

Honcopampa



Monumental Ruins in Peru's North Highlands

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More than three thousand years ago, a great tradition of stone sculpture and megalithic architecture emerged in Peru's north highland valleys of which the Early Horizon (1200-200 B.C.) temple complex at Chavín de Huantar is a spectacular early example. In the subsequent Early Intermediate Period (200 B.C.-A.D. 550), the Callejón de Huaylas (or upper Santa River Valley; Fig. 2) appears to have become the center of this stone-working tradition. We know this, however, not from temple complexes like Chavín,

but from a collection of clearly local but largely unprovenienced statues and decorated stone lintels now housed in the museum of the modern city of Huaraz. This stonework is superb, yet most of the settlements of the period are unimpressive, with monumental stone constructions limited to subterranean tombs and massive retaining walls.

The contradiction between such an elaborate stone sculptural tradition and such modest settlements is puzzling. Have archaeologists somehow missed the monumental capitals of the Early Intermediate Period in the Callejón de Huaylas? Or were there no such capitals, and were these impressive sculptures produced in-

Figure 1. Looking north across the green marshy expanse of Honcopampa, one sees the majestic Cordillera Blanca in the background. Ruins cover the high ground in the center of the photograph.

stead by autonomous communities of peoples whose stone architecture, and perhaps their statues as well, were primarily mortuary in function?

The subsequent Middle Horizon Period (A.D. 550-1000) brings with it another set of questions about the nature of settlement in the Callejón de Huaylas. This was a time when the styles of the city of Huarí, 550 km to the south, spread throughout much of highland and coastal Peru, bringing to an end the Early Intermediate

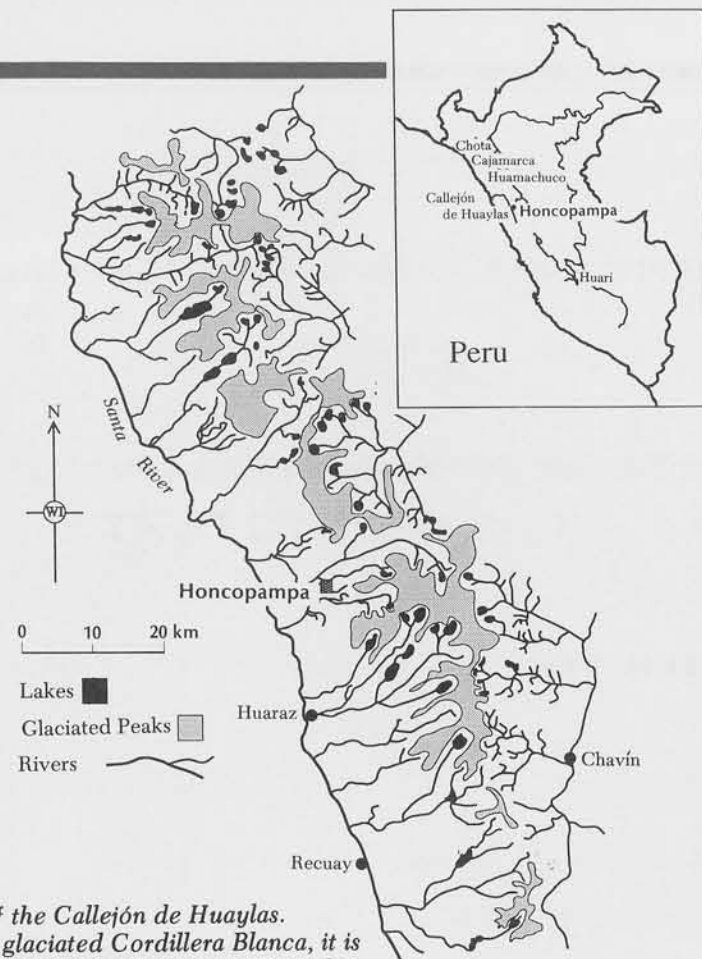


Figure 2. The eastern side of the Callejón de Huaylas. Bordered on the east by the glaciated Cordillera Blanca, it is located in Peru's north highlands, intermediate between the major Middle Horizon site of Huari to the south, and culturally important far northern basins that include Huamachuco, Cajamarca, and Chota. Honcopampa lies high on the eastern side of the Callejón de Huaylas adjacent to an important pass through its peaks.

Figure 3. Aligned boulders on the hills surrounding Honcopampa suggest that in the past many more walls and perhaps even buildings were present.



Period. What effects did this Huari expansion have on the Callejón de Huaylas, with its striking local tradition of stone working and architecture? And what in turn might local settlements in the Callejón de Huaylas tell us about the organization and administration of the important pre-Incan polity of Huari? The site of Honcopampa seemed likely to hold some answers.

