

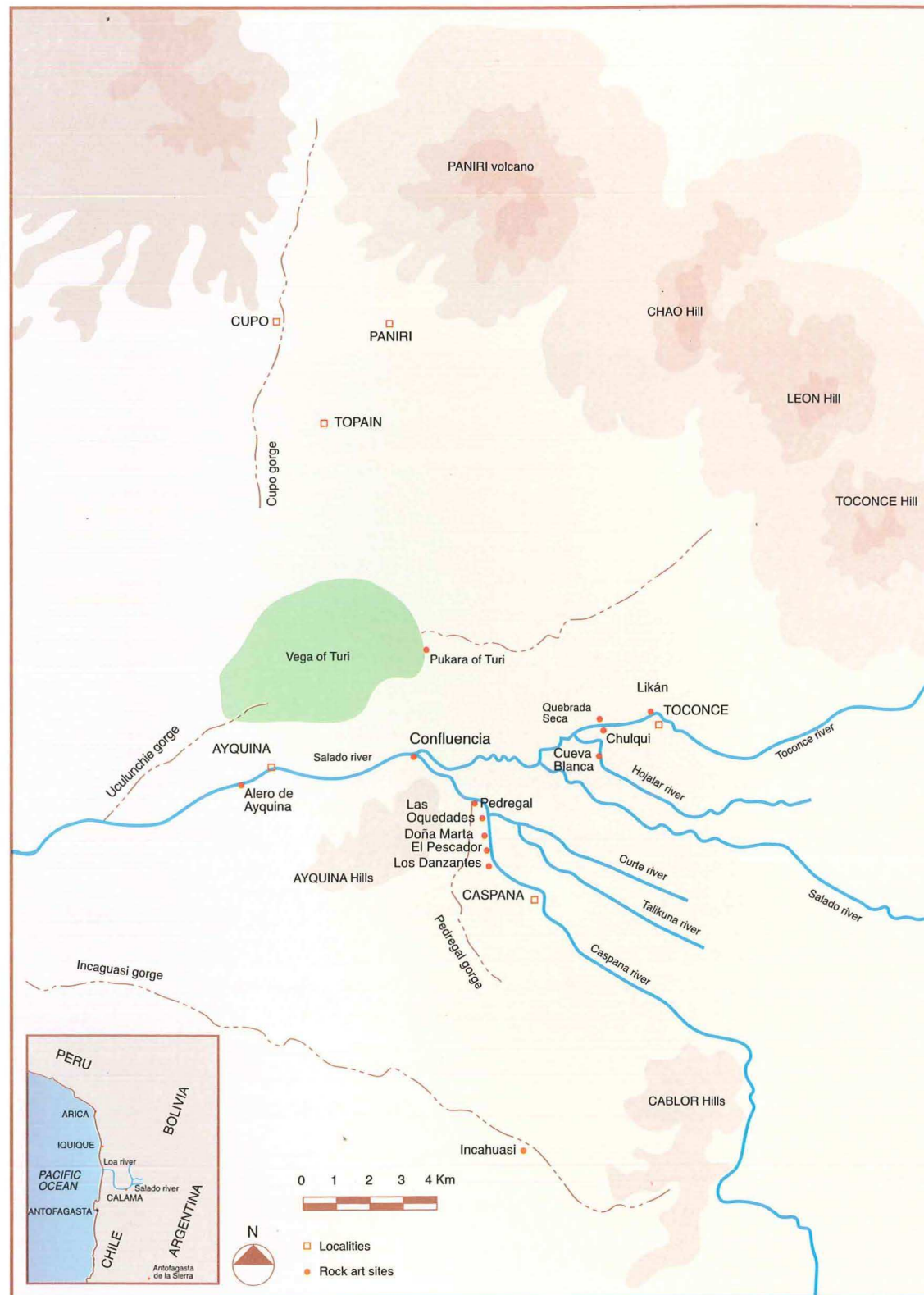


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ROCK ART, LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE IN THE ANDEAN FOOTHILLS OF THE ATACAMA DESERT

*Strong light, vastness without points of reference, endless silence... human creation,
placed there like a shelter... architecture at rest, expressed in the ancestral
language of stone, simply, austerely.¹*

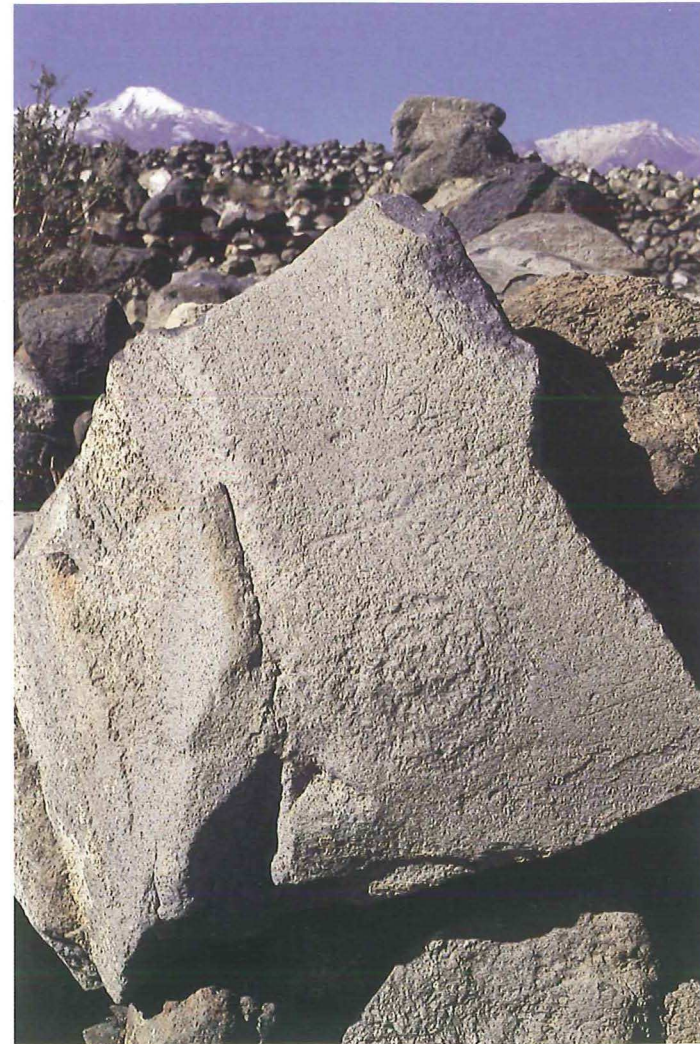
Subregion of the Salado river (Atacama desert, northern Chile)



The Atacama desert was extensively inhabited in prehistoric times. Some of the architectural complexes of those early residents still remain but most have been reduced to the barely perceptible vestiges of dwellings and workplaces, cemeteries and offerings. The list of archaeological findings is ample and heterogeneous, and can be interpreted to a greater or lesser degree. However, there is a set of remains that appears to be inscrutable: a series of engravings and paintings executed in caves that served as dwellings, on loose blocks of stone alongside paths that cross the desert, and on the rocky walls of the gorges of mountain rivers.

The content of these works has awakened the interest of several specialists and although there have been some commendable efforts that offer tempting conclusions, some believe that rock art is a domain that is inaccessible to interpretation.² Until now, the studies that have the best credentials in this sense are those that have related this kind of archaeological site to pre-Hispanic traffic and pathways, with streams and with ceremonies to propitiate the abundance of camelid herds, or with celestial phenomena.³ Beyond the historical or cultural issues that these works intend to clarify, perhaps the most relevant lesson is that it is possible that some aspects of rock art may reveal their meanings if they are considered in relation to their associations, whether these are human installations or geographical features.

Rock art has its own meanings, but these must be considered in conjunction with the space where it is located and with its relationship with the natural or artificial objects that make up its physical support or surroundings. Undoubtedly, a work of art would lose a great deal of its cultural value if we did not consider these vital aspects; for example, it is important to know that *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci was made



Engraved spiral at the Turi fortress
(Photo F. Gallardo).

to decorate a monastery's dining room wall and that *Double Negative* by Michael Heizer is a cyclopean excavation on the edge of a plateau in Nevada.

