

TOWER HILL, WATER OF LIFE AND THE BLACK POOL

Donald E. Thompson

There is an aspect of archaeological fieldwork in the Andes that has been troubling me, at least the humanistic side of me, for some time; and I would like to broach the subject for consideration as well as provide a useful and interesting example. The matter concerns the peripheral archaeological and nonarchaeological data that we inevitably gather in the course of our research on more narrowly defined archaeological problems, or more precisely how, or indeed if, such data should be recorded. Personally, I look upon the whole Andean picture as a kind of huge three-dimensional sculptural puzzle of which these data are small pieces. Any given piece may have no obvious place at first glance, but taken with other pieces it might be part of an important linkage through time or space.

Unfortunately, the kind of information to which I refer is seldom complete or systematic enough to allow its publication in the usual places. Yet, such information can be very important in the right context; and, as we all know, rapid cultural change is extinguishing it at a breakneck pace. Some of it, to be sure, has been transmitted informally at meetings, site visits and the like. I still vividly recall John Rowe's visit to Huánuco Pampa in July of 1964, when he shared with us his views and experience not only on the Inca in general and Huánuco in particular, but also on a wide variety of Andean subjects far removed from the Inca in time and Huánuco Pampa in space. Also, when the field was smaller and the Pensión Hope Morris still functioned as a kind of ongoing Andean anthropology seminar at mealtimes, some of this informal lore was shared. Yet even in these situations, such transmission as takes place is informal and much of the information is surely lost or at least severely distorted within an academic generation.

I record here a modest example of the kind of information to which I refer. Between June 13 and 21, 1965, Delfín Zúñiga, the late Emilio Mendizábal and I were camped in the Chupaychu site of Paco. Delfín and I were doing archaeological survey and excavations (Thompson, 1972), and Emilio was gathering ethnographic and folkloric data there in "Pachitea andina," as he later defined that part of Huánuco (Mendizábal Losack, 1965). As will be apparent, the information was peripheral to our immediate project, but relates to it and to Andean studies in general and deserves to be recorded. I have limited the discussion to Torrejirka, omitting a great deal of similarly interesting peripheral information gathered during the same period.

Torrejirka, one of those fairly common cases of Spanish/Quechua linguistic miscegenation, refers to a rock outcrop which forms one of the two highest peaks in the neighborhood. These two peaks, which appear to be about the same height, dominate the view to the south of Paco; local interest, however, appears to be concentrated on Torrejirka alone.

We began to hear references to Torrejirka early in our work, and when the occasion permitted, asked questions about it. On Friday, June 18, for example, I noted in my journal:

Today is the first day we have labor: 1 boy who is avoiding the draft. Our boy said that lots of people go to Torrejirka

for Thursday and Friday of Holy Week. He says they get water there, bathe. Also gather herbs. He also claims there is music (radio and band) - dances. Also business transacted - food sold etc. He says there are all sorts of ruins there, plus a big grinding stone and "*monumentos*." He is a young boy, and I don't know if he really knows. Later we found out that the gathering of water is quite correct - i.e., they do go up there during Thursday and Friday of Holy Week to get the water from a pool near the top. This water is known as *Agua de la Vida* and is said to be a curative for any ailment. As for all the other trimmings described, I am uncertain - I would certainly guess that it is not as active as he describes it, but if there are a lot of people up there gathering water, I suppose there could be some activity. Hell of a climb, though, to carry much.

Our curiosity aroused by these and other comments, we arranged to visit Torrejirka on Sunday, June 20, when we would not be excavating. The peak lies S. 20°W. of Paco, and although I am not sure of the exact linear distance, it was a hard three-hour walk in each direction. Our most conservative estimate of the height of Torrejirka was 3650 m. above sea level, but it may well be somewhat higher.

Several small lakes surround the base of the summit outcrop (fig. 1). The outcrop itself is modified by wall construction in some of the steepest places and, as a result, looks fortified, though there is no reason to suppose that the walls did in fact serve a defensive function (fig. 2). On a flat area up on the outcrop but just below the summit proper lies a small pool, presumably the one from which the *agua de la vida* is drawn. Beside the pool irregular stone foundations outline what appear to be the badly distorted remains of a rectangular building (figs. 3 and 4).

The summit commands a fine view of the surrounding countryside. Although the peak lies within the Chupaychu domain, there is nothing there which relates architecturally to other known Chupaychu sites. On the contrary, the feeling of the outcrop walls and the rectangular foundation is more Inca than local. The surface pottery collected over the site proved to be very eroded and difficult to identify. Notable among the 103 sherds was the absence of the typical Chupaychu micaceous paste and the presence of two thin strap handles, an Inca but not a Chupaychu trait. Two additional handles could have been Chupaychu. There was no decorated pottery on the surface. All in all, my impression is that the site dates after the Inca conquest of the area.

A little over two weeks after our visit to Torrejirka, I talked to Emilio Mendizábal again. He had discussed Torrejirka with several other local people and had confirmed that the pool on top is indeed the one with the curative powers, but in addition that one of the small lakes at the base is "magical." Called Yanapozo, another miscegenated word, like Torrejirka itself, the pond is the dwelling place of magical cattle, sheep and cows, which have red marrow instead of white. They come out of the lake at night, but if they see humans, they become small, "like little stones." If a person can get close to them without being seen by them and can throw something of human manufacture, a poncho, for instance, over them before they become small, then they are captured and cannot shrink themselves again. You can then add

the new animals to your herd and they will crossbreed with ordinary cattle; indeed, they are better breeding stock than ordinary animals and are thus a very welcome addition to one's livestock.

