Art of Colonial Latin America Gauvin Alexander Bailey

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Introduction 4

1 **First Encounters** The Pre-Hispanic World and the Colonial Scene 17

2 **Eyeing the Other** The Indigenous Response 69

3 **The Image of Empire** Arts of the Viceroys 109

4 **Making Art** Guilds and Academies 167

5 **Idols and Altars** Missions and Country Churches 207

6 **A Divine Splendour** Metropolitan Churches 261

7 **Town and Country** Arts of the Colonial Aristocracy 311

8 **The Renaissance Abroad** Iberian Empires in Asia and Africa 355

Epilogue 375

& Glossary 412

Brief Biographies 418

Key Dates 425

Map 434

Further Reading 435

Index 438

Acknowledgements 446

Opposite
Lopo Homem-Reineis, map of Brazil from the *Atlas Miller* (detail of 17), 1519. Pigments on parchment; 42 × 59 cm, 16½ in × 23¼ in. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Few episodes in the history of the world evoke at once the awe, wonder and sadness of Europe's encounter with America. When the Spanish and Portuguese conquered what they called the 'New World', tens of millions of people occupying a land mass several times larger than Europe fell under alien kings and governments whose very existence they had known nothing about before. As these same powers had also made incursions into Asia and Africa, five of the world's continents were now linked together for the first time. For better or worse, ancient civilizations that had existed in isolation for centuries now participated in a new global culture of trade, conquest and religion. It was a time of cataclysmic change, especially for the indigenous peoples of the Americas, but also for their European conquerors. It was a time when ancient traditions and ways of life were altered or shattered, a time of treachery and exploitation, and a time of terrible plagues. But it was also a time of extraordinary cultural flowering, especially in the fine arts. The product of a unique collaboration between Europeans and non-Europeans of every walk of life, the art and architecture of the Iberian empires in America during the three-century colonial period is one of humanity's greatest and most pluralistic cultural achievements.

3
Olmec colossal head, c.1000 BC. Basalt; h.2·85 m, 9 ft 4 in. La Venta Park, Villahermosa, Mexico

In the year 1492, North and South America were home to advanced civilizations, with populous cities, stone architecture, elaborate forms of public ceremonial, written languages, and extraordinary literary and artistic traditions. Although they shared an origin in the steppes of northeast Asia, these Amerindian societies were vastly different from each other, spoke entirely different languages (hundreds of them, relating to ten different major groups) and in many cases knew nothing of each other's existence. America was a world unto itself, as varied as the Europe that 'discovered' it. Although Amerindians quickly spread over the entire hemisphere, from the Canadian Arctic to Tierra del Fuego at the southernmost tip of South America, the most complex

civilizations occupied only a small part of the two continents, a densely populated strip running from central Mexico, through Central America and into the northern and central Andes. The rest of both continents (places like Brazil, Argentina, the Amazon and the southwestern United States) were home to much less populous groups of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes. Although these latter groups, including the Moxos of lowland Bolivia and the Mapuches of Chile, did not build great cities or found empires, their mythology, religion and culture were as ancient and complex as those of their settled counterparts, and they had flourishing arts traditions of their own.

Despite their extraordinary diversity, Amerindian societies had certain cultural features in common. These commonalities included religions in which religious specialists – popularly known as 'shamans' – gained access to the spirit world through dreams or trances and under the

protection of animal patrons. Sometimes these visions were achieved by smoking tobacco, a plant indigenous to the Americas, as in this eighteenth-century pipe (4). Used by the Payaguá people of Paraguay, its decoration, featuring men who mutate into animals or mythic beasts, is typical of the Amerindian understanding of the cosmos. For Amerindian peoples the spirit world was a place of danger, but it was also the source of power and wealth, and the secrets learned there could be used to combat illness, poor harvests or inadequately stocked hunting grounds. The first peoples of the Americas also had a highly advanced understanding of the solar and lunar cycles. This celestial knowledge informed everything from their town planning, which in many cultures was based on the science of geomancy (divination by signs from the earth), to their advanced calendrical and mathematical sciences. Most Amerindian societies saw the universe as having three levels, including a celestial

upper world, the earth and the watery underworld of the dead. Religious specialists gained access to these worlds via the World Tree, a vertical *axis mundi* (link between the worlds) sometimes located at the centre of the world and sometimes at each of the four cardinal directions of the cosmos. In this depiction of the World Tree from a pre-Hispanic manuscript (c.1350) by the Mixtec Indians of southern Mexico, the tree serves as a conduit for human creation with its origins in a severed head or sacrificial 'seed' (5). The *axis mundi* was often combined with an opening in the earth, such as a cave or a subterranean spring, which served as a gateway to the underworld.

4
Payaguá shamanic pipe, 18th century. Wood. Museo de América, Madrid

5
Mixtec World Tree, from the *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I*, c.1350. Pigment on deerskin. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna

Unlike in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Amerindians believed that animals, plants and natural features such as water, mountains or rocks also possessed souls or spirits.

The first high cultures emerged in Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America) and the Andes in the second millennium BC, including the Olmecs of eastern coastal Mexico (c.1200–600 BC) and the Chavín of Highland Peru (c.900–200 BC). Both these civilizations focused on large, open-air ceremonial complexes, with a temple mound shaped like a mountain or a pyramid fronted by a ceremonial plaza, outdoor

altars and a cluster of outbuildings, all arranged according to the four cardinal directions. Representations of animal spirits such as jaguars or serpents attest to the animist nature of these societies' religions, as seen in a stone relief carving from the sunken circular court in front of the Old Temple at Chavín de Huantar (c.400–200 BC), which shows the final stage of the transformation of a human religious specialist into a jaguar (6). Mesoamerican civilizations were unique in developing a ritualistic ball game, played on an outdoor court with rubber balls, which related to the movement of the sun and often resulted in the sacrifice of one of the players. These civilizations based their economy on subsistence agriculture, particularly native American crops such as

6
Stylized jaguar plaque, c.400–200 BC. Stone; 2·27 × 3 m, 7 ft 6 in × 9 ft 10 in. Chavín de Huantar, Peru

7
Jaguar Temple, Tikal, Guatemala, 731 AD

maize, squash and potatoes, and they engaged in long-distance trade, which was carried out entirely by relays of human carriers, as they had no pack animals and used the wheel only for children's toys. The Olmecs introduced a sophisticated tradition of monumental stone sculpture, in particular strikingly naturalistic heads carved from basalt like this example from La Venta Park (c.1200–900 BC; see 3). Stone sculpture would thrive among the peoples of Mesoamerica up until the time of the Conquest. Although the Chavín also had an advanced sculptural tradition, their descendants in the Andes would excel more in the ceramic and textile arts.

The so-called 'Classic' civilizations – Teotihuacán, the Zapotecs, the Maya of Mesoamerica and their equivalents, the Nazca and Moche of the Andes – built on the foundations of these earlier cultures between about 100 BC and around 800 AD. Many scholars consider this period to be the apogee of Amerindian civilization, particularly in the arts and sciences. Focused on true cities, including not only open-air ceremonial centres but also residential quarters, these states were ruled by hereditary princes who held authority in both the secular and sacred worlds as they assumed many priestly functions. These rulers lived in spacious palaces arranged around

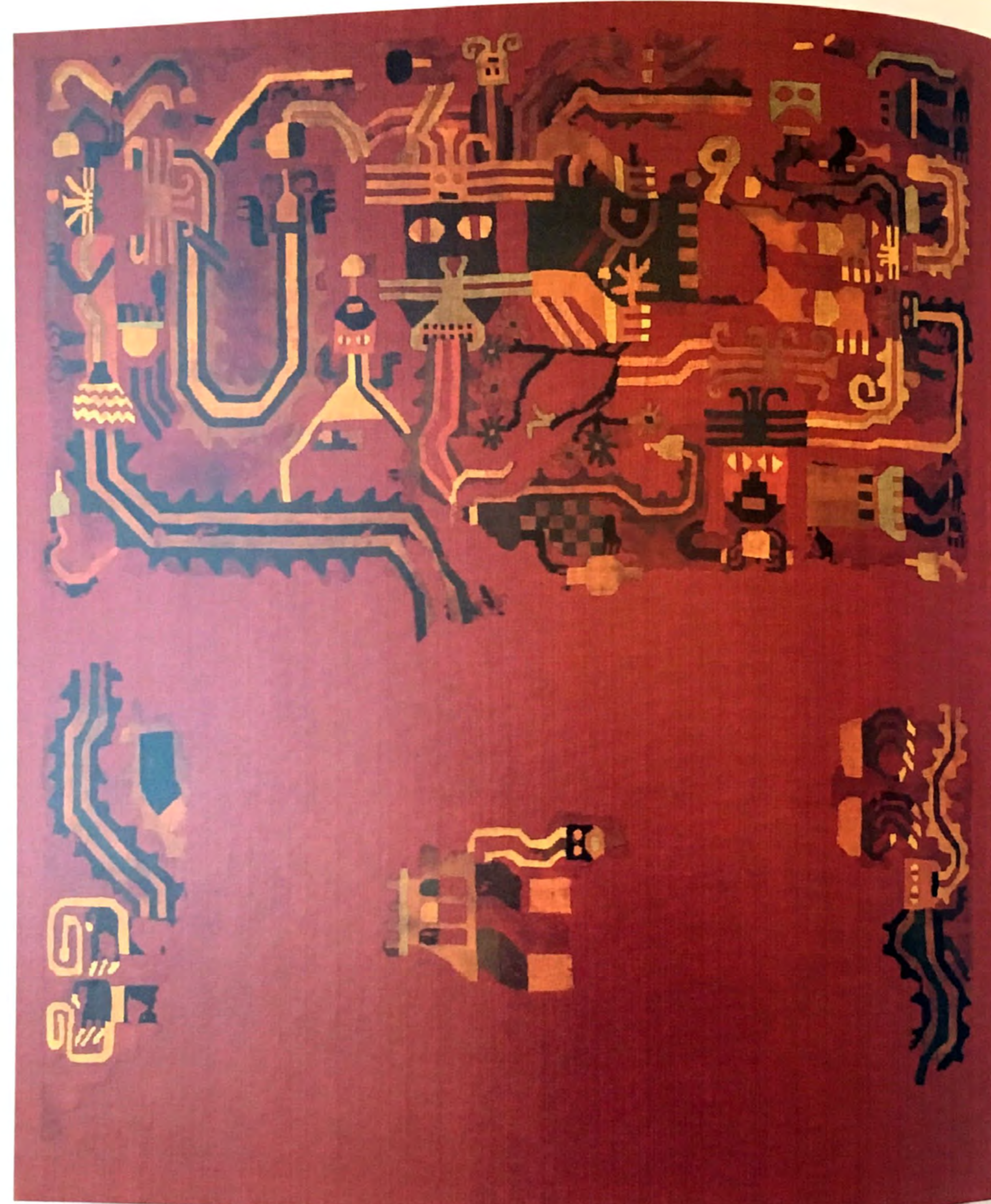
courtyards and were buried in elaborate tombs or pyramids, as at the spectacular Mayan Temple of the Giant Jaguar at Tikal in Guatemala (731 AD; 7), which was built over the tomb of King Hasaw Ka'an K'awil. Although urban planning was still based fundamentally on the four cardinal directions, the architecture of the cities became more complex and hierarchical, based on a grid of streets and plazas with multiple pyramids, ceremonial ball courts (in Mesoamerica) and astronomical observatories. The site of Teotihuacán, near Mexico City, is especially impressive.

