

ICONOGRAPHY AS A REFLECTION OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CEREMONIAL PLACES OF THE SALASAKA PEOPLE

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Abstract:

This study is part of the project "Design and memory. Senses exposed in Salasaca iconography", which is developed at the Faculty of Design and Architecture of the Technical University of Ambato and in which the iconography of Salasaca's embroidery and paintings is analyzed, to identify the morphological, aesthetic and symbolic characteristics of their iconography. In addition, the relationships between these visual representations and other aspects are explored, such as the ritual sites of the indigenous community located on the slope of the Tungurahua volcano in Ecuador. Salasaca is known for its cultural and ethnic wealth, with an economy based on agriculture and textile crafts, which attract tourists. Salasaca's reality is intrinsically linked to its geographical environment, where physical spaces have a symbolic value. The community has maintained an authentic religiosity over time, consecutively performing traditional rituals. Recently, tourism has flourished, especially after the Inti Raymi festival was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ecuador, which has provided a new source of income for its inhabitants. In this study, in addition to an iconographic analysis, six ceremonial and sacred sites for the community are identified, which contribute to cultural tourism.

Keywords: Ethnic group; Intangible cultural heritage; Salasaca; Ritual sites; Iconography; Indigenous ceremony.

1. Introduction

This study arises from the research project entitled "Design and memory. Senses exposed in the iconography of Salasaca", which is being developed at the Faculty of Design and Architecture of the Technical University of Ambato. The objective of this research is to analyze the meanings built around embroidery and Salasaca's paintings, from the reading of the morphological, aesthetic and symbolic characteristics, created by this indigenous community located in the center of the Ecuadorian Andes, recognized for its textile crafts. In the present stage of the research, in addition, the relationships between iconography and its heritage environment have been investigated, seeking to establish the link between visual representations and the ritual or sacred sites of this sector.

Salasaca is a vibrant Kichwa community, located on the eastern slope of the imposing Tungurahua volcano, in the Pelileo, 20 minutes from the city of Ambato, capital of the province of Tungurahua [1]. This parish is known for its ethnic and cultural richness represented by the Quechua ethnic group, with a strong presence of national and foreign tourists who come to appreciate the crafts, dance, music and also to learn about the vegetation, its way of life and the Tungurahua volcano [2]; [3].

This territory is known for its emigratory nature and the economy of the community revolves mainly around agricultural work,

livestock, as well as the manufacture of various fabrics, mainly tapestries and sashes.

A significant percentage of the food consumed by the community is of vegetable origin, which reflects a deep connection with the land. The population of Salasaca has undergone a notable change in its diet; dependence on livestock products, especially in ceremonies and social events, in which cattle or sheep are usually consumed, but also guinea pigs and chickens. In Salasaca, it is common to observe large expanses of communal land, where you can see hedges and a variety of animals, such as cows, sheep and guinea pigs, grazing peacefully in the meadows. It is also evident the fixing of plots, which are worked with dedication and care for several months of the year. These plots alternate with the respective fallow lands in other extensions of land, thus allowing sustainable management of resources.

It is impossible to study reality without taking into account its geographical environment [4]. In the social, housing and ceremonial base of the Salasaca are considered particular physical spaces, of specific constitutive and symbolic value, which in turn are linked to each other by different links of complementarity and interrelation that enrich their culture [5].

Salasaca is a wonderful example of an indigenous Kichwa community, where religion and spirituality have been preserved with admirable fidelity over time. Over the years, its inhabitants have maintained religiosity in its purest and most authentic form, which means that all traditional rituals are carried out at the indicated time and form, always with the patronage of the offices, guilds and marriages, as appropriate on each occasion [6].

In recent years, there has been a flourishing of tourism, which represents a new and valuable source of income for its inhabitants. This phenomenon of tourist resurgence was generated after the declaration of the *Inti Raymi salasaca* as Ecuadorian Intangible Cultural Heritage, decreed in 2018, by the National Assembly.

1.1. Background on cultural tourism in Ecuador

Cultural tourism is intrinsically related to people's ability to travel in search of religious sites or relics, as well as objects of cultural, linguistic, gastronomic or natural value. This type of tourism is defined as one that, under the premise of visiting places whose offer is based on the cultural and historical heritage of a community or region, faces and reflects on the gaze of the other, seeking answers to their questions [7] [8]. It is a tourism that wants to observe, be informed and value the existence of new cultures different from those of its place of origin.

In Ecuador, tourism is presented as an urgent economic need due to the poor performance of traditional sectors, lack of competitiveness and annual economic results. The tourism that is sought to be developed in the country is mainly cultural, attractive for its diverse offer that ranges from the coast to the Amazon [9]. Currently, it has become a valuable and essential activity, constituting an important link for Ecuador: cultural tourism [10].

In recent years, tourism in Ecuador has become more relevant due to its impressive tourist attractions. In particular, cultural tourism has gained a lot of importance recently. The cultural richness is largely due to its geography, which divides the country into four regions: the Coast, the Amazon, the Sierra, and the Galapagos Islands. The diversity of climates and soils has allowed the cultivation of a wide variety of vegetables and animals. All this, together with the influence of the local inhabitants, has given rise to the diverse and rich cultures that coexist within the territory.

Tourism is the appropriate means to show its current potential, in addition, obtaining monetary resources through tourism is a "national first urgency" due to the situation of traditional export products and their substitutes in the world market. Domestic production that monopolizes a resource in various groups is not beneficial if it does not result in a good for the entire nation, its provinces, resources, and inhabitants.

