

## writing history into the landscape: space, myth, and ritual in contemporary Amazonia

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Very early in the morning, during a bright September day in 1977, I started what was going to be a three-day walk from the Yanesha community of Yorenačo to that of Muerraño,<sup>1</sup> passing through the communities of Huacsho and Yoncollmaso, all of them in the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Central Andes (see Figures 1 and 2).<sup>2</sup> My travel companion was Francisco, a middle-aged Yanesha who was going downriver to visit relatives and do some hunting and fishing. When we departed, I had no idea that this trip was also going to be a fascinating journey along the landscape of Yanesha history and myth.

Shortly after leaving Yorenačo along the colonization road built in the 1970s we went by a gently sloping hill on top of which, Francisco told me, lay the foundations of an old Yanesha temple/forge. At its base, he claimed, one could still see rests of the furnace in which iron ore was melted. A few hours later, close to the colonist town of Eneñas he singled out the site of the last fully functioning Yanesha temple, abandoned in the 1950s after the death of the officiating priest. Before arriving at the settlement of Huacsho, we went by a small lake in a site called Cacasaño. Francisco told me that here the warrior divinity Yato' Caresa (Our Grandfather Caresa) hid himself after being defeated by the Muellepen, ancient cannibals who used to travel upriver along the Palcazu River in order to attack the Yanesha settlements of the Cacazú Valley.

We spent that night in Huacsho and the next day headed to Yoncollmaso, walking along the right bank of the Cacazú River. Soon we came to the end of the colonization road and entered an old trail. Some fifteen minutes later, Francisco informed me that right across the river lay the remains of the house in which his grandfather had died. He told me that in the old-house site one could still see his grandmother's large manioc beer pot—an object no longer manufactured by Yanesha women—as well as the peach palms and coca bushes sown by his grandfather. Before arriving in Yoncollmaso, Francisco showed me the trail to the old Yanesha settlement of Asopeso (nowadays inhabited mostly by Ashaninka), which he and his father had followed

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*Like members of most nonliterate societies, the Yanesha preserve historical memory through narrative and performative practices such as myths, traditions, reminiscences, rituals, and body practices. Among the Yanesha, however, these coalesce into a major inscribing practice, that of "writing" history into the landscape. I contend that "topographic writing" constitutes a protowriting system based on "topograms"—individual elements of the landscape imbued with historical significance through myth and ritual. When combined in sequential or nonsequential ways, these elements behave as "topographs" (units of a longer narrative). Through this mnemonic device the Yanesha have preserved not only the memory of the mythical consecration of their traditional territory, but also that of its despoliation and desecration in more recent times. [history, myth, ritual, landscape, memory, protowriting systems, Amazonia]*

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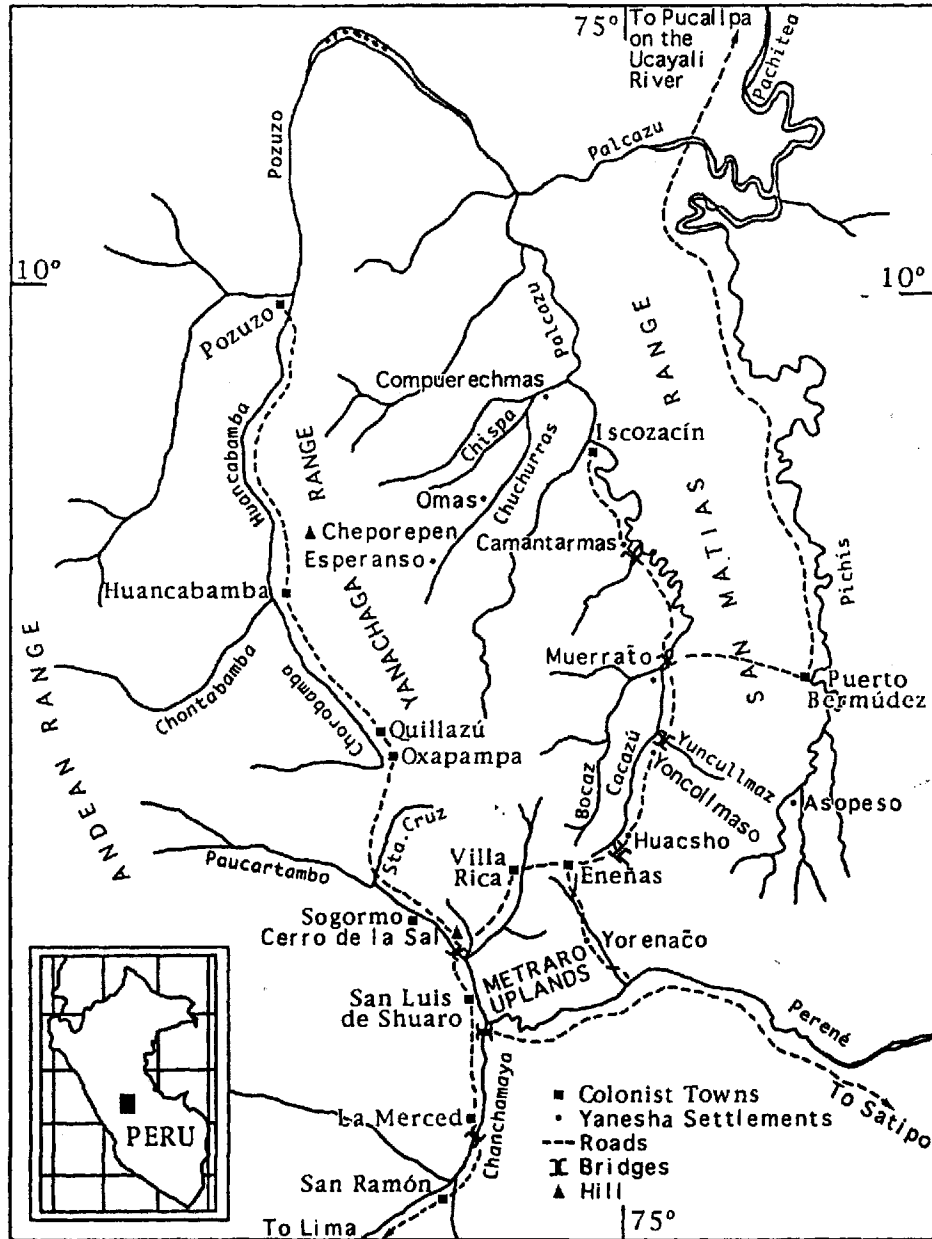


Figure 1. Yanesha "traditional" territory.

when he was 12 years old. He recounted the happy memories of that trip, the first long walk he had undertaken with his father.

Next day, we started walking toward our destination very early in the morning. We went past the spot where the Yuncullmaz River flows into the Cacazú to arrive at a point called O'machpuetso where the river narrows and flows through steep hills. Francisco asserted that it was there that Yato' Caresa, the warrior divinity, used to post his guards in order to prevent the cannibalistic Muellepen from entering the territory. He showed me the large rock where the Yanesha of ancient times used to burn the bodies of the Muellepen enemies they had killed.

