



CAROLYN DEAN

A Culture of Stone
INKA PERSPECTIVES ON ROCK

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TO CECELIA F. KLEIN



Contents

List of Illustrations ix

Acknowledgments xiii

Note on Orthography xv

INTRODUCTION

Coming to Terms with Inka Rocks i

CHAPTER ONE Rock and Remembrance 25

CHAPTER TWO Rock and Reciprocity 65

CHAPTER THREE Rock and Rule 103

CHAPTER FOUR Rock in Ruins 143

Notes 179

Glossary of Quechua Terms 255

Bibliography 257

Index 289



Illustrations

All photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated.

PLATES (*between page 48 and 49*)

1. Third Stone or Intiwatana, Saywite
2. Carved outcrop, Kenko Grande
3. Carved monolith, Saywite
4. Sacred Rock replicating Mount Yanantin beyond, Machu Picchu
5. Tower, also known as the Temple of the Sun, Machu Picchu
6. Carved stone with steps and crevice, Saywite
7. Quillarumi, a carved rock located near an extensive waterworks
8. Royal Mausoleum, Machu Picchu
9. Chinkana Grande, Saqsaywaman
10. Curvilinear terracing, Moray
11. Carved rock passage, Saqsaywaman
12. Curvilinear terracing, Wiñay Wayna
13. Masonry with protuberances, Ollantaytambo
14. Zigzag terraces, Saqsaywaman
15. Temple of the Condor, Machu Picchu

FIGURES

1. “Indians worshipping a stone as a god” 3
2. Structures arranged around crags, Machu Picchu 9
3. Outcrop integrated into a masonry wall, Pisaq 11

X ILLUSTRATIONS

4. Detail of abstract design carved into megalithic wall, Ollantaytambo 15
5. Coat of arms with Wanakawri as both mountain and anthropomorph 23
6. Ancestral caves 28
7. Contoured outcrops, Písaq 30
8. Carved monolith, detail zoomorph, Saywite 33
9. Paqcha, or channel for liquid offerings, Kenko Grande 33
10. So-called Puma Rock, Kenko Grande 35
11. Chuquillanto and Acuytapra transformed into mountains 38
12. Specialists constructing saywa 47
13. Saywa 48
14. Inga Urcon moving a sayk'uska 51
15. Ynga Urcon moving a sayk'uska 52
16. Apachita 58
17. Apachita 59
18. August agricultural ritual 69
19. Terrace wall, Chinchero 78
20. Unassembled wall showing bedding joints, Písaq 78
21. Coursed wall, Pasaje Loreto, Cuzco 78
22. Uncoursed polygonal masonry, Tarawasi 79
23. Integrated outcrop, Tambomachay 83
24. Tower, also known as the Temple of the Sun, Machu Picchu 84
25. Detail of outcrop integration, Tower (Temple of the Sun), Machu Picchu 86
26. Polygonal and coursed masonry, Saqsaywaman 87
27. Mountain-framing window, Machu Picchu 94
28. Machu Picchu 95
29. Funerary Rock (Ceremonial Rock), Machu Picchu 98
30. *Mapa mundi del reino de las Indias* (World Map of the Kingdom of the Indies) 106–7
31. Outcrop carved with flat places or seats, Intinkala (Copacabana, Bolivia) 110
32. Trapezoidal niche, Ollantaytambo 110
33. Carved zoomorph, Vilcashuaman 114
34. Pecked wall of nibbled stone, Compound of Inka Roqa (Archbishop's Palace), Cuzco 116
35. Masonry at Machu Picchu 119
36. Incised ashlar, Saqsaywaman 119
37. Megaliths, Saqsaywaman 127
38. Double lithic seat, Vilcashuaman 132
39. Double lithic seat, Ollantaytambo 135

ILLUSTRATIONS xi

- 40. Sabacurinca, also known as the Inka Throne, Saqsaywaman 135
- 41. Double lithic seat, Urubamba River, Ollantaytambo 136
- 42. Intiwatana, Machu Picchu 140
- 43. Coat of arms of Cuzco 149
- 44. Qurikancha–Santo Domingo exterior, Cuzco 153
- 45. Señor de Tetecaca, Cuzco 156
- 46. Foundations of Muyuqmarka, Saqsaywaman 160
- 47. Tourists touching Intiwatana, Machu Picchu 160
- 48. Twelve-Angled Stone, Cuzco 163
- 49. Soul Naciente brand chocolate 164
- 50. Inka Calendar. T-shirt based on drawings by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala 165
- 51. Mural by Juan Bravo, Cuzco 166
- 52. Llama shape discerned in polygonal masonry, Saqsaywaman 171
- 53. Condor's head, Temple of the Condor, Machu Picchu 173



