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Empires for Peace: Denis Veiras’s Borrowings from Garcilaso de la Vega

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ABSTRACT
Writing The History of the Sevarambians in the 1670s, the Huguenot Denis Veiras borrowed many ideas from Garcilaso de la Vega, also known as El Inca, whose Royal Commentaries of the Incas was published in 1609. Both works describe the history of an empire and justify it on the ground that it brought peace and unity. While Garcilaso’s book purported to be a history, his selection of facts reflected his goal of improving the treatment of the Incas by the Spanish. Veiras’s story also claimed to be a history, but it was transparently a fiction, even to the point of lifting many elements from Garcilaso’s book. What both works equally emphasized was that empires could aim at, and could be justified by, the benefits they provided their subjects. Both tell stories of benevolent and paternalistic rulers who founded nearly ideal societies in the countries they conquered. These were models of empire for peace and unity rather than merely promoting toleration of differences or concord among differing parties. Veiras’s utopia thus offers an instructive case study of the effects of cross-cultural borrowings of literary and political ideas.

KEYWORDS
Empire; peace; Denis Veiras; Garcilaso de la Vega (el Inca); Utopia; cross-cultural borrowing; political ideas

Throughout history, writers have transposed discourses by borrowing from one culture as they write about another. Thomas More, Montaigne, and Montesquieu, for example, used exotic foreign cultures to examine the problems of their own societies. Denis Veiras, writing in the 1670s in both English and French, carried this strategy even further. Not only did he set his utopian novel The History of the Sevarambians / L’histoire des Sevarambes in Australia, relying on the literature of European travels to Persia in order to portray the conquering hero as a Zoroastrian, but he drew much of the structure and many elements of his work from Garcilaso de la Vega’s Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of the Kingdom of Peru / Comentarios reales de los incas (1609).¹ This merging of different cultures and discourses gave him great flexibility for comparisons and contrasts. There are many lessons here on how discourses and practices of peace and unity in one culture are imaginatively applied to another. More specifically, Veiras’s History of the Sevarambians justifies conquest and empire on the ground that they bring peace and unity and eliminate violence and persecution. Garcilaso and Veiras thus belong to a tradition of justifying empire on the basis of the peace it promotes.

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Veiras’s *History of the Sevarambians* of 1675–79 was the first utopian work of the early Enlightenment with substantial philosophical and political content, which also enjoyed widespread distribution. He did not make it up alone: he had plenty of other utopian and travel writings to draw on. It is perhaps no surprise that Veiras relied on the recent travel literature from Persia and India for details for a story whose hero is supposed to be a Persian. It is also no surprise that there were recent models for the magical realism he employed in the English version of his story. But it may come as something of a surprise that one of the main sources for the narrative structure and some of the ideas he integrated into his story was the story, not intended as a utopia, but rather as a history, of the ancient Incan dynasty of Peru: Garcilaso de la Vega, *El Inca’s Royal Commentaries of the Incas* of 1609.

A few authors have previously noted this influence. Geoffrey Atkinson observed that “The general indebtedness of Veiras to Garcilaso has been mentioned in Marchand’s *Dictionnaire*, in the Article Veirasse, and by M. Chinard.” He pointed out a number of similarities between the *Commentaries* and the *Sevarambians*: “Sevarias introduces sun-worship, abolishes corrupt moral practices, and founds granaries wherein to store food against the years of poor harvests, in the same way that the first King or Inca introduced sun-worship, abolished corrupt practices and founded granaries in Peru, according to the Histoire des Yncas.” In both the *Commentaries* and the *Sevarambians* a king invades an enemy and brings back slaves; in both, there is also a king who builds an aqueduct. Given that these seem to be the most extensive remarks about Veiras’s use of Garcilaso, our aim is to provide a much more detailed review of these borrowings and of their importance.

But why would an author who set his utopia in Australia draw on a work about Peru for structure and content? The answer must be that the work about another part of the world provided him with new ideas. We may speculate that he wrote his book quickly, and thus found it easier to model it on other works. Writing practices of the time often relied on the free borrowing and adaptation of ideas, even of extended passages, from other writers. Readers might even have appreciated the originality of copying ideas from one culture into the depiction of another.

Veiras’s *Sevarambians* originally appeared in two short volumes in English in 1675–77, and then in a longer French version in five volumes in 1677–79, which was then translated back into English as the full version of 1734. Denis Veiras was a Huguenot who spent the years 1665–74 in London, where he was associated with the Duke of Buckingham. In the English version, the narrator is a Protestant, while in the French version he is a Catholic, but other than that there are few obvious references to contemporary affairs. His criticism of religious events in Europe seem to apply to the two major contending religions. He seems to have returned to the south of France in the 1690s, which suggests that either the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes did not have much effect on him or that he converted to Catholicism, at least nominally.

Garcilaso’s *Commentaries*, first published in Spanish in Lisbon in 1609, were translated into French in 1633, with later editions appearing in 1658 and 1672. Garcilaso was born in Peru, the illegitimate son of a Spanish aristocrat and a royal Incan mother who was educated in both cultures. His first language was Quechua. At the age of twenty-one he traveled to Spain to obtain acknowledgment as his father’s son, and remained there for the rest of his life. His *Commentaries* was an attempt to bridge the two cultures by inspiring more respect and sympathy for the Inca in Spain.
Garcilaso wrote at a time when distant societies and lands, as described in travel accounts, were constantly being compared to European countries. Moreover, with the rise of rationalism and reason in response to dogmatic tradition, there was growing fascination with the idea that other societies enjoyed peace and plenty without Christian churches, priests, and external forms of religion. This trend of thought was ultimately subversive of Christian Europe, as some readers and writers of the time realized. Yet despite being subversive, these two texts paradoxically also served to justify Christian Europe’s spirit of conquest and expansion of empire. Veiras and Garcilaso, as noted earlier, may be seen as writers who are part of a tradition of justifying empire on the ground that it brought peace, as will become apparent in specifying what Veiras borrowed from Garcilaso.

