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Anton Raphael Mengs

Aussig 1728-1779 Rome

The Rest on the flight into Egypt

Oil on panel with bevelled corners

41 3/4 x 32 7/8 in. (106 x 83.4 cm)

Painted c.1767



Provenance

Don Luis Antonio Jaime de Borbón y Farnesio, Infante de España (1727-1785);
María Teresa de Vallabriga, Rozas, Español y Drummond de Melfort (1759-1820);
Luis María Cardenal de Borbón y Vallabriga, Farnesio y Rozas (1777- 1823);
Joaquín José de Melgarejo y Saurín, I Duque de San Fernando (1780-1835);
María Luisa Fernando de Borbón y Vallabriga (1783- Madrid 1846);
Carlota Luisa de Godoy y Borbón (1800-1886);
Private collection, USA, circa 1995 until 2023.

Literature

G. N. de Azara, *Obras de D. Antonio Rafael Mengs, Primer Pintor de Camara del Rey, publicadas por Don Joseph Nicolas de Azara, Caballero de la Orden de Carlos III, del Consejo de S. M. en el de Hacienda, su Agente y Procurador general en la Corte de Roma*, Madrid, 1780, p. XLVII.

G. L. Bianconi, *Elogio storico del Cavaliere Anton Raffaele Mengs scritto dal Consigliere Bianconi con un Catalogo in fine delle Opere da esso fatte*, Milan, 1780, p. 90 (Ed. Perini 1998, p. 293)

D. de Longrais, *Œuvres de M. Mengs, traduites par J. P. Doray de Longrais, avec un Éloge historique de Mengs, rédigé par L. T. Hérisant, sur des Notes qui avaient été envoyées de Stuttgart au Traducteur par Guibal, Élève de Mengs*, Ratisbon, 1782, p. 30.

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- M.C.F. Prange, *Des Ritters Anton Raphael Mengs ersten Malers Karl III. König in Spanien hinterlassene Werke. Nach den Originalhandschriften übersetzt und mit ungedruckten Aufsätzen und Anmerkungen vermehrt herausgegeben von M. C. F. Prange*, Halle 1786, I, p. 93.
- G. N. de Azara/C. Fea, *Opere di Antonio Raffaello Mengs, primo Pittore del Re cattolico Carlo III. Pubblicate dal Cavaliere D. Giuseppe Niccola d'Azara e in questa edizione corrette ed aumentate dall'avvocato Carlo Fea*, Rome, 1787, p. XLIII.
- G. Schilling, *Anton Raphael Mengs' Sämmtliche hinterlassene Schriften. Gesammelt, nach Originaltexten neu übersetzt und mit mehreren Beilagen und Anmerkungen vermehrt. Hg. von G. Schilling*, Bonn, 1843-44, II, p. 197.
- D. Honisch, *Anton Raphael Mengs und die Bildform des Frühklassizismus*, Recklinghausen 1965, no. 339.
- G. Casanova, *Chevalier de Seingalt, Geschichte meines Lebens. Erstmals nach der Urfassung ins Deutsche übersetzt von Heinz von Sauter*, Berlin 1985, XI, p. 82.
- A. Ansón Navarro, *Goya y Aragon: familia, amistades y encargos artísticos*, Zaragoza, 1995, p. 153.
- J. Jordan de Urries y de la Colina, 'Mengs y el infante don Luis: Notas sobre el gusto neoclásico en España', in exh. Cat. *Goya y el infante Don Luis de Borbón: Homenaje a la "infanta" doña Maria Teresa de Vallabriga*, ed. by J. J. Junquera y Mato, Zaragoza 1996, p. 93.
- J. L. Sancho / J. Jordan de Urries y de la Colina, 'Mengs und Spanien' in exh. cat. *Mengs. Die Erfindung des Klassizismus*, Padua-Dresden 2001, ed. by Steffi Roettgen, Munich, 2001, pp. 71-85.
- S. Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1778, I. Das malerische und zeichnerische Werk*, Munich, 1999, no. 33, pp. 65-66; QU 28, p. 491.
- S. Roettgen, *Anton Raphael Mengs 1728-1779. II. Leben und Wirken*, Munich, 2003, pl. XXXIII.
- J. Jordan de Urries y de la Colina, cat. 41 in exh. cat. *Carlos IV Mecenas y Coleccionista*, Madrid, Palacio Real, 2009, pp. 180-182.

