



The Qoyllurit'i Pilgrimage: Religious Heritage versus Socio-Environmental Problems¹

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Abstract

The article discusses the theme of the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Señor de Qoyllurit'i (and his alter ego – Señor de Tayankani), one of the most important patron feast (*fiesta patronal*) in the central-Andean region (Perú). The first part contains an ethnographic description of the procession, its location in “sacred space” and the main social actors involved. In the following part the attention focuses on the description of the foundational legends and myths of the festivity and the debate related to the syncretic form of the worship of Señor de Qoyllurit'i, based on the fusion between religious traditions of the Andean region and Catholicism. In the end the process of changes in the structure of the ceremony is presented, related to environmental problems: the aspect of climate change and its repercussions on regional beliefs.

Keywords: Qoyllurit'i, Peru, religious heritage, religious syncretism, climate change, socio-environmental problems

Słowa kluczowe: Qoyllurit'i, Peru, dziedzictwo religijne, synkretyzm religijny, zmiana klimatu, problemy społeczno-środowiskowe

Introduction

The cult of Señor de Qoyllurit'i is one of many examples of worship of saint patrons (*santos patrones*), one of the characteristic elements of the popular Catholic tradition in Latin America. Pilgrimage to the Qoyllurit'u Sanctuary and the few-days-long festivity are interesting not only due to the still intense processes of syncretism (combining and mixing elements of the traditional beliefs of the Andean region, Catholicism,

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and recent influences of the New Age concept, mysticism and the increasingly active presence of *evangélicos*), but also due to the processes of the patrimonialization of the worship (at the national and international levels), the presence of socio-economic conflicts (extractive policy of the state designated for the protected area of the Sanctuary) and the phenomenon of global warming (melting glaciers), which has a direct impact on the course of the ceremony and changes introduced to the traditional form of devotion. This article presents the debate on the processes of syncretism and discusses the aspects related to environmental changes and their impact on socio-cultural issues.

The precise date of the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Señor de Qoyllurit'i (in Quechua: Lord of Snowy Star) varies every year according to the ecclesiastical calendar, as the main celebration takes place on the 58th day following Easter Sunday.² The central days of the feast are Monday and Tuesday, although the ritual activities are extended for about a week, between Saturday and Thursday of Corpus Christi. The Qoyllurit'i pilgrimage is spatialized across a broad "sacred landscape" that extends between two central points: one in Sinakara Valley (in Quechua: Plain of Nothing, or Naked Hill), at the foot of the Nevado Qolquepunku (in Quechua: Silver Door), where the Sanctuary of the Señor de Qoyllurit'i is located, and the second one in the small community of Tayankani, a place with a little chapel dedicated to the cult of Señor de Tayankani. The ceremonial space in Sinakara Valley is delimited by two large crosses, which are the objects of particular attention and acts of adoration during the processions: the "cross of the entrance," known as Cruzpata, located at about 4,700 meters ASL in the lower part of the plain, and the "cross of the exit," or "the cross of the glacier," located above 4,900 meters ASL, in the direction of the Nevado Qolquepunku. The Christian temple that constitutes the heart of the sacred space stands at 4,800 meters ASL. Initially in the form of a small chapel made of adobe bricks, with the roof made of straw *ichu*, today it is a large building almost 100 meters long, made of cement and covered with a roof made of corrugated sheet metal (*calamina*). On the main altar there is an image of the crucified Christ (Señor de Qoyllurit'i) painted on a huge black rock, almost invisible from behind a thick panel of glass which protects it from the fire of hundreds of candles set in front of the miraculous image. The altar is covered in a cascade of flowers and religious devotional objects offered by pilgrims. On its right side there is a statue of San Martín de Porres (patron of mulattos and indigenous peoples) and on the left a figure of Virgen de Fátima. Apart from the central building of Sanctuary there are two more places of great importance during the days of festivity. The chapel of the Virgin of Fátima, or Virgen Dolorosa (in Quechua called *Mamachapata* or *Awaq Mamacha*) and the "place of games," in Quechua *Pucllanapata*, located in a plain, open space above the temple of the Señor de Qoyllurit'i. Around the chapel of the Virgin young peasant girls offer their first yarns with the goal

² In 2016 pilgrim to the Sanctuary of Señor de Qoyllurit'i took place between 21st-25th of May; in 2018 in 26th-30th of May. I would like to thank *Mayordomos* of *comparsa* of *Wayri Ch'unchus Puka Pakuri Wayri* (Paucartambo Nation): Enrique Riveros Yábar and Asenet Medina Miranda; chief of *comparsa*, *Inka Arariwa* – Rudy Aquino Espirilla and all the members of the group for their invitation and the information they passed during our journey from Cusco to Paucartambo, Sanctuary in Sinakara Valley, Tayankani pueblo and Ocongate village.

of receiving the blessing for skillful hands, and the chapel itself also serves as a “bank,” so that the pilgrims can make their deposits with false money, simulating doing it for real. The same “game” takes place at the *Pucllanapata* site: the pilgrims play with miniatures of various objects made of pebbles, imitating the real transactions of sale and purchase of various constructions (houses, offices, restaurants, workshops). This mimetic game, treated very seriously by the participants, aims to fulfill their material and commercial wishes and in an interesting way reflects the process of significant and continuous changes of their material needs: the game is played now with ersatz banknotes, notarial documents and university diplomas, and with *alasitas* (an Aymara term that means “buy me”) – plastic miniatures of houses or hotels, and objects like cars, computers, TVs, and various other items of everyday use that everyone wants to have.

