

Coca is not Cocaine: The Traditional Use of Coca in Peru and Bolivia

Coca – *Erythroxylon novogratense/coca*

From Quechua: *kuka*



Pulgar Vidal 1996

The plant

- a bush which grows in the warm *yunga* regions of the Eastern slopes of the Andes; leaves can be harvested several times per year
- contains vitamins, minerals and alkaloids; when chewed it is not intoxicating

History

- documented in time depth for the Inca period (certainly not invented by them) and before; probably mainly used by the elite
- Spanish administration did not approve of its usage (because of its links with traditional Andean religion), but gave special permission for usage in mines

Traditional usage

- chewing (Sp. *mascar*, Qu. *akullikuy*, *pikchay*) with alkaloid (Andean Sp. *lejía*, Qu. *llypt'a* – alkaline paste made of *quinua* ash) makes it easier to endure hardship, stress, and pain, e.g. when working in the mines or on long trips; as social convention when meeting
- offering to supernatural beings for wellbeing (e.g. *Tío de la mina*, *Pachamama*)
- divination, e.g. in order to find out about one's luck in an imminent trip or about an illness

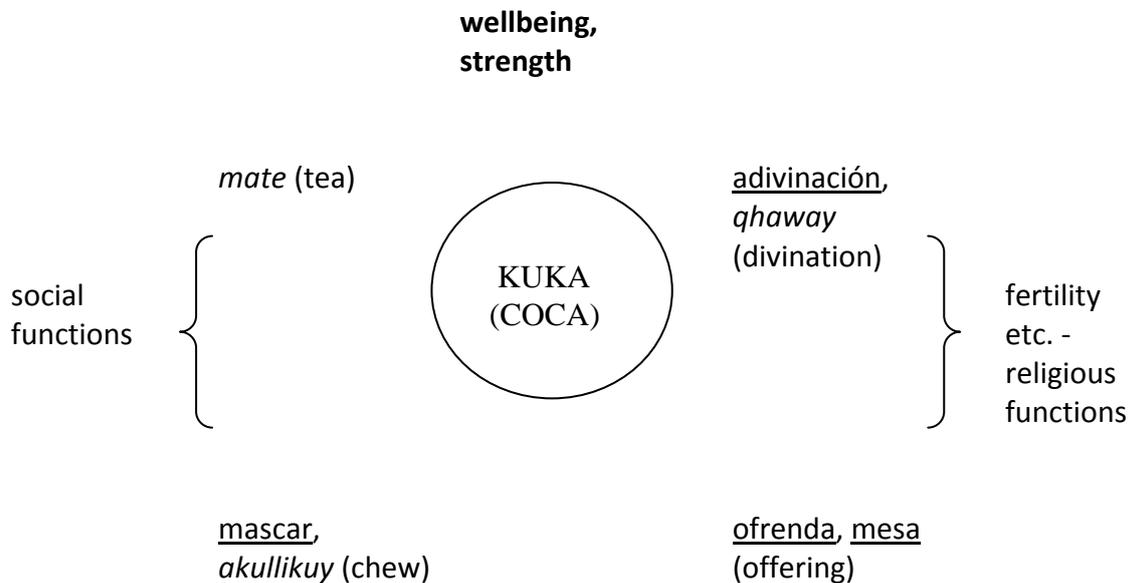
→ Allen ([1988] 2002) on contemporary coca usage

- esp. in towns and by the urban population as coca tea (*infusión* or *mate de coca*)
- as alternative medicines against a variety of ailments, cream; cakes, biscuits etc., but only allowed to be sold in the Andes

Modern/Western usage

- can be chemically refined into the drug cocaine, market (for cocaine as illegal drug) almost exclusively in the USA and Europe
- production by many small-scale peasants (*cocaleros*) who depend on this market
- Andean governments, in cooperation with US military forces, try to eradicate these plantations; aid programmes try to convert coca plantations into plantations of alternative products, such as bananas and pineapples, but markets are limited
- legal export with special permit for coca-cola flavouring (?) and medical usage (pharmaceutical industry)

Coca usage



social ritual

On coca

Allen, Catherine J. 2002. *The Hold Life Has. Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community* [1988]. Washington and New York: Smithsonian Institution. Second edition.

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Museo de la coca. [no year.] La Paz. Internet: <http://www.cocamuseum.com/> (accessed 16.11.2016)

On Peru

Starn, Orin, Carlos Iván Degregori, and Robin Kirk, eds. 2005. *The Peru Reader. History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press. Second edition, revised and updated.

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