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Introduction

In the 1776 volume of his work *Journey Around Spain*, the eminent scholar Antonio Ponz recorded two anonymous series of *enconchados* (mother-of-pearl inlaid paintings)¹ depicting the *Conquest of Mexico* and the *Battles of Alexandre Farnese* (Figs.1 and 2). These works were in the House of the Dukes of Infantado and Ponz referred to them as two series of medium colored paintings, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, worth seeing.² By the time Ponz saw these *enconchados*, over 70 years had passed since they had been shipped from New Spain, so the fact that they were still in exhibition and caught Ponz' attention is itself significant. The paintings mentioned by Ponz have been preserved to this day,³ and it can be affirmed that the reason why he found them so appealing relates to their materiality.

In fact, *enconchados* aroused interest of members of different social groups in New Spain between ca. 1660 and 1750 because of their very use of mother-of-pearl, bright colors, and elaborate ornamentation. The review of many *enconchados* –either those signed by different artists or the anonymous ones– suggests the existence of a shared aesthetic, that allows affirming that shine and light were important for the audience.⁴ That is to say, although not all succeeded at depicting light, the spectators shared a conception of what they should look like.



Fig. 1. Anonymous, "Battle of Cempoala", *Conquest of Mexico*, late 17th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 6-panel series, 163 x 110 cm, Franz Mayer Museum.

Interestingly, albeit mother-of-pearl inlays were essential to *enconchados*' particular effects, in-depth research on the use of this material is yet to be done. The main quality of mother-of-pearl is shine, which suffuses the most outstanding *enconchados* with a sumptuous surface. Mother-of-pearl is found in the inner walls of the shells of certain bivalves, such as oysters and mussels –both sea and freshwater species. This material consists of a number of translucent layers made of very fine calcium carbonate crystals and conchiolin, an animal protein that acts as a bonding agent. Shine is the result of light reflection over the crystalline surface and iridescence results from the light refraction and diffraction over the different layers. However, most shells have an opaque covering which makes them unsuitable for inlay.⁵

This text will first of all describe *enconchados*, as well as their relationship with both New Spanish painting and certain Asian lacquerware.

Secondly, it will discuss the use of shell – namely the problems that arose when acquiring pearl shells in Mexico City around 1700. This text will also examine the possibility that both luminosity and ornamentation suffused *enconchados* with a sense of luxury, which might have been essential for both their function and acceptance at the highest social levels in New Spain.



Fig. 2. Anonymous, “Triumphal Feasts for Alexander in Paris”, *Battles of Alexander Farnese*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 6-panel series, private collection.

Enconchados share many of their characteristics with other viceregal paintings, including production techniques and materials.⁶ In the early 20th century, some scholars misunderstood the use of mother-of-pearl as harkening back to Pre-Columbian times;⁷ others realized its use reflects Asian art.⁸ In 1997, it was pointed out that they were related to Japanese *Namban* lacquerware (ca. 1570-1630), primarily exported to Europe.⁹ The resemblance is more obvious on *enconchado* frames (**Figs. 1, 6 and 7**), which make use of mother-of-pearl, as well as ornamentation from Japanese works.¹⁰

Namban lacquerware includes objects for Catholic worship, such as lecterns, book stands, Communion vessels and triptychs objects, as well as others destined for household use, such as chests and desks (**Fig. 3**).¹¹ These works have black grounds filled with native species of flowers, birds and grape clusters, as well as geometric motifs. The images are outlined with powdered gold or silver, with the occasional detail in color. The main substance used for *Namban* lacquerware is a resin called *Toxicodendron vernicifluum* (formerly *Rhus verniciflua*), indigenous to Asia.¹²



Fig. 3. Anonymous, round box, black lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlaid, Japan, late 16th century. From Oliver Impey and Christiaan Jörg, *Japanese Export Lacquer 1580-1850*, Amsterdam, Hotei Publishing, 2005.

Although the resemblance to *Namban* lacquerware is remarkable, *enconchados* are paintings technically unrelated to Asian lacquerware. Furthermore, the aesthetics of mother-of-pearl in *Namban* lacquerware are complex, and could not have been emulated by Mexico City painters, since it is unlikely that they were familiar with mother-of-pearl before they began the experimentations that led to *enconchados*. In other words, Japanese production was a mere starting point for New Spanish works, which were developed separately.

Enconchados used *Namban* lacquerware as a source of inspiration to introduce their own variations into New Spain painting techniques inherited from Europe. The shifting shine of *enconchados* challenges spectators in different ways: they are still open to different gazes, and reveal that this deceptively simple artistic phenomenon has an elusive allure, made possible through a transient -yet very significant- technical adaptation.

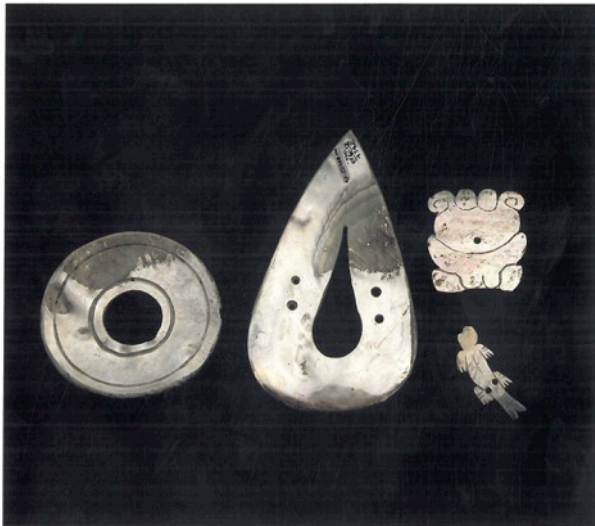


Fig. 4. Set of shells used in Tenochtitlan, early 16th century.



Fig. 5. Anonymous, *Saint Joseph with the Baby*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 64 x 42.5 cm, Monastery of Descalzas Reales, Madrid.



Fig. 6. Anonymous, *Ecce Homo*, (Life of Christ), late 17th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 24-panel series, 69 x 102 cm, Museo de América.



Fig. 7. Juan González, *Saint Francis Xavier Embarking for Asia*, 1703, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 113 x 91.75 cm, private collection.

***Enconchados* and their relationship with Japanese *Namban* lacquerware**

While the inlay of mother-of-pearl gives *enconchados* a unique, dazzling light (**Fig. 4, 7 and 8**), they owe part of their beauty to their meticulously crafted frames (**Figs. 5, 6, 8 and 9**), most of which have black grounds, filled with golden figures (sometimes a bit of red or other colors is added); figures such as birds, flowers, as well as leaves and grape clusters. Motifs tend to be detailed, yet in most cases they cannot be identified, as they are not meant to depict nature, but to embellish the works. The use of mother-of-pearl, as well as the figures and the color palette of *enconchado* frames take after *Namban* lacquerware, yet the effects are very different.



Fig. 8. Anonymous, *Virgin of Guadalupe*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 84 x 60 cm, Museo Catedralicio y Diocesano de León.

In *Namban* lacquerware, native species of flowers, plants and birds are usually depicted. Specific shapes can be cut out of mother-of-pearl, and sometimes pieces are cut to representations of bigger foreign animals, like tigers. Many cut-out shapes are geometric and are arranged together to create a pattern, predominantly on border decorations.

