

*On the Path to Good Health:  
Representing Urban Ritual in Mexico City  
during the Epidemic of 1727.\**

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*Abstract: This essay considers a monumental painting located in the chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary in the parish church of San Pedro Zacatenco, delegación Gustavo A. Madero, Mexico City. It depicts a religious procession – that took place on 1727 to ask for release from an epidemic. Its particular history is uncovered in order to posit that the painting functions as a visual pact, commemorating a moment of agreement and alliance between the Jesuits and the highest ecclesiastic authorities of Mexico. At the same time, this essay examines the ways this work is different from other paintings of the genre. It is unusually detailed, and this is visible in its treatment of individual figures, their costumes, and its remarkable inclusion of almost the entire processional route. Finally, it also illuminates important aspects of colonial Mexico City that speak to broader patterns in the early modern Spanish world regarding the political, social and ritual use of urban space and the need to perform social hierarchy publicly and then commemorate it pictorially.*

*Key words: procession, urban ritual, Virgin of Loreto, Mexico City, epidemic*

In 2002, a group of Mexican researchers studying colonial sculpture discovered a monumental painting depicting a religious procession in the chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary in the parish church of San Pedro Zacatenco (Delegación Gustavo A. Madero, Mexico City) (fig. 1). Measuring almost 9.5 x 12.5 feet (290 x 380 cms including a frame of approximately 7 cms wide), the painting is one of those rare colonial works that captures urban ritual in rich detail. In it, we see the sculpture of the Virgin of Loreto taken on procession through the crowded city streets of the center of Mexico which have been lavishly decorated for the occasion by colorful textiles hanging from windows. As will be shown in this essay, this procession took place in October of 1727 in order to ask for intercession and relief from the measles epidemic which had broken out in the city the year before.

Paintings of this type, often called pictorial documents, are of great interest because they provide information about public ritual and how Spanish American heterogeneous societies organized themselves for such occasions and then commemorated them in paintings. Other famous examples for New Spain include the painting signed by Arellano in 1709, *Transfer of the Image and Inauguration of the Sanctuary of Guadalupe* (Private collection, Spain); *Transfer of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the First Hermitage and Representation of the First Miracle* of the mid-seventeenth century (Basilica de Guadalupe, Mexico City); and Pablo José de Talavera, *Transfer of the Virgin of*



Fig. 1. Unknown artist, *Solemn Procession that the City of Mexico Celebrated for the Image of Our Lady of Loreto in 1727*, ca. 1727-28, oil on canvas, 290 x 380 cm, Church of San Pedro, Zacatenco (Mexico City). Photo: Pedro Ángeles (Archivo Fotográfico “Manuel Toussaint”, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM), 2009.

*Solitude and Foundation of the Convent of Our Lady of Solitude and Saint Therese*, ca. 1748 (Church of Our Lady of Solitude, Puebla). It is also worth mentioning the Peruvian Corpus Christi series, sixteen anonymous paintings dated between 1674 and 1680 currently divided between the Museo del Arzobispado in Cuzco and a private collection in Santiago de Chile. These paintings have been analyzed in the historiography both collectively and individually (Sigaut 1995; Berndt 2000 and 2005; Rubial 2008, 9; Dean 1999). The monographic studies, in particular, have demonstrated that despite their common features – such as public exaltation of specific cult images and the construction of collective identities – the paintings tend to include specific details that respond to the unique situations that arose in each occasion and the historical circumstances of their production. For the way in which collective identity is constructed through some of these images, Richard Kagan coined the term “comunicentric” (Kagan 2000).

This essay considers the Zacatenco painting in light of contemporary sources and documents in order to uncover its particular history. It posits that the painting functions as a visual pact, commemorating a moment of agreement and alliance between the Jesuits and the highest ecclesiastic authorities of Mexico. At the same time, this essay examines the ways this work is different from other paintings of the genre. As will be shown, it is unusually detailed, and this is visible in its treatment of individual figures, their costumes, and its remarkable inclusion of almost the entire processional route including streets and salient buildings such as the north facade of the Cathedral, or the nearby hexagonal chapel known as the *Capilla de los Talabarteros*.

In the process, the essay illuminates important aspects of colonial Mexico City that speak to broader patterns in the early modern Spanish world regarding the ritual use of urban space and the need to perform social hierarchy publicly and then commemorate it pictorially. As is well known, public processions were not just lavish and celebratory occasions but rather complex events in which power was exercised by the actors involved. One way in which that power was activated in a procession is in relation to the physical placement of each representative body (Cathedral Chapter, confr-

ternities, religious orders, etc.) in it, something which was of primordial concern to the creator of this painting and thus, to his patrons. As we shall see, the idealized rendition of this procession, including the way it presents the city streets and urban space, speaks to eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals and a spirit of reform that would increasingly lead local authorities to seek greater control over public use of urban space.

*Setting the scene: The cult to the Virgin of Loreto in the Church of San Gregorio*

The Italian devotion of Loreto centered on a sculpture of the Virgin and Child thought to have been made by Saint Luke and the relic of the House of the Virgin, which had supposedly been transported by angels from the Holy Land to the Adriatic coast of Italy in the last years of the thirteenth century. The cult became important as a symbol of Jesuit identity throughout Counter Reformation Europe and, at the same time, it was promoted in Spanish America. The Society of Jesus had founded various institutions in the viceregal capital, but by the last quarter of the seventeenth century, they concentrated this cult's devotion in the church of San Gregorio, adjacent to the school they had founded for the education and catechization of the children of the local noble indigenous population in the late sixteenth century. This is the church which housed the image we see processed in the painting of San Pedro Zacatenco.

The school of San Gregorio was founded in 1573 to teach Christian doctrine, reading, and music to the children of the indigenous nobility. The indigenous community of the town of Tacuba financed the first building erected, a rudimentary construction with a thatched-roof that remained standing well into the seventeenth century. Institutionally, for most of the seventeenth century the school and church of San Gregorio was officially ascribed to the larger Jesuit Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo (Decorme 1941, 250, 3; Ruiz 1971). However, in the early 1680s the Jesuit Juan Antonio Nuñez de Miranda secured the patronage of one of the wealthiest inhabitants of the city, Captain Juan de Chavarría y Valera who lived nearby San Gregorio and paid 34,000 out of the 36,000 pesos that the building cost. Construction on a new church was begun in 1681-82 and completed in 1685 (Bazarte 1989, 241, 64; Ruiz 1971, 10-13, Archivo Histórico de la Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, C.G., tomo 120, rollo 2, *Copia del extracto...*, 112-117v.).

This period of transformation of the Church of San Gregorio coincided with the arrival of two young Jesuit missionaries from Italy, Juan Bautista Zappa and Juan María Salvatierra, who were especially devoted to the Virgin of Loreto and who launched a promotional campaign for the cult in New Spain. They embarked for the viceroyalty in 1675 and Zappa, well aware that copies of miracle-working images, which were ritually "touched" to their originals, had a greater potential for success, arranged for a copy of the head and hands of the original icon in Loreto to be sent to Mexico (Flores and Oviedo 1995, 154). In New Spain, the skin tone of the copy was whitened (Alcalá 2008) and it was assembled by a local sculptor who produced a dressed sculpture further adorned with lavish clothing and jewels donated by various women of the Mexican elite. It is not clear if the head and hands were incorporated into a fully carved body of the Virgin or if the sculpture was of the type called *imagen de vestir*, that is with a wooden support for the body on which to place the actual dresses of the Virgin. At the same time, Zappa introduced the novelty of constructing a full-size scale copy of the actual House of the Virgin kept in Loreto (Italy) for the church of San Gregorio. Because Father Zappa was reassigned to the noviciate church in Tepetzotlán, he left this project in the hands of his friend and colleague, Father Salvatierra who concluded the construction of the replica for the old church on January 5, 1680 (Venegas 1754, 50-52; Cabrera y Quintero 1746, 100).

