

Perspectives on Place



Pots, Petroglyphs, and Pathways: The Mythical Killer Whale in Nasca Art

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Flying over the pampas between the Ingenio and Nasca River valleys on the southern coast of Peru, one can view geoglyphs—large-scale images on the ground—depicting animals, spirals, long trapezoids, and straight lines in radiating arrangements. Scholars have compared many of the figural geoglyphs to representations on the colorful ceramics of the Nasca civilization (c. 100 BCE–700 CE) to date them or explain their significance.^[1] In fact, studies of Nasca art have largely focused on ceramic painting, with relatively little written about other art forms, such as petroglyphs—images that are carved, incised, or pecked on rock surfaces. Yet there are important similarities among these forms of expression. The images painted on Nasca ceramics are most often reproduced through photographs or line drawings, and these representations do

not fully recreate the original viewers' firsthand experience of these objects. Similarly, we experience a Nasca geoglyph differently from an airplane or in a line drawing than the original viewers would have at ground level, where it was intended to be seen.

Examining various types of viewer experiences of the same images in different mediums, on different types of supports, and in vastly different scales is a useful exercise to better understand Nasca iconography. Representation, scale, support, and location are intertwined in Nasca art, yet scholars have rarely discussed the position of the viewer in relation to the image in analyses of these works. This essay is an attempt to remedy that oversight. The Nasca Mythical Killer Whale (see fig. 1), represented in ceramics, geoglyphs, and petroglyphs, is an ideal subject for investigating changes in representation across media and in a variety of contexts and settings. Considering the character of viewer interaction with these images on different supports reveals that Nasca art employs a sophisticated system of signs with consistent meanings and associations and also presupposed an informed, literate audience that understood the significance of these signs, even in partial representations.



Fig. 1

Two examples of the Nasca Mythical Killer Whale. Left: Vessel with Mythical Killer Whales, 180 BCE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 17.9 × 16.2 cm (7 1/16 × 6 3/8 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.2097. See this work's page in the Art Institute's online collection. Right: Double-spout vessel depicting a Mythical Killer Whale, 180 BCE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 17.2 × 12.7 cm (6 3/4 × 5 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.2098. See this work's page in the Art Institute's online collection.

THE NASCA CULTURE

The style that scholars have labeled *Nasca* is associated with sites in the valleys of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage (fig. 2), on the southern coast of Peru, with some of the main Nasca settlements located about thirty to sixty kilometers (roughly eighteen to thirty-eight miles)

inland. The coastal region of Peru is a very dry desert with the Andes Mountains to the east. An agricultural society, the Nasca lived close to their fields. Virtually nothing grows on the plateaus between these river valleys, and some of the rivers in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage do not have surface water year-round. In response, the Nasca built water filtration galleries called *puquios* to tap into subsurface water. It is probably due to the unpredictable availability of water that agricultural themes, agricultural abundance, and fertility are such prominent subjects in Nasca art.



Fig. 2

The Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, south coast of Peru. Modified satellite image, Google Earth Pro.

Ritual activities related to agricultural production seem to have been particularly important for the Nasca, and both iconographic and archaeological evidence indicate that human sacrifice played an important role in these beliefs. The disembodied head is often depicted in Nasca artworks. Though these images are called “trophy heads” in much of the archaeological literature, evidence of the careful treatment of actual human heads—including the sealing or closing of the mouth with cactus spines or thorns from *huarango* trees, as well as their ritual burial in caches—suggests that they served a ritual function and were not simply trophies taken in battle.[2] In Nasca ceramic paintings, depictions of these heads often appear alongside complex mythical beings, and they are occasionally shown sprouting plants, a clear indication of their association with agricultural abundance. Additionally, standing figures with trophy-head traits can be seen in Nasca art, suggesting animated representations of the dead.[3]

Much of Nasca iconography derives from the earlier Paracas tradition, and there is significant consistency of theme. Scholars use a change in technique to mark the transition from Paracas to Nasca: whereas Paracas polychrome ceramics were incised and fired, and only after that painted with resin-based paint, the Nasca painted their polychrome ceramics with slip before firing. Both the Paracas and the Nasca produced magnificent textiles, although in the Nasca tradition the primary medium for complex mythical iconography was ceramic painting. Mythical beings in both Nasca ceramics and Paracas textiles are often adorned with smaller motifs either incorporated into their bodies or attached to them with streamers. These complex

arrangements of symbols connect various motifs and figures to each other thematically and conceptually.

The images on the thin-walled Nasca vessels are delicately painted and rich in detail. The compositions are colorful, and their iconography consistent. While Nasca sculptural vessels, including effigy vessels, do exist, the culture's ceramic tradition relied heavily on painting, and most sculptural vessels incorporate painted designs in some way.[4]

The Nasca ceramic chronology is thoroughly described elsewhere, but for present purposes it is important to note that there are significant stylistic changes that affect the way one can “read” the images on painted Nasca vessels.[5] Throughout Nasca history, ceramic painters used outlined shapes and polychrome, slip-painted images. However, in Early Nasca ceramics (what scholars label Nasca phases 2 through 4, often referred to as “Monumental” Nasca), the images use broader and wider shapes that often describe more naturalistic representations as well as supernatural beings. Significant changes start to appear in Middle Nasca vessels (phase 5), considered a transitional phase, a time of experimentation when some motifs begin to be depicted in a much more abstract manner. Appendages are attached to the bodies of mythical beings, and radiating designs with volutes and rays are introduced. In Late Nasca vessels (phases 6 and 7; also called the “Proliferous” style) abundant ornamentation (or *proliferation*, as Nasca specialists term it) takes over the compositions, resulting in crowded images whose sheer volume of smaller, secondary designs make them very difficult to “read.” Given the drastically different conventions of representation in Late Nasca art, in this study I focus on Early and Middle Nasca ceramics.

THE MYTHICAL KILLER WHALE IN NASCA CERAMICS

Representations of mythical beings in Nasca ceramic paintings can be quite complex. In a prior study, I addressed the importance of wholeness and fragmentation in the iconography of Nasca ceramic paintings of mythical figures.[6] Mythical beings can be identified by their particular attributes and perceived as figures in and of themselves, but those attributes can also function independently, as symbols in their own right. If an image of a mythical being is painted around a vessel, this produces an only partial view of the figure from any single vantage point and, therefore, a fragmented experience of this representation. It is only by interacting with the object by turning it in their hands that viewers can obtain a complete understanding of the image.

