



Saint Joseph and the Christ Child Walking in a Landscape

Joseph Nicolás Ecoz¹ (active in Potosí, Bolivia during the 1760s)

1762

Oil on canvas, 37 x 29 inches

Until the acquisition of this painting by the Thoma Foundation, vanishingly few works by Joseph Nicolás de Ecoz had been identified. They include a painting representing *Our Lady of the Rosary of the Dominican Monastery of Potosí* (fig. 1), a *Crucifixion* (fig. 2) and two “Doctors of the Church” (figs. 3 and 4). The *Crucifixion* has been aptly described as “*de muy regular*

¹ The artist’s biographical entry by Fernando Rodríguez de la Torre in the online version of the *Real Academia de Historia* gives his name as “Nicolás (de los) Ecoz Aguirre.” Ecoz’s mother’s last name was Aguirre, but his known signatures never include it. It seems best to allow him his own agency in choosing his own name.

factura:”² it is so stylistically bland that it does not tell us much about Ecoz’s art. Of the two “Doctors of the Church,” one is signed and dated 1762. Both are strikingly like the fictive portraits of old men by Melchor Pérez Holguín (1660-1732) such as the depiction of Saint Mark in the Thoma collection. The similarities suggested to earlier scholars that Ecoz should be considered a follower of Melchor Pérez Holguín who had been the premier painter of Potosí (1660-c. 1762) and who indeed seems to have had many disciples.³ However, these two paintings are likely to be simply copies after Holguín by Ecoz: an homage to the earlier master, the result of a specific commission honoring a favorite painter, or a “study”, a painterly exercise.

We know that Ecoz was a native of Potosí; that he married Manuela Manrique on October 10, 1758; and that he was appointed as an appraiser of paintings confiscated from the Jesuits, who were expelled from the Spanish empire in 1767. That appointment in July of 1771 suggests that he was a well-regarded artist despite the small number of works by him known today. In February of 1772 an additional document notes that poor health prevented him from actually appraising the Jesuit works. However, the following month he did buy some of those paintings at auction, which indicates that he could afford them, an indication of his relative success.⁴

Although Holguín had a flourishing workshop and many followers, it is likely that Ecoz’s mature style, best illustrated by the Thoma *Saint Joseph* and the elegant presentation of his *Our Lady of the Rosary* reflects the style of paintings created by Gaspar Miguel Berrío (1702-after 1764), who had a flourishing workshop in which *Ecoz* may have trained. A comparison between the face of Saint Joseph in the Thoma painting with a detail of a male worshipper in Berrío’s *Our Lady of Aranzazu* show similar facial characteristics in both artists’ male physiognomies, particularly the very prominent eyes and aquiline noses.

² Mario Chacón Torres, *Arte virreinal en Potosí. Fuentes para su historia* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1973), 120.

³ José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert, *Holguín y la pintura virreinal en Bolivia* (La Paz: Librería Editorial Juventud, 1977), 189-199, 221, 223-225, figs. 240-244.

⁴ Chacón Torres, 119-120.

Many such comparisons may be made with the figures in Berrío's large, elaborate painting called *The Patronage of Saint Joseph* (fig. 7). Berrío was the most important artist in Potosí after Holguín. He left a considerable body of signed paintings and a number of unsigned works that can be assigned to what must have been a fairly large workshop.⁵ Like other Spanish American painters, Ecoz must have had his start in an established workshop and it seems that the studio of Berrío is the most likely candidate for Ecoz's artistic origins.

Akemi Luisa Herráez Vossbrink has possibly identified the individual who commissioned the *Saint Joseph* painting. Above the signature of Ecoz on the painting is inscribed: "A devocion del Señor Jph. Antonio de Alza[...]." A certain Joseph Alzaga held a court position at the *Real Audiencia de Charcas*, where his name appeared in a case involving Spanish and Buenos Aires merchants that was signed in Potosí in 1769. He was therefore in Potosí during the decade when Ecoz was active.⁶ Alzaga's patronage of Ecoz, as well as his selection by the *Ramo de Temporalidades* to evaluate works that had belonged to the Jesuits suggest that Ecoz worked for a distinguished clientele.

Joseph was, of course, Alzaga's "name saint," but Saint Joseph was immensely popular in Spanish colonial paintings, sometimes with Mary and Jesus, but some times as an individual. This painting brings to four the number of depictions of Saint Joseph in the Thoma Collection.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

⁵ See Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, *The Art of Painting in Colonial Bolivia/El arte de la pintura en Bolivia colonial* (Philadelphia, PA: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2017), 51-55 and 178-179 for a selection of color illustrations.

⁶ Akemi Herráez found this information on the web at Eduardo R. Saguier, *Genealogía de la tragedia Argentina. Auge y colapso de un fragmento de estado o la violenta transición de un orden imperial-absolutista a un orden nacional-republicano (1600-1912)*, digital document, unpaginated, notes 68, 71, 1522, 2298, 2314-2316, 2318-2319, 2321, 2324, 4218, 4926. I am grateful to Dr. Herráez Vossbrink for sharing this reference, the photographs of the paintings in Sucre's Museo de la Catedral, and other research notes with me.



Fig. 1. Joseph Nicolás Ecoz, *Our Lady of the Rosary of the Dominican Monastery, Potosí*, dated 1763. Museo de Charcas, Sucre, Bolivia. Signed “Jph. Nicolas Ecoz me pintó.”

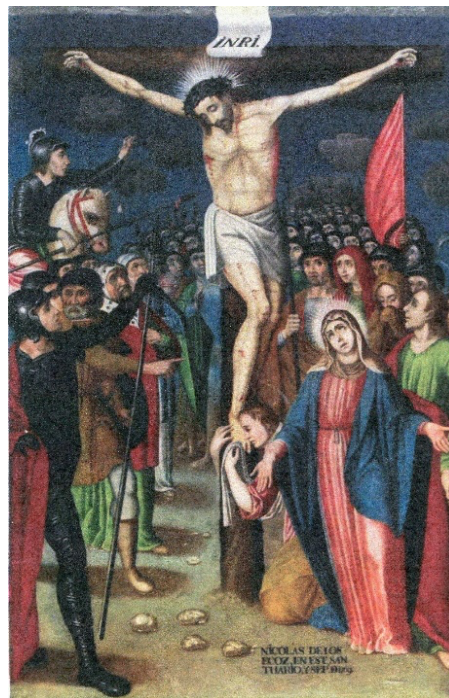


Fig. 2. Joseph Nicolás Ecoz, *Crucifixion*, 1769. Museo de la Moneda, Potosí, Bolivia. Inscribed: “Nicolás de los Ecoz, en este Santuario [de Manquiri], Y Sep°. De 1769.”



Fig. 3. Joseph Nicolás Ecoz, *A Doctor of the Church (called Saint Augustine)*, 1762. Museo de la Catedral, Sucre, Bolivia. Signed and dated on the inkpot: “Nicolas Ecoz me hazía en Potosí [año] 1762.”



Fig. 4. Joseph Nicolás Ecoz, *Doctor of the Church (called Saint Jerome)*, 1762. Museo de la Catedral, Sucre, Bolivia.



Fig. 5. Joseph Nicolás Ecoz, detail of the face of Saint Joseph



Fig. 6. Gaspar Miguel Berrío, detail of *Our Lady of Aranzazu*. Museo de la Moneda, Potosí, Bolivia.



Fig. 7. Gaspar Miguel Berrío, *Patronage of Saint Joseph*, 1737. Museo de la Moneda, Potosí, Bolivia.