Humility and Influence

Female Agency and the Confraternity of Saint Rosalia in Eighteenth-Century Cuenca

Isabel Oleas-Mogollón
Independent scholar, Quito, Ecuador
ioleas@udel.edu

Abstract

In June 1773 Doña Luisa García de Medina filed a lawsuit against the Spanish colonial government demanding the return of her generous donation to the confraternity of Saint Rosalia in Cuenca (Audiencia of Quito). This dispute provides a clear testimony of the influence of religious devotion and the power of female self-fashioning and agency. Doña Luisa’s piety, her promotion of the cult of Saint Rosalia, and her substantial donation allowed her to establish associations with leading local institutions and shape Cuenca’s sacred landscape and its inhabitants’ religious experience. Doña Luisa’s control of the processional route also identified her oratory as a space for spiritual introspection, self-representation, and social exchange. This article illustrates the importance of humility in the advancement of female agency in the colonial period. This research also proves that the study of religious confraternities supports a more inclusive construction of Spanish American history and shows the impact of female patronage in the civic space.

Keywords

female agency – religious patronage – confraternity of Saint Rosalia – Audiencia of Quito – Cuenca
In June 1773 Doña Luisa Rosalía García de Medina filed a lawsuit against the Spanish colonial government demanding the return of her generous donation for the congregation of Saint Rosalía and for the adornment of the saint’s altar in the Jesuit church in Cuenca, in the Audiencia of Quito (figs. 1 and 2). After Charles III expelled the Society of Jesus from all his domains in 1767, the government confiscated the possessions of the Jesuit Colleges established in the Spanish Empire, including those from Cuenca. As Doña Luisa claimed that her bequest was meant to take effect only after her passing, she requested back all the assets she had previously donated. Although the effigy of Saint Rosalía, her altar, and all its ornaments have disappeared, this dispute provides us with a comprehensive record of Doña Luisa’s choices as an art patron.

1 The entire lawsuit appears in “Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración de bienes, respectivos a la Congregación de Santa Rosalía del Colegio de Cuenca, [1774].”
inventory of her house and her testament also disclose the most important values she embraced during her lifetime. These various—previously unknown—documents indicate that Doña Luisa used religious devotion and art patronage to publicly express her agency and to fashion herself as a role model of virtue.

The ideal elite woman, as expressed in early modern Spanish texts, was meant to be obedient, chaste, and pious, and keep her influence within the private domain. In general women were expected to be extremely devout and go to church, pray from home, and maybe join a lay confraternity. Under these circumstances, it seems logical that Doña Luisa chose piety as the most suitable path to establish her influence and shape her identity. Undoubtedly, religious devotion frequently enabled women to portray themselves in a positive light and to make their artistic choices more freely. As this research shows, art patronage also allowed women from Spanish America, as many of their Euro-

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2 The inventory of Doña Luisa de Medina is described in “Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 294r–295v. See also “Testamento de Doña Luiza Rosalía García de Medina, [1776].”

3 These texts were originally published in the 1500s, but continued to be printed in the following centuries. See Vives, fol. 8r–10; and F.L. de León, 15–28.

4 See, for instance, the research by Sanger and Dunn.
pean counterparts, to showcase themselves and their social merit without the need to become a man's accessory or an object of sexual desire.

This article is the first study dedicated to the devotion of Saint Rosalia in the Spanish Americas and to the influence of female patronage in the decoration of the Jesuit church in Cuenca. The role of gender in art patronage within the Iberian world has been addressed only recently and remains an understudied field. While some scholars have dwelled on the intersections between female visibility and ethnicity, others have focused on the depiction of women in secular and religious contexts. Recent projects also examine female agency within Christian institutions through women's artistic practice, patronage, and the use of religious material culture. Besides showcasing a significant case of female patronage in the Spanish Americas, this article departs from colonial studies on self-representation that link notions of Christian devotion with wealth. Instead, it illustrates the relevance of humility in the promotion of women's public image and the advancement of female agency in the Americas. It also stresses the importance of studying confraternities when addressing the involvement of women in Spanish colonial societies.

This article first discusses Doña Luisa's decision to emulate the most notable characteristics of Saint Rosalia in order to underline her outstanding humility and honor. It then addresses the ways in which religious patronage encouraged Doña Luisa's associations with leading religious and secular institutions, connections that strengthened her social standing and furthered her public influence. The article also shows that Doña Luisa's commission of the effigy and altar of Saint Rosalia was directed to underline her generosity and devotion, as well as to popularize this cult in the city of Cuenca. Subsequently, the article describes the visual and affective qualities of the congregation's annual processions and argues that these events shaped Cuenca's holy landscape and the audience's understanding of the sacred. Finally, it shows that the unusual processional route identified Doña Luisa's oratory as the main locus of Saint Rosalia's devotion and as a privileged space for spiritual introspection, self-representation, and public exchange.

5 The first major research dedicated to the intersections of gender and the arts of Spanish America is Woman and Art in Early Modern Latin America. Charlene Villaseñor-Black discusses the limited scholarship around this topic.
6 See the publications by Lavrin, Núñez Arancibia, Córdova, Cruz González, and Middleton.
7 The research by Perry, Kennedy (“Mujeres en los claustros”), and Van Deusen are relevant references.
8 The intersections between piety, female patronage, women's agency, and the Society of Jesus have also been addressed in a European context. See, for instance, Valone's important contributions.
Doña Luisa: Her Private and Public Life

Doña Luisa Rosalía García de Medina, legitimate and only surviving daughter of Don Basilio de Medina and Doña Gertrudis García y Ambulodi, belonged to a relatively affluent criollo family. Her assets were valued in 5,329 pesos, a sum that was comparable to the dowries of Quiteño criollo women of the period, which usually ranged between 5,000 and 6,000 pesos (Borchart de Moreno, *Retos de la vida* 46–47). Named after Saint Rosalia, she saw this divine figure as her role model. Rosalia Sinibaldi (1130–1166) was a young woman of noble birth who chose to leave behind the luxuries of Palermo’s court to devote her life to the worship of Christ. As such, she lived as a hermit in Mount Pellegrino in the outskirts of the city, where she kept her faith and chastity intact and benefited from divine apparitions and spiritual knowledge.

Like Saint Rosalia, Doña Luisa de Medina was a woman of great piety. In 1759 she decided to bestow virtually the entirety of her wealth to support her religious devotion (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 247v). Her donation, which was over 5,000 pesos, included a large two-story house and several shops facing the street, as well as all of Doña Luisa’s belongings, present and future. She commissioned an altar for Saint Rosalia with all its ornaments to be erected in Cuenca’s Jesuit church, as well as a large effigy of the saint to replace an older and smaller statue Doña Luisa already owned. Moreover, she funded an annual procession in honor of the saint. To celebrate this cult, the confraternity of Saint Rosalia also provided a dinner at the Jesuit College and a banquet for the local authorities in Doña Luisa’s house.

