apostle's head and spreads in shades progressively over the space of the picture. This exceptional technique, since it is used by Tristan only in this work, is taken from El Greco, who gives with it the sensation of divinity to some of these figures (Saint Thomas, Saint Peter, Saint Bartholomew, Saint Philip^(Fig. 18) – El Greco Museum, Toledo). In this sense, it is due to the relationship between Tristan and Ribera that this same technique appears in many of the first apostles by Españoletto, as in those of Cussida or in the Prophet (Museo Civico di Castello di Ursino, Catania) and even in his first Roman works, 1609-1610, Cristo Redentor (Nivillac – Church of Saint Pierre).

Velazquez adopts this pictorial technique that appears already in his Saint Paul (Museo d'Art, Cataluña)^(Fig. 19), achieving a new sensation of space in "Las Meninas" with his representation of perspective in the most natural way ever done before, where the air seems to circulate around the figures which are perfectly fixed in space, without any need of resorting to artificial lines or vanishing points. Space is determined only by introducing in the scene a series of points of light. This artistic novelty which Tristan takes to Italy, will indirectly influence many Italian painters who will break with the definite Caravaggesque lines separating colour and light, due fundamentally to the importance of Jose Ribera in the Italian artistic world and the universality of Velazquez.



Fig 16 Jose de Ribera, *Prophet*, Museo Civico do Castello di Ursino, Catania.

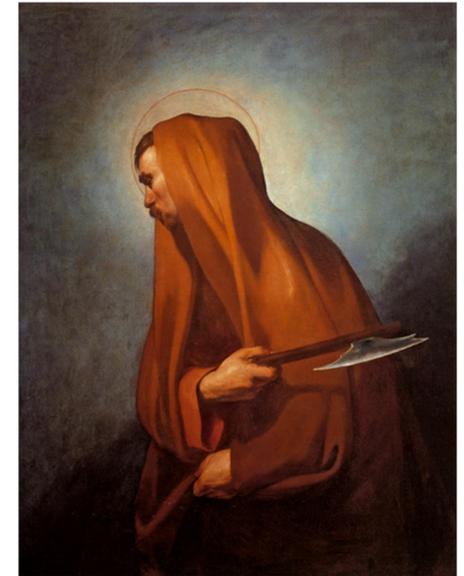


Fig 17 Jose de Ribera, *Saint Matthias?*, 1612. Longhi Foundation, Florence.



Fig 18 El Greco, *Saint Philip*, 1610. El Greco Museum, Toledo.



Fig 19 Diego Velazquez, *Saint Paul*, 1618-1622. Art Museum of Catalunya, Barcelona.

Though Tristan uses in this picture a restricted chromatic scale consisting of earthen and ochre tones, the colouring surprises us by its luminous effect. This light, which seems to give a special sparkling effect to the colour, in some ways reminds us of the way El Greco's figures emanate flashes of light, as do certain Apostles of Ribera and notably the Saint Thomas of Velazquez. This luminosity so inherent in the work is the result of a masterly pictorial technique which is distinguished by a combination of liquid and thicker strokes of paint, always executed in a free and vigorous fashion, with great and ample strokes in the folds of the robe and lively rendered when shaping the face; yet all of them follow faithfully the drawing which has marked the pattern of the composition.

The technique attains even greater virtuosity when in an evident "tour de force" the artist paints the Apostle's ear^(Fig. 20) in a masterly way, as only Tristan can do it, combining ochres, earthen colours, shades of white and vermillion and when, using a greyish brown, he indicates the expression of eyes and the wrinkles of the face.



Fig 20 Luis Tristan, Saint Mathews?, detail, ear, 1613. Private collection.

The way Tristan treats hair is a supreme gem in painting, creating the sensation of old hair, weakened by age^(Fig. 21). This impression is shown in many of Velazquez' portrayals of old persons belonging to his first Sevillian period that already expresses his initial interest as a painter for how things are seen. (The luncheon – Budapest; The Adoration by the Wise Kings-Prado Museum; Saint Paul – Catalonia Museum; The Apostle – Bellas Artes Museum of Seville) ^(Fig. 22). This technique is only Caravaggesque in that it reminds us of Orazio Borgianni (1574-1616) in a few aspects, and the Milanese Tanzio de Varallo (?-1633)^{6(FIG 23)}. Here Tristan tries to depict the visual sensations of the painter, without previous judgement, regarding what things essentially are, anticipating Velazquez' naturalism and his obsession regarding how light transforms visual sensations and how objects appear to us.

