Description of Colonial Lima, 1748

Note on document: Extracted from *A Voyage to South America* (1748) written by two brothers (Spanish scientists), Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa. Note their detailed descriptions of the different social classes, racial divisions, differences in wealth, manners, and dress. Clearly, much more divided than united people in this Peruvian colonial city. Thanks to Professor Richard Slatta for permission to reproduce this document and introduction from his web site.

The inhabitants of Lima are composed of whites, or Spaniards, Negroes, Indians, Mestizos, and other casts, proceeding from the mixture of all three. The Spanish families are very numerous; Lima according to the lowest computation, containing sixteen or eighteen thousand whites, Among these are reckoned a third or fourth part of the most distinguished nobility of Peru; and many of these dignified with the title of ancient or modern Castilians, among which are no less than 45 counts and marquises. The number of knights belonging to the several military orders is also very considerable. Besides these are many families no less respectable and living in equal splendor; particularly 24 gentlemen of large estates, but without titles, tho' most of them have ancient seats, a proof of the antiquity of their families. One of these traces, with undeniable certainty, his descent from the Incas. The name of this family is Ampuero, so called from one of the Spanish commanders at the conquest of this country, who married a Coya, or daughter of the Inca. To this family the kings of Spain have been pleased to grant several distinguishing honors and privileges, as marks of its great quality: and many of the most eminent families in the city have desired intermarriages with it. All those families live in a manner becoming their rank, having estates equal to their generous dispositions, keeping a great number of slaves and other domestics, and those who affect making the greatest figure, have coaches, while others content themselves with calashes or chaises, which are here so common, that no family of any substance is without one. It must be owned that these carriages are more necessary here than in other cities, on account of the numberless droves of mules which continually pass thro' Lima, and cover the streets with their dung, which being soon dried by the sun and the wind, turns to a nauseous dust, scarce supportable to those who walk on foot. These chaises, which are drawn by a mule, and guided by a driver, have only two wheels, with two seats opposite to each other, so that on occasion they will hold four persons. They are very slight and airy; but on account of the gildings and other decorations, sometimes cost eight hundred or a thousand crowns. The number of them is said to amount to 5 or 6000; and that of coaches is also very considerable, tho' not equal to the former. The funds to support these expenses, which in other parts would ruin families, are their large estates and plantations, civil and military employments or commerce, which is here accounted no derogation to families of the greatest distinction; but by this commerce is not to be understood the buying and selling by retail or in shops, every one trading proportional to his character and substance. Hence families are preserved from those disasters too common in Spain, where titles are frequently found without a fortune capable of supporting their dignity. Commerce is so far from being considered as a disgrace at Lima, that the greatest fortunes have been raised by it; those on the contrary, being rather despised, who not being blessed with a sufficient estate, through indolence, neglect to have recourse to it for improving their fortunes. This custom, or resource, which was established there without any determinate end, being introduced by a vain desire of the first Spaniards to acquire wealth, is now the real support of that splendor in which those families live; and whatever repugnance these military gentlemen
might originally have to commerce. It was immediately removed by a royal proclamation, by
which it was declared that commerce in the Indies should not exclude from nobility or the
military orders; a very wise measure, and of which Spain would be still more sensible, were it
extended to all its dependencies. At Lima, as at Quito, and all Spanish America, some of the
eminent families have been long since settled there, whilst the prosperity of others is of a later
date; for being the center of the whole commerce of Peru, a greater number of Europeans resort
to it, than to any other city; some for trade, and others, from being invested in Spain with
considerable employments; among both are persons of the greatest merit; and tho' many after
they have finished their respective affairs, return home, yet the major part induced by the fertility
of the soil, and goodness of the climate, remain at Lima, and marry young ladies remarkable
equally for the gifts of fortune as those of nature and thus new families are continually settled.
