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Julio Ortega
Brown University, Julio_Ortega@Brown.edu

Philip Debenshire
pdebenshire@kennesaw.edu

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Representation and Appropriation in Guaman Poma de Ayala

Julio Ortega

(Translation by Philip Debenshire)

By discussing the cultural role of iconography, this article explores the likely source of representations in Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*. His process of appropriation serves as a model of the new Andean cultural production by showcasing how emblematic allegories have been used in Latin America to illustrate Colonial manuscripts as well as national emblems and public art.

The Emblematic Mode

The earliest editions of Cesar Ripa’s *Iconologia* had no illustrations, just the allegorical descriptions, which the author says he has taken from sculptures and coins from classical antiquity, as well as Greek and Roman authors. In 1603 Ripa published the first illustrated edition of his *Iconologia*, which was aimed at historians, poets, painters, and sculptors who were interested in the use of allegorical figures. In this first illustrated edition of *Iconologia* the emblem of *Abondanza* is a Roman matron, who offers a serene prodigality in the cornucopia full of fruits, grapes, and olives which she holds in her right hand, while in her left she carries a stalk bearing ears of wheat, some of which are falling to the ground. She has classical attributes, namely a garland of flowers and a green raiment embroidered with gold that represent the fertile countryside and ripe fruits, standing in implicit opposition to scarcity. The edition of Pietro Paolo Tozzi from 1616 gives us a reduced version of the previous text on Abundance. The image is also different. The first was a solid matron, whilst the latter is a young woman who looks directly at the viewer. The pose is the same (*figura serpentina*) but now she is bending her right knee. The images also differ in that the Tozzi’s cornucopia is more detailed, and therefore more decorative. The manipulation of these figures by various printers highlights their didactical character. Humanist images are grounded in the applied arts: they may be allegorical drawings and moral lessons, but they are produced by print shops and publishers. This is punctuated by the fact that whilst the story is more or less the same, the image varies from edition to edition. Other expanded editions appeared under Ripa’s direction, and they multiplied after his death, appearing in different countries and different languages.

The history of the emblem of Abundance from the beginning of the Renaissance to the beginning of the 20th century follows the evolution of applied arts in their passage through print technology and industrial production where they gravitate towards the
decorative arts in their forms, consumption, and meaning. The emblem, whose origin lies in a convergence of philological insight and didactic moralizing, first confirms the power of imperial authority and colonial functionaries, then subsequently regionalist and nationalist imaginaries. Eventually the emblem of Abundance becomes public art, occupying a position somewhere between the ephemeral frieze and the rhetorical fresco, in the newly built palaces of the modernist, bourgeois state where it speaks in the name of an idea of Progress, but with a neoclassical inflection. This Humanist tradition moves to the New World with new, larger functions. Abundance represents the richness of the land, the providential history and God’s love for his Spanish colonial enterprise. Eventually, it will change hands. Re-appropriated by the new populations, the emblems will represent national lore, creole dominance, and regional pride. Today’s Peruvian national flag includes in its insignia the corn of abundance to emphasize mineral richness as state foundation.

Barbarous America

Cornucopia is generous in its emblems. This is certainly the case with the figure of Italy herself, “bellisima donna vestita d’habito sontuoso,” who bears the scepter of imperial rule in her right hand and in her left the cornucopia, which indicates the wealth of the world over which she reigns (Ripa, 1970, pp. 230-232). Asia carries a bunch of flowers and grasses, and Africa a cornucopia full of grain. America, by contrast, bears no symbol of abundance. Indeed, she bears the very opposite signs. In her right hand a bow, and in her left an arrow. As noted earlier, Ripa, whose examination of iconography emphasizes sensuality and physicality in its imagery is generally quick to praise in lavish descriptions, but finds no virtue in America. He sees her as a naked woman: she is a savage with fearsome features, and is depicted in a blend of colors. She is a warrior, the fiercest of them all: beneath her foot lies a human head pierced by an arrow. The condemnation is plain: these barbarous people eat human flesh. Furthermore, they go about naked, even if they cover their private parts.

