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The Ritual and Religious World of Coporaque: Apus, Saints, and the Cult of the Dead in a Peasant Community of the Southern Andes of Peru

Rytualny i religijny świat Coporaque:
Apus, święci i kult zmarłych w społeczności chłopskiej
południowych Andów w Peru

Summary: This ethnographic study explores the rich tapestry of ritual and cultural practices in Coporaque, a peasant community in the southern Andes of Peru, highlighting the deep integration of religiosity into everyday life. Coporaque, with roots dating back to pre-Incan times, reflects a unique synergy of pre-Columbian and Catholic influences that manifest through rituals and festivities ranging from the celebration of the Day of the Dead to the festivities of San Santiago and the Cocha fiesta. The study employs an ethnographic approach consisting of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, facilitating an understanding of how faith and the veneration of natural elements, such as the Apus and *cochas*, contribute to community cohesion and cultural continuity. The findings highlight how the community strives to maintain its



ancestral traditions while facing the challenges of modernity and emphasize the role of these practices in fostering a sense of community identity and cultural resilience.

Keywords: Andean Religiosity, Cult of the Dead, Rituals and Ceremonies, Religious Identity

Streszczenie: Przedmiotem tego etnograficznego studium jest bogata mozaika praktyk rytualnych i kulturowych w Coporaque, społeczności chłopskiej w południowych Andach w Peru. Artykuł podkreśla daleko idącą integrację religijności z codziennym życiem. Społeczność Coporaque ma korzenie sięgające czasów przedinkaskich, odzwierciedla wyjątkową synergię wpływów prekolumbijskich i katolickich, które manifestują się poprzez rytuały i uroczystości, od obchodów Dnia Zmarłych po uroczystości San Santiago i Cocha. W badaniach wykorzystano podejście etnograficzne (obserwacja uczestnicząca i częściowo ustrukturyzowany wywiad), aby zrozumieć, w jaki sposób wiara i cześć dla elementów naturalnych, takich jak Apus i *cochas*, przyczyniają się do spójności społeczności i ciągłości kulturowej. Wnioski obrazują sposób, w jaki społeczność dąży do utrzymania tradycji przodków, stawiając czoła wyzwaniom nowoczesności, oraz akcentują rolę tych praktyk w pielęgnowaniu poczucia tożsamości społeczności i odporności kulturowej.

Słowa klucze: religijność andyjska, kult zmarłych, rytuały i ceremonie, tożsamość religijna

Introduction

In the heart of Peru's Andean region, the community of Coporaque stands out as a bastion of ancestral cultural and spiritual traditions, intertwining everyday life with a profound sense of faith and respect for nature.¹ This study aims to delve into the richness of Coporaque's ritual practices and celebrations, specifically through the lens of the Day of the Dead Celebration, the "tinkachi" ritual, the veneration of the Apus, and other natural elements, as well as the importance of faith in these cultural practices and the celebration of patron saints. The interaction of these practices not only offers a glimpse into the community identity of Coporaque but also reflects the complexity of social life in Andean contexts, marked by a synchrony between life and death, the sacred and the everyday, the individual and the collective.²

1 G. Ríos-Vizcarra, L.E. Calatayud-Rosado, A.B. Duché-Pérez, V. Cano-Ciborro, "The emotional structuring of the Andean territory: Mapping embodied narratives in Coporaque, Peru," *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 2023, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 985–998.

2 C. Zeballos-Velarde, C. Butron-Revilla, G. Manchego-Huaquipaco, C. Yory, "The role of ancestral practices as social capital to enhance community disaster resilience: The case

There is extensive documentation on cultural and spiritual practices in Andean communities, particularly ethnographic studies that address how these are manifested and experienced in the daily life of Coporaque or other towns in the Colca Valley.³ The Day of the Dead Celebration, for example, more than an annual event, is a confluence point where memory, spirituality, and cultural identity intertwine through the practice of setting up altars in homes with the favorite food of the deceased.⁴ Similarly, “tinkachi” is not just an agricultural ritual; it is an expression of gratitude and faith that solidifies the relationship between the community, its crops and livestock, and the sacred natural elements like the Apus.

