



Titu Cusi Yupanqui. *An Inca Account of the Conquest of Peru.* Translated by Ralph Bauer. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005. 184 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87081-821-9.



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The Last Inca Rulers

Titu Cusi Yupanqui was one of the last Inca rulers who held out against the Spanish invaders of Peru. From Vilcabamba, he ruled the remains of the Incas until his death in 1571. Before he died he dictated the story of his people in the face of the Spanish conquistadors to a Spanish Augustinian friar, Marcos Garc a. This then is Titu Cusi's story.

The manuscript, completed in 1570, survived and is today in the library of the monastery, the Escorial, built by Philip II. As the translator, annotator, and editor Ralph Bauer states: "it is one of the most fascinating documents preserved from sixteenth century Peru, telling the story of continuing Native cultural resistance, change, mixture and survival in the Americas after the European invasion" (p. 12). Bauer does a good job of explaining how such figures as Titu Cusi were caught on the cusp of two cultures, one still retaining a semblance of dominance and authority, although being rapidly displaced by the invading European one. So it was not unusual for this last Inca to convert to Christianity and maintain diplomatic relations with the Spaniards in Cuzco, the old

capital of the Incas, even while maintaining his quasi-independence at his stronghold of Vilcabamba.

The text itself is the subject of intense scrutiny by the translator, who himself is a student of languages. And, not surprisingly given modern trends, he found the text fascinating in itself, an object of study and a source of information through its structure and creation, as much as by what it reported. "The composition of this text was profoundly informed by Spanish and native Andean structures of knowledge, fusing various and often incommensurate rhetorical practices and conceptions of history" and "this text is an apt expression of the hybrid culture that was taking shape in sixteenth-century colonial Peru" (p. 21).

Writing itself was a source of power, and one that Titu Cusi adopted not only to finally make his story known, but also to have it serve as a defense and apology for his understanding of what had happened in his lifetime. It is perhaps ironic that the very Christianity to which he converted attributed life and power to the

word, spoken or written. And it is certainly not surprising that this Inca ruler framed his argument within a deep legal tradition in Spain—a form of scholasticism deeply imbued with Thomism—that was employed to frame and make arguments. The Augustinian friar probably helped Titu Cusi in constructing the argument, in much the same fashion that the Protector of American Indians (a title bestowed in 1516), Bartolomé de las Casas (1485–1566), struck at the legality—not to speak of Christian imperative—in the Spanish conquest of the Indies. In this historical context of open criticism, Bauer notes correctly, “the apparently radical critique of Spanish abuses in Titu Cusi/Marcos Garcés’s historical narrative becomes intelligible as a politically shrewd and rhetorically persuasive exercise” (p. 25).

In an especially good section, beginning on page 26, Bauer puts Titu Cusi’s account into the general framework of other Incas and Spaniards—Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, and others—who were creating the first histories of this period. The “hybrid” character of the texts, sometimes true to the objective facts, but more often imbued with an adversarial form of argument, are explained clearly and follow modern scholarship.

The notes on orthography, on the various versions and translations of the manuscript, and other insights will be of value to scholars and students of the time and place where all this happened. The translation itself is well done. The tone of the Inca, sometimes smooth and condescending to the Spaniards, at other times laying them out for their unbridled greed, certainly catches the mood of a society, a culture, in transition, attempting to reconcile the old with the incontrovertible facts of the new. While the speeches and advice given and taken by Titu Cusi and his once powerful relatives are sometimes stilted and wooden, the pathos of a civilization being devastated clearly comes through. A sorrow suffuses Titu Cusi, and for anyone wishing to sense that time and place, this is a must read.

It is tempting to wax on at length here on such fascinating topics as migrations, invasions, host cultures, accommodation, adaptation, coercion, and other elements that percolated through sixteenth-century Peru, not to speak of the old standards of greed, power, authority, cruelty, avarice, and duplicity, to name but a few. Having just emerged from a decades long study of Las Casas—whose insistence on Indian liberty and restitution framed his famous defense of American Indians—the story of Titu Cusi rings with familiarity as he moved between the poles of Spanish power expressed by the cruelest and greediest of Spaniards, and those whose intentions were more purely Christian and noble. Some have claimed that all Spanish approaches were tainted by imperial overtones, some just more outrageously practiced than other more subtle approaches, and that point of view has merit. Titu Cusi had to navigate between these poles and he did so for much of his life with perception and some success, even in the face of fighting what was in effect a losing rear guard campaign.

What makes this work interesting and useful is how Titu Cusi and other Incas perceived of the Spaniards and how they negotiated the minefield sown by Spanish ambition and power. Not everyone stepped on the mines. There was life on the other side, and how Titu Cusi described his passage informs us of early colonial life in Peru, a new culture in the making, as complicated and diverse as any in the history of the world.

The presentation of this study is very well done by the University Press of Colorado. There have been many Spanish transcriptions and publications of Titu Cusi’s memoirs over the years, but this is the first complete one in English, although the author notes another one is on the way. The glossary of Quechua (*qhichwa*, for those curious about the evolution of modern orthography, see pp. 46–47) is useful. A map or two to orient the reader not totally familiar with the Peruvian/Inca setting of this story would have been helpful.

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