

1998

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Recommended Citation

Wallace, Dwight T. (1998) "The Inca Compound at La Centinela, Chincha," *Andean Past*: Vol. 5 , Article 6.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean_past/vol5/iss1/6

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THE INCA COMPOUND AT LA CENTINELA, CHINCHA

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Introduction

La Centinela is a large site at the north-west edge of the floor of the Chincha Valley, Peru, very near the ocean and the bluffs that separate the fully utilized flood plain from the higher pampa (Figure 1). The Chincha Valley floor is a triangular, delta-like flood plain, roughly 25 km on a side, of very rich and easily irrigated farmland. The western and southern edges of the area on the bluffs did have additional human settlement in pre-historic times, and this area has a very extensive and dense population today. La Centinela dates from the Late Intermediate Period, A.D. 1250-1470, through the Inca-dominated Late Horizon, from A.D. 1470 until the Spanish Conquest in A.D. 1532.

Working at La Centinela in 1900, Max Uhle reported the many building units that formed the extensive ruins (see Uhle 1924: plates 2-5). The site (Figure 2) is dominated by a pyramid at least 18 m high set on a platform approximately 12 m high that forms a terrace at the foot of the steep southern side of the pyramid. The Inca later constructed administrative buildings in front of the southern terrace (Figures 2 and 3) and also across the terrace itself, many using the distinctive Imperial Cusco architectural style. From this focal location a set of five straight roads radiated out across the valley floor, the two outer roads having alignments very close to true east and south (Figure 1). One diagonal road crosses the entire valley floor and continues straight across the pampa to the Pisco Valley, where it meets a road up-valley to the highlands and another that continues south to the Ica Valley (Wallace 1991; map adapted by Hyslop 1984: figure 21.4).

These physical features indicate the pre-historic socio-cultural importance of the site, an importance which is further reflected by the fact that it was the largest ceremonial structure

south or east of the famous central coast temple of Pachacamac during the late prehispanic periods. The obviously symbolic layout of the road system and its focus on the main pyramid fit the known function of La Centinela as the pilgrimage center for a famous oracle, serving all areas -- coast and highlands -- to the south and east. It was considered a "daughter" of the even more famous Pachacamac oracular center (Menzel and Rowe 1966; Patterson 1985). The Chincha oracle was established before the arrival of the Inca and continued in use through the period of Inca control. There is also documentary evidence of specialized Chincha merchants maintaining a very far-flung trade network (Rostworowski 1970, 1977; Morris 1988; Wallace 1978a, 1978b), giving an economic facet to La Centinela's pre-Inca function as the center of the powerful Chincha socio-political unit. This economic role would also explain why the Inca developed La Centinela as their major political administrative center for the south central coast (but *cf.* Sandweiss 1992:10).

Inca use of rectangular adobes identifies their architecture in Chincha, because only *tapia*, or puddled adobe, was employed before. The main Inca construction area on the southern platform or terrace is shown on the plan in Figure 3. The set of buildings constructed by the Inca during the period they controlled Chincha includes a large rectangular ground level plaza in front of this southern platform, centered on the pyramid (facing the lower right corner of Figure 2). The full layout (see Santillana 1984: figure 1) also included a small set of compounds built directly on the east side of the main platform, just to the right of the plan, but at a somewhat lower platform level. In front of this eastern group is a construction wing that matches the one shown on the lower left of the present plan (Figure 3, see also Figure 2, lower center). There are also additional buildings

around the ground level plaza, a few of which show at the lower right in Figure 3.

Rectangular adobes that are visible near the top of the main pyramid, on top of puddled adobe walls, show that some modifications or repairs to the earlier construction were also made during the Inca occupation. The result was probably a new southern front to the main pyramid itself, the focal point of the entire complex. As could be expected for Inca-directed construction, the result was a very orderly, well balanced, and visually impressive religious and administrative center, although it should be noted that neither high pyramidal building bases nor pyramids were common Inca architectural features.

Most of the observations here concern the compound with the central set of raised rooms (Figure 3: Compound C; Figure 4) that is at the southwest corner of the large southern terrace, already noted as part of the Inca construction on the terrace. Uhle considered this "palace" a focal structure, and Santillana (1984:19) gives a cogent argument for the relative importance of this area and its associated courtyard (Figure 3: Courtyard B) and entrance plaza (A). To preview the construction, a set of rooms (Figure 4: Area 6) raised to second story height by a solid basal terrace is a dominant feature of the compound, a view of which can be seen in the photo taken in 1900 by Uhle (1924: plate 4), included here as Figure 5. (Uhle's photo can be compared with my own 1957 photo in Figure 6, showing that hardly anything had been moved in 57 years!) In Figure 7, the reconstruction based on these photos, the tall-niche gallery wall (Figure 4: Area 3) at the east side of the raised room block can be clearly seen. One niche is actually a door that opens into some small rooms (Figure 4: Area 4) against the base of the raised room block. Various double jamb doors and a rare geometric painted mural in one room emphasize the importance of this central warren of raised rooms. An eastern, or front door into the upper room block has access from the niche gallery by a roundabout way up a stairway and along a ledge.

The back or western end of the compound is taken up mainly by an apparently open area that will be referred to as a veranda (Figure 4: Area 10), from which there is a magnificent view of the beach and ocean (see also the reconstruction drawing in Figure 8). The veranda has a sub-floor water cistern and drain, and there are small rooms on both the north and south ends of the veranda; the niches and double jamb entries mark these rooms as more than minor storage areas, and one small southern room (Figure 4: Area 9) has steps down into a tank with a drain, undoubtedly to be used for bathing. Uhle (1924:78) traced both drains to outlets outside the compound. There is also a back or western entrance (Figure 4: Area 7) to the raised room block off the veranda, reached by a stairway starting at the entrance to the southern rooms (Figure 4: Area 8). The corridor entrance to the veranda (Figure 4: Area 2) and the two relatively large northern rooms or enclosures (Figure 4: Areas 1, 12) complete the spaces in the main compound. Apparently all interior and exterior wall surfaces were painted white over a fine clay plaster surface.

Inca and Pre-Inca Wall Art

At least two decorated walls are known at the site, one associated with the pyramid looming high above the terrace with its Inca construction, the other in the main Inca compound just discussed. Their contrasting decorative techniques and building associations emphasize the contrast between the local pre-Inca source of the Centinela complex and the distinct Inca-style construction and art in the extensively remodeled sector where the Inca established their administrative center.

At some unknown date between Uhle's visit in 1900 and the 1957 survey, a small room on the west side and near the top of the main pyramid had been cleared, revealing a 3-dimensional frieze (Figure 9) on the inside of the outer wall. The frieze is plano-relief, that is, the flat face has been cut to a fixed depth (about 5 cm), giving only two surfaces: the foreground design and the excised background. One section retained a height of nearly 2 m, the original full height judging

from the nature of the design. The erosion of the wall into very large blocks makes it clear that it was *tapia*-constructed, as are all Late Intermediate Period buildings in the Chincha Valley. *Tapia* consists of adobe (prepared mud) that was either poured directly into forms, much like modern concrete, or was mixed and packed in place between the forms, like modern tamped earth. Each pouring created a fairly large rectangular block. The process was then repeated on top of and/or at the side of the previous blocks until the desired height and width were reached. The process left joints that tend to erode so that the size of each block is quite evident. From appearances, the adobe forming the design is firmly attached to the wall, so that it might have been created during the molding of the wall itself. However, it seems more likely that the design was cut into the still plastic surface, was hand modeled by adding clay to the damp surface, or was produced by applying pieces or sections that had been formed in molds.

The elements in the design on the wall are similar to ones found on local textiles, including the scrolled fret in curvilinear form (O'Neale and Kroeber 1930: plates 37, 40) and also in squared form (*ibid.*: plate 43c), the diamond-shaped ray-like figure with eyes and what looks like a V-shaped mouth (*ibid.*: plate 43c) and the fret of bird heads of the same date and provenience (*ibid.*: plates 32, 42a). The general diagonal and diamond-shaped layout is found on textiles, pottery, and basketry, so that the motifs of the wall frieze are well-established as south coast designs of the Late Intermediate Period and Late Horizon.

Scraps of shaped adobe from what were probably similar plano-relief friezes were found at two other late sites (PV57-20, PV57-97) and an entire frieze has been uncovered more recently at Litardo Bajo (PV57-80) during the continuing work in Chincha in conjunction with that directed by Craig Morris (1988). Interestingly enough, adobe sculpture of this type and date has not yet been found elsewhere on the south coast (or, to my knowledge, the central coast), but it is well known and abundant on the north coast, especially at the Chimú capital of Chan Chan

(Pillsbury 1993). The plano-relief technique, the diagonal layout, and the use of many geometric and simple animal elements can also be found in the north coast decoration. The similarities could be due to convergences in design and technique of rendering, because many of the styles in the Central Andes of this later period did consist of uncomplicated and/or geometric designs, often incorporating images of animals or animal heads, especially simple bird heads. Actually, the plano-relief type of adobe sculpture is somewhat more limited than might be expected, given that adobe was used in coastal architecture for several millennia. In any case, the recent ethno-historical evidence for direct trade ties between Chincha and the north coast (Rostworowski 1970, 1977; Morris 1988; Pillsbury 1996; Sandweiss 1992; Wallace 1978a, 1978b, 1991) suggests the possibility of historical connections between the decorative art of the two areas, an important subject for future research.

