

Chapter 16

Lightning (*Illapa*) and its Manifestations: *Huacas* and *Ushnus*

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Introduction

Nature's wrath is a recurring and unpredictable reality in the Andes, particularly in the *altiplano* of Peru and Bolivia where electrical storms (*salla*) are frequent as are diluvial rain (*para*), intense wind (*wayra*), destructive hail (*chikchi*), thunder (*sallallaya* or *qhaqya*), and, most violent of all, lightning (*Illapa*) (Gade 1983: 770). Lightning has received widespread religious veneration in the Andes because of its essential qualities and natural association with the heavens. It is still perceived as a manifestation of a vitalising force or animating essence (*enqa* or *sami*), a life force believed to permeate all things. The celestial and climatic forces associated with lightning are central to Andean cosmology in general, and are depicted in the iconography of a number of cultural traditions (Staller and Stross 2013; MacCormack 1991; Urton 1981). Lightning has mythical dimensions in Inca cosmology, so important that Guaman Poma (1980 [1583–1615]: 62, f. 79) included it in the Inca coat of arms (see Plate 16.1).

The importance of lightning to religious thought is related to its celestial qualities, its associations with liquid, light and sound, at once indivisible and unique. Lightning in Andean religious thought represents an absolute manifestation of the heavens that suppresses differences in that even pairs of opposites coincide (Staller and Stross 2013: 18; Sullivan 1988: 32). This explains why it is such a powerful entity and agent of transformation throughout the ancient world. Among the Inca, lightning or *Illapa* was the lord of meteorological phenomena – a polymorphic animating essence, manifested in thunder, rain, hail, rainbows and snow with the ability to penetrate water (Topic *et al.* 2002). The term '*Illapa*' refers to the physical phenomena of thunder and lightning and to lightning bolts.¹ The Inca regarded *Illapa* as the animating essence that controlled thunder, and by extension, all celestial bodies and climatic

forces, particularly rain, hail and rainbows (Rostworowski and Morris 1999: 792; Staller and Stross 2013: 28).

In the context of Inca religious thought, *Illapa* consistently formed part of the group of three named deities, *Viracocha*, *Inti* and *Illapa*. These formed the upper pantheon stated in chronicle sources (Cobo 1892 [1653]: 324–6; Molina 1959 [c.1576]) as participating in the chief seasonal state managed festivals celebrated in Cusco and the empire's regional centres. *Illapa* in Cusco was represented by a faceless gold idol kept in a special sanctuary in the Coricancha Sun temple with idols to *Quilla* the Moon and *Inti* the Sun (Gade 1983: 775). *Illapa* had its own shrine with priests and state lands to support it, as well as individuals designated by tradition to serve as its sacrificial victims (Espinosa Soriano 1988b). Among the Inca, lightning was related to a religious cult called *Catequil* or *Catequilla* (Topic *et al.* 2002).

The sanctification of the natural world and concepts and beliefs surrounding the sacred places or *huacas* are ancient in the Andes. Oracles, *huacas* and divination played a major role in Inca culture in 'interacting' with the natural world and surrounding landscape (Guaman Poma 1980 [1583–1615]; Hyslop 1990; Topic *et al.* 2002; Staller 2006). *Huaca* refers to the sacred and extraordinary, and in the colonial period had reference to humans, objects, places and venerated ancestors among other things (Staller and Stross 2013: 28; Staller 2008: 269–70). Such places were and continue to be venerated through *pagos*, that is, ritual offerings.

Distinct ceremonial centres and modifications of 'sacred places' in the natural environment were the primary focus of religious veneration to *Illapa* (Espinosa Soriano 1988a; Topic *et al.* 2002). Lightning *huacas* have been associated with truncated or stepped platforms surrounded by artificial terraces and often located on hilltops or cliffs, near artificial springs, and sometimes associated caves; some lightning *huacas* were crafting centres associated with the metallurgical arts (Topic

