Megalithic sites in the Nepeña Valley, Peru

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The focus of this paper is on a number of intriguing megalithic ruins in the Nepeña Valley. After briefly describing this valley, a history of research into the nature and extent of these ruins will be provided as will a discussion of specific ideas which have been offered to account for their origin. A discussion of relevant research conducted elsewhere will follow and it will provide a chronological framework for the Nepeña ruins. Finally, discussion will center on two newly discovered sites in Nepeña and, on the basis of the configuration of one of these sites, relationships between specific megalithic sites in Nepeña will be suggested.

The Nepeña Valley is located approximately 400 km north of the capital city of Lima (Figure 1). The valley is narrow relative to others and it lacks a fan-shaped coastal plain (Kosok 1965: 207). About 60 km in length, the valley has been divided into lower, middle and upper parts for the purpose of discussion (Proulx 1968: 5). The lower valley extends from the shore to Capillania (Figure 2). A valley bottleneck just above San Jacinto marks the juncture of the middle and upper parts of the valley and this latter part extends above Jimbe to about 1550 m in elevation (Daggett 1982).

The upper part of the valley may be subdivided into wider and narrower parts as one proceeds up valley and immediately beyond the bottleneck there is a marked expansion of the valley floor into an agricultural pocket (Kosok 1965: 95). Known as the Moro Pocket, the broadening of the valley floor is primarily due to the fact that the Vinchamarca River, the last major tributary, merges with the Nepeña River at this point.

