

25 Years Pioneering High Altitude and Glacial Archaeology from the Mountains of Argentina

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Abstract: Glacial archaeology is an emerging field of scientific research, rapidly expanding in Scandinavia, the Alps and North America. And yet its origins are to be found in the Andes of Argentina. Constanza Ceruti is the first woman high altitude archaeologist in history. Her pioneering contributions to this field of research involve having ascended and explored, sometimes solo and unsupported, more than one hundred peaks above 5000 meters in remote corners of the Andes. In 1999, Ceruti codirected the scientific excavations on mount Llullaillaco (6739 m), the highest archaeological site in the world, and co-discovered three extraordinarily preserved frozen mummies, together with an outstanding collection of artifacts from the Inca civilization (currently housed at the Museum of Mountain Archaeology in Salta, Argentina). In recent years, Ceruti has climbed hundreds of mountains in different parts of our planet, to study (from an anthropological perspective) their role in pilgrimage, folklore, popular devotion, mythology, identity and tourism. Her academic production includes more than one hundred scientific papers and twenty-five books on sacred mountains of the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia and Polynesia. A northern hemisphere predominance in anthropology at large, and particularly in high mountain and glacial archaeology (associated also with mobbing and male chauvinism in mountaineering), have led to a lack of proper recognition, not only for her own pioneering career, but for the rightful place of the Andes at the forefront of academic research on the sacred role of mountains in ancient cultures.

Keywords: high-altitude archaeology; glacial archaeology; history of anthropology; sacred mountains; women in Science.

Constanza Ceruti is a high altitude archaeologist who studies the anthropology of sacred mountains. She is a Professor at the Catholic University of Salta, the Director of its Institute of High Mountain Research, and a Research Scholar at the National Council for Scientific Research in Argentina (CONICET). She is the youngest member of the National Academy of Sciences in Buenos Aires (ANCBA). She graduated with a Gold Medal from UBA and got her Ph.D. at UN Cuyo. She has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate at the Moravian College and she is an Emerging Explorer of the National Geographic Society and a Distinguished Lecturer in Anthropology at University of West Georgia. She has received numerous international awards.

INTRODUCTION

Glacial archaeology is an emerging field of scientific research, rapidly expanding in Scandinavia, the Alps and North America. And yet its origins are to be found in the Andes of Argentina.

I am an Argentinean anthropologist and for the past 25 years I have climbed hundreds of mountains in different parts of our planet, to study their role in pilgrimage, folklore, popular devotion, mythology, identity and tourism, thus becoming one of the handful of experts on the symbolic dimension of mountains worldwide. I am also the first woman high altitude archaeologist in history, and for many years, the only one in the field. My pioneering contributions to this new discipline include having ascended and explored, sometimes solo and unsupported, more than one hundred peaks above 5000 meters in remote corners of the Andes. I codirected the scientific excavation of the highest archaeological site in the world and co-discovered three of the best-preserved frozen mummies, together with an extraordinary collection of artifacts from the Inca civilization. I subsequently coordinated the interdisciplinary study of those findings at the Catholic University of Salta (UCASAL), and authored numerous scientific publications.

In this paper I offer an overview of my bibliographic production and I analyze some of the challenges faced while working in the high mountains of the Andes, including issues related to the invisibility of women in Science. I also ponder the impact of my high altitude archaeological research in Argentina -and the worldwide recognition of its results- in the emergence and consolidation of glacial archaeology and the anthropological study of sacred mountains.

HIGH-ALTITUDE ARCHAEOLOGY AS A SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE

Approximately five hundred years ago, the Incas became the first civilization in human history known to have climbed to elevations above 6000 meters for ritual purposes. From the 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 successes at war, the propitiation of the fertility of the crops, or to appease angry spirits that “caused” natural catastrophes (Reinhard and Ceruti 2005). The processions towards the mountains underlines the sacredness of the Andean geography, and served to consolidate the Inca domination on the newly conquered territories.

