



El Inca: The Life and Times of Garcilaso de la Vega (Texas Pan American)

John Grier Varner

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Garcilaso de la Vega, the great chronicler of the Incas and the conquistadors, was born in Cuzco in 1539. At the age of twenty, he sailed to Spain to acquire an education, and he remained there until his death at Córdoba in 1616. As the natural son of a noble conquistador and an Indian woman of royal blood, he took immense pride in both his Spanish and Inca heritage, and, living as he did during a bewildering but stimulating epoch, he personally witnessed the last gasp of the dying Inca empire, the fratricidal conflicts that accompanied the Conquest, and the literary growth as well as the political decline of the Spain of Philip II and Philip III.

Garcilaso left for posterity one of the earliest accounts of the ancient Incas, a reliable though admittedly biased chronicle of Spanish conquests in Andean America and a glowing story of Hernando de Soto's exploration of North America. Though he never lost pride in his Spanish heritage, continued rebuffs in caste-conscious Spain strengthened his pride in his Indian heritage and his sympathy for his mother's people. Thus his histories, while ennobling Spaniards, also ennobled the Incas, and eventually were to have some influence in the struggle of South Americans for political independence from Spain. In both blood and character El Inca Garcilaso was a true mestizo. He is generally considered to have been the first native-born American to attain the honor of publication.

This was the life, and these were the times, that Varner has evoked so richly in his narrative. It rings and glitters with the sounds and colors of festivals, pageantry, and battle; it listens to the murmur of prayers, the defeated mutter of the Incas, the scratch of the scholar's quill; it pictures both highlights and shadows. For the reader already acquainted with Garcilaso's chronicles, this book will be a welcome complement; for those who are meeting El Inca here for the first time, it will be a rewarding and satisfying introduction.

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