



Unidentified Artist  
*Saint Isidore the Farmer (San Isidro Labrador)*  
Ca. 1700  
Oil on canvas, 28 ½ x 24 inches  
Peru, Cuzco

Saint Isidore the Farmer (c. 1070-1130) was a poor Spanish laborer in the service of Juan de Vargas, a Madrileño landowner. Isidore was extremely pious, attending Mass daily before going to work in the fields. His fellow laborers complained to Juan de Vargas that Isidore was always late in the morning. When the master investigated, he found Isidore at prayer while an

angel was doing the ploughing for him. Isidore is said to have caused a fountain of fresh water to spring from the earth to quench his master's thirst. Both the miraculous intervention of the angels and the striking of the ground with Isidore's mattock to bring forth water are depicted in this painting. However, Isidore was credited with many miracles including quite a number of posthumous ones recorded in the twelfth-century hagiography, *Leyenda de San Isidro por Juan Diácono*. Isidore was beatified in 1619 and canonized in 1622, along with such luminaries of the church as Saints Francis Xavier, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, and Philip Neri. Isidore the Farmer is the patron saint of the city of Madrid and of farmers, and his feast day of May 15 is widely celebrated throughout the Hispanic world.

When Bishop Manuel de Mollinedo came to Cuzco from Madrid, he brought with him a devotion to the cult of Saint Isidore, and he commissioned the immense painting of the saint and his miracles in the Cathedral of Cuzco (fig. 1). It is signed by Basilio de Santa Cruz and dated 1693. Both Basilio de Santa Cruz and the author of the Thoma painting probably relied on a print, but the Thoma painting, in the choice of colors, reveals a debt to the work in the cathedral. However, the painter of the Thoma version asserted his independence in the background scene, in which the image of the angels plowing the field is different.

Mollinedo also commissioned a pair of paintings representing the bishop himself kneeling in adoration of Our Lady of Bethlehem and one depicting King Carlos II of Spain and his queen kneeling before a sculpture of Our Lady of La Almudena, like Isidore, a patron saint of Madrid. Mollinedo thus added major images of Madrid's patron saints to the iconography of the Cathedral of Cuzco.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These three large canvases are still in the Cathedral of Cuzco. For more about Mollinedo and the decoration of the cathedral see Suzanne L. Stratton Pruitt, "The King in Cuzco: Bishop Mollinedo's Portraits of Charles II, in Sarah Schroth, ed., *Art in the Hispanic World: essays in honor of Jonathan Brown* (London: Paul Holbertson Publishing in Association with Center for



Fig. 1. Basilio de Santa Cruz, *Miracles of Saint Isidore the Farmer*, 1693, Cathedral of Cuzco. Photo courtesy Jaime Mariazza.

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Spain in America, 2010), pp. 304-21 and Ramón Mujica Pinilla, “¿Copias o originales? La geografía de la exclusión en las dinámicas culturales entre el grabado europeo y la pintura virreinal peruana, in *Arte y tesoros del Perú 50 años: nuevas miradas* (Lima: Fondos Editoriales del Banco de Crédito del Perú, 2023), pp. 49-91.



Unidentified Artist  
*Saint Isidore the Farmer*  
Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
Oil on canvas, 52.75 x 39 inches  
Bolivia

The details of this depiction of daily life in the countryside, with its specifically Andean references, reflect the Spanish and Spanish American current in literature and the visual arts called “*costumbrismo*.” The development of *costumbrismo* in Spain in the early nineteenth century was almost immediately followed by developments in literary Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru in the 1840s. Writers, and then artists, documented folk life, for the first time

introducing *campesinos* into the subject matter of Spanish colonial art. The movement had its roots in both the romantic idealization of nature and the events of day-to-day life and in the scientific urge to catalogue people, customs, nations.<sup>2</sup>

Agricultural life of the Altiplano (the high plain outside of La Paz) continues today very much as it is pictured in the Thoma painting. The hagiographic elements in the painting (the angel with the plow and Isidore's striking of the mattock to bring forth water, witnessed by his master kneeling beside his horse), are far outnumbered by a variety of genre motifs including a couple and the llamas at upper left, heading past distant snowy peaks. Musicians accompany the threshing of grain. A slaughtered beast is butchered. A river runs through a water mill. Both domestic and wild beasts are pictured. Even today, the feast day of San Isidro Labrador is celebrated on May 15 with a Mass, music, and *chicha*. The yolked oxen are honored for their indispensable role. Then, seeds are planted. The feast recognizes both Catholic tradition and the far older seasonal cycles of the Altiplano.<sup>3</sup>

In an essay published in 2004, Pedro Querajazu Leyton discussed several mid-nineteenth century paintings signed by an otherwise undocumented artist named Joaquín Castañón,<sup>4</sup> who apparently worked in present-day Bolivia. A painting of Saint Isidore the Laborer in the San

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<sup>2</sup> For *costumbrismo* in the visual arts in Peru, see Natalia Majluf, "Pattern-Book of Nations: Images of Types and Costumes in Asia and Latin America, ca. 1800-1860," in *Reproducing Nations: Types and Costumes in Asia and Latin America, ca. 1800-1860* (exh. cat., New York: Americas Society, 2006), and Víctor Peralta Ruiz and Charles F. Walker, "Viajeros, naturalistas, científicos y dibujantes. *De la ilustración al costumbrismo en las artes (siglos XVIII y XIX)*," in *Visión y Símbolos del Virreinato Criollo a la República Peruana (Colección Arte y Tesoros del Perú)* (Lima: Banco de Crédito, 2006), pp. 243-273.

<sup>3</sup> See: Maribel Noa Olaguibel, *La fiesta de San Isidro Labrador en la comunidad de Chichuaco, barrios de Chara, Chaupimuyu y Chillcoma, Canchis* (Lima: Instituto Superior Pedagógico Público Túpac Amaru, TAREA, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Pedro Querejazu Leyton, "Joaquín Castañón. Vírgines y santos," in *Pintura boliviana del siglo XIX (1825-1925). Homenaje a Mario Chacón Torres*, Teresa Gisbert and Teresa de Aneiva, eds. (La Paz: Fundación Cultural del Banco Central de Bolivia/Museo Nacional de Arte/SIART, 2004), pp. 99-101. First published in *Revista Historia y Cultura* 7, La Paz, 1981.

Antonio Museum of Art is signed by Castañón and dated 1866 (fig. 2). As in this painting in the Thoma Collection, the charming vignettes of country life have a folkloric quality, but they are rendered with a confident and skilled hand. It is possible that both paintings, striking for their myriad small details of daily life, were inspired by a popular print. Very little is known to date about the role of popular, locally made prints in the dissemination of iconography in colonial Spanish America. It is also possible that this unusual composition, featuring a holy figure amidst quotidian details, bears some relationship with paintings of Our Lady of Cocharcas (fig. 3), but this has not been studied.



Fig. 2. Joaquín Castañón, *Saint Isidore the Laborer*, 1866, Oil on canvas, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas.



Fig. 3. Unidentified Artist, *Our Lady of Cocharcas*, Peru, 1751, oil on canvas, Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma (2011.040)

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt