How St. Bartholomew Became a Ñak’aq: Representations of Ñak’aq-Slaughterers and the Church in Quechua Oral Narratives

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This article examines the socio-historical contexts which have influenced the construction of the Ñak’aq-slaughterer character within the colonial and contemporary Quechua oral tradition. The malevolent Ñak’aq is one of many characters in this tradition who transitions from entertaining plots into a very real source of fear in the everyday lives of indigenous Andeans. In these narratives, references to particular geographic spaces or members of the local clergy foreshadow the imminent appearance of a Ñak’aq-slaughterer and the resultant dangers for indigenous protagonists. In order to recognize the aesthetic, semantic, and practical implications of these religious and geographical allusions, this article provides a close reading of the Ñak’aq narrative “How St. Bartholomew Became a Ñak’aq.” An analysis of Quechua verbal aesthetics, performance techniques, and rhetorical devices offers insight into the culture’s ritual practices, values, fears, oral traditions, and histories.

The Quechua oral tradition boasts a colorful cast of malevolent characters whose powers intervene in the lives of humans and fictive characters in dangerous and even fatal ways. One of these characters is the Ñak’aq, also known as lik’ichiri, garisiri, or qariqari in Bolivia, or the pishtaco in some regions of Perú and Ecuador. The Ñak’aq is almost exclusively represented as male and narrators often describe him as a pale stranger who appears to be either a foreigner or a mestizo. In the
southern Peruvian district of Chinchero, he is often dressed in the
dark-colored, coarse woolen robes of a Franciscan priest (Morote Best
1988:159; Mostajo 1952:175-177). The ñak’aq wanders across the hills
and mountains surrounding rural villages and waits for an encounter
with lone, indigenous travelers so that he might attack them with a magi-
cal powder that lulls them to sleep and allows the assailant to suck out
his victims’ life-sustaining fat, wirá (Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, per-
sonal communication, ; Mannheim and Van Vleet 1998:341; Quijada
Jara 1958:101). Many narrators explain that the ñak’aq fabricates this
paralyzing powder by grinding up the bones of the dead which he col-
lects from local graveyards and hospitals. Indigenous fat is usually ex-
tracted with a large knife, though in some ñak’aq narratives the assailant
uses a small, black machine imported from abroad (Gose 1986:308).

Quechua narrators explain that the ñak’aq enriches himself
by selling this fat to priests who use it to improve the acoustics of
their church bells. Priests are also believed to be involved in the
profitable export of human fat to Lima, the United States, and
Europe for use in the fabrication of medicines designed to treat
foreigners’ diseases and for the lubrication of machines such as
planes, tractors, or spaceships (Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, personal
communication, ; Quispe Quispe, personal communication, ;
Larouche 1981:88; Oliver-Smith 1969:363, 366). Ñak’aqs are also
accused of participating in government plots to export indigenous fat
in exchange for a reduction of the national debt (Ansión 1989:125).

In 200? the Quechua narrator Grimaldo Quillahuamán Cusihuamán
described the ñak’aq to me in the following manner:

Ari chay ñak’aq qharipis kan warmipis kan, chiqaq ñak’-
aqqa kan. Tutapi purinku—maymanchá. Muhuynin- man
chinkayunku. Ahá, purinku, tawa kinsa hurasta purinku,
chay hurasta runakunata maskhanku—sallqapi, chakra-
pipis, otaq maypi runakuna kanku. Qhawakacha- yuspa
purinku—ñak’aq paqpa larukunapi paqayukunku. Chay
paqpaq k’uchuchamanttas qhawayunku samayu- kunku.

Chaytaq mana allinta risakunan karan, maypis puñuytaya
saqisunkikuman. Kaypi wañuwaq, chay k’uchuchapi
panpapi puñupuwaq risakunaqtin riki. Chaypaqsi apa-
kunku pantiyunnantas allin allpata, apakunku tulluta,
apamunku nispa. Ñut’uchata kutanku pulvurata ch’isipi chaywansi phukuyusuñkiku—ançhaykunapi k’anchan ch’aska ch’aska.

Yes, there are female ñak’aq just as there are male ñak’aq, it is true that the ñak’aq exist. They walk by night—where might they go? Over yonder [signals to the north with his hand] they are lost in the sallqa, just beyond the limits of the community’s fields. Yes, they walk, at four, three [in the morning]. They walk at that hour in search of runakuna—in the fields, or wherever runakuna are found. Always looking around they walk—underneath the edges of the maguey cactus the ñak’aq hide themselves. They say that from that edge of that maguey they watch and they rest.

And then they say evil prayers and [the ñak’aq] leave you asleep in any old place. There you would die, in that little corner on the ground, you would remain forever asleep, because of their prayers of course. They say that this is why they bring fine dirt from the cemetery, they bring bones, it is said that this is what they bring. They finely grind the [cemetery] dust and soon after dark, it is said that they blow this [dust] towards you—in those places where bright stars shine.

Sinister and intriguing, the ñak’aq is one of many characters in the Quechua oral tradition who transitions from entertaining, albeit frightening, plots into a very real, source of fear in the everyday lives of many Quechua agropastoralists (runakuna). In contrast to the fantastic beings that populate other literary traditions, for the runakuna of the Southern Andes a ñak’aq can inflict pain and cause mortal chaos within the world of the imagination, as well as in their daily lives. Not surprisingly then, narrators assert that their performances of ñak’aq narratives serve to both entertain audiences and to deliver them cautionary lessons.

In order to foreshadow grave danger for indigenous protagonists, Quechua narrators refer to particular geographic spaces surrounding their communities or to certain individuals, places, and accoutrements associated with the Catholic Church. To highlight the aesthetic and semantic implications of these religious and geographical allusions, this article analyzes the ways in which Quechua narrators use particular
linguistic and symbolic constructions and intertextual references to develop the ſak’aq character. This analysis also takes into account the performative context of the oral narrative, together with the pertinent socio-historical and cultural references that inform character construction, certain plot elements, and a narrator’s lexical and syntactic choices.

Following a brief description of some of the forms and functions of contemporary Quechua oral narratives, the remainder of this article is divided into two sections. The first describes two of the ſak’aq’s most salient attributes, the theft of indigenous body fat and the use of magical powders as a weapon. In an effort to better understand the possible socio-historical origins of these traits, as well as the ſak’aq’s association with hospitals and the clergy, this section draws connections between chronicles of ſak’aq-like beings and behaviors in the pre-colonial Andes and in medieval and renaissance Europe. Section two presents a transcription, translation and close reading of a contemporary ſak’aq narrative performed in the district of Chinchero, Perú and entitled ‘‘How St. Bartholomew Became a ſak’aq’’ (San Bartolomé ſak’aqmán tukupun). The analysis of this narrative considers its performative context, as well as the semantic particularities of specific passages and the socio-historical referents of various plot elements and character constructions.

My analysis of this ſak’aq narrative is based on a version taped within the context of a specific conversation held in Ch’akalqocha, Chinchero, in May 2007. Located at more than 3,700 meters (12,139 feet) above sea level, Chinchero is well-known for its vibrant Sunday market where tour buses headed towards the Sacred Valley briefly stop in order to allow tourists to buy craftwork; watch Quechua women weave textiles on backstrap looms; and visit the town’s Inca ruins, small archeological museum, and intricately decorated colonial church. The community of Ch’akalqocha lies across the highway from the town of Chinchero and can be reached on footpaths in about a twenty-minute walk. While carrying out fieldwork in the community of Ch’akalqocha as part of a study of the region’s Quechua oral narratives (August-November, 2005 and May-June, 2007), I spent scores of enjoyable hours listening to the performances of Grimaldo Quillahuamán Cusihuamán
and his wife Rosa Quispe Quispe (for an analysis of several of Rosa’s narratives see Krögel 2009). Grimaldo is a monolingual Quechua speaker and a farmer, retired traveling merchant and respected narrator (yuyaq tayta). His narratives generally focus on sociopolitical themes such as his community’s participation in resisting the abuses of local clergy and hacienda owners, as well as their cooperation in the 1960s land reform uprisings led by the indigenous (campesino) rights activist Hugo Blanco Galdos. Grimaldo is also well-known in the community for his entertaining and often frightening characterizations of malevolent priest and ñak’aq characters. In these performances, the ñak’aq’s greedy machinations and unsavory pacts with clergy demonstrate the danger of becoming involved with certain sectors and spaces of contemporary Andean society that lie beyond the boundaries of Ch’akalqocha.

My analysis of “How St. Bartholomew Became a Ñak’aq” demonstrates the ways in which constructions of the ñak’aq character serve to reinforce and disseminate the importance of certain ayllu customs while concomitantly denouncing the unjust treatment of runakuna by non-indigenous institutions and individuals such as the clergy, the army, physicians, or government officials. In the narratives performed in the Southern Andes, ñak’aq characters never attack runakuna within the community’s space of the llaqta (land on which ayllu members construct their homes) or in their agricultural fields (chacrakuna). Instead, ñaq attacks materialize in urban spaces, near Catholic churches or within the uncultivated, savage space of the sallqa (Isbell 1985:89-97; Bolín 1998:102-105; Arnold and de Dios Yapita Moya 1992:10). In this way, cities, churches and the sallqa come to represent portions of the Andean landscape in which family and community members can no longer intervene to protect vulnerable runakuna from the violence committed against individuals and the ayllu’s values and customs. By representing the negative consequences suffered by those who stray too far from the physical and cultural boundaries of the ayllu, ñak’aq narratives serve as a vehicle for the continuous (re)construction of ayllu members’ identities in opposition to the perceived dangers emanating from beyond the community’s borders.
Some Forms and Functions of Quechua Oral Narrative (willakuy)

In the community of Ch’akalqocha, Chinchero, narrators use the noun willakuy to describe narrative representations performed in specific contexts and which recur not only to verbal creativity, but also to the use of physical gestures, sound effects and audience participation. Formed by adding the inchoative infix /-ri-/ to the infinitive willay (to tell/recount) a speaker implies that the action of recounting a narrative is begun with care; in Ch’akalqocha, Quechua speakers use this verb willariy to describe the act of performing a willakuy. Although terms such as oral narrative and verbal art adequately reflect the concept of a willakuy, I will avoid using expressions such as story, tale, or folktale in this article since they suggest that the narratives are characterized by an exclusively fictional quality which neither the narrators nor the Quechua audience of a willakuy would assume. Likewise, in the following pages the word “character” refers not only to fictional actors but also to the neighbors, family members, clergymen, or other individuals who may appear both in willakuy plots and in the daily lives of audience members.

In Ch’akalqocha, narrators often perform their willakuykuna in response to a conversation between family or ayllu members and which relates to specific socio-cultural, political, or historical contexts. Thus a willakuy may be performed in dozens of different versions since narrators craft each performance in response to context specific needs and interests. Narrators affirm that their willakuykuna serve a didactic function (expressed by the transitive verb yuyarinapaq), and that these narratives can best achieve this function through the creation of plots and characters who frighten (q’aqchanapaq) an audience into a critical awareness of their surroundings (personal communication, Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, 2007 and Quispe Quispe, 2007). Q’aqchanapaq literally signifies “in order to frighten” while yuyarinapaq means “in order to remind.” Narrators from Ch’akalqocha affirm that a good willakuy (allin willakuy) involving malevolent characters should engross the audience (often through a frightening plot) and also present new information or critical perspectives that relate to the historic or fu-
ture well-being of the ayllu (personal communication, Quillahuamán Cusihuaman, 2007; and Quispe Quispe, 2007). Since an existing willakuy can be reshaped or altered to fit a particular situation, narrators may decide whether or not to emphasize didactic, critical, or fear-inspiring plot elements (personal communication, Rosa Quispe Quispe, 2007; Grimaldo Quillahuamán Cusihuaman, 2007; and Nieves Quispe 2005).

Stolen Fat and Paralyzing Powders: Historical Traces of the Ñak’aq Character in European and Andean Contexts

Given the lack of a written record of pre-Colombian Andean societies, it is difficult to trace the origin of the ñak’aq character and his distinctive attributes. Yet like many of the characters in this tradition, it appears that the contemporary ñak’aq’s traits reflect a syncretic amalgam of Andean and Iberian oral traditions and lived experiences. The two key substances associated with the contemporary ñak’aq character—magical powders and human fat—were also described as the tools of the witches, healers (“wise women”), and physicians of medieval and renaissance Europe and as the weapons of ñak’aq-like beings detailed in colonial Andean chronicles.

In Pablo José Arriaga’s La extirpación de la idolatría en el Pirú (“The Extermination of Idolatry in Perú”) (the Jesuit “extirpator of idolatries” gives an account of a ñak’aq-like being known as a cauco o runapmícuc (“human-eater”): “They are these Cauchos, or Runapmícuc, as they call them, that means he who eats men, a type of witch that has killed many people, especially young men” (Arriaga 1920: ch. III, 39). Citing the experiences of his colleague Francisco de Ávila, Arriaga asserts that gathering information on the cauchos is extremely difficult “. . . because of the great secrecy that they [the Quechua informants] maintain amongst themselves and because all of the Indians greatly fear these said [beings]” (ibid., p. 39). Yet Arriaga proudly reports that the intrepid Ávila eventually received a full and trustworthy account of the vampire-like beings. His description resembles both medieval accounts of European witch Sabbats and paedophagy, as well as contemporary Quechua portrayals of the ñak’aq.
They enter scattering some dust [made] from the bones of the dead that they have concocted for this very purpose and prepared with bits of I don’t know what things and words, and with this they put to sleep all who are in the house to such an effect that neither person nor animal in all of the house shall stir, nor do they feel anything; and in this way they approach the person whom they wish to kill and with a fingernail they extract a little bit of blood from any part of the body and from there they suck out all that they can, and for this reason in their language they also call this sort of Witch “the ones who suck” (ibid., p. 40).  

Resembling accusations against witches in medieval and renaissance Europe (and differing from the solitary ñak’aq character), Arriaga’s account of the cauchos includes descriptions of group attacks, sordid cannibalistic banquets, and widespread paedophagy (ibid., pp. 40-41). Yet like both the contemporary portrayals of the ñak’aq and descriptions of medieval and renaissance witch spells, Arriaga affirms that the cauchos’ victims do not die immediately since, “the effect is, that the person who has been sucked [faces] his death within two or three days” (ibid., p. 40).  

Although contemporary descriptions of the ñak’aq character as a profit-driven trafficker of human fat might seem like a bizarre plot element, manuscripts from both the colonial Andes and medieval and renaissance Europe suggest that fat was valued as both a medicinal and a ritual substance (frequently used in the form of oil). For example, in Primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno (The First New Chronicle and Good Government) Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980:ch. XII, 247, 248, 251) disapprovingly describes the ritual use of human fat sebo de persona by witches (hichezeros) who used it to prepare magical concoctions that could harm the Incas’ enemies. In Bernabé Cobo’s (1895: ch. XXII, XXXV, 83, 135, 143) Historia del nuevo mundo (History of the New World), the Jesuit chronicler also asserts that Incan ritual specialists used human fat to grease the faces of sacred idols and the embalmed bodies of deceased Incan rulers, while alpaca or llama fat (sebo) was utilized for divinatory rituals of less importance.  

Proceedings from witch trials held throughout medieval and renaissance Europe also include accusations against women and men who allegedly manipulated and
cursed their victims with deadly powders and unguents (supposedly made from the fat of child victims) (Tucker 1980:74; Russell 1972:183). For example, in the proceedings from a witch trial led by the archbishop of Toulouse in 1335, two women are accused of making powdered poisons and malicious ointments from the hair, nails, and fat extracted from dead bodies exhumed from local cemeteries and collected from hanged criminals at the local gallows (Russell 1972:181-183).

New and Old World inquisitors and the colonial extirpators of idolatry frequently accused locally respected healers and herbalists of designing deadly curses and consorting with the devil (Silverblatt 1987:174-175; Michelet 1987:123-127; Tucker 1980:72). Yet as we have seen, colonial Andean sources also refer to pre-conquest uses of mysterious powders and fat from unsavory provenances. What might have inspired these similar references? Brief glimpses into the medicine chests of medieval and renaissance apothecaries and the remedy satchels of healers in Europe and Incan Perú offer us an important clue. Manuscripts from both colonial Perú and medieval and renaissance Europe reveal healers’ dependence on fat-derived ointments and powdered medicines for creating their remedies. Thus, in the stressful and confusing context of the conquest, extirpation of idolatries, and the Inquisition it is not surprising that the mysterious power of these powders and fatty unguents would become associated with violence carried out against Indians by strangers.

Cristóbal de Molina’s *Fábulas y mitos de los Incas* (Fables and Myths of the Incas) reveals that in the decades immediately following the conquest, indigenous Andeans did express a very real fear of being attacked by fat-thieving Spaniards. Molina’s knowledge of the Quechua language and his work as a parish priest at Cuzco’s Hospital de Naturales (Hospital for Natives) placed him in a unique position to hear the testimonials of patients who attributed their ailments to ñak’aq attacks. Molina briefly explains the fears expressed by indigenous Andeans of sixteenth century Perú within the context of the widespread indigenous millenarian uprisings known as Taqui Onqoy (“The Singing Sickness”):
In the year seventy-one it was held and believed by the Indians that from Spain they had sent to this Kingdom for the Indian’s fat, in order to cure a certain illness for which no other medicine was found but this fat (*unto*); for this reason, in those times the Indians were quite wary and they kept away from the Spaniards to such a degree that they didn’t want to take firewood, hay and other things to the house of a Spaniard, saying they didn’t want them to kill them, there inside, in order to extract the fat. (Molina 1989:129)

This passage suggests that just thirty-two years after Atahualpa’s first meeting with Pizarro, indigenous narratives (mediated here by the priest Molina) already expressed themes of the violent danger associated with outside institutions and individuals seeking to harm the integrity and well-being of the indigenous *ayllu* (Morote Best 1988:167; Gose 1986:305).

Thus, in both Europe and the Andes, centuries of oral and written narratives describe healers and witches who cross-contaminate dead and living bodies as they seek either to cure or infect. In the Andes, the ñak’aq character and the seventeenth century caucho cause harm by blowing magical dust and sucking out the fat of their victims. They use the dried bones of the deceased to extract living victims’ humid fat and radically speed-up the disintegration a living body. It is no wonder then, that indigenous patients greatly feared the humoralistic therapies of greasy unguents, dusty powders, sucking leeches, and cupping glasses (*ventosa*) administered in the newly founded hospitals throughout colonial Perú would have inspired great fear among indigenous patients. The fact that religious orders founded the vast majority of hospitals in the Cuzco region and throughout the Spanish empire explains the close association between the characters of the ñak’aq’una and priests in contemporary Quechua oral narratives (Foster 1987:363; Tibesar 1991). Five hundred years after the founding of Cuzco’s first hospital by a religious order, Quechua narrators in southern Perú continue to perform willakuykuna featuring sinister pacts between priests and ñakaq’una who wield magical powders and traffic in the fat of indigenous victims (Morote Best 1988:168-174).
Many of the willakuykuna performed in the community of Ch’akalqocha feature malevolent characters: lay’qa, “witches,” condénado, “condemned souls,” and ñak’aqkuna who are involved in evil dealings with local clergymen. The narrative known in Ch’akalqocha as “San Bartulmé ñak’aqman tukupun” (“How St. Bartholomew Became a Nak’aq”) serves as interesting example of the ways in which Quechua narrators creatively integrate aspects of Catholic hagiography and ritual with expressions of an Andean cosmovision and notions of the sacred. The plot of “How St. Bartholomew Became a Nak’aq” centers on a commonly held belief in the Cuzco region, namely, that ñakaqkuna and local priests are involved in the trafficking of indigenous fat. According to local lore, the ñak’aq rob runakuna of their fat and then spirit away their plunder to the Convent of Santo Domingo where some of the most powerful priests in the department of Cuzco purchase the stolen wira. Grimaldo Quillahuamán Cusihuamán performs a version of this willakuy that, like many of the oral narratives told in Ch’akalqocha, emphasizes the aspect of predestination associated with ñak’aq encounters. In order to capture and hold the attention of his audience, Grimaldo uses physical gestures, sound effects, and the creation of parallel structures and repetition to emphasize key concepts and criticisms. An analysis of Grimaldo’s verbal gestures—his use of particular verbal tenses or shifts in the semantic implications of Spanish words with religious referents and connotations—highlights Quechua aesthetic preferences, narrative techniques, and clever criticisms of authority.

Grimaldo performed the narrative transcribed below within the context of a conversation about life in Chinchero during the 1950s, before both the Agrarian Reform of 1968 during Juan Velasco Alvarado’s presidency and the land takeovers organized by Hugo Blanco in the department of Cuzco. In the hours preceding the performance I had been helping Grimaldo’s wife Rosa and four other female ayllu members, ranging in age from 18-65, to harvest the potatoes from one of Rosa and Grimaldo’s fields. Late in the afternoon Grimaldo arrived home from a brief trip to the town of Chinchero and came to offer us all some coca leaves. Seeing that we
were quite exhausted from our labors, he began describing the lives of Chinchero’s runakuna in the decades preceding the Agrarian Reform. In those difficult years, he explained, priests working within the district of Chinchero demanded that local families contribute an onerous quantity of products and communal labor (mink’a) to the town’s church:


For the souls (of the Christian dead tended by the clergy and the Church) there were coins, potatoes, eggs, broad beans, corn, our coca leaves, and a great deal of our labor mink’a. We collected a whole lot of things, that’s for sure. All of that we took to the priest . . . That’s how it was in the time of the priests. (Quillahuamán Cusi Huamán, personal communication, 2007)

Directing himself to the younger women and me, Grimaldo repeatedly emphasized that the runakuna of Chinchero no longer pay this sort of tax to the local priest, and that indigenous fields previously annexed by “Christ, the souls of the [Christian] dead, and the priest” had now been redistributed. Nevertheless, he resignedly stated, attacks by ñak’aq-kuna working in association with the region’s priests continue to pose a threat to all runakuna living in the area. According to Grimaldo, if your destiny calls for you to die from a ñak’aq attack then it will be nearly impossible to avoid this tragic end.

How St. Bartholomew Became a Nak’aq (San Bartulumé ñak’aqman tukupun”)

In the times of long ago, in the age when Jesus Christ had been born, there was an apostle called St. Bartholomew. 

And so, it is said that St. Bartholomew cut off the horns of the devil. And then, it is said that brazenly, with his little knife he had transformed almost all of the humans [by cutting off their horns]. Long before that you see, St. Bartholomew had become a nak’aq. According to your destiny, it is said that a nak’aq can appear before you. And so, according to your own destiny maybe he will attack you or then again, maybe he won’t attack you, standing right there beside you and that time he won’t attack you. These nak’aq understand [the book] of St. Cipriano, that’s why they can cast prayers with St. Justina. They appear before you, some say it could be from very far away, and then towards you they will pray.

And so as if from no where he pulls you towards sleep; your strength disappeared and so, in the sallqa you fell asleep and then he approached you. They say that this is the way that he extracts your wira, and in that moment they say that he will extract your blood—just like that. <Really?! How awful!> 

Next, it is said, he takes your wira to [the Convent of] Santo Domingo—he takes it right inside. <Ay! And then what?!>. Menthol, medicine, that’s what they make [from your wira]. Then, they say that from the back [of the church] a nak’aq approaches the
altar and so they say [he moves] right up to this altar where there is money. They say that he lifts [the wira towards the altar with great reverence] with his hands [receiving money in exchange]. <How awful!>. And in these instances the Fathers will absolutely not give a mass (blessing) for your soul, not even if you were unmistakably [and definitely] dying. <Ay!, Ay! How awful!!>.

In this willakuy, Grimaldo explains that St. Bartholomew/ Bartolomé became the father of all ñak’aqkuna during the age of Jesus Christ when he was serving as an apostle. In that epoch he apparently acquired a taste for cutting things, specifically the horns of devils and these humans. To describe the ñak’aq Bartholomew’s trade, Grimaldo uses the Quechua verb qh’uruy which means “to cut with a saw or a very large knife.” Unlike the ñak’aq characters described in other Andean communities, this ñak’aq Bartholomew slices open his victims and extracts both their fat and their blood. Clearly it is not a coincidence that Quechua narrators would associate Bartholomew with the ñak’aq since the saint’s attributes and emblems in Church art include carrying a very large knife, an association with hospitals and medicine and a martyrdom in Greater Armenia where he was supposedly blindfolded and flayed alive by King Astiages (Delaney 1980:79; Attwater 1985:53). The Quechua infinitive ñak’ay signifies “the act of slicing open” (usually the throat of an animal or person) and by attaching the agentive suffix /–q/, the word is converted into the noun ñak’aq. In some regions of the Andes the word ñak’aq also signifies “butcher,” a trade that counts St. Bartholomew as its patron saint and is a rather grotesque nod to the cause of the Saint’s death; Bartholomew also serves as the patron saint of tanners and other leather workers.

In describing the lack of apparent logic that characterizes ñak’aq Bartholomew’s attacks, Grimaldo emphasizes his community’s strong belief in predestination: “According to your destiny, it is said that a ñak’aq can appear before you. And so, according to your own destiny maybe he will attack you or then again, maybe he won’t attack you, standing right there beside you and that time he won’t attack you.” Grimaldo’s use of repetition and parallel structure emphasizes that destiny and not a ñak’aq’s physical proximity to your body dictates his attacks. In this way the narrator underscores
the Quechua maxim that an individual’s actions can rarely save her from a predestined fate. Yet for a Quechua audience, the fact that they cannot protect themselves from a ñak’aq’s violence is not even the most preoccupying detail associated with this evil being. More unsettling for residents of Ch’akalqocha is the contract that the ñak’aqkuna have established with the Church which permits them to sell stolen runa fat to the priests working throughout the region, including some of the most powerful ecclesiastics in the department of Cuzco who preside over the Convent of Santo Domingo. Morote Best (1988:161) reports the existence of a similar belief in the provinces of Paruru and Anta, Department of Cuzco, where narrators relate willakuykuna featuring ñak’aq characters who present stolen indigenous fat to priests working in the Convent of Santo Domingo (see also Gose 1986:306; Casaverde 1970:180; and Martínez Escobar 1993). Interviewees from Anta affirm that on St. Bartholomew’s Day, August 24, the priests of Santo Domingo celebrate a solemn mass for a large group of blindfolded ñak’aqkuna (Morote Best 1988:161).

If the ñak’aq characters in the Anta and Paruru oral traditions appear blindfolded during their mass each August 24, Quechua narrators from Ch’akalqocha clearly see that in associating the characters of priests, ñak’aqkuna, and St. Bartholomew, they deliver a rather direct criticism of the Church’s abusive appropriation of indigenous labor and resources and its intolerance of Quechua rituals and beliefs. After all, narrators explain, Bartholomew’s death comes as a result of his blindly believing the Church could protect him, while his name has come to be associated with the gruesome spate of sixteenth century assassinations and ruthless mob violence carried out by French Catholics and directed at Huguenots, referred to by narrators as evangelistas, the general term used for protestants in the Chinchero region by both Quechua and Spanish speakers (Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, personal communication, 200?; Rosa Quispe Quipe, personal communication, 200?).

The character of the ñak’aq Bartholomew reflects the fact that runakuna in Ch’akalqocha and throughout the Cuzco region are well aware of the clergy’s intolerance of their reverence for local
mountain deities (apukuna). Still, in a region where few residents expect governmental institutions to address the population’s needs, many parents and elders in Ch’akalqocha express frustration with the clergy’s failure to help improve their children’s access to a quality education. This criticism finds its way into the community’s oral traditions, since Grimaldo and his neighbors accuse local priests of having taught the ñak’aqkuna to read and write, while ignoring the educational needs of indigenous children. Thus, in Grimaldo’s version of “How St. Bartholomew Became a Nak’aq,” part of the evil being’s power is described in terms of his literacy: “These ñak’aqkuna understand [the book] of St. Cipriano, that’s why they can cast prayers with St. Justina.” In this line, Grimaldo references the protagonist of a popular exemplum named Cipriano who supposedly lived in Antioch in the third century AD and who is the attributed author of a popular medieval grimoire. A respected master of the art of sorcery, Cipriano renounces his pagan practices and converts to Catholicism after learning of its divine power from the lovely Justina (Goodspeed 1903:66; Delaney 1980:164). Yet this conversion later costs him his life when both he and his beloved Justina are arrested and eventually executed at Nicomedia during a persecution of Christians (Goodspeed 1903:66; Delaney 1980:164).23 In noting that the ñak’aqkuna use St. Cipriano’s grimoire to pray with St. Justina, Grimaldo links the ñak’aq slaughterers even more closely to the Church, since it is well-known throughout Latin America that St. Cipriano turned away from black magic and towards Catholicism when he fell in love with the ardently pious Justina (Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, personal communication, 2007; Goodspeed 1903:66).

For hundreds of years, popular oral traditions in regions throughout the Iberian peninsula and Latin America have held that Cipriano recorded many of his most powerful and effective spells in a famous grimoire miraculously recovered in the early Middle Ages and which now carries his name (El ciprianillo or El libro de San Cipriano). Consequently, St. Cipriano has come to be known as the patron saint of magicians and witches and is also credited with the power to protect his followers from malevolent spells. References to
St. Cipriano in willakuykuna serve as a slighting allusion to Church hypocrisy because, as in the case of St. Bartholomew, Quechua narrators attribute Cipriano’s death to the Church’s unwillingness or inability to protect a loyal convert. Assumedly, the early disseminators of the Cipriano and Justina exemplum hoped to illustrate the devout faith of a reformed pagan convert, so it is ironic that St. Cipriano is now admired for his knowledge of powerful witchcraft.

Residents of Ch’akalqocha believe that St. Cipriano has long served as a tutor for ñak’aq kuna and layq’a, witches who receive free copies of his grimoire, a text which many runakuna fear, explaining that it contains detailed instructions for casting powerful and irreversible spells. In “How St. Bartholomew Became a Nak’aq” and other willakuykuna, Quechua narrators artfully and critically conflate the concepts of casting spells with praying and the profession of ñak’aq with priest.” Thus, in lines 6-7 of his willakuy, Grimaldo uses a Quechua declension of the Spanish verb rezar (“to pray”) to describe the way in which, armed with copies of the Book of St. Cipriano, the literate ñak’aq are able to cast their malicious prayers (“towards you they will pray,” rizamusunkiku). These lines also allude to the widespread illiteracy of most runakuna living in Ch’akalqocha. The narrative indirectly blames this problem on the priests who neither facilitate indigenous residents’ access to the grimoire, nor to the skills needed to read it. Thus, illiteracy and lack of access to print resources precludes runakuna from benefiting from St. Cipriano’s knowledge. For this reason, they explain, he has decided to assist the better prepared ñak’aq.

