

# COLNAGHI



Francisco de Goya y Lucientes  
*Sacrifice to Priapus*, 1770 or 1771



## FRANCISCO DE GOYA Y LUCIENTES

(Fundetodos 1746 – Bordeaux 1828)

*SACRIFICE TO PRIAPUS*, 1770 or 1771

oil on canvas

40.4 x 30.3 cm; 15 7/8 x 11 7/8 in.

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### Provenance

Private collection, Paris, until 1950s;

Marie (Molly) Balkany (1928-2015), Lake Geneva, Switzerland;

Her posthumous sale, Geneva, Piguet Hôtel de Ventes, 6 May 2017, lot 519 (as 18th century French School);

Private collection, Spain, since 2017.

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### Literature

Camón Aznar, José. *Francisco De Goya*. Zaragoza 1980, 4 vols. I: p. 54.

De Angelis, Rita, ed. *L'opera pittorica completa di Goya*. Milan 1974, p. 90, cat. no. 18.

Gassier, Pierre, and Juliet Wilson. *Goya: His Life and Work*. New York, 1971, pp. 74, 82, cat. no. 24 [reproduced].

Gudiol, José. *Goya 1746-1828. Biography, Analytical Study and Catalogue of His Paintings*. New York, 1971, p. 233, cat. no. 16.

Mangiante, Paolo Erasmo. *Goya e l'Italia*. Rome, 1992, pp. 58, 116 (n. 42).

Tabar Antinua, Fernando. "Los 'sacrificios' romanos del joven Goya" *Ars Magazine* 56 (2022): pp. 70-77 [reproduced].

La estela de Corrado Giaquinto en España, edited by Arturo Ansón. Exh. cat. Zaragoza (Fundación Ibercaja), 2021, cat. no. 35. [reproduced].

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### Exhibition History

Zaragoza 2021.

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In 1770, a young Francisco de Goya y Lucientes arrived in Rome from his hometown of Zaragoza to absorb all the Eternal City had to offer. Despite Goya going on to become the premier Spanish artist of his time, very little is known about his early Roman sojourn. Without any sponsorships or bursaries from an artistic academy, the paper trail relating to this period is scant. Even his Roman address has thus far been hard to come by.

This extraordinary canvas represents one of only about a dozen known works produced by the artist during his stay in the city.<sup>1</sup> Rediscovered by Xavière Deparmet Fitz-Gerald in 1964, the work depicts a sacrifice to Priapus, the Roman God of fertility. A priestess dressed as a vestal virgin (the high priestesses of Ancient Rome) offers up a dish of libations to a statue of the god, in front of which there is a rectangular altar with cups and liturgical ornaments and, to the right, a lit incense burner. Another female figure, crouching down with her back to us, has her right arm around the statue while her left hand is holding a sacrificial goat. The statue of Priapus features an erect phallus and is adorned with floral garlands.

The canvas shows the myriad artistic debts the young Spanish artist held, particularly to eighteenth-century French painting. Besides the work's incredibly warm palette and thick woody foliage evocative of French Rococo painters such as Fragonard (see, for example, the exactly contemporary *Meeting at the Frick Collection*, Fig. 1), the work also takes a great deal of inspiration from the burgeoning neoclassical trend which had taken hold in the city. Here too, Goya looked toward its French current, represented *in primis* by the sculptor Claude Michel, known as Clodion.

Clodion (1738–1814) is counted amongst the finest and most sought-after sculptors in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. Along with Jean-Antoine Houdon, he is responsible for disseminating a particularly French take on neoclassical sculpture across Europe and America. From 1763 and 1766, Clodion was a resident artist in the French Academy in Rome, having won the prestigious *Prix de Rome* for his work. After the end of his official tenure in the Academy, the sculptor stayed in the Eternal City until 1771, the same year Goya left Italy to return home.<sup>2</sup>

During his Roman tenure, Clodion produced several small, highly sought-after figures depicting pagan sacrifices. In the case of Goya's *Sacrifice*, Lopez-Rey noted an affinity to a *Vestal* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, (Fig. 2)<sup>3</sup> and a strikingly close

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<sup>1</sup> *Goya & Italy*, edited by Joan Sureda, exh. cat. Zaragoza (Museo de Zaragoza), 2008, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Zaragoza 2021, p. 260

<sup>3</sup> Lopez-Rey 1979.

resemblance to the (slightly later) *Offering to Priapus* now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Fig. 3).

The light, ethereal pagan sculptures made by Clodion during his Roman period created a market for this type of genre imagery in the visual arts across all visual media, and it seems that Goya's *Sacrifice* is the young artist's response to local Roman taste. Out of the small nucleus of Goya's known Roman production, two other paintings -- another *Sacrifice to Priapus* and a *Sacrifice to Vesta* (Figs. 4-5) -- portray extremely similar subjects. De Angelis and Gudiol both noted<sup>4</sup> that Goya likely made these canvasses to support his artistic activity in Rome.

The other *Sacrifice to Priapus* presents the opportunity for a close confrontation with the present work. The other canvas, formerly in the collection of José Gudiol was long known as the *Sacrifice to Pan* before the discovery of the work under consideration here, due to the absence of the phallus on the statue. Other small variations in the smaller canvas include the absence of flower garlands around the herm, a wine jug instead of a sacrificial goat, and a square platform instead of a round one. The pictorial manner in the smaller work is slightly more closed, whereas the handling in the present work is fresher and more effortless, especially in the rendering of the semi-transparent fabrics worn by both figures.

Though Goya made this before his tenure as official court portraitist to King Charles III, and well before the debilitating illness that caused the artist to develop his dark, disturbing manner for which he is most known, certain seeds of his mature style (or rather *styles*) are clearly visible in this rare work. The aforementioned verdant, fluffy foliage, along with the bright and fresh colour palette expressed in the *Sacrifice* can also be seen in his court masterpiece *The Parasol* (1777, Museo Nacional del Prado, Fig. 6).

Goya's appropriation of pagan sacrifices this early marked his production and influenced his mature fascination for the occult in celebrated paintings such as *Witches' Sabbath* (Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Fig. 7) and his canvases from *'The Forcibly Bewitched'* (of which one is in the National Gallery, London, Fig. 8). For an *oeuvre* so multifaceted and complex as that of Goya, this canvas holds the seeds for almost all the currents that would diverge so just a few years after its production.

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<sup>4</sup> De Angelis 1974, p. 90; Gudiol 1971, p. 233.





Fig. 1. Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Meeting* (From the *Progress of Love* Series), 1771-73.  
New York, Frick Collection.



Fig. 2. Claude Michel, called Clodion, *A Vestal*, 1770.  
Washington, National Museum of Art.



Fig. 3. Claude Michel, called Clodion, *Offering to Priapus*, 1775.  
Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.



Fig. 4. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Sacrifice to Priapus* (formerly known as *Sacrifice to Pan*), 1771.  
Private collection.



Fig. 5. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Sacrifice to Vesta*, 1771.  
Private collection, Spain.



Fig. 6. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *The Parasol*, 1777.  
Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.





Fig. 7. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Witches' Sabbath*, 1798.  
Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano.



Fig. 8. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *A Scene from 'The Forcibly Bewitched'*, 1798.  
London, National Gallery.

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