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A diver heads down to the site to further explore the extraordinary ancient Incan find off the main island of K'akaya.

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First Intact Incan Offerings Found in Lake Titicaca

By Meyla Bianco Johnston

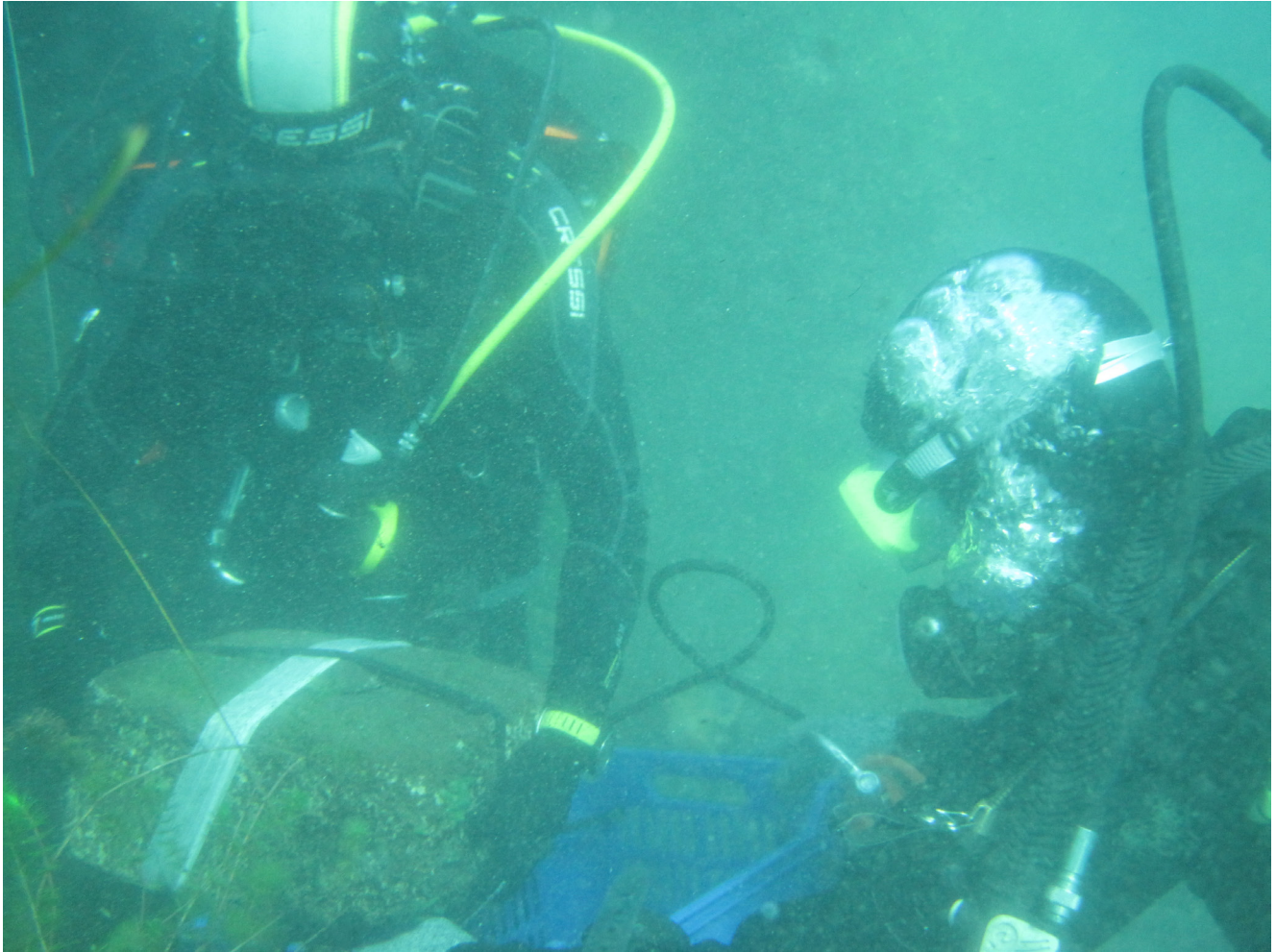
Known as the world's highest altitude navigable lake, Titicaca is also the largest South American lake, extending into Bolivia and Peru. Recognized for its sacred importance to cultures pre-dating the Incans as well as to Incan culture which spanned 1438 to 1533, it remains an important spiritual touchpoint for the Uru and Aymara peoples living there today.

Underwater artifacts had been found here before by amateur divers in 1977, 1988 and 1992, but their contents were either broken or looted.

