



2002.006
Unidentified Artist
Peru
Our Lady of La Salceda
Early 17th century
Oil on copper, 12 ½ x 9 ½ inches

The image of the Virgin and Child in a tree is based on an engraving by Francisco Heylen (fig. 1) that appears in Pedro González de Mendoza's book, the *Historia del Monte Celia de Nuestra Señora de la Salceda* (Granada, 1616), recounting this miraculous apparition of the Virgin. However, the painter has incorporated a number of elements from the history of the devotion.



Fig. 1. Francisco Heylen, engraving in Pedro González de Mendoza's *Historia del Monte Celia de Nuestra Señora de La Salcedo* (Granada, 1616). The Marian Library, University of Dayton, Ohio.

According to legend, two members of the Order of Malta, called the knights of Saint John, lost their way on a stormy night in the region of Guadalajara, Spain between Tendilla and Peñalver. They prayed to heaven for help, and the Virgin appeared to them in a willow tree, bearing light to show them safely on their way. According to the legend, this miraculous event took place in the year 1236.¹ The knights built a hermitage on the site in appreciation for her help and later an important Franciscan monastery took its place. González de Mendoza, Archbishop of Granada in the early seventeenth-century, had stayed for a time at the monastery, which he had rebuilt at his own expense. Another famous visitor was Saint John of God.

The Peruvian artist who painted this delicate work in oil on copper followed the engraving by Heylen precisely, and then added the figures of the knights and their horses, Saint

Anthony of Padua at the lower right and the figure of the donor of the painting at the lower left. The artist also created the storm with tiny touches of white pigment suggested rain.

Paintings on copper plates were imported to the Americas from Europe, especially from Flanders, and were also produced by Spanish colonial artists.ⁱⁱ The artist who created the Thoma painting, probably on commission from someone who had emigrated to Peru from the region around Guadalajara, was an excellent copyist with a good eye for color. It would be impossible to locate the painting to South America if the artist had not added the images of the patron and his patron saint at the bottom of the composition. There, without the print to guide him, the artist was on his own and somewhat less suave. The face of the saint is generic, the infant Christ he bears is somewhat awkward, and the portrait of the donor less than inspired. The unknown artist's achievement in turning a black and white graphic image into a lovely painting, however, is considerable.

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ⁱ William A. Christian, Jr., *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 77.

ⁱⁱ For medium in Spanish colonial art, see Clara Bargellini, "Painting on Copper in Spanish America," in *Copper as Canvas. Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper 1575-1775*, exh. cat., (New York: Phoenix Art Museum/Oxford University Press, 1999), 31-45 and Bargellini, "La pintura sobre lámina de cobre en los virreinos de la Nueva España y del Perú," *Anales de Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* XXI, no. 75 (1999): 79-98.