One mythical figure often depicted in Nasca art has been labeled the Anthropomorphic

Mythical Being.[7] The Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (hereafter AMB) is depicted with a forehead ornament, a spondylus necklace, and a mouth mask (see figs. 3–4). It might wrap around a cup or drape over a double-spouted vessel. Its torso is painted with a flat color and decorated with parallel lines, and when wrapped around a vessel, it may have a streamer emerging from its back that may have symbols within it or along its border.[8] Some figures also have streamers emerging from their mouths (see fig. 4). The figure often holds trophy heads, but these heads may also be depicted within the figure’s streamer, or alternating with triangular projections as attachments to the streamer (see fig. 3). The vessels illustrated in figures 3 and 4 must be turned for viewers to see the various attributes of the AMB, and not all vantage points allow viewers to understand it as a complete figure. Some vantage points reveal only the torso or the rows of trophy heads, allowing viewers to focus on these as independent symbols. A similar fragmentation appears in some representations of the Nasca Mythical Harvester, which also wrap around vessels.[9] The complete view of these figures is only experienced through interaction with these vessels.



Fig. 3

Collared jar depicting an Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, 180 BCE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 12.7 × 14 cm (5 × 5 1/2 in.) The Art Institute of Chicago, S. B. Williams Fund and Edward E. Ayer Endowment in memory of Charles L. Hutchinson, 1956.1178. See this work’s page in the Art Institute’s online collection.



Fig. 4

Small bowl depicting an Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, 180 BCE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 9.2 × 14 cm (3 5/8 × 5 1/2 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.1933. See this work’s page in the Art Institute’s collection.

On the vessel shown in figure 5, the vantage point that would allow viewers a clear view of the double spout and bridge also permits a full view of the head of the AMB and its human arms. If

we rotate the vessel, however, we see that the body is not the usual extended anthropomorphic torso of the AMB; instead, the torso has been replaced by the body of a marine animal. Only through turning the object do viewers discover that this representation of the AMB incorporates an attribute of another being, the Mythical Killer Whale (MKW).



Fig. 5

Vessel with an Anthropomorphic Mythical Being with Mythical Killer Whale attributes, 50 CE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 18.6 × 17.2 cm (7 5/16 × 6 3/4 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.2100. See this work's page in the Art Institute's collection.

Fish and what appear to be orcas are recurring subjects in the arts of the southern coast of Peru, from embroidered Paracas textiles to slip-painted Nasca ceramics. In fact, Paracas embroidered designs are without a doubt the source for the Nasca Mythical Killer Whale. This mythical being resembles an orca in the shape of its body, which is divided into bands of different colors, as well as in the presence of a spot above its eye (see fig. 1).^[10] The figure has triangular fins, and a human arm often emerges from the lower portion of its body—characteristics that closely follow earlier Paracas conventions.^[11] The head of the Nasca Mythical Killer Whale has a circular eye with a dark, round pupil. Its flat snout opens to reveal triangular teeth, and there may also be a curl under its head or several thin, parallel lines emerging from the snout. Curator and art historian Richard Townsend considers it a composite fish-like creature that incorporates both orca and shark elements.^[12] Although the division along the body is present in other depictions of marine animals, the flat snout and the parallel lines on it are not. These lines are most often seen in representations of land mammals such as the fox.^[13]

Anthropologists Helaine Silverman and Donald Proulx have described the characteristics of the Mythical Killer Whale and its relationship to the other mythical beings and motifs in Nasca art:

The Mythical Killer Whale, representing the most powerful creature of the sea, nevertheless appears to be of secondary importance to the AMB. Like the AMB, it has its origins in Paracas art. The creature is depicted naturalistically in Nasca 1 with the exception of the human arm extending from its ventral side. Soon, however, Mythical Killer Whales are depicted holding knives or human trophy heads in their anthropomorphized hands; this association with trophy heads and blood continues through the entire ceramic sequence. In Nasca 5 radical changes take place in the depiction of some Mythical

Killer Whales. An abbreviated form appears, representing a frontal view of the creature's head characterized by open jaws and a patch of blood (symbolizing a trophy head). Roark (1965) coined the term "Bloody Mouth" for this variant form. The Bloody Mouth is most prevalent in Nasca 5 but continues into Nasca 6; in Nasca 7 and 8 it is replaced by a profile form with a jagged-toothed jaw. In the meantime, Killer Whale attributes are attached to the AMB in the form of signifiers which terminate in the form of a killer whale tail.^[14]

Although earlier versions of this being are relatively clear and easy for viewers to "read" as a complete figure, Middle and Late Nasca versions are much more abbreviated and stylized, and could even be represented in partial form.^[15]

Of course, what immediately strikes viewers today is that Nasca settlements were, as mentioned above, located inland thirty to sixty kilometers (roughly eighteen to thirty-eight miles)—not along the seashore where the ocean teems with sea life—and yet marine motifs are extremely important in Nasca art, as exemplified by the many representations of the MKW and all its variations. Archaeologist Patrick Carmichael has argued that marine representations in Nasca art are strictly symbolic and do not reflect the use of marine resources by the Nasca people.^[16] His argument is primarily based on the lack of Nasca settlements along the coast; the relatively minimal evidence of fish and shell remains in Nasca sites; and evidence provided by stable isotope analysis, which indicated that marine food sources, such as fish and shellfish, played a rather minor role in the Nasca diet. Rather, based on Jesuit missionary Bernabé Cobo's assertion that the ocean was considered "the ultimate source of all water" in Andean thought, Carmichael proposes that the MKW is symbolic of water in general, not specifically of the ocean, and is therefore tied to the theme of agriculture through that association.^[17] Proulx has also pointed out the symbolic function of the MKW, although he explains its significance by emphasizing the MKW's association with trophy heads and their links to agriculture in Nasca ceramic painting.^[18] Regardless, the focus of the present paper is not what the images mean specifically but rather how these images function.

The highly abbreviated versions of the larger motif can best be described as *pars pro toto* representations of the MKW, a type of visual synecdoche. This is particularly evident in some of the Middle Nasca variations of the MKW, including the representation of horizontal bands with long triangular projections that resemble spikes alternate with representations of trophy heads. Proulx associated these triangular projections with the triangular fins of the MKW (see fig. 6), represented in this case without the rest of the figure's body.^[19] These fin bands are also often integrated as borders on the AMB's streamer (see fig. 3).^[20] The mouth of the MKW becomes the "Bloody Mouth" motif in Nasca 5, another highly abbreviated variation of this motif that is not dependent on the representation of the entire body.^[21] The MKW, in other words, can be

represented as a whole, complete being or can be shown in a fragmented manner, and attributes of the MKW can be shown on their own or can be added to other figures, modifying them, as seen in the examples in figure 5 (by replacing the AMB's body with an MKW body) and figure 3 (by adding the fin band to the AMB's streamer).



Fig. 6

Open bowl with rows of repeated abstract motifs and trophy heads, 180 BCE–500 CE. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Ceramic and pigment; 7.3 × 19.2 cm (2 7/8 × 7 9/16 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Kate S. Buckingham Endowment, 1955.1959. See this work's page in the Art Institute's collection.

