Sacred Opulence: The Devotional Qualities of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the Metropolitan Cathedral, Sucre
Lucia Abramovich, Tulane University


In 1600, the Spanish Jeronymite friar Diego de Ocaña arrived at the Imperial City of Potosí, the economic center of the Viceroyalty of Peru, with the intention of continuing his alms-raising tour throughout the Spanish territories of the Americas.¹ Ocaña’s journey was intended to raise funds and establish confraternities for the Virgin of Guadalupe, Extremadura, the patroness of the Jeronymite order. Ocaña had been so impressed with Potosi upon his arrival that he had drawn it immediately in his travelogue, the Relación del viaje de Fray Diego de Ocaña por el Nuevo Mundo. He added an inscription to his illustration of the city’s famous mountain—which at the time was producing vast quantities of silver ore—writing “Cerro de Potossi, octava maravilla del mundo” – Potosi Mountain, eighth wonder of the world (figure 1).² As part of his realization of this campaign for the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Ocaña produced images of the Virgin to inspire devotees and contributions to the advocation to which his order was devoted.³ The original version of this Marian icon in Spain was a Romanesque “Black Madonna” statue depicting the Virgin enthroned with the Christ Child. The Virgin of Guadalupe was, and remains, one of the most famous imágenes de vestir, or dressed images, of the Iberian Peninsula,

² Diego de Ocaña, Relación Del Viaje de Fray Diego de Ocaña Por El Nuevo Mundo (1599-1605) (Biblioteca de la Universidad de Oviedo, Spain, n.d.).
³ Diego de Ocaña et al., Viaje por el Nuevo Mundo: de Guadalupe a Potosi, 1599-1605 (Madrid; Frankfurt; México D.F.: Iberoamericana ; Vervuert ; Bonilla Artigas, 2010). pp. 305-307.
known as such for the elaborate garments with which she is outfitted. During his time in Potosi, Ocaña was first asked to paint a large, embellished image of Guadalupe to be placed upon the altar of the Church of San Francisco (figure 2). Ocaña ultimately painted several of these images of the Virgin of Guadalupe during his fifteen-month stay in Potosi, and managed to raise significant funds, totaling 44 bars of gold, in alms for his home monastery in his efforts to promulgate the cult of Guadalupe.

In 1601, Ocaña arrived in the city of La Plata (now known as Sucre, in present-day Bolivia) with the intention of continuing his alms-raising tour throughout the Viceroyalties. He was invited by the Bishop of the Audiencia de Charcas, Alonso Ramiréz de Vergara, to create an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Ocaña’s commission was aided by the deacon of the cathedral, Juan de Larrategui, who offered the friar lodging in his home and materials with which to paint the Virgin. The day after Ocaña’s arrival in La Plata, a great earthquake took place while he attended Mass at the Cathedral. The building was spared, an act that the parishioners considered to be the first miracle realized by the Virgin of Guadalupe in the city of La Plata. Ocaña soon finished the commissioned image, and with Larrategui’s assistance, he collected precious alms to place upon the painting itself. The people of La Plata, perhaps in gratitude for the Virgin sparing their lives in the earthquake months prior, donated to the Virgin’s image with exceptional

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8 Alvarez, Guadalupe, 155.
generosity. The resulting image was spectacular, it adornment far exceeding its counterparts painted by Ocaña for other churches in the Viceroyalties during his tour (figure 3).

Ocaña’s image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Plata is no doubt an extraordinary example of a Marian image from the viceregal period. She exists in a liminal space between two- and three-dimensionality, originally painted on canvas, now reinforced by a slab of gilded silver, and dripping with precious tribute of pearls, emeralds, diamonds, rubies, gold, silver, and other gems and medallions. As noted in his chronicle, it is certain that Diego de Ocaña intended for this image to be presented in this way. In this brief presentation, I will explore why Diego de Ocaña chose this form of display to represent Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Plata. I will provide a quick look back at her Spanish predecessors, then return to La Plata to examine the pieces on the Virgin herself. Lastly, I will offer just a few examples of other “liminal” two-dimensional images of the Virgin from the viceregal Andes with jewelry appliqués on canvas, as frames of reference for this rare practice. My aim here is to question what this outstanding example of precious embellishment on a two-dimensional image of Our Lady of Guadalupe conveys with regard to the nature of devotion to this Marian advocacion in La Plata, and how closely this devotion is tied to the socioeconomic panorama of seventeenth century La Plata. I also wish to pose the question of what La Plata’s Guadalupe may reveal about the inspirations and devotional qualities of the small number of extant embellished Virgins in the Andes.