It is dominated by giant stone pyramids such as the Pyramid of the Sun (the name is not original), which was over 200 m (700 ft) square and almost 60 m (200 ft) high and located over an ancient cave that served as a gateway to the underworld and a place of oracles. Palaces were arranged around open courtyards, their walls adorned with elaborately carved columns and friezes, and large-scale mural paintings. Their inhabitants may have ruled over a population as great as 200,000 people.

The Classic Maya (250–830 AD), in cities like Copán in Honduras and Tikal, developed an advanced and intricately carved figural sculpture, and narrative painted murals and ceramics. They were also the first and only Amerindian culture to establish a fully written language, based on syllabic glyphs that have only recently been deciphered, many of them surviving on painted ceramic vessels that preserve vivid descriptions of Mayan history, society and religion (8). The glyphs surrounding the seated ruler and figures of noblemen on this cylinder vase describe a palace ritual involving a sacrificial dance and they end with a discussion of the painting and polishing of a vessel and the signature of the artist Chuk-Hi Ti Chan. Maya artists were unique among pre-Hispanic peoples in signing their name. Their kings were believed to be supernatural beings and their highly stratified official religion, focusing on human sacrifice and ritual warfare, favoured elaborate public spectacle. The Classic Maya civilization dispersed sometime in the ninth century AD, as people abandoned the rainforest cities, probably for ecological reasons or because of warfare, and moved to the more arid Yucatán peninsula.

8
Chuk-Hi Ti Chan, Maya cylinder vase with glyphs, 700–800 AD. Ceramic; diam. 16.4 cm, 6 in. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, DC

Although the Nazca and Moche civilizations of the coastal Andes in South America also built grand ceremonial centres – the Moche built terraced pyramids of adobe bricks reminiscent of those in Mesoamerica – their greatest legacy was in textiles and ceramics. The Nazca created the most brightly painted pottery in the Americas, featuring complex compositions of animals, plants and geometric patterns, and in an unprecedented variety of shapes, from panpipes to effigy jars. Geometrical patterns and animal and humanoid



figures also dominated the production of Nazca textiles (a tradition inherited from their precursors, the Paracas people, c.600–175 BC), possibly the most sophisticated fibre-arts tradition in the history of the world. Tunics, mantles, shirts, wigs and other pieces such as this fragment of a hanging (9) from around 500 AD were made of wool and cotton fibres and woven on backstrap looms using a dizzying array of embroidery methods. Their most remarkable achievement was the extremely laborious discontinuous warp and weft technique (where neither the warp nor the weft pass uninterrupted across the loom but are made up of different colours linked together) – such a difficult method that the weaver has to erect a cumbersome

9
Paracas-Nazca transition textile, 200 AD. Wool, 69·9 × 113·6 cm, 27 × 44 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

10
Moche stirrup-spout vessel depicting a laughing man, 400–500 AD. Ceramic. Museo Nacional de Arqueologia, Antropologia e Historia del Perú, Lima

scaffolding of threads over the intersections of the colour warps to hold them in place while it is being made. The colours, including primary reds, yellows and blues as well as pinks and oranges, are strikingly vivid, even well over a thousand years later. Moche ceramics provide us with an even more remarkable body of work than their Nazca counterparts. Tens of thousands of highly burnished clay vessels survive, in a wide variety of shapes, some of them extremely virtuosic, and they are animated by an intense realism, a sense of movement and even of humour. One of the key features of these vessels is the ingenious stirrup-spout (which serves both as a handle and a pouring

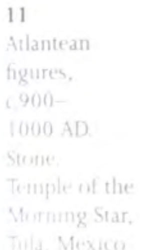
spout), allowing minimal evaporation in the hot, arid climate. Types include vessels featuring three-dimensional portraits of individuals, such as this laughing man, which allows great insight into the personality of the sitter (10). Others display scenes of everyday life from childbirth to fishing trips, and depictions of disease and deformities that are so accurate that medical historians use them today as evidence.

The civilizations encountered by the European conquerors date from a later era, when large empires ruled the day and the visual arts reflected a new emphasis on military symbolism. During the

so-called 'Post-Classic' era, civilizations such as the Toltecs of central Mexico (750–1150 AD) expanded beyond their ethnic boundaries to subjugate neighbouring peoples and found multinational states. However, these were not empires in the European sense. Although the ruling powers sent army garrisons and sometimes settlers into conquered territory, the emphasis was on rendering tribute, and these vassal regions could keep their own élites and even rulers. Amerindian empires also facilitated trade, as far-flung areas were now part of the economy of large, centralized powers. By the twelfth

century, the proto-Puebloan people of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, could participate in a trade network of macaws, turquoise and other luxury items extending as far as Central and even South America. The American empires also allowed for a freer exchange of artistic ideas, so that in the distant Yucatán carved temple guardians among the Toltec Maya (a late Mayan civilization conquered by the Toltecs c.900–1200 AD) bore a strong resemblance to these counterparts in Tula, the Toltec capital north of present-day Mexico City (11).

The Toltecs began as a warlike tribe of nomadic hunters, who swept into the basin of Mexico and adopted the civilization of the settled



11
Atlantean figures, c.900–1000 AD. Stone. Temple of the Morning Star, Tula, Mexico

12
Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlán, Mexico City, Mexico, 14th–16th century

peoples. This pattern repeated itself with the Aztecs (literally, 'the people from the land of the herons'), a people from the west who reached central Mexico sometime around 1375, consolidated their power there and quickly expanded into the largest empire in North America. A Nahua (Nahuatl-speaking) people like the Toltecs before them, the Aztecs eventually ruled from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic, from central Mexico to Central America, with their capital Tenochtitlán (Mexico City) built on land they reclaimed from a lake bed. Laid out on a grid plan according to the four cardinal directions, linked to the

land by causeways and served by an aqueduct, Tenochtitlán had a population of as many as 150,000–300,000 people. Tenochtitlán's monumental stone architecture included a main temple precinct (recently excavated) and the adjacent but separate palace of the Aztec rulers (12). The city had a bustling economic quarter called Tlatelolco which featured a vast outdoor market with produce from the four corners of the empire. The Aztec system of tribute from subject states focused on the need to obtain human sacrificial victims; these were sometimes acquired through ritual warfare known as 'flowery wars', fought by jaguar and eagle knights, the élite warrior cults of the Aztec regime. Although they borrowed the style of their arts and architecture from their predecessors in the region, the Aztecs were particularly masterful carvers and their stone figural sculpture, with its deep, bevelled carving and geometric symmetry, is one of the greatest artistic legacies of pre-Hispanic America. The monumentality and emphatic three-dimensional character of Aztec sculpture is captured in this green porphyry sculpture of the feathered serpent god-king Quetzalcóatl (c.1440–1521; 13), who is engulfed in a sensuous pattern of plumage. Other art forms flourished as well, especially picture-writing, which recorded proper names, places and dates using boldly outlined glyphs, but which could only be read with the help of a knowledgeable reciter because it did not record complete thoughts as with the Maya. Only fragments of Aztec writing survive, primarily in early post-Conquest manuscripts such as this History of the Chichimec Indian Nation from the *Codex Xolotl* (14), painted by the Nahua convert Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1578–1650), and the Founding of Cuauhtinchan (c.1578; see 33) from the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, which are characterized by bold black outlines, crouching figures in profile and a tendency to spread glyphs and other symbols evenly across the page without their overlapping. Aztec books, including religious works (such as almanacs), historical chronicles and practical manuals, were painted on screenfold scrolls (long scrolls that fold together like a concertina) of deerskin or fig bark. Another art form at which the Aztecs excelled was that of feather mosaics, a painstaking craft that produced hangings, clothing and other items

13
Quetzalcóatl, c.1440–1521. Green porphyry; h.44 cm, $17\frac{3}{8}$ in. Museo Nacional de Antropologia y Historia, Mexico City

14
Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, History of the Chichimec Indian Nation, from the *Codex Xolotl*, c.1542. Ink and pigments on cotton paper; 42 × 48·5 cm, 16½ × 19⅛ in. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

using the brilliant feathers of exotic birds kept in special aviaries or imported from distant lands.

