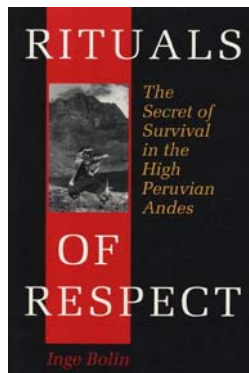


Rituals of Respect: The Secret of Survival in the High Peruvian Andes

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University of Texas Press 1998



Introduction

Doña Escobar, her daughter, and other neighbors shook their heads in disbelief as they heard of my plans to go to Chillihuani. Having lived all their lives in the Vilcanota Valley, they had never ventured to the *puna*, the high, windswept region above their village where only a few tubers can grow, and they know little about this society of herders. At times young men from the high mountains come to the valley to help during harvest time or to sell or barter their goods at the Sunday market, but they communicate little information about their society. Some people from Cusipata had heard anecdotes about the herding way of life, and they too advised me not to go. The mountains are precipitous, they said, the weather is unpredictable, and the society—well, no one really knows what goes on up there. One university-educated man from the valley told me about powerful shamans—too powerful for him to dare to venture to those heights.

The people in the villages and towns of the Andean valleys are not alone in their comparative ignorance about the ideology and life ways of the inhabitants of the high mountains. Until quite recently, the scientific world has also lacked systematic knowledge of high-altitude herding societies. In 1963 anthropologist Bernard Mishkin deplored the fact that the literature contained so little reliable data on the extent and nature of Quechua herding societies even though these same societies are the foremost custodians of ancient Andean customs and life ways which go back to their Inca and pre-Inca past. Sergio Quijada Jara (1957:29) agreed with Mishkin that the people living high in the Andes have conserved the purest traditions and are the guardians and faithful interpreters of thousands of years of Andean culture.

For centuries, perhaps millennia in pre-Columbian times, the seat of power and the highest demographic density in the Andes were found at altitudes above 3,400 meters (Murra 1985a:3). Settlements in the Andes are older, denser, and are found at higher elevations than those in the Himalayas. John Murra (1988:57) found that in Nepal, Sherpa settlements were very sparsely populated, while the *altiplano* of the Titicaca and the Charcas had high population densities; and Isaiah Bowman (1938) found the highest house in the world at 17,000 feet (5,182 meters) above sea level in the Andes. The well-known Peruvian researcher Carlos Monge (1953:5) wrote: "Andean people are born, live and reproduce at altitudes up to 17,000 feet above sea level."

The Vilcanota Valley (also referred to as Willkamayu Valley—*willka* means "sacred"; *mayu* means "river"), which lies far below Chillihuani at an altitude between 3,100 and 3,300 meters, was densely populated and of considerable importance already in pre-Inca times, as indicated by the ruins from the Wari civilization which are found there. "The Vilcanota Valley played an outstanding role in the development and elaboration of Inca civilization," wrote Daniel Gade (1975:18). Inca canals and astonishingly shaped and polished stones attest to the fact that the Incas lived and worked in and around Cusipata and up toward Chillihuani.

Cusipata, capital of the Cusipata district, which includes Chillihuani, is located in the province of Quispicanchis 80 kilometers south of Cuzco, between this former capital of the Inca Empire and the town of Sicuani (see map). (See Jacques Malengreau's 1972 study on Cusipata.) Extensive trade routes have long existed throughout this area as well as to the south to Lake Titicaca, which, at 3,800 meters above sea level, is the highest navigable lake in the world. This lake is strategically and economically important and is the hub of many ancient myths and legends. Legend tells that the first Incas originated in Lake Titicaca, traveled along subterranean channels, and emerged in a cave in Pacariqtambo. These children of the high lake founded an immense empire in Cuzco that eventually included what is now Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, southern Colombia, northern Chile, and upland Argentina.

