

A REVIEW OF MY BOOKS
ON HIGH ALTITUDE
ARCHAEOLOGY: RETHINKING
RITUAL VIOLENCE AND
SACRIFICES IN THE ANDES*



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Resumo: *como a primeira mulher arqueóloga de grandes altitudes, fiz contribuições pioneiras ao estudo da violência dos rituais nos antigos Andes. Explorei cem picos e realizei escavações codirigidas no local mais alto do mundo. A descoberta inesperada de múmias congeladas no monte Llullaillaco (6.739 m) me confrontou com a necessidade de estudar o sacrifício de crianças antigas a partir de uma perspectiva interdisciplinar. O papel da violência (ritual e simbólica) desempenha um papel significativo na compreensão da civilização Inca, uma vez que sacrifícios humanos eram executados no topo de montanhas sagradas para a população local como uma estratégia para legitimar o controle dos territórios das comunidades andinas. Neste artigo, apresento uma visão geral dos numerosos livros que escrevi sobre arqueologia de altitude, estudos de múmias e antropologia da peregrinação nos altos Andes, e reflito sobre a importância da arqueologia no estudo da violência do passado e do presente.*

Palavras-chave: *Arqueologia de grandes altitudes. Livros. Sacrifício. Violência. Mulher na Ciência.*

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As the first woman dedicated to high altitude archaeology in the Andes (and for many years, the only one) I have made pioneering contributions to the study of Inca religion, ritual violence and sacred mountains. About 25 years ago, I started exploring elevations above 5000 meters and I eventually completed the ascent of more than one hundred peaks in remote corners of South America. From the start I was interested in the ambivalent construction of mountains, as life-sustaining entities deified since times immemorial, and simultaneously feared as the causers of natural catastrophes.

My focus has been centered on the sacred dimension of the peaks, but the role of violence (ritual and symbolic) has also played a part in my interpretations about the use of high altitude settings. I have hypothesized -and eventually demonstrated- that the Incas built shrines and made human sacrifices on the top of mountains already sacred to the local groups, as part of their strategy to take control of the territory (and the minds) of the Andean communities that were being subdued to the *Tawantinsuyu*.

I also codirected the scientific excavations at the highest archaeological site in the world and co-discovered three of the best-preserved frozen mummies, together with an extraordinarily documented collection of artifacts from the Inca civilization. The mummies from mount Lullailloco belonged to a young woman and two children who had been sacrificed at the climax of a state organized mountain pilgrimage known as *capacocha*. The unexpected archaeological finding of these unique mummies confronted me, “face to face”, with the phenomenon of child sacrifice in antiquity. And it became clear that the stories of those ancient victims needed to be told with the help of science. Subsequently, for many years, I coordinated the interdisciplinary study of those findings at the Catholic University of Salta, in northern Argentina. The mummies and offerings from mount Lullailloco are currently preserved at the Museum of High Mountain Archaeology (MAAM) in Salta.

In this paper I offer an overview of the books I have authored on high altitude archaeology, mummy studies and the anthropology of pilgrimage in the high Andes. I also share some considerations about the importance of archaeology as an instrument for the study of violence, past and present.

REVIEWING MY PUBLICATIONS AND REFLECTING ON RITUAL VIOLENCE IN THE ANDES

The exhaustive approach I selected for the archaeological exploration of the highest Andean summits, and the rigorous academic publication of the observations and inferences that resulted from my ascents, had a significant impact in the expansion and consolidation of high altitude archaeology as a systematic field of scientific research. In addition, my work also contributed to opening new angles from which to examine ritual violence in the ancient Andes.

Numerous scientific papers came out after I had surveyed more than one hundred mountains above 5000 meters above mean sea level (AMSL) in the Andes of Argentina (CERUTI, 1997, 1998b, 1999b, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003b, 2004c, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2017b). I also ascended peaks in Peru (CERUTI, 2013b) and northern Chile (CERUTI, 2005). Attributes such as the altitude of the mountains and their visibility, as well as the accessibility of the summits, were taken into consideration in my analysis, with the purpose of understanding the strategies used by the Incas to cope with glaciers climbs, active volcanoes and

snowcapped peaks (CERUTI, 2014b, 2016b). Articles were also published on the study of high altitude mummies and human sacrifices (CERUTI, 2014a, 2015a, 2018a), Inca offerings (CERUTI, 2015b), Andean identity (CERUTI, 2017a), high altitude pilgrimages (CERUTI, 2015c, 2016a) and indigenous ritual experts (CERUTI, 2018b). Additionally, an auto-ethnographic article was devoted to the analysis of academic violence, as an obstacle to the praxis of high altitude archaeologists (CERUTI, 2019a). Some of my books are no longer available to the public, since they have been out of print for years; most of them have been written in Spanish and published locally, in northern Argentina. Consequently, in the following paragraphs I will attempt to summarize the content of each of my volumes, which have fulfilled a foundational role in the consolidation of high altitude archaeology and the emergence of glacial archaeology as scientific disciplines. They have also contributed to augment public interest in Inca archaeology and mummy studies, catalyzing academic discussion on topics related to human sacrifices and ritual violence.

