

ARSI, Peruana Litterae Annuae, Tomus III 1613-1627

Annual Letter from the Province of Peru of this year of 1617 (fol. 48-71)

Excerpt (fol. 51v-52v)¹

51v ...

Mission to the Idolatrous Indians of the Corregimiento² of Barranca³ and Cajatambo⁴

Many years have passed since [we] began to work for the remedy of the Indians of this Archdiocese and to extirpate their idolatries, and even though some *Visitadores*⁵ and many of the Society have been occupied with this matter, there have always been those who have relapsed [...] For this reason the most Excellent Lord the Prince of Esquilache began in this kingdom [...] with great care to look for the way to root out such great evil, which has spread in this land from children at the breast to the most ancient.

52r There is no-one (in this land) that escapes it, and he discussed it with the Lord Archbishop, whose desire was to find a remedy for such great harm, and they resolved [to implement] some methods, worthy of such Christian and zealous princes. The first thing was to send three Visitors—people with an established reputation—for such a great enterprise (paid for by both [Prince and Bishop]) and to give them all the ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction that would be necessary for the successful execution of their offices. And for helpers and advisers, three of the Society [of Jesus] would accompany each one, so that entering into the towns they would soften the forceful rigour that the Visitors had to use, and with the oil of their softness, they would mitigate the pain of the wounds that they cause on the body of the Indians, and with the medicine of the sacraments, heal those old wounds of the soul. The first visit and mission that left was to the *Corregimiento* of Chancay, and for this, and the others, his Excellency gave 1500 pesos for the necessary expenses (charged to His Majesty) so

¹ Working translation by Andrew Redden.

² *Corregimiento* is the territory assigned to a *Corregidor* – the royal official assigned to Indian affairs over a set jurisdiction. He would ensure tribute was collected and legal cases were decided.

³ This is near to Lima on the coast of Peru.

⁴ This is further inland climbing up into the Andes.

⁵ Ecclesiastical Visitors/Judges.

that everything could be carried out comfortably, and without cost to the Society. The Fathers José de Arriaga, Francisco Conde and Luis de Teruel, left and were to be occupied in this exercise for the entire year. The mission began in the town of Guacha, which is 22 leagues from Lima, but filled with such ignorant people that there seemed to be more than a thousand, none of whom knew how to make the sign of the cross, had no idea of the existence of God, or didn't know the Catechism (which was most usual) or if they knew it they were like parrots for it never having been explained. No-one dared to come near the Fathers and all seemed to be in agreement in covering up their idolatries, such that even using torture they could not find trace of the great evil that had been covered up: nothing but a confused mention of certain *huacas*.⁶ Only one famous *hechicero*⁷ was found to be more pliable, who began to declare certain things, but in such a way that the Visitor thought he completely lacked consolation, and the Fathers tried to persuade him to commend himself truly to God Our Lord. With everything, so as not to lose time, as it was Lent, the penance⁸ began on Wednesday and Friday. This was preceded by many examples of their stubbornness, exhorting them to confess, and with this and many sermons, catechisms and other good temporal works they were won over, in such a way that the visit was entirely successful and to the present day the town is one of the best taught to be found in the kingdom. They found 20 sorcerers, ministers of idolatry, 36 *huacas* and public shrines and 2500 *conopas*⁹ (that is the name they give to their domestic gods). They had many superstitions and errors against our Holy Faith the principal one was the common one amongst the Indians, and it is important to note that [they say] they and the Spaniards were not born of the same source – nor even amongst themselves did they have a single origin, rather some came from stones, others from springs, and those of this town came from two bones that fell from heaven, one of gold (from which come the Curacas¹⁰ and most important Indians), and another white one from which the plebeian Indians come. [They also say] that the souls of those who die go to Loaica, which is a very pleasant valley in which they [52v] have new farmlands and which they sow and harvest like in this life (albeit with less work). They

⁶ A *huaca* is a regional (often ancestral) deity.

⁷ lit. sorcerer = indigenous religious practitioner.

⁸ lit. *disciplinas* = penitential practices (flagellation).

⁹ Domestic gods.

¹⁰ nobles/chiefs.

say that it is the burning road of ash that burns travellers feet and afterwards there is a furious river that is crossed with a bridge of hair, but often they are carried by black or red haired dogs that they raise for this reason, and they order killed when they die, others say that that the souls live in the *huaca* that they adore.