In contrast to the local style of plano-relief adobe friezes and their Chincha style designs, both unknown in strictly Inca style structures, there is a painted wall in at least one room of the raised room block ("murals" in Figures 3, 4); it is attributable to the Inca, both in context and design style. The design (Figure 10; see also Bonavia 1985: figures 113, 114) is strictly an angular geometric one that fits the largely geometric decoration found on Inca-style textiles and ceramics. Inca mural painting is virtually unknown due to the poor preservation of most wall surfaces in Inca buildings, especially in the highlands. Therefore, the unique Centinela example takes on added importance. Painted murals have a long pre-Inca history on the coast. Best known are elaborate examples associated with the north coast Moche culture of the Early Intermediate Period (see Bonavia 1985).

A feature of both murals that is important in a closer consideration of their function is that both occur in locations not readily accessible from any truly public exterior space. Rather, both are in places seemingly designed to provide privacy from general viewing. The rooms or spaces in which they occur are them-

selves limited in size, more appropriate for only a few viewers at a time. Both can therefore be considered as elite art. These areas are not directly associated with any archaeological features of more specific function other than a general religious and administrative nature, and neither the design content nor imagery of either mural suggests any symbolism beyond that of a decorative nature. On the other hand, Inca geometric motifs, on textiles in particular, are known to have had associations with specific elite Inca kin units and, in some cases at least for the Inca emperor, specific rituals. As murals, such art was apparently not very common, so its mere occurrence could have provided an aura of elitism and authority.

Hiding Architectural Disorder?

During the 1957 survey of Chincha, I made a plan of the Inca construction on the platform on the south side of the pyramid proper (Figure 3; also adapted by Hyslop 1984: figure 7.10). To start the plan, both wall lengths and compass readings for three sides of the compound were taken at the SE and NE corners, but not for the western side, where the 12 m drop off the back terrace did not encourage such measurements. These figures gave three sides of the expected rectangle, but the back wall was not at right angles to the sides. What seemed like botched measurements turned out to be quite accurate on re-examination, the back wall having been aligned with the pre-existing outer terrace wall. The east-west alignment of nearly all the Inca reconstruction, including the south face of the older pyramid itself, is only 2 degrees off a true cardinal alignment, an obviously intentional, symbolic alignment that the Inca are known to have used for important structures (Hyslop 1984:313, figure 31.4: 1990:235). So there is little question why most of the Inca walls were not aligned with the earlier terrace wall: it simply did not fit their strongly preferred orientations and could not have been changed without the major task of rebuilding the high terrace edge.

Obviously, something had to give in making the ideally oriented plan fit with the existing outer wall. The plan in Figure 4 and

the reconstruction drawing in Figure 8 show that a "correction" was made along the line following the east side of the veranda (Figure 4: Area 10), including the entrance from the central passageway (Area 2). Walls were made with a wedge-shaped plan, that is, thicker at one end than the other. As a result, the only trapezoidal interior spaces are the short entry passage (Area 11) to the small rooms at the northwest corner of the building, and the small entry space (Area 8) that leads to the rooms at the southern end of the veranda. Nearly all other affected rooms and spaces are parallelograms in plan, not rectangles (nor trapezoids), so that opposite walls are parallel. The only possible exception occurs on the veranda, where the upper back wall of the raised rooms follows the north-south and east-west grid. However, if the angled alignment of the retaining wall for the back stairs and walkway to the raised rooms were of full height, forming a curtain wall closing off the entire stair and walkway entry to the rear door (see the dotted lines in Figure 8), then all the opposing veranda sides would have been parallel. If this wall had even been high enough to form only a balustrade, as is very likely, then the same effect would have been at least partially given.

Hyslop (1990:5-7, 21-25, 234-243) brings together considerable information on Inca architectural forms. Truly rectangular building and compounds (*kanchas*) are nearly universal. Rounded walls are used on rare occasions, for unquestionably intentional visual contrast, with requisite symbolic connotations. Plazas are often rectangular, but occasionally trapeziform ones (no sides parallel) are probably alignments with astronomical symbolism. True trapezoids are normally limited to door, window, and niche shapes.

Hyslop notes that rectangular form is found in Inca orthogonal street and compound wall layouts, but partial deviation or even lack of any apparent order can occur when there are physical hindrances. A fascinating clay architectural model of a trapezoidal structure along with the topography of its site is reported by Sandweiss (1995:151 and figure 129) inside a building of probable Incaic date

at Túcume on the north coast. Circular alignments occur at a few notable sites, based on the radial segmentation which follows a conceptual map of kinship organization and associated ritual symbolism. In short, rectilinearity can be shown to be the underlying principle in Inca architectural planning, but intentional deviations for both esthetic and symbolic purposes can be identified, with no apparent resistance to deviations when environmental obstacles make them unavoidable. In short, impose a *proper* order whenever possible, but give some leeway for choosing the logic of the pattern when practical problems or physical limitations occur.

In the Centinela case, the most obvious solution would have been to put an ideally aligned and rectangular compound abutting the misaligned terrace edge, leaving a triangular dead space between the back wall and terrace edge. Or, less ideal but most spatially economical, would have been to follow ideal alignment for all walls except the western outer one; the angles of the back corners would not be visually obvious from any outside angle. However, the unequal corner angles and non-parallel walls of differing lengths of the veranda would have been noted by anyone with any spatial sensitivity, an architect or master mason in particular. A more complicated "corrective" plan having been chosen, we are left with the inference that the adjustments were consciously made to minimize the perceived irregularities of trapezoidal room shapes in favor of a parallelogram, with facing walls of equal length and with the deviation from the ideal right angles distributed equally between four somewhat off-right angle corners, which adds up to a practical and somewhat more subtle masking of the deviations from the ideal.

The clear Inca preference for trapezoidal doors and niches is an interesting contrast with the equally preferred rectilinearity. There is, in fact, evidence for the ultimate contrastive comparison in Inca world view, involving visual and conceptual perceptions of ideal form, as suggested by the order so basic to Inca worldly affairs and the unpredictability (a type of disorder) with which they seem to have

viewed nature and its deities. This view was apparently symbolized physically by their highly ordered plans reflected in both socio-cultural organization and material culture vs. the many irregularly shaped, natural boulder and large rock outcrops that were often the foci of worship. The *intiwatana* at Machu Picchu is a particularly interesting case in that it consists of a small natural rock outcrop that was entirely altered from its natural state, but reshaped into a completely abstract form with many planes, a case of manufactured disorder.

As remote as all this may seem from the simple question of why a veranda and some rooms were parallelogram-shaped rather than trapezoidal, the discussion does support the claim that the architect of the central Inca building at La Centinela was not only motivated by a desire to show that he could produce a geometrically neater structure, but that this "neatness" would be intended to enhance his product as a fitting center of power for the administration of the Inca state. I urge that similar analyses of other Incaic sites be done to test the interpretations made here.

Architectural Access as Power Symbolism

Visually dramatizing important buildings or spaces by manipulation of architectural elements is a very widespread practice. Monumental features such as steeples or elevated bases are familiar examples, although *monumentality* includes symbolic impact, not merely physical prominence. Power, in one or more forms, is being signified in all cases. Control of access to some physical or abstract seat of power is a common feature, although two distinct factors are in operation: the value of encouraging public participation vs. that of restricting interactions in order to increase organizational efficiency or to heighten perceptions of authority and power. An *admire but don't touch or enter* approach, or one where the public is barred only from a final area or a central, ultimate visual symbol actually fits both objectives. Domestic privacy still remains a common goal in architectural layouts, but some difference in architectural treatment, such as a simple, remote entry and/or features of the interior rooms, ought to distin-

guish domestic privacy from restricted entry for areas of symbolic importance. Of course, in a monumental context such privacy has its own symbolism.

The very large elite Chimú compounds at Chan Chan have been analyzed in terms of accessibility (*e.g.*, Moseley 1978). The compounds commonly have single entrances, obviously for control of access. Beyond an initial courtyard, there is increasing restriction of entry pathways when proceeding through a warren of structures and spaces. Public contact, probably tribute collection and/or adjudication, is inferred to have been carried out in specially designed enclosures in areas nearest the entrance, while the furthest and most inaccessible areas had elite living quarters, a monumental tomb-to-be, and private religious structures. The Chimú compounds seem to combine a feature of limited accessibility to the king's monumental tomb and its immense pre-burial structures as well as post-burial collection of grave goods, with limited access to provide privacy for domestic activities. Jerry Moore (1992) has applied a line-of-sight analysis to these Chimú compounds, giving a quantitative measure that he inferred as indicating the degree of control over accessibility, thus augmenting the interpretations of the compounds' function.

Monumentality can also be seen as a factor at Chan Chan. The mere size and complexity of the compounds are monumental in scale, but in a way apparently more integrated with features of kinship organization, political power, control of the flow of economic goods, and a role in religious ritual that had developed as facets of the total power held by the ruling elite. Such a situation is comparable to the level of complexity reached by Inca imperial organization, rather distinct from the earlier periods of massively monumental religious structures.

