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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE INITIAL PERIOD CENTER OF HUACA EL GALLO/  
HUACA LA GALLINA, VIRÚ VALLEY, PERU: THE 1994 FIELD SEASON

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### Introduction

Archaeological work in the Virú Valley has a long and distinguished place in the field of Andean studies. Research began with the first reconnaissance and excavation in the valley by Kroeber (1930) and Bennett (1939). The seminal Virú Valley Project of the 1940s helped pioneer many of the methods still in use today, especially in the realm of settlement pattern studies. Yet, after this auspicious beginning work in Virú languished for the next fifty years. In the meantime, people continued to use the Virú data to construct models of social complexity (Carneiro 1970; Conrad 1977; Canziani 1989) despite the fact that the participants of the Virú Project had warned that their findings were by no means complete (Ford 1952; Ford and Willey 1949; Willey 1953; 1996). Recent work in the Virú Valley has shown the Guañape Initial Period occupation of the valley to be radically different from that first proposed by Willey in his original study. This work forces a reconsideration of the development of complex forms of social organization during Guañape times.

The author directed excavations at Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina during 1994 and again in 1995 with the goals of better defining the Guañape culture in the Huacapongo drainage of the Virú Valley and revealing the nature of a major Guañape public center. The 1994 excavations, reported here, focused on public architecture on both sides of the site: the eastern sunken circular plaza and adjacent circular structures near La Gallina, and the El Gallo

pyramid, secondary mound, and a spiral-shaped enclosure just north of the pyramid. The spiral-shaped structure proved to have been erected directly over the elaborate tomb of a religious specialist who was buried with a polished stone mortar and pestle as well as a sculpture which has been reported elsewhere (Zoubek 1998a, 1998b, 1998d).

The 1995 season concentrated on excavating the terraplein between the El Gallo and secondary mound on which the spiral-shaped structure had been located. A number of additional circular structures were located, all of which had been located directly over burials. This pattern led to the hypothesis that these structures may have served as ancestor shrines, which has been presented elsewhere (Zoubek 1998c, 1998d). Over 200 m<sup>2</sup> were excavated and six additional circular structures were noted.

Further work was carried out in 1998 in the little-known Susanga region of the Upper Huacapongo. Willey had mentioned that here a large number of pyramid-platforms were located, but he had only reported a few in any detail. The author of the present article excavated a number of sites identified by Willey, including V-198 and V-230, in addition to mounds hitherto unreported. The mounds were initially constructed during the Middle Guañape Phase and only lightly used thereafter, primarily as sites for tombs during the Puerto Moorin and ultimate Chimú Phases. The discovery of Middle Guañape sites in Susanga proves that by this

time Guañape people were making full use of the entire valley.

### The site of Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina, Virú Valley, Peru

Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina is one of at least three large ceremonial dual pyramid sites in the Virú Valley of the Peruvian north coast dating to the Initial Period (ca. 1800-900 B.C.; Figure 1). The most prominent structures at the site are the pyramid-platforms called El Gallo and La Gallina which are both aligned to the NE at E 10°N and E 12°N magnetic respectively (Figure 2 a, b, Figure 4). The site has two alluvium-filled sunken circular plazas that are also visible on the surface, although the west court (on the west side of the La Gallina mound) is completely filled (Figure 2 c, g). Other small structures appear on the surface as half-buried wall footings. The core area of the site measures 480 m (E-W) x 260 m (N-S) and is delimited from the interior of the quebrada (ravine) by a large double-faced wall of stone masonry over 1 m high in places (Figure 2 e). No domestic architecture dating to the site's primary construction phase was found by the project.

First noted by Willey in the Virú Valley Project Settlement Survey (1953:210-213, 284-286), Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina was described as two sites and attributed to the later Gallinazo and Moche Cultures. Although T. Pozorski proposed an early date for the site (1976:223-235), it was only after the excavation of the site that diagnostic ceramic evidence revealed the site's Guañape (Initial Period) cultural affiliation. Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina represents the best-documented Guañape Phase site to date (Zoubek 1997; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; 1998d; 1999).

The site was established during the Middle Guañape Phase. This dating is based on the discovery of diagnostic Middle Guañape ceramics and artifactual material (stone vessels, mortars, bone tools) in burials and architectural

levels. Middle Guañape ceramics are characterized by their friable paste, brownish-red color (generally Munsell 2.5YR 4/4), large quartz inclusions, and evidence of poor control over firing. Decorated sherds are characterized, generally, by horizontal appliqué ribs decorated with finger-pressings or incisions. The Ancón-style decorated sherds originally thought by Strong and Evans to characterize the Middle Guañape Phase have been shown, through excavations at Huaca Verde V-37, Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina V-149/148, and V-198, to date to the Late Guañape Phase. Radiocarbon dates are not yet available; however, given similarities in the architecture and ceramics from this site with others from the middle to late Initial Period, the assignment of the site to this period is secure.

Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina is on an alluvial terrace at the mouth of Quebrada El Niño. The site is divided in two by a 4-5 m deep and 60 m wide natural ravine into which the west face of the El Gallo pyramid is currently eroding (Figure 2 f). The El Gallo side of the site is protected by a hill spur (Figure 2 h) such that surface architecture and artifacts have not been washed away as much as on the La Gallina side of the site, which is open to the quebrada interior. During torrential rains (El Niño events) the quebrada acts like a funnel which collects rain from the surrounding hillsides and directs it toward the La Gallina core area. Such waters carry a large burden of mud and boulders that cover the entire surface of the inner quebrada. The most visible artifact of these events is the natural ravine. These events may explain the construction, by the site inhabitants, of the large double-faced wall across the mouth of the quebrada (Figure 2 e). This wall served to protect the La Gallina site from the destruction posed by the rains. The overburden on both sides of the site is shallow. The cultural levels overlay a subsoil of gravel, boulders, and silt eroded from the surrounding hills by torrential El Niño rains. The soils of the site area are poor, being both thin and rocky.

Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina is less than 300 m from the Virú River in an area of fertile floodplain at 240 meters above sea-level (masl). It is likely that during the occupation of the site surrounding arable lands were watered by gravity canals from intakes located upstream. One such canal is still visible today at the base of a hill spur directly north of the El Gallo pyramid (Figure 2 i). It winds its way along the slopes toward cultivated fields lower in the valley and in heavy rain seasons continues to carry water. The discovery of a large number of furrows and small canals to the north of the core area of the site (Figure 2 j) suggests that at some period this area of the Niño Quebrada was also irrigated, perhaps from a spring located in the interior of the quebrada. Although the canals and furrows cannot be dated to the Initial Period with confidence, recourse to irrigation agriculture would have been necessary to support populations sufficiently large to have built this and other centers in the valley (Burger and Salazar-Burger 1991:275).

The site's location presents difficulties for irrigation, because it sits several meters above the surrounding floodplain. The poor quality of the soil and the location away from easy access to irrigation canals may have influenced its placement on the alluvial terrace. There is no evidence of Initial Period irrigation in any part of the site's core. The site's location may also have been selected because of the proximity of building material. Most of the footings of the structures at El Gallo/La Gallina are formed of large boulders, and the pyramids themselves have heartings and facings of stone.

At the innermost area of the quebrada, about 1.5 km from the site, is a spring which still flows and supports vegetation, as well as large colonies of land snails. The discovery of land snails in virtually every excavation unit argues for this resource's importance to the diet of the site's inhabitants. The spring may also have provided potable water. The site's location close to the river would also have ensured the availability of fresh water as well as material to make

adobes and rushes for the weaving of mats and for shelter roofs. The riverine environment also supported wild game that would have supplemented the diet of the site's occupants.

#### *Guañape Diet*

The Guañape diet also included marine foods. Even though Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina lies approximately 24 km from the Pacific Ocean, fish bones and shellfish remains were recovered during excavation (Vásquez *et al.* 1995). If data from neighboring Huaca Los Reyes and Gramalote in the Moche Valley are comparable, then it is likely that the majority of the meat protein at the site was made up of marine resources, and the remainder was composed of deer and small mammals (S. Pozorski 1983; Pozorski and Pozorski 1987; 1991: 352-354; 1992: 859).

The economy of Initial Period Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina, however, was essentially agricultural. The majority of the foodstuffs consumed were likely to have come from crops grown in the surrounding fields, but the diet was supplemented with wild plants. A great variety of cultigens have been recovered at contemporaneous and slightly earlier sites on the coast (e.g., Huaca Prieta in Chicama, Gramalote in Moche, and Huaca Negra in Virú) (Bird *et al.* 1985; S. Pozorski 1983; Strong and Evans 1952). Because these sites do not have any arable farmland nearby, it is likely that such produce was obtained by way of exchange with coastal sites providing marine resources and in-valley sites supplying agricultural goods (S. Pozorski 1983). Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina is likely to have partaken in such a trade network. Unfortunately, preservation of perishable plant foodstuffs at the site is not good, so indirect evidence must be used to reconstruct the role of agriculture in the diet.

Contrary to those who credit maize as an early staple of the Initial Period (Corbett 1953; Strong and Evans 1952: 23, 45, 206-207, 247; Willey 1953:30; Wilson 1981), no evidence has

yet been recovered at the site to suggest that maize was an integral component of the diet of the inhabitants. This absence is common to many coastal Initial Period sites (Burger 1985). Only a small number of squash seeds were recovered, suggesting the presence of this widely used cultigen (Vásquez *et al.* 1995). Thus, at this point there is no evidence that any one staple crop supported Guañape Phase populations.

The dentition of many of the burials provides indirect evidence of a varied diet and argues against reliance on a staple. John Verano (1996) noted that there were few dental caries in the sample of individuals examined. Such caries are generally associated with diets based on single staples, such as maize, and become especially prevalent in later coastal populations, such as the Moche and Chimú. Their absence here suggests that the occupants were making use of a wide variety of foodstuffs. The analysis of the teeth also suggested that much of this material was ground on stone mortars. Many of the teeth were extremely worn, suggesting consumption of a gritty diet. In summary, it is likely that the Guañape Phase population of the upper valley was made up of farmers who grew the majority of their necessities and accessed the rest through valley-wide trade in foodstuffs. However, until site occupations can be correlated with agricultural works and domestic refuse, the evidence for this interpretation is largely indirect.

### Chronology

The ceramic material recovered indicates that Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina is a Middle Guañape site and dates to the Initial Period. There is no evidence of Chavín-influenced iconography. Artifacts diagnostic of the Early Horizon, such as stone blades and panpipes, are absent. The pottery assemblage is made up primarily of poorly fired neckless ollas (pots) and straight-sided bowls, often marked with fire-clouds. The clay is highly porous and friable and has large inclusions. Decoration is limited

to finger-pressed and incised appliqué ribs generally attached horizontally at the vessel shoulder (Figure 3 a, b). No instance of vertical ribs was found at the site. The decorated sherds recovered conform to the Guañape Finger-pressed and Guañape Incised Rib varieties identified by the original Virú Valley Project from their collections at Huaca Negra. A small number of modeled, Guañape Punctate, and Zoned-Punctate sherds were also recovered, and their quantity as well as diversity of decoration increase with time (Figure 3 c, d; *c.f.* Strong and Evans 1952:207). Ancón decorated sherds (Fine and Broad-Line Incised) were only recovered from post-occupational contexts, generally looted graves. Other diagnostic Guañape artifacts recovered included the stone mortar and pestle from a burial (Zoubek 1998a; 1998b; 1998c; 1998d), stone spindle whorls, and a jet mirror fragment recovered by looters from the El Gallo pyramid.