The way Doña Luisa channeled her money indicates that most of it was destined to support her religious devotion and only a smaller portion to finance her daily needs. For example, the altar’s ornaments cost around 2,747 pesos, which was more than half of Doña Luisa’s funds. She also spent 400 pesos on a ranch formerly owned by her friend Doña Juana de Córdoba, the proceeds from which served to support the yearly festivities and the cult of Saint Ros-

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9 It is important to note that in the eighteenth century, ethnic identity was not as distinct as in early stages of the colonial period. Although the last name “García de Medina” is of Spanish origin and is associated primarily with a criollo identity, it is possible that Doña Luisa was actually of mixed race. For a discussion of the fluidity of ethnic identities, especially between criollos and mestizos, in the late eighteenth century, see Büschges 52–55.

10 Early modern Spanish authors like Calasibetá and Juan de San Bernardo published hagiographies about the life of Saint Rosalia in the seventeenth century. For recent research around the cult of this saint, see de Cavi, Mínguez, and Tedesco.

11 The lawsuit indicates that the Doña Luisa already owned an effigy of Saint Rosalia, which she deemed too small (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 269v).
Although Doña Luisa continued to live in her large house, valued at 1,800 pesos, she did so with squalor. Indeed her belongings were assessed at merely 138 pesos. The inventory of her house describes the poor estate of many of Doña Luisa’s possessions, including old carpets and furniture consumed by moths. The list includes various damaged items, like a biombo (folding screen) “in pieces” and an old estrado (an elevated platform for public entertainment) that were not even priced because the government considered them worthless. Her everyday possessions were also made of modest materials such as wood and ceramics, a fact that is particularly interesting because even Cuenca’s poorest households had objects made of glass (Jamieson 226–233). The 1771 inventory of Doña Luisa’s house does not mention any silver kitchen artifacts either, which were also quite common in eighteenth-century homes. Neither the inventory of Doña Luisa’s house nor her testament refers to any items of clothing besides some ropa blanca (undergarments) and a Carmelite robe for her burial. This exclusion is largely unusual because, at the time, textiles were expensive and cherished items and were often mentioned in wedding dowries and testaments (Borchart de Moreno, Retos de la Vida 46–47). These documents do not refer to any personal jewelry either. Instead all rings, bracelets, and necklaces are listed only under the inventory of Saint Rosalia’s altar. Overall these records suggest that Doña Luisa denied herself any costly personal adornments and lived quite modestly. Her body and dwelling expressed her chosen identity as a woman who embraced the joys of the spirit over earthly pleasures.

Doña Luisa’s humble preferences present a definition of criollo women that was somewhat at odds with contemporary portrayals of the high-born. Eighteenth-century depictions of Spanish American women—and men—commonly associated their criollo identity with Christian piety and economic status.\textsuperscript{12} When representing members of the criollo elite, portraits usually show them in their most adorned selves, wearing rich clothing and abundant jewelry. The posthumous portrait of Doña María Rosa de Larrea, marquise of Selva Alegre, with her two youngest children illustrates this concept quite clearly (Stratton-Pruitt 235–236). In this painting, she and her two sons are shown inside a private oratory. The marquise is portrayed kneeling in front of the altar that displays a painting of the Virgin Mary. The fashionable apparel of the sitters, especially that of the marquise, highlights their noble status. She is dressed in a translucent white blouse with a ruffled collar decorated with two large red bows, covered with a white cape adorned with lace, and a long brown skirt embroidered with delicate white flowers. Her hair is concealed under an ele-

\textsuperscript{12} For an analysis of criollo portraiture, see Middleton’s and Engel’s recent publications.
gant red and white scarf set up in a bow and topped with a black headband and gold ornaments. Her wealth is also shown in her numerous pieces of jewelry: a pair of long pendant pearl earrings, a pearl choker and a blue silk choker with a gold cross, long necklaces presumably made of a blue semi-precious material—possibly lapis lazuli or turquoise—and multiple gold, pearl, and lapis lazuli bracelets, as well as gold rings. Doña María Rosa's extravagant clothing matches the elaborate outfit worn by the painted effigy of the Virgin, which is adorned with a golden crown and scepter, as well as with jewelry made of precious materials. This portrait thus presents a version of piety in which women's affluent appearance reflects the wealth of their spiritual world, quite like the effigies of Mary, the most important female divine role model. A similar approach was taken in contemporary donor portraits of less wealthy people where representations of women of various ages linked religious devotion with honorability and an overt display of riches.13

Doña Luisa's austere living circumstances and appearance suggest that she did not identify with such practices. Instead she lived like a beata—a woman who dedicates her life to pious devotion but is not affiliated with a religious congregation—and embraced the humble life of a bride of Christ like Saint Rosalia. These preferences are evident in the way she managed her household. Indeed her testament shows that Doña Luisa lived a life that was practically conventual. She favored a vow of silence in her dwelling that was imposed on any other person living with her and that was meant to be reinforced after her passing. She specified that any person living in her house, be it a woman or a man, should continue to worship Saint Rosalia and maintain their chastity, virtuosity, and honesty.14 As it is clear from her testament, Doña Luisa also avoided any unnecessary interaction with the outside world, similarly to her beloved Palermitan saint.

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13 Examples of donor portraits can be found in Stratton-Pruitt 178, 264–266. Stanfield-Mazzi has researched the connections between Andean identity and self-representation in her research.

14 “Declaro que ... a que después de mis días pueda y deba continuarse en la modesta habita-
ción de dicha [mi] casa Doña María Rosa de Orellana, y la niña de su crianza llamada Ignacia de Orellana, sin que se entienda que en la crianza de ésta se disimule cosa que sea menos virtuosa, en silencio, honestidad y recogimiento, para que en caso de sobrevenir alguna cosa opuesta o menos decente a esta cláusula, deba la dicha Doña María Rosa excluirla ... Quien amparará dándole morada segura en dicha casa al citado Don Josef García de Medina y que éste se comprenda en las mismas condiciones y gravámenes de la referida niña, teniendo vida celibata, arreglada y virtuosa y caso de tomar estado matrimonial ... no tenga alojamiento en dicha casa, y sea excluido de ella; y que siempre se haya de guardar el silencio y clausura que se ha observado por la misericordia del Señor en dicha casa ...” (“Testamento de Doña Luiza” fol. 276v–277v).
Chastity was a crucial value in Doña Luisa’s life, partly because, at the time, a woman’s honor was directly related to her sexual behavior.\textsuperscript{15} Proving one’s own honor was particularly important for criollo women as female virtue was commonly associated with social superiority (León, “Género, matrimonio y sociedad criolla en Cuenca”). Moreover, in Christian thought virginity was considered one of the main paths to elevate a person’s spirit and to get closer to God. Saint Rosalia, as many other Christian saints, had also achieved a special rapport with the divine through the dismissal of her earthly body and of the world’s sensual pleasures. Seclusion was likewise an important aspect of female spiritual life, and it was particularly emphasized in the lives of the Discalced Carmelites. Theresa of Ávila, the order’s founder, fervently expresses in her writings the role of isolation in furthering spiritual enlightenment. Doña Luisa’s self-imposed seclusion was thus likely directed to showcase her honor and chastity as well as to further her spiritual enrichment.

