

Relíquias em projeto

Relics in project

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índice

contents

5 apresentação presentation

7 Relic Studies: Material evidence
for a sacred reality

Georges Kazan

Department of Archaeology, University of Turku

27 *Corpi santi* in Portugal. An overview

Joana Palmeirão^(1,2), **Maria Coutinho**⁽¹⁾, **Eduarda Vieira**⁽¹⁾
e Teresa Ferreira^(2,3)

⁽¹⁾ Universidade Católica Portuguesa, School of Arts,

Research Center for the Science and Technology of the Arts (CITAR),

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45 O Património das Misericórdias.
Nova Realidade – Novos Desafios

Mariano Cabaço

Gabinete do Património Cultural da União das Misericórdias
Portuguesas

61 Global Bones and Local Pains.
The 1578 Translation of the Roman Relics
in Mexico City

Alberto Saviello

Institute of Art History, University of Bern

SNSF–Project: Global Bones. Entangled Histories,
Transfers and Translations in the Early Modern Age

89 Mapping Saint's Cult in Medieval Sweden
and Finland: A Digital Humanities Project

Lena Liepe

Department of Music and Art, Linneaus University, Sweden

98 sinopses synopsis

Global Bones and Local Pains. The 1578 Translation Procession of the Roman Relics in Mexico City

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resumo

O artigo analisa a procissão solene organizada pelos Jesuítas para a translação de uma coleção de relíquias recebidas de Roma na Cidade do México a 1 de novembro de 1578. Descreve os múltiplos significados locais, transregionais e globais das relíquias, como uma transferência da *Ecclesia Romana* para a Cidade do México, como parte de uma rede global de relíquias e como formas de sublimação e sacralização das experiências locais de dor e miséria.

palavras-chave

Procissão de relíquias; Translação de relíquias; Transferência de relíquias; Rede de relíquias; Jesuítas; Sublimação

abstract

The article analyzes the solemn procession organized by the Jesuits for the translation of a collection of relics received from Rome in Mexico City on November 1, 1578. It describes the multiple local, transregional, and global meanings of the relics, as a transfer of the *Ecclesia Romana* to Mexico City, as part of a global relic network, and as forms of sublimation and sacralization of local experiences of pain and misery.

keywords

Relic procession; Relic translation; Relic transfer; Relic network; Jesuits; Sublimation

The celebration held in 1578 by the Jesuits in Mexico City to honor the receipt of a shipment of relics from Rome was one of the largest public events in New Spain during the early modern period.¹ The eight-day festivities – consisting of theatrical performances, poetry

contests, dancing, and playful tournaments such as the *juego de cañas* – began with a great procession on All Saints' Day (November 1), whereby the relics were solemnly transferred from the city's cathedral to the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo. With reference to historical descriptions, this article explores the meanings attached to the relics in the context of the Jesuit mission and the local circumstances in the capital of the viceroyalty during the preparation and orchestration of the procession. It will be shown that the translation of these saintly relics represented as complete a transfer as possible of the tradition and structure of the *Ecclesia Romana* to Mexico City. Whereas from a global perspective the bones served to construct a Christian-Jesuit network, on a local level their value and significance were highly context dependent: in view of the destruction of the coterminous capital of Tenochtitlan by the Spaniards only two generations prior and the enormous inequalities in New Spanish society, processing and overcoming such experiences of pain became a central theme of the relic procession.

Relics on the move

Movement is an essential feature of the Christian cult of relics. Following the first relocation of such mortal remains via exhumation – known as the *elevatio*, in the sense of their elevation to the altar or another site of public veneration – relics were commonly moved within public space, whether as part of recurring processions or while being transferred to another place of safekeeping (*translatio*). In these usually presentational movements, the social significance and efficacy of relics manifested themselves to a particular degree.² The processions within urban space, in their various forms, have been increasingly studied in recent years,³ with emphasis both on their function as a symbolic form of communication and on their aspect of performativity:

Processions do not simply 'signify' something; rather, they constitute reality, i.e. through their enactment, they produce something that cannot be accessed otherwise. In this respect [...] they are media of approaching the intangible, are performative practices of constructing an interstice between the factual and the imaginary.⁴

On a theoretical level, the procession's performative constitution and transformation of reality have been examined through the concept of liminality.⁵ Indeed, translations and processions of relics can be understood as *rites de passage*, with the capacity to effect change not only in the meaning assigned to the relics⁶ but also in the actors and spaces involved.⁷ The liminality traversed during relic processions holds the possibility of desired transformations, such as the warding off of evil and the sanctification of the space in question, along with undesirable ones, including the unintentional sacralization of certain sites or even the loss of relics.⁸

As pertains to the procession's quality of mediating between the factual and the imaginary, the bilocation attributed to the saints – their ostensibly simultaneous presence on earth and in heaven – is of particular importance. Through their relics, the holy persons were understood to be corporeally present and to take an active part in the procession.⁹ At the same time, these sanctified figures had already entered the heavenly community and thus could act as intercessors before God. The connection to the transcendent established by the relics and the resulting possibility of the transmission of divine grace are concretely reflected in miracle reports, which were a central element in the description of translations, testifying to the legitimacy and success of the relic's movement.¹⁰ While such sources speak to the results of processions, the performativity of the actions themselves as they unfolded is difficult to grasp on the basis of the written descriptions and the few pictorial representations. If chroniclers portray the actual experience of procession at all—the interwoven optical, acoustic, olfactory, and tactile stimuli of lights, gold, and velvet, of the sound of bells, singing, and silence, of incense, fragrant water, and sweat, the feeling of taking part in an extraordinary communal undertaking, and the aching limbs of the participants as they slowly made their way over the course of hours—they do so in often compressed and standardized linguistic tropes. The Jesuit Juan Sánchez Baquero, for example, describes the sensory impressions of the 1578 procession as paradisiacal («parecía un paraíso»)¹¹

Reports of the procession and a missing «rock»

