

# Rubens and His Spanish Patrons



ALEXANDER VERGARA

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## The First Visit to Spain, 1603–1604

### *Ambitious for a Little Flattery*

By his very birth in 1577 into a Flemish family, Rubens' life was linked to Spain. When Rubens settled in Antwerp in 1589 with his mother and siblings he moved to the largest and most prosperous city of the Spanish Netherlands. That territory had fallen under Hapsburg rule by right of descent from the dukes of Burgundy in 1506 and shortly afterward was incorporated into the domains of the Spanish Hapsburgs. Throughout Rubens' life, the southern Netherlands remained the Spanish monarchy's stronghold in the north of Europe, and the territory was ruled by members of the Spanish royal family. Following the governorships of Alexander Farnese and the archduke Ernst of Austria, another nephew – and brother law-of Philip II of Spain, the archduke Albert, arrived in Brussels as governor-general in 1596. Two years later, in 1598, Albert married his cousin the infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, daughter of Philip II. The Netherlands were the dowry Isabella brought to the marriage, and thus the archdukes, as Albert and Isabella would be called, ruled as joint sovereign princes, with the stipulation that the territory would revert to the Spanish Crown if they had no children, as occurred after the death of Albert in 1621. The infanta continued to rule as governor until her death in 1633, and from then until after Rubens died in 1640 the post was occupied by the cardinal-infante Ferdinand, brother of King Philip IV.<sup>1</sup>

As a youth in Antwerp, and in nearby Brussels, Rubens must have become familiar with some aspects of Spanish culture and patronage. He probably met members of the Spanish colony and the Spanish administration, for whom local artists sometimes worked – including his teacher, Otto Van Veen, and also his friend the portrait painter Frans Pourbus the Younger.<sup>2</sup> However, no specific projects executed by the young Rubens for Spanish patrons are documented before his first visit to Spain in 1603–1604, and given the painter's young age and his still developing professional status, there probably were none. It was during his Spanish sojourn that Rubens had his first direct interaction with Spanish patrons and, equally important for the painter's development, with the works of art existing in Spanish collections.

## Rubens' Activities in Spain

The circumstances of Rubens' first visit to Spain are known to us through the correspondence of the painter with other persons who were involved in his mission to the Spanish court. After completing his apprenticeship in Antwerp and becoming a member of the local Guild of Saint Luke in 1598, Rubens decided to continue his artistic education in Italy. He traveled there on May 9, 1600, and soon entered the service of Vincenzo Gonzaga, duke of Mantua. Rubens' visit to Spain came about three years later, when he was selected to form part of an embassy from the ducal court of Mantua to the court of King Philip III in Valladolid.<sup>3</sup>

Rubens left Mantua on March 5, 1603, charged with delivering to the Mantuan representative in Valladolid a series of gifts for the king and other courtiers, including a group of paintings intended for the king's favorite, Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, first duke of Lerma (1552–1625). The gift included close to forty paintings, among them a *St. Jerome* by Quentin Massys, an unspecified portrait of the duke of Mantua, seventeen copies after Raphael believed to be by Pietro Facchetti, and copies after Titian and others.<sup>4</sup> This is the first of several instances in this book where one sees that Rubens' art, and to some extent also himself, were used as commodities in a form of economic transaction typical of the period, namely the exchange of gifts among Europe's dignitaries. In this case, Rubens was chosen to assist in the delivery of the paintings, and to contribute to the gift by adding paintings of his own if the occasion demanded.<sup>5</sup> After embarking from Livorno on April 2, the painter first set foot on Spanish soil in the port of Alicante, where he had arrived by April 22. From there he traveled nearly four hundred miles across the Castilian plateau to Valladolid, where he arrived on May 13.