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Note on Orthography

From the time the first Spaniards recorded the word *Pirú* (later Perú), not comprehending what indigenous Andeans said to them, spelling native words has been nothing if not difficult. Quechua (Keshwa, Quichua), the language of the Inka as well as many other Andean peoples, has had an especially vexed orthographic history. What started as *Inga* became *Inca* and then *Inka*. The latter orthography reflects modern efforts to introduce consistency, as well as to spell words in Quechua, a language unaccompanied by its own writing scheme, without reliance on the particulars of Spanish pronunciation. However, the pronunciation of Quechua was not consistent throughout the Andes in pre-Hispanic times, nor is it constant today. Rather than a note on orthography, this might better be characterized as an explanation of unavoidable *heterography*.

I have elected to spell most Quechua words following Rodolfo Cerrón-Palomino's dictionary of southern Quechua (1994). Where alternate spellings might be more familiar to some readers, I have listed them in parentheses upon the first usage. When reference is made to a particular historical source, the original spelling is retained with alternate spellings provided in parentheses. Site names are spelled according to common practice. In cases where there appears to be no agreement (as in Pisac/Pisac or Sacsahuaman/Saqsaywaman), I have selected the spelling that seems to be most commonly used at present; again, alternate spellings are provided in parentheses in an effort to minimize confusion. In particular, Cuzco, the Inka capital, was spelled both Cusco and Cuzco by early

Spaniards. In 1990, *Q'osq'o* became the city's official spelling, but many residents prefer *Cusco*. Because *Cuzco* is the standard spelling in English, I will follow the convention likely to be more familiar to readers.

Finally, the plural case of Quechua nouns is indicated by the suffix *-kuna*. Unfortunately, using the Quechua plural proves confusing for many readers. Rather than adding an *s* at the end of a Quechua word, thereby creating an awkward bilingualism, I have elected to maintain Quechua words in their singular form regardless of whether they are singular or plural.

The stone is normally no work of art while in the driveway,
but may be so when on display in an art museum.

—NELSON GOODMAN, *Ways of Worldmaking*



INTRODUCTION

Coming to Terms with Inka Rocks

In the South American Andes, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the Inka (Inca) framed, carved, sat on, built with, revered, fed, clothed, and talked to certain rocks. This book is about some of these rocks, and what they meant to the people who forged various kinds of relationships with them. Here we reckon primarily with pre-Hispanic Inka perspectives on stone, as they are articulated in and through the rocks themselves, as well as in Andean stories about stone.¹ Even so, as an art historian I am mindful that much of Inka rockwork — extant since the fifteenth century and still sitting in plain view — has just recently been recognized and talked about as “art” (plate 1). Although many readers will concur that the rocks discussed here are indeed prodigious works of art, and I would not argue against them, this book is not about Inka rocks *as* art, for the Inka’s culture of stone was not guided primarily by aesthetic criteria. However, changing assessments of Inka rockwork, from Spanish colonization to the present, and the implications of those changing assessments influence our present considerations. Thus, while I devote the most attention to the meaning of stone within Inka signifying systems, I also note the non-Andean notions that have shaped current understandings of Inka rockwork.²

Like Andean indigenes today, the pre-Hispanic Inka knew well, named, and communicated with many natural topographic features.³ Mountains,

rivers, lakes, boulders, outcrops, caves, and springs were (and still are) kratophanic. They were sacred places where humans encountered and interacted with powerful numina.⁴ Such places were regarded as *waka* or *huaca*, a word in Quechua (or Runa-simi), the language of the Inka and many other Andean peoples, that has no exact equivalent in other languages.⁵ It may be provisionally defined as a sacred thing, landscape feature, or shrine; it can be natural or artificial or a combination of the two. In the mid-sixteenth century, a Spanish colonial official who studied Inka religion to curb its influence observed that native Andeans counted among their *waka* “idols, ravines, boulders or large rocks, hills, mountain peaks, springs, fountains, and finally whatever natural objects that seem notable and are differentiated from the rest.”⁶ *Waka* are thus both extraordinary and sacred things. In pre-Hispanic times, they commonly received offerings of shells, textiles, leaves of the coca shrub, feathers, and *chicha* (known in Quechua as *aqha*, a fermented maize drink). Some received sacrificed llamas and figurines of shell, stone, silver, and gold. A few were offered children.

