

A Roman Chapel for Saint Rose in Lima. The commission of Melchiorre Caffà's sculpture, four paintings produced by the 'best European artist', and hundreds of medals to spread her worship

Una capilla romana en Lima para Santa Rosa. La comisión de la escultura de Melchiorre Caffà, cuatro pinturas del mejor artista de Europa y cientos de medallas para la difusión de su culto

Rafael Japón

Universidad de Granada, España / Università di Bologna, Italia

ORCID: 0000-0002-4203-2786

rafaeljaponf@gmail.com

Abstract

In 1668, the festivities for the beatification of Rose of Lima took place in Rome. Its organization was overseen by some Dominican friars who arrived from the Peruvian capital, led by Fray Antonio González de Acuña. The most important piece of art created for this occasion was the famous marble sculpture representing Rose in ecstasy with an angel, made by Melchiorre Caffà. In this article, it is possible to confirm with unprecedented documentation, to whom and why was commissioned this piece of art, and one of a series of paintings of Rose's life probably attributed to Lazzaro Baldi. This article also studies some pieces of goldsmith, which would serve after the beatification for the ornate of the chapel and altarpiece of Rose in the church of Santo Domingo, Lima. Then, the social pretensions of the González de Acuña family as the main patrons of the chapel are also clarified. Finally, this article serves as a documentation for the petition of hundreds of commemorative medals made for the event in precious metals with the effigy of Pope Clemente IX and the future Saint.

Key Words

Rose of Lima, Melchiorre Caffà, Beatification, Lazzaro Baldi, Rome, Lima, Family González de Acuña

Resumen

En 1668, tuvieron lugar en Roma las festividades para la beatificación de Rosa de Lima y su organización fue supervisada por algunos frailes dominicanos que llegaron de la capital peruana, encabezados por fray Antonio González de Acuña. La obra de arte más importante creada para esta ocasión fue la famosa escultura de mármol que representa a Rosa en éxtasis con un ángel, realizada por Melchiorre Caffà. En esta contribución, es posible confirmar con documentación inédita quién y por qué se le encargó esta obra de arte, y una serie de pinturas de la vida de la futura santa atribuidas probablemente a Lazzaro Baldi. Este artículo también estudia algunas piezas de orfebrería, que servirían después de la beatificación para el adorno de la capilla y el retablo de Rosa en la iglesia de Santo Domingo, Lima. Además, también se aclaran las pretensiones sociales de la familia González de Acuña como principales mecenas de la capilla. Finalmente, esta contribución documenta la creación de cientos de medallas conmemorativas hechas para este evento en metales preciosos con la efigie del papa Clemente IX y la santa.

Palabras clave

Santa Rosa de Lima, Melchiorre Caffà, Beatificación, Lazzaro Baldi, Roma, Lima, Familia González de Acuña.

In the May 2016 issue of Burlington Magazine, Shawon Kinew published a series of four sonnets produced by Orazio Quaranta in 1668 for the beatification of Saint Rose of Lima. Although said sonnets are very well known,¹ he attached the verses containing the description of one of the distinguished Saint Rose marble sculptures created by Melchiorre Cafà (fig. 1) for the celebrations that took place in Rome.² The title of the first poem, stating “To the Marble Sculpture of Blessed Rose of Lima, asleep, and later awake, in the sight of an Angel, before her Beatification”, is eloquent enough to confirm its resemblance with the aforementioned effigy, which, on the other hand, is the only one known to have been created for such an occasion. According to various sources, the cited statue was placed on the central altars of the two theatres built for the beatification ceremonies. The first ceremony was celebrated in Saint Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican by Pope Clement IX. The other one, held a few weeks later, took place in Santa Maria sopra Minerva Church by the Dominican Friars.³

In the same article, the author also included the description of the ceremonial decoration of that last church done by Carlo Cartari, a Bolognese lawyer, scholar and Federico Borromeo’s godchild. In the description, he also explains that the sculpture was later sent to Lima.⁴ Indeed, the beautiful Rose of Lima, sculpted in fine marble, arrived at El

1. Mújica Pinilla, R., *Rosa limensis: mística, política e iconografía en torno a la patrona de América*, México, D. F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005, págs. 258-260. The research for this article is part of my PhD Thesis under joint supervision between the Universidad de Granada and the Università di Bologna entitled “La influencia de la pintura italiana en la escuela barroca sevillana” (The influence of the Italian painting in the Sevillian Baroque School).

2. Kinew, S., “New sources for Melchiorre Cafà’s 1665 sculpture of Rose of Lima”, *The Burlington magazine*, 158, 2016, págs. 345-348.

