



2012.022.

Unidentified Artist

Cuzco

Our Lady of Mercy, called "La Peregrina" (the Pilgrim)

Mid-18th century

Oil on canvas, 39.625 x 29.625 inches

Inscribed at the top: *N^a S^a DELA MER CED LAPERE GRI NA*

Inscribed at the bottom: *Yo que ostentando candores/Coronada de trofeos/Mas alla de las esferas/E colocado mi asiento/Postpuesta la dignidad/de emperatriz poseo. Mendi-/cando, peregrino por las ciudades/y pueblos/Solicita de alcanzar/en la piedad de mis siervo\limosnas conque se erijan/las columnas de mi temple/El obsequio no me niegues si te/Precias de mi afecto e a lo me/consagras a la Reina de los/[Cielos]*

“I who wear supreme whiteness ornamented with emblems [the habit of the Mercedarian order] beyond the spheres, have arranged my seat, postponed the dignity of empress that is mine to go on a pilgrimage, begging through cities and towns, solicitous to obtain from the piety of my worshippers alms to build the columns of my temple. Do not deny me the gift if you value my affections, so as to consecrate the Queen of [Heaven].”

The Mercedarians of Quito owned a wooden sculpture of the *Virgin and Child Enthroned* legendarily said to have been a gift from the Emperor Charles V. In the eighteenth century it was sent on a pilgrimage to collect alms. A single contemporary text reflecting this mission,

Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela's *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*, reported in detail on the visit of the sculpture to that city in 1732.ⁱ

According to Orsúa y Vela, writing as a somewhat credulous eye witness, the sculpture had been sent with Friar Francisco Xavier Enríquez from Quito on a pilgrimage to obtain alms toward the building of a “church or sumptuous chapel” in its home city. Along the way, the image was captured by the Dutch (Protestants, of course) on the sea between Cartagena and Portobello, damaged and hung in a tree. The figure of the Christ Child was so aggrieved by this treatment that it leaped into the sea. A French Catholic gentleman saved the image of the Virgin Mary, returning it to Quito where somehow the sculpture of the Christ Child had been already saved and returned to the care of the Mercedarians.

Less colorful but closer to the facts, the wooden sculpture that belonged to the Mercedarians in Quito did travel through South America, perhaps beginning in 1703, on a fund-raising tour for the home church.ⁱⁱ When the sculpture reached Potosí in 1732, Orsúa y Vela described it as a beautiful miracle-worker, with exceptional carving of the wood, the whole a little over a *vara* high, so a bit less than life-size. The sculpture was processed richly clothed, with a black velvet hat, on a throne garnished with silver on March 20. The Mercedarians and the Peregrina de Quito were met outside the city and accompanied into the Villa Imperial by members of the cabildo and magistrates, led through a triumphal arch, and entertained by great numbers of dancing Indians. The walls of the city were decorated even more sumptuously than on Corpus Christi, according to Orsúa y Vela, with “silk tapestries, beautiful paintings in gold frames, *láminas* [in this context, probably engravings] and mirrors.”

Most of the paintings of the Peregrina de Quito extant today can be attributed to Cuzco artists, though the Potosí painter Melchor Pérez Holguín created a version of the subject after the events in that city in 1732.ⁱⁱⁱ Most of the painted images picture the Virgin and Child, seated on a throne, but dressed for travel.

The Thoma painting instead pictures the subject as a narrative event, with the Virgin Mary mounted sidesaddle on a donkey, as in representations of the Flight into Egypt, walking through a landscape setting. In the distance are small figures of the Mercedarians who accompany the sculpture on its pilgrimage through an Andean landscape. At the bottom, to left and right are the founders of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy, Saints Peter Nolasco (who holds what may be a model of the building for which the pilgrimage is raising money) and Saint Raymond Nonnatus (Ramón Nonato). Between them is an inscription in which the Virgin Mary beseeches her followers to grant “alms with which to build the columns of my temple.”

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela, *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí*, vol.1, Lewis Hanke and Gunnar Mendoza, eds., 3 vols. (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965), *Año 1732*.

ⁱⁱ See Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, “Our Lady of Mercy, Called the ‘Pilgrim of Quito:’ Travels of a Devotion and its Image in Art,” *Hispanic Research Journal* 20:5 (2019): 433-450.

ⁱⁱⁱ The painting by Holguín is in the museum of the Monastery of San Francisco in Potosí.