It seems odd that this material ends up in the emblem as a condemnation: after all, the emblem is produced to express moral virtues, for the praise of the good and of goods. It is not meant to reveal the strangeness of the Other. Given the choice between the Edenic “noble savage” and the “natural man” lacking in morality, Ripa chooses the latter, condemning a savage America in the graphic language of the emblem. In other later editions of the Iconologia the emblem has changed register if not meaning: America is now a dark-skinned native, covered with tattoos, representing the chief of an exotic tribe, surrounded by precious stones, pearls and gold dust, the latter alluding to the legend of El Dorado. A slave attends him, giving a note of civilized luxury to the scene and making it even more incongruous. There is still a human head next to the native, pierced by an arrow. At the edge of the image is a stake from which hangs a human arm, the sign of the cannibal feast, and in the background we can see some Indians worshipping a calf, demonstrating their paganism. An alligator, which protrudes from the image, is a symbol of America’s nature, primitive and dangerous. The Latin tag says: “Everything here is in abundance, especially the gods that blind superstition has created.” The diptych in German is a moral sentence: “Because superstition
prevails here, the treasures of this land are hidden." Both sentences derive from the Reformation and introduce the gaze of the trader and businessman, who berate superstition as a barrier to progress. The image of America introduces a tension into the system of representations that reproduce normative versions of control and management of natural resources.

It is no coincidence that similar imagery is present in the engravings of Theodore de Bry, whose works were made for a market that sought after exotic material, but were also transformed into evidence of barbarism. Ironically, de Bry supported emerging attempts to discredit the Spanish colonial enterprise, which by the 17th century was dismissed as itself barbaric. During this era, America was conceived not as a territory where barbarism reigned, but as the source of wealth which drove forward the development of banking and finance capitalism. As the older Humanism gave way to the newer capitalism, the images of America became exotic rather than barbarous, but were no less fertile.

From Image to Miracle

Carolyn Dean points out in her article "The Renewal of Old World Images and the Creation of Colonial Peruvian Visual Culture" (1996, 171-182) that once these models, especially in religious iconography were transplanted to the New World, they became the conflictive space of the new identities that began to form there. An illustrative case is that of art, "documenting God’s actions in Peru," which had as a consequence a "geographical locus of divine power." Dean believes that the most well-known saintly visitations occurred in 1536 during the long siege of Cuzco organized by the rebellious Inca ruler Manco." According to legend, both Saint James and the Virgin Mary appeared at critical points in the battle for Cuzco, the ancient Inca capital. As a result of his efforts during the siege, Santiago Matamoros (Saint James, Moor-slayer) was turned into Santiago Mataindios (Saint James, Indian-slayer). Mary was acclaimed for having appeared atop the Inca tower (the sunturwasi) where Spaniards had taken refuge. She extinguished the fire set to the thatched roof by the rebels and flung dust (or hail) into the eyes of the enemy troops, causing them to flee. Interestingly, this is most clearly expressed in Guaman Poma de Alaya’s illustrations of the siege which underscores that it was a supernatural force that saved the Spaniards; although his interpretation of the apparitions of both Mary and James show only the conquering divinity and the rebel Inca, the Spaniards are absent from his commemoration of the event. In the accompanying text he emphasizes how the natives were defeated by divine intervention (rather than superior Spanish military technology).

