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Unidentified Artist

Spain

Allegory of Faith with Saints Dominic and Peter of Verona and the Donors, Baltasar Francisco Ramos (or Ramirez) and his Wife.

1626

Oil on canvas, 87 x 40 ¼ inches

Inscribed on the reverse: *Hico pintar este cuadro Baltasar Franc^o Ramos/familiar de el S.^o oficio año de 1626 siendo 42 años de edad [Baltasar Francisco Ramos, a “familiar” of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, had this picture painted in 1626 when he was 42 years old.]*

The female figure at the center of the composition is an allegory of faith holding in her proper right hand a cross and in her left a monstrance representing the Eucharist. The golden mandorla around her would originally have been completed over her head, but the canvas has been cut down. She is accompanied on the left by Saint Dominic, founder of the Dominican order, and on the right by Saint Peter of Verona, also called Saint Peter Martyr. The latter, a Dominican, was famous for his sermons against heresy. The Inquisition, founded in the thirteenth century precisely with the goal of suppressing heresy, was put under the authority of the Dominicans by Pope Gregory IX, and Peter Martyr served for a time as an inquisitor in Lombardy. In the sixteenth century Pope Paul III established a system of tribunals (in Spanish Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición) throughout Catholic Europe. In 1569, by edict of King Philip II of Spain, who held authority over the church in his monarchy, tribunals of the Holy Office were established in Lima (1570) and in Mexico City (1571). A third tribunal was established in Cartagena in 1610.

The *familiars* were lay collaborators of the Inquisition who served as assistants and informers for the Holy Office. Baltasar Ramos proudly, in the inscription on the reverse of this painting, identifies himself as a *familiar*, which meant that he was a permanent, unpaid official ready to denounce heresy and bring individuals to trial. The *familiars* had to be “old Christians” (without Moorish or Jewish blood) of impeccable character, over the age of 25, married or widowed, and sufficiently well off to have no need of a salary.ⁱ The rewards for this highly esteemed position were both social status and freedom from the jurisdiction of the civil or criminal courts.ⁱⁱ

Ramos and his wife kneel to either side of the shield they hold between them bearing the insignia of the Spanish Inquisition. Each proffers a rosary, the guide to prayer that originated

with the Dominican order, but came to be practiced by all Catholics. The portraits of the donors are strikingly naturalistic as compared to the more formulaic faces of the allegorical figure and the two saints. Perhaps this distinction between the real and spiritual worlds was intentional on the part of the artist. Or, perhaps two hands were at work on this canvas, with a portrait specialist called in to record the appearance of Baltasar Ramos and his wife.

When this painting entered the Thoma collection it was considered, on the basis of style, a colonial painting from South America. Given the dearth of portraits of that period from other cities of the Viceroyalty of Peru and its iconographical connections to the Inquisition, this writer thought it was probably from Lima. Subsequently, it has been discovered that the sitter was a Spanish veterinarian, resident of Chinchón, a town near Madrid, who was a *familiar* of the Holy Office of the Inquisition of Toledo.ⁱⁱⁱ His name (as Baltasar Francisco Ramírez) has come down to us as the author of a book on veterinary science first published in 1623 and again in 1629. These dates make it highly unlikely that the couple had emigrated to Peru by 1626, the date on the reverse of the painting.

Despite the revised attribution of the painting to a provincial Spanish artist, the work is of interest precisely for exemplifying the style of painting that was probably practiced by a number of Spanish artists who made their way to the Viceroy of Peru. These artists and evidence of their work are nearly completely undocumented, which has left our understanding of their role severely limited. A modest exception is the oeuvre of the Spanish painter Antonio Montúfar, whose signed paintings are found in Sucre, Bolivia and Quito, Ecuador. His painting representing *Saint Francis of Assisi Appearing Before Pope Nicolas V, with Donors* (fig. 1) now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, is dated 1628. Its early provenance is unknown.



Fig. 1. Antonio Montúfar (active 1600/1614-1629).^{iv} *Saint Francis of Assisi Appearing Before Pope Nicolas V, with Donors*, 1628, oil on canvas, 42 ½ x 34 ½ inches. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

This writer has expressed elsewhere that the emphasis on Italian influence on early viceregal painting in South America has overshadowed consideration of the Spanish contribution.^v

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ⁱ Teodoro Hampe Martínez, *Santo Oficio e historia colonial: Aproximaciones al Tribunal de la Inquisición de Lima (1570-1820)* (Lima: Ediciones del Congreso del Perú, 1998), 13.

ⁱⁱ According to the instructions establishing the Holy Office in Peru, twelve *familiares* were assigned to the Holy Office in Lima, four *familiares* assigned in each city of the Viceroyalty of Peru that was the seat of a bishopric, and one for each *pueblo de españoles*. Paulino Castañeda Delgado and Pilar Hernández Aparacio, *La Inquisición de Lima: 1570-1635* (Madrid: Delmos, 1989), 59. This is the first of three volumes published 1989-1998. In 1623, three years before the date on the reverse of this painting, there were still only 12 *familiares* in Lima, despite complaints that Lima had tripled in size and needed a larger representation, four each in Arequipa and La Plata, two each in Quito and Cuzco, and only one each in La Paz and Buenos Aires.

Castañeda and Hernández found the names of 253 *familiares* in their research in the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid, sometimes with the place where they were assigned to this position, but almost no other information. Only in about 25% of cases is there any information about where the man came from or what his profession had been. *Ibid.*, 60-61. This information is included here in the off chance that Ramos is discovered to have emigrated to Peru.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Ricardo Kunusoki Rodríguez for sharing with me his discovery of the gentleman's identity. See

<https://buleria.unileon.e/bitstream/handle/10612/2553/Miguel.pdf.sequence=1>

^{iv} The LACMA website gives Montúfar's active dates as 1614-1629. Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, in his essay "Between Archaism and Innovation, 1610-70," in *Painting in Latin America 1550-1820*, eds. Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown, 275-303 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 294, suggests instead 1600-1629.

^v See "Origins of the Art of Painting in Colonial Peru and Bolivia," in *Journeys to New Worlds: Spanish and Portuguese Colonial Art in the Roberta and Richard Huber Collection*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt with Mark A. Castro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 30-35.