A particularly useful concept that helps us understand how these images were used in Nasca art and how they were experienced by the original viewers is the Andean concept of the *quilca* (also spelled *quillca* or *quellca*). I am not implying that the Nasca used the term *quilca*, of course, but instead simply situating characteristics observed in Nasca art within an indigenous conceptual and linguistic framework. The Quechua and Aymara term *quilca* has been translated and interpreted in many ways, with some taking it to mean specifically “writing” while others suggest it is more accurately understood as “painting” or any representational art form. In her discussion of Paracas resin-painted ceramics, anthropologist and art historian Lisa DeLeonardis addresses the uses of this word in the colonial era and the actions and art forms with which it was associated:

In Aymara, the verb to paint (pintar) is expressed as pintatha or quellcatha, while painters (pintor, pintora) are quellqueri ccosccori (Bertonio 2005 [1612]:344). In Quechua, quillca refers to “painting or drawing,” but the act, quellcani, is defined “to write, draw, carve on hard surfaces, to embroider, or to dye.” This latter term suggests that the processes of carving, embroidering, and dyeing are conceptualized as similar.[22]

These various associations indicate that *quilca* was a broadly used term that encompassed the making of images in various media. *Quilca* also describes writing and texts in general, however, and archaeologist Gori Tumi Echevarría López has pointed out that the term continues to be used colloquially in Ayacucho for signatures and writing.[23]

This term has been embraced by rock art scholars in Peru and is commonly used to refer specifically to rock art sites.[24] Echevarría López has proposed using *quilca* as an indigenous

term that effectively substitutes the Western term “art” with an indigenous concept.[25] He also hoped that, through adopting this indigenous term, Eurocentric understandings of the definition and categorization of art, as well as the Western emphasis on craftsmanship, would be eliminated, effectively terminating the “hierarchical imposition of Western thought” on the discussions of art in the Andean region.[26] However, as linguist Galen Brokaw has pointed out, in using the term as an equivalent of “art,” we may be separating the aesthetic (art) and the rational (writing) from one another in a way that does not accurately reflect the term’s use in the Andean region; *quilcas*, Brokaw argues, both encode information *and* have a visual component.[27]

Although there are further nuances to the debate regarding the use and meaning of *quilca*, it is indisputable that a *quilca* is a type of sign that can communicate meaning to an informed audience. The term describes signs in general—whether they are representational/figurative images (icons) or more abstract, highly fragmented, or stylized representations (symbols)—as long as these have a conventional meaning or consistent associations. In other words, whether we think the referent of *quilca* is more like an image or more like a piece of language, or is something that renders that distinction moot, if a *quilca* has specific associations, these carry over wherever this *quilca* is placed, regardless of medium, scale, or location.

We can think of the larger representations of mythical beings in Nasca art as *quilcas*, but due to the fragmented view of them that vessels often present, and due to the highly abbreviated character of Nasca 5 versions of these motifs, we can also consider their attributes *quilcas* in their own right. It may be that the Nasca themselves did not think of these representations primarily as complete beings with attributes that specifically apply to each of them. Clearly, all parts need not always be present, and the motifs seem to be transferable to other beings. When these *quilcas* appear on larger figures, they emphasize the connections between the larger figure and important themes. It is through the close observation of consistent patterns of substitution and interchangeability in these *quilcas* that we can begin to discern their conventional associations.[28]

It is important to note that the structure of many of these complex images painted around Nasca vessels makes it impossible to fully separate either viewer or support from these representations: there is an essential connection between the painted representation and the support on which it is depicted. In the case of ceramic paintings, viewers must rotate the vessel to understand how the *quilcas* relate to one another. The MKW can be understood as a complete *quilca* when seen as whole and complete as in figures 1 and 2, but its bifurcated tail also functions as a *quilca* that modifies the AMB, something that is evident upon turning the vessel, as shown in figures 3 and 5. In the latter examples, the MKW’s associations are

transferable to the AMB, although there is also a link that connects both figures and perhaps justifies these substitution patterns: namely, the representation of trophy heads and the theme of decapitation.

There are also sculptural representations, or effigy vessels, of the Mythical Killer Whale. The fact that these vessels are actual three-dimensional objects, though, poses an interesting case for the centrality of interaction to Nasca art; although the object can be perceived from a distance as a whole figure, close inspection by viewers can reveal other aspects of its iconography. Some motifs, like trophy heads, might be integrated into its body and clearly visible from a distance, but this is not always the case. The vessel in figure 7 needs to be turned over to view the trophy head painted on its underside, for example.^[29] The trophy head is hidden unless the viewer interacts with the object, but other quilcas like the triangular fins and teeth are clearly visible, and the teeth have red spots to indicate blood. Taken together, these link the larger figure to the theme of decapitation. It is worth noting, however, that compared to the painted versions of this motif and its variations, sculptural versions of the MKW seem relatively rare with Proulx's *Sourcebook of Nasca Iconography* mentioning only seventeen effigy vessels of the MKW in his sample, which ranged from Nasca phases 3 to 7.^[30]



Fig. 7

Killer Whale effigy vessel, 100 BCE–700 CE. Nasca; Peru. Earthenware with slip; 12.1 × 21.6 × 7.9 cm (4 3/4 × 8 1/2 × 3 1/8 in.). The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the Shell Oil Company Foundation at “One Great Night in November, 1997,” 97.469. Right: Side view. Left: Bottom view.

THE GEOGLYPHS

The experience of closely observing and interacting with small ceramic objects contrasts dramatically with that of viewing the large geoglyphs of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. These large-scale images on the ground are located on the plateaus between valleys or on the hills that flank these valleys. By far the largest concentration of these geoglyphs is on the pampas between the Ingenio and Nasca Valleys, which I will here call the Nasca Pampa. Many of the figural geoglyphs on the Nasca Pampa have been compared to the colorful ceramics of the Nasca civilization. Collectively known as the Nasca Lines, today the geoglyphs on the Nasca

Pampa are experienced mostly by tourists flying over them in small planes, and the photographs used in many publications are typically aerial photos. Of course, such geoglyphs were never meant to be experienced this way by their creators, but due to their larger scale and their locations, these quilcas did indeed need to be “read” differently than those on portable objects.

The range in style and scale of the geoglyphs in this region of Peru suggests that not all date to the same period and that they may have had different functions. Following a thorough documentation of the sites in the Palpa Valley, archaeologists Markus Reindel, Johnny Isla, and Klaus Koschmieder argue that the earliest geoglyphs, which predate the Nasca, were on the slopes of hills, visible from the valleys. Many of those depict human figures that resemble those of the petroglyphs of the Palpa Valley. Reindel, Isla, and Koschmieder assert that the petroglyphs preceded the geoglyphs; these representations simply became larger and moved from boulders to hillsides. Later geoglyphs—like those associated with the Nasca civilization—eventually became more stylized and geometric and were made on the elevated pampas next to the valleys. Since these were on a relatively flat area and large in scale, they were no longer meant to be viewed from the ground, suggesting that these geoglyphs may have had a divine audience.^[31] As I will address later in this essay, however, there are at least some petroglyphs in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage that were made by the Nasca, and which would have been contemporary with the large geoglyphs on the pampas.

