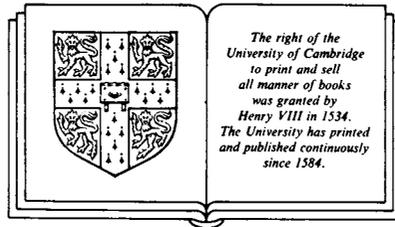


Language, authority, and
indigenous history in the
Comentarios reales de los incas

MARGARITA ZAMORA

*Assistant Professor of Spanish and Ibero-American Studies
University of Wisconsin, Madison*



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS ·

CAMBRIDGE

NEW YORK · NEW ROCHELLE · MELBOURNE · SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1988

First published 1988

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Zamora, Margarita

Language, authority and indigenous
history in the *Comentarios reales de los
incas*. – (Cambridge Iberian and Latin
American studies).

1. *Comentarios reales de los incas*

i. Title

985'.00498 F3429

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Zamora, Margarita.

Language, authority, and indigenous history in the
Comentarios reales de los incas.

(Cambridge Iberian and Latin American studies)

Bibliography.

Includes index.

1. Vega, Garcilaso de la, 1539–1616. *Comentarios
reales de los incas*. 2. Incas. 3. Peru – History – To
1548. 4. Peru – History – 1548–1820. 5. Peru – History –
To 1548 – Historiography. i. Title. ii. Series.

F3429.v3873236 1988 985'.02 87-25581

ISBN 0 521 35087 5

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
1 Introduction	i
2 Language and history: Renaissance humanism and the philologic tradition	12
3 Language and history in the <i>Comentarios reales</i>	39
4 Philology, translation, and hermeneutics in the <i>Comentarios reales</i>	62
5 Contexts and intertexts: the discourse on the nature of the American indian and the <i>Comentarios reales</i>	85
6 “Nowhere” is somewhere: the <i>Comentarios reales</i> and the Utopian model	129
7 Epilogue	166
<i>Notes</i>	169
<i>Bibliography</i>	189
<i>Index</i>	201

I

Introduction

Garcilaso Inca de la Vega was born Gómez Suárez de Figueroa in Peru in 1539, just seven years after the first official encounter between Incas and Spaniards took place at Cajamarca.¹ His father, Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega, was a Spanish officer while his mother, Chimpu Ocllo, was an Inca *palla*, or princess of the royal family. Although they never married, the captain and the *palla* had at least two children and lived together for some ten years, until he took a Spanish bride. Garcilaso remained in his father's household until the latter's death in 1559, although he apparently also kept in close and frequent contact with his mother and her family.

As a *mestizo*, offspring of the union between an Amerindian and a Spaniard, both of whom were prominent residents of Cuzco, Garcilaso grew up in the privileged position of being able to learn the ways of two vastly different cultures and to witness the process of conquest from the perspectives of both the conquerors and the conquered. His earliest education seems to have been in Quechua, the language he considered his native tongue. Through his mother and the elders of her family, Garcilaso was introduced to the history and customs of the Incas. From comments he interspersed throughout his works we know that gatherings of the Incan side of the family were frequent and usually had a didactic effect on the young Garcilaso, who loved to hear stories of the empire's former grandeur and to satiate his curiosity with probing questions on life in Tahuantinsuyu, as the Inca empire was called in Quechua, before the arrival of the Europeans. Very little is known of his formal education. He alludes to it apologetically in his works, in a style that is reminiscent of the rhetorical formula of false modesty, but a similar reference in a personal letter suggests that his modesty reflected his formal instruction accurately. Writing to the antiquarian Fernández Franco, Garcilaso speaks of a limited and sporadic exposure to the fundamentals of Latin as a child

in Cuzco, which came to an abrupt conclusion when Garcilaso was approximately fourteen years old. He relates that he and his classmates turned to the “exercise of horses and arms” when the last of a series of seven tutors departed during the increasingly turbulent times of the Peruvian civil wars.²

Garcilaso received a small inheritance upon his father’s death so that he could travel to Spain to complete his education and in 1560, at the age of twenty-one, he left Peru never to return again. There is no indication that he ever pursued formal studies in Europe. His own explanation of how he acquired the skills necessary for his literary achievements is not without irony. He joined the army, Garcilaso explains, but the lack of royal recognition for his military efforts in the Alpujarras wars, in which he served as captain in the King’s forces (1570–1), coupled with too much leisure time upon his return to civilian life, turned him from soldier into student.

