



1999.008

Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple

Unidentified artist

Peru, Cuzco

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 37 3/4 x 51 1/2 inches

Anne and Joachim had been married for twenty years when they prayed that God at last grant them a child, and in return they promised to dedicate that child to serve God. In his *Flos sanctorum*, first published 1599-1600, which remained a source of orthodox iconography in art through the eighteenth century, the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira wrote that the Virgin Mary was three years old when Anne and Joachim presented her to the priest of the temple. This event Ribadeneira placed precisely on 21 November:

They declared the vow they had taken to the priest, entrusting their daughter to him, as a thing already dedicated to God, and asking that he place her with the other damsels who together served God next to the temple, in a house built for this purpose, where the virgins were sustained by the revenues of the same temple, and, being kept away from noise and tumult, could occupy themselves in holy and laudable exercises and easily enter the temple for prayer.ⁱ

The Thoma *Presentation of the Virgin* was likely one of a series of paintings representing the Life of the Virgin, as told by Ribadeneira or based on another, similar treatise.

Some series were commissioned for churches and religious houses, particularly for women's convents. Others were created for the art market, as described in a contract signed 17 July 1754 by Mauricio García and Pedro Nolasco y Lara (both *maestros pintores* and residents of Cuzco) and the art dealer Gabriel del Rincón, to provide the latter with:

125 paintings two *varas*ⁱⁱ high by one and a half wide at three pesos and four *reales* each . . . 150 paintings a *vara* and a half high and three quarters of a *vara* high at 11 pesos a dozen . . . a life of Saint Rose of 12 canvases a *vara* and a half high and one *vara* wide at two pesos each . . . A life of Saint Anthony with 12 canvases a *vara* and a half high and one wide at two pesos each . . . two lives of the Virgin Our Lady with 12

canvases: each one a *vara* and a half high and one wide at ten pesos and seven *reales* each . . . the History of David with 12 canvases . . .ⁱⁱⁱ

The master painters agreed to use fine pigments for the faces, to use horizontal formats, to add interesting details (“De modo que todos los referidos liensos ande ser apaisados con buenos adornos de curiosidades”), and to stencil gilding on some of them (“algunos de ellos brocateados con oro fino”). Another Cuzco contract of around the same date, that agreed upon between the master painter Mauricio García on 12 March 1754, called for 212 canvases on various subjects. Clearly these master painters had busy workshops to enable them to fulfill their contracts, called “conciertos.”^{iv}

The master painter of this *Presentation of the Virgin* may have sketched out the composition or provided his shop with a print to be followed, at least in part. And the master painter may have himself painted the faces, which are finely done and quite individualized. Another artist may have painted the Flemish style landscape seen in the distance and another probably specialized in the artfully strewn roses that accompany the Virgin Mary, speeded along by the cloud under her feet, up the stairs toward the priest and his acolytes. Last, the specialist in *brocateado*, the stenciled gold patterns that imitate the gilded surfaces of Spanish polychromed sculpture, covered the garments of the figures with a wide variety of delicate patterns.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ “Declararon al Sacerdote el voto que avian hecho, encargandole, que tuviese cuenta con su hija, como con cosa dedicada yà à Dios, y que la pusiessen entre las otras doncellas, que le servian junto al Templo, en una casa edificada para este efecto, donde las virgenes eras sustentadas con las rentas del mismo Templo, y apartadas del ruido, y bullicio, podian ocuparse en santos, y loables ejercicios, y entrar facilmente en el mismo Templo à hazer oracion.” Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Flos sanctorum*, 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1716-1717), 1:60-61.

ⁱⁱ A *vara* is 33 1/3 inches.

ⁱⁱⁱ Published in Spanish by Jorge Cornejo Bouroncle, “Arte cuzqueño,” *Revista del Archivo Histórico del Cuzco* 1 (1951): 286-87.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, 287.