When Roman Catholic Spaniards first contacted the indigenous peoples of what are now called the Americas, they were predisposed to understand most Andean *waka* as idols.⁷ They exhibited great consternation because of the incongruity between their expectations for what idols should look like and the reality of what *waka* actually were. According to early modern European thought, idols ought to be man-made, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, and composed of precious materials or finely crafted.⁸ What Spaniards found in the Andes were boulders, lakes, caves, mountains, mummified bodies, and so on. Indigenous Andeans did not often locate the numinous in representational statuary, for *waka* were normally unshaped or slightly shaped natural substances; they were the preserved bodies of ancestors and natural formations in the Andean landscape. *Waka* could not readily be identified by appearance, material composition, or location. As the seventeenth-century Jesuit Bernabé Cobo said with regard to one stone *waka* of great importance, Spaniards “paid no attention to the idol, because it was, as I have said, a rough stone.”⁹ A European artist charged with illustrating Pedro de Cieza de León’s early chronicle of a Spanish conquistador’s experiences in the Andes, a place the artist had never visited, imagined what Inka “litholatry” might have looked like (figure 1).¹⁰ He depicts an Inka, cloaked in a toga in the manner of ancient Rome, elevating an egg-shaped rock so that it might be



1. "Indians worshipping a stone as a god." *Crónica General del Perú*, by Pedro de Cieza de León, fol. 63r, 1553. Photograph provided by the Library of Congress.

revered by a throng of devotees. Unlike most sacred rocks in the Andes — located outdoors and frequently placed, or more often left, in natural or quasi-natural settings — this imagined sacred rock is housed indoors. The artist borrowed from familiar scenes of already known religious worship, replacing the customary figurative idol with a smallish rounded stone. It would seem that reverence for mighty, unhewn rocks that were worshiped in the open air — what the Inka thought of as “natural temples” — was beyond imagining and, as a consequence, beyond imaging.¹¹

For Europeans in the Andes who encountered waka face-to-face, the matter was apparently just as baffling.¹² Even Juan Polo de Ondegardo, the magistrate of colonial Cuzco in the second half of the sixteenth century, a man who gained great familiarity with Andean religious practices,

was stymied by the multifarious natural objects of Andean reverence. He finally abandoned his long list of things that Andeans worshiped by concluding that one could best identify idols not by what they looked like, what they were made of, or where they were located but by the fact that they received offerings.¹³ In other words, the only sure way he found to recognize sacred things was by the way the Inka and other Andeans responded to them. Polo's observation is a critical one and bears repeating: to the Inka, what something looked like did not often reveal its inherent value. As an example, the Inka employed a word for the decoration of surfaces regardless of media; whether painting, engraving, or embroidery, all superficial decoration was referred to as *qillqa*.¹⁴ Because *qillqa* could describe a painting or a carving, it might be taken to describe things of aesthetic value, that is, things that have been rendered more visually appealing. Early in the Spanish colonial period, however, the word *qillqa* was readily used to describe writing on paper, something not used in the pre-Hispanic Andes and not esteemed for its aesthetic merits when it was introduced to the region.¹⁵ The word *qillqa* indicated only that the thing to which it referred had some superficial decoration, and did not convey any particular sense of value as a consequence of that decoration. *Qillqa*, superficial marking, did not affect value, for it did not impact the inherent worth, the essence, of the thing so adorned.

This basic principle of categorization by the essence of what things are has troubled those who have sometimes sought to categorize Andean material culture primarily by what things look like. From an Inka perspective, what the eye perceives (a thing's surface appearance) was important, but nearly always less significant than what the mind conceives (a thing's substance or essence). As a corollary, process — an emphasis on working with the substance of a thing — was often valued over the end product, its “finished” appearance. For the Inka, sacredness was embedded in the material of the thing rather than in its form. Thus the Inka identified sacred essence in a variety of hosts, and any particular essence was not necessarily reflected in its external form.¹⁶ Several scholars have discussed the notion of *kamay* (*camay*), which is often translated as “essence.” The art historian Tom Cummins, for example, explains how the sand used by the Inka to cover the central plaza of Cuzco, their capital city, contained a sacred essence that was specific to itself.¹⁷ Although the Spanish authorities, finally recognizing that the sand of the plaza was held holy by the indigenous residents of the city, ordered its removal and used it to make

mortar for the construction of the cathedral, they could not separate the kamay from the sand. Regardless of the shape it took or how it was used, it was invested with its own essence. Essence was transubstantial, and so its significance was independent of form.

