
Book Review: *Cuzco*

Cuzco: Incas, Spaniards, and the Making of a Colonial City, by Michael J. Schreffler. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020. 200 pages. Hardcover \$75.

No other city is like Cusco, Peru. It was once the beating heart of the Inca world, a heart seized by Iberian invaders who occupied its sacred center beginning in 1533. Its layered stories can be sensed today, within both cloisters and *chifas* (Chinese-Peruvian restaurants), in plazas and along streets where a walker can run her hand along the cool weathered surfaces of Inca andesite, the coarser stones reworked after the arrival of Europeans, the white-plastered walls and slick wooden portals of Spanish *casernas*, the modern neo-Inca walls, and sleek commercial construction. As a living city, heritage site, and monument to multiple imperial projects, Cusco is quick to intrigue but fast to evade any endeavor to know it completely. Many books have been written about its histories and unique built environment. None of those books is like Michael J. Schreffler's *Cuzco: Incas, Spaniards, and the Making of a Colonial City*.

This is not a book about Inca architecture. Nor is it a history of later European-style architecture imposed upon pre-Hispanic foundations. Rather, *Cuzco* is a book about the efficacy of words (both spoken and written), acts (of ritual, reading, and imagination), objects, and images (many now lost) to conceive the Spanish colonial city out of the smoldering ruins of the Inca capital. As such, its subtitle is a touch misleading. The story told here is not that of the construction of the colonial city in the second half of the sixteenth century, or its rebuilding after the devastating earthquake of 1650. What interests Schreffler is how the colonial city was prefigured during the pivotal decades of the 1530s and 1540s, before Spanish control of the city—let alone what would become the Viceroyalty of Peru—was a *fait accompli*. For Cusco's Spanish invaders, this transformation “was, at first, an act of the imagination.” Only later were the “metaphysical changes” followed by physical changes (159). This is a story of colonial anticipation in the throes of conquest. It lays out what we might consider the *prehistory* of colonial

Cusco, a liminal story told between the end of one era and the beginning of another. It is a book about the “instrumentality of language and writing” (66), the power of ritual, and the operation of “mental images of the city” (45) in the making of the colonial city.

Schreffler builds a polyphonic account through the words of Inca, Spanish, and mestizo writers, replete with conflict and crossed understandings, of how Cusco was remembered, rumored, desired, encountered, plundered, burned, seized, (re)founded, redistributed, and remembered anew. The book begins with a chapter on the Inca city and its pre-Inca origins (principally narrated, retrospectively, through Juan de Betanzos's *Suma y narración de los Incas* and the memories of his Indigenous wife Angelina Yupanqui and her family). The main story commences with the death of Huayna Capac and the arrival of foreigners led by Francisco Pizarro. Among them were Cristóbal de Mena and Francisco de Xerez, whose words take us from coastal Ecuador to Cajamarca. The dramatic confrontation there between Pizarro and Atahualpa has long captivated historians and art historians. It is the encounter that launches Tom Cummins's *Toasts with the Inca* (University of Michigan Press, 2002) as well as the place where Adam Herring's *Art and Vision in the Inca Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) dwells entirely. But Schreffler joins with others, such as Jeremy Mikecz in his article for *Hispanic American Historical Review* (2020), to offer recent analytical moves “beyond Cajamarca.”

With Pedro Sancho as our guide, we then travel along the Inca roads to Xauxa and into the heart of empire to Cusco itself. There, Indigenous elites recognized Manco Inca, who traveled with the Spaniards, as their legitimate sovereign. But within weeks, the city was claimed for Spain and symbolically transformed by Pizarro's public reading of the *Requerimiento*, followed months later by the Act of Foundation and the raising of a *picota* (pillar).

Subsequent chapters address the formation of the *cabildo*, the Distribution of Lots among the *conquistadores*, the Inca city's stubborn resistance to divisibility by the grid, Manco Inca's unsuccessful attacks on Sacsahuaman and the Spanish-controlled city, and the later civil wars (the latter recounted through Pedro de Cieza de León). The book ends with the recollections from Spain of Garcilaso de la Vega, "El Inca," and his imagined stroll through the Cusco of his childhood.