Evidently the problem lies in the notion of space, in that which surrounds and involves us beyond ourselves. What is the space that we inhabit? The one where life develops? The archaeological answer to these questions that border on the deepest existence of social beings, has mainly been functional or instrumental. For Gordon Childe, as well as for North American and Soviet materialists, the history of humanity is the history of rational action on the environment, and space is only the place where we produce, circulate, consume and discard what has been consumed.⁴ This perspective is correct in many aspects relating to subsistence. However, it bypasses the fact that life is not limited to economic activity; it forgets that when a





Detail of the Alero de Aiquina paintings, Confluencia style.

human being settles in one place, the act of symbolic appropriation of territory takes place –a variable synthesis between the individual who is there and the environment to which it grants significance.⁵

Nature precedes the person, but it must be transformed in some measure to be made habitable in all the ways that this word evokes. It is no longer a question of reducing the environment to a mere source of provision, but of recreating it according to means, needs and beliefs. In view of these actions, territory becomes landscape, nature that has lost its neutrality. From our cultural perspective, landscape is constituted to the degree we are situated as passive spectators, as observers who do not share a relationship with it. The tradition of thought and action that predetermines us is that which radically separates the subject from the object. This does not help us to experience landscape as if we were a part of it. However, the diversity of experiences gathered by anthropology show that this concept is far from being universally accepted.⁶

Australian aboriginal art of the central desert, for example, is an extraordinary example of the dissolving of the spectator-landscape figure. The natives of that region usually paint canvas with dots and other figures with a geometrical appearance representing parts of the territory, establishing it as system of relationships between geographical features and the tracks of animals, people and gods.⁷ This is a remarkable reference to a complex way of experiencing the environment, as the reality of the individual in terms of

space not only exists in terms of specific geographic features, but also of a variable set of tracks among which it is impossible to ignore his own. Here, the landscape is not purely visual, but rather an active map of variable signs telling of the circulation and the position that each thing has in the world.

Landscape is a dialogue between the set of material interventions introduced by the community and the environment in which they find their place to settle. These actions are exercises in domestication, echelonment and distinction of that territory; they are the materialization of devices (for example: rock art, terraces for crops, paths, etc.) to exercise control and to manage the movement and the ideas of people in the apparent triviality of everyday life.⁸ Rock art appears on this scenario as an extreme case of material delicacy, of intervention and modification of the environment. Nevertheless, despite its physical magnitude and the small investment of energy supposedly used for its creation, the results in shape and color, in volume and texture, are extremely evident on the rocky surfaces used as support.⁹ The visible effect of this action is so pronounced that it cannot be ignored. Even a small red line on a large natural wall is enough to attract the eyes.



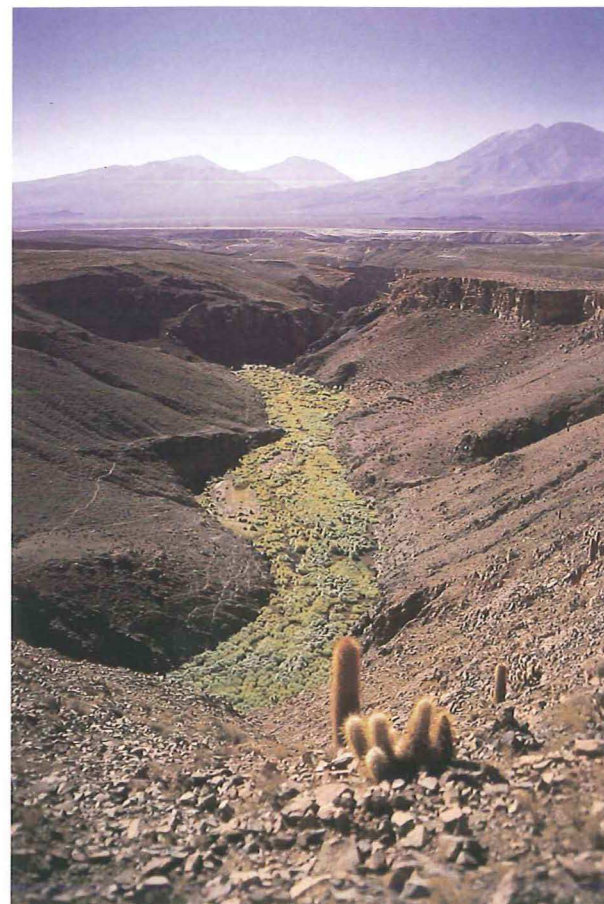
Painting at the Alero de Likan site, Toconce river.

◀
Alero de Aiquina site.

Rock art is simply provocative not only because of its quality or coloring, but because of the contrast it establishes with its support and immediate environment. Its location is somehow disconcerting, but because of the fact that the artist chose that location and not another, we can suppose that there is a certain logic of distribution, an order that can be described by means of the regularities of its associations. This is a complex task, as the relevance of these relationships must be found by identifying the stylistic series and their relative temporality. This is not exclusively due to zeal for formal, chronological and cultural coherence, but because when these series are multiplied in time, a patrimonial accumulation is produced that places the individual before landscapes that have already been created. Undoubtedly, the rupestrian environment was not the same for those that created the first works and for those that at different moments of history produced other new ones.

ECOLOGY, SOCIAL HISTORY AND STYLES

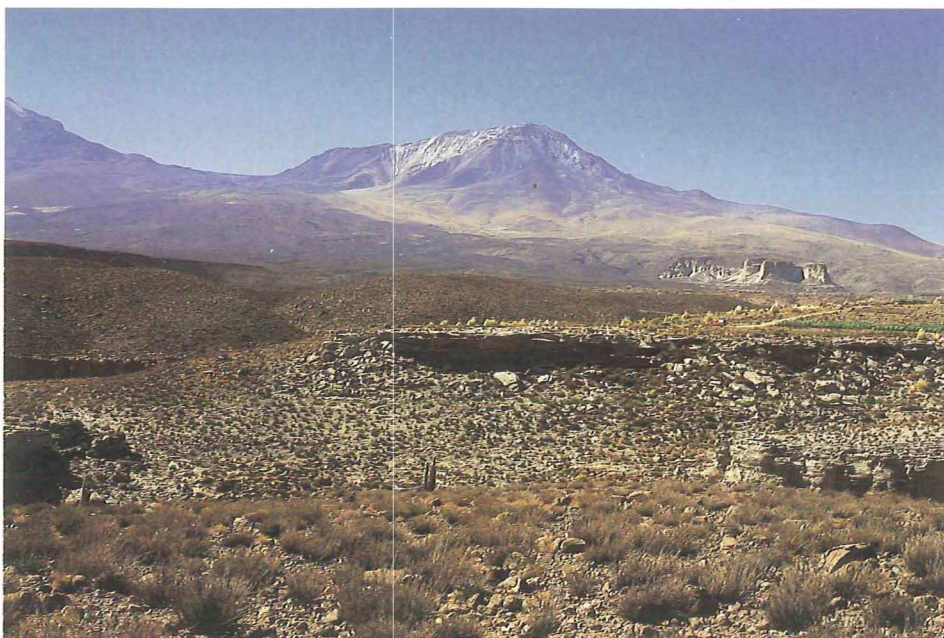
The Andean foothill environment of the Salado river, the main tributary of the Loa river, is the threshold of the Puna Salada (over 4000 m above sea level), and can be described as a rocky plane of volcanic origin that descends the slopes of Andean volcanoes and mountains to the pampas of the Atacama desert, some 1000 m below. It is a region of gorges with deep, sinuous valleys through which a number of rivers, such as the Toconce, Hojalar, Caspana, Curte and Cupo, flow. Rainfall, heaviest in the austral summer season, or "altiplano winter," reaches almost 200 mm per year. Temperatures are high during the day and descend substantially at night. The environment is arid but there is a good supply of drinking water coming from



Caspana river
Foto F. Gallardo

cordillera snowmelts and from underground water that rises to the surface in the form of springs. At present, forage is not abundant because the vegas have been drained by regional mining enterprises to obtain water for their operations, but is sufficient to maintain limited herds of llamas, alpacas, sheep and goats.¹⁰ Vicuñas, guanacos, suris, flamingos, vizcachas and other rodents are some of the wild animals that must have been plentiful and important for the prehistoric populations.

