



Unidentified Artist
Our Lady of Mount Carmel with Donor, 1783
Oil on canvas, 36.3 x 27.8 inches
Cuzco, Peru

The Carmelites, the only contemplative religious order to have been founded in the Crusader States, first emerged as a group of hermits living on Mount Carmel, a site in Galilee associated with the prophet Elijah. The Carmelites' presence in the Holy Land became more

established in the early 13th century during the time of Saint Albert, who provided the hermits with a rule that emphasized a life of poverty, prayer, and community living. In 1247, with the publication of the papal bull *Quae honorem conditoris*, the hermits were constituted into the Carmelite Order within the Church.¹

Albert's rule was confirmed in a bull by Honorius III in 1226, and again by Gregory IX in 1229, with a modification regarding ownership of property and permission to celebrate divine services. In 1238, however, an exodus from Mount Carmel to Cyprus took place. The migration marked the beginning of a crucial phase in the Order's history, a phase that lasted until the end of the thirteenth century and has been called the Order's "age of expansion." The years between 1241 and 1250 saw the Carmelite expansion grow beyond Cyprus to Sicily, England, and France. The Carmelite order settled in the Iberian Peninsula around 1270 and by 1780 they had eleven houses in Catalonia.² Their influence expanded to America in the sixteenth century as they traveled as missionaries accompanying Spanish authorities.

Tradition holds that before the institutionalization of the Carmelite Order, their patroness, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, appeared to the hermits in the bay of Haifa during the 13th century. However, the more widely and celebrated apparition of the Virgin occurred in 1251, when she appeared in Cambridge, England to Saint Simon Stock, an English Carmelite. The Virgin Mary appeared to him in prayers for guidance and assistance. In doing so, she presented him with the Brown Scapular, a small piece of cloth worn over the shoulders which is decorated with images of the Virgin, and told him "This is a privilege for you and the Carmelites. The one who dies with it will be saved."³ The use of the Scapular rapidly spread in Europe and the Americas in the 17th century through the *cofradías* that wore it as a sign of love for Mary, and as a special protection at the time of death.⁴ Furthermore, Stock's vision helped to forge the iconography of Our Lady of

¹ The circumstances, context, and significance of the Bull have been thoroughly examined by M. H. Lauren, "La Lettre *Quae honorem conditoris* (October 1, 1247)," *Ephemerides Carmeliticæ*, 2 (1946): 10-16.

² Andrew Jotischky, *The Carmelites and Antiquity. Mendicants and their Pasts in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 12-14, 22.

³ Héctor Schenone, *Iconografía del Arte Colonial. Santa María* (Buenos Aires: Educa, Editorial de la Universidad Católica Argentina, 20008): 338.

⁴ Ibid.

Mount Carmel as the legend states that, when she appeared to Saint Simon Stock, she was wearing the brown habit of the Carmelites along with a white cape.

In the Thoma Collection painting, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, appears wearing the brown tunic and white cape and is adorned with lavish jewelry while wearing the coat of arms of the Carmelites. She presents the Brown Scapular to Captain Ignacio Salga[...], the donor of the painting. He kneels before her, wearing Spanish military dress and a white powdered wig.

The painting is dated in 1783. The Virgin appears as a supernatural apparition that dominates a landscape in which the fantasy of a castle and the blue hues typical of Flemish landscapes intersect with reality. The use of *brocateado* or gold applications in the vestment of Mary and Jesus, as well as the brown and ochre palette of the painting, makes it possible to link its production to Cuzco where there has been a Beaterio dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel since 1675.⁵ The sweet and idealized representation of the Virgin and Child, as well as the use of gold reinforce the atemporality that dominated painting in the Spanish colonial Andes.

⁵ For more information about the Beaterio de Nuestra Señora del Carmen, see: Ewa Kubiak, "El Beaterio de Nuestra Señora del Carmen a la luz de un documento inédito de 1772 y de la arquitectura actual de recogimiento," *Sztuka Ameryki Łacińskiej*, Nr. 12 (2022): 65-85.