

## Chapter 7

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# Prehispanic Carved Stones in the Northern Titicaca Basin

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The study of the stone carving traditions of the pre-Colonial northern Titicaca Basin (Figs. 7.1, 7.2) remains in its infancy. We have of course the seminal work of Valcárcel (1925, 1932, 1935, 1938), Kidder (1943), and Sergio Chávez and Karen Mohr Chávez on the Yaya-Mama tradition (Chávez and Chávez 1975). Valcárcel's work demonstrated the sophistication of this stone working tradition in the pre-Tiwanaku periods. He showed that this Andean carving tradition extended from Colombia to Bolivia and was richly represented in the northern Titicaca Basin. Chávez and Chávez defined the Yaya-Mama religious tradition with monoliths having male and female icons being central in the material expression of this ideology. They also demonstrated that the famous Arapa stela was actually the missing half of the Thunderbolt stela in Tiwanaku, providing an early case of huaca capture in the Titicaca Basin.

The work of these pioneers focused on the beautifully carved monolithic statues found largely at Pucara, Taraco, Arapa and Hatuncolla. The systematic reconnaissances and surveys that have been conducted in the region in the last two decades indicate that there is a much greater quantity and variety of stone carving in the region than is apparent by a focus on the carved statues alone. Along with these impressive monoliths are large numbers of carved stone pieces, utilized in a variety of ways throughout the centuries.

The purpose of this brief report is primarily to illustrate some new finds from the Northern Titicaca Basin Archaeological Sur-

vey. Carved stones in the region come in a number of varieties that can be classified with several different features, including morphology, stylistic motifs, and raw material. I refrain from creating a formal typology until we have additional data; new stone carvings are constantly discovered and our sample, while magnificent, is still far too small for meaningful statistical samples. This chapter should instead be viewed as the beginning of the construction of a typology for the Titicaca Basin as a whole.

At the present time, we can therefore offer the following classification of stone carving in the northern Titicaca Basin based upon the following morphological and functional types: carved statues, undecorated statues, carved architectural slabs, uncarved architectural slabs, lintels/building stones, smaller carved portable stones, and finally, as a temporary category, "miscellaneous" pieces.

### **Carved Stones in the Northern Titicaca Basin**

#### *Carved Statues (Stelae)*

The most prominent carved stones of course are the large monoliths or statues that formerly graced the sunken courts and possibly other buildings in the ancient political centers of the northern Titicaca Basin. Some of the morphological types that seem to be especially meaningful include statues with notches,