The present-day climate is harsh, but 10,000 years ago, when human settlement in the Atacama desert began, rains were more abundant and the highlands had numerous lakes, lagoons and a high concentration of animal life. A couple of millennia later, when the area underwent a dramatic change, becoming arid, the first populations of hunter-gatherers and the animals that sustained them were forced to take refuge in places privileged by the presence of water and subsistence resources. This period of drought lasted up to



*Alero de Chulqui
site, Toconce river
(Photo F. Gallardo).*

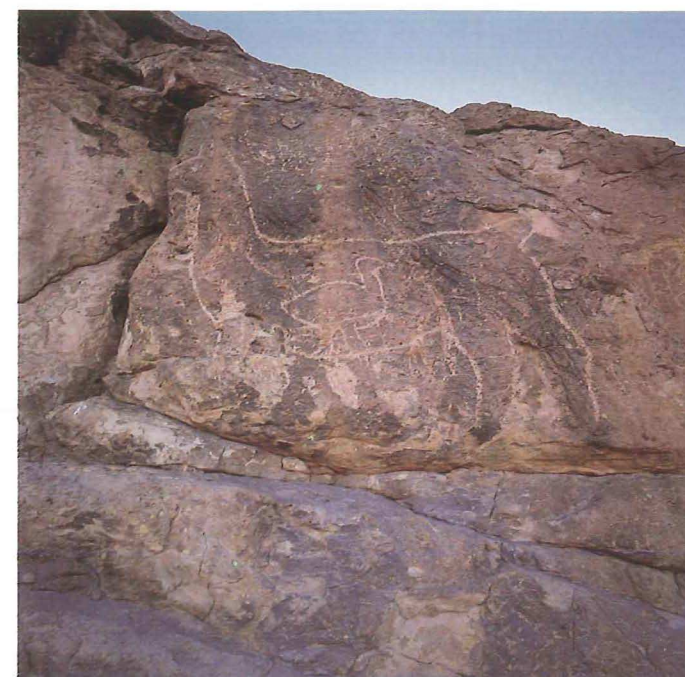
approximately a thousand years before Christ, when the climate started to improve, with increasing precipitation, until conditions similar to those existing today were reached.¹¹

The oldest human occupations of the Salado river have been recorded in certain rock shelters in ravines in the region, in the way of waste left behind by groups of hunter-gatherers. The fruit of a cordilleran cactus, edible roots of seasonal grasses, remains of wild camelids and vizcachas and traces of the manufacturing of stone tools are notable among the findings that date back some 10,000 years.¹² These groups occupied these shelters on their way to the highlands where they went to hunt guanacos and vicuñas, and to obtain obsidian to manufacture their tools, as well as to gather fruit and seeds and other edible resources offered by this environment overflowing with vegas and streams.¹³ This way of life persisted without significant variations for almost six thousand years and the practical wisdom accumulated during this long period of cohabitation with wild camelids led these populations to the initial domestication of these animals. Towards the end of the hunter-gatherer development stage, the first rock art works were produced. They consist of camelid figures often engraved with very fine lines, which have been found

in the Alto Loa and in the Puripica gorge, north of the Atacama salt flats, especially on small rocky blocks that are often found mixed with waste in the first semi-permanently occupied dwellings of this region.¹⁴

Approximately three thousand years ago when the climate improved substantially, the populations of the Atacama desert kept herds of llamas, benefited from small-scale agriculture, began to produce pottery, textiles and metallic objects, and practiced ceremonies linked to the fertility of their animals and plants.¹⁵ These ancient herdsmen walked great distances to obtain subsistence resources and exotic goods from the Pacific coast, the high puna and even from trans-Andean valleys and jungles, directly or through barter.¹⁶ Rock art associated with this period, which we call *Taira-Tulán* in reference to the sites where the first panels were found, forms a style that seems to be distributed practically throughout all the Andean foothills area, stretching from the Alto Loa river, though the Salado watershed, to the Valley of Tulán, north of the Atacama salt flats.¹⁷ It seems that the most favored technique was engraving, although there are quite a few figures painted in red. The most frequently found subject matters and associations are large camelids and birds, and perhaps their most outstanding features are the excessive retracing of their outlines and the superposing of designs.

*Depiction of camelid
and bird at the
Caspana river.*





▲ Engravings from the Taira-Tulán stylistic series, at the confluence of the Caspana and Salado rivers.

► Figures with spear-throwers and short skirts, painted in the Alero Los Danzantes site, Caspana river.



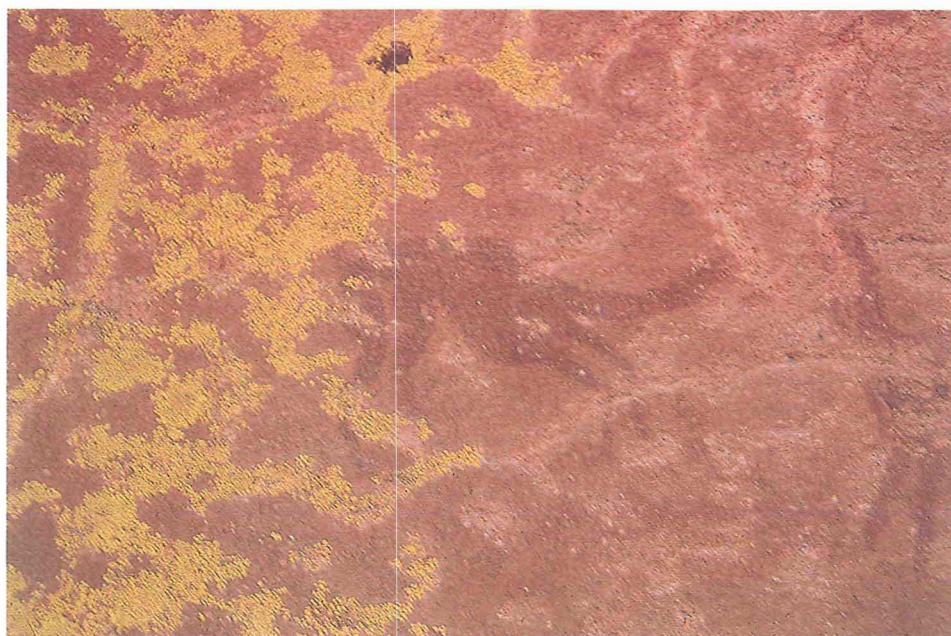


Camelid engraved with deep grooves, on a rock wall of the Toconce River canyon.

Engraved camelid in a variation of the *Confluencia* style.

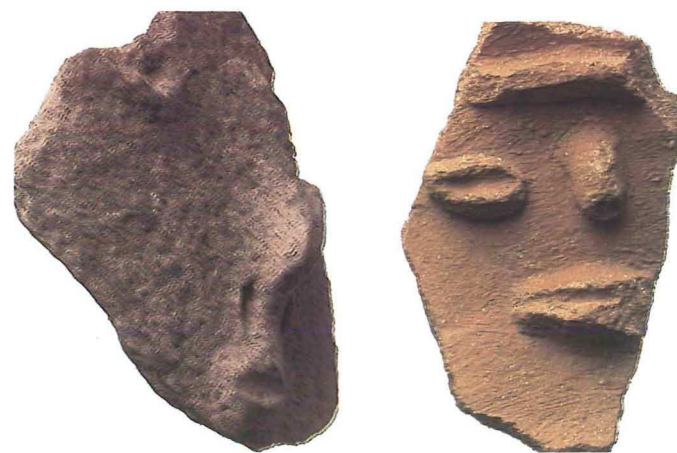
In the valley of the Caspana river, an affluent of the Salado, there are two archaeological sites in which figures of the *Taira-Tulán* stylistic series appear in a relationship of superposition with another style of rock art we have called *Confluencia*. The characteristic of the latter is that it depicts scenes with human figures and animals, most of which are camelids, painted in red and reddish-yellow. The most outstanding features of this style are: their small size (around 20 cm high), the emphasis placed on accentuating the anatomical features of the figures' bodies, such as wide torsos and hips, small waists and excessively rounded legs, and the effect of movement or animation they convey. Animals and human beings are depicted in profile and the latter often carry weapons, apparently spears and spear-throwers, in their hands.¹⁸ They are basically paintings, but lately, we have detected some figures with outlines that have been engraved with deep grooves, giving an effect of volume.

Camelid in the *Confluencia* style at the Caspana river
(Photo F. Gallardo).