3. According to Giovanni Battista Marini, a third ceremony with the same purpose was performed in the San Giacomo degli Spagnoli Church as totally unknown event, Cfr. Marinis, J. B., *Breve relación de la vida de la beata Rosa de Sta. Maria, del Orden de nuestro padre Santo Domingo en el reino del Perú en la ciudad de Lima*, Roma, s.n., 1668, f. 3; confirmed through Bullarum Ordinis FF. Praedicatorum, where there was another celebration in the convent of Saint Sabine all’Aventino is also pointed out. It is in this convent where the papal bull was signed and in whose portico was placed a plaster statue of the saint (cf. Polvorosa López, T., “La canonización de Santa Rosa de Lima a través del Bullarum Ordines FF. Praedicatorum”, *Actas del I Congreso Internacional sobre los Dominicos y el Nuevo Mundo* (Sevilla, 21-25 de abril de 1987), Madrid, Deimos, 1987, pág. 631. The celebration made in the San Giacomo degli Spagnoli Church is described in De la Parra, Fr. J., *Rosa laureada entre los santos, epitalamios sacros de la Corte, aclamaciones de España... al feliz desposorio que celebró en la Gloria con Christo la Beata Virgen Rosa de Santa María*, Madrid, por Domingo García Morras, 1670, págs. 109-112.

4. Kinew, S., *Op. Cit.*, pág. 348.



1.- *Saint Rose of Lima* with an Angel, Melchiorre Cafà. 1665. Marble, 82 by 147 cm. (Convent of Santo Domingo, Lima)

Callao seaport in 1670.⁵ After a spectacular procession, it was brought to the Saint's hometown in order to decorate her funerary chapel, which was already located in Our Lady of the Rosary's Basilica (also known as Santo Domingo's Basilica).

Studying these two intrinsically different sources, Kinew was venturing to corroborate Jennifer Montagu's theory which stated that the statue was commissioned by Father Antonio González de Acuña, a Dominican friar from Lima, who was in charge of ensuring the success of Saint Rose's proclamation festivities.⁶ In fact, Quaranta's sonnets were dedicated to González and, additionally, Cartari's chronicle also identifies the same figure as leader of the sacred company. This suggests that the Dominican friar could have commissioned Melchiorre Cafà with this work as part of the ceremonies decorative program along with a broader project arranged by the Dominican Order in Lima. However, the discovery of this new documentation allows us to specify the nature of the famous statue in detail. While it is true that it was Antonio González de Acuña who commissioned the sculptor, the statue's main purpose was not just the decoration of Roman churches and, most likely, the Order was not even the one in charge of financing it. In addition to his commission of getting Saint Rose to be beatified, Antonio's arrival to Rome was also due to another commend involving his family. His parents, Catalina de Acuña and Francisco González (his father having

5. Mugaburu, J. de, *Diario de Lima (1640-1694) crónica de la época colonial*, Lima, Imp. de Librería Sanmartí y Ca, 1917, págs. 198-199; Hampe Martínez, T., *Santidad e identidad criolla: estudio del proceso de canonización de Santa Rosa*, Cuzco, Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos "Bartolomé de las Casas", 1998, pág. 80.

6. Kinew, S., *Op. Cit.*, pág. 347.

already passed away during the years studied), were the ones who paid for the theatre decoration and Cafà's statue itself, with their own money.

Albeit this marble beauty was admired with great passion even among Roman poets, it was not the only high-quality artistic work. Four paintings were commissioned to an artist whose name is unknown, but whose high-quality work and talent is so well described as follows: "[...] *these pieces being so precious that in Europe there can be found none better than them*".⁷ To this generous set, an altar frontal made of precious stones was added. It was formed by silver plates that probably constituted a rose with stones stuffed in its centre;⁸ or, possibly, by lapis lazuli and other precious stones gem-set in bronze and gold with medallions with episodes of the Saint, as specifies by some authors such as De la Parra.⁹ Moreover, there was a catafalque for the Saint's remains and various, apparently ostentatious and Roman-factored, pieces of fabric for the liturgy. Although the Bolognese chronicler only points out the statue decorative purpose in the Roman church, it could be argued that the rest of the elements were also used as ornaments since Cartari himself mentions four more paintings that represent the Saint's miracles, along with one more painting representing her portrait.¹⁰ In addition, De la Parra confirms the use of several cycles of paintings for the decoration of the facade of the church and for the theatre of the high altar.¹¹

However, as it has been previously stated, this important artistic commission final aim was not that of enhancing and embellishing the beatification theatre, but that of constituting the chapel complete iconographic program for the church and convent of Santo Domingo

7. Archivio Storico Capitolino di Roma (ASC), Archivio Urbano, sezione 1, libro 360, [S.F]. See Appendix 1.

8. Meléndez, J., *Tesoros verdaderos de las Yndias en la Historia de la gran Provincia de San Juan Bautista del Perv*, II, Roma, imprenta de Nicolas Angel Tinassio, 1681, pág. 467.

