

## Chapter 10

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# Ritual Use of Isla Tikonata in Northern Lake Titicaca

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### **Introduction**

A group of eight post-Tiwanaku mummified bodies were found in a cave on the small island of Tikonata in the district of Ccotos in northern Lake Titicaca. These mummies are similar to other post-Tiwanaku burials in the region. In addition to these mummies, Tiwanaku ceremonial objects were discovered in another location a few hundred meters from the cave. Significantly, all of the Tiwanaku-style ceramics are locally produced. Isla Tikonata is one of several islands in the lake with Tiwanaku and Pucara materials. The nature of these materials and their context suggests a ritual use of the island, reinforced most likely by the island's capacity to grow maize in this highland region. In this chapter, we present the data from Tikonata and suggest that many maize-producing islands in the lake were used by Tiwanaku and later peoples as a pilgrimage and/or as a string of sacred places, creating a pan-regional system of ritual associated with the concept of "uma" or water.

### **Isla Tikonata**

Isla Tikonata is located approximately one-half kilometer from the tip of the Capachica Peninsula (Fig. 10.1). Around the year 2005, local residents of the island discovered and removed eight mummy bundles from a narrow cave on the island's southeast

side. They also recovered a number of objects putatively associated with the mummies. After contacting the local archaeological authorities, who told them to stop any more unauthorized excavations, they carefully protected the mummies and objects in a storage building on the island. A little later, an NGO arrived and provided funds for a hostel and a small museum, and then contracted the first author to evaluate the materials and create an exhibit of these materials on the island.

The island is very small at approximately 315 ha in total area and measuring 700 m at its maximum extent (Fig. 10.2); it belongs to the community of Ccotos immediately adjacent to the Capachica Peninsula. There are no villages or permanent residents on the island. However, the land is parceled out to individual families who work the land and graze animals, and there are temporary houses used by people whose main residence is in Ccotos.

The island is notable in that it is extremely fertile on the east side where maize can be grown, along with dozens of other Andean plants and European imports (Fig. 10.3). Maize is a plant that normally does not grow well in the region. However, under certain climatic and geographical conditions, such as islands (which, being surrounded by water, have elevated ambient temperatures), maize can be grown. The significance of maize in Andean ritual life cannot be overstated. Tikonata is an agriculturally rich island ideally suited to grow this important crop in the high and cold Titicaca region.

