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Edited by Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel

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'A dazzling cornucopia'
Professor Neil F. Safier, Brown University

NEW WORLD OBJECTS of KNOWLEDGE

A Cabinet of Curiosities

Edited by Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel



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Cover image: *El Quadro de Historia Natural, Civil y Geográfica del Reyno del Perú, año de 1799.*

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INTRODUCTION

Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel

Unlike the items in Neil MacGregor's bestselling *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, our small cabinet's curious objects cannot be found in a single museum.¹ The reasons for this are several. First, from the late 15th century down to our own day, the New World, and in particular that part of it now called Latin America, has been plundered and pilfered for its 'treasures' and 'wonders' not by one conqueror, empire, explorer, collector or museum but by many. Consequently, many of its natural and cultural productions are scattered around the world, and in too many cases the provenance of the object has been lost. Second, the global nature of knowledge production has, since the 16th century, meant that everywhere objects have been removed not once but several times to new sites of study, storage and display. As a result, many key objects of modern wonder and knowledge have had several owners and keepers, indeed several 'afterlives'. Their histories and identities have often been lost, or remade, in the shuffle.

Our small cabinet of curiosities of New World objects is thus not a select inventory of any museum collection. It is instead the collective product of the Latin America and the Global History of Knowledge (LAGLOBAL) international research network. It responds to the LAGLOBAL charge to make

accessible to the non-specialist reader knowledge otherwise difficult to access. With generous support from the Leverhulme Trust and, at turns, the network's several institutional partners (Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London; Centre for Amerindian, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Saint Andrews; Department of the History of Science, CSIC, Madrid; Department of the History of Sciences and Health, Fiocruz, Rio de Janeiro; Department of Anthropology, History and Humanities, FLACSO Ecuador, Quito; Centre for Historical Studies, El Colegio de Mexico; Institute for Historical Studies, University of Texas at Austin; the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University), our purpose at LAGLOBAL is to advance and disseminate research on Latin America's frequently neglected and often invisible contributions to the global history of knowledge.

This portable cabinet squeezed between two covers is not an encyclopaedia. It consists of about 40 finely illustrated, eye-opening entries of 1,000–4,000 words that, each in its own way, attempt to capture the dynamic, often global itineraries of key New World objects of knowledge. Our object-images range from pre-Columbian codices to colonial portrait paintings, from enlightenment treatises to medicine cabinets, volcanoes and fossil bones. Any New World cabinet could house hundreds of objects or images, but our aim here is not to be comprehensive nor systematic. Like most historical

¹ N. MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

cabinets, ours reflects the interests and contingencies of its collectors and keepers. In this sense, it is clearly the contingent product of the recent itinerary of the LAGLOBAL project. That itinerary has included a series of international workshops held in the museums, libraries and research centres of London, Madrid, Seville, Cadiz, Rio de Janeiro and Quito.

Our purpose here is not to prescribe how to read these objects but instead to gently encourage historical curiosity in readers with an eye for images and objects. In this regard, our little cabinet is not so unlike those early modern *gabinetes* (Spanish), *studioli* (Italian) or *Wunderkammern* (German). Indeed, we have thus modestly opted to mimic the traditional classificatory structure of early modern cabinets, dividing our objects into the questionable but historically significant categories of *artificialia* and *naturalia*. We do this with clear recognition that the ‘natural’ things in our cabinet are ‘artificial’ representations with specific histories.

Our further aim here is to incite critical curiosity about the New World as a key protagonist in the history of modern knowledge. A prime example of this curious but at the same time critical mix of the artificial and the natural, condensed in an object of New World knowledge, is the stunning *Quadro del Perú*.² This Hispano-Italo-Peruvian ‘wall museum’ or ‘painted museum’ is a veritable cabinet in itself. Like a museum, it embraces in a single work several genres or discourses of representation and transmission, including scientific and historical text, landscape, miniature portraiture and cartography, all in a framed exhibition that presents hundreds of niches or galleries of Peruvian naturalia and artificialia. It will serve us well in this introduction as a potent illustration of our purpose and method.