9. De la Parra, Fr. J., *Op. Cit.*, pág. 107.

10. This fact completes Vittorio Casale's hypothesis about the reutilization of the large paintings in the Vatican's altar. Although he is right when asserting that the Saint's portrait was placed in Minerva's altar, he also mentions that at least two large canvases were transported to Rome, when in fact, the whole series was transported. Cfr.: Casale, V., *L' arte per le canonizzazioni. L'attività artistica intorno alle canonizzazioni e alle beatificazioni nel Seicento*, Torino, Allemandi & C., 2011, pág. 157; All paintings of the series were accompanied by a caption with an episode of the life of Saint Rose. For example, it is emphasized a very interesting portrait of Gregory IX with Carlos II and his mother Mariana de Austria that was crowning the altar. Cfr.: De la Parra, Fr. J., *Op. Cit.*, pág. 106.

11. De la Parra, Fr. J., *Op. Cit.*, págs. 102-105.



2- Saint Rosa of Lima Chapel, paintings and frescoes by Lazzaro Baldi. c. 1668.
(Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome).

as a tribute to Saint Rose. Albeit it is true that Cafà's work is the only one that seems to have transcended to our days, it appears that the remaining works that have been mentioned were also incorporated in the same expedition, since all of them were created "*for the aforementioned blessed Rose's chapel's ornamentation*".¹² Therefore, if those four beatification paintings were the same ones that were sent to Lima for that occasion, this act could be understood as an attempt to emulate the Colonna Chapel from the Church of Santa María sopra Minerva in Lima (fig. 2) since said works were probably produced by Lazzaro Baldi, who was the author of both cycles.¹³

On the other hand, it should be mentioned that González de Acuña also financed the decoration of the Roman chapel in addition to the one dedicated to St. Louis Bertrand, another Spanish Saint who was canonized on the same occasion, in the same church. This would make the theory of a possible contract with Baldi plausible, who, in that case, may have been commissioned to produce the two sets for both chapels, even following the same models. If that were true, the miraculous scenes in the exported paintings referred to by the Bolognese chronicler would have presented the different appearances that abound in Saint Rose's hagiography. That is, the appearances of the Child Jesus, Christ, and the Virgin. It is important to remember that Baldi was specialized in large-format paintings created for this kind of events, thus he organized a broad and prosperous painting workshop thanks to the numerous sanctification festivities carried out during the second half of the XVII c. in Rome.¹⁴

Therefore, Antonio González de Acuña, probably following the advice from someone around him who was acquainted with the Roman artistic context, not only designed the ephemeral beatification celebrations and their decoration, but also a Roman-Baroque iconographic program for the place where Saint Rose would be buried and venerated in Lima. This is an important statement, since, she was the first person to be beatified in the American continent, thus her role in the constitution of a Creole identity awareness in South Americans with Creole origins

12. See note 7.

13. Bouillaud, C., *Breue relatione della solennissima festa della beatificazione della beata Rosa di Santa Maria natiua della città di Lima nel Perù*, Roma, imprenta de Nicolas Angel Tinassio, 1668, pág. 5; Casale, V., *Op. Cit.*, pág. 156.

14. Casale, V., "I quadri di canonizzazione: Lazzaro Baldi, Giacomo Zoboli; produzione, riproduzione e qualità", *Paragone Arte*, 33, 1982, págs. 33-61.

has been largely discussed¹⁵. In this sense, the priest, born in Lima but from Spanish parents (as in the case of Saint Rose herself), decided along with his family to build a Roman chapel for the South American Saint, possibly to ennoble her identity and spread her worship. It was

also useful for this attempt the manufacture of 740 medals of different materials which were sent and spread all around the city of Lima, as specified in a power of attorney in which the pieces description and inventory are recorded (see Appendix 2). Seven hundred out of the seven hundred and forty medals were cast in silver and brass, in different sizes, upon which the Saint effigy was carved. The rest were cast in bronze, with Pope Leo X carved on one side, and an epitaph commemorating Saint Rose's beatification carved on the other side (fig. 3).¹⁶ It is assumed that this delivery was different from the aforementioned works since the power of attorney was signed in February the following year, and the main goal was transporting the heirloom of Saint Faustus' body from Rome to de Vera Cruz Chapel, which was adjacent to the Dominican Temple in Lima.