Honcopampa

Honcopampa is the ruin of a small city 11,400 feet above sea level on the western flank of the glaciated Cordillera Blanca (Fig. 1). It is characterized by a large concentration of impressive, multi-storied buildings often called *chullpas* (see below). Many archaeologists date these structures to the Middle Horizon and interpret Honcopampa as a provincial capital built by Huari rulers to govern the subjugated peoples of the Callejón de Huaylas. Others disagree and suggest that the buildings were instead constructed during the Early Intermediate Period by leaders of a complex local polity called Recuay.

The site was briefly investigated in 1961 by American archaeologist Gary Vescecius and Peruvian Hernán Amat. They reported that Honcopampa was a Middle Horizon center, but their findings were never published and remain controversial.

Establishing the site's dates would be the first step in providing a proper historical context. Was Honcopampa a "missing" Early Intermediate Period capital of the Recuay polity, or was it the provincial administrative center of an expansive Middle Horizon Huari state? These questions motivated my investigations in the summer of 1987.

Architecture at Honcopampa

Honcopampa's archaeological zone surrounds a shallow bowl-like depression high on the eastern side of the steep Callejón de Huaylas. The depression is about a kilometer across and comprises pasture and marsh areas; modern inhabitants state that the name Honcopampa (perhaps more properly spelled Joncopampa) derives from a descriptive term in the local Quechua language for "wet land where people sink into the ground."

Three large concentrations of well-preserved buildings are located on high ground at the northern edge of the marsh, but most of the well-drained slopes surrounding the depression are dotted with various alignments of boulders—straight lines, circles, V shapes, grids, terraces, and perhaps even plazas and courts (Fig. 3). At least some of these boulder alignments were once monumental walls, constructed of massive stones with infill of smaller rocks between them (see Fig. 4).

Chullpas

Small rectangular buildings are also scattered across the hills surrounding the depression. Foundations of these buildings were discovered on cultivated slopes near modern homesteads, and also on steep and windy hilltops (Fig. 9). Called *chullpas* by the natives, the buildings range in size from only a



Figure 4. A megalithic gateway preserved in one of the boulder walls gives a clue to the former complexity of this rustic architecture.

couple of meters square to at least 4 or 5 meters on a side. They sometimes occur in groups of two or three.

Chullpas were constructed not of boulders with smaller infill stones but in a technique called block and spall. The masonry of the walls consists of more or less rectangular stone blocks carefully and attractively combined with small, flattish rock slabs or spalls set in strong clay mortar. The stout little structures were roofed with huge stone slabs, had large door jambs and megalithic lintels over tiny doorways (Fig. 10).

Today, most of these scattered chullpas are so severely damaged that their remains are often difficult to detect. They have been the targets of intensive looting as well as deliberate dismantlement for their megalithic roof stones and door lintels, which are reused in bridges as well as for door and window jambs in modern buildings. Their original contents are missing or in disarray, making functional interpretations difficult. Most archaeologists accept them as mortuary monuments, but while human bones have been found in some of their chambers, it has yet to be demonstrated that the chullpas all belong to a single category of build-

ings intended for the burial of human remains.

Chullpas are also found in each of the three architectural concentrations on the northern side of the marshy depression (Fig. 5). Each concentration has its own characteristic set of building forms, but masonry techniques and the general chullpa building type are similar in all three.

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Ama Puncu is a long, low hill with the remains of nine or more chullpas. Most of these chullpas are much bigger than the ones dispersed on the surrounding hills, but they share the same masonry. Many are two stories tall. Seven or more of the chullpas are arranged around three sides of a courtyard. They enclose a U-shaped area that is open to the north (see cover).