The Negroes, Mulattoes, and their descendants, form the greater number of the inhabitants; and
of these are the greatest part of the mechanics; tho' here the Europeans also follow the same
occupations, which are not at Lima reckoned disgraceful to them, as they are at Quito; for gain
being here the universal passion, the inhabitants pursue it by means of any trade, without regard
to its being followed by Mulattoes; interest here preponderating against any other consideration.
The third, and last class of inhabitants are the Indians and Mestizos, but these are very small in
proportion to the largeness of the city, and the multitudes of the second class. They are employed
in agriculture, in making earthen ware, and bringing all kinds of provisions to market, domestic
services being performed by Negroes and Mulattoes, either slaves or free, though generally by
the former. The usual dress of the men differs very little from that worn in Spain, nor is the
distinction between the several classes very great; for the use of all sorts of cloth being allowed,
every one wears what he can purchase. So that it is not uncommon to see a Mulatto, or any other
mechanic dressed in a tissue, equal to any thing that can be worn by a more opulent person. They
all greatly affect fine clothes, and it may be said without exaggeration, that the finest stuffs made
in countries, where industry is always inventing something new, are more generally seen at Lima
than in any other place; vanity and ostentation not being restrained by custom or law. Thus the
great quantities brought in the galleons and register ships notwithstanding they sell here
prodigiously above their prime cost in Europe, the richest of them are used as cloths, and worn
with a carelessness little suitable to their extravagant price; but in this article the men are greatly
exceeded by the women, whose passion for dress is such as to deserve a more particular account.
In the choice of laces, the women carry their taste to a prodigious excess; nor is this an emulation
confined to persons of quality, but has spread thro' all ranks, except the lowest class of Negroes.
The laces are sewed to their linen, which is of the finest sort, though very little of it is seen, the
greatest part of it, especially in some dresses, being always covered with lace; so that the little
which appears seems rather for ornament than use. These laces too must be all of Flanders
manufacture, no woman of rank condescending to look on any other. Their dress is very different
from the European, which the custom of the country alone can render excusable; indeed to
Spaniards at their first coming over it appears extremely indecent. Their dress consists of a pair
of shoes, a shift, a petticoat of dimity, an open petticoat, and a jacket, which in summer, is of
linen, in winter of stuff. To this some add a mantellette, that the former may hang loose. The
difference between this dress and that worn at Quito, though consisting of the same pieces is, that
at Lima it is much shorter, the petticoat which is usually tied below the waist, not reaching lower
than the calf of the leg, from whence, nearly to the ankle, hangs a border of very fine lace, sewed
to the bottom of the under petticoat; through which the ends of their garters are discovered,
embroidered with gold or silver, and sometimes set with pearls; but the latter is not common. The
upper petticoat, which is of velvet, or some rich stuff, is fringed all round, and not less crowded with ornaments, than those described in the first volume of this work. But be the ornaments what they will, whether of fringe, lace, or ribbons, they are always exquisitely fine. The shift's sleeves, which are a yard and a half in length, and two yards in width, when worn for ornament, are covered with rolls of laces, variegated in such a manner as to render the whole truly elegant. Over the shift is worn the jacket, the sleeves of which are excessively large, of a circular figure, and consist of rows of lace, or slips of cambric or lawn, with lace disposed betwixt each, as are also the shift sleeves, even of those who do not affect extraordinary ornament. The body of the jacket is tied on the shoulders with ribbands fastened to the back of their stays; and the round sleeves of it being tucked up to the shoulders, are so disposed together with those of the shift, as to form what may be term'd four wings. If the jacket be not buttoned or clasped before, it is agreeably fastened on the shoulders; and indeed the whole dress makes a most elegant figure. They who use a close vest, fasten it with clasps, but wear over it the loose jacket, already described. In the summer they have a kind of veil, the stuff and fashion of which is like that of the shift and body of the vest, of the finest cambric or lawn, richly laced: But in winter the veil worn in their houses is of baize; when they go abroad full dressed, it is adorned like the sleeves. They also use brown baize, finely laced and fringed, and bordered with slips of black velvet. Over the petticoat is