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GUAMAN POMA, A SPECIAL CASE?

ABSTRACT: Guaman Poma does not need to be presented as a superhero to highlight his place in history as the author of a codex containing a protest, a proposal, and a history of the Andes. Indeed, the case of Guaman Poma must be understood in its historical context, as it has been studied since its publication in Paris almost a century ago, in 1936. Thanks to rigorous studies by scholars from many countries, we are increasingly learning more about the author and his work, concluding that this is a completely plausible case—a product of the circumstances in which he lived, was formed, and developed over several decades during the consolidation of the colonial regime in the Andes.

The *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* is a historical source—and at the same time, a historical narrative—that continues to provide information and material for interpretation on a wide range of aspects of pre-Hispanic reality, the conquest, and the establishment of the colonial regime in the Andes. It is best understood within the historical context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, both in terms of the phases of colonization and of the relevance of the political and social ideas captured in its text and images.

The text under discussion presents itself as innovative, refuting previous research in its attempt to establish a new starting point for future interpretations. The first major "discovery" it claims is that Guaman Poma was not an Indigenous nobleman. While it is true that many researchers were influenced by what Guaman Poma himself said about his family lineages, it is also true that, at least since the additional documentary discoveries of the 1990s (in particular, the Prado Tello file), this possibility has been ruled out. Instead, efforts have focused on understanding the reasons why Guaman Poma presented himself as a nobleman. Leading investigations have long since moved past this point and now understand that Guaman Poma deliberately resorted to this ruse—calling himself a prince, *capac*, chieftain, governor of the Lucanas, etc., as well as claiming descent from a *coya* and an *apu*, or depicting himself side by side with the Spanish king before the Pope—to be heard by the king and other officials. In any case, it can be said that Guaman Poma was successful. This strategy allowed him to

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address the king on equal terms, and his book was received by the viceroy's office in 1615.[1]

The other central point of the commented text is its attempt to present Guaman Poma as a special case. According to the commentary, the author, chronicler, and historian must be "vindicated" from the supposed disregard of researchers who have allegedly failed to recognize him as a superior individual, possessing a culture advanced for his time. In reality, however, Guaman Poma has already received ample recognition and needs no comparison with figures from other contexts and circumstances.

In this document, I will examine both general and specific aspects of the conditions under which Guaman Poma created and presented his work to understand it within its historical context and demonstrate its value without portraying him as an exceptional figure. Accordingly, my analysis is divided into two parts. The first provides an overview of the historical context in which Guaman Poma lived, wrote, and drew. The second examines the author's intellectual development and how it is reflected in his work.

Without a doubt, Guaman Poma was remarkable. He was not a superhero, but rather a person who understood his reality and confronted it with boldness, offering an explanation for the chaos he perceived—chaos that, in his view, stemmed from corrupt values and the rapidly changing social and political conditions of his time. At the same time, he proposed concrete solutions to address these problems. In fact, the chaos he described was nothing less than the consolidation of the colonial regime in the Andes, which served the interests of powerful Spanish and *kuraka* elites, while the common Indigenous population bore the greatest burden.

THE COLONIAL REGIME DEFINES ITS CONDITIONS IN THE ANDES

It is not necessary to recount in exhaustive detail the conditions under which the colonial regime was consolidated in the Andes. The process was complex and began with the "pacification" of the new colony, as the separatist attempts of the *conquistador-encomenderos* were crushed in the 1540s and 1550s, followed by the defeat of Inca resistance in Vilcabamba in the early 1570s.

1. Elías Prado Tello & Alfredo Prado, *Phelipe Guaman Poma de Ayala: Y no ay remedio* (Lima: Centro de Investigaciones y Promoción Amazónica CIPA, 1991), 338–339. From the mid-seventeenth century, in contrast, when Indigenous kurakas and chiefs address the king, they did so from positions of humility. See, Luis Miguel Glave, *Memoria y memoriales. La creación del programa político de la nación Indiana, siglo XVI-XVIII* (Cusco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos Bartolomé de las Casas, 2024). Guaman Poma must have been a restless person, and it is likely that his aspirations to climb the ladder in the colonial bureaucracy were strong even before he decided to write his text.

