

**THE PERUVIAN NORTH CENTRAL COAST DURING
THE EARLY INTERMEDIATE PERIOD:
AN EMERGING PERSPECTIVE**

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The purpose of this paper is to present evidence relevant to the Early Intermediate Period settlement of the North Central Coast of Peru. Evidence will initially take the form of a historical review of pertinent research conducted in this area. This data base will be used to test the idea that during most of the Early Intermediate Period, the occupation of the North Central Coast was concentrated in the upper valley and was linked to the highlands. Data from excavations conducted elsewhere in Peru will then be presented in support of this idea. A brief discussion of the North Central Coast and the Early Intermediate Period follows.

Definitions

The North Central Coast (Figure 1) has been defined on cultural-historical grounds as that part of the Peruvian coast which includes the Nepeña, Casma, Culebras, and Huarmey Valleys (Lanning 1967:32; Willey 1971:87; Daggett 1984:78, Figure 3-1). I have expanded this list to include the Lacramarca and Seco Valleys (Daggett 1984:20, Figure 2-1, p. 21). The Lacramarca, Seco, and Culebras Valleys are formed by third class rivers which, because they fall in the zone of periodic or variable rains, are characterized by a flow which is both scant and rare (Kroeber 1930:74). The North Central Coast as a whole suffers from limited rainfall and it is unique in being the only part of the coast which lacks a first class river, or one originating in the continental watershed (Ibid:74-75). The presence of an eastern intermontane valley formed by a river which ultimately flows to the Pacific is partially responsible for this local coastal hydrology.

The Santa is a first class river, the upper part of which flows northward, dividing the sierra and forming the Callejon de Huaylas. The Nepeña, Casma, and Huarmey Valleys are formed by second class rivers which originate in the Cordillera Negra, the rain-scarce western slopes of this intermontane valley (Adams 1906; c.f. Kroeber 1930:74-75). Finally, the northern-most Central Coast valley, Fortaleza, is also formed by a second class river with its headwaters in the Cordillera Negra (Figure 2).

The Early Intermediate Period (EIP) follows the Early Horizon (EH) (Rowe 1960:628-629) and dates ca. 100 B.C. - A.D. 600. The Early Horizon is characterized by cultural diversity and increasing regional development. Cultures have been defined for the North Coast, the North Central Highlands, and the Central Coast based upon a study of EIP ceramic styles, architectural practices, and general patterns of settlement.¹

Those cultures best known for the North and Central Coasts during the earlier part of this time period are Gallinazo (Ford 1949; Willey 1953:101-177) and Miramar (Patterson 1966:98-101) respectively. Their stylistic equivalent in the North Central Highlands is Huaras (Lanning 1965; Lumbreras 1974a:85-86,

