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Encounter at Cajamarca

Imagine the following scene if you will, filmed in broad panorama at considerable distance from the main event. Two men, the Inca chief Atahualpa, and Dominican Fray Vicente Valverde, meet and appear to converse. The priest is holding a cross in one hand and a book in the other. Suddenly the book is out of the friar's hand and on the ground. While this event is taking place (or shortly thereafter), a battle breaks out, the Inca chief is captured, and many of his followers are killed.⁶⁶

On November 16, 1532, a small band of Spaniards met the Inca of the empire of Tiwantinsuyu in the city of Cajamarca. The Inca Atahualpa resided in this city, surrounded by thousands of soldiers and his imperial officials. The Spaniards were led by Francisco Pizarro, who carried with him the authorization of the Spanish monarch to conquer Tiwantinsuyu. The Dominican priest Vicente de Valverde stood by his side, carrying with him a cross and a book, both symbols of the Spanish god. The story of what happened next has been recounted many times. The rendition of William H. Prescott follows, the most widely read version in English of the encounter at Cajamarca.

At this moment Fray Vicente de Valverde ... came forward with his breviary, or, as other accounts say, a Bible, in one hand, and a crucifix in the other, and, approaching the Inca, told him, that he came by order of his commander to expound to him the doctrines of the true faith. ... The friar then explained ... the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, and ... [of the] redemption of Jesus Christ. ... This power had been transmitted to the successors of the apostle ... who, under the title of the Popes, held authority over all powers and potentates on earth. ... The friar concluded with beseeching the Peruvian monarch to receive him kindly; to abjure the errors of his own faith, and embrace that of the Christians ... and ... acknowledge himself as a tributary of the Emperor Charles V. ...

[Atahualpa] replied, — "I will be no man's tributary. I am greater than any prince upon earth. Your emperor may be a great prince ... and I am willing to hold him as a brother. As for the Pope of whom you speak, he must be crazy to talk of giving away countries which do not belong to him. For my faith ... I will not change it. Your own God, as you say, was put to death by the very men whom he created. But mine," he concluded, pointing to his Deity, — then alas! sinking in glory behind the mountains, — "my God still lives in the heavens, and looks down upon his children."

[Atahualpa] then demanded of Valverde by what authority he had said these things. The friar pointed to the book which he held, as his authority. Atahualpa, taking it, turning over the pages a moment, then, as the insult he had received probably flashed across his mind, he threw it down with vehemence. ...⁶⁷

Shortly thereafter Pizarro ordered his concealed men to attack the plaza. Scores of Peruvians were killed or wounded. The Inca was captured and later executed. The conquest of Peru had begun.

The meanings of the encounter at Cajamarca can be sought on many levels, each of which will yield a distinct analysis. Many scholars have used it as a starting point for Peruvian history. The encounter at Cajamarca meant different things to the contemporary Spaniard, to the mestizo of colonial Peru, to native lords, and to intellectuals of twentieth century Peru. Patricia Seed has recently utilized literary criticism to produce a fascinating image of the role of the written and non-written word as a tool for penetrating the scene, determining the meaning of the encounter according to different valuations of words. My paper draws inspiration from her study, but departs in significant ways insofar as it seeks a distinct purpose. It will focus upon diverse sources of authority for Spaniard and Andean, and upon the different meanings that people have engendered by distinct presentations of the encounter at Cajamarca.

The confrontation between Pizarro and Atahualpa differs in fundamental ways from that of the events at Tenochtitlan thirteen years earlier. An earlier paper commented upon the common disease factor in the two encounters, but also upon the dissimilar impact upon the native imperial structures. Smallpox had devastated the Mexica after the meeting of Moctezuma and Cortés. Its appearance followed the decision of Moctezuma's successor to wage war upon the Spanish. Disease seriously weakened the Mexica military capacity, facilitating the Spanish siege of Tenochtitlan and victory over the Mexican army. By contrast, disease preceded by six or seven years the advance of the Spanish on the empire of the Four Quarters. Smallpox killed the Inca Huayna Capac and many of his religious, military, and political elite. It spawned a civil war of succession. In it Huáscar, the lord of the capital at Cuzco and the legitimate heir to Huayna Capac, lost to his half-brother, Atahualpa, who began to reconsolidate the empire from the northern capital of Cajamarca. Disease destabilized the imperial fabric of Tiwantinsuyu and devastated the capacity of its populace to resist.

