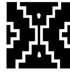
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction



On May 3, 1586, in a small underground prison cell beneath the Jesuit residence in Lima, Blas Valera penned an urgent letter to the general of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Aquaviva, asking for a release from his imprisonment and a transfer to Rome. Valera had already spent three years in jail, in a prison he shared with some of the unfortunate individuals being held by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Lima. During the years of his incarceration, Valera was required to endure weekly floggings—"mortifications"—under the supervision of the Jesuit provincial, as well as weekly fasting. Not surprisingly, his health suffered under this harsh regime, and in his request to the general, he pleaded that his illness and poor health were principle reasons for his removal to Rome.

Yet it would be another year until Valera was released from the Jesuits' underground jail cells, and even then he would continue under house arrest for an additional six years. Forbidden to leave the Jesuit residence, to talk to outsiders, or to perform any of the sacraments of a priest, he presumably used these six years to write his monumental work, the *Historia Occidentalis* (History of the West), cited by the chroniclers Garcilaso de la Vega and Alonso de Sandoval but now lost. Only in 1593, at the urging of José de Acosta, did Aquaviva

allow Valera to be transferred to Europe, albeit to Spain rather than to Rome. After an unintended delay in Quito of almost two years, Valera arrived in Cádiz in 1596, where he was permitted to resume teaching. He was not allowed to enjoy his newfound freedom for long, however; that same year, he was severely injured in the English pirate attack on Cádiz, and according to Jesuit sources, he died of his wounds on April 2, 1597.

What was Valera's crime, an infraction so heinous that he was forced to spend the latter fourteen years of his life in imprisonment and then exile? Humiliatingly for the priest and scholar, his Jesuit superiors claimed that he had been imprisoned by the Inquisition for the crime of fornication. But as newly discovered Inquisition documents reveal, the Jesuits themselves had imprisoned Valera—for the crime of heresy, not fornication. Through his teachings and writings, the Jesuit missionary staunchly defended the rights of the native peoples of Peru. His work lauded not only native Inca government, culture, and learning but Inca religion as well, suggesting that Andean Christianity should incorporate many aspects of the pre-Spanish native religiosity. His apologetics for the Inca faith, in fact, came dangerously close to heresy, a situation that the Jesuits, battling Inquisition efforts to destroy the Society in Spain, could not tolerate.

Born of a native woman and a Spanish father, Valera was able to use his fluency in his mother's language and culture to work with native peoples throughout Peru and eventually to lead "spiritual discussions" with Inca elites in Cuzco. Echoes of these discussions, which centered on the similarities between the Inca and Christian religions, can be found in the existing remnants of Valera's chronicles of the Andes. His work demonstrates that he dedicated most of his intellectual life to defending Inca civilization against defamation by Spanish authors: he condemned the Spanish conquest of the Incas as unjust; he praised Inca rule as legitimate and moral; he placed the Inca language, Quechua, on par with Latin for its civilizing influence; he claimed that Inca religion possessed an implicit knowledge of Christ; and he even portrayed the defeated Inca emperor, Atahuallpa, as a Christian saint in heaven.

By taking these stands in favor of the native peoples, Valera placed himself in the middle of one of the most controversial issues of his day in Peru. Spanish debates over the legitimacy of Iberian rule in the

Indies and the manner in which natives should be treated, begun in the 1520s with the influential teachings of Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546) in the Universidad de Salamanca, continued unabated throughout Valera's lifetime. In Salamanca, Vitoria and his followers elaborated principles of "just-war theory," propounding fairly restrictive circumstances whereby a Christian ruler could justify the conquest of a pagan kingdom; the writings of the "Salamanca school" formed the basis of subsequent attempts to protect the Indians from Spanish abuse, most notably by Vitoria's fellow Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas. The debates that occurred in Peru during Valera's life over the character of Inca rule, Inca civilization, and Andean religion had extensive political and spiritual consequences. Such issues as the recognition and treatment of native nobility, the legitimacy of new conquests in the interior, the nature of native labor and tribute, the ordination of men of Indian descent as Catholic priests, the use of native rituals in Christian ceremonies, and the forgiveness of conquistadors' sins in the confessional hinged on the outcome of these controversies.[1]

Valera was one of the first chroniclers of the Incas to present a strongly pro-Indian position, one developed in conscious response to the negative depictions of the Inca state that were sponsored by the viceroy Francisco de Toledo. For the breadth and vigor of his writings, Valera merits comparison with the other great defender of the rights of the native Americans in the sixteenth century, Bartolomé de las Casas. Yet for his involvement in these controversies, Valera would suffer the imprisonment, slander to his reputation, exile, and obscurity of his latter years. In fact, when the Jesuits in Peru voted unanimously in 1582 to never again allow mestizos into the Society, some claimed that this policy was necessary because of the dangerous example provided by the mestizo Valera. Valera's story provides a remarkable example of courage in the defense of the native Peruvians and sheds valuable insights into the controversies over religion, language, and Inca culture among sixteenth-century missionaries and native elites.