The worship of the Señor de Qoyllurit’i translates mainly in the pilgrim and dances of the representatives of the communities (*comparsas*) as a form of offering in honor of religious images. Each group has its own formal structure and moves in established order, presenting banners of the *comparsa*, the standards of the parish and sometimes the Peruvian flag. In front of the group walks *carguyoq*, the person responsible for organization and financing the participation in the pilgrimage, “the one in cargo.” As a symbol of his/her status, he/she carries a *demanda* (in Quechua *apuyaya*) – the image of the Señor de Qoyllurit’i in a small, wooden altarpiece. In addition, each group has its religious specialist (*arariwa*), who is responsible for all the stops, prayers and offerings during the pilgrimage. There is a complementary relationship that occurs during the pilgrimage in the two main types of traditional group dancers, who represent two principle provinces related to the Qoyllurit’i pilgrim: *Qhapaq-Qolla* (from Quispicanchis province) and *Wayri Ch’unchu* (*Qhapaq-Chunchos*, from Paucartambo province).³ Randall (1982) interpreted the *Wayri Ch’unchus* as the most obvious pagan element of the festivity and indicates the Pre-Columbian origin of their dance, based on a similarity between the contemporary visual aspect of the dancers and the illustration of “the Feast of the Antisuyus,” provided in the chronicle of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615).⁴

The primary intermediary between the *comparsas*, the devotees, and the Señor de Qoyllurit’i is the *ukuku*, also known under the name of *Pablucha* or *Pablito*. The *ukuku* is considered an anthropomorphic character usually associated with the popular legends of “Juan the bear” or “the bear raptor” – the son of a woman kidnapped and violated by a bear – spread throughout the Andean area.⁵ The *ukuku*’s outfit consists

³ In the times of the Incas the inhabitants of those two regions represented two ethnic groups, which formed two parts of *Tahuantinsuy* State, located in different geographical areas: *Collasuyu* (sierra) and *Antisuyu* (selva). More about group of dancers, their traditions and signification see: J.A. Ramirez Escalante, *Apu Qoyllorit’i. (Historia del Señor del Qoyllorit’i)*, Cusco 1996; J.F. Canal Cearhuarupay, *Cambios y continuidades en el sistema religioso del Señor de Qoyllorit’i*, Lima–Cusco 2013.

⁴ F. Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno (1615/1616)*, <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>, p. 322 [324] [access: 15.09.2018]; R. Randall, *Qoyllur Rit’i, an Inca Fiesta of the Pleiades. Reflections on Time and Space in the Andean World*, “Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Études Andines” 1982, vol. 11, p. 45.

⁵ For some authors, the *ukuku* is related to the alpaca and not to the Andean bear. This form of understanding the *ukuku* is mainly due to work done by David Gow (1974), who emphasized the importance of the alpaca for the pilgrims of Qoyllurit’i: “The dress of the *Pauluchas* represents the skin of an

of a woven white mask (*waq'ollo*), colored shawls on the back and waist, an alpaca fiber scarf, a heavy, black dress woven of alpaca wool (*pellón*), with a white or red cross on the chest and hanging bells. Each *Pablucho* also has a little doll – *luichito*, a miniature of himself. The role of the *ukukus* is to be celadores – the wardens of the Señor, responsible for order and discipline during the liturgical acts. They also carry whips and look out for any disorder or anomaly that may hinder the festivity. At the same time, they generate chaos among the troupes of dancers, making jokes and hitting anyone who does not follow their orders with a *waraqa* sling. One of the ritual activities of the *ukukus* is the ascent to the Nevado Qolquepunku on Sunday night, just before the main day of the festivity. On the climb they carry the crosses, flowers and small candles with which the devotees have entrusted them. The crosses remain on *Qolquepunku* until Tuesday, the central day of the pilgrimage, and then they are brought back and presented in the Sanctuary. From this ritual has come the idea that they are mediators between the Nevado Qolquepunku, Señor de Qoyllurit'i, and the devotees.

The main Catholic procession of the feast takes place on Monday afternoon and consists of the meeting of the image of the Señor de Tayankani (placed in a small altarpiece made of the wood of a tayanka tree in the shape of a cross and decorated with feathers of jungle birds in red, green and yellow) and the figure of the Virgen Dolorosa in a place called *Cruzpata*. The image of the Señor is carried only by the men, while the figure of the Virgin only by the women. This meeting symbolizes the meeting of Christ and his mother along the Way of the Cross. When the procession is finished, from 7 pm all *comparsas* participate in the “Serenade to the Lord,” dancing and singing in front of and inside the Sanctuary. Dances of hundreds of groups are recognized as the obligatory offering to the Señor de Qoyllurit'i and last all night. On Tuesday morning a Blessing Mass (or “Farewell Mass”) is celebrated, which marks the end of the main Catholic ceremonial activities and the beginning of the so-called “24-Hour Pilgrimage” (“Procession of Height”), in which only *comparsas* representing the indigenous communities of the dancers of *Ch'unchos*, *Wari Ch'unchos* and *Puka Pakuri* participate. They are those who carry the image of the Señor de Tayankani along the distance of approximately 30 kilometers, from the Qoyllurit'i Sanctuary to the small chapel in the community of Tayankani. The road climbs towards *Marchucruz*, an *apacheta* (mountain pass) at about 5,000 meters ASL. At 4 pm pilgrims arrive at *Yanacancha* saddle, where *comparsas* celebrate the special dance: they form parallel lines, that when crossing like intertwined snakes generate a great *q'inqu*, the characteristic motif found on textiles from the Cusco region. After the ritual dance the walk continues in the direction of *Intilloqsina*, where the rite of *Intialabado*, the greeting of the rising sun, is held. The dancers kneel in long rows, facing east. When the first rays fall on the place, the *pututus* (musical instruments made of shells), and little bottles that are blown by the *Pabluchas* begin to sound. The pilgrims pray, thank the sun for the end of the holy procession, and embrace one another. After

