

NEW WARI MORTUARY STRUCTURES IN THE AYACUCHO VALLEY, PERU¹

Lidio M. Valdez

Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 13-27 H M Tory Building,
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H4 Canada

Katrina J. Bettcher

Department of Anthropology, Trent University, Canada

J. Ernesto Valdez

Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de Huamanga, Ayacucho, Perú

Recent archaeological salvage excavations in the Ayacucho Valley of the Peruvian Central Highlands resulted in the discovery of two totally new mortuary structure forms for the region and for the Wari culture in particular. The first form consists of two rectangular mortuary chambers, each with a small east-facing entrance and holding the interred remains of several individuals. The second form consists of several cylindrical cists, each containing the remains of a single individual. We describe both mortuary forms and compare them to other known Wari mortuary structures of the region. Since both chambers evidently were accessible, we also discuss their possible implications with regard to ancestor worship, keeping in mind that an important aspect of Inka ayllu organization was the veneration of ancestors' mummified bodies kept in accessible mortuary buildings.

WHEN THE SPANIARDS entered the Inka capital of Cuzco in 1533, they soon learned that the bodies of dead leaders were kept in special buildings (called *chullpas*) and were periodically visited, adored, feted, and consulted (Allen 1988:57; Rowe 1995:30). The preserved corpses of former emperors were dressed in fine clothing and on special occasions were brought into the plaza to receive offerings and to be consulted by the living (see Pizarro 1965 [1571]:192; Rowe 1946:259). These preserved corpses were regarded as the founders of the *panaka*, or royal *ayllu* (Rowe 1946:253–55; Hyslop 1990:62–63; Patterson 1991:65–67), a corporate descent group that claimed a common identity (Moseley 1992:49). *Ayllu* organization and worship of *ayllu* founders were ubiquitous features of Andean society during Inka times.

According to Cieza de León (1973 [1553]:164), the shape of the mortuary buildings in which the *ayllu* founders were kept varied from one region to another; for instance, some were underground and deep, others aboveground and tall.

Regardless of their shape, a notable feature of these structures was their accessibility. Both Cobo (1956 [1653]:272) and Cieza de León (1973 [1553]:165), for example, note that the mortuary buildings had a small east-facing doorway, which was kept closed by a flat slab on the outside (see also Rowe 1946:286). Cieza de León (1973 [1553]:165) explained that these doors allowed the sepulchers to be reopened in order to renew the clothing and food placed there for the dead.

However, while we have information about the *ayllu* in Inka times, the origin of the Andean *ayllu* organization has remained obscure. On the one hand, Michael Moseley (1992:94; see also Kolata 1991:113) suggests that the *ayllu* organization already may have existed about six thousand years ago. On the other hand, William Isbell (1997:136) has argued that the *ayllu* organization is a late innovation of pre-Hispanic Andean society. Because a fundamental feature of *ayllu* organization during Inka times was the worship of the ancestral founders' preserved corpses kept in specially designed mortuary buildings, Isbell (1997:139) suggests that the best way to find evidence of the ancient *ayllu* is by locating the ancestor mummy and its open sepulcher. According to Isbell (1997:148), the open sepulcher is an aboveground structure, or cave, that could be entered without difficulty. For the Ayacucho Valley of the Peruvian Central Highlands (Figure 1), Isbell (1997:187) asserts that this type of mortuary structure has no greater antiquity than the Middle Horizon. Indeed, he argues that *ayllu* organization may not have preceded the Wari state (Isbell 1997:188).

Recently we excavated two burial chambers in the Ayacucho Valley (Bettcher, Valdez, and Valdez 1999; Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001). In both cases, excavations revealed multiple interments in chambers of a type not previously reported for the region. In this article, we describe these findings, focusing our attention primarily on the chambers' construction and contents. We also describe burial cists discovered in association with one of the chambers. Finally, we address the significance of these findings for interpreting social organization in the Ayacucho Valley, particularly with regard to recent discussions about mortuary monuments and the origin of the *ayllu* (see Isbell 1997; Bawden 2000). To familiarize the reader, a brief introduction to Wari and to Middle Horizon chronology is in order.

WARI AND MIDDLE HORIZON PERU

Ever since the influential studies published by Lumbreras (1960), Rowe (1963), and Menzel (1964), the Wari culture (circa A.D. 550–900) has been regarded as a conquest state that expanded from its Ayacucho Valley heartland and established political control over most of the Central Andes (see Lumbreras 1974a; Schreiber 1992; McEwan 1996). Wari-style artifacts and several highly uniform architectural complexes—identified as Wari administrative centers—are found throughout much of modern Peru. The spread of Wari-style artifacts was accompanied by dramatic changes, for instance, in settlement patterns (see Schreiber 1992); such changes are interpreted as mirroring economic and social reorganizations imposed on local populations by the Wari administration.

