

Ancient Andean Compartmentalised Boards in Perspective

Games and Social Organisation in the Pre-Columbian Andes

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En memoria de Benigno Malo Vega

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates a little-understood class of Andean artefacts known as *maquetas*, *yupanas*, and/or *taptanas/tableros*. These enigmatic objects are compartmentalised boards whose function is still uncertain. Often studied in isolation or appropriated to support external arguments, they are here studied as part of a wide assemblage, analysing the largest database of known examples to date. This research recontextualises these boards as a coherent corpus, situating them within their cultural, chronological, and geographical frameworks.

Through typological, iconographic, and contextual analyses, the study proposes that some board Types – particularly those defined here as Types 1, 2 and 3, and possibly Type-6 – functioned as gameboards. Their formal and symbolic characteristics align closely with the social and ritual roles of games in ancient Andean societies. The boards' layouts and imagery evoke an idealised microcosm of the Andean world, articulated through principles of duality, complementarity, and mediation – key structural logics of Andean cosmology and social organisation.

These findings link the boards to broader transformations in the Peruvian highlands during the Early Intermediate Period and Middle Horizon, involving exchanges between Recuay and Wari, and the large-scale interaction networks of the Middle Horizon, encompassing the north coast of Peru and the southern Ecuadorian highlands. Games, in this context, may have served as ritualised arenas, mediating relations among emergent corporate groups in a segmentary social landscape. By reframing these artefacts as active instruments of social and cosmological mediation, embedded within broader social processes, this research highlights the significance of play as an analytical category in Andean archaeology. It argues that gaming as ritual performance was not a peripheral amusement but a central integrative mechanism in the ritualised economies of ancient Andean societies, fostering cooperation within diverse, ecologically and politically complex societies.

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P R E F A C E

Although I had already seen them in books, I remember well the first time I encountered one of the odd objects that would later become the main topic of my PhD research. It was in December 2019, in the storage rooms of the *Museo delle Culture* in Milan, during a private visit. A few brief remarks were made about this curious artefact before attention quickly shifted to the colourful *kipu* displayed on the adjacent table. Ironically, this episode encapsulates the marginal position these boards have long occupied within Andean studies.

I cannot say exactly why, but something about that object captured me that day, despite knowing almost nothing about it. Perhaps it was precisely the casual way in which it was set aside that sparked my fascination. I remember leaving the room wondering whether I might ever have the opportunity to study it.

As life sometimes has a particular way of unfolding, only a few months later – on the first day of a lockdown that marked the beginning of a global pandemic – I was on a video call with George Lau, discussing the possibility of pursuing a master's degree at the Sainsbury Research Unit. As our conversation turned toward the idea of continuing into a PhD project, George suggested I take a look at the compartmentalised boards common in Ancash, about which he had recently written. He believed there could be sufficient material for a doctoral study. I was both elated and surprised and, as humans often do, I took it as a sign of something – though what exactly, I cannot say. As anthropology reminds us, humans are consummate meaning-making beings, and in that sequence of perhaps fortuitous events, I found the motivation to dedicate the following four years of my life to the study of these objects.

A lot has happened since, and that first board I saw in 2019 became part of this research. I was even given the opportunity to radiocarbon date it. Along the way, these boards have become something of a companion. I was initially drawn to them for their enigmatic character – as many had been before me – but they gradually became familiar objects; their geometries and symmetries increasingly logical. They even turned into guiding forces during my fieldwork, leading me north to Ecuador, where unanticipated research perspectives emerged. There, I visited the place where the first board was found, which felt like returning to the beginning of a research journey that continues – one of which I am happily a part.

My work tries to show why some of these boards may have in fact been gameboards, and how the archaeological evidence bears out this interpretation. I hope that I have been able to highlight the importance of these objects beyond the mere identification of their function, and in relation to much broader topics concerning the Andean past and related to social organisation and intercultural exchange. An additional hope is that my research will help bring these objects into current scholarly discussions in Andean archaeology, so that researchers will be able to better contextualise the presence of these artefacts in the future.

Finally, while often neglected by Andean scholars, games appear to have played an important role in the Andes, past and present. I have tried to highlight this not just in relation to the archaeological boards, but also based on the historical and ethnographic evidence, which provides ample evidence for the significance of games in the ritual life of Andean societies. I believe this is linked to the broader importance of play in relation to ritual. Following Hocart and Huizinga, who happened to publish their books in the same year (1936) and probably never read each other, I think that the link between play, ritual, and government can still be explored much further, although this is not what this thesis intends to do. It does, however, provide a contribution to the study of ritual play in cultures from an indigenous Andean perspective.

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Introduction

PRE-HISPANIC ANDEAN COMPARTMENTALISED BOARDS AS SCIENTIFIC OBJECTS

A corpus of artifacts variably known as *yupanas*, *maquetas*, and *tableros*, has been the subject of academic studies for almost 150 years. Personal, social and theoretical contingencies have underpinned the main theories on the function and cultural significance of these items, which remains elusive to this day.

This introductory chapter presents how a set of archaeological boards from the pre-Columbian Andes has become the object of scientific attention. It intends to provide a historiographical framework to critically evaluate the dynamics that underpinned different academic interpretations, laying the foundations for the development of my main argument. As was common at the dawn of modern Western archaeology, what started off as a curiosity later became the object of careful scholarly enquiry, capable of engendering and being entangled with new theoretical and ideological positions. This chapter owes to Lorraine Daston's work (2000; 2004), especially on how scientific objects "come into being and pass away". She claims that scientific objects are historically situated and that their historicity is crucial to comprehending their biographies.

The coming into being of scientific objects occurs when dispersed pieces of data become visible as a coherent entity, but their continued existence is dependent upon their potential to keep generating new ideas. They become marginal and eventually pass away whenever they are not perceived as capable of engendering novel questions. Their embeddedness in theoretical matters and cultural as well as material practices increases their scientific relevance.

Accordingly, this chapter will examine how these archaeological artifacts went from being individual scattered boards to a homogeneous and coherent category of items that commanded the attention of the academic community. Paradoxically, even as these boards frustrated precise functional, chronological, and formal interpretations, they became all the

more interesting to anthropologists and archaeologists, because of their potential to generate and provide pieces of empirical data for new epistemic endeavours.

This study is situated within the broader literature on the history of archaeological collecting and practice, as well as anthropology. The treatment of these boards as objects of interest spanned a significant period of time, including different stages of archaeological research, from the pioneering epoch of travel-writing and incipient collecting habits of the second half of the 19th century, up to the professionalization of archaeology, becoming connected over time with broader issues concerning diffusionist discussions on “culture areas” and the development of pre-modern civilizations.

The boards studied here first came to the attention of the scholarly community in the second half of the 19th century. Three works published between 1877 and 1878 mentioned the existence of compartmentalised rectangular boards with similar layouts (Bastian 1877; González Suárez 1878; Wiener 1878). Since then, several scholars have used them as scientific evidence for their theories, and their personal research agendas had an impact on the way in which these objects have been considered.

These items have been variably identified as architectural maquettes or urban models, as counting-devices, and as gaming boards. As a critical history of the scholarship on these objects, the different theories will be presented through their main proponents and following a chronological order, reflecting the broader trajectory of the archaeological and anthropological debate both at the local (national) and global level.

I

The founder of the ethnological museum of Berlin, Adolf Bastian (1877:149; 1878:124-25) was the first to comment on an example of this artifact type, in an article on some new accessions to his museum’s collections (see also Penny 2002:51-94; Gänger 2014). This was the replica of a wooden board he had seen in Cuenca, Azuay, Ecuador, that he proposed to identify with the relief plan of an Inka city (Figure 1). However, the first elaborate presentation of the argument claiming that this object was an urban plan was made by an Ecuadorian clergyman, Federico González Suárez, regarded as the father of modern historiography in Ecuador. The first time he mentioned this artifact (1878:25-32) was in a book on the history of the *Cañari*, a pre-Hispanic people of the southern Ecuadorian highlands.

He believed the Cañari were the authentic Ecuadorian people of the pre-Hispanic past in opposition to the foreign Inkas, characterized as Peruvians (Hidalgo 2019:95), and whose conquest is presented on a par with that of the Spaniards; i.e., two equally alien nations. In this book, González Suárez examined the burials excavated by graverobbers over the previous decades and reviewed the artifacts found inside them. The object he describes as the “most notable” (1878:25) is a carved wooden board from a town east of Cuenca, Chordeleg (Maps 2, 6). For Suárez, its importance lay in the odd and unprecedented features (González Suárez 1914:ix). Regarding it as a unicum, specific to the material culture of the Cañari, he tried to make sense of it in relation to its location.

The board had been excavated by a *huaquero* (informal excavator) called Antonio Serrano, in the 1860s (González Suárez 1892:6; Saville 1924; Matovelle 1921:56).¹ Reportedly, the board had been found inside a lavish burial located east of the town of Chordeleg, a short distance from the main square of the village (see Chapter 8) (González Suárez 1878:21; 1892:87; Bruhns 1994:257-59; 2008a:181; Matovelle 1921:60; Saville 1924). Suárez identified this grave with the burial of an important Cañari lord or priest, and he considered some of the objects found therein to be genuine examples of the material culture of the Cañari, that is to say, an authentically Ecuadorian culture as opposed to a Peruvian-Inka one (González Suárez 1878:30). Accordingly, he suggested that the board may have represented the “plan of Chordeleg” (26), locating the burials the huaqueros had raided and the two hills rising on the outskirts of the city (Cerro Llaver and Chaurinzhin).

His interest in a more systematic approach to the collecting and studying of antiquities originated in the political value that archaeology offered (Hidalgo 2019:101-02; see González Suárez 1914). González Suárez strived to find in the archaeological record from the southern provinces of Azuay and Cañar the material basis for the existence of a pre-Columbian past that was unique to Ecuador.

These objects found particularly in the southern area of the country, begin to appear like stimuli to the construction of the frontier in the past, an

¹ The phenomenon of the huaqueros was rife in Central and South America in the late 19th and early 20th century. These were usually poor peasants, who drew a profit from selling *huacos* (i.e., precious gold and silver objects found in pre-Columbian tombs – often known as *huacas/wak'as*) to collectors (Coe 1993:273). In the province of Azuay, there is evidence of graverobbing from the earliest colonial epoch (Salomon 1987).

imaginary, material and symbolic boundary that distances these peoples from the Incas, and from which the origins of the “Ecuadorian” nation could be rebuilt.²

(Bedoya Hidalgo 2021:240)

In addition to linking the artifact to the location of its finding, González Suárez (1878:27-30) tried to show that this object proved that the origins of the Cañari were to be found among the Toltecs in Mesoamerica. We will not need to dwell upon the details of his argument, based on speculative iconographical and architectural resemblances, but what is important to stress is that, by making this argumentative move, Suárez could extend the distance that separated the Cañari – representatives of an authentic Ecuadorian past – from the Incas. Furthermore, he bestows upon the peoples of the southern Ecuadorian highlands an ethnic origin that is rooted in what was perceived at the time as another important polity, akin to that of the Incas, but older. He clarifies that,

Of the objects found in the huacas of Chordeleg, some belong then to the civilization, so to speak, of the Incas; others [belong instead] to that of the Cañari, whose works are distinct from those of the Peruvians, from which we necessarily have to agree that they belong to a different race [sic]. The Cañari were a full-fledged and brave nation when the Incas conquered them.

(González Suárez 1878:30)

Finally, González Suárez claims that there was evidence in the chronicles that the pre-Columbian people of Peru used to build maquettes and scale architectural models (citing Castellanos 1847:446; Garcilaso de la Vega 1609:52 Book 2, Ch. 26). What his claim implicitly suggested is that, if such models existed in ancient Peru, then not only does this add credibility to his identification of the object as a city plan, but it also goes to demonstrate that the Cañari of Ecuador were equally capable of producing refined cultural artifacts as their Peruvian counterparts.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.

On the occasion of the *Exposición Histórico Americana de Madrid* of 1892-93, an international exhibition held in Madrid to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the so-called ‘discovery’ of the Americas, Ecuador sent a collection of artifacts that was to be representative of the country’s past. This event marked a crucial step in the formation of a sense of a national identity by means of the exhibition of antiquities (Hidalgo 2019:95). González Suárez contributed to this exhibition with a few items from his collections and with a scientific publication – an archaeological atlas (1892), part of a larger work on the history of Ecuador (1890-1903).

Notably, among the items he sent to Madrid, the first was the “plan, carved in wood, with drawings, of the ancient city of Chordeleg. It was found covered in gold sheets, which have disappeared” (*Exposición Histórico-Americana* 1893:21). Many other collections had been gathered for the Madrid exhibition, but it is significant that, among the few items given by Suárez, the first one is a wooden artifact presented as the plan of an ancient city. This choice jarred with the dominant narrative that the Ecuadorian state promoted for this exhibition, in which the emphasis was placed on highlighting an Inka past. As Bedoya Hidalgo (2019:96) suggested, the narrative upheld by the Ecuadorian state and the related selection of items displayed are to be understood as a diplomatic gesture to Spain, where the Inka empire was the most widely known aspect of pre-Hispanic South America. Modern scale models of Ecuadorian Inka sites were also on display, and it is probably as a response to these models that González Suárez’s decision to send the wooden board from Chordeleg is best understood. The board stood as a reminder of the existence of an Ecuadorian past, which he believed was entirely distinct from the Inkas. The scientific contribution that came along with his collection, the archaeological atlas, substantiates this.

In the 19th century, scientific atlases were a popular choice of many post-independence South American nations to provide a cartographical, naturalistic or historical portrayal of the country (Villacorta Ostolaza 2012:175). In atlases such as González Suárez’s, the selection and visual representations of archaeological objects was part of a process of standardization of artifacts to attain an ordering and classification of the associated cultures and geographical regions (see Daston and Galison 1992:84-87). In effect, González Suárez outlines a historical narrative that is articulated via the display of archaeological cultures that shared common Ecuadorian origins (Hidalgo 2021:234-38; Salazar 2000:27-29). Given his

emphasis on Ecuadorian pre-Hispanic cultural groups, González Suárez dedicates only the last four plates (out of 44) to Inka sites and artifacts (González Suárez 1892:165-99). His atlas had to compare with others published in Peru, where *Antigüedades Peruanas* by Rivero y Ustáriz and Tschudi (1851:iii) embraced a narrative presenting the Inkas as “the ancient Peruvian nation” (Villacorta Ostolaza 2012:176-77; Tantaleán 2014:24-26).

González Suárez, who was familiar with Rivero and Tschudi’s publication (1892:167), developed his atlas as a counter-narrative to reappropriate a past other than the Inka one. This is the narrative within which the wooden board from Chordeleg is presented along with other non-Inkan antiquities from Ecuador, classified according to the archaeological culture to which they were deemed to belong. Here, González Suárez identifies it again as the plan of Chordeleg. However, by the time of his archaeological atlas, the board was no longer the most notable finding from the Chordeleg burials, as he had previously stated (1878:25). The board lost its pride of place because González Suárez had to include a new contribution on this topic by a French traveller named Charles Wiener, which turned his argument on its head. The piece did not appear to be uniquely Cañari or Ecuadorian, as it seemed to have been more commonly found in Peru.

II

In 1875, Charles Wiener was a professor of German at a Parisian high school, when he was commissioned by the French Ministry of Public Education to lead an archaeological and ethnographic mission across Peru and Bolivia, funded by the French state (Riviale 1993:917; 2001:285). After he arrived in Lima in February 1876, he embarked on a journey throughout the Peruvian coast and cordillera, which took him to many famous archaeological regions (Riviale 2003:543). By the time of his return to France in August 1877, about 15 months after he had set foot in Peru, Wiener had collected a vast amount of archaeological artifacts (Riviale 2000:108), which went on to form the core collection of the new Musée du Trocadero (Riviale 1993:920; Verneau 1919:249).

Once back in Paris, Wiener quickly achieved a celebrity status, and he started to be regarded as an authority on Peruvian antiquities. This happened thanks to the significant public attention that his collection enjoyed on the occasion of a few exhibitions held in Paris after his return. His fame also largely benefited from the conferences and publications that

followed these exhibitions, of which the foremost was his book *Pérou et Bolivie: Récit de voyage* (1880), the popular account of his travels in Peru and Bolivia. However, his personal reputation, and even more so that of his scientific work, was soon smeared by accusations coming from colleagues and collectors, who lamented that his work contained several inaccuracies. Furthermore, many accused Wiener of extolling his own feats at the expense of others (Macedo 1881:iii-vii; Reiss and Stübel 1880-1887:1:4; Verneau 1919:250; Riviale 2000:107-10; Villacorta Ostolaza 2007:52-64; Pillsbury 2014:52). The limited amount of time Wiener could spend in Peru casts reasonable doubts over the number of excavations and investigations he claims to have carried out. This is especially true for his work in the northern Peruvian highlands (Riviale 2003:544-46; 1993:920), where Wiener first came across these compartmentalised boards.

In his travel account (1880:178, 777-78), Wiener reported seeing such boards in An-cash, which he describes as “counters”. As the drawing of one of them demonstrates, the object he discusses formally resembled the Chordeleg board (Figure 2). However, Wiener introduces these objects abruptly and out of context to bolster his argument that khipus (Andean knotted cords used as a record-keeping device) were in fact only a mnemotechnic device, employed in accounting by the administrators of the Inka Empire, and as such, they were inferior to writing proper.

Wiener argued that the boards functioned according to a principle of addition and multiplication carried out by means of tokens, such as kernels or small pebbles, the colour of which indicated either the nature of the product or the moiety it belonged to. He claims that the different compartments and levels of the board were associated to numerical values, which permitted the performance of calculations. The way he provides this interpretation makes it appear as certain, although he does not cite any source. This is consistent with the general style of his book, which promotes an image of the author as a romantic explorer to the detriment of scientific accuracy. Riviale (1993:920) plainly writes that “it seems likely that [Wiener] disseminated imaginary discoveries and anecdotes throughout his [travel] account”. While this should caution against taking any unsubstantiated interpretation in Wiener’s work at face value, it is worth investigating why he developed this theory.

An earlier publication by Wiener is instructive. Two years prior to his successful travel account, Wiener (1878) published a shorter version of his travelogue in a popular

French travel magazine. This comprised only a portion of his longer wanderings across the Andes, roughly the itinerary across highland Ancash from Huandoval to Baños, south of Chavín de Huantar (Map 5). In recounting this section of the journey in his later book, Wiener repeated, almost verbatim, the content of this earlier article. However, there are significant discrepancies, which help to contextualize his interpretation of the boards.

Unlike his later book, where these artifacts are introduced only to serve an argumentative purpose, in the earlier version, their presentation is embedded within the anecdotal narrative of Wiener's travelogue. The French traveller writes that, after spending a night near the ancient ruins of Chucana (Figure 3, Map 5), in the vicinity of Huandoval (Map 5), the priest of this town guided him around the archaeological site.³ This anecdote allowed Wiener to introduce some considerations on what was, to his eyes, the stark contrast between the miserable present and the glorious past of Andean peoples. Reflecting upon the current state of affairs in Huandoval, Wiener (1878:4) notes that the ancient city was not as degraded as its present counterpart and he calls contemporary indigenous Andeans "ungrateful" to their ancestors for their inability to live up to their past glories. According to him, Andeans of the past "knew how to live" (4) because there was an order that regulated their society. Such order was epitomized by a "ledger of debt and credit" (4) that the ancient inhabitants of Peru had developed.

These considerations introduce the "curious specimen" the priest showed to him, namely, a block of granite that resembled the model of a fortress with two turrets and walls. Wiener reports the priest related to him "a legend" (1878:4), according to which this object had once been used to record the contributions of the people of Huamachuco, using grains to perform calculations. Then, Wiener writes that the priest complained about the poverty of the area, highlighting the sharp contrast between the ingenuity of that ancient accounting device and the current economic context. A noteworthy difference from his later book is that the boards' function as accounting devices is not presented as certain, but as a legend. Whether this is an actual folk legend Wiener heard from the priest of Huandoval is difficult to determine. However, this account allows him to argue that contemporary Andeans were inferior to their ancestors, capable of such clever inventions. This is a recurrent theme of his

³ Chucana is a Recuay hilltop archaeological site with circular structures akin to those found at another Recuay hilltop site, such as the nearby Pashash (Lau 2016:186; see also Schaedel 1952).

work. For instance, one just needs to look at Wiener's illustrations of pre-Hispanic ruins – as in the case of his view of the archaeological ruins of Chan Chan (1880:494),⁴ where a local man is “depicted as reduced as the ruins”, as Pillsbury (2012:18) aptly puts it (see also Majluf 2000:96).

The contrast between present and past and the contempt Wiener shows towards contemporary indigenous people fits with the broader social discourse of 19th-century Peru, where the indigenous Andean population was considered an obstacle to progress (Méndez Gastelumendi 2011:94). This dovetailed with the positivist ideals of the second half of the 19th century, which influenced the study of human societies. Embedded within the framework of social Darwinism, positivist thinking explained the economic backwardness of certain societies and countries as due to racial issues – in the case of Peru the issue was seen as residing in the native population of the Andes (Tantaleán 2014:29-30).⁵

Despite this, the Peruvian national past and identity remained firmly rooted in its pre-Columbian origins. The glory of the Andean past materialized in the ruins and artifacts of a great civilization, broadly identified as Inka even when dealing with older cultures (Lau 2020:170). In addition to their monumental architecture, the assumption was that these ancient polities required an efficient bureaucracy – formulated by Wiener as a “ledger of debt and credit”. In effect, these boards were relevant to Wiener's argument, since, just like the *quipu*, they demonstrated a developed accounting system, worthy of a state-like apparatus, confirming the European notion of a glorious bygone Inka past.

That his theory on the function of these devices also involved a significant degree of imagination becomes apparent if we look at the inexplicable changes Wiener makes in his subsequent book on how calculations could be carried out.⁶ Such modifications can only be the product of Wiener's own ideas and imagination once he was back in France, with no access to new data. Hence, his second explanation is necessarily something Wiener himself conjured up. It goes without saying that this casts serious doubts also over his whole hypothesis.

⁴ Chan Chan is an archaeological site on the coast of Peru, located near Trujillo, associated with the Chimú culture (ca. AD 1000 – 1470).

⁵ Individual differences among 19th century travel writers existed, and some showed a more empathetic view (e.g., Raimondi 1876; Squier 1877).

⁶ In 1878, Wiener suggested that counting was done according to a decimal system where each higher level of the two raised areas multiplied the unit value of the lower compartments by 10. Instead in 1880, he writes that the unit value doubled in either of the two bigger rectangular spaces, tripled in the central compartment, sextupled in the middle-level and was twelve times the unit value in the upper level.

Wiener (1878:4, 12; 1880:178, 777) claims to have seen three boards. One in Chucana, which is illustrated in both his publications, one in Cabana, also in Pallasca, and one in the private collection of Mr. Théry in Urcón, which had allegedly been found at the ruins of the hilltop fort of *Huauullang*, located somewhere between Aco and Urcón in northern Ancash (Map 5).⁷ In addition to the board that appears in both his 1878 article and then again in his 1880 book, Wiener had two replicas made, probably on the occasion of one of the Parisian exhibitions of his Peruvian and Bolivian collection, which were subsequently incorporated in the Musée du Trocadero. These two reproductions survive to this day in the Musée du quai Branly.

One further point concerns the unusual number of compartments that characterises the board Wiener illustrated in his two travel accounts, different from the Chordeleg board (and all those known today), making it an outlier among a corpus of otherwise standardised artifacts. This is likely to be a mistake on the part of Wiener. In fact, like many other authors of the time, Wiener tended to disregard accuracy in scale reproductions of archaeological ruins and artifacts in favour of a more imaginative recreation of them, which allowed for creative liberties (Pillsbury 2012:28).⁸ Therefore, it seems likely that the oddities of the board illustrated by Wiener result from his interest in presenting a captivating, novelised travel account – in line with what readers expected from this genre in his time – than a systematic and rigorous work.

III

The assessment of Wiener's work raises many doubts over the accuracy of his account. While the truthfulness of his claim to have seen these boards is not in doubt – especially, given that one of the boards he documented is probably still extant (CAB-9) – his subsequent interpretation of their function and use appears to be inextricably linked to the author's arguments and surmise. Even attending to the anecdotal event in which Wiener claims to have learned about the function of this object, we are at best dealing with local folklore filtered by a

⁷ The exact location of this archaeological site is unknown to the author. *Huallán* is a common toponym in highland Ancash.

⁸ Wiener was no exception in this. See for example the differences between the engraving of the "Gateway of the Sun" in Tiwanaku from Squier's travel account (1877:288), and the photograph of this archaeological ruin taken around that same time (shown in Pillsbury 2012:29).

Catholic priest. However, his theory was taken into serious consideration by several scholars over the following years, despite his work being often discredited within the academic community.

In the meantime, González Suárez (1892:74-75) continued to uphold his interpretation even despite the new boards described by Wiener.⁹ In Europe, Wiener's accounting hypothesis soon became the favourite of French and German scholars writing about the nature of human cultures (e.g., Ratzel 1888:657; Cronau 1892:111). As we have already discussed above, the idea of dealing with tangible counting-devices was more palatable to a European academic audience, as it resonated with the prevalent narrative of the time, according to which the Inka empire was a highly complex society with institutions typical of pre-modern states.

A few years later, a first systematic study was carried out by the French anthropologists Paul Rivet and René Verneau in *Ethnographie Ancienne de l'Équateur* (1912-1922). Their work should be credited with being the first to examine these artifacts as a coherent corpus of objects, taking into account all known examples and sifting through the evidence proposed in support of either hypothesis.¹⁰ The French anthropologists had doubts over the scientific quality of Wiener's work and one of the two authors, Verneau (1919), made this clear in an obituary of the French traveller. Paul Rivet knew González Suárez personally (Rivet 1919:633) and it was likely through his acquaintance with the Ecuadorian historian that Rivet became interested in the artifact type found in Chordeleg. However, González Suárez's hypothesis looked untenable to the French authors, since it fell short of making sense of the standardized features of the corpus and its geographical distribution, which indicated they were more common in Peru than in Ecuador. In the absence of alternative explanations, the French anthropologists settled for the option that appeared to them as the least implausible, that is, Wiener's.

⁹ González Suárez (1915:Note 32) claims Wiener read his book on the Cañari in Cuenca.

¹⁰ In addition to the boards we have already discussed, they included a specimen excavated at Pachacamac (PAC-1) and one from Caraz, Ancash (CAR-1).

IV

In the first decades of the 20th century, two significant figures of Andean anthropology and archaeology provided a new contribution. The German archaeologist, Max Uhle (1922a:27-28), and the Swedish anthropologist, Erland Nordenskiöld (1918) almost contemporaneously drew the conclusion that these objects were likely gameboards. The two scholars were in contact with each other during this period (Lindberg 2016:217; Lindsoug and Gustavsson 2015:102; Rowe 1954:16) and Uhle knew about Nordenskiöld's opinion (Larrea 1965:40). However, they reached this conclusion through different arguments.

Nordenskiöld is the founder of the anthropological discipline in his country.¹¹ After graduating in geological and paleontological studies, he embarked on field expeditions to South America, that soon caused his interests to shift to ethnographic and archaeological studies (Lowie 1933:158). Particularly, his second South American expedition to the Chaco Cordillera in 1901-02 (see Rosen 1904) proved decisive (Lindberg 2016:215-17; 2008:165-72).

Nordenskiöld focused on the study of artifacts, which he regarded as authentic documents revealing of the pre-Columbian history of native American peoples. He also believed that it was not possible to draw a divide between archaeology and ethnography, since they were complementary. Accordingly, he focussed on the systematic collection and description of archaeological data in chronological sequences, concentrating on the accurate mapping of geographical distribution, which he deemed a key methodological element in the study of cultural change and human migrations. In turn, he believed that ethnographic evidence could contribute to the interpretation of the archaeological material (Lindberg 1999:xx).

Nordenskiöld lived at a time when anthropology consisted mainly of ethnological studies and one of the main academic preoccupations was to determine the origins of each civilization, tracing back their migratory routes and diffusion over time. However, these theoretical frameworks came in different forms. In Europe, an 'extreme' diffusionism became popular, culminating with the German and Austrian school of the *Kulturkreis*, which theorized that all societies, including those of the Americas, had their roots in just a few centres of

¹¹ Erland's father, Baron Adolf Erick Nordenskiöld, was the first man to successfully navigate across the North-east passage in 1879-80 (Lindberg 2016:216). The anthropological school Nordenskiöld set up in Gothenburg formed important anthropologists, such as Alfred Métraux and Henry Wassén.

origin from which all world cultures multiplied, producing vast interconnected culture areas. Their research programme aimed at the reconstruction of cultural histories, focusing on the identifications of shared cultural traits and their geographical distribution (Gräbner 1905:53; Penny 2008:90).

North American ethnology and museum anthropology adopted a different conception of diffusion, which was based on a more restricted notion of culture area, limited to the American continent – a school of thought that started with Franz Boas. Nordenskiöld opted for a path that was closer to that of his American colleagues, as exemplified by Lowie (1933:160), who wrote that the Swedish ethnologist “appraised distributions in terms of history, steering a middle course between an outdated evolutionism and an extravagant diffusionism”. Nordenskiöld had been initially influenced by the anthropogeographic thought of the German scholar Friedrich Ratzel, who believed that cultural similarities could be explained by human migrations, ancient contacts between societies, and by cultural loans (Penny 2008:89; Lindberg 2008:165; Ratzel 1882-1891). However, Nordenskiöld grew particularly hostile to the *kulturkreise* theory, developed by Ratzel’s followers, especially as represented by the Viennese scholars Wilhelm Schmidt and Wilhelm Koppers. He regarded it as speculative and lacking empirical evidence, settling for a more nuanced approach, relying primarily on material culture analysis (Lindberg 2008:165).

In diffusionist theories of the time, games and musical instruments (i.e., different forms of play) were of particular interest because of the widespread belief that they represented a stable ‘cultural trait’, not prone to modifications because minimally affected by external constraints. As such, a systematic and comparative study of games was deemed an important methodological tool to identify cultural areas, because it could shed light on past contacts between societies and their migrations along with the movement of ideas, technologies, and other artifacts. The work of several anthropologists in the late-19th and early-20th century attests to this interest in games. For example, the father of British cultural anthropology, Edward B. Tylor (1879; 1880; 1896), argued that the Aztec boardgame *patolli* demonstrated that Central American civilizations originated in Asia, given his claim that it derived from the Indian boardgame *pachisi*. Likewise, he made similar arguments about the Asian origins of the string-figure game called *cat’s cradle*, before migrating to Europe and Australia. The anthropologists William Rivers and Alfred Haddon (1902) even devised a whole system to

systematically record string-figures in children's games for comparative purposes, with the ultimate goal of testing their diffusionist hypotheses (Eastop 2007:198-99). String-figure games were studied by diffusionist anthropologists both in the United Kingdom and the United States, and Franz Boas (1888) had been the first to include a descriptive account of these games in an academic study. This interest in games can be found in central Europe too, where Marcel Mauss gave a lecture series in 1937 at the Collège de France, titled "On the greasy pole, the ball play, and some other games of the periphery of the Pacific Ocean". Mauss used games to argue in favour of the existence of a unique culture area that encompassed both sides of the Pacific (Dumont 1986:196; see also Mauss 1990:note 139).

The foregoing helps to explain how and why Nordenskiöld came to consider these objects gameboards and the way in which his argument developed. Upon his return from a period of nearly two years in the Gran Chaco (Map 1), in 1908-1909, Nordenskiöld (1910:427) published an article on a game of chance that he had recorded among several different ethnic groups of the region. His attention to this game of chance stemmed precisely from the more general diffusionist interest in games that was current at his time. Nordenskiöld believed that games were a privileged cultural trait to study distribution and cultural exchange, considering them "of great importance in anthropogeographical investigations because they are so independent of the external circumstances under which people live" (Nordenskiöld 1999:143). Unlike dresses and architecture, he claimed that games were not altered by external conditions, and they could be played irrespective of climate.

Initially, Nordenskiöld (1910:433) argued there were striking similarities between the Gran Chaco game and North American games (see Culin 1898a).¹² He later abandoned this extreme diffusionist view, steering toward a milder position based on a methodological approach he developed to determine cultural change from pre-Hispanic through colonial and post-colonial times in South America. He believed two key factors drove cultural change: independent inventions and cultural loans (Nordenskiöld 1929; 1930; 1931). Based on these postulates, his methodology relied on a comparative analysis of ethnographic and archaeological material, with a particular attention to their geographic distribution. The product of

¹² In this early phase of his career, Nordenskiöld still adhered more closely to Friedrich Ratzel's anthropogeographic theory (Lindberg 1999).

this new methodological work was published in his series known as *Comparative Ethnographical Studies* (1919-1938).

The first two volumes of this series (1919; 1920), which focussed on the cultural area of the Gran Chaco, included two whole chapters on the comparative study of games. Applying his methodological procedure to the distribution of the game of chance of the Gran Chaco, he showed that its vocabulary was of Quechua origin, although none of these groups spoke Quechua (Nordenskiöld 1918; 1919:153-58). These Quechua terms were also used by some early-colonial chroniclers to refer to certain Andean boardgames, thus demonstrating their pre-Hispanic antiquity (Cobo 1893:228; Garcilaso de la Vega 1609:40 Book 2, Ch. 14). Besides this linguistic evidence and the testimony of early-colonial chroniclers, Nordenskiöld searched for archaeological artifacts that could confirm his hypothesis on the Andean origins of the Chaco game and found them in the boards Verneau and Rivet (1912-1922) had presented in their book.

It seems to me, however, that within the cultural area in the west, gameboards have been found that were used either for the game in question here or for a very similar one. I would like to refer here to those peculiar objects whose function caused Rivet and Verneau so much puzzlement.

(Nordenskiöld 1918:169)

These boards served as ideal candidates for the role of tangible forerunners to the Gran Chaco's game and allowed Nordenskiöld to argue there existed a pre-Hispanic cultural influence of Andean Quechua people on Gran Chaco's groups, evidenced by cultural loans. Nordenskiöld's (1918) argued that the layout of the archaeological boards was compatible with the game he had recorded in the Gran Chaco. However, the layout of these Andean boards is starkly different from that used by Chaco groups (Figure 4), so that he had to allow for the occurrence of modifications to the gameboard design and game rules over the centuries.

Nordenskiöld (1919:Map 27) prepared a map (Figure 5) to show the distribution of what he believed were archaeological gameboards related to the ethnographic game. His interpretation was the result of the comparative analysis of the distribution of material culture to test his theory on cultural change and past human contact in the South American

continent. Nordenskiöld could not avail himself of any more data about these boards than those presented by Verneau and Rivet, and he was not interested in them *per se*. Rather, he was keen to make a point concerning the diffusion of cultural traits from the Andes to the Gran Chaco by relying on what the anthropological literature of his time regarded as one of the best cultural traits for distribution analyses – games.

V

Like Nordenskiöld, Max Uhle also proposed to identify these items as gameboards. During the years spent in Peru, his work led to important advancements in the understanding of the Peruvian pre-Inka past, and to the establishment of the earliest relative chronologies based on his excavations (Tantaleán 2014:29-43; Marcos 1998; Rowe 1954; Kaulicke 2010). After having conducted fieldwork in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Chile, Uhle moved to Ecuador in 1919, where he was summoned by Jacinto Jijón y Camaño – a pupil of González Suárez's. When Uhle arrived in Ecuador he was already 63 years old, and some scholars have pointed out how his age may have negatively affected the quality of his research in this final stage of archaeological work in South America.

During this period, Uhle's ability to discern chronologies based on stylistic features was confused by an overt preoccupation to demonstrate that some South American societies originated in the Maya area of Central America (see Collier 1982:6; Kaulicke 2010:19). He carried out archaeological excavations in Ecuador under Jijón's patronage, including in the region around Cuenca and Chordeleg. The book in which he identifies these items as gameboards largely focuses on diffusionist models, to show the Mayan origins of highland Ecuadorian cultures (1922a:27-28). The diffusionist attention to games may have probably played a role also in the case of Uhle's analysis. Additionally, given his awareness of his Swedish colleague's work, he may have been influenced by the latter.

Most of Uhle's argument hinges upon the fact that neither the urban plan nor the counting-device hypotheses explained convincingly the "symmetrical opposition" of the two halves of compartments that characterizes all boards, which he regarded as the defining feature of this corpus of artifacts. Furthermore, he identified the iconography of the board from Chordeleg as heads of decapitated prisoners who had to gamble their lot at a game played with these boards. Uhle's attention to the layout of the boards' surfaces and their iconography

is consistent with his general methodological approach that concentrated on stylistic features to empirically formulate and assess chronological and diffusionist theories (Tantaleán 2014:36-37; Kroeber 1957; Rowe 1961). Despite his general belief that southern Ecuadorian cultures originally came from Central America, Uhle argues that the board found in Chordeleg clearly showed a *Tiahuanaco* (i.e., Wari) influence.¹³ However, given the little consideration reserved for Uhle's later research output, this observation has been largely neglected by scholars (Rowe 1954:21; Willey and Sabloff 1974:79).

Despite this though, he was the first to deduce the chronological placement of the Chordeleg board. Remarkably, as we will see, this placement is, broadly speaking, correct. The method by which Uhle arrived at this conclusion is closely tied with his own comparative study of styles and 'types' and belies his continued effort to try to extend the relative chronology he had developed in Peru to other parts of the Andes, such as Chile and Ecuador. Uhle always prioritized descriptive and comparative work with the aim of determining cultural sequences through the seriation of styles. Rowe (1954) points out that only Uhle's early work – characterised by a thorough descriptive character – stood the test of time and describes the German archaeologist's later contributions as "naïve" (22) due to their insistence on diffusionist concepts and an increasing inability to distinguish styles.

Uhle's progressive shift from an archaeology focused on regional historical trajectories of his early Peruvian work to one obsessed with broad diffusionist patterns may not be solely linked to a naïve diffusionism. This may also have to do with Uhle's lifelong dedication to the establishment of cultural chronological sequences in the Central Andean region. This is made explicit by Uhle (1954:77-78) in a series of lectures given at the University of Quito. Uhle was aware that his relative chronology had been a significant contribution to South American archaeology, but he had made no progress towards determining an absolute chronology, as it could be done for other parts of the world for which there are written records. The then recent developments in the decipherment of the Maya calendar promised to offer a solution (Bowditch 1901; 1910). Uhle was aware that Maya script contained several

¹³ Through his fieldwork in Peru, Uhle had correctly identified a pre-Inka 'Tiahuanaco [Tiwanaku]' horizon, now known as Middle Horizon. However, the Wari style had not been coined yet and he attributed the whole central Andean style from this horizon to Tiwanaku influence (Bruhns 2008:180-81; Uhle 1969). Tiwanaku was a polity contemporary with Wari, whose sphere of influence extended throughout northwestern Bolivia, southern Peru and northern Chile.

references to dates, which would have provided the first absolute chronology for the Americas (Uhle 1954:78). At a time without radiocarbon dating, and in a region with no known scripts, Maya calendrical references must have looked to Uhle as a chance at an absolute chronology in the Andes.

Uhle was aware that this would have been possible only if a cultural and stylistic connection could be established with the Central American region. When summoned to Ecuador by Jijón y Camaño, Uhle hoped to find traces of these links in this intermediate area, focussing little on local chronologies and directing his attention to broader long-distance ties. Uhle proposes that a Wari horizon (see note 12) extended to the southern Ecuadorian highlands, a suggestion that has rarely, if ever, been taken up again (Uhle 1922a; 1922c; also see below).¹⁴ In suggesting this, he was hoping to find links between the Central Andean region and Mesoamerica in the southern Ecuadorian highlands, so that a correspondence could be established between the Maya dates and a major Central Andean cultural group.

Uhle had come to form this idea on account of material found in some areas of southern Ecuador, such as Palta and Azuay (Jijón y Caamaño 1997:202), about which we have only scant reports.¹⁵ In his writings, Uhle points to the wooden board from Chordeleg as one of the prime examples of an object that is stylistically related to the Central Andes and was thus indicative of Wari influence. Uhle (1922a:28; 1922c:112-13) identifies certain stylistic features of the board and a few more metal artifacts found in the looted burials of Chordeleg as clearly Tiwanaku/Wari in style, such as the chevron-bands decorating the side of the Chordeleg board, separating profile human heads. As we will see, new evidence presented in this study substantiates this attribution and iconographic identification.

VI

Over the following decades, these three theories kept being discussed by scholars in Peru, North America and Europe (Urteaga 1928; Wassén 1990; Means 1931; Bennett 1949). A trend can be discerned after Nordenskiöld and Uhle, when the identification as gameboards became dominant, although commentators did not rule out other hypotheses a priori, given

¹⁴ Only few scholars have discussed this possibility (e.g., Bruhns 1994; 1998; 2008a; Durán 1931; Segarra Íñiguez 1967).

¹⁵ Only more research in Uhle and Jijón y Caamaño's archival material can shed more light on his fieldwork during this period.

the patchy evidence and lack of new data. Some tried to find evidence of games that could be played with these boards in the early-colonial chronicles (Urteaga 1928:101; Means 1931:327-29), or discussed their possible use as gameboards in relation to counting, mnemonic, and accounting devices (Wassén 1990:213; Bennett 1949; Means 1931:327).

A few scholars did not rule out the possibility that gameboards could also have been used as counting-devices or may have developed into them (Bennett 1949:615; Means 1931:328-29; Wassén 1931:198). None of these authors followed Uhle in his chronological proposal and made no advancements towards a more accurate identification of the boards' cultural attribution. As a result, many scholars continued to rely on early-colonial chroniclers in search of Inka-period material culture, trying to determine whether these were boardgames or counting-devices.

Only in the 1970s, after a long hiatus in which these objects had become marginal to the academic debate, new information on their dating became available after an archaeological finding at the hilltop settlement of Pashash, near Cabana, province of Pallasca, in northern Ancash. The board displayed the same layout as the one found in Chordeleg but was made of stone (Figure 6). The object was dated to about AD 500 and 600 (Grieder 1978:68, 109; Smith 1977:111). The dating of the piece and the archaeological context in which it was found made it possible to attribute the artifact to the Recuay culture and to infer that these boards had become widespread during the Early Intermediate Period (ca. AD 1-700), when the Recuay culture flourished in highland Ancash. The iconographical style of the designs that were carved on the sides of the Pashash board reinforced its cultural affiliation.

Based on this discovery, Smith (1978:56-59) argued these boards were diagnostic of Recuay's cultural influence. The context of the Pashash find in association with a Recuay elite burial (see Chapter 6), suggested these boards were likely linked to the ruling class, and as such they were probably culturally significant items in Recuay belief-systems. The stylistic variability displayed by an otherwise standardized corpus of objects led Smith to argue that their function must have been very familiar to the whole Recuay society, who had a mental template of what the standard features of this artifact form had to be. Many were made of stone, displaying carving techniques typical of the Recuay tradition and their capillary spread demonstrated that they played a major role in Recuay's artistic production (John Smith Jr., personal communication, 2021). Smith appraised their distribution in relation to their

material (stone in the highlands and wood along the coast) as indicative of Recuay's cultural interactions. He (1978:57) suggested that they were likely used as gameboards, and also probably functioning as a "divination device consulted on ceremonial occasions".

Smith devised three different games, both of chance and strategy, that could have been possibly played with these boards. These are largely speculative, but what is important to emphasize is Smith's shift of focus from the function of these objects to their role as a significant artefact associated with an Andean archaeological culture. The director of the excavation at Pashash that unveiled this piece, Terence Grieder (1982:110-11), also identifies them as gameboards, and relates them to the emerging significance of the arrangement of squares in a chequerboard grid, whether in gaming, divination, or counting.

Around the same time, the Italian-Peruvian ethnohistorian Carlos Radicati (1979) identified these objects as Inka yupanas (counting-devices), despite conceding that the evidence appeared to show otherwise. Radicati neglected to include the recent finds at Pashash, but his work proved influential enough to set the tone of the academic debate on this topic in the following decades. His study of these boards was a by-product of his broader research on khipus. Indeed, the work in which these boards are discussed (1979) concentrates primarily on Inka record-keeping and accounting methods, examining the relation between khipus and yupana, the Inka counting-device described by early-colonial chroniclers (Figure 7) (e.g., Acosta 1590:411-12, Book 6, Chapter 8; Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:360[362]-361[363]).¹⁶

Radicati set out in search for archaeological correspondences to the device the ethnohistorical sources described. He found that the compartmentalised boards studied here likely functioned as gaming devices, but he then concluded that it was the "natural" (1979:284) development of a gameboard to become a(n) (ac)counting-device. This statement was based on a set of assumptions underlying Radicati's motives behind his interest in khipus, likely originating in a common ethnocentric conviction in the centrality of writing (Duccio Bonavia 2006:22). Hence, the Inka's apparent lack of a script jarred with Radicati's paradigm, placing them on an inferior ranking to other major pre-modern states.¹⁷ His

¹⁶ Yupana is a Quechua word that translates as 'numbers', but which also used to indicate an Inka counting-devices according to the early Quechua dictionaries (Santo Tomás 1560:98, 143).

¹⁷ Western scholarship had traditionally placed great importance on writing as a defining feature of 'civilized' peoples (see Pagden 1982).

dedication to khipu studies drew from his ample knowledge of pre-modern record-keeping systems from around the world and it aimed to demonstrate that the Inkas had developed an analogous technology. In fact, Radicati was convinced that khipus were not solely a record-keeping device but a true form of writing (Urton 2006:41-42). Radicati (2006:284-85) tried to build an argument to show that pre-existing Andean gameboards had developed into counting-devices or yupanas as a result of the growing needs of the Inka state for an efficient bureaucracy. In arguing that gameboards would naturally develop into counting-devices, Radicati intended to refute the Inkas' alleged inferiority to other ancient civilizations based on the assumption that writing and complex bureaucratic systems are the defining elements of a state's advancement.

Scholars have since used various names to identify these artifacts. Common labels included *maqueta* (e.g., Campana 2001; Lockard 2011:121; Orsini 2014:238),¹⁸ *yupana* (Diessl 2004a:164; e.g., Pillsbury 2015:18; Wiersema 2015:77-79; e.g., Urton 2018) and in some cases *gameboard* or *tablero* (board) (Bankmann 1981:41; Wurster 1982; Wegner 2001; Lau 2016:Chapter 6). Some of these terms have been employed primarily as identifying labels. The influence of Radicati's interpretation remained dominant, notable in the widespread use of the term *yupana* to refer to these objects (Mackey et al. 1990; Urton 2018).

The silence on this topic of important archaeologists who worked in Ancash is also noteworthy. Julio C. Tello, who pioneered the archaeology of highland Ancash (Lau 2020:171-78), where these boards are widespread, never published anything about them. His silence is difficult to explain, as Tello (1929:55; 1967:61) was familiar with Wiener's work and the Ecuadorian finds and was interested in large scale interactions across the Andes.¹⁹ Another conspicuous silence is that of Tom Zuidema, who only mentions these boards in passing within a book chapter on Inka state bureaucracy (1982:423), where he calls them "gameboards", but in doing so he also relates them to accounting and Inka state practices.

In nearly 150 years of academic studies on these curious boards, their real role as cultural products of pre-Hispanic Andean people is still little understood. Their significance as scientific objects alternated periods in which they were embedded within important

¹⁸ *Maqueta* refers to the notion that the boards may be architectural maquettes, and as such they may be architectural scale models.

¹⁹ Only one of Tello's students, Emilia Romero (1943:24), wrote about the boards from Ancash in a review of Andean games.

theoretical and empirical issues and others when they were largely marginal to the academic debate. This is in line with what Daston (2000:13) writes about the “coming into being” and “passing away” of scientific objects that is dependent upon their entanglement “in webs of cultural significance, material practices, and theoretical derivations”. Scientific objects become marginal when “nobody expects them to be generators of unprecedented events any more” (Rheinberger 2000:274). The biography of the scientific life of these boards shows an analogous pattern. Their relevance as scientific objects has been linked to their entanglement with sets of anthropological and archaeological theories, whether the construction of the identity of a nascent state, positivist and racist theories, or diffusionist studies. As the identification of these boards’ function and cultural significance is still debated, they still have a great potential to generate new research questions and become embedded within new theoretical issues.

VII

Even if historically contingent, the validity of the three primary theories needs to be examined based on the available evidence. To begin with, these different types of compartmentalised boards do not have a universally accepted label to refer to them. The two most common names are *maqueta* and *yupana*. The former implicitly suggests that these boards were architectural models. As already noted by Lau (2016:140), such an interpretation does not take into account that boards with clear architectural features form only a subset of a much larger corpus where architectural mimesis is not the primary purpose. This interpretation ignores that these boards are part of a broader assemblage, characterised by a standardised layout. Even the subgroup of boards displaying architectural representations is accompanied by the same arrangement of compartments. Unless one presupposes that all boards are representing a standard architectural plan – appearing across the Central Andes but never documented archaeologically – this theory cannot adequately explain their standardised features. As the repeating layout is what defines these boards, permitting their grouping in a larger corpus, it would be logically askew to identify the boards’ function based on an accidental property while overlooking their main structural traits. This is not to say that their relationship to architecture should be ignored. On the contrary, it will be argued that this is a key feature

contributing to our understanding of the socio-cultural practices to which these boards were linked.

The other most common label, *yupana*, refers to the interpretation of these boards as counting devices. There are several issues with this designation too. First, the term *yupana* itself is anachronistic. Even if these objects had actually been counting devices, the use of a Quechua term, borrowed from early colonial chronicles and dictionaries, and referring to Inka accounting tools would be chronologically amiss. These boards are not associated with the Inka Late Horizon (ca. AD 1470-1532), by which time they seem to have largely fallen out of use (see Chapter 4, 7). Likewise, the whole theory with which this term is associated stands on shaky grounds. First, this interpretation originated from an amalgam of Charles Wiener's travel account and Radicati's desire to identify an archaeological equivalent for the Inka counting devices, even though the archaeological evidence indicates no direct connection to accounting practices (see Chapters 5-8).

Insofar as this theory was first devised by Charles Wiener based on little explicit archaeological evidence but only what were, at best, folktales, and, at worst, blatantly racist prejudices, this theory comes with a burdensome colonial heritage. Wiener casts ancient Andeans as superior to their "ungrateful" descendants and accounting served as a practical means to illustrate how past Andeans excelled where contemporary Andean people underperformed from Wiener's ethnocentric perspective. Decades later, Radicati (2006 [1979]) attempted to show that examples of *yupanas* existed in the archaeological record, and his speculative identification proved so successful because these boards featured as nothing more than an appendage to the more popular *kipus*, which offered the tantalising promise of being an undeciphered script.

It is worth noting that bona fide *yupanas* are known. In recent years, for instance, grids drawn on architectural floors have been found archaeologically at several sites, associated with Inka state administration and sometimes with storages featuring *kipus*, where accounting practices would have been performed (Urton and Chu 2015; 2018; Areche Espinola 2019:159; Eeckhout 2012:220; Mackey 2006:335; 2004:85; Valle Alvarez 2018:64-66). *Kipus* and *yupanas* were used during the Inka period as a system of accountancy, taxation, and record-keeping within the redistributive economy of the Inka state. However, as I will argue, playing a game of chance can also serve key economic-cum-religious functions.

The yupana-theory also ignores that khipus have never been documented in a Recuay context, which is the first archaeological culture with which these boards are associated.²⁰ Moreover, every board found in situ so far shows associations with structures related to mortuary and termination rituals, but none has yet been discovered in association with archaeological contexts linked to accountancy. Altogether, these elements cast several doubts on the credibility of the counting-device or ‘yupana’ theory, and I will argue that there are valid reasons to argue these were in fact gameboards.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the role of games in the Andean context. In particular, Chapter 2 explores the ethnohistorical and ethnographic record to determine the role of games in indigenous Andean society, shedding light on the broader social, religious, and political dynamics in which they have been embedded. Chapter 3 examines the current corpus of known indigenous Andean boardgames, focusing on their key defining traits.

Chapter 4 presents the database of archaeological compartmentalised boards documented by the author, included in Appendix C. It outlines the seven main typological groups identified in the archaeological record, describing their principal morphological characteristics and chronological sequence. Chapter 5 provides a general framework for the emergence and spread of the three main Types (1, 2 and 3), which form the core corpus of the database on which this study is based.²¹ It situates their development within the broader social processes of the Central Andes during the Early Intermediate Period (ca. AD 1-700) and Middle Horizon (ca. AD 700-1000), while also advancing an original theoretical analysis of the relevance of games of chance and skill in pre-modern societies.

Chapter 6, 7, and 8 discuss the three main phases of the stylistic sequence proposed for these boards, based on new radiocarbon dates and stratigraphic evidence (respectively, phase A, B1, and B2). Each chapter includes an overview of the boards attributed to each phase, analysing their distribution, style, materials, and portability. Boards associated with particularly informative archaeological contexts are examined in detail.

Chapter 9 discusses the principal iconographic evidence for the symbolism and probable function of these boards as gaming devices. The iconography appears to be associated

²⁰ Khipus start appearing during the Wari Middle Horizon, but whether the Wari used them in the same way as the Inkas is still debated (Splitstoser 2020).

²¹ The database contains additional board Types, see Chapter 4.

with concepts of transition and transformation towards a new equilibrium, as well as with mortuary activities conducted in the presence of numinous ancestors. These boards also seem linked to the emergence of a new form of segmentary social organisation that, I argue, spread across the Andes in parallel with these objects. This study proposes that these were probably gameboards, tied to divinatory or propitiatory rites of ancestral veneration – traditions that developed in the northern highlands of Ancash during the Recuay period and disseminated across the Andes through Wari influence during the Middle Horizon. While substantial evidence makes the gameboard hypothesis the most plausible, its confirmation remains partly hypothetical due to the limitations of the archaeological record. Nevertheless, this study contends that – if not gaming devices – these objects were neither *maqueta* nor *yupana*, but fulfilled a distinct, yet undetermined, ritual function. Only additional documentation of boards in their original context of deposition may reveal new possible interpretive nuances.

The Social Life of Games

ANDEAN GAMES, PAST AND PRESENT

This chapter will examine the ethnohistorical and ethnographic reports on the role of games in Central Andean cultures. While often overlooked, games are a significant human practice, often related to broader social processes. The next section presents a review of games in the Andean region, with a view to highlighting the social and ritual role that games can acquire in Andean societies. At the risk of generalisation, some of the conclusions proposed here are broad, but they offer the possibility of learning some basic principles informing play and games in the Andean world which will resonate with the following discussion about archaeological boards.

I

Ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources on the Andean region provide evidence for the use of games in different contexts. These include information from the early colonial chronicles, Quechua and Aymara dictionaries, and ethnographic reports providing examples of games and other forms of play in different social scenarios. Ethnographic cases will be discussed in light of their possible continuity with pre-Hispanic practices. Continuity does not indicate a conviction in a complete survival of meaning and form from pre-Hispanic to contemporary times (see Kubler 1970), but, more conservatively, this is taken to suggest a possible continuity in the structuring principles that animate ritual and social practices in Andean societies. Ethnohistorical sources mention the use of games in the late pre-Columbian and early colonial Andes, showing their relevance in connection with politics, mortuary rites, feasting and drinking, and as facilitators of social interactions.

Four broad categories wherein games feature prominently can be identified. These reflect different but deeply interconnected social contexts in Andean culture.

- Funerary rituals.
- Divination practices.

- Political and hierarchical rituals and events.
- Ritualised competition (i.e., *tinkuy*).

The ethnohistorical record is particularly poor when it comes to mortuary games, which are on the contrary very well documented in ethnographic reports. The Jesuit extirpator of idolatry José de Arriaga (1999:66) constitutes one of the few early sources hinting at a connection between games and mortuary practices, when he describes the playing of a game during funerary wakes in Ancash. The area of Ancash is particularly relevant as this is where most of the archaeological boards originate.

Arriaga describes a ceremony known as *pacaricuc*, consisting of a five-day wake in which participants were required to fast. On the fifth and last day, the mourners would go to the river to wash the deceased's clothes.

The *pacaricuc* usually lasts five days, during which they fast, eating no salt or chili, but only white maize and meat, and they play a game called *pisca*, named after the five days. It is played with little sticks marked with various lines, which I understand to have no deeper meaning beyond simply passing the time. At the end of these five days, they go to wash the clothes that the deceased left behind in the river.

(Arriaga 1999:66)

Arriaga suggests that the five-day time frame of the wake is what earned the game the name *pichca*, which means 'five' in Quechua. Despite his expert extirpator's eye, which made Arriaga prone to see demonic influences in most cultural practices, the *pichca* game was deemed innocent enough that he judges it a diversion – played to stay awake at night during the *pacaricuc*.

Two aspects of his account warrant further attention. First, the number five is significant in Andean gaming traditions, as this is the name of the most common die used during Inka times, characterized by six, usually numbered, faces and a truncated trapezoid shape. Archaeological and ethnographic examples of these dice have been documented (see for example, Karsten 1930; Corr 2008; Hartmann and Oberem 1968; Valdez and Bettcher 2020). Moreover, as discussed in the next chapter, early colonial chroniclers used the term

pichca (also *pisca*, *pichica*, etc.) to describe several dice- and board-games involving the use of similarly shaped dice. Even if Arriaga did not see any potential threat (to Christianity) in the playing of this *pichca* game during the *pacaricuc*, ethnographic accounts of very similar games played during the funeral wake suggest that these may have had a greater ritual significance than Arriaga conceded.²² Most of the following ethnographic examples relate to funerary rather than mortuary rituals. The former refers to the ceremonies that occur in the immediate aftermath of an individual's death, whereas the latter encompasses a broader set of practices focuses on important deceased persons and extending long after the post-mortem funerary events, often taking place on a recurrent basis. Mortuary practices were widespread in the pre-Columbian Andes, where ancestral veneration was central to indigenous religious and political systems (Salomon 1995). In the contemporary Andes, however, mortuary rituals have become much less prominent, as centuries of Christianisation have profoundly transformed local religious practices. It will be argued that the presence of gaming activities in contemporary funerary settings may represent an adaptation of older mortuary practices within a shifting ritual landscape.

A particularly prominent tradition where a game is played during funerary rites comes from the southern Ecuadorian highlands and it has been repeatedly documented in the 20th and 21st century. For example, in the Ecuadorian community of Salasaca, in Ecuador, games of chance have been practiced until recent times as part of funerary rituals. Corr (2008:4) suggests that these games are best understood as a means by which the living interacted with the deceased. Particularly relevant to our argument is that the game played by the Salasacans at funerary wakes is called *huayro* and it used a single die made from an animal bone and displaying the same shape as other historically attested *pichca* dice. The term *huayro* provides a link between the ethnographic case and the historical testimony of José de Arriaga of the *pichca* game. Early colonial dictionaries provide *huayro* as a synonym for *pichca* (González Holguín 1952:143; Bertonio 1879a:274; 1879b:157), referring both to the truncated die and to one or more game(s) played with it. The chronicler Bernabé Cobo (1892:174-75) even narrates an episode to explain why the term *huayro* (spelled as *guayro*)

²² Perhaps, is this a rare case in which European ethnocentrism contributed to the survival of an indigenous ritual practice, given that, as a result of Arriaga's lenient position, the game did not end up being persecuted by Christian missionaries. After all, how could something as childish and innocent as a game be the vehicle of 'demonic' (as in non-Christian) rituals?

became associated with a game. Cobo's account is significant, in that it shows the pre-Columbian antiquity of this Quechua term in relation to a dice game and provides a mytho-historical narrative of how it came about.

Cobo relates that Tupa Inka Yupanqui – the tenth Inka sovereign – had a secondary wife (i.e., non-ethnically Inka) who belonged to the 'Guayro' nation – possibly an ethnic group that lived around the shores of Lake Titicaca and tentatively identified by Zuidema (1973b:149) as the present-day indigenous community of the Urus. Cobo relates that on the occasion of a *pichca* game the Inka played with some of his provincial lords, his Guayro wife brought him good luck by having the sovereign say her name before the last throw of the die. What was needed was one point for the Inka to win the game.²³ As a result, the story continues, the Inka decided to dedicate his victory to her and to commemorate this event he decided that thereafter the term *guayro* was to indicate the face of the *pichca* die with the value of one.

Returning to the *Huayro* game played in Salasaca, this appears to belong to the same tradition as Arriaga's *pichca*. Similarly to the *pacaricuc* ceremony described by the Jesuit extirpator, Salasacan mourners play the *huayru* game in the patio of the house during the wake which continues into the night. Corr (2008) argues that playing this and other games during funerary wakes offers a mediating mechanism between the living and the deceased, where the casting of dice, a randomizing device, provides an element of chance regarded as the final expression of the will of the departed.

The *pisca* or *huayro* game is not confined to Salasaca and appears to have been much more widespread in the southern Ecuadorian highlands. The game was also of considerable antiquity in this area, dating back at least to the colonial period, when it was first documented in the mid-18th century by Juan and Ulloa (1748:549, Ch. VI, Book VI, 941). During the 19th and early 20th century, further references to the game describe its funerary context during wakes, where it also served as a form of gambling to redistribute the belongings of the deceased (Jiménez de la Espada 1928:155) or to cover funeral expenses through wagered

²³ One can only guess the rules of this game from Cobo's text. Possibly, the fact that the Inka needed to throw the *pichca* die to score a specific number (i.e., 1) may suggest that it had to move his gaming piece(s) only one space to win. This is how the European game of the goose works for example, where a player needs to throw the dice and get the exact number of remaining spaces to win (see Chapter 3).

money (Rivet 1925:377, 81). The game was often accompanied by feasting (Rivet 1910:258).

The tradition of playing the *huayru* dice game in the Ecuadorian highlands was still widespread at the beginning of the 20th century, as Rafael Karsten's (1930) ethnographic report suggests. Between 1916 and 1919, Karsten documented people playing this game during funerary wakes in different localities of the Ecuadorian highlands, including Pelileo and Ambato, but also in the Riobamba area and Quito. Again, the game played a divinatory and redistributive role within a funerary context, where the *huayro* die is cast over the body of the dead person during the wake. The will and satisfaction of the dead are reflected in the outcome of the throw (13). The die itself is regarded as carrying the soul of the person being mourned. The luckiest and most successful player at the game is regarded as the one who is looked upon most favourably by the departed, even if this person had no close associations with the dead in life. The game was also used as a form of gambling (10) – at stake was the cattle belonging to the dead, most of which (but not all) was divided up among the winning players. Similarly to Arriaga's account, the wake concludes with the deceased's clothes being taken to the river where they are washed by relatives.

Another instructive ethnographic case from the southern Ecuadorian highlands was reported by Brownrigg (1989) and it dates to 1969. She documents an instance where the game of *pichca* was played on the occasion of the fifth day after a funeral wake in the community of Quingeo, Azuay. In this context, the outcome of the dice game determined how the belongings of the deceased were to be redistributed amongst the living (29), but it also helped to establish who would cover part of the cost of the funeral. Finally, the game was taken to divine the ultimate will of the departed on certain matters, which in the case documented by Brownrigg concerned the overall fate of the Quingeo community in the aftermath of the agrarian reforms of the 1960s (29-36).

Yet another ethnographic case comes from the nearby town of Sigsig, Azuay, located within the same area as Chordeleg, where the first archaeological board was found. During fieldwork conducted in 1965, Hartmann and Oberem (1968:241-48) documented a funerary game that involved the use of the *huayro* die in conjunction with a gameboard and gamepieces. This game appears to be a race-game, where tokens are moved along the board based on the number given by the *huayro* die (see Chapter 3). Within the context of the wake, it

operated as a form of gambling, with the winnings allocated to help cover funeral expenses. In instances where no money could be wagered, the losers were required to offer prayers to the deceased. The ritual unfolding of the game demanded that the board be placed on painted canvases with Christian representations related to the afterlife. This practice still survives in Sigsig today (Ordóñez Carpio 2010; 2013).

Common cultural traits can be detected in the way in which funeral games have been played among Kichwa-speaking and rural communities of the Ecuadorian highlands up to the 20th century. Recurrent traits include the use of the *pichca* die, usually referred to as *huayro*, during the funerary wake with both divinatory and gambling purposes. Divination contributes to determining the will or disposition of the dead on specific matters, while gambling allows for the redistribution of the deceased person's possessions or permits to gather financial support to cover the expenses of the social events linked to the funeral. Another key recurrent element is the purification ceremony that normally occurs on the fifth day of the wake, which involves the washing of the clothes of the dead. Among these Ecuadorian highland communities, the name *pichca* seems to have come to refer exclusively to the fifth day purification ceremony, rather than to the dice game, which is normally termed *huayro*. In most ethnographic cases, the playing of *huayro* or *pichca* is set within the context of feasting and banqueting, where food and alcoholic beverages are served. The game also served the purpose of keeping vigil during the wake, as suggested by Arriaga, something that is seen as a crucially important both out of respect for the dead, whose soul needs to be accompanied in her journey to the afterlife, but also on account of beliefs that it is dangerous for family members to fall asleep at such a time (Rivet 1925:388-89; Hartmann 1980:260). More generally, diversion and chance often appear in relation to funerary contexts, likely due to the functional role that chance-based diversions have for the mourners.

That most ethnographic examples come from Ecuador may reflect a bias in the ethnographic literature but is also likely indicative of a tradition that has persisted more robustly in the northern Central Andes, where it seemed to have enjoyed substantial continuity of practice. The ethnographic cases documenting the southern Ecuadorian funerary tradition suggest a considerable degree of cultural continuity with the early-colonial period, when Arriaga reported the *pichca* game played at wakes in highland Ancash (Peru). Despite the

notable distance in space and time, the contemporary Ecuadorian ritual gaming practice seems to be directly connected with the 17th century one from Ancash.

These Ecuadorian communities do speak a dialect of Quechua, known as Kichwa, that shares numerous traits with other Quechua-speaking groups to the south. According to Brownrigg (1989:15), the practice of the *pichca* in funeral wakes was typical among groups of Quechua I (or B) speakers (Torero 1964; 2007; Adelaar 2013). Also known as Quechua Wáywash, this is a variety of Quechua typical of highland Ancash. Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615:297 [299]) describes funerary customs involving the washing of the deceased's clothes at a *tincoc yaco* – the confluence of two rivers – on the fifth day of a funeral wake, as a typical ritual characteristic of the *Yungas*. The *Yungas* were the people of the northern part of the former Inka empire, encompassing as far north as modern-day Andean Ecuador (Novo Reino). Even if Guaman Poma does not mention any game played as part of these funerary rituals, this passage could support the idea that this tradition originated in the northern Peruvian highlands. There is at least another ethnographic attestation where a game of chance, similar to the *pichca*, was played throughout the funeral wake's night in Cajamarca, in the northern Peruvian highlands (Reichlen 1953:411).

However, Brownrigg's theory is difficult to sustain, since Ecuadorian Kichwa is not linked to the form of Quechua spoken in Ancash (Hocquenghem 2012; cf. Torero 2007). This is still a debated topic but suffice it to say that the type of Quechua variant that travelled to Ecuador is not a dialect of Quechua I but of Quechua II – the so-called Chinchay variant spoken in southern Peru, including the Inka capital of Cusco.²⁴ Hocquenghem (2012) and Itier (2021) argue that Quechua reached Ecuador as a result of the Inka northward expansion, imposing a variety of southern Quechua as a *lingua franca*.

The Ecuadorian tradition started as a result of the arrival of waves of migrations from the south, which included various ethnic groups and Quechua variants, including those from Ancash. People were moved around the empire as part of the Inka imperial programme of resettlement known as *mitmaq*, by which the Inkas forcibly re-located large groups from one province to another (D'Altroy 2005; 2015:523; Pease 1982; Lara et al. 2023). The

²⁴ The subvariant spoken in Ecuador is usually referred to as Quechua IIc, while that spoken in the south (e.g., Cusco, Ayacucho, Boliva, etc.) Quechua IIb.

communities of *mitimaqkuna* had a profound impact on the Quechuisation of Ecuador (see Hartmann 1994), as Itier (2021:683) puts it,

It was the Incas who introduced Quechua into the northern Andes, largely through colonists from different regions of Peru. At first, Quechua must have appeared in Ecuador as a group of varieties undergoing a process of 'Cuscoization' and koineization. Among these, the varieties from northern Peru predominated. Over these, Cusco Quechua, as spoken by the Incas, acted as a superstrate with particular impact on the phonological and lexical levels, while the morphology of the future Ecuadorian-Colombian Quechua remained close to its northern Peruvian roots.

This indicates that northern Peruvian influences, both cultural and linguistic, may have reached Ecuador in Inka times.²⁵

Examples of funerary traditions involving games feature also in the ethnographic record of the southern Central Andes (Salomon 1995:330; Randall 1987), although the terminology and structure of these games diverge from the northern examples. In Usibamba, Junín, a six-sided die is used in a game called *chunga*. Like *Pisca*, this is also a Quechua numeral (i.e., *chunca*), meaning ten. The outcome of the die roll established what character each player had to impersonate. These six characters (one each face of the die) were drawn from stereotyped real-life figures, reproducing the social hierarchy. Through pretend play, the participants in these two games enact the needs and dangers that the soul of the dead will encounter on her journey to the afterlife (Pærregaard 1987:26-27).

This is reminiscent of another southern Andean ethnographic case in an Aymara community located near La Paz, Bolivia, where a knucklebone game was played during the funeral wake and after the burial (Carter 1968:241-44). The knuckles were conceptualized as llama caravans that needed to travel to each ecological niche comprising the Aymara world. Each niche was associated with a specific product required by the soul of the deceased for her journey to the afterlife. Only when knuckles fell in a certain way were the llamas imagined to

²⁵ Presently, there is no certain indication of how widespread the *pichca* was in Inka or early colonial times.

have successfully carried the cargo back. In an instance of play reported by Carter, frustration mounted up after a series of unlucky rolls, and one of the players is reported asking the dead angrily “why are you making me fail?” (Carter 1968:241). This is not a unique case in the Bolivian altiplano, as the Laymi of northern Potosí also play with knucklebones, using them as dice, in a different game during the funeral wake (Harris 1982:51).

Similar funerary games have been documented in another village near Usibamba, Santa Rosa de Ocopa, where a bone die (*taba*) is used, as well as in Tapay, Arequipa, in the southern Peruvian Andes, where the game involved beans and maize kernels. In these other instances of funerary dice games, the two opponents are embedded within a gendered dual opposition, where the game is understood as a battle of the sexes. Pærregaard (1987) interprets these games in their funerary context as mechanisms of social reproduction in the face of the death of a community member. These dice games mimic and play with the social structure of the community, reproducing an element of chance through a randomizing device (the dice) that reflects the unpredictability of one’s fate on earth (see also Bloch and Parry 1982; Hertz 1960). Additionally, by turning social categories into the subject of a game, the incapability and arbitrary nature of individual fates and social injustices is transformed into a ludic matter, acted out within the entertaining, social, and orderly environment of the game.

In yet another southern Peruvian community, Awkimarka, in the Apurímac province, a funerary game is played which bears the name of *piscay*, linked to the significance and perhaps symbolism surrounding the number five (*pichca*). Here the game is played throughout the night of the wake until dawn. A six-sided die is used in the game, of which only four sides bear a meaningful symbolism, thus leaving five possibilities at every throw. Only the deceased’s son-in-law and daughter-in-law are allowed to play, and their throws determine the number of prayers that will be offered to the dead person. The winner is the one who first gains twelve prayers, while the loser needs to provide everyone with a bottle of alcohol. The game is played in a joking atmosphere, and bad luck is construed as a want of will power on the part of the in-laws who need to form a connection with the soul of the departed (Valderrama and Escalante 1980:248-50).

These southern Peruvian instances of mortuary games also feature a few common characteristics. The game is played at wakes while food and alcohol are served. The will of the dead manifests itself in the chance inherent to any dice game. The gambling is not so much

about the possessions of the departed or the money needed to cover the feasting expenses. What is at stake is the wellbeing of the soul of the deceased in her journey to the afterlife. The game reproduces key elements of the Andean social landscape and ecology, with which the players are familiar.

Overall, entertainment, divination and gambling are three key factors underlying mortuary games in both geographical areas – although this is less obvious in southern Peru than it is in Ecuador, where these games' outcome usually concerns the wealth and the fate of people in this world rather than in the hereafter.²⁶ A further constant feature of all these examples is the strong relation between games and mortuary practices. However, the lasting and entrenched practice of these games in funerary rituals by Andean communities suggests these were older practices, which did not originate in European Christian influences, but display a direct continuity with pre-Columbian customs.

The understanding that defuncts can express their will through the random rolls of dice may have been influenced by a Christian understanding of the soul, as using lots to determine such things is not unprecedented in Christianity. However, there is an equally solid divinatory tradition that is indigenous to the Andean area, and it should be noted that well-documented indigenous notions regarding death involved a sustained interaction with the corpses of the ancestors, who had an agentive role in society. Their agency was predicated upon native Andean notions of death as a continuum rather than a binary opposition (living/dead) (Salomon 1995:328; see also, Urioste 1981). This review foregrounds the mortuary contexts in which the archaeological boards have been found across the Andes, suggesting significant parallels.

With regard to divination, the role of dice and lots in relationship with *wak'a* needs to be briefly addressed as it is relevant to the role of chance in funerary games. *Wak'a* is a Quechua term referring to sacred and animated places as well as objects with an agentive role in society (Salomon 1998; Bray 2009; 2015). There are several examples of *wak'a* being interrogated as oracles by priests assigned to them. Effectively, the casting of lots or dice to determine the will of a *wak'a* is a form of oracular divination, a well-documented native practice of the pre-Hispanic Andes (Curatola Petrocchi 2016; 2020; Topic 2008). None of the

²⁶ This may reflect different degrees of Christianisation of native practices.

recorded practices associated with these oracles can be defined as games, strictly speaking. However, the connection between the casting of lots and games of chance resides in the employment of randomizing devices as a decision-making technology.

One colonial example of this comes from the province of Huarochirí, Peru, in the highlands inland from Lima. An indigenous testimony reports the use of a die to divine the will of the *wak'a*. Ávila (1966:255-57) informs us that the lot was a small stone called “chanca” that was cast as a die to divine if the main *wak'a*, called “cunchur”, was angry and what sacrifices would please it. The priest interpreted the way in which the chanca die would fall to provide the response offered by the cunchur to the question that had been asked.

In the same province of Huarochirí, an even earlier Jesuit account dating to 1571 describes the same practice. A small stone serving as a casting lot and called

Jhanca, [...] is the interpreter of the principal idol. This stone has a mark on one side, and after they worship the principal idol, which is called guaca [sic], they cast this stone as if throwing dice. If the marked side comes up, they say that what they ask for will be granted; and if it does not, they begin to weep, and then they make sacrifices to appease the idol, killing an animal and offering its entrails.

(Polia 1999:199)

Chance in the form of lots and dice was a divination technology utilized by Andean people in the early-colonial period. Given that the evidence shows that pre-Hispanic Andean religious practices were frequently oracular in nature, the use of lots in divination in the Andes probably had pre-Columbian origins (see Gentile 2008).

III

The ethno-historical record provides several accounts of games played in non-funerary contexts. For instance, as a form of entertainment, which seems to have often acquired political overtones. This is true for example of early colonial accounts about the Inka period, such as the excerpt by the Spanish chronicler Bernabé Cobo, discussed above, in which the *pichca* game was played by Tupa Inka Yupanqui with a subordinate lord.

While in this story the purpose of the *pichca* game is not further specified, we find more information in the following account related by Cobo (1892:175-76). This latter story features the same main characters as the previous one: Tupa Inka Yupanqui and one of his secondary (non-Inka) spouses who belonged to the ‘Guayro’ ethnic group from the southern part of the Inka Empire, the Qullasuyu. In this second story, Tupa Yupanqui is described playing another game, referred to as the game of the *ayllus* (i.e., bolas/boleadoras - a throwing weapon consisting of interconnected cords with weighted stones or balls at the ends) with his son from this Guayro wife. Cobo does not provide a detailed explanation of how the game was played, writing only that the Inka’s half-Guayro son was assigned five villages because he had won against the Inka at this game. The judges and Inka counsellors supervising the game are said to have been agitated by the outcome, unfavourable as it was to the Inka. When the Guayro son obtained a second victory over this father, the judges demanded that the game be stopped.

However, given that the fair result of the game could not be ignored, the judges were forced to concede to the Inka’s secondary son what he had fairly gained against his father. The game is thus shown to be of great political consequence, as at stake was the administration of an imperial district. Cobo suggests that the game was always supposed to be won by the Inka, and that his losing against his son was regarded as potentially problematic – could this perhaps indicate a deliberate political act on the part of Tupa Inka Yupanqui to bestow new lands on his half-Guayro son?

That the Inka was normally expected to win is confirmed by another chronicler who refers to the game of the *ayllus* within Inka socio-political practices. At the end of the 16th century (1581-1585?), Cristóbal de Albornoz (in Duviols 1984:201), describes a game that consisted in throwing into the air a woollen object in the shape of a *machacuay* or *amaru* – a mythological animal with both serpentine and feline features – while players attempted to catch it using bolas.²⁷ Albornoz explains that

Today, the machacuay is used in their festivals and taquis [dances], as part of a game called ayllar that was formerly played by the Inca. This involved

²⁷ For the relationship between festive ceremonial games and a mythological serpent, the *amaru*, see Chapter 9.

throwing into the air a figure of a snake made of wool. Those who placed bets would throw their *yllos* – three strands of rope made from animal sinew or leather, with lead balls at the ends. Through this game, the Inca won many provinces from the huacas that had previously claimed them. The *camayos* [priests] of the huacas were allowed by the Inca to play for these provinces against him, and they let themselves lose. After winning the provinces through this game, the Inca would compensate the huacas and their *camayos* by giving them land, livestock, and other services. Many lands were gained [by the Inka] through this game of *ayllar* with the *machacuay*.

(Albornoz [1581-1585], in Duviols 1984:201)

Albornoz makes it clear that the Inka was always meant to win at this game, and that his opponents – the “priests of the *wak’a*” – were expected to intentionally lose. Once he had won, the Inka would then reward these *wak’a pacariscas*²⁸ and their priests with land, animals, and specifically designated people at the service of the *wak’a* – i.e., *mitmaqkuna* (Albornoz in Duviols 1984:198). As Zuidema (1973b:148) notes, this passage suggests that the Inka used this game – and probably others too, such as the *pichca* game – as a tool to affirm his ultimate sovereignty over newly conquered lands and peoples through redistributive and (re-)organisational acts. The game appears to have played a role in the selection of the conquered local *wak’a* that were to be re-established as provincial *wak’a pacariscas* and integrated into the Inka imperial ritual system. The evidence indicates that the game served as an instrument through which the Inka confirmed the position of his provincial subjects and redistributed privileges, status, and lands.

This is confirmed by another chronicler who describes the play of games in an Inka political-cum-ceremonial context, including the game of the *ayllus* or *bolas*. Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615:243 [245]) mentions the game of the *bolas* (which he calls *rivi*) and other dice games, including the “*uayro* [*huayro*] de *ynaca* [iñaca] [and] *pichica* de *hilancula*”²⁹ as

²⁸ In this context, *wak’a pacarisqa* (*wak’a* of origin) refers to a sacred place of origin of a conquered ethnic group, which had been integrated by the Inka as an official *wak’a* of the empire.

²⁹ In his list of games, Guaman Poma also mentions “the game of [...] *choca* [...] and of *challco chima*”. These are not detailed elsewhere, but it is worth mentioning that Zuidema (2010:461, Note 377) suggested that *Choca* seems to derive from the Quechua verb meaning “to throw stones” and may have indicated a form of *tinkuy* battle known from the ethnographic reports (Alencastre and Dumézil 1953; Gorbak et al. 1962).

being played during the *Inka Raymi Killa* – an Inka festivity that Guaman Poma places in the month of April, celebrating the end of the harvest. Guaman Poma is the only chronicler that uses this name to refer to the month of April, making it hard to reconcile the native chronicler's calendar with that of other ethnohistorical sources. While this festival is attested elsewhere, it is hardly ever referred to by this name.³⁰

This ceremonial festival was a significant event in the Inka ritual calendar, celebrating the social and cosmic order of the Inka universe and ensuring its continuity through the enactment of rituals in which the Inka king played a central role. These ritual activities aimed to secure the reproduction and maintenance of the cosmic order upon which the Inka polity was founded, and after which it was structurally modelled. The ceremonies involved both the Inka king and his principal wife, and included ritual ploughing, communal feasting, the playing of games, and ritual toasting and drinking. Through these performances, the Inka displayed and enacted his socio-cosmic role in regulating agricultural cycles, redistributing resources, and reaffirming political hierarchies (Zuidema 1989).

Zuidema (1989) argues that the Inka Raymi is best understood in complementary opposition to another ritual celebration called *itu*. The latter celebrated the Inka king and his kin as a separate entity from the rest of the empire. During the *itu*, the city of Cuzco was closed off to foreigners, animals, and women who owned animals (see Polo de Ondegardo 2012:351-52; Cobo 1893:120-24, Book XIII, Ch. 30-31). The city became thus identified solely with the Inka nobility, which alone carried out rituals involving fasting and the sacrifice of llamas for one day and one night. This was then followed by feasting, drinking, and dancing. Possibly, it may have involved initiation rites associated with Inka mummified ancestors.

The *Inka Raymi* was also a festival centred on the figure of the Sapa Inka and its centrality within the broader social universe of Tawantinsuyu. However, it emphasised opposite aspects to those highlighted by the *Itu Raymi*. Where the latter entailed the closure of Cusco to foreigners, the former involved the opening of the Inka capital to all ethnic groups. The *Inka Raymi* was the enactment of the other – reverse – side of the socio-cosmic role of the Inka sovereign, one emphasising integration and mediation at an empire-wide level, rather than exclusion and separate identity.

³⁰ The only exception is Pérez Bocanegra (1631:133).

Zuidema (1989) suggests that unlike the Itu Raymi where the Sapa Inka performed an inward perspective, concerned “with a separate [Inka] identity and continuity over time” (253), the Inka Raymi – occurring as it did immediately upon the harvesting season when the warehouses (*collicas*) were overflowing with provisions – emphasised the redistributive and reorganizational role of the Inka sovereign as the bodily manifestation of the centre of the whole empire.

Building on a long-standing ritualised economy based on reciprocity among kinship groups, the Inkas developed a system of redistribution that figuratively and (during the Inka Raymi also physically) passed through the person of the King as ultimate mediator. An early colonial anonymous source illustrates rather eloquently how this role was symbolically and ritually enacted during the Inka Raymi.

And thus after the Inca (king) had received all the things that they had brought to him as tribute from the whole country, he gave (from it) to his relatives as he felt pleased to do; of the rest he gave and favoured the same Curacas (lords) who came to this Reunion; and to those who came from the Collao (towards present-day Bolivia) he gave from the things that they had brought to him from the Andes (towards the eastern lowlands) and to those from Condesuyu (towards the South coast) he gave the things brought from elsewhere of those things that they missed in their own lands. What the ones had given he gave to the others, so that most that was given was consumed by themselves; and he feasted and had a good time with them; and he punished severely those who had to be punished and the others he sent off with great love. And in this month they stored the food that they had harvested.

