

Image and rock art research, a Peruvian case

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Introduction

The present article delineates the partial history of the rock painting known as “Quebrada Palo Pictography” (1962-1963 UNMSM), a painting that has been used as a main referent of this kind of rock art manifestation in Peru and that also has served as a comparative parameter in the analysis and study of this type of archaeological material.

As it will become evident later, the current studies on this painting prove that its original perception and representation was notably distorted, and that this image has been used without the adequate technical confrontation and critical review generating irregular derived interpretations.

The history of this rock painting illustrates the variability present in the perceptions and recording of ancient art, of the degree of accuracy and confidence in the use of this record; but above all, of the level of truthfulness and rigor in the study and interpretation of this kind of cultural material in Peru.

Antecedents

The first news we had about the existence of the “Quebrada Palo” painting is due to the most valuable description of Mr. Andrés Mármol who explored the hills of “Lachay” in 1954 (Mármol 1962). This author recorded at least three of the numerous paintings that he found associated in what he called “Gruta No 3” (Grotto No 3), making an interpretative but clear description of this painting¹ of which unfortunately he did not leave any graphic records, this is the reason why their descriptions have not been associated to the graphic records that have appeared later (UNMSM 1962-1963, Echevarría 1996).

The image of this painting however came out in the occasion of the “First National Exhibition of Quilcas”² organized by the Department of Toponymical Research of the Faculty of Letters (Literature) of the San Marcos University where it was nominated as a “Quebrada Palo Pictography”. This event was completed between 1962 and 1963 and showed color reproductions of many paintings and petroglyphs recognized in Peru until that year, and where the famous sites of “Quillarumi” and “Checta” were also included (UNMSM, *ob cit.*)

The painting (Fig. 1)

¹ Mármol divided descriptively the painting in 4 parts starting from left to right and recognizing sequentially: One cactus plant, signs (“Chinese letters”), a feline mask with pen diadem, and two feet drawn until the ankles, elements that can be recognized today.

² “Quilcas” is the native quechua language term to designate “writing” or graphic signs in Peru at the time of the Incas, and is generally associated to the Peruvian rock art.

acquired its name and more popular appearance thanks to that exhibition and so it was represented from that date until recently. This is interesting because until 1996 (Echevarría *ob cit.*) this painting had not been recognized directly again by any other researcher, leaving the image intact in the Peruvian rock art graphical record. (Burns 1981, Guffroy 1999.)

This situation is due to several reasons, among them is the ignorance of the exact location of the painting, but fundamentally, to the little interest paid to the contrast between the existing graphical records of the painting with the original- that remains with the rock art researchers of the Peruvian archaeological rock art.

In 1993 professor Dr. Alberto Bueno from San Marcos University took us to the location of this painting and we recognized the original image for the first time (Fig. 2) with enough precision to establish the relationship between the original image and the copy known as “Quebrada Palo”, noticing the strong grade of alteration in the reproduction of the copy. When we published this rock painting in 1996 (See Fig. 3; Echevarría *ob cit.*) we did not use the original nomenclature of the “Quilcas Exhibition” in spite of recognizing that it was the same one brought to light in 1962. We preferred to avoid its conventional name due to our nomination system derived from the geographical location the picture was found: the hills of Lachay.

We now recognize, after ten years, that it was an error to separate the toponymical name³ from its identification key (L/FI/P1c: Lachay/ Farallón [Cliff] I/ Pictograph 1c.) since this has generated independent images to formalize and create an even greater divide in separation between the rock art of “Lachay” by one side, and the rock art of “Quebrada Palo” by the other, the last one even pushed towards Cañete, to the south of Lima (Hostnig, 2003.)

The rock art of Lachay

³ The places where rock paintings were found were called “Quilcas Centers” and nominees according to the local toponym, ravines: “Quebrada Hierba Buena”, “Quebrada Palo”, “Cerro Carbonera”; and plains: “Teatino”, “Doña María”, “Huajta Teatino”, and “Alto Viejo”.



Figura 10: “Pictografía de Quebrada Palo” (Quebrada Palo Pictography) as was expoused in the First Nacional Quilcas Exposition. UNMSM 1962-1963.



Figura 2. Rock art painting of "Quebrada Palo Pictography" or L/FI/P1c. Lomas de Lachay, Lima. Picture by Gori Tumi 2009.



Figura 3. Rock art painting of "Quebrada Palo Pictography" or L/FI/P1c. Lomas de Lachay, Lima. Picture by Gori Tumi 2009.