There have been and are many ways to interact with this object. It’s perhaps easy to imagine all the people and animals depicted in the *Quadro del Perú* leaping out of their colourful frames and into our post-Google world of virtual galleries and video messages, in a sort of animated trompe l’œil. But can we imagine the reverse? If, like Alice in Wonderland,

we could swallow a shrinking pill, step through the looking-glass and find ourselves in the underworld of the *Quadro*, what might we see and learn?

Despite the lacunae of the historical record, scholars have pieced together key elements and moments in the secret career of the *Quadro del Perú*. From its intercultural gestation in late 18th-century Peru to its purgatory in Madrid’s colonial and museal offices and its more recent mass exposure on the Google Arts and Culture web platform, the *Quadro* has been a silent witness to a chiaroscuro history of enlightenment and ignorance. On the one hand, the *Quadro* is a brilliant tableau of the natural and cultural ‘treasures’ of Peru, a jewel in the crown of the Spanish Enlightenment, as its gilded frame unmistakably announces. On the other hand, this enlightened tableau of Peruviana is a spectre, a ghost, a haunting sign of loss and ignorance. First, properly understood, it represents the knowledge production not of the Spanish Enlightenment, as it is often read in Spain, but of the global and colonial Peruvian Enlightenment. Second, for most of its history it has gone largely unseen, in part due to bureaucratic contingencies and in part because the *Quadro* fits uneasily into dominant modes of aesthetic, scientific and museal classification. As an unseen, unsung and uncomfortable artefact of colonial enlightenment, the *Quadro* is a potent emblem for the LAGLOBAL project and an appropriate starting point for this New World cabinet of curiosities. As it turns out, the LAGLOBAL project and the *Quadro* share common goals. European ignorance of Peru was one of the primary motives behind the production and framing of the *Quadro*. Similarly, LAGLOBAL is devoted to recovering the lost knowledge of the Iberian New World or Latin America for the global history of knowledge, where it is too often ignored.

The primary intellectual author of the *Quadro* perished in the port of Cadiz in 1800 before he could embark for his adopted home in Peru. Most likely a victim of smallpox, he had only just completed and delivered the *Quadro* to the Secretariat of the Indies in Madrid. Born in Vizcaya, José Ignacio de Lequanda (1748–1800) had spent most of his productive life in Lima. There he played an important part in the collective academic project of the Sociedad Académica de Amantes de Lima (Academic Society of Patriots of Lima), whose most famous print

² J.I. Lequanda, *Quadro de Historia Natural, Civil y Geográfica del Reyno del Perú, año de 1799* (Madrid, 1799).



Figure 1. El Quadro de Historia Natural, Civil y Geográfica del Reyno del Perú, año de 1799 (courtesy of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Madrid). A high-quality image of the Quadro is available for viewing on the Google Arts and Culture platform: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/quadro-de-historia-natural-civil-y-geogr%C3%A1fica-del-reyno-del-per%C3%BA-jos%C3%A9-ignacio-de-lequandal/igE86USP5Q1cYg?hl=es>.

legacy was the brilliant scientific, historical and literary journal the *Mercurio Peruano* (1791–4). As historian Victor Peralta has argued, the *Quadro* is an illustrated encapsulation of the spirit and letter of the Lima academic society’s learned project and journal. The society included savants born not only in Peru but also in other parts of the vast Hispanic realm, including Italy and the Iberian Peninsula. From the very first issue, the *Mercurio Peruano* explicitly sought not only to enlighten Peruvian readers with scientific reports and historical essays about ‘the country’ but also to combat European ignorance about Peru’s place ‘in the universe’ of science and letters, where it fared rather badly. Most European savants considered Peru to be a ‘semi-barbarous’ land of downtrodden peoples ruled by ignorant despots and inquisitors, and thus void of enlightenment.

