

REPORT

A CACHE OF 48 NASCA TROPHY HEADS FROM CERRO CARAPO, PERU

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The recent discovery of a cache of 48 Nasca severed heads provides archaeologists with the largest-known associated and provenienced corpus of this material. Although recovery of the skulls was conducted as a salvage operation and the wider spatial context of the find is still unknown, preliminary physical anthropological analysis of the skeletal material, along with archaeological comparison of the cache, provide valuable information on the nature and role of head-hunting in ancient Nasca society of the south coast of Peru.

Una ofrenda de 48 cabezas decapitadas Nasca recientemente descubierta viene a ser el corpus más grande de este material con asociación y procedencia conocida. Aunque se recuperaron los cráneos mediante una excavación de rescate y, por consiguiente, el contexto espacial mayor del hallazgo todavía se desconoce, el análisis antropológico físico preliminar del material óseo y la comparación arqueológica proveen una información valiosa sobre la naturaleza y el papel de la caza de cabezas en la antigua sociedad Nasca de la costa sur del Perú.

A common motif on Nasca pottery of the south coast of Peru is the portrayal of decapitated human heads with a hole in the frontal bone, a carrying cord emerging from that opening, and, sometimes, lips and/or eyes that are sealed with spines. Individual heads (e.g., Proulx 1968:Figure 18), multiple heads (e.g., Proulx 1968:Plate 21), and caches of multiple heads (e.g., Lapiner 1976:Figure 513; Tello 1959:Figure 123) appear on Nasca ceramic art. Actual Nasca skulls treated in the manner of the iconographic images are well known in the archaeological record. Traditionally, these skulls have been referred to as trophy heads (see, for example, Kroeber 1944:38; Proulx 1968; Roark 1965; Sawyer 1961; Schlesier 1959; Seler 1923; Uhle 1901). During the course of fieldwork in the Palpa Valley in the Río Grande de Nazca drainage we carried out a salvage excavation of a partially looted cache of 48 such skulls. This is the largest concentration of this class of remains thus far reported for Nasca and in the central Andes. In this article we describe this find and contextualize it within ancient Nasca society (ca. 100 B.C.–A.D. 700).

TROPHY HEADS OR RITUAL HEADS?

From as early as 2000 B.C. at the late preceramic site of Asia on the central coast (Engel 1963), decapitated individuals and bodiless skulls are present in the Andean archaeological record. Lumbreras (1974:80) discovered a ritual burial of five artificially deformed skulls at the Initial-period temple of Wichqana in Ayacucho. Actual decapitated heads as well as severed-head iconography occur at the Initial-period Shillacoto mound, in the eastern highlands near Kotosh (Izumi and Terada 1972:308; Izumi et al. 1972). Decapitated heads and mutilated body parts iconographically

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define the lithic frieze of the Initial-period temple of Cerro Sechín on the north coast (Tello 1956). During the Early Horizon, severed-head iconography is found on Chavín stone sculpture (Kauffmann Doig 1973:Figures 262 and 273). Interest in decapitated heads increased dramatically on the south coast at the end of the Early Horizon when this motif became a dominant iconographic theme on Paracas pottery and textiles (Dwyer 1979; Proulx 1971:17; Sawyer 1966:122). Decapitated heads are also an important element in Early Intermediate period Moche art (Donnan 1976) and Pucara art (Chávez 1992). They are well represented in Wari art of the Middle Horizon (Cook 1986). But nowhere and at no time in ancient Peru did severed-head iconography and actual head-hunting reach the apparent obsession of Nasca.

Not every severed Nasca head is a trophy head. Minimally there must be a hole in the frontal bone in order for a skull to be labeled a trophy head. That hole seems to be invariably associated with a deliberately widened foramen magnum. This was done to remove the soft tissue inside the cranium so as to attach the carrying cord. The lips and/or eyelids of the individual may or may not be sealed with cactus spines. Eye sockets may be stuffed with plainweave cotton cloth. When the flesh covering the skull is preserved, frequently it has been cut under the jaw, lifted, and stuffed with plainweave cotton cloth. Some ceramic portrayals of Nasca trophy heads are remarkably faithful to reality. An effigy vessel at the Art Institute of Chicago (Townsend 1985:Figure 14) shows the hole in the frontal bone, spine-sealed lips, the widened foramen magnum, and blood-covered flaps of skin pulled away from the neck. In Nasca art the depiction of a carrying cord and/or spine-sealed lips and/or eyes is sufficient to identify the motif as a trophy head.

The term "trophy head" was coined by Max Uhle (1901) who considered the depiction of severed heads in ancient Peruvian art to correspond to trophies of warfare. It was Uhle who first noted the similarity of Nasca severed heads to the shrunken Jivaro heads of lowland Ecuador in their similar use of spines to seal the eyes and mouth and the carrying cord that emerges from a small hole drilled into the forehead, though in ancient Peru heads were never reduced in size. Tello (1918) argued that in the Andes head-taking was a fundamental aspect of social organization, a surviving part of a system of beliefs from an earlier period of savagery that continued to have the force of an inherited religious tradition. He emphasized the head rather than the trophy aspect of trophy heads:

The head [was] a fetish or imbued with mysterious or magical powers or attributes that notably influenced the intellectual and affective life of prehistoric man. That is why it was so intensely and profoundly represented in the most outstanding manifestations of its art . . . and was subject to the powerful impulse of religion in its evolution [Tello 1918:33; translation by the authors] . . . The head was not a simple trophy. . . . The head was, above all, a religious symbol, a symbol of power; it was the most valued attribute of the gods. Maybe in its origin it was a simple trophy; but its use in Nasca and in Peru in general presents another, much more important aspect . . . in it were deposited the qualities of the beloved person [Tello 1918:57–58; translation by the authors].

Since Tello's time there has been considerable debate over the appropriateness of the trophy-head label for Nasca severed heads with a hole in the frontal bone. The debate centers on whether the heads were obtained as trophies of war or as memorabilia of nonconquest ritual practices. We feel that the term trophy head is so well established in the Nasca and general Peruvianist literature that it should not be changed. We use it in this article but discuss below the meaningful debate surrounding this term.

Donald Proulx (1989:82; see also Patterson 1986) believes that Nasca trophy heads "were obtained during warfare whose main purpose was territorial expansion and as such, are the heads of enemy combatants, whoever they might have been. The heads were not taken in ritual battles among the Nasca people . . . [although] the main purpose for removing the heads from war victims was ritual in nature." In contrast, Vera Coelho (1972) has emphasized the ritual aspect of the Nasca trophy heads. She considers the term "trophy head" a misnomer and has suggested that they be called "ritual heads," arguing that the head fulfilled a ritual and ceremonial function in Nasca society rather than being a by-product of secular warfare (see also Neira Avedaño and Coelho 1972–1973). Coelho's argument is based on the following facts and interpretations of them.

1. Nasca trophy heads include adult females and children as well as adult males. In a situation of warfare for conquest, Coelho expects the warriors to be male and the trophies taken to be male

as well. Nevertheless, we must note that the vast majority of reported heads are those of adult males as is the case in the Cerro Carapo cache.

2. Nasca trophy heads are found in Nasca cemeteries where they have been treated similarly to other, full-body Nasca burials in terms of grave goods and care of preparation. This ritual attitude, for Coelho, indicates intraethnic head-taking activity rather than warfare, which she sees as inter-ethnic.