We are extremely grateful to Professor Steffi Roettgen for the below catalogue entry (Munich, 18th February 2024).

The support and dimensions of the present painting were not known when I prepared the text for it in my catalogue raisonné published in 1999, which was based solely on a colour photograph (Roettgen 2003, colour plate XXXIII). As such, and based on the laterally reversed drawn copy by Richard Cooper (fig. 1), the picture was also reproduced in reverse in the catalogue raisonné (fig. 2). It only later turned out that the drawing too was an inverted copy. Cooper, who stayed in Madrid from 1766 to 1767 and sought Mengs's acquaintance there (letter of 1 April 1767 to David Erskine, later 11th Lord Cardross, then secretary to the British ambassador in Madrid, see Roettgen 2003, p. 517), apparently copied a preparatory drawing for the painting by Mengs that has not survived (see <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/7054>).

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According to Cooper's handwritten inscription, the painting was then in the 'New Palace', i.e. the Palacio Real. This makes it possible to identify the painting with a work that Mengs painted for the brother of King Charles III, Don Luis Antonio Jaime de Borbón y Farnesio (1727-1785), which Azara describes as follows: "Para el Sr. Infante D. Luis, Nuestra Señora con el Niño, y San Joseph, en tabla, vara y quarta de alto, y vara de ancho." (Azara 1780, p. XLVII). Converting these measurements into the metric system provides us with the present-day dimensions of the painting, with a slight difference of 4-5cm. for the measuring methods used at the time. There is a copy by Vicente Lopez y Portaña (1772-1850) (fig. 3), showing the painting in its entirety and with greater space around the Holy Family and Saint John. Next to the sketch, Lopez notes who the owner of the painting was at the time: "Rasguño del famoso cuadro, pintado en tabla por el celebre Mengs, q.e poseia la S.ra Vallabriga en Zaragoza, y ahora pertenece al Duque de S.n Fernando". Don Luis (fig. 4) had bequeathed the painting to hismorganatic wife Maria Teresa de Vallabriga (fig. 5), who lived in Zaragoza from 1792. In the inventory of her household from 1818 (Madrid, Archivo Historico de Protocolos (AHPM), prot. 20.822, f. 642 r, cfr. Jordan de Urries y de la Colina 1996, p. 93), the painting is listed as measuring 111.5 x 88.8 cm, without Mengs being named as the painter. In 1820, María Teresa de Vallabriga decreed in her will that "el Quadro de Nuestra Señora que tengo pintado por Menigis, por se [la] al[h]laja que más estimo y aprecio de todas quantas poseho" should go to her son Luis María Cardenal Borbón y Vallabriga, Farnesio y Rozas (1777- 823), who had been Archbishop of Toledo since 1799 (A. Navarro 1995, p. 153). After his death, the painting became the property of the I. Duke de San Fernando, who had been married to María Luisa Fernanda, the youngest daughter of the Infante D. Luis, since 1817. On his death in 1835, an inventory of his estate was drawn up, in which the painting, no. 1 and measuring 109.7 x 88.8 cm, is described as follows:

"representa a la Virgen vestida de túnica de color de rosa y manto azul, con toca blanca en la Caveza y un pañuelo blanco al Cuello, teniendo en el regazo el Niño Jesús desnudo, que le sostiene con la mano derecha y en aptitud de levantar con la izquierda una faja que está en el suelo; a lo lejos forma un pais con pocos árboles y en el se ve a San Josef que está leyendo en un Libro."¹ (AHPM, *protocolo* 24.922, f.399v, n. 1, after Jordan de Urries y de la Colina 1996, p. 93).