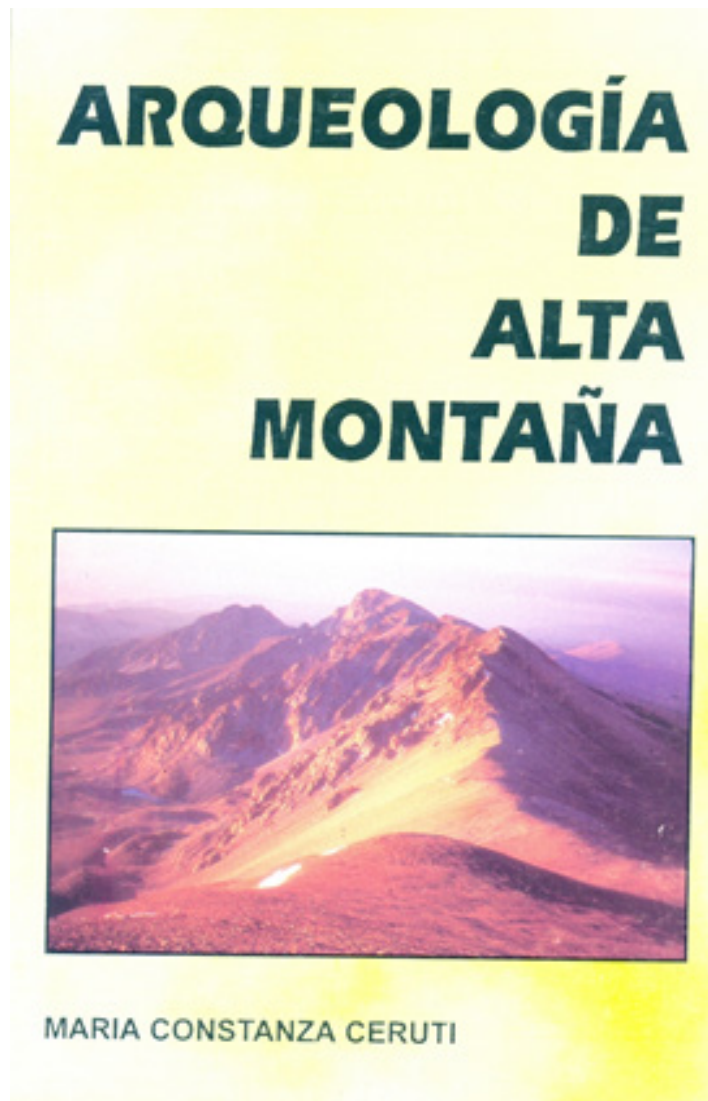


Figure 1: High Altitude Archaeology (*Arqueología de Alta Montaña*)
Written by María Constanza Ceruti
Published in 1998 by Editorial Milor in Salta, Argentina

This book is dedicated to the development of a theoretical-methodological proposal for the study of archaeological sites in high elevations, based on survey methods and techniques (Figure 1). The archaeological record of the Inca sanctuaries, excellently preserved in the dryness and cold environment of summits above 5000 meters AMSL, allows to hypothesize on the nature and frequency of the cultic activities, the number and social status of the participants, the investment of labor required for the construction of the ceremonial structures, the demand for luxury objects to be used as offerings, among other aspects of interest for the study of Inca religion. For the first time in Argentinean academic discussion, social conflict theories were explicitly introduced into the analysis of Inca state ceremonialism, and the ritual appropriation of mountains was interpreted within the realms of social strategies of domination and resistance.

