A landscape photograph of the Ancash region in Peru, showing large, dark, monolithic stone structures (huacas) in a dry, grassy field under a clear sky.

# AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANCASH

STONES, RUINS AND COMMUNITIES  
IN ANDEAN PERU

GEORGE F. LAU



# An Archaeology of Ancash

*An Archaeology of Ancash* is a well-illustrated synthesis of the archaeology of north-central Peru and, specifically, the stone remains of the mountainous Ancash region. All the major cultures of highland Ancash built impressive monuments, with no other region of South America showing such an early and continuous commitment to stone carving. Drawing on Lau's extensive experience as an archaeologist in highland Peru, this book reveals how ancient groups of the Central Andes have used stone as both a physical and symbolic resource, uncovering the variety of experiences and meanings which marked the region's special engagement with this material.

An abundant raw resource in the Andes, stone was used for monuments, temples, tombs and carved monoliths, which were crucial to the emergence of civilisation in the region, and religious objects from magical charms to ancestor effigies. Detailing the ways stone has played both an everyday and an extraordinary part in ancient social life, Lau also examines how cultural dispositions towards this fundamental material have changed over time and considers how engagements, past and present, with these stone remains have the potential to create and regenerate communities. With an ample selection of colour photos which bring these sites and artefacts to life, *An Archaeology of Ancash* is an essential guide to the key monuments, places and objects that distinguish this region and its rich archaeological heritage.

**George F. Lau** is Reader in Archaeology at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas of the University of East Anglia, UK.

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# **An Archaeology of Ancash**

Stones, ruins and communities  
in Andean Peru

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First published 2016  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Lau, George F., 1969– author.

Title: An archaeology of Ancash: stones, ruins and communities in Andean Peru / George F. Lau.

Description: New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015042642 | ISBN 9781138898998 (hardback: alk. paper) | ISBN 9781315708201 (ebk)

Subjects: LCSH: Ancash (Peru)—Antiquities. | Excavations (Archaeology)—Peru—Ancash.

Classification: LCC F3429.1.A45 L386 2016 | DDC 985/.21—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015042642>

ISBN: 978-1-138-89899-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-70820-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

# Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <i>List of figures</i>  | viii      |
| <i>List of tables</i>   | xi        |
| <i>List of plates</i>   | xii       |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>   | xiv       |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <i>Key propositions</i>   | 2         |
| <i>Previous scholarship on Andean stonework</i>                           | 9         |
| Stone as archaeological culture: Chronology, function,<br>materialisation | 9         |
| Objects of cult and landscape   | 11        |
| Stone and lithicity: Materials and making                                 | 16        |
| Stone work as visual culture, as art                                      | 18        |
| <i>Art and communities</i>  | 20        |
| <i>Organisation of the book</i>   | 23        |
| <b>2 A land of stone</b>  | <b>26</b> |
| <i>Life, land and water in Ancash</i>                                     | 26        |
| <i>Ancash geology</i>   | 31        |
| <i>Mobilising and modifying stone</i>                                     | 32        |
| Quarrying   | 34        |
| Transport   | 35        |
| Reduction and fitting   | 38        |
| Work and community in the Andes   | 39        |
| <i>Conclusion</i>   | 41        |
| <b>3 Constructing collectives: Early stone monuments<br/>in Ancash</b>    | <b>42</b> |
| <i>Building the body politic: The Kotosh Religious Tradition</i>          | 44        |
| Site in focus: La Galgada   | 46        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>Formative coastal developments in Ancash</i>                      | 49         |
| Early monuments along the north-central coast                        | 49         |
| Site in focus: Caral   | 52         |
| Precocious developments in the Casma Valley                          | 53         |
| Site in focus: Cerro Sechín  | 56         |
| <i>Social organisation and monumental architecture</i>               | 62         |
| <i>Conclusion</i>  | 64         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>4 Of monsters and monuments in the Chavín period</b>              | <b>66</b>  |
| <br>   |            |
| <i>Chavín de Huántar</i>   | 66         |
| Objects in focus: Chavín's stone pantheon                            | 77         |
| <i>What was Chavín? Chavín influence in Ancash</i>                   | 83         |
| Chavín in highland Ancash  | 85         |
| Object in focus: The Yauya Stela                                     | 87         |
| Casma and Nepeña   | 89         |
| <i>Conclusion</i>  | 94         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>5 'Children of the stones': Lithicity in the Recuay tradition</b> | <b>98</b>  |
| <br>   |            |
| <i>Ancash after Chavín</i>   | 98         |
| Huarás sites   | 100        |
| <i>Rise of Recuay material culture</i>                               | 102        |
| Housing ancestors  | 105        |
| 'Children of the stones': Ancestral replication and agency           | 108        |
| Site in focus: Jancu   | 110        |
| Site in focus: Pashash   | 113        |
| Object in focus: Pashash great divinity                              | 115        |
| Site in focus: Chinchawas  | 117        |
| Object in focus: Warrior bundle effigy                               | 119        |
| Site in focus: Yayno   | 120        |
| <i>Conclusion</i>  | 124        |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>6 An ancient Andean game</b>                                      | <b>125</b> |
| <br>   |            |
| <i>Amerindian sociality and the culture of opposition</i>            | 127        |
| <i>Andean board games: Comparative perspectives and evidence</i>     | 129        |
| <i>Function of Andean tableros: Forms, materiality and contexts</i>  | 133        |
| <i>Confrontation, complementarity and ranking</i>                    | 143        |
| <i>Conclusion</i>  | 148        |

|          |  |            |
|----------|--|------------|
| <b>7</b> | <b>States and stones: Wari and Inka in Ancash</b>      | <b>150</b> |
|          | <i>States and stones, round 1: Wari</i>                | 150        |
|          | Wari entanglements in Ancash                           | 152        |
|          | Mausolea and the new materiality                       | 154        |
|          | Tomb spaces and ancestral optics                       | 155        |
|          | Site in focus: Wilkawain                               | 157        |
|          | Site in focus: Honcopampa                              | 158        |
|          | <i>Between states: The Late Intermediate Period</i>    | 159        |
|          | Standing stones: Huancas                               | 163        |
|          | <i>States and stones, round 2: Inka</i>                | 165        |
|          | The work of stone in Inka culture                      | 166        |
|          | Inka in Ancash   | 167        |
|          | Site in focus: Huánuco Pampa                           | 169        |
|          | Site in focus: Yayno                                   | 171        |
|          | Site in focus: Cajarumi                                | 174        |
|          | <i>Conclusion</i>                                      | 178        |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Old presences, new relevances</b>                   | <b>180</b> |
|          | <i>I. New places for old stones</i>                    | 181        |
|          | Pallasca: Heartland of sculptures                      | 182        |
|          | Museum in focus: Cabana's archaeological museum        | 182        |
|          | Around Cabana  | 184        |
|          | Huandoval  | 186        |
|          | <i>II. Huaraz and the Museo Arqueológico de Ancash</i> | 190        |
|          | Site in focus: Parque Lítico                           | 193        |
|          | Site in focus: Pomakayán                               | 194        |
|          | <i>III. Making and commodifying the past</i>           | 196        |
|          | Souvenirs and sculptural production in Peru            | 199        |
|          | Rumichuco – 'place of stone'                           | 199        |
|          | Soapstone miniatures                                   | 206        |
|          | <i>Conclusion</i>                                      | 209        |
| <b>9</b> | <b>Concluding thoughts</b>                             | <b>212</b> |
|          | <i>Appendix</i>  | 215        |
|          | <i>Glossary</i>  | 221        |
|          | <i>References</i>                                      | 225        |
|          | <i>Index</i>   | 249        |
|          | <i>Plates</i>  |            |