With this foundation and cautionary note, it is appropriate to introduce what I will be calling throughout this book the Inka's culture of stone, that is, the broad array of stories, beliefs, and practices that both constitute pre-Hispanic Inka perspectives on, and are articulated in, stone. Stories, both pre-Hispanic and contemporary, record the actions of the once and future animate Andean topography. In many of these stories, life-forms—both humans and animals—turn into rocks, while in others, stones animate. Thus in the Inka mind, stone, like the sand of Cuzco's main plaza, was transubstantial. Appearances might vary, but its essence was stable. Petrification signaled the suspension of, but not an end to, life. Given Andean notions about the ideal structure of the cosmos, a composition of conjoined complementary pairs (to be discussed further in chapter 2), we may recognize that stone often complemented biological matter. Not subject to death and decay, stone was life immobilized. It was animacy "paused" for an unspecified period. The challenge here is to understand rocks not as mineral matter of variable composition that the Inka and other Andeans mistakenly (or even charmingly) endowed with life force, but as ancient Andeans saw them—potentially animate, transmutable, powerful, and sentient. However, if rocks to the Inka were the stuff of gods and culture heroes, they were also the stuff of houses, terrace walls, and llama corrals. Rocks were therefore simultaneously both normal and numinous. Thus, in spite of their reverence for certain rocks, pre-Hispanic Inka cannot accurately be labeled litholators. That is, they did not worship *all* rocks, nor did they worship rocks *as* rocks. My subject of study, then, is not the whole range of rocks employed by the Inka. I will not catalog every rock artifact produced, and classify each form. Rather, I will consider rocks that the Inka recognized as something beyond mineral composites, rocks that were revered or had symbolic import because they were at once rocks and more than rocks. While a few of the rocks to be discussed here are very well known, most are barely recognized or incompletely understood examples in which the fact that the Inka believed the rock in question to be much more than rock has been forgotten, overlooked, or not fully explored. Here I offer fresh perspectives and new interpretations of petrous forms based on Inka notions, practices, and

values. How we recognize the significance of such stones, which to us have little readily apparent meaning, is both a measure of how we value perspectives that are not our own and a measure of our hermeneutic limitations.

"I like that boulder. That is a *nice* boulder." This was Donkey's response after spying the ogre's squalid living conditions in the popular animated movie *Shrek* (2001). His utter inability to find anything nice to say about Shrek's abode was emphasized when Donkey paid the compliment to a clearly inconsequential rock. Rocks, in Western culture, are generally things not to be noticed, and certainly not to be praised or worshiped. Indeed, in stark contrast to the Inka's perspective, Europeans have historically associated the veneration of sacred stones with primitive superstition. Ancient Greeks revered *argoi lithoi*, which were unworked stones, as well as black meteoric stones known as *baitulia* or *lithoi empsychoi* (animated stones).¹⁸ From the earliest recorded times, such rocks were anointed with olive oil and spoken to by devotees. Such practices were later derided as superstitions by those who believed that anthropomorphic statuary was the proper focus of worship, and apparently the more "realistic" the better.¹⁹ Because the Greeks moved from unworked rocks to imagistic stones, heirs to some of their traditions (such as early modern Spanish conquistadors, as well as many modern scholars) too often assume that such was the natural course of things. These assumptions then color the perception of the rockwork of other cultures, including that of the pre-Hispanic Inka. A brief consideration of varying perspectives on the nature of stone may help us approach Inka rockwork with minds open to new and different possibilities.

Around the world, societies can be found in which rocks are recognized and celebrated as extraordinary, as embodiments of some thing or idea beyond the stone of which they are made. The Ojibwa language of North America, for example, distinguishes between animate and inanimate objects; stones are grammatically animate, and Ojibwas sometimes speak to stones as if they were persons, recognizing the potential for animation in particular rocks under certain circumstances.²⁰ On the other side of the world, in Vanuatu, stones called *navat mbarap* represent ancestors and ancestral places. As parts of nature, stones are recognized as metonymic surrogates for the land. Throughout the Pacific, living people establish relationships with stones as embodiments of particular places and the past people who inhabited those places, much as they were and

are in the Andes.²¹ Almost universally, the possession of certain rocks is equated — by metonymic associations — with claims to territory and contact with the ancestors who lived there.²²

