

“*Wakcha Alcaldemanda* - On the Poor Alcalde“

“The Poor Alcalde Sponsors the Corpus Fiesta”
Salasaca Quichua origin story narrated by Rosa Masaquiza
Translation and analysis by Tod Swanson
with the assistance of Alissa Johnson
Eric Meringer, Jonathan Confer.

Mt. Chimborazo blesses a poor man and in so doing inaugurates the Salasaca Kichwa Corpus Cristo ceremony, a local variant of Inti Raimi the Green Corn harvest festival central to Andean Religion.

Let me begin telling you this story¹ of Salasaca for you to hear. It is said that a long, long time ago² a poor³ *alcalde*⁴ lived in this town, Salasaca. You all know what an alcalde is, don't you? Well, at the start of each January⁵ the people of Salasaca take the staff.⁶ One time, it is said, a very poor man took the staff. After saying he wanted to be alcalde, this man now walked about sadly because he was so poor.⁷ Now months have passed and the day for putting on the celebration grew closer and closer, and they say⁸ for

¹ Parlumanda – possible a Spanish loan word from the old verb *parlar*, which means to tell or recount.

² Pacha is actually a noun for both time and place. This translation, therefore, is both in ancient times and in an ancient place.

³ *Wakcha* references a number of different meanings. In the Quichua community, a wealthy person is someone who has successfully created a family network which allows him to draw on their resources. Therefore, a *wakcha* can be translated as an orphan, poor, homeless or as having little respect. Because this story continues on about material items, we chose to use poor in the terms of *without resources or means*.

⁴ In this case, Alcalde (Mayor) does not relate to a government or elected position. Instead, it is a person who has gained enough respect from the community in order to throw the annual fiesta, which requires great resources. This person will then become a community elder.

⁵ The great fiesta is called Inti Raymi and is always held on the first of the month.

⁶ Varata: The staff is passed among the tribal Mayors. Each year, a new Mayor accepts the staff and makes the promise that on the first day of the next year they will share a feast with the town members. This is a great honor and after the feast's success, they can enter into the esteemed group of men called Mayors.

⁷ *Wakchakashkamanta*: this word has three parts, yet is written as one. The root noun is *Wakcha* as we have seen is poor in resources, family and friends. Additionally, *kashka* is the past participle of *kana*, to be. And *-manta* is a suffix that signifies “from”. Implied in this sentence is that the would-be alcalde realizes he has taken on a commitment he is unable to fulfill.

⁸ This phrase is often repeated throughout the story due to its oral nature. Additionally, it often changes form such as “*ninmi*,” “*nisha*,” and “*nishkashi*” but always refers to the story passing from the mouths of townspeople into our present story.

that he was sad. Again and again, the previous alcaldes and even his friends and neighbors asked of the poor alcalde:

“How will he make a fiesta like this?”

“How is he going to provide food for the people?”

“What will there be to wear?”

“How will the dancers dress?”⁹

Like this, the men and the women wondered, “What will become of this?”

As the alcalde walked about, one old man said to him, “Listen, young man, are you going to put on the Alcalde festival?” he asked him.

The alcalde said, “Yes, I am.”

This old man said, “You? Being so poor! How will you do it? What will you put out to eat? With what do you think you are going to buy the costumes?” he asked.

The alcalde said, “In that day, you will see how it will turn out!”

Again, asking of the alcalde the old man said, “So then, you would like to receive nice costumes and good food to put out?”

The poor alcalde said, “Yes I do (I would like it)!”

With that the old man said, “I know where you can find good clothes and where you can find help with good food.”

This alcalde said, “Great Sir¹⁰, please (rikuchipai) tell me where do I go?” he asked while saying this.

⁹ Punctuation in Quichua is often sparse or nonexistent. We have translated this story and used English punctuation and grammatical rules in order to make it smooth and understandable in this language.

¹⁰ Tayta is a form of respect in Quichua. It can mean Señor, Sir or man. In this case, it is used among the strangers and also is consistently repeated about the man at the foot of Mt. Chimborazo, thereby distinguishing his character.

The man said, “Go south,” indicating the direction of Mt. Chimborazo. “Follow that path,” he said. And so the alcalde went.

Walking and walking went. He walked some two or three days until arriving at Chimborazo. Upon arriving at the foot of the mountain now, they say he found a very old man who had white, white hair.

This man asked the alcalde, “Where are you going?”

“I am looking for costumes.¹¹ The Alcalde fiesta is coming and yet I am walking without food, without clothing and without money.”

The man then said, “Where are you going to look?”

The alcalde said, “They say that a man lives at the foot of Mount Chimborazo.”

The old man then said, “You are here. Come on in.” Leading him inside the mountain, the white-haired man said, “I am he! Look around. Here you will find everything you need.”

They say that the poor alcalde saw a great big field filled with lots of corn. The white haired man said this, “Take just one ear of corn, as others will also need and will also come and I help all,” he said. “Open your poncho like this and take the corn.¹² Now, take this and return to your home,” he said.

The poor alcalde said, “I am so very happy! Thank you, Sir Chimborazo. Now I can go and make the fiesta.” Next, he came carrying the corn in his poncho. In his house, he opened what was held in his poncho but it was not just the one ear of corn. It

¹¹ Mashkacrini: is a joining of two verbs (mashana = to look for/find, and rana = to go). By placing rana as a suffix, it seems to change this verb combination into the future tense.