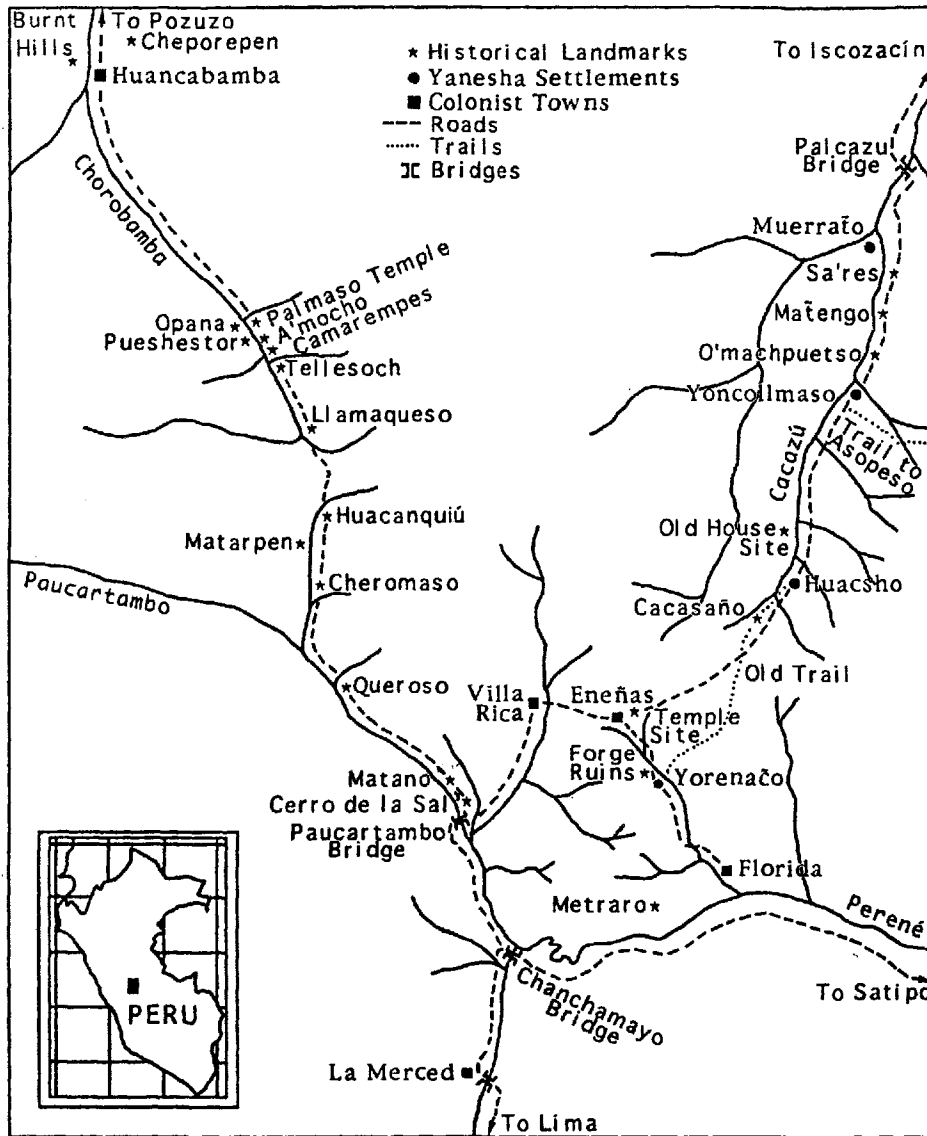


Figure 2. Historical landmarks in Yanesha territory.

Further downriver, he singled out several large, elongated, and polished stones lying on the riverbed and explained that those were the bodies of the Yanesha warriors killed by the Muellepen in the attack in which they finally defeated Yato' Caresa. At noon we arrived at a small waterfall called Sa' res. My companion informed me that the flat slabs along which the water ran were the hiding place of the ancient divinity Yato' Ror (Our Grandfather Ror), for which reason this water had the property of prolonging human life. So we bathed under Sa' res before arriving at our final point, the settlement of Muerraño.

Experiences such as this were in no way exceptional. During my two periods of fieldwork among the Yanesha, whenever I drove or walked along the roads and trails that crisscross their "traditional" territory my Yanesha companions would point out different sites or features of the landscape,<sup>3</sup> readily connecting them to past events, whether personal, historical, or mythical. The present article constitutes an attempt to understand the implications of such associations.

## historical and mythical memory

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Arawak-speaking Yanéscha migrated upriver from the Amazon basin before settling in what became their "traditional" territory (Lathrap 1970). Because of their strategic location and the existence of important commercial networks (Lathrap 1963; Tibesar 1950), present-day Yanéscha share cultural complexes with both Amazonian and Andean peoples. Andean influences are manifested in Quechua linguistic borrowings (Wise 1976); in the development of a religious complex of priestly leaders, temples, and pilgrimage sites (Santos-Granero 1991; Smith 1977); and in the incorporation into their mythology and astronomical lore of important Andean motifs (Santos-Granero 1991, 1992). In addition, the Yanéscha have adopted Christian elements from the Franciscan missionaries who tried to convert them—briefly and intermittently during the 17th century and for a longer period of 33 years during the 18th century. After enjoying a spell of relative political autonomy between 1742 and 1847, the Yanéscha were again subjected to further foreign pressures, this time from the Republican Peruvian governments.

As the archaeological, linguistic, and historical evidence clearly indicates, the Spanish conquest was not the starting point for the history of the Yanéscha people, which extends much further back. Far from being tranquil, the history of the Yanéscha has been an eventful one, characterized by long-distance migrations (from the lowlands to the Andean slopes and back again into the lowlands), dramatic cultural encounters (with the agents of the Inca empire, the Spanish Crown, and the Peruvian state), defensive and offensive warfare (with the Panoan peoples of the Ucayali River, the Andean peoples, other neighboring Arawak-speaking peoples, and Spaniards and Peruvians), and revolutionary material changes (such as the adoption of iron-forging techniques from the Franciscan missionaries in the 18th century). Despite the fact that the history of the Yanéscha people is among the best-known and documented cases for the indigenous peoples of Western Amazonia, very little is known about the way in which the Yanéscha recall and transmit it.<sup>4</sup>

Much has been written about "how societies remember" and, more specifically, about how members of nonliterate societies remember. Three means or modes through which historical information is transmitted and historical consciousness manifested have been underscored: the mythical mode, including myths and related narratives and ritual action (Hill 1988); oral tradition, with mythical narratives occupying a secondary place (Vansina 1988); and performative acts such as commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices (Connerton 1989). Recently a number of authors (Bender 1993; Feld and Basso 1997; Friedland and Boden 1994; Hill 1989, 1993; Rappaport 1989; Renard-Casevitz and Dollfus 1988; Schama 1995) have emphasized the importance of landscape as another means of encapsulating and transmitting historical memory in both literate and nonliterate societies. The goal of the present article is to explore the subtle ways in which the Yanéscha have "written" history into the landscape. I shall concentrate on two spatiohistorical processes: the occupation of what became their traditional territory in pre-Hispanic times, and the process of territorial despoliation and physical displacement to which they have been subjected in colonial and Republican times.

I shall begin the analysis with a brief account of the cycle of myths that narrate the wanderings and actions of the solar divinity Yompor Ror and his brothers and sisters at the end of the second of the three eras into which the Yanéscha divide their history. According to the Yanéscha, in his trajectory the solar divinity left important landmarks. These have become salient reference points for demarcating their traditional territory. Relying on archaeological evidence, I shall contend that the events of the saga of Yompor Ror recalled in myth and recorded in the landscape reflect the actual migration of the proto-Yanéscha from the Amazonian lowlands into the eastern slopes of the Andes. I shall also argue that the Yanéscha interpret the process of occupation of what became their traditional territory as an act of "consecration"; they conceive

of the topograms through which this process is recalled as sites of creation and, in some cases, of veneration.

Subsequently, I shall provide a brief account of the long process of territorial despoliation that the Yaneshas have experienced since 1847, arguing that the most recent events in this process have been interpreted by the Yaneshas in terms of the *pishtaco* mythology of Andean origin. In their reinterpretation of this mythology, *pishtacos* are malignant beings, employed by the road-building company to kill the Yaneshas and bury them in special sites in order to advance and consolidate the roads and bridges under construction. Thus the Yaneshas have interpreted the process of occupation of their lands as an act of desecration, conceiving of the new landmarks created in the course of this process as sites of destruction.

Finally, I shall try to demonstrate that the myths, oral traditions, personal memories, rituals, and bodily habits through which the Yaneshas build their history coalesce in support of a major inscribing practice. This is the "writing" of history into the landscape. This "topographic writing" constitutes a kind of protowriting system common to other Amerindian societies such as the Paez of Colombia and the Wakuénai of Venezuela. It is my contention that even though topographic writing constitutes an important means of preserving historical memory and consciousness in nonliterate societies, it is by no means a mechanism exclusively employed by simple, unstratified societies. It is present in hierarchical societies as well, and can even coexist with "true writing systems."

