

The First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas up to 1615

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Abstract:

A review of **The First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas up to 1615**. By Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. Translated and edited by Roland Hamilton. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. xxiv + 363 pp., foreword, introduction, notes on translation, figures, glossary, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth.) By Donna J. Nash, *University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

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Article:

The First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas up to 1615. By Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. Translated and edited by Roland Hamilton. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. xxiv + 363 pp., foreword, introduction, notes on translation, figures, glossary, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth.)

Donna J. Nash, *University of North Carolina at Greensboro* One of the most compelling documents from the early colonial period of Peru, for ethnohistorians and archaeologists alike, is Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's (1936 [1615]) *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, which is a detailed and illustrated letter addressed to the king of Spain, Philip III.

This document is held by the Danish Royal Library in Copenhagen, and a digital copy is available on their web page. Although Guaman Poma was born after the conquest and wrote this work some seventy years after the fall of the Inka Empire, scholars use it, especially its detailed illustrations, as a valued source to understand pre-Hispanic Inka times. Roland Hamilton's recent translation, *The First New Chronicle and Good Government: On the History of the World and the Incas up to 1615*, includes the first 369 pages and 146 illustrations and encompasses the

section pertaining to the precolonial era. Never before available in English, no doubt this translation will stimulate further use of this source to understand the Inka; however, given the content of the text, I suggest that Hamilton's English version will also promote more cautious use of Guaman Poma's illustrations, as it will provide a detailed knowledge of the associated text, its author's intent, and the purposeful bending of history that served to promote the author's agenda. Hamilton's unabridged translation offers the unrefined details of the work as translated from multiple languages, uses current conventions of spelling, provides a glossary of terms, and inserts the original Quechua—all of which serve students and scholars with different interests and skill sets.

Until recently, the primary source of this complicated document, which includes colonial-era Spanish, Aymara, and several dialects of Quechua (xiv; Ramírez Ferrell 1996; Szeminski 1993: 13–14) was the Spanish version edited by John V. Murra and Rolena Adorno with Quechua translation by Jorge Urioste (Guaman Poma 1980 [1615]; see also Guaman Poma 1993 [1615]). This collaborative work was produced from the original document, preceded only by a facsimile (Guaman Poma 1936 [1615]). The original, reportedly discovered in 1908, is fragile, and its life history is unclear; however, the life history of the author, Guaman Poma, is coming into focus with information from other documents and the work of Adorno (2000), among others (e.g., Pereyra Chávez 1997).¹

Guaman Poma was a distant member of Inka royalty, a descendent of Tupac Inca Yupanqui's granddaughter. His family apparently originated in Huánuco and were relocated as *mitmaqkuna* to Huamanga (modern-day Ayacucho) as representatives of the Inka likely involved in the region's pacification or administration. As such, they were prestigious newcomers, possibly migrating during the reign of Tupac Inca Yupanqui, but maintaining dress and customs of their Huánuco heritage, a situation that weakened claims to land and resources in Huamanga during the colonial regime. Nevertheless, Guaman Poma participated in the colonial government as an interpreter. He also assisted the priest Cristóbal de Albornoz in his ecclesiastical campaign (1568–70) to Lucanas, among other locales. Guaman Poma's efforts to intertwine biblical and Andean history demonstrate his education in the church and its teachings as well as his willingness to extirpate the pagan practices of Andean religion. At the same time, he affiliated himself with the indigenous elite hierarchy and titled himself as a *cacique principal* (member of the indigenous elite leadership) and a *gobernador de los indios y administrador de la provincial de los Lucanas* (governor of the Indians and provincial administrator of Lucanas) (Adorno 2000: xxv; Prado Tello and Prado Prado 1991: 338–39).

Guaman Poma was well versed in legal affairs and the literature circulating in the colonies. He also was familiar with the composition of chronicles, having illustrated a portion of Fray Martín de Murúa's (2004 [1590]) manuscript (Adorno and Boserup 2005). Nevertheless, his knowledge could not overcome the intrigues of local politics. The Expediente Prado Tello describes a long-term legal battle (ca. 1587–1600) for which Guaman Poma laid claim to lands in Huamanga but ultimately lost those rights and was condemned as an impostor, with a sentence of

two hundred lashes and two years' exile from Huamanga for his crimes (Adorno 2000: xxxvi–xxxvii; see also Zorilla 1977).

Guaman Poma does not detail his litigation and conviction in his manuscript to the king but rather implicates the guilty parties as miscreants, uneducated and treacherous. The letter itself was likely composed after his exile in 1600 and seemingly is motivated by his personal experiences with corruption in the colonial government (Adorno 2000). Guaman Poma's manuscript is a carefully composed document that has been recognized for its lyrical qualities and rhetorical power (Husson 1995; Mannheim 1986; Cárdenas Bunsen 1998). These attributes do not translate well into English, and some of the qualities perhaps derived from indigenous conventions, such as repeating certain lines, have been removed to make the document more intelligible. Nevertheless, Guaman Poma's message is clearly conveyed, and Hamilton's frequent footnotes include a wealth of salient information that nicely compliments and explains Guaman Poma's references to recent events and contemporary conventions. The translation effectively captures a portrait of the author living in a dynamic world, desperately trying to manipulate autochthonous traditions and maneuver intrusive institutions to assert his dignity and regain his privilege. As such, aspects of the document need to be considered carefully, and this new English version allows scholars to study the information conveyed from a more critical perspective, recognizing that although it was not written by a Western observer, much of the chronicle was purposely Westernized for a Western audience.

Notes

1 Other documents shedding light on the life of Guaman Poma include the Expediente Prado Tello (Prado Tello and Prado Prado 1991) and the Compulsa Ayacucho (Zorilla 1977), both of which are collections of legal documents revealing the course of Guaman Poma's litigations.

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