In the Commentaries there is an account of the founder of the Inca empire in the thirteenth century, Manco Cápac, and his successors; an account of the natives before their redemption by Manco Cápac; and a description of the Inca empire in operation. In *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Frank Manuel and Fritzi Manuel divided Sevarambians into four separate stories, which we have rearranged in loose parallel to Garcilaso’s account: (1) the story of Captain Siden, a European who happened upon the Sevarambians; (2) an account of the traditions of the natives, benighted victims of conniving priests before their redemption by Sevarias; (3) the story of Sevarias’s conquest of Sevarambia and the subsequent succession of kings; and (4) the institutions and practices of the utopian civilization. To some extent these stories are intertwined and do not follow our logical plot sequence, yet this arrangement makes more sense in terms of understanding the Sevarambians and seeing what it borrowed from the Commentaries.

**Alonso Sánchez de Huelva and Captain Siden**

The Commentaries begins with Alonso Sánchez de Huelva being shipwrecked by a storm and discovering Peru for the Spaniards, thus introducing us to the story of the Incas. Similarly, in the Sevarambians, Captain Siden is shipwrecked by a storm and discovers Sevarambia (later known as Australia), thus introducing us to the story of the Sevarambians. There are some differences: the narrator of the Commentaries is the author, Garcilaso, who was born in Inca lands as a child of an Incan and a Spaniard, while the narrator of the Sevarambians is the fictional Captain Siden, an outsider.

The introductions to both books affirm the existence of the antipodes. Given this belief and thus the belief that the Earth is a globe, and that the author’s people have not explored it all, it follows that there are places they know nothing about. Garcilaso mentions the certainty that there are antipodes and the subsequent uncertainty as to how the natives arrived in their lands, whether by sea or by land, and how they brought over animals and food (G 13). This uncertainty and lack of knowledge will be filled by him with the story of the history of the Inca kings and their succession, their conquests, laws and government in peace and war (ibid.). In the Sevarambians Veiras too mentions the certainty of the antipodes and the uncertainty about undiscovered lands and people, saying that most discoveries of new places have happened by chance, which is why curious people should travel and learn more (V 118). Captain Siden, the storyteller, has discovered a civilization after his shipwreck and will “supply this Defect” of knowledge and tell us the story of the Sevarambians (V 120).
Before Manco Cápac and Sevarias

The second story in both texts—the account of the Peruvian Indians before they were saved by Manco Cápac and the account of the Australian natives before their “redemption” by Sevarias—are remarkably similar. The natives are described as simple, uncivilized, ignorant, benighted, stupid, and, most importantly, as lacking the true religion before they are conquered, “saved,” and shown the light. The natives in the Commentaries, before the Incan conquest, are far less likeable than the natives in Sevarambia. The Indians are simple, stupid, and worship only what they see without thinking whether or not such things are worthy of worship (G 31). Most, though not all, are cruel and barbaric in their human sacrifices and cannibalism (G 33). All are heathens. They live like “wild beasts” in dens or in caves (G 35). Their attempts at dressing themselves are “laughable” (G 36) and indecent (G 37). The dissolution and immodesty of women is even desired by many (G 39). In sum, they are depicted as barbaric and in need of being civilized.

In the Sevarambians, the account of the native Prestarambians appears as part of the story of how Sevarias conquered them. They are described as attractive, gentle, just, living in common, with agreeable manners, and would have been perfectly happy if it were not for their enemies, the Stroukarambians, who frequently attacked them (V 211). Because of this conflict each tribe elected captains to fight their enemies (V 213). This conflict arose from disagreements over how the sun should be worshiped. Although both native groups worshiped the sun, according to Sevarias, they lacked the correct version of sun worship (the significance of which point will be discussed later). Although the Prestarambians were admirable and had benign characteristics, they are portrayed as less civilized and more ignorant than Sevarias’s people.

The Stroukarambians were conquered by Sevarias and the Prestarambians working together. We learn that they were poor victims of a conniving impostor, Stroukaras, who claimed to be the son of the sun, and his impostor priests. Many of the Stroukarambians, or at least “all reasonable persons,” were disabused and saved when Sevarias exposed the impostors before the people. Soon, the impostors’ temples were destroyed and their version of religious worship abolished. However, there were still some who “persist in their idolatry to this day” (V 349). In sum, both the Prestarambians and the Stroukarambians were simple, just, and gentle when not under the influence of a corrupt religion.

The Founders and the Succession of Kings

The heart of both books is the story of the founders of the two empires and how they conquered the natives, followed by the story of successive rulers. Both books emphasize that the success of the utopian societies depends on their paternalistic leaders. Their methods of conquest set the tone for their presence and leadership and also laid the foundation for colonization. The respective founders of the Incas and the Sevarambians did not persecute nor subject the natives to ill treatment. Rather, after the conquest, they were forgiving in their methods of government.

