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*Our Lady of Characato*

Cipriano de Toledo y Gutiérrez (active 1761-1775)

Peru, Cuzco

Dated 1771

Oil on canvas, 35 x 27 inches

Signed, lower center: "Sipriano Gutierrez fecit"

Inscribed: *V<sup>o</sup>. R<sup>o</sup>. De N<sup>o</sup>. S./de Characato/a devoción de D. Joseph Vizente/Belicarres[?] Cuzco/7<sup>o</sup> de 1771*

In the church of Characato, not far from Arequipa, Peru, is a venerated image, a "dressed sculpture" of the Virgin Mary, said to have been brought from Copacabana in 1590. As described by Ramos Gavilán, in his *Historia del Santuario de Copacabana*, the sculpture, in the likeness of Yupanqui's famous rendering of the Virgin of Candlemas at Copacabana, was at first relegated to a cupboard in the sacristy of the parish church in Characato on account of being a

rather rough work created by an Indian. After awhile, one of the priests wanted to show the sculpture in the church and commissioned a very capable sculptor to rehabilitate it. When the sculptor got to the project, he realized that the effigy had been completely transformed into a beautiful work of art that now emitted a soft radiance. The image came to be credited with a number of miraculous cures and was a favorite devotion of the *Arequipeños*, though not only *Arequipeños*. In 1691 a gentleman from Cuzco, whose right leg had become completely paralyzed, was carried to Characato, where he was completely cured.<sup>i</sup>

This painting is signed by a well-documented Cuzco artist, Cipriano Gutiérrez, and dedicated by a patron who may well have experienced a cure granted him at Characato as had his fellow *cuzqueño* nearly a century earlier. The composition and rose and blue palette reflect a combination quite popular in the second half of the eighteenth century. Our Lady of Characato, holding the Christ Child in her left arm and bearing the candlestick and basket with two doves symbolizing the February 2 feast of the Purification, is surrounded by rosettes in which the themes of the Rosary prayers are depicted: the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the Virgin. Although the Rosary prayers were originally a Dominican custom, here the Virgin is flanked by the founders of the Mercedarian order, Saints Peter Nolasco and Raymond Nonnatus. The Mercedarians were in charge of the propagation of the faith in this Andean region from 1566 to 1786. However, this painting also includes a panoply of fathers of the church and saints associated with several orders. Saints Dominic and Francis of Assisi kneel below the tree that blossoms with the mysteries of the Rosary (a composition well known in prints by the Wierix family and others), and up and down the sides of the painting appear, counterclockwise, Saints Christopher, Bonaventure [?], Rita of Cascia, Francis Xavier, Diego de Alcalá, John the Baptist, Saint Joseph, Vincent Ferrer, Gertrudis, Anthony of Padua, and John Nepomuk. God the Father and the Holy Spirit at the top of the composition are flanked by angels including the archangels Michael and Raphael. So, nearly all the religious orders fundamental to the evangelization of South America – Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit, Mercedarian – are included with other saints and angels – all of them devoted to the Our Lady of Characato. At the bottom of the composition the Four Last Things (Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven) are pictured in roundels.

Cipriano Gutiérrez was a mestizo, the son of a Spaniard and an indigenous woman. He worked on the decoration of the main Jesuit church in Cuzco, the *Compañía*. The signature of “Sipriano Gutierrez” appears on the *Death of Saint Ignatius* in that church, and an inscription by Marcos Zapata confirms Gutiérrez’s participation: “The paintings in this church were finished on 16 January 1762 Marcos Zapata made me and Sipriano Gutiérrez helped.”<sup>ii</sup>

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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<sup>i</sup> See Ruben Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Buenos Aires: Editoriales Huarpes, 1947), 570-73.

ii “SEACABO LOS LIEN[Z]OS DE ESTA YGLESIA A 16 DE HENERO DE 1762 MARCOS ZAPATA ME FECIT Y AYUDO SIPRANO GUTIERRES.” See Teófilo Benavente Velarde, *Pintores cuzqueños de la colonia* (Cuzco: Municipalidad Qosqo, 1995), 125, 140.