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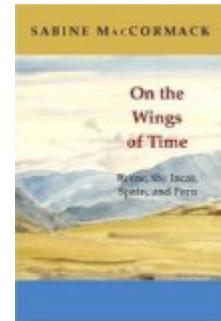


Sabine MacCormack. *On the Wings of Time: Rome, the Incas, Spain, and Peru*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. xix + 320 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-12674-6.

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On the Wings of Time is an excellent addition to Sabine MacCormack's impressive oeuvre. It puts on fine display her classicist training and long study of the culture of the Spanish Empire and Andean societies. Her overarching argument is that members of diverse social groups (indigenous, mestizo, creole, and Spanish) in the colonial Andes found in the Roman past templates for making meaning and integrating various histories (Roman, Incan, Spanish) with their colonial presents.

Though not touted as such, this is good "Atlantic History," moving gracefully between intellectual developments in Iberia and in the colonial Andes all the while insisting on the way that different groups within this interconnected world "had and have their own ways of creating and interpreting meaning" (p. 23). The notion that classical models were indispensable for those of European cultural provenance seeking to comprehend the New World is not revelatory, yet MacCormack takes her investigation in some different directions than did her laudable predecessors (such as Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* [1995], J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New: 1492-1650* [1992], and Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, 1st ed. [1987]). For she considers many diverse, often competing, manifestations of classicism, particularly Roman ones, in the Andean context, and gives significant attention to mestizo, indigenous, and creole voices, as well as Spanish ones. MacCormack is clear that there was no unitary view of the Roman past nor agreement on what were the relevant analogies. For instance, in the encounter between Spanish and Inca empires, who were the Romans' successors? The Spanish or the Inca? And even among those who agreed that the

Spanish conquerors were analogous to Roman imperialists, there was still disagreement as to whether Roman imperialism was legitimate, and therefore Spanish imperialism as well.

Thematic considerations drive the chapter organization of *On the Wings of Time*, while within the chapters the progression is largely chronological. In chapter 1, "Universals and Particulars," MacCormack gives an overview of the major themes of the book, as well as useful background on the historical period covered. She begins with a fascinating discussion of the various ways that the Roman past lived on in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberia. Roman antiquity was "absorbed into the fabric of the present" not only in law, literature, and the calendar, but also "in the layout of some cities, the design of private and public buildings, the shape and decoration of tools and utensils, the titles of functions of dignitaries" (pp. 5-6). Yet MacCormack makes the important point that that self-conscious humanist recuperation of classical antiquity had also made the Roman past newly "strange and unfamiliar" (p. 11). The rediscovery of classical languages, texts, and artifacts, writes MacCormack, "transformed the old and established, easygoing familiarity and intimacy with the ancient world.... A great deal now emerged about the Greeks and Romans that seemed strange and required explanation" (p. 12). The long-absorbed and newly recuperated Roman past was fundamental to how those in the colonial Andes context created meaning in their world, from the wake of conquest to the eve of independence movements (though the focus is on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The remaining six chapters and epilogue investigate what MacCormack calls "polyvalent" uses of the Roman past as various subjects of the

Spanish Empire grappled with language, history, politics and natural history.

I found MacCormack's exploration of language in the Andes particularly stimulating. In chapter 2, "Writing and the Pursuit of Origins," MacCormack argues that the Spanish inherited the classical view that "thanks to writing, knowledge would never be lost" (p. 35). This created a problem for understanding the Inca past, because "the absence of writing in the Andes constitut[ed] a grave obstacle to historical understanding" for the Spanish (p. 39). Yet, much to her credit, MacCormack does not reproduce a simple and essentialist dichotomy between colonizing textuality and the colonized orality (a binary enshrined in Tzvetan Todorov's classic, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* [1999]). Instead, she shows how this valuation of European writing systems prompted an indigenous Andean author to write in the early seventeenth century that "'since nothing has been written until now, I set forth here the lives of the ancestors of the Huarochirí people'" (p. 32). In other words, native subjects were quick to appropriate European textual modes for their own ends. With a similar affection for paradox, MacCormack shows how new interpretive methods spawned by Renaissance scholarship led colonial observers to value non-textual evidence. Just as humanists in Iberia were inspired to copy Roman inscriptions wherever they were found, be it on tombstones or road markers, so colonial observers approached the Inca past in a similar way: "At the very time when the roads of Spain yielded information about the Roman past and Roman imperial power, the roads that the Incas had built rendered their achievements intelligible to European newcomers," writes MacCormack (pp. 39-40).

In chapter 6, "'The Discourse of My Life': What Language Can Do," MacCormack is at her best in showing the contradictory legacies afforded by classical models. On the one hand, assumed cultural superiority of the conquerors—whether Roman or Spanish—led the elite mestizo humanist scholar Garcilaso de la Vega to take for granted that his "native Quechua could not have equipped him to understand, let alone translate, a platonizing dialogue on love" (p. 172). On the other hand, it was largely the "multifarious erudition" oriented around linguistic study in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain that provided the basis for scrupulous and sustained study of Quechua, the imperial language of the Inca Empire (p. 174). "Astounded and puzzled" by the dizzying linguistic diversity of the Americas, missionaries saw the "ubiquity of Quechua" as a "preparation for evangelization, the work of divine providence" (pp. 174-

176). And just as humanist scholars struggled to restore the pure Greek and Latin of antiquity, Garcilaso sought to ensure "that Quechua should be maintained in its purity and elegance,... that it should be pronounced and construed correctly, avoiding the infiltration of Spanish semantics, syntax, and vocabulary" (p. 195). As the colonial era progressed, scholar-missionaries went farther, insisting that learners of Quechua (namely, Spanish missionaries) had "to internalize as dominant those concepts that derived from the behavior of the Quechua and not some other language" (p. 198). MacCormack's fascinating discussion of linguistic issues made me wish for explicit comparisons with similar and related processes related to alphabetization and translation simultaneously unfolding elsewhere in the Spanish colonies, most obviously in Mesoamerica.