Sometimes the shell is broken into random shapes to form a mosaic. Both lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlays tend to be thick, and lacquer is applied with a coarse brush -also used for the decoration- which consists of shades of gold lacquer painted onto the black lacquer ground, and sometimes onto the inlaid shell. Since *Namban* lacquerware is very sticky, no adhesives are required to affix the sheets of mother-of-pearl.¹³

Some figures in *enconchado* frames show mother-of-pearl sheets, which have geometric shapes, but they are usually irregular and never form specific shapes. In *enconchados* layers of paint and varnish are applied over mother-of-pearl inlays. *Namban* lacquerware was very popular in both Portugal and the Spanish dominions -including New Spain.¹⁴ This production stopped in the 1630s, when Christianity was banned in Japan and the country closed itself off from the world. On the other hand, evidence suggests that the production of *enconchados* started around 1650 and reached its peak around 1690-1700.¹⁵ Little is known about the circulation of *Namban* lacquerware in New Spain: some pieces were likely imported via Manila.¹⁶ References to *Namban* lacquerware in Mexico City household inventories have been identified.¹⁷ Moreover, two groups of Japanese visitors arrived in New Spain in the early 1600s.¹⁸ While there is no record of the objects brought by these visitors, there is no doubt they brought *Namban* lacquerware with them, because of its excellent reputation.

Mother-of-pearl is the key to explaining the relationship between *Namban* lacquerware and New Spanish *enconchados*, as shine was used along with rich ornamentation to create dazzling, opulent surfaces that were highly prized on both sides of the Atlantic. While *enconchados* had an important domestic market, many works were shipped across the Atlantic in the 1690s and 1700s.¹⁹ Both in New Spain and in Spain, the audience seems to have focused on their pictorial nature, while in a few Spanish cases there seems to be a certain focus on the resemblance to lacquerware.

For instance, in a document itemizing Spanish noblewoman Catalina de la Cueva's dowry from 1717, two are mentioned in her "lacquerware treasure", along with a Chinese folding screen.²⁰

Additionally, in the 1766 inventory of Isabella of Farnese (the wife of Spain's King Phillip V), there is record of a 24-panel series of *enconchados* depicting the *Conquest of Mexico* (plate 2), listed with lacquerware, not with paintings.²¹ *Enconchados*, as well as *Namban* lacquerware, owe their success to both the shine of mother-of-pearl and the sumptuous ornamentation, which will be discussed separately below.

Shells in New Spain

The shell species used in New Spanish *enconchados* are yet to be identified. In *enconchados* the shell was polished, cut into small sheets, pasted on wooden panels, painted and varnished, which makes their identification extremely difficult. Nevertheless, there are some possible discoveries from archaeological research about the use of shell in Mesoamerica, as well as from historical accounts from New Spain and technical research on viceregal furniture.

As far as we know, Pre-Columbian art primarily used seashell species.²² Mexico is rich in such species: it has 11,000 kilometers of coastline, including four malacological regions (Californian, Panamic, Carolinian and Caribbean). For this reason, it seems likely that domestic shells were used in *enconchados*, though technical studies will be needed in order to confirm it. The artistic use of shell was very important throughout Pre-Columbian times for religious and economic reasons;²³ their use seems to have reached its peak in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, around the time when the Spaniards first arrived in Mexico (Fig. 4).

Interestingly, shells are mentioned by 16th century conquerors such as Hernán Cortés and Bernal Díaz del Castillo; as well as by chroniclers of the West Indies, such as Pietro Martire d'Anghiera and Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, and Catholic chroniclers, such as Diego Durán, Bernardino de Sahagún, Gerónimo de Mendieta and José de Acosta. The fact that so many authors mention shells proves their awareness of how important they were to the Aztecs. However, none of these sources offer particular information about the species used, since they are limited to describing shells with adjectives such as large, small, sumptuous and

eye-catching, tiger-print, blue, yellow, red, white and golden.²⁴

Shells were closely related to Aztec power structures: research has found that different kinds of shells were offered to the Aztecs as a tribute from cities in what is now Veracruz. It is likely that shells were exchanged in different ports along the Gulf of Mexico, such as Coatzacoalcos River, and in Chontalpa, located in the mouth of the Grijalva River.²⁵ *Spondylus princeps* shells could have been brought to Tenochtitlan from as far away as modern-day Nicaragua. These shells would have been carried via what are now Honduras and the Yucatan peninsula to the port of Xicalango in Campeche, where they would have been acquired by *pochtecas*, the Aztec long-distance traders.²⁶

Archaeological research at the Templo Mayor (the religious core of Tenochtitlan) has identified 141 shell species, including some from the Caribbean Sea (about 1600 kilometers from Tenochtitlan): *Oliva scripta*, *Stombrus gigas* and *Turbinella angulate*.²⁷ As for the species *Olivella volutella*, *Pinctada mazatlanica*, *S. calcifer*, *Chama echinata*, *Oliva spicata* and *O. incrassata*, they must have been collected in the south Pacific coast, between modern-day Jalisco and Chiapas.²⁸ Other species, like *Oliva sayana* and *O. reticularis*, are common in the Gulf of Mexico.²⁹ All of these species are alluring for their beauty and shine, and in some cases for their large size. Because a lot of effort was required to carry them to Tenochtitlan in central Mexico, it is not surprising that they were used in objects related to important rituals. Furthermore, some of the most highly regarded species -such as *Pinctada mazatlanica*, *Spondylus americana*, *S. calcifer*, *S. princeps* and *Chama echinata*- were especially hard to obtain, collected alive in rocky substrates, 10 to 40 meters below the surface.³⁰

By the late 17th century the situation had changed and the raw material was not necessarily expensive, since the New Spaniards, unlike the Aztecs, did not consider shells to have a strong symbolic or economic value. Documentary information reveals that shells were used in New Spanish objects that varied in price, including many inexpensive ones.³¹ Raw shells circulated in Mexico City, and evidence suggests that the ones used in *enconchados*

were processed in *enconchados*' workshops. A good example of this is found in the 1704 asset inventory of Bentura de Paz, which included two boxes full of raw shells valued at the relatively low price of 10 pesos (34v), so we can gather that shell supply was not a problem for artists working in Mexico City.

Although nothing is known about the origins of the shells used in *enconchados*, it is known that there existed some old shell supply centers that apparently had already been abandoned. In 1780 (about 30 years after the end of the documented production of *enconchados*) the well-known Jesuit chronicler Francisco Javier Clavijero wrote that the Pacific Mexican coast harboured shells of singular beauty. Even though Clavijero added that pearl fishing had been practiced all along this coast throughout different times,³² the terms he used suggest that by the 18th century both shells and pearls stopped being commercialized.³³

Similarly, Jesuit priest Eusebio Kino wrote that blue shells were highly prized by Pima Indians in California around 1700.³⁴ California shells also impressed another Jesuit priest, Miguel del Barco, whose historical account of California (ca. 1750) mentions a large quantity of winkles and shells of different kinds, shapes, colors and sizes, flooding the beaches. According to Barco, some of these shells had a gorgeous, lace-like surface, and "may well be the most beautiful on Earth," because a brightly hued blue covered their shine, even more brilliant than that of the finest mother-of-pearl, as fine as that of lapis lazuli. This color looked like an extremely delicate and transparent varnish, and silver grounds could easily be seen beneath it.³⁵ While Barco does not name this gorgeous shell, scholar Enriqueta M. Olguín considers it must have been black, green or blue abalone (*Haliotis cracherodii* or *Haliotis fulgens*).³⁶ According to Barco, if these shells had been common in Europe, pearl shells would have lost appreciation.³⁷ Barco's words suggest that by the mid-18th century these shells were no longer usually found in Mexico City as they had been in Pre-Columbian times.³⁸

Pearl fishing was very important in California by the time Barco wrote his chronicles. He wrote that the inner part of pearl shells had the same color as pearl itself, but because they were flat and concave, they looked even shinier than

pearl. However, the "perfect" and gorgeous mother-of-pearl remained abandoned on the beach, since there were no buyers for it in New Spain.³⁹ Even though Barco is writing about 50 years after the height of *enconchados*, it is likely that the beautiful Californian shells or the gorgeous pearl shell that so deeply impressed the Jesuit chronicler were not used in *enconchados*.

Despite its beauty, abalone would hardly have been the best choice for *enconchados*, as its iridescent shine would have partly been hidden under layers of paint and varnish. The manufacturers seem to have preferred mother-of-pearl with a pearly, non-iridescent shine, probably because it worked better under the layers of color. For this reason, it is probable that any medium or large shells with a pearly shine would have been considered suitable for *enconchados*, and that painters would have successfully used different species.

Technical studies conducted by Alejandra Quintanar Isaías in the Franz Mayer Museum (Mexico City) have found both fresh and sea water shells in Spanish American mother-of-pearl inlaid objects. Some Mexican furniture pieces are inlaid with freshwater mussels of the genre *Unia*, while other pieces are inlaid with pearl oysters of the genre *Pinctada*, and the so called "concha nácar" (oyster shell) from the Sea of Cortés (*Pteria sterna*). The two main Latin American oyster shell species were *Pinctada imbricata* in the Caribbean Sea, and *Pinctada Mazatlantica* in the Pacific coast. It is likely that both species were used in some mother-of-pearl inlaid objects, as they were collected and exported to Europe since the early 16th century in the island of Cubagua in Venezuela.⁴⁰ While technical analysis will be needed in order to determine if freshwater shells were ever used in *enconchados*, the case of the furniture in the Franz Mayer Museum suggests that this possibility should not be discounted.

As for the origins of the shells used in *enconchados*, there are many different possibilities. Due to the artistic use of mother-of-pearl in early modern times in the Americas, Asia and Europe, and because of the existence of large commercial networks, raw shells circulated throughout the world. For instance, Blas Sierra Calle has mentioned the existence of some polished mother-of-pearls in Spain, which

he believes came from Canton or the Philippines. According to Sierra Calle, this delicate material was also inlaid in furniture sold in both the domestic and the export market. Furthermore, raw mother-of-pearls were also shipped abroad, as many European accounts, beginning in 1750, mention mother-of-pearls imported from China.⁴¹

It has been suggested that Chinese shells circulated in New Spain,⁴² so it is not impossible that some *enconchados* had Asian shells in them. Barco suggested that the beautiful abalone shells from California were unknown in Europe and regretted that not even Mexicans were interested in them. However, in 1699 the Italian traveler Francesco Gemelli Careri wrote that the best purchases in the New World included mother-of-pearl.⁴³ It is likely that *enconchados* used domestic shells, as importing material would have led to higher prices -which would have been rejected by most consumers- and many documents mention low-priced ones.⁴⁴ If any customers required high quality shells, it is likely that the artists made use of highly regarded domestic species.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that requirements were made on the shell species used. A 1699 contract has been published where Juan González agrees to make some *enconchados* for a buyer. The document refers several times to the high quality expected from the (shell) inlay.⁴⁵ However, it does not say anything about the kind of shells used, or even about the size or shape of shell inlays. In other words, as long as the effect would be shiny and colorful, buyers would not care about the kind of material employed.

Regardless of their origin, the shells used in *enconchados* had to be supplied to Mexico City, where the works were made. While different kinds of shells were likely used, the finest works would utilize good-quality shells with a pearly shine. Such is the case in an *Immaculate Conception* paired with a *Joseph with Baby Jesus* in the Monastery of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid (**Fig. 5**), whose frames show whole pieces of shell and leave aside the use of painting, unlike most *enconchado* frames. This original solution suggests that some customers made special requirements, which the artists were eager to satisfy. Although a precise identification is yet to be made, different shell

species appear to have been used in the works in Descalzas Reales. In *enconchados* the use of shells must have been flexible, as it was based upon their shine, providing the artists with a wide range of possibilities for the species' selection. Nevertheless, for practical reasons it is likely that most shells were supplied from domestic coasts -either from the Atlantic or the Pacific- as well as from freshwater sources.

Technique

Technically, *enconchados* are very similar to other paintings of their time. However, some adaptations were required in order to successfully add mother-of-pearl to paintings. Because of the weight of mother-of-pearl, the support base used was a wooden panel, to which pieces of fabric were attached. Afterwards, "the first layer of ground was applied, upon which an initial underdrawing was made (probably in ink) to outline the main features of the composition where the shells were to be placed. This is the drawing that normally shows through the pieces of nacre".⁴⁶ The mother-of-pearl is part of both the support base and of the layer of paint, since it is painted and varnished; yet, its shine plays an important role in the chromatic effect of the works. This is a unique quality; regardless of the use of mother-of-pearl, painting skills were essential in the making of *enconchados*.

Enconchados would not use just any part of the shell, only mother-of-pearl: that is, a shiny shell layer. Raw shells must have been processed in *enconchado* workshops using hammers, knives, coarse and fine files, tongues and sharpening stones to obtain mother-of-pearl sheets and give them the shape and size required. Coarse files would remove thick, hard and rough layers of shell while fine ones would be used to both polish mother-of-pearl and give it a smooth finish, and to shape the pieces.⁴⁷ As for sharp knives, they would be used to thin shell stripes when the material was too thick.⁴⁸ Shell work must have been similar to that of current Thai mother-of-pearl inlaid lacquerware, which has been described by Julathusana Byachrananda:

The shells [...] are first cleaned and the shell is smoothed using a small hammer and file to remove the brownish-green, rough outer surface, until the inner glossy white and pink part, used for the decoration, is reached. The shell is now about the size of a young

coconut shell. The portion of the shell used for the mother-of-pearl inlay work extends from the mouth 75-130 mm further into the body. This portion is thin and good for cutting and making into designs. [...] The portion cut from the mouth of the shell is curved so it needs to be cut into smaller pieces of 50 x 75 mm. Each shell can yield between 5-6 small pieces of this size, or some 16 square inches in total. [...] The opposite side is covered with a white film formed by the saliva (*namlai hoi*) of the shell animal. Each piece must be filed with a whetstone to remove the filmy saliva and to reduce the pieces to a thickness of 3 mm.⁴⁹

This detailed description shows that the process does not require sophisticated tools. In *enconchados* workshops, journeymen were likely to do much of shell work. Evidence suggests that they were exclusively made in painting workshops, and that the artists who made them were painters. In these works, mother-of-pearl is not only inlaid but also painted (and usually varnished), and the artists who did this part of the work were not necessarily familiar with other mother-of-pearl objects. Notable was the González family -Juan, Miguel and Tomás, who specialized in *enconchados*, and were members of the guild of painters.⁵⁰ The painter Nicolás Correa, nephew of Juan Correa -one the most prestigious painters of his time, made both traditional paintings and *enconchados*.⁵¹

Both technical and documented evidences suggest *enconchados* were the result of pictorial experimentations: it is unlikely that artists had a very sophisticated knowledge of mother-of-pearl inlay since beginning. The earliest one known is a *Nativity* signed by the renowned Juan González, who in this case was not able to match the shine of the shell with the pictorial work. This *Nativity* has little mother-of-pearl, inlaid in irregular shapes only into some parts of the characters' clothes.⁵² Nonetheless, over time, the best artists developed a skillful technique. Adelina Illán and Rafael Romero analyzed the technique of an *Adoration of the Magi*, attributed to Juan González, and pointed out that,

given the transparency of the shell and the non-discoloration of a probably existing intermediate material between the shell and the underlying layer of ground, perhaps an adhesive was not used at all. The shells

would have been placed on the first layer of ground recently applied, the surface then being leveled off with a new layer of gypsum that would also affix the shells. [...] Regarding the arrangement of the shell areas, it should be noted that all the samples taken in these areas present, firstly, a thin film (in all cases less than 5 µm) of translucent brown. It consists mainly of a mixture of linseed oil and a terpenic resin, which also contains small amounts of earth and carbon. The purpose of this film would be to improve the adhesion of the subsequent paint layers and glazes applied, being at the same time a fixer for the decorative features and lines in silver and gold.⁵³

Thin sheets of mother-of-pearl would be covered with a layer of paint that underwent a special process to make sure it would affix well on the shell. Mother-of-pearl would typically be inlaid in the characters' clothes, as well as in some details within the architecture and landscapes. The specific areas where mother-of-pearl would be inlaid were carefully selected, to make sure they would give the paintings an appealing shine. The best *enconchados* usually have thin layers of yellow, red, green and sometimes blue paint, with a subtly changing luminosity because of the mother-of-pearl inlays. Evidence suggests that both oil and tempera paints were used.⁵⁴ As for the pigments, they would include lead white, white pipeclay, cinnabar, minium, yellow ochre, madder lake, bone black, carbon black, natural umber, burnt umber, natural sienna and burnt sienna: all of which were common in the painting of New Spain. As for the glue, more technical analyses are required, but some sources report that animal glue was used to paste mother-of-pearl sheets over the panels.⁵⁵

The amount, shape, and size of mother-of-pearl inlays vary considerably in different works, yet they tend to stay constant in panels belonging to the same series. Shells have a laminar structure that makes it hard to obtain square sheets from them, for they are easily broken when pressed, so a very gentle and skillful touch is required.⁵⁶ For this reason, geometric tesserae of mother-of-pearl are always an evidence of specialization. Not surprisingly, most works with regular sheets of mother-of-pearl have a fine, delicate layer of paint that reveals the shine of the underlying nacre.

An example of this is a 24-panel series of the *Life of Christ* in Museo de América in Madrid, done by an anonymous artist (**Fig. 6**). Jesus' clothing is rendered mosaic-like, entirely out of geometric sheets of mother-of-pearl that match perfectly. Some sheets are as large as two inches square. Interestingly, the sheets of mother-of-pearl used for the other characters, while being large, have irregular shapes. In other words, the main character stands out because of the very shape of the mother-of-pearl inlays. Jesus is also accentuated through the use of color: he is wearing a bright blue tunic, under which the sheets of mother-of-pearl maintain their shine, which reveals real skill. According to the 17th century Spanish painter and author Francisco Pacheco, blue was the most difficult color to work with and many good painters could not use it properly.⁵⁷

In *enconchados*, the natural shine of mother-of-pearl tends to be lost under deep colors, and for this reason some works leave out colors like blue, brown and gray. Since this series is sumptuous and meticulously crafted, it is likely that blue was partly used to show off the artist's technical knowledge. While shell inlays were originally taken from Japanese lacquer, *enconchados* use light resources to create their own optical effects, which belong to artistic tastes particular to New Spain –yet not exclusive to *enconchados*. More reflection should be made on New Spanish' perception of shine and color, and how they related to the meaning of the works.

Also impressive are the aforementioned *Immaculate Conception* and *Joseph with Baby Jesus* (**Fig. 5**) in the Monastery of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid. The characters' clothes are painted over a real mosaic of mother-of-pearl, as the edges of every fragment perfectly match the surrounding ones. The shine of the mother-of-pearl is enhanced by a light layer of paint: some black, golden and red strokes are used to outline the folds of the robe, as well as the delightful edge of the tunic and the Virgin's hands, which appear in praying gesture. While the paint is subtle, it has an appealingly bright effect, suggesting a highly specialized adaptation by a very skillful artist. The shine given off by these works is very noticeable, despite being kept in a poorly lit room.

Enconchados are very fragile, given that over time mother-of-pearl inlays tend to come off, since the rest of the elements in the painting end up making a single, compact layer in which the mother-of-pearl cannot fit. Moreover, the coat of paint over the shell tends to fall off too. For these reasons, most –if not all– of the existing works have been restored many times. As a result, many outstanding *enconchados* have lost their shine under thick layers of paint, the result of restoring techniques such as *rigattino*. However, a rough coat of varnish, which has sometimes been believed to be original,⁵⁸ enhances the shine of some *enconchados*.

While this idea is appealing, technical evidence has been found that an outstanding *Saint Francis Xavier Embarking for Asia*, signed in 1703 by Juan González does not have rough coats of varnish (**Fig. 7**).⁵⁹ This evidence is especially significant as it comes from a good work made by a prestigious artist. Although more technical analyses are necessary to make conclusions on this subject, this example should be taken into account before affirming that the finish provided by rough coats of varnish was essential to *enconchados*. In any case, the most appealing works suggest that technical painting adaptations were mainly related to the need to show the underlying shine of mother-of-pearl.

Outstanding Works, Shine and Symbolism

The most appealing *enconchados* are better appreciated up close. The subtle sheen of the underlying mother-of-pearl invites spectators to move around them: their appearance varies with the light, and the spectator's perspective. In other words, to best appreciate the works, the spectator must engage them. Since New Spanish asset inventories suggest that most works were displayed in private households, it is likely that spectators would indeed get up close and move around them. Little is known about how *enconchados* were originally exhibited, but probably by day they would be seen under a natural soft light, filtered through windows, and after sunset they would be viewed by candlelight. The subtle differences derived from the variations of light were certainly an appealing invitation to revisit them again and again.

Enconchados were created with a strong will to impress their audience, as it can be seen in the dazzling frames, with intricate designs made for careful observation. The close link between frames and paintings is taken to the extreme in some *enconchados*. The best example of this is found on an anonymous *Virgin of Guadalupe* in the Cathedral and Diocesan Museum of León, Spain (**Fig. 8**). The black ground is full of golden flowers, leaves and birds, all of which are meticulously crafted and enhanced by the mother-of-pearl shine. The ornamentation spreads out all over the surface -except for Guadalupe and the apparitionist medallions; it is asymmetrical and has a certain rhythm that captures the spectator's interest.