In recent years, cultural tourism in Latin America has gained importance due to the economic dynamism it generates and the variety of trends that attract visitors, allowing them to explore new worlds and times. This type of tourism

usually attracts people who, out of self-interest, seek to learn and enjoy the values, customs, beliefs, lifestyles and natural environments offered by local societies, different from their own. In Ecuador, the diversity of its regions offers thousands of tourist destinations with numerous natural and cultural attractions, which are the main asset of each area.

It is estimated that cultural tourism represents 10.13% of total tourism in the country. In the report on tourism data presented by the National Government, in January 2024, it is noted that "in the period January-September 2023 had a recovery compared to the same period of 2022, the contribution of tourism represented the third source of non-mining exports, contributing USD 1,491.60 million dollars. However, tourism continues to represent the first item in the balance of services" (Ministry of Tourism, 2024, p. 15) [11].

During 2023, the Ministry of Tourism recognized 6 sites declared "Magical Corners": a) Historic Center of Riobamba; b) Vilcambamba; (c) Salinas de Guaranda; d) Historic Center of Guaranda; (e) Latacunga Historic Centre; and, f) Historic Center of Cuenca. In addition, 2 localities were established as "Best Tourism Villages", these are: Oyacachi (Napó) and El Cisne (Loja) [11].

In the case of Salasaca there are some points of tourist concentration, the Salasaca Artisan Plaza in the center of the parish and the Kayak Raymi Artisan Market, have become places of visit for local and foreign tourists, in addition, some community tourism sites have begun to be implemented such as the Runa Huasi Hostel.

1.2. Salasaca's cultural practices, traditions, and cultural rites

The Salasaca's traditions come from a common trunk with Andean beliefs, even pre-Inca, but, above all, these acts come from historical moments, after the Spanish conquest, coming to be defined as cultural symptoms. The Spanish conquest implanted a series of beliefs that revolved around the figure of Christ the Redeemer, opposed to the original Andean traditions. This period was unique in colonial history, almost coinciding with the end of three centuries of colonization and economic exploitation for the indigenous population.

These conditions of exploitation, however, did not change, although the colonial period ended, the indigenous people continued to be marginalized until the republican era. In the case of the Salasaca's community, it was marginalized and isolated from the mestizo population until approximately the middle of the twentieth century. "This phenomenon made the fabric of being a homogeneous people, insurmountable in the face of their cultural barriers (...) Although there are several factors for which the community opened its walls, it is considered that a first step was taken with the construction of the Ambato-Baños highway" [12, p. 147]. Although this construction meant progress for the country, in the case of the parish, it marked a time of impoverishment for the original inhabitants of Salasaca.

The remarkable enrichment of the Creoles, especially during the boom of the hat industry at the end of the eighteenth century, led them, as the Salasaca's recall, to want to buy more land from the natives with the intention of obtaining greater profits. Perceiving this greed, the natives reacted by locking up the non-natives on three separate occasions, in one of them to auction their cattle and in another, kidnapping their wives and children, which resulted in a deep and painful conflict.

Due to the unrest caused by greed and the inability of the colonels to effectively suppress the indigenous people, it was decided that, for the duration of the conflict, it was necessary to "beat and humiliate all the Salasacas" as punishment for their alleged rebelliousness. The word "humiliate" is key in these historical accounts. "Boom," they said, when they saw those who least resisted the pressure fall, hence the dancer threw himself on the ground as a sign of surrender. The fate of the Salasacas was marked by humiliation and degradation, both economic and moral, distancing them from their former position of social hegemony. Therefore, they resorted to meaningful ritual acts, desperately asking for help from their heavenly protectors to regain their dignity and re-establish their place in the community [13].

However, with the opening of this new road, the outlook for the community began to change. Later, various religious organizations tried to settle in the community, but were repeatedly

rejected. However, the people's attitude towards these groups changed due to the fear they felt after the 1949 earthquake, which devastated much of the region. However, the most significant event that facilitated the community's connection with other sectors was the beginning of the trade in their handicrafts, especially tapestries. The production of these began in the mid-1950s and, from the 60s, allowed the artistic and artisanal production of salasaca to obtain recognition both locally and internationally.

Along with the knowledge about the artistic skills of the indigenous people of this sector, a process of exploration, study and anthropological interpretation of the local festivities began.

There are now several traditions that recall the ritual practices and sites in which the Salasaca culture practices ceremonies. In each of these celebrations, the Salasacas wear special outfits, full of embroidery that narrates several of their ancestral stories. All ritual ceremonies in this sector are accompanied by music and dance. The dancers also use other clothing artifacts, depending on each celebration, but they are also accompanied by musicians who carry a drum that has two types of paintings that suggest another symbolic narrative for the community.

Among the traditions and festivities of Salasaca are: Corpus Christi, Jatun Fiesta, Inti Raymi in June; Octave of Corpus Christi, Chishi Octava in July; Aya Marka or celebration for the Deceased, Pendoneros and the Captaincy festival in November; Alcaldes o Varayuk and Caporales in January [12] [14] [15] [16].

During these festivities, mayors are the ones who organize, finance, and direct events. Music is an essential element that accompanies the journey and the performance of the dancers. In Salasaca, although instruments such as the harp and violin are used, musicians who play the drum and the pingullo are essential in the ritual celebrations. The mayors are also in charge of hiring the painter who decorates the drum used by the musicians. This traditional Andean percussion instrument is made with sheepskin membranes, although cow or dog skin can also be used [12] [17].