The celebration of the relic translations in Mexico City in 1578 is a historiographical stroke of luck, as various authors reported on it. Among the descriptions of the feast, that of the Jesuit priest Pedro de Morales is the most important. Morales, a doctor of theological and secular law from Salamanca, in Spain, came to the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo as a teacher in 1576 and was most likely involved in the organization of the feast.¹² His *Carta*, published only a year after the event, gives a detailed account of the whole festival, from describing the design of the reliquaries and the ephemeral architectures to reproducing the submissions to the poetry contests. In addition, his report contains the complete script of the tragedy *Trionfo de los Santos*, which thematizes the importance of the early Christian martyrs and was written specifically for the reception of the relics. While the *Carta* incorporates texts by other authors and describes itself as a mere report to the Jesuit general,¹³ in its detailed ekphrasis it has the character of an artistic work in its own right. Through its parallel use of Italian, Latin, Nahuatl, and Spanish in rendering various poems, chants, inscriptions, and emblems, the *Carta* evokes the plurality of New Spanish society as well as the enormous importance of linguistic and cultural translation for the mission.¹⁴ Two other reports, probably also written by eyewitnesses, are included in histories of

the first decades of the Jesuits in New Spain. Juan Sánchez Baquero, who had been in Mexico City since 1572 and later worked as a teacher at the Jesuit college, probably wrote his account around 1609.¹⁵ The other description was likely penned after 1620 by an anonymous Jesuit author.¹⁶ These two sources are less comprehensive than Morales's *Carta* but sometimes contain additional information.

The only account not written by a Jesuit is that of the historian Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, who descended from a local noble family. His history of Mexico was written in Nahuatl around 1620. Chimalpahin devotes only a few lines to the feast of 1578 and emphasizes, above all, the beauty of the procession and the participation of the local population.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that he mentions a relic of the apostle Peter in this context. In fact, such a relic is kept, next to one of Saint Paul, in a reliquary that was donated by the mine owner and benefactor of the Jesuits Alonso de Villaseca in the immediate aftermath of the procession (fig. 1).¹⁸ However, the information Chimalpahin relays about the procession is



otherwise not reliable. For example, he falsely identifies its destination as the «iglesia mayor» rather than the church of the Jesuit college.

The other authors, too, give contradictory accounts of the procession. While Sánchez Baquero mentions that the most important relics (*la Santa Espina Y Lignum Crucis, y algunas otras reliquias de las principales*) had been personally brought to Villaseca, who then commissioned reliquaries for the Passion relics and for the relics of Peter and Paul (fig. 1),¹⁹ Pedro de Morales explicitly notes the absence of a relic of Saint Peter from the procession.²⁰ The Roman gift's inclusion or exclusion of this particular relic, the one most clearly embodying the tradition of the papacy, was obviously an important – if fraught – issue for the historiographers.²¹

Figure 1 – Anonymous artist, Reliquary of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, New Spain, Mexico City (?), after 1578, Gilded silver, embossed, chiseled, crystal and precious stones, 47 x 14cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, OR/002

Traveling bones

Unfortunately, the prehistory of the compilation and dispatch of this gift of relics remains largely unknown, as many letters from Mexico have been lost, the majority of survivals being letters of reply from the Jesuit superior general Everard Mercuriano. However, the Jesuit correspondence attests to a consistent demand for relics in New Spain.²² The *Societas Iesu* was not present as a missionary order in this territory until 1572, some fifty years after the arrival of the Franciscans (1522), the Dominicans (1526), and the Augustinians (1533). As newcomers, the Jesuits aspired to establish themselves as mediators between New Spain and Europe and as innovators of evangelization.²³ Morales speaks of the *Societas* obtaining a papal decree in 1572 that allowed agents of the order to take relics from Rome and other places as a means of addressing the lack of saintly remains in the newly founded houses in Brazil, Peru, Japan, and New Spain.²⁴ In any case, the 1578 consignment was preceded by one of probably equal importance, the contents of which were lost in a shipwreck of 1575. This gift of relics—of which Sánchez Baquero reports to have been recovered only a thorn from the crown, a small cross made of the wood of the True Cross, and some unidentifiable bones²⁵—was addressed to the archbishop of Mexico Pedro de Moya y Contreras. In parallel, the Jesuits planned another shipment to the newly established Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo. It may well be that this batch was augmented after the loss of the first one, being declared a gift from the pope himself to the Mexican people. In any case, speaking to the extraordinary importance of both relic compilations is the fact that the second shipment likewise included highly venerated Passion relics, namely a thorn from Christ's crown and a piece of the Cross. Even after 1578, correspondence with Rome repeatedly mentions relics being brought to Mexico, with Mercuriano promising the archbishop a replacement for the items lost in the shipwreck; in 1594, Pedro Morales would bring what was probably the first complete martyr's body from the catacombs of Rome, along with a veil of the Virgin Mary.²⁶ Compared to all the other documented relic transfers, however, the 1578 consignment, consisting of 214 relics, clearly stands out in terms of volume alone. The shipment from Rome arrived at the port of San Juan de Ulúa (Veracruz) on September 7, 1577, but preparations for an appropriate celebration of the relics' arrival dragged on for over a year. In addition to some concerns about how to properly communicate the importance of the holy remains to the Indigenous population,²⁷ in his letter to Rome Morales attributes this delay to the need to first repair damage to the roof of the college church.²⁸ Undertaken with the help of two hundred locals, the repair began six months before the inaugural celebration. Despite being the middle of the rainy season, the rain ceased for the duration of the construction work—to everyone's amazement. This meteorological phenomenon is the only miraculous

event, in the broadest sense, mentioned by Morales in his report on the reception of the relics. That the clerics of Mexico City were hardly prepared to receive a shipment of relics of such size and importance is also evident in Morales's report to Rome, one and a half years later, that only a hundred silver reliquaries and a retable had thus far been produced for the storage and presentation of the bones, with the manufacture of the remaining vessels still underway. Nevertheless, Morales expresses his hope that, once the work is complete, the Jesuit college would become a center and sanctuary of relics and devotion for all of New Spain.²⁹

A church of bones

Not only was Pope Gregory XIII's donation of relics to the Jesuits significant in terms of quantity: it also contained bones of extremely high rank.³⁰ Upon their arrival, the relics were first approved by the archbishop and made accessible to a smaller circle in the college church. Next, a list of all the contents was drafted and, together with information about the indulgences that the pope and archbishop had granted for the celebration, was printed and distributed throughout New Spain.³¹ While the organizing principle of this register is not completely apparent, it seems largely related to the perceived importance of each group and saint within an ecclesiastical hierarchy (**app. 1**).

Appendix 1

List of the relics sent from Rome, Mexico City, 1578, from MARISCAL HAY (2000), pp. 19-22.