This study, therefore, sets out to fill this gap by exploring how these practices are integrated into the social structure of Coporaque, emphasizing how faith, in its multiple manifestations, serves as a pillar for cultural continuity. Through an ethnographic methodology based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, this study will delve into the daily life of Coporaque to reveal the dynamics between these ritual practices and community life.

The primary purpose of this study was to delve into the cultural universe of Coporaque to understand how its rituals, beliefs, and daily practices are influenced by a blend of ancestral and contemporary traditions. We aimed to discover how elements like the “tinkachi,” the Day of the Dead celebrations, and other local customs, shape community identity, social relationships, and the connection with the natural and spiritual environment. This holistic approach allowed for a deep understanding of social cohesion and cultural continuity in a globalized context.

In doing so, it aims not only to contribute to the anthropological understanding of Andean traditions but also to highlight the relevance of these practices in strengthening community identity in the face of contemporary challenges. The focus on the community of Coporaque allows for a detailed exploration of these practices, avoiding generalizations and highlighting the uniqueness of lived experiences.

of the Colca Valley, Peru,” *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 2023, vol. 92, Article 103737.

3 N.D. Cook, *The People of the Colca Valley: A Population Study*, New York–Abingdon 2022; B. Lisocka-Jaegermann, K. Wołoszczak, “Transformations of tourism in the Colca valley – New actors and new patterns of local development,” *Miscellanea Geographica* 2008, pp. 219–229; F.E.B. Rainsford, “The Alpaca ladies of Arequipa’s Colca Valley,” *Textiles Magazine* 2004, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 17–19; G. Ríos-Vizcarra et al., op. cit.; M.C. Velasco, “Building on the ancestors: Mortuary structures and extended agency in the late prehispanic Colca Valley, Peru,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 2014, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 453–465.

4 F. Duchesne, J. Chacama, “Prehispanic funerary towers of the south-central Andes: Death, space occupation and social organization. Comparative study: Coporaque, cañon del colca (Peru), chapiquiña, precordillera of Arica (Chile),” *Chungara* 2012, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 605–619.

Materials and Methods

The community of Coporaque, located in the Caylloma province (Arequipa, Peru), was selected as the study site due to its rich cultural heritage and unique mix of pre-Columbian and Catholic influences, manifested in ritual practices and community celebrations. This location offered a valuable case study for exploring how communities maintain their identity and cultural practices amidst contemporary socioeconomic and cultural changes. The choice of Coporaque was based on its representativeness of the tensions and synergies between tradition and modernity in Andean communities.

An ethnographic approach was chosen for its ability to provide an intimate and detailed understanding of the complex networks of meaning within the Coporaque community.⁵ This method, combining participant observation with in-depth interviews, offered a unique insider perspective, allowing researchers to live and experience local customs firsthand. Ethnography was particularly valuable in this study for its focus on prolonged observation and participation, crucial for understanding cultural practices that fully reveal themselves over the seasons and life cycles.⁶

Data collection was conducted through two primary methods: participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation allowed researchers to integrate into the community, participating in daily activities and rituals, which facilitated an insider's understanding of cultural practices.⁷ Semi-structured interviews, conducted with four community members: Sebastián, Yuri, Jesusa, and Roxana, who represented a diverse cross-section of the community in terms of age and gender. The interviewees, aged between 38 and 62 years, are permanent residents and serve as representative figures of the community. These individuals included both male and female participants, providing a comprehensive perspective on cultural practices and social dynamics. Personal insights gathered from these interviews deepened the understanding of specific aspects of local culture. A detailed field diary was maintained to record observations, reflections, and preliminary analysis.

For analyzing the experiences of Coporaque residents regarding their religiosity and daily life, a phenomenological approach was adopted, allowing for deep immersion into the collected data such as interview transcripts and field notes. This methodology focused on capturing the essence of the experiences through a process

5 V. Marda, S. Narayan, "On the importance of ethnographic methods in AI research," *Nature Machine Intelligence* 2021, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 187–189.

6 B.J. Thornton, "Fieldwork: Time, fidelity and the ethnographic method in religious studies," *Fieldwork in Religion* 2022, vol. 17, no. 1, 13–25.