All indications suggest that Garcilaso was essentially an autodidact. The inventory of his library, together with the evidence provided by his works, testify to his command of the knowledge and skills of a highly educated humanist. The contents of the library reveal that his intellectual interests ranged from European and New World history to the history of classical and Christian antiquity. Although it is sometimes difficult to determine from the hastily written inventory which books were in the original languages and which in Spanish translations, it is clear that Garcilaso knew Latin. The presence of a Greek grammar in the collection suggests at least a working knowledge of the second great classical language to which the humanists were so devoted. The inventory also indicates a predilection for writers of the Italian Renaissance and an interest in rhetoric, as evidenced by the presence in the collection of works by Cicero, the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle, as well as the *Arte rhetorica* of Francisco de Castro, who dedicated the work to Garcilaso. Typically for an educated Christian of the period, the inventory indicates that he also owned a considerable number of devotional works.³

Garcilaso settled in Montilla, a small town in southern Spain where his father’s brother, Alonso de Vargas, had his estate. There he wrote his first three works, *La traducción del indio de los tres diálogos de amor de León Hebreo* (1590), a translation from Italian of León Hebreo’s (Judah Abarbanel) Neoplatonic dialogues;⁴ the *Relación de la descendencia de Garcí Pérez de Vargas* (1596), a genealogy of the Vargas branch of the family; and *La Florida del Inca* (1605), an account of the

exploration and conquest of Florida. In 1591, after his uncle's death, Garcilaso moved to Córdoba where he completed his masterpiece, the *Comentarios reales de los incas* (1609), an interpretation of the history and culture of the Incas, and its sequel the *Historia general del Perú* (published posthumously in 1617), devoted to the history of the conquest and colonization of Peru by the Spaniards.

Garcilaso enjoys a privileged position in the history of Spanish American writing. He was the first New World native and the first person of Amerindian descent to be published and read widely throughout Europe.⁵ In the *Comentarios reales* he became the first writer to attempt to incorporate indigenous elements into a Western discourse, in effect transforming the way a European audience conceived of Inca history and culture. This study explores the rhetorical and conceptual models which enabled him to achieve that goal.⁶ It also attempts to explain the originality of Garcilaso's literary achievement and the goals and intentions of his undertaking. By considering both the formal and conceptual aspects of the text as narrative strategies with specific objectives and results, I hope to show that for Garcilaso the conquest and colonization of the New World was not only a military struggle but, perhaps more significantly, a discursive one.

Garcilaso's task in the *Comentarios reales* was to reconcile the Inca experience of the past with the European world view, in an attempt to restore and ultimately to vindicate the indigenous tradition. But perhaps the most transcendental aspect of the work is that in opening up Western discourse to accommodate Amerindian elements, the *Comentarios reales* in effect inverted the process of conquest in its discursive dimension. European writing on the New World typically excluded, condemned or, at the very least, marginalized indigenous culture. Garcilaso, however, sought to reconcile the oppositions and contradictions that he perceived in those discourses in order to achieve the Renaissance ideal of *concordia*, or the conciliation of opposites. In the final analysis, his interpretation of Inca civilization strives to demonstrate the fundamental complementarity of New World and Christian histories.

In this study I focus on the role that language plays in the *Comentarios reales* – first, as part of a rhetorical strategy for the revision of what Garcilaso considers the false versions of Inca history written by Spaniards, and then, as an essential component in the process of integration and synthesis of two widely divergent worlds – the Incan and the European. I argue that the intellectual world that Garcilaso

entered upon his arrival in Spain was steeped in humanist linguistic thought and practice; just as the one he had left behind in Peru had been preoccupied with the relation of language to the politics of conquest and religious indoctrination.⁷ Thus, it was language that provided him with the contours of his argument. The narration of the Amerindian past is conceived in the *Comentarios reales* as an act of translation, in the broadest and most ambitious sense of the term. But it is Renaissance linguistic theory and practice that informs, in very concrete and specific ways, the formal strategies of the text. Garcilaso's personal associations with a circle of Andalusian philologists and biblical exegetes left an indelible mark on his intellectual formation and gave a unique shape to the narration of the past in the *Comentarios reales*.