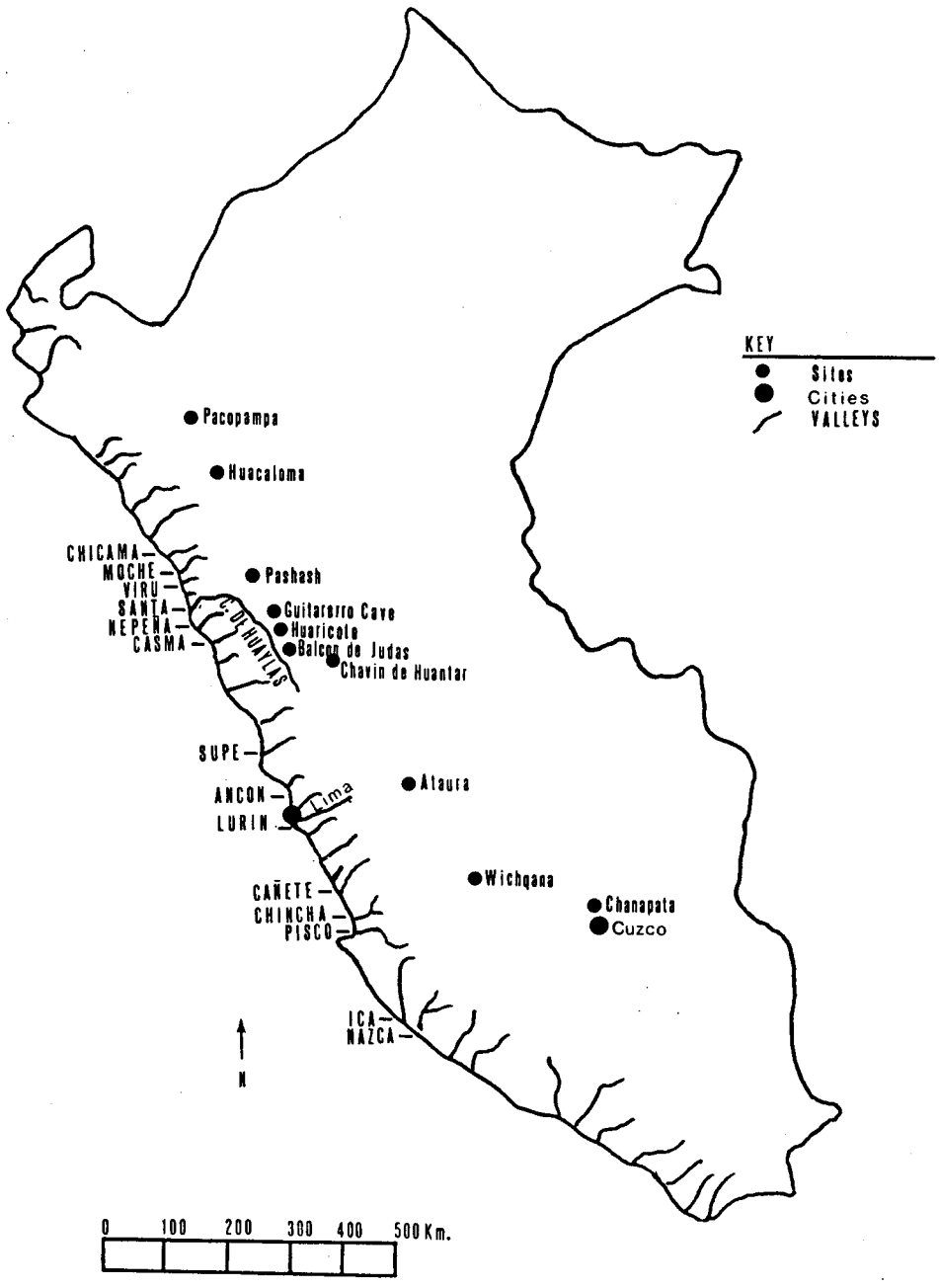

Figure 1. Map of Peru.

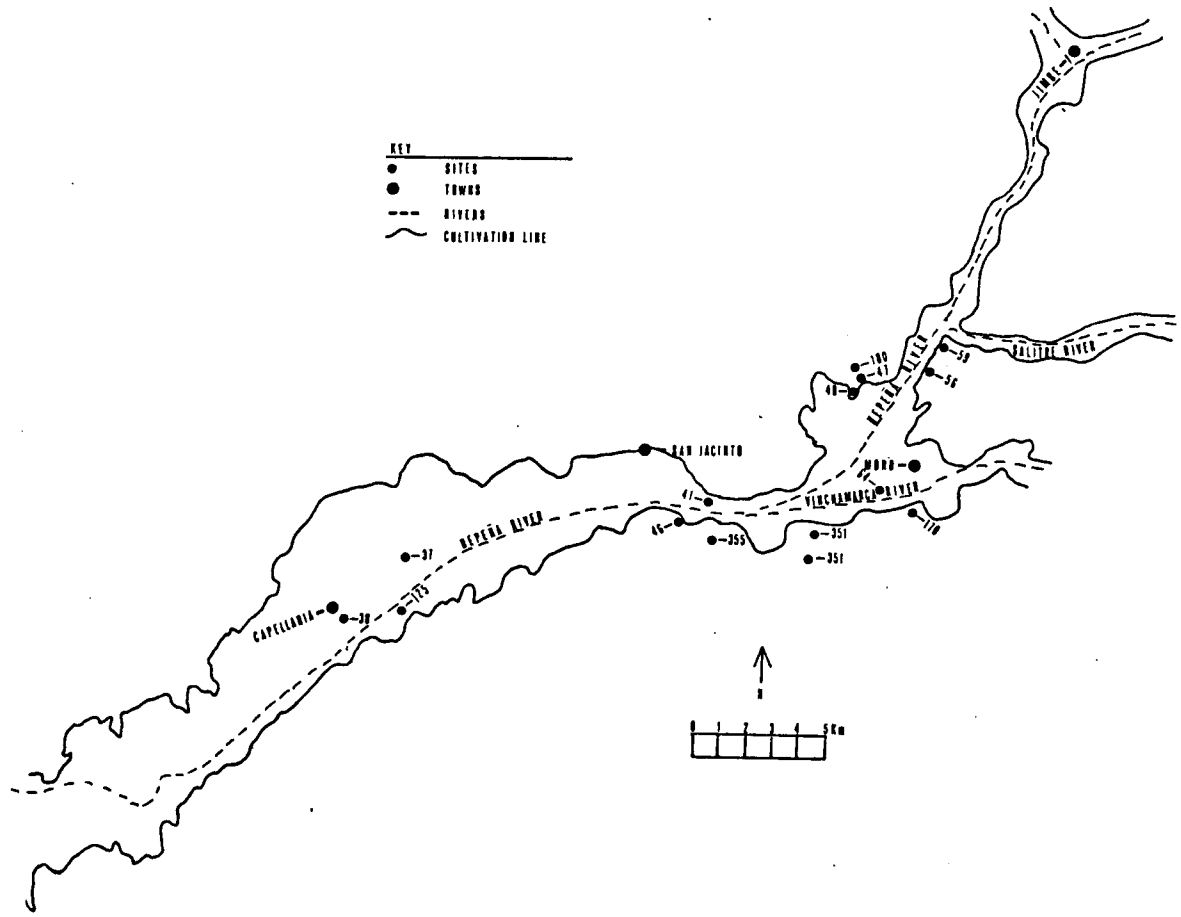

Figure 2. The Nepeña Valley.