Hammond's (1972) study of a Classic Maya site illustrates a different use of limited access from that found for a Chimú compound. He calculated an index of accessibility by counting the rooms or spaces it was necessary to pass through to arrive at various points,

with high values signifying restricted access. Hammond found high indices for areas of connected rooms and patios that lacked monumental construction and had indications of domestic activities. In contrast, temple mounds and their adjoining plazas were highly accessible (at least up to their plaza bases). It appears that the architecturally least accessible places housed only domestic activities, providing an interesting contrast with the Chimú case.

At the main compound at La Centinela, there is an inescapable question concerning the strikingly limited access to the raised set of rooms by either the eastern "front" or the western "back doors". To trace the paths (see Figures 3, 5, 6, 7), first is entry up the ramp and through the outer gate into the plaza (Figure 3: A) and then into the inner courtyard (Figure 4: B), both points of restriction and potential control. The single entry to the building compound is via a short stairway and simple doorway (Figure 4: Area 1), which curiously lacks the double jamb that marks Inca state architecture. The first room or enclosure has many small niches in the rear wall, giving a connotation of importance, whether the niches were for practical use or decoration; no other features suggesting a particular function were visible in 1957. From there, the single, nearby exit leads into the central corridor (Figure 4: Area 2), at which point there are two ways to proceed. To reach the eastern front of the building, a left turn into the corridor (Figure 4: Area 2) leads to a door into the gallery of tall niches (Area 3), which was open to a view from the Courtyard (B) over a low wall. The entry through the fourth "niche" leads to a dead end in a small set of rooms (Area 4), but the path can continue from the gallery with a right turn at its south end (Area 5), a climb up a stairway, a walk along the eastern face of the raised room block on a ledge, then up a stairway and through the simple door into the upper room area. As a *front* pathway to the raised rooms, this indirect course combines a simple, visually shielded stairway with a public passage along the gallery and across the upper wall face, with another simple stairway and entry that could have also been visible from the courtyard.

This notably round-about path was not dictated by the layout; it obviously could not have been meant to serve for general public access to the raised room block and would have been a rather curious path even if meant to serve only a smaller elite.

The one other pathway that can be taken after entering the corridor (Figure 4: Area 2) is to proceed down the full length toward the back of the compound. This course would pass the door to the large room or enclosed patio on the center north side of the compound (Area 12). This room is fairly accessible from the initial entry and has a double jamb entry and small wall niches, connoting some special function; whatever that function, it did not call for frequent and efficient interaction with those in the raised room block. Finally, there is the end doorway in the corridor, leading to the back or western area (Area 10), an apparent veranda open to the west over a low balustrade (Figure 8). The access is reasonably direct and visually unimpeded, and the space is large enough for a moderate size group of people. Beyond that, there is no other architectural feature of the space itself that would indicate anything more than some semi-formal and semi-private activity such as meetings, feasts, or entertainment of visiting dignitaries or local lords, or just a private open area for those utilizing the compound rooms. The one exception is the sub-floor cistern, which in itself does not immediately suggest a specific function for the area.

It is clear that the western door to the upper story is not designed for a simple, straightforward access from the corridor entrance to the veranda area. Instead, it is necessary to pass along the eastern veranda wall, enter and make two short 90° turns in an enclosed foyer-like space, ascend the stairway, walk along a short passage, then turn in through the door. As noted elsewhere, it is probable that the door and stairway were fully screened by a wall, or at least a solid balustrade. A simple stairway directly to the upper door would have been perfectly possible if simple access to the door had been the goal, so an intentional degree of separation between the veranda and the entry to the upper room block is indicated. At

the very least, with a balustrade, the space in front of the door could have served as a raised dais, allowing an official to appear, speak to a moderate-sized audience, and then retire into the upper rooms. But a good alternative is that access *out* of the room block was intended primarily to provide a direct and private access into the set of southern corner rooms via an entry area (Figure 4: Area 9), with the veranda being reached only after a full U-turn and re-emergence from the foyer. The veranda itself could have served for daily domestic or restful activities by the upper room occupants as well as other more social or administrative functions for moderate size groups.

Concerning domestic activities, I should note that south of the main compound are two smaller compounds at a slightly lower level and separated from the main compound by a narrow alley (see Figure 3). Access between the compounds is minimal. Families of the administrators, whether Inca or local, could be expected to be of fairly large size and likely to include more than the nuclear core. Uhle assumed that the southern compounds were the main living quarters, and he had good reason to think that the size of the main compound was not large enough to serve as both full living quarters of an entire basic kin group and also a main administrative center. However, there is the possibility that the higher Inca administrators did not have their families in residence. In contrast, if one or more of the larger rooms or patios on the north side (Area 12) served for larger meetings or feasts, leaving the veranda area a private one for domestic activities, a regular domestic occupation by a few high officials seems possible, especially if activities such as food preparation were carried out elsewhere.

The raised room block itself has a greater number and smaller size of interior spaces than most other Inca buildings of my knowledge. Such spaces might have had ritual or administrative functions, especially given the high rank of the Inca governor. These include storage of ritual clothing and other accouterments, *qhipu* records, the more valuable and less bulky tribute, such as *mullu* (pieces of

sacred *Spondylus* shell) or gold, silver, and copper objects; or the privacy needed for small, high level planning sessions as well as sleeping areas for top officials. Multiple functions are certainly possible.

Four areas may have been functional sub-areas of the Inca compound:

- (1) The tall-niche gallery may have been a functional adjunct of the eastern courtyard (B), given the connection implied by the open sight line between them over the intentionally short height of the separating wall. The higher floor level of the gallery emphasizes the mainly visual nature of access between these spaces, except for the possible passing of material, such as tribute, over the balustrade. The higher level of the gallery floor would add to the aura of higher authority given by the symbolism of the tall niches and raised rooms. However, the view of the blank outer wall of the upper room, with the modest stairway and small door over at one side, seems a curiously bland capping of this scene.
- (2) The most inaccessible unit is the raised block of rooms. The two southern rooms on the veranda level can be added as an adjunct sub-unit, given what I see as a deliberately arranged privacy and ease of access between them, but only at the expense of what could have easily been direct access to the veranda. The greatest degree of restriction for outside access, the tall niches and double jamb doors in both upper and lower areas, the unique mural in an upper room, and the walls of small niches, the south-facing "window", and the unique bathing tank room of the lower rooms all give the strongest connotations of elite function. The upper warren of small rooms is obviously not meant for interpersonal activities by more than a few individuals, so use by a few high ranking officials and/or underlings carrying out official work is indicated. The southwest corner rooms (Figure 4: Areas 8, 9, and corner room) are particularly interesting, given the bathing tank; either hygienic and/or ritual activities, in either case of a more private nature, are suggested.
- (3) The veranda can be seen as a transitional link between the front courtyard-niche gallery unit and the rear (and probably main) entrance to the raised room block via the straight central hallway, the hallway giving the most direct, formal line of access in the entire compound. This is a more direct or potentially formal access than the somewhat shorter but indirect one via the gallery. The veranda (and possibly the small rooms at its north side) might be seen as a large foyer-like room or larger meeting/entertainment area for visiting dignitaries, with a dramatic view as an added diversion. Alternatively (or alternately), the veranda could also have served as a multi-purpose area for more relaxed or semi-domestic activities by those stationed in the compound. In any case, it can be viewed as part of a major path of ingress that would put those entering at a point near the main entrance to the southwest corner rooms and in front of what is undoubtedly the main door of the upper room block (the east door lacking the double jambs). That, however, is about as far as the layout draws those entering the veranda area, the southeast exit not giving any visual clue to where it led. As noted earlier, the raised area in front of the upper entrance, if fronted only by a balustrade, could act as a podium, although separating the speakers from their audience.
- (4) Finally, the two fairly large rooms or enclosures off the main corridor and along the north compound wall form a loose grouping that is distinct from the others. They have easy and direct access from the front entrance and can be expected to have served some direct functions, such as storage-accounting areas for tribute or meeting/feast rooms, a more public and official function suggested by the more formal double-jamb door and niche features.

A Stage Production with Power Niches

One further question continues the discussion of the features already mentioned. The starting point is at the tall-niche wall at the eastern side of the main compound. Tall niches have been briefly introduced as having connotations of importance based on their associations with Inca buildings of high state-level functions. Their implied importance is also strengthened by the fact that the row of four niches was meant to be viewed publicly from the entry courtyard. The wall has also been noted as part of a curiously complicated access that involves following a circuitous route past it to the eastern entrance of the raised room block. The access from the entry courtyard to the niche gallery alone suggests that it was not meant to be available to or used by any public group of even moderate size. What, then, was the purpose of this particular layout?

Before following through on that question of access, however, there are some features of the adobe block construction of the wall itself that are pertinent. The outlines of some adobes in the back of one niche are shown in Figure 11, visible because the original adobe plaster has fallen off in places. The rectilinear shape is like all Inca adobes from either the highlands or the coast, and the proportions also fall into a recognizable range, with lengths about 3 to 4 times the heights. However, there is a notable anomaly visible here. Two adobes have been cut into in order to correct for some unequal heights in the coursing. This situation may seem quite minor, even familiar from viewing typical Inca stone masonry. However, it is technologically pointless when used with adobe bricks, a very un-Inca type of behavior.