This is the kind of link between past and present that I find very interesting and stimulating. Most of us working in the Andes have heard of magical bells that toll on Todos Santos and of tunnels that go to Cuzco and of Awkillos who live in the ancient ruins, but Torrejirka is a bit different. Without more archaeological work, I cannot be sure of the function or the date of the site there. Without more local interviews, the full nature of the mountain's present meaning and use will remain uncertain. And perhaps without these and some ethnohistorical work as well, the degree of crossover between *agua de la vida* and holy water and between European cattle and llamas and alpacas, which are no longer raised in this part of the Andes, will also remain in the realm of speculation. But, nonetheless, for me at least, places like Torrejirka and their associations deserve a space in our literature for, if nothing else, they open our eyes to the living past, that is, how Andean Indians relate to and use their ancient places. In a certain way, the meaning of these spots, to them, is as real and important as our purely archaeological analysis of the same locations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mendizábal Losack, Emilio

1965 La fiesta en Pachitea andina. *Folklore Americano*, año XIII, no. 13, pp. 141-227. Lima.

Thompson, Donald E.

1972 Peasant Inca villages in the Huánuco region. *Verhandlungen des XXXVIII. Internationalen Amerikanistenkongresses*, Stuttgart-München, 1968, Band IV, pp. 61-66. Klaus Renner Verlag, München.

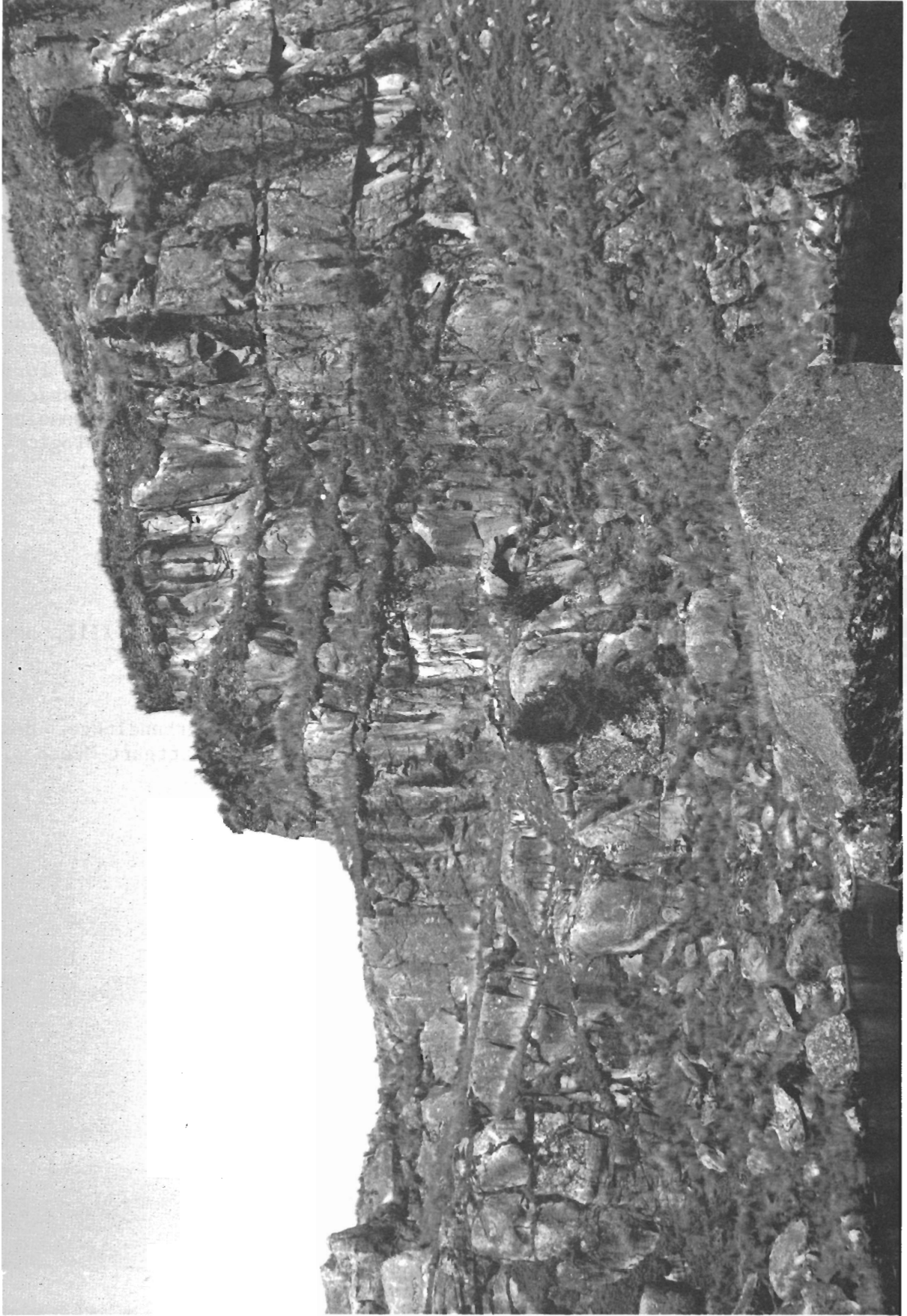


Fig. 1, summit outcrop of Torrejirka with one of the surrounding ponds at its base. "Fortification" walls are visible at its base.



Fig. 2, closer view of summit outcrop of Torrejirka with "fortification" walls.



Fig. 3, irregular foundations of a rectangular structure just below the summit of Torrejirka. The pool from which the *agua de la vida* is drawn is barely visible at the lower right; two of the surrounding ponds at the upper left.



Fig. 4, flat area just below the summit of Torrejirka. Pool from which *agua de la vida* is drawn is visible in foreground, irregular foundations of rectangular structure in middle ground and one of the ponds that surround the base in right background.