

Plant and Animal Imagery in the Churches of Chucuito
in the Late Colonial Period. Book review of *Naturaleza,
cultura andina y concepciones doctrinales jesuíticas*
by Carla Maranguello

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THE ARCHITECTURAL SCULPTURE of the so-called Mestizo Baroque or Andean Hybrid Baroque churches of southern Peru and Bolivia has fascinated—and polarized—scholars of Latin American colonial art for precisely a century, particularly the degree to which it reflects indigenous sensibilities and styles. Scholars from Ángel Guido and Martín Noel to Teresa Gisbert and the present reviewer have paid particular attention to the significance of the rich assortment of flowers, other plants, birds, and animals that animate these facades, some

of them originating in European Christian iconography and others clearly of Andean and Amazonian origin.

Carla Maranguello's excellent new study,¹ derived from her PhD dissertation and focused exclusively on Chucuito (Juli, Pomata, and Zepita), treads this familiar territory yet takes us much deeper into the specifics of the flora and fauna, highlighting the flexibility of the missionary patrons and the agency of the indigenous sculptors who executed these extraordinary decorations. Instead of the usual formalist approach, she uses ethnobiology to identify more closely species of plants and animals and relate them to indigenous practices from the prehispanic and colonial periods alike and to Jesuit missionary methodology. Chapters six and seven take the form of a catalogue of vegetal and animal motifs such has not been attempted since the time of Ilmar Luks (1973). However, unlike Luks' study, which notoriously focused only on motifs of European origin, Maranguello's book concentrates on native species, both from Chucuito and from other zones linked with that region in what John Murra (1974) called a «vertical archipelago» (economically and socially related settlements located across an ecologically varied landscape). These plants and animals resonated powerfully among Andeans thanks to their role in ritual, alimentary, and medicinal practices: as depicted in church sculpture they were not merely metaphors for larger concepts but «tenía una entidad y una sustancia directamente análoga a la del ser humano» (p. 327). In a field in which labels have proliferated, the author wisely avoids creating a new one for this architecture, although her decision to avoid the term *Baroque*, while a praiseworthy attempt to avoid a Eurocentric approach, sidesteps the reality that these buildings with their Solomonian columns, broken pediments, and cupolas belong indelibly to a global Baroque architectural matrix (indeed, her

1 *Naturaleza, cultura andina y concepciones doctrinales jesuíticas. Las iglesias del lago Titicaca en Chucuito tardo colonial* (Arequipa: Universidad Católica San Pablo, 2023).

choice of the term *late colonial* acknowledges these buildings' links with the European colonial project).

One of the most intriguing sections of the book, and one which the present reviewer would have liked to have seen explored more fully, is her suggestion that the patios in front of Andean churches were designed specifically to allow indigenous worshippers to associate Christian ritual with sacred landscape features such as mountains, hills, and water bodies (including Lake Titicaca, believed to be the place of origin of humankind). These *huacas*, since they are indestructible and permanent parts of peoples' surroundings, were impossible to eradicate, unlike stones, metalwork, and ceramics. She writes, «Desde los atrios de las iglesias, los cerros y el lago aparecen integrados a las estructuras, y en algunos casos, mediante juegos de enmarque por los arcos, participando del circuito para garantizar la continuidad sacra de espacio» (p. 104). Such is the prominent cat-shaped hill in the Jesuit missionary centre of Juli known as the Cerro Zapacollo, which can be seen from the patios of Santa Cruz, San Pedro, and La Asunción churches, and the lake itself, seen directly from the northern flank of the Santa Cruz patio. To what degree the triumphal arch gateways and walls of these patios relate specifically to these sites could be further explored. For instance, were direct sightlines made between features of the patio and nearby hills (including also the Salipucará, Ancarcollo, and Caracollo hills)? What potential relationship existed between the framing of natural forms by these arches and the Inca tradition of framing stone outcrops in stone masonry? (The arch on the north wall of the Santa Cruz patio, which seems to embrace all of Titicaca, is particularly suggestive). This section reminds the present reviewer of Eleanor Wake's *Framing the Sacred* (2010), with its discussion of depictions of sacred hills in the mural decoration of early colonial mission complexes in New Spain.

This potential framing and association between sacred landscapes and mission church complexes suggests, as the author maintains, that the Jesuits and other missionaries were willing to allow

their indigenous congregations to integrate aspects of prehispanic sacrality into mission life to strengthen Christianity's hold on them. She asks: «¿Por qué pensar entonces que los nativos incorporados al cristianismo, cuyos templos se erigían en el mismo paisaje sagrado, y cuya iconografía evocaba de la misma forma el mundo natural, olvidarían la sacralidad que había caracterizado a la religión de sus ancestros?» (p. 63). Chapter three, on mission strategy, looks closely at the writings of pioneering missionaries such as José de Acosta and at how much they knew about Andean huacas and the persistence of Andean rituals. She shows that they maintained a remarkable flexibility toward such traditions, attempting to redirect indigenous worship of the sun, moon, stars, stones, mountains, rivers, and lakes toward the Christian God, for whom these objects are simply reflections of Divine Creation. However, the distinction was subtle. Since these *huacas* were still associated with divinity Andeans could continue to venerate them as deities: «podía resultar confusa, porque seguía vinculando al mundo natural con la sacralidad» (pp. 118-119). Chapter three also looks at the extirpation movement of the early seventeenth century, which brought so many details of indigenous ritual practices, including plants and animals, to the knowledge of clerics (and to that of present-day scholars). As the author notes, extirpators divided *huacas* among the mobile (and therefore destructible) and immobile (and therefore impervious to destruction), the latter more dangerous for that reason and including astral bodies and landscape features.