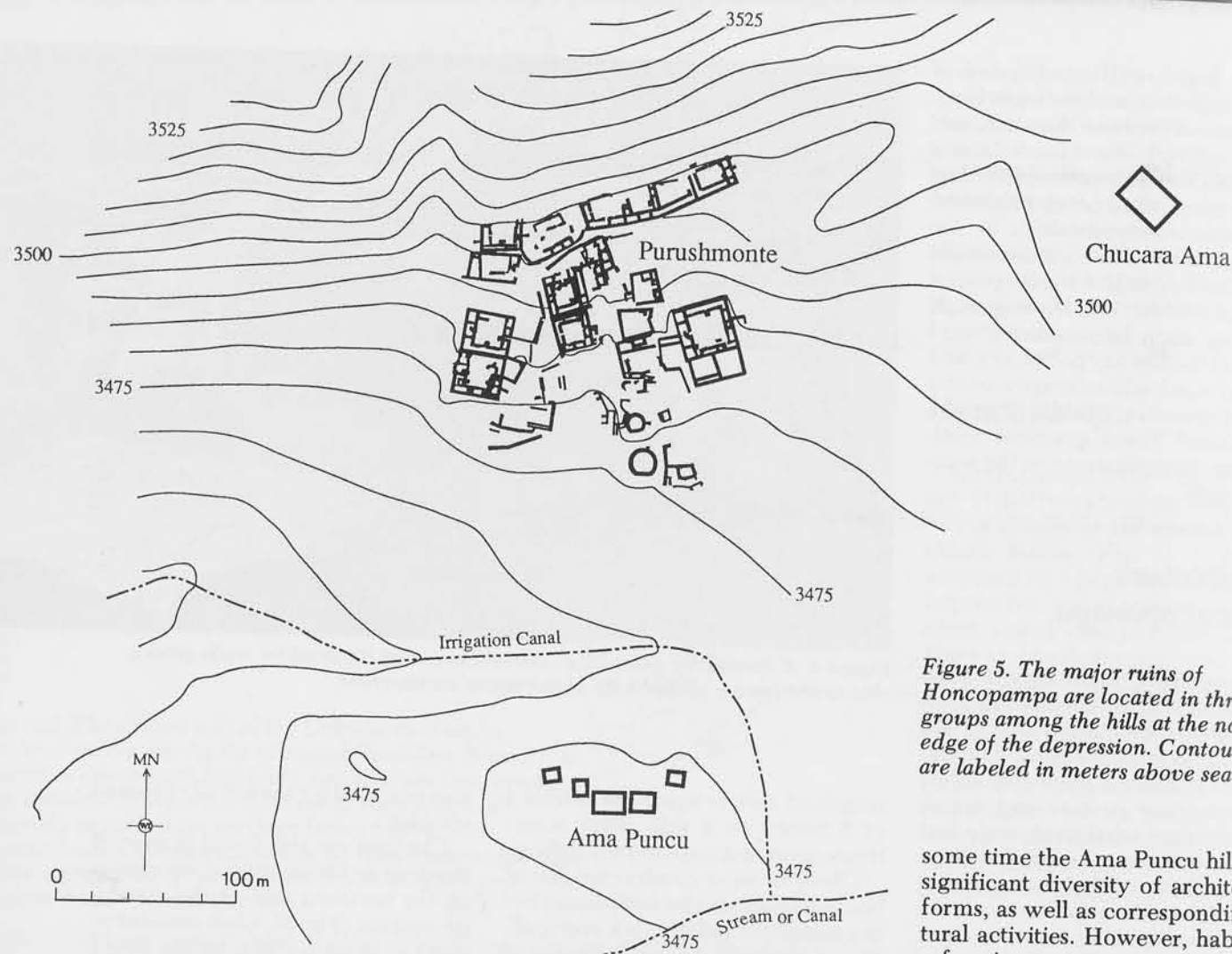


Figure 5. The major ruins of Honcopampa are located in three groups among the hills at the northern edge of the depression. Contour lines are labeled in meters above sea level.

some time the Ama Puncu hill had a significant diversity of architectural forms, as well as corresponding cultural activities. However, habitation refuse is very scarce among current surface remains, and it seems unlikely that Ama Puncu was ever an important residential area.

Chucara Ama is located about a kilometer northeast of Ama Puncu. A large chullpa occupies an extensive rectangular platform. Remains of several smaller chullpas are also in evidence, as well as many walls that probably belonged to terraced plazas. An outstanding and unique feature at Chucara Ama is a red rock that looks like a bedrock outcropping, surrounded by well-constructed stone walls. As in the case of Ama Puncu, surface refuse is scarce at Chucara Ama.

D-shaped Buildings and Patio Groups on the Purushmonte Hill

Purushmonte is a hill with the largest area of architectural remains at Honcopampa. It is covered by very dense brush, giving the initial impression that the ruins are limited to big terrace walls. However, clearing the

and numerous internal chambers. Many, but not all, of the chambers are tall enough to stand in comfortably and large enough for several adults to sleep on the floor. Some of the ceilings are stained from smoke, and occupation debris can be found on the floors. But the chambers have been used as camp sites by travelers and trekkers for many years, and the multiple reoccupations make it very difficult to determine how the chambers were used by their original builders.

