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**THE INTERPRETER FELIPILLO
AND HIS ROLE IN THE TRIAL OF THE INCA RULER
ATAHUALPA**

Francisco Pizarro (1476-1541) was with Vasco Nuñez de Balboa when he discovered the Pacific in 1513. Hearing of the fabled wealth of the Incas he formed a partnership with Diego de Almagro and Fernando de Ruiz (a priest who secured funds). The first expedition reached the San Juan River, part of the present boundary between Ecuador and Colombia. On the second expedition (1526-28), Pizarro explored the swampy region further south while his pilot, Bartolomé Ruiz, crossed the equator and then returned to bring definite news of the southern realms. Ruiz and Almagro went to Panama for supplies; Pizarro and a few followers remained behind and endured severe hardships. The supplies finally came, Pizarro sailed south along the Peruvian coast before returning to Panama. On his outward voyage, he stopped at Tumbez, a favorite city of the Incas, where the Spaniards were received with generosity. Won by the comfortable aspect of the place and delighted by the women they were given there, Pizarro's men asked permission to remain. He allowed them to stay and also took three Indians back with him who were to be taught Spanish and trained as interpreters. One of them, a youth named Felipillo by the Spaniards, was to play an important role in the history of subsequent events.

In 1528, Pizarro's partners sent him to Spain to seek aid from Emperor Charles V; he achieved this and retained for himself most of the future profits. In 1530 Pizarro landed at Tumbez and ascended the Andes to Cajamarca, where the Inca, Atahualpa, awaited him. Professing friendship, Pizarro lured Atahualpa into the Spanish camp, seized him, exacted a stupendous ransom, and then treacherously had him executed. Felipillo the interpreter from Tumbez, who for personal reasons hated Atahualpa, did everything he could to damage the Inca's reputation and undermine Pizarro's confidence in him.

The following account of Felipillo's role at Atahualpa's trial, through which he is said to have gotten his revenge on the Inca, is largely based on William H. Prescott's History of the Conquest of Peru. Massacre of Cajamarca - Atahualpa's Seizure and Imprisonment.

November 16, 1532, Pizarro succeeded in enticing Atahualpa to spend the night in Cajamarca as the Spaniards' guest. Atahualpa left most of his armed warriors outside the town and brought only 4000 to 5000 men into Cajamarca. The first to enter were the servants; they were followed by the soldiers and the guard. In the midst of his nobles, finally, came Atahualpa himself. He was carried in a magnificent sedan or open litter upon which was a throne of gold. The procession traversed the plaza in silence, and not a Spaniard was to be seen. Atahualpa thought the Spanish must have hidden themselves for fear. Not for a moment did he realize that a ruthless trap had been prepared for him. He halted and, turning around with an inquiring look, demanded, "Where are the strangers?"

At this moment, the Dominican friar Vicente de Valverde, followed by the interpreter Felipillo, came forward with his breviary in one hand and a crucifix in the other and, approaching the Inca, explained, as clearly as he could, the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. He began with the creation of man and spoke, of man's fall and redemption through Jesus Christ, whose power had passed to the apostle Peter and through him to his successors the popes, one of whom had commissioned the Spanish emperor, Charles V, to conquer and christianize the Indians in the New World. Francisco Pizarro had arrived to accomplish this task on behalf of the emperor. The friar therefore demanded that Atahualpa receive the Spaniards kindly, give up his own heathen beliefs, accept christianity and acknowledge Charles V as his lord.

The friar's entire speech was interpreted by Felipillo who, it appears, was not quite up to this task. Prescott writes that it may be doubted whether Atahualpa understood every link in the curious chain of argument by which the monk connected Pizarro with St. Peter (p. 940) and goes on to say that "it

is certain that he must have had very incorrect notions of the Trinity, if, as Garcilasso de la Vega (*Commentarios Reales*, Lisbon, 1609) states, the interpreter Felipillo explained it by saying that 'the Christians believed in three Gods and one God, and that made four.' (Por dezir Dios trino y uno, dixo Dios ves y uno son quatro, summando los numeros por darse a entender.)

However, the Inca clearly understood the main intention of the discourse, which was to acknowledge the supremacy of another. At the end of the priest's speech he was cold with fury. He replied , "I refuse to be the vassal of any man. Your emperor may be a great man and I am willing to hold him as a brother. As for the Pope, he must be crazy to talk of giving away countries which do not belong to him. For my faith, I will not change it". He then demanded to know by what authority Valverde spoke, and in response the friar held up the breviary. Atahualpa, taking it, turned over the pages a moment and then threw it down with an angry gesture. Felipillo picked it up and returned it to Valverde, who was scandalized at the indignity the sacred book had suffered and cried out for Pizarro to attack.

