



2021.15

Unidentified artist, Colombia

Our Lady of Monguí

17th century, gold added 18th century

12 11/16 x 10 3/16 in.

The town of Monguí lies to the northeast of Tunja in the region of Boyacá, Colombia. It was established by the Franciscans who built a convent there first in 1603 and rebuilt it in 1699. According to legend, an image of the Holy Family at rest on the flight to Egypt was sent as a gift to the people of Monguí by either Charles V or his son Philip II in thanks for their allegiance to the Spanish Crown.¹ This image, showing Mary seated with the Christ Child cradled in her lap and Joseph behind her right shoulder, became known as Our Lady of Monguí. In some versions of the legend, the splendid painted image is the product of Philip's own skill with a paintbrush – and in others, his father's.² Recalling this imperial connection is the crowned Habsburg double

¹ Another telling of the tale has the Virgin misdelivered to Monguí instead of its intended destination, the nearby village of Sogamoso. See Ruben Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados* (Buenos Aires: Editores Huarpes, 1947), 403. For additional details of the image's history, see also Olga Acosta Luna, *Milagrosas imágenes marianas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2011), 248-51.

² "Aquí se venera la prodigiosa imagen de Nuestra Señora de Monguí, dádiva del Señor Felipe Segundo y hechura de su habilidad en el pincel, pues es de las más hermosas que hemos visto," in Eugenio de Lanuza y Sotelo, *Viaje*

eagle rendered in gold visible on the Virgin’s chest. According to the 18th-century chronicler Basilio Vicente de Oviedo, some believed that Charles V painted St. Joseph’s face the color of toasted wheat (*trigueño*) after being informed that the local indigenous peoples of Monguí were “moreno” – that is dark, or swarthy.³ While this story is fanciful – even Oviedo himself did not give it credence – some artists in the colonial period did alter the skin tones of sacred images. Notably, during his peregrinations in the Americas, the Spanish Hieronymite friar Diego de Ocaña painted images of the Spanish Virgin of Guadalupe of Extremadura with brown (rather than very dark or black) skin in order to appeal to the local indigenous populations that he sought to evangelize, duly noting that they adored her “because she was of their color.”⁴

Throughout its history, the image has attracted veneration as a miraculous image and received gifts of precious jewels and other adornments, which are represented in this and other paintings.⁵ In the Thoma painting, the Virgin wears not only a pectoral double headed eagle, but beneath it another round brooch. Spanning her collarbone is a type of necklace known as a *hombro*, with gems at each shoulder; in the traditional iconography of Our Lady of Monguí, the Christ Child plucks at the necklace gently.⁶ The Virgin wears rings on each finger of her left hand, and both she and the Christ Child wear multiple strands of pearls. The delicate gold detailing on the Virgin’s voluminous mantle is a feature found widely in other examples of the iconography. While the painting was created in the 17th century and bears the palette of browns typical to painting from Nueva Granada, the gold touches may have been added later, in the 18th century.

ilustrado a los Reinos del Perú en el siglo XVIII (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1998), 52. For the earliest recorded narrative, in which Charles painted the image, see Lucas Fernández Piedrahita, *Historia general de las conquistas del Nuevo Reino de Granada* (Antwerp: Juan Baptista Verdussen, 1688), 228.

³ Basilio Vicente de Oviedo, *Cualidades y riquezas del Nuevo Reino de Granada: Manuscrito del siglo XVIII* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1930), 122.

⁴ See Jeanette Favrot Peterson, “Through Ocaña’s Eyes” Our Lady of Guadalupe in Sucre, Bolivia” in *The Art of Painting in Colonial Bolivia*, ed. Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2017), 307.

⁵ See for example the 1765 inventory [Archivo Histórico Nacional, Fabrica de Iglesias, Tomo 10, ff. 656-63] reprinted in *Oribes y plateros en la Nueva Granada*, exh. cat. (Bogotá: Editorial del Banco de la Republica, 1990), 20-22.

⁶ Jesús Paniagua Pérez, “La joyería colonial en Nueva Granada. Siglos XVI y XVII. Aspectos generales y documentos pictóricos,” *Ensayos. Historia y teoría del arte* 34 (2013): 73.



Fig. 1 Giambattista Remondini, Nuestra Señora de Monguí, mid-to-late 18th century, engraving. Image courtesy Museo e Biblioteca Civici di Bassano del Grappa, Italy.

The original image of Our Lady of Monguí at the *Basílica Menor de Nuestra Señora de Monguí* likely takes iconographic cues from 16th-century Flemish and German representations of the Holy Family at rest on the flight to Egypt, placing St. Joseph behind the intimate mother and child pairing at the center of the composition.⁷ The relatively standardized iconography of Our Lady of Monguí may have been disseminated through a little-known 18th-century print (fig. 1)

⁷ Acosta Luna, *Milagrosas imágenes*, 255-56, 281.

now at the Museo e Biblioteca Civici di Bassano (Bassano del Grappa, Italy) from the local Remondini workshop.⁸ The Thoma painting predates the print and departs from it in several small ways: St. Joseph lacks his flowering staff; the emblems on the Virgin's chest and arm are different, as is her crown; the Virgin is not crowned by angels; and the crescent moon under the Virgin is painted to look like tooled silver. Nevertheless, the presence of this printed image suggests that it may have been a source for many of the paintings of Our Lady of Monguí produced in Nueva Granada.

The Remondini workshop was founded by Giovanni Antonio Remondini 1634-1712) in Bassano in the mid-17th century, a century later employing over a thousand workers in the production of prints and books and shipping prints not only across Europe but to the Spanish Americas.⁹ Informed by itinerant salesman and their agents in the Americas, the workshop produced engravings of popular Spanish American devotions, among them the *Christo de Huamanga*; *Our Lady of Mercy*, "*Pilgrim of Quito*," and *Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados de Lima*, which were imported to the Americas in vast quantities.¹⁰ The influence of this workshop and the engravings it produced on painting in South America merits further study, but bears noting briefly here.

⁸ See PESSCA 4968A/4968B and Raffaele Moro R., "Las torpes imágenes americanas: Devociones locales entre los Alpes y los Andes a través de las estampas Remondini" *Revista Andina* 12, no. 2 (1994): 487-527.

⁹ Mario Infelise, "I Remondini" in *Storia di Bassano del Grappa: L'età moderna*, vol. 2 (Bassano del Grappa: Comitato per la Storia di Bassano, 2013), 306.

¹⁰ Moro R., "Las torpes," 92. See also Mario Infelise, *I Remondini di Bassano. Stampa e industria nel Veneto del Settecento* (Bassano: Ghedina e Tassotti, 1980), 21.