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REPORT FOR STAHL FOUNDATION ABOUT THE PAST FOUR YEARS OF RESEARCH ON THE TARACO PENINSULA, BOLIVIA

Stahl Field Report 2015

Archaeological Research Facility, UC Berkeley
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Christine Hastorf initiated archaeological field research in 1992 on the Taraco Peninsula, naming the long-term project the Taraco Archaeological Project (TAP). The project initially was interested in an understanding of the processes that lead to the formation of the Tiwanaku state. Since 1990 there has been more active research focused on the Titicaca Basin Formative and into the Tiwanaku Middle Horizon. A large number of researchers have advanced our understanding of the social processes in the Titicaca Basin human history. The Taraco Peninsula is a modest spit of land (approximately 100 square kilometers in area) projecting into the Bolivian portion of Lake Titicaca (Figure 1). The spine of the peninsula is formed by the Lomas de Taraco, a low range of hills dropping down to the lake on both sides (Argollo et al 1996). Politically, today the peninsula is located within Canton Taraco, Ingavi Province, in the Department of La Paz, Bolivia. It lies approximately 80 km due west of the city of La Paz. The Taraco Archaeological

Project has been a participant in the recent wave of research activity. In seven field seasons, between 1992 and 2006, TAP completed research with excavations at the site of Chiripa. This work was designed to provide a baseline cultural and ceramic chronology for the southern Titicaca Basin, to identify the key social, economic, ideological and political processes taking place during the Formative as well as to explore the architectural extent of the settlement. Our work at Chiripa has resulted in a detailed sequence of ritual architecture spanning the Early and Middle Formative periods, and has elucidated the origins and early development of the sunken court architectural form and the Yaya Mama Religious Tradition (Chavéz 1988; Hastorf ed. 1999; Bandy 1999; Hastorf 2003). Between 2003–2009 TAP focused on a second site, Kala Uyuni, where the later Formative times was present. These two phases have produced information on the early development of Titicaca Basin agriculture and subsistence as well as political and social changes (Bruno 2009; Whitehead 2007; Bruno and Whitehead 2003). Equally importantly, Lee Steadman, the project ceramicist, has produced a robust chronology of Early and Middle Formative period ceramics that is now used by all projects in the southern basin (Steadman 1999, 2004).

After the Chiripa excavations in 1998–1999, Matthew Bandy completed a systematic settlement survey of the Taraco Peninsula, presented in his dissertation (Bandy 2001). Using Steadman's ceramic chronology, Bandy was able to document the Taraco Peninsula settlement system from 1500 BC through the Spanish conquest.

Significantly, TAP is one of the first projects in the Titicaca Basin that was able to subdivide the Formative period into relatively fine-grained chronological units, which was first outlined in the Chiripa ceramics (see Lemuz 2001 for another chronologically fine-grained settlement analysis).

Steadman's ceramic chronology, applied in the context of regional pedestrian survey, permitted us to study changes and transformations within the Formative period at a regional scale.

The Middle Formative settlement system on the Taraco Peninsula was dominated by four major villages, each with a population of about 400 persons. Together, these four villages accounted for more than half the total population of the peninsula at the time. Chiripa was one of the major villages, and Kala Uyuni was another. Each of these villages appears to have been politically independent. Three of them, at least, had their own ceremonial precincts with sunken courts. All shared a common political culture, of which the Yaya Mama Religious Tradition is the material expression. The Middle Formative phase may therefore be characterized as a series of autonomous villages, with no evidence of regional political hierarchies or the domination of one settlement by another. The archaeological site of Kala Uyuni is located on the south side of the peninsula, indicated on Figure 1. It was recorded by Bandy in his survey of the Taraco Peninsula. After that investigation, supported by the National Science Foundation, TAP then returned to Chiripa to complete more work on the site in 2006 and 2012, addressing questions of social change, architectural rebuilding, and landscape impacts.



Figure 1: The southern Titicaca Basin with the Taraco Peninsula

The Taraco Peninsula appears to have a more concentrated population history than other parts of the Titicaca Basin. In the Early Formative phase (2000–800 BCE) the population density on the Taraco Peninsula has been estimated to be more than 8 persons per square kilometer, whereas the Juli–Pomata area at the same time (for example) had a population density of roughly 1 person per square kilometer (Bandy 2001: 104).

The settlement dynamic of the Early Formative phase was fundamentally structured by the process of village fissioning and separation. Bandy has documented that during this time these villages held about 150 persons. Upon reaching this critical population size, the villages would split into smaller villages (Bandy 2004). In the Late Chiripa phase, however, around 800 BC, villages ceased fissioning and began to grow to larger sizes, up to almost 450 persons in some cases. This change in the settlement life took place at about the same time that we see the emergence at Chiripa of the Yaya Mama Religious Tradition, an integrated suite of artefactual and architectural traits that appear to be related to public ceremonialism that is displayed in different forms across the central Andean region. Bandy (2004) and Hastorf (2003) have hypothesized that this public ritual activity served to integrate these settled populations, allowing the formation of much larger communities than was comfortable in earlier phases in the region.

In the three 2003–2005 field seasons, the Taraco Archaeological Project turned to the next phase in the historical sequence the Late Formative phase to begin to track in more detail the political developments on the Peninsula. To best accomplish this, we turned to a site identified in Bandy’s survey (2001) Kala Uyuni. Since no comparable sites of this time period had been excavated in the area, we cannot be certain as to the forms of the Sonaji platform, which await future excavations.

While working at the site of Kala Uyuni we engaged with the community of Coa Collu, who were engaged and interested in our research. One major outcome of that work was the plan to build a local museum. In 2009, TAP initiated discussions with the community and others in La Paz to make plans for this museum. The community chose a place between the two major sectors of the site, and the construction began in 2010, seen in Figure 2. The community contributed adobe bricks and TAP gathered funds to pay for the maestro to oversee construction (seen standing in blue overalls), as well as Factum X, a Bolivian group, provided the architectural plans.



Figure 2: A community meeting about building the museum

The building was inaugurated in 2012 with an official opening and festival (Figure 3). That entailed having the interior completed and the displays that were created by TAP members installed. Further, all of the excavated artifacts were stored in the back deposit in the same building. On the day of the inauguration, there was a community gathering, opening, meal, and tour of the museum. Figure 3 shows one of the community leaders, discussing the ceremonial vessels uncovered in the excavations.



Figure 3: The opening of the museum and the community's visit



Figure 4 is the template for the brass plaque put up by the entrance to the building. Note that the Stahl Foundation is listed in the contributors.

Over the next few years, including 2014 and 2015, the TAP co-principle investigators, Christine Hastorf and Maria Bruno returned to work on the completion of the building, with special help from Jose Capriles and Ruth Fontenla.

With Stahl funds, in 2015, we were able to see the exterior completed, as illustrated in Figure 5. The remaining work is to revise the display cases, as some were poorly constructed. Further we want to add a bathroom and place to sit outside for visitors. These are planned to be completed in 2016. TAP and the community are planning an open day in July 2016 to present the material to the school classes, once these cases are completed.



Figure 5. The Coa Collu museum in 2015 with the outside finished.

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Whitehead, W.T. 2007. Exploring the Wild and Domestic: Paleoethnobotany at Chiripa, a Formative Site in Bolivia. PhD Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley. **Figure 1.** [figures should be large and presented with a 1.5 pt box around the figure and caption in Times size 10.]