Archaeological remains reveal the impressive achievements of the ancient inhabitants of these regions of the Andes, and reports from early chroniclers as well as the oral histories of today's inhabitants verify the grandeur of these past times. We find enormous structures in stone and adobe, earthquake-resistant architecture, outstanding irrigation works, and superb agricultural terraces. The Incas knew about astronomy, practiced brain surgery, and organized their empire in ways unlike any other known society. Tawantinsuyu—the Inca Empire (literally, the United Four Quarters)—became the largest native empire that ever arose in the New World.

Apart from mythology and important archaeological evidence that reveal Inca and pre-Inca occupation of the Vilcanota Valley and the mountains above, significant events took place here in colonial times as well. The provinces of Quispicanchis and Cuzco received major attention, for example, in the early 1780s when José Gabriel Condorcanqui, born in Tinta as a direct descendant of the Inca royal lineage, took the name Tupac Amaru II, and together with his wife Micaela Bastides, led an ill-fated revolution to prevent the outrageous exploitation of the native people by colonial authorities. Contrary to the plans and intentions of Tupac Amaru II, Micaela Bastides, and their followers, the uprising turned into the bloodiest rebellion of the colonial epoch (Sallnow 1991:285), in which both the native people and the Spanish suffered devastating losses. After a series of unfortunate circumstances, Tupac Amaru II and his followers were defeated and taken to Cuzco, where on May 18, 1781 he, his family, and other leaders were executed most cruelly in Hawkaypata, the large central plaza. Tupac Amaru had to witness the execution of his wife, his son, and other relatives. Then his limbs were tied to horses which were chased into the four directions of Tawantinsuyu. According to witnesses, his body never divided. Finally he was chopped into pieces (see Fisher 1966 and Walker 1991 for details). Although Tupac Amaru II and Micaela Bastides were defeated and killed, they live on in the memories of the people today as heroes.

These historic and prehistoric events occurred at the very margins of Chillihuani. Although a remote village today, it may have been within a far more frequently traveled region in pre-Columbian times. Its location in the high mountains and its proximity to the sacred Apu Ausangate must have conferred religious and economic significance to the region. Intriguing rock engravings, Inca canals, and remains of ancient inhabitants indicate that Inca ideology was at home in the stormy heights of Chillihuani.

Fieldwork

To undertake fieldwork in the former Inca Empire is an experience of a very special kind. Although one is reminded at all times of the Spanish Conquest, which devastated Andean society with disease, forced labor, and gruesome efforts to extirpate ancient religion and life ways, the impressive remains of this once-magnificent culture still speak loudly of the strength, courage, and creativity of the people who built it. These characteristics have survived among the people of the high Andes and are most pronounced in the remote region where Chillihuani is located. Arguedas and Stephan (1957:179) wrote that the settlements of the high region of the Vilcanota were densely populated and "had not been reduced to a state of servitude like the majority of the populations in both the hot and temperate valleys of Cuzco, and like the Indians of the farming and cattle-grazing regions of the plateau."

Chillihuani is situated in precisely this rugged and inaccessible area, the inhabitants of which have preserved an indomitable spirit and pride in their culture. These characteristics of the Chillihuani herders actually facilitate fieldwork. Respectful and polite, yet with utter self-confidence, they tell about their lives and the lives of their ancestors. A sense of perfectionism and total honesty guide their conversations.

Yet, some aspects of their worldview are not easy to comprehend, particularly because people often speak in metaphors, using ancient myths and legends to describe actual phenomena. Therefore, it is important to analyze the mythological accounts of the indigenous people. In turn, what we know about the Inca and pre-Inca societies can clarify and explain the metaphors through which Andean people see the world.

To help minimize potential misunderstanding of what I saw and heard, Chillihuani residents participated in group discussions regarding certain metaphors and symbolic actions after I had observed a ritual or conducted an interview. On such occasions each person explained the issues from his or her own perspective. Flannery, Marcus, and Reynolds (1989:xii) realized in the course of their fieldwork among llama herders of Ayacucho that "it is one thing to collect a series of concepts in an American Indian language; it is quite another thing to have their underlying meaning revealed by someone who spent his entire youth thinking in that language." Similarly, the preeminent anthropologist Victor Turner (1969:11) suggested that in the study of ritual, one must try to discover how the indigenous people themselves feel and think about their own rituals.