### The Huaca El Gallo pyramid

One of the goals of the 1994 field season was to make an accurate map of the site. During the course of the mapping, the decision was made to clear the middle of the eastern face of the El Gallo pyramid of accumulated rubble that had resulted from the collapse of the tiers of the pyramid and massive looter activity on the summit. The reason for clarifying this area of public architecture was to facilitate better comparisons between this site and that of the presumably contemporary Huaca Los Reyes in the Moche Valley. Both sites are located in comparable areas in up-valley quebradas.

The El Gallo pyramid measures 68 m (N-S) x 95 m (E-W) and is the largest mound in the Huacapongo Basin (Figure 2 a, Figure 4). Like many Initial Period pyramids, El Gallo faces the upstream source of water, the Huacapongo River. The mound lies 230 m east of La Gallina.

Like El Gallo, the La Gallina pyramid is stone-covered and rectangular, measuring 38 m wide (E-W) and 61 m long (N-S), but it differs

both in orientation at E 10°N and in layout. The entire mound is bisected by a trench into separate north and south platforms. Whether this trench is the product of intense looting activity, an artifact of the original construction layout as proposed by Willey (1953:284), or a combination of the two, is unclear. These north and south levels cover roughly the same area, but the south platform is 3 m taller than that to the north. The southern terrace of La Gallina rises 4-5 m above the sloping plain to the south, while the north terrace is only about 2 m higher than the facing enclosed area north of the mound. A 3 m deep and 2-3 m wide pit has been dug at the NE corner of the southern platform, roughly where an atrium would have been located if any ever existed. The pit reveals an interior construction of boulders and small rocks set in mud mortar and gravel.

The El Gallo pyramid is U-shaped as are many Initial Period mounds (Williams 1985). It may be divided into two architectural sub-units: the main mass of the platform mound to the west, and a facing plaza and north and south arms to the east (Figure 2 a, k). The western mound's base measures 48 m (E-W) by 68 m (N-S), including the lower terrace annex on its north side, and rises 4-5 m above the surrounding plain. It takes advantage of the natural topography of the landscape so that when viewed from the fields to the east and south, it appears more massive. In this respect it is very like other platform mounds of the Initial Period and Early Horizon, such as those of Caballo Muerto in Moche, which also make use of natural high terraces to increase their apparent height and size (T. Pozorski 1976).

Stone walls 85 cm wide delimit the north and south annexes of the pyramid and may have served as encircling walls (Figure 2 l). On the north and south sides, the areas enclosed between the collapsed north and south faces of the pyramid and these walls are 4-5 m wide. Remnant walls running N-S appear to divide these extensions into rooms. Because of rubble overburden, no such walls are visible along the south

face, although it is possible that such compartments exist. The entire west face of El Gallo has eroded into the ravine and only vestiges of the SW corner remain intact. All these basal walls are preserved to heights of, generally, less than 1 m. These foundation walls project east from the main mound on the north and south side forming the outer enclosing walls of the arms of the sunken square plaza.

The rectangular summit of the pyramid currently measures 45 m (N-S) by 37 m (E-W). Willey (1953:212) gives an E-W measurement of 41 m and cites the existence of an 85 cm wide, well-defined, double-faced enclosing outer wall, with rounded boulders set in mud mortar, on the summit. The erosion and collapse of the west face of the mound account for the discrepancy of 4 m of summit extension. While sections of this summit wall still exist, in most places it has been destroyed by looting and erosion. This activity has also destroyed all remains of rectangular summit rooms mentioned by Willey. The majority of the mound is a mass of disorder caused by extensive looting of the mound summit and by erosion, and its sides are covered by numerous boulders.

The pyramid's final construction appears to have consisted primarily of a boulder and gravel fill retained by walls of irregular stones set in mud mortar. There appear to have been at least three terraced levels faced by stone retaining walls which sloped inward to increase stability. The stones were likely collected from the quebrada interior, and some may have been quarried from the surrounding hills. Some relatively intact walls are still visible on El Gallo's south and east sides. When Willey first examined the mound he noted the absence of adobes anywhere (1953:211); however, during the 50-year interval since Willey's visit, the site has experienced a great deal of damage, resulting in the collapse of the outermost facing of the western side of the El Gallo mound revealing an inner wall constructed of conical adobes.

The projecting arms of the El Gallo platform mound enclose a sunken square plaza to the east, giving the entire mound complex a U-shape (Figure 2 k). In this respect it is comparable to the much larger site of Huaca Los Reyes in Moche (T. Pozorski 1976, 1983; Conklin 1985). The facing plaza and arms together measure 68 m long (N-S) by 47 m wide (E-W). The sunken square plaza is currently 2 m below the surrounding arms which also causes the platform to seem more imposing when viewed from the plaza. The north-projecting arm of the U is 15 m wide (N-S) and 1-2 m higher than the south arm which is 19 m wide (N-S). These measurements of width were taken from the inner face of the second terrace in the interior plaza area to the outer wall. Along the east face another raised embankment runs N-S and joins the north and south arms of the U to completely enclose a square plaza approximately 33 m x 33 m. The east face is in a state of collapse, partially eroding down the slope, thus obscuring the true configuration of this face. The current surface of the plaza lies above the level of the plain to the south outside the structure. The depth of the final plaza floor is unknown. On the La Gallina side of the site the floor of the western plaza lay under 20 cm of alluvium. More may have accumulated in the closed plaza area at El Gallo.

The interior of the plaza is bordered by terraced embankments of two levels on all sides, and a possible third step-like bench is visible along the east face of the El Gallo Pyramid. The retaining walls of these terraces or benches are made of stones one course wide and deep set in mud mortar, and most of these benches survive intact. The terraced embankments on the north and south are flat-topped. The high step-like bench measures 3 m wide, while the lower terrace has an average width of 1 m and rises only 20 cm above the current plaza surface. Willey mentions that a number of dividing walls were visible on the south flanking arm summit, and in 1994 one such wall was located; however, the bulk of the south arm and terraces have been severely looted since the 1940s and

any other walls present have been obscured by this activity.

Because the east face is fronted by a sunken square plaza, it was assumed that the principal stairway would be located in the center of the east face. Prior to investigation a linear alignment of large boulders appeared to delineate the right (north) side of the stairway. Clearing revealed this right stairway wall was constructed of large rectangular stones laid in mud mortar. Excavation then proceeded from the north side wall to the south along the east face for 3.5 m without discovering the south side wall delimiting the south edge of the stairway. It is likely that this wall had been destroyed by the collapse of the pyramid.

The stairs were found to be at the center of the east face, and they determined the main axis of the El Gallo pyramid complex. It is unclear whether another stairway was built on the west face. The clearing of the base of the stairs revealed that the three benches or terraces that surrounded the interior sides of the sunken square plaza were also present along the east face of the pyramid (Figure 5). The floor at the base of the pyramid stairs was compact and had sherds imbedded in it. On the surface of this floor were traces of burning and some ash. The east side of the floor had been ruptured. The presence of many *huaquero* (looter) pits along the east face of the pyramid combined with scattered human remains and cultural material from later periods, principally Chimú (ca. 1100-1460 A.D.), illustrates the pyramid's later reuse as a cemetery, a practice common in the valley (Willey 1953).

The final stairway was composed of eight stairs with a landing between steps 4 and 5 and a second landing at the top (Figure 5). Each step's rising face was constructed of a single row of square or rectangular stones laid in mud mortar. Each step was about 20 cm high, 25-30 cm deep and had a plastered upper surface of compact white clay most of which was intact. On the landing some of this plastering was also

preserved. From the floor of the plaza to the upper landing the stairway rises approximately 2.5 m.

On the final landing another intrusive Chimú tomb was close to the surface. It had suffered some damage from the erosion and collapse of material from the summit. The tomb was excavated while clearing the upper landing in order to clarify the construction sequence in this area of the pyramid. A large, deep, intrusive looter pit in the summit was also cleaned to observe the sequence of construction. The pit was almost 3 m deep. The earliest phases of construction of the El Gallo pyramid could not be documented because they lay below the final depth reached in this pit.

At least four construction phases exist at the El Gallo pyramid (Figure 6). The first is represented by Floor 4, found at the base of the *huaquero* pit, and the associated Wall 1 (Figure 6 a, b). Whether Wall 1 was a retaining wall for a small truncated platform mound or some other enclosure could not be established. Phase 2 began with the filling in of the area with rubble and large rocks (Figure 6 c). A second fill of lighter consistency was later added and then the entire area was sealed by Floor 3 (Figure 6 d, e). While it is possible that a floor once existed between the two different layers of fill, evidence was lacking. The third and fourth construction phases appear to have been minor remodelings, as is clear from the thinness of the layers separating Floors 2, 3 and 4 from each other compared with the thickness of the fill separating floors 1 and 2 (Figure 6 f, g). A thick layer of disturbed rubble sealed the deposit (Figure 6 h). Although it is impossible to correlate directly building phases identified at the pyramid with those suggested for other areas of the El Gallo site, it is interesting to note that three main construction phases were identified in Unit 1 immediately north of the pyramid (Zoubek 1997; 1998d).

Although the earliest construction phases of the pyramid remain buried, it is likely that they

were small-scale in nature. The bulk of the pyramid appears to correlate with the massive Construction Phase 2 at which time an estimated 80% of the final mound height was attained. It was also during this phase that all architecture from earlier phases was entombed beneath fill. While the hearting of the pyramid is composed mostly of boulders and rubble, along the eroding west face of the pyramid a wall of conical adobes is visible. It is possible that at the end of the second construction phase the pyramid was faced with plastered conical adobe walls. Ultimately, the pyramid received a stone facing of rectangular and square stones set in mud mortar. Along the west pyramid face this outer stone facing has collapsed revealing the earlier conical adobe inner wall. This sequence of conical adobes followed by stone facing has also been documented at the Initial Period site of Sechín Alto in the Casma Valley, and the use of conical adobes suggests the contemporaneity of these two centers (Pozorski and Pozorski 1987).

No atrium walls were encountered during clearing of the landings. It is likely that such walls, if they survive, are buried under the rubble covering the pyramid summit. Further work will be necessary to clarify the structure of this pyramid and identify those activities that may have taken place upon it.

#### **Huaca La Gallina: the eastern sunken plaza and associated circular structures**

Work at Huaca La Gallina initially focused on the remains of several wall footings along the north side of the eastern sunken circular plaza (Figure 2 c). At least four whole and partial circular wall footings were visible on the surface prior to excavation. They were located adjacent to the north side of the perimetric wall surrounding the eastern sunken circular plaza on the La Gallina side of the site. Two were excavated entirely, and cuts were made on the south exterior of each structure in order to clarify their form, determine their function, define their stratigraphy, and establish the correlation



among them and between them and the sunken circular plaza. Four 10 x 10 m units were laid out, and an area of 85 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated that included both circular wall footings and parts of the interior of the sunken circular plaza. A number of floors were encountered which were physically linked with one another and clarified the relation of the structures.