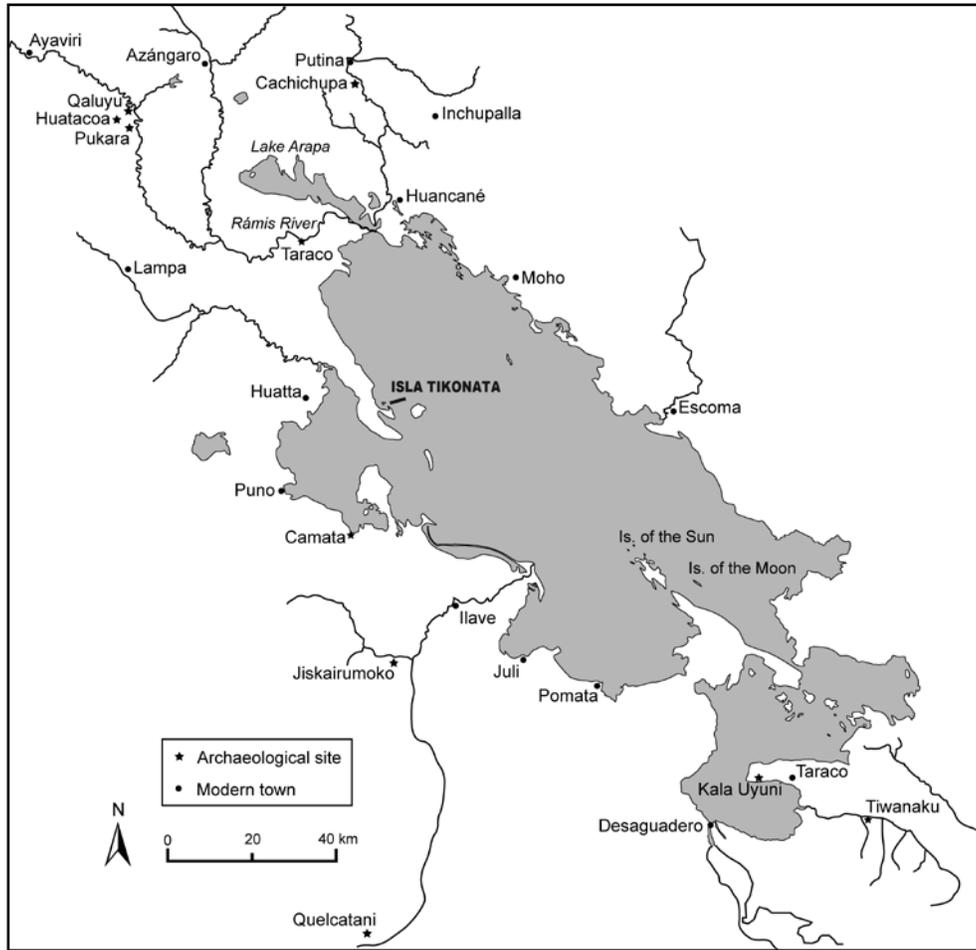


Figure 10.1. Map of Lake Titicaca showing location of Isla Tikonata.

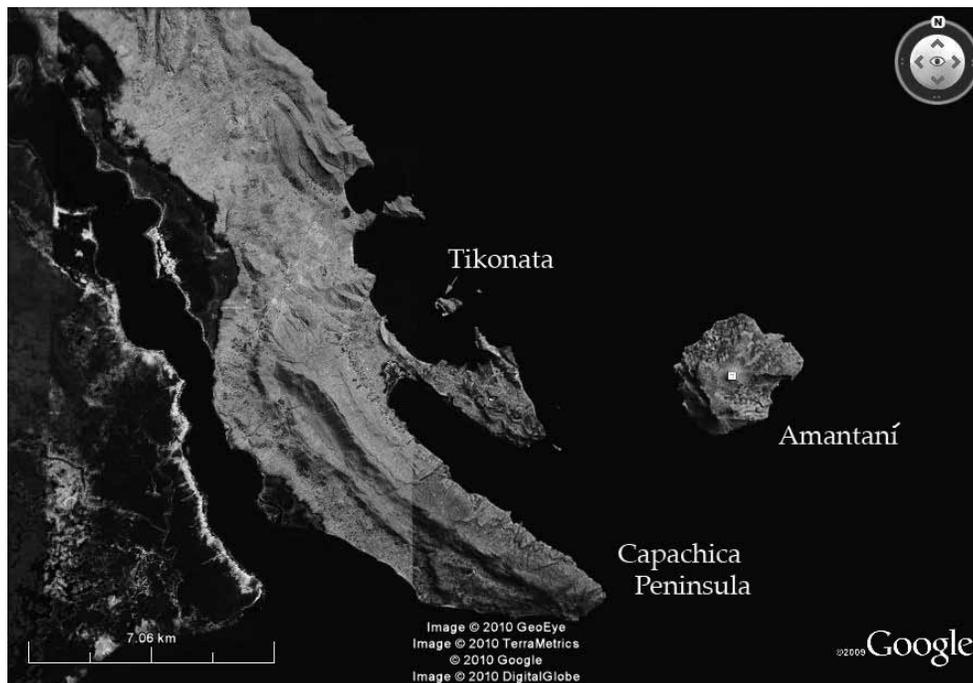


Figure 10.2. Google image of the Capachica Peninsula and precise location of Isla Tikonata.



Figure 10.3. Maize growing on the east side of the island during March. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish.<sup>1</sup>

Community members recovered eight mummy bundles in a typical altiplano style known as basket burials from a limestone cave on the southeast side of the island (Figs. 10.4, 10.5). They say there was a platform that they used for temporary activities, such as sleeping and eating, while working their fields. One day, some rocks moved and exposed a second platform where the mummies were located. The mummies were then removed and stored by the community. The information provided by the community members implies that the mummies were located in a lower level of the cave that over time had been covered by modern activities and natural sedimentation.