(Anonymous b, cited in Zuidema 1989:254)

The Inka acted as mediator between the Sun and the people (his cosmic role) – ensuring the continuity of the life cycle – but, because of this role, he also ritually acted as the fulcrum of the redistribution system sustaining the empire.

The king, in the center of the political universe, drank with everybody else. Only he could mediate between them and the Sun by drinking with the latter. The act was part of the system of redistribution whereby all the goods, offices and wives that were received and bestowed went through the hands of the king. [...] The king kept nature's gifts in balance and thus mediated between society and nature [...] the king mediated between society and the cosmos.

(Zuidema 1989:261)

Inextricably linked to this is the (re-)organisational role of the Inka, which originated from the Inka's role as mediator between society and cosmos. Elsewhere, Zuidema (1973b:149) argued the Inka Raymi rituals aimed to redistribute not just goods but also the imperial "order and the cosmic, religious, and social hierarchy", echoing a passage from the anonymous chronicle written around 1594 and attributed to the mestizo Jesuit Blas Valera (Hyland 2011:1-16). Valera (2011:85) writes that, during the Inka Raymi,³¹ "they renewed their homage and the vows that they had made to obey, first, the gods and their ministers, and then the Inka and his ministers".³² This role of the Inka is highlighted in the two episodes involving games related by Cobo and Albornoz. A game of chance in one story and a game of skill in the other two are used by the Inka to sanction and confirm the status of his subject lords – whether through the bestowal of political power, as in the story related by Cobo, or the distribution of wealth and privileges as in the account of Albornoz.

This is implicit in the account of Guaman Poma as well, who speaks of two dice games and at least one game of skill. In the case of the two dice games, he associates the term *huayro* with *inaca* and *pichca* with *hilancola*. *Inaca* is a term often used to identify women of the lower nobility (Zuidema 2010:457-60). *Hilancola* appears to be related to the Aymara term *hilanco*, which meant "chief of an ayllu [Andean social unit]" (Bertonio 1879b:133; Zuidema 1973b:149). It is noteworthy that Bertonio (1879b:110; 1879a:273) also mentions a boardgame resembling backgammon and played with the *pichca* die, which he calls "halancola" – a term that appears related to Guaman Poma's *hilancula* and to *hilanco* (see Chapter

³¹ Valera does not use this name but simply refers to it as the ceremony happening at the end of the harvesting season.

³² Translation by Sabine Hyland.

3). Why does Guaman Poma imply a relationship between these dice games and the Inka social hierarchy? Molina (2010:86-87) writes that the ritual activity inaugurating the Inka Raymi's festival was the ploughing of a sacred field, hallowed to *Mama Huaco*.³³ A 16th century anonymous Spanish source³⁴ is quite informative with regard to the development of this ceremony, adding crucial information that can help explain Guaman Poma's passage. This chronicle helps clarify the association between the *pichca* and *huayro* games with *inacas* and *hilancos*. The Sapa Inka along with his main consort initiated the ploughing of the sacred maize field with a golden foot plough, followed in a ranked sequence by the four lords or head counsellors of the four suyus of the empire (*Apus*), then the governors of 10,000 household units (*Hunu Kuraka*) and their wives, and finally the provincial chiefs with their spouses. This ranking reflected the hierarchical structure of the Inka decimal administration (D'Altroy 2015:354-56; Zuidema 2010:462).³⁵ At the end of the ritual ploughing, all attendants came together for lunch.

After the meal, they would all return to work, except for the Inka, who remained with the four imperial counsellors [i.e., *Apus*] and the *Caciques* responsible for ten thousand people each [i.e., *Hunu Kurakas*]. These men would then play a game called *Pisca*, which is like a dice game, though the die is larger and made of wood. While playing, they would toast each other with their maize drink, *chicha*.

(Anonymous a 1570-1575:166)

Guaman Poma is probably referring to the inclusion of these provincial chiefs in the Inka Raymi rituals when he refers to the *huayro* of the *inaca* and the *pichca* of *hilancos*. The anonymous source leaves off the list of officials admitted to the Inka Raymi activities with "the ambassadors of the provinces" (165) who came after the *Hunu Kurakas* in charge of 10,000

³³ She was an ancestral figure associated with the conquest of the land in the Cuzco valley and, accordingly, with agriculture and harvesting (the conquest of the produce of the land).

³⁴ This account was written probably between 1570 and 1575 but possibly based on information recorded earlier – perhaps starting even as early as the 1540s (Rostworowski 1970:139-40; Anonymous a 1570-1575:165-66).

³⁵ The decimal administration included in descending order those who were in charge of 1,000 households (*waranqa kuraka*), of 100 (*pachaka kuraka*), and of 10 (*chunka kamayuq*).

households. Zuidema (2010:462-63) interprets this as indicating that the most inferior rank that could participate in the ritual ploughing and could play games with the Inka and his higher officials were the *hunu kurakas*. He further argues that Guaman Poma's *hilancos* (i.e., *ayllu* chiefs in Aymara) may have referred precisely to this wider group of provincial chiefs, who were allowed to play with the Inka; and *iñacas*, at least as used here by Guaman Poma, referred to women of the same status (their wives?) (see also Murúa 1590:Fol. 57r; Zuidema 2010:466-74). These would have not been Inka-by-blood but Inka-by-privilege, and as such a lower foreign class of nobility.³⁶

What this seems to suggest is that the Inka played with his provincial lords at an event that symbolised, enacted, and reproduced the unity of the socio-cosmic order of the empire. Significantly however, what the stories by Cobo and Albornoz suggest is that – while the Inka was expected to win – the element of chance and/or skill was not entirely removed in the fair unfolding of these games, which would strongly suggest that this provided subordinate lords a form of negotiation to press for change or the acquisition of new titles and more status (Zuidema 2010:465-66). This is also what appears to be happening in Cobo's stories of the Guayro consort and her son.

Another relevant aspect relating to this is the term by which Cobo and Albornoz refer to the game of bolas, i.e., *ayllus*. *Ayllu* is a word with various meanings in both Quechua and Aymara. Besides indicating the three-bola weapon used in the game described above, it is also the name of the most basic unit of the Andean segmentary social structure (the name of the moiety in a dual system), and in Aymara it also signifies 'penis'. Due both to its function as a weapon and its phallic overtones, Zuidema (1973b:148; 1964:72) argues that the term *ayllu* carries a masculine connotation, which is reflected in the patrilineal character of the *ayllu* as a kinship group.

As a social unit, the *ayllu* is a descent group within the hierarchical dual structure of native Andean society. It is an ancestor-oriented kindred situated within a set of hierarchical relations that link it to the land it inhabits and to the water required for its irrigation. The precise character and structure of the *ayllu* in pre-Hispanic times is still debated and the way in which the term is used by early Spanish chroniclers is rather broad and variable (see

³⁶ Martín de Murúa (1590:Fol. 48v; 1616:Fol. 189r [210r]) also provides two accounts involving the playing of games in relation to *iñaca* women and Inka nobility.

Zuidema 1973a; Salomon 2018:219; McEwan 2008; Rowe 1946). The hierarchical character inherent to its dual structure was often emically visualized as a relation between conquerors and conquered. The former were seen as foreigners connected with socio-economic activities related to high-altitude ecological zones, such as llama herding and the cultivation of potatoes. The latter instead were conceived as locals – tied to the land – and associated with land-based activities of the lower valleys, such as farming, pottery, etc. This duality was often further subdivided into a second embedded duality, thus creating a quadripartition. This was visible at different scales: the local, as local groups were (and to some extent still are) divided into four *ayllus* (e.g., Platt 1986); and the imperial, as the whole the Inka empire was made up of four parts (*suyus*), so much so that the Quechua name the Inkas used to refer to their polity was Tawantinsuyu, literally “four (*tawa-*) parts (*-suyu*) together (*-ntin-*)”.

Zuidema’s (1967; 1973b) interpretation of the game of the *ayllu* provides useful guidance to understand how these different strands of data may fit together. While the *ayllus* or *bolas* used in the game carried a masculine connotation, the mythological serpentine creature, the *amaru*, is linked to the feminine sphere. Thus, the game may have symbolized the opposition male/female and by extension the tension between a set of related dual opposites (i.e., conqueror/conquered, upper/lower), where one member of the pair is always expected to win (Lau 2014a; 2016:Chapter 6). In other words, Zuidema interprets the *ayllu* game as a tool of social order, where the symbolic struggle between two opposite sides of a hierarchical pair reflects the conflict between the ruling class and rebel or conquered groups. This symbolism aligns with its redistributive role in relation to Inka hierarchical politics and the Inka Raymi events – consecrating the cosmic and social order of the empire – as well as the institution of *wak’a* *pacariscas*.

Moreover, as a practice that was deeply connected with the Inka socio-political structure and the hierarchical relations between the Inka sovereign and his provincial subordinates, the game embodies what Zuidema (1973b:159) defines a bottom-up view of the empire. This is the perspective of the imperial structure seen from below, as opposed to the centralised view of the Tawantinsuyu as seen from the top, namely, its centre – embodied by the Inka sovereign and the city of Cusco. Zuidema (1973b) proposes to visualize this opposition between a bottom-up and top-down perspective as one between square and circle – or, put

differently, between the quadripartite periphery and the radiating circular centre that intersects the periphery – i.e., the *ceque* system (Zuidema 1973b:163; 1964).

While a detailed discussion of Zuidema's analysis of Inka structure and *ceque* system is not necessary here (see Zuidema 1964), what is worth considering for our purposes is Zuidema's indication that games may have played a role in what he refers to as the peripheral or bottom-up view of the empire, which emphasized quadripartition as a social ordering principle, manifesting in the *ayllu* system's segmentary organisation and, on a larger scale, in the very notion of Tawantinsuyu. Games appear to be always related to the segmentary quadripartite (*ayllu*-like) structure. As we will see, this strongly resonates with the archaeological evidence for the use of the archaeological boards.

The latter point also aligns with the argument developed above about the role of games of chance and skills in giving provincial lords negotiating space with the Inka within ritualised contexts where the socio-cosmic order of the Inka empire was celebrated, propitiated, and re-enacted. This negotiating space corresponds to the peripheral or bottom-up view of the empire, emphasising a segmentary political organisation. It is to the latter perspective that games belong, and if what Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615:314 [316]) says is true – that this game could not be played outside highly ceremonial occasions in which they were warranted by the Inka himself – we begin to understand that their cosmo-political import was substantial (Zuidema 2010:461).

As an instrument allowing the mutual recognition of sociopolitical status between the Inka and his subordinate lords, games may have belonged to a pre-existing form of government that the Inkas simply incorporated into their empire – one related to the quadripartite, bottom-up, perspective of society based on segmentary organisation and the *ayllu* system. Recent studies have highlighted how segmentary organisations structured around lineage groups focused on apotheosised ancestors is a much older Andean tradition, emerging before the Inkas (e.g., Isbell 1997; McEwan 2005; Lau 2010a; 2010c; Jennings and Berquist 2022; Berquist 2022; Lau and Luján 2025). Accordingly, in this work, I will try to argue that this political aspect inherent to games far from being an Inka innovation, was a surviving legacy of a much older Andean tradition in which games played exactly this role – mediating between moieties, contributing to the settlement of disputes and the creation of a sense of

unity, while affording mutual understandings of order and status and the establishment of a new equilibrium in hierarchical practices and power struggles.

In fact, the form in which this broader socio-political role of games survived in Inka times would have probably looked like a weakened version of older practices, stifled as it was by the centralised political power of the Inkas. Another aspect that emerges from this analysis of games in Inka society is that skill and chance allowed for these games to be utilised as political instruments. The reason for this is probably to be sought in the way chance and skill are conceived in immanentist societies, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

It is also important to note that the role of games in a funerary context is not too dissimilar to the political aspect analysed here. In both cases, these are liminal times of passage, whether the end of the harvesting season ushering into a new agricultural cycle, or the end of a human life requiring that a new equilibrium be reinstated. Zuidema notes that the period of time in which the Inka Raymi was held was associated with death and rebirth. A common aspect to both social contexts is also the role of games in ritual practices concentrating on the creation of a sense of unity across a social body.

An illustrative ethnographic case of a game played within a political context comes from the region of Huarochirí, in the Central Peruvian highlands, where a form of *pichca* was still played every year in the village of Pacota at the beginning of the 21st century (Salomon 2002). The game is part of a New Year political ceremony that marks the passage of power from the governing council that is stepping down to the incoming one, which will take on the responsibility of government in the coming year. This type of *pichca* does not have an associated gameboard but is only played with two truncated *pichca*-shaped dice: a bigger die (seen as male) and a second smaller one (seen as female). The game is played within a highly symbolic space, divided into two opposite sides, which reflect the dual structure of upper and lower moieties, specifically mirroring the division between the highlands and the coast (see Salomon 2002:12, Figure 8). Thus, the ceremonial space where the game is played is a bipartite rectangle – a recurrent structural element of ceremonial spaces across the Andes (e.g., Platt 1986).

The game is accompanied by feasting taking primarily the form of drinking – a state of drunkenness is seen as the most suitable to play this game. Duality extends beyond spatial organization and is embodied in key ceremonial figures: the referees are two masked

individuals dressed as a puma and a soldier. The former represents the highland Puna lands, where pumas roam, as well as a number of associated concepts such as the “peripheral and pre-cultural” (Salomon 2002:11). The latter instead symbolises an urban orderly environment associated with the coast. This opposition also echoes the broader ethnohistorical pattern of duality between conquerors and the conquered, described in the previous section. The existence of an opposition between foreign conquerors from the highlands and local conquered people, inhabiting the lower valley, is ethno-historically attested in the Huarochiri region (Salomon and Urioste 1991:7-8). The same duality can be found in the male/female complementary opposition inherent to the two dice used, which are ranked hierarchically. Finally, a dual structure also informs the development of the game, which is divided into two phases, one for the incoming and one for the outgoing council members. Each phase in turn is divided into two throws, one with the male and one with the female die.

The game has an overarching divinatory and propitiatory role, thereby uniting all parties involved. The game aims to determine if it will rain and where – whether on the coast or in the highlands. Rain on the coast signifies abundant water for low altitude cultivated fields, while rain in the highlands means plentiful water supply for pasture grasslands. As a communal ritual, the game does not produce individual winners or losers; rather, its outcome affects the entire community, ensuring collective benefit or shared misfortune.

The Pacota’s picha game may have derived from a fusion of the Inka *pichca* game, the casting of lots (previously discussed as a form of oracular divination), and a ritual game described in a local Quechua source – the Huarochiri Manuscript. This manuscript presents the people of Huarochiri as divided into two groups, one descended from local people, known as Yunca, who were associated with the cultivation of quinoa and agriculture in general. The other group was thought to descend instead from foreign invaders associated with blood and mountain herders and they were known as Yauyos (Salomon and Urioste 1991:6-9, 117). Chapter 24 (particularly, sections 327–335) of this manuscript discusses the structural division of early-colonial ritual practices in Huarochiri, which maintained the equilibrium between the two sides of this duality by alternating the rites of each group every two years, thus facilitating their coexistence. The Machua Yunca was part of the cultivators’ or conquered (i.e., Yunca) side’s version of the ritual, and it comprised a tournament between the *ayllus*, involving a spear-throwing competition. Two targets were set up – one was symbolically

female and the other male. Similarly to the ethnographic *pisca* game, the early-colonial spear-throwing competition functioned as a ritual to propitiate resource abundance, with the female target symbolizing the valley's fertility and the male target representing highland productivity (Salomon and Urioste 1991:123).³⁷

Salomon (2002:20) suggests that the propitiatory *pichca* game of Pacota served as an integrative mechanism to settle disputes between herders and cultivators, who are constantly vying for (limited) resources. Ultimately, the game contributed to reinforcing a sense of unity and reciprocity by emphasizing the shared fate of the community as a whole across its dual distinction(s). Put differently, the ritual *pisca* game of Pacota played a key role in facilitating social integration through an emphasis on complementary hierarchy for the benefit of the whole community.

The division in two socio-economic groups (herders and cultivators) has a long history in the Andes, and it is rooted in the pre-Columbian past (Duviols 1973; Platt 1986; Zuidema 1973a; Parsons et al. 1997; Urton 2012). The relationship between these two groups is a complex and delicate one, predicated upon the same duality that defines the structure of so much of Andean cosmology, society, and ritual practice. However, this is never solely a duality of opposition, but one of complementarity as well, where each side needs the other for being – both material and ontological. We have seen that a system based on reciprocity involving ritual mechanisms aimed at social integration has been in place in the Andes for a substantial period of time, where it functioned as a balancing factor in the potentially tense co-existence between competing social groups (see for example Gelles 1995; Cummins 2004; Salomon 2004; Lau 2014a).

However, clashes and tensions would arise nonetheless, and Andean societies developed a series of tools to mediate and settle disputes. The *pichca* of Pacota seems to have been one such ritual practice, but there is another well-documented tradition in the ethnographic record that falls under the broad category of ritual play – that of the *tinkuy* battles (see Lau 2014a; 2016:Chapter 6).

³⁷ It is noteworthy that here again the competitive game is associated with rituals related to the lower moiety, much like in the Inka case it is related to the *Qullasuyu*, the lower *suyu*. This may be related what Zuidema calls a bottom-up view of power and hierarchy, one focussed on competition and renegotiation of power structures.

IV

Tinku and the related word *tinkuy* express a key concept of Andean worldview informing structure, organisation, and ritualistic practices. According to the early colonial Quechua dictionary by González Holguín (1952:342), *tinku* indicates the coming together or convergence of two elements, as for example the confluence of two rivers (*tinkucmayo/tinkucyaco*), an eco-cosmologically significant place for Andean cultures. Similarly, Holguín's dictionary provides the following meaning for *tinkuy*: "pair of identical things" (e.g., a pair of gloves). More generally, *tinkuy* refers to a relationship between things but also kindred groups which is simultaneously opposite and complementary, based on confrontation but also interdependency (Mayer 1977; Allen 1978:80).

Tinkuy events are known ethnographically from all over the Central Andean region, including Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador (Orlove 1994; Hopkins 1982; Harris 1985; Harrison 1989; Sallnow 1987:131, 36; Skar 1982; Platt 1986; Gorbak et al. 1962; Remy 1991; Cama Ttito and Ttito Tica 2003; Zecenarro Villalobos 1992; Molinié-Fioravanti 1988; Barrionuevo 1971; Alencastre and Dumézil 1953). They can take the form of ritual battles, dances, and other types of confrontations, but they are always ritually circumscribed. Socially, these *tinku* rituals functioned as contained combats occurring within festive contexts, often referred to locally as games or play (Arkush and Stanish 2005:13; e.g., juegos Fock 1991:217; Hopkins 1982:182; puqllay (i.e., playing) Allen 1988:183; Orlove 1994:148). However, these games could have serious consequences and there are documented cases of casualties resulting from them (Gorbak et al. 1962:249; Cama Ttito and Ttito Tica 2003:28-30; Chacon et al. 2007).

These *tinkuy* rituals often take place in significant locations of the Andean ecological landscape, or at the boundary between the territories of opposing groups. In other instances, *tinkuy* meetings can also occur in the central square of the village. In the case of the Cañari indigenous communities of southern Ecuador, Fock (1991:216-20, 25) reports that ritual confrontations, presented as games but functioning as heated duels, took place on hill- and mountain-tops (known as *pucarás*), strategically situated near watersheds or at points where irrigation canals diverge toward the respective communities engaging in the fight. These competitive duels contributed to settling disputes over land ownership and mediating social tensions over limited resources, such as water.

Determining if these tinku fights represent an earlier pre-Columbian tradition is difficult. Certainly, as we have seen earlier, competitive play did serve a political function in Inka government and the Inkas relied on pre-existing Andean traditions and social mechanisms. Much like the contemporary *tinkuy* rituals, the early-colonial and Inka games examined above aimed at resolving unstable social relationships within a hierarchical structure. As noted by Lau (2014a:319), this is what the early-colonial mestizo chronicler Garcilaso de la Vega appears to be suggesting when he writes that Inka law:

Mandated that two or three times a month, the inhabitants of each village should eat together in the presence of their curacas and participate in military or popular games, in order to reconcile their spirits, maintain perpetual peace, and encourage and uplift herders and other agricultural workers.

(Garcilaso de la Vega 1985:235)

Garcilaso appears to be also hinting at the role of games and ritual battles in creating social unity at the community level and refers once again to herders and cultivators as the two socio-economic groups in an Andean village that engaged in such games. The role of these groups is related to the political ecology of Andean society, which has famously been characterized as a “vertical archipelago,” a concept introduced by Murra (1968; 1972; 1975) to describe a social system that dealt with a differentiated access to resources along the distinctive altitudinal gradients of the Andean cordillera.

Scholars have since generalized about verticality and its adaptation as a kind of “ecological complementarity” (Shimada 1985). Ecological complementarity does not focus exclusively on the vertical dimension; rather, it encompasses a broad range of ecological variations, and the social strategies communities adopt to access often limited resources from diverse ecological zones. The available evidence indicates that ritualized games and play in the Andes may have functioned as one such strategy from pre-Inka times (Parsons et al. 1997). They represented important integrative mechanisms within the hierarchical practices that regulated Andean society and political economy.

While recent tinku fights involve chiefly bolas and slingshots competitions, or even more violent forms of combat, boardgames appear to have also been used in such contexts in the

past. Their use was not merely recreational but played a role similar to *tinkuy* confrontations. However, what do we really know about Andean boardgames? What kind of game was the *pichca*, how was it played? What other indigenous boardgames have been played in the Andes? We will now shift our focus to these questions, examining boardgames' typologies, ludic elements, and related paraphernalia.

Andean Boardgames

Early ethnohistorical sources describe various activities that would broadly qualify as the playing of games involving a board with compartments, often accompanied by dice, playing pieces or tokens (e.g., beans, maize kernels, stone pebbles), and that pitted two players one against the other. Unfortunately, no chronicler provides a complete description or full set of rules for any these games. What survives from 16th- and 17th-century chronicles are only fragmentary references to gaming equipment and brief accounts of indigenous games, typically through analogies with European games they resembled.

Consequently, these descriptions can only provide only a general impression of what these games may have looked like, lacking any detailed information. Ethnographic accounts fare somewhat better, since there are a handful of cases in which roughly contemporary indigenous games have been documented more thoroughly, including their rules, game mechanics, and equipment. However, such descriptions remain rare, reflecting the still nascent state of the anthropology of games and play in the Central Andes.

We will first review the principal ethnohistorical references to boardgames, trying to glean as much information as possible from the available sources. Subsequently, we will analyse ethnographic descriptions of Andean boardgames, determining, insofar as it is possible, which ones, if any, display indigenous components (i.e., unaffected by European playing practices and rules).

First, a classification of boardgames will facilitate their identification and will make the following discussion clearer. I will follow the most basic typological subdivisions of boardgames developed by Parlett (1999:8-16); (see also Murray 1978; Bell 1969). Broadly, boardgames can be subdivided into (Table 1):

- Race Games (e.g., Snakes & Ladders, Pachisi, Ludo, Backgammon etc.). These games are played on a linear track, featuring one or more starting and finishing points and movement is usually bound by dice.

- Alignment or Space Games (e.g., nine men Morris', noughts & crosses, go, merels etc.). The fundamental principle behind these games involves players placing or moving their pieces across a bidimensional field, aiming to achieve a particular arrangement, formation, or position.
- Hunt or Chase Games (e.g., tafl group). In these games, one player has more pieces than the other, who usually has only one. They are played on a war-game (i.e., chess-like) board.
- War or Displace Games (e.g., draughts (checkers), chess). Strategy games where a player needs to capture the opponent's pieces.
- Mancala Games (also sowing games) – they are related to war games as they have a capture mechanism as in war games, but they also differ, in that mancala game pieces are completely inert and neutral, and they are not distinguishable on account of their value, function, and they do not belong to an individual player.

Dice are typically associated only with race-games, as the number of movements of the pieces is bound by the roll of dice or the cast of some other types of lots. Frequently, the goal is that of taking all game pieces out of the board before the opponent. The pieces can often interact with each other, usually via the ousting of the opponents' pieces – i.e., sending them back to a starting point whenever landing on a space occupied by them. In other instances, dice games may involve 'capturing' as a mode of interaction, thereby eliminating completely the captured piece from the game.

Race games can be based on a mix of skill and chance or rely solely on chance:

1. Simple race games are games of pure chance, where each player has only one piece to bring 'home' (e.g., Snakes and Ladders).
2. Complex race games are games of chance where an element of skill is introduced. Each player has a small number of pieces, but more than one, typically between two and four (e.g., Pachisi, Ludo).
3. Multiplex race games are games of chance where the skill or strategy factor becomes prominent. They typically involve a larger number of pieces per player, which need to be brought 'home' (e.g., backgammon).

A particularly significant aspect relating to the materiality of boardgames is the layout of the field of play: the design of the track that can be followed on a board or some other surface.

Generally, fields change according to game typology. Broadly speaking, race games are characterised by a linear track. Areal tracks instead derive (typologically but not necessarily historically) from linear ones by enfolding the single line of holes/spaces upon itself to create new successive layers – this contributes to elongating the single linear track. Finally, reticular fields are made up of lines connecting points, including diagonal lines, marking the movement that the game pieces can follow (Parlett 1999:14-16). This classification provides a useful guide for the analysis of Andean gameboards.

I

Appendix B shows an overview of games mentioned and described to different extents in the available historical sources. The three most frequently cited Indigenous Andean games are the *pisca/pichca*, *chunca*, and *tapta(na)*. *Pisca* refers to the truncated trapezoidal die discussed in Chapter 2, and, by extension, to a game or more likely a set of games that employed this die. There are instances in which the *pisca* die seem to have been used alongside a compartmentalised board with tokens (Ricardo 1586; González Holguín 1952:284; Bertonio 1879a:273-74; 1879b:92, 157; Murúa 1590:Fol. 48v, 77r; Cobo 1893:228; Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:243 [245]; Arriaga 1999:66-67). The *pisca* games are generally described as dice or race games and they are tightly related to the other most commonly used noun/verb related to native Andean boardgames: *chunca* (Santo Tomás 1560:79 [174], 29 [274]; Ricardo 1586; González Holguín 1952:71, 121, 321, 551; Bertonio 1879a:162; 1879b:92; Cobo 1893:228; Garcilaso de la Vega 1985:90).

Similarly to *pisca*, which means five in Quechua, *chunca* is the numeral 'ten'. The naming of board games after numbers is not unheard of – for instance, the Indian game *pachisi*, literally translates as the number 'twenty-five'. The significance of numbers in board games clearly relates to the physical structure of the die or the board, and their related game mechanics. Gameboards, whether linear or areal, have compartments, spaces, or marks to track the movement of tokens along a path. This makes race-games inherently numerical. The use of counting boards for gaming purposes likely originates from early human counting practices, which were deeply rooted in materiality and commonly employed tokens (e.g., Mark 2007:152-53). Research suggests that the cognitive ability to count in humans developed not from abstract thinking, but rather from concrete practices such as the counting of fingers or

pebbles (Morley and Renfrew 2010; Malafouris 2010; Renfrew 2018:14; Schmandt-Besserat 2010). In Quechua, this connection is evident in the very etymology of the term for ‘number(s)’ – ‘yupana(kuna)’ – which literally translates as ‘counting things’ or ‘counters’ (Urton 1997:41).

Given that Quechua employs a decimal system, the significance of number ten in the context of games is unsurprising. The entire Inka administration and hierarchical apparatus was based on a decimal logic (Rowe 1946:264; Julien 1982; D'Altroy 2015:354-56). The connection between boardgames and numerical concepts in the Andes did not escape the attention of two early colonial chroniclers. Murúa (1590:77r) chooses to introduce the topic of the *pisca* game within a discussion focused on the Inka numerical system and accounting practices, implicitly highlighting the relationship between these seemingly separate domains (to a western audience). In a section dedicated to Inka accounting and administration, the mestizo chronicler makes this connection even more explicit when he writes that:

The very same term *chunca camayu* [the name given to officials in the Inka decimal state administration], in another meaning, refers to a habitual gambler, one who carries playing cards in the hood of his cloak, as the saying goes, because they call any game *chunca*, since all games involve counting numbers. And because numbers ultimately end at ten, they adopted the number ten (*chunca*) as a synonym for game; thus, to say 'let us play,' they say *chuncásu* [emphasis mine].

(Garcilaso de la Vega 1985:90)

When stating that “all games involve counting numbers”, Garcilaso implicitly suggests that games utilised compartmentalised boards with spaces associated with numerical values. This is borne out by most of the available ethnohistorical evidence. The particular significance of ten may have manifested in several different ways, including the layout of the board, the number of compartments, the number of tokens each player could move, and so on. For example, Cobo describes a gameboard that was used in the game called *chuncara* as follows,

Consisting of five small pits carved into a flat stone or wooden board. It was played using beans of various colours, which were moved from pit to pit

according to the throw of dice. Players advanced their beans through these spaces until reaching the end. The first pit was worth ten points, and each subsequent pit increased in value by ten points, up to the fifth pit, which was worth fifty.

(Cobo 1893:228)

Finally, a third common term associated with boardgames is *tapta* or *taptana* (Santo Tomás 1560:18 [53], 173 [363]; Ricardo 1586; González Holguín 1952:338, 402, 26, 676; Murúa 1616:Fol. 189r [210r]; Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:387 [389]-88 [90]). *Tapta* is etymologically unrelated to numbers, and its origins are unclear. The term is usually employed in early colonial dictionaries as a translation for any European game, including chess, alquerque, which are war-games, as well as a race-game such as backgammon. When looking for translations of these European games, the authors of the early dictionaries add the adjective “Spanish” to *taptana* (*castilla taptana*), thereby signalling that the term is used simply as indicative of boardgames in general, but does not imply similarity in game mechanics. Murúa (1616:Fol 189r [Fol. 210r]) claims that the Inka aristocratic youth played the *taptana* in pre-Hispanic times and, in what appears to be the closest thing to a description of the actual game, he claims that he resembled backgammon (*tablas*).

This variation in naming is difficult to reconcile. Probably, each referred to a different type of boardgame, or maybe even to whole families of boardgames associated with distinct boards and tokens. For someone like Ludovico Bertonio (1879a:40) – author of the earliest Aymara dictionary – these terms did not appear specific to individual boardgames; rather, they referred to the “way of playing” them. At least, this is how the Spaniards came to understand them.

Moreover, some names appear to have been interchangeable, and the chroniclers used them liberally. *Pisca* clearly referred to the truncated die that is still in use in parts of the Andes today, but by extension it came to indicate a series of race-games that were played with it. *Chunca* could indicate several types of race-games, including those played with the *pichca*, which is sometimes given as a synonym. However, the scope of the term *chunca* was rather sweeping, and it could even encompass Spanish card games (Santo Tomás 1560:79 [174], 29 [274]). A common trait of all these games appears to have been chance or, put differently,

the fact that they all are ‘incomplete information’ games – i.e., they rely on the fact that players do not have access to a complete set of information, whether this is because the outcome of a dice-throw cannot be known in advance or because a player cannot see what cards their opponent is holding.

When Quechua dictionaries use European analogies to translate *chunca*, they are not always helpful, in that they mention any popular European game of their time. However, the few times in which *chunca* and *taptana* are described in detail – and not simply used to provide convenient translations for European games – the most common description we encounter is that they were reminiscent of backgammon.³⁸ To 16th century Spaniards, backgammon would have represented the race-game *par excellence*. Therefore, by drawing this analogy, the chroniclers and early colonial Quechua and Aymara dictionaries were referring to a boardgame played with multiple game pieces or tokens, which were moved around the spaces along a track according to the throw of dice or some other randomizing device (e.g., knucklebones/astragali, stick-dice, etc.).

Bertonio’s 17th century Spanish-Aymara dictionary offers more detailed descriptions of boardgames and their mechanics. Alongside Cobo, Bertonio also offers a description, albeit brief, of the layout of a native Andean gameboard. It’s worth analysing Bertonio’s scattered information on games in depth.

Halancola: The holes or small pits of a game by this name, somewhat resembling backgammon.

(Bertonio 1879b:110)

A game somewhat resembling backgammon, in which the players advance through positions [houses/spaces] using the word 'Halancola.' The board pattern [layout] used for this game is called *auca ttaca*, and

³⁸ This is always given as *tablas* or *tablas reales*, the name of a game closely resembling contemporary backgammon and played with the same board in medieval and early modern Spain. The game is already mentioned in the Alfonso X’s ‘Libro de los Juegos’ (1283:Fol. 72r-80r). While the exact rules of the game are not known, it is regarded as part of the broader ‘tables’ family, to which modern backgammon also belongs. These were race-game played with dice on a backgammon-like board (see illustrations in the Alfonso X’s Libro de los Juegos).

the wooden die used to play it is called 'Pisca.' To play this game [is expressed as]: 'Piscasitha,' 'Chuncasitha,' 'Huayrusitha,' or 'Huncusitha'".

(Bertonio 1879a:273-74)

“Huayrusitha, Piscasitha: To play with small stones, moving them forward through their pits according to the points [shown] by a kind of large die. In some of these games, the little stones are advanced around or in a circle; in others, they move by turning like [i.e., in a path resembling the winding course of] a river, etc.”.

(Bertonio 1879b:157)

Cumisitha: To play a game similar to the one we call the game of the goose, although it differs in many aspects.

(Bertonio 1879b:59)

Bertonio describes only race-games (mostly resembling backgammon or in one case the game of the goose) played with pebbles on a board made up of a sequence of pits, suggesting these were hollowed out depressions carved into the surface. He describes some that are circular and others that follow a winding, river-like pattern. Arguably, this probably meant that their track was S- or Z-shaped. This aligns with Parlett's (1999:14-15) analysis of the geometries of boardgames' fields described above. Particularly, it relates to how areal and linear tracks derive one from the other. For example, Parlett claims that a linear field, with a single straight track, can be made longer by bending it around and turning the straight line into a circle or by folding it onto itself, adding layers. The resulting layout can still be used for a race game as well as for any space, hunt, or war game. The board Bertonio refers to as *auca ttacca* appears to have been exactly one such extended – circular or zig-zagging – track.

Another important aspect emerging from Bertonio's dictionary is related to nomenclature. First, Bertonio is writing an Aymara dictionary, but many words he uses for games are of Quechua origin. This is the case of *chunca* and *pisca*, but also *huayro*. Although the latter may have not been originally Quechua, the evidence suggest that it was first used as a game-related term within a Quechua-speaking Inka cultural environment (see Chapter 2). This

suggests that some games may have originated in the culturally Quechua parts of the Central Andes and travelled to Aymara speaking regions, which used to be much more widespread than now, including the highlands inland of Lima (Heggarty and Beresford-Jones 2010; Adelaar and Muysken 2004; Cerrón-Palomino 1995; Lau 2012a).

The other term mentioned by Bertonio – *cumisiña* (noun) or *cumisitha* (verb) – suggests instead an Aymara origin, since it does not appear in any Quechua dictionary, except perhaps in the form ‘*comina*’ in the dictionary of Santo Tomás (1560), where it is provided as a synonym for *taptana*. The latter term instead is not included by Bertonio in his Aymara dictionary. Speculatively, we can take this to indicate that *tapta*(na) was a Quechua term while *cumisitha* an Aymara one, and they could have referred to similar games in different languages.

Murúa (1590:Fol. 48v) also describes some boardgames, including one named *aucai*. Unfortunately, he does not describe its board, but the name *aucai* that he provides is relevant to our discussion. Murúa says it was played with the *pichca* die and came with a board as well as beans of different colours used as tokens. The name provided for this boardgame – *aucai* – is etymologically related to the name Bertonio offers for the gameboard used in a number of race games: *auca ttacca* (see above). *Auca* is an Aymara word meaning ‘enemy’ or ‘opponent’ (Bertonio 1879b:27), and by extension also a series of related terms, including opposites in a complementary pair, which underpins Andean duality. Bertonio (1879a:140) says that opposite colours or elements are also examples of *aucas*, such as white/black, fire/water, day/night, and sin/grace.

The other terminological element in Bertonio’s Aymara name for a gameboard – *ttacca* – can be translated as ‘part’ of a whole, and by extension as ‘group’ – for example, a group of people (Bertonio 1879b:346). At face value, *auca ttacca* could be translated as ‘enemy groups’, and this is an entirely plausible meaning for a word describing a game where two adversaries are playing against each other. However, considering the broader meaning associated with the word *auca* and relating to the Andean notion of duality, a more nuanced rendering is ‘complementary pair of opposite groups’. This would reflect a relationship between two members in a pair, typically characterised in Andean worldviews by hierarchical interdependence, reciprocity, and a tension toward a balance reached through complementary asymmetry. Although members in a pair can sometimes manifest overt opposition or antagonism during periods of instability, Andean ranked duality is always aimed at the re-

establishment of a social and/or cosmological equilibrium (see also the discussion in Lau 2014a; 2016).

All this seems to suggest that Murúa's aucai race-game as well as Bertonio's auca ttacca gameboard played with the symbolism of war and enemy groups fighting each other within the structuring principle of dual opposition (see Lau 2014a:Table 12.1). A race game thus conceived is entirely possible. While one would be tempted to think of war games as the most appropriate category for games with military symbolism, it is important to note that these categories only refer to game mechanics and have no bearing on the symbolism that at a certain point and within a certain cultural group may become associated with a game.

Although there is no way to ascertain this, one could assume that Murúa's aucai may have been a similar game to the one described by Bertonio (*halancola*) and played with a track called auca ttacca, or at least it may have belonged to the same family of games. Bernabé Cobo (1893:228) also mention "another game [...] called tacanaco, played with the same type of die [*pichca*] and coloured beans, similar to the game of backgammon". This is likely to be a further variation of the same name given to a native game or family of games. In fact, Cobo's *tacanaco* looks suspiciously similar to the Hispanicisation of the Aymara auca ttacca, provided by Bertonio. If correct, this would further reinforce the possibility that all these overlapping descriptions referred to very similar native Andean race-games, if not the same one.

Significantly, this game's symbolism appears to have directly engaged with fundamental Andean notions of duality and opposition, in which two sides exist in complementary tension. This symbolic relationship underlies several ethnographic examples discussed in the previous chapter, such as the *pichca* game played in Pacota and documented by Salomon (2002). Such a symbolism is not surprising for games, which are by nature competitive, creating an opposition between two rival players or teams and whose outcome is uncertain. As noted by Lévi-Strauss (1966:30-33), games typically have a disjunctive effect in culture, engendering asymmetry where originally there was symmetry – the initial equilibrium between two players starting a game on an equal footing under the same set of rules. Lévi-Strauss further argues that rituals function in the opposite way to games, as they conjoin, where games create disjunction. He writes that "ritual, which is also 'played', is on the other hand, like a favoured instance of a game, remembered from among the possible ones because it is

the only one which results in a particular kind of equilibrium between sides” (30). Hence, the example he makes is that of a game rigged in such a way that it ends with a draw. However, this argument can be turned on its head within the context of Andean duality – which is as pervasive a structuring principle in Andean cosmology and society as any. The equilibrium that according to Lévi-Strauss results from that particular instance of game that is the ritual is achieved in the Andes precisely thanks to the disjunctive nature of games. This is to say that in Andean duality, the equilibrium is attained through the hierarchical disjunction between the members of a pair, as for example the winner and loser in a game. In other words, while it is true that games create disjunction, as Lévi-Strauss argued, this is not opposite to ritual (as a conjoining mechanism leading to an equilibrium), at least within an Andean context. On the contrary, due to the quintessentially Andean form of hierarchical and complementary opposition, games have an intrinsic ritualistic character, since they are capable of engendering an equilibrium, precisely because they create a ranked disjunction – an upper and lower (a conqueror and a conquered, an invader and an invaded, etc.) – the perfect balance for all paired entities in native Andean cosmology and society.

Noteworthy is also the fact that both Bertonio (1879a:273; 1879b:110) and Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615:243 [245]) mention two similar words in the context of these race games: “halancola” or “halancolata” the former, and “hilancula” the latter. As suggested by Lau (2014a:319), these terms appear to be related to one another, either as different spellings of the same term or as cognates. As already noted by Zuidema (1967:48; 1973b:149), both terms are also likely to be related to the Aymara word “hilanco” or “hilacata”, which indicated the “chief of the ayllu”, according to Bertonio (1879b:133). In light of the discussion in Chapter 2, this etymological and terminological connection is unlikely to be a coincidence. Keeping in mind what *auca ttacca* may have meant and aware of the significance of games in inter- and (intra-)ayllu relationships, the term *halancola* given by Bertonio possibly hints at an additional symbolic element related to these games, involving *ayllus*, particularly as represented by their heads or chiefs. Accordingly, one possible way to interpret this is that the “*auca ttacca*” or enemy groups of the race game were the *hilancos* – i.e., the *ayllu* chiefs – representing their *ayllu* communities fighting each other.

The overtones inherent to the term used by Bertonio for a gameboard may be hinting at a broader symbolical and perhaps ritual significance that these race games had. Possibly, they

could have been seen as one of the many mediating mechanisms (see below) regulating inter- and intra-*ayllu* interactions, akin to some of the North and Central American ballgames played by opposite moieties, symbolising a cosmology of dualities: upper vs lower, sky vs earth, etc. (see Hocart 1970:264-68).

Race-games lend themselves to be re-interpreted symbolically. This happened with many ancient games that gradually acquired more elaborate meanings, even if they may have initially been just a recreational activity. The list is long, but to name just a few, the ancient Egyptian race-game Senet came to symbolise the journey of the soul in the afterlife (Piccione 1980; 2007); the Japanese game Sugoroku had deep cosmological connotations (Yuan 2021); or the 18th- and 19th-century Indian divination game Gyan Chaupar (known in Europe as Snakes and Ladders) was associated with an elaborate symbolism (Schmidt-Madsen 2019).

In terms of gameboards and gaming paraphernalia, we can now draw a few conclusions. Race games seemed to have been the most popular, if not the only, native boardgames documented by the early colonial chronicles. Boards were made of different materials (for example, Cobo mentions boards made of wood and stone), but they could probably also be simply carved on any flat surface and be much more ephemeral. By early colonial times, the main randomizing device employed by native Andeans was the *pichca* die, which was probably of Inka origins and had spread throughout the Andean region as a consequence of Inka expansion (Gentile 1998). The game pieces described by the chroniclers are always practical and makeshift objects, such as beans and small stones or pebbles.³⁹ These are ephemeral and inconspicuous – often indistinguishable from ordinary domestic refuse – making them particularly challenging to identify archaeologically.

II

In this section, I will briefly discuss the drawing of a gameboard that has been identified (among others) as a pre-Columbian *taptana* by some scholars and will argue why this claim cannot be accepted given the current available evidence. The native Chronicler Guaman

³⁹ Scenes of people playing with beans are known from pre-Columbian times, and they appear frequently on Moche pottery (Vivante 1942; Hocquenghem 1984). According to Gentile (2008), in some of these visual narratives made by the Moche and involving beans, something resembling a *pisca* die is represented.

Poma de Ayala (1615:387 [389]) drew a lattice-grid gameboard in his illustration of Atahualpa's captivity in Cajamarca at the hands of the Spaniards. In this depiction, Atahualpa is depicted in shackles with a guard sitting in front of him. Between them is a gameboard, which Guaman Poma refers to as *taptana* in the following page of the manuscript, where he writes that "while imprisoned, the Inka Atahualpa conversed with Don Francisco Pizarro, Don Diego de Almagro, and the other Spaniards, and played the game of chess with them, which they call *taptana*. And he was a very peaceful prince, and thus he entertained himself amicably with the Christians" (388 [390]).

The Danish-Ecuadorian archaeologist and historian Olaf Holm (1958) argued that the account of Atahualpa playing chess with his Spanish prisoners is a legend that emerged in the 17th century, due to the fact that such information never appears in any of the earlier 16th century eyewitness account of the conquest. The first to relate this story is Herrera y Tordesillas in 1615 (68 [Decada 5, Ch. 3, Book 2]). Holm thinks that the incorporation of a boardgame in later chronicles occurred for two reasons. First, it stemmed from the need to make the captivity of Atahualpa – a monarch – look less brutal than it may have actually been. Second, this may originate from the misunderstanding of a description reported in earlier Spanish accounts, which mentioned that the Inka's army wore a tunic with a chequered design that resembled a chessboard (e.g., de Xérez 1891:89; de Estete 1918).⁴⁰ However, as noted by Holm (1958:100-01), Guaman Poma did not use Herrera as a source and neither did Herrera have access to Guaman Poma's manuscript.

This means that Guaman Poma can be treated as an independent, but not eyewitness, testimony attesting to the play of a boardgame by Atahualpa and the Spaniards. However, Guaman Poma illustrated a European alquerque board, which was a common game in Spain at that time, but referred to it as chess in the text. Even if we were to concede that Atahualpa actually played a boardgame with the Spaniards at Cajamarca, these contradictions prevent us from drawing any further conclusion about the nature and indigeneity of the game itself. The drawing was simply meant to illustrate that Atahualpa played a boardgame with his guard, and Guaman Poma – who must have been familiar with European boardgames that had probably become widespread in the Andean region by his time – drew something that

⁴⁰ There are many surviving examples of Inka garments with this decorative pattern. See for instance the Inka tunic at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) of New York, n° [2017.674](#).

his intended audience (the Spanish king) would have immediately recognised as a game-board (and that he himself may have enjoyed playing).

To complicate the picture is a similar alquerque board – albeit slightly modified – found archaeologically as a graffiti on the stairs leading to the entrance of the main church in the Andean village of Chinchero (Figure 8) (Alcina Franch et al. 1976; Alcina Franch 1980). The central square of present-day Chinchero, including the access to the church, was built during colonial times on top of the previous Inka architecture, which was incorporated into the new buildings (Alcina Franch et al. 1976:7-26). Several graffiti appear on the Inka stone masonry of the square and church of Chinchero. Most are made up of abstract lines and geometrical shapes, with a few representing sketched animal shapes. Given the Inka architecture continued to be used during the colonial period, there is no way to establish conclusively whether these graffiti are pre-Columbian or not, but Alcina Franch et al. (1976) claim to have no doubts that they are. However, this claim is not substantiated by further evidence, and this is reflected in the discussion of the alquerque graffiti board, which they claim to be an indigenous pre-Columbian game, possibly a *taptana*. An argument in favour of the pre-Columbian origins of this board is that it is not entirely identical to the European alquerque, as it displays an additional triangular shape on one of its four sides.

Other graffiti boards depicting the same modified alquerque grid have been found in Cuzco – where they sometimes have two additional triangles (Solar and Hostnig 2007) and in Curi Leuvú, Neuquén, Argentina (Hajduk et al. 2013). In both these places, they appear again in colonial contexts, which leads the latter authors to conclude that these graffiti boards represent a version of a Spanish hunt-game, originating from alquerque and later modified through regional adaptations (Solar and Hostnig 2007:304-05; Hajduk et al. 2013:106). The mechanics of play of the South American version might be traced back to a specific type of alquerque documented in the *Libro de los juegos* of Alfonso X (1283:Fol. 91v) under the name ‘seeking the hare’. The modification to the alquerque board was preserved in Chile in a game known as *Komikan* among the Mapuche, where it was still played until recently, but also in Argentina and Peru where it was known by different names such as Solitario, Leona, (or Leonera) (Depaulis 1998:45; Culin 1898b:876; Matus 1920:10; Hajduk et al. 2013:106).

While this change differentiates these South American boards from their European alquerque counterparts (as well as the gameboard illustrated by Guaman Poma), the

evidence suggests that this was a later colonial evolution of a game introduced by the Spaniards. Early descriptions of the pre-Hispanic *taptana* present a race game that had very little to do with the hunt-game played on this slightly modified alquerque board. There are no cogent reasons to believe that either Guaman Poma's alquerque drawing or the graffiti boards from Chinchero and Cusco are examples of pre-Columbian games (*contra* Depaulis 1998; Holm 1958).

III

The ethnographic record can help us gain a deeper insight into native Andean gaming practices. Particularly, there are a few cases in which games have been documented in their entirety, including board shape, paraphernalia, and game mechanics.

A relevant concept that needs to be briefly discussed before proceeding to the following discussion is that of *ludeme*. The term *ludeme* originates in the context of game-design theory and it refers to the elements that represent the core conceptual structures of a game, providing researchers and designers with abstract categories through which games can be analysed and articulated (Parlett 2016). The term was coined in the 1970s by Pierre Berloquin and it was influenced by the structuralist thinking of the time, via analogy with words such as *phoneme* and *grapheme* (Depaulis 2019; see also Schmidt-Madsen 2024:78-81). They comprise every building block of a game, from the mechanics of play to the material components of a game set. Parlett (2016:82) further elaborated on this concept defining it as the “fundamental unit of play, often equivalent to a ‘rule’ of play” characterised by an “ability or propensity to pass from one game or class of game to another”. More recently, Browne provided a working definition:

A ludeme is a discrete unit of information relevant to any game, which may be atomic or compound in nature, and which can be readily transferred between games to change the function of the game in at least one plausible case.

(Browne 2021:16)

In the following pages, we will adhere to this notion of ludeme. Thinking in terms of ludemes makes it possible to break a game down into its tangible and intangible constituent parts.

However, to avoid falling into the trap of deconstructing a game excessively into parts that would hardly make sense for our purposes, we will abide by the caveat proposed by Schmidt-Madsen (2024:79) and have the term encompass both atomic and compound ludemic units. For example, the knight's move in chess is a compound ludeme composed of atomic ones, such as the direction of movement, adjacency of cells, the ability to leap over other pieces etc., but it will be considered in itself a ludeme.

A further attribute of ludemes, which is key to this study, is their transferability from one game to another. Ludemes act as 'ludic memes' (Parlett 2016:81) – an analogical borrowing from the concept of 'cultural meme' elaborated by Dawkins (1976:190-201) – because they have the capacity to travel from game to game, allowing us to track the historical patterns of individual as well as pools of ludemes shared by different games or a whole game family. This latter aspect is what makes ludemes particularly relevant to archaeological and anthropological research (Crist and Soemers 2023; Browne 2018).

In the Andean case, as the early colonial sources indicate considerable overlap in gaming terminology and suggest the existence of several distinct yet somewhat backgammon-like race games, it is productive to conceive of games not as "monolithic entities" but rather as "interconnected ludemic composites" (Schmidt-Madsen 2024:80), forming regional webs that transcend spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries. This perspective enables a nuanced understanding of what distinguishes one game from another, highlighting how games evolve through modifications – by tweaking, adding, or removing their ludemic elements. By identifying South American or specifically Andean ludemes, one can attempt to isolate certain aspects of the game rules or board characteristics that are quintessentially indigenous to the Andean region, rather than belonging to the pool of ludemes imported through European influence.

Ultimately, the goal of this inquiry is to identify ludemes that may have been indigenous to the Andes (i.e., non-European), assess their distribution and prevalence (for example, whether they appear consistently across a diverse range of race games), and determine whether such analysis might cautiously enable the reconstruction of foundational elements of historical (and prehistoric) Andean race games.

As a final proviso, the following discussion of ludemes in the Andean region is not intended as a revival of earlier diffusionist theories or to assert continuity in meaning,

symbolism, or ludic practices over time and across space. Rather, the goal is to investigate whether shared pools of ludemes exist within a region known for prolonged cultural interactions. While individual games may have significantly transformed in their meanings, social functions, and formal characteristics, certain fundamental ludemes may have continued to circulate regionally, contributing to the creation and structuring of new games. This approach is starting to be seen as an asset in anthropological and archaeological studies of cross-cultural connections through time and space (e.g., Schmidt-Madsen 2024).⁴¹

Some of the native boardgames for which we have a complete ruleset have already been mentioned in the previous analysis of games reported in ethnographic studies. The complete rulesets for these games are described in Appendix A, and an overview of them is shown in Table 2, which reports for each game the layout of the track and a few key elements belonging to its game mechanics, paying particular attention to the ludemic elements that these games share and that may differentiate them from European examples. ‘Linear’ indicates a single line straight track, while ‘extended linear’ refers to single tracks that are not straight and have been elongated by curving them or folding them onto themselves. The second attribute – central compartment – refers to the significance of the compartment placed at the centre of the track’s layout, usually at the convergence of two opposite and symmetrical sequences of compartments (a *tinkuy* of sorts). Particularly, it highlights if this compartment has a special function in the game rules or even a special symbolism associated with it. For example, in the case of the Gran Chaco game Chunquánti/Tsúka, the central compartment is seen as a river or lake, and it causes the token that falls into it to remain blocked if it does not manage to flee during the following turn (Nordenskiöld 1910; 1918). ‘Equal’ means that each player has the same number of tokens. ‘Movement’ instead simply refers to the mechanics of play, particularly, whether tokens are moved freely or according to the numbers determined by a randomizing device. The ‘interaction’ and ‘objective’ indicate if and how the opponents’ game pieces can interact with each other by capturing, ousting, or otherwise, and finally, the objective is the way in which the game can be won.

⁴¹ The Digital Ludeme Project attempted to map the spread of ludemes from around the world over time. A repository of traditional games with ludemic information was developed as a result – <https://ludii.games/library.php>.

We have only four well-documented indigenous games and these are all variations of race-games, with different interaction modes, fields, and objectives. Three of them have some recurrent characteristic features. Notably, these are the three which originate from indigenous Andean games. One is called *huayru* and is still played in Sigsig and is part of a larger tradition of Inka origin, examined in Chapter 2. Another is called *píchica* and has been documented in Argentina (see App. D). It is said to have come from indigenous communities, and its name is clearly related to the Quechua *pichca* (Gentile 1998). Finally, a game from the Gran Chaco, Bolivia, may have also been related to the Quechua cultural area. As discussed in Chapter 1, Nordenskiöld (1918:168-69) was interested in the gameboards precisely because he believed the Gran Chaco had been culturally connected to the Central Andean area and that this game proved it. He noted how the names associated with the different instances of this game in the Gran Chaco and the labels used for its scores appeared to be Quechua borrowings. For example, in the Chaco this game is variably known as *Chunquánti* or *Tsúka* (among other variations), which appear to descend from the Quechua *chunca*, discussed earlier. Further examples include the terminology for stick throws – *tauva* is the term used to refer to a throw that results in four points. Nordenskiöld suggests that it is related to ‘*tawa*’, which means four in Quechua. While more research is needed to verify these connections, it is feasible that some of the nomenclature used for this type of games in the Chaco is actually of Quechua (Andean) origin, suggesting that so is this family of games.

The ethnographic sample of indigenous boardgames from the Andean region is admittedly very poor. Lack of anthropological interest in the subject has resulted in limited sampling of gaming practices.⁴² Only a wider sample of native games can illuminate common patterns that would make a characterisation more robust.

Notwithstanding, this survey of relevant native Andean games reveals recurrent features that characterise them.

- They are all race games.
- A capturing mechanism of interaction exists in addition to ousting.

⁴² This is particularly notable when compared with work done in other regions of the world, such as Africa, where mancala games have been the subject of detailed studies from Kenya to Madagascar (e.g., Townshend 1979; 1986; de Voogt 1999), or North America (Culin 1898a; 1907).

- The goal of the game is not only removing all the player's pieces from the board, but also of overwhelming the opponent, by capturing their pieces.
- A central compartment with special function and symbolism where the two halves or parts of the track converge, which usually plays a special role. Often, other compartments placed at regular intervals also have a special function.
- Two (*huayru* and *píchica*) have an extended linear track taking different shapes, through folding or curving.
- The use of a single die with six sides (even if usually only five are used).

The capturing methods and objectives of these games are different from the known European race-games the Spaniards introduced to the Americas during colonial times, such as *alquerque*, *tables* (backgammon), chess, *chequers*, nine-(also three- or six-)men's-Morris.⁴³ This suggests that they likely are indigenous and may descend from Amerindian pre-Hispanic games or, more generally, gaming practices.

For example, the fact that in the Gran Chaco players have only one marker/token that can eat unmovable pieces (called *sheep*) on the opponent's half of the board is a structural aspect unknown in European race-games. Likewise, none of the European games emphasise the central compartment at the convergence of two halves, and the specific shapes the extended linear tracks acquire are also unknown in European examples of race-games – whether the game of the goose or the backgammon family.

I take these recurrent elements, unknown in European games, to be indigenous Andean ludemes, unaffected by European influence and indicative of local gaming practices. Their antiquity cannot be established conclusively but some evidence would suggest they descend from games that existed in the early colonial and late pre-Columbian period. For example, their names are related to *píchca*, *huayro*, and *chunca*, mentioned in colonial dictionaries and chronicles. Additionally, the scattered descriptions available indicate that indigenous games were also race-games akin to backgammon, thus involving an ousting and/or capturing mechanism, the use of dice, and a(n) (extended) linear track.⁴⁴

⁴³ Most of the games are still played today and their antiquity is attested to in the “Libro de los juegos” (Alfonso X 1283), which includes their description and illustrations.

⁴⁴ The material culture associated with boardgames is also characterised by remarkable stability and longevity in time and space. A game like 20-squares, for example, has been transmitted across cultures over a period of about 1400 years with only minor or no alterations (de Voogt et al. 2013; Crist et al. 2016; Neiman 1995).

This can be of some help when examining the archaeological record in search for gameboards and when reviewing the corpus of ancient Andean compartmentalised boards. This will be particularly relevant to the discussion of the board Types-1, 2, and 3. As discussed in Chapters 4, 6-8, these boards are characterised by an S/Z- or U-shaped track converging at a central compartment, which has a different shape, suggesting a special function. Sometimes, this shape can be symbolically significant, such as a cross. In addition to the central compartment, other compartments placed in the corners (Type-1, 3) or on one side (Type-2) also seem to have played a special role and stand out as different – either because they are elevated or have a distinct shape. These morphological characteristics are reminiscent of indigenous Andean gameboards reported ethnographically, particularly the folding linear track layout and the significance of the central compartment. They are also similar to the early-colonial gameboards described by Bertonio in the passages cited earlier. These had an extended linear track with a river-like or circular shape, which would match the shape of respectively Type-1/3 and Type-2 (see Chapter 4). Arguably, if these are key indigenous ludemes characterising Andean gameboards that have survived into the colonial and contemporary era, their formal similarity to the archaeological gameboards classified as Type-1, 2 and 3 suggest an additional link to gaming.

Let us now then turn to the database of archaeological Andean compartmentalised boards, including the aforementioned typologies as well as others. The next chapter will provide an overview of each typology's morphological, material chronological, and (when available) cultural traits. It also introduces the methodological framework for data collection and database analysis.

Methodology and Database Analysis

This chapter presents information about the compartmentalised boards that form the database in Appendix C, including data collection, structure, and analysis. It is necessary to examine the structure of the database as it forms the backbone of this work.

Data about compartmentalised boards from the Andean area have been collected at various locations in highland Ancash, Peru, Azuay, Ecuador; museums and private collections in Peru, Ecuador, U.S.A., Italy, Germany, and Sweden; as well as via analysis of reports and fieldnotes from excavation projects in Peru. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been gathered during fieldwork. Whenever possible, boards made of organic material (different types of wood) were sampled for radiocarbon dating. The boards' main morphological aspects – length, width, height (or depth), number of compartments and their size – were measured using a meter tape, and their weights were recorded with a commercial scale. In the case of standardised boards, repeating layout patterns were recorded to analyse stylistic variations within a recurring template, focusing on the arrangement of compartments. Qualitative aspects, including the fineness of carving, were recorded, along with descriptions of the material(s) used. The degree of fineness of carving was assessed visually on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), according to surface polish, the crispness of edges, the degree of orthogonality, the overall geometric precision of forms, the uniformity in the size of compartments, and the presence of iconographic components (e.g., references to architectural forms). This criterion rests on the working assumption that boards showing finer carving entailed a greater investment of labour and may therefore be associated with contexts of elite production and use. All boards were photographed, and a few selected examples underwent photogrammetry.

The majority of the documented boards, included in the database are housed in museum and private collections. A corpus of 71 has been compiled by Lau (2016:Ch. 6 and Appendix), while others were documented by the author for the first time. These boards were mainly found as isolated objects, and only occasionally in documented excavations. In the

case of boards coming from controlled excavations, documentation was supplemented by field notes, excavation reports, or publications, as well as personal communication with the archaeologists who excavated them. Some of the boards coming from a scientific excavation have remained unpublished until now and are discussed here for the first time, owing to the assistance of various archaeologists.

Most of the items recorded in the database, however, were not recovered from controlled archaeological excavations, which limits the availability of precise contextual and stratigraphic information. In certain cases, provenance can be reconstructed with relative confidence, though this is not universally possible. Among the boards that do not proceed from controlled excavations, some originate in looted contexts, while others were discovered by agricultural workers and cannot be classified as 'looted', given the legal and ethical implications of this designation. To avoid the potentially inappropriate connotations associated with such terminology, boards of uncertain or undocumented provenance found in local or indigenous contexts are classified in the database as "chance finds" – an umbrella term by which I include both looted pieces and accidental discoveries. Accidental discoveries refer to common instances in the Central Andean region, where archaeological artefacts are uncovered by local people during agricultural, construction, or other ordinary work, often within private properties or in any case, in areas lying outside official archaeological sites. All the boards examined in this work and labelled as chance finds have been discovered before the 1970s. This term is preferred for its neutrality, as their recovery outside controlled excavation does not imply looting for financial gain.

The artefact assemblage that forms the subject of this study derives from numerous *legacy collections* – a broad term encompassing material from past excavations, both informal and controlled. Broadly defined, a legacy collection refers to any assemblage of archaeological objects separated from their original excavator(s) (King 2016:5-7). A substantial portion of archaeological material from the Central Andean region, now held in museum and private collections around the world, exhibits these characteristics. Such material is often overlooked by archaeologists, who tend to exclude it from academic research. This exclusion is primarily due to the absence of stratigraphic context – perceived as an impediment to rigorous archaeological studies – but also to the ethical and legal concerns arising from the problematic and frequently contested histories of these objects. As a result, only a limited number of visually

striking or unique artefacts from these collections – those deemed display-worthy – fall under the scope of art-historical research, while the rest remain neglected. In the case of these boards, they have only been included in archaeological texts as convenient illustrations of architecture or counting practices.

However, the case has been made that archaeology can benefit from the inclusion of these assemblages, whether they come from past excavations or consist of individual finds scattered across museum storages, private houses, fields, or public buildings. The argument in favour of their inclusion in archaeological studies is that by ignoring them we incur in a double, if not triple, loss. First, not only has the original context been lost forever, but by excluding them from further academic studies on account of their problematic past, we lose the opportunity to learn more about these items and the cultures that produced them. Additionally, by effectively hiding these objects, we prevent possible descendant communities from ever learning about their existence (Berger et al. 2022:62; Berger 2019; Levine and de Luna 2013:264). In response to this, the discipline has witnessed in recent years a rise of what is known as ‘museum archaeology’ – broadly construed as the study of artefact assemblages and collections in museums and beyond, after or aside from their excavation. New studies have highlighted how this can still be a productive approach in advancing our knowledge of past human cultures (Stevenson 2022b; Harris et al. 2019; Majluf 2007; Osborne 2016; Wingfield 2017).⁴⁵

In this research, I have included boards originating from several different assemblages of archaeological artefacts, including museum collections with little documented provenance, material scientifically excavated in the past, as well as collections associated with what Bezerra and Gomes Ferreira (2022) define as “affective museums”. This term refers to private collections of archaeological artefacts – often situated within local or indigenous contexts – that have come to be perceived by their owners as mementos, acquiring emotional value through connections to personal biographies. Despite their differences, each of these collections contributes distinct and valuable information to the present study of

⁴⁵ In a way, this is archaeology looking back to its past. Archaeological studies, by and large, have their origins inside the museum, as the laboratory where artefacts were assembled and re-assembled to address different research questions, including the establishment of chronological sequences – e.g., C. J. Thomsen’s three-age-system (Eskildsen 2012; Stevenson 2022a).

compartmentalised boards. As outlined below, examining these assemblages in the aggregate offers crucial insights into the significance and potential functions of these artefacts.

I

In order to understand cultural processes and sequences, archaeologists often employ a site-based approach, where various types of information, recovered through excavation and related laboratory work, are examined in combination. Yet there are artefact types that cannot be fully understood in isolation and need to be studied as part of broader assemblages. In the case of the Andean boards discussed in this work, the analysed corpus was documented through a combination of fieldwork surveys, museum study visits, literature review, and the examination of archaeological excavation reports to document boards found in situ. The resulting database includes artefacts with variable provenances and characteristics, displaying a wide spatial and temporal distribution, with regional density varying significantly over time. I propose to conceptualize this corpus of boards as a “surface assemblage” in its own right (Harrison 2011).

It is important to note, however, that the way I employ this term is not entirely orthodox and thus needs to be explained. In archaeology, a surface assemblage consists of the collection of artefacts and other archaeological materials (e.g., ceramic sherds) found on the surface of a site in the present. These often have an inherently diachronic character and can be composed of disparate materials, which need to be (re-)assembled by archaeologists depending on their epistemological and theoretical purposes. The distribution and characteristics of surface assemblages have been examined to address various archaeological questions (Lewarch and O'Brien 1981).

More broadly, the notion of *assemblage* as a framework for interpreting the archaeological record originates in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and has been further developed by DeLanda (2016), who interprets assemblages as “heterogeneous groupings in which the grouping itself could be distinguished as a whole from the sum of its parts.” (Harrison 2011:155). As Harrison (2011:156) observes, the significance of “thinking of assemblages as heterogeneous groupings of humans and non-humans”, which can be dynamically assembled and re-assembled, has far-reaching implications for how we conceptualise archaeological material. Metaphorically, this approach entails a move away from the

traditional conception of “archaeology-as-excavation” (158), rooted in the geological trope of “stratigraphic depth” (155), toward a more horizontal perspective aptly illustrated by the image of the surface assemblage.

The boards comprising the database are conceived in this way. They are scattered across a broadly construed *surface*, both spatially – encompassing the Andean region and museums worldwide – and temporally, in terms of the present moment in which this study is conducted. Conceptualising the boards as a surface assemblage allows the development of an analytical methodology, modelled on approaches used for site-specific surface assemblages, and makes it possible to analyse a dispersed corpus through relational rather than purely typological criteria.

Much like site-specific surface assemblages, this corpus is diachronic: individual pieces date from different times and are associated with distinct cultural groups. They also vary morphologically, materially, and stylistically. What binds these Andean artefacts together and allows for their aggregation is the shared presence of sequences of hollowed compartments or gridded spaces. The analysis of their layout and the identification of patterned arrangements of the holes/spaces led to the reconfiguration of the assemblage into distinct typological groupings.

Following Lucas (2012:196-97), typologies are here understood as being “based on relations of similarity between objects, and that such similarity is not fortuitous but directly linked to concrete practices of production in the past [...] The conventional way to see such reproduction is in terms of some abstract archetype [...] a mental template [...]”. In this sense, the typological groups are defined by the repeated reproduction of ancient mental templates, expressed through geometric layouts and a characteristic spatial and numerical arrangement of compartments – whether these take the form of hollowed-out pits or marked spaces within a chequered grid.

The documented boards have been grouped into seven principal Types, three of which (Type 1, 2, and 3) represent design variations on a shared, standardised layout. These form the principal and best-known typological group, which has been the subject of scholarly discussion for over 150 years (see chapter I). Type-5 boards represent an exception: this group includes all those boards for which no recurrent formal features could be identified. One could argue that the defining commonality of this Type lies precisely in the absence of

standardisation or a shared mental template. As such, Type-5 boards appear to be isolates in the current archaeological record, although further research can reveal new patterns.

A final methodological remark concerns the meaning of *archaeological context*, insofar as these boards are concerned. ‘Context’ in archaeology typically refers to an artefact’s matrix (the material in which it was found), its horizontal or vertical provenience within that matrix, and its association with artefacts in the same matrix or excavation (Renfrew and Bahn 2020:585). However, this work employs this term in light of a broader understanding of what *context* can indicate. I will follow Darvill’s (2002) definition of “context” in archaeology:

1. A generic term for the smallest identifiable stratigraphic unit recognized in an excavation; also known as a layer. Contexts may be positive in the sense of an accumulation or deposit of some kind, or negative where they represent a cut or the removal of something. In single-context excavation all finds, samples, and records are directly linked to the contexts identified during the excavation process.
2. The *position* of an archaeological find *in time and space*, established by measuring and assessing its *associations, matrix, and provenance*. The assessment includes the study of what has happened to the find since it was buried in the ground.
3. The physical and cultural circumstances surrounding the deposition of archaeological material and the formation of archaeological deposits [emphasis mine].

(Darvill 2002:98)

While all three points are relevant to the present work, point 2 is particularly significant, since it incorporates the notion of a find’s position in space and time. This allows for a wider range of associations beyond the site of excavation, which are key to the analysis of these boards, as will be presently seen. Additionally, the inclusion of the term ‘provenance’ by Darvill suggests a broader definition encompassing both an object’s pre- and post-depositional history.

Data pertaining to the distribution of boards, their morphological and typological characteristics, and their excavation context is coupled by the proposal of a new chronology. This was achieved through C-14 dating, available stratigraphic information, distribution analysis, and stylistic seriation. If these boards exist in the present on a single horizontal surface, their chronological depth adds a vertical dimension. This vertical dimension enables a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural history of these objects, offering insights into their cultural associations, social uses, functions, ceremonial significance, and how these roles may have transformed and adapted to new socio-cultural contexts throughout their centuries-long existence as culturally significant artefacts of the pre-Hispanic Andes.

The database identifies seven Types, which reflect the primary categories into which these boards can be subdivided. These Types differ in form, design, and in the distribution of compartments.

- Types 1, 2, and 3, which I will refer to as the “core corpus” of the database. These three Types will be the focus of Chapters 5-9.
 - This is further subdivided in three chronological and stylistic phases (A, B1, and B2), each associated with a different cultural groups and geographic area.
- Pashash (Type 4).
- Group of non-standardised boards (Type 5).
- Tacalshapa boards (Type 6).
- 12-spaces south- and north-coast boards (Type 7).

II

Types 1, 2, and 3 form the core corpus of the database. These are the primary and most extensive sample of boards, as well as the best-documented typologies. They are the most widespread Types, belonging to the same overarching artefact class, featuring standardised features. However, they are classified into three different subcategories based on structural differences. Boards in the core corpus maintained enduring relevance for multiple pre-Columbian Andean cultural groups and continued in use for many centuries during the first millennium AD.

The compartments of these boards are typically rectangular or square in shape (although circular examples have been documented), with varying depths – averaging between 1 and 2

cm – and appear to have been intended as containers for small items, such as seeds or pebbles. In the vast majority of cases, their dimensions suggest they were designed to allow human fingers to interact with their contents. They exhibit a high degree of standardisation and share various defining features. However, the spatial arrangement of these standardised features varies, allowing for the identification of subcategories. These correspond to Type-1, 2, and 3, as defined by Lau (2016:Chapter 6). The same typological distinction has been retained in the database because it is still valid and useful to the present discussion.⁴⁶ Nordenskiöld's (1918:170) classification of the board's layout is also still useful to visualise distinct zones, and it will be followed here. This facilitates the identification of Type-1/2/3's arrangement of compartments (Table 3, Figure 9).

Zone A is characterised by special compartments, often elevated as a stepped platform over the rest of the boards. Even if not elevated, they are identifiable by specific features, such as shape, size, or a combination of both. Zone A exhibits variation in both the number of stepped levels and the number of compartments. Such variability is partially but not entirely attributable to changes in style, design, and layout over time and across regions.

Zone B is composed of two converging sequences of 7 small compartments, but their track differs depending on Type.

Zone C is composed of three usually larger and sometimes differently shaped compartments. One is placed at the convergence of the two tracks of Zone B compartments. Two additional compartments, usually featuring an elongated shape, are placed to the sides of the central compartment.

These zones are repeated on both sides of the boards, according to two different symmetries, which affect the placement of Zone A, B, and C on the board's surface. A primary typological distinction depends on the nature of the symmetry characterising their layout. Type-1/3's layout is symmetrical with respect to the board's central point, known as *rotational symmetry*. Type-2 boards display a symmetry about the central line along the long side of the board, known as *reflection symmetry*, though they share the same underlying structural principles as Type-1/3. Type-1 and Type-3 instead differ based on shape. Type-1 is characterised by a rectangular format, while Type 3 is more rounded in shape, ranging from elliptical to

⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that the distinction between Types 1 and 3 is primarily one of design, rather than of structural layout.

fully circular (in one known instance – PAC-01). Type-3 can be considered a subset of Type-1, though with a few important qualifications, as certain Type-3 examples clearly reflect distinct periods, stylistic conventions, and possibly divergent functions (see Chapter 8).

As a consequence of rotational symmetry in Type-1/3 boards, Zone A is positioned along the top-right/bottom-left or top-left/bottom-right diagonal in rectangular boards, or on opposite sides of the ellipsis in rounded examples. In Type-1/3, Zone B departs at the side of Zone A and converge at the central compartment of Zone C, which is the centre of rotation. The track typically follows an S- or Z-shaped trajectory. Zone A may include as few as one level with a single compartment or as many as three levels with three compartments, or a single level containing four compartments. The most common configuration consists of two levels, each with one compartment. Regional and chronological patterns are discernible in the distribution of these variants. In two cases, the two elongated compartments of Zone C are absent.

Type-2 boards can be rectangular or D-shaped with more rounded features. Zones are arranged following reflection symmetry. Zone As are located side by side on the same short end of the rectangle. The number of levels and compartments in Zone A varies, though the extent of variation is smaller than in Type-1 boards. This may be due in part to the smaller sample size for Type-2 boards, and their shorter chronological span.

Additionally, in the case of Type-2 boards, two rows of seven small compartments originate from the outer edges of Zone A and follow L- and reversed L-shaped paths, converging at a central fifteenth compartment usually located on the opposite short end of the rectangle. The two elongated compartments of Zone C extend from this end toward Zone A. Variations exist (Figure 9).

Type-1 and 3 boards are known in various materials, including stone, wood, and ceramic. By contrast, Type-2 boards are attested only in stone and ceramic. The database records multiple properties for each board when available. In some cases, however, it was not possible to obtain all metric or descriptive data due to the lack of direct access to the physical artefact. In such instances, documentation relied on museum catalogues or secondary publications, when available. Recorded metrics include height, width, and length, as well as the dimension of individual features such as the compartments. Weight has been recorded wherever possible, in order to assess questions of portability and its change over time.

In the database, ‘small compartment’ designates any of the 14 compartments of Zone B; Top and middle compartment(s), the compartments situated at different levels of Zone A; Long Compartment, the elongated compartment of Zone C, and finally the Central Compartment is the one where the Small Compartments converge in Zone C.

In addition to three morphological typologies, the other primary organisational principle structuring of the core corpus in the database is based on the proposed identification of three major chronological, cultural, and stylistic stages in the history of these boards. This is the first time in which a subdivision into distinct stylistic and chronological phases is suggested for these objects. It is based primarily on stratigraphic data and radiocarbon assays of five wooden boards housed in museum collections in Peru, Italy, and Germany (Tables 4, 5). These chronological markers were cross-referenced with notable stylistic changes in external design, material characteristics, and their geographical provenience. This comparative framework has allowed for the construction of a provisional stylistic seriation of the boards over time and across different Andean regions, as well as the identification of their principal cultural affiliations. The current evidence indicates three phases, which I will refer to as A, B1, and B2 (Table 6).

The first phase designated as “phase A” in the database, corresponds approximately to the Early Intermediate Period (EIP, ca. AD 1-700) (Rowe 1962; 1967; Rowe and Menzel 1967; Quilter 1991) (Figure 10), with particular emphasis on the centuries during which the Recuay culture flourished in highland Ancash (ca. AD 200-700). This first phase is the most geographically restricted, being confined to the Recuay sphere of influence. Despite this limited geographic distribution, Phase A includes the largest number of documented examples in the core corpus. Boards from this phase encompass all three Types.

The second phase, termed “B1” in the database, corresponds to the Middle Horizon (MH, ca. AD 700-1000), and exhibits a broader geographical distribution. It includes areas traditionally associated with the Wari heartland (Ayacucho, Huamanga) as well as peripheral Wari sites in the southern and northern highlands of Peru. At present, no boards corresponding to this phase have been documented on the Peruvian south coast. So far, only Type-1/3 examples have been documented for this phase.

The third stylistic phase, “B2”, is contemporaneous with B1, falling within the MH, yet it is distinguished from B1 both stylistically and geographically. Its distribution includes the

Peruvian central and north coast (e.g., Pachacamac, Chan Chan, Castillo de Tomaval), as well as the southern Ecuadorian highlands (Chordeleg, Azuay). Although the current sample may not fully capture the extent of this northern tradition, it clearly reveals a higher concentration of B2 boards on the Peruvian north coast. While the distribution of Phase B2 is also likely connected to the broader Wari cultural influence during the Middle Horizon, distinct stylistic and material features suggest that this represents a parallel, coastal board-making tradition. The extension of B2 into the Ecuadorian highlands – specifically in the territory associated with the Tacalshapa culture during the Ecuadorian Integration Period (ca. AD 500-1500) (Meggers and Evans 1961; Meggers 1966:25) – is based on a single example. Despite its highland origins, this board is stylistically and culturally aligned with the north coast tradition of Phase B2. This phase includes Type-1 and 3 boards.

Table 4 presents the radiocarbon dates obtained from six wooden boards in European and Peruvian museums, sampled by the author. Table 5 provides the main chronological references for boards with the most securely documented stratigraphic contexts. In addition to ceramic associations, radiocarbon dates have been included wherever available. These C-14 dates derive either from the same stratigraphic layer as the board itself or from an adjacent area directly associated with the context in which the board was found, thus offering a temporal indication of the board's depositional context.

As seen in Table 6, phase A spans much of the Early Intermediate Period in highland Ancash (MALI-1, CAB-1), aligning with the rise of the Recuay culture. The two available radiocarbon dates show a statistical overlap between AD 541-575 (Figure 11), suggesting that such boards were likely in use among the Recuay by at least the 6th century A.D (see also Grieder 1978:192; Smith 1977:111). Their use may have extended across a longer period within Recuay history and may have involved changes in design, function, and ritual significance over time. While the excavation context of one board (CAB-1) indicates a highly ceremonial setting, this may have not been the case since the beginning, but it does suggest that, at least by this point, they were involved in ceremonial practices.

Following this initial phase, boards began to appear outside of highland Ancash, particularly on the Peruvian north coast and in the southern highlands. The date ranges associated with this broader distribution fall within the Middle Horizon, especially the final two centuries (9th and 10th century) – TOM.1, PAC-1, MUD-1, MAN-1, COP-1, BAU-1, BAU-2. The

minimum overlap among these MH dates is between AD 850-894 (Figure 11), indicating that boards likely spread across Wari cultural areas by the 9th century AD – a period marked by a significant socio-political reorganisation within the Wari world (see Chapter 5).

Building upon the geographic distribution and chronological framework established through this analysis, it becomes possible to delineate key stylistic and morphological transformations associated with each phase. Based on the identification of their material composition and formal characteristics it will be possible in some case to suggest the attribution of individual boards – unprovenanced and devoid of excavation context – to specific periods and cultural groups.

In Chapters 6-8, each phase will be examined in detail, focusing on its distribution patterns, stylistic and morphological features, materials, and physical attributes, such as weight. Each section will conclude with an analysis of selected case studies – boards with well-documented archaeological contexts – which serve as critical reference points for a discussion of these objects' function, symbolism, and social significance.

III

Type-4 is represented by a very limited sample of boards – only two: CAB-24 and CAB-25 – both currently housed in the Museo Arqueológico Zonal of Cabana, located in the province of Pallasca, northern Ancash. Most of the objects in the local museum of Cabana are associated with the nearby archaeological site of Pashash – a fortified Recuay hilltop settlement, discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Pashash is also the site that has yielded the largest number of phase A boards of the core corpus. Given that this Type is represented by only two examples, the sample is insufficient to conduct broader analysis. While unprovenanced, these two boards likely originate from the local area around Cabana, which features several archaeological sites (Grieder 1978; Lau et al. 2023). No similar boards have been documented anywhere else.

These two boards are morphologically distinct from those in the core corpus, exhibiting a unique arrangement of compartments. They are narrow, elongated rectangular boards, featuring two rows of small square compartments that converge at a series of central compartments, which are rectangular and span the length of two small square ones, while maintaining same width. The overall layout is characterised by mirror symmetry along the axis formed by

the central compartments, the number of which varies between two and three (Figure 12). Both boards are made of a local stone and are fragmentary, each having one side broken near the centre.

CAB-24 is thinner and carved on both sides, each displaying the same Type-4 design. One side is more finely polished and features three central compartments and eight small ones (two parallel rows of four). The opposite side appears to be an unfinished version of the same layout, with two central compartments (instead of three) and an undetermined number of small compartments. It is relatively light, weighing 9 kg, with an estimated reconstructed weight of approximately 13 kg if complete.

CAB-25 follows the same structural layout, with two central compartments and ten small compartments (five rows of two each side). It is carved only on one side and is significantly taller and heavier than CAB-24, with a reconstructed weight of approximately 60 kg and a height of about 32 cm. The board was likely fixed into the ground, as suggested by its uncarved sides and tall body, which were probably intended to remain buried or only partially visible (Figure 13).

However different these boards may be from those in the core corpus, the underlying principles structuring their layout are based on a similar symmetrical arrangement of compartments, with two opposing yet specular sides converging at the centre in differently shaped central compartments. The compartments are hollowed but shallower than those in the core corpus, with an average depth of approximately 1 cm. Still, they indicate that they were also intended to contain small items or tokens.

While additional examples are necessary to comprehend their function and context better, the presence of these boards in Cabana, near Pashash – where various types of compartmentalised boards are abundant – suggests that Recuay groups of Pashash engaged in and valued a set of ritual or quotidian practices involving the use of compartmentalised boards with symmetrical layouts. At present, there is no evidence that this board typology existed outside the Recuay settlement of Pashash, though further research and documentation are required to confirm this. If true, it would indicate a particular interest of Recuay groups living in and around Cabana in experimenting with and using compartmentalised boards.

IV

Type-5 comprises compartmentalised boards (particularly from Ancash) that do not belong to any standardised group, as their design, layout, and overall arrangement of compartments does not resemble any other example. The majority are in the museums of Huaraz and Cabana and they are likely connected with the Recuay. It should be noted however that this is due to a data collection bias, as this is the area where most field surveys have been conducted thus generating a broader sample. While there is the possibility that Recuay groups were keener to make compartmentalised boards than other cultures, this contention cannot be borne out by the current database, which is admittedly skewed.

