

# *Kay Pacha*

Cultivating earth and water in the Andes

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# 16. The role of the *challada* in llama culling (Puna of Atacama, Argentina)

Hugo D. Yacobaccio and Marcela P. Malmierca

## Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo consiste en analizar, desde una perspectiva arqueológica, el ritual de la *challada* específicamente cuando el sacrificio de llamas es llevado a cabo en contextos de la vida cotidiana en las unidades domésticas de los pastores andinos. Dado que consideramos al registro arqueológico básicamente material nuestro interés estará centrado en los artefactos y sus ordenamientos espaciales. Nuestro interés en discutir los componentes materiales de la *challada* tiene el objetivo de proponer ideas que puedan ayudar a estudiar situaciones rituales relacionadas con el manejo de camélidos en el registro arqueológico. La *challada* que analizaremos está llevada en contextos cotidianos previamente al sacrificio de una llama en un contexto no ceremonial (es decir, no programada en el calendario ceremonial anual). El estudio etnoarqueológico se llevó a cabo en Susques (Puna de Atacama, Argentina) en una zona de transición entre la Puna Seca y la Salada a 3700 msnm. El análisis de contextos regionales en los andes Centro-Sur puede ser de utilidad para encarar el estudio del comportamiento ritual de los antiguos pastores puneños porque permite emplear diferentes líneas de evidencia y ampliar el marco teórico y empírico tenido en consideración.

## Introduction

*Challada* (*ch'allakuy*, *cchalla* o *cchalaña*) is an Aymara term (Bertonio 1984[1612] II: 75) that refers to a complex ritual that is performed in several ceremonial contexts such as animal marking, irrigation canal and well opening, human inhumations, All Saints Day ceremonies, sowing and animal sacrifices. The purpose of this paper is to analyse from an archaeological perspective the ritual of the *challada*, specifically when the sacrifice of llamas is carried out in everyday contexts within pastoralist domestic units. As we consider the archaeological record as basically material (see Tschauner 1996), our interest will be focused on artefacts and their spatial arrangement. Our concern in discussing its material components has the goal of proposing some ideas that could help to address rituals related to the management of camelid herds in archaeological situations.

From an epistemological point of view, archaeological knowledge, as Wylie (1993: 24) states, '...depends on background knowledge of contemporary contexts'. Therefore ethnoarchaeology as a research strategy is specially well suited to generate arguments based on present-day situations to obtain independent lines of evidence for interpreting the archaeological record.

The *challada* we are interested in here is performed before the sacrifice of the llama in a non-ceremonial (i.e. not scheduled according to a calendarical date) context. Every llama sacrifice requires a previous *challada* that is ritually performed. In order to clarify our argument, it is central to establish the meaning of ritual. Many scholars find it very difficult to define. However, there exists agreement upon its patterned structure (Baxter 1996; Hill 1996; Luff 1996). We define ritual operatively as prescribed or customary behaviour that may be religious if it is intended to link people with supernatural beings (Baxter 1996). It is our

intention to highlight that the ritual is composed of a series of formalized behaviours that are carried out on regular basis (Giddens 1997; Turner 1969; Wilson 1996). This formalization and regularity also includes an examination of the material elements that are involved (Turner 1969).

The *challada* consists in sprinkling alcoholic drinks and coca leaves around a symbolic hearth lit over aromatic herbs. The purpose of doing this is to propitiate the perpetuation and multiplication of the herd. The first description of this ritual dates from the XVIth Century observed by Spanish conquerors in Peru and Bolivia (Cieza de León 1959[1553]; Manzo and Raviña 1996). In the Puna of North-western Argentina, this ritual has been documented on several ceremonial occasions. Mariscotti (1966) records different events of *challadas* in an important ceremonial context such as the animal marking (*señalada*). This is carried out in August and consists of marking the animals by a cutting a piece from their ears and by inserting coloured wool threads. Similar descriptions are made by Aranguren Paz (1975) also in a *señalada* context, where several *challadas* were made from the beginning of the ceremony (see Vignale de Ardissonne (1948) and Santander (1962). Comparable events take place in Peru and Bolivia, where they are called *tinka* (Nachtigall 1966; Manzo and Raviña 1996), and in northern Chile (Castro and Varela 1994; Dransart 1997).

In general terms, this ritual represents the relationship between people and land through offerings to the earth divinity or Pachamama, particularly between humans and their herded animals (Dransart 1997: 87).

