

11. Contending Gods

“Trojan Chronicle” Crónica Troyana (around 1400)

I have heard of some people say: “If you are staying in Spain for only one day, go to Toledo.” Certainly the old town of Toledo is attractive, but it is difficult to visit Toledo in a day considering the time required for traveling to and from the town. If I were to visit Toledo, I would like to take more time. Madrid is probably the best place to visit if you only have one day. A good plan for sightseeing would be: waiting for the Prado museum to open while looking at people exercising in the Retiro Park in the early morning, spending the entire morning in the museum, and having lunch around the Plaza Mayor. Then in the afternoon, you could go to the Plaza de España via Gran Vía to see the statues of Cervantes and Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and in the evening, you could watch the sunset as it moves from Palacio Real to Parque de Oeste. If there were time later in the evening you might find it nice to join in the hustle and bustle of Puerta del Sol.



【Picture 11a: Cibeles】

When we walk around Madrid we can see the traces of the ancient gods. The fountain of Cibeles, the Goddess of the Earth in Asia Minor, is located in the rotary where Paseo del Prado crosses over Alcalá Street in front of Retiro Park (picture 11a). When we go to the south, the fountain of Neptune, the Roman Sea-God, comes into view (picture 11b). The Prado museum is located diagonally in front of this fountain. The Paseo del Prado is a short street of about 500m, but it is a beautiful passage (paseo) surrounded by trees.

●Competing Beauties

Many famous art objects with the theme of ancient Greek and Roman myths can be seen at the Prado museum. For example, “The Judgement of Paris” (El Juicio

de Paris) (1638) and “The Three Graces” (Las Tres Gracias) (1636) by Peter Paul Rubens are familiar from illustrations, but there is nothing better than viewing the actual work in person. Hearing the expressions of delight and pleasure in the voices of the visitors to the museum, we realize that these are indeed the original works; the only ones of their kind in the world.

The Age of Fable (1855) by Thomas Bulfinch clearly explains complicated ancient myths. It shows the beginning of the Trojan War as follows: “Athena is the goddess of wisdom. One day she did a foolish thing. She competed with Hera and Aphrodite for beauty in order to monopolize beauty.” (“Greek and Roman Myth”

Japanese Translation; Yayoko Nogami, Iwanami-bunko). Surely it is a “foolish thing” for The Three Graces (Las Tres Gracias by Rubens) to compete for sole possession of beauty. Gods and people have their own unique value, and it is foolish to compete or compare these. Paris, also in Rubens’ paintings, took the role of a judge for this competition. He was seduced in a bargain with Aphrodite



【Picture 11b: Neptuno】

and gave her the prize (an apple). As a reward, he took Helene, the wife of Menelaus, with Aphrodite’s assistance and brought her back to Troy. Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon were enraged at his action and attacked Troy with a large Greek army. The war continued for a long time, but finally a wooden horse with many Greek soldiers hidden inside were taken into the fortress and the soldiers slipped out of the horse and attacked from inside the city, and Troy fell to them. This is the well-known history of the Trojan War¹.

¹ cf. Paragraphs of “Cassandra” and “The Trojan War”. “The Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Myth”. Harushige Kouzu (1960)