It is telling that, considering Doña Luisa’s extreme piety and desire to distance herself from the world, she decided not to enter a convent. At the time, Cuenca had two female convents associated with the orders of the Immaculate Conception and the Carmelites. Doña Luisa, being a criollo woman of relative means, could have joined either of those institutions. The Carmelites’ stipulations—which only allowed twenty-one nuns in their premises—might have hindered Doña Luisa’s chances of becoming one of them. However, she could have entered the convent of the Immaculate Conception if she paid the respective fee, which was substantially less than the amount she spent on the cult of Saint Rosalia.\textsuperscript{16} It is possible that Doña Luisa considered this institution unworthy of her virtuous life because, at the time, there were claims that its nuns celebrated religious festivities with alcohol and in the company of men. In consequence, in 1764 the Spanish King Charles III extended a royal rule in order to reinforce nuns’ seclusion in Cuenca’s monasteries (León, “Género, matrimonio y sociedad criolla en Cuenca” 33).

More importantly, while choosing to live independently from any regulated institution Doña Luisa was able to avoid a life of obedience and to keep control of her assets. Although it is not clear whether Doña Luisa remained single by choice or by chance, she certainly embraced her destiny and took advantage of her social situation. Decidedly, her status as a single woman provided her with greater independence than most married criollo women, especially

\textsuperscript{15} See Migden Socolow 81; Cerda fol. 14r–14v; F.L. de León 191–192; Astete 152; and León Galarza, “Las élites coloniales y la politicidad del sexo.”

\textsuperscript{16} The fee or dowry to join a convent was approximately 1,800 pesos. The acquisition of robes and a cell was of a few hundred more pesos (Borchart de Moreno, Retos de la Vida 40–43).
by having the possibility of managing all her property as she desired. Although at the time Spanish laws conferred married women certain agency—especially when compared to English laws of the same period, allowing them to own property and litigate without the assistance of any male relative—the colonial order imposed a gendered hierarchy in which women were at the bottom. Men were indeed the only ones granted the power to regulate political and religious institutions, and they were frequently able to manage the spiritual lives and assets of their wives and other female members of their household. By remaining single, Doña Luisa was thus in full control of her economy, spirituality, and public image.

2 Art Patronage and Social Influence

In the Spanish Americas, sodalities promoted the development of female agency, especially because they allowed women to perform leadership roles within the group that paralleled those of men. As Susan Webster argues, in the Audiencia of Quito confraternities supplied a public space for gender equality. Doña Luisa certainly took advantage of the possibilities of religious patronage to shape her identity and simultaneously exert her agency. Besides furthering her public persona as a woman of great piety, her support of the cult of Saint Rosalia enabled Doña Luisa to establish direct associations with the local Jesuit college, one of the Audiencia’s richest religious institutions, and with members of Cuenca’s colonial government.

The European worship of Saint Rosalia has been closely linked to the Society of Jesus since the sixteenth century. Although this devotion was born in Palermo in the twelfth century—after the death of Rosalia Salvini—it became more important in the 1620s as the city was hit by the plague. According to popular narratives the plague subsided when the saint’s relics were rediscovered in

17 To learn more about early modern Spanish laws and how they compared to English laws, see Spanish Colonial Women and the Law 13–43.
18 The status of women in colonial Cuenca is discussed in León’s “Género, matrimonio y sociedad” and La primera alianza, “Introduction” and 1–23. The status of Spanish American women in the colonial period is studied by Vieira Power and Socolow. Gauderman and Borchardt de Moreno (“La imbecilidad y el coraje”) provide a more positive view of female agency in colonial Quito, especially in connection to their involvement in the local economy.
19 This characteristic was not inherited from Spanish sodalities which did not generally attribute the same status to women. See Webster, “Las cofradías y su mecenazgo artístico durante la colonia” 67–85 and Guerra 46–67.
Mount Pellegrino and transferred to the cathedral in 1625 (de Cavi 172; Mínguez 111). After that event, yearly extravagant processions to honor the saint became a point of pride for the city of Palermo. The Society of Jesus was partly responsible for the rise of this devotion, especially through the work of Jesuit writer Giordano Cascini whose hagiography of Saint Rosalia was published in Latin and Italian in the mid-seventeenth century. The Society of Jesus might have also been responsible for introducing the cult of Saint Rosalia in the Americas, especially in New Spain (Rosa 331n120; Estrada 13).

However, in the Audiencia of Quito the Jesuits were focused on supporting other cults. A favorite was the devotion to Our Lady of Loreto, which had a large following in the Audiencia of Quito. Certainly in Cuenca it was not the Society of Jesus but Doña Luisa de Medina herself who was the strongest champion of the cult of Saint Rosalia. Even so, she deemed the Jesuit church as the perfect place for building the saint’s altar, in all likelihood due to her personal connections with the Jesuits and to the latter’s interest in this particular devotion. Most importantly, the Jesuit church was one of the most attractive buildings of Cuenca’s urban landscape.

Although the Jesuits in Cuenca experienced some economic difficulties right before their expulsion from the Americas in 1767, their local church was impressive, proving the strong position of the Society of Jesus in the Audiencia of Quito. Everything we know about this building comes from records and chronicles of the colonial period, as it was destroyed in the nineteenth century.20 Designed in the 1660s by Jesuit Brother Marcos Guerra, the church’s inventory describes it as a large building made of mortar and brick, with one nave and a barrel vault, a choir, a pulpit, and a tower still under construction (Webster, Quito, ciudad de maestros 54). According to Jesuit historian Juan de Velasco, the church was the best in town even though it was quite modest compared to its counterpart in Quito and had been severely damaged by recent earthquakes.21

A watercolor from 1729, describing the damages produced by a newly built canal, provides a bird’s-eye view of the city’s main square (fig. 3). Organized in a grid-like manner, the city is a vision of order and civility, and the Jesuit

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20 The complete inventory of Cuenca’s Jesuit College can be found in “Expatriación de Jesuitas en la ciudad de Cuenca de la Gobernación de Quito, [1767].” The history of Cuenca’s Jesuit College is explained in the works by Mercado; Rodríguez 91–92; González Suárez; and Jouanen 124–125, 148.

21 “El que fue Colegio de los Jesuitas, aunque grande, y de dos pisos, es de fábrica ordinaria; mas su iglesia, toda de distintas bóvedas redondas, aunque de arquitectura antigua, es la mejor de todas” (Juan de Velasco 393); Jesuit Mario Cicala mentions that the Jesuit College is large and beautiful, and that its high bell towers and domes stand out among other buildings (Cicala 503–504).
college and its church are presented as its crowning jewels. The two-storied college and its two courtyards—one of them with a garden—faced the west of Cuenca’s central plaza, across from the city’s cathedral. The Jesuit church was built adjacent to the college, oriented from north to south, with its main door facing the northern street. This watercolor shows in all clarity the church’s large green domes and their lanterns as well as a tower on top of its altar. The Jesuit church certainly stands out among other religious buildings, especially the neighboring Carmelite monastery and the city’s cathedral, due to its unique architecture and its domes’ vibrant colors. This representation of Cuenca’s religious and secular center provides a striking view of the Jesuit college and its church, proudly positioned as the focus of the city’s political and religious hub.