All dressed stone needs shaping, all the more so for the perfectly fitting blocks of the best Inca masonry; but producing blocks to fit an irregular space is not automatically more time consuming than producing a simple brick-like one, because there is no short-cut to dressing stone that has no natural cleavage planes. However, producing blocks of identical height, in order to maintain evenly hori-

zontal courses so that joints can be overlapped when laying the next course, would be very inefficient in the time consumed for exact shaping, and also inefficient in use of raw material, because only properly sized blocks or blanks ready for final trimming could be used. For this reason, perfect coursing was restricted mainly to the construction of the most important buildings (e.g., Hyslop 1990: figure 1.8). Even then block length commonly varied widely, a good indication that attempts to have all masonry block dimensions equal would have been too costly even for a state mason. In any case, careful choice of blocks with different widths could easily avoid any potential alignment of vertical joints.

When laying adobe bricks, filling any potential void with mud mortar is much easier than either cutting a dried adobe or pre-shaping one to fit an irregular space. It is even more pointless when the finished surface is to be plastered over. Producing bricks of reasonably equal height is not at all difficult, and laying them using a simple mud mortar makes slight differences in brick height easy to adjust. In addition to the pointless cutting of the adobe blocks, the lack, or very minimal use of a mortar, as in the present case, is not yet noted among the many other cases of the use of adobe bricks at La Centinela. However, the other examples differ significantly: they are not part of buildings in the Imperial Inca style.

In any case, the result of these irregular adobe shapes gives a visual impression close to that of dry-laid Inca stone masonry. These two cases of cut adobes may be unique, but even so the irregular shaping was obviously the result of a conscious act by whoever had to plan a correction for the uneven coursing, and it was done in a technologically inefficient way. I suggest that it was the reaction of someone accustomed to stonework of the quality used in Inca state architecture and familiar with its attendant problems, and not by anyone trained locally in Chíncha, where stone was not easily available and dressed stone construction was unknown. It seems reasonable that this architect and/or artisan may have reacted in this way because he was working with rectangular blocks associated

with the top quality Inca stonework used in a building destined for important state-related activities. In short, the reaction was as if stone were being worked rather than adobe, despite the common Inca use of rectangular adobes set in thick mortar, a technologically more reasonable approach that also made it easy to cover up irregularities in brick size. It is even likely that this mason was abrading the dried adobe blocks in order to attain their very close fit, just as he would have worked stone. In any case, the situation suggests one more reason to consider the compound as an important place for conducting matters of state.

The full size double jamb niches (Figure 4: Area C) are one of the main reasons why Compound C is considered the main center of Inca authority in Chincha. The only other cases of this feature anywhere at the site, to my knowledge (as of 1957), are the one niche in a back room and one in a raised block room, both in this Compound. In Inca state architecture, this niche type, especially in a long series, is usually found where its appearance emphasizes the importance and monumentality of a structure or area, or where it visually enhances walls lining an interior open space or, especially for retaining walls, a large open courtyard or plaza. The gallery itself is too narrow for such a view from within, establishing the earlier interpretation that the wall was meant to be viewed by an audience in the courtyard, better fitting the Inca pattern. From a strictly architectural perspective, the association of a series of tall niches with walls functioning to retain fill might have given the impression that it was a common extension of the solid platform under the raised rooms, emphasizing the feeling of monumental solidity.

Having set up the supposed intentional manipulation of the layout and the structures so that an audience in the courtyard would be faced with a barrier wall, with a government-style tall-niche wall behind, but a blank wall and simple door without the double jamb seal of government approval above (see Figure 7), there is definitely something amiss. What was worth waiting for and looking at? If people were there to pay tribute, was passing it over the wall really a sensible way of handling

the transaction? If they were to pass into the compound itself, even if no further than the first space, in order to transact some business, what was the purpose of the large viewing space? If everyone visiting the place was meant to be impressed by the view, why was it possible to enter the courtyard and go directly into the building proper without even getting a view of the niches? The only certainty is that this setup was meant as a carefully managed attempt to impress the viewer with the visual symbol of the focus of great power that resided in the building and in its occupants.

There is one possibility that would make sense both of the symbolism and the architectural form of this layout as just discussed. The possible answer comes from one obvious step: putting a roof over the small row of rooms behind the niche wall, using the top of the walls and the ledge across the front side of the room block for support of roof beams or the floor boards themselves. The roof surface would then serve as a platform or stage, as shown in the drawing in Figure 12a. The stage could have various sorts of screens, space dividers, or walls, and could well have been roofed, as shown in Figure 12b. There is definitely a precedent for such a function: the Inca *ushnu* (Zuidema 1989), a platform found in almost all state-constructed Inca centers, placed in some central location in the main plaza and functioning as a symbol of Inca state power (Hyslop 1990:70). Some *ushnus*, such as the one in the principal plaza at Cusco, were much more than daises or stages and involved the complicated symbolism discussed by Zuidema. Nevertheless, the simpler raised platform type is widely found at Inca centers established throughout the empire and had a minimal function at least of serving officials for carrying out various formal reviews or rituals, as detailed extensively by Hyslop (*ibid.*:66-101). The point here is that *staged* public rituals were a common part of official Inca activities, not that the stage proposed here is necessarily an *ushnu*, a term which apparently covered a range of forms. A simple *ushnu* has been identified in the main plaza at Tambo Colorado, an Inca center in the Pisco Valley just south of Chincha (*ibid.*:85, figure 3.19), as an example near La Centinela.

The idea of a stage also makes sense of the very indirect access to the raised room block. It may have had two main functions: the high official(s) residing in the upper structure could easily exit by the eastern door and descend the few stairs to the platform and use it to address the public or receive requests from the audience, as well as oversee any activities carried out in the courtyard, now open to his elevated view. Further contact with the audience would have been well controlled. The access from the lower niche gallery, via the end passageway (Figure 4: Area 5) and stairs, could have been meant mainly for access to the stage from below, by any attendants of the high officials or any guards stationed in the gallery itself. The rooms directly behind the tall-niche wall (Figure 4: Area 4; Figure 7), entered through the one false niche, could have housed a permanent contingent of guards and/or been used to store any tribute passed over the wall by those in the courtyard. The full access from the niche gallery into the raised rooms could have been only a convenience at times, not its main purpose, and therefore not designed as an efficient, direct, commonly used method of entering the raised room block from the lower level or from outside the compound.

All this argument can be translated into formal symbolic terms. Both the distance and higher elevation maintained between officials and their subjects would translate into figurative "low" and "high" socio-political distance, while the wall that blocked access to the stage itself would shield officials from any direct contact, emphasizing the socio-political gulf between the audience and the officials, and the inaccessibility of the source of power and impossibility of challenging it. The simple emergence of high officials from their second floor aerie, possibly from behind hangings concealing the actual door and stairs, would augment their impressiveness. In addition to the niche wall adding an aura of authority to anyone using it, the stage could have been roofed (Figure 12b) and some true *staging*, in the modern sense of adding drama and esthetic impact, could have been employed. This may have included pennants flying from the roof, many other props on the stage level, and walls

and/or mat screens covered with decorative wall hangings adding opulence to the signs and symbols of authority. Lower order officials and guards stationed in the niche corridor would have added to the total effect, while separating them, in part symbolically, from the higher officials literally above them and the audience below, in front of the low wall between them.

To summarize, the analysis of access suggests that the entire main compound, minus the courtyard, was not meant for *public* usage in the usual sense; instead, it was at most open only for visiting high dignitaries or state officials with moderate size retinues. Nevertheless, the fact that officials could easily have a public audience of moderately large size without leaving the compound proper gives an interesting twist to the meaning of *public*. They simply had to descend to the stage overlooking the courtyard, where they were only *visually* accessible to their audience, a situation which actually emphasizes the aura of restricted access, leaving an interesting type of both *managed* public access *and* privacy. While this situation would fit a desire for domestic privacy, only the bathing tank specifically suggests domesticity, so whether the compound proper was laid out for either administrative or domestic privacy or for some combination of these, is still open.

There is one further possibility for the function of the compound and courtyard, one which fits the most salient function of the site at a whole: as the home of a very powerful oracle. If it were assumed that the Inca insinuated themselves fully into the activities of this very important pilgrimage site, they may have seen the value of having the actual location of the oracular pronouncements be framed, literally, by a setting of Inca style architecture, and probably would have had control, or at least veto power, over the content of the oracle's output. The stage setting would be perfect for such pronouncements, assuming they were not of too personal a nature. In addition, drama could be added to the act by delivery by a disembodied voice: there is the space under the stage, which, if the entrance were disguised as just another tall niche so

that the impression were of a solid terrace, would make quite effective staging.

There are undoubtedly further interpretations and speculations that could (and probably will) be made, but I have no more at the present. In closing, I will simply note that, even in considering just this one Incaic compound, and despite treating only certain types of features, the underlying theme concerns the use of architectural form and decoration for purposes of facilitating and augmenting the maintenance of the social and political order. The Inca are prime subjects for this kind of inquiry, because their ethnohistory and archaeology show an inordinate concern with order and control. John Hyslop's work on Inca settlement planning (1990) has culled and organized a mass of data and analyses. Like most good work, it reminds us how much there still is to be done and should inspire us to try all possible types of analysis, particularly ones that search for repeated patterning among the ever increasing detailed data on Inca architecture and planning.