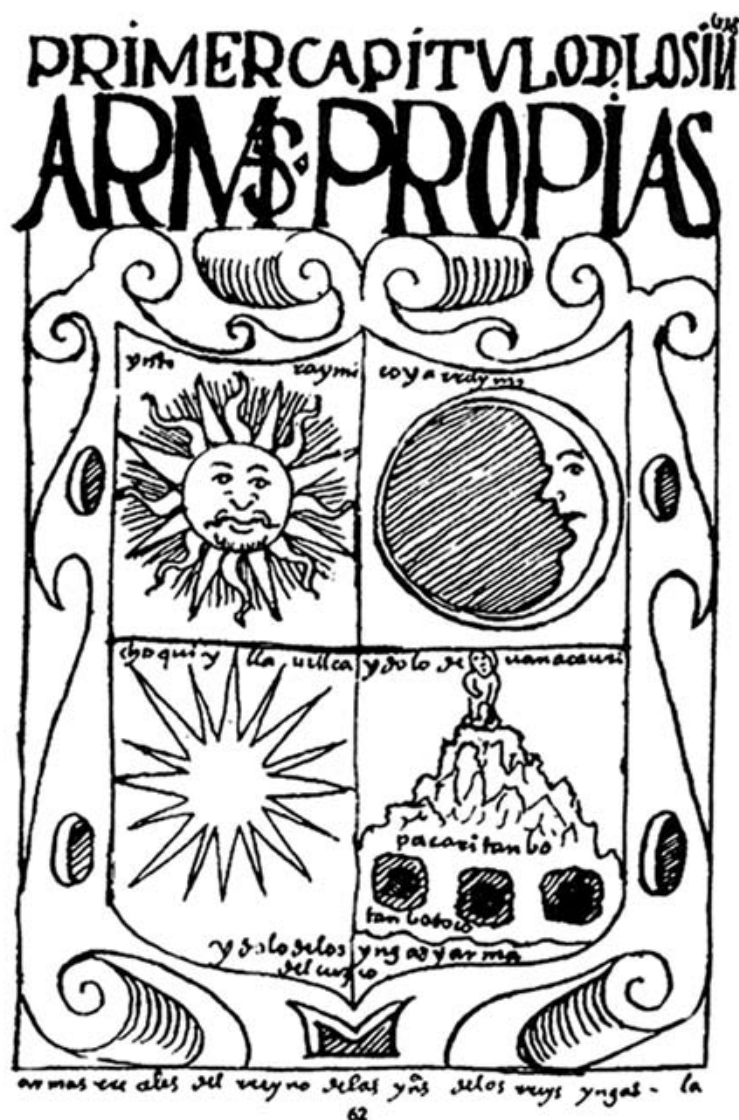


Plate 16.1 *Armas Propias*: Inca coat of arms as depicted by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala including *Inti* the Sun, *Coya* the Moon, *Illapa* (lightning) and *Pacariqtambo*, the site of their mythological origins. Above and below the symbol is written, '*Choqui Ylla Uillca*' ('the noble bolt or gold') in reference to the golden idol without a face (*Choqui Illa Illapa*) kept in the Coricancha (Golden Enclosure) in the imperial capital of Cusco (Guaman Poma 1936 [1583–1615]).

et al. 2002; Staller 2007; Staller and Stross 2013: 101). This chapter discusses the role of lightning in Inca worldviews and how this was manifested in the Andean landscape, focusing on key lightning *huacas* and *ushnus* (Fig. 16.1)

Lightning and creation: principles of an ethical order

According to Inca cosmogony, lightning descended from the creator *Viracocha*, and *Inti* the Sun, and was brother to *Pachamama* (Earth Mother) (Demarest 1981; Sullivan 1985). Some sixteenth-century accounts describe this spirit as a trinity composed of father (*Choqui Illa*) and two twin sons, *Katu Illa* and *Inti Illapa* (Acosta 1962 [1589]: 2210). Hail (*chikchi*) was anthropomorphically endowed with

malevolent terrible knowledge and power, and intimately associated with crop failures and sterility (Valderrama Fernández and Escalante Gutiérrez 1996: 44–5, 156 f. 4).

Incan cosmogony generally perceives ultimate sacred beginnings and origins in terms of emergence from a wild (*purum*) or natural state upon a 'wild' landscape, from mountain summits, hilltops, mountain passes, rock outcrops, caves, lagoons and natural springs (Staller and Stross 2013: 22–6; Sullivan 1985; Urton 1990). Among the Incas and other Quechua- and Aymara-speaking populations, the existing world cycle represented the fourth creation, marked by dynamism and the transformation of the natural world through human action, based upon traditional forms of reciprocity (Sullivan 1985: 104). Creations were separated by three periods of chaos, divinely imposed destructions of unbroken duration that involved conversion into stone, water (deluge and floods) and fire (Pachacuti Yamqui 1950 [1613]: 209–11; Pease 1973:18; Staller and Stross 2013: 22–3).

It is lightning's associations with earthquakes, stone and fire that provide a basis for understanding why it was perceived among some Andean cultures to pertain to earlier epochs preceding the existing world cycle. Many of these concepts were pan-Andean, particularly the mythological emergence from a wild or natural state into the existing creation cycle. Inca cosmogony ultimately involved the creation and/or imposition of an ethical order or civilisation (*camachisqa*) over people (*camachicuna*) and lands (*patachana*) to create *ayni*, that is, balance and reciprocity (Sullivan 1985: 103; Classen 1993: 11). These goals were met by the cultivation of valley bottomlands, constructing terraces, channelling water into agricultural fields along the cordillera, and the modification of sacred places in the managed landscape. Cultural beliefs of four epochs separated by periods of chaos and destruction continued after the Spanish conquest among some indigenous populations, as is evident from the *Huarochiri* manuscript and various chroniclers (Guaman Poma 1980 [1583–1615]; Pachacuti Yamqui 1950 [1613]).

Lightning and Inca cosmology

Inca cosmology is based upon an underlying duality of all life, dialectics of structure and fluidity, right/left (*paña/lloque*), upper/lower (*hanan/hurin*), male/female (*urco/china*), external/internal etc. (Staller 2006: 454; 2008: 278). Divinity was transferred through a certain prescribed sequence that also ordered rather than eliminated the boundaries of the senses as a mirror of the duality embodied in the cosmos that were separate and not interchangeable (Isbell 1985: 305; Classen 1993: 79–80; Staller 2006: 449, 454, 464–5). The conjugal pair (male/female) embodies potential fertility and reproductive capacity of Andean dualism, and the centrality of humans to the cosmos. The symbolic referents extend beyond a structural logic for organising the cosmos or an ideology for social hierarchy, and rather serves as a medium through which the fertility of the natural world is conveyed to the human realm (Staller and Stross 2013: 87–8).

Quechua-speaking Andeans refer to *huacas* as places crucial to the Earth Mother, or *Pachamama*, and to the cosmic order fertilised by ritual offerings and the ultimate masculine energy, the channelling of fluids (Mariscotti de Görlitz 1973; Zuidema, this volume). Lightning brings rain that channels water from mountain summits and penetrates the earth and is thus associated with crop fertility. The channelling of fluids or water down mountain summits and through irrigation canals is metaphorically equivalent to semen, in a sacred conjugal union of *Illapa* and the *Pachamama* (B.J. Isbell 1978: 143; Sullivan 1985: 110).

Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui (1950 [1613]: 266) drew a diagram of Inca cosmology as represented in Coricancha in the imperial capital of Cusco (Plate 16.2). The upper portion depicts a wide array of celestial and meteorological phenomena. The structural and organisational



Figure 16.1 Tahuantinsuyu, the land of the four corners showing the approximate boundary of the Inca Empire and some of the cities, towns, *huacas* and *ushnus* mentioned in this chapter.

properties projected into the sky represent a systematic integration of celestial bodies into solar and ritual cycles with the calendar of activities, an expression of the ethical order of being. A man and a woman occupy the middle of the diagram and represent the focal point, emphasising the centrality of humans to the cosmos, and separating gender-related aspects of the natural and cultural world. On the left, males are represented by the sun, summer, rainbows, lightning, morning star etc., while on the right females are represented by the moon, clouds, winter, spring, evening star, World Tree, felines etc. (Zuidema 1982c: 159; Classen 1993: 21 fig. 2). The underlying principle is to bring *ayni* or balance and harmony from the middle, the symbols of culture (Staller and Stross 2013: 87–9).

The black *Choque-chinchay* cat directly opposite the male lightning and the rainbow is a mythological figure, described as a 'crying' feline representing a harbinger of rain and particularly dark clouds, which usually appear just before a storm.² Pachacuti Yamqui included the cat because it was believed to produce hail and was venerated during different times in the annual cycle in the Coricancha (Classen 1993: 21). Rainbows (*k'uychi*) were a harbinger for hail and lightning, and when visible during thunderstorms were called 'cat of the *apu*' because it controlled lightning,

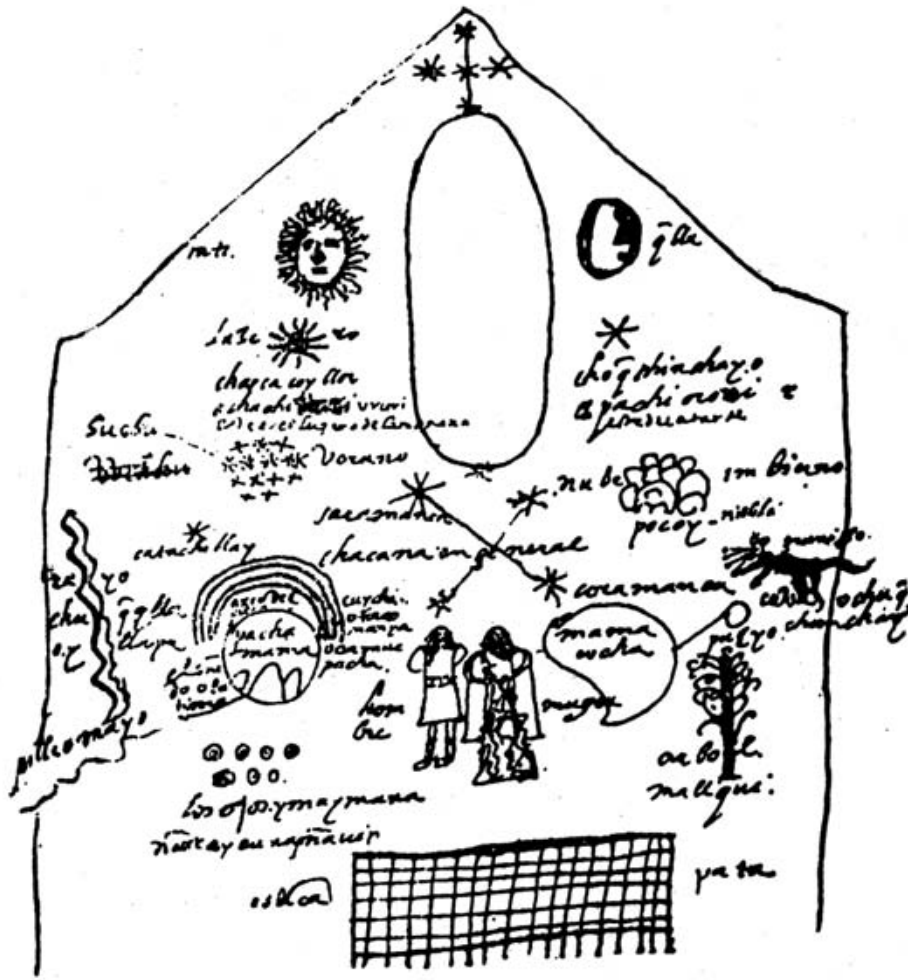


Plate 16.2 Diagram of Inca cosmology in the Coricancha by Pachacuti Yamqui (1950 [1613]).

which strikes down both people and crops (Mishkin 1940: 237). The black cat has metaphorical references to female gender, male lightning and rainbows, and the vertical axis (*axis mundi*) through the transfer of divinity (Classen 1993: 20–22). The Pachacuti Yamqui diagram thus confers lightning with symbolic reference to rainbows, feline imagery, mountain spirits and forces controlling climate and affecting agricultural productivity (Staller and Stross 2013: 92).

R. Tom Zuidema (1980: 331) has emphasised the astronomical, *axis mundi* and conduit functions of *ushnus* (see also Zuidema, this volume). In more remote highland areas, architectural features that emphasise vertical openings or wells in which libations and ritual offerings were made are considered to have represented Inca *ushnus*. Many of these would have had basins and cut stone canals to channel fluids providing spiritual linkages to the landscape, the heavens and the world below (Meddens 1997; Meddens *et al.* 2008).