Unhewn rocks have long been regarded as culturally significant in the Far East. Rocks have held a special role in Chinese oral and visual culture for over two thousand years. According to a cosmogonic story, the sky is a great cave; mountains were formed by fragments that came loose from its vault and fell to earth. As they fell, they were charged with cosmic energy (*qi* or *ch'i*). Mountains and rocks, their microcosmic manifestations, are charged with the *yang* energy of the heavens and, in this sense, complement the *yin* of earth and water. My colleague John Hay derived the title of his highly regarded monograph *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth* (1985) from an eighteenth-century Chinese encyclopedia that uses these phrases to describe rock. The same encyclopedia also indicates that rock is the “essential energy of earth.” While all rocks might be significant, historically in China rocks of unusual size or shape have been treated as special conduits of *qi*.²³ Rocks came to play important symbolic roles both in representation, particularly in painting, and in reality, especially in gardens. When set apart in gardens, they are both objects of aesthetic appreciation and reservoirs of *qi*. Thus the placement in gardens of rocks, which are sometimes natural and sometimes shaped to enhance their appearance, is as important in China as the placement of plants. Indeed, rocks were considered essential elements of Chinese gardens from very early times.²⁴

Perhaps no rock gardens are as well known as those created by Zen Buddhists in Japan. There the Chinese Buddhist regard for rock conjoined with preexistent Shinto notions that the natural world is animated and pervaded by spirits. Rocks in particular were thought to be inhabited by various *kami*, or divinities.²⁵ The term *karesansui* (dry landscapes) appears for the first time in the eleventh century in the oldest existing treatise on the art of gardens in Japan, where it is defined as “a place without a pond or a stream, where one arranges rocks.”²⁶ In these dry gardens of rocks and sand, nature, stripped down to its essential components, aids in the revelation of the true self when contemplated by human beings. The rocks were seldom altered in form, and, in fact, while the making of a garden involved moving rocks, their natural position was to be respected such that a rock found lying horizontally was not to be placed upright and vice versa.²⁷ In East Asia, as in the Andes, stones housed vital

energies and were on a continuum of animacy along with plants, animals, and human beings. Comparing Inka understandings to those of other cultures can help counter pervasive Western notions that have historically clouded scholarship on Inka rockwork.

Unlike those just discussed, Western tradition does not generally recognize a “continuum of animacy,” what Graham Parkes calls “panpsychism.”²⁸ Denying the constant (though imperceptible) changeability of rocks, Western thought has most often identified stone as the binary opposite of, rather than a complement to, things recognized as animate. Andean perceptions of stone’s transmutability run contrary to traditional Western thinking. Aristotle, for example, denied that inanimate nature, such as rocks, possessed a “soul,” unlike plants and animals, which he recognized as animate. Maintaining this basic Aristotelian division, the eighteenth-century Catalan writer Nicolas Felieu de La Peña asserted that “inhabitants comprise cities, not stones.”²⁹ In the ancient Andes, however, stones were often perceived *as* inhabitants of settlements; in fact, they were believed to be the original owners of certain territories, and they were often the most important residents of particular places. They were clothed, fed, and conversed with. Rooms were built to house them, and structures were carefully located around them (figure 2). Relationships, as real as those between sentient beings, were established with rocks.

While throughout Western history, with the exception of a few Renaissance-period philosophers, most thinkers have excluded rocks and minerals from the realm of animacy, this does not mean that rocks have not been seen as sources of great inspiration. Goethe’s essay “On Granite” praises the ability of natural rock to awe and inspire; Emerson, Thoreau, and other American transcendentalists understood that the contemplation of natural rock yields great insights, so that it can be perceived with admiration and even affection. It might be observed that heirs to this tradition include the residents of, and visitors to, New Hampshire (the Granite State) who had over many years attached personality to, and grew very fond of, the natural rock formation known as the Old Man in the Mountain. The rock was featured in the short story “Great Stone Face” by Nathaniel Hawthorne and appeared on the license plate of New Hampshire. To the dismay of many, it came crashing down in early May 2003. In television interviews, the state’s governor compared its tragic demise to a death in the family. While the recognition of personality and



2. Structures arranged around crags, Machu Picchu.

life in an esteemed rock would seem to bring diverse cultural perspectives close, it is important to note that those who loved the Old Man required imagism to see him. Manifesting what Simon Schama has called “anthropocentric fixation,” they needed the craggy rock to look like an elderly gentleman.³⁰ Imagism was something not required by the Inka or needed in the Andes today. Anecdotal evidence supporting this assertion may be found in a Quechua song, collected in 1975 in the Ayacucho region of central Peru, that laments the “poor rocks” and “poor boulders” that must be pulverized by dynamite for a new highway to be built.³¹ The song does not bemoan the devastation of a beautiful landscape but mourns the destruction of rocks regardless of their form or setting.