Above the Moro Pocket the valley floor narrows considerably to just below Jimbe, this also being the case in the Salitre area where the Salitre and Nepeña Rivers come together. As for Jimbe, it is situated on the center-most of a number of ridges extending in finger-like fashion down from the Andes and which are formed by the upper tributaries of the Nepeña River.

In recording his travels in Nepeña, Ernst W. Middendorf (1894) mentions his visits to the ruins of Pañamarca (PV31-38)[1], Kushipampa (PV31-56) and Huancarpon (PV31-59). Ephraim G. Squier likewise comments on his visits to these first two ruins while providing detailed drawings of them (1877). He does the same for the ruins of Paredones (PV31-64), Motocachy (PV31-48), Quisque (PV31-46) and Alpacote (PV31-41). As for Quisque, this site particularly sparked the interest of the early twentieth century investigator Julio C. Tello.

This megalithic site was constructed off the valley floor on the southern side of the bottleneck distinguishing the middle and upper parts of the valley. Its strategic setting and the fact that its walls were parapeted led both Squier (ibid.) and Tello (1928: 263-264) to conclude that its function was defensive. Tello also concluded that Quisque exemplified how far what he had become convinced was a highland megalithic culture had spread to the west and, hence, to the coast (ibid.). He was later to expand his roster of such sites in Nepeña to include Kushipampa (1943: 138), Paredones (ibid.; 1960: 33) and Alpacote (1956: 16) in the upper valley and Huaca Partida (PV31-125) (1943: 138), the second <u>huaca</u> of Cerro Blanco (PV31-37) (ibid.: 139) and Pañamarca (ibid.: 138; 1956: 16) in the middle valley. The upper valley sites of Motocachy (Mejia X. 1963) and Huancarpon (ibid.; Sor-

iano I. 1941: 265) were subsequently added to this roster by other investigators.

Tello's idea of a highland origin for these sites was predicated upon his extensive work in the highlands and was in direct contrast to that of his contemporary Rafael Larco Hoyle. Having worked exclusively on the coast, Larco Hoyle had become equally convinced that such a megalithic culture was coastal in origin and that highland sites of this type were a later and related manifestation (1938: 36; 1966: 45).

A systematic documentation of sites in Nepeña has been under way since 1967 (Daggett 1982; Proulx 1968; 1973; Proulx and Daggett 1980). With the aid of aerial photographs, sites were initially recorded up to the Salitre area (Proulx 1968, 1973) and these sites included all of those mentioned by Tello as being megalithic in type. During his initial reconnaissance of the valley, Donald A. Proulx discovered at Kushipampa fragments of bowls decorated on the exterior with cross-hatched pattern burnishing (1968: 99). He had discovered like pottery at Motocachy in association with sherds decorated with stamped circle and dot (ibid.: 92; Figures 13e-f: 159).

Pottery decorated with stamped circle and dot had been widely reported to be an Early Horizon diagnostic (Izumi and Sono 1963; Menzel et al. 1964; Tello 1956; 1960; Willey and Corbett 1954) but this was hardly the case for pottery decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing. Because of this, Proulx initially concluded that this latter decorative technique was unique to Nepeña during the Early Horizon (1973: 23-26). Later, on the basis of further research in the Salitre area, he concluded that this technique was a late Early Horizon time marker for the valley (Proulx and Daggett 1980).

The ceramic prehistory of Peru has been divided into a series of alternating Periods and Horizons (Rowe 1962). This is based upon the fact that Peru experienced three periods of stylistic homogeneity each of which was preceeded by a period of stylistic heterogeneity. The Chavin, Huari and Inca art styles date to the Early, Middle and Late Horizons, respectively. The site of Chavin de Huantar, located in the North Central Highlands, is the type site for the Early Horizon and it is especially well-known for its megalithic architecture and the Chavin art style. The essence of this art style was the feline motif (Willey 1951: 103) and, given that the iconography carved in stone at Chavin de Huantar embodies the Chavin art style (ibid.), the introduction of this style into a local assemblage, or of artifacts normally found in association with it, marks the beginning of the Early Horizon there (Menzel et al. 1964). A master sequence has been established for the Ica Valley on the South Coast and there the Early Horizon begins with the introduction of the Chavin art style and ends, arbitrarily, with the replacement of resin painting by slip painting (Rowe 1963: 1).