Andean populations maintain the Inca emphasis of *ushnu* as a vertical opening for channelling fluids into the world below, and to the mountain lords. In Ayacucho, *ushnu* refers to the spirit of the bones of venerated ancestors and is commonly associated with mountains and mountain spirits or *apu* or *wamani* (Meddens *et al.* 2008; Staller 2008: 319). Body/mountain metaphors refer to Inca cosmogony, which equates the circulation of water across the landscape

with that of blood, a symbolic reference to the fertility and fecundity of the earth and humankind (Sullivan 1985). The liquid/water association with landscape and mountains as well as with lightning suggest that lightning had similar links including aspects of ancestor veneration, fictive kinship relations, and connections with the tripartite cosmos. Differences regarding *ushnus* associated with conquered regions of the empire, and those linked to the Inca elite in Cusco, may be more clearly understood with reference to the *hanan/hurin* dichotomy and Inca authority to Quechua speaking and subject populations (Sullivan 1985).

Lightning: celestial, temporal and natural associations

Various celestial and natural phenomena associations are apparent in interrelated symbolism and iconography surrounding rainbows, felines and serpents, underground springs and caves. The intrinsic relationships between light, colour and water are all regarded as manifestations of celestial forces that, by their emergence from the earth, sky or water, establish connections among the tripartite

cosmos (Urton 1981: 93; Staller and Stross 2013: 101–3). Divisions of time are related to divisions of space; among the most obvious examples are seasonal cycles and *ceque* lines that radiated from the Haucaypata, the main plaza in Cusco (Zuidema 1964, 2011a; Urton 1981: 195). Rainy and dry seasons relate to solar cycles as well as to the position of the Milky Way, while periods or phases of the moon determine planting with respect to the position of the sun. This cycle includes associations with variations in the frequency of lightning, which is chiefly coupled with the rainy season that occurs between December and February and are common along the coast, particularly in the *puna* and *altiplano* of the high sierra (Staller and Stross 2013: 64–50).

Chroniclers mention a constellation outlining a man wielding a club in his left hand and a sling in his right symbolising lightning (Acosta 1987 [1589]: 316; Murúa 1922 [1590–1609]: 234; Cobo 1964 [1653]: 160). Among the Inca, *Illapa* was a celestial constellation dressed in shining garments that projected flashes or bolts of lightning when he whirled his sling to bring on the coming rain³ (Cobo 1990 [1653]: 32). The constellation of Orion alluded to *Catequil* with regard to the *Capac Raymi* festival during the winter solstice festival usually around 7 December⁴ (Rostworowski and Morris 1999). Significantly, *Illapa* was venerated during *Capac Raymi* with the rituals and rites focused upon penitence and blood sacrifice (Cobo 1990 [1653]; Zuidema 1992, 2011a). A symbolic association of *Illapa* to lunar cycles and eclipses may be related to the December solstice, which had and has celestial associations to dark cloud constellations, felines, serpents and foxes. Animal familiars link celestial phenomena and mountain summits; fox- and serpent-shaped dark constellations are visible in the centre of the Milky Way during certain points in the rainy season, particularly December through to February (Urton 1985; Magli 2005; Staller and Stross 2013: 103–7). Since meteorological serpents (rainbows/*amarus*) appear principally during the rainy part of the year, they exhibit a seasonal activity cycle similar to periods of the most intense lightning storms in parts of the Andes. The gestation period of the Andean fox (*Lycalopex culpaeus* L.) is governed by lunar cycles, and they reproduce in early December, hence in Andean mythology their association with the lunar cycle and eclipses (Urton 1985).

Lightning is indirectly associated with Inca origin mythology. One of the original mythological Incas hurled sling stones in four directions from the summit of a sacred mountain near Cusco, which struck the surrounding hills so hard they were transformed and ravines (channelling fluids) were created (Betanzos 1996 [1551]: 14). Thus, the valley of Cusco was shaped and transformed (civilised) by sling stones (Urton 1990, 1999). The sling as an instrument was held by the man/constellation symbolising lightning, with sling stones further emphasising this association in their shape resembling hail stones. Indeed the association between small stones of one sort or another and lightning is widespread across South America (Karsten 1926: 372). It is the cultural creation of balance and harmony (*ayni*) in cyclical time that made astronomical calculations, particularly lunar and solar cycles, play such an important

role in worldview and perceptions regarding the inter-relatedness of the cultural and natural world – especially among cultures with agricultural economies (Magli 2005).

Lightning *huacas* and the Inca Empire

The Inca landscape as a whole and the mountains within were metaphorically perceived as a human body (Classen 1993). Lightning was commonly associated with the head as well as mountain summits, cliffs, rock outcrops (*qaqas*), natural springs (*puqyos*), caves (*pacarinas*) and mountain passes (*apachitas*) (Sullivan 1985; Staller 2007). The term ‘*apu Catequil*’ or ‘mountain lord’⁵ has reference to mountain summits. Topic *et al.* (2002: 326) state, ‘*Catequil* or *Catequilla* sites would be associated with hilltops, cliffs, sources of water and offerings of river-rolled stones and *Spondylus* shell’, an assertion consistent with geographic toponyms in northern and central highland Ecuador (Fig. 16.2).

Augustinians and other religious clerics emphasise *Catequil de Huamachuco* as the primary *huaca* associated with *Illapa*, and as being pan-Andean and worshipped from Quito to Cusco (San Pedro 1992 [1560]: 174). *Catequil de Huamachuco* was on a high hill with three large cliffs near San José de Porción (Topic 1992, 1998; Topic *et al.* 2002) (see Fig. 1.2).

Catequil is credited as a mythological hero or founding ancestor who dug out the Indians of Huamachuco from their *pacarina* (San Pedro 1992 [1560]). Seventeenth-century chroniclers mention another *huaca* called *Cati Quillay*, described as an ‘emissary of the Inca’ or given by the Inca emissary to the community of Llacsa Tampa in Huarochiri (Taylor 1987: 293). *Cati Quillay* may represent an Aymara variant of *Catequil*, and like *Catequil de Huamachuco* is described as a *yañca*, or one that could force other *huacas* to ‘talk’ or ‘speak’⁶ (Pease 1973: 18–19; Rostworowski and Morris 1999: 796).

