The Jesuits and the Iconography of Saint Rosalie in Palermo and New Spain

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Obscure early saints were often repurposed in the early Modern period to promote the agendas of new religious orders, even when that order could already boast saints from among its own members, as did the Society of Jesus after 1622, the year Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier were canonized. Yet two years later, the Jesuits would play a leading role in promoting the cult of a little-known anchorite named Saint Rosalie of Palermo (1130-1170). Despite her tenuous ties to the Society, the Jesuits remained proprietary about Rosalie over the next century and a half and across the globe, especially in Italy and New Spain. The daughter of a nobleman at the court of King Roger, Rosalie had lived as a hermit on two hills outside Palermo and Agrigento called Monte Pellegrino and Monte Quisquina, and her cult was unknown beyond Sicily and Tuscany until her bones were rediscovered shortly after the onset of a terrible plague in Palermo in May 1624, one that had also stranded a young painter in the city who would become her greatest promoter. Anthony Van Dyck, at the time on a sojourn in Italy (1621-27), was quarantined there from June 1624 when the city's gates were closed, until September 1625[1]. Van Dyck had likely been invited to Palermo by the Spanish Viceroy Emanuele Filiberto (1588-1624), whose portrait he painted. Shortly afterward however, on 3 August, following a tour of the afflicted city during which he fell ill, Viceroy Filiberto died. The plague would eventually take 10,000 lives.

Even before the Viceroy's death, the Jesuits were already promoting Rosalie in the visual arts: a painting of her in their possession was brought to the dying Viceroy in

[1] V. Segreto, *Geronimo Gerardi tra Van Dyck e Novelli: momenti del disegno e della pittura in Sicilia nella prima metà del Seicento*, in "Storia dell'Arte", 158, 2 (2022), pp. 97-126; G.A. Bailey, *Van Dyck in Sicily*, in "Apollo", March 2012, pp. 102-105; X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily: 1624-25 Painting and the Plague*, London 2012; G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck, the Cult of Saint Rosalie, and the 1623 Plague in Palermo*, in *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague, 1500-1800*, eds. G.A. Bailey et al., Worcester and Chicago 2005, pp. 118-120; R. Santoro, *Il festino di Santa Rosalia,* Palermo 2003, pp. 26 and 29-30; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck as Religious Artist*, Princeton 1979, p. 125; C. Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings of St. Rosalie*, in "The Burlington Magazine", 74, February 1939, p. 53.

procession in late July and placed in his bedroom along with the relics of Saint Christina from the Cathedral[2]. The Jesuits sent the painting because Rosalie's own relics would not be approved until February 1625. The picture was an adaptation of Rosalie as shown in the original icon from the Martorana monastery (Fig. 1), and although it is lost it was engraved by Valérien Regnard for the Jesuit Giordano Cascini's first life of the saint in 1627 and copied a century later by Vito D'Anna (Fig. 2). Both show Rosalie in a Greek Rite habit standing frontally and making the benediction: the engraved version suggests that it featured a landscape with Monte Pellegrino in the background and D'Anna includes a skull, book, and angel holding a crown of red roses[3]. Like the artworks produced during the Palaeochristian Revival in Rome in the 1590s, this first Jesuit painting attempted to preserve the archaistic painting styles and rigid poses of medieval iconography in the belief that it preserved the unmediated sanctity of the original[4]. Cascini does not say who painted or commissioned it, but he wrote that it had been «venerated in the professed house of the Society of Jesus for not many years»[5]. I suspect that it may have been commissioned around 1617, when Sicilian Jesuit Ottavio Caietano (1566–1620) wrote the first brief life of the saint[6]. By July 1625, the Jesuits already had three altarpieces dedicated to Rosalie in their churches in Palermo[7].

Nevertheless, Rosalie had been represented only sporadically before 1624 and only in groups: in the Martorana icon she and fellow Palermo patrons Elia and Venera are outranked (and outsized) by the then favourite Saint Oliva (Fig. 1); a handful of mostly Quattrocento Tuscan paintings depict her as part of a *sacra conversazione*; and some Cinquecento Sicilian panels dressed her as a Franciscan in deference to a group of Franciscan anchorites who began living near her cave[8]. Riccardo Quartararo's unfinished *Madonna and Child with*

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[2] X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily*…, 2012, p. 26.

[3] G. Travagliato, Ex tabula omnium antiquissima… *Alle radici dell'iconografia moderna di Santa Rosalia*, in *Il Restauro della tavola antiquissima di Santa Rosalia del Museo Diocesano di Palermo*, eds. G. Travagliato-M. Sebastianelli, Palermo 2012, p. 17; G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck*…, 2005, p. 123; L. di Giovanni, *Le opere d'arte nelle chiese di Palermo*, ed. S. La Barbera, Palermo 2000, p. 106.

[4] On the Palaeochristian Revival movement, see G.A. Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque: Jesuit Art in Rome, 1565-1610*, Toronto 2003, pp. 123-26.

[5] G. Travagliato, Ex tabula omnium…, 2012, p. 16; G.A. Bailey, *Between Renaissance and Baroque*…, 2005, p. 120. The quotation is from G. Cascini, *Di S. Rosalia, romita Palermitana, palesata con libri tre*, Palermo 1651, p. 40.

