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Est. 1760



Attributed to Pedro Franco
(Mexico City, 17th century)

Chalice-Monstrance

before August 8, 1608

partially silver-gilt; turned, smelted,
embossed, engraved and chiseled

marks: male head in left profile over 'O/M in
between crowned columns (repeated twice),
'TO/RES' (with horizontal separating bar) and
an 'F' crested with a crown (several times in
the small bells). engraved

height: 57.5 cm.; 22 5/8 in.

cup diameter: 16.5 cm.; 6 1/2 in.

weight: 2.443 kg

Provenance

Former Apelles Collection, Chile - England.

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This object is a chalice with a monstrance on top. The chalice has a circular base with a convex plinth decorated with abstract motifs over a gilded chiseled background together with eight highlighted and polished mirror pieces; the turned shaft is made of a cylindrical pedestal with a string of sunken pieces of mirror and a big egg-shaped knot with outlined wedge-shaped ornaments, the larger chalice is supplemented with a smaller bulbous chalice adorned with wedge-shaped ornaments and crowned with a protruding border. The monstrance, fitted into the mouth of the chalice by means of a cylindrical piece, has the shape of a squared-base shrine with Tuscan columns in each corner, plant-like semicircular arches in its four faces and a straight entablature; over the axis of the brackets, there are four children sculptures and underneath, little hanging bells; it is crowned with a bell-shaped dome decorated with motifs identical to those of the chalice's base. On top of the dome is a sculpture of The Savior.

A tripartite mark confirms that the chalice-monstrance has a Mexican origin.¹ In the inner part of the base and in the shrine's base there are two stamped marks very close to each other: o/M with a male head in a left profile within two crowned columns and TO/RES (with a horizontal bar separating the surname Torres in two lines).² The first mark can be linked to the stamp used in Mexico City with a variation in which the "o" binds the first letter of the name with the head making it look like an earring of the icon. This mark was used by *Miguel de Torres Hena*, a silversmith whose craftsman period cannot be fully confirmed, except that this chalice was finished on August 8, 1608³, although this year predetermines the period of this piece since it must have been finished prior to that date. Next to these two signs – place and marker – there should be a third mark, indicating the payment of a tax (called "quinto" in Spanish) that every piece made in the Mexico Viceroyalty must have, which was represented by a tower in the lake during its time, thus making a reference to the origin of the Mexico City (Texochitlan) founded on the Texcoco lake.

The four bells are marked with a third stamp in which a capital letter "F" can be seen crowned with a simplified crown that undoubtedly represents the symbol chosen by the silversmith to reflect his work. Since 1986 when this piece was published⁴, we are still in doubt about the

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attribution, since there are many masters with surnames start with “F”: *Juan Falcón* (1626-1634)⁵, *Antonio Faria Saldaña* (1603)⁶, *Baltasar Ferras* (1601-1609)⁷, *Juan de Fonseca* (1622)⁸ and etc.. Even sometimes the marks can be the initial of silversmith’s first name; such is the case of *Francisco Frías Salazar* (1570-1587)⁹ or that of *Francisco Fernández* (doc. 1618-1639)¹⁰. However, the morphology of the mark is not the most commonly used among Hispanic silversmiths, since they tend to use their full or abbreviated names, not independent initials and, even less, crowned, which is why, we have suspected that could belong to a Portuguese artisan and, taking into account the date, could be the work of Pedro Franco, a silversmith born in Camiñal¹¹ and found in Mexico City between 1619 and 1620, when he gave a letter of dowry and deposit for his marriage. But, this is a hypothesis that has yet to be tested.