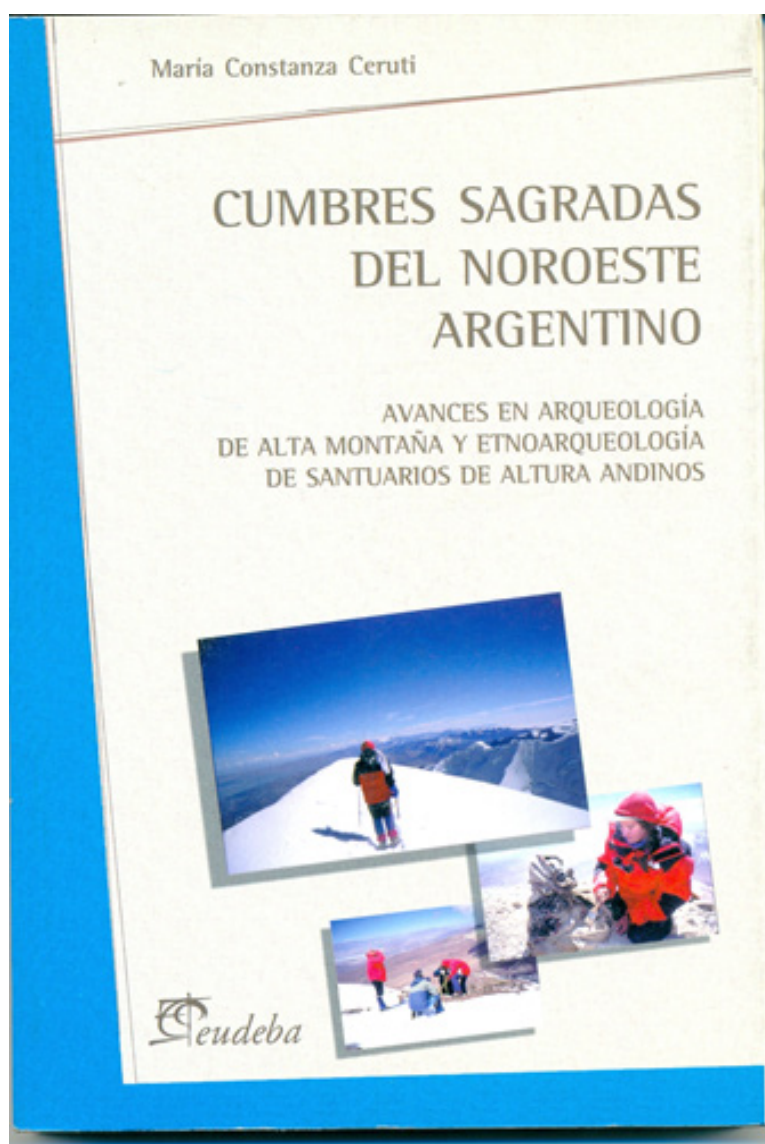


Figure 2: Sacred Summits of Northwestern Argentina (*"Cumbres Sagradas del NOA"*)
 Written by María Constanza Ceruti
 Published in 1999 by EUDEBA in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Andean high-altitude shrines are thoroughly described and analyzed in this book (Figure 2). I have relied on contributions from ethno-historical sources, ethnographic data and ethno-archaeological observations in high places (such as mount Aconcagua, the highest in the western hemisphere) for the interpretation of the dynamics related to the construction, maintenance and use of Inca high altitude sanctuaries. The first chapter deals with the history of high mountain archaeology, from the first findings, more than a hundred years ago, to the scientific investigations of the late twentieth century. The second chapter includes the operational definition of the Inca mountaintop shrines and the generalities about their geographical distribution, location and material evidences. Central chapters include the description of more than twenty-five mountaintop sites that I surveyed on high mountains of northern Argentina between 1996 and 1999. The last chapter addresses the difficulties inherent to scientific studies in extreme mountain environments, and the urgent need to raise awareness about the importance of the preservation of the high altitude archaeological heritage, which is impacted by looting, treasure hunting, mining activities, tourism, and unintentional destruction due to ignorance.



Figure 3: Llullaillaco: Offerings and Sacrifices on an Inca Mountaintop Shrine (“*Llullaillaco: sacrificios y ofrendas en un santuario Inca de alta montaña*”)

Written by María Constanza Ceruti

Published in 2003 by EUCASA in Salta, Argentina

Expanded second edition by Mundo Editorial in 2015

In 1999 I codirected the project to the highest archaeological site in the world and I co-discovered three extraordinarily preserved ice mummies. Research on the summit of mount Llullaillaco (at 6739 meters AMSL) was conducted together with National Geographic explorer Johan Reinhard and a group of students and collaborators. We spent one month on the mountain and worked for two weeks on its summit, where

we discovered and brought to safety the frozen bodies of three Inca children, the best-preserved mummies in history (CERUTI, 2004a, 2011). We excavated them within the Death Zone, with enormous efforts and literally risking our lives, nearly seven kilometers above the sea level (CERUTI, 2003a; REINHARD; CERUTI, 2000).

In addition to protecting the frozen mummies from destruction (by treasure hunters, climate alterations and the impact of mining) we excavated and brought to safety a vast array of offerings, including pottery and miniature figurines, which turned out to be one of the best documented collections of artifacts from the Inca civilization (CERUTI, 2015d). Ethno-historical investigations around these archaeological findings led me to write “Llullaillaco” (CERUTI, 2003a), the first academic book on Inca sacrifices and offerings based on evidences collected during scientific excavations in high altitude (Figure 3 and 6). The understanding of the symbolic meaning and social implications of the Inca high altitude offerings and sacrifices was deepened with the analysis of dozens of historical sources, including chronicles written by the Spanish conquistadors, manuscripts compiled by the “extirpators of idolatries”, and texts authored by Quechua indigenous priests.