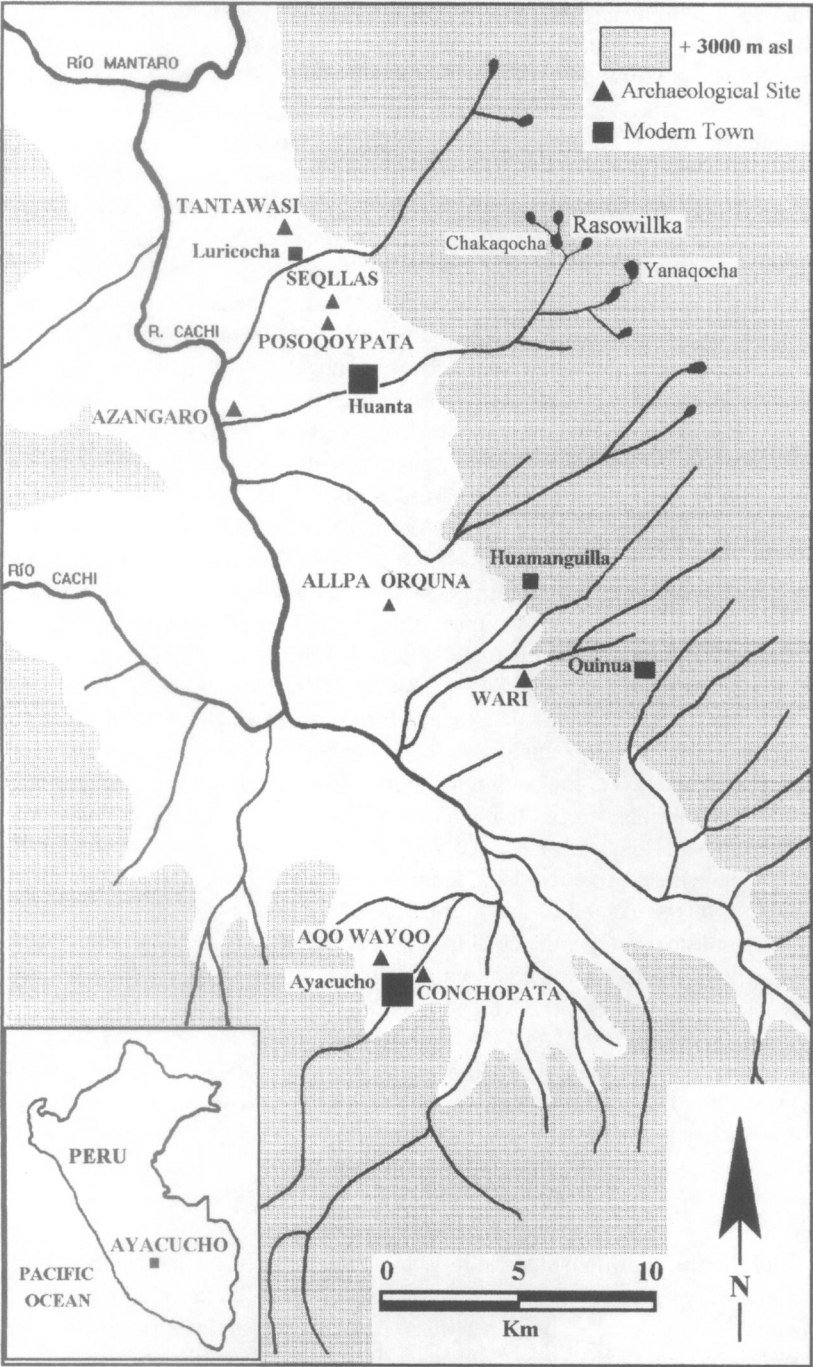


Figure 1. Location of Seqllas and Posoqoyyata in Relation to Wari and Other Middle Horizon Sites in the Ayacucho Valley

Evidence that indicates Wari's presence (or influence) beyond the Ayacucho Valley is recognized in the terminology of Peruvian archaeology as the Middle Horizon (Menzel 1977:3).

The Ayacucho Valley, located in the Central Highlands of Peru, was also reorganized. Prior to the emergence of Wari, which occurred around A.D. 550, the population of the region was scattered in small villages (Valdez 1997). With Wari, most of those villages were abandoned as their inhabitants were concentrated in fewer, but larger, settlements. At the same time, specialized centers, such as the pottery-making center of Conchopata (Pozzi-Escot, Alarcón, and Vivanco 1993), were established in the region. Also during this time, the site of Wari, the capital city, was converted into the largest settlement of all the valley, and perhaps of all the Central Andes (see Isbell 1984). These changes and innovations likely were promoted by the newly established Wari administration.

In 1964 Dorothy Menzel published the most comprehensive study of Wari ceramics, which remains widely cited today. Menzel's (1964) detailed chronological scheme of Middle Horizon ceramics was divided into four epochs (Middle Horizon 1 to 4). The first two epochs are subdivided into two phases (Middle Horizon 1A and 1B, Middle Horizon 2A and 2B). Briefly, Middle Horizon 1A represents the beginning of important changes in the Ayacucho region. During this time, a new iconographic art made its appearance in the region and may have been associated with the establishment of a new political authority in the Ayacucho Valley (see Isbell and Cook 1987; Knobloch 2000). During Middle Horizon 1B, the newly established Wari state expanded from its Ayacucho basin heartland and established control, for instance, over the South and Central Coast regions. Menzel (1964:67) argued that at the beginning, Wari expansion may have been carried out by religious missionaries but that later on it likely involved military incursions.

During Middle Horizon 2A, the Wari state continued to flourish, but a Wari-related style with a distinctive local iconography called Pachakamac soon made its appearance on the Central Coast. Menzel (1964:71) interpreted this as evidence of the likely political independence of the Central Coast. During Middle Horizon 2B, the Wari state and its capital city continued to grow; however, by Middle Horizon 3, Wari hegemony seems to have collapsed, followed by a "great depression" that characterized Middle Horizon 4 (Menzel 1964:72; see also Isbell 1984:104). In the Ayacucho Valley, the capital city likely was destroyed and many—if not all—Wari sites were rapidly deserted. With this introduction, now we turn our attention to Wari mortuary patterns.