While attention is first caught by the sumptuous surface that surrounds the Virgin, it soon turns to Guadalupe herself: far the shiniest figure in the work. Guadalupe's robe and tunic are only slightly painted with a few thick black lines that make the folds of the clothing. Both tunic and robe have a mosaic-like appearance derived from the superimposition of square pieces of mother-of-pearl, whose shine is especially remarkable. The artists left out the traditional blue robe of Guadalupe, yet the work has a shiny, dazzling effect that might have Christian connotations, as in the Bible both Jesus and his followers are identified with the Light.⁶⁰ The ground is so sumptuous that, once the spectator has looked at Guadalupe, his attention is drawn back to it. There is no doubt that this work was meant to impress and dazzle spectators: the potential customer was likely very interested in both the ornamentation and the shine, which relate to the beauty and the Divine Light.⁶¹

This *Virgin of Guadalupe* has been in Spain at least since the early 20th century.⁶² It was likely sent to Spain soon after it was made, as happened with many of the most impressive *enconchados* we have today.⁶³ Numerous *enconchados* were shipped to Spain, which suggests that they were considered appealing enough to dazzle European spectators. These paintings were a strong physical evidence of both the Splendor of Faith and the wealth of the New World.

Also remarkable are two anonymous *Virgins of Guadalupe*, one of which belongs to the convent of Capuchin nuns of Castellón de la Plana, Spain (**Fig. 9**), while the other one is kept in the

Parish of Saint Joseph in Tlaxcala, Mexico. While almost the same, the one in Castellón is even more splendid: it has a sumptuous frame painted and inlaid with mother-of-pearl.⁶⁴ The spectator is drawn immediately to the Virgin's robes: the numerous layers of blue and golden paint reveal the underlying shine of mother-of-pearl, set in a mosaic-like pattern. It is usually necessary to come up close to *enconchados* in order to perceive their shine, but in these cases it is so intense, it can easily be seen from 12 feet away.



Fig. 9. Anonymous, *Virgin of Guadalupe*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 182 x 112 cm, convent of Capuchin Nuns, Castellón de la Plana.

Good quality shells must have been used in these paintings but what is truly remarkable is the skill, especially noticeable in the uniform shape of the sheets, and the thorough layer of blue paint, which succeeds in enhancing the natural shine of mother-of-pearl.⁶⁵ Obviously the unknown artist was an experienced specialist, perhaps a member of the Gonzalez family. These *Guadalupes* affirm that from a technical standpoint, *enconchados* required some skills unknown to European painting, and to Asian and European mother-of-pearl inlay traditions. That is to say, they are a New Spain

contribution to painting techniques inherited from Europe.

The frame of the *Virgin of Guadalupe* in Castellón is so full of grape clusters, flowers, leaves and birds that it takes careful observation to recognize the figures. Attention is immediately drawn to the different types of flowers, all of which are extremely detailed and beautiful. Several types of birds in different presentations are also depicted. Realistic depictions are seldom found on these frames; nonetheless, one of the birds evokes the Northern Cardinal. This frame is also interesting because it shows a butterfly: a motif that is only found in two other frames, one of them being *Saint Francis Xavier Embarking for Asia* by Juan González (Fig. 7). The color palette is also appealing: some figures are light red; others purple or light green, while others show the natural color of mother-of-pearl.



Fig. 10. Anonymous, *Saint Peter Bishop*, Featherwork, 17th century, measures unavailable, Ochavo Chapel, Puebla Cathedral.

The grape clusters were rendered taking advantage of the natural purple tone of some mother-of-pearl sheets, but the vine shoots were painted with golden strokes. These figures are especially interesting, for they likely have a Eucharistic meaning,⁶⁶ which is enhanced by the shine of mother-of-pearl.⁶⁷ It is deliberate that shine lights the main figures, and that special attention is paid to the shape of shell inlays and the color of those figures.⁶⁸ Sumptuous *enconchados* were displayed in wealthy houses or sent to important Spanish collections not just to look beautiful, and the tricks were not there because they made *enconchados* look good; they served a purpose.⁶⁹ Far from being non-essential decoration, both shine and ornamentation were necessary to impress spectators while transmitting religious and economic values.



Fig. 11. Cristóbal de Villalpando, *The Transfiguration*, 1683, Oil on canvas, 865 x 550 cm, Puebla Cathedral.

Interestingly, *enconchados* shipped to Europe often depicted Mexican subjects, namely the *Virgin of Guadalupe* and the *Conquest of Mexico*. The depiction of religious subjects is not accidental, as Christianity has identified God with light since the early Middle Ages.⁷⁰ New Spanish audience would hardly have ignored the suitability of mother-of-pearl to

refer to the Divine Splendour,⁷¹ so it is likely that many *enconchados* depicting religious subjects were used for devout contemplation. Society in New Spain was at the same time profoundly religious and aesthetes, as well as being fond of luxury. Both luminosity and sumptuousness made *enconchados* outstanding vehicles for all these ideals, hence their success.

Little is known about New Spanish taste for shine on art, and its possible relationship with Catholic beliefs. It is unknown if people knew texts that made explicit references to light and its Christian symbolism,⁷² or if references to this topic were made at preaching, especially in holidays such as the Purification of the Virgin, popularly known as the Candelaria for the blessing of candles. However, there are many evidences that in New Spain –like in Europe– light was considered to be very important in the context of Catholicism, and that shine and bright were very appreciated in Catholic works of art.⁷³

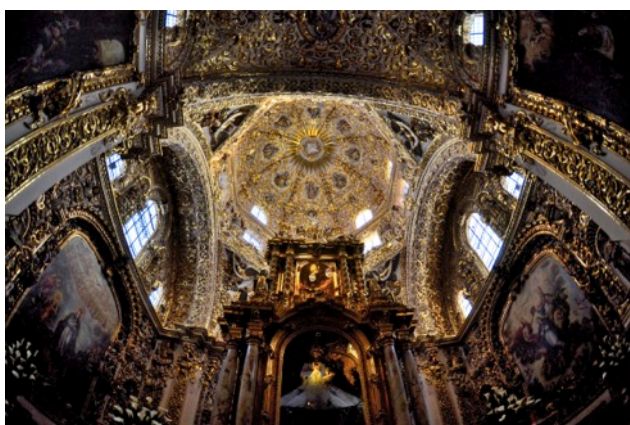


Fig. 12. Rosary Chapel, Santo Domingo Church, Puebla, 1690.