Mount Llullaillaco is home to the highest ceremonial site on the planet. The frozen bodies of three Inca children discovered on the summit are considered the best-preserved mummies known to date. The associated objects are the most thoroughly documented set of high mountain offerings ever discovered. Furthermore, our investigations at the top of Llullaillaco have been the highest scientific work ever carried out in the history of archaeology. The pages of this book ponder the significance of the discoveries on Llullaillaco, opening a window to the universe of the sacrifices and offerings in the Inca world.



Figure 4: High Mountain Archaeology in La Rioja (“*Arqueología de Alta Montaña en La Rioja*”)

Written by María Constanza Ceruti

Published in 2004 by EUCASA in Salta, Argentina

Second edition by EUCASA in 2010

The Incas ascended numerous Andean massifs between 1471 and 1532 AD. High-altitude sanctuaries were an important part of the Inca strategy of ideological and territorial control over the empire. This book describes the archaeological observations undertaken on mountains between 5000 and 6800 meters AMSL in the province of La Rioja, in western Argentina. I include an account of my ascent to the summit of Pissis (6882 meters AMSL), the second highest volcano in the world, as well as winter climbs to Famatina, the highest sierra on the planet. Additionally, I provide a preliminary description of the numerous sacred peaks around the enigmatic Laguna Brava. The two editions of this book contribute to the understanding of the materiality around the ritual appropriation of the most sacred mountains in the southern corners of the Inca Empire (Figure 4).

