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ASENSIO, Raúl H., 2017, *El apóstol de los Andes. El culto a Túpac Amaru en Cusco durante la revolución velasquista (1968-1975)*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos. 347 pp.

The figure of Túpac Amaru has pursued and seduced the national imagination with a persistence that few individuals of a similar historical stature can claim. He is identified and recognized by everyone as an emblematic social fighter and a symbol of resolute, unbreakable courage that transcended the colonial coordinates of his era. The construction of his image, however, was appropriated by various actors whose political goals, historical narratives, and intellectual motivations were plagued by underlying dissensions and misunderstandings, although there were also possible affinities. This tension, whose major stage was Cusco, had among its most conspicuous proponents the military government of Juan Velasco (1968-1975) and a heterogeneous group of individuals made up of leftist activists, academics, historians, intellectuals, local officials, mayors, rural teachers, priests, and Andean politicians, many of whose particular roles in the creation of this myth are truly fascinating. They made up circles that, according to their levels of devotion and types of motivations, could be classified as: vernacular *tupacamaristas*, considered as precursors of the cult – who in turn can be divided into moderates and radicals; *tupacamarist* officials who supported the military government; *tupacamaristas* who shared regional pride but engaged in a praxis that was less militant; and finally, a sector made up of peripheral individuals and organizations that sought to extract the maximum benefit possible, in a context of affirmation of the sentiment and identity of *cusqueños*. This motley constituency contributed to forging the image of Túpac Amaru as the incarnation of an Andean apostle: a Cusco version of the Catholic Christ who would rekindle the former Andean splendor and vindicate the region's neglected and humiliated population.

In the case of the military, its objective was the revaluation Peru's ancestral national culture, the *Peruanization* of the country through the recognition of Quechua as an official language and the creation of a new public morality – hierarchical and authoritarian – that would sustain and socially legitimize their political and ideological project. The best way to achieve this goal was to stimulate the emotional and visual imagination of the population by employing the virile and brave attributes of the Andean caudillo and, thus, cultivate a profound identification with reformist measures (above all the Agrarian Reform) of a new nationalism through which military reformists intended to re-found the Republic. For its most conspicuous *cusqueño*

adherents, the heroic and iconic figure of Túpac Amaru inspired a “sincere cult.” When conceived in these terms, this was a powerful and magnetic devotion that brought together, in a singular synthesis, the desires and aspirations that nourished the complex collective identity of the population of Cusco. It should also be kept in mind that Cusco society is highly reflective, concerned about understanding the meaning of its traditions and historical inheritances, and interested in identifying its place in the construction of the Peruvian national identity.

Rául Asencio’s notable book provides a detailed reconstruction of the various stages in the checkered trajectory of the popular cult of Túpac Amaru, and of the path that lifted his figure to unsuspected heights in the political and cultural imagination of the period. Moving easily between the examination of large historical processes and the local and regional dynamics that gave life to this religious veneration, the author provides us with a great mural (providing historical detail and scrupulous in his revision of primary sources) of the rapturous admiration which Túpac Amaru evoked during the first years of the more radical version of military reformism. To achieve this goal, Asencio systematically reviewed the local press (*El Comercio* of Cusco, one of the oldest and most respected periodical publications in the region, and *El Sol*, founded by Luis E. Valcárcel and a group of *indigenistas*), sources which have been little studied by contemporary historians despite the enormous wealth of local, national, and international information they contain within their pages. It is in these publications that Asencio found the primary material for his book, thanks to which he was able to explore the daily life of Cusco’s population, the unpleasantness of disputes between groups and factions, and the celebratory spirits that permeated official ceremonies and local events related to the person of Túpac Amaru. Nevertheless, as he himself admits, he did not find anything that would allow him to understand the mentalities of the rural men and women, since the publications he reviewed did not cover the local life of small and extremely poor peasant communities, those located far from urban networks and their vehicles for the transmission of information: places where the Túpac Amaru cult did not achieve the sustained – and sometimes explosive – visibility that it had in the capital of Cusco and in some urban centers that are part of its milieu.