The many illustrations that together compose the dazzling *Quadro*, drawn by Louis Thiébaud in Madrid from an archive of drawings and prints, paint Peru’s place in the universe as one of unparalleled abundance, and useful knowledge of

that abundance. The *Quadro* drew upon Peruvian concepts, sources and earlier illustrations, including the so-called *Trujillo Codex* (1782–5), assembled by native and *mestizo* informants, collectors and artists working under the direction of the bishop of Trujillo, Martínez Compañón, who in turn was responding to an official call to assemble objects of knowledge about Peru and submit them to Madrid and its Royal Natural History Cabinet, directed and founded by the Peruvian Creole Pedro Franco Dávila (see ‘Creole Cabinet’ in this volume). Other images found in the *Quadro* were derived from the Malaspina Expedition, one among the many notable global scientific projects associated with the Hispanic Enlightenment. In turn, that expedition had derived many if not most of its findings from Peruvian sources. In effect, the *Quadro* mixes its iconographic motifs from several genres, including *casta* painting (portraits of mixed-race couples) and the *mapas orlados* or *cartes à figures*, those ornate early modern maps in the Flemish tradition in which representative human figures of the territory populate the borders of the map.

What kind of artefact is the *Quadro*? The answer is not simple. Is it art? Is it science? Is it a painting? A book? A map? A gallery? A portable cabinet? A wall museum? Where does it belong? The *Quadro* is all these things, but it does not quite fit fully or comfortably into any one of them. The material of the *Quadro* is oil on canvas, which suggests it is a painting. It is distinguished, however, by its dimensions (331 × 118 cm) and composition: 195 scenes with 381 figures accompanied by an extensive explanatory text interspersed among the scenes, maps and landscapes. In addition, the framed canvas is crowned and gilded with twin cornucopias graced by a sheaf of arrows, symbolising the bounty of the New World or America under Hispanic monarchy. The two central geographical images (an east-up map of central Peru and below it a profile view of the rich new mines at Hualgayoc) form an axis that represents the new economic fulcrum point of 18th-century Peru, which had shifted from the southern mining region around Potosí to the central region adjacent to Lima. Notably, the central region encompassed coastal Lima and the new highland mines as well as the relatively undeveloped but highly promising Amazonian region to the east, thus uniting three major ecological and productive zones within a relatively short distance. In the *Quadro*, this vertical economic geography is represented by the unfolding of a concentric sequence of cells and niches populated by fishes and amphibians, small and large quadrupeds, and simians and humans – the latter divided in two classes, ‘civilised’ (or coastal and highland) and ‘savage’ (or Amazonian), with each composed of 16 ‘nations’ or ethnic groups. Birds occupy the perimeter of the *Quadro*, seemingly lifting the entire canvas on their wings. The four corners are notably reserved for reptiles and insects, beings that, to be sure, had always occupied disquieting positions in the Great Chain of Being. Nevertheless, the *Quadro* is clearly not merely another iteration of the *scala naturae*, a Neoplatonist scheme that in the 18th century was twisted to serve racialist and supremacist thought in Europe. That twisting scheme had been energetically rejected in Peru by José Hipólito Unanue, an influential member of the Academic Society of Patriots of Lima. In its stead, Unanue offered an alternative vision of Peru as a land of unparalleled natural and cultural diversity that, in most ways, was more universal than Europe (see the ‘Andes’ entry in this volume).

The *Quadro* is a mimetic device that reveals in synoptic visual fashion what today would be called biodiversity and cultural diversity but which in Peru at the time was simply called the idea of Peru. This ‘idea’ was a well-developed notion evident in historiography, natural science and iconography. The idea was that Peru was culturally and naturally sovereign. Favoured by providence, geography and history, Peru lacked nothing. With its astounding vertical climatic diversity, Unanue and other *Mercurio Peruano* authors argued, Peru was the teeming home of more fauna and flora than anywhere else on the planet. This diversity could be put to productive use, transforming Peru into a prosperous cornucopia for the world. This desire to convey the exuberant nature of Peru is expressed in the irrepressible dispersion of text within the *Quadro* itself, which snakes through the Eden of Peruvian biodiversity depicted in the painted frames. Lequanda is the author of this snaking encyclopaedia, whose title is the name given to the *Quadro* as a whole: *Quadro de historia natural, civil y geográfica del Reyno del Perú, año de 1799*. His profuse text draws upon previous writings by the author, including learned essays published in the *Mercurio Peruano* and statistical reports on Peruvian political economy, prepared for Peru’s viceroy and later submitted to the Secretariat of the Indies in Madrid along with the *Quadro* itself.