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The colonial regime was consolidated through both violent repression of dissidents and resistance groups, as well as through negotiations that secured the loyalty of key institutions necessary for colonial rule in the Andes. Guaman Poma lived precisely through these uncertain times.

After the initial decades dominated by *encomendero* rule, power shifted to the miners and landowners. The doctrine we generically refer to as *Lascasian*—which promoted the vindication of native peoples and their political leaders (lords and *kurakas*)—had guided imperial policy in the early years following the conquest and remained influential. However, in a colony as immensely wealthy as the Viceroyalty of Peru, by the second half of the sixteenth century, the consolidation of Spanish control required downplaying—and at times ignoring—the protective principles of the Lascasian doctrine to exploit resources more effectively. To maintain the privileges over the Americas granted by the papal bulls of Pope Alexander VI in 1493, the Spanish Crown continued to present itself as a Catholic monarchy committed to defending the Indigenous population, and it maintained its opposition to the perpetuation of the *encomienda* system. Nevertheless, the decision was made to facilitate greater access to land, pasture, water, and Indigenous labor for the non-encomendero, property-owning sectors of society.

This marked the "failure" of Viceroy Francisco de Toledo's indigenous resettlement program. While ostensibly rooted in protectionist principles, Toledo's reforms gathered the Indigenous population into *reducciones* (villages) that were strategically located to make them accessible to those who needed labor for private ventures—*haciendas*, *estancias*, *obrajes*, and mines—using systems such as the *mita*, *minga*, or employing *yanaconas*. Toledo's reforms represented a significant step toward the type of order that the powerful groups of the viceroyalty sought to establish in the mature colonial regime, beginning around 1590.

Indigenous community members were often forced to leave their villages—not primarily for economic advancement, but to earn enough money to meet colonial obligations such as tribute payments, church services, forced labor under the *mita*, or to buy their way out of *mita* assignments. Meanwhile, their family members were left to fulfill their obligations within the village. These communities bore the full cost of reproducing the labor force required by private enterprises. Community members had to feed and clothe themselves, substitute for one another, take on more *mita* shifts than officially assigned, and ultimately work as entire family units to satisfy the demands of employers. These employers not only paid inadequate wages, but also often

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made those payments to the ethnic authorities rather than to the laborers themselves.

Viceroy Toledo met the demands of large, medium, and small landowners by guaranteeing them the labor force they required. Thus, far from failing, Toledo's reforms established the conditions necessary for a functioning colonial system—one that satisfied the interests of the Crown, civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and landed colonists, while formally upholding the monarchy's commitments to the Catholic Church.

The influence of Las Casas and his followers gradually waned as "colonial reason" prevailed. The doctrine of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas—shared by many secular and regular clergy—opposed direct exploitation of Indigenous property, and above all, questioned the very legitimacy of conquest and colonization. The reaction against Las Casas was fierce, and by the 1570s, it had gained significant traction among groups invested in the colonial system. Nevertheless, the ideals of Indigenous vindication that he championed endured —and continue to endure—in various sectors that sought to protect the native population.

The colonial system also demanded political loyalty. It was a time of decision-making at all levels. At the highest level, Toledo's administration moved to eliminate Inca resistance by persecuting the descendants of the *Inkas* and publicly executing Túpac Amaru in the main square of Cuzco in 1572. However, at the middle and lower levels of governance, colonial authorities needed officials to carry out the complex task of administrating a vast, populous, and resource-rich territory—ideally with minimal financial cost. The system of intermediary native authorities—kurakas and *principales*—was reaffirmed. However, this process was far from simple, given the diversity of actors involved and the sensitive nature of the responsibilities being delegated.