3. A modeled ceramic trophy head can substitute for the real head of a decapitated Nasca individual buried in normal Nasca manner (on Nasca mortuary practices see Carmichael [1988] and Silverman [1993]). For Coelho this means that the activity of taking heads was confined to Nasca peoples.

4. Fine incisions were frequently cut with care into the scalps of various of the victims. These incisions contrast with the chaotic head wounds that would be received in the battlefield. Baraybar (1987) subsequently has suggested that these incisions were part of a bloodletting rite prior to the physical death of the individual.

Physical anthropologist Sonia Guillén (personal communication 1991) has offered an interpretation of the Nasca severed heads that complements Coelho's interpretation of them as objects of ritual. Guillén emphasizes that the ancient Nasca went to extraordinary lengths to conserve the skulls they took. She has argued forcefully to the authors that this behavior is compelling evidence that Nasca heads were an important element of an ancestor cult. In preparing the head, often an attempt was made to conserve its recognizable physiognomy. The eye sockets and cheeks were stuffed with cotton cloth, lips and sometimes eyes were sealed with cactus spines so as not to deform them, and mandibles were sewn together. Guillén argues that bloodletting and removal of the brain were necessary to mummify the head and thus preserve it. On the other hand, Neira Avedaño and Coelho (1972-1973:124) observed that one of the Nasca trophy heads from the Chaviña site in Acarí was drenched in blood, as if from the process of decapitation. But in contrast to Neira Avedaño and Coelho's observation, we may cite Carmichael and Konigsberg's (see Carmichael 1988:290-291, 349) determination that the head of the adult female in Kroeber's Nasca Grave Al 4 from Cahuachi had been torn off after the body had mummified. Clearly, Nasca heads were obtained by various means.

Guillén's interpretation of Nasca trophy heads as ancestor heads returns us to Tello's statement, quoted earlier, that, in these heads "were deposited the qualities of the beloved person." As such, Guillén's theory and the others offered in this section may not be mutually contradictory. We should not seek or propose a single, simple, lineal explanation of this complex phenomenon (see Needham [1976] for a similar cautionary note). We recognize that Nasca severed heads with holes in the frontal bone were treated in a highly ritualistic manner. Yet despite their participation in the same art style and cultural and religious tradition, Nasca people may have been organized in autonomous or semiautonomous communities; it is possible that the determining factor in head-taking was social alliance and nonalliance within the Nasca interaction sphere. Coelho's view of warfare is limited by the fact that she envisions only territorial battles and does not consider the well-documented ethnographic and ethnohistoric cases of competitive ritual battles in the Andes (Gorbak et al. 1962; Platt 1986:239-240; compare with the Aztec "flowery wars" [Davies 1977:96-98; Hassig 1988:128-130, 197, 256], which fulfilled ritual, military, and political functions). Of particular importance is the fact that, ethnographically, women as well as men could participate in these ritual battles, which could be extremely violent, indeed deadly (Platt 1986:239-240).

Coelho also ignores significant diachronic changes that occurred in Nasca head-taking. These changes are visible on the ground and in Nasca art. In Early Nasca times (Early Intermediate period 1-4, equivalent to Nasca ceramic phases 1-4 in a nine-phase Nasca stylistic sequence, ca. 100 B.C.-A.D. 400/500) trophy heads are not common (see below). The source of these Early Nasca trophy heads must be the headless Early Nasca skeletons reported in the literature (e.g., Doering 1966:143).

In Early Nasca pottery, trophy heads are found in the hands of supernatural agents such as the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (Proulx 1968:Figure 18), identified as a priest/ritual specialist/masked performer by Townsend (1985). Trophy heads are carried by the Killer Whale (Townsend

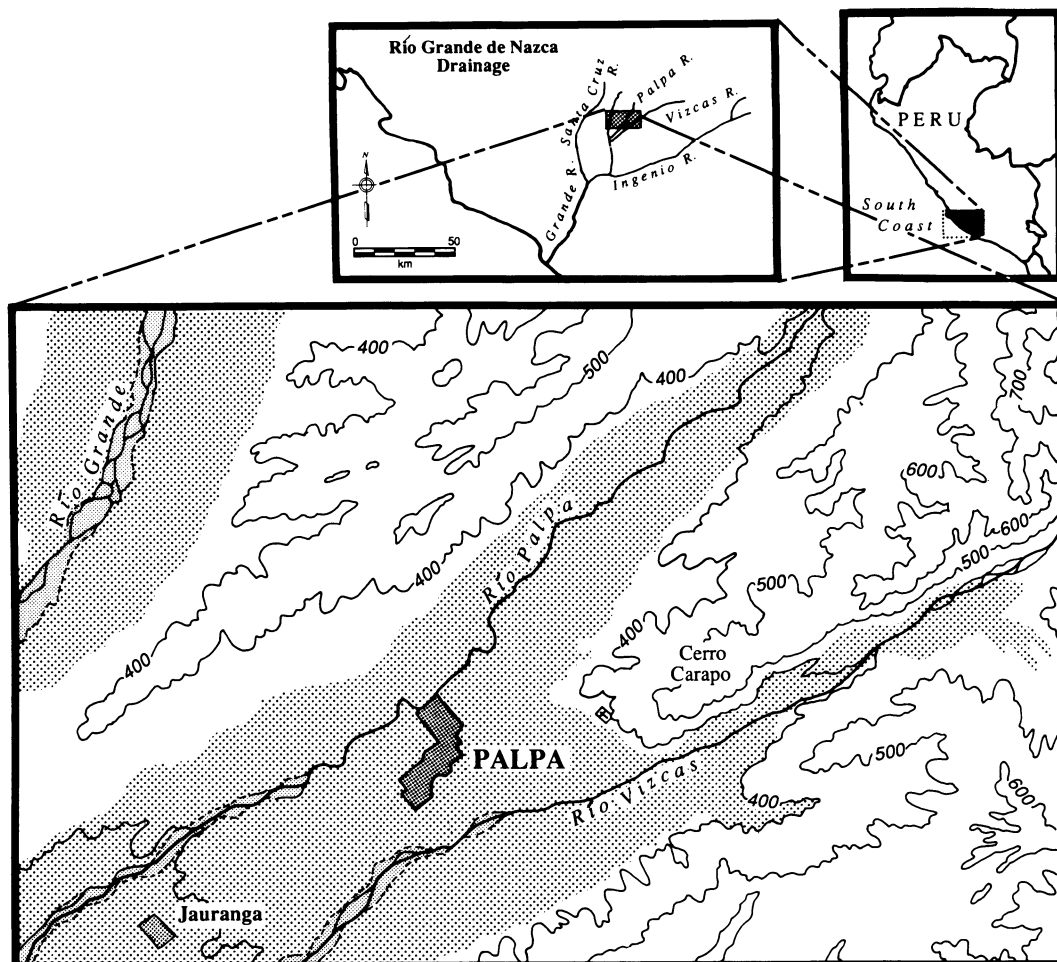


Figure 1. Location of the Palpa Valley and Cerro Carapo.

1985:Figure 18). The body of the Horrible Bird typically contains trophy heads (Wolfe 1981:Figure 69a); the Horrible Bird may also be shown devouring a human head or picking at a headless human body (Banco de Crédito 1986:160 top right, 176 top left). Harpy Birds are decorated with trophy heads (Wolfe 1981:Figures 123–126). Trophy heads also commonly occur as an independent theme on Early Nasca pots (Proulx 1968:Plate 21).