Unfortunately, many of Ama Puncu's chullpas are in such poor repair that they cannot be mapped accurately without clearing and excavation. Two that are in extremely bad condition were identified less than 100 meters west of the U-shaped group, but still on the Ama Puncu hill. There are also traces of stone walls that appear to have belonged to constructions other than chullpas. Perhaps at

In the southwest corner of the 'U' is Honcopampa's largest chullpa, measuring 12 by 16 meters (Fig. 6). At ground level, this building has three doorways on the north side that open into the U-shaped court, and a single doorway on each of the other sides. The interior of the building is divided into 20 chambers that are arranged in interconnected groups of 3 or 4 rooms (Fig. 7). The second floor of the chullpa has a single entrance to the north and contains 6 interconnected chambers, while an old report claims that what may have been a third story was visible in the past. Hernán Amat, who excavated in the chambers of this chullpa with Gary Vescecius in 1961, reports finding human bones as well as pottery in the Viñaque style (a style diagnostic of Huari during Middle Horizon 2, about A.D. 700-850).

Five other chullpas in the 'U' also have two stories, multiple doorways,



Figure 6. The largest of the chullpas measures 12 by 16 meters and is located in the southwest corner of the U-shaped plaza. Originally it may have had a third floor. In 1961 Gary Vescecius and Hernán Amat excavated in this chullpa and found human bones, as well as pottery in the Viñaque style that originated at Huari, in the Ayacucho Valley.

vegetation revealed lovely buildings with great doorways (Fig. 13). Many walls were standing 2 meters tall. Periodic cultivation had destroyed other walls to the bottom of the plow zone, but ca. 30 centimeters below the surface they were relatively well preserved. Once the vegetation had been cut down, shallow trenches revealed nearly complete building plans without disturbing the deeper occupation strata that will be so important for more detailed studies of Honcopampa in the future.

In spite of dense vegetation, abundant occupation refuse was recovered, including large grinding stones found in many of the buildings. Some small, poorly preserved chullpas were also recorded. Several large retaining walls on the Purushmonte hill are of boulder and infill construction, but most of the walls, except for a few examples that may be technologically intermediate, are of block and spall construction.

Two additional building forms were identified at Purushmonte. Both are complex, multi-roomed compounds, but the first surrounds a central D-shaped room or tower,

while the second surrounds a rectangular patio. Surface remains suggest that there are somewhere between 6 and 12 hectares of such compounds. The well-preserved architecture cleared in a 2.5 hectare study area may all belong to one or the other of these two compound classes (Fig. 8).

D-shaped building complexes are less frequent than patio groups. Only two examples were found, both located in the southern or lower part of the Purushmonte study area. However, since the lower part of the slope has been much more disturbed by modern and historic activity, the scarcity of D-shaped buildings may not be indicative of their original numbers.

The larger D-shaped building, AC-13, has a doorway in the flattened side that faces south, and another feature that may be a door in the northwestern section of the wall, at a significantly higher level. One part of the D-shaped wall stands over 5 meters tall suggesting that in its original condition the building was a tower-like construction that may have contained multiple floors. The smaller D-shaped building, AC-14,

just north of AC-13, has several large niches in the interior of its curved wall. Since both of the D-shaped buildings have rooms abutted onto their exteriors, they appear to have been the foci of elaborate architectural complexes. One room on the east side of AC-14 has a row of stones projecting from the inner face of the wall, perhaps corbels to support a second floor. However, they are only a few centimeters above the level of the modern surface of the ground.

No excavations were conducted in the D-shaped buildings. An old trench in AC-13, probably excavated in 1961 by Amat and Vescecius, was cleaned and inspected. Its walls revealed ashy zones but few artifacts, and it seems likely that AC-13 was either cleaned regularly and carefully, or it was not a residential structure. Since D-shaped buildings were identified in only the lower part of Purushmonte, spatial separation may have correlated with functional or ethnic differences within the city of Honcopampa.

The rectangular patio group complex is the most frequent building form in the sample study area, and all the examples are located higher on