7 P. Sayer, S. Ataei, "Observation and ethnographic methods for researching young learners," [in:] *Research Methods for Understanding Child Second Language Development*, eds. Y.G. Butler, B.H. Huang 2022, pp. 11–32.

of re-reading and meticulous analysis, identifying patterns and themes that reflect how participants perceived and made sense of their rituals and cultural practices.⁸ The analysis was deepened through an iterative process of reflection, maintaining an “epoché” attitude to avoid preconceptions and allow interpretations to emerge from the participants’ internal perspective. This revealed significant structures in the shared experiences and provided a rich understanding of the interaction between traditions, rituals, and daily life in Coporaque, illuminating how these elements mutually influence each other in this specific cultural context.

The research adhered to high ethical standards, ensuring informed consent from participants and protecting their anonymity,⁹ while handling culturally sensitive information with special care, respecting the norms and values of Coporaque. Transparency and respect guided all interactions, allowing participants the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Additionally, the research was designed as a collaborative ethnography. From the outset, community members actively participated, not only by sharing their practices and traditions but also by engaging in the interpretation of the data. This approach ensured that their voices and perspectives were fundamental in shaping the study, making the cultural representation authentic and meaningful. Throughout the process, we held feedback sessions where we shared our findings and discussed interpretations. These sessions served as an open dialogue space, allowing community members to corroborate, question, or enrich our conclusions. Through this exchange, we adjusted our data interpretations, ensuring the validity of the findings and honoring the participants’ perspectives on their own cultural practices.

The research site, Coporaque, strategically located in the Colca Valley in Arequipa, Peru, is a place that harbors a rich history dating back to pre-Inca and Inca times. Originally home to the Collaguas, an ethnic group noted for their advanced terrace farming techniques designed to maximize land use on the steep slopes of the valley, this system represented not only intensive agriculture but also a sustainable method, which allowed the Collaguas to prosper long before Inca expansion. These agricultural practices were crucial for the socio-economic development of the region before the arrival of external influences.¹⁰

8 B. Cypress, “Qualitative research methods: A phenomenological focus,” *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* 2018, vol. 37, no. 6, pp. 302–309.

9 R.C. Schuster, A. Wutich, A. Brewis, “Ethnographic methods in cross-cultural research,” [in:] *Handbook of Qualitative Cross-Cultural Research Methods*, ed. P. Liamputtong, Cheltenham–Northampton 2022, pp. 273–289.

10 H. Llosa, M.A. Benavides, “Architecture and peasant homes in three Andean villages: Yanque, Lari and Coporaque in the Colca Valley, Peru,” *Bulletin – Institut Français d’Etudes Andines* 1994, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 105–150.

With the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, Coporaque underwent a significant cultural and structural transformation during the colonial era. The establishment of an important administrative and religious center in the town was marked by the construction of the San Sebastián church in 1565, which is not only one of the oldest buildings in Peru but also a symbol of the cultural fusion between the indigenous people and the Spaniards. The architecture and new social practices introduced by the Spaniards profoundly altered the dynamics of the town. These structures reflect the interaction and cultural change during this period.¹¹

After gaining independence, Coporaque, like the Caylloma region, faced a series of political and administrative changes that redefined its territorial structure and its role within the country. According to Robles Mendoza¹² and Vera Delgado & Vincent,¹³ this stage was crucial for the town's evolution into a vital agricultural center, though still limited by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of basic services. This phase marked the beginning of a period of integration and adaptation to the new economic and administrative reality of independent Peru.

In recent decades, the community of Coporaque has witnessed a series of initiatives aimed at improving local infrastructure and essential services. These efforts, promoted by the government and various non-governmental organizations, have included forestation projects and the improvement of irrigation systems, which seek not only to preserve the environment but also to enhance the quality of life for residents. Researchers such as Silió et al.,¹⁴ Iruri-Ramos et al.,¹⁵ Boelens & Seemann,¹⁶ and Stensrud¹⁷ have highlighted how these initiatives are designed to strengthen the region's sustainability and self-sufficiency, focusing on long-term solutions for environmental and economic challenges.