Una espina de la corona de Nuestro Señor Iesu Christo
Una cruz pequeña del *Lignum Crucis*

Huessos de Apóstoles y Evangelistas

De sant Pablo Apóstol, de sant Mathías Apóstol, de sant Bartholomé Apóstol, de Santiago el Menor, Apóstol, de sancto Thomás Apóstol, de sant Andrés Apóstol, de sant Bernabé Apóstol, de sant Tadeo Apóstol, de sant Matheo Apóstol y Evangelista, de sant Lucas Evangelista, de sant Marcos Evangelista.

Huessos de Sanctos Doctores

De sant Ambrosio, de sant Agustín, de sant Hierónymo, de sant Gregorio, de sancto Thomás de Aquino, de sant Luán Chrysóstomo, de sant Athanasio, de sant Basilio, de sant Gregorio Nazianzeno, de sant León Papa, de sant Cipriano Obispo y Mártir, de sant Hilario, de sant Isidro, de sant Dionisio Obispo y Mártir.

Huessos de Sanctos Mártires

De sant Estevan Prothomártir, de sant Laurencio Mártir, de sant Vincente Mártir, de Sant Clemente Papa y Mártir, de sant Lino Papa y Mártir, de sant Sixto Papa y Mártir, de sant Marcello Papa y Mártir, de sant Martín Papa y Mártir, de sant Aniceto Papa y Mártir, de sant Silverio Papa y Mártir, de sant Ygnatio Obispo y Mártir, de sant Apollinar Obispo y Mártir, de sant Valeriano Obispo y Mártir, de sant Iustino Praesbítero y Mártir, de sant Grisógono Mártir, de sant Gorgonio Mártir, de sant Christóval Mártir, de sant Georgio Mártir, de sant Adriano Mártir, de sant Eugenio Mártir, de sant Archenio Mártir, de sant Bonifacio Mártir, de sant Prosdócimo Mártir, de sant Antonino Mártir, de sant Pancracio Mártir, de Sant Iuliano Mártir, de sant Hippólito Mártir, de sant Basíledes Mártir, de sant Anastasio Mártir, de sant Colocerio Mártir, de sant Anceias Rey y Mártir, de sant Eugenio Rey y Mártir, de Sant Fabián y Sant Sebastián, de sant Marcellino y sant Pedro, de sant Cosme y sant Damián, de sant Protho y Iacinto, de sant Tiburcio y Valeriano, de sant Tiburcio y Susanna, de sant Crispín y Crispiniano, de sant Felcissimo y Agapito, de sant Abdón y Senén, de sant Vital y Argícola, de sant Tranquillino, y sancta Martia, de sant Vital y sant Timotheo, de sant Nemesío y Lucilla, de sant Félix y Adaucto, de sant Chrísanto y Daría, de sant Ioán y Sant Pablo, de sant Sergio y Bacho, de sant Faustino y Iovita, de sant Nabor y Félix, de sant Nereo y Archileo, de sant Alexandro, Evencio y Theódolo, de sancta Simphorosa y sus hijos, de sant Mauricio y sus compañeros, de sant Ciriaco, largo y Smaragdo, de los Siete Durmientes.

Huessos de Sanctos Confesores

De sant Ioseph, de sant Paulino Obispo, de sant Martín Obispo, de sant Nicolás Obispo, de sant Fulgencio Obispo, de sant Gelasio Papa, de sant Máximo Obispo, de sant Buenaventura Obispo, de sant Anselmo Arçobispo, de sant Briçio Obispo, de sant Eusebio Obispo, de sant Benito Abbad, de sancto Domingo, de sant Bernardo Abbad, de sant Pablo, primer ermitaño, de Sant Luís Rey de Francia, de sant Bernardino de Sena, de sant Antonio de Padua, de sant Hilarión Abbad, de sant Gil Abbad, de sant Honofreo, de sant Mauro Abbad, de sant Leonardo Abbad, de sant Alexo.

Huessos de Sanctas

De sancta Ana, de sancta María Magdalena, de Sancta Lucía Vírgen y Mártir, de Sancta Cecilia Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Ynés Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Elena, de sancta Constancia Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Prisca Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Potenciana Vírgen, de sancta Dorothea Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Sabina Vírgen y Mártir, de Sancta Bibiana Vírgen y Mártir, de sancta Flora, de sancta Eufemia

Vírgen y Mártyr, de sancta Beatríz, de sancta Cirilla, de sancta Christina Vírgen y Mártyr, de sancta Margarita Vírgen y Mártyr, de sancta Susana Vírgen y Mártyr, de sancta Felícitas, de sancta Victoria Vírgen y Mártyr, de sancta Catherina de Sena, de sancta Clara Vírgen, de sancta Mónica, de sancta Petronilla Vírgen, de sancta Anastasia Mártyr, de sancta Sophía y sus hijas: Fe, Esperança y Charidad.

De otros sanctos cuyos nombres se ygnoran. Son por todas dozientas y catorze reliquias.

.....

Named first are the Passion relics: the thorn from Christ's crown and the wood of the Cross (*lignum crucis*). The list continues with the relics of apostles and evangelists. In lieu of a relic of Peter, the group was expanded to include Paul and his teacher, Barnabas, who were important for the early Christian mission. John is missing among the evangelists. These founding figures central to Christianity are followed by the saintly doctors (*santos doctores*), beginning with the four Church Fathers: Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great. The bishops Dionysius and Cyprian are referenced as martyrs. It is noteworthy that this group is not limited to early Christian teachers but also incorporates Thomas Aquinas, as one of the most important scholastics.

After the doctors, the list proceeds to name martyrs, the blood witnesses of Christ, leading with the protomartyr Stephen. The also highly venerated martyrs Lawrence and Vincent are then mentioned. In keeping with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, these are followed by popes, bishops, and a presbyter. In the series of martyrs without ecclesiastical office, the patron saint of New Spain, Hippolytus, comes relatively late yet precedes Saint Anceais and Saint Eugenio, dubbed as kings.³² The assembly of martyrs concludes with several pairs of martyrs and three of the seven sleepers. Named first among the confessors (*confessores*) is Joseph, the stepfather of Christ. He is followed by bishops, popes, abbots, King Louis of France, as well as such central saints of the Middle Ages as Bernard of Clairvaux, Dominic, and the Franciscans Anthony of Padua and Bernardine of Siena. The desert father and proto-hermit Paul of Thebes is also mentioned here.