Two other important differences are noteworthy, one from the native and the other from the Spanish point of view. As the Spanish had advanced on the capital of the Mexica empire, they marveled at sights that they had never seen before. Twenty-five years of experience in the Caribbean had not prepared the Spanish for the dense population, the complex culture, the wealth, nor the powerful polity of the Mexica. This was an often timid advance, one in which skillful diplomacy and bold tactics staved off what could have been a

disastrous fate for the invaders. Cortés proved to be an extraordinarily adept leader, one who kept restraint and action in careful balance. The Spanish became experienced as they conquered the Mexica. They learned how to attack and defeat a powerful imperial power. The Spanish also learned of the extraordinary wealth to be gained from such a venture. After 1521, their search was for another Mexico. When they eventually found it in Peru, the Spaniards were experienced at conquest.

Cortés had undertaken the conquest of Mexico without permission from either the Spanish monarch or the governor of Cuba, the crown's representative in the Caribbean. Cortés penned numerous letters to the crown justifying his behavior and glorifying his accomplishments, all in the effort to avoid sanction for his unlicensed behavior. Pizarro, by contrast, had gone to Spain to obtain official approval for his expedition to Peru.

I give license and authority to you, the said Captain Francisco Pizarro, and in our name and in the name of the Royal Crown of Castile, the said discovery, conquest, and colonization of the said province of Perú . . .

. . . you shall take with you such officials of the exchequer as we shall select; and also such religious and ecclesiastical persons as we shall appoint for instructing the Indians and natives of that province in our Holy Catholic Faith, with whose counsel, and not without it, you are to make this conquest, discovery, and colonization⁶⁸

Unlike Moctezuma, Atahualpa did not see a god when he looked at Pizarro. Moctezuma had searched and waited for the return of Quetzacoatl for years, so much so that he first saw Cortés as a god. The Inca cosmology and their imperial history did not parallel that of the Mexica. The Inca creator-god, Viracocha, created Inti, the sun-god, and Quilla, the Mother-Moon. The Inca claimed to be the family of Inti, who was present in the incarnation of the Inca family. The male Inca had his counterpart in the female Coya Pasca. Quilla ruled Pachamama, Earth Mother, and Mamacocha, Mother Sea; Inti ruled Lord Earth. In short, if one seeks to define the authority of the Inca, it must be attributed to the proximity to the gods, much like the pope claimed authority through the Christian god. Atahualpa did not see a god, he spoke with a god-like voice.

However, the recent history of the Inca muted the authority of Atahualpa's voice. The royal city of Cuzco served as the administrative, spiritual, and ceremonial center of empire of Tiwantinsuyu, as well as the home of the Inca family. The empire was divided into four sections, each of which had its internal divisions and subdivisions. Many subjugated peoples had representatives in the imperial bureaucracy, a practice designed to insure the loyalty of distinct imperial peoples. Quite often representatives of the royal family married local ethnic lords, thereby forging kinship as well as administrative ties between the Inca and their subjects. The *huacas* of distinct peoples within the empire, their religious and spiritual representations of people, places, spirits, or gods, were also gathered in Cuzco, with much the same purpose.

Atahualpa was lord of Cajamarca, however, not of Cuzco. Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui had led the expansion of the Inca state from its capital of Cuzco in the 1430s. His son, Topa Inca, had continued the military expansion in the 1460s, extending the empire to Ecuador and as far south as Chile. Later members of the lineage of Capac Inca consolidated the empire after 1483. The death of Huayna Capac in the 1520s and the ensuing civil war had resulted in the defeat of the natural lords of Cuzco, the Capac Inca lineage. Burr Cartwright Brundage notes that this defeat shattered the prestige of Cuzco, its *huaca*, or spiritual icon:

It was the insult to this concept which more effectively undermined the resistance of the Incas than even their drastic loss of members. In the past they had assumed that a spiritual rampart surrounded the city, impenetrable and secure, guarded by the ghostly armies of Virachocha....⁶⁹

Atahualpa, while Inca, represented a certain degree of usurped authority. This type of authority shifting was not alien to Andean political history, but consolidation of shifted authority required a passage of time to effect. Fate did not grant Atahualpa the time to reassemble the full authority of the red fringe of the Inca.

