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## THE SEATED FIGURES OF THE RIO GRANDE DE NASCA DRAINAGE: DEFINING A DESCRIPTIVE TYPE IN THE ROCK ART OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ICA, PERU

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**Abstract.** In order to understand the relationship between rock art sites and rock art motifs in Peru's Department of Ica, this essay proposes the definition of a descriptive type. Some of the petroglyphs belonging to this type can be compared to representations on portable objects from the later portion of the Early Horizon and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period.

### Introduction

By far the largest and best known examples of Rio Grande de Nasca drainage rock art consist of geoglyphs, large-scale representational images, spirals, trapezoids and straight lines on plateaus between river valleys or on the slopes of hills. Known collectively as the Nasca Lines, these geoglyphs have captured the imagination of the general public and have been the focus of many academic publications and popular documentaries. Their purpose has been the subject of debate for decades. Lesser known, but also widespread in the river system, are concentrations of rock art of a much smaller scale, i.e. petroglyphs and pictograms. These, like the geoglyphs, are also examples of site-specific images that were most likely linked to indigenous ideas of place and landscape. In some cases, Rio Grande de Nasca drainage petroglyphs and geoglyphs are closely associated to each other by their location or their iconography. Unfortunately, however, the study of petroglyphs and pictograms in this area has been neither thorough nor systematic.

The present essay defines a descriptive type found in petroglyph sites of the Palpa and Aja valleys, in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage.<sup>1</sup> Although Palpa valley rock art sites have been documented through photographs

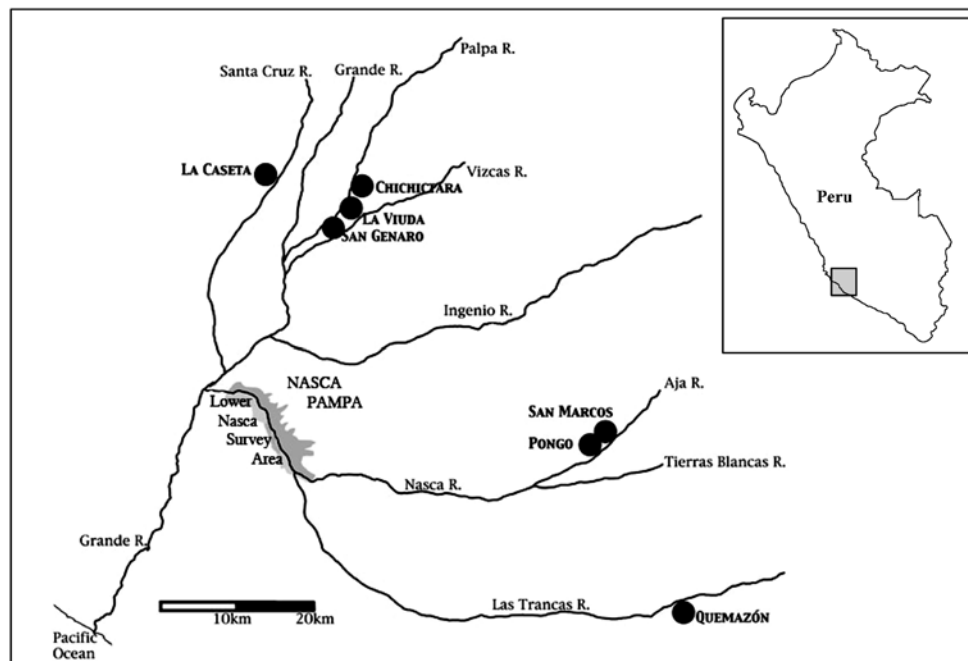
and drawings in various publications (such as Núñez Jiménez 1986; Matos Ávalos 1987; Fux 2011 *inter alia*), a thorough and comprehensive classification of motifs in the river system is still needed in order to understand the relationship between these and other rock art sites. Any study of this river system's rock art is limited and problematic, however, since very few publications include a complete description or documentation of rock art motifs at any of the sites. The definition of descriptive types is a necessary first step towards a greater understanding of rock art sites across the valleys of the river system. As more sites are documented and their motifs are described in future publications, the descriptive type presented here, its distribution and its iconographic associations can be revised or modified.

### Theoretical background

Finding systematic ways to document and analyse motifs is crucial in the study of rock art. In discussing the classification process in rock art research, Whitley (2005) and Francis (2001) made reference to Meyer Shapiro's definition of 'style' (1953) and its influence in the study of rock art. Shapiro (1953: 287) defined the concept of 'style' as 'constant form' in the art of an individual or a group. In this case, 'form' refers to the visual (artistic) elements of the work, or the use of line, shape, colour and composition. The purpose of a formal study and a definition of styles, according to Shapiro, is to date the work and establish connections between sites or cultures. This is based on the assumption that each culture or period has a limited number of styles (Shapiro 1953: 287–288).

Francis (2001) argued, however, that relying on style for the dating of rock art panels can be problematic, since scientific dating methods have sometimes con-

<sup>1</sup> This descriptive type was originally discussed in my dissertation (Nieves 2007) and at that time it was called the seated figure iconographic complex (SFIC). Peter Fux (2011) also referred to the SFIC in his discussion of Chichictara petroglyphs. In the present article, however, I avoid using 'iconographic complex'. I am simply proposing a classification based on patterns of representation, which is verifiable, and not an interpretation of subject matter. Furthermore, in the present article I also expand and update the definition and discussion presented in my dissertation.



**Figure 1.** Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. The area covered in Nieves' 2000 survey is indicated in grey. The map also indicates petroglyph concentrations that had been documented in publications at the time of the survey.

tradicted the dates assigned for rock art motifs based on their style (either individual styles were proven to have lasted too long for their application as a dating tool, or completely different styles that were assumed to indicate distinct phases were later proven to be roughly contemporaneous). As a way to bypass these problems, Francis (2001: 234–238) proposed an approach for the classification of rock art based on the definition of descriptive types as an alternative to the use of style for the dating of rock art. These descriptive types would be determined for specific regions based on a consistent pattern of attributes, which could include manufacturing techniques, figure types, poses and dress as well as the characteristics of the archaeological sites. This is a very basic descriptive approach which has as its sole purpose to organise and define motif types within a larger body of work, but not to date these motifs. The present article follows Francis in the definition of a descriptive type for a particular area.

