

Rare Petroglyphs of Skeleton-Anthropomorphs in Caravelí, Arequipa, Peru

Introduction

Although rock art images all over the world often narrate of life and death in ancient societies, representations of copulation, pregnancy, giving birth and - ultimately - death are relatively rather scarce. The situation in the Andes of South America is not different, and in particular when it concerns death, imagery is rare in Andean rock art. Although the ancient Andean peoples definitely will have known that inside the body of many zoomorphs - thus also humans - there is a hard skeleton that becomes exposed after the soft parts have decomposed, graphical representations of skeletons in ancient Andean records are extremely rare, both in absolute and relative terms.

For instance, in their well-known (ceramic) art the ancient Moche society of northern Peru relatively frequently depicted 'dead' people as 'dancing' skeletons, or as 'Death' sacrificing animals in certain rituals. But in the rich rock art repertoire of northern Peru only two petroglyphs depicting skeleton-anthropomorphs have so far been recorded (Van Hoek 2012b: Figs 307 and 308) and most likely these two figures are not even of Moche origin, being situated in the Santa Valley, far inland. It now proves that - in general - the scarcity of depictions of biomorphic skeletons in the iconography of the Andes is remarkable. Perhaps there once was some kind of taboo that forbade making depictions of (human) skeletons.

Perhaps this purported taboo also may explain why depictions of skeletons of anthropomorphs are so extremely rare in Andean rock art. In Chile I know of only three possible petroglyphs of a skeleton-anthropomorph, while in Ecuador just one possible skeleton-anthropomorph is known to me to have been reported. As far as I know, in the north of Peru only two rock art panels with a possible skeleton petroglyph have been reported; both rather close together in the Santa Valley, Ancash (Ponte 2005: Figs 5 and 6; Van Hoek 2012b: Figs 307 and 308).

In view of the scarcity of petroglyphs of skeleton-anthropomorphs in the Andes it is therefore most surprising to see that an amazing concentration of petroglyphs depicting skeleton-anthropomorphs occurs in the mountainous and volcanic region of the coastal deserts of southern Peru. In the south of Peru at least nine sites in the Departments of Ica and Arequipa have no less than 77 petroglyphs that may depict the skeleton-anthropomorph. In the Department of Ica two sites have six doubtful examples: 4? examples at Huancor and 2? examples at San Marcos (the '?' refers to the number of doubtful examples).

However, in the Department of Arequipa, some 450 km SE of Ica, is the most extraordinary concentration of the skeleton-anthropomorph. Eight sites in a relatively small area prove to have no less than 71 petroglyphs of the skeleton-anthropo-



Figure 1. Map of the Arequipa area showing the five valleys where skeleton-anthropomorphs have been reported. The numbers indicate the total of all examples, inclusive of doubtful examples. All other rock art sites have been omitted on this map. Map © by Maarten van Hoek, based on Google Earth Relief Maps.

morph (Figure 1). Up to 2012, petroglyphs of skeleton-anthropomorphs were known to me to have been recorded in the following four valleys (from west to east): Ocoña (with the site of Chillihuay: 3 examples; +1?), Majes (with Toro Muerto: 3 examples; +1? and Alto de Pitis: 28; +17?), Sihuas (with Quilcapampa: 1 example, and La Tuna: 2 examples) and finally Vitor (with La Caldera 1 example reported to me in 2014, and Culebrillas: 6 examples). Significantly, the Majes Valley has the biggest concentration. This anomaly is justified by the altogether 49 examples at Toro Muerto and - especially - at Alto de Pitis. Also for that reason I have labelled the Majes Valley 'The Death Valley of the Andes' and Alto de Pitis its 'Petrified Cemetery'.

I have comprehensively explained the remarkable concentration of skeleton-anthropomorphs at Alto de Pitis by associating the whole group with the volcano Coropuna - still the most sacred mountain (*Apu*) in this part of the Andes - which is only visible from Alto de Pitis; not from any other rock art site in Majes (Van Hoek 2013).

