

WARI MINIATURE FIGURINES: IDENTITY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Patricia J. Knobloch © 2015

The 'Who Was Who' database (<http://whowaswhowari.sdsu.edu>) is an ongoing project of collecting anthropomorphic imagery to determine agency identity for those individuals who coexisted during the Middle Horizon. Please refer to the database to locate 'Agent' references mentioned in this text.

One form of anthropomorphic imagery occurs on miniature figurines presumably of Wari individuals and their contemporaries. These figurines are an important source of Middle Horizon agency identity. This discussion begins with two large caches of figurines carved in stone, then one large cache in stone, shell and metal, and finally, variously made unassociated examples, often unprovenienced.

In 1927, two caches of 40 figurines from two separate subfloor offerings were unearthed at the site of Pikillacta. Pikillacta is located 30 km east of Cusco and is one of the largest Wari sites. Gordon McEwan (1984:63-65) who excavated at Pikillacta relates the following account provided by Sr. Leonidas Wilson, the site guard in 1984, who was an eyewitness to the discovery when he was eight years old (abstracted here by author):

“On the day of the find he was sent by his mother to carry a lunch to Pikillacta for his “*padre politico*” Simon Garcia Santa Cruz who was the *mayordomo* of the Hacienda Anchibamba, owned by the family of Sr. Justo Roman Aparicio. In 1927...its ownership was apparently disputed by the neighboring Hacienda Huambutio. Wilson arrived...just as the discovery was made by Sr. Roman Aparicio and eight *campesinos*...However, he goes on to say that a Sr. Astete, owner of the Hacienda Huambutio...upon hearing of the find, sent in his own work crew to Pikillacta that night after Roman Aparicio and his men had left. He uncovered a second set of forty figurines about five meters southwest of the original find and in a nearly identical context. In the course of this excavation, one of the figurines was lost in the dirt so that the second set ended up with only 39 pieces. The lost piece was later found by one Simón Aredondo...and he sold it for twenty *soles* in order to buy some *chicha* or native beer.”

The first set of 40 figurines was eventually housed at Cusco's Museo Inka (formerly Museo Arqueológico) and analyzed by Luis Valcárcel (1933:23) who mentioned that at that time Santiago Astete did not answer his inquiries about the second set. The second set of 39 figurines was sold (McEwan 1984:65) and became part of Sr. Juan Larrea's donated collections to support the Cusco Museo Arqueológico in 1936 but in 1941 it was gifted to the Museo de América (Madrid, Spain) in support of its founding (Ramos and Blasco 1977:68). From his systematic excavations, McEwan

(2005:36, figs.3.5, 153-154) suggests that Unit 36 in one of the larger niched halls was the location of the 1927 offerings.

Valcárcel's (1933) extensive report of the 'Cusco set' resulted in several important observations. He noted other examples of Pikillacta (i.e., Wari style) figurines; three came from the Ica Valley (IBID.:22, Lám. X, figs. L, ll, m)(Agents 315-2, 336-1, 337-1). In 1893, a private collector, Emilio Max Montez, sold an extensive collection of Peruvian artifacts to the Field Museum (Bauer and Stanish 1990:3) that included four figurines, two of which were from the Ayacucho area at a site on the hacienda of W. M. Jaime (Agents 370-373). Dr. Garcia del Barco owned other Ayacucho examples. Perhaps, those on exhibit at the Museo Histórico Regional "Hipólito Unanue" in Ayacucho (Agents 382, 383) were part of that collection. Valcárcel (1933:23-27) also established that the figurines' stone was not necessarily turquoise. His analysis concludes with figurine descriptions and possible origins of the ethnic identities by comparisons to anthropomorphic artifacts with known cultures. Due to the limited knowledge of pre-Inca cultures at that time, Valcárcel was left to believe that the figurines represented ethnic groups known during Inca imperial history. Of course, ethnic clothing styles can be memorialized and sustained for generations allowing similarities to occur over several centuries.

Luis Ramos and Maria Blasco (1977:69-70) analyzed the second cache, described here as the 'Madrid set'. They agreed with Valcárcel, as well as Trimborn and Vega (1935:87), that the figurines represent group identities or ethnicities such as tribes but date to Wari imperial history. In affirming that the sets were historically related they indicated similarities between the Cusco and Madrid figurines with descriptive terms such as "*semejante*", "*muy semejante*", "*muy parecido*" and "*igual*". Obviously a handmade figurine cannot be exactly duplicated and so this database does not employ such refined terms. Instead terms such as pairs, triplets and quartets describe duplications assigned to a single 'agent' category with allowances for minor differences in size and placement of design features.