[6] M.C. Di Natale, *S. Rosalia virgo solitaria*, in *Le estasi di santa Rosalia*, ed. M.C. Di Natale, Cinisello Balsamo 2024, p. 17.

[7] M.C. Di Natale, *S. Rosalia*…, 2024, p. 21; F. Rangone, *Anton van Dyck a Palermo,i Gesuiti e Santa Rosalia*, in *A la luz de Roma. Santos y santidad en el barroco iberoamericano*, eds. F. Quiles García et al., Rome 2020, I, p. 264.

[8] They were called the Romiti di Montepellegrino. See R. Santoro, *Il festino*…, 2003, p. 25; V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia nella rappresentazione pittorica*, in *La rosa dell'Ercta*, ed. A. Gerbino, Palermo 1991, p. 92. For a chronology of pre-1624 Rosalie paintings see G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck*…, 2005, pp. 119 and 121-123. See also T. Pugliatti, *Rosalia vergine palermitana nelle immagini pittoriche del secolo XVI*, in *La rosa*…, 1991, pp. 68 and 72-82; A. Barricelli, *Imago pittura di Santa Rosalia tra Medioevo e civiltà del Quattrocento*, in *La rosa*…, 1991, pp. 53 and 56-58; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art crétien*, Paris 1955-59, p. 1170.

Fig. 1. Anonymous, 13th century, *Saints Oliva, Elia, Venera, and Rosalie*, tempera on panel, Palermo, Museo Diocesano, from the Martorana Monastery.

Fig. 2. Vito D'Anna, 1745, *Saint Rosalie*, oil on canvas, Palermo, Chiesa del Gesù, cappella di Santa Rosalia (© Archivio Fotografico Regionale dell'Arte Siciliana (A.F.R.A.S.), n. inv. AF_S_03_3_11285).

Saint Rosalie (1506) is the first picture to include depictions of the two hills where she lived[9]. By 1624 Rosalie had already acquired her main attributes: a crown of roses (a reference to her name), a martyr's palm (renouncing the flesh counted as martyrdom), a book (a symbol of meditation), a lily (for purity), a skull (a *memento mori*), and the twin hills[10].

Nevertheless, municipal authorities under Jesuit guidance had already hired a painter to create an updated iconography for the saint. The Sicilian Vincenzo La Barbera (ca 1577-ca 1651), who was a favourite of the Society and had helped design the iconography for the 1622 canonization of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier in Palermo, was hired by the Senate on 27 July 1624, the day before the Viceroy made his fatal tour. He produced *Saint Rosalie Intercedes for Palermo* in just over a month to debut in a Jesuit-sponsored procession on 4 September, the second they sponsored since the outbreak (Fig. 3)[11]. He converted Rosalie into a forceful advocate for the city

[9] On the introduction of the two hills see: F. Abbate, *Storia dell'arte nell'italia meridionale*, Rome 2001, pp. 30-31; T. Pugliatti, *Rosalia vergine…*, 1991, pp. 35-40.

[10] G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, p. 119.

[11] M.C. Di Natale, *S. Rosalia…*, 2024, p. 20; F. Rangone, *Antoon Van Dyck…*, 2020, pp. 261-262; G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 124-125; X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 37-38 and 90-91 (cat. 11); V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*,1991, pp. 92 and 99; P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia*

Fig. 3. Vincenzo La Barbera, 1624, *Saint Rosalie Interceding for Palermo*, Palermo, Museo Diocesano.

of Palermo, kneeling just left of centre and gazing beseechingly at the Madonna and Trinity while she gestures toward the main lazaretto, harbour, and Monte Pellegrino, all rendered in exacting detail. A brunette with a small, round face and doe eyes she wears a dark brown cowl and is balanced on the right by a still-life group complete with lily, book, and skull. As in D'Anna's copy of the Casa Professa painting, a putto lowers a crown of roses onto her head[12]. Barbera painted an awkward version of the same scene a year later, this time with a gruesome pile of corpses. Fellow Sicilian painter Pietro D'Asaro (1597-1647) was employed in 1625 to design Rosalie iconography for the triumphal arches that lined the route of the saint's first Festino on 9 July, including *Rosalie Interceding for Palermo*, which he also executed for the church at Delia[13]. However, both La Barbera and D'Asaro were clearly second-rate artists, and the Jesuits and other patrons wanted something better[14].

nella storia e nell'arte, Palermo 1977, p. 96. See also C. González, *Devotional Geographies and Imagined Communities: A Sicilian Saint for the Spanish World*, in *Cultural Convergence in New Mexico: Interactions in Art, History & Archaeology*, eds. R.F. Gavin-D. Pierce, Santa Fe 2021, p. 86; X.F. Salomon, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2012, p. 26; A. Giannino, *La chiesa del Gesù a Casa Professa*, Palermo 2003, pp. 29-30; *Costruire Gerusalemme: il complesso gesuitico della Casa Professa di Palermo dalla storia al museo*, ed. M.C. Ruggieri Tricoli, Milan 2001, pp. 80-82, 104, 115-16; T. Pugliatti, *Rosalia vergine…*, 1991, p. 86; V. Abbate, *La città aperta. Pittura e società a Palermo tra Cinque e Seicento*, in *Porto di Mare 1570-1670: Pittori e pittura a Palermo tra memoria e recupero*, ed. V. Abbate, Naples 1999, p. 273.

