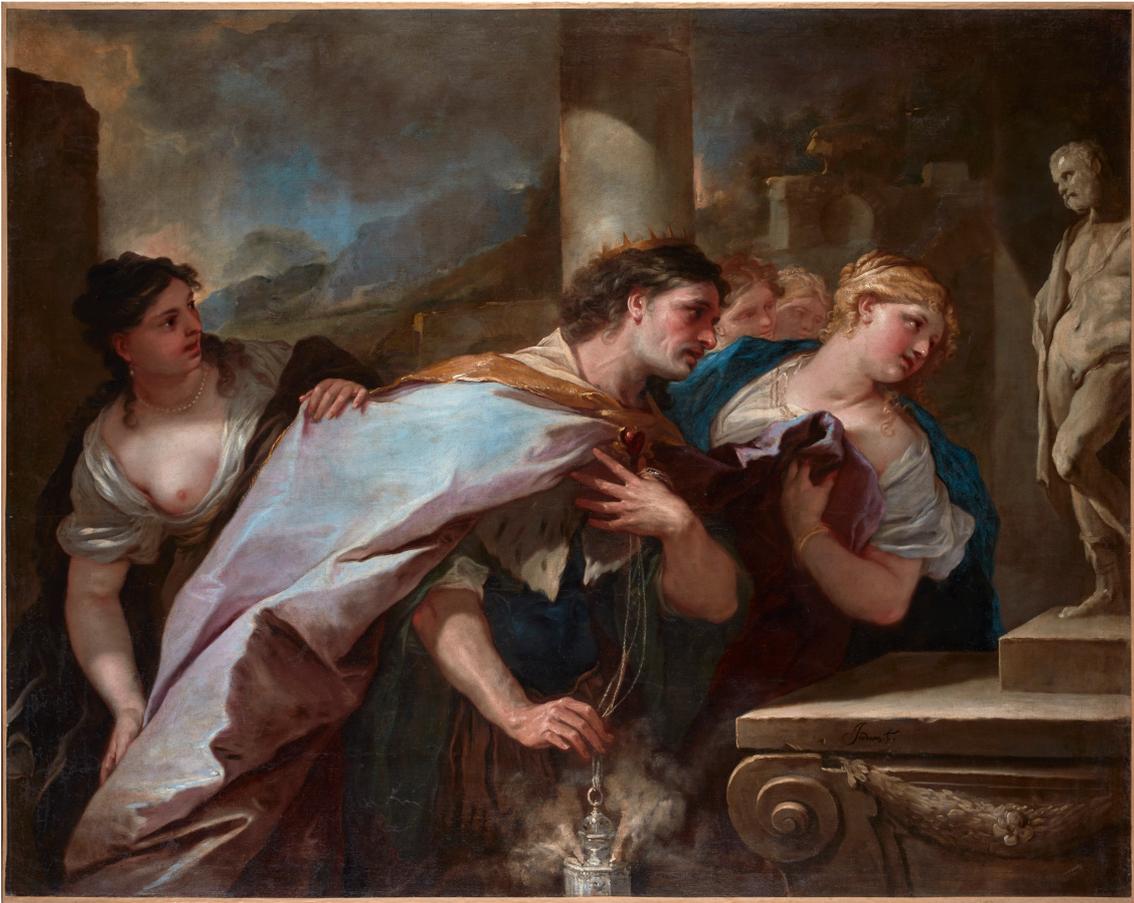


Caylus



LUCA GIORDANO
(Naples, 1634-1705)

The Idolatry of Solomon

Oil on canvas

162 x 207 cm

Signed: "Jordanus .F."

PROVENANCE:

Manuel María de Allendesalazar Loyzaga, III conde de Montefuerte (1814-1891); by descent to the present owners.

LITERATURE:

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Son of the minor painter Antonio Giordano (ca.1597-1683), Luca Giordano's first known works are reworkings of compositions by José de Ribera. Around 1652 he made his first study trip to Rome, Florence and Venice, focusing in particular on the art of Pietro da Cortona and the great masters of the Venetian Cinquecento, above all Titian and Veronese. In Venice Giordano received his first public commissions for the churches of Santa Maria del Pianto, San Pietro di Castello and the Spirito Santo. Having returned to Naples, he presented *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter* and *The Meeting of Saints Peter and Paul on their way to Martyrdom*, both of 1654 (Naples, church of San Pietro ad Aram), in which he revealed the lessons absorbed during his study period. During that decade and the first half of the following one Giordano produced tenebrist paintings together with others that reveal his knowledge of the works of Venice and of Rubens, which had started to arrive in aristocratic collections in Naples and which he had admired in churches and collections in

Rome. At this period he also came close to Mattia Preti (1613-1699) in what would be a profitable artistic relationship for the two painters.