The original Indians were easily conquered when Manco Cápac, the founder, went up to them and announced that the Sun had sent him to be their teacher and to deliver them from their wild lives. They were impressed by his clothes and his promises, so they simply believed him (G 44). For the most part, the Indians “believed any new thing” (G 104). The
Commentaries is explicit in saying that the method of the Inca’s conquest of the barbarians was not to be despised, for they only waged just wars. They never waged war “unless moved by causes that seemed to them sufficient, such as the need that the barbarians should be reduced to a human and civilized existence, or offences and injuries inflicted on their subject peoples by untamed neighbors” (G 264). Before waging war, they gave numerous warnings. The barbarians’ idols would be held hostage until they were convinced of their wrong religious practices. The natives were carried away to Cuzco where they were treated well and given education, land, and houses (G 265). For the most part, in the many accounts of conquest in the Commentaries, the Indians succumbed easily to the Inca kings’ requests and appeals, and were convinced they should submit to the Incas after seeing examples of other Indians who had benefited from Inca rule.

This theme of quick and easy submission carries over even to the conquest and colonization of the Incas by the Spanish. The last Inca king, Huaina Cápac, tells his people to give in to the Spanish who are destined to rule and are better than the Incans. After being asked by Garcilaso how the Inca empire was so quickly lost and surrendered to so few Spaniards, he “repeated the prophecy about the Spaniards which he had told us some days before, and explained how their Inca had bidden them obey and serve the Spaniards since they would prove superior to them in everything” (G 578). Furthermore, the superiority of the Spanish was even more convincing in light of the Inca belief that they had come to save the Incas from a usurper who had killed their rightful king. The Incas said that the Spanish were the children of their god, and “killed the tyrant to avenge the Incas and that this was ordained by the god Viracocha [a child of the Sun]” (G 287). This is strikingly similar to how Sevarias comes to save the Prestarambians from their enemy, the Stroukarambians. Thus convincing the natives of the founders’ and kings’ righteousness and noble motivations helped them conquer them.

Some of the Inca kings, such as Maita Cápac, were forgiving of obstinate Indians who did not want to immediately succumb to Inca rule. However, this was only the case if the Indians repented their obstinate resistance, which they did only after suffering great losses in the war. The Inca king told them in “gentle” words that “he had not come to take their lives or property, but to do them good and teach them to live by natural law and reason, and abandoning their idols, to worship the Sun as god, to whom they owed their pardon” (G 141). Another example of Inca royal mercy was when the stubborn Ayaviri tribe continued to fight them: “The Incas could have butchered them, but did not wish to do so, and by tightening the siege forced them to surrender. ... The Inca received them unconditionally and, after severely reproaching them for their disrespect to the child of the Sun, pardoned them and ordered them to be well treated without regard to the obduracy they had displayed” (G 108). Some natives in the Commentaries were submissive and tractable and some were obstinate, but even the latter were treated gently after they had been defeated.

Impressing the natives is an effective method of conquest that avoids the need for violence. Sevarias conquered the Prestarambians by winning their respect in several ways. He fired artillery to “impress them with fear and respect” (V 213), just like the Spanish did in Peru. Though violence was used against the Stroukarambians, it was not used against the Prestarambians, the primary group Sevarias wanted to conquer and colonize. He soon helped the Prestarambians by allying with them to fight the Stroukarambians, who invaded them annually. This also parallels the Spanish alliances with disgruntled Indians in various of their conquests in the Americas. Creating alliances as a strategy for conquest echoes
Machiavelli’s advice in *The Prince*, published in the previous century: “Whoever is in a province that is disparate as was said, should also make himself head and defender of the neighboring lesser powers, and contrive to weaken the powerful in that province.” The success of his military campaigns against the Stroukarambians convinced the Prestarambians that Sevarias should be their leader. He was also merciful and forgiving. After he helped the Prestarambians defeat the Stroukarambians, he told the latter that he did “not come there to destroy them, nor yet to drive them from their Habitations, but only to chastize them for the Cruelties they had exercis’d on their Neighbours the Prestarambians” (V 219). Fortune, to use Machiavelli’s term, favored Sevarias by providing him with a conflict between natives that he could exploit. Yet his ability to successfully impress, create allies, and ultimately manipulate the natives serves as evidence of the strength of his virtù over fortune, something Machiavelli would have praised. For Machiavelli, as one examines the actions and lives of excellent princes, “one does not see that they had anything else from fortune than the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased. Without that opportunity their virtue of spirit would have been eliminated, and without that virtue the opportunity would have come in vain.” Sevarias and the Inca kings could be added to Machiavelli’s list of excellent men, seeing that they took advantage of opportunities and used their virtù to conquer and maintain power over the natives.

Both conquerors claimed that their purposes were benevolent and religious. The aim of the Inca kings was “to uplift the Indians from the inhuman barbarism of their present existence and to reduce them to a moral and political way of life through the knowledge and worship of their father the Sun, whom they regarded as God” (G 475). Similarly, Captain Siden observed that before the arrival of Sevarias, “these People were stupid and barbarous, as are still their near Neighbours, and, I believe, all the Inhabitants of that Continent” (V 197). Thus Sevarias decided to conquer the natives of Australia because “it look’d as if Providence had bestow’d [it] on them [the Persians], for the Restoration of the ancient Splendour of those who were true Persians, and for the Reestablishment of the right Worship of the illustrious Star of Day” (V 215).

