



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ARTS & ANTIQUES

---

**Francisco Lecadiu (attrib.)**

Mexico City. 1779-1788

**ALTAR  
CROSS**

---

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES



**Francisco Lecadiu (attrib.)**

Mexico City, 1779-1788

*Altar Cross*

Silver, partially gilded. Cast, engraved and inscribed

Measurements: Height 56 cm, maximum width 25 cm, 25 cm at base

The following marks appear several times: LNC, M with a crown and eagle in flight

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES

Latin cross with straight, rectilinear arms and moulding on its edges decorated with striped ridges on the inside, which have a leaf with three appendages (trifolia) at their extremes, held on by a circular rivet. On the crosspiece are four lines in a sunburst pattern. The cross is presided over by the image of the body of Christ, elegant and stylised in its anatomical detail, without a crown of thorns and with his head resting on his right shoulder. There are four nails and he is covered with a loin cloth held on by a cord. His arms are slack, emphasising the tension in his suspended body, while his nailed feet are resting on a foot-support. At the top is a cartouche with the monogram INRI. The cross is supported on a high, triangular base whose lateral edges are covered in a geometric motif that curls around in a scroll pattern at the top and the base, and which act as supporting legs for the piece. The central part of the lower plinth is cast with a plant-based pattern. The emblems of the Passion are engraved on the front, with other ornamental motifs such as a ring of circular, flower-shaped mirrors and a latticed pattern of small diamond shapes; two cherubs' heads appear on the sides.

This is a crucifix that was a principal feature of the altar, intended to remind the celebrant and the parishioners celebrating Mass that the victim offered at the altar was also sacrificed on the cross. It had to be placed in the centre, with candle holders on either side, and large enough to be seen by the celebrant as well as by the congregation, so that it was always visible to those attending Mass<sup>1</sup>.

In this case, it is not simply a cross: it is presided over by the figure of a dying Christ, flawlessly portrayed as a serene, dignified nude whose depiction allows the viewer to see the anatomical beauty of the elongated figure. The depiction is an elegant, meticulous anatomical study in which muscles, veins and ribs are visible in a way that is serene rather than dramatic, as advocated by the Spanish painter and writer, Francisco Pacheco.

The crucifix is a common example of a straight cross with a dying Christ with four nails (two in his hands and two in his feet). It follows the tradition of the nun St Bridget of Sweden in whose mystical visions Christ appeared depicted in this way. This would go on to influence Diego Velázquez, who painted Christ in the same way in around 1632 in his famous work 'Christ Crucified' or the 'Christ of San Plácido' (now in the Museo del Prado in Madrid) and it is this interpretation that led to the inclusion of the foot support (*suppedaneum*) on which the feet of Christ are resting.

Fortunately, the item has been marked with three hallmarks (repeated twice, although one of them is not fully struck) which allow us to note that it was made in Mexico, capital of the Viceroyalty. The three marks show the competence of the assayer, who has stamped his personal mark onto the item (**LNC** within a rectangular frame with rounded ends), as well as its provenance in Mexico (**the letter M under a three-pointed royal crown**) and the fiscal stamp (a **flying eagle** within a rectangular frame with bevelled corners). Having identified the mark LNC (taken from his paternal surname) as the trademark of the silversmith *José Antonio Lince y González*<sup>2</sup>, it is possible to identify the item as having been made between 1779 and 1788, since this was the period in which he was active as an assayer.

However, as Lince used various different combinations of the three hallmark punches interchangeably throughout his career (showing his own personal hallmark<sup>3</sup>, the location and a fiscal mark), it is very difficult to know with any certainty in which period he was using the ones used here, although, as we shall see later, he used them in 1786 and possibly at other times too.

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES

However, it has been possible to confirm that these three different combinations must have been used on very few occasions. The other items on which they have been seen are a pair of lecterns<sup>4</sup>, rococo in style, and a custodia<sup>5</sup>; both held in private collections in Mexico. In the latter, we see once again the design with a triangular base with an identical spiral pattern on the supporting angles which act as feet, and some of the decorations are identical (the plant motif around the border, the scrolled leaves running from the supports and even the border of engraved circular mirrors), although the angels' heads are replaced with whole cherubs. The markings are the same, since the three hallmarks on it<sup>6</sup> are identical to those used in the item under discussion here.

Since the altar cross does not bear the corresponding maker's mark, nor any other information that might identify it (either an inscription or a document), it seemed that its maker would be destined to remain anonymous. However, the parallels between this item and the aforementioned custodia have meant it has been possible to identify him. The custodia is signed and dated by way of a long, etched inscription, which reveals that the maker was *Francisco Lecadiu* in 1786<sup>7</sup>, raising the possibility that this could be the same silversmith who made the altar cross, and to whom we may, without doubt, attribute it.

This is the only evidence that we have of this master silversmith, originally from France, being active in Mexico, since at present he does not appear in the long list of known silversmiths or in the unpublished version that we have.

If we analyse the cross from a stylistic point of view, we can see that it reflects the changing style from Rococo to Neoclassicism, since shapes and decorative features from both are evident. This is to be expected in a piece made between 1779 and 1788, during which time the aforementioned assayer, *Lince y González*, was influential.