Among the female saints, the text again leads with those who were directly connected to Christ: Anne, the mother of Mary, and Mary Magdalene. Listed next are early Christian women distinguished by their martyrdom, virginity, or both. But here again, the lineage of early Christian martyrs is supplemented by other eminent women, such as Emperor Helena, who discovered the True Cross, and the medieval mystic Catherine of Siena. In the last category fall the bones of saints whose identities could not be confirmed. It is not entirely clear how many of the 214 relics belong to unidentifiable martyrs,

since elsewhere the list makes summary mention of Saint Maurice and his comrades (*sant Mauricio y sus compañeros*), i.e. members of the Theban Legion. However, assuming that the latter subgroup was not too large, the unidentified bones seem to have constituted around twenty percent of the relic donation.

The variety of categories and subcategories into which the respective saints are divided in the inventory characterizes this gift of relics as a kind of *translatio ecclesiae*. Indeed, the contents range in rank from the relics that came into contact with Christ during the Passion to those of unknown saints, via those of the apostles and evangelists, the Holy Family, the most important late antique and medieval scholars of the Church, early Christian martyrs, holy virgins, kings and an empress, from the relics of canonized popes, key saints of the Christian orders, popular preachers to those of hermits and mystics: the assembly encompasses most of the central persons and ways of life recognized by the Church to be holy. The community of saints gathered in the papal relic donation did more than help Christianize the new territory.³³ The presence of these saintly bodies enabled the Jesuits to actualize a desire the Christian missionaries had articulated repeatedly since the conquest of Tenochtitlan: to establish Mexico as a new, Latin American Rome.³⁴

The procession

The night before the translation procession, a small group of clerics carried the relics from the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo to the cathedral, which was the point of departure for the event. There, they spent the night in prayer. Despite the distance being little more than a kilometer between the two institutions, the procession, which began at seven o'clock in the morning, lasted until the afternoon because of the series of Masses, dances, and chants that took place at the various stations, followed by the celebration of Mass at the college church.³⁵ The processional route was punctuated with ephemeral architectures, eight arches and a tabernacle, dedicated to different saints and themes (**fig. 2**).³⁶ Five of the arches were triumphal, with a classicizing European form, and were donated by different civic and religious groups.³⁷ The three remaining arches were decorated with flowers, plants, and feathers, having been made by representatives of the Indigenous population.

The procession itself comprised five rows.³⁸ At the center were the bearers of the relics—contained in ephemeral reliquaries, most of which were specially made for this occasion—as well as the porters of processional crosses and standards. Flanking the relics, in the inner rows, were ecclesiastical dignitaries of various orders from all over New Spain. The outermost rows consisted of secular persons and numerous processional platforms (*andas*) designed and carried by Indigenous people and on

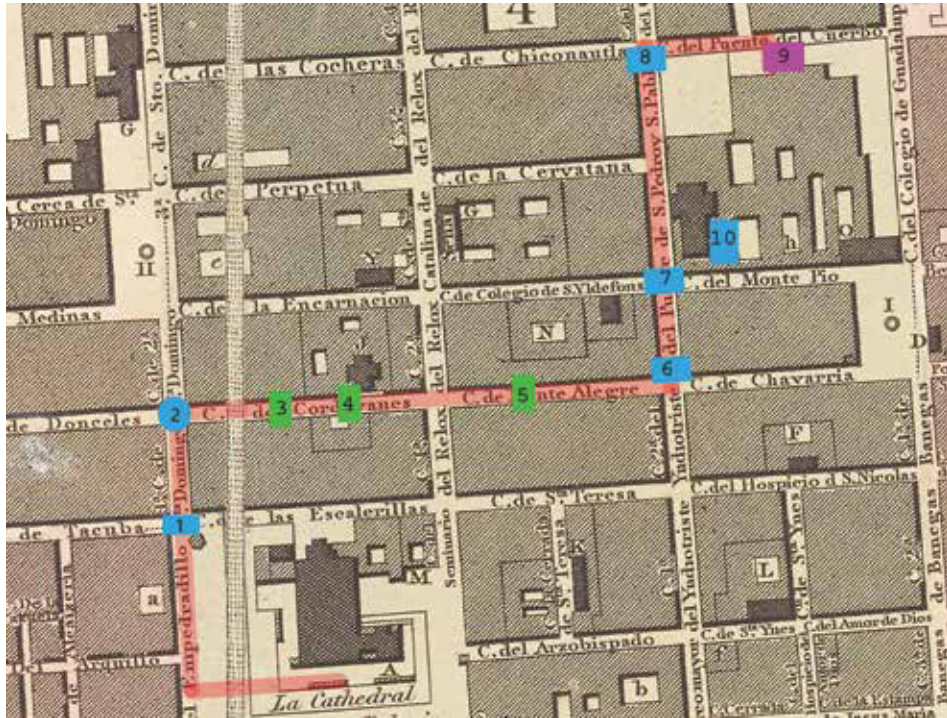


Figure 2 – Route and approximate positions of the ephemeral architectures of the 1578 translation procession on a city map from 1793

1 Triumphal arch dedicated to Saint Hippolitus and the martyrs, **2** Tabernacle dedicated to the martyrs Crispín y Crispiniano, **3, 4 and 5** Arches of the indigenous people (no. **4** dedicated to John the Baptist), **6, 7, 8** Triumphal arches dedicated to **(6)** the Virgin Mary, Joseph and Anna, **(7)** Apostles, **(8)** Doctors of the church, **9** Gate to the Colegio Máximo dedicated to Pope Gregory XIII, **10** Triumphal arch dedicated to the Holy Thorn and the Holy Cross at the side(?) entrance of the Jesuit church

which the saints of the different parishes were represented. Behind the relic biers followed the secular officials and dignitaries, first among them the viceroy, the *oidores*, and the ministers of the Real Audiencia.

Not all of the information given by Morales and the other authors can be included in the present study of the translational procession, due to space constraints. The focus of this analysis is the allocation of the relics to reliquaries and bearers as well as their sequence in the procession (app. 2). The relics of the saints, through their respective

positioning and grouping in the reliquaries, formed compositions comparable in certain principles to history painting, as Anton Legner has noted for the arrangement of relics within panel reliquaries and staurotheques.³⁹ However, these reliquary «paintings» were alive in two respects: on the one hand, because the saints, via their relics, were presented as active participants and, on the other hand, because they were carried through space by living persons and interacted with the audience and the urban landscape in a variety of ways. Of particular importance in this regard were the ephemeral architectures with their pictorial representations and inscriptions, along with the interventions made at the various stations. These external elements of the procession not only served to highlight the high rank of the participating saints but, moreover, made concrete their corporeal presence, in the here and now, for all those involved.