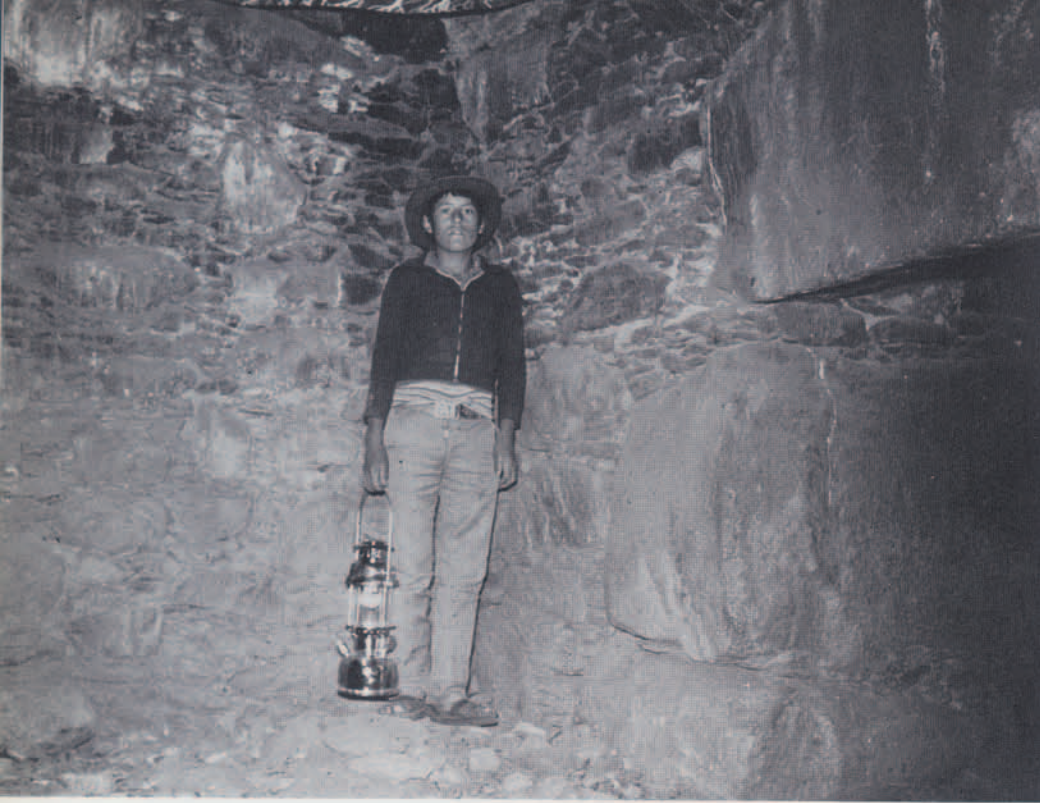


Figure 7. The large chullpas contain sizable rooms constructed of massive block and spall walls, with megalithic door jambs and roofs.

the hill than D-shaped buildings. Patio group masonry, like that of chullpas and D-shaped buildings, is of the block and spall type. However, the quality of patio group masonry varies, depending on its location (Fig. 11).

The patio groups consist of four elongated halls around a rectangular court or patio, creating an enclosed compound. The idealized Honcopampa form is oriented more or less to cardinal directions, and has a main entrance in the center of the east side of the compound. The entranceway is a corridor with megalithic door jambs and great stone lintels. It provides access to the central patio, and sometimes to one of the adjacent perimeter halls. Each long perimeter hall is divided into rooms, usually three. One perimeter hall, usually on the west side, is wider than the rest; it too is divided into rooms (Fig. 12). Each room has a doorway with large stone jambs and lintels connecting it with the patio, but direct access between rooms is rare. The rooms were probably one story high. The largest lintel in each patio group is located over the central doorway into the wide hall, which also has the finest masonry. These lintels, ranging from 3 meters to more than 4 meters in length, are extremely impressive.

Occasionally patio groups have a secondary entrance from the outside: a small corridor into the patio from one side of the rectangular compound. More rarely, there is a doorway through the outer wall directly into one of the hall rooms. Patio groups also appear to have had broad benches about 20 to 30 centimeters high that encircled the entire edge of the central enclosure. It is within the patios that large grinding stones are typically found.

Compounds AC-2, AC-3, AC-4, AC-5, AC-6, AC-9, and AC-11 are especially good examples of the rectangular patio group complex, even though few of them meet all of the ideal criteria discussed above. Other

Figure 9. This chullpa, probably constructed for mortuary purposes, has been so thoroughly looted and destroyed that only a concentration of large stones reveals its existence. The steep hilltop has recently been converted into a Christian shrine by placing a cross among the prehistoric ruins.



Figure 10. This chullpa was covered by dirt until it was exposed by a local family making adobe bricks. The chullpa's walls of large, rectangular stone blocks and small infill spalls, as well as its doorway and monumental lintel, are still intact but the interior has been looted.