Certainly Doña Luisa used her patronage to establish personal associations with important religious and political institutions and to exert her influence outside of the private domain. Not only did the Jesuits allow Doña Luisa to build an altar in their church but also permitted her to keep in her own house all the donations associated with the congregations of Saint Rosalia and of Our
Lady of Loreto. This agreement likely resulted from the fact that Doña Luisa made a generous bequest to the cult of the Virgin of Loreto as well, including several mirrors, some jewels, and the considerable sum of 500 pesos. Doña Luisa's choice to keep her donations in her own house was not necessarily uncommon. However, her generosity and social standing enabled her to control the use of these treasures during religious festivities. Indeed Doña Luisa decided not to lend Saint Rosalia’s ornaments for the celebration of the Corpus Christi which was to take place in Cuenca’s cathedral, arguing that the head of the Jesuit college, Father Herze, had forbidden it (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 271r). Considering that she claimed the full control of her donation until the day she died, this choice suggests that she did not agree with lending her treasured riches, probably because she feared they might be misplaced or lost. Her substantial patronage allowed Doña Luisa to exert certain influence in the city’s religious festivities, and to assert her will over other people, including male members of the Church.

The fact that she organized annual dinners for representatives of the Cabildo also indicates that Doña Luisa used her devotion to establish personal connections with men from Cuenca’s most influential families, who held the city’s legal and administrative powers. Although it is not clear whether these contacts were profitable for Doña Luisa during her struggles with the Spanish government in the 1770s, it shows that religious piety constituted an important arena for fomenting interinstitutional associations and for forwarding personal agendas. The close connection between Doña Luisa and members of Cuenca’s Cabildo also suggests that some of them might have belonged to the confraternity of Saint Rosalia, stressing the role of sodalities in furthering social and political exchanges.

22 “De la declaración que consta haberse hecho ante el subdelegado, y escribano por Doña Rosalía de Medina, se afirma que así como había tenido a su cuidado las alhajas de la imagen de Santa Rosalía, tuvo también las pertenecientes a Nuestra Señora de Loreto, sus vestidos, y demás ornamentos, hasta el día en que se ocuparon por la expatriación de los jesuitas; de las cuales algunas habían sido dadas por dicha Doña Rosalía como eran catorce espejos, una onza o media de perlas ... una toca de perlas con sus pasadores de oro, una joya de esmeraldas de nueve a diez piezas, diez ángeles vestidos, y 500 pesos en plata ...” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 241v).
23 Other examples of women who kept their donations can be found in archival documentation. See for instance, “Colegio Máximo de Quito, Testimonio del Sequestro del Colegio Máximo de Quito actuado el 20 de agosto de 1767,” fol. 125v–126v.
3 Doña Luisa’s Donation

The prominent standing and central geographic location of the Jesuit college certainly made its church the ideal place for the newly commissioned effigy of Saint Rosalia. The saint’s appealing altar, also funded by Doña Luisa, was one of the building’s eight retablos. Carved in wood, its central niche displayed two sculptures in the round, one large and one small, presumably the new and old effigies of Saint Rosalia. These sculptures were flanked by eight paintings of different advocations, including one depicting Saint Rosalia’s death and another of Saint Francis Xavier. The table that functioned as an altar was covered with a mantelpiece of fine linen and a frontal made of painted canvas. Two sculptures of angels completed the altar’s adornment. The list of items that Doña Luisa further donated for the congregation is quite extensive and includes several sculptures of angels, mirrors, liturgical objects made of gold and silver, an ivory crucifix, rich vestments for the priest leading the services, and expensive dresses and jewelry for the effigies. Many of these objects were likely part of the yearly processions and might have adorned Saint Rosalia’s altar during special religious festivities as well.

Although the image of Saint Rosalia is now lost, the records indicate that it was an *imagen de vestir* with a polychromed face and hands and a balsa wood body set on top of a pedestal. Imágenes de vestir, quite popular in Spain and the Americas in the eighteenth century, are constituted by a polychromed head

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24 Besides the main retablo, the building had side altars to honor the cults of Our Lady of Sorrows (or *La Buena Muerte*), Saint Francis Xavier, the Virgin of Loreto, Saint Rosalia, Saint Luis Gonzaga, Our Lady of the Pillar, and Saint Joseph. See “Expatriación de Jesuitas en la ciudad de Cuenca de la gobernación de Quito,” vol. 246, fol. 371r–371v and vol. 237, fol. 209v–222v.

25 “Primeramente una mesa de altar de madera con su tabernáculo pequeño de lo mismo, con un lienzo de la Santa por remate, y al centro un nicho con sus puertas sin cerraduras ni llave. Ítem un lienzo de la muerte de la Santa con su moldura de coral. Ítem siete lienzos colgados en los pilares vecinos al altar, los seis sin molduras, y el uno con ella dorada con la advocación de San Xavier. Ítem un frontal de lienzo pintado, un mantel de Bretaña y dos angelitos de madera en el altar. Ítem dos imágenes en bulto de madera, una pequeña y otra grande ...” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 291v–294v).

26 “En la ciudad de Cuenca en 17 días del mes de febrero de 1773 ... presentó por testigo al Doctor Don Vicente Antonio de Arizaga, presbítero domiciliario de este obispado ... quien respondió lo siguiente ... que la imagen primaria que [Doña Rosalia] tuvo fue de corto bulto, por lo que mandó traer a su costo, cabeza y manos y formó la que hoy existe de bastante tamaño, para cuyo cuerpo le costeó el que declara (Don Vicente) un madero de balsa, que lo hizo conducir del caliente de Machala, pagó el costo del que lo labró, y el encarne interno que tiene, y también le aplicó una peana de madera de nogal, que la hizo labrar con su peculio ...” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 269v).
joined to a wooden torso that is sometimes attached to a pair of legs or to a pyramidal structure (fig. 4). Moveable arms with polychromed hands are joined to the torso to complete the sculpture. The figure’s torso, arms, and legs were concealed under ornate dresses and were usually roughly made. Only the hands, head, and the upper part of the torso were fully finished and polychromed.

The appearance of the statue of Santa Rosalia was probably quite similar to the effigy of Our Lady of Mercy, a popular Quiteño imagen de vestir (fig. 5) (Stratton-Pruitt 177). Paintings of Our Lady of Mercy show that her head and hands were visible while the rest of her body remained concealed under a dress. They also highlight the significance of the sculpture’s embellishment, whose impact was meant to attract the masses especially during processions. As seen in these images, garments for imágenes de vestir were extremely adorned, usually embellished with gilded thread, silk embroidery, delicate lace, and translucent veils (fig. 6). Lavish silver or gilded crowns and scepters, rosaries made of coral and pearls, and other attractive jewels further heightened their appeal. Similarly, the large and small effigies of Saint Rosalia from Cuenca were handsomely dressed with the most expensive fabrics available at the time, including brocade and silk tissue which were delicately embroidered with gold and silver thread and adorned with lace. These sculptures were likewise decorated with numerous jewels made of gold and precious and semiprecious stones, including crowns, necklaces, earrings, rings, bracelets, and rosaries. The inventory also indicates that the feet of the effigy were covered with bejeweled silver sandals.

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27 To learn more about imágenes de vestir and their use in religious processions see Webster, Art and Ritual in Golden Age Spain, chapters 2 and 3, and Bray.