The first intervention of a professional archaeologist in the extreme mountain environment of South America can be dated back to 1964, with Swiss-argentine archaeologist Juan Schobinger’s rescue mission to retrieve a mummy of a young adult male, accidentally found by climbers on mount El Toro, in western Argentina (Schobinger 1966). It was followed by another expedition to retrieve the frozen body of an Inca boy, unexpectedly discovered by mountaineers on the slopes of Aconcagua in 1985 (Schobinger 2001). Schobinger coordinated

the interdisciplinary study of those two mummies, as well as the study of a female mummy found by treasure hunters on the heights of mount Chuscha in the early 20th century (Schobinger 2004). Juan Schobinger was my mentor when I started exploring the high Andes in 1996, after having completed my studies in anthropology and archaeology at the University of Buenos Aires.

My work has promoted the expansion and consolidation of high altitude archaeology as a systematic field of scientific research, by means of an exhaustive approach to the exploration of the highest summits, and the rigorous academic publication of the observations and inferences that resulted from my ascents (Figure 1). In 1997, I wrote the first book on theory and methods for high altitude archaeology (Ceruti 1998a); two years later, the academic press of the University of Buenos Aires (EUDEBA) published my second book, with my preliminary field observations on more than thirty summits of northern Argentina (Ceruti 1999a). A book on high altitude archaeology in western Argentina was later published by EUCASA, the academic press of UCASAL (Ceruti 2004b). Other books were dedicated to mummy studies (Ceruti 2011) and mountain pilgrimage in the Andes (Ceruti 2013a).

Numerous scientific papers on high altitude archaeology were published after I had surveyed more than one hundred mountains above 5000 meters in the Andes of Argentina (see Ceruti 1997, 1998b, 1999b, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2003b, 2004c, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2012). 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 glacier climbs, active volcanoes and snowcapped peaks (Ceruti 2014b, 2016c).

American anthropologist and National Geographic explorer Johan Reinhard had also explored dozens of mountains in the Andes of Peru and Chile. In 1998 he invited me to join a group of Peruvian archaeologists during a one-month excavation at 5800 meters, inside the crater of mount Misti, an active volcano in Arequipa (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010). Subsequently, we conducted an archaeological mission to rescue the remains of a mummy that had been destroyed by treasure hunters on the summit of mount Quehuar, a dormant volcano above 6000 meters, in northern Argentina (Reinhard and Ceruti 2006). Eventually, Reinhard and I codirected the expedition to the highest archaeological site on earth.

Excavating the highest site in the world and discovering the best preserved ice mummies

In 1999 I codirected the project to the highest archaeological site in the world and I co-discovered three extraordinarily preserved ice mummies. We conducted this research on the summit of mount Lulllaillaco (at 6739 meters) together with Reinhard and a group of students and collaborators. We worked for one month on the volcano and spent two weeks on the top, where we discovered and brought to safety the frozen bodies of three Inca children (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 and Ceruti 2000).

The mummies were buried inside enlarged natural niches in the bedrock, and covered with an artificial platform. A thin layer of permafrost had formed at the most superficial level, but the bodies were entirely surrounded by volcanic ashes that could be gently excavated using

trowels and brushes. A seven-year-old boy was buried in a hyper-flexed seated position. He was wearing a red tunic, leather moccasins, fur anklets, a silver bracelet and a sling wrapped around his head, with his forehead adorned with white feathers. Colloquially known as the Llullaillaco “Maiden”, a fifteen-year-old girl was buried nearby, with her body covered with two brown outer mantles. Her hair was combed in many little braids and a feathered headdress denoted her status as a “chosen woman”-later described by Spanish conquistadors as “Virgins of the Sun”-. The third mummy belonged to a six-year-old child, referred to as “the Lightning Girl”, since her body got hit by lightning while buried. She was wearing a sleeveless dress and a shawl, both kept in place with metal pins, moccasins on her feet and a metal plaque on her forehead (Ceruti 2003a; Reinhard and Ceruti 2010) (Figure 2).

In addition to protecting the frozen mummies from destruction (by treasure hunters, climate change 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 preserved and best documented collections of artifacts from the Inca civilization (Ceruti 2015d). The understanding of the symbolic meaning and social uses of these items was deepened by my analysis of dozens of historical sources including chronicles written by the Spanish conquistadors, manuscripts compiled by the “extirpators of idolatries”, and texts written by Quechua indigenous priests. This detailed ethno-historical investigation led me to publish “Llullaillaco” (Ceruti 2003a), a book on Inca sacrifices and offerings based on evidences collected during scientific archaeological excavations in high altitude. Years later, Reinhard and I co-authored a book on Inca Rituals and Sacred Mountains (Reinhard and Ceruti 2010) (Figures 3a and 3b).