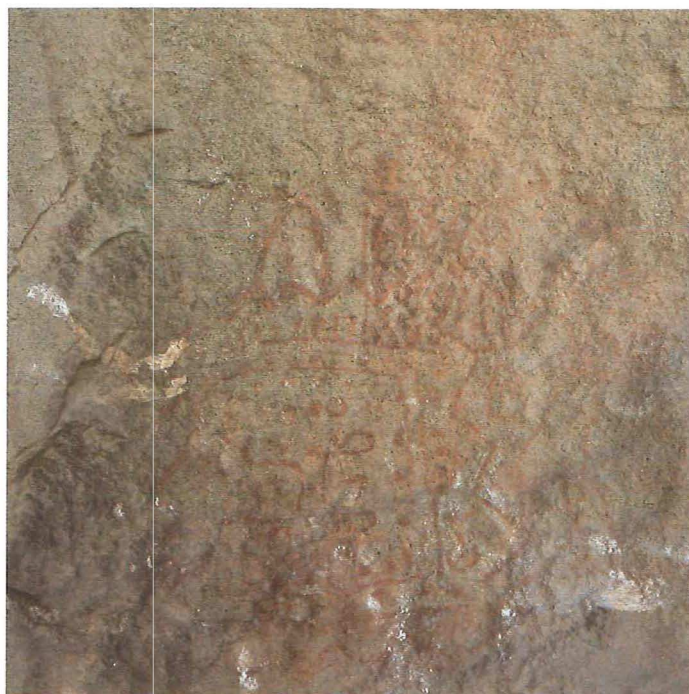


The *Confluencia* style is the start of a pictorial tradition that seems to have subsisted up to the first centuries of our era, when populations with an openly sedentary way of life began to settle in the region. They settled in villages with circular precincts grouped around central spaces, forming small, scattered communities in the accesses of valleys and near the edge of vegas. Their inhabitants combined llama shepherding with horticulture, especially the cultivation of maize, complementing their resources with extensive networks of inter-regional barter and traffic by means of llama caravans.¹⁹ A remarkable aspect of this period is the vast system of relationships that the people of the area established with populations inhabiting places as far off as Lake Titicaca, southern Bolivia, and northwest Argentina.²⁰

Faces modelled in clay of local and foreign pottery, Turi area.



Geometric painting in the Cueva Blanca style, at the confluence of the Caspana and Salado rivers.



population built vast cultivatable terraces on the slopes of some of the main valleys of the Salado river basin. These works are impressive because of their size and the investment of energy they demanded, and not only imply a shift in the productive strategies of the population, but also a profound transformation in the organization of the work force. All these technological and social changes bear witness to a new way of life. The people built larger, more complex nuclear villages on the slopes of river valleys, with rectangular dwellings, routes of access and storehouses. They established small agricultural outposts in the gorges and cattle ranches on the hills where the herds were kept in summer, taking maximum advantage of the resources offered by this vast territory.²² The ceremonial architecture in villages, the way of burying the dead in rock shelters, and a certain type of decorated pottery, bear the imprint of influence from the Bolivian altiplano

Paintings from the Cueva Blanca site, on the Hojalar river.



Textile from the cemetery of Topáter, Calama.

(Photo F. Maldonado)

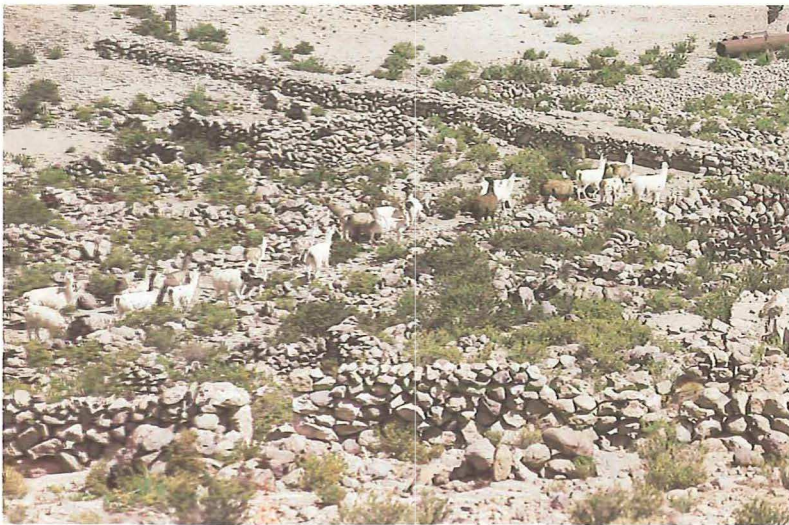
This is when a new style of rock painting, which we call *Cueva Blanca*, appears. It is radically different from the preceding style. The anatomical features of humans and animals disappear progressively, becoming more rigid, without the vigorous quality of the earlier ones. The number of camelid figures also decreases; human figures are painted mainly front view; and geometric figures, especially undulating lines, zigzags and crosses, increase. This is a pictorial art that closely follows the iconographic rules of textile decoration during this period. Textiles were goods of enormous prestige in the Andes and a privileged part of funeral offerings in Atacameñan cemeteries at this time of regional prehistory.²¹

This way of life persisted in the region until approximately the eighth century of our era, when complex agro-hydraulic technology came into use and the



Cultivation terraces of the village of Caspana





Village of Likán. Its initial occupation coincides with the introduction of large-scale agriculture to the area.

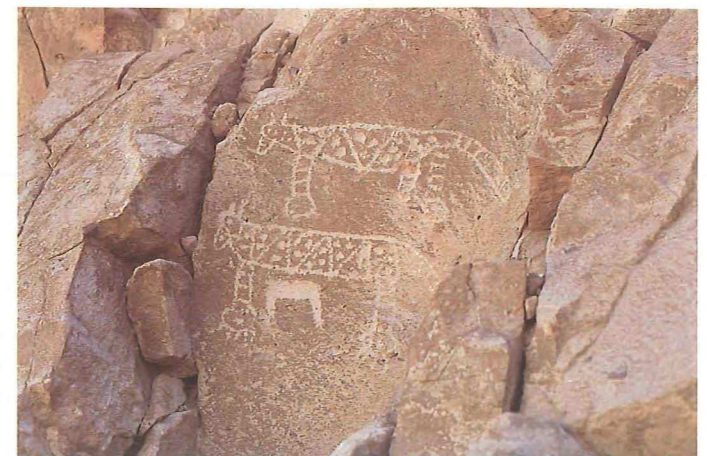
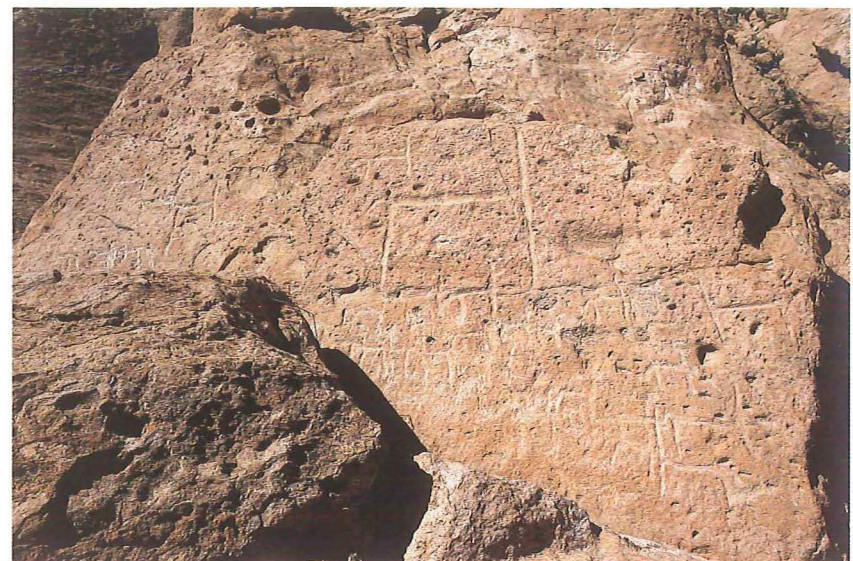
that lasted for almost four centuries in this traditional Atacameñan-based region.²³ Throughout this period, the inhabitants sustained and increased contacts and exchange with communities from the puna, valleys of northwest Argentina and southern altiplano, and with peoples of the Pacific coast and Tarapacá region, by means of vast caravanning circuits.²⁴ We know little about the rock art of the Salado region during this period, but it seems to consist basically of painting organized under the textile tradition of the preceding period. The frontal view and mirror-symmetry of human figures and geometric designs invade practically all the pictorial universe, as opposed to the earlier phase of this series in which these principles never came close to affecting the composition of these works.²⁵

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of rock art in the period after the *Taira-Tulán* and *Confluencia* series is the remarkable decrease in camelid images and the increase in human figures. We do not yet have answers for this, but we do know that the depiction of camelids reappears profusely around the fourteenth century of our era, when the area population fell under Inka dominion and was economically reoriented through symbolic and political mechanisms of dominion, to exploiting the great mineral wealth and to managing herds of domestic camelids.²⁶ The style known as *Quebrada Seca*, the last series of pre-

Hispanic rock art identified in the Salado region, belongs to this period. Engravings of camelids—represented orthogonally with lines forming right angles and fine-lined rigid bodies—are occasionally associated with the figures of other animals having feline features and bodies segmented into triangular fields decorated with dots. There are few scenic subject matters in this art. The herdsman leading a herd of animals is one of the most prominent. The *Quebrada Seca* style is technically simple but associated with these panels of simple solutions we have found a set of works that—through the use of pronounced bas-relief—seem to be veritable scale models of agricultural terraces and irrigation systems.

