



2013.007

Unidentified Artist

Bolivia, Potosí

Genealogical Tree of the Mercedarian Order

Mid-18th century

Oil on canvas, 89 x 73 inches

The genealogical trees of the Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, and Mercedarian orders were painted throughout the Viceroyalty of Peru for the religious houses. Some of them, such as those in the Franciscan monasteries of Cuzco and Quito were painted on an enormous scale, following engravings, in the seventeenth century.ⁱ Others, more modestly scaled like this one from Potosí, continued the type into the eighteenth century. The compositions of these allegorical representations of the foundation and history of the orders were based on medieval representations of the Tree of Jesse.

In this painting, the allegorical tree springs from the reclining form of Saint Peter Nolasco, founder of the Mercedarian Order in Spain, whose undulating white robe seems to respond to the rolling hills of the landscape in which he rests. At the top of the tree is the Virgin Mary, resting on the shield of the order and the crown of the kingdom of Aragon. The coat of arms with its characteristic red and gold bars refers to King Jaime I of Aragon, who, with Peter Nolasco, co-founded the order. The original purpose of the Mercedarians was the ransom of Christian captives from the Moors of North Africa. In the America, they instead sought to save the souls of the indigenous people.

On the twelve branches of the tree, perhaps a reference to the twelve apostles of Christ who carried the faith throughout the world, are kneeling members of the Mercedarian order. Only one of them, however, can be surely identified. He is Friar Pedro Urraca (1583-1657), pictured near the left hand of Peter Nolasco. Urraca was a native of Jadraque, Spain, who spent his life in the monasteries of Quito and Lima, where he was famous for his piety and charity.ⁱⁱ

Urraca, identified by the heart he holds in his hands and by the three stars, was never formally beatified. Urraca also appears in a Quito painting of the Genealogical Tree of the Mercedarian Order, along with Pedro Falcón, another venerable who had not yet been beatified by the church.ⁱⁱⁱ

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ See, for example, cat. no. 9 in *The Art of Painting in Colonial Quito/El arte de la pintura en Quito colonial*, Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, ed. (Philadelphia, Saint Joseph's University Press, 2012), 45-47.

ⁱⁱ This was pointed out by Luis Eduardo Wuffarden in a document of September 18, 2012. In this same document Wuffarden suggests that the painting is by a follower of Melchor Pérez Holguín because of the expressive features of the small figures. However, the painting style is quite different from that of Holguín.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stratton-Pruitt, *Art of Painting*, 222-223.