The teeming, cornucopian *Quadro* was in fact an emphatic argument, a polemical point of view in ongoing debates about the ‘genius’ and nature of the New World and about the status of the Hispanic American kingdoms ‘in the universe’. At the time, many European savants held that in the New World, and particularly in the American tropics, nature was relatively young, humid and weak; the effects of this nature on people and civilisation were enfeebling or degenerative. Such ‘enlightened’ views had been preceded by the ancient Aristotelian and Ptolemaic traditions, in which the mythical ‘torrid zone’ or tropics was taken to be barren of life if not uninhabitable. In addition, by the late 18th century many European philosophes had argued that Peru was not a kingdom at all but a mere ‘colony’, unfit for self-rule, in part because, in their view, the effects of Peru’s enfeebling clime were augmented by the cruel exploitation of ignorant and despotic Spain. The enlightened Peruvian authors of the *Mercurio Peruano* energetically rejected such ignorant views,

arguing that Peru's history and natural resources demonstrated that she was in fact a sovereign, self-sufficient 'country' that had produced her own 'genius'. In this way, the *Quadro* was a powerful visual argument against condescending Northern European views of the tropical and subtropical New World. It directly countered European myths about the supposed ignorance and backwardness both of the Hispanic Empire at large and of Peru in particular.

At first glance, the *Quadro* appears to fall midway between an inventory and a collection or gallery of images – that is, somewhere between an Andean *quipu* (a mnemonic and narrative device of colour-coded, knotted cords; see 'Modern Quipu' in this volume) and Instagram. Like the former, it serves as an instrument for registering events and data; like the latter, it is a frame for displaying and sharing images. Lequanda was in fact an enlightened executive accountant or treasurer, not so unlike those Inca administrators, called *quipucamayoc*, who recorded in systematic fashion and in knotted, colourful strands the fruits and rents of Tawantinsuyu, the Quechua name for the Inca realm. The cadastral element of the *Quadro* aligns it not only with the quipu but indeed with the rich semantic field of the old Spanish noun that names it. According to the Real Academia Española, *cuadro*, which in the 18th century was typically written *quadro*, carries more than a dozen accepted meanings. Among these, the following six glosses are particularly relevant here:

Pictorial composition on canvas, wood, paper, etc., normally framed; frame; in gardens, that part regularly cultivated in squares and adorned with flowers and herbs; description, written or oral, of a spectacle or event, so alive and animated that the reader or listener may represent in his imagination the thing being described; set of names, statistics or other data presented graphically, such that the relations among them are made evident; spectacle of nature, or group of persons or things, that offers itself to viewing and is capable of moving or terrifying the subject.³

³ Editors' translation from the Spanish. Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 'Quadro' (Madrid: RAE), <https://dle.rae.es/cuadro?m=form>.

Most of these senses of the word were anticipated in the frugal 1737 edition of the Royal Academy's dictionary, known as the *Diccionario de autoridades*, where *quadro* is given eight meanings.⁴

In short, *Quadro* is an ingenious, polysemic name that captures the multidimensional nature of our artefact. Indeed, *Quadro* would not be a bad title for this book if it were not for the fact that the term has fallen out of use. It thus comes close, for English readers, to the better-known French notion of *tableau*. For the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the *tableau* is a key device for ordering and classifying the world, a way of visualising it and making it apprehensible. We are reminded of the great works of Turgot or Condorcet, where *tableau* alludes to compendium or synopsis; of Alexander von Humboldt's *Tableau physique des Andes et pays voisins*, or indeed of his famous vertical profile or *Naturgemälde* of Chimborazo (see 'Andes' in this volume) in the *Geographie des plantes*.

Why was the *Quadro* presented in Madrid? And how did it end up hanging, as it does today, on an office wall in Madrid's National Museum of Natural Sciences (MNCN), out of public view? In a sense, the *Quadro* was for Lequanda personally, and the Peruvian Enlightenment collectively (although as we shall see this was problematic), a stunning calling card, a treasure of art and nature presented to the Secretaría de Hacienda de Indias in Madrid as visual proof of Peru's natural resources and political economy. Lequanda had left Lima for Madrid with a purpose. That purpose was to gain official appointment as the *contador del Reino del Perú* (accountant of the Kingdom of Peru), a lucrative and prestigious position that he fully deserved but was denied in Peru by the sitting viceroy, who had favoured his rival. This effort to gain appointment from the top required the deft use of connections and knowledge. Lequanda thus participated in several notable publication projects in Madrid that, in effect, disseminated or excerpted, often without proper citation, the writings and insights of the Academic Society of Patriots of Lima. The *Quadro* would be the more visible trace of his efforts, though eventually it too would become nearly invisible. For, like many

