

11-1-2009

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### Recommended Citation

Falcon Huayta, Victor (2009) "Reconstruction of the Burial Offering at Punkuri in the Nepena Valley of Peru's North-Central Coast," *Andean Past*: Vol. 9 , Article 9.

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## RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BURIAL OFFERING AT PUNKURÍ IN THE NEPEÑA VALLEY OF PERU'S NORTH-CENTRAL COAST

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In 1933 Julio C. Tello began a program of field-work in the Nepeña Valley. There he carried out various projects, among them excavations at a site called Punguri by local people then and Punkurí by archaeologists and the general public today. At the time, Tello was interested in everything related to his concept of Chavín. At present, Tello's field records are divided between the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú (MNAAHP) and the Museo de Arqueología y Antropología of the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (MAA-UNMSM). Previously unpublished documents relating to Tello's excavations at Cerro Blanco and at Punkurí were recently printed by MAA-UNMSM (Tello 2005).

In the course of investigating the role of large exotic molluscs including *Spondylus princeps*, *Strombus galeatus*, *Conus fergusonii*, and *Fasciolaria princeps*, among others, in the ritual and paraphernalia of central Andean precolumbian societies, my colleagues and I found a "natural trumpet" made from the shell of a *Strombus galeatus*, a marine gastropod (Falcón *et al.* 2005). Later, I established that it pertained to the burial context of a "sacrificed woman" found by Tello at Punkurí, which he declared enthusiastically to be "the first trace of the people of the Chavín culture identified in the area"

(Anon. 1933b in Daggett 1987:139).<sup>1</sup> This article analyses the circumstances of the discovery of this burial context and the objects associated with it. The goal is to reconstruct the event which included the deposit of this precolumbian trumpet or *huayllaquepa* which is, at present, the only object known to remain from the context excavated by Tello at this site.<sup>2</sup>

### PUNKURÍ

Punkurí, as described by Tello, is on the right bank of the lower Nepeña River Valley, at km 409 on the Pan-American Highway North, where it makes a turn to the east, near the town of San Jacinto. Its distance from the coast is 27 km and its altitude is 230 masl (Daggett 1987:

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<sup>1</sup> "El primer hallazgo de las gentes de la cultura Chavín, identificado en el terreno".

<sup>2</sup> The whereabouts of all the other objects associated with this burial offering are unknown, although the discovery was published in various periodicals of the day and extensive field data are now available. These objects, among which are a stone mortar and pestle, both beautifully decorated, belong to Peru's national cultural patrimony and their value is emblematic because they correspond to a context excavated by one of the founders of Peruvian archaeology; they belong to a time in which the earliest iconographic repertoires associated with monumental architecture were being created; and they come from a known archaeological context which makes them one of only two known cases. The other Formative decorated stone mortar from an excavated context was recently recovered from the Santa Valley site of San Juanito (Chapdelaine and Pimentel 2008:248-253).

114; Vega-Centeno 1999:5). Today the setting of Punkurí is the same as Julio C. Tello when saw it more than seventy years ago (Figure 1).

Like many of the huacas in the valleys of the Peruvian coast, Punkurí appeared to be an earthen mound set in the middle of sugar cane fields, in this case belonging then to the Sociedad Agrícola Nepeña Ltda (Nepeña Agricultural Company Ltd.), administered by a North-American, John B. Harrison, who had excavated there in 1929 (Daggett 1987:112). Harrison had also excavated at Cerro Blanco during the previous year, when, during the course of the construction of irrigation canals and wagon roads, its well-known Chavinoid walls were uncovered. It was the photographs of these murals that made Tello take an interest in the Nepeña Valley sites (Bischof 1997:203; Daggett 1987:111-112).

Through the recent publication of Tello's field notes, it is now known that Punkurí was the object of at least two clandestine excavations. The first of these was conducted by another hacienda administrator called Subiriá in the western part of the site many years previously ("hace muchos años"). The second excavation was by Harrison (Tello 2005:76; Figure 2).

Tello's work at the site attracted the attention of the press. Nevertheless, once the site had become old news and the emotion of the moment had passed, Punkurí did not become the object of greater attention, and the continuity of research there was lost because of the political hostilities of the government at the time towards Tello (Daggett 2007:81, 83-84, 87-91). No conservation measures were taken, and the face of the polychrome clay sculpture of a feline, unique in all the Andes, was destroyed (Bischof 1994:173; Samaniego 2006:18, 22-23; Vega-Centeno 1999:7, 12). Fortunately, in 1998, a research and restoration project at Punkurí

under the direction of Lorenzo Samaniego Román changed the fortunes of this monument by preparing it for visitors.<sup>3</sup>

## RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PUNKURÍ BURIAL OFFERING

In this article I consider the burial offering in its funerary context, which is characterized by its status as a primary context, its articulation with the monument's architecture, and its composition and associated objects, the majority of them elaborate and exotic in relation to the location of the find.

Until recently, the absence of better references to the work of Tello at Punkurí forced researchers to resort to reports in newspapers of the day, to discussion of the little iconography that had been published, and to site visits (Bischof 1994, 1995; Daggett 1987; Proulx 1973, Vega-Centeno 1998, 1999). As for the discovery and description of the contents of the burial offering, there were only brief references (Anon. 1933b in Daggett 1987:139; Tello 1943:136-137), a few profile drawings of excavations in the temple, and a photo which shows the funerary context at the foot of the clay feline (Larco 2001:15-29, figure 24). In this article I reconstruct events related to the excavation of the burial offering, principally as narrated by recently published documents from the Tello Archive.<sup>4</sup>

There is detailed information about the way that Tello came to work in the Nepeña Valley (Bischof 1997; Daggett 1987:112). According to

<sup>3</sup> (<http://www.uns.edu.pe/punkuri/punkuri6.html>; consulted July 20, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> I worked directly from papers in the Tello Archive in UNMSM. However, because those documents are now published, I refer to the pagination of the published book, not to the original foliation of the documents themselves.

the field notes, when Tello decided to excavate in front of the clay feline, an earlier excavation had already been made in the area by Harrison's workers who had begun to excavate the "waka" from its upper part in the north, opening a deep trench. They had encountered what Tello later called the "Painted Staircase" ("escalera pintada") and the clay feline found in the middle of it (Tello 2005:76, photo P9/F2/ 56 on p. 78). The discovery of the feline made Harrison and his workers so enthusiastic they were about to destroy the head of the idol under the suspicion that it contained the treasure they sought. Fortunately, Harrison did not take the suggestion and decided to contact Tello (*ibid.*). Continuing his search, Harrison discovered a small quadrangular feature at the top of the monument and decided to excavate almost its entire floor which was at a depth of 4 meters from the top of the excavation. At this point he was halted by the resistance of the fill and the lack of results (*ibid.*: 80-81). Under these circumstances, Harrison ordered excavation in front of the clay idol to a depth of one meter, at which point excavation ended because of the compaction of the fill (*ibid.*: 90).

Four years later, on Tuesday, 19 September 1933, Tello's workers had already cleared the rubble left by Harrison on the part of the site containing the Painted Staircase, the clay feline, and in front of it. Tello decided to excavate there because he thought that Harrison's test trench was shallow, and that by deepening it one might encounter human remains ("algunos cadáveres") given the presence of the idol nearby. An important point is that Tello said that Harrison broke the plaster of the floor ("rompió el enlucido del piso"), which consisted of a layer apparently formed by lime and sand, or perhaps by a special whitened clay and sand, which formed a cap some 4 cm thick, located over

another surface painted brick-red (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup> On the following day, Tello cleared the area better, and confirmed that earth had previously been removed. Nevertheless, he decided to go at least 2 m deeper in order to understand the structure of the huaca (*ibid.*).<sup>6</sup> At that point Platform 2 was already quite clear. During this operation Tello discovered a lower plastered and painted wall, distinct from the staircase structure, and he decided to follow it. He was sure he had an interesting discovery and enlarged the area of excavation to 3.5m in length by 2.5 m in width, ordering his workers to dig "until reaching the painted wall" ("hasta alcanzar el muro pintado"; *ibid.*).

