






Patronal Feast as a Symbol of Mayordomo's 'Purchasing Power' in Huanta, Peru

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study of a religious event of great importance in the community, where the mayordomo assumes a central role, not only as a spiritual leader but also as a symbol of purchasing power. This study examines how the festival's organization reflects the economic status of the mayordomo, who is compelled to finance various aspects of the event to maintain his prestige within the community. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology was used, employing narrative and discourse analyses. Through interviews with stewards and participants, narratives and discourses are identified that highlight how the position of stewardship manifests economic power and social respect. In conclusion, the festival has religious value and great economic and social significance, where the mayordomo exhibits his status through his ability to finance and organize the festivity, reaffirming his position within the community.

Keywords: Customs and traditions, Intangible cultural heritage, Culture, Festival, Oral tradition.



INTRODUCTION

Patron saint festivities in Peru are celebrated on established dates each year and take place in different stages. These festivities have great significance for people who venerate their patron saints as divinized protectors (Canto Lapa & Chamorro Clemente, 2023; Damiano Palomino, 2018; Schäfer, 2015). In this sense, the Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay is an event of great national relevance that promotes the faith and traditions of the people of Huanta Province, located in the Ayacucho Region in the Peruvian highlands. It may be mentioned that the region known as the VRAEM (Valley of the Apurimac, Ene and Mantaro Rivers), is marked by constant armed conflicts which is related to drug trafficking and remnants of the Shining Path terrorist organization. The political authorities of the province of Huanta support and allocate resources from the municipal budget for the festival which is “considered one of the most important events in the province of Huanta, in Ayacucho, expects more than 15,000 visitors” (Agencia Nacional de Noticias, 2023).

The Lord of Maynay has a long history of religious celebrations and associated fairs, where the culture, art, and gastronomy of the place are highlighted. In 2024, the XV National Fair and LXXXV Regional Fair of the Lord of Maynay 2024, was held from September 12-16 in Huanta, with the expectation of gathering of more than 10,000 visitors (Castro, 2024). It should be noted that although the exact dates of celebration may vary slightly each year, the festivity is held consistently within the month of September as part of the traditional calendar of the province of Huanta. As Lanza & López (2014) state, it is “a festive calendar that responds to that long process of dispute and configuration of identities, rituals and symbolic complexes, in which the liturgical calendar of the Catholic world was superimposed on the productive calendar of the Andean world”. This overlapping feature has generated a ritual practice that, far from creating conflicting

interests, has, in fact, reinforced the local cultural identity, keeping alive a collective memory that gives meaning to the festivities and the social role of its main actors, such as the mayordomos (stewards or administrators).

The mayordomo is not a fixed individual, and there is usually competition between members of the same family or community to assume stewardship, a position that symbolizes both religious devotion and symbolic and economic power within the collective. As Valiente Estrada (2020) points out, “the patron saint festivities are organized by several mayordomos, one of them is the one who hires the dancer and his musicians, who will be part of the celebration and will compete with a group hired by another”. In the context of symbolic and musical competition, different genres and cultural expressions are intertwined in a relatively small space, representing a community of approximately 751 families. Thus, the festival reflects the cultural dynamism and social relations of the region. The initiative of the representative characters of each Andean community plays a fundamental role in the configuration and continuity of the festive traditions. Gutiérrez-Gómez et al. (2024) highlight how communal leadership is directly linked to the institutionalization of religious celebrations. As the authors point out, “once the Village Center is instituted, the communal leader is the one who organizes the first Patronal Feast, transferring the Saint or Patron Saint of the village to the political issue of the first Mayor of the Village Center formed.” This practice gives rise to a festive tradition that consolidates and strengthens the social fabric over time. Peru’s patron saint festivals feature cultural events that are deeply rooted in ancestral traditions. However, modernity and structural changes in the culture of the towns generate divergent manifestations that, according to the political authorities, can alter good customs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a close relationship between economic power and religiosity in international scenarios. In this framework, it has been pointed out that “religiosity can lead to greater adherence to religious customs and traditions, including the celebration and timing of holidays, which explains why coinciding holidays are not modified even when they have negative consequences for development” (Montero & Yang, 2022). In other words, religiosity reinforces attachment to traditional practices, which generates resistance to change, even when it could benefit economic or social development (Squicciarini, 2020; Ünal, 2024).