12 X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, p. 90; G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro: nuovi documenti per van Dyck e Gerardi a Palermo*, in *Porto di Mare 1570-1670…*, 1999, pp. 65-66; V. Abbate, *La città aperta…*, 1999, p. 22 (Fig. 11).

13 V. Segreto, *Geronimo Gerardi…*, 2022, pp. 104-105. Two drawings attributed to D'Asaro showing Rosalie intervening for Palermo are in the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia di Palazzo Abatellis (S. Intorre, *La Vita S. Rosaliae di van Dyck nella Biblioteca della Fondazione Sicilia*, in *Le estasi…*, 2024, p. 66, figs. 26, 27. A very poor copy by D'Asaro of La Barbera's painting from ca.1625 is in the Chiesa Madre in Delia, Sicily. See P. Busub, *Delia e Santa Rosalia: tra devozione, culto e marchesato Lucchese*, Delia 2021.

14 I cannot agree with Rangone that Van Dyck invented the composition before La Barbera painted it (i.e., that he made the sketch and handed to La Barbera to paint it). Her thesis is that La Barbera was chosen even though he was clearly a second-rate painter, because he was Sicilian and it was considered improper for a non-Sicilian to paint Palermo's new patron. See F. Rangone, *Antoon Van Dyck…*, 2020, p. 262.

Van Dyck's involuntary quarantine gave them the perfect opportunity[15]. Van Dyck would transform the reconditioned saint into one of Catholicism's most popular images of victory over plague[16]. Archbishop Giannettino Doria, who set up the commission to establish the authenticity of Rosalie's bones, may have first contacted the young artist as Doria was of Genoese origin and Van Dyck had earlier worked for prominent Genoese clients[17]. Van Dyck also had close ties to the Jesuits through his teacher Peter Paul Rubens, with whom he collaborated on the decorations of the Jesuit church in Antwerp, and through his friendship with English Jesuits in Rome in 1621, and I and Fiorenza Rangoni suspect that the Jesuit Cascini was responsible for hiring him to develop a new iconography for Rosalie[18]. The young painter worked swiftly, producing as many as eight canvases of the saint in a single year between September 1624 and September 1625, comprising at least three main iconographical prototypes[19]. None are altarpieces and they may have been meant as festival decorations: Vita Segreto has recently suggested that four of them may have been hung on the façade of the house of the Consul of the Spanish Netherlands and Germany, Hendrik Dych, during the saint's first Festino in 1625[20]. Filippo Paruta, secretary of the Senate of Palermo and official chronicler of the Festino, called them «rich and sumptuous paintings» and «the most beautiful paintings that have ever been seen»[21]. During that same Festino, Van Dyck and his companions Jan Breughel the Younger (1601-78), Willem Walsgart (Geronimo Gerardi, 1595–1648), and Pietro Novelli (Il Monrealese, 1603-47), also made their own *apparato* on the front of the house

[15] G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 123-124; R. Santoro, *Il festino*…, 2003, pp. 15-16; L. Réau, *Iconographie*…, 1955-59, p. 1170. Urban VIII entered her into the *Martyrologium Romanum* in 1630.

[16] According to legend Saint Rosalie (d. ca 1160) was the daughter of a noble at the court of King Roger named Sinisbaldo and some legends have her descend from Charlemagne. See G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 19-20; G. Mele, *Santa Rosalia: storia e leggenda della patrona di Palermo*, Palermo 2003, pp. 11-15; R. Santoro, *Il festino*…, 2003, pp. 15-17, 24-25; U. Santino, *I giorni della peste: il festino di Santa Rosalia tra mito e spettacolo*, Palermo 1999, pp. 6-10; P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia*…, 1977, pp. 22-36; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck*…, 1979, p. 125; L. Réau, *Iconographie*…, 1955-59, pp. 1170-71.

[17] X. F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, p. 16.

[18] F. Rangone, *Antoon Van Dyck…*, 2020, pp. 248-259; X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily*…, 2012, p. 45.

[19] I arrive at the number eight by including *The Virgin Presenting Saint Rosalie to the Trinity* in Munich – of uncertain attribution – and two lost Rosalie pictures (a *Saint Rosalie* and a *Virgin and Child with Saint Rosalie and Saint John* mentioned in the 1632 inventory of Simone Sitaiolo) published in X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, p. 38. For a partial bibliography of the van Dyck Rosalie series see: Idem, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 34-41, 90-107; *Van Dyck. A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, eds. S. Barnes et al., New Haven and London 2004, pp. 159-61; G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro…*, 1999, pp. 88-105; E. Larsen, *The Paintings of Anthony van Dyck*, Freren 1988, I, pp. 230-22; II, pp. 181-84; C. Brown, *Van Dyck*, Oxford 1982, pp. 80-82; E. Larsen, *L'opera completa di van Dyck: 1613-26*, Milan 1980, cat. 442-446, 451, 454; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck*…, 1979, pp. 125-126; C. Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings…*, 1939, pp. 53-62. For the debate over whether certain of his Rosalie paintings were executed in Genoa, Sicily, or Antwerp see G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 124-125. On the Munich picture see X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, p. 39 (Fig. 28).