The dead were placed in a seated position in the cave. They were arranged in a half-moon shape as if they were seated around a traditional altiplano communal meal. According to one of the members who recovered the mummies, they were positioned to the southeast looking out of the cave entrance. There was no mention of artifacts found with the mummies by this informant. It is not possible to determine if certain remains were missed or thrown away since this was not a scientific excavation.

Apparently, the use of caves for burials extends back to the early Archaic periods and goes up to at least the Altiplano period in this region. These data suggest that in these early periods, prior to the development of above-ground chulpas (see Stanish, this volume), collective burials were associated with mobile agropastoral lifestyles (Frye and de la Vega 2005). The bodies were interred in vegetal fiber baskets (Fig. 10.6), in a flexed position, covered with textiles. Studies indicate that the majority of the

bodies were infants—like those found on the coast—although adults of both sexes were also buried in this manner throughout the altiplano. Several of these eight individuals show signs of cranial deformation and are associated with a funerary context composed usually of Altiplano period pottery (Sillustani, Col-lao, Allita Amaya, etc.). It is significant that in some cases (Niño Korin, Molino Chilacachi) there are ritual ceramic vessels such as keros and hallucinogenic Tiwanaku artifacts (Wassén 1972; de la Vega et al. 2005). This suggests some kind of continuity with Tiwanaku traditions, or at the very least the use of curated heirlooms in the collective burials.

#### *Tiwanaku and Pucara Remains on the Island*

Community members also discovered a number of artifacts as a result of agricultural land use and adobe manufacture. The pre-Tiwanaku evidence is light, with just a few puma faces that are almost certainly Pucara in date. On the other hand, there are some magnificent Tiwanaku ceremonial ceramic objects found by the community members (Figs. 10.7–10.10).<sup>2</sup> The Capachica area, where the island is located, has previously reported Tiwanaku sites (Erickson 1988). Therefore, we can conclude that Isla Tikonata was part of a larger Tiwanaku occupation of the region.

The Tiwanaku ceramic assemblage is composed of incensarios and keros manufactured locally. The incensarios have pedestaled bases, scallops on the rim and a lateral handle. In general terms, the incensarios use exterior painted motifs and molded figures.



Figure 10.4. The cave entrance where the mummies were found. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish



Figure 10.5. Two of the mummies found in the cave seen in Figure 10.4. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.



Figure 10.6. A typical, well-preserved basket (*serón*) burial found at the cave site of Molino-Chilacachi. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish.



Figure 10.7. A Tiwanaku incensario found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish.

The motifs use geometric designs (lines, steps, squares) in black, orange, white, and yellow over red. The molded appliqué represent feline heads. Vertical burnishing was used on the wet clay. On the other hand, the keros are not decorated but some are banded under the neck. They are orange slipped with vertical burnishing. In general terms, these vessels have a decoration that combined the exterior painting with plastic applications.

These two vessel types were used in ceremonial rituals and their presence on Tikonata indicates some kind of ritual use on the island. The materials associated with Tiwanaku were recovered on terraces as well as in a cave located on the northeast side of the island. In this latter cave, there is standing water and the local residents say that there are still more feline heads inside. This raises the possibility that this *pukio* or cave spring was used as a place for offerings to water and therefore linked to the lake.

#### *Altiplano (Late Intermediate) Period Remains on the Island*

The eight basket mummies are typical of the region, and a number of similar finds have been documented in area limestone or volcanic rockshelters. Several reports document the presence of this kind of burial in the northern Titicaca Basin in the Omasuyu region (Nordenskiöld 1953; MacBain 1959; Rydén 1947), in the Callawaya area (Oblitas Poblete 1953 and see Wassén 1972), in the south in the Mallku territory (Berberían and Arellano López 1980; Arellano López and Berberían 1981; Arellano López and Kuljis 1986), in the Colla territory to the northwest at Sillustani (Ayca 1995), and in the western Lupaqa territory (de la Vega et al. 2005). As with the Tiwanaku period, there was a very substantial Altiplano period occupation in the region (Erickson 1988; de la Vega et al. 2005). The community



Figure 10.8. A Tiwanaku-style kero found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.