The celebration of patron saint festivals in Andean villages is a constant practice that reflects symbolic competition based on the purchasing power of money, expressed publicly through spending. In this context, power can be understood from the perspective that “given that money is a source of power, if income and wealth in a society are more concentrated, power will also be more concentrated: the rich have more power than the poor when inequality is greater” (Solt et al., 2011). This statement highlights how the concentration of income and wealth intensifies power inequality, favoring those with greater resources. In scenarios of high inequality, the better-off sectors exert greater influence on economic and social decisions, while the impoverished sectors are excluded, perpetuating structures of domination and reducing the possibilities of equity (Roberts, 2024; Savidan, 2016).

The fusion of Andean cultural traditions, such as the veneration of the apus or natural deities, with the Christian tradition gives rise to a symbolic synthesis expressed in patron saint festivities. These celebrations show how “the pagan and the ecclesiastical come together in a resemantization that the collective memory constructs to process its trauma and overcome the mourning that meant

abandoning its sacred places and objects of worship" (Guerrero, 2020). Along the same line, it is argued that societies and cultures of the world have established their sacred spaces and times in opposition to the profane, that is, to the natural and everyday aspects of human life (Reyna, 2013, 2018). Both approaches reveal that patron saint festivals articulate the pagan and the religious as a cultural strategy to re-signify the past. Collective memory reconfigures the sacred in the face of the everyday, processing historical traumas through symbols, rituals, and new community meanings.

Churches in the Peruvian highlands, particularly those analyzed in this study, are spaces where worship has been built and practiced intermittently, mainly during annual celebrations. These religious activities generate significant economic movement in towns that lack sustainable income sources. In this sense, "the historical scenario of the economic survival of the Ayacucho region with the promotion of the 33 colonial churches or temples does not match the image presented to the public opinion of the world" (Gutiérrez-Gómez et al., 2025). This statement reveals a contradiction between the local economic reality, based on the symbolic exploitation of religious heritage, and the idealized image disseminated internationally. The dissonance reflects cultural tourism-oriented strategies that, while generating temporary resources, also mask the deep inequalities and structural constraints affecting these communities.

Objective

The social aspects of patron saint festivities in the province of Huanta have been the subject of several studies. However, the present paper focuses exclusively on the patron saint tradition of the Lord of Maynay, a celebration characterized by a great deal of hullabaloo, symbolic competition, and an exhibition of economic power. This festivity stands out for the active participation of the mayordomos, who are in charge of hiring dancers and musicians to enhance the

celebrations. Therefore, this study attempts to examine how the organization of the festival reflects the economic status of the mayordomo, who is forced to finance various aspects of the event to maintain his prestige within the community.

METHOD

The methodology used in this research includes both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources are participant observation, in-depth interviews, and interactions with relevant individuals related to the festival. In-depth interviews were conducted with flexible questions, focus groups, and collective interviews in interaction with the participants. Data were also collected from the content analysis of texts, recordings, or visual materials, which were examined to identify patterns, recurring themes, and field diaries. Secondary sources include articles, research works of books, journals, etc.

In the data processing, the analysis of the Maynay patronal feast was carried out using both narrative and discourse analyses, which helps to understand the role of the mayordomo that goes beyond the religious and is intertwined with purchasing power and social status. While narrative analysis highlights the personal experiences and meanings of the mayordomos, discourse analysis provides critical insights into how language constructs social and economic identity around this holiday. Together, these approaches offer an in-depth understanding of the dynamics between the religious, cultural, and economic aspects of the Maynay community of Huanta Province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Cultural Context

The creation and founding of towns have particular characteristics that respond to their own histories. The predominant interests are mainly of a political and economic nature, leaving aside the cultural aspect, which fragments a people that, in essence, is understood through its identity. It is understood that “the participation of those who hold political office, create towns and their patron saint festivals, the purpose is to gain the interest of the population in the election of their first mayor” ([Gutiérrez-Gómez et al., 2024](#)). This way of proceeding contrasts with the research of Castillo Guzmán (2001), who notes “in the feast of the Virgen del Carmen, in the mestizo town of Písac, this same ideal is proclaimed. There are 13 dance groups with their own carguyocs or mayordomos organized as brotherhoods. The cultural scenario of the Andean peoples, especially among Quechua speakers, is characterized by the fusion of their ancestral religious worldviews with elements of Christian religiosity. A representative example of this synthesis is the Maynay festival, which has become a national cultural reference, highlighting the heritage of Huanta.