### Structure 1

The westernmost structure (Structure 1) was in the center of Unit I (Figure 7 a). It was a circular wall footing 3.4 m in external diameter formed by a 50 cm wide wall of stone masonry in mud mortar one course wide. There was a probable entrance 90 cm wide on the NW side (Figure 7 b). At 50 cm below the surface a prepared yellow-beige clay (Munsell 10YR 8/6) floor (hereafter Floor A) was encountered (Figure 7 c). The fragmentary floor had suffered erosional damage. A second floor, gray-beige in color (Munsell 2.5Y 7/2; hereafter Floor B) was encountered 25 cm below the first (Figure 7d, 8a). This floor overlay the sterile quebrada subsoil. A burial had been placed in the fill between Floors A and B (Figure 8 b). The burial postdates Floor B, but it is unclear whether the burial was intrusive into Floor A due to the eroded condition of this floor.

The burial pit was oriented E-W and was located in the central part of the structure (Figure 7 a, 9). The pit was circular with a diameter of about 1.10 m and was about 1 m deep. It was slightly elongated toward the west side. This burial contained a flexed female skeleton oriented NE that appeared to have been forced into the pit. Small compact cakes of mud and medium-sized to large-sized rocks were associated with, and encrusted on, various parts of the skeleton. Animal bones, charcoal, a quartz crystal, and two small blue-green soapstone beads were collected from the matrix surrounding the interment. The burial may have been dedicatory because its position and tomb construction differed markedly from others at the site (Zoubek 1997). The absence

of domestic artifacts, despite fine screening, its suggests ritual cleanliness, a concept well documented in the Andes (Burger and Salazar-Burger 1985:115- 116; 1986). This finding supports a ceremonial function for this structure.

### Structure 2

Structure 2 spanned the SE corner of Unit 1 and the SW corner of adjacent Unit 2 (Figure 10). This circular wall footing had an external diameter of 3.7 m and was composed of a 50 cm wide wall of stone masonry of one course set in mud mortar with gravel. Other features were attached to this outer wall. Two parallel wall segments extend out from the east exterior wall face, projecting approximately 80 cm to the east (Figure 10 a). They may have defined an entrance. Arc-shaped walls were located parallel to the NW and SW external sides of the structure (Figure 10 c, d). In addition, one linear alignment of stones oriented SW-NE was found in the interior of the structure on the NW side (Figure 10 b).

Excavation revealed a concentration of eight *Choromytilus* valves 15 cm below the surface between the two east projecting wall segments. A fragmented, thin-walled, hemispherical bowl, together with additional *Choromytilus* valves were found between the SW arc-shaped wall and the structure's SW exterior (Figure 10 d). Although these artifacts were not associated with any prepared floor, it is possible that the final floor of this structure (and also that of Structure 1) had eroded away completely. The presence of the various offerings noted at a consistent depth supports the assertion that they had rested on a floor. The soil below this level also differs from the proposed floor level in that it contained a greater number of larger rocks and compact clods of clay.

The first prepared floor of Structure 2 was encountered 25-30 cm below the surface (Figure 11 b). Associated with the floor was a U-shaped alignment of stones in the center of the struc-

ture and an arc-shaped stone alignment located on the structure's south interior (Figure 12). Although initially the U-shaped structure looked like a hearth, no ash or other evidence of burning was found nor were any ventilation shafts discovered. The floor on which these features were located corresponded stratigraphically to Floor A. Floor B was encountered 15 cm below Floor A buried by an intervening layer of fill (Figure 11 c, d). Areas of this floor had red-orange coloration indicating a burning episode. This layer was associated with the initial construction of the structure since the wall footing reached to this depth. A third floor (Floor C) was encountered some 10 cm below Floor 2 (Figure 11 e). It predated the construction of Structure 2 and passed beneath the stone wall footings while overlaying the sterile *quebrada* subsoil.

In order to explore further the relationship between the external circular structures and the sunken circular plaza, a 2 x 4 m area in the SE corner of Unit 2 was excavated (Figure 13, 14). The sunken circular plaza was surrounded by a double-faced perimetric stone wall 1.2 m thick with a gravel, earth, and sand core. The maximum external diameter of the sunken circular plaza was 16.5 m and its internal diameter was 14.8 m. The plaza had been affected by alluvium, wind erosion, and looter activity. This had destroyed a large part of the architecture and had disrupted the stratigraphy.

Floor A was found 25 cm below the surface along the exterior face of the perimetric wall. About 15 cm below Floor A, a second floor (Floor 2) was revealed that was whitish-yellow in color (Munsell 5Y 8/2) and was greatly eroded. It is possible that this floor was associated with the construction of the sunken plaza's perimetric wall since the base of the wall appeared to rest on this same level, however, no plaster bonding between the wall and floor was in evidence (Figure 14 a). Plaster fragments were recovered in the intervening fill between the first and second floors, suggesting that the

outer face of the perimetric wall had originally been plastered.

Following the dismantling of the wall, an intrusive pit containing the burial of an old woman was discovered (Figures 14 d, 15, 16). The burial pit was aligned along a SW-NE axis and was delimited by medium-sized rocks. It had an elongated plan measuring 1.7 m (SW-NE) by 80 cm (SE-NW) and was 40 cm deep with respect to its matrix. The woman was interred in a fetal position with the head located to the NW and facing slightly NE. Seven reddish-gray agates were found located on the north side of the tomb near the hand (Figure 16 a) and remains of *Choromytilus* shells were at the south side. The agates showed no sign of having been worked. The use of red stone beads has been noted in tombs of the preceding Late Preceramic Period, for example at Aspero; and it is possible that the agates fulfilled a function similar to that of the beads in the Aspero tomb (Feldman 1985; Quilter 1991).

Below the burial further excavation revealed Floor B, which continued below the wall and formed the uppermost floor surface of the terraced benches lining the interior of the sunken circular plaza (Figure 14 b). A fourth and final floor, (Floor C) was exposed slightly below Floor B (Figure 14 c). This floor was grayish-yellow (Munsell 2.5Y 7/4) and corresponded stratigraphically with Floor C from Structure 2 (see above) which pre-dated the construction of that structure.

#### *The eastern sunken circular plaza*

An L-shaped trench was excavated along the west side of Unit 3 to expose the basal floor of the sunken plaza (Figure 14). Excavation within the sunken circular plaza revealed the continuation of the gray-beige Floor B from the preceding excavation and below it grayish-yellow Floor C as the final and penultimate floors surfacing the upper surfaces of the benches that descended along the plaza's interior to the plaza floor (Figure 14 b, c).

Thus, the plaza and its three-tiered ring of benches was built prior to the construction of the outer perimetric wall. Floor C was correlated with the floor underlying Structure 2, and clearly pre-dates the construction of that structure, indicating that the sunken circular plaza had initially stood alone and that the small circular structures were added later as part of a general refurbishment. The final refurbishment took place at the same time as the construction of the surrounding circular structures, based on the correlation of the final plaza surface (Floor B) with Floor B of Structures 1 and 2, because this floor was associated with the construction of these wall footings (Figure 17). The perimetric wall was the final addition, perhaps built to better separate the ceremonial spaces occupied by the sunken plaza and the surrounding secondary structures.

The discovery of a reconstructable bowl of Guañape cultural affiliation in the SW exterior corner of Structure 2 supports the dating of the structures and sunken plaza to no later than the Middle Guañape Phase. The discovery, under the perimetric wall and in Structure 1, of two flexed female burials facing toward the NE repeats several of the Guañape burial canons at other areas of this site and at contemporary sites from the neighboring valleys of Moche, Chicama, and Santa (Donnan and Mackey 1978; Larco 1941, 1945; César Lecca, personal communication). Both of the burials appear to have been dedicatory in nature, perhaps made to insure the success of rituals taking place within the structures. This, along with the absence of any associated domestic refuse, and the presence of items posited to have had a ritual function elsewhere around the foundations and on the floors of these shrines, supports the interpretation of the sunken circular plaza and adjoining circular structures as ceremonial in function.

The assertion that the circular structures had a ritual function is also supported by their sizes and configurations, which differ markedly from Guañape domestic structures identified elsewhere. Willey (1953:46, 48-51, figures 7

and 8) notes two late Guañape domestic sites, V-83 and V-84. Although the refuse was light, the domestic zones he discusses did yield "a significant number of potsherds." House foundations at the sites were characterized by "walls . . . of double-face type with a narrow fill of smaller stones . . . masonry was cyclopean and the stones had been set in mud mortar" (Willey *Ibid.*:48). Willey isolated a total of 25-30 houses consisting of some 70 rooms in total. As Willey summarizes, "Each house is composed of from one to six rooms with the average about two rooms. Most buildings and rooms are more or less rectangular although there is some tendency for many of the houses to have rounded corners" (*Ibid.*:51).

In 1998, excavations directed by the author in the Susanga area of the Upper Huacapongo drainage included the clearing of a Middle Guañape domestic structure. Like the Late Guañape structures identified by Willey, the Middle Guañape example was formed by two rooms, each roughly rectangular in shape, but with rounded corners. There was abundant refuse associated with this structure, including large numbers of potsherds, many heavily sooted from use. Faunal remains included many marine shells, most notably purple mussels, as well as fish bones.

The wall footings indicated that the two excavated structures at La Gallina originally had perishable superstructures which have since disappeared. No evidence of post-holes or hearths was recovered. Neither structure had been ritually interred after the final period of use. Rather, it appears both were simply abandoned at the end of the site's occupation. However, one must consider that the heavy erosion noted in this area of the site may have washed away significant amounts of material that could have once interred the structures. Wall footings of at least two other structures, with estimated external diameters of 3.4 m and 3.5m, were found to the east of Structures 1 and 2.

It is likely that all had functions similar to those of Structures 1 and 2, serving as settings for more intimate rituals for smaller audiences as has been suggested for small ventilated hearth structures found in Casma with similar dimensions and for the larger sunken circular courts found on the wings of Initial Period Cardal in Lurín (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996; Burger 1987: 369-370; Burger and Salazar Burger 1991: 291). The structures at the Casma Valley sites were dated by radiocarbon and by ceramic associations and, with the exception of Huaynuná, were all clearly Initial Period in date (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996:343, table 1). Although dates are so far lacking from Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina, ceramic associations clearly indicate the contemporaneity of the structures with those of Casma.

*The Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina circular structures compared with those of Casma*

The circular structures identified at Huaca La Gallina have a great deal in common with structures identified by the Pozorskis in the Casma Valley at the Initial Period sites of Pampa de Las Llamas-Moxeke, Taukachi Konkan, and Bahía Seca and the Preceramic site of Huaynuná (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996). These structures were notable for the presence of a ventilated hearth at the center of each. Of eight structures, five were round with internal diameters from 3.2-4.32 m and averaging 3.6 m (Pozorski and Pozorski *Ibid.*:343, table 1). In addition, two rectangular structures were noted. One at the Preceramic site of Huaynuná measured 3.0 x 2.5 m while the second at Pampa de Las Llamas-Moxeke measured 2.55 x 2.45 m. A final square structure 7 x 7 m in area was located in an administrative mound complex and was a reutilization of a square room unit not originally containing a hearth (*Ibid.*:349).