28 “Ítem un vestido de la imagen grande, que se compone de túnica y esclavina de brocado azul de plata bordado a trechos de hilo de plata, oro, y seda con su franja de oro en medio, y encaje de plata al vuelo forrado en tafetán carmesí, y su manto de brocado piche de plata con dos encajes de los mismo al vuelo, forrado en tafetán amarillo, y su cíngulo de cinta de tisú de oro. Ítem otro dicho de la imagen pequeña de brocado carmesí de oro, que se compone de túnica y esclavina guarnecido con franjas de oro…” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 291v).

29 For example: “Ítem dos gargantillas de perlas tejidas dimidiadas con cinco chapitas de oro esmaltadas con esmeraldas, y amatistas con sus cruces de oro y perlas pendientes, ambas en una, con el peso de dos onzas tres cuartas y un adarme. Ítem dos dichas de perlas tejidas con sus chapitas de oro a los extremos y en el medio más joyitas de tres esmeraldas pequeñas y pendientes de aguacates de amatista, ambas en una con el peso de dos onzas, y cuatro adarmes” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 292v).

30 “Ítem dos sandalias con las plantillas de plata maciza, y las capelladas de terciopelo carmesí con sobrepuestos de chapas de oro de filigranas, algunas perlas y en cada una un botoncito con su esmeralda a la parte del empeine ambas en uno, con el peso de siete
This splendorous image of Saint Rosalia was in stark contrast with many European works which usually showed this divine figure as a poor hermit. Seventeenth-century printed, sculpted, and painted images presented a uniform vision of Saint Rosalia, focused on her poverty and her Christian devotion. It has been suggested that Anthony van Dyck established the saint’s iconography in the paintings he made while living in Palermo during the plague outburst (Liedtke 43–45). In his works van Dyck depicts Rosalia as a beautiful young woman with long hair, reminiscent of the Immaculate Virgin, wearing a
hermit’s plain, woolen tunic, sometimes accompanied by a skull and a crown of roses (fig. 7). These paintings show the saint in two main settings: in the rough landscape of Mount Pellegrino’s cave or in a divine scenery interacting with holy beings. This same iconography was reproduced in contemporary prints, such as the illustrations of the saint’s life included in Cascini’s Di S. Rosalia.

PHOTO: ISABEL OLEAS-MOGOLLÓN

PHOTO: METMUSEUM.ORG
Most Spanish American representations of Saint Rosalia, which are based on European sources, are also quite different to Cuenca’s lavish effigy. For instance, the Bolivian painting *Saint Rosalia at a Cave in Mount Pellegrino*, after a print of *Saint Venerius* by Raphael Sadeler I, shows the Palermitan saint wearing a simple tunic and a cape, sitting next to the cave’s entrance (“Rosalie of Palermo,” *Pessca*). The scene is set in a landscape typical of Andean painting of the period, with colorful birds, flowers, and a large, leafy tree, and a generic representation of the city of Palermo. A similar humble portrayal of Saint Rosalia is shown in an eighteenth-century work by New Spanish artist Miguel Cabrera (“Santa Rosalía,” *ARCA*).

The highly adorned imagen de vestir of Saint Rosalia from Cuenca, so different from many European and Spanish American examples, relates however to a painting from the collection of the monastery of Santa Clara in Quito (Webster, “La presencia indígena en el arte colonial quiteño” 36–50). This eighteenth-century work shows Saint Rosalia leaving her privileged life in Palermo’s palace and walking towards an existence of bodily sacrifice and spiritual enrichment. She is accompanied by Archangel Raphael, who provided her with his wooden staff, and her guardian angel. Rosalia carries a crucifix in her left hand. She is lavishly dressed, with a long green blouse embroidered with gold thread and a shirt underneath with intricate white lace cuffs and neck. An equally striking pink brocade skirt embellished with gold flowers and a pair of sandals complement the saint's rich costume. Her head holds a crown of roses and a shining halo. As in the sculpture from Cuenca, this painting shows Rosalia wearing rich jewelry: earrings, a gold necklace, a large rosary made of coral, and a large image of the Immaculate Virgin. The two angels are also depicted in lavish costumes and fine jewelry. Rosalia’s guardian angel carries an indigenous purse, or *shigra*, that holds her devotional books and clices. This same scene was represented in other New Spanish works of the same period, although in these paintings Saint Rosalia is clothed with a simple tunic instead of the rich dress of the Quiteño example.31 Considering the strong iconographic connections between the painting of Santa Clara and the sculptural group from Cuenca, it is quite possible that the latter also represented Rosalia in her journey to spiritual enlightenment.

The striking images of Saint Rosalia produced in Quito and Cuenca probably reflect a local preference for ornate imagery. However, the choice of an imagen de vestir versus an equally striking polychrome effigy needs to be addressed,

31 See, for instance, “Santa Rosalía de Palermo acompañada por San Miguel y San Rafael,” *ARCA*, and “Santa Rosalía de Palermo,” *ARCA*.
especially as the Audiencia of Quito was quite famous for its talented sculptors.\textsuperscript{32} Imágenes de vestir certainly offered some advantages over traditional Spanish-style sculpture. Their relatively simple workmanship meant that they were cheaper and quicker to make. They were also lighter, a characteristic that made them ideal for processions. Finally, the striking dresses and jewelry worn by imágenes de vestir were donated by the faithful, a fact that established a significant connection between the donor and the sculpture.\textsuperscript{33} Undoubtedly such donations served to underline the faithful’s economic status and the extent of their devotion. For instance, one of the dresses for the effigy of Saint Rosalia was assessed at 140 pesos, a large sum that was comparable to the price of all of Doña Luisa’s household belongings. Similarly, a golden crozier embellished with emeralds, amethysts, and pearls for the image of Saint Rosalia cost the striking sum of 190 pesos.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, Doña Luisa’s choice to commission an image intended to be clothed in actual garments can be interpreted as a strategy to strongly engage the viewer and popularize the cult.

The compelling imagen de vestir commissioned by Doña Luisa also intended to establish a visual association between Saint Rosalia and more well-known Marian devotions as a way of legitimizing the former’s cult. Although the worship of Saint Rosalia proliferated in Palermo during the seventeenth century, it never became as prominent in the Andes. Whereas in Palermo Saint Rosalia was held as an important deterrent of the pest and other deadly diseases, in the Audiencia of Quito different Marian advocations—such as Our Lady of Gua-pulo, Our Lady of Mercy, and Our Lady of El Quinche—became the region’s protectors against natural disasters and epidemics (Stratton-Pruitt 109, 177). Eighteenth-century paintings of these Marian images show that these effigies were also lavishly dressed and adorned with dazzling jewelry, a mark of their regional appeal and elevated number of devotees (fig. 8). Considering the relatively low popularity of the cult of Saint Rosalia in the Audiencia of Quito, Doña Luisa possibly tried to enhance it by commissioning an image that was truly alluring to the faithful. The reinterpretation of Saint Rosalia as a lavishly

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In the eighteenth century in particular, Quiteño sculptures were quite popular in the Americas and Spain. See Kennedy-Troya, “Arte y artistas quiteños de exportación” 24–43 and Palmer.
\item See Webster’s “Sacred Altars, Sacred Streets” 159–177 and Art and Ritual in Golden Age Spain, chapters 2 and 3.
\item “Item un báculo de oro, compuesto de cinco canutos, esmaltado a trechos con esmeraldas, amatistas y perlas menudas, y adornado con una poma muy pequeña, dos animalitos, y dos jarritas, con dos dijeitos azules, todo de cristal, y pendiente de dicho báculo, con el peso de quince onzas, y cinco adarmes con ciento y noventa pesos” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 297”).
\end{enumerate}
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PHOTO: METMUSEUM.ORG
dressed sculpture can be thus seen as a way of legitimizing its place among already established cults and as a tool to attract greater numbers of devotees among Cuenca’s population.

