



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ARTS & ANTIQUES

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**Anonymous. Viceroyalty of Peru  
(Andean Highlands or Altiplano)**

Second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

**PROCESSIONAL CROSS**

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Second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

## *Processional Cross*

Gilt silver with enamel; cast, repoussé and chiseled

Dimensions: Height: 64 cm (cross and node); total height: 232 cm (including shaft); total width: 36 cm

Weight: 5,722 g. State of preservation: excellent

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Latin cross of rectilinear arms and rectangular section, with cresting motifs cast in the middle, its vertexes finished off with three cast pear-shaped finials, similar to the four laid at the crosspiece angles. The ends are expanded in an oval arrangement including in each of them a *repoussé* little winged cherub head. On the planes of the arms there is a cartouche with rolled-up borders, on which there is a rectangular ornament in dull azure, yellow and black enamel, with two silver flower buds facing each other outlining the inner drawing. At the intersection of the arms there are two round medals with the representation of the main icons: on the obverse, the intersection medal with a laureled bordure has the image of Santiago Matamoros (St James the Moor-slayer) holding his sword high while at the horse's feet there is a Moor killed; on the reverse, a similarly designed plate, but in this case showing the Immaculate Conception surrounded by a *mandorla* (almond-shaped frame) with flaming rays. The knop is vertically traversed by cast ribs and small handles dividing it into four sections; it is made up of three bodies, the central one cylindrical, bearing on each of its faces enameled square ornaments with an abstract-plant motif combining two pairs of overlapping and opposing Cs; on it, and following a cornice, there is a hemispherical body crossed along its four fields by enameled ornaments, now rectangular in shape, with the drawing of a foliate branch inside; at the bottom an item resembling a torus adorned with four other enameled ornaments fitted to its concave profile. The socket where the node is inserted is bell-shaped, whereas the shaft is cylindrical and flat and has only two tori between moldings.

This cross is used for going out in Catholic processions, which is why it is called *processional cross* (also known as "high cross"). As a silverware piece it should be marked with the statutory punches, but this one bears no mark, which – though it is often the case – makes it very difficult to accurately assign it a specific origin. Thus, there is no other choice but to analyze its formal and decorative characteristics, and to establish a comparison with other examples that may guide its classification. This task will allow us to establish an estimated date and also to locate its provenance within a geographical area.

From the structural point of view, both the cross and the node follow the usual patterns of Hispanic (peninsular and American) classicism, so in principle the piece could be ascribed to any of the many silversmithing shops there. Thus, given this format standardization, it is difficult not only to ascribe it to a specific workshop, but also to date it within the seventeenth century, during which this design was used. But the key to approach its chronology, as well as its provenance, will basically lie in its decorative items: on the one hand, the figurative motifs (angels) and, on the other, the presence of enamel (technique and color palette).

Concerning the former, the facial features in the winged cherubs' heads follow the peculiar way of representing them with chubby faces and huge eyes underneath strongly marked sockets, and with their hair done into locks, one curl falling over the forehead. This type of icon will be repeatedly found precisely in the Peruvian area of the central and southern Andes and in the Altiplano. As regards the latter, we can see that the cross is covered by enameled ornaments, a custom that was also widespread in crosses<sup>1</sup> and all kinds of religious pieces (particularly in monstrances) held in churches in the same geographical area in Peru, while they are very uncommon in other parts of Spanish America, such as Mexico or Guatemala. This same Peruvian origin is reinforced by another detail halfway between the structural and the ornamental aspects: the motif chosen as cresting for mobilizing the silhouette of the arms based on an oval framed by two opposing braces, the same Mannerist motif we find, for instance, in the cross at the Site Museum of the convent of St Catherine, in Cuzco,<sup>2</sup> or in another cross kept in the Santa Fe cathedral (Argentina),<sup>3</sup> with which it shares great structural similarity.