In South America, the Inca state (c.1427–1532) became the largest empire in the Americas, extending from Ecuador to Chile and Argentina. With their capitals at Cuzco and later also Quito, the Inca rulers maintained contact with their far-flung empire through an extraordinary system of paved roads, and made their Quechua language the civilization's lingua franca. Although they also lacked a complete written language, the Incas kept records through rows of knotted and coloured strings called *quipus*, an alternative form of literacy that similarly employed professional readers. Through differentiations

15
Detail of masonry from ritual structure, Machu Picchu, Peru, 1450–1530

in knot type and position, as well as fibre colour, the Incas were able to encode a prodigious amount of information ranging from astronomy to history and poetry. Their greatest achievements were in diametrically different media. One was their stone architecture, built without mortar using giant, often multifaceted blocks that bulged outwards and were so tightly stacked that it is impossible to insert a razor blade between them. Such buildings, seen at Sacsayhuaman (before 1532) and Machu Picchu (1450–1530; 15) possess a solidity and sculptural grandeur that makes all decoration superfluous. Textiles known as *qompi* or *cumbi* (fine cloth), were another of the Incas' greatest achievements, particularly the tunics worn by

the nobility, such as this *uncu* (male tunic; 16) of interlocked tapestry from c.1476–1534, whose intricate, chessboard-like patterns spoke of rank and familial ties. The most élite textiles were those made by men and women who had been chosen for religious service and they learned their traditions in a secretive and rarified atmosphere. The Incas worshipped a creator god Viracocha and his progeny the Sun, Moon and other celestial beings. Their worship focused on phenomena like thunder and rainbows as well as natural forms such as rocks or hills

16

called *huacas*. Consequently, the figural arts were not as important to them as they were among the Aztecs, although some fine naturalistic portrait sculpture survives, as do numerous intricate silver and gold figurines of people and animals.

Although these Native American worlds were forever changed by the events that unfolded after 1492, and their people were decimated through disease and other hardships, Amerindian cultures continued to thrive under colonial rule. Despite having to make profound changes

and adaptations to fit into their new Euro-Christian context, Amerindians still spoke their own languages, practised their own religions and made works of art derived from their own traditions. Even today, Guaraní is an official language in Paraguay with a flourishing contemporary literature, the Puebloan peoples of New Mexico still perform ritual dances every year to bring rain and fertility from the heavens, and Mayan priests teach traditional forms of medicine to their disciples. Nevertheless, Amerindian cultures after the Conquest were not preserved like a hothouse flower, withheld from the events of history and kept in a primordial pre-Hispanic state. Dynamic and active reflections of a people, they transformed and evolved with the times, borrowing and exchanging ideas with their European overlords and taking part in contemporary culture.

The Europeans first came to America by mistake. The incentive that drove the Spanish and Portuguese to travel thousands of miles into the unknown vastness of the Atlantic Ocean was another continent altogether: Asia. Since the time of the Crusades, spices, ivory, precious metals and other luxury items from Asia and Africa were controlled by Muslim powers in the eastern Mediterranean, keeping prices high and making such products scarce in Europe, where they were monopolized by the great Italian trading cities of Venice and Genoa. Beginning with Portugal, the Iberian nations sought direct access to these riches by bypassing Muslim-controlled territory. The Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias made a series of exploratory trips to the coast of North and West Africa under Prince Henry the Navigator, and finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1487. Dias paved the way for Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India in 1498, the first time a European had reached Asia directly by sea without going through the Mediterranean. Soon afterwards, on his way to India, the Portuguese captain Pedro Alvares Cabral landed for the first time in Brazil (1500), which became a convenient stopping point between Lisbon and Asia.

Meanwhile, Portugal's Iberian neighbour was jealous of these successes. Even before the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon united (1479) to form modern Spain, Queen Isabella of Castile commissioned the Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus to find an Atlantic passage to Asia.

Between 1492 and 1504, Columbus, who had been turned away by the Portuguese king John (r.1481–95), would make five voyages to America in Spain's name, both in the Caribbean and to modern-day Panama. While it would take several years before it dawned on the Spanish that they had not yet found a western passage to Asia (Columbus thought he had landed in Japan and named the indigenous people 'Indians'), Portugal and Spain had now both entered the fray as direct competitors, and the pope was compelled to step in to divide their territory. Drawing boundaries was especially important as the exploratory phase was now over and both nations were beginning the long and slow process of colonization and evangelization.

In Pope Alexander VI's (r.1492–1503) Bulls of Donation of 1493, the year after Columbus's first voyage, the Catholic Church entrusted the Spanish Crown with the Christianization of America, leaving Africa and Asia to Portugal. The line of demarcation was more substantially sketched out for both sides in the Treaty of Tordesillas of June 1494, when the pope drew a boundary in the Atlantic from pole to pole 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. The Spanish were given responsibility for everything west of that point, and the Portuguese everything east of it. Both nations soon differed in their interpretation of that boundary, which was why Portugal slipped in Brazil on the grounds that it extended sufficiently to the east, as seen in this 1519 map (17) by Lopo Homem-Reineis (d.1565), and why the Spanish pushed the westward boundary across the Pacific to take the Philippines in 1565.

17 Overleaf Lopo Homem-Reineis, map of Brazil from the *Atlas Miller*, 1519. Pigments on parchment; 42 × 59 cm, 16½ × 23¼ in. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

By the first decade of the sixteenth century, when Michelangelo was still a young man, the colonization of the Americas had begun. Lisbon and Seville became the exclusive ports for ships going to the Indies from Europe for much of the colonial period, and these cities would have a profound impact on the culture of the colonies. By 1496 Spanish missionaries and colonists were already permanently settled in the Caribbean, especially the island of Hispaniola, divided today between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Portuguese worked just as quickly. Between 1505 and 1515, viceroys Almeida and Albuquerque established the Portuguese mercantile empire in Asia by founding settlements in places like Goa, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and

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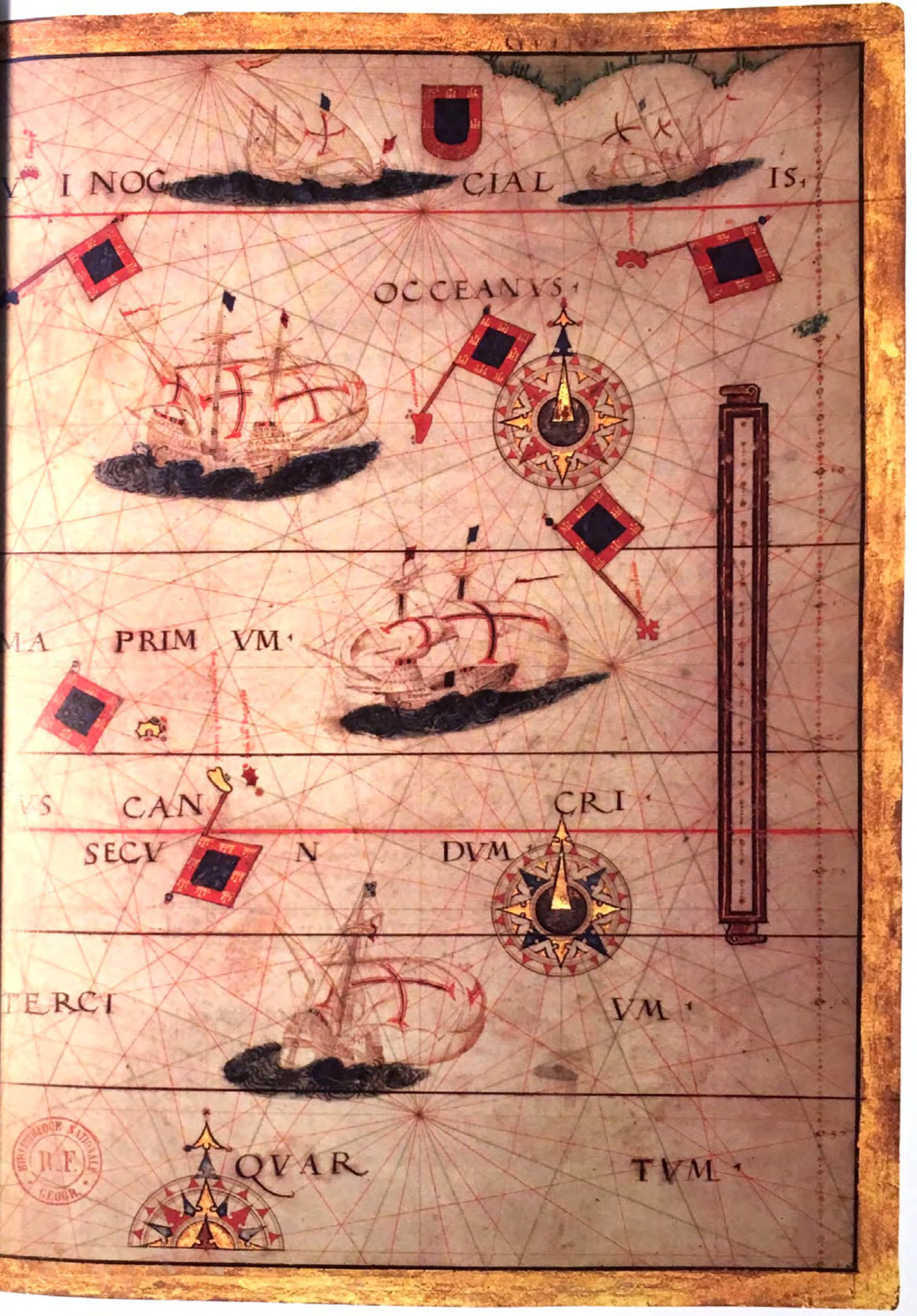
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Malacca in present-day Malaysia, and they began exploring the coast of Brazil and harvesting the native brazilwood. But the most dramatic moment was still to come.