Nothing remains of this chapel in the church of San Gregorio (today, the Church of Loreto stands in its place), but a general sense of what it must have looked like is provided by the contemporaneous construction that Zappa undertook in the Jesuit church of San Francisco Javier in Tepetzotlán

to which he had been transferred, and which still exists. Further copies of the House of the Virgin of Loreto were erected in a number of Jesuit churches throughout the viceroyalty of New Spain between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, including San Luis Potosí, Guadalajara, and Havana suggesting that the initiative of these two missionaries in the 1680s was widely accepted by colonial society (Decorme 1941, 92-93).

The attraction of the cult of Loreto lay in that together, the image of the Virgin and Child and the House, evoked a number of powerful historical and devotional associations. The House of the Virgin in Loreto was the place where the Annunciation had taken place and where the Holy Family had lived upon their return from Egypt. Beyond the material connections it could provide with the Holy Land, the cult was associated with devotion to the Holy Family (including Saint Anne and Saint Joachim) and especially Saint Joseph. Devotion to Saint Joseph was on the rise in colonial Mexico, and it was being re-signified as a political cult of local identity (Sánchez Reyes 2006, 739-56; Cuadriello 1989; Ramos 2014, 73-96). In other words, for a number of reasons the cult to the Virgin of Loreto resonated with Mexican colonial society sufficiently to pave the way for a period of generous gift giving and splendid construction and decoration of its chapel.

Only a year after the new church of San Gregorio was inaugurated, it was decided to rebuild and enhance the chapel of the Virgin of Loreto. Thus, in May of 1686, there was another inauguration ceremony. In 1715, a *camarín* (a small chamber or back chapel often built behind altars to miraculous images in the Hispanic world, in which the image would be dressed and visited on special occasions) was added thanks to the generosity of Juan Clavería Villareales (Venegas 1754, 53). Donations to the image continued to increase and, in 1728, Juan Ignacio Castorena y Ursúa, canon of the cathedral and bishop-elect of Yucatán, crowned the image with a tiara of diamonds and gold valued at more than 4000 pesos (*Gacetas de México* 1949, vol. 1, 123). Finally, in 1737-38 the House of the Virgin was reconstructed a third time, as a votive response to the epidemic of those years when the sculpture of the Virgin of Loreto, like many other miracle-working images in the city, was beseeched for intercession and taken on procession.

Although there are partial descriptions in diverse sources of the chapel in San Gregorio, such as in Cayetano Cabrera y Quintero's *Escudo de armas*, the most complete information for a reconstruction of the display of the image is found in the inventory taken after the expulsion of the Jesuits, dated 23 March 1774 (Archivo General de la Nación, Temporalidades, vol. 173, exp. 5, 18v-22. The inventory is fully transcribed in *Encrucijada*, 45-47). It reveals that the dressed sculpture was encased in a silver niche that was double-sided and faced both towards the interior of the church, from its altar, and to the *camarín*. It was inaugurated in 1730 and contained relics of six saints, five *Agnus Dei* (wax seals blessed by the pope) and 43 gilt silver reliquaries. The elaborate niche was part of a larger *retablo* that rose two levels high and was entirely covered in silver with the central image of the Virgin of Loreto flanked by sculptures of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim and topped with one of Saint Joseph, thus completing the presentation of the Holy Family. The inventory also mentions a portable altar at the foot of the niche where the image was usually kept, suggesting that there was a tendency to move the image that would require its frequent use. In fact, Cayetano Cabrera y Quintero mentions this altar when he describes the inauguration of the third chapel in 1738, and one can surmise that it was used for processions such as the one illustrated in the painting in San Pedro Zacatenco. But, undoubtedly, one of the most attractive elements in the chapel must have been its relics since their presence greatly increased the taumaturgical power of the cult. The one of highest esteem in the chapel was probably the one described as a "*piece of textile of red silk, which according to the old inventory is said to be from the original*" (Archivo General de la Nación, Temporalidades, vol. 173, f. 20). This is probably a reference to one of the garments of the Virgin; textile relics of Mary were of great importance because the Virgin's assumption to heaven meant that there were no corporal relics of her.

Despite the fact that there are various brief descriptions and documents to help garner a gene-

ral sense for the decoration of the chapel of the Virgin of Loreto in San Gregorio, these sources are not helpful in placing the painting of the procession. It is not among the works listed in the 1774 expulsion inventory nor is it registered for the adjacent school's possessions where the only reference to a painting of Loreto is for "a large painting of the Holy House with gold frame" ("*un lienzo grande de la santa Casa con marco dorado*") in the staircase (Archivo General de la Nación, Temporalidades, vol. 173, exp 6, f. 4v). The absence of a registry for the painting is not, however, atypical considering the circumstances surrounding the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. Various years passed between the expulsion and the time in which the inventories were drawn up, and while many objects had gone missing from their institutions, others were not adequately described in the documents.

The strongest documentary evidence that the painting must have once been in the Jesuit church of San Gregorio is found in the history of the church of San Pedro Zacatenco published by Horacio Senties. This author asserts that the painting was acquired in the early nineteenth century from the church then known as dedicated to Loreto, but which was the site of the earlier church of San Gregorio, along with a cedar pulpit, two tecali fonts, four gilded sculptures, a large grill, a small table, a campanile, a painting of the House of the Virgin of Loreto and four paintings of the Church Fathers (Senties 1992, 101). According to Senties, these things were purchased to decorate the chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary of San Pedro Zacatenco which was under reconstruction in 1804, although it is possible that the project was actually slightly later, around 1809, and that it was not finished until 1827. The dates provided by Senties, however, do not match the text inscribed on the entrance arch to the chapel and which designates 1809 as the date in which the chapel was begun: "*El día 4 de Mayo de 1809 se colocó la primer piedra de esta Capilla de N. Sa. del Rosario, y se concluyó sin el cimborrio, con su adorno el 5. de Marzo de 1827*". Either way, these approximate dates for the acquisitions from the once church of San Gregorio are logical if we consider the fate of the Jesuit church at the time. After the expulsion, San Gregorio was closed for several years and the sculpture of the Virgin of Loreto was temporarily transferred to the church of the convent of La Encarnación (Orozco y Berra 2000, vol. 1, 152-59). By 1777, the image had returned to San Gregorio, reopened by instruction from the Junta de Temporalidades (Orozco y Berra 1867, 116-117). Years later, however, in 1807, it was necessary to remove the image once again – this time to Santa Teresa la Nueva – because the church was collapsing and had to be reconstructed, a project that began in 1809 (Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México. "Oficio del virrey...". Fondo episcopal, caja 153, exp. 30). The new church, now called Loreto, was constructed by the architects Ignacio de Castera and José Agustín Paz and was completed in 1816. The sale of the objects noted above – and which may have included the procession painting – from the church of Loreto (before San Gregorio) to that of San Pedro Zacatenco may have taken place any time between 1809 and the 1820s in which both churches were undergoing reconstruction projects. In this regard, it is important to recall that it was common practice for old churches to sell off their no longer desirable objects to smaller parochial churches in localities in the periphery of the city, which were usually glad to recycle objects given their meager economic means. It is also possible that the procession painting was transferred at a later date, in 1832, when the new monumental and impressive church of Loreto began to sink because of serious problems with the foundation, and it was necessary to close it to the public.