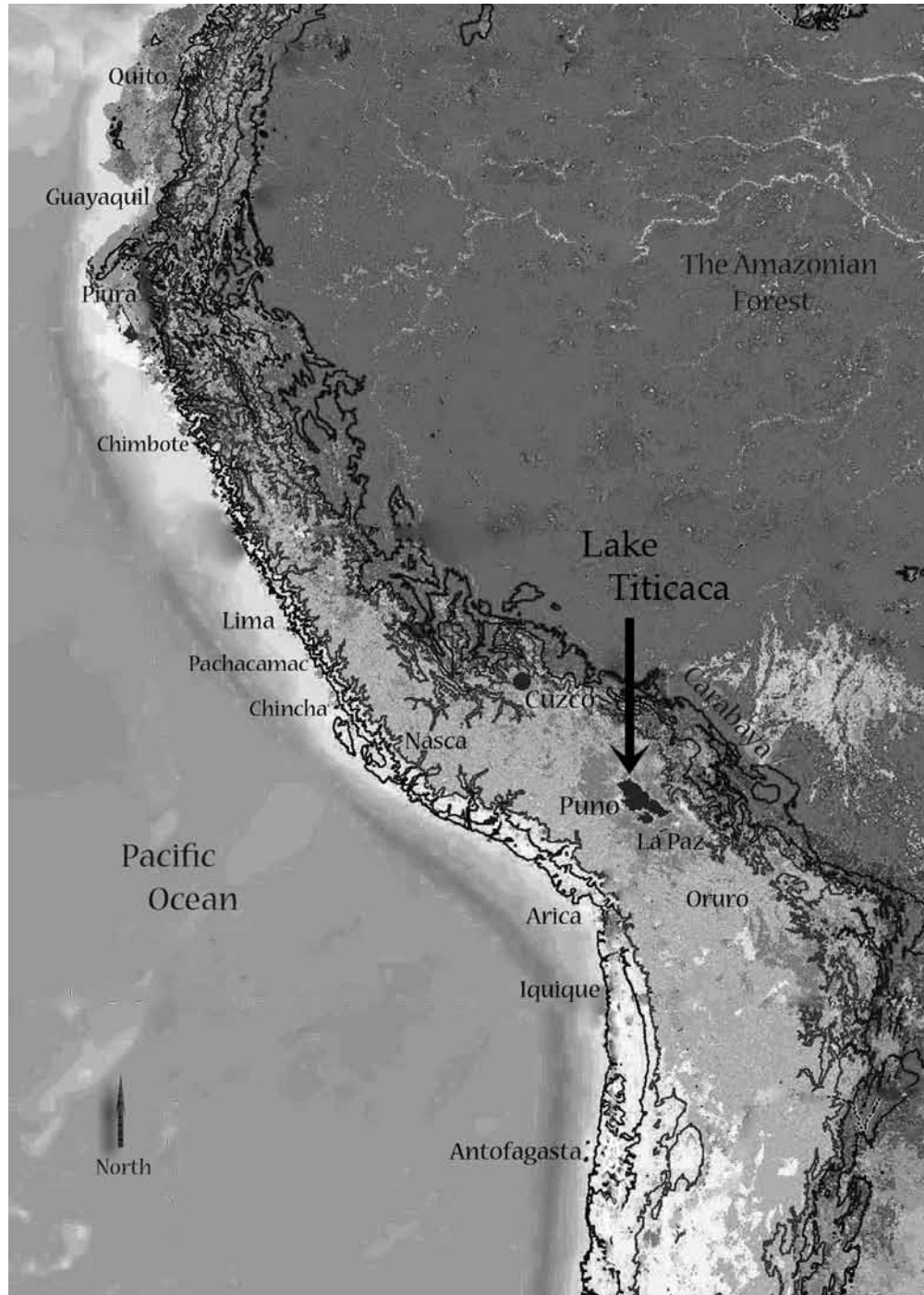


Figure 7.1. Lake Titicaca in South America.

statues without notches, bulky, squared and anthropomorphic statues. Based upon iconographic motifs, some statues are clearly Pucara (ca. 400 BC–AD 300) while others have motifs that have been described as Qaluyu. Qaluyu is a long period, beginning by 1400 BC and ending around 200 BC.

The broad categories of motifs include geometric, animal, and human. Within these categories are elements like crosses, steps, felines, rings, flamingos, snakes, frogs, decapitators, trophy heads, and so forth. When found in situ, carved statues are usually associated with large Middle and Upper Formative period



Figure 7.2. Map of the entire Titicaca Basin.

political centers in the northern Titicaca Basin. This places the statues firmly within this broad tradition of Qaluyu and Pucara in the north, and in the Chiripa and Early Formative periods in the south (see Bandy and Hastorf 2007).

The Middle and Upper Formative time periods are huge, beginning circa 1400 BC and ending in the fourth century AD. Such a chronological designation is admittedly of little utility when used without some kind of qualification. We can date the carvings a bit more precisely using several lines of evidence. It is likely that the use of small, uncarved stones began around 1400 BC, more or less simultaneously with the development of the sunken court tradition (Stanish 2003; Cohen 2010). The earliest courts probably did not have carved stone, but instead used the

polished andesite or basalt “huancas” that were possibly painted periodically and were placed upright in the courts.

The carving tradition of statues probably began around 1000–800 BC, though this remains very speculative. It is possible that some of these carved statues could have been used during Tiwanaku times (ca. AD 650–950) in the northern Titicaca Basin, as in the south, but the evidence is thin at this point. In the greater Titicaca Basin, carved statue tradition continued unabated through the Tiwanaku period and was found sporadically in the Inca and even in the early Spanish Colonial period. We have no statues that are known from Altiplano (Late Intermediate) period contexts, but we have indirect evidence that earlier monoliths were used through that time and into the present as huacas or sacred objects.

Within this broad swath of time, we can identify some chronologically sensitive motifs and carving techniques, particularly Pucara and Qaluyu ones. Some possible candidates for a pre-Pucara date are the bulky, seated anthropomorphic ones, as seen in Figure 7.3 and in Kidder (1943: Plate III, 1-6). These limestone statues were found in the plaza of Taraco and have been noted for quite some time around the region. Similar ones are found in Titimani on the Huata Peninsula in Bolivia (Portugal 1981, 1988a, 1988b; Lémuz 2001). Evidence that they are pre-Pucara is speculative. First, they do not have the motifs as seen in Pucara carvings. Second, the faces are vaguely reminiscent of Chiripa styles from the south, placing the statues early in the Titicaca Basin sequence.

