



# Journey to Kansrø

(the Underworld of Misak tribe in the south of Colombia)

Lucie Vinsova  
Masaryk University Brno



Time unfolds in a spiral. Misaks say that Time is actually a snail shell, *srurrapu*, which is constantly on the move. Only from our perspective, it moves backwards, so the past is in front of us and the future behind.

**Kansrø**, the Realm of the Dead, is said to be located in páramos, the Andean mountain highland plains. It is believed that the spirits actually reside there and that is why páramos are considered sacred places. This together with the arrow of time means that the Misaks can “see” their ancestors, those who “*walk before them*”.

*“... Thus those who have already passed through this world, opened the path and showed us which way to walk. And so the Misaks of today walk in the footprints of their great tatas, sages, whose work thus hasn` t yet been completed...”*

(Luis Guillermo Vasco Uribe, Hijos del Aroiris y del Agua)



There are three underworld beasts and one demonic spirit that come when somebody is dying. These four make sure that the spirit of the deceased leaves the dead body...

They are:

**Yemwasrø** (an eagle), **Kuawera** (a demonic dog) and **Kuskunku** (an owl). The fourth is **Kuanmusik** (a spirit of a dead person).

**Kuanmusik** persuades the spirit (the dark part of the spirit) of the newly deceased person to leave the body and then whistles to the demonic beasts to pursue the escaping spirit to the páramos. There they attack the spirit and start biting off its flesh and pecking at its bones.

This was connected to the practice of **burying the dead** after the bruises caused by these demonic animals have appeared on their skin. This custom has now been replaced and the deceased is buried as soon as possible).

Nowadays, Christian funeral customs have merged with the original tribal ones.

Funeral now includes a mass held in Silvia or Las Delicias (towns in Cauca), a funeral procession, the burial itself and cleansing ceremonies.

The deceased is dressed in “**western clothes**” , for there is a common belief that western clothes don't burn in Hell. The Misak clothes is burnt with other things of personal possession.

The mourning period of nine days is followed by cleansing ceremonies performed by the local *mərəbik*, shaman.

During those **nine days**, neighbours and family relatives help the family of the deceased. They bring them food and drink, for the household of the dead person is contaminated by *papə* (strong contamination of cold essence which attracts illnesses, evil and malicious spirits), and so cooking is prohibited until the arrival of the shaman who performs the purification rituals.





Shaman, *mərəbik*, arrives 9 days after the death to perform the purification ceremonies.

The *yem məsik*, “dark spirit” doesn’t want to leave its home and clutches to its formal material possessions. That is why most of the personal possessions, and especially the Misak clothes of the deceased are instantaneously taken outside the house to be burnt.





Picture by Jhon Ferney López Muñoz



Picture by taita Juan Bautista Ussa Ulluné.

The importance of a shaman: his access to the four spheres of existence and his connection to certain powerful animals.