The following day, when the area was cleared to a depth of a meter, Tello ordered the work to stop there. He went into the trench to examine the excavation to decide if they would continue to deepen it only near the painted wall, which had been discovered about 30cm below, and a little in front of, the last step of the Painted Staircase (*ibid.*).<sup>7</sup> With his shovel he removed a lump and was surprised to notice the rim of what appeared to be a cup ("taza") which he examined in private and which gave him the "sensation of stone or of iron" ("sensación de piedra o de fierro"; *ibid.*: 91). Tello had been presented with a stone mortar which he did not disinter immediately because, as he said,

Not being yet sure of the type of object I had found, I covered it with earth and I re-

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<sup>5</sup> "Torta formada aparentemente por cal y arena o tal vez por una arcilla especial blanquizca y arena que forma una capa como de cuatro centímetros de grueso colocada sobre otra superficie pintada de ladrillo."

<sup>6</sup> "por lo menos unos 2m de profundidad con el fin de conocer la estructura de la huaca".

<sup>7</sup> "Había descubierto como a 30 centímetros por debajo y un poco atrás del último peldaño de la escalera pintada."

mained at the site and ordered the laborers to continue working at my side . . .<sup>8</sup>

They were continuing to go down on the sides while Tello remained above the mortar, when one of them alerted him to the presence of an object “in the form of a drill” (“en forma de barreno”). Tello covered the new find and the work day continued. The fact that the workers were speaking in Quechua aroused his suspicions. Tello indicated that he once again covered with earth the finds of the day and selected a new watchman to stay and sleep at the site, guarding the objects until the following day. In the afternoon the administrator of the hacienda and his wife arrived at Punkurí. Tello told them what had happened and invited them to witness on the next day the removal of the stone objects including a “large stone vessel with engravings in the Chavín style and a tool similar to a mace, also completely made of stone” (*ibid.*).<sup>9</sup>

In an account of the events of this day Tello said he took down a wall which ran longitudinally along the platform and which retained its fill. Likewise he indicated that

during the excavation of the two stone objects towards the rear center of the sounding a mound of ash and small carbon fragments was found, as well as guinea pig skeletons at two sides, and a type of white plumage at various points (*ibid.*: 92).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “No seguro aún de la clase de objeto que había encontrado lo cubrí con tierra me paré sobre el sitio y ordené a los obreros que continuaran trabajando a mi alrededor . . .”

<sup>9</sup> “Vaso grande de piedra con grabados al estilo Chavín y otra que es una herramienta semejante a una porra también toda de piedra”.

<sup>10</sup> “Durante la excavación que condujo al hallazgo de las dos piezas de piedra se encontró hacia la parte media y posterior del pozo un montón de ceniza y pequeños

Copper objects and human bones, which appeared to be disturbed, were located “in the back-dirt” (“en el desmonte”).

On Thursday, 21 September, Tello expanded and cleaned his excavation with the goal of photographing the objects *in situ*, finding fragments of purplish clay murals. He once again checked the prepared surface of the platform and the fill consisting of “layers of semi-spherical adobes slightly flattened, and hardened clay with a few stones” (*ibid.*: 93).<sup>11</sup> We note the absence up to now of references to the presence of ceramics in the fill. This situation continued throughout the course of the excavation and is very important because it contradicts the information which subsequently appeared in newspapers of the time.

I continue to follow events from Tello’s perspective:

at about 1.2m from the line which the upper part of the sounding forms with the base of the first step of the Painted Staircase, as one sees in the attached schematic drawing, a precious gray stone mortar with decoration in relief on its external surface was found, as well as a large pestle also made of stone (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup>

Harrison took photos and filmed the discovery. At this point Tello intuited that he was being

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fragmentos de carbón y a uno y otro lado esqueletos de cuyes y una especie de plumilla blanca en varios sitios.”

<sup>11</sup> “Capas de adobes semiesféricos aplanados o achatados y barro endurecido con algunas piedras”.

<sup>12</sup> “Como a 1.20m de la línea que en la parte superior del pozo forma la base del primer peldaño de la escalera pintada como se ve en el esquema adjunto se encontraron. . . un precioso mortero de piedra gris con ornamentaciones en relieve en su cara externa y un largo molidor igualmente de piedra”.

presented with his first authentic Chavín tomb (“auténticamente Chavín”). Successive events confirmed his hunch of being near the body of the burial. Continuing, he noted the presence of very fine purplish dust and a few pieces of charcoal.

Soon I [Tello] discovered the skull and from its position I deduced that the body was placed with the face up and a little forward (*ibid.*: 94).<sup>13</sup>

The fragile bones of the cadaver defined the position of the body with the head towards the east and the feet to the west. The purplish fine dust was found mainly around the waist and pelvis of the individual. Tello attributed its presence to the remains of the soft tissues (“partes blandas”) and the clothes of the cadaver. At this time Tello, as he later did in the company of Rafael Larco Hoyle, recovered

many turquoise beads and a bluish stone. . . The beads were of different sizes, and of various shapes; the work is relatively crude in the majority of the beads, nevertheless, a few are very well made, especially a large sphere (*ibid.*).<sup>14</sup>

One must observe that, up to this point, Tello does not mention in his field notes the presence of several objects associated with the burial offering, such as the *huayllaquepa* made of *Strom-*

*bus galeatus* and the *Spondylus princeps* valves to which we will return later.

The objects found were moved to the nearby town of San José. On Friday 22 September, Tello’s team proceeded with the excavation of the fill containing the funerary context until they arrived at the floor on which the body had been placed. Likewise, the clearing of the north or main façade and the east side of the temple continued. During this work they found a few isolated cadavers, some Moche sherds, and constructions of rectangular adobes within the rubble near the surface. This aspect is interesting, because such references are characteristic of mentions which appear in the field notes of the presence of human remains, among which were isolated skulls. The presence of another type of ceramic is only referred to in a news article dated 28 September, which was neither written nor dictated by Tello, in which “fragments of black ceramics” (“fragmentos de cerámica negra”) were mentioned (Anon 1933a in Daggett 1987:137). When Tello referred to the presence of ceramics at Punkurí in a newspaper report, he did so in the following manner: “I also found ceramic fragments which belong to the finest types and pieces encountered” (*ibid.* 136).<sup>15</sup> As we have seen, this could refer to the presence of Moche ceramics which were found in the rubble which covered Punkurí.

Saturday, 23 September was dedicated to clearing the two columns that began to appear towards the east side of the temple, and to almost completely clearing the main (north) facade (Figure 3). According to the available records, the body was not touched, and clearance was limited to a niche at the foot of the

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<sup>13</sup> “Un polvillo muy fino de color violáceo y de algunos trozos de carbón de palo . . . Pronto descubrí [dice Tello] el cráneo y por su posición deduje que el cadáver estuvo echado pues la cara estaba hacia arriba con una ligera inclinación adelante” (*ibid.*: 94).