For six years I coordinated the scientific interdisciplinary research on the discoveries from mount Llullaillaco at the Catholic University of Salta (UCASAL), which included DNA studies and hair analysis of the mummies (cf. Wilson *et al.* 2007), radiological exams (Previgliano *et al.* 2003 and 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 prestigious academic journals (Ceruti 2004a, 2014a, 2015b; Wilson *et al.* 2013) (Figure 4).

The MAAM Museum of High Mountain Archaeology, where the Llullaillaco mummies and offerings are currently preserved, is the second most visited cultural institution in my country, while the city of Salta (in northern Argentina) 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.

PIONEERING GLACIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND SACRED MOUNTAIN STUDIES

In 2008 I was invited to lecture at the National Technological University of Trondheim, and I had a chance to join Martin Callanan and other colleagues who were undertaking archaeological surveys in the Norwegian mountains of Dovre. In 2010, I was back in the mountains of Oppland with colleagues from the universities of Trondheim and Oslo (Ceruti 2019a). During the inspection of a high altitude snow patch we came across an iron arrowhead, which dated back to the times of the Vikings. Invited to lecture at the Yukon Institute of Science in 2012, I hiked in the mountains and visited ice-patches near Whitehorse, together with local

residents and Canadian archaeologists Greg Hare and Chris Thomas. In 2014, I joined Leandra Reitmaier and other archaeologists and students from the University of Bern in archaeological surveys of mountain passes in the Swiss Alps (Figure 5).

Originally, these types of projects were described as “high mountain archaeology”, until someone came up with the idea of giving our field of research a more “glamorous” name. During one of the Frozen Past meetings, I witnessed the moment when “glacial archaeology” was voted as an alternative to “ice-patch archaeology”. However, I could not foresee the unexpected consequence of baptizing the emerging subfield: it would no longer be viewed as intrinsically linked to the high altitude research that Juan Schobinger, Johan Reinhard and myself pioneered in the Andes.

At the Congress of Archaeology of the Cryosphere, hosted by the University of Innsbruck in 2016, I analyzed the connections between high altitude and glacial archaeology. I see glacial archaeology as an evolution of high altitude archaeology, adapted to mountain geographies in Scandinavia, the Rockies and the Alps. Both lines of research have been nurtured by early work in the Andes. The dates of published scientific articles show that the majority of alpine and Norwegian colleagues started surveying peaks and glaciers in the XXI century (see Dixon et.al. 2014), more than ten years (and oftentimes, more than twenty years) after the finding of the mummy of the Ice Man of Tyrol. On the other hand, I had already been pioneering groundbreaking archaeological research in the high Andes, during the XXth century, at a time when no other women were dedicated to these activities (Ceruti 2017f).

Although the archaeological findings can be diverse, methodology and techniques are very much the same, as I noticed during field experiences shared in Scandinavia and the Alps. If anything, it is considerably easier now to practice mountain and glacier archaeology than it was before. In the mid nineties, I could not count on the positive image that glacial archaeology has now acquired in the public eye, thanks to the current concerns and awareness about climate issues. As a pioneer, I also had to challenge the skepticism of armchair archaeologists who evaluated my proposals negatively, alleging “low feasibility” for any project involving a woman working on high mountains. And besides, in those days, there was no *Journal of Glacial Archaeology* where I could publish the results of my work.

Environmental challenges are similar in nature, but considerably more difficult to overcome in the Andes, a part of the world where mountains are much higher than most ranges in the world (except the Himalayas), glaciers are equally dangerous but more inaccessible, peaks are located hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest settlement (unlike the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Tatras, etc.) and average temperatures are considerably colder. I worked without access to proper technical equipment, without the assistance of helicopters or the chance of emergency calls. Many times I ended up doing my climbs solo, underequipped and with hardly, if any, institutional support.

The media coverage and worldwide attention sparked by my work and its results was considerable. Just to give an example, two decades ago (in days prior to the expansion of internet), as I was completing a winter hike along the Khumbu valley towards the foot of mount Everest, I was surprised to learn that Tibetan Buddhist lamas in the Himalayan monastery of Tengboche had heard about the frozen Inca mummies of the Andes and were delighted to have a chance to ask questions to one of the discoverers. Our excavation on the summit of mount Lullaillaco has clearly been a turning point in the history of our discipline.