Immediately after his arrival, Rubens set to work repairing the pictures in the shipment, which had been damaged on the arduous trip. The deterioration of the paintings was first believed to be very severe but later turned out to be somewhat less so. Nonetheless, Rubens' restoration work must have been extensive, as a large number of paintings were repaired. Iberti, the Mantuan representative in Valladolid, informs us that all the paintings were restored with the exception of a *St. John* and a small *Madonna*, which were thought to be beyond repair – as it turned out, at least the *St. John* was also mended.<sup>6</sup> Rubens also added to the gift a painting by his own hand, a *Democritus and Heraclitus*, his first documented painting in Spain. According to the correspondence, this was painted in Valladolid sometime between June 14 and July 6 and was intended to make up for two of the damaged paintings that Rubens had brought to Spain for the duke of Lerma.<sup>7</sup> After delivering the gift to the king and his favorite, Rubens began to work on a

commission he had received from the duke of Mantua to paint a series of portraits of ladies of the Spanish court.<sup>8</sup> Little is known about the results of this commission. The artist was not pleased with the job, and although the documents say that he worked on the portraits,<sup>9</sup> he tried to keep the project to a minimum. In his correspondence he refers to it as a humble occupation,<sup>10</sup> and he avoided going to France, where he had been instructed to travel in order to complete the commission.<sup>11</sup> The fact that no trace of these portraits exists suggests that he must have painted only a few.<sup>12</sup>

The only documented commission that Rubens received from the Spanish court is an *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma* on which he began to work in September of 1603. This is the most important work that emerged from the Spanish visit, and more will be said about it later. As far as is known, Rubens did not paint a portrait of the king at this point, apparently not yet having attained a status that warranted a royal sitting.<sup>13</sup>

During the years he had spent in Italy, Rubens had carefully studied antique sculpture and Renaissance works by artists such as Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo, and Titian, and his visit to Spain offered him the chance to continue his studies. As we shall see, Rubens visited the royal collections and was impressed by the amount and quality of the paintings he saw there. But the only unequivocal evidence of Rubens' study of other artists at this time is a sheet that includes figures drawn by him after a painting of the *Martyrdom of Saint James* by Fernández de Navarrete "El Mudo," several drawings by Leonardo, and other, unidentified sources.<sup>14</sup> Navarrete's painting hung in El Escorial (where it remains today), and Rubens must have copied it there. Aside from the merits of the painting itself, Rubens' interest in this picture reflects the esteem in which this painter was held in the Spanish court, and it is an indication of the status the Spanish artist had gained since his early death in 1579.<sup>15</sup> The drawings after Leonardo were probably copied from the collection of drawings by the great Florentine artist that the sculptor Pompeo Leoni had brought to Spain at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Rubens must have met Pompeo Leoni in Spain, either in Madrid, where the sculptor was based and where he is documented in the summer of 1603, or in Valladolid, where he also worked regularly.<sup>17</sup> It was natural for the Italianized Rubens to seek out Italian company in Spain. Leoni's link with his father, the great sculptor Leone Leoni, and his privileged position at the court, certainly would have incited Rubens' curiosity.

Mention should be made here of an additional work by Rubens that he is believed to have brought to Spain during this trip, but that may actually never have existed. In 1607 and thereafter, the inventories of the Spanish royal collection list a *Portrait of the Duke of Mantua* attrib-

uted to Rubens.<sup>18</sup> This portrait has been linked in the literature with a painting referred to in the correspondence between the Mantuan embassy in Valladolid and the court in Mantua.<sup>19</sup> However, the correspondence shows that the only picture mentioned is a portrait by Frans Pourbus the Younger, who also worked for the duke.<sup>20</sup> We are thus left with the royal inventories as the only source to mention Rubens' portrait of the duke. There are, however, reasons to believe that the attribution may be incorrect. The painting first listed in the royal collection in 1607 as by Rubens is probably identical to an anonymous portrait of the duke of Mantua that belonged to the duke of Lerma in 1603, and that is probably the portrait by Pourbus mentioned above.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that this painting is the same one that later appears in the royal collection, where it presumably entered as a gift or sale from Lerma. It is easy to imagine that when the portrait was first inventoried in 1607 in the royal collection it was attributed to Rubens, the person in charge of its delivery, instead of Pourbus. The initial mistake was probably perpetuated in later inventories, which were often based on previous listings and not on observation of the actual collection.<sup>22</sup>

During the months Rubens was in Spain, he had a chance to tour the royal collections in the monastic and palatial complex of El Escorial and elsewhere. He wrote about this visit in a letter to Mantua dated May 24, 1603, where he expressed the great impression made on him by the array of Italian masterpieces but also noted his lack of interest in the modern paintings owned by the king. In the letter he refers to the "many splendid works of Titian, of Raphael and others, which have astonished me, both by their quality and quantity, in the King's palace, in the Escorial, and elsewhere. But as for the moderns, there is nothing of any worth."<sup>23</sup>

