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Monique Delhoume-Sanciaud, *Les Incas ou la destruction de l'Empire du Pérou de Jean-François Marmontel: Le Regard d'un homme du dix-huitième siècle sur le Nouveau-Monde, sa conquête et son évangélisation*. Paris, Honoré Champion, 2017. 2 vols., vi + 1,322 pp., numbered consecutively. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, appendices, and index. €199.05. (pb). ISBN 978-2-745-3070-3; ISSN 1259-4482; e-ISBN 978-2-7543-4818-0.

Review by Harvey Chisick, University of Haifa.

This study of Marmontel's *Les Incas* is a remarkably comprehensive examination of a lesser-known work by a *philosophe* who, while of considerable importance, does not rank among the most prominent thinkers of the time. Nevertheless, the scope of the author's competence and interests, and the way she has handled her subject make this study of general interest for students of the Enlightenment.

Jean-François Marmontel was born in 1723 and died just before the end of the century. He was exceptional in the world of the Enlightenment in that he came from a modest peasant family and owed his early education to the *curé* of his village, and to the kindness of a secondary school instructor who took him on despite his deficient Latin, and helped him with free tutoring. The good cleric's efforts were amply rewarded as Marmontel showed himself to be an exceptionally capable and hard-working student. The young man began his career in the way typical for talented young men without resources, studying in a seminary, in his case in Toulouse, and initially enjoyed the patronage of the Jesuits. He also taught for a short while in a *collège*, where his success indicated a level of competence in Latin and the classics well above the ordinary. Having become an admirer of Voltaire, he moved to Paris, where he met the great man and enjoyed his protection.

Marmontel had a remarkable range of literary abilities and enjoyed great acclaim for his works. He wrote successful plays and librettos, won prizes in contests proposed by academies, wrote poetry, did translations, and attended some of the leading salons of the time, such as those of mademoiselle de l'Espinasse and madame Geoffrin. He was friendly with many of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, including Diderot and d'Holbach. In his personal life he succeeded in winning the affections of not one, but two, of the mistresses of the Maréchal du Saxe, and of the acclaimed actress, mademoiselle Clairon. Marmontel had sympathy and respect for women and is regarded by Delhoume-Sanciaud as a feminist (pp. 132, 312, and 812). Through a combination of sheer talent and patronage he rose to be editor of the important and profitable *Mercure de France* (1758-60), and was elected to the Académie française in 1763, following d'Alembert as its secretary twenty years later. In 1772 he succeeded Voltaire in the office of

historiographer of France. Clearly, he had reached the peak of the enlightened establishment. When he finally married it was to the niece of the abbé Morellet. While, again, not one of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, Marmontel has received considerable and well-deserved scholarly attention, from the early monograph of Scipion Lenel to the more recent impressive works of Jacques Wagner and John Renwick.

Today, Marmontel's most often read book is his *Mémoires*, which he wrote late in life, and which provides insights into the life and culture of its time. He contributed significantly to the *Encyclopédie*, providing that enterprise with most of its articles on literature. His uncontroversial *Contes moraux* were widely read and appreciated. The work that drew most attention was *Bélisaire* (1767), a rather pedestrian political and moral treatise that won the admiration of the future Gustave III of Sweden and drew the heated condemnation of the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne and the conservative press on account of its advocacy of toleration, and the attendant argument that the state had no business in religion, and no right to coerce religious belief or practice (pp. 212-19). Voltaire and other progressive writers strongly supported Marmontel's argument for toleration. The controversy aroused by the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book lasted for years, and was a benchmark in the Enlightenment struggle for a more tolerant and secular society. Marmontel conceived *Les Incas* as a defense of *Bélisaire*. While it indeed was that, it was also a great deal more.

Delhoume-Sanciaud devotes roughly the first three hundred pages of her book, which form a respectable monograph in their own right, to Marmontel's career up to the time he published *Les Incas*. She then devotes the rest of her study to a comprehensive analysis of the writing of the book, its sources, its style, and what Marmontel sought to achieve in writing it. In many ways it was a remarkable undertaking with a remarkable subsequent history.