¹ Translation: "It represents the Virgin, dressed in a pink tunic and a blue cloak, wearing a white headdress and a white scarf around her neck and holding the naked Christ Child on her lap, which she holds with her right hand while picking up a nappy from the floor with her left hand; : in the distance is a landscape with some trees and Saint Joseph reading a book"

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This description exactly fits the painting. The dimensions here given in the metric system suggest that the wooden panel was reduced in size at a later date, presumably at the same time as the corners were bevelled. The later history of the painting is not documented. However, it can be assumed that together with the art collection of María Luisa Fernanda, who died childless in Madrid in 1846, it came into the possession of her niece Carlota Luisa de Godoy y Borbón, whose valuable collection of art was passed on to her heirs before being dispersed in the 20th century. This collection contained several important works by Goya, which entered the art market during the 20th century. This also applies to two portraits of the Infante D. Luis by Mengs, which were at some point attributed to Goya (see Roettgen 1999, cat. 142 and DW 331; figs. 6 & 7: https://sempub.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/wv_mengs/wisski/navigate/22194/view).

Just like Goya, who later painted portraits of the Infante's family in 1783 (fig. 4), Mengs also had a good relationship with D. Luis, who was excluded from the succession to the throne and was characterised by his intense interest in art and music. His lifestyle was considered unconventional, especially after hismorganatic marriage (1776) to the 16-year-old María Teresa de Vallabriga. The 'devotional painting' (*Andachtsbild*) of *The Rest on the flight into Egypt* was probably painted for Don Luis in 1767, around the same time as the depiction of the same subject painted for the Prince of Asturias (fig. 8), which, as Mengs writes, was completed in July 1768 (Jordan de Urries y de la Colina 2009). Cooper's copies made in 1767 after drawings by Mengs, which engage with the subject in several variations, also speak in favour of this dating (fig. 9).

A more precise *terminus ante quem* for the picture is provided by a passage in the Memoires of Giacomo Casanova (fig. 10), who arrived in Madrid on 19 November 1767, where he stayed for ten months, during which he lived for some time in Mengs's house. The picture he paints of his host in his *Memoires* is, however, anything but positive, both in human and artistic terms (Roettgen 2003, pp. 394-395, 520-521). However, this does not apply to two of the painter's paintings that he explicitly mentions. One is a *Penitent Mary Magdalene*, which cannot be precisely identified; the second is the present *Rest on the flight into Egypt* in the collection of Don Luis. Although he erroneously refers to the painting from memory as being a horizontal, there is no doubt as to which painting Casanova is referring to:

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"The King's brother never travelled without a picture of the Holy Virgin that Mengs had painted for him. It was a painting two feet high and three and a half feet wide. The Holy Virgin was sitting on the grass with her bare feet crossed in the Moorish style. Her sacred legs were visible up to the centre of her calves. The picture thrilled the soul by way of the senses. The Infant was enamoured of it and thought it a pious feeling, which was the most sinful of all lustful impulses, for he could not possibly look at this picture without burning with the desire to hold the Mother of God depicted on the canvas warmly and vividly in his arms. But the Infant was not even aware of this. He was delighted to be in love with the mother of his God. This love guaranteed him his eternal salvation." (*Memoires* XI, p. 85, quoted in Roettgen 2003, p. 247).

Casanova's comment is interesting in two respects. Firstly, it becomes clear that it was his own erotic fantasies that were fuelled by the Virgin's crossed, but covered legs and perhaps also by her bare feet; secondly, his observation that religious fervour requires sensual appeal is highly accurate. It is also revealing that the Infante, following a tradition begun by the King and the Prince of Asturias, always carried the image with him when travelling to his various residences. The elaborate security measures with which these paintings were transported are well documented (Jordan de Urries y de la Colina, *op. cit.* 2009) and almost gave the painting, which remained visible when travelling, the status of a holy relic.

