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SACRED MOUNTAINS OF THE ANDES: A COMPARATIVE REAPPRAISAL

Jon Mathieu

Abstract: In recent decades, an interdisciplinary *corpus* of comparative accounts about sacred mountains in the world has emerged, usually addressed to a broad readership. This paper first presents the *corpus* and then compares it to selected specialized studies on religious aspects of the Andes. What can comparative studies learn from Andean studies, and what can Andean studies vice versa learn from comparative studies? In its current state, there is a wide range of opinions. Considerable efforts are needed to promote scholarly quality. The conclusions touch on topics of historical change, mountain topography, mountain diversity and a possible model for further research.

Negli ultimi decenni si è affermato un *corpus* interdisciplinare di resoconti comparativi sulle montagne sacre del mondo, rivolto in genere al largo pubblico. Il saggio comincia presentando tale *corpus* per poi confrontarlo con una selezione di studi specialistici sugli aspetti religiosi delle Ande. Cosa possono imparare gli studi comparativi dagli studi andini e cosa possono imparare gli studi andini dagli studi comparativi? Allo stato attuale, la gamma di opinioni è molto ampia. Serviranno notevoli sforzi per promuovere un livello adeguato di qualità accademica. Le conclusioni, infine, affrontano argomenti quali il cambiamento storico, la topografia delle montagne, la diversità delle montagne e un possibile modello per ulteriori ricerche.

Keywords: Mountains, Sacred, Sacredness, Andes, Change, Topography, Diversity, Pilgrimage

Parole chiave: Montagne, Sacro, Sacralità, Ande, Cambiamento, Topografia, Diversità, Pellegrinaggi

1. Introduction

"Where the Gods become Mountains" — this is a slogan that Peru's tourism industry launched some time ago. The slogan is intended to convey the message that the mountains around the high–altitude Andean city of Cusco are located in a mysterious sphere between the natural and supernatural, making them an attractive tourist destination. Other advertisements are aimed more at an initiated, spiritually interested clientele from all over the world and present the country as the "magnetic center of the planet". In order to do their job professionally, tour operators and local guides today need to be up to date with the different expectations of this "mystical tourism". The touchstone for the magnetic attraction is "the planet" (De la Cadena 2015, p. 188; Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 237–239).

In the world of books there is a counterpart to this Peruvian development. Sacred mountains on a global scale have become the topic of a particular literature in recent decades. An interdisciplinary corpus of comparative accounts has emerged, usually for a broad readership. Contrary to what one might expect, the Andes do not play a prominent role in them. A fairly typical statement about sacred mountains in Latin America reads as follows: "The semicontinent, officially so Catholic that it was allowed to provide the new Pope, has remained true to its old myths under a thin Christian varnish." (Messner and Märtin 2013, p. 224). Spain's Christian colonialism, which wanted to suppress these "old myths", seems to stand in the way of increased interest. Most authors have a Christian background, but find other religions more attractive with regard to mountain experiences.

In general, Christianity occupies a peculiar position in the new genre. There are authors who make practically no distinction between religions when it comes to sacred mountains, along the lines of: all mountains are sacred, or all religions have their sacred mountains. Other authors, on the other hand, assume that Christianity and sacred mountains are mutually exclusive in the strict sense, because the worship of natural objects is considered idolatry in church dogma and constitutes a sin. Even if the religion has become "greener" as a result of the ecological movement, the theological reservation remains (Rime 2021, pp. 554–581; Mathieu

forthcoming). There is probably no more suitable terrain for exploring such questions than Latin America. After all, this continent was the scene of the earliest and largest "conversion" to Christianity in the world (Orique, Fitzpatrick–Behrens and Garrard 2020, p. 2).

The following essay first presents the state of comparative research on sacred mountains and then turns to the Andes. On the basis of five well–known authors, we sketch a historical outline of mountain worship in its respective social and political contexts. Finally, the question arises as to which paths future research on sacred mountains could take. What can comparative studies learn from Andean studies, and what can Andean studies vice versa learn from comparative studies[1]?

2. State of comparative research

The state of comparative research can best be assessed on the basis of a number of selected texts. I use certain formal criteria for sampling. The publications must be books (not journal articles) that deal with sacred mountains in more than one continent, irrespective of the specific method of presentation (more additive or more synthetic). For reasons of linguistic competence, I only consider books in a European language. This gives the sample a Western bias from the outset, but I suspect that the bias also reflects the current situation to a certain extent. China, for example, has an extremely rich and early literature on sacred mountains in its own country. But I am not sure how much globalization and a comparative outside perspective have developed in this field so far (Sheng 2013).

If one excludes books that simply deal with religious conditions in mountain regions and concentrates on books that really deal with the sacredness of mountains, one can, for example, compile ten publications by the following authors and editors for the last few decades: Samivel (pseudonym for Paul Gayet–Tancrède) 1984; Edwin Bernbaum 1990; Karl Gratzl as editor 1990 and Karl Gratzl as author 2000; Amilcare Barbero with Stefano Piano as editors 2006; Julien Ries as editor 2010; Marianne Boilève 2010; Pierre Chavot 2013; Reinhold Messner with

(1) I thank Raquel Gil Montero for her critical comments on a first version of the article.

Ralf–Peter Märtin 2013; Jon Mathieu (the author of these lines) 2023. Apart from translations, four books have been published in French, three in German, two in English and one in Italian. I reproduce all quotations here in English.