⁴ Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de autoridades* (Madrid: RAE, 1737).

well-guarded and/or misapprehended treasures, access to the work has always been problematic. In its afterlife, the *Quadro* would become – and indeed it remains so today – a haunting spectre of the Hispanic-American enlightenment. It is precisely for this reason that the *Quadro* fits so well as the frontispiece and starting point of this book or ‘cabinet’, and as an emblem for the LAGLOBAL project as a whole.

We know that the *Quadro* was the property of the Secretaría de Hacienda de Indias from 1799 to 1836, when the secretariat was absorbed by the Ministerio de Hacienda (Ministry of the Treasury). The *Quadro* did not physically move premises until 1880, however, since the ministry occupied the same building as the old secretariat. The ministry was located adjacent to the Goyeneche Palace on the Calle Alcalá. That palace housed, under one roof, the Royal Cabinet of Natural History and the Fine Arts Academy of San Fernando. The *Quadro* was thus a silent witness to eight decades of the affairs of imperial officialdom, but at least it had admiring, if not jealous, neighbours. If the figures in the *Quadro* could step out of their niches and speak to us today, we might learn many state secrets otherwise lost to history. So many flies on the wall.

In 1880 the naturalist and historian Jiménez de la Espada petitioned the ministry to transfer the *Quadro* to the Museum of Natural History, successor to the Royal Cabinet of Natural History, located next door. ‘Here,’ the petition read wishfully, the *Quadro* ‘may be displayed to the public under favourable conditions, such that it may be utilised for the benefit of science.’ The ministry acceded to the request and, without crossing the street, the *Quadro* passed to the museum. But that was not the end of it. The expansive ministry had its eye on the museum’s space, and soon annexed it. It was now necessary to dislodge the *Quadro* once again. This time, its fate was worse. After 1895 it became, together with much of the Natural History Museum’s collection, a homeless wanderer, making its way from the Calle Alcalá to the storehouses of what is today the National Library, while many of the *Quadro*’s ethnological companion specimens ended up in Doctor Velasco’s private museum (an anatomy theatre devoted to physical anthropology), which later became the National Museum of Anthropology. In 1910 the *Quadro* found a new home at the National Museum of Natural Sciences, which took

up quarters in the Palace of Arts and Industry on the north side of Madrid, where both reside today. The *Quadro* would, once again, remain for the most part unseen by the public. But along the way it would garner the attention of one or two notable scholars and naturalists, including Francisco de las Barras de Aragón and Ignacio Bolívar. In the banner exhibition year of 1929 (the same year in which the Ibero-American Exposition opened in Seville and Barcelona), the *Quadro* made its appearance in a retrospective exhibit on natural history staged at the Royal Botanical Garden next to the Prado Museum. In 2005, the *Quadro* was finally declared by the state to be a *Bien de Interés Cultural* (Object of Cultural Interest), which permitted its restoration by the Spanish Institute of Cultural Patrimony. Since then it has been the object of several notable research projects led by the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). Nevertheless, the *Quadro* is not normally on exhibit to the public (although it has been shown at several temporary exhibits in Madrid), according to the MNCN for preservation reasons. It hangs today on a poorly lit office wall behind the desk of the museum director’s secretary. This is where the LAGLOBAL research team examined the *Quadro* during a workshop held in the museum in April 2017 (Figure 2).