11 J.C. Cárdenas Gómez, M. Bosch González, C. Damiani Lazo, "Comparative study of techniques in reinforced adobe for the sustainable reconstruction of the Colca Valley after the 2016 earthquake," *RE-HABEND* 2014, pp. 1936–1945.

12 R. Robles Mendoza, "Irrigation systems and Andean ritualism in the Colca valley," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 2010, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 197–217.

13 J. Vera Delgado, L. Vincent, "Community irrigation supplies and regional water transfers in the Colca Valley, Peru," *Mountain Research and Development* 2013, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 195–206.

14 C. Silió, M. Rodríguez, C. García, "Terraces abandonment. Elaboration of an accessibility model and cartography in a GIS environment: The Colca Valley, Arequipa, Peru," *Estudios Geográficos* 2001, no. 243, pp. 369–396.

15 C. Iruri-Ramos, P. Domínguez-Gómez, F. Celis-D'Amico, "Envelope improvements for thermal behavior of rural houses in the Colca Valley, Peru," *Estoa* 2023, vol. 12, no. 23, pp. 113–124.

16 R. Boelens, M. Seemann, "Forced engagements: Water security and local rights formalization in Yanque, Colca valley, Peru," *Human Organization* 2014, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 1–12.

17 A.B. Stensrud, "The formalisation of water use and conditional ownership in Colca Valley, Peru," *Water Alternatives* 2019, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 521–537.

Results

In Coporaque, religion and religiosity are deeply woven into the social and cultural fabric of its inhabitants, creating a unique dynamic in community life. Religious devotion is not just a daily practice but also a fundamental element that shapes the social and cultural structure of the town. According to Cook¹⁸ and Wernke,¹⁹ Catholic faith in Coporaque intertwines with pre-Hispanic practices and beliefs that have survived through the centuries, resulting in a cultural synthesis that characterizes the community's identity. This phenomenon is evident in how Catholic traditions have been adapted and merged with indigenous rituals, creating a distinctly local form of religiosity.

The religious festivities in Coporaque, such as the celebration of San Sebastián, are events of great social and spiritual importance that illustrate the fusion of Catholic beliefs with indigenous traditions. During these occasions, the community comes together in a series of activities including processions, masses, and communal feasts that not only strengthen social bonds but also reaffirm the cultural identity of the town. The rituals performed during these festivities carry significant symbolic weight and often include native practices such as *pagos a la tierra*, offerings of food and drink intended to honor and appease the earth.

Beyond the major celebrations, faith permeates daily life in Coporaque through practices such as the blessings of fields, animals, and homes. These activities not only seek divine protection for the harvest and family life but also reflect a worldview in which nature and the sacred are intimately connected. In this worldview, mountains and springs are considered living and essential entities, demonstrating the deep respect and spiritual relationship that Coporaquenos maintain with their natural surroundings.

Ultimately, religion in Coporaque transcends mere spiritual doctrine to become an essential part of cultural identity and a pillar of community life. The religiosity in this town is a reflection of its history, its culture, and the deep spirituality of its inhabitants, demonstrating how tradition and modernity can coexist and enrich each other. This integration of faith in all aspects of everyday life is a testament to the vitality and relevance of spiritual and religious practices in modernity, keeping traditions alive while adapting to contemporary changes.

In Coporaque, religiosity is manifested through four key elements that are fundamental to understanding its religious world. The festivities of San Santiago and the Cocha fiesta underline the importance of religion in daily life and reflect a rich cultural heritage. Additionally, the celebration of the Day of the Dead is conceived

18 N.D. Cook, op. cit.

19 S.A. Wernke, "Analogy or erasure? Dialectics of religious transformation in the early Doctrinas of the Colca Valley, Peru," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 2007, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 152–182.

as a practice that strengthens the connection with deceased loved ones and keeps their memory alive. Another significant ritual is the “tinkachi,” conducted during carnivals to bless and bring prosperity to livestock and crops, including the use of corn and coca and acts of blowing on these grains as a show of faith and gratitude. The Apus and natural elements are also venerated, demonstrating the community’s deep respect for nature. Each of these elements is described below.