alpaca with its threads; in addition, some dancers wear alpaca hides and all wear an alpaca wool shawl” (D. Gow, *Taytacha Qoyllur Rit'i. Rocas y bailarines, creencias y continuidad*, “Allpanchis Phututinqa” 1974, vol. VII, p. 76).

Intialabado the procession begins to descend the slope of the hill towards the community of Tayankani, where in the small chapel the last mass is celebrated, finished with a blessing to all the participants. Then, the image of Señor de Tayankani is taken to his chapel in Ocongate.

Qoyllur'Riti: lo Andino versus lo Cristiano in Sinakara Valley

In the literature dedicated to the cult of Señor de Qoyllurit'i, we find several versions of the legend of its origins. They can be divided into the official, Catholic one, written and linked mainly to the *mestizo* population of the region, and the various versions based on the oral traditions, disseminated among indigenous peoples and related to the Andean popular religion. The official Catholic version was compiled between 1928 and 1946 by Adrián Mujica Ortiz, priest of Ccatca, who used the parish books of Ocongate as the main source.⁶

The story tells about the indigenous Gregorio Mayta, owner of herds of alpacas, llamas, and rams. One of his pastures was at the foot of the Nevado *Qolquepunku* in the Sinakara Valley. Two of his sons grazed the animals: the elder twenty years old, and the younger, twelve, called Marianito. The elder mistreated his younger brother; he was lazy and gave him too much work. One day little boy decided to run away and began to climb towards *Qolquepunku* Glacier. Suddenly, a white, blond-haired boy appeared and prevented him from continuing on his way. He gave Marianito bread and comforted him, and the boys began to play and dance on the slope of the mountain. The scene was repeated for several days. Alerted by a neighbor that his son was playing with the other boy and worried about animals, Gregorio Mayta went to look for his youngest son, and to his great surprise discovered that his herd had increased and that the animals were in excellent health, better than before. Asking the reason for this, Marianito replied that he had a friend who was waiting for him every day at the foot of the mountain and helped him to watch the animals. By order of his father, the young Mariano interrogated his friend to know his name: he found out that his name was Manuel and that he was from pueblo Tayankani (in Quechua: *Tayankanimantakani*). The father wanted to reward the boys for their good work by giving them new clothes. Marianito noticed that his friend always wore the same garments and they never seemed to wear out. He asked Manuel about his clothes and a few days later his friend appeared with his clothes in rags. Determined to help him, Mariano sought permission from his father to take a sample of the clothes to Cusco in order to buy new material. The tailor in the town could not help him: the fabric was too delicate and inaccessible to a simple craftsman, but the news about a scrap of Manuel's garments reached the Bishop of Cusco, Dr. Juan Manuel Moscoso y Peralta (1732–1811). It turned out that the material that Marianito had showed was the same

⁶ The full version of the legend, entitled: "Traditional Origin of the Apparition of the Lord of Coyllor-Rit'e" appears in a book by Carlos Flores Lizana (*El Taytacha Qoyllur Rit'i. Teología india hecha por comuneros y mestizos quechuas*, Sicuani 1997, pp. 30–36). The discourse about various versions of the legends see: Canal Ccarhuarupay, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–157; cf. J.A. Ramirez Escalante, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–87.

textile used to sew the bishop's ornate and to cover the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament. Thus suspicions arose that the textile was cut off and the boy had committed theft and sacrilege. It was decided to investigate the case, so the parson of Ocongate, Don Pedro de Landa was sent to the Sinakara Valley to check whether Manuel had stolen and cut the ornate into pieces. On June 12, 1783, the priest along with the sacristan, the church steward, and Marianito went to the mountains to meet with Manuel. As they approached the Sinakara, Marianito saw Manuel dressed in a beautiful white robe, and he began to run amiably to him. At that moment a white, shining light flashed, blinding the parish priest and his companions. They suspected that boys were playing tricks with a mirror and decided to return to the valley with representatives of the local authorities from Ocongate and Ccatca. They came back to the Sinakara Valley a few days later and went to the place where the boys were playing, but when de Landa tried to catch Manuel, he realized that in his outstretched arms he held a trunk of tayanka bush, in a shape reminiscent of the cross from the crucifixion of Christ. Frightened Marianito, seeing the change of his companion, died suddenly of fear and regret. He was buried in the same place where he died, near a big rock. When those miraculous events came to the attention of King Carlos III, he asked the cross made of tayanka wood to be sent to Spain. The authentic cross was not sent back over the years, although the local peasants requested its return to the authorities in Paucartambo and Quispicanchis provinces. For fear of a revolt, the parishioners and the authorities from Ocongate commissioned the making of a replica, and since that time the image, known as Señor de Tayankani, has been kept on the side altar of the church in Ocongate, and during feast days it is carried in the procession to the Sanctuary in Sinakara Valley.