During the field visits for data collection, the villagers' interest in having their town recognized as a district was confirmed. This desire dates back to the 1990s, when the process of founding a town center began, a common step on the road to district status in Peru. The main drivers of this initiative are the local leaders, who actively promote the change of status, starting with “Municipalities of Town Centers are local government bodies, responsible for the administration and execution of the functions and local public services delegated to them and are governed by the provisions of this Law” ([gob.pe, 2021](#)). Its operation is governed by a law, which is taken advantage of by the inhabitants to organize themselves and advance their objectives. As is

the case in most towns, the number of inhabitants does not yet meet the minimum requirements for creating a district; however, they continue to function under this condition, motivated by a common interest in achieving district status in the future. In this way, the Pampa de Maynay becomes “a sanctuary that has always originated waves of diverse emotions in the ranks of the Catholic clergy, intellectuals, visitors, curious and faithful” (Zielina, 2016). At present, the Maynay is known by parishioners as a religious sanctuary.

As the space has been converted into a sanctuary, during the week it usually goes unnoticed due to the scarce presence of settlers, the majority of whom are engaged in farm work. There are only sporadic visits by outsiders in very small numbers. This tranquility contrasts sharply with the large influx of people during the Maynay Festival, an event sponsored by the Municipality of Huanta that attracts an unparalleled crowd. Promotional publicity of the festival includes major musical event with artists such as Corazón Serrano, Amaranta and Libido and providing an outstanding space for Ayacucho artists, who will showcase the local cultural and artistic potential” (infobae, 2023). In the previous stages and during the central day of the patron saint festival, thousands of visitors congregate. However, during the rest of the year, in the absence of celebrations, the stage -called “Sanctuary” by the population of Huanta and its parishioners- remains almost empty. This reality was evident during the field visits conducted as part of this research (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Field Where the Fiesta Takes Place on Sunday



Source: Photograph Taken by the Authors (2025).

The Maynay festival is pompously promoted through various digital media, contributing to its growing popularity. This is well known by the Ayacuchan people, especially by parishioners and visitors who come in search of entertainment during the event. This festivity, promoted nationally, contrasts dramatically with the daily life of the Maynay community. While on holidays, the attendance of people is counted in the thousands, and on normal days, the tranquility and leisurely pace of rural life predominates. This massive turnout during the celebration even comes to contradict certain aspects of the local popular culture, which has traditionally been more reserved and linked to the everyday, which is “also considered as an agricultural, agro-industrial, handicraft, folkloric, gastronomic and

religious activity” ([Redacción Correo, 2015](#)). The event, which is held in a spectacular manner with a music performance, is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Party and Presentation of Musical Groups on One of the Programmed Days



Source: Photograph Taken by the Authors (2025).

Economic Context

The patronal feast of the Lord of Maynay is not only a religious and cultural manifestation but also a space where the steward's economic power is expressed. This person is not only chosen for his devotion or spiritual qualities, but also for his financial capacity to assume the high costs involved in the preparations, such as hiring bands, feeding the attendees, organizing religious events, and covering logistical expenses. In this sense, the mayordomo figure becomes a public symbol of purchasing power within the community. As Leyva ([2014](#)) points out: “the election of the mayordomo is a recognition that makes you proud because it makes you the most important representative of your village in front of the religious

image, you also gain respect and status for your relatives". This statement makes it clear that the role transcends the religious, since it represents a symbolic ascent in the social fabric, where respect and status are directly linked to the capacity for spending and economic ostentation; therefore, the economic context surrounding the festival cannot be understood without considering informality, the effort of years of saving, and even the collective financing that many mayordomos assume.

The festivity functions as a kind of "public stage" where individual economic success is exposed as part of the logic of prestige and collective recognition. Leyva (2014) opines that, "the election of the butler is a recognition that makes you proud because it makes you the most important representative of your people in front of the religious image, you also gain respect and status for your relatives". She highlights that the election of the mayordomo is an honor that has not only spiritual value, but also social and economic value. By being designated as the most important representative of the community before the religious image, the mayordomo acquires a high level of respect and status in the community. This role gives him not only personal prestige but also recognition for his family, since his ability to organize the patron saint's feast demonstrates his purchasing power and his ability to finance the celebration, which becomes a symbol of power in the community.