Advancing the anthropological knowledge of sacred mountains

The love of mountains runs in my veins. I am a descendent of people who migrated from the mountains of Italy, Spain, the Basque Country and Switzerland, and I have Native Andean ancestry. Mountain studies are a way to learn about the world, celebrate and preserve its genuine cultural diversity, and honor the memory of our ancestors.

I have always been interested in the role of mountains in pilgrimage, folklore, popular devotion, mythology, identity and tourism. My current research goes beyond archaeology, and it is oriented to cultural and comparative studies of sacred mountains, from an anthropological perspective. My production includes more than a dozen books on the peaks in Ireland (Ceruti 2016a), Scotland (Ceruti 2017a), Norway (Ceruti 2019a), Iceland (Ceruti 2020a), Thailand (Ceruti 2014d), Australia (Ceruti 2016d), Spain (Ceruti 2015a, 2015e, 2018a), Canary Islands (Ceruti 2016g), Italy (Ceruti 2014f), Costa Rica (Ceruti 2015c) and the Andes (Ceruti 2013a). I have also published numerous papers on the religious aspects of mountains in Italy and the Alps (Ceruti 2015f, 2016b, 2016e, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2018b, 2019c, 2019e, 2020b, 2020c, 2020e, 2020f), the Pyrenees (Ceruti 2019d), the Tatras (Ceruti 2018c), Crete (Ceruti 2014e), Croacia (Ceruti 2020d), Polynesia (Ceruti 2014c, 2015g) and the Americas (Ceruti 2008b, 2015h, 2016f, 2018f, 2020g), in addition to contributed chapters and conferences on the matter (Ceruti 2019f, 2019h). My research is based on personal observations gathered on hundreds of mountains ascended, as well as my participation in high altitude pilgrimages, the visit to numerous ethnographic museums and historical monuments, and informal interviews conducted in Spanish, English, and Italian.

My work on sacred mountains of the world has been possible thanks to the multiple academic invitations received, as travelling abroad can be very difficult to afford for a scholar based in Argentina. Frugality and endurance also played a part, since I did not mind hitchhiking or walking to the foot of the peaks I intended to study. I got used to limiting the supplies of groceries to the minimum. I avoided hotels (as much as possible) and restaurants (entirely), and spent countless forgettable nights on airport benches and long distance buses. I was a grateful guest of alpine families, generous colleagues, mountain huts, mountain tents, and occasional student's residencies and religious monasteries. My field notes have been enriched by these treasured anthropological experiences.

The sacred dimension of the Alps was not contemplated in archaeological discussion until I presented a communication about my work on high altitude ritual use of peaks from the Italian-French border to the Dolomites, during a Frozen Past meeting in Innsbruck in 2016. Three years later, during the annual conference of the European Association of Archaeologists at the University of Bern, I coordinated a symposium on the sacred dimension of mountains with two colleagues (from Norway and Switzerland), with more than twenty speakers and about sixty participants.

Additionally, I am aware that current public interest in the symbolic dimension of mountains has been fueled during my twenty-five years of intense teaching and international lecturing (Figure 6), with academic visits to dozens of universities in USA, Europe, Latin America and Australia.

CONSIDERATIONS: CHALLENGES BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

Successfully overcoming the many challenges presented by the mountains has been relatively easier than facing other more painful obstacles along my path. I have been repeatedly targeted and mobbed; some colleagues have tried to discourage my progress, and some of my contributions have been inexcusably silenced. I have addressed these issues extensively in an article in Spanish entitled “Excellence and Violence in Archaeological Practice”, published in the *Journal of Inca Archaeology Haucaypata* (Ceruti 2019b), a contribution that was met with empathic support from Andean archaeologists in Peru. Some of the points discussed in that paper are summarily approached here, in addition to new examples of practices and discourses connected with the perception and representation of Andean high altitude archaeology in the northern hemisphere.