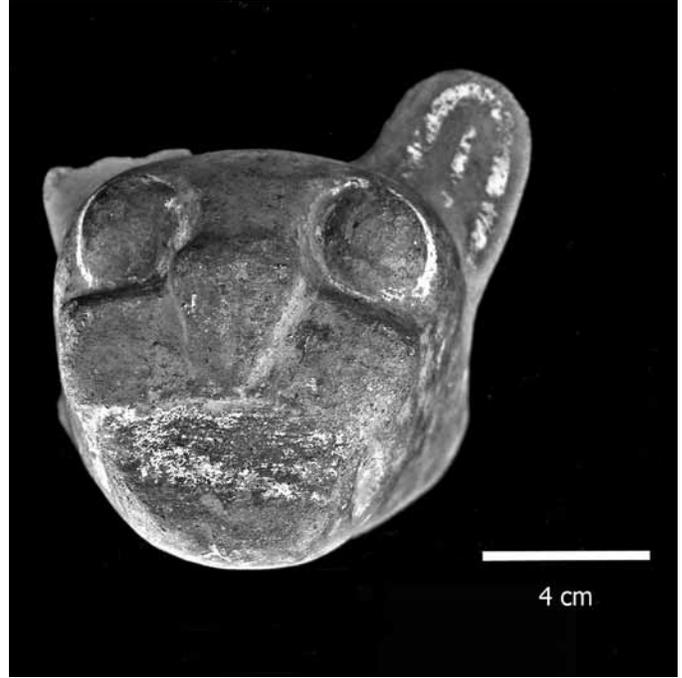


Figure 10.9. A possible Tiwanaku- or Pucara-style puma head from an incensario found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.

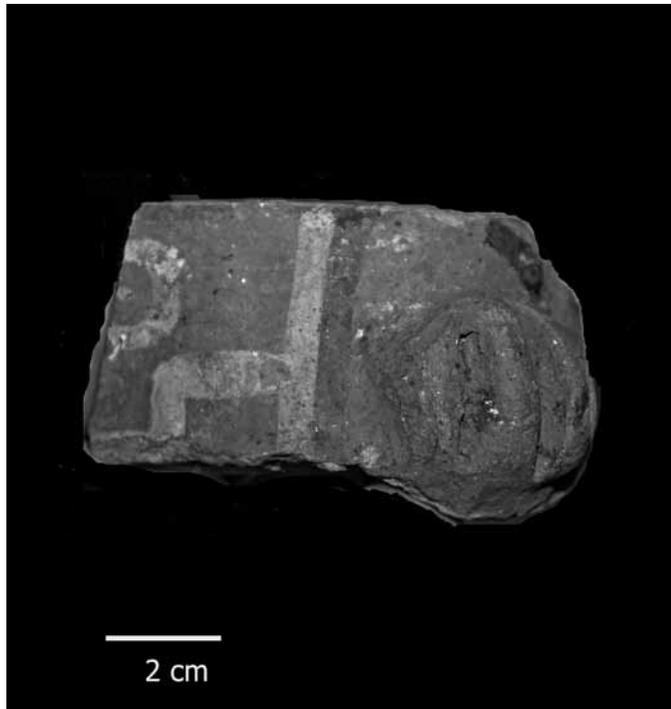


Figure 10.10. Detail of an incensario fragment found on the island. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish.