Celebrations and Patron Saints

In the community of Coporaque, situated in a context rich in traditions, the celebrations and veneration of patron saints are fundamental elements of community life. These events reflect a deep cultural heritage and highlight the relevance of religion in the daily activities of its inhabitants. The most notable festivities are the patron saint festival of San Santiago, celebrated on July 25th, and the Cocha fiesta, held on August 12th. Both are occasions of great importance as they represent not only moments of religious fervor but also gatherings, spirituality, and collective joy. These events serve as pillars for unity and strengthening community bonds, setting the rhythm of the year and providing space for shared celebration.

The festival of San Santiago is particularly significant for Coporaque, acting as a catalyst to bring the community together in a series of rituals and processions that transcend the religious and become social and cultural meeting points. Yuri, a community member, highlights the importance of these festivities by saying,

Here, the patron saint festival is San Santiago on July 25th, and another big festival is the Cocha fiesta on August 12th. Both of these festivals are important. These celebrations are sacred to us because they not only show our faith but also bring the whole community together, keeping the traditions of our ancestors alive. During the San Santiago festival, the streets are filled with music, dances, and colorful processions; we carry the saint on our shoulders and pay him homage, asking for protection for our families and our crops. The Cocha fiesta, on the other hand, is to give thanks to the waters that give us life. We perform rituals and make offerings, praying that we never lack the water we need to irrigate our fields. These festivities are times when everyone, both old and young, comes together, reminding us of who we are and helping us preserve our culture, even as the world changes.

During these celebrations, all community members actively participate in the preparation and execution, reinforcing Coporaque’s cultural identity and cohesion.

On the other hand, the Cocha fiesta places special emphasis on the community’s relationship with water and natural resources, underscoring the vital dependence on these elements for survival and overall well-being. Through this celebration,

deep respect and gratitude towards nature are expressed, reflecting an ancestral understanding of the interdependence between man and his environment.

Additionally, other festivities such as Holy Week, with a special focus on Maundy Thursday, and carnivals, which include the tinkachi ritual, demonstrate how religiosity and cultural practices are intrinsically intertwined in the life of Coporaque. During Holy Week, for instance, the custom of decorating the church with fruits is observed, a practice that integrates natural elements into religious worship and showcases the fusion of the spiritual with the earthly.

These festivities in Coporaque not only provide a platform for the expression of faith and religious devotion but also serve as a vehicle to affirm community bonds and transmit values and knowledge from generation to generation. Through music, dance, rituals, and processions, the community celebrates its heritage, strengthens its social cohesion, and reaffirms its connection with the natural and spiritual environment. Furthermore, these celebrations and the veneration of the patron saints are vibrant expressions of the community culture, where religion and tradition intertwine with everyday life to weave a rich and diverse social mosaic. These events not only honor spiritual and natural entities but also celebrate life, community, and respect for the natural world, being essential pillars of the Andean worldview.

Day of the Dead Celebration

In the community of Coporaque, the celebration of the Day of the Dead transcends as a profound manifestation of the connection between the living and their deceased ancestors. This festival is deeply rooted in millennia-old cultural practices that not only traverse time and space but also connect the community to its most ancestral roots. More than an annual event, the Day of the Dead in Coporaque is a space for meeting, memory, and cultural continuity where personal, decorated home altars act as the main stage for a ritual that simultaneously celebrates life, death, and eternal remembrance.

The ritual of setting up altars in homes, which includes placing the favorite food of the deceased, drinks, coca, and decorating with candles, is a practice that shares similarities with other Latin American traditions, particularly the Mexican one, but acquires a unique meaning in Coporaque. Sebastian, a local resident, describes the practice by saying,

Here we do it on the 2nd, at noon, starting at 12 PM. As you say, each deceased family member, in their house, on their altar, because we have altars at home or on a table, we place the food they liked, chicha, alcohol, coca, everything, with their candle lit, waiting for 12. Then, normally, that's how we set up [the altars].

This description highlights how the tradition is personalized and adapted to local beliefs.

This conception of the Day of the Dead in Coporaque reveals a worldview in which death is not seen as an absolute end but rather as a transition to another form of existence where the deceased remain an integral part of the community. It is believed that, on this date, the spirits of the deceased have permission to visit their loved ones, and the altars serve as meeting points between the earthly and spiritual worlds, reinforcing the enduring bonds between families and those who have passed to the other side.