There are some contrasts between the *Commentaries* and the *Sevarambians* regarding their respective founders. The first Inca king was the child of the Sun, sent to the Earth to give civilized life to the barbarians. The first Sevarambian king, Sevarias, never claimed to be the son of the Sun. However, the Stroukarambians, whom he had helped the Prestarambians to conquer, had an impostor who claimed to be the son of the Sun. It seems likely that Veiras freely borrowed the idea of the first king being the child of the Sun from Garcilaso. Yet, in writing that it was an impostor who claimed to be the child of the Sun to dupe his people, as Cyrus Masroori has suggested, he “gives his readers an opportunity to observe a dystopia that looks a lot like Europe of the author’s time.” Veiras was clearly criticizing Christianity and the state of affairs in Europe at the time.

What is, perhaps, the most obvious similarity between the *Commentaries* and the *Sevarambians* is the account of the detailed succession of kings and how they improved their empires. In the *Commentaries* this account extends throughout the first part of the book, beginning with the founder, Manco Cápac, and covering 410 out of the 625 pages in the printed English text. Veiras’s account of the viceroy’s and their accomplishments appears in the first 43 pages of the printed text of Part 3 in the modern English edition.

The kings do good things to benefit the conquered. Indeed, one of the more important things the Incan kings and the Sevarambian viceroy’s introduce is the theology of Sun
worship. It is a rational religion in which in addition to worshiping the sun, they also worship an incomprehensible God. Public works are also an important theme. After the conquest of a few valleys, an Inca king spent time “improving the kingdom with sumptuous buildings, great irrigation channels and many other benefits that he conferred on the inhabitants” (G 547). Another king, Viracocha, established plans for a great irrigation channel (G 297); and yet another visited the valleys of a new territory and ordered them “to be improved and adorned with royal buildings and great new channels for irrigating and extending the cultivable fields far beyond their previous limits; storehouses were built for the revenues of the Sun and of the Inca as well as for the use of the natives in years of want, all of which the Incas used to have made by ancient custom” (G 390); and he also built a strong fort. Likewise, Sevarias “caus’d divers Canals to be cut in the Plains of Sevarambe, for the Improvement of the Land, tho’ it was naturally very fertile, and form’d the Designs of several publick Works, which his Successors have since executed” (V 235).

One contrast between the two accounts is their emphasis on conquest. While Garcilaso reports that “a chief object of the Incas was to conquer and expand empire” (G 442), the Sevarias, despite helping the Prestarambians conquer the Stroukambians, and despite the fact that military training was mandatory for most Sevarambians, did not conquer much and their nation “was never much engag’d in War” (V 279). There is much more emphasis in the Sevarambians on the goodness of their utopia than on the conquest of other lands. It is possible that Veiras was inspired by kings who preferred to improve their empire rather than conquer new lands in the texts mentioned above and by the Inca King Yâhuar Huácac who wanted to do good for his people and kingdom and sustain property rather than conquer (G 227). Not to appear pusillanimous the Inca conqueror may have decided to “abandon all thought of war and the conquest of new provinces and attend only to the government and peace of his kingdom” (G 230).

The theme of alternatives to conquest is repeated at a number of points. The Inca king Pachacútec, for example, stopped conquering new provinces to allow his dominions to rest. At the time, his government focused on building new buildings and enacting new laws and regulations for rites and ceremonies (G 384). Another king, Inca Yupanqui, “decided to abandon completely the idea of gaining new territories, considering that those won by himself and his captains were already many” (G 462). He devoted the rest of his life to building fortresses, more temples for the sun, houses for chosen virgins, more storehouses, and more irrigation canals. He visited his realms to “study the needs of his subjects with his own eyes and provide remedies: he attended to them with such care that he earned the title of pious” (G 462). Similarly, one of the Sevambian kings wanted to conquer for expansion, yet the council opposed him, saying that their land “ought to be improv’d to the utmost before they touch’d of any more distant” (V 243). He indeed listened to this advice and improved agriculture, built new buildings, and introduced new religious and marriage ceremonies, rather like the Inca (ibid.). Perhaps Veiras was implying that Louis XIV would do better to attend to such matters rather than engage in perpetual wars.

Lastly, the kings of both civilizations were embalmed. The Inca kings were embalmed so well that “the corpses remained so fresh that they seemed to be still alive” (G 323). Sevambian magistrates were embalmed so well that Captain Siden reported that he had “seen some, who, after lying above a hundred Years, seem’d still living, without being at all hurt by the Air when the Cases were open’d that enclos’d them” (V 272). In the Commentaries the embalmed bodies of the kings were kept in the main temple of the sun in Cuzco
(G 324), and similarly in the Sevarambians, the portraits of the kings were kept in the main temple of the sun (V 290).

**Utopian Institutions and Practices**

We now turn to the descriptions of the actual utopias. In both texts, the results of conquest and colonization are superb, with idyllic and harmonious societies. Both the Incas and the Sevarambians had “backward looking” politics, that is to say, the state heavily regulated life by law and custom in almost Spartan style.\(^{16}\) For the Incas, children served their parents until they were twenty-five, after which they served the republic (G 226). In Sevarambia the children were adopted by the state when they were seven years old (V 234). An Inca law prohibited luxury in dress and the use of gold, silver, and fine stones (G 263). The Sevarambians were required to have clothes of particular colors and materials to denote their age and social status (V 256, 262). The Incas also required eating meals in public two to three times a month. Moreover, “they should dine and sup with their doors open so that the officials and judges should be able to inspect them freely” (G 263). The Sevarambians similarly required that two of the three daily meals be eaten in public (V 263). Military training was mandatory in the Inca kingdom (G 263), and so too in Sevarambia, where children were trained in arms, everyone served in the army, and different armies even pretended to surprise each other for the sake of practice (V 279). Both societies were communist: just as the Incas thought that no private property was needed (G 102), the Sevarambians had no private property (V 250).