[20] V. Segreto, *Geronimo Gerardi…*, 2022, p. 103.

[21] *Ibidem*. See also S. Intorre, *La Vita S. Rosaliae…*, 2024, p. 50; C. D'Arpa, *Da Palermo alle Fiandre e viceversa: le iconografie di santa Rosalia Sinibaldi promosse da Antoon van Dyck e dai gesuiti di Anversa*, in *Le estasi di…*, 2024, p. 69.

Fig. 4. Anthony Van Dyck, ca. 1624-25, *Saint Rosalie Interceding for Palermo*, oil on canvas, Puerto Rico, Museo de Arte de Ponce.

they were renting on nearby via dei Bottai with colourful velvet and damask textiles as well as landscapes that may have been executed by Breughel.

Van Dyck completely transformed Rosalie, combining the refinement of his society portraits with the fervour of his early religious pictures (Fig. 4). La Barbera's skinny peasant girl became a full-figured blonde and her rough garb is treated more sensually, revealing the contours of her body and accessorised with diaphanous or silken veils casually draped over her shoulder or her thigh and arms. Segreto has suggested that Van Dyck altered Rosalie's physiognomy in homage to one of his sisters, whose portraits he had painted before his departure as studies for the Madonna and Mary Magdalene, possibly including one now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York[22]. In the Ponce canvas, which I believe to be the earliest, Van Dyck emulated La Barbera's precise brushwork and polished surfaces, as well as the protagonist's pose[23]. But Van Dyck's Rosalie occupies almost the entire canvas and is set against a tenebrous cave and stormy clouds, drawing attention to her sparkling eyes and the kind of radiant flesh tones that so pleased the artist's female sitters. The cityscape, now entirely on her left, is less painstakingly executed than that of La Barbera but the saint's gesture more effectively embraces both Palermo and Monte Pellegrino. The still-life group is now just a pile of bones, representing for the first time the cult of her relics. Another addition is the rolled-up mat in the cave, a symbol of her life as an anchorite and perhaps derived from the iconography of the

[22] V. Segreto, *Geronimo Gerardi…*, 2022, pp. 99-100.

[23] I first make this suggestion in G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 125-126. For a select bibliography on this picture see: X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 92-93 (cat. 12); *Masterpieces of European Painting from the Museo de Arte de Ponce*, eds. C. Hartup-R. Aste, Ponce 2008, pp. 92-93 (cat. 28); *Van Dyck. A Complete* Catalogue…, 1999, p. 286 (cat III.51); V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 95; E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, II, p. 183 (cat. 454); S.J. Barnes, *Van Dyck in Italy: 1621-28*, PhD dissertation, New York University, 1986, p. 57; J.S. Held, *Museo de Arte de Ponce: Fundación Luis A. Ferré. Paintings of the European and American Schools*, Ponce 1984, I, pp. 58-59, 104-107; C. Brown, *Van Dyck…*, 1982, pp. 81-82; E. Larsen, *L'opera completa…*, 1980, p. 118; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck…*, 1979, pp. 130-131 (cat. 35); P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia…*, 1977, pp. 62, 100; C. Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings…*, 1939, pp. 59-62; *Des Meisters Gemälde*, ed. G. Glück, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1909, p. 156.

Death of Saint Francis Xavier[24]. Van Dyck brings Rosalie's pose and situation into line with depictions of the Penitent Magdalene or Saint John the Baptist, thus turning her into a more mainstream contemplative saint that could appeal to a wider audience outside Sicily[25].

Van Dyck refined this prototype in an oil sketch at Apsley House that was probably a study for his version in the Menil Collection (Fig. 5)[26]. Perhaps so as to avoid confusion with the Magdalene, Van Dyck reintroduced some of her traditional attributes, including angels -one of them with the crown of roses and the lily- and the book, and the artist trims back the cave and parts the clouds to allow us an optimistic glimpse of blue sky. Rosalie is more elongated with pinker skin, and she places her hand on her breast similarly to the Magdalene. All these features appear in the Menil canvas, although the book and skull are now at far right. The Menil version is far and away Van Dyck's best Rosalie, not only on the merit of the figure but because the entire canvas is enlivened by a bolder Venetian-inspired brushwork and impasto, seen especially in the clouds and her tresses[27]. Rosalie is elegant, passion-

Fig. 5. Anthony Van Dyck, ca. 1625, *Saint Rosalie Interceding for Palermo, Houston*, Menil Collection.

[24] On the iconography of the Death of Saint Francis Xavier see: G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, pp. 125-126; Idem, *The Jesuits and Painting in Italy, 1550-1690, The Art of Catholic Reform*, in *Saints and Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image*, ed. F. Mormando, Boston and Chicago 1999, pp. 160-69 and figs. 14-18.

[25] Abbate was the first to suggest that van Dyck was deliberately mainstreaming the iconography of Saint Rosalie. See V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 91. See also G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro…*, 1999, p. 101; C. Brown, *Van Dyck…*, 1982, p. 81; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck…*, 1979, p. 126.