Rubens' mention of Raphael is surprising, given the small presence of works by the painter from Urbino in Spain at this time. The *Madonna of the Rose* (Madrid, Prado) was probably in El Escorial when Rubens visited there and must be one of the pictures that he had a chance to view. A small number of additional works by Raphael, all of them unidentified, are documented in Spain in the early seventeenth century and may also account for the statement made by Rubens.<sup>24</sup> The mention of Titian is especially interesting, given the number of works by this painter the Spanish monarchs had assembled in the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup> In El Escorial, Rubens must have seen the *Trinity* (Madrid, Prado) and the late *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* (El Escorial; Fig. 41), among other pictures, and in and around Madrid he could have contemplated several portraits of Spanish monarchs (among them the famous *Charles V at the Battle of Mühlberg* and the *Philip II in Armor*, both in the Prado; Figs. 31 and 37); the mythologies known as the *poesie*; the so-called *Pardo Venus* (Paris, Louvre), as well as many others. Titian's style did not have the long-lasting impact on Rubens at this point that it would have in

later years, especially after his second visit to Spain. Even though some authors believe that he carefully studied Titian's works at this time by making copies after some of them, this is not certain.<sup>26</sup> What Rubens' reference to Titian in the letter mentioned above does show is that the Venetian master made an impression on him at this time. Titian's influence has been detected in some of Rubens' post-Spanish works, especially in his use of color.<sup>27</sup> This is not yet the close artistic relationship that would emerge after Rubens' second Spanish trip, but it is an anticipation of things to come.

The fact that Rubens' correspondence does not mention one painter who was active in Spain at the time is worth noting. El Greco lived in Toledo until his death in 1614. Two of his works (the *Adoration of the Name of Jesus* and the *Martyrdom of Saint Maurice*) could be seen in El Escorial at the time of Rubens' trip to Spain. Also, one of El Greco's most important series of paintings had been recently installed in the College of Doña María de Aragón in Madrid, very close to the Alcázar (as the royal palace was known), one of the sites where Rubens presumably viewed the royal collection.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the work of this idiosyncratic genius baffled Rubens as much as it did other contemporary critics. Francisco Pacheco, for example, commended El Greco for his erudition and his struggles in support of the professional status of painters, but was puzzled by the lack of drawing in his works and by the primacy given in them to color.<sup>29</sup>

In another passage of the letter of May 24, 1603, quoted above, Rubens wrote about his opinions of the painters then active at the Spanish court in Valladolid.<sup>30</sup> He stated that he associated little with the local court artists, whose work he described with great contempt, saying of them: "the incredible incompetence and carelessness of the painters here, whose style (and this is very important) is totally different from mine." This often quoted opinion, which is sometimes used to legitimize criticism of the painters of the court of Philip III, may have been expressed with excessive haste. The painters present at the court at the time included the Florentine Bartolomé Carducho (originally Bartolommeo Carducci), who was one of the most influential figures at court in artistic matters, and who probably met Rubens when he inspected the paintings included in the gift from Mantua.<sup>31</sup> Also there was Bartolomé's younger brother Vicente Carducho, nearly an exact contemporary of Rubens; and the aging portrait specialist Juan Pantoja de la Cruz; in addition to other lesser-known artists. The Carduchos and some of the other painters were certainly competent, if less than great.<sup>32</sup> Rubens' letter shows that he disapproved of the style of the painters in Valladolid. Given Rubens' interests during his first Italian years, and the strong naturalism prevalent in Spanish painting at the time, this may indicate that he thought the work of the local artists was too far removed from the classical ideal. But Rubens' critique of these artists,

made when he had spent only ten busy days in Valladolid, can also be seen as a reflection of his state of mind. A late bloomer who was still trying to accelerate his career, he appears to have been annoyed by these artists, whom he regarded as inferior, perhaps because, as the painter of a lesser prince, he could be seen as having less status than they did.<sup>33</sup>