Several geoglyphs in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage depict marine animals. One of them is on the eastern side of the Grande Valley and clearly depicts a MKW (fig. 8, top left). It measures approximately sixty-five meters long (about two hundred and thirteen feet) and was recently cleared to make it more easily visible and accessible for future tourists.^[32] Because it was made on a hillside and can be seen from the ground, it is assumed to be pre-Nasca.

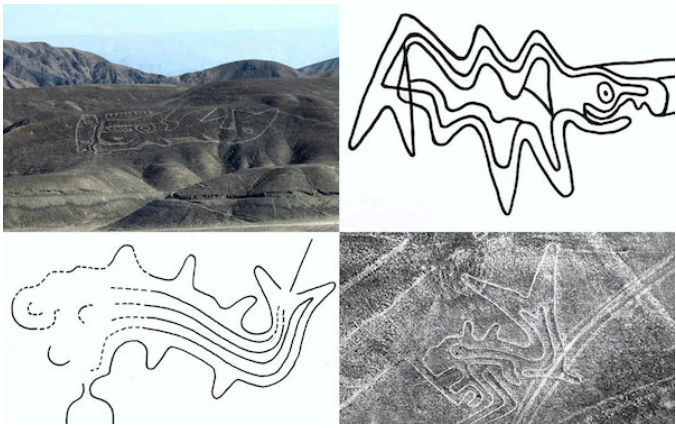


Fig. 8

Some geoglyphs that depict the Mythical Killer Whale in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. Top left: A geoglyph that was recently cleared for better viewing. It is on a hillside and measures approximately 65 meters (213 feet) across. It is assumed to be pre-Nasca. Image from Jason Daley, “Ancient Orca Geoglyph Rediscovered in Peru,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/check-out-orca-geoglyph-rediscovered-peru-180967338/, published November 29, 2017. Photograph credit: Johny Isla Cuadrado, Peruvian Ministry of Culture/German Archaeological Institute. Top right: A Palpa Valley geoglyph measuring approximately 55 meters (180 feet) across, with lines that are approximately 50 centimeters (20 inches) wide. After a site plan in Marcus Reindel, Johny Isla Cuadrado, and Klaus Koschmieder, *Vorspanische Siedlungen und Bodenzeichnungen in Palpa, Süd-Peru/Asentamientos Prehispánicos y Geoglifos en Palpa, Costa Sur del Perú, Beiträge zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie 19* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1999), fig. 11. Drawing by Ana Nieves. Bottom left: A geoglyph on the northern side of the Nasca Pampa measuring approximately 25 meters long (82 feet). Drawing after Paul Kosok and Maria Reiche, “Ancient Drawings on the Desert of Peru,” *Archaeology* 2 (Winter 1949), fig. 8. Bottom right: A geoglyph photographed from a helicopter, c. 1954. Image from Maria Reiche, *Contribuciones a la Geometría y Astronomía en el Antiguo Perú* (Lima: Asociación María Reiche para las Líneas

de Nasca/Epígrafe Editores, S. A., 1993),
fig. 7.31.

Geoglyphs associated with the Nasca civilization are mostly made with a continuous line that does not cross itself, a characteristic that was noted early on by historian Paul Kosok and mathematician Maria Reiche.^[33] Because of this, various scholars have proposed that these Nasca images constitute a type of procession path designed to be walked on, possibly by groups in a single file. Other straight lines that likely served as pathways cut across the Nasca Pampa as well, and these have been referred to as “roads” or paths since archaeologists first documented them.^[34] Being able to walk the images seems to have been an essential aspect of Nasca geoglyphs; their function was integrated into their design.

One drawing published by Kosok and Reiche in 1949 shows what was left of an MKW geoglyph at the time (fig. 8, bottom left). It measures approximately twenty-five meters long (eighty-two feet) and is on the northern side of the Nasca Pampa, close to the Ingenio Valley. At the time of Kosok and Reiche’s publication, portions of this geoglyph were incomplete due to substantial damage to its head. Later photos of this geoglyph indicate it had been partially reconstructed, although Reiche noted that this reconstruction was an act of vandalism, so the accuracy of the head in later photos of this geoglyph is questionable.^[35] In the 1949 drawing, however, the curved shape of the body is clearly visible with an extension below the head that corresponds with the human arm of the MKW. This arm ends in a circular shape that corresponds to the decapitated head that these figures usually hold in ceramic representations. Another MKW geoglyph on the Nasca Pampa, also documented by Reiche, has an extended arm holding an object (fig. 8, top right). In both cases, the MKWs were executed with a single, uninterrupted line, so we can assume they were meant to be walked. There are other marine animal geoglyphs made with an uninterrupted line on the Nasca Pampa as well, although not all have MKW attributes. Another highly stylized marine being with triangular fins and a bifurcated tail that is approximately fifty-five meters long (one hundred and fifteen feet) is on the Cresta de Sacramento in the Palpa Valley, further north in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage (fig. 8, bottom right).^[36]

It is interesting that the geoglyphs attributed to the Nasca culture based on their iconography really do not resemble the style of comparable quilcas in ceramic paintings. The shape of the geoglyphs is informed by their function, and this prompts more abstracted versions of the same representations. We can identify some of the basic features in the Nasca MKW geoglyphs such as the triangular fins, the bifurcated tail, and/or human arm, but not every feature or attribute is described as thoroughly as they are on Nasca ceramics, nor as clearly depicted as on the pre-

Nasca MKW on the hillside (fig. 8, top left). In other words, “legibility” of the geoglyphs is affected by their location and function. As the images moved from the hillsides to the pampas and were used as pathways, the ability to view them as whole figures was severely limited. The use of a single line gives these figures a more abstract appearance, though viewers familiar with the structure of these representations would be able to associate a simple circular shape with a trophy head based on its placement in relation to the larger figure. As with Nasca ceramic paintings, viewers’ actions compensate for the partial visibility of these representations; viewers’ movement completes the image. Thus, viewer interaction is absolutely necessary and integrated into the quilcas in both art forms.

The geoglyphs, as pathways for processions, are sites of ritual activity. The presence of broken pottery on the geoglyph-covered pampas supports the theory that they served a ceremonial function, as the pottery sherds are believed to be the result of ritual smashing of pots. Leaving aside the vast difference in scale between the geoglyphs and the vessels and the drastic change in style this prompts, the ceremonial associations of the quilcas depicted in both media are clear and, most importantly, were understood by their intended audience. A quilca’s associations are therefore independent from style, scale, or even the visible completeness of the whole motif.