¹² The corn is wrapped up in a fold in the poncho and cradled by the arms. It folds into the space provided by the bent elbow. This is a common mode of transportation in the Andes, and therefore has its own verb phrase that is easily understood. However, for English speakers, the clarification is necessary.

was a lot of money, a whole bunch. So after some days, everything was acquired - very, very fine costumes and lots of food.”

The day of Corpus arrives and now the people of Salasaca were thinking that this poor alcalde wouldn't be able to make the fiesta. “With what will he make the fiesta?” they were saying.

But then on the day of the fiesta, they saw. His three dancers were dressed in new costumes. The musicians also dressed in fine, fine clothing.

The alcalde took in his hand the cane, which looked new and was banded with silver, and carried it in his hand. His dancers also wore new costumes adorned in gold, they wore headpieces that shined with gold and on their feet, they wore bells that sounded: “chilin, chilin¹³.” The musicians' drums were large, new, very, very fine with drwing and painted. Also, in the alcalde's house, there was offered beef, potatoes, a lot of cooked corn, and so much chicha¹⁴ it was like water. Everyone drank, they say.

The people of Salasaca were happy, eating and drinking. Yet, they continued to wonder. They asked, “From where did this alcalde bring this? Where did he get the money?”

This Corpus celebration, all the little children, the husbands, wives and grandparents, everyone saw this poor Alcalde.

“Where did he get all of this?”

“Where did all of this come from?”

“We didn't think that he would be able to do it!”

¹³ “Chilin chilin” here is an onomatopoeia. It is references the sound that bells make while the dancers perform. Because it is a mostly oral community, Quichua speakers often add noises into stories to emphasize action.

¹⁴ Chicha is a sweet, alcoholic drink made from either yucca or corn.

In their heads, they kept wondering. These men and women kept asking themselves, it is said. The mayors wondered among themselves as all the people here and there wondered. So finally, they asked this poor Mayor:

“Yes, an old, old white-haired gave the money to me.”

“Where is it that this man lent you money? Did you ask for money from some rich person in Salasaca?”

He said, “No, it’s not like that! I went to the foot of Mt. Chimborazo, there was an old man, and at the mountain, he gave me one ear of corn. I came with that one corn in my poncho. Then, after arriving at my house, it became money. With all of that money, I bought this. Because of this, I am happy to be giving the celebration.”

The old Salasacas had an idea about the one who would become this alcalde and who would become dancers saying that not just anyone should stand up [and volunteer]. To take on the task of being an alcalde or a dancer he should be a 40 yearold. Year by year, turning and turning they dance. Young men should not do it yet. When they reach this said year they [can] do it. The alcaldes starting with the very beginning of January, day by day, passing the months arrive from there to the recital day. On this day they they pass the whole day dancing in the alcalde’s house, choosing, measuring, and fixing up their outfits because the day of Corpus is arriving.¹⁵ The poor alcalde’s dancers wore peacock feathers in their headpieces and danced with those brilliant and shining feathers. They danced with force. From there, they go to dance at Cruz Pamba.¹⁶

¹⁵ The community gets together about once a month leading up the fiesta. On these days (other small festivals), the community discusses and prepares the clothing, food, organization for the day of the fiesta. Finally, in the last week before the Raymi fiesta, the dancers must practice together. The Sunday before the Thursday of Corpus is called “Domingo de Ensayo”.

¹⁶ Cruz Pambapi is the sacred site on the outskirts of Salasaca. It initially represented the crossing of two major roads: where the road to Ambato crosses the road to Riobamba. However, more recently, the church

Although they don't dance looking at only one path, still they always, they always dance looking, looking toward the downhill direction, looking toward where the sun sets.

There in the Salasaca dance we remember, the path from which we came we remember.

That is what our grandfathers said [we should do].¹⁷

All of these ideas were shown to the Poor Mayor because the ancient ones opened the roads to us. Even though we are poor, we can continue in the path that they began.

And like this, we receive their help. The mountains are not dead, and even more than this, they are alive. For this reason, they helped this poor alcalde with one small corn that grew into enough food for him to offer to all the men, women and children of Salasaca.

On the day of the fiesta, the Alcalde didn't give out just enough food for one or two people. He is not selfish or miserly. He put out food for all the people who came to the fiesta: cooked corn, bread, potatoes, meat and even more, he offered chicha to all. And then, the poor Alcalde said, "Even though we are poor, we ought to go forward with our with our [Salasaca] ideas, in keeping on doing the alcalde raymi ideas, let us come to know our life."

has placed a cross there and, in the last thirty years, they also added a cemetery. Therefore, both religions mix a little bit in the religious ceremonies.

¹⁷ Literally "like that our grandfathers say." Significantly the dancers face the direction where the sun sets because temporally the setting sun is associated with the direction of the past and the ancestors who like the sun have set. Thus the west becomes a spatial symbol for the past. At the same time the Salasacas associate the setting sun with the South because their ancestors came from Bolivian in the South. Thus they dance facing the West but remembering the journey from the South. All of this is linked to the Andean "ura (urai hurin) direction which connects with anacma or hanan.