The pieces are also poorly executed, prompting speculation by some that this means that they are early. Frankly, we do not really have a good idea as to how old these statues are. Very few have been found in secure professional excavation contexts in situ and properly published, with the exception of Chiripa and possibly Tiwanaku. Furthermore, there is no comparable iconography on excavated pottery, with the possible exception of some figurines found in Sillumocco (C. Chávez, pers. comm.) and possibly in Bolivia. What we can say is that some figurines with similar faces in the south are fiber-tempered. Fiber-tempering begins with the first pottery around 1400 BC and most likely ends around 200 BC (Steadman 1995), giving us an unsuitably large bracket of time for any systematic analysis of statue dynamics. It is important to keep open the possibility that the stylistic variation as seen in these blocky anthropomorphic statues may very well not be chronological, but regional. We can also state with some certainty that the Yaya-Mama tradition, as described by Chávez and Chávez (1975:65), is in fact pre-Pucara in date as these two scholars assert (and see Tantaleán 2008). This conclusion is based upon iconographic analyses between the Yaya-Mama and Pucara styles.

One of the few scientific excavations to uncover a standing, in situ monolith is from the work of the Taraco Archaeological Project in the southern Titicaca Basin at the site of Kala Uyuni. Here, Cohen and Roddick (2007) report an intact standing sandstone monolith in the center of one of two sunken courts. The court, according to Bandy and Hastorf (2007), dates to the Late Chiripa period circa 800–200 BC. These data accord extremely well with the observations of our work in the northern Titicaca Basin reported here regarding the nature and kinds of courts associated with statues. The statue in the Kala Uyuni court was not decorated. Its raw material, size and shape are typical of undecorated statues found throughout the entire Titicaca Basin (see below).

Carved statues come in most types of raw material, including limestone, andesite, sandstone and basalt. Given our current data set, there does not appear to be any pattern between morphology, motifs and raw material, at least for carved statues. Raw material sourcing studies and the expansion of our database will allow us to make more precise statements in the future.

The most famous of the northern Titicaca Basin carved statues come from just a handful of sites. This is most likely not just

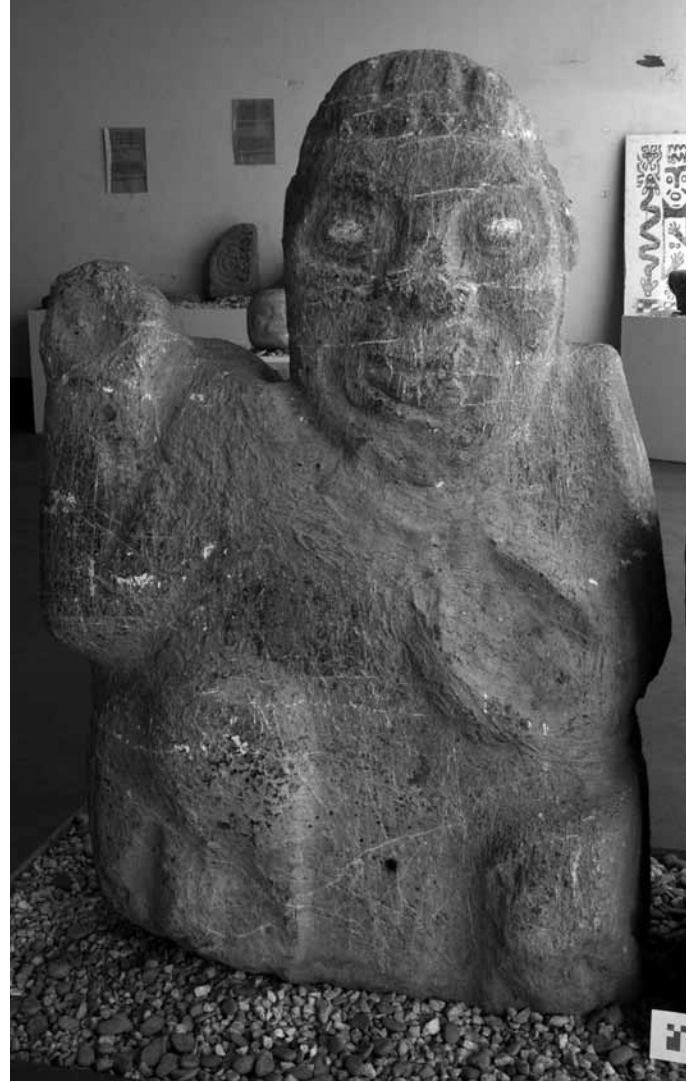


Figure 7.3. A low, bulky statue found in Taraco, Peru, in the northern Titicaca Basin. This limestone statue is now in the municipal museum.

an artifact of archaeological work, but a real pattern in which only the political centers actually had the majority of monoliths while the smaller centers and sites did not have many or had none at all. It is also possible that in the highly competitive environment of the Upper Formative, many stelae from smaller sites were captured and placed as trophies in courts. We know, for instance, that the Arapa stela was captured by the Tiwanaku peoples and half of it was moved 175 km to the capital (Chávez and Chávez 1975).