Since 2012, international archeologists have been searching for

submerged artifacts in Lake Titicaca. The group includes researchers from Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology, University of Oxford, UK, Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine, Université libre de Brux-

elles, Belgium, Department of Anthropology, the Pennsylvania State University, USA and Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas y Arqueológicas and Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, Bolivia.



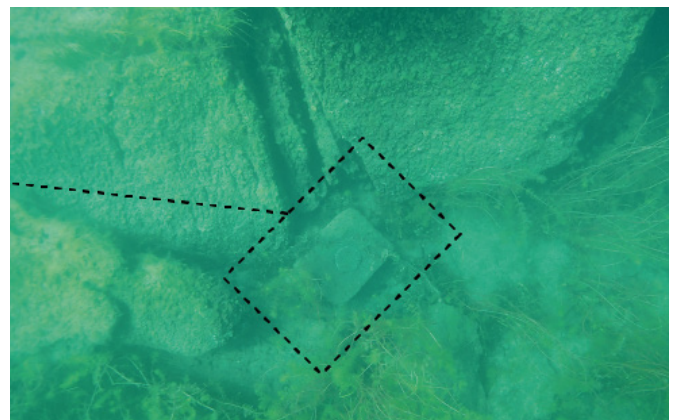
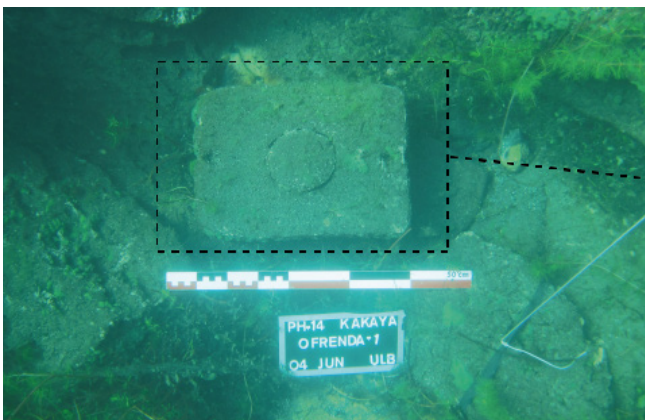
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These experts recently discovered and removed an intact offering at the bottom of a reef near K'ayaka Island in the northeastern shore of Lake Titicaca that they believe was undisturbed since its original interment.

Recovered by divers and later opened in the researchers' field laboratory "in the presence of various municipal and local Indigenous community authorities," the entire process was rigorously documented according to modern archeology standards.

Above: "After recording the context of the discovery (photos, drawings, etc.), the next step was to take the offering out of the water. To make sure that the stone box remained closed, we protected the cover (tapa). We then had to lift the box (more than 50 kg!) and put it in a basket to put it back together," Delaere says.

Below: Scientists carefully documented the exact underwater placement of the artifact near K'akaya Reef before removal.