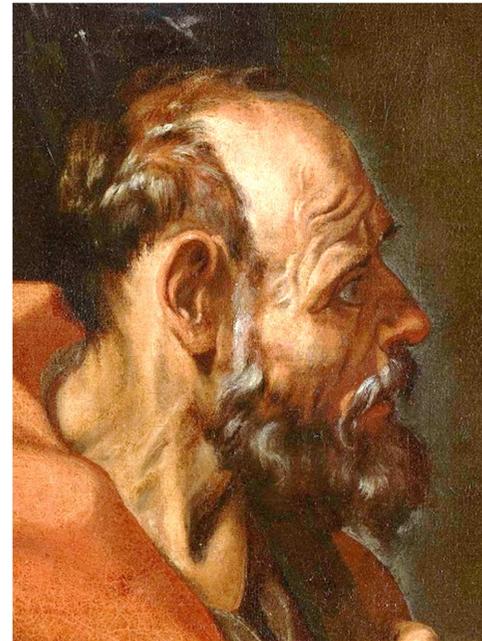


Fig 21 Luis Tristan, Saint Mathews?, detail, head, 1613. Private collection .

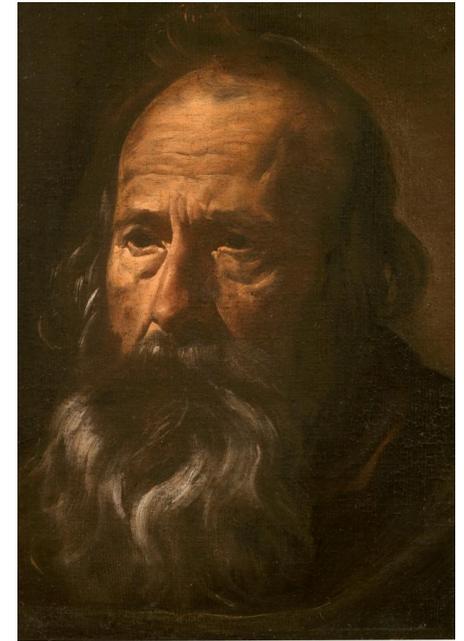


Fig 22 Diego Velazquez, *Apostle*, Bellas Artes Museum of Seville.

Another sign for attributing this work to Tristan is the way he treats the apostle's jugular muscle freely and with "bravura", expressing an exceptional tension, often represented in many of his saints (Holy Family with Saint Ann – Seville, private collection; The Holy Supper – Prado Museum; Saint Jerome and the Adoration of the shepherdess – Convent of Santa Clara, Toledo)^(Fig. 24). The muscle is literally nailed to a triangle whose vertex unites both sides of the cloak, revealing the edge of the tunic. This triangle is another of the artistic virtues of the work since on the one hand it enriches the range of colours with a dark greyish brown which facilitates the transformation in the earthen colours of the cloak to the light ochre tones of the face and, on the other hand, setting firmly the saint's magnificent head on his classical and monumentally robed body, We acknowledge again this feat in many apostles of el Greco^(Fig. 25) and to a certain extent, transfigured in the Saint Thomas of Velazquez.

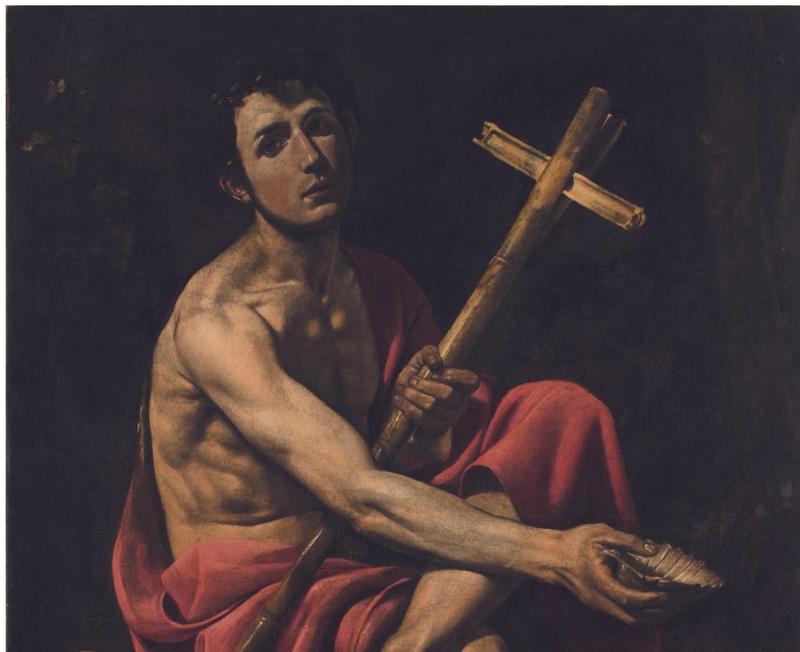


Fig 23 Tazio da Varallo, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1610, Capodimonte Museum, Naples.

