

## From arquebusier angels to the spirit of the Escalade

Mr President, dear Gregory,

Dear Members of Oxford and Cambridge Club of Geneva,

In Argentina, in the Quebrada de Humahuaca (→ image **2**), a canyon of spectacular shapes and colours, is to be found the village of Uquia (→ **3**). As opposed to their neighbours its inhabitants offered nearly no resistance to the Spaniards. The church (→ **4**) has not changed and is home to some astonishing masterpieces. You can see arquebusier angels along the nave (→ **5**; Salamiel, Eliel, Uzziel → **6**), and Ange Gabriel carrying a banner (→ **7**). There are 36 similar masterpieces to be found in Bolivia, at Calamarca; among them Hoziel (→ **8**) and Letiel (→ **9**).

Arquebusier angels are a particular feature of the Colonial Art of Cuzco, in Peru. Each angel has its own aesthetic character, typical of Andean Baroque: a face of almost feminine beauty, heavenly wings, a broad-brimmed hat, and clothes which recall the magnificence of those worn in the era of Charles II. The “chambergá”, or wide-sleeved gown, is decorated with “brocateado”. It combines baroque splendour with indigenous taste. The ruff and lace in the Van Dyck manner are also worthy of note.

Each is carrying accessories such as Gabriel’s banner, and the arquebuse of Letiel. Eliel is preparing his weapon (→ **10**). Some angels are holding a shield or a pike (→ **11**). Three of them bear the name of the biblical archangels: Raphael, Gabriel and Michael (the latter missing in the series at Uquia). These powerful references are consistent with the Catholic religion whose impact also served political purposes. On the other hand, several angels bear names proscribed by the Council of Latran in 1261 which banned the scriptures of the Apocrypha. Among them, Uriel, or *The Light of God*, who reigns over peace, and also Uzziel of the *Abundance of the day*, and Uzziel of *Fortune*.

If the freshness of popular taste manages to disguise the harshness of the Catholic Church which undertook its conversions with no reservations, this is due in good measure to the influence of the Jesuits. In South America, they set up a system of teaching characterized by open-mindedness and tolerance, which comprised numerous disciplines, including music and song. Many sources support the fact that educated Indians thus escaped slavery.

1) First, these images are the expression of a coming-together.

If one discounts the atrocities committed by the conquistadors, there are no documents in the 17th century allow the observation of a direct confrontation as the basis of this symbiosis, even though the image of the Spaniards and of the invaders lives on in the collective memory, even nowadays. In fact, Italian and Spanish painters went to Peru to exercise their art. The Indians and the mestizos joined forces with them and discovered the Flemish engravings, treaties, encyclopedias and above all the currents of the Renaissance. This can be observed in the flowered borders (**11**) but mainly in the rendering of the paintings (→ **12**).

The composition is very well structured: the gown forms a triangle associated with the vertical and oblique lines of the legs and of the accessories – the shaft of the banner and the arquebuse. The geometry is balanced by the curves of the sleeves, the hat and the

feathers. The colours of the ensemble and the quality of the brocade, lace and spangles, all create an impression of splendour. In spite of the absence of any perspective, balance is achieved by the delicate portrayal of the flesh and by the variations of posture. Such postures are to be found in two European military treaties published in the early 17th century (*The Exercise of Arms*, by Jacob de Gheyn, 1608; *The Principles of the Art Militarie practised in the Warres of the United Netherlands*, by Henry Hexman, 1637).

2) Following this coming-together between the Andes and Europe, arquebusier angels feature syncretism between ancestral traditions and western technology.

Beneath the themes of Christianity and the decorum of the Renaissance lies the pre-Columbian mythology. One particular cult honoured invisible beings – half man, half bird of prey – called “huamingas”. Their depiction as winged warriors with the head of a falcon can be found on ceramics pre-dating the Inca period and partially on petroglyphs in Peru (→ **13**) and Argentina (→ **14**). Thus, the arquebusier angel represents the archetype of the Inca warrior. Associated with the falcon, he is equipped with a weapon, the noise of which conjures up thunder, the manifestation of the god *Illyapa* (in the language of the Quechua). This iconography simultaneously:

- 1<sup>o</sup>) creates the idea of power and nobility as seen in armed and elegant figures, and
- 2<sup>o</sup>) conjures up the “huamingas“ through the wings and the feathers (→ **15**).

The originality of these paintings is characterized by the mixture of western and Amerindian influences, and ultimately by whatever can bring together different cultures and beliefs. This popular symbiosis lasted from the 17th to the 18th century. In the same style, there are representations of musician angels (→ **16**), a well-known theme, as well as images of the Virgin which recall the *Cochamama* or goddess “Mother Earth” (→ **17**). She is associated with *fertility* and *protection*, somewhat like the Greek goddess Gaïa.