Furthermore, these rituals not only demonstrate Coporaque's adaptability and cultural resilience in the face of contemporary socioeconomic and cultural challenges but also underline how, despite the growing influence of modernity, the community preserves and revitalizes its traditions, ensuring the perpetuation of its intangible cultural heritage. Thus, the Day of the Dead celebration is both a manifestation of faith and devotion and an act of cultural resistance that affirms the community's identity and cohesion.

The Day of the Dead celebration in Coporaque is a rich and complex cultural practice that not only embodies the community's values, beliefs, and hopes but also serves as a bridge between generations. By erecting altars and offering tributes to the deceased, the inhabitants of Coporaque not only preserve the memory of their ancestors but also reaffirm their cultural identity and strengthen community ties. The Day of the Dead thus becomes a space for intergenerational dialogue where the past and the present intertwine to jointly celebrate life, death, and the eternity of memory.

Tinkachi

The "tinkachi" ritual in Coporaque, celebrated during the carnivals, represents an ancestral tradition deeply rooted in the Andean worldview, highlighting the intricate interconnection between human beings and nature. This rite is performed with the purpose of blessing and attracting prosperity for the livestock and crops, using essential natural elements such as corn (*misqa*) and coca. In a symbolic act, these elements are delicately blown over dishes, in a gesture that evokes faith and gratitude, intended to attract the benevolence of the earth's spiritual forces, known as Pachamama, and the Apus, guardian spirits of the mountains. This act seeks not only the favor of nature but also reflects a deep reverence and respect for the spiritual entities that guard the community.

Additionally, the "tinkachi" takes place in the fields, a vital space for the community, where members gather dressed in festive attire and adorned with streamers, to participate in this collective offering. This ritual transcends the mere request for an abundant harvest and the health of the livestock, acting as a catalyst that strengthens unity and community cohesion. Active participation in the "tinkachi" not only reinforces social bonds but also underscores the importance of collaboration and solidarity among community members.

Thus, the “tinkachi” is more than just an agricultural rite; it is a celebration of the symbiotic and mutual respect relationship that the Coporaque community maintains with its environment. Through this ritual, the community not only expresses its gratitude towards the land, considered sacred but also recognizes its dependence on environmental well-being for its subsistence. This practice emphasizes a reciprocal relationship, where care and respect for nature are considered essential for the survival and prosperity of the community.

Furthermore, this ceremony reflects an important spiritual dimension of life in Coporaque, where the practice of rituals is carried out with deep faith and seriousness. The community firmly believes in the effectiveness and spiritual importance of these practices. A poorly conducted “tinkachi,” especially under disrespectful influences such as alcohol consumption, can have negative consequences for the community. This aspect reinforces the belief in the importance of reciprocity and balance between human beings and nature, highlighting the need to maintain respectful and responsible behavior during these rituals.

These cultural practices are vibrant expressions of the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the community and not only encapsulate its worldview, social values, and deep connection with the land but also promote material prosperity through good harvests and health for the livestock, as well as spiritual prosperity and community cohesion. This interweaving of the material and spiritual ensures the continuity of their cultural heritage for future generations, perpetuating a legacy of respect and harmony with the natural environment.

Faith in the Apus and Natural Elements

In Coporaque, the devotion to the Apus and the veneration of natural elements such as rivers and *cochas* (lagoons) profoundly illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the community and its environment. This connection goes beyond mere aesthetic or functional appreciation of nature; it is manifested through practices and rituals that not only demonstrate a deep respect for the environment but also aim to maintain ecological balance and strengthen social cohesion through shared faith. In this context, rituals and offerings become acts of direct communication with the spiritual forces believed to manage and protect the vital natural resources for community life.

A clear example of these practices is the offering of “iranta” to the springs, a ceremony rooted in the belief that water is a sacred gift that requires acknowledgment and reverence. Jesusa, an elder from the area, articulates this local belief by stating,

If we don't place “iranta” at the springs where water emerges, it dries up. It's a tradition handed down from our ancestors, and we continue it with great respect. The “iranta” is our sacred offering, made with coca leaves, flowers, and other natural

elements, which we give to the Apus and the water deities to bless our fields and ensure good harvests. Without doing this, we say the land becomes sad and stops producing, and the water, which is our lifeblood, would cease to flow for our people.

