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Ayrampu Qontu, named after a nearby hill, or qontu in Aymara, where a particular cactus called ayrampu grows, is the westernmost sector of the Kala Uyuni site. This area was selected for excavation based on the high density of Early and Middle Formative period ceramics encountered by Bandy (2001a) in his survey of the Taraco Peninsula. The density and utilitarian character of the ceramics led Bandy to conclude that this sector represented a Chiripa-period residential area. Recovery of a Chiripa-period household has been a longstanding goal of the Taraco Archaeological Project, and we hoped excavation of this area might reveal such remains. While such a structure failed to materialize, we excavated nearly two meters of stratified, well-preserved midden that, based on the ceramic assemblage, dates between the Early and Late Chiripa phases.

Altogether, we opened seven contiguous 2x2 meter units (figure 3.1). Units N857/E535, N857/E537, and N855/E536 were opened as individual 2x2 meter units. Unit N855/E536 was reduced to 1x1 meter and excavated to sterile. We also conducted deep excavations in a larger area, two contiguous 4x2 meter units, referred to as unit N859/E535.

We began with Unit N857/E539. After removing the plow zone (approximately 20 cm thick), we encountered several distinct deposits that appeared to run diagonally (southwest to northeast). Particularly suggestive were wide and linear deposits of a dense orange clay that we hypothesized might be the remains of an adobe wall. The other deposits consisted of a dark, silty clay with flecks of charcoal that we hypothesized might be midden associated with the structure. An alternative explanation for these features, however, was that a series of strata had been deposited on a western trending slope, the crest of which was truncated by plowing (see figure 3.2). The truncation of these sloping strata could create a banded pattern such as we saw at the base of the plow zone.

From the first 2x2 units, we decided to expand horizontally and removed the plow zone from Unit N857/E535 and the large Unit N859/
Figure 3.1 Map of AQ and KU areas. The AQ area is located on the left side of the map.
Figure 3.2    AQ North profile.
As a result of these excavations we were able to determine that the clay deposits did not form part of a structure. Instead, it appeared as if we had encountered a fairly complex series of superimposed midden and architectural rubble deposits (figure 3.2). We decided to rapidly excavate a 1x1 meter sounding in the southwest corner of unit N855/E536 in order to determine the depth of the site and the general stratigraphic sequence.

After completing excavation of the 1x1 meter sounding, we decided to excavate a larger area in order to obtain a good sample of what appeared to be stratified, Chiripa-period midden. Beginning in the western Unit N857/E535, we excavated the most recent midden deposits, Events C3, C4, and C5 (see figure 3.2 for a Harris Matrix). The ceramics from C4 and C5 are Late Chiripa and a radiocarbon date from a locus within these events revealed a calibrated C14 age of 786-413 B.C. (see chapter 2, this volume). The removal of these deposits in this unit exposed midden Event C6, which was identified in the initial excavations in Unit N857/E537. Leaving a 50 cm balk from the eastern wall of Unit N857/E537, we excavated Event C6 in one locus that extended through both units. Beneath, we encountered Event C7, which was primarily orange, clay-rich material. While it was difficult to interpret its origin, we described it as a dump of adobe-like material, possibly architectural rubble. It is possible that it could be the highly disturbed remains of an adobe structure, but its condition precludes such a conclusion.

Beneath C7 we encountered a dark midden (C8) that extended across both units. Since it appeared that the archaeological deposits were deeper to the east, we decided to continue the excavations in Unit N857/E539 down to sterile so as to obtain a proper sample of the entire occupation sequence.

Altogether, we excavated 13 distinct midden events and 3 adobe dump/slump events. The midden events consisted primarily of silty clays with varying densities of carbon and

Figure 3.3 Area AQ Harris Matrix.
clay inclusions, ranging in color from red to yellowish-green. Several of the midden events had very high densities of fish and camelid bone. Dr. Katherine Moore found several bone weaving tools such as shuttles, spindle whorls, and combs in her analysis of the bones from several of the midden deposits. There were also large quantities of ceramics in the midden deposits. Analysis of the ceramics suggests that they are overwhelmingly utilitarian, with very few decorated sherds present (Steadman, chapter 7 of this volume).

The majority of these midden events date to the Late Chiripa phase. The earliest deposit, C18, appears to be a mixture of Early and Middle Chiripa, with some Late Chiripa. A date obtained on carbonized seeds from Locus 5065 of this event produced a calibrated radiocarbon age of 800-523 B.C. While excavating the lowermost loci, we noted the occurrence of large pore sizes and insect disturbance. These insects excavate burrows about 5 cm in diameter, which often fill with a soil distinct from the primary matrix. This creates the appearance of many small lighter- or darker-colored circles in the soil. Dr. Melissa Goodman took a micromorphological block sample from this area, but her field assessment was that it was highly disturbed and that the Early and Middle Chiripa deposits (the earliest deposits in the AQ area) had most likely been homogenized by post-depositional bioturbation. Interestingly, however, Dr. Steadman detected a vertical separation of Early from Middle Chiripa in the ceramic assemblage of superimposed loci in Event C18, so perhaps this movement may not have affected the larger artifacts.

The excavated deposits and the artifacts contained therein, therefore, support Bandy’s hypothesis that Ayrampu Qontu was a domestic habitation area in the Early, Middle, and Late Chiripa phases. The majority of the material pertains to the Late Chiripa phase, and promises to provide rich data on changes and/or continuities in domestic life during this time and an interesting comparison to the Achachi Coa Collu (AC) ceremonial sector of Kala Uyuni (reported by Cohen and Roddick, chapter 6 of this volume).