In rough order of importance, the sites with significant numbers of statues are Pucara, Taraco, Arapa, Hatuncolla and Cancha-Cancha Asiruni (Tintiri). Ephraim Squier and other

early travelers commented on a few of the more prominent statues. The first serious publications on the Pucara pieces were by the celebrated Luis Valcárcel (1925, 1932, 1935, 1938). He advanced his famous interpretation of the “gato de agua” motif and demonstrated similarities between Pucara statue motifs with other cultures such as Tiwanaku and Nasca. Alfred Kidder II (1943) referenced the Pucara sculptures and tried to contextualize them with some statues from around the region. Cancha-Cancha Asiruni was scientifically discovered by Chávez Ballón and described by Sergio Chávez. The site has a number of carved statues on the surface that were placed in the numerous sunken court complexes on the settlement (Stanish 2003; Tantaleán and Leyva 2010).

In the town of Taraco, we discovered a number of statues not previously reported. The vast majority of the statues were uncarved (see below). One complete sandstone piece, however, has a distinctive carving on its upper face. The motif appears to be some kind of stylized toad or fish though it is very worn (Fig. 7.4). At over 4 m in height, this statue is typical of the many uncarved ones found throughout the region, but in this case it has a very modest carving. It is very similar to the monolith fragment found in TA-1039 that we have called the Cornejo stela after the landowner on whose property we found the piece (Fig. 7.5). Site TA-1039 is located about 200 m from the Rámis River; it is composed of a low and very small mound about 10 × 15 m in size. This sandstone statue measures about 87 × 41 × 20 cm. It is broken on both ends so we do not know if it was notched. The anthropomorphized frog motif looks like one seen in the Taraco Museum today (Fig. 7.6).

Another fragment with crossed hands (seen in Fig. 7.7) is almost certainly part of a statue that was originally much larger. The piece was found (during dredging operations to build a bridge) in the river next to the town of Taraco and is currently in the Taraco Museum. The river has indeed cut into the ancient town over the centuries. The fragment came from an area with considerable architecture, as indicated by excavations in the area, and was originally part of a complex sunken court area.

The small statue in TA-1057 (Figs. 7.8, 7.9) may have been a tenon or a freestanding carved statue. It has a *suche* or serpent motif carving typical of the region. It was at least 1 m high, and was probably much larger originally.

Two statues (one small, the other large) were found at site AR-1245 (Fig. 7.10), one that is typical of many more in the region. The site is a classic sunken court complex in the northern Titicaca Basin. The small limestone piece (Fig. 7.11) is about 111 cm long and measures about 28 cm in diameter. There is a damaged carving that may be a frog, lizard, fish or other naturalistic motif. The second, larger, limestone statue was found nearby. It is over 200 cm in height, and some 80 cm wide at its greatest width (Fig. 7.12). Most significant is the fact that the stones were only minimally carved in antiquity. The limestone in the area naturally forms into these elongated shapes, and the carvings on the pieces were effectively added on to what was natural stone. The carving itself is a crude rendition of a snake or

lizard motif with the ubiquitous oval or “donut” shape typical of Formative period carvings. Their shapes clearly suggest their use as typical statues, but they appear to have been natural limestone rocks selected for their shape and modified with a modest carving on a natural surface.

Farmers and construction workers have discovered a few carved statues in sites, at least according to various unsubstantiated reports. One intact but broken statue was discovered by farmers near the town of Huancané at the site of Huancanewichinka (Fig. 7.13). This Formative statue was set perfectly upright in virtually the middle of the court when we visited the area in 1998. Whether the stones were left exactly as they were during the use of the court (unlikely) or were maintained by locals as a huaca well after the courts were abandoned (much more likely) is not known. What is clear is that the statue was broken long ago, as evidenced by the heavy weathering on the cracked faces.

### *Undecorated Statues*

While the carved statues have captured the archaeological imagination, uncarved statues are far more common throughout the region. Uncarved stelae are found in scores of sites in the area, almost always associated with Formative period pottery. Uncarved statues are morphologically very similar to carved ones. They are carved from sandstone, limestone, basalt and andesite. Some have steps or notches at the top, while many others do not.

The towns of Taraco and Putina, both major Formative period centers, are replete with uncarved statues throughout the streets. These statues are today incorporated into buildings and streets and used as steps or as building materials. Dozens of such statues were incorporated into the foundations of the Colonial period churches in each town.

The statues shown in Figures 7.14 and 7.15 are typical of those found in the streets of Taraco; the statues in Figures 7.16 and 7.17 are found in the streets of Putina. There is now little question that the uncarved stelae were originally located in or at least very near the sunken courts. Figure 7.18 shows several such stelae at the iconic site of Qaluyu. These were thrown on the surface as debris from looting activities. Our extensive surveys in the region have discovered a number of sunken court sites with uncarved, as well as carved, stelae.