While further research on the exact location of the painting in San Gregorio and its transferal to San Pedro Zacatenco is necessary, the existing documentation about the chapel of the Virgin of Loreto leaves no doubt as to its luxury. With its silver ornaments, alabaster and porcelain objects, polychromed sculptures, paintings, Agnus Dei, relics and mirrors, it had by the time of the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 amassed considerable wealth. More specifically, it seems that it was in the period between the late seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century that the cult became a popular devotion. By then, it was capable of competing with many of the other Marian images that were available to Mexican society through its extensive network of churches. The most

convincing evidence of the rise of the cult in this period is the role the devotion played in the epidemic of 1727 and the fact that after the procession depicted in this painting, the city decided that it was thanks to Loreto's intercession that it was saved. The idea that the image triumphed and the city was saved thanks to its intercession is found in several sources, including the *Gaceta de México* (January 1728) and Cayetano de Cabrera y Quintero's later account (*Gacetas de México*, 1949, vol. 1, 73; Cayetano Cabrera y Quintero, 1746, 101).

### *The Procession as an Act of Redemption and the Crisis of the 1720s*

During the first half of the eighteenth century, New Spain's society suffered the consequences of various crises in agricultural production. The prices of basic food products underwent dramatic variations, which in turn aggravated unemployment and emigration and ultimately lead to a rise in banditry and epidemics. Regarding the years preceding the epidemic of 1727, we know that in June of 1720 the lack of rain resulted in a shortage in the corn supply. The following year, there was again a shortage of corn but this time it was caused by commercial speculation since merchants decided it was to their benefit to sequester crops and store instead of sell. Documents from 1724 reveal that some of the warehouses had insect-infested grain which meant that eventually, in that same year, the stored corn in the public exchange (*alhóndiga*) had to be sold, but it was not sufficient to satisfy demand. Between 1724 and 1726 the lack of corn had caused another problem: shortage in the meat supply. The crisis was worsened by speculation and in the end, the general impoverishment of many and the overall weak situation of the populace lead to the breakout of various diseases (*Gacetas de México*, 1949, vol. 1, 34-37). Historians agree that this chain of events was in some way responsible for the measles outbreak of 1726 which lead to various penitential processions.

That local authorities were aware of the causes behind the city's grave situation is evident in the sermon that the canon of the Cathedral of Mexico, Bartolomé Felipe de Ita y Parra, delivered on the day of the procession represented in the painting in San Pedro Zacatenco. Although following a traditional format for sermons offered during epidemics throughout the Catholic world in which the vices of society are held responsible for the community's suffering and the disease is understood as divine punishment, it is significant that besides blaming general avarice, Ita y Parra refers specifically to price inflation. First, he says:

*Oh Mexico! So deserved is this plague because of your Greed; the heavens gifted you with treasures of wealth, oh New Spain! Making it so that your land produced gold and silver; and you, with all your greed, delved into its insides to extract it, and place it in your hearts as the Idol of your affection.*

*O México! Y quan merecida tiene tu Codicia esta misma peste, te doto el cielo con los thesoros de su riqueza, o Nueva España! Haziendo que tu tierra produxesse, el oro y la plata; y tu Avantiento alla te metes en sus dentro para sacarla, y ponerla en tus corazones, por el Idolo de tus affectos.*

In another passage, he turns to the specific problems:

*What other reason is there for these exorbitant prices which have affected some things that are necessary for daily existence, and also for devotion in the churches; there is no reason for it but personal interest.*

*Que otra razón ay para estos exorbitantes precios a que se han subido algunos géneros*

*necesarios para el uso de la vida, y aun para el culto de las Iglesias, sin que aya para ello motivo alguno, sino solo el interés.*

Other activities worthy of blame for the epidemic in his sermon include prostitution, card playing, *pulquerías*, the moral laxity and overall frivolity of women's behavior in churches as well as the feminization of men due to the changes in fashion at the time:

*[...] even the churches are profaned, with women coming to them with the same laxity with which one goes to a Comedy; the same is true of the men, so effeminate that no longer do they seem men, but rather phonies, mannered in the way they walk, with ribbons and bags in their hair; and with facial lotions that polish their skin; the women with diamonds and jewels in their hair, flowers in their heads, rings on their breasts [...] What say you, Mexico, was pagan Rome otherwise in the games of Bacchus, or did Cyprus do otherwise in the festivities of its Venus [...]*

*[...] hasta los Templos se profanan, viniéndole las mujeres a la Iglesia, con la misma desemboltura, que se puede ir a una Comedia, lo mismo es los hombres, tan afeminados, que ni hombres parecen, sino farsantes, moda en el andar, listones, y bolsas en los pelos, aguas de rostro con que bruñir la tez, las mujeres, diamantes, y joyas en los cabellos, flores en la cabezas, anillos en los pechos [...] Qué dices México, si pintara de otra manera Roma gentil en los juegos de su Bacho, o Chipre en las diversiones de su Venus [...]*  
(Ytta y Parra, 1728, 9-11)

The admonishing and moralistic tone of Ita y Parra's sermon frames the contemporary painting as a representation of an act of contrition and repentance for sins committed. Indeed, the procession is represented in an ordered, sober, and solemn way, in accordance with the legend inscribed on the frame: "*Solemn procession that the City of Mexico offered to Our Lady of Loreto, entreating relief from the desolating measles plague in the year of 1726*" (*Solemne procesión que hizo la Ciudad de México a la imagen de Ntra. Señora de Loreto implorando el socorro, por la peste desoladora del sarampión en el año de 1726*). The inscription on the frame is undoubtedly of recent manufacture and most likely replicates an earlier one. Regarding the date, it is possible that when copying the exact year of the event in the new one a mistake was made, especially because although there could have been processions to mitigate the epidemic's effects in 1726, neither the City nor the Cathedral documents refer to any such event in that year. An earlier photograph of the church, taken by Constantino Reyes Valerio in 1975, shows that the painting had a different frame at the time and that it did not have an inscription although one did appear right below it in a small tablet (Fototeca Constantino Reyes Valerio, MXC-56). On the other hand, the following year the epidemic had worsened, and there are many more documents referring to actions taken at this time (Archivo de la Catedral Metropolitana de México, vol, 30, fs. 301- 381).

As is well known, during such times of crisis, it was typical for more than one procession to be organized and for both civic and religious authorities to take an active role in these events. To a certain extent, responsibilities between these two authorities were shared but parceled. The Church was responsible for organizing special services and prayers in the churches, and these would be decorated with the collaboration of confraternities. City Hall in turn was responsible for decorating the streets along which a procession would pass as well as safeguarding the public spaces and guaranteeing that order was maintained (Molina 1996, 92-101). However, the initiative to organize a procession could come from many different sectors of society. On October 3 in a meeting of the city council, José Vela (Prior General) proposed that a *novena* (a nine-day prayer period) be celebrated to a patron saint of

the city or to one of the saints that typically had a protective role. It was then decided to vote on the devotion to which the *novena* would be dedicated and ballots were cast, among others, for the Virgin of Remedios, san Antonio Abad, santa Teresa de Jesús, san Francisco Javier, san Nicolás Tolentino, san Bernardo, san Hipólito, san Gregorio Taumaturgo, san Fernando, santo Domingo, santa Rosalía, san Roque, san Lazaro, san Marcial and santa Quiteria. On the eighth draw, san Nicolas Tolentino was chosen, which was appropriate since this saint had been a protector of the city, especially against earthquakes, since 1611 (Ragon 2002). After the meeting, the Viceroy, the Archbishop, the Cathedral Chapter, and the Prior of the Augustinian order were informed of the decision (logically, because san Tolentino was Augustinian, this religious order took on an active role in organizing the *novena*). At the meeting, it was also agreed that the *novena* should begin on Wednesday, October 8 and conclude on Thursday the 16th with a sermon and, in the afternoon, a penitent procession with the image of san Nicolas Tolentino and the miraculous image of the Christ of Totolapa would take place (Otaola Montagne 2008). The prelates of all the religious orders would be invited to assist the final mass and sermon and announcements of the events planned should be printed and posted on all the churches (Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal, Actas de Cabildo, vol. 53, fs. 85-87v.).