### **the mythical consecration of Yaneshas territory**

The saga of the birth, deeds, and ascension of the solar and lunar divinities Yompór Ror (Our Father the Sun) and Yachor Arrór (Our Mother the Moon) is recounted in numerous myths comprising the central core of Yaneshas mythology. According to myth, before Ror and his sister Arrór were born, the heavens were ruled by Yompór Rreñ, a maleficent solar divinity. At that time, women did not give birth to normal children but to lizards, monkeylike beings, and rotten wood. The wondrous birth of Ror and Arrór inaugurated a new era of normal childbirths and biological order (Santos-Granero 1991:54–67); their ascension to the heavens and the defeat of the previous solar deity inaugurated the present historical era. As we shall see, the actions that took place in between these two events mark "this land" (*añe patsro*) as the territory of the Yaneshas.<sup>5</sup>

Myths recount how on his way to Cheporepen—a hill in the Huancabamba Valley from which he and his brothers and sisters would ascend to heaven<sup>6</sup>—Yompór Ror wandered along this land, first in an upriver, north-south direction along the Palcazu-Cacazú basin, and later in a downriver, south-north direction along the Chorobamba-Huancabamba basin. At that time the land was inhabited by gods of the "grandfather," "father," and "brother" categories, as well as by *mellañõeñ* spirits, powerful demons, the primordial human forms of present-day animals and plants, and the ancestors of the Yaneshas. According to myth, along his way to Cheporepen Yompór Ror was angered by the behavior of the beings he encountered. Using his divine power, he transformed them into stone, or into the animals and plants that the Yaneshas know nowadays.

According to the myth, Yompór Ror came from the downriver area of the Palcazu Valley. After walking along the Cacazú River, he arrived in the valley of Eneñas, where he found out that Yompór Huar—a boy he had reared—had had sexual relations with his wife Yachor Coc, Our Mother Coca. Infuriated by Huar's deceit and Coc's infidelity, Ror dismembered his wife's body and scattered her body parts in all directions. From them grew the coca bushes the leaves of which the Yaneshas consume nowadays. Knowing how angry Ror was, Huar attempted to escape toward heaven. But Ror, dressed up as his wife Yachor Coc, deceived him, planting him firmly on this earth so that Huar would have to support the weight of the heavens forever after.<sup>7</sup>

Yompor Ror went on to the Metraro highlands, where he heard that his brother Yompor Yompere was impatiently waiting for him in the Chorobamba Valley. When he arrived at the mouth of the Paucartambo River, he changed his route to a south-north direction. Two kilometers past the present bridge over the Paucartambo River (at the site called Matano), he met Oneñeñ. The latter attempted to run away from the angry Yompor Ror, but to no avail. With his divine power, Ror transformed him into the master of the present-day *oneñeñ* demons. Further on, Ror arrived at a small stream where he met Quer, the human primordial form of a kind of parrot, transforming him into the bird we presently know. Nowadays, this stream is known as Queroso (parrot stream). Ror went on upriver along the Santa Cruz, one of the tributaries of the Paucartambo River, until he reached a stream on its left bank. There he met Cherom and transformed him into the small swallow that nests close to the homes of the Yanasha. At present this stream is called Cheromaso (swallow stream).<sup>8</sup>

Yompor Ror continued his way northward. He was fishing in a small tributary of the Santa Cruz River when a group of travelers passed by. They were loaded with *chemuer* and smoked fish that they had collected in the Palcazu Valley.<sup>9</sup> Ror asked one of the men, called Matar, to give him some fish and *chemuer*, but the man refused. When Matar started climbing a hill, Yompor Ror shouted his name in anger, transforming him into a large white boulder that is still visible over the right bank of the river. This place is now known as Canclo, and the white boulder as Matarpen. Further on he saw another group of travelers who were also coming from the Palcazu Valley loaded with *chemuer* and a large variety of parrots. The divinity asked Huacanquiú, one of the travelers, to give him a parrot, but Huacanquiú refused. Ror became angry at the travelers and transformed them into boulders that are now visible on the left bank of the Santa Cruz River close to the place called Mesapata.

He then left the basin of the Paucartambo River and walked toward the Chorobamba Valley. He arrived at a large stream, where he met Llamaque' (another kind of parrot) and transformed him into the bird that nowadays bears that name. This is why this river, which flows into the Chontabamba in order to form the Chorobamba River, is now known as Llamaqueso.<sup>10</sup> By then the divinity was very angry. When he reached a stream called Quelleso (silver stream),<sup>11</sup> he chased away the people who lived there. The inhabitants ran away, farting from their fear; this is why this place is now known as Tellesoch (the place where people farted). Further on he met Camarempue' in a small stream and transformed him into the large butterfly that nowadays bears that name; this stream is known as Camarempes (butterfly stream). He then met a powerful *mellañoñeñ* spirit called O'patenaya, who picked a fight with him. Yompor Ror won the battle, forcing the spirit to hide forever in the place known as Amo'cho.

Further along the Chorobamba River, Ror met two men, Pueshestor and Arrarpeñ, who were chasing down the river all the water beings he had created. They were sifting the water with a round sieve in order to catch even the tiniest of fish. When asked why they were doing this, they answered that they wanted to deplete the river in order to keep all its creatures for themselves. Ror became angry at their greed and transformed them into stones; their stone bodies can still be seen, together with their stone sieve. He dealt similarly with a man he found driving away—downriver and across the Yanachaga range—all the terrestrial beings he had created. He asked the man, "Why Opana, my child, do you want to empty the land that I have created?" By calling him Opana he transformed him into a dumb person (*opan* being the word for dumb). That is why the stream where Ror found him is now known as Opanmaso.<sup>12</sup> The Yanasha say that had it not been for Pueshestor, Arrarpeñ, and Opana, the upriver area (the valleys of Chorobamba and Huancabamba) would now have as many fish and game animals as the downriver area (the valley of Palcazu).

When Yompor Ror headed for the site from which he would ascend to heaven, his elder brothers—Yompere, Yompuer, and Ețetar—and their respective sisters/wives decided to precede him. When Yompere reached the stream now called Opanmaso, together with his

sister/wife Yachor Mamas (Our Mother Manioc Beer), his classificatory son Yemo'nasheñ Senyac (Our Brother Senyac), and another minor divinity called Yepañer Señyac (Our Brother-in-Law Senyac), he stopped to rest and wait for his younger brother. When Yompör Ror arrived there after having transformed the greedy men, he was still very angry; he argued with Yompere, starting a fight with him. Ror won, transforming Yompere, his wife, and Yemo'nasheñ Senyac into stones. These divinities are now visible as large boulders on the right bank of the Chorobamba River.

After or before that event (informants are not clear on the sequence of events), Yompör Ror transformed his brother Yompuer into a small polished stone. Having transformed his two brothers, Yompör Ror continued along the Huancabamba River toward Cheporepen, the hill from which he was going to ascend to the heavens. His third brother, Yompör Ețetar, had preceded him and was waiting for him. Knowing that Ror had transformed his other brothers, Ețetar was angry and defiant. When Ror arrived, they started fighting. In the fashion of gods, they gleamed like fire, knocked each other down, and cast each other far away, burning all the surrounding hills. This is why these barren hills are nowadays covered only with tall grass. Ror defeated Yompör Ețetar and, at the latter's request, transformed him into a half-stone, half-human being. Finally, Yompör Ror ascended to the heavens amidst a fabulous celebration.

Ror's ascension marked the beginning of the present era through a series of ruptures. It signaled the end of Yompör Rreĩ's rule over the heavens immediately above the land: Ror forced the evil solar divinity into an upper heaven where he could not harm the Yaneshä any more. It marked the separation among humans and plants and animals: Ror transformed the primordial human forms of plants and animals into the shapes that bear their names today. It marked the end of sociability between humans and divinities: Ror was followed into the heavens by other divinities who became the present stars and constellations (Santos-Granero 1992).

This sort of second creation was not the seraphic kind of event depicted in the biblical Genesis; it was the violent creation of an angry god.<sup>13</sup> It was nevertheless through the divine, transformative actions of Yompör Ror that a previously unmarked space became añe patsro (this land)—in other words, the marked and consecrated "territory" of the present-day Yaneshä. As we shall shortly see, the consecration of the space of mythical time into Yaneshä territory before Yompör Ror's ascension corresponds closely to what we know about the migratory route followed by protohistoric and historic Yaneshä.