For example, Type-5 boards found south of Huamachuco and included in the database, are probably not Recuay (Figure 14) (Topic, personal communication, 2021). These boards come from two sites related to the oracle of Catequil excavated by Topic et al. (2005) at Namanchugo and Chulite, near Santiago de Chuco, La Libertad. Topic claims these stone boards may have served as gaming devices and identifies associated conical pieces as game tokens. While this hypothesis may well be correct, their lack of standardisation prevents any study of these boards within a broader assemblage and thus their identification remains impossible to verify. Type-5 boards such as these can be studied only as a site-specific cluster in relation to the context in which they were found – provided this is known. For example, in the case of the Huamachuco boards, while gaming is a likely function, as discussed by Topic et al. (2005), a divinatory purpose should not be ruled out. Of course, gaming can itself function as a form of divination within certain ritual contexts as discussed in Chapter 2. While the discussion of these boards cannot be developed in full here, and Topic et al.'s (2005) analysis remains the most informed, they exemplify the problematics inherent to Type-5 boards.⁴⁷

In general, the carving of hollow compartments – whether in stone, clay, or wood – is a widespread and common human practice, which may serve a plethora of different purposes. Ultimately, it would be nigh on futile to try and document all boards or surfaces with hollow compartments carved on them. Humans have carved rows of compartments for many different reasons, and surfaces with hollow spaces are ubiquitous. However, there is rarely an easy way to determine their purpose. Sometime, context can help elucidate their function, but in

⁴⁷ It is possible that these as any other Type-5 board could actually belong to yet unknown standardised typologies.

the absence of a corpus with standardised features, any single example is bound to remain just a single contingent instance.

A case in point is provided by a Type-5 board from Pashash, carved at the entrance to the La Capilla sector near the trail that unravels along the ridgetop connecting Pashash to the town of Cabana (Figure 15), for a description of the site, see Chapter 6). It consists of three lines of small roughly circular hollow compartments carved on a stone surface on top of a rock shelter where various Recuay-style decorations have been carved and are still visible today (Figure 16, 17). Most of these graffiti depict well-known Recuay motifs, common across different media such as ceramic, stone, and even textiles (Lau 2014b). These motifs are here spread out on a slanted stone surface, which is sheltered from the sun and other meteorological agents by a jutting rocky outcrop. Today, an individual of average height who wants to see and interact with this surface is forced to bend in an awkward position, but the place may have looked different in the past.

While this has not been proven geochemically yet, this rocky outcrop may have possibly served as a quarry during the Recuay period, potentially indicating that Recuay stone sculptors may have been practicing the carving of motifs on this trial surface before transferring them onto a stela, sculpture, or monolith meant for the monumental elite palatial compound that towered over La Capilla hilltop. Other graffiti instead appear more casual and desultory in design and form, and they may be the product of these same sculptors idling away their free time carving and chatting, while waiting to move on to the next task or at the end of their workday. While these are speculative suppositions, the presence of these graffiti seems to be the product of unplanned and spontaneous activities.

Notably, this is the context where the three lines of hollowed pits were carved – a layout that does not display any formal similarities to any other known board. This board's vicinity to the graffiti provides a glimpse into how they may have emerged. The same contingent situation and activities that led to the creation of the rock shelter carvings may have equally led to the making of this board. What for is difficult to determine. There may be several reasons, ranging from playing a game, demonstrating the arrangement of something – even constellations – or simply as a pastime for people who would have been very familiar with the act of carving stone – a paramount practice among the Recuay. While the context does not provide additional clues clarifying what the function of this board may have been, it does however

indicate that despite its use remains enigmatic, as a cultural product it probably stems from very contingent human needs, outside of any set of ritual practices or formalised activities.

This contingency is probably what characterises most of the other Type-5 boards. While those carved in stone have survived, these are likely only a small subset of all the instances in which someone has carved in the ground, for whatever purpose, a sequence of hollowed compartments or holes – be that Recuay or any other cultural group. These ephemeral boards leave no lasting trace in the archaeological record, but they responded to the same set of fortuitous requirements and practices – whether counting, playing, teaching, illustrating something, or anything else.

Some Type-5 boards are more structured than others and appear to be related to standardised Types as well – for example, they display a formal layout belonging to a standardised Type but have a different number of compartments. This may be due to undocumented variations that cannot be fully reconstructed or even to mistakes in the making of a board. In yet other instances, while the structure is not related to any known standardised board, it still features a symmetrical layout and a meaningful shape overall, as in the case of a board with a layout resembling a rosette motif documented by Lau (2016:138, Figure 6.5B). There are also examples of seemingly Type-5 boards, which are poorly carved and makeshift instances of standardised boards from the core corpus. The compartments are arranged so disorderly that it is difficult to determine their original layout – yet their creator probably had no difficulty identifying their structure. Whenever possible, these have been moved to the core corpus, but there are instances where it is not possible to determine conclusively. Although not much further analysis can be done on them at present, it is a rich and diverse corpus and future study may find clues to their patterning.

V

Type-6 constitutes a little-known typology of compartmentalised boards featuring a standardised layout originating in the southern Ecuadorian province of Azuay and is particularly widespread in the area east of Cuenca. Although these boards have been discussed in passing (Uhle 1922a; Smith 1977; Holm 1958), they have received only limited attention as independent artefacts within their cultural contexts (Cordero 1981; Arriaga 1965; see also Segarra Íñiguez 1967). They are variably referred to as *Contadores Cañari*, reflecting the

suggestion that they may have functioned as counting devices used by the local Cañari culture (e.g., Arriaga 1965), or as *taptanas* – the early-colonial boardgame discussed in Chapter 3 (Holm 1958; Uhle 1922a).

Although the current sample includes only eight examples, additional specimens have been recorded in the past but are now lost. For example, the private collection of Jesús Arriaga in the early 20th century contained several additional boards of this typology, the current whereabouts of which are unknown. According to Arriaga (1965:474), his compartmentalised boards originated from Chordeleg, Sigsig, Gualaceo (east of Cuenca along the Santa Barbara river), as well as Patamarca (within the modern city of Cuenca) and Chacoshina near Valle, located southeast of Cuenca. Among the boards documented in the database, some are provenanced. These include two from Sigsig and two from Paute, north of Sigsig (Map 7).

Their distribution is limited to Azuay – corresponding to the area associated with the pre-Hispanic culture of Tacalshapa and subsequent Cañari. They exhibit standardised features with small negligible variations. The boards are flat and rectangular, usually made of light limestone, sandstone, or wood, with a circular plate on top characterised by raised edges. The rectangular bodies of these boards display two chequerboards, reminiscent of a tic-tac-toe grid, in which the different compartments are only indicated by incised lines and not hollowed pits. One chequerboard is placed in the top-right quarter of the rectangular board and the second in the bottom-left quarter or vice versa. Each chequerboard is composed of a three-by-three grid, forming nine cells. The bottom corner of one grid meets the top corner of the other around the centre of the board (Figure 18).

Although none of these boards have ever been recovered from controlled archaeological excavations, there is recorded information about the finding context for three of them (SIG-01, GUA-01, and GUA-02). SIG-01 (Figure 19) was found in a tomb at the site of Casa Llanos, Chobshi, near Sigsig (Map 7) (Valdez 1984:171-73), but nothing is known of the burial content, which had already been looted. The other two boards (Figures 20, 21) come instead from a burial found in the early 1970s in Guarainag (in a sector known as Ucumarina), situated further north from Sigsig, in the Paute Canton (Malo Vega 2015:36-41; personal communication, 2023). The latter two are made of wood and come from a burial rich in silver and gold artefacts, analogous in material and style to the famous tombs excavated in Chordeleg and Sigsig in the late 19th and early 20th century (see Chapter 8).

Among the recorded objects from the same burial were ceremonial spear-throwers wrapped in silver foils – one of which survives in a private collection (Figure 22). This corresponds to a typology of ceremonial spear-throwers well documented in Tacalshapa mortuary contexts (Bastian 1878:124; Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922:48-49; Uhle 1922c:110). While the remaining gold and silver pieces from this burial are now lost, Malo Vega (2015; personal communication, 2023) – who was shown this material by the excavators around the time of their discovery – reports that

Among the metal pieces in the possession of those local farmers [...] there were about a dozen of those solid *gold tokens*, which altogether weighed approximately one pound [0.5 kg]. According to what they [the discoverers] told me, they had found them piled on top of the 'carved boards' – referring to the *taptanas* or counting boards – which were located beside the 'deceased' in a corner of the mortuary chamber [*bolsón*]. [...] They had zoomorphic representations [...] one with monkeys and another with birds of prey.”

Malo Vega (2015:37)

Reportedly, these were “formally similar” (37) to those excavated in another Tacalshapa burial in Sigsig, in 1899, three of which have been preserved and are now in the collections of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI, see Figure 23) (Saville 1924; Saville and Segarra Íñiguez 2000; Malo Vega 2015). These cast gold pieces have long perplexed archaeologists and scholars due to the absence of contextual evidence and the limited number of known examples. Various yet tentative interpretations have been proposed, including the suggestion that they functioned as seals or stamps (Saville 1924:13). While conclusive insights can only be gained through new scientific excavations that uncovers such material in situ, the reported information regarding the excavation context of GUA-01 and GUA-02 sheds new light on the functions of the cast gold tokens at the NMAI in relation to this typology of Tacalshapa boards.

The small cast gold tokens at the NMAI are characterised by a circular base, upon which the object rests, and a pointed shaft extending from its centre. Protruding from the circular base are a pair of zoomorphic heads – identified in the three surviving examples as felines in

one case, snakes in another, and tentatively as either camelids or birds in a third. The underside of the circular base is smooth; although decorated with geometric motifs, there is no indication that it functioned as a stamp or seal. The base enables the object to slide easily across a surface and provides stability when standing upright. The shaft is neither sharp nor long enough to have served as a shawl or dress pin, a further possible identification.⁴⁸

Reportedly, the original context of GUA-01 and GUA-02 included many additional tokens, about a dozen, all with pairs of distinct animal heads. Their depositional arrangement – piled up on top of a Tacalshapa compartmentalised board – either GUA-01 or GUA-02 – and next to the body of the deceased, strongly suggest that these two artefacts were intended to be used together within the same set of practices. If the NMAI gold tokens are any indication, their base measures on average 2 cm which would fit within the cells forming the chequered grid of these boards – for instance, the dimensions of the compartments of GUA-01 are 2.5 x 2.5 cm.

The tokens are made in such a way that they lend themselves to be held by the pointed stem with two or three fingers, while resting on the circular base. When standing upright, the animal heads point forward and are clearly visible. The three pieces are light (30, 31, and 58 g) and can be easily handled in such a way and moved around a board. The iconicity of the animal heads makes each piece unique, thus differentiating them. Additionally, small variation in size is detectable.

If the reported context of GUA-01 and -02 is accurate, it may help explain the outward features of the tokens and suggest a probable use of the Tacalshapa boards as gaming devices rather than accounting tools. The iconicity of the pieces, their highly ceremonial deposition – buried in a lavish elite tomb – and the precious material from which they are made all point to a function beyond ordinary accounting. While gaming is not the only possible interpretation – and other ritual or divinatory purposes cannot be ruled out – the structure of the boards, composed of two symmetrical chequerboard grids intersecting at a corner, strongly evokes numerous European and Asian gameboards (e.g., alquerque, tic-tac-toe, three-, six-, or nine-men's morris, chequers etc.), placing gaming at the forefront of possible

⁴⁸ The shafts do not resemble those of typical Andean pins. These pins were a common object in the ancient Andes, often made of precious metals and popularly known in Quechua as *tupu* or *ticpi*. Unlike *tupus*, the Sigsig tokens are thick cast gold pieces.

interpretations. Additionally, the distinctive character of the tokens – with zoomorphic animal heads that differentiate each individual piece – as well as their form, provide additional support for this hypothesis. Lastly, the circular plate with raised edges found in the upper section of every board suggests a designated activity space linked to the grids. This area may have served as a surface for rolling dice or for conducting other practices such as casting lots or accumulating tokens.

Notably, as Holm (1958:103) points out, we should not dismiss Arriaga's (1965:474) comment that local people who came across these boards during informal excavations in the early 20th century referred to them as "Ingachuganas" – a term Arriaga claims was used by local huaqueros to label any object they did not recognise. This assertion is not entirely accurate, as *Inga* was commonly used in Kichwa-speaking communities of Ecuador to refer to the Inkas, and more broadly to the pre-Hispanic past. A well-known example of this usage appears in the toponym for Ecuador's main Inka site: Ingapirca, meaning "the wall of the Inka", a reference to the pre-Hispanic ruins visible at the site. The same toponym has been employed in reference to other places too, wherever ancient, even pre-Inka, ruins were visible (Fresco 1984:11; Bedoya M. 1965:55-56) – for example, the orthogonal structure at the archaeological site of Chobshi – known today as Castillo de Chobshi – was originally labelled Ingapirca de Chobshi (Valdez 1984).

It is noteworthy that the term *Ingachugana* was given without further explanation of its meaning – at least none is provided by Arriaga – but it contains two elements that are highly relevant to this discussion. The first is 'Inga', which refers to something belonging to the pre-Hispanic, or gentile, past. The second is the term *chugana*, likely a cognate of *chunca(na)*,⁴⁹ meaning "ten" but also used to refer to various boardgames in early colonial Quechua, as discussed in Chapter 3. This seemingly minor term, recorded by Arriaga from local informants, appears to mean quite appropriately "the game of the Inka", or more broadly, "pre-Columbian (board)game." Whether or not those who used this term were aware of its semantic

⁴⁹ The suffix "-na" in *chugana* is probably a verb nominaliser, which in Quechua is used to turn a "verb root into a noun referring to an abstract idea" (Howard 2013:141). For example, the verb "to do" is "ruway" in Quechua, and "ruwana" is the derivative noun, meaning "job" or "task". In this sense, *chuga* or *chunca* could have been treated as a verb from the numerical term for ten, meaning "to play" such boardgames. The term "*chuncana*" referring to boardgames is attested in both Holguín's dictionary (1952) and the anonymous dictionary edited by Antonio Ricardo (1586) (see also Chapter 3).

components is unclear, but it is possible that the name – and aspects of its meaning – outlived direct cultural memory of the function of these boards.

Another relevant factor supporting the identification of these boards as gaming devices relates to the social organisation and associated ritual practices documented for late-pre-Hispanic, colonial, and contemporary Cañari communities, as briefly discussed in Chapter 2. The Cañari are the historically attested inhabitants of Azuay and neighbouring Cañar provinces in southern Ecuador at the time of the Inka and subsequent Spanish conquests. While the degree of cultural continuity between the earlier Tacalshapa tradition and the later Cañari groups remains unclear – some scholars have posited the existence of a proto-Cañari tradition linked to Tacalshapa – ethnographic and ethnohistorical records indicate that various forms of games and ritualised duels played a vital role as integrative mechanisms among Cañari competing chiefdoms or moieties.

It is broadly accepted that the late pre-Hispanic Cañari were organised into a loose confederation of small polities that alternated between alliances and enmity (Bray 2008:538-39). Early colonial sources describe the pre-Inka period as one marked by persistent conflict among the leaders of these communities, suggesting that sociopolitical relations were based on ongoing renegotiation (Gallegos 1897:275-76). Fock's (1991) analysis of ethnohistorical and ethnographic data concerning Cañari groups concludes that such conflicts were often ritualised in the form of competitive games or combat events – referred to as *pucara* duels – which, although attenuated, persisted into the 20th century. As discussed in Chapter 2, these contests were regularly held between moieties of a single community, between territories governed by distinct caciques, or even between the broader Cañari federation and neighbouring groups. Notably, they were consistently staged at sites of particular ecological and cosmological significance – typically on strategically located hilltops situated at watersheds or at the bifurcation points of irrigation canals (locations frequently referred to as *pucarás*).

Much like the Central Andean *tinkuys* (e.g., Cama Ttito and Ttito Tica 2003; Platt 1987), these *pucara* duels functioned as ritualised safety valves, regulating intra- and inter-group tensions and reinforcing social cohesion among competing factions. Beyond their pragmatic function, these contests were embedded in a broader eco-cosmological understanding of space and society – one in which both territorial boundaries and social relations were perceived as fluid and in constant need of renegotiation. This conceptual framework provides a

plausible social context for the use of Tacalshapa boards. While they may have served merely as instruments of entertainment, it is equally possible that they participated in more complex integrative practices akin to the pucara duels – functions that need not be mutually exclusive, but which may have developed one from the other.

The cultural affiliation of these boards was first discussed by Uhle (1922a:28), who placed them in the Tacalshapa phase of his chronological sequence, between his Tiwanaku and Inka phases of Azuay. This identification was later confirmed by Valdez (1984:171-73), who was able to investigate the archaeological context of the tomb in which SIG-1 was found. The excavations at the site of Casa Llanos, which investigated the area that is now approximately occupied by the Museum of Chobshi, yielded the best context yet for Tacalshapa ceramics and associated ¹⁴C dates (Valdez 1984:230-32).

Table 8 presents all available radiocarbon dates associated with Tacalshapa. The picture emerging from the combined sets of C-14 dates provided by Valdez from his excavation of Tacalshapa-associated contexts at the site of Casa Llanos and Catherine Lara's (2017: 206) Tacalshapa dates from the Valle del Cuyes shows that the period related to Tacalshapa covers a long time span, beginning during the Regional Development Period, extending throughout the Integration Period and, at least for the Valle del Cuyes, into the Colonial Period. Casa Llanos's radiocarbon assay suggest that the site was occupied throughout the Tacalshapa phase.

The new radiocarbon assay obtained by the author for one of the two wooden boards from Guarainag – GUA-01 (Table 7) – offering a calibrated age of cal. AD 900 – 1045 (at 95% accuracy) falls in the middle of the date range associated with Tacalshapa. This new date confirms the chronological placement and cultural association of these boards, but it does not provide a full chronological range for the cultural relevance of these artefacts among Tacalshapa groups. At present, it is not possible to determine how long these boards remained meaningful cultural objects.

The date of GUA-01, falling between the end of the 10th and beginning of the 11th century AD is also significant because it is the first date ever obtained for one of the rich burials (commonly known as "*tumbas quintaleras*") of eastern Azuay (Tacconi n.d.; Uhle 1922c). As discussed in Chapter 8, a board attributed to phase B2 of the core corpus also comes from the Tacalshapa area. This is the only documented case in which these two separate board-

making traditions overlap. However, while Type-6 boards are numerous in the region and are clearly diagnostic of Tacalshapa, the board from the core corpus appears in isolation as a unique case. As shown in later chapters, the latter belongs to a foreign tradition and may have appeared exotic to Tacalshapa people.

VI

Another group consists of two sets of fairly standardised boards featuring two sequences of small hollow compartments, displaying either point or line symmetry, with three wider and differently shaped compartments. The first set, of which only two examples are known, comes from the Peruvian north coast, particularly the area of Trujillo. In one case, it can be associated with the Salinar culture. The other cluster was first presented by Radicati (2006:274-77) and is part of the collections of the Regional Museum of Ica. According to Radicati, they originally came from the archaeological site of Cárhua de la Bahía, in the Pisco province on the southern Peruvian coast. While the two sets are not identical and differ in terms of layout and number of compartments, they were placed in the same category as they retain some commonalities and may be variations of a little-known typology (Figure 24).

The three boards presented by Radicati include one made of clay (Radicati 2006:275, Figure 5 - RAD-1) and two made of sperm whalebone (Radicati 2006:276-77, Figure 6-7 - RAD-2 and RAD-3). Their layout follows a common pattern with two symmetrical halves – reflection symmetry in the case of the clay board (RAD-1) and rotational symmetry in the case of the two whalebone boards (RAD-2, and RAD-3). Either half features a sequence of small roughly square compartments which follow the edges of the board, turning then inward to converge at a differently shaped, usually elongated, compartment placed at the centre of the board. Two additional elongated rectangular compartments are flanked by the meandering line of small compartments on either side of the board (Figure 24a, 24b).

The south coast set reportedly came from a site commonly referred to as Carhua, or Karwa (Tello 1959), located on a promontory jutting out into the Pacific Ocean along the desert coast between Ica and Pisco. A long history of looting has revealed archaeological material from this site, including elaborate Chavín textiles which were reportedly found here (Cordy-Collins 1976:43-46; 1979; Burger 1988:117).⁵⁰ Surveys conducted at the site by

⁵⁰ However, as with any looted artefact, their provenance remains dubious.

Engel (1981:28-29) in the 1950s, by Cordy-Collins (2020) in 1980, and by Carmichael (2020:Site-6) in 1990, have established that the site of Carhua mostly dates back to the Early Horizon and is associated with the Paracas culture, featuring also Chavín-related pottery.⁵¹ The site comprises a series of mounds, oriented East-West, and a vast cemetery, located northeast of the mounds. The poverty of the funerary material associated with looted burials and the lack of monumental architecture led Carmichael (2020:33) to identify the site as a “fishing village [...] sporadically occupied throughout much of its prehistory.”

While we do not know the precise location of these boards’ discovery, as they were likely the product of informal excavations, they may originate from the cemetery sector, where the majority of cultural material is said to be from. The significant occupational timespan relating to the Paracas culture suggests that these boards may date from the Early Horizon and may have been associated with this cultural group. However, the limited and geographically restricted sample does not warrant any broader conclusions, since no additional example of this Type has ever been documented at any other south coast EH Paracas site.⁵² Likewise, the limited evidence available about their context of discovery does not permit the formulation of further hypotheses about their function. More research is required to reveal if these boards belonged to a larger group featuring a standardised layout and to support the proposed cultural attribution.

The other Type-7 boards come from the Trujillo area, in La Libertad, on the Peruvian north coast. One was excavated by the Programa Arqueológico de Huanchaco, which investigated the archaeological site of the Colonial Church of Huanchaco, in the Moche valley. It was found in the José Olaya sector of the site, which is today located within the premises of a state school. Excavations carried out in 2017 at this sector revealed three occupational phases, all associated with the Salinar culture (ca. 400 – 150 B.C.) (Villalobos Escobar 2021).

The two areas associated with the José Olaya sector comprise twenty-nine Salinar period tombs. The Type-7 board was found in an area characterised by a small architectural space, which included five sunken pits, probably storage feature, dating to the third and most recent

⁵¹ Particularly, ceramic associated with the Paracas “Necropolis Phase” is said to have been found at the site, which straddle across the end of the Early Horizon and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period (Carmichael 2019). There are also minor traces of a later localised re-occupation dating to the Late Intermediate Period.

⁵² A more thorough investigation into the distribution of these artefacts is needed. The author did not carry out intensive field survey for this typology.

phase of Salinar occupation. One of these sunken pits featured a doorway, which is where the board lay. Its depositional context was part of the intentional sand fill, sealing the stratigraphic layer related to the last Salinar phase. Possibly, this could suggest that its deposition was related to termination and abandonment events or rituals (Villalobos Escobar 2021:102, 221). The board was fashioned from a whale vertebra, like RAD-2 and RAD-3. These are the only three boards documented so far in the database made of this material. The overall shape of the board reflects the anatomical shape of a whale vertebra, to which it adapts. The layout exhibits a rotational symmetry. Two lines of twelve small, roughly square compartments converge at a central, elongated compartment and surround two irregularly shaped ones (Figure 24d, 25). The board is finely crafted, with the hollow compartments carefully carved. A ^{14}C date was obtained that is relevant to the board's depositional context indicating a calibrated date of ca. 400-300 B.C. (Gabriel Prieto, personal communication, 2021). This radiocarbon date places the board's use and deposition firmly in the Salinar phase (see Sghinolfi et al. 2023).

Both Prieto (personal communication, 2021) and Villalobos Escobar (2021:242) interpret this board as an architectural model. Particularly, the latter highlighted the similarity between the board's layout and the plan of an architectural structure at the site of Cerro Saloganda, near Santiago de Chuco, in the highlands of La Libertad, just north of the border with Ancash (Pérez 1998c:137, Figure 4).

A similar board in the private collection of Victor Julio Rossell, ROS-01 (J. Smith, personal communication, 2021), while slightly distinct in design and material, exhibits a formally similar layout to HUN-01. This collection contained a non-standardised Type-5 board, as well as a fragmentary example of what may have been an additional Type-2 board (Figure 24c). Nothing is known about their provenance or place of finding and they cannot be contextualised. Due to the formal similarity of ROS-01 to HUN-01 and its presence in a private collection of Trujillo, it is fair to assume it may also come from this area, or at the very least from the north coast of Peru.

The latter two boards are certainly distinct in many respects, but they also display the same underlying structure. Rotational symmetry and two sequences of twelve small roughly square compartments converging at a central elongated one. These two boards' layout are in turn formally similar to those presented by Radicati from Carhua, but they differ in terms of

number of small compartments. Particularly, RAD-02 displays the same structural layout as HUN-01 and ROS-01, with the only difference that it features 11 small compartments instead of twelve. RAD-01 and RAD-02 exhibit similar underlying characteristics.

An additional element that warrants the grouping of these boards together is that the three boards from Carhua and the one found at Huanchaco appear to date from a similar time – at the end of the Early Horizon – and they are all from the Peruvian coast. A further element that points to potential commonalities between these two traditions is represented by their materiality, which in three cases consists of whalebone. Possibly, these two traditions of board-making may have been connected, and these boards may represent variations of the same template and structural components. However, this can only be determined through more extensive documentation of this typology to determine their variations and commonalities across a larger corpus.

VII

The quantity and variability of compartmentalised boards from the ancient Andes is significant, with several little-known typologies that are under-represented in the database and necessitate further research. Type-4, 5, 6, and 7 will not be discussed further in this work, which will concentrate on Type-1, 2, and 3. These form the core corpus of the database and substantial evidence is available about them. Such evidence includes statistical variability given the broader sample, contextual information due to the larger number of boards found in situ, and a robust chronological framework.

Type-6 also constitutes another significant tradition of board-making from the ancient Andes that may have functioned as gameboards. The available data about their original context of use and chronology places them in the Tacalshapa culture context of southern Ecuador. More data are needed to substantiate the hypothesis developed in this chapter. The discussion of the context of Type-6 boards offered here is complemented by the analysis of a Type-1 board found in the same Tacalshapa area, which will be developed in Chapter 8.

Generally, the typological analysis was made possible by the inclusion of a diverse assemblage of pieces comprising museum and private collections, as well as excavated material. This approach enables the identification of connections across different objects, such as

Type-6 boards and the NMAI gold tokens. It also allows for the development of a chronological sequence for the boards in the core corpus, understood here as a surface assemblage – an assemblage that can be reconfigured and reorganised in response to different epistemological questions. Chapters 6-8 treat the core corpus assemblage as separate stratigraphic layers, corresponding to distinct archaeological periods and cultural groups. Chapter 5 examines the diachronic or vertical dimension of this assemblage, highlighting their chronological development and the social processes with which the core corpus appears to have been associated.

Recuay and Wari at Play

ANCESTORS, SOCIAL ORGANISATION, AND GAMES

I will contend in this and the following chapters that the archaeological evidence is consistent with the identification of Type-1, 2, 3 as gameboards, associated with a set of ritual practices related to ancestral veneration and the emergence of a segmentary logic of social organisation, involving corporate kinship groups akin in structural principles to the later *ayllu* system of the Inka and early colonial period. Before examining specific ancient cultural contexts, it is important to situate our discussion within the broader archaeological literature on boardgames. Research on games and gaming paraphernalia in Andean archaeology is still in its infancy (e.g., Lau 2016:Chapter 6; Valdez and Bettcher 2020), but studies in other regions of the world offer a useful comparative framework. We will explore how archaeological material related to play can be indicative of broader social processes and dynamics. This chapter will attempt to set the debate regarding the social implications of games (and boardgames in particular) within the framework concerning the changing social organisation of Andean polities in the Early Intermediate Period (ca. AD 1-700) and Middle Horizon (ca. AD 700-1000).

The topic of social organisation is relevant because it relates to broader debates on the nature of pre-Inka polities, such as the Wari (Berquist 2022; Jennings 2025; Jennings et al. 2022; Jennings and Berquist 2022; Gibbon et al. 2022; Giersz and Makowski 2014) and the Recuay before them (Lau et al. 2023; Lau 2013; 2011) – the two cultures that, I argue, were most associated with these gameboards. For instance, the precise nature of the Wari cultural phenomenon is still the subject of disagreement. Scholars have described it as an “empire” (Schreiber 2001), while others prefer an “interaction sphere” (MacNeish et al. 1975), or a form of pre-modern “globalization” (Jennings 2011:Ch. 6). Fundamentally, these questions are linked to a discussion concerning the nature of sovereignty, power structure, and hierarchical relationships in pre-modern societies in general (e.g., Graeber and Sahlins

2017; Moin and Strathern 2022b) and in the pre-Columbian Americas in particular (Lau and Chicoine 2025; Quilter 2025).

The analysis of the Recuay and Wari cultural phenomena provides a framework for the following chapters, which will discuss each sub-phase characterising the core corpus of the database. Understanding how these gameboards and their site-specific contexts relate to the wider dynamics of the EIP and MH in Peru and southern Ecuador sheds light on the broader implications of their distribution and contexts of use. The transformations occurring at the end of the Early Horizon, coinciding with the decline of Chavin, ushered into an era of experimentation with new social arrangements and power structures, characterised by an increasing degree of regionalisation. Understanding what role games may have played within such societies is the goal of this chapter.

Finally, I will propose a way to theorise the role of games of chance and skill in immanentist societies (Sahlins 2022b:34-69; Moin and Strathern 2022a), a trait largely shared by most of these pre-Columbian groups. In relation to this, the concept of “cosmic polity” (Sahlins 2022b:124-73; 2022a; Graeber and Sahlins 2017:2-3) will prove useful to understand how games may have played significant religious-cum-political roles as part of a vast array of “integrative mechanisms” (Carballo 2013; DeMarrais and Earle 2017; see also Jennings 2025) that constitute the backbone of societies characterised by “ritualised economies” (Stanish 2013; 2017:6-10, 80-165). These mechanisms included various ritual practices such as communal feasting, dancing, and regulated competitions, unfolding in a context of increasing (ritual) co-operation for different practical purposes, such as resource allocation and labour coordination.

I

Scholars have noted that games appear to function in society in a manner akin to the consumption of alcohol or other psychoactive substances, acting as “social lubricants” (Crist et al. 2016:180-81). They also allow players to transcend social and cultural boundaries and, particularly when involving only two players, games contribute to creating an intimate setting where individuals – perhaps unfamiliar with one another – can bond or negotiate status, interacting “across kinship, ethnic and socio-economic boundaries” (181). This property of games does not seem alien to the Andean context, and it has resonances with the role that the

pichca dice-game reportedly had in Inka society. As discussed in Chapter 2, the game was played by the Inka sovereign and his principal *kurakas* (lords) within relatively intimate contexts, as in the case of a ritual celebrating the harvest. The game was an opportunity for these provincial lords to transcend the strictly hierarchical and immutable order of Inka society, in which social boundaries were momentarily suspended, creating opportunities for mutual recognition and reconfiguration of identity and status.

Scholars have also pointed out that boardgames are characterised by a remarkable cross-cultural quality (Finkel 2007:1). In their analysis of the cultural transmission of popular games from the ancient Near East, de Voogt et al. (2013) suggest that boardgames tend to be transmitted with high fidelity across time and space. When modified, changes usually occur at cultural boundaries, often crossed through exchange networks rather than conquest, and new games tend to coexist with older ones (see also Crist et al. 2016:182).

These characteristics are reflected in the wide distribution of Type-1 and Type-3 boards across the Andes for at least 500 years of the first millennium AD.⁵³ As I argue, they crossed multiple cultural boundaries, and they have been known by different cultures such as Recuay and Wari, and possibly others too, such as Moche-Wari and Sican-Wari groups, and the Tacalshapa of Ecuador. However, layouts remained remarkably consistent over time, with only minor stylistic variation (see Chapters 6-8). I argue that the evidence suggests they did not seem to have spread primarily through military conquest and they appear to have coexisted with other games – for example, Tacalshapa Type-6 boards (see Chapter 4), and the bean game depicted on Moche ceramics (Hocquenghem 1989:144-56; Vivante 1942).

Crist (2019) highlights that archaeological gameboards can illuminate broader social processes. His analysis of gameboards from Bronze Age Cyprus suggests that their association with different contexts may reflect changes in social organisation, prompting us to consider how Andean people may have used games to navigate a shifting social landscape. As Chapter 6-8 will show, their archaeological contexts reveal associations with mortuary rooms, elite compounds, feasting, offerings, and funerary rituals. These are consistent with the social function of games documented in ethno-historical and ethnographic record, which – as argued in Chapter 2 – were closely tied to political, economic, and mortuary affairs. The documented roles of games in the (proto-)historical and historical Andes thus provide an

⁵³ Type-2 seems to have disappeared with the decline of Recuay culture.

instructive framework for understanding how archaeological gameboards may have been embedded in the social processes of the EIP, MH, and Integration Period in Ecuador. The following section will present the broader cultural contexts in which, I argue, these boards first emerged, spread, and were employed: the Recuay and Wari societies. The social processes characterising these cultures are key to understanding their significance.

II

The Recuay culture has long been known to Andean archaeology. It was first identified at the end of the 19th century from its distinctive material culture (Macedo 1881) and has since been studied in greater depth (e.g., Tello 1929; Bennett 1944; Grieder 1978; Lau 2011; 2016). It flourished during the EIP, also known as Regional Development Period (Lumbreras 1974b), a time of fragmented cultural landscapes with distinctive regional traditions. With the decline of Chavín de Huántar, new cultures and *modi vivendi* emerged across the Andes. Recuay groups occupied much of the former Chavín heartland – including the site of Chavín itself. While the relationship between Recuay and Chavín is complex, it is enough to note that Recuay people often built villages and cemeteries over Chavín temples, signalling a shift in practice toward the deceased reflecting new cultural and social values (Burger 2008:685; Lau 2004b:181; Tello 1960; Bennett 1944; Lumbreras 1970).

The Recuay territory corresponded broadly to present-day Ancash, stretching from the Huayhuash mountains in the south to Pallasca in the north and the Marañón basin in the east (Lau 2011:11). This ecologically diverse region encompassed valleys, high plateaus, puna grasslands, and glaciated peaks, offering resources from coca and fruit in warm valleys to camelid pastures and tuber cultivation at higher altitudes (Pulgar Vidal 2014; Tosi and Holdridge 1960; Millones 1982).

Recuay society consisted of independent chiefly polities with distinct architectural and material expressions. Paramount chiefdoms were centred on major settlements, prominent examples of which are the sites of Yayno, Huaraz, and Pashash. Elites controlled land, water, herds, and access to prestige goods with a strong emphasis on warfare and competition (Lau 2013; see also Lau 2010b; 2014a). The current record of the Callejón de Huaylas shows the highest density of Recuay settlements. This intermontane stretch of the Santa valley forms a corridor flanked by the two main mountain ranges of the Andean divide: the Cordillera

Negra to the west and the Cordillera Blanca to the east. Recuay traces are also found east of the Cordillera Blanca in the Conchucos region, and north in Corongo and Pallasca, beyond which influence diminished. West of the Cordillera Negra, groups settled in lower valleys linking Ancash to the coast.

Although the later “vertical archipelago” system is not documented for Recuay (Murra 1972; 1975; Brush 1976), they seem to have practiced a smaller-scale form of “compressed ecological complementarity” (Lau 2011:38-39, 58-61; Masuda et al. 1985), accessing diverse resources through localised networks. Recuay’s ecological complementarity likely took place at a settlement or community level. Settlement location, particularly in northern Ancash, emphasised defensible hilltops with access to both farmland and pastures, sometimes positioned between ecological zones. While many Recuay groups favoured fortified settlements (e.g., Pashash, Yayno), exceptions existed, as, for example, in the Callejón de Huaylas.

Given the prominence of camelid herding among elites (Lau 2021a; 2021b) – evidenced by the proliferation of corrals and an emphasis on herd wealth in elite artistic representations – some scholars proposed applying the *huari/llacuaz* model (Duviols 1973), documented in early-colonial Ancash (Hernández Príncipe 1923), to Recuay and other pre-Columbian societies (e.g., Orsini 2006; Parsons et al. 2000:54-55; 1997). In this dual system, one moiety comprised settled agriculturalists (*huari*), while the other belligerent highland herders (*llacuaz*). Segmentary kinship groups (*ayllus*) articulated along these lines, with internal upper/lower divisions. The former inhabited low-altitude intermontane valleys, while the latter were associated with the high-altitude *puna* grasslands (Duviols 1973; Zuidema 1973a; Gose 1996; 2008; Platt 1986; Burger and Salazar-Burger 1993).

A similar corporate, segmentary, logic seems to have shaped Recuay social organisation, especially in its later phases (Lau 2011:75-76). By the 2nd century AD, at sites such as Pashash, Ichik Willkawaín, and Huamparán – we see evidence of elite compounds, ancestral worship, and increasing emphasis on camelid wealth (Lau et al. 2023; Ibarra 2021:97-151; Paredes 2007; Lau 2021a; 2021b; Grieder 1978). Patio-group compounds with integrated burial chambers articulated ties between the living and the dead, prefiguring patterns later expanded under Wari (see below). These traits – ancestor veneration, lineage-based compounds, camelid wealth – were central to the social processes within which, I suggest, the compartmentalised boards played a role.

III

Space limits a full review of Wari's rise from its core in Ayacucho and later expansion (Jennings 2010). Here, I highlight aspects relevant to my argumentation on the gameboards, especially the relationship with the northern highlands and the social processes in which these items were involved.

The MH marked a shift to wider interaction networks that spread styles, artefacts, social structure, and ceremonial practices across the Central Andean region – weaving together previously unconnected peoples (Jennings 2025). Already during the EIP, small and isolated settlements started to appear in the Ayacucho valley with no evidence of urban planning or hierarchical differentiation (Isbell 2001a). This period is usually associated with Huarpa ceramics – ca. AD 200-700 (Lumbreras 1974a; Menzel 1964) – and its subphases (Knobloch 1983; 2023). By the time of Late Huarpa (ca. AD 550-600), ceremonial centres began exhibiting social differentiation and attracting larger populations (Leoni 2006).

Centres such as Huari and Conchopata grew rapidly as dispersed communities moved into these hubs (Valdez and Valdez 2017; 2020). Jennings (2025:256) suggests the transition from Huarpa to Wari was gradual, reflecting a series of dynamic processes, such as population growth (Isbell 2001a), rising violence (Valdez and Valdez 2017; 2020; 2021), expanding exchange networks (Valdez 2017), and elite accumulation of prestige goods (Earle and Jennings 2012; Paulsen 1974).

Urban growth produced agglutinated patio compounds at these centres (Isbell et al. 1991; Isbell 2001a; 2009; Ochatoma Paravicino et al. 2015; Pérez 1999), sometimes termed “palaces” (Isbell 2006).⁵⁴ Scholars suggested that these types of enclosures with a central patio, functioned as ritual and domestic structures related to important lineage groups. Intimate spaces for mortuary rituals emerged in association with these palatial compounds, where mummified ancestors were interred in burials under the floor. The architecture of these mortuary rooms allowed for iterative interactions with the deceased, since tombs could sometimes be reopened for additional offerings or interments, and maize beer or other liquids

⁵⁴ This is the term preferred also by Lau et al. (2023:49) for similar compounds in the Recuay context (see also Evans and Pillsbury 2004).

could be poured to the dead through an aperture in the tomb's capstone (see Chapter 7) (Isbell 2004; Isbell and Cook 2002; Milliken 2006; Tung 2012).

Berquist (2022) links these compounds, which he refers to as *kancha* structures,⁵⁵ to the earlier northern highland forms of the EIP – such as the Recuay patio-group architecture discussed above (Lau et al. 2023; Lau 2011; 2010c; Herrera 2005; Segura Rivera 2016) – but found also in Huamachuco (Topic and Topic 2000; Topic and Topic 2010), and Cajamarca (Reichlen and Reichlen 1949; Narváez and Melly Cava 2010). Wari people appear to have increasingly engaged with northern highlands societies from the 6th-7th century AD, eventually adopting the patio-group architectural model that had previously developed there. The incorporation of these compounds appears to have followed the adoption of new social mechanisms that had emerged in the northern highlands during the EIP – if not before (Berquist 2022:330) – which the Wari adapted to cope with increasing urbanisation, growing population, and expanding interaction networks (Berquist 2022:Chapter 5; Jennings and Berquist 2022). These mechanisms consisted of a segmentary logic of social organisation centred on ancestors and descent groups. From Berquist's (2022:Chapter 6) perspective, its emergence would have not been driven by a singular expansive polity (i.e., Wari) but was the result of an organic process that culminated in the new social scenario of the MH.

Archaeologically, the processes leading to the rise of this new social organisation are evidenced by a set of significant markers, which included a spread of patio-group architecture, new funerary practices, and an iconography of numinous ancestors. Additionally, I shall argue, the compartmentalised gameboards of the core corpus also spread alongside these archaeological elements and social processes. The current record suggests that the earliest concentrations of boards appear in Ancash, especially Pashash, related to the Recuay culture. If the current database is indicative of their distribution, they then spread south and to coastal regions during the MH. Notably, a few boards, presumably alongside a set of related ideas and practices, reached the Wari heartland in Ayacucho, where they appeared at centres such as Huari and Conchopata.

⁵⁵ *Kancha* is a Quechua word referring to a type of compound associated with Inka state architecture. Though variations existed, its basic form was characterised by a rectangular enclosure comprising three or more rectangular structures placed along the sides of the compound and surrounding a central open patio (Hyslop 1990:16-18; Gasparini and Margolies 1980:181-93). Given the structural similarity, this label is applied to Wari architecture by morphological analogy. Patio-group structures show great variability in size in Ancash, suggesting different scales and purposes.

The evidence indicates that they are consistently associated with elite patio groups and mortuary spaces, suggesting use in rituals of ancestral veneration and other integrative mechanisms characteristic of the social process paving the way for the rise of *ayllu*-like segmentary social organisation. These gameboards appear to have fallen out of use after the end of the MH, in the 11th century, though later Inka practices may echo their role within ritualised economies and early colonial boards bore morphological resemblance.

Wari also repurposed autochthonous architectural forms to meet emerging needs, such as D-shaped temples, often considered diagnostic of Wari statecraft (Cook 2001). Cook (2015:298, 311) argues that they derived from earlier domestic circular structures, adapted to accommodate the increasing importance of ancestral veneration. D-shaped structures are also significant in relation to the gameboards, as, in at least one case (i.e., Cerro Baúl), they appear closely associated (see Chapter 7). While not exclusively dedicated to ancestral worship (Tung and Knudson 2008; Sayre and Whitehead 2017), D-shaped structures may have functioned in a similar manner to patio groups, but on a larger scale, involving only smaller groups of elites who made decision on behalf of numerous collectives (Jennings 2025:258; Lau n.d.).

As noted by Jennings (2025:260), the issue of scale is crucial. The socioeconomic tools the Wari appropriated had developed within the context of agropastoral societies, which practiced an economy of compressed ecological complementarity on a small scale, often confined to the community level and comprising perhaps only a few satellite settlements, as discussed for the Recuay. The progressive urbanisation and expansive aims of the Wari meant that these tools had to be readapted to accommodate larger urban populations, requiring new ways to organise labour and manage the agricultural surplus and the logistics of redistribution and property rights on a wider scale. The way in which this transition occurred during the MH is still far from clear, but certainly, in repurposing social mechanisms and logistical arrangements, the Wari had to engage in a process of scalar adaptation of socioeconomic practices. Arguably, the gameboards underwent a similar adaptive shift.

Chronology substantiates the link between the emergence and spread of gameboards and key Wari institutions, such as the patio groups and D-shaped structures. Bayesian models of over 1,000 radiocarbon dates (Williams et al. 2024) show overlap with the date ranges of the gameboards (Table 9 and Figure 26).

Chronologically, the MH has been traditionally subdivided into Epochs, following the pioneering work of Dorothy Menzel (1964; 1968; 1977; Table 10). Additional research has complicated Menzel's original chronology, and new radiocarbon dates have since refined the date ranges associated with each epoch (Isbell 2019; Giersz and Makowski 2014; Knobloch 2013). Table 10 shows the updated date ranges (Isbell 2019).⁵⁶

As first noted by Menzel (1964:69), during late Epoch 1B (AD 700-800) and particularly at the beginning of Epoch 2 (AD 800-1000), several changes appear to have occurred across the Wari world, which have left visible traces in the archaeological record. These social shifts may have reflected broader political processes that Jennings (2025) proposes to identify as an attempt at political centralisation that eventually failed. A significant innovation that appears related to these changes is the introduction of a new type of iconographic repertoire from the southern highlands of Lake Titicaca, known as the Southern Andean Iconographic Series (SAIS) (Isbell and Knobloch 2009; 2006; Isbell et al. 2018). SAIS imagery included a series of personages and deities – staff god, sacrificers, and profile attendants or winged angels – represented according to a specific visual canon (Cook 1994; Knobloch 2013).⁵⁷ A further associated element emerging around the 8th century and continuing into the following centuries is the depiction of disembodied profile human heads, primarily on ceramic – e.g., face-necked jars or ceremonial vessels (Knobloch 2013; 2010; Cook 1994; Menzel 1964; 1968). These heads always bear some unique features that differentiate one from the other and have been taken to represent ethnic or kinship groups. They are often termed 'agents', to underline their agentive political role in Wari society (Knobloch 2002). Based on the assumption that they represented political or ethnic groups, they appear to suggest a heterarchical society, only weakly centralised (Gibbon et al. 2022). Notably, they are sometimes shown fighting with each other (Knobloch 2013). These human agents also appear in relation to godly personages of the SAIS repertoire, perhaps a further indication of the changes in ideology and governance that occurred in the 9th and 10th century. Sometimes, they accompany SAIS deities that are also shown in confrontational situations (Knobloch 2018).

⁵⁶ Epochs 3 and 4 of Menzel's sequence have not been borne out by subsequent investigations and are not included here.

⁵⁷ The Southern Andean Iconographic Series becomes prominent in Tiwanaku art, but its origins are rooted deeper into the Andean past, possibly emerging as a blend of different iconographic traditions (Isbell and Knobloch 2006; 2009; Isbell 2018; Chávez 2018; Haerberli 2018).

An additional sign of change in the archaeological record is represented by a programme of reconstruction and reorganisation of settlement's architecture occurring around AD 750-800. This programme of reconstruction appears to have affected exclusively the monumental parts of Wari state settlements, where administrative and ceremonial structures were located (Williams et al. 2024:61). For instance, at Cerro Baúl, this major reorganizational event led to the reconstruction of monumental sectors featuring large Wari-style palatial compounds, in one of which a Type-1 gameboard was found (Williams et al. 2005), discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Williams (2001b:79) dates the transformation at Cerro Baúl to as late as the beginning of the 10th century. Williams et al. (2024:61) note that except for Cerro Baúl, Wari settlements featuring monumental compounds do not have D-shaped structures (e.g., Azángaro, Pikillacta, and Jincamocco), while those with elite patio groups and D-shaped structures do not feature monumental compounds (e.g., Conchopata and Espíritu Pampa). They tentatively propose that this may indicate distinct institutions of Wari statecraft. Notably, phase B1 boards documented so far are associated only with sites featuring patio-group and D-shaped structures.

There is a general chronological alignment as to when these changes took place but the type of sociopolitical shifts they imply can only be hypothesised. The evidence seems to suggest that they reflected underlying changes in governance, affecting the internal organisation of the Wari political assemblage. For instance, these changes may have involved the concentration of political authority in the hands of a few, to the detriment of other corporate groups who were forced into exile (Jennings 2025), or they may have reflected a religious schism that gave rise to conflicts (Isbell 2019), or a combination of multiple factors.

The gameboards appeared as the Wari world was incorporating new elements associated with patio-group architecture, D-shaped structures, and numinous ancestors whose veneration was foundational to wider collectives. They seem to have been compatible with a political landscape of competing corporate groups, although their use appears to have continued into the later phases of potential centralisation, at least at sites such as Cerro Baúl and Conchopata.

Further evidence derives from the iconography of a Type-1 gameboard from Ecuador, which will be discussed in Chapter 8. Made outside the Wari sphere of influence by local

Tacalshapa people, it features disembodied Wari profile heads all along its sides.⁵⁸ While these heads appear to simply mimic actual Wari iconography, as they lack the common details differentiating one human head from the other, their presence reinforces the notion that these gameboards were symbolically linked to Wari agents or groups seemingly confronting each other. This symbolism may also suggest that they were involved in ritual practices related to Wari sodalities and descent groups that these heads are taken to represent.

Whatever changes were occurring around the Wari world in the 9th century, they seem to have been short-lived, as the 10th century marks the beginning of a decline which culminated in the 11th century (Jennings 2025). Given their archaeological contexts, I argue that the gameboards were involved in the sociopolitical experimentations related to governance and social cohesion happening between the 8th and 10th century, and they fell into disuse with the demise of Wari – although early-colonial gameboards echo in shape and symbolism the archaeological gameboards of the core corpus (see Chapter 3 and 6).

An additional and still debated aspect of the Wari MH, reflected in the distribution of boards, is the connection of Wari to the north coast of Peru, and indirectly to the southern Ecuadorian highlands. Rather than conquest or a full-fledged Wari presence in these areas, it may represent a result of the widening of interaction spheres and exchange networks, which is the hallmark of the MH. During the late MH, Wari people founded a settlement in the northern highlands of Cajamarca at a site called El Palacio (Watanabe 2001; 2010; 2012; 2019). While there is little evidence of direct control over the surrounding area, Wari settlers at El Palacio may have sought to establish better trade relationship with the north coast, which would have provided access to the highly valued spondylus shell. This shell originated in the equatorial waters off the coast of Ecuador (Manabí), and there may have been both maritime and land trade routes connecting this area to northern Peru (Knobloch 2022; Carter 2022). From Cajamarca, the north coast could be reached via the Jequetepeque valley (Castillo 2000; Castillo et al. 2012; Swenson and Berquist 2022), and signs of Wari presence along this route may be found at Huaca Santa Rosa de Pucalá in Lambayeque, where a D-shaped structure was excavated, possibly suggesting a Wari enclave (Bracamonte Lévano 2021; 2022). The region of Lambayeque appears to have had been the entry point of

⁵⁸ This is the only known occurrence of Wari profile heads on wood and metal, as they normally appear only on ceramic vessels and textiles.

spondylus to the Central Andes (Carter 2011; 2022; Paulsen 1974; Torre 2016). In addition to maritime trade, documented historically, trade routes crossing the current border between Peru and Ecuador also existed. As detailed in Chapter 8, the region of Azuay appears to have been well connected to both the Ecuadorian coast and to the north coast of Peru, to which it was linked via well-trodden routes descending the intermontane valleys of southern Ecuador (Hocquenghem et al. 1993; Hocquenghem 1991; 1993).

Possibly, the gameboards also spread following these interregional connections along with Wari ideas, rituals, and iconography. Notably, they arrived to the Ecuadorian Tacalshapa people along with SAIS imagery, such as a *sacrificer* (Figure 76, see Chapter 8) and a profile attendant deity with an avian head (Figure 77) (Lleras Pérez 2015:135; Knobloch 2022; chapter 8; González Suárez 1878). The fact that they likely arrived together suggests the spread of these boards to the north coast occurred after Epoch 1B, when SAIS imagery began to circulate. While north-coast Moche had established contacts with the Recuay already during the EIP (Lau 2004a; Lau et al. 2023), it is noteworthy that only with the widening of cross-cultural connections of the MH, did these gameboards begin to filter into coastal regions, crossing the highland-coast cultural boundary.

To conclude, the gameboards appear in the Wari world at some point between the 8th and 9th century (late Epoch 1B or Epoch 2), alongside several other elements that the Wari took from Recuay and Huamachuco cultures, including the patio group architecture and, possibly, a related logic of segmentary social organisation giving rise to sodalities centring on common ancestors. These practices were scaled up to match an increasing urbanisation at home and the broadening of interregional networks across the Andes. Despite the attempts at managing the difference in scale, the Wari seem to have retained to a significant extent a form of governance that was “predicated on creating and sustaining personal relationships” (Jennings 2025:269), with sovereignty remaining largely “familial” (276). In other words, despite scalar adaptations, the nature of the Wari political toolkit may have remained the same as that of the Recuay, relying on the same mechanisms, although facing new and often unprecedented social changes (see also Shady 1982; 1988; Shady and Ruiz 1979). These mechanisms included a set of integrative practices, involving ritual feasting in exclusive elite ceremonies of corporate groups. Competition among collectives emerged as a result of this political system, while new foreign peoples came to be integrated into the Wari polity through

a reliance on the same set of face-to-face mechanisms, including feasts and intermarriage (Nash 2015) – methods largely based on the construction of personal relationships. A system of elite gift-exchange is probably what made Wari material culture circulate widely, even beyond the actual reaches of Wari political or military power. Based on the current evidence, I suggest that the gameboards may have functioned and circulated across the Andes within this context, where they could have served as social lubricants that oiled the mechanisms of gift-exchange and face-to-face relationships in the increasingly broad interaction networks of the MH.

Significantly, in keeping with the analysis of gameboards to assess social change set out at the beginning, the spatial contexts within which we find them do not change substantially between Recuay and Wari, despite the broader social changes, particularly in scale, that occurred between the EIP and MH. Based on the few available archaeological contexts of boards found in situ, the spaces with which they are associated remain consistent. Two archaeological contexts are known from the Recuay period:

- One related to a patio group palatial compound in proximity of the burial of an important ancestor at Pashash (Grieder 1978).
- A second is part of the fill covering a Recuay tomb at Tumshukayko (Carolina Orsini, personal communication, 2024).

In Wari, boards excavated in situ are also found:

- In connection with mortuary rooms and burials at Conchopata, Huari, Castillo de Tomabal (Milliken 2001a; 2006; Pérez 2000; Campana 1983).
- In connection with palatial patio-group compounds and D-shaped structures at Cerro Baúl (Williams et al. 2005) and Huari (Pérez 2000).

This seems to further suggest that, despite the shift in scale, Wari sociopolitical mechanisms remained similar in nature to those developed by the Recuay, especially in terms of consistency in spatial contexts. It is also noteworthy that they often appear in high-status elite contexts.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ For example, scholars suggested the mortuary structure at Huari (Monqachayuc sector) where a board was found was for “royal interments” (Isbell 2004:20).

The foregoing evidence would appear to suggest that the gameboards were implicated in the ritualised economy (Stanish 2013; 2017)⁶⁰ practiced by the Wari, which included several integrative mechanisms (Carballo 2013; Carballo et al. 2014) – such as exclusive feasting in intimate settings (e.g., patio groups structures) among the members of a sodality – and in the context of gift-exchange with foreign groups – where a boardgame served as a social lubricant in smoothing the relationship with, for instance, a Mochica person of the north coast. An instructive archaeological instance of the first scenario can be found at Cerro Baúl (see Chapter 7), where a board was found in the annex to a D-shaped structure. Here, the gameboard was recovered within an unroofed central patio, alongside numerous smashed ceremonial cups and plates indicating that it may have last been used within a feast involving ritual drinking and eating – probably, a ceremonial event marking the ritual termination of the D-shaped structure and annex complex (Moseley et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2005). Moreover, the symbolism of these gameboards was probably understood by many Andean groups as it was based on common worldviews based on duality, mediation, and complementarity, which may have further facilitated their proposed cross-cultural spread.

In examining the way these gameboards were integrated in Recuay and Wari society and how they were involved in changing social scenarios, several resonances have emerged with the social role of games as instruments to navigate shifting social boundaries. In the next section, I will examine how boardgames could have served as meaningful tools in the ritualised economy of these cultures. What is the relationship between games and ancestors? Does this connection indicate a more profound significance of play in relation to ritual? The answer, I will contend, is related to the role that chance and skills have in societies where ancestors, spirits, and deities, are not removed from this world and exiled to a transcendental dimension but are participating in the immanent reality experienced by people.

IV

In Chapter 2, I argued that several important games in Inka society served as political instruments within the structure of the Inka empire, allowing for a concerted recognition and

⁶⁰ For Stanish (2013; 2017), a ritualised economy is an economic system in which ritual structures, norms, and taboos are the primary mechanisms that organise production, coordinate labour, ensure fairness, and maintain cooperation, particularly in societies without formal coercive institutions. Ritual is the infrastructure through which the economic life operates.

sanctioning of order and status. The Inka was meant to win at these games, but sometimes provincial lords would defeat him, and such an event appears to have been of considerable political consequence. What this suggests is that the ability and/or luck to win at a game was seen as both politically and socially significant on a deeper level.⁶¹ According to early colonial sources, the Inka played both dice games, such as the *pichca/huayro*, and skill games, such as the game of the *ayllus/bolas*. I contend that these two elements, chance and skills, are key to understanding the wider ritual role that games and play acquired in pre-Columbian and, perhaps, other pre-modern societies as well.

A useful operational concept that provides a framework for discussing the cultural and ritual role of chance and talent is that of *immanentism* (Strathern 2019). Immanence describes a social realm in which no distinction between belief and real, secular and sacred, or natural and supernatural exist (Sahlins 2022b:Chapter 2; Moin and Strathern 2022a). In a similar social setting, religion is politics and vice versa, ultimately because this distinction would be entirely alien to an emic understanding. Non-human persons, or metapersons/metahumans (Sahlins 2022b:2, Chapter 3), such as spirits, deities, etc., populate the immanentist world to the point that they are the necessary foundation of human success in any endeavour. They are not removed to a transcendental dimension, neither are they supernatural, since there is no notion of natural to be above of, but they are ever present in human affairs, whether benevolent or malignant. They often arise in myths that recount their stories, powers and cosmic roles. They can have abilities human do not have, but they are not omnipotent gods – they can be injured and die. Neither are they morally perfect – quite the opposite, they can be whimsical, capricious, and even morally deplorable.

A widespread characterisation of these metahumans is as *ancestors*, whether fictive or real, whose influence on the world of the living continues even after the biological death of their bodies. However, their influence is limited to their real or fictive descendants (Bellah 2011:95; Sahlins 2022b:94-104). This is the case particularly of the ancient Andes, where forms of *ancestrolatry* have been amply documented (e.g., Zuidema 1973a; Salomon 1995) – the most famous of which was the Inka dynasty (Bauer 2004). I have argued in the previous

⁶¹ Depending on the game being played, skill or chance may be preponderant, although sometime both are needed.

sections that the archaeological gameboards in the core corpus may have developed and spread in parallel with the emergence of practices of ancestral veneration.

The relevance of the following discussion to the archaeological boards is related to their possible use as gaming devices, as I argue, serving as integrative mechanisms within the ritualised economy of ancient Andean communities. It is not possible to determine conclusively whether chance, skills, or a combination of both were involved in the game that was possibly played with these objects. Chapter 2 and 3 showed that games of both chance and skills have been known in the Andes. Even in the case of boardgames, while dice or race games are prevalent, it is not possible to establish whether chance alone was sufficient. Either way, games can have significant ritual roles in immanentist societies because both chance and skills, I will argue, can equally be channels of communication and exchange between the human and cosmic society.

The significant role of chance and skills in games is something already noted by Lévi-Strauss (1966:30-33) in a passage discussed in Chapter 3. The French anthropologist argues that, unlike rituals, games start from symmetry but create “asymmetry [...] from the contingent nature of events, themselves due to intention, *chance or talent* [my emphasis]” (32). Notably, the identification of “chance and talent” as disruptive forces is relevant to our discussion. Both are seen by Lévi-Strauss as capable of engendering new and unpredictable outcomes.

As far as chance is concerned, Huizinga (1949:56-58) notes that dice games make divine efficacy accessible, and Hocart (1970:158) underlines how the divine king can win against the powers of evil, and thus protect his people, not just through warfare and ritual violence (i.e., sacrificial offerings), but also with the aid of dice. Hocart mentions a Buddhist practice in which a representative of the Dalai Lama engages in confrontation with the evil king of demons, defeating him at a dice game (Köppen 1859:315; Dotson et al. 2021:10). In this context, dice games are seen as an “arena for communication between humans and gods” (Dotson et al. 2021:10). Chance is a particularly powerful tool of communication between the human and metahuman society. In fact, it can be a challenge to the socio-cosmic order, as it defies merit and is unpredictable (Caillois 2001:17-18). As a “disruption of the cosmic order [games of chance are] also a disruption of the status quo. They correct in favor of balance, which is itself an assertion of a different sort of cosmic order” (Dotson et al. 2021:11).

Thus, dice games lend themselves to the renegotiation of status, given their disruptive force, but they can also be potentially dangerous. This may be why the Inka sovereign seems to have always been expected to win at games. As noted in Chapter 2, the Inka was conceived as the prime mediator between the human and the cosmic polity of metahumans and he may have been expected to win because of this role (Zuidema 1989). Andean societies, such as the Inkas, lived in an immanentist world (e.g., Gose 2022; Lau and Chicoine 2025). Their social order reflected a cosmic order, as perfectly exemplified by the Inka Capac Hucha, the sacrificial ceremony carried out at the death of an Inka emperor. The Capac Hucha's sacrificial offerings activated the network of political ties of the centre (i.e., the Inka and Cusco), "repairing the homology between polity and cosmos which would once again be presented as timeless under the rule of the succeeding sovereign" (Salomon 1995:327). As argued by Sahlins (2022a; 2022b:Chapter 6, 137), the importance of preserving this homology for the social reproduction of sovereignty can be explained by conceiving the cosmic polity or cosmic state as preceding the human one, both in chronological and causal terms. In this sense, humans appropriated godly powers and reproduced a preexisting cosmic order in a social context, thus basing their sovereignty on one originally belonging to a cosmic sphere.

Notably, Hocart's parallel between ritual violence and dice games as a way for sovereigns to assert their cosmic victory is pertinent in the context of the Inkas. The Capac Hucha was a sacrificial ceremony carried out at times of disruption, when transition to a new order was needed (i.e., the death of a ruler). Games appear to have been ritually significant at similar times, as discussed earlier and in Chapter 2. Both seem to have functioned as a manner to repair the homology between the human and cosmic society at transitional periods, which can involve disorder before a new order is achieved. These concepts find several resonances in the iconography of the boards discussed in Chapter 9.

Both ethno-historically and ethnographically, dice games in the Andes appear to have intervened at transitional moments in life (e.g., death) or the ritual calendar (e.g., harvest and replanting), helping to establish a new equilibrium (see Chapter 2). For instance, they contributed to creating a sense of unity among participants, facilitating redistributive processes and reconfiguring status relations. In the majority of these contexts, the unpredictable outcome of dice and lots is explicitly presented as channelling metahuman will to sanction a new

order, so that the disruptive force of chance is tamed and acquires a meaningful cosmic function (e.g., the funerary dice game of southern Ecuador and Peru).

Skills are also related to metahumans in immanentist societies, where humans typically appropriate the powers or talents of metapersons – what Sahlins (2022b:104) describes as the “human usurpation of the gods”. For examples, Hocart (1970:156-61) relates the warlike character of kings, battling against evil to protect society, to their specific association with thunder-gods, associated with warfare. This stands in opposition to the law-giving and orderly power of the king, which proceeds instead from his association with the sun.⁶² Hocart’s analysis finds again resonances in an Andean context. In the Inka empire, the sovereign acted as a representative of the sun and it was in this quality that he could appropriate and enact the governing power associated with it (Zuidema 1989:262). In the hierarchy of metahumans composing the Inka cosmic state, while the sun was associated with “order and sovereignty”, the thunder represented “transition and force” (Zuidema 1992:38). Ethnohistorical sources attest to the association, in colonial and proto-historical times, between the lightning- or thunder-god (known as *illapa* or *libiac/liviac/lliviac*) and the upper moiety/*ayllu* associated with foreign invaders and warriors (*llacuaz*). Again, the lightning god is associated with warfare, conquerors, and the coming of rain. Local paramount chiefs were regarded as the children of the lightning god (Duviols 1973; Zuidema 1973a; Mariscotti de Görlitz 1972). These resonances may extend even further back in time, as argued by Lau and Luján (2025), who made the case that the Recuay lords of Pashash were equally associated with the lightning god through the apotheosis of esteemed ancestors, who became identified as storm deities. Pashash elites also promoted an iconography that presented them as pastoralist war lords.

Notably, in addition to lightning and lightning-god, the Quechua term *illapa* referred to mummy bundles, thereby suggesting a culturally informed semantic overlap between these concepts (Lau and Luján 2025:136). The ancestors were significant metahuman instantiations in the ancient Andes. As seen in the previous section, veneration of esteemed forebears may have been crucial to the social processes characterising the EIP and MH. In Inka times, mummified rulers (also known as *illapa*) continued to be relevant political actors, retaining

⁶² Hocart (1970:138, 46) suggests that this is related to the regularity of the sun in determining the “orderly procession of the seasons”.

their attendants, properties, and they were regularly engaged with by the living (Bauer 2004:159-84; Gose 1996; Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:287-88 [289-90]).

In an Andean context, ancestral mummies are perceived as descendants of higher metahumans, *wak'a*, whose essence animates sacred objects such as lithic statues and stones. The *wak'a* ancestry stretches further up the cosmic lineage to significant land features in a sacred geography, or to natural agents, celestial bodies, such as imposing snowcapped mountains and storm deities. Salomon (1995:321) writes that “in this fashion, ancestry could be imagined as a seamless web expanding from family organization to geographic and even cosmological order”. However, this statement can be reversed so that the cosmic hierarchical order beginning with storm and celestial deities or sacred mountains and descending to the lower echelons of divinity (*wak'a* and ancestors) is linked to humans via lineage through the apotheosis of esteemed ancestors, thus allowing humans to appropriate the cosmic polity and turn it into a source of divine power and authority. Certain powers and prerogatives inherent to these metahumans became hypostases claimed by human actors, which included human skills and abilities.

Sillar (1994) and Allen (1997; 1988:135) note that skills are conceived in the Andes as a gift of the deities and they are also related to ‘play’ due to the crucial role that the latter has in a child’s acquisition of new skills. Children learn through imitative play, and this gives them access to talents that belong to metahumans. As a result, ‘play’ is seen as a powerful communication channel with the divine, and, for this reason, forms of play akin to that of children feature in instances of adult rituals (e.g., Allen 1997). Through play, children are said to enter in a system of reciprocal exchange (*ayni* in Quechua) with the gods, which is crucial to the life of any individual. In fact, this system governs the circulation of life-giving energy, known as *camay*, both at the social and cosmic level (Mannheim 1986; Allen 1997; Bray 2009). Deities bestow upon humans the skills individuals need to be active members in a system of reciprocity governing the human and cosmic society, which enables *camay* to circulate.

Scholars have noted that the concept of *mana* offers a useful paradigm to understand *camay* (Bray 2009; Sillar 2009; Marett 1914). In Polynesia, *mana* indicates a vitalising force originating in the divine, which is indispensable to any generative or productive aspect of life (Valeri 1985:98). Not only does *mana* animate matter, but even humans owe their abilities

and success in life to the possession of *mana* (Codrington 1891:120). Accordingly, Sahlins (2022b:122) argues that “*mana* is literally handed down as a substance by the god to the [...] ancestor, and thence to the chief” and it is attributed *post-factum* to those who achieved success – whether political, military, or financial – by virtue of their skills.⁶³

Arguably, skills are key to success in many games and, in immanentist societies, a successful performance at a game can become evidence of someone’s divine efficacy. In discussing games of skill, it is noteworthy that the concept of *mana* has also been linked to another historical example where human skills, specifically applied to athletic games, were considered divine. In the ancient Greek panhellenic games, victorious athletes were apotheosised to a semi-divine status in life (*hêmitheos*) (Spivey 2018:259-60). Kurke (1998) argues that athletic victory in archaic Greece was not only personal glory but part of an “economy of *kudos*”. *Kudos* was a special, talismanic power, akin to *mana*, equally bestowed by the gods upon humans as a result of their prowess. Contests such as the Panhellenic games were not just sports, but they were embedded in a symbolic economy of divine power, civic honour, and ritual exchange. *Kudos* proceeding from victorious athletes bound together individual achievement to communal identity, sometimes elevating victors to the status of heroes, who were deemed to have a special sacred efficacy. Their skills, resulting from talent and training, were seen as a gift from the gods (Spivey 2018:261).

As explored in Chapter 2, ethnographic and ethnohistorical data from the Andean region substantiate the role of games in human communication with metahumans and in a symbolic economy of ritual exchange with the divine. For example, ethnohistorical sources relate that an Inka’s secondary son gained new provinces after winning at a game of skill against his father (Zuidema 1967; 1973b). We learn also of a spear-throwing competition to propitiate rain and abundance (Salomon and Urioste 1991:117). The ethnographic record provides evidence of games used to communicate with the dead, where the outcome channelled the expression of the will of the departed (e.g., Karsten 1930; Brownrigg 1989; Rivet 1927a; 1925; 1927b; Corr 2008; Pærregaard 1987).

In several instances, games of chance and skill served to propitiate the dead, redistribute wealth (e.g., at funeral wakes but also during the Inka Raymi), and as a reconciliatory

⁶³ On the relation between *mana*, effectiveness, and divine origins, see also Firth (1940); Shore (1989).

instrument at times of disruption, including the death of someone, a change in government (e.g., Salomon 2002), or a transitional period of the ritual calendar – e.g., between the harvest and the replanting (Zuidema 1989). At times of disruption, propitiatory games appear to have facilitated the transition toward the establishment of a new order, sanctioned by metahuman will, whose beneficial outcome was redistributed among the participants. Significantly, games are entertaining and enjoyable communal events, and accordingly, they bring people together. This aspect should not be dismissed, as it may have been foundational to their ritual role (Crist 2019). Even when games take on a more violent character, as in the case of *tinkuy* and *pucara* fights, they appear to have still served an overarching reconciliatory role, where tension is released and a new order established.

I suggest that some of the traits associated with games of chance and skills in the Andes from the Inka period until today are compatible with the archaeological record of gameboards from the pre-Columbian Andes (see above and Chapters 6-8) and their iconography (see Chapter 9). The main archaeological contexts in which of these gameboards have been found suggest they were associated with spaces related to mortuary activities and ancestral veneration (see Chapter 6 and 7), termination rites at times of abandonment of a building or settlement (see Chapter 7), and burials (see Chapter 6-8). Iconographically, the archaeological boards emphasise confrontation with an emphasis on military symbolism and transition towards a new equilibrium (see Chapter 9). In a few cases, the imagery of the boards seems to also relate to divinised forebears and higher metahuman beings.

Thus, based on the foregoing, I argue that the boards of the core corpus were gaming devices, serving similar purposes as their later counterparts. My previous discussion on the role of chance and skills in immanentist societies provides a possible framework to understand why gameboards could be linked to the emergence of ancestral veneration and a new set of related social mechanisms. Ancestors became increasingly important actors in the ritual practices of corporate groups in the Andes, and their apotheosis appears to have linked kinship groups to higher metahuman beings, such as storm deities, who were key to the continued fertility and prosperity of the land. Evidence suggests that they acted as supreme mediators in the political economy of collectives. If understood as an expression of their will and influence, chance and skills in games may have served as a primary communication channel through which these metahuman entities could sanction a new cosmic order, bestowing unity

upon a segmentary collective, and integrating social groups across divides. Thus, I argue that the function of the gameboards in integrative mechanisms, mediating between competing collectives in ritualised economies, originated precisely from their propitiatory and unifying quality under the aegis of metahuman agents.

In light of the general framework and trajectory of argumentation provided here, the next three chapters will delve into the evidence offered by the archaeological record for each of the three phases associated with the core corpus. The evidence allows for a better understanding of the specific modes in which the gameboards operated and were utilised.

6

Phase A

HIGHLAND ANCASH (ca. AD 200-700)

Phase A boards are confined to highland Ancash, clustering particularly around the province of Pallasca and along the Callejón de Huaylas. Despite their geographically limited distribution, they constitute the largest sample in the core corpus. There are 72 boards belonging to phase A, making up 84% of the total. This attests to the popularity of these objects within the Recuay cultural area, in which they appear to have first emerged as socially meaningful artifacts (Figures 27-29).

Two main collections comprise the bulk of the phase-A sample. The largest one includes boards from Pallasca, the northernmost province of Ancash. These boards are housed in the museum of Cabana, the capital of the Pallasca province, and a few private collections – a further example held at Field Museum in Chicago and collected by G. Dorsey in the late-19th century also originates from Cabana (FIE-01). Except for two examples, the Cabana corpus is made up of chance finds, encountered by locals in fields. Most of the boards now in the local museum were formerly in private collections. Some had originally been reutilised as building blocks and integrated in the architecture of the town – as for example CAB-02. When first documented by Richard Schaedel during his PhD fieldwork, it was part of a modern architectural wall (Smith 1977:Figure 5; Schaedel 1952). Upon the opening of the new archaeological museum of Cabana in 1984, these boards along with other archaeological artefacts held in private collections or excavated archaeologically merged to form the museum collection (Lau and Wegner 2023).

The only two boards from this area that were found in controlled excavations include an elaborate Type-1 board, excavated by Terence Grieder (1978) in the summer of 1971 at the site of Pashash (see also Smith 1977), and a second one excavated by the Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológica - Región Pallasca (PIARP) project in 2022 (Lau and Luján 2025:137). Even though we do not have any detailed information about the provenance of the other boards, it is safe to assume that they all originate from the broader archaeological

area pertaining to the site of Pashash and its surroundings, which would have originally extended beyond the bounds of the modern archaeological site. Many satellite settlements have been documented around Cabana by PIARP (Lau et al. 2023). For the purpose of this study, all the boards in the Cabana Museum – though unprovenanced – have been recorded as coming from Pashash.

Boards have also been documented in other parts of Pallasca, such as in the village of Conchucos at a location known as Pirocancha, where a chance find revealed a Type-1 board, now in a private collection in Lima (José Alfonso Raga Miranda, personal communication, 2022) and in the village of Huandoval, where Wiener (1878; 1880) reportedly documented the earliest known examples of this artefact type in Peru – of the two boards Wiener presented, one is lost but a second is likely still in a private collection of Cabana (ID n. CAB-09).

A second substantial corpus comes from the Callejón de Huaylas. Part is held at the archaeological museum of Caraz and the Museo de Sitio of Tumshukayko (Huaylas province). These boards largely come from the nearby area, including the site of Tumshukayko, where 5 boards were found (CAR-03, TUM-01, -02, -04, -05, the latter was excavated by the Antonio Raimondi archaeological project in 2024). Tumshukayko is a vast temple mound, dating back to the pre-Ceramic period, but featuring numerous later re-occupations, including Huaylas (ca. BC 200 – AD 200) and Recuay (Orsini et al. 2023; Bueno 2003; 2005).

Moving south along the Callejón de Huaylas, the second largest sample of Phase-A is located in the archaeological museum of Huaraz. None of the boards in this collection have documented provenance, but they all probably originate from sites around Huaraz – both on the Cordillera Negra side (e.g., Walun, Pongor, Balcón de Judas, etc.) and on the side of the Cordillera Blanca (e.g., Wilkawain, Kekamarca, Jancu, etc.). The area of Huaraz, and more generally the whole Callejón de Huaylas, features several Recuay period sites (Lau 2011:40).

Additionally, south of Huaraz, other boards may come from the province of Aija, where the founder of the museum, Augusto Soriano Infante, is known to have collected pieces. For example, a Type-2 board in the collections of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York (AMN-1; Figure 28a), with documented provenance, reportedly comes from Aija, where it was originally collected by Augusto Soriano Infante. In 1950, it was sold to Walram von Schoeler and was given after his death to Junius Bird who donated it to the AMNH (AMNH Accession n. 1981-29). An additional southern example is also

known from Castillo Punta, Catac, Recuay province (P. Maza Herrera, in Lau 2016:Appendix). A board has also been documented in Pamparomás, along one of the valleys descending from the Callejón de Huaylas toward the coast. Finally, two other boards have been recorded north of Caraz, in the town of Huaylas.

A few more examples have also been documented in the region east of the Cordillera Blanca, which also fell within the Recuay cultural sphere, with one specimen documented in the northern province of Pomabamba, and probably coming from the hilltop fortified site of Yayno (Lau 2010b:439-40; 2010c; 2014a:320), one in Chacas (Asunción) (Wegner 2001:14; Lau 2011:Figure 45), and one from the Huari province, at the site of Pariac Punta, Huántar (Diessl 2004a:160-63; 2004b:351).

The concentration of boards is higher west of the Cordillera Blanca, with Pallasca and the Callejón de Huaylas north of Huaraz featuring most prominently. While caution is necessary, it is reasonable to believe that the geographical distribution documented in the current database reflects the original distribution of these boards and their popularity during the Recuay period. The large collections of Cabana and Huaraz (and, to a smaller degree, Caraz and Mancos, also in the Callejón de Huaylas) are not found anywhere else in Ancash. The high density of boards in these areas also correlates with Recuay settlements' distribution patterns (Lau 2011).

In brief, the current record presents a higher concentration of boards in Pallasca and the northern tip of the Callejón de Huaylas. While Recuay groups from other areas of Ancash were familiar with this artefact, and appear to have utilised it too, the sample indicates that nowhere else did it ever reach the same level of popularity as in northern Ancash. This is unlikely to be a sampling bias, since the Callejón de Huaylas has been even more thoroughly researched and studied than Pallasca or the area around Caraz (e.g., for Chacas, Asunción see Orsini 2014; for Chinchawas, see Lau 2010a; for Hualcayán, Bria 2017).⁶⁴ Broadly speaking, these boards seem to have been more connected with a northern Recuay tradition that spread south, along the Callejón the Huaylas, and across the Cordillera Blanca to the area of Chacas, Pomabamba, and Huántar.

⁶⁴ This does not discount the possibility that further research will not reveal new examples from these southern areas too.

I

Geographical Distribution

A further relevant aspect is the boards' distribution by Type (Table 11, Map 6). All three Types have been documented during phase-A (1, 2, 3), as opposed to the following phases, which have produced so far only Type-1 and Type-3. Type-2 boards appear to have been unique to phase-A and thus to Recuay. As discussed earlier, Type-2 features reflection symmetry instead of rotational symmetry resulting in a different arrangement of the compartments. Despite disappearing from later phases, it is the most common design of phase A according to the current database, with 38 out of 72 boards belonging to Type-2 (53%). The proportion of Type-1 boards increases moving north along the Callejón de Huaylas. There are particularly high percentages of Type-1 and Type-3 boards at Tumshukayko (Huaylas) and Pashash (Pallasca).

In Pallasca, 22 boards have been recorded, 21 coming from Cabana (Pashash). In the Pallasca corpus, there are 10 Type-1, 1 Type-3, and 11 Type-2 boards. The finest Type-1 boards of phase-A are found in Pallasca – where there is an equal number of Type-1/3 and Type-2 – while the finest Type-2 boards are found in southern Ancash.

Out of the 5 boards found in Tumshukayko, 4 belong to Type-1/3 and only 1 to Type-2. Likewise, the northern portion of the province of Huaylas has produced 8 boards, 6 of which are Type-1/3 (75%) and only 2 belong to Type-2 (25%). This area includes the village of Huaylas – home to Chupacoto, another site that similarly to Tumshukayko shows a long occupational span, including Recuay (Querevalú Ulloa 2014; Brock 2024) – Caraz, Pamparomás, and a Recuay high-altitude site known as Aukispukio, in the Quebrada Los Cedros (Kinzl 1935).

Descending the Callejón de Huaylas, 4 boards are held in a private collection in Mancos and an additional 10 in the archaeological museum of Huaraz – all likely originate from the surrounding areas along and around the Callejón de Huaylas – 11 are Type-2 (79%) and only 3 are Type-1/3 (21%). Thus, the proportion of Type-2 to Type-1/3 becomes inverted south of Caraz, with a majority of Type-2 boards.

While small, the sample of boards from the area south of Huaraz shows a similar pattern, with the few documented examples all belonging to Type-2. For instance, Aija has only produced one Type-2 board and the site of Castillo Punta, Catac, yielded an additional Type-

2 board. Unfortunately, the limited number of examples documented in these southern provinces is too limited to draw any generalisation. However, the modest sample size seems to reflect the general distribution pattern of these boards. Type-1/3 boards are clustered around the northern fringes of the Recuay territory, corresponding to the central and northern portion of the Callejón de Huaylas and the province of Pallasca, while Type-2 dominate the sample in southern Ancash.

East of the Cordillera Blanca, the sample is even more modest, preventing an in-depth understanding of their distribution. In the south, Pariac Punta, Huantar, yielded 2 Type-2 boards (Diessl 2004a:160-63; 2004b:351), and one more Type-2 board has been recorded in Chacas, Asunción. To the north, a Type-1 board has been documented in Pomabamba (Lau 2016:Appendix).⁶⁵ While the sample is too small to draw any general conclusion, it is worth noting that the only Type-1 board corresponds to the northern area of Pomabamba, while the southern provinces have produced only Type-2 boards, which parallels the distribution pattern highlighted for other side of the cordillera.

Overall, the boards' distribution of phase-A, as recorded in the current database, suggests a north-south gradient, both in terms of general and typological distribution. Type-1 boards are more common in Pallasca and the northern fringe of the Callejón de Huaylas, but they decrease in number as one descends the Callejón de Huaylas towards the south, where the ratio Type-1 to Type-2 is reversed. The site of Pashash presents the largest sample and also the most balanced typologically with an equal number of Type-1/3 and Type-2 boards. The Pashash/Cabana sample also includes the most refined examples. Nowhere else in Ancash can one find the same concentration and variability of boards as in Pashash.

Tumshukayko is also a notable site where a group of 5 boards has been found, which present less fine carving than those from Pashash. All but one (a Type-2) are Type-1/3 boards. This distribution pattern suggests that Type-1 boards may have been more closely associated with northern Recuay groups during phase-A. More broadly, boards are more numerous in northern Ancash, where they cluster around Pashash. Perhaps, this may suggest that they first emerged at the site of Pashash and spread south via intra-Recuay contact.

⁶⁵ A third Type-1 board was found in Marcajirca, but this will be discussed in the section dedicated to Phase B1 to which it appears to belong due to stylistic traits.

If the current database is representative of Recuay typological preferences, southern Recuay groups appear to have been more drawn to a Type-2 design, for yet unclear reasons. Also noteworthy is that Type-1/3 are more common in areas with a higher concentration of boards. While sampling issues cannot be entirely ruled out, it is reasonable that this distributional pattern may reflect different symbolical values attributed to the two designs, and different ways in which southern and northern Recuay groups related to them.

Differences in iconography and material culture expressions within the broader Recuay cultural sphere are known. Recuay styles and architectural patterns vary across Ancash. For example, the type of Recuay monoliths common in Aija and Huaraz are not documented in Pallasca. Likewise, ceramic styles also indicate a north-south division and there are also architectural differences between the Recuay settlements in Huaraz and Caraz – which do not feature any major defensive structures – and the northern hilltop forts typical of Pallasca (e.g., Pashash, Sugar, Chucana, Pocsha, etc.) and Pomabamaba (e.g., Yayno) (Lau 2011; Lau et al. 2023).