Evidence on this includes *plumaria* (featherwork) (Fig. 10), as well as paintings made by famous artists, like Cristóbal de Villalpando. Villalpando was active at the same times as the Gonzalezes, and his depictions of subjects such as the Transfiguration (Fig. 11) or the Apocalyptic Virgin stand out for their light effects.⁷⁴ As Clara Bargellini has pointed out, “Villalpando carefully considered the problems of light representation, and the meaning of the divine presence”,⁷⁵ so his and others’ combinations of hues, bright, and shadows deserve more attention from those pretending to understand these works.⁷⁶

The relationship between shine and devotion is

also suggested on the following reference from the asset inventory of the Cathedral of Puebla: “An ebony bookstand inlaid with semi precious stones from Mixteca [...] garnished with golden silver and a cross in between, made of the same stone, to be used on the Holy Friday”.⁷⁷ But maybe the best example of taste for light related to both Christian faith and luxury is the Rosary Chapel in Puebla (1690) (Fig. 12).⁷⁸ This chapel has a complex iconographic program full of symbols, which are reinforced by the dazzling and colorful beauty of the materials used: tecali – a local type of alabaster –, gilded plasterwork, tiles and sheets of gold. While little has been written about the importance of light on this chapel, there is no doubt that bright and color were considered essential to better express the splendor of faith of the wealthy people of Puebla.



Fig. 13. Anonymous, “Joachim and Anne Meeting at the Golden Gate”, *Life of the Virgin*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 11-panel series, 61 x 86 cm, Museo de América.

Not surprisingly, high-quality *enconchados* were expensive. For instance, the 1695 asset inventory of María Teresa Guadalupe Retes Paz Vera, marquise of San Jorge, mentions a 10-panel *enconchado* series depicting the *Life of the Virgin Mary*, valued at 500 pesos. These works were some of the most expensive paintings possessed by *doña* María Teresa, who was one of the wealthiest heiresses of the time.⁷⁹ The price must have been set due to the skill displayed, yet we can only speculate about this, for the series is no longer available and the description in the inventory is not detailed enough: it only mentions the shell frames and the height (104.5 cm). However, the series owned by *doña* María Teresa was the same size and cost twice as the one that was commissioned in the aforementioned contract

of Juan González only three years later.⁸⁰ The latter refers to new works, made to order by a prestigious artist at the peak of the taste for *enconchados*, so there is no doubt that the works itemized in the 1695 document were of highest quality.

It is likely that this series was similar to another with the same subject that belonged to the Spanish King Phillip V and which is currently in Museo de América in Madrid.⁸¹ Phillip V's inventory does not mention any mother-of-pearl inlays in the scenes depicted in the series, but it does refer to "pearl frames inlaid with mother-of-pearl".⁸² Interestingly, the frames don't have pearl, but plenty of mother-of-pearl inlays, thoroughly distributed in an appealing design (**Fig. 13**). The fact that the royal appraiser did not mention the mother-of-pearl in the scenes suggests that he was more impressed by the shine and the skillful work in the frames. That is to say, the success of *enconchados* was related to sumptuous frames as much as it was to shine.



Fig. 14. Anonymous, "Joachim and Anne Meeting at the Golden Gate", *Life of the Virgin*, late 17th-early 18th century, Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 11-panel series, 97 x 68 cm, Museo de América.

However, shiny shell inlays were used in some/certain *enconchados* to simulate gold, silver, precious stones, porcelain, and marble.⁸³ Such is the case in another anonymous series of the *Life of the Virgin Mary* also in Museo de América (**Fig. 14**), as well as a *Wedding at Cana* by Nicolás Correa now/currently in the Hispanic Society of America (**Fig. 15**). While none of these paintings have *enconchado* frames, the scenes show a rich ornamentation, in which shine and color are combined to enhance the architectural highlights, or other details of the sumptuous rooms where the scenes take place. Albeit both series of the *Life*

of the Virgin are based on similar models, the shine is more noticeable in the latter, which also shows more brilliant colors, including blue. As for the work by Correa, the shine effect is as appealing as it is original because of the use of a black ground. In this case, Correa paid very much attention to the depiction of the characters – especially Jesus and the Virgin Mary on the foreground. That said, he was also very careful at depicting the frames on the wall, as well as the marble tiles of the floor, and the porcelain dishes exhibited on the left. All of these figures show a beautiful shine, made possible thanks to the use of pieces of shell of different sizes.



Fig. 15. Nicolás Correa, *Wedding at Cana*, 1696. Oil and tempera on wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, 57.6 x 74.8 cm. The Hispanic Society of America.

A similar sense of luxury is found on highest quality *enconchados* depicting historical subjects. Maybe the best-known ones are five series about the *Conquest of Mexico* (**Fig. 2**). These series are closely linked to each other, and evidence suggests that one of them was made especially for the Spanish King Charles II, perhaps commissioned by the Viceroy José de Sarmiento y Valladares, Count of Moctezuma.⁸⁴ The other series are also likely to have been made for being shipped to Spain.⁸⁵ According to Michael Schreffler

The materials and optical components of the panels suffused the works with a visual intensity and a sense of economic value that reinforced the ideas about the Americas' role in the enrichment of the Crown. In addition, their sumptuous appearance attested in a more subtle way to the labor-intensiveness of the acquisition and manipulation of the materials used in their manufacturing [...] One of the king's loyal subjects –perhaps the

Count of Moctezuma himself- gave his sovereign a set of glittering, golden paintings depicting scenes from an episode in Spanish imperial history. In this sense, the images can be regarded as variations on the phenomenon Victor Stoichita called the “self- awareness” of images, a condition of reflexive self-consciousness in visual imagery that emerged in concert with the development of mercantile capitalism in early modern Europe.⁸⁶

However, the series depicting the *Conquest of Mexico* given to the king seems not to have been highly appreciated. That is to say, not all viewers considered *enconchados* to have economic or religious symbolism. Nonetheless, they were very appreciated in other contexts on both sides of the Atlantic, as Ponz’ quote suggests. Also, the fact that many *enconchados* stay in Spanish collections lets us think that some of their recipients developed a taste for *enconchados*. Such a taste must belong to those characteristics that made *enconchados* different to other works –that is, shine and ornamentation. How can we explain, then, that many of them have been preserved with hardly any shine or ornamentation? As these qualities were the *raison d’être* of *enconchados*, we can suppose that –regardless the cost of the work– the aim of most artists, and buyers, was that *enconchados* would be both shiny and decorated. Some of these qualities have been lost over time, which makes it hard to know what the original audience saw when they saw an *enconchados* –not only because our visual culture is not the same as theirs, but also because the works might look today very different than they originally did.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to suggest new paths for the study of *enconchados*, as well as contribute to demonstrate the importance of light in New Spanish art. Further technical studies focusing on the kind of shells used in *enconchados* are necessary to better understand the relationship between this kind of paintings and other mother-of-pearl inlaid objects, as well as the relationship between the kind of shells used, the quality of the work of different artists and the economic appraisal of *enconchados*. Also, approach the study of New Spanish art from the standpoint of brightness will allow us to notice the relationship with sacredness,

whose importance had not been properly addressed until recent times.⁸⁷ Furthermore, to this day few studies have raised the importance that ornamentation may have had in New Spanish art in symbolic terms; hence the need for further reflection on these phenomena.