The Incans and the Sevarambians were encouraged to imitate their kings, just as children were encouraged to imitate their parents in doing what is moral. Both civilizations shared the belief that it is important to set examples. Thus Manco Cápac instructed his officers to “imitate him in keeping the laws and commandments; they should be the first to obey them to set an example to the subjects, and they should be mild and merciful, subduing the Indians with love, and attracting them with good works and not by force, for constraint would never make good vassals” (G 60). Similarly, the Sevarambian viceroys maintained their power through the love and esteem of the citizens (V 248). Social order and virtue were maintained by setting an example: “the Sevarambians, who are not suffered to do anything but what is intrinsically good, cannot preserve their dignities but by a constant practice of virtue, and have nothing to leave to their children but a good example for their imitation” (ibid.).

Both civilizations condemned avarice, ambition and, most importantly, idleness. For the Incas, “avarice and ambition prevent men from being able to moderate themselves and others, for avarice distracts the mind from the public and private good, and ambition limits the understanding so that it cannot receive the good counsel of the wise and virtuous but only follows its own fancy” (G 497). There were no idlers among the Incan officers, largely because of the severe punishments, generally of the death penalty (G 95). Every Incan subject was given a task according to his or her ability. Idleness was a violation of domestic law and it was “a most degrading and dishonorable thing to be punished for idleness” (G 263): for them “idleness fosters vice. Occupation fosters virtue” (G 180). To discourage idleness, every Incan tribe was supposed to produce everything they needed and not to import anything (G 251). Among the Sevarambians, it was believed that “misfortunes of societies derive principally from three grand sources; which are pride, avarice and idleness”
(V 232), which is why Sevarias made sure everyone was employed (V 233). And as among the Incans, among the Sevarambians there was no need to trade with other nations (V 282).

The Incans were educated by amautas, or philosophers, and the proper way to raise and educate children was not to be too soft and or too harsh so that they would be “strong and brave in time of war and wise and prudent in time of peace” (G 309). Education was even more heavily emphasized in the Sevarambians as the remedy for vices, for it prevented the seeds of vice, the “natural bias” of men, from growing (V 253).

The Inca did not travel for private motives, but only “by order of the king or of the curacas, who sent them from place to place.” Travelers who went anywhere without a reason were punished (G 259). Similarly, only a select few of the Sevarambians were allowed to travel, never for private purposes, but only for the benefit of the state. They were ordered to pick up, “among us [in Europe], such Arts and Sciences as they judg'd might contribute to the Glory and Happiness of their own Nation” (V 244).

Both societies fostered harmonious labor practices. For the Incans tilling the land of the king was a “matter for festivity and joy because it was performed in the service of their god and their kings” (G 244). Though there were poor Incans, unlike among the Sevarambians, the kings loved them so much that they forced the poor to remove their lice and give it as a tribute, so that they were cleaned and would not be devoured by the lice (G 252). Everyone except state officials, soldiers, old people and the sick gave tribute (G 250), and they did so cheerfully because it was so small and they knew it ultimately benefited them (G 272). There were so many Incans that the “amount of labor required of each of them was so small that they hardly felt it, for they all took their turns and were perfectly honest in seeing that none were more burdened than the rest” (G 276). Everyone, from a young age, learned “all the crafts that a man needs to sustain human life” (G 258).

The Sevarambians were required to work eight hours a day, with a bell waking them up and getting them in the mood for work (V 264). They then had eight hours for rest and eight for recreation. No one was poor, everyone had all the necessities of life, they were never tormented by excessive hard work, with “each partake[ing] of the publick Pleasures and Diversions, without tormenting either his Body or Mind, by excessive Toil, or hard Study for the acquirement of them” (V 251). No one lived idly while others worked hard. “In a word, if we take a nice view of the Happiness of this People, we shall find that it is as perfect as anything in this World can be, and that all other Nations, compar'd with them, are in but a poor wretched Situation” (V 252). None of the Sevarambians had any trouble paying taxes (V 251). The Incans kept the harvests and tributes in public storehouses (G 255), and the Sevarambians too kept their goods in public storehouses (V 250).

Both civilizations had gendered jobs. The task of the Inca women was to spin, weave and make clothes (G 197), just like the task of the Sevarambian women (V 254).

Impressive architecture and works of engineering were a common theme in both societies. The Incas built bridges (G 149, 217), great aqueducts (G 113), fountains in the main temple for the Sun as well as a garden (G 186), “marvelous buildings,” and more (G 463). By his time, the Incan fountains were falling into disrepair, according to Garcilaso, causing their gardens to dry up (G 186). In Sevambria there were large bridges (V 242), great aqueducts (V 245), an impressive fountain in the palace of the viceroy as well as a beautiful garden (V 286), and large buildings that, though they housed a thousand people each, were very spacious (V 272).
Both civilizations sought gold not for money, but for its decorative value. The Incas used it to adorn the royal palaces and temples of the Sun (G 253), whereas the Sevarambians had no money and sought gold just for adorning the royal palace and temple of the sun (V 244).