This practice, involving placing corn offerings at the springs, not only symbolizes gratitude but also serves as a preventive ritual designed to ensure the continuous flow of water. This act reflects a reciprocal and respectful relationship between the community and its natural resources.

Interacting with the Apus, considered guardian spirits of the mountains, is another crucial aspect of spirituality in Coporaque. These beings are honored through various ceremonies and offerings, reflecting a deep understanding that the community's prosperity is inextricably linked to the health of the natural environment. This veneration is part of a broader belief system that perceives nature as a living entity, with which humans must coexist in a state of interdependence and respect.

These practices, deeply rooted in tradition and reinforced by communal faith, are essential to the cultural identity of Coporaque. They represent an Andean worldview in which the spiritual and material not only coexist but are intertwined such that every element of nature is considered sacred, and every human action towards it carries significant spiritual and practical implications.

In this cultural and spiritual context, faith in the Apus and natural elements transcends mere veneration to become an essential strategy for survival and sustainability. Practicing rituals like placing “iranta” and other similar ceremonies becomes an expression of a life philosophy that recognizes the interdependence of all beings and underscores the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. These practices not only perpetuate the continuity and prosperity of the community but also strengthen its bond with an environment that, although sometimes hostile, is deeply respected and valued.

The Importance of Faith in Cultural Practices

In the community of Coporaque, faith plays an essential role in the execution of cultural practices, especially in rituals like the “tinkachi”. This ritual, crucial for requesting blessings and prosperity for the livestock and crops, highlights the belief in the effectiveness and spiritual importance of practices carried out with sincerity and respect. Jesus, a respected member of the community, illustrates the depth of this belief by sharing his perspective on the consequences of a poorly executed “tinkachi”: “It starts to die when you act poorly or mock the altar... if you don't do it with faith, it starts on its own.” This testimony emphasizes that a lack of seriousness or the influence of alcohol during the ritual can have adverse effects, such as the loss of livestock, highlighting the conviction that the ritual must be conducted with utmost integrity and respect.

Faith in these practices transcends mere adherence to tradition; it is a living expression of the symbiotic relationship between the community and its natural environment. This relationship is marked by a deep respect and an understanding of the interdependence between people and the nature surrounding them. The act of performing the “tinkachi” with genuine faith and community consensus is fundamental to the success of the ritual and to the overall well-being of the community. Jesus further elaborates on the risks: “It falls ill, gets pneumonia, falls into the ditch, or breaks a leg... something is bound to happen. So, to prevent that, you have to do it with faith and in agreement.” This underscores that practicing the ritual with faith is not merely a preference but a necessity to prevent negative consequences and ensure harmony and prosperity.

This emphasis on faith and respect deepens the understanding of the attitudes and intentions underlying cultural practices in Coporaque. Rituals like the “tinkachi” are not merely ceremonial; they are acts imbued with meaning, designed to maintain the balance and harmony between the community and the cosmos. In this context, faith is not an abstraction but a vital force that guides and enriches the community’s interaction with the spiritual and natural world.

The importance of faith in the cultural practices of Coporaque is manifested not only in how these rituals are performed but also in the collective awareness of the consequences of individual and community actions. Through the narrative of Jesus, it is evident that faith acts as a fundamental pillar in preserving community harmony, prosperity, and respect for tradition and the natural environment. Faith is seen as an essential component that ensures the continuation of these deeply rooted cultural practices and their relevance in the daily life of Coporaque.

Conclusions

This study addresses how ritual and cultural practices are integrated into the daily life of Coporaque, a community that proudly preserves its pre-Columbian and Catholic roots. A notable symbiosis between religiosity and daily life is observed, evidenced through festivities and rituals that not only structure the annual calendar but also strengthen social cohesion and facilitate the transmission of cultural values to future generations. This integration of the spiritual into everyday routines not only reflects a deeply rooted cultural heritage but also demonstrates how tradition serves as a foundational element for the community, emphasizing the continued importance of cultural practices in maintaining a sense of identity and connection amid changing times.