The foreword to Chavot's book begins as follows: "From time immemorial, mountains have fascinated and worried human beings, who have made them the abode of their gods and occult forces. Such is the merit of this magnificent album: to help us discover some of these mythical peaks across the five continents, in a veritable geography of the sacred" (Chavot 2013, p. 9). This expresses two important peculiarities of the sample. Most authors treat the sacred mountains strictly from a timeless perspective — from time immemorial, *de tout temps*. Secondly, Chavot's book, like almost all the others in the sample, contains many attractive pictures and is really a beautiful album. Obviously, the books are aimed at a broad readership and not specifically at an academic audience. However, this does not mean that the authors skip academic conventions altogether. This is demonstrated by the "footnote test", a formal criterion for scholarly texts. Of our ten books, only one has no footnotes at all; yet it provides references in the body text.

The main driving forces behind the emergence of this genre are the development of mountaineering and the emergence of global tourism. With Reinhold Messner, there is even a famous extreme mountaineer and adventurer among the authors. But cultural interest is also important. Some books were written with the strong support of publishers who wanted to appeal to a curious audience. And finally, there are also texts in this sample that stem from an academic specialization. As a rule, the authors have a university degree. However, only a few are professional researchers and teachers, which is likely to be a problem for the future development of the field, as methodological issues are less important outside academia.

Methods are indispensable for the topic insofar as the description of sacred mountains can also be understood as an act of consecration. Whether we adopt common attributions of holiness or reject them for certain reasons, or whether we "canonize" a mountain ourselves in our texts — these are questions that are sometimes difficult to decide and can have consequences. An attribution may be adopted unchecked by others and the mountain may take on a different face. The

scientific decision is made more difficult by the diverse sources and dimensions of religious traditions and actions. How meaningful is the mythology, the textual exegesis, the praxeology, the dogmatics? In our sample of books, two pioneers of religious studies are mentioned again and again: Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). Both were supposed to help link the confusingly diverse religious phenomena around the globe and understand their essence(2). However, the sample also indicates that both authors have recently been increasingly criticized or simply sidelined. Their phenomenological–structuralist approach has tended to give way to actor–centered approaches.

If there is a continent "where the gods become mountains", then according to the publications under study, it is not Latin America, but Asia. Among many other sacred mountains there is Mount Kailash, which in Western literature (not so much in Chinese literature) rose to become the "holiest mountain in the world" in the twentieth century, as a spiritual counterweight to the materialistic Mount Everest. The Andes are generally given much less attention, and in some of the books in our sample they are missing altogether. The fact that there was no scientific specialization in which the topic immediately imposed itself, as in Tibetology or Japanology, for example, probably played a part in this(3). In the depictions of the Andes, the sacred mountain Ausangate became a topic. In our sample, it first appears in Bernbaum 1990 and later three times, namely in Ries 2010, Boilève 2010 and Chavot 2013. This reflects the increasing reputation and touristic development of a major annual religious event at its lofty location (see below). It is quite easy, however, to overlook in these descriptions that it is not just about an "exotic pagan" mountain worship, but also a Catholic Corpus Christi festival.

The question of the sacred mountains in the Andes will now be presented in five sections, each with a well–known author. The sections follow a loose historical chronology. In order to keep the presentation

(2) This connecting function is particularly clear in the comparison of Gratzl 1990 and Gratzl 2000; in the first work, the editor juxtaposed texts by specialist scholars and left the connection to a cardinal with a short foreword (without Otto and Eliade); ten years later, in a lexicon, the two famous religious scholars are then mentioned as bridging the religions.

(3) This could have been the case, for example, with Barbero and Piano 2006: it is an anthology that arose from a public event and was organized by the University of Turin; I myself omitted the Andes mainly because the source situation makes the historical description of a single mountain difficult, which contradicted the concept of the book (Mathieu 2023).

manageable, I will only discuss selected works by these authors. Almost all of them have produced a rich oeuvre, so that a strict selection is inevitable. These contributions are further contextualized as required and linked to studies by others. I have chosen Johan Reinhard (High Altitude Archeology), Kenneth Mills (Extirpation of Idolatry), Gauvin Alexander Bailey (Andean Hybrid Baroque), Michael J. Sallnow (Pilgrimage) and Antoinette Molinié (New Andean Shamanism). It is known that in the fifteenth century the Inca empire with its center in Cusco stretched for about 5000 kilometers through the Andean mountains from what is now Chile to Colombia. From the 1530s onwards, Spanish invaders established secular and spiritual domination with their colonial headquarters in the new coastal city of Lima. In the early nineteenth century, the individual parts broke away from Spain and developed into nation states in an imperial world.

3. High altitude archeology

Johan Reinhard (born 1943) is an US–American anthropologist, archaeologist and mountaineer. He completed his doctorate in Vienna and spent many years researching in the Himalayas and other areas before moving to the Andes in 1980, where he became famous for his high mountain archaeology. He is certainly one of the people who have contributed a great deal to a religiously charged image of the Andes in recent decades. He still gives lectures worldwide on the subject of *The Sacred Andes. High Mountain Archeology*[4]. From his independent oeuvre, produced mainly outside the university, I am presenting an essay from 1985 and a book from 2010. They show his entry into a new field of research and a mature work with important results.