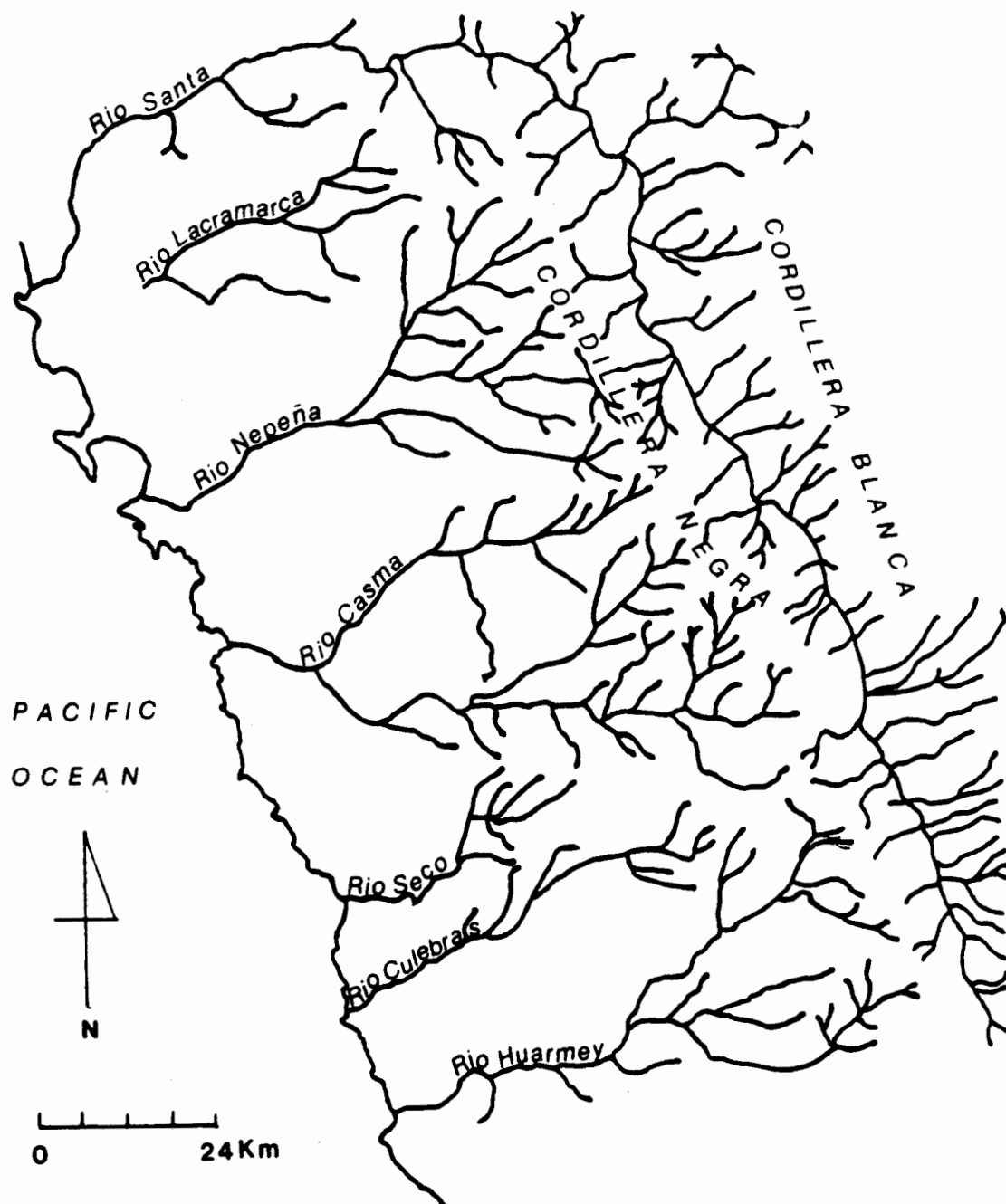


Figure 1. The North Central Coast of Peru.

1974b:39, 50-51). The Moche conquest of Gallinazo during the latter part of the EIP (Moche III-IV) has been well documented (Topic 1982:270, 272-273), while Gordon Willey (1971:142-143) has proposed a political unification of the Central Coast centering on the Lima Culture during this period (Figure 3).

The Moche occupation of the North Coast has been divided into five phases (Larco H. 1948), only the first four of which date to the EIP (e.g. Topic 1982:-256). The political unification of the North Coast was achieved toward the end of this time period during phases III and IV. Both Moche and Lima are characterized by the construction of large adobe pyramids (Lanning 1967:117). In this they differ from Recuay, which was the highland successor of Huaras (Lanning 1965), and which was essentially contemporary with Moche (Grieder 1978:75, Table 10) and Lima. Instead, Recuay is characterized by the construction of tombs (Amat 0. 1976:535) and the creation of distinctive stone sculpture (Schaedel 1948).

To summarize, the North Central Coast consists of six valleys (Lacramarca, Nepeña, Casma, Seco, Culebras, and Huarmey) and it is bordered on the north by the Santa Valley, on the east by the Callejon de Huaylas, and on the south by the Fortaleza Valley. The EIP has been described as a time during which political unification was ultimately achieved on the North and Central Coasts. Finally, specific EIP cultures have been identified for the coastal and highland areas which border the North Central Coast.

History of North Central Coast EIP Research

Research focused upon an earlier time period inadvertently shed light on the nature of the settlement of the North Central Coast during the EIP. In 1933, Julio Tello excavated the site of Punkurí (PV31-10) in the middle Nepeña Valley (Figure 4). He uncovered an occupational sequence there which spanned from Chavin to Moche (Tello 1933a). He had delayed excavating Punkurí for a number of years because of his admitted lack of interest in what he thought was a Moche site (Tello 1933b). His success in documenting Chavin in Nepeña led him to work in Casma and one result was the discovery there of Moche vessels in local collections (Tello 1956:308, Figure 141). This prompted the conclusion that both the Nepeña and Casma Valleys had fallen within the sphere of Moche influence (Bennett 1946:100).