Regarding visits to the Señor de Maynay sanctuary on non-holiday days, there is a greater presence of people on Saturdays and Sundays, as many visitors take advantage of these days to come from other localities. According to Machaca (2022), the ethical and moral responsibility to assume a position, whether as mayordomos or alféreces, is an economic duty. This suggests that the organization of the feast implies not only a spiritual and cultural commitment, but also an economic one, which reinforces the importance of feast days for

those who actively participate in these events. In the field observation, it was noted that the faithful approach the Sanctuary of the Lord of Maynay, attracted by the miraculous fame of the saint, to pray for the health and well-being of their families. During their visits, they often bring candles, roses, and even incense as offerings. Some people, though not frequently, throw coins into the shrine as a symbol of their wishes or petitions.

Some reports ([El Popular, 2017](#); [La República, 2017](#); [Mendoza, 2017](#)) highlight the significant economic impact that religious festivities have on communities, especially in terms of consumption. According to the author, “in this patron saint festival, they consume more than 44 thousand bottles of beer for three weeks in a row, which represents an important indicator of consumption during religious festivities in the interior of the country”. This data highlights not only the magnitude of the event in terms of participation but also the purchasing power associated with the celebration, since the massive consumption of products such as beer reflects a key aspect of the economic behavior of the attendees, linking the patron saint festival with an expression of collective purchasing power and social exchange within the community.

In 2024, preparations for the patronal feast of Maynay began on September 1, but the central day of the celebration was September 14, as indicated by the organizers. According to the interview with last year's steward 2024, ‘Since the beginning of the month, we have been meeting with the community to coordinate everything necessary. Planning includes buying food, hiring musicians, and arranging the sanctuary, among other tasks. The 14th day of September is the culminating day, but the entire month of September is an intense and continuous preparation.’ This reflects the meticulous organization and community effort involved in the festivity, highlighting how the commitment of the mayordomos and residents impacts the region's

social and economic life. According to Machado (2014), the “informal economy in Peru, refers to a universe of about 2.4 million productive units, which produces between 35% and 60% of GDP and employs about 60% of the EAP, about 9.5 million workers”. This panorama is also reflected in religious festivities such as that of Maynay, where there is no direct remuneration for the devotees, since, as one interviewee mentions, on the cost that “none, since all the devotees do it by will, in this case those who make a profit are those of the municipality by holding the fair in the Pampa of Maynay.” This shows how, in the context of the festival, work and participation in the organization are developed within a framework of the informal economy, where certain actors, such as the municipality, are the ones who really obtain direct economic benefits.

The Steward and His Economic Role

In the Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay, the steward not only plays a religious or symbolic role but also assumes a central economic function. His election represents social recognition but also implies strong financial responsibility. This figure becomes the main organizer and financier of religious and festive activities, thus demonstrating his purchasing power in the community. According to Leyva (2014) “in provinces, the economic contribution is given by the family of the mayordomo, who may commit to the expenses of the lunch or the decoration of the anda”. This research reveals how the butler's commitment transcends the individual, as he involves his entire family in the economic investment necessary for the celebration. From preparing food for hundreds of people to hiring musicians and religious decorations, the mayordomo uses his resources to reaffirm his status within the community. In this way, the patron saint festival becomes a visible platform where personal spending is transformed into a symbol of prestige and social respect, positioning the

mayordomo as a key player in the economic and cultural fabric of Huanta.

The Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay represents not only an act of faith but also an event of great economic movement in the province. The figure of the steward is key in this context, since his role is not limited to the symbolic organization of the event, but also involves a considerable financial investment, which turns this celebration into a reflection of the purchasing power and economic stability of those who assume this position in the community. According to information from Cheiru News (2013), “compared to previous management, this year 5 million more was generated, something that shows that in one year there was not much upward mobility, but rather the movement of trade and investment in the celebration was maintained”. This statement reveals how, despite the lack of exponential growth, the economic flow associated with these festivities remains stable, supported mainly by the participation of the mayordomos and their families. In an interview, a member of the community explained that “there is a book of minutes, in which a list of those interested in the position of stewardship in the church is shown. With this, the designated persons sign and present themselves again in September”. This indicates that the assumption of the position is not improvised but responds to previous planning, where the concerned families already have the necessary resources to fulfill the demanding function.

