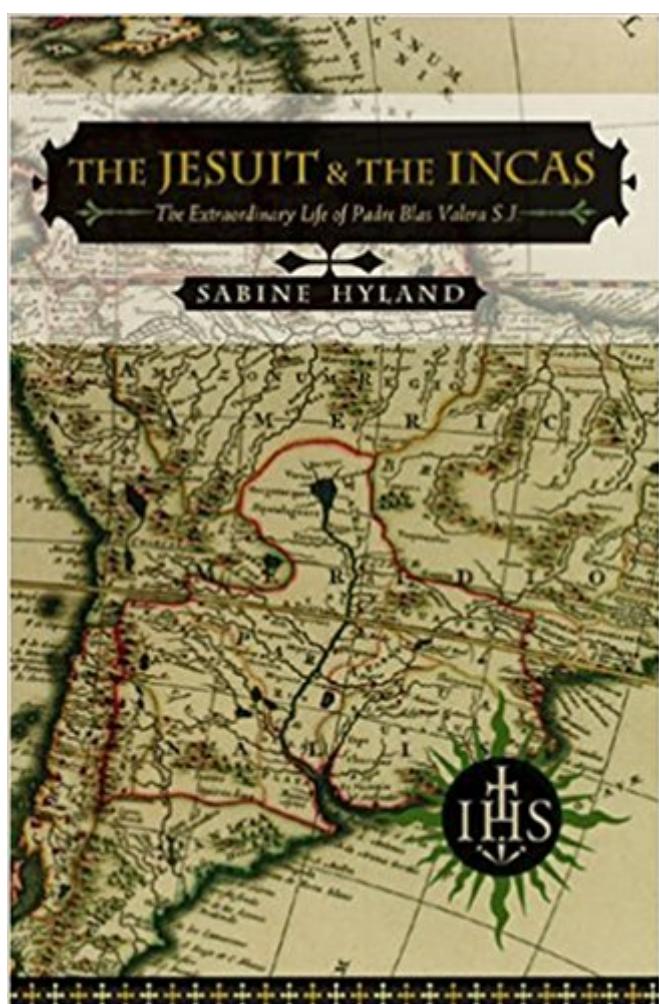


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The Jesuit And The Incas: The Extraordinary Life Of Padre Blas Valera, S.J. (History, Languages, And Cultures Of The Spanish And Portuguese Worlds)





Synopsis

In the spirit of justice Blas Valera broke all the rules-and paid with his life. Hundreds of years later, his ghost has returned to haunt the official story. But is it the truth, and will it set the record straight? This is the tale of Father Blas Valera, the child of a native Incan woman and Spanish father, caught between the ancient world of the Incas and the conquistadors of Spain. Valera, a Jesuit in sixteenth-century Peru, believed in what to his superiors was pure heresy: that the Incan culture, religion, and language were equal to their Christian counterparts. As punishment for his beliefs he was imprisoned, beaten, and, finally, exiled to Spain, where he died at the hands of English pirates in 1597. Four centuries later, this Incan chronicler had been all but forgotten, until an Italian anthropologist discovered some startling documents in a private Neapolitan collection. The documents claimed, among other things, that Valera's death had been faked by the Jesuits; that he had returned to Peru; and, intriguingly, while there had taught his followers that the Incas used a secret phonetic quipu-a record-keeping device of the Inca empire-to record history. Far from settling anything, the documents created an international sensation among scholars and led to bitter disputes over how they should be assessed. Are they forgeries, authentic documents, or something in between? If genuine, they will radically reform our view of Inca culture and Valera. The author insightfully examines the evidence, showing how fact and fiction intertwine, and brings the dimly understood history of this author-priest to light. Sabine Hyland is Co-director of a multidisciplinary project studying the Chanka people of Peru. She holds a doctoral degree in anthropology from Yale, and is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at St. Norbert College.