The essay from 1985 is entitled *Sacred Mountains: An Ethno–Archaeological Study of High Andean Ruins*. It contains cartographic plans of ruins on the summit and at the foot of the inactive Licancabur volcano on the border between Bolivia and Chile (5920 m), which Reinhard

(4) For example on May 27, 2024, at the University of Warsaw in Poland on the occasion of a personal award, https://en.uw.edu.pl/dr-johan-reinhard-with-the-uw-medal/#lightbox[galleryid-36323-1]/3/ (last access 7 July, 2024).

drafted himself with a colleague. Otherwise, the essay presents the general state of knowledge about such high–altitude ruins in the southern Andes, which are interpreted as cult sites. The author is interested in the origin of pre–colonial mountain worship and focuses on an ecological hypothesis: the most important motive was the control of weather and water sources and thus the fertility of crops and animals (Reinhard 1985).

The archaeological findings do not yet play a major role in this essay. It is more about the Spanish chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which comment on the earlier Inca period, as well as observations made by anthropologists in the twentieth century, including some by Reinhard. As a historian, I find it remarkable how naturally he assumes a continuity of religious ideas and practices of the Indigenous population over many centuries. Without presenting any conclusive evidence, he repeatedly uses the phrase "just as today". Pre–colonial mountain worship "has persisted, despite considerable Christian proselytism, with few changes to the present day" (Reinhard 1985, p. 315). This "proselytism", however, is only mentioned in a footnote, and only to emphasize its minor effect. The Indigenous Pachamama is worshipped under the name of the Virgin Mary and the Inca weather god Illapa under the name of Santiago. There are more examples, "but it is clear that an interesting study remains to be made on the relationship of Christianity to mountain worship" (Reinhard 1985, p. 314).

Reinhard did not pursue this trail any further. Instead, he successfully devoted himself to the excavation and examination of mummies at high–altitude cult sites. In 2010, he summarized his findings in a richly illustrated volume written together with Argentinian researcher Maria Constanza Ceruti (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010). The starting point is the three frozen mummies that they recovered on the Llullaillaco volcano on the border between Argentina and Chile at 6740 m — according to their own statement, the highest archaeological site in the world. The mummies were a 7–year–old boy and two girls, aged around 6 and 15 respectively, who were sacrificed here for ritual purposes during the Inca period. The huddled bodies and grave goods were in remarkably good condition and could be studied in detail after the laborious excavation. It immediately becomes clear how great the difference is between ruins and mummies as archaeological evidence for religious questions. In

this environment, human bodies and their furnishings provide more detailed and convincing answers than architectural structures(5).

However, this is also thanks to the chronicle tradition. Reinhard and Ceruti systematically evaluated the early Spanish descriptions and brought them together with the mummies found on Llullaillaco and other Andean peaks. This made it possible to plausibly interpret the Inca rituals of human sacrifice at high altitude. The authors show how the rulers in Cusco institutionalized their extensive empire, not least by exchanging deities and offerings. Human beings — especially children and adolescents who were considered innocent — were selected from the individual ethnic groups and redistributed via the center of power to the regional imperial cult sites for sacrifice. It was an elaborate territorial ritual system in which mountains played a major role. At these altitudes, the mummies were also well protected from later Spanish destruction (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010, pp. 89–132).

The ecological thesis of Reinhard 1985 is relativized in this mature study from 2010. Other political–religious motives play a greater role. However, a one–to–one correlation of chronicles and archaeological sources is only possible in single cases. There is, for example, no historical information at all on the Llullaillaco, which forms the focus of the volume (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010, pp. 169–170). Overall, nonetheless, the mountain cult system seems to be so well documented that it should also be considered in a global context as a specific territorial variant. I will come back to this.

4. Extirpation of idolatry

The Spaniards, who established their colonial rule in the Andes from the sixteenth century onwards, referred to the measures to track down, ban and punish Indigenous cult forms as the "extirpation of idolatry". Some of these cults related to natural phenomena, not least mountains. They were regarded as idolatrous because they were seen as competing with the Christian God and thus as a violation of the Mosaic

(5) See also the more methodologically and theoretically oriented volume of archaeological research on rituals in the Andes by Rosenfeld and Bautista 2017.

commandments in the Bible. The Christianization of the population was an important goal and a justification for Spanish colonialism. A great deal of resources and personnel were invested in this. Kenneth Mills, a Canadian historian of religion and culture, completed his doctorate on this topic in Oxford in 1992 and later published his dissertation under the title *Idolatry and Its Enemies. Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750*. The book and other subsequent publications made him a prominent voice in the field.

As can be seen from Mills' vivid account, in 1609 a large auto–da–fé took place in the main square of Lima, which was to be the prelude to the extirpation campaign. The viceroy and the archbishop looked out from the balconies of their palaces onto the square, where a pulpit, two stages and a large pyre had been erected. A collection of objects and mummified corpses that had been confiscated as "idols" of a false religion in a mountainous area not far from the capital were publicly burned. An arrested Indigenous cult master was tied to a stake near the pyre. He had long since admitted his transgressions, but now he was to hear and feel the sentence: lashes, hair shaving and banishment to a remote Jesuit college. This message about the future treatment of non–Christian religious practices was directed above all at the many Indigenous people who had been summoned to the auto–da–fé (Mills 1997, pp. 30–33, 146–147).

The campaigns were carried out by spiritual *visitadores*, who "visited" the parishes of the diocese with assistants in order to uncover and punish the rampant "errors". These actions continued in various waves until the middle of the eighteenth century. It is important for us to note that some of them were directed against popular mountain cults. Mill's study focuses on the large archdiocese of Lima with its approximately 130.000 Indigenous people (as of 1664). From a socio–historical point of view, one could lament the lack of further statistics. The author's strength lies on another level. He has consulted a rich written tradition: protocols of idolatry visits and trials, ecclesiastical letters, catechisms, books of sermons, pastoral guides, and religious chronicles. In this way, many voices become audible, such as that of María Poma Ticcla. She was interrogated in 1660 in her Andean home and reported on offerings and community rituals that were made at a sacred place

on Mount Chanqui for a particular deity ("huaca"). María used to address the mountain with a short prayer, and she fed and gave it gifts so that it might ripen the maize and protect the llama herds (Mills 1997, pp. 64–66, 111, 115, 119, 129, 158–159).