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The dull enamel work is very original both as regards the color palette and the ornamental drawings. Among the colors used, sky blue and deep yellow prevail, and black for backgrounds leaving the ornaments drawn in the same color as silver. This shade of blue is not too common, but it can certainly be found in other religious pieces such as the monstrance at the church of St Sebastian, Villarrobleto (Albacete, Spain), a gift from archbishop Diego Morcillo Rubio, in 1708,<sup>4</sup> or in another monstrance in Upper Peru, auctioned off at Sotheby's, New York, in 1990.<sup>5</sup> As regards the way of finishing off these enameled ornaments with a festooned border, we have seen it in other pieces from Cuzco: in the monstrance of the Apelles collection (Chile), signed by Cuzco silversmith Francisco de Soria Hurtado 1685,<sup>6</sup> in another monstrance at the convent of St Catherine in Cuzco<sup>7</sup> and in the *ostensorium* at the church in Yaurisque (Cuzco).<sup>8</sup>

And if we take a close look at its classicistic formal structure, there are also examples pointing toward Peru, since this structure can be found in the processional crosses of the convent of St Catherine, in Cuzco,<sup>9</sup> the unpublished one held at the convent of St Francis in the same city, the one kept at the Enrico Poli collection (Lima) from Puno,<sup>10</sup> or another one in an Argentine private collection.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the cross depicts in the crosspiece medal the image of Santiago Matamoros suggests that the piece belonged to a church where this Apostle was the titular saint, hence the choice of the icon dominating the cross. And in this sense, it is worth recalling that Santiago was highly worshiped from Cuzco to other Andean villages and there were churches dedicated to him.

For all the foregoing reasons, it seems strongly justified to assign to the cross an Andean origin, maybe from Cuzco, but until we are able to prove this, we would rather extend the geographical setting to the Altiplano region of Peru and Bolivia.

Concerning its date, if we consider the format of the cross we could date it around the middle years of the seventeenth century (and even earlier if it were from the Spanish peninsula), but if we take into account the angel figurations, whose wings have already become loosely drawn large leaves, and the enamel ornaments that have left behind the abstract geometrical compositions to resort to a plant vocabulary based on buds, branches and four-petaled flowers (but with petals certainly simulated by four braces), we would tend to define it as a work from the early baroque, whose chronology must be placed within the second half of the seventeenth century, very probably around the last two decades.

The whole design is very proper and balanced in style, and the work stands out because of its colorfulness, ornaments and good preservation of the enamel, whereby not only is the chromaticism of the piece enhanced, but also the cross is imbued with an opulence that confirms that it was a costly and, hence, highly careful work from the technical and ornamental viewpoints. It is undoubtedly a collectable piece.

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## Notes

1. We can cite as an example a beautiful gilt silver and richly enameled processional cross of a similar type at the convent of St Francis in Cuzco. Its size is 69 x 27 cm and its weight 4 marks and 4 ounces.
2. It is photographically reproduced in *Platería Virreynal*. Colección Arte y Tesoros del Perú. Banco de Crédito del Perú en la Cultura, Lima, MCMLXXIV, p. 62.
3. See Gustavo José Vittori: *Santa Fe en Clave*. Santa Fe, 1997, n. pag. This cross, like ours, shows in the crosspiece a round medal, with a cordon bordure; the icon depicts the tiara with the crossed keys, referring to St Peter.
4. In *Los Caminos de la Luz. Huellas del Cristianismo en Albacete*. Albacete Municipal Museum, December 19, 2000 to March 25, 2001, pp. 296-297, No. 162. On this occasion it was classified as a piece from Nicaragua because its donor was a bishop there, without taking into account that in 1708 he moved to the see in La Paz (currently Bolivia).
5. It took place on April 27, 1990, lot No. 324.
6. In Cristina Esteras Martín: *Platería en el Perú Virreinal. 1535-1825*. Banco Bilbao Vizcaya and Banco Continental, Madrid-Lima, 1997, pp. 108-109, No. 15.
7. There is a small-sized photograph in *Platería Virreynal*, op. cit., p. 52. We personally studied it in 1980 during one of our research stays in Cuzco.
8. It came up for bid at Christie's, New York, on October 19, 2010, lot No. 50. It was owned by the church in Yurisque (Paruro Province, Cuzco), a place it left illegally, being recovered for Peru in 2011-2012.
9. Already mentioned in note No. 2.
10. José Antonio del Busto Duthurburu: *La platería en el Perú. Dos mil años de arte e historia*. Enrico Poli Collection. Lima, MCMXCVI, p. 223, No. 183.
11. *Tesoros de América. Tres siglos de platería iberoamericana*. Isaac Fernández Blanco Spanish American Art Museum. Buenos Aires, 1983, No. 79.

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