The site referred to as Hu-316, also locally called Machacamarca in the upper Huancané valley, has a classic notched, undecorated stela (Figs. 7.19–7.21). This is one of the principal Formative and Huaña I period centers with a sunken court and monolith; it is part of the complex that includes several domestic habitation sites below the sunken court area. The site covers most of the east side of Cerro Machacamarca with artificial terraces. The court is trapezoidal with a “key-shaped” entrance. It is impossible to precisely measure the court, but it is about 17 m on a side with some variation for the trapezoidal effect. An uncarved stela is found in the center of the court, apparently very close to its original location. The sandstone monolith is 2.30 m long, and



Figure 7.4. Slightly decorated sandstone statue on the northern side of Taraco, Peru.



Figure 7.5. The Cornejo stela found at site TA-1039.



Figure 7.6. A fragment of a statue with a frog motif found in the municipal museum in Taraco.



Figure 7.7. A carved statue fragment dredged from the river Rámis at Taraco.



Figure 7.8. A possible tenon or standing statue fragment from the site TA-1057.

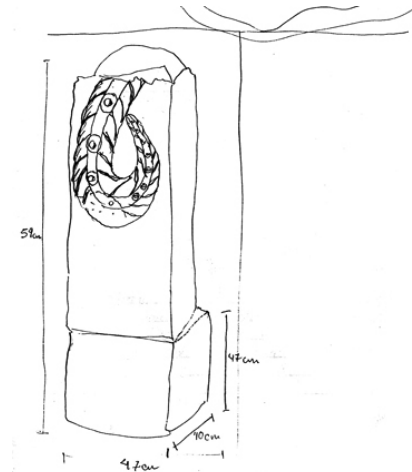


Figure 7.9. A field drawing of the opposite side of the statue in Figure 7.8. Drawing by Adán Umire.



Figure 7.10. Two limestone monoliths on the surface of site AR-1245.



Figure 7.11. The smaller of two statues on AR-1245.

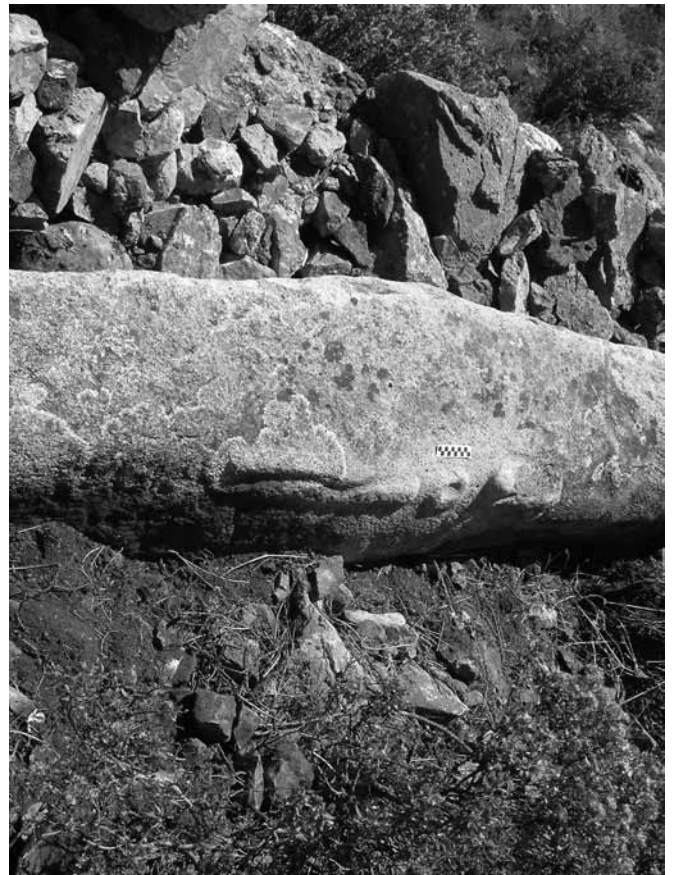


Figure 7.12. The larger of two statues on AR-1245.



Figure 7.13. Broken upright statue at the site of Huancanewichinka near Huancané. The statue appears to be in its original location.



Figure 7.14. Uncarved statue in the streets of modern Taraco, Peru.



Figure 7.15. Uncarved statue in the streets of modern Taraco, Peru.



Figure 7.16. Uncarved statue in the streets of modern Putina, Peru.





Figure 7.17. Uncarved statue in the streets of modern Putina, Peru.



Figure 7.18. The site of Qaluyu with numerous carved stones on the surface.



Figure 7.19. The sunken court at the site of Machacamarca in the upper Huancané Valley.



Figure 7.20. A notched, sandstone statue at Machacamarca. The notch is adjacent to the arrow scale in the photograph.



Figure 7.21. Close-up of a notched, sandstone statue at Machacamarcá.