Early Nasca iconography shows an outstanding emphasis on themes concerning agricultural fertility (Proulx 1983). We believe that there is a relation among trophy heads, ancestors, and principles of cyclical death and regeneration/rebirth/fertility (cf. Proulx 1971, 1983, 1989) similar to the connection of trophy-head sacrifice to agricultural fertility and the marking of cyclical time that Gillespie (1991) has recently indicated for the mesoamerican ball game. In this light, we point to the substitutability of germinating beans and trophy heads in Paracas Necropolis iconography (which is intimately related to Early Nasca iconography) and to the conjunction of fertility celebrations and homages to the dead in traditional Andean society (see Allen 1988:165, 182; Harris 1982:57–58; Rasnake 1988:242).

Many Late Nasca (Early Intermediate period 6–7, the equivalent of Nasca ceramic phases 6–7, ca. A.D. 500–700) painted images vividly depict aggression among human actors (Roark 1965), and the actors appear to be Nasca people (e.g., Benson and Conklin 1981:67). Warriors are shown



Figure 2. Aerial photograph of Cerro Carapo. Courtesy of Tony Morrison and South American Pictures. Arrow points to site location just behind modern walled cemetery.

carrying trophy heads (e.g., Lapiner 1976:491) or are in close association with them (e.g., Banco de Crédito 1986:167). Also common in Late Nasca art are modeled portraiture of richly dressed “big men” or “leaders” who carry trophy heads in their hands or are in other direct association with them (e.g., Benson and Conklin 1981:64; Townsend 1985:Plate 4). In contrast to Early Nasca times when only supernaturals and ritualists are shown in association with trophy heads, Late Nasca iconography suggests that the prestige of the leaders of Late Nasca society was enhanced by successful head-hunting. Nevertheless, in view of the ritualistic treatment Late Nasca trophy heads continued to receive, it can be argued that the head was still imbued with sacred qualities and supernatural power—attributes now manipulated by the Late Nasca leaders, equivalent to what Demarest (1984: 237) calls “personal legitimation.”

SITE P538 AT CERRO CARAPO

The trophy-head cache excavated by the authors was registered as Site P538 in accordance with Browne’s numbering system for his Palpa Valley survey (see Browne 1992; Browne and Baraybar 1988). It is located just above the modern cemetery of the town of Palpa on a small, relatively flat, southwest-facing terrace at the foot of Cerro Carapo, a hill that commands a magnificent panorama of the combined flood plains of the Palpa and Vizcas rivers (Figures 1 and 2). The northern edge of the site is bordered by a narrow, shallow *quebrada*. The west edge is a low scarp, while to the south and east rise the moderately steep, dissected south slopes of Cerro Carapo (Figure 3). Old and recent looters’ holes pockmark this surface. To the east is a series of artificial terraces with

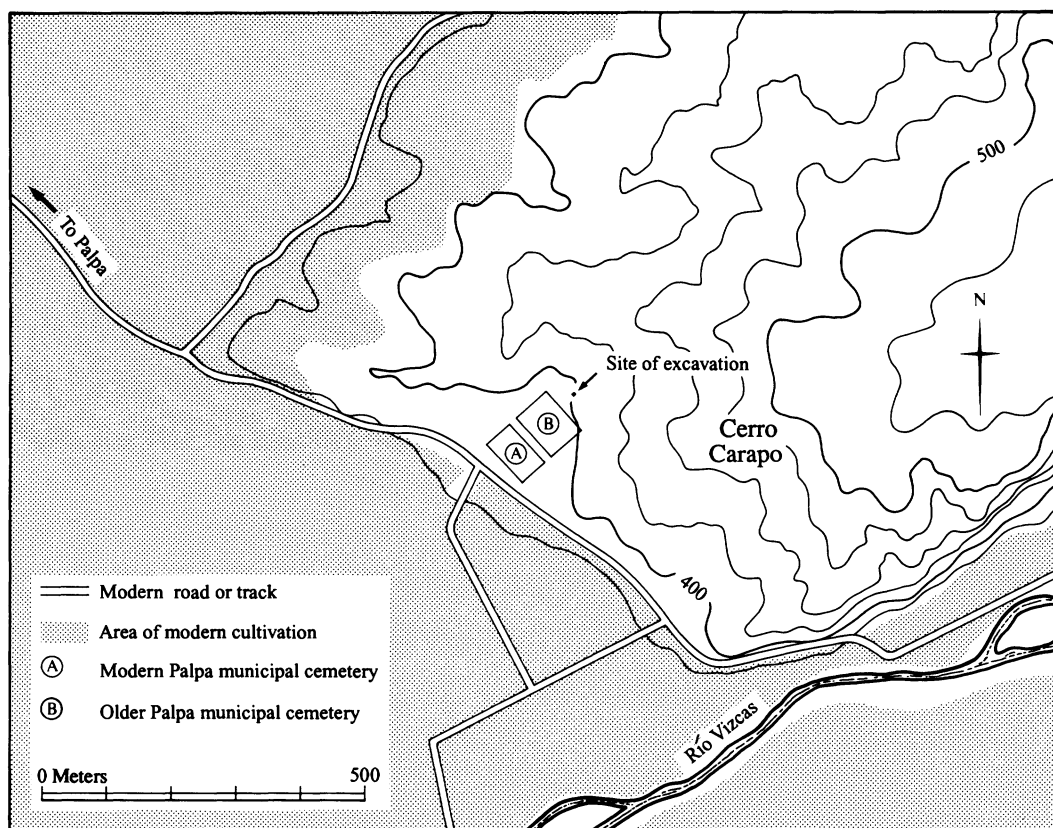


Figure 3. Location of the Cerro Carapo site showing topographic setting.

associated Late Intermediate period ceramics. The south face of Cerro Carapo, on which the trophy-head cache was located, is covered with more than 500 habitation terraces associated mostly with Nasca 1 pottery (Figure 2). The trophy-head cache is intrusive into this context. Late Intermediate period sherds were identified on the surface and in the sides of deep trenches excavated by looters within the modern cemetery. A small number of Nasca 5 sherds were also observed on the surface near Site P538.

The cache was discovered through the activity of looters who partially destroyed the cache. Upon our intervention, the jumbled remains of 15 skulls lay around the hole the looters had made (Figure 4). Each of these skulls had a hole in the frontal bone and exhibited artificial deformation of the frontal-occipital type associated with Nasca culture (see Weiss 1962). Careful examination of the sides of the looters' hole revealed the presence of at least two more skulls in situ. This prompted our salvage operation.

The looters' hole in which the cache was found measured 1 m (north-south) by 1.2 m (east-west) and was about 1 m deep prior to excavation. A 3-x-4-m trench was defined around the pit. This excavation unit was subsequently extended at its southeast corner when Burial 1 was found. A further extension to the northwest was added to define the full extent of the context of the skulls. Figure 5 presents a plan of the excavation unit. The excavation was directed by David M. Browne.

Description of the Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy (Figure 6) encountered above the cache of skulls is described below in the order in which it was excavated.



Figure 4. Site P538 prior to excavation. Trophy heads from the looted cache lie on the surface.