Marmontel finished a first version of the book in 1771, and sent the manuscript to Gustave III of Sweden, where it lay forgotten until discovered by the American researcher James Kaplan. For reasons that are not clear, Marmontel did not publish this first version, but reworked it during 1774 and 1775. Kaplan thought the revision an improvement, in that it eliminated superfluous material and made for a neater, better integrated final copy. Delhoume-Sanciaud, however, regrets the elimination of some of the more lyrical passages and on the whole prefers the version of the 1771 manuscript (p. 580). The book was much anticipated as Marmontel had said that he was working on it for a considerable time, and linked it to *Bélisaire*. The publisher, Lacombe, anticipating a best seller, paid him the enormous sum of 36,000 *livres* for the book. Although Delhoume-Sanciaud does not regard *Les Incas* as a great success in its own time, the information she provides on its sales seems to indicate otherwise. To meet demand Lacombe published 20 editions in 1777 alone, another seven the following year, and a total of 31 through 1789. There were also numerous French-language editions by other publishers in France and abroad, as well as translations. It is hard to say that Lacombe's investment was not justified. In total there were 230 editions of *Les Incas* between 1777 and 1854, substantiating Delhoume-Sanciaud's claim that the book was highly popular in the nineteenth century (Annexe 1, pp. 1209-19). However, most critics did not like the book, though Diderot admired it (pp. 1188-90).

One reason that *Les Incas* was not initially well received concerned its form. Contemporary critics were quick to point out that it did not conform to any established genre. Nor did Marmontel intend it to. He referred to it variously as a prose poem, an epic, and a novel. Until Delhoume-Sanciaud's study, most criticism of *Les Incas* focused on questions of style and genre. In his

comparison of the manuscript and print versions of the book, James Kaplan noted that the prose of the book contains many instances of octosyllabic blank verse undifferentiated from the text (pp. 613-14). Delhoume-Sanciaud confirms this observation, and herself cites numerous examples. This scattering of blank verse in the text suggests that Marmontel was indeed attempting to create a new genre fitting for the epic and tragic events he set out to describe and the significance he saw in them. For Delhoume-Sanciaud the book is sort of hybrid whose form is indefinable (p. 573).

One of the admirable features of this study is the care the author has taken to examine the sources Marmontel used in preparing his book. She examines not only the contemporary Spanish accounts of the conquest and destruction of the Aztec and Inca civilizations, which she cites in the original with accompanying French translations, but also the translations into French which Marmontel used—he did not read Spanish—and comments on the quality of these translations. The source Marmontel most relied upon was Garcilasco de la Vega in Baudouin’s highly competent translation, though Delhoume-Sanciaud also considers two other translations of this work available to Marmontel (pp. 321-30 and 407-413). Garcilasco, who was believed at the time to have been an Inca, but who was in fact of mixed descent, was treated by Marmontel as his “bible” on matters concerning the Incas (p. 418). The key figure in *Les Incas* is Las Casas, the colonizer, prelate, and Dominican who witnessed and denounced the sufferings of the native populations under Spanish domination, but who is given, despite his own testimony, a fictionalized role in Marmontel’s book. Other Spanish-language sources used by Marmontel, who did extensive research for his book, include Antoine de Herrera (pp. 419-38), Antoine de Solis (pp. 430-38), and Augustin de Zarate (pp. 438-46). In addition to discussing the texts of these works, Delhoume-Sanciaud also provides insightful analyses of the engravings with which these books were enriched, often on the initiative of publishers who appreciated their commercial value. But these Spanish histories of the conquest of central and south America were not Marmontel’s only sources. He was also up to date on what eighteenth-century authors had to say about the new world.