# Figures

|      |  |    |
|------|--|----|
| 1.1  | Map of Central Andes locating sites mentioned in the text.   | 4  |
| 1.2  | Bosque de piedras, 'Forest of stones', Hatun Machay.   | 11 |
| 1.3  | Stone effigy objects.  | 13 |
| 2.1  | Map of north-central Peru, showing the location of the Department of Ancash, main study region and sites mentioned in text.                          | 27 |
| 2.2  | View of north side of Yayno, showing large moat-like trenches and vertical exposures of light-coloured rock.   | 35 |
| 2.3  | Notching on stones from Yayno (A) and Pashash (B), as holds and grips for the stones at different stages of their production, transport and fitting. | 37 |
| 3.1  | Chart showing ceramic chronology and occupations of different regions of Central Andes.  | 43 |
| 3.2  | Ceremonial structures of the Kotosh Religious Tradition, layouts.  | 45 |
| 3.3  | Stonework at Tumshukayko. Note the teardrop shape of some of the stones and the chinking stones to form orderly rows.                                | 48 |
| 3.4  | Reconstructed stone building, Unit 1, El Paraíso.  | 50 |
| 3.5  | Shicra net bag holding rubble fill, Unit II, El Paraíso.   | 51 |
| 3.6  | Ceremonial platform mounds at Caral.   | 52 |
| 3.7  | Reconstruction of Huaca A, Pampa de Las Llamas-Moxeke.   | 55 |
| 3.8  | View of Cerro Sechín.  | 56 |
| 3.9  | Relief carvings at Cerro Sechín.   | 58 |
| 3.10 | Relief carvings at Cerro Sechín.   | 61 |
| 3.11 | Dual staircase and slab with image, perhaps a banner or war standard, Cerro Sechín.  | 61 |
| 4.1  | Site map of principal monumental sector of Chavín de Huántar.  | 68 |
| 4.2  | Southeast corner of the Castillo, Chavín de Huántar.   | 71 |
| 4.3  | Black and White Portal, Chavín de Huántar.   | 72 |
| 4.4  | Tenon-head sculptures (A–C) from Chavín de Huántar.  | 73 |
| 4.5  | Interior of gallery, Chavín de Huántar.  | 75 |
| 4.6  | Main Rectangular Plaza, Chavín de Huántar.   | 76 |
| 4.7  | Stone relief of 'Medusa Figure', Chavín's major divinity with both human and animal characteristics.   | 78 |

|      |   |     |
|------|---|-----|
| 4.8  | Rollout drawings of the column reliefs on the Black and White Portal.   | 80  |
| 4.9  | Rollout drawing of the carved reliefs on the Tello Obelisk, showing paired cayman images.                                       | 82  |
| 4.10 | Relief of profile supernatural figure, associated with the ingestion of hallucinogens.  | 83  |
| 4.11 | Drawing of principal image of the Yauya Stela, a split image of a massive cayman creature.                                      | 88  |
| 4.12 | The thirteen towers of the solar observatory at Chankillo, Casma Valley.  | 90  |
| 4.13 | Agglutinated architecture at Caylán.  | 92  |
| 4.14 | Isometric reconstruction of Compound-A and Plaza-A.   | 93  |
| 5.1  | Map of the Huaraz area, locating sites and places mentioned in the text.  | 101 |
| 5.2  | Stone effigy of ancestor bundle, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash, Huaraz.  | 106 |
| 5.3  | Plan of Jancu tomb.   | 111 |
| 5.4  | Stone staircase and stone-lined tunnel that leads into the Jancu tomb.  | 112 |
| 5.5  | The Caserón structure at Pashash.   | 113 |
| 5.6  | Stone relief slab showing supernatural figure, 'Pashash Great Divinity'.  | 115 |
| 5.7  | Stone relief slab showing male ancestral figure, Chinchawas.  | 116 |
| 5.8  | View of the primary mound at Chinchawas and its adjacent funerary sector.   | 117 |
| 5.9  | View of Yayno from the south, showing the extensive construction of buildings and terraces on the mountaintop (4,150 masl).     | 121 |
| 5.10 | Plan of quadrangular compound at Yayno.   | 122 |
| 5.11 | Fragments of tenon-head sculpture found at Yayno, showing its nose and (right) ear.   | 123 |
| 6.1  | Type 1 boards, or tableros (A–C) (Museo Arqueológico de Cabana).  | 126 |
| 6.2  | Configurations of yupana and tableros.  | 134 |
| 6.3  | Type 2 tableros (Colección de La Municipalidad de Chacas, Museo Arqueológico de Cabana, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash – Huaraz). | 136 |
| 6.4  | (A–B) Type 3 tableros, including a ceramic example, and (C–D) Type 4 tableros (Museo Arqueológico de Cabana).                   | 137 |
| 6.5  | Type 5 tableros (Ancash collections).   | 138 |
| 6.6  | Scatterplots (length vs. width) and regression analyses for tablero Types 1, 2, 3 and 5.  | 139 |
| 6.7  | Top and oblique views of tablero fragment (Type 1) with central compartment marked with a cross and entry ramp with two holes.  | 141 |

