

'Of the Rich and famous Mountain of Potosí and of its *grandezas*' and 'Of the Imperial Villa of Santiago de Potosí' (c.1613)

Fray Martín de Murúa

Selections from Martín de Murúa's *Historia General del Perú*, 1616 (Getty Manuscript, published in facsimile), ff.379r-383v.

Translation draft by Kris Lane 3 Aug. 2018

Martin de Murúa, a Mercedarian friar, ends his massive unpublished history of the Incas with two chapters on Potosí, one treating the mountain and the other the city. It is clear that he saved Potosí for last, as it comes after descriptions of almost every other major town or city in Peru, including the 'ill-fated' Arequipa of recent disaster (the eruption of Huaynaputina Volcano in 1600). All that comes after Potosí is Murúa's table of contents. An earlier version of this manuscript dated 1590 but actually compiled in 1596 includes a briefer overall description of Potosí but does include a full explanation of the iconic image of the Cerro Rico flanked by the Pillars of Hercules and overseen by an Inca (This is the Seán Galvin ms. also published in facsimile by the Getty Research Institute).

Chapter 30: 'Of the Rich and famous Mountain of Potosí and of its *grandezas*'

Without surpassing or exceeding the limits of truth I can affirm that this Imperial Villa of Potosí, of whom [sic] this chapter shall treat, is the richest, most opulent, and most renowned of any known on the entire planet [*orbe*], and the one to yield the most rents to its king, and more silver has gone out from it alone than from all the others in the world put together, and one could even say that it enriches all of Europe, Asia, and Africa, because whatever is superfluous in Spain is distributed to all the remaining provinces, and it is well known that the Cerro of Potosí swells Spain annually with the silver bars it sends out.

Some refer to the year of 1540, more or less, or of [15]43 according to others, [as when] this famous deposit [*mineral*] was discovered in the following way: Hernando Pizarro, brother of the Marquis don Francisco Pizarro, who lived for so many years imprisoned in the tower of Medina del Campo, was at the site of Porco, seven leagues from Potosí, with many Spaniards, working those very rich mines (which had they not struck water would be the most prosperous in the kingdom). And from there, having need of food, he sent one of his yanacunas to buy maize in Chuquisaca, and this Indian along with another yanacuna belonging to one Diego Mateos, whom they called The Rich, with a few llamas they set out, and spending one night next to this mountain of Potosí, they slept alongside in what is today the parish of San Benito, because all that is inhabited now was then marsh [*senegal*], and some of the llamas brought by one of them having gotten loose he went climbing up the mountain. It was full of groves of quíñua, little Peruvian [*Polylepis*] trees found in the puna, and one of these Indians went to catch the llamas so as to load them, and as he found some missing, one went off to search for them among the quíñua groves until he arrived at the vein and mine they call 'Of Tin,' where he found his llama, and taking notice of the signs, he being an Indian who had worked with ores, he took a little and carried it to his companion and showed it to him, and once back in Porco and having milled a bit

of the ore they had carried, they smelted it with a wind furnace and extracted much silver from it, and the Spaniards having news of it, they went to reconnoiter the mountain and to sink test diggings in order to assay its ores, and upon reaching the measure of their desire [*y acudiendo a la medida de su deseo*], they began to populate a site, and later in a different spot, the Villa, which is where there had been the marsh, and it went on growing such that there are in it today as many Spaniards as in the greatest city of the kingdom, and more than in [the city of] Los Reyes [Lima].