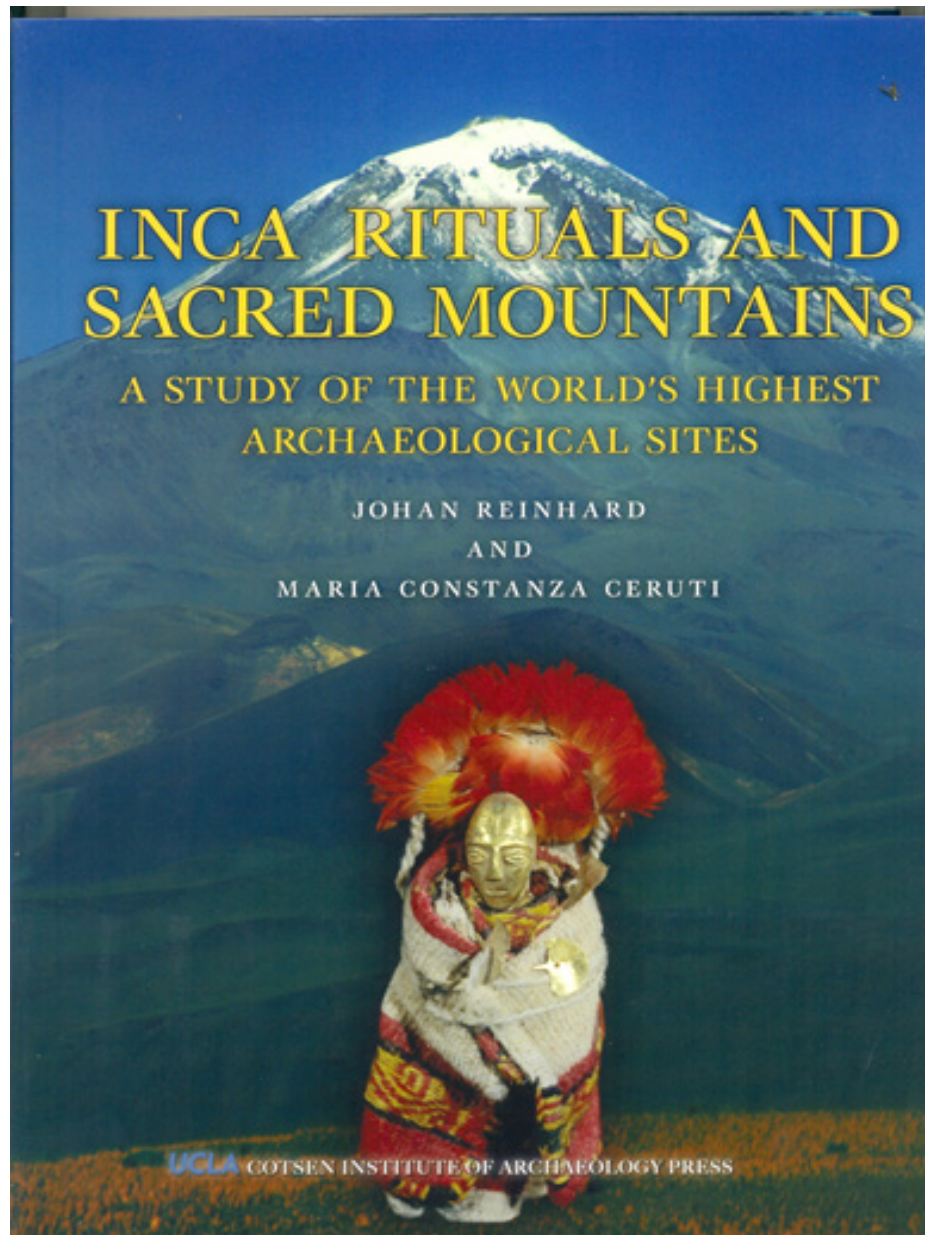


Figure 5: Inca Rituals and Sacred Mountains: a study of the world's highest archaeological sites
Written by Johan Reinhard and María Constanza Ceruti
Published in 2010 by the academic press of UCLA in Los Angeles, California.

Approximately five hundred years ago, the Incas became the first civilization in human history to climb to elevations above 6000 meters AMSL. From the high Peruvian sierras down to the volcanoes in the Bolivian highlands and the monumental peaks of central Argentina and Chile, the Inca shrines crowned the summits of the highest mountains, consecrating them as places for offerings and sacrifices. Rituals were performed in commemoration of important moments in the life of the Inca emperor, for the success at war, the propitiation of the fertility of the crops, or to appease angry spirits that “caused” natural catastrophes, as in the case of the active volcano Misti, the tutelary mountain of the Peruvian city of Arequipa. In a collaborative book written with Johan Reinhard, we analyze the ancient processions and high altitude rituals that underlined the sacredness of the Andean geography and contributed to consolidate the Inca domination on the newly conquered territories (Figure 5).

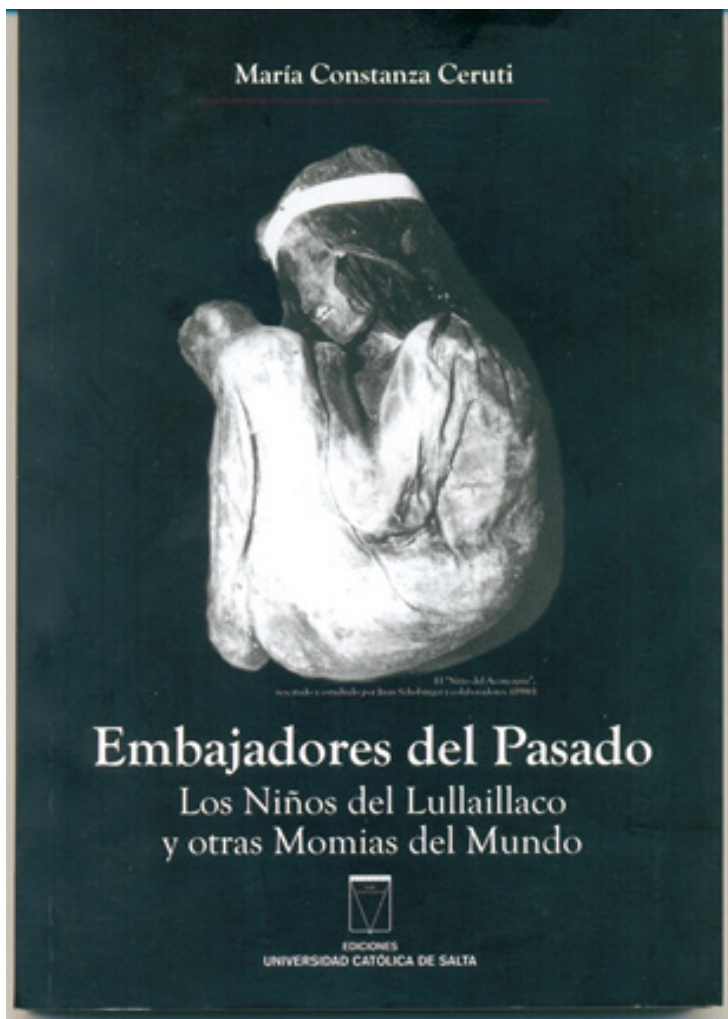


Figure 6: Ambassadors from the Past: the Lullaillaco children and other mummies of the world (“*Embajadores del Pasado: los niños del Lullaillaco y otras momias del mundo*”) Written by María Constanza Ceruti Published in 2011 by EUCASA in Salta, Argentina Second edition by Mundo Editorial in 2014