3.- Papal medal of Clemente IX (1667-1669), 1668, Bronze. (Artemide action house, Dogana).

Friar Antonio González de Acuña went back to America in 1673 after Saint Rose's canonization. He was probably the one providing the necessary money for the ornamentation of Saint Peter's theatre, where the ovation for the Saint took place around Lorenzo Bernini's luxurious baldachin. Some years after the beatification, he was appointed bishop of Caracas,¹⁷ a position that he had previously held before his flawless work in Rome where he had to conduct the canonizations of Saint Rose and St. Louis Bertrand in 1672. Although at the time he accepted the task, potentially his most ambitious goal, his real aim was to consolidate his family (a very economically prosperous and noble lineage, as it is implied by all the money they spent for such occasions) as one of the most socially relevant families, not only in Lima, but all around the Hispanic world, by

15. Hampe Martínez, T., "El proceso de canonización de Santa Rosa (nuevas luces sobre la identidad criolla en el Perú colonial)", *Historia sacra*, 98, 1996), págs. 719-740.

16. See note 7.

17. Larios Ramos, A., "El dominico Antonio González de Acosta, primer obispo de Caracas", *Actas del II Congreso Internacional sobre los Dominicos y el Nuevo Mundo (Salamanca, 28 de marzo-1 de abril de 1989)*, Salamanca, Editorial San Esteban, 1990, pág. 563.

relating themselves to the sanctification of the first American Saint. This theory is confirmed, as said disbursement was gladly compensated with the permission to bury some secular female members from the González de Acuña family in the same place as the Saint:

“Father Fr. Juan Bautista de Marin, Master General of the same order [...] it is allowed, in recognition of the many pious works and other fair causes carried out [...] grants, instructs and perpetually appoints, in favour of said lady Mrs. Catalina de Acuña, her daughter Mrs. Beatriz González, her sister Mrs. Isabel de Acuña, and their heirs, their creditors and missing immediate relatives [...] the burial place located at the entrance, on the right of the preachers’ convent of the aforementioned city of Lima [...] so that they and whoever from their family can, in their own time, in perpetuum, enjoy, have, and be buried in said burial place as their own”.¹⁸

Nevertheless, all the efforts in creating a Roman chapel in Lima seemed to disappear after the 1678 earthquake, which was less than a decade after the arrival of the Italian works, resulting in the total destruction of the church and the partial damage of the rest of the convent. In all likelihood, the canvases were totally damaged, and the frontal made of precious stones was lost or sold in order to pay for the reconstruction of the religious complex. At least, that is the theory supported by this article since it is hard to understand how such a rich and important area has not transcended or been documented in any kind of way, and how its track has been totally lost except for Cafà’s distinguished sculpture. It is thanks to this statue survived of the earthquakes, that we continue to have the recollection of one of the most relevant in all America.

Appendix

1.- Juan Bautista Marino, General Master of Predicators, attested to the ornaments that Francisco González and Catalina de Acuña donated to the Chapel of the Blessed Rose in the Our Lady of the Rosary’s Basilica in Lima (ASC, Archivo Urbano, sezione 1, libro 360, [S.F], October 19, 1668):

El reverendísimo Padre fray Juan Bautista de Marino maestro general de la orden de predicadores doy fe que conozco digo que por quanto Francisco González, difunto (que Dios haya), y doña Catalina de Acuña su viuda han