The only other oracle site known to have claimed this power was Pachacamac – the most powerful and influential of all oracles, second only to the Coricancha or Golden Enclosure in magnitude, devotion, authority and richness (Rostworowski and Morris 1999: 793–4). Pachacamac was believed to foresee earthquakes and their intensity, and for this reason was a *yañca*.⁷ Divine rulers (*Sapa Inca*) likewise were believed to have this power (Guaman Poma 1980 [1583–1615]: 235 f. 206).

One of the most important *huacas* dedicated to lightning was *San Catequilla de Pichincha*, located directly at the equator. This hilltop *huaca* is near a series of underground springs between two rivers at 0°00’00” latitude south. The location of *San Catequilla* directly at the equator demonstrates the astronomical importance of such *huacas* in the Inca Empire. Two further *huacas* with *Catequilla* toponyms are found to the east in nearby Cayambe. *San Catequilla de Pichincha* has a large circular earthen platform constructed from fine yellow clay mixed with sling stone inclusions (Staller and Stross 2013: 111–12). Sling stones

have symbolic associations to *Illapa* in Inca mythology and cosmology. José de Acosta states that *Illapa* was portrayed with a sling and a mace (Acosta 1987 [1589]: 316 bk 5, ch. 4), and sling stones have been reported at other *huacas* and *Catequilla* sites along the equator and central and southern highlands (Beorchia Nigris 1985: 35–6).⁸

Inca lightning *huacas* in remote regions were generally located at rock outcrops or centred on large boulders cleft by lightning and walled in to emphasise their sanctity, on high hills, cliffs, near mountain passes, and sources of water, underground springs and/or waterfalls (Arriaga 1968 [1616]: 205–31; San Pedro 1992 [1560]; Reinhard and Ceruti 2010). Associated offerings include gold and silver figurines, *Spondylus/Strombus* shell, sling stones, river-rolled pebbles sometimes covered in ochre, and maize beer (*aqha* or *chicha*) or drinking vessels (*qeros*) (Temme 2000: 130 figs 5g–h). Maize beer or *chicha* is included in rituals surrounding lightning and played numerous roles in the transfer of divinity (Morris 1979, 1993; Staller 2006, 2010). *Illawasi* was a lightning *huaca* in the *puna* of the Huaylas region; ritual offerings to it included camelids, *chicha* and various food crops sacrificed to ensure herd proliferation (Hernández Príncipe 1923 [1621–2]: 27).

One of the most important lightning *huacas* was found on the summit of Porco mountain in highland Bolivia (Cruz 2009: 59). Porco had rich silver deposits, and in the mid-fifteenth century, the Inca ruler Pachacuti Yupanqui is said to have brought hammered sheets of refined silver from Porco to wrap the Temple of the Sun in Cusco⁹ (Platt and Quisbert 2007: 115). The *huaca* on the summit of Porco consists of two platforms demarcated by artificial terraces constructed of fieldstone (Cruz 2009: 59 figs 2–3). These modifications and the association with twinned platforms similar to the mountaintop *ushnu* sites identified in Ayacucho (Meddens *et al.* 2008, 2010; Vivanco Pomacanchari, this volume) suggests that some lightning *huacas* were also *ushnus* or had a direct link with *ushnu* platforms.

All *ushnus* were *huacas*, but not all *huacas* are *ushnus*. Chroniclers mention *ushnus* as characterised by particular architectural features. Many of the *huacas* associated with lightning are described as coupled with truncated platforms and artificial terraces, usually on the summits of hills or cliffs, cut-stone bases, subterranean fountains that channelled fluids, and/or stone pillars or gnomons (Acosta 1962 [1589]; Arriaga 1968 [1621]; Albornoz 1989 [1581–5]; San Pedro 1992 [1560]). The same complex of characteristics is seen as typifying the *ushnu* complex (Hyslop 1990: 69–100). Between 1438 and the Spanish conquest in 1532, the Inca constructed over 100 ceremonial platforms and shrines (*villcas*) on the summits of the highest mountains, some of which were associated with *Catequil* and lightning veneration (Topic *et al.* 2002).

Lightning *ushnus* are referred to and identified by chroniclers; Albornoz in his description of the suppression of the Taqui Onqoy movement of the 1560s centred on Ayacucho repeatedly combines the terms referring to ‘illapa, ushnus’ (Albornoz 1996 [1581–5]) as a separate and specific category among *huacas* centred in an area where a considerable number of high altitude mountaintop *ushnu*

platforms have been identified. This designation of ‘illapa *ushnu*’ is discussed in more detail in Gabriel Ramón Joffre’s chapter in this volume.

Spanish priests ordered the destruction of thousands of *huacas*. In their quest to convert all native religious beliefs to Catholic orthodoxy, the Augustinians were particularly zealous in eradicating religious veneration to *Illapa*. The indigenous peoples transferred such veneration to the cult of Santiago, patron saint of Spain (San Pedro 1992 [1560]; Albornoz 1989 [1581–5]; Topic *et al.* 2002). Thunderbolts were related to Santiago Matamoros or St James the patron saint of war, trade and death in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Santiago was also associated with twins as St James was the twin brother of John the Apostle. Andeans readily adopted Spanish lightning associations to Santiago, whom they called ‘Santiago *Illapa*’ (Staller and Stross 2013: 52–6, 63–5).