We know about two other Mexican examples of similar structure with the same features in which the monstrance is designed in the shape of a square shrine crowned with a dome-shaped piece: the one kept in the Diocesan Museum Lucas Guillermo del Castillo in Coro (Venezuela)¹² and the one kept in the Museum Bello y González in Puebla (Mexico). In this format, the chalice adjusts to the traditional structure of this type of pieces during the time of *Torres Hena The Elder*, but now the egg-shaped knot is slightly more slender and the decorations are more simplified that adapted to the repertoire of Abstract Mannerism, leaving aside the naturalistic motifs used in other chalices, possibly from the end of the century like the ones mentioned from Reinosa and Coro. This array of geometrical abstraction, along with the structural design of the piece, confirms that the object was make within the XVII century no later than 1608.

The fact that this is the only chalice-monstrance known so far to have been made by this silversmith (Crowned F) and that it has all its pieces, since the usual circumstance is to find these pieces torn with missing parts, makes this chalice-monstrance extremely valuable not only for its artwork catalogue, but also to have a clue about the evolution of this type of work in Mexican silver. Furthermore, this object has the remarkable characteristic for pieces from

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this period of being marked by the author, which is unusually rare, making this chalice-monstrance an extremely exceptional piece.

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Footnotes

¹ Se dio a conocer con reproducción fotográfica y con un pie de texto con su origen en Cristina Esteras Martín: “El Oro y la Plata americanos, del valor económico a la expresión artística”, *El Oro y la plata de las Indias en la época de los Austrias*, Madrid, Fundación ICO, 1999, p. 400.

² Existe otra variante de su punzón en el que elimina la barra de separación. Puede verse reproducido en Cristina Esteras Martín: *Marcas de platería Hispanoamérica. Siglos XVI-XX*, Madrid, Ediciones Tuero, 1992, nº 31 y 33 a 36.

³ Lo teníamos nosotros documentado hasta mayo de 1606 (véase Cristina Esteras Martín: “*El Arte de la Platería Mexicana. 500 Años*”, México, Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, 1989-1990, nº 23), pero esta fecha ha sido recientemente ampliada hasta el día, mes y año señalados arriba (en María del Carmen Heredia Moreno: “Precisiones sobre los cargos públicos de la platería en el Virreinato de la Nueva España (1527-1650)”, en *Estudios de Platería*, San Eloy 2010 (coord.. Jesús Rivas Carmona), Universidad de Murcia, 2010, pp. 314-315), pasando el cargo a su hijo *Miguel de Torres Hena* “el Menor” (quien para no confundirse con el padre elige como punzón personal su segundo apellido: ENA). Lo cierto es que *Torres Hena* “el Mayor” debió estar un dilatado periodo de años en el ejercicio de marcador, pues son muchas las piezas que llevan su marca.

⁴ Fue con motivo de estudiar el cáliz de Reinosa (Santander) (Cristina Esteras Martín: “*Orfebrería hispanoamericana. Siglos XVI-XIX*”, Madrid, Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana 1986, nº 8)

⁵ México, Archivo General de Notarías. Notarios Pedro Santillán, 1-III-1629, fol. 550 v^a y Alonso de Rueda Torres, 12-IV-1634, s/f.

⁶ México, Archivo General de Notaría. Notario Menén Pérez de Solís, 30-VII-1603, s/f.

⁷ México, Archivo General de Notaría. Notario Diego Álvarez, 11-V-1609, s/f.

⁸ México, Archivo General de Notaría. Notario Alonso Hidalgo Santillán, 20-VII-1622, fol. 205

⁹ México, Archivo General de Notaría. Notario Baltasar Díaz, 9-V-1570 y General Parte, , I, fol. 170.

¹⁰ México, Archivo General de Notaría. Notario Francisco Muñoz Silíceo, 6_IV-1618, s/f y José Veedor, 20-XII-1639, fol. 590 v^a.

¹¹ Debe tratarse de Caminha, municipio en el distrito de Viana do Castelo.

¹² Se atribuyó con dudas a *Domingo Torres* (por Carlos F. Duarte: *Catálogo de obras artísticas mexicanas en Venezuela*. México, 1998, nº 13). Hallado en la iglesia de Churuguara, Estado Falcón.