For fourteen years, the Museum of High Altitude Archaeology (MAAM) -specifically inaugurated to house the mummies and artifacts that Reinhard and I excavated on mount Lulllaillaco- inexplicably “forgot” to include my name anywhere in the building. A situation that was aggravated when, without acknowledgment of my authorship, data and information obtained in my scientific research ended up being used extensively in the museum posters and brochures. These unacceptable omissions caused moral damage, affected my professional reputation, and clearly silenced my contributions as a woman scientist (Ceruti 2019b: 122). However, they were largely ignored by the indifferent or complicit silence of many Argentine colleagues. Only after the intervention of a public notary, who certified the injustice of the situation and the perjury it caused me, did the local authorities decide that it was time to include a sign on the internal doors, mentioning the name of the woman co-director of the expedition.

To this day, curious micro-stories are still being told at the local level, which attribute to men born in Salta the clairvoyant indication of the “precise spot” on the top of volcano Lulllaillaco where the mummies were later to be found. These narratives were referred to me by various sources, including mountaineers, campus staff, and university professors, who were unaware of the degree of involvement I personally had in the discovery of the mummies, and intended to educate me about it. In some way, these accounts seem to echo the foundational narratives of the Inca Empire, according to which Manco Capac used “a golden rod” that he bore through the top of the sacred mountain, to show the exact location where the city of Cuzco was meant to be built.

The legitimizing intention of these narratives is quite obvious, as well as its effectiveness in placing male figures in positions of power. Its efficacy is better understood if one takes into account the performance of some climbers invited to the 1999 expedition to mount Lulllaillaco. For personal reasons, many of them chose to go back to Salta after participating in the initial stages of fieldwork including access to the base of the volcano and carrying loads to the high altitude camps. Their decision to return to the city preceded the development of the archaeological excavations at the top of the volcano and coincided with a snowstorm, and the unforeseen need to evacuate a photographer who failed to acclimatize to the altitude. Those who preferred to take advantage of the logistics arranged by Reinhard for the evacuation of the sick photographer returned to the comfort of their homes and did not become part of the unexpected and historic discoveries that took place days later. However, some of them continued to be associated with the discoveries (and credited with scientific

merits), when in fact they were not professional archaeologists at the time of the expedition and were not even present on the mountain when we found the mummies (Ceruti 2019b: 124).

Invisibility has long lasting effects: nearly twenty years after the famous discovery, in a documentary movie about volcano Lullailloco and its mummies, my name was simply not mentioned (not even in the credits at the end). The film-makers chose to feature one of the climbers who had opted to return to the city days before we started excavating on the summit of the volcano. He was presented as “the protagonist of the Lullailloco ordeal”.

More concerning for me at the moment is the current tendency to leave aside the foundational Andean chapter, when the global history of mountain archaeology is addressed by colleagues in the northern hemisphere. An article about the emergence of glacial archaeology published in 2014 failed to refer to my pioneering work in South America, and only briefly mentioned the frozen Inca mummies, misleadingly comparing our scientific excavations on Lullailloco with the accidental finding of the Tyrolean Iceman. I did not think much of it at the time, but the effects are palpable: in a recent conversation with a younger colleague, he reverently referred to “the founding fathers of glacial archaeology”, and I had to remind him that, in truth, there has also been a “founding mother” (or grandmother!) in the genesis of our discipline.

In September 2019, during the yearly conference of the European Association of Archaeology at the University of Bern (Switzerland), the keynote speaker considered that “mountain archaeology was in its infancy”, a clearly erroneous claim that I firmly contested at the end of his speech, pointing out the substantial Andean contributions to high altitude and glacier archaeology. An alternative *ad-hoc* hypothesis of an allegedly “independent evolution of mountain archaeology in Europe” is also incorrect, for reasons already discussed above: firstly, the evidence that published research in the Andes predates the first systematic contributions written by field archaeologists in Europe. Secondly, the fact that I was already a world-renowned and experienced mountain scholar (and an invited lecturer for European and American colleagues and their students) at times when glacial archaeology projects in the northern hemisphere were only starting to shape up. As early as 1997 I presented the initial results of my high altitude archaeological research at the International Congress of Americanistas in Ecuador. In 2001, I communicated my work on frozen mummies at the International Congress of Mummy Studies in Greenland; and a few months later, I was invited by the French Embassy to lecture at the Society of Americanistas in Paris.