However, in 2014 an impressive petroglyph site in the same area was kindly reported to me by Mr. Mario Casas Berdejo from Arequipa (2014: pers. comm.). Importantly, this new (?) site also included some perfect images of skeleton-anthropomorphs that - as far as I know - have never been reported and/or described before. This new (?) site (actually comprising three sites that are located very close together) is found in the Caravelí Valley, which is located only a few km west of the Ocoña Valley (Figure 1). Caravelí thus proved to be the fifth valley in Arequipa where examples of true skeleton-anthropomorphs have been reported. Because - at the time of writing - this extensive rock art site has not been officially recorded or surveyed and because its imagery is very special, I will not mention its site-name. Also, I will not reveal its exact location, except that it is located 'somewhere in the Caravelí Valley' (the square in Figure 1 does not indicate the site, but the valley). Especially the petroglyphs of several skeleton-anthropomorphs - recently discovered in this Caravelí rock art zone - are the subject of this paper.

The Skeleton-Anthropomorph

In order to understand the importance of those new finds it will first be necessary to explain why the skeleton-anthropomorphic figure is so special in Andean rock art. First of all, of the thousands and thousands rock art images in the Study Area (the zone from Caravelí to Vitor) less than fifty concern true skeleton-anthropomorphs, which is probably less than 2%. Secondly, the name 'skeleton-anthropomorph' is in fact misleading. In my opinion the figure definitely does not represent a dead body (Van Hoek 2013). Instead, I regard it to represent a Carancha. The term '*Carancha*' has been introduced by Frederico Kauffmann Doig (1981, 2010) to refer to depictions of the 'Living Death' in Pre-Columbian iconography. Although Caranchas are relatively common in the iconographies of several Andean cultures, especially in Moche iconography, in Andean rock art they only seem to occur in the Department of Arequipa, but - again - only very sporadically.

Last but not least, when compared with any other representation of an anthropomorphic figure in Andean rock art, the layout of the skeleton-anthropomorph is highly idiosyncratic. The group of skeleton-anthropomorphs only comprises figures that all have been depicted fully frontally and often in the so called 'saluting' posture (which in itself is a rather common posture in [Andean] rock art). Also the size of most 'skeleton-anthropomorphs' is remarkable in view of the usually small petroglyphs of anthropomorphic figures in rock art of this area. Although also a few small-sized petroglyphs of this type occur, most of the figures are relatively (very) large and have an average height of about 75 cm.

Moreover, a 'skeleton-anthropomorph' figure comprises specific features that most likely are indicative of a human skeleton. Very convincing are the joints on legs and/or arms that are emphasised by circles or knobs and the grinning mouth with teeth (but no fangs) exposed. Many skeleton-anthropomorphs have (often outlined) hands and feet (with or without digits) that

are astonishingly large and unlike any other representation of hands and feet in Desert Andes rock art (as far as I know).

The most defining feature is the presence of ribs, often combined with a sternum (or backbone). In most cases the 'ribs' of the 'skeleton-anthropomorph' are clearly indicated and moreover often separated (a situation which, in reality, only applies for the lower part of the rib cage). However, several 'skeleton-anthropomorphs' show parallel straight lines or parallel V-shaped lines that are continuous. Those properties symbolise 'death'. Most significant, however, is the explicit presence of genitals in several of the 'skeleton-anthropomorphs', symbolising 'life', together with the often active posture. Although most 'skeleton-anthropomorphs' seem to be male, a few sexless or even possibly female examples occur.

The Caravelí Caranchas

First of all, I must emphasise here that I never visited any of the purported 19 rock art sites in the Caravelí Valley myself. All my observations in the current paper are based on the personal photographic records generously made available to me by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo (2014: pers. comm.) and Ing. Rainer Hostnig (2009: pers. comm.) and of course on other sources that I have available, especially the results of my own surveys in the other valleys in Arequipa. However, only I am responsible for all my illustrations, observations, conclusions and theories presented in this paper.

As is the case in most of the other valleys where Caranchas have been recorded, the collection of skeleton-anthropomorphic petroglyphs in Caravelí comprises doubtful examples and - in my opinion - true Caranchas. No less than eight petroglyphs of (alleged) Caranchas have been recorded in Caravelí. This would mean that Caravelí is the area second after Majes where most examples of the skeleton-anthropomorph are found. All eight Caravelí Carancha petroglyphs will now be discussed.