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Appendix 2

Order of reliquaries and bearers in the translation procession from MARISCAL HAY (2000), pp. 23-24.

1. Sant Hyppólito – sacerdote anciano
 2. El cofre – un otro sacerdote
 3. Los Sanctos Casados – un otro sacerdote
 4. Los Sanctos de la Orden de Sant Agustín – un otro sacerdo
 5. Sancto Domingo – un otro sacerdote
 6. Sanctos Abbades – Abbdad del Cabildo de los Sacerdotes desta ciudad
 7. Sanctas Vírgines – un Canónigo de la Puebla de los Ángeles
 8. Sagrados Mártires – un Canónigo de Guatemala
 9. Los Sanctos Doctores de la Yglesia – un Canónigo de Mechuacán
 10. Las Sanctas Magdalena, Egipciaca y sancta Helena – otro Canónigo de Mechuacán
 11. Los Sanctos Marcos y Lucas Evangelistas – a un Canónigo de Guaxaca
 12. Sant Matías y Sant Bernabé Apóstoles – Thesorero de Guadalajara
 13. Santiago el Menor y Sant Thadeo Apóstol – Chantre de Guadalajara
 14. Sant Bartholomé, sant Matheo Apóstol – Arcediano de Mechoacán
 15. Sant Andrés Apóstol – un Canónigo de esta Sancta Yglesia
 16. and 17. Sant Pablo, la Casa de Loreto, Sant Ioseph y Sancta Ana – dos Racioneros desta Cathedral delante del palio
 18. La Sanctissima Cruz – un Canónigo de esta Sancta Yglesia
 19. La Sagrade Espina – Señor Inquisidor, electo Obispo de Xalisco
-

Histories of pain

The relic of Saint Hippolytus was given special prominence in the procession, in contrast to its subordinate position in the initial inventory of the Roman shipment. Displayed in a large, silver arm reliquary, it led the procession. The choice to place this relic at the forefront of the procession linked the celebration's central theme of early Christian martyrdom to the story of the Spanish conquest of the city. After the victory over the Aztecs and the destruction of Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521—the same day on which this saint's feast is celebrated annually—Hippolytus was elected patron saint of Mexico City and New Spain. Leading the 1578 procession, his raised arm now paved the way for an ecclesiastical conquest of the city.⁴⁰

The importance of this relic was further emphasized by the first arch (**fig. 2, no. 1**), which stood at the entrance to Calle Santo Domingo and was dedicated to him and the other martyrs. Centered on the entablature of the arch was a painting depicting the saint's martyrdom by being tied to horses and dragged to death. A later painting of the same subject by Alonso Vázquez, which echoes Morales's description in many respects, gives a sense of what the image on the arch might have looked like (**fig. 3**).⁴¹ The saint is shown being pulled by horses into an urban space, and it is in the execution of this movement—which was reenacted by the relic procession—that he suffers his graceful martyrdom. Thus, right at the beginning of the procession, the performative nexus of triumphant architecture, history painting, and the martyr's relic intoned, as an underlying theme of the event, a fundamental connection between the movement of bodies and the experience of pain and grace.

The figure of Hippolytus seems to have exemplified in particular the suffering experienced by the Christian conquistadors and missionaries, who saw themselves as martyrs in the spread of Christianity.⁴² That their sacrifices were not in vain was attested within the procession by a dance of native children dressed in the manner of local tradition, who sang, in Nahuatl, praises to the saints and especially their patron saint, Hippolytus, with accompaniment from an organ and native instruments. The saint, tortured in Rome, thus found his exaltation in Mexico thanks to the Spanish «martyrs.»⁴³

Meanwhile, the figure of Hippolytus could represent only inadequately or not at all the unspeakable suffering of the Indigenous people at the hands of European invaders and as a result of the destruction of their culture. From the missionaries' point of view, this human suffering may largely have been a necessary evil. Nevertheless, the procession made a gesture of identification with these past and present hardships on the part of the Indigenous population by foregrounding a reliquary that addressed this theme in a suggestive way. Morales mentions a box of crimson velvet, richly studded with silver, that was carried immediately behind the reliquary of Hippolytus, thus being assigned



Figure 3 – Alonso Vázquez, The Martyr of Saint Hippolytus with Hernán Cortés at prayer, oil on canvas, 103 x 71 cm, 1605-7, Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Historia, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, inv. 10-23823

second position in the procession. This vessel, with relatively modest dimensions of about 40 cm long and 30 cm high, must have contained more than 130 relics, namely all the contents of the Roman shipment not otherwise displayed in reliquaries.⁴⁴ Given the size of the box, it is clear, firstly, that most of its contents must have been very small pieces. Therefore, in addition to the approximately twenty percent of the relics that could not be identified, a large portion of those that could in fact be matched to known saints remained anonymous by being gathered in this single reliquary for the procession. The box thus symbolizes the treasury of the saints, whose individual stories and identities need not be named or even known in order for them to be recognized before God. The anonymity and semantic indeterminacy of many of the relics, amplified in the case of those that were communalized within this treasure chest, speaks to the liminal character of martyrdom itself—martyrdom being a process, beyond the purview of the earthly church, of sublimating suffering into grace.