Despite the fact that the Patronal Festival of the Lord of Maynay does not have a massive publicity strategy, it is well attended year after year. As one interviewee mentioned: “There is little publicity, but it is done by the municipality in conjunction with the convent. What matters is the faith with which you make your prayer; you can do it as you wish.” This statement shows that, beyond traditional media, personal and collective devotion mobilizes the faithful and keeps the

tradition alive. From this perspective, the festival can be defined as a religious manifestation that is sustained not by spectacle or promotion but by the spiritual commitment of its participants. Faith acts as a symbolic engine, capable of mobilizing economic, social, and emotional resources, regardless of media coverage. The experience of the festival, then, does not depend exclusively on publicity or institutional organization, but on the intensity of individual belief, which legitimizes participation in its own terms and form.

Participation in the patron saint festivities implies devotion and a high level of expenditure, often from the informal economy. As Arrata-Corzo (2019) explains, "it is not only the dance that has the most followers, but also the one that demands the greatest amount of economic resources. The women's costume is the most expensive, not only in terms of clothing but also in terms of accessories". Thus, the festival's aesthetic and cultural dimensions require strong individual investment, especially from those who actively participate as dancers or representatives. However, as Machado (2014) warns, "the non-existence of a time series of the informal economy covering the last decades has limited the understanding of its dynamics and determinants in the country". This suggests that many of the expenditures made for these festivities are not recorded in official statistics because they are financed from informal sources: personal savings, family loans, or income from unregulated activities. Thus, a reality is configured where culture is strongly expressed, but its economic sustainability is kept in the background. Therefore, patron saint festivals not only represent tradition and religiosity but also a space in which the structural fragility of an economy based on private effort and not officially accounted for is reflected.

During the Maynay Patron Saint's Day, educational activities are not suspended for long periods, which shows a balance between religious tradition and compliance with the school calendar. As one

interviewee mentioned, “They only tend to suspend for one or two days for fear of a traffic accident happening to the children.” This statement reflects that the suspensions are not due to the celebration itself but to a preventive measure focused on student safety. This indicates that the community values both education and festivity and that it seeks for both to coexist without major interference. It also shows responsible management by educational institutions, which prioritize the welfare of students while recognizing the cultural importance of the event. In this context, the festival becomes part of the students’ social environment, but without significantly interrupting their academic training.

Social and Cultural Impact of Maynay’s Patron Saint Festival

The Maynay Patron Saint Festival is a religious manifestation that transcends the liturgical to become an event of social cohesion, cultural expression, and symbolic construction of collective identity. Its impact is reflected in multiple dimensions of community life, from neighborhood organization and resource mobilization to the reaffirmation of traditions, dances, and ritual practices that strengthen social ties. As Machaca (2022) points out that, “one cannot ignore the views of cultural studies, performing arts and folklore, among others, since each researcher emphasizes what is of interest to him or her”. The analysis of this festivity cannot be reduced to a single perspective, since it integrates religious, economic, educational, and aesthetic elements. Its richness lies in its interdisciplinary character and the diversity of meanings it acquires for those who live it. In this sense, the festival not only fulfills a devotional function but also becomes a space of cultural representation and reaffirmation of the collective memory, being an essential component of the local identity of Huanta.

Although the presence of foreign visitors is still limited due to the lack of publicity, as pointed out in an interview: “There is little presence, since there is a lack of publicity” Maynay’s Patron Saint

Festival continues to be an event of deep social and cultural significance for the local community. Its relevance does not depend exclusively on its external visibility but on its capacity to reaffirm the identity of those who celebrate it. As Quintana Soles (2021) argues that, “the festival, and in particular traditions, recurrently ritualize particularism, updating and reaffirming the feeling of being part of a local, regional, national community and symbolically reproducing the collective identity”. In this sense, although its diffusion is limited, the festivity fulfills a fundamental symbolic function: keeping community ties alive, transmitting ancestral values, and consolidating a sense of belonging. Thus, the festival acts as a ritual space where identity is reconstructed year after year, not necessarily through its external projection but through the strength of the shared tradition within the community.