Hayden White reminds us that all historical writing is ideologically marked, and insofar as historical texts present a certain view of the historical record they employ a series of narrative tactics of emplotment and argumentation in order to render that record intelligible to the intended audience.⁸ In this way, unprocessed historical material is transformed to mirror the ideology of both the historian and the audience. The *Comentarios reales* is an interesting case, however, because while Garcilaso addressed a Christian European readership working within a familiar ideological framework, the rhetorical strategies in the text point to a double intention. They are directed at integrating indigenous elements which had previously been incomprehensible, and therefore unacceptable, to that audience while at the same time subverting the unflattering and unsympathetic versions of Inca history and culture sanctioned by the Spanish Crown. Implicit in Garcilaso's interpretation of Incan Peru, for example, is the idea that the pagan Incas played a privileged role in Christian history. This claim not only undermines the ideological premises which had been invoked to justify the conquest, but more importantly, it is nothing short of a devastating indictment of the Spanish destruction of Inca civilization. It is a tribute to Garcilaso's remarkable rhetorical abilities that the *Comentarios reales* received the official approval of the Inquisition and the Crown and was published, uncensored, in 1609.

Throughout the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, when the *Comentarios reales* was regarded as the final word on the history and culture of the Incas, Garcilaso's authority and prestige as historian of pre-Hispanic Peru was unrivaled. Consequently, the *Comentarios reales* has usually been studied in relation to

historiographical criteria. Even when scholars have arrived at the conclusion that it is not a history, in the usual sense, historiographical considerations have provided the basis of comparison and evaluation. With the rise of rationalist and positivist historiography, study of the work was focused for many years in the history versus fiction debate. In 1905, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo affirmed that the *Comentarios reales* was not a history at all but a utopian novel, in the tradition of More, Campanella, and Harrington.⁹ But well before Menéndez y Pelayo's literary evaluation of the fictionality of the work, several historians had questioned Garcilaso's reliability and integrity as a narrator of history. Robertson initiated the unfavorable re-evaluation by questioning his frequent use of secondary sources as well as his apparent inability to discriminate between the factual and the fabulous.¹⁰ Prescott echoed Robertson's misgivings about Garcilaso's credulity, suggesting that he was a gossip and an egomaniac.¹¹ In Peru, a heated polemic arose over Garcilaso's use of sources. González de la Rosa charged that he was a plagiarizer who had lifted the better part of his history of the Incas from secondary sources, especially the Valera manuscript Garcilaso frequently cites. Riva Agüero defended Garcilaso's integrity and objectivity.¹² Since then, Sánchez, Porras Barrenechea, Miró Quesada, and Durand have all argued in support of Garcilaso's accuracy and integrity as a historian, if not of his impartiality.¹³

His defenders notwithstanding, Garcilaso's feeling for the Incas together with his Renaissance penchant for literary creativity have served to all but exclude him from the current historiographical canon. It is important to note, however, that his contemporaries did not consider the *Comentarios reales* to be fictional; nor were public attempts made to discredit the work or its author. It was approved, published, and read as a presumably truthful and accurate account of Inca civilization. While we might be tempted to attribute this to naiveté on the part of an audience composed primarily of the learned and influential, or to an unlikely liberalism in the heart of Counter-Reformation Spain, we must once again credit Garcilaso's acute command of the rhetorical and conceptual models available to him. For later readers the codes employed by Garcilaso were no longer familiar, often resulting in confusion and misunderstanding.