During the colonial period, Augustinian and Dominican orders recognised early on the pre-conquest basis of vaguely masked ancient traditions. These missions focused intensely upon eradicating the idolatrous rites and beliefs (e.g. twin births, Albornoz 1989 [1581–5]: 167–8) that had become linked to Santiago. Colonial authorities campaigned to root out these pagan concepts in the seventeenth century, and all forms of native animism were strongly suppressed and punished. Clerics forbade subjects to name their children *Liviac* or even Santiago in the case of babies born during a lightning storm (Arriaga 1968 [1621]: 215; Gade 1983: 779).

Because of the reported importance and primacy of the *huaca* of *Catequil de Huamachucho* the events surrounding its destruction merit discussion. Religious clerics and Spanish chroniclers credit the Incas with its destruction. Juan de Betanzos (1996 [1551]: 250–51) states that Atahualpa spent three months supervising the obliteration of *Catequil’s huaca* and shrine because of a ‘prediction’ by the oracle made to Atahualpa while he ‘consulted’ it during the civil war with Huascar. While Atahualpa reportedly single-mindedly devoted himself to the demolition of this *huaca*, his troops captured his half brother Huascar in Cusco and Pizarro and his ships landed along the Tumbes coast (Staller and Stross 2013: 73–4). Cristóbal de Molina (1968 [1552]) states that Atahualpa destroyed the oracle because it had foreseen the Christian victory. Father Pablo Joseph de Arriaga (1968 [1621]: 200) attributes its destruction to Huascar, who put fire to the *huaca*, but its priests rescued the idol and brought it to Cahuana (modern Cabana, Conchucos) where a shrine was built, which in turn was destroyed by Fray Francisco Cano (Topic *et al.* 2002: 307). Arriaga (1968 [1621]: 200) states that some believed the idol was removed to Tauca (also in Conchucos), where it remains hidden. Fray Juan de San Pedro (1992 [1560]: 177–8) and Betanzos (1987 [1551]: 250) emphasise that the cliff and the hill were burned, while Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1907 [1572]: 176) states it was levelled, portraying it as the elemental battle between supernatural protagonists fire and water – the essential elements associated with lightning. Emphasis on the hill confirms it embodied the vitalising force or *enqa* of the

huaca. Thus, this lightning deity was a significant religious component and aspect of the Inca civil war as well as the subsequent conquest of their empire by the conquistadors.

Encounter at Tumbez: lightning, palace estates and Virgins of the Sun

Inca royal estates and administrative centres frequently appear to have included a house to the *mamaconas* or Virgins of the Sun. An early Spanish encounter with native peoples along the Tumbez coast highlights such connections. Alonso de Molina told Francisco Pizarro of a ‘fortress’ on the Tumbez coast that was very strong and held six or seven stone walls with ‘many riches inside’. Native Andeans were on the beach when Pedro de Candía¹⁰ and the Spaniards landed. When the Lord of Tumbez noted his stature he, ‘begged him to discharge his arquebus’. Upon discharging the weapon, ‘the Indians fell to the ground, others screamed, they judged this Christian as very brave because of his stature and for discharging those shots’. The Lord of Tumbez brought a lion (puma?) and a *tigre* (jaguar), ‘to see if Candia could defend himself from them or they would kill him’ (Cieza de León 1998 [1553]: 112).

They brought them and set them loose on Candia, who, having the arquebus loaded, fired it, and more Indians than before fell to the ground in fright. And without the Indians, the animals came to him as gentle as if they were lambs ... The cacique ordered them returned to where they had been. He asked Candia for the arquebus and poured many cups of their maize wine into the barrel, saying: ‘Take it, drink, since one makes such great noise with you that you are similar to the thunder of the heavens’ (*ibid.*: 112–13).

This greatly impressed the Lord of Tumbez and in his toast, he invoked the life force of *Illapa* (MacCormack 1991: 286; Staller and Stross 2013: 38–45). The deadly power and deafening noise of cannons and arquebuses account for the name ‘*Illapa*’ Andeans gave to these weapons (Cieza de León 1998 [1553]: 114).

This revealing account also emphasises the importance of maize beer (*chicha*) and felines to prehispanic lightning veneration and from it particular associations to the metallurgical arts can be inferred;

[Candia] said that he saw silver vessels and many silversmiths working, and that on some walls of the temple there were gold and silver sheets, and that the women of the Sun ... were very beautiful (*ibid.*: 113–14).

Guaman Poma’s depiction of Pedro de Candia interacting with Huayna Capac in Cusco reinforces a symbolic association of *Illapa* to the metallurgical arts (see Plate 16.3). He

