



# **The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera, S.J. (History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds)**

*Sabine Hyland*

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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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