Besides this information, we know that the Cathedral Chapter also held a meeting to make its own decisions on that same day, a coincidence which is striking and reveals the way in which competing spheres of power could act on the same issues (Archivo de la Catedral Metropolitana de México, Actas de Cabildo, vol., 31, fs. 43, 44v.). The session was presided over by Antonio de Villaseñor y Monroy (portrayed in the painting to the right of the archbishop in the center) (fig. 2) and a number of other important church figures were present. They include the *maestrescuela* Martín de Elizacochea, Tomás Monaño, the *canon lectoral* Juan de Aldave and the *capitulares* José Llabres, Sebastián Salas, José Pasilla, Luis Urpierres, Pedro de los Ríos, Luis Torres, Juan de Castro, Juan de Gracia, Francisco de Meñaca, Francisco Navarajo, Joaquín Zorrilla, Miguel de Luna and Francisco de Fábregas, and Bartolomé de Ita, who wrote the sermon delivered before the procession mentioned earlier in this text. The minutes of the meeting include a marginal note (“*Sobre novena Santa Rosalía por la gravedad de la enfermedad del sarampión*”) that suggests that the Cathedral was also thinking that a *novena* should be celebrated, but they were inclined to devote it to santa Rosalía (Actas de la Catedral Metropolitana de México, Actas de Cabildo, vol., 31, f. 44v.). Apparently, the proposal of santa Rosalía was made by Villaseñor y Monroy. The chapter approved the proposal, and it was suggested that the *novena* be of the “rogation” type so that “*all the people should attend and pray for help and relief from so much ills*”. In the original, the text refers to the inclusion of litanies in order to placate God’s ire and instructs that the image be placed in the high altar. (Actas de la Catedral Metropolitana de México, Actas de Cabildo, vol. 31, f. 43-44v.).

Documentary evidence thus suggests that plans for *novenas* were taking place in the highest city councils (ecclesiastic and civic) in the fall of 1727 and that they were not focusing their attention on the Virgin of Loreto. In fact, it is unusual that there are no documentary records in the chapter papers of the Cathedral nor in those of the city’s meetings regarding the procession of the Virgin of Loreto of 1727. A number of other sources, however, including the sermon cited above, leave no doubt that such a procession was celebrated on Sunday 29 October. One of the prologues in the ser-



Fig. 2. Detail of the middle of the painting with Archbishop in the center: Solemn Procession that the City of Mexico Celebrated for the Image of Our Lady of Loreto in 1727, ca. 1727-28, oil on canvas, 290 x 380 cm, Church of San Pedro, Zacatenco (Mexico City). Photo: Pedro Ángeles (Archivo Fotográfico “Manuel Toussaint”, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM), 2009.



mon by Ita y Parra noted that this procession was organized at the express petition of Carlos Bermúdez de Castro (1669-1729), a creole from Puebla who was canon of the Cathedral of Mexico and was named archbishop of Manila in 1725 but did not embark for the Philippines until 1728, dying there shortly after arriving (*Diccionario Porrúa* 1976). According to this source, the image of the Virgin of Loreto left the church of San Gregorio on 19 October and went to the Cathedral where a *novena* was celebrated until the procession of October 29 returned it to the Jesuit church (Ytta y Parra 1728). As will be explained further below, a number of reasons, especially the direction of the procession depicted in the painting, suggest that our painting is commemorating the return of the image to the Jesuit church on this date.

The absence of any official record in civil and ecclesiastical documents regarding the Loreto procession of 1727 may be explained by the way in which Francisco Javier Alegre describes the event in his *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús*. According to Alegre, during the epidemic the Jesuits devoted themselves to caring for the sick and moribund, servicing confessions and distributing food, medicine and clothes among the poor. However,

*Even though the excellent Marquis Casafuerte and all the principle authorities of the city took all possible measures to extinguish the fire, it only seemed to grow. All human remedies exhausted, some devotees decided to intervene through the excellent Carlos Bermúdez de Castro so that the image of Our Lady of Loreto which is venerated in our church of San Gregorio would be taken on procession throughout the city. And so it went on procession with extraordinary numbers of participants and great solemnity. On its route, the venerable dean and chapter of the Cathedral passed by and a note was given to the Jesuit Provincial asking for his permission to take the Sovereign image to the Cathedral and celebrate there a solemn novena to it. Father Andrés Nieto could not but acquiesce to such a request by the ecclesiastic chapter, which was of all the city, nor could the most devout Mother of God help but manifest how pleasing such an offer was to her.*

*A pesar de todas las precauciones que el excelentísimo señor marqués de Casafuerte y todos los principales sujetos de la ciudad tomaban para apagar el incendio, no parece sino que le ministraban pábulo para nuevas creces. Agotados todos los remedios humanos, procuraron algunos devotos, por medio del excelentísimo señor Carlos Bermúdez de Castro se sacase en procesión por toda la ciudad la imagen de nuestra Señora de Loreto, que se venera en nuestra iglesia de San Gregorio. Salió efectivamente con extraordinario concurso y solemnidad. En el camino pasó el venerable deán y cabildo de la Santa Iglesia Metropolitana, un oficio al padre provincial pidiéndole su beneplácito para conducir a*



Fig. 3. Detail of the left side of the painting: Solemn Procession that the City of Mexico Celebrated for the Image of Our Lady of Loreto in 1727, ca. 1727-28, oil on canvas, 290 x 380 cm, Church of San Pedro, Zacatenco (Mexico City). Photo: Pedro Ángeles (Archivo Fotográfico "Manuel Toussaint", Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM), 2009.

*la Catedral la Soberana imagen, y hacerle allí un solemne novenario. No pudo el padre Andrés Nieto dejar de condescender a la súplica del cabildo eclesiástico, que lo era de toda la ciudad, ni la piadosísima Madre de Dios dejar de manifestar cuanto se agradaba de aquel obsequio. (Alegre 1842, Tomo II, 241-242).*

In this account, it would seem that the Cathedral canons reacted spontaneously to the populace's following of the procession of the Virgin of Loreto that Bermúdez de Castro instigated, and that they were seeking to participate in her intercession and even to position themselves as protectors and patrons of her intervention. Although Alegre's sources are still unclear, from a Jesuit perspective his historical narrative was clearly flattering because it places the order and their official cult image in a position of favor with the Cathedral. As official chronicler of the Society of Jesus, Francisco Javier Alegre had copious information with which to document his *Historia*. It is likely that one of the sources he used was a manuscript account of the Virgin of Loreto which circulated among the Jesuits around 1728, and they were hoping to publish according to Cayetano Cabrera y Quintero (Cabrera y Quintero 1746, 99). The idea that the *novena* in the Cathedral was an improvised event is also noted in one of the prologues or *pareceres* that appear in the publication of the sermon by Ita y Parra and written by Juan Antonio Fabrega (Ytta y Parra 1728). Furthermore, Alegre's version of the events sheds light on the detail depicted on the lower left corner of the painting (fig. 3). This area of the composition marks the place where the procession turns. There, we see a group of priests, probably the Jesuits themselves, greeting and bowing their heads to the secular clergy who respond by removing their birettas. If this is indeed the correct interpretation for this scene, then it is likely that one of the Jesuits in the group is Andrés Nieto, the Provincial of the Society of Jesus between 1726 and 1729, and the man who accepted the Cathedral's proposition of harboring the image for a *novena*. The rector of the Colegio de San Gregorio in those years should also be in the group. According to Zambrano, Father Juan Cassati was rector between 1727 and 1732 and before him the post was occupied by Father Juan Martínez (Zambrano and Casillas 1977-1981, vols. 15 and 16). The corner scene in the painting would thus be commemorating the pact between the Jesuits and the Cathedral Chapter, which allowed the Virgin of Loreto image to enter the Cathedral even if the *novena* had not been planned through the official channels.