The original statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Extremadura, located in Seville, Spain, was the source of inspiration for Ocaña’s images in the Americas (figure 4). Since the fourteenth century, the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Extremadura, has appeared dressed in

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sumptuously embroidered garments, with only her face, the face of the Christ Child she holds on her lap, and their right hands exposed.\textsuperscript{11} Guadalupe’s influence in Spain and the Americas was vast, and cults of Guadalupe overseen by other monastic orders already existed by the time Ocaña embarked on his journey to the Americas in 1599.\textsuperscript{12} Ocaña likely modeled the numerous images of Guadalupe that he produced in the Americas on an image of personal devotion, a copper engraving of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Pedro de Angel. This image served as the frontispiece for the book \textit{Historia e Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe}, written by Gabriel de Talavera and published in 1597 (figure 5). Ocaña brought 300 copies of this book with him on his journey to the New World. The image conveys a richly dressed and decorated Virgin and Christ Child, and inspired several paintings of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Americas. However, Ocaña understood that a mere print would not suffice to inspire the creation of confraternities and the donations of alms everywhere he visited.

To return to the tradition of Iberian \textit{imagenes de vestir}, I’d like to refer to one more example that I believe encapsulates the opulence we see in the image from La Plata, that may enhance our understanding of Ocaña’s inspiration. The \textit{Virgen de los Reyes}, a fourteenth-century \textit{imagen de vestir} located in the Seville Cathedral, is one of the most salient examples of precious embellishment in an Iberian dressed Virgin (figure 6). The inventory of her adornments is long; most notable among them is her opulent gold crown containing rubies, sapphires, emeralds, topazes, and pearls. In the work \textit{Art and ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week}, Susan Verdi Webster notes the importance of

materiality to inspiring devotion, specifically referencing Perez de Guzman’s fourteenth century inventory of the adornments given to the Virgen de los Reyes. She notes that, “there is an unmistakably reciprocal relationship among the importance and prestige of the sculpted image, the magnitude of popular devotion, and the incrustation of adornments that surrounds it.”\textsuperscript{13} The Iberian confraternities were motivated to heavily adorn their Virgins, despite protests by the religious community, as Ecclesiastical synods throughout the Iberian Peninsula prohibited dressing sculptures in loaned garments and accessories. The \textit{imagen de vestir} quickly became popular in the viceroyalties after its rise in the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{14} While this art form is credited for inspiring the Marian statues and statue paintings so common in viceregal art, the composition of the Guadalupe image in La Plata merely draws inspiration from the aesthetic the dressed virgins, though her adornments are unique to her, and reveal traits unique to the city of La Plata.

When Ocaña finished his painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December of 1601, the image was almost ready for display, but it was necessary to trim it with pearls and precious stones before its presentation. As previously noted, Deacon Larrategui took it upon himself to knock on the doors of his parishioners to ask for precious items to add to the image, and the reaction to Larrategui’s campaign was immediate.\textsuperscript{15} The donated gemstones on the image included diamonds, amethysts, sapphires, topazes, and rubies. Ocaña provides an abbreviated inventory of the image in his chronicle, noting the placement and values of the jewels and metals he received as offerings to apply onto the Marian devotion. Some notable inclusions are pearls shaped like “garbanzos”, recognized as the famous \textit{barroco} pearls of Cubagua and Margarita, off

\textsuperscript{13}Susan Verdi Webster, \textit{Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 82.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 73.
\textsuperscript{15} Torres del Solar et al., \textit{Virgen de Guadalupe}, 11-12.
the coast of Venezuela (figure 7). Other remarkable details include a small golden parrot dangling from the foot of the cross, with its belly made of a single large emerald (figure 8).

