

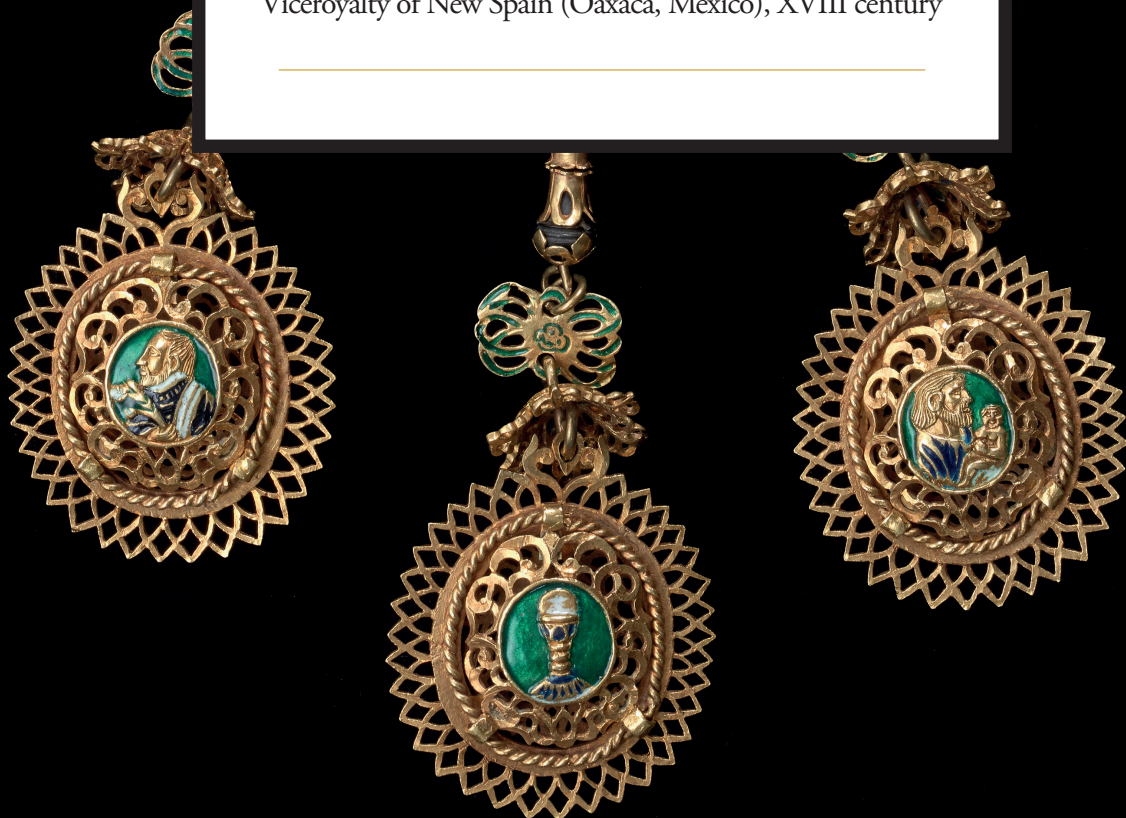


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**FRANCISCAN CROWN
ROSARY (THE SEVEN
JOYS OF THE VIRGIN)**

Viceroyalty of New Spain (Oaxaca, Mexico), XVIII century



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Franciscan Crown Rosary (The Seven Joys of the Virgin)

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Gold, jet, and enamel

Weight: 282 g (0.62 lb)

Maximum length: 125 cm (49.21 in); Maximum width: 12 cm (4.72 in)

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The devotional practice consisting in repeating certain prayers in groups of sections that are organized in regulated number and order derives from Eastern religions, based on the idea that repeating a prayer increases its effectiveness, and has been brought to the Western world by the expansion of the Muslim Empire. In order to make it easier, closed strings of beads have been used to avoid losing them and to help complete the prayer, such as the Islamic *tasbeeh*, the Hindu and Buddhist *Japamala*, or the Catholic rosary or crown.

In Spain and its historical, eminently Catholic territories, the use of the rosary has been universal and constant over time, until it has become one of its marks of cultural identity. Countess d'Aulnoy, on her celebrated work *Un viaje por España en 1679*, testified to “*the constant use of the rosary here. Every lady has one attached to her waist, which is so long that it is almost dragged along the ground. They pray while walking down the street, when they play ombre, when they talk, and even when they fall in love, murmur, or lie, they pray and move their fingers from one rosary bead to another*”. Even Mariana of Austria, King Charles II's mother, during the hearing that was granted to her in the Alcázar of Madrid, received the French lady carrying a large rosary in her hands.