II Style

Type-1 phase-A boards feature stylistic variations, such as the shape of a specific compartment or the number and arrangement of levels and compartments in Zone A. The central compartment can either have a rectangular shape (Figure 27a/d/e/f), or it can be shaped like a Greek cross (Figure 27b). The latter is a rare occurrence, appearing in only two examples – one in a fragmentary Type-1 stone board in the museum of Cabama, CAB-7 – and a Type-1 wooden board documented by Wolfgang Wurster (1982:302) in the early 1980s in a private collection in Lima (WUR-02).⁶⁶ However, this shape is particularly significant from an iconographic perspective. Often referred to as *chaca(na)*, these crosses have arms of equal length and a long history as an iconographic motif. Appearing already during the preceramic period

⁶⁶ It should be noted that WUR-02 could equally belong to phase-B2, and in the absence of radiocarbon dating this attribution must remain tentative. The rationale in assigning it to phase-A is that the only other instance of a cross-shaped central compartment occurs in a phase-A Type-1 boards from Pashash. Second, the other piece documented by Wurster in the same private collection (WUR-01), which allegedly has an analogous provenance, is a Type-2 piece possibly from the Callejón de Huaylas.

(Bueno 2003; 2005) – with several examples dating to the Late Formative period and related to Chavín – and continuing into the present (Mardones 2023; Kauffmann Doig 2015).

The term *chaca(na)* has been documented ethno-historically, appearing in several early-colonial chronicles and dictionaries, where it is variably translated as steps, threshold, hip, but also as indicating the Orion belt constellation (González Holguín 1952; Ricardo 1586; Zuidema 1973a). Significantly, the early-colonial native chronicler Pachacuti Yamqui (n.d.:Fol. 13v), writing at the beginning of the 17th century, depicts a celestial cross in his famous cosmological drawing, adding the caption “*chacana en general* [*chacana* in general]”. This has been taken to suggest that *chacana* indicated any two lines or axes that meet in one point, whether forming a celestial cross, a bridge, a ladder, or even the human hip (see González Holguín 1952).⁶⁷

As argued by Urton (1981:138, 40, 50), the common thread running through all these manifestations of the *chaca(na)* concept is the “expression of a principle of simultaneous union/bifurcation”, and by extension the meeting of complementary opposites, which come together to unify. The term *tinkuy* – already discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to a type of ethnographically attested games and duels – is the Quechua expression that captures the broader symbolism associated with such union and simultaneous bifurcation of two elements. A primary example of the notion of *tinkuy* in relation to the *chacana* cross is encapsulated by the term *tincuk-mayo*, provided by the Quechua dictionary of González Holguín (1952), which translates as the confluence of two rivers. This is a particularly significant feature of Andean sacred geography and associated cosmology. Multiple strands of archaeological evidence seem to indicate that the significance of the confluence of two rivers is of considerable antiquity, stretching back into the pre-Hispanic past. For instance, the temple of Chavín was built at the confluence of two rivers (Mosna and Huanchecsa) (Burger 2008:684). Historically, we have already seen that on the fifth day of the *pacaricuc* funerary wake – during which the *pichca* game was played – the deceased’s clothes had to be washed in a river, but Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615:297 [299]) specifies this had to be the

⁶⁷ The use of *chaca(na)* in this text differs from its commonplace meaning in Andean archaeology, but it is closer to the meaning it reportedly had in early-colonial Quechua. It is employed here to denote any “non-Latin cruciforms” (Urton 1981:138) and as an expression of the *tinkuy* of opposites. This interpretation draws on early colonial chroniclers, particularly Pachacuti Yamqui (n.d.:Fol. 13v), on Quechua lexicographic sources (e.g., González Holguín [1952]) and on studies of Andean ethnoastronomy (Urton 1981:132, 138-40, 150).

confluence of two rivers, which he refers to as “*tincoc yaco* [i.e., the confluence of water(courses)]” (see also Arriaga 1999:65-66; Hacas Poma 1981:114).

Relevant to this is the interpretation provided by Randall (1987:156-57) and echoed by Sillar (1994:55) of Ludovico Bertonio’s description of a type of *auca-ttacca* gameboard, discussed in Chapter 2, characterised by a meandering sequence of playing spaces that resembled a river. They regard this piece of information as symbolically meaningful and argue that the gaming track may have actually represented a river, symbolising the link between the living and the dead. Based on Hacas Poma’s (1981:114) early colonial account of Andean funerary practices, Randall (1987:157) argues that the clothes of the deceased had to be washed in a river at the end of the *pacaricuc*, because the river would have carried the essence of the dead to the Ocean, thus preventing the deceased from ever returning. Underlying such a worldview is a conception of the ocean as part of the underworld and thus connected to the realm of the dead. Likewise, Randall argues, the meandering shape of the *auca-ttacca* gameboard symbolised the river leading to the ocean and linking living and dead.

This reading, while hypothetical, is suggestive in light of the overall layout of Type-1 boards and the placement of a *chacana* cross right at the centre of two examples. Particularly significant is the potential link of this layout to watercourses and their confluence. That Type-1 board are highly reminiscent of the meandering design described by Bertonio cannot be entirely ignored. While this does imply continuity in symbolism and meaning, their similarities and the presence of a *chacana* cross in a couple of Recuay examples warrants further considerations.

Crosses in the pre-Hispanic Andes are believed to have carried a water symbolism. Citing Quiroga (1942:254), Urton (1981:138) argues “that water/rain was the fundamental motive of the different religious systems in the Americas and that its uniform symbol was the cross”. As more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 9, the iconography of two watercourses merging at the *chacana* compartment is not alien to the overall symbolism of these boards and the possible game that was played with them. The presence of a *chacana* right where the two sequences of small compartments converge serves to highlight the symbolical importance of the compartment situated at the confluence of two meandering tracks. This may indicate a general notion of *tinkuq* or *tinkuy*, whether of a *mayu/o* (i.e., river) or any two opposite elements that according to Andean duality merge to create a unity through a

hierarchically ranked pair of complementary halves. This ties in with the discussion of the meaning of *auca-ttacca*, the term Bertonio provided for these gameboards and presented in Chapter 3. If *auca-ttacca* meant enemy groups and, by extension, it indicated the complementary yet ranked opposition of two halves, it would appear related to the symbolism of a Type-1 board's layout.⁶⁸

It is probably no coincidence that a Christian cross was carved in the rectangular central compartment of a Type-1 board in the collection of the archaeological museum of Caraz (CAR-02, Figures 27d, 30). This board allegedly comes from the site of Chupacoto, near the village of Huaylas, where it was reportedly found in the 1990s by construction workers (Mariano Arayas, personal communication, 2023). The presence of a Christian cross in the central compartment would support an interpretation that assigns a symbolical significance to the central compartment. However, it also complicates the chronology this work is proposing. The addition of a Christian cross to CAR-02 may suggest that, even after these boards had fallen out of use, following the Middle Horizon, some Andean communities still recognised their symbolism. Notably, the Spanish replacement of the Andean *chacana* with the Christian cross, fostering syncretism, is well documented (Burgoa Coria 2010; Mardones 2023).⁶⁹

The part of the board that is most susceptible to changes is Zone A, which shows several variations. In the current database, during phase-A, Zone A of Type-1 boards can vary from 1 to 3 levels, which can display from 1 to 4 compartment(s) each (Figure 27). Type-2 boards follow a similar pattern, including twenty-one examples with 2 compartments but a variable number of levels, either 1 or 2 (Figure 28). Type-3 boards from phase-A are more consistent and tend to have 2 compartments and 2 levels (Figure 29). The large degree of variation of Zone A in an otherwise very standardised artefact cannot be currently explained. While the combination of 2 levels and 2 compartments seems to have been the most standard, their variability does not seem to have compromised the function of the boards. As the

⁶⁸ Another Type-2 board in the Cabana museum has a central compartment whose shape resembles a lake (CAB-15).

⁶⁹ The inclusion of Christian symbols in pre-Hispanic items was part of a documented syncretic process that took place at the beginning of the colonial period, when Andean worshippers were wont to adding Christian elements to native sacred items in an attempt to solve the religious tensions originating from the new Catholic impositions (Salomon 2004:120).

rest of the layout displays remarkable consistency in number and arrangement of compartments (7 small compartments and 3 wider one in the centre), it is possible that these were the boards' key elements that allowed for their correct functioning. Zone A variability also suggests possible alternatives in the use of these boards – for example, if these were game-boards, layout differences may have determined variations in game mechanics.

III Materials

Out of the 72 boards from the core corpus belonging to phase-A, 67 are made of stone, accounting for 93% of phase-A corpus. Different types of stone have been utilised, including andesite, sandstone, and rhyodacite. However, individual identification of stone used for each board awaits further research. Stone selection often depended on the availability of local quarries, but intentional choices may have also played a role (Litschi 2022; Brito and Litschi 2022). Litschi and Brito conducted mineralogical identification of many lithic sculptures in the archaeological museum of Huaraz, including one board in the core corpus – MAA-02 (cat. n. MAA-0307, Figure 28b). This is made of an unaltered andesite, belonging to the San Franciscan andesite group originating from a quarry at the site of Pongor, across the Santa River from the modern town of Huaraz, in the Cordillera Negra (Litschi 2022:246, 375, 77, Table 3.17).

In some instances, the process leading to the selection of a particular kind of stone seems to have been intentional. For example, CAB-1 (Figure 27a), discussed below, is made of sandstone, unlike the stone(s) used for most sculptures in Pashash, where it was found. Probably, this choice was partly due to the practical needs of using a more malleable stone suitable for the elaborate carvings and iconography decorating its sides. Frequently, sandstone appears in the Cordillera Negra as layers within outcrops with distinct geological properties (Mirko Brito, personal communication, 2022).

In general, the variety of rock types utilised in lithic sculptures by Recuay sculptors reflects their knowledge and craftsmanship, and the role that stone played as a medium in the Recuay world. That stone was and is a significant material in the Andes has been repeatedly attested both in Recuay (Lau 2016) and beyond (e.g., Janusek and Williams 2016; Janusek et al. 2012; Dean 2010; Ogburn 2004; 2013). Sometimes, the significance of stone appears

to have been augmented by the importance attributed to certain outcrops by Andean cultures. In Recuay, this can be seen in the case of the exploitation of certain quarries, such as in Walun and Pongor in the Huaraz area, as documented by Litschi (2022) and Brito and Litschi (2022) – the Walun quarry was part of a broader outcrop that is still sacred and a significant landmark today. A small cave inside this outcrop (Figure 31), near an archaeological quarry, is still the focus of ritual offerings by local indigenous communities, as witnessed by the author at the time of his visit.⁷⁰

The sacredness of rocky outcrops, whether small boulders or whole mountains, is well documented in the Central Andean region (Duviols 1978; Lau 2016; Salomon and Urioste 1991; Dean 2010; Ogburn 2004; Salomon 2018). In historical times, *ayllu* lineages had very remote ancestor, far removed from the living present, who had transformed into such landmarks (i.e., rocky outcrops or other prominent land features), thereby linking the descent group to the land they inhabited (Salomon 1995:321). In the Cabana area, a possible pre-Hispanic quarry is the outcrop in a locality currently known as El Mirador, situated at the feet of Cerro Huancayoc, which originally featured archaeological structures that are no longer visible but that used to be part of the wider archaeological area connected to the site of Pashash. According to local oral memory in Cabana,⁷¹ this outcrop used to be much larger until it was dynamited in the 1950s to quarry stones, then used in the construction of the modern buildings of Cabana. In the process, pre-Columbian burials were exposed, which were probably interred in cave-like spaces within the outcrop. If true and provided this outcrop was actually a pre-Columbian quarry used during the Recuay period (which still awaits scientific confirmation), it would represent a compelling example of why this stone source could become particularly meaningful to local Recuay people. Several of the boards in Cabana museums are made of local stones, which may have included the El Mirador quarry.

In the case of the boards from Tumshukayko, these were often made by reutilising the building blocks from the older walls of the temple mound, which by Recuay times had undergone profound changes. There is evidence of Huaylas and Recuay houses built on top

⁷⁰ Brito (personal communication, 2022) identified several lithic implements in the area that suggest the presence of a carving workshop. Additionally, during the visit to the site, unfinished Recuay monoliths in the making were found scattered around the outcrop.

⁷¹ Special thanks to Guilda Vivar, who was so generous in sharing her encyclopaedic knowledge of the town of her birth. Local newspapers from the time reportedly had news of such events but the author was not able to consult them.

of or inside the structures of the Preceramic and Formative temple (Orsini et al. 2023). Two Type-3 boards from Tumshukayko (TUM-03 and TUM-05) demonstrate this. They have been classified as Type-3 due to their rounded shape, but their shape is largely the result of being makeshift boards, produced rapidly utilising stones or building blocks available on site.

Aside from stone, three phase-A boards are made of ceramic (4%). These include two Type-3 (Figures 29c/d) and one Type-2 board (Wurster 1982:296-97). The two Type-3 boards reportedly originate from the high-altitude site of Aukispukio, where they have been allegedly excavated by Hernan Eduardo Osorio Herrera, whose private collection (largely self-excavated) was donated to the city museum of Caraz (see Osorio Herrera 2019).⁷² They are made of red clay, but traces of a white coating are still visible in certain places, suggesting that they may have originally been covered in a thin layer of white – possibly kaolin – clay. The two boards are virtually identical in shape, design, and arrangement of compartments. However, one is slightly larger (24 x 21 cm and 19 x 15 cm) – an aspect reminiscent of Andean ranked duality. One of them was allegedly found with a white stone sphere, which lay in one of its compartments. The sphere’s dimensions are compatible with the size of the compartments of the larger board.

The third ceramic board is unprovenanced and was documented by Wolfgang Wurster (1982) in the early 1980s (WUR-01), whose current whereabouts are unknown. According to the information reported to Wurster by the owner of this piece, the board allegedly originated from Ancash, possibly from the Santa valley (i.e., Callejón de Huaylas).

The board presents several outstanding features. First, it is made of a red-fired clay, with traces of an original dark red to dark violet paint. Along one side, Wurster (1982:295) describes the still partially visible dark-red decoration as “frieze-like”. Zone A features architectural representations, including steps, doors, enclosures, columns or domed structures, and ramps. Despite all these figural elements, the board preserves the typical layout of any Type-2 boards, although with a few extra compartments in Zone A (Figure 32). Additionally, WUR-01 displays tiny holes pierced in the centre of each compartment in Zone A. Wurster (1982) interprets this as a feature of a hypothetical game. These small apertures may have

⁷² This information was reported to the author by the curator of the museum of Caraz in 2023, based on information provided by Hernan Osorio.

functioned as the base for some items, maybe tokens, standing on pin-like shafts that could have been inserted into them.

Finally, two wooden boards from phase-A have also been documented. One is an unprovenanced board in the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI). The board is one of the largest of phase-A, measuring 57 x 35 cm, but relatively thin – measuring maximum 10 cm in height. While featuring the typical layout of a Type-1 board, it also displays some unique characteristics, including Recuay-style anthropomorphic elements decorating the sides of the elevated Zone A, which are likely miniature reproductions of sculptural forms jutting out of Recuay architectural walls (Figure 33). Another unusual feature appears in the middle of the central compartment, where a cone stands in the central point of the board, around which the symmetry revolves (Figure 27c). The elevated areas with their sculptural forms appear to mimic architectural elements of Recuay edifices – a characteristic defining other boards. This specimen has been radiocarbon dated (see Chapter 4), yielding a cal. date range at 95% probability of AD 340 – 575, placing it in the early to mid-Recuay period. A second board, made of wood and discussed earlier in relation to its cross-shaped central compartment, was tentatively attributed to phase-A. This was also documented by Wurster (1982) in the same private collection in Lima as WUR-01, also possibly coming from the Callejón de Huaylas.

Very few wooden boards are known to come from the highlands, as opposed to the high proportion of wooden boards from the coast belonging to phase-B2. This may be partly due to a sample bias, but also to the climatic conditions in the highlands, which prevent organic material from preserving as on the desert coast of Peru. However, it cannot be ruled out that this may partly have been due to intentional preferences, especially in the Recuay culture, with its long-lasting predilection for stone carving.

III Portability

The boards' weight varies, reflecting partly the materials with which they were made and their dimensions. Different weights may have been linked to different contexts of use, with the lightest items being more portable, while the heaviest examples were probably meant to be fixed in one place. In the database, boards the author could gain access to were weighed using a commercial scale. Whenever the board was in a fragmentary state, the reconstructed weight

was calculated based on a rough approximation of the percentage of board missing. Forty-one boards from phase-A have been weighed. The average weight of fourteen Type-1 boards is 12.53 kg, the average weight of twenty-four Type-2 boards is 7.60 kg, and the average weight of two Type-3 boards, both made of ceramic, is 1.35 kg.

Broadly speaking, several Type-1 boards of phase-A do not appear to have been meant to be portable. The majority of them weighs more than 5 kg, thus rendering their transport inconvenient. Probably, they were largely meant to be used within one confined space, as exemplified by the case of Pashash, where all boards found in-situ all come from one sector – La Capilla – which included a large residential and ceremonial compound (see below), and they were probably used within certain rooms.

The heaviest specimens, such as CAB-04 weighing 31 kg, CAB-07 with a reconstructed weight of ca. 33 kg, and MAL-03 weighing of approximately 21 kg were probably meant to be laid in one place as a fixture, possibly, within a communal space where people would gather. MAL-03 belongs to a group of three Type-1 boards (alongside MNA-01 and MNA-04) that feature a higher, elongated, body, which seems deliberate, possibly for a functional purpose.

IV Boards in Context

While a more detailed iconographic discussion will be developed in Chapter 9, boards with special iconographic features will be presented here. These include special outward characteristics that make these examples stand out from the wider corpus. Additionally, the archaeological context of one board excavated in situ will be discussed in detail below.

Not only do Cabana and the associated site of Pashash provide the broadest sample of boards, but also the most diverse in terms of iconographic representations. These include figurative images and architectural elements, usually in Zone A. This is the case of MAL-03 and WUR-01, described above, but also of CAB-07 which displays a ramp to access the elevate compartment of Zone A (Figures 34-35). This example is particularly revealing, in that a small aperture connects the topmost compartments to the ramp descending to the surface of the boards, where the remaining compartments are. A roughly spherical piece, whether a kernel, seed, or pebble, would have easily passed through this small hole and rolled down

from the top through the ramp to the central compartment, which in this case takes the shape of a *chacana* cross. Lau (2016:141-42) notes that the board appears to have reproduced the ramp structure accessing elevated architectural compounds typical of Recuay hilltop forts such as Yayno and Pashash. Moreover, the aperture and ramp are reminiscent of many games and toys from around the world, which involve the use of marbles or other spherical beads that are rolled down a sloping surface.

Likewise, the heaviest recorded board of phase-A, CAB-04 (Figure 27e) displays two bulging protrusions on the top compartments of Zone A. While rather abstract, they appear to represent mountain peaks or hilltops, with which the stepped elevated areas of these boards may have been associated (see Chapter 9).

Two more relevant specimen boards come from a private collection of Cabana, where they are integrated as decorative elements in a courtyard wall. These include one Type-3 (CAB-9, Figure 29b) and two Type-2 (CAB-21 and CAB-22). CAB-9 is likely one of the two boards seen by Charles Wiener (1880) in the 1870s during his travels in this region (Kubler 1993:461, Figure 404).⁷³ CAB-22 is a particularly illustrative example, displaying a unique iconography (Figure 36). The board displays a modified Type-2 layout, which features the standard 14 small compartments running along the external borders and converging at a 15th larger compartment, with 5 compartments in a non-elevated Zone A. Additionally, it features 12 small compartments placed on the internal side of the outer 14 and running parallel to them. This is an unprecedented variation on a Type-2 layout, and its meaning unclear. CAB-22 also stands out because it features two iconographic motifs in the middle of its carved surface, which include a stylised anthropomorphic figure, which appears to be holding a shield and possibly a club (poor preservation makes the identification tentative), and a geometric design above it. The latter is formed by a rectangle with an opening towards Zone A. The inner sides of the rectangle are serrated, with three rectangular designs on the left side and four on the right side. Finally, a diamond shaped element is placed in front of the opening of the rectangle. This iconography will be examined in Chapter 9. The piece reportedly comes from Pashash, where also another board with a unique iconography was excavated

⁷³ According to their current owner, these three examples were allegedly found in the agricultural fields occupying the land that now pertains to the archaeological site of Pashash – more precisely between the sectors of La Capilla and El Caserón.

(see below). The site of Pashash is related to the rise of a local Recuay elite, whose power seems to have been associated with warfare, camelid herding, and ritual practices of ancestral veneration. As a result of their recent investigation at this site, Lau et al. write that the offerings excavated in the palatial compound of Pashash

Seem to present the lord as mediator between complementary opposites, an individual who brings together the masculine and warfare associations (club, shield, and flute) of the right side versus the domestic associations (camelid and offering) of the left.

Lau et al. (2023:51)

As an anticipation of what will be argued more thoroughly in Chapter 9, these boards may have functioned as integrative mechanisms in a symbolic economy of mediation between “complementary opposites” associated with Pashash-Recuay lords (see also Grieder 1992). As a Type-1 board was archaeologically excavated inside the palatial compound of Pashash, its context will be particularly instructive.

CAB-1 (Pashash, Cabana, Pallasca, Ancash)

The excavations conducted by Terence Grieder (1978) and Alberto Bueno at the site of Pashash, in the province of Pallasca, northern Ancash, revealed a unique example of Type-1 board, associated with the Recuay culture (Figure 27a) (see also Smith 1977; 1978). Pashash is a fortified hilltop settlement. Although traces of occupation at the site extend from 2000 B.C. (George F. Lau, personal communication, 2025), up until late pre-Hispanic times, its main developmental phase occurred during the Recuay period (approximately between AD 200 – 700).

Located at approximately 3150 meters above sea level, south of present-day Cabana, Pashash is one of the major Recuay centres of northern Ancash. It was here that local elites and chiefly groups fostered an impressive technological and artistic flourishing, evident in the site’s ceramic, lithic, and metallurgical traditions. The site comprises the ruins of monumental architecture, including defensive ridgelines, elite compounds, such as palatial structures – particularly in the La Capilla sector. This is a large quadrangular compound with thick

perimeter walls and a central courtyard, belonging to the patio-group architecture discussed in Chapter 5. Positioned on a strategic hilltop overlooking a productive agricultural basin, La Capilla was the elite ceremonial and residential core. The broader archaeological area once extended across a larger network of adjacent ridgelines – including the sector known as El Caserón – and neighbouring hilltops around Cabana (e.g., Puchumalca, Cerro Huangayoc) (Figures 37, 38).

From a political-ecological perspective, the location of Pashash is consistent with a system of ecological verticality and complementarity operating at the local level. The site occupies a transitional Zone Between the high-altitude puna grasslands – ideal for camelid herding – and the lower highland basin, suitable for the cultivation of crops, such as maize, quinoa, and tubers (Lau et al. 2023; Lau and Brito 2023). As Lau et al. (2023:39) note, “Pashash’s location thus bridges two major production zones; its position also features in local oral traditions as a place that mediates the herder groups of the high, frost-prone lands above and the farmers of the warmer valley zone” (on local oral traditions, see Cuba Manrique 2019:325ff.). A broader settlement pattern – marked by terraced hillslopes, platforms, water reservoirs, and irrigation canals – facilitated agricultural exploitation of the lower basin. In addition to enabling more efficient resource use, this vertical arrangement connected local Recuay groups to trade networks and cultural interactions that transcended ecological zones.

Recent archaeological research has highlighted how Pashash’s prominence in the Early Intermediate Period coincided with the emergence of divinely sanctioned authority among elite members of the Recuay society. These forms of rulership appear to have drawn on ancestral cults, mythic genealogies, and cosmological narratives involving meteorological deities – storm or lightning gods – traditionally linked to highland herding groups cast as outsider-conquerors (Lau and Luján 2025). As discussed in Chapter 5, one significant implication of these belief systems is that Recuay social organisation was likely structured along segmentary lines, analogous in some respects to the later colonial-era *ayllu* model (Mariscotti de Görnitz 1972; Zuidema 1973a; Silverblatt 1987:71-75).

Pashash elites seem to have been engaged in the coordination of inter-zonal production and exchange, as suggested by the presence of camelid remains, iconography emphasising camelid wealth, and evidence for agricultural intensification in the Cabana basin. These features point to a controlled and hierarchical access to diverse ecological resources (Lau and

Luján 2025; Lau et al. 2023). Within this ideological and ecological framework, local rulers at Pashash may have identified as “children of the thunderbolt,” grounding their legitimacy in divine ancestry, storm deities, and the cult of apotheosized forebears. Their symbolic connection to highland ecological forces – rain, lightning, fertility – also served a practical role in reinforcing social cohesion and integrating distinct productive spheres, where separate groups competed and collaborated for scarce but complementary resources. This convergence of ritual ideology, vertical resource management, and segmentary authority may represent the most immanent expression of the cosmic structure underpinning the Recuay/Pashash polity – aligning their mythic status with their political role (see also Grieder 1992 and Chapter 5).

Pashash provides a rich and well-contextualized ceramic sequence, anchored in a solid cultural and chronological framework (Table 12). Grieder (1978) proposed the first ceramic sequence based on his excavation at the site. This sequence has since been refined by Lau et al. (2023) through new stratigraphic data and radiocarbon dates (see also Lau and Brito 2023:26). Although Grieder’s sub-phases for the Recuay period remain a useful point of reference, ongoing PIARP ceramic studies aim to determine whether these stylistic subdivisions hold up to further scrutiny.

Phase 3 ceramics at Pashash fall recognisably within the broader Recuay stylistic tradition, yet they exhibit distinct local features that support the definition of a specific Pashash-Recuay tradition. Local styles are notable for their use of white and cream-colored kaolin clay, modelled effigy vessels, and a red slip with polychrome decoration, typically in red, black, and negative painting. Their forms and surface designs are distinctive, featuring geometric patterns, depictions of what appear to be high-status individuals – and a range of stylized animals, including crested creatures, felines, bicephalic serpents, and birds (Lau and Brito 2023:26; Grieder 1978:65-70; Wegner et al. 2011). Grieder’s Yaiá sub-phase (ca. AD 400-500) represents the most refined, rich in forms and decorations, and identifiable Pashash-Recuay sub-style. The following Huacohú style is in many respects a direct continuation of Yaiá, displaying most of the same features. It is to the latter that CAB-1 is associated.

The context of the so-called “burial temple” (Grieder 1978:45-49) inside the palatial compound of the La Capilla sector is key to comprehending what, to this day, is the best-documented archaeological context for a phase-A board. CAB-1’s context is instructive, as it

was found in an elite ritual setting at a site that features the highest concentration of Type-1 and Type-2 boards anywhere in the Andean region. Additionally, this board also stands out for its unique iconography, displaying typical Recuay motifs found on other media as well. They comprise a bicephalic serpent, whose body is composed of diamonds with a *chacana* cross nested inside, and stepped motifs around the sides of Zone A.

The patio group of the La Capilla sector represents the main edifice within the monumental architecture on the fortified hilltop. It is one of the largest quadrangular compounds currently documented in highland Ancash. The structure is organised around a central courtyard, enclosed by substantial perimeter walls and bordered internally by a series of side chambers (Lau et al. 2023:48). In the southeastern corner of the compound, two adjacent rooms – an outer and an inner chamber aligned along the east wall – were excavated by Grieder (1978:39-44, Cuts 10, 11, and 12). The inner chamber contained a primary interment of a flexed individual of undetermined sex, placed in a prepared burial pit at the base of the stratigraphy. A second extended burial was located in the outer chamber at a higher level (stratigraphically above the original structure’s floor). The primary burial was accompanied by three offerings, a foundational one, placed adjacent to the burial itself; a second and later one situated below the doorway linking the outer and inner rooms. The former two offerings appeared intentional, with a planned arrangement, while a third one, covering the top of the burial chamber was “different from the other two in its casualness. It suggests something like family members gathered around the grave, smashing vessels and tossing them in or laying down treasured objects which had lost ritual usefulness by being broken” (Grieder 1978:58). In contrast, the secondary burial was not associated with any formal offerings, but just a scattered group of objects (Grieder 1978:51-58). Based on this layout and the nature of the finds, Grieder (1978:45-49) interpreted the two-room unit as a “burial temple”, possibly integrated with adjacent residential spaces. Additional human remains were also recovered from other parts of the La Capilla enclosure, suggesting a more complex mortuary use of the building (Lau et al. 2023:49).

Rather than a temple surrounded by domestic structures, the compound should be understood as a formally planned elite enclosure, typical of the Recuay architectural tradition. Its quadrangular layout and integration of residential, ritual, and funerary functions

match closely other highland Recuay compounds (e.g., Lau 2010c; see Lau et al. 2023:41; Lau 2011:63-83).

The three offerings excavated by Grieder (1978:51-58) were later joined by a fourth during recent fieldwork by PIARP (Lau et al. 2023; Lau and Brito 2023), located south of the original burial. Radiocarbon dates from both Grieder's and PIARP excavations suggest that the mortuary rituals associated with the important deceased individual buried inside this complex covered a timespan of approximately three or four centuries during the Early Intermediate Period (Lau et al. 2023:50). The "burial offering", "doorway offering", and the fourth offering excavated by PIARP are structured offerings, which show signs of planned activities and termination rituals. The third offering found by Grieder, appears instead the result of spontaneous actions, perhaps concluding ceremonial feasting or similar rituals.

The structure – here referred to as the "burial temple" for the sake of consistency – is where CAB-1 was discovered (Grieder 1978:109-10, 204-05; Smith 1977:111; 1978:56). The object was found within what Grieder designated "Cut 10", a 2 x 4 m rectangular excavation unit opened in the eastern half of the outer room adjacent to the mortuary chamber, where the primary interment and the associated "burial offering" were located. Level 2 of Cut 10, extending from approximately 175 to 210 cm of depth from the top of the east wall, consisted of a fill layer that covered the original stone floor surface of the structure. The floor was composed of stone slabs laid over a clay base. The board rested directly on this floor, in a relatively central position within Cut 10 – roughly situated between the later secondary extended burial (Cut 11) and the doorway leading into the inner chamber, which contained the principal and foundational interment (Figures 39-40) (Grieder 1978:39-41 and Figures 22, 23, 28).

There is a small concentration of cultural material in level 2 and nothing seems to be directly associated with the board (Grieder 1978:204-06). Level 2 of cut 10 features a few bones, including an ulna of a condor displaying carvings and red paint, and a tubular bird bone with circular lines incised on one end and coloured in red and black. These bones may be associated with other tubular bones found in the stratigraphic layer directly above (level 1B). The latter bones also feature carvings and traces of red paint. Grieder (1978:115) claims that "their appearance together in a small area suggest they were deposited intentionally,

although casually, since they were not closely associated among themselves or with other things.”

Level 2 also contained a few fragmentary metal pieces, including a copper strip with diamond-shaped holes and a set of copper wires of indeterminate function (Grieder 1978:118, Figure 110). Lithic finds from the same level included small, roughly carved stones, and a larger black granite piece depicting an animal, interpreted by Grieder (1978:112, 206) as a guinea pig. However, the miniature quadruped is too abstract to be confidently identified and could equally represent a camelid, feline, or other animal form. Grieder tentatively associates the style of this miniature stone carving with the Usú phase, which post-dates the Pashash-Recuay period in his ceramic chronology. Ceramic fragments from level 2 largely belong to Grieder’s final Pashash-Recuay sub-phase, Huacohú. However, the third and uppermost offering, found beneath the stone floor of the burial temple was dominated by ceramics from the earlier sub-phase, Yaiá. As this offering appears to have been the final ritual deposit before the floor was constructed, it implies that Yaiá-phase pottery may be contemporaneous with the paving of the floor itself. If so, the fill sealing the floor surface on which CAB-1 was found could contain materials deposited after the period in which the board was originally used. This suggests a degree of chronological layering in the ritual use of the space and complicates any straightforward association between the board and the surrounding artifacts.

Level 2 of the adjacent Cut 11, opened in the western half of the same outer chamber, revealed an extended interment with very little cultural material accompanying it, and nothing suggesting a deliberate offering. Cut 11, while a different unit, represents the same space and stratigraphic layer. This appears to be a later burial.

Grieder (1978: 109) notes that the context of CAB-1 does not offer clear evidence regarding the function of this artifact. However, if the board was found in-situ and accurately reflects its original depositional context, a few further observations are possible. The stone-paved floor of the burial temple corresponds to a phase of this complex’s use when the inner chamber likely served as the principal locus for mortuary ritual, while the outer room may have functioned as an antechamber for associated ceremonial activities. The extended burial at the same level as the board does not necessarily belong to the same episode of use. It may have been placed at a later time, once the floor surface had already been sealed. Alternatively,

it may relate to a termination event, marking the cessation of ritual activities within the shrine. Thus, although both the extended burial and the board rest at a similar stratigraphic depth, they may represent distinct depositional episodes, potentially separated by a significant span of time.⁷⁴

The paved floor on which CAB-1 was found sealed the sequence of offerings deposited below. The activities associated with this architectural surface likely formed part of the ritual programme surrounding the primary interment. While the label “burial temple” may not fully capture the architectural or functional complexity of these Recuay compounds, the space referred to by that term appears to have served as a key setting for mortuary rites centred on at least one ancestral figure of high status, but possibly more within the larger walled residential complex (George F. Lau, personal communication, 2025). These ritual practices of veneration of esteemed forbears would have been instrumental in legitimising the authority of the emerging local elite of Pashash.

Overall, CAB-1’s context points to a post-Chavín development of ancestral cults as a foundation for emerging models of rulership. These new political orders were legitimised through the apotheosis of revered ancestors, who became associated with divine forces – such as storm deities – and sacred features of the landscape, including mountains and other numinous places (Lau and Luján 2025:140-41; Lau 2018; Astuhuamán González 2008). The stratigraphic position of the board – located near the threshold of the inner sanctum, that housed the altar of the principal ancestor, strongly suggests that its deposition was closely linked to such ancestral cult practices.

The stratigraphic context of CAB-1 provides a strong chronological reference point for understanding the emergence of these boards within the Recuay cultural sphere (Table 13). Grieder (1978:191-93) obtained two radiocarbon assays associated with the two main offerings. TX-1824, taken from the fill sealing the main burial (Cut 12, Level 4) and TX-1329, from the fill above the doorway offering. More recently, PIARP obtained a third related radiocarbon date (OxA-41441) from a newly excavated offering adjacent to the principal burial (Lau et al. 2023:45). This offering, which contained metal pins and ceramic vessels, yielded the earliest date – likely relating to the foundational interment – suggesting a time frame

⁷⁴ Grieder (1978:52) suggests that no more than two centuries separate the foundational flexed burial from the later extended interment.

around the 3rd or early-4th century AD. The cult of the deceased ancestor interred within the shrine appears to have continued for three or four centuries. Grieder's radiocarbon dates point to a ritual activity extending to as late as the 6th or even 7th century AD

Of the three samples, TX-1329 is the latest and also the most relevant for dating the deposition of CAB-1. This sample derives from a fill beneath the floor surface of the burial temple, directly above the doorway offering and just below where the board was found. As such, TX-1329 provides a terminus-post-quem for the construction of the stone floor and for the depositional event of CAB-1, placing it most plausibly between the 6th and 7th century.

This date does not indicate when compartmentalised boards started to appear in Recuay culture, nor does it necessarily reflect the date of manufacture of CAB-1 itself. These artifacts may be considerably older, as suggested by the earlier date associated with the MALI-1 board. CAB-1 exhibits traits typical of a high-status object and may have been curated and used over multiple generations. Notably, it shows only minimal signs of wear, which may point to restricted, ritually controlled use rather than continuous handling.

What the radiocarbon evidence does provide, however, is a chronological reference for these boards' integration into ancestral cult practices and the broader political and ritual life of Recuay (or, at least, Pashash) elites. In other words, even if these boards were likely in use prior to this period, the evidence from CAB-1 suggests that, by this time, they had become entangled in elite ritual contexts, particularly those concerned with mortuary rites and ancestral veneration.

CAB-1 is one of the two boards from phase-A exhibiting an iconographic decoration (Figure 41). The rarity of its iconography reinforces an interpretation of CAB-1 as a high-status example, used by the Pashash elite within high-power settings. The bicephalic creature with diamond shaped body parts framing *chacana*-crosses is a quintessential Recuay iconographic motif, appearing on elite ceramics (Wegner 2011) – e.g., *pacchas* (ceramic vessels for libation) in the shape of lordly households (Lapiner 1976:Figure 417). The quality of the carvings of CAB-1 is superb, suggesting refined craftsmanship – a mark of elite labour mobilisation.

CAB-1 features a further iconographic element that is commonly associated with elite status and authority – the stepped motif. There are four stepped motifs, two (a bigger and a smaller one) on each side of Zone A, creating a visual link between the bidimensional

steps of the motif and the three-dimensional steps of the elevated areas. A detailed discussion of this motif in light of these boards' function will be reserved for Chapter 9, but suffice it to say that it has been usually associated with mountains and/or stepped pyramid-platforms, both emblems of chiefly status (Lau and Luján 2025). It is an impressively cross-cultural design. Stepped motifs can either be accompanied by a fret-shaped design – forming the so-called step-fret, e.g. in Moche (de Bock 2003) – or by another stepped motif. Two adjacent stepped motifs can converge – e.g., in Sicán (Pillsbury and Mackey 2020; Pillsbury 2025) – or diverge forming a cleft in between. The latter layout is prominent in Pashash iconography (Lau and Luján 2025:142; Grieder 1978:99, pl. 4; 1992), as well as coeval coastal cultural groups, including Gallinazo/Virú, Moche, and north coast Wari-Moche (Giersz 2025). Whatever the specific meaning of this design, which clearly had a purely decorative purpose too, it is worth noting its presence on this high-status board in association with one of the most puzzling traits of these artifacts, the stepped elevated platforms of Zone A.

To summarise, the context of CAB-1 seems to indicate that by the 6th century, at least in Pashash, Type-1 boards had been incorporated by chiefly elites in mortuary rituals focusing on illustrious ancestors. These activities were foundational to the new socio-political settings that emerged in highland Ancash after the demise of the Chavín's sphere of influence – a period which witnessed the rise of a new form of sovereignty founded upon apotheosised ancestors acting as mediators in a hierarchical and dualistic understanding of cosmology, society, and ecology.

These boards' function appears to have been related to ancestral cults and was possibly part of a wider set of ritual practices in chiefly Recuay settings instrumental to the legitimisation of authority and the consolidation of local lordships, which based their power on a new form of divinely sanctioned leadership. These boards probably belonged to diverse sets of paraphernalia employed in ritual practices by ancient Andean elites to enact, legitimise, and perpetuate the cosmological-cum-political role of their lineage in society.

Phase-A boards span the entire Early Intermediate Period, but they remain confined to highland Ancash. However, one or two centuries into the Middle Horizon, these boards (particularly, Type-1 but also Type-3) spread beyond the Recuay territory. Even though some of the outward characteristics of the boards during the following phases B1 and B2 were

slightly modified, these changes are primarily stylistic. Overall, there is a remarkable continuity in design and layout that defies cultural and temporal boundaries.

The next chapter will explore the boards documented for what I termed phase B1. This group of boards dates to the MH, and their distribution is wider, encompassing also the central and southern Peruvian highlands. This phase appears to be associated with the Wari culture.

Phase B1

THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS (c.a. AD 700-1000)

Phase B1 is geographically much more widespread than phase A, but only a limited number of examples are known. The database includes 11 boards attributed to phase B1, including three whose attribution is based solely on stylistic observations. However, unlike phase-A, most of the known B1 examples originate from well-documented excavation contexts, providing sometimes illuminating data about the events leading to their deposition. Phase B1 includes mostly Type-1 boards, and only one Type-3 board. Type-1 and Type-3 are the only two layouts so far documented after the phase A.

I

Distribution

Of the eleven boards associated with this phase, eight come from controlled excavations. These include one from the site of Conchopata, four from the site of Huari⁷⁵ – both located near Ayacucho – one from the site of Pumapuquio, south of Ayacucho, and two from Cerro Baúl, Moquegua, in the southern Peruvian highlands. Additionally, while their attribution is uncertain, I have included in phase B1 a Type-1 board from Marcajirca, southern Ancash, reutilised as a building block in a Late Intermediate Period structure (Bebel Ibarra, personal communication, 2024; Lau 2016:Appendix), and yet another from Cerro Miraflores near Huamachuco, in the southern highlands of la Libertad (Monzon Layza, personal communication, 2022).

At the site of Huari (Maps 2-3), three Type-1 and one Type-3 boards have been found. One Type-1 comes from the sector of Monqachayuq (MON-01). Sufficient information about its excavation is available to reconstruct its archaeological context, presented

⁷⁵ The name of the cultural group, Wari, originates from the eponymous archaeological site near Ayacucho. However, we will be keeping two different spellings for the sake of clarity: ‘Wari’ is used for the polity and cultural phenomenon of the Middle Horizon, and ‘Huari’ for the archaeological site.

below. Little is known about the other three boards. Two have been presented by Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero (2023:52). These include a Type-1 boards (HUR-02) with a large central hole and a central line of breakage indicative of ritual termination, and a Type-3 board (VEG-01) reportedly excavated in the sector of Vegachayuq Moqo. A fourth board fragment (HUR-01) was found as part of salvage archaeology operations carried out during the construction of the Site Museum of Huari (Pérez 1995:17).⁷⁶

At the site of Pumapuquio (Chincheros, Apurímac), situated about 20 km southeast of Ayacucho, another Type-1 board (ISL-01, Figure 42c) was found associated with MH structures, discussed below (Lockard 2011). Two more examples were excavated at the site of Cerro Baúl (BAU-01 and BAU-02), located in the southern Peruvian highlands of Moquegua, about 550 km south of Ayacucho (Williams et al. 2005). This is the southernmost Wari settlement known to date, and it occupied a strategically dominant mountaintop at the interface between the Wari and Tiwanaku cultural spheres. As detailed below, Cerro Baúl comprised monumental architecture, elite palaces, and an administrative sector.

Although there are no B1 boards with a documented archaeological context north of Ayacucho, two boards from the northern highlands have been tentatively attributed to phase B1. Their attribution is based on contextual information and stylistic features. The first is an intact Type-1 board first recorded by Ibarra (Lau 2016:Appendix, and Bebel Ibarra, personal communication, 2024) at the site of Marcajirca in the Huari province of southern Ancash, east of the Cordillera Blanca (MAJ-1). The site of Marcajirca shows an occupation covering the period between ca. AD 1000 and 1500 – with architecture largely dating to the Late Intermediate Period (Ibarra 2024; 2021; 2009). Upon discovery, the board had been re-used as a building block in the architectural wall of an archaeological structure (Figure 43) (Bebel Ibarra, personal communication, 2024). The attribution is based on the style of Zone A, composed of one elevated level divided into four compartments, which appears to be a feature associated with the group of boards attributed to this phase (see below).

At Cerro Miraflores (also known as Cerro Tuscan), in the province of Huamachuco, La Libertad, north of Ancash, a fragmentary Type-1 stone board (MHM-01, Figure 42b) was found within a Late Horizon (or LIP) structure, where it was re-utilised as a stone threshold in a doorway leading into an architectural enclosure associated with LIP or LH occupation

⁷⁶ This is known only from a drawing hindering its typological identification.

(Monzon Layza, personal communication, 2022) (Figure 44). The site's chronology remains debated, but it appears to show an occupation stretching from the EIP, through the MH and into the LIP, including later intrusive Inka burials and offerings (Rosas Rintel 2018:80; Topic 2009:223, 37; Yamamoto 2009; Thatcher 1972; Lumbreras 2010). The site is part of a series of hilltop settlements, around Huamachuco, such as Viracochapampa, Cerro Amaru, and Cerro Sazón – but its precise function is still unclear (Rosas Rintel 2018).

The board likely dates to the MH, justifying its attribution to phase B1, as Cerro Miraflores lies outside the Recuay area of influence associated with phase A but is surrounded by sites that show some degree of influence from the Wari heartland. Its central compartment provides a further clue, as it is characterised by a Z-shape, discussed in more detail in the next chapter. This shape for the central compartment is undocumented in the earlier phase and appears to be a phase B innovation.⁷⁷

These two boards were re-purposed in pre-Hispanic times by people who seemingly did not consider them important. In the case of MHM-01 from Cerro Miraflores, its fragmentary state made the piece unusable, though its weight and size⁷⁸ suggest it was deliberately broken. It may have been broken for construction or ritual purposes. More broadly, its placement as doorstep in a LIP or LH indicates a lack of regard for its cultural value.

MAJ-01 instead is still intact, but LIP builders found it of no better use than as a building block. Considering the chronological evidence and the fact that these two boards are the only ones found in archaeological contexts later than the MH, it is reasonable to hypothesise that they fell out of use during the LIP. The boards documented in good stratigraphic contexts date to the MH or earlier. Subsequently, the current record suggests that they virtually disappeared. The only two instances in which they are associated with post-MH contexts, they seem to have been re-purposed for an unrelated function.

The currently available evidence indicates that these boards began losing their significance after the waning of Wari cultural influence. The current database suggests that these boards remained in use throughout the EIP and MH, initially among Recuay groups in highland Ancash and then in other parts of the Andes too. These include the Wari heartland in Ayacucho, some provincial administrative outposts, but also the broader Andean region in

⁷⁷ HUA-02 also features this shape.

⁷⁸ Just the surviving fragment weighs 35 kg, and measures 27 x 40 cm and is 20 cm in height.

the wake of Wari direct and indirect influence. The Peruvian central and north coast board-making tradition, while likely related to the spread of Wari influence, seems to be a distinct phase (B2). Research suggests that Wari presence in the central and north coast of Peru differed from the highlands and south coast (Berquist 2022; Segura Llanos and Shimada 2010; Bracamonte Lévano 2022; Giersz and Makowski 2014; Giersz 2017).

The distribution of phase B1 boards largely reflects the location of Wari administrative centres across the Peruvian highlands. The highest density of boards from this phase concentrates in the heartland of the Wari polity around the modern city of Ayacucho (Huari and Conchopata). Beyond it, they appear in conjunction with Wari provincial settlements – often associated with sites exhibiting ritual and administrative sectors, mortuary architecture focused on ancestral cults, or elite palatial complexes (Cerro Baúl, Pumapuquio).

If the attribution of MHM-01 and MAJ-01 to phase B1 is correct, the appearance of Type-1 boards in the northern highlands can be understood in light of the interaction sphere and influence that linked these regions to the Wari world. While the presence of full-fledged Wari administrative centres in the northern highlands is still debated (Topic and Topic 2010:200; Topic 2009:227), interactions are evidenced in the local material culture and in the mutual influence between these cultural groups. For example, Topic and Topic (2010) argue that the connection between Huamachuco and Wari is better understood as one of mutual influence within a broader and pre-existing web of interactions, dating back to the EIP, that placed the Huamachuco area within networks of exchange with the neighbouring regions of Cajamarca to the north and Ancash (Recuay) to the south, including Pashash (195).

These spheres of interactions incorporated highland Ancash, both during the EIP and MH. For example, it has been shown that Pashash was integrated into broad exchange networks extending to the Moche north coast (Lau et al. 2023). That the influence between Recuay and Wari was mutual has already been discussed in Chapter 5. The LIP site of Marcajirca associated with MAJ-01 does not feature any Wari influence (Ibarra 2021:259). This complicates the attribution of MAJ-01 to phase B1. As this area was part of the broader Recuay sphere, it cannot be ruled out that MAJ-01 belongs to phase A. It is unclear whether boards were still made in highland Ancash after the decline of Recuay. The current record would suggest a steep decline of board-making in Ancash after the EIP.

It is worth noting the conspicuous absence of boards from administrative Wari sites such as Pikillacta (McEwan 2005; 1996; 1991) or Jincamocco (Schreiber 1991), among others. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but boards appear to have featured more prominently at certain Wari sites. Possibly, this may be linked to the broader social changes occurring across the Wari world and discussed in Chapter 5, which may have resulted in yet unclear differences between Wari settlements (Williams et al. 2024; Williams 2001b).

II Style

Stylistically, phase B (both 1 and 2) boards show remarkable continuity with the previous phase, both in design and layout. Such a degree of continuity over time and across cultures seems to indicate that any modification to the boards' morphology could have affected their function. This would suggest that Wari adopted these boards along with a set of practices or rules. Continuity in design and style is linked to the so-called "innovation rate" of a population of artefacts, which corresponds to the frequency at which new variants are generated within an object population (Neiman 1995). The innovation rate has been demonstrated to be high on average for artifacts such as pottery, but low for other types of material culture, such as gameboards, which would easily lose their purpose if their layout is modified (de Voogt et al. 2013; see also Shennan and Wilkinson 2001; Kohler et al. 2004).

The main stylistic differences in the current group of boards associated with phase B1 concerns the central compartment of Zone C and the number and arrangement of compartments in Zone A. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Zone A was susceptible to a substantial degree of variation even within the phase A sample. While it is not possible to establish if these stylistic changes during phase A were diachronic or synchronic, or whether they reflected regional preferences, they suggest that such modifications were not enough to affect the function of these items.

B1 boards typically retain a rectangular central compartment, except for two examples (MHM-01, from Cerro Miraflores, and HUR-02, from Huari, Ayacucho). These two boards feature a Z-shaped compartment, which appears associated with the coastal boards of phase B2. In the case of HUR-02, Huamachuco is known to have had contacts both with coastal areas and the central or southern highlands, which may explain why it would integrate

stylistic traits from the coast (Topic and Topic 2010). In the case of HUR-02 from Huari (Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero 2023:52), this stylistic trait seems consistent with connections between the Wari heartland and the Peruvian north coast.

A second and more pervasive stylistic innovation related to phase B1 is a new common layout of Zone A. In most examples found in Wari contexts from the highlands (e.g., COP-01, BAU-01, ISL-01, HUR-02), Zone A is composed of one elevated level, roughly square, divided into either two or four compartments of approximately the same size (Figure 42a, c, d, e. Despite Zone A layout variations in phase A, this layout first appears in phase B1.

Unlike boards associated with phase A, and probably reflecting the limited number of boards attributed to phase B1, the overall design and layout is more standardised. Six out of ten feature a bipartite or quadripartite⁷⁹ one-level elevated Zone A, including the unprovenanced MAJ-01 and MAL-02.⁸⁰ Three more have a two-level Zone A (VEG-01, MON-01, BAU-02), with one compartment on each level, which is the most common arrangement of Zone A in phase A.

III Materiality

Stone remains the primary material with which boards are made. The stones utilised appear to originate from local quarries, as in the case of BAU-01 and BAU-02 (Patrick Ryan Williams, personal communication, 2022). In general, as B1 boards come from distant places, they tend to be made of different types of rock. For instance, MAL-02 is made of a black, probably, subvolcanic rock (andesite?), with a well-polished smooth surface, while ISL-01 is composed of reddish volcanic tuff containing inclusions of quartz and mica (Carrillo Bustamante 2008:Espacio Arquitectónico 16A, Hallazgo 20). The only B1 board that is not

⁷⁹ The quadripartite subdivision of Zone A is reminiscent of the four-cornered hats typical of Wari. As the latter were also related to the stepped motif and linked concepts, they may represent a similar iconography (Frame 1990).

⁸⁰ These two boards have been attributed to this phase precisely on account of this stylistic feature.

made of stone is a fragmentary ceramic piece, made of fired red clay, and excavated at the Wari site of Conchopata (see below).

IV Portability

The dimension and weight of boards attributed to phase B1 are approximately comparable to those in phase A. This is related to a shared material choice, as stone is heavier than ceramic and wood. These boards measure on average 24 x 19 cm, and the three for which weight could be obtained (BAU-01, BAU-02, and MAL-02) weigh respectively 10 kg, 3 kg, and 8.7 kg. Generally, and much like in phase A, these boards appear only limitedly portable – likely meant to be used within restricted spaces and associated with a particular place or architectural unit. They were light and small enough to be moved small distances, from one room to another, but they would have been inconvenient for longer transfers.

There is one outlier, MHM-01 (Cerro Miraflores). Despite being only a small fragment, it measures 40 x 27 x 20 cm and weighs 35 kg. Based on a rough estimate of the percentage of board missing, its reconstructed weight would have been approximately 88 kg. Such a board was probably intended as an architectural element within a communal space, where it was likely fixed to ground and would have been large enough to accommodate several people around it.

V Boards in Context

There are no boards with a special iconography associated with phase B1. However, most boards from this phase have been found in controlled archaeological contexts and in some cases, their stratigraphy is instructive.

BAU-1 and BAU-2 (Cerro Baúl, Moquegua)

Two boards (BAU-01 and BAU-02) were found at the southern Wari administrative settlement of Cerro Baúl, strategically located in the Moquegua basin, at a key interface between the two dominant polities of the Middle Horizon, Wari and Tiwanaku (Williams 2001b; Moseley et al. 2005). Cerro Baúl was part of a broader system of Wari settlements, including

neighbouring hilltops such as Cerro Mejia and Cerro Petroglifo, and featured terraced slopes dedicated to agricultural production. It housed ritual and administrative buildings on a prominent mesa in the upper Moquegua valley – selected for its remote and inaccessible nature, which bestowed upon the site sacredness and defensibility (Map 3).

Archaeological investigations have documented two primary phases of occupation. The initial phase began around the mid-7th century AD, reflecting the establishment of the settlement. The second, dating to the 9th and 10th centuries AD, witnessed significant architectural remodelling characterised by the introduction of distinctive Wari architectural elements, such as patio-group structures, administrative complexes, and ritual buildings – including, D-shaped structures. This aligns with broader patterns of structural (political and architectural) reorganisation within the Wari polity, as observed also at other sites (Lumbreras 1974b; McEwan 1991; 1996; 2005; Schreiber 1992; 1991).

As indicated by Williams (2001b) and Moseley et al. (2005), three distinct sectors can be identified on the artificially levelled summit of Cerro Baúl, each with specialized functions (Figure 45) (see also Williams et al. 2005; Williams and Ruales M 2004; 2002):

- Sector A (Residential): Characterized by domestic architecture for daily living, small-scale craft activities (including lapidary and obsidian work), and household rituals.
- Sector B (Ceremonial): Included specialized ritual structures, most prominently the largest pre-Inka brewery excavated to date, and a D-shaped structure. This sector also hosted an elite residential complex or ‘palace’, associated with high-status feasts and ritual drinking.
- Sector C (Administrative/Monumental): Featured expansive plazas flanked by galleries and multi-story structures, likely used for administrative or storage purposes, as well as housing at least one D-shaped structure.

BAU-1 and BAU-2 originate from sectors C and B respectively, both associated with the site’s monumental ceremonial and administrative functions. A noteworthy aspect of Cerro Baúl’s excavated contexts is that numerous buildings, particularly those in sectors B and C, underwent ritual termination upon the site’s abandonment. Artifacts found in situ thus

provide insights not only into the original functions of these structures but also into the elaborate final rites that culminated in the intentional destruction and burning of ceremonial and administrative buildings.

BAU-1

An intact Type-1 board made of stone was excavated in Unit 26 (Williams et al. 2005:20-34; Williams and Ruales M 2004:34-38), which consisted of a building adjacent to the D-shaped structure in sector C (Williams and Ruales M 2002:Section 2, Unidad 10). Their proximity and seemingly related activities led Moseley et al. (2005:17270) to define it as a “temple annex”.

The temple annexe comprises a central rectangular structure (Recinto A) with a platform on its west end where diagnostic and decorated ceramics, as well as burned camelid bones, wood, seeds, molle, squash, maize, obsidian points and flakes, chrysocolla, malacological material, and guinea pig excrement were found (Williams and Ruales M 2004:35 - Capa H). The east side is divided into two small rooms associated with burned clay, animal bones, land-snail shells, vegetal residues, stone pebbles etc. (Williams and Ruales M 2004:34 - Capa C), which suggests they may have been used as a storage or bin.

This structure has an access opening to the north, where it features a bench under a roofed veranda. This is where most of the diagnostic ceramics (Chakipampa) emerged. The bench area in front of the rectangular structure shows evidence of a fire that burned down the veranda roof. Beyond this space is an unroofed central patio (Recinto B), which gives access to four small contiguous rooms built along the north side of the compound (Recinto C2, Recinto D, Figure 46)

The square room situated in the north-west corner of the compound (Recinto C2) stands out in that it displays more polished surfaces and elaborate construction. The room has a wide painted and plastered entrance, which would have offered a view of the interior. The whole space was dedicated to housing the burials of two individuals, probably related to activities carried out in the adjacent D-shaped structure. A burial came in the form of a small urn in the southwest corner of the room, beneath the floor, which contained the bones of an infant. The second was more centrally located and contained the bones of a prepubescent individual interred in a circular cist that cut through the plastered floor with no

accompanying grave goods. In addition to these two – possibly consecratory – burials, the room housed a late-Nazca drum positioned upside-down, alongside four more Loro-style bowls (Williams et al. 2005:25-27 and photos 20-21; Moseley et al. 2005:17270). Both the drum and the bowls were found fragmented and they were likely shattered upon ritual abandonment of these spaces.

Within the context of this compound or D-shaped structure annex, the finding of a Type-1 board is informative. The board was excavated on the northern side of the unroofed central patio (Recinto B) next to the wall, as shown in Figure 46 (Williams et al. 2005:21 - Capa C, Figure 41, and Photo 18). The depositional context of the board appears related to abandonment rituals. Associated finds – including fragments of keros and cups, dedicatory burials, and imported ceramics – link the board directly to ritual drinking in a ceremonial setting. A fragmentary *kero* (ceremonial drinking cup) (Williams et al. 2005:photo 22) and decorated broken cups were excavated on the bench beneath the burned veranda, which Moseley et al. (2005:17270) interpret as evidence of drinking and feasting during the final rites before the abandonment of this building and its ritual termination marked by roof burning, offerings, and libations. Thus, the board's position within the inner patio, where the keros and cups were also recovered, suggests that participants likely engaged with the board while partaking in feasting and drinking, indicative of communal interaction.

BAU-2

The second complete Type-1 board found at Cerro Baúl was excavated by Donna Nash in Sector B (the ceremonial sector) inside an elite complex termed 'palace' (comprising units 40, 25, and 9) (Moseley et al. 2005:17268-69; Williams et al. 2005:34-47; Williams and Ruales M 2004:9-21, 31-33; 2002:Section 2, Unidad 9; Nash 2025; 2017:98; 2012; Nash and deFrance 2019). This was an elite residential compound comprising three main areas (Figure 47).

The first (Unit 25) was an unroofed court, probably serving as a feasting or reception hall, which was home to activities and rituals intended to cement and reinforce corporate ties between executive chiefs of the Wari elites and clientele, possibly locals or people related through kinship. This entry hall had an entrance on its western side, which provided access to the whole complex, and featured two long 20 cm high stone benches running along the

northwest and southeast walls, covered by a roof. Not far from the entrance, a roofed U-shaped structure was built into the western wall as an outward extension (Williams and Ruales M 2004:33, pl. VII). Moseley et al. (2005:17268) argues that this structural form may have been akin in function to later similar architectural examples, such as the Inka *masma* (Gasparini and Margolies 1980:169-89; Moseley 2001:80, 137), which functioned as office-like locales for Inka administration. If true, this would mean that the court may have served a similar purpose as a principal administrative centre for state affairs, where governance and statecraft were enacted, and patrons met their corporate groups.

The entry court was connected to a second open plaza (unit 40A, 8 x 8 m) by a door in the eastern wall, opposite to the U-shaped structure. This unroofed enclosure was a ceramic production workshop situated between the entry hall and the inner sancta of the palace complex. This interpretation is based on the abundant presence of tempering material and raw clay in floor pits and of working tools found in connection with the original floor dating to the last period of use of this space (Williams et al. 2005:46-47). Moseley et al. (2005:17268) suggest that the pottery produced in this structure may have been deployed as gifts in the entry court, as part of hierarchical strategies through which Wari elites reinforced bonds of obligation with subordinate groups. Such acts of gift-giving operated within a broader Andean tradition of reciprocal exchange, where the distribution of finely crafted goods served not only as a demonstration of status but also as a mechanism for generating social debt, reaffirming loyalty, and sustaining asymmetrical alliances across networks of dependency. Most of the evidence seems to suggest that entry court was the stage of elite patronage activities of Wari lords, and the associated workshop sustained sponsorship ceremonies and facilitated asymmetrical relations with attendees. The pottery workshop has three entrances: a west entrance – connecting it with the entry court – an east one – leading to a garden – and one on the north side – which leads to a corridor that leads into the inner patio group.

The inner patio group (Unit 9) of the palace was accessed via two narrow passages running along the northwest side of the entry court, restricting access to it. It had a stone paved floor and was surrounded by five abutting roofed rooms, where artifacts associated with domestic activities were excavated. It had a long 30-cm-high paved platform on the eastern side, and benches on all four sides to accommodate several attendants. Those on the paved platform would have had a more prominent position during meetings. Termination rituals

featured in the archaeological material excavated in the patio, in the form of shattered vessels, animal bones and other traces of feasting and drinking.

BAU-2 was discovered in Unit 40A – the pottery workshop – next to the north entrance, which opened onto one of the corridors leading to the inner patio group (Figure 48). Vessels smashed during termination rites do not appear around the north entrance, where the board was found, but only near the east and west entrances. There are no signs of ritual burning either, suggesting different, perhaps less systematic abandonment rituals than in the patio group and entrance hall. However, Moseley et al. (2005:17269) suggests that the whole complex may have been ritually terminated, proceeding “from the more private interior patio complex to the more public entry court.” The board was found in the stratigraphic layer associated with the last occupation of the building (Capa C) and may have been involved in these termination rites. It is also possible that the board was used in relation to the workshop’s or entrance hall’s activities.

In brief, one board comes from a building linked to a D-shaped structure, while the other from an elite palatial compound. The depositional place of both boards found at Cerro Baúl may reflect the final termination rituals carried out in these structures. Both contexts show evidence of feasting, drinking, and ritual offerings, which may have provided the setting for the use of these boards. Whether these boards were only used during termination ceremonies or were regularly employed in those spaces cannot be determined conclusively (Nash 2025:23).

In both cases, the boards are associated with the later phase of Wari occupation of the site, after the major re-organisational shifts, involving sweeping architectural remodelling, that Williams (2001b) argues may have occurred at Cerro Baúl around the late-9th/early-10th century AD. This is further reinforced by the ceramic associations of these boards with Wari Chakipampa style and the roughly contemporary late-Nasca and Loro styles (Vaughn et al. 2014; Carmichael 2013; Rowe 1960; Menzel 1964).

COP-1 (Conchopata, Ayacucho)

Conchopata – located at the southern tip of the Ayacucho Valley, Peru – was a significant Wari administrative centre. Covering an area of at least 20 hectares, Conchopata served as a critical node in the cultural transformations of the MH. As one of the principal cities

subordinate to the centre of the Wari polity (Huari), Conchopata featured residential areas, public plazas, D-shaped temples, specialized ceramic production workshops, and distinct mortuary contexts (Figure 49).

Archaeological excavations have revealed new insights into Wari social organisation and ritual practices. Excavations have uncovered a variety of burial contexts, ranging from individual interments within residential spaces to extensive multi-roomed mortuary complexes associated with high-status households. These findings underscore the significant role of mortuary rituals, indicating ancestor veneration and prolonged interaction with the deceased as integral components of elite domestic and social life. Mortuary patterns likely functioned as a social and political tool for expressing social distinction (Isbell 2001b; 2004; Milliken 2006; Isbell and Cook 2002; Tung and Cook 2006). Conchopata is also renowned for its oversize ceremonial pottery decorated with distinct iconography, including depictions of SAIS imagery. These vessels, intentionally smashed and deposited in ceremonial contexts, suggest that Conchopata was a centre for both religious activity and specialized ceramic production (Pozzi-Escot 1991).

The site was divided into two sectors (A and B), situated respectively west and east of the modern road that intersects the site. Sector A included residential units and workshops, with a higher-status northern section and a lower-status southern part that served as a residential and ceramic production area. Sector B, extensively excavated since the late 1990s and early 2000s, revealed over 150 distinct architectural spaces, including domestic areas, public plazas, temples, ceramic workshops, and complex mortuary facilities. Conchopata's spatial organization was characterized by a dense arrangement of interconnected rectangular rooms surrounding interior courtyards, which facilitated both domestic and ritual activities. The civic centre hosted high-status administrative and ceremonial functions, including elite patio-group residences and distinctive circular and D-shaped structures.

COP-1: The Mortuary Room EA-153

A fragmentary Type-1 board made of ceramic was found in EA (Estructura Arquitectónica)-153, located in Sector B (Figure 49) (Milliken 2006:41, 93-94, 135, 75, 399-400). According to Isbell (2004:13-15) and Isbell and Cook's typological analysis (2002:284-88) of burials at Conchopata, EA-153 belongs to Type 5. Type-5 burials are characterised by a structure

defined as a “Mortuary Room Interment” (Isbell 2004:13), due to the large and dominant space occupied by the tomb within the room, strongly indicating that these mortuary roofed enclosures housed primarily if not solely funerary rituals related to the burial. EA-153 belongs to the sub-type 5a, composed of only one architectural space containing multiple circular and/or rectangular cist tombs with the remains of various individuals. Frequently, one multi-chambered cist is the primary tomb, sealed with a capstone, often features an aperture. This hole is known as a *ttocco* and it allowed ritual communication with the tomb. EA-153 seems to have been devoted exclusively to funerary rituals. It could be accessed from an entrance built in the east wall and had plastered floor and walls. The fill above the floor of EA-153 was rich in ash, suggesting that the room was burned as part of its ritual termination (Milliken 2006:135).

There were three small platforms in this room: two – serving as capstones – were placed along the south wall. An additional one, which functioned as an offering platform/altar, was located along the centre of the north wall (Figure 50). Two circular cist tombs are located beneath the southern capstones, already looted upon excavation. The southwestern capstone (85x80x70 cm) displayed traces of red paint and covered a tomb where nine spondylus wedges, one piece of carved greenstone, and a miniature jar were found. The south-wall capstone (42x33x4 cm) had a *ttocco* (Huamán López 2001b:Locus 6071; Milliken 2006:93-94, 399-400). The burials contained the remains of several different individuals, including children and adults (Huamán López 2001c:Burial 91, Tomb 2; 2001a:Burial 87, Tomb 1).

The original floor of the room (Locus 6050) was an undisturbed context. A fragmentary Type-1 board (HE 7062, Figure 42a) was found approximately 1 m north of the access to the mortuary room, lying next to the east wall. The board appears to have been purposefully broken in half, as evidenced by the precise line of breakage along the central axis. Buried beneath the board was an offering of guinea pig (*cuy*) bones (Huamán López and Milliken 2001; Milliken 2001a). Associated with the same floor-level were a fragment of a Huamanga-style⁸¹ plate with interior decorations (red lazy-S motifs set within black horizontal bands) near the south-western capstone, and a tripod bowl lying opposite to the board next to the

⁸¹ The Huamanga – also Secular Viñaque (Menzel 1968:92) – is a MH pottery style from Ayacucho, which has been interpreted as a polychrome variant for domestic use of the Wari ceramic tradition (Meddens and Vivanco Pomacanchari 2018; Bauer et al. 2010).

west wall – the tripod is of the type known in Spanish as *escudilla*, a form also associated with Huamanga-style ceramic at Conchopata (Owen 2007:307-08; Lumbreras 1974a; Pérez 1998a). Given the associated material culture, this level and the whole architectural space 153 are linked to Middle Horizon 2. Based on PAC radiocarbon dates, the date range of MH2 at Conchopata is AD 850/900-1000 (Wolff 2012:116, Appendix B).

Near the base of the northern platform were 14 greenstones (possibly chrysocolla, Figure 52) (Milliken 2006:175), eight of which were found clustered together in a pile, forming a discrete grouping suggestive of deliberate ritual deposit (HE 7183-7190) (Huamán López and Milliken 2001; Milliken 2001a). Strewn around them were a few other carved greenstone pieces (HE 7143, 7170, 7191-7193, 7202, Figure 53). The eight greenstones found together in a pile were carved into small geometrical shapes and were polished. I propose to subdivide them into two groups of four based on shape and colour. HE 7183, 7184, 7185, 7189 are darker in colour (a shade of dark green), and they were identified by Cook and Wolff (2003) as miniature representations of maize kernels. The other four (HE 7186, 7187, 7188, 7190) have a triangular shape and are lighter in colour (light green). All were purposefully carved into their specific shapes and appear to be selected based on the desired shade of colour. Moreover, the miniature maize kernels, including one found near the clustered group (HE 7170, 7183, 7184, 7189) all display an identical incision in their acute angles, reminiscent of a corn kernel's tip cap. The texture of the dark greenstones is further identifiable due to a characteristic surface feature of white spots and veins. Four miniature representations of stylised maize kernels in dark green with white spots and four light green triangle-shaped pieces make up two discrete groupings. Additionally, the greenstones in the clustered set have consistent dimensions (1x0.65 cm on average) and, with minor variations, weight (between 0.5g and 0.1g). They are small and light objects.

The remaining six greenstone pieces associated with locus 6050 were found around the piled set, less than 50 cm away from the northern platform/altar, most were found within a few centimetres of the clustered group (Milliken 2001a; 2006:175). These include HE 7143 (1.24x0.84/0.57x0.46 cm) – a trapezoidal piece with a pointy end on one side and two indentations on the other, interpreted as a miniature *kaywa* (*Cyclanthera pedata*) seed (Cook and Wolff 2003); HE 7170 (1x0.5x0.3 cm), a triangular piece identical to the clustered set of pieces resembling maize kernels; HE 7191 (1x0.8/0.6x0.2 cm), a trapezoidal piece with one

flat and one slightly rounded side; HE 7192 (0.8x0.3 cm), a small circular stone; HE 7193 (2.5x1.4/0.3x0.6 cm), a roughly triangular piece with ovaloid features and spiralling striped incisions, interpreted as the pod of the huarango tree (*Neltuma* sp., formerly known as *Prosopis* sp.) (Cook and Wolff 2003); HE 7202 (1.1x0.7x0.3 cm), a rhomboid piece a rounded side and a flat one, and a vertical incision along its central line.

Finally, HE 7203 (2.8x1.1/1x0.5 cm, Figure 60) – found in the same area but associated with an older floor-level (Locus 6087) – might have belonged to this group (Milliken 2001b). At the stratigraphic level in which it was found, it appears out of context and isolated and it may have moved due to some disturbance. The piece is larger and is shaped like a triple-lobed vessel with a stem, interpreted as a miniature representation of a pacay tree's (*Inga feuillei*) pod (Cook and Wolff 2003). Possibly, I suggest this could represent other vegetal pods, such as those of the vilca tree (*Anadenanthera colubrina*), whose seeds were used as potent hallucinogenic. Vilca pods appear in the iconography of Wari (Knobloch 2000) and other pre-Columbian cultures (e.g., see Burger 2011).

The northern platform or altar (Locus 6083 – 60x34x5/10 cm, Figure 51) incorporated a rich sealed offering within the shallow circular pit over which it had been built. The offering consisted primarily of additional small carved greenstones and wedge-shaped spondylus pieces (Milliken and Huamán López 2001; Milliken 2006:175). The offering was divided into two strata. The bottom stratum consisting of twenty-two greenstones and ten Spondylus pieces. Covering this lowermost layer was a deposit of soil, above which lay the second stratum, comprising seven greenstones and thirteen Spondylus objects. The bottom stratum included five pairs of identical greenstone pieces (Figure 56):

- Two pairs of triangular pieces (#1 HE 7147-7148 – 1.25x0.84 and 1.50x0.68 cm; #2 HE 7158-7159 – 0.90x0.88 and 0.90x0.87 cm).
- Two pairs of miniature seashells (#1 HE 7154-7155 1.11x0.66 and 1.20x0.58 cm; #2 HE 7156-7157 1.25x0.64 and 1.18x0.61 cm).
- One pair of miniature axes (HE 7149-7150 – 3.20x0.90 and 1.30x0.96 cm), resembling those on Wari urns from Conchopata (Cook and Wolff 2003; Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero 2000:Figure 10b; 2001:236).

Twelve more greenstone pieces were found in this layer (Figure 55, 57), including odd-shapes and/or fragmentary pieces (HE 7151, 7160-7162); a right triangle with a linear

incision along the narrow side between the two polished faces (HE 7152); a spindle-shaped piece with a flat and a rounded side (HE 7153); a cylindrical piece (HE 7173); a rhomboid/triangular piece (HE 7174); a half-cone piece (HE 7175). two triangles with a rounded side and a linear incision along their narrow side between the two polished faces (HE 7176, 7179); a rectangular piece with flat sides (HE 7180).

The top stratum included six greenstones and eleven wedge-shaped Spondylus pieces (Figure 61). The greenstones include:

- A puma head with feline teeth and what appear to be a collar – HE7132 (4.76x1.45x0.88 cm, Figure 58).
- A maize cob – HE: 7133 (2.70x1.30x0.90 cm, Figure 59).
- A spoon-shaped piece – HE 7136 (2.5x1.46x0.55 cm, Figure 55).
- An oblong piece with rounded rectangles carved on its flat side – HE 7135 (1.86x1.32x0.50 cm, Figure 55).

Based on recurrent shapes and intentional incisions, I propose to identify some discreet clusters, linking the pieces in the altar offering and those on the adjacent floor:

- Dark green maize kernel group, comprising four pieces from the floor of the mortuary room (locus 6050) – HE 7183-7184, 7185, 7189, 7170.
- Light green triangular group comprising four pieces from the floor of the mortuary room (locus 6050) – HE 7186, 7187-7190.
- Triangular pieces with an incision along the centre of their flat side, comprising three pieces: one from locus 6050 – HE 7202 – and two from the altar's offering (locus 6083) – HE 7174-7175.
- Triangles with an incision along their narrow side, comprising seven pieces from the altar's offering – HE 7152, 7147-7148, 7158-7159, 7176, 7179.
- The kaywa seed group consists of similarly odd-shaped pieces with one end terminating in an acute angle and the other in a wider and rounded shape with indentations. It comprises two pieces: one from locus 6050 – HE 7143 – and the other from locus 6083 – HE 7160.

Both strata were also filled with abundant spondylus offerings. Several spondylus pieces had been polished and carved into geometrical wedge shapes, with a red and a white side.

The greenstone pieces seem to have represented seeds, kernels and general geometrical shapes, with repeated incisions, possibly to distinguish them. Some are figural representations of seashells and war axes, coming in pairs. A puma/llama head and a maize cob form an extra pair of different-looking pieces, but they are possibly related to each other symbolically. There is a total of twenty-eight greenstones in the altar offering and fifteen more (including the vilca pod from locus 6070) on the floor adjacent to the altar platform.

The two sets of greenstones – those found on the floor and those integrated within the altar offering – present similar shapes and sizes, although the pieces within the altar offering tend to be larger. Iconographic resemblance and consistency in appearance suggest a potential link, and I would argue that their final division into three separate groups may be attributable to different depositional stages during mortuary and/or termination rites. The half Type-1 board was associated with the same floor (locus 6050) as the greenstones. It appears to have been deliberately broken – a well-documented practice in the ritual life of the pre-Columbian Andes (Glowacki 2013; in the case of Wari, see Nash and deFrance 2019; Nash 2018:490-94). The breakage of the board within a mortuary context suggests that it was involved in ritual activities requiring its termination. It is worth noting that the greenstones fit the size of the boards' compartments.

This find bears some resemblance with other types of Wari turquoise stone figurines, such as the two caches of forty figurines each found at Pikillacta in 1927 and the more recent cache of fifty-six miniature metal, stone, and shell figurines found in a ceremonial offering pit near the Eastern Gate of Pikillacta in 2004 (Bergh 2013a; Arriola Tuni and Tesar 2011; Cook 1992; McEwan 1987; Ramos and Blasco 1977; Valcárcel 1933). The 1927 greenstone figurines came in different sizes and were accompanied by an offering of *Spondylus*, emphasising a dual arrangement. Aside from these similarities, the Pikillacta figurines differ substantially. For one thing, their context is different as none seems to have been found in a mortuary setting. Significantly, unlike the Conchopata greenstone offering, the Pikillacta pieces are miniature anthropomorphic representations of individuals differentiated according to their attire and headgears. Their deposition layout is structured, bearing little resemblance to the informal context described above. The larger Pikillacta figurines seem to have served a different ritual practice, and their symbolism appears to have had little in common with the Conchopata cache. A find that is instead similar this one comes from the nearby site of Huari.

MON-1 (Monqachayuq, Huari)

Since its discovery, the archaeological site of Huari has been the key defining centre of the Wari culture. Located approximately 25 kilometres northeast of the modern-day city of Ayacucho and spanning an estimated 260 to 500 hectares of core architectural space, the city was strategically positioned on an irregular plateau bordered by the deep ravines of Pacaycasa and Tarahuayqo. Known since early-colonial times, it became the subject of controlled excavations in the 20th century (Tello 2009; Bennett 1953; Isbell et al. 1991; Schreiber 2012:12).

Huari served as a metropolitan hub for administrative, ceremonial, and elite residential purposes, characterised by increasingly sophisticated urbanism. Notably, the city featured a well-defined sectorisation comprising monumental architecture such as palaces, temples, and mausoleums. The site also reveals extensive usage of terracing and irrigation channels, reflective of sophisticated engineering skills adapted to the region topography and climate. Huari exhibits remarkable funerary architecture, particularly in sectors such as Cheqo Wasi and Monqachayuq, where mausoleums and subterranean galleries were used for intensive ancestor veneration, sustaining elite lineage continuity (Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero 2023; Ochatoma Paravicino et al. 2015; Cabrera Romero et al. 2022; Isbell 2001a; 2009; Pérez 2000; 1999). Research indicates that the urban centre of Huari originated from earlier Huarpa foundations, with significant influences from coastal Nasca societies and highland Tiwanaku traditions, visible in local ceramic styles. Excavations have uncovered distinct layers of construction reflecting a sequential occupation and highlighting the transformations from Huarpa to Wari (Ochatoma Paravicino et al. 2022).

The urban area comprising the site of Huari is divided into three principal zones characterised by different functions and architectural complexes (Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero 2023:55; see also, Williams 2001a; Lumbreras 2007). These include a northern zone, comprising the sectors of Uchpaqoto and Roblesmoqo and characterised by palatial compounds. A central zone, including sectors such as Sullucruz and Lumpaqorqona, used as an elite residential area and characterised by a considerable presence of workshops for craft production. A southern 'sacred' zone, which includes six architectural groups: Capillapata, Vegachayuq Moqo, Monqachayuq, Moraduchayuq, Cheqowasi, and Cerro San

Cristóbal (Ochatoma Paravicino et al. 2015:25). The latter featured the most elaborate buildings, such as temples, elite mausoleums, and "D-shaped" structures.

MON-1 is a fragmentary Type-1 board made of limestone that was found in the sector of Monqachayuq. Located on the extreme west, Monqachayuq borders with Vegachayuq Moqo and Sullacruz, from which it is divided by high walls, probably marking the passage of an ancient road. The Monqachayuq sector belongs to the later phases of Wari development, when Tiwanaku influence on local iconography and architecture had become established. The board was found during the clearing and excavation of a disturbed area by Ismael Pérez (1998b; 1999:50-56; 2000), which revealed subterranean funerary structures, whose upper level was connected to a series of previously excavated underground tunnels. Most believe that this underground architectural complex constituted a multi-levelled mortuary structure (Pérez 2000; Isbell 2004; Cabrera Romero et al. 2022), comprising four subterranean levels of construction. The visible surface architecture includes a D-shaped structure, a large building, and a possible road or passageway. The monumentality of these subterranean structures led scholars to regard them as "royal" tombs (Isbell 2004:20-24; Cabrera Romero et al. 2022:24). This megalithic complex had already been heavily looted by the time of its excavation (Pérez 1998b:27) and the mortuary chambers were empty upon discovery.

The first level below the surface was a rectangular hall divided by a wall into two spaces. Only a portion of the floor associated with this level survived on the east/south-east side. Originally, the floor of the first level would have formed the roof of the second level of architecture, to which it was connected via an access on the south end. The second level comprises twenty-one cells made of ashlar combined with stonework (Figure 62, 63). The majority of these cells are characterised by a roughly rectangular shape, with the exception of one (Compartment 15, Figure 63, 64), which is a circular pit. The architecture of the second level was severely damaged due to the usage of this site as quarry during colonial times (Pérez 2000:516; 1999:56). An intentional fill sealed the architecture of the second level, as indicated by the presence of architectural stones in it. Possibly, this indicates termination rites that marked the abandonment of these mortuary chambers during Wari times (Pérez 1998b:18-19, Capa C; 2000:516). The third architectural level – accessible via a shaft – consisted of a floor, terminating in a deep cylindrical pit. The latter represents a yet deeper level

– the fourth and lowermost one. This circular pit was probably a cist tomb – possibly the primary interment of the whole mortuary complex.

Most of the material recovered by Pérez (2000) comes from the fill covering the second level (Capa A and B), including MON-1, as well as from the intentional fill sealing it (Capa C), particularly from the interior of the circular cell (compartment 15). Notably, only a fragment of the board was found (Pérez 2000:533), consisting of the elevated corner (Zone A) of a Type-1 board made of pinkish limestone.⁸² It was found in the lower stratum of the upper fill (Pérez 1998b:17-18, Capa B), above Compartment 17 of the second level, approximately at the same height as the remaining portion of floor associated with the first level (Figure 62, 64) (Pérez 2000:533; personal communication, 2024). This fill (Capa B) consisted of stones and partially compacted soil, likely compressed by the weight of debris from the upper layer (Pérez 1998b:14-16). Amongst the stones found in this fill, some come from architectural structures, including the floor of the first level (Pérez 1998b:14-18, Capa A and B). Since this is a disturbed fill, no straightforward stratigraphic association can be made. The board fragment may have been originally associated with the first level floor, to which the fill would appear most directly associated. At present, it cannot be established if this floor featured openings for ritual communication with the burial chambers below.

Only two cells of the second level were excavated (compartments 14 and 15). The interior of compartment 15 was disturbed and it comprised two access steps: a first smaller and higher step, located in the upper third of the circular pit and a second larger one (Figure 64). On top of the surface associated with the upper step, within loose soil, were about 200 pierced beads (made of chrysocolla and spondylus), as well as variably shaped spondylus pieces and seashells (Figures 65-66). A few larger unpierced greenstones came from the fill covering compartments 14, 21, 24, at a higher stratigraphic level (Pérez 2000:532). Unlike COP-1, a full reconstruction of the stratigraphic context of the greenstone set is not possible.⁸³

Amongst the recovered pieces, the majority are circular beads with a hole pierced in the middle. They come in different sizes, between 3 and 12 mm, and they are variably made of chrysocolla and spondylus. Other spondylus pieces with a whole pierced in the centre were

⁸² It should be noted that this fragment is known only through a drawing by Pérez (2000), as the board cannot currently be located in the Site Museum of Huari.