The dimensions of the circular structures and internal areas encompassed by the rectangular structures are similar to those of the circular structures found at Huaca La Gallina. Of the circular structures associated with the

sunken plaza at Huaca La Gallina, the range in diameter was 3.4 m to 3.7 m with an average of 3.5 m. An El Gallo example may have served a different function from those at La Gallina, especially given its location directly over a tomb, but it, too, was constructed in the same manner and associated with the foundations of other, mostly buried, circular wall footings (Zoubek 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d).

Each of the Casma structures was small and composed of stone wall footings of irregular boulders set in mud mortar like the La Gallina structures. In most cases, the wall footings survived to less than 1 m. Each was posited to have had a perishable superstructure and in some cases direct evidence was present. At the site of Taukacki Konkan one circular structure contained material believed to have made up the roof including "numerous curved twigs and sooty twig and cane-impressed plaster fragments found on the floor" (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996: 345). At Bahía Seca another structure that lacked a stone footing had a superstructure apparently supported by 5-8 cm diameter posts set in a stone-lined trench. In addition, this structure yielded totora reed mats and *junco* rope that likely composed the superstructure of the building which is hypothesized to have had a dome shape (*Ibid.*:346). Additional *junco* rope and cane were recovered in other structures at Pampa de Las Llamas-Moxeke, and curved vines and sticks and fragments of silty clay plaster bearing impressions of sticks were found in a Taukacki Konkan structure (*Ibid.*:347-348). It is hypothesized on the basis of indirect evidence that the Huaca La Gallina structures and the one excavated at Huaca El Gallo (Zoubek 1998a, 1998b) had superstructures similar to the Casma examples.

Unlike the Casma examples, the Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina structures did not rest on any raised platform or dais, but were built directly upon finished plaster plaza floors (Zoubek 1997; 1998a; 1998b). The Virú structures differ from those of Casma in their lack of hearths and ventilation shafts. Although one structure

appeared to contain some sort of interior structure (Figures 10 b, 12), no ash was found nor did any of the structures manifest evidence of interior firing. Rather, many of the structures contained burials. Their small size suggests that only a small group could have taken part in ceremonies at once, perhaps individuals related by blood or fictively.

In contrast to the Casma ventilated hearth structures which were built isolated from one another, at Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina circular ritual structures were constructed in groups. No material indicative of domestic use is found in either set of structures nor in their vicinity. Other than some sherds and small pieces of quartz crystal and shell, the El Gallo/La Gallina structures are devoid of artifacts. Interestingly, many of these same artifacts were recovered in highland ventilated hearth structures such as at Huaricoto; however, there they were generally recovered burnt from the central hearths (Burger and Salazar-Burger 1980:28,1985; 1986).

That these structures were important to ritual and yet not the centers for primary rituals in Virú is shown by their location next to, but not upon, the large pyramidal mound structures. In Casma, the hearth structures were found both on and next to the pyramids suggesting that they played a slightly different role in ceremony. Evidence is so far lacking as to whether Virú circular structures were built on the pyramids. However, the public nature of the impressive pyramid-platform mounds and associated plazas underscores the difference between Initial Period rituals in the small structures and the public architecture. Such a contrast also characterizes the difference between Initial Period coastal and highland ceremony with the former overwhelmingly public in nature and the latter restricted to small interpersonal rituals from Preceramic times into the Early Horizon. The small circular structures' presence on the coast may represent the integration of these highland rituals as secondary ceremonies into the wider ceremonial practice (see also Pozorski and Pozorski 1996:350-352).

### Huaca El Gallo/La Gallina contrasted with other known Guañape sites

Prior to this project no large Initial Period settlements of this period were known to exist in Virú, nor was the Guañape Culture believed to have constructed sites of this magnitude. Early Guañape was limited to one site (V-71), and only two Middle Guañape Phase sites were known, V-71 and V-100, 1.5 km inland from V-71. The type site for the Guañape Culture had been Huaca Negra which lies within a kilometer of the Pacific Ocean (Strong and Evans 1952; Willey 1953). The most notable public architecture at this site is the Temple of the Llamas, a rectangular structure measuring only 15.75 m (N-S) x 19.35 m (E-W) and accessed by a three-step stairway (Strong and Evans 1952:28, figure 5). Like the El Gallo and La Gallina pyramids, it faces to the NE, nearly sharing the same orientation at E 7°N magnetic. It is also built on a natural rise. Its walls are constructed from irregular rock boulders set in mud mortar and vary from 65-80 cm thick with a preserved height of 75-80 cm (*Ibid.*:28; Willey 1953:55-57, figure 9). The east stairway steps were 25 cm, 35 cm, and 65 cm deep respectively and each was 90 cm wide and rose 20-25 cm. Strong and Evans noted the use of conical adobes to close the east entrance. It is unclear whether the temple was entombed or reutilized after the closure. Like El Gallo, it appears that the exterior walls of the Llama Temple were plastered (Strong and Evans 1952:31). The many shared traits between the Llama Temple and El Gallo, as well as the material assemblage leave no doubt as to their contemporaneity. Conical adobes like those found at V-71 are also present at El Gallo as well as a number of other sites in the valley, including Huaca San Juan I and II (V-77 and V-103), V-126, V-127, V-149, V-198, and V-206.

Other circular stone foundations like those of El Gallo/La Gallina have only been found at V-140 and possibly at V-512 of the Chavimochic survey (Uceda *et al.* 1990), both sites in the upper Huacapongo. Given that in Virú these

structures have wall footings that survive to less than 1 m in height, many may be buried, so the full distribution of these structures is unknown. Their association with a sunken circular plaza at Huaca La Gallina may, likewise, argue for the interrelations of rituals and ceremonies carried out in the two areas.

The absence of ventilated hearths in the Virú cases, despite their other many similarities with the Casma structures, suggests either an *in situ* ceremonial development or a further transformation of highland canons. The presence of yet another circular ventilated hearth structure at Montegrande in the Jequetepeque Valley (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996:343, table 1, 350; Tellenbach 1986:250-254, plates 103, 104, 105, 144, 145), 300 km north of Casma, becomes problematic because it is unclear whether this represents a case of independent development or an alternate route of coast-highland exchange of religious practices. At this point no coastwise proliferation of the ventilated hearth structures that characterized the highland Kotosh Religious Tradition may be posited. Only with further survey and excavation can the nature and extent of the Virú type structures be known.

### Conclusions

It is now clear that V-71 and the Llama Temple were marginal sites during the Guañape Phase. As opposed to the earlier settlement pattern identified for this culture which showed a concentration along the shore and in the lower valley (Willey 1953), the data from El Gallo relocate the center of the Guañape occupation to the upper valley and, specifically, to the Huacapongo Drainage. The El Gallo site shows that, despite earlier hypotheses, Middle Guañape does represent the culmination or full development of the Guañape Culture in Virú (Strong and Evans 1952:209; Willey 1996). To view the Guañape culture from the vantage point of V-71 as the type site is to grossly underestimate the Guañape phase technology and occupation and use of the entire valley. While

the Initial Period settlement pattern of the Virú Valley is still unclear, the work at El Gallo/La Gallina suggests that it will resemble those patterns of other north coast valleys.

The circular, non-domestic structure seems to be a diagnostic aspect of Guañape ritual architecture. The Pozorskis note the similarities between highland ventilated hearth structures of the Kotosh Religious Tradition and those they excavated in Casma, and hypothesize a highland origin for the structures which were gradually adopted but reinterpreted within a coastal framework. They suggest La Galgada as a transitional site of adoption (Pozorski and Pozorski 1996:350-351). It is unclear whether the Virú structures represent a further divergence of the circular ritual structure from those of the highlands, wherein the ritual meaning of the structure was transformed and the omnipresent hearth was eliminated. The similar ritual context and content of the structures in Virú and Casma may be coincidental. Another suggestion is that the Virú structures may derive from earlier Preceramic house forms. As demonstrated by Malpass and Stothert (1992), during the Preceramic much domestic housing was circular. With time and increasing complexity a square room form was adopted. The circular form characterizes egalitarian social formations (Kent 1990). It is possible that in the Virú cases the circular form was retained because of its earlier associations with egalitarianism which stressed the unity of community and equal access to resources. In this instance conservatism may have characterized this aspect of religious architecture. Such overtones may have been essential given the characterization of Initial Period society by many as reciprocal and lacking status classes (Burger 1992). This archaic form was contrasted with the temple mounds themselves which, though the result of community labor, may have symbolized different power relations.

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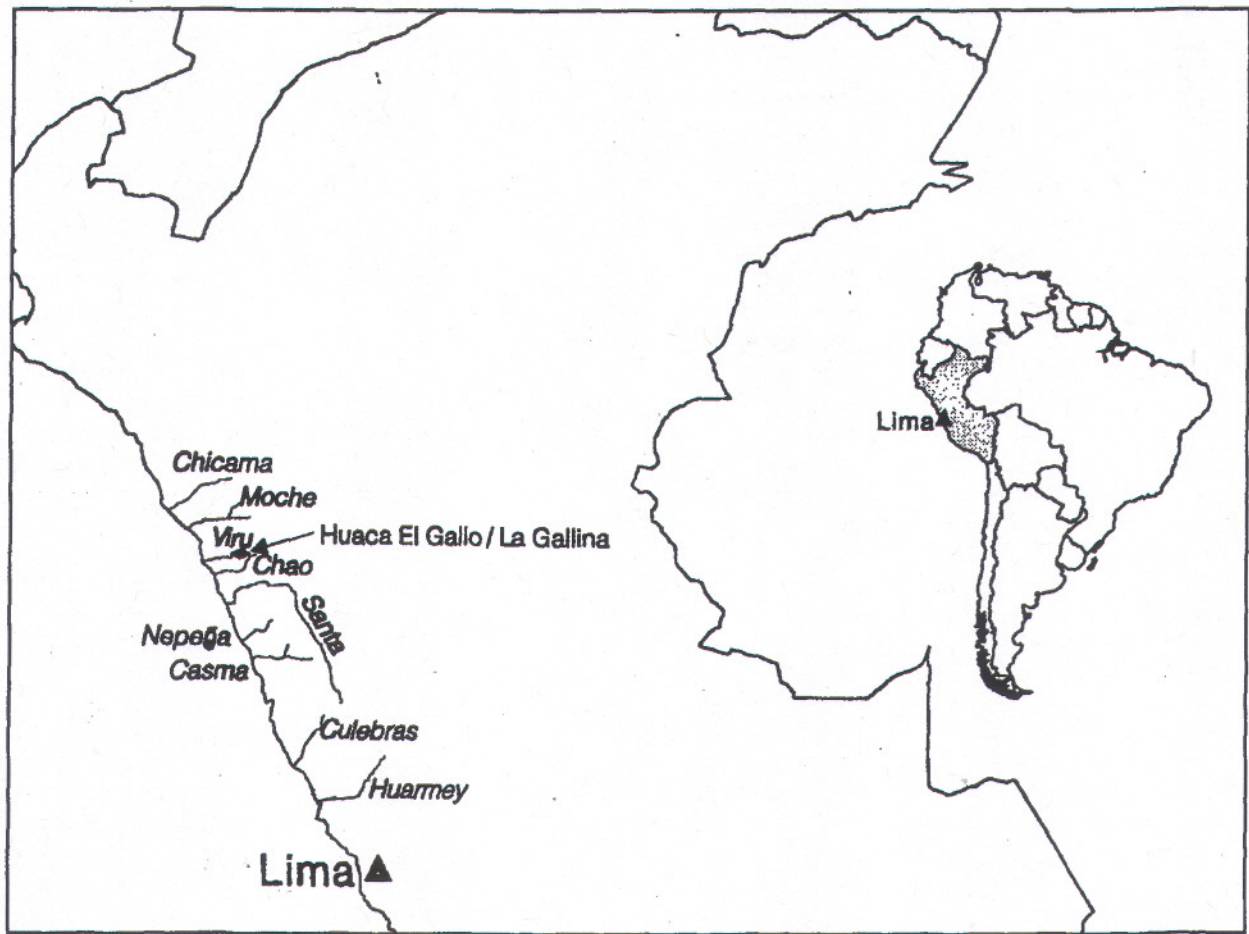


Figure 1. Map of the Peruvian North Coast Valleys.