Another eighteenth-century Jesuit source provides a slightly different and more official account of the procession in so far as it edits out the idea that the Cathedral canons acted at the last minute. This is the biography of Father Salvatierra written by Venegas and mentioned earlier. It is interesting to consider the painting in light of this account because Venegas privileges the figure of the archbishop over that of Bermúdez de Castro as initiator of the events that lead to it. Venegas writes:

*And when the human remedies were no longer sufficient, the Illustrious Archbishop, Friar Joseph Lanziego y Eguilaz, turned to divine intercession, and it was decided that the Holy Image of the Virgin of Loreto be taken on procession from the church of San Gregorio to the Cathedral. There, a Novena with Solemn services was celebrated with the attendance of both the Ecclesiastic and secular councils. All the Holy Religions offered to go to the Cathedral, alternating in their rightful order, to sing to the image the Salve. And the last day, a sermon was delivered by Dr. Mro. D. Bartholomé de Yta y Parra, who was then Canon Magister of the Cathedral church. When the novena finished, the Holy Image returned to the church of San Gregorio in a solemn procession [...] Being well served as she was with such fervent dedication, she purified the air and banished the malignities that were dominating in Mexico, and so she restored the City to desired health.*

*Y quando no bastaban los remedios humanos, acudió a los divinos el Ilmo. Señor D. Fr. Joseph Lanciego y Eguilaz Arzobispo que era de Mexico, se determinó a que la Santissima Imagen Lauretana se llevase en Proceßion desde la Iglesia de S. Gregorio a la Santa Iglesia Cathedral. En ella se hizo un Novenario de Missas solemnes con asistencia de los dos Cabildos Eclesiásticos, y Secular. Y todas las Sagradas Religiones alternándose por su orden se ofrecieron a ir en Comunidad a cantarle en la Iglesia Cathedral la Salve, y las letanias de nuestra Señora. Y el ultimo día se celebró con sermón, que predico el Dr. Y Mro. D. Bartholomé de Yta, y Parra, entonces Canónigo Magistral de la Iglesia Cathedral. Acabado el Novenario se restituyó la Sagrada Imagen a la Iglesia de S. Gregorio con solemne Proceßion [...] quedándose por bien servida de tan fervorosos obsequios, purificó los ayres, y desterró los malignos influxos, que dominaban en México, y restituyó a la Ciudad la sanidad desseada. (Venegas 1754, 74-75)*

As we have seen, with the exception of the texts by Cabrera y Quintero and Ita y Parra, most of the sources available for the procession of the Virgin of Loreto are Jesuit, and they tend to emphasize that the penitent act was organized on the initiative of the Cathedral (whether it be by archbishop Lanciego y Eguilas or Bermúdez de Castro). Regardless of how the events unfolded, it is clear that in these Jesuit texts there is an interest in privileging the Cathedral's role, which the painting does as well. The ecclesiastical authorities occupy the center of the canvas whereas the Jesuits, most likely the masterminds behind the painting, chose a secondary role for themselves: compositionally, they only occupy a small corner of the painting on the lower left side. Whether a Jesuit or someone else (perhaps Bermúdez de Castro, although his portrait is yet to be identified in the painting) commissioned it, this work celebrates one of the fruitful collaborations that often emerged from the extensive Jesuit social network in Mexico City and which, in this case, clearly helped them promote a devotion with which they identified as a religious corporation.

### *Order and Solemnity in an Ideal Urban Procession*

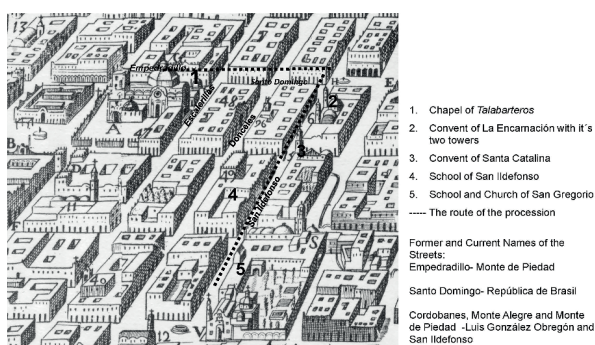


Fig. 4. Reconstruction of the processional route using a detail of the plan "Planta y descripción de la Imperial Ciudad de México en la América. 1760" by Troncoso (engraved) and Carlos López (delineated) published in *Memorias de las obras del sistema de drenaje profundo del Distrito Federal, DDF, Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, vol. 4, Atlas de planos técnicos e históricos, plano II.2, México, 1976.*

memory of events passed for the general public. For this reason, careful analysis of how the procession is represented – who is in it and where, and who is not, as well as how key figures are depicted – provides a window onto the process of pictorial history-making and the place of urban ritual in the construction of the past.

As we have seen, processions in the city in time of crisis could be quite numerous. However, processions in which the Cathedral Chapter and archbishop participated were much fewer, which is why this is the one that is chosen for visual commemoration in the painting now in San Pedro Zacatenco. Given that there are not that many surviving paintings of religious processions from the viceregal period, it is quite likely that only exceptional processions were considered appropriate for permanent visual commemoration. Typical subjects found in surviving procession paintings include the inauguration ceremony of a new church or convent, a *Corpus Christi* procession, and several penitential processions. As time went by, these paintings constructed history and triggered

The first impression one has of the procession painting of San Pedro Zacatenco is that there are a great, many number of carefully arranged figures dressed in different kinds of costumes and uniforms, including several portraits. Such a compositional task could not have been accomplished by the painter without detailed instruction. As is well known, the order in which civil and religious authorities participated in processions throughout the Early Modern world was carefully regulated and, at the same time, often bitterly contested. In this regard, it is worth recalling that the sources cited in the previous section all make references to the organization, order and solemnity of the processions addressed. While one could argue that most documentary references to a procession are formulaic, this insistence on employing language to reaffirm that age-old sense of hierarchy and order also betrays certain self-consciousness and even anxiety over this matter which, as will be examined below, coincides with mounting concerns in Mexico over the uses and abuses of public spaces in this period. Not surprisingly, then, order, understood not only as the arrangement of hierarchies on the canvas, but also as a clear sense of space (including architecture) and presence permeates every aspect of the painting.

Knowing as we do that the procession depicted began in the Cathedral and finished in the Jesuit church of San Gregorio, it is possible to reconstruct its route using the architectural details it provides and matching these against contemporary urban plans of Mexico City (fig.4). Most paintings of processions provide few clues about settings and processional ways, nor do they tend to encompass such a considerable amount of distance, various city blocks, in one canvas. For these reasons, this work offers a unique visual record of the way in which urban space was ritually activated.