► *Depiction of late-period herder and camelids near the village of Aiquina.*

Camelids in the Quebrada Seca style, at the Toconce river.



Felines of the late period at the Puñtor gorge (Photo F. Gallardo).





▲ Site with rock art in the Quebrada Seca style on the Salado river.

► Depiction of felines from the late period.



ROCK ART, LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE

The different locations of rock art imply places and relationships with their surroundings that resemble a scenographic construction; they allow the significance of being there to provide direction for the action. This is especially noticeable in places saturated with rupestrian images, spaces that have been the object of a special iconographic redundancy. Places of this kind are scarce in the region, but the three we know of belong to the period immediately prior to Hispanic irruption.

The first of these sites is the *pukara* of Turi, a village with a defensive wall and 600 constructions, among which are recognizable dwellings, enclosures, storehouses and ceremonial architecture.²⁷ Here, engravings of camelids of the *Quebrada Seca* series predominate. They can be seen on the surrounding wall, along circulation routes and inside houses.²⁸ Most of the panels are located in the upper area, very near

to the *kallanka*, a large adobe building of unquestionable Inka imprint, which was most likely used for community meetings and feasts. The second location with a large number of panels is the Salado river gorge, not far from Ayquina, a small village of Andean farmers and herdsman. Here, the most popular rock art is the same as that recorded in the *pukara* and, although it was engraved on the bare rock of the gorge, it is directly associated with abandoned agricultural terraces and with *silos* or storehouses for harvested crops.

Rock art of the *Quebrada Seca* style is an art, the relevance of which appears to be linked to the occurrences of daily communal life. In fact, other small rupestrian sites with designs of this series often appear to be associated with enclosures, mines and paths leading to the hills where seasonal grasses grow during the short, summer rain period. This linkage with areas marked by activities of an economic or social nature is reminiscent of the propitiatory ceremonialism practiced by the natives today, in which a variety of figures made of sugar or tin are consumed to protect travellers and to obtain riches, agricultural abundance, or success in the reproduction of livestock.²⁹ These objects resemble rock art in their extreme iconographic conventionality and in the contexts of their use, but unlike it, they do not alter the environment and remain, but instead are burned and disappear. Rock art may have been propitiatory, but its indelible nature shows us that its effectiveness was not lost once the ritual ended, but quite the contrary, its lack of temporality dominated the place where it was installed by providing it with a permanent surfeit of significance.

The meanings of this rock art have been barely explored, but the location of the work provides us with several surprises. There are very few cases in which figures of the *Quebrada Seca* series appear on a panel together with designs of other stylistic series, or even in the same location. This strategy reveals a behavioral pattern of the artists that could be qualified as extreme caution regarding the location of rock art when it was part of the region's heritage.

►
*Camelid in the
Quebrada Seca style,
by the Caspana river.*

*View of the Turi
fortress
(Photo C. Aldunate).*





This “non-intervention in the past” policy is evident if we observe the kind of art found in the last of the zone’s areas containing a large number of rupestrian panels. Cupo is a short, narrow gorge that empties its water into the Turi vegas. According to our first archaeological observations, it was intensely occupied from the period in which large-scale agro-hydraulic technology was introduced up to Inka times. The predominant rupestrian technique is painting and most of the figures probably date from the period immediately prior to the Inka invasion. As in Ayquina, there is a vast complex of agricultural terraces. Nevertheless, not a single engraving of the *Quebrada Seca* type has been found here.

Painting in this style is an extremely rare technique, and its scarcity may have been affected by general arrangements regarding the access and use of certain resources of interest to the Inka State. Colonial documents show us that among the resources claimed



Painted camelids at the Inkahuasi mining site
(Photo F. Gallardo).

by the Inkas as their exclusive property were the «color» mines, which yielded minerals, such as iron oxides and copper sub-products, that provided them with a variety of ocher, reddish, green and blue pigments.³⁰ The purpose of the restrictions imposed on the management of coloring substances is not evident in colonial documents; however, they may have had a privileged status, because Andean mythology insists that the gods gave life to nations by applying paint.³¹ Whatever the reason to these arrangements, the fact is that the Inkas restricted the number of rock sites and designs in which pigments were used. The particular nature of these sites is not only revealed by their quantity, but also by the type and nature of their location, which was usually near mining deposits extensively mined by the Inkas and which exhibited pre-Inka rock art. This double strategy implies a double rupture, as neither the concurrence of styles nor color are rules of *Quebrada Seca* rock art. This is a remarkable break, but as it concerns copper mines around which the Inkas exercised an ostentatious architectural development that included houses, storehouses and constructions linked to the exercise of political authority, it is justified because it reaffirms the empire’s domination and sole right over these resources on another highly visible level.



Painted figures at the Cupo gorge.

Paintings of the Cupo gorge.





*Cave used as tomb
at the Toconce river.*

While rock art in the upper valley of the Salado river seems reasonably well defined and contextualized in the period of Inka rule, it still remains a bit hazy in the preceding historical period. Nevertheless, if our first impressions are correct, most of the sites where panels with this art—basically painting—are found seem to be rock shelters, a geomorphological category that seems to attain noteworthy cultural importance during this period. In fact, we know that in the vicinity of the pre-Hispanic village of Likán, which dates back to between the ninth and twelfth centuries of our era, there is a group of rock shelters that were used as family burial places. This funerary practice is as radically new as the large-scale agriculture, villages on slopes and ceremonial architecture introduced during this time span. Specialists have found proof linking these new practices to the Bolivian altiplano, an area that seems to have inspired admiration and been a center of cultural prestige for two thousand years.

Caverns and caves had enormous symbolic value for the peoples who inhabited the Andes at the time of the Spanish conquest. They were not only the burial places of relatives, but were also considered to be sacred places, places where the different lineages had

originated. It is evident that this mortuary style, which may have included the extraction of the bodies during community feasts, is a symbolic strategy to reclaim the “property” of the territory through the ancestors. This concern may have stemmed from new forms of social production, probably to protect and limit the access of others to agricultural land, or to bring together and not disperse the work force. There is not enough evidence available to corroborate this point of social history, but if we are right, rock art in this period may have operated as a mark of territoriality. This would enable us to make statements concerning disparities in the occupation of the area, such as the belief that the formal differences between the paintings of Cupo creek and those of the Salado river probably express forms of political and economic segmentation of social space.

The paintings of this period are not the only ones, or the first to be created in association with rock shelters. These sites were used for several centuries before the “agricultural revolution” and we were able to detect the presence of the *Cueva Blanca* style in them. The distribution of this rock art and its relationship to the settlement of the populations of this period show us the differential importance of this type of location. During the first eight centuries of our era, people inhabited

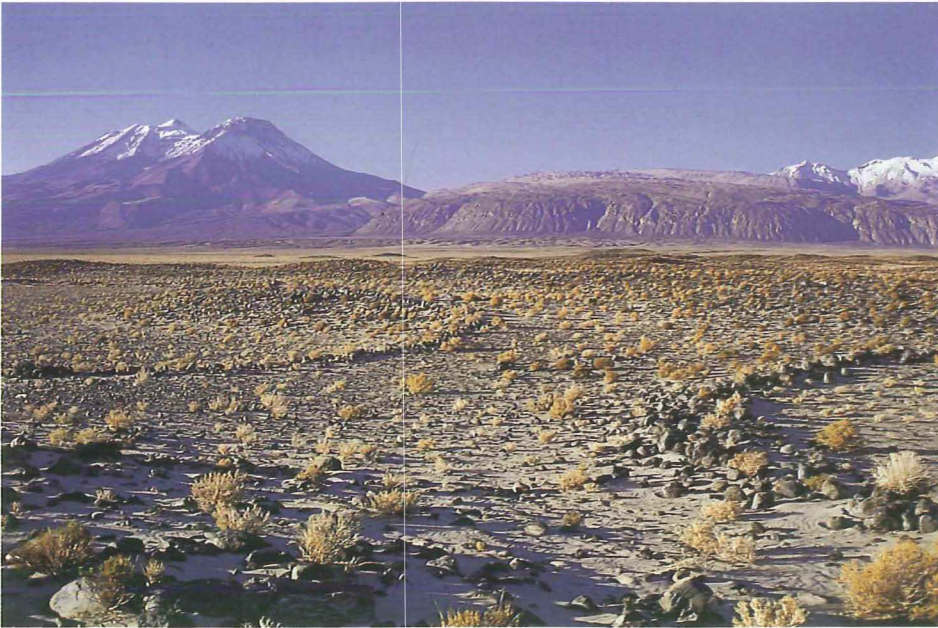
► *Anthropomorphic
figures at the
confluence of the
Caspana and
Salado rivers.*

*Rock art designs in
the Cueva Blanca
style at the
Inkahuasi site
(Photo F. Gallardo).*





also the activities carried out in it were valued. Rock art gave lived-in spaces a meaning that exceeded simple habitation. It gave them a cultural quality whose very conspicuousness had a bearing on the way they were viewed. Though it may seem exaggerated, rock shelters appear to be spaces in which dialogue with aspects of traditional culture took place, an act that probably proved more effective in the rock shelters than in the villages. If this is in fact true, these locations probably allowed a degree of intimacy technically impossible in the communal context of the village. The secrecy and privacy connected to rock art is well known in the ethnography of peoples who still practice this kind of art, and when these conditions are present, the locations tend to be outside the normal circuit of human traffic.³² Although there is a site with many panels in a short, narrow creek unsuitable for habitation or traffic, this is generally not the case. However, the type of production-related social relationships implied in the occupation of certain locations may have contributed to this differentiation between what is public and what is private.