Chapter four also looks at Jesuit missionary strategy, considering the role played by Probabilism, the system of moral theology based on the principal that if there is any doubt about whether an act is licit or illicit it is permissible to rely upon a «probable opinion» even if the law suggests otherwise (it is essentially about the difference between law and liberty). This approach became a gateway for the Jesuits in their missionary work and education to accommodate to indigenous

practices, which in this case meant embracing Andean beliefs about flora and fauna: «No solo se prestó atención a las cualidades y diversidades de la flora y de la fauna desde el punto de vista empírico, sino que, además, se puso interés en las posibilidades que ofrecía para diferentes aspectos de su misión evangelizadora. Se veía en la naturaleza un plan esbozado por Dios, un reflejo de lo superior, en tanto los fenómenos se ordenaban en torno al esquema de la creación» (p. 171). The Jesuits believed that plants and animals could serve as metaphors for catechetical concepts while preaching, similarly to symbols or emblems, paving the way for the incorporation of depictions of local flora and fauna in carved church decoration.

Chapter five focuses on what the author rightly calls the *cooperative* nature (p. 240) of the architecture in this book by emphasizing the degree of freedom indigenous carvers had in decorating the churches of Chucuito, tracing the style back to the Compañía in Arequipa and reviewing what we know about the Andean artists who contributed to this style, their building history, details about contracts, and named indigenous artists. Indigenous agency in choosing decoration increased as Andeans became more and more involved with construction over the years: «puede leerse la creciente participación en mano de obra con el tiempo, ocupando un lugar cada vez menos subordinado y por lo tanto con mayor libertad para el manejo de los programas iconográficos de las fachadas, que en su mayoría se resolvía en la ornamentación» (p. 240). The chapter also provides closely-observed descriptions of the carved part of the (mostly) exteriors of the churches of Juli, Zepita, and Pomata. These narratives cover the same territory as earlier scholars, including the present reviewer and Ricardo Mariátegui Oliva, a fact which references to previous scholarship could acknowledge more explicitly. The same goes for the *libros de fábrica*, inventories, and other sources cited earlier in the chapter: most of them have been cited and even transcribed by earlier scholars, which the author does not always concede.

The second part of the book (chapters six and seven) provides a handy and handsomely-illustrated catalogue of the most likely Andean flowers and animals to be represented in sculptural decoration, with excellent photographs of botanical and zoological specimens, several by the author herself, juxtaposed with carved representations taken from the churches. Chapter six focuses on flowers, which the author divides into six families organized into three groups. The first group comprises flowers with complex compositions (including cactus, passion flowers, and members of the daisy family), featuring multiple levels of petals and petals of varying shapes. The second comprises bell- or tube-shaped flowers (members of the nightshade and Phlox family, including the *cantuta*). The third group includes cruciform flowers associated with the Brassicaceae family (crucifers). All flower species are present in the department of Puno and are endemic either to the Altiplano or other elevations in Murra's archipelago, many of the latter introduced already in prehispanic times. No previous study has attempted to identify the flowers depicted in this architectural sculpture with such precision. Chapter seven turns to animals, mostly birds followed by primates and hard-to-identify hybrid feline figures, all of them also locally endemic or derived from lower elevations. The birds are divided into two categories: members of the parrot family (including macaws) which are identifiable by a prominent upper bill which curls down over the lower one, and passerines (such as the cactus canastero, a member of the ovenbird family which feeds and nests on cacti) with straight bills.

Scholars have often rejected the identification of real species in these carvings because they are so schematic, although some of them (*cantuta*, cactus flowers, monkeys, pumas) were identified by Guido as early as 1925 and subsequent writers such as Noel, Gisbert, and the present reviewer added to the list over the years. Maranguello makes the important point that highly stylized representations of specific plants and animals have appeared in the arts of

the Aymara-speaking Lupaca people (the indigenes of Chucuito) in prehispanic times (including members of the parrot family and quadrupeds such as camelids). Nevertheless, the identification of specific species remains the Achilles heel of scholarship about the Andean Hybrid Baroque, and the present reviewer can speak from personal experience. For example, blossoms are invariably depicted with even numbers of petals (for example, eight or ten), whereas in reality blossoms frequently have uneven numbers. This is the reason why the author's identification of the four-petal crucifers, a notable exception to the rule, are the most convincing (images 72, 73). Carvings of what she identifies as passionflowers are difficult to confirm because they do not include the characteristic stigmas and anthers and the number of petals has been reduced (images 55, 56). The author's identification of Members membermembers of the cactus and daisy family are more persuasive because they share an inner nest of petals and pointed blossoms, and also because of their ubiquity and importance in the region.

Representations of animals are equally problematic, although thanks to the shape of their bills the presence of macaws and other parrots have long been identified in the literature. The author rejects the present reviewer's identification of the *chiguanco* thrush, squirrel monkey, and pygmy marmoset in favour of the cactus canastero (*As-thenes cactorum*), Marañón white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus albifrons yurac-us*), and miniature European heraldic lions. These are all reasonable identifications, but they cannot be verified even in consultation with zoologists as what is at stake is the representation of the animals, not the animals themselves, which lack scientific precision. The *chiguan-co* is of such great importance in Andean religion and agriculture that it would be curious if some of the birds depicted here did not represent it. It would also strengthen the author's argument to mention representations of similar species of plants and animals in churches in other regions (e.g. La Paz, Arequipa, Coporaque).

Nevertheless, the author is to be praised for investigating possible prototypes with such zeal and she has significantly deepened our understanding of these iconographically-rich sculptural decorations. Maranguello demonstrates a mastery of the literature not merely of the late colonial architecture of Southern Peru but also of the intricacies of Jesuit theology and mission methodology and of Andean religion and lifeways. This book is a welcome addition to the literature about one of the most studied topics in South American colonial architecture, and it is timely that it appears just in time for that field's centenary.

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