

A Peruvian Monstrance of 1649

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THE AMERICAN WING of The Metropolitan Museum of Art houses a fine silver monstrance from the distinguished collection bequeathed in 1931 by Michael F. Friedsam (Figure 1). The monstrance was long believed to be Mexican, but my research has proved it to be a Peruvian work of considerable importance. It has already figured prominently as such in an exhibition assembled by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1992;¹ some further information about it may be of interest to readers of the *Journal*.

This portable sun-type Peruvian monstrance in silver gilt with applied enamels dates from 1649. The square planar base is supported by four balled feet beneath scrolled foliate devices with lambrequin ends that bracket each corner. From its center rises a flaring square block topped by a boldly projecting square plate with a quarter-round upper edge. The stem is composed of a cylindrical pedestal, then an urn-shaped knob affixed along the sides with four cast brackets with beaked projections, and then a torus molding mounted with four beaded, scrolled handles; the neck is in the form of a truncated cone. At the base of the impressively large gloria, or nimbus, where it fits into the shaft, are back-to-back winged and rayed cherub heads flanked by projecting foliate scrolls. The elaborate gloria surrounds a transparent case for the host, which is framed by a circular enameled band, curved in profile; from it emerge fifteen rays of alternating design (plus one for the mount) sprouting a dense network of interlaced beaded and foliate scrolls; the rays terminate, again alternately, in simple finials and more complex openwork ornamentation. Silver and champlevé enamel plaques of differing sizes and shapes covered with geometric floral designs decorate the rays as well as the stem and base; the dominant color of the enamel is blue with touches of green and yellow-orange.

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An inscription engraved in capital letters runs around the edge of the base (Figures 3–6): EL PADRE FR Pº DE URREA NATURAL DESTA Vila DE XADARQVE DIO ESTE SAGRARIO A ESTA IGLESIA MAIOR DONDE FVE BATICADº RVEGEN A DIOS POR EL AÑO 1649 (Padre Fr. P. de Urrea Native of This Town of Xadarque Gave This Monstrance to This Great Church in Which He Was Baptized Pray to God for Him in the Year 1649). Thanks to this inscription, we possess valuable information that allows us to arrive at a correct classification of the piece—supremely important material when we consider that the absence of legal marks eliminates the source of such significant data as the work's place of origin or the name of the artist who crafted it.

The donor of the monstrance was in fact the revered Fray Pedro de Urraca,² who was born in 1583 in the Spanish town of Jadraque in the province of Guadalajara (Figure 2). When still very young, he traveled to Quito (Ecuador), where in 1603 he entered the Orden de la Merced. Five years later, in 1608, he moved again, this time to Lima, Peru, where he lived until his death in 1657.³ Urraca is buried in the chapel of San Pedro Nolasco in the church of the Merced monastery in Lima. His reputation for saintliness was such that procedures for beatification are currently under way. The man responsible for the monstrance, then, was one of the best-known and best-loved religious figures of colonial Peru, a fact that bestows additional historic value upon the piece.

The monstrance was commissioned for use during services in the parish church of Jadraque in Guadalajara, Spain, where Fray Pedro was baptized,⁴ a fairly typical oblation among Spaniards who immigrated to the New World. We know that the gift was effected in 1649, as indicated by the inscription and confirmed by the style.

In typology and ornamentation, including the enamels and their coloring, the monstrance adheres faithfully to the solutions and designs employed by silversmiths in Lima between the middle and end of