The conqueror-patron of Mexico, Hippolytus, was thus immediately followed by a reliquary that epitomized the value even of anonymous and institutionally unremembered suffering when endured for the glory of God. Precisely because names and other signs were missing from this reliquary chest, its shape and materiality may have been of particular semantic significance. As with the design of its silver mountings, which Morales describes as «romano,» viewers would likely have associated the velvet of the chest with a European origin. Moreover, it is not far-fetched to imagine, in the context of the relics of martyrs, a connection being drawn between the crimson velvet and dried blood. The material of silver, on the other hand, carried strong local implications. North of Mexico City, the Spanish operated silver mines in Pachuca, Ixmiquilpan, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas.⁴⁵ Morales himself emphasized the material's Mexican identity, stressing the local origin of the silver employed in the creation of the arm reliquary of Hippolytus.⁴⁶ This connection becomes even clearer when one recalls that Alonso de Villaseca was the greatest sponsor of the Jesuits in New Spain, including funding the construction of the Jesuit college and the manufacture of important reliquaries in the procession's aftermath. Villaseca, nicknamed «el rico,» was one of the owners of the New Spanish silver mines—and thus one of the men most enriched by the exploitation of the Indigenous population.⁴⁷ Indeed, the productivity of the silver mines in the decades following the conquest was largely maintained through various forms of forced labor. In addition to local Indigenous inhabitants, convicts were also forced to perform the arduous and extremely dangerous labor in Villaseca's mines.⁴⁸ According to Cubillo Moreno's account, the death toll from mine labor contributed not insignificantly to the horrendous decimation of the Indigenous population of New Spain.⁴⁹

Their suffering and martyrdom being closely bound to the mining of silver, the Indigenous people thus made a very concrete contribution to the ornamental appearance of the procession and to the appreciation of the holy bones. The theme of the Indigenous

subjects' sacrifice of treasures was reiterated elsewhere in the festive decoration, this time being explicitly linked to the reliquary chest. The rich adornment of the college's garden included eleven panels of *hieroglificas* (emblematic combinations of image and text), one of which showed a personification of the city of Mexico in indigenous garb. She held gold and silver in her left hand, signaling her refutation of such riches, while with her right she received the chest of relics (*el cofre de la Sanctas Reliquias*). The words of the personification, given in the text associated with the image, refer to a classic topos of disdain for material wealth over spiritual treasure: «*Exchanged be my riches, for before this treasure, silver is straw and gold is mud.*»⁵⁰

While the reliquaries and triumphal arches encountered throughout the procession introduced further thematic aspects, the suffering and triumph of the martyrs remained the basso continuo from the outset. In specific, the martyrs were again honored with their own reliquary at the eighth spot in the processional order; however, Morales does not specify the saints presented therein (**app. 2**). The theme culminated with the staging of the last reliquaries—around in the middle of the procession, a place traditionally reserved for the most important relics.⁵¹ Here, the Passion relics were carried by an unnamed Jesuit canon and the newly elected bishop of Xalisco, Francisco santos García, who was also the grand inquisitor of New Spain.⁵² The instruments of the Passion represented the sacrifice of Christ as the model for all Christian martyrs and, at the same time, the actual power of the institution that possessed the relics. It is certainly no coincidence that the thorn—the instrument of suffering that, due to its shape, most clearly demonstrated the pain it was capable of inflicting—was presented in the hand of the grand inquisitor. In Europe more broadly, the Crown of Thorns and the individual *spinae Christi* were relics often associated with secular power.⁵³ The event was thus also an expression of the Church's claim to power and of its right to exercise this power by secular means. This statement of ecclesiastical authority was upheld by the representatives of secular power—from the leaders of the city government and the city judiciary, who carried the canopy under which the two Passion relics were presented, as well as from the viceroy and the members of the Real Audiencia, who followed directly after them, without carrying any relics themselves.

«*Con los huesos predicamos*»

By distributing the relics in the procession among a total of nineteen reliquaries, and through their designing of the triumphal arches, the Jesuits were able to develop further themes. In addition to the category of *santos casados*, i.e. married saints, which was newly defined for the procession,⁵⁴ the group of virgins, whose relics were gathered in their own reliquary, and the triumphal arch dedicated to the Holy Family (**fig. 2, no. 6**) each emphasized the importance of certain social behaviors and institutions

propagated by the Church. Another theme of social relevance was Christian education. This concern, central to the Jesuits,⁵⁵ was highlighted by the reliquary of the *santos doctores* as well as by the arch specially dedicated to them, which had been donated by the youth of the city (**fig. 2, no. 8**).⁵⁶ Other processional reliquaries, such as those containing the relics of Saint Dominic and Saint Augustine, certainly served a function within internal Church politics, incorporating and honoring the religious orders that had been present in New Spain before the Jesuits.

The Jesuits generally attributed to the sacred bones an outstanding ability to convey Christian content. This was made clear by another hieroglyph panel in the garden of the college. Above the image of a pulpit, which in lieu of a preacher showed a bone surrounded by light, toward which the Indigenous people turned, appeared the verses: «*With our tongues we cannot / do what we wish / with the bones we preach.*»⁵⁷ Similar to what contemporary ecclesiastical author Gabriele Paleotti assumed for Christian images,⁵⁸ relics here were assumed to be able to convey meaning even across linguistic barriers. In this sense, the Jesuits presented the bones as an important means of encouraging faith in Christian saints and as a tool in the fight against acts of heresy and idolatry by the Mexicans.⁵⁹

It is remarkable that the Jesuits in their descriptions gave little space to the thaumaturgic powers usually attributed to relics. Besides the already mentioned meteorological peculiarity of the lack of precipitation during the repair of the church's roof, not a single miracle is mentioned in connection with the translational celebrations. It was not until two years after the feast that Morales reported to the general of the order, without specifying further, that water that had come into contact with the Holy Thorn made present the miracles of the Lord every day.⁶⁰ By emphasizing their ordinariness (*cada día*), Morales deprives the miracles of their essential characteristic of exceptionality. With this renunciation of supernatural events in their texts, Morales and his friars clearly set themselves apart from medieval reports of relic translations, in which miracles played a central role.⁶¹ The extent to which this departure from traditional accounts of miracles—a departure evident also in descriptions of the circulation of sacred images at this moment⁶²—is a Jesuit peculiarity or corresponds to a general post-Tridentine caution cannot be discussed further here. What is clear is that the Jesuits, assuming that (Indigenous) people were very much influenced by the external senses,⁶³ spared no effort to convey the Christian message by all available material and aesthetic means, recognizing also the need for linguistic and cultural translation.