### **the prehistoric occupation of Yaneshä territory**

According to Lathrap (1970:102), from 1500 B.C. to A.D. 650 the Upper Pachitea basin was occupied by Arawak-speaking peoples belonging to the Nazaratequi tradition. Lathrap suggests that these peoples had migrated from the central Amazon River into the Ucayali and later into the Pachitea. Around A.D. 650, the Upper Pachitea River was invaded by the Naneini peoples who, according to Lathrap, were "one branch of the wave of Panoan-speaking peoples who overran the whole Ucayali basin at this time" (1970:135). The presence of Naneini peoples in the area was short-lived. Sites of this period have as their latest component a layer of refuse left by peoples of the Enoqui complex; their ceramic styles suggest they were directly descended from makers of the Nazaratequi tradition:

The fact that the Enoqui complex is the most widespread and latest ceramic complex in the area occupied until very recently by the Amuesha [Yaneshä], makes it probable that the Enoqui midden can be attributed to the proto-historic and historic Amuesha. [Lathrap 1970:135]

The archaeological evidence presented by Lathrap suggests that the route through which the Yaneshä or proto-Yaneshä arrived to occupy their precontact territory was along the Ucayali-Pachitea-Palcazu axis. They were forced to follow this route by the pressures exercised by

Panoan-speaking peoples. Yanesha oral and landscape history is in agreement with this reconstruction; the northeastern boundary of their territory was the point at which the Cacazú River flows into the Palcazu. Here, Yato' Caresa, the warrior divinity, stationed his guards, to stop the cannibalistic Muellepen from attacking the Yanesha. It is highly probable that the Muellepen mentioned in Yanesha mythology are the present-day Cashibo or Uni, a Panoan-speaking people who occupy the left bank of the Upper Pachitea River and who practiced a form of endocannibalism until the 1960s (Frank 1994:207). The entrance to the Cacazú River must have represented the southernmost limit of the expansion of the Panoan-speaking peoples, who ascended along the Ucayali, Pachitea, and Palcazu Rivers.

Historical evidence confirms this suggestion. Soldiers, missionaries, and travelers who visited the Palcazu Valley in the 19th century do not report the presence of a large indigenous population; those they mention were mostly Ashaninka (Campa). In 1886 when the French explorer Olivier Ordinaire (1892) visited Guillermo Frantzen (by then the only colonist in the Palcazu Valley), the latter told him that when he settled in the mouth of the Chuchurras River around 1880 he found only 12 Ashaninka families. At the time of Ordinaire's visit, Frantzen had managed to gather 60 Ashaninka and Yanesha families around him. The latter were brought from the Chorobamba-Huancabamba Valleys. The low population density of the Palcazu Valley suggests that the area was a buffer zone separating the Yanesha from their enemies, the Panoan peoples located to the north.

The wanderings of Yompor Ror before his ascent to heaven follow the same route as did the protohistoric Yanesha. According to myth, Ror came from the downriver area, the Palcazu Valley, following a north-south direction until he reached the mouth of the Paucartambo River and a formidable barrier, the eastern slopes of the Andes. From there he continued downriver along the Chorobamba and Huancabamba Valleys, following the foothills of the Andes in a south-north direction. Ror's wanderings marked what was in fact the core of Yanesha territory at the time of their contact with Spaniards. Insofar as Yanesha mythology reflects the actual migratory route and the areas occupied by the historical Yanesha, it is not surprising that the most heavily marked areas in mythicospatial terms are those in which the Yanesha finally settled: the Bocaz and Cacazú Rivers (headwaters of the Palcazu River); the interconnected valleys of Eneñas, Villa Rica, and Yurinaki; the highlands of Metraro; the Lower Paucartambo River; and the axis of the Chorobamba-Huancabamba-Pozuzo Valleys. In contrast, the Palcazu basin appears very poorly marked in mythicospatial terms. This situation changed radically after the mid-19th century, when the region was conquered by the Peruvian army and the displacement of the Yanesha from their territory began.

### **the historical despoliation of Yanesha territory**

The 1847 invasion of Yanesha territory by the Peruvian army put an end to a period of more than a century of autonomy, achieved after the great panindigenous rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa in 1742. Since 1847, the colonization of Yanesha territory became a gradual but inexorable process. Colonization pressures came from two points: the military garrison of San Ramón in the southwestern limit of Yanesha territory (founded in 1847), and the German colonist settlement of Pozuzo in its northwestern limit (founded in 1856). Waves of colonists originating from these two centers acted as pincers, eventually encircling the Yanesha living in the heart of their territory.

Between 1847 and 1880, the Yanesha were displaced from the southwest portion of their territory, away from most of the left bank of the Chanchamayo River, and from the northwest, away from the valleys of Pozuzo and Huancabamba. Between 1880 and 1900, what was left of the core of their territory was occupied almost entirely by new waves of colonists. As a result of the founding of the missionary post of Quillazú in 1881 and of the colonist town of Oxapampa



in 1891, the Yanesha were almost totally dislodged from the valley of Chorobamba. With the creation of the missionary posts of San Luis de Shuaro (1886) and Sogormo (1896), they were displaced from most of the lands located along both banks of the Paucartambo River. Finally, in 1891, with the establishment in the region of the Peruvian Corporation Company, a British coffee-growing firm, the Yanesha were forced out of the left bank of the Upper Perené River (Barclay 1989; Barclay and Santos 1980:47–50).

Having been displaced from a large part of their traditional territory, the Yanesha retreated into the Palcazu basin. This sparsely populated area, which in the past had been a buffer zone between the Yanesha and their northern Panoan neighbor-enemies, thus became a refuge zone. Many present-day Yanesha settlements located in the Palcazu basin were founded during the first half of the 20th century by peoples displaced from their original areas as a result of colonization pressures. This is true of the settlements of Camantarmas, founded in the 1940s by Yanesha migrants from the Upper Perené area, and of Omas, founded in the 1960s by descendants of Yanesha families that had originally come from the Chorobamba Valley (Santos-Granero 1991:177–182). In their retreat, the displaced Yanesha followed—but in the opposite direction—the same route once trodden by their ancestors and their divinities.

From the 1940s onward, the process of displacement was accelerated by the construction of new colonization roads bringing in massive waves of new Andean settlers. During the ensuing decades, the Yanesha were pushed further and further downriver. By the beginning of the 1980s, 14 out of a total of 28 Yanesha settlements were located north of the mouth of the Cacazú River (Barclay and Santos 1980:70–71); as we have seen, this was the old boundary with their Panoan neighbors. Of these, two settlements were located in the Upper Pachitea River, and two in the Lower Pichis River—the home area, according to Lathrap, of the protohistoric Yanesha. In an ironic twist of events, the Yanesha, who had been forced out of the Upper Pachitea basin around A.D. 750, were forced back into that area 1,200 years later. We have seen how the Yanesha have inscribed into the landscape the history of occupation and consecration of their traditional territory. We will now see how they conceive of their present-day displacement and retreat from this territory and how they have written this story into their landscape as well.

### **the contemporary desecration of Yanesha territory**

In 1977, when I did my first fieldwork among the Yanesha, the colonization road departing from the colonist town of La Merced and skirting the towns of Villa Rica and Eneñas had already reached the Yanesha community of Huacsho. Lack of financial resources forced the Peruvian state to stop construction of the road a few kilometers past this settlement. At the beginning of the 1980s, during his second term in government, President Fernando Belaúnde announced his decision to implement a large colonization and development project—the Proyecto de Desarrollo de la Selva Central—involving most of Yanesha territory. The Proyecto Especial Pichis-Palcazu, a component of the larger Selva Central project, entailed building new roads of penetration and continuing existing roads. When I started my second stint of fieldwork in May 1983, the continuation of the La Merced-Huacsho road had been under way for almost two years; by then, the road had already reached the settlement of Muerraño.<sup>14</sup> This road building was a joint effort by the Villasol S.A. Company and the Ollantaytambo Battalion of Engineers of the Peruvian army. The former had its field headquarters close to the settlement of Muerraño; the latter was encamped in a site called Mañengo, midway between the settlements of Yoncollmaso and Muerraño. Associated with road construction were also several sentry posts: immediately past the settlement of Huacsho, near the mouth of the Yuncullmaz River, and immediately before the settlement of Muerraño. The headquarters of the Pichis-Palcazu Special Project were located in the colonist town of Iscozacín, on the left bank of the Palcazu River, where the road had not yet reached.