During the 1940's there was a decided emphasis on Chavin research in Peru (Schaedel and Shimada 1982), and it was not until 1950 that EIP research was seriously begun on the North Central Coast. At that time Richard Schaedel (1951) conducted a coastal survey aimed at determining the extent of Moche influence. He was led to the ruins of Pañamarca (PV31-38) in the middle Nepeña Valley, and his excavations there confirmed earlier suspicions (Soriano I. 1941:265) that this impressive adobe pyramid indeed dated to Moche times.

The Casma Valley was included in Schaedel's survey as well, but his report makes no mention of Moche discoveries there. This apparent absence of a Moche occupation in Casma was supported by a subsequent survey conducted by Donald Collier and Donald Thompson. They surveyed the lower to middle valley, utilized aerial photography, and concentrated on architectural sites nearly to the exclusion of looted cemeteries (Thompson 1974:9). In spite of the Moche artifacts reported by Tello, they were unable to find any evidence for a

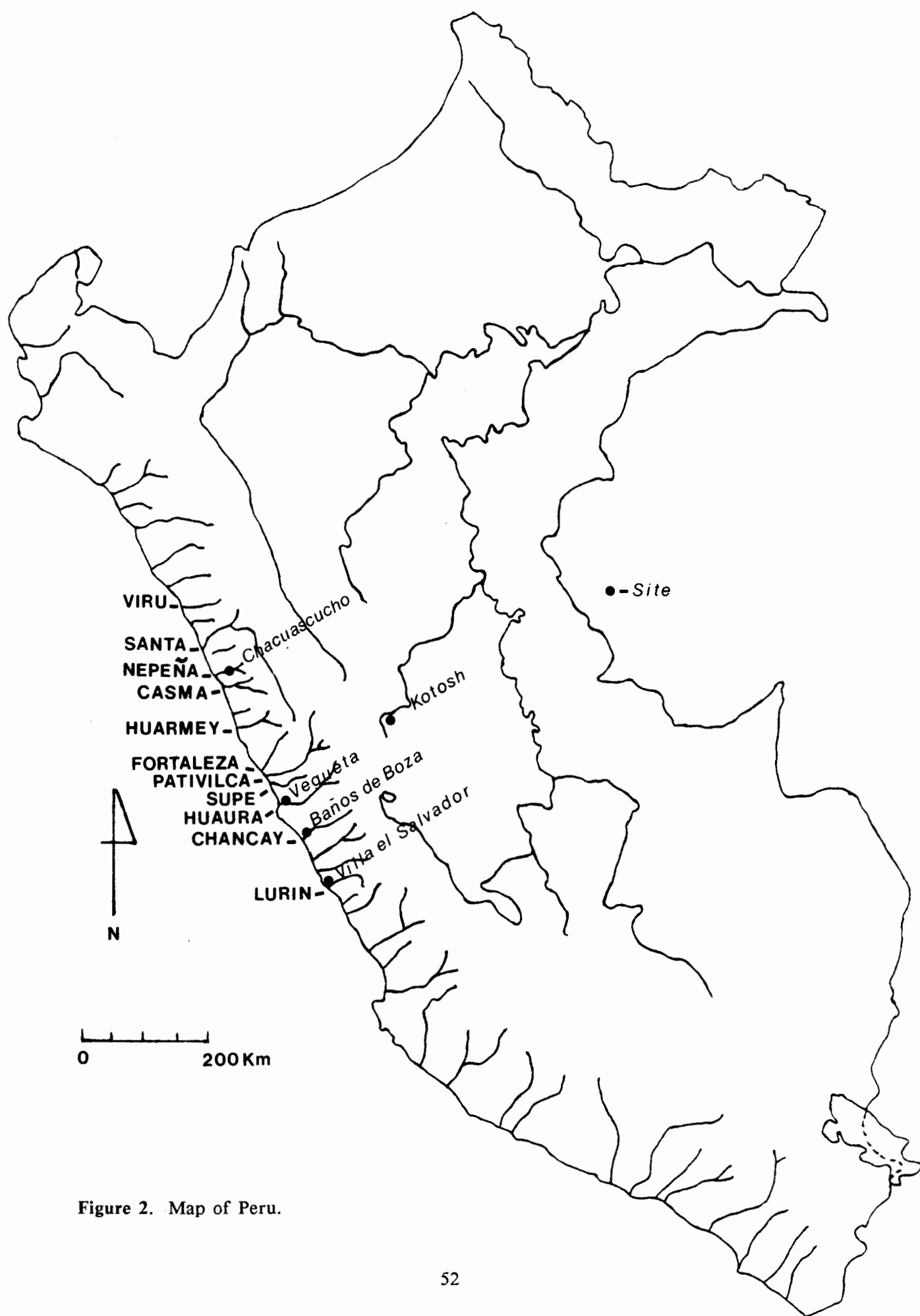


Figure 2. Map of Peru.