WARI MORTUARY CUSTOMS

Despite the enormous interest in Wari studies (see Isbell and McEwan 1991), Wari mortuary customs are not well known, particularly in the Wari core area: the Ayacucho Valley. Indeed, with very few exceptions, archaeologists have only referred to burials in passing. Consequently, a detailed study of Wari mortuary forms for the Ayacucho Valley is still lacking. This article is an attempt to fill this vacuum, although we understand that due to the nature of the recent findings

(discussed below), our interpretations have certain limitations. The information we have gathered on this subject during the last few years remains fragmentary, but in order to generate interest in this issue, we believe that publication of our data is warranted.

The lack of interest in the study of Wari mortuary practices in the Ayacucho Valley is not due to the absence of mortuary data—on the contrary, almost every archaeological excavation carried out in Wari sites of the region has produced some kind of mortuary data. However, this information, for whatever reasons, has not attracted the interest of archaeologists. For instance, at the urban center of Wari (see Figure 1), skeletal remains have been found in several different contexts. The most salient are those reported from the Cheqo Wasi sector of Wari (Benavides 1979, 1991) that represent over one hundred individuals found in the vicinity of megalithic stone boxes (see Lumbreras 1974b: Figure 174). Unfortunately, the stone boxes had been looted, but Benavides interprets them as elite burial chambers. For the Moraduchayoq sector (also at Wari), several stone cists located under the floors of rooms have been described (Isbell, Brewster-Wray, and Spickard 1991). The cists were built of rough stone, mortared together with clay, covered with white plaster, and then capped by heavy stones with holes.

At Conchopata, another site in the Ayacucho Valley, several Middle Horizon Epoch 1 burials have been excavated (Lumbreras 1974a:172–77). Almost all of the burials were single and were found in cylindrical pits excavated into the rock. The bodies were placed inside large vessels, then put directly into the pits, some of which were stone lined. In all cases, the burial pits were sealed with slabs or large pottery sherds. Aside from the single burials, a double burial was found in a stone and mud tomb attached to a building (see Lumbreras 1974a:180). Recent excavations at Conchopata have uncovered additional Middle Horizon Epoch 1 burials, most of them single and similar to the previous findings, except for one that reportedly contained multiple interments and dates to Middle Horizon Epoch 2 (Anita Cook, personal communication 2000).

At Aqo Wayo, another Middle Horizon Epoch 1 site located in the vicinity of Conchopata, a burial placed inside a large vessel was accidentally discovered in 1985. Following this discovery, excavations carried out at the site found another burial in an extended position (see Ochatoma 1987). At Azángaro, a Wari site located in the northern end of the Ayacucho Valley (see Anders 1991), burial remains were also found. Finally, at Allpa Orquna, a site located in the vicinity of Wari, Cirilo Vivanco (personal communication 1999) excavated a partially destroyed stone-walled chamber. Pottery associated with the chamber reportedly belongs to Middle Horizon Epoch 2. During our recent excavations at the Wari site of Marayniyoq, located a short distance north of the Wari capital city, we also discovered burial remains. The Marayniyoq evidence is very similar to that discussed below (multiple interments inside a chamber), except that the burials had been looted.

In summary, several burials have been excavated in the Ayacucho Valley, but in no case have the findings been carefully studied. Nonetheless, current information, although fragmentary, tends to indicate that most—if not all—Middle

Horizon Epoch 1 burials were single. Conversely, it appears that during Middle Horizon Epoch 2, mortuary patterns changed, as the dead were interred in groups and in larger and accessible structures. With this introduction, we now turn to our recent findings.

THE BURIAL CHAMBERS FROM SEQLLAS AND POSOQOYPATA

Seqllas and Posoqoykata are, respectively, about 16.0 and 15.5 km north of the archaeological site of Wari in the northern part of the Ayacucho Valley (see Figure 1). Both sites consist of small hills and are relatively isolated from other contemporary (that is, Wari) settlements (Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000). In both cases, the burial chambers were discovered by accident—the first in 1999 when water flooded into the chamber from an irrigation trench that ran across the top of the hidden structure, the second in July of 2000 when the hill containing the chamber was bulldozed. In association with the chamber at Posoqoykata, several cylindrical cists capped with stone (Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001: Figure 6) also were found (see below). Following their incidental discovery, and because both chambers and their contents were at risk of being destroyed, we carried out salvage excavations.²

At Seqllas, the first stage of the excavation involved clearing away the surface soil above the structure in an area 2.0×2.5 m in size. During the process, a few undiagnostic pottery sherds were found in the surface soil. Adult human bones were also found scattered to the northeast of the opening where the water had flooded in. Underneath the surface soil was a clay layer, surrounded by an oval of fieldstones. Right above the clay layer, we found a pottery sherd decorated in the Okros style of Middle Horizon Epoch 1B (Knobloch 1991; Menzel 1964). On the north and west edges of the fieldstone oval, and about 15 cm below surface, the skeletons of two infants were exposed. Beneath the clay layer and about 25 cm below the surface, we exposed irregular stone slabs forming the roof of the chamber and set upon corbels. Once the ceiling was removed, we noticed that the top part of the chamber was empty, but at the bottom was a layer of wet dark soil, likely accumulated over the years. In this layer we found the commingled skeletal remains of several adult and subadult individuals who seemed to have been brought into the chamber for burial at different times over the years. Unfortunately, the bones were so deteriorated that at first contact they broke into many pieces, making it difficult to assess sex and age. In addition, there was no order to their arrangement, making it impossible to determine burial posture (Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000).