In the case of Huamanga, the main setting for the life and work of Guaman Poma, Stern (1982) analyzes the complex situation of native populations facing the changes brought about by the conquest and colonization. Huamanga confirms the general dynamics of the viceroyalty, since around the 1570s, power relations were restructured thanks to the predominance of authorities (*encomenderos* and *corregidores*) and owners of estates, ranches, textile workshops, and merchants. The kurakas acted as intermediaries. Stern has found that the communities' greatest concern was to retain their members by preventing them from leaving to fulfill colonial labor obligations (in particular, the mining mita in Huancavelica and Castrovirreyna). Hence the insistence on so-called *retasas* to establish the new amounts of tributaries that the towns had

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due to the double phenomenon of population decline owing to disease and the flight of tributaries precisely to evade colonial burdens. On the contrary, it appears that external threats to community lands were a relatively minor concern. This is understandable, as the number of tributary community members was closely tied to their ability to manage the common lands they still possessed. However, the communities were not free from internal challenges. Chief among them were numerous boundary disputes between ethnic groups, stemming from overlapping territorial claims, and more generally, contested borders. The frequency of such conflicts has led some to conclude that territorial disputes were inherent to the nature of the communities themselves.

A distinctive feature of the Huamanga region was the millenarian movement known as *Taki Onqoy*, or the "dancing sickness." This protest movement emerged in Huamanga and spread throughout various regions of the southern Andes beginning in the mid-1560s.[2] It significantly shaped relationships within Indigenous towns and between these towns and both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. Guaman Poma himself participated in the campaign to suppress this movement, serving as an interpreter. The *Taki Onqoy* was viewed by colonial officials as a religious rebellion—an uprising of the Andean gods (*huacas*) against the Christian God.

By the end of the sixteenth century, metropolitan and colonial authorities sought to resolve cases of land usurpation, and apparently, boundary disputes between ethnic groups and communities (1591–95). The purpose of this procedure, known as *composición*, was to end internal conflicts and generate revenue for the Crown during a period of acute financial crisis. Through payment to the Crown, individuals who held land without formal titles were given the opportunity to *componer*—that is, to regularize—their ownership status. It is well known that the peoples of the Andes were dispossessed of their lands as part of the broader process of forming agricultural *haciendas* and cattle ranches, developments that would shape the trajectory of the colonial Andes for generations.

All of this helps to contextualize the case of Guaman Poma de Ayala as an Indigenous man who lived through—and was directly affected by—these transformative processes. His personal experience of dispossession and injustice likely played a significant role in his decision to denounce the abuses of the colonial regime, which had been reshaped by the profound changes of his era.

2. See Steve Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest. Huamanga to 1640* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

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GUAMAN POMA, THE HISTORICAL PERSON

Guaman Poma's life remains largely unknown, which complicates efforts to fully appreciate his work. Nevertheless, specialized scholars have identified certain details that allow us to understand him as a historical figure—a common Indigenous person, according to the colonial parameters that defined who belonged to the Andean nobility, and who, as a result, could serve as an interlocutor in the colonial process of dominating a vast and complex territory.

He is believed to have been born around the middle of the sixteenth century and to have died in 1616 or shortly thereafter. Born in the province of Lucanas, the Indigenous child Felipe Lázaro was condemned to grow up without access to formal education.

The high level of instruction he ultimately achieved may be attributed to an early experience as a foundling servant in the household of his protector, Doña Leonor de Ayala, and her husband Pedro Díez de Solier in Huamanga—a son of a conquistador, *corregidor*, and *encomendero*, and a prominent figure in mid-sixteenth-century Huamanguino society.[3] Guaman Poma's first known public service was as an assistant during Cristóbal de Albornoz's campaign to extirpate idolatry in the regions of Soras and Lucanas, approximately between 1568 and 1570.

Later, Guaman Poma became part of the writing and drawing workshop of the Mercedarian friar Martín de Murúa in Cuzco during the late 1580s and early 1590s. In addition to his skills in ink drawing and watercolor painting, Guaman Poma contributed ethnographic and historical information to Murúa's work. He also likely drew from the theological and political discussions Murúa held—especially those in defense of Lascasian positions before the great Inca lords assembled in a town council at the Indian Hospital in Cuzco. This collaboration allowed Guaman Poma to gain insight into the colonial Church's doctrines regarding the evangelization of Indigenous peoples, particularly those formulated by the Second Lima Council (1567), and more importantly, the Third Lima Council (1582).[4]

3. In any case, Guaman Poma's instruction in the schools created for the Andean kuraka elites is ruled out because these schools appeared very late, in the 1570s, when Guaman Poma was already acting as a minor colonial official. The real possibilities of instruction for Indigenous people are discussed in Gabriela Ramos & Yanna Yannakakis (eds.), *Indigenous Intellectuals. Knowledge, Power, and Colonial Culture in Mexico and the Andes* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014).