## The herders of Susques

Susques is situated at the transition between the Dry and Salt Puna, in an alluvial terrace at 3600 m.a.s.l., at the confluence of the Susques and Pastos Chicos Rivers in the Puna of Jujuy (North-western Argentina). The environment is arid, with cold and dry weather, and summer precipitation varying between 80 and 200 mm (Yacobaccio, Madero and Malmierca 1998a). In this region herds are composed of llamas (*Lama glama*), goats (*Capra hircus*) and sheep (*Ovis aries*); the former play an important role in the domestic economy. Every domestic unit has herds that oscillate between 30 and 300 animals, the llamas being 43% of the average total. Managing the animals includes using several sectors of the environment, which have different kinds of pasture. In this way, herds and people rotate annually between distinct settlements dispersed in the territory. Herding is the main economic activity in the community, for agriculture is very reduced not being relevant. The llama herds are used for the production of meat and wool, the consumption of these animals being greater than ovicaprids.

## Ritual: the *challada* and the *juires*

In this section we will give a detailed description of the slaughter of a llama, involving the observation of a

*challada* in an everyday sacrificial context. This means that the llama was sacrificed to provide food for both immediate and delayed consumption (i.e. manufacturing *charqui*). It is worth noting that the steps the herders follow to sacrifice and butcher a llama are very similar and patterned (Yacobaccio, Madero y Malmierca 1998a).

This took place in the main house of a herder, in which her son, her daughter-in-law, her youngest daughter and a friend of the family were also engaged. The first step consisted of driving the llamas to the yard. While three members of the family did this task, the herder prepared the *challada*. This involved digging a shallow pit almost in the centre of the enclosure, in which some coca leaves were placed. On a tabular stone placed beside the pit, she lit aromatic herbs (*coba trenzada*, *Artemisia copa*). She put the base of an empty ceramic pot on the hearth. While doing this, she scattered coca leaves around the tabular stone (fig. 1). At the same time, she poured wine into a glass, sprinkling a small amount onto the ground as an offering to the Pachamama. The remaining wine was drunk. These actions were carried out kneeling close to the tabular stone. After this, an animal was chosen for slaughter (in this case it was an adult male). The animal's throat was cut and the blood was poured into a pot. Some of the blood was poured into another small pit near the first one, in which the 'marks' of the animal were left: the wool threads of the ears and the tassel (*pollerita* or *floreo*), which was tied round the base of the llama's neck. Later, the pit was covered with a stone. At the same time, the *challada* continued with the drinking of wine, and sprinkling some of it onto the ground until the bottle was empty. If a pregnant llama is sacrificed, the foetus is also offered and buried in the same pit inside the yard.

These actions took place in the principal house, specifically inside the llama yard, where the pit was dug almost in its centre (it is worth noting that in the region every house has a yard for llamas and another for goats and sheep). The material items involved were coca leaves, the wool marks, the remains of ash from the ritual fire, the ceramic pot and the tabular stone that covered the pit. Occasionally, llama foetuses might be included.

On the festival of St. Anthony (patron of llamas) on 12 June, a *challada* is celebrated, and the wool marks that were buried in the yards during the year are relocated. The spot for doing this is called *juire* (fig. 2). *Juirs* are stone accumulations approximately 60cm high placed near to the houses. Their number can vary from one to three, and each one of them identifies a distinct type of herd. Their meaning is related to the most important event in the pastoralist ritual calendar. The existence of *juirs* in Susques has been recorded since the beginning of the century. Boman (1908 [1991]) states that '...near all Indian huts in the Puna, there exists a species of shrine, the *Kuiri*, which is a mound of stones, many of them white [i.e. constructed with quartz rocks] (fig. 3). This mound is one or two metres in diameter [and] is at a distance of 20 to 30 metres from the house...'. The *Juirs* play a distinctive role in certain important events of the local ritual calendar.



Figure 1. Elements of the *challada*: tabular stone with the symbolic fire and the pot on it. In the foreground, the bottle of wine, glasses, and on the right hand corner the *chuspa* with coca leaves



Figure 2. *Juire* on a terraced level close to the house. Note the wool offerings



Figure 3. *Juire* of quartz stones recorded at Arroyo Chorrillos, San Antonio de los Cobres (Salta)