At this moment Fray Vicente de Valverde . . . came forward with his breviary, or, as other accounts say, a Bible, in one hand, and a crucifix in the other, and, approaching the Inca, told him, that he came by order of his commander to expound to him the doctrines of the true faith . . .

[Atahualpa] then demanded of Valverde by what authority he had said these things. The friar pointed to the book which he held, as his authority. Atahualpa, taking it, turning over the pages a moment, then, as the insult he had received probably flashed across his mind, he threw it down with vehemence. . . .

The friar, greatly scandalized by the indignity offered to the sacred volume, stayed only to pick it up, and, hastening to Pizarro, informed him of what had been done, exclaiming, at the same time — “Do you not see, that, while we stand here wasting our breath in talking with this dog, full of pride as he is, the fields are filling with Indians? Set on, at once; I absolve you”⁷⁰

With these words, Prescott describes Friar Valverde’s authorization to Pizarro to attack the assembled Andeans.

Pope Alexander VI awarded the Spanish monarchs the exclusive right to bring the Christian word to the natives of the Indies in 1493. The papal bull *Inter caetera* granted Spain dominion over the land of the Indies so that this evangelical obligation might be fulfilled.⁷¹ The early stages of Spanish conquest and colonization witnessed deep conflicts over the two papal authorizations of souls and territory. Only very slowly did the Spanish state elaborate a formal system to both win souls and grant land. The outcry of Friar

Antonio de Montesinos in December of 1511 about the treatment of natives at the hands of abusive colonists led to the formulation of the Laws of Burgos, which spelled out the terms for an *encomienda*. Years of struggle remained before a system of evangelization and land acquisition could be worked out that was mutually acceptable to both crown and colonist, but the statutes of Burgos provided the eventual model for the colonial *hacienda*.

The Laws of Burgos formalized the authority of conquest as well. Conquest of native peoples could only be initiated in the instance of "just war." Before a just war could be undertaken, the Spanish who encountered a "new" people had to read the Requirement, or *requirimento*. The Requirement invited natives to submit to the authority of the Spanish crown and its representatives. It began with a description of the person doing the reading as a messenger of the crown. It then traced the crown's lineage to god by recounting the source of royal patronage down from god, Jesus, the apostles, and the pope. Natives were asked to recognize the authority of that lineage and to allow Christian priests to teach their faith. Failure of the native listener to accept these requirements empowered the Spaniards to engage in just war. Patricia Seed notes that the author of the Requirement, Palacios Rubios, when asked whether the simple reading of the Requirement absolved the conscience of the Spaniards, replied that it did. She writes that "no demonstration of understanding was required; rather, the issue of reception was studiously ignored. It was the *act of reading the text* that constituted the authority." The only other action needed to legitimate Spanish rule was to record that the act of reading had taken place.⁷² The central issue is that the reading of the requirement necessitated a submission to a distinct authority, the hierarchy of Christianity that ran from the priest, the conqueror, the crown, the pope, Jesus, and to the Christian god.⁷³ Failure to recognize that authority authorized conquest.

The encounter at Cajamarca reveals a confrontation between distinct authorities. The Spaniards brought the authority of conquest to Cajamarca. This authority flowed from their shared belief that they were the legitimate messengers of crown and god. They carried with them the authorizations for their behavior, the *requirimento* and a contract of conquest. Atahualpa stood at Cajamarca as god incarnate. The fringe of red threads on his forehead symbolized his position as the Inca. Atahualpa's stance was that of a seated leader; he rose to meet Pizarro, granting him an audience. However, Cajamarca did not contain the huaca of the Inca; that authority rested in Cuzco. Atahualpa commanded the loyalty of his troops and officials. He appeared to have the trappings of authority. It must be doubted, however, whether Atahualpa carried the full authority of an Inca lord as he confronted Pizarro.

Historians tend to value “eye witnesses” to an event as somehow more objective in their observations. Authority, for some, comes from being a participant in the event. The words that follow come from Francisco de Jerez, who was present at Cajamarca, and whose account of the conquest strongly influenced the initial perceptions of the event in Spain. The words are part of the *True Account of the Conquest of Peru*, written in 1534, shortly after Jerez returned from Peru.