***The Portrait of the Duke of Lerma and the Heraclitus and  
Democritus***

The most important painting made by Rubens in his visit to Spain is the *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma*.<sup>34</sup> It is also the only painting documented in the correspondence from this trip that can be identified with certainty with an extant work; it is now in the Prado (Fig. 1). Only a few of Rubens' other early paintings match this work in ambition and grandeur. Among them are the panels of the *Ecstasy of St. Helena* (Grasse, Chapel of the Municipal Hospital), the *Mocking of Christ* (Grasse, Chapel of the Municipal Hospital) and the *Raising of the Cross* (now lost), which formed the altarpiece for the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome of 1602; the large *Entombment* now in the Borghese Gallery in Rome; and some of the early mythologies that Rubens painted in his first Italian years, such as the *Assembly of the Olympians* (Prague, Castle), and the *Hercules and Omphale* (Paris, Louvre). In these scenes, Rubens had tested his artistic abilities by creating large and complex compositions for important patrons. In comparison with these paintings, the *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma* offers a glimpse of a more evolved stage in Rubens' development as an artist. In the earlier images, the powerful anatomies of the figures are mitigated by their delicate facial features and sensitive expressions and gestures, as can be seen, for example, in the *Entombment* from the Borghese Gallery (Fig. 2). The poses of these and other figures from Rubens' early Italian pictures are reminiscent of the aesthetics of mannerism in their emphasis on grace and artistry. In these early works, light is used in a discontinuous way that adds both drama and confusion to the images. Although the movement of the figures and the painter's concentration on marginal areas of the compositions result in scenes that are somewhat disjointed, they are nevertheless successful because of their emotional intensity.

In the portrait of the duke of Lerma, significant changes have taken place in the artist's style. As in his earlier work, the forms are robust, but here the gestures are consonant with the powerful anatomies of the horse and rider. The light is still unrealistically dramatic, but it is used to enhance the horse and the mounted figure and does not distract the viewer's attention from them. The sinuous grouping of trees behind and above the sitter are reminiscent of the intricacy of the background

elements in the earlier paintings, but now they too are less distracting. The result is a more unified composition, where every element is directed at exalting the splendor of the sitter and the viewer's contemplation of him. As in the works from his first years in Italy, in this portrait Rubens makes abundant use of specific elements taken from other sources and artists. Among the numerous sources, direct or indirect, that have been cited for this painting are: a description in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* of a painting by Apelles showing Antigonos, king of Macedonia, advancing with his horse; a series of anonymous Flemish paintings of emperors on horseback in Lerma's collection; prints of equestrian Roman emperors by Collaert and Jan van der Straet (or Stradanus); and Titian's *Charles V at Mühlberg*, which was in the Spanish royal collection.<sup>35</sup> But these – or other similar influences that can be cited, such as Hans Burgkmair's print of *Saint George*<sup>36</sup> – are now more successfully transformed into a personal idiom than the classical quotations in his earlier paintings.

The innovations evident in the portrait of Lerma do not represent the beginning of an entirely new phase of Rubens' career, because in the following years the artist would occasionally return to elements of his earlier style. Perhaps this phase of his artistic evolution is best characterized as one of trial and error. However, the Lerma portrait does exhibit for the first time many features that Rubens would develop more fully in the future. The forceful presentation of the horse and rider, and the subordination of all parts of the image to a central theme, which are absent in earlier paintings, can be seen again in *The Gonzaga Adoring the Trinity*, painted shortly after Rubens' return from Spain to Mantua. The same boldness of conception and execution characterizes pictures such as the *Portrait of Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria* in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the *Saint George Slaying the Dragon* (Fig. 68) from the Prado, and other works that Rubens executed in the years immediately preceding his return from Italy to Flanders in 1608. Another aspect of Rubens' art that would become increasingly important later in his career is the ideological conviction that he instilled in the images he made for Europe's governing class. In the *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma*, Rubens underscored the political stature of the sitter by using as a source for his design the images of past emperors and rulers mentioned above.

The exact circumstances that led to the creation of *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma* are not fully documented, leaving this matter open to speculation. One obvious possibility is that Lerma personally commissioned the portrait. This is supported by one interpretation of the painting, which suggests that Rubens' equestrian portrait should be seen as part of a campaign by Lerma to call attention to his descent from a family of warriors who had served the Spanish Crown for centuries, a campaign that also included the commissioning of commemorative fres-

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**FIGURE 1**

*Facing page*

Rubens, *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma*. Madrid, Museo del Prado.