THE PETROGLYPHS

Like geoglyphs, and also part of the larger category of rock art, petroglyphs are another form of artwork embedded in the natural environment. Concentrations of petroglyphs have been reported throughout the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, and in 2000 I conducted a rock art survey of the lower Nasca Valley that resulted in the documentation of several previously unknown rock art sites. Interestingly, there was a high concentration of petroglyph sites deep within the *quebradas* (dry streambeds and ravines) on the northeastern side of the Nasca Valley. These quebradas served as corridors that allowed people to travel between valleys efficiently. Most importantly, the quebradas on this side of the valley also connect the valley to the Nasca Pampa, an area with a very high concentration of figurative geoglyphs. All marine animal petroglyphs documented thus far are on the sides of the valleys adjacent to the Nasca Pampa.[37]

One of the Nasca Valley petroglyph sites, in Quebrada Majuelos, has very large examples of marine animal petroglyphs.[38] This site was first described in Proulx’s report for his 1998 survey of the lower Nasca Valley, and since 2000 I have documented the site’s petroglyphs through drawings and standard photography, and, more recently, with Reflectance Transformation Imagery and photogrammetry. Petroglyphs in this site are on poorly cemented sandstone, a

relatively soft surface that does not require percussion techniques to be marked. Unfortunately, the ease with which one can mark the stone surfaces at this site has also facilitated recent graffiti, so a thorough documentation was essential.

One of the large petroglyphs at Majuelos is clearly a Nasca MKW (see figs. 9–10). It measures two meters and thirty-five centimeters long (about seven feet eight inches) and has an upward-curving body with triangular fins that ends in a bifurcated tail. This large MKW has a human arm and lines that divide its body lengthwise, with circles along the center line. It has a pointed ear, rectangular snout, and a hook-like extension under the chin. Its eye consists of a round shape with a circular pit carved at its center—a three-dimensional version of the eye with a black pupil of the MKW in ceramic paintings. Interestingly, this MKW has an oval shape near its tail that resembles the eye-shaped navel on the banded body of the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being but which is not typically shown in MKW representations (and is thus another quilca transferred from one larger being to another).

Fig. 9

A petroglyph of the Nasca Mythical Killer Whale measuring approximately 2.35 meters (about 7 feet 8 inches) long. Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru. 3-D model by Ana Nieves.

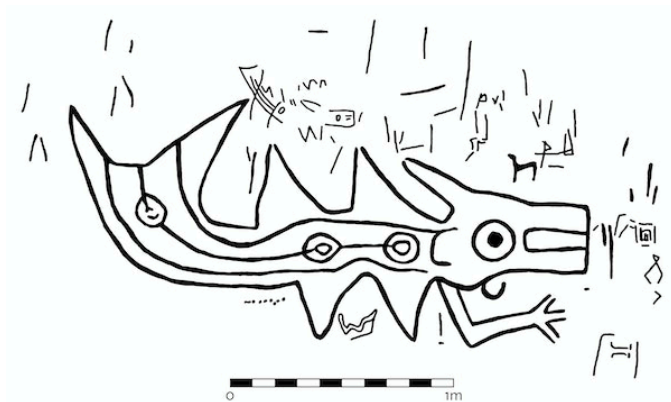


Fig. 10

Drawing of the petroglyph panel in fig. 9. Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru. Drawing by Ana Nieves.

The lines used to create this large MKW are deep grooves compared to other markings in the rock art panel. Another large-scale petroglyph of a marine mammal at the site (see fig. 11) features the same deep grooves, and we can place it in the same manufacturing episode as the large MKW. This second petroglyph faces the left and also has lines on its body, but it has a

pointed head shape and lacks the pointed ear.

Fig. 11

A petroglyph measuring approximately 1 meter 93 centimeters (6 feet 4 inches) from the point of the head on the left to the end of the tail long. Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru. 3-D model by Ana Nieves.

The large MKW petroglyph in figures 9 and 10 is centrally located on this rock art panel with other, smaller petroglyphs around it. Those smaller images are made with shallow and narrow incised lines. Interestingly, none of these smaller representations are within the body of the large MKW. This suggests that the larger MKW was carved first, and the smaller images with thin lines were made later, filling up the space around the large MKW.

Among these smaller, incised representations is a second MKW located between the upper fins and the tail of the large MKW (figs. 10 and 12). They both face the same direction. Like the larger MKW, the smaller one also has a rectangular snout, long ears, and a banded body with triangular fins. The proportions of the eyes, ears, and head are like those of the large MKW, and the curvature of the body of the smaller figure mirrors the shape of the larger one. In every way, this is a smaller version of the larger petroglyph. The placement suggests it postdates the larger MKW, but the consistency in its attributes and style indicates that the time between manufacturing episodes was not very long. It is also worth noting that the vast difference in

scale between these two representations of the same being demands different viewing distances. Although viewers can stand about fifteen feet away from the rock art panel and see the larger MKW, they must move very close to the panel to see the smaller depiction.

Fig. 12

A small petroglyph of a Mythical Killer Whale located between the upper fins and tail of the large Mythical Killer Whale depicted in figs. 9 and 10. Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru. Reflectance Transformation Image file by Ana Nieves and Gori Tumi Echevarría. The video shows several rendering modes in the RTI viewer, with the light moving in clockwise direction.

There are other small petroglyphs made with a similar technique to that used in the small MKW in other rock art panels at this site as well. Some of these other designs depict standing anthropomorphic figures between thirty and fifty centimeters in height (eleven to twenty inches), with open, circular eyes and vertical lines above their heads, suggesting hair (fig. 13). The fact that the small incised MKW is clearly Nasca helps us date these petroglyphs due to the use of similar techniques; furthermore, all of the potsherds documented at this site thus far have been Nasca. Interestingly, on the anthropomorphic figures, small vertical lines descend from their mouths, which indicate that these are representations of animated trophy heads. In Nasca ceramics, trophy heads are often shown with hair, and sometimes vertical lines cross their lips. These lines are a visual representation of the cactus spines or the thorns of the *huarango* tree that the Nasca used to seal the mouths of ritually treated human heads. In other words, although the large MKW petroglyph does not actually hold a trophy head, other petroglyph panels throughout the site feature trophy head quilcas that complement and reinforce the iconography of the MKW petroglyph. The close association of the MKW to the ritual of head-taking is still here, but seeing it involves the movement of the viewer around the site. Knowing that the Nasca incorporated viewer interaction with an image and its support into images' designs, we can therefore make associations between quilcas on different rock art panels here. The representation of the MKW on these petroglyphs is not made with a single, uninterrupted line and thus is closer to the ceramic versions of this motif than to the geoglyph versions. The closer resemblance to the ceramics form of the quilcas is likely because, as with the ceramics and unlike the geoglyphs, these images were not meant to be walked. It is important to note that the concept of quilca refers to the sign, but that it is independent from style and notions of "craftsmanship." The images that are carved or incised onto the rock surfaces might seem roughly executed compared to the depictions of the same motifs on finely painted ceramics, but this difference is not relevant to their meaning or their associations.

