

Bednarik, R. G. 2010. The First Cupule Conference: introduction and summary. In R. Querejazu Lewis and R. G. Bednarik (eds), *Mysterious cup marks: proceedings of the First International Cupule Conference*, pp. 1-3. BAR International Series 2073, Archaeopress, Oxford.

THE FIRST CUPULE CONFERENCE: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

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Conferences dealing with rock art have become increasingly frequent in recent years, and now occur several times a year in one part of the world or another. In general, they address regional, methodological and particularly generic concerns in rock art research and protection, rather than highly specialised subjects such as one specific form of rock art. Professor Roy Querejazu Lewis, the President of the Asociación de Estudios del Arte Rupestre de Cochabamba (AEARC), has now presented an experiment breaking with this practice: an international conference dedicated exclusively to cupules, which would appear to be one of the simplest phenomena in the field. But he has managed to demonstrate two things: that such a specialised conference can be extraordinarily productive and pleasant, and that the subject of cupule research is significantly more complex than anyone had anticipated.

The International Cupule Conference was held in Cochabamba, central Bolivia, from 17 to 23 July 2007. Its first three days consisted of a series of symposia held at the Centro Pedagógico y Cultural Simón I. Patiño, a palatial, sumptuously furnished building surrounded by magnificent gardens. The second part of the conference offered participants the opportunity of visiting several sites of cupules and other, cupule-like phenomena in the Mizque valley and elsewhere in central Bolivia. The symposia were attended by almost one hundred tourism students of the Universidad Mayor de San Simón, filling up the venue's lecture hall to capacity. The international component of the participants included, besides many Bolivian researchers, representatives from Australia, Chile, India, Peru and Switzerland, and papers presented in absentia were contributed from Argentina, Greece, Holland and U.S.A.

The flawless performance of the conference was a credit to Professor Querejazu's superb planning and choice of secretariat personnel, and a seemingly effortless efficiency marked the proceedings throughout. From the pleasant welcoming of international visitors at the airport, to the impeccable continuous translation service (the outstanding quality of which deserves particular mention) for the full three days of lectures and discussions, to the well-orchestrated official events, even the perfectly organised and delightful tea breaks on the palace's terrace — the entire

event was characterised by cordiality. It showed once again the advantages of smaller academic events, and one aspect that I found noteworthy is the expedience of combining academic content with didactic purpose. Querejazu had integrated the event in his teaching curriculum and his students were the most attentive participants.

Another outstanding factor was the participation of native Quechua speakers, especially David Camacho who presented one of the lectures (Figure 1). The involvement of indigenous people is one of the most consequential practices AEARC is developing, and is no doubt related to Querejazu's own studies of ongoing use of Bolivian rock art sites by traditional communities. Indeed, Camacho turned out to be a most fascinating scholar, a complete autodidact in every sense, and a self-taught archaeologist who researches Incan masonry, ceramics and cultural practices.

Another of Querejazu's 'trump cards' was Gori Tumi Echevaría López, a young archaeologist from the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, Peru, one of a new breed of Andean scholars. He, too, has Quechua ancestry, and his approach to archaeology differs markedly from that of his traditional, neo-colonialist colleagues. Not only does



Figure 1. *Quechua scholar David Camacho presenting his lecture at the Cochabamba cupule conference.*



Figure 2. Fieldtrip participants examining natural, cupule-like features (potholes) at Chutu Kollu, near Tarata, central Bolivia.

he espouse a scientific and logical approach to the discipline, together with a deep personal commitment, his infectious enthusiasm will, I predict, ensure that we will hear much more from this young researcher. And he is not alone, Andean archaeology is developing rapidly into a modern discipline freeing itself of the intellectual vestiges of colonialism.

In every sense, this conference broke a great deal of new ground. Cupules are of course a significant feature in Andean rock art, as indeed they are in dozens of other major traditions around the world, from the Lower Palaeolithic in India to the 20th century in Australia. Perhaps one might have predicted that this will be a rather pedantic affair — after all, how much is there to be said about cupules? Yet this event has demonstrated that cupules are in fact a ferociously complex subject. Leaving aside the fairly obvious topics of their dating, and the perennial matter of their possible functions and meanings, a number of rather more interesting new facets emerged. For instance, there is no standardised methodology for their recording and study, yet there is an obvious need for its introduction. Then there are the great difficulties of distinguishing between cupules and natural features of a surprisingly great variety, or between cupules and other, perhaps utilitarian anthropic markings (such as mortars). These matters were highlighted and it emerged that they are in need of better resolution. This leads directly to the issue of distinguishing between cupules that relate to acoustic properties of the rocks they occur on (lithophones) and those that do not. Then there is the complex subject of the taphonomy of cupules. One of the most overwhelming impressions I took from the conference was that traditional interpretations, especially those one

finds in European commentaries, are probably more misleading than we had thought. Cupules, ultimately, need to be seen as the surviving remnant of a highly specific but rather strange form of human behaviour, all the other traces of which have disappeared. Or, as they expressed it in Latin, *‘ex ungue leonem’* ([to paint] ‘the lion from the claw’): we have tended to deduce the whole from a small part or trace of it — which is what archaeology does at the best of times. The simplistic attempts to explain cupules (astronomical, receptacles of blood and so forth) that we have seen for a great many years are probably much further from the truth than even I, ever so sceptical of humbug explanations, had suspected. Cupules, most particularly, show us the impotence of ethnocentric interpretations. And they also show us that, in rock art, the perhaps most rudimentary phenomena might be far more complex research subjects than the celebrated ‘naturalistic’ zoomorphs that have been so much more popular (cf. Yann-Pierre Montelle’s [2009] ‘iconocentrism’). As we look at cupules, and other ‘archaic’ features in rock art, we catch a fleeting glimpse of the real intricacies of human worldviews that are of overwhelming remoteness from our own.

After this sacrilegious note I best round off my report of this particularly pleasant event with a brief account of the fieldtrips. They began with visits of several interesting sites near Tarata, a picturesque small town about 30 km from Cochabamba. The first three, of which only two were seen by the main body of the tour group (Chutu Kollu and Punku Cocha), were river sites of cupule-like phenomena and extensive rock fluting at a waterfall (Figure 2). These ‘pseudo-cupules’, also found at Rocas Rio Milloma, turned



Figure 3. Conference fieldtrip participants meet with the residents of Karakara, having been requested by the villagers to support their bid to have the nearby superb cupule sites protected and included in an archaeological park the community wants to see established. Their spokesman, Oswaldo Sanchez (with white beard) addresses the meeting, flanked by the spokesman of the community's Quechua speakers (left) and Professor Roy Querejazu Lewis (with book). Further to the right stands Enriqueta de Sanchez, who acted as Quechua interpreter, and seated on the far right is Dr Giriraj Kumar (India). Gori Tumi Echevarría López (Peru) is seated next to him.

out to be typical potholes (features caused by the water's kinetic energy released in quartz rocks caught in holes in soft schist rock), a veritable lesson in distinguishing between natural and artificial rock holes. A most memorable event was a meeting arranged between the tour group and the inhabitants of the small village Karakara, who had initiated a request that their rock art sites be protected and made the centrepiece of an archaeological park adjacent to their settlement. A community leader, Oswaldo Sanchez, whose family had lived there for 320 years, had made an impassioned speech to us in the town hall in Tarata, 'demanding' that the scholars turn their attention to 'his' valley (Figure 3). Querejazu will organise a thorough study of the cultural resources present, with the keen collaboration of the villagers (made up of both Quechua and Spanish speakers). There are at least two fascinating cupule sites near Karakara. In both cases the rock art occurs together with potholes now elevated more than 20 m above the river, and one of the sites is rich in archaic stone tools.

From Tarata, the fieldtrip continued to the Mizque valley, where the cupule sites at Inca Huasi, Lakatambo and Uyuchama 2 were visited. For the first of these three sites, I have provided limited dating information (Bednarik 2000). Meanwhile, Professor Querejazu and I undertook several days of fieldwork near Cochabamba, where we had previously commenced a study of a site complex at Kalatranconi. Here we had spectacular success: we located four new cupule sites in the general area, and one of them turned out to be the largest site currently known in the State of Cochabamba. It is now named Roca Fortunato 1,

after the man who directed our attention to it. With this site alone, the number of cupules known in the entire region has virtually doubled, and the site also comprises hundreds of other petroglyphs.

I would like to express my gratitude to all who have contributed to the success and warmth of this most enjoyable event, people like Daniel Salamanca, Hugo Santa Cruz, Ana Maria Urquidi, Miguel Guzman, Pamela Rodríguez, Karim Mostacedo, Eliana Lizárraga, Melanie Delgadillo and Lorena Rojas; to the incredibly helpful Charles Disch, to Alfredo Palizza, Rodolfo Rodríguez, and particularly to Raquel Velasco. I am sure I express here the sentiments of each and every participant. We also thank Elizabeth Torres, the Director of the architectural marvel that was provided as the venue, the Centro Patiño. But, as is most obvious to everyone who had the good fortune of participating in this lovely conference, our principal thanks are to Roy Querejazu Lewis, who planned and executed this memorable experiment. He has demonstrated to the discipline that a small conference addressing a highly specific topic can be very successful, provided it is conducted with flair and a great deal of enthusiasm.

REFERENCES

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