

Rapid #: -14279533

CROSS REF ID: **793958**

LENDER: **OPEN :: DOIS 092818**

BORROWER: **MUM :: Main Library**

TYPE: Article CC:CCL

JOURNAL TITLE: Gastronomica

USER JOURNAL TITLE: Gastronomica

ARTICLE TITLE: Marcos Zapata's Last Supper: A feast of European Religion and Andean Culture

ARTICLE AUTHOR: Christina Zendt

VOLUME: 10

ISSUE: 4

MONTH:

YEAR: 2010

PAGES: 9-11

ISSN: 1529-3262

OCLC #:

Processed by RapidX: 2/7/2019 10:45:03 AM

This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

Marcos Zapata's *Last Supper*

A Feast of European Religion and Andean Culture



THE VIEWER OF Marcos Zapata's 1753 painting of the Last Supper (in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo, commonly known as the Cathedral of Cuzco, in Cuzco, Peru) gradually becomes aware of an anomaly. Within the history of art the Last Supper is hardly a surprising choice of subject matter, and owing to its array of precedents, Zapata's composition features many of the expected elements. Christ is in the center, flanked by his twelve, mostly devoted, apostles. Standing slightly higher than them, he wears a distinguishing halo, and his fingers are arranged in the sign of benediction. The men are clothed in heavy robes that feature a lot of reds, a hue common to painting in Cuzco, and all but one of them bend toward Christ. Cloaked in red

in the lower right-hand corner of the painting, Judas glares as though he is trying to show the viewer the moneybag that he is clutching beneath the table.¹ No one seems to be looking at the Crucifixion scene on the wall behind the figures, which points to Christ's upcoming death. The focal point of the painting can be found in front of Christ on the table around which the men are gathered—the eponymous Last Supper. But this is where Zapata's painting diverges from its many precedents. Just below Christ's chalice lies a dish holding a Peruvian delicacy that would not be found in any European rendering of the subject.² Christ and his disciples are about to feast on *cuy*, or guinea pig, one of the most traditional meats in Andean cuisine. In his

culturally hybrid and culinarily delightful representation of the Last Supper, Zapata offers a stunning example of the mixing of European and local traditions in the Cuzco School of painting.

Throughout history artists have depended on precedents; traditional European training centered on drawing from ancient sculpture and copying the masters. Through imitation, artists learned the technical skills necessary to make alterations and invent their own style. Artistic innovation can easily be seen in the treatment of traditional subject matter, especially Christian themes, in which only slight changes are made—whether aesthetic or expressive of a new understanding of an old story.

In colonial Latin America images were the most important tool for Christianizing the indigenous peoples. Through prints of European paintings, as well as the presence of several important European religious painters, local Indian populations became familiar with Christian imagery, and thereby Christian stories and beliefs. Furthermore, when indigenous artists were taught to paint Christian subjects, they inserted Christian symbolism into their local iconography. Despite the Spaniards' forcing of Christianity onto indigenous peoples who already had their own beliefs and ideologies, the resulting colonial Latin American painting often represents a blending of European religion with local culture.

There is no better example of this cultural blending than in Cuzco. Because it was the Inca capital, it was very important for the Spanish to conquer and convert Cuzco in both cultural and religious terms. Francisco Pizarro and his soldiers entered Cuzco on November 15, 1533. The Inca, taken by surprise, were at one of their rare weak moments of internal civil unrest. What followed was one of the bloodiest European conquests in South and Central America. The Spanish made strategic decisions to maintain an illusion of Inca power; thus Cuzco became a hybrid of Spanish control masked by Inca aesthetics, ceremonies, and feasts.³ The city, which had been the center of Inca culture, was turned into the center of colonial Spanish production, and then into what inevitably became a mixture of the two.

By the late sixteenth century the Cuzco School produced more paintings than anywhere else south of Mexico.⁴ The school was made up mostly of Indians, yet there were some mestizos and a handful of Spanish and Italian immigrants.⁵ Marcos Zapata was an extremely prolific late member of the Cuzco School, and one of the few indigenous painters known by name. He was taught to paint by the first generation of the Cuzco School—local men who had been taught by European painters using prints of European

paintings.⁶ Mestizos made up a large portion of the population. By the early eighteenth century they had gained a higher place in society and soon had representatives in the church and the government.⁷ By the time Zapata was painting in the mid-eighteenth century, this hybrid of European and indigenous populations held more cultural stock than either did individually.