Francis' definition of descriptive types resembles Panofsky's (1955) methodology for iconographic analysis in the basic assumption that there are consistent rules that organise motifs and we are therefore able to identify patterns and an internal structure in visual representations. In the case of Panofsky, basic descriptions of images help define a classification of types that can be associated to themes and concepts. However, one problem with applying Panofsky's iconographic analysis to the study of rock art is that comparisons with texts that verify the identification of these themes and concepts are often impossible. But, rock art research is not unique in this respect in the Andean region, since this is also a problem in the study of ancient ceramic painting. In the analysis of Moche and Nasca ceramic

art in particular, the first two levels of Panofsky's approach have allowed scholars to organise the images and establish relationships between them. A Panofsky-influenced approach has been particularly useful in the study of Moche ceramic painting, where there are clear narratives with recurring figures.<sup>2</sup> In Moche art, themes are therefore identified based on the consistent depiction of figures with particular attributes (such as head-dresses, clothing, jewellery, zoomorphic traits etc.), engaged in specific actions (running, fighting, raising a cup, bleeding a captive etc.). In Nasca art, there is very

little interaction among the figures painted on ceramics, so a redefinition of the thematic approach was necessary. However, Nasca figures are still identified and defined based on consistent patterns of designs (attributes) that are shown on their bodies (Proulx 2006: 55). In some cases, these attributes can be shared among different Nasca figures, indicating that they are linked to each other. In both the Moche and Nasca cases, a detailed description of figures and motifs with their respective attributes was absolutely necessary for a better understanding of these cultures' visual forms of expression. It is also important to note that in both Moche and Nasca art, the same figure type can be depicted in different artistic styles, suggesting possible regional or temporal stylistic differences. However, in both Francis' and Panofsky's methodologies, the identification of the type or theme is independent from the issue of dating and can be used as a basic organisational tool based on verifiable patterns.

### Geographical context

The area that is addressed here is located in the Department of Ica, in the south coast Peru. The Peruvian coast is a narrow, dry strip of land, cut by rivers that flow into the Pacific Ocean to the west, forming valleys. Between the river valleys of the Rio Grande de Nasca

<sup>2</sup> There are many Moche scholars that have used such an approach. Of particular importance is the work of Christopher Donnan (Donnan 1978; Donnan and McClelland 1979; Donnan and Alva 1993 *inter alia*). Anne Marie Hocquenghem also based her approach on Panofsky's and provided a thorough description of this methodology in a book dedicated to Moche iconography (Hocquenghem 1989).

river system or drainage (Fig. 1) are large plateaus that are known locally as *pampas* (such as the Pampa Cinco Cruces, Pampa Majuelos and Pampa de Atarco, for example).<sup>3</sup> The *pampas* to the north-east of the Nasca valley, between the Ingenio and Nasca Rivers, are best known for the abundance of geoglyphs on their surface (the famous Nasca Lines). Following Aveni (1993: 3 and 2010: 26), I refer this particular group of *pampas* between the Nasca and Ingenio Rivers as the Nasca Pampa.

The Peruvian coastal climate in general is dry during the summers and moist and foggy in the winters. In the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, however, a barrier of mountains to the west of the Nasca area prevents the moist air from the sea from entering further inland and this results in a climate characterised by warmth and dryness. Temperatures in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage range from an average temperature of 25.4°C in February to an average temperature of 16.3°C in July, while high temperatures can reach 32°C in the summer (ONERN 1971: 49).

Although water was involved in the formation of the local landscape, there is little surface water in the area now. Water availability was and still is a major concern for the inhabitants of this area. With the exception of the Grande and Ingenio Rivers, all of the rivers from this drainage are dry for an average of eight months a year (ONERN 1971: 182). Fluvial water tends to be available during the rainy season in the highlands, which spans from January through March (ONERN 1971: III, 55).

### Previous research

In the Rio Grande drainage, petroglyph sites have been reported, formally and informally, in the Las Trancas, Nasca, Aja, Ingenio, Palpa, Grande and Santa Cruz valleys (Fig. 1). Petroglyph sites in the Palpa valley have been the main focus of the rock art research in the area and the work at these sites has been primarily for documentary purposes.

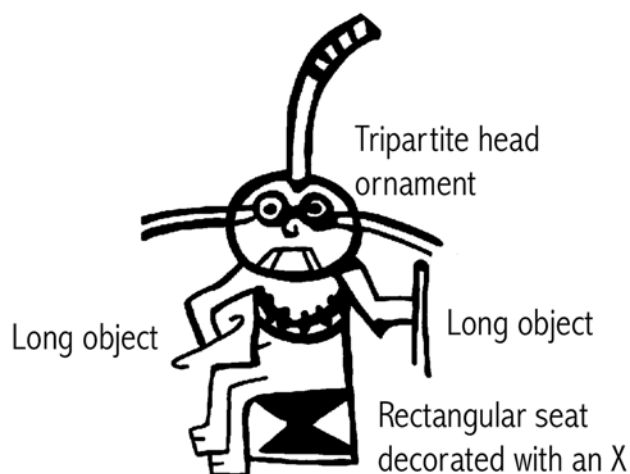
In an investigation of the middle Palpa valley conducted in the 1950s, Toribio Mejía Xesspe was able to work in the petroglyph site of Chichictara and excavate nearby sites. He described the site of Chichictara and associated the site's rock art to the objects found in the tombs he excavated in the same part of the valley (Mejía Xesspe 1972). These tombs included incised ceramics, decorated with pre- and post-firing painting. Based on the proximity of these sites to Chichictara and the shared iconography between the rock art and the ceramics, he placed the Chichictara petroglyphs within the Paracas/Nasca tradition.

Another rock art scholar who worked in the Palpa valley was Antonio Núñez Jiménez. His four-volume publication, *Petroglifos del Perú* (Núñez Jiménez 1986), was a very thorough catalogue of rock art sites in this country and is still the only large-scale publication of this kind. In this publication, Núñez Jiménez included the Palpa valley sites of La Viuda and Chichictara,

although he used different names for the different rock art concentrations that are now simply considered sectors within the larger site of Chichictara (La Cantera, La Cabañita, El Vado). Núñez Jiménez used photography and tracings to record the imagery at each of the sites he visited and he provided a selection of rock art illustrations with his descriptions of the sites and petroglyphs. Considering the damage that some of these sites have endured since he published his catalogue (Rubén García, pers. comm.; Joerg Haeberli, pers. comm.), Núñez Jiménez's publication remains an important source of information on the iconography of many sites of the Department of Ica. At the same time, his work at these sites is far from comprehensive. It is likely that not all rocks were traced or photographed during his visits since relatively few were reproduced in his publication.