This is, without a doubt, the most exquisite altar cross of its type and period in Mexico. The quality of its technical execution, the equilibrium of its structure, its delicate decorative features and, above all, the anatomical beauty of Christ crucified, make it an outstanding example of its type. In addition, the silversmith has worked with flawless accuracy in contrasting the gilded areas with the silver parts, thus obtaining a contrast of light that highlights the areas considered most important by the maker; in particular the body of Christ crucified. In summary, it is an outstanding piece that adds to the artistic catalogue of *Francisco Lecadiu* and shows the skill and elegance of his silverwork.

**Dr. Cristina Esteras Martín**

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES

- The depiction of the loin cloth (*perizoma*) is superb. Its purpose is to conceal Christ's nudity, for reasons of modesty, after being stripped of his garments. It is shown floating delicately over his right hip. Fixed at the top is a cartouche (titulus) in the shape of a scroll on which the acronym INRI appears, from the Latin *IEVS NAZARENVS REX IVDÆORVM* which, according to the Gospel of St John, was written on a sign by order of Pontius Pilate to explain why Jesus was condemned to die on the cross. As a piece intended to remember the suffering of Christ, it is complemented by the Instruments of the Passion (*Arma Christi*) which symbolise those memorable events, so as to internalise and contemplate the sufferings of Christ on earth.

## CHRIST:

- Christ dying
- frontal nude
- suppedaneum: ledge, rest, bracket, platform to support the feet
- elongated figure
- *titulus* fixed above the head INRI: IEVS NAZARENVS REX IVDÆORVM 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' (monogram, acronym of the Latin phrase which, according to the Gospel of St John, was written on a sign by order of Pontius Pilate to explain why Jesus was condemned to die on the cross.
- *perizoma*: loin cloth to conceal Christ's nudity, for reasons of modesty, after his disrobing (the removal of his garments).
- *Arma Christi* or Instruments of the Passion: for the remembrance of the events of the Passion of Christ, to internalise and contemplate the sufferings of Christ on earth.
- Four nails ca 1632. In 1627 *Velázquez* completed his work, Christ Crucified or the Christ of San Plácido, since it was commissioned by the Benedictine nuns of the Convent of San Plácido in Madrid (now in the Museo del Prado). He is shown on the cross, two nails in his hands, two nails in his feet (following his father-in-law and the master *Francisco Pacheco*, painter, writer and theorist; 1611 Christ, Parish of Our Lady of Consolation, El Coronil). Those believing that three nails were used in the crucifixion were followers of Classicism, while those believing that there were four were followers of Realism.
- The rivets are exceptionally well preserved and the screws that support it at the back are the originals, with just the one that held the left foot of Christ having been lost.
- The piece is worthy of **José María Rodallega**, renowned silversmith who qualified as a Master Silversmith on 22/10/1772 and was still working in 1812, as a result of which his work was both Rococo and Neoclassical in style.
- Also **José Luis Rodríguez Alconedo** (+1815), maker of the imposing plaque depicting Charles IV (1794) which is held in the Museo Nacional de Historia in Mexico.

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES



## Notas

1. The oldest documentary evidence of the placing of the cross on the altar is found in canon III of the Council of Tours, AD567.
2. Reproduction and study of his hallmarks in Cristina Esteras Martín: *Marcas de platería hispanoamericana. Siglos XVI-XX*. Ediciones Tuero, Madrid, 1992, pp. 53-57, nº 138-148. See also L. Anderson: *The Art of the Silversmith in Mexico*. Hacker Art Books, New York, 1975, pp. 318-319.
3. It should be noted that, as well as the one under discussion here, he chose three variations: LIN/CE inside a circular surround, LIN/CE inside a square frame and LIN/CE inside an octagonal frame.
4. As well as the hallmarks on our altar cross, there are another three variants. On the lecterns, rather than using just one set of hallmarking punches, he used two others: LIN/CE in a rectangular frame, o/M between crowned columns and a flying eagle inside an oval (see Cristina Esteras Martín: *El Arte de la Platería Mexicana...*, op. cit., p. 57, nº 150).
5. First studied and reproduced by Cristina Esteras Martín in "Platería Virreinal Novohispana. Siglos XVI-XX", *El Arte de la Platería Mexicana 500 Años*. Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico, 1989-1990 pp. 332-333, nº. 102.
6. They are reproduced in Cristina Esteras Martín: *El Arte de la Platería Mexicana...*, op. cit., p. 403 and *Marcas de platería hispanoamericana...*, op. cit., p. 56, nº 149.
7. The inscription is as follows: "Se hizo en Abril de 1786 para esta cavezera de Sta. María Tlaollan siendo Cura por S. M. El B. D. Joseph Mariano Lazo de la Vega. Pesa 29 marcos. 3 q,s costo 612 ps7 rrs. La yso Don Francisco Lecadiu Maestro Platro en MX". [Made in April 1786 for the apse of Saint María Tlaollan of which Mr Joseph Mariano Lazo de la Vega, in the name of His Majesty, is priest. Weight 29 marks. 3 cs, cost 612 pesos 7 reales. It was made by Mr Francisco Lecadiu Master Silversmith in MX.]

# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES



# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES





# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES



# JAIME EGUIGUREN

ARTS & ANTIQUES