an apron of the same stuff as the sleeves of the jacket, hanging down to the bottom of it. From hence some idea may be formed of the expense of a dress, where the much greater part of the stuff is merely for ornament; nor will it appear strange that the marriage shift should cost a thousand crowns, and sometimes more. One particular on which the women here extremely value themselves, is the size of their feet, a small foot being esteemed one of the chief beauties; and this is the principal fault they find with the Spanish ladies, who have much larger feet than those of Lima. From their infancy they are accustomed to wear straight shoes, that their feet may not grow beyond the size of which they esteem beautiful; some of them do not exceed five inches and a half, or six inches in length, and in women of a small stature they are still less. Their shoes have little or no sole, one piece of Cordovan serving both for that and the upper leather, and of an equal breadth and roundness at the toe and heel, so as to form a sort of long figure of eight; but the foot not complying with this figure, brings it to a greater regularity. These shoes are always fastened with diamond buckles, or something very brilliant in proportion to the ability of the wearer, being worn less for use than ornament; for the shoes are made in such a manner that they never loosen of themselves, nor do the buckles hinder their being taken off. It is unusual to set these buckles with pearls, a particular to be accounted for, only from their being so lavish of them in the other ornaments of dress, as to consider them as of too little value. The shoemakers, who are no strangers to the foible of the sex take great care to make them in a manner very little calculated for service. The usual price is three half crowns a pair, those embroidered with gold or silver cost from eight to ten crowns. The latter, however, are but little worn, the encumbrance of embroidery being suited rather to enlarge than diminish the appearance of a small foot. They are fond of white silk stockings, made extremely thin, that the leg may appear the more shapely; the greatest part of which is exposed to view. These trifles often afford very sprightly sallies of wit in their animadversions on the dress of others. Hitherto we have considered only the more common dress of these ladies; the reader will conceive a still higher idea of their magnificence, when he is informed of the ornaments with which they are decorated in their visits, and upon public occasions. We shall begin with their manner of dressing the hair, which being naturally black, and capable of reaching below their waists, they dispose in such a manner as to appear perfectly graceful. They tie it up behind in six braided locks, through
which a golden bodkin a little bent is inserted, and having a cluster of diamonds at each end. On this the locks are suspended so as to touch the shoulder. On the front and upper part of the head they wear diamond egrets, and the hair is formed into little curls, hanging from the forehead to the middle of the ear, with a large black patch of velvet on each temple. Their earrings are of brilliants, intermixed with tuffs of black silk, covered with pearls, resembling those already described in the first volume. These are so common an ornament, that besides their necklaces, they also wear about their necks rosaries, the beads of which are of pearls, either separate or set in clusters to the size of a large filbert; and those which form the cross are still larger. Besides diamond rings, necklaces, girdles, and bracelets, all very curious both with regard to water and size, many ladies wear other jewels set in gold, or for singularity sake, in tombac [an alloy consisting essentially of copper and zinc]. Lastly, from their girdle before is suspended a large round jewel enriched with diamonds; much more superb than their bracelets, or other ornaments. A lady covered with the most expensive lace instead of linen, and glittering from head to foot with jewels, is supposed to be dressed at the expense of not less than thirty or forty thousand crowns. A splendor still the more astonishing, as it is so very common. A fondness for expense in these people, does not confine itself to rich apparel; it appears no less in the strange neglect, and the small value they seem to set upon them, by wearing them in a manner the most careless, and by that means bringing upon themselves fresh expenses in repairing the old or purchasing new jewels; especially pearls on account of their fragility. The most common of the two kinds of dresses worn when they go abroad, is the veil and long petticoat; the other is a round petticoat and mantelet. The former for church, the latter for taking the air, and diversions; but both in the prevailing taste for expense, being richly embroidered with silver or gold. The long petticoat is particularly worn on holy Thursday; as on that day they visit the churches, attended by two or three female Negro or mulatto slaves, dressed in an uniform like pages.