The themes that receive most attention in *On the Wings of Time* are those related to politics and history. The discovery of analogies between the Inca and Roman past went beyond academic interest, for if, writes MacCormack in chapter 2, "the Incas had become powerful in much the same way as kings and dynasties did elsewhere, and ... they could not be labeled as mere *caciques*, regional chiefs, or tyrants, then what were the Spanish doing in Peru?" (p. 54). This line of questioning led Bartolomé de las Casas to reject the legitimacy of the Spanish colonial regime, and to insist that the right action would be to restore "everything that they had taken from those they conquered, including sovereignty to the Incas" (p. 55). Those on the other side of the colonial polemic came to very different conclusions, of course, all the while accepting the same framework of classical antecedents. Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a supporter of Viceroy Francisco de Toledo and accomplished historian of the Inca, depicted the Incas not as "natural lords" but rather as akin to "Carthaginians during the wars against Rome in being cruel 'treaty breaking tyrants'" (p. 57). In other words, for apologists of Spanish rule, the legitimacy of the colonial regime derived at least in part from the toppling of a New World empire akin to classical tyrannies.

In chapter 3, "Conquest, Civil War, and Political Life," MacCormack further develops this theme of how Roman antecedents structured the competing views of the colonial regime among authors of diverse identities (Spanish, creole, native, and mestizo). MacCormack argues that the classical past provided a template not only for how to understand the Inca past but also for how to make sense of the colonial period, be it the turbulent decades of conquest and civil war that reigned between 1533 (the year Francisco Pizarro and his forces killed the

Inca Atahualpa) and 1571 (the year that saw the execution of the last Inca ruler Tupac Amaru), and the later period characterized by colonial consolidation and creolization. For instance, the chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo saw parallels between the conquistador Diego de Almagro and “kings of early Roman who had come from humble origins,” and between Francisco Pizarro, “who like Julius Caesar, might have avoided assassins’ swords if only he had listened to the warnings of his friends” (p. 71). After 1571, “when war leaders were being replaced by officials and lawyers,” colonial chroniclers “yielded primacy of place to Tacitus, who wrote about the first century of Roman imperial rule” (p. 85). War was not the only way in which the “Peruvian *patria*” was forged. The founding of cities was a practice that bound Inca, Romans, and Spanish imperialists.

I found MacCormack’s treatment of natural history in chapter 5, “Works of Nature and Works of Free Will,” to be one of the most intriguing. That the seminal New World chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo depended on classical authors, whether considering New World crops in relation to Pliny’s writing about Mediterranean cereals or discussing Caribbean body painting in reference to Caesar’s discussion of tattooing among savage Britons, will surprise few familiar with scholarship of this period. More striking is MacCormack’s argument that Oviedo took from Pliny not only a general approach for considering the “nature of things” but also the view that “human and natural history formed an inseparable continuum,” that “human experience and nature form[ed] a continuously evolving interconnected fabric” (p. 137). These arguments advance this area of natural history in an interesting fashion. MacCormack views the late sixteenth century as a transitional moment for natural history, particularly as manifested in Jesuit José de Acosta’s *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590). Departing from Oviedo and succeeding natural history

writers who saw human and natural history as inextricably intertwined, Acosta’s scheme, according to MacCormack, “was designed to differentiate and juxtapose the stable facts of natural history and the fluid ones of ‘moral history’; and of human free will. The scheme had the added trait of separating the history of government and religion from that of the arts of crafts, of agriculture, technology and science” (p. 163). Beyond what McCormack reveals about the practices of empire within the Spanish realm, the implications of *On the Wings of Time* are important for historians of early modern intellectual and scientific history more generally.

MacCormack elegantly concludes that the Roman legacy was “polyvalent because it could be and was claimed on behalf both of the Inca and of the Spanish empire, on behalf of Inca past and Spanish present.... History being the teacher of life, the Roman past allowed room for contradiction, for uncertainty and for not knowing” (p. 274). MacCormack offers fresh readings of the works of Spaniards, including Oviedo, Las Casas, and Pedro Cieza de León, and also Andean authors, such as Guaman Poma de Ayala, and puts them into dialogue with less canonical figures, such as the anonymous Andean author of the Huarochirí manuscript. A special virtue of this work are her use of images, ranging from photographs of architectural monuments, reproductions of period-specific engravings and illustrations, and her own wonderful water colors (one of which graces the book’s cover). The images, of usefully diverse provenance, are not ornamental but fundamental to the panoply of evidence, are read carefully, and are integrated into the larger arc of argument. I highly recommend this book. This is an important contribution for the field of Atlantic history not only for illuminating new perspectives on empire but also for showing that intellectual history in the early modern period must not be constrained by European geographic parameters.

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