Marmontel tended to idealize the Incas and other inhabitants of the new world, following Las Casas in his sympathy for them and regarding them from a distance as variations on the theme of the noble savage and their societies as utopias. La Condamine had visited these regions and in addition to providing a rich geographical survey described the native inhabitants negatively (pp. 464-75). Buffon’s theory of the degenerate nature of the inhabitants of the new world also went against Marmontel’s tendency to idealize them, and seems to have caused the author of *Les Incas* to modify his views somewhat (pp. 510-17). Other relevant sources Delhoume-Sanciaud examines are the Président de Brosses, Bougainville (pp. 475-92), Fénelon, Voltaire (pp. 517-32), Madame de Graffigny (whose *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* Marmontel does not cite directly), and the physiocrat Quesnay, whom he knew personally from his time at Versailles (pp. 547-62). According to Delhoume-Sanciaud, the abbé Prévost’s enormous 80-volume *Histoire générale des voyages* included in volumes 45 to 48 new translations of some of the Spanish works already cited, and served Marmontel as a valuable undeclared source (p. 495). Delhoume-Sanciaud points out that both the text and the engravings of *Les Incas* were influenced by the vogue of classical antiquity. As a former seminary student and *collège* instructor, Marmontel was, like many of his educated contemporaries, a competent Latinist and steeped in classical culture. Though he had many talents, Marmontel’s standing as a classicist should not be overlooked. While in the Bastille from the end of 1759 to early 1760 he began a translation of Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, which he later

completed and published. Some of the more epic passages in *Les Incas* may well have had their inspiration from that work (pp. 533-43).

While Delhoume-Sanciaud's careful examination of the sources of *Les Incas* provides depth for our understanding of the book, it is not her main concern. That lies more in the direction of what the book is about and what it meant for its own time and the following century. Delhoume-Sanciaud emphasizes the effort Marmontel made to read and understand the available histories of the conquest, but she is clear that *Les Incas* cannot be read as history (pp. 429, 431, 486, 811, 927, 1049, 1101, and 1154). Rather the book is an historical novel with many elements of pure fiction, a lament for a vanished civilization and condemnation of those responsible for its destruction. It is also an informal ethical treatise marked by issues of central concern to Enlightenment thinkers (pp. 246, 865, 1175, and 1188). History plays a role in *Les Incas*, but as a backdrop to the novelistic and moral elements in this work of mixed genres.

In terms of plot, the main relationship is that between an Inca girl, Cora, a virgin of the Sun, who did not have much choice in her vocation—not unlike some European women who ended up in nunneries for the convenience of their families—and Alonzo, an honest and moral Spaniard who is presented as what the conquistadors could and should have been. When Cora falls in love with Alonzo she incurs the death penalty for Sun virgins who stray from the designated path. The Inca, who is presented more or less as an enlightened despot, does the enlightened thing and pardons her. Alonzo, in properly heroic fashion, dies fighting with the Incas against his countrymen. Not so sad a relationship as that of Esmeralda and Quasimodo, nor so happy as that of Monte Cristo and Haydée, the romance of Cora and Alonzo was one of the reasons Marmontel's book was so successful in the nineteenth century (pp. 982-83).

The affair of Cora and Alonzo was intended to show the potential for mutual understanding and cooperation between the civilizations of the old and new worlds. This missed opportunity was, to a considerable degree, the main theme of Marmontel's book, as was the attendant lament on the murder and destruction wreaked by the Spaniards.

Marmontel was not, however, engaging in a blanket condemnation of European colonialism. While he portrayed the native peoples of the new world as morally better than the Europeans, he regarded the arts and sciences of Europe as superior to those of the Incas and Aztecs and more independent peoples of central and south America. He thought that Europe had a civilizing mission to fulfill in the new world, but that instead of fulfilling this life-enhancing mission, certain Spaniards had used their technological superiority, supported by an ideology of pseudo-religious imperialism, to despoil and destroy the civilizations and peoples they conquered. For Marmontel there was a right and acceptable form of colonialism, which involved persuading other cultures of the advantages of European civilization while accepting the positive elements in those cultures (pp. 718, 735, 1041, 1127-28, and 1165). To make this point Marmontel often uses paired polar opposites to show the differences between positive and negative colonialism. Davila, the embodiment of rapaciousness and greed, and an historical figure, is contrasted to Pizarro, who is taken (implausibly) as a brave and virtuous hero of antiquity (pp. 930, and 1083 and 1118). Davila's entirely fictional son, Gonsalve, is also contrasted to his rapacious and faithless father in that, like Alonzo, he takes the side of local peoples (1058). A comparable contrast is made between Valverde, whom Marmontel paints in far darker shades than the historical record makes necessary, as the embodiment of fanaticism (pp. 933, 958, 1133, and 1139), and Las Casas, the humane, charitable, and profoundly religious teacher and advocate of the native populations. As