[26] A select bibliography follows: X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 96-97 (cat 13); M.C. Kauffmann-S. Jenkins, *Catalogue of Paintings in the Wellington Museum, Apsley House*, London 2009, pp. 102-104 (cat. 42); G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 127-128; *Van Dyck. A Complete Catalogue…*, 2004, p. 160 (cat II.15); V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 95; E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, II, p. 191 (cat. 453); S.J. Barnes, *Van Dyck in Italy…*, 1986, pp. 57 and 173-175; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck…*, 1979, pp. 127-128; P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia…*, 1977, pp. 60 and 100; *Des Meisters Gemälde…*, 1909, p. 156; C. Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings…*, 1939, p. 59.

[27] A select bibliography follows: X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 98-99 (cat. 14); G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, p. 127 (cat. 30); *Van Dyck. A Complete Catalogue…*, 1999, p. 161 (cat. II.16); G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro…*, 1999, pp. 101, 103; V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 95 (cat. 451); E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, I, p. 233; II, p. 181 (cat. 451); S.J. Barnes, *Van Dyck in Italy…*, 1986, pp. 57 and 347-349; C. Brown, *Van Dyck…*, 1982, pp. 18-82; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck…*, 1979, pp. 127-129 (cat. 34); P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia…*, 1977, p. 100; C.

ate and beautiful, with an opulent cascade of golden hair -he highlights it in a way he did not in the Ponce version -as well as tapered fingers and a vivid orange veil which gathers over left thigh and right arm. Her left hand sensually strokes her hair. Again Van Dyck gives us a more expansive view of heaven with its rolling cloudbursts and the golden sunrays which illuminate the young woman's face. But he reduces the specificity of the painting by eliminating the cityscape, which is now just a vague glimpse of a harbour and low hills. Rosalie is no longer a local girl, but a devotional figure engineered for an international market.

Van Dyck's other treatments of the saint were one-off exercises. The Prado Rosalie shares the Menil's facial features and the angels in both paintings are close, leading me to suspect that it was executed soon afterward, although it is less energetic, her body and fingers are not as elongated, and her hair is less fiery. Here the iconography is so standardized that if it were not for the crown of roses it could easily be taken for a Magdalene[28]. The Metropolitan Museum version is an apotheosis that despite its inclusion of the cityscape, skull, and crown of roses resembles an Assumption[29]. It is also the last one in which the saint is the sole subject of the painting. The inclusion of an angel holding his nose because of the smell of decaying flesh, an old trope in paintings of plague, is included here for the first time. In the first altarpiece, *The Madonna of the Rosary* (1628), commissioned and perhaps designed in Sicily but painted in Naples and Genoa, she almost disappears, crowded together with ten other saints in a cramped *sacra conversazione* while the Madonna, Child, and angels look on from above[30]. Rosalie is recognizable by her flowing reddish hair and brown cowl. This time a nude boy at the bottom holds his nose against the smell in reference to the plague.

In Van Dyck's last Rosalie picture the saint, like her creator, has left Sicily far behind. The triumphant *Coronation of Saint Rosalie* (1629) was executed for his Jesuit Sodality of Bachelors in Antwerp and Xavier Salomon considers it to be his

Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings…*, 1939, pp. 59-62; M. Vaes, *Le séjour d'Antoine van Dyck en Italie*, in "Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge à Rome", IV (1924), p. 201.

[28] A select bibliography follows: E. De Castro, *Antoon van Dyck, Santa Rosalia*, in *Le estasi…*, 2024, pp. 83-85; X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 102-03 (cat. 15); G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, p. 130; *Museo del Prado: Catálogo de las pinturas*, Madrid 1996, cat. 1494; V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 95; E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, II, p. 181 (cat. 455); S.J. Barnes, *Van Dyck in Italy…*, 1986, p. 380; P. Collura, *Santa Rosalia…*, 1977, p. 100.

[29] A select bibliography on the Metropolitan picture follows: X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 104-107 (cat. 16); V. Abbate, *La grande stagione del collezionismo*, Palermo 2011, pp. 95-96; *Omaggio a Capodimonte: da Caravaggio a Picasso*, ed. N. Spinosa, Naples 2007, pp. 156-157; G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, pp. 128-129, 238-239 (cat. 31); *Van Dyck. A Complete* Catalogue…, 1999, pp. 159-160 (cat. II.14); G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro…*, 1999, pp. 101-02; E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, I, p. 233; II, p. 181 (cat. 449); C. Brown, *Van Dyck…*, 1982, pp. 81-82.

[30] X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 44-45 (Fig. 33); G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, p. 130; *Van Dyck. A Complete Catalogue…*, 1999, pp. 153-155 (cat II.7); G. Mendola, *Un approdo sicuro…*, 1999, p. 99; E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, II, 181 (cat 448); S.J. Barnes, *Van Dyck in Italy…*, 1986, pp. 51-54, 154-158 (cat. 8); E. Larsen, *The Paintings…*, 1988, p. 117 (cat. 441); C. Sterling, *Van Dyck's Paintings…*, 1939, p. 60.

personal ex-voto to the saint[31]. Her main attributes are there, such as the book, skull, lily, and crown of roses (here held by Christ), but Van Dyck places her in an opulent Venetian Renaissance setting before a regal enthroned Madonna and Child framed by massive columns that soar beyond the limits of the canvas. Discarding her cowl for an ensemble of satin and brocade that would do Veronese proud Rosalie has at last assumed the demeanour of the Flemish and English nobles van Dyck would make his stock in trade as he began his own triumphant march to fame and fortune[32].