Dean concludes that the native artist contradicts the Eurocentrism of the Spanish accounts of the 1536 apparitions, which emphasize the heroism of the conquistadors. The drawings represent a more complicated account of the colonial process that go far beyond the story of a military event. In the first place, this process is not a one-off confrontation, but a drawn-out negotiation. Even the very protocol of the drawing, whose Spanish format is adapted by the native artist, now forms part of the new American language. This is a language of appropriation and reorganization, which is as a consequence of colonial experience and unfolds within the very system that it contra-
dicts. Second, the absence of Spaniards from this encounter between Indians and religious figures suggests another point of view, that of the mestizo, who thus takes responsibility for the saints and the Indians, as if he were reappropriating superior religious forces in order to reenact and exorcize them on his own account. The oppressor/oppressed mechanism is absorbed in a symbolic resolution where the binary undergoes productive transformation. Space is created for a new subjectivity of cultural hybridity and historical subalternity. In both drawings, the Indians who stand on the ground form the new, local aspect of the miracle. “Miracle” means “to see more”: the one who confirms the exception is the interbred native, the new subject who is produced from both worlds. This subject stands on the shore of potential: with the Spanish language and the allegorical language of the tools he has appropriated, he works so that his own culture, regional and Andean, is assured a place in the midst of the new order.

Transitions

The process of colonization was carried out at the cost of native systems of representation, which were dismantled in the conversion of the native population to Christianity. By ridding the country of idols and occupying the spaces of the native imagination and religions with new images, in a dramatic transformation and translation of forms and contents, the Catholic pantheon slowly but surely replaced the native equivalents. In many cases, despite the very fragmentation of beliefs, the natives succeeded in modifying the new images so that they formed a parallel system with their own: various figures of this double system flowed from one to the other, with an encoded doubling of their protective vocation. Today we know that this mechanism of evangelization and conversion, with its erasure and rewriting was not necessarily a “spiritual conquest” but taking place on the homogenized religious landscape of Meso- and South American religious cultures, where gods of different origins and powers were superimposed on each other.

In the end, native religious sentiment was regional. Each region learned to cohabit with the imperial religions on its own terms. The monotheistic tendencies of colonial Christianity meant that the great dramas within Catholicism occupied a shared space, and messianic movements and clandestine cults responded to colonial violence. The role of painting and art in this conflictive process demonstrates both the dominant religion’s capacity for destruction and the adaptive capacity of native religious practice. In his book *La colonisation de l’imaginaire, Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVI-XVIII siècle* [Transcribed as *The Conquest of Mexico: The Incorporation of Indian Societies into the Western World, 16th to 18th Centuries*], Serge Gruzinski takes part in a detailed discussion of the techniques adapted in these paintings and writings. He claims that native artists incorporated the technologies that the conquerors brought from Spain. They also turned a novel gaze on their own world; hence, changes in Nahuatl representations, for example, of different imagery can no longer be characterized as indigenous (Gruzinski, 1988, p. 37). At the same time, natives who were taught in the college of Santa Cruz, thus counting as amongst the first American letrados (lawyers), maintained the old traditions and knowledge alongside their Western education. The letrado Indians and mestizos of the College of Tlatelolco,
who acted as translators and wrote their histories in both languages, defended their family privileges and their standing as aristocrats. Painting lineage thus became a means of proving the legitimacy of this intermediary local nobility, who adapted so as to maintain their former privileges. But from at least 1540 a “radically new culture” had begun to emerge, expressing a clash of codes and describing the fate “of the old forms and their preservation” (Gruzinski, 1988, p. 90).