The impassioned and protracted polemic over Garcilaso's integrity and authority served to underline the crucial role that the *Comentarios reales* has played in the emerging Peruvian national culture, first in

forging the most influential image of Peru's pre-Hispanic past, and later as the literary symbol of Peru's indo-hispanic nationalist cultural identity.¹⁴ The transition from studying the work as historical document to interpreting it as symbolic representation constitutes a significant cultural reclassification, marking its passage from the discipline of history to that of literature. But its cultural importance has only intensified as a result.

Literary studies have tended to emphasize the fictional or creative aspects of the work at the expense of other characteristics, particularly its documentary value. In the works of Durand, Miró Quesada, and Pupo-Walker the argument has taken a more sensitive and sophisticated form, however, for instead of viewing its fictional or historical qualities as irreconcilable value judgments, these critics emphasize their harmonious coexistence in the text. Durand and, especially, Pupo-Walker have studied this aspect from the perspective of the personal dimension of Garcilaso's account, which has enabled them to reconcile its subjectivity and imaginative characteristics within a historical framework.¹⁵ Paradoxically, however, to recognize the historical nature of the text while emphasizing its creative or inventive aspects does not effectively clarify the fundamental generic questions that have been raised.

In the sixteenth century the lines between history and fiction were not clearly drawn. Historical texts availed themselves of fictional or imaginative devices to enhance their narrative, and fiction masqueraded as history in an attempt to bolster its own questionable authority. Cervantes parodied this ambivalence in his "history" of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*.¹⁶ Aristotle had clearly separated the two in the *Poetics* when he affirmed that actual deeds were the province of history while the probable or possible were that of poetry.¹⁷ But Aristotle's definition spoke only of the appropriate content of poetical and historical works, not of their formal characteristics. Indeed, his brief statement on the question of form leads one to believe that he felt the issue to be irrelevant: whether in verse or in prose Herodotus' work would always be a history, he affirmed. Cicero, the other major source for humanist historiography had, however, made important statements about the writing of history in *De oratore*. Consequently, the humanists came to regard history as a branch of rhetoric, as an instrument of persuasion which would move the reader to virtuous action imitative of the heroes whose deeds were represented in histories. The ultimate purpose of history was to teach by example. As

Gilbert puts it, "Not factual completeness and accuracy, but moral guidance was expected from the true historian, and he was therefore permitted to select and stylize events from the past."¹⁸ Thus, the subject matter of history must be based on actual events in order to be didactically useful, as Aristotle required, but the form of the expression had to comply with rhetorical and literary criteria of elegant and persuasive prose. Stylistically, the representation of the historical material had as its primary purpose not the communication of strictly factual information, but the shaping of the past into an aesthetically effective and rhetorically convincing form. Studies like Durand's and Pupo-Walker's are essential to understanding Garcilaso's work, for in recognizing the fundamental duality of his narrative they have allowed us to leave behind once and for all the critical absolutism of earlier approaches, revealing a more complex vision of the work. However, the "creative history" approach still limits us to a two-dimensional reading. Moreover, it leaves us with a nagging question: Is the *Comentarios reales* simply a typical Renaissance history?

The history/fiction idiom is a restricted model from which to read the *Comentarios reales* because it limits the discursive possibilities of the text to two clearly delineated types. It starts from the premise that every utterance can be classified either as historical, that is strictly referential, or as creative, where the narration of the past is embellished through fictional resources or transformed through the interjection of the personal feelings and circumstances of the author, or simply invented. In the case of the *Comentarios reales* the imaginative dimension of the discourse is manifested primarily through the intense subjectivity that Garcilaso's personal memories introduce into the narration of the historical material. But, if one were to follow this argument to its logical conclusion, it must also include all of the dialogues represented in the text, all but the most literal of Garcilaso's interpretations, the narration of tales and anecdotes, the representation of characters, the symbolic or metaphorical nature of many passages, and the like.