|      |  |     |
|------|--|-----|
| 6.8  | Entry ramp for compound c24, Yayno, with half-turn stone staircase.  | 142 |
| 6.9  | Tableros documented at Chinchawas (AD 400–900).  | 143 |
| 6.10 | Imagery on tableros.   | 145 |
| 7.1  | Plans of structures at Honcopampa.   | 152 |
| 7.2  | View of chullpas and other mortuary structures at Pueblo Viejo de Huandy, near Caraz.  | 156 |
| 7.3  | Aquilpo-style pottery showing closed vessels with exterior plastic decoration, including punctuation, incisions, appliqué strips and nubbins, and matte finishing. | 161 |
| 7.4  | Agglutinated architecture at Garu, Huánuco.  | 162 |
| 7.5  | Stone-lined pits revealed evidence of burning and offerings at the foot of Huancajirca, near Huaraz.   | 165 |
| 7.6  | Dressed Inca stones, some with characteristic edge beveling for reuse in highland town, Jirón Arica, Pomabamba.  | 168 |
| 7.7  | Ceremonial platform, <i>ushmu</i> , at Huánuco Pampa.  | 170 |
| 7.8  | Cut stones and fine masonry chambers in the elite ceremonial sector of Huánuco Pampa.  | 171 |
| 7.9  | Stone-lined cist burial containing skull of child, as well as <i>tupu</i> pins, fragments of wooden vessel, and tatters of cloth.                                  | 172 |
| 7.10 | Rock-cut chamber, Cajarumi.  | 175 |
| 7.11 | Detail of geometric frame and channel around rock-cut chamber, Cajarumi.   | 176 |
| 8.1  | Exhibition display at the Museo Arqueológico de Cabana.  | 183 |
| 8.2  | Cement bench in the Plaza de Armas, Tauca.   | 185 |
| 8.3  | Stone upright set up at the forecourt of the Huandoval church.   | 187 |
| 8.4  | Fragment of stone sculpture on Huandoval church, with relief in the Ancash Formative styles of Sechín, Kushipampa and La Pampa.                                    | 188 |
| 8.5  | Fragment of Recuay-style stone sculpture, depicting profile feline with front-facing visage, Huandoval.  | 189 |
| 8.6  | Stone pylons using replicas of Recuay-style mummy effigies, at Pomakayán, Huaraz.  | 196 |
| 8.7  | The entrance to the Cahuish tunnel, leading back into the Callejón de Huaylas, with flanking Recuay-style profile felines.   | 197 |
| 8.8  | Street art, by the artist Jape, in Huaraz.   | 198 |
| 8.9  | Replica stone sculptures for sale at Rumichuco, outside Huaraz.  | 200 |
| 8.10 | Replica stone sculpture of the Chavín Medusa, Rumichuco, outside Huaraz.   | 202 |
| 8.11 | David Nieves chiseling on a block, transforming it into a replica Lanzón figure of the Chavín culture.   | 204 |
| 8.12 | Chart showing the general production and distribution sequence for Rumichuco stone sculptures.   | 205 |
| 8.13 | Soapstone miniature plaque showing profile anthropomorphic supernatural holding San Pedro cactus, carved by Martín Justiniano, ca. 1998.                           | 208 |

# Tables

|     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 1.1 | Comparison of portable sacred stone objects of the Central Andes. | 15  |
| 2.1 | Primary geological formations and rock types in Ancash.           | 32  |
| 2.2 | General comparison of basic properties of common Andean stones.   | 34  |
| 4.1 | Comparative nomenclature for Chavín's buildings.                  | 69  |
| 5.1 | Recuay cultural periods and associated materials.                 | 103 |

# Plates

- 1 Burial structure underneath large boulder, Pueblo Viejo.
- 2 Photograph of large standing stone uprights, or huancas (wankas), above Huaraz.
- 3 Narrow-walled valley, or *quebrada*, in the Cordillera Blanca, U-shaped due to glacial cutting.
- 4 La Galgada, a Preceramic centre in northern Ancash.
- 5 Fine stonemasonry at Yayno.
- 6 West view of the main ceremonial sector of Chavín de Huántar, comprised of a series of platform mounds and plazas.
- 7 Northwest view of staircase leading up from the Circular Plaza into the Lanzón Gallery, Chavín de Huántar.
- 8 The right (north) column of the Black and White Portal, Chavín de Huántar.
- 9 Circular enclosure compound, Pomabamba region.
- 10 Polychrome ceramic vessels from Jancu.
- 11 Polychrome ceramic vessels from Pashash.
- 12 Stone remains at Chinchawas.
- 13 Photographs of effigy sculpture of a warrior, Museo Arqueológico de Ancash, Huaraz.
- 14 Uplifted fins of light rock at Yayno.
- 15 Walled compounds, Yayno.
- 16 Layouts and types of *tableros*.
- 17 Old stone boards in new contexts.
- 18 Keushu.
- 19 Chullpa burial structures in the Callejón de Huaylas.
- 20 Wari-style polychrome vessels.
- 21 Ridgetop town of Garu, Huánuco.
- 22 Standing monolith of Huancajirca.
- 23 Stonemasonry at Huánuco Pampa.
- 24 Plan of Operation 16, showing location of Inka-period cist burial and *Spondylus* sp. shell offerings.

- 25 Inca period offerings at Yayno.
- 26 Stonework at Cajarumi.
- 27 Recuay-style carved owl, Cabana.
- 28 Capilla del Perdón, Cabana.
- 29 Recuay-style tenon-head set into adobe wall, near Cabana.
- 30 Recuay stones in new contexts, Huandoval.
- 31 House façade, Pomabamba.
- 32 Stone replica making at Rumichuco, Huaraz.

# Acknowledgements

I am indebted to various people who took the time to comment on and discuss ideas and data that have somehow made it into this work. This includes, in no particular order: Ki Kim, Andy Mills, Sabine Hyland, David Kay, Kitty Allen, John Mack, Steve Hooper, Penny Dransart, Alex Herrera, Bill Sillar, Jeff Blomster, Carolina Orsini, Kevin Lane, Denise Arnold and the editors at Routledge. Richard Burger, Lizardo Tavera, Steve Wegner, Jeff Quilter, David Chicoine and Matt Helmer kindly provided permissions to reproduce their images. Emma Pomeroy examined the Yayno skeletal material. Of course, any errors of fact and interpretation remain my own.

Various people facilitated the collections work that fuels the gameboards chapter, in Peru, elsewhere and in cyberspace. This includes Guillermo Orellana, Steve Wegner, Benjamín Morales Arnao, Francisco Bazán, Fernando Enver Gutierrez (Huaraz) and Felipe Caballero (Cabana). Bebel Ibarra, Joanne Pillsbury, Polay Maza Herrera, Jack Chávez Echevarría, Andrew Hamilton and Greg Lockard kindly shared information on boards found in Peru and around the world, and deserve many thanks for helping to add to this ever-growing database. The tableros are indeed an international phenomenon today, just as they were of pan-Andean interest more than a millennium ago.

Fieldwork in Pomabamba was facilitated by Mariano and Magda González, and Julio Escudero and Miriam Escudero. Explorations in Pallasca were assisted invaluablely by Rodolfo Monteverde Sotil and countless people who took an interest in our interest in stone and their stories. Thanks are owed to Carlo Brescia, Rebecca Bria, and John Rick for their generosity and stimulating discussions and for facilitating various forays into the Ancash countryside. Ysa Meza, Chris Benway, Steve Wegner, and Ada Oliveros constantly make Huaraz my home away from home.

I am thankful for different spates of research and writing time which allowed the creation of this volume. Most notably, a period of research leave in 2013 led to new discoveries, revelations and understandings, which comprised much of this book's theoretical backbone and new data, but especially Chapter 8. That period was supported dually by the University of East Anglia and the British Academy Small Grants programme.

Many thanks are owed to my host institution, the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, which takes scholarship seriously

and never wavers in extending a hand to make it happen. I am constantly thankful being able to share in the spirit of intellectual mission and generosity with all my colleagues and students at SRU.