<sup>14</sup> “Numerosas cuentas de turquesas y de una piedra azulada. . . Las cuentas eran de diferentes tamaños, y de varias formas, el trabajo es relativamente tosco en la mayoría de las cuentas; sin embargo, unas están muy bien talladas principalmente una grande esférica” (*ibid.*).

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<sup>15</sup> “Hallé también fragmentos de cerámica que acusan pertenecer a modelos y piezas de los más finos que se han encontrado.”

idol. At the end of the day Toribio Mejía Xesspe and his wife arrived from Lima.

On Sunday, 24 September, Punkurí received the visit of various personalities who took part in the extraction of the individual within the burial offering. Among them were Rafael and Javier Larco Hoyle, Alfredo Hoyle, a Mr. Miñano, a photographer, and the draftsman Mr. Díaz. Views of the context were recorded with still photographs and on ciné film. Rafael Larco Hoyle and Tello concentrated their work on the body of the burial offering and Tello declared,

It appears that the cadaver corresponded to an individual of poor constitution who was probably put to rest with the muscles and legs flexed. Around the body, especially around the waist, I encountered a multitude of turquoise beads, and a few purple cylindrical beads, some triangular plates with closed [sic] edges, or sharp objects which look like shark teeth. In addition a good set of shell beads was found, and a magnificent example of *Strombus* with the external surface also worked in Chavín style” (*ibid.*).<sup>16</sup>

This is the first mention of the *huayllaquepa* of *Strombus galeatus*, in spite of the fact that it certainly would have been visible since the day when the stone objects were removed, because it was located between them and the body of the individual. The *Strombus* was broken into sev-

eral pieces, perhaps by the weight of the fill, or perhaps during handling, so that only Tello perceived the incisions which mark its Chavín affiliation. The left hand on the last curve of the *huayllaquepa* shell was not noticed, so this motif remained unknown (Figure 4).<sup>17</sup>

Toribio Mejía assumed the recording for the excavations on the following day, Monday, 25 September, as indicated by the notes in the Tello Archive of the MAA-UNMSM. On this day the removal of the last elements of the context was finished, adding additional data about the event. Mejía noted that 70 shells of *Scutalus proteus* appeared “at the sides and shoulder of the body” along with

a good quantity of beads made of turquoise and of shells, two examples of *Spondylus pictorum* with two pairs of perforations made in order to wear them as pendants. The presence of very fine, pulverized, somewhat purplish earth is noted around and below the body, as if it consists of the remains of clothing, or other objects that perhaps accompanied the cadaver (Mejía in Tello 2005:97).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Parece que el cadáver correspondiera a un individuo de constitución pobre y al ser acostado se le colocó probablemente con los muslos y piernas flexionadas. Alrededor del cadáver y principalmente alrededor de la cintura encontré multitud de cuentas de turquesas y algunas cuentas cilíndricas de color morado, de láminas triangulares con bordes cerrados [sic] o espinosos que parecen dientes de tiburón. Además se encontró un buen lote de cuentas de conchas y un magnífico ejemplar de *Strombus* que presenta la superficie externa labrada también del estilo Chavín.”

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<sup>17</sup> Milano Trejo Huayta found the remains of the *huayllaquepa* from Punkurí in two separate bags in the MNAHP storehouse of organic material in 1999. Later, noticing the similarity of the fragments and their joins, he proceeded to glue the parts together, reconstructing the conch trumpet and revealing, in this way, the incised design of a left hand. The recent final restoration was entrusted to Rosa Martínez Navarro, conservator of the MNAHP (Falcón *et al.* 2005).

<sup>18</sup> “A los lados y hombro del cadáver: buena cantidad de cuentas de turquesa de conchas, dos ejemplares de *Spondylus pictorum* con dos pares de perforaciones como para llevar colgados. Se constató la presencia de tierra muy fina pulverizada de aspecto algo violáceo alrededor y debajo del cadáver como si se tratara de restos de las partes tal vez correspondientes a los vestidos, algunos otros objetos que quizás acompañaron al cadáver.” This was written by Toribio Mejía Xesspe in the site notebook.

Having cleaned the area, they noted that the individual had been placed on a platform and that the back of the body had made a small depression in it.

Later, the work was organized to clear the walls with polychrome reliefs which were encountered on both sides of the burial offering. At this point lenses of ash and molluscs were detected. I stress that Mejía also did not mention ceramics in the fill, except when he referred to “Muchik ceramics” (“cerámica Muchik”) in the upper fill. On the other hand, the iconography of the reliefs has been written up and discussed and several photos of them have been published (Bischof 1994:173 figure 3d; Daggett 1987:116-117; Samaniego 1992). To this we can add the publication of the Tello Archive (2005).

## DISCUSSION

What was the fullest description we have of this burial offering before the publication of the field notes? In a newspaper interview that appeared on 2 October 1933, Tello mentioned its components in this context:

Having made a test pit in front of the small platform on which the talons of the idol rested, and only at a depth of 2m, a body was encountered. . . It was placed in an east-west direction. Next to it were found two stone objects, a large vessel and a type of pestle, both ornamented with figures in relief, in Chavín style. . . Around the body, and mainly at the level of the pelvis, about a kilo of turquoise beads was found, of different forms and sizes, from the small, discoidal bead, almost flat, to the large bead, spherical or cylindrical, and weighing eight to ten grams. Also found was a conch shell (*Strombus galeatus*) trum-

pet, whose surface appears ornamented with hidden [sic] figures, also in Chavín style; sixty examples of land snails (*Scutalus proteus*); a pair of mollusc shells (*Spondylus pictorum*); and skeletal remains of guinea pigs and birds, very fragmentary and partially pulverized (Anon. 1933b in Daggett 1987: 139).<sup>19</sup>

Now we know that there was a sequence in the appearance and location of the objects associated with the burial offering and we can draw some important conclusions:

(1) It is improbable that the burial offering had an entrance to the surface of the platform which extended to the feet of the feline. Even if it is certain that Tello did not see the original surface, he ascertained that Harrison broke it in his search and Tello encountered remains of this surface as soon as he enlarged his own excavation. Likewise, it is difficult to think that if Harrison had found any indication of the presence of a tomb he would not have continued. Nevertheless, he abandoned the excavation at only a meter's depth from the start. In consequence, it is most probable that the tomb was sealed and hidden with the fill of the second platform.

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<sup>19</sup> “Al realizarse un cateo delante de la pequeña plataforma donde descansaban las garras del ídolo, y sólo a dos metros de profundidad, se encontró un cadáver. . . estuvo echado en dirección E.O; junto a él se encontraron dos objetos de piedra; un gran vaso y una especie de porra, ambos ornamentados con figuras de relieve, del estilo Chavín. . . Alrededor del cadáver, y principalmente al nivel de la pelvis, se concentró como un kilo de cuentas de turquesas de diferentes formas y tamaños, desde la cuenta pequeña discoidal casi laminar, hasta la cuenta grande, esférica o cilíndrica y de peso de ocho a diez gramos. Se halló, además, una trompeta de caracol (*Strombus galeatus*), cuya superficie aparece ornamentada con figuras escondidas [sic], también al estilo Chavín; sesenta ejemplares de caracol terrestre (*Scutalus proteus*); un par de conchas (*Spondylus pictorum*) y restos de esqueletos de kuyes y aves, muy fragmentados y en parte pulverizados.”

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Mejía did the recording on 25 September 1933.



(2) Until now, the presence of Early Formative ceramics at Punkurí has been suggested on the basis of news items published in the periodicals of the time (Anon. 1933a in Daggett 1987, Daggett 1987:116; Proulx 1973:15). Nevertheless, in the light of the field notes and current observations we can conclude that in the fills which constituted the matrix of the funerary context there were no sherds from this period.