4. Rolena Adorno & Ivan Boserup, "The Making of Fray Martín de Murúa's Historia General del Perú," in *The Getty Murúa: Essays on the Making of the "Historia General del Perú": The J. Paul Getty Museum Ms. Ludwig XIII 16,* (Comps.). T.B.F. Cummins y B. Anderson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 43; José Cárdenas Bunsen, "La legislación eclesiástica, el cabildo indígena del Hospital del Cuzco y la relación entre Murúa y Guaman Poma," *Letras* 91, no. 133 (2020, Lima), 163–186. In addition, José Carlos de la Puente Luna, "Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala,

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Between 1594 and 1596, Guaman Poma also served as an interpreter and witness in judicial proceedings concerning land titles and demarcation trials. This experience familiarized him with contemporary legal norms and the procedures involved in acquiring—or losing—property. During this period, he is referred to with the honorific *don* before his name, a notable distinction. He is also listed as "interpreter of this audiencia," signifying a formal—though task-specific—position within the viceroyalty's principal court of justice.

One particularly revealing case appears in the most recent documentary discovery: Guaman Poma is shown notifying six kurakas of proceedings related to a land demarcation action stemming from the first land settlement (*composición de tierras*) under Viceroy García Hurtado de Mendoza. This took place in the town of Sincos (Mantaro Valley) on May 5, 1594.[5]

Already a litigant, by 1597 and 1599 Guaman Poma was engaged in litigation and was present in Lima to follow a lawsuit involving his family and 20 Chachapoya families who had occupied lands in Chiara, located in Santa Catalina de Chupas, Huamanga. On those occasions, Guaman Poma presented supporting documents in defense of his claims. The case concluded in 1600 with a ruling in favor of the Chachapoya families. Guaman Poma was punished for falsely claiming the title of *cacique principal* —a title reserved for recognized Indigenous nobility—and was further accused of having "bad inclinations." As a result, he was exiled from Huamanga for a prolonged period.[6]

The humiliation he suffered is widely considered to be the starting point of his major work—a project that sought not only to vindicate himself, but also to advocate for the rights and dignity of the Andean peoples. In other words, the

administrador de bienes de comunidad," In: Juan Marchena Fernández, Luis Miguel Glave Testino & José Carlos de la Puente Luna, *Caminando con don Phelipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. Primer Nueva corónica y buen gobierno, 1615* (Cusco: Municipalidad Provincial del Cusco, 2009), 216–219, proposes that the second exile suffered by Guaman Poma occurred between 1600 and 1613, when he held the position of administrator of the community's assets in the province of Lucanas and that this position could have been related to this new expulsion.

5. Carlos H. Hurtado Ames & Víctor Solier Ochoa (eds.), *Guaman Poma de Ayala en Jauja. Títulos de deslinde y amojonamiento que divide las jurisdicciones de los dos repartimientos de Jauja y Luringuanca aprobado por el excelentísimo señor don Francisco de Toledo virrey que fue se estos Reynos y provincias del Perú, año de 1570* (Trujillo: Escuela de Historia, Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, 2017), 49–50. If the identification of Guaman Poma as husband of María Curi Ocllo, *cacica* of Astanya, Circamarca, Warowayko, Yana Piruro, and Rantavilcas, daughter of Don Melchor Roque Yupanqui, owner of the lands of Chiara, is true, it is understandable that the judicial authorities allowed Guaman Poma to use the term "don" in the legal actions in which he acted as an assistant and interpreter. See Alfredo Alberdi Vallejo, "De Felipe Lázaro, indio, a don Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala," in *Runa Yachachiy,* (Berlin: 2008), 3, 7–13.

6. Despite his experience in legal proceedings, he lost the land dispute he was having with the Chachapoyas. Apparently, he failed to recognize his lineage, as his father, and by extension, his family, were considered recent arrivals from other places (*mitmakuna*). See John Charles, "Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala en los foros de la justicia eclesiástica," In: A. de Zabaela Beascoechea (ed.), *Los indios, el derecho canónico y la justicia eclesiástica en la América virreinal* (Madrid: Vervuert, 2011), 203–222.