Fig. 6. Mattia Preti, 1677-1678, *Saint Rosalie*. Floriana (Malta), Church of the Immaculate Conception of Sarria.

Van Dyck's creation enjoyed a long afterlife. Andrea Vaccaro and Mattia Preti promoted the saint's image in Naples and Malta, where the saint's protection was sought during the plagues of 1656 (Naples) and 1676 (Malta) (Fig. 6)[33]. But her greatest supporters were in Sicily, including Gerardi and Van Dyck's most notable Sicilian friend Pietro Novelli, who even named his artist daughter Rosalia (1628-88). Novelli's resplendent *Madonna and Child Flanked by Saint John the Baptist and Saint Rosalie* (ca 1630s) exhibits the ample figure, rosy cheeks, and golden tresses of van Dyck, but enhances her gracefulness through a more attenuated body and swan-like neck[34]. However in other versions Novelli transformed her again into a Sicilian brunette, and indeed dark-haired Rosalies remained popular in Italy and in the Hispanic world.

[31] C. D'Arpa, *Da Palermo alle Fiandre…*, 2024, pp. 69-81; X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, p. 45.

[32] X.F. Salomon, *Van Dyck in Sicily…*, 2012, pp. 45-46 (Fig. 35); G.A. Bailey, *Anthony Van Dyck…*, 2005, p. 133; J.R. Martin-G. Feigenbaum, *Van Dyck…*, 1979, p. 126; V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, p. 98.

[33] C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 87; S. Debono, *Mattia Preti, Santa Rosalia*, in *Le estasi…*, 2024, pp. 93-97; J. Clifton, *Art and Plague at Naples*, in *Hope and Healing…*, 2005, pp. 97-117.

[34] On this and other Rosalie pictures by Novelli see M.A. Herradón Figueroa, *Pietro Novelli, Santa Rosalia di Palermo in gloria*, in *La estasi…*, 2024, 97-91; G.A. Bailey, *Baroque & Rococo*, London 2012, pp. 48-51; *Pietro Novelli e il suo ambiente*, ed. V. Abbate, Palermo 1990, II, cat. 68 and III, cat. 93; V. Abbate, *Il '600: Santa Rosalia…*, 1991, pp. 232-233 (cat. 31).

Even though one of Van Dyck's Rosalies ended up in the Spanish royal collection, along with versions by Luca Giordano and Andrea Vaccaro, and in spite of the close ties that existed between Antwerp, Sicily, and Spain, Rosalie had little impact on the religious art of the peninsula. Francisco de Zurbarán included her in a hagiographic series around 1645, and there are paintings of her by Madrid-based painters Matías López (fl.1645-65), Juan Bautista de la Peña (ca.1710-1773), and Antonio Palomino (1655-1726), but not much else[35]. Nevertheless, her cult was supported in Seville and Toledo by two clerics who had lived in Palermo, the Theatine Manuel Calasibeta and Archbishop Jaime de Palafox y Cardona. In 1688 Palafox donated a splendid silver reliquary bust by Palermo sculptor Antonio Lorenzo Castelli to Seville Cathedral, which was taken out in processions during important feast days. A much later sculpture of Rosalie accompanied by angels in the Church of Santa Eulalia in Murcia (before 1730) was executed by Marseille sculptor Antoine Dupar (1675-1755)[36]. Neither sculpture was by a Spaniard.

By contrast, the Rosalie cult enjoyed enthusiastic reception in New Spain. Although many artworks were commissioned for non-Jesuit patrons, Cristina González has demonstrated that Jesuits were operating vigorously behind the scenes through publications, including an anonymous 1730 novena published in Mexico City and reprinted 11 times, a popular prayer book by Jesuit Domenico Stanislao Alberti reprinted four times, and an anonymous devotional manual republished four times celebrating her as one of the Three Roses of three religious orders. A uniquely New Spanish devotion, it identified Rosalie as Jesuit, Rose of Lima as Dominican, and Rose of Viterbo as Franciscan[37]. Juan Ignacio María de Castorena y Ursúa (1688-1733) even explained that Rosalie compensated for the Jesuits' lack of a female division[38]. González writes about Jesuit support of the saint in New Spain that it was «not just robust, it was proprietary»[39].

In Puebla painters Juan Tinoco, Luis Berrueco, and Cristóbal de Talavera represented the saint as a pilgrim, standing against a landscape in a black gown, crowned with roses, and with a crucifix in her hand, in both cases with reddish or golden hair as in Van Dyck's depictions. In Tinoco's painting she stands on a giant rose and holds a pilgrim's staff as well as a penitential whip and Berrueco and Talavera show her outside her cave accompanied by angels, one of whom holds a crucifix and rosary (the iconography was taken from an engraving in Cascini's life of the saint)[40]. A similar scene appears in Miguel Cabrera's *Saint Rosalie Guided by Angels*, where the pilgrim saint is led barefoot

35 An Iberian engraving of the saint was also executed in 1653 (C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 88; D. Angulo Iñíguez-A.E. Perez Sanchez, *Pintura madrileña del Segundo tercio del siglo XVII*, Madrid 1983, pp. 106-107).

