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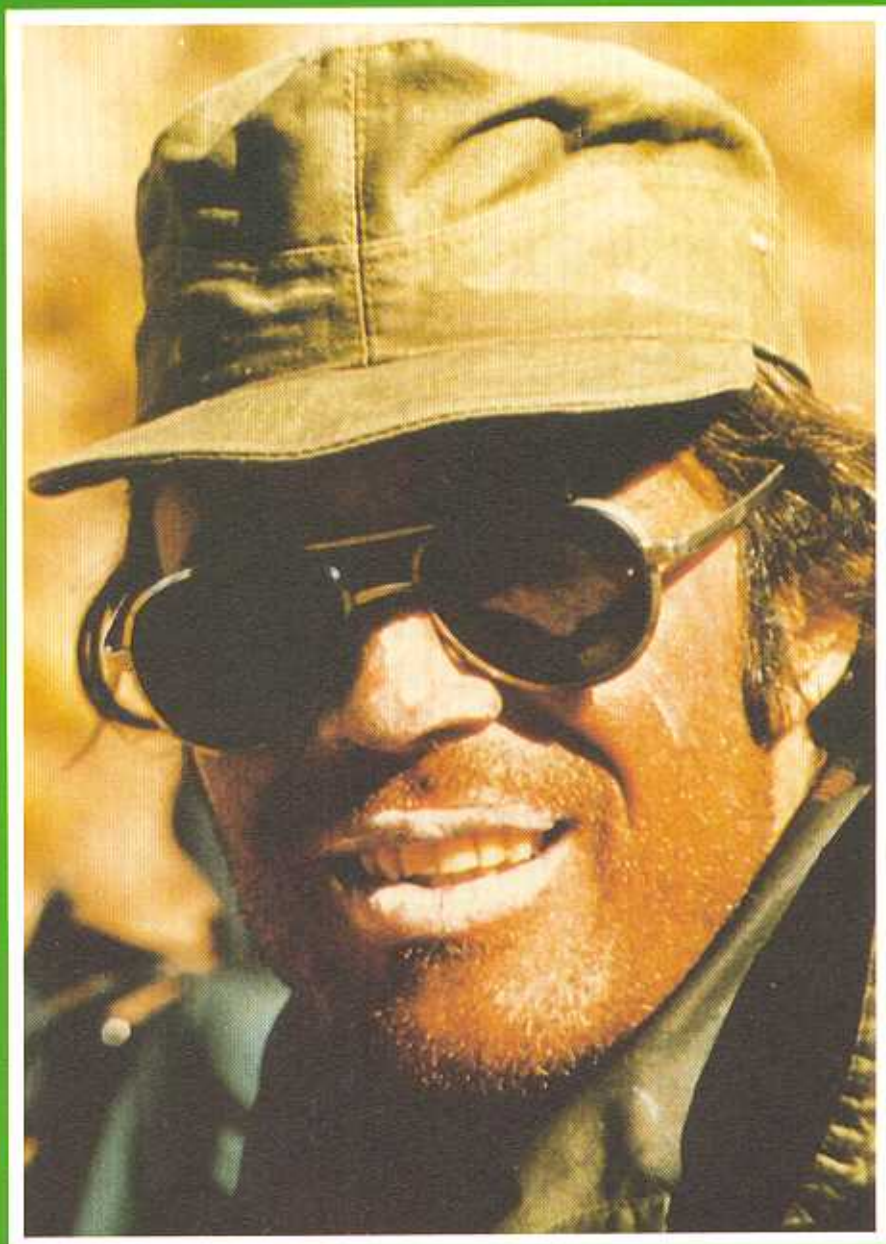
THE 1987 ROLEX AWARDS

Johan Gjefsen Reinhard

Exploring sacred mountains and
ancient ceremonial centres in the
Andes



Rolex Laureate
The Rolex Awards for Enterprise – 1987



Exploring sacred mountains and ancient ceremonial centres in the Andes



Johan Gjefsen Reinhard

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American, born 13 December 1943. Free-lance anthropologist, writer and lecturer. Educated in USA, West Germany, UK and Austria; Ph.D. (Cultural Anthropology) from University of Vienna in 1974.

My project involves searching for and investigating mountain ritual sites in the Andes at altitudes of up to almost 7,000 m and collecting information on mountain worship in selected Andean areas from Chile to Colombia. Use of such data to reinterpret selected ceremonial centres in terms of sacred geography has already led to reasonable explanations for some of South America's most enigmatic archaeological sites.

Mountain worship was a major feature of prehispanic religion and continues to exist in many areas today. It has been called the "keystone of Andean culture", providing a cultural unity for otherwise divided Andean peoples, and my research indicates that an understanding of the basic concepts of mountain worship is essential for interpretations of ceremonial centres of great antiquity.

I selected three types of sites (Chavin, Nazca and Tiahuanaco) and examined them on the basis of data collected relating to mountain/fertility cults in the vicinity and found that this information allowed a more unified explanation of the sites' functions and locations, and of the meanings of many of the figures found there. This project should further substantiate my theoretical and methodological approach, provide deeper insight into some of the most enigmatic sites in South American archaeology, lead to re-examination of previous theories about prehispanic ceremonial centres and help change our perspectives about ancient religious beliefs and practices in the Andes.