Why is the magnificent *Quadro* still out of public view? The full answer to our query goes beyond questions of bureaucratic rivalry, lack of funding or preservation concerns. As we have suggested, the *Quadro* is true to its polysemic name; it is a mimetic and moving tableau of image, text and map that together invite the viewer to imagine and know, if not take possession of, a world named Peru. It fits uneasily into the categories of art or science as these concepts are understood today. The *Quadro* has not made its way into the Prado Museum, where both colonial American art and science have been effectively banned from the canons of the nation and art history. Ironically, the *Quadro* would have fit perfectly in the original Prado that never was. The Prado was never intended to be an art museum. It was designed by Juan de Villanueva for the enlightened monarch Charles III to house the Royal Cabinet of Natural History and a Spanish Academy of Science, thus complementing the Royal Botanical Garden next door. Today, the *Quadro* hangs uncomfortably and out of view in the National Museum of Natural



Figure 2. LAGLOBAL research team examines El Quadro del Perú in the offices of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Madrid (photo by Mark Thurner, April 2017).

Sciences not only for preservation reasons but because it is not true ‘science’ by contemporary Spanish standards. Its digital afterlife on Google Arts and Culture is more heavenly than its extended museum purgatory. Removed from its materiality, history and institutional frames, the *Quadro* may now be examined and dissected piecemeal on any screen as ‘art’ and ‘culture’. But the *Quadro* is somewhat out of place here as well since it is clearly not a ‘masterpiece’ by the standards of art history.

As the frontispiece of this cabinet-book, the *Quadro* serves as a telling, polysemic trace of the history of knowledge and aesthetics. Each object or set of

objects presented and discussed in this volume by participating scholars of the LAGLOBAL project similarly serves as a telling trace of a history of knowledge and ignorance vis-à-vis the Iberian New World. It is by no means an exhaustive collection. All cabinets are subjective and dynamic affairs that reflect moments in the lives and interests not only of the collectors but of the wider networks within which they operate. By the same token, we welcome all visitors to this cabinet to encounter these curious objects on their own terms. Like Alice in Wonderland, we trust, readers will exercise their own experience and imagination in the face of what they find here.

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MODERN QUIPU

Sabine Hyland and William P. Hyland



Figure 1. Yacapar quipu (photo by W.P. Hyland).

Deep in the heart of an Andean village, hidden in a wooden box in a secret chamber under the altar of the colonial church, lie two *quipus*, the knotted and coloured cords used as ‘writing’ and regarded as sacred by the villagers who guard them today. These mysterious cords are not the precolonial creations of the Incas that may be encountered in museums. Instead, they were created in the 1780s as revolutionary epistles sent from one community to another, calling for a revolt in the name of ‘the Inca emperor’, the recently executed José Gabriel Condorcanqui, known as Túpac Amaru II. In these two colourful and sensuous texts, we see the ancient and modern Andean art of quipu-making united with the worldwide revolutionary fervour of the late 18th century, making them in effect a pair of historical documents that testify to the regional and

global dimensions of knowledge in a small Peruvian village. This piece will focus on one of these two epistles – the Yacapar quipu, created during the festival of Corpus Christi in 1782 and signed with the lineage (*ayllu*) name of its creator, Ciriaco Flores of the neighbouring hamlet of San Mateo de Otao.

Quipus have long occupied a central place in the European imagination concerning ‘ancient’ South American forms of knowledge. In the 16th century, for example, the Jesuit scholar José de Acosta argued that the Andean knotted texts were a defective form of writing, inferior to Mexican hieroglyphs and Chinese characters, not to mention alphabetic scripts. In Françoise de Graffigny’s wildly successful novel *Lettres d’une péruvienne* (*Letters from a Peruvian Woman*), published in 1747, *quipu* missives were the means by which the heroine, Zilia, communicated with her beloved fiancé Aza.¹ Later in the 18th century, the inventor Raimondo di Sangro, prince of Sansevero, asserted that quipus represented the original mark of Cain in the Bible and thus were the oldest form of writing, corresponding to the common human language spoken before the fall of the Tower of Babel.² Yet while writers such as Sansevero and Graffigny popularised romantic views of quipus in Europe, the knotted cords continued to be used in

¹ F. de Graffigny, *Lettres d’une péruvienne* (1747).

² R. di Sangro, *Lettera apologetica* (1751).



Figure 2. Sacred archive with goat-hide folders with manuscripts (photo by S. Hyland).

the Andean highlands, in some places until the 20th century. Throughout the Spanish colonial period and beyond, quipus could be integrated into a chain of record-keeping that included written ledgers and account books. In the case of the Yacapari quipu, the corded text provided a means for rebels to communicate secretly.