Until now, most of the Amerindians encountered by Europeans were nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples who lacked a political organization beyond the local level and explorers dismissed them as 'naked savages'. This situation changed dramatically in 1519, when the Spanish officer Cortés sailed from Cuba to the Yucatán and found that he had landed at the easternmost extremity of a great empire of twenty million inhabitants that extended to the Pacific. The European discovery of the Aztec state and its subsequent invasion and conquest by 1521, depicted vividly in a seventeenth-century Mexican oil painting of *The Conquest of Tenochtitlán* (see 87), sent shock waves throughout Europe. Here was a great civilization, with stone cities, monumental religious buildings and a pictographic written language. It also had an emperor, Moctezuma II (or Montezuma; r.1502–20), whom the Spanish could easily equate with their own Charles V (r.1516–56). More importantly perhaps for a Europe in thrall to its classical past, they were an ancient civilization. Although the Aztecs themselves had only been in Mesoamerica since the fourteenth century, they were part of a cultural lineage that went back to before the time of Christ and were very conscious of this heritage. Cortés only succeeded in his conquest because he was able to secure alliances with tribute peoples, such as the Tlaxcalteca, who bore a grudge against their Aztec overlords.

Similar revelations soon followed that of Cortés. In 1524, the Spaniard Bartolomé Ruiz made a reconnaissance mission south from Panama and discovered an Inca trading ship laden with treasure. Acting quickly on this news, the adventurer Francisco Pizarro led a band of Spanish soldiers to Peru in 1531, where they encountered the even greater Inca Empire, whose society and culture equally astonished its conquerors. Thanks to their mountainous homeland in the upper Andes, the Incas managed to stave off the Spanish longer than their counterparts in Mesoamerica. Although the capital of Cuzco was occupied and the Inca emperor Atawallpa executed as early as 1533, striking a powerful ideological blow to the people, a combination of hostile geography

and squabbles between the conquistadors meant that the conquest of Inca territory was not secure until 1581. Even afterwards the cultural conquest was never as thorough as elsewhere in Latin America.

The European conquerors and missionaries arrived in America during the height of the Renaissance. This cultural movement, which began in Italy and was refracted through Spain and Portugal, shaped their world-view and gave form to their first art and architecture in the New World. In Europe the Renaissance meant a new interest in empirical knowledge and also a return to antiquity and the intellectual and literary movement known as humanism. This fascination with antiquity also signalled a desire to evoke the purity and glory of a classical Golden Age. A similar utopianism, coupled with religious fervour, fuelled the Spanish and Portuguese advances into the New World, a region that many saw as a survivor from purer times, ripe for civilization and indoctrination. In a way that is difficult to understand today, the conquerors and missionaries were able to reconcile this idealistic vision with much more profane desires for adventure,

18
Andrea Mantegna, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*, 1457–8.
Oil on panel; 68 × 30 cm, 26¾ × 11¾ in.
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

commercial gain, gold and conquest. Likewise, Renaissance artists strove towards a classical idealism in the visual arts, which they founded in pictorial realism. They were especially concerned with anatomical accuracy in depicting human figures and painters were preoccupied with recreating the third dimension through spatial illusions and shading. Many of these traits are seen in the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (1457–8; 18) by the Italian artist Andrea Mantegna

19
Leon Battista Alberti,
Sant'Andrea,
Mantua, Italy,
designed 1470

(1430/1–1506), including a subtle modelling of the main figure, the use of a panoramic landscape to suggest distance, and a nod towards antiquity with the Roman relief fragments and Sebastian's pose. Architects also sought a return to ancient models, and the architecture of the period was composed of elements taken from Greek and Roman temples: components such as columns and pediments, which were

as easily reconstructed in the Americas as they had been in the far-flung reaches of the ancient world. Here, in the church of Sant' Andrea in Mantua by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72), a Roman-style triumphal arch serves as a façade, alluding to the spiritual conquest of Christianity (19). This same motif became a powerful metaphor for Christian victory in the New World.

The Spanish and Portuguese conquerors transplanted these new forms and principles to the Americas. Thus, the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán was rebuilt in 1521 as Mexico City on an ideal grid plan with buildings based on Italian and Spanish Renaissance building manuals, signifying what the conquerors felt to be their right to rule: an administration based on European concepts of moral virtue and rational thought (see Chapter 3). Likewise, the earliest mission churches in the Lake Titicaca region of Peru were even more strictly classical in style than those of Spain or Portugal, demonstrating that Renaissance ideals could be a more potent mark of legitimacy overseas than in the homeland (see Chapter 5). Even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when newer, more exuberant styles such as the Baroque and Rococo blossomed in church architecture, Renaissance classicism persisted in the palaces and fortresses of the imperial government, proclaiming an authority redolent of ancient Rome. In many ways the Americas were a showcase for the aspirations and hopes of European peoples who felt their own society to be decrepit and corrupt. In rectifying their own past, however, they showed scant concern for the aspirations and hopes of the people who already lived there.

Before the age of exploration and conquest in the late fifteenth century, Europeans divided the world into Christians and 'infidels', Good and Evil. This binary conception persisted for almost two centuries after the time of Columbus. The 'infidels' were primarily the Moors (Muslims). The Crusades in the Middle Ages (eleventh–thirteenth centuries) had been Europe's response to the rise of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa, and the later conquest and Christianization of America and parts of Asia were a direct extension of the Crusader mentality – after all, it was to circumvent the Muslims that the Iberian powers first encountered the Americas. Spain and Portugal were

themselves ruled entirely or partly by Muslim leaders from 711 AD until 1492. In Spain the Crusader spirit manifested itself in the *reconquista*, the reconquest by Christian forces of those regions under Islamic control, ending with the fall of Granada. The conquest of the Americas began on the heels of the *reconquista*, in Spain's case quite literally, since Granada fell in 1492, the same year Columbus made his first voyage. Small wonder that when a ragged band of Spanish adventurers first set eyes on an Inca temple in the sixteenth century they called it a 'mosque', and when missionaries in Mexico built their first churches for the Nahua Indians they sometimes used the design of the Great Mosque of Córdoba (begun 784 AD; 20), with its forest of columns, partly in the naive belief that it would be more familiar to the new converts.

Europeans had an unrealistic view of America because it was something completely new. When Europeans came into contact with Amerindians, a people totally isolated from the Eurasian world recorded by the classical geographers, it took them a very long time to realize the enormity of the encounter. Europeans stubbornly held on to the belief that the social norms of all people were universal. This need to find cultural unity led many to make connections with their own past, so that the Aztec and Inca empires were ceaselessly related to ancient Rome and Egypt and the peoples of the Americas were held to be one of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel. It also meant customs that differed from European ones – especially religion – were seen as errors by a culture in need of correction. Yet, despite this blinkered view of the world, the problem of how to deal with this new 'Other' became a major ethical question that occupied the Spanish (less so than the Portuguese) government and intellectual community for most of the sixteenth century.

20
Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, begun 784 AD

The Spanish were the first to examine the legalities of how to approach and govern Amerindians, leading to a famous debate over the nature of the inhabitants of the New World that had repercussions for future encounters with non-Europeans around the globe. The Spanish government was especially concerned with the ethical questions of conquest. How could they justify enslaving Amerindians and declaring

war on non-Christians with the purpose of converting them? Spain's legal fastidiousness had little impact on how the conquerors and colonists actually treated the indigenous people, as many of them were merely interested in exploiting the human and natural resources of the new territories. These atrocities sparked calls for justice from missionaries working in the New World, such as the Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos in Hispaniola, who declared famously in 1510: 'are these Indians not men?'

The Spanish monarchy was concerned enough to host a public debate on the matter of slavery in the Castilian capital of Valladolid in 1550–1 between the Dominican missionary Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a leading Aristotelian humanist from Córdoba. The protagonists represented the two camps into which most European intellectuals had grouped by the middle of the sixteenth century. The first were against forced Amerindian labour and defended cultures such as those of the Aztecs or Incas as being equivalent to the civilizations of the ancient Greeks or Romans. The other had a crusader attitude towards non-European peoples; they believed that slavery and subjugation was not only justified but also liberating, and they used the Greek philosopher Aristotle to back them up. Aristotle believed that there were certain people who were naturally born to serve and those whom it was just to conquer, a doctrine that was later strengthened in the minds of Christians by the writings of the thirteenth-century medieval scholastic St Thomas Aquinas.