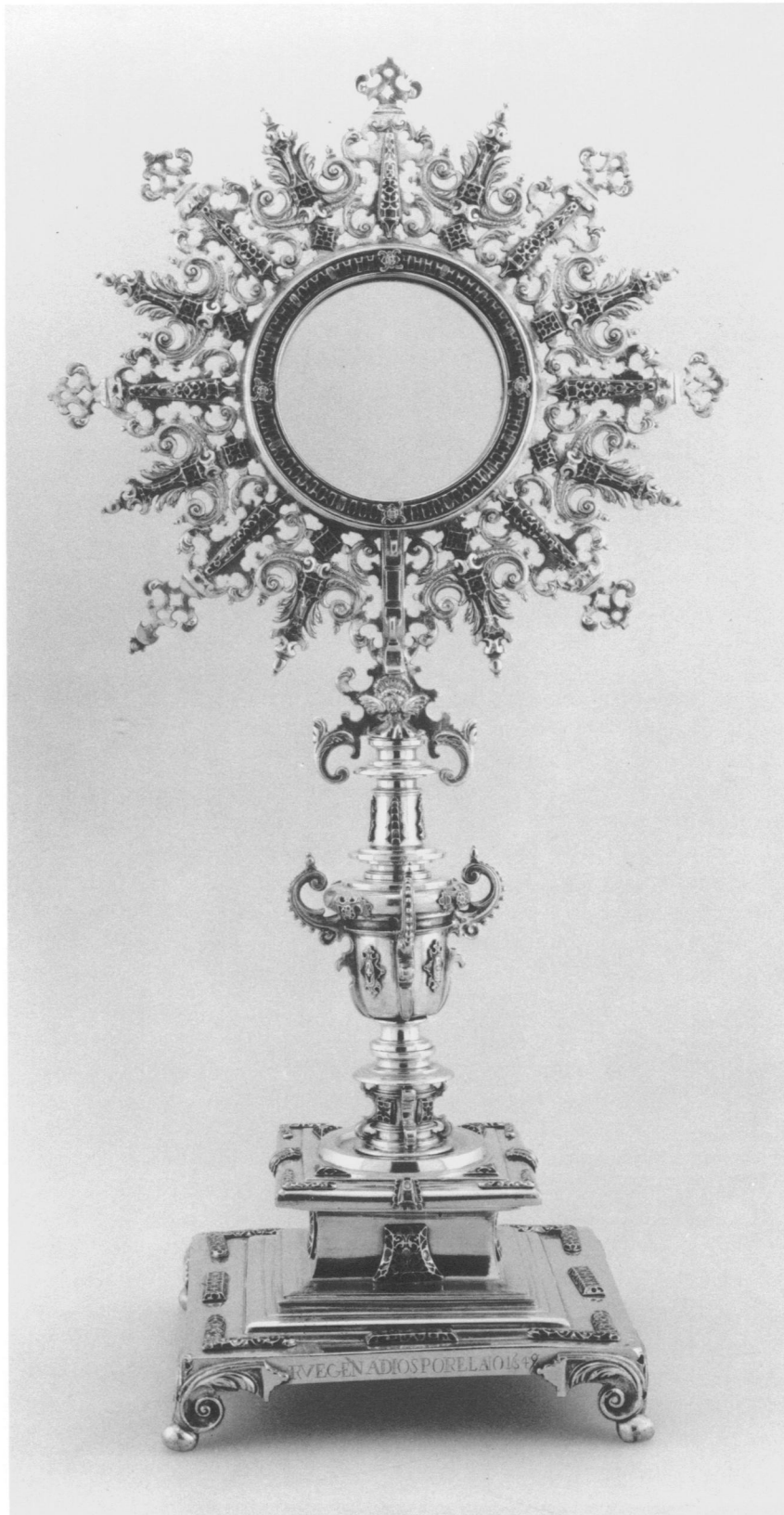


Figure 1. Monstrance. Peruvian, Lima, 1646–1649. Silver-gilt with applied plaques of blue, green, and honey-gold champlevé enamel, h. 57.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931, 32.100.231



Figure 2. Fray Pedro Urraca (1583–1657), frontispiece in Felipe Colombo, *El Job de la Ley de Gracia* (2nd edition, Madrid, 1790) (photo: General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations)

the seventeenth century. There is, therefore, no reason to hesitate in attributing the monstrance to the silver workshops of that city, and careful comparison with other known examples reinforces this affirmation.⁵ The closest analogue is a monstrance in the church of Embid de la Ribera, in Zaragoza, Spain.⁶ It is possible that both monstrances were created by the same artisan (Figure 7). The Zaragoza piece, however, could be of slightly ear-

lier execution, since the sun is less elaborate and the stem lacks the typical projecting handles that became an ornamental code of Baroque silver in viceregal Peru.