⁸³ The location as well as the stratigraphic association of each find were only partially recorded.

polished and carved in lenticular and rectangular shapes. There are also a circular and a cylindrical bluestone. Associated with the spondylus and chrysocolla's beads and found in the same place are two silver sheet pieces, made with a repoussé and chasing technique. These include,

- A puma hybrid hammered silver sheet (11 x 9 mm, Figure 67) – resembling the puma head from Conchopata (Figure 58).
- An abstract form (12 x 6 x 0.5 mm, Figure 68) tentatively identified by Pérez (2000:532) as a Wari-style “fleur-de-lys”.⁸⁴ This decorative motif – characterised by coiling rays around a central geometrical element – is considerably different from the bulbous globular design of this silver figurine. As this figural motif appears to have no parallels in Wari iconography, it is difficult to determine what it might represent.
- A circular piece of silver sheet with a hole pierced near its perimeter. It is formally similar to the pendants known from Peruvian north-coast metallurgical traditions, such as Sicán.

Possibly, another associated metal object was found below the second step. This was a thin sheet of gold, shaped into a quadrangular form with a narrower base and slightly concave sides that flare gently upward and outward (4/2.5x1.5 cm, Figure 69). It is open at the top, opposite the base, resembling an inverted truncated bell with rectilinear edges. A hole is pierced in the centre of the base. Given that the context consists of a loose and disturbed fill, it is plausible that the object shifted from its original position—perhaps falling or being displaced downward over time. All these metal pieces are similar in size and technological manufacture.

Another notable item is a small stone piece, representing a dual-stepped cleft motif (ca. 4.5x4x0.5 cm, Figure 70), reminiscent of those commonly found in Recuay art from Pashash (Grieder 1992; Lau and Luján 2025:Figure 6, 8) and discussed in Chapter 9. Unfortunately, the specific stratigraphic location of this piece cannot be determined, but it came from either the fill of compartment 15, or the upper layer of the fill covering compartment 14, 15, 21, and 24 (Capa B). The greenstone pieces found in the fill of compartment 15 have similar dimension and form, their surfaces are polished, and they are carved into geometrical shapes.

⁸⁴ This is a decorative motif on ceramics, first defined by Lumbreras (1959:84). Menzel (1964:14, Plate II) associates it with the Chakipampa style.

However, no pairs or specific motifs can be identified. Tentatively, I suggest that the board, greenstones, and other shell pieces found in the upper fill (Capa B) may have been originally associated with the first level floor. The pieces belonging to the fill below, instead, may have been deposited inside one of the tombs of level two – i.e., compartment 15 – as an offering.

It is not possible to determine conclusively if these pieces are connected. Based on their forms and comparisons to the Conchopata context, I will argue that there are reasons to believe that they are. In both cases, the boards are fragmentary, and they are associated with mortuary structures. Carved greenstone and spondylus pieces feature in both contexts (although they are less figural and systematic in Monqachayuq), where they appear at different stratigraphic levels – part of them seem to have been deposited inside a tomb in one case and an altar in the other as offerings. Both depositional episodes may reflect termination rites in a mortuary setting. Pérez (2000:516) indicates that the intentional fill sealing the second level appears to be the result of termination or abandonment rituals of the mortuary structures. Finally, the iconographic resemblance of the puma-llama hybrid further links the two contexts. Both feature feline teeth and the collar of domesticated llamas and they are associated with a piece depicting a maize cob in one case and an unidentified motif in the other, whose lobed leaf-like shape may be interpreted by analogy as a reference to the vegetal world.

Arguably, the first and second level at Monqachayuq may have been associated with each other, functioning as interconnected funerary structures in which ancestral worship and related mortuary rituals were carried out. If the board was associated with this level, it may have served a purpose during mortuary rites at a Wari centre of great significance, which housed the bodies of highly esteemed ancestors, perhaps some of the most powerful potentates in the Wari polity.

ISL-01 (Pumapuquio, Acocro, Huamanga)

Another Type-1 board was found by an archaeological rescue project during the construction of a gas pipeline, which investigated 227 sites between coast and highlands encompassing different Peruvian departments, including Lima, Chincha, Huancavelica, and Ayacucho, over a distance of 408 km (Lockard 2011). The discovery occurred at Pumapuquio, which comprises two adjacent sites located in the vicinity of a present-day community by the same name, in the district of Acocro (Huamanga, Ayacucho). The site lies approximately 40 km

southeast of the city of Ayacucho. The complex as a whole shows an occupation spanning the local Huarpa period (EIP), and the Wari MH – featuring a high density of Wari ceramics (Lockard 2011:89-93).

One of the two sectors forming this complex, known as Islacha 1 (Carrillo Bustamante 2008), includes two distinct architectural sectors. A central sector is characterised by elaborate masonry and has been identified as the administrative and ritual part of the site. This architectural complex includes a Wari D-shaped structure, as well as a dozen rectangular rooms associated with irrigation canals. Three burials and several offerings were found in this area, including different pottery styles, including Huarpa and Wari (Chakipampa and Huamanga) alongside a local Wari style (Lockard 2011:113-21). Islacha 1 may have been a minor Wari administrative outpost. It may also have been used by a local elite, integrated into the Wari world (Lockard 2011:89, 91). Additionally, Islacha 1 has a southern sector, which features less elaborate and poorly preserved architecture, including the foundation of a dozen rooms. These architectural spaces have been identified as domestic areas (Lockard 2011:89).

ISL-01 (Figure 42c) was found in the latter sector, inside an architectural complex within Unit 18, denominated *Espacio Arquitectónico 16A* (Figure 71), consisting of a rectangular plan that measures 1.50 × 4.60 m. The walls of this architectural unit are built with hewn stones of volcanic origin, with rounded to sub-angular outlines and of various sizes. The overall masonry appears irregular, with the flat faces of the stones oriented toward the interior of the enclosure. The excavation report cautiously suggests that, given the modest dimensions of this space, it may have served as a storehouse. However, the poor state of preservation does not allow any further inference, other than it dates to the MH, as evidenced by the archaeological material excavated inside, including pottery, metal items (e.g., a tupu), and lithics (Carrillo Bustamante 2008:Unit 18, Espacio Arquitectónico 16A).

Stratigraphically, the board was found in level 3C, a mixed layer consisting of semi-compact silty-clayey soil and organic earth. The level contained medium-sized stones and gravel, with intrusive roots present. In addition to the board, finds from this layer include ceramics, lithics, and animal bones. Immediately below it (level 4D), on the southern side, in a location adjacent to where the board was discovered, an intrusion consisting of stones of various sizes, along with cultural material and brown clayey soil was present (labelled context

27). Context 27 consisted of an intrusive pit of irregular shape in a sterile clay layer, measuring 86×96 cm. The pit was covered by a mound of stones of varying sizes. Context 27 was interpreted by the excavators as an offering deposited by an artisan. The cultural material recovered from it included a copper *tupu* (9x1.1 cm, 3 mm thick); a pedestal bowl with four legs made of kaolin with an orange slip, possibly stylistically linked to Cajamarca pottery; a rectangular hand hoe, made of andesite or slate and showing signs of wear; an elongated stone blade with a pointed end; as well as ceramic sherds and bones (Carrillo Bustamante 2008:Unit 18, Espacio Arquitectónico 16A, Nivel 4D).

While the available information does not allow a conclusive identification of the function of the architectural space, the evidence presented above enables a brief discussion of the interpretation proposed by the excavators. First, the sector in which this unit is located is said to have been largely domestic, including several small-sized rooms. Measuring 1.50 × 4.60 m, EA 16A is no exception, but as noted by Carrillo Bustamante (2008), such modest dimensions may be more compatible with a storage space than a habitation or a mortuary structure. The cultural material uncovered within this architectural structure, including animal bones, pottery sherds, and various utensils, are consistent with this interpretation.

An offering inside a storehouse would not be impossible. Storage facilities can be significant ceremonial places in the Andes (Salomon et al. 2016). They played a key role in the practical enactment of the redistributive economy typical of many Andean societies. While the identification as a storehouse is not certain, its location within a domestic area of the site, detached from the ceremonial centre, suggests it may have been associated with local rural communities. The pit unearthed in context 27 indicates an intentional offering episode, containing agricultural implements, pottery, and a copper item. The offering is relatively poor, but it may be fitting for a local agricultural worker or craftsman. The current reporting indicates that the board may have been associated with the storage activities related to this structure or it may have been itself stored inside this space. The offering pit may also suggest possible ritual activities related to the management of stored goods. Given the stratigraphic position of ISL-1 in relation to, and its proximity to, the offering pit, a link between the two cannot be ruled out.

Finally, a different interpretation of the whole southern area of Islacha is that the poorly preserved dense cluster of about a dozen rooms may have been something akin to a

smaller version of the Wari enclosures with “small conjoined buildings” (Sillar et al. 2013:36) found at sites such as Pikillacta (McEwan 2005:55), Azángaro (Anders 1991:169), and Raqchi (Sillar et al. 2013). One possible identification of these enclosures, offered by Sillar et al. (2013:38), is that they functioned as Wari “labour camps”, hosting the labour force employed in state-directed activities for agricultural production and possibly used only for restricted periods of time. This could explain the stark difference between the southern sector of Islacha and the nearby Wari administrative centre, which would have organised and monitored the labour force. Both the offering and board deposition may have been part of the activities conducted by workers who dwelled in these cramped spaces, perhaps at the end of the agricultural working season.

Phase B1 provides instructive stratigraphic contexts, which help situate a group of boards attributed to phase B1 in their original place of usage and offer a glimpse into the broader ritual activities into which these boards were integrated. I suggest that the small tokens found in two contexts (Conchopata and Huari) may have been related to activities with these boards. At Conchopata, tokens were found in pairs of identical pieces, or clusters of similar ones differentiated by colour. This pattern would appear compatible with an interpretation of these objects as gameboards. Termination and mortuary rituals also feature prominently in the contexts analysed in this chapter, suggesting the use of these boards was very strongly associated with these activities.

While the B1 board-making tradition was happening across the central and southern highlands of Peru, a parallel tradition developed along the north coast. While connected to B1, phase B2 spread from the site of Pachacamac, near present-day Lima, to the southern Ecuadorian highlands of Azuay. These are interrelated yet slightly distinct traditions, possibly reflecting the interaction networks of the MH, involving highland and coastal regions.

Phase B2

THE PERUVIAN COAST AND SOUTHERN ECUADORIAN HIGHLANDS (ca. AD 700-1000)

Smaller, lighter, and portable boards appear along the central and north coast of Peru during the Middle Horizon. Phase B2 is coeval with B1 and is also linked to the spread of Wari influence, but its stylistic, morphological, and material peculiarities suggest that it should be considered a separate tradition. The distribution of the boards included in this phase extend to the southern Ecuadorian highlands, for reasons explained below. Seven boards belonging to this phase have been documented so far, including five Type-1 and two Type-3, all made of wood. Unlike phase B1, no B2 board comes from a controlled excavation, but the archaeological context of two boards (TOM-01 and CHO-01) can be reconstructed based on the available information.

I

Geographical Distribution

Four boards from phase B2 have documented provenance. Following a south-north direction, a Type-3 board (PAC-01, Figure 72d) now in the ethnological museum of Berlin was reportedly found at the coastal site of Pachacamac in the late-19th century (Baessler 1902:pl. 152, Figure 417).⁸⁵ Interactions between Wari and the coastal oracular temple of Pachacamac existed, and a coastal Wari ceramic style is named after this site (Menzel 1964; Knobloch 2013). However, no monumental Wari architecture has ever been found at Pachacamac. To this day, the main Wari material recovered from Pachacamac comes from the burials excavated by Uhle (1903:19-34) at the feet of the Templo Viejo – a large adobe structure

⁸⁵ The board is recorded as part of Arthur Baessler's (1902) collection. However, Baessler worked with collections that had recently arrived in Berlin at the end of the 19th century, including that of Christian Theodor Wilhelm Gretzer, which comprised many artifacts found at the site of Pachacamac (Kaulicke 2000:313-14). The board likely comes from Gretzer's collection.

constituting the main temple during the MH (Giersz and Makowski 2014:286; Franco and Paredes 2000:611; Kaulicke 2000; Jiménez Borja and Bueno 1970:16). It is entirely possible that the board was originally found by huaqueros in the burial area excavated by Uhle. A radiocarbon date was obtained for this board that yielded a cal. date range of AD 770 – 990 (95% probability).

Two more Type-1 boards were found at two north coast archaeological sites, Chan Chan, near Trujillo – CHA-01 (Figure 72a) (Izikowitz 1967)⁸⁶ – and Castillo de Tomaval, in the Virú valley – TOM-01 (Figure 72c) (Campana 2001; 1983). The former has limited provenance information, and its reported origin place should be taken with caution. TOM-01, instead, is better documented and there is enough information about its archaeological context to allow for a more detailed discussion. While not a Wari site, Castillo de Tomaval does show highland influences during the Middle Horizon, leading to the incorporation of Wari practices (see below). A radiocarbon assay obtained for TOM-01 provided the dates of AD 770 – 895 (86% probability).

Two additional wooden boards, a Type-1 (MUD-01, Figure 72b) and a Type-3 (MUD-02, Figure 72e), are held at the Museo delle Culture of Milan. Although unprovenanced, the use of American carob wood – identified at least for MUD-01 (Carolina Orsini, personal communication, 2024) – suggests a coastal origin. A radiocarbon date obtained for MUD-01 places it between AD 770 – 990 (95% probability).⁸⁷ The good preservation of these wooden objects is also an indication of a coastal origin. Surviving organic material is more common in the archaeological record of the arid coastal region of Peru, given the favourable climatic conditions. Occasional finds of pre-Hispanic wood in the highlands exist, but these are rare and often not as well-preserved.⁸⁸

A further unprovenanced fragmentary board held in a private collection in Mancos, in the Callejón de Huaylas (MAN-05), has been identified as a coastal example due to the

⁸⁶ CHA-01 could not be dated due to the heavy surface treatments the board has been subjected to, which profoundly affect the radiocarbon analysis. Larger samples would be needed in order to clean them of the petrol-based resinous substances used to preserve the wood. However, this would risk affecting the integrity of the item.

⁸⁷ They were purchased by the Italian collector Federico Balzarotti in 1968 in Peru by a collector named Meléndez (Orsini, personal communication based on archival material held at the museum, 2024).

⁸⁸ MAL-02 – presented in Chapter 6 and attributed to phase A based on its radiocarbon dating and stylistic features – is an exception. It likely originates from the highlands and is in a good state of conservation.

type of light brown wood, very similar to the Tomaval and Pachacamac examples.⁸⁹ However, its presence in a private collection in the region may also point to a more local origin in highland Ancash. The collector of this fragment has reported to the author that these pieces were acquired from different parts of Ancash, including the coast. A radiocarbon assay of this board fragment yielded a date of AD 770 – 900 (cal. age at 87% probability).

Finally, an additional B2 board was found in a burial near the modern town of Chorodeleg, Azuay, Ecuador. The southern Ecuadorian highlands are rarely discussed in conjunction with the Central Andes, as they stood at the interface with the Northern Andean cultural sphere. As discussed at the end of this chapter, the archaeological evidence suggests a sustained and prolonged contact between this area and the Peruvian north coast in pre-Hispanic times.

The C-14 dates obtained for four boards from Phase B2 boards exhibit a remarkable degree of chronological convergence. All fall (at 87% or 95% probability) within the date range AD 770 – 900/990, neatly overlapping with the end of Wari Epoch 1B and, in particular, Epoch 2A. These are the Wari epochs characterised by major re-organisations of urban architecture and the introduction of new forms of material culture and iconography from both the northern and southern highlands (Isbell 2019; Giersz and Makowski 2014; Knobloch 2013; Williams 2001b; Menzel 1964; 1968). This convergence suggests that the boards began to circulate along the central and north coast of Peru during the 9th and 10th century AD, at a moment when the globalising influence of Wari was at its height (Jennings 2011; 2010). This is not to imply direct conquest in these regions. Rather, the boards and their associated practices appear to have spread alongside Wari ceramic styles and the Wari-propelled SAIS iconography, both of which formed part of the broader cultural horizon shaped by Wari influence across the Central Andes. In this sense, these boards were embedded within the globalising phenomenon that defined the Middle Horizon.

⁸⁹ This is a very small fragment, whose identification is uncertain. I propose to identify it as two compartments of Zone B in what was possibly a Type-1 board. Its radiocarbon date is compatible with the interpretation.

II Style

The sample of boards attributed to Phase B2 is small and remarkably standardised, comprising mostly Type-1 boards – except for two unusual Type-3 (MUD-02 and PAC-01). Most Type-1 examples recorded so far feature a two-level Zone A, with one compartment per level – a common arrangement in phases A and B1 too. TOM-1 represents an exception, since Zone A displays an architectural representation of a multi-storied building, including a stairway and a roofed doorway. The two Type-3 boards display a different Zone A layout, which comprises one level with four compartments.

The main stylistic innovation of this group concerns the shape of the central compartment – a compartment that, as we have seen, had already been susceptible to modifications probably on account of its symbolic value and special function. All Phase B2 boards exhibit a S- (2 boards) or Z-(4 boards) shaped central compartment, which zig-zags across the central point of the board, linking one sequence of small compartments to the other. From an aesthetic perspective, this element produces a dynamic effect across the centre of the boards, serving as the axis on which Type-1 and Type-3 symmetry depends. Visually, this shape simultaneously emphasises the connection between two series of seven small compartments, as well as the characteristic rotational symmetry of Type-1/3 boards. Morphologically, this shape is created by placing an additional compartment along the side (four instead of three), offsetting the convergence point of Zone B (Figure 72). This gap thus formed is bridged by a zigzagging central compartment. Iconographically, the resulting S or Z shape resembles motifs known from other instances of Andean art and iconography. It should be noted that a Type-1 and Type-3 layout already reproduces the same sense of movement in their very design – in fact, the sequences of small compartment departing from Zone A and converging at the centre have an S or Z shape. It is possible that this shape also had a symbolic value for the Wari-Moche people of the north coast. In Wari art a similar zigzagging design appears associated with SAIS imagery, such as the frame of the staff deity's head (Cook 2013).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ In later Inka times, a *tocapu* motif (textile designs), referred to either as Inka key (Rowe 1980) or diagonal-and-dots (Hamilton 2024), had a similar diagonal, S or Z, shape, linking two of the four dots depicted in the corner of a square. While its symbolic meaning is unclear, it is conspicuously represented on tunics related to the Inka administrative apparatus (Hamilton 2024: Chapter 4; Cummins 2007; 2011).

An additional unique feature of this group is the presence of miniature boards. Two Type-3 boards, PAC-01 and MUD-02, are very small scale. PAC-01 is circular, and its diameter is 8 cm, while MUD-02 measures 11 x 9 cm. Both can be held in the palm of a hand. Their small compartments measure 1 x 1 cm and are very shallow (less than 0.5 cm), making it hardly possible for human fingers to interact with their content.⁹¹ Miniature boards, seemingly of no practical use, suggest that they may have referred to the symbolic value of these objects and they may have been deposited as offerings, perhaps in burials. Miniatures and scale representations are well-documented material expressions of Andean cultures. They often manifest a preoccupation with accessing and controlling the animate power or energy inherent to certain places, people, and things, and they functioned synecdochally (i.e., *pars pro toto*) (Allen 1997; 2016; Sillar 1994; 2016; Hamilton 2018).

III Material and Portability

The current record associated with phase B2 includes exclusively wooden examples.⁹² While the botanical identification of wooden boards awaits to be done, the choice of this medium over stone or ceramic – both utilised by coastal Peruvian cultures – is informative. First, while the sample for phase B2 is still limited, that all the extant examples are made of perishable wood is in itself revealing. It is unlikely that, if stone and ceramic boards had been made in the same number, only wooden examples would have been found until now. This seems to reflect a deliberate choice on the part of board makers, who may have preferred the intrinsic properties of this material, such as its weight and malleability. Phase B2 boards are the lightest (0.5 kg on average). This suggests an interest in portability, as lighter and smaller boards would have been easier to transport. On average, B2 boards measure 17 x 13 cm, with three outliers: two small Type-3 boards discussed earlier (PAC-01 and MUD-02) and a large

⁹¹ Measuring 18.5 x 9.5 cm, TOM-01 is also another possible candidate as a miniature board. However, TOM-01 could also be an example of a very small, highly portable, board.

⁹² In a few cases, the wood has been identified as carob wood (*Prosopis* sp.). However, it is possible that other coastal woods were also used, such as the balsa tree (*Ochroma* sp.).

Type-1 board from Ecuador (CHO-01, 33 x 27 cm). Higher portability indicates a higher mobility of these items within a geographical area.

Generally, their enhanced portability is indicative of more free roaming boards. Perhaps this is reflected in the archaeological contexts documented so far for this phase, which include grave goods or offerings, rather than in association with ceremonial spaces. However, the small sample does not warrant any general conclusion.

All these elements reinforce an interpretation of phase B2 as distinct from B1. While they spread to the north coast likely following an increasing Wari influence across the Central Andes through exchange and interactions, they may have become entangled in a new bundle of social practices and values pertaining to the different cultural contexts of the central and north coast of Peru. Notably, no board has yet been documented in the Peruvian south coast, which was also under Wari influence during the MH.

IV Boards in Context

TOM-01 and CHO-01 are unique boards for at least two reasons. First, they are the only B2 boards for which we have documented evidence of their archaeological context. Additionally, they both feature a unique iconography, in the form of architectural representations in the case of TOM-01, and elaborate motifs and figures in CHO-01.

TOM-1 (Castillo de Tomaval, Virú Valley, La Libertad, Peru)

TOM-01 was found at the site of Castillo de Tomaval, a terraced pyramid adobe complex situated on a hill spur overlooking the Virú valley. The site has received archaeological attention since the early 20th century (Kroeber 1930:77-78; Bennett 1939:27-28; Horkheimer 1944:78-79) and it was the subject of in-depth investigations by the Virú Valley Project (VVP), led by Duncan Strong. The VVP established a foundational chronological sequence for the whole valley, including Castillo de Tomaval, referred to as Site V-51 (Strong and Evans 1952:91-128, Site V-51; see also Willey 1953:116-18, 60-65; see also the discussion of the VVP in Castillo and Quilter 2010; Willey 1988). Their research determined that the site showed consistent occupation from Salinar times (ca. 400 – 200 B.C.) until Late Virú/Huancaco (ca. AD 600 – 750) and early Late Phase/Tomaval (ca. AD 800 – 1100)

periods of the local chronology (Table 14). The most intense period of occupation of V-51, to which the construction of the pyramid complex probably dates to, is linked to the late Middle-Virú or Gallinazo culture (ca. 200 B.C. – AD 600) (Quilter 2022; Downey 2015:58; Haas and Creamer 2006; Willey 1953:37; Sghinolfi et al. 2023; Millaire 2020).⁹³ Tomaval is part of an archaeological complex which includes three additional *castillos* (San José, Sarraque, and Napo), built on hilltops overlooking the Virú river gorge and strategically located at the valley's neck. While their location suggests a chiefly defensive purpose, the more structurally elaborate Castillo de Tomaval and Sarraque may have also served as administrative centres (Downey 2015:170-71; Millaire 2010:224, 39). In addition to a pyramid adobe structure, V-51 included a residential area and three cemeteries.

A Type-1 board, made of carob-tree (*Prosopis* sp.) wood, was reportedly discovered on the north side of the Castillo de Tomaval by a student of Cristóbal Campana (1983; 2001), sometime before 1983.⁹⁴ It was uncovered among disturbed grave goods from a looted tomb, which Campana suggests was associated with the Moche IV phase of Larco Hoyle's (1938; 1939; 1945; 1946) sequence. On the grounds of the limited locational information provided by Campana (1983:161-63), the board was probably found within the area identified as Burial Site 3 by Strong and Evans (1952), which consists of a cemetery, whose location is consistent with the area indicated by Campana. Of the three cemeteries identified at Castillo de Tomaval, Burial Site 3 is the closest to the pyramid complex, situated on its northern side (Strong and Evans 1952:109, Figure 17). The cemetery's recovered material exhibits affiliations with Middle and Late Virú phases, as well as Late Epoch material of the Tomaval period.

Campana (1983:161-63) claims this board was found inside an adobe brick, which was tossed to the ground by one of his students, who broke it open, thereby revealing the wooden board inside (see also Wiersema 2010:125, Note 185). Reportedly, the grave goods associated with the board included:⁹⁵

- Sixteen diagnostic Moche IV ceramic sherds.

⁹³ The approximate dates proposed here follow the updated chronological references in Downey (2015:58); (based on Millaire n.d., cited in Downey [2015]).

⁹⁴ The year in which this object was first published and presented by Campana.

⁹⁵ However, the suggested association should be taken with caution, given that we are dealing with a disturbed context which is only approximately reconstructed by Campana, who presumably visited the place along with his student(s), but limited himself to taking notes of the looted burial without any additional excavation or analysis.

- A human tibia, fibula and a piece of the lower jaw, which Campana believes to have belonged to an adult man.
- Three small pieces of gilded copper (ca. 0.5 cm² each).
- Several square adobe bricks with fingerprints and crosses on a side (Moche?). Campana suggests they were part of the tomb's sealing wall before it was looted.
- Some pieces of totora rope (*Enea californiana*) with remains of caña brava (*Gynerium?*).

The board is repeatedly defined as an architectural maquette by Campana. This is understandable, given the explicitly architectural representations of Zone A. The layout of the board follows a standard Type-1 template with an S-shaped central compartment, but with some odd features. The two long compartments of Zone C absent, but there is an additional compartment between the elevated Zone A and Zone B. Furthermore, Zone A features a higher number of compartments than usual, perhaps four or six, which is difficult to determine due to their unusual arrangement.

The architecture depicted on this board leads Campana (1983:162-63) to conclude that the building represented is later than Moche IV material allegedly associated with the burial. Thus, Campana suggests that this type of structure is consistent with the period of Wari influence in the area. In the absence of further information, it is difficult to understand how he reaches such a conclusion. Campana insinuates that there is a three- or four-century gap of between Moche IV and Wari, which is not substantiated by more recent cultural chronologies of the north coast, showing a degree of overlap between Moche IV and Wari (Chapdelaine 2010; Bourget 2010; 2003). While the chronological attribution proposed by Campana may appear tenuous, as the present work demonstrates, TOM-01 does indeed date to the period of Wari influence in the area, as also indicated by its C-14 dating (AD 770 – 895, at 95% probability). As to the validity of Campana's argument, little can be said. The only possible observation is that the structure does not seem to depict a stepped pyramid temple, typical of the Moche period, but a different type of edifice. This can be taken to suggest a non-Moche or hybrid architectural form, which is what may have led Campana to place it in the Wari period.

Moche influence in the Virú valley appears during the Huancaco phase (ca. AD 600 – 750) (Table 15) (Willey 1953; Bourget 2010; Millaire 2009; Chapdelaine 2010). This

corresponds with Moche IV in Larco's sequence, which is the ceramic style reported by Campana (1983) in association with the looted tomb. Wari influenced pottery instead begins to appear in the Virú valley during the Tomaval period (ca. AD 750 – 1100), as evidenced by surface pottery in looted cemeteries. In addition to the appearance of Wari ceramics, albeit limited, the Tomaval period is characterised by the introduction of new types of vessel forms and a marked change in social practices (Willey 1953:234-35; Ford and Willey 1949:17). Chronologically, the board belongs to the Tomaval phase, which has been documented at Burial Site 3 of Castillo de Tomaval. Its C-14 dating aligns with an early period of this phase.

Based on this context, the board may have been deposited inside or on top of a tomb as part of ritual activities around the time of the interment. It is clear via relative and absolute dating that Wari and Moche IV partially overlap chronologically (Chapdelaine 2010:216). TOM-1 is linked to a burial, which suggests that it may have also been utilised in a mortuary setting, similarly to the highland examples examined in the previous chapters, or as an offering. It is not possible to determine conclusively whether the board was intentionally incorporated into an adobe brick or not.

CHO-1 (Chordeleg, Azuay, Ecuador)

A Type-1 wooden board covered in a thin silver sheet was found in a lavish burial in the town of Chordeleg, in the southern Ecuadorian Andes, province of Azuay. Chordeleg is located approximately 50 kilometres east of Cuenca and is situated on the eastern slopes of the Santa Barbara River valley, which heads northward to merge with the Cuenca (or Tomebamba) River, forming the Paute River – a tributary of the Marañón. The Cuenca region, in particular the area of Chordeleg and Sigsig, has been historically recognised for the remarkable findings uncovered by local huaqueros since the 16th century (Salomon 1987; 1986:93), and particularly during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These discoveries attracted the interest of various anthropologists and archaeologists, prompting research visits to the area and publications about its archaeology in the early days of this discipline in the Americas (Heuzey 1870; González Suárez 1878; 1892; Bastian 1877; 1878:120-24; Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922; Uhle 1922c; 1922a; Saville 1924).

Despite these early discoveries, the area of Cuenca has since received only scant archaeological attention, particularly with regard to the Regional Development (500 B.C. – AD

500) and Integration (AD 500 -1500) periods of the Ecuadorian chronological sequence (Evans and Meggers 1957; Meggers and Evans 1961; Meggers 1966:25; Quilter 2022:34). These two periods cover a large time span, extending up until the arrival and conquest of the Inkas in southern Ecuador in the second half of the 15th century. The Regional Development Period and part of the Integration Period in the Cuenca region are associated with the Tacalshapa (also spelled Tacalzhapa) culture, as first defined by Uhle (1922b:243; 1922c:112), and taking its name from a locality in the Santa Ana parish, situated in the eastern part of the Cuenca Canton (Idrovo Urigüen 2000:52).⁹⁶ Scholars have continued to use this term to refer to the local prehistoric culture (Meyers 1998; Idrovo Urigüen 2000:52-59; Lara 2017; 2019; Lara et al. 2023; Bennett 1946; Jijón y Caamaño 1997:296-302). Some of these authors position the Tacalshapa tradition as a phase within the broader, historically documented, Cañari culture, which inhabited Cañar and Azuay at the time of Inka arrival. Sometimes, these earlier periods are also referred to as proto-Cañari (Meggers 1966:151-54; Holm and Crespo 1981:48-65; Moreno Yáñez 1988; Lara 2017:7-22; Gomis 2021).

As discussed by Salazar (2004:49), Lara (2017:7-19; 2019), and Gomis (2021:305-14), the two main chronological sequences for Tacalshapa ceramics have been proposed by Albert Meyers (1998; Table 16) and Jaime Idrovo Urigüen (2000:52-61; Table 17), although there are significant discrepancies between them (see Tables 16-17). Neither sequence can rely on sufficient stratigraphic evidence and associated radiocarbon dates, and they are largely based on stylistic considerations. Both Meyers and Idrovo sequences engage with the stylistic associations between Tacalshapa and Peruvian chronologies, particularly, of the north coast, such as those discussed earlier from the Virú valley. Idrovo downplays the Wari influence on local pottery, which Meyers sees as central to his Tacalshapa IV. Additionally, one of the main issues derives from the absence of any direct correspondence between the burial in which CHO-01 was found and the ceramic seriations. Allegedly, the richest tombs of Chordeleg and Sigsig did not feature any ceramics, complicating attempts at cultural and chronological attributions (Uhle 1922c). The ¹⁴C presented in Chapter 4 is the only available chronological reference for these Tacalshapa burials.

⁹⁶ Uhle later redefined this culture and ceramic style more descriptively by referring to it as the “clay seat” or “drum” culture, a term used also by other authors (Jijón y Caamaño 1927; 1930; Collier and Murra 1943:56).

CHO-1 was found by two huaqueros, brothers Antonio and Ignacio Serrano, in the vicinity of the main square of Chordeleg. According to González Suárez (1878:21; 1892:64), this was in a place called *Patecte*, which he describes as being located a very short distance to the east of the main plaza. However, this indication is misleading because the only place with a similar name – i.e., Pactente (Map 7) (*Patecte* is likely a misspelling or an older unrecorded spelling variation of this toponym) – is located south of Chordeleg on the way to Sigsig, at a much longer distance from the town than González Suárez insinuates. While the latter was also the location of several finds (Uhle 1922c:109)⁹⁷, this is probably not where the board was found. As González Suárez himself writes, all the early burial excavated by the Serranos were found within, or very close to, the central plaza of Chordeleg. Uhle (1922a:27) explicitly writes that the provenience of Pactente was mistaken (see also Matovelle 1921:60). Decades later, Antonio Serrano’s grandchild, Gonzalo Serrano Iñíguez (1979:146), published a brief memoir of his grandfather’s grave digging exploits and failures, in which he provides “Shimpirca” as the site where CHO-1’s burial had been excavated.

Shimpirca is more compatible with the geographical references provided by González Suárez. This is a small hill located just a few hundred metres east of the main plaza (see Map 7). Today, Shimpirca’s gentle hill slopes are at the very margins of Chordeleg’s expanding urban area (Figure 74). No signs of pit excavations are visible on the surface and most of the area is covered by grass fields or small agricultural patches. Etymologically, this toponym may be a Hispanicisation of ‘Zhinpirca’, which includes two significant elements. ‘Pirca’ (lit. ‘wall’ in Kichwa), was often used in toponyms to identify architectural elements (e.g., Ingapirca, referring to Inka or pre-Columbian architectural ruins). Zhin- is instead of uncertain origins and its meaning is unknown. However, the evidence indicates this is a common prefix in many local toponyms, such as Zhingate – where another important burial was found in 1956 (Segarra Iñíguez 2000; 2003) – Zhindilig in Azogues, Zhindélig, Zhingata, Zhingrú, etc. (see Cárdenas Espinoza 2003:29 for a longer list). Possibly, this word comes from the Cañari language. This is suggested by the presence of the voiced fricative phoneme ‘zh’, which is foreign to Kichwa dialects and is considered to have originated in the linguistic Cañari

⁹⁷ Pactente is an artificially levelled hilltop where looters have been active until fairly recently. During the author’s visit to the site, he was able to document the presence of several looters’ pits, some of which may have only been only a few years old.

substrate that survived in the locally spoken Cañari-Kichwa variant (Howard 2010:131). Even though this remains speculative, such a toponym may have indicated the presence of architectural (possibly, archaeological) elements on this hill in the past.⁹⁸

Most of the information available for this burial context come from an early work by González Suárez (1878:21), which is based on his interviews with Antonio Serrano, probably taking place in Cuenca in 1874 (Tacconi n.d.; González Suárez 1915:149, Note: 32), a few years after it had been found, which allegedly happened in 1869 (see also Bastian 1878:124; but cf. Salazar 1999:151). Reportedly, the Shimpirca burial was a circular shaft tomb, following a common pattern of Tacalshapa burial practices (Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922:115-25; Uhle 1922c:109-10; Bastian 1878:124-25; González Suárez 1878:12-13), which contained only one individual of undetermined sex lying supine in the *bolsón* (“big bag,” huaquero term) – a lateral chamber at the base of the shaft pit (Figure 75).

According to González Suárez (1878), some of the objects that formed the Shimpirca burial were sent to Paris around the time of their discovery, where they were examined and illustrated by Heuzey (1870) in a piece titled “The Cuenca Treasure”. Verneau and Rivet (1912-1922:244) examined and reproduced unpublished photographic material taken on the occasion of Heuzey’s publication, which are listed in Table 18.⁹⁹ Whether all of these actually came from the same burial is difficult to determine conclusively. However, this is what González Suárez suggests, and the French authors accept.

Of the pieces sent to Paris only three survive in the collections of the museum of quai Branly, while the others were melted down in France (Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922:244). The extant items include two circular plaques, of which one features decorations depicting four animals running in groups of two in opposite directions, and a cast gold axe with decorations. Additional gold items, including other axes, a headdress, and gold pots were also found in the same burial as CHO-1 (Table 18). Reportedly, it also contained a lost gold plaque – originally mounted on a wooden frame (González Suárez 1878:53, pl. 1) – depicting a SAIS personage (Figure 76). The Chordeleg figure most closely resembles the characteristics linked to the SAIS personage known as *sacrificer*. Characteristic attributes include a

⁹⁸ It should also be noted that Zhingate is adjacent to another hill named Llaver (also spelled Llaber or Yaver/Yaber), which still features pre-Columbian terracing. Uhle (1922a) claims that Llaver presented Tacalshapa surface pottery and Bray (2008:538) lists it as one of the main Cañari sites.

⁹⁹ These were attached to a copy of Heuzey’s work held at the National Library of France (P. Angrand, 360).

profile head with a frontal torso, a zigzagging staff, a trophy head, a three-pronged crown-like motif on the top of an appendage resembling a tail and emerging from the waist of the personage – probably, a rather free depiction of the three-fillet tuft,¹⁰⁰ a serpent emerging from the figure's mouth. As noted by Knobloch (2022:115), while indubitably attributable to the SAIS, the image represented on the Chordeleg plaque also diverges in terms of stylistic choices. This may be due the loss of the original object. In fact, this iconography is known only through a painting commissioned by Antonio Serrano to, presumably, a local artist, who may have misrepresented aspects of the image being copied. It is possible that the original resembled more closely known Wari SAIS styles. However, it may also have reflected the local appropriation of Wari iconography by Tacalshapa artists. Local Tacalshapa incorporation of SAIS iconography is identifiable in an ear spool found in Zhingate, Sigsig, which depict a profile attendant of the SAIS canon, now in the collections of the Museo Nacional del Ecuador (Figure 77) (Segarra Íñiguez 1967; 2000; Holm and Crespo 1981; Lleras Pérez 2015). Probably of local manufacture, its iconography closely resembles that of another ear spool found at the Moche-Wari site of Castillo de Huarmey, in the Peruvian north coast (Tacconi n.d.; Prządka Giersz 2014:115).

CHO-1 is noteworthy for several reasons. While it exhibits a standard Type-1 layout, with a Z-shaped central compartment, it also displays unusual characteristics that shed light on the broader contacts between Azuay and Peru during the MH. CHO-1 is the only board found in Ecuador so far, outside the area that is commonly taken to have been under the influence of Wari. The cultural sphere associated with Wari is usually considered to have stretched from southern Peru to the northern Peruvian highlands, including administrative sites such as El Palacio, near Cajamarca (Watanabe 2001; 2012; 2019; 2022). The nature, degree, and characteristics of the Wari presence the central and north coast are still widely debated (Bracamonte Lévano 2022; Giersz 2017; Chapdelaine 2010; Kaulicke 2000; Franco and Paredes 2000; Berquist 2022).

Although there have been scholars who suggested that the southern Ecuadorian highlands should be incorporated within the broader Wari sphere of influence, their suggestion has never met a consensus (cf. Uhle 1922a; 1922c; Bruhns 1994; 2008b; 2024). A re-assessment of the burial context of CHO-1 and the new cultural chronology proposed in this study

¹⁰⁰ For a similar instance see the sacrificer on a Wari mirror, see Bergh (2013b:222 and Figure 206).

for these boards demands a re-evaluation of the Tacalshapa tradition of southern Ecuador and the broader Andean networks in which it partook. This does not necessarily entail a Wari presence in Azuay or southern Ecuador, given that Wari elements associated with Tacalshapa are admittedly limited and the currently available evidence does not warrant such a conclusion. While more research in this region is needed, there are more conservative and cautious interpretations that can explain the available data.

A possible way to understand the presence of this board as well as other Wari-related artifacts in Azuay is to adopt a bottom-up perspective and think about cultural groups such as Tacalshapa as being themselves the active agents in the complex networks and dynamics characterising the Middle Horizon across the Central Andes. Possibly, the strategic geographical position of the Tacalshapa, inhabiting a borderland between different cultural spheres as well as ecological regions (Guffroy 2008). The presence of a board belonging to phase B2, typical of the Peruvian central and north coast, in Azuay is consistent with the strong ties that this southern Ecuadorian region appears to have had with coastal Peru, particularly visible in local metallurgy (Tacconi n.d.). These two regions were probably connected by well-trodden trails stretching back in time, some of which were possibly integrated by the Inkas into their road system (Qhapaq Ñan) (Hocquenghem et al. 1993; Hocquenghem 1995; 1993). For example, remains of pre-Columbian roads have been documented in Chobshi, near Sigsig, crossing two archaeological sites, Shabalula and Castillo de Chobshi (Salazar 2004:62; Valdez 1984:94-95).¹⁰¹

There is evidence suggesting that they played a significant role in long-distance exchange networks too (Bray 2008:539). Inter-zonal relationships existed in different parts of present-day Ecuador during pre-Columbian times (Valdez 2008). The Cañari were strategically positioned to have privileged access to both coastal equatorial products, such as spondylus shell, as well as to lowland amazonian products, which were equally sought after by many highland and coastal cultural groups to the south.¹⁰² The presence of CHO-1 in the Shimpirca burial

¹⁰¹ Contacts between these two areas have continued until recently. According to a local Sigseño, Segarra Íñiguez (1967), this was still happening in the 1960s, when people would regularly travel from Sigsig to the Peruvian north coast for business. The elders reportedly referred to the Peruvian north coast as “the provinces” in common parlance.

¹⁰² A terrestrial highland route was not the only one connecting the southern Ecuadorian coast with the Central Andes, as a maritime route had been in place for a long time as well. Possibly, different routes were used at different times for the trade of spondylus, and it should not be ruled out that highland cultures – such as the Inkas and before them Wari – may have preferred a more familiar inland route rather than a maritime one

of Chordeleg may reflect a participation in this type of long-distance exchange networks, which may help explain Tacalshapa affinities with cultures of the Peruvian north coast and the use by local Tacalshapa elites of foreign imagery and objects to assert and legitimize their political authority (Tacconi n.d.).

Another noteworthy aspect of CHO-1 is that it was reportedly covered with a thin silver foil, which replicated the iconography carved on the wooden surface. If true, this would be an additional unprecedented trait. While we do not have direct evidence of this other than the testimony of González Suárez – who must have related what Antonio Serrano had told him – the practice of applying gold and silver sheets to a wooden support or frame is arguably a well-known practice of Andean metallurgy, particularly, again, in Peruvian north coast traditions, such as Middle Sicán (e.g., Shimada et al. 2000:34-35).

Evidence suggests that this was a paramount aspect also of Tacalshapa metallurgy and artistic expressions. According to the descriptions of items found by huaqueros, Tacalshapa metalwork appears to have involved the frequent use of metal sheets mounted onto a wooden support by means of pegs. Through the process known as chasing and repoussé, Tacalshapa artists were able to produce elaborate decorations and iconographies on the metal surfaces. Today, very few examples of this practice survive due to the extensive destruction caused by looting. In most cases, we only have either the external metal sheets or the wooden core. A handful of examples survive in a few museum and private collections, including a flute (V A 2151) in the collection of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin, acquired by Adolf Bastian in Chordeleg, possibly directly from Antonio Serrano (Bastian 1878). Another example is a spear-thrower from the burial excavated by local people in Ucumarina, near Guarainac, Paute Canton, during construction operations in the late 1960s (Figure 22) (Malo Vega 2015:20-21; personal communication, 2023).¹⁰³ In addition to pegging it, the external metal sheet was made to adhere to the wooden surface by annealing and hammering, a process that would have also affected the surface colour of the metal (Figure 78).¹⁰⁴

(Knobloch 2022:116). Moreover, the highland route the Cañari may have used gained access to lowland selva products, which would be inaccessible via the maritime route, indicating that spondylus may have not been the only product exchanged.

¹⁰³ This is the same burial where GUA-01 and -02, presented in Chapter 4, were reportedly found.

¹⁰⁴ On the importance of metal surface colour enhancement and treatment in Andean cultures, see (Lechtman 1984b); (1984a; 1993); Lechtman et al. (1982). See Lau (2010d) and Costin (2021) for more general example of the significance of surface treatment in the ancient Andes.

The narrow grooves along the edges of the compartments and sides of CHO-1 (Figure 79) may have been an adjustment to better secure the metal sheathing to the wooden surface. (González Suárez 1878). This is also visible in Serrano's 1869 painting of the Shimpirca gold plaque, which was also originally affixed to a wooden frame. The painting depicts bass-reliefs indentations all along the edges of the plaque, which would have corresponded to the grooves carved in the underlying wooden panel. This narrow indentation was likely meant to accommodate the metal cover, facilitating its positioning and adherence, but also provided space for the metal pegs to be hammered into the wood (Figure 80).

Arguably, the fact that the board's surface was treated in the same way as the surface of other ceremonially significant objects is understandable from a Tacalshapa perspective as part of a process of domestication of foreign practices and artifacts. Such a process was probably intended to safely incorporate the otherness inherent to such objects by encasing it within a surface that was meaningful to Tacalshapa people. The same surface treatment appeared to have involved the principal chiefs buried alongside these items, who were dressed in clothes woven with metal sheets as well several metal ornaments, such as those in the NMAI collection (Saville 1924). The resulting enhancement of surfaces across different bodies and media, within a burial setting, suggests an interconnectedness between objects and human bodies – becoming themselves social artifacts in death, as they had probably been in life (Tacconi n.d.; Lau 2010d). Overall, this shows a high degree of agency on the part of Tacalshapa, who – far from being passive receiver of Wari cultural artifacts and iconography – appear to have appropriated and integrated foreign and exotic elements from the Peruvian north coast into their cultural-cum-political landscape. A fair assumption is that these objects and images were accompanied by ritual practices as well as cosmological beliefs and systems which might have been equally re-visited and appropriated by Tacalshapa.

The scenario that emerges from the burial of Shimpirca, as well as the general archaeological record of Chordeleg and Sigsig, is that exotic objects and iconography were particularly tied to the Peruvian north coast of the Middle Horizon, as exemplified by CHO-1 and SAIS-related imagery. These two elements appear to have spread together, possibly coming as part of the same package of ritual cults and religious beliefs. In particular, the board appears to have been accompanied by specific profile deities from the SAIS pantheon, including the

avian headed griffin that may have belonged to specific central and north coast Peruvian ethnic groups (Menzel 1968:87-88; Knobloch 2018; Gibbon et al. 2022; Lleras Pérez 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the profile heads of Wari agents depicted along the sides of CHO-1 are a hallmark of Wari iconographic tradition (Figure 81). Typically, these heads are individually distinct, each bearing defining traits that allow for their identification (Knobloch 2002). In contrast, the ones visible on this board appear identical. We cannot determine whether the original representations once displayed individual variations that were subsequently lost through copying, or whether they were intentionally uniform from the outset. Possibly, Tacalshapa artists were less concerned with replicating the specific meanings attached to these profile heads than visually signalling the board's essential association with Wari culture. By invoking a recognizable motif from the central Peruvian highlands, the artist may have aimed to convey affiliation with – or legitimacy drawn from – this distant cultural source. After all, the key issue is what these heads would have evoked for a Tacalshapa viewer rather than a Wari one. Possibly, they carried an entirely different meaning, a symbol of the exotic and far-off Wari world, accessible only to the elite, and represented here through a de-contextualised yet iconic image – familiar, yet little understood.

At the same time, the heads appear to face one another as if engaged in combat – an arrangement that recalls narrative scenes in which Wari agents or warriors are shown fighting with each other. For example, this is visible on a tapestry fragment from Ocucaje, Ica Valley, Peru, where ten agents are depicted in a confrontational pose (Gibbon et al 2022:651) or on urn fragments from Conchopata (Knobloch 2013:130). This visual cue, when considered alongside the broader imagery that decorates CHO-1, may offer insight into the function or intended use of these boards (see Chapter 9 for a fuller discussion). The integration of Tacalshapa into Wari network provokes a re-evaluation of Knobloch's (2022) analysis of one particular Wari agent (109) as, potentially, of Ecuadorian origin. If true, it may have identified a Tacalshapa individual. Distinctive traits of this agent are consistent with Tacalshapa ornaments and headgear; however, these are admittedly little known. The distribution of this agent appears to be more associated with the central and north coast of Peru, with additional examples from the Wari heartland (Tacconi n.d.; Knobloch 2022:117; 2002:Agent 109).

Ultimately, CHO-1, along with the accompanying SAIS imagery and Wari profile heads, may have been a Tacalshapa elite's attempt at displaying and controlling exotic objects, over

which they exercised exclusive control and that likely entered their cultural sphere via long-distance interaction networks. Tacalshapa elites appeared to have known enough about the Wari world to suggest that they may have relied on stable and established contacts with Wari-influenced areas such as the Peruvian north coast. The display of MH Central Andean iconography and artefacts by local elites in the Tacalshapa area of Chordeleg and Sigsig aimed at legitimating their authority through exclusive access to foreign material, whose surfaces were enhanced by means of dazzling gold and silver covers. The presence of SAIS iconography and a Type-1 B2 board also allow us to chronologically place some of these burials in the 9th or 10th century AD, corresponding to Wari Epoch 2, when these images and B2 boards spread along the Peruvian north coast. Notably, this is a time of significant transformation in power dynamics within the Wari polity.

The complex dynamics characterising most of Peru during the Middle Horizon and constituting what is known as the Wari cultural phenomenon likely involved complex core-periphery networks, which are still only partially understood and the subject of different – sometimes competing – models (see Jennings 2025; Jennings et al. 2022; Jennings 2006; Graeber and Sahlins 2017:Chapter 6). The precise role of Chordeleg and Sigsig is yet to be determined, and more research is needed. Possibly, these were the sites of important chieftainships, which exerted a high degree of control over the long-distance traders who travelled back and forth from Peru.

From a local perspective, at least some of the burials would appear to date to phase of Tacalshapa IV in Meyer's (1998), and III in Idrovo's sequence, but their chronology might extend to cover a much broader period (contra Idrovo Urigüen 2000:56). Meyers also points out the similarities between Tacalshapa pottery and Huancaco ceramics from the Virú valley, where the only other well-documented boards attributed to phase B2 (TOM-01) was found (Figure 82). Additionally, both Idrovo (2000:56) and Meyer (1998:187) highlight the broader connections between the Peruvian north coast on and the south coast of Ecuador – visible, for example, in ceramic styles – suggesting that Tacalshapa links to the Peruvian north coast may have been part of wider exchange networks.

In conclusion, phase B2 boards form part of the broader phenomenon of cultural hybridisation on the central and north coast of Peru during the MH, when local traditions merged with

the expansive influence of the Wari polity. Miniature boards, possibly employed as burial offerings, are found for the first time during this phase, suggesting a degree of cultural appropriation and reinvention, as highland traits filtered into coastal contexts. Within this process, a B2 board reached Azuay, where the local Tacalshapa groups appear to have maintained sustained interactions with the north coast of Peru. In appropriating these boards, the Tacalshapa provided a uniquely elaborate iconography that strongly associates these objects with Wari warriors or agents, depicted along the sides and juxtaposed with a mythic creature – half-reptile and half-feline – set in opposition to kernels or seeds on the sides of Zone A.

As argued in the next chapter, this iconographic theme echoes that of the tokens from Conchopata and, possibly, also Monqachayuq, where a hybrid creature – half-llama and half-puma – appears in (complementary) opposition to a maize cob and a possible vegetal motif. If the Chordeleg board's iconography does reference either the function or symbolism of the board, perhaps as a way of making an otherwise exotic and foreign object more accessible, then these iconographic sets may be interrelated and provide important insights for our final discussion.

Iconographic Discussion

In the previous chapters, I have described the available evidence about these boards, focussing on their emergence, distribution, and synchronic as well as diachronic change. According to the current record, they first appear in association with Recuay and seem to have remained culturally significant objects throughout the MH, when they became associated with elite and administrative contexts, including in the Wari heartland. They appear to have crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries and to have accompanied a set of ritual practices related to ancestral veneration, which were spreading across the Andes. Their current distribution pattern does not cover the entire Wari-influenced area, but is clustered around certain regions, possibly reflecting local agency and preferences in determining the adoption of these boards.

These artifacts travelled from Recuay to Wari during what appears to have been a time of intense cultural exchange between the central and northern highlands of Peru, characterised by the acquisition of foreign objects and a cultural disposition to cross-cultural interactions (Lau 2012b). By no means were these boards the only things the Wari took from northern Peruvian cultures, but they seem to have been part of a larger transfer of practices and knowledge, which included nucleated patio-group architecture, ancestral worship, *chullpa*-style burial structures, and probably, a logic of segmentary social organisation, articulated around kinship groups bound together by descent from a common ancestor. Their spread to coastal regions of Peru and the southern Ecuadorian highlands are probably the result of an intensification of interactions following the expansion of interregional networks of exchange during the MH.

I have suggested that they likely functioned as gameboards within the integrative mechanisms of Recuay and Wari. Games have been shown to be key instrument of socio-political mediation in the Andean world, at least since Inka times. In the next pages, I will first discuss the iconography of a few specimen boards and then I will examine the general layout of Type-1/3 and Type-2. I intend to explore what the iconography and layout of these boards can reveal about their symbolism and meaning. This analysis will allow us to then draw

conclusions regarding why these objects became meaningful in association with the broader social processes characterising the EIP in Ancash and the whole Andean region during the MH. These social processes led to establishment of principles of social organisation informing Andean societies ever since – including, most notably, the Inka empire. To some extent, the same social structure continues into the present, showing the resilience, adaptability, and ingenuity of this system and of Andean cultures.

I

Three boards feature figural iconography along their sides, bottom, or main surface (Figure 83): CAB-1 (Figure 41), CHO-01 (Figure 79), and CAB-22 (Figure 36). The iconographic representations running along the sides of CAB-1 show a common Recuay motif, depicting a bicephalic creature with both feline and reptilian features, whose body is composed of diamond-shaped elements encasing *chacana* crosses. On top of them, there are two stepped motifs, a larger and a smaller one, depicted on each of the four lateral sides of Zone A. These motifs appear in conjunction with the elevated areas of the board, themselves reminiscent of stepped platforms (Figure 83a).

The double-headed serpent/feline is depicted on several other examples of Recuay art (Wegner 2011). For instance, it can be found on Recuay architectural vessels – usually depicting elite ceremonies taking place inside residential architecture. When appearing on these pots, the bicephalic creature is usually a decorative element of an architectural feature of the building – for instance, a vertical component (e.g., column) or a horizontal one (e.g., arch). These decorations mark a separation between the domestic dimension of orderly ceremonial life inside the house-pot and the outside (Lau 2010d:279; 2011:229).

Thematically, the bicephalic creature transcends the Recuay world and is a common motif throughout Andean art and mythology. As noted by Lau (2016:145-47), a similarly described creature with both feline and reptile features is known in both Inka and early colonial Quechua mythology with the name of *mach'acuay* (lit. snake) or *amaru*.¹⁰⁵ In a passage

¹⁰⁵ The two terms demonstrate a significant semantic overlap, but they also differ, in that the latter term seems to have been more closely associated with the mythical creature variably described as a serpent, a feline, or a dragon, characterized by a composite body and identified as – among other things – the rainbow. The *amaru* is often conceived as double-headed, with one head emerging from a *pukiu* (water spring) and the other plunging into another *pukiu* (Urton 1981:88-89, 177-80; 2008:222; Salomon and Urioste 1991:93).

examined in Chapter 2 and relating to the game of *bolas/ayllus*, Albornoz (in Duviols 1984:201) introduces this mythical animal as “a certain kind of snake [...] called machacuay and amaro”, claiming that the game was played in festivities dedicated to it, including by the Inka (201).¹⁰⁶

Recent ethnographic data collected in Misminay, Cuzco valley, and Tomanga, Ayacucho, suggest that a double-headed serpent can be associated with both the rainbow and the Milky Way, equally conceived as celestial arcs that feature a set of overlapping symbolic associations, particularly in relation to water (Urton 1981:93-94, 190; Salomon and Urioste 1991:93). In fact, while the rainbow is associated with rain, the Milky Way is conceived as a cosmic river (*mayo*), linked to the cycle of terrestrial waters, encompassing the Ocean, rivers, and lakes. Water – flowing to the Ocean through rivers and lakes from glaciated mountains – comes back in the form of rain from the sky. Thus, the complete cycle of water includes the celestial river (i.e., the Milky Way) that brings water back from the cosmic ocean to the earth. This worldview was documented ethnographically at the end of the 20th century (Urton 1981:60), but it seems to have been in direct continuity with pre-Hispanic cosmology, as it closely resembles what Cobo (1892) reports to be the view held by the Inkas.

In seeking [...] the ulterior cause of the water that falls from the sky, these Indians held the common opinion that it was the Thunder, and that it was his charge to provide it whenever he wished. After Viracocha and the Sun, they gave this god the third place in their veneration. They imagined him as a man who dwelt in the heavens, formed of stars, with a mace in his left hand and a sling in his right, clothed in shining garments, which gave off that brightness or lightning whenever he turned about to cast the sling; and that its crack caused the thunder, which he gave whenever he wished rain to fall. [The Inkas] also said that across the sky ran a very great river, which they pointed out as that white band we see from down here, called the Milky Way; about this they invented a world of fantasies too long to relate. From this river, they believed, [the Thunder] drew the water that it poured over the earth. And since

¹⁰⁶ This association is confirmed by another early colonial source written by an anonymous Augustinian friar in Huamachuco, near the northern Recuay area of Pashash (Anonymous c 1992:32).

they attributed to the Thunder the power to cause rain and hail, and everything else pertaining to the clouds and the region of the air, where these imperfect mixtures are forged, so too, under the name of Thunder, or as things belonging to it, they worshiped the Lightning/Thunderbolt (*Rayo*), the Flash (*relámpago*), the Rainbow, the rains, the Hail, and even the storms, whirlwinds, and gusts of wind.

(Cobo 1892:331-32)

Just in the previous chapter, Cobo had linked the thunder-god to the *machacuay/amaru*.

[The Inkas] also took great care to venerate another [deity] called *Machacuay*, whom they believed concerned with the preservation of snakes, serpents, and vipers; chiefly because, *when the thunderbolt flashes, it appears in that shape*; and, moreover, because the Inkas had them as emblems, and even raised them and kept them here as *huacas*, particularly those of the province of Chinchaysuyu [my emphasis].

(Cobo 1892:330)

Thus, already in Inka times, the cosmic river of the Milky Way seems to have been associated with water, and a set of interrelated elements, including the rainbow. Ultimately, all pertained to the domain of the thunder-god. In turn, the latter was associated with the *machacuay/amaru* serpent, as one of its main manifestations. In Chapter 5 and 6, I have discussed how storm deities, such as the thunder-god, were prominent in Ancash during colonial times. Lau and Luján (2025) have suggested that the Recuay elite of Pashash may have appropriated the powers of these storm deities through the exaltation of their ancestors to a divine status, thereby linking their authority to that of these powerful metahumans via descent.

The symbolism of the double-headed *amaru* appears to be even older than the Inkas. During the EIP, the imagery of a double-headed serpent was not exclusive to the Recuay. Though in a different style, a double-headed serpent is commonly found in Moche art.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ The Moche were a contemporary cultural group of the Recuay, they inhabited the north coast of Peru.

There are examples of a bicephalic snake on Moche fine-line ceramics, such as the ‘coca ceremony’ scene (Figure 84), where it appears as a celestial arc above human figures involved in ritual procedures (Figure 85). Moche scholars commonly refer to this iconographic motif as the “bicephalic arc/arch” (Bourget 2016:29, 404; Hocquenghem 1989:114-15; Lavallée 1970:108-11). Given that the bicephalic arc/arch is often surrounded by black dots in Moche iconography, Hocquenghem (1989:114-15) proposes to identify it as the Milky Way surrounded by a star-studded sky, and by extension as the celestial river and the source of water and fertility. Likewise, Lavallée (1970:108-11) relates the dark dots to the night sky and interprets the double-headed serpent as a celestial symbol representing water and rain, and, accordingly, fertility. In both pre-Columbian and colonial times, even distinctive geological layers with a serpentine shape appear to have been seen as instantiations of the *amaru*, or bicephalic arc/serpent, often emphasising concepts related to the cycle of water and life (Bourget 2016:29; Albornoz, in Duviols 1984:201-02). The serpentine body of a serpent, reminiscent of the meandering course of a river, may have added to these associations (Randall 1987:157; Zuidema 1974:215-17).

The coca ceremony scene is believed to represent a ritual activity related to another common ritual scene depicted in Moche iconography, that of the ritual combat and mountain sacrifice, which features the same personages (Uceda 2008; Bourget 2016:333-49). The imagery related to the latter emphasises the relationship between the sacrificial victim’s blood and the riverine water descending the Andean cordillera to the desert coast of the Moche, ensuring agricultural fertility. Sometimes, the sacrificial victim’s blood is represented as a river (Bourget 2016:Figure7.6). In Stage-B/Phase-IV/Middle-Moche art, the bicephalic arc becomes a horizontal band, dividing the iconographic narrative depicted on fine line ceramics into an upper and a lower register (Figure 86). Bourget (2016:404) suggests that it “marks a separation” between distinct phases of a ceremony, which resonates with later colonial conceptions of the *amaru*, seen as “symbolic of disorder erupting in the transition to a new order” (Salomon and Urioste 1991:93). A common narrative sequence divided in two by the bicephalic arc is that of the ‘Sacrifice Ceremony’, which also relates to the circulation of life-giving liquids – the sacrifice of a victim in the lower register and the presentation of the sacrificial victim’s blood in the upper.

Therefore, the bicephalic serpent, known as *machacuay/amaru* in later Quechua mythology, may bear some resemblance with the mythic creature represented in the iconography of earlier pre-Columbian cultures. While cultural variations across space and over time probably occurred, adding to the already polysemic nature of this mythic creature, I argue that a few common traits seem to have characterised the cosmological thinking accompanying it. These are:

- Aquatic associations – particularly, with celestial arcs such as the Milky Way or cosmic river and the rainbow.
- Transitional disorder towards the establishment of a new order. A relevant aspect to the role of games in bringing about a new order or equilibrium (see Chapters 2, 5).
- At least in the highlands, it appears to have been related also to storm deities (e.g., Thunder) and downward flowing water (Salomon and Urioste 1991:15).

If the bicephalic creature decorating the side of the CAB-1 (Figures 41, 83a) is a forerunner of the *machacuay/amaru*, it may suggest a connection to a set of related concepts, such as the thunder-God, the cycle of water and life, and, possibly, exalted ancestors who had become associated with storm deities. As discussed in Chapter 6, CAB-1 was found in the burial temple of the hilltop palatial compound of La Capilla, which was likely the main residential palace of the Pashash chiefly elite. The board was found adjacent to the mortuary room hosting the burial of a numinous forebear. The water associations of the *amaru* resonate with the analysis of the *chacana* cross in Chapter 6, representing an axis mundi with a primary aquatic connotation (i.e., *tinkucmayo*).

The other iconographic element of CAB-1 is the stepped motif associated with the terraced platform of Zone A (Figure 83a). This is also a long-lived pan-Andean motif, often accompanied by a spiral (wave-like) or meandering shape resembling a Greek fret, and known as step-fret motif (Kroeber 1926:22; Grieder 1982; Kubler 1993). In the context of Moche art, de Bock (2003) identifies the step-fret as a “symbol of transition” (315) and of the “annual cycle of regeneration” (321), due to its relation to mountains and temple mounds (stepped design), water, and the ritual calendar. Notably thus, at least in Moche art, the step-fret shares a similar set of symbolic associations with the double-headed serpent, such as transition,

water, and regeneration. In Moche art, the step-fret motif appears consistently associated with sacrificial blood and mountaintops or stepped pyramid mounds (de Bock 2003:310-315).

The step-fret motif also appears in Recuay art, both on pottery and stone carvings. Stone carvings from Pashash display the step-fret motif in conjunction with a splayed figure, displaying a diamond-shaped torso encasing a *chacana* cross, formally similar to the body of the bicephalic creature (Figure 87). Lau and Luján (2025:136-37) interpret the splayed figure as a local ancestor, elevated to divine status. The stepped motif also appears repeatedly on other stone carvings from Pashash, for example along the body of a coiling creature with a triangular appendage containing a *chacana* cross (Figure 88). Lau and Luján (2025:140-41) call this figure a “crested bundle” and suggest it is another instantiation of the splayed figure, representing the ancestor at a different stage in the process of divinisation into a storm deity. Notably, these iconographic similarities manifest a set of overlapping concepts shared by the bicephalic creature and the stepped motifs, which include a symbolism of transition and transformation related to the water cycle and storm deities. It is possible that the boards partook in these interrelated sets of symbolic and cosmological associations within ceremonies of ancestral veneration, which may have involved rituals related to rainfall propitiation or prediction. This would be consistent with ethnohistorical and ethnographic data on the role of games in the Andes (see Chapter 2).

Another common iconographic use of the stepped motif in Recuay art is on ceramic vessels, where series of step-frets are represented linked to one another, thereby stressing their divergence/convergence. The iconographic operation through which they are locked together involves a modification in the shape of fret-motifs, which are made to connect with each other by acquiring a zigzagged (S or Z) shape. This design, which I will call ‘interlocking step-frets’, is a common decorative motif in Recuay iconography. Ornamenting either the tunics of elite personages or the friezes of ceramic architectural vessels and often appearing alongside the bicephalic arc/arch (Figure 89a-b).

It does not seem coincidental then that the stepped designs of CAB-1 are placed in conjunction with Zone A. In several instances of Type-1 boards, Zone A is also a stepped or terraced platform, replicating three-dimensionally the shape of the stepped motif. I would argue that their association indicates a correspondence between this recurrent motif and the morphology of Zone A. Possibly, the boards’ elevated stepped area may have been construed

as a three-dimensional projection of the stepped motif. By the same token, the entire layout of a typical Type-1 board like CAB-1 appears as a three-dimensional rendition of two interlocking step-fret motifs (Figure 90). The meandering shape of the track of fourteen compartments in Type-1/3 layouts (Zone B) may have been visualised in such a way. Additionally, the interlocking step-fret motifs, along with the *chacana* cross and the bicephalic creature, emphasise similar concepts related to the simultaneous convergence and divergence of elements and a symbolism of duality and transition. Such a symbolism would be compatible with the role of games in the Andes, where the emphasis is often placed on the coming together of two players facing each other before a new order is established at the end of their confrontation (see Chapter 2-3, 5).¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, it is possible that the water associations inherent to the *chacana* cross, the bicephalic creature, and the step-fret motif further informed the symbolism of the layout of Type-1/3 boards. In fact, this may have been symbolically associated with a dual opposition between mountains/fortified hilltops (i.e., the stepped design) and river valleys (S/Z-shaped track), a familiar landscape for the Recuay. This interpretation resonates with Randall's (1987:156-57) contention that a colonial gameboard described by Bertonio (1879b, see also Chapter 3), featuring a meandering track that looked like a river, actually represented one. Randall argues that if the latter gameboard was used during funerary rituals, as suggested by the colonial sources, it would have been involved in the *pacaricuc* (see Chapter 2 and 6), which terminated with the washing of the deceased's clothes at a river or river confluence. This was done so that the river would carry the essence of the dead to the ocean, which was connected to the cosmic cycle of life/death and regeneration (Guaman Poma 1615:297 [299]; Arriaga 1999:66-67; Hacas Poma [1657] 1981:114; Duviols 2003:113, 349, 405, 80). Accordingly, Randall further argues that, as rivers lead that the cosmic Ocean, the river represented by the gameboard was "a symbolic connection with the other world".

The architectural representations characterising Zone A in an elaborate subset of boards (e.g., Figures 33-34, 72c, 73) provides additional evidence seemingly indicating that this part of the board could be symbolically associated with hilltops and architecture (Figures

¹⁰⁸ In Recuay stone carvings, two step fret motifs are also shown in inverted opposition following a rotational symmetry akin to that of Type-1 and Type-3 boards (Lau 2016:Pl. 30B; Grieder 1978:Figure 167).

33, 34, 73).¹⁰⁹ Recuay architectural patterns are compatible with this view, as they are often characterised by opposing or paired hilltop settlements, divided by river basins or valleys, which defined the social and ecological environment of Recuay communities (e.g., Figures 37, 93).

The iconography of a second board (CAB-22, Figure 36, 83c) is instructive in this regard. This is a non-standard Type-2 board found in Pashash, featuring two unusual designs in Recuay iconography (see Chapter 6). Both are placed at the centre of the main surface of the board, one above the other. The upper motif shows a rectangular perimeter with an opening at the top. It has serrated sides, made up of small rectangles surrounding a central open space. In front of the top opening is a diamond-shaped element. Based on the association of Zone A with architecture, it could represent a bird's eye view of a Recuay quadrangular architectural compounds, with thick perimeter walls, a group of smaller rooms placed along the internal sides, surrounding a central open patio. The opening and the diamond-shaped forms may represent the entrance to the compounds and the ramp/stairs to access it, as seen for example in the La Capilla compound of Pashash (Grieder 1978:Figure 15).

Below it stands a stylised human figure, which appears to be holding a shield or a weapon (a mace head?) in the proper-left hand (Figure 36, 83c). In the proper-right hand, the figure seems to hold another object, probably also a weapon. Based on Recuay weaponry and its representation, I propose to identify it either as a club or a sling (see Lau 2004a:171-74; Moretti 2019). The figure seems to depict a warrior. The depiction of a warrior is compatible with the symbolism of fighting and confrontation related to these boards. Notably, in the passage by Cobo (1892:331) cited above, he reports that the thunder-god in Inka times was imagined as “a man [...] with a mace in his left hand and a sling in his right”. While caution needs to be exercised when applying colonial sources to archaeological material, it would be tempting, in light of the foregoing discussion, to identify a similar symbolism in this warrior figure. If the design placed above was a depiction of patio group architecture, it would appear to associate it with a warrior possibly related to the thunder-god. This would be consistent with the statement that the elite of Pashash claimed descent from divine ancestors, connected to storm deities and having a warlike connotation. This would also seem to reinforce the notion

¹⁰⁹ In one example, a rounded bulge on top of Zone A may have been a stylised representation of a mountaintop (CAB-4, Figure 27e).

that the board and likely the game played with it had a military symbolism, involving a fight between two sides and more importantly, emphasising the significance of transition to a new order (i.e., winner and loser) under the aegis of divine ancestors and storm deities (see Chapter 5).

Lau (personal communication, 2025) suggests that the upper register of this board's iconography represents the fanged mouth of the feline-reptile mythic animal of the Recuay, such as one represented along the sides of CAB-1, but seen from a different, top-down, perspective. The diamond shape may represent its eye, and the pointed shapes above, its ears. As both this mythic creature and the warrior may have been manifestations of storm deities, which were in turn associated with war and transition, this iconography could indicate that the martial character of the human figure is projected towards Zone A by the *amaru* creature. Such a symbolism could ultimately be interpreted as a clue to the mechanics of the possible game played with these boards, which may have involved the conquest of Zone A by players, presumably by moving their tokens there through Zone B.

The latter interpretation is relevant to the following discussion, as it resembles the iconography of another board from phase B2, CHO-1 (see Chapter 8 and Figure 79, 81). This Type-1 board features another reptilian animal with a fanged mouth along the side of Zone A, which is seemingly attacking the stepped area. Similarly, this creature is also placed at the end of a sequence of Wari profile heads, often identified as warriors, as if it was carrying their warlike potential towards Zone A.

II

The iconography of CHO-1 (Figures 81, 83b) has long perplexed scholars. Of local Tacalshapa manufacture, it features what appears to be a local reproduction of Wari profile heads and the image of a reptile creature with a fanged mouth in the act of climbing (or attacking) the elevated Zone A, while seeds or kernels are falling down its sides (Lau 2016:145; Arnold 2005:122; Arnold and Hastorf 2008:83-85; González Suárez 1878:25-29).¹¹⁰ Arguably, this iconography may be an example of cultural translation and adaptation of Wari ideas and iconography circulating widely across the Andes during the MH. In order to understand

¹¹⁰ Arnold (2005:122) and Arnold and Hastorf (2008:82-83) propose to identify what I call seeds or kernels as chrysalises.

its imagery, the analysis of the context of two other boards will be instructive – COP-1 (Figure 42a) and MON-1 (Pérez 2000:Figure 29).

As discussed in Chapter 7, COP-1 was found inside a mortuary room at Conchopata. The board covered an offering of *cuy* bones and lay not far from a set of carved greenstones. The board, made of ceramic, was broken in two, precisely along its half-line, indicative of ritual termination (Huamán López and Milliken 2001).¹¹¹ Some carved stones were found piled up on the floor and were carved into repeating geometric shapes, differing in colour and minor details. Other greenstones were found buried inside an adjacent altar alongside spondylus wedges. These were bigger and included identical pairs of iconic pieces, such as miniature shells and clubs, as well as a few broken or odd pieces. Significantly, two highly figural tokens from the altar offering do not have an identical pair. They represent a maize cob and a puma head (Figures 58-59).

At the site of Huari, in the Monqachayuq sector, two similar figures were found alongside carved greenstones and spondylus pieces inside a burial cist. These are metal sheet figures, one depicting a feline or camelid (Figure 67) and the other an abstract figure (Figure 68). Additionally, among the carved stone pieces coming from the same fill, or the one immediately above it, is a clefted dual step motif akin to those found in Recuay art (Figure 70) (Lau and Luján 2025; Grieder 1978; 1992). The stratigraphic context does not permit any straightforward association between these pieces and the board, but I will argue that the proximity of similar small token-like pieces and board fragments in two different, yet similar contexts and their iconographic resemblance suggest a possible connection. If these boards were in fact gaming devices, these could have been their associated game pieces. The fact that distinct cluster of an equal number of pieces were found piled up together is compatible with such an interpretation.

Both the maize cob and feline head are common motifs in Wari art, appearing frequently as appendages radiating from the staff deity's head belonging to the SAIS canon (Cook 2013:114, see also Chapter 5). The rayed appendages often include also a snake-like frontal face, which is regarded as a possible Wari take on the *amaru* concept/imagery (Cook 2013:112, 14; see also Lau 2012b). Cook (2013:114-15) proposes that “all these creatures [...] serve in mediating, communicator roles among opposing concepts; they transform and

¹¹¹ The whole room seems to have been ritually terminated before abandonment (Milliken 2006:135, 361).

move generative forces among levels of the cosmos. [...] Perhaps they were also conceived as mediators between the staff deity and the human community.” Another recurrent iconographic feature of the staff deity’s rayed head is a zigzagging design with a shape similar to the one forming between two interlocking frets in Recuay iconography. It appears along the frame of the deity’s head, but also on bands, headdresses and staffs (Figure 91). Cook (2013:114-15) argues it “potentially references movement, flow, and the cycling of life force (including water) so central to biological and social regeneration”. This suggests several possible parallels between the iconographic symbolism discussed by Cook and the foregoing iconographic analysis.

Cook’s assertion that these figures were mediating opposing concepts is relevant to the puma head and the maize cob from Conchopata. The former displays a head with feline teeth but also a collar, typically associated with domesticated animals, such as llamas and alpacas. While the puma is the wild animal *par excellence*, the llama is the principal Andean domesticated animal. This combination of traits possibly indexes a set of symbolic associations. Early colonial sources indicate that the puma was symbolically related to llama-owners and herders, given that both lived off of llamas. Llama herds and other *puna* animals constituted one of the main forms of wealth for many Andean groups, and people displayed their affluence by wearing puma skins (Salomon and Urioste 1991:48, 58, 78). In general, pumas are seen as the lord of llamas and sometimes they are also connected to the rain and the *amaru* serpent. Similarly to the *amaru*, the puma is symbolically associated with concepts of transition and transformation, as well as the rainbow (Zuidema 1985:183, 228). By extension, in Inka times pumas came to be symbolically related to the concept of leader or guardian of the people – conceived as a herd – with a specific emphasis on military action, as when Inka Yupanqui is said to have worn a puma skin in the war against the Chanka people (Cieza 1985:133; Zuidema 1985:204; Abercrombie 1998:342; Smith 2012:47). Notably, through its associations with owners of llama herds and military strength, the puma is also related to the upper *ayllu* (*llacuaz*) of foreign conquerors coming from the highlands and primarily associated with llama herding and storm deities.

Thus, the maize cob may acquire additional meaning if seen in mediating opposition to the feline head. In fact, if the latter is associated with herding and warcraft, maize is the fundamental symbol of cultivated crops and valley settlers. During the colonial-era, maize was

related to the lower *ayllu* (*huari*) conceived as composed of autochthonous cultivators living in the lower valley (Duviols 1973). Thus, if seen as an additional non-identical pair, they may have referred to concepts of mediation and transition between opposites in a duality. In Monqachayuc, two metal sheet figures depict once again a feline with a collar and an unidentified motif, resembling a leaf with multiple lobes. Based on the resemblance with the Conchopata context, I tentatively propose to identify the latter as a floral or vegetal motif. If correct, these two pieces would indicate a similar duality.

Could this mean that the game played with these boards was symbolically, at least in Wari time, a contest between herders and cultivators? Arguably, the colonial *ayllu* organisation stands in continuity with the segmentary logic of social organisation that these boards, I have argued, may be linked to. Thus, it would be feasible that some key structural features of the *ayllu* system were already beginning to form at this incipient stage, including the herders/cultivators (*huari/llacuaz*) opposition. As discussed in earlier chapters, this reflected a division between a group related to higher elevations, associated with warfare and herding, and another linked to agriculture and the river valleys. Notably, the boards' layout played with similar concepts of opposition between the stepped or terraced mountaintops and the river frets.¹¹² The ethnographic record from Chapter 2 shows that even contemporary Andean dice games are associated with a valley/coast-highlands opposition (e.g., the *pichca* of Pacota in Chapter 2).

Returning to the enigmatic iconography of CHO-1 (Figure 83b), the foregoing analysis can inform our interpretation of its meaning. Tacalshapa artists represent a reptilian animal, resembling a caiman or iguana, with a feline fanged mouth. As discussed in Chapter 8, Tacalshapa may have created an imagery intended to show key associations of this exotic object, and perhaps of its function and symbolism. Due to sociocultural differences, the symbolism of pumas discussed earlier may have been lost on local Tacalshapa people, for whom llama herding played a much less prominent socioeconomic role than it did among Peruvian cultures (Miller and Gill 1990).¹¹³ Possibly, to convey the deeper meaning of duality and

¹¹² The other iconic carved stones from Conchopata included pieces depicting shells and clubs, which could be further references to water (the ocean) and fighting.

¹¹³ While Tacalshapa people would have been familiar with pumas, which inhabit their region, they were also accustomed to large reptiles, including caimans, crocodiles, and iguanas, given their proximity to the eastern lowlands and tropical coast.

herder-cultivator opposition that, I suggested, may have been linked to these gameboards, Tacalshapa artists resorted to animal concepts and iconographies that were more familiar to them. Notably, they seemed to have been familiar with a version of the double-headed serpent or *amaru*, as seen in a cast gold axe reportedly from the same burial of Shimpirca, which is stylistically similar to a Middle Sicán style (Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922:pl. XXIII, Figure 10). The creature on the sides of Zone A may have been a local take on the *amaru* imagery and a set of interrelated concepts.

Additionally, this animal is shown climbing or attacking the stepped platform of Zone A surrounded by seeds or kernels. In light of our previous discussion, this may have been an attempt to show the concept of complementary opposition (as seen in herders-cultivators), which was probably foreign to the local Tacalshapa culture, but that represented the underlying symbolism of the gameboard. In addition to this imagery, the decision to include Wari profile heads, seemingly in a confrontational pose, suggests that, to the Tacalshapa, the general symbolism of the board could be related to these personages, which may have represented the ethnic or kinship groups that dominated the political scene of the Wari MH. These heads would be normally identifiable by unique features in Wari art, but Tacalshapa seem to have used them iconically to refer to the cultural sphere that they evoked (Gibbon et al. 2022; Knobloch 2022; 2018; Isbell and Knobloch 2009; Jennings et al. 2024; Menzel 1968).¹¹⁴

Possibly, from a Tacalshapa perspective, a symbolism of competitive segmentary groups – with a socioeconomic designation (herders and cultivators) – was inherent to these gameboards and could be related to the broader political scene of the Wari world. This may be a further indication that the boards participated in a shift in scale between Recuay and Wari, as discussed in Chapter 5. The boards carried on a symbolism that had emerged among the small-scale agropastoral Recuay communities of highland Ancash, before being adapted and scaled up to meet the expansive aims of the Wari polity. Here, they participated in a similar political economy of face-to-face interactions, but they may have been involved in wider

¹¹⁴ The rosette-like motifs decorating the bottom of CHO-1 (Figures 81, 83b) remain difficult to interpret. They resemble flowers, which may indicate a symbolism related to the vegetal world. However, in the context of an object emphasising opposition and confrontation, they may also represent star-shaped mace heads, a common type of weaponry among the Recuay and Wari. Notably, Andean mace heads typically had six spikes and the CHO-1's design also displays 6 petal-like lobes and a central circle, which may indicate the insertion of the shaft (Lau 2004a).

integrative mechanisms comprising the different political groups of the MH. If correct, the overall symbolism of these gameboards provokes a re-evaluation of Urton's (2012) contention that the herder-cultivator model could be relevant to the emergence of the Wari phenomenon. The iconographic and archaeological evidence pertaining to these gameboards suggests that a segmentary political economy – organised around complementary yet opposing moieties of herders and cultivators – may have been emerging during the Middle Horizon, possibly articulated through interactions spanning the highland–coast divide. Menzel (1964, 1968, 1976), Knobloch (2018:Note 72) and Gibbon et al. (2022) suggest that such a highland-coast opposition may be identifiable in the distribution and representation of SAIS personages and Wari agents during the Middle Horizon.

It should be noted that several of the considerations presented so far refer particularly to type-1/3 boards. However, at least during phase A, Type-2 boards display a different layout, which does not feature a zigzagging track of compartments reminiscent of the interlocking step-frets. How can we explain this different arrangement? Both seem to have been parallel traditions, perhaps indicative of different symbolical associations. I will argue in the next section that these alternative layouts may have been associated with the role of symmetry and quadripartition in the Andes.

III

Symmetry is widely recognised as a key cultural element of social organisation, cosmology, and iconographic production (Washburn and Crowe 2004; Washburn 2004). Its role among Central Andean cultures is as long-living as it is pervasive of every aspect of Andean life and art, probably originating in the structure of weaving technology (Paternosto 1996). The two possible layouts of the gameboards in the core corpus depend on whether reflection or rotational symmetry is used. While most chequerboards used for games around the world display some form of symmetry, the choice to reproduce the same pattern of compartments inverting it according to two different symmetrical principles does not seem meaningless. In light of the likely connection between these boards and an emerging segmentary social organisation, I will argue that it is the latter's structure that informed an understanding of symmetry based on quadripartition.