portrayed by Marmontel, Las Casas, using only gentle persuasion, inspired preaching, and charitable actions, was accepted and venerated by the local populations. He exemplified the version of European culture and colonialism that Marmontel advocated, and no doubt mistakenly, thought possible (pp. 1113, 1156-66, and 1171).

Delhoume-Sanciaud repeatedly points out that when historical fact gets in the way of Marmontel's story and the moral points that he is making, it is history that receives short shrift (pp. pp. 752, 845, 1169, and 1175). This is true in the case of Las Casas also. Rather than the Christian humanist that Las Casas was, Marmontel presents him almost as a *philosophe* whose religious beliefs are compatible with deism, and whose great enemy was fanaticism, which Marmontel held responsible for the devastation of the new world. In his own writings Las Casas sees greed as the main motive of the conquistadors and the reason for the destructiveness of their enterprise. Marmontel, however, makes fanaticism the main cause behind the disastrous conquest of the great civilizations of the new world (pp. 255, 366-67, 571, 594-96, and 1172-73). A certain use of Catholicism was no doubt at play in the conquest, but by itself it could hardly have had the effects Marmontel attributed to it. What the author of *Les Incas* was about was the defense of toleration and the criticism of the distorted form of religion that he had undertaken in *Bélisaire*, and that had caused such controversy.

Delhoume-Sanciaud is clear that Marmontel was not a free thinker or atheist. If he was a deist, it was a deism with a strong tincture of Christianity. Apparently a matter of being able to take the boy out of the seminary, but not, sometimes, the seminary out of the boy. Of course, Marmontel's religion was selective and enlightened. But that is the point. Enlightenment and religion are not mutually exclusive. One sees this clearly in the frontispiece of the first edition of *Les Incas*, which is reproduced as the image preceding page 1003. Entitled "Religion defends Humanity against Fanaticism," the image portrays Religion as a clothed and very lovely woman with a large cross, who defends fallen Humanity (an equally lovely but naked woman) from looming Fanaticism, a nearly nude, powerfully built, blindfolded male. The engraver has gotten Marmontel's intention just right.

Production of these volumes is on the whole good. There are a few typographical errors: "énènements" for "événements" (p. 192); "Shtendhal" for "Stendhal" (p. 494, n. 114); "ad" for "had" (p. 620); "ÀÀ" for "À" (p. 1142), and indiscriminate spelling of Gonsalve and Gonzalve (e.g. pp. 1068-70). In one case a section of the text beginning "On voit..." has been indented as if it were a citation (p. 172). Parentheses have been banished from the book and brackets used in their place. In citations, paragraphs are consistently not indented. However, there are also instances in which paragraphs in the text are not indented (e.g. pp. 502, 580, and 613). There also appear to be a few inaccuracies. Baudouin (or Baudoin) is said to have translated a work by David Bacon, when Francis Bacon is probably required (p. 368) and [Elie-Catherine] Fréron is said to have written a review of *Les Incas* in the last number of the *Année littéraire* for 1776. As Fréron died on 10 March of that year, this attribution is unlikely. None of these issues is substantial or detracts from the very substantial achievement that Delhoume-Sanciaud's book represents.

We are all probably thankful for the concise volumes on various subjects appearing in the Oxford "Past masters" and "Very short introduction" series. We should also be grateful to Champion for making possible the publication of works of outstanding scholarship and erudition such as Delhoume-Sanciaud's volumes on Marmontel and one of his lesser-known works.

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