Decorative techniques are termed horizon techniques when they can be shown to have been practiced widely across space but during a relatively brief span of time (Willey 1945). One such technique, circle stamping, has already been shown to be an accepted Early Horizon diagnostic. Another well-known horizon technique is that of decorating a red or red-slipped ware with geometric designs painted in white. In the Callejon de Huaylas, where it is best known, this technique characterizes pottery of the White-on-red (Bennett 1944), Huaylas (Lanning 1965: 140) or Huaras (Lumbreras 1974) phase.

For the purpose of this discussion, it is important to note that distinctive Huaras phase painted pottery is to be found in association

with bowls decorated on the exterior with cross-hatched pattern burnishing (Richard Burger, personal communication). These bowls are like those found in Nepeña and, in fact, the Nepeña ceramic assemblage which includes these bowls is essentially replicated at sites in the Callejon de Huaylas (ibid.). Equally important, the Huaras phase dates to the end of the Early Horizon (Burger 1978: 402-405; Lumbreras 1974: 17) and it corresponds to the last three epochs or phases of the Ica Valley Early Horizon sequence (Burger 1979: 139).

It is now possible, then, to tie the Nepeña sequence into the Ica master sequence by way of the sequence established for the Callejon de Huaylas. Significant is the fact that two sherds decorated with pattern burnishing, one of which was specifically decorated with a cross-hatched design, were found in an Janabarriu phase context at Chavin de Huantar (Burger 1978: 231). This is the second of three Early Horizon phases which have been established for this site, the last being the Huaras. Significant, too, is the fact that pattern burnishing was a characteristic decorative technique in the Ica Valley during the last three of ten Early Horizon phases and the initial phase of the Early Intermediate Period (Menzel et al. 1964).

Absolute dating makes it clear that the time frame under consideration here brackets the final centuries of the first millennium B.C.. The end of the Early Horizon in the Ica Valley has alternatively been dated to A.D. 100-150 (ibid.: 4), 350-300 B.C. (Rowe 1967: 25; Table 3) and 400 B.C. (Rowe and Menzel 1967). As for Chavin de Huantar, recent excavations there have provided radiocarbon evidence to support a dating of 390-200 B.C. for the Janabarriu phase (Burger 1981: 596) and a single date of 150 B.C. $\pm$100 has been obtained for the Huaras phase (Amat 1976). Other excavations at the site of Huaricoto in the Callejon

de Huaylas support this dating (Burger and Burger 1980: 31). At Huaricoto (Richard Burger, personal communication) and at the site of Pashash in the North Highlands (Smith 1978: 277-278, 302) white-on-red pottery was found in association with pattern burnished pottery. At Pashash the interface between the Early Horizon and the Early Intermediate Period is dated to 200 B.C. (ibid.: 60).

The North Coast equivalent of the Huaras pottery is Salinar in the Chicama and Moche Valleys (Larco H. 1944; 1966) and Puerto Moorin in the Viru Valley (Ford 1949; Willey 1953). Though pattern burnished pottery has not been reported for the megalithic sites in the Viru Valley it has been reported for the Early Horizon site of Huaca Herederos Chica (Pozorski 1976: 106) and the Salinar site of Cerro Arena (Brennan 1978, Appendix B) in the Moche Valley. Salinar is dated 450-200 B.C. (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 6) and a single radiocarbon date of 180 B.C. $\pm$220 has been obtained from Cerro Arena (Curtiss Brennan, personal communication). Finally, the South Highland equivalent of Salinar and Huaras would be Chanapata. This is so both in terms of the dating of Chanapata (350 B.C.-B.C./A.D.) (Chavez 1977: 154; Figure 4.5) and in terms of the fact that pattern burnishing is a characteristic decorative technique (Rowe 1944: 17; Figures 10-10,11,14).

The late Early Horizon practice of decorating bowls on the exterior with cross-hatched pattern burnishing is now known for the sites of Pacopampa (Morales C. 1980: Lamina 48), Huacaloma (Terada 1982: Plates 25-26) and Pashash (Smith 1978: 278; Illustration A-2,3) in the North Highlands as well as for the sites of Guitarrero Cave (Lynch 1980: 225; Figure 9-23a), Huaricoto (Richard Burger, personal communication) and Balcon de Judas (Steven Wegner, personal communication)[2] in the North

Central Highlands. As for the single sherd found at Chavin de Huantar, it is considered to be an exotic piece (Richard Burger, personal communication).