Las Casas, who unlike Sepúlveda had actually been to America as a missionary in Hispaniola and Guatemala, won the debate, but his radical ideas that Amerindian rulers should be restored and that Spain should rule as an 'Emperor over many Kings' never caught on. Most people in Europe felt that Amerindians should be treated with greater leniency, but as subjects of the Spanish crown and as Christians. This was the official response that had already been taken in the so-called New Laws of the Indies promulgated in 1542, which abolished Amerindian slavery. Most also believed that non-Europeans were equivalent to children, people who had fallen into error and required guidance. One tragic result of these debates, based on a ludicrous legal

distinction, was that Spanish colonists started using African slaves instead of Amerindian ones because they had been captured by the Portuguese and were therefore not Spain's legal responsibility. The first Africans to come to America arrived in 1510–11; over 200,000 were brought to Mexico alone in the seventeenth century and millions more were brought to Peru, Brazil and the Caribbean throughout the colonial period. The conditions suffered by Africans in the Americas – particularly in Brazil, where slavery was only abolished in 1888 – were arguably worse than the fate of the Amerindians. Nevertheless, these men and women showed an astonishing resilience and would play a crucial role in colonial Latin American culture over the next three centuries.

Las Casas's ideas did leave a more positive legacy in the Iberian policy towards America and Asia in centuries to come. One was a new European respect for 'high' cultures such as the Aztecs and Incas who had cities and some form of written communication. Las Casas also changed how Europeans studied non-European peoples. One of his most important contributions to literature was his *History of the Indies* (written in 1588 but only published in 1875), the first empirical description of Amerindian societies, which was soon followed by a similar work on the Indians of Peru by the Jesuit missionary José de Acosta called *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590). Both men grounded their research in the belief that Europeans had to understand Amerindian societies on their own terms by living among them, learning their languages and exposing themselves to their cultural traditions, a radical belief at the time.

The Iberian conquests were a strange mixture of avarice and religious zeal. Performing missionary work was central to Spanish and Portuguese expansion. Once the conquistadors had done their work, the missionaries moved in to convert the newly 'discovered' indigenous people. The earliest missionaries came from the so-called mendicant (begging) orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Mercedarians. They were accompanied later on (in Brazil in 1549, elsewhere beginning in the late 1560s) by the Jesuits. The Jesuits were a new order (founded in 1540) of priests and lay brothers, but

not friars, primarily conceived to function in small groups over wide expanses of territory and they soon became the leading Catholic missionary order in the world. They were especially known for adapting to indigenous ways, a methodology that they borrowed from the Franciscans, and it helped them gain access to remote areas that other orders were unable to penetrate. Missionaries were especially affected by their era's spirit of utopianism. They saw their mission as equivalent to that of Christ's Apostles among the ancients (they often arrived in groups of twelve) and saw the indigenous peoples of the Americas as lost children, pure in heart but in need of

spiritual guidance. The first twelve franciscans to arrive in New Spain in 1524 were depicted in a wall-painting by indigenous artists at the Franciscan mission in Huejotzingo, Mexico (21), lined up like the Apostles at the Last Supper. The paternalistic attitude of the friars sometimes led to abuses. Some friars baptized thousands of 'converts' without teaching them the basic tenets of Christianity, especially in New Spain between 1524 and 1536 – on one day, the Franciscans baptized 15,000 Nahua in the town of Xochimilco, so many that the friars reportedly felt that their arms would fall off. Other friars, such as the Franciscan Martín de Valencia, who was born in 1466, beat their

charges into submission. Many missionaries treated the Amerindians as if they were mentally deficient. Europeans had such poor knowledge of indigenous languages that they assumed that the Amerindians were incapable of the abstract terms necessary for higher thought.

Not all missionaries were cut from the same cloth and missionary idealism also had a positive side. Some churchmen fought avidly for indigenous rights even when it placed them in political danger. Friars fought also to keep native communities separate from colonial centres, allowing Amerindians to preserve their unity and ancient traditions. As Chapter 4 will explore, some missionaries were inspired to adopt features of indigenous culture and led a push for education among Amerindians, not only training in crafts and practical trades but higher degrees that allowed some to rise to the top of the social ladder, publish books and travel in Europe.

21
Portraits of the first twelve Franciscan friars in Mexico, c.1570. Mural. Franciscan mission of San Miguel, Huejotzingo, Mexico

In terms of territory and authority, the Spanish and Portuguese empire could not have been more different, a disparity even maintained through the sixty years when both nations were under the same crown (1580–1640). Most obviously, although Pope Alexander VI (r.1492–1503) gave both nations comparable areas of responsibility, in reality the Spanish area was much larger. The Spanish ruled an empire on land, the Portuguese an empire on the sea. At its fullest extent, Spain held huge tracts of territory in Mesoamerica, the Andes, the Caribbean, the so-called 'Southern Cone' of South America, and the Philippines. Portugal, by contrast, held very little land in the interior of Brazil until the late seventeenth century, maintaining instead small fortified towns on the coast, often nothing more than a *feitoria*, or trading post. In its first two centuries of conquest and settlement, Brazil could boast no cities of the size of the Portuguese-Asian metropolis of Goa in India. Spain also had an easier time holding on to its conquests. Portugal lost its supremacy on the seas in the seventeenth century and was forced to give up many of its Asian possessions to the English and Dutch. The Dutch even captured northern Brazil between 1624 and 1654, after which they held on to Guiana (now Surinam) and Curação. In fact, although Portuguese Brazil would expand and prosper in the eighteenth century, Portugal was no longer a great seafaring power.

Both nations appointed viceroys or governors to rule in the place of the king over vast tracts of territory, men who would live in palaces and enjoy all of the pomp, splendour and intrigue of a royal court and who would be one of the most important patrons of the arts. The Spanish kings had already used this form of representation in European colonies such as Sicily or Naples, and the Portuguese had done so in Asia. The first viceroyalty in the Spanish Empire was New Spain (Mexico) in 1535, which also ruled over the Philippines after 1565. Peru was the second viceroyalty (1542) and held sway over South America until two new viceroyalties were carved out in the eighteenth century: New Granada (Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela and Panama; 1718) and La Plata (Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia; 1776). Smaller regions within the viceroyalties were called 'captaincies general', such as those of Venezuela and Guatemala. The Portuguese had a similar system, but as their attentions were focused on Asia, where a viceroy was installed in Goa in 1505, they only established a viceroy in Brazil in 1694. Before that, they had experimented with feudal captaincies (beginning in 1531), in which plots of land were awarded to 'donatory captains' and their descendants, and then they centralized the colony under a governor based in Salvador (1549). Although the Portuguese monarchy actually moved briefly to Brazil in the nineteenth century (1807–21), no Spanish king ever set foot on American soil.

The viceroys were usually military aristocrats, but they were also sometimes churchmen or lawyers. Although they represented royal power and were paid princely salaries, the Crown kept them in check to prevent them from using their post for personal gain or from declaring independence. Viceroys were responsible for collecting the 'Royal Fifth', or tax on revenues from the mines, as well as a share of treasures found in pre-Hispanic temples or shrines. They were also responsible for building mints near the mines and fortifying the coasts and ports. In the Spanish Empire, viceroys presided over the royal tribunals, or *audiencias* (such as the *audiencia* of Lima, 1544), and were also the head of the *cabildo*, or municipal council of the viceregal capital. They could not, however, draw upon funds in the colonial treasury without royal approval and they had no power over important appointments. The *audiencias* had some of their own governmental

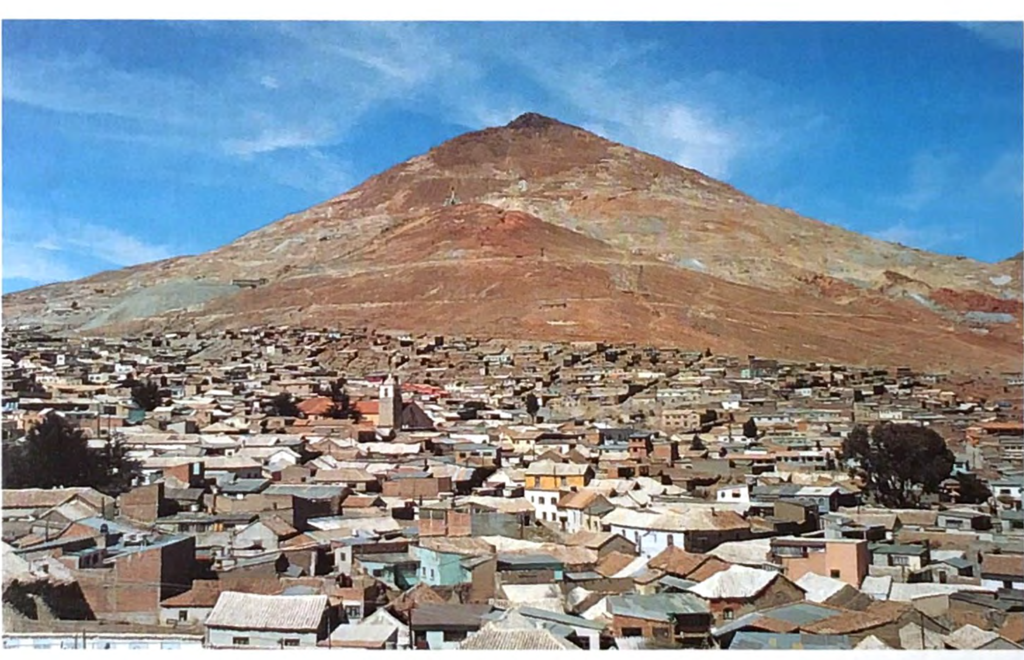
and supervisory powers, and when the viceroy and the *audiencia* disagreed, the king did not always rule in the viceroy's favour. Nevertheless, the viceroys were the most important symbol of European rule. In the entire history of Spanish America, only four viceroys were born in America.