In this book I analyze examples of mummy studies in different parts of the world, from the renowned embalmed corpses of the Egyptian civilization, or the lesser-

known but even older mummies of the Chilean Chinchorro tradition, to the ice mummies of Qilaqitsok in the arctic and the Ice Man from the Tyrolean Alps (Figure 6). References are made to the Guanajuato mummies in Mexico, the Andean high altitude mummies from mount El Toro and Aconcagua, studied by Dr. Juan Schobinger (1966, 2001, 2004), as well as the bodies from the peat bogs and marshes of northern Europe, from victims of human sacrifices and ritual over-killing in the Iron Age. Analysis is based on aspects related to the position of the body, its mortuary treatment, and the belief system around death and the afterlife. The social role that mummies have traditionally fulfilled in Mexican and Andean communities is also taken into account, in the veneration of naturally mummified infants known as “miraculous little angels.”

For six years I coordinated the scientific interdisciplinary research on the archaeological discoveries from mount Llullaillaco at the Catholic University of Salta (UCASAL), which included DNA studies and hair analysis of the frozen mummies (WILSON *et al.*, 2007, 2013), radiological exams (PREVIGLIANO *et al.* 2003, 2005) and technical studies on the associated offerings (CERUTI, 2003a; BRAY *et al.*, 2005). Some of the leading European and American experts in the field of mummy studies came to Argentina to collaborate with us, and the results of our research were published in numerous and very prestigious academic journals (CERUTI 2004a, 2014a, 2015b). The second part of the book summarizes the results of those studies, pondering the importance of the Llullaillaco children, the best-preserved mummies found to date.

The MAAM Museum of Mountain Archaeology, where the Llullaillaco mummies and offerings are currently preserved, is the second most visited cultural institution in Argentina, while the city of Salta has grown to become a destination for international cultural tourism (CERUTI, 2017b). The magnitude of our discovery prompted the inscription of volcano Llullaillaco and other archaeological sites associated with the Inca Road system- in the UNESCO World Heritage List.



Figure 7: Mountain Processions in the High Andes (“*Procesiones Andinas en Alta Montaña*”) Written by María Constanza Ceruti Published in 2013 by EUCASA in Salta, Argentina Second and third editions by EUCASA in 2016 and 2018

335 My book on Mountain Processions in the High Andes was first published in 2013 by the academic press of UCASAL, and it has been re-edited in 2016 and 2018

(Figure 7). The phenomenon of Andean high altitude pilgrimage is analyzed in the context of the construction of social identity in multicultural communities of South America. Syncretism between traditional indigenous religiosity and the Catholic world is seen in the cult of water, the propitiation of fertility, ceremonial music and dances, and numerous rituals for purification and healing. Performing such rituals at unusually high elevations is conceived, in itself, as a “sacrifice”, which is offered to Pachamama and the mountain spirits.

Tens of thousands of people congregate annually at a glacier basin in the Vilcanota range of Peru, to pay homage to the Lord of the Star of Snow by means of ceremonial dancing, long-distance ritual marching and the recollection of ice, endowed with magical and healing properties. In the Humahuaca Gorge of northern Argentina, the high altitude sanctuaries of Punta Corral and Sixilera receive thousands of devotees who walk for miles carrying images of Virgin Mary, followed by bands of musicians who defy hypoxia while playing their *sikus* (Andean panpipes). And for the last two decades, residents in the highlands of Salta have gone back to climbing to the summit of mount Macon, also considered sacred by the Incas.

