

The Stones of Cuzco

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Lift up the stone and you will find me there.

Egyptian Oxrhynchus Paprus¹

Ancients believed that stones were the dwelling places of gods. Forged by nature or hewn by hand, they are symbols of the unfathomable expressions of human consciousness. This desire and ability of man to create symbols to mediate himself with the unknown is the underlying structure of all the arts.

Unchanging and more durable than ourselves, stones seemed to be “especially apt symbols of the Self...”

Many people cannot refrain from picking up stones of a slightly unusual color or shape and keeping them, without knowing why they do this. It is as if the stones held a living mystery that fascinates them. Men have collected stones since the beginning of time and have apparently assumed that certain ones were the containers of the life-force with all its mystery... For a while the human being is as different as possible from a stone, yet man's innermost center is in a strange and special way akin to it (perhaps because the stone symbolizes mere existence at the farthest remove from emotions, feelings, fantasies, and discursive thinking of ego-consciousness.) In this sense the stone symbolizes what is perhaps the simplest and deepest experience—the experience of something eternal that man can have in those moments when he feels immortal and unalterable.²

Most primeval cultures worked stone slightly. There are many examples whereby a found stone was carved only to give hint to its inherent form or a surface relief of what the artist intended to bestow it. As time and technology progressed, we witness increasingly baroque works such as the Mayan edifices in Meso-America and the Gothic Cathedrals of Europe. Here, the artist is the alchemist, turning cold stones into all representation of what it is not. Magic was performed.

From the megaliths of Great Britain and Ireland to the Zen Buddhist gardens of Japan; the arrangement of naturally occurring stones removed from their places of origin result in an abstraction and framing of nature. The stones of Cuzco exemplify this magic. These artifacts are archaic, yet the Inca civilization responsible for them was but 500 years old. In view of the absence of iron tools in the Inca culture, it is all the more impressive to witness the delicate and precise joints of this polygonal masonry.

Like the builders who left the imprint of their hand in wet stucco; these masons left the marks of their craft and the evidence of ‘building’ on these stones. In so doing they have uncovered the spirits bound within.

NOTES:

1. Paul Caponigro, *Megaliths*, New York Graphic Society 1986, intro.
2. Marie-Louise von Franz & Carl G. Jung, “The self—Symbols of Totality,” *Man And His Symbols*, 1964.