Secular entities were not the only ones answerable to the viceroy and to the Crown. Even Church government rested in royal hands. The Spanish and Portuguese kings managed the Church, including missions, by right of an authority granted by the pope beginning in the early sixteenth century and codified by Philip II in 1573. According to this law, the rulers of Spain and Portugal were empowered to appoint bishops, to license churchmen and control their movements, to intervene in matters of religion and spiritual jurisdiction, to collect tithes and even to approve the construction of religious buildings – an authority the Spanish kings did not even enjoy in most of Spain until the eighteenth century. Primary religious authority in the colonies was vested in the archbishops and bishops, who often lived in splendour in palaces with private libraries and art collections. On a village level the Church was represented by parish priests (secular clergy), who were directly answerable to the bishops. Together with these secular clergy were the religious orders (regular clergy), who were not appointed by the bishops and therefore enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. In the cities they lived according to the rule of their order in giant monasteries and convents, and they operated universities and charitable foundations. Outside the cities they ran the missions, which were free of episcopal control because their communities were not considered fully converted. Taken together, these various church bodies were the most active art patrons in colonial Latin America. By the end of the seventeenth century the Catholic Church in the Americas could boast 70,000 churches and 500 monasteries, possibly the largest and swiftest building campaign in the history of the world.

The Spanish and Portuguese were most interested in parts of America that could be exploited for their precious metals. Sometimes, as in the optimistically named Río de la Plata ('river of silver') in Argentina, they looked in vain. But elsewhere they found unprecedented riches.

CIVDAD
LA VILLA RICA ENPERE
al de potocchi por la dha mina es castilla - rroma es rroma el papa
es papa y el rrey es monar ca del mundo y la s.ta ma de ygle
cia es defendida y nuestra s.ta fe guardada - por los quatro
rreys de las yns y por el en perador ynga - agora lo pode
ra el papa de rroma y nuestro s.r rrey don phelipe el terzero
PLVS VLTRA
EGO FVLCIO
CVLLVNA SEIOS
chinchaysuyo
colla suyo
minas de potocsi de plata
ciudad enpereal castilla

The most important was the silver mine of Potosí, founded in 1546 in present-day Bolivia, under the suzerainty of the viceroyalty of Peru, seen here (22) in a drawing by the Andean historian Guaman Poma de Ayala (1534–1615). Its centrepiece was the Cerro Rico, or 'rich hill', a mountain of silver ore that has been mined for over four centuries and even today looms like an open wound over the southern flank of the city (23). Potosí was a place of such astounding wealth and such unspeakable horrors that it defies the imagination. The second largest city in the world in 1600, Potosí produced so much silver that it flooded the European market and was almost single-handedly responsible for Spain's rise to pre-eminence in the world. It also meant that Latin American silver and gold objects, primarily altar frontals and



22
Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Rich Imperial City of Potosí*, from *Nueva Coronica*, 1613–15, 14.5 × 20.5 cm, 5¾ × 8 in (book). Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen

23
Cerro Rico, Potosí, Bolivia

monstrances (containers for the host during the Eucharist), were among the most lavish and intricate in the world (see Chapter 7). But these riches carried a human price. The working conditions in Potosí were the grimmest in the Americas and they depended for the most part on Indian labour, exploiting a pre-Hispanic mode of migrant rotational work called the *mita* system. Under this system, indigenous communities were called upon in turn to provide labourers for public works for a fixed period of time and a fixed salary. The death toll from the mines was enormous, especially from overwork, but also from the various plagues, including smallpox, that ravaged the town. Similarly horrible mines existed in nearby Huancavelica (1566), which provided

mercury to purify Potosí's silver, as well as the silver mines of New Spain such as San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato and Zacatecas. In eighteenth-century Brazil, the gold and diamond mines of Minas Gerais (1693) and Matto Grosso (1720) brought about a similar combination of wealth and misery, with African-American slavery in the Brazilian back country fuelling Portugal's Golden Age at home.

The *mita* system was one of several ways Europeans exploited indigenous people. These methods were intended – ironically – to guarantee the spiritual wellbeing of the workers, but usually amounted to little more than slavery. First came the infamous *encomienda* system, introduced by Columbus into Hispaniola in 1499, and later spread throughout Spanish America. In a procedure similar to feudalism, colonists were given tracts of land called *encomiendas*, which included the people already living on them. In cases where the indigenous people were nomadic, they were forcibly settled into towns, a policy made official in the 1512–13 Laws of Burgos. The indigenous community was assigned to a colonist for the long term in return for spiritual guidance, protection and a small wage. This system began to be replaced in the second half of the sixteenth century by the *repartimiento*, by which smaller parties were divided among different colonists for shorter periods. In addition to these and other systems of exploitation, indigenous people were compelled to pay the king in goods such as agricultural produce and manufactured items, and later in cash.

In the Portuguese Empire, exploitation of the indigenous and African peoples was even more arbitrary and heartless. The Tupí-Guaraní Indians of Brazil were forcibly moved far from their homelands in the interior to live in shanty towns near colonial cities, where they served as convenient labour pools for Portuguese settlers. Indians in the Paraguayan hinterlands were regularly kidnapped in the seventeenth century by roving bands of slave hunters from São Paulo, who were called '*Mamelucos*' after the Islamic rulers of medieval Egypt. However, the worst exploitation was reserved for the African slaves, 3·5 million of whom were brought to Brazil from various nations in West Africa before the abolition of slavery in 1888. Beginning in the sugar plantations of Bahia and Pernambuco in the sixteenth century and

culminating in the gold and diamond mines of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth, the institution of slavery was the basis of the Brazilian economy. Lives were brutal and short, with harsh working conditions reducing slaves' life expectancies to about seven to twelve years from the time of arrival in Brazil. Some slave owners worked their charges to death in the belief that it made economic sense to get all the work out of them in a few years and replace them with new recruits – a method later used in Nazi death camps. Escapees were punished by branding, amputation or death, and in 1755 the citizens of the town of Mariana introduced the custom of cutting slaves' Achilles tendons to prevent them from running away. Nevertheless, many African slaves were introduced into more humanitarian environments as domestics for urban households (aside from Brazil and the Caribbean, Lima, Nueva Granada and Mexico City all had substantial African populations).

Ironically, the institution most notorious for its policies of torture and punishment had comparatively little effect on the Amerindian or African populations. The Inquisition, or Holy Office, was established in Lima in 1569, in Mexico City in 1571 and in Cartagena in 1610. Although the Inquisition was never formally established in Brazil, beginning in 1591 the Portuguese Inquisition regularly sent commissaries to Brazil. However, contrary to popular belief, the institution had no jurisdiction over non-converted Indians, and even Indian and African Christians were punished much less frequently and more leniently than their Spanish and *mestizo* counterparts. The investigative office of the Catholic Church, the Inquisition focused instead on people of European descent and mixed blood, attacking Protestants, Freemasons, and apostate Jews and Muslims. These people were tried and often tortured and burned at the stake for 'heresy', or deviation from Catholic norms. Frequently the trials were trumped up to gain more wealth for the inquisitors. Only one Indian was burned at the stake in sixteenth-century New Spain and it caused such a public outcry that the incident was never repeated. On the other hand, the Inquisition also monitored real abuses and tried priests accused of mistreating their indigenous congregations.

Colonial forms of labour exploitation created constant tension between the colonists, who needed indigenous and African workers to turn a profit, and the missionaries, many of whom were genuinely concerned about the rights of native and African peoples. This was the kind of conflict that erupted in Hispaniola in the early sixteenth century, when Bartolomé de las Casas and Antonio de Montesinos made urgent appeals to the Spanish crown against the ill-treatment of Amerindians by Spanish settlers. In New Mexico, where the Spanish

24
Aztec place glyph, incorporated in the façade of the mission church of San Agustín, Acolman, Mexico, 16th century

had a colony from 1598, the conflict between the missionaries and colonists over labour and tribute contributed ultimately to the bloody Pueblo Revolt, which drove the Spanish from the territory for more than a decade. On 10 August 1680, 17,000 Pueblo Indians representing more than twenty communities rose *en masse* to expel the Spanish from their lands – a rare example of such unified political activism in the colonial era. Incited by the bickering between the Spanish colonial