One of the most informative ethnographic studies of the quadripartite model, and how it informs people's worldview, is Platt's (1986) ethnographic study of the Macha's social system in Bolivia. Platt proposes an integrative analysis that reconciles Zuidema's (1973a; 1973b; 1967) discussion of social quadripartition and Murra's (1972; 1975) vertical archipelago model. At the time of Platt's ethnographic study, the Macha's social system exploited resources from different ecological zones, without recurring to a market economy. Platt examined the Macha's conception of their society as a quadripartite entity of nested dualities, where each half in a pair is further subdivided in two parts. Platt suggests that this basic structural principle is repeated in Macha society at different scales, from the domestic to the community level, suggesting a high degree of scalar adaptability. For example, Platt (1986:234-36) describes the duality of the maximal Macha moiety into upper and lower (*aransaya* and *urinsaya*). These two moieties are further subdivided into upper and lower, reflecting the ecological distinction between *puna* and valley. Ritual competition (i.e., *tinkuy* games) is a key integrative mechanism regulating these moieties' relations during certain festivities.¹¹⁵ The quadripartition extends to Macha's cosmology, where the sun and moon (*hanan pacha*, upper dimension with male associations) are opposed to *pachatata*/earth-father and *pachamama*/earth-mother (*uk'upacha*/inner dimension with female associations). The two sides are further subdivided into male and female (sun and *pachatata* vs moon and *Pachamama*).

In agreement with his local informants, Platt offers a visualization of quadripartition (Figure 92a), in which the vertical axis divides the space into the first layer of duality (i.e., the upper and lower moiety – *aransaya* and *urinsaya*), while the horizontal axis further subdivides it into the upper ecological zone of herders and the lower valley of cultivators. The horizontal line represents the *chawpirana*, the intermediate zone between these two ecological areas. The second graph instead (Figure 92b) captures the cosmic quadripartition of which the social quadripartition is a reflection. Here, the upper dimension is inherently male, while the lower is inherently female, so that for example the sun has a double male association, as much as *pachamama* is doubly female. On the contrary, the moon and *pachatata* are “symbolically imperfect” (243), as they are part male and part female. The horizontal line in this second chart represents the *kay pacha*, the dimension of human society, and it occupies the same position

¹¹⁵ The *tinkuy* fights occur in the central square, with each moiety occupying one side. The description is highly reminiscent of the arrangement and setting of the *pichca* game in Pacota (see Chapter 2).

in the overall structure as the *chawiprana*. “The configurations of the Andean landscape are thus assimilated to the relationship between two earth divinities” (242), with mountains commanding over the cultivated fields of the valley.¹¹⁶ Humans must mediate between these complementary yet opposite dimensions.

The Macha conceive the complementarity between opposites as *yanantin*, which Platt (1986:245-48) defines as a relation of reflection symmetry. While *yanantin* is glossed locally as “pair” or “man-and-woman” (245), Platt demonstrates that the underlying model is not sexual difference per se but the left-right symmetry of the human body. Eyes, hands, legs, breasts, testicles, and even twins are all considered *yanantin*, as they appear as dual, mirrored halves of a single whole.¹¹⁷ Since men and women are not in themselves symmetrical reflections of one another, the Macha must actively create symmetry through ritual practices that duplicate gestures, objects, and offerings in pairs. Quadripartition resolves the problem by nesting one duality within another, thereby producing four positions analogous to the four combinations of gendered attributes (male men, female men, male women, female women; Platt 1986:247). It creates combinations that can stand in for the ideal of mirrored duality. Through this logic, quadripartition allows social opposition to be mediated and unified, transforming inherently asymmetrical relationships into relations modelled on the reflection symmetry of the body.

Notably, Platt argues that this ideal model of Macha society is visualised as rectangular, the most perfect example of which is the square, such as the square-shaped space where *tinkuy* games are performed. The corners of the rectangle are given great ritual emphasis, as they are “designating an important place of the interayllu boundaries” (255). This system could easily be scaled up and down at convenience, and Platt argues it is its scalar adaptability that made it possible for the whole Inka empire to be structured in this way. Ultimately, this was a way in which the Macha, as well as other Andean groups, conceived their social world, “correcting the imperfections of nature [...] through symbolic and ritual methods” and thus creating “a microcosmical model of the theoretically rectangular objects that is Macha” (255).

¹¹⁶ Notably, the lightning is seen as the prime mediator, and shamans need to be struck by a lightning and be revived to be able to communicate with mountain spirits (see also Bennison 2022; Gade 1983).

¹¹⁷ Twins are in turn related to the thunder or lightning.

Arguably, quadripartition, symmetry, and mediation are central to the layout and general design of the gameboards. First, these features seem to relate to the segmentary social organisation which is thought to have emerged and consolidated during the EIP and MH. Second, rectangularity, corners, symmetry, and principles of mediation constitute key elements in the gameboards' symbolism and, arguably, function. Platt claims that quadripartition is expressed across social organization, architecture, iconography, and ritual practices through an emphasis on symmetry and rectangularity (Platt 1986:253-54). Notably, by formalising Platt's quadripartite system in a Cartesian coordinate system (see Figure 92c-d), two types of symmetry can be identified: reflection and rotational symmetry (Table 19).

Arguably, this model may offer a framework for interpreting the two possible layouts of Phase A boards. The use of rotational and reflection symmetry in arranging the boards' compartments may have served decorative purposes, yet it also appears to express an emerging concern with quadripartition as a structural paradigm. Notably, these two forms of symmetry are pervasive in pre-Hispanic Andean iconography and ritual life. Presently, no conclusive statement can be made about their broader symbolic associations among the Recuay. It is possible, however, that they represented different modes of visualising complementarity in an emerging quadripartite system of segmentary organisation, which was not only informing Recuay social but also cosmological structure. As discussed in the next and final section, by emphasising different understandings of mediation and opposition, they may have, accordingly, visualised different concepts of authority.

IV

I have contended earlier that Type-1/3 boards are a three-dimensional rendition of the interlocking step-fret and that their layout is modelled on rotational symmetry. As such, they are three-dimensional visualisations of paired or opposing terraced platforms, resembling another common Recuay motif, especially at Pashash, that Lau and Luján (2025:142) term a "dual stepped" design. This design shows two paired stepped motifs diverging from one another to form a central cleft. At Pashash, dual stepped motifs are depicted as the headdress of elite figures, as for example on *tupu* pins (Lau and Luján 2025:142) and ceramic vessels (Figure 94; Grieder 1978:236, Pl. 4), but they also appear in connection with metahuman creatures in stone carvings (Lau and Luján 2025:139). Lau and Luján (2025:141) suggest that

the “cleft headdress form” may be related to storm deities, such as the lightning, and that it “probably signalled a lordly status with a martial designation for the Pashash Recuay”, in accordance with the wider symbolism described earlier. If Type-1/3 gameboards are a three-dimensional version of diverging stepped motifs, they possibly referred to similar underlying notions of authority, associated with storm deities and with warfare, as also emphasised by the iconography of CAB-1, CAB-22, and CHO-1 (Figure 83). Notably, one of the small carved stone pieces found near a type-1 board’s fragment in the mortuary structure of Monqachayuq, Huari, displayed the same design of diverging stepped motifs – which is common in Recuay but rarer in Wari iconography (Figure 70; Pérez 2000:532). If connected, as I have argued, the association between these two items would further indicate that Type-1/3 boards’ layout were associated with the dual stepped form.

As argued earlier, the layout of Type-1/3 may have also represented the opposition between mountaintops and river valleys as well as opposing hilltop settlements divided by a valley. Ultimately, such a layered symbolism may be reconciled as expressing similar notions of authority associated with storm deities. In fact, clefted formations produced by the lightning in the landscape, such as on boulders or outcrops, were consecrated to storm deities (Bennison 2022; Gade 1983),¹¹⁸ and it is possible that the rugged mountains interspersed with deep valleys, characterising the landscape familiar to the Recuay, also epitomised the workings of storm-deities in Recuay mytho-orogeny (see also Lau 2018).

Type-2 boards are instead based on reflection symmetry, and they emphasise the convergence of two stepped platforms rather than their divergence. Zone A in Type-2 boards is placed on same side of the board, with the elevated areas adjacent to one another (Figures 9, 28). The convergence of stepped motifs has other instantiations in Andean iconography, although it is not common in Recuay art. Examples of this iconography are known among groups of the north coast of Peru, such as Middle Sicán and Chimú, where it again appears associated with elite headdresses (Pillsbury 2025:200-01; Pillsbury and Mackey 2020:238). In Wari and Tiwanaku iconography, stepped motifs converge to form platforms, upon which deities stand (as, for example, the Staff God on the Gate of the Sun at Tiwanaku). One example in Recuay art from Pashash is the carved stone block depicting a ‘crested bundle’ that I

¹¹⁸ Notably, also people born with a hare lip or a cleft palate were associated with the lightning, as also twins (Gade 1983:776; Bennison 2022; Mariscotti de Görlitz 1972).

have described earlier (Lau and Luján 2025:139). This figure features a five-pointed element, akin to a mountain, formed by the convergence of two stepped motifs.

Possibly, owing to their connection with deities and elites, the convergence instead of divergence of stepped motifs may have been a way to visualise lordly status but with a different designation – one that was not related to the lightning and war but to a different set of concepts underlying authority. This distinct symbolism may have been reflected in the different layouts of Type-1/3 and Type-2 boards.¹¹⁹ In the case of Type-2 boards, stepped platforms converge on one of the sides of the board and the tracks of seven small compartments (Zone B) begin on their external sides to converge at a larger compartment situated on the opposite side, forming a U shape instead of the S/Z shape of Type-1/3.¹²⁰ The structure of such a layout resembles that of sacred beings in Recuay art, whose heads have radiating appendages, usually in the form of snakes or *amaru* creatures, that move out and then down the side of the deity's or ancestor's head following a similar shape (Figure 95). In light of the association between stepped platforms, architecture, and lordly elites, and between the latter and divinised ancestors, it is possible that this structural resemblance reflected deeper associations.

The iconography of CAB-1 (Figure 41) also suggests that the *amaru* could be associated with Zone B. Additionally, the body of principal figures could sometimes be represented in Recuay architectural vessels as if they were the embodiment of the house structure (Lau 2010d:278). Finally, headdresses appear associated with meaningful iconographies such as the dual stepped design (Grieder 1992; Lau and Luján 2025). Possibly, this could suggest that a structural homology existed in Recuay between the human body, the body politic, and elite households' architecture (i.e., patio groups), with a particular focus on the head, both figural (lineage head or apical ancestor) and literal (human head). In this sense, the converging stepped platforms of Zone A may have been associated with the head of divinised ancestors and deities represented in Recuay art, from which snake-like appendages radiate. This would also support the idea that the two layouts represented different forms of cosmic authority, in a society that was taking shape through a segmentary, possibly quadripartite, organisation.

¹¹⁹ Notably, this is similar to what Grieder (1992:184-185) argues about sovereignty among the Pashash-Recuay. He claims that the different headdress types represented in local art, which include the dual stepped form, visually conveyed distinct modes or archetypes of authority in a cosmic system.

¹²⁰ Exceptions exist, where the central compartment is placed on the same side as Zone A (Figure 9, Type-2, central image).

In this context, the divergence and convergence of Zone A, the *chacana* cross (both of which are forms of *tinkuy*), and the presence of two types of symmetry that emphasise quadripartition appear to bolster an interpretation of these boards as participating in integrative mechanisms based on ritualised confrontation (such as a boardgame) and underlying forms of cosmic governance founded upon mediation under the aegis of ancestralised divinities.

To conclude, the most notable aspects and broader associations of the gameboards' layout and imagery relate to deified ancestors and forms of cosmic authority within corporate groups. The iconography seems to reinforce the idea that these boards were involved in the social processes associated with the rise of a segmentary social organisation in the ancient Andes. Possibly, these were accompanied by the emergence of quadripartition and herder-cultivator relations that would be typical of the later *ayllu* system. Chapter 2 highlighted the relation between games, *ayllu* politics, and quadripartition in Inka and colonial times. The Inkas divided their whole empire into four parts based on a similar structural logic and Zuidema (1973b; 1967) argues that games belonged to the quadripartite or bottom-up view of the empire, which emphasised mediation and complementarity. My foregoing examination indicates that very similar notions are expressed through these boards' form and imagery. Thus, their symbolism is not only consistent with an interpretation of these objects as gameboards, but further reinforces it, emphasising opposition and transition resolved via a cosmically mediated confrontation.

Concluding Remarks

After nearly 150 years of scholarly attention, these enigmatic objects remain among the most elusive pieces of Andean archaeology. At times, they have been put to convenient use as appendices to support broader arguments; at others, their presence in the archaeological record has been overlooked. When examined, they have been treated in isolation rather than as part of a wider corpus. A meaningful reappraisal only began when they were once again considered as a coherent group, situated in time and space (Lau 2016:Chapter 6).

Despite (re-)appearing intermittently in the literature, these compartmentalised boards have long remained marginal within Andean studies. This likely reflects the uncertainty surrounding their function, which has prevented them from occupying a central place in archaeological narratives while paradoxically ensuring their scholarly longevity. Their story began as a curio preserved by a huaquero who, though he discarded countless other finds, was fascinated by this artefact. Then, Charles Wiener used them to craft his image as an intrepid explorer, while subsequent scholars sought more scientific perspectives. Yet, the enigma of their function allowed them to retain the enduring allure of epistemological ‘stem-cells’.

In Chapter 1, I set out to deconstruct the main theories regarding their function, disentangling the evidential value of each interpretation from the broader web of personal, political, and epistemological agendas in which they were embedded. If scientific objects matter insofar as they generate new questions, then these boards can still be significant archaeological artefacts in their own right – objects that speak to a broader discourse on ancient Andean social organisation, ritual practice, and economic mechanisms.

These boards were almost certainly associated with social changes taking place in the Andes during the EIP and MH, which would have characterised the nature of ancient Andean polities, such as Wari (Jennings 2025; Jennings et al. 2022; Jennings and Berquist 2022; Berquist 2022; Lau et al. 2023; Lau and Chicoine 2025). This study contributes to the ongoing discussion on contacts between Recuay and Wari, and, more broadly, between the

northern and central highlands of Peru during the late-EIP and early-MH. These contacts appear to have entailed multiple exchanges, involving not only material culture but also political and religious ideas.

The key contributions of this work to Andean archaeology and the study of prehispanic compartmentalised boards include:

- A larger database including photographs and new Types of boards.
- The radiocarbon dating of 6 wooden board.
- The first comparative discussion of little-known or unpublished archaeological contexts of boards.
- The proposal of a chronological sequence and the cultural attribution of different Types of compartmentalised boards. In the case of Type 1, 2, and 3, I also established the first timeframe for their emergence and eventual decline as culturally significant objects based on both absolute and stylistic/stratigraphic evidence.
- A thorough visual documentation of boards' variations, including the digital photogrammetry of a few notable examples.
- The analysis of the social dynamics to which Type-1, 2, and 3 boards were likely linked.
- A reconsideration of the presence of a Type-1 board in a context related to the Tacalshapa culture of southern Ecuador and its implications.

Future excavations can reveal new examples of boards in their depositional context, which is crucial to developing a more nuanced understanding of their function. One of the aims of this research is to bring renewed attention to these artefacts, across all 7 Types. Future archaeological research will be able to assess their presence in stratigraphic contexts through the analytical framework developed here.

Iconographically, I have proposed that boards from the core corpus constituted a microcosm of the lived social and ecological landscape understood, if not shared, by many Andean peoples. Their layout and iconography provided a miniaturised and idealised model for a social, cosmic, and ecological order. Rather than the representation of specific places, these boards may represent essentialised landscapes – simultaneously social and ecological – structured by notions of duality and mediation. Among the Recuay, settlement distribution could follow the same pattern, but so possibly did their cosmos at large.

In Andean worldviews, society and landscape often overlapped. Mountain, valleys, rivers, and the ocean could be inscribed into a mytho-historical map linking peoples to places and tying the human polity to the landscape (Zuidema 1982; Cummins 2007). The reduction of the lived world or built environment into miniature form is also a well-attested Andean ritual practice (Sillar 1994; 2016; Allen 1997; 2016; Hamilton 2018). As Lévi-Strauss (1966:23-24) observed, small-scale models or miniatures render reality more comprehensible, offering the illusion that a larger-than-human totality can be grasped at a glance. The miniaturisation of idealised landscapes – often alongside architectural miniatures – is consistent with Andean ritual practices involving tokens and miniatures to interact with cosmic entities. Notably, play features prominently in these ritual activities, which accords well with the ludic interpretation proposed here.

As to these objects' function, can we say with certainty that Type-1, 2 and 3 were boardgames? The boardgame theory remains the only interpretation compatible with the archaeological record. The role of games presented in Chapter 2 and 3 displays a remarkable congruence with the contexts in which the archaeological boards appear. Their symbolism of transition, mediation, and quadripartition, discussed in Chapter 9, resonates with the broader social role attributed to games both in (proto-)historic times and, to some extent, today. Morphologically, known indigenous Andean gameboards shared key traits with the archaeological corpus – most notably, an extended single track and a symbolically charged central compartment with a special function.

More research is needed to document additional native Andean boardgames. Ethnographic data remain limited, and such practices are rarely the main focus of anthropological studies. Considering the social role of games in Andean society, future ethnographic research may provide a more nuanced understanding of Andean boardgame typologies and their wider social role.

As argued in the introduction, if these artefacts were not gameboards, none of the currently available theories withstands the evidential test. It remains possible that they fulfilled a different, as yet unidentified function – perhaps linked to divination or mortuary rituals – but no other interpretation presently offers comparable consistency with the data. For example, amulets in the shape of chequerboards or representing miniature architecture and animals were still used by 20th century Aymara people for various ritual purposes, including

séance, divination and propitiation rites (Tschopik 1951:238-39, Figure 5). However, these rituals can include playful elements, and a boardgame can be used for the same purposes (Grieder 1982:110-11).

Throughout this work, I have argued that play and gaming in the Andes extend beyond entertainment. While pleasure may have been part of their appeal (perhaps, the source of their ritual efficacy) – as with other forms of ritual celebration such as feasting and drinking – games can also function as socio-political instruments. Despite early influential reflections on play (e.g., Huizinga 1949), and their notable role in Inka society (Zuidema 1967; 1973; 1989, 2010) this dimension has seldom been the subject of studies in Andean archaeology and anthropology. Recent research, however, has emphasised the role of play in ritual and social organisation (Renfrew et al. 2018; Bellah 2011; Hocart 1970; Crist 2019), suggesting that games are meaningful cultural traits and not just for diffusionist studies.

I have tried to demonstrate that games could serve as significant redistributive and integrative mechanisms in ancient Andean societies. As these were non-market economies, Andean cultures developed different socioeconomic systems that relied on principles of ritual cooperation rooted in reciprocity and complementary opposition. From an Andean perspective, cooperation required confrontation as much as exchange – confrontation (e.g., *tinkuy*) was essential to maintaining equilibrium within a segmented society. Games – whether of skill or chance – provided structured, ritually sanctioned settings for such confrontations, possibly mediated by human and metahuman authority. These gameboards may thus have served the purpose of settling disputes and cultivating unity among emerging corporate groups, who gathered around revered forebears that had the ultimate authority over the living. Consistently, the iconography of these boards appears linked to cosmological notions related to divinised ancestors. In their earliest phase, they seem closely tied to Recuay cultural development, and the iconographic discussion can certainly benefit from further analyses of the new information emerging about Recuay society and imagery, particularly in relation to sovereignty, as seen at the site of Pashash (Chapters 6, 9).

Within the core corpus of the current database, boards exhibit notable variations in terms of the fineness of carving, with a few labour-intensive examples featuring a polished surface and elaborate iconographic decorations, including architectural representations. These differences are synchronic and appear even within groups of boards from the same site,

such as at Pashash. They may be partly due to social differentiation, as elaborate examples may be associated with elite production and use. In turn, less refined boards may represent attempts by commoners to emulate elite practices. However, a spatial component seems to be present too, as elaborate boards are rarer further south in Ancash, possibly reflecting the lesser importance attributed to these objects by southern Recuay communities. Diachronically, boards kept being produced after the decline of Recuay, albeit in different materials, with elaborate examples carved in wood during Phase B2. It is noteworthy that in such an elite Wari context as the ceremonial and administrative sectors of Cerro Baúl, neither board recovered in situ is particularly elaborate. As the sample associated with Phase B1/2 is still small, further research and additional excavations are required to elucidate these aspects.

The high concentration of boards from the core corpus at specific sites, particularly during Phase A, is another notable aspect which requires additional studies. Given that the earliest and highest concentration of Type-1, 2, and 3 boards to date appears in association with the Recuay site of Pashash, I have suggested that this locale may have featured significantly in their emergence and subsequent involvement within a set of ceremonial practices. Whether though they originated from Pashash cannot be determined conclusively at present.

An additional notable aspect that warrants further consideration concerns the fragmentary state of many boards, including those recovered in situ. Approximately 27% of the boards in the core corpus are fragmentary, and some appear to have been intentionally broken along the midline (e.g., Figures 27b, 42a; see also Ochatoma Paravicino and Cabrera Romero 2023:52, top Figure). Intentional breakage of gameboards is known from other parts of the world (Crist 2021), and it is also consistent with practices of ritual termination – well attested in Andean cultures (see p. 160). In other cases, breakage may reflect later re-use of boards for different purposes, possibly after they had already fallen out of use. For example, six boards were subsequently incorporated into walling or construction, but in only two instances does this seem to have occurred during the pre-Hispanic period (see Chapter 7). Primary depositional contexts of boards across the three Phases suggest functions related to abandonment and mortuary rituals. In at least one example from Conchopata, the board appears to have been intentionally broken prior to its final deposition.

Further archaeological documentation will allow us to gain a more nuanced understanding of their use and temporal span. Additional work is needed to confirm, refine, or address questions concerning:

- Their origin, including when they first emerged as culturally meaningful objects and when they became associated with elite ritual contexts.
- Patterns of concentration and distribution, such as why certain sites, such as Pa-shash and Tumshukayko, are associated with unusually high number of examples.
- The circumstances of their decline, particularly when and under what conditions they fell out of use.
- The relationship between ritual breakage and ritual function, and whether breakage served as a formalised component of termination practices.
- Their broader typological variability, as the database assembled for this study includes additional board Types that merit further analysis to identify patterns in compartmental arrangement, geographical distribution, and contextual associations.

For instance, Type-6 boards, discussed in Chapter 4, are especially notable. Associated with the Tacalshapa culture of southern Ecuador, they may have also functioned as gameboards, albeit for a distinct kind of game. This suggests that, as in the Old World, multiple types of boardgames coexisted across the Andes, possibly linked to specific cultural traditions. Our knowledge of boardgame diversity in the pre-Hispanic Andes is still in its infancy, warranting further investigations.

The area linked to the Tacalshapa culture emerged repeatedly in this study – not only in relation to Type-6 boards, but also because it yielded the earliest known Type-1 specimen. Though seemingly peripheral to the cultural sphere where Type-1, 2, and 3 boards originated and flourished, it remains an area of great importance for understanding inter-Andean networks. Echoing Collier and Murra's (1943:89) call for "immediate survey and excavation" in the Tacalshapa region, such work is still needed – and perhaps overdue. The connections between Tacalshapa and the Peruvian north coast, evidenced by one of these boards and the local metalwork, may illuminate the broader networks that linked the Central and Northern Andes in pre-Inka times.

No pre-Columbian boardgame can be currently reconstructed with all its *ludemes* based on the archaeological record, and any attempt at reconstruction is bound to remain speculative. Nevertheless, scattered iconographic indications suggest that the aim of the game may have been that of attacking or conquering Zone A, starting on the opposite Zone A. This claim is based on the iconography of two boards (Figures 36, 83b-c) and the structure of CAB-7 (Figures 34-35) which suggest a movement of tokens from Zone A towards the central compartment (Zone C) and, possibly, from there to the other Zone A through the track of small compartments (Zone B). Such mechanisms would be compatible with a race game, akin to backgammon, as indigenous Andean games are described by early-colonial chroniclers.

More broadly, this work has sought to demonstrate that:

- 1) Some compartmentalised boards were used for gaming (e.g., Type 1, 2, 3, and 6).
- 2) These games had a significant role in Andean society and culture, beyond mere entertainment.

The role of games in ancient Andean societies as propitiatory devices and channels of ancestral authority resonates with the role of games in humanity more generally. Long before the contemporary reappraisal of play as a significant feature in human cultural evolution, Plato had already aptly observed in the *Laws* (Book 7, 803e) that “one should live out one’s days playing at certain games – sacrificing, singing, and dancing – with the result that one can make the gods propitious to oneself and can defend oneself against enemies and be victorious over them in battle”.¹²¹

¹²¹ Translation by Pangle (1980:193).

Maps¹

Map 1. South America and the Gran Chaco area in light grey.



¹ All maps are by the author.

Map 2. Map of Peru and Ecuador showing sites discussed in the text.



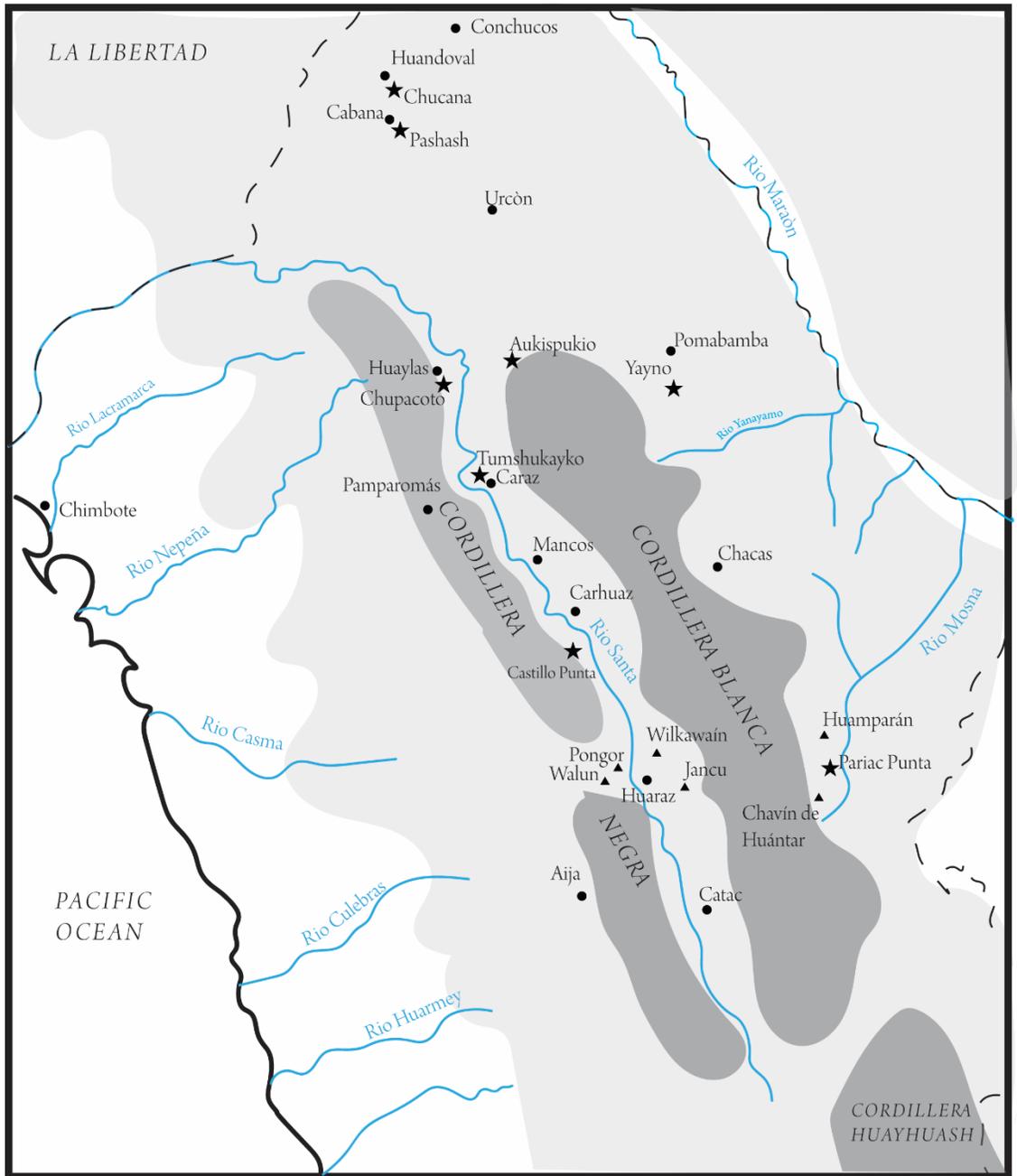
Map 3. Map showing the Wari cultural sphere and the main Wari sites mentioned in the text.



Map 4. Ancash and the Cuenca area.



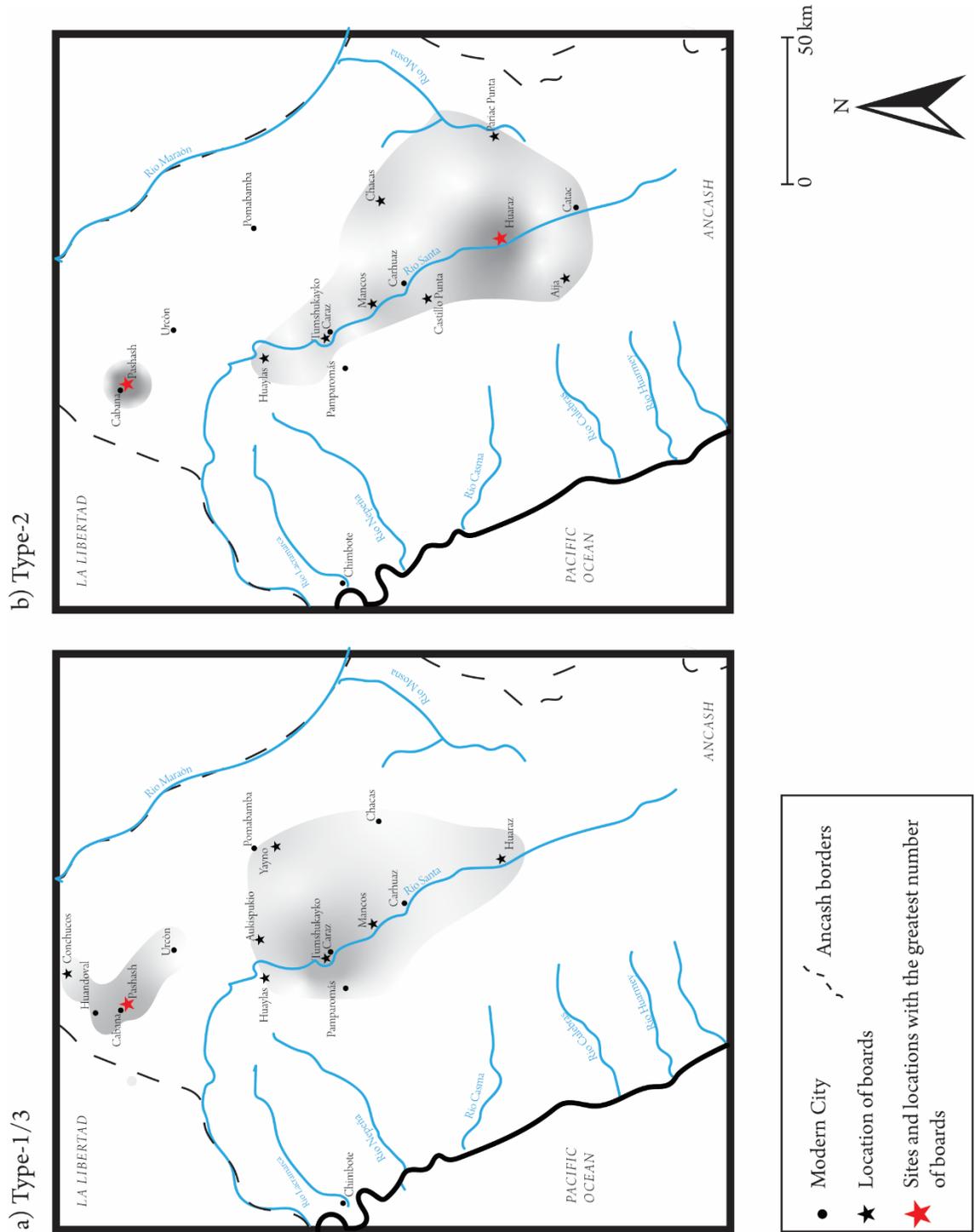
Map 5. Ancash with Recuay sites and the boards' findspots.



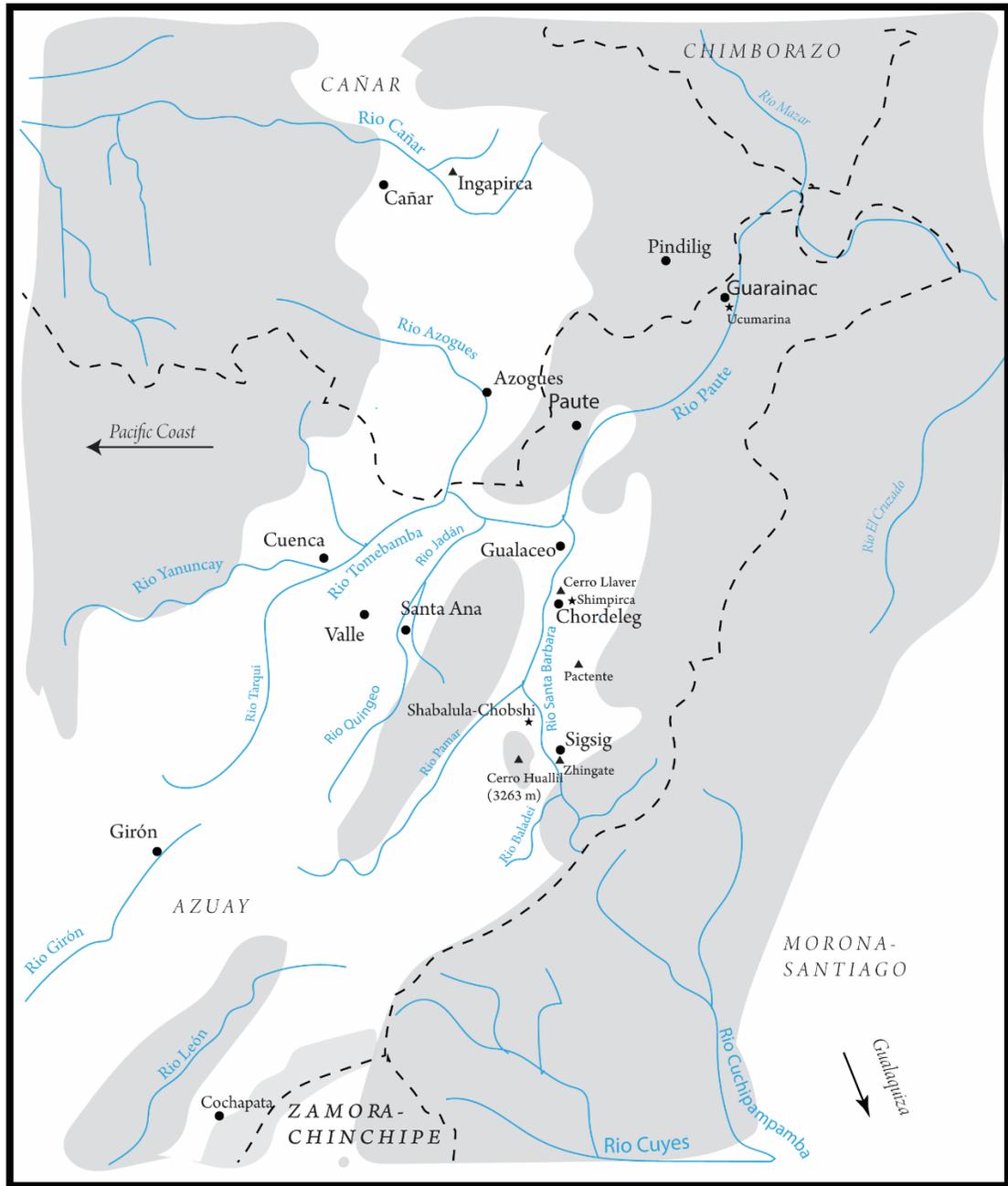
● Modern City	Above 4000 masl
▲ Recuay Tradition Archaeological Site	Above 2000 masl
★ Boards' findspots	



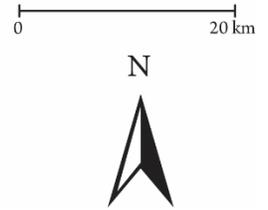
Map 6. Distribution map of a) Type-1/3 and b) Type-2 boards in highland Ancash during Phase A.



Map 7. The area of Cuenca, Azuay, with the main sites and places mentioned in the text.



●	Modern City		Above 3000 masl
▲	Archaeological sites		Province Border
★	Boards' findspots		



Tables²

Chapter 3

Table 1. Key features of the five main typologies of games. Adapted from Parlett (1999).

Class	Field	Equal	Movement	Interaction	Objective
Race Games	Linear	Yes	Dice-Bound	Oust*	Attain Position
Space Games	Areal	Yes	Free	Block [^] /Capture	Attain Position/Make Patterns/Gain Territory
Hunt/Chase Games	Reticular	No	Free	Capture [#]	1- Attain Position 2- Overwhelm
War/Displace games	Any	Yes	Free	Capture	Overwhelm

* Once landed on the space of a rival piece, this is sent back to the start.

[^] The opponent has no available moves left.

[#] The opponents' pieces can be removed from the field.

² Unless otherwise indicated, all tables are by the author.

Table 2. Main characteristics of native boardgames from the Andes and neighbouring regions.

Name	Region	Class	Field	Special Central Compartment	Equal Number Pieces	Movement	Interaction Between Pieces	Objective
Chunquánti, Tsúka, et al.	Gran Chaco, Bo- livia	Race Game	Linear	Yes	Yes	Dice-bound	Oust	Overwhelm
Huayru	Sigsig, Azuay, Ec- uador	Race Game	Extended Linear	Yes	Yes	Dice-bound	None	Attain Position
Píchica	La Carolina, San Luis, Argentina	Race Game	Extended Linear	Yes	Yes	Dice-bound	Oust	Attain Position /Over- whelm
Kechukawe	Mapuche Area, southern Chile	Race Game	Extended Linear	No	Yes	Dice-bound	Capture	Overwhelm

Chapter 4

Table 3. Structural characteristics of the layout of Type-1, 2, and 3 boards formign the core corpus of the database.

	General Characteristics	Position in Type 1	Position in Type 2	Position in Type 3
Zone A	Special compartments, which can be marked either by: Elevation (stepped platform) Different shape Different size	Opposite corners of a diagonal	Centre of a short side, adjacent to each other	Opposite ends of an ellipsis or circle
Zone B	Two lines of seven small compartments converging at Zone D	S/Z-shaped sequence converging at the centre of the board	U-shaped sequence converging at the centre of a short side of the boards opposite Zone A	S/Z-shaped wave-like sequence converging at the centre of the board
Zone D	Three special compartments that are normally identified by a different Size and/or Shape	1 is at the centre of the board where Zone B converges. 2 placed in between the central compartment and Zone B	1 is at the centre of the short side where Zone B converges. 2 are at the centre of the board between Zone A and Zone C	1 is at the centre of the board where Zone B converges. 2 placed in between the central compartment and Zone B

Table 4. Radiocarbon dates of five wooden boards – four complete boards and one fragment (MAN-01).⁵ All samples were measured at LABEC (Laboratorio di tecniche nucleari per l'Ambiente e i Beni Culturali). Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN), Florence, Italy.

Sample ID ³	Samples	Type	¹⁴ C conc. (pMC)	t _{RC} (years BP) ⁴	Cal age (CE) $\frac{A.D.}{B.C.}$ 68% level of probability	Cal age (CE) $\frac{A.D.}{B.C.}$ 95% level of probability
Fi5263, Fi5266	Castillo de Tomaval (TOM-1)	1	85.57 ± 0.34	1252 ± 32	AD 780 – 885	AD 685 – 740 (7%) AD 770 – 895 (86%) AD 940 – 955 (2%)
Fi5283, Fi5290	Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI-1)	1	81.34 ± 0.44	1660 ± 44	AD 385 – 525	AD 340 – 575
Fi5274	Pachacamac (PAC-1)	3	86.13 ± 0.36	1199 ± 34	AD 770 – 810 (9%) AD 870 – 975 (59%)	AD 770 – 820 (17%) AD 840 – 990 (78%)
Fi5276, Fi5284	Museo delle Culture, Milan (MUD-1)	1	85.91 ± 0.42	1220 ± 39	AD 770 – 815 (24%) AD 840 – 895 (32%) AD 930 – 960 (12%)	AD 770 – 990
Fi5298, Fi5300	Mancos (MAN-1)	1(?)	85.63 ± 0.34	1246 ± 32	AD 775 – 885	AD 690 – 740 (4%) AD 770 – 900 (87%) AD 930 – 960 (4%)

³ When two Sample ID numbers are provided, this indicates that two prepared graphite targets from the same sample were measured. The reported results correspond to the weighted average of the two determinations, following verification of their statistical consistency.

⁴ BP i.e. Before Present, where Present is conventionally intended as 1950.

⁵ Calibrated ages were obtained using OxCal v.4.4.4, and SHCal20iii developed by Alan G. Hogg et al. (2020) as the reference calibration curve. The age ranges are reported at 68% and 95% level of probability.

Table 5. Stratigraphic context and dating of boards. Whenever available, all relevant radiocarbon dates have been reported.

ID Number	Site	Unit/Building	Stratigraphic Dating	Cultural Association	Notes	References
CAB-1	Pashash, (Cabana, Pallasca, Ancash, Peru)	Sector La Capilla, Cut 10, Level 2	C-14 Tx-1329: 1400 ± 60 BP (1950). AD 604–669 (1σ) AD 541–765 (2σ) (Terminus post quem).	Recuay (Huacohú and Yayá)	The Date was taken from a piece of charcoal in Cut 10, Level 4, representing the fill covering doorway offering of mid-Recuay materials.	(Griener 1978; Smith 1977; Lau et al. 2023:45)
CAB-20	Pashash, (Cabana, Pallasca, Ancash, Peru)	?	EIP ⁶	Recuay	The board comes from the same La Capilla sector as CAB-1 within a clear Recuay context	(Lau, personal communication 2022)
TUM-5	Tumshukayko, (Caraz, Huaylas, Ancash, Peru)	Tomb's fill	EIP	Recuay	The board was part of a fill covering a Recuay-period burial	(Orsini, personal communication 2024)
TOM-1	Castillo de Tomavál (Virú, Virú province, La Libertad, Peru)	Disturbed tomb	MH AD 770 – 895 (86%)	Late Moche (Moche IV/Tomaval)	Encased in an adobe brick. Found as part of the backfill from a looted tomb.	(Campana 1983:161-63)
CHO-1	Shimpirca/Zhinpirca, (Chordeleg, Azuay, Ecuador)	Tomb	MH	Tacalshapa (associated with metalwork displaying SAIS iconography. One Wari Viñaque pot known to come from Chordeleg)	Presents iconography and was completely wrapped in a silver sheet. It was found in an elite burial (shaft tomb) in Chordeleg, alongside several other gold artefacts.	(González Suárez 1878:25-31; Gonzalez Suarez 1892:67-75)
ISL-1	Islacha (Pomapuquio-Pumapukyo, Acocro, Huamanga, Ayacucho, Peru)	Unit 18: Espacio Arquitectonico 16A	MH ⁷	Wari (Huamanga)		(Bustamante 2008; Lockard 2010:122)
COP-1	Conchopata (Ayacucho, Huamanga, Ayacucho, Peru)	Estructura Arquitectonica (EA)-153, Locus 6050	The structure belongs to MH2. The date range for MH2 at Conchopata is ca. AD 850-1000.	Wari – Conchopata MH2 (Huamanga, Chakipampa, Wari Blackware)	Found on the floor of a mortuary room devoted to funerary rituals. The board was accompanied by 14 chrysocolla stones, carved into abstract and more figural shapes and most of which came in pairs.	(Milliken 2001; see also 2006 for context)
MON-1	Huari (Ayacucho, Huamanga, Ayacucho, Peru)	Sector Monqachayoc, Level 2, Fill, Layer B	MH	Wari (Chakipampa, Ocros, Huamanga, Viñaque, Wari Blackware, Huarpa – these are all the type of ceramic found in the same fill).	Found in the fill covering llama-shaped elite burials. The board was found alongside carved greenstones, spondylus shells, and three metal pieces: a silver "fleur de lis", a gold "bell"-shaped item, and a silver Puma head with camelid features.	(Pérez 1998:25-26; 2000:533)

⁶ Early Intermediate Period/Recuay (ca. AD 200-700).⁷ Middle Horizon (ca. AD 700-1000).

BAU-1	Cerro Baúl (Torata, Mariscal Nieto, Moquegua, Peru)	Sector C, Unit 26, Recinto B, Capa C, Q38*	<p>1) C-14_AA 53343 (Carbon, n° 1373) – Sector C, Unit 26, Recinto B, Capa C:</p> <p>1,195 BP</p> <p>1σ: 770–900 2σ: 690–980</p> <p>2) C-14_AA 46595 (wood) – from Sector C, unit 10, D-Shaped Temple:</p> <p>1,310 BP</p> <p>1σ: 660–770 2σ: 640–810</p>	Wari (Chakipampa) and Late-Nasca style Ceramic Drum	<p>Found in the courtyard at the centre of a patio group, defined as ‘temple annex’, where ceremonial activities related to the adjacent D-shaped temple were carried out. The board lay at the feet of a bench under a veranda. The place was ritually terminated.</p>
BAU-2	Cerro Baúl (Torata, Mariscal Nieto, Moquegua, Peru)	Sector A, Unit 40, Recinto A, Capa B, Q78*	<p>1) C-14_AA 58413 (Carbon sample from floor occupation n° 1202) – Sector A, Unit 25, Recinto A, Capa B</p> <p>1252 ± 33BP</p> <p>Calibrated: 763-894 (86.9%) 688–736CE, 7.0% 939–950CE, 1.5%</p>	Wari (ceramic workshop)	<p>Found near the north-wall access to a workshop adjacent to an elite patio group (“palace”). The workshop is an open space with two roofed sides. Activities carried out in it were dedicated to some steps in the production and processing of ceramic pots and colours.</p>

(Williams et al. 2005:21, 47)

*Qs refers to the specific location where the board was found as indicated in the excavation plans, see Figures 46 and 48).

Table 6. Chronological and stylistic phases of the boards in the core corpus.

Phase	Cultural Affiliations	Region	Approximate Date Range	Sites
A	Recuay	Highland Ancash	Ca. AD 200-700	Pashash, Tumshukayko, Aukispukio, Yayno, Par-iac Punta
B1	Wari	Central and Southern Peruvian High-lands	Ca. AD 700-1000	Huari, Conchopata, Puma- mapuquio, Cerro Baúl
B2	Wari-Moche, Wari-Lam-bayeque (Peruvian north coast), and Tacalshapa (southern Ecuadorian high-lands)	Peruvian North Coast and Southern Ecuadorian High-lands	Ca. AD 700-1000	Pachacamac, Castillo de Tomaval, Chan Chan, Chordeleg

Table 7. Radiocarbon date of a Tacalshapa wooden board from Guarainag (Ucumarina) – GUA-01. The sample was measured at LABEC (Laboratorio di tecniche nucleari per l’Ambiente e i Beni Culturali). Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare (INFN), Florence, Italy.

Sample ID ⁸	Sample	¹⁴ C conc. (pMC)	t _{RC} (years BP) ⁹	Cal age (CE) $\frac{A.D.}{B.C.}$ 68% level of probability	Cal age (CE) $\frac{A.D.}{B.C.}$ 95% level of probability
FiS267, FiS268	GUA-01	87.38 ± 0.29	1083 ± 27	AD 990 - 1025	AD 900 – 925 (5%) AD 965 – 1045 (90%)

Table 8. ¹⁴C dates from the site of Casa Llanos, Sigsig, and the Valle del Cuyes associated with Tacalshapa ceramic, adapted from Lara (2017:206).

Sample ID	¹⁴ C Years B.P.	CAL Years $\frac{A.D.}{B.C.}$	Site	Sector	Reference
2-TP1-83	630 ± 255	AD 1320 ± 255	Casa Llanos	Carbon from test trench.	Valdez (1984: 228)
3-H1-83	935 ± 180	AD 1115 ± 180		Carbon from huaca n. 1.	
3-CA1Z1-83	1125 ± 120	AD 825 ± 120		Carbon from the trench bottom.	
2-B02-83	1365 ± 130	AD 585 ± 130		Carbon from the offering pit.	
Ly-16923	?	AD 1451 - 1634	Valle del Cuyes	San Miguel, sector 2	Lara (2017: 206) Cal. at 2 sigmas.
Ly-16925		AD 1356 – 1389; 1270 – 1316		Espíritu Play, sector 1	
Ly-13039		AD 1280 – 1395		Santopamba sector 3	
Ly-16924		AD 1154 – 1260		Espíritu Playa-sector 1	
?	?	110 ± 50 B.C.	Pumapungo, Cuenca	? (Associated with Tacalshapa II ceramic – Idrovo sequence)	Idrovo (2000: 54)

⁸ When two Sample ID numbers are provided, this indicates that two prepared graphite targets from the same sample were measured. The reported result corresponds to the weighted average of the two determinations, following verification of their statistical consistency.

⁹ BP i.e. Before Present, where Present is conventionally intended as the year 1950.

Chapter 5

Table 9. Radiocarbon phases for seven Wari archaeological markers across the Central Andean region, including gameboards, adapted from Williams et al. (2024:51, Table 1).

Wari Traditions/Institutions	n.	Starting Date		Ending Date	
		Median cal. AD	95% range	Median cal. AD	95% range
Gameboards	7	690	685-875	980	950-995
Patio Group Residences	70	780	760-830	910	890-930
Monumental Compounds	24	690	570-770	1050	970-1160
D-Shaped Structures	20	720	640-770	1020	990-1070
Mortuary Traditions	46				
Ashlars	4	850	770-960	1100	1030-1210
Caves (La Real)	7	680	580-770	790	680-920
Cist & Shaft Tombs	15	680	590-770	790	680-920
Collective Structures	20	670	580-740	1330	1230-1450
Roads and Waystations	23	800	710-870	1000	910-1040
Khipus	5	810	590-960	950	770-1170

Table 10. Dorothy Menzel's Epochs

Middle Horizon Epochs	Updated Chronology (Isbell 2019)	Ceramic Styles	Social Events
1A	AD 650-700	Chakipampa, Ocros	Early MH contacts with Nasca art
1B	AD 700-800	Chakipampa, Ocros, Conchopata, Pacheco	Introduction of iconography related the Lake Titicaca pantheon – expansion to the Peruvian south coast and southern highlands
2A	AD 800-850	Viñaque,	
2B	AD 850-1000 (?)	Atarco, Pachacamac, Chakipampa	Broader interaction networks, including the Peruvian north coast

Chapter 6

Table 11. Boards' distribution across Ancash during the Recuay period by Type.

	Northern Ancash						
	Pashash	Conchucos	Tumshukayko	Huaylas	Aukispukio	Yayno	Total
N. of boards	21	1	5	3	2	1	33
Type 1	10	1	3	2		1	17
Type 2	11		1	1			13
Type 3	1		1		2		4
	Southern Ancash						
	Mancos	Huaraz	Aija	Pariac Punta	Castillo Punta	Chacas	Total
N. of boards	4	10	1	2	1	1	19
Type 1							
Type 2	3	9	1	2	1	1	17
Type 3	1	1					2

Table 12. Pashash ceramic sequences with date ranges.

	Approximate Date Range			Approximate Date Range	Grieder's Sub-styles	Approximate Date Range
Phase 5 (Late Intermediate and Inka Period)	AD 1000 – 1532					
Phase 4 (Middle Horizon)	AD 700 – 1000		Usú	AD 600 – 700		
Phase 3 (Pashash-Recuay)	AD 100 – 700		Pashash – Recuay	AD 310 – 600	Huacohú	AD 500 – 600
		Yaiá			AD 400 – 500	
		Quimít			AD 310 – 400	
Phase 2 (Quinú)	400 B.C. – AD 100	Late Early	Quinú	? – AD 310	Late Early	?
Phase 1 (Chavín, Santa, and Nepeña Styles)	750 – 400 B.C.					

Table 13. La Capilla's radiocarbon dates related to the main burial with offerings. Adapted from Grieder (1978: Appendix) and Lau et al. (2023:45, Table 1)

Sample ID	¹⁴ C Years B.P.	CAL Years B.C./AD 1 Sigma	CAL Years B.C./AD 2 Sigma	Context/Association	Ceramic Associations
TX-1824	1590 ± 60	AD 411–540	AD 264–616	Cut 12, Level 4. Fill above main burial. Charcoal.	Recuay (Yaiá)
TX-1329	1400 ± 60	AD 604–669	AD 541–765	Cut 10, Level 4. Fill covering doorway offering of mid-Recuay materials. Charcoal.	Recuay (Yaiá)
OxA-41441	1806 ± 19	AD 245–255 (12.6%) AD 294–335 (55.7%)	AD 225–340 (95.4%)	Operation 8 (East Extension). Capa D, Locus 9. Charcoal found in Locus 9 of offering.	Recuay

Chapter 8

Table 14. Time periods for the Virú Valley showing the time periods used by Downey (2015) and the corresponding name employed by the Virú Valley Project (VVP).

Periods used by Downey (2015)	VVP Equivalent	Approx. Date Range	Larco's Moche Valley Sequence
Late Epoch	Estero	AD 1470 – 1532	Moche IV/V
	La Plata	AD 1100 – 1470	
	Tomaval	AD 750 – 1100	
Late Virú	Huancaco	AD 600 -750	
Middle Virú	Gallinazo/Virú	200 B.C. – AD 600	Moche I/II/III
Early Virú	Puerto Morín	400 – 200 B.C.	
Guañape	Guañape	1200 – 400 B.C.	
Cerro Prieto	Cerro Prieto	? – 1200 B.C.	

Table 15. Andean chronology and the corresponding phases in the Peruvian North Coast.

Period	Years	North Coast Phases	Virú Valley (VVP)
Late Horizon	AD 1470 – 1532	Chimú-Inka	Estero
Late Intermediate Period	AD 1100 – 1470	Chimú	La Plata
Middle Horizon	AD 800 – 1100	Lambayeque (Wari influence)	Tomaval
Early Intermediate Period	AD 100 – 800	Moche	Huancaco
	200 B.C. – AD 600	Virú	Gallinazo
Early Horizon	400 – 200 B.C.	Salinar	Puerto Morín
	900 – 400 B.C.	Cupisnique	Guañape
Initial Period	1800 – 900 B.C.	Initial Period	Cerro Prieto
Late Preceramic	3000 – 1800 B.C.	Late Preceramic	
Preceramic	14000 – 3000 B.C.	Preceramic	

Table 16. *Tacalshapa ceramic sequence according to Meyers (1998).*

Phase	Date Range	Region	Notes
Tacalshapa IV	A.D. 700 – 900	Azuay (?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wari influences, particularly via the Peruvian North Coast during the MH, mixed with local styles. • Negative painting. • Vessels related to “Huancaco Decorated” in the Virú valley sequence.
Tacalshapa III	No date given. A.D. 500 – 700 (?)	Azuay (Cuenca area) and Cañar (Taday, Pindilig)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant similarities to Peruvian pottery. • Anthropomorphic faces. • Negative painting. • Related to Negative Carchi.
Tacalshapa II	100 B.C. – A.D. 500	Azuay (Cuenca area) and Cañar (Azogues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White-on-red with/without Negative painting. • Characterised by similarities to the Gallinazo II style and “Castillo Modelled” pottery of the Virú valley (the latter is prominent at Castillo de Tomaval).
Tacalshapa I	300 – 100 B.C.	Azuay (particularly, Paute/Gualaceo), Cañar, (and Loja?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corresponds to a subset of what call Group X (cylindrical and globular vases). • Characterised by Chorrera influences.

Table 17. Tacalshapa ceramic sequence according to Idrovo (2000).

Phase	Date Range	Region	Notes
Tacalshapa III	A.D. 500 – 1100/1200	Azuay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Larger vessels (up to 1.20 m high). • Anthropomorphic faces with dotted or linear incisions to represent facial features. • Hands' appliqués.
Tacalshapa II	200 B.C. – A.D. 500	Azuay and Cañar (one tomb excavated in In-gapirca)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One C-14 date from the site of Pumapungo: 110 ± 50 B.C. • Larger anthropomorphic lenticular vessels. • Negative painting. • Anthropomorphic appliques. • Vessels presenting similarities to Moche and Gallinazo V. • Associated with advanced copper metallurgy related to the Peruvian North Coast Vicús culture. • The burials rich in gold and silver from Chordeleg and Sigsig would be associated with this phase, particularly the period overlapping with the Peruvian EIP (A.D. 1-600). • Paralleled by significant socio-economic changes.
Tacalshapa I	500 – 200/100 B.C.	Azuay (Cuenca and Paute)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anthropomorphic pots • White-on-red • Chorrera influence • Lenticular shapes

Table 18. Grave goods of the Shimpirca burial.

Grave goods in the Shimpirca Burial	Plates in Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922	Reference
A gold plaque mounted on a wooden frame (Figure 76).		Verneau and Rivet 1912-1922
CHO-1, made from the wood of the Ecuadorian walnut tree and covered with a thin silver sheet		
Nine large hemispherical cups		
Five gold axes with semi-circular blades	Pl. XXIII, figs. 4, 5, 9; Pl. XXV, fig. 8	
Two flat cups	Pl. XXV, fig. 1	
An axe with a circular space intended for the mounting on a stick functioning as a handle, and a double-headed snake stretched along the semi-circular blade, resembling in style the Moche and Lambayeque bicephalic creature.	Pl. XXIII, fig. 10	
Ear and nose ornaments;		
Several belts;		
A headdress with a conical shape on top and bas-relief decorations all around its base	Pl. XXIII, fig. 2	
Two tiaras, probably akin in style and shape to those in the collection of the American Museum of the National Indian, Washington D.C., and the Museum of Five Continents in Munich, Germany	Pl. XXIII, figs. 1, 11; Pl. XXIV, fig. 3	
Circular plaques (number unknown), four of which with chasing and repoussé designs		
Two gold ingots (?)		

*Chapter 9**Table 19. Quadripartition and symmetry types.*

	I Quadrant	Type of symmetry
I Quadrant	$(x, y) \rightarrow (x, y)$	None
II Quadrant	$(x, y) \rightarrow (-x, y)$	Reflection symmetry across the vertical axis
III Quadrant	$(x, y) \rightarrow (-x, -y)$	rotational symmetry of 180° about the origin
IV Quadrant	$(x, y) \rightarrow (x, -y)$	across the horizontal axis

Figures¹⁰

Chapter 1

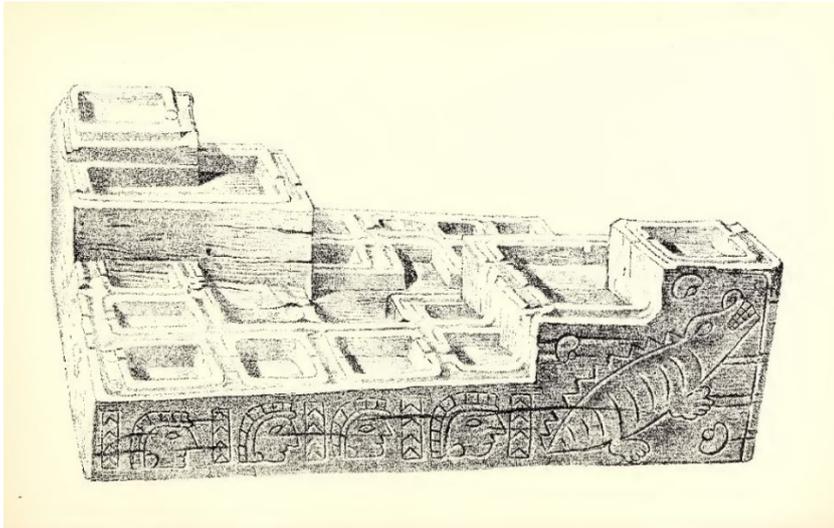


Figure 1. Illustration of the Chordeleg Board, from González Suárez (1892: Pl. 3).

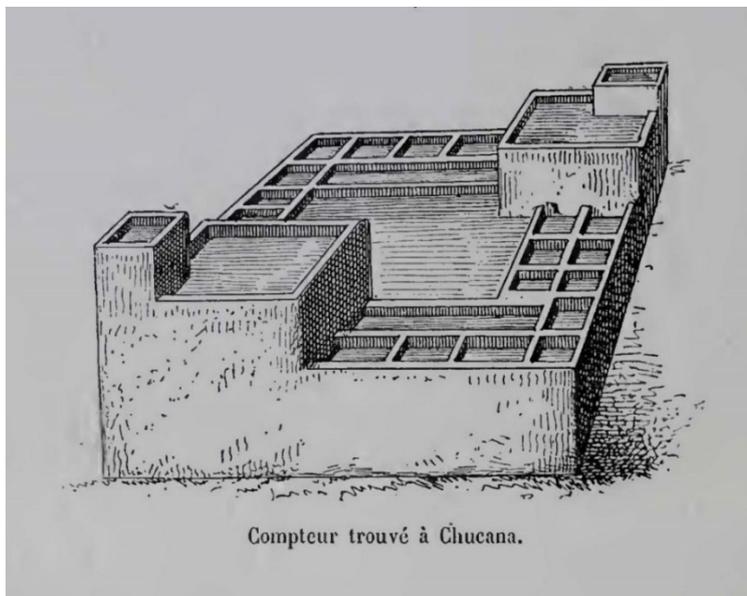


Figure 2. A board found in Chucana, Huandoval (Pallasca) by Charles Wiener, from Wiener (1880:778).

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs and figures are by the author.



Figure 3. Hilltop site of Chucana, Huandoval, Pallasca.

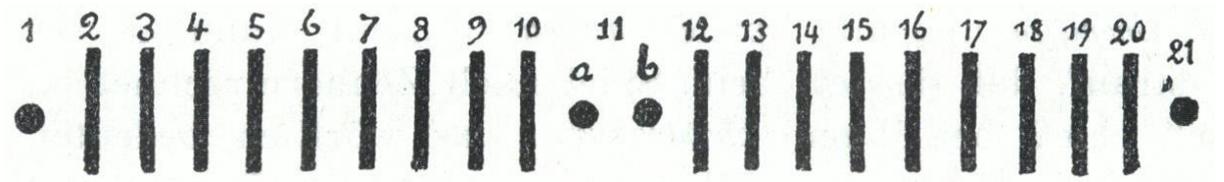


Figure 4. Gameboard for a race game played in the Gran Chaco region. Adapted from Nordenskiöld (1918:167, Figure 1).



Figure 5. Map by Erland Nordenskiöld showing the distribution of the games of chance in the Gran Chaco and of the archaeological boards presented by Verneau and Rivet (1912), from Nordenskiöld (1918:171, Figure 3). The numbers indicate the geographical distribution of the Chaco ethnic groups where the Tsuka game of chance was played (1-10 in numerical order: Choroti, Ashluslay, Tapiete, Guaraní, Chane, Matico, 7-9 Toba, Lengua, Araukaner, 66 Peguenche, 18 Quichua (Inkas). The letters refer to the archaeological boards presented by Verneau and Rivet; L is the Chordeleg board, K are the boards from Chucana and Caraz, A is Baessler's board from Pachacamac; while 'T' is probably a mistake or a board from a different uncited source. The solid and dashed line represents the boundary of the Inka Empire.

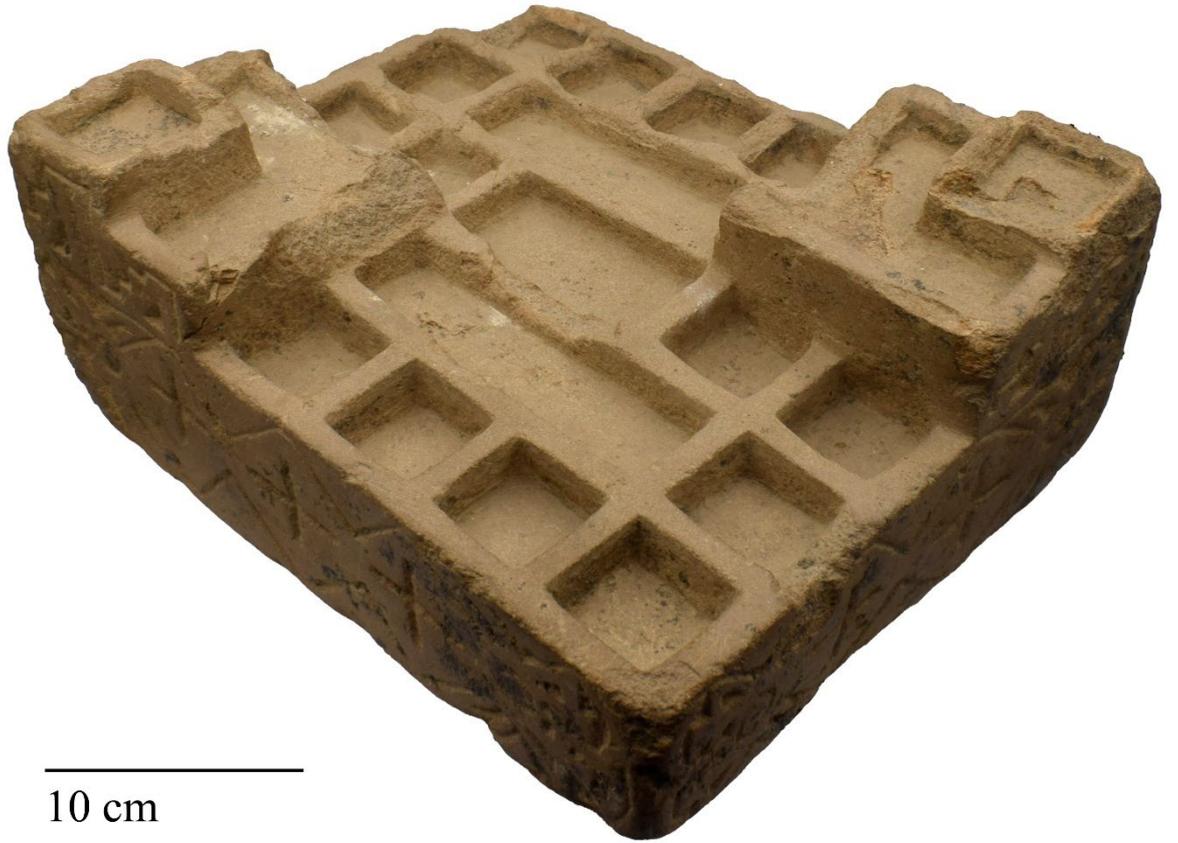


Figure 6. Stone board found at the Recuay site of Pashash.



Figure 7. Guaman Poma drawing of a chief accountant with a yupana (folio 360 [362]), in *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (1615). Image from “[The Guaman Poma Website](https://poma.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm)”, Det Kongelige Bibliotek. <https://poma.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>.

Chapter 3

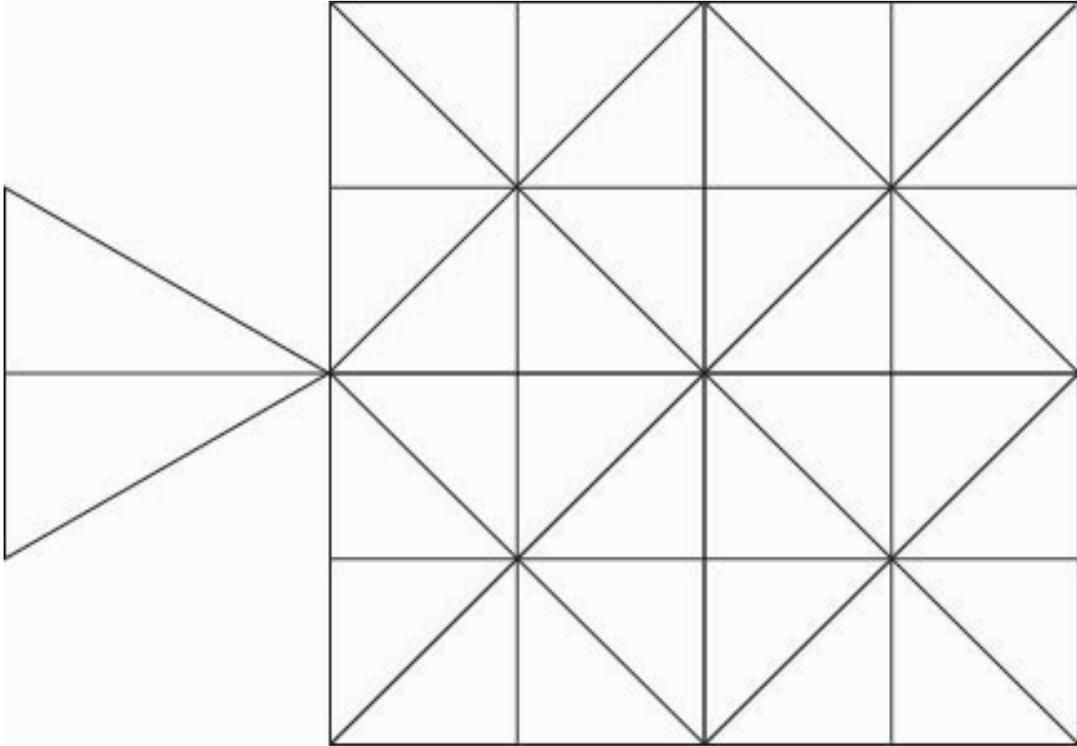
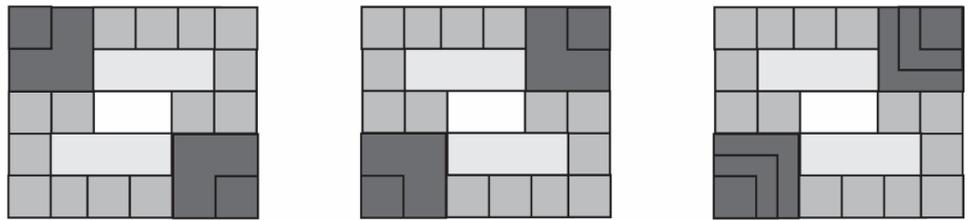
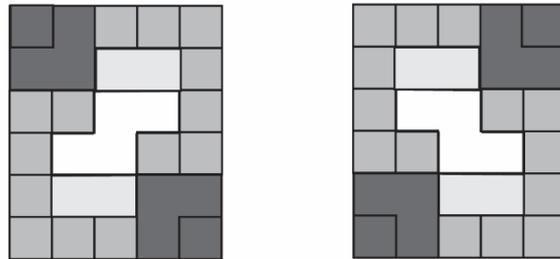


Figure 8. Modified alquerque board documented in colonial contexts, such as Chinchero in Peru, but also Argentina and Chile.

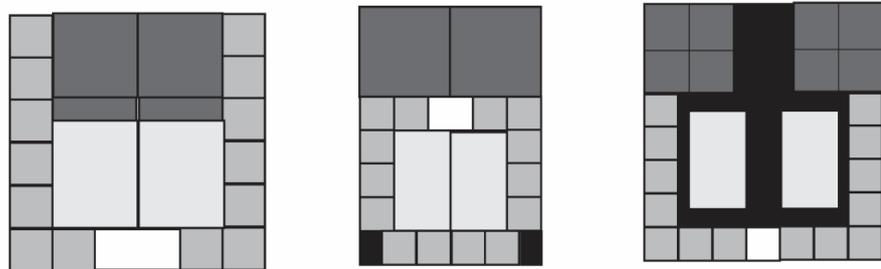
Chapter 4

- Zone A
- Zone B
- Zone C

Type 1



Type 2



Type 3

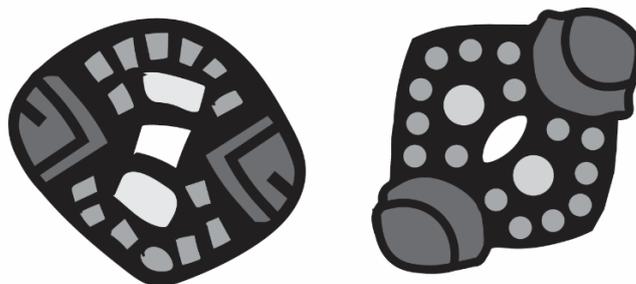


Figure 9. Board Type 1, 2, and 3 forming the core corpus. Different colours identify Zone A, B, and C.

FIGURES 247

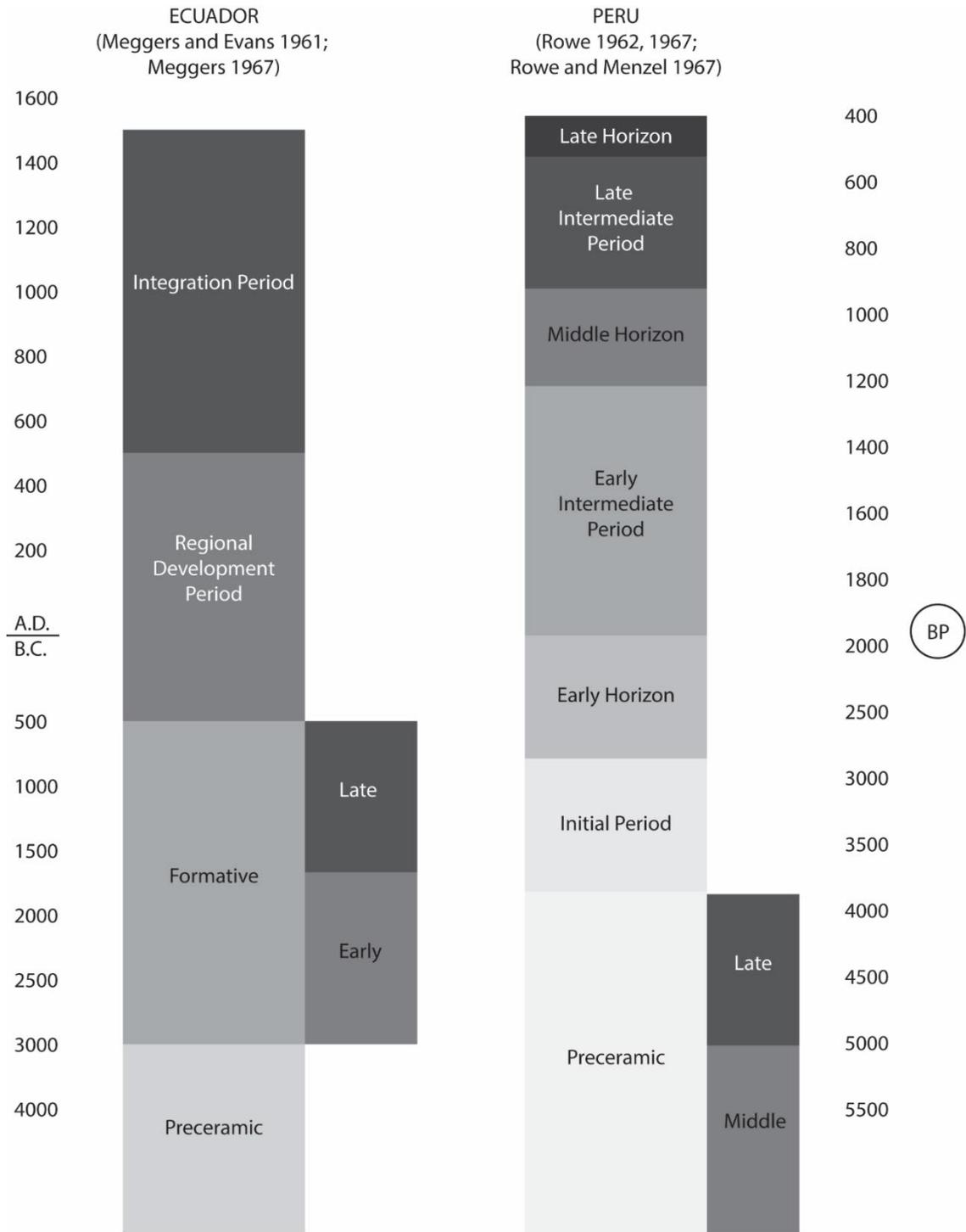


Figure 10. Chronological periods for the Central Andean region used when discussing Ecuadorean and Peruvian cultures. The date ranges for each period are approximate.

FIGURES 248

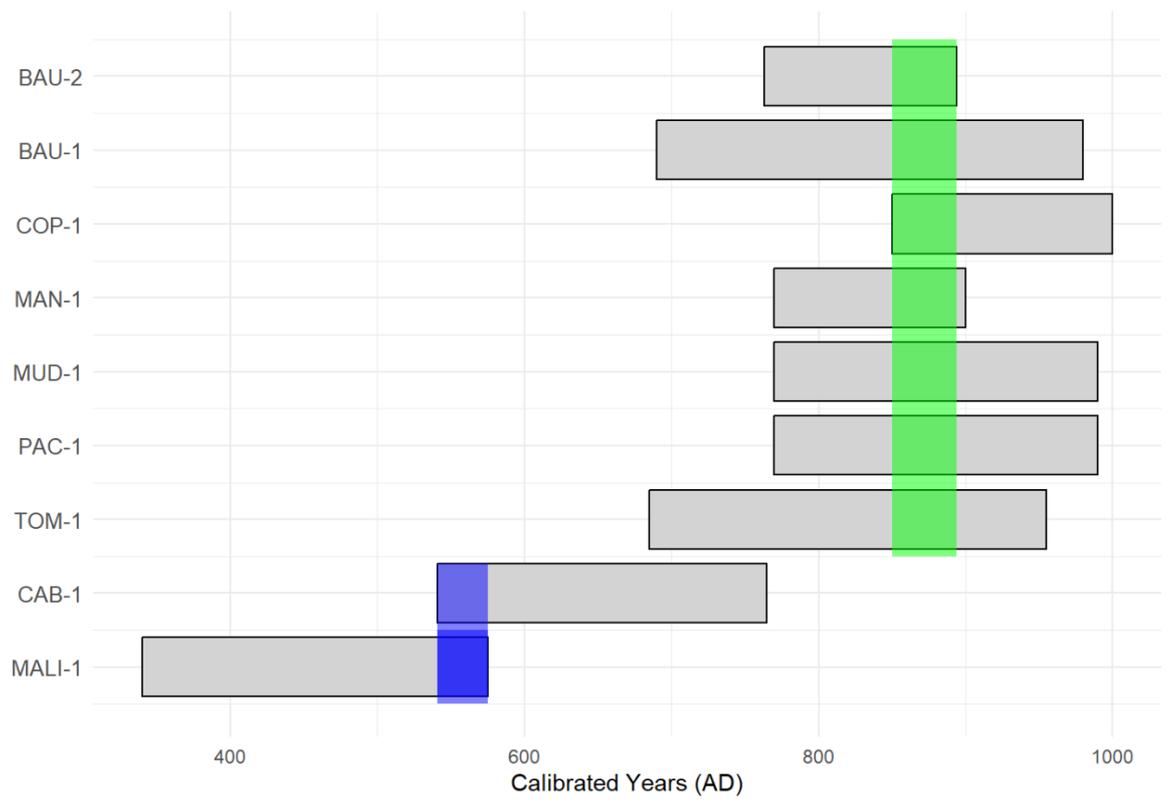


Figure 11. Distribution of calibrated ¹⁴C dates of boards. Blue and green highlights indicate the minimum overlap between the 95% confidence intervals for date ranges from the Recuay and Wari periods.

Type 4

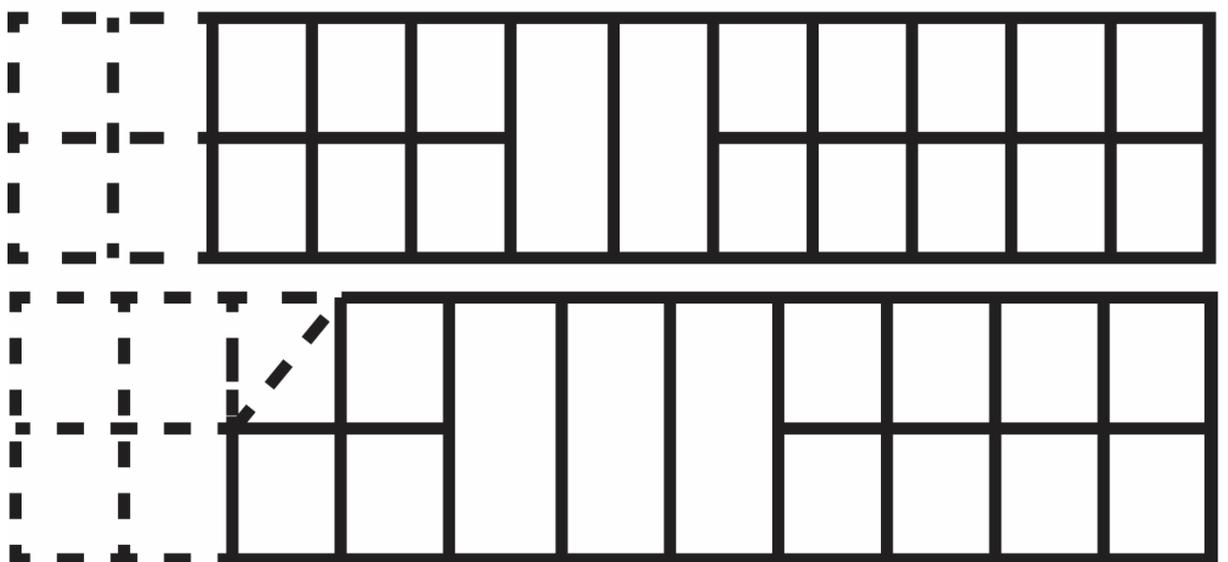


Figure 12. Type 4 layout. This type of compartmentalised board is only found at the Recuay site of Pashash.



Figure 13. Type-4 board (CAB-25) with a tall body, possibly meant to be stuck into the ground or used as a freeze-like architectural element.



Figure 14. Example of type-5 board excavated at the site of Namanchugo (NAM-1). Photograph courtesy of John Topic.



Figure 15. Type-5 board carved on a boulder near the entrance to the La Capilla sector of the Pashash site.



Figure 16. Rock shelter near the entrance to the La Capilla sector at the site of Pashash, where rock carvings possibly dating to the Recuay and earlier periods are visible.



Figure 17. Rock shelter carvings near the entrance to the La Capilla sector at the site of Pashash.

