



Ushnus of the Inca provincial region: An analysis of two ceremonial platforms from Inca sites in Catamarca (Argentina)

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ABSTRACT

The Inca polity deployed a variety of strategies in the establishment of imperial relations with the local communities of the southern provinces. These strategies included the translation of symbols materialized in architectural structures. In this sense, the ceremonial platforms denominated *ushnus* were spaces with particular significance and high hierarchy.

In this paper, we analyze and compare two different platforms located in two sites from the Argentine Northwest, Province of Catamarca. The first archaeological site, El Shincal de Quimivil, has been considered an Inca provincial capital and the second, Hualfin Inca, an important administrative centre.

The results show interesting differences between them, such as architectural forms and the archaeological record. These differences reflect not only the way in which the State operated in different territories and the nature of the relationship with local groups, but also the nuances of the historical process involving the Inca establishment in this region of the Argentinean Northwest.

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1. Introduction

Today it is known that the Inca Empire was developed as the largest and maybe the most complex political system in South America before the Spanish arrival. It was an expansive state that involved an ample territory of pre-Hispanic America, from Ecuador to Chile and Argentina along the Andean range, stretching over 4000 km.

From the heart of the Peruvian mountains, and starting in the XIV century, a Quechua-speaking society spread first in the continuum valleys to dominate an extent territory. These groups, associated with a cultural material, the Killke pottery, showed a more important gradual settlement growth (Cuzco) standing out a hierarchical settlement pattern with secondary administrative centres over its orbit (Covey, 2003).

A subject that has been discussed at length, and on which it is difficult to reach consensus, is the nature of the politics of imperial expansion, a controversy that was initiated by the first chroniclers.¹

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¹ Garcilazo de la Vega (1609) and Sarmiento de Gamboa (1572) had different ideas about the relationship of the Inka State with the subordinate communities. For Garcilazo de la Vega, the Tawantinsuyu consisted of a paternalist State that extended its power with the consent of the conquered villages, a situation that might not seem completely logical to us but that deserves to be analyzed in the context of the social relationships typical of Andean societies. On the other hand, Sarmiento de Gamboa proposed a quick and violent conquest of the territory as the most important expansion strategy. These two positions were starting points of different "schools" that influenced the subsequent research (Pease, 1989).

Today it seems clear that they did employ coercive strategies (basically, militarized conquest), but also that many of the imperial relations were a successful product of negotiations with local populations. Even the expansion of the first periods did not have the dynamics of the subsequent moments once the Tawantinsuyu had been established. At the beginning, the negotiations and alliances played vital roles and military conquest were less frequent (Rostworowski, 1999). It is known that military conquest would have been a mechanism to legitimize the power of the sovereign in the consolidated government in the control of ample territories (Ziolkowski, 1996). According to most contemporary researchers the strategies of conquest, settlement and effective colonization were very different depending on the regions, ethnic groups over the State and the temporal moment. Alconini (2007) pointed to a model with two poles within a spectrum where control must be understood from the equation infrastructural investment – benefit obtention (mainly in human and natural resources). This is how the territorial control model with high investment and consequently mayor greater benefits developed on the one hand, and in the other hand the hegemonic control model, where the pattern is reversed. Somewhere in the middle we can find the cases presented by Alconini in Oroconta (Bolivia), with disembedded centres where it is not possible to obtain high benefits for the State from a high investment in Inca architecture.

Most researchers today emphasize the role of local elites in the development of imperial policies. These local ethnic chiefs would have a mediatory role in the articulation between the State and local population (Rostworowski, 1999), working as a "hinge" between these two social spaces as part of State strategies

(Dillehay, 2007; Páez and Giovannetti, 2008). On one hand, these actors were responsible for the demands and needs of the native population through the administration of communal property and control of the labour force with redistributive purposes. Moreover, they officiated as religious leaders in ceremonial practices (Pease, 1991). On the other hand, they met the demands of the Inca power centres. For the Inca administration, local chiefs would have been responsible for the management of political and economic projects in the State at a lower level. The maintenance of this figure may have been carried out through the economic contribution of the State to local chiefdoms and the granting of gifts, which would have secured loyalty to the Inca (D'Altroy, 1987).