**FIGURE 2**

Rubens, *Entombment of Christ*. Rome, Galleria Borghese.



coes and oil paintings from Bartolomé and Vicente Carducho for the duke's quarters in the royal palace in Valladolid.<sup>37</sup>

The theory that the commission came from the sitter is certainly plausible, but it is not certain. All we know from the documentation is that in July of 1603 the duke of Lerma asked Rubens to paint him a picture of his own invention (“di suo capriccio”).<sup>38</sup> The next document that can be related to this work is a letter of September 15 of the same year, in which Rubens excitedly refers to a “great equestrian portrait” of the duke that he is to paint.<sup>39</sup> The fact that what had originated as an unspecified commission from Lerma had now become a monumental equestrian portrait may indicate that the subject matter of this work was decided, at least in part, by the painter. If this is the case, it is a measure of the ambition with which Rubens approached his stay at the Spanish court.

Whatever the origin of the painting, the importance of the Spanish court, and also of the sitter, help to explain the unprecedented splendor of the equestrian portrait of Lerma. The court of Philip III was among the most important in Europe at the time, and, as the favorite of the Spanish king, the duke of Lerma was one of the most powerful men of the period. The king and his minister were also important collectors and patrons of the arts who ruled over a court known at the time for its pageantry and lavish festivities. The royal and ducal households in and

around Valladolid were richly decorated with canvases and fresco paintings inscribed in gilded moldings, and they also housed natural wonders and numerous other objects typical of the taste of collectors of the day. Even though he was not the equal of his father, Philip II, who had been one of the greatest collectors of the sixteenth century, Philip III clearly had inherited his high standards and was well aware of the importance of creating for himself an image of splendor.<sup>40</sup>

As the protagonist and recipient of what may be considered Rubens' most important painting to date, the duke of Lerma needs some further explaining. From 1598 to his downfall in 1618, Lerma was the first true favorite, or *valido*, to serve the Spanish king, a powerful political figure typical of the early seventeenth century in Europe. He was also the most important art patron and collector of his generation in Spain and one of the most avid collectors – in terms of the number of paintings purchased – in all of Europe.<sup>41</sup> During Rubens' visit to Valladolid in 1603–1604, Lerma's collection of paintings was in the midst of a period of rapid growth. An inventory of the duke's quarters in the royal palace in Valladolid taken in September of 1603 (the same time when Rubens was working on Lerma's equestrian portrait) listed 488 paintings, including copies of the works of many leading Italian painters whose originals were extremely difficult to acquire (such as Titian and Raphael); many Netherlandish works (some attributed to Bosch); and works by Sánchez Coello, Ribalta, and other important Spanish painters.<sup>42</sup> The collection continued to grow in the following years, so that by 1606 it included close to 1,500 paintings, and the quality of the works would gradually become more selective: by 1606 Lerma owned originals by Titian, Veronese, the Bassani, and Mor, among others, and it should also be remembered that he owned Giambologna's monumental marble group *Samson Slaying a Philistine* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum), which he had received as a gift from Ferdinando de' Medici in 1601.

In a letter cited earlier in this chapter, Rubens wrote to Mantua about Lerma's "knowledge of fine things" and his "particular pleasure and practice" of seeing the great works that had been assembled in the royal collection.<sup>43</sup> Lerma's power and position at the court also impressed Rubens, perhaps even more than his interest in the arts. In a letter to a friend written in 1626, the painter remembered an incident that had taken place during his visit to Spain more than two decades earlier:

The king, in granting audience to an Italian gentleman, referred him to the Duke of Lerma (with whom an audience was extremely difficult). "But if I had been able to have an audience with the Duke," replied the gentleman, "I should not have come to Your Majesty."<sup>44</sup>

The importance of the Spanish court, and Lerma's position within it, must have made Rubens feel that the opportunity to portray the duke

was a unique occasion to display his talents. The resulting equestrian portrait shows that the painter responded brilliantly with a work that was a magnificent debut to his relationship with Spain's rulers and patrons.