Such an approach lacks specificity for it obliges us to lump together a wide variety of discursive forms, obscuring much of the richness and originality of Garcilaso's rhetorical achievement. In fact, the rhetorical models he employs in the *Comentarios reales* are many and varied. They are by no means limited to Renaissance historical discourse or the just-emerging fictional genres which in the fifteenth century took the form of the "novels" of chivalry, and in the sixteenth that of the

picaresque narratives.¹⁹ Garcilaso borrows from the Hebraeo-Christian tradition of biblical hermeneutics, forensics, utopian discourse, philology, theology, and from the chronicles and missionary narratives describing the newly discovered peoples, as well as from a variety of fictional models, to mention only the most obvious examples, in order to persuade his readers to reject the negative image of the Incas found in the Spanish histories in favor of a new interpretation in which the Amerindian element is shown to be an indispensable component of Christian world history.

One final issue should be addressed before concluding this orientation – the matter of the supposed lack of authenticity of Garcilaso’s representation of Inca history and culture. This objection has been voiced particularly by anthropologists. In comparative studies of the *Comentarios reales* and indigenous narratives of the same period, such as Wachtel’s article on Garcilaso and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, Garcilaso’s European acculturation is often contrasted to the more typically Andean vision of other native narrators.²⁰ But when one speaks of lack of authenticity in the *Comentarios reales* one cannot afford to overlook the fact that Garcilaso addresses precisely that same issue throughout his work. He phrases it, however, in sixteenth-century terms. The nature of those terms will be examined in the second and third chapters of this study. For now it is important to remember that the modern concept of authenticity has been shaped by nineteenth-century positivism. We understand an “authentic” experience to mean one that is empirical and verifiable. Viewed from this perspective, a faithful and authentic representation is one which attempts to represent that experience realistically by literally creating the illusion of objectivity and immediacy. But during the Renaissance, knowledge was considered the product of interpretation; as Foucault puts it – “The function proper to knowledge is not seeing or demonstrating, it is interpreting.”²¹ In the sixteenth century the transmission of truth was conceived of as an act of mediation. Accordingly, Garcilaso defines his narrative task in the prologue to the *Comentarios reales* precisely as an interpretation of Inca civilization. And when he claims that his story is a true one, he is defining truth in a hermeneutical sense, as an act of mediation which is faithful to the essence or “idea” of the original, in the Platonic sense. Garcilaso sought to render Inca civilization truthfully and faithfully, as those terms were understood in his day, but most importantly, to do so in a manner that would be intelligible and persuasive to his audience. The *Comentarios reales* could be described

then as an essentially rhetorical work, whose purpose it is to convince at least as much as to inform. That is, in fact, what Garcilaso suggests in his proem where he tells the reader that his purpose is not to contradict the historical record but to explain it by serving as a commentator and interpreter. The rhetorical character of the work underscores Garcilaso's commitment to the Amerindian cause. It also reveals, however, the extreme complexity of the terms of that commitment, as will be seen in the pages that follow.

If we were to subject the *Comentarios reales* to a modern anthropological critique we might be tempted to criticize Garcilaso for what seem to us to be distortions of Andean reality. But in doing so we would be obliged to recognize that we were imposing our own discursive prejudices on a Renaissance work. If, on the other hand, our intention is to understand how a Peruvian *mestizo* of the sixteenth century sees the historical relationship between Inca civilization and the Spanish conquest, and how he translates that perception into an effective rhetorical strategy to vindicate the conquered in the aggressor's own terms – then we must read the *Comentarios reales* utilizing the same rhetorical and conceptual models available to Garcilaso and his readers in the sixteenth century. Although it would be naive to believe that one can completely overcome the limitations imposed by one's historical perspective, and presumptuous to claim absolute accuracy of interpretation, the responsible reader must strive to approach the text in a manner consistent with the discursive possibilities available to Garcilaso and his intended audience.