The Patron Saint Festival of the Lord of Maynay may also be seen as not only a religious manifestation but also a community strategy for identity affirmation and social organization. As one of the town's leaders explained, Maynay is in the process of becoming a district, which is why it seeks to decentralize its management and promote its festivities on its own schedule. This intention reflects a collective desire for autonomy, expressed largely through the organizational structure of the patron saint's feast. The same leader, also a steward for several years, says that he has contributed with the musical band and other efforts, although he recognizes that there is not much budget to continue promoting the other festivities, September being the most solid month in terms of organization, since it has the participation of institutions and devout people. In this context, Huamán Ordóñez (2024) quote acquires relevance: “It is not exhausted in the single idea of transgression, poverty and marginality, as is ordinarily thought, but rather, it implies culturally developing singular rules, not democratically consensual”. The fiesta, then,

becomes a space where the community organizes its own power structure, roles, and meanings, without the need to validate its practices under formal institutional standards.

The organization of the Patronal Festival of the Lord of Maynay does not respond to rigid or formalized structures, but to an internal cultural logic based on devotion, will, and community continuity. One of the persons in charge of the throne commented that she was in charge of the Lord of Maynay for 14 years and that the responsibility would pass to another person only in 2025. According to her, the transfer of the charge is carried out among volunteers and devotees without restrictions or impositions, which is evidence of a unique form of social organization based on spiritual commitment. This dynamic can be understood in the light of what Huamán Ordóñez (2024) points out: “It is not exhausted in the single idea of transgression, poverty and marginality, as is ordinarily thought, but rather, it implies culturally developing singular rules, not democratically agreed upon”. In other words, the festival does not follow imposed institutional norms but builds its own structure of participation and leadership, legitimized by tradition and shared faith. Additionally, the spirit of solidarity that guides the festival is reflected in the fact that many of its services are offered free of charge. Everything is designed so that attendees do not pay for food, drink and that, in addition, they can participate without major concern in the masses, processions, folkloric dances of the comparsas, etc. (Instituto Peruano de Economía, 2020). This approach reinforces the idea of a self-sustaining community organization, where the sense of belonging and the act of giving outweighs any economic motivation. Overall, the Maynay Patronal Festival is configured as a space of autonomous cultural and social construction, in which faith, tradition, and unofficial but profoundly effective collective forms of organization are articulated in community practice.

The participation of the mayordomos in the Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay is a profound expression of faith, identity, and cultural commitment. According to an interview with a member of the community, the great majority of the mayordomos come from different places and, although they do not reside permanently in Maynay, they return every September out of devotion and a signed commitment. Each assumes their position of their own free will, without expecting anything in return, as part of a religious and cultural manifestation that transcends the material. This voluntary commitment reflects a solid connection with the cultural roots of the people and actively contributes to the preservation of their traditions. In this sense, Torres Agama (2024) points out “cultural identity and religious tourism, highlighting the importance of preserving customs and traditions to strengthen religious fervor and promote tourism in the region”. The festivity is not only an act of personal faith but also a collective strategy to keep local culture alive, generate a sense of belonging, and attract visitors who value the authentic expressions of Andean intangible heritage.

Christian Faith during the Patronal Feast

During the Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay, Christian faith is the central axis of the celebration, expressed through masses, processions, prayers, and songs that reaffirm the people's devotion to their patron saint. However, this religiosity coexists harmoniously with Andean spiritual elements, giving rise to a syncretic practice that deeply characterizes the region's religious experience. The faithful not only venerate the Lord of Maynay as the central figure of Christianity but also maintain their connection with Pachamama, understood as the protective mother of daily life. The place where the Lord of Maynay is venerated does not have modern construction, which reinforces the sense of direct connection with the ancestral and the spiritual. This space, represented in Figure 3, maintains a simple

structure that invites an intimate experience of faith, far from the monumental but deeply meaningful for devotees.