Schreffler is notably uninterested in creating a synthetic narrative or in distilling "a history of the city that makes a claim to objectivity." Rather, as he writes, "the contradictions and idiosyncrasies in the primary sources come to be seen not as liabilities but rather as evidence of the multiple ways in which an ethnically, linguistically, and confessionally diverse host of historical actors conceived of the city and their places in it" (16).

At times in reading, I longed for more extended analysis. Sometimes compelling ideas are only touched upon before the author quickly moves on. For example, at the end of chapter 2, the brief discussion of the gilt cartographic placement of Cusco relative to Seville in Battista Agnese's world map created in Venice in the mid-1540s (61) left me wanting to know more about that extraordinary object and the mental images of the Andean city that were forming concurrently in Europe. As university presses increasingly prioritize shorter monographs, it may be unfair to critique an author because one would prefer that his book were longer. This trend in book publishing, though, constricts projects that would benefit from more ample rumination on complex topics.

In writing this history of how the physical city was experienced, and how the future city was imagined, Schreffler performs less close looking at extant architecture and its historical images than the art historian might expect. In part, this is because what much of the city looked like in the 1530s now "can only be imagined" (90). But it also makes sense, given the author's commitment to plurality, that he resists the art historical habit of assuming that authorial voice of universal perception. The role of illustrations in this book is, by extension, unconventional. The pictures create a stunning visual backdrop that Schreffler has deliberately constructed to enable the reader to imagine the places, paintings, and things that the Andean and Spanish protagonists of this book *likely would have seen* in Peru, or *might have had in mind*, as some recalled their earlier lives in Iberia.

Conditional, subjunctive, and speculative voices are often necessary in the study of colonial art and architecture. In Schreffler's *Cuzco*—as in Alessandra Russo's "Cortés's Objects and the Idea of New Spain" (*Journal of the History of Collections*, 2011), the late Linda Rodríguez's dissertation on José Antonio Aponte's lost *libro de pinturas* in Cuba (2012), and Ximena Gómez's forthcoming work of the art of Black confraternities in Lima—the art historian must grapple with the problem of how to study artworks and architecture that are no longer extant, at least not as they once were.

What I appreciate most about this book may be that, through his critically informed work of suggestion and supposition, Schreffler does not allow the reader to lose sight of Andean people, and in particular Andean women. The book's beginning and end center on the story of Angelina Yupanqui, and the author takes care to suggest her presence throughout its pages. He asks us to remember the *acllacona* (the cloistered "chosen women" of the Incas) and the *mamacona* who would have remained within the "abandoned" palaces of Spanish-occupied Cusco (83, 94). Although the archive is too often silent on the fate of Indigenous women, their treatment at the hands of foreign men is not difficult to imagine. Schreffler's insistence on recalling their lives in the city can be put into conversation with Stella Nair's discussion of sites of sexual coercion and violence within Inca architecture ("Salones de vino,' conventos y otros espacios inca imaginarios,' in *El arte antes de la historia* (Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2020), which disabuses us of romantic images of so-called "pleasure houses" (cf. Herring, *Art and Vision*, 169–70).

In fact, although Schreffler does not make the metaphor explicit, it is possible to read his narration of the life of Angelina Yupanqui in parallel with the story of Cusco itself. The royal Inca girl named Cuxirimay was married to Atahualpa until Pizarro executed the Inca ruler in Cajamarca and took her as his own sexual partner (she was barely thirteen years old). Upon her baptism, Cuxirimay took the Christian name Angelina. After Pizarro's death, Angelina married Juan de Betanzos. There are clear parallels between Schreffler's accounts of her life and the transformation of the Inca city that was remade as Spanish Cusco through Pizarro's foundation, "as a rebirth, *akin to the sacrament of baptism*: through the uttering of words and the performance of a ritual act" (77, emphasis added).

It may be too pointed to equate Angelina Yupanqui née Cuxirimay and/as Cusco. A woman who survived

such horrors in her youth to become one of the most important memory-keepers of her generation cannot be reduced to stone and mortar. But given the fact that the person of the Inca king himself was sometimes called “Cuzco” (50), perhaps it is not too much to imagine Cuxirimay herself as a comparable embodiment. The author is careful not to overstate this convergence; he refuses to reduce Cusco to a bridal trope or render the city as

a subaltern female allegory of colonial survival. After all, Cusco would surely resist that desire as well. As this book masterfully demonstrates, the city cannot be essentialized through any single metaphor or telling. It was, and remains, a place that can only be known through its plurality.

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