

Wednesday, September 11 – Huacarpay lagoons for birds, Cusco Cathedral and Musician

Today we are up and out early for birding in the Huacarpay wetlands south of Cusco. Marta's bountiful and delicious breakfasts continue to fortify us every day.



We drive out of town and take in the city scenes outside the tourist area, but not in the slums. Just ordinary, everyday Cusco for the ordinary everyday Peruvians. It seems "disorganized" or "messy", but there is no trash on the streets.



Once we are at Huacarpay we make a large, wide circle around a good-sized lagoon. Much more of a lake than the small ponds we visited on Monday, with meadow or marshland all around. Lots of birds and interesting ruins from the Wari civilization that are thought to be from the 10th century CE. Thought not as "fine" at building as the Inca and the Tiwanaku before them, they did amazing things with walls that run for miles.



The road around the big lagoon is nicely paved, but very rural . . . cars, trucks, people and livestock all share the road.



Doris and Ann "scoping" the lake and marsh.



We see lots of water birds, two beautiful hawks and a kestrel. We get an especially good view of a Variable Hawk, so called because of the wide variety of color morphs, like the Red-tailed Hawk in the US, and about the same size. Some common moorhens up close to us, many ducks and other birds at a distance. The most beautiful is a Little Blue Heron, quite different from our big blues which have lots of gray. This one is solid slate blue, but about the size of a small pheasant, nowhere near the size of the “bigs”. We also see a couple of hummingbirds, some doves and some interesting ground birds too.



*above: Little Blue Heron
left: Common Moorhens*

But then Doris’ spotting scope breaks and that ends the birding for the day. She thinks it is fixable, but even though both she and Ed give it a shot, it isn’t a simple fix that could be done with only a Swiss Army knife as a tool. If she can’t repair or replace it we will be in a pile of hurt when we head for the Amazon in a couple of days.

So it’s back to Cusco, and we ask to be dropped off at the Plaza Mayor. We’ll spend the afternoon exploring on our own. The Plaza is beautiful as always, and there is something going on. There are several motorcycle police, all women, and we’re not sure what it’s about. They occasionally make a stop, but it all seems friendly enough, no gunfire, no riot gear, so we just ignore it. Of course our first stop is the tamale lady for a “hold off” until lunch. Breakfast was six hours ago, but one until three is lunch time in Peru.