A more thorough documentation of the rock art at the site of Chichictara was made for Peru's National Institute of Culture (Instituto Nacional de Cultura, or INC) under Alejandro Matos Ávalos (1987). In this study, the site was divided into four sectors (numbered I to IV). The documentation involved individual data forms for all of the 158 carved boulders, each of which was assigned an identification number. This project also involved the documentation of imagery through photographs and drawings. According to the description of the project, the petroglyphs were also traced. However, a comparison of the drawings to the actual petroglyphs often brings up significant discrepancies that indicate that final drawings which combine the in situ drawings with the tracings were never made. Another, very significant, problem for a catalogue of this type is that many of the drawings on the data forms are not complete. Only fragments of motifs are included in some of the drawings and, in some cases, entire petroglyph motifs are missing.<sup>4</sup> A possible explanation for such oversights is that lighting conditions were not ideal at the time some of these drawings were made. As any rock art scholar knows very well, the angle of light can enhance some motifs, but may also obscure others, so some motifs that are clearly visible in the morning may not be visible in the afternoon. Limitations on time may have prevented the team from documenting individual boulders with different lighting conditions. Another possible factor

4 For example, the INC drawing of sector II's rock 7 shows an anthropomorph and a circle, with nothing in between, when there is another figure depicted in this area. Sector II's rock 6A has a quadruped decorated with a linear pattern that is not shown in the INC drawing. On rock 53, also in Sector II, there is a spotted feline that is not shown in the INC drawing. Finally, the drawing of rock 57 shows a comb-like form in the upper area and what appears to be a small figure in the lower area. This petroglyph actually represents a large, seated figure with a semicircular headdress similar to other seated figures in Chichictara and in La Viuda (Palpa valley) and San Marcos (Aja valley), and clearly a figure belonging to the seated figure descriptive type that is described in the present article.



**Figure 2.** Diagram indicating some of the main attributes associated with the seated figure descriptive type (drawing by Ana Nieves).

was the lack of familiarity with the area's rock art motifs. Furthermore, since this project dealt with the registration of the images as an inventory in preparation to make the site more accessible to visitors through the construction of a parking lot and the installation of tourist information signs, these drawings were likely to have been simply considered a quick and basic reference tool more so than a comprehensive and accurate catalogue.

Both the Núñez Jiménez study and the INC study included drawings of the motifs that I am identifying below as belonging to the 'seated figure descriptive type'. However, the focus of both of those studies was a general documentation of the site and not the classification of motifs, so no overall conclusions were drawn from the information gathered about the motifs or their distribution.

Browne's survey of the Palpa valley (Browne and Baraybar 1988; Browne 1992) also included this valley's rock art sites. Browne and Baraybar (1988: 310) suggested that the anthropomorphic petroglyphs at La Viuda should be considered part of a ritual complex that included a cleared area called a *campo barrido*. Browne (1992: 93) proposed that the petroglyphs could correspond to the Early Horizon 10 and promised a future investigation of the motifs. Unfortunately, these authors did not elaborate on the characteristics of this ritual complex as this was outside of the scope of the published survey reports.

Any analysis of rock art in the Palpa valley must also consider the detailed and thorough work of the Nasca-Palpa Project. In the publications by Reindel and Isla (1999) and Reindel et al. (1999), the authors propose a sequence that relates the Palpa valley petroglyphs to the area's geoglyphs. According to these authors, this river system's geoglyphs derive from the Palpa petroglyphs. The same motifs that were originally carved on rolled boulders, according to these scholars, eventually became large geoglyphs on the slopes of hills. The location of

the geoglyphs moved from the slopes to the elevated plateaus or *pampas* between valleys. Without restrictions of space or topography, *pampa* geoglyphs were larger, more geometric, and highly abstract (Reindel and Isla 1999: 195). These authors argued that the earliest petroglyphs belong to the Late Formative (Ocucaje 8) and the anthropomorphic geoglyphs on the slopes of hills date to Ocucaje 10 and Nasca 1 (Reindel et al. 1999: 371). Also as part of the Nasca-Palpa Project, some of the petroglyphs of the Palpa valley have recently been documented through more recent techniques, such as laser scanning and photogrammetry (Fux 2006; Fux et al. 2008; Fux et al. 2009). A recent publication by Peter Fux (2011) provides very clear 3D models of the petroglyph-covered boulders at Chichictara.

Although not as well known or studied as the Palpa valley petroglyph sites, the rock art concentrations in the lower Nasca and Grande valleys include petroglyphs and examples of very rare pictograms which have yet to be thoroughly documented.<sup>5</sup> The research for my dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin (Nieves 2007) included a rock art survey of the lower Nasca valley and in that dissertation I provided descriptions of this valley's sites and decorated boulders (Nieves 2007: Appendix A).<sup>6</sup> The purpose of my dissertation was to contextualise the rock art of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage through a classification of the motifs (including the seated figures of the Palpa and Aja valleys) and a comparison of these rock art motifs to images on portable objects for which there is a better known chronology. I proposed categories or types, some of which were compared to diagnostic material such as textiles and ceramics. Based on these comparisons, I demonstrated that much of the rock art in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, including the petroglyphs of the lower Nasca valley survey area, was comparable with material that was dated to the Early Horizon and the Early Intermediate Period. These dates were consistent with the dates that Reindel et al. proposed for the petroglyphs in Palpa valley sites.

### Definition of the seated figure descriptive type (SFDT)

The main attributes that define the SFDT (Fig. 2), the focus of this particular study, involve the following:

<sup>5</sup> Proulx (1999) reported four petroglyph concentrations in the Nasca valley during his settlement pattern survey of the area. Orefici (2009a) mentioned petroglyph sites in the Grande valley that depict sacrifice and hunting scenes: 'escenas complejas representando a personajes en actividades sacrificiales y de caza' (Orefici 2009a: 88). He did not include any drawings or photographs of the petroglyphs or sites, although he reported that petroglyphs like these exist throughout the valley, all the way to the Pacific shore. Fux (2011) mentioned rock art in Coyungo, in the Grande valley. He published two photographs, one of the site and one of a very weathered petroglyph of a circular form with radiating lines around it (Fux 2011: 170).