Amazingly, over four centuries after his death, Valera's role in

1. Two recent, excellent treatments of Vitoria, Las Casas, and the Spanish struggle for justice are Tierney 1997 and Goti Ordeñana 1999.

controversy is far from over. When I began this study years ago, Valera was an overlooked chronicler of the Incas; his mysterious life was little known. Scholars knew none of the details of his imprisonment; his work with native confraternities; his theories of language, writing, and history; or his experimentation with quipus. No scholar had even attempted to prepare a comprehensive, comparative study of his writings. Then, in 1996, at the Fourth International Ethnohistory Conference in Lima, the Italian anthropologist Laura Laurencich Minelli announced that a seventeenth-century document about Valera had been discovered in a private collection in Naples. This new document, she claimed, made a host of extraordinary assertions, including that Valera's death in 1597 had been faked by the Jesuits; that after 1597, Valera returned secretly to Peru, where he authored the famous *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (New chronicle and good government), which has been attributed to the native writer Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala; that Valera taught his followers that the Incas used a secret, phonetic quipu to record history; and that several of these special phonetic quipus had been sent to Garcilaso de la Vega, who, however, lied about them in his book *Comentarios reales de los Incas y historia general del Perú* (Royal commentaries of the Incas and general history of Peru).

Minelli's revelations about the "Naples documents," as they are called, created an international sensation and has led to bitter disputes among scholars over how these documents should be assessed. Numerous Andeanists have denounced the manuscripts as forgeries concocted by the owner, Clara Miccinelli, and her friend Carlo Animato, perhaps with the assistance of Minelli. Francesca Cantú, from the Universitá di Roma, and Maurizio Gnerre, from the Instituto Universitario Orientale, have both discovered additional documents in public archives in Italy that confirm aspects of the story found in the Naples materials; these established Italian scholars likewise have been accused of participating in an intentional fraud, by seeding the archives with fake texts.

Other Peruvianists have argued that the Naples documents, while authentic seventeenth-century manuscripts, were forged by Jesuit followers of Valera after the latter's death, possibly to express political theories censored by the Society. Those who belong to this school of opinion point out that while some of the assertions in the texts, such

as the claim that Valera wrote the *Nueva corónica,* are clearly false, much of the manuscript fits into what is now known (but was still unpublished in 1996) about Valera and the Jesuits in Peru. Finally, there are those who maintain that the Naples documents are both authentic and true in their startling allegations about Valera's faked death and his subsequent activities in Spain and Peru.

With the discovery of the Naples documents, knowing the truth about Valera's life has taken on a heightened importance. Some of the claims in the Naples documents, if true, will have major repercussions for our understanding of Andean civilization. Did the Incas have a secret, phonetic writing system? Was the *Nueva corónica,* a major testament of indigenous resistance to Spanish hegemony and one of the most important written sources about Inca culture, actually written by a Jesuit in hiding? Establishing a firm understanding of Valera's life is necessary for evaluating the authenticity of these mysterious and troubling documents.

The purpose of this book is to present a discussion of both Valera's life and his writings about native Peruvian history, religion, and language. It represents the first full-length monograph devoted to studying the poorly understood history of this mestizo author and priest. First, his childhood amid the "cloud forests" of Chachapoyas, his formation as a Jesuit priest, and his missionary work throughout Peru are explored to assess the influences on his thought. Then, the content of his writings is examined to demonstrate the diverse ways in which he developed his apologetics for the Incas and the native peoples of Peru. Because the Naples documents are so controversial, chapters 1–8, describing Valera's life and work, are based entirely on material unrelated to the manuscripts from Naples. Chapters 9–10 focus on the Naples materials, explaining what the documents are and considering their authenticity and their implications for our knowledge of Valera and of the Incas. It is hoped that this approach will allow readers to judge the documents for themselves based on what is known about Valera from other independent sources. It will also allow the story of Valera to shine in its own right, without being marred by the recent controversy over the Naples documents. Valera was a Peruvian of great courage and importance in the struggle for native rights, and he deserves to be recognized for his achievements in this area.