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Customer Reviews

"[A] refreshingly lucid account of an important but poorly known figure in colonial Latin American history."-Richard L. Burger, Yale University"This is a beautifully written, deeply informed and highly informative work. . . . [Hyland] has cast a bright light into a corner of early colonial Latin American scholarship that we had all but abandoned hope of ever seeing into very clearly."-Gary Urton, Harvard University". . . Hyland provides insight into the life of the Jesuit scholar, indigenous historian, teacher, and religious comparativist. Part history, part detective novel, the book plunges into various controversies: Christianity and indigenous Inca religion; Jesuits and the Spanish Crown; Valera's own mixed heritage; and even Valera and the Jesuits who imprisoned and then exiled him, despite his loyalty to the order. . . . Valera takes his place among ethnographers such as Acosta and Native rights advocates such as Las Casas, and Hyland's book provides captivating access to his unique contribution to history. Highly Recommended."--Choice

Sabine Hyland is Co-director of a multidisciplinary project studying the Chanka people of Peru. She holds a doctoral degree in anthropology from Yale, and is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at St. Norbert College. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Wonderful book on a very tough subject to get your mind around.

I would not normally respond to an anonymous review, but there may be some potential readers who will be seriously misled about the contents of my book by the reviewer from London. First, most of my book is not about the so-called "Miccinelli documents" -- the sensational manuscripts which claim, among other things, that Valera faked his death, returned secretly to Peru and taught a phonetic form of Inca writing -- at all. The first eight chapters of my book discuss Valera's tumultuous life and radical ideas based entirely on sources other than the Miccinelli documents. Only the final two chapters of my book concern the Miccinelli texts; Chapter 9 describes the documents while Chapter 10 explores the controversy over them. Second, I state unequivocally in my book that I believe the documents to be forgeries. The issue is whether they are 17th century forgeries or modern forgeries. My book argues that they are 17th century forgeries created by Valera's followers within the Society of Jesus in Peru, a position supported by other respected researchers in the field. Other scholars have argued that the Miccinelli texts are modern forgeries,

suggesting in print that Umberto Eco is the criminal mastermind behind this alleged conspiracy of forgery, in collusion with professors at the University of Bologna and other Italian universities. I leave it to readers of my book to decide which position is more convincing. Because this cannot be posted without assigning stars, and, while I am confident in my book, there is always room for improvement, I assign it three stars.

The prose was excellent and scholarship first rate. In dealing with the life of Blas Valera Dr. Hyland was confronted with a very complex and controversial topic. Rather than obsessing over the authenticity of the so-called Naples documents, she did a thorough background study of the man and his time and the injustices he experienced at the hands of those institutions and persons he served. In dealing with the authenticity of the Naples documents in the final part of the book, I found her analysis to be thorough and dispassionate. The ethnohistoric data was presented in a clear, highly detailed, and unambiguous manner. Instead of taking sides or taking the data beyond its limits, Dr. Hyland let her readers make up their own minds about the controversy surrounding the Naples documents on the basis of the evidence. In my opinion, Hyland is to be applauded for the breadth and scope of her research and for not letting herself become entangled in the bitter acrimony which no doubt played a large role in some of the poor reviews this fine work received. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in Andean ethnohistory.

The Jesuit & The Incas: The Extraordinary Life Of Padre Blas Valera, S.j. by Sabine Hyland (Associate Professor of Anthropology at St. Norbert College and co-director of a multidisciplinary project studying the Chanka people of Peru) is the informed and informative biography of Father Blas Valera, a man born in the 1500's to a native Incan mother and Spanish father. A Jesuit in sixteenth-century Peru, Blas Valera dared to believe and spread word that the Incan culture, religion, and language were equal to the Christian way of life -- a view that his superiors claimed was heresy and for which they compelled his imprisonment and exile. Blas Valera allegedly died at the hands of English pirates in 1597, yet a recent discovery among private documents suggest that Valera's death was faked by Jesuits, and that he returned to Peru to continue teaching his followers. A most fascinating life story written with a keen eye to research and detail, The Jesuit & The Incas is a highly recommended contribution to Peruvian History in general, and the New World history of the Catholic Church in the 16th century in particular.

Dr Hyland should be commended for her scholarship, dedication and fortitude on bringing to light

the life of Blas Valera. His chronicles give great insight on the transition of Incan to Spanish culture and society that effects Peru to today. Prof Hyland's narrative is very helpful in understanding Blas Valera and the context of the world around him. My only criticism, and a mild one, is that Blas Valera's somewhat gilded view of Incan culture and accomplishments, although understandable given his imprisonment, could have deserved more discussion. The presentation of the Naples documents was fascinating, and I think, fairly represented. The Jesuits and the Incas is a highly readable and recommended book for all interested in Peruvian history.

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