

Pachamama

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Key words

Andean worldview – earth – telluric cults – farming rituals

Definition

Reverential appellation with which the Andean peoples worship earth for being the place of human life, and especially the Quechua and Aymara peoples of central and southern Andes, for whom the Pachamama is a living and conscious being that has ability to produce. Its cult has pre-Hispanic origins and is based on rituals offerings of food, aromatics herbs and symbolic objects, with which the man feeds the earth in order to it provides the healthiness and the farming goods necessary for the life of men and herds in the Andean highlands.

Introduction

The worship of Andean earth universally known as Pachamama is rooted in the early pre-Hispanic times, when several human groups began to settle along the Andes and developed various modes of agricultural and pastoral production (7000-5000 B. C.), which benefited from the heterogeneity of the Andean ecological zones and followed a calendar system according to the biological cycles of the natural environment (Earls 1976; Milla Villena 1983). Celestial bodies, elements and phenomena of physical nature, such as land, rain, sun etc., were considered crucial for agricultural productivity and therefore the Andean populations propitiated their favor with magical-religious forms and rituals. The archaeological literature provides in that regard numerous examples of figurative representations of natural elements and phenomena that pre-Hispanic Andean societies wrought in textiles and ceramic pieces or in architectural monuments with propitiatory purposes. However, it is mainly in the chronicles of the Andean colonial times (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, di Salvia 2013) in which it describes the naturalist and telluric cults worshipped by the Andean peoples since they were incorporated into the Inca State since the thirteenth century and later conquered by the Spanish in the sixteenth century. Despite the Catholic indoctrination to which they were subjected during the Spanish colonization, these peoples continued preserving along the time those native religious beliefs and practices closely connected to farming daily activities, although they adapted them to Catholicism under emblematic syncretic forms that have come until our days (Marzal 1985; Flores Ochoa 2002). Today as yesterday the agricultural and pastoral activity remains crucial for human sustenance in the Andean highlands and therefore the earth is made an object of worship in terms of productive soil and grazing land, but also for its own topography, that reaches steep

slopes and snowy peaks beyond the high pastures, the uncultivated lands and the familiar farming lands.

The worship to the Andean earth in pre-Hispanic times

Consolidated its presence thousands of years ago from the inter-Andean valleys to the highest regions of the Andes, early prehispanic societies forged their culture in reference to the specific space that they occupied (Garavaglia and Marchena 2005), especially establishing with earth a daily contact based on farming and animal husbandry, but not only: the productive stability of the agricultural system depended on the good use of the biological mechanisms of natural Andean environment, and land and other natural and atmospheric elements such as water, rain or celestial bodies, played in a complementary way the role of gods of human sustenance (Kauffmann Doig 1990). In fact, the first ceremonial centers appeared as astronomical observatories, which acted as oracles for the success of agricultural and pastoral activities. In addition, with the knowledge and use of architectural, artistic and craft skills, the ancient Andean people expressed over the centuries their religious worldview representing on paintings, sculptures and weaves elements and phenomena of the surrounding Nature, in order to gain their benevolence in the real life. In their innumerable works of goldsmith, weaving, pottery and architecture, it's likely that the earth appeared in the form of stepped geometric drawings and anthropomorphic female figures representing notions of agriculture and female fertility (Kauffmann Doig 1990; 2009), although currently the Andean Archaeology maintains dissimilar interpretations about it. However, some monographic studies on the Andean telluric cults show how various prehispanic cultures that followed between **1500 BCE and 1500 CE** in the Central Andes (for example Paracas Pukará, Mochica, Chimu cultures) developed iconographic renderings of amphibians that possibly symbolized the earth for their ecological connection to the telluric humidity and fertility of farmlands (Mariscotti Görlitz 1978; di Salvia 2014): in particular, in these renderings humanized toads appear holding their young, coated with fruit and vegetables, or in scenes of coupling with other amphibians as a symbol of propitiation of telluric fertility, etc. **Since the fifth century CE** various regional states and empires expanded in the Central Andes; the last was the Inca empire of Tawantinsuyu (XIII-XVI centuries), that adapted to its religious worldview many local cults: among these there was that of the earth, an unidentified image of which was worshiped along with other gods and natural deified elements as Viracocha, the sun, the thunder and the moon, in the main square of the Inca capital of Cusco during monthly feasts that were celebrated there (Silverblatt 1990). Parallel to the institutional cults, under Inca rule the local populations of the Andean highlands also maintained their own household cults connected to agricultural sphere and, therefore, to family or community events as the tilling of the land or planting, harvesting and storage of agricultural products activities. In this sense, the daily nature of worship to the earth in the pre-Hispanic Andes was precisely what allowed its preservation even after the arrival of the Spanish to Andean lands.