The community leader, Mercedes Moreyra Orozco, along with other authorities in San Juan de Collata, the village where the quipus have been treasured for over two centuries, invited us to study the two objects. In 2015, funded by a grant from the National Geographic Society, we made the hair-raising journey through the mountains to arrive at Collata, located at an elevation of 3,416 metres in Huarochirí Province, Peru. We were permitted to examine the quipus over the course of two days, under the watchful eyes of two experienced herders, Huber Brañes Mateo and Javier Núñez Torres. The secret box containing the quipus also holds 37 specially prepared goat-hide

folders with over a hundred manuscripts, the earliest dating from 1645. Most of the colonial documents are correspondence between the community authorities and the viceregal government; there are also reports of local administrators, inventories of church property and protracted lawsuits against neighbouring communities over land rights. Many Andean communities maintain village archives of 19th- and 20th-century documents, but the manuscripts in Collata's sacred archive are unusually old and plentiful. Indeed, Collata is one of the few remaining villages in the Andes where colonial manuscripts and quipus are known to be preserved together.

Quipus are twisted cord devices that were used for communication and recording information in the Andes during the Inca Empire (c. AD 1400–1532), throughout the early modern or Spanish colonial period and even into the 20th century. During the Inca period, quipus were employed for

recording numerical data, such as tribute amounts and demographic information; however, Spanish chroniclers wrote that these cords also encoded narratives, such as royal biographies, and were sent as letters from one leader to another. While we can read the numbers on about two-thirds of the quipus known to exist and have gained some understanding of accounting quipus, Andean narrative quipus remain a mystery. Notably, the Collata examples are, as far as we know, the first ever identified as narrative letters by the descendants of their creators.

Both Collata quipus have a traditional Inca format: a top cord from which hang multicoloured pendants. In the Yacapar quipu, the top cord is about two feet long and has 288 pendants in shimmering shades of yellow, red, blue, green, white, black, grey, purple, pink, orange, golden brown, light brown and dark brown, with combinations of up to four colours together in a single pendant. Huber and Javier identified the animal fibres used to make the pendants (in order of decreasing frequency): vicuña, alpaca, guanaco, llama, deer and an Andean rodent known as a vizcacha. Huber insisted that the difference in animal fibre was meaningful, and he referred to the quipus as 'a language of animals'. In many cases, the only way to distinguish the type of fibre was by touch, and the herders insisted that we remove our gloves to handle the quipus with our bare hands. The pendants are differentiated not only by colour and fibre type but also by the direction of their final twist – 58 per cent are twisted to the right (S ply), while 42 per cent are twisted to the left (Z ply). Ply direction is known to be meaningful in quipus and this ratio is nearly



Figure 3. Collata quipu pendants (photo by S. Hyland).

identical to that of Inca-period animal-fibre quipus: 59 per cent to 41 per cent.

In Collata, when a man first accepts a major communal responsibility, such as sponsoring the festival in honour of the Virgin of the Assumption, he is shown the contents of the hidden archive. Senior men inform the younger ones that native leaders made the quipus as epistles (*cartas*) about their wars on behalf of the Inca emperor in the 18th century. They say that the quipus were created around the time of a legendary local chief, Pedro Cajayauri, whose signed letter to colonial authorities, dated 1757, is kept with the other manuscripts.

Led by Felipe Velasco Túpac Inca Yupanqui, a cousin of José Gabriel Condorcanqui Túpac Amaru II, in 1783 the people of Collata joined an insurrection that had convulsed the Southern Andes. Túpac Amaru's capture and execution in May 1782 had seemed to signal the end of the unrest, but Felipe Túpac Inca nevertheless encouraged his followers by telling them that Túpac Amaru's execution or quartering in the plaza at Cusco had been a fiction. The Inca emperor, he claimed, had escaped and was living in the lowland kingdom of Paititi with over four thousand jungle warriors at his command.