A global network of holy bones

In the Christian mission, the bodily relics of the saints not only served to sacralize and spiritually take possession of certain sites—for example, in the course of the

consecration of altars—or to communicate Christian dogmas and discourage heresy: they also connected distinct places that shared, in the form of relics, the body of a saint. This calls to mind Carneiro da Cunha's notion of relics as vehicles that transport memories as well as places.⁶⁴ Pierre-Antoine Fabre has proposed that, simultaneous with the Jesuit college in Mexico, the college in Rome received a papal gift of relics, a «transfer simultanée» that reinforced and deepened the relationship between these two Jesuit sites.⁶⁵ Similarly, Coello de la Rosa sees the distribution of relics, as well as the much better researched missionary use of sacred images,⁶⁶ as part of a global strategy on the part of the Jesuits.⁶⁷

The translation of the institution of the Roman Church that was symbolically accomplished by the Jesuits through the transfer of the relics, and through which Mexico City was to become the Rome of the New World, was in fact only the first step toward more far-reaching goals. The first triumphal arch in the procession, donated by the Jesuits themselves and dedicated to the apostles (**fig. 2, no. 7**), illustrated the mandate resulting from the relic donation. Between the columns on the lower register of the arch appeared an unidentified figure, described by Morales as a philosopher; an accompanying panel of text articulated that, in the future, Mexico City itself should become a transmitter of relics: «*Times will see that from here / they will go further / [From] Goa to Japan, [from] Mexico to China / They will send Holy Bones and fine people.*»⁶⁸ The philosopher's prophecy deliberately plays with the linking of different, and somewhat unclear, spatial and temporal locations. If «here» (*de aquí*) is understood to indicate Rome, then the prediction would have already been fulfilled with the arrival of the Roman martyrs in New Spain. However, by shifting the «here» to Mexico, it can also be read as a reference to the future mission emanating from the viceroyalty.

A pressing concern for the Societas was that its brothers who had been murdered in the course of missionary activity be recognized as martyrs and, as possible, be beatified or canonized. This was achieved first with the cofounder of the Societas, Francis Xavier, who had died of fever on Shangchuan Island, off the coast of China. He was canonized in 1620, and from Goa (present-day southwestern India) his bones were disseminated globally.⁶⁹ For New Spain, however, it was Felipe de Jesús who, through his martyrdom suffered in Japan in 1597, fulfilled the prophecy pronounced on the triumphal arch. Born in Mexico City in 1572, Felipe was the first Mexican to be beatified, in 1627, being subsequently canonized in 1862, and his bones are venerated on various continents.⁷⁰ Felipe was not a Jesuit but a Franciscan. However, according to his later hagiographers, he had been a Latin student at the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo (**fig. 4**). Though there is no evidence of this in the archives of the college,⁷¹ Felipe's alleged period of training served to link the martyrdom of the Mexican future saint to the tradition of ancient martyrs whose relics were transferred from Rome, thus further spinning the global web of holy bones.



Figure 4 – José Montes de Oca, The boy Felipe de Jesús as student of Grammar at the Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo, from *Vida de San Felipe de Jesús protomartir de Japon, y patron de su patria Mexico, Mexico City 1801*, fol. [IV r.], engraving and etching, 23.2 x 16.4 cm

Conclusion

The large shipment of relics from Rome embodied an almost complete assembly of the most important saints and representatives of forms of holy life, thus signaling a transfer of the foundation of the *Ecclesia Romana*, along with its traditions and hierarchies, to Mexico City. At the same time, by highlighting individual saints while incorporating others into various subgroups within lists, reliquaries, and the sequence and program of the translation procession, the Jesuits were able to address a variety of religious and social issues. The case of the 1578 procession demonstrates the enormous potential of relics—as embodiments of persons, places, memories, divine grace, and worldly power—to generate meaning in the course of their performative activation. Particularly relevant, yet little studied, with regard to the bodies of the martyrs is the ability of relics to represent pain and suffering and to reinterpret it as a form of triumph and grace.⁷² Asserting control over past, present, and future pain was among the essential goals of the translation procession. The regional foundation of ecclesiastical power that was accomplished with the transfer of these relic holdings was, at the same time, part of a global strategy to present Mexico City as a new center within a global network of holy bodies. Mexico was not only to be the recipient but also the sender. Analysis of the early modern dissemination of bodily relics—not only from Rome but running in multipolar networks among the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Europe—is a desideratum that can only be successfully undertaken via similar multipolar networks, through the cooperation of many disciplines and expertises.

1. Authoritative for later analyses of the feast is the 1579 description by the Jesuit Pedro de Morales, edited by Mariscal Hay. MARISCAL HAY (2000). On the Roman gift of relics and its transfer to New Spain FABRE (2016), (2014), (2011). On Indigenous participation RUBIAL GARCÍA (2010), pp. 199-203; ARACIL VARÓN (2008). On theatrical performances ARRÓNIZ (1979); JOHNSON (1941).

2. FOLETTI (2018), p. 64: «*il potere dei santi si manifestava con più facilità quando questi ultimi erano in movimento.*» See also REUDENBACH (2015), p. 145.

3. HENRIQUES (2022); LUCHERINI (2018); RIHOUEU (2017); DEFRIES (2010); LEGNER (1995), pp. 120-133.

4. GVOZDEVA and VELTEN (2011), p. 12: «*Prozessionen ,bedeuten' nicht einfach nur etwas, sondern sie konstituieren Wirklichkeit, d.h. sie stellen im Vollzug etwas her, das außerhalb ihrer selbst als Referenz nicht verfügbar ist. Insofern [...] sind sie Medien der Annäherung an dieses Unverfügbare, performative Praktiken der Konstruktion eines Zwischenraums von Faktualität und Imaginärem.*» Translation my own.

5. GEORGE (2018), p. 37; SCHMITT (2011).

6. FABRE (2014) shows that the spatial translation of relics can be accompanied by a recontextualization and thus a possible change in their meaning.