In order to get a deeper grasp of Andean culture the way the Chillihuani herders see it, I made sure that people would on many occasions speak for themselves. Our discussion sessions were always held in the form of a dialogue. And, while I was interested in Andean phenomena, I was also open to the curious questions of the Chillihuani herders about people and places in other parts of the world. I found that even though most herders had little knowledge of geography and the people who populate the world, their questions were consistently formulated in such a way that they made sense. The facility with which the

people of Chillihuani were able to perceive new phenomena and the speed at which they learned was astounding. I was often reminded of the school principal of Cusipata who had told me that the children of those Chillihuani herders who came to the valley to study were always at the top of the class.

The people of Chillihuani have very good memories and seldom forgot what we had discussed. Sometimes when I asked my centenarian friend Roberto a question that I had previously asked, he would answer it patiently but remind me that we had already discussed the matter two or three years ago.

Old people and most women spoke Quechua exclusively. Young and middle-aged men, as well as a few young women (particularly those with more schooling, who did not adhere as much to tradition as the older women did), often spoke in Spanish during interviews. I taped all interviews and music, as well as our *chansanakuy* (joking sessions), which would crop up occasionally during our conversations. Because Chillihuani is very remote and most people have never seen a foreigner, it was surprising to me that our sense of humor was so much the same. As an outsider, I found it difficult at first to understand their myths and metaphors, but when it came to joking or having a good time, I never experienced a gap in understanding and I soon began to feel as though I had grown up in this village under the clouds.

Chillihuani herders, especially the elders, are well versed in oral history and often talked about the Incas and those ancestors who lived before the Incas. Sabine MacCormack's (1991:179) historical research supports the notion that Andeans' memories go back to pre-Inca times; she found that even though imperial rituals had been introduced by the great Inca Pachacuti as early as the mid-fifteenth century, aged Andeans who were living around the time of the conquest remembered how their region had been administered before the advent of the Inca. Oral history is extremely important to any effort to piece together a coherent picture of Andean society.

In order to shed more light on specific issues revealed to me by the people of Chillihuani, and to analyze them more thoroughly, I have compared their accounts, where applicable, with those written in early documents by Incas who learned to write in Spanish and by Spanish soldiers and missionaries. Analyses of more recent investigations have been helpful in defining specific issues and circumstances more precisely. When reading early Spanish documents, one must be careful with regard to the interpretation of the conquerors and early chroniclers since few of them understood the customs and the religion of the people they conquered. This situation has hardly changed. The *mistikuna*, people of usually mixed descent who live in towns and cities, rarely understand the realities lived by the *runakuna*—"the people," as the Indians of the high regions refer to themselves, who speak predominantly Quechua (or *runasimi*, "the language of the people"), wear homespun clothes, and chew *coca* leaves. Although the Indians of the Andes use two last names, their father's and their mother's, I have sometimes used only the first of the two last names, since both are not always given.

Because Quechua was not a written language in Inca times, we find tremendous variation in orthography. My spelling of Quechua is based on the Quechua-Spanish-Quechua dictionary prepared in 1995 by the Academia Mayor de la Lengua Quechua. For an occasional clarification of concepts I used the *Diccionario Quechua Cuzo-Collao* by Antonio Cusihuaman and the *Diccionario Kechawa-Español* by Jorge A. Lira. As is common among most

investigators of the Quechua language and culture, I have used the English -s to designate the plural, since Quechua does not have an equivalent suffix. The Quechua suffix *-kuna* (as in *wasikuna*, houses) cannot be used in all cases where the plural is warranted. Quechua quotes from documents have been left in their original spelling. Names of people and places have, for the most part, been left in the customary spelling, as it appears in many documents and maps. Wherever possible I have tried to identify the Latin names of the plants and animals to which I refer. The sources to which I had access were, however, not always consistent. The principal source for Latin names of plants is Daniel Gade (1975). The Latin names of plants not mentioned in Gade's book were taken from Weberbauer (1945), Yachasun (Pantigozo de Esquivel, 1995), and Franquemont et al. (1990). The Latin names of animals are as given in the dictionary of the Academia Mayor de la Lengua Quechua.