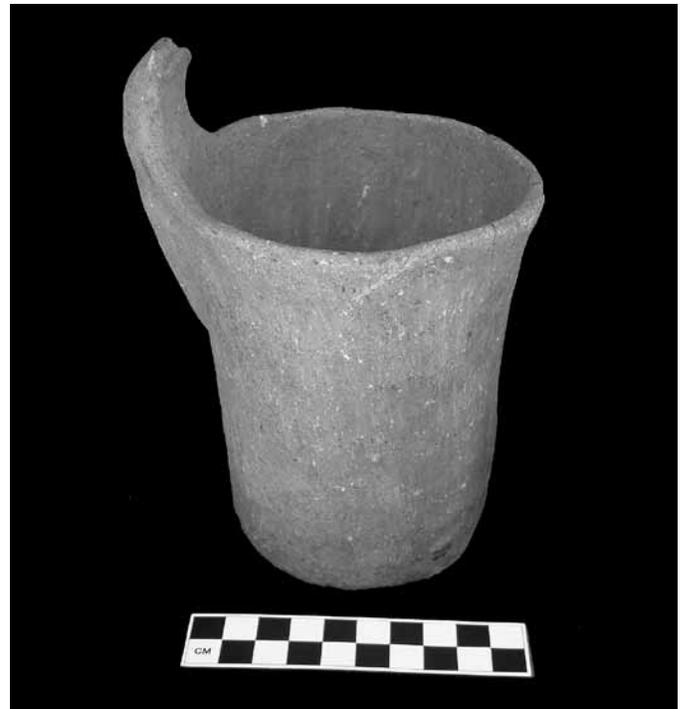


Figure 10.11. An Altiplano period-style kero found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.



Figure 10.12. An Altiplano period-style olla found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.



Figure 10.13. Altiplano period-style jars found on the eastern side of the island. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.

on the island found a number of Altiplano period ceramic objects, including jars, bowls, miniatures, and an Altiplano period kero (Figs. 10.11–10.13). Miniatures are usually associated with funerary or other ceremonial contexts.

Individual objects include medium and small jars, almost all plainwares, with only one example of a decorated one. This jar is a black-and-red on orange ware with geometric lines; it was slipped in orange and has an appended lizard facing upward. The miniatures include plainware jars and bottles plus an olla with exterior painted decoration in white over red, with geometric undulating lines under the rim. An interesting observation is that there were neither large vessels, nor any used for storage, preparation or consumption (pitchers, ollas, bowls or tazones). This suggests a largely ritual assemblage associated with the burials (particularly miniatures) and possibly lake offerings given that the local residents claimed that the objects were found in the same cave as the Tiwanaku objects described above.

The mummies, as mentioned, were Altiplano period in style. The adults have been provisionally sexed and all are female with ages between 12 and 35; the infant was 3 years old or less (Silvia Velásquez, pers. comm., 12 March 2010). One mummy was reportedly found with a vegetal fiber cap, as seen in Figure 10.14. Perhaps the most significant observation is that none of these individuals had typical cranial deformation seen in other mummies recovered from similar contexts. This raises the possibility that these females were not from the region. It could also

be that these mummies are not even Altiplano period in date and are from a time when cranial deformation was not practiced. Obviously, more intensive study is needed to determine the reason for why these individuals did not have typical cranial deformation of the region.

#### *Inca Period Remains on the Island*

There is a massive Inca presence in this region as there is throughout the Titicaca Basin, and community members found a few Inca ceramic objects. They also found a number of stone objects, including an Inca bowl, escudilla, stone mace heads, and some porras (Fig. 10.15). The ceramic sample is scarce and includes a medium-sized bowl with painted decoration on the interior in black over red with geometric motifs (lines and triangles) that cover the entire inside of the vessel. The vessel was burnished. There was also a bird head decorated with black lines on a red slip. This bird imagery is characteristic of Inca period bowl appendages.

These examples came from the same site as the Tiwanaku and Altiplano period objects. It is interesting to note that no closed vessels such as ollas, pitchers, jars or glasses in this period were found. Nevertheless, the bowls are open forms associated with food consumption. What is apparent is that this assemblage confirms a ritual use of Tikonata from at least Tiwanaku up to the Inca presence on the island.



Figure 10.14. Fiber cap reportedly found on this mummy. Photo courtesy of E. de la Vega.



Figure 10.15. An Inca-style mace head found on the island. Photo courtesy of C. Stanish.