There was a multiplicity of expressive media: glyphs rubbed shoulders with the alphabet and musical notation, the painted picture met the engraving, oral transmission oscillated between pre-Hispanic or Christianized forms, and plain chant and polyphony followed upon ancestral dances. Latin and Spanish were added to the Indian languages, dominated by Nahuatl which served everywhere as lingua franca (Gruzinski, 1988). Multiplicity, which also reached the calendar, the repertoire of time, economic practices, and native paintings, included graphic forms and iconographies that hardly deserve the generic name of painting. All of which explains why the native world had a “double gaze” on things (Gruzinski, 1988, p. 64). A gaze that revealed in the pleasure of form, the play of adaptation, the conjuncture of disparate codes, and the decorative line in which another language is quoted. This language is already a different form of expression, lacking canonical authority, perpetually open in its flexible adaptability. The wondrous quality of its fruits, the meeting of name and thing in abundance, are already re-appropriated by the new cultural subject, being produced in both registers. This subject decorates the space where he displays his incorporated forms and materials as if demonstrating in line, clay, and color that both worlds were his. The everyday pottery of Puno, in the Peruvian altiplano, found a favorite emblem in the bull. At once a chthonic figure, yet at the same time inexplicable, because of this it is richly decorated in spells. This new bull is a graceful animal, lithe and alert, modeled from the traditional pottery figure of the llama. Produced by native artisans the bull is much more Andean than Spanish, even retaining the circular depression on the figure’s back, which the tiny Inca figurines of the llama had used for offerings, as Dawn Ades points out in her introduction to *Art in Latin America* (1989, p. 5).

Guaman Poma: A Book of Memory

In 1908, while examining the collection of manuscripts in the Royal Library of Copenhagen, Richard Pietschmann, the director of the Gottingen Library, discovered an unknown chronicle, the *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (New Chronicle and Good Government), written by the Peruvian Indian Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. The 1200-page work with 400 full-page drawings was published in a facsimile edition by the Institute of Ethnology in Paris in 1936. A critical edition was published only in 1981, edited by Rolena Adorno, Jorge Urioste, and John Murra. This is a multiple text: its Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara where titles, phrases, and paragraphs are phonetic transcriptions, a multiple inner translation. It is also inscription and drawing, a true iconography of speech. The book was composed between 1584 and 1615 as a letter to the king denouncing the Spanish conquest of Peru and proposing the reorganization of colonial society. On the last page, Guaman declares that he is standing at the door of the Viceroy’s palace in Lima to deliver his work: a letter written on hundreds of pages.
Having traveled the central Andes for 30 years, he tells us of the things “seen by his own eyes.” At the conclusion of the long letter sent in February 1615, the chronicler reminded the king about his work with the urgency of his message: “The aforementioned Indians complained to the said author as their lord; he calmed their lamentation and affliction and consoled and appeased them, saying, ‘My son, entrust yourself to God and the Virgin Mary; soon we will have help’” (ff. 1105-06). Injustice, however, loses its meaning in the face of the promise of hope: “Remedy will come soon,” the author repeats like a litany. Existence itself becomes absurd: “They persecute the poor of Jesus Christ; sometimes it is cause for laughter, at other times it is heart-rending and cause for pity. This I have seen with my own eyes” (ff. 1105-06). Beyond the testimony of violence itself, the text is full of its transformative and instrumental possibilities.

Gustavo Gutiérrez in his book on Las Casas alerts about convergences between the principles enunciated by Las Casas in his text Doce dudas and Guamán’s ideas. He also observes that for Guamán, God became a human being, but a human being who was poor. In his reordering of Andean knowledge and need to preserve memory as a cultural model, Guamán constructs a work that addresses all readers in a volume equivalent to an encyclopedia of the New World. He is aware of the boldness of his undertaking, and he is promptly obliged to defend his grand design by explaining his condition as the author of the manuscript: “the uncultivated state of my understanding and blind eyes and little seeing and little knowing, and not being learned nor a doctor nor a graduate nor a Latin scholar” (f. 8). With this rhetorical strategy, he first puts forward a definition of the Andean writer/scribe. If he is neither learned nor a (doctor, neither a lawyer nor a Humanist, who is he? Who is this bearer of encyclopedic knowledge, who claims he knows nothing, this prodigious writer, who claims he cannot write? He is “the author,” the father and son of that text in which he recreates himself. His appropriation of the Code par excellence, the Spanish language, is a kind of willful pillage; his linguistic competence is limited, but his performance is unrestricted. He is, then, the other author, the new author, the author as difference. The archive of the hegemonic culture has no room for this writer who exceeds the Code. Characteristically, it is not the interpretation of truth found in the hegemonic archive that the author revises, but rather its classifications, regulations, and procedures for distributing information. He writes his own Andean multi-ethnic and pluri-lingual codification within the new archive. This organic process is the cultural spectacle of the text, where information overwhelms chronology, fractures its verisimilitude, and creates the tools to articulate a nascent discourse. One of these powerful new tools is the captioned and emblematic figure, which Guamán appropriates by producing a drawing that borrows from the Humanist and Christian repertories, but is used to account for the immediacy of change and denunciation. At the same time, it also maintains the memory of the lost order as a model for the order to come. Guamán manipulates these old forms with a certain irony: in the emblem of the vices and virtues he replaces the image of the soul being tempted with the figure of the Indian being tormented.