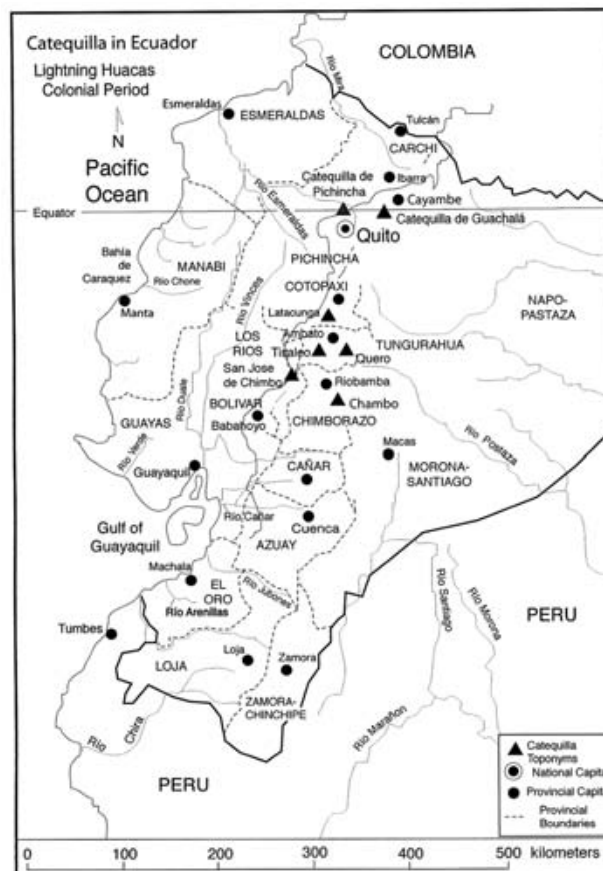


Figure 16.2 Geographic locations in Ecuador with *Catequilla* toponyms. These topographic place names designate locations that were Inca, and in some cases, pre-Inca *huacas* to lightning during the colonial period. They are located primarily in northern highland Ecuador extending south to Riobamba.

depicts the Inca ruler Huayna Capac sitting and holding a plate of gold nuggets beside a plaza in Cusco asking Pedro de Candia, the Spanish conquistador, ‘*comes este oro?*’ (‘do you eat this gold?’). Candia responds, ‘*Este oro comemos*’ (‘this is the gold we eat’). Huayna Capac was said by to have been informed by Inca messengers of the arrival of the Spaniards along the Tumbez coast (Staller and Stross 2013: 45). A stepped or truncated platform appears in a storehouse in the background, and may represent the Cuyusmanco, an *ushnu* or ‘seat of power’, periodically moved into the main plaza (Haucaypata) beside the sugarloaf stone and pillar during certain ceremonial rituals. Below the image Guaman Poma wrote, ‘*en el Cuzco*’. Many lightning *huacas* in the southern cordillera of Ecuador appear to also have operated as craft centres (see Uhle 1922; Saville Marshall 1924; Idrovo-Uriguen 1992, 2000; Rehren and Temme 1994).

Gender and lightning

In the Department of Cusco, indigenous Andeans in Chincheros make gender distinctions between a *rayo* and a *relámpago*: ‘Female lightning’ (‘*rayo*’) is a vertical flash that can reach the ground with lethal potential, whereas



Plate 16.3 *Conquista: Guiana Capac Inga, Candia Español* (Guaman Poma 1936 [1583–1615]: 343).

‘male lightning’ (*relámpago*) is a cloud to cloud flash, thus not as harmful (Urton 1981: 91–2).

According to traditional folklore and legend, female *rayos* or lightning bolts (*intiallapa*) that strike the earth affect pregnant women out in a lightning storm by splitting the womb resulting in twin births or physical deformities such as harelips or cleft palates – presumably empirical indicators of women affected by the animating essence of lightning (Plate 16.4). The traditional culture perception is that bolts or *rayos* enter the womb causing physical deformations as well as twin births. When male twin offspring resulted they were perceived of as transcendence of a binary duality male/female, gender boundary. Seen another way, the *rayo* or female bolt plus female (pregnant) equals male same-sex twins (Staller and Stross 2013: 52–8). Thus, single-sex twins considered ‘divided’ by a thunderbolt have a symbolic significance that a male-female set does not possess (Mariscotti de Görlitz 1978: 366). Only male twins were bestowed special status – as *Illapa huacacuna*, sons

of lightning.¹¹ An individual conceived or born during a thunderstorm was ipso facto a child of lightning and also a candidate for sacrifice in the *capac hucha* rite (Cobo 1990 [1653]: 224). In some regions of the Andes when individuals with the abovementioned abnormalities or male twins died, they would be put into ceramic urns and kept at *Illapa huacas* (Garcilaso de la Vega 1966 [1609]: 76–7; Arriaga 1968 [1621]: 205).

The gender-related perceptions of different kinds of lightning provide a rationale as to why during the Late Horizon and colonial period only male twins or individuals with the aforesaid disfigurements were ascribed special status by the state, and provide an insight into why such male children were *illayoc runa*, that is ‘rich and lucky’. Girl twins or female infants and children with certain deformities were commonly sacrificed in the context of the *capac hucha* rites, and thus bestowed with the status of *huaca* or sacred and extraordinary venerated ancestors (McEwan and van de Guchte 1992: 360; Staller 2008; Staller and Stross 2013:



Plate 16.4 Twin lightning bolts or *rayos* over Otavalo, Ecuador (photo © John E Staller).

57–8). They were usually entombed in a special place providing a symbolic connection between that location and the state (Molina 1959 [1575]: 94; Reinhard 1983a, 1985b; Reinhard and Ceruti 2010). Such sacrifices other than children without blemishes included those born feet first (*chaqpa*), with cleft palates or harelips (*qhaqya sinqa*), head hair (*chaki wawa*) as well as single-sex twins (*Illapa kuri*), who were thought to have been divided by a *rayo* or thunderbolt (Murúa 1922 [1590]: 234; Arriaga 1968 [1616]: 205; Mariscotti de Görlitz 1978: 366; Gade 1983: 776). Ultimately, they had a major role in rank and hierarchy within their moieties (Molina 1959 [c.1575]: 94; Reinhard and Ceruti 2010: 101–2; Staller and Stross 2013).