The structure of the book is ambitious and extensive, as the author seeks to explain the reasons that converted the *tupacamarismo* of Cusco during the first half of the 1970s into a true “social phenomenon” with unsuspected political and cultural repercussions. Although admiration for the Andean caudillo existed on a national level, its greatest symbolic power,

its most intensive fervor, and its greatest popularity were to be found in Cusco. Nevertheless, this was a phenomenon that at first grew dramatically and a few years later, no less surprisingly, declined and was displaced to the peripheries of discourses about *cusqueñidad*. The reasons behind this decline are associated with the development and consolidation of other cultural currents (*incatsmo*, the defense of the patrimony, and the touristic vocation of the imperial capital) that allowed for the introduction of new ingredients into the aesthetics and imagination of *cusqueños*. Of course, the coup d'état of 1975, which led to the overthrow of General Velasco – and as a result, the disappearance of the radical current within military discourse – coincided with and nurtured the development of a new social sensibility that led to the practical collapse of *tupacamarismo* in Cusco and in the rest of the country. Asensio notes that the languishing of this fervor and of this transitory sentiment of apotheosis, which had its greatest splendor between 1969 and 1972, should not be interpreted as it having been a forgotten or completed episode, since the *Velasquista* idea of the Andean caudillo persists in currently existing aesthetics and popular images. Túpac Amaru has joined the symbolic pantheon of our great national icons as one of the most well-known precursors of Peruvian independence and, more precisely, as a carrier of a message of rebellion, emancipation, and the defense of the neglected Andean world.

Among the vast information and suggestive lines of analysis that this book provides in its ten chapters, there is one matter – among the many raised by its reading and which probably does not do justice to the great riches to be found in its pages – that especially caught my attention. What is the historical singularity that makes the Cusqueño cult of Túpac Amaru unique and non-transferrable? According to the author, the answer is related to the dual dimension of the phenomenon: the heterogeneous ideological and political backgrounds of the members of the Túpac Amaru “cult community,” each of which was the carrier of discourses and visions that were very dissimilar to the next; and the powerful influence of the Catholicism that permeated the language, narratives, and annual celebrations and provided a mantle of religiosity very similar to that which believers professed for their saints and virgins. In the first case, each of the actors projected their own biases, visions, and interests, converting *tupacamarismo* into a kind of “empty signifier” – as the author himself postulates, using the concept of Ernesto Laclau – in which different layers of meaning can be inserted (the regenerationist discourse of Lima intellectuals and academics, the regional cult promoted by *cusqueñismo neoindianista*, the new visions of scientific archaeology, etc.) and which produces adhesion, rejections, or

indifference depending on who is the emitter in charge of the artistic, literary or discursive message. In the second case, the near-mystic elevation of the Andean caudillo to celestial heights, the hope of a symbolic resurrection, the comparisons of his martyrdom with the Stations of the Cross of Christ, and the devout idealization of followers ever-willing to go on pilgrimages to the places where he lived and to convert the material objects which he used in life into relics, are some of the evidence that demonstrates the singular construction of such a zealous cult. The interweaving of these two components was, without doubt, a source of tensions that intensified conflicts, exacerbated passions, deepened rancor, and opened chasms between various actors who sought greater prominence in the cult. A more theoretical and conceptual analysis of the relationship between ideologies and discourses, communication and reception, orality and textuality, myth and memory would have been desirable to round out the author's central arguments.

A book like this will find readers both in Peru and abroad. Those who are interested in the study of how societies construct and reformulate their past in order to explain their present will find Asensio's analysis a suggestive source of inspiration. For *cusqueños*, although not only for them, *El apóstol de los Andes* will help to identify the avatars that mark the complex construction of their regional identity and provide them with a mirror in which to observe their fascinating recent history. Of course, all of us will find elements in this work to help us rethink and construct a narrative that can help us reflect on our present and enrich our understanding of the great cultural horizons of the future.

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