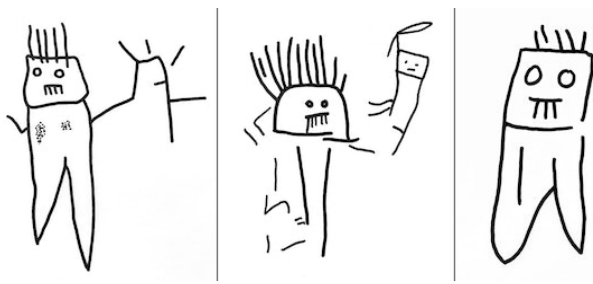


Fig. 13

Anthropomorphic petroglyphs measuring 30–50 centimeters (12–20 inches) in height. Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru. Drawings by Ana Nieves.

Finally, whereas the images painted on ceramic vessels can be admired aesthetically when isolated from their immediate contexts, the petroglyphs cannot be understood in isolation from their surroundings. I referred above to the incongruous prevalence of marine iconography in a society with settlements so far inland, and it is even more surprising to find so many examples of marine animal representations in land-based art, particularly in such dry locations as quebradas or pampas. A characteristic of the area around Quebrada Majuelos, however, is the presence of marine fossils, and it's worth noting that these quebradas on the edges of the pampas have visible features that tie this area to the ocean. Although speculative, it is interesting to consider that this feature could have made these places ideal locations for the depiction of marine iconography, particularly such a large MKW petroglyph.

THE NASCA MYTHICAL KILLER WHALE IN CONTEXT

Nasca art involves a complex series of motifs with interrelated meanings. Often these images cannot be completely separated from their support or from people's interactions with the objects and the places on which they are depicted. Quilcas maintain their meaning and associations through these different interactions in Early and Middle Nasca art, regardless of scale or differences in style across media.

The Mythical Killer Whale and its attributes or component parts function as quilcas—signs with consistent associations—and there seems to be a syntax that organizes them. Not all the associated quilcas need to be present in each representation of the MKW, however, but their meaning and associations are transferable. Heads and knives are attributes of the MKW and indicate this figure's associations with ritual head-taking. On the continuum between the themes of death and life that Carmichael argued is an essential aspect of Nasca representations, the MKW incorporates a greater number of references to death.^[39] But heads are not present in every single representation of this being. As independent quilcas, they can also be depicted in association with other figures like the AMB or on their own.

One attribute that is not easy to explain is the curl underneath the head of some MKWs like the Quebrada Majuelos petroglyph (see figs. 9 and 10) and one of the Nasca vessels in figure 1 (see

fig. 1, left). This curl is not depicted on other marine animals painted on Early and Middle Nasca vessels. Even if the head of the MKW resembles that of a fox, only the parallel lines on the snout appear in fox representations in Nasca art, not the curl. One possible comparison that might explain this feature is a composite being in the art of the Moche, a civilization from the north coast of Peru and contemporary with the Nasca. Archaeologist Steve Bourget identified the body of one Moche being (see fig. 14) as resembling the *pez borracho* (*Scartichthys gigas*), and it is represented in Moche art with appendages under the head where it meets the body; the curl underneath the head of the Nasca MKW is in the same place as the *pez borracho*'s appendages. Interestingly, in Moche art, this *pez borracho* can also be a composite creature, one depicted with a human arm and a head that suggests a terrestrial mammal, possibly the fox. Long, parallel projections are sometimes present above and/or below its snout, much like the parallel lines depicted on the snouts of some versions of the Nasca MKW (see fig. 1, right). Furthermore, the Moche *pez borracho* is also shown holding knives, making a clear connection between this creature and ritual decapitation for the Moche. Bourget points out that in the north coast, the head of this fish is used to make a soup that has intoxicating properties and can produce vivid dreams.^[40] Although the exact relationship between representations of the Moche *pez borracho* and those of the Nasca MKW is not fully understood, the basic characteristics of these composite marine animals and the associations to head-taking and ritual activities are quite similar.



Fig. 14

Examples of the Pez Borracho. Moche, north coast, Peru. After drawings by Donna McClelland published in Steve Bourget, "El Mar y la Muerte en la Iconografía Moche," in *Moche: Propuestas y Perspectivas*, ed. Santiago Uceda and Elías Mujica (Trujillo: Universidad Nacional de la Libertad, 1994), 425–47, figs. 5.78 and 5.80.

The connections between the Nasca quilcas discussed here are further illustrated by the cup shown in figure 15. The composition of this ceramic painting is divided into quarters. As viewers turn it, they see a fragmented version of the Nasca Mythical Harvester with its head and arms on one side of the cup and its torso and legs on the opposite side. The Harvester's head is formed by two crossed figures which have trophy-head facial features. Chevron designs on their torsos suggest that these may be skeletal figures or corpses, reinforcing the trophy head identification. Also on opposite sides of this cup are representations of a standing

Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, on one side, and four orcas on the other. The arms of the central Mythical Harvester extend outward, holding the group of orcas with its right hand and the AMB with its left. The MKW is not depicted here in its entirety, but the orcas all seem to have blunt snouts with parallel lines above and below the snout, and the intended audience, educated in this symbol system, could make the connection between these orcas and more elaborate versions of the MKW. Relationships between quilcas are reinforced throughout the painting. The standing AMB seems to be holding one of the heads of the crossed figures with one hand and grasping a weapon in the other, thus confirming the identification of the heads of the crossed figures as trophy heads. Since the other crossed figure's head is by the orcas, it is the ritual of head-taking that connects the AMB and orcas to each other. Again, it is viewers' interaction with the cup that not only makes the relationship between these quilcas clear but also reveals the important role of trophy heads. The trophy heads, in other words, are not merely attributes of the larger figures, or secondary motifs—they are quilcas in their own right, and an essential part of Nasca religion. The intended audience could alternate between seeing these heads as part of other representations or as independent quilcas.



Fig. 15

A cup with multiple figures. Nasca; south coast, Peru. Collection of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Peru. Reproduced from Julio C. Tello, *Paracas* (New York: Institute of Andean Research, 1959), pl. 85.