18. See Appendix 1. The saint’s tomb is located in the chapter hall’s crypt.

servido y sirve mucho al convento de Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Lima del dicho orden de predicadores, en que han tenido quatro hijos que por sus trabajos han merecido ser graduados en servicio de la religión que el uno es actual provincial y el otro que es el padre fray Antonio González de Acuña compañero de su reverendísima. Ha trabajado y trabaja actualmente en servicio de dicha religión con satisfacción della en el oficio de secretario, el qual ha alcanzado y promovido con mucho zelo y satisfacción la beatificación y patronato de la ciudad de Lima y reino del Perú extensión de officio para todas las Indias con octavas de la gloriosa madre Rosa de Santa María hasta conseguirla felizmente y celebrarla suntuosamente en que se han gastado muchos millares de ducados de plata, sin que la provincia ni otro ninguno para este efecto hayan concurrido en cosa alguna, y agora envía para el sepulcro de la misma beata Rosa una estatua de mármol, frontal de piedras preciosas, y quatro quadros de celebre pintura para el adorno de la capilla de la dicha beata Rosa, siendo estas piezas tan preciosas que en Europa no las havrá mejores a lo que se puede entender, y echo caja para su sancto cuerpo, terno bordado de casullas de brocado, dalmáticas, pluvial de mantíes, y en depósito para el monumento y otras obras pías que el dicho Francisco González y Catalina de Acuña y sus hijos han hecho y hacen en servicio de la religión, por tanto el dicho reverendísimo Padre fray Juan Bautista de Marin maestro general de dicha orden de su libre y espontánea voluntad en aquellos mejores y modo, vía y forma que mejor y más eficazmente pudo y devió, puede y deve y de derecho le es permitido en reconocimiento de tantas obras pías y por otras justas causas que le mueven a su reverendísima, dio, concedió, asignó, y señaló, da, concede, consigna y señala perpetuamente a favor de dicha señora doña Catalina de Acuña, su hija doña Beatriz González, su hermana doña Isabel de Acuña, y de los herederos, sus creedores dellas y parientes en línea recta ausentes, en presencia de mí, notario por ellos estipulantes, la sepultura que está al entrar del capítulo a mano derecha del convento de predicadores de la dicha ciudad de Lima en la provincia de San Juan Bautista del dicho reyno del Perú en que yace enterrado el licenciado Salvador González, Juan de Uscateguy, y doña Catalina González, padre, hermano, cuñado y sobrina respectivamente del dicho padre reverendísimo fray Antonio González de Acuña para que puedan y qualquier de ellos pueda en su tiempo, in perpetuum, goçar, disponer, y enterrarse en dicha sepultura como propia, poniéndoles como su reverendísima ordena y manda sean puestos en la real, actual, corporal, quasi posesión della [...] inhibiendo a todos y qualquiera inferiores prelados [...]. Fecho en Roma en el convento de la Minerva en el quarto de su reverendísima.

2.- Pope Clement IX instructed to Juan Bautista Marino to transport the heirloom of Saint Faustus' body from Rome to de Vera Cruz Chapel in Lima, and Fray Antonio González de Acuña send in the same expedition a chest with the commemorative medals of the beatification of Saint Rose for the authorities of Lima. (ASC, Archivio Urbano, sezione 1, libro 360, [S.F], February 10, 1669).

El reverendísimo padre maestro Fray Antonio González de Acuña, de la orden de predicadores y compañero del reverendísimo padre fray Juan Bautista Marin, maestro general [...], estante al presente en la curia romana, al qual doy fee y conozco, digo que por quanto nuestro muy Santo Padre Clemente Nono habiendo mandado que se le entregase a su reverendísima el santo cuerpo del glorioso mártir San Fausto a efecto que lo enviase por persona segura a los señores alcaldes y regimiento de la [...] ciudad de los Reyes de los reinos de las Indias, para ponerlo y colocarlo en su capilla de la Santa Vera Cruz, que según dijo le ha sido realmente y con efecto entregado, consignado y puesto en su poder dentro de una caja que según della parece es de leña aforrada en tela carmesí y oro ligada con un listón también carmesí sellado con el propio sello del Ilustrísimo Reverendísimo Señor arzobispo de Urbino vicegerente de esta dicha curia romana, y su reverenda queriendo obedecer, [...] habiendo hallado persona segura que es el reverendo padre presentado fray Marcos de Vera de la provincia de san Juan Bautista del Perú [...]. Dicho día, el dicho reverendísimo padre maestro Fray Antonio González de Acuña, estante al presente al qual conozco, de su libre en aquellas, consignó, entregó y puso en manos y poder del reverendo padre presentado Fray Marcos de Vera [...], que según dijo está de partida en esta dicha corte para la ciudad de Lima, presente y reciviente una caja de poco menos de cinco palmos de largo, y de ancho poco menos de dos, aforrada en tafetán carmesí con cerradura y llave dorada en presencia de mí y de los testigos infrascritos van las cosas siguientes: es a saber muchos agnus de cera blancos y sesenta bordados, trecientas medallas de plata, doscientas pequeñas y ciento grandes, quatrocientas de oton grandes y pequeñas por y quales partes todas con la efigie de la B. Rosa de santa Maria de Lima, y quarenta de plata y bronce también y por yquales partes con el rostro de su santidad, cuya llave dorada el dicho reverendo padre presentado fray Marcos de Vera recibió en sí y cerró la dicha caja, la qual luego puso dentro de otra de madera cerrada y ligada con un listón carmesí, y sellada con el propio sello de sus armas ,que doy fe, con su rotulo arriba puesto y escrito que dice: para los señores alcaldes, regimiento de la ciudad de Lima [...].