Moche occupation in Casma, nor a Lima or local equivalent (Collier 1960:415; Thompson 1962:297-298). They concluded that there were no major sites or pyramids dating to the EIP in Casma and that the EIP occupation there would likely prove to be both small and rural (Thompson 1962:299).

Thompson continued working on the North Central Coast, first conducting research in Culebras in 1959 (Tabio E. 1977:100) and then continuing the systematic survey of Huarney begun the year before by Ernesto Tabio and Duccio Bonavia (Ibid:99-100). Thompson completed his survey of Huarney in 1965. Rare finds of Moche pottery (Ibid:112-113) and the absence of architecture attributable to Moche, Lima, or a local cultural equivalent led him to conclude that this valley, like Casma, had probably been occupied by a simple rural culture during the EIP (Thompson 1966:544).

In 1967, Donald Proulx began a systematic survey of the Nepeña Valley. With the aid of aerial photographs, he was able to document a Recuay occupation at the upper valley ceremonial site of Huancarpon (PV31-59) (Proulx 1968:100-101). In addition, he found evidence for a Recuay burial near Pañamarca in the middle valley (Ibid:100).² Though he also found a few more Moche sites in the middle valley, the apparent paucity of EIP sites overall led him to conclude that the Moche and Recuay occupations of the valley were limited (Ibid:27-30).

The following year, 1968, Rosa Fung and Carlos Williams (1977) worked in the Sechin or northern branch of the upper Casma Valley. Based upon an analysis of archaeological remains, they proposed a valley sequence which included highland influence in the early EIP phases and local development in the later phases of EIP occupation (Ibid:137, 143). Their early date for the Casma culture is not supported by the Nepeña data, however, which suggest instead a post-EIP date for this culture (C. Daggett 1983; Proulx 1973:61).

Proulx continued his survey of Nepeña in 1973, documenting more Moche sites in the middle valley (Proulx 1973:40-44) but failing to find more Recuay sites. He concluded that the Moche occupation of Nepeña was heavily concentrated in the middle valley and essentially Moche IV in date (Ibid:48). Data for the non-Moche EIP settlement of the valley were limited to two Recuay sites and a few Gallinazo ceramics seen in local collections (Ibid:31).

In 1979, Proulx invited me to assist him in a concentrated survey of the upper Nepeña Valley. A principal result was our discovery of a significant number of Recuay ridgetop sites. This led us to the realization that the valley had experienced distinct upper valley Recuay and lower to middle valley Moche occupations (Proulx 1982). I continued working in the upper valley in 1980-1981 and now present certain conclusions about the nature of the settlement of the valley at the end of the EH and the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period.

The upper valley site of Huancarpon appears to be a late EH ceremonial center which remained occupied during the EIP (R. Daggett 1983, 1984:295-297, 351-353). The existence of earlier public architecture there explains why Huancarpon is the only Recuay site in the valley clearly visible from a study of aerial photographs. The upper valley is rich in EIP sites and among the new sites that I found there are a few that were occupied during Moche times (Daggett 1984: Appendix A; Proulx 1982). Their discovery serves to establish the expected valley-wide Moche occupation of Nepeña (Topic 1982:279) and