Notas

¹ In Spanish *enconchado* means, literally, something that has seashell in it. The term is currently used to refer to different objects inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Since 1970, the term *enconchado* has been used extensively for New Spanish mother-of-pearl inlaid paintings and has also been used in English. Michael J. Schreffler, *The Art of Allegiance: Visual Culture and Imperial Power in Baroque New Spain*, University Park, Pennsylvania State Univ. Pr., 2007, pp. 81-105; Gauvin A. Bailey, *Art of Colonial America*, London, Phaidon, 2000, pp. 350-351; Sonia I. Ocaña Ruiz, “Mother-of-Pearl Inlaid Frames: The Use of Japanese Ornamental Models in New Spanish Paintings”, in Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (eds.), *Asia and Spanish America: Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange 1500-1850*, Denver, Denver Art Museum, 2009, pp. 129-149, and Clara Bargellini, “28. Saint Francis Xavier Embarking for Asia.” In *Painting a New World. Mexican Art and Life 1521-1821*, Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka editors, 187-189. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2004, pp. 187-189. While “paintings inlaid with mother-of-pearl” would be a more proper designation, in this text I have decided to use the term *enconchado* as it is familiar to the English-speaking audience.

² Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España. Seguido de los dos tomos del viaje fuera de España*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1947, p. 498.

³ In the late 20th century, the panels of both series were jointed to make folding screens. However, originally each series consisted of 6 separate panels. Ponz’ quote starts with a reference to “a cabinet full of medium size panels/paintings”.

⁴ Liz James’ thoughts on Medieval mosaics shed some light on this topic. See “What Colours were Byzantine Mosaics?”, in Eve Borsook, Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi and Giovanni Pagliarulo (eds.), *Medieval Mosaics. Light, Color, Materials*, Milan, Silvana, 2000, p. 43. New Spanish sources from the 17th century do not say anything about the shine of *enconchados*. However, the proof that light was intrinsically important in *enconchados* are the works themselves. Something similar has been observed regarding Medieval mosaics as, despite their recognizable light properties, little was written about them. *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁵ Jorge Rivas Pérez, “El mobiliario “enconchado” en el virreinato del Perú”, in *Memorias de las VI Jornadas Internacionales de Arte, Historia y Cultura Colonial “Asia En América”*, Bogotá, Ministerio de Cultura, 2012, p. 75.

⁶ Adelina Illán y Rafael Romero, “La técnica pictórica de los *enconchados* mexicanos y la problemática de su restauración”, in *Ciencia y Esencia. Cuadernos de Conservación y Tecnología del Arte. Science & Essence*

Conservation and Art Technology Notebooks, no. 1, 2008, pp. 31-40.

⁷ Miguel Solá, *Historia del arte Hispanoamericano*, Barcelona, Labor, 1935, pp. 99-100; Martin S. Soria, "Painting", in Geroge Kubler & Martin S. Soria (eds.), *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and Their American Dominions*, The Pelican History of Art, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1959, p. 313.

⁸ Manuel Toussaint, "La pintura con incrustaciones de concha nácar en la Nueva España", *Anales*, V, no. 20, 1952, p. 10.

⁹ Rodrigo Rivero Lake, *La visión de un anticuario*, Mexico City, Américo Arte, 1997, pp. 246-248.

¹⁰ Ocaña Ruiz, "Mother-of-Pearl...", *op. cit.*, pp. 19-36.

¹¹ Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, *Lacas Namban em Portugal*. Lisbon: Edições Inapa, 1990, pp.72-99.

¹² Oliver Impey & Christiaan Jörg, *Japanese Export Lacquer 1580-1850*, Amsterdam, Hotei Publishing, 2005, p. 75.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁴ Mendes Pinto, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-64; *Laca Namban: brillo de Japón en Navarra*, Pamplona, Gobierno de Navarra, 2016, and Yayoi Kawamura, "La laca japonesa de exportación en España. Del estilo Namban al pictórico", *Archivo español de arte* 82, no. 325, 2009, pp. 87-93.

¹⁵ The earliest work is a *Nativity* housed in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, signed by Juan González in 1662. This artist was still active in 1703, when he signed a *Saint Francis Xavier Embarking for Asia* (private collection, Mexico). Many works are signed either by Miguel González or Juan González in the late 1690s or early 1700s. See Sonia I. Ocaña Ruiz, "Nuevas reflexiones sobre las pinturas incrustadas de concha y el trabajo de Juan y Miguel González", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 35, no. 102, 2013, pp. 125-76.

¹⁶ *Arte hispanoamericano en las Canarias Orientales siglos XVI-XIX*, Gran Canaria, Casa de Colón, 2000, p. 184.

¹⁷ Such identification is a true challenge, as descriptions tend to be vague and their origins are often omitted. Adding to the confusion, works from different parts of Asia were often mistakenly thought to be Chinese. Gustavo Curiel, "Perception of the Other and the Language of "Chinese Mimicry" in the Decorative Arts of New Spain", in Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (eds.), *Asia and Spanish America: Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange 1500-1850*, Denver, Denver Art Museum, 2009, p. 25.

¹⁸ Manuel Romero de Terreros, "Relación del Japón (1609)", *Anales del Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Historia y Etnografía I*, 5th Epoch, 1934, pp. 67-111.

¹⁹ María Concepción García Sáiz, "La conquista militar y los enconchados. Las peculiaridades de un patrocinio indiano", in *Los pinceles de la historia. El origen del reino de la Nueva España*, Mexico City, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1999, pp. 111-114.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²¹ Teresa Lavalle Cobo, "El coleccionismo oriental de Isabel de Farnesio", in *Oriente en Palacio: tesoros asiáticos en las colecciones reales españolas*, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional, 2003, pp. 213-214.

²² However, according to Lourdes Suárez Diez the shells depicting the Florentine Codex include *Lygunia recta esp.* and *Unionidae*, both of which are fresh water species. Lourdes Suárez Diez, *Conchas, caracoles y crónicas. El material conquiológico en las fuentes escritas de los siglos XVI y XVII en la cultura mexicana*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004, p. 55.

²³ Adrián Velázquez Castro, "La concha nácar en la época prehispánica", in *La concha nácar en México*, Mexico City, Grupo Gutsa, 1990, pp. 14-49.

²⁴ Suárez Diez, *op. Cit.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 33.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 84-85. *Spondylus*, and especially *Spondylus princeps*, was very appreciated in the Andean world, not only for its ritual use, but also for its economic importance in long-distance commerce. Recent research has found out that *Spondylus princeps* was also very important for the Tarascos and Teotihuacanos, who had maritime trade exchange with Ecuador. Patricia Carot and Marie-Areti Hers, "De perros pelones, buzos y Spondylus. Una historia continental", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 108, 2016, pp. 9-50.

²⁷ Adrián Velázquez Castro, Belem Zúñiga Arellano & Norma Valentín Maldonado, *Ofrendas de concha, tesoros de fertilidad*, Mexico, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 17.

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.

³¹ Sonia I. Ocaña Ruiz, "Enconchados: gustos, estrategias y precios en la Nueva España", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, 37, no. 106, 2015, pp. 107-108.

³² Francisco Javier Clavijero, *Historia antigua de México*, Mexico, Porrúa, 1945, p. 150.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 150.

³⁴ Eusebio Kino, *Favores celestiales de Jesús y de María*, Mexico, Publicaciones del AGN, 1922, pp. 68-69.

³⁵ Miguel del Barco, *Historia natural y crónica de la antigua California*, Miguel León Portilla (ed.), Mexico, UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1973, p. 136.