The Nasca audience's familiarity with the symbol system allowed its artists to produce a range of image types, including larger and much more abstract images, sometimes as part of the landscape itself, and frequently quite different in style from those on ceramics. Examining this symbol system across media and formats reveals just how much the Nasca took into consideration the position of viewers in relation to their representations of mythical beings and religious symbols. Just as the images painted on Nasca ceramics are integrated into the objects' form and viewer interaction is factored into the design, geoglyphs' and petroglyphs' literal groundedness in specific locations presupposes a particular type of interaction from viewers. Thus, the single vantage point provided by static photographs or line drawings often falls short of recreating the experience of these images, and we must take care to remember that these representations were sometimes experienced not only visually but in a much more embodied manner. In an analysis of monuments at the Formative period site of Chavin de Huantar in the

north-central highlands of Peru (active roughly between 1200 and 500 BCE), anthropologist Mary Weismantel discerned a similar active, physical process of viewing the images carved on these monuments: “non-literate peoples, undisciplined by the tyranny of the written page—which dictates a passive, stationary way of looking—often create works that make these kinesthetic demands.”^[41] The process of assigning, learning, and reinforcing the associations and meanings of Nasca signs was in many cases an interactive process in which viewers were not passive but engaged with the image in a more active, meaningful way, “reading” these images through their own movement. Nasca objects and images could have served as pedagogical tools that helped impart specific religious concepts by demanding viewers’ active participation. A close examination of these objects and images also suggests that the Nasca may not necessarily have defined and understood mythical figures such as the MKW in quite the same way that saints are conceptualized in Christian iconography, but rather as groups of independent yet interrelated quilcas that could be presented and experienced in various ways. Nasca art offers a sophisticated system of symbols, whose structure and context must be considered as these allow art historians and archaeologists to move beyond categorization of motifs to address deeper questions regarding how images communicate with their intended audience.

Banner image: Petroglyph in Quebrada Majuelos Rock Art Site, Nasca Valley, Peru (see figs. 9–10). Photo: courtesy of the author.

Notes

1. Scholars have used two spellings, *Nasca* and *Nazca*, to describe a number of things, including a valley and a modern town as well as a civilization and its artistic style. The name for the location (valley and modern town) is likely derived from an indigenous word, and there is evidence that it was associated with a family name; for a study of this area’s social organization based on colonial-era sources, see Gary Urton, “Andean Social Organization and the Maintenance of the Nazca Lines,” in *The Lines of Nazca*, ed. Anthony F. Aveni (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1990), 175–206. Since indigenous Andean languages like Quechua and Aymara were purely spoken languages, the transcription of indigenous words has produced multiple spellings of the same terms, and the use of different spellings for the same place or civilization is therefore not surprising. These two spellings, *Nasca* and *Nazca*, are often used in different publications to designate the same civilization, and different museums also

use different spelling conventions in their own catalogues and other print materials (for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología, e Historia del Perú; Museo Larco; and Brooklyn Museum use *Nasca*, while the Art Institute of Chicago, Field Museum, and British Museum use *Nazca*). In southern coast research, there have been some attempts to standardize the spelling in order to differentiate locations (spelled *Nazca*) from the ancient civilization and art style (spelled *Nasca*). Scholars such as Persis Clarkson and Helaine Silverman have followed this convention; see Persis Clarkson, “The Archaeology and Geoglyphs of Nazca, Peru, or the Extraterrestrial Foundations of Andean Civilization” (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 1985); and Helaine Silverman, *Ancient Nasca Settlement and Society* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002). However, the use of two separate spellings within the same publication has been criticized by linguists in more recent studies of language in the ancient Andes; see especially the introductory comments in Paul Heggarty and David Beresford-Jones, eds., *Archaeology and Language in the Andes: A Cross-Disciplinary Exploration of Prehistory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxii–xxiii. As noted by Anthony F. Aveni, most recent publications are moving away from making this distinction; see Anthony F. Aveni, *Between the Lines: The Mystery of the Giant Ground Drawings of Ancient Nasca, Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 235. Some archaeologists who have worked in the Nasca heartland, such as Donald Proulx and Cristina A. Conlee, have consistently been using *Nasca* for both the civilization as well as for geographic features and locations; see Donald Proulx, *A Sourcebook of Nasca Ceramic Iconography: Reading a Culture Through Its Art* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006); and Christina A. Conlee, “Decapitation and Rebirth A Headless Burial from Nasca, Peru,” *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 3 (June 2007): 438–45. For consistency, in this essay I use *Nasca* as the spelling for the civilization and style as well as the geographic locations.

2. Decapitated heads, carefully buried, have been excavated as part of caches. Excavated tombs of decapitated Nasca individuals also suggest the importance of head-taking, as there are cases where such burials had a vessel that depicted a head as an offering next to the body. See Donald Proulx, “Ritual Uses of Trophy Heads in Ancient Nasca Society,” in *Ritual Sacrifice in Ancient Peru*, ed. Elizabeth Benson and Anita Cook (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 119–36; David M. Browne, Helaine Silverman, and Ruben García, “A Cache of 48 Nasca Trophy Heads from Cerro Carapo, Peru,” *Latin American Antiquity* 4, no. 3 (1993): 274–94; and Conlee, “Decapitation and Rebirth,” 438–45.
3. Patrick Carmichael, “The Life from Death Continuum in Nasca Imagery,” *Andean Past* 4 (1994): 81–90.
4. In this, the Nasca tradition differs markedly from the contemporary tradition of the Moche in the north coast, who produced many sculptural ceramics.

5. Helaine Silverman and Donald Proulx, *The Nasca* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); and Proulx, *Sourcebook*.
6. Ana Nieves, "More Than Meets the Eye: A Study of Two Nasca Motifs," *Andean Past* 9 (2009): 229–47.
7. We do not know what the Nasca called their supernatural beings, and there is certainly no consistency in the names different publications use for the same representations. In this essay, I follow the terminology found in Proulx, *Sourcebook*.
8. This streamer is called a "signifier" in some of the literature.
9. A great example of the Mythical Harvester is in the Art Institute of Chicago's collection, object [1955.1929](#).
10. The identification of this motif as an orca can be dated to Eugenio Yacovleff, who identified it as *Orcinus orca* due to the shape of its body. Later publications maintained this identification. Eugenio Yacovleff, "La Deidad Primitiva de los Nasca," *Revista del Museo Nacional* 1, no. 2 (1932): 103–60. See also Patrick Carmichael, "Interpreting Nasca Iconography," in *Ancient Images, Ancient Thought: The Archaeology of Ideology, 23rd Annual Chacmool Conference*, ed. S. Goldsmith, S. Garvie, D. Selin, and J. Smith (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1990), 187–97; Markus Reindel, Johny Isla Cuadrado, and Klaus Koschmieder, *Vorspanische Siedlungen und Bodenzeichnungen in Palpa, Süd-Peru/Asentamientos Prehispánicos y Geoglifos en Palpa, Costa Sur del Perú. Beiträge zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie* 19 (Mainz am Rhein, Germany: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1999); Markus Reindel and Johny Isla Cuadrado, "Das Palpa Tal: Ein Archiv der Vorgeschichte Perus," in *Nasca: Geheimnisvolle Zeichen im Alten Peru*, ed. Judith Rickenbach (Zurich: Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 1999), 177–97; Silverman and Proulx, *The Nasca*; and Proulx, *Sourcebook*.
11. In Paracas art the orca "is distinguished by an elaborately arching body with two fin projections at the top and two at the bottom, a saw-toothed mouth, a widely flaring, concave-sided tail, and a 'hand' in front like hands of humans or of the Oculate Being." Dorothy Menzel, John H. Rowe, and Lawrence E. Dawson, *The Paracas Pottery of Ica: A Study in Style and Time*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology 50 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964), 249.
12. Richard F. Townsend, "Deciphering the Nazca World: Ceramic Images from Ancient Peru," *The Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 133.
13. Similar flat snouts with parallel lines can be seen on two of the Nasca vessels in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, [1956.1162](#) and [1955.2044](#).
14. Silverman and Proulx, *The Nasca*, 141–42.