(3) On the basis of my review of the field notes and photographs I propose the following sequence for the inhumation of the Punkurí burial offering:

(a) On the floor of the first platform and at the middle of the entrance whose lateral walls exhibit the painted friezes with a zoomorphic personage in a horizontal position, identified as a bird (Daggett 1987:117, figure 4b), or as “ferocious mythical animals” Bischof 1994:173), the body of a woman<sup>20</sup> was identified, in a flexed position, and with the head towards the east. The face looked up and had a slight forward inclination. Apparently the body was attired in a purplish garment.<sup>21</sup> At the sides and around the shoulders were placed *lomas*<sup>22</sup> snail shells of the species *Scutalus proteus* and many beads of turquoise and other stones, mainly around the waist. Around this section were found two pierced *Spondylus princeps*

valves, but the exact location cannot be determined. Later, some type of burning was possibly done.

(b) During this initial part of the burial offering sequence a *huayllaquepa* of *Strombus galeatus* was placed with its mouth or stoma facing downwards. The incised left hand remained visible on the dorsal face of the marine gastropod. The piece was unbroken at the moment of its deposit, and was fractured by the weight of the fill. Nevertheless, the ventral part, adjacent to the stoma (*columela*) contained a round hole in the middle which could hardly be a fracture made by the fill or during the time of removing the specimen from the burial. This suggests that the *huayllaquepa* may have been ritually sacrificed by breaking this part in an intentional manner, before placement. Likewise, in the broad incisions which make the design of the left hand one finds the remains of red pigment which Larco also observed on the bones of the individual (Falcón *et al.* 2005; Vega-Centeno 1999:6).

(c) These objects were lightly buried and later the stone mortar was deposited with its principal design facing up. Around its base was placed the large pestle or “mano”, also decorated with incised strokes.<sup>23</sup>

(d) Finally, in order to raise the level of the fill, a retention wall was constructed and a fire was made. Beside it were deposited guinea pigs. Likewise some feathers were spread in the fill.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The sex of the individual is mentioned in the note of an anonymous journalist, who surely was told of it by Tello, dated 28 September, 1933 (Anon. 1937a in Daggett 1987; Tello 1943:137).

<sup>21</sup> Tello and Mejía suggest this repeatedly. One must consider the possibility that the purplish substance relates to a pigment or colored earth, because mural fragments of this color were found in the fill.

<sup>22</sup> In Peruvian geography and archaeology, *lomas* is a term referring to the slopes of the western Andean foothills and the seasonal patches of vegetation upon that that derive their moisture from fog.

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<sup>23</sup> In an account of these events, Mejía gives the depth of this level as 1.6m from the surface of the platform (Tello 2005:114).

<sup>24</sup> I have not considered the copper finds that Tello mentioned because they were apparently in disturbed contexts. Likewise, I note that a pencil drawing indicates the presence of a support stone (“piedra de apoyo”) below

(e) When the fill covered the lower 30cm of the walls with the clay friezes, the surface upon which the new platform was constructed was prepared (Figure 5).

Finally, one has to take into account an inventory that Mejía prepared of the “species found next to the Chavín cadaver” (“especies encontradas junto con el cadáver Chavín”) of Punkurí. Among these notes are mentions of the following:

(1) Perforated shells of *Scutalus proteus* snails, among which were found “five triangular beads of serrated teeth, identical to five others which figure in P12”,<sup>25</sup> which are assigned a provenience of the fill of the habitations of Building I.<sup>26</sup> These last are 3cm long by 2cm

wide at the base and have two perforations, presumably in order to be strung.

(2) Flat turquoises that were square, circular, and rectangular.

(3) Cubical beads of “*Spondylus pictorum* or of *Strombus galeatus*”.

(4) Large, flat beads of *Spondylus pictorum* whose length varies between 2 and 4.8cm, among them two triangular ones, and one in the form of a human foot with incised toes (“pie humano con dedos incididos”), etc. (Mejía in Tello 2005:115).

#### ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE BURIAL OFFERING

One of the problems affecting Peruvian state museums is the need to order and catalogue collections. It is usual to emphasize research, which must take place as one of the indispensable pillars of their activity, even if it does not receive the same emphasis and have the same resources as are allocated to it in modern museums. Cataloguing and research are indissolubly linked, because it is not possible to deepen the knowledge of a collection, series, or object that is part of a museum’s holdings if previously there was not the minimum control of a computerized inventory and acquisition data.

I now comment on the most important elements of the burial offering and ask some questions concerning their whereabouts.<sup>27</sup>

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the mortar (Tello 2005:92, drawing on folio 518v (104) of the archive), assigning it the letter “d” and showing it in a schematic drawing of the base of the excavation (“fondo de la excavación”) of the burial offering. On the other hand, a statement by Tello to the press about the contents of the funeral context indicates the presence of bird bones (Tello 1933) which are consigned to a list of “objects found in the fill of the houses of Building I” by Mejía (Tello 2005:115) next to a polished turquoise bead, from which it is reasonable to think that it belonged to the burial offering context in that, apparently, deposits of such objects were made as the platform was in-filled. Some of these extraneous objects would be the unusual conical adobes with incised faces or surfaces to which Santiago Antúnez de Mayolo called attention and tried to explain (Antúnez de Mayolo 1933 in Daggett 1987:161). Likewise, in a statement to the press, Tello argued that he had encountered “in the lower fill of Punkurí some beads of rock crystal, worked and polished in a special manner . . .” (Tello 1933 in Daggett 1987:147; “en los rellenos más inferiores de Punkurí algunas cuentas de cristal de roca, talladas y pulidas de una manera especial . . .”), all of which leads one to consider that the process of adding fill to raise the platforms of these structures was a ritual act.

<sup>25</sup> “Cinco cuentas triangulares de dientes aserrados, idénticos a otros cinco que figuran en P12”.

<sup>26</sup> Building I or “Edificio I/I edificio” was used by Tello in his field notes to designate the earliest construction phase

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at Punkurí.

<sup>27</sup> According to published letters, we now know that the political events in Peru at the beginning of the 1930s influenced the changes in the direction of the institutions related to the Nepeña campaign which, in turn, caused a resurgence in the intellectual rivalries that obstructed Tello’s work and contributed to a turbulent atmosphere (Tello 2005:165-179). In relation to this Toribio Mejía Xesspe declared, “Because of the absolute abandonment

*The human remains.* The fragile skeletal remains of the burial offering of Punkurí (skull, long bones, and “other pieces” (“otros pedazos”) were recovered and sent to Lima during the Cerro Blanco campaign. The Storehouse of Human Remains at MNAAHP contains only four skulls from this site, which, on the basis of their characteristics and annotations written on them in pencil, correspond to those discovered in the fill over the site. The bone remains of the Punkurí burial offering have not been located.

#### *The huayllaquepa of Strombus galeatus*

As mentioned above, this object was removed from the burial offering in pieces. Nevertheless, thanks to the only photo of the context published by Rafael Larco Hoyle, who was an exceptional witness, we can identify it as the specimen in the Storehouse of Organic Material of MNAAHP, because the photo shows a broken, whitish, ovoid object among the remains of a burial located at two meters below the clay feline (Larco 2001 [1938]: figure 24). Later research provides more evidence for relating the photo to the *huayllaquepa*. A photo in the Tello Archivo of MNAAHP (negative 101), and some in the archive of the MAA-UNMSM, now published, confirm this definitively because in the photos one observes the *huayllaquepa*, its breaks, and the little and ring fingers of the engraved left hand.