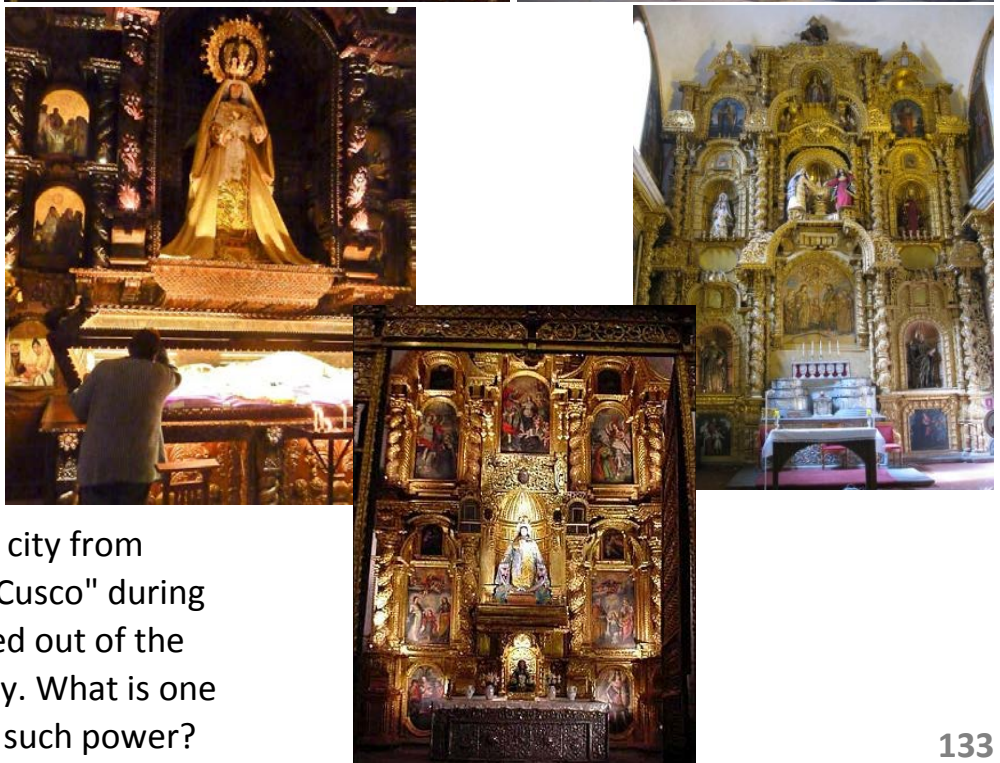


Then back to the Cusco Cathedral. Ann just has to see more of those saints all clothed in resplendent garments with solid gold crowns and real hair. The cathedral has about 20 small side chapels and 2 very large ones (each as large as many Churches in the US), all with huge gold or silver altars, paintings, statues, etc, etc. We aren't allowed to photograph, so for this section we pull some photos off the internet. Every area of the cathedral is more spectacular than the last, with gold and silver everywhere. Glorious excess!



Ann also lights an electric candle for Tara and family. Just insert one sol and "bingo" a candle turns on, but we're not sure for how long.

Ann lights it in honor of Our Lord of Earthquakes. He is somehow both Jesus and a saint who protects the city from earthquakes. He has "saved Cusco" during earthquakes by being paraded out of the Cathedral and around the city. What is one more miracle to a deity with such power?



He is portrayed as Christ crucified with dark skin. Originally white-skinned; over time the figure has been stained by the candle smoke to a very dark brown hue, almost black (as mentioned, the “candles” have now been converted to electric). He wears a guara (a loincloth, but longer like a skirt) embroidered in solid gold and his crown of thorns is solid gold with diamonds. Each year important Cusco companies bid for the honor of supplying the guara for the figure. This year, the honor was won by PeruRail, so the PeruRail logo is large, front and center on the guara. “Jesus prefers travel by PeruRail” . . . ???



And the restoration of the Cathedral is being funded by the Peruvian national telephone company. We really expect, when in the chapel of The Holy Family, to see Joseph handing Mary a cell phone, captioned, “Here, Dear, this one is for you.” But no, there is really no evidence showing that they are the \$ behind the project.



We have lunch at the Inca Grill on the main plaza. We walk past a McDonald’s to get there, and it is a difficult decision, but Inca Grill wins out over Mickey D’s. Of course, we order causa for a starter; and it was



just like the one we prepared yesterday at our class, but with shrimp. It’s good but we decide that ours was tastier.



Ed has Aji de Gallina, a traditional Peruvian chicken and rice dish and Ann has a pesto and veggie pizza, but with stinky cheese. She puts salsa de racotto on it, very hot



pepper sauce and almost takes it over the top heat-wise. Big servings, Ann has ½ left over to take away.



After the Cathedral, which was Ed's indulgence to Ann, she indulges him by going to the Cusco Natural History Museum. It's really just a few large rooms with badly mounted birds and animals . . . apparently decent taxidermists are scarce here. But many of the birds are those we might see east of the Andes, as we head down into the Amazon and while we are there. We are anxious for the next part of our trip . . . starting in just a couple of days now. It will be different, we hope in a positive way, as another couple will be joining us.

Then "home" to our apartment, we have a visitor

coming at 4:00 and want to be sure we are there on time. Doris has arranged for a visit from a friend of hers, Tito León. He is a city planner by day, a musician by night and collects native Peruvian musical



This is so wonderful that we have separate pages following "today's pages" to describe it all.

we are so out of touch in Peru, not necessarily a bad thing, just frustrating at times. The only TV stations in English are CNN and reruns of several very old US TV programs subtitled in Spanish. Trying to get the news from CNN International is impossible. We remember, almost as an afterthought the anniversary of 9/11. It seems all that CNN wants to talk about is the President's message on Syria. So after a bit of reading and huddling around the heater,



we tuck into leftovers, soup and pizza, Ed eating some of the cheese we purchased at the market, and Avocados for sure. Here is one of our larger ones.

All is good, albeit cold in the apartment. Ann needs to shower and wash her hair tomorrow morning and she's dreading it. Tomorrow is a "free day", as is Friday. We won't see Doris again until early Saturday morning when we leave for the eastern slope of the Andes and the Amazon.