As part of their argument, Ramos and Blasco (1977:69) stated that "veinte de las piezas del Museo de América son iguales o muy parecidas a las existentes en el Museo Arqueológico de la Universidad del Cuzco." In fact, they are inconsistent in counting those "20" figurines. They recognized the duplications of Agent 317 from four figurines – two from each set - and counted them as two of the 20 (Ramos and Blasco 1977:99, Numero 8). However, when they identified the pair of figurines that represent a duplication of Agent 303 with their description of figurine "Numero 16" they did not count the other duplicate of Agent 303 when they described figurine "Numero 34" as similar to "Numero 16" (Ramos and Blasco 1977:101-102 and 106-107, respectively). Thus, they should have stated that there are 21 figurines in the Madrid set that have duplicates among 20 figurines in the Cuzco set. Moreover, their statement was not a determination that their 20 figurines in the Madrid set represented 20 distinctly different figurines or "agents" paired with 20 figurines in the Cuzco set.

Susan Bergh (2012:233, ftns. 5, 6) noted Ramos and Blasco’s observations of the pairs, triplet and quartet duplications. It is important that she also noted another duplicated pair within the Cusco set that neither Valcárcel nor Ramos and Blasco acknowledged (Agent 300-1, 300-2). Here, I am adding one more duplicated pair and changing one pair to a triplet of figurines. The pair occurs in the Madrid set where the agent has a slightly flattened, spherical turban and bangs that come to a point above the nose (Agent 352). The triplet (i.e., triplet ‘b’) is formed from a pair - that Ramos and Blasco noted (Agents 320-1 and 320-3) - with the addition of another duplicate in the Cusco set (Agent 320-2). The addition of Agent 320-2 contrasts with Bergh’s (2013:234, fig.224d) figure caption that this figurine is “unique to the Cusco” set.

Table 1 - Duplicates

Cusco Agents	Madrid Agents	
303-1	303-2, 303-3	triplet ‘a’
305-1	305-2	
307-1	307-2	
308-1	308-2	
310-1	310-2	
311-1	311-2	
312-1	312-2	
313-1	313-2	
314-1	314-2	
316-1	316-2	
317-1, 317-2	317-3, 317-4	quartet
318-1	318-2	
320-1, 320-2	320-3	triplet ‘b’
322-1	322-2	
326-1	326-2	
327-1	327-2	
328-1	328-2	
333-1	333-2	
335-1	335-2	
300-1, 300-2		unique pair in Cusco set
	352-1, 352-2	unique pair in Madrid set
17 more		unique in Cusco set
	16 more	unique in Madrid set

To recapitulate, the Cusco set has forty figurines that represent 37 different agents. Nineteen Cusco figurines represent 18 unique agents that do not occur in the

Madrid set in which two Cusco figurines are paired to represent one unique agent (Agent 300). Sixteen Cusco figurines are paired with Madrid figurines to represent 16 agents. One Cusco figurine is matched to two Madrid duplicates to form triplet 'a' of one agent (Agent 303). Two Cusco figurines are paired and match one Madrid figurine to form triplet 'b' of one agent (Agent 320). Two Cusco figurines and two Madrid figurines represent a quartet of one agent (Agent 317). The Madrid set has 39 figurines that represent 36 agents in which only 18 figurines represent an additional 18 unique agents that do not occur in the Cusco set. Thus the 79 figurines from both sets represent 54 agents: 33 agents are represented by unique figurines, 18 agents represented by pairs, 2 agents represented by triplets and 1 agent represented by a quartet.

Table 2

Cusco set:

40 figurines =
 17 (unique) +
 2 (one unique pair) +
 16 (paired to the Madrid set) +
 1 (triplet 'a') +
 2 (one pair in triplet 'b') +
 2 (one pair in quartet)

37 agents =
 18 (unique to the Cusco set) +
 16 (paired to the Madrid set) +
 1 (triplet 'a') +
 1 (triplet 'b') +
 1 (quartet)

Madrid set:

39 figurines =
 16 (unique) +
 2 (one unique pair) +
 16 (paired to the Cusco set) +
 2 (one pair in triplet 'a') +
 1 (triplet 'b') +
 2 (one pair in quartet)