Acknowledgments

The subject matter of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Northeastern Conference on Andean Archaeology and Ethnohistory held in Albany, New York, in 1985, although it has been considerably reworked from its original form. The field work was part of the 1957-58 site survey of the Chíncha Valley (Wallace 1971) supported by the Fulbright Commission in Lima, under Eduardo Indacochea. I was ably assisted on the survey by Luis Guillermo Lumbreras and Isabel Flores. I am indebted to these individuals, and also to Dorothy Menzel for her comments on an earlier draft.

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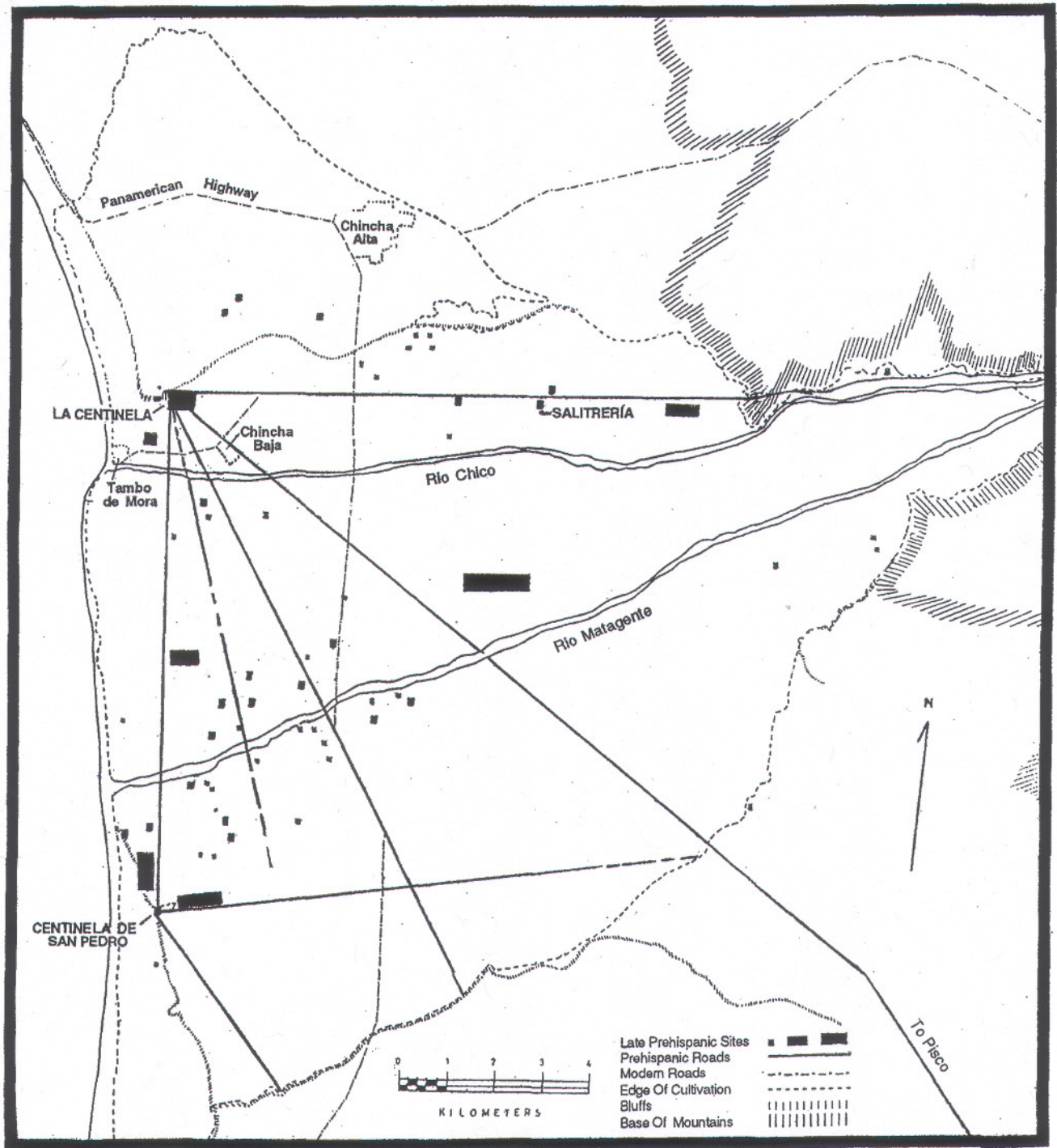


Figure 1. The Chíncha Valley, with La Centinela as the center of a radiating set of straight, ancient roads. The ritual platforms at Centinela de San Pedro and Salitrería are on the outer arms. The three modern urban centers are also shown. Late prehispanic sites existing in 1957 are shown by relative size. Map is based on aerial photos by the Servicio Aerofotográfico Nacional del Perú, Proyecto 6351, 1953. Site survey was funded by the Comisión Fulbright in 1957-59; map was adapted from Wallace (1971).



Figure 2. Air view from the southwest of the Centinela site in the Chincha Valley. The 12+ m high main terrace runs from the high wall at lower left across in front of the 18+ m high central pyramid. The road system focuses on the entry plaza at the south front of the main terrace, lower center right, between two lower terrace arms. The main Inca administrative-living compound is at the southwest corner of the high two-stage terrace wall, at lower center left of the photo. Photo courtesy of the Department of Library Services, AMNH, Negative 334733 (photo by Shippee-Johnson).

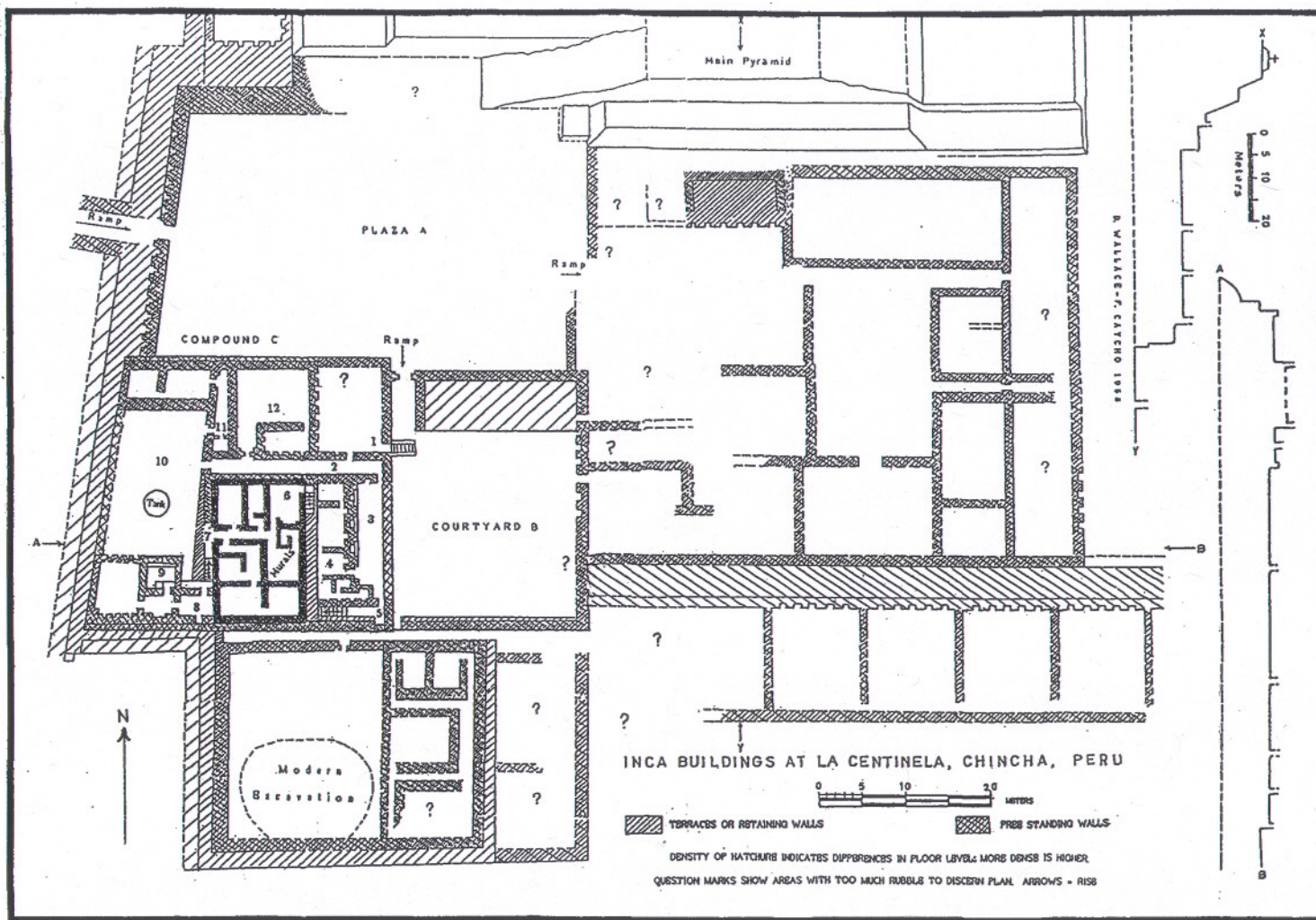


Figure 3. Plan of the Inca construction on the 12 m high terrace in front of the pyramid, as of 1957. The main Inca compound (C) is center left. Hatching roughly indicates differences in level, denser being higher.