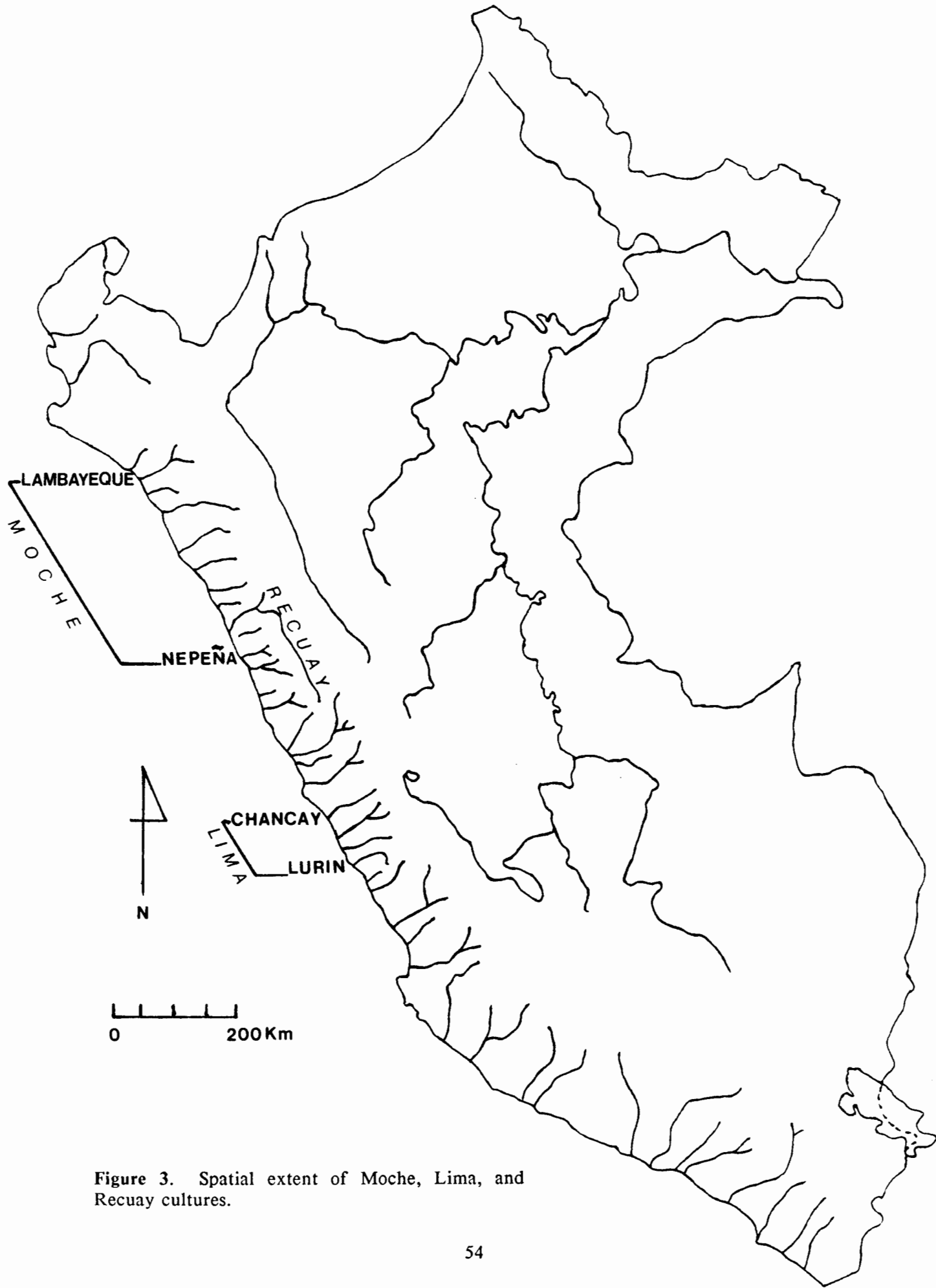


Figure 3. Spatial extent of Moche, Lima, and Recuay cultures.

conforms to previously observed patterns in that this occupation was both late EIP in occurrence and heavily concentrated in the middle valley.³

The most important of the newly documented EIP sites in Nepeña are the contiguous upper valley ridgetop sites of Cerro Chacuascucho West (PV31-184) and Cerro Chacuascucho East (PV31-185). The former appears to date to the start of the EIP while the latter became important later during this period (Daggett 1985). Information from these sites and from previous surveys suggests that the pre-Moche occupation of Nepeña was upper valley ridgetop in kind and highland in orientation. The absence of a Gallinazo or Gallinazo-like occupation in the lower valley (Ibid) supports this conclusion as does the data obtained from Lacramarca.

David Wilson recently conducted a systematic survey of the Santa Valley which he extended southward to include the mouth of the Rio Lacramarca. The EIP occupation of this part of the Lacramarca Valley consists of a Moche III-IV settlement which was *not* preceded by a Gallinazo one (Wilson 1981:52-53). The absence of a demonstrable Gallinazo occupation in Lacramarca and Nepeña in contrast with evidence for just such an occupation in Santa (Donnan 1973:125; Wilson 1981:47-52) strongly suggests that the North Central Coast was essentially isolated from North Coast influences until late in the EIP; that is, not before Moche III-IV times.⁴ Finally, recent work in Casma and Huarmey makes it clear that valleys to the south of Nepeña remained all but unaffected by North Coast traditions even during Moche times.