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punishment he received dealt a severe blow to his real or self-proclaimed status as an Indigenous noble. His response was to produce a forceful intellectual and political work. Although his standing within the colonial bureaucracy remained modest, it was sufficient to give him access to important networks and debates that deeply influenced the complex political and religious reflections found in his writings.[7]

Guaman Poma skillfully drew on the experience he had accumulated through his work as an interpreter, court assistant, and contributor in Murúa's workshop. Unable to provide official documentation to prove his alleged privileges and rights, he turned to a different medium: a written, and more significantly, visual, complaint.

As Adorno has demonstrated, Guaman Poma's drawings were not merely illustrations that complemented the text—they were the central content of his work. Nearly 400 images were created before the accompanying text was written into the blank spaces left on the pages. For this reason, it is entirely plausible that he began work on *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* while still collaborating with the Mercedarian friar Martín de Murúa in the late 1590s and early 1600s.

In this sense, the foundational motivation behind Guaman Poma's project may have been the absence of documentary evidence to support his claims, at a time when both collective and individual Indigenous petitions were being increasingly standardized and regulated according to the administrative interests of colonial power—what scholars today refer to as "archivalization." It is also plausible that Guaman Poma's proximity to the civil and ecclesiastical judicial world made him acutely aware of the power of documentary discourse in asserting claims to justice. Equally plausible is the idea that Guaman Poma's self-presentation as a nobleman was a strategic choice—one meant to ensure that his voice would be heard, his grievances acknowledged, and ultimately, to contribute to setting the colonial world "back on its feet."[8]

7. For a discussion about the level of Christianization of Andean Indigenous people throughout the colonial period, see Juan Carlos Estenssoro Fuchs, *Del paganismo a la santidad. La incorporación de los indios del Perú al catolicismo, 1532–1750* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2003).

8. "Archive" and "archivalization" have become terms related to the process of ethnic vindication. Guaman Poma is understood to have encountered a reality in which the use of the term or concept "archive" is perfectly appropriate, as it implies a response different from the judicialization of claims. In this case, with no possibility of winning a lawsuit (especially if it had already been lost) due to a lack of "archive" (adequate documentation), the frustrated party resorts to a more complex representation: a history told as a chronicle or commentary. Glave, *Memoria y memoriales* . . . , 349.

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The World Upside Down

Guaman Poma describes the world around him as a "world upside down." The transformation of provincial life led to a gradual but persistent deterioration in the living and working conditions of the Indigenous population. Yet, the world was also upside down in another sense: it enabled upward social mobility among ordinary people across various social and ethnocultural sectors—a phenomenon commonly associated with periods of war (including conquests) and colonization. This shift was further reflected in the colonial authorities' preferential treatment of certain ethnic groups over others, often determined by the alliances and negotiations established during the consolidation of colonial rule.

Guaman Poma sought to reform this inverted world—a world, in his eyes, without remedy, as he frequently reiterated with the phrase "*Y no ay remedio*" ("And there is no remedy"). The repetition of this refrain emphasized the urgency of his call for change.

Guaman Poma was a product of his times, shaped by the transformations of a world shifting in ways largely beyond his control. He did not need to be a nobleman to document and denounce the profound changes he witnessed in his daily life. What makes Guaman Poma exceptional is that, as one of the many common Indigenous individuals recruited by Spanish civil and ecclesiastical authorities for various tasks, he went beyond his assigned roles. He immersed himself in the complex world of political and religious ideas during a pivotal period in the consolidation of the colonial system.

The "minor official" positions he held gave him firsthand experience and insight into the colonial order that Spain was forging in the Andes—an order continually negotiated with local power structures, including Indigenous chiefdoms.[9] Guaman Poma's unique position between worlds enabled him to understand and critique the emerging colonial society and to envision a better one in its place.