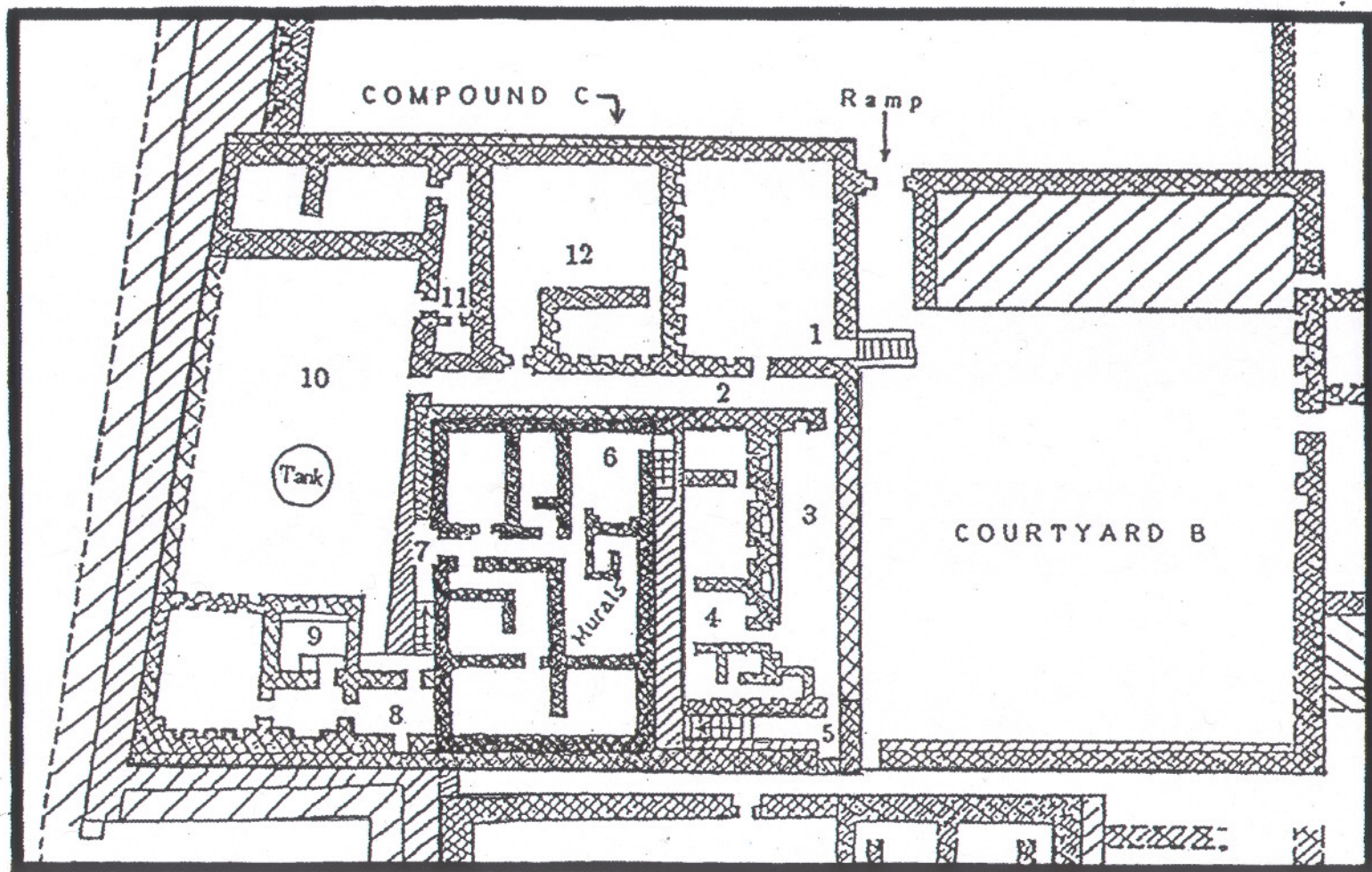


Figure 4. The main Inca compound, enlarged from Figure 3. The raised block of rooms is in darkest outline. The tall-niche gallery (Area 3) can be viewed from Courtyard B over a low wall. The veranda (Area 10) has an ocean view. Rooms in the lower left corner include a sunken bath with drain.

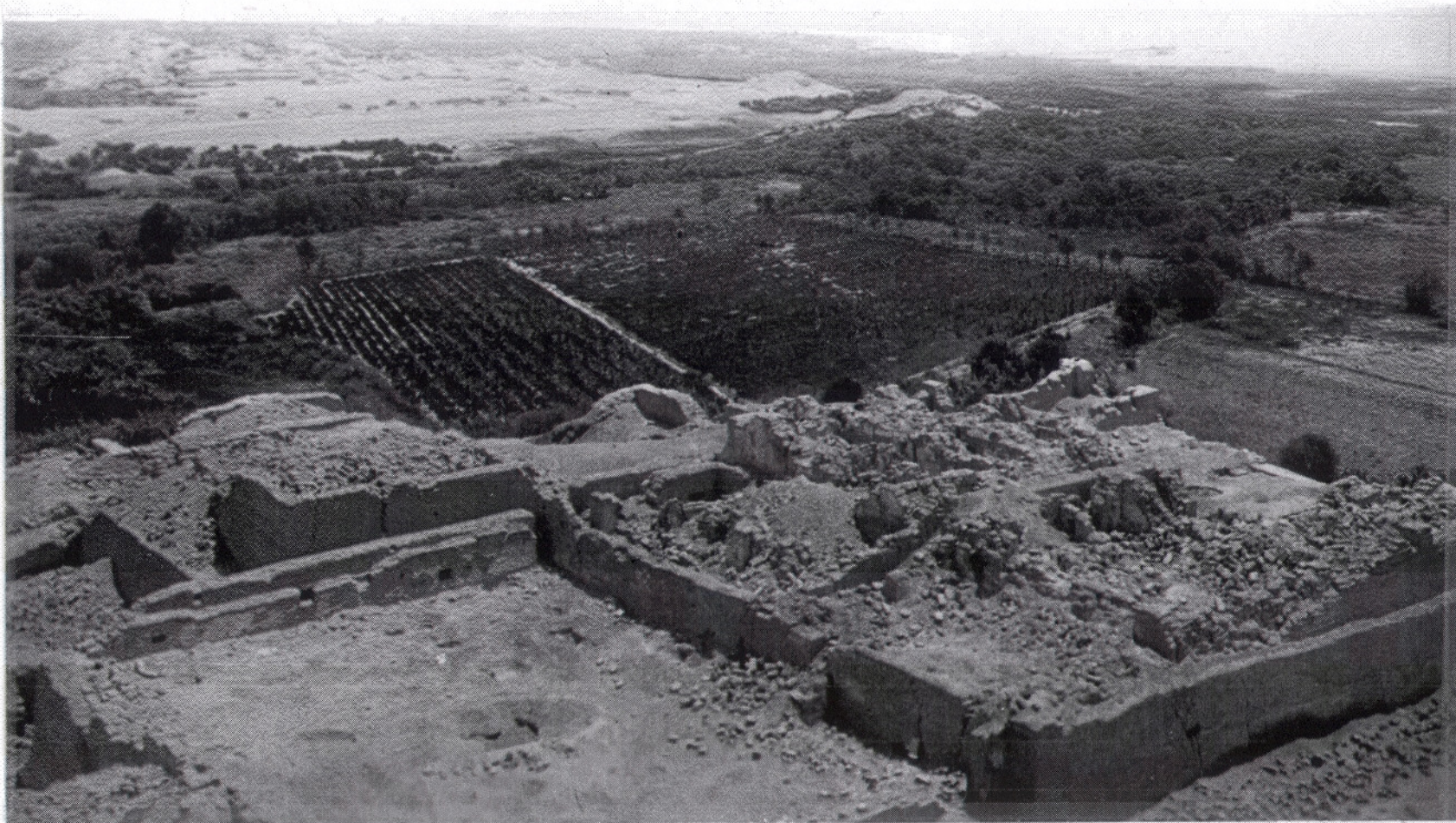


Figure 5. The Inca compound seen from the pyramid, looking southwest, with the ocean as background. Huaca de Tambo de Mora is seen in the distance, while the area between is probably filled with structures. Photo taken by Uhle in 1900, here courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California-Berkeley.



Figure 6. The Inca compound seen from the pyramid, looking southwest, with the ocean as background. Only Uhle's cleaning of the niche gallery, seen in Figure 5, differs. Huaca de Tambo de Mora is in the distance, while the area between was probably filled with structures. Photo taken by Wallace in 1957.