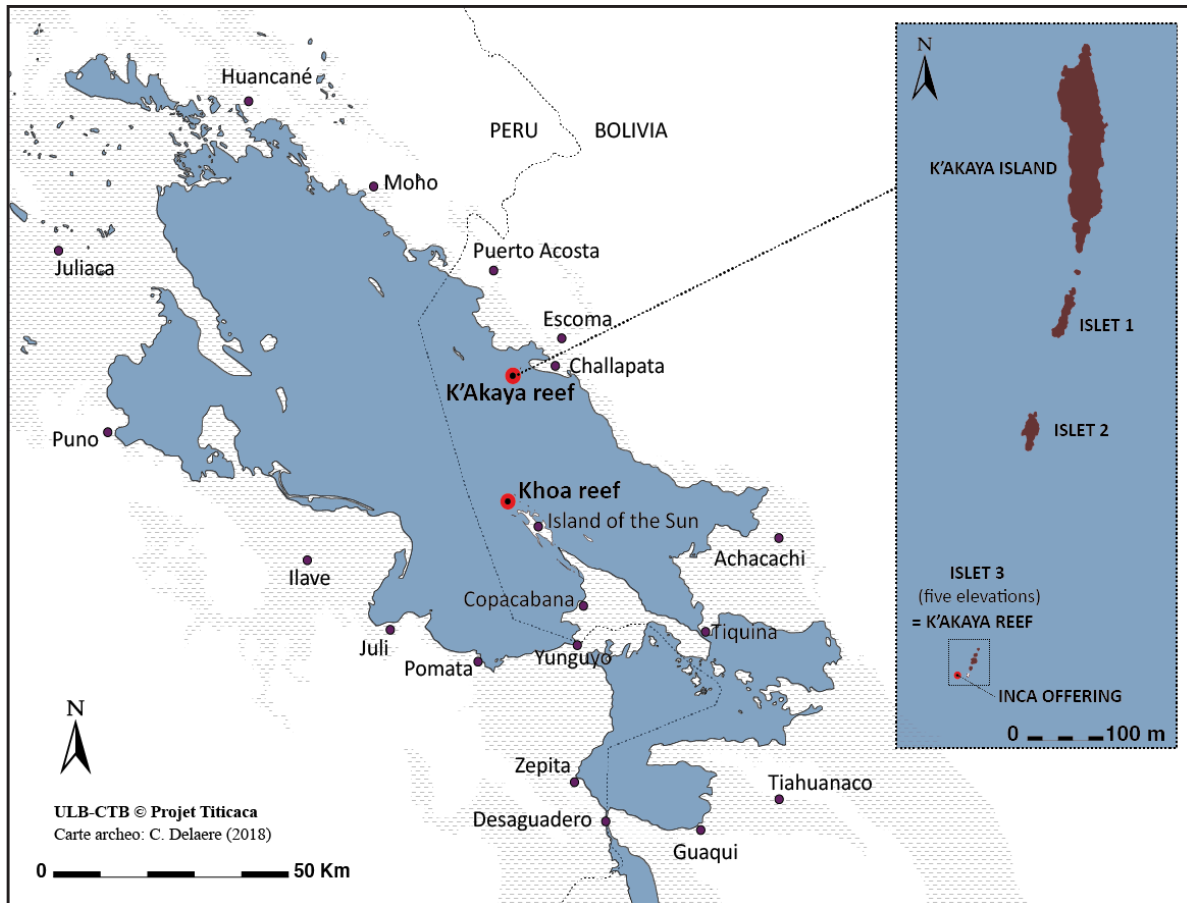
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Top: Camelid figurine made of shell, measuring 1.1 inches (28 mm) long and a rolled gold sheet measuring 0.98 inches (25 mm) long.

Bottom: The ancient peoples who carefully left this cultural offering beneath the waters of Lake Titicaca were meticulous in its construction and placement.



Lake Titicaca



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The artifact consists of a hand-sculpted and polished volcanic andesite rock container which is 1.2 feet (0.4 meters) long by 0.9 feet (0.3 meters) wide. The center of the stone is hollowed out, and the corresponding plug was placed over a recessed cavity.

Inside the cavity, researchers found two small objects: a camelid figurine measuring 1.1 inches (28 mm) long made of hand-carved Spondylus shell and a rolled gold replica bracelet measuring 0.98 inches (25 mm) long. The tiny bracelet was made to look exactly like those worn by Incan noblemen on their right forearms.

This rare find matches documentation from the 17th Century by Alonso Ramos Gavilán, an Augustinian cleric, detailing ritual interment of

similar offerings at Lake Titicaca. He describes Incan rituals at Lake Titicaca in which "the blood of children and animals was placed in stone boxes and lowered from rafts into the lake with the aid of ropes." Clouds of blood rising from the boxes would reportedly tint the lake red.

Researchers believe the recovered artifact may also have contained blood when it was initially interred. The scientists believe the artifacts "strongly suggest an Incan affiliation" and an overall theme of appeasement or glorification of local gods.

Current Aymara spiritual offerings are similar in their creation of dolls which they offer to the lake as sacrifices during challenging weather trends.

Researchers speculate that the

ancient offering was made from a vessel, and "the presence of two perforations on the lateral ends of the stone box suggests that it was lowered to the bottom of the lake using ropes, which either decomposed over time or were removed once the offering had been made."

The location of the offering is described by scientists as "deliberate." To the east, the reef faces the tallest peaks in the Eastern Cordillera, the Illampu and Janq'uma Mountains, visible from the lake, described as "the most revered mountains of the Carabaya/Larecaja gold-rich area."

The researchers further speculate that, "given the resemblance of the reef to one of these peaks and the fact that rainfall originates in the Eastern Andes, the offering could have referred to the successful reproduction

of the Inca and their herds by linking Lake Titicaca with the mountains of this productive region.” ●



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[meaning-of-an-intact-inca-underwater-offering-from-lake-titicaca/](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/context-and-meaning-of-an-intact-inca-underwater-offering-from-lake-titicaca/)

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Boat captain Julio at the end of the day when the scientists returned to port. “In the background, we see the main island of the K’akaya archipelago (Municipio de Escoma) in front of which we found the offering almost six meters deep in the lake,” Delaere says.