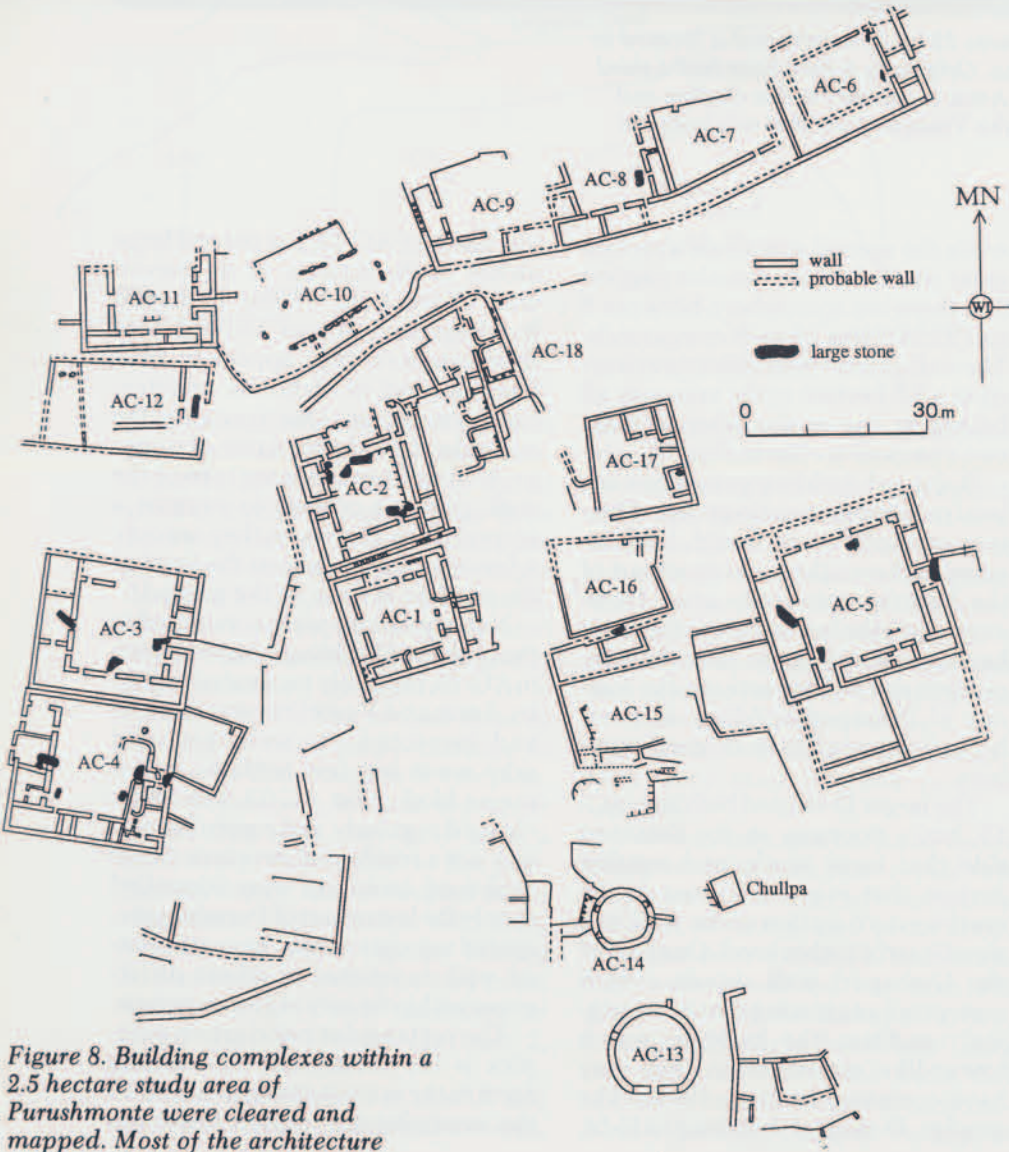


Figure 8. Building complexes within a 2.5 hectare study area of Purushmonte were cleared and mapped. Most of the architecture preserved falls into two formal classes, the D-shaped complex and the patio group.

Dating Honcopampa with Ceramics and Carbon Samples

Honcopampa's long ceramic sequence starts at the beginning of Peru's Early Intermediate Period. This period, however, is only sparsely represented at the site. Pottery of the white on red, early Huaraz style, usually assigned to the two centuries before and after the time of Christ, was found only in the bottom of a single excavation trench and was not recognized anywhere on the surface of the site. It has not been convincingly associated with any architectural remains. Pottery of the subsequent Recuay style considered to date between A.D. 200 and 600 is even less common. It seems to be present in the form of one Yahia-like sherd and three pieces with resist decoration. Another possible example was found inside the isolated chullpa examined by project members.

The Early Middle Horizon is represented by polished blackware and plain redware ceramics, and a few local copies of Huari's Chakipampa and Viñaque styles. Polished blackware and plain redware are associated with patio group occupations and are also the most common ceramics found in the isolated chullpas. Hernán Amat claims to have recovered authentic Viñaque from the largest chullpa, and my surface collections yielded a badly eroded sherd that may also be an import from Huari.

Clearing walls in order to map the patio groups exposed a great deal of pottery from plow zone strata, especially in the patio group complexes remodeled during Honcopampa's final prehistoric occupation. Most of the pottery from these areas comes from gray-

brown bowls and jars dating to the end of the Middle Horizon, or perhaps the Late Intermediate Period. Decoration is exclusively plastic and consists of appliquéd clay fillets, sometimes incised, punctated or slightly modeled, as well as some low-relief, press-molded designs that are difficult to identify as regards theme. These wares seem to belong to what has been called the Aquilpo style elsewhere in the Callejón de Huaylas.

