

Colonial Latin American Historical Review

Volume 11
Issue 4 *Volume 11, Issue 4 (Fall 2002)*

Article 8

9-1-2002

Sabine Hyland, *The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera, S.J.*

Luis Millones-Figueroa

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

Recommended Citation

Millones-Figueroa, Luis. "Sabine Hyland, *The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera, S.J.*" *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 11, 4 (2002): 441. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol11/iss4/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

some passages, while sparse and deficient in others. The Texas passages descend into the second category. Sadly, almost every encounter between the Crown and the Church resonated with anticlerical tolls. John L. Kessel deserves a magnum opus to cap an illustrious career. *Spain in the Southwest* falls short of the mark.

Félix D. Almaráz, Jr.
Department of History
University of Texas at San Antonio

The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera, S. J. By Sabine Hyland. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. xii + 269 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 cloth.)

Sixteenth-century mestizo Jesuit Blas Valera has long remained an elusive figure in colonial Andean history, but Sabine Hyland's new study of this fascinating man changes that. Her book uncovers the key events in Valera's life and spells out his ideas on native Peruvian history, religion, and language. As a result, Valera rises from the shadows and becomes a significant player in the debates on the historical conception of the Incas and evangelization strategies for the indigenous population in the sixteenth century.

Chapters 1 through 8 of *The Jesuit and the Incas*, which deal with Valera's life and work, are based both on previously available material (here carefully analyzed) and new sources from many different archives. In Chapters 9 and 10, Hyland focuses on the controversial "Naples documents," which are described in detail (although no illustrations are offered), and discusses the documents' authenticity and authorship.

A major contribution of the book is the revelation that Valera was taken prisoner, not by the Inquisition but by his fellow Jesuits, and that his "crime" had to do not with fornication but rather with his teachings. Hyland attempts to explain the views and activities that made Valera a dangerous man and a victim of the Order's hierarchy. She argues that Valera had developed a "pro-Indian position" (p. 3) not shared by his superiors or by the colonial authorities. Valera not only praised the Quechua language beyond everyone else, but also espoused idiosyncratic interpretations of the Inca gods and the nature of Incan religious beliefs. In addition, Valera's close relationship with native leaders made him suspect to Jesuits with less appreciation for Incan culture. Being a mestizo, Valera's supposed defection was then used as proof that people of mixed race should not become priests.

Hyland's well-researched and clearly written book accomplishes several goals. For many readers, Blas Valera will lose his ghostly aura and become an important actor among the intellectual and political interpreters of

Incan culture during his time. In addition, the internal conflicts among the Jesuits and important figures of colonial Peru (José de Acosta and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega to mention the most prominent) may now be revisited in light of issues that relate to Valera. Less studied authors of the time, such as Giovanni Anello Oliva and Fernando de Montesinos, will gain importance as a better picture emerges of the multiple positions toward the indigenous population taken both by those in power and by less prominent figures. Also revealing are the many levels of censorship that were present in sixteenth-century Peru and the ideological struggles common to the time.

Welcome as Valera's reappearance in colonial Andean studies is, however, Hyland might have been carried away by her enthusiasm for her subject. She does not succeed in showing how, exactly, Valera's view of the Incan past and culture, and his ideas for Christianizing the Indian population, translate into an "importance in the struggle for native rights" (p. 5) that equals that of Las Casas (p. 236). Valera's views aimed at defining a set of Incan concepts and practices that would support his views on Christianization. Was this "new vision of Andean Christianity" (p. 236) necessarily in the best interest of the native people? I have yet to see in the failed Jesuit an activist whose goals resembled those of Las Casas.

Colonial Andean students should welcome *The Jesuit and the Incas* as a stimulating book that points to several directions for more research both on Valera himself and on the historical background of the period. Thanks to Sabine Hyland's book, many readers will find a new window through which to view the history of colonial Peru.

Luis Millones-Figueroa
Department of Spanish
Colby College