An inventory of the Virgin made in 1784, preceding its transfer from the original canvas onto the silver plate, is where we first see explicit mention of the use of “barroco” pearls used as the “bodies” of mermaids, seen in the previous slide, and of this little dog (figure 9). Pearls were emblems of elite wealth that could be applied to any number of materials, which made them ideal tribute for the Marian adoration. Like pearls, emeralds did not make a significant economic impact on the economy of the viceregal Andes, as they possessed little monetary value beyond those rare, high carat examples that were coveted by elites of the Islamic world at the time. Emerals mined in the Americas were considered to be of lesser quality than their counterparts mined in Eurasia.

Ocaña estimated the total cost of the image as being about fourteen thousand reales, an amount appraised by the metalsmiths of La Plata. The friar’s interest in valuing the Virgin and her embellishments using monetary terms and official appraisals is striking, in that it invites the contemplation of how this image may have been seen by the people of La Plata as a declaration of their prestige in the wake of the fanfare the image of Guadalupe that Ocaña produced in Potosí received. It was this image and its veneration, after all, that caused the Bishop of Charcas to call upon Ocaña to create an image for La Plata. Perhaps the reason for the extravagant embellishment of La Plata’s Guadalupe image was not only to demonstrate their deep devotion to the cult of Guadalupe, but also to assert the power of La Plata, measured in economic value. While Potosí evoked chaos and abundance, La Plata was emerging as the city of order and

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18 Torres del Solar et al., Virgen de Guadalupe. 17.
tranquility, of knowledge, of laws and religious piety. It was also the seat of local government, serving as the capital of the Audiencia de Charcas. Potosinos sensed and feared the interference of the authorities settled in La Plata. This rivalry surely played a role in the alms-raising campaign for La Plata’s Guadalupe, serving as a selling-point for donors to bestow their most decadent adornments to the Virgin.

Interestingly, the jewels adorning Our Lady of Guadalupe were not the most valuable adornments placed upon her canvas. The material with the most commercial value and abundance in the early seventeenth century Alto Peru was silver, mined from the Cerro Rico, or rich mountain, of Potosí. The archives of the annual registered silver production in Potosí district indicate that Potosí reached the peak of its silver production between 1575 and 1615. Ocaña’s visit falls squarely within that period. Silver was used for all manner of things due to its great available quantity in the region. While the material was plentiful, it could also be sold legally and otherwise with wide profit margins due to its value in Europe and Asia.

Tracing the routes and values of gemstones, either in their pure form or set into jewelry, is a more complicated task than measuring the output of regional silver mining enterprises in the viceroyalties. Restrictions on the legal buying and selling of precious gems limited their circulation to a certain extent. In the seventeenth century, the Laws of the Indies forbade merchants from bringing gemstones to the Americas from Spain. These laws exempted the circulation of pearls and emeralds, which were found domestically; these precious stones appear with considerable frequency in works of art from the viceregal Andes, as adornments to cult figures and personal portraits. They are also the most prevalent gemstones featured on Our Lady

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of Guadalupe in La Plata. The imported gemstones, such as diamonds and rubies, were often brought on consignment to sell in Potosi, which was known to be a safe and bounteous black market from which to trade in gems.\(^{21}\) Since loose gems and jewelry could not easily be sold, nor held the same value as silver, the donation of precious gems to Our Lady of Guadalupe could have been a grandiose gesture to assert devotion to the Virgin using material that held an assumed value.

What propelled the devotion of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Plata where it has floundered in other places where Ocaña left portraits? We know that Ocaña added precious gems onto at least three of the canvases he created of Guadalupe on his alms-raising campaign.\(^{22}\) In making his image at La Plata, Ocaña was incredibly intrepid and effective as the envoy for his monastic order and his Marian cult, knowing that his divine image-making and precious embellishment would appeal to his power-hungry audience in La Plata. He applied a similar formula to other places in the viceroyalties where he established cults for Guadalupe.

The act of embellishing his images also served to activate the divine gaze of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the image of those places he visited on his journey. He referred to this as the establishment of a “strong memory” through the materiality of the images, which would fit within the social fabric of the place in question.\(^{23}\) A theory from medievalist Patrick Geary, eloquently pointed out by Guadalupe scholar Jeanette Favrot Peterson, notes that “the success in relocating Christian holy images and relics across Medieval Europe depended on the creation of a meaningful symbolic armature, customized for local consumption and embedded in wondrous

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 52.
history in order for a cult to germinate around the imported relic/image."