Pioneering new fields of research requires unwavering determination to overcome initial resistances. As early as 1994, when I was still a student, I received a handwritten missive from one of the archaeology professors advising me NOT to pursue high-mountain archeology. Despite the innumerable troubles that professional practice has brought me, I am glad that I did not listen to him (it is still curious that this same professor, many years later, had no problem supervising male students who were taking their first steps in this field). In 1996, my access to a research grant was jeopardized, in spite of the fact that I had just graduated from the University of Buenos Aires with the highest grades (9.9) and I was a recipient of the Gold Medal Award. “Animosity against the supervisor” was the alleged motif, which at the time was apparently considered valid: one of the evaluators had sustained a confrontation with Dr. Schobinger in the late sixties, and nobody seemed bothered that my professional future could

be easily compromised as a consequence of an incident that took place years before I was born (Ceruti 2019b: 127).

In the early days, my projects were contested on the grounds of "low feasibility", and while some evaluators at the National Council of Research doubted about a woman's ability to climb mountains, I was back from numerous ascents much more difficult than those foreseen in the original plan. Then came the attempt to undermine my explorations, calling them "sporty" or "touristy" in a context in which almost everything about high mountain archeology was ignored, and in times when glacier archeology had not yet emerged. When the magnitude of the discovery of the Llullaillaco mummies forced many to remain silent, my youth was used to question my ability to coordinate the interdisciplinary research on the materials that we had discovered. By then, at the age of 26, I had already founded a small institute at UCASAL, had written dozens of scientific articles, and was actively collaborating with international colleagues. The results of those studies were published in the Proceedings of the US National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) and in several other prestigious journals.

Johan Reinhard and I unwittingly hold the Guinness World Record for being the professionals who worked at the highest archaeological site in the world, during the co-led expedition and the discoveries on top of Llullaillaco in 1999. I found out about this non-academic recognition when I got an unexpected call from a local radio station, after the Guinness book came out. The fact that the highest site on the planet is located precisely on the summit of Llullaillaco is one of the reasons why this volcano became part of the UNESCO World Heritage list, an aspect that is repeatedly highlighted in the discourse of the colleagues who deal with these matters today. I contributed to confirm this fact by additionally climbing to the top of Aconcagua (6959 m), Pissis (6882 m) and Mercedario (6770 m), documenting the absence of superficial evidences of ancient use on those summits, which are higher in elevation than the top of the aforementioned volcano (cfr. Ceruti 1999a, 2003b and 2009c). However, on the occasion of having referred to the peak of Llullaillaco as the highest archaeological site in the world, an archaeologist who works at sea level, in the pampas of central Argentina, made it known that my statement "sounded presumptuous".

Twenty years later, similarly old-fashioned criticism about "the use of superlatives" has been pointed by a "peer reviewer", whom most likely never codirected excavations above 6500 meters, and certainly did not participate in the 2001 World Congress of Mummy Studies, the scientific event in which the Llullaillaco children were described (by the experts in attendance) as "the best preserved mummies". A subjective, unsubstantiated, vague and slightly insulting review by this "expert" (whom I do not consider my "peer") was used to denigrate a paper that I had submitted by invitation from the editors of a certain journal who claimed that they had an interest in increasing its inclusiveness and diversity.

Mobbing also occurs as a consequence of conflicting interests. From a historical perspective I wonder if some of the obstacles faced nearly twenty years ago, while working in high altitude archaeology in the Andes, were somehow connected to the expansion of mining activities (for which the sacred dimension of mountains revealed by my professional work was "inconvenient"). I also wonder if my surveys in the highlands, as a young independent scholar moved by an idealistic vocation to study the Past, somehow became a nuisance for veteran colleagues with a more earthly interest in conducting well-paid environmental studies. Rivalry between universities has definitely been responsible for many difficulties encountered in Salta

after the discovery of the Llullaillaco mummies. Narratives of invisibility already seem to be at play, working to silence the Andean origins of high altitude archaeology, now that there is growing interest in glacial archaeology (and increasing international support for these kind of projects in Europe and North America).

I take pride in my performance in these first 25 years of my career, as reflected in scientific papers and books published. And yet I realize that academic awards and media attention have not protected me from decades-long forms of bullying, “unconscious biases” and the intentional cancellation of my professional contributions, with the silent complicity of some colleagues and the clear benefit of others. The extent of the undeserved resistance encountered at this point in my career (of which only the tip of the iceberg is visible here), makes me wonder about the unnecessary suffering of younger colleagues, which must be unfathomable. Canadian Emeritus professor, Dr. Ken Westhues, author of the book “The Envy of Excellence”, has studied mobbing in academia for decades and he affirms that moral harassment can have devastating effects in the life of the professionals that are targeted, not unlike those suffered by veterans of war and war prisoners-.