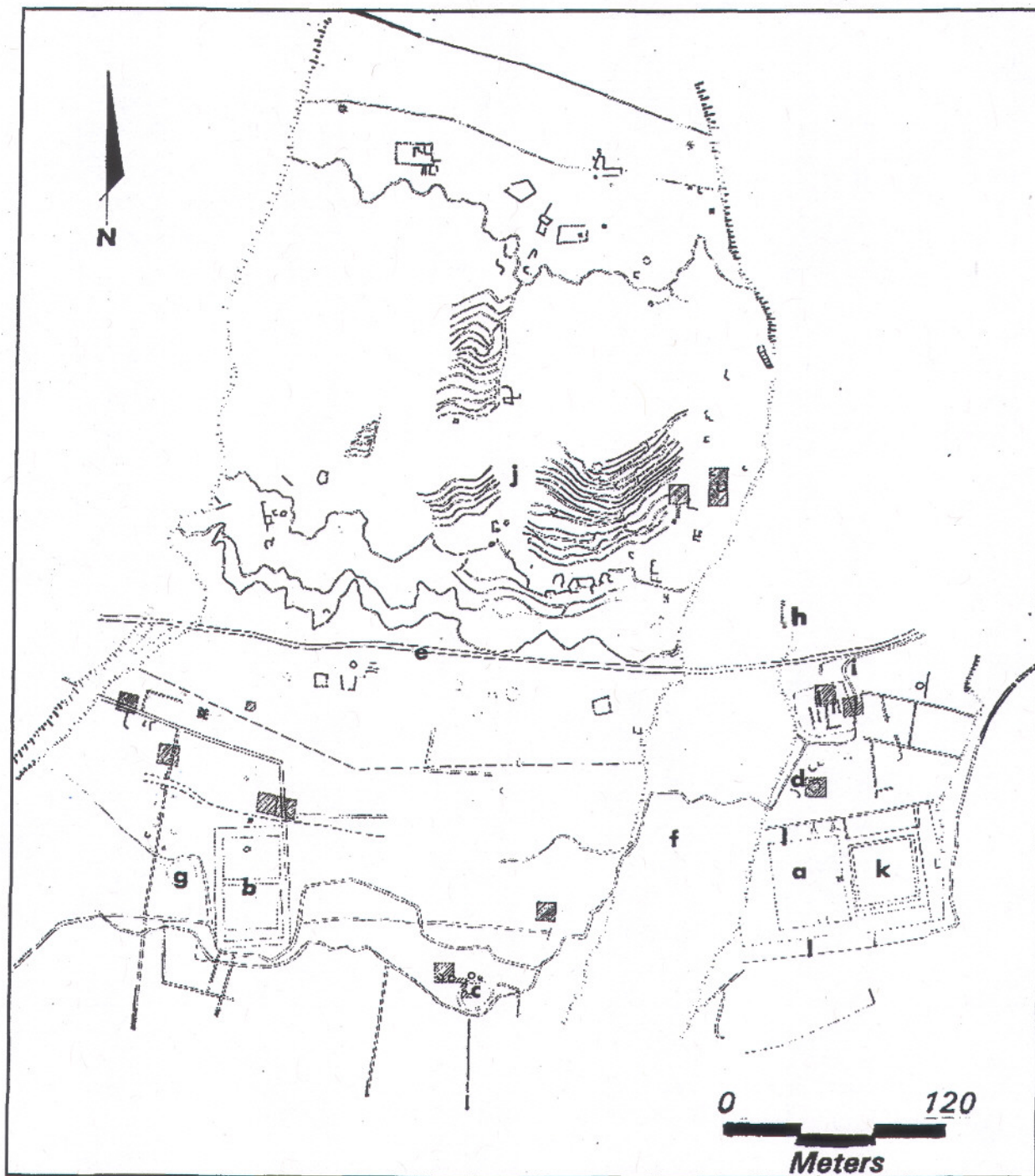


Figure 2. Map of the site of Huaca El Gallo/Huaca La Gallina, Virú Valley, Peru. a) Huaca El Gallo. b) Huaca La Gallina. c) Eastern Sunken Circular Plaza and associated structures. d) Huaca El Gallo Circular Structure. e) Double-faced wall. f) Ravine. g) Western Sunken Circular Plaza. h) Hill spur. i) El Gallo Canal. j) Agricultural furrows. k) Sunken Square Plaza. l) Stone perimeter walls. Hachures indicate excavation units.

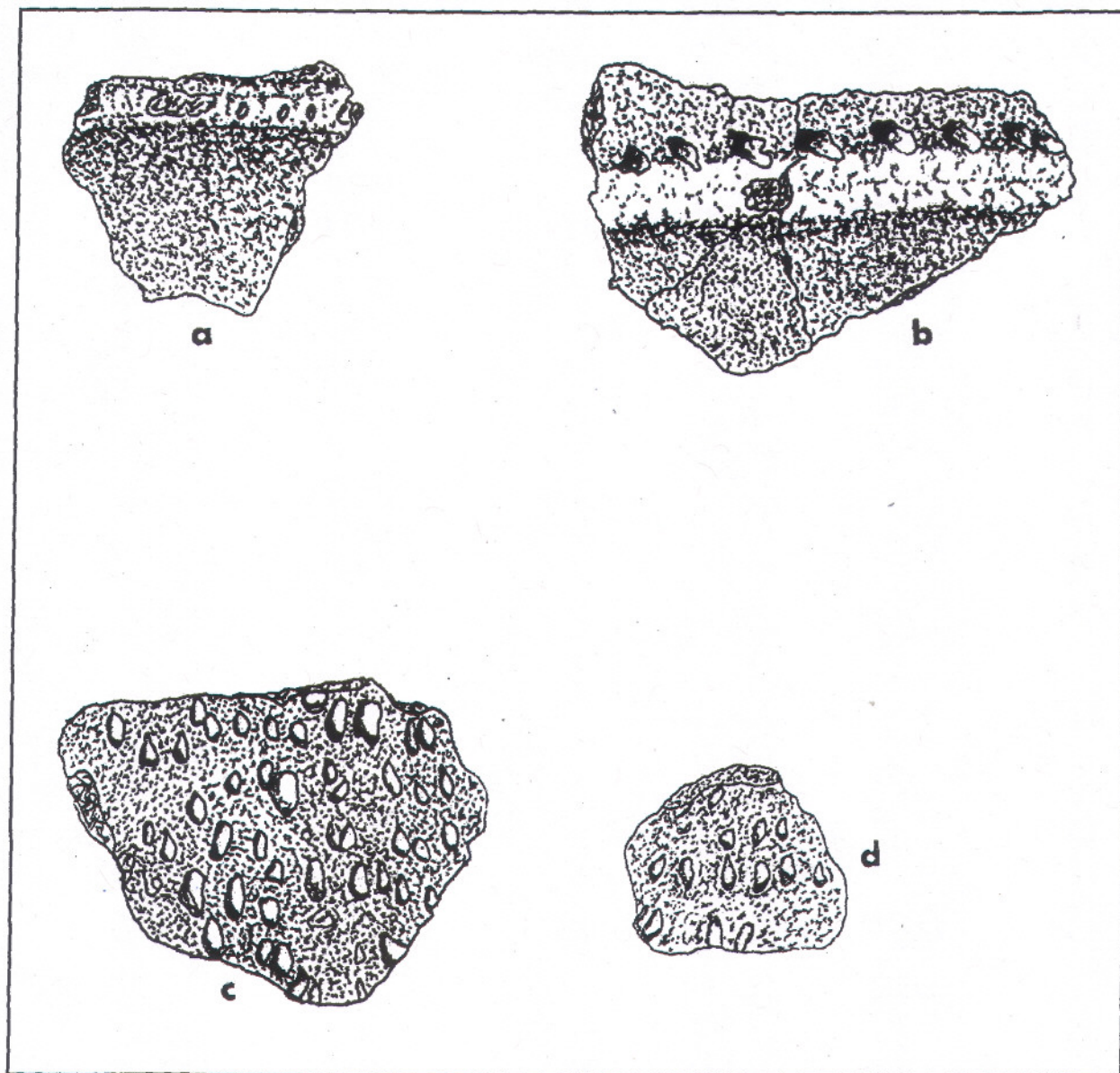


Figure 3. Ceramic sherds recovered at El Gallo. a) Guañape Incised Rib, b) Guañape Incised Rib, c) Guañape Punctate, d) Guañape Punctate. Sherds are illustrated 1:1.



Figure 4. Photo of the El Gallo side of the site from the cliffs to the sites' north. The secondary platform is in the foreground and the El Gallo pyramid with its facing court is located in back of the secondary platform and terreplein.



Figure 5. Photo of the east-facing stairway at Huaca El Gallo after clearing. Central portion of grid consists of 1 m squares.