Telluric pre-Hispanic cults in the colonial chronicles

Despite the radical changes caused by the Spanish conquest and colonization of the territories of Tawantinsuyu, the Inca institutional festivities didn't disappear suddenly (Duviols 1977), although over time the household cults to Andean nature where the ones that persisted in the collective religious practice. Its description is due to the diffusion of various chronicles that Spanish soldiers and priests, but also Indians and mestizos writers, composed along the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, among other things to keep the Crown of Castille informed about the religious facts in the Andes, to perpetuate the memory of the ancient pre-Hispanic religious traditions, or simply to brand them as idolatrous and thus justify its definitive eradication. Besides describing myths and rituals practiced by the Inca religious institutions, these chroniclers thus provided valuable informations about the ancient Andean cults of physical and astronomical nature and of the earth as an integral part of it (di Salvia 2014).

The first chronicles of soldiers and explorers who took part to the events of the Spanish conquest of the Andes date back to 1534, and reported the existence of places and natural elements situated throughout the central Andes (trees, stones, caves, mountains, rivers, natural springs, etc.), which in the Quechua language of the Incas were called *wak'a* and considered sacred. But it was not until the second half of the sixteenth century when various chroniclers of the colony began to refer specifically to indigenous cults and rituals worshipped the earth as mother and goddess of the ancient Tawantinsuyu. Historians such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (*Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, 1535-1556) and Francisco López de Gómara (*Historia General de las Indias*, 1555) documented, for example, that the Incas had the sun as father and the earth as mother, and that the latter was also venerated as the mother of all things. According to the *Relación del origen, descendencia, política y gobierno de los Incas* of the jurist Hernando de Santillán (1572), the earth was also considered the patron goddess of women who were about to give birth and, therefore, who consecrated to it propitiatory sacrifices. This protector role was also extended to the Inca nobility that, according to chroniclers such as Pedro Cieza de León (*El Señorío de los Incas*, 1553) and Cristóbal de Molina 'El Cusqueño' (*Relación de las fábulas y ritos de los Incas*, 1584), invoked the earth with the sun and moon on the occasion of the official festivities. The cosmological complementarity that these heavenly bodies exerted in relation to the land and especially in order to favor its agricultural productivity, had a great relevance in the Andean religious worldview because, as the Jesuit Bernabé Cobo explained in his *Historia del Nuevo Mundo* (1653), the ancient peoples worshiped the sun, water, land and other things they considered divine, because they had the virtue of providing the necessities for the human life.

Other chroniclers also emphasised the former existence of figurative representations of the earth and local shrines dedicated to this one. The mestizo Pedro Gutiérrez de Santa Clara (*Quinquenario o Historia de las guerras civiles del Perú (1544–1548) y de otros sucesos de las Indias*, ca. 1590) described that the Indians had the earth as goddess and that, unlike other particular idols made of gold, it was made of

mud. As the royal official Juan Polo de Ondegardo (1571) reported in *El mundo de los Incas*, in the Inca region of Antisuyu there was a shrine called Ayllipampa that harbored a plain, regarded by Indians as the goddess earth, to which they offered women's clothing in miniature. Several chroniclers also documented an ancient ritual practice related to the propitiation of the agricultural healthiness: it consisted in placing upright in the familiar farming lands (*chaqra*) some long stones, which acted as altars of invocation of the earth in order to this one protecte and fertilize the *chaqra* (Bernabé Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 1653), a benevolence that was propitiated by offering sacrifices especially during the planting season (Jose Pablo de Arriaga, *La extirpación de la idolatría en el Pirú*, 1621). According to the jesuits Cobo and Arriaga, these stones also formed the statue of the earth and were worshiped as *chaqrayoq*, that is "the owner of the *chaqra*". In this respect, the development of the telluric productivity was so decisive that, as it's documented in the chronicles of monks and religious as Cristóbal de Albónoz (*La instrucción para descubrir todas las guacas del Pirú y sus Camayos y Haziendas*, 1582), Martín de Murúa (*Historia del origen y genealogía real de los reyes Incas del Perú*, 1590), or Giovanni Anello Oliva (*Historia del Reyno y provincias del Perú y vidas de los varones insignes de la compañía de Jesús*, 1630), the Andean imaginary regarded as sacred the agricultural products too, and especially tubers and corncobs that had a size or shape out of the ordinary, as a sign of the telluric benevolence in favor of crops (Flores Ochoa 1972). In imitation of these special products, which were kept as amulets in remote areas of the houses, the Andean populations also made small manufactures dressed in women's clothes and named mamapapa or axomama ('Mother of the potato') and mamasara or Saramama ('corn Mother'); as vegetable symbols of the earth, it was believed that these figurines had powers to reproduce themselves in abundance (Silverblatt 1990).