Further south, the late Early Horizon practice of decorating pottery with pattern burnishing per se is known for the sites of Ataura in the Central Highlands (Matos M. 1974: 98-100) and Wichqana in the South Central Highlands (Lumbreras 1959: 74). As already mentioned, Chanapata sites in the Cuzco region of the South Highlands characteristically include pottery decorated with pattern burnishing. On the South Coast this technique has been discussed as well for the Ica Valley. Immediately to the south, this technique has been reported for the Nazca Valley (Strong 1957: 19; Figure 7) and, presumably, it was practiced toward the end of the Early Horizon there just as it was in the Pisco, Chincha and Cañete Valleys on the South Central Coast (Stothert 1980: 289).

In the Lurin Valley on the Central Coast bowls like those found in Nepeña and decorated in the same manner with cross-hatched pattern burnishing have been found at Early Horizon sites (Scheele 1970). The same may be said for sites in the Bay of Ancon and in the Supe Valley (Willey and Corbett 1954: 43; Figure 7) both also being situated on the Central Coast. As for the North Central Coast, the only valley for which pottery decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing has been reported besides Nepeña is that of neighboring Casma where it has been found at one upper valley site (Fung P. y Williams L. 1977: 135; Lamina 1n-o). This is in sharp contrast to the Santa Valley, Nepeña's North Coast neighbor, which is now known to have experienced a late Early Horizon cultural phenomenon very similar to that of Nepeña with megalithic architecture and cross-hatched pattern burnished decoration being very

popular (Wilson 1981: 41-45). Finally, I have already mentioned the fact that the decorative technique of pattern burnishing is a Salinar trait in the Moche Valley.

To summarize, the decorative technique of pattern burnishing has been shown to have enjoyed considerable popularity in Peru, on the coast and in the highlands, from north to south, from the end of the Early Horizon to the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period. As for the specific decorative technique of cross-hatched pattern burnishing, it enjoyed a more restricted popularity in the northern highlands and on the north to central parts of the coast from Santa to Lurin. It is anticipated that as widespread as these phenomena appear to be each will prove to be even more so and each of these decorative practices will come to be recognized as true horizon techniques.

During 1981 two new sites were documented in Nepeña on the south side of the Moro Pocket and the discovery of these sites has led to a new perspective regarding the relationship between specific megalithic sites in the valley. The first of these two sites, Virahuanca Bajo (PV31-351), is the most important and as such it will be discussed first. The second, Santa Lucia (PV31-355) will be discussed in terms of the first, as will the sites of Anta (PV31-170), Huancarpon, Kushipampa, Motocachy, Paredones and San Juan (PV31-47 & PV31-180) all of which are to be found in the upper valley. Finally, the sites of Quisque and Alpacote at the juncture of the upper and middle parts of the valley and the sites of Huaca Partida, Pañamarca and the second huaca of Cerro Blanco in the middle valley will all be discussed in terms of these upper valley sites.

Virahuanca Bajo has spatially distinct northern and southern parts

(Figure 3). The northern part consists of four principal architectural features: a pair of stone-walled compounds, A and B, a stone-faced platform, and a stone-faced platform mound. This latter feature is situated at the western end of this part of the site, it is constructed of earth and rubble and it is faced at its corners with large well-cut blocks of stone. There are the remains of a fieldstone foundation atop this truncated mound and at the base of its northeastern corner huaqueros have exposed a large subterranean jar which was presumably used for storage. A low quadrangular stone wall encloses this mound while a natural gulley separates it from the largest and most complex of the two compounds.

Situated to the north of the platform mound, Compound B measures approximately 350 by 60 meters and it may be perceived as having three distinct parts. The western end is subdivided into a number of rooms of varying dimensions while the central part is subdivided into lateral rooms of equal size, there being seven of these on a side. As for the eastern end, it was left open and may be thought of as a plaza or courtyard. The outer walls of this compound were constructed of alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone with smaller stones being used for chinking.

About a hundred meters of open ground separates this larger compound from the smaller and less well-preserved one. There is ample evidence that Compound A bore the brunt of flash flooding in times past and at present it is bisected by a dirt road used principally by large trucks hauling stone from a local quarry. Fortunately, severe damage is essentially restricted to the northern side of this compound and enough remains of it to ascertain the overall dimensions of the compound. Measuring roughly 230 by 60 meters, the walls of this compound were con-