By the time I arrived, the landscape between the settlements of Huacsho and Muerraño had dramatically changed since my 1977 trek. The road builders had dynamited several hills, sometimes excavating the foothills, sometimes cutting the lower hills in two. In order to avoid having to construct a large number of bridges, they had built the road along the right bank of the Cacazú River. As a result, the old jungle trail had been destroyed and many of the landmarks that I had been shown during my 1977 walk were no longer visible. Some of those that were still visible, such as Yato' Ror's waterfall, had been damaged or highly modified by the builders of the road.

Ten days after my arrival, I heard the first version of the strange things then taking place along the road. Being in Muerraño, I went to fish with a friend at night. He was very nervous, walking silently and waving his flashlight in all directions. When I asked him why he was so cautious, he answered that it was no longer safe to fish on the right bank of the river, for the pishtacos now wandered along the new road, "hunting people in order to cut their throats." Further, he said that before the road reached Muerraño everything "was silent," for the pishtacos had appeared together with the road builders. I was surprised to hear this, for the pishtacos are malignant beings characteristic of Andean folklore; until then, no Yanesha had mentioned them.

In Andean folklore, pishtacos—also known by the Quechua name *nakaq* or the Spanish term *corta-cuellos* (throat-cutters)—are evil beings who attack persons walking along solitary places in order to extract their fat and use it for several purposes. They were first mentioned in the 1570s by the chronicler Cristóbal de Molina, who reported that Andean Indians had begun to avoid the Spaniards, accusing them of killing people to extract their fat, purportedly to cure a strange disease affecting only Spaniards (Ansión 1989:69). In 1723 these beings—by then identified with priests—appeared for the first time as throat-cutters under the name of *nakaq* (Ansión 1989:70). Since then, the figure of the pishtaco, as well as popular interpretations of its activities, have evolved in adaptation to ever-changing historical contexts and circumstances. According to Ansión (1989:9), however, the pishtaco is always a personage associated with the powerful. He has the physical features of a *gringo*<sup>15</sup> and, although endowed with magical powers, is neither a spirit nor a being of the other world but a man of flesh and bone.

During the following days and months I heard innumerable accounts of pishtaco activity in a large area extending from Huacsho downriver to Compuerechmas. The accounts of pishtaco activity followed the same downriver direction as the road under construction. All reports coincided in that the pishtacos were gringos: they were hairy and wore long hair and hirsute beards; they frequently wore masks and cloaks; they generally wandered in groups of twos and threes along the road and close to *huaros* and bridges;<sup>16</sup> they could swiftly travel along the forest, but they frequently used cars to pursue their victims; and they hunted solitary walkers and cut their throats for several alternative purposes: (1) to extract their fat and export it out of the area and even out of Peru for several uses; (2) to "support" the foundations of *huaros* and bridges; and (3) to "feed" the hills in order to prevent landslides during the process of road building.<sup>17</sup> Informants were not always in agreement as to the kinds of people pishtacos preferred to attack and kill: some said that they only attacked outsiders, others that they also attacked local Yanesha people. All accounts coincided, however, in representing pishtacos as employees of the Villasol road-building company, or, in some cases, of the Ministry of Public Works.

Later, in that same month, I was informed that two pishtacos had followed with flashlights a member of the community of Yoncollmaso who was hunting close to the river. They also told me that an army officer who worked on the road warned members of the community not to walk along the road after 4:00 p.m., for the workers of the Villasol company were hunting peccaries and could inadvertently kill those passing by. My informant interpreted the officer's words as a warning against the pishtacos hired by the road-building company, and the phrase "hunting peccaries" as a euphemism for "hunting people." In Muerraño I was further informed that one

of the engineers of the Ollantaytambo Battalion had warned the local people not to wander along the road after dusk or before dawn, for they could be attacked by pishtacos.<sup>18</sup>

Later on, the rumors spread to the downriver area. I heard reports about the presence of pishtacos in the settlements of Camantarmas, Omas, Compuerechmas, and Esperanso, located along the Palcazu River and its left bank tributaries. In June 1983, while visiting Camantarmas, I was warned not to travel alone, for those who worked for the Villasol company in the Pichanaz-Iscozacín section of the road were killing people in order to "support" the bridges that were being built in the Pichanaz-Puerto Bermúdez section. In Muerraño, it was explained to me that the road builders needed a total of eight persons to support every bridge (two for each of its pillars). As they planned to build many bridges in both sections of the road, they needed to kill many people. The job of the pishtacos on the payroll of the Villasol company was precisely to secure people to support the planned bridges. In Yoncollmaso my companions added that the pishtacos beheaded the people they killed and then placed them in an upright position in the holes where the pillars of the bridge were to be built. Afterward, and in order to ensure that they would firmly support the bridge, they soaked them with formaldehyde ("so that they stay hard and firm and won't blacken").<sup>19</sup>

In that same month, I heard in the settlement of Yoncollmaso that the Villasol company had killed many soldiers belonging to the Mañengo camp of the Ollantaytambo Battalion in order to "feed" a particularly rough hill dropping vertically into the right bank of the Cacazú River—downriver from the mouth of the Yuncullmaz. It had taken the road builders almost one full year to dynamite and remove a steep hill in order to build a scant three-kilometer section of the road. People told me that the spiritual beings residing in the hills were very angry at being dynamited and removed. As a result, they caused massive landslides, killing many workers and burying expensive machinery. People said that the hills demanded to be fed human beings in order not to produce further landslides. That would explain, so the story went, why the pishtacos hired by the Villasol company were killing civilians and soldiers: wherever a landslide had occurred the pishtacos killed and buried one or two persons in order to prevent further accidents.

Further downriver, in the settlement of Omas, rumors of the presence of pishtacos began in August 1983, when a dead young man was found in Esperanso with his body severely sliced in the manner in which the Yanéscha prepare fish and game for smoking and salting. In the ensuing days, pishtacos were sighted in the surroundings of Omas, in Compuerechmas, again in Omas, in the area of the Chispa River, and once more in Omas. People reported that the pishtacos were very hairy, dressed in black, wore masks, cloaks, and helmets, and were armed.<sup>20</sup> In this downriver area the Yanéscha identified the pishtacos with the state functionaries working for the Pichis-Palcazu Special Project, whose headquarters was located in Iscozacín. According to my informants, visitors to the headquarters of the Project were magically "appeased" (*amansados*) and rendered defenseless by the state functionaries living there—who later on cut their throats. The Yanéscha were not sure as to what they did with the dead visitors, but they suggested that "it might be to extract their fat and export it."

Reports of the presence of pishtacos in Yanéscha territory were clearly associated with the implementation of the Pichis-Palcazu Special Project and the construction of roads and bridges—in short, with the process of modernization prompted by the Peruvian state. The Yanéscha are conscious that roads constitute a mixed blessing. On the one hand, because of their increasing involvement with the regional and national market economy they require cash to buy the manufactured products they now consider indispensable. In this sense, roads constitute a blessing for they provide an easier way to transport local produce to the marketplace. On the other hand, the Yanéscha know that roads bring with them colonists, lumberjacks, merchants, soldiers, and state functionaries—people who despoil their lands, exploit the Yanéscha economically, and diminish their sociopolitical autonomy. By May 1983, the road had just arrived at Muerraño. Even though it took more than one year before private transport was allowed

along the road, the mere fact of its opening meant a rapid increase in contacts with regional and national society. Recent literature on pishtacos (Ansión 1989; Wachtel 1994) suggests that they are a widespread phenomenon, reported by traditional rural or urban dwellers who are undergoing accelerated change under external forces. Moreover, as Ansión has argued, reports of the appearance of pishtacos are always associated with pressures exercised by an external power, be it the state, the Catholic Church, or other organizations and institutions that attempt—and have the means—to impose their will over these sectors of society. Pressures may take different forms: attempts to control the labor force, extract votes, or expropriate lands or resources; pressures toward acculturation or modernization; and much more. Not surprisingly, in 1987, when Peru was undergoing the worst crisis of its Republican history under the violence generated by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA), pishtacos were reported in many of its war-ridden regions, in both rural and urban areas (Ansión 1989).

Among the Yanésa, pressure from the state came under the guise of a large colonization and development project, the most visible expression of which was the construction of roads and the most foreseeable and threatening result of which was the further displacement of the Yanésa. Events in this process of territorial despoliation and physical displacement, interpreted in the light of pishtaco mythology and conceptualized as acts of desecration, were recorded in the landscape in the form of evil sacrificial sites—burial places that appear as sites of destruction.

