



Unidentified artist

Ex-voto Dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel

1784(?)

Peru, Cuzco

Oil on canvas, 38 ½ x 28 ¼ inches

Inscription: *A su ilustrisima [...] Maria Santisima, ano de 1784, ano de la consagracion de la Virgen del Carmen con el milagro que me libro de la enfermedad del demonio al que mato de [...] en la localidad de Sulco, Distrito de [...] catqa. – Cuzco 1784*

[To her most illustrious...most holy Mary, year 1784, year of the consecration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel with the miracle that freed me from the illness of the demon that killed...in the town of Sulco, District of ...catqa. – Cuzco 1784]

Ex-voto paintings are those commissioned specifically to thank a holy personage for their intervention, usually for answering prayers for health restored following a life-threatening illness. In this case, the donor specifically credits Our Lady of Mount Carmel, thanking the saint for protection from the plague. [For more information about the Carmelite order, see *Our Lady of Mount Carmel with Donor* in the Thoma collection.]

The Virgin Mary is depicted wearing the brown habit of the Carmelite order, and both she and the Christ Child offer the “Brown Scapulars,” worn as professions of faith. They are accompanied by the archangels Gabriel, Michael, Raphael and Uriel. To either side are Saints Joseph and John the Baptist. Below are two souls in Purgatory.

The town of “Sulco” is no longer recognized as a community in the Province of Quispicanchi, Province of Cuzco.¹ However, Ccatca [Catca] is the capital of the eponymous district. In the church of Saint John, the Baptist in Catca is a mural dedicated to a plague, probably painted around 1720.

The patron saint of the District of Catca is the *Virgen del Carmen*.² The donor notes in the inscription that 1784 was the year of the “consecration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel,” so perhaps the particular devotion of the district began at that date. My colleague, Raúl Montero, who has done extensive research in the regional archives, has found a number of references to a plague of *garrotillo* (diphtheria) in the 1780s and early 1800s. A painting in the church of Tiobamba memorializes the suffering.³

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

¹ See Wikipedia, “Distrito de Ccatca.”

² Ibid.

³ I am as always grateful to Raúl Montero, who knows so much.