

On the subject and its clothing

Francisco de Goya (Fuendetodos, Zaragoza, 1746 - Bordeaux, 1828)

Don Pantaleón Pérez de Nenin

1808

oil on canvas

206 x 124.7 cm

inv. no. 444



The uniform instantly identifies the subject as one of Queen María Luisa's hussars, and he was described as such by Augusto L. Mayer in his work *Goya* from 1925. Pérez de Nenin's record, which was located by Nigel Glendining in 1963 in the Military Archive in Segovia, provides information on his promotions, licences and retirement. Later, Manuela Mena, in the catalogue for the exhibition "Goya en tiempos de guerra" (Madrid, 2008) confirmed that he was raised to the rank of First Lieutenant without having graduated from a military academy, thanks to the fact that his family helped finance the creation of the Queen's regiment of hussars.

Glendining also added other key facts from his biography, including his birth in Bilbao in 1779 "to a family of wealthy traders in Villa del Nervión". Otherwise, Pérez Sánchez, according to documentation proportioned by its previous owners, described him as "anti-French though liberal in ideas, if we deduce the consequence of the fact that, in 1821, during the bienio progresista (progressive biennium) [sic], he led the persecution of absolutist groups in Galdácano". In this regard, Manuela Mena claims that there is documentary evidence of his participation in the Peninsular War, though of scant importance.

Elías Tormo, in the catalogue for the exhibition "Pinturas de Goya" (Madrid, 1928), said that he was appointed General Major in 1808. This claim was disputed by Sambricio in 1961, as the name in question is Don Pantaleón de Nenin and not Pérez de Nenin. Despite the doubt, this assertion was maintained until 1983, when it was confirmed that he rose to the rank of Adjutant Major in 1802, after the War of the Oranges with Portugal, and to General Major in 1808. Meanwhile, Glendining noted that he signed his decommission in Aranjuez, with the rank of Adjutant, on 21 February 1806, though later documentation argues for 1808.

In 1996, in the catalogue for the exhibition "Goya en colecciones españolas", Juan J. de Luna documented that in 1805 he was addressed as "capitán graduado", literally graduate captain, meaning an officer with the rank and pay of lieutenant whose has been raised to the rank of captain but waiting for a vacancy and thus an exclusively honorary rank, and dated his decommission in February 1808, as "discharged adjutant in Bilbao". The author maintained the date for his promotion to General Major, as it was backed up by experts in military history, although he noted that there were no existing documentary references to confirm it.

In the study carried out in 2008 by Manuela Mena, the date of birth given by Glendining, 1779, was confirmed and the family trade was given as "goods from the North" and "the Spanish Americas". Between 1804 and February 1808 he applied several times for leaves of absence to settle family affairs pertaining to an inheritance which eventually led to his application for a decommission, perhaps after the death of an elder brother which forced him to take over the family business.

Manuela Mena also coincided with the rest of experts in the subject's lack of any martial aptitudes. In the dispatch for this decommission, signed in 1808 in Aranjuez, the alleged reason for obtaining said decommission from military service and returning to his hometown of Bilbao was an illness defined as "spasmodic hypochondriac ailment".

Goya reproduced precisely the uniform as described in the ordinances of 1802, which comprised "trousers, cape and sky blue pelisse, dorman jacket with embroidery of palms and sables and white turk's head buttons". The sable, used for light cavalry, allows us to estimate the height of the subject, and the ceremonial staff tells us of his rise to the rank of Adjutant-in-Chief.