

Matthijs Musson's trading activity

Matthijs Musson (Antwerp, 1598 –1678/79)

Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary

ca. 1640-1650

oil on canvas

230 x 340 cm

inv. no. 2565



Musson traded mostly in the Low Countries, both in the South (Antwerp and Brussels) and in the North (Amsterdam, Middelburg and Haarlem), all of them important economic centres with which he established regular commerce. On the contrary, he had no active relationship either with Germany or with Italy.

There are no records of him travelling to Spain, even though Seville had become the epicentre of the Spanish trade with the West Indies since the late 16th century and particularly in the 17th century. Spain's inability to meet the demand for artworks was the reason why Antwerp supplied the market needs after its incorporation into the Empire, resulting in the establishment of a strong commercial link between the Low Countries and the Iberian Peninsula. The financial and diplomatic policies of the Spanish kings (Philip III and Philip IV) allowed Flanders to obtain a dominant position in the art markets of Spain and the other side of the Atlantic.

Unlike some of their rivals, Musson and his wife Maria Fourmenois did not assume the risks of the transport on their own. On one hand, they limited losses by using commercial agents and, on the other, their customers assumed part of the risk involved in the shipping of the goods.

Correspondence between Musson and his representatives in Spain has revealed that at least fourteen people were working for him in several locations in the Iberian Peninsula, that local markets had been opened in Bilbao, Cadiz, Madrid and Malaga, and that in some cases he maintained commercial relations simultaneously with several representatives in the same city. The regular communication with his agents in Spain gave him a good insight into the market in Spain and the new American territories.

The strong link with Spain would explain the presence in the Iberian Peninsula of his three most important works known to date, one in the BBVA Collection, *Jesús en casa de Marta y María*; and two at Universidad Pontificia in Salamanca: *Abraham y Melquisedec* and *La clemencia de Escipión*, both copies of works by Rubens. Similar in size, the three paintings were signed by the artist and are currently the only three documented works to bear his signature.