36 agents (only 17 are additional to the 37 recognized in the Cusco set) =
 17 (unique) +
 16 (paired to the Cusco set) +
 1 (triplet 'a') +
 1 (triplet 'b') +
 1 (one pair in quartet)

This review of the two 1927 collections is presented here to compare new observations, update additional duplications and prepare a database for future discoveries. It also addresses Susan Bergh's pertinent observation of an analytical inconsistency regarding Anita Cook's (1992) analysis of these two collections that appear in an article on Wari attire.¹ Bergh (2012:241, fnt. 23) states:

Cook believes that the figurines depict "the legendary 40 founding ancestors," that twenty figurines from one set have twins in twenty from the other, and that the latter number also has an Inca parallel in the twenty groups (*ayllus*) into which Cuzco's population was organized. It is unclear how this interpretation squares with the presence of many more than forty figure types in the two figurine collections, or the fact that, due to the presence of a triplet and a quartet, the matching figurines total 39 and represent eighteen types, not twenty.

As noted above, the matching figurines that occur in both sets now total 42 and represent nineteen types. Cook did not provide a list of the exact figurines that she refers to as the 20 "twins". Therefore, a reader cannot independently confirm her results. At this point the evidence only negates Cook's comments regarding Wari ancestral identity of 40 founding fathers and any antecedent *ayllu* structure to Inca administrative strategies. Though one figurine remains missing, the two caches of 40 figurines still present an interesting quantitative pattern that may have some importance to a Wari accounting system.

In 2004, a new discovery of Wari figurines was made, again, at Pikillacta. Carlos Arriola Tuni (Arriola and Tesar 2011) directed a restoration project to remove wall rubble from the central, east-west corridor of the site. Under nearly a meter of rubble at the corridor's eastern gate, an 84 cm diameter pit was discovered and excavated to 3.19 meters. Offering objects began to appear at 2.2 m with miniature figurines uncovered at 2.79 m that were positioned just above a 41.0 cm long bronze rod driven into undisturbed soil.

I will make two comments before discussing the figurines. My first comment is with reference to Arriola and Tesar's (2011:8, fig. 8) schematic profile view and Feature 1. At 20 cm below the occupation level there was a thin layer that contained vessel sherds of apparently little importance, perhaps plainware sherds, but somehow identified as Wari style pottery. This shallow layer of sherds may be the result of a more complex process of deposition than simply a purposeful deposit associated with filling in the pit. First, with any pit of significant depth the soil will settle and a depression will form. Second, the other subfloor offerings were concealed as described by McEwan (2005:46) under a "massive, gypsum-plastered floor...very smooth and had an original thickness of approximately 10 centimeters...Seams in the floor apparently represent margins of units of gypsum plaster, perhaps basket or bucket loads that were sequentially added during the construction of the floor". Third, an observation common at archaeology sites is that disturbed soil is often marked with plants bigger than those around them. Given

these three conditions, I suggest the following scenario. Most likely the East Gate offering was not accentuated with a capstone but hidden. As the fill settled, then sherds could have lodged in the developing depression.² Over centuries, loose surface soils could gradually fill any depression and possible plant growth would carbonize and darken the soil. Finally, wall collapse eventually covered the area. I posit this scenario in order to suggest that the sherds may not be associated with the pit construction.

My second comment refers to the bronze rod that was obviously pounded into the pit's bottom (Arriola and Tesar 2011:31). Thus, the Madrid example may have also been pounded into its pit and is curved as the result of hitting unyielding bedrock. Therefore, the image we see from Madrid's reconstruction (see Bergh 2012:232, fig. 223) may be more accurate with the rod below the figurines.

Arriola and Tesar (2011:21-28, see Feature 3) believe that Feature 3 contained 50 figurines, though the 50th is a "sack" like object and clearly not an agent; therefore it was not added to the database. These objects are made of: 1) two-piece mold cast metal, 2) joined front and back repoussé sheet metal, 3) carved and polished stone and 4) carved *Spondylus* shell.

Detailed descriptions of most figurines can be found in the publications or viewed online where available. Otherwise, descriptions and drawings are a future endeavor. In the meantime, two terms that define certain hairstyle representations are introduced here. First, many figurines with headgear have a curved bulge at the back of the head and below the rim of the headgear. I disagree that this curved bulge represents a cloth wrapping similar to those depicted on Moche style portrait bottles (Valcárcel 1933;Lám. VII, figs. 40, 41, 43). Moche portrait vessels show a headscarf where one end was most likely pulled under the hair at the nape and tied to the forehead and then the other end was pulled up from the back to lump the hair into a smooth sack. However on the figurines, the parallel curves in the bulge appear to be the bending of an agent's long hair that was pulled together at the nape and inserted under the back of the headgear. This hair treatment is referred to here as "bundled hair" and examples include Agents 315, 316, 320, 328, 346, 348, 349, 352, and 353.