The second version of the foundational legend was transmitted orally in the region of Ccata and Ocongate. The events were passed in the same topography and sequential framework, but with differences in some details. It was Manuel who pitied Mariano's poor Indian clothes and gave him a fragment of his fine garment. He dispatched Marianito to Cusco to procure more clothes for them both. Another difference is related to the events in Sinakara Valley: when the boys were found playing on the slope of *Qolquepunku* Glacier, the body of Manuel suddenly becoming weak and broken, he entered into the huge black rock and disappeared. After losing his friend, Marianito fell into such despair that he fainted and died on the spot. He was buried under the black rock into which Manuel had changed, and then the image of crucified Christ appeared above the stone. The news of the miracle spread around the area, and the indigenous peasants came to the Sinakara Valley to light candles and to pray close to Marianito's grave. In order to avoid any transgression of idolatry (cult of the black rock), the representatives of the Church of Ocongate ordered a display of the image of the crucified Christ, so that the people could continue with their religious acts and venerate the image of the Lord. In 1935 they commissioned a painter from Cusco, Fabián Palomino Alvarez to "correct" (to paint?) the image of Christ directly on the huge dark rock, and this is the image is known today as Señor de Qoyllurit'i, in 1944 blessed by the archbishop of Cusco.⁷

⁷ C. Flores Lizana, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–33; cf. J.A. Ramirez Escalante, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–88.

The most significant difference between the “official” Catholic version of the legend and that of the peasant’s lies in the fact that in the former the attention is focused on the black rock where the image of the crucified Christ was painted, and in the latter on the cross made of tayanka wood. Many Qoyllurit’i pilgrims believe that the spirit of Manuel still lives in the rock and surrounding glacial landscape. Among the indigenous peoples Señor de Qoyllurit’i is called “Cristo de los campesinos” (Lord of the Peasants) or “Señor de los pobres” (Lord of the Poor), but sometimes invoked also as “Padrecito de la Estrella de la Nieve” (Father of the Snowy Star), “Señor del Nevado” or “Apu Jesucristo.” For them, the annual pilgrimage is part of the immemorial tradition of peregrinations to the distant places of worship, and pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Señor de Qoyllurit’i is simultaneously a visit of the mountain deity, Nevado *Qolquepunku*, where the miracle took place.

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest religious traditions of the Andean region. In the light of the results of archaeological research, religious centers from the preceramic period (around 7600–2000 BC) were already visited by devotees from the distant regions of today’s Peru. The destination of pilgrimage was also mountain shrines, *Apus*,⁸ like Pariacaca (Huarochiri), Catequil (Huamachuco), Coropuna (Arequipa), Ausangate (Cusco) and Marcahuasi (San Pedro Casma). The high Andean Mountains were believed to be the abodes of the deities that controlled the weather and the productivity of crops, and they had a direct impact on the development of breeding. They decided whether rain would fall, and in what abundance. They were ambivalent beings, who could behave in a malevolent or benign way, thus men would make payments (offerings) to profit and maintain good relations with them.⁹ The Andean populations recognized themselves also as descendants of the nearest *Apus* and linked them with their *paqarinas*, mythical places of origin. It is known that the hills and high mountains have been worshipped for thousands of years, although most of the archaeological remains found at these sites indicate construction by the Incas (between 1470 and 1532).¹⁰ Johan Reinhard, a specialist in high-altitude archaeology, explains: “When the Inca entered to the areas where these beliefs already existed, they apparently felt it necessary to construct ritual sites to help in gaining greater

⁸ *Apu* in Quechua means *Lord* and refers to the tutelary deities of the hills and snowy peaks. It is also used to designate the spirits that inhabit the mountains. The origin of these deities is often part of large cosmogonic cycles, which explain the meaning of the world, human existence and the general order of Andean societies (see more: J. Szemiński, M. Ziolkowski, *Mity, rytuały i polityka Inków*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 310–315; T. Besom, *Of Summits and Sacrifice. An Ethnohistoric Study of Inca Religious Practices*, Austin 2009, pp. 68–93, 118–126; R. Sánchez Garrafa, *Apus de los cuatro Suyus. Construcción del mundo en los ciclos mitológicos de las deidades montaña*, Cusco–Lima 2015, pp. 65–84, 269–278).

⁹ To this day there are strong relations of reciprocity between the peasant settlers and the *Apus*. It is customary to offer offerings and sacrifices (*pago*); the idea is that service pleases the *Apus*, satisfies their hunger and ratifies their reciprocal obligations with the inhabitants of the places they protect.

¹⁰ “They also adored streams, creeks, rivers and lakes; the snowy mountain ranges, and any other mountain range or hill [...], the rocks or big stones [...].” (B. Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo, Publicada por primera vez con notas y otras ilustraciones de D. Marcos Jiménez de la Espada*, Tomo 3, Part XIII, Capítulo XI, p. 344; see also illustrations in: F. Guaman Poma de Ayala, *op. cit.*, pp. 261 [263]; 268 [270]; 272 [274]).