The pictorial type adapted by Mengs for the Virgin seated on the stony but grassy ground goes back to the medieval *Madonna dell'Umiltà* (fig. 11), which was "reformed" by Mantegna's engravings (fig. 12) in such a way that it did not fall into oblivion, although it played a rather minor role in painting from the 16th to the 18th century. Raphael's *Alba Madonna* (Washington, D.C., NG) and the Virgin in Caravaggio's famous *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj) are the most prominent examples of this pose and, as far as I know, the only ones in which Mary's naked, albeit uncrossed, feet can be seen. As Casanova's statement shows, it was primarily this motif in Mengs's painting that he perceived as provocative. The painting's scenic impression is created by the figure of Saint Joseph in the background, while the Virgin's left hand reaches for the rolled-up nappy lying on the edge of the cot.

Formally, as with most of his paintings of the Virgin, Mengs follows in Raphael's footsteps and was possibly directly inspired by the aforementioned *Alba Madonna*, which came from the collection of the Marchese del Carpio (died 1687) and was owned by the Dukes of Alba in Madrid at the time (fig. 13). In keeping with

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contemporary taste, he reinterprets his model as a scene of idyllic character, which is "ennobled" by a delicate *sfumato* that lends the colour of the skin an almost porcelain-like smoothness and delicacy.



Fig. 1: Richard Cooper, *Virgin and Child after Mengs*, Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland

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Fig. 2: The present picture as illustrated in the 1999 catalogue raisonné

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Fig. 3: Vicente Lopez y Portaña, *Sheet with sketches*, Madrid, Museo del Prado

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Fig. 4: Francisco Goya, *Luis de Borbón y Farnesio with his family*, 1783, Mamiano/ Parma, Fondazione Magnani Rocca

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Fig. 5: Francisco Goya, *Maria Teresa de Vallabriga*, 1783, Madrid, Museo del Prado

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Fig. 6: Anton Raphael Mengs, *Luis de Borbón y Farnesio*, c.1774, location unknown

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Fig. 7: Anton Raphael Mengs, *Luis de Borbón y Farnesio*, c.1768, San Diego Art Museum, San Diego, USA

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Fig. 8: Anton Raphael Mengs, *The Rest on the flight into Egypt*, 1768, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional.

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Fig. 9: Richard Cooper after A. R. Mengs, *Study sheet with several composition of the Virgin and Child*,
Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland

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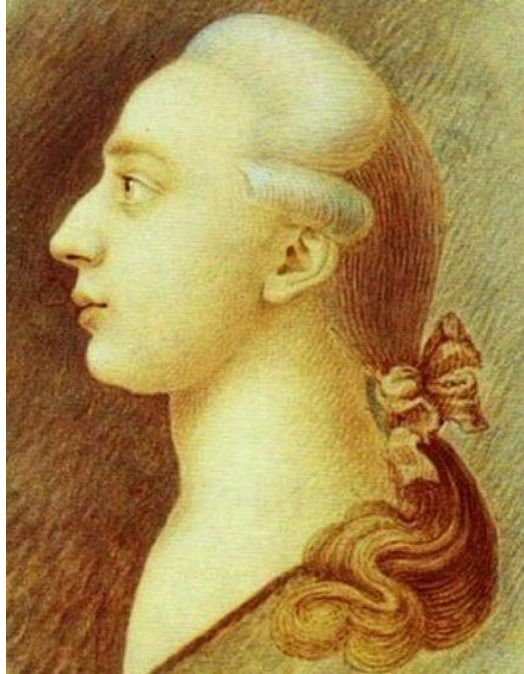


Fig. 10: Francesco Casanova, *Portrait of Giacomo Casanova*, Moscow, State Historical Museum



Fig. 11: Attributed to Jacobello dl Fiore, *Madonna dell'Umiltà*, Christie's, London, 3 December 2008

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Fig. 12: Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna dell'Umiltà*, engraving



Fig. 13: Raphael, *The Alba Madonna*, Washington DC, National Gallery of Art