I believe it is time to become aware of the mobbing and biases that taint the praxis in so many academic spaces, pushing scholars to undeserved ostracism. Nobody should be instigated to commit “academic suicide”. And yet I am aware of at least five colleagues whose careers (and livelihoods) have been severely affected for this very reason. Professional jealousy and conflicting interests should not be allowed to conspire, unnecessarily and unjustly, against meritorious contributions to the advancement of our professions. The purpose of the examples offered above is to invite reflection on these delicate matters which affect the current and future praxis of disciplines such as high altitude and glacial archaeology.

In a book entitled “*Antropólogas de la Gran Puna*”, published recently by the academic press of the Catholic University of Salta (EUCASA), I have compiled the memories of women anthropologists who have worked in remote corners of northern Argentina, contributing to forge and consolidate Andean studies in archaeology, anthropology, ethnography and rock art (Ceruti 2020h). In the preface, readers are welcomed to enter a metaphoric “cabaret of neurons”: witnessing the testimonies of the accomplishments attained (and hardships endured) by women anthropologist and archaeologists, in their own voices, seems to be still somewhat “scandalous” for many scholars in our profession.

We could begin a positive “change in climate” by celebrating professional trajectories more openly in humanities, just as they are acknowledged in other fields of sciences, where more attention is paid towards inspiring the younger generations. This will also enhance the appreciation of our fields of research in the eyes of the international scientific community, and the public in general.

CONCLUSIONS

My pioneering contributions to high altitude archaeology involve having ascended and explored, sometimes solo and unsupported, more than one hundred peaks above 5000 meters in remote corners of the Andes. In 1999, I codirected (with Johan Reinhard) the scientific excavations on mount Llullaillaco (6739 m), the highest archaeological site in the world, and

co-discovered three extraordinarily preserved frozen mummies, together with an outstanding collection of artifacts from the Inca civilization.

In recent years, I have climbed hundreds of mountains in different parts of our planet, to study (from an anthropological perspective) their role in pilgrimage, folklore, popular devotion, mythology, identity and tourism. My academic production includes twenty-five books on sacred mountains of the Americas, Costa Rica, Easter Island, Norway, Ireland, Scotland, Thailand, Australia, Spain, Canary Islands, among others. I also published numerous papers on the symbolic dimension of mountains in the Andes, the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Tatras, Crete and Polynesia.

This journey essay has summarized my bibliographic production and described some of the challenges faced during my work in the high mountains of the Andes, including issues related to mobbing and the invisibility of women in Science. The impact of high altitude archaeological research in Argentina -and the worldwide recognition of its results- has also been pondered in the context of the emergence and consolidation of glacial archaeology.

By the time I co-discovered the mummies from mount Lullllaillaco in 1999, I had already surveyed more than fifty mountains above 5000 meters in the Andes. Those early contributions -that predate most systematic archaeological fieldwork on mountains of Europe, Africa, Asia and North America- have been fundamental to the consolidation of glacial archaeology, and they should earn Andean high-altitude archaeology its rightful place in the world history of the archaeology of mountains.

In as much as I am proud of my own contributions, I remain humbled by the power of the mountains and thankful those who accompany me, from the past, now and into the future. But I remain concerned that my experiences reflect a type of chauvinism in high altitude anthropology and glacial archaeology, perhaps stemming in part from perceived male dominance in mountaineering in general. In addition, I believe that predominance of northern hemisphere academic concerns at large, and in anthropology in particular, may be contributing to a failure to acknowledge Andean primacy in recognizing the sacred role of mountains for ancient cultures.

As is true for so many disciplines, it is time for the “cabaret of neurons” whereby the achievements of women working in male-dominated fields, come out from the shadows and be recognized as “high art” in and of itself. It is the love of my life, a birthright that I carry in my blood, that keeps me studying, ascending, exploring, discovering and embracing the world’s high mountain peaks. I would cherish a new birth for the recognition of women, and of the Southern hemisphere excellence, in this great undertaking.

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