political, religious, and economic control over the people and land they conquered.”¹¹ This theory is also shared by Constanza Ceruti (2007), who notes that in the times of the Inca Empire the most remote and highest mountains were the object of adoration and pilgrimage. The *Apus-huacas* (mountain gods) were the special markers in the process of appropriation of the sacred space by the Incas. The circulation of the devotees was reflected in pilgrimages that covered hundreds or thousands of kilometers of the Andean topography, ascending even to extreme heights.¹² At the winter solstice (in June) processions left the sacred capital in Cusco and went to the area of Lake Titicaca, to the islands of the Sun and the Moon. In these pilgrimages, the Qoyllurit’i region was not omitted: a pilgrimage of Cusco nobles and priests proceeded to the Nevado Ausangate area to thank the *Apus* and Mother Earth *Pachamama*. The Ausangate, at 6,384 meters ASL, is the highest mountain of the Department of Cusco, therefore it was considered as the most powerful *Apu* of the region. Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615) in his illustrated chronicle mentions Ausangate as one of the most powerful deities of Collasuyu province in the empire of the Incas.¹³

Pre-Colombian aspects in the pilgrimage to the Sinakara Valley have appeared in the first investigations related to the cult of Señor de Qoyllurit’i, published in the 1970s and 1980s. For the authors David Gow and Rosalind Gow (1975) the figure of the Señor de Qoyllurit’i corresponds to only a “nominally Christian deity” and must be understood, rather, as a practice that maintained an important pre-Colombian substratum. They referred to the ritual practices of the indigenous peasants of Ocongate, who considered that “[...] the rocks and stones [were] dwellings of their ancestors,” so they needed to take care and respect them by exact fulfillment of certain rituals.¹⁴ Therefore, the image of the Christ on the black rock venerated during the celebrations takes on an importance beyond that of the Catholic rite. Robert Randall (1982), during his research based on the review of chronicles of the 16th and 17th centuries, among others *Historia de los Incas* (1572) by Sarmiento de Gamboa, *Nueva coronica y buen gobierno* by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615), and *Extirpación de la idolatría en el Perú* by Pablo José de Arriaga (1621) noticed an interesting aspect of the Señor de Qoyllurit’i festivity: that the official version of the legend does not explain why it should be celebrated in the days just before Corpus Christi. He relates it with the celebration of the *Oncoymita* festivity of the times of the Incas, in which honors were paid to the Pleiades (known as *Oncoy*, the “Seven Sisters” stars). In Cusco, the Pleiades have their heliacal set (time of disappearance) on or about April 24th and their heliacal rise on or about June 9th. According to the Quechua believes when the Pleiades are not visible in the Southern Hemisphere for a period of 45 days, the world becomes a dangerous place caught up in a time of illness and imbalance. Their return “announces” the winter solstice and the beginning of a new year, and the pilgrim then

¹¹ J. Reinhard, C.M. Ceruti, *Sacred Mountains, Human Sacrifice and Pilgrimage among the Incas. Pilgrimage and the Ritual Landscape in Pre-Columbian America*, Washington 2001, p. 44.

¹² C.M. Ceruti, *Qoyllur Riti: etnografía de un peregrinaje ritual de raíz incaica por las altas montañas del Sur de Perú*, “Scripta Etnológica” 2007, vol. XXIX, pp. 29–30.

¹³ F. Guaman Poma de Ayala, *op. cit.*, p. 275 [277].

¹⁴ D. Gow, R. Gow, *La alpaca en el mito y el ritual*, “Allpanchis Phututinqa” 1975, vol. VIII, p. 145.

marks an annual renewal and time of rejoicing when the Pleiades reappear in the sky of the Southern Hemisphere.¹⁵

For David and Rosalind Gow the Christianization of Qoyllurit'i was an attempt by the peasants of Ocongate to legitimize an ancient cult before the eyes of the Catholic Church. For Robert Randall (1982), it was the church that had appropriated the area of the sanctuary, with the intention of dispossessing the indigenous pilgrims of the veneration of the black rock (*huaca*).¹⁶ Yet during colonial times, in the fervor of the evangelization process, extirpation of idolatry campaigns and the attempt to control the ancestral movement towards sacred places in the mountains, the Catholic Church framed the Andean pilgrimages within the calendar of official worship, building chapels, planting crosses and legitimizing foundational legends in the places of traditional destination for the pilgrims. One of the main precepts of the First Limense Council (1551) was that "the *huacas* has to be torn down, and in the same place, if decent, churches are made or at least a cross is placed."¹⁷ The official (Catholic) legend of Marianito can be then interpreted as an attempt to convert the sacred place identified as *huaca* to a sacred place of the Christian cross. This substitution was not entirely successful, since the indigenous peasants still would light their candles and put flowers at the place of the dead of Marianito, at the foot of the black rock. For that reason, to avoid any transgression of the believers the image of Crucified Christ was painted, so that the religious acts could continue, but to the "proper" (Catholic) hierophany.¹⁸

We can hypothesize then, that the supposed appearance of the Señor de Qoyllurit'i was an attempt by the indigenous people of the area to preserve the sacred place. David and Rosalind Gow (1975) noted that "[...] the rocks spoken by the legend of the Lord of Qoyllurit'i were sacred long before the 'miracle.'"¹⁹ Also Bérnabe Condori and Rosalind Gow (1982) state that

[t]he presence of archaeological ruins in the same area suggests that the Lord appeared in an ancient religious place. [...] The cult, that was previously addressed to indigenous deities was transferred in this area [Sinakara] to the Lord; it became an *Apu-Santo*, with the same power as the *Apu Ausangate*. Both have power to miraculously heal, Ausangate heals with his holy snow and the Lord heals with holy water, [...] both receive the offerings: Ausangate of wine, animal fetuses, tallow of alpaca and flowers; the Lord of candles and prayers.²⁰

It is worth mentioning that the official legend about the miraculous appearance of Christ on the black rock in Sinakara Valley and the growing popularity of the shrine

¹⁵ See: R. Randall, *op. cit.*, pp. 40–42; por.: T. Zuidema, *La religión Inca*, [in:] *Religiones andinas*, M.M. Marzal (ed.), Madrid 2005, pp. 97–98.