The mountain stands alone, without having any other around it that is attached to it. It is rounded and in the shape of a sugarloaf, with one part of it facing east and the other toward the north. On this part they found the first veins and the most principal ones, and they were five: that of Tin, the Veta Rica, la de Muiza [sic, Muñiza], that of Mendieta, and that of Sozo. From these veins there go out huge branches that have crossed the entire mountain, and run from north to south, and such is its greatness [*grandeza*] that all the earth and rocks, loose and fixed, that are found on it, above and below and in the Villa itself, wherever they may be, have contain some silver. And one may gain from the principal veins. As I have said there come out infinite trails and paths of silver [*caminos y veredas de plata*] with different names corresponding to their discoverers and even today they discover more, some of the names of which may be put down, although not all of them, because they are innumerable and one may count in one vein thirty-five adits and diverse names. From the Veta Rica there go out those of Centeno, the King's Adit [Socabón del Rey], Chinchilla, Antona, that of Berrío, Our Lady of Grace, St. Barbara the Upper, Holy Spirit, and many others that they work from the King's Adit and from that of Centeno and the rest. From the Muñiza vein: the adit of Juan Ortiz Lobato Polo, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Christopher, Our Lady of the Remedies, Pancorbo, and many others. From that of Mendieta and Sozo there go out those of the Flemings, Patero Sozo, the Blind Men - Lower and Upper, Çibincos, The Clean, All Souls, St. Anthony, St. Francis, Purgatory, and many others toward midday [directional]. From the Tin Vein there go out St. John, La Pedrera, the Mondragón adit, St. John of the Tin, St. Barbara, the Millstones [*las amoladeras*], and many others. Toward the western part there is attached to this great mountain another, about a quarter of its size, which comes out of it like a woman's teat, coming right out of it without division, which the Indians call Huaina Potosí, which means Potosí, Jr. It is toward the north and has many veins of silver, and if you are not looking from the town you would not see it, as there is, as I have said, no division.

The color of the mountain is dark leonine, and from foot to summit it is a long league of climbing, and at the base it is three long leagues around.

The veins are at 200 statures' [depth], some more or less, according to their type. They went along following the richness and those that are two-thirds of the way down give over to 'little black' ores [*metales negrillos*], and also those that fall from the west and from the south and many that are toward the east, and none have hit water up until today, which has been the origin and cause by which they have been followed and sustained, and if fortune had been ordained that they hit upon how to refine the negrillo ores, and from them could be taken the greatest richness of silver that they have hidden [*que tienen abscondida*]. It is beyond doubt that just by taking them out of Potosí the rents will exceed those of all Europe, but God's Majesty has not wanted it to be discovered in order to reprimand the arrogance of the Spanish and to place a limit on the insatiable thirst for money they have, and which has grown with the rise of silver. The nearest

mountains to this one are those of Cari-Cari, about a league away, on the other side of the lakes [i.e., reservoirs], toward the east, with silver veins that some work. The mountain of Guari-Guari is five leagues away, with silver and copper veins that are worked. Andacahua is at three leagues, another mountain with many negrilla ores. That of Hachachiri, at two leagues, with the same ores, and that of Tullosi, likewise abundant in negrillos. And that of Masnisa, at nine leagues, and that of Strongbox [Caja], and many others full of rich deposits, should they be refined.

The name of this mountain, the most illustrious of any in the world, in past times was Potoche, and today the old Indians keep it, the Spaniards corrupting the pronunciation by calling it Potossí. They have to pass through the adits that are now there, more than 2,000 [workers], and entering into them a man must go with a tallow candle in hand along the ladders made of cowhide through such different parts and places so dark and gloomy that even the most experienced [*cursados*] lose their bearings [*el tino*] and get lost, and there are some narrows such that a man on his belly can barely squeeze through. In sum, in the mine what goes on is a portrait of hell in darkness and confusion, and so it appears to all those who go about in it. Roses and flowers to barter for silver [unclear what the author means here, unless it is to contrast the lives of mine overseers with native mineworkers], the mine overseers [*mineros*] who go about in the working of these adits, they being the servants of the mine owners. They would be above 700, all of them gaining tremendous salaries. There ordinarily work in the mines above 12,000 Indians, 8,000 of them crowbar-men [*barreteros*] and the rest called *apires*, which are those who carry the ores. They expend each day in the mountain more than 1,500 pesos' worth of tallow candles, not counting those used up in the town and mills.

The mountain has a chapel dedicated to the seraphic father St. Francis, with the richest ornaments and paraphernalia of silver, in the same which every Thursday mass is said, and in order to hear it there gather the mine overseers and infinite Indians, because on Sundays and Saturdays in the afternoon they go down from the mountain into the Villa, and it is by that road that cannot hold all the people that they take up to the mountain all the gifts that could be eaten in the most abundant cities of Europe, the old and young Indian women, and they do not want money for them but rather ores to barter so as to exchange them below, and thus they are there provided with what is necessary all week. Llamas go up and down, loaded with ore for the mills, such that they are not lacking at any hour of the day.