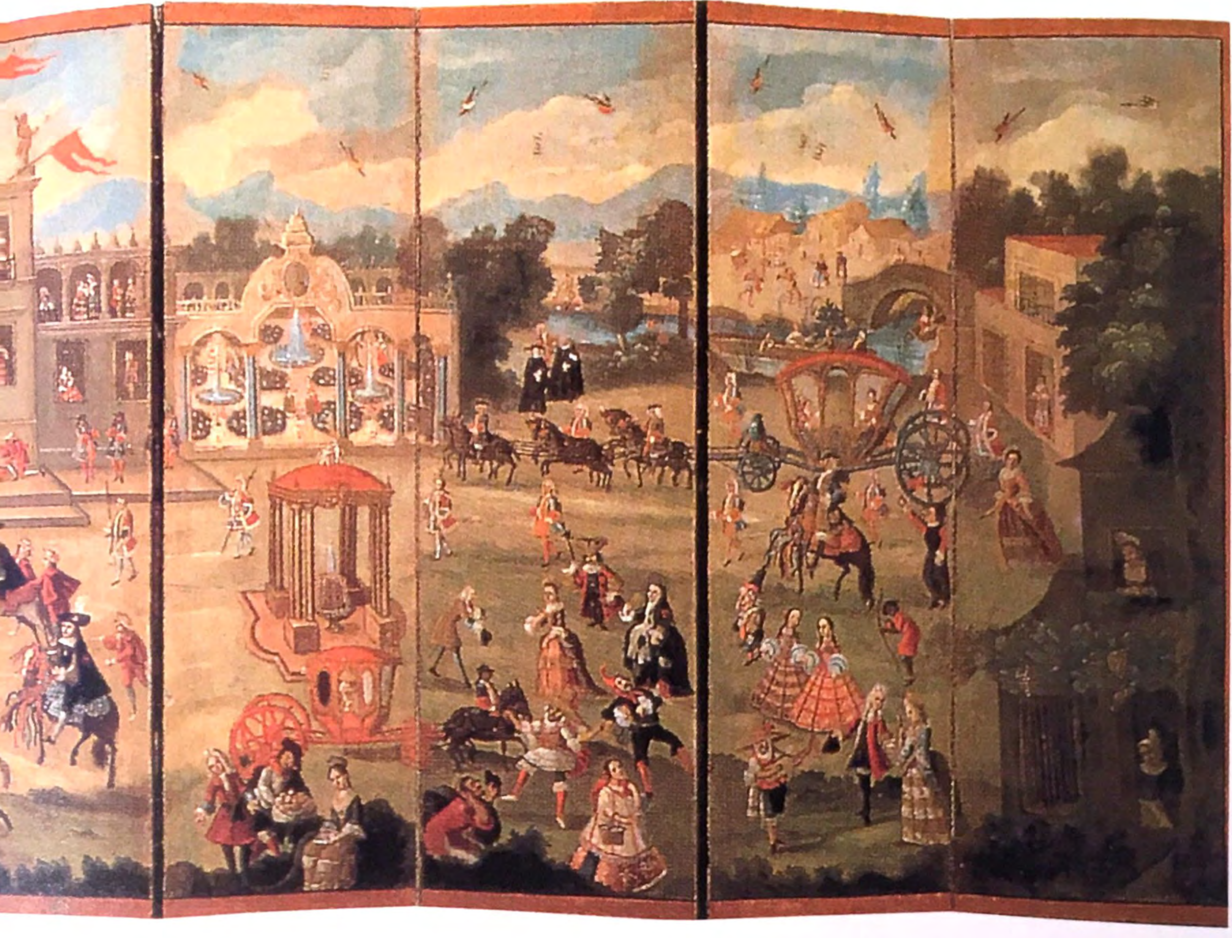
government and the friars over indigenous labour, and also by the friars' increasing conservatism on the missions, the Puebloans under their leader Popé attacked Spanish settlements, burned churches and ranches, and killed some 400 colonists, including twenty-one priests.

One way the missionaries kept Amerindians away from the mines and from paying tribute was through large-scale building projects on the missions themselves. Employing pre-Hispanic *corvée* labour systems that had been used to raise temples, mission building projects allowed Amerindians to devote their energies to creating their own living environment. Many indigenous communities, after they had been converted, considered their church as a symbol of civic pride and identity, and sometimes their architects proudly signed their names, such as the Nahuas Juan Gerson (named after a French theologian), who painted the vault of the church at Tecamachalco (see 45) in Mexico, and Francisco Juan Metl, whose signature adorns the sixteenth-century church at Cuitzeo in Michoacán. Elsewhere the community put its stamp on the church with a symbol of their village, as in the Aztec place glyph showing a severed arm with radiating streams of blood that was incorporated into the façade of the sixteenth-century church at Acolman, outside Mexico City (24). The image refers to the Aztec creation myth in which the first human being was carried by his arm from Lake Texcoco and deposited at Acolman, the very site of the Augustinian mission.

These mines and rich plantations helped create a world of wealth and privilege for the colonial élites, shown here (25) enjoying a royal festival in Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, in the eighteenth century. The extravagance of aristocratic lifestyles in the metropolitan areas such as Mexico City, Lima, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro at their height was staggering and the source of much jealousy in Europe (see Chapter 7). Dressed in imported silks and laces, and adorned with diamonds and pearls, élite men and women divided their time between urban palaces and country estates, both furnished with gold and silver objects, Asian ceramics and lacquers, English and French furnishings, and Middle Eastern carpets. During the height of the social season, they travelled to opulent balls and soirees in sedan chairs and

gold-plated carriages, attended by legions of liveried servants, and they financed musical and theatrical entertainments that could last for days. However, there was more to Latin American urban culture than pomp and circumstance. These centres were home to some of the leading intellectuals of their day, such as the Mexican poets Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (see 193) and Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, as well as visionary art patrons such as Bishop Juan de Palafox y Mendoza of Puebla and Bishop Manuel de Mollinedo of Cuzco, who transformed their two cities into the jewels of the New World in the middle of the seventeenth century. The universities of the Americas, beginning with Mexico City in 1553, Lima in 1574 and Cordova (Argentina) in 1613, rivalled their counterparts in Europe and made crucial contributions to the study of the American landscape, its languages and its peoples.

Although the wealth of élite Latin America was enjoyed by both sexes and women such as Sor Juana were able to gain critical success in a male-dominated field, Latin American women in general wielded less power than their European sisters. The Iberian empires were founded on conquest and missionary work, neither of which was open to women, and in the early period very few European women of



25
The Royal Festivals of Chapultepec, 18th century. Oil on canvas; 1·75 × 5·4 m, 5 ft 9 in × 17 ft 8⅝ in. Banamex Collection, Mexico City

any kind travelled to the New World. It is estimated that of the 600,000 to 700,000 Spaniards to settle in the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as many as ninety per cent were men. Consequently, most of the women in early colonial Latin America belonged to other races, a double mark against them in the eyes of European and *criollo* men – although this social distinction did not prevent Spanish and Portuguese men from interbreeding on an extraordinary scale, resulting in the huge *mestizo* components of both empires by the eighteenth century. In Brazil, there were so few women of European descent that the government published a decree in 1720 drastically limiting their freedom to leave the colony. Although the balance between white men and women evened out as the urban settlements expanded, the latter were still in the minority and could not enjoy the power of their husbands, sons or brothers. Nevertheless, women could secure great wealth and prestige through marital unions and were legally permitted to inherit titles. Women also formed lay religious sisterhoods called *sodalidades*, social groups that gave them a collective voice within colonial society. Women could gain even greater freedom and authority through widowhood. Widows had more

ALABADOSELSANTISIMOSACRA
MDELATARILALINPIACONSEF
SIONDENVESTRASERNORACON
SEVIDASINMANCHANIDEVD
ADEPECADOORIGINALMEN
JOESVS MARCAIJOSEF

control over family fortunes, legal claims and territorial possessions than women whose husbands were still alive, and could leave important legacies in their own names as patrons of the arts.

Many of the European women who came to the Americas in the early colonial years were nuns. Such were the Franciscan Sisters of Santa Clara, who arrived in the sixteenth century. Although nuns were not allowed to work on the frontier mission areas where their mendicant and Jesuit brethren were learning how to adapt to indigenous cultures, they did play an important role in the cities. They cared for the sick and sheltered travellers, priorities which differed little from those in Europe. However, the life of a nun was not necessarily one of asceticism and selfless service. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nunneries could be as luxurious as an urban palace; such was the mammoth convent of Santa Catalina (founded 1575; 26) in Arequipa, Peru, a city within a city of luxurious private suites, calming courtyards and gardens, delightful fountains and picturesque passageways. Many daughters of wealthy families paid huge dowries to enter such nunneries where they were attended by legions of servants and became leading lights in society (see Chapter 7). Nuns of Sor Juana's class could hold court at a convent, receive visitors (including men), accumulate great libraries and collections of curiosities, play music and organize concerts, and even pursue scholarship and write poetry. However, not everyone could afford Sor Juana's lifestyle. Poorer women had far fewer options, and their only escape from marriage and a life of servitude was by taking refuge in hospices set up by pious patrons or confraternities for their lodging and protection.

26
Convent of
Santa Catalina,
Arequipa,
Peru,
founded 1575

Spanish and Portuguese colonial society may indeed have been the most diverse and cosmopolitan on earth before the nineteenth century. Latin America was home to the peoples and traditions of five continents: not only North and South America and Europe, but also Africa and Asia – the former, as we have seen, through slavery and the latter through immigration from the Philippines, China, Japan and India.