I wish to dedicate this book to Martin Justiniano, Ancashino and archaeologist, who gave me countless lessons on how to see stone in the Andes. He also taught me how to light a Petromax.

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# 1 Introduction

This book results from a long personal engagement, at once intellectual and experiential, with that most elemental material of the earth: stone. Having researched as an archaeologist in highland Peru for several decades now, I can say that there is no more abundant and ambivalent presence in our work.

My interest in ancient ruins and cultures brought me to the mountainous **Cordillera Blanca** region, in Peru's Department of Ancash. This is the heartland for some of the most exciting prehistoric archaeology in the Amerindian world. Yet my attention to this region also led inexorably to me cursing the rocky, hard-to-reach locales where the ancients lived and buried their dead, or to excavations that failed to advance due to tons of rock rubble and collapsed walls. For our ancient subjects, too, stone must have been both boast and burden.

Modern archaeology is predicated on detecting change in past cultures. But stone remains the most durable of common raw materials and is amongst the most impervious to change in the archaeological record. Small wonder, then, that stone fascinates us, yet also resists our prying eyes and hands. It also resists easy understandings. This book will show that a variety of experiences and meanings marked ancient engagements with stone as well.

Reduced to its most basic, stone is that hard stuff that is the most abundant raw material in the Andes. By 'basic', I refer to its common and ubiquitous quality, but also mean to highlight its propensity to be 'Of, pertaining to, or forming a base; fundamental, essential' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Native Andean groups continually made stone essential for their needs, but also for special kinds of symbolism and desires.

Even without modification by humans, stone comes in many forms, colours, textures and sizes. It is also inherently multivalent. It can be abundant and rare, vast and handheld, hard and workable, heavy and portable, mundane and extraordinary, worthless and precious.

It seems impossible alone, but more tractable with many. During the time of the Inkas (Incas), the largest political system in ancient America was built through labour mobilisation, a way of exacting tribute in the form of human work from millions to do the will of the state. Certainly one of the most lasting vestiges of this Inka practice manifested as gargantuan projects involving the movement, piling and elaboration of stone across the landscape. All the effort for making palaces, fortresses, terraces and temples out of rock continues to impress today.

## 2 Introduction

Immediately upon seeing this millenary work, however, there is the feeling that ‘basic’ – if boiled down only to energetics and labour – does not really cover it. There was a deep care and commitment to stone that underwrote such practices. Earlier pre-Inka uses and cultural engagements with stone represent one of the main themes of this book.

Scholars use *materiality* to describe understandings and human relationships, physical and cognitive, with material things. This book aims to provide a window on stone’s materiality for Andean groups, but crucially with an eye to describing its long prehistory in the highlands of Ancash (northern Peru), over some five millennia. This focus permits an examination of the changes and continuities in cultural dispositions to stone in one region where use of stone was both commonplace and extraordinary in ancient social life. No other region of South America shows such early florescence and continuous commitment to stone carving through time.

Stone monuments manifested meanings and distinguishing features and techniques that we attribute to indigenous cultural values, stuff we would count as aesthetics and cognitive logics very different from our own. Yet their forms, designs and techniques of manufacture did not remain constant, nor did their meanings and desires.

It is important to recognise that many Pre-Columbian stone things continue to be important today. They remain vital as elements of national and local heritage, as keepsakes and inspirations for new creativity. Hence, they continue to have effect in the present by mediating meanings and action for people. This applies as much to contemporary peoples of the Andes as to outside commentators (such as myself) and observers interested in the archaeological past.

Stone places and monuments are what make the prehistoric cultures of this region tangible. They are, plainly, often what excites people about archaeology. Their significances, impregnating the carving and ruins, remain to be revealed. Readers of this book, I hope, will be rewarded by the promises of wonder and thinking that consideration of the past encourages.

In addition to exploring the main theses of the work, this book intends to provide a primer about the prehistory of one of the most archaeologically rich regions in all of South America. It seeks to respond to the many visitors now frequenting the Ancash region – tourists, hikers, weekenders, students, expats and many others – who have asked why there is no good general introduction to the archaeology of the region, which exists for other parts of Peru, such as Cuzco, Chachapoyas or Trujillo. Hopefully this book paves a space for enthusiasts to revel in and be informed about the varied stone ruins that animate the countryside, towns and trails of northern Peru and beyond.

### **Key propositions**

Why do people carve and venerate stone? Why do stone idols assume the form that they do? Why do people make buildings, monuments and cult objects out of this hard and rather intractable material? How do people view and use durable

edifices and places of stone? And crucially, how do engagements with it – physical and cognitive – change over time?

The influential historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, wrote about the importance of stone and provided an answer of sorts.

nothing was more direct and autonomous in the completeness of its strength, nothing more noble or more awe-inspiring, than a majestic rock, or a boldly-standing block of granite. Above all, stone *is*. It always remains itself, and exists of itself; and, more important still, it *strikes* . . . Rock shows him something that transcends the precariousness of his humanity: an absolute mode of being. Its strength, its motionless, its size and its strange outlines are none of them human; they indicate the presence of something that fascinates, terrifies, attracts and threatens, all at once . . . Men have always adored stones simply in as much as they represent something *other* than themselves. (Eliade 1958:216)

The brief passage touches eloquently upon key concerns of this book: the material, agentive and imagistic capacities of stone. Simply put, it highlights the powerful otherness, or *alterity*, of stone – which Eliade construed as a human universal: the fascination with stone arises because of its *inhumanity*. As bold as this is, however, the assertion challenges scholars to seek evidence, detail cases, put forward comparisons and, perhaps most important, cultivate a perspective of change through time.

Our exploration leads us to the Central Andes and, specifically, to the highlands of north-central Peru (Figure 1.1). This region is home to the Cordillera Blanca, the highest mountain chain in the New World tropics and heartland for early civilisation in the Americas. In this dramatic land, with its glaciated peaks, azure lakes, mosaicked fields, and deeply carved canyons, stone is plentiful and varied. In fact, stone might be considered the material ‘glue’ that links all these settings. Thousands of years ago, ancient groups came to rely on the material for all manner of making and cultural practice having to do with dwelling, work, play, politics and art.

Carved **monoliths**, as great cult images or idols, were crucial for the emergence of civilisation in the region, most notably for the Chavín religion that rooted in the Peruvian Andes during the 1st millennium BC. Subsequent societies also depended on stone for their religious objects: e.g., small magical charms, outcrops, oracles and ancestor effigies. All the major cultures of highland Ancash, the region of the Central Andes which will comprise my case studies, built impressive places and monuments out of stone.