Pizarro waved a white scarf, the appointed signal, the cannon was fired, the Spaniards rushed out into the plaza, firing artillery and muskets. The Indians, stunned by the attack, and taken completely unawares, were seized with panic. The massacre lasted two hours, and it is estimated that some 6000 Indians were killed.

Atahualpa was captured and put under strong guard. He was taken to Pizarro's quarters, where a banquet was prepared There, "the intercourse with the Inca was carried on chiefly by means of the interpreter Felipillo-a malicious youth, as it appears, who bore no good-will to Atahualpa, and whose interpretations were readily admitted by the conquerors, eager to find some pretext for their bloody reprisals". (Prescott, p. 944).

Felipillo was one of Atahualpa's worst enemies A man without rank in the Inca hierarchy, he was in Atahualpa's eyes an upstart of the worst type,

mean and arrogant, elevated to a position of importance that bore no relationship to his qualities as a man. Felipillo had "fallen in love with one of Atahualpa's concubines and his intrigue with her had become a source of gossip in the camp. As far as the Spaniards were concerned, this was "simply an amusing and totally trivial incident, but not so to Atahualpa. When he heard the gossip about Felipillo and his woman, he was outraged. "That such an insult should have been offered by so base a person was an indignity," he said, and he told Pizarro, "that, by the Peruvian law it could be expiated, not by the criminal's death alone, but by that of his whole family and kindred (Prescott, p. 970). Felipillo was, of course, too useful to the Spaniards for them to permit this, especially as they did not give much weight to the affair. "Felipillo, however, soon learned the state of the Inca's feelings towards himself, and from that moment he regarded him with deadly hatred. Unfortunately, his malignant temper found ready means for its indulgence (Prescott, p. 971).

As a prisoner, Atahualpa continued to live in the Spanish quarters, relatively well treated and respected. Realizing the Spaniards' lust for gold, Atahualpa offered his famous ransom: if Pizarro would free him, he would cover with gold the floor of the apartment in which he was being held captive, then fill it as high as he could reach. Atahualpa kept his promise, and gold was arriving in the city every day and accumulating fast.

However, rumors of a rising among the natives, pointing to Atahualpa as the author, began to filter through to the Spaniards. Through repetition and fear these rumors became exaggerated. The agitation among the soldiers increased to such a degree that Pizarro consented to bring Atahualpa to instant trial.

The Trial and Execution of Atahualpa.

A court was organized over which the two captains, Pizarro and Almagro, were to preside as judges. An attorney-general was named as prosecutor for the Crown, and a defense counsel was appointed to

Atahualpa.

A whole catalogue of charges was brought against the Inca. The most important were that he had usurped the crown and murdered his brother Huascar; that he had squandered public revenues in favor of his relatives and friends; that he was guilty of idolatry and of adulterous practices, openly practicing polygamy., and finally, that he had attempted to provoke a rebellion against the Spaniards.

A number of Indian witnesses were examined, and "their testimony, filtrated through the interpretation of Felipillo, received, it is said, when necessary, a very different coloring from that of the original." (Prescott, p. 973). The dice were thus loaded. (David Tipton disagrees with the writers who claim that Felipillo got his revenge on Atahualpa through the trial. He argues that the testimony was irrelevant and that neither Pizarro nor Almagro would have been influenced by it. Felipillo, he suggests, was simply used by the Spanish as a scapegoat, in an attempt to absolve the conquistadors themselves.)

The examination was soon ended. Atahualpa was found guilty and sentenced to be burnt alive in the great square of Cajamarca. The sentence was to be carried out that very night.

The doom of the Inca was proclaimed by sound of trumpet in the great square of Cajamarca. Two hours after sunset, the Spanish soldiery assembled by torchlight in the plaza to witness the execution of the sentence. Friar Valverde tried to persuade Atahualpa to accept baptism, promising that if he did so the painful death by burning would be commuted to death by the garrote, a mode of punishment causing immediate death by strangulation. To save himself from the torture of the flames, Atahualpa agreed to renounce his own religion and receive baptism.

Felipillo paid the forfeit of his crimes sometime afterward by being hanged by Almagro on the expedition to Chile when as some say, he confessed to having perverted testimony given in favor of Atahualpa's

innocence, directly against the monarch' (Prescott, p. 981).

About the author

Ingrid Kurz, University of Vienna, regularly appears in the pages of the *Jerome*, contributing articles on the history and the requirements of the profession

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