<sup>6</sup> In that dissertation, I described a total of 26 rock art sites in the Nasca valley.

- (a) *Figure type and position*: as the name of the complex indicates, these are primarily representations of seated anthropomorphic figures. The figures have a frontally depicted torso and clearly depicted arms and legs. Sometimes feet are indicated as well. The figures' legs are shown on one side of the seat.
- (b) *Facial features*: the heads are large (roughly one fourth of the length of the body) and the faces are clearly shown frontally. The eyes can be simple circular pits or large circles, often with a central dot. Some figures also have a mouth or a nose.
- (c) *Head ornaments*: the most common head ornament consists of a tripartite arrangement of forms, with one vertical shape on the upper portion of the head and long, horizontal shapes at each side of the head.<sup>7</sup> However, some of the figures are shown with a rounded or semicircular headdress, and some are shown with a combination of the tripartite head ornament and the semicircular headdress.
- (d) *Seats and X marking*: the object on which these figures are seated is roughly rectangular and usually has an X within it.
- (e) *Associated objects*: the figures may hold one or two objects. These are usually depicted as long shapes.
- (f) *Technique*: the seated figures are primarily depicted in petroglyphs made through direct percussion, although there are geoglyphs with similar head-dresses and hand-held objects (Orefici 2009b: 101; Fux 2011: Fig. 6). If these motifs were ever painted, those examples do not survive now.

At Chichictara, in the Palpa valley, some examples of SFDT figures are on rocks 13 (Fig. 3), 46 and 57 of sector II and rocks 30, 30B, 32 and 33 of sector III. The example on Figure 3 (rock 13 in sector II of Chichictara) incorporated both headdresses: the semicircular headdress and the tripartite headdress.

The site of La Viuda, also in the Palpa valley, has the more elaborate figures belonging to the SFDT. Three complete figures belonging to this type are on a single side of a boulder at this site. In the case of La Viuda, the legs are to the left and they all wear a

<sup>7</sup> Fux (2011) compared what I call the tripartite headdress to the mouth mask and forehead ornaments often depicted in Paracas textiles. Because of this and the 'staff' held by the figures, he argues that these represent dignitaries (Fux 2011: 126).

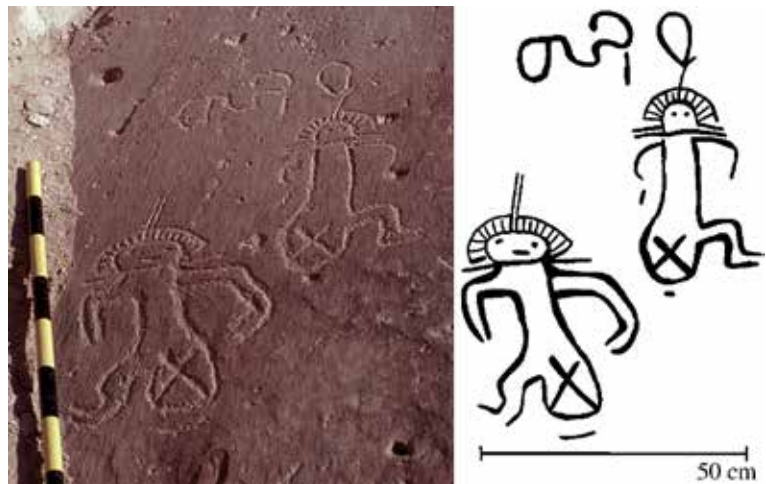


Figure 3. Seated figure type, Chichictara, sector II, rock 13, Palpa valley (photograph and drawing: Ana Nieves).



Figure 4. Seated figure type, La Viuda, Palpa valley (photograph: Ana Nieves).

tripartite head ornament (Figs 4 and 5). Two of the La Viuda figures also have very large round eyes and diagonal lines below the mouth. The figure furthest to the left also has short lines or notches along the upper contour of its head.

On the right of the group of three seated figures at La Viuda shown on Figures 4 and 5 is a circular or oval form with two parallel lines on the top of the circle and horizontal lines at each side. There are two lines below the circle, but these are more widely separated than those on top of the circle. The caption for Nuñez Jimenez' drawing (Fig. 5, right) states that this motif depicts a bird (Nuñez Jimenez 1986: 270). However, I propose that this arrangement is closely related to the other three seated figures on the same boulder. The size of the circle on the motif on the right is roughly the same as the size of the heads of the three seated figures to the left. The slight curvature on the two lines on top of the circle corresponds to the curvature of the top element on the other figures' tripartite headdresses (also made with two curved parallel lines). The space between the two lines below the

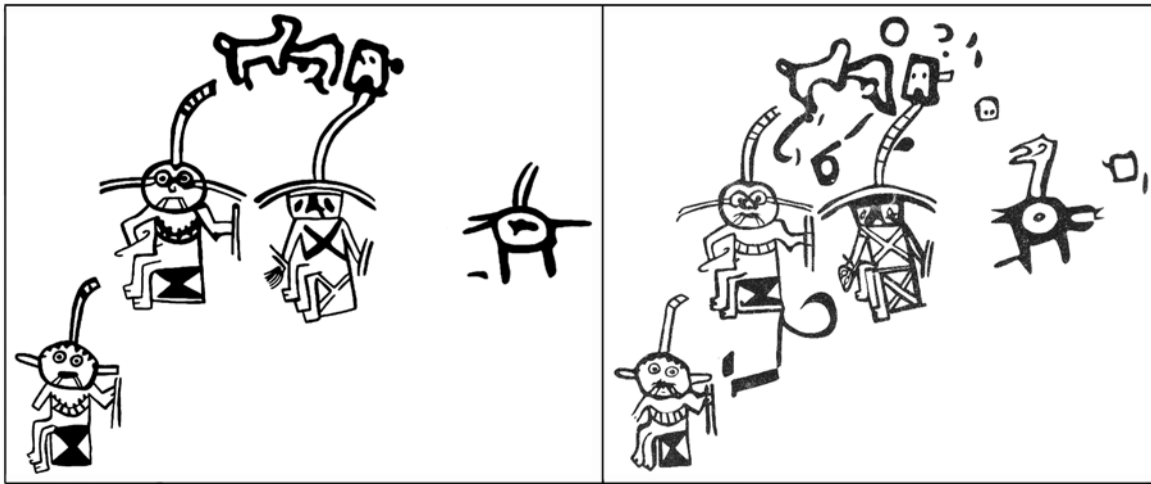


Figure 5. Two drawings of the figures at La Viuda, Palpa valley (drawing on the left: Ana Nieves, drawing on the right: Nuñez Jimenez 1986: Fig. 1952).

