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Unidentified Artist

Peru

Anagram of the Sweet Name of Mary

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 66 x 44 inches

The Third Council of the Catholic Church in Lima, convoked in 1582 by Archbishop Toribio de Mogrovejo (later one of the first prelates in the Americas to be named a saint), prescribed various practices in honor of the Virgin Mary. Chapter 27, article III of the proceedings of that council order that the *Salve Regina* be sung in all the cathedrals and parish churches of the Viceroyalty of Peru on Saturdays. This order was renewed by the synod convoked by Toribio de Mogrovejo in Santo Domingo de Yungay in 1585. In 1605 Pope Paul V conceded fifteen years

and 150 days of indulgence to those who attended the *Salve* and the recitation of the litanies of the Virgin on Saturdays in the churches of Peru. The prescribed Litany was included in the 1592 publication of the rituals of the cathedral of Lima, and that *Litania in Laudem B. M. V.* includes ninety invocations of the Virgin Mary, each followed by a response:

Rosa sine spina (rose without thorns)
Ora pro nobis (pray for us)
Hortus conclusus (enclosed garden)
Ora pro nobis (pray for us)
Stella matutina (morning star)
Ora pro nobis (pray for us)
Puteus viventium aquarum (well of living waters)
Ora pro nobis (pray for us)ⁱ

And so on. Some of emblems form the initials MRA in the Thoma painting. The sun shining from behind the initials and the crescent moon beneath them are usually included in depictions of the Virgin Immaculate, based as many references are, in the Song of Solomon 6:10: “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?” Beneath the crescent moon, the Devil hopefully offers an apple.

The *porta coeli*, the gate of heaven, is from Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28:17. The cedar *exaltata* is a reflection of the prophesies of Ezekiel and is also mentioned in Ecclesiasticus 24:17. The rose without thorns is an old symbol of the purity of the Virgin. The *fons hortorum*, *puteus aquarum viventium*, and *hortus conclusus* are from the Song of Solomon 4:12-15: “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” and “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon.” [. . .] The Virgin as the *stella maris*, the star of the sea, is taken from a medieval liturgical hymn; it perhaps originally derived from the “bright morning star” mentioned in Revelation 22:16. *Sicut liliun inter spinas* is from the Song of Solomon 4:4: “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.” The *oliva speciosa*, mentioned in Ecclesiasticus 24:19 is an ancient symbol of peace; in early paintings of the Annunciation, Gabriel often offers an olive branch to the Virgin. The *turris David cum propugnaculis* is from the Song of Solomon 4:4: “Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an army,” a reference to the Virgin as the Bride of Christ and, hence, symbolic of the church itself.ⁱⁱ

The letter R is formed by the cedar in Lebanon, the cypress on the heights of Hermon, the palm tree in Engedi, and rose plants in Jericho, all mentioned in Ecclesiasticus 24: 13-14. The mirror mentioned in Wisdom 7:26 traditionally refers to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin: “For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.”

The elements that decorate the letter M are selected, not from the litanies, but from the life of the Virgin Mary. The angel Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,” are emblazoned on the unfurled banderole that wraps around the lilies always pictured in paintings of that subject. The hat and staff may refer to the Flight into Egypt or to the journey to Bethlehem. The Nativity is recalled through the donkey and the ox who attended the manger, three crowns of the Three Magi, and the evening star

that led them to the stable. A candelabrum refers to the Purification and Presentation in the Temple and the doves to Mary's offering there. Finally, the heart pierced with the seven swords of sorrow reflect Mary's role as the Mater Dolorosa.

At the top center of the composition is a crown (Mary is Queen of Heaven, Queen of Martyrs, Queen of Angels, and so on) surrounded by twelve stars, and in the corners of the composition are banderoles and symbolic elements referring to the four Latin Doctors of the church – Saints Gregory the Great, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome – whose writings about the Virgin Mary were invoked by later theologians in their defenses of her. These elements have been partially lost because the canvas was at some point cut down on all sides.

Spanish colonial painters used prints as compositional sources for representations of complex theological concepts. The Thoma painting shares iconographical elements with a painting in the Museo Santa Clara in Bogotá, which is dated 1673 (fig. 1). That painting includes the figures of the Virgin Immaculate as well as the four Latin Fathers of the church, but the concept and even the details suggest a common source in a print created before 1673. The palette of the Thoma version suggests a much later date.



Fig. 1. Unknown artist, *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with the Four Fathers of the Church*, 1673, oil on canvas (176.5 x 133.5). Museo Santa Clara, Bogotá. Photo: Viki Ospina.

The advocacy to the Sweet Name of Mary was first authorized in the Spanish city of Cuenca in 1513. Father Simón de Rojas (1552-1624) of the Trinitarian order founded the Congregation of the Slaves of the Sweet Name of Mary in 1612. He served at the Spanish court as tutor to the royal princes, was elected Provincial of Castile, and was chosen confessor of Queen Isabel de Borbón. According to pious legend, he was so devoted to the Virgin Mary that

his first words at the age of fourteen months were “Ave Maria.” In 1622 Rojas petitioned the Holy See for the approval of his liturgical text composed in honor of the Sweet Name of Mary, an approval that Innocent XI later extended to the universal church. In an era fascinated with hieroglyphs and symbols, the Franciscan Luis de Solís Villaluz wrote an emblem book published in Madrid in 1734 that paired graphic images with poetic explanations of each.ⁱⁱⁱ Solís Villaluz’s ninth hieroglyph is an “explication of the Sweet Name of Mary against Luther.” The anagram so elaborately illustrated in the Thoma painting is found in simpler form throughout the book.

In 1647 King Philip IV ordered that his American realms honor the “Sweet Name of Mary (“Dulcísimo nombre de María”) with a celebration on the second Sunday of October.^{iv} This was to mark an octave (an eight-day celebration) recalling the naval victory at Lepanto. The Dominican chronicler Juan Menéndez (vol. 7, xii) wrote a detailed description of the procession that departed from the church of Santo Domingo in Lima “con grandes ostentaciones.”^v

This emblematic painting in the Thoma collection was undoubtedly intended as a stimulus to prayer. It was perhaps intended for the practice of the *Salve Regina* or the *Litania in Laudem B.V.M.* observed on Saturdays throughout the Viceroyalty of Peru, or, even more precisely, the celebration of the Sweet Name of Mary ordered by Philip IV.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ See Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editoriales Huarpe, 1947), 79-83.

ⁱⁱ Suzanne L. Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luis de Solís Villaluz, *Geroglíficos varios, sacros, y divinos epitectos, en que se cifran algunas de la eminentísimas glorias, y prerrogativas de Maria Santissima, Señora Nuestra, sobre los tymbres de la letania, que en honra suya canta nuestra santa madre la Iglesia* (Madrid: Imprenta de Juan de Ariztia, 1734).

^{iv} Alfonso J. Rospigliosi, *Recopilación de Hechos Históricos de la Archicofradía de Nuestra Sra. del Rosario de Españoles “Hermanos 24”* (Lima: Salas e Hijos, 1945), 31 et seq.

^v *Ibid.*, 33.