In Coporaque, the interaction between ritual practices and daily life reveals how religiosity is deeply intertwined with the community’s cultural identity. This integration is manifested in the richness of rituals that act both as expressions of faith

and as catalysts for social cohesion. Festivities, serve as community meeting points where social bonds are strengthened and ancestral culture is passed down from generation to generation. During events like the Cocha fiesta, the community not only celebrates its religious faith but also its essential connection with water, underscoring how spiritual practices are directly related to material needs and community survival. This holistic approach in celebrations highlights a worldview in which the spiritual and the practical are inseparably intertwined.

Although globalization and modernity present challenges, Coporaque exhibits a remarkable ability to integrate these changes without compromising its cultural identity. Modern elements are assimilated and reinterpreted through the lens of local traditions, allowing the community to preserve its cultural heritage while adapting to new realities. However, this balance is delicate and requires constant vigilance to ensure that modernization does not erode the foundations of its culture. For instance, the increase in tourism can offer economic benefits but may also lead to the commercialization of cultural practices that could alter their original meaning, as highlighted by Neyra-Paredes et al.²⁰ and Rendón & Bidwell.²¹

The role of religiosity in community and environmental relations in Coporaque is also crucial for how the community interacts with its natural surroundings. The veneration of the Apus and the practice of rituals such as the earth offerings are essential not only for the spiritual identity of the community but also for its physical survival, promoting sustainable resource management. These practices underscore a model of interdependence between humans and nature, essential for ecological and social sustainability.

Furthermore, faith and religious practices in Coporaque act as mechanisms for conflict resolution and crisis management, providing structures and rituals through which the community can collectively face both internal and external challenges. This aspect of religiosity is vital in a context where resources are scarce and community cohesion is crucial for the common well-being.

This study, according to Coayla,²² demonstrates how Coporaque has managed to maintain and adapt its cultural and spiritual practices in the context of social

20 K. Neyra-Paredes, L. Benites-Laso, M. Llaza-Loayza, "Strategic planning for the economic reactivation of tourism in the Colca Valley Caylloma during and post COVID-19 pandemic," *Proceedings of the LACCEI international Multi-conference for Engineering, Education and Technology* 2021, July.

21 M.-L. Rendón, S. Bidwell, "Success in progress? Tourism as a tool for inclusive development in Peru's Colca Valley," [in:] *Tourism in Latin America: Cases of Success*, eds. A. Pannosso Netto, L.G. Godoi Trigo, Cham-Heidelberg-New York-Dordrecht-London 2015, pp. 207-213.

22 E. Coayla, "Willingness to pay to conserve the recreational service of condor flight at Colca Canyon, Peru," *Journal of Sustainability Science and Management* 2022, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 99-116.

and economic changes. Religiosity is not manifested only in specific rituals but is a constant presence that strengthens the community and provides a sense of continuity and security in a constantly changing world. The results underline the importance of understanding cultural practices not merely as relics of the past but as living, dynamic elements that contribute to the community's resilience, as highlighted by Ríos-Vizcarra et al.²³

Ultimately, the preservation of Coporaque's rich cultural heritage is vital for maintaining community cohesion and identity in an era of rapid change and globalization. It is crucial that local authorities, along with cultural and social organizations, implement policies and programs that promote the documentation and ongoing support of traditional practices, as suggested by Bidwell & Murray.²⁴

To deepen our understanding of how Andean communities like Coporaque are navigating the challenges of modernity and globalization, it would be beneficial to conduct comparative studies with other Andean communities facing similar challenges. These studies could explore regional variations in cultural and religious practices and how these influence community resilience in the face of external pressure. Understanding the different responses to modernization and globalization would better equip policymakers and community leaders to design interventions that support the preservation of cultural identities while embracing the benefits of modernization.

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23 G. Ríos-Vizcarra et al., op. cit.

24 S. Bidwell, W.E. Murray, "Tourism, mobile livelihoods and 'disorderly' development in the Colca Valley, Peru," *Tourism Geographies* 2019, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 330–352.

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