This object was restored in the MNAAHP. The team there identified its archaeological

context, restored its original appearance and incised design, recovered its sonic register, and exhibited it (Falcón *et al.* 2005; Figures 6, 7).

#### *Stone objects*

The identity and quality of stone objects was already made clear with the publication and study of Tello's field notes. Nevertheless, before this there was a little confusion that arose at the time of the excavation of Punkurí. In an issue of *La Crónica*, one of the newspapers that published news of the events, dated 5 October 1933, there is a photograph in which appear

two of the vessels brought from Nepeña by Dr. Tello. Some of the symbols which will be studied by the archaeologist can be seen faintly.<sup>28</sup>

One of these vessels (“vasos”), that which shows a thick band below its lip and three triangles pointing towards the base, like large tusks, is the one that appears in association with the burial offering (negatives 94 and 106 of the Tello archive at MNAAHP). This is corroborated by Mejía in his list of objects encountered in association with the burial offering. The other piece corresponds to the “stone Chavín vessel” (“vaso Chavín de piedra”) purchased by Tello from someone called Silva, whom he met in the Hotel Central owned by Víctor L. Pérez of Chimbote (folio 122 del Archivo Tello de MAA-UNMSM). Its iconographic characteristics correspond with those of the mortar afterwards known to have come from Suchimán in the Santa Valley. Later, when Tello returned to the theme of the funerary context and its description, he noted, in respect to the stone objects, “a mortar and pestle, both of diorite, polished and engraved with figures in the classic

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by the government and the institutions charged with the conservation and study of archaeological ruins at the time, the excavated parts of the Templo de Punkurí were reburied on the express order of Professor Tello. . .” (Samaniego 2006:99; “Por abandono absoluto de parte del Gobierno y de las instituciones encargadas de la conservación y estudio de las ruinas arqueológicas, en la fecha, se realiza la tarea de enterramiento de las partes descubiertas del Templo de Punkurí por orden expresa del Profesor Tello. . .”).

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<sup>28</sup> “Dos de los vasos traídos de Nepeña por el doctor Tello. Pueden verse débilmente algunas de las simbologías que serán estudiadas por el arqueólogo”.

Chavín style” (Tello 1943:137, figure 17a) and illustrated both mortars with their respective identifications (*ibid.*: 17b). In 1948 Rebeca Carrión Cachot published drawings of both mortars as coming from Nepeña (Carrión Cachot 1948: 125, plate 11, figures 7, 8). Curiously, the designs are placed in the same position in which they appear in the *La Crónica* photos. A little more than a decade ago a photo of the Suchimán mortar was published (Kaulicke 1994:392, figure 368). It is very similar to one of Carrión Cachot’s drawings (*ibid.*: plate 11, figure 8), but is different from the one illustrated by Tello as having come from this site (Tello 1943: figure 17b), possibly because the other side of the piece is shown. For his part, Henning Bischof published drawings of three mortars (1994: figure 12): (a) that from Punkurí; (b) that of Suchimán as presented by Tello (1943); and (c) one without provenience drawn by Bischof from a photo in the archive of MNAHP. The last is the same as that illustrated by Kaulicke (1994) as coming from Suchimán. Kaulicke suggests that (b) and (c) are one and the same, the Suchimán mortar (Bischof 1994: figure 12a-c, 1995:170, figure 7), which is correct. Finally, later work, in which the two views of the Suchimán mortar which had previously been presented separately are combined, suggests its iconographic development (Vega-Centeno 1998: 195, 196, figure 5c). Nevertheless, it lacks several important motifs that were already part of the iconographic repertoire (Tello 2005:107, [P9/F7249]).

With respect to the pestle with incised designs, we previously did not have any illustration or description except the comment of Antúnez de Mayolo that it was “adorned with a pair of designs in ribbons” (Antúnez 1933 in Daggett 1987:160; “adornado con un par de dibujos en lazos”). Now we have a photo available which shows the design in some detail, so we can add that the “lazos” appear to be, in

reality, three attached bands that turn in a spiral around the piece (Figure 8).<sup>29</sup>

With respect to the Punkurí mortar I can indicate its decorative restraint on the basis of three iconographic motifs: (a) a stepped fret with mirror repeats and with the base of the design at the rim of the vessel. The stepped fret is emphasized by means of a line which defines a band; (b) the three large and sharp triangles which separate the step fret elements and end at the base of the vessel; and (c) a rectangular motif running horizontally within a thick band below the rim, such that it repeats around the whole circumference. The long sides of this motif have small breaks in two places. Within this motif are two inscribed lines, also with small breaks.

The step fret motif is very similar to the upper heads of the “staffs of authority” (“bastones de mando”) or scepters carried by the “warrior-priests” of Cerro Sechín (Bischof 1995: 165, figure 4e). It is differentiated only by the triangular space which is made by a diagonal stroke that creates a division from the upper left vertex of the figure towards the base of the step fret. In this space three rectangles are inscribed. The three sharp triangles are comparable with those that emerge from a similar motif called the “Eccentric Subrectangular Eye” (“Ojo Subrectangular Excéntrico”; *ibid.*: figure 4b) in the

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<sup>29</sup> During the course of research my colleagues and I went to the Storehouse of Lithic Materials of the MNAHP in search of these pieces, but without results. We did not find the objects, nor did we encounter the “kilo” of turquoises. We thank Julissa Ugarte Garay for her kind attention. We continued the search in the collection of lithic materials at MAA-UNMSM with equally negative results. Faced with the physical absence of the stone objects from the burial offering in the institutions in which they should be, we registered a formal complaint to the National Institute of Culture in the second half of 2006. We did the same for the other missing components of this context and for the Suchimán Mortar.

iconography of the Suchimán mortar (Tello 2005:107, P9/ F7/ 249). The only difference is that in the Punkurí example the motif is emphasized by a band. The rectangle with lightly broken inscribed lines is similar to the motif engraved on a stone block from Sechín Alto (Samaniego 1995:39, 40, figure 13) which is exhibited in the Museo Max Uhle in Casma. Therefore, the three motifs which decorate the Punkurí mortar reoccur in the iconography of stone objects dating to this period from the Casma and Santa Valleys and, because the find spot of the Punkurí mortar is proximate to the staircase, this mortar is directly associated with an object that denotes power.

#### *The other associated objects*

The potential of the study and analysis of molluscs from precolumbian archaeological contexts has been established (Rivadeneira and Piccone-Saponara 1998:31; Sandweiss and Rodríguez 1991:55, 56) so that, although we have not found those from the burial offering, we can still offer some commentary on the *Spondylus princeps* valves which are part of the list of sumptuary and exotic objects associated with the burial offering. It must be noted that these are complete worked pieces and are part of the earliest evidence of this type in these circumstances, occurring a little before the presence of ceramics in the Central Andes at c. 1600 B.C. As we know, later they become more frequent and were part of the ceramic and lithic cultures of Cupisnique and Chavín during the first millennium B.C.

In spite of their number (seventy individuals), until now little attention has been given to the terrestrial gastropods of the species *Scutalus proteus* associated with the Punkurí tomb. These are *lomas* snails which reach a size between 3.5 and 5 cm. They can be considered part of the food offerings and are also represented as such in Moche ceramics (Donnan 1978: figure 102).

Finally, the guinea pig and bird bones were other evidence of the diet associated with this important context.