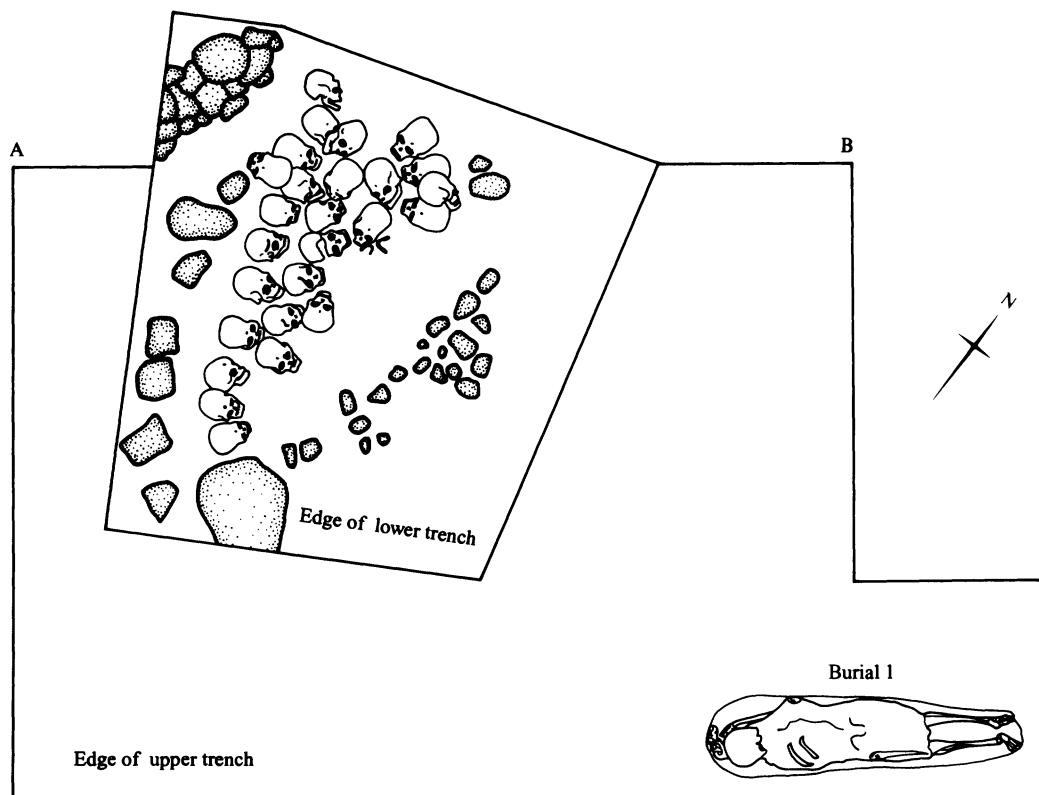
Level 1. Level 1 was a shallow (.04 m) surface deposit dipping gently northeast–southwest. It consisted of small angular and subangular stones, a few larger rocks, many small fragments of vegetal fiber, and goat and cow excrement in a matrix of loose, light brown silty soil. Also incorporated in the deposit were 10 Nasca 1, one Nasca 5, one Nasca 4 or 5, and 53 undatable potsherds, human bone fragments, pieces of textile, and two mother-of-pearl fragments.

Level 2. Level 2 lay conformably under Level 1 and over Levels 3 and 4, dipping gently northeast–southwest. It consisted of a deposit .04–.12 m deep of gravel in a matrix of brown silty soil. Associated with the main constituents of the layer were 40 Nasca 1 sherds, one probably Nasca 5 sherd, 22 Nasca sherds that could not be assigned to a particular phase, one Late Intermediate period sherd, a fragment of a Late Intermediate period female figurine, five panpipe sherds, two ceramic spindle whorls, a piece of plainweave cloth, a tuft of wool, a gourd fragment, bits of mother-of-pearl, plant remains (peanut, charred corn), shells (sea urchin, snail, *Choromytilus* sp.), tiny slivers of bone, and goat and guinea pig excrement. Level 2 was the product of modern activity on a surface littered with ancient materials, probably derived from neighboring slopes and cast up by looting.

Levels 3 and 4. Levels 3 and 4 were excavation subdivisions of an essentially single deposit between .08 and .14 m deep. They lay conformably under Level 2 and over Level 5, dipping gently northeast–southwest. Organic material (cane and carbonized wood) was concentrated in clumps within the general matrix of the layer, which was a loose brown to gray soil mixed with brown and white sand and gravel. In places the surface of the deposit formed a hard patch of calcareous sandy silt. Within the deposit were found one Ocucaje 10, five Nasca 1, and 19 Nasca potsherds not assignable as to phase, a fragment of marine shell, and small scraps of cotton textile and thread.

Levels 3 and 4 were excavated over three-quarters of the area of the trench but left undisturbed in the southwest corner. Upon removal of the deposit in the southeast corner a burial (Burial 1) was encountered excavated into the surface of Level 5. Levels 3 and 4 appeared to be the product of natural agencies acting on the surface of the terrace and its adjacent slopes.

Burial 1. The body (Figures 5 and 7) lay in a subtrapezoidal, concave-profiled shallow depression measuring 1.5 m long by .4 m wide at the shoulders, .24 m wide at the feet, and with a maximum depth of .15 m. The head of the individual was pointing to the southwest. The body was buried



A-B Line of stratigraphic profile

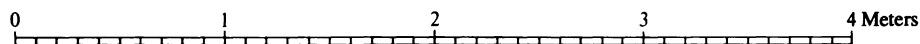


Figure 5. Plan of the excavation unit showing positions of the head cache and Burial 1. The lower trench dug to excavate the area of the skulls was expanded to the west and southwest after the stratigraphic section (see Figure 6) had been drawn.

face down with its lower limbs extended. The left arm was flexed with the hand laid against the right cheek and temple, while the right arm was flexed away from the body with the right hand covering the stomach region. The individual had been wrapped in a plainweave cloth covering all the body down to the knees. Preservation of the bones was very good, and its head hair and some pubic hair survived. A skein of green thread and a sling lay very close to the left hand at the crown of the head. We interpret these items as an offering. One cotton seed was found in the fill by the right side of the head, and a small amount of llama excrement was scattered in the pit fill. The date of this burial is unknown other than that it was found under Levels 3/4 and was excavated into Level 5. Analysis of the burial to establish sex, age, and possible cause of death is pending.

Level 5. Level 5 lay conformably under Levels 3 and 4 and over Levels 6 and 7, dipping northeast to southwest. Burial 1 was dug into the surface of this level. The deposit varied in thickness from .05 to .2 m. It consisted of whitish coarse sand and gravel associated with a few large waterworn stones. Within the deposit were found six Nasca 1 and 31 Nasca sherds unassignable to phase, two fragments of panpipes, and a small piece of a human skull. The deposit appeared to be the product of natural agencies.

There is no evidence from Levels 5 to 1 to suggest sequential cultural activity on the site such as would aid us in dating or speculating about the precise context of the burial of the trophy heads described below.