Drum manufacturing has evolved; Traditional techniques have been replaced by the work of carpenters, who have put rituals aside. However, some artisans, such as Manuel Masaquiza "Grande", still maintain this process, although there are no other salasacas who continue to practice it. In this analysis, we focus on the bass drum used by the Inti Raymi dancers (Figure 1), decorated with two traditional ornamental motifs painted on each side, known as "mama tambora" [18].



Figure 1. Painting of the Salasaca drum.

In each of these celebrations, moreover, the salasaca clothing varies, is more colorful and fuller of details related to each ceremony.

Salasaca garments stand out not only for the fact that they are made within the community itself, assuming the entire process that includes

from obtaining the wool for spinning, the natural dyeing of the textile and the subsequent manufacture of the garment. In addition, several of these garments are decorated with embroidery that tells a graphic story.

Embroidery is a form of craftsmanship that can involve collaboration between designers, artists, and artisans. In this process, each participant brings their experience and creativity to create a final product that reflects a common vision. In addition, embroidery can serve as a means of expressing cultural and ethnic identity [19] or to preserve traditional techniques.

Salasaca embroidery (Figure 2) can traditionally be seen on men's trousers, known as *catumba*-type breeches (worn by mayors and dancers) and *mint* (worn by godparents and grooms at weddings). They are also present in women's shirts for special occasions and in the scarves used by dancers. These embroideries represent the beliefs, myths and rites of the community, and reflect the syncretic processes that have occurred.



Figure 2. Embroidery on mint pants.

These embroideries are loaded with symbolism and reflect both the worldview and the cultural identity of the community. Designs often include natural elements, such as flowers, birds, and animals (both endemic and introduced to the region), as well as religious and mythological symbols. Each design has a particular meaning and conveys the history and traditions of the community.

These artistic productions, both at the level of painting and embroidery, are part of the cultural heritage of this ethnic group, at the same time, these practices group a number of visual motifs that are part of the iconography of the people that carries cultural meanings for each element.

With regard to these productions, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Heritage (Mexico, 1982) states that the Cultural Heritage of a people includes the works of its artists, architects, musicians, writers and scholars, as well as the anonymous creations that emerge from the popular soul. It also encompasses the set of values

that give meaning to life, that is, both the tangible and the immaterial works that reflect the creativity of that people. This includes language, rites, beliefs, historical places and monuments, literature, works of art, archives and libraries [20].

When referring to heritage, we find a direct connection with heritage, memory and identity. It is closely linked to the past as a legacy, but it is updated in the present and becomes an indisputable reference for the future, being an essential part of our identity traits.

In the Ecuadorian User Manual for the Management of the Heritage Information System [21] it is stated that tangible or tangible heritage includes all objects, expressive forms or cultural assets that can be perceived through the senses and that have a physical presence. These can be both movable and immovable. Among the material goods are archaeological objects from different periods and uses, urban complexes, buildings, works of art such as paintings and sculptures, books, furniture, musical instruments, clothing,

personal ornaments, utensils, and other elements that fall into this category.

This categorization of tangible heritage includes cultural landscapes and sacred places for communities.

Regarding Cultural Landscapes, the User Manual for the Management of the ABACO Heritage Information System, mentions that cultural landscapes refer to the various interactions between human beings and their natural environment. Through practices such as agriculture and agro-pastoral activity, individuals have created environments such as terraced crops, coffee, sugarcane, and cocoa landscapes, among others. These landscapes demonstrate the harmony and mutual influence between humans and nature.

Likewise, sacred places include areas with natural characteristics such as mountains, water sources, rivers, and forests, which have acquired symbolic values and are used for religious, healing, meditative, contemplative, and commemorative celebrations [21, p. 16].

The Ecuadorian state recognizes that, especially in rural contexts, Intangible or Intangible Heritage encompasses a vast wealth of ancestral expressions [21, p. 35]. These are manifested in knowledge about nature and the universe, such as the prediction of rain, drought or frost, and the identification of the lunar or solar phases. It also includes a valuable collection of traditional medicine, community-based forms of social organization, environmental preservation practices, conceptions of time and space, skills to adapt to and take advantage of natural resources, wisdom transmitted through oral tradition, myths and legends, and the use of traditional artisanal technologies and techniques, among other expressions.

All this ancestral knowledge is part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of our peoples. Ecuador is a signatory to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage [22], signed in Paris in 2003. The Convention establishes that Intangible Cultural Heritage is manifested in the following areas: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, social uses, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices

related to nature and the universe, and traditional craft techniques.

Intangible Cultural Heritage, or Intangible Cultural Heritage, includes the performing arts, are cultural expressions of a community that reflect its creativity. These manifestations have been passed down from generation to generation, taking on new meanings over time. They include the performance of dances, music, theater, literature and traditional games. This denomination includes the celebration of the Inti Raymi of the Salasaka People [23], declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ecuador, on June 30, 2018, under Article 79 of the Organic Law of Culture.