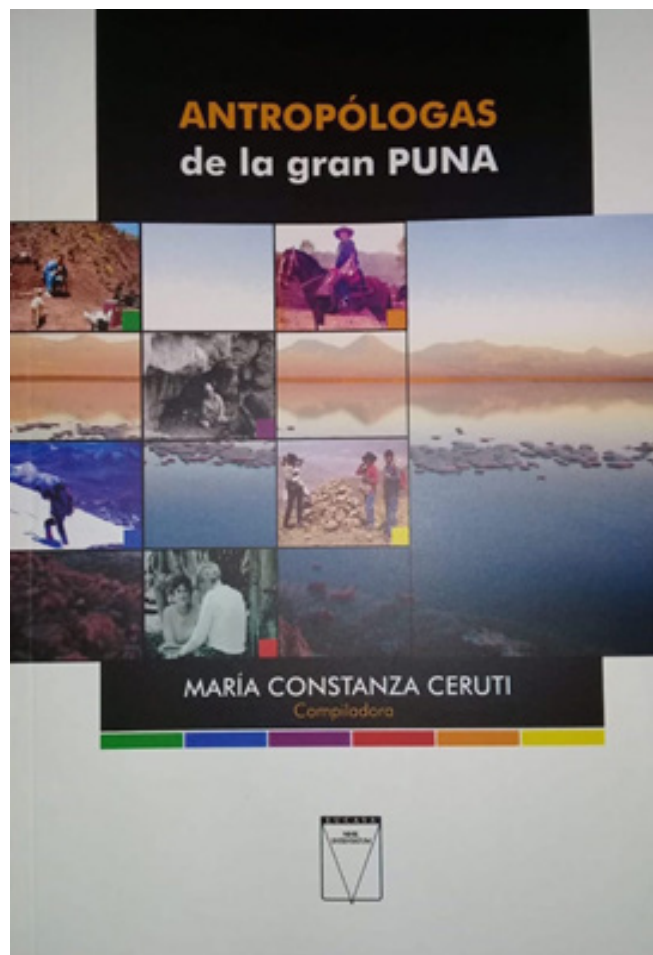


Figure 8: Women anthropologist of the Great Puna (“*Antropólogas de la Gran Puna*”) Compiled by María Constanza Ceruti Coauthored by Cristina Bianchetti, Constanza Ceruti, Alicia Fernandez Distel, Claudia Forgione, Maricel Pelegrin and Marjorie Snipes Published in 2020 by EUCASA in Salta, Argentina

For more than a quarter of a century, the co-authors have pioneered field studies in remote corners of the Puna highlands of northern Argentina (Figure 8). Memories from professional experiences in ethnography, high mountain archaeology, Andean prehistory, rock art and comparative cultural studies illustrate the “behind the scenes” of professional practice, where wedding trips, field schools and doctoral dissertations intertwined with the challenges of constructing identity during the fieldwork. There is also room for the remembrance of creative strategies implemented to overcome tensions with indifferent politicians, authoritarian landowners and jealous colleagues, in search for the enhancement and preservation of the unique Andean heritage. This book contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of women in the history of anthropology and archaeology in Argentina. It also invites a necessary discussion on practices and discourses that reduce visibility of the contributions by female scientists in Latin America, and elsewhere.

CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Andes mountains were originally worshiped from a safe distance, but an important transformation took place five hundred years ago, when the Inca civilization became the first in history to climb to the highest peaks and build shrines on their summits. The mountaintop sites marked the remotest frontiers of the ever expanding territories controlled by the empire, and effectively coopted emblematic mountains under a state-sponsored cult of the Sun, which demanded sumptuary items as “offerings”, in addition to the sacrifice of young women and children.

My archaeological research on mountaintops has contributed to the expansion and consolidation of high altitude archaeology, as well as to a deeper anthropological understanding of ritual violence and sacrifices in the ancient Andean world. In my quest for approaching sacred mountains from multiple and diverse angles, I wrote the first book on theory and methods for high altitude archaeology (CERUTI, 1998a). The academic press of the University of Buenos Aires (EUDEBA) published my second book, with preliminary field observations on more than thirty summits of northern Argentina (CERUTI, 1999a). Two editions of my book on high altitude archaeology in western Argentina were later published by EUCASA, the academic press of UCASAL (CERUTI, 2004b, 2010). My book entitled “Lullailaco”, dedicated to the analysis of the sacrifices and offerings performed by the Incas at the highest ceremonial site on the planet, was first printed by EUCASA (CERUTI, 2003a), with a revised second edition published by Mundo Editorial in 2015. In 2010, the academic press of UCLA published a book on Inca Rituals and Sacred Mountains, coauthored with American anthropologist Johan Reinhard (REINHARD; CERUTI 2010). “Ambassadors from the Past”, my book on mummy studies, was first published in 2011 and reedited in 2014. My book on Andean High Altitude Processions was first published in 2013 and re-edited twice in the following years. I have also compiled a book with testimonies of women anthropologists who worked in the Andean villages of northern Argentina (CERUTI, 2020). All these contributions are part of a quarter-of-a-century-long academic legacy that has remained little known to scholars in the northern hemisphere, due to linguistic and geographic reasons.

High-altitude archaeology has demonstrated the complexity of the mountaintop Inca burials in the southern Andes, with frozen mummies of sacrificed children having been found on many peaks, including Misti, Chañi, Quehuar,

Chuscha, El Plomo, El Toro, Misti and Llullaillaco, the highest archaeological site on the planet. Scientific studies on the frozen mummies have illuminated aspects of the life and death under the rule of the Incas.

It is interesting to reflect on some aspects of institutionalized violence against young women that were sacrificed on mountains under the Inca domination. Their ritual killing of the “chosen” girls was preceded by their removal from their communities, and by months or years of seclusion and forced labor in institutions that the European conquistadors compared with “nunneries” or “convents”. A lifetime of isolation awaited young women who were not selected to become concubines of the Inca, or secondary wives of imperial bureaucrats and local lords. Yet a more radical destiny could also be met on the lofty mountaintops. Blas Valera, a mestizo Jesuit priest who tried to deny the historicity of human sacrifices among the Incas in the early 1600s, provide us with an unexpected revelation (CERUTI, 2013c). While trying to convince his readers that Inca human sacrifices never happened, he claimed that “it was not true (sic) that those girls who refused been given into forced marriage were the ones selected to be sacrificed”.