Doña Luisa was in full control of her donation and was closely involved in the commission of the most crucial element of the cult, the new effigy of Saint Rosalia. Although historical records stipulate that Don Vicente Antonio de Arízaga, a local presbyter, paid for the effigy’s balsa wood body which remained concealed under garments, Doña Luisa handled the commission of the statue’s hands and head. She also chose and supervised the tailors and silversmiths who made the vestments and jewels for the image. Doña Luisa had to follow certain requirements, particularly when considering the effigy’s garments. Apparently Don Miguel de Córdova, another local presbyter, advised her on the “perfection” of the fringes for the dresses, including the types selected and the ways they should be applied. Córdova’s advice was likely geared to avoid any problems with the Church which was weary of the indecent representation and display of holy figures (Webster, “Shameless Beauty and Worldly Splendor” 249–271). It is also possible that Córdova’s intervention meant to increase the appeal of the effigy. At the time, the word “perfection” was associated with artifice, technical knowledge, and artistic skill (Arphey Villafañe ix–x). Likely, Córdova advised Doña Luisa on the artistry and harmony of the garments’ embellishments as well as their decency. Her association with Córdova therefore allowed her to commission a striking image that was duly sanctioned by the Church and safe for public worship.

4 Doña Luisa and the Confraternity of Saint Rosalia

In the early modern period lay confraternities were essential instruments for spreading religious cults and for furthering political and personal agendas. All over the world, religious processions were also critical in advancing the con-

35 See note 26.
36 “[T]odas las alhajas, galas y muebles que hoy posee la imagen de Santa Rosalía se costearon a expensas de la mencionada Doña Rosalía de Medina, habiendo el declarante visto muchas veces trabajar en su propia casa a los oficiales de sastreía y platería, haciendo vestidos y joyas para dicha imagen...” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 270v–271r).
37 A selected bibliography of recent works about confraternities in Europe includes Webster’s Art and Ritual in Golden Age Spain and the publications by Wisch and Cole Ahl, Vroom, and Dow.
version of non-Christian populations.38 Accordingly, the annual festivities in honor of Saint Rosalia became a public stage for the promotion of this cult and for shaping Cuenca’s sacred landscape and the religious experience of its diverse population.

While in the first centuries of the colonial period confraternities were organized according to ethnicity, by the eighteenth century the increasing fluidity of ethnic identities made it impossible to maintain rigid racial distinctions (Webster, “Las cofradías y su mecenazgo artístico durante la colonia” 68). As a result, confraternities were mostly defined by social and cultural characteristics. This was especially true of sodalities that were privately funded such as the confraternity of Saint Rosalia. Even though historical records do not provide the number and identity of all the members of the confraternity of Saint Rosalia, these documents suggest that several of them belonged to Doña Luísa’s close social circle and came from white or mestizo families (e.g., Doña Michaela de Neyra, Cathalina de Albear, Doña Rosa de Orellana, Doña María Vélez, and Don Tomás de Neyra). It is not clear whether people from other ethnicities, including indigenous and black men and women, were also members of the confraternity, as was the case for important cults celebrated in the Audiencia of Quito.39 Even if that was not the case, the procession’s occupation of the urban space fostered ideological and physical interactions between Cuenca’s different socioeconomic and ethnic groups.40 Certainly indigenous and black communities were able to participate in the cult by visiting the Jesuit church and praying in front of the saint’s altar as well as by taking part in the yearly processions along the streets of Cuenca. As such, the town’s large indigenous population, as well as its smaller black community, could benefit from the numinous powers of Saint Rosalia’s effigy.

An essential element of early modern religious processions was the display of a myriad of dazzling objects. Opulence and splendor were intrinsic elements of Catholic ritual, used as tools to heighten the emotional reaction of the faithful and to designate divine and secular spaces.41 The abundance, luxury, and

38 The role of confraternities in religious conversion in various parts of the globe is explored by V.L. Rafael, Mendonça, and Fromont, among others.
39 The studies of other confraternities in the city of Quito show that many of them were open to different ethnic groups, including those related to the cults of Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of the Pillar. See Guerra 23–33 and 54–62.
40 According to a census from 1778, almost 60% of Cuenca’s urban population was white and mestizo, 35% was indigenous, and 3.3% were of African descent. See Poloni-Simard 447.
41 For a thorough study about the effects of splendor and wealth in the spiritual transformation of the faithful, see the works by Dekoninck, Delbeke et al., and Dekoninck and Delfosse.
diversity of brilliant objects tended to overwhelm the beholder, to immerse them in the event, and to trigger their spiritual response. The cult of Saint Rosalia, and all the rich objects associated with it, were therefore aimed at simultaneously shaping the faithful’s interior experience and the city’s sacred landscape. Certainly the naturalism and splendor of the effigy of Saint Rosalia contributed to erase the boundaries between the sacred and the earthly. This effect was reinforced by the notion that Christian images were potent vessels of the divine and could bring the faithful to their beloved deities. To produce a greater impact, the image of Saint Rosalia was paraded on a platform decorated with mirrors and flowers and was possibly surrounded by precious ornaments, including stars and feathers made of gold and numerous silver *mallas* (small, decorative plates) (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 291r–293v). All these items were activated through their playful interactions with the candles carried by members of the procession and with the rays of the strong Andean sun. Incense, music, and vocalized prayers likely completed the striking procession and helped define the sacred geography of colonial Cuenca.

It is possible that several relics were also included in the event as a way of legitimizing the cult of Saint Rosalia. According to the inventory of the congregation, Doña Luisa donated two highly appealing reliquaries with the remains of the saint.42 One of them was a gold eagle adorned with pearls, emeralds, and fake stones. The other reliquary was a diptych, lined with gilt silver and embellished with fake stones, that hung from a wooden arch, also silver lined. These relics, believed to represent the saint’s entire body and all of her virtues, were likely paraded along the statue, impregnating the audience and Cuenca’s streets with their holiness. By doing so, they established a personal, almost bodily, connection between the viewers and Saint Rosalia and between the city space and its cult. This direct dialectic was meant to foster the spiritual transformation of the viewer and to increase the importance of this devotion. While heightening the numinous power of the effigy, these relics also furthered the transformation of Cuenca’s urban space into a heavenly city.