Caravelí Carcancha 1

A large boulder has numerous petroglyphs, mainly small quadrupeds, but also at least three rather large anthropomorphic figures. The largest anthropomorph (about 45 cm in height) has an outlined, rectangular body and a circular outlined head without facial features and a short neck (Figure 2). The protuberance from the head may be part of the figure (a nose, perhaps?), but equally may belong to another figure. The anthropomorph has short legs with feet showing two or three digits. The two arms are extremely short and end in hands with four digits. Because of the position of the arms (or hands) the figure may be regarded to display the 'surrendering' attitude. The thorax encloses two parallel arcs and a bow-shaped feature. Other grooves within the thorax are part of a row of small quadrupeds, one larger quadruped and some other

Figure 2. Caravelí Carcancha 1. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.



indeterminable features. Because the thorax-features marked in red do not exactly represent ribs and because the figure has no other specific properties of the 'ideal' skeleton-anthropomorph I regard this Carcancha to be a doubtful example.

Caravelí Carcancha 2

Another large boulder has several faint petroglyphs, some superimposed by a large anthropomorphic figure measuring about 116 cm in height, thus being the largest Carcancha (?) in Caravelí (Figure 3). Although the whole figure is much weathered and faint, it is clearly in the 'surrendering' position. Both fully pecked, single-line arms are raised and end in large, outlined hands with five digits each and a large dot in the palm (?) of each hand. The outlined, square head is joined by a short, fully pecked neck to the outlined, rectangular body. The head has two eyes; one being a circle with a central dot representing the pupil. The other eye may be fully pecked but that is uncertain. If the right eye is indeed fully pecked, the anthropomorph may represent 'el tuerto'; the half-blind person, in comparison with the petroglyph of an alleged mummy-bundle from the Majes Valley (Van Hoek 2012: Fig. 301). The ears that I have drawn in Figure 3 are very doubtful. There is no nose, but the head seems to have an open mouth showing teeth. If this interpretation is correct, this is the only (doubtful) Carcancha with a 'grinning', mouth in Caravelí. The fully pecked legs end in very large, outlined feet with four and five digits; a typical property of the Carcancha. The markings in the thorax area are very doubtful, but just possibly may be indicative of (unfinished?) ribs.

To the right of the larger anthropomorph are the incomplete traces of an (unfinished?) second anthropomorph measuring 80 cm in height. Although one arm is actually visible, the figure may also have been depicted or have been intended to be in the 'surrendering' position. The circle in/near the head-area (an eye?) is most uncertain. The thorax area has no visible sign of ribs.



Figure 3. Caravelí Carcancha 2. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

Caravelí Carcancha 3

Another boulder has a large collection of all sorts of petroglyphs including quadrupeds (one with a 'line'), anthropomorphs, a faint square enclosing a parallel zigzag groove pattern, and possible lizards. There is an older layer of petroglyphs of zoomorphs of a different layout. Partially superimposed by a fully pecked anthropomorph is an outlined, rectangular anthropomorph (about 35 cm in height) with a rectangular head (no neck) showing two dots for eyes and one short groove representing a mouth. From the head five short, parallel grooves seem to indicate hair or a headdress. One leg is short and featureless while the other is superimposed by the head of the lower anthropomorph. The figure seems to have one arm in the drooping position and one arm raised and thus possibly the figure displays the 'saluting' pose. The thorax is filled with several amorphous markings (deleted in Figure 4), but also with eight short diagonal grooves; four emerging from each side of the thorax. Those eight grooves may represent the ribs.

Caravelí Carcancha 4

Above a fully pecked petroglyph of a zoomorph is a 'strange' anthropomorphic (?) figure with outstretched legs and arms; each with four digits (Figure 5). The figure,



Figure 4. Caravelí Carcancha 3. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

which may also be regarded to display the 'surrendering' position, measures about 42 cm in height. The arms, legs and body are all represented by single grooves. Most remarkable are the parallel, slightly curved grooves that emerge from the body: four at each side. I regard those eight grooves to represent the exposed ribs of a Carcancha. This example at Caravelí may be compared with similar cases with an external rib-cage in Majes; one example occurs on panel AP3-076E at Alto de Pitis (Van Hoek 2013: 120-121; Fig. 117) and one at Toro Muerto (Van Hoek 2013: 114). In Ocoña a petroglyph of a biomorph (zoomorph?) may have external ribs (Van Hoek 2013: Fig. 94). A



Figure 5. Caravelí Carcancha 4. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

second biomorphic petroglyph from Ocoña (not reported previously) may represent an anthropomorphic Carcancha with very short external ribs.

