



2013.005
Unidentified Artist
Christ Entering Jerusalem
Peru, Cuzco
Eighteenth century
Oil with gold on canvas, 21 x 16 inches

“And on the next day, a great multitude that was come to the festival day, when they had heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried: Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel, And Jesus found a young ass, and sat upon it, as it is written: *Fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, thy king cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.* (John 12: 12-15, emphasis added)

This composition clearly derives from one of the engravings in the *Annotations & Meditations on the Gospels* by Jerome Nadal (fig. 1), a set of 153 prints illustrating episodes from the Gospels. The engravings and text were first published in Antwerp in two editions in 1595 and in another edition in 1607. There is compelling visual evidence in Spanish colonial art that these

prints, carried to the Americas by Jesuit missionaries, were invaluable guides to orthodox renderings of these narratives over a long period of time.



Figure 11. *The Solemn Entry into the City*. Jerome Nadal, *Annotations et meditations in Evangelia* (Antwerp, 1595). Engraving by Hieronymus Wierix after Bernardino Passeri, 231 x 145 mm.

Fig. 1. Hieronymus Wierix, *Eadem dominica*, Plate 87 of Jerome Nadal's *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels* (Antwerp, 1595).

However, the artist did not follow the engravings slavishly. In this Cuzco painting of *Christ Entering Jerusalem*, the panoramic vista is greatly compressed, with the city of Jerusalem reduced to only a few emblematic buildings rising in the distance, and the multitudes described by Saint John focused on the twelve disciples of Christ. The tighter focus transforms a narrative composition into a devotional image.

This painting in the Thoma collection is a perfect example of the balance between artistic naïveté and sophistication in paintings from colonial Cuzco. The skill of the painter is evident in details such as the varied ages and faces of the palm-bearing apostles, the gentle expression of the donkey, and the delicately rendered vision of Jerusalem in the distant background. However, the artist is uninterested in the accurate perspective introduced to the art of painting in the Renaissance. The figures gathering fronds from the palm tree to lay beneath the feet of the donkey during Christ's entry into Jerusalem appear to be very close to the action in the foreground, even apparently dangling over the head of Christ himself. In the foreground the figures are tightly compressed together so that the progress of the donkey, delicately picking its way across a carpet of extravagant brocade, is in fact impossible.

One of the most salient characteristics of paintings created in colonial Cuzco is the impression of rich textiles achieved through the application of actual gold to the oil-on-canvas



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painting. Our unidentified artist excels in this craft, and the result is a small, gleaming masterpiece that makes Renaissance perspective seem very unimportant.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt