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Author: Dransart, Penelope

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At the Mountains' Altar: Anthropology of Religion in an Andean Community

By Frank Salomon. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018. xvi + 235 pp. Hardback: US$ 150.00, ISBN 978-1-13-803746-5. Paperback: US$ 39.95, ISBN 978-1-13-803750-2. E-book: US$ 35.96, ISBN 978-1-31-517788-5.

This scintillating book is earth-bound, with the anthropological study of ritual forming "the ethnographic center of gravity" (p 15). By earth-bound, I mean that ritual practices and religious beliefs, ethnographically described, constitute the ground from which Frank Salomon sets out to explore different theories of religion. Mountains are significant personalities in this investigation.

Based on fieldwork conducted over 8 years in Rapaz, a highland Peruvian community in the Department of Lima, events taking place in and starting from an architectural complex provide the focus of attention. This set of structures includes an ancient building with a pre-Hispanic past, known as Pasa Qulqa, and its companion, Kaha Wayi, built according to 17th-century architectural principles. These buildings form the hub where community members conduct rituals in engagement with the surrounding mountains and meteorological phenomena, which Salomon describes as a "world full of person-like superhuman agents" (p 21). He explains that, historically, people have understood their world not to be founded on a nature–culture antithesis. Instead, people have imagined their social existence to be a "field of interaction between antagonistically interdependent poles" (p 24): between multiple, corporate Huari lineages leading a riverine way of life (associated with agriculture and stability) and multiple, corporate Llacuaz lineages leading a montane way of life (associated with pastoralism and foreign origins).

Consideration of this social context and these historical antecedents provides the motivation for exploring significant themes in the anthropology of religion. Salomon does not claim to innovate new theories. He invites readers to accompany him in a journey of reading, in order to make connections to anthropological veins of inquiry relevant for understanding different religious contexts.

In each chapter, different aspects of people's lives in Rapaz provide a starting point for exploration, beginning in the first chapter with theories on the cognitive–evolutionary foundations of religiosity. In chapter 2, Salomon revisits structuralist views of culture and explains how the Rapacinos' views of their social existence in a mountainous terrain can be seen as expressing a worldview based on fundamental precepts that are analogical in character. Chapter 3 considers present-day people as the descendants of an ancestor called Libiac Cancharco in the light of debates concerning the sacralization of society. Chapter 4, cowritten with Luis Andrade Ciudad, investigates linguistic challenges in translating from Quechua into English the songs people sing for their herd animals and their crops, in the context of their religious experiences. Chapter 5 is devoted to the teamwork that took place between local people and outside researchers to conserve the Kaha Wayi and its contents, and the discussion leads to a consideration of religion in terms of symbolism, science, and power. In the course of this chapter, Salomon asks "What is it that gives sacred objects their compelling hold on people?" (p 149). Chapter 6 contains an account of an all-night ceremony that Salomon experienced as a prelude to his consideration of the ontological basis of religious behaviors and concepts. The final chapter, titled "The ground trembles," presents Salomon's closing thoughts on the study of religion in an increasingly secular world—and whether or not academic pursuits and religious participation are comparable activities.

Each of these chapters takes the reader on a voyage of discovery. Salomon is a generous reader of other authors' works—he mentions some of the deficiencies and infelicities where they exist in the published literature, but he does not dwell on them. Instead, he invites us to read other authors' works attentively, in order to enhance our capacity for understanding when confronted by unfamiliar religious beliefs and practices. A particularly intriguing example is his admission that he took Richard Dawkins' *Unweaving the Rainbow* (Dawkins 1998) as bedtime reading while doing fieldwork in Rapaz (which he read with the assistance of a headlamp).

At the Mountains' Altar will be a vital resource for undergraduate and postgraduate modules on the anthropology of religion, whether or not there is a focus on Christianity and/or the Andes. It will also be invaluable in the teaching of fieldwork methods, because, in treating religion as an arena of intersection between certain human ways and a domain called "the sacred," Salomon resists compressing other people's religious experiences into ill-fitting theoretical frameworks. He also demonstrates a sensitivity to the fine line that often exists between "anthropological curiosity … [and] inquiry that someone else might think desecration" (p 7). His book also has much to offer in areas that might not be immediately obvious from the publisher's description. There is, for instance, an extremely good analysis of gender relations in the attribution of a dominant analogy of femaleness associated with Pasa Qulqa and maleness

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associated with Kaha Wayi. Salomon demonstrates how the importance of the former has been eclipsed with the onset of external developments. Now that fields are no longer communally sown and harvested in Rapaz, female hierarchical roles in connection with Pasa Qulqa have lapsed, while male hierarchies continue to be important in the functioning of Kaha Wayi. There are therefore pertinent reasons for including the book in reading lists for modules on gender and development. Finally, while the book is not intended to be an ethnographic monograph, Salomon presents the rituals performed by Rapacinos and their veneration for mountains in a satisfyingly rounded manner. In this respect, the book has a wider reach than the classroom. It is a book to be enjoyed for the author's keen insights into what he calls religiosity, and how his responses to his reading of an intriguing range of authors can be used to illuminate a phenomenon that cannot be satisfactorily defined yet still has the power to demand our attention.

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AUTHOR

Penelope Dransart
p.dransart@uwtsd.ac.uk
Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7ED, UK

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