### the writing and reading of history in landscape

In his recent work, *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama contends that “landscape is the work of the mind” (1995:7). By this the author means that landscapes result from the application of human agency to specific natural settings over time. It is “our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (Schama 1995:10). As a result of human agency and perception, landscape becomes the carrier of “the freight of history,” its scenery “built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (Schama 1995:5, 7). Schama traces the origins of this phenomenon to “the days of ancient Mesopotamia” and asserts that it “is coeval with writing” (1995:7). The author does not elaborate on this assertion, which presumably derives from the bias historians generally have for written sources, as well as from his subject of study—namely, landscapes in the Western tradition. In any case, if the connection among landscape, memory, and historical consciousness is important in the context of Western literate societies, it is even more important in the context of nonliterate societies, where landscape not only evokes memory but is written upon it, thus *becoming* memory.

The Paez of the highlands of southwestern Colombia and the Wakuénai of lowland Venezuela will serve to confirm this point. In analyzing how historical memory is transmitted among the Paez, Rappaport asserts that they “locate their historical record in sacred sites dispersed throughout the area, which serve both as mnemonic devices for remembering history and as clear-cut boundary markers for *resguardos* [indigenous communities]” (1989:85). These sites may have symbolic significance at the local level of the *resguardos*, or at the more general level of the ethnic group. According to Rappaport, in either case sacred sites “are talked about in oral histories, and acted upon through pilgrimage and ritual” (1989:87). Moreover, as Espinosa (1995) reports, the Paez visualize themselves as being involved in a constant process of “sowing history” through their historical migrations and the occupation of lands outside their traditional territory. According to Rappaport, however, rather than recounting events as such, these histories allude to “the growth of indigenous institutions,” serving the very pragmatic objectives of “remembering political boundaries” and thus of defending their territory (1989:87–88).

The Wakuénai, an Amazonian indigenous people scattered in lowland Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil, are, like the Yanésa, members of the Arawakan linguistic family. According to Hill

(1993:44), the ritual naming of places in the *málikai* (particular kinds of sacred chants) narrating the second mythic creation of the world reflects the Wakuénai's historical consciousness of the past, particularly at the level of political relations with distinct peoples. The Wakuénai use the names of places, natural species, objects, and geographical landmarks to "construct a historical consciousness of outsider others." Through the processes of "searching for names" and "heaping up names," the keepers of *málikai* chants draw a mythical map of the world with its center at Hipana, the place where the Wakuénai emerged according to myth.

According to Hill (1993:44), this map reflects with great accuracy not only the distribution of the different Maipuran Arawakan language groups in pre-Hispanic times, but also that of the principal Wakuénai phratries. More important, the map that emerges from the *málikai* songs incorporates the presence of the white invaders. The songs recount the location of Portuguese and Spanish settlements, and the routes that the Wakuénai were forced to follow either after being enslaved or when they returned to their lands after regaining their freedom. According to Hill, this proves that far from freezing history into a static mythic order, the Wakuénai have incorporated the experience of Western colonial domination into "their narrative representations of the original coming-into-being of human society and history" (1993:159). Through this and other rituals the Wakuénai have produced what Hill has called an "environmental history."

Although the Yanésa, the Paez, and the Wakuénai build up their history through myths, oral traditions, personal memories, rituals, and bodily habits, all these elements, I contend, contribute to and come together in the practice of writing history into the landscape. The inscription of the landscape that we observe among peoples like the Yanésa, the Paez, and the Wakuénai does not, however, constitute a writing system in the strict sense of the term—that is, the "systematic link between sign and sound" that allows for "an exact transcription of a linguistic statement" and is characteristic of "true writing systems" as defined by Goody (1993:17). Rather, what I have called "topographic writing" can be defined as an "identifying-mnemonic device" of the kind Gelb (1974) attributes to protowriting systems.

A further distinction should be introduced here. Whereas in the pictorial protowriting systems that Gelb describes the identifying-mnemonic device is based on "pictograms," or drawn signs, in topographic writing it is based on landmarks resulting from the action of human or superhuman beings. I will call these "topograms"; they are elements of the landscape that have acquired their present configuration as a result of the past transformative activities of human or superhuman beings. Examples of human-made topograms are old building or garden sites, graves, mines, trails, bridges, or battlefields.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, topograms attributed to supernatural agency are generally natural elements that stand out in the landscape because of their extraordinary aspect (shape, size, color)—this, according to the Yanésa, constituting evidence that they are not in fact natural. While pictographic writing is based on human-made signs that recall things or events, topographic writing is based on attributing the character of signs to particular elements in the landscape believed to manifest some kind of supernatural intervention: the transformation of a divinity or a human into stone, the burning of a forested hill slope in the midst of a battle between divinities and its transformation into a patch of grassland, or the transformation of a natural element such as a waterfall into the hiding place of a superhuman being. By attributing a transcendental reality to particular elements in the landscape, the Yanésa transform these salient natural elements into signs that recall past events. In this sense, and in spite of their differences, pictograms and topograms share the property of being varieties of "shorthand, a mnemonic, which attempts to recall or prompt linguistic statements" (Goody 1993:17); but they are also, as we shall see, performative acts.

As pictograms, topograms constitute signs that stand by themselves and evoke a single thing, event, or idea. As in the case of pictograms, which when combined in a sequential manner become "pictographs," however, topograms can also be combined in various forms, thus becoming what I would call "topographs." These can be defined as landscape signs that "stand

in opposition to or in conjunction with other such signs," forming a "wider semiotic system" (Goody 1993:8). Examples of this kind are the 16 or more topograms through which the saga of Yompor Ror is recalled, or the three or more topograms that recall the deeds of Yato' Caresa in his struggle against the cannibalistic Muellepen.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, a person walking along the trail followed by these ancient divinities could, and actually does, "read" their histories, either partially (by reading single topograms) or in their totality (by reading interrelated topograms).

According to Rappaport, this is also the case among the Paez, whose historical narrations, "keyed to dispersed topographical referents," are "composed of episodes which can stand on their own, or can be related to other episodes through visual observation and movement through space" (1989:85). Rappaport asserts that these "topographical referents," which I call topograms, are sometimes related in a chronological—that is, sequential—manner, but that more frequently the "use of space as framework for interpretation breaks down the chronology of the spoken narration, creating new relations among historical referents" (1989:88). This would be the case for those topograms that encode "a variety of historical referents occurring at different times, all of which are related by having taken place at the same site" (Rappaport 1989:88). Also, it would include those "remembered in an order which corresponds more to calendrical or annual markers than to a chronology marked in years or eras" (Rappaport 1989:89). In other words, very much like Lévi-Strauss's "mythemes" (1969), topograms can be combined and recombined, either temporally or spatially, in order to generate new associations, or stories that may be used to illustrate, explain, legitimize, or question new historical situations.

Among the Yanesha three different types of topograms can be distinguished according to the predominant means through which they have been infused with historical significance: personal reminiscences, collective oral traditions, and mythical narratives. Examples of each can be found in the account of my 1977 walking trip. In spite of the importance of these three types of topograms as means of preserving historical information and memory, however, they turn into powerful mnemonic devices only when they become the subject of mythical narratives. In effect, even though it is through personal reminiscences and collective oral traditions that certain features of the landscape are originally imbued with historical meaning, it is only when these features have been in some way sacralized through myth that topograms and topographs acquire collective significance and a greater resistance to the erosive forces of time and oblivion. Personal memories are generally shared by only a few people and consequently tend to be short-lived. Collective oral traditions seem to have a longer life. The cases of the Yanesha and Paez nevertheless suggest that at most these latter traditions go back in time for a century. The only historical events that are preserved in topographic writing for much longer are those imbued with mythical significance, whether positive or negative, as witnessed by the existence of sites of consecration and desecration. It seems, therefore, that in these nonliterate societies it is through the legitimizing power that derives from the sacred nature of myths that particular elements of the landscape are historicized in a collective and, to a large extent, permanent manner, thus becoming true topograms and topographs within a sacred geography.