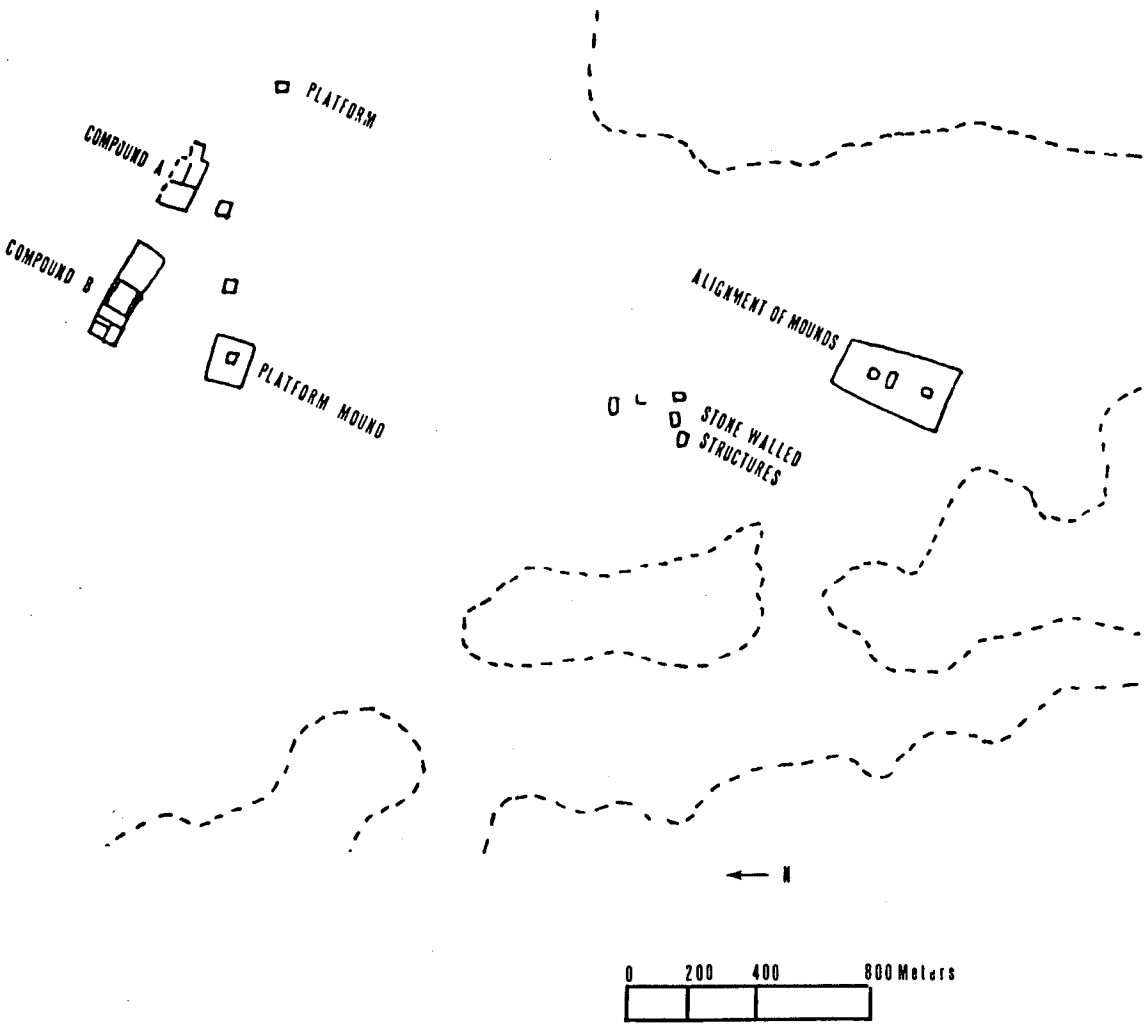

Figure 3. Virahuanca Bajo (PV31-351).

structed of alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone with smaller stones used to fill spaces. In addition, like Compound B, Compound A may also be viewed as having three parts. The western end is left open like the eastern end of the larger compound. This is followed by a central area which was bisected by a stone wall and which was probably subdivided into smaller rooms. As for the eastern end, it may actually have been an addition. It is indented 10 meters on its only preserved side and the enclosing stone wall actually consists of two walls back-to-back.

To the southeast of this compound is the stone-faced platform. Like the platform mound, it was constructed of earth and rubble but, unlike it, six stone-lined holes or cists have been exposed by huaqueros. While there is no surface evidence to support the contention that these cists had a mortuary function, the placement of the holes in close juxtaposition rules out their having been used as settings for pillars.

Evidence to suggest the likelihood that these stone-lined holes are indeed cists and did serve a funerary function comes from the first of two principal architectural features making up the second part of Virahuanca Bajo. This evidence consists of three stone-lined holes to be found on the middle of three aligned low earthen mounds which are enclosed by a low stone wall. It is assumed that this was a ritual alignment of mounds and that the holes were in fact cists used for the interment of remains, human or otherwise.[3] Situated approximately 400 meters northwest of this ceremonial area is a cluster of five quadrangular structures of varying dimensions. Like the compounds, these structures were built of split fieldstone, though the specific technique of alternating layers of large and small stones is not in evidence.