The Seqllas chamber was well made and definitely had been built with care (Figures 2 and 3). The interior is rectangular, with walls of irregular fieldstones and perhaps some quarried stones, as well as mud mortar. The width, length, and depth of the chamber are about 1.0, 1.7, and 1.4 m, respectively. The west side of the chamber had a floor of flat, irregular stones. This floor probably had once covered the whole chamber but was missing on the east side, likely as the result of looting activities. Set in the east wall was a small door (approximately 50 cm high and 45

cm wide) that was closed by a flat stone slab on the outside. This access is only about 50 cm from the current edge of the hill, and there can be little doubt that in the past it faced the open air. On the west wall was an empty small (about 20 × 20 cm) niche, where offerings and other ritual paraphernalia may have been placed (see Isbell 1997:156).

Only a few artifacts were found in the Seqllas chamber (Figure 4), and these had been broken and moved about. For example, parts of a black bowl (Figure 4B) that likely had been placed in the chamber as an offering were found in three separate places in the chamber. In addition, only the mouthpiece of a musical instrument (an ocarina) was found. This evidence strongly suggests that the chamber had been entered and looted, perhaps in the pre-Hispanic past, resulting in the mixture of primary burials and the removal of burial offerings. Consequently, the offerings found inside the Seqllas burial chamber appear to be incomplete.³ As discussed by Isbell (1997:149), several reasons are behind the looting of ancient burial chambers.

As noted above, the skeletal remains represent several individuals. To determine the minimum number of individuals, the most representative and identifiable bones were sorted according to left and right side. The most abundant bone element was the distal end of the left humerus with a count of twelve, indicating a minimum number of twelve adults in the chamber. An examination of the mandibles and teeth revealed that one individual had lost several teeth while still alive and the bone had resorbed, indicating an elderly adult. Finally, the



Figure 2. The Seqllas Burial Chamber before Opening the Ceiling (west-east view)



Figure 3. The Seqllas Burial Chamber after Opening the Ceiling (west-east view)

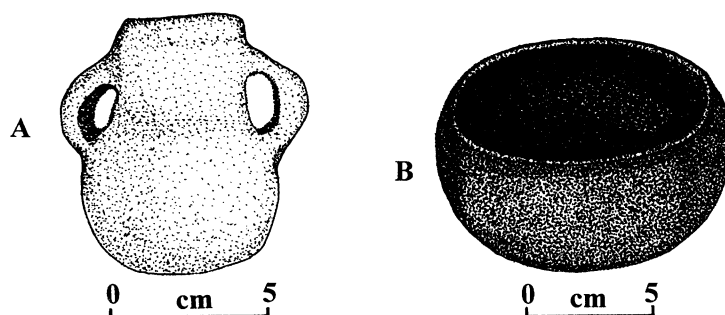


Figure 4. Pottery Offerings from the Seqllas Chamber

A, undecorated miniature vessel; B, black bowl (Middle Horizon 2).

presence of relatively small limb bones lacking epiphyses suggests the presence of at least two subadults. As already noted, two infants were found above the chamber. In sum, a range of ages was represented by the minimum of sixteen individuals found in and above the chamber. However, we believe that the original number was greater, and the possibility that the chamber was an ossuary cannot be ruled out (Bettcher, Valdez, and Valdez 1999; Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000:4–5).

The first stage of the excavation at Posoqoyyata also involved clearing away the surface soil in an area of 11.0×7.5 m and resulted in the discovery of a rectangular chamber, in addition to several cylindrical cists (Figure 5). Beneath the surface soil was a clay layer which sealed a ceiling built from several irregular stone slabs. However, bulldozing seems to have removed most of the clay layer and also caused part of the ceiling to collapse. As the collapsed ceiling was removed, we found several human bones in between and under the stone slabs, but most were totally destroyed by the stones' pressure. At floor level, we found more skeletal remains of several individuals comprising adults, children, and at least one infant. With very few exceptions, the bones were deteriorated and at first contact broke in many pieces, making it impossible (in most cases) to identify even the elements represented. As a result, the original number of individuals deposited in the chamber cannot be determined (Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001:348). Based on the presence of three left parietal bones of adult individuals, in addition to the skull fragments of at least one subadult (child?) and the bones (without the skull) of an infant, we estimate that at least five individuals were buried in the chamber. Clearly this number is very conservative, and we believe that the original number of individuals was greater. Considering that the Posoqoyyata chamber is bigger than the one from Seqllas, it is possible, but not certain, that more individuals were buried in it than at Seqllas.⁴

The Posoqoyyata burial structure was well made and built with care (Figure 6). Its shape is rectangular, with walls of irregular stones and mud mortar. Its width,

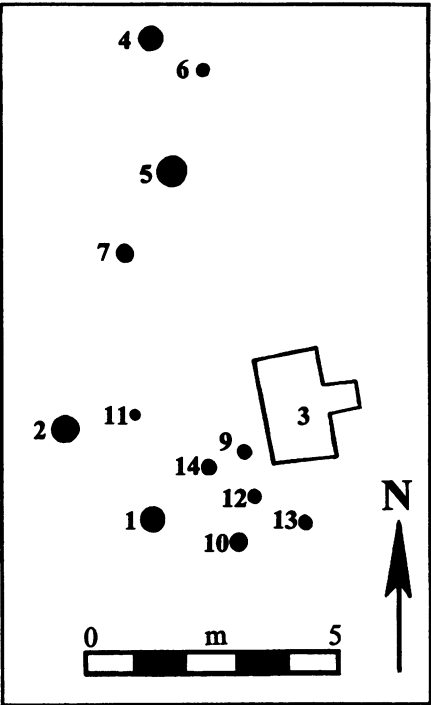


Figure 5. Location of the Posoqoypata Burial Chamber and the Cists
1, 2, and 4–14 are cists; 3 is a burial chamber (the feature excavated as “cist 8” was not a cist).