Figure 7.22. Uncarved statue in Taraco (site TA-725).

about 35 cm wide. We cannot measure the third side because it is buried. Virtually all the pottery on the surface in the sunken court area is Formative and Huaña I period in date. It is therefore likely that the court was built in the Formative with associated occupations on the sides and below the hill.

Machacamarcá is typical of dozens of sites in the northern Titicaca Basin. Uncarved stelae are found throughout the area, usually associated with sunken courts and almost always in association with Formative period pottery. The stelae found at the sites of TA-725 (Fig. 7.22), AR-626 (Figs. 7.23–7.25), Hu-521 (Fig. 7.26), Hu-291 (Fig. 7.27) and Hu-220 (Fig. 7.28) are typical of this pattern as well. The statue at Hu-291 is made of limestone and appears to be less worked than those made of sandstone. It is similar in style and appearance to those in AR-1245. Even more emblematic of these kinds of limestone statues are those such as the one seen in Figure 7.29 from the site of AR 1249. This 2-m-long piece appears to be largely a natural fracture, with some obvious shaping on one end and a protuberance at the base reminiscent of other carved statues. The most spectacular in size is the giant limestone found at AR-1385 (Figs. 7.30, 7.31). At over 6 m high, this piece was decorated with small, carved depressions. It is found alone, in a field next to the modern and ancient road. There is evidence of shaping of the limestone to achieve a statue-like effect but nothing like this has been reported in the literature in this area. It is most likely that the piece was set upright in the pampa, but the precise site with which it was affiliated is unknown. Not surprisingly, the piece is called “balsarumi” or “stone balsa,” balsa referring to the reed boats that are used on the lake.

#### *Carved Architectural Slabs*

One of the sunken courts at the iconic site of Pucara is shown in Figure 7.32. The sunken court is faced on the interior with large and heavy slabs, almost all of them carved from the relatively soft red sandstone found in the area. One of the niches, as seen in Figure 7.33, is faced with a carved slab creating a stepped pattern. It is likely that many other carved slabs were at the site and have since been removed.

More elaborate slabs have been described in the southern Titicaca Basin for the Chiripa cultures (Chávez and Chávez 1975:49). In the Northern Titicaca Basin Survey, we discovered several bas-relief slabs that almost certainly were used to face sunken courts. The Aguirre stelae, named after the owner of the land on which they were first recorded, are seen in Figures 7.34–7.36. These sandstone stelae are in the pampa, moved from a site where there was most certainly a sunken court. We do not know where that site was, but it is possibly covered by pampa mounds and natural soil accumulations. Both stelae have snakes or other serpent-like creatures that are very similar to one found in the Pucara Museum (Fig. 7.37). Both slabs are around 60 × 60 × 20 cm in size, with variation across all the axes due to the uneven surfaces.

Another badly worn red sandstone decorated slab is found at the intersection of two roads in the pampa, not associated with any nearby archaeological site. Residents of the area call it the Tacca stela. According to informants, it is used today as a marker (*hito*) between two communities (Fig. 7.38). The slab appears to have the characteristic Formative period crossed hands with two crosses below, and a stylized step or lightning bolt motif as



Figure 7.23. The sunken court at AR-626.



Figure 7.24. Uncarved statue at site AR-626.



Figure 7.25. Close-up of uncarved statue in Figure 7.24 at site AR-626.



Figure 7.26. A uncarved limestone statue at site HU-521.



Figure 7.27. Large uncarved statue and other carved stones at site HU-291.



Figure 7.28. Uncarved statue at HU-220.



Figure 7.30. A huge, solitary limestone block that was shaped into a statue-like form. This stone had cupules on the surface.



Figure 7.29. Uncarved limestone statue at AR-1249.



Figure 7.31. Close-up of the huge, solitary limestone block shown in Figure 7.30. This stone had cupules on the surface.



Figure 7.32. One of the great sunken courts at the site of Pucara.



Figure 7.33. Carved slabs in the sunken court at Pucara.



Figure 7.34. The Aguirre 1 carved stone slab from site TA-934.

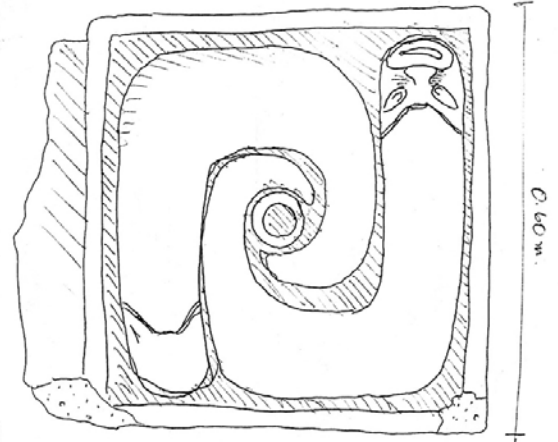


Figure 7.35. Field drawing of the carved stone slab seen in Figure 7.34. Drawing by Adán Umire.