³⁶ Enriqueta M. Olguín, *Nácar en manos otomíes*, Mexico, UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2004, p. 108.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

³⁸ Charles di Peso, *Casas Grandes: A Fallen Trading Center of the Gran Chichimeca*, Vol. I, Flagstaff, The Amerind Foundation Inc. Dragoon Northland Press, 1974, p. 170.

³⁹ Barco, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

⁴⁰ Rivas Pérez, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

⁴¹ Blas Sierra Calle, "190. Madreperlas talladas", in *Filipinas. Puerta de Oriente: de Legazpi a Malaspina*, Madrid, Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2003, p. 307.

⁴² Roberto Hernández Hernández, "El comercio exterior de China y su relación con México. Una perspectiva histórica", *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico* 8, no. 26, 2005, p. 124.

⁴³ Juan Francisco Gemelli Careri, *Las cosas más considerables vistas en la Nueva España*, Mexico, Xóchitl, 1946, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Ocaña Ruiz, "Enconchados: gustos...", *op. cit.*, pp. 106-110.

⁴⁵ Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, "Documentos sobre 'enconchados' y la familia mexicana de los González", *Cuadernos de Arte Colonial*, 1, 1986, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Illán & Romero, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Olguín, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 197-198.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 188-189.

⁴⁹ Julathusana Byachrananda, *Thai Mother-of-Pearl Inlay*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2001, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Tovar de Teresa 1986, pp. 100-101; Mues Orts 2008, p. 395.

⁵¹ Ocaña Ruiz, "Enconchados: gustos...", *op. cit.*, pp. 87-91.

⁵² Ocaña Ruiz, "Nuevas reflexiones...", *op. cit.*, p. 139.

⁵³ Illán & Romero, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35, 37-38.

⁵⁴ Alejandro Huerta Carrillo, *Análisis de la técnica y material de dos colecciones de pinturas enconchadas*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1991, pp. 48-50.

⁵⁵ José de Santiago Silva, *Algunas consideraciones sobre las pinturas enconchadas del Museo Nacional de Historia*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976, p. 28; Agustín Espinosa *et al.*, *Los enconchados: conservación y restauración de pinturas con incrustaciones de concha*, Acapulco, Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1986, p. 16; Huerta Carrillo, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵⁶ Velázquez Castro, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Francis Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura* (3rd edition, Vol. II), Madrid, Instituto de Valencia de don Juan, 1990, pp. 84-85.

⁵⁸ Julieta Ávila, *El influjo de la pintura china en los enconchados de Nueva España*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1997, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Bargellini, *op. cit.*, pp. 187 and 293.

⁶⁰ Jn 8:12; Mt 5:14.

⁶¹ Jean-Claude Bonne, "Les ornements de l'histoire (à propos de l'ivoire carolingien de saint Remi)", *Annales HSS* 51, no. 1, 1996, pp. 44-45; John Gage, *Colour and Culture, Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1993, pp. 59, 124.

⁶² Manuel Gómez Moreno, *Catálogo monumental de España. Provincia de León (1906-1908)*, Vol. I, Madrid, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes, 1925, p. 565.

⁶³ While *enconchados* had a very important domestic market, about 100 of the 280 extant works have been in Spain since the 18th century. Many *enconchados* shipped to Spain were better preserved than the ones that stayed in Mexico. Not surprisingly, the largest collection of *enconchados* in the world is in Museo de América in Madrid, whose works come from different old Spanish collections.

⁶⁴ It should be noted that the work in Tlaxcala might have had an *enconchado* frame; many extant *enconchados* have lost their original frames.

⁶⁵ Ocaña Ruiz, "Enconchados: gustos...", *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁶⁶ While a number of viceregal paintings include fruits without religious significance, grapes are usually the only fruits to appear in *enconchado* frames.

⁶⁷ Jean-Claude Bonne has pointed out that ornament is often used to heighten the aesthetic or para-aesthetic value of works through such qualities as rarity, splendor, brilliance and subtlety of the effect produced, luxury, polychromy, skill and ingeniousness involved in production, even the sheer painstakingness involved in the work's execution, and the cost and weight of the precious materials used. Bonne, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁶⁸ These comments derive from James, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ Gage, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Liz James, "What Colours Were Byzantine Mosaics?", in Eve Borsook, Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi & Giovanni Pagliarulo (eds.), *Medieval Mosaics: Light, Color, Materials*, Firenze, Silvana, 2000, p. 44.

⁷¹ Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero, "El tesoro perdido de la catedral michoacana", in Nelly Sigaut (ed.), *La catedral de Morelia*. Zamora, El Colegio de Michoacán, Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1991, p. 148.

⁷² In 1769, the Spanish priest Antonio Lobera y Albió got *El porqué de todas las ceremonias de la Iglesia y sus misterios. Cartilla de prelados y sacerdotes que enseña las ordenanzas eclesiásticas que deben saber todos los ministros de Dios* published. This book discussed the meaning of light in the Bible, and made specific references to the use of candles. David Carbajal López, "Velas, religión y política en la Nueva España del Siglo de las Luces", *Temas americanistas*, No. 33, 2014, pp. 2-3.

⁷³ However, it has been pointed out that the Catholic hierarchy had opposing points of view on the appropriateness of exhibiting very much splendour in the Church. David Carbajal López, *op. cit.*, and Janeth Rodríguez Nóbrega, "El oro en la pintura de los reinos de la monarquía española. Técnica y simbolismo", *Pintura de los reinos: identidades compartidas, territorios del mundo hispánico, siglos XVI - XVIII*, V. IV, Juana Gutiérrez Haces (coord.), México, Fomento Cultural Banamex, 2008 - 2009, pp. 1314-1375.

⁷⁴ Clara Bargellini, "Interrogantes sobre los colores del arte virreinal", *El color en el arte mexicano*, México, UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 20-, pp. 22-223.

⁷⁵ *Ibídem*, p. 223. Author's translation.

⁷⁶ *Ibídem*

⁷⁷ Cathedral Archive, Puebla, Sacristy Inventory, 1734, f. 4.

⁷⁸ The New Spanish taste for light in Catholic contexts is also easily noticeable in the insistence of some communities on lighting candles to make celebrations more splendid. Carbajal López, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Gustavo Curiel, "El efímero caudal de una joven noble. Inventario y aprecio de los bienes de la marquesa Doña Teresa Francisca María de Guadalupe Retes Paz Vera (Ciudad de México, 1695)", *Anales del Museo de América*, no. 8, 2000, p. 77.

⁸⁰ Tovar de Teresa, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸¹ Eight of the eleven panels of this series are in the aforementioned museum, while the whereabouts of the other three are unknown.

⁸² Ángel Aterido Fernández, Juan Martínez Cuesta & José Juan Pérez Preciado, *Colecciones de pinturas de Felipe V e Isabel Farnesio: inventarios reales*, Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 2004, p. 120.

⁸³ For a reflection on the depiction of gold in Viceregal painting, see Rodríguez Nóbrega, "El oro en la pintura...", *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ García Sáiz, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁸⁵ García Sáiz, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114.

⁸⁶ Schreffler, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

⁸⁷ Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf & Diane Fane (eds.), *Images Take Flight: Feather Art in Mexico and Europe (1400-1700)*, München, Hirmer Verlag, 2015.

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