The Governor, seeking this [military sign] asked Father Friar Vicente if he wished to go speak to Atahualpa with an interpreter, and he said yes. [Valverde said] I am a priest of God, and I teach the Christians things of God, and I also come to teach you. What I teach is what God has spoken, which is in this book. Atahualpa asked him to give him the book in order to see it, and he gave it to him closed. When Atahualpa did not succeed in opening it, the friar extended his arm to open it. He stubbornly persisted in opening it, which he did, and not marveling at the letters or the paper, like other Indians, he threw it five or six paces from him. And to the words the friar had said via the interpreter, he responded with great arrogance.⁷⁴

Jerez stresses the military aspect of the encounter, which for him justifies a conquest of which he was most proud. Pizarro, as Governor and as a “legitimate political ruler,” assumes the central role in his narrative, a position in which he is supported by the priest, a legitimate religious authority. A military sign opens the account, which sustains Jerez’s larger function of glorifying the Spanish achievement in Peru. Atahualpa, for Jerez, is haughty and full of pride, but he is also subservient, as the Spaniards causes the Inca to come to Pizarro for the meeting. Seed notes that Atahualpa’s “failure to marvel” at the word of the book and at its religious message meant to the Spaniards that they had encountered a barbarian people, a people who lacked civilization and literacy, a people whose lack of writing called even their humanity into question.⁷⁵ Jerez thus narrates the encounter in terms of its military importance, the evidence it offers of Spanish cultural superiority, and the arrogant pride of the Inca, which proves his undoing. All of this justifies the Spanish conquest, which Jerez sees as a culmination of a superior over a barbarian civilization.

As we move from the contestation of authorities present at Cajamarca and the Spanish victory, we enter a colonial world. No longer is Peru a native world dominated by the Inca. No longer is Peru the place of struggle between the military might of distinct political entities. Peru becomes a battleground of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious forces, all subsumed under the aegis of the Spanish empire. Ethnicity constituted perhaps one of the most important social signatures in colonial Peru.

The mestizo Gracilaso de la Vega, El Inca, recorded the encounter at Cajamarca in his opus *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*. A mestizo, according to the Spanish racial hierarchy, was the offspring of a Spaniard and an Indian. The achievement of a valued social niche constituted the great mestizo challenge, insofar as the society of neither parent tended to value their mixed offspring. Gracilaso's work represents what some have called one of the "first American classics—that is, one of the earliest books about America by an American."⁷⁶ Gracilaso, born in 1539 to the Spanish captain Sebastián de la Vega Vargas and the Inca princess Ñusta Chimpu Ocllo, was a second cousin to both Atahualpa and Huáscar, but the Hispanic world provided his education and much of his value system. For a short period in his teens, he inquired into his mother's culture, acquiring some sympathy for his Incaic ancestry. Gracilaso went to Spain in 1562, never to return to Peru. His massive volume was penned in the early 1600s.

After hearing the last part of the speech in which he was asked to renounce his realms willingly or by force and become a tributary as the pope required and the emperor desired, and on hearing the threat of war with fire and the sword, with the destruction of himself and his peoples . . . Atahuallpa was filled with sadness. . . .

[The Inca said that] It would have caused me great satisfaction, since you deny everything else that I requested of your messengers, that you should at least have granted me one request, that of addressing me through a more skilled and faithful translator. . . . this is needful among all peoples and nations, [but] it is much more so between those who come from such widely distant regions as we. . . . I say this, man of God, because I perceive that the words you have spoken must mean something different from what the dragoman has told me. . . . I should therefore be very glad if you would explain these things to me through a better interpreter so that I may know them and obey your will

By now the Spaniards, who were unable to brook the length of the discourse, had left their places and fallen on the Indians. . . .

