

PEDRO DE LEÓN PORTOCARRERO
DESCRIPTION OF LIMA (early 17th century)

The eight most important streets of Lima converge in the city's plaza mayor [central square, or plaza de armas], with two entering at [and leaving from] each corner. First there is the Street of the Plaza Mayor next to the [viceregal] palace and between the arsenal and the houses of the municipal council.

Another street leaves from the palace and the houses of the archbishop and proceeds straight to the east, passing the College of Santo Toribio and the houses of the main postal office, and continuing to the square of the Inquisition, some three blocks east from the plaza mayor.

Another street leaves [the plaza mayor] by the Clothiers' Street. These shops [more than twenty, according to Salinas] stock clothing for Blacks. This street goes straight south and passes by the side of the Mercedarian friars' monastery and leads directly to the convent of the nuns of the Incarnation, the most renowned [religious] house in Lima, in which there are more than four hundred professed nuns. Many of the rich nobles' daughters come [to stay in this house] to learn good manners, and they leave it [ready] to marry. In this convent there are splendid and intelligent women, endowed with a thousand graces, and all of them, both nuns and [pious] lay women, have Black women slaves to serve them.

All merchants are exceedingly skilful in their buying. A merchant will collect all the manifests of shipments brought to the plaza for sale, and quickly refix their prices, and from there choose and buy whatever seems best to him. This gives an idea of the merchants of Lima. [Everyone] is involved, from the viceroy to the archbishop; all have dealings and everyone is a merchant, even if it is through a third party or on the sly.

From among the arcades [on the plaza mayor] where there are four streets and the Merchants' Street [already described], another street leaves, beginning with the Street of the Mantas [cloaks and coverings of coarse cotton cloth], which is also lined with merchants' shops. This street, like the Merchants' Street, takes up its own block. Along this entire street, proceeding directly west, there are many shops with different specialities: chandlers, confectioners, boilermakers who work with a lot of copper, blacksmiths, and other craftsmen. And it passes next to the Espíritu Santo hospital for sailors who are gathered there and cured when they are ill, [then] under the arch and on to the church of Monserrat.

On another street that runs behind the Jesuits' establishment is the College of San Martín, also belonging to the Society of Jesus; it has more than five hundred students, the sons of notables throughout the kingdom [of Peru] who send them there to study, and to pay the Jesuits an annual fee of 150 ordinary pesos for each one, from which sum the students are fed [as well as instructed]. The Jesuits offer a very elaborate course of studies incorporating many branches of learning.

Taken from "Pedro de León Portocarrero's Description of Lima, Peru," in *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 190–195.