

Paintings representing Our Lady of Mercy were often created by the artists of Cuzco, and they are well represented in the Thoma collection (see 1997.4, 1997.13, and 2016.77). As well, the collection includes a painting of Our Lady of Mercy with Captives created in Quito, Ecuador in the eighteenth century that reflects the particular devotion of quiteños to the “Virgen del Terremoto” for her intervention to save the city after an eruption of Mount Pichincha. In 1575 the ecclesiastical and municipal authorities declared a special feast day in honor of that miracle, and, following Ecuador’s independence from Spain, Our Lady of Mercy was declared the protectress of the young nation.

A group of paintings representing Our Lady of Mercy, called the “Pilgrim of Quito” that were created in Cuzco in the first half of the eighteenth century respond to an image carried on an alms-gathering tour throughout South America. These are also represented in the Thoma collection (see 2012.22 and 2015.100).<sup>1</sup>

The present painting clearly represents Our Lady of Mercy of Quito, as the inscription reads, and as is further supported by the emblem of the Mercedarian order pictured twice, on her bosom and on the scapular in her proper right hand. However, the iconography is heavily indebted to an entirely different devotion, although one established in Quito in the late sixteenth century, called Nuestra Señora de Guápulo.

In 1584 a confraternity of Quito merchants established a devotion in the nearby indigenous village of Guápulo and commissioned a polychromed sculpture from Diego de Robles to represent their devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe of Extremadura.<sup>2</sup> A painted image of the sculpture, called the “Pilgrim of Guápulo,” kept in the Capilla del Santísimo in the sanctuary of Guápulo (fig. 1), traveled around South America on an alms-gathering journey to raise funds for a new church. The image of the sanctuary is embroidered on Our Lady’s gown.

This pilgrimage occurred in the late seventeenth century, though a number of Cuzco paintings based on it seem to have been painted in the eighteenth century (fig. 2<sup>4</sup>). The original dedication to Our Lady of Guadalupe of Extremadura had evidently been forgotten when the unidentified Cuzco painter undertook a depiction of “Nuestra Señora de la Mercedes de Quito,” for he simply borrowed the image of Our Lady of Guápulo in creating the Thoma painting. The most striking shared element is the veil that covers Mary’s hair, but the way she holds the Christ Child, the flowers in her right hand, and the crowns they bear are all similar.

It is curious that so many paintings of Ecuadorian Marian devotions were created in Peru. These do not appear in collections in Quito. In fact, Quito was a rare artistic center in colonial South America that seems to have evaded the influence of the Cuzco artists during the eighteenth century.

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1. 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, no. 5 (2019): 433-450.[↵](#)
2. Robles (d. 1594) was a Spanish sculptor active in Quito. Robles' sculpture was destroyed in a fire in 1839.[↵](#)
4. This painting appears on a Christmas stamp issued for the 2020 holiday season by the United States Post Office.[↵](#)