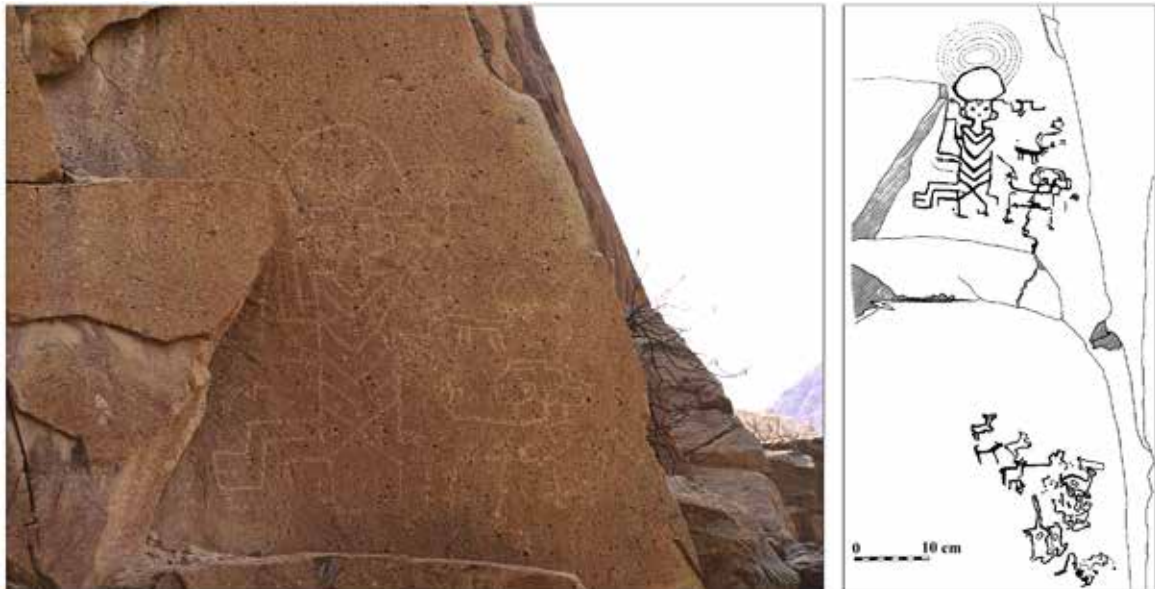


Figure 6. Seated figure type, San Marcos, Aja valley (photograph: Ana Nieves; drawing: Orefici 1993: Fig. 84).

circle corresponds to the width of the torsos of the three figures. In other words, this circular motif appears to be an incomplete or unfinished version of a seated figure. These petroglyphs should be studied more closely (perhaps with the use of reflectance transformation imaging or photogrammetry) to determine whether there are also similarities in the manufacturing marks and therefore the group would be likely to be part of a single manufacturing episode; or if the differences between them are significant enough to argue that the circular motif was a later addition, an unfinished copy of the complete seated figure motifs on the left.

The largest single example of a SFDT is in the Aja valley site of San Marcos (Fig. 6). At this site there is a seated figure petroglyph that measures approximately 1.50 m high. Orefici (1993: Fig. 84) included a detailed drawing of this particular petroglyph. Below the seated figure there are representations of zoomorphs (these can be observed in the drawing by Giuseppe

Orefici on Fig. 6). There are also zoomorphic figures next to the seated figure. At San Marcos, the main SFDT has a semicircular headdress and the body has angular, V-shaped or chevron marks.

Further north in the Department of Ica, but outside the Rio Grande de Nasca river system, Gori Tumi Echevarría has recently documented petroglyphs that clearly belong to this descriptive type. They are located in the District of Huancano of the Pisco Province. Figure 7 shows one of the Pisco Province anthropomorphous figures. It is sitting with its legs to the right, holding an object, and wears a headdress which is very similar to the headdress on the Chichictara petroglyphs shown on Figure 3 and the La Viuda anthropomorphs shown on Figure 5. Furthermore, it also has large round eyes like the La Viuda figures and a set of small lines along the upper contour of the head, also like the petroglyphs of Figure 3 and La Viuda. Although there is no X on the seat, there is an X that was carved where



*Figure 7. Anthropomorphic figure from the District of Huancano, Province of Pisco, Department of Ica (photograph: Gori Tumi Echevarría).*

the mouth of the figure would be.

Examples of the seated figures have also been found in the highlands, near the headwaters of the rivers that make up the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. Fux (2006) published photographs of the petroglyphs at the site of Letrayoq (Fig. 8), a site located near the village of Armaycancha, in the Lucanas Province of the Department of Ayacucho, and argued that the similar motifs found in Letrayoq and Chichictara are evidence that these sites are associated to each other. The figure in Fux's photograph has a semicircular headdress with radiating lines. It is clearly in a seated position, although it is difficult to discern whether the seat is decorated with an X or if he is holding any objects in this particular photograph of the petroglyph.

The inherent problem in defining types based on attributes, however, involves the arbitrary decision regarding the amount of attributes that must be present for a motif to belong to a particular descriptive type. After all, we cannot assume that one attribute used to define the type was more important than any of the other ones to the people that made these petroglyphs. There are many examples of petroglyphs with one of two of the SFDT attributes.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Some related examples include: Chichictara sector II rock 19, Chichictara sector II rock 43, Chichictara sector III rock 22, Chichictara sector III rock 22, Chichictara sector III rock 32, Chichictara sector III rock 33. Also, very close



*Figure 8. Anthropomorphic figure from the site of Letrayoq (from Fux 2006: Fig. 4).*

### Comparisons

The main goal in defining a descriptive type in rock art is not to date the motifs, but simply to organise and classify them. However, in the case of the seated figures, there are attributes that are comparable to those found on motifs depicted on objects with better known chronologies in the same region. These links suggest a relationship between these motifs and the possibility of contemporaneity, so it is therefore important to address them.