These two parts of Virahuanca Bajo, though spatially distinct, are

components of a single large site. Pottery decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing was found in association with all of the architectural features discussed above as have other late Early Horizon diagnostics. In addition, a canal was carved into the side of the low mountains which enclose the ceremonial part of this site on three sides.

Not long after the discovery of Virahuanca Bajo, a second and somewhat similar site was discovered in the Quebrada Santa Lucia near the valley bottleneck mentioned earlier. Like Virahuanca Bajo, Santa Lucia has been exposed to the ravages of flash flooding in times past and it is currently exposed to truck traffic. Unlike Virahuanca Bajo, however, it is much more the worse for this treatment. The remnants of stone-walled structures and terracing are difficult to make out on the rock-strewn slopes of the western side of the quebrada. Other structures built with the use of masonry techniques seen at Virahuanca Bajo are to be found on the floor of this side and are in a relatively good state of repair. The same cannot be said, however, for what must have been an impressive compound in the center of the quebrada. Enough remains, though, to make it clear that its architects were the same or were ones who shared ideas with those who constructed the Virahuanca Bajo compounds.

The Santa Lucia compound is indented at the only preserved end of its only remaining side. In this regard, then, it is like the smaller compound at Virahuanca Bajo. It is also like the larger compound there, however, because this end is subdivided into two sets of seven rooms of equal size separated by a narrower entryway. Interestingly, most of what remains of the wider part of the Santa Lucia compound consists of a third set of seven rooms. Diagnostic late Early Horizon artifacts were found in association with all of the architectural features making

up the site of Santa Lucia and a canal is visible on the slopes on either side of the quebrada.

The unique configuration of Virahuanca Bajo makes it clear that megalithic sites previously thought of as being individual sites are in fact components of much larger sites or centers. In addition to the centers of Virahuanca Bajo and Santa Lucia, there are two other such centers in the Moro Pocket, one in the Salitre area and, possibly, one in the middle valley.

Situated on neighboring plateaus at the confluence of the Nepena and Salitre Rivers, the sites of Kushipampa and Huancarpon are the major components of one such center. Huancarpon may be described as an alignment of stone-faced earthen platform mounds. Ceremonial in nature, (Proulx 1968: 100-101; Plate 6a: 174), this site is known to have been occupied at the end of the Early Horizon because of the presence of cross-hatched pattern burnished pottery, large underground storage jars and stone-lined cists.

As for Kushipampa, it is by far the largest compound in the valley. Its walls were constructed of alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone with chinking and large well-cut blocks of stone were used to define corners and entryways. A lintel stone for one of these entryways was carved with a figure (ibid.: 99; Plate 5b: 173) and, as has already been mentioned, the pottery of this site dates almost entirely to the end of the Early Horizon. Finally, though separated by about a kilometer, Huancarpon and Kushipampa are linked by a canal which was excavated along the lower slopes of their respective plateaus.

The sites of Paredones and Anta may also be shown to be components of a larger site. Situated in a pampa to the southwest of Paredones on the south side of the Moro Pocket, Anta looks remarkably like the cere-

monial sector of Virahuanca Bajo. It consists of an alignment of three earthen mounds around which a low stone wall was erected (Proulx 1973: 191-193; Figure 45). Of interest is the fact that the largest of these mounds has five segments, three of which are defined at either end by stone-lined cists. During 1981 distinctive late Early Horizon pottery was discovered at this site and at the nearby compound of Paredones which was constructed of alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone and with large dressed stones used to define corners and entryways (Proulx 1968: 104-105; Plan 12; 1973: Plate 22: 277).

Finally, the sites of Motocachy and San Juan may be paired in the same manner. Motocachy is a ridgetop platform mound site situated on the north side of the Moro Pocket across from Paredones. During the late Early Horizon this site was transformed into a ritual alignment of platform mounds, two of which were surmounted by stone structures. In addition to cross-hatched pattern burnished sherds, large subterranean storage jars (Proulx 1968: 92; Squier 1877: 208-209) and the masonry technique of alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone (Proulx 1968: 91) are to be seen here.