Although the Indigenous people were victims of the Spanish colonial rulers in such campaigns, Mills emphasizes that they were also instrumental in creating an Andean Catholicism. He treats the beliefs of the two disparate groups of actors as interpenetrative, co–evolving traditions, thus challenging the dichotomous "self/other" view of the sources. In contrast to earlier interpretations, he considers the terms "syncretism" or "religious duality" to be unhelpful. In his eyes, one should speak of a "widespread mixture" and an "interculture". One may ask whether he pays enough attention to the existing and newly generated power relations. However, the longer the asymmetrical cultural contact lasted, the less the two original forms of faith could be kept strictly apart (Mills 1997, pp. 243–266).

This was also evident in the concept of the sacred. In the Spanish tradition of Christianity, the sacred emerged from acts of ecclesiastical consecration. At its center were the Holy Scriptures and precisely defined sacraments. The Indigenous people used the Quechua term "huaca" to designate the sacred and the extraordinary. In addition to certain ancestors, this also included natural phenomena such as mountains and rock formations as well as a variety of cult objects. Often, "huaca" phenomena were linked to stories that assigned a place in the landscape to an Indigenous group as a place of origin. In contrast to the Christian view, in which the worship of natural objects was considered a sin, the sacred was thus "independent of human activities and rituals" (MacCormack 1991, pp. 335–338; Mills 1997, pp. 39–74; Ramírez 2005).

Nevertheless, many Indigenous were able to combine the two conceptions, and the Spanish rulers never really succeeded in eradicating the tradition and evolution of the "huaca". Ten years after his major work, Kenneth Mills showed in an essay that the flourishing of the Catholic cult of saints in the Andes was based not least on this Indigenous conception of the sacred. The population was familiar with visible representatives of their deities and with the possibilities

of inspiring the deities to action through sacred narratives, offerings and visits to special places. This formed a zone of overlap that contributed to the dynamism of Andean Catholicism. This went so far that church exponents occasionally criticized not only the huaca cult, but also the exuberance of the cult of the saints they had imported (Mills 2007).

5. Andean hybrid Baroque

Churches and chapels were among the first manifestations of a permanent Spanish presence and rule in the Andes. To emphasize their relevance, they were often erected in places that had already had public significance in the past. However, the Spaniards quickly realized that Andean societies often practiced open–air cults, while they themselves had brought a distinctly indoor religion with them from Europe. As a result, at least in the sixteenth century, there were often improvised hybrid forms of church buildings, which were adjoined by demarcated or non–demarcated open spaces. The latter were used in particular for Christian worship and the instruction of the many Indigenous people (Abraham 2017).

Later, the material situation improved, allowing the construction of churches to proceed. Their splendid furnishings became a long–term project for generations of Catholic religious and secular clergy. A consecrated building was necessary for the correct, God–pleasing performance of religious acts. Around 1650, a Spanish Jesuit recorded in retrospect what they expected from their building in the large Peruvian city of Arequipa. As elsewhere, the Jesuits here were "engaged in building a church where they could celebrate the Holy Sacrament, celebrate Mass, preach the Divine Word, and hear the confessions of the people with decency" — *con desencia* (Bailey 2010, pp. 57 and 370).

This formulation can be found in the extensive, detailed work by art historian Gauvin Alexander Bailey entitled *The Andean Hybrid Baroque. Convergent Cultures in the Churches of Colonial Peru*. In it, the author examines a new baroque style of church decoration that

emerged in the late seventeenth century, spread across many regions in the eighteenth century and bore the stamp of Indigenous artisans with their own visual ideas. Bailey places this building in Arequipa at the beginning of the style movement. The façade portal facing the Plaza de Armas, built in 1698–99, became particularly famous. A Spanish master architect designed the façade structure and supervised the work, but the decorations were carried out by Indigenous craftsmen, mainly stonemasons. The cost amounted to over 8740 pesos (Bailey 2010, pp. 67–68).

The entire façade is covered with flat ornaments carved out of the stone between the columns (see fig. 1). They already contain almost the entire repertoire of the emergent hybrid style: plants such as cactus flowers, grapes and pomegranates; animals such as songbirds, hummingbirds, snakes; but also symbols of power, both those of the Incas and those of the Spanish Habsburgs; all interspersed with Christian elements and learned sayings such as the Latin initials SD/SF/SI/MN for "Holy God, Holy Strong One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy upon us" (Bailey 2010, pp. 52–54).

Bayley assumes that many ornaments originate from Indigenous people and had special meanings in their horizon. He considers the depiction of flora and fauna from the natural environment to be the most important contribution to the Andean Hybrid Baroque. "It is crucial that we discover what these animals and plants meant to ordinary Andeans, and we can do so by interpreting their mythological, ritual, medicinal, and alimentary associations and functions." The *yucyuc* bird, for example, appears not only on churches, but also in the above–mentioned forced confessions during extirpation interrogations. In certain Indigenous concepts, it was regarded as the "father of the potato" and was worshipped in a forbidden manner with prayer and ritual (Bailey 2010, pp. 321–324). The art historian goes even further in his interpretation and establishes a connection between church ornamentation and the highly developed female textile art of the Andes, in which dual and symmetrical arrangements played a major role. The Jesuit church in Arequipa is an excellent example of this (Bailey 2010, pp. 331–333).