#### THE BURIAL OFFERING AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE TEMPLE OF PUNKURÍ: CHRONOLOGY

Several authors have dealt with the theme of the construction phases of Punkurí and its relation to the early cultural traditions of the central Andes. They agree that there have been at least three construction phases (Bischof 1994: see figure 2, section; Daggett 1987; Samaniego 2006; Vega-Centeno 1998, 1999). The context of the burial offering was located in the fill of "Platform 2" ("plataforma 2"; Figure 9) and was deposited as part of this. This is assigned to the second construction phase of Punkurí, or "Phase A-2" ("fase A-2"; Vega-Centeno 1999:7-11). The famous clay feline is part of Phase B-1 ("fase B-1"; *ibid.*:13). Vega-Centeno places Punkurí in the Early Formative c.1800 B.C.-1200 B.C.

Nevertheless, on the basis of stylistic comparisons, I deduce a different chronological range for Punkurí. I present the arguments for it here. A first coherent grouping was made by Tello, who indicated that a bas relief stone plaque engraved with a "crouching" ("agazapado") feline had traits sufficiently naturalistic to relate it to the corpus of Chavín objects which, according to him, was its place of origin (Kan 1972:73, figure 7; Tello 1960:228).<sup>30</sup> Kan, however, questioned this assignment, and also the Chavín affiliation of the painted feline on the clay building of Cerro Sechín (Kan 1972:74, figure 8). Finally, he distinguished the sculpted feline of Punkurí from the Chavín style, al-

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<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it must be noted that Tello also related this engraved plaque directly to the Punkurí feline head (Tello 1960:229).

though the monument itself appeared to indicate a Chavín affiliation (*ibid.*: 76, figure 11).

Later, a study of the early Chavín styles and their precedents reunited these three icons once again under a more unified classificatory scheme, and added another example to the group, the petroglyph of a feline with an inscribed bird, located in the Jequetepeque Valley (Bischof 1994:180, figure 14d; 1995:171, figure 8; Pimentel 1986:23, figure 59). Thus, the number of the early felines in this group has increased, making it one of the earliest representations of cats associated with monumental architecture (Falcón and Suárez in press).

Along these lines, the following sequence has been proposed by Henning Bischof for a series of representations important for the case of Punkurí, and considered to be “pre-Chavín A”; (a) the clay murals of Punkurí (Punkurí Style); (b) The painted clay feline of Punkurí, and the painted felines of Cerro Sechín; (c) the engraved iconography on the stelae at Cerro Sechín (Sechín Style). One must note, nevertheless, that this sequence is more appropriate for classification than for chronological purposes. It has been suggested that the earthen building decorated with two painted felines in the interior of Cerro Sechín was constructed in the twenty-fourth to the twenty-second centuries B.C. while the stone building there, also Preceramic, existed sometime between the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C. It continued in use until the sixteenth to fourteenth centuries B.C. (Bischof 2000:48; Fuchs 1997: 159). If I attempt a correlation between the painted feline of Cerro Sechín and the freestanding sculpted feline of Punkurí, considering them to be stylistically linked, I can propose a chronological position for the latter at about 2100-1800 B.C. In consequence, if the fill which contained the burial offering corresponds to an architectural phase immediately prior to the sculptured feline, it can serve as a temporal

framework in which to place the burial offering. These correlations support the observations of Samaniego, who indicated that the three construction phases of Punkurí lack ceramics (Samaniego 2006:38).

On the intra-site level, the stylistic affinity between the engraved design of the stone mortar and the representations on the murals called friezes I and II of the earliest Punkurí building has been noted (Bischof 1994:173). These have been assigned to Phase A1 (“fase A1”; Vega-Centeno 1999:15, figure 10). Nevertheless, the stylistic characteristics of the hand represented on the *Strombus galeatus huayllaquepa* of Punkurí relate more to the “naturalistic” style of the freestanding feline (Vega-Centeno’s Phase B1), so that the iconography of the objects from the burial offering context would constitute a group which associates schematic and geometric motifs with the stylized naturalism of Phase A2 of a building which in any case shows articulated, coherent, and continuous architectural modifications.<sup>31</sup>

As for the hand motif represented by itself, a stone sculpture found at Jaive in the Supe Valley shows the very stylized palms of both hands in which the order of the fingers can be distinguished by their proportions and location beside a round anthropomorphic face. I note that the hand on the Punkurí *huayllaquepa* shows its back. Nevertheless, the Jaiva stone sculpture may be one of the first engraved, low relief lithic pieces in the central Andes (Falcón

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<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, it has been proposed that “geometric or schematic conventions are present in the Preceramic as well as in the Early Formative” (“convenciones geométricas o esquematizadas están presentes tanto en el precerámico como en el Formativo Temprano”) and that there were developed figurative resources available as guidelines for the Punkurí Style (Vega-Centeno 1998: 187). I am more in agreement with this position, but think that this occurred a little before the Initial Period or the Formative.

2006) and may belong to a style of representation earlier than the iconographic repertory of Punkurí. However, this suggestion still needs to be refined. Another example of this motif is found on the stone block associated with Huaca A at Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeque (Burger 1989; Pozorski and Pozorski 1988). This hand is more naturalistic than that engraved on the Punkurí *huayllaquepa*, to the extent that it appears to be the impression of a right hand on the stone, that is to say, the palm is shown. According to its discoverers, this stone, securely associated with Huaca A, is the earliest securely-dated stone carving known in Peru. A wooden door from Huaca A produced an uncorrected  $^{14}\text{C}$  date of  $1565 \pm 70 \text{ B.C.}$  ( $3515 \pm 70 \text{ B.P.}$  Uga-5462) and is in the mid-range of dates from that site (*ibid.*). This date and the iconography of the felines which flank the entrance portal of the associated architectural complex, assigned to Chavín A, puts it sometime after Punkurí.

Finally, I would like to indicate that until recently the presence of *Strombus galeatus huayllaquepas* as part of the cult paraphernalia of the end of the Late Archaic had not been documented. Now we have the *huayllaquepa* from Punkurí and a possible representation of another *Strombus galeatus huayllaquepa* held by one of the seated personages on a mortar from Lambayeque that is assigned to the same period (Bischof 1995:169, 170, figure 6d). On this object the *Strombus* is represented as a spiral which has an oblong vertical piercing and which ends by tracing a straight edge, and is serrated with blunt points, which represent the characteristic ribs that naturally form on the dorsal surface of *Strombus galeatus* and which, although generally smoothed out in order to incise designs, leave clear traces on the lip edge of the mollusc. In consequence, it is now known that this sonorous ritual instrument, abundantly present in the galleries of Chavín de Huántar, had its antecedents at this time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks go to Henning Bischof for numerous consultations on the Late Archaic of the central Andes. Likewise, Richard Daggett and Rafael Vega-Centeno have my gratitude for their comments. Finally, I recognize the notable efforts of Lorenzo Samaniego Román for the recovery of Punkurí to the point of converting it into a cultural center and an example to Peruvians, and to the world, of a seminal stage in the development of precolumbian Andean religion. To a great extent, this article is a tribute to his tenacious work.