Type 6

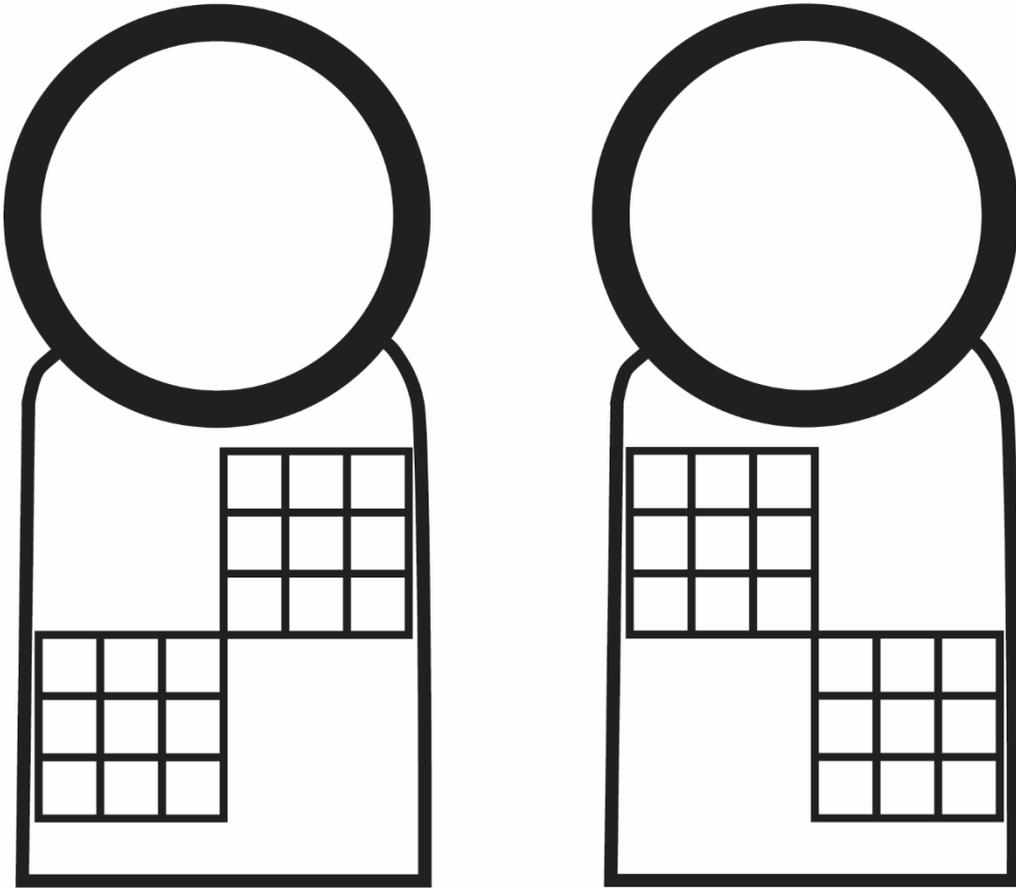


Figure 18. Type-6 board layouts.

10 cm



Figure 19. Type-6 board from Casa Llanos (SIG-1), Chobshi, Sigsig. Museo Pumapungo, Cuenca.



Figure 20. Type-6 board from Ucumarina, Guarainag, Paute, Azuay, Ecuador (GUA-1). Private Collection, Cuenca.



Figure 21. Fragmentary Type-6 board from Ucumarina, Guarainag, Paute, Azuay, Ecuador (GUA-2). Private Collection, Cuenca.



Figure 22. Spear-thrower covered in a silver foil from Ucumarina, Guarainag, Paute, Azuay. 60 x 2 cm. Private Collection.



Figure 23. Cast gold tokens from Sigsig, Azuay, Ecuador. From left to right: 4.6 x 2.2 cm; 3.8 x 2.5 cm; 4.1 x 2.7. The exhibit zoomorphic heads, identifiable with birds (or camelids), two snakes, and two felines. National Museum of the American Indian, Washington D.C.

Type 7

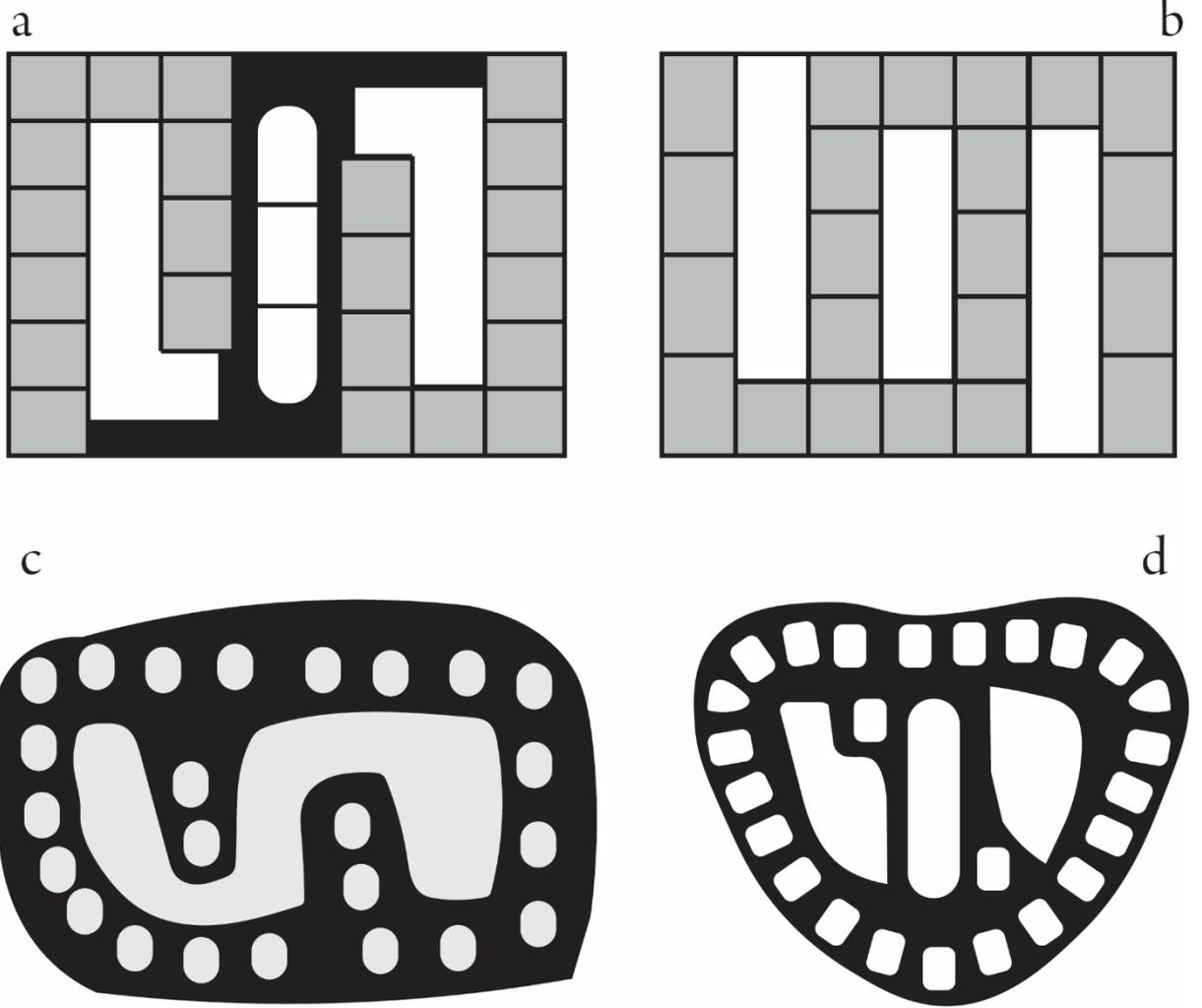


Figure 24. Type 7 layouts.



Figure 25. Type-7 board made of whalebone from Huanchaco. Photo courtesy of the Programa Arqueológico de Huanchaco.

Chapter 4

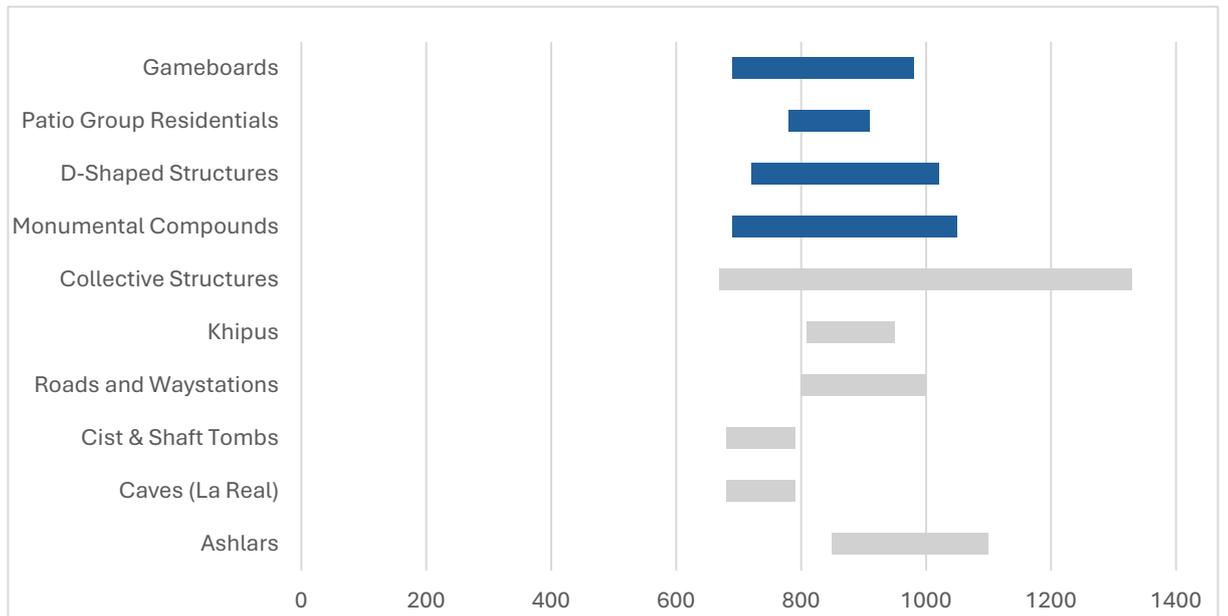


Figure 26. Radiocarbon phases related to Wari institutions, showing the alignment of the phases pertaining to the emergence and spread of Type-1 and 3 gameboards and some key Wari institutional hallmarks, based on Williams et al. (2024:51).

Phase A Type 1 Boards



Figure 27. Examples of Type-1 boards attributed to Phase A. a) CAB-1, Museo Arqueológico Zonal, Cabana; b) CAB-7, Museo Arqueológico Zonal, Cabana; c) MAL-1, Museo de Arte, Lima; d) CAR-2, Museo Municipal, Caraz; e) CAB-4, Museo Arqueológico Zonal, Cabana; f) CAB-5, Museo Arqueológico Zonal de Cabana.

Phase A Type 2 Boards

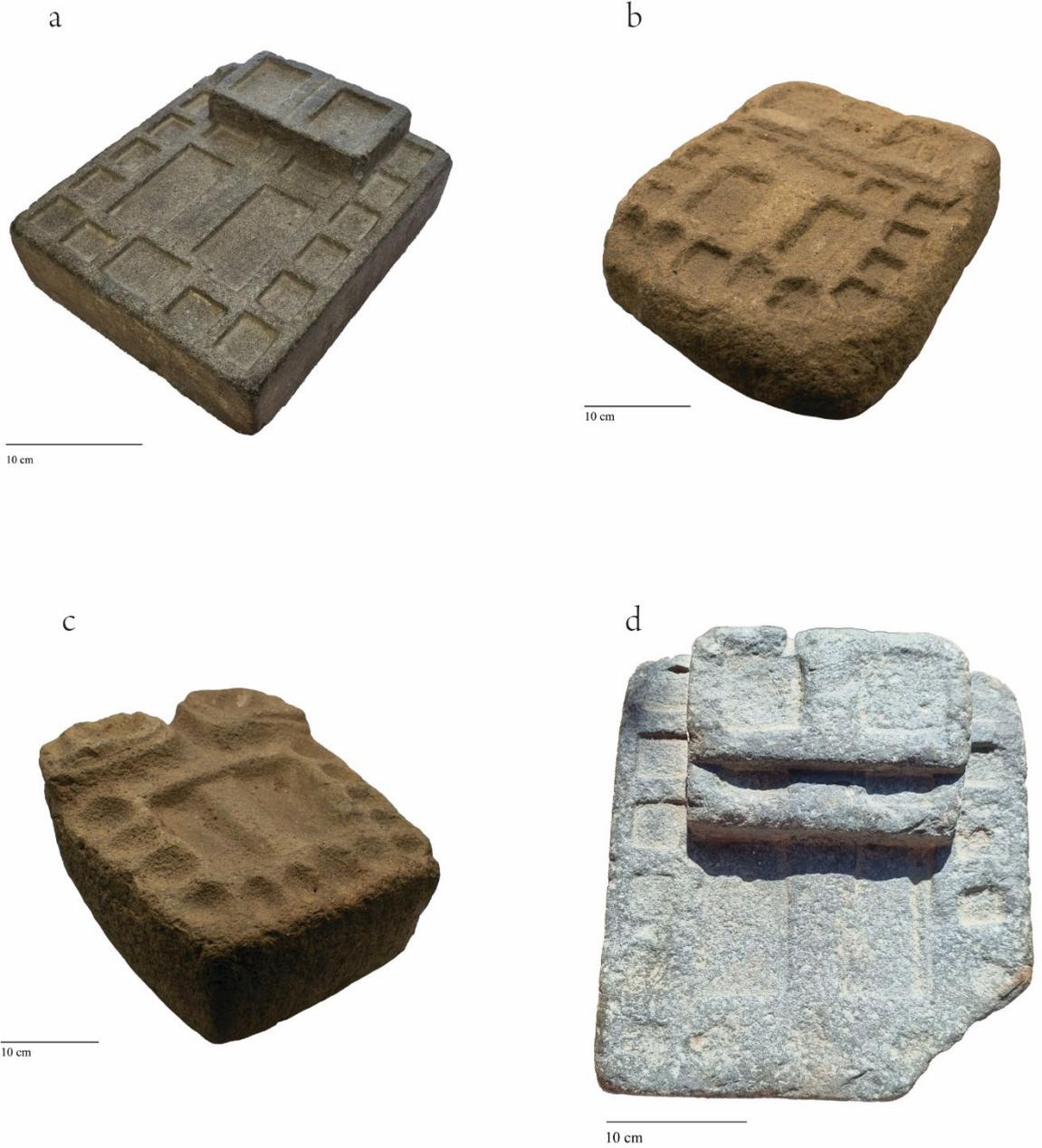


Figure 28. Examples of Type-2 boards attributed to Phase A. a) AMN-1, American Museum of Natural History, New York; b) MAA-2, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash, Huaraz; c) MAA-8, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash, Huaraz; d) HUA-1, Private Collection, Huaylas.

Phase A Type 3 Boards



Figure 29. Examples of Type-3 boards attributed to Phase A. a) MAA-7, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash, Huaraz; b) CAB-9, Private Collection, Cabana; c) CAR-5, Museo Municipal, Caraz; d) CAR-4, Museo Municipal, Caraz.



Figure 30. Christian cross carved in the central compartment of CAR-2, Museo Municipal, Caraz.



Figure 31. Cave in the Walun outcrop (map 5), Huaraz, Ancash. Possibly, the outcrop was used as a pre-Hispanic quarry.

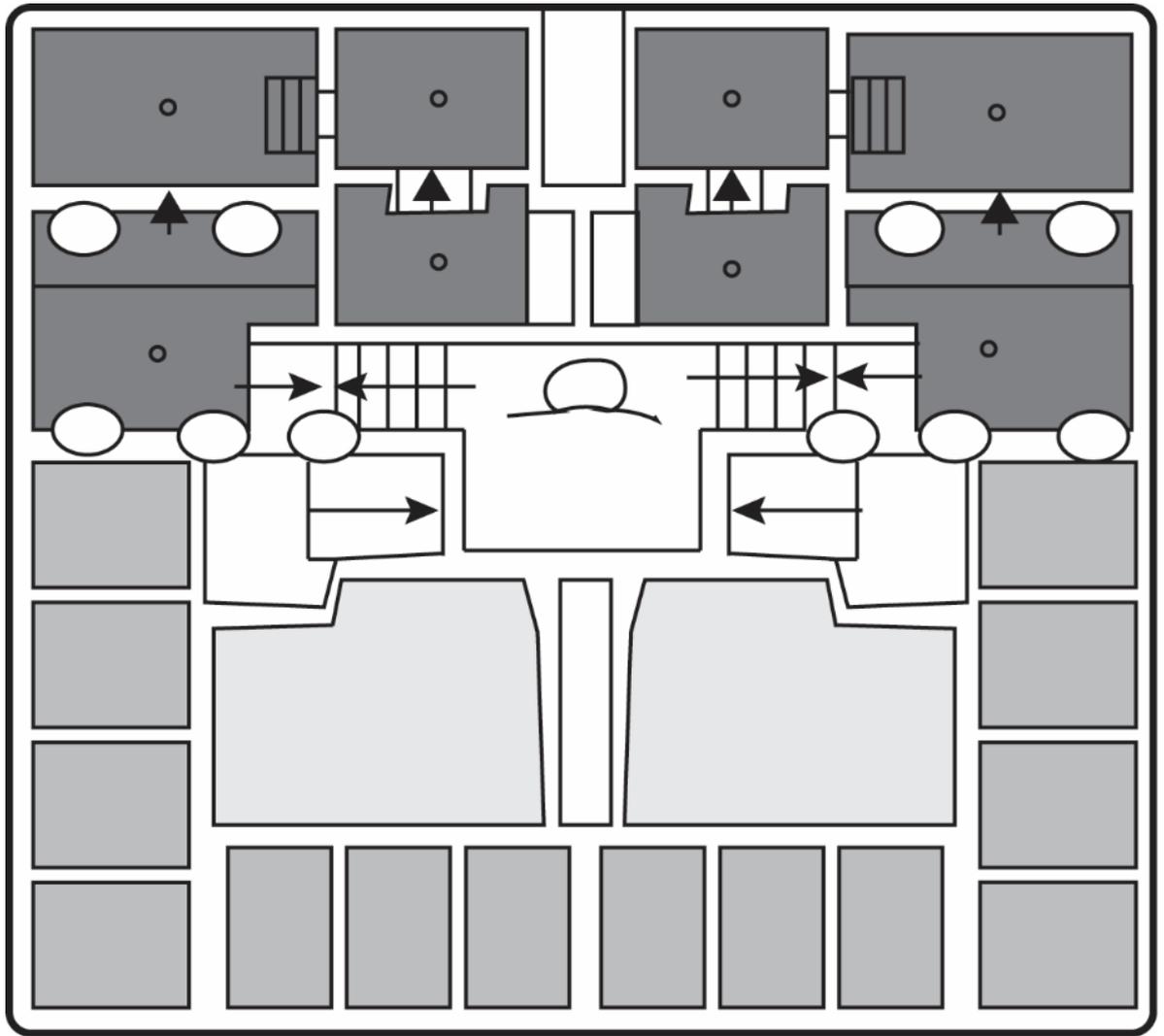


Figure 32. Layout of WUR-1. The circles indicate sculpture-like or tower-like protrusions in the original board. Drawing based on Wurster (1982:299, Figure 4).



Figure 33. MAL-1, detail. Museo de Arte, Lima.



Figure 34. CAB-7, detail. Museo Arqueológico Zonal, Cabana.

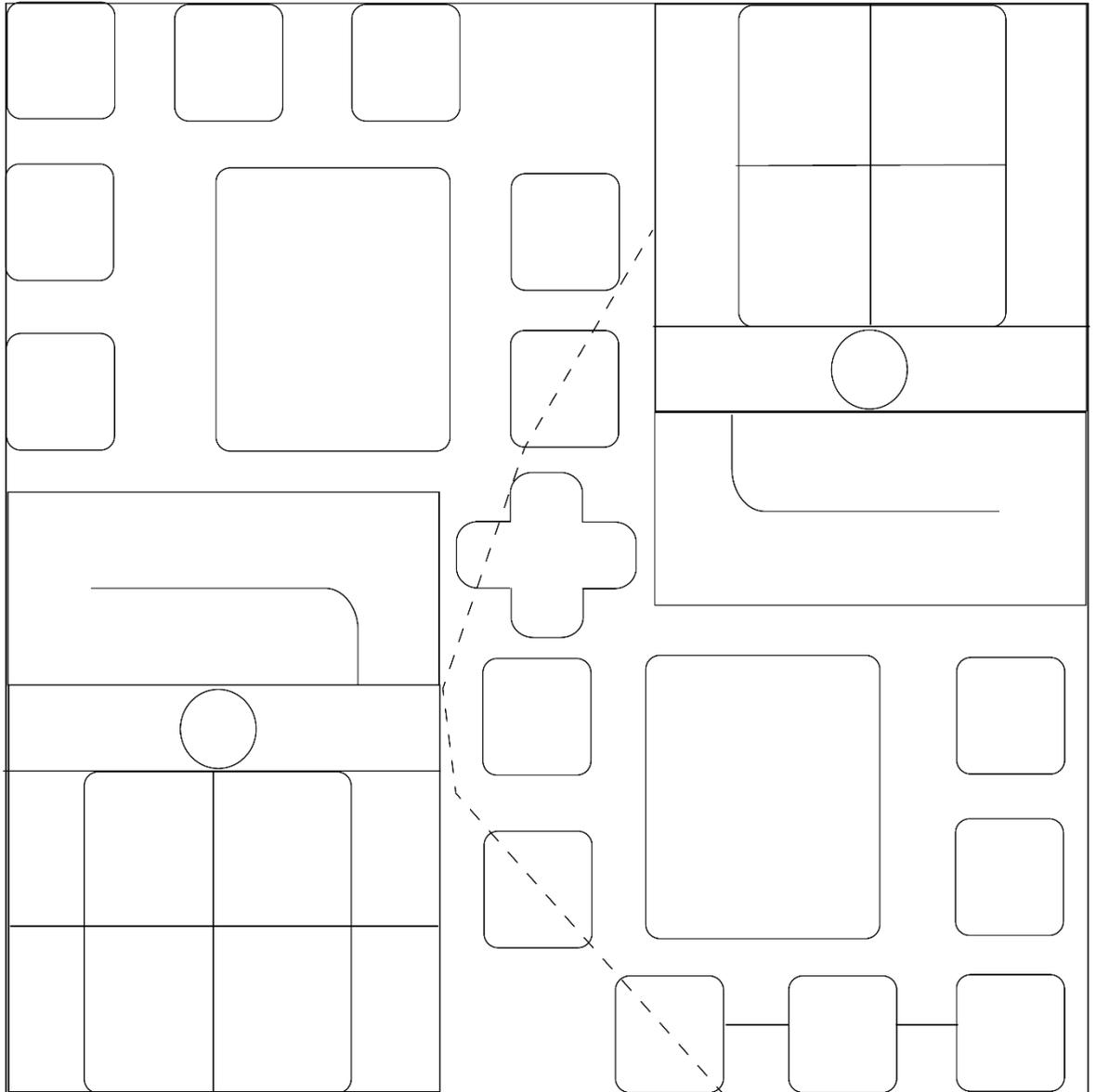


Figure 35. Reconstructed layout of CAB-7. The dashed line represents the line of breakage.



Figure 36. CAB-22, 32 x 22 cm, stone, private collection, Cabana.

FIGURES 270



Figure 37. View of the site of Pashash and the modern town of Cabana and the satellite settlements of Puchumalca and Cerro Huangayoc. The photograph was taken from another Recuay site – Cushe – perched on a hilltop on the other side of the valley.



Figure 38. La Capilla sector, Pashash, seen from the ridge linking it to Cabana.

FIGURES 272

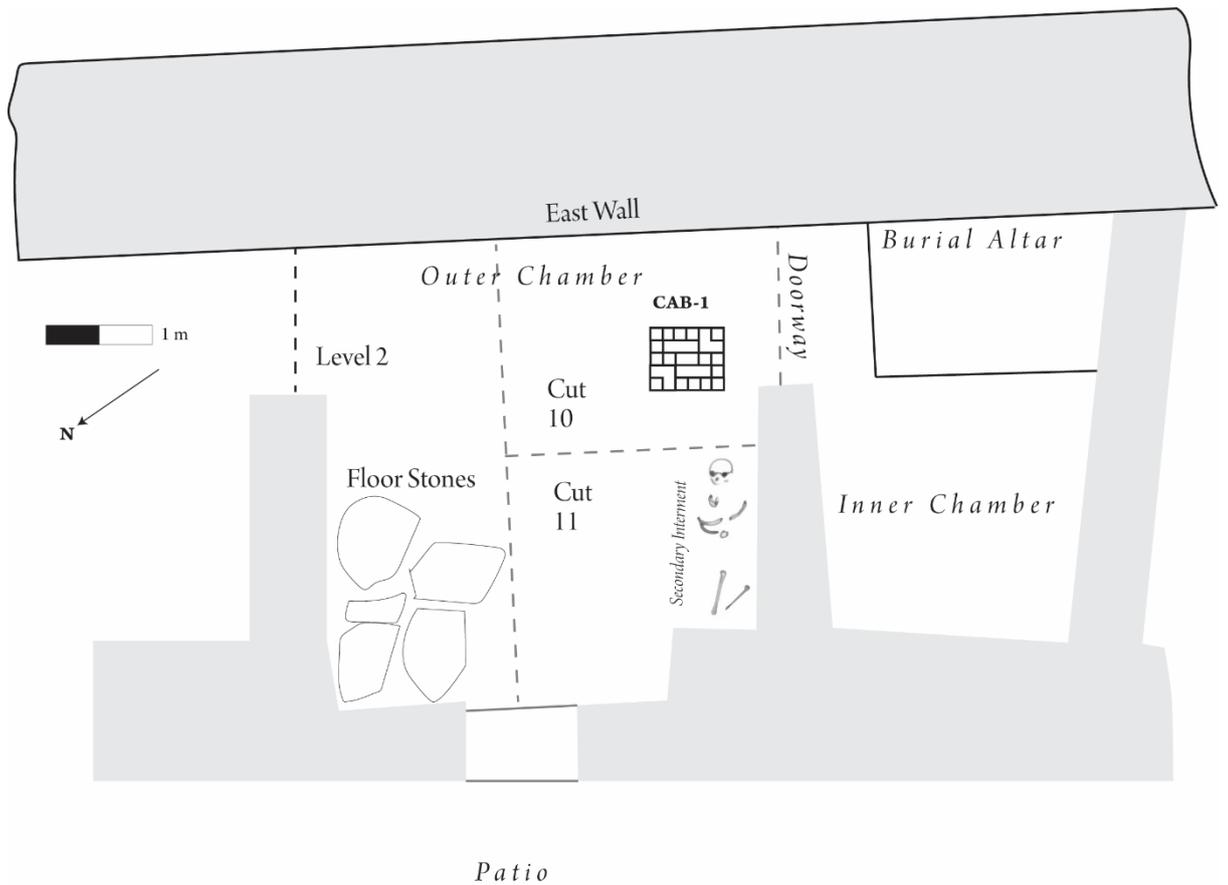


Figure 39. Plan of what Grieder (1978:45-49) defines a “burial temple” with the finding location of CAB-1. Drawing based on Grieder (1978:41, Figure 22).

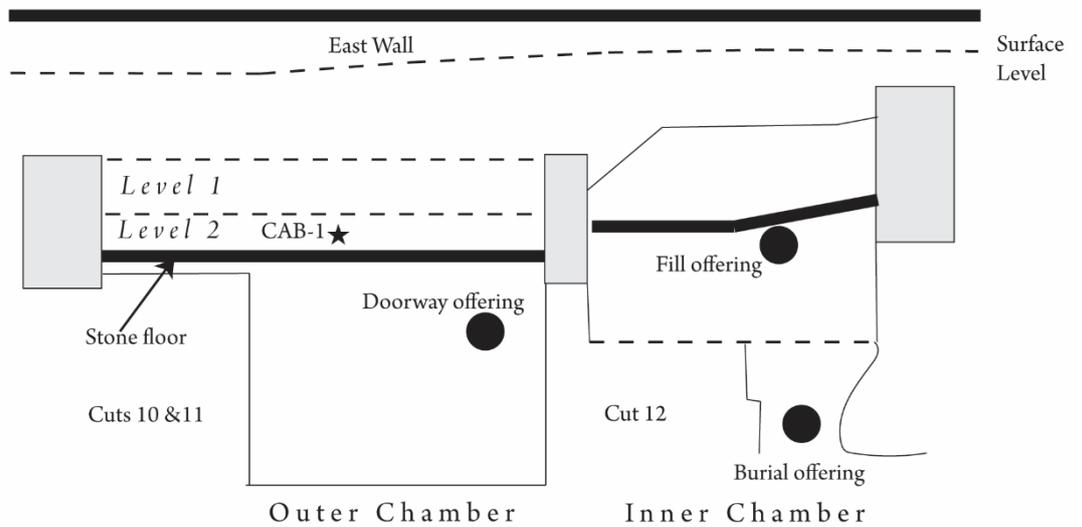


Figure 40. Relative stratigraphy of the “burial temple”. Drawing based on Grieder (1978:42-43, Figure 23).



10 cm

Figure 41. Lateral iconography of CAB-1, which is repeated on all four sides.

Phase B1 Type 1 Boards



Figure 42. Examples of Phase B1 Type-1 boards. a) COP-1, Conchopata, Ayacucho (photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC); b) MHM-1, Cerro Miraflores, Huamachuco; c) ISL-1, Pumapuquio (Apurímac), from Lockard (2009:122); d) MAL-1, Museo de Arte, Lima; e) BAU-1, Cerro Baúl, Moquegua, from Williams et al. (2005: Pl. 18); f) BAU-2, Cerro Baúl, Moquegua, from Williams et al. (2005: Pl. 32).



Figure 43. MAJ-1 shown reutilised as a building block in a LIP construction in Marcajirca, Huari, Ancash. Photo courtesy of Bebel Ibarra.



Figure 44. MHM-1 reutilised as a threshold stone in a LIP structure in Cerro Miraflores, Huamachuco, La Libertad. Photo courtesy of Proyecto Arqueológico y de Conservación del Subsector La Plaza, Sector Cerro del Castillo, Marcahumachuco.



Figure 45. Cerro Baúl, site plan. Adapted from Williams et al. (2005: Figure 2).

FIGURES 277

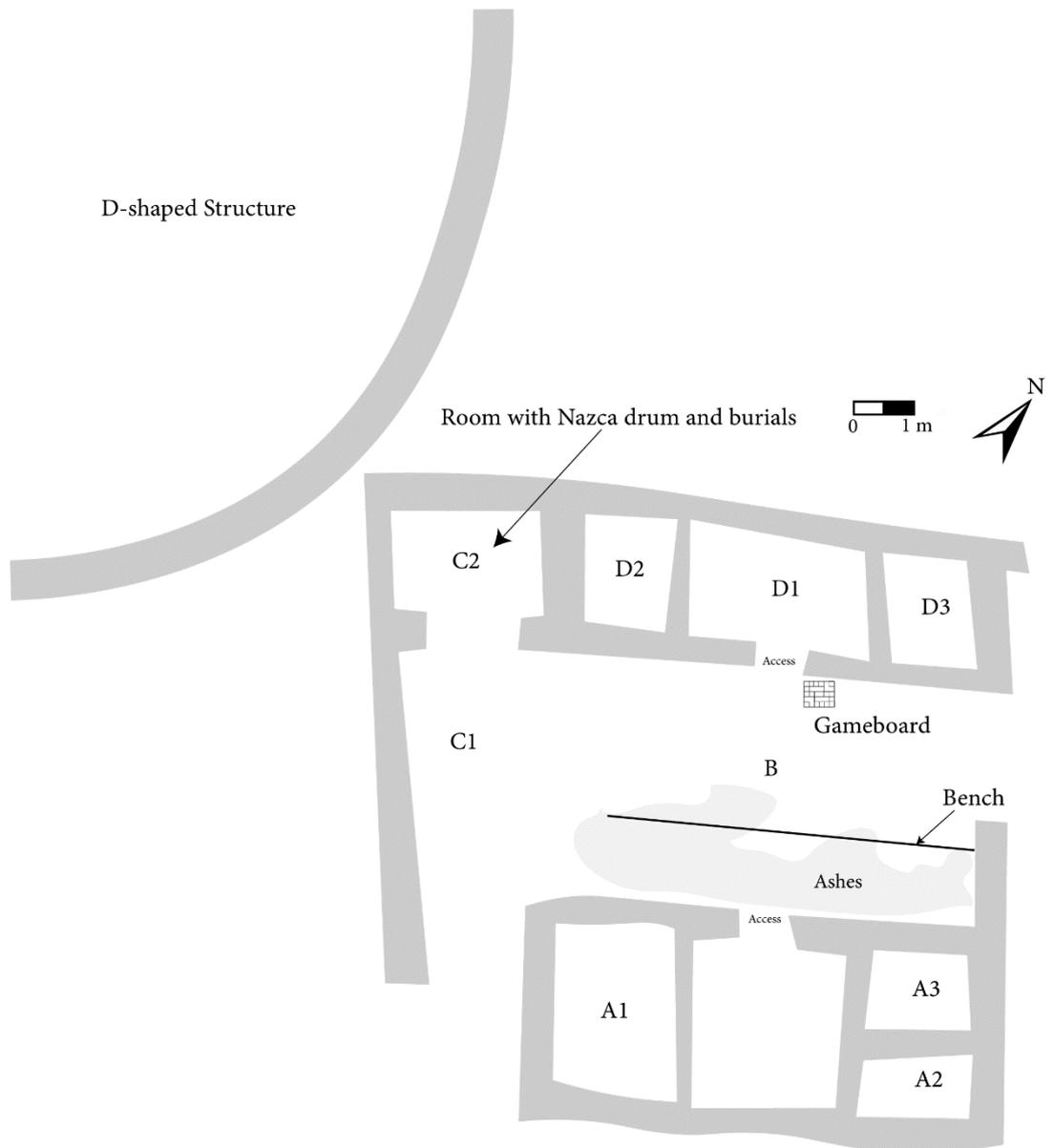


Figure 46. Unit 26, Sector C, Cerro Baúl, showing the finding location of BAU-1. Adapted from Williams et al. (2005: Figure 38).

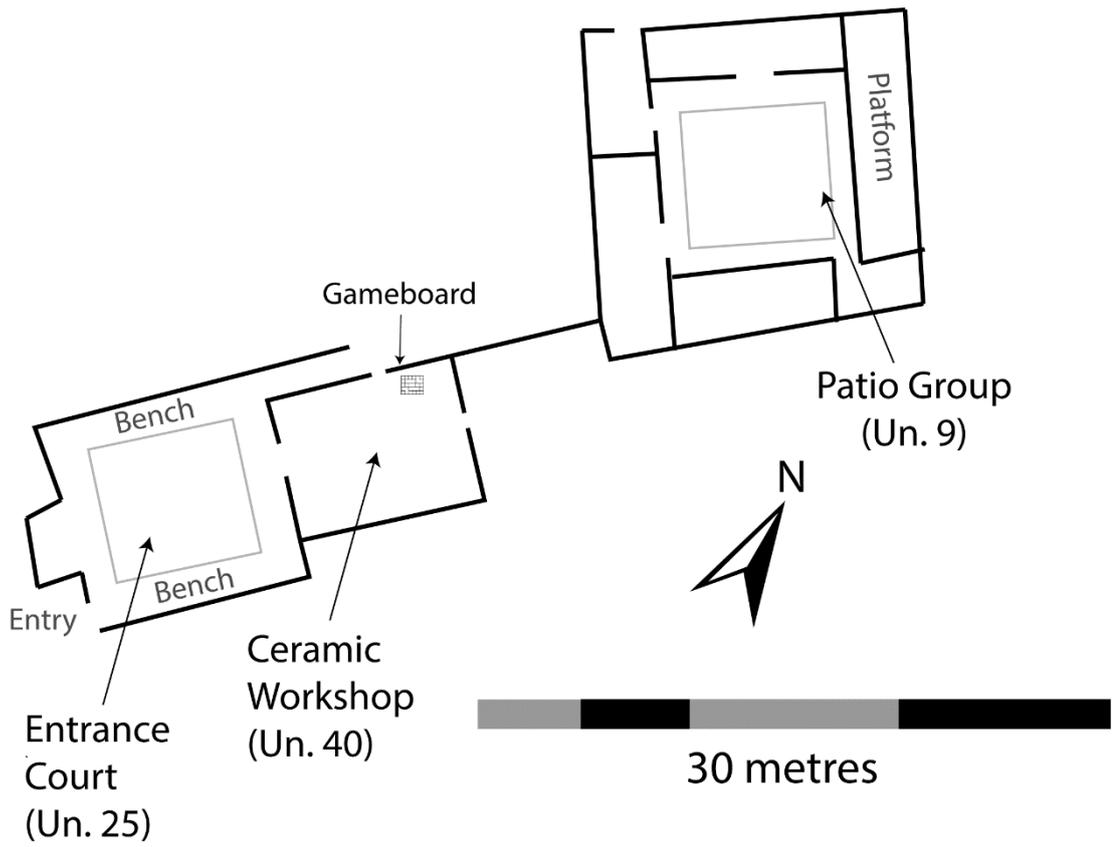


Figure 47. The 'palace' complex, comprising units 25, 40, and 9. Sector B, Cerro Baúl. Adapted from Moseley et al. (2005:17268, Figure 10).

FIGURES 279

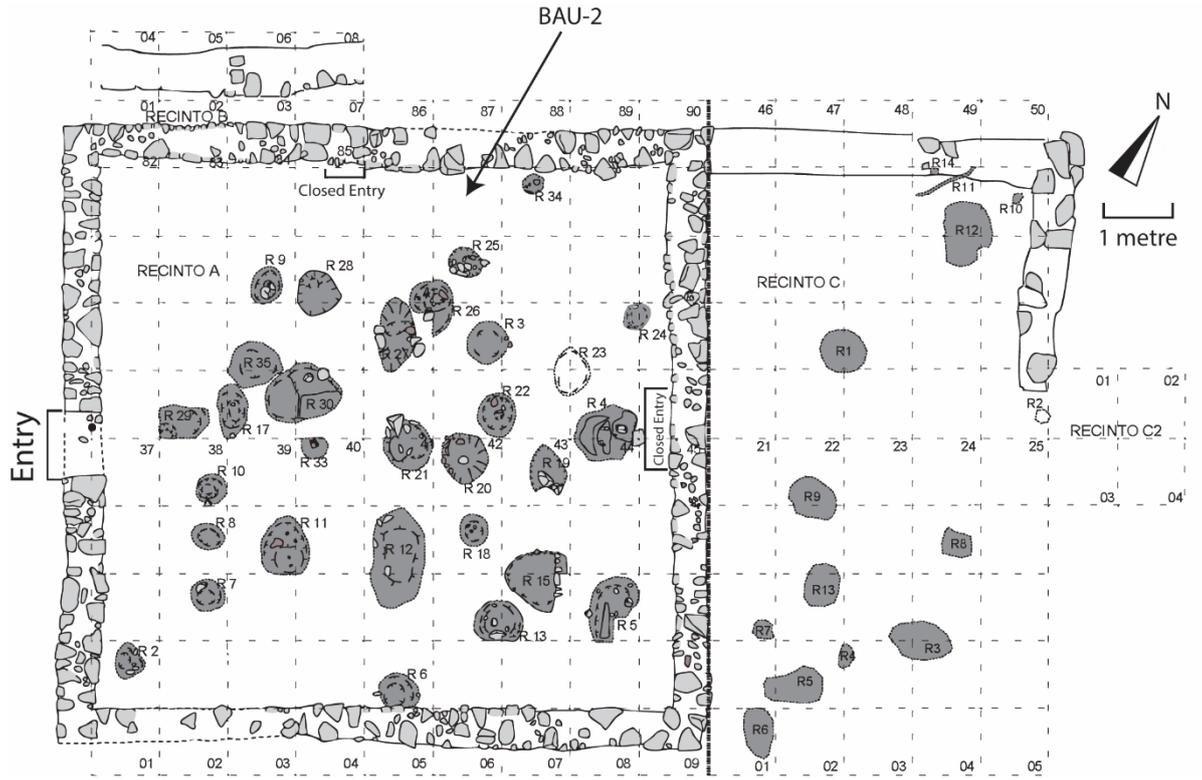


Figure 48. Unit 40 of the 'palace' complex in sector B of Cerro Baúl, showing the finding location of BAU-2. Adapted from Williams et al. (2005: Figure 38).

FIGURES 280

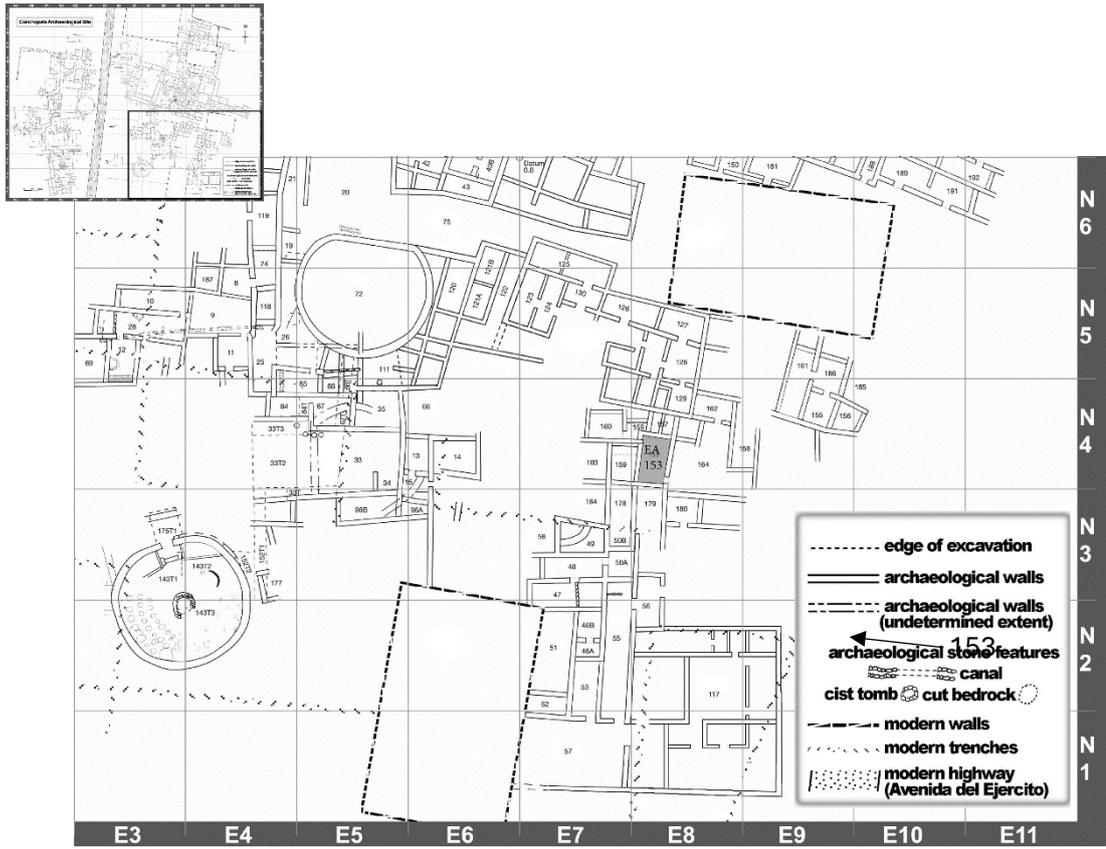


Figure 49. Map showing in light grey the location of the mortuary structure EA-153 within the archaeological site of Conchopata. Courtesy of Barbara and Patricia Wolff.

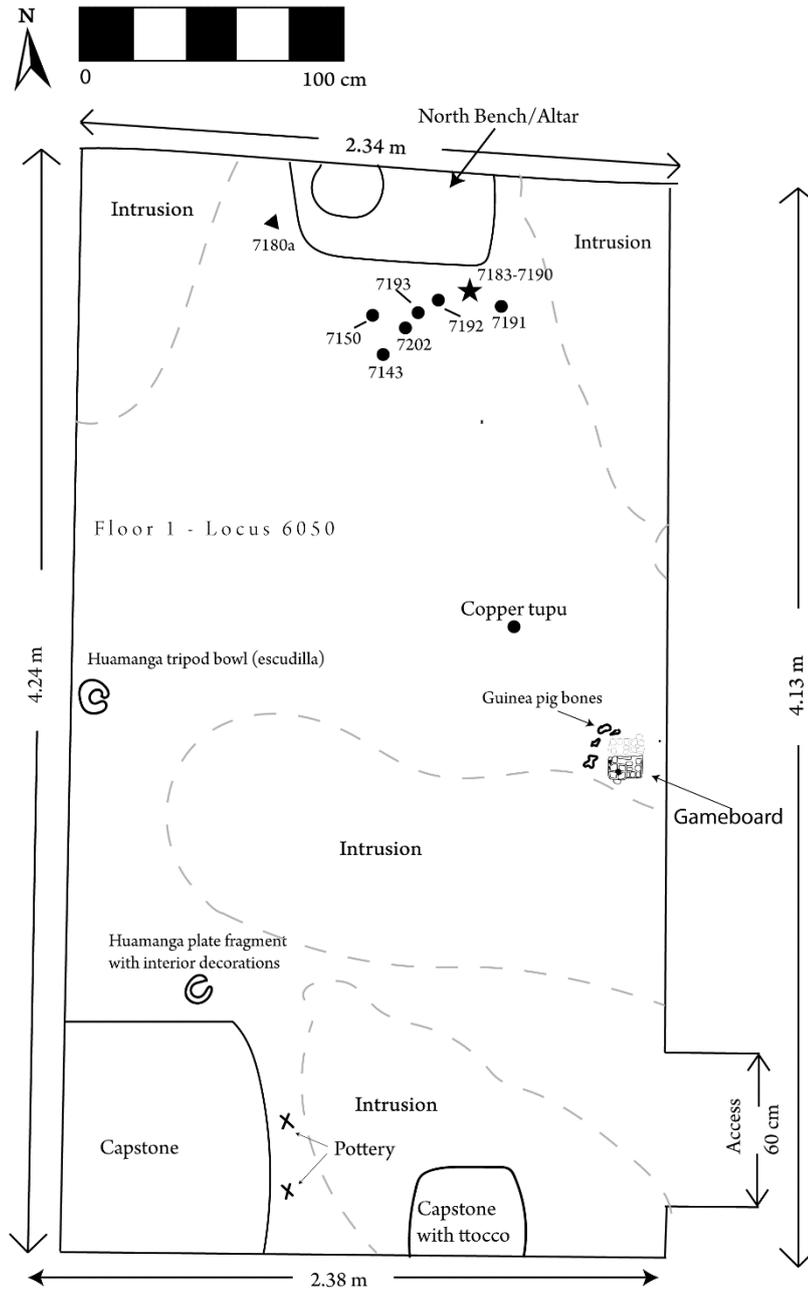


Figure 50. Plan of EA-153, showing the special findings (HE n.#) mentioned in the text and the location of COP-1. Drawing based on field notes and drawings by Charlene Milliken and Oscar Huamán López. Courtesy of Anita Cook and PAC.

FIGURES 282

EA 153
 LOCUS 6083
 Close-up of Banqueta Norte with Spondylus and Greenstone Offering

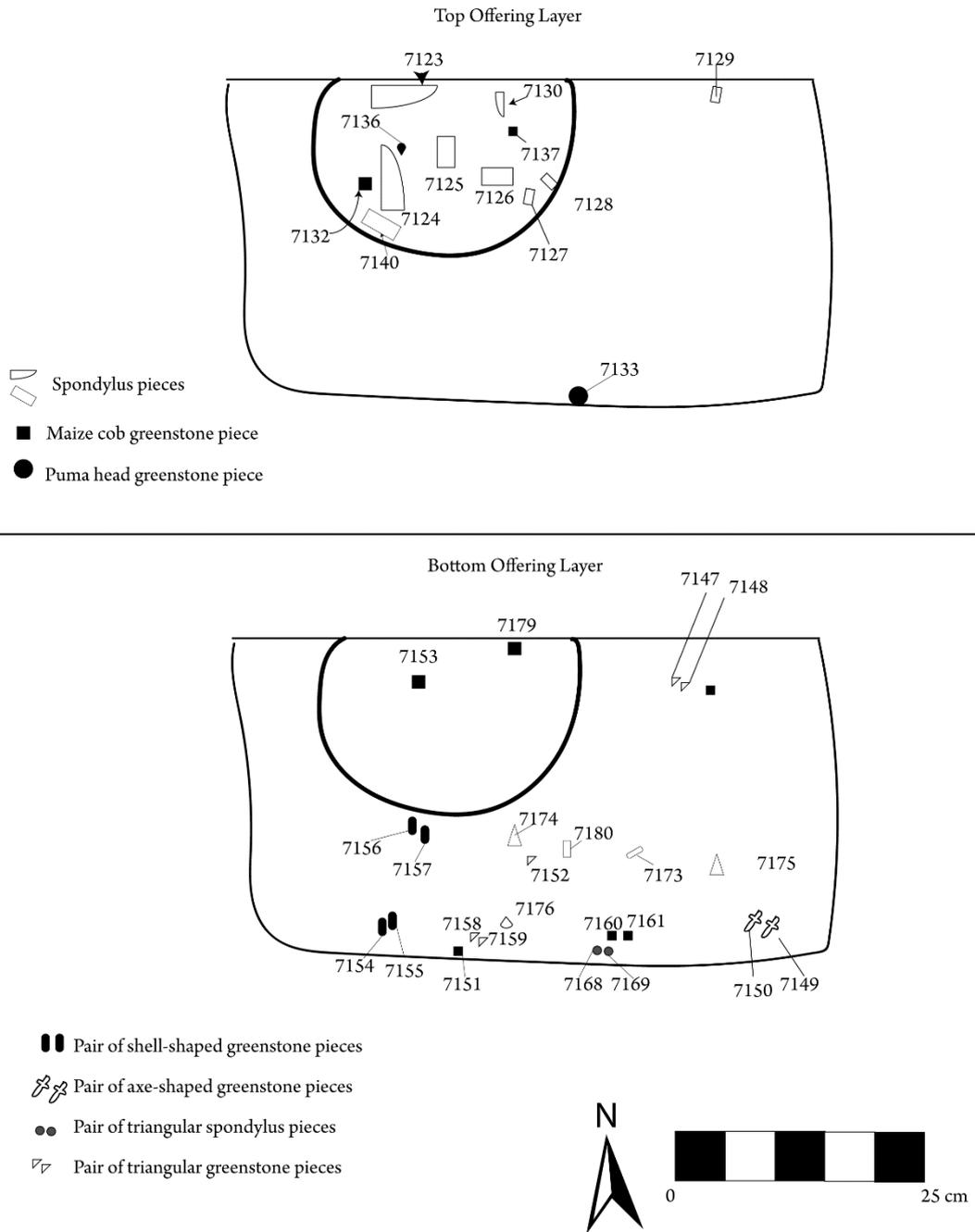


Figure 51. The northern altar offering inside the mortuary room EA-153. Drawing based on field notes and drawings by Charlene Milliken and Oscar Huamán López. Courtesy of Anita Cook and PAC.

FIGURES 283

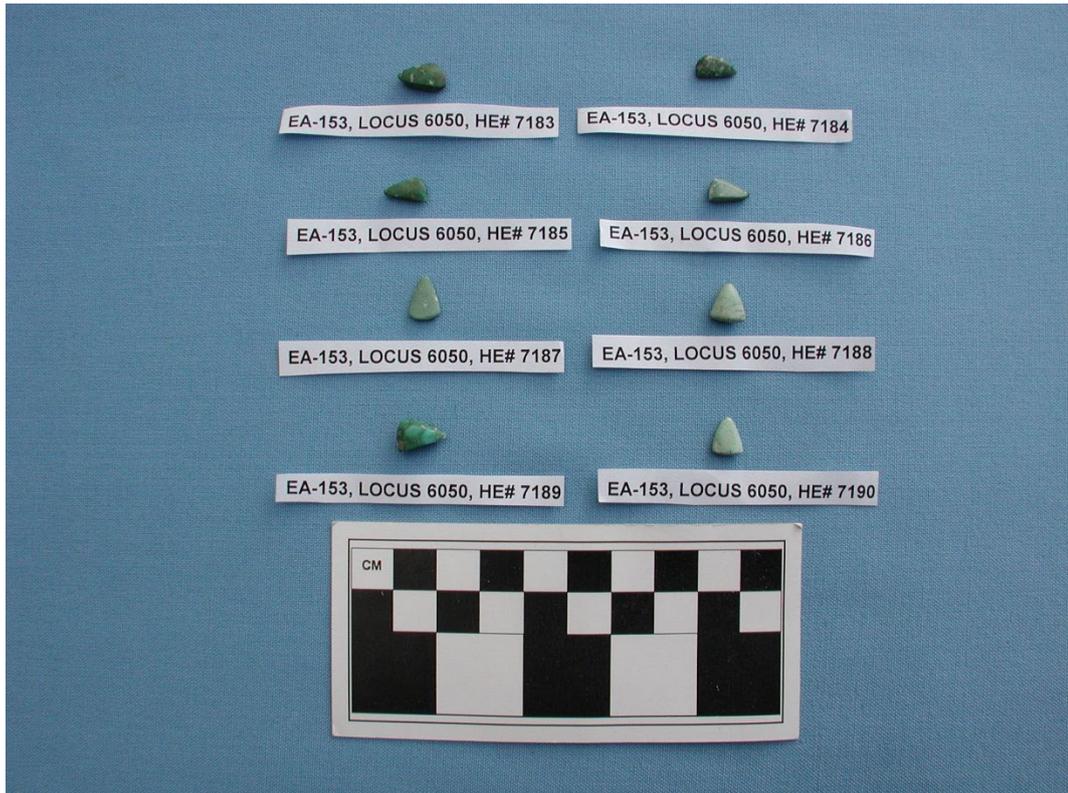


Figure 52. HE 7183-7190 from locus 6050 – the discrete cluster. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

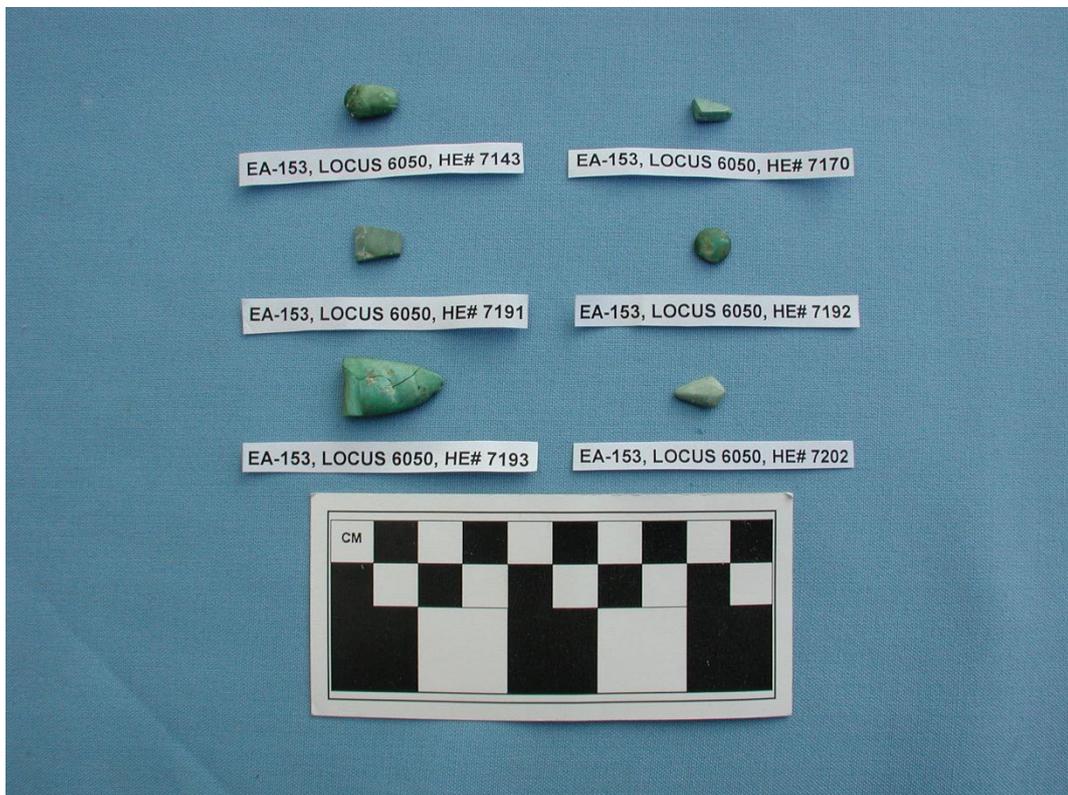


Figure 53. HE 7143, 7170, 7191, 7192, 7193, 7202, from locus 6050. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

FIGURES 284

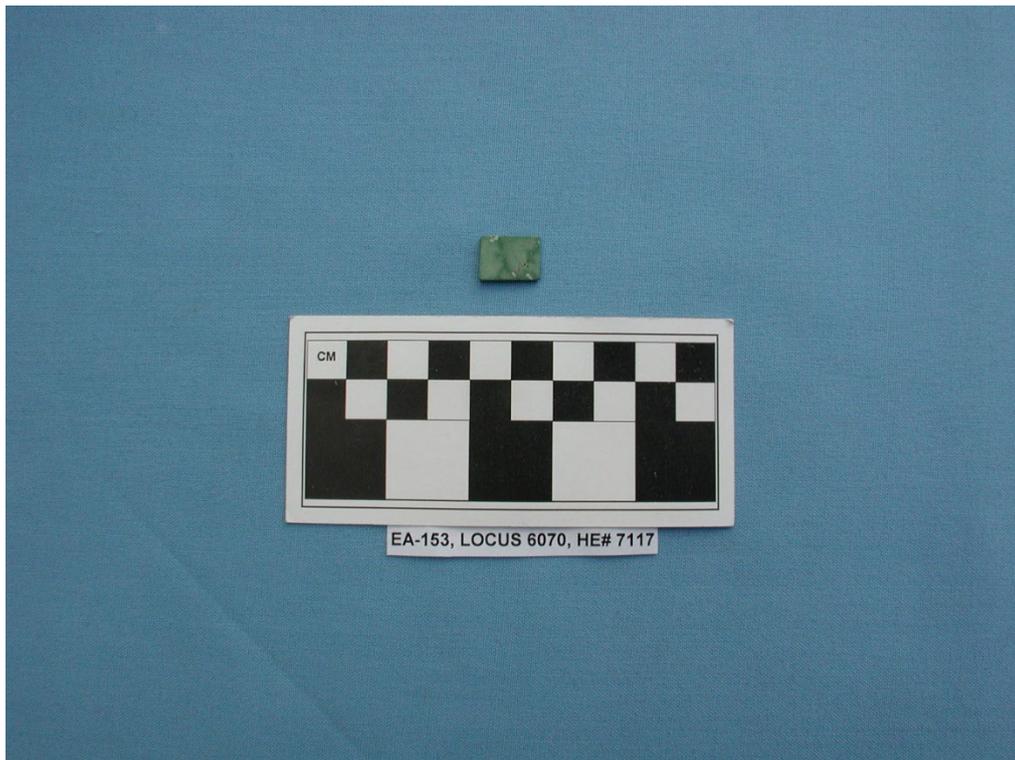


Figure 54. HE 7117 from locus 6070. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

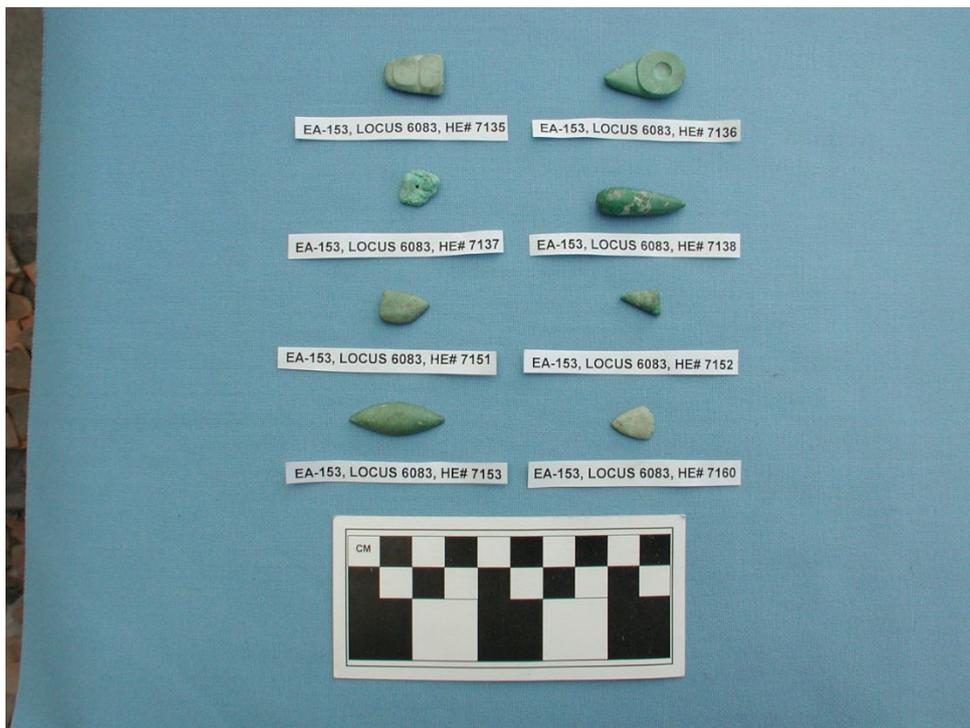


Figure 55. HE 7135-7138, HE 7151-7153, and 7160, from locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

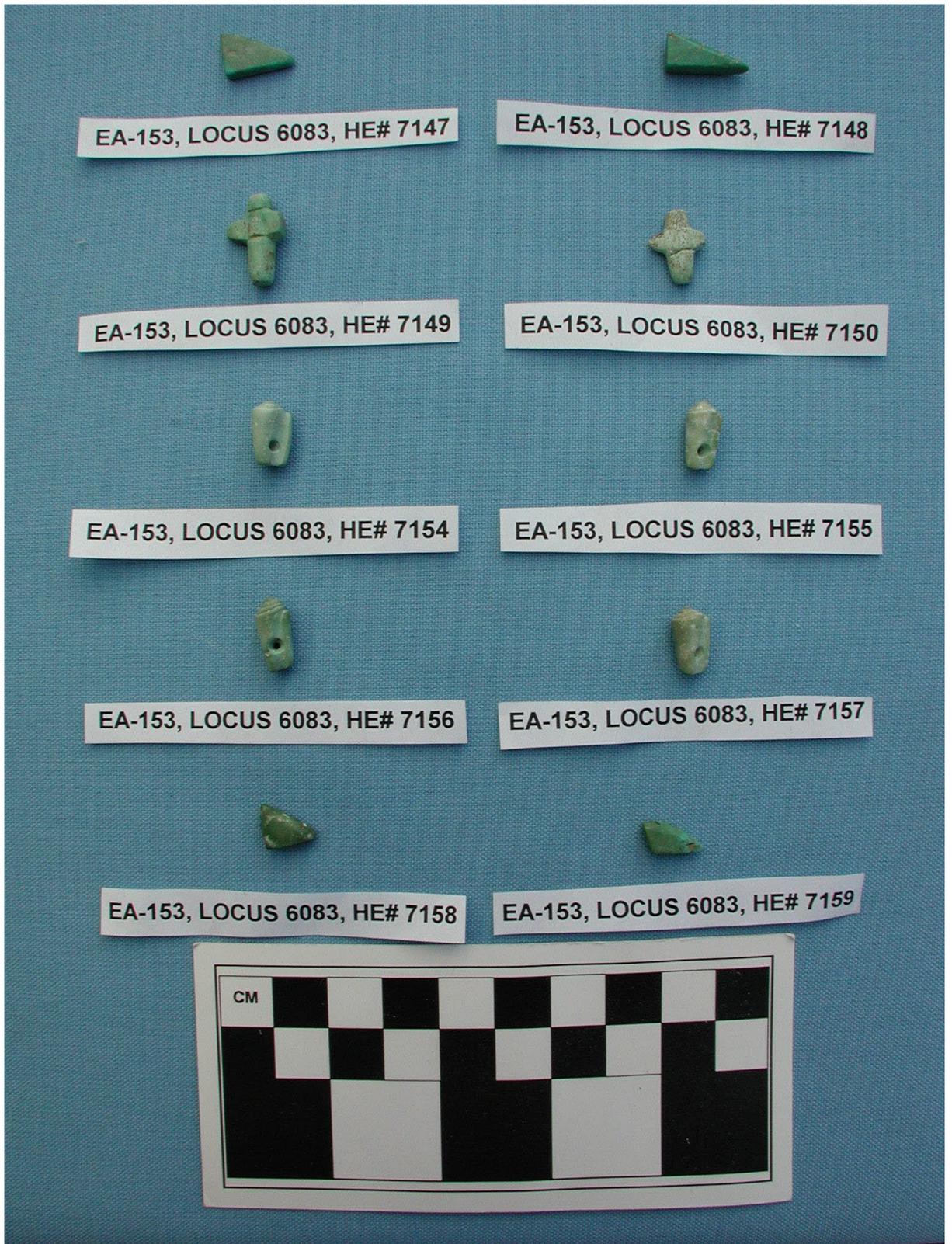


Figure 56. HE 7147-7150 and HE 7154-7159 from locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

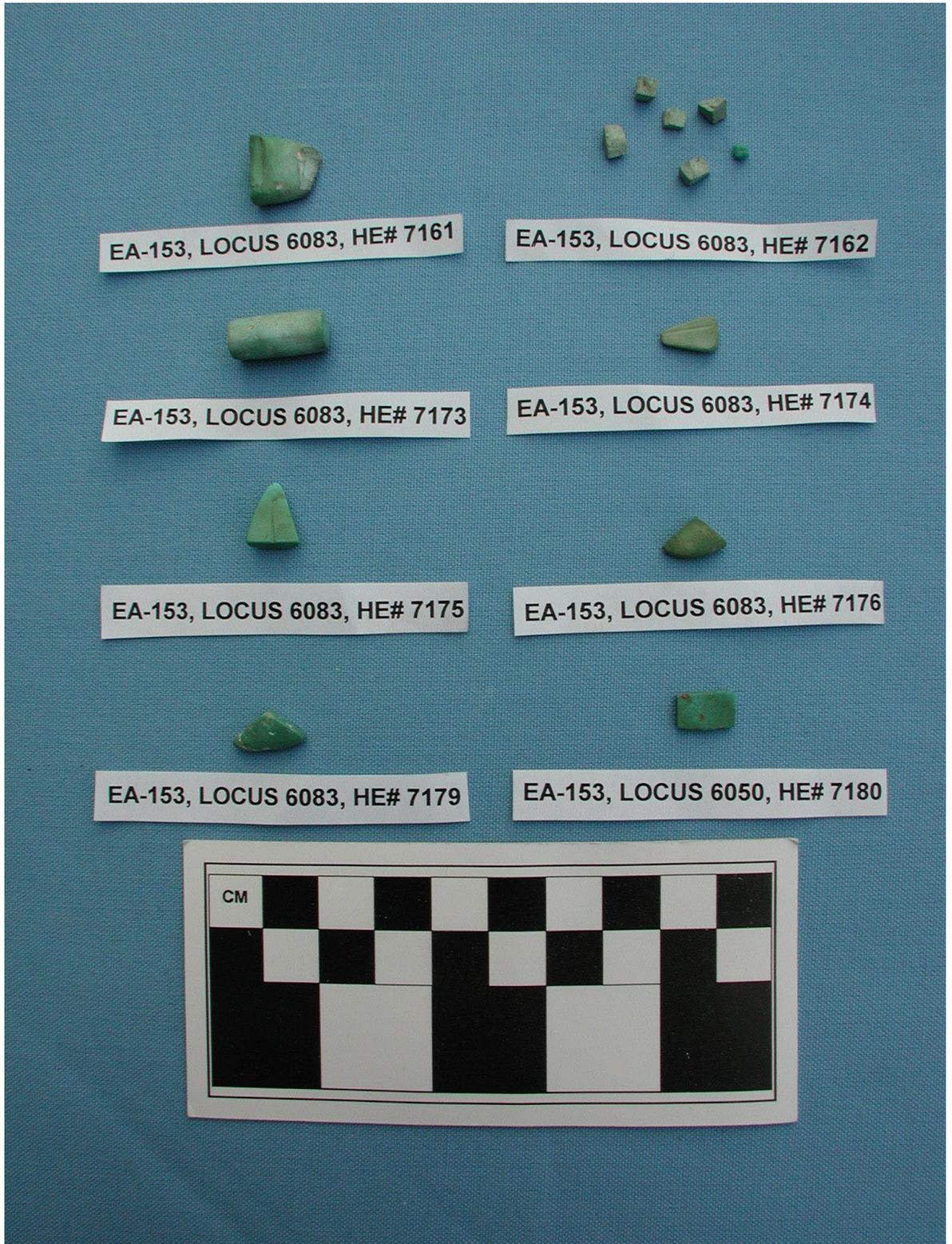


Figure 57. HE 7161-7162, 7173-7176, and 7179-7180 from locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.



Figure 58. Puma head (HE 7132), from locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

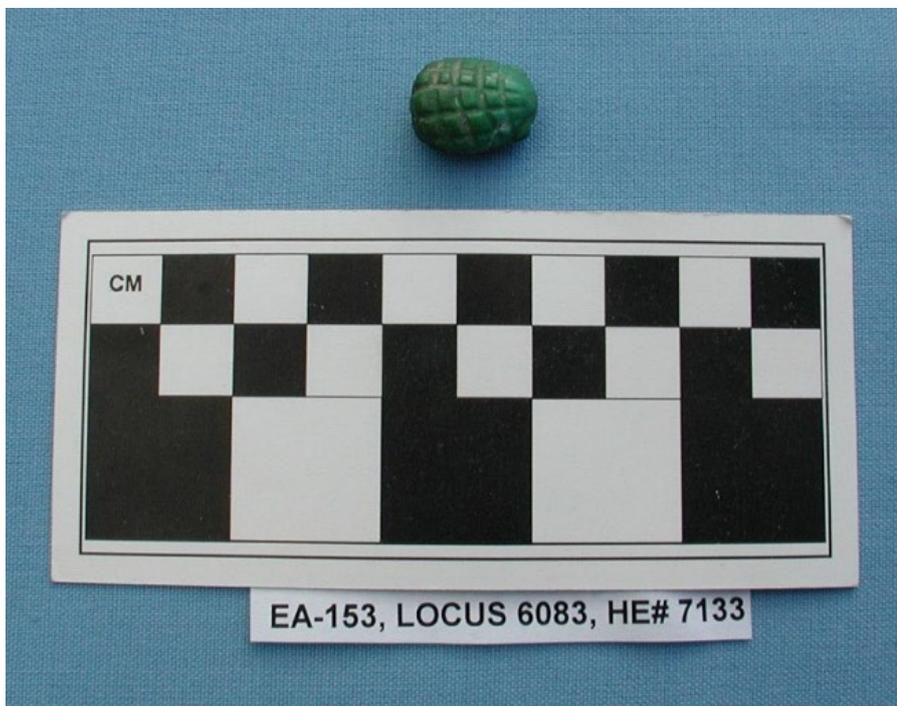


Figure 59. Maize cob (HE 7133), from locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

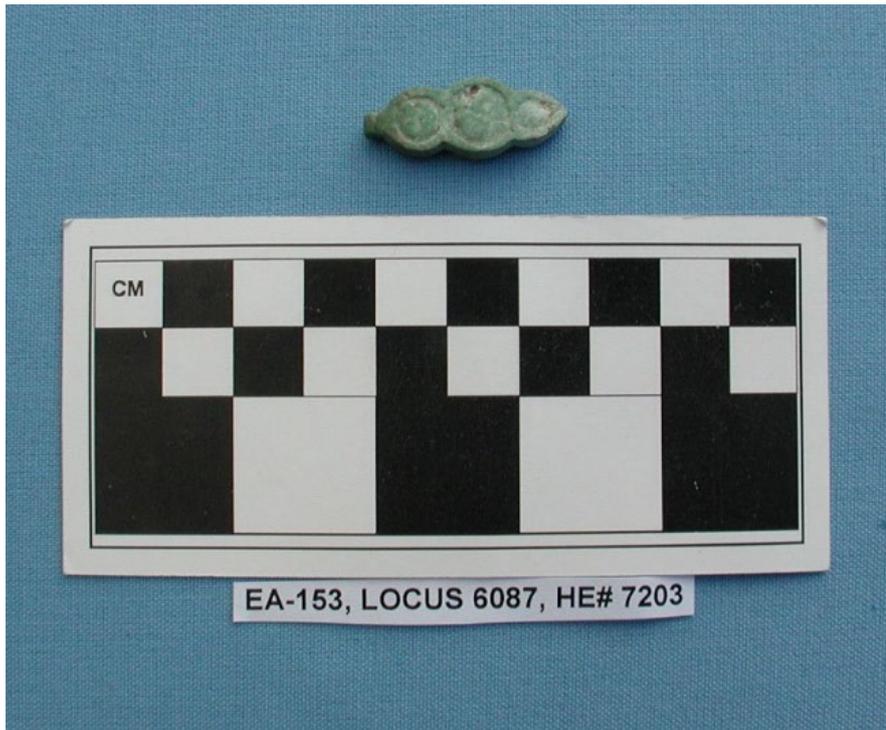


Figure 60. Vegetal pods piece (HE 7203) from locus 6087, stratigraphically lower than 6050. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

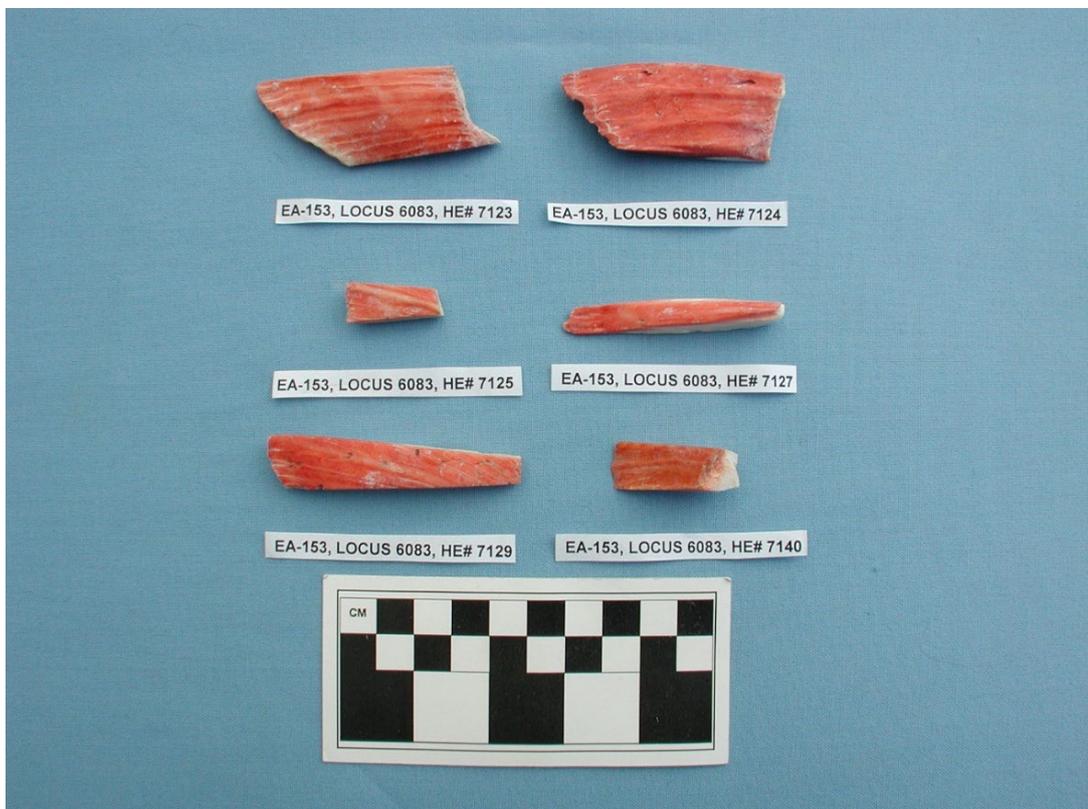


Figure 61. Spondylus wedges from the altar offering, locus 6083. Photograph by Charlene Milliken, courtesy of PAC.

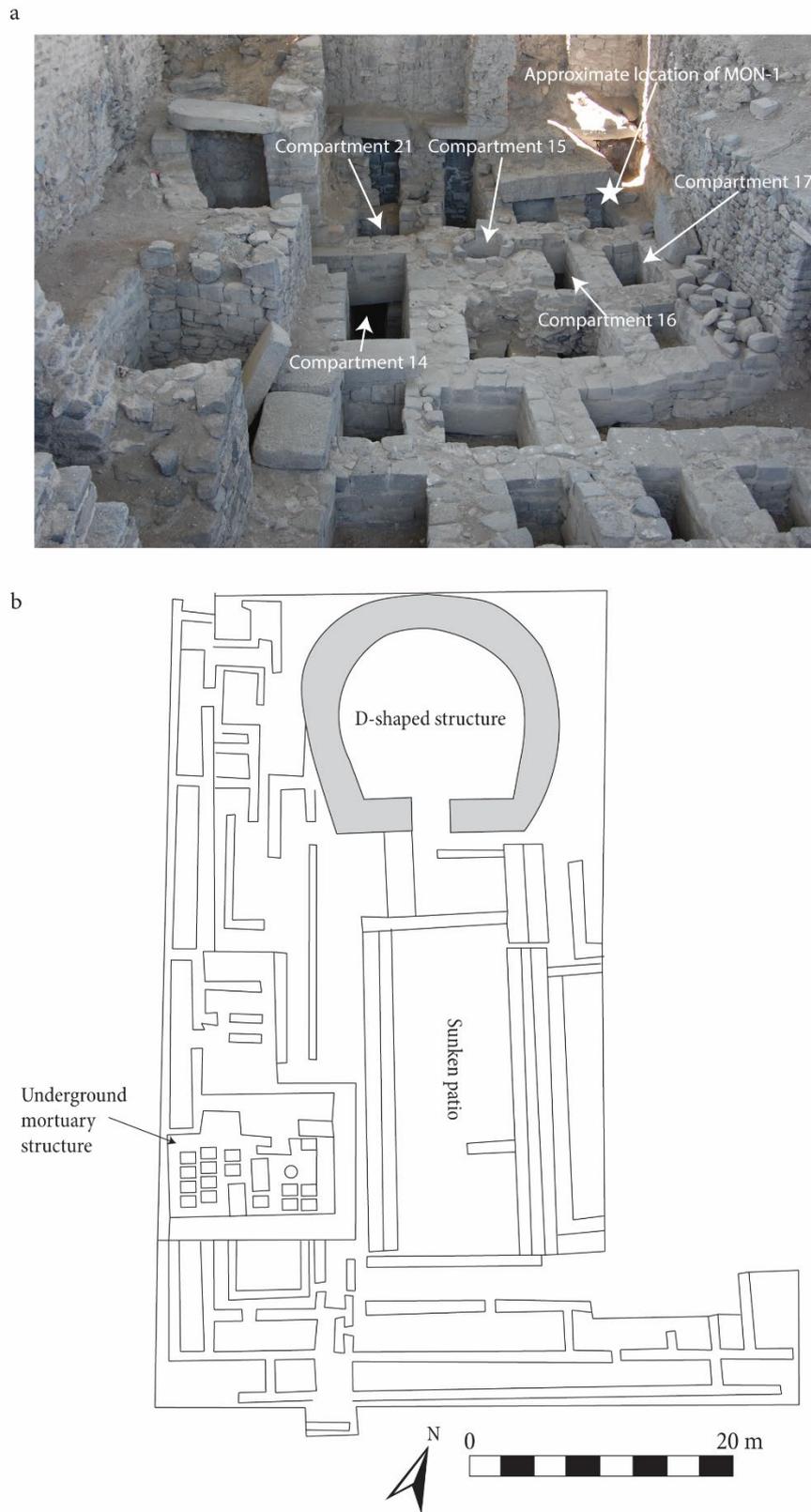


Figure 62. a) The second level of the mortuary complex excavated by Pérez (1998; 2000), showing the location of the finding location of MON-1, and the main compartments mentioned in the text. Photograph by Kim Dodge. b) Plan of Monqachayuq showing the location of the mortuary complex. Drawing based on the map presented by Cabrera Romero et al. (2022:37, Figure 1).

FIGURES 290

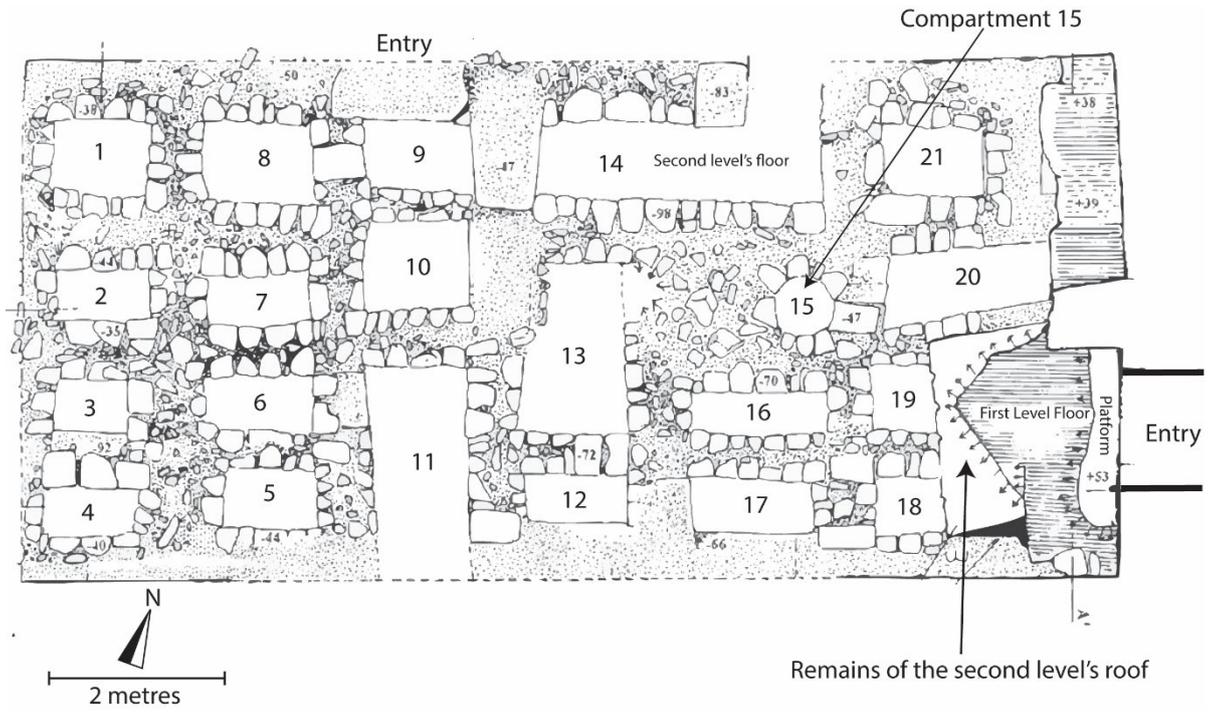


Figure 63. Plan of the second level of the Monqachayuq mortuary complex. Adapted from Pérez (2000:519, Figure 11).