The abundance of riches available in the vibrant Audiencia de Charcas, along with the limitations surrounding the buying and selling of gemstones, made them an excellent choice of adornment for the representation of La Plata’s new Marian devotion, one that would far surpass its counterpart in Potosí. The radiant power of gemstones to strike awe in the viewer goes without explanation.

Something I have found useful in exploring this question is finding other examples of precious embellishment on two-dimensional images of the Virgin, such as this image, known as the Virgin of the Necklace, located in the Church of San Pedro Apóstol de Juli in Puno, Peru (figure 10). This is a decidedly different sort of Marian devotional image than Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Plata. It was likely painted in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, and has several pieces of embroidered fabric affixed to the canvas. Her necklace, fastened onto the canvas, is beaded with the same small pearls seen in Ocaña’s Guadalupe in La Plata. Since this image appears in a church context, one could assume that her adornments were added subsequently, and the image also appears to be cropped. Unfortunately, our speculations will remain as such, since there is not existing documentation on this image.

One final example of embellishment is this image of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, a Cuzco school work painted in the late seventeenth century (figure 11). Her adornments are subtler still than those of the Juli Virgin, appearing as rings on her right hand and as an earring on her left ear (figure 12). This work may have been used for private devotion, though its larger size (206 cm x 137 cm) may lay this claim into question. The application of jewelry onto a private devotional image that already has preciousness represented two-dimensionally on the Virgin begs the question of what purpose the adornments may have served.

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These few comparative examples help demonstrate how embellishment may impact the devotional aspect of images of the Virgin, and highlight how spectacular the example from La Plata truly is in comparison to the relatively few adorned two-dimensional Virgins that exist today. The characteristic of three-dimensionality in these two-dimensional works has yet to be explored fully. Looking forward, we must incorporate more deeply studies regimes of value for precious materials in the Viceroyalties and the impact of their direct application on devotional images. In the case of La Plata, my belief is that Ocaña’s Guadalupe is the glorious manifestation of the city’s wealth and power at that time, propelled by a dynamic friar who sold his image well. Ocaña’s commitment to adorning this Marian icon suited the excesses of La Plata society, a city setting itself apart from its monumental neighbor.

Thank you.
Figure 1: “Cerro de Potossí, octava maravilla del mundo”. Diego de Ocaña, Relación del viaje de Fray Diego de Ocaña por el Nuevo Mundo. fol. 169. Image courtesy of the Universidad de Oviedo (http://hdl.handle.net/10651/27859).
Figure 2: Diego de Ocaña, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Potosí, Bolivia. Image courtesy of Fray Arturo Alvarez, Guadalupe en la America Andina.
Figure 3: Diego de Ocaña, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Metropolitan Cathedral, Sucre, Bolivia. Image captured by the author, with the permission of the Metropolitan Cathedral.
Figure 5: Pedro de Angel, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Extremadura, 1550. Image courtesy of PESSCA project: https://colonialart.org/archives/subjects/virgin-mary/advocations-of-the-virgin/virgen-de-guadalupe-extremadura#c137a-1000b.
Figure 6: Virgen de los Reyes (pictured without the Christ Child), Seville, Spain. Image courtesy of Arte Sacro: Primer Diario de Noticias Cofradieras, Sevilla, España.
Figure 7: Detail of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sucre. Image courtesy of *Virgen de Guadalupe: Patrona de Sucre* (MUSEF Bolivia, 2005), p. 36.
Figure 8: Detail of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sucre. Image courtesy of *Virgen de Guadalupe: Patrona de Sucre* (MUSEF Bolivia, 2005), p. 16.
Figure 9: Detail of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sucre. Image courtesy of *Virgen de Guadalupe: Patrona de Sucre* (MUSEF Bolivia, 2005), p. 20.
Figure 10: The Virgin of the Necklace, Church of San Pedro Apóstol de Juli, Puno, Peru. Image courtesy of Ananda Cohen-Aponte, Paintings of Colonial Cusco: Artistic Splendor in the Andes, p. 39.
Figure 11: Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana.
Figure 12: close-up of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, Louisiana.
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