Since Spaniards first set foot in the Inka realm, rocks, and Andeans’ regard for them, have bewildered Western observers. The early stages of this awkward history of misapprehension will be charted in the final chapter. Here, however, I would like to focus on more recent history with particular attention to changing perceptions of the aesthetic value of Inka rockwork. Not long ago the philosopher Nelson Goodman concluded that “What is Art?” is the wrong question and ought to be replaced by “When is Art?”³² For Inka rocks, the “when” is the latter half of the twentieth century, making them a very late entry into the ledger

of world art. While in 1957 the historian J. Alden Mason concluded that stone sculpture “was entirely missing” from Inka material culture and made no mention of their carved or framed boulders and outcrops in his study of pre-Hispanic Andean societies, just five years later the art historian George Kubler, in *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, does note, albeit briefly, the Inka’s “intricate non-figural carvings on the surfaces of caves and boulders.”³³ Since that time, discussion of Inka rock carving has been mostly on the rise.³⁴ The anthropologist Shelly Errington helps us address why that might be in her article “What Became Authentic Primitive Art.”³⁵ She observes that what was initially recognized in the West as “art” from outside the European tradition was, in essence, driven by the needs and expectations of the modern Western art market. In part, what became art in the twentieth century was what had been and could still be collected and displayed in the manner to which art had become accustomed; its iconicity (imagism or optical realism) and perceived ritual function were also critically important. That most numinous Inka rocks, being outcrops or large in size, are not portable—and therefore not subject to collection and display except through photography and modern touristic practices—militated against early recognition of their aesthetic merits, as did their dominant aniconicity.

Esther Pasztory, in an insightful essay on Andean aesthetics, points out that the twentieth-century turn to abstraction in western Europe and America encouraged a midcentury reevaluation of abstract Inka forms, especially their treatment of large rocks and outcrops.³⁶ In this observation, she echoes an essay written in 1953 by Meyer Schapiro, who concluded that “the values of modern art have led to a more sympathetic and objective approach to exotic arts than was possible fifty or a hundred years ago.”³⁷ It would seem that we have Western artistic movements, from the earliest experiments in abstraction to Land Art of the 1960s and 1970s, to thank for our ability (or willingness) to value what the Inka wrought in rock.³⁸ Certainly Frank Lloyd Wright’s belief that houses ought not be on hills, but of and belonging to hills, was comparable to that of fifteenth-century Inka architects who commonly integrated rock outcrops into the foundations of their stone walls (figure 3); such perspectives will be explored further in later chapters. For now, suffice it to say that many of the rocks that the Inka valued so highly were not much valued beyond the Andes until after the mid-twentieth century, when the widespread use of photography made them collectible, and an apprecia-



3. Outcrop integrated into a masonry wall, Písaq.

tion of abstraction rendered them aesthetically appealing. My discussion of Inka rockwork must necessarily reflect on their reception outside the Andes to understand the fragmentary nature of the records on which we now rely.

In what remains of the pre-Hispanic Inka world, we find few if any likenesses of the numinous. Finely crafted images of deities in precious metal were melted down for Spanish coffers, while others were hidden away, lost, and forgotten.³⁹ In contrast, numerous natural waka still exist; many of them were likely far more significant than the Inka objects collected by the Spaniards and recognized as having aesthetic value in European terms. The art historian Cecelia F. Klein observes that “in [non-Western] cultures the most important values and most profound ideas are sometimes expressed through forms that are not [human-made], are not imagistic, and/or are not executed with the materials and ‘care’ that we expect of ‘great art.’”⁴⁰ Of course, the Spaniards who first colonized the Andes were not looking for “art,” since the concept of art as something valued primarily for its aesthetic qualities did not come into being until the eighteenth century in western Europe.⁴¹ However, the notion of what was aesthetically pleasing clearly influenced what they collected, preserved, contemplated, and described. Some Spaniards concluded that Andean “idols” were ugly. The sixteenth-century Jesuit José de Acosta,

for example, wrote, “In Peru, they [their idols] were called *huacas* [waka], and ordinarily these were ugly and deformed in appearance; at least all the ones I have seen were so. I believe there is no doubt that the devil, in whose veneration they were made, liked to be worshiped in ill-featured figures.”⁴² Because Acosta expected the highest order of sacred objects—those that conveyed the presence of the holy—to be not only imagistic but optically “realistic,” he maligned the appearance of Andean sacred objects, thinking that they were meant to be representational, but just very poorly formed. To the Inka and other Andean peoples, of course, optical realism did not mark the presence of the holy.⁴³