Public hunts as games and diversions were held both by the Inca (G 325) and the Sevarambians (V 264). Language is a theme in both the Commentaries and the Sevarambians but with different outcomes. Among the Inca, the attempt to enforce the common language of Cuzco failed as different languages prevailed in different provinces (G 406). Sevarias invented a perfect language which used all the words, phrases, and idioms that he thought were good and discarded those that he thought were unnecessary (V 363).17

With respect to religion, both civilizations worshiped a sun god that was revealed to them by their first king, who then ordered temples dedicated to the sun to be built. Thus the Incan ruler Pachacutec built many temples to the sun (G 391). Similarly, Khemas, the sixth viceroy of the Sevarambians, obtained gold for the temple of the sun. Although all the inhabitants had "adored the sun" before Sevarias arrived, he introduced sun worship as a religion (V 315). After Sevarias conquered the Prestarambians he ordered a temple of the sun to be built (V 289). The descriptions of their temples are strikingly similar. Both the main Inca and the Sevarambian temples contained a globe, representing the sun.18 Both also had an unknown god. The Incas unknown god was called Pachacamac. They did not build temples or represented it in any way "for they said that he was not known to them because he had not allowed himself to be seen" (G 75). The Sevarambians represented their unknowable god with a black curtain (V 304).

In both civilizations, worship of the sun was based on reason. In this sense, they were both neo-Platonic, believing that "partial access to the truth about God” can come “through the use of reason.” In the Commentaries we read: “As to their gods, reason should show them that the Sun was more deserving of worship than their idols, without any need for the Inca to tell them” (G 224). Similarly, the Sevarambian religion was “agreeable to human reason” (V 303) because the “sun causes motion and warms everything” (V 306). Their worship similarly included sacrifices, ceremonies, and feasts for the sun (G 185; V 350).

They also shared a belief in life after death. For the Incas this meant “punishment for the wicked and rest for the good,” with the good going to heaven and the bad going to the center of the earth. They also believed in the immortality of the soul (G 84). The Sevarambians believed that after death there were punishments and rewards for good and bad men and that the soul left the body to go further or nearer the sun, according to how good it had been (V 306). Similarly, there was someone who claimed to be the son of the sun in both civilizations. In the Commentaries, Manco Cápac, the founder, persuaded his people that he was the child of the sun (G 55), whereas in the Sevarambians the impostor Stroukaras claimed to be son of the sun (V 322). Veiras’s portrayal of the latter, according to Masroori, is one of “the sharpest and most daring attacks of the time against Christianity in general” because of the analogy with that religion.20

There were also some differences between the two civilizations. For the Incans, it was an honor to have a daughter taken by the Inca or an officer (G 203ff.), whereas for the Sevarambians this was one of the abuses of Stroukaras’s priests (V 323). Unlike the Inca, who had arranged marriages (G 205), the Sevarambians could choose their marriage partners (V 165).

The Sevarambians appear closer to modern tastes than the Incas. Whereas there were poor Incas who had to be cared for (G 263), there were no poor people among the Sevarambians
There was a striking contrast between the two when it came to punishments: whereas the Incas enforced the death penalty and severe punishments for the transgression of laws (G53, 97, 226), in Sevarambia there were righteous judges and no death penalty (V 278). The Inca promoted incest, especially among the royalty (G 61), whereas incest was outlawed in Sevarambia (V 222). The Inca consumed large quantities of wine, making drunkenness “one of the most conspicuous vices” until the Spanish came and set an example for abolishing it (!) (G 363), whereas the Sevarambians did not drink alcohol until they were married (V 260). The Sevarambians elected their viceroys whereas the Inca had royal succession (V116). The Sevarambians were literate whereas the Inca language had no written form (G 262; V 364). Yet what may seem a deficiency impressed Garcilaso even more when he observed that the Incas framed laws that are still followed by the Indians by recording them in knots or threads of different colors (G 262). Except for this, however, as Atkinson pointed out, the Sevarambians were inventive whereas the Incas were not.21 For example, the Sevarambians invented ways to make the soil more fertile (V 200) and invented musical instruments that were unknown to Europeans (V 272). Again, we see from these contrasts that Veiras improved on the ideas of the Commentaries in order to make the Sevarambians appear more perfect than the Inca.

All of the above comparisons suggest how discourses of conquest and colonization in one empire can be applied to another. What both texts illustrate is quite simple: how an enlightened people encounters an unenlightened people. Rather than persecuting the unenlightened or merely tolerating their way of life, the enlightened show the unenlightened the light—of religion, society, and law. Thus both Manco Cápac and Sevarias did not persecute the barbarians after conquering them, but made them change their customs. Though the conquest and subjection of the unenlightened was sometimes violent, it was mostly achieved with righteous, nonviolent means. The conquerors’ reasons and good examples were said to be convincing enough for the barbarians. The result of these conquests was an idyllic and harmonious civilization, which is much closer to what is described in the literature as “concordia” or peaceful unity than to “toleration,” or the coexistence of major differences.22