It is through and about stone that we can begin to reconstruct a prehistory about the patterns of engagements between people and their landscape over some five millennia. This epoch spans the rise and fall of pilgrimage centres, warrior societies, ancestor cults and imperial conquests, both Andean and European. What seems to have remained constant in this sociocultural flux was the enduring commitment to working this plentiful, hard material. Thus this book

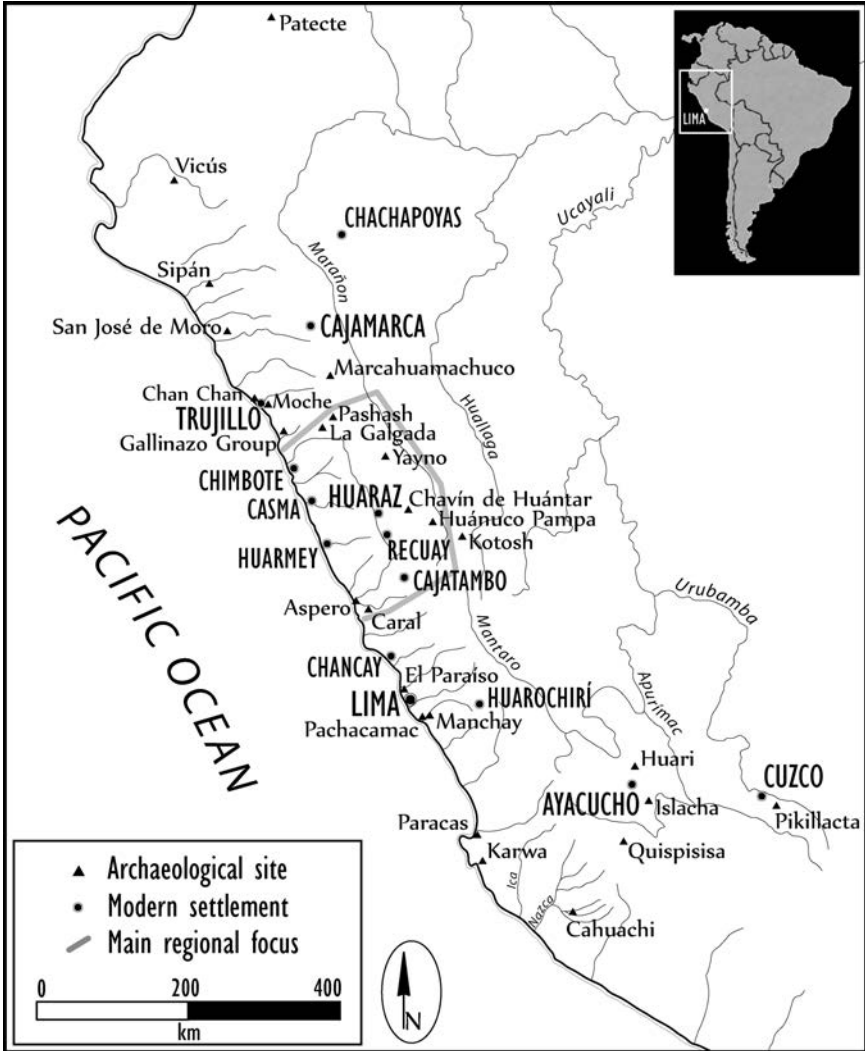


Figure 1.1. Map of Central Andes locating sites mentioned in the text. Drawing by author.

illuminates a long-term regional tradition of human effort with stone. In the course of describing the region’s archaeological record, I aim to explore three main propositions about the work and presences of stone for groups of the Central Andes.

The first proposition regards stone and its various modified forms as material durations. By ‘material durations’, I mean culturally negotiated understandings by which people reckoned time, history and social relations. Stone monuments are tangible measures of time in several important ways. It provides a duration

for this book's reader; that is, it provides a dataset and frame by which to imagine and keep track of the particular past to be explored within these pages. Stone also provided a material basis to understand the past for our subjects: the ancient groups in question. Andeans very often fabricated objects and places in stone to emphasise durability, perpetuity and location. It related people to places. Other kinds of durations entail their reuse and their fragmentation – which reorients the tracking of time by interrupting or extending the life of the stone and its essence.

Second, I aim to show that stone was seen to be agentive. For Andeans, stone was ascribed an energy and life that gave it capacity to act and do stuff for and with people. Stone acted as expressions of human and nonhuman powers who both embodied and served to do things as *persons* of a certain kind – they were functional. While it is difficult to be certain regarding the continuity of such durations, patterns in the archaeological record can be compared and also analysed with historically known examples. The comparisons are made to elucidate individual cases of stonework; they will also help to reconstruct a sequence of cultural patterns through time as a regional tradition.

The final important issue treated by this book concerns how worked stone helped to create communities. This is more than contending that stone was important for constructing houses and settlements. Rather, I aim to illustrate how it was a fundamentally social material: I will show that, by promoting relations between human beings, in various instances stone and stone things (monuments and cult objects) served to integrate, maintain and sometimes distinguish social groups, broadly termed here 'communities'. With its many qualities, stone played and continues to play vigorous roles in orienting social life.

\* \* \*

Having foregrounded the key propositions, I wish now to itemise the main theoretical perspectives which frame this investigation and the interpretations to follow. Essentially, I examine stone monuments with an eye toward their phenomenology, object agency, distributed personhood and role in sacred landscapes. These somewhat clunky terms demand some clarification.

*Materiality and being in the Andean world.* First, my study draws from phenomenological approaches to the materiality and perception of the environment, specifically of stone things and places. Especially relevant is the anthropological literature considering how people interact with their environment. Landscape features and objects manifest cognitive structures (Tilley 1994; Tilley and Bennett 2004), but also result from and orient patterns of practice and behaviour (Bradley 2009; Ingold 2000). Although, admittedly, it is often difficult to acquire archaeological evidence on how things were *experienced* in the past, even without eyewitness or indigenous accounts, we can nevertheless reason empathetically and make best guesses linking comparable contexts.

Recent studies of stone monuments in Pre-Columbian societies emphasise their physical effects, as things in interaction with people (e.g., Bray 2009; Dean

2010; Houston, et al. 2006; Lau 2008, 2013; O’Neil 2012). Such a perspective also entails experiential recognition of bodily activity and senses, not just the visual. This perspective helps to complement the traditional emphasis on iconographic ‘meanings’ – what an image depicts, stands for or signifies.

The look, feel and properties of stone have important effects on their uses (Plate 1). People prefer marble countertops, slate roof tiles or green aquarium pebbles. Coloured gemstones orient tastes in the jewelry industry. When struck, chert produces a potentially useful spark and a sharp blade. Even common stone rubble will be selected for its use as fill, precisely because of its qualities – namely it is nondescript, nearby and plentiful; people will not miss it when it is gone. Stone qualities vary, and distinctive ones are often valued. Some of the most important include size, colour, sheen, texture, ductility/brittleness, abundance/rarity, proximity of source, resistance to fire and durability. Put another way, stone and their properties are integrated into complex systems of meanings affecting value, demand and utility.

Stone properties are experienced because they are sensed by people. Seeing, touch, hearing and smell count as the most important senses. But of course the ways to detect these senses in the ancient past can only be limited (Houston, et al. 2006; Moore 2005; Skeates 2010). What archaeology recovers is evidence of activity contexts and behaviours from which to infer likely kinds of sensory engagements with artefacts. Evidence of carbon sooting in a dark chamber tomb may indicate candlelit illumination or burning offerings and incense, just as a low passageway leading to it may have required visitors to crawl.