Figure 1: Façade Portal of the Jesuit Church at Plaza de Armas in Arequipa, Peru. Photo by Pierre André Leclerq 2011, Wikimedia Commons License CC-BY-SA.

6. Pilgrimage

A classic study of Andean religiosity is by the anthropologist Michael J. Sallnow (1949–1990) and is called *Pilgrims of the Andes. Regional Cults in Cusco*. It was published in 1987, but it was a long–term project. The author had already undertaken his field research in 1973–74 and then devoted himself to additional archival work. Among his publications, it is worth consulting two articles that appeared in 1981 and posthumously in 1991. The fieldwork took place in the mountain village of Qamawara, in the district of San Salvador, east of Cusco. There, Sallnow studied the religious ideas and practices within and outside the Christian repertoire.

So, he inquired in the village about what he called "nature spirits" (*Apus* in the local Quechua language). "Among those who bring us justice are our apus, who are many", an old man told him. This was followed by a list of over forty such Apus: Apu Ausangate, Pachatusan, Ch'ayñakoto, Intiwatana, Willkar and so on. This was the longest list that the anthropologist was able to collect. The beginning of the list was also known to other informants and followed the same hierarchy. The very first Apu, Mount Ausangate, 6384 m high, 70 km from the village and not visible from there, was considered the most powerful. Most of the Apus in these various versions were mountains, some also lakes and swamps. They had their own specific areas of influence and characteristics. "Apu" can be translated as "lord" or "chief". They were responsible for the welfare and fertility of the inhabitants and their animals. Some guarded the underground mineral resources in the mountains. As a rule, the mountain Apus were male, but some were explicitly female. Sometimes they were related to each other, for example as twins. They were honored with casual gestures or with formal sacrifices (Sallnow 1987, pp. 127–131).

The village under study belonged to the parish of San Salvador as its own chapelry. The large church was located in the main town down in the valley. In this way, practically the entire country was included in the Catholic organization. The places of pilgrimage and shrines on which Sallnow concentrated were outside this system of ecclesiastical routine. Most of them were the result of "miracles" that had manifested

themselves since the beginning of the seventeenth century. According to the stories circulating, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in particular repeatedly intervened in worldly events for the good of mankind. The Catholic Church had a long tradition of such apparitions. For the Spaniards, they were comforting proof that the Christian God had confirmed their conquest and that the new world would now be freed from the clutches of Satan. The shrines that emerged were often located at or near older Andean places of worship, signaling both spiritual transformation and continuity (Sallnow 1991, pp. 139–140).

At the time of his field research, it was customary in Sallnow's village of Qamawara to visit six sites of pilgrimage, some in the surrounding area, others further afield. The inhabitants who went on pilgrimage often organized themselves as delegates of the village, as the "Nation of Qamawara". Accompanied by musicians and dancers, they carried a small statue of Christ or Mary, the *lámina*, to the shrines. On various days in August, the *Señores* of Aqcha, Kisikancha and Wat'a were visited, and in September and October those of Justo Juez and Saqaka. The most important and elaborate pilgrimage took place after Pentecost for the feast of Corpus Christi to the distant mountain Ausangate and the Señor de Qoyllur Rit'i (Sallnow 1981, pp. 166–169; 1987, pp. 63–88, 177–206).

Up there, at an altitude of around 4750 m, below the glaciers, legend has it that Jesus revealed himself to a shepherd boy from the pastoral society around 1780. Some researchers link this appearance of Jesus with the simultaneous rebellion of Tupac Amaru, as a Christian reaction to the endangered colonial rule. Qoyllur Rit'i is often translated as "Snow Star", but there are also other interpretations[(6)]. Since the 1930s, there has been a lay confraternity that looks after the sanctuary and oversees the pilgrimage. In 1944 it was visited and upgraded by the Archbishop of Cusco (Sallnow 1991, pp. 143–144). Sallnow went to Qoyllur Rit'i several times from 1973 onwards and even arranged a film for a British television company. At that time, around 10.000 people from a very wide area came together for this Corpus Christi festival in the thin mountain air, the vast majority of them Indigenous people with their musicians and dance groups, some in regionally coded disguise. A part of the rituals

(6) See for example Ricard Lanata 2010, pp. 272 and 282.

took place at the sanctuary, others on the glaciers. There, certain groups of participants would cut, not without danger, heavy blocks out of the ice, which they consecrated in the sanctuary and later used as healing water (Sallnow 1987, pp. 177–199, 207–242).

Research has interpreted the belief in Apu Ausangate as a basis for these mountain rituals. The scenes with the ice have also been seen as the "eucharistic transfiguration of a glacier". Just as the consecrated host is transformed into the body of Jesus Christ during the Eucharist, the blessed blocks of ice give access to the body of the holy glacier (Molinié 2003; Ricard Lanata 2010, p. 271). Since Sallnow, the Corpus Christi festival of Qoyllur Rit'i has become very renowned and undergone major transformations. UNESCO included the festival in its inventory of intangible heritage in 2011. At that time, 90.000 people attended, including many non–indigenous people and tourists. In the meantime, the glaciers are in sharp decline, making the mountain ritual a suitable ecological illustration of climate change (UNESCO 2011).