In the case of the Salasaka community, it is also possible to find another intangible heritage, related to ancestral knowledge and uses related to nature and the universe. These encompass a set of knowledge, techniques, skills, practices, and representations that communities have developed and maintained through their interaction with the natural environment. This knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation and includes areas such as gastronomy, traditional medicine, symbolic spaces, toponymy, traditional production techniques and ancestral ecological wisdom. In the case of this people, there is not only oral transmission of knowledge related to nature, but also to their artistic and artisanal practices, such as the practices of weaving tapestries and shigras, the embroidery of their clothing, the textile dyeing with natural dyes and the painting of their drums.

Also, within the framework of the transmission of ancestral knowledge, knowledge about sacred places or ritual sites for the people is included and in which ancestral practices continue to be carried out that maintain the unity of thought in the ethnic group, but at the same time increasingly summon tourists who wish to witness these Andean practices of pre-Columbian origin.

Ritual sites are cultural units or associations that define the space and social life of a human group [24]. They originate from the systematic execution of ceremonial or ritual acts that give certain areas of the territory and particular spaces of daily life a special or sacred meaning. Ritual sites generally become the fundamental situation associated with certain phenomena identified in

the worldview or symbolic system of a human group. Around it develops a weak territory of use, through which the group sustains and manages its ritual sites. The territory of use is, in many cases, complex [25] [26].

In the aforementioned context, we open the reflection on how the Salasaka iconography, present in his paintings and embroideries, is articulated with the sites considered rituals in the community, which currently contemplate community tourism practices.

2. Materials and Methods

Considering that the first stage of this project has sought to classify the Salasaka iconography, the motifs present in the embroideries and paintings were documented to establish their formal, figurative and symbolic characteristics. In this process, based on the identification of the icons, 74 graphic semiotic analysis sheets were made (Table 1), according to the model established below.

Table 1. Model of a Semiotic Graphic Analysis Sheet of Salasaka Iconography.

GRAPHIC SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS SHEET OF SALASAKA ICONOGRAPHY			
N° 007	Support: Calzón yerbabuena		IMAGE SURVEY
Responsible:	Andrea Daniela Larrea Solórzano		
File code:	DM_ASGS_007		
Categorization of motifs according to the Salasaka´s taxonomic classification			
Zoomorphic	X	Category	monkey
Orthomorphic		Category	
Rain magic			
* Snakes			
* Amphibians			
Anthropomorphic	X		
* Of power		Category	
* Of everyday life	X	Category	Disguised
Narratives of festivities, rites			



* Terrestrial and phytomorphic	costumed characters who participate in the festival of Chisi octava. Traditionally, the idea is shared that monkeys were first humans who then grew their tails and adapted that shape, a process inverse to the theory of evolution.	It features three colors in high contrast. An orange that delimits the silhouette and two shades of blue that, opposite to each other, but complementary to orange. The color composition turns out to be warmer.
roads / ditches / irrigation ditches.		
sowings		
Construction details:		
The structure in general is geometric, although it presents some organic details, like a spiral in the tail. The profile motif faces to the left.		

The images collected became the basic units for this analysis, since the unit of analysis is the way in which the entities, subjects, or events on which the study itself is concentrated are named [27]. For the processing of the images, the main use was to record and catalog by means of the AT-LAS.ti software.

In addition to employing methods that allow interpreting the sociocultural interactions that drove the structural changes in drum painting and embroidery, that is, in its morphological structure, a methodology was used that combines the analysis of the social history of art, according to Baxandall's perspective [28], and the iconographic method to analyze the meanings of the work. proposed by Hadjinicolaou [29], from these components it was possible to define the type of motif analyzed from the Categorization of motifs according to the salasaca taxonomic classification,

previously developed, as well as to trace the connotative and denotative resources of each of the 74 motifs analyzed.

In 2011, the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, through the Directorate of Heritage Inventory of Real Estate Cultural Assets (Fig. 3) prepared the model of the Registration Form [30] and the registration form, however, the places considered emblematic in the case of Salasaca have not yet been officially catalogued [31]. Therefore, knowledge about these spaces has been generated from interviews with key figures in the community and some articles and titling works that have been developed in the area.

For the reasons indicated, we collected information to theoretically address the issue of ritual sites in the Salasaka community [32] [33]. In addition, during the period of fieldwork, information was collected about their main ritual sites

[34] and the functions, symbolisms and use of materials in each sector [35]. To determine the ritual site, interviews and others were conducted for key informants about the uses of the space, as well as

other ethnographic methods [36] with an inductive approach, which would allow us to identify the characteristics of each sacred place.

<p style="text-align: center;"> INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE PATRIMONIO CULTURAL DIRECCIÓN DE INVENTARIO PATRIMONIAL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL INMATERIAL FORMA DE INVENTARIO AS USOS SOCIALES, RITUALES Y ACTOS FESTIVOS </p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> INPC Rep. de Cuba </p>	<p style="text-align: center;">000000</p>
1. DATOS DE LOCALIZACIÓN		
Provincia:		Ciudad:
Participa:		<input type="checkbox"/> Urbana <input type="checkbox"/> Rural
Localidad:		
Coordenadas UTM 84 2178 - UTM: X (Este)		Y (Norte) Z (Altitud)
2. FOTOGRAFÍA REFERENCIAL		
Descripción de la fotografía: Código fotográfico:		
3. DATOS DE IDENTIFICACIÓN		
Denominación	Otra (x) denominación (es)	
	D1	
	D2	
Grupo social	Otra (x) denominación (es)	
	L1	
	L2	
Breve reseña		

4. DESCRIPCIÓN				
Origen				
Fecha o periodo	Detalle de la periodicidad			
Anual				
Ordinaria				
Ocasional				
Otro				
Alcance	Detalle del alcance			
Local				
Provincial				
Regional				
Nacional				
Internacional				
Preparación	Detalle de actividades			
P1				
Descripción de la manifestación				
Elementos significativos				
Nombre	Tipo	Detalle del elemento		
E1				
Estructura organizativa				
Nombre	Tipo	Detalle de la estructura		
O1				
5. PORTADORES / SOPORTES				
Tipo	Nombre	Cargo, función o actividad	Discusión	Localidad
Procedencia del saber		Detalle de la procedencia		
Padres-Ayos				
Maestro-aprendiz				
Centro de capacitación				
Otro				

Figure 3. Model of Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory File of Social Uses, Rituals and Festive Events.