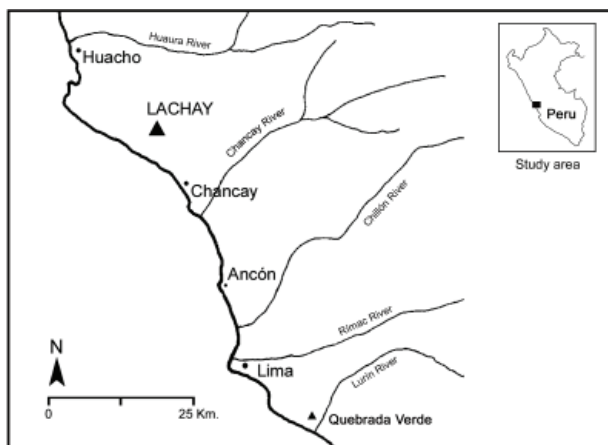


Figura 4. Map of location of the site of Lachay and other sites mentioned in the text.

Lachay is the toponym of an extensive semi-desert region located between the rivers Huaura and Chancay to the north of Lima (Fig. 4.) The topography of the hills is characterized by upward raising rocky cliffs and short ravines approximately 700 meters height, in an ecological zone of stationary flora and fauna known as "lomas."

This territory of hills, rocks and cliffs, many of them with marked wind erosion, have served to support the rock paintings and was part of the landscape of

different archeological sites and occupations to which the rock art is primarily associated with conforming a very important archeological area.

Nevertheless, due to the lack of systematic archaeological research, the rock art has not been integrated to a wider chronological sequence or associated directly to any specific culture. This is the reason why it has remained disaggregated and has frequently been shown like an individual object; which has clearly reflected the current reproductions of the rock art paintings from the zone, dependent on the graphics and records published in 1962-1963 and/or in fragmentary registries in the site in latter years (Núñez

Jiménez 1986).

Despite this, our studies of the site and on the examination of at least four sectors of paintings in Lachay demonstrate that these materials were associated and corresponded to a local pictorial tradition. This is characterized mainly by the pattern of the support painting, the execution technique and the predominant use of the reddish tone, as well as the tendency to use other colors.

According to our observations and using the color as a discreet variable, we could establish a general distinction of four "pictorial groups" which included an important variation of formal series put together on the general base of its color variation. This division of groups corresponds as well to four consecutive painting phases achieved by superposition and other variables, so we established the intra chronological distinction of the rock art of the zone. (Echevarría *ob cit.*)

The result of this adjustment, on the base of one variable and certain external indicators, implicated in fact a direct reevaluation of the scenic composition of the paintings, which was noticed clearly in the painting L/FI/P1c or "Quebrada Palo Pictography" which showed an obvious overlapping between red paintings and elaborated paintings made on white pigment which have no parallel in any other known local samples.

Although it was clear to us that the process of this painting was accomplished over a long period of time, it is also possible to notice, now better than before, that a much more complex cultural process and organization of the rock art exists and overlaps itself, and that this complexity implies the other paintings that were found on the same support including different scenes in discontinuous sections of the rock.

As it is evident, the determination of the complexity and sequence of the "Quebrada de Palo" painting have consequences in the interpretation of their nature and meaning, which we specify more in the following description.

The "Quebrada Palo" Painting

As we already said, the "Quebrada Palo" is in one of the numerous eroded concavities of a great rocky outcrop to which we denominate "Farallón I" (Cliff I)

(Fig. 5) which includes seven scenes in three consecutive concavities located at the left of the cliff, to which we denominate "Panels."

Establishing a composed nomenclature, we fix a consecutive sequence of paintings in the panels from right to left, beginning with the letter "a" being the "Quebrada Palo Pictography" of the Panel 1c, that is to say the third scene within a particular rock concavity (Fig. 6.)

As one can see in Figure 7, the scene L/FI/P1c or "Quebrada Palo" painting is clearly a complex scene formed by at least 14 independent motifs, some of them composed, which present an interesting range of variations in the execution of the technique, the form and style.

In relation to the painting technique, this can be simplified by separating the two groups from the colors used, with an observable differentiation between the type of application that can be recognized, and stand out with the use of the thick lines and painting in an area principally used for the white motifs (motifs 1; 2; 3; 4 and 5.)

According to the form the differences are bigger, thus it is possible to separate the white motifs from the red ones in base of its geometric composition and composed tendencies (Fig. 7). The red motifs conform clearly to two groups, the main one characterized by linear motifs with a vertical tendency and transversal short lines, and the second, forming spirals, winding and circulars motifs (motifs 12, 13, and 14.)