Justifying Empire for the Sake of Peace

We are so accustomed to thinking of empires and imperialism as inherently evil that it is hard for us to reconstruct the early modern consciousness that saw them as something beneficial and good. By portraying the Inca kings and Sevarambian viceroys as merciful and forgiving conquerors, Garcilaso and Veiras are part of a tradition that justifies conquest and empire building for the sake of peace.23 They echo Cicero, who wrote in On Duties that “Wars, then, ought to be undertaken for this purpose, that we may live in peace, without injustice.”24 And, of course, his ulterior purpose was to justify the empire of the Roman Republic. St. Augustine summarized Cicero’s De republica as “a most vigorous and powerful argument on behalf of justice against injustice.”25 As St. Augustine summarized it, Cicero observed that some had argued that:

It is unjust that men should be servants to other men as their masters; and yet an imperial city, the head of a great commonwealth, cannot rule its provinces except by adopting this injustice. Now it was replied on the side of justice, that this situation is just, on the ground that servitude is in the interest of such men as the provincials, and that it is established for their benefit, when rightly established— that is, when unprincipled men are deprived of the freedom to do wrong
with impunity. It was also asserted that the subjugated will be better off, because they were worse off before subjugation.26

Thus Cicero’s argument against the charge of imperial injustice was that some may rule others as long as the ruled benefited from it. However, Augustine rejected the characterization of the Roman Empire as a just regime, claiming that “the Romans served evil and impure demons.”27

Following Cicero, and despite Augustine, the Roman Empire remained a model for the justification of empire by virtue of the peace it brought to the world. In De monarchia of the early 1300s, Dante asserted that the Emperor Augustus was a fine model of a leader because he pacified the world and brought it peace and tranquility. A universal ruler would not need to be ambitious and greedy for more, and thus would be the most just in judging.28

The idea of an imperial peace has been traced down to 1913, shortly after which it probably lost most of its credibility with the outbreak of World War I.29

Bartolomé de Las Casas, writing less than a century before Garcilaso, famously defended the native Indians against the abuses of the Spanish conquerors. Nevertheless, he has been criticized for simply calling for a more peaceful method of conquest, compared to the brutality of Spanish: “The Indians are a docile and good natured people, accustomed to the practice of moral virtue more than any other nation; and this makes them better suited to indoctrination in the Catholic Faith, provided it be taught them according to the principles established by Christ.”30 But, as Daniel Castro suggests,

Rather than viewing him as the ultimate champion of indigenous causes, we must see the Dominican friar as the incarnation of a more benevolent, paternalistic form of ecclesiastical, political, cultural, and economic imperialism rather than as a unique paradigmatic figure. In this context, he must be reevaluated as a representative of another face of Spanish ecclesiastical imperialism, albeit a more benevolent form of imperialism than the one offered by the traditional colonists.31

Like Las Casas, Garcilaso, who “insistently identifies himself as an Indian, can praise those who were viciously instrumental in the collapse of the Indian empire and exploited the native people they conquered. Because for him the Spanish conquest is no source of dissatisfaction, Garcilaso affirms that conquest is not only justifiable, but desirable if it brings with it improvements for the conquered.”32 Thus despite initially appearing to be genuinely supportive of the natives, Las Casas and Garcilaso ultimately justified European conquest by illustrating the positive results of both the nonviolent and violent conquests carried out by the Inca kings and the Spanish.

Yet another example of the same attitude was shown by Las Casas’s contemporary, the natural law theorist Francisco de Vitoria, who also speciously defended the American Indians. He argued that since “the barbarians undoubtedly possessed as true dominion, both public and private, as any Christians,” they could not be robbed or denied rights that were given to other “enemies of the Christian religion” such as “Saracens and Jews.” Moreover, “even if the emperor were master of the world, he could not on that account occupy the lands of the barbarians, or depose their masters and set up new ones, or impose taxes on them.” Though the enlargement of empire could not be a cause of just war, the Spanish could preach the Gospel to the barbarians. And “if the barbarians permit the Spaniards to preach the Gospel freely and without hindrance, then whether or not they accept the faith, it will not be lawful to attempt to impose anything on them by war, or otherwise conquer their lands.”33
However, there is a loophole in Vitoria’s argument: a just war can be waged against the barbarians if, after hearing the Gospel, “reasoning fails to win the acquiescence of the barbarians, and they insist on replying with violence.” He continues:

If all other measures to secure safety from the barbarians besides conquering their communities and subjecting them have been exhausted, the Spaniards may even take this measure. The proof is that the aim of war is peace and security, as St Augustine says in his letter to Boniface. Therefore, once it has become lawful for the Spaniards to take up war or even to declare it themselves for the reasons stated above, it becomes lawful for them to do everything necessary to the aim of war, namely to secure peace and safety.  

Vitoria, we see, justifies empire on the grounds of bringing peace and improvement to the barbarians. Since they are “so close to being mad,... they are unsuited to setting up or administering a commonwealth both legitimate and ordered in human and civil terms. … It might therefore be argued that for their own benefit the princes of Spain might take over their administration, and set up urban officers and governors on their behalf, or even give them new masters, so long as this could be proved to be in their interest.” Both Las Casas and Vitoria display the same thin veneer of defending the barbarians while actually justifying empire, and Garcilaso and Veiras concur that empire is justifiable if it brings peace.