Caravelí Carcancha 5

On another large boulder are a few petroglyphs, among which is a faint image of a Carcancha of about 42 cm in height (Figure 6). Again the figure displays the 'surrendering' position, with single-line arms ending in four digit hands. The outlined head may only have a single groove representing a mouth. More interesting are the single-line legs, one of which ends in a large, outlined foot without digits. The other foot, which is equally large and also lacking digits, seems to be fully pecked (or damaged?). Indicative of the Carcancha are the distinctive, outlined knee-joints. It is also significant that the elbow joints have been emphasised with small knobs. Although the figure does not show ribs, the pattern on the thorax is interesting. It comprises six diagonal grooves crossing each other thus forming a



Figure 6. Caravelí Carcancha 5. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

pattern of outlined 'diamonds'. This pattern may be compared with similar examples on panels AP3-060A and AP3-065A at Alto de Pitis in Majes (Van Hoek 2013: 122; Fig. 129). It is uncertain however if those 'diamond' patterns symbolise rib cages.

Caravelí Carcancha 6

This Carcancha is the only example in Caravelí that more clearly displays the 'saluting' position (Figure 7). It is about 55 cm in height. All four extremities are single-line grooves. Its left arm is raised and ends in an outlined hand showing five digits. The drooping right arm is S-shaped and also ends in an outlined hand with four or five digits. The legs end in rather large outlined feet with four or five digits. The left foot has rather 'clumsily' been joined to the body. The outlined, rectangular head sits directly on the rectangular, outlined body. It



Figure 7. Caravelí Carcancha 6. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

has two circles representing eyes and a single line for a mouth. From the head emerge two outlined appendages that most likely represent (bifurcated) hair or a headdress. Most interesting however is the clearly indicated, 'floating' sternum from which six diagonal grooves emerge. The whole pattern unmistakably represents the rib cage.

Caravelí Carcancha 7

This is perhaps the most telling panel of the Caravelí Valley because it clearly shows two definite examples of the Carcancha (Figure 8). The larger example (Carcancha 7) measures about 80 cm in height and is clearly in the 'surrendering' position. The single-line arms end in large hands with five digits (although the digits of the left hand are blurred by weathering). A short, fully pecked neck supports an outlined, circular head with very distinct outlined ears, each with a central dot. The head shows an outlined mouth and two parallel lines that emerge from the top of the head. Those two lines - a very rare feature - may represent the nose. From the top of the head emerge two large, single-line, curved

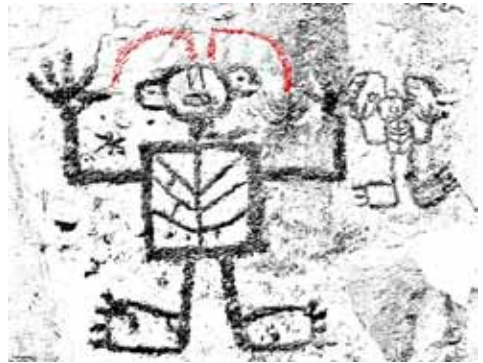


Figure 8. Caravelí Carcancha 7. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

appendages that no doubt will represent some kind of bifurcated headgear or hair-dress. This type of bifurcated hair or headgear may be compared with the Carcancha at Culebrillas in Vitor (Van Hoek 2013: Fig. 102). The short, single-line legs end in very large, rectangular, outlined feet; each with four digits. The right foot has a small arc. The almost square body clearly shows a rib cage with a sternum and six diagonal grooves clearly representing the ribs.

There is a remarkable difference between the headgear (or hair) and the rest of the figure. The headgear is relatively faintly visible, while the rest of the figure is more clearly pecked out. Thus the figure (except the headgear) may have been re-pecked. This may point to a ritual re-sanctification of the Carcancha.

Caravelí Carcancha 8

To the right of Carcancha 7 is a much smaller example (see Figure 8). It is only 27 cm in height. This Carcancha (Figure 9) seems to be a copy of the larger one (or *vice versa*). Both arms, oddly emerging from the lower end of the body, are also in the 'surrendering' position and end in four and five digits. The very short legs again terminate in extremely large, rectangular, outlined feet (although it is uncertain if the left foot is also outlined; it seems to be fully pecked) with respectively three and four digits.



Figure 9. Caravelí Carcancha 8. Drawing © by Maarten van Hoek, based on a photograph by Mr. Mario Antonio Casas Berdejo from Arequipa.