Stylistically the differences also separate the composition into three groups, the white with a very clear tendency towards the composed adjustment and symmetry, and the red ones with a prevalence of geometric linear verticality against the motifs that show lines mainly in curved and compound groups.

We are not stating that these three groups are not culturally contemporary, but rather that they present at least a three phase sequence in its complete accomplishment. According to our first distinction it is apparent that the white motifs (the first group in this support) are earlier, followed by the linear short red motifs (the second group) and following the preceding analysis, it is possible that the rest of the motifs include a final third group (Fig. 8).

The adjustment of the sequence in three phases can be supported if we consider the primary point of observation focused in the center of the concavity where the red vertical line motifs are placed clearly superposed to the white motifs of semi rectangular and circular symmetric arrangement. The red motifs of the third group, those who present lines of curved tendency, occupy clearly marginal areas to the center of the concavity

in relation to the other motifs (See Fig. 2.)

If we examine the external painting's scenes and motifs more thoroughly it becomes clear that most of the vertical linear motifs (our second group in L/FI/P1c) do not form direct associations with that of the other type (of curved lines,) at least achieving compositions formally integrated, on the contrary this kind of motifs are clearly a formal unit by itself which present remarkable bonds with motif "P2a" and the motifs of the scene "P3b" (Fig. 6 and Fig. 9), which also exclude scenes with the other isolated forms- like of the scenes P1a and P2b.

All the other motifs also present very coherent associations like the "P3a" motif with the associated motifs on the scene "P1a", and are even possible that the superior motifs of the scene "P3b", which is a schematic anthropomorphous figuration (Fig. 9), are related to the third group of motifs of our painting scene in study (Fig. 8.)

Though given the characteristic technique and color it is possible the groups that show the red color (group 2 and 3) share the same cultural association, it is clear for us that these groups imply some cultural variations and also significant temporary differences expressed in the different figurative representational tendencies and in the different location tendencies.

If our analysis is correct then we are confirming part of our investigation exposed in 1996, and the differentiation between the groups is right. The "Quebrada Palo" painting is a very outstanding sample of rock art of Lachay and show the high variation and complexity of the rock art in this site.

The "Quebrada Palo" painting, some archaeological implications

As we have previously stated, the distorted image of the "Quebrada Palo Pictography" was very popular as an example of Peruvian rock art painting, and was use several times to illustrated different publications on the matter, nevertheless its more relevant use was made by Jean Guffroy in the book "El Arte Rupestre en el Antiguo Perú" in 1999 (The rock art



Figura 2. "Farallón No 1" (Cliff 1), outcrop of granite. Lachay, Lima. Picture by Gori Tumi 2009.