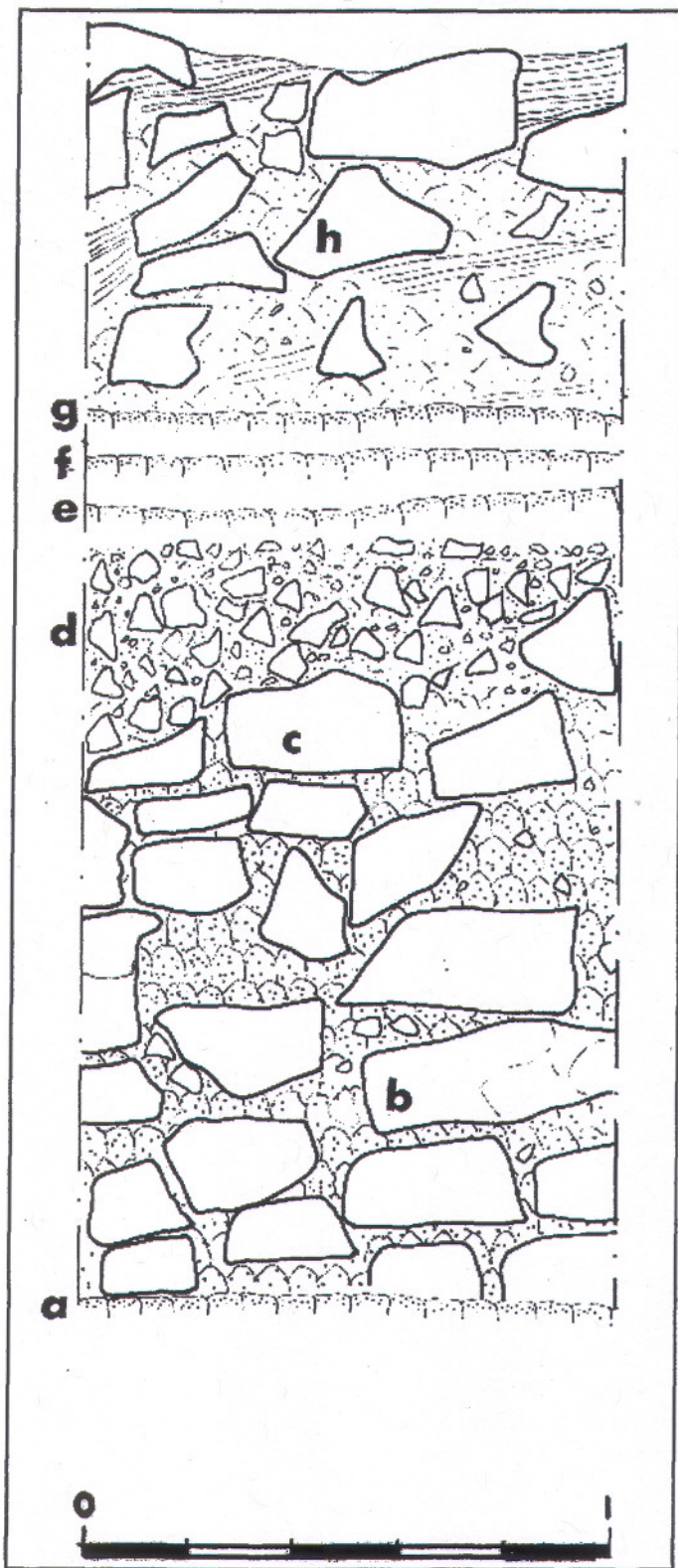


Figure 6. Stratigraphy of Huaca El Gallo, West Profile: (a) Floor 4, (b) Wall 1, (c) Fill above Wall 1, (d) lighter fill, (e) Floor 3, (f) Floor 2, (g) Floor 1, (h) disturbed rubble. Scale is 1 meter.

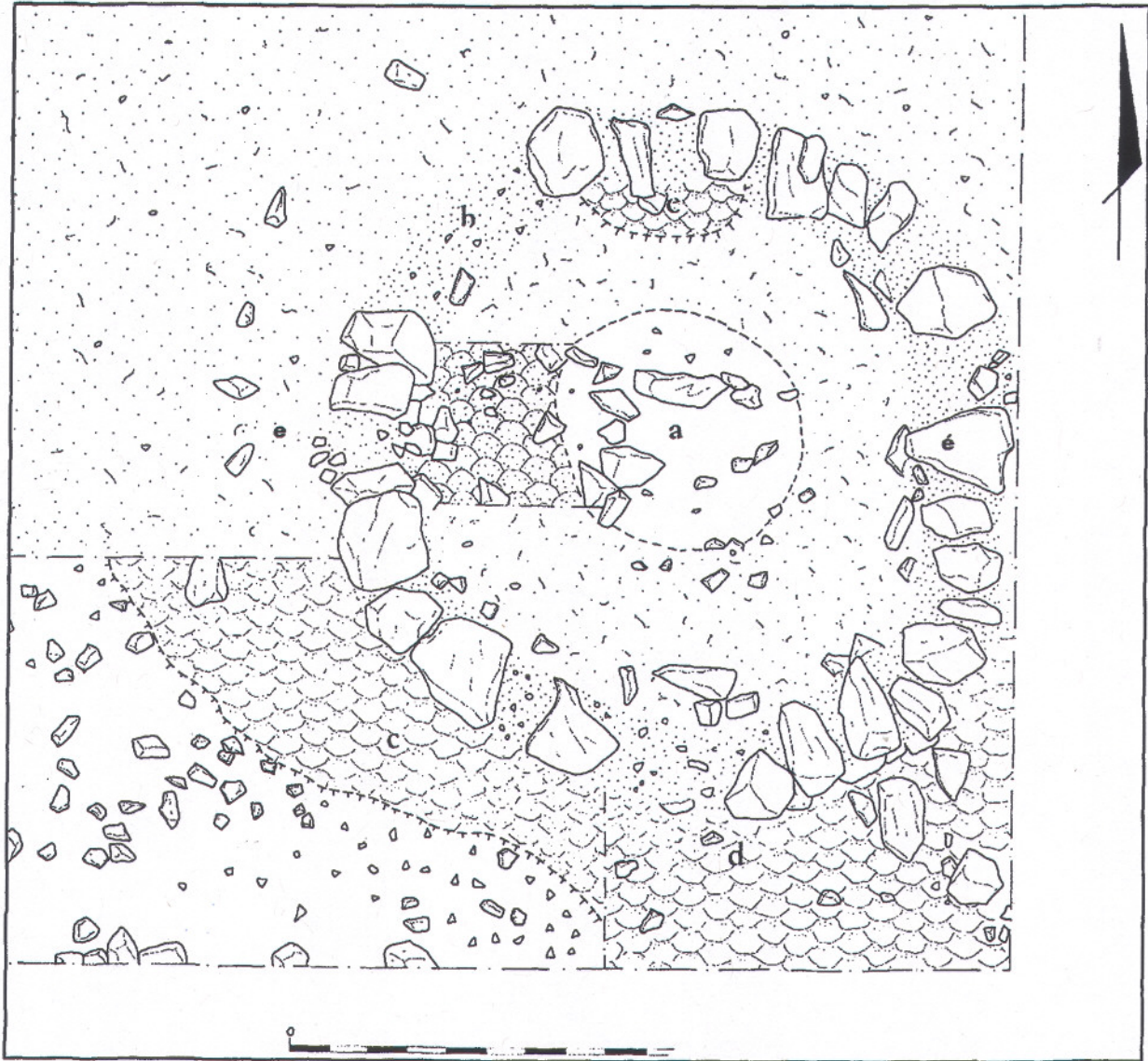


Figure 7. Structure 1: (a) Burial pit, (b) probable entrance to the structure, (c) Floor A, (d) Floor B, (e-é) cut of north stratigraphic profile (See Figure 8). Note that this plan view represents different levels in different sectors as a result of partial excavation (See Figure 9, which shows the structure at the same stage of excavation.) Scale intervals are 10 centimeters. Patterns follow conventions for archaeological illustrations used in Trujillo, Peru region; see key, Figure 18.

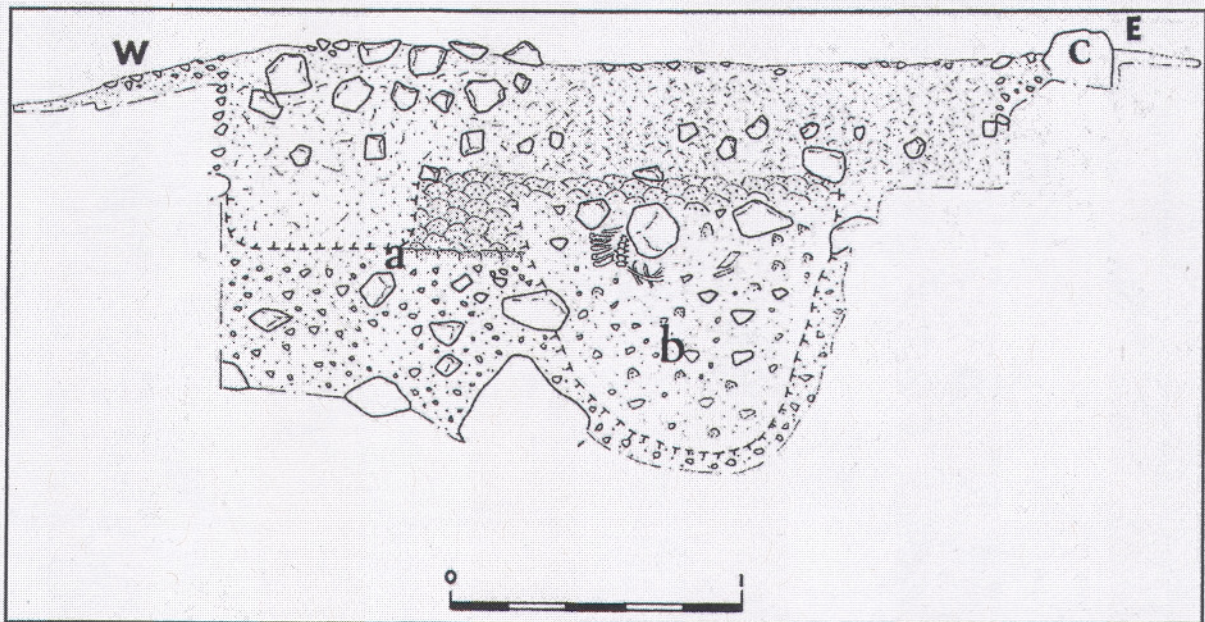


Figure 8. Burial 1, Structure 1, north stratigraphic profile (e-e' on Figure 7): a) Floor B., b) Burial pit, c) Structure 1 wall footing. See key, Figure 18. Scale is 1 meter.

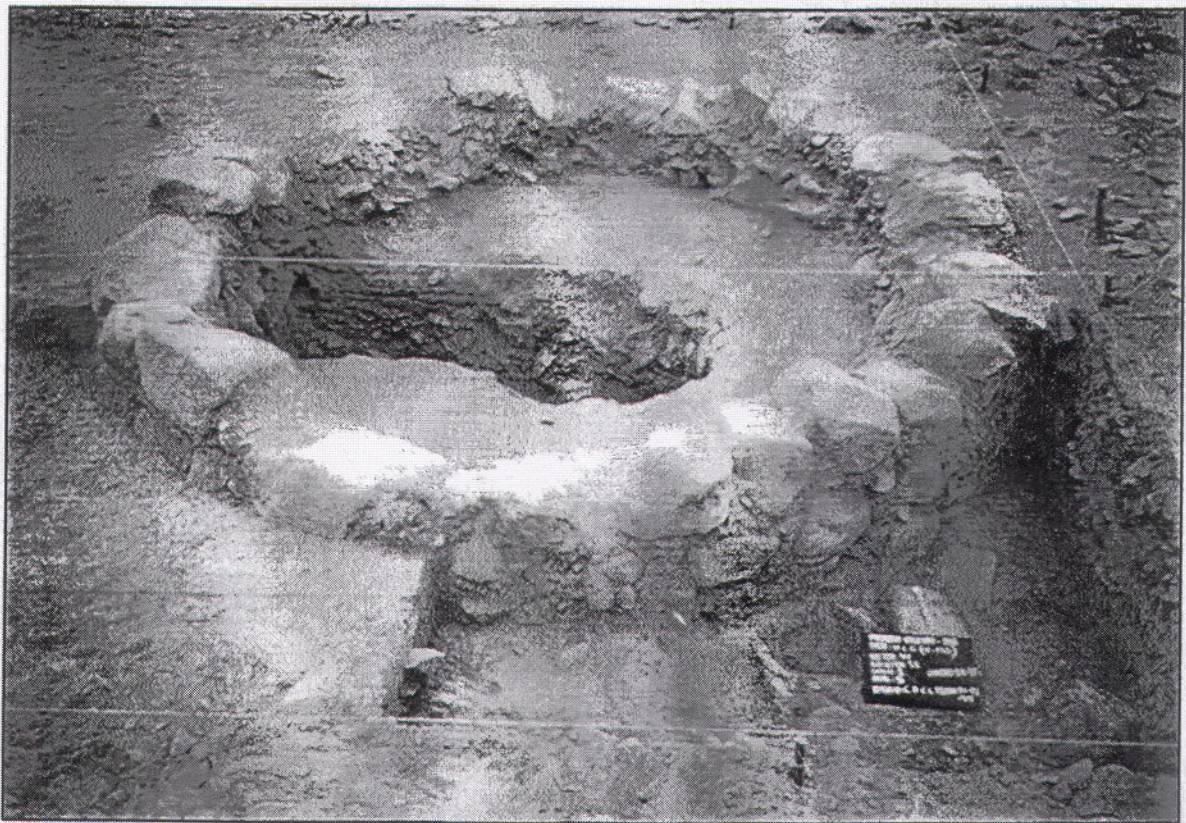


Figure 9. Photo of Structure 1 showing the burial pit inside of the structure, as well as floors A (foreground left) and B (foreground right). Scale stick is 20 cm.