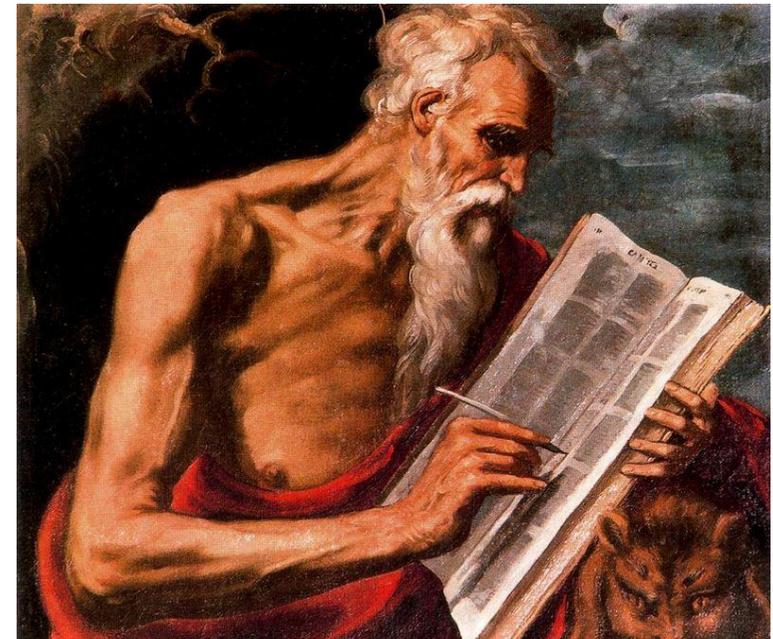


Fig 24 Luis Tristan, *Saint Jerome*, Altarpiece of the Christ and our Lady Santa Clara Convent, Toledo.



Fig 25 El Greco, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1577-1579. Santo Domingo El Antiguo Convent, Toledo.

How is it that Luis Tristan manages to create a work so perfect in its execution and which unites so successfully opposing tendencies in an epoch so convulsed artistically and which has such an impact on the young Velazquez? Paraphrasing Fernando Marías one might ask: How is Tristan converted in a modernized reincarnation of the art of the old Cretan Master along the path of naturalism? And How does his painting stands as an early reference announcing the art of Diego Velazquez?

Luis Tristan is the result of his circumstances. When he was only thirteen years old, he entered the workshop of El Greco who we know greatly appreciated him as he gave him the copy of the “Lives of the Artists” by Vasari. In that workshop Tristan remained various years until he embarked on a journey to Italy in about 1606 and assuredly during this first period in Toledo got to know Borgianni^(Fig.26) who in 1598 had already introduced Caravaggesque figures in Spain and had returned to Italy in 1605, just before Tristan left for Italy⁷. Therefore, it is certainly possible for us to think that Borgianni could have introduced Tristan in Roman artistic circles. According to Giuseppe Martinez, Tristan made this journey in company with the young Ribera and, thanks to the annotations written by Tristan himself in the book by Vasari, we certainly know that he embarked on the trip to Italy and was at least in Rome and Milan and probably also in Florence. This would explain the influence exerted on his work by Michelangelo, the Caravaggesque and the Venetian-Lombardian painters.



Fig 26 Orazio_Borgianni, *Portrait of an old woman*, 1610. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

The interplay between this picture and the Apostles of Cussida^(Fig.27 – Fig. 28) by Jose de Ribera is evident, but not absolute. Even though Tristan represents the apostle as belonging to the common people as Ribera does, nevertheless, in this work, he gives the impression that he raises him to the level of Fathers of the Church, presenting the personage in a distant, solemn and majestic way, very different from Ribera’s Apostles who are rough, with peasants’ hands and are always looking directly at the spectator. In this sense, if Ribera is much closer to Caravaggio, Tristan is inspired fundamentally in Michelangelo and Titian, though he does not fail to be imbued in the naturalistic influences of the moment⁸.