In the first lines of this willakuy when describing San Bartholomew’s transformation into a ñak’aq in the age of Christ, Grimaldo utilizes the Quechua tense marked by the infix /–sqa–/ that is usually referred to as the narrative past” (Cusihuamán 1976:170; Howard-Malverde 1990:75-76; Malverde 2002:42; and Mannheim and Van Vleet 1998:338). Although scholars of Quechua generally explain that speakers use this verbal tense in order to relate actions or events that they have not personally witnessed, Durston argues that narrators’ use of /–sqa–/ in storytelling might be best understood as a category of “sudden disclosure,” suggesting that the narrated event
is new and surprising for either the speaker or the audience (Durston 2007:299-301). While Grimaldo does use the narrative past when recounting events that he did not personally witness (as in the first four lines of this willakuy), his use of /–sq/ does not always follow the conventional descriptions of the tense since he often employs it as a “sudden-disclosure category” in the way Durston describes to recount shocking aspects of personal or ayllu history as in his description of the onerous tributes paid to local priests before the Agrarian Reform.

In order to emphasize the horror of a ñak’aq attack, in line 5 Grimaldo begins to personalize the concept of predestination and switches to the voice of the second-person future: “And so, according to your own destiny maybe he will attack you.” In this way he positions his audience so that they might imagine this as their own sealed destiny. Then, when describing the characteristics associated with ñak’aq violence, Grimaldo uses the second-person unmarked or simple past tense expressed with the infix /–ra–/ (as in line 9, puñurapunki, “you fell asleep”). Even if, as Durston argues, Quechua linguists and other scholars have too narrowly defined this tense as implying a speaker’s direct knowledge of an event, Grimaldo’s use of a second-person past is still unsettling for each audience member because it expresses the fact that the actions related have already taken place in relation to you. This subtle and powerful suggestion is only possible because listeners realize that victims of ñak’aq violence do not suffer visible wounds following an attack and that they are also left without any memory of the savagery. Consequently, by using the second person past (“your strength disappeared and so, in the sallqa you fell asleep and then he approached you”) the narrator captures his audience’s attention because it locates them within the narrative as a possible victim of the malevolent protagonist.

To describe the ñak’aq’s arrival to the Convent, the narrator shifts to the present tense in line 10. The ñak’aq Bartholomew enters the Convent from the back through a hidden door and with the intention of exchanging the stolen fat for cash. In order to suggest the ñak’aq’s assertive movements within the Church, Grimaldo uses the
intensifier infix /-yu/ on two occasions: “he takes your wira to Santo Domingo—“he takes it right inside (apayunmi) and, “[he moves] right up to this altar” (achhuyun misaman) (lines 11-12). The narrator expresses the exchange at the altar through the use of physical gestures associated with Andean spiritual rites that his Quechua audience readily comprehends and decodes. When relating the ñak’aq’s action of lifting the fat towards the Catholic altar with both hands, Grimaldo imitates the careful movements of an indigenous pago (“ritual specialist/healer”) placing coca leaves and other offerings on the square of woven cloth used to feed the apukuna (sacred mountain gods). In this way, the narrator visually suggests a nourishing, indigenous offering at the same time that his words describe a sinister exchange of stolen, indigenous fat for cash within a Catholic space.

To refer to Santo Domingo’s altar Grimaldo utilizes the word mesa, derived from the Spanish word for table). In the Southern Andes, Quechua speakers this word to signify the square of woven cloth where the pagokuna prepare offerings, such as food, coca leaves, candy, cane alcohol (tragu), and fermented corn beer (chicha) for the mountain gods. As Gose (1986:299) points out, Quechua speakers’ intermediate pronunciation of the Spanish vowels e and i infuses the word mesa with the “semi-sacrificial nature of consumption that characterizes both the Andean “mesa” ritual and the Catholic “misa” (“mass”). In effect, Grimaldo’s pronunciation does not distinguish between the Spanish e and i; therefore both his verbal and visual descriptions reinforce the hypocrisy of clergy who seek to draw runakuna away from their Quechua mesa towards the Catholic misa, but who are all too willing to profit from the sacrifice of indigenous fat offered by ñak’aq atop their altars. The narrator delivers reaches the crescendo of his disturbing revelations when he reveals the shocking pact between the ñak’aq Bartholomew and Santo Domingo’s priests which assures that “in these instances the Fathers will absolutely not give a mass for your soul, not even if you were unmistakably [and definitely] dying.”

In this, the last line of his brief, but powerful narrative, Grimaldo insinuates that at the moment when a priest receives stolen indigenous fat, he also implicitly promises to the ñak’aq Bar-
tholomew that he will not administer the last rites for the souls of Catholic runa who would expect these sacraments to be performed for them. The phrase emphasizes the treachery of local priests who refuse to anoint the sick or offer a final penance and Viaticum for runa believers who have suffered from ŋak’aq violence. The line emphasizes the horror felt and communicated by the narrator when he affirms that the priest will refuse to bless your soul, “not even if you were unmistakably [and definitely] dying.” The willakuy’s last clause “misata ruwarunkunyá,” is formed by a conjugation of the verb ruway (“to do/to make” and translated here as “will absolutely not give”). The word ruwarunkunyá includes the exhortative infix /–ru–/ that emphasizes the urgent need for mass,” the last rites in this case, as well as the emotive /–yá–/ that signals the disillusionment and dismay felt by the narrator as he describes the sad reality of the situation to his relatives and other members of the ayllu (Quillahumán Cusihuamán, personal communication, 200?; Aráoz and Salas 1993:54, 196). By charging this narrative with, 200? verbal and visual allusions, subtle semantic shifts, and intertextual and his- torical references, Grimaldo’s version of “How St. Bartholomew Became a Ńak’aq” accuses local clergy of hypocrisy and abuse in the guise of an entertaining willakuy.