Figure 6. The Posoqoypata Chamber (West-East View)

length, and depth are about 1.25, 2.25 and 1 m, respectively, and it definitely is larger than the Seqllas chamber. The floor does not appear to have been paved; however, inside the chamber were found two stone slabs, each with a hole in the central part and one of which was still sealed to the floor.⁵ Underneath this slab was a small empty space of unknown function and purpose. An important aspect of this chamber is a small doorway (45 cm high and 50 cm wide) set in the middle part of the east wall. Like the entrance of the chamber from Seqllas, this access was closed by a flat slab on the outside.

The Posoqoyyata chamber also had been looted at some time in the past, resulting in the destruction of the northern portion of the west wall. Part of the roof probably collapsed at this time, and most of the offerings deposited in the chamber likely were removed then. Nevertheless, inside the chamber, we found several pottery sherds decorated in the Viñaque and Wamanga styles of Middle Horizon Epoch 2, in addition to a black cup (Figure 7D) and a miniature vessel (Figure 8C). These features are crucial for assessing the relative chronology of this mortuary structure.

Overall, the Seqllas and Posoqoyyata chambers are very similar to each other but significantly different from those previously reported in the region (e.g., Benavides 1979, 1991; Lumbreras 1974a, 1981). Most notably, both chambers have some of the “affirmative features” of the open sepulcher noted by Isbell

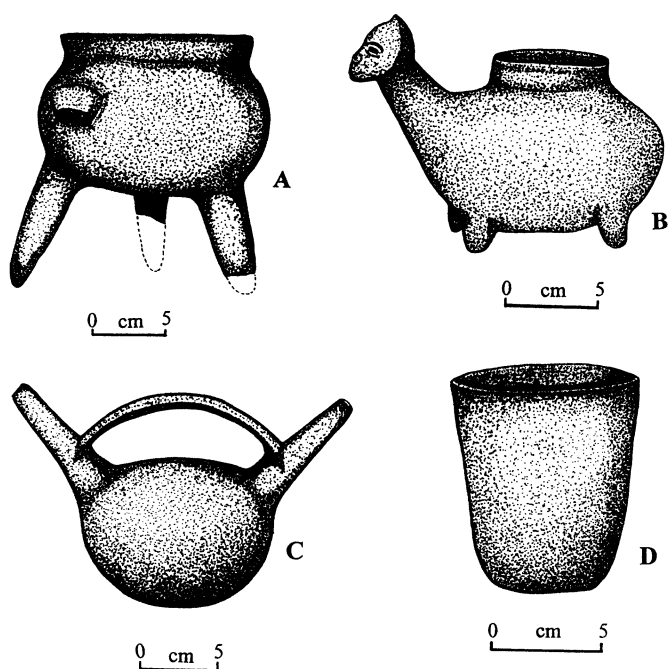


Figure 7. Pottery from Posoqoyyata

A and C from cist 4; B from cist 2; D from the chamber.

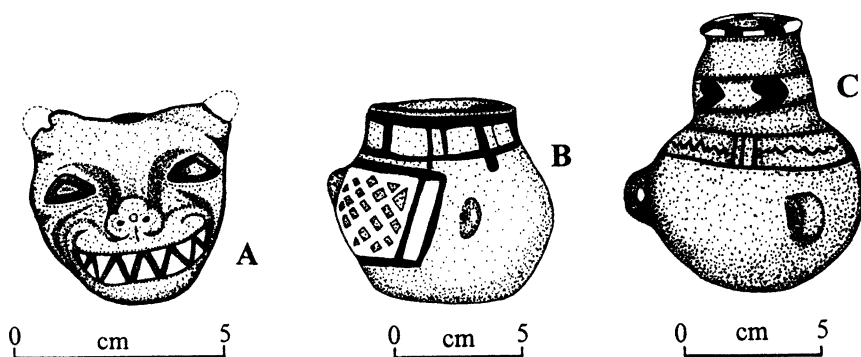


Figure 8. Pottery from Posoqoyyata

A and B from cist 4; C from the chamber.

(1997:156). First, Seqllas and Posoqoyyata are relatively isolated from neighboring contemporaneous Middle Horizon settlements; for example, Tantawasi and Azángaro are about 2 and 4 km to the north and west, respectively. Second, both chambers are quite small with a low ceiling. Third, the Seqllas chamber has a niche. Finally, in agreement with Cobo's (1956 [1653]:272) and Cieza de León's (1973 [1553]:165) observations of mortuary buildings, both chambers have a small east-facing doorway. However, unlike the open sepulcher, which Isbell (1997:148) defines as an aboveground accessible structure, the Seqllas and Posoqoyyata chambers were set into the ground.⁶ The significance of these features is discussed further below.