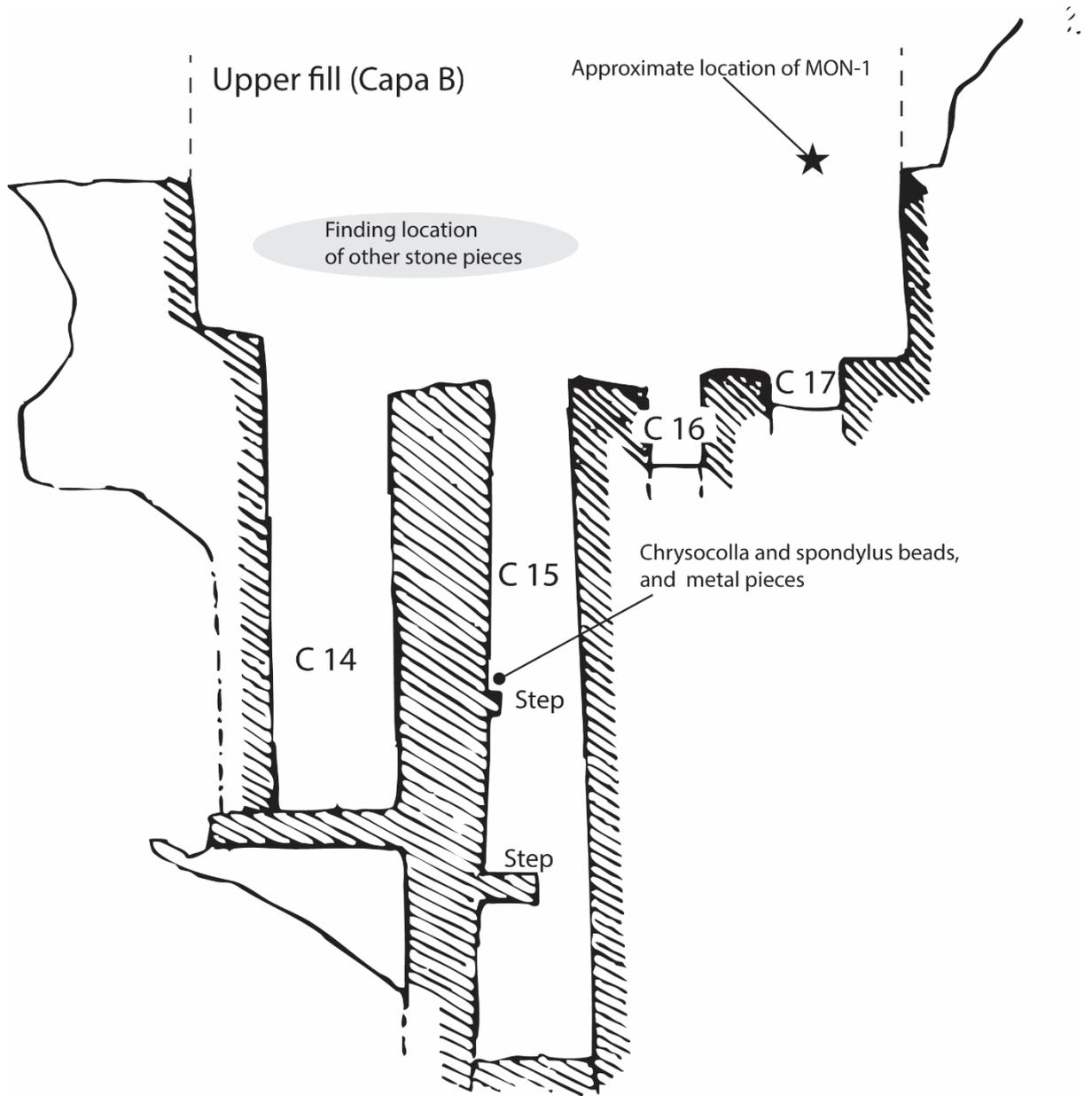


Figure 64. Profile drawing of the excavated part of the second level of the Monqachayuq mortuary complex, showing the relative position of the stone and spondylus items, as well as the board, MON-1. Adapted from Pérez (2000:523, Figure 17).



Figure 65. Stone pieces and beads from the Monqachayuq context (from 3 to 12 mm) excavated by Pérez (2000). Museo de sitio of Huari. Photo courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.



Figure 66. Additional stone pieces and beads from the Monqachayuq context (from 3 to 12 mm) excavated by Pérez (2000). Museo de sitio of Huari. Photograph courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.



Figure 67. Silver sheet figure (11 x 9 mm),¹¹ which Pérez (2000) interprets as a feline or camelid from compartment 15. Museo de sitio of Huari. Photograph courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.



Figure 68. Fragmented silver sheet piece (1.2 x 6 x 0.5 mm, missing top) from compartment 15, which Pérez (2000) interprets as a fleur-de-lys. Museo de sitio of Huari. Photograph courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.

¹¹ The measurements of the objects in Figures 67-70 are based on Pérez (2000:532).

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Figure 69. Gold sheet (4/2.5 x 1.5 cm) found in compartment 15. Photograph courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.



Figure 70. Dual stepped cleft motif (4.5 x 4 x 0.5 cm) found either inside compartment 15 or in the fill above. Photograph courtesy of the DDC of Ayacucho.

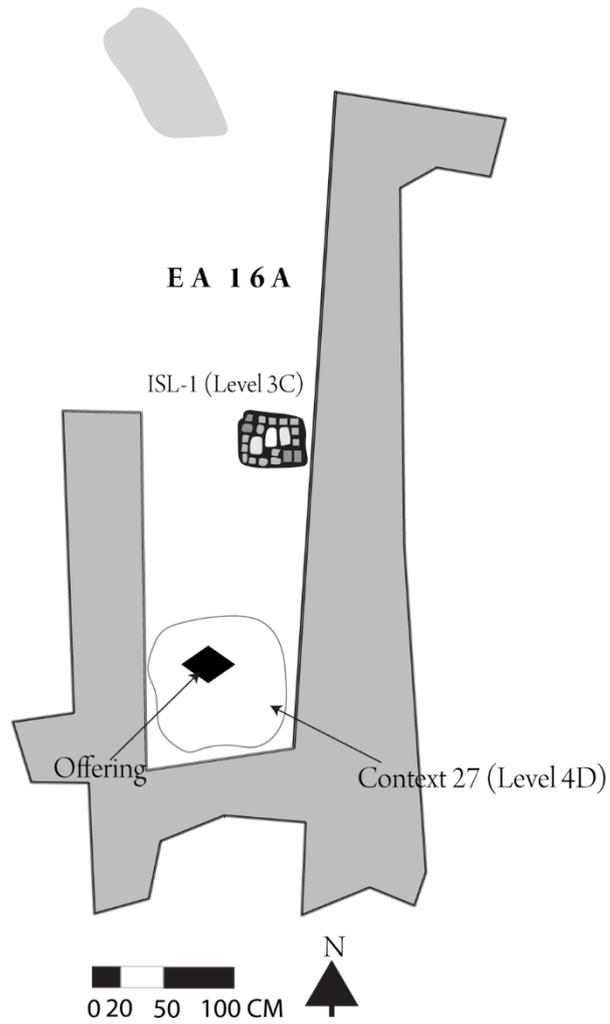
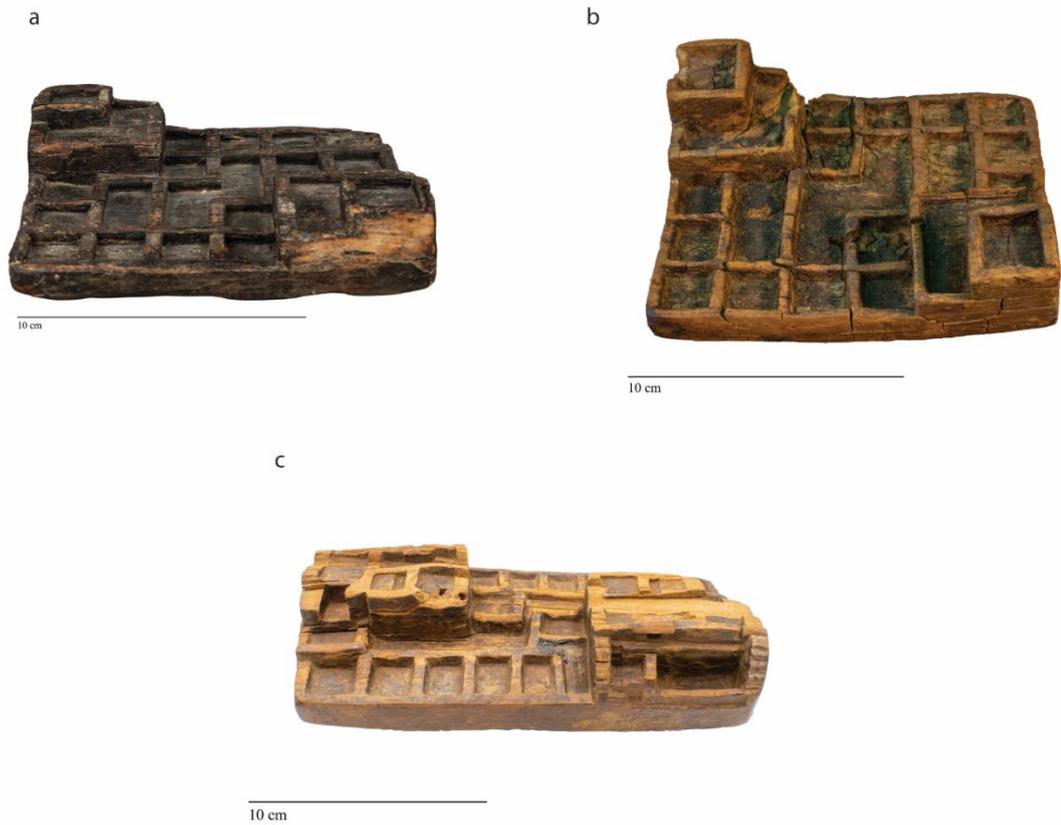


Figure 71 EA 16A showing the finding location of the board ISL-1 and the intrusive pit with the offering, Islacha, Pumapuquio, Acocro, Huamanga. Drawing based on Bustamante (2008: *Espacio Arquitectónico 16A*, Figures 1-2)

Phase B2 Type 1 Boards



Phase B2 Type 3 Boards

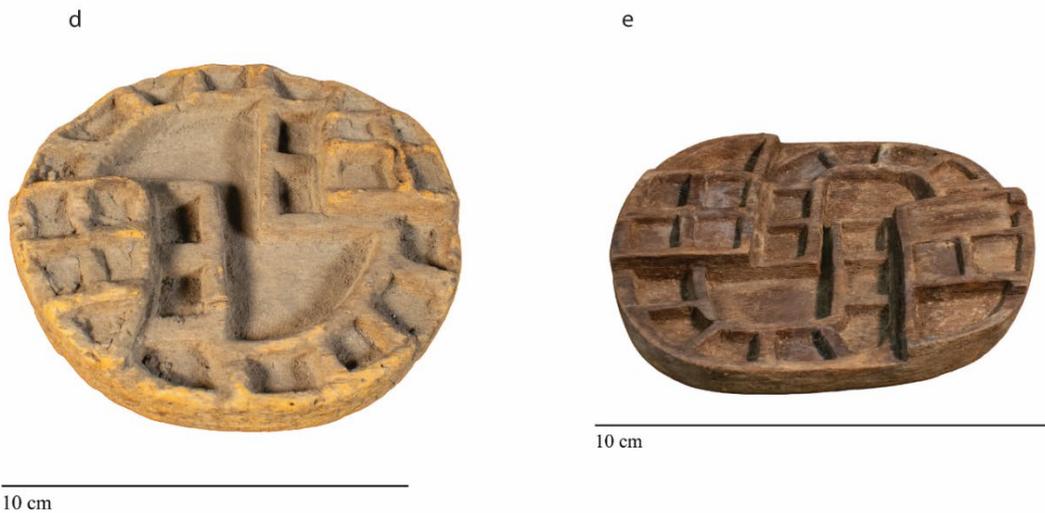


Figure 72. Examples of Phase B2 Type-1 and Type-3 boards. a) CHA-1, allegedly from Chan Chan, Trujillo, La Libertad. Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg, Sweden, Gothenburg; b) MUD-1, Museo delle Culture, Milan, Italy; c) TOM-1, from Tomaval, La Libertad. Museo Arqueologico de la Universidad Nacional de Trujillo (formerly in the private collection of Cristobal Campana); d) PAC-1, from Pachacamac, Lima. Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin; d) MUD-2, Museo delle Culture, Milan, Italy.



Figure 73. TOM-1, detail showing architectural representation in zone A.



Figure 74. The hill of Shimpirca today. In the distance, the city of Gualaceo is visible and lower to the left is part of the modern urban area of Chordeleg.

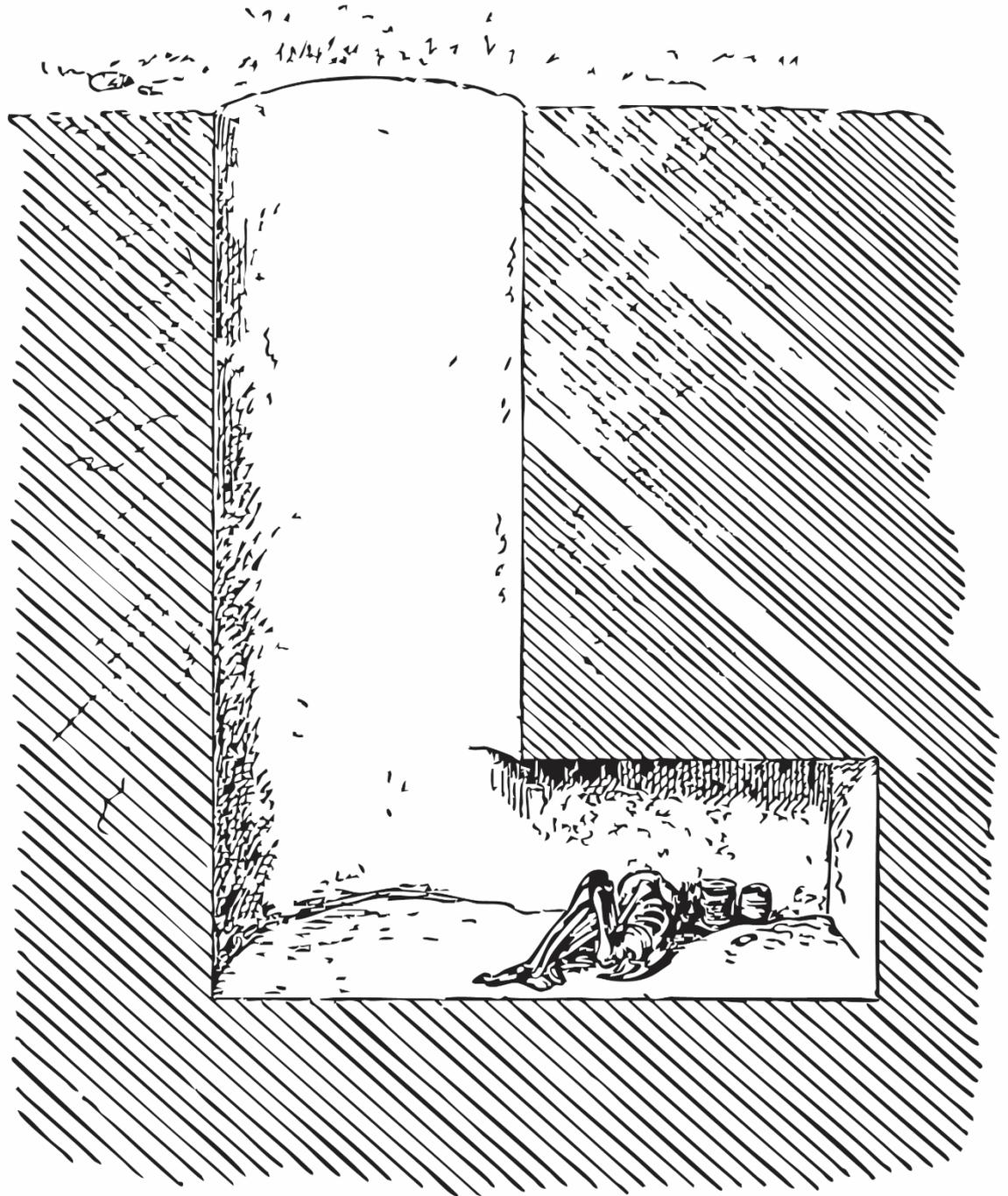


Figure 75. Illustration of a Tacalshapa (Idrovo III or Meyers IV?) circular shaft burial pit showing the lateral chamber (bolsón), with the main interment alongside the accompanying grave goods. Adapted from Verneau and Rivet (1912-1922:117).



Figure 76. Painting commissioned by Antonio Heduvides Serrano of a now lost gold plaque allegedly found in the same burial as CHO-1. It was originally mounted onto a wooden frame. The date given, 1869, possibly indicates that the burial was excavated that year. Private collection, Quito.

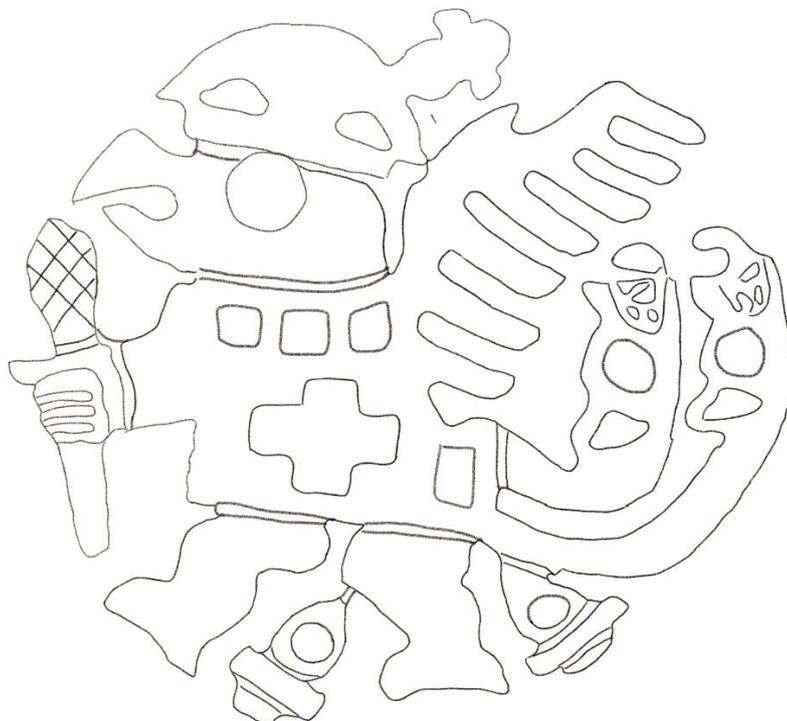


Figure 77. Drawing of the iconography on a gold earring from a Tacalshapa burial in Zhingate, Sigsig.



Figure 78. Spear-thrower from Guarainag, detail.



10 cm

Figure 79. Replica of CHO-1, commissioned by Adolf Bastian Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

Metal peg

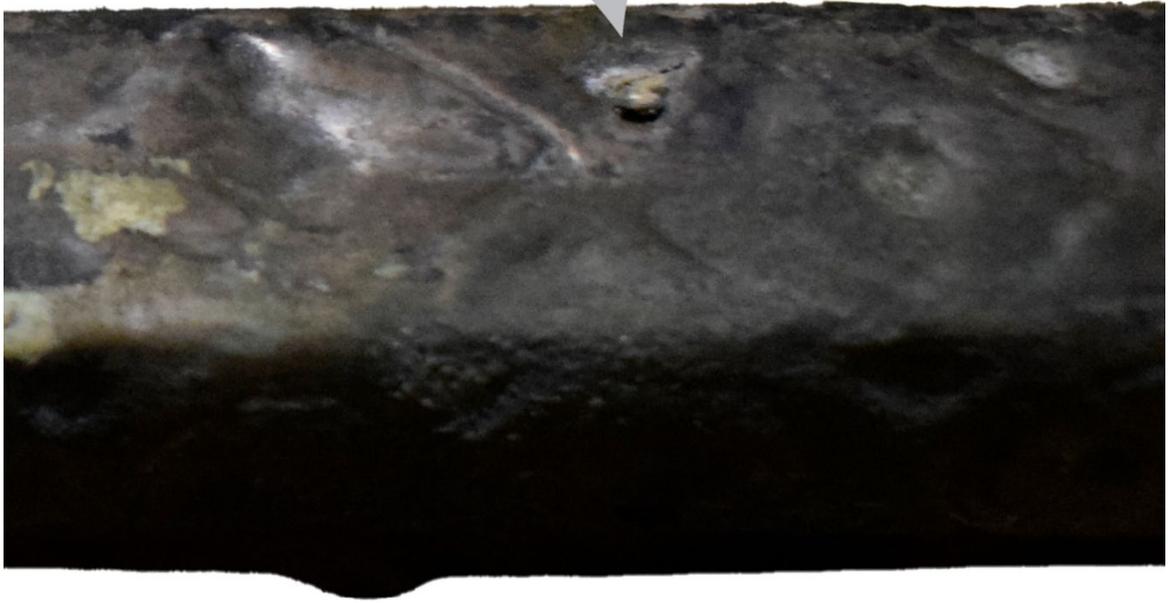


Figure 80. Spear-thrower from Guarainag, detail.



Figure 81. Lateral and bottom iconography of CHO-1. Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

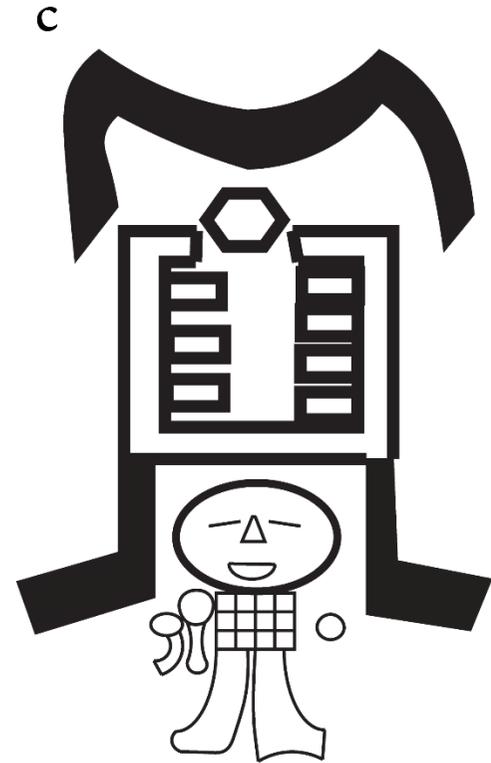
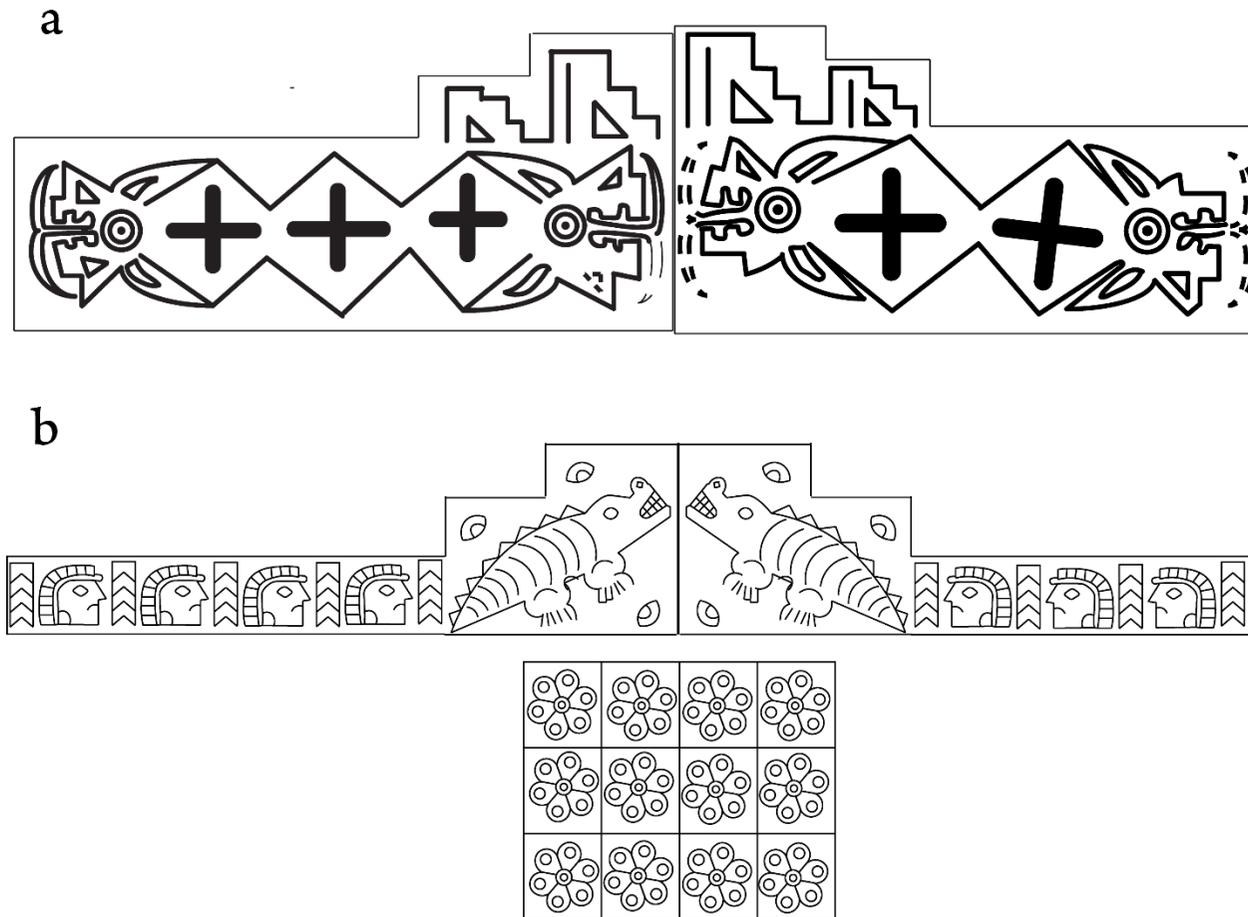


Figure 83. a) Iconography along the sides of CAB-1; b) Iconography along the sides (top) and base (bottom) of CHO-1; c) Iconography on the surface of CAB-22.



Figure 83. Coca takers beneath a bicephalous arc. Moche Archive fineline drawing number 0099. Drawings by Donna McClelland. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.



Figure 84. Figures taking coca beneath a bicephalous arc. Moche Archive fineline drawing number 0522. Drawings by Donna McClelland. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

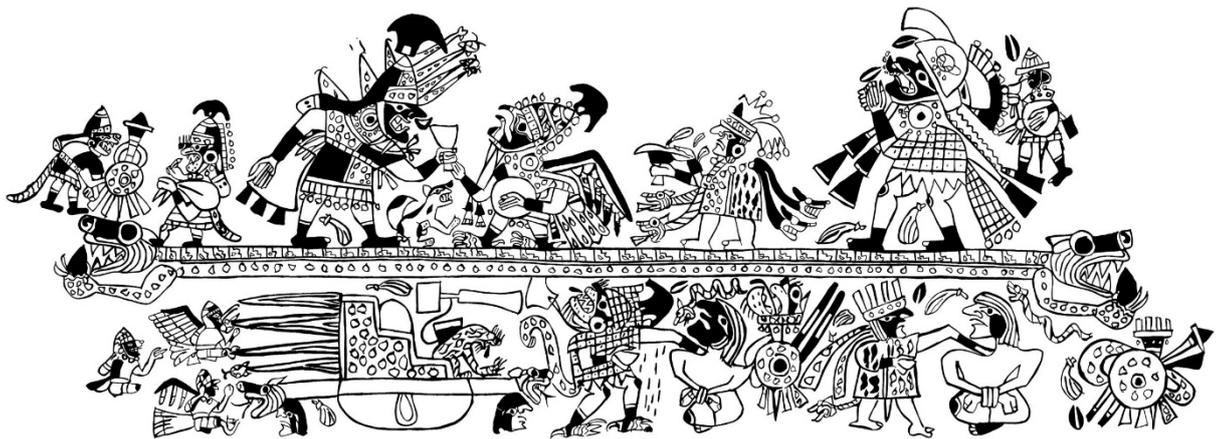


Figure 85. Presentation theme. Moche Archive fineline drawing number 0092. Drawings by Donna McClelland. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

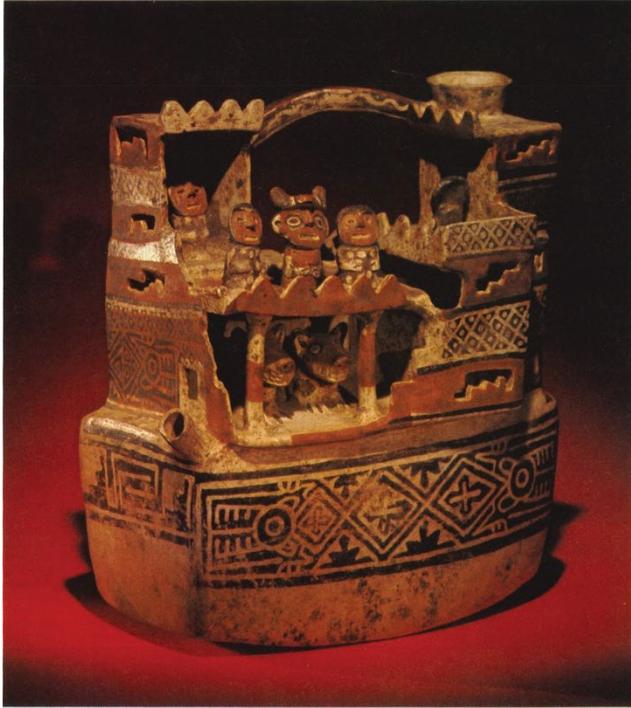


Figure 86. Splayed figure from Pashash. Note the step-fret motifs running along the base of the platform upon which the figure rests. Museo Zonal Arqueológico de Cabana.



Figure 87. Stone carving of a "crested bundle" from Pashash. Museo Zonal Arqueológico de Cabana.

a

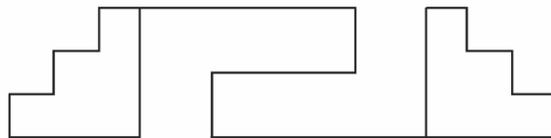
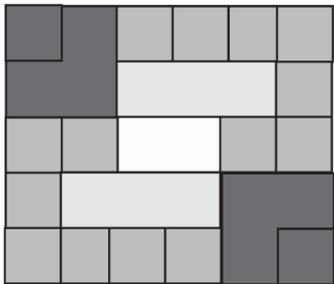


b



Figure 88. Examples of the interlocking step-fret motifs. a) Recuay vessel in the shape of a house, from Lapiner (1976: Figure 417); b) Recuay vessel in the shape of a lordly figure, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin (V A 48262).

a



b

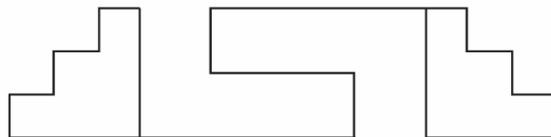
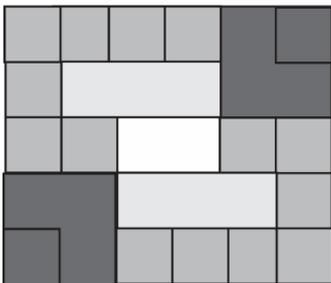


Figure 89. Drawing showing the interlocking step-fret as a projection of the layout of type-1 boards.

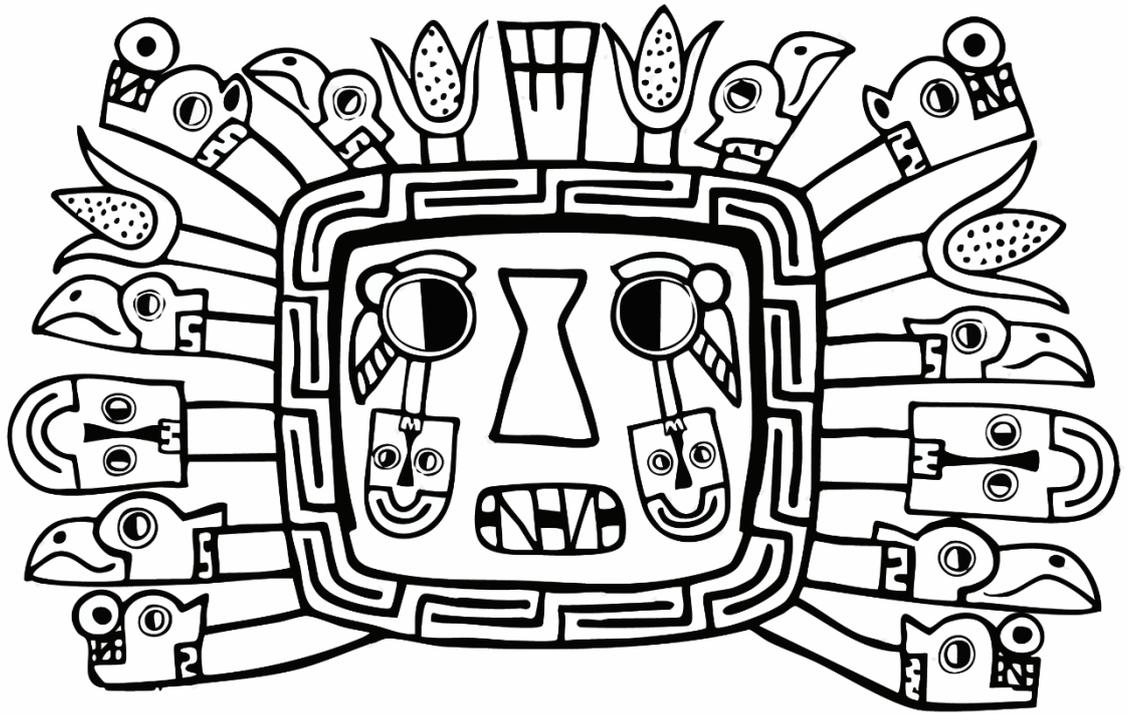


Figure 90. Staff deity head on an urn from Pacheco at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, Division of Anthropology, cat. 41.0/5314. Drawing adapted from Cook (2013:114, Figure 83).

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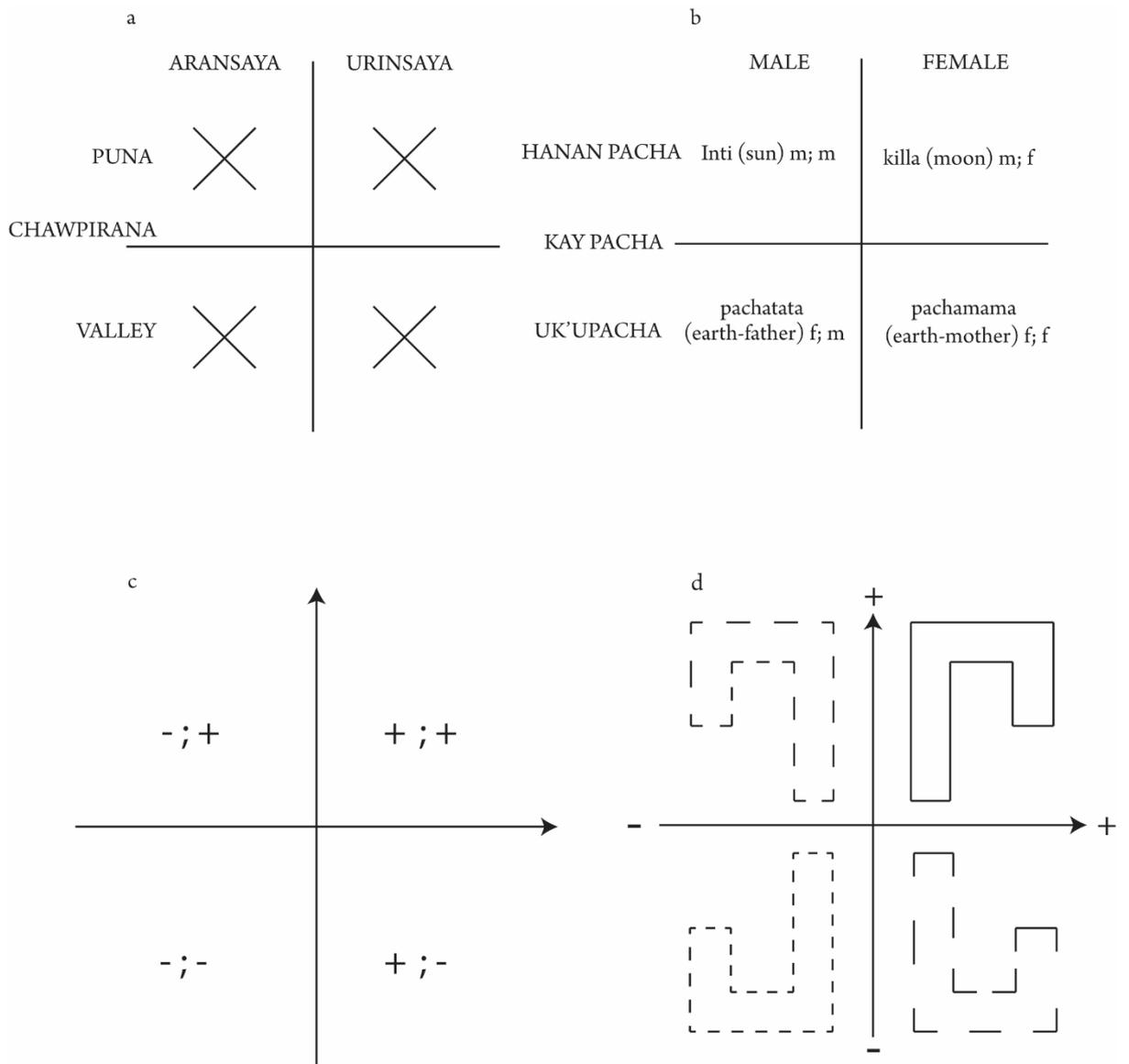


Figure 91. a) and b) Macha quadripartite system according to Platt (1986). c) and d) formalisation of Platt's quadripartite system in a Cartesian coordinate system – with a horizontal axis (x) and a vertical axis (y). The first quadrant is the top right one, which has both positive x and y (+; +). Accordingly, quadrant 2 is (-; +), quadrant 3 (-; -), quadrant 4 (+; -). In Macha's quadripartite model, the elements that are (-; +) and (+; -) mediate across the opposites (+, +) and (-, -), and they can be both + or – depending on context.



Figure 92. The white circles indicate the location of two Recuay hilltop settlements, Inkawain and Shanllacoto, situated north of Caraz in the Callejón de Huaylas. Note the dual opposition of these settlements in relation to one another.



Figure 93. Cleft headdress form showing the dual stepped design on a ceramic vessel from Pashash. From Grieder (1978: Pl. 4).



Figure 94. Splayed figure painted on a ceramic sherd from Pashash with radiating appendages in the shape of a snake or amaru, Museo Arqueológico Zonal de Cabana.

Appendix A

ANDEAN BOARDGAMES' RULES

The Gran Chaco Race Game

In the early 20th century, the Swedish anthropologist Erland Nordenskiöld, whose interest in the Andean gameboards has been discussed in Chapter I, documented a type of boardgame played in the Gran Chaco region in the first decade of the last century. Due to his interest in games as a pathway to identifying cross-cultural connections, Nordenskiöld was keen to record gaming practices and provides a detailed analysis of a game that was played in similar ways by different communities of the Gran Chaco region in Bolivia at the time of his fieldwork, such as Lengua, Choroti, Asluslay, and Tapiete. The game employs:

- Wooden sticks or chips with one flat and one convex side – points are determined by how many sticks fall with the convex sides facing upward.
 - The convex side can sometimes be decorated with a pattern
- The track is linear and composed of shallow pits carved in the ground
 - There are a variable number of spaces, in some communities it is 23 in others 21: space 1 and 23 or 1 and 21 are the houses of the players.
 - Space 2-11 (or 2-10) and 13-22 (or 12-20) have stalks or twigs placed in them, sometimes these are conceived as sheep.
 - The central compartment (12 or 11) is empty and is called 'river'
- Arrows or pointed sticks are used as a player's marker and at the beginning of the game they are placed in space 1 and 23.
- More than two players can take part in the game
 - Players are always men

Sticks are thrown and arrow-markers are moved as many spaces as dictated by the throw. Once a player's marker has passed the central space, it can start capturing the stalks/sheep on the opponent's half of the track. The goal is to capture all the sheep pieces and then the opponent's arrow-marker to win the game. If a player falls into the central compartment (i.e., the river) and cannot get out of it within the next throw, the marker needs to go back to the closest stalk a player still has on their side of the board. If there aren't any stalks left and both

markers fall into the river, it's a draw. This is a race game with certain specificities that are unknown in European or Asian race games, suggesting at the very least a local origin.

The Huayro Game Played in Sigsig, Azuay, Ecuador

A version of the huayro game with a board, dice, and tokens, has been played until recently in the Andean village of Sigsig, Azuay, in southern Ecuador – where it was recorded at different times with relatively small variation in game mechanics and equipment. The general rules followed by the game are the following:

- The game uses two dice that have a typical pichca shape, emphasising again hierarchical duality, in that one is bigger than the other.
 - Five of the six sides are marked with points – from 1 to 5 – and the sixth side is empty – it is called lluchu, meaning naked or destitute in Kichwa.
- The board was traditionally made from an agave leaf, but today it can also be made of wood. The name given to it is 'Tishno'.
- The track is composed of 29 round-shaped compartments carved in the agave or wooden board: 24 small ones and 5 bigger ones, placed at regular intervals (4 small spaces apart).
 - The bigger compartments are called 'houses' (casas).
 - In the version recorded in the 1960s there are two paths to the central house: a shorter one comprising 10 compartments, and a longer one comprising 20.
 - In the more recent version, recorded in the 21st century, there are two paths of equal length that start separately but then merge on the last section of the track toward the central compartment.
- Maize kernels, beans, or any other seeds are used as tokens.
 - The number of tokens per team is not specified, but there are clearly multiple pieces that need to be moved by each player.
- Two groups play against each other, each headed by one person called 'callai' (which means 'beginning' in Kichwa), who is the one starting to throw the die.
 - If a die falls with the blank side upward, players must throw the die again up to three times.
 - If a die falls standing upright on its (narrower) base, the team wins immediately.

The goal of the game is to race the pieces to the central house. In the version reported in the 1960s, the team who first throws a 1, which is also marked with a Christian cross in one of the dice that have been ethnographically documented, picks a shorter track, while the other team has to follow the longer one. This is a pure race game with no capturing mechanism. The team that first races all their tokens to the central compartment is the winner. In the 21st-century version of the game, the tokens need to first reach the central compartment and then race back to the start in order to win.

The Píchica of La Carolina, San Luis, Argentina

Gentile (1998) examined seven versions of a game called píchica (clearly derivative of pisca) described in an archival document dating from 1920, and concerning the Argentine provinces of San Luis and Córdoba, including several different localities within these provinces, such as Los Lobos, El Arroyo San Martín, Nueva Escocia, La Carolina (El Arenal), Lafinur, Balcarce, and San Bartolomé. While the rules vary slightly from one version to the other (and from one place to the other), they all clearly describe variations of the same game, played with similar boards. Some rules are shared by all. For example,

- The game was played exclusively by men, whether adults or children.
- The boards were carved in the ground and they could be circular or square in shape.
 - Different layouts have been recorded according to the place and source. Generally, depending on who was playing, the shape of the board could be more or less complex.
- The game pieces were moved according to the points indicated by the die.

The most complete and detailed píchica game rules are those from the fourth version reported by, given in 1920 by the son of a the 65-year-old woman – Genara Lucero – of a píchica game that, while no longer played at the time of the interview, had been played until recently in La Carolina, San Luis. In this case,

- The board was composed of an extended linear track in the shape of a square, including two diagonals
 - In each corner was a special and bigger compartment referred to as 'big house'.
 - In the centre was another special compartment of the same size as the big house termed 'water'.

- The remaining smaller spaces were lined up along the sides of the square and its two diagonals.
- From 2 to 4 people could play this game.
 - If 4, the players formed two teams of two people each, with each team member sitting opposite their teammate.
- The die was a four-sided pyramid of fired clay or wood.
 - Each side had marks (circles or stripes) indicating the points, from 1 to 4.
 - If the die fell on its base (the fifth side of the pyramid), the throw was worth 5 points – this was called “to make or pull a píchica”.
 - The side of the die marked with only one circle or stripe, which was worth 1 point, was called ‘guairo’.
 - Scoring a guairo forced a player to give up one of his points to the opponent.
- Each player could move 4 game pieces.
 - The game pieces were usually seeds or pebbles.
 - Each player started with all his game pieces in one of the ‘big houses’. [In another version - #1, each player started with their pieces in the central compartment, marked as ‘water’].
- A piece could be moved out of the big house once a player would pull a píchica.
 - Then, pieces moved according to the number given by the die.
 - If a piece came across a compartment where an opponent’s piece was, the latter would be captured, effectively eliminating it from the game.
 - If a piece succeeded in going around the entire perimeter of the square without being captured, it could start making its way down a diagonal toward the central compartment named ‘water’.
 - A piece could then enter the central compartment only if the die gave the precise number. Otherwise, the piece would pass beyond the ‘water’ onto the other side of the diagonal.
- Once in the water, the piece was safe.
 - In the central compartment, the pieces were piled up until the end of the game.

- The player who was able to first carry all his pieces into the 'water' and/or capture all his opponent's pieces won the game.

It is noteworthy that some of the basic aspects of this game are not too dissimilar from the Gran Chaco game. Additionally, the names *píchica* and *guairo* to indicate the numbers five and one are clearly borrowings from Quechua and strongly suggest a Central Andean origin for the game. While the game is described as "clearly indigenous" by the archival sources, it had only been introduced to the La Carolina area in the 19th century (or maybe 18th c. as suggested by Gentile), allegedly by someone who had direct contacts with native communities. It appears that it has been played by the miners working in this region, who used it mainly for gambling purposes.

The Kechukawe (quechucague) of the Mapuche, Chile

This is a game played by the Mapuche in southern Chile up until the 20th century. The first ethnohistorical report on this game dates back to the 17th century. While these early sources do not provide a full description of the game, they offer a general overview of what it may have looked like. There are better recorded game rules dating from the early 20th century, by which time it is said to have been played rarely. By this time, however, the game mechanics appear to have changed.

Similarly to *pisca*, the name of this game is etymologically linked to the Mapuche numeral 'kechu', meaning five. In the case of the *kechukawe*, the numerical connection is probably to be found in the number of sides characterising the die used in this game, which are five. The specific shape of the die may vary, in some cases it can be very similar to the one used in the Argentine *píchica* described above, consisting of a pyramid with four faces and a base, in others it is a prism with three lateral sides and two triangular bases or a truncated pyramid.

- The board was a semicircle carved in the ground.
 - The board was then divided into two symmetrical sides by tracing a vertical line that was perpendicular to the middle of the base of the semicircle.
- Each player has 10 game pieces (e.g., small sticks or stones)
- The five sides of the die (*kechukan*) are marked with dots, indicating the numerical value of that face (1 to 5).

- According to and, along the sides of the semicircles an undetermined number of compartments were carved, which received the pieces, and the game function like the game of the goose, that is, like any race game.
 - However, according to, there were no compartments and the semicircle only indicated where the die had to fall when thrown. In this version, the goal of the game was to capture all the opponent's pieces simply by throwing the die and scoring a higher number than the other player.
- In the race game version of the kechukawe with compartments, as related by, the game began with each player placing 10 pieces at the right angle formed by the semicircle base and the vertical line dividing the semicircle in two parts. Two additional sets of two pieces each were placed at the other two lateral angles of the semicircle.
 - According to, the pieces were moved around the track following the die throws and when landing on a space occupied by another piece, they could capture it.
 - In, the die throws determined how many pieces a player had to surrender to their opponent.
- The winner was the player who was able to capture all the opponent's pieces.

What appears from these sources is that in its earlier (18th and maybe 19th century) form, the kechukawe was a race game, resembling the game of the goose – in which the game pieces were moved around the spaces along the track of a board. In versions of this game recorded more recently (early 20th century), the kechukawe appears to have morphed into a pure dice game where the board track did not matter.

Appendix B

EARLY COLONIAL PASSAGES ABOUT GAMES

Games in socio-political contexts

Game Description	
(Cobo 1893:228)	<p>Aunque bárbaros, inventaron estos indios algunos juegos ingeniosos, que corresponden a él de los dados y á otros de los nuestros; pero usábanlos más por entrenamiento que por codicia de la ganancia; si bien á veces iba en ellos algún precio, como eran mantas, ganados y otras cosas; mas esto era en poco cantidad y sin picarse mucho al juego.</p> <p>Piscoynu era cierto juego que corresponde al trompo ó peonza; el llamado Pichca era como de dados: jugábanlo con un solo dado de cinco puntos, que no tenía mayor suerte. Chuncara era otro juego de cinco hoyos pequeños cavados en alguna piedra llana ó en tabla: jugábanlo con frísoles de varios colores, echando el dado, y como caía la suerte, los mudaban por sus casas hasta llegar al término: la primera casa valía diez, y las otras iban creciendo un denario hasta la quinta, que valía cincuenta. Otra suerte de juego se decía Tacanaco, y era con el mismo dado y frísoles de varios colores, como el juego de las tablas. Fuera éstos tenían otros juegos menos principales, como eran el llamado Apaytalla, Puma y otros.</p>
(Bertonio 1879a:273-74)	<p>Juego de bolos: Sinco, vel Sincosiña. Y son unas piedrecicas larguillas que llaman Cala chunta o huesos de manos o pies de carneros que llaman Lukana. Jugarlos: Sincusitha, Hisquinasitha, vel Luttisitha, Chhokhllositha.</p> <p>Juego que se parece algo al delas tablas, y van adelantando las casas con estas palabras, Halancola: y a su traça llaman Auca ttaca: y al dado de madera de que usan, Pisca. Jugarle: Piscasitha, Chuncasitha, Huayrusitha, Huncusitha.</p> <p>Juego con unas piedrecitas, o otras cosas equivalentes que arrojan con la palma de la mano en alto y las paran en la parte contraria: Cchulusiña. Jugarle: Cchulusitha.</p> <p>Juego de la Tagua: Ccancallu. Jugarle: Ccancallusitha.</p> <p>Juego de argolla, Causiña. Jugarle: Causitha.</p> <p>Juego de Liuis: Ccañusiña, vel Kayrusiña, Liuisiña. Jugarle: Ccañusitha, Liuisitha, etc.</p>
(Bertonio 1879a:40)	<p>Alquerque: Cumisíña, y lo mismo significa Axedrez, porqué los Indios no distinguen los juegos, sino miran al modo.</p>
(Bertonio 1879b:59)	<p>Cumisitha: Jugar a un juego como al que llamamos oca, aunque en muchas cosas difiere.</p>
(Bertonio 1879b:92)	<p>Chunca: Tagua de madera para jugar. Chuncasitha, Pisacasitha; jugar a la tagua que acá es de madera. Chuncaasitha, Marccaasitha. Perder a este juego. Chuncajasitha. Vencer.</p>
(Bertonio 1879b:110)	<p>Halancola: Los agujeros, o hoytos de un juego así llamado que algo se parece al delas tablas. Halancolasitha; vel Halancolatha jugar a este juego.</p>
(Bertonio 1879b:157)	<p>Huayrusitha, Piscasitha: jugar con unas piedrecillas adelantándolas en sus hoytos, según los puntos de una manera de dado grande en unos destos juegos van adelantando las piedrecitas alderredor [alrededor] o en circulo: en otros dando buelta como rio etc.</p>

(Bertonio 1879b:157)	Huncusitha: jugar como ala tagua con un dado grande de madera adelantando una piedrecitas en sus casa o hoyos, lo mismo que halancolatha.
Relationship between games and supernatural serpents	
(Anonymus c 1992:32)	Halláronse una cosa muy común en todos los edificios o en los más del ynga y rey de aquella, y aun hasta oy los pintan los yndios; ques unas culebras muy grandes y dizen quel ynga tenya dos culebras por armas y así la he yo visto en muchos tambos, especialmente en el Cuzco y en Guamachuco. Dizen estos yndios que antiguamente en tiempo de Chalcochima, que hera un capitán del ynga que tenya toda la tierra, estando en Guamachuco con gran fuerza de gente, vino el demonyo hecho serpiente a manera de culebra; la qual hera según los que la vieron tan gorda como un muslo, y tenya pelos y la cabeza como de un venado; y hera tan larga que desde la cabeza no podían ver la cola estando en tierra llana. A esta culebra serpiente llamavan Uscayguay , a ésta mocharon los yndios para ser ricos porque traya unas petaquillas de oro en la cola; y después que la ovieron mochado y adorado, hizieron grandes alegría diziendo ya mochamos a nuestro señor y dios, y de aquí adelante seremos ricos. Otra vez se les apareció diziendo que se quería subir a el cielo, lo qual vieron todas aquellas naçiones que allí se hallaron. Començó a subir haziendo bueltas por el ayre, y así se le fué hasta que le perdieron de vista. Yo he preguntado esto a muchos por ver si confirmavan, todos dizen lo mesmo y en memoria desto hazían grandes fiestas y juegos ; los quales como sean ydolatría vedan y an quitado los padres con gran fuerça y que no pinten serpientes ni culebras .
(Albornoz 1984:201)	Del machacuay usan el día de hoy en sus fiestas y taquis, haziendo un juego de ayllar que antiguamente jugava el ynga, echando en alto esta figura de culebra y hecha de lana; y los que apostavan echavan sus yllos, que son tres ramales de sogá hecha de niervos de animales o de cueros dellos, a los cavos unas pelotas de plomo. A este juego ganó el ynga muchas provincias a las guacas que ya se las avía dado. Y los camayos de las guacas, permitía el ynga que jugasen las tales provincias con él por otras y se hazían perdedizos. Y después de ganados por el ynga con este medio de juego, le satisfacía el ynga a las guacas y camayos con dalles tierras y ganados y otros servicios. Son muchas las tierras que ganó a este juego de el ayllar el machacuay.
Games and Inka Politics	
(Cobo 1892:174-75)	Entre las mujeres deste Inca había una de nación Guayro , de extremada hermosura, á la cual él amaba y favorecía más que á su legítima mujer, y tenía en ella un hijo igualmente amado que su madre; y no había fiestas y regocijos á donde no llevase consigo á madre y hijo. Viendo, pues, sus vasallos que esta mujer era la que más preciaba y más cabida tenía con el rey, la procuraban todos agradar y servir, por el contento y gusto que dello recibía el rey. Sucedió una vez que estando el Inca holgándose en el valle de Yucay, se puso á jugar con ciertos Señores á la pitchca , que es al modo de dados, y habiendo ya el Inca ganado casi todo el juego, sólo le faltaba un punto, que era el as, y si no lo echaba, no ganaba nada, y echándolo, ganaba y remataba el juego. Dijo entonces á la Señora Guayro, que estaba presente: “Hermana, un punto me falta para ganar el juego; ¿qué haremos? Si quieres que se vuelva de principio, se volverá, y si no, vaya en tu nombre, si gustas dello.” Ella, aunque vio que la presea que se jugaba era de mucho valor, le respondió: “Ea, Señor, echa el dado en mi nombre, y di Guayro, que Guayro será el as.» Dijo el Inca: «Pues en tu nombre vaya, que se gane ó se pierda.” Y echando el dado el rey, dijeron á voces todos los presentes: “Guayro, Guayro.” Y cuando cayó la suerte, fué el as, que era todo lo que se pedía. El Inca con todos los demás quedaron muy contentos, y mucho más la Señora, á quien dio luego el Inca la joya que

	<p>ganó; y desde este juego mandó el Inca que el número uno se llamase guayro en toda la tierra, en memoria de la suerte y ganancia que con él hizo en nombre desta Señora; y así, hasta el día de hoy, en la mayor parte del reino llaman al número uno guayro, al modo que entre nosotros se dice as.</p>
(Cobo 1892:175-76)	<p>El amor grande que tenía el Inca á esta Señora Guayro, solicitaba su ánimo para que buscasse trazas cómo dejar á su hijo bien remediado. Pues con este fin, siendo ya el mozo de edad para ser armado caballero, introdujo entre los Señores de su corte el juego de los ayillos, que antes era sólo de las naciones del Callao; y así, llegada la fiesta del Guarachico, en que su hijo se había de armar caballero con otros hijos de grandes Señores, pidió el Inca á los de su consejo que, para más solemnizar la fiesta, quería jugar con su hijo algunos pueblos de su Señorío. Ellos, por complacerle, consintieron con lo que pedía y le respondieron que jugase su Alteza en hora buena todo lo que fuese servido. Señaláronse jueces y padrinos para los juegos, y para más autoridad de la fiesta, dio licencia el rey para que entrasen en ellos los Señores que quisiesen; y era ley que se había de jugar joya ó presea de mucho valor, ó cierta cantidad de oro ó plata. Llegado el día señalado, digron principio á los juegos los Señores de la corte, y últimamente entraron en ellos el rey y su hijo. El rey, como valeroso y diestro en este juego, hacía maravillas de sus ayillos, y el mozo no se descuidaba, antes jugaba con tanta destreza, que en muy breve tiempo ganó la apuesta á su padre y pidió á los jueces se la diesen. Ellos, maravillados desto y sospechando no fuese cautela el haber perdido el rey, fueron de parecer que volviesen al juego; pero el hijo lo rehusaba, si primero no le daban lo que había ganado. Viendo los jueces que tenía razón, le prometieron dar lo que pedía con que prosiguiese el juego. Volvieron á jugar padre y hijo, y fué tan venturoso el hijo, que tornó á ganar por segunda vez. No consintieron los del consejo que pasase adelante el juego, porque llevaba el mozo talle de ganar á su padre todo el reino. Preguntáronle los jueces que quería por la ganancia, y el mozo pidió la provincia de Urcosuyu, y así le fueron dados los cinco pueblos délla, Nuñoa, Oruro, Asillo, Asángaro y Pucará; y estos son los pueblos que llaman Aylluscas, en memoria desta historia.</p>
(Murúa 1590:Fol. 48v)	<p>Este nombre de Anaguarque es nombre propio de la mujer que fue a edificar de Pachacuti Ynga Yupangui por causa de haber esta señora mandado edificar aquel lugar y asiento, donde dicen haber unas recreaciones inventado un juego llamado entre estos indios apaitalla. Es un genero de frijoles redondos de diversos generos y nombres, e hizo en el suelo con la cabecera alta, de donde sueltan los tales frijoles, y el que de ellos pasa adelante y hace ruido más, gana a los otros. Esta con sus rayas y arcos a manera de surcos y tiene sus nombres particulares el juego, como es apaitallana y otros. Así los auquies que son infantes ditados de los hijos de los Yngas, jugaban así a este juego como a otro, que es muy ordinario, questos Indios llaman la pisca, con su tabla y agujeros o señal donde iban pasando los tantos. La pisca es como una perinola aunque no se anda, antes arrojan y descubre el punto. como a la taba o dados y a otro juego. Llaman también aucai, ques en una tabla con frijoles de diversos colores y dificultoso en jugar. También echan los puntos con la pisca, como queda ya dicho, el qual es un juego muy gustoso.</p>
(Murúa 1616:Fol. 189r [Fol. 210r])	<p>Tupa Amaro Ynga, nuestro Príncipe, fue hijo de Pachacuti Ynga Yupanqui el qual, siendo capitan en tiempo de su padre, conquisto muchas tierras, tantas que se echaba bien de ver la sangre real que tenía. Fue valeroso, prudente y sagaz, pues como estuviese su hermano Tupa Ynga Yupanqui en el asiento de Mana Huañunca, pareciole no ser justo dejarle en tan grande enfermedad y peligro. Y así fue con el, y el tiempo que estuuo ausente del Cuzco se ejercitó en algunos juegos, y en particular en el de la tapta que es como a las tablas Reales. Y esto no menos que</p>

	<p>con los orejones tíos suyos, y otros señores, principales, tan libre de pena y apartado de los ascidentes amorosos, que no parecía reinar en el la jubentud. Llegaronse a ber el juego vnas ñustas, doncellas de su cuñada la coya Mama Oello, que eran como damas de la Reina. No estaba el Príncipe tan embebecido en el juego que no alzase los ojos a mirar a las ñustas, y como el amor dicen que es un no se que, que entra por los ojos y se asienta en el corazon, luego de ymprouiso se sintio Tupa Amaro herido de los amores de vna de ellas y de la mas hermosa, llamada Cusichimpo. Y dejando el buen amante su entretenimiento y juego, por parecerle que el que empesaua el amor le sería de mas gusto, se aparto por no dar muestra delante de tanta gente de lo que dentro en su pecho sentía.</p>
<p>(Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:243 [45])</p>	<p>ABRIL, Inca Raymi [festejo del Inka] Quilla: En este mes ofrecían unos carneros pintados a las dichas uacas ydolos, dioses comunes, que abía en todo el rreyno y con ello tenían mucha serimonía. Y el dicho Ynga tenía muy grande fiesta; conbidaua a los grandes señores y prencipales y a los demás mandones y a los yndios pobres y comía y cantaua y dansaua en la plaza pública. En esta fiesta cantaua el cantar de los carneros, puca llama, y cantar de los rriós aquel sonido que haze. Esto son natural, propio cantar del Ynga, como el carnero canta y dize “yn” muy gran rrato con conpás. Y con ello mucho cunbite y uanquete y mucho uino, yamur aca [chicha]. Este mes está la comida maduro y ancí comen y ueuen y se hartan la gente del rreyno a costa del Ynga. Y este mes los aues del cielo y los rratones tienen qué comer. Todo el mes juegan los señores prencipales al juego de riui [boleadores], choca, al uayro de ynaca, pichica de hilancula y de challco chima [todos juegos] y juegan otros juegos y rrecocijos. Tiene todo el rreyno en este mes de abril Ynca Raymi [festejo del Inka] y se horadan las orejas en este mes todos, haua yncas [pariente lejano de un Inka] como capac ynga [poderoso Inka], uaccha yngas [Inka sin poder]. Con ello tienen gran fiesta entre ellos y se conbidan unos con otros, acá como rrico como pobre.</p>
<p>(Garcilaso 1985:235, Book 5, Chapter XI)</p>	<p>y mandaba que dos o tres veces al mes comiesen juntos los vecinos de cada pueblo, delante de sus curacas, y se exercitasen en juegos militares o populares para que se reconciliasen los ánimos y guardasen perpetua paz, y para que los ganaderos y otros trabajadores del campo se alentasen y regocijasen.</p>
<p>Games and Feasting</p>	
<p>(Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:830 [44])</p>	<p>Que en todo rreyno a las yndias no le cargue ni haga mita cazada, soltera ni biuda ni muchacha ni lleue hornamento ni hato de padre ni de corregidor ni de comendero ni entre al tanbo [mesón]. Sea castigado a los alcaldes, caciques, mandones questo hiciere. Sean castigados por todas las justicias cinqüenta asotes y priuado de los oficios. A los españoles que concientieren que se lo dé yndias mitayas, cinqüenta pesos de pena de cada ues, la mitad para la cámara de su Magestad y la mitad para gastos de justicia. Porque en los pueblos de los yndios deste rreyno se esconden los yndios en las quebradas o se quedan en los pueblos los yndios y enbía a las yndias al tanbo a los españoles, padres, corregidores y le dan yndias mitayas, lo que ellos quería. Y escoge la hermosa y ellos queda jugando con la hilancula pichica [juegos] a y se enborrachan y hazen otras uellaquerías y ofensas del seruicio de Dios, Y se hazen yanaconas, paseando libre, ocupando a las uiudas, güérfanas cin trauajar; estando borracho se matan con cochillos y palos. Y no ay rremedio en este rreyno.</p>
<p>(Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:766 [80])</p>	<p>Que los dichos caciques principales son grandísimos tranposos y mentirosos y haraganes. Sólo tienen de bicio de estar de continuo borracho y coquero con el tributo. Y se enseñan a xugar con naypes y dados como español, al axedrés, hilancula, chalco chima, uayro, ynaca, riui, pampay runa, yspital, uayro ynaca</p>

	[juegos]. Juegan con españoles y mestisos, mulatos ni negros y con yndios yanacunas y curacas. Y con ello se enborrachan y se matan entre ellos y rroba a los pobres con ello. Y hazen ofensas del seruijio de Dios y de su Magestad y mal y daño en los yndios y pobres y destruyjón deste rreyno en la borrachera.
Games between Inkas and Spaniards	
(Cobo 1892:207)	Sucedió en esta ocasión, que cierto cacique vasallo de Manco-Inca, por nombre Carbayayso, Señor de Cotamarca, intentó matar al Inca y ocupar toda aquella provincia. No se le encubrió al Inca aquella rebelión, de que recibió grande enojo, y envió al punto á la gente de su guarnición, que eran mil soldados guerreros, para que prendiesen á Carbayayso y lo trujesen á buen recaudo. Tardaron los indios en esta jornada más tiempo que el que se les había señalado, y durante esta ausencia se le ofreció al Inca hacer un solemne banquete, en el cual con gran regocijo y muestras de amor brindaba á ios españoles. Alzadas las mesas, se pusieron á jugar á los bolos de compañeros; ganó Diego Méndez al Inca una pieza de oro, y se la pagó luego, y pasando adelante el juego, se desquitó el Inca, de que Diego Méndez mostró pesar, y advirtiéndolo el Inca, le dijo: que por qué se enojaba, que si quería la pieza de oro y otras más se las mandaría dar. Encendióse más en cólera Diego Méndez, tanto que hubieron de dejar el juego. Apartóse un poco el Inca con algunos indios de su guarda y Diego Méndez se quedó paseando con un español llamado Barba, los cuales se presumió que urdían matar al Inca por lo que luego sucedió. Llegó á este punto un correo con aviso de que los capitanes del Inca traían preso á Carbayayso, y oyendo Diego Méndez que otro día habían de llegar, se resolvió en no diferir la ejecución.
(Murúa 1616:Fol. 164v)	Y un día jugaron a los bolos Manco Ynga y Diego Mendez, y en el juego gano cierta plata Diego Mendez a Manco Ynga, y luego se la pago, y auiendo jugado un rato dixo que no quería jugar mas, que estaba cansado, y mando traer de merendar [...]
(Guaman Poma de Ayala 1615:388 [90])	de cómo estando preso conuersaua Atagualpa Ynga con don Francisco Pizarro y don Diego de Almagro y con los demás españoles y jugaua con ellos en el juego de axedrés que ellos les llaman taptana . Y era muy pacible príncipe y acá se contentaua con los cristianos. Y daua su hazienda y no sauía con qué contentalles y rregalalles.
Games and Counting	
(Murúa 1590:Fol. 77r)	También hacían sus cuentas por piedras y por nudos, como esta dicho, en cuerdas de colores luengas. Contaban uno, diez, ciento, un mil, diez cientos, diez mil, diez cientos de mil. Jugaban estos indios con un solo dado , que llaman la pichca , de cinco puntos por un lado, uno por otro, dos por otro y por otro tres, y el lado, cuatro, y la punta con una cruz vale cinco, y el suelo del dado, veinte, y así se juegan hoy en día, y esto lo usan así los indios como las indias aunque fuera de conejos, que ellos llaman cuyes. No juegan cosa de plata. Su pan y vino es de maíz, y emborrachaba reciamente, aunque otras bebidas hacen de frutas y yerbas.
(Garcilaso 1985 [1609]:89-90; Book 2, Chapter XIV)	Llamaban a estos decuriones por el número de sus decurias: a los primeros llamaban Chunca Camayu, que quiere decir el que tiene cargo de diez, nombre compuesto de chunca, que es diez, y de camayu, el que tiene cargo[...] y el mismo nombre chunca camayu , en otra significación, quiere decir perpetuo tahur , el que trae los naipes en la capilla de la capa, como dice el refrán, porque llaman chunca a cualquier juego , porque todos se cuentan por números , y porque los números van a parar al deceno , tomaron el número diez por el juego, y para decir juguemos dicen chuncásum , que en rigor de propia significación se sirven aquellos indios de un mismo vocablo, por lo cual es muy dificultoso alcanzar de raíz las propiedades de aquel lenguaje.

Games and Mortuary Rituals	
(Arriaga 1999:66-67)	El <i>Pacaricuc</i> suele durar cinco días, en los cuales ayunan, no comiendo sal ni agí, sino maíz blanco y carne, y juegan el juego que llaman la pisca , tomando el nombre de los cinco días, que es con unos palillos con diversas rayas, y no entiendo qué tienen más misterio que para divertir el sueño, y al cabo de estos cinco días van a lavar la ropa que dejó el difunto al río.

Games' description and vocabulary

Bertonio – Spanish-Aymara Dictionary		Bertonio –Aymara-Spanish Dictionary	
Alquerque	Cumisiña	Cumisitha	Jugar a un juego como al que llamamos oca, aunque en muchas cosas difiere
Juego que se parece al de las tablas	Halancola (palabra que usan para adelantar las casas)	Halancola	Los agujeros, o hoyitos de un juego así llamado que algo se parece al de las tablas
Tablero del Halancola	Aucattaca	Haancolasitha	Jugar a este juego
Dado del Halancola	Pisca	Huayrusitha, Piscasitha	Jugar con unas piedrecillas adelantándolas en sus hoyitos, según los puntos de una manera de dado grande en unos destos juegos van adelantando las piedras alrededor o en circulo: en otros dando vuelta como rio etc.
		Huncusitha	Jugar como a la tagua con un dado grande de madera adelantando unas piedrecitas en sus casas o hoyos, lo mismo que halancolatha
		Chunca	Tagua de madera para jugar
		Chuncasitha, Piscasitha	Jugar a la tagua que acá es de madera
		Chuncasitha, Marccaasitha	Perder a este juego
		Chuncajasitha	Vencer a este juego
1. Adversario enemigo 2. Contrario en los colores, y elementos. Y de otras cosas así, que no pueden estar juntas. V.g. [negro/blanco; fuego/agua; Dia/Noche] 3. Enemigo particular y publico que hace guerra	Auca	Auca	Enemigo
Ejercito de enemigos	Auca suu		
Guerrar	Aucasitha, Auca pura tincusitha		

Adversario contrario en brindar: y competidor en juegos	Concha	Concha	Amigo con quien suele beber y holgarse
1. Parte o división 2. Punto del sermón	Ttacca	Ttacca	Una parte del rosario, un denario. Una parte, o punto de sermón, una manada, o compañía etc.
Quebrar sogas, hilos etc.	Ttaccatha	Ttaccatha	Quebrar el hilo, o la soga, etc. Y morir.
		Ttaccastha	Quebrarse de suyo. Quebrar la amistad. Decirse palabras injuriosas.
		Ttacttaccaratha	Descoyuntar
		Ttaccartatha	Tener desmayos, o paraxismos
		Ttaccacatha	destetar la criatura
		Ttacca tacca saratha	Andar a manadas, o compañías
		Ttacca taccaro halaatha	Dividir en partes
		Ttaccarastha	Apartarse, dividirse, descoyuntarse

Holguin Spanish-Quechua Dictionary		Holguin Quechua-Spanish Dictionary	
Ajedrez	Castilla taptana	Cculluchuncana	Ajedrez, o tablas
Jugador	Chuncaycamayok chuncaypi yachacuk, o yachacuscca.	Chuncana cuna	Los instrumentos de cada juego
		Chuncaycuna	Cualquier juego de fortuna
Jugar precio	Collquepak chuncam ymapakpas	Chuncani	Jugar precio a juego de fortuna
		Huatuc hinacuy pucllay	El juego de pares o nones, o de otras adivinanzas y los pares yanantincuna y nones chullacuna, o yanantin yanantin chulla chulla yanantin chullacta pucllassun. Juguemos a pares, o nones.
		Ppichca	Un juego como de dados
		Pichcana	Un palo seisavado con que juegan.
Jugar a la pichcca	Pichccacuni	Ppichcani ppichccacuni	Jugar este juego
		Puma	Un juego de indios
Tantos del juego	Runa, chuncamrunay. Yo tengo diez tantos.	Runa	Los tantos en el juego, como chuncam runay, o chuncarunayoc micani. Tengo diez tantos.
Juego de alquerque	Ttaptana	Taptana	Alquerque juego
Jugar al alquerque	Ttaptancuni	Taptani	Jugar al alquerque
Tablero de Ajedrez	Castilla Taptana		
		Ticnu	1. Buena suerte en el juego de la

			pichca cuando gana. 2. El zenit o punto de la mitad del cielo
		Tincuc maciy	Mi contrario en juego o fiesta, o porfias y en todo ya chaypipas. Contario en letras.
		Tincunacuni	Ser contrarios, o competir

Domingo de Santo Tomas Spanish-Quechua		Domingo de Santo Tomas Quechua-Spanish	
Ajedrez	Taptana, comina	Comina o taptana	Alquerque
Ajedrez jugar	Taptani, o comini	Taptana, o comina	Ajedrez, tablas, o alquerque
Alquerque	Comina, taptana	Taptani, comini	Jugar al ajedrez o tablas
Alquerquear	Taptani, o comini	Taptani, comini	Jugar al alquerque
		Taptana	Alquerque o trebejo
Jugar juegos como dados	Guayroni.gui	Guayroni-gui	jugar fuego de fortuna

Anonymous 1586 Spanish-Quechua		Anonymous 1586 Quechua-Spanish	
		Culluchuncana	Ajedrez, o tablas, etc.
Tabla	Cullu		
		Chuncana	Cualquier juego de fortuna
Jugar precio	Chuncani	Chuncani	Jugar a cualquier juego de fortuna
		Tapta	Alquerque juego, o ajedrez
Jugar al alquerque	Taptani	Taptani	Jugar al alquerque
		Huayru	Un tanto, o azar al juego de los Indios
		Runa	Los tanto en el juego
		Pichca, pichcana	Un cierto genero de juego de indios.
		Pichcani, pichcacuni	Jugar a este juego
		Tincuc macij	Mi contrario en juego o fiesta
adversario	auca		

Martin de Murua 1590 (Galvin Manuscript)		Martin de Murua 1613 (Getty Manuscript)	
Apaitalla	“Un genero de frijoles redondos de diversos generos y nombres, e hizo en el suelo con la cabecera alta, de donde sueltan los tales frijoles, y el que de ellos pasa adelante y hace ruido mas, gana a los otros.	Tapta	Juego “que es como a las tablas reales”

	Esta con sus rayas y arcos a manera de surcos y tiene sus nombres particulares el juego, como es apaitallana y otros.”		
Pisca	Juego muy ordinario “con su tabla y agujeros o señal donde iban pasando los tantos”. La pisca es como una perinola aunque no se anda, antes arrojan y descubre el punto. como a la taba o dados y a otro juego.”		
Aucaí	“una tabla con frijoles de diversos colores y dificultoso en jugar. También echan los puntos con la pisca, como queda ya dicho, el qual es un juego muy gustoso.		

Cobo XII, 15		Cobo XVII	
Pichca	Juego “que es al modo de dados”	Piscoynu	Juego que corresponde al trompo o peonza
		Pichca	Juego que “era como de dados: jugábanlo con un solo dado de cinco puntos, que no tenía mayor suerte
		Chuncara	“era otro juego de cinco hoyos pequeños cavados en alguna piedra llana o en tabla: jugábanlo con frísoles de varios colores, echando el dado, y como caía la suerte, los mudaban por sus casas hasta llegar al término: la primera casa valía diez, y las otras iban creciendo un denario hasta la quinta, que valía cincuenta.”
		Tacanaco	“otra suerte de juego [...], y era con el mismo dado y frísoles de varios colores, como el juego de las tablas.

		Apaytalla	Fuera éstos tenían otros juegos menos principales, como eran el llamado Apaytalla, Puma y otros.
		Puma	Fuera éstos tenían otros juegos menos principales, como eran el llamado Apaytalla, Puma y otros.

Garcilaso XIV	
Chunca	“Cualquier juego, porque todos se cuentan por números; y porque los números van a para al deceno, tomaron el número diez por el juego, y para decir juguemos dicen chuncásun”

Guaman Poma 243[245]		Guaman Poma 766[780]	
Riui Choca [tejo]	Juego que se juega en el mes de abril del Inca Raymi	Ajedrez	Juego
Uayro de ynaca pichica	Juego que se juega en el mes de abril del Inca Raymi	Hilancula	Juego
Uayro de hilanucla	Juego que se juega en el mes de abril del Inca Raymi	Chalcochima	Juego
Uayro de Challcochima	Juego que se juega en el mes de abril del Inca Raymi	Uayro	Juego
		ynaca	Juego
		riui	Juego
		Pampayruna	Juego
		yspital	Juego
		Uayro ynaca	Juego
Guaman Poma 830[844]		Guaman poma 388[390] (drawing 387[389])	
Hilancula pichica	Juego acompañado por borrachera	Taptana	Juego del ajedrez

Appendix C

DATABASE

[DATABASE.xlsx](#)

(https://ueanorwich-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/hxm20ruu_uea_ac_u/k/IQBOJFe7pnOwQKpiKBZZcnMDAa1ojfdcF9vM14p3jCmDigk?e=CKH3cl)

GLOSSARY

Adobe. Mud brick, used for construction in the pre-Columbian Andes

Aqha (chicha). Fermented maize beer, often acquiring a ceremonial role.

Apotheosis. The process of exaltation of a human to divine status, which in the Andes frequently occurred with important ancestors.

Auca. Warrior or enemy in Aymara

Ayllu. Basic unit of social organisation in the Andes, akin in principles to a lineage group, whose membership is frequently associated with descent from a common ancestor (kinship). Often characterised by duality and quadripartition, the ayllu system is foundational to ritual co-operation, economy, and social life in many Andean communities even today.

Ayni. A Quechua term that refers to a form of reciprocity crucial to the value and ethical system of Andean cultures.

Capac hucha. (royal debt or prestation). An Inka ritual of sacrificial offering occurring at sacred locales and involving the sacrifice of children.

Ceque. Lines radiating from a centre, which in Cusco was represented by the temple of Coricancha, and intersecting a series of sacred sites, which were imagined to be aligned.

Chullpa. Above ground burial structures.

Chunca. Quechua term meaning ten. It also referred to a number of indigenous race games.

Cuy. Quechua term for the guinea pig – a staple food in ceremonial feasting in the pre-Columbian Andes.

Heterarchy. A social or political system in which power and authority are distributed among different people or groups, rather than arranged in a single top-down hierarchy. Different roles or statuses can be equal but function differently depending on context.

Hilanco. Ayllu chief in Aymara.

Horizon. Chronological term to describe a pre-Hispanic period of variable duration characterised by the widespread distribution of stylistically similar material culture.

Huaquero. From 'huaqa' *(i.e., wak'a). An informal excavator of archaeological artefacts in the Andes. Sometimes, the term refers to people who seek to exploit the economic value of antiquities, while others it refers to local or indigenous people who developed a profound knowledge of the archaeology of their region.

Huayro. An indigenous term that possibly originally referred to an ethnic group from the southern province of the Inka empire, which came to indicate a type of dice game and the score of one with the pisca die.

Hunu. Quechua numeral meaning 10.000.

Illapa. A Quechua term referring to both the thunder, as a natural phenomenon and a deity, as well as mummy bundles.

Immanentism. A term indicating those societies where divinity has not been confined to a transcendental dimension but is immanent to the material world of humans.

Khipu (quipu). Knotted strings used as a recording and accounting device by Inka and Wari.

Kuraka. A political role in the Inka empire, akin to that of governor of a province or unit.

Ludeme. A basic unit comprising a boardgame's mechanics of play and paraphernalia.

Maqueta. Architectural plan and model made in pre-Columbian times.

Masl. Meter above sea level.

Mayo. Quechua term indicating a river. The Milky way was also referred to as 'mayo' by Andean cultures.

Mitmaq(kuna). Quechua term to indicate an Inka imperial programme of relocation of conquered groups from one region to another.

Pacarisca/pacarina. Quechua term indicating a place of origin of an ethnic group. Often this consists of a landscape feature such as a cave, lake, or outcrop, from where the primeval ancestor is said to have emerged.

Picha/pisca. Quechua term meaning five but also referring to a type of truncated trapezoidal die used since Inka times and a series of related dice games.

Pucaras. Common term among Kichwa speaking communities of Ecuador that refers to significant mountaintops or hilltops and by extension to ritual confrontation that took place in such locales among the Cañari.

Puna. Ecological area, usually located above 4,000 masl, typically with cold, treeless and steppic grasslands; subject to nightly frosts. It is the uppermost ecocological zone used by humans below the mountain glaciers. The main activities associated with this zone is camelid pasturing.

Quebrada. A narrow mountain gorge or ravine in the Andes, typically with a stream running down it.

Quechua. A native Andean language and the language used by the Inka administration.

Race games. Boardgames where the movement of token is dictated by the roll of dice.

Sapa (Inka). A Quechua term meaning the "unique" Inka, and referring to the Inka sovereign.

Spondylus sp. A marine shell found in the tropical water off the coast of Ecuador. The shell is red and purple on the outside and white inside. Both the shell and its mollusc were highly valued by Andean peoples for its ceremonial and symbolic import.

Step-fret. A common Andean iconographic motif showing a stepped design terminating in a spiralling or coiling form.

Survey. In this thesis I use this term to indicate the documentation of archaeological compartmentalised boards through field research, whether via excavation, the study of collection, or the historiographical reconstruction of boards biographies.

Taptana. A type of indigenous race game described by early-colonial sources.

Tawantinsuyu. The Quechua term the Inka adopted to refer to their empire. It literally means the four (tawa-) parts (-suyu) together (-ntin-).

Tinkuy (tinku). The Quechua term for the simultaneous convergence and divergence of two elements, usually seen as complementary opposites such as man/woman, black/white, upper/lower, the confluence of rivers (tinkuc-mayo), or any pair of opposite concepts.

Ttacca. Aymara term meaning group or part of the whole.

Verticality and Ecological complementarity. Socioeconomic and ritual adaptation system developed by Andean communities to deal with a differentiated access to resources along the distinctive altitudinal gradients of the Andean cordillera. Its scale could vary from the area inhabited by a single community to the entire Central Andean region, including coastal and highlands.

Wak'a/Huaca. Sacred and animated places as well as objects with an agentive role in society.

Yupana. A quechua term meaning numbers but indicating also a counting device used in Inka times.

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