In the pampa below and to the northeast of it are to be found the remains of the non-ceremonial part of this late Early Horizon center. The stone foundation of a hilltop quadrangular structure overlooks a segment of a stone wall (ibid.: 89), perhaps all that is left of a megalithic compound. To the northeast is a small earthen mound set upon a meter-high earthen platform. This mound associates with what may be a plaza and about a hundred meters to the west of the mound there is a larger stone-faced platform (Proulx 1973: 198-199). A final stone-walled structure, long and narrow and divided into four compartments of roughly equal size, is to be found about 200 meters to the west of the platform. Typ-

ical late Early Horizon pottery was found over a wide area of this pampa.

Quisque is an excellent match for Kushipampa and Paredones in terms of the architectural techniques employed in its construction. Like the two compounds, Quisque was built by putting down alternate layers of large and small split fieldstone. Small stones were used to fill in spaces and very large well-cut stones were then used to define corners and entryways (Proulx 1973: Plate 23B: 279). To cement the late Early Horizon dating for Quisque, cross-hatched pattern burnished decorated sherds were found there in 1980.

The same cannot be said for the ruins of Alpacote situated on the valley floor below Quisque. This compound was constructed of rounded river cobbles set in mud (Kosok 1965: 206; Proulx 1968: 82-83; Plan 7) and, though ceramic evidence is lacking, the use of this construction technique sets Alpacote apart from the other sites being considered here. Hence, the assessment that this site is post-Early Horizon in date (Mejia X. 1963; Proulx 1973: 117) appears to be correct.

It is conceivable that the sites of Pañamarca, Huaca Partida and, possibly, the second huaca of Cerro Blanco are parts of a late Early Horizon center in the middle valley. Pañamarca is dominated by an Early Intermediate Period (Moche) mud brick ceremonial center, but there is also a smaller stone structure which is the focus of interest here. Though this latter structure has been argued to be Middle Horizon in date (Schaedel 1951), the fact that its walls were constructed of large and small split fieldstone put down in alternating layers and the fact that its corners and entryways were defined by large blocks of well-cut stone supports the counter-argument that it is late Early Horizon in date. This latter argument receives additional support from the fact

that a sherd decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing was collected here in 1967 (Donald Proulx, personal communication).

Unfortunately, very little in the way of surface artifacts have been found at the site of Huaca Partida and none that have been found are distinctive of the late Early Horizon. This large earthen platform mound receives its name by virtue of the fact that a deep trench has been excavated into its summit and this has created the illusion that there are two mounds (Proulx 1973: 152-153; Figure 34). Ceremonial in nature (ibid.: 152), this artificial mound was faced with distinctive alternating layers of large and small split fieldstone with small stones being used to fill the gaps (ibid.: Plate 24a: 281).

As for the site of Cerro Blanco, it is composed of a larger and a smaller mound and this is considered to be an example of an Initial Period form of ceremonial architecture (Pozorski 1976: 242-243). Evidence for a late Early Horizon occupation of the larger of these two mounds, then, serves to document a later use of this mound. This evidence consists of large blocks of well-cut stone on the down valley side of the mound and distinctive pottery discovered atop the mound in 1981.

To conclude, a number of megalithic ruins in the Nepeña Valley have been discussed. These ruins are characterized by specific masonry techniques and by pottery decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing. This particular form of pattern burnishing and pattern burnishing in general have been shown to be horizon techniques indicative of the late Early Horizon-early Early Intermediate Period time frame. In Nepeña at this time, valley settlement favored the Moro Pocket and the Salitre area immediately adjacent to it in the upper valley. There, five centers composed of spatially distinct ceremonial and non-ceremonial parts were constructed.[4]

Footnotes

[1] In accordance with the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Centro de Investigación y Restauración de Bienes Monumentales, Lima, Perú, sites in the Nepeña Valley have been numbered consecutively with the prefix PV31 (Peruvian Valley 31). For convenience sake, sites are so numbered without this prefix on Figure 2.

[2] According to Steven Wegner, while no pattern burnished pottery has come to light during his recent excavations at the site of Balcon de Judas, he did see a single sherd decorated with cross-hatched pattern burnishing in the collection made by Wendell C. Bennett in 1938 and which is housed at the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

[3] Stone-lined cists, mortuary in function, are reported by Gary Vescelius to be a new feature characteristic of the Huaylas (Huaras) phase in the Callejon de Huaylas (Lanning 1965). In addition, stone-lined cists are a feature of the Puerto Moorin phase sites in the Viru Valley (Willey 1953).

[4] Research during the year August 1980-August 1981 was conducted under the auspicies of Credenciales No. 112-80-DTCPMC and 029-81-D-OMA issued by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura. Funding for field research was provided by a Fulbright-Hays grant for graduate study abroad and by a Sigma Xi grant-in-aid of research.

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