3. Results and Discussion

Ritual sites in indigenous communities, such as those of the Salasaka people, have a significant anthropological value that manifests itself in various dimensions. These places are not only physical spaces, but also represent the worldview, cultural identity, and collective memory of the communities. These ritual sites are fundamental for social cohesion and the transmission of ancestral knowledge, as well as for cultural resistance to external influences. Indigenous territoriality includes cultural elements and worldviews that connect communities to their natural environment, where mountains, rivers, and other landscape elements take on sacred meanings.

These spaces become landmarks that allow communities to maintain their connection to their ancestors and traditions, which is essential for cultural continuity. In addition, the practice of rituals in these sites fosters social cohesion and the

strengthening of community identity. Through collective ceremonies, community members come together to celebrate and reaffirm their cultural values. This is particularly relevant in contexts where communities face external challenges, such as tourism or modernization, that can threaten their way of life. Indigenous tourism, for example, can be a tool for communities to exercise control over their territories and preserve their biocultural heritage.

The importance of these places is also reflected in their role as spaces for learning and knowledge transmission. In many communities, rituals are opportunities for elders to teach new generations about agricultural practices, traditional medicine, and the indigenous worldview. This teaching process is vital for the preservation of cultural identity as it allows young people to connect with their roots and understand their place in the world.

The valuation of ritual sites in contemporary anthropology implies recognizing cultural diversity and the need for intercultural dialogue. Research must take into account indigenous perspectives and their vision of the world, promoting a respectful and appreciative approach to their worldviews. This is crucial to achieving a deeper and more respectful understanding of cultural dynamics.

2.1. Main Sacred and Ceremonial Sites of Salasaka

The ceremonial places of the Salasaka people are spaces of great cultural and spiritual importance. These places are not only the scene of rituals and festivities, but also strengthen the identity and social cohesion of the community. Agricultural and ceremonial practices that reflect their connection to the land and ancestral traditions are common in this territory. Their relationship with nature is manifested, for example, in their rituals of gratitude to Pachamama (Mother Earth). These rituals are usually carried out in specific places that are considered sacred, where offerings are made and the protection and fertility of the earth is invoked.

In addition, they have developed a belief system that integrates elements of indigenous spirituality with contemporary practices. This is evidenced in the way the ceremonies adapt to external influences, while maintaining their cultural essence. For example, festivities such as Inti Raymi (Festival of the Sun) are celebrations that not only honor ancestors but also serve as a means for cultural resistance. The preservation of these ceremonial places is also related to the transmission of indigenous knowledge, which is carried

out through oral traditions and ritual practices, turning them into living classrooms where their traditional practices are taught. The sacredness of these spaces is manifested in their use for rituals of gratitude, invocation and healing, which highlights their function as centers of spiritual and community power. In addition, the symbolism associated with these sacred places is multifaceted.

To contrast the oral and bibliographic accounts of the sacred or ceremonial sites of Salasaka, we conducted a tour of the community, documenting on video the experiences offered by each space for locals and tourists who visit this territory. The guide on this tour was in charge of Mayra Caizabanda, Bachelor of Tourism, who has developed exploration work on these ritual sites.

Among these sacred sites, which promote cultural tourism in the area, we can describe, below, the following:

2.1.1. Cruz Pamba or Chakana Pamba:

Cruz Pamba is a site located next to the cemetery known in Kichwa as Chakana Pamba (Fig. 4). It is the first spiritual meeting point and a place of healing for the Salasaka people. The name comes from the term "cruz" which comes from Spanish and "pamba" means soil in Kichwa. For the indigenous Andeans, when they talk about the "cross" they refer to the "chakana," or also known as the square cross, which refers to the star of the southern cross visible in the hemisphere. This monument represents the four cardinal points and has the fountains that represent fire, water, air and Pachamama (mother earth).



Figure 4. Salasaka ritual in Chakana pamba in the celebration of Inti Raymi 2024

Previously, there was a hollow (waka) with the passage of time they built this site that includes the cross.

It is related that, when digging the waka to put the cross, many coins and banknotes were found that would have been placed there by ancient inhabitants of the community, but it was decided to leave all these elements in their place and place the cross on top, as a symbol of a ritual of good fortune.

In this site, ceremonies of gratitude for the crops are carried out, rituals are practiced for good living, depositing objects and plants for spiritual and disease cleansing. Also, the ancestors performed ceremonies to the sun, the Pachamama and the stars in this place. Here the festival of the Caporales, Alcaldes or "varayuk" is celebrated. It is said that those who participate in these festivals pass calmly to the afterlife, to the other world, while those who do not face difficulties, hence the importance of these celebrations for purification and passage to the divine world.

