



2004.009

Portrait of a Lady

Unidentified Artist

Peru, possibly Cuzco

Ca. 1670-1700

Oil on canvas, 35 3/4 x 27 inches

Although there are a number of eighteenth-century portraits from the Viceroyalty of Peru still extant,¹ those dating from the seventeenth century are exceedingly rare. The woman portrayed in the Thoma painting may have been Spanish born, or a *criolla* born in Peru of Spanish parents. In either case, the setting and costume reflect a desire to connect the sitter with Spain. The rich red draperies drawn back with tasseled silk rope, a table covered with a cloth on which the lady rests her left hand, and which bears a mirror and the luxurious accouterment of an elaborately inlaid cabinet adapted from the Flemish style, reflects the *mise-en-scène* of Spanish court portraiture from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The costume, with its horizontally drawn neckline revealing a modest display of white shoulders, enormous pouf sleeves, tiny waistline drawn into a downward triangle, all worked in brocade with embroidery and touches of Flemish lace, mirrors the style popular late seventeenth-century Spain, as well as among the nobility in Spanish America.

A useful comparison may be made with two full-length portraits of women in the Convento de Santa Teresa, Potosí (figs. 1 & 2). These represent the wives of the founders of the convent, which was established in 1685. In both, the swags of drapery establish a luxurious space, one of which is further adorned by a beautifully woven carpet, the other by a red velvet draped table, with a little lap dog below to further underline the aristocratic status of the ladies represented. Their costumes are also similar to that worn in the Thoma portrait, but their hairstyles, restrained on one side by elaborate bows, are more like those found in Spanish royal portraits of the period.



Fig. 1 Unidentified artist, *Portrait of Francisca de Ayala*, c. 1685-1700, oil on canvas. Convent of Santa Teresa, Potosí, Bolivia.



Fig. 2 Unidentified artist, *Portrait of Ana de Oquendo y Eguibar*, c. 1685-1700, oil on canvas. Convent of Santa Teresa, Potosí, Bolivia.

Comparison with the few other female portraits of the period suggests that the Thoma portrait might originally have been full length. The canvas may at some point have been cut from its original frame, for Peruvian artists of the period the glued the canvas directly to the frame, without any wraparound. Now the painted canvas is wrapped around what is a very old support, but probably not the original one. Therefore, there would have been more drapery shown at the top and right side of the canvas, the chest and table would have been more visible, with the result that the figure would have been more spaciouly displayed. And, if we are correct that she was originally painted as a full-length figure, the portrait would have been all the more imposing.

The chandelier earrings, the pearls woven through the sitter's wavy tresses, and the enormous ring she holds in her proper right hand suggestive of the creole society of the viceroyalty, famous for spectacular jewels and sumptuous dress.ⁱⁱ The face of the sitter is

without individuality or psychological depth, which lends the image the distant air of one of the many painted “portraits” of virgin martyrs that were so popular in Hispanic churches, convents, and, probably, private homes.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ See Ricardo Estabridis, “El retrato del siglo XVIII en Lima como símbolo de poder,” in *El barroco peruano*, vol. 2 (Lima: Banco de Crédito del Perú, 2003), 2: 35-171.

ⁱⁱ All of the foreign travelers to Peru recorded their amazed impressions of Peruvian costume and jewelry. For a brief survey of this interesting subject see Scarlett O-Phelan Godoy, “El vestido como identidad étnica e indicador social de una cultura material,” in *El barroco peruano*, vol. 2 (Lima: Banco de Crédito del Perú, 2003), 2: 99-133.