7. New Andean Shamanism

One specialist in modern and postmodern developments is the French anthropologist Antoinette Molinié, who, like Sallnow, began her Andean research in the 1970s. In 2013, together with Jacques Galinier, she published the book *The Neo–Indians. A Religion for the Third Millennium*, which had appeared in French a few years earlier(7). Her colleague focused primarily on Mexico, Molinié mainly on Peru and partly on the neighboring Andean countries. In essence, the book deals with a complex "invention of tradition" linked to state formation and other factors, a concept introduced into the academic debate in 1983 by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. In a second phase, there was a fusion of this modern construction of identity with the *New Age* movement, which originated primarily in the USA and led to a globalization of religious–political trends.

(7) The French edition of 2006 and the English edition of 2013 are not completely identical; there are also small differences to the Spanish edition of 2013. A Spanish collection of essays with nineteen articles provides a good insight into Molinié's complete works: see Molinié 2022.

After the replacement of Spanish rule in the early nineteenth century, the Creole elite faced a dilemma. In order to emphasize the distance to the old rulers in Europe, it would have been obvious to give the Indigenous population a leading role in the identity of the republic. This, however, contradicted their social Darwinist conviction of the inferiority of these people. In order to move the nation forward on the road to modern progress, it was necessary to get rid of the archaic rural heritage. On the other hand, the Indigenous population formed the vast majority and could not be excluded from nation–building for reasons of taxation alone. One way out of the dilemma was to create the image of an idyllic, perfect Inca state that had been destroyed by the Spanish. Unlike the real Indigenous people, the constructed "Imperial Inca Indigenous" were well suited to establishing a national tradition. This view intensified after World War I. The 1920s also saw the rise of the fertility goddess Pachamama, who rarely appeared in early chronicles, and when she did, it was not as the beloved Mother Earth, but rather as a sacrifice–devouring deity (Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 100–107).

The "Incaization" of Andean culture progressed in waves and manifested itself above all in the old center of Cusco and in the archaeological citadel of Machu Pichu. The movement was supported by an urban educated bourgeoisie that maneuvered between the large landowners with their feudal–economic interests and the dependent rural population. From the 1920s onwards, indigenist societies used their own "Inca" flag, which was later declared the official city flag of Cusco. In 1944, the literary theater culture gave rise to a large annual ritual, the *Inti Raymi*, which performs the sun cult of the Inca state. At the same time, a hymn was sung for the first time ("Cusco is your sacred name, like the Sun of the immortal"). In 1990, the city tried to introduce a new spelling that was closer to the Quechua pronunciation ("Qosqo"). Built on top of a tower–like museum, a statue to Inca Pachacutec, considered the most powerful Inca ruler, was added in 1993. In 2011, the Inca managed to be placed on the baroque fountain in the center of the city as well (see fig. 2). Andean anthropology and the University of Cusco in particular played a significant role in this development. The latter also became a neo–shamanistic place of worship (Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 49–69, 120–146).