As seen in other examples of public Catholic expressions in the Andes, the procession of Saint Rosalia sent multiple and even conflicting messages to its

42 “Ítem una águila de oro con su media luna debajo esmaltado en piedras falsas, perlas y dos ojuelos de esmeraldas con un relicario en medio, que guarda una reliquia de Santa Rosalía, con peso de once y media onzas … Ítem una reliquia de Santa Rosalía fijada en una tabla de más de tres cuartas en alto, de dos piezas, la superior forrada en plata dorada con sus botones de piedras falsas, y la inferior forrada también en plata sin dorar, no se pesa. Ítem un arquito de madera forrado en plata por un lado que sirve para dicha reliquia, no se pesa” (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 298r–299v).
diverse audience, depending on the viewer's ethnic and cultural background.\textsuperscript{43} Although the imposing image of Saint Rosalia and the shimmering effects of all its ornaments intended to enforce a Christian cult, they probably had conflicting meanings for Cuenca's indigenous and black audiences. It seems possible that these objects made of silver, gold, and precious stones were associated with the brutal conditions established in the extraction of such materials from the Andean region. Cuenca's neighboring areas in particular were exploited for the extraction of gold, silver, and copper since the pre-Hispanic period and until the early eighteenth century (Chacón Zhapán 133). Before the Spanish conquest, indigenous communities profited from such mines and produced magnificent objects made of precious metals destined to adorn the bodies of the elites and to worship pre-Hispanic deities. After the arrival of the Spaniards to the region, mining became a source of extensive abuse of indigenous and black bodies, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Chacón Zhapán 135–138). Spaniards were also involved in the sacking of indigenous tombs and temples that contained offerings made of precious materials. Although much of this bounty was melted and sent back to Europe, many of these objects were repurposed to make a variety of commodities similar to the ones shown during the procession of Saint Rosalia. Thus, these splendorous items were reminders of the colonial power exerted by the social elites that displayed them, of the mistreatment of indigenous and black populations, and of the Spanish government's attempts to eradicate Andean religious beliefs.

Cuenca's indigenous audience also interpreted the image of Saint Rosalia and its bright adornments within the framework of Andean Christianity, a convergence of indigenous and European religious practices (Mills; MacCormack). By the eighteenth century, Christianity was highly engrained in indigenous beliefs and was commonly the focus of Amerindians' spiritual devotion. As an example, the extensive Andean adoration of ancestors was transferred to the cult of former huacas (objects or places of indigenous veneration), which were in turn linked to the powers of Christian powers.\textsuperscript{44} As such, indigenous people adapted and adopted Catholic beliefs during the many centuries of colonial regime. Indeed, Amerindian groups considered objects used in Christian rituals made with repurposed materials from Andean huacas to still contain the essence that made them divine. The brightness of these materials and

\textsuperscript{43} Carolyn Dean's analysis of the Corpus Christi in Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ provides an interesting example of the characteristic conflicting interpretations of Christian public manifestations that empowered indigenous identities.

\textsuperscript{44} For a thorough analysis on the worship of huacas, see the works by Dean (“The Afterlife of Inka Rulers”) and Gose.
objects also resonated with indigenous communities which had historically associated reflective and brilliant materials with the sacred (Herring; Saunders). Though religious processions and their rich objects were reminders of the many inequities of the colonial social order, indigenous groups likely perceived them as vessels of the divine as well.

Similarly, the relics of Saint Rosalia might have evoked ancient indigenous beliefs. Pre-Columbian Andean cultures relied on the worship of ancestors and of political and religious leaders, whose bodies were desiccated to preserve their divine essence. For the Incas, for instance, the power of their leaders transcended human life, and their mummies were frequently displayed in religious and political rituals, even in the early stages of the colonial period (MacCormack 131–134). The worship of mallkis (mummified ancestors) continued to exist, although not openly, after the arrival of the Spaniards to the Andes (Brosseder 134). The understanding of relics by the Andean population is unclear, although it seems plausible that they perceived these objects as embodiments of the divine, be it within an indigenous or Christian context. It is not apparent whether the members of the confraternity of Saint Rosalia understood the inconsistent meaning of these festivities, but they probably realized that the cult’s lasting success depended on the support of Cuenca’s substantial indigenous community.

5 Doña Luisa’s Oratory and Cuenca’s Sacred Geography

Processions were, in general, scenarios in which confraternities could promote themselves as well as the status of their members (Webster, Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain 35, 43–52). Considering that Doña Luisa was the most prominent champion of the cult of Saint Rosalia in Cuenca and that she provided most of the procession’s ornamentation, she was likely in charge of the procession’s route as well. Doña Luisa’s control of the procession’s movements and visual characteristics certainly allowed her to highlight her public role in shaping Cuenca’s sacred spaces and in fashioning herself as a mediator of the divine.

The processional route of Saint Rosalia’s effigy in Cuenca was undoubtedly unusual. Frequently the starting and ending points of processions marked points of social and religious significance, such as churches or plazas. The procession of Saint Rosalia in Palermo was organized in this manner. The third day of the festino, the saint’s relics were paraded in an impressive triumphal chariot along the streets of Palermo, stopping at various churches, convents, palaces, and squares, and ending at the cathedral. All of these locations were lavishly decorated with triumphal arches and shimmering ornamentation as a
way of signaling their transformation into sacred loci. Local religious and political institutions, as well as the rest of the Palermitan people, participated in these festivities.

In the case of the annual procession of Saint Rosalia in Cuenca, Doña Luisa established quite an exceptional route which incorporated her own house within the event. According to witnesses, the celebrations commenced the day prior to the official festivities by moving the new effigy of Saint Rosalia from Doña Luisa’s house to the saint’s altar within the Jesuit church.45 The next day, the procession brought the statue back again to Doña Luisa’s private oratory. Although the precise location of Doña Luisa’s house is not certain, according to historical records it was situated within the city, facing one of its three royal roads (“Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración” fol. 247–247v). Unsurprisingly, these three roads led directly to Cuenca’s main square, the center of the town’s political and religious power (Chacón Zhapán 412–413). Considering the relatively small size of Cuenca’s urban center, it is highly likely that her house was located only a few blocks away from the city’s principal plaza. Thus, it would have been easy for the confraternity to start the procession at the Jesuit church, take one or several laps around the city’s main square, and end at Doña Luisa’s private oratory. This route would have allowed the confraternity to parade Saint Rosalia’s effigy past Cuenca’s most important political and religious buildings, including the cathedral, the Jesuit, Dominican, and Augustinian churches, the monasteries of the Carmelites and of the Immaculate Conception, and the colonial government’s hub.

The processional route established the Jesuit church and Doña Luisa’s own house as thresholds of Cuenca’s holy landscape. Through these landmarks the faithful were allowed to participate and be involved in the ritual in different ways. The Jesuit church provided a space of regulated devotion, organized around the rite of the Mass. The building’s architecture also determined the number of people that could be included in this ceremony. Then when the procession moved from the Jesuit church into Cuenca’s communal spaces, everyone could take part in the festivities. As the congregation moved from one street to the next, the procession’s splendor likely attracted an increasing number of people. The city’s inhabitants, no matter their cultural and socioeconomic background, were given access to the liminal space surrounding the effigy of Saint Rosalia up until the entrance to Doña Luisa’s household. This new threshold reduced again the number of devotees that could worship the

45 See note 11. According to the lawsuit forwarded by Doña Luisa, the statue of Saint Rosalia was usually at her house, so it is likely that the small effigy of the saint mentioned in the inventory remained in the Jesuit church instead.
holy image. Presumably, these people were mainly members of the congregation and Doña Luisa’s friends.