2.1.2. Nitón Cruz

Located 1 km from Mama Kinlly, there is a small sacred site at the confluence of Kinlly Urku and Mount Niton. In this place, requests are made to develop skills such as reading and writing, creating fabrics, crafts and playing instruments such as the zampoña, quena, or flute, which is left there to learn to play them. Those who sought to learn weaving techniques carry threads as an offering.

In addition, since childhood, women were taken by their mothers to this place to deposit a small wango (a skein made of sheep's wool) as an offering, to acquire the ability to spin with precision, which is a characteristic practice of Salasaca women.

Entry into this small site is restricted only to shamans, or the mayors of the community. If there is a presence of tourists, they must be accompanied by members of the community who instruct them on how to proceed in this place. It is a space dedicated basically to prayer, request and gratitude for artistic skills.

2.1.3. Kinlly Urku and Taita Kinlly

Kinlly urku is the name by which this protective hill is known. This mountain is considered as the protector of the community, so it is a place of important rituals in Salasaka, to cure diseases and perform prayers, especially to attract rain and cure rainbow sickness.

Kinlly Urku is located 2 km from Cruz Pamba and next to the community of Nitón. Rituals and ceremonies take place at the top of this mountain, and there are two sacred sites: Tayta Kinlly and Mama Kinlly.

Tayta Kinlly is a place of masculine balance in the universe, important for ceremonies intended for the men of the community. During the captain's festival, which is celebrated at the beginning of December, people went to sleep and make requests to the sun and to the Chimborazo and Cotopaxi volcanoes, considered the taytas (fathers) of the place.

2.1.4. Mama Kinlly

Mama Kinlly is located 5 minutes from Tayta Kinlly, this site has a great spiritual connection, formerly it was the place where the King's feast was celebrated. This festival, performed by people of great power, marked the culmination of all the traditional festivals of the Salasakas.

Mama Kinlly is a symbol of power, wealth, and strength. In addition, it was considered a space where women went to ask for healing. The Yachaks performed healing rituals using chants and a guinea pig, leaving it as payment for the sick person. To this day, the women of the community come to this site to leave their offerings of gratitude or ask the Pacha Mama for some act of kindness.

2.1.5. Punta Rumi and the Huasalata viewpoint

In the community of Guasalata, northeast of Salasaca, there is a giant stone in the shape of a skull, where rituals are performed to achieve the wisdom of shamans and the healing of the sick.

It is a large stone that, seen from different angles, shows the head of a human (if viewed from above) and the head of an iguana (viewed from below). In this place, our ancestors made requests and practices to develop musical skills with the panpipe, quena, flute, pingullo, and other string and percussion instruments, as well as to improve singing and verbal communication between peoples.

It is possible to take a tour around this rock or observe it from the Mirador de Huasalata, which is another tourist and important point for the area. This viewpoint is known for its healing and strengthening capacity for good living. Since colonial times, verbal communication between indigenous peoples has been fundamental and in the case of the Salasaka community, this practice was maintained until the 80s, where people with loud voices called the community from high points or used horns, whose sound indicated the need to gather. This practice is no longer frequent, but it is still practiced in some community mingas. The Huasalata viewpoint is one of these calling points for the community.

2.1.6. Pogyo Yaku Sacred Waterfall

It is a small water spring that is located about 10 minutes from Punta Rummy, it is considered a place of healing and purification known as pure water or pure spring. In this place, the ancestors bathed to purify their body and mind and to this day people go to bathe there at 4 in the morning with medicinal plants to avoid feeling heavy or unlucky. It is a place to cleanse the soul and spirit, and it is energizing. Ritual baths in this sector have been documented in various audiovisual materials.

An ancient legend is told about this aspect that is part of the Salasaka mythology. It is said that a woman bathing there was approached by a man wearing the typical attire of the Salasaka people. As he approached, the man transformed into a condor and took her to the top of the hill, making her his companion. It is said that the people of the Salasaka people come from this union. It is the legend of the Kaka Galloping Condor, which for the inhabitants of the community poses a possible mythological origin to their people. From this legend it was believed that unmarried women could

not go alone to this site to practice ritual baths for fear of being kidnapped.

2.2. Iconography as a reflection of the intangible cultural heritage of the community.

The iconography created by indigenous peoples is not simply decorative; From its beginnings it has been a profoundly symbolic construction. It is a key visual tool for expressing and conserving a community's intangible cultural heritage. Through its symbols, motifs and designs, not only the beliefs, customs and values of a group are reflected, but also its history, mythology and relationship with the environment. In them, rites, mythical scenes and magic endure; Although these elements have lost a certain presence within the communities, they still remain, as a means to transmit cultural heritages that have even ceased to be part of orality.

These iconic elements are represented in textiles, ceramics, painting, and other forms of visual art, fulfilling a communicative function that transcends generations. Iconography becomes a tool for teaching and cultural memory, allowing intangible knowledge and traditions, such as rituals, legends and festivities, to find a visual and concrete form to endure and adapt over time. Thus, iconography is both a reflection and a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage, keeping alive the bonds of identity and belonging within the community.

The aesthetics reflected in the Salasaka's creations (Fig. 5) not only show artistic styles, but also integrate the graphic form with an expressive and communicative function. It is a symbolic ideography that, as a stylistic feature, tends to schematization and even extreme simplification of forms. In drawings, the line becomes an essential element: it delimits planes, creates textures and is the basis of abstraction. It could be said that these drawings achieve a conception close to heraldry.