**Conclusion**

Representations of the ŋak’aq character in this and scores of other oral narratives performed in the Southern Andes over the past five centuries entertain and engage audiences through their development of frightful plots (q’aqchanapaq). Moreover, these willakuykuna serve to remind (yuyarinapaq) listeners about key aspects of their ayllu’s socio-cultural history, while also emphasizing the importance of learning to recognize the presence of malevolent beings such as the ŋak’aq, and potentially abusive institutions such as the Church. In the willa- kuykuna narrated in Ch’akalqocha and in many others performed throughout the Southern Andean highlands, tragic ends befall runakuna who travel across the sallqa by night or who fail to pay attention to the suspicious characteristics of an outsider. Yet, by emphasizing the powerful force of destiny which greatly influences the direction of humans’
lives, Grimaldo Quillahuamán Cusihuamán and other Quechua narrators suggest that even the most perceptive and cautious observers may not be able to save themselves from death if it is their destiny to die by the knife of a ñak’aq.

Quechua narrators have come to develop the creative and practical maxim which holds that “to frighten is to remind” (Quillahuamán Cusihuamán, personal communication, 2007). In order to increase narrative tension and audience trepidation in performances that critique oppressive local institutions and officials, Quechua narrators utilize gestures, sound effects, intertextual and historical references, clever semantic shifts, and the creation of parallel structure and repetition. Although very few of the ñak’aq narratives performed in Ch’akalqocha detail the violent deaths of runa protagonists, their ambiguous denouements and allusions to tragic ends remind audiences of the importance of taking great care when moving beyond the physical and cultural boundaries of the ayllu. Consequently, these willakuykuna reinforce an identity constructed in terms of an intra-ayllu, exclusive “we” (ñoqayku) and in opposition to the outside institutions who have violated the community’s trust or committed acts of violence against individuals or the collective’s well-being.

This article explores the interpretive possibilities of considering socio-historical contexts that influence narrators’ constructions of malevolent characters and their conflicts with indigenous protagonists. A close reading of one ñak’aq narrative reveals key aspects of Quechua verbal aesthetics and rhetorical devices, while a detailed analysis of a narrator’s performance techniques, and verbal and thematic constructions offers insight into his culture and ayllu’s ritual practices, values, fears, and oral history. Readings which consider narrators’ interpretations of their own verbal art, together with performative and socio-cultural context(s), help to illuminate the aesthetic and thematic preferences and practical motives that inform the creation and performance of indigenous oral narratives.
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Notes

1. Ansión (1987,1989) describes the significant increase in ñak’aq narratives performed in the Peruvian region of Ayacucho in the 1980s when thousands of indigenous civilians became the victims of the violent conflict surrounding the “Shining Path” (Sendero luminoso) insurgency and the government’s ruthless counter-insurgent tactics. In these narratives, ñak’aqkuna are alternately described as supporting the Shining Path’s violence and as receiving written governmental permission to murder Quechua civilians.

2. Quechua agropastoralists who self-identify as indigenous refer to themselves as runa—the Quechua word for “human” or “person” (see also Gelles and Martínez Escobar 1996 and Allen 2002). Quechua speakers refer to their language as runasimi, “tongue of the people.” In Quechua, the suffix /-kuna/ marks plural nouns, so that “Quechua people” is expressed with the word runakuna. In this article I have opted to mark plural Quechua nouns with /-kuna/ instead of with the English /-s/, although I have used the English possessive, as in runa’s.

3. All translations of the Quechua to English are my own. Hernán Quillahuamán and Wency Condori Callapiña helped me to transcribe taped versions of the Quechua narratives and quotations that...
4. The deferential terms Yuyaq mama (“wise mother”) and yuyaq tayta (“wise father”) refer to narrators whom the community respects for their skillful and entertaining performances and for their capacity to remember details about the history and way of life in the community in the “times of long ago.”

5. In rural villages and communities throughout the provincial department of Cuzco the word ayllu refers to maternal and paternal kin as well as those of a spouse. Ayllu may also denote a residential community, particularly when most of the inhabitants are related by birth or marriage. Allen (2002:82-101) provides a detailed explanation of the multiple levels of meaning associated with the term ayllu. Salomon and Urioste (1991:21-23) discuss the meanings of ayllu within the colonial Andean context.


7. Various scholars have described this conversational aspect of Quechua narratives (Allen 2002:76; Cáceres Romero 1993:251;
Howard 1990; Howard-Malverde 1989; Mannheim 1999:49; Mannheim and Van Vleet 1998:326-328). These and other studies (Ryan 2004:41; Taylor 2000:21) also point out that oral narratives often respond to themes and concerns raised by the narrator’s interlocutors and may seem fragmented in terms of chronology and plot development.

8. As Howard (2002:29-30) explains, for Quechua speakers the concept of “yuyariy is a culturally vital activity involving not only the telling of stories but also the performance of rituals and participation in fiestas”.

9. Given the malleable and context-driven nature of Quechua willakuykuna, lifting an oral narrative from its performative context within the ayllu, transferring it to the written page and translating it into English inevitably leads to the loss of various registers of meaning. In order to mitigate some of this diminished signification, this article provides details regarding performative context, a transcription of the willakuy performance, and an explanation of many of the socio-cultural, semantic, and historical references that most Quechua audience members would recognize.

10. “Son estos Cauchus, o Runapmícuc, como ellos llaman, que quiere dezir el que come hombres, vn género de brujos, que an muerto mucha gente, especialmente muchachos.” Gonçalez Holguín’s colonial Quechua dictionary defines cauchu as “el aojador,” or “one who casts the evil eye”—belief in this curse spread throughout the Américas following the Spanish conquest.

11. “por el grande secreto que tienen entre sí, y porque temen a éstos tales grandemente todos los Indios.”

12. “Entra[n] esparciendo vnos polvos de huessos de muertos, que ellos tienen para este efecto conficionados, y preparados con otras no se qué cosas, y palabras, y con ellos adornacen a todos los de casa de tal suerte, que ni persona ni animal de toda la casa se menea, ni lo siente, y assí se llega a la persona, que quiere matar, y con la vña le saca vn poquito de sangre, de cualquiera parte del cuerpo, y le chupa por allí la
que puede, y así llaman también a estos tales Brujos en su lengua chupadores.”