3) Third, the syncretism which composes them also refers to feasts in honour of St. Michael. They took place in Lima, the capital of the Spanish viceroyalty. Because of his role in the Last Judgement, St. Michael is *a symbol of eternal life* (→ **18**). From time immemorial, St. Michael has symbolized *strength and protection* and inspired *creativity*, as one sees in the work of Lorenzetti (→ **19**). The indigenous population appropriated its virtues, exteriorizing them. As angels they bore wings, and weapons borrowed from... the arsenal! At the time when claims of identity arose, this aspect exalted a mythical past. The feasts were suspended in 1750 on account of the uprisings against the viceroy.

In the everyday life of the Andean peoples, the arquebusier angels have served what is called *personal growth*. According to the anthropologist Fiorenzo Facchini, “Symbols are the language of the subconscious; they are silent references connected to a greater message and they naturally point us in the direction of whatever is in accord with our projects”. Facchini identifies two criteria of a symbol: its faculty of *referring to other things* and its particular *unifying nature*. Let us also bear in mind Paul Ricœur’s idea according to which “*the symbol gives food for thought*”.

A symbol is to be understood as a reality charged with a meaning; its distinguishing feature is its capacity for implying something other than its first-level signification. Here for instance, Aspiel Apetus Dei is carrying his arquebuse upside down for he is “shield of

God” (→ 20). These angels call to mind the power of the church just as much as *defence, justice and protection* and *some principles of life* which are to be found in their intrinsic qualities, such as *peace* in the case of Uriel, or *Abundance of the Day and Fortune*, in the two Uzziel.

It is here, I think, that we rediscover the meaning that one can give to the commemoration of the Escalade and its symbol: *reference to other things, unification and food for thought*. Of course, no one can imagine our Genevans in 1602 dressed in Spanish-style clothes, weighed down with lace, puffed sleeves and brocade! Nevertheless, it was the shot of an arquebuse that raised the alarm at 2.30 in the morning. At the same time, it brought the Genevans face to face with a very uncertain outcome. What frightful images and thoughts could have been in everyone’s minds during that terrible night?

Doubtless, their sense of freedom and independence were strengthened after Savoy’s first attempts to scale the walls of the city in the 16th century. The suddenness of the invasion, above all, conditioned people’s survival reflexes. What else can one feel but fear at the idea of defeat when faced with 2’000 assailants? Just as with the blind acts of violence committed nowadays, the night of December 11th 1602 was nothing less than a living nightmare. This is where the determination of a whole population came into play, beginning with its 18 dead. This courage of which Aristotle once said that it was the foremost of all human virtues for it guaranteed the safety of others.

However, many other troubles lay in wait for the Genevans in the course of time. As I said last year, the peace and the humanist vocation of our city were severely shaken at the end of the 18th century. Think of the violence of the Terror from 1793 to 1795, with its summary executions on the site of the future Palais Eynard. A vocation of humanism and open-mindedness was germinating however, and continues to express itself until this day – like an art form in a way, or like a conviction, both born of a collective memory, of a tradition and of symbols.

Ten years after the creation of the League of Nations, Robert de Traz published *L’esprit de Genève* (“The Spirit of Geneva”). This work retraces its origins through three famous figures: Calvin, Rousseau and Henri Dunant. Raising a banner of openness to the outside world, perhaps like angel Gabriel, their legacy helped to make of Geneva *a symbol of dialogue, peace and democracy*. First, the City welcomed victims of oppression who had adopted the Reform. The author of the Social Contract then proposed a confederation of peoples to guarantee perpetual peace, not without reference to the Swiss model. A hundred years later Dunant laid the first stone of the International Committee of the Red Cross (which was born of the Geneva Convention of 1864).

Remember also the recent initiatives which all had in common the same will to defend human rights: in 1999, The Geneva Spiritual Appeal; in 2000, The Geneva Call for a ban on anti-personnel land mines; and in 2001, The Initiative for Peace in Palestine and the Geneva Accords.

In conclusion, let us recall Gaston Bachelard in his “Poetics of Space”: “The resonance of the symbol calls on us to intensify our existence. It is not content with merely provoking resonances but calls for a transformation of being; it possesses energy power...” The nature of the symbol is thus to remain largely suggestive, just like the arquebusier angels,

and each of us sees what his/her particular powers of awareness allow him/her to perceive and see, as in the commemoration of the Escalade.