15. For examples of the MKW in Late Nasca art, including references to the MKW on the bodies and clothing of other anthropomorphic figures, see Christiane Clados, “El ‘Hombre Ballena’ de Nasca,” *Arqueología y Sociedad* 20 (2009): 269–80.
16. Carmichael, “Interpreting Nasca Iconography,” 187–97; Patrick Carmichael, Brenda V. Kennedy, and Lauren Cadwallader, “Coastal but not Littoral: Marine Resources in Nasca Diet,” *Ñawpa Pacha: Journal of Andean Archaeology* 34, no. 1 (June 2014): 3–26.
17. Carmichael, “Interpreting Nasca Iconography,” 188.
18. Proulx, *Sourcebook*, 85.
19. Proulx, *Sourcebook*, 17, 87.
20. Proulx, *Sourcebook*, 87.
21. Examples of the “Bloody Mouth” motif in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago include vessel [1955.1854](#). The Bloody Mouth is found in sixty vessels documented in Proulx’s *Sourcebook of Nasca Iconography*; see Proulx, *Sourcebook*, 85.
22. Lisa DeLeonardis, “Encoded Process, Embodied Meaning in Paracas Post-Fired Painted Ceramics,” in *Making Value, Making Meaning: Techné in the Pre-Columbian World*, ed. Cathy Lynne Costin (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), 147.
23. Gori-Tumi Echevarría López, “‘Quilca’ y ‘Arte Rupestre,’ Disquisiciones en el Contexto del Arte, la Arqueología y la Ciencia Peruana,” *Arqueología y Sociedad* 31 (2016): 11–22.
24. This follows Javier Pulgar’s research on toponyms during the 1930s, which linked the term to concentrations of rock art.
25. Within this term he included any types of images (“todo tipo de expresión gráfica”). Echevarría López, “‘Quilca’ y ‘Arte Rupestre.’”
26. *Ibid.*, 16.
27. Galen Brokaw, “Andean Semiotics and the Quechua Concept of Quilca,” in *Colonial Mediascapes: Sensory Worlds of the Early Americas*, ed. Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 166–202. Brokaw’s analysis places particular emphasis on color. Additionally, Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins have examined the overlap or interchangeability of text and image implied in the use of the term *quillca* during the colonial era, arguing that people interacted with texts, images, and objects through ritualized actions that emphasized and reaffirmed their meaning or significance. Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, “Between Images and Writing: The Ritual Use of the King’s *Quillca*,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 7, no.1 (1998): 7–32.

28. We can observe, for example, that disembodied heads and plants are interchangeable in Nasca art. A similar pattern of substitution between heads and beans is also observed in Paracas iconography. I previously used this type of analysis of substitution patterns to identify recurring AMB and Mythical Harvester attributes and argued that these figures are actually anthropomorphic plants, living embodiments of seeds and corncobs. Representations of mice nibbling at corn plants and also nibbling at the AMB's body suggest that there is an equivalence between the AMB and a plant, and therefore the same action can be performed on both; see Nieves, "More Than Meets the Eye."
29. Museo Larco's vessel ML013684 can also be turned around to view a trophy head that is integrated into the loincloth of this figure.
30. Proulx, *Sourcebook*, 87.
31. Regarding the view from the ground, see Reindel, Cuadrado, and Koschmieder, *Vorspanische Siedlungen*, 375–76. Regarding the suggestion of a divine audience, see Dan Collyns, "Scratching the Surface: Drones Cast New Light on Mystery of Nazca Lines," *Guardian*, May 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/may/24/nazca-lines-drones-new-discoveries-peru>.
32. There have been other attempts to clear up the markings on geoglyphs to make them easier to see, either to better document them or make them more visible to tourists. Kosok and Reiche mentioned that in the areas where the lines were difficult to see, they removed the darker surface layer and exposed the lighter soil underneath by either dragging a large stone with a rope along the lines or using their heavy boots to push away the surface layer; see Paul Kosok and Maria Reiche, "Ancient Drawings on the Desert of Peru," *Archaeology* 2 (Winter 1949): 208.
33. *Ibid.*, 208.
34. For an example, see Kroeber's work in the 1920s, including Alfred L. Kroeber and Donald Collier, *The Archaeology and Pottery of Nazca, Peru: Alfred L. Kroeber's 1926 Expedition*, ed. Patrick Carmichael (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998): 39–41.
35. Maria Reiche, *Contribuciones a la Geometría y Astronomía en el Antiguo Perú* (Lima: Asociación María Reiche para las Líneas de Nasca/Epígrafe Editores, S. A., 1993), 424.
36. Reindel, Isla, and Koschmieder, *Vorspanische Siedlungen*, 335, fig. 11.
37. This includes the petroglyphs I documented in my survey as well as at least one in the Ingenio Valley that I was able to photograph in 2016.
38. This is not the only rock art site in the Grande River drainage with the MKW, but the ones on

other sites are much smaller. A nearby site has a small MKW facing left, with an arm. Another site on the northern edge of the Nasca Pampa, on the Ingenio Valley side, also has a small MKW. These are all sites located on the side of the valley closest to the Nasca Pampa.

39. Carmichael, “The Life from Death Continuum in Nasca Imagery,” 81–90.
 40. Steve Bourget, “El Mar y la Muerte en la Iconografía Moche,” in *Moche: Propuestas y Perspectivas*, ed. Santiago Uceda and Elías Mujica (Trujillo, Peru: Universidad Nacional de la Libertad, 1994), 426–28; and Steve Bourget, *Sacrifice, Violence, and Ideology among the Moche: The Rise of Social Complexity in Ancient Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 246.
 41. Mary Weismantel, “Encounters with Dragons: The Stones of Chavin,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 65/66 (2014): 48.
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