Among the artist's patrons were Gaspar de Bracamonte, Count of Peñaranda, the Spanish Viceroy in Naples, the Florentine Medici and various Tuscan and Venetian nobles. In Naples Giordano returned to his activities in fresco for the dome of the sacristy of the chapel of San Gennaro which he had started in 1663. He also painted numerous works for the Neapolitan and foreign aristocracy including various Spaniards, a fact that propitiated his subsequent arrival in Spain.

Among the masterpieces of Giordano's oeuvre are the frescos for the Benedictine abbey of Montecassino (destroyed in World War II), which the artist began in 1677, as well as those for the dome of the church of Santa Brigida in Naples (1678). Other celebrated fresco schemes include the dome of the Corsini chapel in the Carmelite church (1682), the gallery of the Medici Riccardi palace (1685), and the extremely large fresco in the church of the Gerolamini, depicting *The Expulsion of the Money Traders from the Temple*.

During these years Giordano sent a considerable number of works to Spain, which led Charles II to summon him to the court in Madrid. The artist set out on 22 April 1692, having received a preliminary payment for his travels of 1,500 ducados and, according to Palomino, "paying for everything aboard ship, which was a great deal." Giordano arrived in Madrid in June and again according to Palomino his first commission was to paint large depictions of *The Battle of the Rebel Angels* and *The Triumph of Saint Michael*, immediately giving rise to legends regarding the rapidity of his technique, which that author denied, reducing it to its correct proportions. In September Giordano went to El Escorial where he painted the ceiling of the monastery's principal staircase. Letters survive from the King's secretary to the Prior of the monastery which record the King's pleasure at seeing the drawings that the Prior regularly sent to Madrid. The fresco for the staircase was completed in April 1693 and Giordano continued to work on the ceilings of the basilica, a task that occupied him from April 1693 to July 1694. Having returned to Madrid, in August he was appointed first court painter and over the following months the artist's sons and sons-in-law received well paid positions "due to the merits of their father" in a reflection of the King's satisfaction.

Various preliminary studies survive for the frieze on the staircase which depict *The Battle of Saint Quentin*, *The Capture of the Grand Constable of Montmorency*, and *The Construction of the Monastery with Philip II's Visit* (Museo del Prado and Alba ducal collections). During the following years Giordano painted numerous works for the Alcázar in Madrid, the palace at Aranjuez and the Buen Retiro. In addition to canvases for the latter he also painted the frescos on the ceiling of the Main Hall, known as the Casón, depicting *The Allegory of the Order of the Golden Fleece* (1697), which can be considered another of his masterpieces. In 1697 the artist also painted scenes of the Life of the Virgin for the Hieronymite monastery (Guadalupe) where he reworked previous compositions. In 1698 he embarked on the decoration of the ceiling of the sacristy of Toledo cathedral, painting *Saint Ildefonso receives the Chasuble*, a scene accompanied by saints, angels and allegories. In 1698 the artist began the decoration of the church of San Antonio de los Portugueses o de los Alemanes, where Carreño and Rizzi had also worked on the dome. This project now involved painting the walls with fictive tapestries depicting the saint's miracles. This project continued until 1701, interrupted by the King's death on 1 November 1700. In February 1692 Giordano returned to Italy as part of the monarch's retinue.

Giordano was an artist exceptionally able to imitate the styles of other painters, as well as a brilliant draughtsman and particularly outstanding in the production of preliminary studies. His facility and speed were proverbial, as recorded in the letters that the Prior of El Escorial wrote to Charles II recording his admiration for the rapidity with which the artist interpreted the mysteries explained verbally to him by two theologians at his side who answered his questions, but too slowly for the speed of his brushes. Giordano's Baroque, colourful style had a significant influence on the Neapolitan painters who were his followers: Giuseppe Simonelli, Paolo de Matteis, Nicolo Maria Ross, Nicola Malinconico and many others.

The present canvas of *Solomon worshipping Idols* is a previously unpublished work that was part of a series on Old Testament kings. Another painting of a comparable subject and size is known, depicting *David and the Prophet Gad* (164 x 207 cm; Auckland Castle) (fig. 1). For Scavizzi and Ferrari it is not clear if the latter was painted in Naples or during Giordano's time in Spain, but it should be noted that both have the same provenance to the Allendesalazar family.



Fig. 1. Luca Giordano, *David and the Prophet Gad*. Oil on canvas, 164 x 207 cm.

Auckland Castle Museum, Auckland.