Circular enclosures near the Turi spring.

simple villages formed by circular-based precincts, but their needs arising from hunting and gathering –as well as from the management of domestic livestock– obliged them to extend their habitational area and incorporate a number of rock shelters as temporary homes. Our archaeological excavations indicate that most of these places, located in gorges with permanent water flows, were used for tasks related to hunting, repairing stone instruments and producing copper ore beads. The preference for the use of this geographic feature could be interpreted as a form of connection with the past. After all, some of these places were occupied for thousands of years. But while rock art not only interacted with the daily lives of the circumstantial inhabitants of the rock shelters, it also sheltered these residents with a system of icons and meanings, suggesting that not only the location but



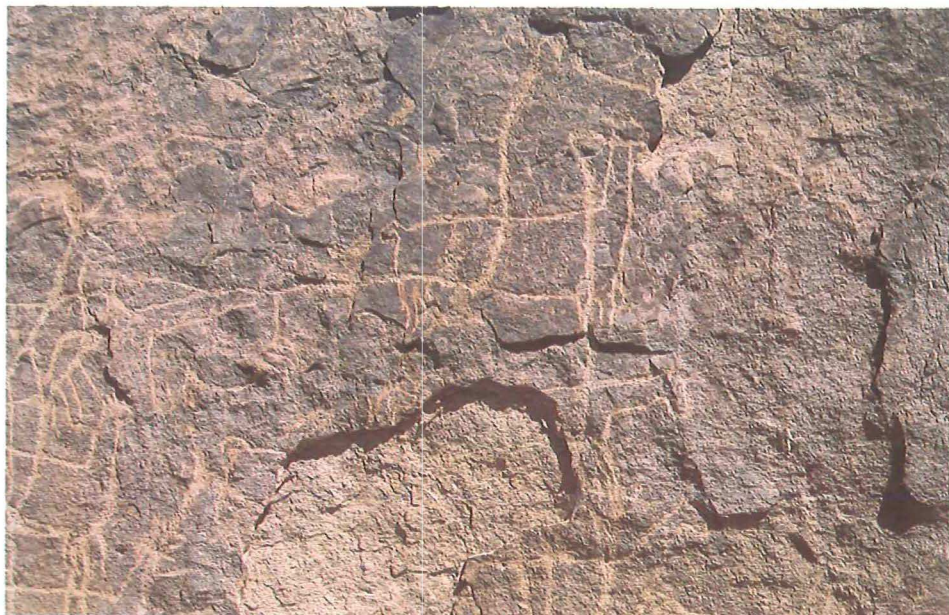
*Las Oquedades site,
Caspana river.*



*Anthropomorphic figure in association with geometric figures
at the confluence of the Caspana and Salado rivers.*

The *Cueva Blanca* style suggests a way of characterizing, both socially and symbolically, the human traffic environment. Nevertheless, it is with the first rock art of the region that a pristine landscape seems to evolve. The present development of archaeological research indicates that the *Confluencia* style (in its painting and picto-engraving variants) and the *Taira-Tulán* series are proof of the most ancient rock art on the foothills along the Salado river. These chronological considerations are still approximate and subject to new reliability testing that could give rise to new interpreting horizons. For now, stylistic definitions and their archaeological associations suggest that sometime along the thousand years that preceded our era, the landscape was the object of a new form of differentiation, a new space organization strategy, with a greater stress on social matters than on simple access to subsistence resources.

*Camelids of the
Taira-Tulán series at
the Caspana river
(Photo F. Gallardo).*



The *Confluencia* style, like *Cueva Blanca's*, was mostly practiced in rock shelters, but, unlike the latter, no ruins of contemporary villages have been found with this style. These villages probably had a dispersed settlement pattern, focalized in gorges and their natural shelters, as well as in *vegas* and *bofedales*, which provided the grass needed to keep herds of domestic camelids. Most of the known dwelling places of this period exhibit slight concentrations of waste produced by the activities carried out there. In spite of this, there is a large rock shelter where the Salado and Toconce rivers converge, having an abundance of remains related to hunting and slaughtering and to the gathering of wild plant species, and evidence of horticulture, elements that suggest an important strategic occupation when compared to other known sites. We cannot affirm that this was an organizing center, but its difference is noteworthy, especially because no remains of rock art have been found in it.

Not all rock shelters in gorges exhibit this type of rock art, and certain locations were undoubtedly privileged over others. This practice led to a spatial distinction that may have been related to the habilitation of spaces to materialize aspects of cultural tradition, of which the iconographic mediation –scenic and referential in this case– had become a necessity. Apart from this appreciation, it is a fact that the intervention of the artist on the walls of these rock shelters entails a degree of familiarity with the concepts of property, shelter, stability and permanence. This is especially true with this particular rock art, the works of which reveal authors highly trained in technique and expression.

The relationship between *Confluencia* iconography and its location suggests a particular kind of sociability linked to the cultural hierarchic organization of space, not restricted to community life within its improvised homes. Our findings indicate that a second rupestrian strategy, the technique and form of which is radically different to *Confluencia*, also operated during this period. The small graceful figures in scenic association

►
*Seated figure
associated to the
Taira-Tulán series at
the Toconce river.*





*Hunters of camelids in the Confluencia style
at the Caspana and Salado rivers.*

*Rafter in the Confluencia style at the
Alero El Pescador site, Caspana river.*



with moving human figures are replaced with large camelids scarcely engraved alongside figures of birds, usually subjected to the rule of superposition with an extreme and even confused saturation on the panels. If the technical solutions for both formulas surprise us because of their different visual effects, they are even more astounding and contrasting because of their location. Never, in all the rupestrian history of these Andean foothills did a style or series so clearly privilege places not directly related to subsistence activities or domestic life.

Although nearly all works of rock art are found within the circuit of day-to-day life, the local expression of the *Taira-Tulán* series is usually discretely located a certain distance away from dwellings and circulation areas, as though favoring geographic features over cultural ones. Springs and river confluences seem to be the

*Springs at the
Caspana gorge*
(Photo F. Gallardo).