A more daring move will be to make his own life emblematic, that is, to propose his role as “the author” as another tool of inquiry and mediation. Guamán Poma de Ayala drew his self-portrait five times. The first drawing, on the title page of the manuscript, is already emblematic of the characters implicated in the textual drama: the Pope, the King, and the Author. The three heraldic coats of arms of this configuration
of religious, political, and scriptural authority are also present. This is not coincidental: the New Chronicle is a letter and, as such, its denunciation presupposes a program, which Guaman Poma expects to be implemented by the king. But the author also takes his work to be a book, a manuscript, whose visual communication is immediate. It is also a type of palimpsest of collective memory and a printed book that brings together multiple audiences in a total reading. Another drawing, which clearly refers to the practice of enunciation, is entitled "The Author Inquires." The text evolves from the wanderings of the eyewitness who communicates what he sees as he comes and goes, writing and drawing. But traveling and writing do not merely represent the will of the witness to record. They are also the fiction of the text inscribed in the truth of history.

Figure 1: Camina el Autor

Source: Guaman Poma de Ayala, Nueva Corónica... fig.1093
This writing subverts the statutes of the general code, the Spanish language, and superimposes its own liberating energy: the desire for a material speech marking the trace of the text in Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara at the same time. The text is in the end a map of reading in which the audience is also anticipated, and which we must actualize. The book, having anticipated all its possible readers, takes its place, as the chronicler repeats, in the world as archive. “The Author Travels” (see Fig.1) shows Guaman Poma, his son, his horse, and his dogs, traveling through Peru and traversing, in fact, the text.

Figure 2: Pregunta Su Majetad, Responde el Autor

Source: Guaman Poma de Ayala, Nueva Corónica..., fig.96

He crosses the textual corpus in the discourse of his own story. His use of a biographical perspective accounts for the “I” as a collective and “we” that speaks and is spoken. Hence, the powerful final drama of this work: a utopian construction whose subject or operator can only be potential. The construction of the work implies the construction of the Author. Another drawing, “His Majesty Asks, the Author Replies” (see Fig.2), presents the author in direct dialogue with the King of Spain. The protocol of communication becomes fictitious: the letter, the very body of the enunciating word
Julio Ortega has arrived at the foot of the Monarch. Guaman Poma anticipates the king’s questions and responds to them in depth. Ucronia (history could have been otherwise with the proper actors in the drama) and Utopia (the chronicler argues for political reform, restitution, and good government) are the final task of the text: questions and answers that design the fictional tools for remaking history. There is still another portrait, in which Guaman Poma de Ayala places himself among the members of his family. His father had been “second person” to the Inca in the kingdom of Lucanas. His own name is evocative: Guaman (Falcon) and Poma (Lion). A half-brother of his, a priest, taught him the Spanish language. In the end, 80 years old and impoverished, he arrives at the Plaza de Armas, in Lima, to deliver his huge letter. He is convinced that, from there, the world-upside-down (topsy-turvy) which denies abundance, justice, and order, must come to an end. The author returns from the world to his home, announces one of the series along the Manuscript dedicated to self-portraits, gray-haired, frail, naked, and barefoot. His travels have come to an end: the rest is history.

