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Unidentified Artist

Quito, Ecuador

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

Eighteenth century, c. 1739-1767

Oil on canvas, 29 5/8 x 20 inches

Inscription: “*Nobile confilium colitur Gonzaga Patronis; est qye domus Juventis tuta Patrocinio.*”

Luigi Gonzaga was born in Castiglione, Italy to noble parents who served at the court of Philip II of Spain. Although Luigi served as a page at the court (and is sometimes pictured in art dressed as a page), he was religiously inclined from a very early age. Despite his father’s hopes that he would pursue a military career, Luigi entered the Jesuit order when he was eighteen years old. He served in a hospital in Milan during the plague of 1587, and died from it in 1591, having received the last rites from Saint Robert Bellarmine, then a cardinal and Luigi’s confessor. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga was beatified in 1604 and canonized in 1726.

The Thoma painting is closely based on an engraving by Joseph Wagner (fig. 1) after a painting by Giambettino Cignaroli. The print was probably published between 1739 and 1786, according to the website of the British Museum. This gives a possible *terminus post quem* for Wagner’s print as the Quito painting could not have been created before the print was published. The *terminus ante quem*, the date before which the painting must have been completed, may be

1767, when the Jesuits were expelled from all Spanish realms. Although the order was established again in Spain in 1814, its members made their way slowly back to Spanish America, not returning to Quito until 1850.



Fig. 1. Joseph ("Giuseppe") Wagner (1706-1780), *S. Aloysius Gonzaga Societatis Jesu*, 1739-86, engraving after a painting by Giambettino Cignaroli (1718-1770). British Museum, London.



Fig. 2. Unidentified Italian artist, *Saint Aloysius Gongaza*, ca. 1790, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 38.5. Figge Art Museum, Davenport, Iowa.

A provincial Italian painting in the Figge Art Museum (fig. 2) shows that not only colonial, but European, artists used prints as compositional models for paintings. The inscription at the bottom of the canvas is in Italian, thereby establishing its geographical origins.

In comparison between the two, the Thoma painting was by a much more skilled painter than his colleague in Italy. The brushwork that suggests the diaphanous linen of the surplice is particularly impressive. Saint Aloysius Gonzaga is pictured with several symbols: the cross that alludes to piety and sacrifice; a lily, representing innocence; and a crown, which may generically refer to his canonization, but might also represent the marquisate he renounced. At the bottom of the canvas is an identifying caption framed with the rococo ornament common to prints by the Klauber family of Augsburg. Their engravings were often used as compositional sources by the artists who worked for the Jesuits in Quito during the eighteenth century.ⁱ

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ⁱ See Almerindo E. Ojeda and Alfonso Ortiz Crespo, *De Augsburg a Quito. Fuentes grabadas del arte jesuita quiteño del siglo XVIII* (Quito: Fundación de la Compañía de Jesús, 2015).