The legacy of the ancient *capacocha* processions is alive among the Andean pilgrims who march, dance and play musical instruments on their way to remote Catholic shrines on peaks of northern Argentina or sacred glaciers in southern Peru. The physical efforts endured while facing the adverse climatic conditions at high elevations, are in themselves conceived as a type of “self-sacrifice” dedicated to the mountain spirits. Explicitly violent interactions, such as whipping, are encouraged for some rituals of initiation on the glaciers. They are also mimicked as parts of the choreography of dances, and inflicted as punishment, to castigate excessive drinking, promiscuity and other offenses deemed unacceptable during religious pilgrimages.

In perspective, as I review my previously published work on Andean processions, I become aware that my own enjoyment of climbing, and what could be described as “adhering to an old school of mountaineering”, have somehow prevented me of fully understanding the sacrificial dimension perceived in connection with the exposure to cold, hypobaric and hypoxic conditions at extremely high elevations. What is logically expected as a constituent of the typical experience of any high-altitude mountaineer is likely to be perceived as a significant “sacrifice” by Andean pilgrims, particularly those coming from valleys situated at lower elevations.

Last but not least, as this volume is being compiled in the year of 2021, considerations about institutionalized violence seem to be coming to the forefront of archaeological discussion. Archaeology may be able to provide us with some clues to ponder, for example, if certain contemporary processes and situations can really be characterized as “unprecedented”. For example, the concept of “restricted mobility”, virtually unknown in western countries during the early XXI century, was in fact prevalent in the Andes five hundred years ago. Under the strict rule of the Incas, individual free circulation was highly restricted. The famous “Inca road system” was seemingly built to be used primarily by the *chasqui* messengers -who delivered orders and information to and from the Inca centralized administration- as well as for the rapid deployment of the armies, in times of warfare or in case of focalized rebellions. Forced colonists, known as *mitimaes*, as well as deputy officers were also allowed to use the roads when instructed to move to a specific distant location. Men were periodically called for trail maintenance work, public constructions and other forms of compelled labor deemed essential for the strategic goals of the Inca administration. Virtually

everyone else was expected to stay in their homes and continue to work in agriculture and herding, not just for the sustenance of their own families and the local rulers, but also for the tributes to be paid to the ever-growing bureaucratic structure of the empire.

The study of the materiality of ancient violence is never easy, but it can substantially enhance our comprehension of human nature and societies. The Past has still got many lessons to teach, which can enlighten us towards a deeper understanding of our Present, and higher expectations for our Future. It is up to us, archaeologists, to lift the veils and ask the right questions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am a research scholar at the National Council of Research in Argentina (CONICET) and a Professor at the Catholic University of Salta (UCASAL). My work has been acknowledged with awards and distinctions, which include the Gold Medal of the International Society of Woman Geographers, an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities from the Moravian College in Pennsylvania, the Courage Award from the Wings World Quest, the Gold Medal Award of the University of Buenos Aires. I was among the first Emerging Explorers of the National Geographic Society and I was one of the five awardees, when the Prince of Asturias in Communication and Humanities was given to this Institution. I was also an invited speaker at the first TED global meeting in Oxford, and a Rising Talent at the Women Forum for the Economy and Society. I also became a Distinguished Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of West Georgia. UCASAL has recently created the Constanza Ceruti Honorary Chair on Sacred Mountains. I am also the youngest member of the National Academy of Sciences in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

UMA REVISÃO DE MEUS LIVROS SOBRE ARQUEOLOGIA DE GRANDES ALTITUDES: REPENSANDO A VIOLÊNCIA RITUAL E OS SACRIFÍCIOS NOS ANDES

Abstract: as the first woman high altitude archaeologist, I have made pioneering contributions to the study of ritual violence in the ancient Andes. I explored one hundred peaks and codirected excavations at the highest site in the world. The unexpected finding of frozen mummies on mount Llullaillaco (6739 m) confronted me with the need to study ancient child sacrifice from an interdisciplinary perspective. The role of violence (ritual and symbolic) plays a significant part in understanding the Inca civilization, since human sacrifices were executed on top of mountains already sacred to the local people, as a strategy to legitimate control of territories of Andean communities. In this paper I offer an overview of the numerous books I have authored on high altitude archaeology, mummy studies and the anthropology of pilgrimage in the high Andes, and I reflect on the importance of archaeology in the study of violence, past and present.

Keywords: High altitude archaeology. Books. Sacrifice. Violence. Women in Science.

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