Summary and conclusion

Inca cosmogony provides a basis for Andean understanding of why many lightning *ushnus* and *huacas* have pre-Inca origins. Lightning has clear symbolic associations with periods of chaos of unbroken duration that separated the four creation cycles of Inca mythology. Intermittent periods of annihilation involving destruction by stone, water, and

fire – all of which have direct or indirect associations to *Illapa* in Inca religious ideology and cosmology – are unfolded in Inca tradition as recounted in the early colonial chronicles. The landscape had metaphorical reference to the human body (*ucu*) where mountain summits represented the head or *uma pacha* which, like *pacha*, also had temporal reference (original time and place), explaining why places and rock outcrops cleft by lightning were sanctified. Lightning is naturally and obviously for the observer seen to be associated with mountaintops, which were conceptualised as the metaphorical human head of the body. *Illapa* also had associations with highland springs (*puqyos*) or the eyes, and with caves (*pacarinas*), the mouth of the world below (*uku pacha*). Sacred places were ‘fed’ through specific kinds of offerings in order to perpetuate the circulation of time and bring forth regeneration and the fertility and fecundity of the earth (Ramírez 2005). The *capac hucha* rites similarly had a close association with *Illapa* and his father *Inti* the Sun and the creator deity. Sons of lightning (*Illapa huacacuna*), as well as children with certain disfigurements, related to an emergence from a wild state and required the imposition of ethical order or civilisation (*camachisqa*). These ideological rationales and their symbolic correlates formed the cultural constructs upon which the symbiotic interdependence between the state and its subjects was

formalised and sanctified, that is, the creation of an ethical order. The relevance of *Illapa* to productive and world creation and apocalyptic cycles – and its malevolence to the fertility of the earth and its potential lethal power, resulting in death and destruction of people and crops, as well as its link with origin, rain and agricultural cycles – reveals why it was such an important and undoubtedly ancient divinity in the Andes.

The evidence suggests *ushnus* such as Vilcashuamán and Huánuco Pampa were *hurin ushnus*, centres that were seats of power generally associated with Inca elite and their administration and organisation of non-Quechua and Aymara populations (Staller 2008: 284–9). *Hanan ushnus* emphasised the channelling of fluids, a fountain, basin or well, from which the Sun and elites drank. Combined with a pillar of gold and notably *Illapa*, this symbolised the *axis mundi* type link between the realms of the ancestors, the living and the *apus*, and the concept of the circulation of sacred essence as controlled by the Inca state. The reference to dead ancestors, stones, fountains and gold suggests that when present-day populations deploy the concept, particularly in relation to mountaintop sites (Escalante and Valderrama, this volume) they may be continuing to emphasise originally Inca-related associations.

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Notes

1. Among the Aymara, '*qhaqya*' as a term signifying the thunder deity is more common than *Illapa* (Sullivan 1996: 184). '*Qhaqya*', is also used by Quechua speakers in southern Peru to refer to a malevolent spirit in lightning. '*Lliwlliy*' (Quechua) and '*qhejsiril*' (Aymara) are two other expressions for this being (Gade 1983: 770). Related synonyms *Liviác* (*Libiác*) or *Choqui Illa* have not survived in Quechua usage (Topic *et al.* 2002: 308).
2. In Andean folklore, pregnant women are advised to stay indoors during lightning storms associated with rainbows, because lightning may cause miscarriages and twin births. Felines are generally associated with the underworld and thus provide a metaphorical connection through the tripartite cosmos (Sullivan 1988). The black cat climbing up the

rainbow is not only a harbinger for hail and lightning, but evokes the underworld connections between bolts that strike bodies of water and pregnant women who give birth to male twins (Gade 1983: 775).

3. This description of celestial lightning and its triadic classification suggests the celestial configuration formed by the stars Alnilam, Saiph and Rigel on the belt of Orion and may provide insight as to why sling stone offerings are sometimes associated with lightning *huacas* (Staller and Stross 2013: 34–8).
4. The existing calendric reference is 25 July, the feast day of Santiago, the patron saint of New Spain or as he is referred to by indigenous populations, Santiago *Illapa*. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is on 8 December and became obligatory in 1845 as a celebration of Mary, the Mother of God, who was born without original sin (Madariaga 1947; Cardinale 1983). Santa Barbara, the patron saint of miners, also has a close association to lightning in some regions of the Andes. Her feast day is 4 December corresponding to the onset of the rainy season and part of the annual cycle when thunderstorms are most intense in the Bolivian *altiplano* (Gade 1983).
5. *Apu Catequil* has overlapping subtexts referencing mountain spirits, thunder and lightning, and 'fathers' as well as founding ancestors, cliff/mountains, rock outcrops, and mountain passes and *apachitas*, often demarcated with crosses (Guaman Poma 1980 [1583–1615]: 236; Albornoz 1989 [1581–5]: 176).
6. *Cati Quillay* was temporarily located in the community of Llacsa Tampo and credited with forcing one of the fictive sons of the oracle at Pachacamac, Llocllay Huancupa, to speak (Topic *et al.* 2002: 307–8).
7. Earthquakes generally follow fault lines and thus would move from one valley to another, an empirical indication that the various *huacas* were 'speaking' to one another through their vitalising force or animating essences (Staller and Stross 2013: 46).
8. Frank Meddens (pers. comm., 2010).
9. The lightning *huaca* on the summit of Porco mountain was symbolically represented by three stones and a lump of pure silver ore, a metaphorical reference to the various triadic classifications associated with *Illapa* and to the *mama* or concentrated fertility (silver ore) of the *huaca* (Platt and Quisbert 2007: 115; see also Cieza de León 2005 [1553]: 386–8).
10. Pedro de Candia, at the time considered one of the largest men in Peru, specialised in the use of firearms. He came to the New World in 1526 as part of the expedition of Governor Pedro de los Rios to Tierra Firme. While in Peru, he took an Inca princess as concubine; their son was a friend of the mestizo chronicler, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (Cieza de León 1998 [1553]: 112 f.).
11. This is because girl infants do not transcend the gender boundary. Folklore has it that when a pregnant woman was believed to have been affected by a bolt or *rayo*, the 'impregnation' by the animating essence of *Illapa* superseded that of the biological father (Gade 1983).