Another hairstyle shows waist length hair that may be braided, gathered to the back and bound near the bottom edge with a barrette-like object. The Metropolitan Museum of Art houses a wood figurine that provides a more detailed example of this hairstyle with a 3" high, wood lime container that depicts a captive Agent 106: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/310308?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=huari&pos=1&imgNo=1&tabName=gallery-label>. This hairstyle is referred to as "bound braids" and examples include Agents 321, 351, 361, 363, 392, 393 and 415.

Many figurines are depicted with possible waist length hair hanging below the sides and back of the headgear and parted by the shoulders. A few figurines

show the vertical lines that could indicate actual long hair down the back but only behind the ears (Agents 314-2, 322, and 351). Most examples do not depict vertical lines and may therefore be cloth hair coverings as Ramos and Blasco (1977) describe with the term, "*cubrecabeza*". The covering consists of one wide flap down the back attached to narrower side flaps. Valcárcel (1933; Lám. VII, figs. 42, Lám. IX, figs. 26, 32) illustrates possible Moche examples, but none exhibit the exact combination of back and side flaps. At this time, I suggest that the origins of this apparel may be in the cultural areas of the far north coast of Chile. Such neck and back coverage may have been a practical sunburn protection in this desert climate. There are some intriguing similarities that require further research into this possibility (see Berenguer 2006:47, figs. 19a, b; Bustamante 2011:62-63). The *cubrecabeza* examples include Agents: 300-304, 311-313, 317, 319, 326, 429-330, 332-334, 337-338, 341-345, 350, 354, 356-357, 360, 366-367, 373, 375, 378, 380-383.

Since 1927 more figurines have come to light in museum collections - especially those with open access catalogs - as well as private collections, archaeological investigations and, unfortunately, online auction sites. The original Pikillacta figurines have been matched with new examples (see Agents 315, 320, 321, 341, 342, 352, 357). Agent 339 is left empty to represent the lost figurine in the Madrid set that may re-appear one day. Other examples are not listed because there is no exact information available. For example, José Gonzales found one figurine at the site Qatacasallacta in Cusco and is housed at the Museo Histórico Regional Casa Garcilaso (Gordon McEwan 2013, personal communication). I do not have a photo of this figurine. Shinya Watanabe (2001:535) illustrates examples of prisoners as Agents 370-5 and 390 from a private collection that contained more than 10 figurines. So far the known proveniences listed in the database are sadly few since such small objects can be easily stolen from Peru, marketed or later donated to museums.

Acknowledgements

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of information. She provided numerous personal photos from various museum collections – some available online, but not as well documented as her photos – that provided the details needed to determine similarities among the figurines. And a grand appreciation goes to all the museums with their online digitized collections that provide so much crucial data for Andeanist research, especially the Museo de América, Madrid.

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¹ Cook (1992:345):

“An essential aspect of these objects, which became apparent during the course of the analysis reported here, is that 20 figurines within the Cuzco Collection are exactly the same as 20 figurines in the Madrid Collection...”

Cook (1992:358):

“The Pikillacta figurines arguably represent the legendary 40 founding ancestors of the Huari polity. The number 40 has special importance because it conveyed an administrative unit of division under Inca rule.”

Cook (1992:359):

“When the two Pikillacta collections are compared there are 20 matching figurines, which suggest that these may represent Huari *ayllus* or the mythical ancestors of the 20 highest-ranked descent groups.”

The suggestion that Huari provides antecedent contributions to Inca governing strategies is stated further by Cook (1992:359):

“A new set of 40 figurines is created when the 20 figurines from the Cuzco Collection are paired with their 20 twin figurines in the Madrid Collection. These observations lend support to the interpretation that the figurines offer a glimpse of Huari political organization and rank differences that are expressed later in Inca administrative hierarchy and linked to the internal ranking of the founding ancestors...”

² Post-abandonment looting may have left scattered sherds that lodged into the depression. Pikillacta’s occupation has been an enigma due its extensive habitation architecture yet lack of artifact remains. Perhaps the Inca systematically cleared the site of non-Inca remains thereby eliminating possible “spiritual” habitation by non-ancestors.