Four samples of carbonized wood were obtained from three of the excavations in patio group rooms. Three of these came from strata that I associate with the occupation of patio groups by their builders, and each came from a different patio group. The three dates for the occupations in the patio groups are 1240 ± 90 (A.D. 710 ± 90), 1380 ± 70 (A.D. 570 ± 70), and 1280 ± 70 (A.D. 670 ± 70). The fourth sample came from the deep strata in AC-5 (Excavation 1, level 11), near the base of the building foundation that also produced sherds reminiscent of the Recuay style and Huaraz styles. While these ceramics imply an Early Intermediate Period occupation at Honcopampa, the date of the carbon sample is 1330 ± 100 (A.D. 620 ± 100), virtually the same as the Middle Horizon dates above. I suspect that the carbon sample pertains to the construction of patio group AC-5, while the ceramics belong to earlier occupations. They may have been disturbed and mixed with construction materials when the foundation trenches for the patio group were dug.

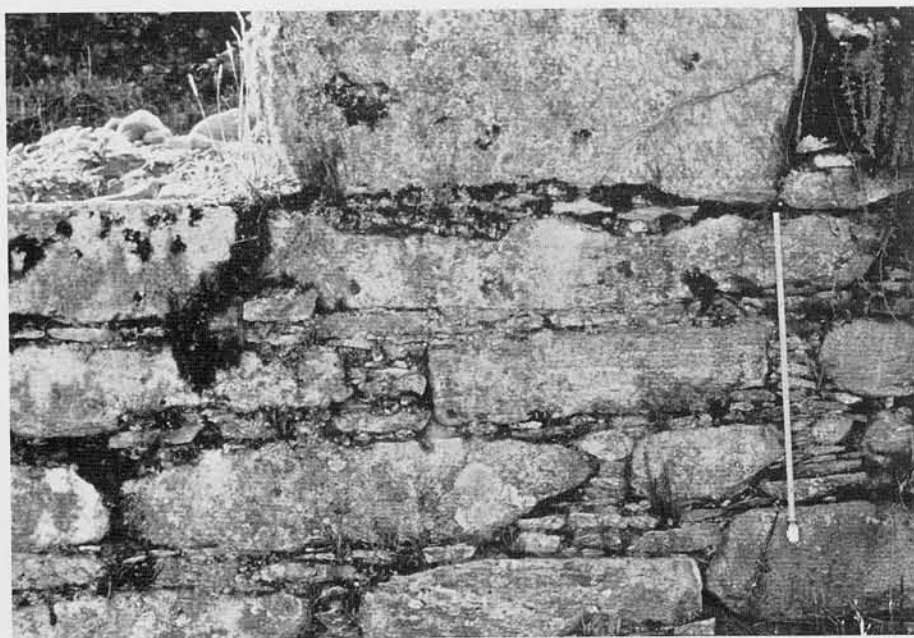


Figure 11. The block and spall masonry of the patio group's inner walls is finer than the masonry of the exterior perimeter walls. The finest masonry of all occurs in the widest perimeter hall. Great care was lavished on this wall in AC-2 to create a dramatic and aesthetic appearance.

buildings at Purushmonte also appear to have been constructed with the patio group model in mind. Future research will clarify the formal aspects of these buildings and reveal whether they belong to subclasses of the patio group complex, or perhaps to another formal class that is yet to be defined.

One rectangular patio group deserves special note. Compound AC-1 lacks a central entrance with corridor. It has no large lintels, and all of its perimeter halls are of approximately the same width. Significantly, there is a row of projecting stones, or corbels, preserved in two of the perimeter hall rooms. This suggests that the peripheral halls of this building may have been multi-storied.

Four small stratigraphic test pits were excavated in hall rooms of four rectangular patio groups. In three cases, AC-2, AC-5 and AC-9, residential debris was abundant. Only the excavation in AC-1 yielded little

more than sterile soil. In view of these results, as well as the general abundance of occupation refuse on the surface (including numerous grinding stones), I conclude that Honcopampa's rectangular patio groups were primarily residential in function.

Several of the rectangular patio groups revealed alterations that represent significant remodelings. Doorways were blocked or added, rooms reshaped, walls removed, and new walls, some of them curved, added. AC-1 appears to have suffered only minor modifications, but AC-4 was dramatically altered. AC-18 has been so extensively rebuilt that its original form is no longer clear, and it may or may not have been a rectangular patio group. I infer that these remodelings represent a final phase of occupation at Honcopampa, when ideas about the shape and use of buildings had changed.