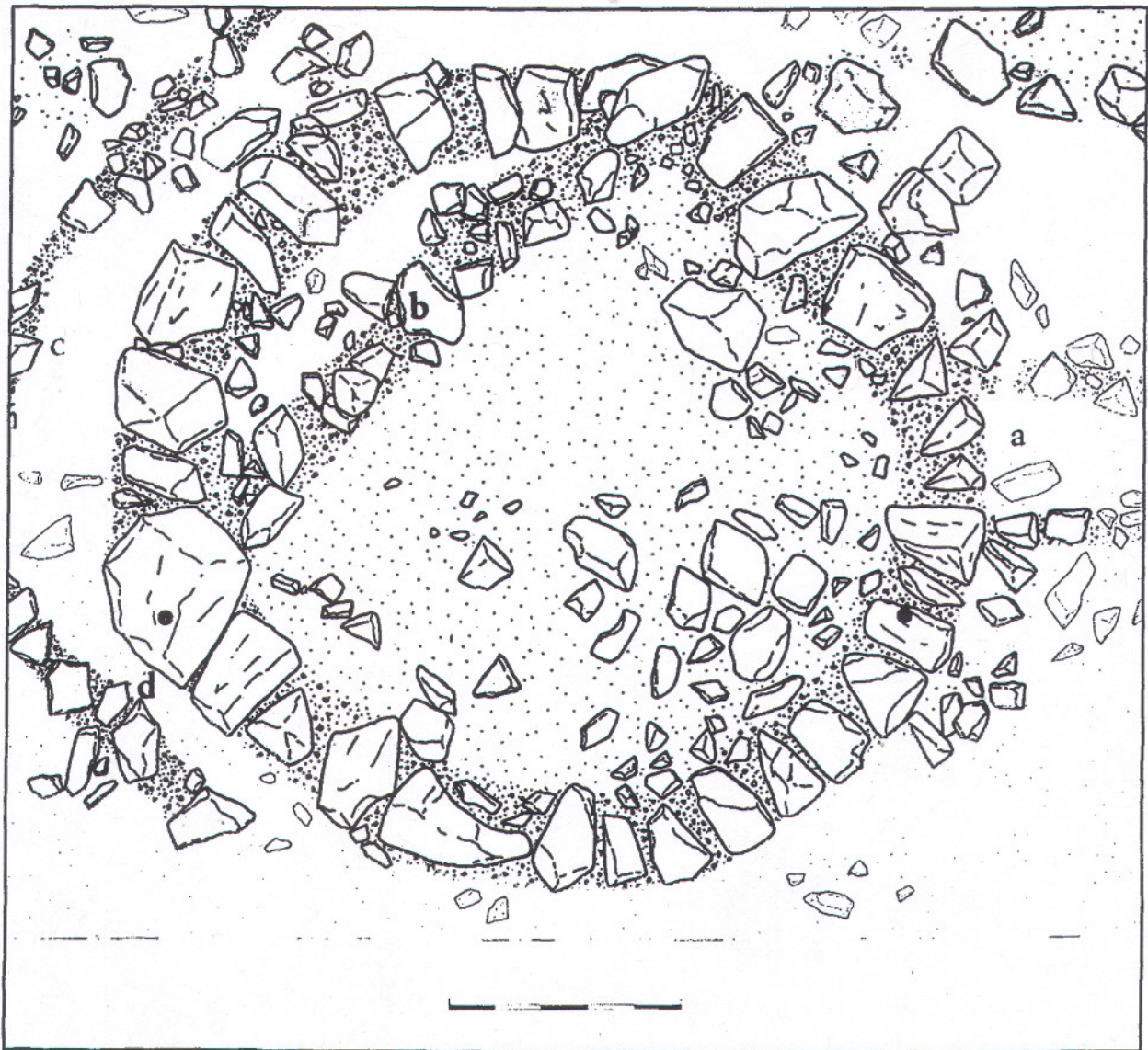


Figure 10. Structure 2. a) Eastward projecting walls. b) Internal NE-SW dividing wall. c) Arc-shaped surrounding walls. d) Location of offerings e-é (solid dots). Location of cut of South stratigraphic profile (Figure 11). See key, Figure 18. Scale is 1 meter.

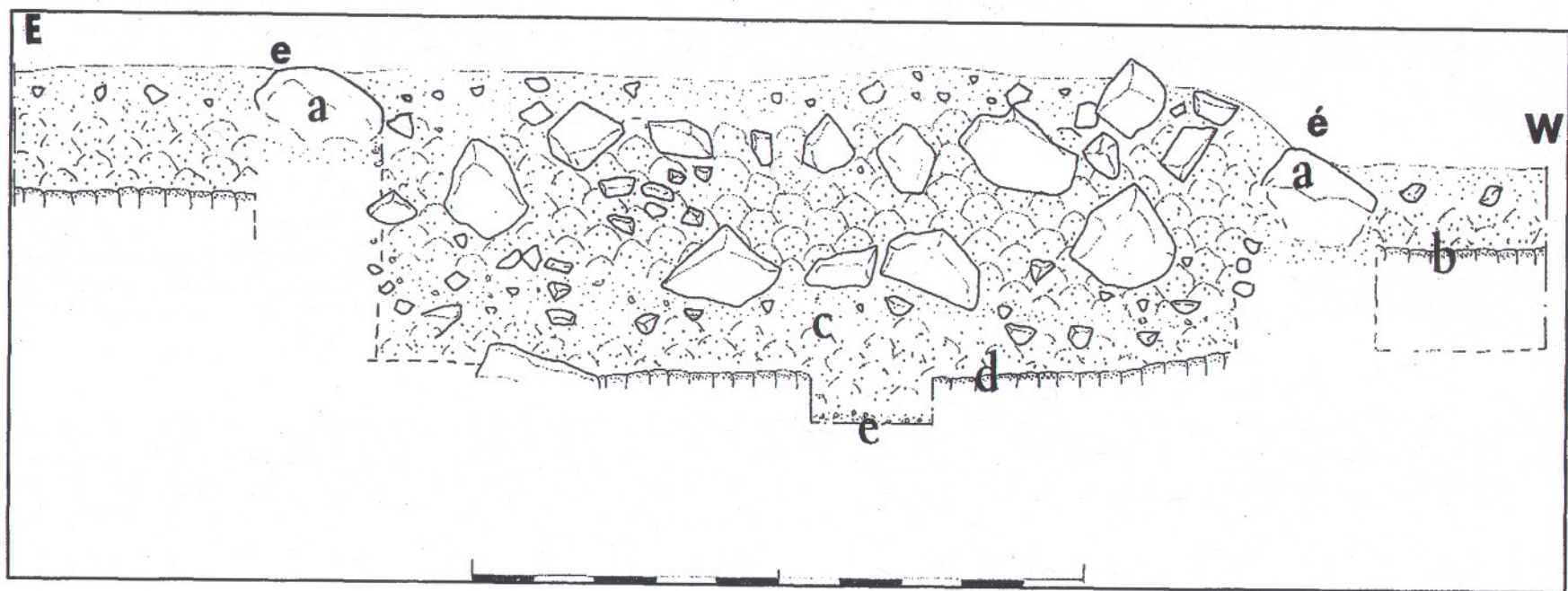


Figure 11. Structure 2, South stratigraphic profile. a) Wall footings of Structure 2. b) Floor A. c) Fill over Floor B. d) Floor B. e) Floor C. See key, Figure 18. Scale is 2 meters.

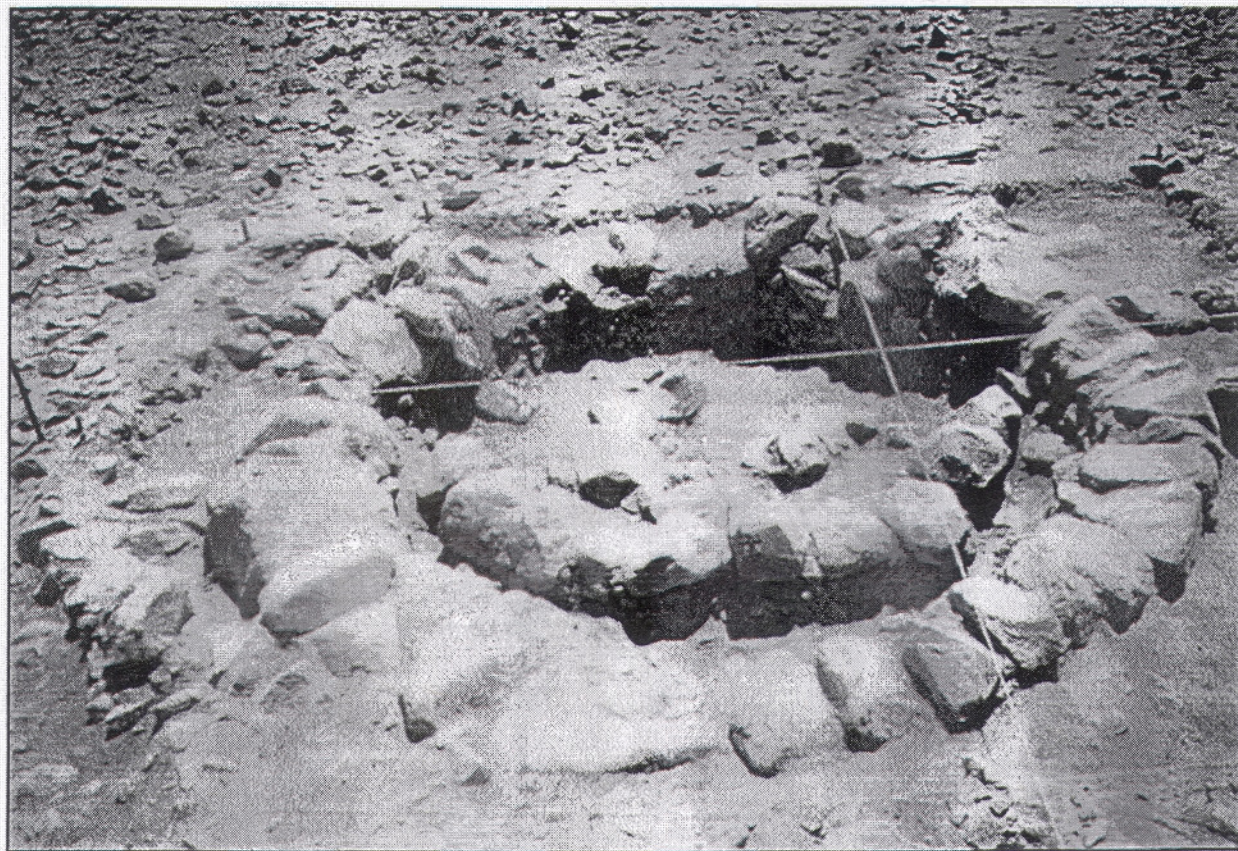


Figure 12. Photo of Structure 2 showing the exterior features as well as the U-shaped inner wall feature. Central grid squares are 2 meters.