Although individual icons are seen in the fabrics of the girdles arranged in square modules, together they tell complete stories. These icons are linked to legends, myths, and celebrations, showing the strength of certain animals and how their qualities are transferred to humans. These

creations do not merely represent isolated icons, but form a joint idea; Embroidery and paintings also narrate scenes, describe environments and identify specific periods.

Over time, in drum paintings, the motifs have become more realistic. The line, which previously delineated the planes, disappears, introducing concepts of light and shadow to create volume. However, there is a tension between adopting new styles and preserving the indigenous elements of his painting. Although the aesthetics retain a certain abstraction and simplicity in the forms, it leaves behind its geometric and linear structure. The motifs now feature less stylization,

with curved lines that move away from traditional representation, in search of greater naturalism.

Both the paintings, as well as the weaving of tapestries, sashes and embroideries made in this community, the stories are associated with their daily life, their celebrations that take place throughout the year, the rituals of gratitude, the healing practices, the characters and environments that build each of these moments. For this reason, it is necessary to recognize that all creation of meaning is intrinsically social, and that each social phenomenon includes, as one of its fundamental dimensions, a process of construction of meaning.

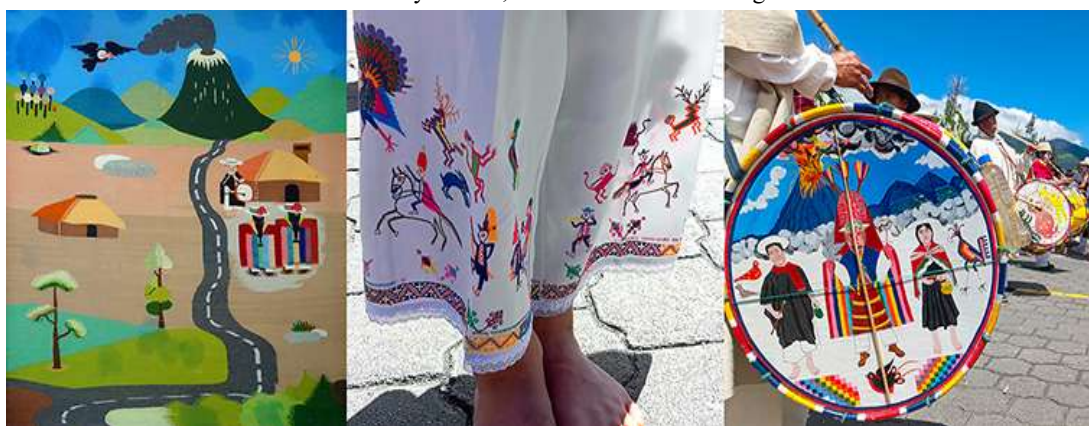


Figure 5. Various iconographic representations of Salasaca rituals in textiles, embroidery and paintings.

As part of the strategies to contribute to the dissemination of the traditions, legends and sacred sites of the Salasaca people, in parallel to the research project, an undergraduate degree project was developed, called "Design of 3D characters inspired by the legends and traditions of the Salasaca indigenous people to make their cultural identity visible" prepared by Nicolas Chiriboga, which was articulated to the macro research project on the artistic practices of the community.

Through this design proposal, the aim was to create 3D characters based on the most representative legends and popular traditions of the Salasaca indigenous people to give visibility to their cultural identity, also establishing effective strategies to highlight the cultural identity of the indigenous people.

The concept was developed based on the knowledge and worldview of the Salasaca people, using the Andean Cross or Chakana as a reference. In Quechua, "Chakana" means ladder or bridge to the top, symbolizing for indigenous peoples the connection between man and the cosmos. The Chakana represents opposite elements on its four sides, such as man and woman, heaven and earth, energy and matter. In addition, it covers the four essential dimensions for community life: spiritual, social, political and economic.

This symbol was fundamental in the creation of the characters, as it encapsulates the essence of the life of the Salasaca people and the mysticism of their legends, especially highlighting the divinity of the condor and the cultural richness of each tradition. In addition, it reflects the meaning of each element in their clothing,

including the colors and symbolic patterns in their embroidery. In addition, he was inspired by the narrative of their ceremonial rituals and by the figure of the musician and the salasaka weaver, who represent the skill of the people.

Figure 6 shows one of the infographic results of this project, which refers to the legend of the Kaka Galloping Condor or the legend of Pogyo Yaku, sacred slope, described in the previous section.



Figura 6. Infographic and 3D link to learn about the Salassack legends, prepared by Nicolas Chiriboga.

2.3. Impact of Cultural Tourism on Salasaka Ritual Sites

The impact of tourism and globalization on indigenous peoples' ritual sites is a complex issue that encompasses both benefits and challenges. As cultural tourism expands, indigenous peoples face pressure to adapt their practices and rituals to meet the demands of tourists, which can lead to the commercialization of their culture and the loss of authenticity. This phenomenon has been documented in various studies that analyze how tourism affects cultural identity and the sustainability of indigenous rituals. However, tourism can have positive effects on communities, such as income

generation and the revitalization of cultural practices. In addition, tourism can improve intercultural understanding and revitalize local cultures, although there is also a risk that processes such as acculturation will weaken indigenous values and identity.