Three Moche or Recuay-influenced vessels have been excavated by Tom and Shelia Pozorski from an intrusive burial at an EH site in the lower Casma Valley (Pozorski and Pozorski 1981:44-46, Figure 35). This discovery serves to validate the presence of such artifacts in Casma but provides little information regarding the nature and extent of the resident population responsible for their interment.

In the Huarmey Valley, a total of twenty-one (21) sites have thus far been assigned to the EIP by Bonavia, each of which he describes carefully, though artifactual detail remains scanty (Bonavia 1982: Appendix). Ten Moche sites are discussed, six of which represent limited reoccupations of earlier sites, while three of the remaining four were reoccupied during the subsequent Middle Horizon. The one single component site is a Moche III cemetery (Ibid:424). As for the eleven non-Moche sites, all are multi-component in nature, one is an upper valley Recuay terraced habitation (Ibid:421), and another may be similar to Cerro Chacuascucho East in Nepeña (Ibid:430).⁵ Despite Bonavia's continuing efforts, then, the survey of Huarmey has not yet led to a breakthrough in the understanding of the EIP settlement of the valley.

To briefly summarize, serious research on the nature of the EIP settlement of the North Central Coast did not begin until the 1950's. Though the documentation of the Moche settlement in Nepeña was an anticipated result, the absence of Moche or Lima evidence in Casma and Huarmey was not. Subsequent efforts to ascertain the nature of the EIP occupation of these latter two valleys has proven difficult. Recent work in Nepeña has led to the realization that there was a significant pre-Moche upper valley ridgetop occupation there with links to the highlands. Whether the North Central Coast as a whole was linked to the highlands during the EIP remains to be demonstrated, but preliminary data support this model.

| Number | Name | Elevation |
|--------|-----------------|-----------|
| 10 | Punkuri | 210 m |
| 38 | Pañamarca | 110 m |
| 59 | Huancarpon | 650 m |
| 184 | Chacuascucho W. | 800 m |
| 185 | Chacuascucho E. | 815 m |