Fig.1 Diego Velázquez, *Lady with a Fan*, ca. 1635-1640, London, Wallace Collection.

Although this unknown, elegant lady painted by the Sevillian genius was named after the fan she is carrying, it is also worth mentioning that she has a superb, gold rosary around her left wrist.

Within a context in which publicly experienced religiosity was, and still is common, the rosary combined two essential functions: being, as it has been mentioned, an object to exercise devotion, and also a symbol of ostentation for its owner, becoming a piece of jewelry. This fact explains the material as well as artistic extent and sumptuousness of the piece that is being studied, made in gold embellished with blue, green, and white enamels which stand out in contrast with the dark jet.

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Apart from the generalized rosary of five mysteries with intervals of ten Hail Marys, there are other structures in repeated prayers, as a product of specific devotions, which is why the length of the strings and the distribution of the beads are different. Among the most popular ones we can mention the Crown of the Seven Joys of Mary, which through seven sections of ten Hail Marys invites to think about the seven moments of greater joy in the life of the Virgin: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Epiphany, the Finding in the Temple, the Resurrection, and the Assumption and Crowning.

Its origin is traditionally traced to the fifteenth century within the Franciscan Order. Legend has it that a young man used to offer a crown of roses to the Mother of God, a habit which he could not keep when he entered the Order of Friars Minor. He was so anguished that, in 1442, the Virgin appeared to him to comfort him, and showed him a daily offering that would be very gratifying: She suggested reciting seven Decades of Hail Marys alternated with the meditation on the seven joyful mysteries. The young man began this devotion and, while praying one day, the person in charge of the novices saw him in the company of an angel that was knitting a crown of roses as he was praying and inserted a golden iris every ten roses. At the end, the angel placed the crown on the head. The superior asked him about the meaning of the vision he had had, and when hearing the explanation, he told all the friars, and soon this devotion was disseminated throughout the Franciscan Family. Bernardino de Siena (1380-1444) also experienced an apparition while he was reflecting on the joys of Our Lady.



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The jewel that is being analyzed here was made to serve that particular devotion. The seventy beads of the Hail Marys, grouped in tens, were carved in jet and linked with ajouré sleeves, with ajouré rosettes between them. The separation of Decades is made through a pair of bigger ajouré links with a floral outline outlined by volutes and struts forming a C shape, and a jet bead inserted in ajouré sleeves for the recitation of the Our Father, bigger than the rest and with the surface carved in a rhomboid-shaped grid. Two more beads complete the string: two Hail Marys at the end, amounting to a total of seventy-two, in honor of the number of years that, according to tradition, the Virgin lived, and another Hail Mary at the end and an Our Father at the beginning to pray for the intentions of the Holy Father.



The string is closed in a delicate knot of Mary of ajouré volumes, where the rinceaux, struts, and rosettes carry the Marian anagram A M, initials of the greeting “Ave, María” (Hail Mary) greeting which the archangel Gabriel extended to the Virgin at the moment of the Annunciation. The rosary is finished off by a Greek cross articulated by jet spheres and elongated sleeves. From arms and foot there hang loops, inverted flowers, and three almond-shaped medallions and figures on both sides, triply bordered by rinceaux, wreathed thread, and ajouré cresting. The center represents a Holy Chalice with Christ's body consecrated and an Immaculate Conception; the one on the left, an evangelist carrying the Holy Scripture and Saint Joseph with a rod of Madonna lilies on his hand; and the one on the right, Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Joseph, both with Infant Jesus in their arms. Saint Anthony of Padua, the Doctor of the Church, was a Franciscan priest, and the double apparition of Saint Joseph was due to the fact that, from the beginning, he was a model of faithfulness, humility, poverty, and obedience, and some of its members dedicated writings to him. It is precisely in the medallions where the enamels are more developed and lively.

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Central medallion: *Holy Chalice with the Sacred Shape and Immaculate Conception.*



Left medallion: *Evangelist with the Holy Scripture and Saint Joseph with the Rod of Madonna Lilies.*

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Right medallion: *Saint Anthony of Padua with the Child in his Arms* and *Saint Joseph with the Child in his Arms*.



It is interesting to note that the multiple-loop links joining the cross and the medallions reproduce at a small scale the metallic loops with encrusted gems and enamels known as *sevigné*, which proves that rich rosaries were not alien to the trends in jewelry. The origin of this French fashion was the colorful textile loops that adorned the necklines of Spanish ladies in the 1650s. It became popular since the engravings published in 1663 by Gilles Légaré, a jeweler in the court of the Sun King, in his *Livre des ouvrages d'orfèvrerie*, which were later gathered in model catalogs such as the one by François Lefebvre from 1665. This design continued being fully used during the century following its appearance.