Archaeology benefits from two powerful comparative methods in this regard. The first is the emphasis on scalar forms and patterns: data can pertain to experiential patterns at house, settlement and regional scales. The other key virtue of archaeological evidence, of course, is its capacity to reveal diachronic change – that is, how patterns may be different over a period time. Such changes tell us about how people adapted to new conditions and sociopolitical contexts.

*Object agency.* Much of this book examines the ‘object agency’ of stone (Gell 1998; Latour 2010; Viveiros de Castro 2004). For many cultures, including our own, objects are not necessarily inert things, seen as lifeless and impotent. On the contrary, many people imbue them with life, subjectivity and the agency to do things. Their capacity as reservoirs of belief is what initiates forms of behaviour in, around and with them. Hence, people go to great effort to make and house effigies of divinities because they are seen to provide good fortune and rains. People visit them in places of worship to see them, but conversely, to be seen by them. People trust in trains to get them from point A to point B, just as dolls are played with as if they are human (Gell 1998; Stewart 1993). What is crucial in this thinking is that objects, including idols and buildings, hold vital places in the various networks of actionable relationships that constitute the indispensable stuff of social life.

Object agency has become increasingly important for investigating the archaeological record. On the one hand, it helps to make sense of contexts where objects, not biological persons, seem to be taken as special and animate.

It is part of the **ontological** or ‘agentive’ turn in various scholarly disciplines increasingly focused on subjectivities and capabilities attributed to nonhumans (e.g., animals, objects, numina). On the other, interpretations about such cases will require new sources of evidence for understanding indigenous logics for human–object relations; that is, why people relate to objects in the diverse ways that they do (Alberti and Marshall 2009; Descola 2010; Pauketat 2013; Santos-Granero 2009a).

Particularly relevant is the rich ethnographic and historical material from different regions around the globe. The Central Andean corpus reveals the importance of stone for Amerindian groups of the high Andes, and especially the great emphasis Andeans placed on stone buildings and objects that promoted ritual life and community well-being (e.g., Allen 1997; Bray 2009; Dean 2010; Duviols 1977; Howard 2006; Lau 2008, 2013; Meddens, et al. 2013; Paternosto 1996; Protzen and Nair 2013; Salomon 1998; Sillar 2009). It also features formal correspondences and continuities in meaning shared by groups during Inka times, the colonial period and those of the ethnographic present. How far back in time these patterns went, and how durable traditional Andean dispositions toward stone were, comprise important topics of this book.

*Distributed personhood.* Objects gain and lose meanings when they are made, given, displayed, modified or otherwise used to act in the world. Because objects participate in the lives and networks of people, very often they are taken as parts, results and/or offshoots of persons (Fowler 2004; Knappett 2006; Lillios 2008; Santos-Granero 2009a; Strathern 1988). Just as making an artwork embeds something of the artist into the piece (e.g., intention, style, creativity), a gift may embody a quality or desire of the giver (e.g., care, debt repaid, esteem). A trap manifests the intention of its maker to ensnare an enemy or prey. People blow on dice to win games of chance. Scholars sometimes call these ‘extensions’ or ‘agents’ because they maintain and channel different sorts of agency, very often to have effect on others, human and nonhuman.

To restate the above ideas in more accessible terms, let’s consider a kind of baseball, say a baseball caught by a young boy as a souvenir. He might value that experience for the rest of his life. That ball plays an ‘agentive’ role in connecting the boy and parents (who brought him to the stadium), those people and childhood, that team and that family, and that event and that place. If the ball happens to have been from the game-winning home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series, it provides an instant link to its hitter, the Los Angeles Dodger Kirk Gibson. Gibson had no hand in making the ball (in producing the hard core or stitching the leather), but that ball’s quality and persona were remade through that event. The home run was broadcast through television and radio, recorded on video, reaching audiences throughout the world. It might be seen as a distributed ‘product,’ a part, of Gibson’s personal handiwork. Moreover, since the ball is worth millions, it now mediates between that lucky fan, bankers, specialists in baseball memorabilia, other fans and maybe Gibson himself, and other collectibles – it holds a place in that network of objects and persons pulled into the vicinity, history and likely future of the ball. Any object – another ball, an

heirloom, smartphone, what have you – may intervene in our social world(s) as persons of this kind. Some objects, such as saintly relics or memorabilia, are often imbued with heavier doses of desirable, powerful qualities than others; they become *sacra*, which embody and distribute the charisma of its previous holder(s) and contributor(s) (Carrasco 1999; Graeber 2001; Munn 1986; Tambiah 1984).

This study is especially interested in the ‘partibility’ of stone. Intact constructions and built spaces in Andean record are exceedingly rare, and what is left are scattered but abundant remnants of a previous whole (e.g., Protzen and Nair 2013:89). Stone has the propensity over time to fragment, both through human and environmental action, into smaller pieces. The major stone forms (e.g., geological formations, outcrops, boulders, pebbles and sand grains) might be taken as parts of a larger body, the living earth or mountains; in the Andes, the smaller forms may retain an essence of the original (Allen 1997; Dean 2010; Howard 2006). It is frequently said that building sacred places counts as efforts that emulate the cosmogonic work of divinities and that bring people closer to gods (Eliade 1958:Ch.X). But reduction, fragmentation and lithification also serve as kinds of action on the world, and in the Central Andes they are driven by human and superhuman effort.

Certain stones in the Andes can be ascribed personhood, not least because blocks were often carved with figural representations of immortals and humans. On occasion, the sculptures were seen to be expressions and sometimes the offspring of their original prototypes – as ancestors and parts of ancestors. Stone, because of its various formal qualities, was the material *par excellence* to carry out this cognitive work. Rock can be chipped, rent, reduced, polished and carved – while maintaining a semblance of its original form (e.g., Bailey 2005; Chapman 2000). Parts of stone (stony presences that share the same colour and texture) can be given away, curated, stolen and otherwise transacted, which by obligation, then, serves to connect people. The interplay of various presences and transformations of the stony landscape form a crucial, running strand in each chapter of this book.

*Sacred landscapes.* The final major element in my framework concerns the landscape. If, for Andean groups, things and artefacts can be animated with capacities to ‘act’, it stands to reason that the setting for them, the environment perceived as the landscape, also held life, power and agency (e.g., Allen 1988; Gose 1994; Walter 2002). The ethnographic literature is especially vivid in describing the animate landscapes of indigenous Andeans, in which a vitality is shared by the environment and its features and inhabitants. This vitality may enliven various beings in the world – plants, animals, things and places – and it is also source of life, well-being and abundance for people. Because it is finite or not always present, however, ritual work is directed at its management and flow, very often based according to the yearly round. Thus the landscape can also be the recipient of attention and veneration.