In the painting, on the upper right side, one can clearly see that the procession departs from the west door of the Cathedral. From there, it must have moved into the street which was known as Empedradillo (today, Monte de Piedad) to then proceed toward Santo Domingo (today República de Brasil), from which it turned into the streets of Encarnación, San Ildefonso y San Pedro y San Pablo (today Luis González Obregon and San Ildefonso). On this last street, represented like a straight vertical on the left margin of the painting, and before arriving at the church of San Gregorio, we can see the participants making a detour in order to incorporate the Convent of La Encarnación to the processional way. La Encarnación was one of Mexico's oldest and most prestigious religious female foundations, and because processions were acts of re-sacralization and re-signification of urban public space, they were supposed to incorporate the most prestigious buildings in their immediate surroundings. Although the painter does not depict the double-door facade of the convent, both of its towers are visible and the procession participants turn left into the street between them where the church entrance was, while others return from there (fig. 3). The detail of the



Fig. 5. Detail of the right side of the painting: Solemn Procession that the City of Mexico Celebrated for the Image of Our Lady of Loreto in 1727, ca. 1727-28, oil on canvas, 290 x 380 cms. Church of San Pedro, Zacatenco (México City). Photo: Pedro Ángeles (Archivo Fotográfico "Manuel Toussaint", Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM), 2009.

detour on the left is the only depiction of how the double doors in female convents could be engaged during processions. The idea that on a procession an image should stop and enter as many churches as possible was common and rested on the desire for the miraculous image to benefit as much of the city ground as possible. Another example of this is found in the history of the Virgin of la Defensa in Puebla. In 1676, various female convents asked for the image to stop by their churches before being installed permanently in the altar in the apse of the cathedral (Flores and Oviedo 1995, 220).

Besides the Cathedral and the convent church of La Encarnación, the most important architectural element in the painting is the small hexagonal chapel of the Holy Cross of the *Talabarteros* with its black-slate roof (fig. 5). No longer extant, it was located in the crossing of the current streets of Monte de Piedad and Tacuba. *Talabarteros*, saddlers and leather-object manufacturers who lived nearby, had their own religious brotherhood and had petitioned, as early as 1607, to be allowed to raise a cross in the spot where legend had it that the eagle had set on the cactus symbolically marking the spot where Tenochtitlan was founded. This place was also thought to be the location where the first mass was held after the conquest, and thus layers of local urban history converged upon the chapel we see in the painting. Permission to raise the cross, however, was only granted in 1643, and it was not until 1667 that it was roofed, giving way to the construction of a free-standing chapel in close proximity to the central plaza at the heart of the city center. In 1751 the chapel was entirely rebuilt which means that one of the few visual records of what the chapel of los *Talabarteros* looked like before that date is provided by this painting. The only other extant representation of this chapel is found in several *biombos* or folding screens with views of Mexico City, including the one in the Museo Franz Mayer. According to Tovar de Teresa (1991, vol. 1, 81), the chapel disappeared in 1824. On his part, Luis Leal does not give the date of its destruction, but he does note that its disappearance was due to a fire (Leal 1958, 65-66). Leal transcribes a description by Francisco Sedano (1742-1812) titled “Noticias de México”, which was published in 1880 by Joaquín García Icazbalceta. It says that the chapel “[...] was elevated by seven steps and was hexagonal, with each of the six sides measuring six varas so that it measured 36 varas in circumference. The entrance faced the south, that is, toward the side door of the Cathedral and, on the high altar, besides the image of the cross, there was a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe.” The other four sides had paintings with emblematic XVIth century events that have been identified with works published by Jaime Cuadriello who further discusses the symbolic valence of this location (Cuadriello 1999, 101-102).

Equally detailed in the painting is the treatment of the different groups of men taking part in the procession. Through careful analysis of processional order and costume, it is possible to identify a number of civic and religious organizations. The most prominent part of the composition is at the center, where we find the sculpture of the Virgin and the archbishop José de Lanciego y Eguilas



Fig. 6. Francisco Martínez, Portrait of José de Lanciego y Eguilas, first half of the eighteenth century, oil on canvas, 113 x 84 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato-INAH, Tepotzotlán. Photo: Museo Nacional del Virreinato. © Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.

(1655-1728) following behind (figs. 2 and 6). He stares straight out of the picture plane and raises his right hand, blessing the public on his way. He is accompanied by members of the cathedral chapter and the secular clergy. Some of them carry candles which have almost been completely consumed while others support the stand on which the sculpture of the Virgin of Loreto is carried. An *horquilla* or crutch-like staff is visible in the hand of one of the figures carrying the image. This staff was used to mark the step of the procession of the image and determine when it was to rest. The archbishop is directly preceded by two assistant priests, one wearing a magnificent cope and the other with a dalmatic. At his sides, he is flanked by the two priests that assisted him as deacon and subdeacon in the service and who dress in black gowns and surplice and have removed their birettas. Following directly behind the archbishop is the *caudatario* who wears a red sash and whose function in solemn ceremonies is to follow behind the archbishop and carry the long train of his cape. There are various portraits in this section of the painting besides that of the archbishop: the one of Antonio Villaseñor y Monroy, dean of the Cathedral, mentioned earlier, can be identified in the figure of the man to the right of the archbishop who we know served as deacon on this occasion (fig. 7).

The next group of male participants following behind the archbishop's retinue and surrounding the chapel of the *Talabarteros*, is also presided over by a pair of mace-bearers and can be identified as Mexico's learned elite: all of them wearing elbow capes or mozette that identify them as university graduates of different disciplines according to color. Four of them wear white mozette with a second one in blue below, a combination that designates Doctors of the Facultad Mayor or College of Theology. The plain blue mozette denote members of the School of Philosophy or Arts, which was of inferior rank and only offered a Master's degree. One can also see a yellow mozetta, designated for the School of Medicine, while others wear green ones for Canon Law, and a few are in red colors which belong to the School of Law or Jurisprudence. Furthermore, the artist has gone to great pains to represent two different kinds of academic birettas, differentiating between secular versus religious university graduates.

Following this group, at the right side of the painting, we can identify a pair of men dressed in red cloaks (fig. 5). These are mace-bearers presiding over the *regidores* and *alcaldes* (members of the city hall council) and followed by the Real Audiencia, all of whom are depicted with their powdered wigs. The first constitute a group of approximately ten or twelve gentlemen dressed in colorful silk coats, behind which we see two men in black togas holding long sticks; it is possible that these are bailiffs at the service of the criminal hall of the Audiencia, whose responsibility it was to make rounds at night to guarantee decency and safety on the streets. Behind them, on the extreme right margin of the painting, another group of men in black follow, and these are most likely the authorities of the Real Audiencia (*oidores*).

Beyond the information the painting provides for understanding the extent to which the procession was carefully orchestrated and all civil and religious authorities were present, its organization and the placement of each sector of Mexi-



Fig. 7. Unknown artist, Portrait of Antonio Villaseñor y Monroy, 18th century, oil on canvas, 89,7 x 119 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato-INAH, Tepotzotlán. Photo: Museo Nacional del Virreinato. © Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.

co's society in it can also be studied by means of two guide books about the Cathedral's celebrations: *Diario Manual* of 1751 and the *Costumbrero* of 1819. Although later in date, these sources suggest that it is likely that the front of the procession, not visible in the painting, was led by the city's confraternities with their insignias and which would typically include both those of Spaniards and Indians. In addition, members of the lay Third Orders were also expected to process, carrying candles and crucifixes. And, should he have participated, the Viceroy would close the procession (Archivo de la Catedral Metropolitana de México. Deán y Cabildo de la catedral de México 1751; Gómez 2004, 29). Both of these texts describe the order that should be followed in processions during the feast of Corpus Christi. The fact that the order was maintained between 1751 and 1819 and that it matches the order seen in the painting suggests that it may have been applied for many other religious processions besides Corpus Christi. In fact, the 1819 book describes a procession for the Virgin of Remedios which follows almost exactly the same order, further supporting this hypothesis.