Fig. 2 Loop brooch made of gold, pearls, rubies, diamonds, and enamels, ca. 1670. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 3 Loop brooch made of silver and diamonds, ca. 1760. London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

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The fact that the arms and foot of the cross are hanging allows us to classify it as a Yalalag cross, a type of cross that has been made since the 16th century in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, mainly in the city of San Juan Yalalag (now Villa Hidalgo). Below are some other examples:



Fig. 4 *Gold Rosary with a Yalalteca Cross*. San Juan Yalalag (Oaxaca, Mexico), 18th century. Madrid, Private Collection.

The medallions have religious themes on both sides.



Fig. 5 *Gold Rosary with a Yalalteca Cross*. Oaxaca (Mexico), 17th century. Mexico, Private Collection.

The filigree is similar to some of the jewelry works that were popular in western Spain.



Fig. 6 *Silver Rosary with a Yalalteca Cross*. San Juan Yalalag (Oaxaca, Mexico), 19th-20th century (?). Mexico, Frederick W. Davis Collection.

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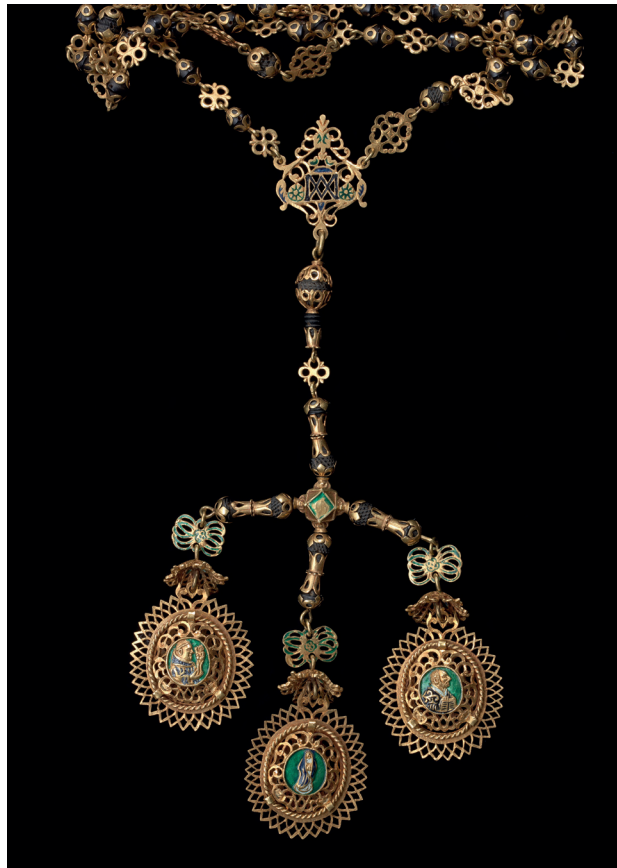
Fig. 7 *Gold Rosary with a Yalalteca Cross*, Oaxaca (Mexico), 18th century (?), City of Mexico, National Museum of History located in the Chapultepec Castle.

The pendants of religious themes have been replaced by flowers in this rosary. Although they are simpler, the links delineating the Our Father beads are similar to those in the rosary we are studying here.



Fig. 8 *Silver Yalalteca Cross*, Oaxaca (Mexico), 19th-20th century, Madrid, The Costume Museum-CIPE.

The medallions and crosses are the most common pendants in this type of pieces.



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The Yalalag cross derives from manifestations of popular Spanish jewelry. Crosses of very similar characteristics are part of necklaces and rosaries that complete the "traje de vistas", one of the traditional female costumes for wedding ceremonies, from La Alberca, in Salamanca. The settlement of "charros salmantinos", i.e. farmers from Salamanca, in Mexico is documented from the beginning of the conquest. They gave the name, the costumes, and the farming knowledge to the Mexican charros, one of the symbols of the country par excellence. Below we show some examples to establish the parallelism:

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Fig. 9 *Silver and Coral Rosary*. Castile and León (Spain), 18th century. Acquired in La Alberca (Salamanca, Spain). Madrid, the Costume Museum-CIPE.



Fig. 10 *Vuelta grande* (heavy necklace) of the "traje de vistas" of La Alberca (Salamanca, Spain). Photo by Ruth Matilda Anderson (Hispanic Society of America).



Fig. 11 *Silver and Coral Rosary* (silver in its color and gilded), Castile and León (Spain), 18th and 19th centuries. From La Alberca (Salamanca, Spain). Madrid, the Costume Museum-CIPE.

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