13. “El efecto es, que la persona que avían chupado su muerte dentro de dos o tres días.” Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980: ch. XII, 249) also describes a sort of witch whose affinity for magical powders made from the bones of the dead helps her to mete out evil. He affirms that in addition to the bones of the dead, in Incan times ground corn also served as an important ingredient in the concoction of the witches’ powders known as uayrap zaran, “wind of maize” (ibid., p. 248). Guaman Poma asserts that thieves and assassins also used these magical powders which often counted ash and the hair of the intended victim among their ingredients. He explains that an assailant would concoct these powders and then approach a victim: “he blows [towards] him with said maize powder known as uayrap zaran and bones of the dead. They blow this and say that they are blowing [away] justice” (ibid.). (“le sopla con el dicho polbo de mays que llamauayrap zaran y güeso de defuntos. Lo soplan y dizen que van soplando a la justicia...”).

14. Cobo (1895: ch. XXII, XXXV, 135, 143, 83) also explains that Incan ritual recipes for feeding the mountain gods included a mixture of fat (he does not designate which sort) with corn flour and wool, while the Incas “were also accustomed to burning fat alone in sacrifice, and it was much used” (“y también el sebo por sí acostumbraban quemar en sacrificio, y era muy usado”).

15. Cobo (1895: ch. XXXV, 139) explains that in Incan times, doctors (médicos) and witches (hechiceros) dispensed medical treatments that included a variety of unctions: “They also used to cure by massaging the sick [patient] and sucking on the stomach and other parts of his body; greasing them with fat (sebo) or the flesh and grease of the cuy or toad, and making them [patients] similar unctions with other filth or with herbs.” (“También solían curar sobando y chupando el vientre del enfermo y otras partes de su cuerpo; untándolos con sebo ó la carne y grosura del Cuy ó de Sapo, y haciéndoles semejantes unturas con otras inmundicias ó con yerbas.”). In the Old World context widely circulated medical treatises such as Ibn Al-Jazzar’s tenth century Medicine for the Poor and Destitute (Tibb al-fuqarda wa ’I-masdkin, translated in the
fifteenth century by the Spanish physician Hayyim Ben Judah Ibn Musa), contain a number of recipes for medicinal ointments that list animal fat and powders (made from various plants, seeds, or animal excrements) as key ingredients (Bos 1998:367, 372). A list of remedies written in 1536 by a Spanish apothecary working in Santiago de Guatemala includes an extensive inventory of the names and prices of medicinal powders and ointments extracted from the fat of animals and the leaves of plants (Simpson 1937:145-164), while in the French province of Berry, medicinal ointments made from the fat of executed criminals were considered to be the preferred remedies for scrofula and rheumatism up until the late nineteenth century (Peacock 1896:269).

16. “El año setenta y uno atrás de aver tenido y creydo por los Yndios, que despagna avían enviado a este reyno por unto de los yndios para sanar cierta enfermedad, que no se hallava para ello medicina sino el dicho unto, a cuya causa, en aquellos tiempos andavan los yndios muy recatados y se extrañavan de los Españoles en tanto grado, que la leña, yerba, y otras cosas no las querían lleuar a casa de Español, por dezir no los matasen allá dentro, para les sacar el unto.”

17. Other malevolent characters in the Andes such as the machukuna and s’uqa also reflect this preoccupation with an imbalance between the dry and humid. While the machukuna wander desperately across the Andean sierra seeking to recuperate the flesh of their desiccated bones, the s’uqa preoccupies himself with the inability of his bones to disintegrate properly into the earth (Allen 2002:45-48, 1981:162).

18. As Allen (1981:165) explains, the most common form of reciprocity in the Southern Andes is known as ayni. Ayni involves the symmetrical exchange of labor or goods between equals while mink’a signifies an asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship (often between a large land owner and a contract laborer) which usually entails the exchange of labor for money, food, or other goods.

19. Four hundred years earlier Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980:ch. XXIII, 533) complained of similar abuses: “Since said Fathers and priests are preoccupied in the confection of clothing of cunbe
(finely knit) and auasca (common knit) for women and chunbes (waistbands), saying that they are for the prelates. They order and commission, calling for them to make the clothing and occupying the poor Indians and they do not pay them anything in any part of the kingdom.” (“Cómo los dichos padres y curas entienden en hacer ropa de cunbe [tejido fino] y de auasca [corriente] para mugeres y chunbes [faja de cintura] para uended, deziendo que son para los perlados. Le manda y comisarios le haze ropa y ocupa a los pobres yndios y no se les paga cosa nenguna en todo el reyno.”)

20. The Quechua narrative device nispa and the evidential suffix /-si/ or /-s/ indicate that a narrator is relaying information that is either common knowledge, often in reference to a very distant past, or that may have been provided by unnamed sources that s/he cannot personally verify. These reportative devices provide an almost invisible cadence to Quechua narratives that the rather clumsy translation of “it is said” certainly does reproduce with any elegance.

21. In this transcription <triangular brackets> have been used to indicate audience commentary; when more than one listener interjects the same remark the expression has been <bracketed and underlined>.

22. Carried out in 1572 on the eve of the St. Bartholomew celebration, these bloody massacres stand as a brutally clear example of Catholic violence and intolerance. The St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre occurred during the French Wars of Religion, a period when religious orders working in the Andes were fervently engaged in “extirpating the idolatry” of indigenous Andeans during the early colonial era.

23. The exemplum first appeared more than a century after the martyrdom of the historic figure Cyprian of Carthage in 258 AD. The widely disseminated and translated oration of the theologian Gregory of Nazianthus provided many of the plot elements and attributes associated with the St. Cipriano (Cyprian) exemplum (Goodspeed 1903: 65-67; Attwater 1985:97-99; and Delaney 1980:163-164).

24. Although Grimaldo frequently uses the evidential, reportative suffix /-si/ or /-s/ together with the /-sqa/ narrative past, in this and
other narratives he does not use the reportative suffix together with the simple past /-ra/. While it appears that many Quechua narrators in the Chinchero region demonstrate a preference for using /-sqa/ to narrate mythic or far-removed events and /-ra/ for more recent past events, more research is needed on the nature and implications of such shifts before any definitive explanation of their uses can be offered.

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