Tito León, Musician and Collector

At four in the afternoon, Tito León, a local architect and city planner whose avocation is Andean music, arrives. He is a friend of Doris's and when she first suggested that he visit us to show his collection of antique instruments and talk to us about Peruvian music our attitude was a bit of "hmmm, not sure about that one . . . oh well, why not" rather than enthusiasm. But we are really happy we took her up on it; what a collection he has and can he play and sing. We are swept away by this musical afternoon. But Ann takes notes on it all or we would never have been able to recall everything we saw and heard.



Many of the instruments he has are actually very old, but most are reproductions from museum pieces. He has been allowed to handle, measure and photograph them in various museums and then has professional instrument makers duplicate them as closely as possible. It's likely his copies sound better than the originals would if played today. His collection ranges from instruments circa 7,000 BCE through recent times, and he brings perhaps 60-75 instruments (only part of his collection) to show us, and plays many of them for us.



He first takes us back to the simplest instruments, various ocarinas, from tiny to mid size. These are both instruments and works of art as most are

beautifully decorated. They play lovely, simple music. He shows us other wind instruments too, including simple sea shells. The variety of notes he can get from such simple instruments is astounding.





There is even a strange ocarina-drum combination.



Then we move on to various qenas (flutes). These are made from a variety of materials: clay, bamboo, gourds, producing a vast register of sound primarily based on the shape and length of the instrument. They are played like a piccolo or in some cases like a flute.

Then he shows us an odd “instrument”. It is a large, hollow jar-like piece of pottery made from clay. It has openings on the sides for his arms to go through and one smaller opening in “front” for a flute to go through. To play this strange combination he puts a flute through the small opening and his arms through the others to finger the flute. This “thing” produces the strangest, most mellow sounds.



He then demonstrates the instrument we have become most familiar with here, the pipes or antara. Since these are easier to play than the quena, they are more frequently used and have become a “brand” for Peruvian music. We often see men in traditional dress playing them, at restaurants, train stations, etc.

There are many sizes, shapes and materials used to make these, even large bird feathers (traditionally pelican or condor).



Then Tito plays the waca-waca, whose name is a derivation of vaca, as it is curled instrument made from about 16 cow horns joined together in sequence to make a long spiral. Again he is able to produce remarkably varied tones from it, using lung power, a varied embouchure and a few holes on the bottom of the instrument. Sounds like a trombone or bass . . . or perhaps the Jewish shofar (although that is traditionally made of Ram's horn).



Next is percussion. Lots of chachas or hanging rattles made from hooves and seeds. Then drums from both clay and wood and bark with skin covers. He then works a chacha strapped to his knee, drums and plays the pipes all at once. And there you have an Andean "one man band". It reminds us of an "economy" wedding in the US where you hire an accordion player with a sideman. Except that in this case, Tito's music is enchanting.

Our favorites are the stringed instruments made after the Spanish conquest. The Indians took the Spanish mandolins and guitars and made them into the very special pachajahaki, or centipede.





It has either 16 or 20 strings, arranged in groups of four over the fret board, with three out of four of the series having strings tuned an octave higher than the others in that series. It works like playing

chords rather than individual notes. So when you play, you create a minor symphony just by strumming, and even more variety with some plucking. The sound transported us. We are surprised that this instrument hasn't been "picked up" by the musical world outside Peru. The sound is so amazing and unique, it sounds like several guitars being played at once.

He has many other strings - a 10-string banjo-like instrument, one made from an armadillo shell, a harp-like instrument that makes beautiful music and others.



Ann's favorite is "the frog", a stone frog with grooves on its back that is rubbed with a hard stick.



Amazing the variety of sounds such a simple thing can make. She subsequently tries to find one to take home to her great-nephew, John (11 years old), who is very interested in music and instruments, but we never do find one.

For his finale, Tito plays contemporary Peruvian music from the Andes and from the Coast that would have featured the box, a percussion instrument from the blacks, who are 10% of the population of Peru and live in rather isolated communities north and south of Lima. He has a wonderful voice, as well as being able to play all of these instruments, but for this he uses a plain, ordinary guitar. He was with us for over 3 hours and we enjoyed every minute of it. As well as being a musician of amazing versatility, he is a good conversationalist in English and quite personable. We hated to see him leave. This was one of the most enjoyable and memorable parts of our trip and we are both so glad we took Doris' suggestion to meet him.



Fortunately, we are able to purchase several disks he had made with his musician friends. He sometimes plays with the group or alone in small concerts or local clubs. It's too bad we won't be able to see him in such a venue. Ann would have recorded our private session, but she is sans iPhone on this trip.

And it's clear to us that he truly loves what he does with instruments and music!