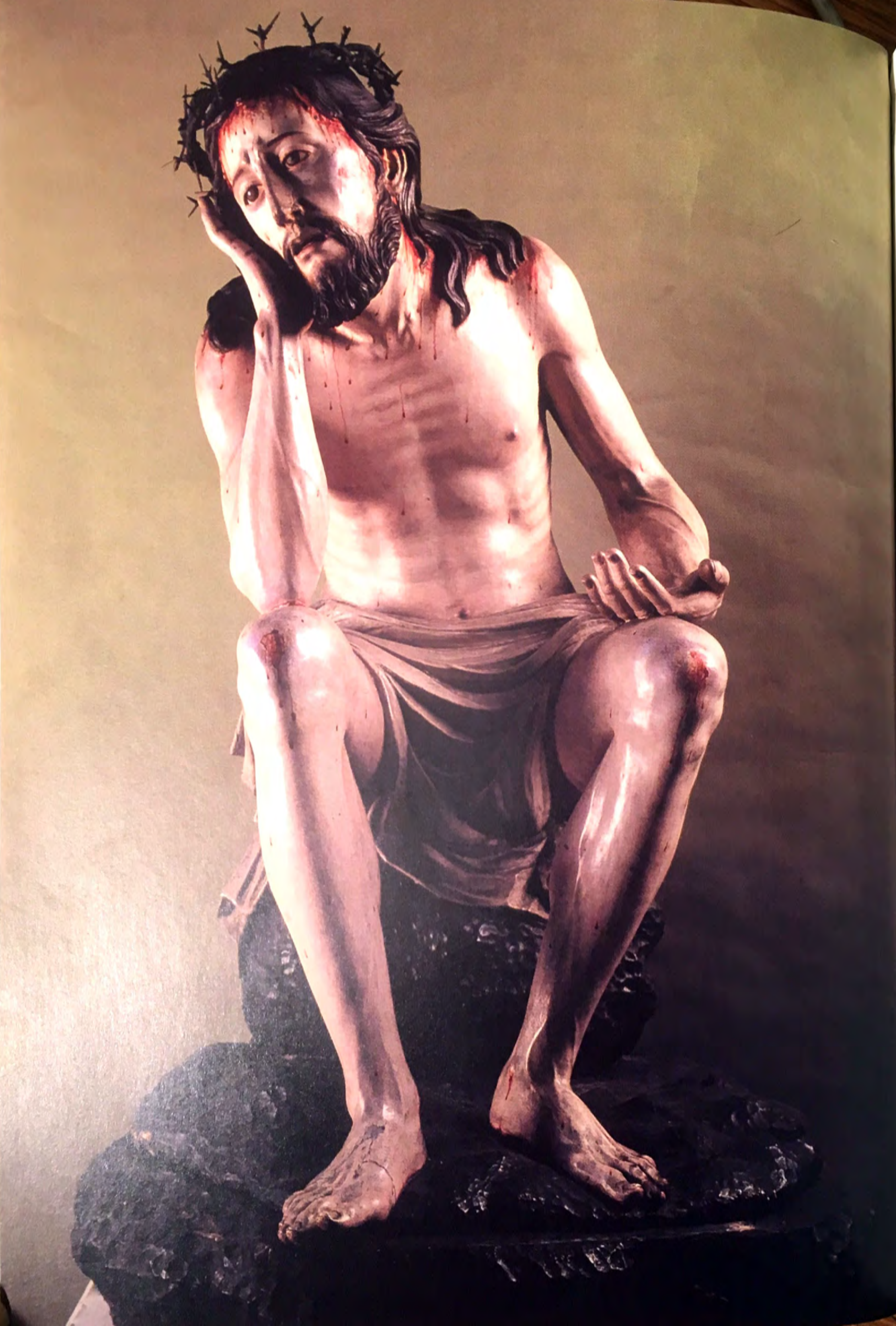
Despite the horrors of slavery, Africans in the Americas preserved their religion, costume and language throughout the colonial era. The most

celebrated cultural survival is Candomblé, a religion brought from Africa by the Yoruba and other West African peoples that continues to flourish today in Bahia (northeastern Brazil) with elaborate ceremonies featuring dancing and chanting in the Yoruba language. Santería, a syncretic Cuban faith that also derives from Yoruba religion, adopted Catholic saints as *orishas*, or African gods and goddesses. The greatest expression of African culture took place in the eighteenth century in places like Pernambuco and Minas Gerais, Brazil, where the Africans vastly outnumbered their white overseers. Africans

27
St Elesbão, 18th century. Polychrome and gilt wood; h. 120 cm, 47¼ in. Superintendência Regional/ Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artistico/ Ministério de Cultura (IPHAN), Pernambuco

had their own neighbourhoods and worshipped in black churches with statues of black saints like St Ifigênia and St Elesbão (27), seen in an eighteenth-century polychrome wooden sculpture from Pernambuco in which the saint is triumphing over a white adversary. A remarkable number of Africans were able to buy their freedom. Some of them organized themselves into lay religious confraternities, such as the 'Black Brotherhood of the Rosary' in Ouro Prêto, which was wealthy enough to finance extravagant parades and other

28
Santa Ifigênia
dos Pretos,
Ouro Prêto,
Brazil,
1733–80



festivities. This black confraternity built the Baroque church of Santa Ifigênia dos Pretos (1733–80; 28), also in Ouro Prêto, entirely at their own expense. This church is associated with one of the most celebrated African leaders in Minas Gerais, Galanga, called 'Chico-Rei' ('Little King'; before 1700–74). A king in Congo, he was kidnapped with his entire tribe by the Portuguese in the early eighteenth century and sold to a mine operator in Ouro Prêto. Chico-Rei worked there as a foreman and eventually purchased not only his own freedom but also that of his entire people. After buying his own gold mine, Chico-Rei and his son Muzinga set up court in town as a royal family and financed lavish festivals on African holidays. Other slave groups were able to escape at great risk to their lives and form separate villages in the forest called *quilombos*, often made up of hundreds of inhabitants, which subsisted on agriculture and periodically raided plantations for new members. The most famous *quilombo* was at Palmares (Pernambuco), which had a population of 20,000 at its height and lasted through most of the seventeenth century. Its last ruler, Zumbí (r.1678–95), finally succumbed to the Portuguese only in 1695. Perhaps the most beloved African figure in the Americas was St Martin de Porres, born in 1579 to a Spanish officer and a free black woman of Angolan background, who joined the Dominican order in Lima and ministered to the sick and abandoned using his extraordinary knowledge of herbal medicine.

Asians reached the Americas on the famed trans-Pacific trade route of the 'Manila Galleon' that ran between Manila and Acapulco from 1565 to the early 1800s, an immensely important conduit for Asian products into Spanish America and Spain itself. The Parián (Chinatown) of Mexico City and also districts of nearby Puebla became home to communities of Chinese, Japanese and Indian immigrants, as they lay directly on the overland trade route, or 'China road', from Acapulco to Veracruz, where ships took Asian products to Europe. The Japanese and Chinese may even have organized themselves into craft ateliers, perhaps as early as 1618, although scholars have recently raised doubts about the veracity of these reports. Occasionally Asians in Spanish American towns would rise to prominence, as happened to Catarina de San Juan, an Indian immigrant who claimed descent from the Mughal emperor Akbar and lived as an extremely popular recluse and visionary in

Puebla. Another key link between Asia and the Americas was the trade route between Goa in India and Salvador (and later Rio de Janeiro) in Brazil, a connection that brought Indians and possibly Chinese to Brazil and the Spanish territories of the Cono Sur. While most Asians who came to the Americas served humble roles as domestics and labourers, in eighteenth-century Buenos Aires a Filipino sculptor named Esteban Sampzon (fl.1780–after 1800) became one of the leading lights of the colonial art world of southern South America. Sampzon was probably of Chinese heritage, not only because he called himself 'Indio de la China' (an Indian from China) but also because the Chinese neighbourhood in Manila had been a thriving sculpture centre since the sixteenth century and was responsible for most of the art in the colony. Sampzon was in Buenos Aires from 1780 to 1800, where he lived at the monastery of Santo Domingo. Later, he lived and worked in Cordova, and at one point joined the military as the leader of a battalion of *mestizos*. His naturalistic and moving sculptures, such as a statue attributed to him, *Christ of Humility and Patience* (29) in the church of La Merced, Buenos Aires, still grace a number of the city's churches. The sculpture demonstrates an expert hand and a delicate sense of line that is also reflected in Filipino ivories (see 219). Especially noteworthy is the realism of the facial features, with parted lips and the intense expression in the eyes, enhanced – as was traditional in Latin American sculpture – by glass inserts.

30
Luís de Mena,
Casta painting,
c.1750.
Oil on canvas;
120 × 104 cm,
47¼ × 41 in.
Museo de
América,
Madrid

In eighteenth-century Spanish America, colonial society's consciousness of its racial subdivisions bordered on obsession as intermarriage between the races increased. While status played a major role in this new fascination – the white ruling class felt threatened by the blurring of racial boundaries – it also reflected a general eighteenth-century interest in scientific taxonomy. The highest level of society was occupied by the so-called *peninsulares*, or those born in Europe, and the *criollos*, each of whom thought themselves superior to the other. Throughout the colonial period these two groups would vie for prominence and the independence movement of the early nineteenth century was largely a victory for the *criollos* (as was the independence of the United States a few decades earlier). Everyone else in colonial society was categorized as one of many *castas* (castes), mostly persons

of racially mixed ancestry, a process that was immortalized in a curious fad for paintings that depict with zoological precision the different categories of race and ethnicity. In one of these so-called '*casta* paintings' (30) by the Mexican artist Luís de Mena, the Virgin of Guadalupe looks down over eight different categories of intermarriage in New Spain, represented by husband, wife and child, the fertility of their union reflected by a display of ripe fruit below. *Casta* paintings were more usually produced in sets of sixteen individual scenes, each depicting a man and a woman of different races with one or more of their offspring, and they were accompanied by a label identifying the resulting racial mix. The pictures begin with the 'pure' race of the Spanish, usually dressed in upper-class costume and engaged in activities that denote their higher status and this social status visibly diminishes as the paintings move on to the mixed races.

The names given to the different castes reflect colonial society's preoccupation with race. They included a person born of a Spaniard and an Amerindian (*mestizo*); a Spaniard and a *mestizo* (*castizo*); an African and a Spaniard (*mulato*); a Spaniard and a *mulato* (*morisco*); an Amerindian and a black (*zambo*), a Spaniard and a *morisco* (*albino torno-atrás*, or 'turn-back'); a *mestizo* and an Amerindian (*lobo*); and an Amerindian and a *lobo* (simply an *indio*). Similar race and status-consciousness existed in Brazil, where the African presence was much greater and interbreeding even more common. Despite this persistent sense of racial division, *mestizos*, Amerindians and African-Americans could rise to positions of prominence through education and wealth, and could hold positions of responsibility in such crucial colonial institutions as the army and the Church. Particularly in the eighteenth century, in Spanish Latin America and Brazil alike, an increasing number of non-whites used this wealth and prominence to gain a political voice, speaking out – sometimes violently – against their treatment by the *criollo* and European élite.