Felipe Túpac Inca, the leader of the 1783 uprising, was born in Cusco around 1753, the son of Don Juan Velasco Túpac Inca Yupanqui and Doña Gregoria Túpac Amaru. His parents were both natives of Cusco and members of the indigenous elite of the former Inca capital. Through his father, Felipe claimed descent from the emperor Túpac Inca Yupanqui; through his mother he was related to Túpac Amaru II. At the age of seven, Felipe moved to Moquegua to live with relatives before relocating to Lima, where he eventually began a relationship with the widowed mestiza Manuela Marticorena.

In Lima, Felipe lived with Manuela, her children from her former marriage and their daughter Lorencita, next to Manuela's store on the Plaza de la Buena Muerte, located in the historic centre of Lima in what is today the neighbourhood of Barrios Altos. Manuela sold religious items, including statues, paintings and prints of Christ and the saints, along with wooden crucifixes. Felipe had a workshop in the store where he painted and decorated religious

objects, creating many of the pieces for sale in Manuela's shop. One of his specialities was cutting mirrors to use as decorations on shrines and holy images, earning him the nickname 'Mirror Maker' (*Espejero*).

For years prior to the 1783 rebellion, Felipe travelled throughout the northern Huarochirí region, in Collata and elsewhere, hawking his religious wares and repairing shrines and sacred artefacts. According to witnesses, he openly began to organise the rebellion in Huarochirí in the latter half of 1782. Felipe preached that the Indians of the land must free themselves of their oppression by the viceroys, *corregidores de indios*, and the secular priests, creating a new kingdom in which all men are 'brothers . . . those of [our] nation as well as Spaniards, Blacks, sambos and all castes without any inequality of persons' (*hermanos . . . así de su nación como españoles, negros, sambos y todas castas sin desigualdad de persona*).³ His declarations of the equality of men resonate with similar declarations of other revolutionaries across the Americas and Europe at this time. Felipe proclaimed himself the royal representative of his cousin, Túpac Amaru II, demanding that he be treated with the same respect and obedience owed to the Inca monarch in the jungle. Elegantly attired in a lilac blue silk frock coat, with mauve frills, black velvet breeches, silk hose, white boots, a tricornered hat and a steel sword strapped to his waist, Felipe must have cut an impressive figure.

The actual revolt began on 30 May 1783, when Felipe read out his proclamation of independence, commanded his followers to destroy all the bridges on the roads to Lima and captured and tried several Spanish loyalists. However, one of his captains betrayed him, imprisoning Felipe and sending word of the uprising to the local *corregidor*. The men of Collata, along with those of neighbouring Chaclla

and Jicamarca fought to free their Inca leader, but to no avail. Felipe and other rebel leaders were brought back to Lima, where they were interrogated and tried. Felipe and his captain-general, Ciriaco Flores, were executed, while other leaders were flogged and exiled to Africa.

From the over one thousand pages of testimony from the Spanish interrogations of the prisoners, we can ascertain when the Yacapar quipu was probably created, by whom and what it said. Spanish authorities questioned the prisoners relentlessly about the messages sent in the revolt, allowing us a glimpse into the quipu letters as well as the alphabetic ones. During the festival of Corpus Christi in 1782, Felipe and Ciriaco holed up in Ciriaco's farm outside of San Mateo de Otao, an annex of the village of Casta, which is adjacent to Collata. Ciriaco was a prosperous farmer and member of the Yacapar clan who had first met Felipe when the latter was repairing a saint's canopy in the Otao church. The two men had discussed revolution for years, but during this week in late June they planned their uprising, with Ciriaco swearing an oath of loyalty as captain-general of Felipe's army. Ciriaco was alphabetically illiterate, unable to read or write in Spanish, yet he created physical letters for the leaders of neighbouring towns, calling on them to revolt. It is apparent that the Yacapar quipu, signed with the name of Ciriaco's clan or ayllu affiliation, is one of the quipu letters that Ciriaco created at this time.

It is instructive to see in Collata how the quipu form may have been used to mobilise villagers and convey ideals of equality and justice common to the Age of Revolution in Europe and the Americas. Likewise, and although extremely rare, it is heartening to know how carefully the villagers in Collata have actively preserved these two precious emissaries from that age.

³ Archivo General de Indias, 1047, Uprising of Topa Inca Yupanqui in Huarochiri, 1783. Testimony of Thomas Palomino, June 11, 1783, frv. 285.

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