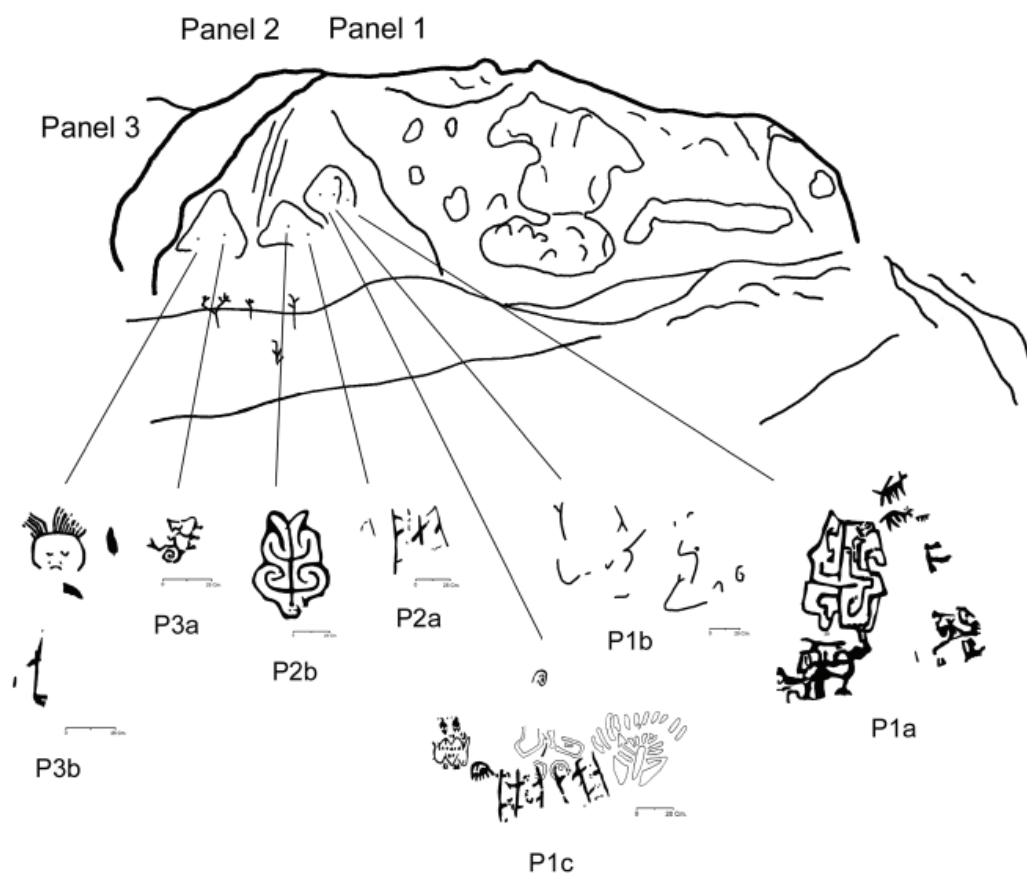


Figura 6. Schematic drawn of the "Farallon 1" showing the location of the scenes present in this site. Lachay, Lima.

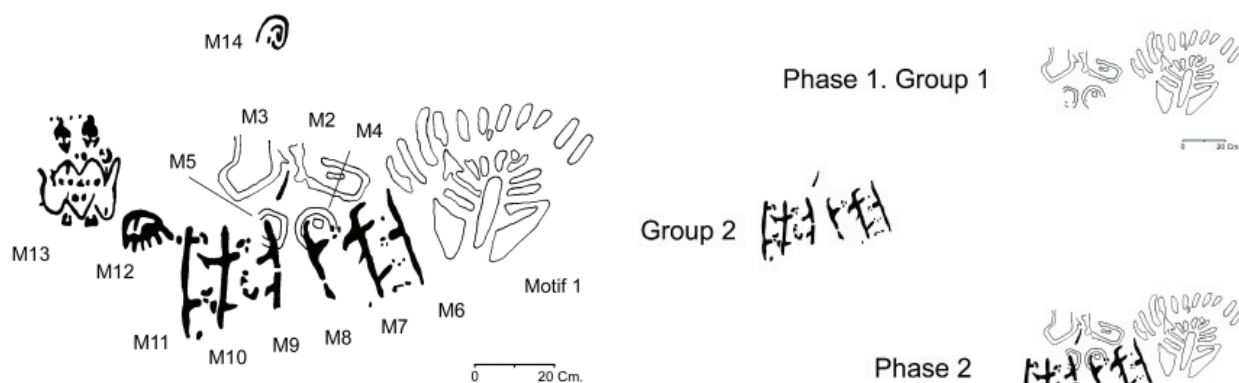


Figura 7. "Quebrada Palo" painting with the motifs isolated in the scene. Lachay, Lima.

in the ancient Peru), in which the author places the painting in his proposed general chronological sequence of Peruvian rock art.

Guffroy consider the "Quebrada Palo" paintings to correspond to his "schematized and geometric" style being very similar with the lineal incised decorations of the local ceramic style known as "Teatino". On the bases of this association Guffroy places *grosso modo* the chronology of the painting between the Middle Horizon Period and the Late Intermediate Period of the Andean archaeological chronology (approximately between 800 and 1200 CE.) and tacitly linked culturally to the producers of this ceramics, we suppose at least in the associated area of occupation called "Teatino"

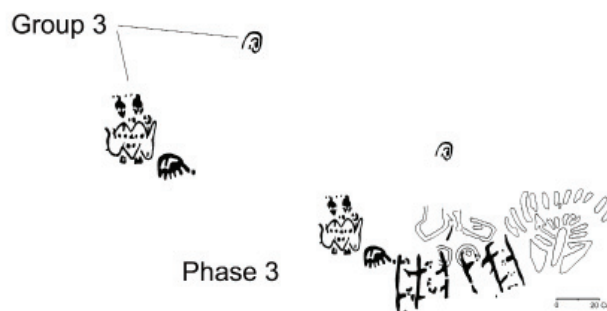


Figura 8. Hypothetic development sequence of "Quebrada Palo" painting scene.