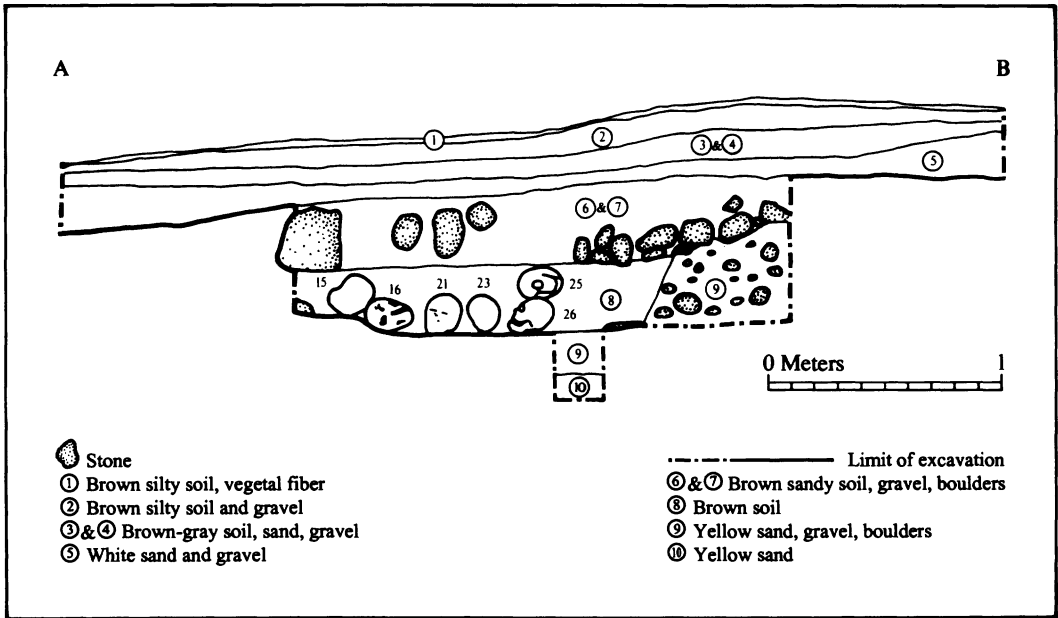


Figure 6. Stratigraphic section of the site.

Levels 6 and 7. Levels 6 and 7 were vertical excavation subdivisions of the same deposit, which was between .18 and .33 m thick and consisted of rounded boulders (generally fist to head sized but with a few larger rocks up to .6 m in diameter) in a matrix of very sandy brown soil with gravel. The levels were excavated only around the looters' hole that revealed the skulls and lay under Level 5 and over Levels 8 and 9. Part of the deposit over the site of the skulls had been removed by looters. Within the deposit were four Nasca 1, one Nasca 5, and 17 Nasca potsherds not assignable to phase, the remains of a small rodent, a small fragment of plain cloth, two small slivers of bone, and llama droppings.

Levels 6 and 7 are interpreted by the authors as a deliberate deposition to cover the site of the cache of trophy heads (Figure 8); in other words, it was the final act in the ritual associated with their burial (compare to the iconography of two Nasca 7 vessels published by Tello [1959:Figure 123] and Lapiner [1976:Figure 513] on which are portrayed caches of multiple trophy heads resting on plain cloth within stepped mounds; white-masked and unmasked human actors participate in some form of seemingly ritual activity). The deposit was heaped over the site of the cache immediately after the infilling of the trophy-head pit. Therefore, the latest pottery found in this deposit gives the date at, or after which, the operation took place. The latest pottery found was a diagnostic Nasca 5 sherd (Figure 9). Therefore, the authors consider the cache to date to either Nasca 5 or later in the Nasca sequence. This argument would only be invalidated were it to be demonstrated that the Nasca 5 sherd was a later intrusion, but the excavators consider that the sherd was integrally associated with Levels 6/7. The presence of numerous Nasca 1 sherds in several deposits has no bearing on the date of the cache as they are rubbish survivals from the adjacent Nasca 1 habitation site (see Browne 1992:95).

The Trophy-Head Pit. Excavation demonstrated that the cache of trophy heads had been deposited in a large pit dug into a natural layer of sand, gravel, and boulders (Level 9) (Figures 5, 8, and 10). The pit was oval in plan, measuring 1.9 m (north-south) by 1.0 m (east-west) and .3 m deep. The sides were steeply sloping and the base flat. The long axis was oriented closely north-south. Browne feels that because of the disturbance by looters, it is not possible to decide definitively whether or not the pit sides were partially stone lined. He feels they probably were not and that the image portrayed in Figure 10 is misleading. Silverman disagrees and sees the large rocks forming the outline of a cist into which the trophy heads were deposited.



Figure 7. Burial 1.

Level 8. Level 8 lay under Levels 6 and 7 and completely filled the pit dug to contain the trophy heads. It lay over and between the heads. It consisted of brown, semicompacted soil and a very small number of stones but no cultural material. Level 8 was the primary fill of the cache pit to conceal the trophy heads.

Levels 9 and 10. Level 9 was a naturally derived deposit of yellow sand, gravel, and boulders about .55 m deep into which the pit containing the trophy heads was dug. It lay over Level 10, a naturally derived coarse, compact yellow sand that was not excavated below a depth of .1 m.

The Trophy Heads

Twenty-six complete skulls were found in situ on the west side of the cache pit; two additional mandibles (Numbers 28–29) also were found in situ (Figure 8). Looters had removed the 15 skulls found on the surface prior to excavation from most of the east half of the pit. During further clearing work in another looters' hole immediately northwest of the main looters' hole, another five skulls were found. We think these may have been deposited originally at the north end of the trophy-head arrangement. On the basis of these observations we estimate that originally the cache contained no fewer than 48 heads.