According to these sources, at the front of the procession after the confraternities and the Third Orders, one would also find the religious orders, organized according to their antiquity in the city. Although small, friars of different orders, including Mercedarians, Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans, are identifiable holding candles and crosses on the left side of the painting, near the convent of La Encarnación.

The only point at which the procession's solemnity seems to be compromised, and one gets a sense for the way in which conflicts typically arose when so many of Mexico's important men gathered together, is in the detail of various figures from the university group described above. They engage in a discussion which seems to stall the procession, with one of them even turning back instead of moving forward (fig. 5). An explanation for this may be found in that they can be identified by their religious habits: three of them are friars (Dominican, Franciscan and Mercedarian) and there is also a secular priest in the group. Their institutional diversity may be the cause behind their conversation, which one can imagine to be about the rightful place each should have in the procession. There are various university graduates and offices represented and the nature of the discussion might be related to the order in the procession. It has not been possible to identify members of the Real Tribunal del Protomedicato in the procession although as the regulators of health issues in the city they must have been present (Molina 1996, 62). The painter has included a man in a green mozetta, standing right in front of the red carriage, glaring at the disruptive group behind him in what seems to be an annoyed and admonishing stare for disrupting the silence. Why exactly it was decided to include this scene in the painting is unclear. Pictorially it functions to introduce movement and dynamism in the frieze-like composition. At the same time, it invites interpretation in light of recent research on public spectacle and the common occurrence of social disruption. In her study on Puebla's municipal council during the colonial period, Frances Ramos argues that disruptions in public ceremonies should not be regarded as failures representing a loss or lack of control. Instead, she posits that "*leaders used ceremony to encourage interrelated and overlapping identities, compete with other individual elites and corporations and extend their power and influence*" (Ramos 2012, xix and 133). For these reasons, she concludes that such conflicts actually contributed to effecting change and clarifying social order. Seen in this light, this detail in the Zacatenco painting posits the importance of order by depicting a disruptive moment; however, it may also reflect a Jesuit desire to indirectly critique others for their disruption during the procession.

Aside from the disruptive element in the group of university men, this procession painting has practically no anecdotal details pertaining to popular civic life, as is more customary in processions commemorating felicitous occasions, such as the inauguration of a new church, for example in the *Transfer of the nuns of Santa Catalina of Siena in Valladolid* of 1738 (Museo Regional de Morelia, Michoacán) (Sigaut 1995) or the *Transfer of the Image and Inauguration of the Sanctuary of Guadalupe* of 1709 (Private collection, Spain) (Vargasluogo and Martínez del Río de Redo 1994, 236-237).

Even the typical inclusion in many paintings of processions of a market scene visible in some corner of the work or the presence of playful children or a trumpeter or musician amongst the crowd are absent. This may be because of a heightened sense of decorum considering the gravity of the occasion or, it may signal that the artist and patrons felt a need to respond visually to mounting concerns in the early eighteenth century over the abuses that local authorities perceived in the use of public space by the popular classes of Mexico City.

From the late seventeenth century onward, contemporary sources, such as municipal orders, chronicles and descriptions of the city, recurrently underscore overcrowding in the central plaza of México, literally invaded by street sellers of fruits and flowers and filled with street dwellers and a great amount of poor people, something that marred the sense of decorum desirable for the capital of the Viceroyalty (Sánchez de Tagle 1997, 16, 30, 31, 52). Although during the first third of the eighteenth century legislation on the matter seems to have been sporadic and largely ineffective, the city government clearly felt that the city was in need of rules and rigid prescriptions that could order its functioning and control events in which there was a massive outpouring of the inhabitants. Molina del Villar affirms that since the beginning of the eighteenth century there is a need to introduce greater order during the processions and feasts (Molina del Villar 1996, 96). That disorder in the Plaza Mayor continued to be a problem is evident from later sources, such as a 1791 text which, once again, describes it as a “*refuge of thieves and homeless people*” (“*refugio de truhanes y de gentes sin hogar*”) (Santiago Cruz 1976). Interestingly, Esteban Sánchez de Tagle has demonstrated that in the eyes of newly arriving Spanish authorities in the early eighteenth century, the city of Mexico seemed to present a confusing paradox. On the one hand, the Spaniards were favourably impressed by the perfect rectilinear plan of the city because of its rational configuration, which implied the existence of a superior public order in accordance with Enlightenment ideals. On the other hand, the reality that they soon encountered, in terms of how that space was used and abused by overcrowding, indecorous and disruptive behavior, presented another picture. Indeed, the tragic rebellion of 1692, had already demonstrated to the local authorities the fragility of civic order and the need to control the public spaces more carefully (Sánchez de Tagle 1997, 16, 31-36 y 50-52). For the Spanish newcomers to the New World, the urban plan of Mexico City contrasted enormously with the more common and chaotic urban plan of Iberia’s medieval cities.

Returning to the painting, the spirit of order and propriety that guided the artist in its production is probably also responsible for the particular treatment of women in it. Amongst the witnessing populace, one woman is visible in profile in the small group huddled in the lower right corner and cast in shadow while a few more seem to be observing from windows with raised shutters in the center of the painting. However, the only prominent women depicted are the two that appear inside a carriage in the middle of the right side of the painting and that clearly belong to the upper class (fig. 1 and 5). Behind, two more carriage tops are visible which suggests that women of a certain social status could (or should) only participate in the procession in this way, occupying a separate enclosed space in which they did not mix with the common populace or with the men.

One of the most surprising absences in this painting is the indigenous population. According to the biography of Father Juan María Salvatierra, written by the Jesuit Miguel Venegas and edited by Juan Antonio de Oviedo, during the procession “*it was moving to see the great tenderness and devotion of the many Naturales Indios, who loaded with sacks of various flowers covered the streets through which the Loretan Mother was to pass with them*” (Venegas 1754, 75). Even if our unidentified painter has represented a crowded audience for the procession, most noticeable in the rooftops and behind the secular clergy in the middle of the painting, it is treated homogeneously as a loosely painted mass of heads and arms waving and watching. In other words, there is no intention of emphasizing specifically indigenous participation or presence in the pictorial commemoration of the event. In this regard, the painting is very different from one of the other monumental works surviving in



Mexico to commemorate a procession to entreat relief from an epidemic, the anonymous mid-seventeenth-century painting *Franciscan Procession from Tlatelolco to Tepeyac During the Plague of the Cocolixtli* (Basilica of Guadalupe, Mexico City). In this earlier work, the penitential element of the procession is prioritized as is the representation of indigenous participation under the guidance of the Franciscans. By contrast, the decision to exclude the Indians in the Loretan painting, even though their participation is documented, must have been deliberate and betrays that there were other priorities behind the commission of this work.