Particular attention should be paid to the motif in Chichictara's sector II, rock 43 (Fig. 9), because it exhibits some of the attributes that are part of the SFDT. However, this figure is not clearly depicted in a seated position. The orientation of the figure is difficult to know for sure since the petroglyph is on the top of a flat boulder. And, although there is an X on the lower portion of the figure, there is no clearly visible 'seat'.

to the large SFDT figure at San Marcos, there is a smaller anthropomorph with the same angular or chevron marks that the SFDT figure displays. Another interesting case consists of geoglyphs in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage that display similar tripartite headdress and hold objects (Orefici 2009b: 101; Fux 2011: Fig. 6). One of these geoglyphs is depicted standing and the other figure is in poor condition, so it is not clear whether the figure is sitting or standing. Further north, the SFDT can be compared with representations of seated figures at Huancor in the Valley of San Juan (Chincha area). Although the distance is considerable, many figures at Huancor are depicted in a seated position. There are also anthropomorphs at Huancor that are decorated with angular marks or chevrons on their bodies similar to the Aja valley SFDT figure. However, there are no figures at Huancor that combine the seated position with the angular marks on the body.

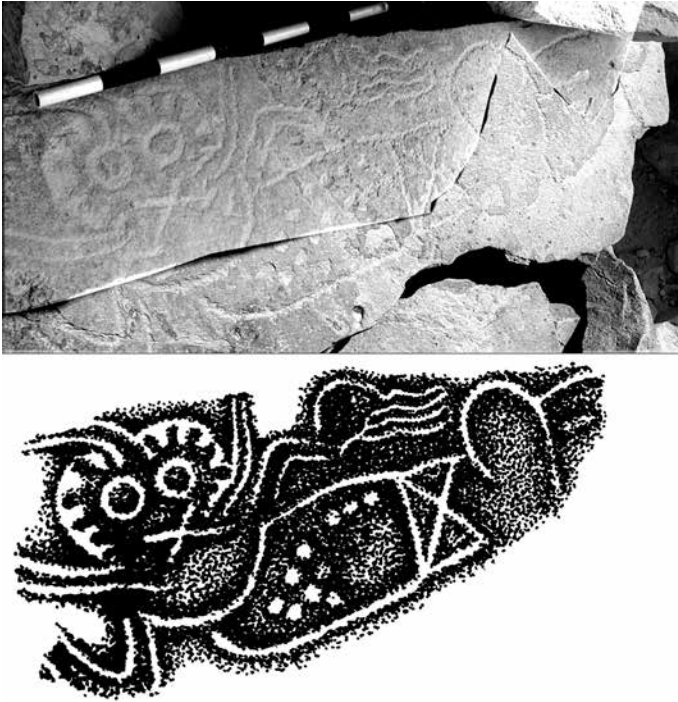


Figure 9. Seated figure type, Chichictara, sector II, rock 43, Palpa valley (photograph and drawing: Ana Nieves)

The figure depicted on sector II's rock 43 also shares many similarities with the La Viuda seated figures (Figs 4 and 5) and the figure from the Province of Pisco (Fig. 7). The figure's large, round eyes and the round shape of the head are all consistent with the figure on the left of the La Viuda panel and the Pisco figure. The figure on rock 43 also has horizontal extensions on the sides of its head and a vertical one on the top of the head, indicating a tripartite headdress. Instead of holding an elongated object, the sector II rock 43 figure holds an oval form with long, curved lines on one side. Finally, like the Pisco Province figure, the figure in rock 43 also has circular markings on its torso as well as an X where the mouth should be.

Some of the attributes of the sector II rock 43 figure at Chichictara are also present in motifs depicted in south coast textiles, specifically in Paracas Necropolis 'block colour' embroideries and early Nasca textiles. The extended position of the body in the petroglyph along with unnatural angle of the head in relation to the torso corresponds to similar extended positions in many embroidered figures which may be shown

holding fans, knives or trophy heads (Fig. 10). Paul and Turpin (1986) interpreted these figures as ecstatic shamans who are either falling or flying (an interpretation which their long, flowing, unbound hair seems to have prompted). Regardless of the interpretations proposed, it is clear that the extended position and the angle of the head are attributes that are present in both the rock 43 petroglyph and Paracas and early Nasca textile motifs, indicating a possible relationship between them. Furthermore, the tripartite headdress on the figure may also be another link to Paracas iconography. Both Mejía Xesspe (1972) and Fux (2011) compared the head ornaments on some of the Chichictara anthropomorphs (i.e. the tripartite headdress) to the forehead ornaments depicted on other Paracas art forms (Fig. 11).

One rather unique attribute in the rock 43 figure is that it does not hold a long shape like some of the other seated figure petroglyphs. Instead, the figure holds a motif that consists of an oval shape with curved lines that extend to one side. As it was mentioned above, extended figures in Paracas and Nasca art also hold objects, some of which are trophy heads (Fig. 11).<sup>9</sup> The trophy heads in Paracas textiles are often shown with 'flowing strands of hair' (Paul and Turpin 1986: 24), depicted as a series of parallel lines. Based on these similarities, the oval motif that the rock 43 figure is holding is best explained as a trophy head, and this is yet another attribute that is present in Paracas art.

Because the aforementioned attributes on the figure on sector II's rock 43 are consistent with Paracas art, it is relevant to discuss another attribute that can be compared to Paracas ceramics or textiles: the depiction of large, round eyes. These evoke the representations of the Paracas Oculate Being (Fig. 12d), which can be depicted in textiles or ceramics and has very large, round eyes that sometimes have concentric circles within them. The Oculate Being is sometimes shown with a pendant nose that descends from the top of the head, such as the one seen in Figure 12d. Oculate Being representations may also have streamers with parallel bands within them and triangular forms along the outer

<sup>9</sup> Trophy heads are often represented in Nasca ceramics, shown frontally or in profile view. For a thorough description of trophy head types in Nasca art, see Proulx 2006: 104–111.



