

## ANNUAL REPORT: TARACO (PERU) 2013 FIELD SCHOOL

**Director:** Dr. Abigail Levine (UCLA)  
**Co-Director:** Lic. Walter Michiel Zegarra Zegarra (Peru)



Excavations along the western margin of the sunken court at Huayra Mocco

### GENERAL

A five-week IFR Field School at Taraco, Peru, took place between June 23<sup>rd</sup> and July 27<sup>th</sup> 2013. This field school was designed as a rigorous, hands-on program in which students would gain experience with all aspects of archaeological fieldwork. The site of Taraco is a major Formative Period center located high in the Lake Titicaca Basin of Peru. Due to the high altitude (3820 m.a.s.l.) of the project area, it was necessary for students to spend the first few days of the program acclimating to the local conditions prior to beginning strenuous fieldwork activities. During this time seminars were conducted in which students were instructed in the method and practice of archaeology, local geography and history, and recent research. Walking tours of the Taraco site area, including visits to various mounds in the site complex, were also conducted. During these first few days, students were afforded the opportunity to become acquainted with the region and learn about its rich cultural history, local traditions and customs, and unique environment.

Archaeological excavations at the site of Huayra Mocco—one of the 18 mounds in the Taraco site complex—began on June 26<sup>th</sup>. In addition to the six IFR students, the excavation team also included graduate students from UCLA, UC San Diego, and the University of Pittsburgh, in addition to 6 local workers. Our work was focused principally on a sunken court located on the southern sector of the mound. In total, three areas of the Huayra Mocco mound were excavated 1) the center of the court; 2) the western margin of the court; and 3) an artificial terrace located northwest of the court. The objective of these investigations was to identify and define architectural remains in order to better understand the sequence of occupation and construction of the sunken court complex.

Our daily routine consisted of excavations from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM, with a lunch break from 12:00-1:00 PM. During this time, students were involved in the removal and screening of sediment, the recording of data on project field forms, drawing of plans and profiles, and site photography. Post-excavation tasks included the washing, sorting, and registration of excavated materials (ceramics, lithics, bones). In the evenings, students entered field form data into the project database, and were instructed in artifact processing illustration. As transportation in the

*altiplano* region can be difficult for inexperienced travelers, on weekends students had the opportunity to participate in group excursions organized by project staff. Weekend trips included visits to the city of Puno, a tour of the *Uros* (floating islands), an overnight at the Fundo Chincheros (a working *hacienda*), and field trips to the archaeological sites of Sillustani and Pukara.

### **UNIT I: COURT CENTER**

The excavations in the center of the court revealed a deep (~5 m) sequence of natural and cultural depositional levels, including at least two phases of construction dating to the Formative Period. The outstanding feature of this area was a semi-circular platform that had been constructed using large quadrangular stone blocks. This feature, likely dating to the Middle Formative Period, was leveled by fill, upon which another patio surface was built. This second phase of construction, which utilized several layers of cobble fill, indicates an effort to keep the semi-subterranean center of the court well drained and free of standing water.

### **UNIT II: WESTERN MARGIN**

The western margin excavations were located due west of the center court excavations along the edge of the sunken court. Work in this area also revealed a stratified occupational sequence reaching over 4 meters in depth. This included a series of floors and activity surfaces that were interspersed with lenses of ash. These were associated with finely made ceramic serving wares, as well as significant amounts of lithic debitage, indicating that this area was used for both food sharing and tool-making, further underscoring the non-domestic function of the court. Most notably, the excavations also revealed a stone-lined canal feature that likely corresponds with the second phase of court construction. The form and placement of this canal are very similar to those found at the monumental site of Pukara, and suggest that it was intended to channel water under the surface and away from the center of the court.

### **UNIT III: NORTHWEST TERRACE**

Work in this area exposed an early occupational phase followed by two phases of terrace construction/remodeling. The earliest occupational phase consisted of a series of floors and buildings that had been remodeled, disassembled, or destroyed. The lack of ceramics and abundance of lithic debitage in these levels may suggest a Terminal Archaic temporal affiliation for the occupation. This would indicate that the sunken court complex was constructed on top of an earlier pre-ceramic ceremonial center. This hypothesis will be tested in future seasons.

The first phase of terrace construction, likely dating to the Middle Formative, was associated with a canal feature, as well as fine ceramic serving wares. This pattern of using terraces for feasting is well established in the northern Titicaca Basin region. The terrace was faced on one side with a wall made of finely cut stone. In contrast, the construction of the second phase of terrace construction appears far more informal, though determining its associations was very difficult due to extensive damage by modern agricultural activity.

In sum, the five-week field season was extraordinarily productive, both as a research project and as a field school. Not only did the project yield a tremendous amount of data, but it also succeeded in providing all project participants with an exciting and interactive learning experience.