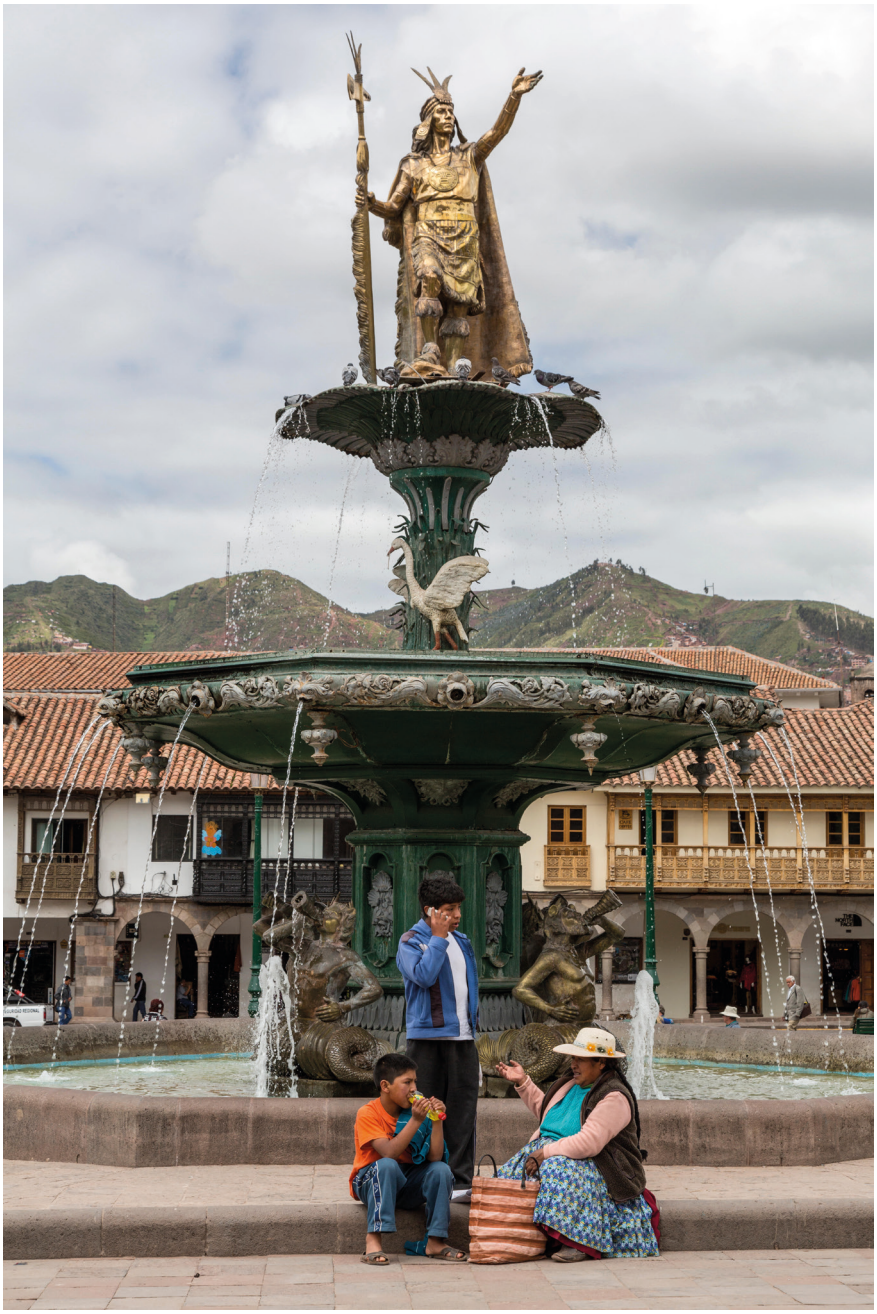

Figure 2: Statue of Inca Pachacutec in the Plaza de Armas in Cusco since 2011. Photo by Charles O. Cecil for Alamy Stock Photo.

This relaunched mountain worship. In her book, Molinié describes in detail a healing ritual performed by a famous neo–shaman who was rector of the University of Cusco in 2002. It took place at the foot of Mount Picol. First the Apu Picol received an offering, then small offerings were also made to other mountain Apus in the area. On another occasion, the rector/neo–shaman sacrificed lamas for the welfare of the Anthropology Department. As an introduction, he implored the mountain gods (Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 137–142). Since 1995, an annual festival of *curanderos andinos* (Andean healers) has been held near Cusco. It brings together specialists from southern Peru and Bolivia, who are consulted by people from the city and by tourists. The festival offers a variety of stalls, screened off with plastic curtains, behind which the "shamans" perform all kinds of alleged Andean rituals. In 2001, the cult also reached the highest political level. The new president of Peru, Alexandro Toledo, was also consecrated as the highest Inca in Machu Pichu after his regular inauguration. His wife Éliane Karp, a Belgian anthropologist, slipped into a sacerdotal role and addressed the mountain gods of the region in Quechua: now the golden times are returning, she explained to them and to the politicians and journalists present. Welfare, equality and joy for all will return. "Rejoice, Oh People! Thank you" (Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 144 and 193).

The main impetus for this development came from the flourishing tourism industry and especially from the US *New Age* movement, which expanded rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s and had many ecological and mystical aspects. The caring Pachamama of Andean indigenism could be easily combined with "Mother Earth" ideas of New Agers from California. As a result, the regional religious–commercial culture experienced a rapid globalization. Suddenly people were also discussing links to distant mountain regions of the world, especially Tibet, where the Dalai Lama and Buddhist monks seemed to offer promising spiritual energies. Expectations were raised at international congresses and by "mystical" travel agencies. Most people continued to identify themselves as Catholic Christians, but so–called Indigenous practices were now much more public and less localized than before (Galinier and Molinié 2013, pp. 218–244). This created a complex situation. In early December 2006, for example, over a thousand people gathered in the Plaza de Armas in Cusco to protest against a mining project that could affect the pilgrimage

to the sanctuary at Ausangate. Many demonstrators carried placards with political and ecological slogans. But some did not just want to protect their *patrimonio cultural*. They also feared, as in earlier times, that Mount Ausangate itself might become angry and take revenge — perhaps bloodily (De la Cadena 2015, pp. 273–275).

8. Conclusions

Johan Reinhard for High Altitude Archeology, Kenneth Mills for the Extirpation of Idolatry, Gauvin Alexander Bailey for the Andean Hybrid Baroque, Michael J. Sallnow for Pilgrimage Studies and Antoinette Molinié for New Andean Shamanism — I have selected five authoritative voices from a broad range of research in order to sketch a picture of the sacredness of the mountains in the Andes. I am aware that many aspects and other opinions have not been included. But for our purposes, the aspects covered should suffice. The key question is: What can comparative studies learn from Andean studies and vice versa? This, also with regard to the academic professionalization of the new literary genre presented at the beginning, which deals with sacred mountains on a global level, but still has a rather popular character. In these conclusions, I would like to touch on four points.

1. *Change Matters:* Most authors in the global section treat the sacred mountains from a timeless perspective and like to use expressions such as "from time immemorial". In doing so, they often reproduce an image that the religious leaders and followers give of themselves. They like to clothe their beliefs and rituals in eternal garments. An asserted longevity gives them stability and security. The tendency becomes particularly clear when we compare the texts on the Andes in the global publications with the texts of the Andean specialists summarized above. Ries, as editor, for example, accepted a chapter which has the Corpus Christi festival at Ausangate begin not less than "thousands of years" ago and apparently attracting 40.000 or more pilgrims even then (Ries 2010, p. 221). In the new edition of his 1990 book published in 2022, Bernbaum added a passage about two *curanderos* whom he had met in Cusco in the meantime and who told him, among other things, that

the Apu–Pachamama belief also affected the marriages of ordinary people. A woman marries her Apu with her husband, and a man marries his Pachamama with his wife (Bernbaum 2022, pp. 244–245).