Figure 10. Nasca, Peru. Border fragment. 1st–2nd century CE. Cotton, camelid hair, H. 17.1 × W. 105.1 cm. Bequest of Arthur M. Bullowa, 1993. Accession number: 1994.35.120, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, <http://www.metmuseum.org> (accessed April 28, 2015).





**Figure 11.** Paracas, Peru. Embroidered mantle fragment. 3rd–2nd century BCE. Camelid hair, 8.26 × 9.53 cm. Gift of George D. Pratt, 1993. Accession number: 33.149.65, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From: *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, <http://www.metmuseum.org> (accessed April 28, 2015).



**Figure 12.** Oculate Being attributes in petroglyphs and textiles: (a) petroglyph from La Viuda, Palpa valley; (b) petroglyph from Chichictara, Palpa valley; (c) petroglyph from Site X12, Nasca valley; (d) depiction of Oculate Being on a painted Ocucaje textile (a, b and c: photographs by Ana Nieves; d: Bird 1954: Pl. LXIX).

edge of the streamers. The figures at La Viuda (Figs 4 and 5) may also be associated to the Oculate Being through their large, round eyes. The pattern of short lines along the top of the head present on one of the figures at La Viuda and also present in the figure on rock 43 of sector II at Chichictara is also part of Oculate Being representations (Figs 12a, 12b and 12d), especially in Ocucaje painted textiles. The suggestion of Oculate Being characteristics is not unique to the Palpa valley rock art. There is one petroglyph in the Nasca valley (Fig. 12c) which not only has the same large, round eyes and short lines along the top of the head, but it also has the Oculate Being's pendant nose and the streamer decorated with parallel lines and triangular ornaments. Although the rock 43 petroglyph is not an exact depiction of the Paracas Oculate Being, it shares many of its attributes, while at the same time it displays attributes of the SFDT. This petroglyph is therefore an important link between both representations.

The similarities in the attributes discussed above suggest that the Palpa valley seated figures are associated to objects that date to the Early Horizon 10 and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period, roughly the time period between 300 BCE and 300 CE. This corresponds to or confirms dates proposed for Chichictara in earlier studies by Browne (1992) and Reindel et al. (1999). It is also important to note, however, that the time frame discussed here applies

to the Palpa valley seated figures specifically and perhaps the seated figure in Pisco as well. In general, the seated figures may have been depicted throughout a much longer period of time and this may explain some of the differences that can be observed on some representations of the same descriptive type, such as the seated figure in the Aja valley site of San Marcos (Fig. 6). The San Marcos figure shares enough attributes to be identified as the same descriptive type, but it has attributes that are not found in Palpa, such as its large scale, elevated location and the chevron markings on the torso. The San Marcos seated figure has different body proportions altogether<sup>10</sup> and also lacks the Oculate Being characteristics observed in the Palpa valley and the Pisco figures. Considering these differences, it is possible that the San Marcos seated figure may have a different date or may be an example of a site-specific style. Furthermore, the aforementioned time frame for the Chichictara seated figures does not necessarily apply to the entire site. Chichictara is large and complex and there are many other motifs and types at the site. It is likely that the site grew and changed through time and that petroglyphs were

<sup>10</sup> Compared to the Palpa valley figures, the seated figure in the San Marcos site of the Aja valley has a much smaller head in relation to the height of the body.

made throughout several manufacturing episodes.

### Location

In earlier versions of this study I argued that the location of the seated figure petroglyphs of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage is significant (Nieves 2007), since these figures seemed to have a limited distribution within the river system (Palpa and Aja valleys). In fact, overall, there are some clear differences among some of the petroglyph motifs in the upper valleys (Palpa, Santa Cruz and Aja) and the lower portions of the valleys (lower Nasca and Grande valleys).<sup>11</sup> If this distribution of motifs indicates socio-political divisions, this could be evidence of early manifestations of the Andean concept of *ayllus* in this area. *Ayllus* are basic Andean social groups, often related and tied to specific locations, which work together to organise religious rituals or community projects. Silverman has argued for the existence of *ayllus* in Nasca society during the Early Intermediate Period and proposed that Nasca *ayllus* from various parts of the drainage were responsible for many of the mounds at the ceremonial site of Cahuachi, in the Nasca valley. Based on ethnographic comparisons, she argued that people from Nasca culture *ayllus* participated in pilgrimages to Cahuachi and conducted elaborate rituals at the site (Silverman 1993; Silverman and Proulx 2002: 244). These rituals helped reinforce social and territorial divisions (Silverman and Proulx 2002: 245). *Ayllus* are only safely attributed to the Late Horizon, however, and their existence is very difficult to demonstrate in earlier periods. Nevertheless, rock art sites could still be expressions of the identity of local groups and could have served as local *huacas*, or sacred sites, linking local groups to specific locales.

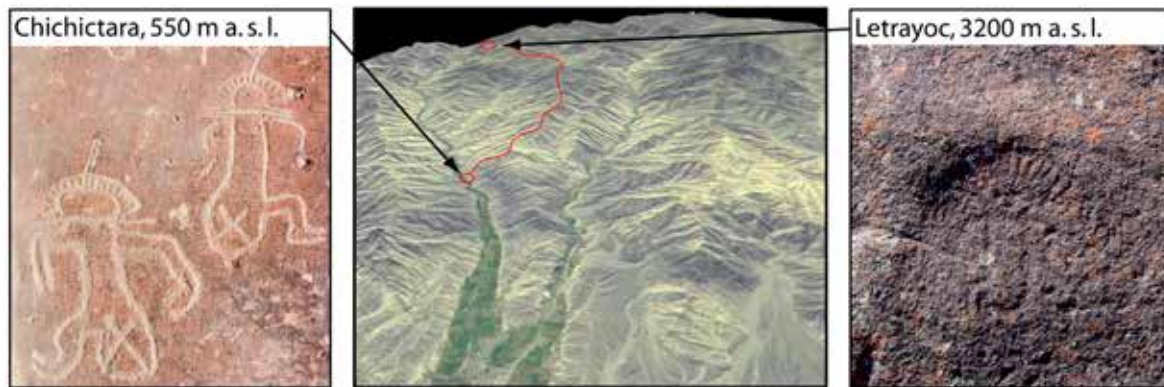
By analysing 16th century documents, Gary Urton (1990) also made an argument for an Andean model for social-political organisation that included *ayllus* in the Grande river system during pre-contact times. Furthermore, Urton argued that *ayllus* of the Rio Grande river system were also organised into north/south moieties and upriver/downriver moieties. Interestingly, the upriver/downriver moiety subdivisions of the Grande river system proposed by Urton reflects the regional distribution of some of the petroglyph motifs in the Rio Grande river system. However,

