



2010.056
Unidentified artist
Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion
Peru, probably Cuzco
Late seventeenth or eighteenth century
Oil on canvas, 21 ½ x 15 ½ inches

The Instruments of the Passion, or *Arma Christi* (“Weapons of Christ”) are objects associated with the Passion of Christ (his suffering and death) in Christian art. The cross on which Jesus was crucified is the oldest of these symbols to appear in art, but manuscripts of the Middle English *Arma Christi* that appear as early as the fourteenth century are illustrated with various of these symbols, often arranged around an image of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. In this painting, however, Jesus appears as a boy.

The instruments of the Passion that appear in art could be numerous, all of them based on their roles in biblical passages. In this painting, Christ is accompanied at the left of the canvas by the cross on which he was crucified, topped by the *Titulus Crucis* inscribed with the Latin INRI (*Iesus Nazarenius Rex Iudaeorum*, “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews”). On the cross is the lance with which the Roman soldier pierced the side of Christ and the Holy Grail, the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper. It drips with blood, reflecting the tradition that Joseph of Arimathea used it to catch Christ’s blood at the Crucifixion. In the chalice are the nails that held him to the cross. The Child holds the Crown of Thorns and a reed as a scepter, both bestowed by the Roman soldiers who scorned Jesus as “King of the Jews.” He rests his proper right foot on a terrestrial globe encircled by a serpent with an apple in its mouth referencing Original Sin. His left foot rests on a bleeding skull, marking the place as the hill of Golgotha where Christ was crucified.

Paintings and sculptures in which Christ was pictured as a child were very popular in Europe as well as Spanish America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is often pictured nearly nude, standing with his arm raised in blessing, as in fifteenth-century prints by Martin Schongauer and in a 1467 engraving by the Master E.S. depicting the Christ Child in a heart surrounded by angels bearing the instruments of the Passion. In seventeenth-century Italy, Guido Reni’s painting of the *Christ Child Sleeping on the Cross* was popularized through a print that influenced versions of the subject by the Spanish master Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. In France, Georges de la Tour painted the boy Jesus accompanying his father in the carpenter shop. The Christ Child as Savior of the World (*Salvator Mundi*) was seen in both paintings and sculptures, the latter famously by the Sevillian master Juan Martínez Montañés.

Life-size sculptures of the infant Christ by Montañés and the many artists who followed him in creating this type made their way to the New World. These were popular in present-day Bolivia, where several Sevillian sculptors who worked in the style of Montañés, such as Gaspar de la Cueva, Luis de Espíndola, Fabián Gerónimo, and Martín de Oviedo made sculptures in polychromed wood that were then sometimes copied in the medium of maguey for Indian churches throughout the Audiencia de Charcas.ⁱ In an inventory taken in 1671, there were six sculptures of the Christ Child in the church of San Agustín in Potosí, and there were undoubtedly other versions around in both prints and paintings. The only known painting of the Christ Child as Savior of the World by the Italian artist Bernardo Bitti, created around 1600, is in the museum of the Cathedral of Sucre. In his *Noticias políticas de Indias* (1639), Pedro Ramírez del Águila wrote that there was a confraternity of the Niño de la Compañía (“Christ Child of the Jesuits”) at the Sucre cathedral to which many young Indian women (*doncellas*) belonged.ⁱⁱ In Peru, a devotion to the “Christ Child of Huanca” was encouraged by the Jesuits in Cuzco and Lima, where a sculpture of the figure, wearing an indigenous type of tunic and with a haircut in the

style of Indian converts, is found in the church of San Pedro. The sculpture was probably originally in the chapel dedicated to the Christ Child of Huanca where it may have appeared on the altarpiece dedicated in 1663.ⁱⁱⁱ Several paintings created in colonial Peru depict the Christ Child as *Salvator Mundi*, wearing an imperial Inca crown and the robes of the Catholic priest.^{iv}

The Thoma painting bears such a close resemblance to a version of this subject in the Casa de la Moneda in Potosí (fig. 1) that the two canvases can be assigned to the same workshop. While the Thoma painting and others similar to it cannot be firmly connected to the indigenous devotions mentioned above, we should keep in mind the complicated cross-cultural background which might have fueled the market for such representations.



Fig. 2. Unidentified artist (Peru, probably Cuzco), *Christ Child with Instruments of the Passion*, oil on canvas, 37 ¾ x 27 inches. Museo Nacional de la Moneda, Potosí, Bolivia. Photo: Antonio Suarez Wiese.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Rafael Ramos Sosa, “De Malinas a Lima. Un largo viaje para un niño perdido. Notas sobre el Niño Jesús montañésino: A propósito de nuevas obras en el Perú,” in *Actas del Coloquio Internacional. El Niño Jesús y la infancia en las artes plásticas, siglos XV al XVII* (Seville: Archicofradía del Santísimo Sacramento del Sagrario de la Catedral de Seville, 2010), 340-41.

ⁱⁱ *Ibidem*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ramón Mujica Pinilla, cat. V-36 “Christ Child of Huanca” in *The Arts in Latin America 1492-1820*, organized by Joseph J. Rishel and Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006), 298.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, cat. VI-111, “The Christ Child Wearing the Imperial Inca Crown and Catholic Priestly Robes,” 460.