I am responsible for the translations of all documents or communications that required translating. Spanish-speaking herders, friends, and experts of the Quechua language assisted in translations from Quechua to Spanish and/or in the clarification of complex ideas expressed in Quechua. Possible errors in facts and interpretation, of course, remain mine.

This book does not overlook the everyday lives of the people of Chillihuani, but it focuses primarily on fiestas and special occasions. This is because rituals are at their most diverse and their most explicit during fiestas. They are performed not only at the level of the individual but also at the level of the family and the community. Fiestas also mark those times which are of special importance for people's herds and fields and act as specific markers of the seasons of the year. In fact, people orient themselves and their activities predominantly with respect to fiestas rather than to the months of the year. The interactions among people, their animals, the earth, and the entire cosmos, as well as the respect they pay to all, are most pronounced in the rituals of a fiesta.

Since I lived in Chillihuani off and on between 1988 and 1996 (1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996), I have participated in the fiestas discussed in this book on several occasions. Thus, the descriptions of a given fiesta or event contain my accumulated observations and experiences over the years. Fiestas are discussed in chronological order as they occur in the course of the year, starting with Pukllay in February.

The herders of Chillihuani are excited about the prospect of having a book published about their customs, including the rituals which are normally performed within the confines of the family. Most villagers want to see their names in the book. I have thus used pseudonyms only for those who were not sure whether their names should appear.

Central Ideas of the Book

In Chapter 1 we ascend to Chillihuani, where people eke out an existence from the land and their animals. As we climb higher through the beautiful yet dangerous landscape, it assumes an increasingly spiritual personality. Ancestral worship in *machu mach'ay*, the cave of the ancient one, introduces us to the beliefs that pervade this society of herders—beliefs that center on respect for ancestors and all of life.

In Chapter 2, which describes the first night of Pukllay, we begin to see these beliefs in action. Secret rites are held in honor of the great deities to assure that *enqa*, the eternal life force, is replenished and will flow throughout the year in order to promote fertility and harmony.

The dual forces that reside in all matter imbued with life come to light in a frightening manner in Chapter 3 as Illapa, the god of thunder and lightning, approaches the small Mamani house. Fear and awe, inspired by the thunder god, are written on people's faces and are expressed in every gesture. Later, with the danger gone and the lives of the family spared, three black animals are sacrificed in honor of the thunder god and the great mountains where this deity resides. The rituals of the sacrifice take us back to the religious ideology of pre-Columbian people and reflect a deep respect for the powers of nature and for the animals offered.

The ritual demonstration of love and respect for animals continues in Chapter 4, which culminates in *irpay*, a marking ceremony and a ritual wedding of two young alpacas.

Solidarity among villagers and ties to the deities are reconfirmed in Chapter 5 with intricate rituals and ancient ceremonial songs and dances. Chillihuani comes alive as this radiant society in exquisite attire strides proudly to Capillapampa, also called Ch'urumarka, a promontory high above the village and site of ancestral ceremonies. These people are masters within their mountain world. They have nothing in common with any image of downtrodden, introverted, hopeless mountain Indians as they are sometimes ignorantly portrayed by outsiders.

In the evening groups of young people come to the homes of their elders to sing and dance, to recite poems, and to wish their elders well, as did their ancestors long ago.

Warak'anakuy, also known as *seq'anakuy*, an ancient dance, takes us back to Inca times when blood had to flow to restore fertility to the earth and when borders between the *suyus* (regions) had to be defined for religious, social, and strategic purposes.