¹⁶ R. Randall, *op. cit.*, pp. 45; see also M.J. Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes. Regional cults in Cusco*, Washington–London 1987, pp. 238–242.

¹⁷ R. Randal, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁸ It is a clear example of a pattern found throughout Latin America: the usurpation of one culture's spiritual space (pre-Hispanic sanctuaries or regional shrines, as *huacas*) by a conquering Christian culture (see more: M.M. Marzal, *Tierra encantada. Tratado de antropología religiosa de América Latina*, Lima 2002, pp. 265–337).

¹⁹ D. Gow, R. Gow, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁰ B. Condori, R. Gow, *Kay Pacha. Tradición Oral Andina*, Cusco 1982, p. 83.

dates precisely to the years of the one of the most violent indigenous, anti-Hispanic rebellions, headed by José Gabriel Condorcanqui, known as Tupac Amaru II (1780–1783). The strongholds of the rebels were (among others) in Paucartambo province and in Ausangate region. According to the documents of the time, we know that Bishop Moscoso y Peralta, a Creole born in Arequipa, played an important role in the rebellion, organizing the troops of ecclesiastics and seminarians. The rebellion was a crucial moment to not lose control over this terrain, so he recognized the native origin of the apparitions of Christ and interpreted it in Christian terms, converting it into a Catholic issue. Angela Brachetti (2002) considers that the construction of the chapel on an indigenous sacred object (the black rock) was the first step in taking control over the territorial and spiritual domination of that region by the Catholic Church, that is the Spanish administration.²¹

Institutionalization of the cult and competition among religious traditions

While the syncretic character of the Señor de Qoyllurrit'i worship seems to be confirmed, there are some doubts about the moment of the transformation of the formerly indigenous sacred site into a Catholic shrine and the “Christianization” of Andean rituals.

There are not many references about the later development of the cult after the events of the 18th century. It is only known that with the passage of time, due to the “miracles” and favors received from Señor by several local people, the faith surrounding the crucified Christ on the black rock came to increase, and the place became a pilgrim sanctuary for the local communities. It is also known that after the independence wars the Catholic Church had neither a strong position nor influence in the area, as then during the 19th century the cult supposedly had a wide margin of autonomy for its syncretic development as an expression of Catholicism in its popular Andean version. Written documents have appeared regarding the 1930s, when the legend of the miraculous apparition was written down for the first time. Carlos Flores Lizana (1997) reports that regular pilgrimages were made since the 1930s, indicating that around 1932 in the region of Marcapata – a neighbor to the Qoyllurrit'i area – gold mining began. During that period the sanctuary gained huge religious interest, since in the belief of the miners the fortune for the exploitation of the gold was owing to the favors that the Señor de Qoyllurrit'i offered to his devotees.²² The first descriptions of the sanctuary before the 1930s refer to a small adobe chapel covered by a roof made of straw, but by 1935 there was already a construction with a tiled

²¹ A. Brachetti, *Qoyllurrit'i. Una creencia andina bajo conceptos cristianos*, “Anales del Museo de América” 2002, vol. 10, pp. 101–102.

²² Flores Lizana indicates, that the first documented pilgrims were the devotees of the Province of Acomayo (*op. cit.*, pp. 25–26). Salas Carreño concludes, that in fact the apparition and cult to the Lord of Qoyllur Rit'i started only in the 1930s and not at the end of the 18th century (G. Salas Carreño, *Acerca de la antigua importancia de las comparsas de wayri ch'unchu y su contemporánea marginalidad en la peregrinación de Qoyllurrit'i*, “Anthropológica” 2010, Año XXVIII, no. 28, pp. 69–71).

roof and stone walls. It was also at that moment when the artist Fabián Palomino was hired to paint the image of the Señor on the black rock and Ezequiel Arce – one of the landowners of Ccatca – donated the first shroud. According to Guillermo Salas Carreño (2010), until the 1940s the pilgrimage involved mainly the indigenous neighbors of the present districts of Ocongate, Carhuayo, and parts of Marcapata, Ccatca and Paucartambo, but thanks to the fame of the miracles and the sanctuary itself, little by little, more distant communities became involved.²³ The *mestizos* of the population of Urcos began to replace the indigenous peasants in the organization of the pilgrimage. From that time the Catholic *mestizo* cult of the Señor de Qoyllurit'i gained the dominant position, replacing the indigenous cult of the Señor de Tayankani. In June 1954, archbishop of Cusco, Felipe Santiago Hermosa Sarmiento officially named the shrine in the Sinakara Valley as "Sanctuary Qoyllurit'i."²⁴

Probably between 1935 and 1944 the parish priest of the town of Urcos Pedro Vargas decided to found the "Association of the Señor of Qoyllurit'i" with the explicit purpose of "putting order to the Indians who go up to dance and who make excesses."²⁵ In 1959 the first association was reorganized in a more stable manner, and in 1960 the Brotherhood of the Señor of Qoyllurit'i was founded, based on the organization formed around the 1920s in the Sanctuary of the Señor de Huanca in the Sacred Valley of the Incas. The Archbishop of Cusco approved the statute of the new fraternity on September 28, 1962. This organization excluded the peasant dancers on the grounds of ethnic superiority: before the 1940s, those who appeared in the Sanctuary and organized the pilgrimage were mainly peasants from the Ocongate area; after 1943, those who organized the pilgrimage were the founders of the Brotherhood, the *mestizos* of Urcos.²⁶

In 2003, not only was the Brotherhood reorganized,²⁷ but a new institution was also created: the Council of Peregrine Nations (*Consejo de Naciones Peregrinas*, CNP), with representatives of all the indigenous groups of dancers (*comparsas*) that participate in the pilgrimage. These are grouped into eight so-called *Naciones*, seven of which correspond to their eponymous provinces: Paucartambo, Quispicanchis, Canchis, Acomayo, Paruro, Urubamba and Anta. The eighth Nation, Tahuantinsuyo, founded in 1996, groups the *comparsas* of the city of Cusco.²⁸ Currently, the CNP articulates about 300 *comparsas* and regional organizations throughout the southern Andean region. With the conformation and reorganization of the Brotherhood of the

²³ G. Salas Carreño, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

²⁴ J.A. Ramirez Escalante, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

²⁵ C. Flores Lizana, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²⁶ A symbol of the Brotherhood is an elegant white silk scapular embroidered with the image of Señor de Qoyllurit'i. At the beginning it had no more than 15 guards of the rites, but in the first years of the 21st century it had more than 80. Today the Brotherhood's members come from the districts of Urcos, Huarco, Huarcapay, San Sebastián, Quincemil, Ocongate, San Salvador, Paucartambo, Huascar, Ccatca and Oropesa.

²⁷ The new Statute of the Brotherhood of the Lord of Qoyllur Rit'i was approved on January 6, 2005.

²⁸ Canal Ccarhuarupay, *op. cit.*, pp. 291–301; see also: Consejo de Naciones Peregrinas Ocho Naciones, www.localprayers.com/XX/Unknown/881062845312621/Consejo-De-Naciones-Peregrinas-Ocho-Naciones [access: 15.09.2018].

mestizos and the modern restoration of the Sanctuary of Señor Qoyllurit'i made by its members, the "power over the keys" of the Sanctuary became an efficient mechanism of discipline and domination of the Catholic Church over the religious rites, and a symbol of the control over the rituals during the festivity. In a gradual way, rites linked to the non-Catholic Andean religious expressions were limited, as was the case with the rituals of offering (*pago*) performed by the *paqos* in honor of Mother Earth *Pachamama*, the snow-covered Nevado *Qolquepunku* or *Apu Ausangate*. It should be mentioned, however, that certain Nations, committed to the indigenous culture revival, avoid participation in the activities organized by the Catholic Church around religious icons, such as the image of Señor de Qoyllurit'i or the Virgen Dolorosa. During the Tuesday mass of blessing (celebrated in Spanish and by the members of the Brotherhood explicitly presented as the most significant, central point of the festivity) *ukukus* were returning from the *Qolquepunku* Glacier, carrying crosses and little bottles of melted water. *Mayordomo* of *comparsa Puka Pakuri Wayri* (Nation Paucartambo) realized a traditional *pago* dedicated to the *Apu Qolquepunku* and the *Pachamama*. At the same time, the representatives of the Paucartambo and Quispicanchis Nations were leaving for a "24-hour Procession," the goal of which was *Intialabado*, a greeting of the sun in *Yanacancha*.

Despite the specific competition for the dominant position and control over the course of the festivity, the two organizations combined their efforts regarding the protection of the sacred space of Sanctuary and safeguarding the same tradition of the pilgrimage. In 2004, with the initiative of the National Institute of Culture, and in coordination with the Brotherhood and the Council of Pilgrim Nations, the feast was declared as Cultural Patrimony of the Peruvian Nation. In November 2011 the pilgrimage was also inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO. The reason for the decision indicates the conciliatory nature of the nominations relating to the elements of intangible cultural heritage: "On the pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the Lord of Qoyllurit'i (Lord of the Snow Star) the elements of the Catholic religion and the cults dedicated to the pre-Hispanic gods are mixed. The pilgrimage encompasses a wide variety of cultural expressions and offers a meeting place for communities settled at different altitudes of the Andes Mountains [...]." ²⁹

***When the glaciers melt, the world will end:* environmental problems in Sinakara Valley**

The animist tradition still present in the Andean region places the snow-capped mountains in the supernatural world. What we may consider as an empty space covered by the snow is, for inhabitants of the Andean cordilleras, occupied by ancestral deities – the *Apus*. Communities have always sought to earn their favors through rituals and

²⁹ Nomination File No. 00567 for the Inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, UNESCO 2011.

offerings (in pre-Hispanic times including human sacrifices), and the deities granted them water and conditions that guarantee a good harvest and an abundance of animals. These beliefs and rituals remain alive and are demonstrated by religious practices around the mountains, such as the Qoyllurit'i pilgrimage. Popular beliefs relate the physical presence of snow and ice in the vicinity of the Sanctuary of Qoyllurit'i with the spiritual presence of the Lord.