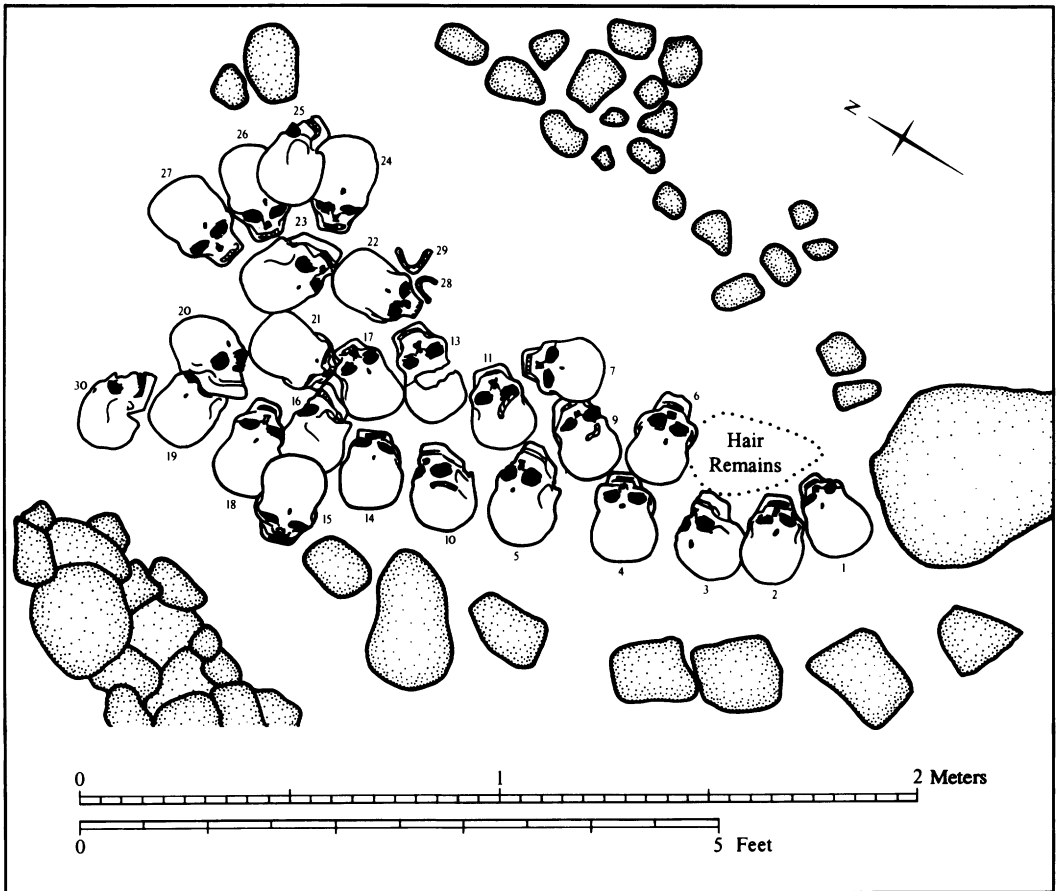


Figure 8. Plan of the excavated trophy-head cache. Note that the numbers 8 and 12 were not assigned to any of the skulls excavated in situ. The count of no fewer than 48 skulls is unaffected by this field procedure.

Arrangement. Except in two cases (Numbers 15 and 25), no head was laid over another. The general arrangement appears to have been in two concentric rings with the faces looking inward (see Figures 8 and 10). Apparent deviation from this pattern is probably the result of later displacement through the settlement of the superimposed soil and boulders over the skulls (see, for example, Numbers 7, 16, 20 and 23). Below the skulls was a very thin (.01–.02 m) deposit of clean yellow sand forming a very even surface. This may represent either a careful preparation of the base of the pit by sweeping the natural deposit or a deliberate deposition of clean material prior to the placement of the skulls.

Preservation. The in situ skulls were in a good state of preservation. All had some traces of hair, or there were hair impressions in the mud attached to the cranium. Between Skulls 1 and 5 a mat of hair was preserved on top of the clean sand surface below the skulls, and elsewhere other portions of hair were also encountered.

In three cases (Numbers 9–11) braided fiber rope was protruding from the hole in the frontal bone of the skull. These were the remains of suspension cords, and associated with them were small wooden crossmembers around which the cords were tied on the inside of the skull, thereby securing them to the skull. A fragment of carbonized wood was recovered from between Skulls 18 and 19.

When the deposit at the base of the skulls was encountered, it was found to consist of silt and cracked mud indicating that water had entered the pit at some stage. This accounts for the lack of



Figure 9. Nasca 5 sherd from deposit sealing the trophy-head cache. The sherd is part of a bowl painted in the Bizarre Innovation style (Blagg 1975:42-49; Roark 1965:25-26), and the motif belongs to the category of "Surrounded Faces" (see Roark 1965:Plate X, Figure 47).

preservation of soft tissue and some hair: when deposited the skulls were covered with skin, which then deteriorated away over time.

Characteristics of the Skulls. All crania exhibit frontal-occipital cranial deformation; the degree of deformation varies from slight to pronounced (Figure 11). Each has a hole in the frontal bone for the carrying cords; these holes vary from a clean circular form to holes with jagged edges (Figure 12). The base of the skull of each head is always damaged, presumably to remove the brain (Figure 13). The damage varies in neatness. We interpret these differences as indicating that more than one person was involved in preparing the skulls. Physical anthropologist John Verano (1990), who briefly



Figure 10. Close-up view of the trophy-head cache.

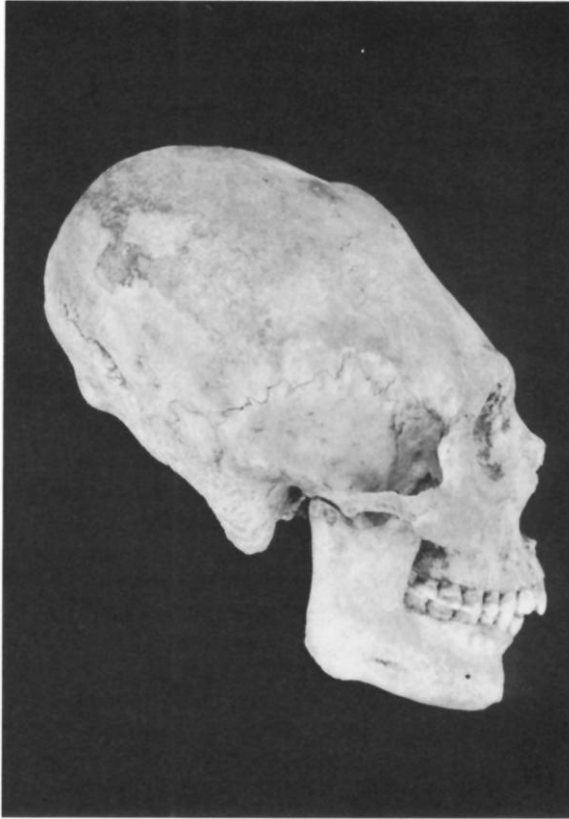


Figure 11. Pronounced cranial deformation on a Cerro Carapo skull.

examined the skulls in 1989, observed extensive cut marks or butchering marks on the faces of the skulls (Figure 14). He interprets the marks as evidence for flaying and subsequent refitting of the skin over the skull.

The skulls do not show sun-bleaching (Verano 1990). We believe that this means that before being deposited in the cache the skulls were probably not kept outside or they were protected from sunlight. The teeth show postmortem spalling of the enamel, probably as a result of the skulls being moved around which, in turn, suggests that they were not immediately buried upon being taken from their originally living owners (Verano 1990). Yet although the skulls were kept around for some time before being deposited they do not show patina (Verano 1990). This suggests that they were not handled a great deal.

Verano (1990) has determined that all except one of the skulls are from adult males between 20 and 45 years of age; they were all robust individuals with good muscle attachments. The exceptional skull belonged to an individual of indeterminable sex, between 12 and 15 years old.

There is almost no evidence for how the individuals met their death. Only one skull showed a perimortem injury that could have led to death (Verano 1990). It was made by a blunt object on the occipital bone that compressed the inside of the skull and could have caused a brain hemorrhage; but there is just a slight surface fracture. Two skulls exhibited depressed fractures that had healed (Verano 1990).

