



2010.057

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Cuzco

*The Christ Child in Three Guises with Indigenous Donors<sup>i</sup>*

1835

Oil on board, 9.6 x 6.8 inches

Inscribed: *D.<sup>n</sup> Ale.<sup>dro</sup> Espinosa y su Mujer D.<sup>a</sup> Manu.<sup>ela</sup> Roñdora han fundado este Bayle de C[...]jiles p.<sup>a</sup> los niños de Marco [...] el año de 1835.*

This composition, which is rare but not unique, depicts the Christ Child in the dress of a priest, a soldier, and a shepherd.<sup>ii</sup> It reflects a tradition dating from the late eighteenth century and still active today in the village of Ollantaytambo near Urubamba in Peru.

In the parish church of Ollantaytambo there is a sculptured image of the Christ Child dressed in the alb and chasuble of a priest. In the neighboring village of Marcacocha a similarly venerated image is dressed like an eighteenth-century magistrate. The Christ Child of Huilloc appears in the guise of a shepherd. Each year, on the feast of the Epiphany, the three images are

brought together in Ollantaytambo and celebrated with feasting, music, and dancing. On the seventh day, the sculptures are returned to their home churches.

The inscription on the Thoma panel indicates that the donors, Alejandro Espinosa and his wife Manuela, founded, or sponsored a dance for the “Niños (Christ Childs) of Marcacocha.” Elaborately choreographed dances enacted by colorfully costumed participants are uniquely characteristic of religious celebrations in the Andes.

The indigenous couple is pictured in their normal dress, with his status enhanced by the smart hat and umbrella on the ground next to him. The “Niño Alcalde de Maracocha” on the simple altar to the left is dressed in eighteenth-century military garb, the “Niño Jesús de Ollantaytambo” wears elaborately detailed clerical garments, and the “Niño Pastor de Huilloc” is dressed more like a missionary than an actual shepherd (*pastor*). Each of the three images holds an alms-plate topped by a crucifix.

It is not known whether this small painting on wood was originally affixed to an altar or near the altar on which the image of the Christ Child of Marcacocha is located.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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<sup>i</sup> This iconography was first identified and explained by Héctor Schenone in *Iconografía del arte colonial: Jesucristo* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Tarea, 1998), 120. He named it the “Niño Jesús de Ollantaytambo,” which seems restrictive as three images are reproduced.

<sup>ii</sup> A version dated 1842 is illustrated by José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert in *Historia de la pintura cuzqueña* (Lima: Fundación Augusto N. Wiese/Banco Wiese Ltda., 1981), vol. 2, fig. 610 as “Triple representación del Niño Jesús,” but is not mentioned in the text (vol. 1). Schenone (op. cit.) identified another version in a private collection in Salta, Argentina.