The most ingrained custom related to the cult of Señor de Qoyllurit'i was that of the *ukukus* performed during all-night vigils close to the *Qolquepunku* Glacier, where they prayed to the gods and battled the condemned souls (*condenados*) said to inhabit the icy slopes. A significant, essential ritual once performed by the *ukukus* was to extract ice from *Qolquepunku* Glacier and to carry blocks on their backs and place them next to the altar in the temple of Señor de Qoyllurit'i as an offering. Water collected from the ice in the bottles and blessed in the Sanctuary during morning mass on Tuesday was believed to have healing and purifying properties. It was taken to the houses and used on diverse occasions: as a cure for *susto* (fear); to bless the farms and animals, to protect from the power of rocks considered "bad," to ward off hailstorms, scare away lightning, and even to calm drunks and the insane and ward off evil of all kinds. The ice extraction test was also associated with passage into adulthood and with the release of sins.

This tradition stopped being practiced a few years ago because of climate change. We can consider the pilgrim to the Sinakara Valley and changes in its ritual structure as one example of the substantial social and cultural impact of so-called global warming over the populations living in Andean regions. Dangerous climate phenomena have already caused the melting of tropical glaciers, with implications for the amount of water available for farming, livestock husbandry and domestic use.³⁰ Historically, glaciers have been the fundamental support of agricultural activities, and therefore, of life of the communities, both on the coast and in the Andean region. The stability of the climate allowed the organization of the agricultural cycle and the anticipation of ritual activities. In modern times, climate changes are producing the phenomena of decreasing water flows for irrigation, unseasonal frosts which affect crops, irregular rains, and prolongation of periods of drought. These changes also prevent coherence in the traditional celebration of seasonal rituals and, therefore, affect the worldview that sustains the peoples: a spiritual relationship with the mountains. New threats and possibilities may force or urge people to change their customs and traditional forms of production, as well as their community relationships and traditions related to religious aspects. As Kronik and Verner note: "Basic to many indigenous peoples' understanding of the relationship between society and nature is the notion of maintaining the balance between the human, natural, and cosmological realms, based on trusted social and cultural knowledge and practices. These balances are

³⁰ See: R. Ruiz Rubio, L. Vittor, *Percepción de los impactos del cambio climático en comunidades indígenas andinas*, [in:] *Glaciares Andinos. Recursos Hídricos y Cambio Climático*, Santiago de Chile 2011, pp. 123–135. The majority (71.1%) of the world's tropical glaciers are concentrated in Peru. Scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the National (Peruvian) Commission on Climate Change have informed that Perú has lost more than 30% of its glacier cover and estimated that by 2025 the glaciers located below 5500 m will have disappeared.

constantly in flux, and living and acting involve negotiating them. So when changes occur, for example, in climatic conditions, people look to themselves and their social institutions and rituals as possible reasons.”³¹ Flores Lizana (1997) recalls people commenting on glacial retreat as long ago as the 1970s. At that time some people saw it as a sign of the end of the world. Throughout the Andes, peoples have long believed that “when the glaciers melt, the world will end,” or a mighty wind will blow everything away and a new epoch will begin.³² In the 1980s a prophecy about Nevado *Ausangate* and disappearing of ice cover was also recorded by anthropologist Michael Sallnow: “For the arrival of the final judgment, you, *Apu Ausangate*, little by little will become grey until you have turned completely black. And when you have changed into a mountain of black cinder, on that day the final judgment will come.”³³ Nowadays, some say the mountains are turning black because they are angry or sad. Carmina Sicusta from Amaru village near the town of Pisac has another explanation: “The earth itself is sick,” she says.³⁴

Although the feast dedicated to Señor de Qoyllurit’i probably has its origins in the colonial times, its elements, like the high mountain scenery, the dynamics of cultural appropriation of the sacred space through the processions, and the rituals of worship and offering performed on the pilgrimage demonstrate its close resemblance to the pre-Columbian tradition. The Nevado Ausangate, and Nevado *Qolquepunku* were known as *Apus*, and the region between Qoyllurit’i Sanctuary and Tayankani village was an important sacred space, which served as a source of spiritual energy. At the beginning of the 21st century, some people still came down from *Qolquepunku* Glacier with pieces of ice, as they believed it could cure them of illness, but *Pauluchas* and guardians of the Council of the Nations (as well as high mountain rescue policemen, commissioned to supervise compliance with such a measure) made sure that the ice pieces turned off the glacier were small, only symbolic. However, the warmer climate in the region has melted much of the sacred glacier in a brief period of time. In 2003, a decision to completely forbid taking ice from the *Qolquepunku* Glacier was made. As explained one of *Pauluchas*, this change of such an important element of traditional rites was caused by the belief that “when the snow goes away the *Señor* also goes away.” The decision has upset many pilgrims, but those who were caught with the “contraband ice” were whipped by the *ukukus* and they had to leave pieces in place. A few years later, guardians of the Señor de Qoyllurit’i decided by general agreement to deny any access to the snowy mountain and change the entire scenario of the rituals and ceremonies related with Nevado *Qolquepunku*. José Luis Mamani

³¹ J. Kronik, D. Verner, *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Washington 2010, p. 125.

³² M. Sallnow, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 263.

³⁴ See: B. Frazer, *Climate Change Equals Culture Change in the Andes*, “Scientific American,” www.scientificamerican.com/article/andes-climate-change-glacieramaru-agriculture [access: 15.09.2018].

León, president of the Paucartambo Nation announced that 2016 was the last year in which the rituals were staged near the *Qolquepunku* Glacier.³⁵

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³⁵ *El ancestral rito del Señor Qoyllur Riti abandona nevado por calentamiento global*, <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-el-senor-qoyllur-riti-se-despide-del-nevado-colque-punku-deshielo-614301.aspx> [access: 15.09.2018].

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