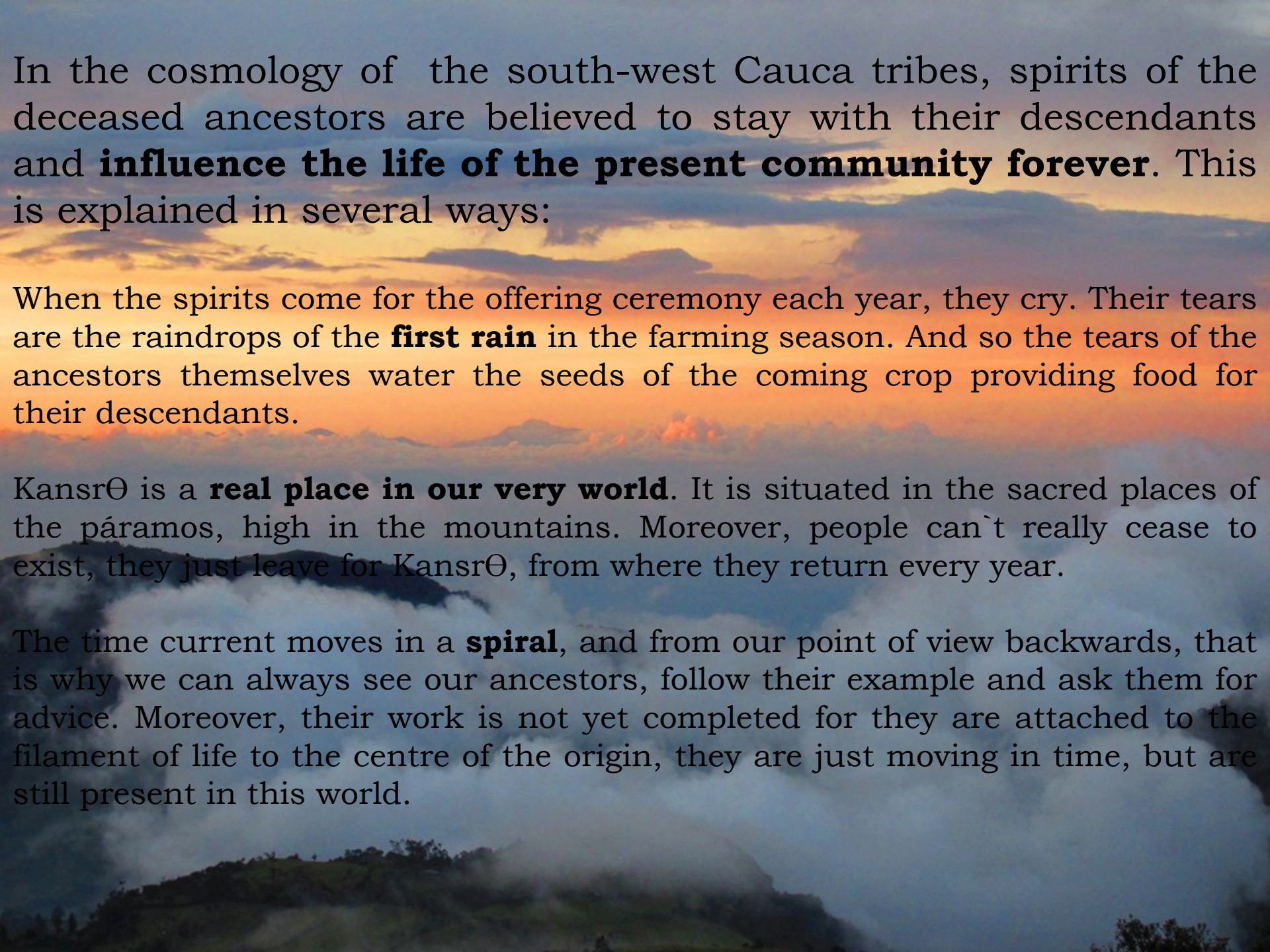
## Festival of Offerings

Originally, this festival was celebrated with the first **rainfall** after the dry season and thus marked the beginning of the new agricultural year, which used to be usually at the end of September or throughout the first half of October.

Today, this festival has merged with the All Saints Day, on the first of November. On this day, people prepare food and drink for the spirits of their deceased (in here they specify that it is the *Sun spirit*, **pθsr mθsik**, which returns).

Offerings consists of prepared and raw food placed in ceremonial *jigras* (woven bags). For drink, spirits can choose from coffee, hot chocolate, hot sugar cane water or specially made *chicha* (fermented corn drink). The offerings differ in case the deceased was a child. (Compare Andean cultures, esp. Cochabamba, Bolivia)

Today, the offerings are usually performed in community centres and at schools.



In the cosmology of the south-west Cauca tribes, spirits of the deceased ancestors are believed to stay with their descendants and **influence the life of the present community forever**. This is explained in several ways:

When the spirits come for the offering ceremony each year, they cry. Their tears are the raindrops of the **first rain** in the farming season. And so the tears of the ancestors themselves water the seeds of the coming crop providing food for their descendants.

Kansrθ is a **real place in our very world**. It is situated in the sacred places of the páramos, high in the mountains. Moreover, people can't really cease to exist, they just leave for Kansrθ, from where they return every year.

The time current moves in a **spiral**, and from our point of view backwards, that is why we can always see our ancestors, follow their example and ask them for advice. Moreover, their work is not yet completed for they are attached to the filament of life to the centre of the origin, they are just moving in time, but are still present in this world.



Picture by taita Juan Bautista Ussa Ulluné



Thank you

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