Your Majesty has on this mountain a mine magistrate [*alcalde mayor de minas*] and three inspectors [*veedores*] who look after reviewing the adits and to resolve the differences that result from the workings between mine overseers when they occur. In order to look after and care for and favor the Indians there is a general advocate [*protector general*] and a [public] defender and a rations inspector [*contador de granos*]. Now we have said something touching upon the mountain, so it would be well to go down to the villa to treat of its extraordinary features [*grandezas*].

chapter 31: of the Imperial Villa of Santiago de Potossí

This famous and most rich villa is painted with an imperial eagle with a crown on its head, and as I understand it these arms were given by the most invincible emperor don Charles V, plus his two columns. The construction of it [i.e., the city] is commonly neither polished nor worked with

expense, because those who live in it only keep their eyes on taking out silver and more silver and going to spend it in other places in this kingdom with better climate and to their liking, and thus they take little care to edify [*curan poco de edificar*], and only the churches are of expensive fabrication. The climate of this villa is harsh and uncomfortable, especially in the months when there come some extremely powerful winds that they call *tomahavis* that carry away houses. This villa does not produce any local product other than silver, but even so it does not lack a single thing necessary to human life. Because at seven, ten, twelve, and twenty leagues [distance] it has extremely fertile valleys that provide it with flour, maize, barley, and all manner of local and Spanish fruits that one may desire, and it has them all year without ever experiencing a lack, and the ravines and stands [of trees] sustain it with charcoal. There are salt springs at nine leagues [distance] that swell it with a supply of salt.

It has seven lakes made by hand and with artifice of the Spaniards that power the mills, because the rains in Potosí last only three or four months. There are nearby, at a little more than two leagues [distance] stone for milling, most necessary in order to break up the iron and make it into flour, with which they refine the ores.

The main church is of medium size, although it ought to be larger given the people who surround the villa, but it is most rich in costly ornaments. The lamp that burns before the most holy sacrament contains 420 marks of silver, and two others, one of Our Lady of the Conception and the other of the sacrament contain 100 marks, and the chapel of St. Ann they adorn with three lamps of 80 marks a piece, and that of All Souls and St. Crispin at another 80 [marks a piece]. And this church is continually served by more than thirty clergymen [*sacerdotes*], not counting the priests [*curas*] and sextons, and the vicar, all enjoying very rich emoluments and perquisites. There is also good music with instruments, and everything required for the divine cult. It is abundant what they have in order to 'illustrate' more than five convents of religious: Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and of Our Lady of Mercies, where there is a most devout image that performs countless miracles, plus the Company of Jesus, all with lovely ornaments. And everything that one might wish to request in order to be well served, and in them [there are] famous preachers and most observant religious who sustain the villa and who are walls against the power of Satan who seeks to extend [his power] there more each day.

The villa is named for St. James, and its patrons and principal advocates are the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, Our Lady, and the great doctor of the church, St. Augustine, and St. Barbara. The hospital may well be the richest in the entire world as its rents surpass 40,000 pesos, all which are spent in it each year, not counting alms, and thus it is very well served by all the ministers there are in it. And the head physician is always of the most experienced in the kingdom, and the sick are there cured with much love and generosity, and no one who may be poor would leave there naked, as the alms that come in from charitable persons are so great that they could be dressed in silver and gold.

There are fourteen Indian parishes surrounding the villa which are: Our Lady of Las Carangas, St. Bernard, St. Martin, Our Lady of Copacabana, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, St. Sebastian, The Conception, St. Francis, St. Christopher, St. James, St. Barbara, St. Benedict, and another church of St. Lazarus. These parish churches are very well adorned with rich ornaments and silver lamps, [with] many religious brotherhoods very well served, and the priests have a salary of 800

assayed pesos paid by the royal treasury not counting their 'altar bonus' [*pie de altar*] which in some reaches three or four thousand pesos, and thus these benefices are highly esteemed and sought after.

There resides in this villa a corregidor with a salary of 4,000 assayed pesos, and he always tends to be a knight of some habit, of great valor and brio, which is good to have for the people who are in it, because it must be the climate that flows in over that villa and its district such that when a poor and luckless man of a cowardly nature enters into it, on the instant he sets foot there his thoughts are raised such that he does not value silver, nor does he make savings with it, and it seems to him useful only for fighting with a battalion of armed men. It has its town councilors [*alcaldes ordinarios*] and aldermen [*regidores*] and a food monopoly overseer and general inspector [*fiel executor*] whose office was sold for 60,000 assayed pesos, plus the ensign office [*alferazgo*] of the villa in another 60,000, and the staff of head bailiff who oversees sixteen others below, in 125,000 Castilian ducats.