In style, the Friedsam monstrance corresponds to the early Baroque, since the foot and stem still manifest the rigidity and schema characteristic of Mannerist formulas, while the sun already displays the structure and diffused organization typical of the



Figures 3–6. Details of monstrance in Figure 1, showing inscription



Figure 7. Monstrance. Probably Peruvian, Lima, ca. 1645. Silver-gilt. Zaragoza, parish church of Embid de la Ribera (photo: Instituto Amatller de Arte Hispanico)

Peruvian Baroque aesthetic. As a particular characteristic of Lima monstrances, we can point to a fondness for foliate ornamentation on balled feet and to the absence of any cross on the colophon of the sun.

At present, we do not know who created this splendid work. It may have come from the hands of the renowned master Benito Pereyra, who was famous for handsome monstrances and reliquaries.⁷ More likely the monstrance is the work of the sil-

versmith Diego de Atienza, who at the midpoint of the seventeenth century owned one of the most important silver shops in Lima. The surname of this master craftsman corresponds to the toponym "Atienza," a town in the province of Guadalajara. This designation may indicate his origins, and, in that case, we would find that the Lima silversmith and Fray Pedro de Urraca came from the same region, even from neighboring towns—Atienza and

Jadraque—allowing for speculation that a close relationship existed between the two based on regional origins. The possibility then arises that the latter entrusted to the former the crafting of the monstrance intended as a devotional gift to the church in Jadraque.⁸

The Metropolitan Museum's monstrance is the earliest dated example known of its type and, as a result, is a key to the formal, and even decorative, evolution of Baroque Peruvian monstrances. It is also of interest for its extraordinary technical execution, the exceptional beauty and originality of the sun, and the quality of the enamels, which add ornamental and chromatic notes to the work. For all these reasons, as well as the fact that its donor was a significant figure in the religious history of Peru, this monstrance may be cited as a true paradigm of Lima silvercraft.

NOTES

1. Cristina Esteras, entry in *Cambios: The Spirit of Transformation in Spanish Colonial Art*, exh. cat., Santa Barbara Museum of Art (1992) pp. 63–64, cat. no. 42.

2. Although the name, abbreviated in the inscription, reads URREA, I have no doubt that it refers to Urraca and that the spelling must be taken as an error on the part of the engraver. We notice that a similar error occurs in the rendering of the place

of birth: XADARQVE for Xadraqve. Even the date of the gift was corrected; it was originally 1646, then changed in the inscription to read 1649.

3. See Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia de la iglesia en el Perú* (Burgos, 1959) p. 486.

4. In local and regional bibliographies of Guadalajara—prior to 1930—we have found no reference to this Jadraque monstrance (although we expected to find a citation in Juan Catalina García's unpublished two-volume "Catálogo monumental de España: La Provincia de Guadalajara," 1906).

5. Among other examples are the monstrance of the Seminario de San Atón, in Badajoz, Spain, and those in San Miguel de Heras y Sámano, in Cantabria, Spain. See Cristina Esteras, *Platería hispanoamericana, siglos XVI–XIX* (Bajadoz, 1984) pp. 36, 37; and idem, *Orfebrería hispanoamericana, siglos XVI–XIX* (Madrid, 1986) pp. 51–54.

6. The photographs were first published in 1952, accompanied by Manuel Trens's brief text "Custodia de sol renacentista, Embid de la Ribera, Zaragoza; Plata dorada, Siglo XVII," *La custodias españolas* (Barcelona, 1952) p. 74, pl. 91. Francisco Abbad later described the piece but without classification, definitive provenance, or documentation as to how it came to that parish. He dates it tentatively to the beginnings of the 17th century—in our opinion, incorrectly, as it should be ascribed a date ca. 1645 (see García, *Catálogo monumental de España: Zaragoza* [Madrid, 1957] I, p. 367, and II, fig. 995). As far as we know, the ostensory in Embid de la Ribera had never been classified nor its Lima origins recognized. This was also the case with a chalice we estimate to be of the same period and provenance (García, *Catálogo monumental de España: Zaragoza*, II, fig. 99).

7. His shop was situated beside the Recoleta de los Padres de Santo Domingo. See Emilio Harth-Terre, "Un Taller de platería en 1540," *Mercurio Peruano* (1984) p. 503.

8. For more about the silversmith Diego de Atencia, see Harth-Terré, "Un taller de platería en 1540."