Figure 7.36. The Aguirre 2 carved stone slab from site TA-934.



Figure 7.37. Carved statue at the Pucara Museum. The view from the top mimics the experience of a viewer on top of an uncovered sunken court.

seen in the drawing by Adán Umire (Fig. 7.39). The size is 48 × 50 × 17 cm.

A pair of opposing felines is seen in a carved decorative slab in the Taraco Museum (Fig. 7.40). These most likely decorated some kind of sunken court or other building. The iconography is decidedly Pucara in style, placing this piece a bit later than the other decorated slabs described above.

Given that these slabs are relatively light and artistically interesting, many have been moved to indoor places, particularly churches, where they were incorporated into Colonial period buildings.

#### *Uncarved Architectural Slabs*

Uncarved slabs were used to line the great sunken courts at Pucara (see Fig. 7.33). They are also found on the surface or incorporated into buildings in Taraco. The slab shown in Figure 7.41 is typical of many andesite slabs found in the town. The Colonial period church that dominates the plaza was built with many sandstone slabs that look very much like those found at Pucara. Figure 7.42 shows a number of red sandstones that are used as steps in the church side entrance. Likewise, site TA-1042 (Fig. 7.43) has stone slabs, near a house, that are used today as a bench.



Figure 7.38. The Tacca “stela” located near TA-1047.

#### *Lintels/Building Stones*

We assume that the narrow and long carved stones are lintels, as opposed to statues, by their shape. In reality, we have little direct evidence to suggest that they were lintels other than simple analogy to later Inca and Colonial period buildings. It is perfectly possible that they were not lintels at all, but rather were building stones or even monoliths.

A classic and beautiful fine-grained basalt lintel is seen in Figure 7.44 at the site of AR-1023. It is reminiscent of the famous Yaya-Mama stela now found in the Taraco Museum (Fig. 7.45) but without the carving. The lintel from AR-1023 seen in Figures 7.46 and 7.47 is an enigmatic foot impression in an otherwise undecorated piece that is 2.25 × 0.45 × 0.22 m in dimension.

#### *Carved Portable Stones*

As mentioned, one of the few portable stones to be excavated scientifically is that from the Taraco Archaeological Project in the southern Titicaca Basin. Cohen and Roddick report finding a small “lightning stone” (Chávez 1975) in a Late Chiripa (ca. 800–200 BC) context. Several portable or at least small stone carvings were found in the Northern Titicaca Basin Archaeological Survey. A small head found in the north is seen in Figures

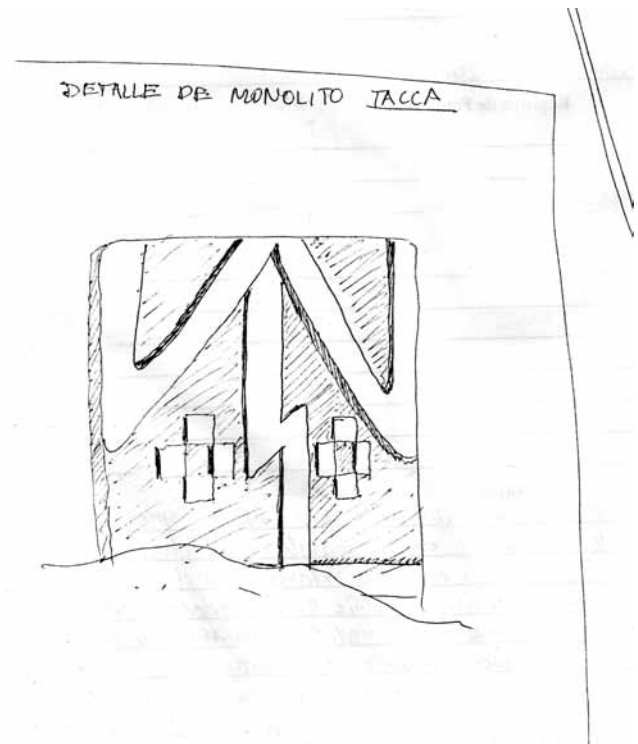


Figure 7.39. Field drawing of the Tacca stela in Figure 7.38. Drawing by Adán Umire.



Figure 7.40. Slab with opposing felines currently in the Taraco Municipal Museum.



Figure 7.41. Uncarved andesite slab in Taraco.



Figure 7.42. Uncarved red sandstone slabs in the main church in the plaza of Taraco.



Figure 7.43. Large uncarved sandstone slabs at TA-1042.





Figure 7.44. A fine-grained basalt lintel from AR-1023.



Figure 7.45. The Yaya-Mama stela now at the Taraco Municipal Museum.



(left) Figure 7.46. The lintel from AR-1023 with foot impression.