Spaniards, whether searching for idols or treasure (or both), tended to focus on objects of gold and silver. In some ways reminiscent of the Spanish focus on precious metals, modern scholars have too often supposed that many sacred rocks must once have been covered in gold, silver, and jewels.⁴⁴ Klein points out, however, that many societies value natural, unworked substances over finely crafted images of precious materials; while the latter are beautiful demonstrations of human creative abilities, the former are numinous just as they are.⁴⁵ Certainly, it seems to be the case that the Inka frequently privileged naturally numinous materials over crafted representations of numina. So while statuary of precious metal was seized and melted, much of Inka sacred visual culture remains in stony ruins and the seemingly natural landscape, both of which are dotted with ostensibly innocuous outcrops and boulders—waka that once were and might again be alive. Contact and interaction with other societies, their beliefs and practices, have caused many in the West to question some long-held notions, including what gods, deities, and numinous beings ought to look like. Yet the idea that gods have fixed, recognizable forms and that these forms are represented in an optically realistic way has long endured and too often colored the ways Westerners look at—or what they look for—in objects revered by non-Western others.

Because it is the potential animacy of rocks rather than their artifice that renders them significant, the question of whether they are “art,” an ambiguous term at best, seems particularly irrelevant. As I’ve argued elsewhere, although the pre-Hispanic Inka, like people everywhere and across history, made aesthetic distinctions between objects and sometimes valued certain things above other things owing precisely to these aesthetic distinctions, they did not recognize art as a special category of things and practices composed of subcategories defined by media,

function, geographic provenance, value, and so on.⁴⁶ To many, the long overdue aesthetic recognition of an overlooked aspect of Andean visual culture will seem a step to be celebrated. Certainly, many students of non-European cultures have pleaded for recognition and an end to the perceived second-class status of their subjects.⁴⁷ The Argentinian artist César Paternosto, for example, whose insights regarding carved Inka rocks I discuss later, bemoans the failure of researchers to acknowledge Inka carved stones as “sculptures” even though he recognizes that other terms and categories borrowed from Western ways of speaking about art are misleading and ill-fitting.⁴⁸ While we might well be disappointed in how long it has taken art historians to recognize and seek the meanings of Inka rockwork, we should be wary of how categorizing Inka rocks in non-Inka ways affects their significance. We should understand that “art” is but a subset or category of things and is ultimately inseparable from things not called art.⁴⁹ Further, as a cultural construct, it is not a universal category. Indeed, Errington has aptly observed that “the notion that art is a panhuman universal is a pernicious idea, which has on balance done more harm than good.”⁵⁰ Too often the term *art* is bestowed and then defended as though, in so doing, we were granting other cultures a favor, recognizing their (to us) strange objects as akin to a notion that we find indispensable to the concept of culture. That some Inka rocks are now called art, however, can be seen as an attempt to reconstruct Inka visual culture in the image of the colonizing West, only different in ways that render it somehow insufficient.⁵¹ Twentieth-century abstraction may ease or even compel our recognition of the aesthetic value of fifteenth-century Inka rockwork, but it does not reveal the fullness of the meanings attached to rocks by the Inka. Nevertheless, prevailing Western categories and the values assigned them influence what Inka rock artifacts have been considered and how they have been considered. In particular, the notion of craft and the modern belief that art ought not to be obviously utilitarian have often colored perceptions and interpretations of pre-Hispanic Andean rockwork.⁵² As will be seen in later chapters, the utility of any particular rock had little impact on its perceived numinosity.