Most of the rituals in this remote region are rooted in the Inca and pre-Inca past, though the meaning of many may be dimmed. Roberto Yupanqui Qoa, a respected elder of Chillihuani, sheds light on some of these mysteries in Chapter 6. Although he has seen a century go by, he retains charm, humor, and much memory of the strong oral tradition of his ancestors. Far from the mainstream of modern Peru, his views are little tainted by the ideology of the conquerors and their successors.

During Pukllay, the ideals of pre-Columbian life are brought together in a holistic way. Fertility and procreation, reciprocity, solidarity, and respect are imbued with love. Chapter 7 focuses on the fourth day of Pukllay, when groups of young dancers come to the Mamani house to honor their elders. They tell how they fell in love and how and why they got married. Romantic yet practical, they relate that they chose their partners according to ancient practices. On this night and during the days and nights to come, young people flock to one or more of the Tusuna Q'asa Pata, the high places located between mountain peaks right on the borders between *suyus*, where ritual dances, pentatonic music, libations to Pachamama and the Apus, scenes of jealousy, and the final pull of a partner across the border of the *suyu* characterize their rites of love. Lovers may join for life as they disappear dancing into the night.

The dance at Tusuna Q'asa Pata is the first part of a series of ceremonies leading to marriage in Chillihuani. Chapter 8 focuses on *rimanakuy*—the traditional wedding—which may occur at any time after Pukllay. During *rimanakuy*, the parents of the young people meet and talk about all aspects of married life. This is not a trial marriage—referred to as *sirvinakuy* by people in the valley and by many Andean investigators. Within the community it is legal and

binding, and it is consummated with rituals of respect between the young people, their parents, and in the presence of the Andean gods.

Sometimes *rimanakuy* is followed by *casarakuy*, a "Catholic" marriage. In Chapter 9 we accompany a couple as they take the blessings of the priest and then engage in a week full of ancient rituals. These rituals focus on the deep Andean concern of the reconciliation of opposing but complementary forces. Male and female are united into *warmi-qhari* (a couple, literally woman and man), a unit of dual forces which, during the time of transformation to married life, is surrounded by a multitude of other forces, both beneficial and malignant. These forces must be dealt with during the long and dangerous journey the wedding party must undertake to reach their home and during the eight days that follow their marriage vows.

Although the rituals of Pukllay have few, if any, Christian elements, the Fiesta de Santiago described in Chapter 10 has been superimposed on an ancient Andean celebration held in honor of Illapa, the thunder god. For the people of Chillihuani, however, the Fiesta de Santiago is the "Day of the Horse." The thundering hooves of horses remind them of their thunder god. During this horse race, close to the eternal snow on what may be the highest racetrack in the world, the riders appeal to their thunder god and other feared and respected deities to bring rain and protection from lightning. The race is spectacular. At its conclusion, out of respect for the participants, no winner is announced.

Ancestral elements that predate the conquest are also central to the festivities of July 28, Peru's Day of Independence. While Peru commemorates this important political event in its history, the people of Chillihuani engage in age-old rituals that give meaning to their lives and guide them in the ways of their ancestors. During the reign of the Inca Empire, women possessed equal rights and performed rituals and duties parallel to those of men. The splendor of Inca times may be gone, but ancient ideology has remained intact; as Chapter 11 reveals, the members of separate male and female hierarchies still carry out their respective rituals in Chillihuani. Male and female elders initiate young men and women to the duties they must perform and the respect which they owe others. There are no juvenile delinquents in Chillihuani. Young people are too busy with their apprenticeships in rituals and a variety of other communal duties.