This dilemma is reflected in the need to balance the promotion of tourism with the protection of cultural heritage. However, the negative impact of tourism should not be underestimated. The commercialization of rituals and traditions can lead to the denaturalization of sacred practices, transforming them into spectacles for the

entertainment of tourists. Tourism can result in the degradation of sacred sites and rituals, raising serious concerns about authenticity and respect for indigenous traditions.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by globalization, which often imposes external cultural standards that may conflict with local practices. Globalization, too, has facilitated the dissemination of images and narratives about indigenous peoples that are often stereotyped or simplified. The representation of indigenous communities in the tourism context is often based on stereotypes that do not reflect the complexity and diversity of their cultural realities. On the other hand, tourism can serve as a platform for indigenous communities to reclaim their identity and promote their culture.

Empowerment through cultural tourism can help address issues such as poverty and lack of access to basic services, allowing indigenous communities to improve their quality of life. This empowerment translates into the possibility for the salasakas to manage their own tourism resources, allowing them to earn direct income from the promotion of their rituals and traditions. However, care must be taken not to lead to a distorted perception of the Salasaka identity, where rituals are seen more as consumer products than as profound expressions of their worldview and spirituality.

Boosting the traditional Salasaka ritual calendar can be an effective way to attract tourists, as long as it is done with respect and consideration towards the cultural significance of the practices. This implies that the rituals will not become mere spectacles, but will be presented as meaningful experiences that will allow visitors to understand the worldview of this place. Training local guides, from the community, in storytelling and cultural interpretation can enrich the tourist's experience and ensure that the information conveyed is accurate and respectful. In addition, the promotion of cultural events can be an effective strategy to attract visitors. Traditional celebrations not only introduce local culture to tourists, but also strengthen identity and foster social cohesion.

Collaboration with non-governmental organizations and local government can facilitate the development of suitable infrastructure for

tourism. Community participation in tourism planning and management is crucial to ensure that economic benefits are equitably distributed and that local culture is respected. This includes the creation of sustainable accommodation, which is currently scarce in the area, as well as the improvement of transport and connectivity services, for example, internet connection is difficult in most of the Salasaka territory. In addition, the promotion of local artisanal products that tourists can purchase, both in the artisanal markets and in the private premises that exist in the sector, must be enhanced.

Educating and raising awareness of tourists about the Salasaka culture is another important strategy. Cross-cultural understanding can enrich the tourism experience and foster greater respect for indigenous communities. Awareness programs that inform tourists about the history, traditions, and challenges faced by the Salasaka community can help create more responsible and conscious tourism.

Finally, it is essential to establish a governance framework that allows the Salasaka community to have significant control over tourism development. The active participation of communities in tourism-related decision-making is essential to ensure that their interests and values are respected. This may include the creation of community-based tourism committees that oversee tourism activities and ensure that they align with the goals of cultural preservation and sustainable development.

3. Conclusions

The iconography of the Salasaka people, an indigenous group in Ecuador, manifests itself as a significant reflection of their intangible cultural heritage and ceremonial sites. This heritage not only includes tangible elements, such as artifacts and monuments, but also practices, traditions, and cultural expressions that are vital to the identity and social cohesion of the community. Iconography, understood as a system of symbols and visual representations, plays a crucial role in the transmission of knowledge, beliefs and cultural values between generations.

One of the highlights of Salasaka's iconography is its ability to encapsulate the

community's worldview, which is deeply rooted in its relationship with nature and the environment. The images and symbols used in their ceremonies reflect not only the history and traditions of the people, but also their resistance to globalization. The preservation of these cultural manifestations becomes an act of vindication of cultural identity, in a context where traditions can be threatened by external forces.

In addition, Salasaka's iconography is integrated into their ceremonial places, which are sacred spaces where rituals and celebrations take place. These places are not only physical, but also possess a symbolic meaning that connects the community to their ancestors and their history. Research on these spaces reveals how iconography can be used to strengthen collective memory and foster a sense of belonging among community members. On the other hand, it is important to consider the challenges faced by intangible cultural heritage, including the symbolic appropriation and commercialization of its elements. Iconography, being a cultural resource, can be exploited if it is not handled with respect and consideration for its original meaning.

Iconography acts as a bridge between tangible heritage (such as artifacts and structures) and intangible heritage (traditions, rituals, and cultural practices). This highlights the importance of preserving both the tangible and intangible elements of the Salasaka culture.

Ceremonial places are central to the practice of rituals and the celebration of festivities. The

iconography associated with these spaces provides a visual context that enriches the experience of the rituals, allowing the community to reconnect with their ancestral roots and beliefs. For this reason, education and awareness of the importance of these traditions are essential to ensure their preservation and so that future generations can continue to enjoy and learn from their rich cultural heritage.

In this way, the research and documentation of Salasaka iconography can contribute to its recognition at the national and international level, promoting the appreciation of the cultural heritage of this people.

Cultural tourism in the ritual sites of Salasaka presents a mixed panorama. While it can offer economic opportunities and contribute to cultural revitalization, it also poses risks of commercialization and loss of authenticity. Promoting cultural tourism in Salasaka implies a comprehensive approach that respects and enhances the cultural identity of the community. Through authenticity in the presentation of rituals, the holding of cultural events, collaboration with external organizations, the education of tourists, and the active participation of the community in tourism governance, a model of tourism can be developed that benefits both visitors and the community. Therefore, it is important to implement biocultural safeguarding models that recognize and protect these spaces against external threats, since the protection and recognition of these sacred places are vital for the cultural survival of the Salasaka.

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