'Pachamama' and other telluric appellations

In the chronicles and other historiographic sources of the Spanish colony is where Pachamama appears as appellation that identified the earth as mother goddess already at the Inca time. Juan Polo de Ondegardo (*Los errores y supersticiones de los indios sacadas del Tratado y aueriguacion que hizo el Licenciado Polo*, 1567) was the first writer who mentioned that the Indians worshiped the earth which they called Pachamama, and others followed his example by documenting the existence of this terminology associated with the Andean earth (di Salvia 2014). Its lexical meaning expresses, on the one hand, the maternal sphere (*-mama*), since the earth provides sustenance to the man and his herds as any mother would with her progeny (Mejía Huamán 2010); and, on the other hand, the inseparable concepts of 'space' and 'time' (*pacha-*), which identify the land as the basis of life whose biological elements are subject to the cycles of birth, growth and material regeneration. In this sense, the Pachamama is the 'mother of the Andean space and time', that is, of those situations of the Andean life that encompass existential concepts as 'world', 'nature', 'ambiental environment', but especially 'fertility', 'productivity', 'vital continuity'. In fact, the colonial chronicles emphasize that the earth was venerated for being fertile and fruitful

(Giovanni Anello Oliva 1630), especially in the times of planting and harvest, when the Andean peoples propitiated or thanked for its production with sacrificial offerings as camelid fat, coca leaves, guinea pigs, corn kernels, colored feathers, clothing, animal figures, shells, aromatic herbs and woods, etc. Moreover, according to some chronicles (Polo Ondegardo 1567a; Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui 1613; Murúa 1616), Pachamama was also invoked with the reverential name Camac Pacha, which meant 'the earth (pacha) capable of giving life (Kamaq)', that is, the land as a vital element whose productive powers are used by man to generate livelihood goods.

Although in the past various appellations existed, Pachamama is today the more known in the Andean region (Mariscotti de Görlitz 1978), although it's not uncommon to find it associated with characteristic personal names of unknown origin and local diffusion (for example, Juana Puyka or Mama Puyka; Pacha Tierra; Teresa Ñust'a, Juana Conorani, etc., in Cusco - Peru; Núñez del Prado Béjar 1970; Gow and Condori 1976; di Salvia 2014). On the other hand, since the secular contact and the symbolic similarities between the Andean and Catholic religions have favored the emergence in the native imaginary of an idea of the Pachamama syncretized with the Virgin Mary (**Gisbert 1980**), it is common too that some appellations that evoke this latter be attributed to the earth: for example, the Andean populations of southern Cusco (Peru) worship a Pacha Tierra, a Pacha Ñust'a and a Pacha Virgen as if they were one only manifestation of the Pachamama (Gow and Condori 1976); whereas in Potosí (Bolivia), especially the Quechua speakers call the earth also Wirhina, considering it as a native appellation despite its clear syncretic origin (Howard-Malverde 1995).

Beliefs and worship rituals to the Andean earth today

Today the rituals and beliefs related to the ancestral cult of the earth still form the core of the Andean religious worldview, by its close association with the production dynamics of everyday life in the mountains. Venerated by various Andean peoples of Colombia, Ecuador, Chile and Argentina, but especially by the Quechua and Aymara of the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes, Pachamama is the earth which has life because it produces and provides food not only in the *kay pacha* or *aka pacha*, that is the visible world made up of agrarian, wild and pastoral reality, but also from the *ukhu pacha* or *manqha pacha*, that is the underground world where its agricultural and vegetal germination takes origin. For this reason, the Andean collective imaginary identifies the **Pachamama with the productive lands consisting of the soil and subsoil, and with the global topographic landscape, in which the mountains**, the snowy peaks and other natural places heirs of the ancient pre-Hispanic *wak'a* (natural springs, ponds, rivers, rocks, caves, ravines, escarpments, etc.), are venerated as elements that form with the Pachamama a sacred geography of the Andean highlands. In particular, the hills and the Andean peaks, called Apu or Awki by the Quechuas, and Machula, Achachila or Wamani by the Aymaras, are considered by them as tutelary spirits complementaries to the earth, who watch over the familiar herds grazing in the vicinity and provide rain for the fertility of agricultural crops; the higher altitude and

mountainous grandeur, the more important is to propitiate ritually its protection about animals and plots (Núñez del Prado Béjar 1970; Ricard Lanata 2007; di Salvia 2014).