The oratory’s restricted access and its lavish decoration defined it as a crucial space in the celebration of Saint Rosalia, particularly suitable for devotional practice. The house’s inventory indicates that the oratory was a relatively richly furnished room, especially when compared to the rest of Doña Luisa’s plain apartments. The altar was a common wooden table, but it had a gilded frontal adorned with small mirrors and varnished red bole, elements that created a lively contrast and attractive visual effects.\(^\text{46}\) Additional items on display elevated the altar’s appeal. A mantelpiece of fine French cambric covered the wooden table while a jasper altar stone was set on top. Two metal candlesticks completed the altar’s ornamentation. A wooden niche was destined to house the statue of Saint Rosalia, and two paintings within gilded frames, one of the Virgin and another of Saint Rosalia, concealed under red and pink curtains decorated with artificial flowers, constituted the crowning elements of the altar. Numerous prints, mirrors, and paintings of different sacred figures, as well as various sculptures of angels, and a scene of the Calvary added to the room’s appeal.\(^\text{47}\) Overall, the oratory’s many striking objects produced a visual overload meant to create an almost surreal setting and trigger the faithful’s affective response. This setting was heightened by the light effects formed by these bright and shimmering items. In this space, Doña Luisa was thus not only able to have full control of the ritual without the intervention of the Jesuit

\(^{46}\) “Item se halló en otra pieza que sirve de oratorio, una mesa de madera que sirve de altar, con su frontal de madera dorado, guarnecido de espejitos y barniz de coral; un mantel de Cambray de Francia llano sin guarnición al vuelo; una ara de piedra jaspe forrada en cañamazo, y dos candeleros de hoja de lata. Ítem un cuadro de Nuestra Señora de vara en alto, con moldura de madera dorada, con su copete que sirve de remate, guarnecido de flores de mano, y encima de él … un cuadrito con la imagen de Santa Rosalía con moldura dorada. Ítem un sitial que corona el altar, de raso colorado, y dos doselitos de lo mismo a los lados del cuadro, que también tiene cuatro cortinas las dos de lo mismo, y las dos de velillo rosado, guarnecido uno, y otro con flores de mano” ("Expedientes sobre pretender derecho de administración" 295).

\(^{47}\) For example: “Ítem un Cristo de madera de media vara en alto en su sitial de raso rosado, velo de gasa con flores de plata falsa, dos cortinas de tafetán sencillo azul, y una imagen de [La Virgen de los] Dolores al pie, pequeña, vestida, con saya, y manto de tafetán doble negro, sin diadema, ni espada. Ítem seis angelitos vestidos con sayas de tafetán rosado, guarnecidos los cuatro con flequito de plata, y los dos con conchuela de lo mismo, y sus camisas de rengo. Ítem ocho angelitos de madera sin vestidura alguna coloreados, y siseados con oro … Ítem un retablo pequeño de madera con las cartelas doradas que se halla en frente del altar, con un lienzo pequeño con la advocación de San Nicolás en que remata, con cortinas de raso, y un farol de vidrio, y hoja de lata colgado por delante” ("Expediente sobre pretender derecho de administración" fol. 295).
community, but she could also influence her peers’ deeply personal religious experience.

By including her own oratory as the ending point of the procession, Doña Luisa blurred the boundaries between domestic and communal spaces. Defying contemporary notions that professed the constant supervision and confinement of single women, Doña Luisa used her Christian fervor to transform her usually private oratory into a site of public devotion, where she could manifest her leadership. In this room, she compelled the interaction between members of the city’s social elite, people likely associated with Cuenca’s religious and secular powers, and established networks that were beneficial for her chosen private and public causes. The rich material qualities of the oratory, in plain opposition to the sparsity of the rest of her house, also enabled Doña Luisa to showcase both her humility and wealth, fashioning herself as an exemplary member of the city’s elite. Moreover, members of the confraternity could demonstrate the intensity of their devotion and the extent of their generosity and wealth through the material and aesthetic qualities of their donations displayed within this room. Doña Luisa’s oratory became, in this way, an arena for public representation, competition, and self-promotion.

In general, the annual celebrations in honor of Saint Rosalia provided Doña Luisa with the opportunity to assert her agency in the public space. This procession not only marked her and the rest of the confraternity’s piety but also manifested this woman’s economic and social status and popular influence. Her decision to culminate the procession in her private oratory, rather than in the Jesuit church or in Cuenca’s cathedral, defined her house as the final locus of the cult. By doing so she positioned herself as the main intercessor between the members of the congregation and Saint Rosalia. The processional route also highlighted Doña Luisa’s own residence as an important element of Cuenca’s sacred geography and herself as an example of virtue and piety, especially in the eyes of the city’s white and mestizo community.

6 Conclusion

Although Doña Luisa fought to regain custody of her large donation, she did not succeed. After her death in 1776, the annual celebration in honor of Saint Rosalia continued for several years, albeit under the control of the Carmelite nuns.48 Considering that all the jewels and ornaments belonging to the confraternity’s oratory were left to Doña Luisa’s house, the oratory became an arena for public representation, competition, and self-promotion. Her decision to culminate the procession in her private oratory, rather than in the Jesuit church or in Cuenca’s cathedral, defined her house as the final locus of the cult. By doing so she positioned herself as the main intercessor between the members of the congregation and Saint Rosalia. The processional route also highlighted Doña Luisa’s own residence as an important element of Cuenca’s sacred geography and herself as an example of virtue and piety, especially in the eyes of the city’s white and mestizo community.
fraternity were retained by the Spanish government, these processions were presumably much less attractive. The lack of a strong support for the cult of Saint Rosalia ended in its disappearance at some point during the nineteenth century.

An overview of these events might suggest that the Spanish government effectively erased Doña Luisa’s legacy. However, the mere fact that the authorities declined her request to regain control over her assets suggests that the government was not comfortable with displays of public female agency, emphasizing even more this woman’s determination. More importantly, Doña Luisa’s choices reveal the strategies used by criollo women to reclaim their public agency and to showcase their moral virtues and spiritual values. This research proves that some elite women fashioned their public personas around the concept of humility. By leading a life full of restrictions and bestowing considerable funds to promote religious devotion, Doña Luisa embodied a female criollo ideal. Her honorable stance and considerable patronage enabled her to acquire public visibility in her own terms, controlling the making, appearance, and use of her donations as well as the public performances of the congregation she funded. Doña Luisa was also able to highlight her socioeconomic status while mediating the interaction between peoples from diverse ethnic and political groups.

The restriction of women’s influence in the political and economic lives of colonial societies tends to erase female agency from the public record. Even so, as this research illustrates, women from the Spanish colonies were closely involved in shaping communal spaces and had a strong participation in the cultural development of the Spanish Americas. Women’s leading involvement in confraternities and public religious expressions supports a more inclusive and equitable reconstruction of Spanish American art and social histories.

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