Guaman Poma had close and sustained exposure to processes that, for him, served as an excellent school for understanding the dominant culture and political order. He served as a Quechua-language interpreter in campaigns to

9. The common Indigenous people had few opportunities for social and political advancement. Those who did benefit were the kurakas, mallku, and their families, who were given opportunities to acquire privileged positions by mediating between the two worlds. The regime negotiated with Indigenous leaders as the most appropriate way to control and dominate a vast, populated, ethnically complex, and rich territory. The "negotiation," however, had its limits, given that the Spanish colonial rule was not in question.

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extirpate idolatry, as an interpreter and witness in judicial proceedings concerning land settlements, and as a collaborator in the workshop of Martín de Murúa, where crucial issues concerning the future of the Andes under colonial rule were discussed in light of the Lima Councils (1567 and 1582) and the enduring relevance of the teachings of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas.

In all these roles—and likely others still unknown to us—Guaman Poma learned the rules, procedures, and subtleties of the judicial system, interacting with priests, judges, and both civil and ecclesiastical prosecutors. He became well versed in legal norms and in the provisions established by the provincial councils held in Lima, and he used those same arguments in his vision of *buen gobierno* (good governance).

His familiarity with these systems should not be seen as exceptional. If few Indigenous individuals of his background expressed themselves in writing, it is likely because not all had the opportunity, the intention, or the means to do so. Guaman Poma did, and that was due not to any extraordinary personal privilege, but to the specific and unique circumstances he navigated throughout his life.

Guaman Poma chose to denounce the abuses and injustices of a regime that, by the 1590s, had reached a point of no return. By then, the colonial system had consolidated: the policies of Viceroy Toledo had borne concrete results, including systemic repression, the favoring of certain ethnic groups, the first wave of land regularization (composición de tierras), and the imposition of forced labor on nearly the entire Indigenous population in mines, haciendas, and textile workshops. These injustices implicated both ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

To voice his denunciation and propose reforms, Guaman Poma adopted a common literary genre of the time: that of the *arbitrista*. The so-called arbitristas were individuals who exposed critical flaws in political or fiscal administration and offered remedies for their correction. By providing advice aimed at improving a situation—whether partially or entirely—they positioned themselves as knowledgeable experts, hoping to draw the attention of the king and other authorities, and potentially secure bureaucratic appointments to implement their solutions. Adorno has rightly identified the *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* as a work in this tradition—an *arbitrio*. In it, Guaman Poma not only diagnosed the political, ecclesiastical, and social problems that needed to be addressed to secure justice for the Andean population, but also presented his proposals as a path to greater economic prosperity for the Spanish monarchy. This greatness was in

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the columns that supported Catholicism, as Guaman Poma metaphorically pointed out when speaking of the mines of Potosí (fols. 1047–1048).[10]

Guaman Poma structured his appeal to the king in terms that would have been entirely intelligible to a learned and experienced Indigenous person such as himself: a statement of a critical situation followed by a proposal for necessary reforms. At the same time, major political and theological debates were taking place within the ecclesiastical, political, and judicial circles in which Guaman Poma was active. Secular clergy, as well as Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit friars, engaged in deep moral and legal discussions about the conquest and exploitation of Peru. Central among these were debates over the dispossession of Indigenous property and the Lascasian call for its restitution—a position increasingly marginalized by imperial policy—and the idea of a "spiritual conquest" through peaceful evangelization. Opposing views, however, defended the narrative of Indigenous tyranny (by Incas and kurakas) and justified Spanish control over economic resources as necessary to eradicate idolatry and defend the Americas from Protestant threats, in line with the Counter-Reformation spirit.[11]

These conflicting ideas directly influenced Guaman Poma's worldview. The concept of dispossession gave him a tangible explanation for his own situation after the loss of lands he considered his family's. His notion of "good government" was conceived as a reform program intended to resolve the deepening crisis he observed in the Andes—above all, the abuses committed by civil and ecclesiastical officials, which he knew firsthand.

10. Rolena Adorno, "La Nueva Corónica y buen gobierno de Guaman Poma: del manuscrito autógrafo del siglo XVII a su reproducción digital del siglo XXI," *Recial* (2022, Córdoba), XIII, 22, Section 4.8.1. At that time, the most important and well-known "arbitristas" were Spanish and Creoles and came mainly from the politics (*oidores* such as Juan de Matienzo) and the church, such as the numerous secular and regular priests who advocated individually or on behalf of their congregations for the Indigenous population affected by the changes and worried about their souls. In later cases, Luis Miguel Glave would call those who spoke on behalf of the Indigenous people when they saw that the Crown failed to fulfill its obligations to protect its vassals "ventriloquists." Glave, *Memoria y memoriales* . . . , 25–26.