We argue that the skulls belonged to Nasca people on the basis of the kind of cranial deformation displayed, the treatment of the skulls as Nasca trophy heads (i.e., the hole in the frontal bone and the carrying cords), and the fact that the cache intruded into a Nasca 1 habitation site and was sealed by a stratum containing a Nasca 5 sherd. But, because the skulls were recovered in a limited

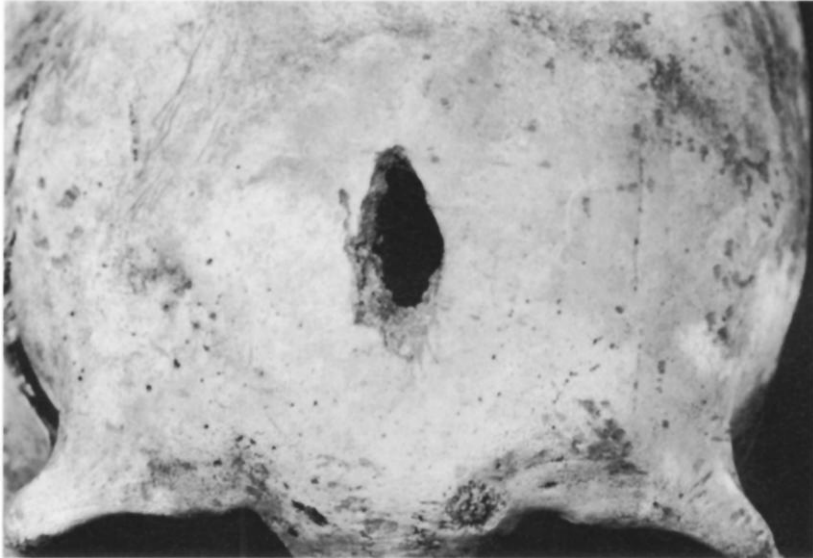


Figure 12. Hole in the frontal bone of a Cerro Carapo skull.

salvage operation, we know little about their specific context. When political conditions in Peru improve, we plan to expand the excavation on Cerro Carapo so as to recover more information on this matter. Nevertheless, the cache is significant for it is the largest associated and scientifically excavated grouping of trophy heads known from Precolumbian Peru.

COMPARISON OF THE CERRO CARAPO CACHE TO OTHER NASCA TROPHY HEAD FINDS

In addition to the cache from Cerro Carapo, Nasca trophy heads have been recovered in Acarí (Coelho 1972; Lothrop and Mahler 1957; Neira Avedaño and Coelho 1972–1973), Ica (Proulx 1989: 73), and elsewhere in the Río Grande de Nazca drainage (e.g., Kroeber 1956:357; Kroeber and Collier ca. 1960; Tello 1918) including at Cahuachi where they have been recorded by A. L. Kroeber (Kroeber and Collier ca. 1960), William Duncan Strong (1952, 1957), Heinrich Ubbelohde Doering (1958, 1966), and Helaine Silverman (Silverman 1993). The contexts and dates of Nasca trophy heads differ.

Early Nasca trophy heads are not common, at least not as reported in the archaeological literature. The limited sample suggests that most Early Nasca trophy heads occur in the context of burials. For example, in a burial at Cantalloc, in the Nazca Valley, Kroeber recovered the trophy head of an unsexed juvenile eight to nine years old, accompanied by a variety of grave goods datable to Nasca 2 (Carmichael 1988:482). There was no other occupant of the tomb. At Majoro Chico, also in the Nazca Valley, Kroeber excavated a Nasca 3 burial consisting of a secondary “bundle” interment of an old adult male in association with an adult male trophy and “a number of other intrusions” (Carmichael 1988:482). Kroeber (Kroeber and Collier ca. 1960) also recovered several trophy heads during his excavation of Nasca 3 burials on Mound A at Cahuachi. Kroeber’s Grave Al 4 contained the skeleton of an adult female that was intact except for the head which was missing. Carmichael and Konigsberg (Carmichael 1988:290–291, 349) determined that the head was torn off after the body had mummified. Carmichael (1988:291) has concluded that “headless bodies were not always the result of fresh kills” and that “trophy heads may have been acquired and revered in a variety of ways.” Kroeber described his Grave Al 9 as a “nest of three trophy heads, side by side” found at 15 cm beneath the surface. One trophy head belonged to a child with “milk dentition.” Another belonged to a young woman whose wisdom teeth had not erupted. The other head belonged



Figure 13. The foramen magnum of the Cerro Carapo skulls was expanded to remove the brain.

to a middle-aged man whose teeth show wear. The woman's and man's heads each had a hole in the frontal bone and an enlarged foramen magnum. All three skulls had jaws and occiputs. Kroeber described the position of each skull as looking "somewhat up" and facing southeast.

Doering (1966:143) reported on an "unusual early Nasca grave" that he excavated near Cahuachi in 1932. In it, the "body lay on its side wrapped in a gauze cloth and was first thought to be that of a child. Closer examination showed it in fact to be the contracted figure of a full-grown man who had been beheaded. His turban of red cord was wound not round a head but round the top of the vertebral column; a cloth had been draped over it to give the appearance of a head."

Kowta (1987:66) reported that a line of five cooking vessels, each containing a trophy head wrapped in cloth, was found along a wall in a room at Tambo Viejo in Acari. He stated that the vessels and their contents were contemporary with the original use of the rooms, which would date them to Early Intermediate period 2-3. The Tambo Viejo find is reminiscent of Feature 24 at Cahuachi (see below).

Silverman (1993) recovered two trophy heads at Cahuachi, one of which dates to after Nasca 3 and the other to Nasca 5 or later. The first, Feature 24, was placed in a corner between two walls in an area of architecture called the Lower Eastern Rooms at the base of the small Unit 19 mound. The head was wrapped in a plainweave textile and covered with large sherds from a sooted utilitarian vessel. The skull belonged to an adult male. The eyes, eyebrows, beard, and moustache were present. The dark, straight hair was elaborately braided. The skin was preserved but brittle. The scalp exhibited a series of deliberate incisions made with a sharp instrument. The tongue had been removed. The lips were sealed with two splinters. A carrying cord emerged through a hole in the



Figure 14. Cut marks on the face of one of the Cerro Carapo skulls.

frontal bone. The cheeks were stuffed with plainweave cotton cloth. The head exhibited frontal-occipital cranial deformation. The other head, Feature 21, had been placed in a cist excavated into the uppermost floor of a room (Room 1) at the top of the Unit 19 mound. The skull was wrapped in a plainweave cotton cloth and faced north. The large, heavy skull belonged to a young adult male. The skin was preserved; it was leathery in texture and copper in color. The hair was dark and straight. There were no eyebrows, eyelashes, beard, or moustache. The dentition was not worn. All teeth were present. The mandible was tied to the zygomatic arch with cord. The cheeks were stuffed with plainweave cotton cloth. The eyeballs had been removed and the orbital cavities were filled with plainweave textile. The foramen magnum had been enlarged to extract the brain and insert a wooden crosspiece around which the carrying rope was tied. That rope emerged through a small hole in the frontal bone. The lips were pinned together with two splinters. The head exhibited typical Nasca frontal-occipital cranial deformation.

Strong's Burial 12 from Burial Area 1 at Cahuachi (see Strong 1957:Figure 4) probably dates to Nasca 5 or 6, as all other burials in this locus date to that period. The burial is not actually a grave but a large globular vessel with a conical bottom. Immediately to the southwest of the vessel there was a trophy head. Nasca trophy heads are known to have been placed within plainware vessels (e.g., Coelho 1972:180–181) and can be covered with fragments of them (e.g., the Feature 24 trophy head described above). Strong's trophy head and the ceramic vessel may be associated because in the gravel that filled the vessel a tooth, a quantity of hair, and 2 small skull fragments were recovered.

Strong's Burial 14 at Cahuachi, dating to Nasca 5, consisted of an adult male, about 20 years old, who was seated cross-legged (Strong 1952:Entry 234). His head was bent forward and was not attached to the spinal column. The head had been treated as a trophy head for a hole was cut in the frontal bone and part of the occipital had been removed.