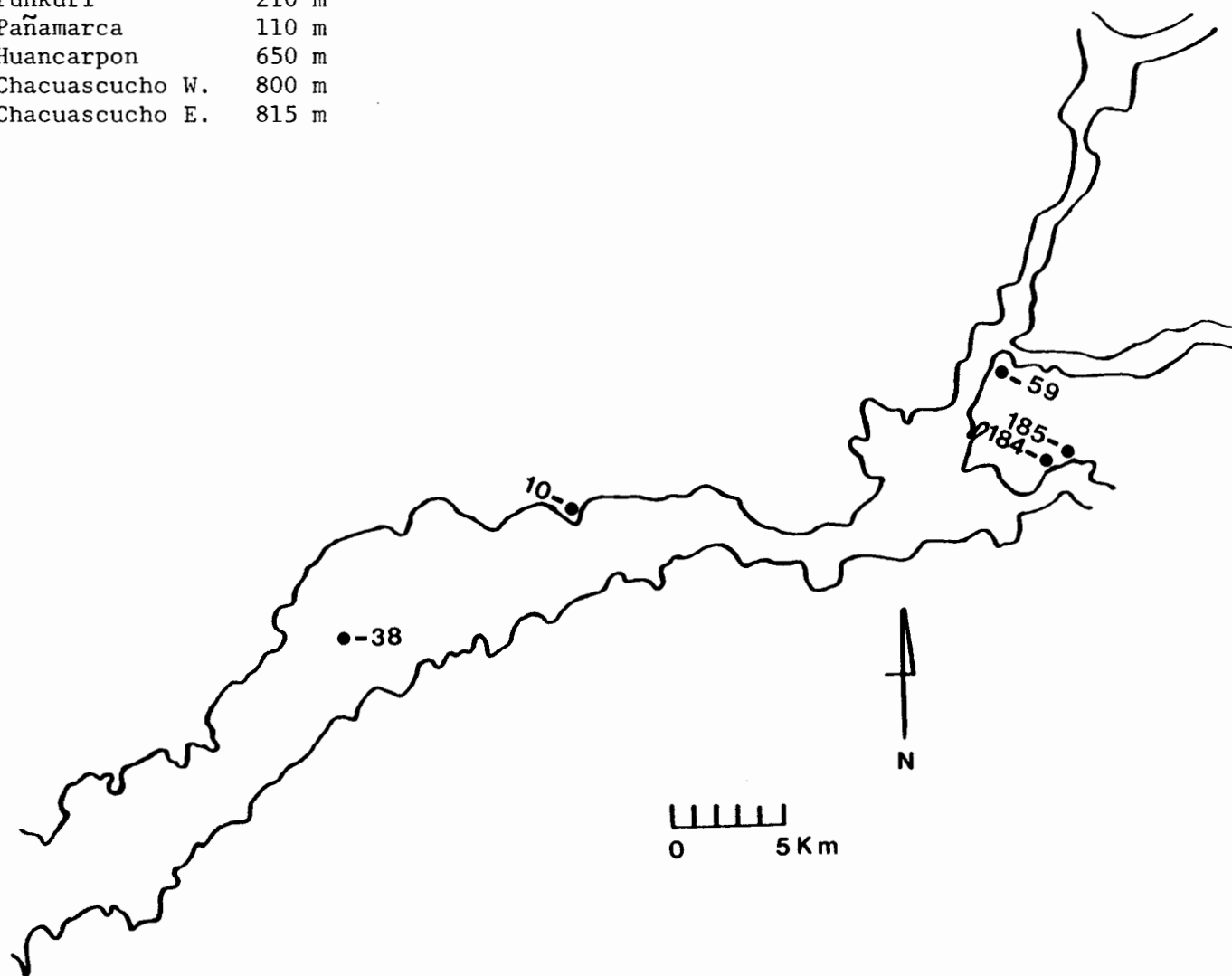


Figure 4. Map of Nepeña showing location of specific EIP sites.

An Emerging Perspective - Frontier Evidence

Evidence is available from the northern, eastern, and southern frontiers of the North Central Coast which hints at a high degree of interaction between this part of the coast and the neighboring Callejon de Huaylas. On the northern frontier, the Santa Valley experienced a marked Recuay occupation (Wilson 1981:48, 51), in addition to the Gallinazo and Moche occupations already mentioned. This Recuay occupation was heaviest in the upper valley (Ibid:48) and, as in Nepeña, the advent of the Moche conquest was accompanied by a major shift in settlement patterning (Ibid:53). In contrast, Recuay evidence is rare in Viru, one valley removed from and to the north of Santa (Strong and Evans 1952:348-351; Topic and Topic 1982:9), though evidence does exist in Viru for a major Gallinazo development (e.g. Willey 1953:31). These data suggest that Santa maintained strong coastal and highland cultural traditions during the EIP while adjoining valleys to the north and south emphasized coastal and highland cultural traditions respectively.

On the Central Coast, the Chancay Valley marks the northern limit of Lima expansion (Willey 1971:142-143). Given the absence of information concerning the EIP settlement of the Fortaleza, Pativilca, and Supe Valleys (Thompson 1966:544), data recovered from other Central Coast valleys takes on added importance. Recent excavations which have been conducted at Villa el Salvador on the Tablada de Lurin (Stothert 1980; Stothert and Ravines 1977) and at Vegueta in the lower Huaura Valley (Shady and Ruiz 1979a, 1979b) have served to broaden knowledge about the nature of the early EIP occupation of the Central Coast.

The EH ceramic assemblages of the Central Coast are characterized by neckless jars, bottles, and plastic decorative techniques. The EIP assemblages, however, are characterized by a marked decrease in all of these features and a concomitant increase in painted decoration and necked jars with strap handles.⁶ Artifacts found at Vegueta compare favorably with those excavated at Villa el Salvador (Shady and Ruiz 1979a:56). This observation suggests a similarity in artifact assemblage for sites along the Central Coast during the early EIP. Support for this idea comes from a third site in the lower Chancay Valley which was excavated decades before (Willey 1943). Baños de Boza is known to have been occupied at the start of the EIP (Patterson 1966:110), and the necked jars with strap handles found there are similar to those found at both Vegueta (Shady and Ruiz 1979a:54, 58) and Villa el Salvador (Stothert 1980:288; Stothert and Ravines 1977:188). Further comparative analysis suggests that this similarity in artifact assemblage may be extended to the North Central Coast by way of the North Central Highlands.