7. LUCHERINI (2018), p. 18.

8. On the dangers of relic processions DEFRIES (2011).
9. GEARY (1986), p. 172; BÄRSCH (2015), pp. 175-176.
10. HEINZELMANN (1979), pp. 63-64, 102.
11. SÁNCHEZ BAQUERO (1945), p. 117. On the problem of the reproduction of performativity in written sources and the text's own performativity, see GVOZDEVA and VELTEN (2011), pp. 13-15.
12. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. XLIV.
13. On the title page of the 1579 edition. <https://repositorio.tec.mx/handle/11285/637201?show=full>.
14. RUBIAL GARCÍA (2010), p. 203 sees this as the expression of a universalistic claim.
15. SÁNCHEZ BAQUERO (1945), pp. 8-9.
16. *Relacion breve* (1995), pp. 43-56. Later descriptions by Jesuit historiographers, such as Francisco de Florencia and Alegre Francisco Javier, are not considered here.
17. CUAUHTLEHUANITZIN CHIMALPAHIN (1965), pp. 283-284.
18. GARZA RÍOS DE CREEL, Beatriz and BOLAÑOS DE ARAIZA (1999); SÁNCHEZ REYES (2004), pp. 291-293.
19. Sánchez Baquero does not explicitly state that Villaseca was presented with a relic of Saint Peter. SÁNCHEZ BAQUERO (1945), p. 126.
20. MARISCAL HAY (2020) p. 49.
21. SÁNCHEZ REYES (2004), pp. 291-293 has studied this case and suspects that the relic was sent to Mexico at a later date or forged.
22. ZUBILLAGA (1956), pp. 104, 192-193, 213, 430.
23. ALCALÁ (2011), p. 170.
24. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 18.
25. SÁNCHEZ BAQUERO (1945), p. 115. The report about the recovered relics is also not credible, as Sánchez Baquero claims that the ship sank off the coast of Mexico and that the relics washed up. However, the subsequent Jesuit correspondence with Rome makes clear that the ship sank while still in the Mediterranean.
26. *Relacion breve* (1995), p. 55.
27. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 3f. On the hesitant acceptance of Roman relics and their relatively minor role in the mission in New Spain compared to the veneration of images, see FABRE (2014) and (2016).
28. In the annual report of Pedro de Morales. See ZUBILLAGA (1956), p. 437.
29. ZUBILLAGA (1956), pp. 521-522.: «[C]onfiamos en la divina Majestad que ha de ser este colegio santuario de reliquias y devoción para toda esta Nueva España.»
30. The prestige of a church treasury depends less on the quantity than on the reputation of its relics. GEORGE (2018), p. 40.
31. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 18.
32. The identities of the two men, who are also mentioned in GONZALEZ DE MENDOZA (1616), p. 822, as kings of Persia and of Africa, respectively, could not be determined. Holy kings of this name are not found in the *Acta Sanctorum*.
33. On this aspect of missionary relic use, see for example CYMBALISTA (2006).
34. See RUBIAL GARCÍA (2010), 199-201.
35. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 93. The author of *Relacione breve* (1995), p. 54, describes that the celebration on that day went deep into the night.
36. The exact location of the ephemeral architectures is not clear in many cases. In particular, the location of the final arches around the Jesuit Colegio is hypothetical and requires on-site investigation.
37. For reconstruction of the arches, see HERNÁNDEZ TELLES (2018).
38. MARISCAL HAY (2000), pp. 24-25.
39. LEGNER (1995), p. 69.
40. RUBIAL GARCÍA (2010), p. 203.
41. MARISCAL HAY (2000), pp. 29-30.
42. Thus, the soldiers of Hernán Cortéz interred the bones of the comrades sacrificed by the Aztecs in the church they built in the urban area, which they consecrated "Los Martires." See DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO, Bernal (1632), p. 153r. The example of Hippolytus, however, was restored to the larger context of early Christian martyrs by the side archways dedicated to the protomartyr Saint Stephen and Saint Lawrence, whose relics were among those translated but were not specifically highlighted in the procession.
43. On the back of the arch was an inscription reading «*Hyppólito glorioso, [...] que si Roma os arrastrado / México os ensalçará.*» MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 30. Regarding the song STEVENSON (1976), pp. 203-204.
44. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 7.
45. CUBILLO MORENO (1991), p. 146.
46. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 7.
47. CUBILLO MORENO (1991), p. 197: «[L]a verdadera fuente de riqueza era el trabajo indígena que sin él, esos metales quedarían estáticos y sin valor en el seno de la tierra.» On the proverbial wealth of Villaseca, see FLORENCIA (1694), p. 303.
48. ZAVALA (1985), pp. 160-161.
49. CUBILLO MORENO (1991), p. 201.
50. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 98: «*Trocado sea mi riqueza, que delante tal thesoro, plata es paja y lodo el oro.*» See also REUDENBACH (2002).
51. DEFRIES (2011), p. 586.
52. *Relacion breve* (1995), p. 54.
53. LEGNER (1995), pp. 79, 88.
54. Although of the saints present among the relics, only Chrysanthus and Daría are recognized as a married couple.
55. Pedagogy was of enormous importance to the Jesuits in New Spain, as evidenced not least by the founding of numerous colleges and schools. ARRÓNIZ (1979), p. 148f.
56. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 67.
57. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 96. «*Con la lengua no pudimos / hacer lo que deseamos / con los huesos predicamos.*»
58. PALEOTTI (1961), p. 221. According to Paleotti, images were a common language (*linguaggio comune*) understood by people from all nations.
59. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 4.
60. ZUBILLAGA (1956), p. 522. Similarly vague is the *Relacion breve* (1995), pp. 54-55, which speaks generally of miracles of healing with the thorn and the *lignum crucis*. More specific are the subsequent descriptions of weather-related miracles with reference to the copy of the icons of Mary from Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which arrived before the relics.
61. HEINZELMANN (1979), pp. 63-66.
62. In the course of the diffusion in the Indian mission territories of copies of the icon of Mary from Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome—an icon attributed to the evangelist Luke and central to the Jesuits—there is no evidence of miracles. Rather, the Jesuits' reports emphasize the artistic-aesthetic potency of the image. See SAVIELLO (2017).

63. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 4: «*los naturales (que tanto por lo exterior se mueven)*»
64. CUNHA (1996), p. 81.
65. FABRE (2014), p. 219.
66. For the construction of a network of copies of the icon of the Virgin Mary from Santa Maria Maggiore, see D'ELIA (1954); SAVIELLO (2021).
67. COELLO DE LA ROSA (2018).
68. MARISCAL HAY (2000), p. 54: «*Tiempos vernán que de aquí / yrán más adelante / [De] Goa à Giapone, [de] México a la China / Osse Sancte daran, é gente fina.*»
69. SCHURHAMMER (1965).
70. On the spread of the cult of the twenty-seven martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597, see OMATA RAPPO (2020).
71. On the life of Felipe de Jesús, see CONOVER and CONOVER (2011), p. 462.
72. Brown emphasizes the connection between the pains suffered by the martyrs and the healing miracles associated with their relics. Brown (2009), p. 79: «*At the root of every miracle of healing at a martyr's shrine of late antiquity there lay a miracle of pain [...]*»

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