*Translation from the Spanish by Monica Barnes*

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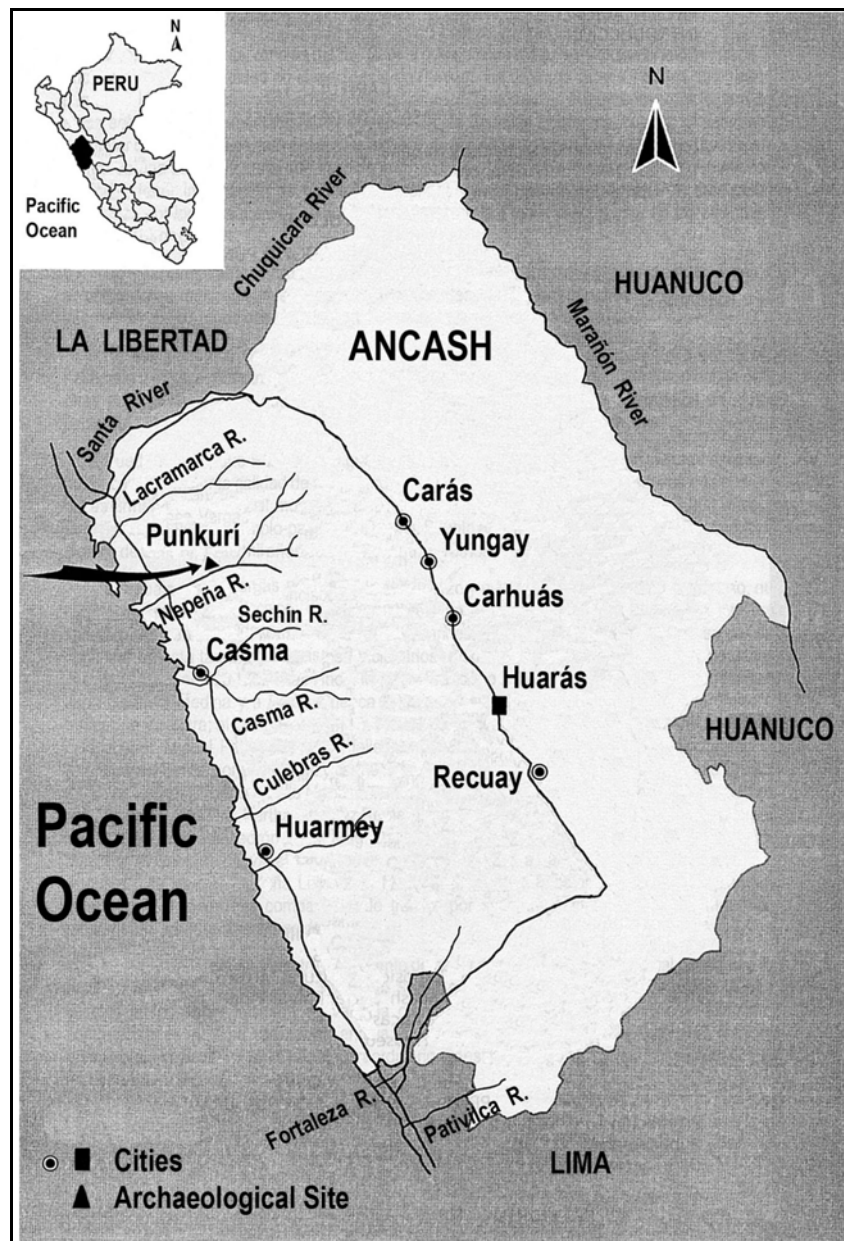
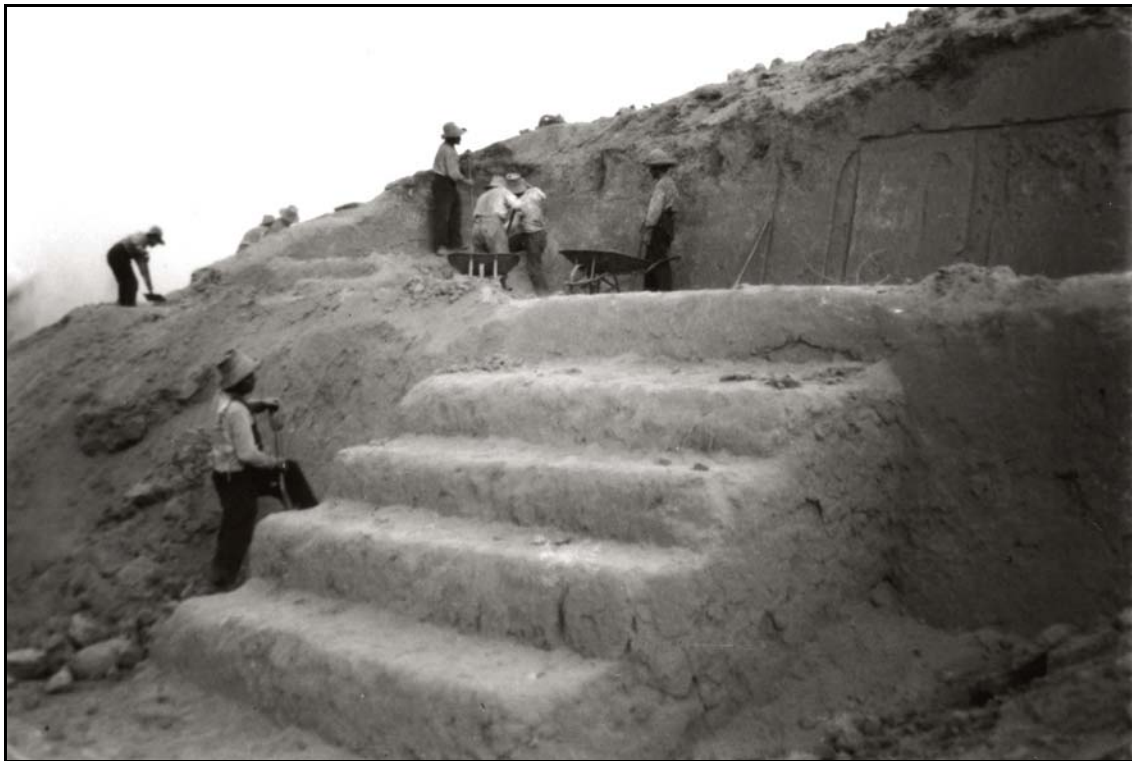


Figure 1: Map showing the location of Punkurí.



*Figure 2: Punkurí, north facade of the monument today.*



*Figure 3: The clearing of Platforms 2 and 3 of the north facade of Punkurí in progress. Note the central staircase which gives access to Platform 2 (photograph courtesy of the Tello Archive of the MNAAHP, negative 109 AT/617).*