(above) Figure 7.47. Close-up of the lintel from AR-1023 seen in Figure 7.46.



Figure 7.48. Small andesite head from TA-1034.

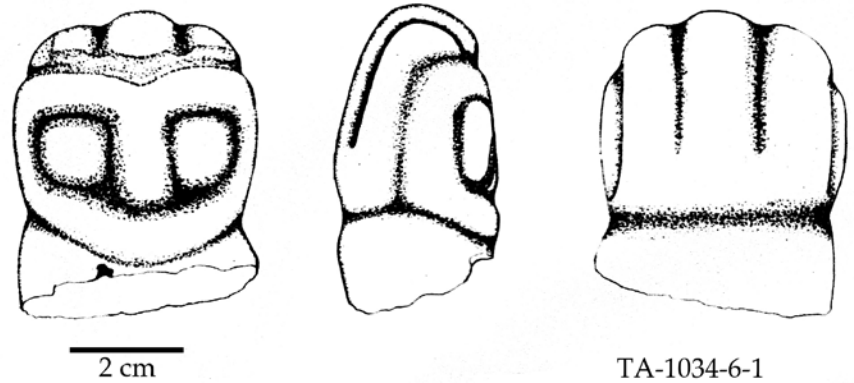


Figure 7.49. Drawing of the head seen in Figure 7.48. Drawing by Cecilia Chávez.

7.48 and 7.49. Made of a coarse-grained andesite, the head is carved in a classic Formative style and was found at the site of TA-1034. Figure 7.50 likewise depicts a head carved in andesite (from TA-1056) while the head shown in Figure 7.51 (from TA-1042) is carved in limestone.

#### *Miscellaneous Pieces*

The category of miscellaneous pieces contains stone carvings of unknown function. The massive carved block at Taraco (Fig. 7.52) is a huge piece that is referred to by people today in the region as an “altar.” At present, we have no idea of how it functioned. It seems unlikely that the piece has been moved from its original location.

#### **Conclusion**

Our knowledge, both empirical and theoretical, continues to grow with each passing research season. It is clear that the two traditional centers of complex cultural development—the southern Tiwanaku/Huatta area and the northern Titicaca region that arcs from Huancané across Lake Arapa to Juliaca—also contained the greatest density and diversity of carved stone. Statues, both carved and uncarved, are associated with mounded pampa or hilltop sunken court sites and political centers. It is likely that many of the stone statues and other stone “huacas” throughout the region were captured by victorious political groups and moved to these political centers. Such a fact obviously complicates interpretation on one hand, but creates exciting new challenges for Titicaca Basin archaeology.



Figure 7.50. A carved head from TA-1056.

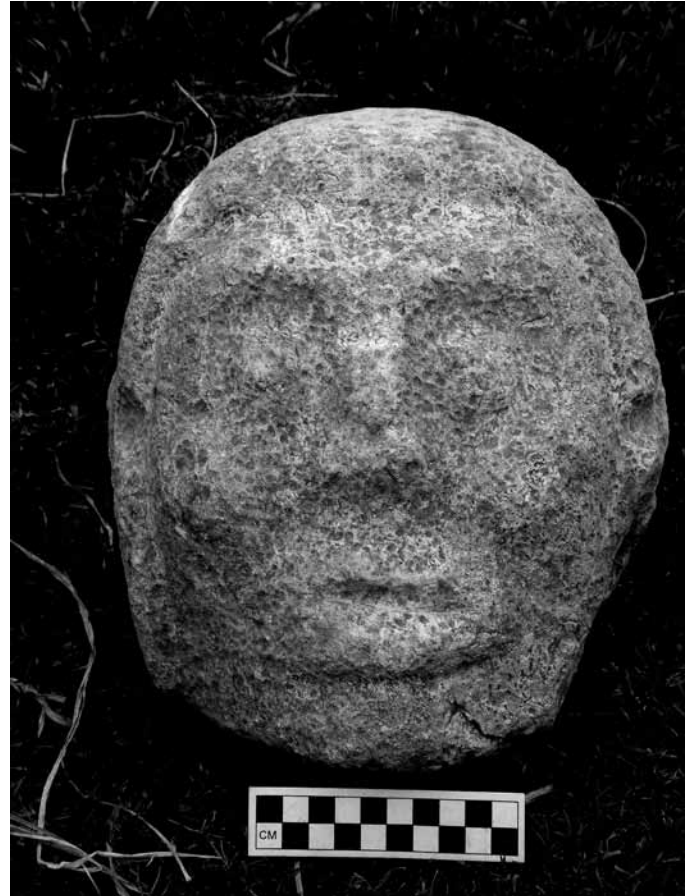


Figure 7.51. A carved limestone head from TA-1042.



Figure 7.52. A large carved block at TA-725.

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