The search for the benevolence of the telluric gods is related to how the Andean religious worldview sees the natural environment as the protagonist of a social universe in which to the earth, mountains, rain and natural sites are attributed behaviors, states and emotions similar to humans (Van der Berg 1989; Ricard Lanata 2007; di Salvia 2014). Within this symbolic personalization, the Pachamama is conceived for example such as the wife of the mountains, with which it shares the care and sustenance of men and herds in the mountains, or as the wife of the rain too, because this latter ensures the humidity of plots and high pastures. In this clear distinction of roles and genres, and precisely as sustaining mother and wife, the earth is therefore vivified and personified in the form of woman who manifests consciousness, will and arbitrariness before the Andean man. This happens especially in the human oneiric dimension, where the Pachamama appears below the profiles of an Andean woman who asks to be fed as she does, expressing thereby basic human needs but also an ambivalent and vengeful personality, that punishes the man with the loss of his crops or herds if it's not rewarded for the productive benevolences received (di Salvia 2014); the religious ritual is the one that acts as an effective and urgent way to ensure this alimentary reciprocity.

In the Andean telluric imaginary the ritual practice represents a form of instant communication between man and the Pachamama that is part of everyday life (Rösing 1994), and is performed by ritual gestures and sacrificial offerings intended for "reaching" literally the telluric gods to satisfy their hungry and thirst (di Salvia 2014). In the Andes there are many rituals of telluric veneration, locally different in terms of the type of paraphernalia used and the method to offer it (Fernández Juárez 1997), and although there are specific times of the year for its celebration, it is also very common among the Andean populations to consecrate in their family privacy and in their farming labors some small votive offerings, accompanied by ritual gestures in which the symbolic use of selected bunches of coca leaves (*k'intu* in Quechua, *ayta* in Aymara) is very important. So, for example, in the central Andean regions of Peru and Bolivia, the coca leaves are cast onto the household fire in order to that its scent can be scattered towards the mountains; it's also usual to bury in the plots some coca leaves to sate the hungry of the Pachamama, and to blow on them to the surroundings is considered as a gesture of respect for the sacredness of all places of the natural environment. Together with these practices, it's also an integral part of the Andean daily life and of the familiar and collective labors the symbolic custom of offering alcoholic beverages to the earth (wine, chicha and other liquors), either by pouring a few drops of liquid on the floor and either throwing them around, to satisfy the thirst of the Pachamama and the mountains. These ritual gestures are named respectively *t'inka* and *ch'alla* in Quechua and *t'inkayaña* and *ch'allaña* in Aymara, and its pre-Hispanic roots are documented in various colonial chronicles (Mariscotti of Görlitz 1978), together with the offerings of many different objects and foods, some of which are still used in the great rituals of worship of the earth.

These ones are more formal and elaborate rituals than the Quechua and Aymara peoples consecrate to the telluric spirits so that they continue favoring the productivity and the healthiness of fields and herds; in this sense, they are particularly prescriptive because they are considered as a real form of “payment” to the earth for the productive benefits received throughout the year. For this reason, in some Andean areas of Quechua speech they are called ‘pago’, ‘pagapu’, ‘pagapuy’ (Flores Ochoa 1972), although there are many other hybrid terminologies too, such as ‘despacho’, ‘alcanzo’, or natives ones such as ‘qorpacha’, ‘hayway’, ‘haywachiy’ or ‘haywakuy’ in quechua; ‘k’orpacha’, ‘loqaña’ or ‘churaña’ in aymara, which express the idea of “reaching” the telluric deities and inviting them to participate in the ritual event. Within the annual production cycle, there are specific times during which the Quechuas and Aymaras perform these ceremonies, that take place especially on the months of August and April but that also coincide, more generally, with some festivities of the Catholic and festive calendar (New Year’s Day, Feast of the Holy Cross or Cruz Velakuy, Saint Isidore farmer, Saint James’ Day, etc.). The beginning of the labors of plowing and sowing from July, and maturation of products from April, is what it marks the performing of the rituals of offering to the earth: in this regard, especially the first of August and Easter are the most representative ritual dates, as according to the Quechua and Aymara beliefs in these days the earth opens, and it’s necessary to feed the Pachamama for it to recover its productive energy; the Easter rituals also have the added meaning that during those days the earth dies as a form of mourning for the sufferings of Christ, to regain life in coincidence with Easter Sunday (Gow and Condori 1976; Fernández Juárez 1997; di Salvia 2014).

