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Unidentified Artist

Peru

Christ with the Woman of Samaria at the Well

Early 17th century

Oil on canvas, 20 x 32 inches

The story depicted is based on the Gospel according to Saint John 4:5-26. Christ's encounter with the woman whom he asks for a drink of water from Jacob's well has broad consequences, for, in their conversation, she becomes convinced that he is indeed a prophet. Her witness brings about the conversion of the Samaritans.



Fig. 1. Hieronymus Wierix, *De Samaritana*, Plate 35 from Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (Antwerp, 1593).

The composition of the Peruvian painting is closely based on an engraving from the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, a series of engravings on the life of Christ organized by the Spanish Jesuit Jerónimo Nadal. The engravings by the Antwerp Wierix family were based on designs by Italian artists and became models for orthodox representations of the subjects after the Council of Trent. In the engraving the apostles have returned from their search for food to find Christ and the Samaritan woman in discussion. At first glance, the painting seems to copy the engraving in all details. However, the artist has made small changes that bring the story from Samaria to Peru.

The apostles carry specific foodstuffs in their baskets: bread rolls, fish, and pomegranates. The latter were not native to the Andes, of course, but are emblematic of the church itself. The ewer at the base of the well is changed into a ceramic jug of simple decoration that might be of local manufacture. The Samaritan woman wears pearls and pendant earrings of Peruvian design.

The figures are simply treated, with garments of undecorated textiles in clear colors, but the landscape is painted with more originality and with livelier brushwork. The Peruvian art historian Francisco Stastny noted years ago that the engravings of the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* not only gave colonial painters correct models for the stories of the Bible, but a vision of an Arcadian landscape.¹

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Francisco Stastny, “Grabados inspiran pinturas de Cuzco y Ayacucho. De Ámsterdam al Perú,” in Francisco Stastny Mosbert, *Estudios de arte colonial* vol. 1, Sonia V. Rose and Juan Carlos Estenssoro Fuchs, eds. (Lima: Fuentes para la Historia del Arte Peruano. Colección Manuel Moreyra Loredo 5, 2013), 348.