The events signified by these topograms are recalled not only through mythical narratives but also through ritual activity. Among the landmarks established during the pre-ascension era, the site of Opanmaso or Palmaso—where Yompor Yompere and his companions were transformed into stone—became an important ceremonial and pilgrimage center. According to Father Navarro (1924), at this site there was a temple that had been functioning until the early 1920s. The temple consisted of a rectangular thatched building inside which resided the two larger stone divinities, Yompor Yompere and his wife Yachor Mamas, while a third smaller stone divinity, Yemo'nasheñ Senyac, was placed outside (Navarro 1924:16). Navarro (1924:15) reported that the ceremonies held in the temple were officiated by a *brujo* (witch) who acted as a *sacerdote* (priest). He further stated that ceremonies held in the honor of the stone divinities were attended by people who came from neighboring and distant places, bringing with them

offerings of manioc, maize, meat, fish, coca leaves, and manioc beer (Navarro 1924:17). Although the temple was abandoned shortly before 1924, the Yanesha peoples that lived in the neighboring settlements continued to deposit offerings of coca leaves, chemuer, and lime at the feet of the stone divinities of Palmaso at least until the 1970s.<sup>23</sup>

Some sites that became significant in the present era, after the ascension of Yompor Ror, were also the object of collective rituals. Thus, for instance, the grave of Juan Santos Atahualpa, the leader of the 1742 multiethnic revolt against the Spanish, became an important ceremonial center visited on an annual basis by Yanesha and Ashaninka pilgrims until the late 19th century (Santos-Granero 1991; Smith 1977; Varese 1973). The Cerro de la Sal, located in the boundaries of the Yanesha and Ashaninka territories and traversed by a large salt vein, was visited annually during the dry season by the Yanesha, Ashaninka, Conibo, and Piro peoples from the lowlands, and by Andean peoples from the neighboring uplands, all of whom came to extract the mineral. According to myth, the Cerro de la Sal was the place where Posona', the primordial salt-person, was transformed into the edible salt the Yanesha know today. People who came to extract the mineral left offerings of coca leaves, lime, and chemuer for the divinity. Although salt is not extracted from it any more, the Cerro de la Sal still constitutes a very important topogram, not only for the Yanesha but also for the Ashaninka (Renard-Casevitz 1993). Under the guise of the religious ceremonies held at the temple of Palmaso, the commemorative rituals held at Juan Santos Atahualpa's grave, or the sacrificial offerings performed at the Cerro de la Sal, in all cases ritual action underlines the importance of specific topograms while at the same time preserving the memory of past events. It is through the narration of myths and the performance of rituals that the Yanesha write history into the landscape, thus transforming raw space into a religious topography that encapsulates historical memory.

Although topographic writing does not offer the multiple advantages of a true writing system, it plays a crucial role among peoples like the Yanesha, the Paez, and the Wakuénai as a means of preserving the memory of what they consider to be important historical events. Through the combined assistance of mythical narratives, ritual activities, and personal memories, these peoples keep fresh the historical significance of their topograms and topographs. For the traveling Yanesha, landmarks comprise history *tout court*; they can be read. Furthermore, the information they contain in shorthand writing can be transmitted to members of the succeeding generations. The power residing in these topograms and topographs is such that even those now located outside Yanesha lands continue to be recognized by old and young people alike. The latter might not know in full detail the myths that recount the origin of these landmarks, but they know the main outline of the stories and recognize their significance.

### **the extent and persistence of topographic writing**

While I would argue that topographic writing is a form of protowriting characteristic of at least some nonliterate societies, it is by no means exclusive of small-scale societies with little social stratification. In fact, it is highly probable that the development of topographic writing systems in these societies resulted from their contact with the complex and hierarchical societies of the Andean highlands. In effect, the common denominator of these three societies is that they are native to Amazonia but have maintained historical relations with Andean peoples. In the case of the Yanesha, as we have seen, there is ample evidence of this long-term interaction. As for the Paez, Rappaport (1989:90-91) asserts that in precontact times they lived in the tropical lowlands east of the Andes; they migrated into the Andean highlands in the early colonial era. In turn, Hill (1989:10) asserts that there is ethnological and linguistic evidence that the Wakuénai, as well as other neighboring Arawakan groups, had been in contact with Quechua-speaking peoples of the central and northern Andes.

Topographic writing seems to have been a common feature among the stratified societies of the highland Andes, as attested by the Inca *ceque* system of sociospatial organization. According

to Zuidema (1977, 1989), the space surrounding Cuzco, the imperial capital, contained 328 *huacas* or sacred places—hills, boulders, springs, burial sites, buildings, and so forth—organized in 41 imaginary lines radiating from the Temple of the Sun like the spokes of a wheel. Each of these ceques was associated with a different social group, a *panaca* or an *ayllu*, of Inca or non-Inca descent. The sacred places aligned in a ceque had mythical or historical significance for the members of the particular group to which they were ascribed; in many cases they included the sites from which the groups' ancestors had emerged in mythical times (Zuidema 1989:479). Members of each group were in charge of maintaining the huacas of its ceque and performing the appropriate ritual ceremonies. Zuidema (1989:468, 475) argues that the ceques also acted as "optical lines" that allowed the viewer to establish visual connections among the different huacas comprising them. Although Zuidema only asserts that through the ceque system the Inca "integrated history and religious topography" (1989:483), the data he presents strongly suggest that the Inca practiced a form of topographic writing. The huacas had the character of topograms, while the ceques constituted topographs that could be visualized and "read" from specific viewing points.

I would also argue that the advent of true writing systems does not necessarily result in the total displacement of topographic writing. Forms of this protowriting system persist hand in hand with true writing systems in literate societies where literacy is not yet extensive. In the Western tradition several instances of this kind of topographic narratives exist, the best known of which is that of the Passion of the Lord. Among Catholics and Orthodox, but also among Protestants of the Anglican faith, the Passion of the Lord constitutes a segment of a longer narrative relating to the life of Jesus Christ. Known also as the Way of the Cross or Via Crucis, this narrative recounts the events that took place in Jerusalem between the moment Jesus Christ was condemned to death by Pontius Pilate and the time of his burial. The 14 events that comprise this narrative are known as the Stations of the Cross. They are associated with particular sites along the way followed by Jesus Christ, from the praetorium to Calvary, the hill on which he was crucified and close to which he was buried. At present, these events are annually reenacted in Jerusalem, when thousands of pilgrims follow the 14 Stations of the Cross along what is also known as the Via Dolorosa.

When comparing the topographically written narrative of the Passion of the Lord with that registered in the Gospels, it becomes apparent that at least six of the 14 events in the former do not appear in the latter.<sup>24</sup> I would suggest that this is because in early Christian times, when literacy was still not widely disseminated, the memory of the events of the Passion of the Lord was preserved through both true writing—the Gospels, which very few could read—and topographic writing, consisting in this case of the topograms along the Via Dolorosa, which the illiterate majority could indeed read. While the writing down of the narration of the Passion of the Lord in the Gospels "fixed" the events recalled, the writing of those same events in the landscape allowed for further elaboration with the passage of time. It was not until much later, when the events in the topographically written narrative were registered in true writing, that they became fixed in the tradition of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches. In this case, however, it is the topographically written version of the Passion of the Lord, rather than the literally written version found in the Gospels, that has prevailed in the memory of millions of Christians. Throughout the world, many Christians continue to recall or reenact the events of the topographic version through the visitation of the sites at which they supposedly took place, by means of a symbolic tour of the 14 Stations of the Cross as represented pictographically, or by numbered crosses along the lateral walls of their churches.

## conclusions

Numerous topograms and topographs attest to the fact that the Yanasha have "written" their past history into the landscape. This is certainly true for historical events having an important



spatial dimension. Most important among these is the occupation and appropriation of their traditional territory, a process recalled through the saga of the solar divinity Yompör Ror. Although these narratives, and the topograms and topographs into which they have been written, might not convey the kind of historical information expected in a Western society, they certainly seem to reflect some past events with striking accuracy. Among the Yanéscha, the north-south-north wanderings of the solar divinity Yompör Ror replicate the route followed by their ancestors as they gradually settled into what became their traditional territory. Among the Paez, the journey of the mythical *cacique* (headman) Juan Tama, marked by a sequence of sacred places giving origin to numerous contemporary villages and *resguardos*, recapitulates their migration from east to west, and from the lowlands to the highlands in the early colonial period (Rappaport 1989:91). Finally, among the Wakuénai, place-naming in the *málikai* chants that recount the second mythical creation of the world reconstruct the spatial distribution of Arawakan-speaking groups at the time of first contact with Europeans (Hill 1989:19, 1993:44). Foundation myths-cum-history, or histories-cum-myth, are by no means alien to the Western tradition; one only has to think of King Arthur, William Tell, El Cid, or Pocahontas. Their importance does not lie in their fidelity to what “really” happened, but in having become an integral part of the historical consciousness and the identity of the peoples that bear them.