One of the chief problems created when the notion of art is introduced to a consideration of Inka rockwork is that in the West, art is historically and often still seen in opposition to nature. While this is a broad and much-debated topic, I raise it here to make a single brief point. From

Plato, who concluded that art was inherently inferior to nature, to his student Aristotle, who in *The Poetics* argued that art can accomplish much more than literal (physical) imitation and can convey the essence of what is represented, Western philosophers have most often regarded art and nature as competitors.⁵³ Consider the words of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne, written in 1580: “It is not reasonable that art should *win* the place of honor over our great and powerful mother Nature.”⁵⁴ This fundamental and often still operative precept of Western thought, that art not only originally imitated but always competes with nature, is inherently at odds with ancient Andean beliefs and assumptions. Stone in the Andes was both nature and culture, both part of the earth and part of human society.⁵⁵ What’s more, the Inka often valued rock precisely for its ability to participate in natural and cultural environments simultaneously. That rocks were often places where complementary orders conjoined, enhanced their significance.

While I have focused on the term *art* in relation to Inka rockwork, many of the ways we traditionally think about and categorize visual culture conflict with Inka (and more generally Andean) notions. Recent studies of Inka rockwork, for example, have tended to separate carved stone from other kinds of Inka rocks, a distinction that is inconsistent with Inka perspectives. Carved rocks are the specific focus of the important book *Piedra Abstracta: La Escultura Inca, una Vision Contemporánea* (1989), by César Paternosto.⁵⁶ One of Paternosto’s foremost objectives was to establish a temporal sequence of carved rocks, which he proposed progressed over the hundred-year period of the Inka imperium (traditionally dated 1438–1532) from partially imagistic and effusive, as at Kenko Grande and on the Saywite monolith (plates 2–3), to abstract, like the Third Stone of Saywite (plate 1), and “minimalist,” as seen best on the carved megaliths of Ollantaytambo’s unfinished temple (figure 4).⁵⁷ Much of Paternosto’s language is derived from Western discourses on art and aesthetics. This is perhaps not surprising, since Paternosto is himself an artist who brings his keen eye to the appreciation of Inka forms *as art*. Although my book takes another course, we can learn much from Paternosto’s subtle observations. Also focusing on carved rock is the work of anthropologist Maarten Van de Guchte, whose dissertation, “Carving the World,” considers the meaning and significance of outcrops in the region around the Inka’s capital of Cuzco. Van de Guchte describes the carving of specific rocks in detail and attempts to identify those carved rocks that



4. Detail of abstract design carved into megalithic wall, Ollantaytambo.

were waka. His work is complemented by that of Brian S. Bauer, who identifies waka, many of which are rocks, in and around Cuzco.⁵⁸ Rock waka could be carved or uncarved; although today these are often treated as separate—though clearly related—topics, the Inka used a variety of visual cues, identified in the following chapter, to signify the importance of certain rocks, whether carved or not. In fact, carving will be seen to be just one of a number of ways the Inka designated numinous rocks. Thus studies of carved rocks, although highly significant and extremely useful for other reasons, unfortunately fragment the Inka's culture of stone in very un-Inka ways.

Studies of rock waka, both carved and uncarved, have also tended to be distinct from the considerable body of research on Inka masonry architecture. All students of Inka masonry owe a debt of gratitude to John H. Rowe, who in 1944 wrote the seminal study on Inka architecture. More than three decades later, in 1977, Graziano Gasparini and Luise Margolies authored a book-length study of Inka architecture that was translated into English in 1980. Other contributions to the study of Inka architecture will be discussed in subsequent chapters. For now, let us note that studies of Inka stonemasonry structures have historically focused on technology, emphasizing engineering feats and extraordinary craftsmanship, as well as form, volume, and spatial arrangement. This work continues to be important. However, it is also useful to consider what the Inka's engineering feats (the moving of stone) and their craftsmanship (the cutting and fitting of stone) represent in light of the Inka's beliefs about the potential animacy of rock. Unfortunately, too many have apparently agreed with Gasparini and Margolies, who concluded that "the deeply rooted cult of the rock, whether the rock was natural or modified in multiple ways by the stone carver, represents an area of investigation apart from architecture."⁵⁹ It should be noted, however, that the same authors also asked, "Why should they [the Inka] incorporate an existing boulder in to the wall of a house . . . ?"⁶⁰ To even begin to answer this question (which I do in chapter 2) requires an exploration of what stone, particularly natural stone, meant to the Inka, as well as an examination of the cultural mechanisms through which the Inka invested rocks with particular meanings. It requires us to attend to what the architectural historian Dell Upton describes as the "cultural landscape," a term he coined to describe the "fusion of the physical with the imaginative structures that all inhabitants of the landscape use in constructing and construing it."⁶¹ In other