The historians bear false witness that Fray Vicente de Valverde gave the alarm, asking the Spaniards to execute justice and vengeance for the fact that the king had thrown on the ground the book he is said to have asked the friar to give him. They bear false witness against the king as well as the priest, for he neither threw the book down, nor even took it in his hands.⁷⁷

A profound sense of uncertainty permeates Gracilaso's words. The Inca is portrayed as sad over the request to submit to Spanish authority. Nowhere can one glimpse the haughty pride that Jerez afforded to the Inca. The inability to translate, to exchange real meanings, seems to have caused the Inca grief. Gracilaso notes that if a "better interpreter" would have been present, the outcome of the encounter might have been different. We are offered an image of a sensitive, thoughtful Atahualpa who, though sad, struggles to understand

the Spanish. He responds with a lengthy discourse, wherein he seeks an understanding of the Spanish words. Spanish impatience, for Gracilaso, sparked the violence of the encounter. Gracilaso forcefully denies that Atahualpa rejected Christianity by throwing the book to the ground or that Valverde ordered the attack. Gracilaso's image is of a confused scene, in which neither the priest nor the Inca meant harm nor violence to each other. The violence comes from a lack of understanding, from an inability to know each other's words, and from the impatience of belligerent foot soldiers. A better insight into the plight of the mestizo in colonial society could not be found. Where do they fit? How are they to be understood? Spanish society must be patient, non-judgmental, and accepting for Gracilaso, so that he and his fellow mestizos can become members of the new society.

The next set of words are those of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, a native author. Guaman Poma descended through his mother from an Inca lineage, though not that of the last leaders. His writings reflect the complexity of native thought within the early colonial period, a period in which numerous authors sought to define the importance of the Peruvian conquest/colonization experience through their chronicles. His 1615 volume, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, written to King Phillip II of Spain, stands as an extraordinarily valuable insight into early colonial Peru. Rolena Adorno has argued that Guaman Poma's work represents the effort to "reconstruct the ways in which a native American (in this case, Andean) author ... translated his experience into the language of the other." Native non-written culture was devalued by the Europeans, who saw the world of letters as the mark of civilized peoples. Combined with Spanish military might, Spanish cultural norms defined the terrain of the acceptable. Spanish cultural hegemony set the standard against which all expressions were judged. Adorno sees Guaman Poma engaged in a "counteroffensive" against the Spanish invaders to reclaim not only their territory and civilization, but also their spirituality and history, in essence, to reclaim their culture.⁷⁸

Friar Vicente joined in the conversation. He came forward holding a crucifix in his right hand and a breviary in his left and introduced himself as another envoy of the Spanish ruler, who according to his account was a friend of God, and who often worshipped before the cross and believed in the Gospel. Friar Vicente called upon the Inca to renounce all other gods as being a mockery of the truth.

Atahualpa's reply was that he could not change his belief in the Sun, who was immortal, and in the other Inca divinities. He asked Friar Vicente what authority he had for his own belief and the friar told him it was all written in the book which he held. The Inca then said: "Give me the book so that it can speak to me." The book was handed up to him and he began to eye it carefully and listen to it page by page. At last he asked: "Why doesn't the book say anything to me?" Still sitting on his throne, he threw it on the ground with a haughty and petulant gesture.

Friar Vicente found his voice and called out that the Indians were against the Christian faith. Thereupon Pizarro and Almagro began to shout orders to their men, telling them to attack these Indians who rejected God and the Emperor.⁷⁹

Guaman Poma's encounter envisions the Spanish approach to the Inca, signalling the subordinate authority of the aliens as they address the native lord. Atahualpa is confident of his person and of the authority of his office. Atahualpa expects the book to speak to him, to offer him some words. The book carries no authority for the Inca, it does not speak to him. Atahualpa encounters the book while seated, another indication that Guaman Poma saw the authority of the Inca as superior to that of the Spaniard. As did Gracilaso, Guaman Poma describes Atahualpa as haughty, but my sense is that it is depicted as flowing less from pride than from superior authority.