THE BURIAL CISTS FROM POSOQOYPATA

These cists were located adjacent to the chamber (see Figure 5), and judging from the ceramic vessels found in the chambers and some of the cists, there is little doubt that the cists and the chamber are contemporaneous. Unfortunately, the most elaborate cists (T1, T2, T4) were opened by the bulldozer and subsequently were looted, thus severely damaging the skeletal remains and resulting in the removal of some ritual paraphernalia. These cist structures, including those uncovered during the excavation rather than by the bulldozer, consist of pits dug vertically into the ground. (The one excavated as "cist 8" was not a cist.) Their sides are walled with irregular stones and mud mortar (Figure 9); an exception is T5, which did not have a stone wall. The openings of the cists are relatively narrow (about 50 × 50 cm), and the cists are about 1.0 to 1.2 m in depth and cylindrical in shape. T2 had a small niche in the eastern wall (Figure 10), where ritual paraphernalia may have been placed (Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001:342). The bottom of the cists was a solid and dry floor; however, in T4 (Figure 11), we found a slab with a small (8-cm) hole in the center. As already noted, two such slabs were also found inside the Posoqoyyata chamber.

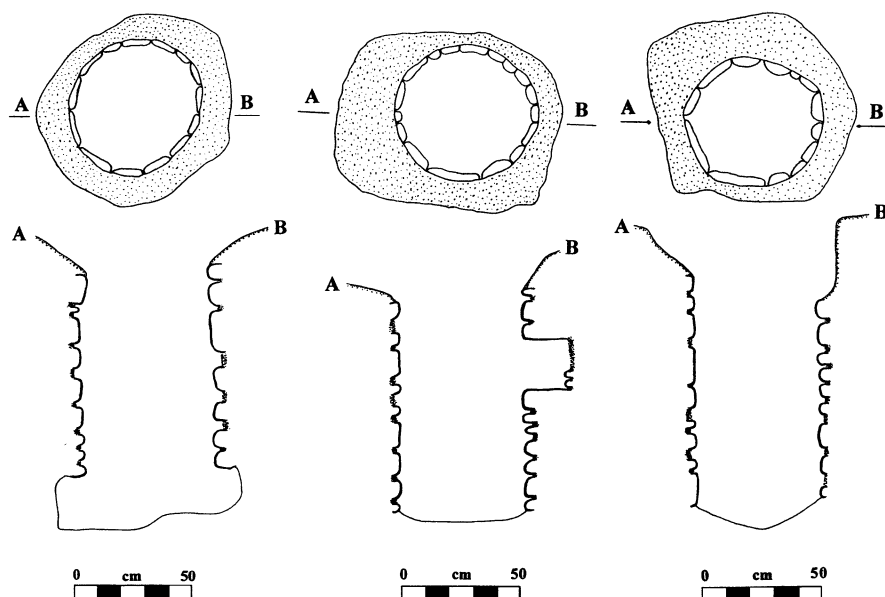


Figure 9. Details of Cist 1
from Posoqoypata

Figure 10. Details of Cist 2
from Posoqoypata

Figure 11. Details of Cist 4
from Posoqoypata

During the excavation of the bulldozed cists, other cists were found, including one that had not been damaged or looted (T10). This cist was perfectly sealed by a flat stone (see Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001:343), and once opened, it was found to contain the skeletal remains of an adolescent individual. Except for the skull, ribs, and phalanges, most of the bones were still articulated. This individual had been placed in a seated position, with the knees flexed to the chest, facing to the east. No offerings were found in this cist. Considering the shape and size of the other cists, it appears likely that the individuals deposited in them had a similar posture and perhaps the same orientation. It is worth noting that the Posoqoypata chamber lies to the east of the cists (see Figure 5), suggesting perhaps that the individuals in the cists faced the chamber. It is also important to point out that single flat stones were found next to T1, T2, and T4, thus indicating that these cists also had stone covers, similar to that of T10. T5 and T7 had no such evidence, but it is likely that their covers were pushed far away by the bulldozer.

In contrast to T10, which had no offerings, some grave goods were found in other cists. Four pottery offerings belonging to Middle Horizon Epoch 2 (see Figures 7A, 7C, 8A, and 8B) were found during the cleaning of T4, which was initially uncovered by the bulldozer. The shape of some of these vessels is reminiscent of the pottery vessels identified as "Atarco Style" by Lumbreras (1984b: Figure 168). Unfortunately, soil and stones pushed inside this cist by the bulldozer had seriously damaged the already deteriorated and fragile human bones it contained. However, among the skeletal specimens was a piece of a mandible;

this individual had lost all of his/her premolar teeth and all (except one) of his/her molars while still alive and the bone had resorbed, thus likely indicating an elderly adult. From T2, we recovered a zoomorphic vessel (Figure 7B), reminiscent of a vessel illustrated by Lumbreras (1974b: Figure 170). Judging from the skeletal remains, T2 also appears to have held an elderly adult, as suggested by the presence of a mandible without the premolar and molar teeth, as well as resorbed bone.

Other smaller and less elaborate cists were also found at Posoqoyyata (cists T6, T7, T9, T11–14). One of these was T6 (see Figure 5), in which we found several deciduous teeth, indicating that the individual it had contained was a child. Cists T9, T12, and T13 are also small, but no bone was recovered from any of them. In T11, only pulverized bones were found.⁷ Considering that the surviving skeletal remains of human subadults, especially of children and infants, are often limited to the most durable elements, such as teeth (see Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994:39), there is little doubt that these cists were used to bury subadults.