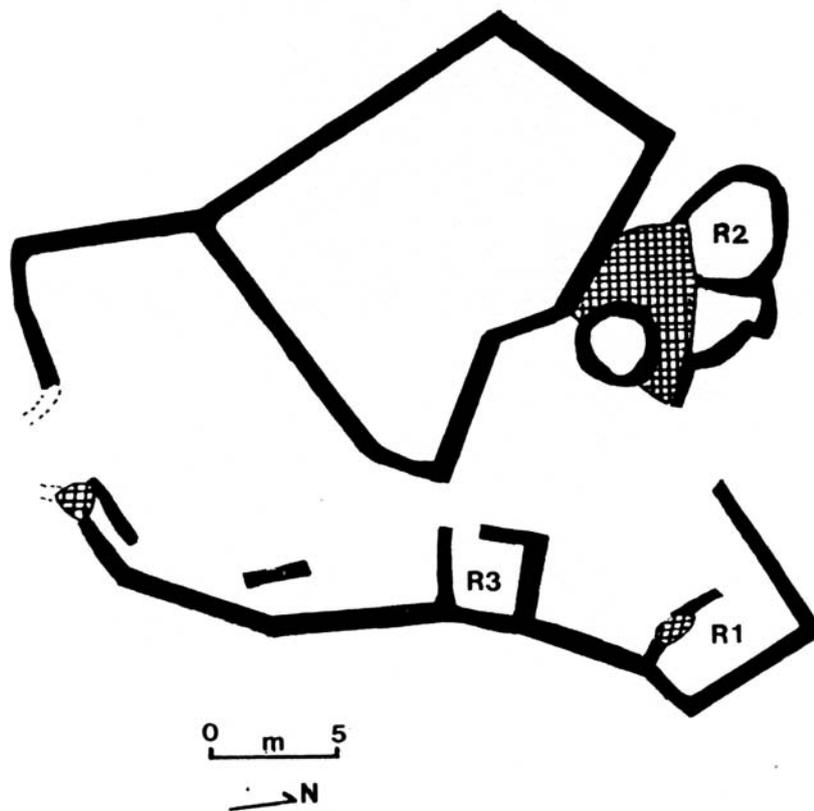


Figure 4. Plan of Puesto Demetria site. The excavation mentioned here is on R1



Figure 5. Small pit inside R1 with the quartz stones

The aim of this ritual is to favour the fecundity of the herd. Moreover at the time of the *señalada* in August, Boman (1991 [1908]) observed ‘the owner [of the flock] asks a relative or a friend to be the godfather [*padrino*] of this ceremony, and invites all his neighbours to take part in the festival, for which he has acquired abundant provisions of coca and chicha...this same day they visit the Kuiri, which is watered with chicha, and coca leaves are tossed over the mound, sometimes fixing to it tassels of red wool and burning coa or cohua...’. Other steps of the ceremony involved inserting pieces of ear cut from the animals into the *juires*.

The archaeological visibility of these ceremonial contexts can be evaluated by taking the spatial location of the rituals into account. The material items include the houses of the herders and the associated yards; as well as material items such as coca leaves, wool, and leather, all of which are subject to differential preservation conditions. The *juires* are sometimes situated inside the settlement near the courtyard, but they can also be adjacent to the houses, in nearby terraces. These stone accumulations have a better archaeological visibility than the material items used in the *challada*.

## Conclusions

It is worth noting that the *challada* is a ritual behaviour not only practised in the scheduled ceremonial calendar, but also as part of everyday ritual events

related to economic aspects. The *juires* are linked to them since they ‘receive’ the products of several *challadas* made during the year. Thus the identification of these rituals in the archaeological record will allow us to obtain a better knowledge of the everyday life of past Andean herders.

However, the possibility of inferring likely contexts related to these ceremonial elements will depend largely on our knowledge about contemporary behavioural contexts in order to establish the degree to which analogy can be profitable. For instance, material elements that are today associated with *challadas* and *juires*, have been found in the same archaeological interactive context. The evidence comes from the excavation of the Puesto Demetria site, situated 5km north of Susques and dated between AD 1253 ( $820 \pm 90$  BP, LP- 345) and AD 1279 ( $760 \pm 60$  BP, Beta 43015) (fig. 4). The location and structural characteristics of the site are comparable to those recorded for current pastoral residential bases. Inside a stone enclosure (R1) white quartz stones, similar to those left today in the *juires*, were recovered, but they were deposited inside two small pits like those dug during the *challada* (fig. 6). Within the pits there were also camelid bones. The quartz stones are not locally available and were brought to the site from several kilometres away.

Whilst we may infer this context as a ceremonial one, we cannot establish a linkage between this event and the complex ceremonies of today because the elements

are arranged in a different way. However, the material elements are the same, so we can speculate that their meaning is concerned with ritual behaviour related to herd conservation. This reasoning may be reinforced by the fact that the archaeological record of the site suggests that a pastoral economy was predominant at that time (Yacobaccio *et al* 1998b). A question to be posed here is whether this is part of the historical trajectory of contemporary ritualistic behaviour related to camelids. In this sense, Berenguer (1995), who studied Taira style rock art dated between AD 600 and 1000-1200, states that it constitutes a manifestation of pastoralist ideology, suggesting that the figures were made following conventions analogous to those found in ceremonies today of herd marking for the propitiation of both animal and human fertility. Thus herd conservation and propitiatory ceremonies conform the core of this 'pastoralist ideology' and could be traced back for hundreds of years, though assuming different structures through time.

The analysis of regional contexts of the South Andes can be profitable for addressing the ritual behaviour of ancient pastoralists, because it permits the use of different lines of evidence, and widening both theoretical and factual frames. The knowledge of the present is useful to increase our understanding about past situations, though, as has already been shown, we should not think that the past variability can be reduced to what is observed in present situations.

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