The question of Garcilaso's intended audience is particularly important because it makes the rhetorical choices of the author intelligible and helps avoid anachronistic interpretations and inappropriate comparisons. The *Comentarios reales* is addressed to an educated and influential minority of Christian European readers. Clearly, it was not intended for the vast majority of illiterate Europeans, nor for the Indians and *mestizos* of Peru, most of whom could not read Spanish and who, moreover, would not have needed Garcilaso to interpret indigenous history for them. Thus, the text employs indigenous materials in a manner which strives to be faithful to the native tradition by representing it in ways that are rigorously consistent with sixteenth-century norms for the representation of truth and, at the same time, to render that material intelligible and acceptable to its intended audience. This becomes clearer if one understands Garcilaso's fidelity as having a double purpose. The *Comentarios reales* attempts to be simul-

taneously faithful to its referent, Inca history and culture, and to its rhetorical goals of transforming European discourse on the Amerindian. Against a discourse of irreconcilable oppositions he proposes a rewriting of New World history which would be consistent with the Renaissance ideal of *concordia*, where cultures once seen as antipodal can finally coexist in harmony. There can be little doubt that the *Comentarios reales de los incas* is a committed work, and it is to Garcilaso's credit that he never loses sight of the essentially persuasive nature of his enterprise.

The methodology I employ in this study emphasizes literary discourse analysis, since it is both the field in which I have formally trained and the one which has generated the greatest interest in the *Comentarios reales* in recent years, but it is also interdisciplinary, in accordance with the hybrid nature of Garcilaso's own work. There are three aspects of the approach that deserve special mention. First, this study strives to be consistent with the historical and cultural contexts from which the *Comentarios reales* arose, attempting to interpret the text in light of the conceptual and rhetorical models available to Garcilaso in the sixteenth century. Secondly, I consider the meaning of the text as a product of the interaction between the content and the manner in which that content is articulated. The basic assumption is that the meaning of an utterance is ultimately as much the result of *how* it is said as of *what* is said.

And, finally, a clarification about the selection of the object of the study. The *Comentarios reales* and the *Historia general del Perú* were conceived by Garcilaso as two parts of a whole which would present the pre-Hispanic and Hispanic stages of Peruvian history as a coherent unit. However, they have traditionally been published and studied as autonomous, though related, works. The most obvious difference that separates the two texts is their subject matter; the *Comentarios reales* focuses almost exclusively on Inca civilization while the *Historia general* deals with the Spanish conquest and colonization. Although Garcilaso places all of Peruvian history on the same historical continuum, the Amerindian culture all but fades out of the picture when Garcilaso begins the narration of postconquest history. At the formal level as well, the differences between the *Historia general* and the *Comentarios reales* are more significant than their similarities. The conceptual and rhetorical exigencies of narrating the Amerindian past, so foreign to his intended audience, forced Garcilaso to stretch the resources of sixteenth-century historiography well beyond its

limits, as the pages that follow will show. His narration of Spanish colonial history, on the other hand, fit comfortably within the bounds of Renaissance historical discursive norms. It is a much more typical and consequently more accessible example of its genre. This is the first book-length study devoted exclusively to the *Comentarios reales* and, as such, it continues the tradition of seeing the two volumes of Garcilaso's history of Peru as separate and autonomous in very significant ways. My purpose in focusing on the *Comentarios reales* was not to deny the validity or fruitfulness of studying both works as parts of a whole, but to underscore the unique characteristics of this classic and much debated text in greater depth and detail than would be possible in a more general study of Garcilaso's *oeuvre*.

A few words about the chapters which follow may help to guide the reader. Chapter 2 is devoted to Renaissance philosophy of language and humanist philology as a strategy of religious reform. It provides indispensable background information for situating Garcilaso's discursive strategies in their historico-conceptual context. The third chapter explores the relations between humanist linguistic thought, Garcilaso's concept of historical truth, and the forging of his authorial persona. It opens with a discussion of the particular demands placed on historiographical notions of truth and narrative authority by the discovery of the New World. The chapter culminates with an analysis of the development of Garcilaso's narrative authority and his *idearium* on language. Chapter 4 examines how humanist philologic strategies shape the narration of Inca history and culture. The fifth chapter relates Garcilaso's discursive strategies to his intentions and purposes by exploring the intertextual relations between the *Comentarios reales* and the texts that constitute the sixteenth-century debate on the nature of the Amerindians. Finally, chapter 6 explores the function of the utopian model in the *Comentarios reales* as the essential model for a complex strategy of cultural translation, which mediates the conciliation of oppositions and contradictions that dominated European discourse on the history and culture of the indigenous peoples of America.