Aside from the portrait of Lerma, the only other work made by Rubens in Spain that has been tentatively identified with an extant picture is the *Democritus and Heraclitus*, which is probably identical to a painting in a private collection in Princeton, New Jersey. (Fig. 3).<sup>45</sup> This picture can be considered as something of a statement by the young Rubens as it was made on his own initiative in substitution for two religious images, a *St. John in the Wilderness* and a painting of the Virgin that were judged to have been damaged beyond repair upon their arrival in Valladolid.<sup>46</sup> The idea of replacing religious paintings with a work that uses classical and Renaissance sources suggests that Rubens wished to present himself as a learned artist, and perhaps also that he was taking a stance vis-à-vis the naturalism favored by local artists. Also, the theme of the two philosophers who react to the fortunes of the world, one by crying and the other by laughing, was used by contemporary Spanish writers. It may be that Rubens was responding to this stimulus with his painting.<sup>47</sup> The *Democritus and Heraclitus* is an awkward picture. The fine features of Democritus, on the left, contrast with the strenuous pose of Heraclitus, and with the massive musculature of his neck and arm. The intensity of the gazes of the two figures, however, makes this a strangely engaging work. As Michael Jaffé has suggested, Rubens' eagerness to please his patrons with this painting appears to have been successful, as it was painted before the equestrian portrait of Lerma and therefore may have prompted the duke to award him that commission.<sup>48</sup>

The paintings produced by Rubens in Spain are ambitious works that, together with his correspondence, reveal a determined artistic personality. In a letter written from Valladolid to Mantua, Rubens denied being "ambizioso di un poco di fumo" ("ambitious for a little flattery").<sup>49</sup> But his opinions about the artists of the Spanish court, the general tone of his correspondence, and the paintings that he executed during his stay in Spain appear to contradict this denial. Rubens seems to have been a determinedly ambitious artist, somewhat impatient with his status, to the point of complaining about delivering a gift to the Spanish court that did not include a single painting by his own hand.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, Rubens had high hopes for his first Spanish sojourn. Seen in the light of these hopes, his 1603–1604 visit to the Spanish court can be considered a success. One sign of this was Lerma's desire to have Rubens remain in Spain and work for the king, as was reported by Iberti in a letter to the duke of Mantua.<sup>51</sup> Also revealing is the praise accorded Rubens' paintings, the *Heraclitus and Democritus* being referred

**FIGURE 3**

Rubens, *Democritus and Heraclitus*. Princeton, New Jersey, The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection Foundation.

to as *bueno* (or “good”) in the 1607 inventory of the collection of the duke of Lerma, and the portrait of the duke receiving praise both during its execution and after its completion.<sup>52</sup>

But the Spanish trip also reveals a less familiar side of Rubens that is characteristic of the early part of his career. He emerges at this period as an artist who has not yet achieved the status that he will attain later and who is bound by the constraints common to his profession. The only specifically painterly instruction that Rubens received from Vincenzo I Gonzaga on his trip to Spain was to paint portraits of women from the court. (It is worth noting that Rubens’ activity during his years in Mantua was remembered shortly after his death as mainly that of a portrait painter. In 1642, the critic and art historian Giovanni Baglione wrote that, when in Mantua, Rubens “made various works, and in particular he painted some very beautiful portraits.”) As we have seen, Rubens considered this a humble occupation for a painter, reflecting a prejudice of his time.<sup>53</sup> At another juncture, his Mantuan patrons suggested that he paint “cose boscareccie,” or woodland scenes, again associating him with a comparatively lesser genre.<sup>54</sup>

Rubens’ success at the Spanish court did not have any significant impact upon local painters at the time. In addition, his visit to the court does not seem to have found a place among the memorable events in Rubens’ relation with Spain. It is not mentioned by the two most important sources on seventeenth-century painting in Spain, the *Arte de la Pintura* by Francisco Pacheco, and the *Lives of the Eminent Spanish*

*Painters and Sculptors* by Acisclo Antonio Palomino, also a writer as well as a painter.<sup>55</sup> Both authors deal extensively with Rubens' second Spanish visit and treat the Fleming as a major figure of the Spanish artistic scene. Their omission of Rubens' first visit to Spain is thus highly significant and demonstrates that it had been forgotten – in the case of Pacheco, only four decades after it had taken place.

The exact date of Rubens' departure from the Iberian peninsula is not known, but it probably took place in the first months of 1604.<sup>56</sup> When he returned to the Spanish court in the summer of 1628 his status had greatly improved. To a large degree this was due to the increasing flow of his paintings into Spain in the intervening years.