The Other Abundance

In “The First Chapter of the Months and the Years” in his New Chronicle and Good Government, Guaman Poma de Ayala announces his intention to discuss the months of the year in the Indies, which are different to those of Castile, where there are six months of summer and six of winter. Castile therefore suffers from hunger for half the year whilst in the realm of the Indies God has provided gold, silver, fruit, bread, wine, and meat the whole year round. With labor and sow, there will be no shortage, he repeats along the Manuscript. This abundance imposes a logic of distribution and justice. Following Las Casas, Guaman explains once and again that food is served to God and His Majesty, and the Indians thanks God for it. The natural order is supported by the divine order—justice is the correspondence between the two. Thus, Guaman draws the emblems of the months of the year in terms of the different kinds of fruit that the land produces because of the Indians’ hard labor. The difference thus lies in the cosmic and ritual function of work, the labor that men and women dedicate to the process of sowing, cultivation, protection of fruit and the harvest, and their storage as a communal resource. This production of Abundance, however, takes place against the backdrop of scarcity and the injustice and disorder produced by colonialism. Guaman’s account is together a lesson about native culture, an example from the book of native memory, and an almanac of advice about regional produce. But it is also a submission on the subject of multiple “difference”: of climate, produce, cultures, and realms. The illustrations serve as the emblematic space where a system of survival is inscribed within the very account of Abundance. Guaman appropriates the design of the emblem to turn it into a language relevant to contemporary reality: it deprives it of its traditional symbolism and allegorical meanings, but continues to use the exemplary character of the picture or body of the emblem. He uses the motto to differentiate the drawing, abstracting its didactic function from Catholic hagiography, by writing the mottos in Quechua.

This is well illustrated in the wealth of detail in the drawing dedicated to the month of May, which is a veritable recoding of the Humanist emblem of Abundance. The motto runs: “Travaxo: zara callchai arcvi pacha mayo aymoray quilia” (Time of reap-
ing, of piling up the corn May the month of the harvest) according to Jorge L. Urioste’s translation in the critical edition produced by John V. Murra and Rolena Adorno (1980, pp. 1040-1041). The woman at the center of the drawing, who is carrying a stalk with leaves of corn, is the Andean equivalent of the Roman matron who represents abundance in Ripa’s Iconology, with a stalk of wheat in her hand. The drawing derives from the familiar emblem, but as its perspective is that of labor, the native woman is not the symbol of Abundance but the agent of its production. There is a double account here: the Andean woman occupies the center of the design, but she is only part of the action implied in the drawing. This activity includes the Indian on the left of the drawing, who has one knee on the ground, and who is harvesting the corn (he is called “reaper/callchac”). We have a young couple who have gone out to harvest. Whilst he is pulling the corn cobs from the stalks, leaving behind the leaves on the ground, she is making a branch out of them and taking them to the right of the picture, where we can see the storehouses for the corn, covered with cones made from the residue of the plant. Labor in the harvest is directly connected to the produce being stored, to its preservation by and for the community. The model demonstrates its goodness.

The Indian woman who represents abundance here carries these American plants not as symbol (emblem) but as sign (instrumental). They are functional objects, which labor will preserve as foodstuffs. The figure of the woman is in movement: although she occupies the center of the picture, she moves towards the corn storehouses (the preserved goods) with the useful burden she carries. She carries the sheaf of stalls on her back and holds it with both hands. She is gazing forward with determination, and walks on. In the eponymous month of Abundance even the boys and girls who are born are rich. They are lucky to come into the world in such a time. Both nature and the community generate this Abundance, whose “force” also includes the genealogy of the emblem, now turned into the instrument through which memory will be preserved and the future reconstructed. Guamán Poma has written a true Indian Bible. Not by chance he has been called “the Andean Don Quixote.”

References