Figure 13. Photo showing the relation of Structures 1 and 2 (in background) and floor outside of the Sunken Circular Plaza. Scale stick is excavation is 20 cm.

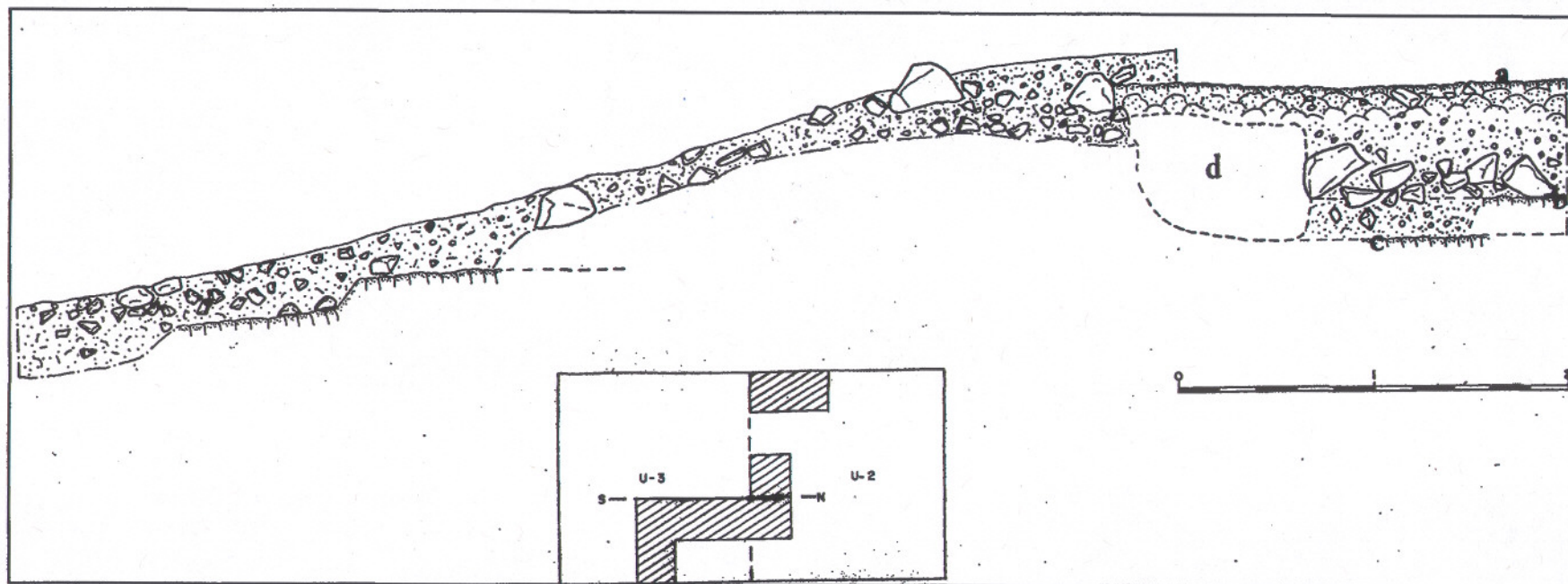


Figure 14. Unit 2-3 Trench, west stratigraphic profile: a) Floor 2, Structure 3. b) Floor B. c) Floor C. d) Burial Pit. See key, Figure 18. Inset is excavation unit at c on Figure 2 but at an earlier stage of excavation. The line between the north and south indicators shows where the profile was taken. The left portion of the profile represents the sunken circular plaza. The dotted lines here represent a presumed extension of the terrace.



Figure 15. Unit 2-3, Photo of the burial found under the sunken plaza's perimeter wall. See Figure 16. Scale stick is 20 cm.

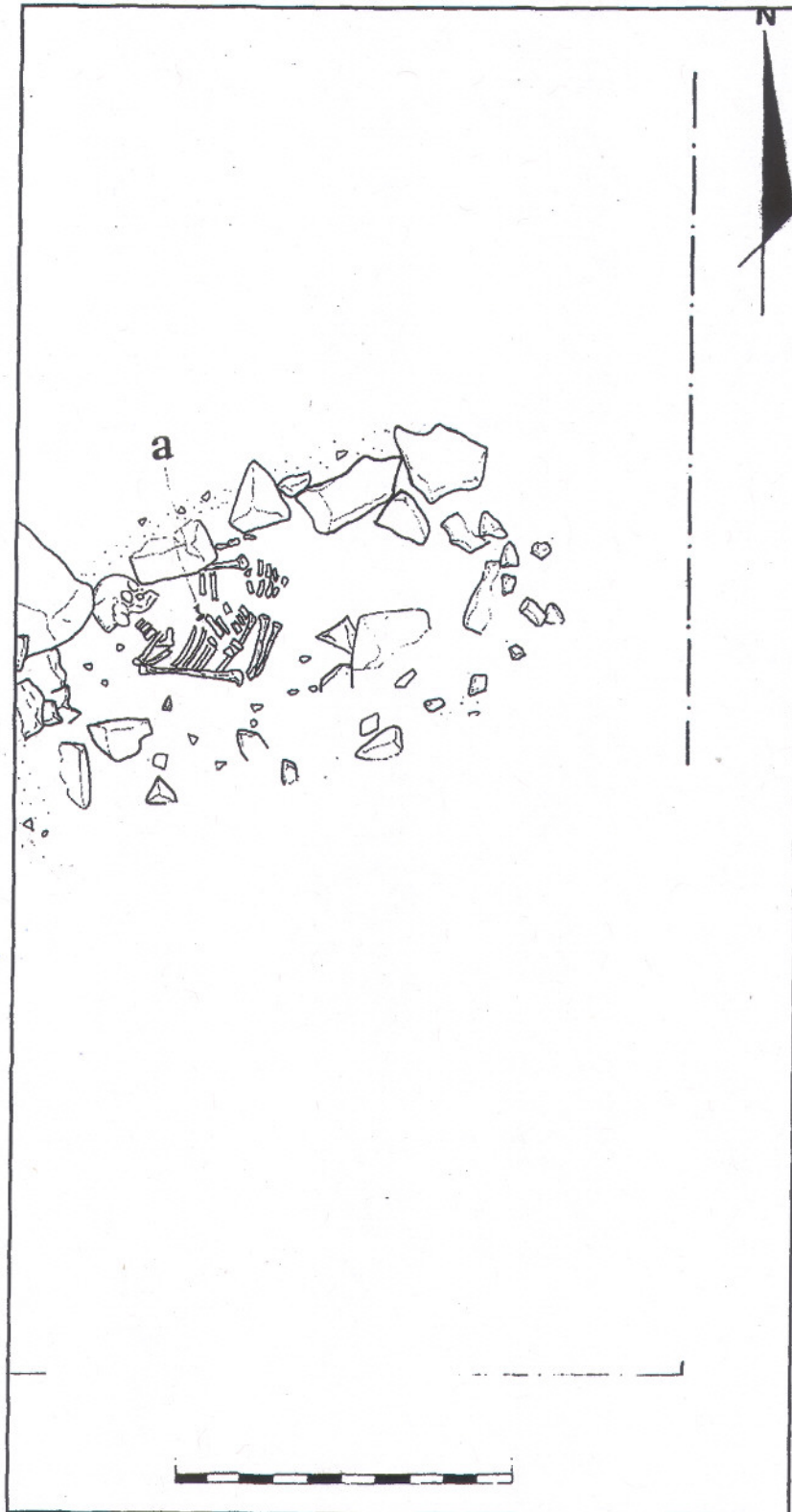


Figure 16. Unit 2-3, Burial found under the sunken plaza's perimetric wall: a) Location of offerings of agates. See Figure 15. Scale is 1 meter.



Figure 17. Photo showing relation of Structures 1 (foreground) and 2 (background). Scale stick is 20 cm.



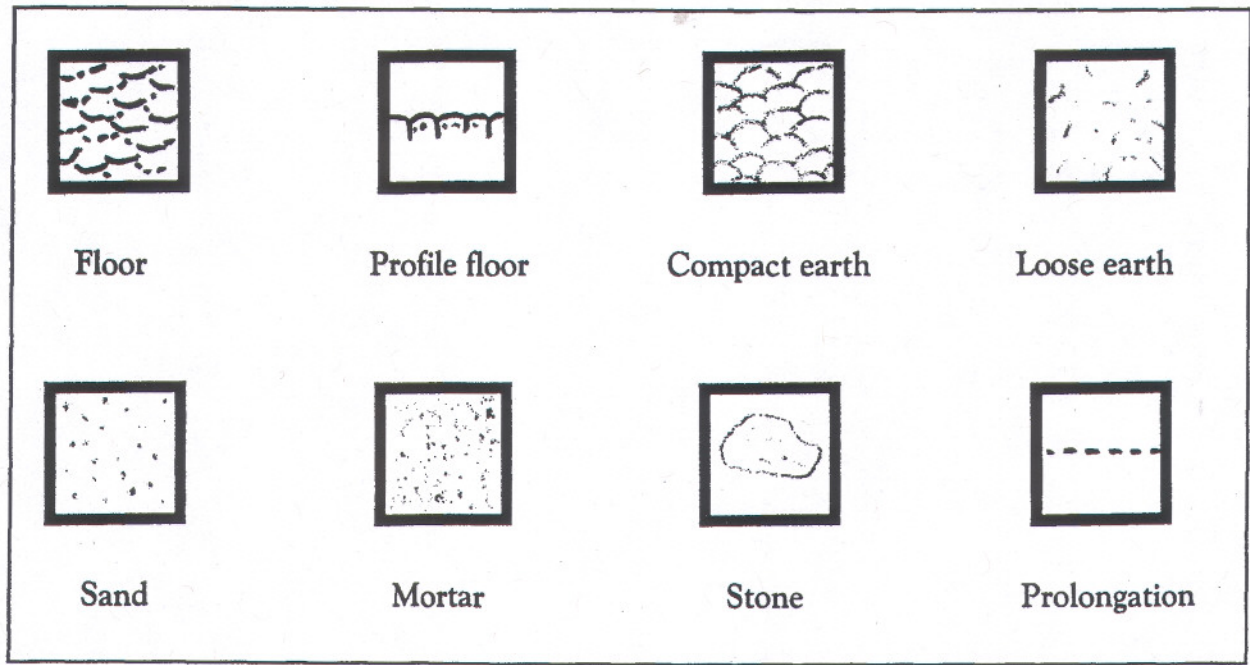


Figure 18. Key to conventions used in figures.