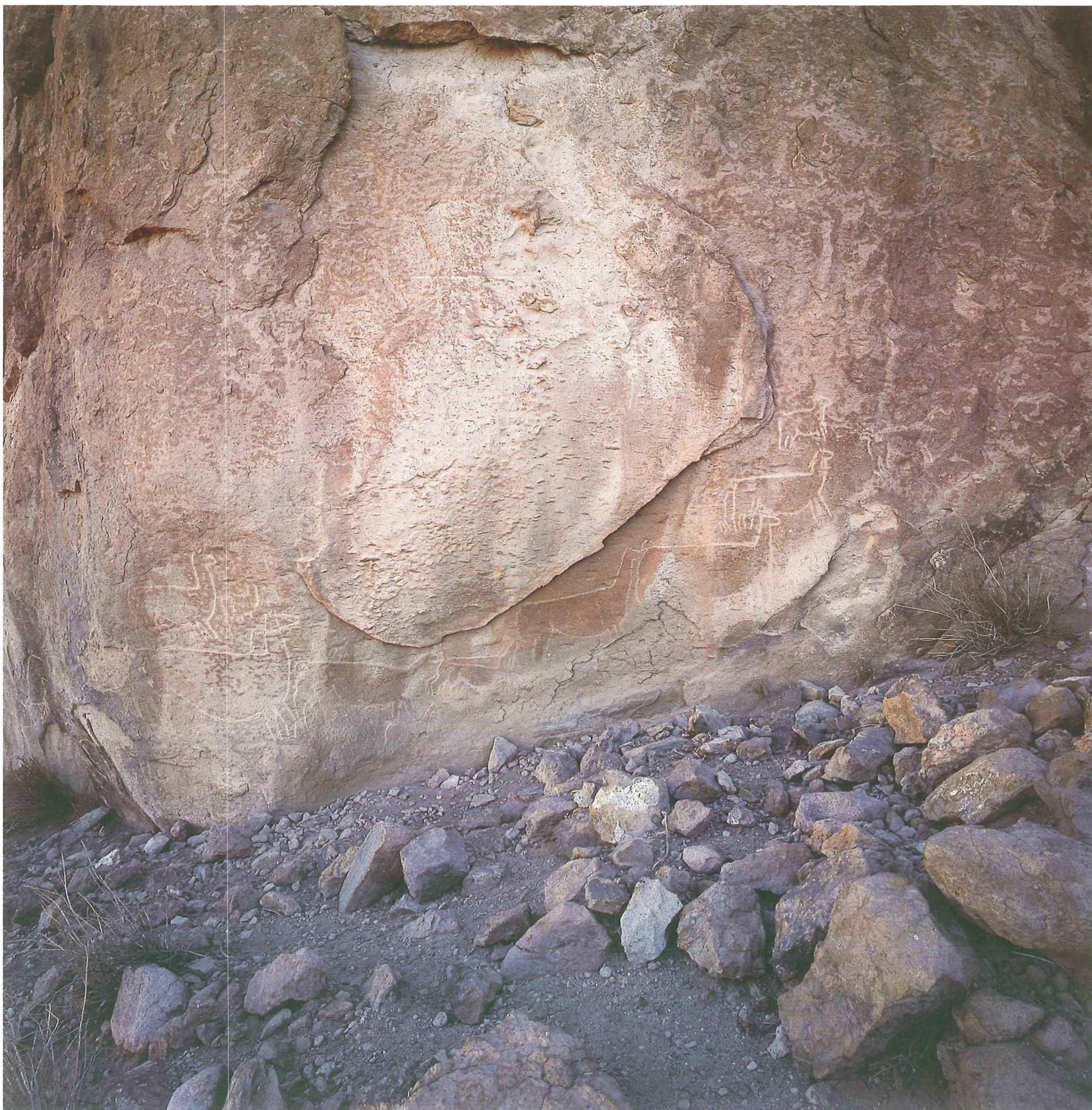
*Engraving at the
Curte river*
(Photo F. Gallardo)

relevant locations for this art, which obviously appears to celebrate water and its sources.³³ Needless to say, this is a resource of singular importance in the region, and all the ecosystem depends on it. Water, fodder and livestock form a trilogy whose interdependence undoubtedly generated pressures on every aspect of social life, a kind of tension that was certainly emphasized in a community of early herdsmen with an incipient agriculture.³⁴

Taira-Tulán is an art in tension and perhaps the feature that describes it best is the sometimes excessive way the lines giving shape to the camelids are retraced, which –along with the multiple superimposition of images– alters shapes and compositions to such a degree that our vision is disturbed and confused. This suggests that action and construction and not contemplation –something perhaps more appropriate in shelters with scenes and figures of the *Confluencia* style– were the main purposes of these panels of rock art. The most impressive panels of engravings furnish the spectator with all the elements indicating that the work of art should remain unfinished, open to being the object of transformation by means of retracing, adding elements and multiplying.

►
*Engraved and
painted camelids at
the Doña Marta
site, Caspana river.*





*Engraved and painted camelids from the Taira-Tulán series
at the Caspana river.*



*Figures from the Taira-Tulán series at the
El Pedregal site, Caspana river.*

EPILOGUE

Until recently, rock art was especially valued for its form, rarity and primitivism, and its most esteemed feature was that it could be found in certain places that—in an excess of archaeological enthusiasm—were anointed with mysticism and ceremony. We do not intend to say that in their original functional context these works did not possess these qualities. What we would like to emphasize is that if we see these iconic expressions as functioning inside that humanized space where life develops, we can discover operations with multiple meanings. These contents may have been linked to the sacred world, but what aspect of ordinary life does not flirt with this rather mysterious realm in order to develop winning plays in political or economic matters? In this essay we have illustrated (and consequently documented) how rock art in the Andean foothill area of the Salado river is not something confined exclusively to ceremonial matters, but also something that appears to gravitate more powerfully over everyday life than what one might have initially imagined.

Over a period of thousands of years this area evolved into a landscape solely due to the communities that lived there, to the occupation and use of the environment through material transformations that have barely left a readily apparent expression or imprint. Nevertheless, by taking root in the territory, populations expressed their position in the world through a varied and growing set of new technical and expressive solutions. At first, the landscape category could only have been sustained by the linguistic, housing and supply system, but this way of organizing the environment was undoubtedly insufficient. We do not exactly know when a change came about, but present-



day evidence indicates that this became a necessity for those hunter-gatherers who experimented with the domestication of camelids, a period when rock art seems to have contributed in a visible and ostentatious way to produce a way of providing the familiarity that these inhabitants required to be able to inhabit the territory.

Rock art contributed with its own language to objectify ideas and practices relevant to the domain of occupation, in providing material channels for the circulation required by social life. This undoubtedly operated within the realm of thought and imagination, in the system of past meanings that seems like a dead end to archaeologists. By making use of available knowledge—some refined and some more general—on the subject of regional prehistory and on that of analogies stemming from colonial documents gathered by the European administrators, we have suggested symbolic values in the field of politics and ceremonial matters. Nevertheless, within this scope of cultural possibilities, rock art as a vehicle of territorialization opens up unsuspected paths for the understanding of social space and its dialectic in the past. In a certain way, it may have operated as a cultural frontier, not only to vindicate a territory, but also to establish a cultural frontier for its own inhabitants.

Scale models associated with late habitation site in the Toconce river valley.

►
Anthropomorphic figure and feline from the Taira-Tulán series at the confluence of the Caspana and Salado rivers.



RUPESTRIAN SCALE MODELS

The Quebrada Seca style is characterized by its conventionality and technical refinement. Nevertheless, a series of works coexist with it that dramatically alters the rocky support. We know of two locations on sloping rock walls that are covered with bas-reliefs featuring strings of rectangular and elliptical cavities linked by narrow engraved furrows. They exist in varying quantities, on different planes and at different heights, forming an intricate system of receptacles linked by grooved lines.

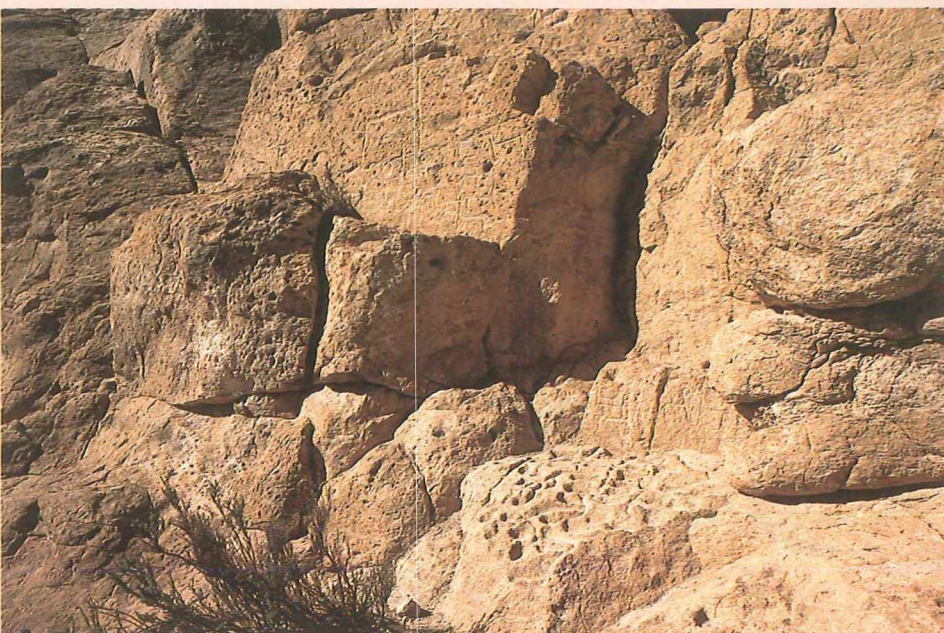
The style is well known in the Andean region and is usually attributed to the Inka tradition. Vast complexes of high- and bas-reliefs representing animals, platforms, stairs, canals and fountains have been described in Cuzco and its immediate surroundings. Also in Apurímac (Peru), in Ingapirca (Ecuador) and Samaipata (Bolivia). All of them are very similar to the ones we

see at the Salado river, although they are larger and more delicately worked.