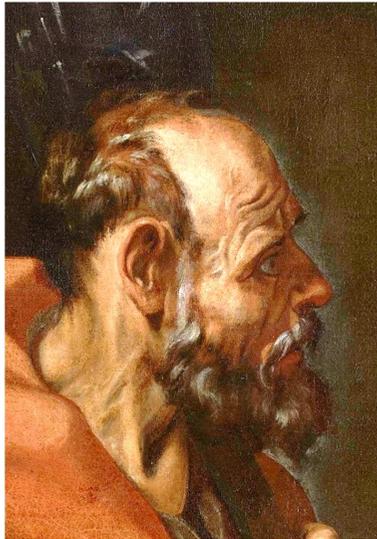
Fig 27 Jose de Ribera *Saint Philip*, Apostolado Cussida, 1612, Longhi Foundation, Florence.



Fig 28 Jose de Ribera, *Saint Paul*, Apostolado Cussida, 1612, Longhi Foundation, Florence.

On the other hand, the pictorial technique of this picture is likewise different from that of Ribera and most of the Caravaggesque artists. Although Tristan may only be considered as an incipient naturalistic painter, since there still remains in him a certain mannerism; this naturalism, which appears principally in the countenance of our Apostle, is based on painting reality just as we see it, with a light, free touch, with only few transparencies, in a modern manner, and in a certain early impressionistic way. These qualities already appear in El Greco's work after 1600 and in Anibal Carracci^(Fig.29), founder of the "Academy of incaminanti"; in Roman Caravaggesque circles we only encounter them in Borgianni; Tristan could have assimilated this novelty in El Greco 's workshop and have developed them due to his connections with Milanese painters belonging to Cardinal Borromeo's circle such as the rather melodramatic and maneristic artists Gian Battista Crespi, "il Cerano" (1575-1632), Morazzone (1573-1626) and G.C. Procaccini (1575-1625) or the decidedly Caravaggesque Tanzio da Varalo.

Finally the lively style shown in particular in the face of our Apostle is related to Velazquez's profiles of old personages from his Sevillian period^{(Fig. 30)(Fig. 31)(Fig.32)} but, in away even more closely linked to Velazquez's art renovated by his first trip to Italy, when he culminates the process of diffusing lines and likewise converts what is natural in a purely instantaneous vision in his Villa Medici landscapes (Prado Museum)⁹. Tristan unfortunately will not continue this trend when he returns to Toledo. His painting will become prosaic and dogmatic expressing faithfully the taste of his ecclesiastical clients, more interested in iconography matters than in new aesthetic solutions.



Luis Tristan, Saint Mathews?, detail, head, 1613. Private collection.

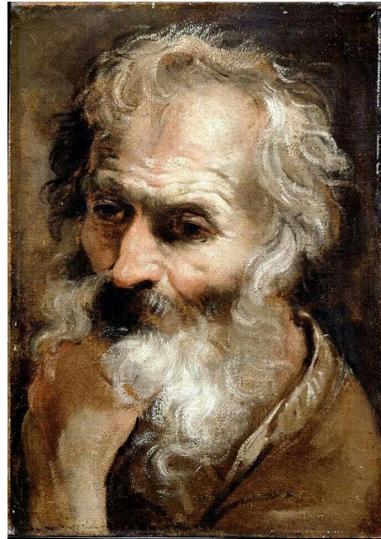


Fig 29 Annibale Carracci, *Head of Apostle*, circa 1590, Dulwich Gallery.

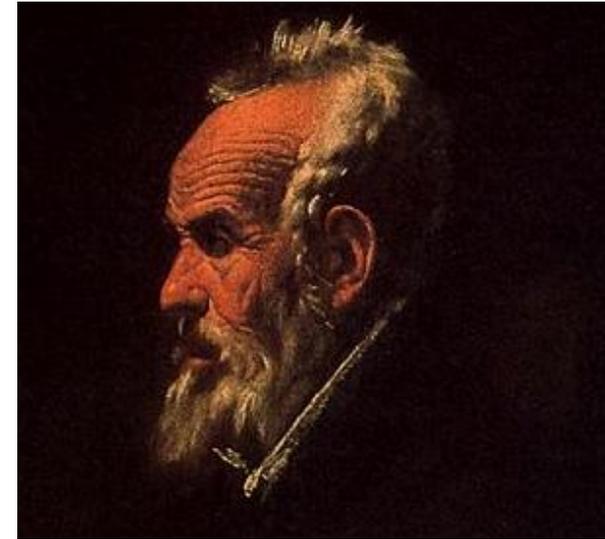


Fig 30 Diego Velazquez o Luis Tristan, *Portrait of Ramón Llull*, 1613 – 1620. Art Museum of Catalunya.