36 G. Ramallo Asensio, *Actualización de cultos y devociones del Barroco en la catedral de Murcia a cargo de escultores franceses*, in *Les échanges artistiques entre la France et l'Espagne, xve-fin xixe siècles*, ed. J. Lugand, Perpignan 2019, pp. 201-221.

37 C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 92.

38 *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici*, ed. I. Katzew, Los Angeles and Mexico City 2017, p. 467.

39 C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 92.

40 C. González, Devotional Geographies…, 2021, pp. 90-91.

by two full-length angels, although without the cave (Fig. 7). Loosely based on an engraving from Cascini, this version by the Jesuits' favourite painter became one of the most popular ways of representing the saint in Viceregal Mexico[41]. Elsewhere Rosalie appears in her cave with a crucifix, lily, book, and penitential whip, as in a version by Juan de Villalobos which also includes angel musicians and a bouquet of roses at her feet[42]. Rosalie also appears in groups with other saints, for instance among supporters of the Virgin Immaculate on a badge worn by a nun[43]. One fascinating painting, by Nicolás Correa (b.1649), shows her statue being processed through a New Spanish city in front of a crowd including indigenous and mixed-race people, one of whom may be a self-portrait of the artist[44]. Although the scene represents the Palermo Festino, its New Spanish setting suggests that it records a local procession such as one in Mexico City reported in the newspaper *Gaceta de México* in 1737. Rosalie is represented as a statue dressed as a pilgrim hermit, barefoot with a crown of roses and staff. In New Spain her protection was sought in particular during the 1737 epidemic and another one in 1762, both of them probably typhus.

Fig. 7 Miguel Cabrera, mid-18th century, *Saint Rosalie Guided by Angels*. Capilla de Aranzazu, San Luis Potosí, Church of San Francisco de Asis, Secretaría de Cultura, Sitios y Monumentos del Patrimonio Cultural.

Jesuit missionaries, primarily Italians, vigorously promoted Rosalie's cause on the northern frontier. In the late 1680s and 1690s, the Sicilians Francesco Maria Gravina and Francesco Maria Piccolo (1654-1729) introduced the saint's devotion among the Tarahumaras and Pimas of Sonora and Chihuahua, and in Baja California, even founding a mission in her name, Santa Rosalía Mulegé, in 1705[45]. Rosalie was celebrated as a protector against measles and smallpox and in Arizpe (Sonora), the village's women organized a two-day annual fiesta in her honour, including processions and popular dances. As befitting a festival dedicated to a strong woman protagonist it even involved

41 C.C. González, *Saints & Santos: Picturing the Holy in New Spain*, Santa Fe 2025, p. 92.
42 C.C. González, *Saints & Santos*…, 2025, pp. 90-93.
43 C.C. González, Saints & Santos…, 2025, p. 189.
44 C.C. González, Saints & Santos…, 2025, p. 93; *Painted in Mexico*…, 2017, pp. 438, 466-67.
45 C. González, *Devotional Geographies*…, 2021, p. 92; *Painted in Mexico*…, 2017, p. 467.

Fig. 8 Francisco Martínez, 18th century, *Saint Rosalie*, Tepotzotlán, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, Secretaría de Cultura.

tournaments of ability and endurance by women dressed in military garb[46]. Jesuit pharmacologist Juan de Esteyneffer (1664–1716) even included her among the cures in his medicinal guide to New Spain, writing: «Saint Sebastian, Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Roch, Saint Rosalie, are advocates of typhoid and pestilential fevers»[47]. Closer to Mexico City, a lateral altar at the Jesuit college at Tepotzotlán, one of whose teachers had published a panegyric to the saint in 1724, was dedicated to the saint in 1753[48]. One of the cult's main supporters there was Sicilian rector Antonio Ignacio Mancusi (1677-1750) who brought several Rosalie relics to New Spain and sent them to Jesuit foundations across the viceroyalty. A prominent student of the Jesuit college, Jesuit Juan José de Arriola (b.1698) wrote a three-part life of Rosalie in verse in Puebla, likely around the time of the 1762 pestilence there, in which she is betrothed to Christ and drinks the Virgin's milk (it was never published because of the Jesuit expulsion from Spanish territories in 1767 but circulated in manuscript form with illustrations)[49]. A 1723 panegyric by Jesuit Lucas Rincón (1685-1741) was dedicated to the viceroy Juan de Acuña y Bejarano (r.1722-34), whose previous post had been in Sicily, further attesting to the saint's popularity in New Spain by that date[50]. Painter Francisco Martínez enjoyed such a «fruitful professional relationship» with the Society, as Luisa Elena Alcalá has noted, that he was able to ask the Jesuit Procurator General directly for the latest pigments from Europe, as he did in 1744 for "French" and "Roman" blue (Fig. 8)[51]. Two of his paintings of Rosalie make particular use of luminous azures and other lively colours, as in this interpretation of an engraving by Austrian Johann Andreas Pfeffel, noteworthy for its shimmering ribbon, vivid floral still lives, and youthful ivory skin tones.