The function and meanings of these "worked rocks" have not been researched, but we know that many of the wak'as or Inka sanctuaries were privileged rocks where the Inka or his priests used to foretell or prophesy events by putting questions to their deities. These wak'as were carefully destroyed and placed off limits by the Spaniards during their mission to eradicate "idolatries." In a document written by Cristóbal de Albornoz in the sixteenth century, *La Instrucción para descubrir todas las wak'as del Pirú y sus camayos y haziendas* (The Command to discover all the wak'as of Peru and its camayos and farms), two sanctuaries are mentioned that might be those described by subsequent archaeologists and travellers: "Guarancinci, a worked rock at the gateway of the Sun.... Achapay, a wak'a made of elaborately worked stone."³⁵

It is interesting to imagine –although without much basis– that these rocks could have been used as oracles, focal points where the time of events could have dissolved and condensed into one place. However, colonial documents not only suggest rituals; they also mention mythical tales where the divinity, in an act to assure agricultural abundance, artificially channeled and dammed the waters of the sacred springs.³⁶ This "water works" myth is as suggestive as the interpretation made by present-day Salado river inhabitants: "Ah, chacritas también tiene dibujadito una peña. Ojito [manantial] y todo está ahí. Como pa'regarlos así," which would roughly translate into "Ah, the small farms also have drawings on a rock. The spring and all the rest is there. And this is how it is watered." (Natividad Berna from the village of Toconce, Victoria Castro, personal communication).

Beyond analogies, the Salado river bas-reliefs are the work of a specialist with "authoritarian power," which authorized him or her to alter nature to the point of giving it a totally new appearance (as if establishing a relationship between "equals"). Undoubtedly, a power of this magnitude could only be exercised and legitimized in a social environment divided into classes with a hierarchy safeguarded by sacred decree, like that of the Inka, where the religious and political leaders believed (and felt) that they possessed divine attributes.³⁷



Quebrada Seca scale models.

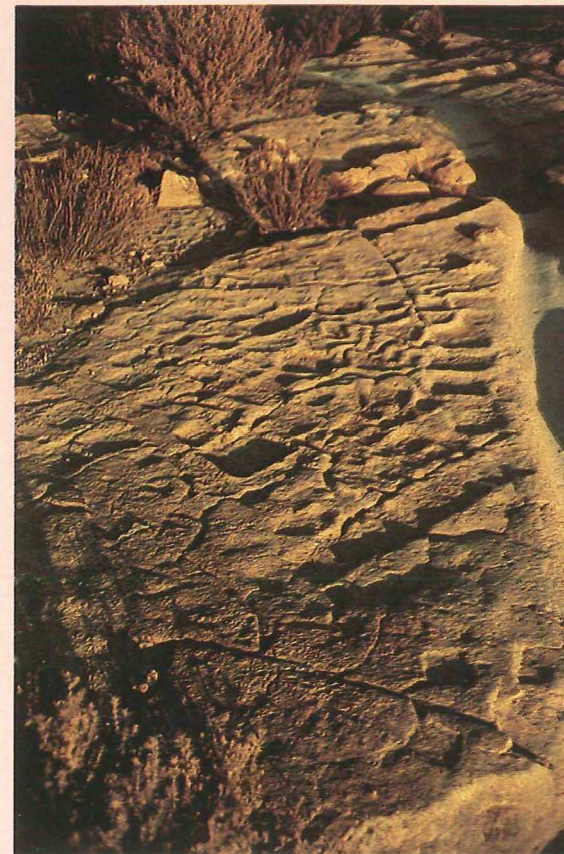


Detail of scale models at Quebrada Seca, Toconce locality.

embraced by rain (which although scarce in the area, is present during the "altiplano winters"). Under these unusual climatic conditions, water would run freely over the surface and cracks in the rocks of the gorges. However, in the presence of rock art, it would necessarily be constrained to move in an artificial scenario, trapped in channels and receptacles made of rock.

The basic material of this representation is stone – the rocky wall of a gorge. It is a mediating element between what is above and what is below; between what is aerial and what is underground; between what is within man's reach and what transcends his abilities. It exists prior to the specialist and will continue to be there after he or she has disappeared. Its "imperishable" nature is the privilege of this rock. Only tremendous natural disasters can modify and reorganize its appearance. It possesses a quality of permanence that can make it a "witness" to the origin and death of a society. It does not age at the rhythm of men or women. It repels time. Set on the scale of the living, the rock is matter that ignores time, imposing itself as a place. Its durability and consistency transform it into a dominion superior to that which is human – a privileged space to establish a dialogue of power that, by means of massive transformation, intends ideologically to bend the unmovable course of its substance.

This "reading" on power does not end nor is it restricted to this apparent (and too vast) feeling of dominating nature. It goes beyond. It finds a place in other relationships, in other "dialogues." This is easy to understand if we imagine for a moment a place



Scale models located upriver from the village of Toconce (Photo V. Castro).

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Notes

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¹ Mascayano & Maldonado (1966)

² And this not only occurs in South America. In the United States of America, it is even more serious since this kind of research is generally viewed as not having much scientific merit (see Whitley (1997)).

³ Núñez (1976); Berenguer & Martínez (1986); Vilches (1996).

⁴ Childe (1981 [1948]); Binford (1962); Mongait (1961).

⁵ Any community that occupies an environment represents it to itself as a humanized one, like a landscape illuminated through the color granted by language. Coldly stated, it is an ethno-categorical exercise that gives meaning, that organizes and imposes rules for use and circulation. However, the word becomes humble when faced with the ephemeral materiality of the word, and in its inadequacy becomes material itself, so as not to become lost in the lineality of sound. Heidegger ([1953]: 161) insisted that speech is the dwelling place of being, and certainly this is so. Language is the means of expression and meaning by excellence. Nevertheless, language is not enough in itself; it requires a material world to sustain it, a landscape that serves as the tangible dwelling place of being (see Barthes (1990: 259-260). To inhabit is not only a set of adaptative or productive functions, but a set of actions to set boundaries, differentiate and grant hierarchy to that space. Michel Foucault ([1984]: 3) expressed this accurately: "we do not live in a vacuum tinted by different iridizations, but within a set of relationships that define locations that are irreducible among themselves and cannot possibly be superposed."

⁶ Hirsch & O'Hanlon (1995)

⁷ Munn (1986)

⁸ Marx (1970 [1853]); Foucault (1976); Hodder (1978); Barros & Natri (1995).

⁹ Criado (1991); Bradley & Criado (1994).

¹⁰ Aldunate (1985).

¹¹ Núñez et al. (1995-96); Grosjean et al. (1997).

¹² Sinclair (1985).

¹³ Núñez & Santoro (1988).

¹⁴ Berenguer et al. (1985); Núñez & Santoro (1988).

¹⁵ Núñez (1981, 1992).

¹⁶ Núñez (1994); Berenguer (1995)

¹⁷ Berenguer (1995, 1998); Dransart (1991); Núñez (1994).

¹⁸ Gallardo & Vilches (1996, 1998); Gallardo et al. (1996).

¹⁹ Aldunate et al. (1986); Castro et al. (1994).

²⁰ Núñez et al. (1975); Núñez & Dillehay (1995).

²¹ Gallardo & Vilches (1998); Sinclair (1998).

²² Aldunate et al. (1986); Castro et al (1979).

²³ Aldunate & Castro (1981); Adán & Uribe (1995).

²⁴ Núñez & Dillehay (1995).

²⁵ González (1998).

²⁶ Cornejo (1995); Gallardo et al. (1995); Adán & Uribe (1999, In press).

²⁷ Aldunate (1993).

²⁸ Gallardo & Vilches (1995).

²⁹ Gallardo et al. (1990).

³⁰ "/The fifth Inga/Capac Yupanqui Ynga... And this said, Ynga ordered the disclosure of all the mines of gold and silver, mercury, *limpi* (sealing wax), *ychima* (dye), copper, tin and of all the colors..." (Poma de Ayala 1980 [1615]: 81).

³¹ Molina (1913 [1575]).

³² Sutton (1998); Tacon (1989).

³³ Berenguer & Martínez (1986); Dransart (1991).

³⁴ Berenguer (1996).

³⁵ Duviols (1967: 26-27).

³⁶ Urioste (1983: 43-47).

³⁷ Martínez (1982).

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