Chapter 2, "In 'the land of strong men,'" describes Valera's early life in Chachapoyas as an illegitimate mestizo son of one of the most powerful Spanish *encomenderos* (beneficiary of a grant of native labor tribute) in the region. This chapter examines in detail the lives of his father, Luis Valera; his native mother, Francisca Pérez; and his younger brother, Jerónimo, who eventually became one of the leading Franciscan theologians in Lima. Valera's eventful career as a Jesuit missionary is discussed in chapter 3, ". . . to go without subterfuge or excuse . . ." Based on a variety of Jesuit and other sources, this chapter first explores Valera's formation in the Jesuit novitiate in Lima. His missionary endeavors brought him into contact with native communities throughout the Andes, including those of Huarochirí, Santiago del Cercado (outside of Lima), Cuzco, Juli, and Potosí. In this chapter, his experiences and contacts in these missions are analyzed in the context of changing Jesuit attitudes toward native Andean Christianity.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of Valera's writings. His four known texts—including his major work, the *Historia Occidentalis*—are described in this chapter. Particular attention is paid to the manner in which his lost works are cited by Garcilaso de la Vega, Alonso de Sandoval, and Giovanni Anello Oliva. This chapter also considers the diverse sources of Valera's work, from the writings of well-known chroniclers, such as Polo de Ondegardo; to lost manuscripts by Spanish, mestizo, and Indian authors, such as Francisco Falcón, Melchior Hernández, and Juan Huallpa Inca; to conversations with indigenous leaders, such as Don Sebastián de Quispe Ninavillca, a native *curaca* from Huarochirí.

Chapters 5–7 focus on Valera's ethnography of the Incas and of Andean life in his own time. Chapter 5, ". . . the age of our country and sequence of events . . . ," examines his complex view of native Peruvian history. This chapter begins by analyzing his highly unusual history of over ninety pre-Inca rulers, including the kings Capac Raymi Amauta, Capac Yupanqui Amauta, Capac Lluqui Yupanqui, and Cuis Manco. This list of pre-Inca kings was shared with the chronicler Fernando de Montesinos and appears to reflect the native traditions of the Quito region. Valera's writings about the Inca kings are studied next, along with the manner in which Valera used this his-

tory to defend the Incas against their Spanish critics. Chapter 6, ". . . the terminology of all matters, human and divine . . . ," treats Valera's theories about the Quechua language, his comparison of Quechua with other South American languages and with Latin and Hebrew, and his beliefs about Andean writing systems. Additionally, this chapter explores Valera's association with an invented, phonetic quipu writing system, the iconography of which expresses many of the chronicler's polemics about Andean religious belief.

The nature of Inca religion is the subject of chapter 7, ". . . the laws of religious ceremonies and of the priesthoods . . ." Valera based his apologetics for Inca religious beliefs and practices on the categories of natural theology propounded by the classical writer Marcus Terentius Varro; this chapter explains how Valera's vision of Andean faith is structured according to Varro's typology, elevating Inca religion to a level almost on par with Christianity. Valera's characterization of Andean religious practitioners—including Inca priests, hermits, and holy virgins *(aclla)*—is also considered. Finally, this chapter concludes with a comparison of Valera's writings on religion with those of José de Acosta, Valera's Jesuit superior.

Chapter 8, ". . . a danger to Peru . . . ," recounts the tragic events leading to Valera's imprisonment by the Jesuits for heresy, as well as their false claims that he was actually incarcerated by the Inquisition. The final years of the chronicler's life are described, along with his protestations of innocence and the ultimate decision by General Aquaviva that Valera never, under any circumstances, be allowed to teach grammar. Completing the chapter is an account of the 1596 sack of Cádiz by Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, and of Valera's subsequent death at the hands of the English pirates.

In the remaining two chapters, the controversy over the so-called Naples documents is explored. Chapter 9 provides a description of the manuscripts found in the private archives of Clara Miccinelli in Naples: the *Historia et Rudimenta Linguae Piruanorum* (History and rudiments of the Peruvian language); *Exsul Immeritus* (Undeserved exile), which includes an account—allegedly by Francisco de Chaves—of the Spanish conquest of Peru; and a woven portion of a "royal" quipu recounting the honorary poem in honor of "Sumac ñusta" (Beautiful princess). Juan Carlos Estenssoro's and Rolena Adorno's

allegations of modern anachronisms in the texts are examined in chapter 10, followed by a discussion of the texts' instances of historical accuracy on matters otherwise unknown at the time of the *Historia et Rudimenta*'s first publication. A tentative solution to the mystery of these manuscripts is suggested, along with a reflection on how they may affect our perception of Blas Valera.