Chillihuani provides glimpses into its past and that of the Inca Empire and pre-Inca life. But many puzzles remain. In Chapter 12, Roberto Yupanqui Qoa, centenarian and custodian of ancient customs, speaks of his *ayllu* (village) and sheds light on some of the central enigmas of Andean ideology. He talks about the days when his grandmother's grandmother was herding her flocks on the high pastures. He remembers his youth when elders kept him awake every night to learn the ways of his ancestors, the Yupanquis. "We belong to the Yupanquis, to the Inca Yupanquis, to those Yupanquis," he told me proudly, referring to the ninth Inca, Pachakuteq Yupanqui, a very successful emperor. Roberto speaks in powerful metaphors—such as the double-headed snake and Llaqtayoq Mach'aqway, the great snake, emblem of the village. These metaphors shed light on his village and, in turn, illuminate concepts that are of great significance in pre-Columbian times.

Some of the most powerful of these metaphors come to life in our ascent to the sacred lagoon Waqraqocha in Chapter 13. As my companions approach Waqraqocha, a pristine mountain lake, we experience the intimate relationship between these people and their powerful gods. Standing in close proximity to the divine lagoon, where life originates and

ends, nature presents herself first in the guise of harmonious serenity and later in a terrifying storm; this sequence illustrates the dual aspects of respect and fear which inhere in the gods of the Andes.

Life continues in this village under the clouds, imbued with the joy of living and the sadness that follows death. Chapter 14 brings together these forces, the meeting of which lends coherence to the Andean way of life. The rituals of respect are as instrumental today as they were in the past. They provide a sense of continuity for the Andean people—a feeling of belonging not only to the present, but also to the past and the future. They instill a sense of being one with the village as they stimulate the force of life to flow throughout the cosmos with renewed vigor.

From Chapter 10

An interesting and complex history surrounds the Fiesta de Santiago which sheds considerable light on the religious ideology of the Incas and also the Spanish. Santiago, the patron saint of Chillihuani, is a Spanish saint. In Spain he is represented as a mounted, sword-wielding warrior (Gade 1983:777), and effigies of Santiago on horseback date from the eleventh century (see Braunfels 1974, 7:34, in Gade 1983:777). In Spain, Santiago was believed responsible for thunder and lightning.

When the Spaniards invaded Peru, they soon discovered that in return for rain and protection against the devastating hail, the Incas held important rituals in July (midwinter in the southern hemisphere) which were of symbolic significance to the entire Inca religious and political structure. Sacrifices were made in honor of Illapa, the god of thunder and lightning (Gade 1983:775; Molina [1575] 1959:43-44). In an attempt to extirpate Andean religion, it was therefore convenient for the invaders to superimpose Santiago on the image of Illapa. Thus Santiago became the patron saint of Chillihuani and other high-altitude herding villages and has been worshiped widely throughout the Andes, where lightning is a constant danger to the people, their animals, and their homes (see Nash 1979:29 regarding Santiago in Bolivia). Federico Lunardi (1946:237) wrote: "Everything that had been attributed to the thunder was attributed to Santiago almost immediately after the arrival of the Spanish."

On our long hike to Chillihuani we talk about the forthcoming event. I ask my companions what Santiago means to them. "Santiago is a Spanish saint who always arrives with the lightning and knows how to make the *warak'a* roar like thunder," one of my traveling companions comments as he swings his arms into the air as though he were swinging the *warak'a*. This way of identifying the Inca deity with the Spanish saint was early recognized by Cieza de Leon, a soldier who came to Peru early in the conquest. He wrote ([1550] 1967:106) that the Andean people see the same characteristics in Santiago as in Illapa. Both bring deadly attacks—Santiago as a warrior, and Illapa as lightning.

Not everyone in Chillihuani views Santiago in the same way. One villager explained, "Santiago is a saint who believed much in Illapa. Perhaps he adored Illapa. This Santiago who believed in Illapa was certainly a man of the Andes who always rode a horse. For this reason he is always depicted on horseback. When Santiago died, the people believed that he could give orders to Illapa. And since the statue of the patron saint Santiago is in the church, people ask him to forego sending hail."

Another villager told me that "the man Santiago has died and his horse is also dead. What is left are the churches with his statue in many villages." For many people in the high villages, however, Santiago represents Illapa, and as such, the patron saint Santiago himself is believed to throw hail with a sling and make the lightning flash through the sky.

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