More important, the same mechanism through which the Yanéscha have preserved the memory of how their traditional territory was consecrated at the beginning of the present historical era has been at play in writing the more recent history of its despoliation. The burial of the purported victims of the *pishtacos* in the foundations of bridges and in landslide sites has created new landmarks in what is left of Yanéscha traditional territory. These are now the landmarks of desecration, terror, and retreat. Thus, despite increased involvement in the national market economy, new forms of political organization, massive conversion to Christianity, and acquisition of literacy by almost everybody below 30 years of age, the Yanéscha continue to write their history into the landscape. It is still too early to know whether the sites created around *pishtaco* activity will become true topograms in such a way that a Yanéscha grandmother traveling along the road a century from now will be able to read them and tell her granddaughter how the road was built and what events were associated with its construction. For now, however, the new landmarks have entered into the historical consciousness of the Yanéscha as an expression of the invasion of their territory by white foreign agents. The Acropolis of Athens bears witness to Turkish occupation and defacement. The Auschwitz concentration camp, transformed into a museum, constitutes a testimony of the death of millions of Jews during World War II. The old astronomical observatory of Hiroshima, incinerated by the atom bomb in 1945, reminds us of the horror of weapons of mass destruction. In like manner, the sites where the victims of the *pishtacos* have been buried stand as signs of the desecration of Yanéscha territory, but also as signs of resistance, and as reminders of what should never have happened.

## notes

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1. The Yanéscha, known in the 17th and 18th centuries as Amage and from the 19th century on as Amuesha (or one of its variants), have recently rejected this latter foreign tag in favor of their self-designation term, Yanéscha, which can be literally translated as “we, the people.”

2. In order to preserve a certain degree of anonymity, the names of the Yanéscha settlements or communities mentioned in the text are not those officially recognized by the Peruvian state; in some cases the names mentioned are presented in Yanéscha rather than Spanish orthography; in other cases I have presented the Yanéscha traditional names instead of the new ones; finally, in a few cases I have assigned them a fictitious Yanéscha name. In contrast, I have maintained the Spanish names, or the Yanéscha names rendered in Spanish orthography, of the main rivers, ranges, and areas.

3. By "traditional" territory I mean the region occupied by the Yanéscha at the time of their first contact with Spanish colonial agents.

4. Among the missionary sources of colonial and Republican times the most important are those by Amich (1975), Córdoba y Salinas (1957), Izaguirre (1922-29), and Rodríguez Tena (n.d.); among the contemporary studies that deal directly or indirectly with the history of the Yanéscha people are those by Barclay (1989), Barclay and Santos (1980), Lehnertz (1969), Ortiz (1967, 1969, 1979), Renard-Casevitz et al. (1986, 1993), Santos-Granero (1980, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1993), Smith (1974, 1977), Tibesar (1950, 1952), and Varese (1973).

5. Like most Amazonian mythologies, Yanéscha mythology is not narrated in sequential order. In general terms, it could be said that every adult Yanéscha has heard, in one or other of its versions, all the narratives that conform their mythology, but can recount only a few of them. Myths are rarely told sequentially as a saga but are narrated individually in specific circumstances and for specific purposes. When one is able to record and analyze a large corpus of Yanéscha myths, however, it becomes apparent—through the informants' use of phrases such as "before (or after) this or that happened"—that the Yanéscha conceive of them as ordered in a sequential manner. This is the case with the myths that recount the actions of Yompór Ror in the period between his birth and his ascension to the heavens. The following account derives from an abridged presentation of some of these myths provided by Smith (1977:87-90) and from my own recordings and transcriptions of one or more versions of each of the myths that compose the Yompór Ror saga.

6. As in the Andean saga of the Ayar siblings, the Yompór Ror saga narrates the deeds of four divine couples:

Yompór Yompere = Yachor Mamas  
Yompór Yompuer = Yachor Capac-huan  
Yompór Efetar = Yachor Coc  
Yompór Ror = Yachor Arrorr

Yanéscha mythology is clear in asserting that the couples Ror/Arrorr and Yompere/Mamas are simultaneously siblings and spouses; it is less clear about the couples Efetar/Coc (most informants claim that Coc was sister and wife of Yompór Ror) and Yompuer/Capac-huan (informants claim that Capac-huan was Yompuer's sister but do not state whether she was also his wife).

7. In the version of this myth recorded by Smith (1977:88), Yompór Huar appears instead as one of Yompór Ror's brothers. According to this version, while fighting they burned the hillsides of the lower Eneñas Valley. This would explain why nowadays the latter have no forest cover and appear as extended grasslands.

8. At present the Cheromáso River is known as Churumazú.

9. Chemuer is known as *chamairo* in Spanish. It is a very bitter bindweed that is chewed together with coca leaves and lime. While the lime precipitates the minute amount of cocaine present in the leaves, the *chamairo* bindweed has a sweetening effect.

10. At present the Llamaqueso River is known as Yamaquizú.

11. At present the Quelloso Stream is known as Quillazú.

12. At present the Opanmaso Stream is known as Palmazú.

13. The first creation was that of Yato' Yos and his evil classificatory brother Yosoper, who, in a fierce competition, created the Yanéscha as well as the primordial human forms of all the beneficent and maleficent beings, plants, animals, and minerals that nowadays inhabit "this land."

14. From Muerraño the road was supposed to bifurcate: the Pichanaz-Iscozacín section was intended to go along the Palcazu River, and the Pichanaz-Puerto Bermúdez section across the San Matías range, and on toward the Pichis River. In May 1983 the Huacsho-Muerraño portion of the new road had not yet been officially inaugurated. For this reason, the only vehicles that were allowed to travel along the road were those of the Army Battalion and the Villasol company.

15. In Peru, the term *gringo* is used by members of the middle and upper classes to designate non-Hispanic whites and by indigenous and peasant peoples to designate both Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites.

16. Huaros are horizontal primitive funiculars used to cross rivers.

17. The killing and burying of people in a sacrificial manner in order to turn them into spiritual forces that will "support" human-made structures (bridges, dikes, forts, temples, etc.) does not constitute an exceptional practice in the history of humankind. Hubert and Mauss have called these rites "building sacrifices" (1964:65). In a recent unpublished paper, Uchiyamada reports that in the past in Kerala, India, high-caste landlords would have "soil slaves" killed and buried with open eyes under the rice field dikes "so as to make them strong" (1995:2-3). According to Uchiyamada's informants, this type of sacrifice made it possible for the victims' *shakti* (mystical power) to emanate from their open eyes and thus support the dikes from below.

18. Some skeptical Yanéscha suggested that these warnings by army personnel were aimed at preventing the local people from seeing how they were illegally cutting logs from Yanéscha lands and transporting them by night to the sawmills of the colonist town of La Merced. To support this claim they pointed out the busy flow of trucks that traveled by night along the road—an unquestionable fact.

19. As far as I know, formaldehyde is not a substance used by the Yanéscha for any of their activities. Thus I take it that the term must have been introduced in the area together with the rest of the pishtaco lore.

20. If we take into consideration that two years later there was reliable evidence that insurgent commandos of the Shining Path and the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA) had entered into the Palcazu River from the north and east, respectively, it would not have been surprising if the pishtacos sighted in 1983 had in fact been advance guards of either of these two organizations, exploring the area.

21. Although petroglyphs can be considered to fit more properly into the category of human-made topograms, I am excluding them from my analysis both because they do not seem to be important in the context of the Yanéscha and because I am more interested in the way landscapes are inscribed through myth and ritual than in their actual material inscription.

22. I say "or more" because it is possible that there are other topograms associated with these two narratives that I was unable to register.

23. In 1973 Smith (1977:229) promoted the restoration of the sacred site of Palmaso among the Yanéscha living nearby and participated in the first collective ceremony performed in honor of the stone divinities since the 1920s.

24. Matthew and Mark report the same seven events; Luke adds one more, while John reduces the number of events to six.

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