This is remarkable insofar as Bernbaum is the author who most closely accompanied and influenced the global mountain movement. However, such an affinity often makes it difficult to maintain a critical, academic distance[8]. Yet the change is evident in all areas of Andean religiosity. The Apu healing specialists are no longer those of the Inca period, and Christianity is no longer that of the Spanish conquerors of 1532. Just as Indigenous "huaca" sanctity gave impetus to the Catholic cult of saints, this cult placed the "huaca" phenomena in a new context. In the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century, "idolatry" was to be eradicated by force. Afterwards, the colonial clergy became more tolerant under the influence of the European Enlightenment; the Jesuits had to leave the field here too in 1767 (Schwaller 2020, p. 20). In the wake of the emerging Alpinism, towards the end of the nineteenth century, even the Holy See in Rome discovered the mountains as places for crosses and spiritual contemplation. In 2015, the encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for our Common Home* also marked a late ecological turn. But anyone who thinks that it is now "Catholic" to properly canonize mountains is mistaken (Mathieu 2023, pp. 77–83, 109–110; Mathieu forthcoming).

2. *Sacred Mountain Topography*: The wealth of chronicles and ecclesiastical–legal sources on the colonial period has recently also led to a theory that emphasizes not the continuity but the change in Indigenous mountain perception in the Andes. The Canadian anthropologist Peter Gose uses these sources to propose a two–phase model. In an early phase, characterized by a local hereditary nobility, worship was primarily directed towards the mummies of the ancestors and thus helped to consolidate the power of the dynasties. In the mountain landscape, only certain places were highlighted that were considered to be the places of origin of these ancestors. Parallel to the interventions of the Spaniards and the decline in power of the local nobility, worship then shifted to the mountains as a whole, which now formed a counterpoint to the new Christian villages. Thus, according to the author, the actual Apu faith only dates back to the eighteenth century (Gose 2016).

(8) I have discussed Bernbaum's book in a methodologically oriented essay (Mathieu 2022).

His thesis has mostly been received critically. The documents are inconclusive, it appears to be an over–interpretation (Nielsen *et al.* 2016). Here I would like to add a "topographical" point that one encounters in comparative studies of sacred mountains: What exactly is revered when a mountain is venerated is often not precisely defined. Is it only certain spots that are associated with certain stories or events? Is it the mountain itself, or is it a deity who has taken up residence there? Such questions have been discussed in several places. For Tibet it was emphasized that this distinction was often unimportant in the thoughts of the believers, which also relativizes the value of the scholarly question. It cannot be the task of research to further refine a religious belief system (Blondeau and Steinkeller 1996, pp. VIII–IX). It should also be remembered that for many people the sacred has an infectious quality: it is passed on through proximity and touch. So, perhaps, when an ancestral spot is revered, this could also impact the environment.

3. *Sacred Mountain Diversity:* Among the Andean authors summarized above, Reinhard is the only one who refers directly to the general sacredness of mountains. At the end of the book *Inca Rituals and Sacred Mountains*, the view goes "beyond the Andes" primarily on the Himalayas, where the anthropologist and archaeologist himself conducted research in earlier years. He identifies many similarities between the sacred mountains on both sides and only points out that the high altitude of the Andean offerings during the Inca period was probably unique (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010, pp. 183–185). This may very well be true, but it also reveals the alpinist's point of view. We should be aware that it was only this modern movement of mountaineering, originating in the West, that made us aware of the mountains as a global ensemble linked through altitude. In this way, we can try to neutralize its unifying impact.

In my opinion, diversity should be emphasized more strongly than Reinhard does. Territorially extensive, almost proto–national mountain rituals such as that of the Incas also existed in some other places, but I am not aware of any that were kept going by human sacrifice. In the Chinese Empire, with its well–documented and institutionalized mountain worship, all three normative traditions — Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism — were involved. The predominant popular offering was incense. "Going on pilgrimage" was succinctly rendered

with two expressions: "paying respect to the mountain" (*ch'ao–shan*) and "offering incense" (*chin–hsiang*). Various important Buddhist currents even tried to protect the lives of all sentient beings, not just those of fellow human beings (Pei–yi Wu 1992, p. 65; Huber 2004; Sheng 2013). I wonder if there could be a clearer contrast to the Inca customs.

4. *Model Pilgrimage Studies:* An interesting path for future research has been pioneered by Sallnow, who gave us the work *Pilgrims of the Andes. Regional Cults in Cusco,* discussed above. During his research in the Andes, he wrestled with the problem of universalism and particularism. He turned critically away from leading universalist researchers such as Mircea Eliade and Victor Turner, who had placed pilgrimages under the unified idea of "communitas". Sallnow, on the other hand, brought the different experiences of pilgrims, and the competition and conflicts between various social groups into the discussion. He made this programmatically clear in a book published posthumously in 1991. Together with a colleague, Sallnow wanted to leave the level of sweeping generalizations that cover up important differences. To demonstrate diversity, the two editors designed a coordinate system consisting of three concepts: place, text and person. Depending on the site of pilgrimage, the weight of one or the other term and the relationships between them varied greatly (Eade and Sallnow 1991, pp. 6–9).

As far as the Andes are concerned, one could say that Christianity was strongly text– and person–oriented in an initial phase, while the Indigenous people assigned an important role to place and had no written tradition. Therefore, unfortunately, we only hear them in the echo of Spanish sources. In any case, Sallnow's suggestion has borne fruit in research. Today, there is a significant scholarly body of pilgrimage studies that can serve as a model for future global research on sacred mountains (Coleman and Elsner 1995, pp. 199–2005; Albera and Eade 2017, pp. 5–7).

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