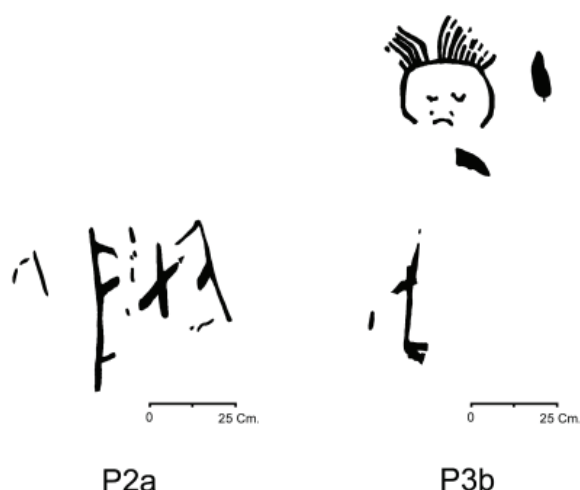


Figura 9. Two scenes with motifs formally associated. Lachay, Lima.

or “Lachay” (Tello 1956.)⁴

Although the style “Teatino” in effect includes some similarities with the painting from a formal level regarding to the linear incise decoration that characterizes the ceramic (Bonavia 1962), in general there is no coherent similarity between the remarkable geometric patterns in these decorations and the Quebrada Palo painting sample exhibited in 1962-1963 (Fig. 1) (see Guffroy Ob. cit, page 63), and even less with the copy obtained by us in our work of 1994 (Fig. 3.)

Only in a formal level as we are arguing, the comparison is very thick and can be called incoherent, if we go into detail it is clear to us that the comparative parameters have not been very well defined and the analysis is based, as we have established, on a copy not rigorously adjusted to the reality of the original rock painting.

The chronology and the cultural association of the “Quebrada Palo” painting as well as the whole rock art complex of Lachay is still an unsettled problem which is due to the lack of systematic research and the difficulties with concern to this archaeological material. In our 1996 publication (Echevarría ob. cit.), we indicate that it was probable that the paintings were linked to late ceramic periods overvaluing its more evident cultural association, the extensive cemetery of tombs are located close to this area (Fig. 10.)

However, it is apparent that the appreciations on the chronology and the cultural association have had a clear intuitive tendency and these wait for a more rigorous and

extensive analysis. In this sense new archaeological sites of rock art are being recorded and integrated in similar zones in Lima such as “Ancón” and “Quebrada Verde” (Echevarría 2009) (Fig. 4), which contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this material that has been typically recognized as absent from the Peruvian coastal region and that the evidence is being denied gradually.

Conclusions

In the first place we must recognize that the “Quebrada Palo” representation was clearly an artistic interpretation of a painting on rock. This copy integrated in a single image two separate scenes (P1b and P1c) (see Fig. 6) forming a complex composition that has characterized, since its original exhibition, a notable and resistant image that ideally showed the Lachay rock painting for the first time in its history.

From our perspective the image can not be considered a falsification or a reality tergiversation since this was made only to show, using a hand made reproduction, a physical fact, the existence of an ancient image, a cultural testimony of the past.

Since the “Quebrada Palo” image was considered a very realistic copy and had not been compared with the original image when it was used in studies or investigations- this image obviously constituted a limited and insolvent cultural resource, which consequently deny or weakens the conclusions of the investigation, or part of them, that became based on the image. This is the responsibility of the researcher who uses the image and not the responsibility of the person who makes it.

The confrontation of the source and the necessary rigor of the registry according to pre-established and exposed parameters must be a clear rule in the technical behavior when someone works with rock art or with any other archaeological material; otherwise there is a risk of confronting the researcher to an uncertain and deceptive material. It's conclusive that the methodological nature of the record must be explicit.

Finally and without the necessity to attenuate



Figura 10. Archeological site “Teatino” or “Lachay” (Tello 1956). A looted cemetery. Picture by Gori Tumi 1994.

⁴ A zone characterized by the presence of a cemetery and some associated archaeological settlements. Julio C. Tello identified this place like a cemetery naming the site as “El Teatino” or “Lachay” indistinctly (Tello 1956: 12.) The gorge where this site was located was called “Quebrada Lachay” by Toribio Mejía Xesspe in his story of the expedition (Tello, 1956.)



what it has been said about our painting, we believe that the two images in discussion are extraordinary, the original painting, by its own archaeological documentary nature, (See Fig. 2); our reproduction: Fig. 11) and the copy of 1962-1963 by the synthesis and interpretation of the real painting (See Fig. 1.) It is notable how images like the “Quebrada Palo” painting have highlighted the cultural value of these testimonies and that still today it is used to exemplify this cultural manifestation, which is probably the original intention of its creation: the rescue and exhibition of the ancient writing of Peru, the “Quilca”.

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Figura 11. “Quebrada Palo” painting. Drawing from convencional photography by Gori Tumi.