Fig 31 Diego Velázquez, *Adoration of the wise men*, detail, 1619, Prado Museum, Madrid.

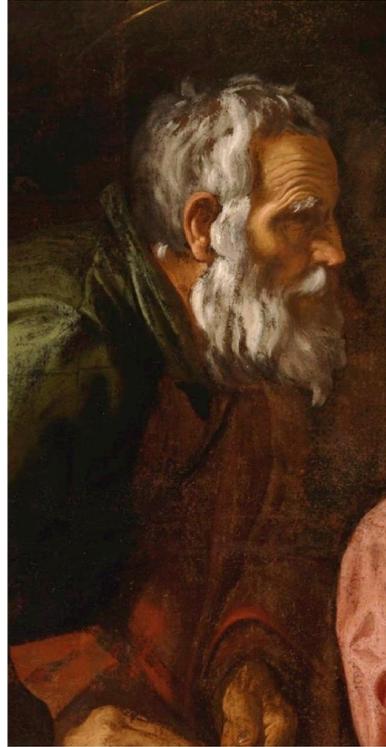


Fig 32 Diego Velázquez, *Education of our Lady*, detail, 1617, Yale University Art Gallery, Yale.

PROVENANCE

_ At present in a Madrid collection.

_ For various generations in the Moreno de Barreda family, Palacio de los Patos (Granada), who in mid-XIXth century formed an important collection of paintings and artistic objects. Supposedly acquired by ancestors of the said family in Christie's auction of Louis Philippe's collection, held in London in 1853, when this work was sold together with all the Apostolado of the Convent of the Carmelitas Descalzas of Toledo.

_ Collection of King Louis Philippe of France(*).

_ Acquired together with the rest of the Apostolado from the Convent of the Carmelitas Descalzas of Toledo by Baron Taylor(**) on 22 May 1836.

_ Convent of the Carmelitas Descalzas of Toledo (order founded by Santa Teresa de Jesús, Toledo) where Ponz located it in the first instance.

(*). Luis Tristan, Pérez Sánchez and Benito Navarrete, Page 251. Works by Tristan only known through literary references.

(**) According to information in the French national archives revealed by Baticles Marinas in 1981.

Exhibited

Musée des Beaux arts d Orléans. Dans la poussiere de Seville. Sur les traces du Saint Thomas de Velazquez .5 July - 14 November 2021.

LITERATURE

- Published in the catalogue of the "L'Exposition Velazquez Grand Palais", Louvre 2015 (pag. 138 cat. 23 fig. 15 text and image).
- Ars Magazine number 33 January /March 2017. Jose Redondo Cuesta. Tristan en Italia pag 115, pag 118 fig pag 112
- Catalogue of the exhibition "Dans la poussiere de Seville. Musée des Beaux Arts d'Orléans. " Sur les traces du Saint Thomas de Velazquez". Guillaume Kientz pag 19; Corentin Dury pag 91, pag 116, pag 138, Fig 104

NOTES

1 Corentin Dury. "Du college Apostologique à l'Apostolado. Dans la poussiere de Seville. Sur les traces du Saint Thomas de Velazquez", 2021 pag 40 – 67.

2 William B Jordan 2014; Guillaume Kientz 2017, 2021; José Redondo Cuesta Ars Magazine 2017, 2019; Corentin Dury 2021.

3 Regarding the influence of Titian in Tristan see Benito Navarrete "Luis Tristan", 2001 pag 49 y 50 and Jose Redondo Cuesta, Ars Magazine, 2017.

4 Regarding the influence of Tristan in Velazquez see Martin Soria, "Varia Velazqueña" pag 451- 462; Alfonso Pérez Sánchez - Benito Navarrete, "Luis Tristan", 2001, Benito Navarrete "the education of the Virgin and the shaping early naturalism", 2014.

Fernando Mariás, "El Greco y el arte de su tiempo. Las notas del Greco a Vasari" 1992 p 130 - 142 introduce the hypothesis that Tristan was in Seville before returning to Toledo and induce Pacheco to visit El Greco in Toledo 1611. Also Navarrete 2015, Jose Redondo Cuesta op cit pag 116, 2017.