In summary, based on the ceramic vessels uncovered during the excavations, it is evident that the burial chambers from Seqllas and Posoqoyyata were built and used during Middle Horizon Epochs 1B and 2. At Seqllas, the finding of the mouthpiece of an ocarina had originally led us to suggest that the chamber perhaps had been initially built during the Early Intermediate period (Bettcher, Valdez, and Valdez 1999). We had assumed this because ocarinas are considered to be representative of that period in the Ayacucho Valley (see Lumbreras 1974a:113; González Carré 1992:63). However, Luis Lumbreras (personal communication 2000) has recently pointed out that these musical instruments continued to be made during the Middle Horizon (Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000). Consequently, and considering the dates of the other offerings (the black bowl and a Viñaque sherd, belonging to Middle Horizon 1B and 2, respectively), it appears that the Seqllas chamber dates to the Middle Horizon. The artifacts found in the Posoqoyyata chamber and cists also belong to the Middle Horizon. Therefore, both the Seqllas and Posoqoyyata chambers seem to have been built and used at about the same time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Most scholars would agree that Wari funerary ritual, particularly in its heartland, remains poorly known. Besides the fragmentary data provided by Benavides (1979, 1991) and Lumbreras (1974a), good comparative information—and discussion—about Wari mortuary practices in the Ayacucho Valley is still lacking. Therefore, the findings from Posoqoyyata and Seqllas provide valuable information for assessing aspects of status, rank, gender, and identity in a society like Wari. Certainly, however, the discovery of similar and better-preserved additional burials in the region is critical for discussing the initial information from the above two sites in a broader context. Despite the poor preservation of the burial contents, the significance of the new evidence from Posoqoyyata and Seqllas is that it provides a totally new kind of data about Wari mortuary customs in the Ayacucho Valley. Indeed, for the first time for the entire Ayacucho region—if not for the

Wari culture in general—we have tangible evidence of accessible mortuary buildings.

Isbell (1997) asserts that Andean societies that were based upon an *ayllu* organization centered their religious attention upon the adoration of mummified ancestors who were kept in a specific type of mortuary building located aboveground, the “open sepulcher.” Conversely, he regards societies that buried their dead below the ground as “lacking” an *ayllu* organization. For the Ayacucho Valley, Isbell (1997:188, 289) infers that the *ayllu* form of social organization arose only at the end of Middle Horizon Epoch 1 or in Middle Horizon Epoch 2 along with the appearance of open sepulchers. He further argues that the development of an *ayllu* organization eventually contributed to the decline of the Wari state.

The recently discovered burial chambers from Seqllas and Posoqoyyata do not neatly fit into either the belowground or the open sepulcher categories as described by Isbell (1997:143–48); instead, the chambers have features of both categories. Although neither chamber was constructed aboveground, both structures evidently were accessible through small east-facing doorways.⁸ Other features in common with the open sepulcher include the presence of a niche (at Seqllas), small size with a low ceiling, and careful construction. In both chambers, the presence of the remains of several individuals of different ages seems to indicate a social organization that was likely kinship oriented. A concern with keeping dead relatives together in well-made and accessible buildings may also be implied (Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000; Valdez, Valdez, and Bettcher 2001). It must be emphasized, however, that due to the underground location of both chambers and the amount of annual precipitation at this altitude (about 500–700 mm, occurring mostly from November to March [see Flannery, Marcus, and Reynolds 1989:14]), bodies probably could not have mummified in these chambers. Perhaps it was not the mummies of the ancestors that were important at Seqllas and Posoqoyyata, but rather their bones (Bettcher, Valdez, and Valdez 1999).⁹ It is critical to point out that according to seventeenth-century Spanish idol destroyers, bones of ancestors, called *mallqui*, were found dressed in fine textiles (see Murra 1962:714).

Despite the above differences, the accessibility of both chambers, the effort spent on their construction, the presence of offerings, and the possibility of family-group interments, as suggested by the presence of several individuals of different ages, could lead one to conclude that these structures are evidence of ancestor worship and *ayllu* organization, thus reinforcing Isbell’s (1997) observations. However, as argued by Bawden (2000:146; see also Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2000:6–7), we think that the presence of accessible mortuary buildings cannot, and should not, necessarily be interpreted as evidence of an *ayllu* organization. The danger exists that later analysts may accept the connection between the presence of open sepulchers and *ayllu* organization uncritically and that whenever an accessible mortuary building is found, the existence of *ayllu* organization will be assumed without careful analysis.

This assumption is particularly dangerous considering that archaeologists

know very little about ancient Andean mortuary patterns and about *ayllu* organization and its archaeological manifestations. Indeed, archaeologists are not sure whether *ayllu* organization was always associated with ancestor veneration and/or accessible mortuary buildings. Likewise, archaeologists are not certain that the worship of dead bodies was always associated with *ayllu* organization. To apply uncritically the Inka mortuary customs regarding ancestor worship to other regions and cultures is to assume cultural continuity and uniformity, even though scholars know that ancient Andean society was diverse and had great time depth. For example, Cieza de León (1973 [1553]:164) notes that mortuary practices varied from one region to another.

As Isbell (1997:108–9, 132) correctly states, cultures and their institutions (including *ayllu* organization) change over time. Indeed, cultures, ancient or contemporary, are in a permanent state of flux due to internal and/or external factors. However, Isbell does not seem to feel the same way about the apparent historical association of *ayllu* organization and open sepulchers, despite his criticism of those who promote “cultural stability” (see Isbell 1997:30). Consequently, it is possible that *ayllu* social organization was also subject to change, and the organizations the Spaniards witnessed at their arrival at Cuzco may not necessarily mirror pre-Inka customs. This is certainly possible, but to make a secure claim, archaeologists must verify other archaeological manifestations of the *ayllu*.