### Interpretation

At present, we know of Tiwanaku remains on several islands in the lake. The largest and most famous is that of the Islands of the Sun and Moon complex (Bauer and Stanish 2001). A substantial Tiwanaku occupation characterized both islands. Numerous residential sites were located among ceremonial centers (Seddon 1998). The first pilgrimage center on the Islands of the Sun and Moon was established in Tiwanaku times. The ceramic assemblage included a number of incensarios and finely made keros.

Other islands in the lake have Tiwanaku remains including Pariti (Pärssinen 2005; Sagárnaga 2007), Amantaní (Niles 1987), Khoa (Ponce et al. 1992), Isla Esteves in the Puno Bay (Nuñez and Paredes 1978), Isla Paco or Suriqui (Estevez and Escalante 1994) and possibly Isla Soto (Myres and Paredes 2005). Altiplano and Inca period remains are found on all of these islands as well, plus a number of others such as Taquile, Amantaní, and some smaller islands near the Island of the Sun, such as Pallalla and Chuyu. Archaeologists to date have intensively investigated none of these other islands.

It is significant that Tikonata does not have any chulpas because chulpas are abundant throughout the region. A very quick walk around the island did not discover any chulpas or chulpa

bases. This is not to say that these may not be found in future surveys, but unlike the other major islands with standing chulpas, Tikonata does not have any large and impressive ones like those found elsewhere. It is also significant that the island has been little disturbed by looting or other agricultural activities. Therefore, if the island had had the distinctive large chulpas, then they would have been obvious to the casual observer.

Also significant is the fact that the Tiwanaku pieces recovered are generally rare in the region. Recently completed work by the authors in the Taraco area indicates that incensarios make up a very small percentage of the total assemblage. Keros, on the other hand, are more common but also are essential components of ritual practices. Whether there is a major domestic component on the island remains to be discovered. However, we can say with some certainty, even with these limited data, that ritual was conducted on the island during the Tiwanaku period.

The Altiplano and Inca period occupations are likewise unknown without intensive survey. However, it is clear from the mummy bundles that stylistically date to this period that at least one cave held a very important burial of many individuals. The fact that all of the adults are female is extremely significant as well. The cave burials at Molino-Chilacachi had individuals of both sexes, and there was a second layer of mummies. It is possible that the cave on Tikonata has more than one level as

well. Also, it is possible that there are burials in the other caves on the island.

In short, we find that Tikonata, like several other islands in the lake, has ceremonial objects associated with burials and other ritual practices. We argue that the Tiwanaku peoples created a series of ceremonial sites on islands as part of a pilgrimage focused on the lake. This would correspond to the well-known dual concept of “uma” and “urqu” (Bouysse-Cassagne 1986) that dominated the ideological views of the Titicaca peoples at the time of Spanish conquest. We suggest a bifurcated pilgrimage route, beginning in Ayaviri where the Inca royal road split between the Urqusuyu and Umasuyu segments (Cieza de León 1984). Parallel to this road system was a ritual pilgrimage that also bifurcated here. The probable route would have been through Asillo, Azángaro, Taraco, Huanacáné and to Carpa by land, and then a water route through the various islands of which Tikonata was one principal stop. Amantaní is one or two hours away by balsa raft in good weather, and it is likely that significant habitation sites are on that island. We also suggest that the Inca likewise had a bifurcated pilgrimage route indicating continuity of this ritual practice.

In this light, the capacity of this island to grow maize is extremely significant. Maize cultivation was possible at least on the Island of the Sun, Pariti, Amantaní, and Tikonata. Maize from special places like these was considered sacred in the Inca period, and we can project this to earlier periods. We suggest that this was a major factor in the use of Tikonata as a pilgrimage destination and/or ceremonial location. We also recognize the brilliant suggestion of Alexei Vranich (pers. comm., April 2010) that the lack of elite Tiwanaku burials across the region could be explained by their focus on islands. In this hypothesis, Tiwanaku elite chose to be buried on sacred islands, like Tikonata, Pariti, the Island of the Sun and so forth. This intriguing proposition deserves much more future research.

### Notes

1. The photographs in this chapter were taken on the island under suboptimal conditions.
2. The puma head in Figure 10.9 may be Pucara style. It is difficult to determine without more of the vessel.

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