The royal treasury building is the main one in the Villa, where there live His Majesty's factor, treasurer, and accountant, who have salaries of 3,000 assayed pesos each. This building has inside it the storehouse for mercury where they collect the 6,000 hundredweight that they expend each year. There is also the smeltery and assayer's office. It is public knowledge that they smelt in it each year above 20,000 bars that come out at 80 marks each, from which is paid to His Majesty the fifth, and it is understood that the sales taxes [*alcabalas*], mercury [sales], and royal duties add up each year to three million [pesos], which is a rent that many kings of Christendom do not have for their entire kingdoms, whereas the Catholic king of Spain gets this from only one villa.

There is a mint building that is the only one now in Peru, where on the part of the king and private persons they make each year more than a million and a half [pesos] in reales. It has a treasurer whose office was sold for 60,000 assayed pesos, and it yields in benefits each year from six to eight thousand pesos. There is a scribe for entries, a senior and junior inspector and keeper of dies, four cutting shop overseers, one assayer, four die cutters, and twenty blacks belonging to the king, minus other persons who serve there, and all with very elevated salaries, and through its door one sees nothing else but entering pinecones [silver ingots] and taking out the most beautiful bars.

There are in the Villa of Potosí - along with Tarapaya, which is two leagues from it with a river and lake alongside it, and in Tabaconuño [behind the Cerro Rico] - [a total of] 158 'mill heads' [*cabezas de ingenio*] using the water they bring from the lakes I have mentioned, plus eighteen horse-powered mills. Each water-powered 'head' mills in a year more than 30,000 hundredweight of ore. And in each mill there go along occupied with the milling, sifting, spreading, and firing of muds and slimes fifty Indians by day, and thirty by night in each mill. For its operation there is a carpenter, a master refiner, an assistant, and a head majordomo. Each [mill] 'head' has eight posts [*mazos*] with eight stamps [*almadanetas*] that weigh five *arrobas* [c.125 lbs.], not counting infinite equipment that would take forever to describe.

The Indians distributed by decrees of His Majesty are 14,800, which cannot ever be short [of this number], and in order to supply these there have to attend to the labor 44,400 over the course of

a year. And these go from all the provinces from 150 leagues around to the labor according to what befalls them, and so many Indians are needed because they work day and night, [and] in the adits it is always night. That which they pay to the redistributed Indians who work in the mountain is four reals, and to those who are rented out according to their own will, who are infinite, and called *mincas* [sic, *mingas*], if they are ore carriers [*apires*] they give them a peso, and if crowbar men [*barreteros*] a peso and a half, which is twelve reals a day, and if one obligated Indian hires another for a week he gives him nine pesos, and last: the day wage that a Spaniard must pay, likewise in the mills, by order of His Majesty, is three-and-a-half reals per Indian, and for those who rent themselves out, six reals, and for those who toss ore into the mill basins at a peso. And there are a thousand more differences in pay. If by chance an Indian should die due to the carelessness of a Spaniard who has charge of him, he pays a standard bar of 250 pesos and now they also add a half-year of exile. There have to be in Potosí ordinarily residents and inhabitants who work by decree or who rent themselves out who enter and leave with food, firewood, charcoal, straw, and other things. More than 80,000 Indian men and more than 250,000 [probably means 25,000] women, plus more than 50,000 children. There must be up to 8,000 Spanish and mestizo men and more than 3,000 Spanish women. [There are] more than 4,000 black men and women, [plus] many stores of Spanish clothing and many more of local [colonial] cloth, shopkeepers and hawkers [*regatones*]. There are fifty tradesmen of all trades: shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, locksmiths, silversmiths, and bakers, all uncountable, and all gain and all get rich and it is certain that if they kept what they earned they could - all those to whom I have referred - found within a very few years the greatest entails. But as I have said, here silver enters the house and leaves with the same ease, [and] there grow there the notions of devaluing the silver, spending it and wasting it without order, so much so that some wager and spend in an afternoon everything they have earned in a year, and they leave contented and without any sign of feeling it.