Figure 3

Original Site of the Lord of Maynay at the Side of the Present Church, the Most Venerated Site



Source: Photograph Taken by the Authors (2025)

Machaca (2022) argues that a believing Christian, who reveres the Virgin, although in parallel he worships Pachamama, since she is in the chacra, in the home and in the church, as a protective mother figure, represents this spiritual duality. In this context, the sanctuary becomes a symbolic space where Christian faith and Andean cosmovision intertwine, expressing a form of local living religiosity. The simplicity of the place does not detract from the value of the devotional act but rather deepens it by allowing the sacred to manifest itself in its closest and most quotidian form. In this way, Christian faith during the festival is not manifested as a closed doctrine but as an open, intercultural, and deeply communitarian experience. In Maynay, the sacred is intertwined with ancestral traditions, generating a unique religious experience that reaffirms the spiritual and cultural identity of the people. Although a modern church has been built (Figure 4), this structure contrasts with the way in which devotees express their faith: through simple gestures, offerings, dances, and rituals that connect with both Catholicism and the Andean cosmovision. Devotion is not conditioned by the monumentality of the temple but by the emotional and spiritual bond that each worshipper maintains with the sacred image and with his or her community.

Figure 4

Present Church Built Next to the Place of Veneration



Source: Armonía- Huanta (2009)

This study reveals that the Patronal Feast of the Lord of Maynay is a living manifestation of Andean religious syncretism, the result of centuries of fusion between the Indigenous worldview and the Christian tradition brought by the colonizers. According to Huamán (2024), “since colonial times, the European Christian influence on Andean religiosity has been marked by miscegenation. The saints brought by the Spaniards were reinterpreted and syncretized by the local population”. This process gave rise to a particular form of popular religiosity in which Catholic images acquired their own meanings linked to nature, agricultural cycles, and community protection. In this context, Señor de Maynay represents not only a figure of Christian faith but also a cultural symbol deeply rooted in

local identity. Torres Agama (2024) states “the Lord of Maynay is considered an important religious symbol, attracting both local people and national and international tourists”. His devotion is not limited to the religious but articulates a collective memory that connects the inhabitants of Huanta with their history, spirituality, and territory. Thus, the festival becomes a space of encounter between the ancestral and contemporary.

In the Maynay community, belief in divine protection through the festival is a central aspect for devotees. According to one interviewee, “these are beliefs that people have, they usually mention that it protects you from evils,” reflecting the importance of the festival as an act of spiritual protection. This belief is intertwined with the idea that the festivity is not only an expression of faith but also of cultural identity. Hinojosa Salazar (2019) notes the similarity between the Viru community and that of Maynay as thus: “The festivity represents a space for the expression of cultural identity and collective faith in the community of Virú”. The festivity of the Lord of Maynay also acts as a means of strengthening community cohesion, consolidating a local identity that is expressed both religiously and culturally. The protection sought through faith reflects a tradition in which the collective and the spiritual meet, reaffirming the ties between community members and their sense of belonging to the community.

CONCLUSION

The figure of the mayordomo as steward in the patronal feast of the Lord of Maynay in Huanta not only embodies a religious and organizational role but also constitutes a clear indicator of the purchasing power of the person who assumes the position. The magnitude of spending on bands, musical groups, religious ornaments, and banquets reveals symbolic competition among participants, where prestige is built through spending power. This

phenomenon reaffirms that patron saint festivals in Andean contexts also function as scenarios for the exhibition of economic and social capital, legitimizing hierarchies within the community. The celebration of the Feast of the Lord of Maynay activates a parallel economy in which the formal and informal sectors converge. Merchants, artisans, musicians, tourists, and service providers are temporarily benefited. Although it is a manifestation of faith, the festival mobilizes significant financial resources, many of which are voluntarily assumed by the stewards. These dynamic highlights the complexity of religious rituals, which, in addition to their spiritual function, play a strategic role in regional economy and religious tourism.

Although the Maynay festival reinforces the Huantina population's cultural and religious identity, it also reveals structural inequalities. Because stewardship is conditioned by economic capacity, it limits participation to certain social sectors, reproducing masked exclusions. Nevertheless, the voluntary commitment of the stewards and the strong symbolic charge of the position reflect a mixture of devotion, prestige, and community responsibility, which keeps alive an ancestral tradition, adapted to the contemporary context of social competitiveness and economic visibility.

Author Contributions

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Informed consent was obtained before participants filled out the questionnaire for this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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