Those feet possibly are (relatively spoken) the largest feet of all known Carcanchas, as, together with the toes, they are larger than the thorax. The outlined, circular head sits directly on an outlined, rectangular body that has a rib cage similar to that of Carcancha 7. The head has an outlined mouth and again two short, parallel grooves from the top of the head (the nose?). It has at least one distinct outlined ear with central dot. The other ear is blurred, possibly by one of the two appendages (the bifurcated headdress) emerging from the top of the head.

Pairs of Carcanchas also occur at Alto de Pitis in Majes (Van Hoek 2013: Fig. 121, 123 and 130), but only the couples on panel AP3-171B (Van Hoek 2013: 119; Fig. 111) and panel AP3-076A (Van Hoek 2013: 120; Fig. 115) show a very large Carcancha next to a (much) smaller example.

Discussion

At least six true Carcanchas and two doubtful examples (Caravelí 1 and 2) bring the total of Carcanchas in Caravelí to eight, making Caravelí the second densest concen-

tration of Carcancha representations after Alto de Pitis in Majes. There are however marked differences with the imagery at Alto de Pitis. Apart from the statistical difference, one discrepancy with Alto de Pitis, with its uninterrupted and telling views of the 'Apu Coropuna' volcano, is that from this Caravelí site no volcano is visible. Only Sara Sara (a volcano, 5505 m in altitude and roughly 60 km NNW of Caravelí) may be visible from more elevated points in the area (although this has not - yet - been checked). Secondly, there is only one example (Caravelí 5) with skeletal joints, while only one doubtful example (Caravelí 2) may show a grinning mouth. Both features occur more often at Alto de Pitis (and at other Arequipa sites with Carcanchas). Thirdly, it is interesting to see that only two examples (Carcanchas 3 and 6) show the 'saluting' position, but in a rather unconvincing way.

Finally, none of the Caravelí Carcanchas shows any indication of biological sex. Therefore any of the Caravelí Carcanchas may be male or female. Also gender-based properties seem to be lacking. However, three Caravelí Carcanchas (Caravelí 6, 7 and 8) feature a bifurcated headdress or hairdress, which may provide a possible clue to define the sex of at least a few of the Caravelí Carcanchas.

Earlier I argued that especially this type of 'hair' may provide an indication of female gender (Van Hoek 2012b: 25 - 26). My tentative 'claim' is based on observations by rock art researcher Ana Nieves (2007: 83; 281) who reported a weathered petroglyph of an anthropomorph on Panel 1 at Usaca (Site X03), located in the Lower Nasca River (part of the Grande Drainage) in southern Peru (roughly 230 km NW of Caravelí). It represents a frontally depicted anthropomorph with bifurcated 'hair' (or 'headdress') and two relatively large, circular pecked areas on the thorax, more or less where the female breasts would be located (Van Hoek 2012b: Fig. 29). Apparently, they are too large to depict nipples (but this option cannot be ruled out; size is not always decisive) and thus they may represent female breasts,

which, however, are very rarely depicted in Andean rock art. Although Nieves (2007: Figs 6.7.d and A.34A) draws them as joined areas, in fact the two 'breasts' occur separately on the thorax as is evident in one of the photographs that Ana Nieves kindly has sent me (Nieves 2009: pers. comm.).

Simultaneously, an interesting hypothesis was put forward by Ana Nieves, who compared the Usaca petroglyph with a 'nearby' geoglyph (2007: 84). Although geoglyph art is not considered by me as rock art, the analogy is so important in the scope of this work that I will briefly discuss those geoglyphs. Only 25 km to the north of Usaca are the geoglyphs of Llipata and Palpa. Several of the geoglyph complexes in that area include anthropomorphic figures also with bifurcated 'hair', while circular areas on the thorax possibly may represent breasts (or 'male' nipples). Fine instances occur at the well known PAP-715 geoglyph site (Van Hoek 2012b: Fig. 30). Importantly, another similar anthropomorphic geoglyph at a nearby geoglyph site (PAP-370) also seems to show labia (Van Hoek 2012b: Fig. 31), thus possibly even more emphasising the female sex of all similar figures in this area (the cultural heartland of the Paracas-Nasca cultures) that are characterised by bifurcated 'hair'. Therefore, those 'female' geoglyphs seem to be closely related to the petroglyph art of the Grande Drainage and thus possibly also to the Carcancha petroglyphs with bifurcated appendages in Arequipa, which may (all?) be female. Perhaps it is a good idea to reconsider the alleged male supremacy of unsexed figures in rock art.

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