Regarding the artistic connection between our Apostol by Tristan and the Saint Thomas by Velazquez see Guillaume Kientz 2014, 2021; Corentin Dury 2021 y Jose Redondo Cuesta 2017, 2019.

5. Antonio Palomino, "Museo Pictórico y escala óptica con el Parnaso Español Pintoresco Laureado" 1715- 1724 (edición Aguilar pag. 866- 867).

6 Regarding the influence of Orazio Borgianni and Tazio de Varallo in Tristan see op cit Benito Navarrete 2001, op cit 2014; Jose Redondo Cuesta opción 2017.

7 Jusepe Martínez "Discursos practicables del Nobilísimo Arte de la pintura" (edición Carderera 1866 pag 185 regarding Tristan's trip to Italy in 1606, see Benito Navarrete 2001, Guillaume Kientz 2014, Jose Redondo Cuesta op cit 2017 op cit Dury op cit 2021.



Fig 33 Luis Tristan, *San Mónica*, 1616. Prado Museum.



Fig 34 Diego Velazquez, *At Marta and Maria's house*, detail, 1618, National Gallery, London.



Fig 35 Diego Velazquez, *Venerable mother Jerónima de la Fuente*, 1620, Prado Museum.

Also see Cloe Cavero Cardeler "El viaje a Roma de Luis de Oviedo agente y coleccionista a principios del siglo XVII". 2019, regarding Tristan's friendship with Luis Oviedo, canon of the Toledo Cathedral and the possibility that they travelled together Scipione Borghese's circle to Rome in 1606. Luis Oviedo introduce Luis Tristan to cardinal. He also mentions that the collection of Luis Oviedo included several works by Tristan among them an Heraclitus y Democritus.

Jose Redondo Cuesta op cit 2017 considers that the "Heraclitus y Democritus" (Fig. 38) in a private collection is the one mentioned in Luis Oviedo's will and, therefore, the unique known work painted by Tristan in Rome. "

8 Regarding the connection between the early Apostolados by Rivera with Tristan and Velazquez see Roberto Longhi, 1927 "un San Tomasso de Velazquez e le congiunture italo- spagnole tra il cinque e il seicento", Gianni Papi "Ribera en Roma, la revelación de un genio ""Catálogo de la exposición " El joven Ribera ", Museo del Prado; Guillaume Kientz op CIT 2014, 2021, Jose Redondo Cuesta opcit 2017, Corentin Dury opcit 2021.

With regards the Apostolado by Velazquez see Ponz 1776- 1794 VIII,1778, 236; Guillaume Kientz - Corentin Dury opcit 2021. they consider that this apostolado could have been executed by various painters pertaining to the workshop that Velazquez could have had in Seville before travelling to Madrid. A Saint Phillip and a Saint Simon are shown as possible work shop by Velazquez at the exhibition "Sur les traces du Saint Thomas de Velazquez" 2021, Musée des beaux arts Orléans.

9 Regarding the connection between Tristan and Velazquez, (Fig. 36)(Fig. 37) see Guillaume Kients op cit 2021 who attributes the portrait of Ramón Llull to Velazquez. Jose Redondo Cuesta op cit 2017 attributes it to Tristan. Also see Benito Navarrete op cit 2014.



Fig 36 Luis Tristan, *Saint Peter*, Royal Palace, Madrid.

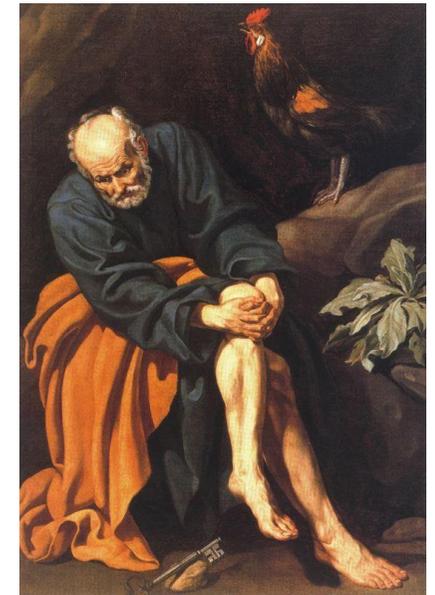


Fig 37 Diego Velazquez, *Saint Peter*, circa 1619. Villar Mir Foundation, Madrid.



Fig 38 Luis Tristan, *Heraclitus and Democritus*, circa 1610. Private collection.