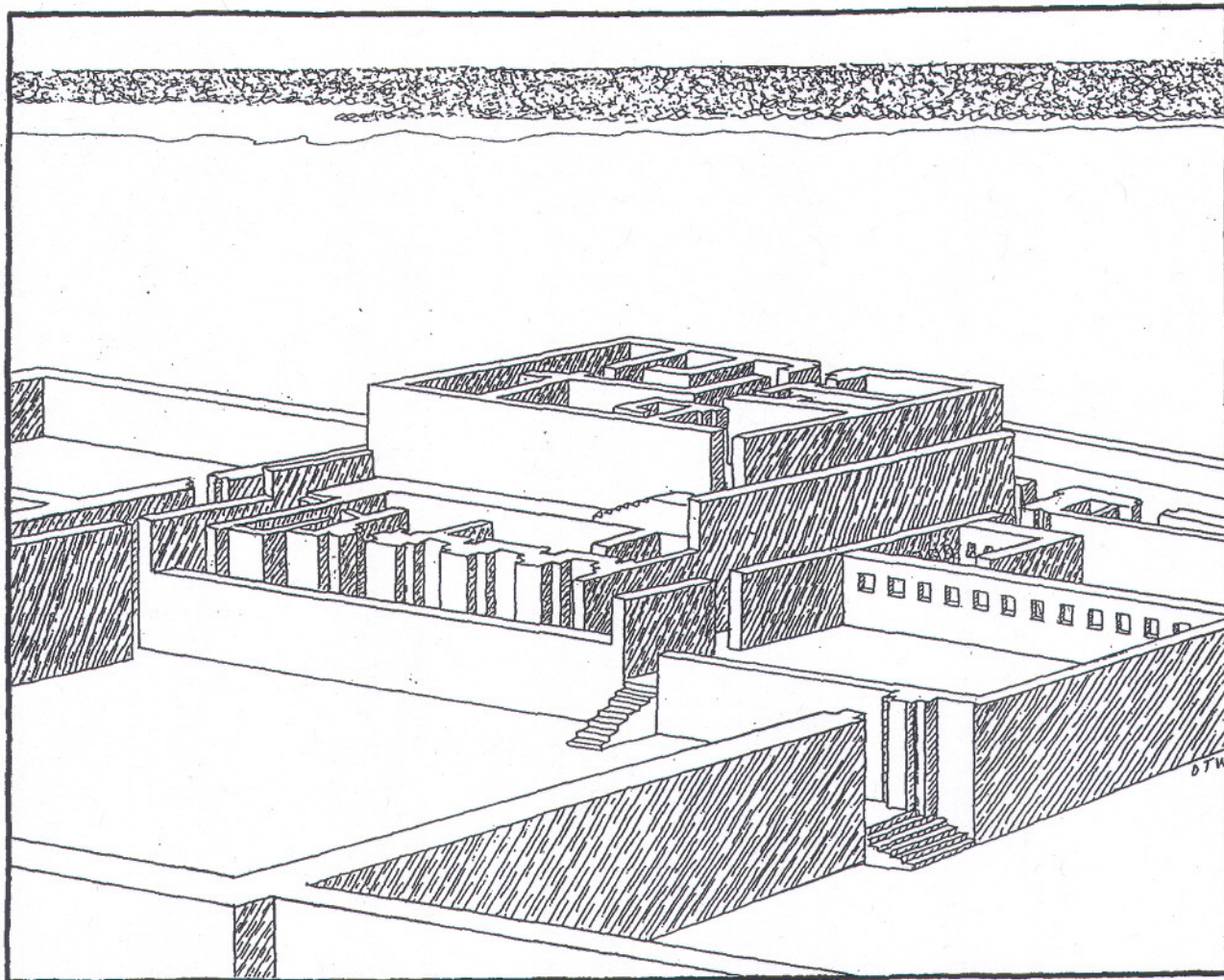


Figure 7. The Inca compound reconstructed, viewed as in Figures 5 and 6. The gallery with tall double jamb niches (Figure 4: Area 3) is at the east end of the raised room block. The corridor along the shadowed side of the raised rooms leads to the veranda off to the right.

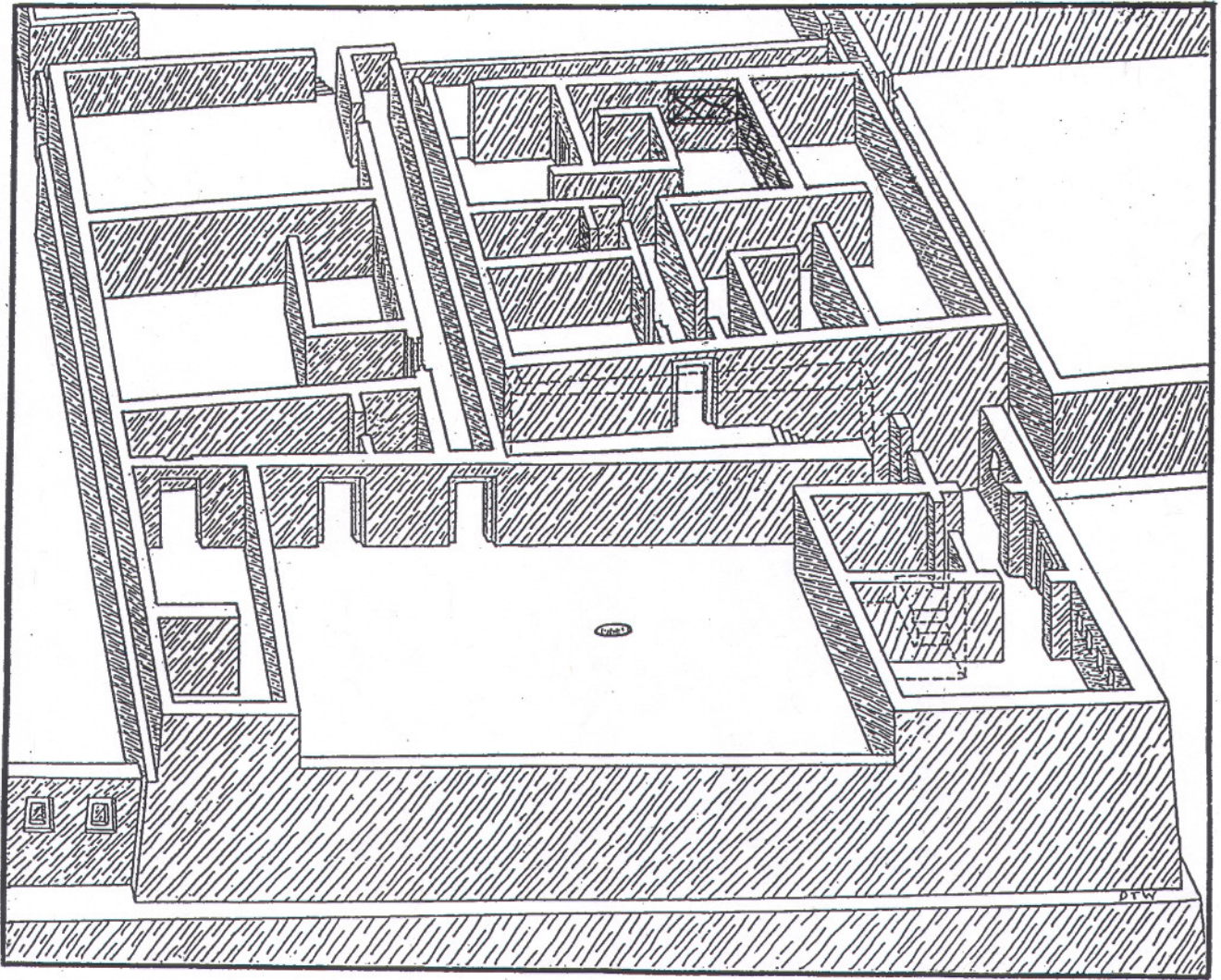


Figure 8. The Inca compound's west end reconstructed, with the veranda front and center. The raised room entrance is via the stairway at the right and along the raised walk. The dotted lines show a probable balustrade or wall, making the access from the door to the lower southwest rooms more private. Gradual widening of this wall would make the west end of the raised block appear parallel to the outer veranda balustrade. A sunken bath with steps and drain is at the right. The niches in this corner room cluster include a tall one, marking an elite function.



Figure 9. A late local style plano-relief adobe frieze in a small room or balcony high on the pyramid. Its location allowed for a restricted, elite viewing. Representing a common technique on the north coast, but not elsewhere on the south coast, it was possibly introduced by traveling Chincha merchants.