Gaging from the painting and the sources analyzed, on this occasion what was desirable was a commemorative portrait of society's elite performing ritual in a perfectly organized event in which representatives of all the religious orders and local institutions took their rightful place in the procession. That decorum, understood as social separation and organization was a mounting concern during processions in Mexico City in this period is further demonstrated by the account of another procession of the Virgin of Loreto in 1737. It too was organized to ask for salvation from an epidemic, and a contemporary source suggests that for some, the massive presence of people of varied racial mixes in the plaza of the Church of San Gregorio was indecent. In his description of this 1737 procession, Cabrera y Quintero metaphorically compares the public to the beads of a rosary as a means of criticizing that they were too mixed and varied, some white, some black, and men of certain status along others of none. Although we do not know if such a crowd gathered for the procession of 1727, it is more than likely and, as a result, we find the painter clearly countering the idea that such events could be chaotic representations of society by choosing to prioritize a sense of order and separation of the elite, including by gender. All these details of presentation reveal that the painter has taken great pains to capture the strict sense of protocol that permeates participation in the procession and that this was the way in which the Jesuits desired for it to be commemorated.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, there are still many unanswered questions regarding the procession painting of 1727 – among them, the identity of the artist, the patron, its precise location in the church of San Gregorio, and when exactly it was made. On the other hand, the documentary analysis of this procession history provides a greater understanding of the peculiarities of this Mexican painting, such as the absence of the indigenous participants, the small role of women in it, and the emphasis on the organization of the institutional elites. The desire to represent the entire processional route is exceptional and speaks to the Jesuit's acute awareness of the importance of controlling and staging public, urban space. Finally, these details show that while this painting is part of an established genre of paintings of processions in colonial Mexico, these works were all different from each other. Artists were being asked to depict specific parts of the processional ways, certain groups of people, individual portraits, buildings and so forth. Choices were made in collaboration with the patrons, offering variations within the compositional standards of the genre. Furthermore, it seems clear that it was often important for the paintings to provide an underlying message, one that was often related to the role of an individual religious institution within the matrix of the colonial city; these political messages went beyond the immediate need of celebrating a specific image and its powers of intercession. On this occasion, the sober presentation and the support given by the Archbishop and the Cathedral Chapter to the Jesuit cult of the Virgin of Loreto seem to have been the definitive concerns that were taken into account in the composition. The sense of order projected by the painting is not only about the way different groups of people are depicted in it; it is also about the way in which the city streets themselves are presented. As noted above, unlike many other procession paintings, such as Pablo José de Talavera, *Transfer of the Virgin of Solitude and Foundation of the Convent of Our Lady of Solitude and Saint Therese*, ca. 1748 (Church of Our Lady of Solitude, Puebla), this one attempts to provide a sense of broad, straight avenues and

sound architectural order, all of it at the disposal of a massive processional body.

With regard to the devotional history of the city, the procession of 1727 clearly marked a turning point for this cult. After 1727 there was greater participation from the civil authorities in festivities surrounding the Virgin of Loreto in the church of San Gregorio, especially in the annual *novena* that celebrated the birth of the Virgin on September 8. As Francisco Javier Alegre notes, after the divine intervention of 1727:

*In gratitude for such a signaled favor, the city decided to annually attend, through the representation of its council, the feast day of the 8th of September which is celebrated in said school. The holy religions took it upon themselves to celebrate the novena and cover the costs, each of one of the nine days, just as, since a few years ago, it has been done with good fortune for all the city and great increase in the devotion towards the Holy House of Nazareth.*

*En agradecimiento de tan señalado favor, determinó la ciudad asistir anualmente en cuerpo de cabildo a la fiesta que el día 8 de septiembre se le hace en dicho seminario. Las sagradas religiones tomaron a su cargo los nueve días antes, venir a hacer a su costa un día de la novena, como hasta ahora pocos años se ha practicado con edificación de toda la ciudad y grande aumento de la devoción para con la santa Casa de Nazaret. (Alegre 1842, 242)*

In addition, the *Gaceta de México* for the month of June of 1734 corroborates that in the years after 1727 the city council recurrently turned for protection to the Virgin of Loreto in times of crisis. On this occasion, the *Gaceta* says that the *novena* would be paid for by the “*Nobilissima Ciudad*” (“*very noble city*”) in order to liberate the population from the contagion of smallpox (Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid. *Gacetas de México*, Diversos. Documentos de Indias. no. 537, 631). A few years later, at the outbreak of the most devastating epidemic of the period, the *matlazahuatl* of 1736-39, one of the first images that was called on for intercession was the Virgin of Loreto. According to Cabrera y Quintero who wrote the chronicle of this epidemic, the city council turned to the then Archbishop-Viceroy to ask that consolation be sought in the Virgin of Loreto because of her beneficial role in earlier times. It was decided to celebrate a *novena* in the church, transferring the image from its chapel to the high altar on December 17, 1736. A few weeks later, in response to “*the constant devotion of some who sought to find the remedy in Loreto*” (*la devoción constante de algunos [que] porfiaba en sacar el remedio de Loreto*) a procession was organized (Cabrera y Quintero 1746, 102). However, the Virgin of Loreto did not process to the Cathedral since it was already planning a procession with one of the legendary protectresses of the city, the Virgin of Remedios. Despite the rising support for the cult of the Virgin of Loreto in the 1720s, in the 1737 epidemic neither Loreto nor Remedios were able to save the city. Despite the victory of Guadalupe, the Jesuits orchestrated an intense relationship of reciprocity and duality between the Virgin of Loreto and the Virgin of Guadalupe (Alcalá 2007). As is well known, this time successful intercession was found in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Had this not been the case, the devotional and Marian history of Mexico would have been quite different. Guadalupe’s cult history has, in fact, overshadowed the history of other cults in Mexico City. Prior to the discovery of the painting in San Pedro Zacatenco, it was easy to overlook the tremendous importance of Loreto’s victory in 1727. On that occasion, the processional route of the Italo-Mexican sculpture took her to the Cathedral, a privilege that was desirable for all cult images but not easily conceded. Looking once again at the painting, it almost seems like the Virgin of Loreto knew how special her day was for, amidst all the pomp and circumstance, she looks out at the viewer and smiles in a surprisingly life-like way.

### Epilogue in the year 2020

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic and the way communities around the globe and their governing authorities as well as religious and social leaders are struggling to handle the situation, the authors consider that revisiting this topic at this juncture could contribute to thinking about how art has responded to pandemics in the past, how it is doing so at present and will no doubt continue to do in the future. During the last months, miraculous images and their copies have assisted faithful believers just as they did in the past. In Mexico, and despite the strongly recommended need for social distancing, on March 17th, the Virgen del Pueblito, whose church is in the outskirts of the city of Querétaro, was taken on procession in the conventional fashion, marching through the streets from its temple to the Cathedral. In other cities, in Argentina, Ecuador and El Salvador, for example, an unprecedented means of intercession has emerged, one that satisfies the need for social distancing and avoids contagion by flying the images over cities and towns in helicopters. Such aerial processions took place with the replicas of El Señor del Nicho (Tepotzotlan, Estado de México) from the Parish Church of San Pedro, on May 11th, and the Virgen de los Dolores de Soriano, at the municipality of Colon, Querétaro, on Good Friday (Avendaño 2020). In both cases, the faithful were able to have contact with the image, either directly as witnesses from the ground, or virtually through the internet. In the XXIst century then, the images of the past continue to be relevant for many, and the age-old means of intercession through procession persists even as new, and now safer means of circulation are emerging: new media and alternative modes of passage for a path to good health.

\* Parts of this essay are based on an earlier version published in Spanish in the journal *Encrucijada* (Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM), vol. 1, 2009, pp. 23-51 with the title “Solemne procesión de la imagen de Nuestra Señora de Loreto: la epidemia de sarampión en 1727”. [http://www.esteticas.unam.mx/encrucijada/revista\\_01.pdf](http://www.esteticas.unam.mx/encrucijada/revista_01.pdf)

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Fototeca Constantino Reyes Valerio-Coordinación Nacional de Monumentos Históricos INAH-CONACULTA, MXC-56.

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