Indeed, many Amerindian groups in the Americas, past and present, recognise a ‘sacred landscape’ (see Dransart 2006; Moore 2005; Scully 1975; Townsend 1992; Walens 1981). Given its relationship to food, resources and the cycle of

life, the environment is at once the context and target of human labour, faith and the arts. All the New World civilisations emphasised the fertility of the environment. Ritual action was directed towards the divinities and elemental forces who held ambivalent powers over the environment and its properties, particularly the rains, the seasons, thunder, earthquakes, the sea, and fertility of crops and herds. Hence, they hold the capacity to vitalise or to destroy.

Yet it is worth noting that some locales feature more importantly than others. Very frequently these were distinctive features, such as caves, springs, and bodies of water seen to be ancestral places, crucial in myth, or hotspots of extraordinary past significance. As will be seen, stone was crucial in all our case studies of being part of and essential to local sacred landscapes.

### **Previous scholarship on Andean stonework**

Just like the many stones that will make up our record, previous research provides the building blocks and foundations for this new consideration. Yet the study of stone, especially for the Central Andean past, has been uneven and has followed certain conceptual frameworks while marginalising potentially productive avenues of inquiry. This section highlights what I see as the four principal intellectual frameworks for appreciating ancient Andean stonework: stone as archaeological culture; stone as potent objects and in sacred landscapes; the materiality of stone; and stone as artworks.

#### ***Stone as archaeological culture: Chronology, function, materialisation***

My study sample consists primarily of stone blocks – things modified into things often termed sculptures, effigies, cult objects, figurines and uprights. This work also evaluates stone constructions, stone outcrops and monuments. For reasons of space and subject, it cannot address the wide scholarship and record of chipped or ground stone artefacts in the Andes, which would comprise a very different kind of book.

The predominant framework in existing scholarship emphasises stonework in its original cultural setting, or in archaeological context. Practitioners treat stone as a normative trait or element, some might say ‘sign,’ of the originating culture. The forms, imagery and techniques of making – sometimes collectively called ‘style’ – are used to identify the stones in time and space, as well as to make inferences about past meanings and culture change.

The basic archaeological questions concerning stone assemblages centre on what, where and when. Strong emphasis is given especially to contexts of appearance and use: that is, where the stone is used and its role(s) in a given society. The remaining questions of how and why typically rely on functional explanations.

Work to date has highlighted the Inka (ca. 15–16th centuries) and the earlier Tiwanaku cultures (AD 300–900) (Dean 2010; Gasparini and Margolies 1980; Janusek, et al. 2012; Niles 1987, 1999; Protzen 1992; Protzen and Nair 2013).

The impressive ruins of Cuzco and Tiwanaku, the capitals of these cultures respectively, reflect the sheer mastery and technical achievement in ancient Andean stone working.

But more than that, the stone work is taken as a diagnostic, a material correlate, of state-level societies. Scholars reason that labour organisation for such work is beyond the means of small collectivities. Archaeological research on Inka stone work has focused on the colossal labour expenditure and organisation of the empire (e.g., Hyslop 1990; Ogburn 2004; Protzen 1992). The style of stone work has also been studied as the quintessential diagnostic of Inka presence in a region, an element of its cultural influence and spread.

A common explanation for the elaboration of stone work is that it is employed by the making group as ideological display. Archaeologists sometimes use the term ‘materialisation of ideology’ to describe the general existence of certain elaborate things (e.g., artefacts, architecture, arts) in complex societies (DeMarrais, et al. 1996). These things are made to ‘materialise’ and convey the politico-religious authority and wealth of leaders, nobles or high-status individuals.

Stone sculpture is a quintessential form of ideological display. Because stone sculpture is expensive in terms of labour and because its production requires expert knowledge and tools, archaeologists frequently understand its production as a specialised activity, which must be contracted or sponsored by the dominant group. A corollary is that leaders do not commission carvings (and associated monuments) for no reason. Rather, they do it to confer legitimacy and bring prestige to themselves or their associations (e.g., lineages and forebears, gods or their reign) (e.g., Janusek, et al. 2012:94; Kolata 1993:103–172; Niles 1999:84; Ogburn 2005:232; Rick 2008:32). It is also a sign of wealth – for it shows the ability to divert some form of capital (monetary, social, labour debt), to what might be seen, at least in orthodox Western terms, as nonessential work. Stone sculpture and monuments are therefore ‘conspicuous’ displays: they *function* to communicate the power and ideology of those who made and use it.

Other studies of stonework highlight the imagery of key cultures and associated sites, such as the early ceremonial centres of Cerro Sechín and Chavín de Huántar (Bennett 1942; Burger 1992; Maldonado and Samaniego 1992–95; Roe 1974; Rowe 1962; Tello 1956, 1960). Although the Chavín people (ca. 1000–400 BC) also built ‘megalithic’ constructions, they are most famous for their finely carved stelae, the standing prismatic slabs bearing intricate imagery of monstrous divinities. These were very likely mythic supernaturals important in the oral traditions of the groups in question. These, too, materialised ideology, but rather than that of lineages and political leaders, the images conveyed the otherworldly subjects associated with specialised cults and priestly elites.

Very few works actually compare sculptural traditions in the Central Andes or examine them over the *longue durée*. The last major assessment was made a half century ago by the archaeologist Richard Schaedel (1952), who created classificatory descriptions of individual sculptures across the Central Andes and defined key sculptural regions (nine ‘central areas’) and ancillary regions (eleven ‘isolated’ and ‘peripheral areas’) for stone sculpture. This book will highlight Peru’s north highlands, which comprises eight of the twenty sculpture areas identified by

Schaedel. Decades of archaeology since this study reveal many other areas with lesser-known developments in stone sculpture, not only in the Central Andes, but beyond – such as Ecuador and Colombia. None of the Andean traditions, however, features the time depth or the concentration of sculpture evidenced in ancient Ancash. It is now timely and more suitable than ever to recount a prehistory of Andean peoples' interactions with stone monuments through time.

### *Objects of cult and landscape*

Another major strand of research about stone in the Central Andes centres on their importance as ritual objects. Comparisons to, or '**ethnographic analogy**' with, the beliefs of contemporary groups have been crucial (e.g., Abercrombie 1998; Allen 1988; Gose 1994). Eyewitness descriptions and a rich ethnohistorical record illuminate appreciation of stone by the Inka and colonial era indigenous groups (see esp. Dean 2010; Mills 1997; Niles 1999; Salomon 1991).

The rich documentary record makes clear that many traditional groups of the Andes value stone(s) as ritually potent objects in a sacred landscape (Figure 1.2). Inka groups believed that special rocky forms<sup>1</sup> were imbued with a life force, or essence, that had power to vitalise others (e.g., Dean 2010; Van de Guchte 1990). Stony forms were incorporated into ritual practices regarding the dead, fertility and land. Most commonly, stones held status as durable embodiments of key forebears who become efficacious beings for the living. The studies highlight how Inka stone work sought to manipulate essences and qualities ascribed to certain stones.



Figure 1.2 Bosque de piedras, 'Forest of stones', Hatun Machay. Photograph by author.