The Dating of Honcopampa

With the exception of a handful of Early Intermediate Period sherds not found in architectural contexts, all the ceramics from Honcopampa date to the Middle Horizon or later (see box on dating). Sherds of the Middle Horizon are associated with unmodified patio groups, D-shaped buildings, and chullpas, as are corroborating radiocarbon dates. Sherds dating to the end of the Middle Horizon and perhaps on into the Late Intermediate Period are associated with plow zone strata and the remodeled patio groups that mark the end of Honcopampa's prehistoric occupation.

The masonry of the patio groups, D-shaped buildings, and chullpas is stylistically united by the block and spall construction technique. While late modifications of several patio groups also employ block and spall construction, it is of the lowest quality; seemingly earlier construction, although not presently datable, is easily differentiated by its boulder and infill technique. Consequently, it appears that the block and spall masonry style as well as the patio group, D-shaped building, and chullpa forms



Figure 12. Completely cleared of vegetation, this patio of AC-2 reveals a low bench surrounding the patio, the division of perimeter halls into three rooms, and impressive lintels over the doorways. The largest central lintel lies in front of the ample doorway, having fallen from its original location.

belong to one time period. Honcopampa is best interpreted as a Middle Horizon center.

Architecture, Honcopampa, and Huari

In many ways, Honcopampa's architecture resembles that of Huari. The patio group was a standard building form at Huari and it is the form most commonly associated with what have been interpreted as Huari's provincial administrative centers during the Middle Horizon Period. We also know that D-shaped buildings are important architectural features at Huari, probably dating to the end of the Early Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Middle Horizon. Only one of Honcopampa's building forms is not typical of Huari and that is the chullpa. Although chullpas may have analogies at Huari in megalithic, dressed stone chambers that often included several rooms and even two or three floors, these seem to have been subterranean, or surrounded by rough stone walls that retained a covering of earth.

However, while the principal construction phase at Honcopampa is Middle Horizon in date and related to Huari, the architecture is not simply a Huari import. Honcopampa responded to the Middle Horizon with a strategy that incorporated some Huari building traits while rejecting others in favor of a continuing affiliation with an old northern tradi-

tion of monumental masonry architecture. Two of Honcopampa's building forms are shared with Huari, but masonry of the block and spall style that characterizes the patio groups, D-shaped buildings and chullpas is not. Huari's buildings were covered with clay and lime plaster, giving them a brilliant white finish. Unlike Honcopampa's careful masonry, their rough stone construction is durable but not aesthetically patterned with stones of selected size and shape.

Huari architecture also avoids the use of large stone lintels or door jambs, preferring to de-emphasize doorways. Consequently, Honcopampa's explicitly emphasized spaces, marked by block and spall masonry walls of differing quality, by larger entrance lintels, and by more massive door jambs, must be considered part of a northern architectural tradition foreign to Huari.

Indeed, block and spall construction characterizes Early Intermediate Period architecture at Pashash and in Huamachuco and Cajamarca, basins farther north than the Callejón de Huaylas. Emphasis on megalithic lintels is another feature widely spread in the north. There are megalithic towers in the northern basin of Chota, tall, narrow buildings of four floors whose masonry includes dressed block construction. These may belong to the Early Intermediate Period, and perhaps are related to, or even antecedents of, the chullpas at Honcopampa and elsewhere in Peru's highlands. Furthermore, among the



Figure 13. Heavy brush growing at Purushmonte made it difficult to appreciate the spectacular buildings without first clearing the vegetation.

architectural remains described for Huamachuco are Early Intermediate Period buildings whose forms are similar to patio groups.

With the field work of 1987, a major question about Honcopampa has been answered. The little city was a Middle Horizon center with buildings characteristic of Huari. But the enigma of Early Intermediate Period settlements and political organization in the Callejón de Huaylas remains unresolved. And now there is more than the sculpted statues in the Huaraz museum to be explained. Honcopampa's architecture is a blend

of Huari building traits with a little understood but obviously powerful northern tradition, in which we must find the antecedents of block and spall masonry as well as architectural spaces marked with megalithic lintels and great door jambs. Do these techniques derive from boulder and infill constructions, and were there boulder and infill buildings at Honcopampa before the patio groups, D-shaped compounds, and chullpas were built? Finally, who occupied Honcopampa, and by what authority did they draft the labor to build the city? It seems most likely that norther-

ners, not Huaris, ordered the patio groups redesigned to include so many northern conventions. Only the AC-1 patio group is true to Huari standards, but it yielded no occupation debris.

The architectural ramifications of Honcopampa indicate a complex cultural history. They suggest that continued research will reveal Honcopampa to have been a dynamic city where southern Huaris and native northerners worked out conflicts and accommodations in the construction of a new system of regional power and control. 21

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