It has been argued that the Commentaries is a sanitized neo-Platonic interpretation of conquest that justifies colonialism. In this interpretation, Garcilaso is said to have written the book to ingratiate himself with the Spanish empire, a tool of European conquest:

The dominant ideology always wanted to believe and make believe that the Amerindian was an inferior being. Spain needed to justify its civilizing actions in the New World and the written chronicles of the moment supported the imperial idea with the necessary testimony of such endeavor. His Comentarios Reales were welcome because Garcilaso himself and his writings were the evidence of the Crown’s effort to bring civilization, language, and religion to the Andean people. The Commentaries, accordingly, enabled a discourse of conquest that made the Spanish the righteous saviors of benighted barbarians. Although Veiras’s text portrays non-Europeans, the Persians, as superior to the Europeans, he, too, justifies conquest and empire under certain conditions. Thus, just as the Commentaries exemplified the idea of neo-Platonic civilizational progress, so too did the Sevarambians: In both cases, a fatherly figure appears and sets out to civilize the barbarians, turning beasts into rational men by introducing them to the rational religion of sun worship and imparting customs, laws, and education to prevent the idleness, ambition, and avarice that destroy civilization.

For a conquest to be just, according to both books, it must meet several conditions. The enlightened are justified in conquering the unenlightened if conquest is done for benign purposes, by tolerant and beneficent leaders, for the purpose of heroically saving the barbarians from ignorance. The Incas are heroes to the barbarians they civilize. Later on, the Spanish conquered and saved the Incas by teaching them Christianity and abolishing their vices, such as drunkenness. Just as Garcilaso and the Spanish thought the Incas were admirable except for their ignorance of Christianity, Sevarias thought the Prestarambians were admirable except for their ignorance of the correct way of sun worship. He therefore becomes their ally to fight their enemies and to introduce a new form of government. He is a hero to the people he conquers, which justifies conquest for both sides.

Garcilaso viewed the conquest as part of a continuous civilizing process. Under the Inca, the Indians progressed from a state of total barbarism to a higher state of civilization. This
state, for all its commendable qualities, was seriously deficient in one respect: religion. To worship the sun was better than to worship wild beasts of various kinds, but the worship of the sun was only a step toward the true religion, Christianity, brought by the Spaniards.37

The chain of conquest in the Commentaries seems to show a neo-Platonic progression from barbarity to civility, from a false religion to the true religion. Thus native Indian paganism was replaced by sun worship which was finally replaced by Christianity. The heroic achievement of the Spanish is clear in Garcilaso’s concluding words in Part 1: “We now enter the tenth book, in which we describe the incredible and heroic deeds of the Spaniards who won the empire of Peru” (G 627). Conquest and colonization, according to both books, are most justified and effective if they are done righteously and nonviolently, by impressing, helping, and rationally convincing the natives. The conquerors must convince the natives that they truly need the conqueror. If this is successful, force is not needed. Force is only a last resort, and even in war the conqueror must be merciful and forgiving.

Conquest and colonization are also justified if the resulting society enjoys certain benefits. Paternalistic kings are the means of achieving utopia, which must uphold a rational religion and a government that helps and provides for the colonized, even if that means that life is heavily regulated. This neo-Platonic, socialist utopia must have laws, customs, and education that will prevent the people from becoming avaricious, idle, or ambitious. Its infrastructure must be impressive and function well, with everyone enjoying their work.

Both discourses thus replace the vices of persecution and violence not with the values of toleration and coexistence of difference, but with the imperial virtue of unity and peace. They justify empire. The Commentaries is an account of a perfect government and society that had no knowledge of Europe. The Incas, according to Garcilaso, did “good things” on their own, without need of European civilization, their wise and paternal kings regulating the life of the citizens. His book was clearly also an indirect critique of the evils of government in Europe.38 Yet Garcilaso ultimately justifies the Spanish conquest of the civilization he praises so much. Veiras was influenced by this and other sources when he wrote Sevarambians. Thus both books seem to share the same paradox. Garcilaso praises the Incas, implicitly criticizing Europe, and yet he justifies first the Inca empire and then the Spanish empire. Veiras praises non-European kings and a fictional non-European society, implicitly criticizing Europe, yet justifies the conquest of Australia by Zoroastrians who act a lot like Europeans. Perhaps it is not surprising that neither author could quite transcend his respective imperial mind-set, either of the Incas or the Europeans, and criticize them more fundamentally. Both Denis Veiras and Garcilaso de la Vega thus emphasized the peace-making potential of empires as the ultimate justification of colonialism.

Notes

5. See, for example, Friederich, *Australia in Western Imaginative Prose*, 15–16.
7. Ibid., 115, 117.
Throughout this article we refer to Laursen and Masroori’s edition of *History of the Sevarambians*, which is a modern edition of the 1734 text. There are no significant differences from the earlier English and French editions that affect our argument here.

On the difference between the two versions, see Laursen and Masroori’s edition of *History of the Sevarambians*, ix–xii.

For more on his biography, see Veiras, *Eine Historie der Neu-gefundenen* and *L’histoire des Sévarambes*.


Ibid., 23.

Masroori, “Toleration in Denis Veiras’s Theocracy,” 124.

Laursen, “Denis Veiras’s Utopia,” 259.


Masroori, “Denis Veiras’s Theocracy,” 127.

Ibid., 124.


The classic distinction in the literature may be found in Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*

For an overview of theories of empire in this period, see Pagden, *Lords of All the World*.


St. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, 882.

Ibid., 882–83.

Ibid.


Ramsay *The Imperial Peace*, passim.


Fiengo-Varn, “Reconciling the Divided Self,” 123.

Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 250, 251, 259, 303, 284, 285.

Ibid., 282, 283.

Ibid., 290.

Ibid., 290.

Ibid., 122.

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