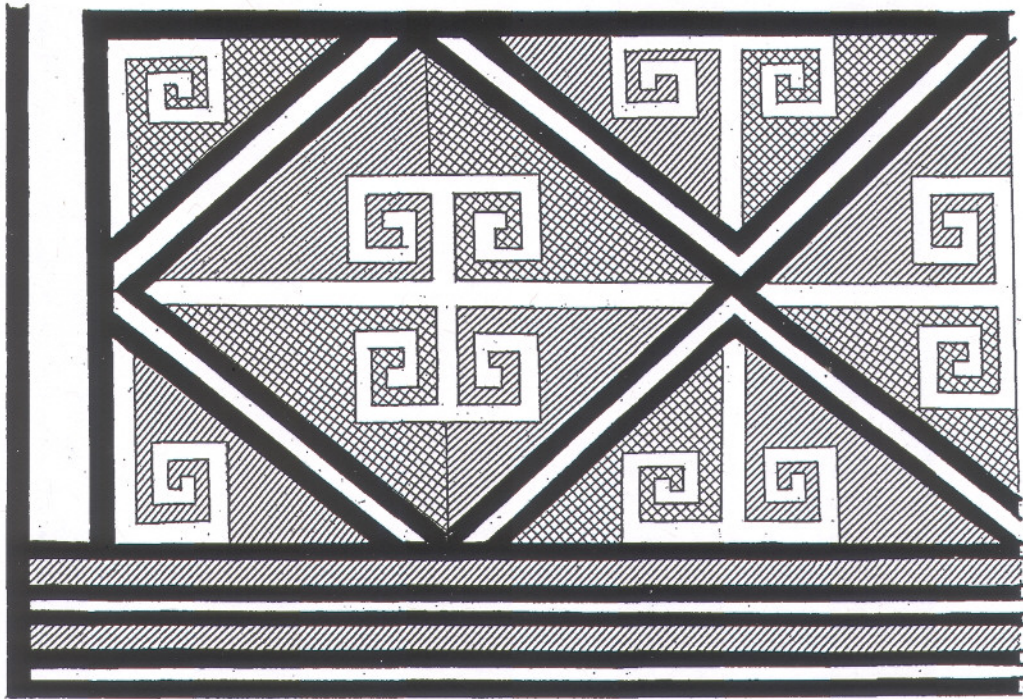


Figure 10. Part of a three wall mural in the raised room block. The bottom and left end lines are the lower and end borders of the full panel; the upper border is missing. Room walls were white, the mural black and red (hatched), plus a now-eroded green (cross-hatched) that Uhle (1924) described.

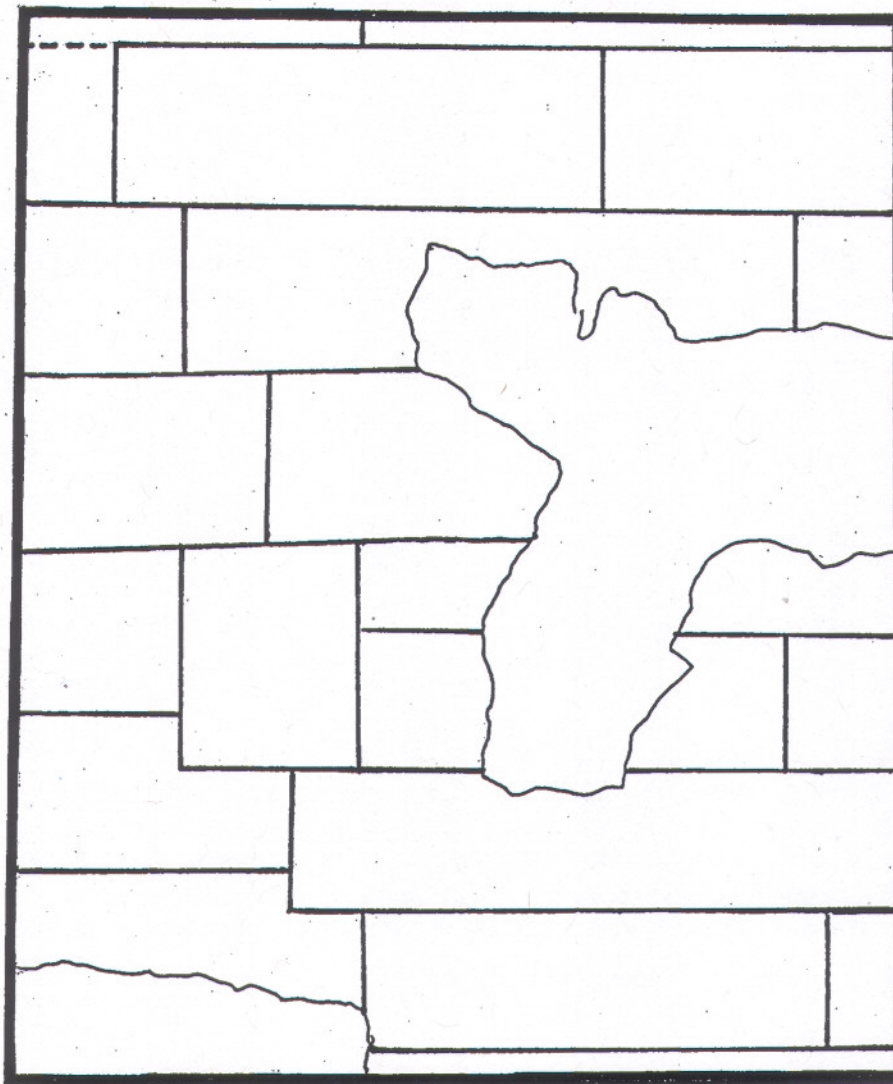


Figure 11. Outlines of adobes in one tall niche in the eastern gallery. The irregular areas are white adobe plaster remnants. The cuts in the rectangular adobes and apparent lack of mortar imitate highland Inca stone masonry used for important state buildings. They are foreign to the normal laying of adobe blocks.

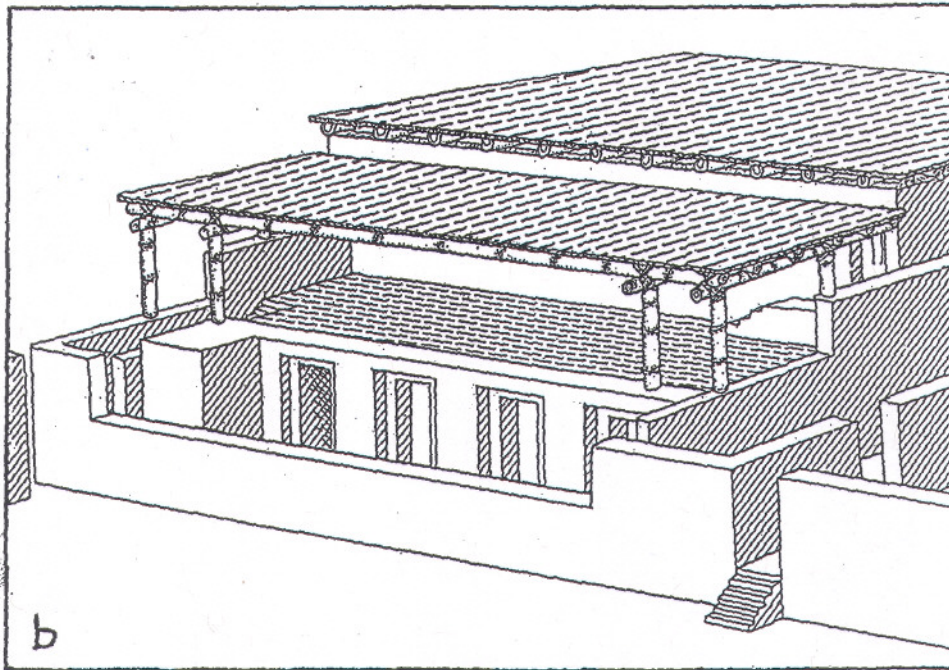
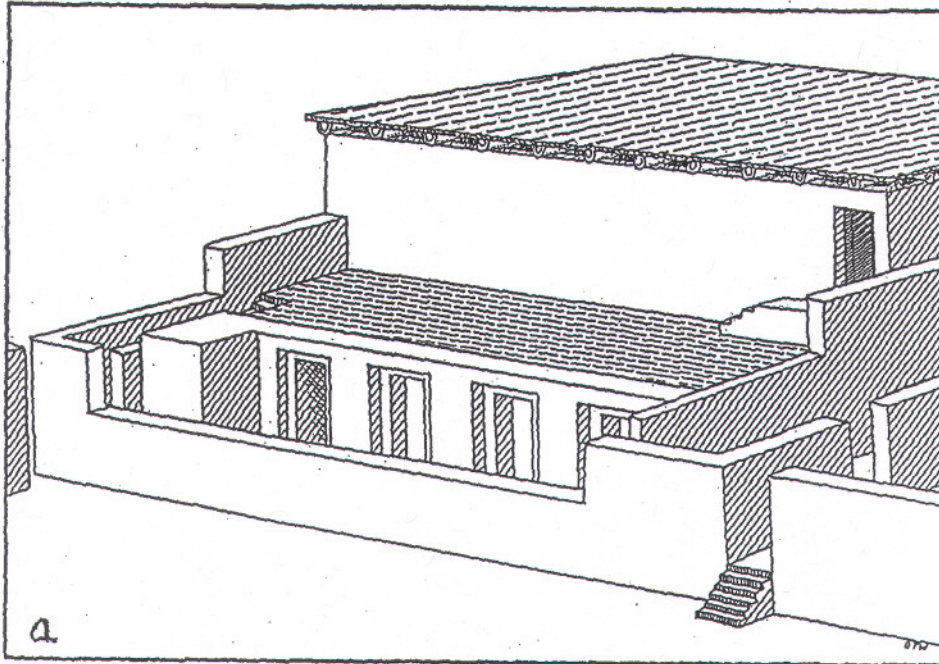


Figure 12. The tall niche gallery shown with roofed interior spaces to form a stage viewable from the eastern courtyard. Officials could easily (and more effectively) descend from the private upper rooms to carry out ritual/judicial/administrative functions. The left stairway would provide access for aides or guards below. Figure 12b adds a possible roof over the stage.