Eleven Nasca trophy heads, dating to Early Intermediate period epoch 4 or 5 on the basis of a published radiocarbon date of A.D. 450 ± 70 (Neira Avedaño and Coelho 1972–1973:142) and stratigraphic evidence (see below), were recovered at Chaviña in the Acarí valley by Máximo Neira Avedaño and Vera Coelho (1972–1973; Coelho 1972). Neira Avedaño and Coelho (1972–1973: 109; translation by the authors) described the skulls as “simple burials wrapped in coarse cloth and associated with offerings such as remains of guinea pig and peanuts.” Six of the skulls were placed in pits excavated into the floor of an Early Nasca adobe wall. They are therefore intrusive into the Early Nasca context. The placing of the trophy heads in a cist excavated into the floor of the wall

is reminiscent of Feature 21 at Cahuachi. The covering of two of the Chaviña trophy heads with sherds from utilitarian vessels is reminiscent of Feature 24 at Cahuachi. Two skulls had been placed in cooking vessels located alongside the wall with the bases of the vessels broken deliberately so as to rest directly on the floor. Two cloth-wrapped skulls rested on the floor alongside the wall. The final trophy head lay in the loose sand above the floor. The 11 trophy heads were covered by a midden containing Late Nasca pottery and a decorated gourd fragment in the style of the later Nasca ceramic phases (Neira Avedaño and Coelho 1972–1973:140). The trophy heads date to some time between the Early Nasca context into which they intrude and the Late Nasca context that covers them.

Doering (1958, 1966:142) excavated an elaborate Nasca 8 tomb at Cahuachi. The head and upper body of the male occupant of the tomb were missing. At the front of the tomb, in the corners and lying over maize cobs, were nine trophy heads with plaited hair. Two of the trophy heads rested on a bed of coca leaves. It is significant that this is a cache of multiple trophy heads in the apparent possession of a single adult male. With the exception of this find and the Cerro Carapo cache, most Nasca trophy heads occur singly.

Pezzia (1969:145) mentioned a looted cemetery at Jumana in the lower Nazca Valley where he recovered six trophy heads in association with a Nasca 8 pot that itself was decorated with representations of trophy heads.

In summary, we see that Late Nasca trophy heads occur in various contexts. One is in association with architecture as when deposited in a cist excavated into a floor or covered by sherds and placed alongside a wall. They may also be placed in a utilitarian vessel. Another context of Late Nasca trophy heads is as an element or grave good in a burial. In addition, Late Nasca decapitated bodies are known. Lothrop and Mahler (1957), for instance, report that in Cist 3 at Chaviña the body of a decapitated male was found; a turban-wrapped gourd had been placed where his head ought to have been. The interchangeability of head and gourd is well documented in the world ethnographic literature (see, e.g., Harner 1972:144–148).

The Cerro Carapo cache differs from the finds discussed above in terms of the number of skulls present and their arrangement. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Cerro Carapo cache was associated with a burial or architecture, although we recognize the need to expand the excavation so as to recover the full context of this find.

THE CERRO CARAPO CACHE IN THE CONTEXT OF ANCIENT NASCA SOCIETY

Early Nasca interest in trophy heads and head-hunting occurred during the apogee of Early Nasca society, a social formation that overtly emphasized ritual and religious sanction as its means of cultural (social, political, economic) integration (Silverman 1988, 1993). The ceremonial focus of this cultural florescence and integration was the great ritual and pilgrimage center of Cahuachi in the Nazca Valley (Silverman 1988, 1993). There is little or no archaeological evidence of territorial conquest in Early Nasca times (Silverman 1993; cf. Massey 1986; Rowe 1963) and internecine warfare probably was not the source of the rare Early Nasca trophy heads and headless bodies found in Early Nasca cemeteries (cf. Proulx 1989). Rather, they appear to be the result of some kind(s) of ritual activity, still to be defined more precisely. Carmichael (1988:183) estimates that approximately 5 percent of the Nasca population lost their heads. Although infrequent among human actors, head-hunting appears to have been a relatively common activity among the Nasca supernatural agents portrayed on ceramic art.

The Nasca archaeological record—in art and on the ground—strongly suggests that there was a change in trophy-head activity between Early and Late Nasca times. With the abandonment in Nasca 4 times of Cahuachi as the major cult and cultural center of Early Nasca society, head-hunting activity increased in frequency, and an equally notable change in the context of trophy-head representation occurred in Late Nasca art as militaristic themes, rather than supernatural ones, came to be emphasized (Roark 1965). The apparently real increase in the amount/frequency of head-hunting activity between Early and Late Nasca times remains to be explained by scholars.

In the possible ritual bleeding prior to or immediately after death (Baraybar 1987), meticulous

preparation, and careful placement of Nasca trophy heads, we see evidence strongly suggestive of an offering/sacrificial function. The documentation of king capture and sacrifice among the Classic Lowland Maya city-states (e.g., Schele and Miller 1986) is an example of how such acts of formalized aggression could have served both ritual and politics (see also Boone 1984; Davies 1977:96–98; Hassig 1988:128–130, 197, 256). Demarest (1984:228) specifically highlights the critical role played by captive-taking and sacrifice for status enhancement and achievement of political power. Perhaps the Late Nasca leaders were trying to consolidate the personal gains they achieved through trophy head-taking (as manifested, for instance, in the ceramic portraits of richly attired, trophy-head-bearing leaders) into effective social power.

Also, increased interest in head-taking and head conservation in Late Nasca times, as part of an ancestor cult, could reflect a perceived need to assert and affirm, on the basis of kinship, claims to territory and resources (material as well as social and ideological) in an increasingly circumscribed setting. Such a competitive landscape could have generated the warfare/ritual battles portrayed in Late Nasca art.

Nasca trophy-head activity appears to have fulfilled various functions. At the same time, it is important to remember that Nasca trophy-head activity was not static over the centuries. Dynamic social and political changes in Nasca culture occurred over time and are reflected in Nasca iconography and in the situational context and distribution of real trophy heads. Trophy head-taking was an important element of Nasca ritual life. In Late Nasca times it also appears to have played a tangible social and political role for the iconography suggests that increased status and social position were gained by successful headhunters or, following Sonia Guillén, head conservators. Despite diachronic changes in the nature of Nasca trophy-head activity, long-term symbolic integrity and continuity were preserved. The trophy head remained an object of immense importance, ritual power, and sanctity, and Nasca head-hunting is congruent with the warfare, ritual battles, and sacrificial practices found in other ancient complex societies (and well documented in the Andes).

The Cerro Carapo cache clearly pertains to Nasca people. It dates to Nasca 5 times or later, ca. A.D. 500 or later; more excavation and radiocarbon assays on recovered organic materials are needed to precisely date the find. By virtue of its size the Cerro Carapo cache offers some of the best available evidence for understanding the prevalent ancient Nasca custom of head-hunting. We are particularly interested in determining who lost whose heads and why. Did it depend on the cultural definition of local and foreign populations? We recognize the need to take more measurements and examine more traits on these skulls, particularly insofar as physiognomy, dental wear, and variants of cranial deformation are concerned. We also are keenly interested in running DNA tests on the extant tissue adhering to some of the skulls to see if the degree of genetic relatedness among these individuals can be determined. Until such time as further excavation and analysis can be conducted we offer this report as an addition to the literature on this noteworthy practice.

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