Zapata's inclusion of *cuy* reflects its importance as the most easily available source of protein for the Andean people. Whereas llamas and alpacas belonged to, and were controlled by, the Inca state, *cuy* was the common man's dependable source of meat. Guinea pigs were traditionally hunted with slingshots or raised in peasants' homes. Despite its ubiquity, *cuy* was still considered a special food; it was rarely eaten for everyday meals and was instead reserved for special feasts. It was also the sacrificial animal of choice for religious festivals. *Cuy* entrails were examined to predict the future, and at agricultural festivals the animals were sacrificed en masse to appease the gods. Several sixteenth-century Spanish chroniclers referred to eating guinea pig. Garcilaso de la Vega recorded that "the Indians have many of them and eat them at fiesta," while Bernabe Cobo specifically mentions a dish in which smooth pebbles were placed in the guinea pig's stomach cavity to facilitate the roasting process.⁸ Cobo also wrote about *cuy* being served with capsicum pepper, which is still a common Andean dish today.⁹

In his rendering of the renowned supper Zapata also included an assortment of colored potatoes, peppers, and a beverage commonly considered to be *chicha*, a fermented corn drink that is still quite popular in the Andes. Though the local motifs are central elements in the painting, they seem separate from the subject's traditional details. The symbols of the body and blood of Christ remain; there is no indication that Christ's chalice holds anything other than the traditional wine (*chicha* is typically drunk from ceramic bowls), and Christ's left hand holds the symbolic loaf of bread. The features of the figures are completely European, as is their dress. The only real Andean elements are the culinary additions, and although Zapata has made important cultural alterations to the subject as it was traditionally depicted, he has not changed the religious symbolism of Christ's last supper. Even though Andean guinea pig is distinctly different from the traditional Christian lamb, it is symbolically equivalent in its local sacrificial significance.

The Spanish were able to convert the indigenous population to Christianity through a calculated process. By building the cathedral that houses Zapata's painting on

the same soil that once supported the sacred Inca palace of Viraccha (a king named after the Inca creator god), the Spaniards essentially replaced the trappings of Inca religion with their own. That the roots of Inca culture remained beneath the surface of the cathedral facilitated the process of conversion.

Aside from the change in religion, indigenous culture remained strong in the area around Cuzco. Around the time Zapata was painting his *Last Supper*, rebellions broke out against Spanish control. The mestizo population was vast, and Quechua, the most common indigenous language in the Andes, was heard as often as Spanish.¹⁰ In Zapata's blending of Andean culinary tradition with an allegiance to a religion brought by the conquistadors, the *Last Supper* exemplifies the sentiment found in most Cuzco painting. Guinea pig may be a surprising departure from traditional renderings of the Last Supper, but this fare aptly reconfigures Christian symbolism within Andean culture and tradition. ☉

NOTES

1. It has been suggested that Judas's features could be linked to those of the conqueror Francisco Pizarro. See Allison Lee Palmer, "The Last Supper by Marcos Zapata (c. 1753: A Meal of Bread, Wine, and Guinea Pig)," in *Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art* 9 (2008), 54–73.
2. Lamb is the most commonly depicted Last Supper meat. However, Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of the subject is said to feature eel. See John Varriano, "At Supper with Leonardo," *Gastronomica* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 75–79.
3. William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Peru, with a Preliminary View of the Civilization of the Incas* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1960), 517.
4. Guy Brett, "Drawn to an Image," *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1991): 4.
5. In the late sixteenth century forty-seven painters are documented in the Cuzco School: thirty-five Indians, seven mestizos, four Spaniards, and one Italian. Leopoldo Castedo, *The Cuzco Circle* (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations and the American Federation of Arts, 1976).
6. Most of these prints were from the Netherlands, which at that time was also part of the Spanish Empire.
7. Castedo, *The Cuzco Circle*, 25.
8. Daniel W. Gade, "The Guinea Pig in Andean Folk Culture," *Geographical Review* 57, no. 2 (April 1967): 217.
9. During a visit to Cuzco in 2008 I enjoyed a delicious meal of roasted guinea pig with red peppers.
10. Though Quechua was banned for some periods during the eighteenth century by nervous Spaniards, it nonetheless spread throughout the colonial period and is still commonly spoken in the Andes today.