They slaughter in Potosí each week 250 cows, and more than 500 llamas, not counting Castilian sheep, which are infinite. Wine [consumption] goes up to 90,000 jugs a year, and as for flour, maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, chuño, vegetables, and fruits there is no mathematician who could count it all. Of firewood they go beyond 500,000 pesos' worth a year, and charcoal, 300,000. And in the transport of ores they consume each year more than 30,000 llamas. And of boards and wood to outfit the mills they expend 30,000 pesos. To conclude with what is spent here, many longtime residents of the villa assured me that they spent last Easter more than 100,000 assayed pesos on marzipan, sugars, sweets, conserves, delicacies, wines, banquets and suppers, and there is not even a week in which more than 20,000 [pesos' worth is consumed] of chicha alone. And it is worth to the Indians who go about collecting in the streets and corrals the excrement of men and animals each year more than 30,000 pesos, which seems an incredible thing to anyone who has not been in that villa. And it also appears that the water fountain they call 'of Castile' because it is sweet and flavorful and most healthy, the same which is in the stone paved section of town [*el empedradillo*] and has four waterspouts [*caños de agua*] cost in bringing it from outside town and constructing it, more than a million [pesos]. This paved area is next to the main church, and it was the first section paved, and it encompasses the whole side of the square upwards, and to a corner which falls into Merchants' Street on one side and on the other the little plaza of the hospital and the [indigenous women's] fruit market, and it is full of confectioners' tents. It has been the theater and center where ire has ordinarily had its throne and seat, since it is the place of greatest concourse in Potosí, and there take place the challenges,

quarrels, stabbings, injuries, bludgeoning, confrontations, and deaths, and it is almost taken for a proverb in Peru to call anyone who is valiant and brave a 'soldier of the pavement' [*soldado del empedradillo*].

Aside from the main squares which are three there are twenty-nine other smaller plazas where all day they sell every manner of things that human necessity might request and despite Potosí being eighty leagues from the sea it is provided with so much fish that some is left over, and sometimes even fresh, as if one were no more than one or two leagues [from the sea]. There are in this Villa extremely rich men who walk about midweek in a suit of brown broadcloth as if they had no other to put on, because that is their style, and entering into their houses one finds them piled high with silver bars, and there is a mine owner who pays out in salaries, only to his servants [*criados*] more than eight thousand assayed [pesos]. There are also extremely poor men who lost out for inability to manage things or from gambling away their estates, or for not wanting to work, but in the end none die from hunger, and all told there is much good in this villa, and much almsgiving, and pious and charitable works that are done. Because they give each year in alms more than 100,000 pesos, [but there is also] much evil, from evil deeds they do in loan sharking, usury, and shady dealings, born of greed, root of all evils.

And concluding on the extraordinary features [*grandezas*] of this imperial, illustrious, and famous villa, about which news has spread to all the world: the Virgin, she without blemish, advocate for sinners, has made certain that this villa not lack her blessings and intercessions, because there are images of her that have shone forth with famous miracles: that of Our Lady of Mercy who in the mountain has brought out Indians upon whom a mine had collapsed, it being impossible to save or extract them; And that of Copacabana has done this another two or three times. And Our Lady of Guadalupe likewise, and the Virgin of the Rosary who has performed many miracles in the villa, and that of the Immaculate Conception, and that of La Piedad which is in the same convent of Our Lady of Mercy who has done two most verifiable ones [*dos patentisimos*]; and thus they are six, the images that are held in highest veneration, and they have taken testimonies of them to glorify the Virgin, who in all the world grants favors and mercies to those who entrust themselves to her with all their heart, and to these Indians, as weak and miserable souls, she goes each day demonstrating how much she loves them and cares for them so that they may also confirm themselves in the living faith of her one and only son, Jesus Christ, creator and redeemer of men, and to forget their errors, sins, and superstitions, in which for so many centuries their ancestors lived and died, and the Devil will be finished, and will have to lose his dominion and lordship that he enjoyed before the Catholic Kings of Spain sent their preachers and ministers to convert such a number of souls as were being lost.

And with this there ends and finishes this general history and genealogy of the Inca kings, formerly of these kingdoms of Peru, and of their rites and ceremonies, and particularities of their cities, in honor of the Omnipotent God, creator of all things visible and invisible, and of Jesus Christ, true god and man, his only son, and of the most serene queen of the angels, Virgin Mary, patron and advocate of my sacred order of Our Lady of Mercy, redeemer of captives, and all that is written in this history should be subject to correction by the holy mother Roman Catholic church, and to the opinion of whoever may understand it better.

Ad laudem dei omnipotentis et. S.V. MMP de Mercede Red. Capt. anno anati vitate dm, 1613.