11. Marcel Bataillon, *La colonia. Ensayos peruanistas* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1995), 16–19, 25–36. Andrés Orías Bleichner describes the impact on the Charcas audience of the political thought derived from the doctrine of the Dominicans Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de las Casas regarding the nature of the indigenous people and their political capacities by the turn of the sixteenth century. Orías identifies two main tendencies: defenders of the Indigenous people and defenders of encomenderos and miners. Although they all started from scholastic postulates, some were Lascasian (the Quechuist Dominican Domingo de Santo Tomás, the Jesuits Luis López Ballesteros, Diego de Torres Bollo) while others followed the oidor Matienzo and the corregidor Juan Polo de Ondegardo. The latter enjoyed the protection of the viceroys and audiences in the second half of the sixteenth century in Peru. A crucial point was the 1582 memorial of the kurakas of Charcas in defense of their privileges as natural lords within the colonial regime. It is important to note that Guaman Poma sided with the Lascasians. One of the issues raised by Friar Domingo de Santo Tomás was the right bishops must have to appoint priests within their jurisdiction. Andrés Orías Bleichner, "Presencia de la escolástica en la historia de las ideas políticas hispanoamericanas. Charcas como centro de reflexión moral sobre el Estado (siglos XVI – XVII)," *Classica boliviana* (2023), 252–258.

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This wealth of lived experience enabled Guaman Poma to formulate a bold and radical proposal, one deeply rooted in his circumstances. He envisioned a new social and political order in the Andes that would eliminate many of the flaws that contemporaries perceived in European Christianity. Crucially, however, Guaman Poma did not advocate for the abolition of the colonial regime or the Christian faith in the New World. His utopia remained within the bounds of contemporary orthodoxy. What he proposed sprang from his experience as an Indigenous person affected by the consolidation of colonial rule and from the mixed results of half a century of evangelization. For instance, while he suggested that members of the regular clergy should retire to the peace of monasteries to focus on prayer, he also proposed that they be replaced in active ministry by Indigenous priests. His reimagining of the Church in the Andes was informed by specific cases he had observed. Notably, his former mentor Martín de Murúa served as a negative example, illustrating the failings of clerics who disregarded the evangelization principles set forth in the Lima councils.

Was He an Anticolonial Rebel?

By 1600, the Andes were firmly under Spanish colonial rule. Military resistance had been suppressed, and Andean society restructured to serve the interests of the colonial regime. From that point onward, Spanish authorities continued to impose their conditions of domination on the diverse Indigenous populations across the region. Importantly, the idea of restitution that shaped the Lascasian political thought—shared in part by Guaman Poma—did not advocate for the withdrawal of Spaniards from the Andes. Rather, what Guaman Poma proposed in his "letter" to the king and the pope was a reform of the Spanish and Christian regime in the Andes, built on a "new" account—a chronicle and diagnosis—of the colonial reality. His objective was to identify concrete actions to remedy the damage caused by corrupt officials and priests, seeking the salvation of the souls of both Indigenous people and Spaniards.

To be sure, Guaman Poma's life was exceptional. By the turn of the seventeenth century, few common Indigenous people possessed the political awareness and intellectual tools that he demonstrated. Formal education, political lobbying, and travel to the Spanish court were typically reserved for Indigenous nobles and mestizos. Guaman Poma was an exception: a common Indian whose immersion in colonial institutions—judicial and ecclesiastical—trained him to fulfill administrative duties and provided him with the legal, linguistic, and rhetorical tools to compose and illustrate a work as complex as the *Primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*. Equally significant was his personal motivation and courage to dedicate himself to the task and to place the finished work in the

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hands of the highest authorities of the empire. This remarkable convergence of circumstance and character is key to understanding a text of such historical depth and vision. Guaman Poma was not a special person in the traditional sense—he was an extraordinary common Indian.

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