46 C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 92.

47 «*San Sebastian, San Carlos Borromeo, S Francisco Xavier, San Roque, Santa Rosalía, son abogados de los tabardillos, y calenturas pestilenciales*». (J. de Esteyneffer, *Florilegium medicinal*, Mexico City 1712, p. 268).

48 L.E. Alcalá, *La obra del pintor novohispano Francisco Martínez*, in "Anales del Museo de América", 7 (1999), pp. 183-184.

49 C. González, *Devotional Geographies…*, 2021, p. 94.

50 *Painted in Mexico…*, 2017, p. 467.

51 L.E. Alcalá, *La obra del pintor novohispano…*, 1999, p. 183.

Fig. 9 José Aragón, ca.1820-1835, *Saint Rosalie of Palermo*, San Antonio, McNay Art Museum.

Thanks to the vigorous efforts of the Jesuits in northern New Spain, Rosalie enjoyed her warmest reception in New Mexico in the mid-eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries, an unexpected epilogue to our story as the area had been staunchly Franciscan since 1598 and this flourishing took place after the Jesuit expulsion of 1767 and even after the secularization of the Clergy by the Spanish Crown in 1794 and Mexican Independence in 1821. The driving force behind Rosalie's cult in New Mexico, a remote colony with insufficient clergy to serve its communities regularly, were penitential confraternities known as Penitentes (the Brothers of Our Father Jesus) for whom Rosalie became a patron because of her ascetic life[52]. Penitentes had been introduced into New Mexico in the late eighteenth century and at first were supported by the Franciscans, who had adopted Rosalie's cult along with the former Jesuit missions they took over in northern Mexico. But after secularization the Penitentes, who were largely rural, were distrusted by the Church and wealthier settlers[53]. Penitentes met in special chapel meetinghouses called *moradas* and offered essential spiritual and charitable support (such as burials and Holy Week observances) to their communities, and their members practiced self-flagellation. Flagellants attended public processions while other members carried crosses; some processions were attended by sculpted female wooden death angels (called *la muerte*), serving as a memento mori. Rosalie was more popular in New Mexico than anywhere else in Spanish-speaking America in the nineteenth century. González has identified over thirty paintings of her between 1800 and 1900; indeed some believe that she was the patron of a female branch of the Penitentes[54].

[52] C.M. Carillo-T.J. Steele, *A Century of Retablos: The Janis and Dennis Lyon Collection of New Mexican Santos, 1780-1880*, Phoenix, New York, and Manchester 2007, p. 96.

[53] M. Weigle, *Introduction: The Penitente Brotherhood in Northern New Mexico in the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries*, in *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy: Southwestern Santos in the Late Nineteenth Century*, ed. W. Wroth, Norman and London 1991, pp. 55-65.

[54] C. González, *Devotional Geographies*…, 2021, p. 95. C.C. González, *Saints & Santos*…, 2025, p. 94; C.M. Carillo-T.J. Steele, *A Century of Retablos*…, 2007, p. 126; L. Frank, *A Land So Remote: Religious Art of New Mexico*, Santa Fe 2001, I, pp. 55, 138, 151, 160, 208, 210; II, p. 439; *Images of Penance*…, 1991, p. 82; T.J. Steele, *Santos and Saints: The Religious Folk art of Hispanic New Mexico*, Santa Fe 1982, p. 37.

All of these features are included in Rosalie's stripped-down iconography in New Mexico, which except for a few imported Mexican paintings on canvas by Miguel Cabrera, take the form primarily of small paintings on wood covered with gesso known in New Mexico as "retablos" (Fig. 9)[55]. In New Mexico the painter worked as an act of devotion and was himself a monk-like ascetic figure for whom sacred painting was a vocation, and the hieratic and simplified imagery was created not as an aesthetic object but as what Thomas Steele calls an "instrument" within a network of prayer, atonement, processions, and other aspects of religious life[56]. Rosalie's iconography is quite uniform, with the long black, brown or grey gown, floral crown, crucifix, scourge, book, and skull, and she is shown as a statue in a niche, sometimes with curtains, and sometimes in front of an altar, but with a minimum of background. The panel format, stiff frontal poses, calligraphic use of line, two-dimensionality, and limited palette of these retablos make them resemble Byzantine icons, and like the latter they are stripped of any narrative features. A panel by *santero* José Aragón (ca.1820-1835) reduces the saint to her most recognizable elements, her body as rigid and robust as a statue as she stands before an altar with the skull and cross in her hands. Thus, in New Mexico we come full circle. Exactly two centuries after the Palermo plague, paintings of Rosalie by artists like Aragón are closer in spirit and function to the standing figure in the original Martorana icon (Fig. 1) than they are to any of the more recent Baroque imagery with its appeal to human sensuality and to beauty, the only hint of Van Dyck's recreation of the saint visible in the demure stance and blushing cheeks of this now fervently ascetic saint.

[55] Paintings by Miguel Cabrera or in his style can be seen in Isleta Pueblo and Santa Cruz de la Cañada (with the two angels) and Santa Fe Parroquia (now the Cathedral), a single standing figure embracing the crucifix, all of which are Mexican. See also C. González, *Devotional Geographies*…, 2021, p. 96.

[56] T.J. Steele, *Santos and Saints*…, 1974, p. 36.

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