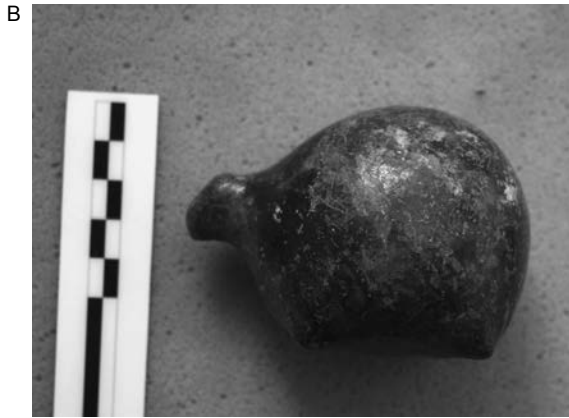
Stone was the material *par excellence* for encoding relations between people and land, for it associated place with local histories, identity and, not least, power relations. For Dean (2010:Ch.2), the elaborate stone work treats the reciprocity between humans and the landscape. Stone monuments acted to incorporate and order the physical world of the Inka Empire, known as **Tawantinsuyu**, or ‘the four parts united’. For Paternosto (1996:186), stone work created an ‘intimate reverence’ by Inka groups for the ‘intrinsic holiness’ of stone and the natural environment; they focused attention there (see also Cummins 2002:27–28; Pasztory 2005:198).

Certain stone and outcrops have associations with celestial and unpredictable natural phenomena. Gade has noted how stones and outcrops cleft by lightning are particularly special and associated by southern Andean groups with dual divisions and complementarity. Specialised shrines, ‘illawasi’, were dedicated to places of lightning strikes (Gade 1983:776) and were places for sacrifices and use of bezoar stones (Hernández Príncipe 1923:27). Lightning was, of course, the sign of Andean storm gods, and their worship often sought to increase herd success.

The colonial literature also makes frequent reference to large standing stones, called *huanca* or *wanka* (Duviols 1977, 1979).<sup>2</sup> These were former humans who had been turned, or lithomorphosed, into stone, and were worshipped as tutelary divinities by the descendant group. From the Formative Period onwards, such uprights play an important role in the ceremonial patterns of Ancash (Plate 2), and subsequent chapters will examine them in more detail. Suffice it to say here that many huancas survive in highland Ancash (Bazán del Campo 2007). They were erected in sacred spots important in the collective memory and action of corporate groups: e.g., origin points (springs, caves), fields, high spots with sightlines, irrigation nodes, places of past divine intervention. As monuments, their later use in prehistory marked the boundaries and fragmented territories of increasingly warlike societies.

For contemporary **Quechua** groups around the former Inka capital, Cuzco, the significance of stone remains very prominent (e.g., Allen 1988, 1997; Flores Ochoa 1977; Sallnow 1987). These groups handle stones, most small and naturally shaped, for all manner of play and ritual. Pebbles are assiduously collected and manipulated to stand for other things (e.g., houses, potatoes, herd animals, televisions, people), typically of miniature households; they are gathered together and moved around not unlike the make-believe of dollhouses. They reproduce human-scale actions and create metaphors, alluding to larger wholes (e.g., villages, fields, mountains, herds, collectives), and to bring about new and bounteous futures. By managing the miniature, the stones are power objects that help ‘change the lived-in world’ (Allen 1997:81).

The Cuzco region is also home to small stone objects known as ‘*illa*’ and ‘*enqaychu*’ (Allen 1982:184; 1997; Flores Ochoa 1977; Salomon 2004; Sillar 2012).<sup>3</sup> These are typically handheld objects, akin to ‘amulets’ or ‘charms,’ that are seen to enhance the well-being and success of their bearers and her/his crops and herds (Flores Ochoa 1977:218). Sometimes *illa* are carved or have natural features which resemble certain plants or animals (e.g., guinea pigs or **cuy**, **camelids**, sheep, corn, beans) (Figure 1.3). Also, some bezoar stones of



*Figure 1.3* Stone effigy objects. (A) Stonecarving in the form of seated mummy bundle height 6.4 cm, Chinchawas. (B) Modelled stone camelid effigy. (C) Modelled stone camelid effigy. Such objects were worshipped as charms for fertility and well-being. Photographs by author.

camelids and deer, also called *illa*, work similarly (Salomon 2004). They are small and hard concentrated forms, reservoirs of vital potency, like a battery. They also have protective and tutelary associations, and they are kept to generate abundance (Flores Ochoa 1977:218–219). They are also seen as lucky objects, for they are found opportunistically and can also dispense good fortune to its bearer. But they are also fickle and alienable, for they can be lost and have other owners.

Such objects appear to have had considerable antiquity. Related stone forms, variously called '*chanca*',<sup>4</sup> '*conopa*',<sup>5</sup> '*con churi*',<sup>6</sup> '*zaramama*' and '*illa*', are known from the prehispanic and colonial periods (see especially Arriaga 1999:Ch.2; Mills 1997:Ch.3).<sup>7</sup> To be sure, they are not necessarily the same, and it is almost certain that meanings for some of these words have changed over the centuries.<sup>8</sup> While the principal commonality is their stoniness, their forms, origins, the intervention of humans, and the domain of efficacy can all be very different for these objects (Table 1.1). The diversity of names and forms indicate their pervasiveness for Andean groups as well as their time depth.

Such objects were selected for their unusual shapes, colour, surfaces or location of discovery. Some Inka *conopas* feature small holes on the back on camelid forms, where fat was inserted and burned as an offering. All of these stone objects were repositories of supernatural potency to help the success of the owner. They have permanent *generative* capacities for that which is either represented or with which it is connected.<sup>9</sup>

The extirpator Fernando de Avendaño, in 1617, provides some insight: 'The Indians worship two kinds of idols, some fixed, like mountains, crags and high peaks . . . others are portable [such as *guanca*, *caullama*, *zaramama*, bezoar stones and personal idols] . . . These idols, which they call *huacas* in their language, are very old, and they are passed on from fathers to sons, and the ministers of idolatry also introduce new idols [e.g., *chancas*] . . . The Indians have stories about their idols, which are known through traditions by the elders, and they say that all of the idols have inside them, although they are stones, *a certain divinity* that transfers into the stone, and for this reason, they adore it' (my emphasis, Avendaño in Duviols 2003:715).

Another indication of their significance is the frequent mention of them being wrapped in cloth, when stored and presented. The wrapping resembles the key treatment of mummy bundles; the dedication of cloth and rebundling of the object were the devotional practices of close relations (Lau 2008). Like the mummy bundles, the stones were also worshipped by making supplications and offerings to them, of *chicha*, llama fat, blood, cuy, coins, *coca* leaf, and other valuables. These were the customary components for their ritual nourishment. Today, such offerings encourage special moments of ritual potency, when they can be efficacious in bringing about change (Allen 1997:81; Sillar 2012). Historian Kenneth Mills (1997:100) asserts the worshipper 'saw his fortune and condition being directly related to his ritual attention to them [the stone objects]'