The artifacts found at Vegueta have been compared with artifacts found in the highlands. In general, they are said to be like those typically found at Huaras sites in the Callejon de Huaylas and most like those which distinguish the Higuera occupation at Kotosh (Shady and Ruiz 1979a:58). Excavations at Kotosh have produced a distinctive set of EIP artifacts (Izumi and Sono 1963:156-158) comparable not only to those excavated at Vegueta but also to those found on the surface at Cerro Chacuascucho East in Nepeña (Daggett 1985). In particular, the large mortars, ceramic spoons, and necked jars with strap handles found at Cerro Chacuascucho East are very similar to those found at Kotosh. In view of this fact, it is suggested that artifacts distinctive of the early EIP occupation of the Casma, Seco, Culebras, and Huarmey Valleys will

likely bear a resemblance to artifacts found on Cerro Chacuascucho East in Nepeña. As to the projected location and configuration of as yet undocumented sites in these four valleys, their setting at higher elevations and on ridgetops is expected.

Finally, Recuay sites have been reported for the eastern frontier along the slopes of the Cordillera Negra; specifically, the upper tributary regions of the Nepeña (Gambini 1975:120), Casma (Smith 1978:46), and Huarmey (Schaedel 1948) Rivers. I have already discussed the strong Recuay occupations of the upper Santa and Nepeña Valleys and the lack of evidence for a Moche or Lima occupation in the lower to middle Casma and Huarmey Valleys. These facts support the idea that there was an upper valley Recuay occupation of the entire North Central Coast.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, large adobe pyramids situated at lower elevations characterize the EIP settlement of the North Coast and the Central Coast. Researchers had assumed a similar EIP settlement of the North Central Coast. Hence, research strategies were developed which emphasized the discovery of ruins with high visibility and relatively easy access. This approach succeeded only in the Nepeña Valley and this fact suggested that other North Central Coast valleys had experienced a rural occupation. However, the occupation of the lower to middle Nepeña Valley is now known to date late in the EIP and it was preceded by an upper valley rural occupation linked to the highlands.

Mounting evidence suggests that the EIP occupation of Nepeña was concentrated on upper valley ridgetops and that pyramids were constructed in the middle valley only toward the end of this period. This dramatic change in valley settlement is reflected in the nearby Santa Valley. For those working on the North Central Coast, these observations suggest the viability of a research strategy which emphasizes the discovery of upper valley ridgetop sites or those marked by low visibility and relatively difficult access. Success in this venture will secure the emerging perspective that the EIP settlement of the North Central Coast was fundamentally different from that of neighboring parts of the coast. Why this was so is but one of a host of new questions which would certainly result from this realization.

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Notes

1. The EIP of the North Coast is not well dated in absolute terms (Topic 1982:256); instead, there is a clear emphasis on relative dating. There is a like emphasis on relative dating for the Central Coast (e.g. Stothert-1980:291, Table 1). As for the North Central Highlands, despite the recent publication of a series of radiocarbon dates (Grieder 1978:191-193), there remains an emphasis on relative dating (Ibid:75, Table 10).
2. The Nepeña Valley has been arbitrarily divided into lower, middle, and upper parts (Proulx 1968:5). The difference in elevation at river level between different parts of the valley reflects a gradual rise from the lower through the middle parts of the valley and then a much more rapid incline throughout the upper part of the valley. These valley parts generally fall within the following ranges of elevation, respectively: 0-100 meters, 101-325 meters, and 326-1500 meters above sea level.
3. The heaviest concentration of Moche III-IV sites, and the largest of them, in the Viru (Willey 1953:178-234) and Santa (Wilson 1981:52) Valleys are found at elevations equivalent to the middle Nepeña Valley.
4. Numerous Gallinazo sites have been reported for the lower Viru (Willey 1953:178-234) and lower Santa (Wilson 1981:47-52) Valleys. This suggests that, if there had been a Gallinazo occupation of Lacramarca, some evidence should have been found in the lower part of this valley, too. The absence of such evidence to date suggests that no such occupation occurred.
5. Like Cerro Chacuascucho East, this is an upper valley ridgetop site characterized by large grinding stones and the remains of countless utilitarian vessels (Bonavia 1982:430).
6. Elsewhere (Daggett 1985), I have discussed major differences between North Coast (Gallinazo) and North Central Coast (Chacuascucho) early EIP ceramic assemblages. These assemblages reflect distinct cultural traditions and one conclusion of this paper is that the early EIP assemblage of the North Central Coast draws inspiration from the cultural tradition of the Central Coast.

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