Guaman Poma's words are valuable insights into Andean thoughts about the encounter. The Andean society was not literate. The highly civilized native culture relied upon other symbols and upon oral communication. Guaman Poma included 399 drawings to illustrate his work, including one of the encounter at Cajamarca. Rolena Adorno offers this image as an "icon in space" that illuminates both the stability and disorder within Tiwantinsuyu at conquest. An earlier image (p. 10) depicts the Inca and the major officials of Tiwantinsuyu, the empire of the four suyus, or quarters. In one woodcut image created by Guaman Poma that accompanies his written account, the Inca Atahualpa is located at the center, just as Cuzco defined the center of the empire. Four men in the front rank represent the lords of the four quarters; from left to right they are Chinchaysuyu, Antisuyu, Cuntisuyu, and Collasuyu. To the right of Chinchaysuyu is Hanan Cuzco and to the left of Collasuyu is Hurin Cuzco, the counselors of the Inca. Hanan, upper, and Hurin, lower, represent the bonded dualism of Cuzco, the center of Tiwantinsuyu, a dualism that is repeated throughout the Inca polity and cosmology.⁸⁰ The arrangement of the "Royal Council" therefore parallels the proper order of the empire, in both its profane and religious sense.

An image of the encounter (p.66), by contrast, depicts a world turned upside down. Again the Inca is centered, but Tiwantinsuyu is threatened. The lord of Chinchaysuyu is now placed on the right instead of the left. Collasuyu is now on the left. The other lords are absent, as is Hanan Cuzco. The Spaniards also adhere to Andean spatial representation. From left to right are Diego de Almagro, Francisco Pizarro, Fray Vicente de Valverde, and the native translator, Felipillo. According to Adorno, Andean spatial positions rank these from the left to the right as most positive to most negative. Almagro and Pizarro are most positively positioned and the "Indian liaison" is most negative. Adorno notes that this "is the essential statement about a paradigm of order about to be overturned. The center will be emptied, and alien elements (the conquistadors, their rivals, the clergy, and the co-opted Andeans) will replace the traditional heads of Tawantinsuyu."⁸¹

Inga Clendinnen observes that “colonial situations breed confusion.” She uses the analogy of a “hall of distorting mirrors in which each individual sees himself, as he thinks, truly reflected, while those about him are disquietingly altered into grotesques, as familiar gestures and expressions are exaggerated, parodied, even inverted.”⁸² A variety of characteristics shaped the mirrors through which we view the encounter at Cajamarca. These include the authority through which a person operates, the propaganda objective of the text, the social status of the author, and many other considerations. The multiple sets of words that describe the encounter reveal these distortions and warn the reader of the necessity of knowing the author as well as the words. That is a primary task of historical construction.

History creates memories. As I conclude this paper, I feel obligated to close with some message of the ongoing significance of 1492. Fourteen ninety-two, in my opinion, is of less importance for what happened and of more importance for what continues to happen. The legacy of 1492 is not finalized. The consequences of 1492 continue. The struggles initiated in that year persist. Nowhere can this be illustrated more forcefully than in Peru, where the Shining Path insurgency seeks to cleanse the land of alien intruders. The Shining Path has been engaged in a war of liberation for two decades. For many in the Shining Path, the words of José Carlos Mariátegui, an Indianist author of the 1920s, serve as an intellectual beacon to action. Indianism burst upon the Latin American literary and intellectual scene in the 1920s in an effort to reclaim the heritage of the native past as a way of changing national futures. Mariátegui wrote of the encounter at Cajamarca as an illustration of the European domination of that land:

I have already said that the conquest was the last crusade and that the conquistadors were the last representatives of Spanish grandeur. As a crusade, the conquest was essentially a military and religious enterprise. It was carried out jointly by soldiers and missionaries... In Cajamarca, the faith of the conquest was invested in Father Valverde. Although the execution of Atahualpa was brought about solely by the crude political maneuvering of Pizarro, it was dressed up with religious reasons and made to appear as the first sentence passed by the Inquisition in Peru.

After the tragedy of Cajamarca, the missionary continued to dictate his law to the conquest. Spiritual power inspired and directed temporal power. On the ruins of the empire, in which church and state had been one, a new theocracy was built. In this theocracy, the latifundium, an economic mandate, was born of the *encomienda*, an administrative, spiritual, and religious mandate. The friars took solemn possession of the Inca temples.⁸³

Mariátigui's somber account did not shape a negative impression of the Andean future. In a call to action, heard in the 1970s by members of the Shining Path, he concluded that "the historical experience of recent years has proven that present revolutionary and social myths can occupy man's conscience just as fully as the old religious myths."⁸⁴ History creates memories. The legacy of 1492 is not finalized. The consequences of 1492 continue. The struggles initiated in that year persist.

