



2018.038
Unidentified Artist
Peru, probably Cuzco
Mater Castissima
1776
Oil on canvas, 38 ½ x 30 ¼ inches.



Plate 16 of the *Litany of Loreto* by Franciscus Xavieris Dornn. Augsburg: Johan Baptist Burckhart, 1755.

A litany is a series of invocations or supplications with responses. The Lauretan Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary is named after the first place it is known to have been sung, the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto (Italy) in 1558. The origins of the litany are not clear, but it was approved in 1487 by Pope Sixtus IV. The Virgin Mary is called by a series of invocations such as Mother Most Pure, Mother Inviolate, Mother undefiled, and so forth. In 1755 and again in 1771 in Augsburg, the

Lauretan Litany was illustrated with engravings by Joseph Sebastian and Johann Baptist Klauber. These publications, as well as many later editions, were widely distributed and the engravings were often copied in paintings. In Peru, there are several series of such paintings extant in the Convents of Santa Catalina de Siena in both Arequipa and Zurite and in the Cathedral of Cuzco.ⁱ

The Thoma painting was not created as one of a series. Instead, this particular engraving (fig. 1) titled “Most Chaste Mother,” was selected by the donor for a devotional painting. According to the inscription added right under the figure of Antonio Fernandos, a lieutenant in the royal cavalry, he commissioned this painting to honor his devotion to the Virgin Mary. The artist followed the Klauber engraving exactly, even including the engraver’s name at the bottom of the print. The letters CPSCM is the acronym of “Cum Privilegium Sacrae et Caesareae Majestatis, or “published with imperial permission.” The inscription “Klauber Cath. Sc. et exc. A.V.” can be translated as “Klauber, Catholic publisher, engraved and published [it] in Augsburg (“Augusta Vindelicorum”).”ⁱⁱ

The theme is the chastity of the Virgin Mary, symbolized by the enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*) guarded by an angel with a flaming sword (perhaps Ezekiel) and by a “fountain sealed,” both elements borrowed from Canticles 4:12: “You are a garden locked up, a spring enclosed, a fountain sealed.” Along the bottom of the canvas in white lettering is a verse from Wisdom 4:1: “How beautiful is the chaste generation [with glory].” The tree on the right bears pomegranates, symbol of the Catholic Church, and the Christ Child holds one in his hand.

The palette of this painting differs from so many others painted in eighteenth-century Cuzco in which the artists favored reds and blues, as this subject called instead for the intense green used to depict the garden and trees.
Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Héctor Schenone, *Iconografía del arte colonial: Santa María* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad Católica Argentina, 2008), 561.

ⁱⁱ Almerindo Ojeda, “Fuentes grabadas y análisis iconográfico del arte colonial: Proyecto para el Estudio de las fuentes grabadas del arte colonial,” in *2ª Festival del Barroco Iberoamericano* Iván Zignaigo, ed., 1-6 (Cusco: Publicaciones Mensurabilis, 2017), 6.