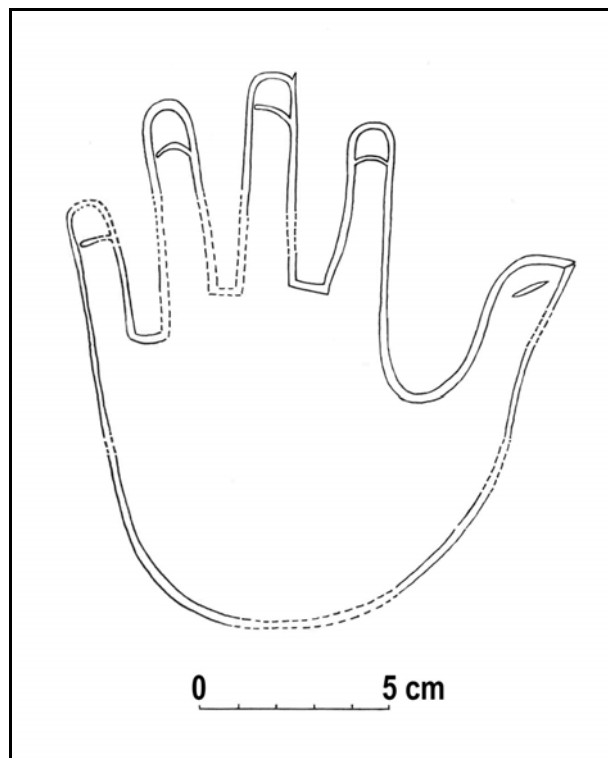
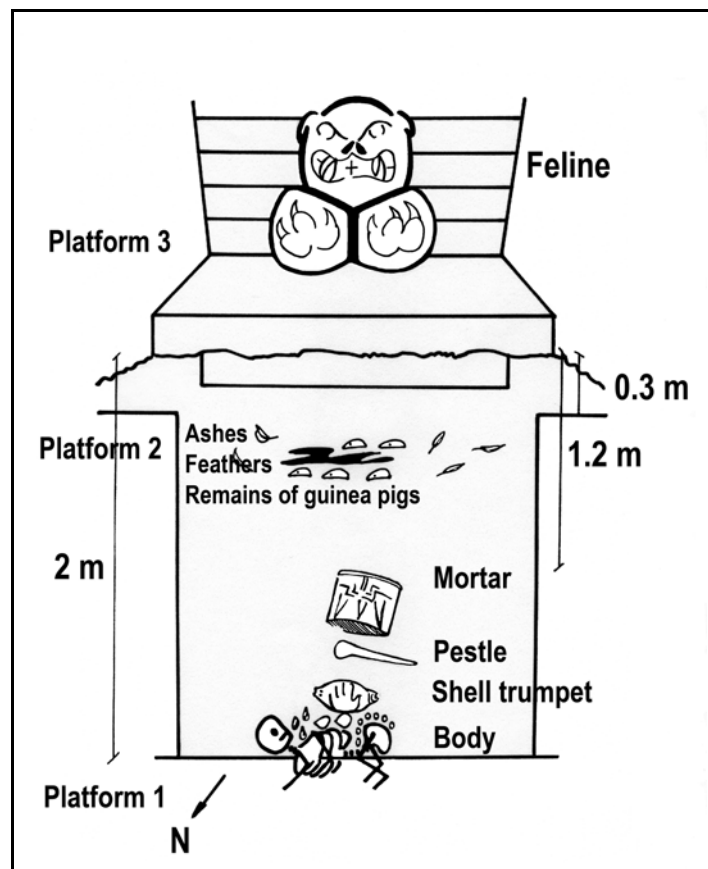


Figure 4: Left hand engraved on the dorsal side of the Punkurí huayllaquepa.

Figure 5: Schematic drawing of the sequence of deposition of the Punkurí burial offering.





*Figure 6: The Punkurí huayllaquepa during its restoration.*



*Figure 7: The Punkurí huayllaquepa after its restoration.*

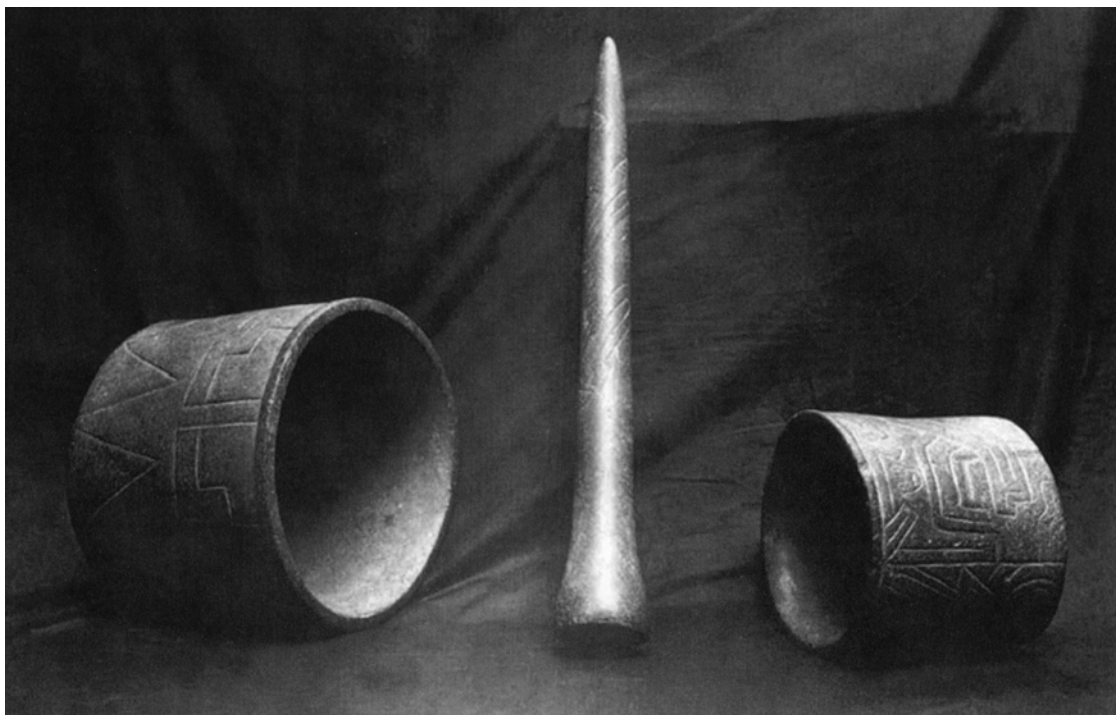


Figure 8: The Punkurí mortar, pestle, and the Suchimán mortar (Tello 2005, CD included, file: "Anexo fotográfico, F2\_Punkurí, Foto 52-119).

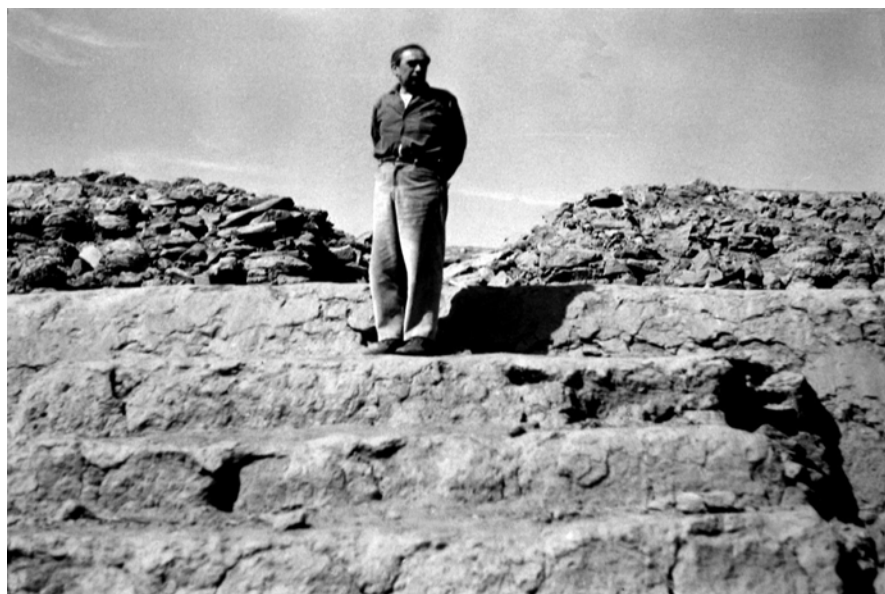


Figure 9: Staircase that leads to the upper part of Platform 2 at Punkurí.

Note the poor state of the staircase and the fill that covers Platform 3.

The figure is Arturo Jiménez Borja on a visit to the site in 1971

(photography courtesy of Lorenzo Samaniego Román, Coordinador General, Centro de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural, Universidad Nacional del Santa).