As in the small daily devotions, the formal rituals of payment to the earth, the mountains and the natural places are celebrated primarily in the domestic intimacy. Today, the kind of offerings employed has evolved along the time, and so, with typical elements of the Andean world there are others that come rather from the current industry. In general, it is common to buy in the urban markets complete packages that bear inside small sheets of paper all the elements necessities for the ritual event. Normally the coca leaves, sweet wines as the Oporto, and white, yellow and red carnations aren’t part of the package, that are purchased separately before the ritual celebration, as well as other objects and domestic manufactured products which are inherited from generation to generation and also represent an important part of the ceremonial offering (seashells, personal charms, etc.).

A ritual of payment to the earth starts with the preparation of the ‘mesa’, that is, placing a cloth on a family altar or in the ground and distributing on it the ceremonial offerings, that are consecrated to the telluric deities following a general though not totally rigid order. Overall, carnation petals and bunches of coca leaves (*k’intu* or *aita*) anointed with animal fat (*untu*) are placed, and each of them is blown as a way to honor the spirits of the surrounding mountains (*saminchay* or *saminkay*); the *k’intu* or *aita* are sprinkled with resins and other aromatic herbs as incense and *wiraq’oya*; coca seeds, legumes beans (white beans, chickpeas and lentils), pasta, sugar, rice and other cereals,

candies and crackers, white and yellow maize and other wild grains, animal fats, small threads y objects colored in gold and silver, individual charms, stuffed alpaca fetuses and sometimes seashells are added. All these ceremonial objects and ingredients represent on a small scale the real species, and to offer them abundantly means that it's equally abundant what is expected to receive in return (Fernández Juárez 1997). Once complete, the offertory package is wrapped in white sheets of paper and, according to the will of the telluric gods, which is predicted with a previous reading of coca leaves, is buried in honor of the Pachamama or burned in order to its fragrance to reach mountains and surrounding places. Normally there are specific places, called *pukara* by the Quechuas (di Salvia 2014) and *qoymina* or *qinyana* in Aymara areas (Mariscotti of Görlitz 1978), consisting of a protected corner of some domestic place or farmland where it proceeds to the burial or burning of the ritual offering; in the latter case, the clear or opaque color of the ashes determines whether the telluric gods have been satisfied or not with the food offered.

In coincidence with the ceremonies of offering to the earth, along the paschal celebrations and the month of August, as well as in other times of the year, between the end of June, December and February, many Andean peoples perform rituals intended to propitiate the multiplication of the livestock. Generally called *ch'uya* or *kilpi* in Quechua, *llamatinku* in Aymara, **or *señalakuy, marca, uysha kuchuy* (hybrid forms which mean 'to tag', 'to mark', 'to cut off the ears')**, these livestock rituals consist in sprinkling with alcoholic beverages and fumigate with aromatic herbs the family herds of sheep, cows, llamas and alpacas; to these one are also applied marks of possession and they are adorned with bells, wool threads and garlands of flowers. Along with the rituals of payment to the earth, the ceremonies of livestock fertility propitiation are an important part of the telluric worship in Andean earth, although there are other exceptional rituals too, that usually coincide with the construction of a new home, the organization of a trip, the recovery of personal health, the cleaning of the communal irrigation canals, or the propitiation of rainfalls, for whose success it is equally **essential** to pay the Pachamama (Mariscotti of Görlitz 1978). Lastly, today it is very widespread in the Andes the habit of performing collective rituals of payment under the service of a shaman and big civic festivals of worship of the earth (*Pachamama Raymi*), which take place especially along the first days of August, when the Pachamama is awake and hungry. Unlike the intimate family ceremonies, these ritual events have in contrast a distinctive character of tourism promotion and lucrative aims, being the city and region of Cusco a particularly attractive and emblematic place for such purposes.

Cross references

Ecology, Immanence/Trascendence, Mistica Andina, Nature, Rituals, Roman Catholicism in Latin America

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