<sup>11</sup> While the petroglyphs of felines in the Palpa valley display parallel lines on their legs and tails, this attribute is not present in the feline petroglyphs of the lower Nasca valley sites. Nasca valley felines often have appendages that emerge from the chin or tongue (similar to the appendages depicted in Paracas Cavernas textiles and Paracas Necropolis linear style embroideries), but these appendages are absent in feline representations in the Palpa valley. Petroglyphs of serpents decorated with circular marks are also limited to the upper valleys, such as Palpa and Santa Cruz, and none of these has been documented in the Nasca valley so far. Finally, the Nasca valley also has several groups of boulders covered with long grooves or channels, which are not present in the upper valleys.

because there was a long span of time between the presumed making of the petroglyphs and the documented evidence for moieties used by Urton, and because of the dramatic political and cultural changes that took place in the area both in the pre- and post-contact periods, it is impossible to argue that the same social and political structure remained unchanged throughout that entire time.

Additionally, a very important factor to consider when discussing the distribution or rock art is taphonomy. Bednarik describes the application of taphonomy to rock art research as 'the study of the processes affecting rock art after it has been executed, determining its appearance and statistical properties' (Bednarik 2001: 157). Broadly speaking, it is safe to assume that the distribution patterns that can be observed today have been affected by the conditions that affect rock art conservation. The fact that what we see today is only a partial record greatly limits the scope of our observations and conclusions. Due to the deterioration of the rock surfaces, and especially because of the fragile nature of some of the poorly cemented sandstone that is the support for much of the rock art in the lower valleys in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, we cannot state with absolute certainty that there were no examples of the seated figures in that area. However, there are documented rock art concentrations which are worth addressing. The most extensively documented sites are probably in the lower Nasca (Nieves 2007), but there are also some reports of rock art in the lower Grande valley by Orefici (2009a) and Fux (2011) as well. Some sites in the lower Nasca valley have very large concentrations of petroglyphs, and there are sites that have surprisingly good preservation. One site in the lower Nasca valley, X02, has examples of sgraffito as well as pictograms in great condition. These techniques are rare in the rock art sites of this drainage, but may be some of the earliest examples of rock art in this river system. Although X02 has evidence of multiple manufacturing episodes and evidence of some petroglyphs made during the Early Horizon and Early Intermediate Period, there are no examples of the seated figures at this site. Therefore, there are examples of rock art in the lower valleys, some of which are quite old, but thus far, nothing that has been documented corresponds to this particular descriptive type. As more rock art sites are documented in this river system, it will be evident whether or not a regional distribution that stresses upriver/downriver differences is still valid.

Another important consideration regarding the location of the seated figure sites is the association to footpaths and transitional locations. For the Palpa valley specifically, Peter Fux proposed that Chichictara was connected to the rock art site of Letrayoq through an ancient footpath and pointed out that similar figures were found among the petroglyphs at both locations, linking both sites (Fux 2006, 2011; Fux et al 2008, 2009). He cogently argued that footpaths like this one connect



**Figure 13.** Peter Fux's comparison between a motif at Chichictara and a similar motif he identified at the site of Letrayoc, further up the valley. Fux indicated the footpath that connects both sites (Fux et al. 2008: Fig. 4).

people in different ecological zones for interaction and exchange, a pan-Andean practice, and that 'petroglyph sites in this area were ancient resting places on long-distance trade routes which connected the coast to the highlands and maybe even the Amazon region' (Fux 2011: 127).

Based on the locations of rock art sites in the Rio Grande drainage, it is clear that petroglyph sites in this river system, generally speaking, are associated to paths and transitions.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the possible absence of seated figure petroglyphs in the lower valleys of the drainage would be interesting in this context as well. The lower Grande valley would have been without a doubt an important trade route, albeit one that connected the agricultural fields in the middle portion of the Grande drainage to the coast and the ocean. Although Grande drainage rock art sites in general may have been associated to footpaths and were perhaps linked to trade routes, these seated figure petroglyphs could have indicated an association between the middle portion of the drainage and the inland paths to the highlands specifically, not those that lead to the coast. Once again, a thorough documentation of the lower Grande rock art sites would be necessary to test this working hypothesis.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Defining the characteristics of a descriptive type is the first step towards a more detailed study of rock art in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. In this case, I presented the characteristics of the 'seated figure descriptive type'. Among these is the seated position of the figures with the X on the seat. The headdress could

<sup>12</sup> In the lower Nasca valley, rock art concentrations are often within the *quebradas*, or ravines, that connect the Nasca valley to the pampas on the northeast and to the Ingenio valley. These *quebradas* are still used today to walk from one valley to another. A large concentration of groove petroglyphs is also found close to the confluence between the Nasca and Grande rivers, close to footpaths that connect both valleys. These petroglyph sites are associated to paths and transitions, but have no examples of petroglyphs of the seated figure descriptive type.

be either tripartite or semicircular, or a combination of both. Comparisons indicate a relationship between the Palpa valley examples and objects that date to the Early Horizon and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period, although these dates do not necessarily apply to all of the seated figure petroglyphs within the drainage. Furthermore, future investigations will need to address the relationship between the Palpa and Aja valley seated figures and between the Rio Grande drainage seated figures and those of the Pisco Province. The possible links between this specific descriptive type and particular locations will also need to be addressed as more sites are systematically documented.

Although the petroglyphs are not large as the geoglyphs or colourful as Nasca ceramics or Paracas embroideries, those of the Rio Grande de Nasca river system are widely distributed and abundant, making them an 'art' form that should be incorporated into studies of the area's material culture. There is a sense of urgency in the study of rock art in the Department of Ica, especially in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, because many of the rock art panels have been destroyed by natural causes and through human activity at these sites. Thorough documentation, classification and analysis should be a priority before we cannot count on this material anymore.

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