High-altitude archaeology and ethnography

Nearly 100 prehispanic archaeological sites have been found at altitudes between 5,200 and 6,700 m in the southern Andes. These are by far the world's highest ruins and, taken together, constitute one of the most awesome accomplishments known to us from ancient times; they are also among the few

Johan Gjefsen Reinhard, Rolex Laureate – The Rolex Awards for Enterprise 1987, pauses in the fierce mountain sunlight on an expedition to a sacred site in the high Andes. (Photo by Antonio Beorchia)

Inca religious sites to escape destruction by the Spanish. Archaeological finds such as frozen Inca bodies (human sacrifices) and rare metal statues have been among the most important in South America. Yet the origin, distribution and purpose of these constructions were subject to conjecture until I began this study in 1980.

My findings were that mountain deities were perceived as controllers of meteorological phenomena (rain, hail, lightning, etc.) and, consequently, of crop and animal fertility. I have hypothesized that the Incas built the sites in the southern Andes to help increase production and to support the Inca state and religion. To test this hypothesis, I now intend to gather further information in Ecuador, northern Peru and Colombia, since I believe that the reason why high mountain sites have not been found north of 10 degrees south latitude is purely that there has been a lack of research in the northern Andes. For example, I will investigate sites referred to by the chronicler Albornoz (1583), and follow up reports from additional historical and ethnographic sources.

The nature of the work at high altitude has necessitated use of specialized techniques and the acquisition of knowledge not commonly held by an anthropologist; in fact, I have helped develop a special subfield in anthropology called "high-altitude archaeology". As unusual as it may seem, diving has also played an important part in this project since the mountain lakes were often perceived as "doors" to the interiors of mountains where the gods reside, or as the wives of these deities.

Research programme and funding

For over two years, this project was entirely self-supported, although local institutions often provided valuable assistance. Subsequently, I received grants from the Explorers Club, the National Geographic Society, the American Philosophical Society, Dumbarton Oaks and the Social Science Research Council. However, lack of funds for a vehicle and an experienced assistant have meant the loss of considerable time and made some aspects of the research dependent on resources and personnel that happen to be available.

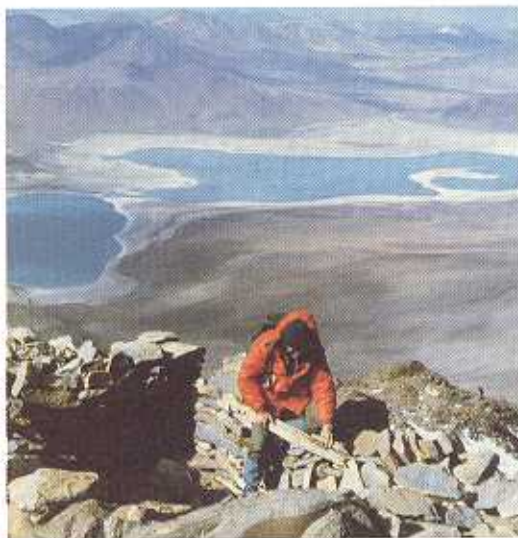
Ethnographic and historical research will be carried out: on Mts. Pariacaca, in central coastal Peru, and Coropuna, one of Peru's highest mountains; on the lakes of Piura, Moína and Urcos near Cuzco; the mountains near Huamachuco to locate the worship place of Catequil, one of the most important deities in northern Peru; Mollotero, a mountain near Cuenca, Ecuador; at Cuzco and near Machu Picchu to collect ethnographic data to interpret the centres in terms of sacred geography; and the ceremonial centre of San Agustín, Colombia.

For the ethnographic research, reports will be obtained from local investigators and field studies will be conducted with local scholars, mainly to interview ritual specialists on such matters as reasons for worship, legends, meanings of ritual objects, etc. Current-day ceremonies will be observed where possible. Historical sources dating back to the time of the Spanish Conquest will be studied for information on mountain/fertility cults. The lesser-known "visitas" of the Spanish priests will be examined and historians will be asked to assist in the location of materials.

The archaeological research will be concerned with locating and surveying ruins on or near mountain summits in the areas selected and in utilizing

excavation reports where available. Detailed site plans and photographic records of finds constitute the principal means of documentation. Excavations are planned only for selected sites under the direction of investigators with the necessary permits. Research on ceremonial centres at Machu Picchu, Cuzco and San Agustín will be primarily concerned with gathering ethnographic and historical information. The figures at the sites will be examined relative to beliefs found as to the roles they play in mountain/fertility cults (e.g. birds of prey as representing the mountain gods).

In conclusion, it is felt that this research will contribute significantly to understanding the traditional Andean religio-economic beliefs and ancient religious sites.



From high aloft in the Andes, the lands of the ancient Empire of the Incas stretch away as far as the eye can see, while Johan Reinhard examines the archaeological remains of a sacred mountain site.

Surprisingly, diving is one of the skills that Johan Reinhard has had to acquire as a high-altitude archaeologist. Mountain lakes are a potential source of thrilling discoveries since precolumbian populations considered them "doors" to the sacred mountains. (below)