To verify Isbell’s assertions regarding the Middle Horizon Epoch 2 appearance of *ayllu* organization in the Ayacucho Valley, archaeologists must find an unquestionable Middle Horizon Epoch 2 open sepulcher. Unfortunately, not a single Wari mortuary building is recognizable as an open sepulcher. For instance, as Isbell (1997:187) states, those from Conchopata are not open sepulchers. Nor do additional burials recently found at Conchopata fit this category; an exception could be a recently excavated structure that reportedly dates to Middle Horizon Epoch 2 and that contained the remains of several individuals (Anita Cook, personal communication 2000). However, this structure is not an aboveground *chullpa*-like building. The structures from Cheqo Wasi are not reminiscent of a *chullpa*, and it is unclear whether they were accessible or not. Thus, in the entire Ayacucho Valley, no Wari mortuary structure can securely be identified as an open sepulcher.

As noted above, the burial chambers from Seqllas and Posoqoypata—although accessible—are not *chullpa*-like aboveground structures. Because both chambers were accessible, it could be argued that these buildings represent evidence of *ayllu* organization in the region during the Middle Horizon. However, it is unclear whether their entrances were only used to introduce new bodies or whether they were also used to renew offerings. We must await additional data that perhaps can conclusively confirm or reject the association of these structures with *ayllu* organization.

What has already become evident, even with the fragmentary evidence we have, is that significant changes in mortuary customs occurred in the Ayacucho Valley between Middle Horizon Epoch 1 and Middle Horizon Epoch 2. Since

mortuary customs are very conservative and definitely idiosyncratic (Carmichael 1988, personal communication 1998; Silverman 1996), the adoption of new mortuary patterns in the Ayacucho Valley by the end of Middle Horizon Epoch 1 does suggest some sort of change in social organization, which needs further, and separate, evaluation.

As the evidence from Posoqoyyata shows, at the same time that the remains of some individuals were deposited in a well-made, accessible chamber, others were buried in separate cists. These individuals also varied in age, and some of them received offerings. Whether this difference has a gender or status distinction (see Goldstein 1981:54; O'Shea 1984:54) is unclear, however. Also, whether the cists were permanently sealed and never reopened, in contrast to the chamber with a doorway, remains unknown. Nonetheless, it is evident that at the beginning of the Middle Horizon, mortuary customs in the Ayacucho Valley were not uniform.

In short, the recently excavated burial chambers have important features that were previously unknown in the Ayacucho Valley. For the first time in the Ayacucho Valley, we have evidence of accessible chambers that contained the remains of several individuals, perhaps related, who had been given offerings. In addition, the burial cists from Posoqoyyata are a new form of prehistoric entombment for the region. Unfortunately, the poor preservation of the skeletal remains does not allow expanding the discussion into, for instance, gender and age differences. What has become clear, however, is that there is a great deal that we still have to learn about the ancient burial customs of the Ayacucho Valley and about the origin of *ayllu* organization.

NOTES

1. We thank Alberto Sánchez Lucero, José Carlos Mendivil, and Teodoro Jaime for their participation in the excavations at Seqllas and Posoqoyyata. Our thanks also to John Topic, Patrick Carmichael, Michael Malpass, and Helaine Silverman for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of the paper. We also thank Michael Moseley and four anonymous *JAR* reviewers for their critical comments and constructive suggestions. Our appreciation also goes to Mariano Benites (former Director of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Ayacucho) for his unconditional support during the salvage excavations carried out at Posoqoyyata. Likewise, our thanks to the Policía Nacional de Huanta for providing security service at Posoqoyyata. Finally, our many thanks to Ricarda Valdez, our mother, who provided support during the studies carried out at the above sites and a place to live.

2. Salvage excavations at Posoqoyyata were conducted in coordination with Mariano Benites, then Director of the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Ayacucho.

3. Additional artifacts include an undecorated pottery rim, a black bowl that dates to Middle Horizon 1B (Menzel 1964), a small Viñaque sherd that belongs to Middle Horizon 2 (Menzel 1964), an undecorated miniature vessel (see Figure 4A), sixty-four beads (most of turquoise, but some of shell), and pieces of *Spondylus*, some of which were worked. The worked pieces of *Spondylus* are reminiscent of similar findings at other early Middle Horizon sites (e.g. Maymi).

4. Subsequent excavations carried out at Posoqoyyata by the third author located two more rectangular mortuary chambers. One was located to the west of the chamber discussed in this paper, while the second was to the east. Both chambers were badly preserved, and the

human remains were mostly deteriorated. Since no offerings were located, it appears that both structures also were looted.

5. According to Isbell (1997:185), some of the lids of the mortuary structures at Wari had similar holes.

6. A mortuary structure was located during recent archaeological excavations at the Wari site of Marayniyoq, located only 4 km north of the ancient urban center of Wari (see Valdez, Bettcher, and Valdez 2002). Excavation revealed multiple interments deposited in a small rectangular chamber. Unfortunately, the structure had been looted, but among the few artifacts found inside and around the chamber were several miniature pottery vessels similar to a small vessel found inside the Seqllas chamber (see Figure 4A). Luis G. Lumbreras (personal communication 2001) reports that miniature vessels were found as burial offerings at the Wari site of Wari Willka in the Mantaro Valley. On the basis of the ritual paraphernalia observed at the above mortuary structures, it is becoming evident that miniature pottery vessels were an important component of Wari burials.

7. An anthropomorphic (undecorated) whistle was uncovered from T11.

8. It is worth pointing out that *Rassuwillka*, the sacred mountain (*Wamani*) of the Ayacucho Valley, is located precisely to the east (Anders 1991:193).

9. For example, it is unlikely that the bodies of fourteen individuals would have fit into the Seqllas chamber.

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