In this interpretative framework, administrative centres would have been the primary scenarios for the maintenance of these relations through the development of ritual events and festive congregations, as well as the traditional roles assigned to them related to the support of the army and bureaucracies (Morris, 1982). Ritual banquets with concomitant consumption of meals and above all, *chicha*, would have been part of the ideological control that the Incas deployed throughout *Tawantinsuyu*. They could establish alliances for the war, marriage arrangements, the organization of payments, tribute in work, among several other structural elements of State functioning (Dillehay, 2003).

The staging launched in these events would have intended the creation of ideological ways inherent to the Inca policy where one of the most effective ideological mechanisms for legitimacy and reaffirmation of the power of the State would be involved. From this perspective, we must understand that the ritual political management comprises a framework of values and meanings that are not always implicit and conscious and can operate at deeper levels of the subconscious. So it is impossible to disaggregate the ideational universe in which the practices of the practices themselves are framed in the interpretation of social behaviour. According to Sillar (1994), in order to explain social reproduction, it is necessary to consider two interdependent aspects. One of them is the material practice whereby people constantly re-created the material world. The other is the ideological background that motivates the wish to participate in them.

Following the same theoretical framework, scenarios marked by an ideological communication can be analyzed under the key concepts of performance and theatricality which in recent years have been suggestively applied to the archaeological field (Inomata and Coben, 2006). As the authors point out, in pre-modern societies theatrical acts had a great social impact by creating communication channels where collective identities were maintained, reinforced or transformed. In this sense, these spaces have a central role in shaping the ideological substrate and the realization of the power relationships, rather than the simple reflection of the prearranged static condition of the group.

Then, one of the key elements of the phenomena is the spatial scenarios where they develop these interactions. A great amount of research has been carried out on the role of the central spaces in the configuration of network of relationships, where through the communication of different cosmological planes – axis mundi in the sense of Eliade (1981) – a social reality is structured where the hegemonic discourses are firmly inserted. Prior to the modern disciplinary States, according to Foucault (1976), the power was manifested usually by ceremonies, monuments, donations, multiple links of vassalage and sovereignty and/or genealogies strongly rooted in the ancestors. Thus, the power is “what you see, what show, which manifests itself, and, paradoxically, is the principle of its force in the movement by which her displays” (Foucault, 1976: 192). Based on this theoretical framework, the present paper focused on the study of one of the central political-ritual manifestations of the Inca world scenarios, the *ushnus* in provincial territories of the *Tawantinsuyu*. In this paper, we present the study of

these structures in two Inca sites, traditionally considered the administrative centres of the province of Catamarca (Argentina) (Fig. 1). One of them, El Shincal Quimivil, is the head of one of the provinces of the Kollasuyu. The other one, Hualfín Inka, located 60 km away from El Shincal, presents Inca architecture and smaller dimensions. The comparative analysis of the two would allow us to explore this constructive variability as a way to approach the fundamental elements of the political-ritual dynamic. This will help us to clarify the differences in the relationship of the state with local societies, the geopolitical organization of space, and its meaning for the development and maintenance of social relationships.

2. Inca's expansion in the Argentinean Northwest

The conquest of Northwestern Argentina (NOA) by the Incas has been the subject of conflicting interpretations, regarding chronological limits and the causes that produced the installation of the State in these southernmost areas. There are researchers that sustain that the arrival of Topa Inca troops to the region took place around 1470 AD based on the writings of chroniclers such as Cabello Valboa (Bárcena, 2007). Others, however, based on a good set of radiocarbon dates taken from Inca sites, argue that the annexation of the NOA to the *Tawantinsuyu* must have occurred sometime before, closely to the 1400s BC (Raffino and Stehberg, 1997; Williams and D'altroy, 1998).

Regarding the region of Kollasuyu, including Bolivia as we know it today, the north of Chile and Northwest Argentina, archaeological research in the 1960s and including the 1980s, was mainly focused on explaining agricultural development, but above all – and this is supported through some chronicles from the 16th and 17th centuries, the interests in the mining resources of the Argentine Northwest and Cuyo (González, 1980; Raffino, 1982). The detailed ethno-historic studies of John Murra helped create the idea of a strong disciplined governmental organization based on economical factors, seeking to consolidate the bases for expansion through a strong, but at the same time redistributive and reciprocal, tax system (Murra, 1999; Rostworowski, 1999).

Since the 1990s, new perspectives of Andean archaeology and anthropology have produced multiple interpretations about social aspects of the ontological and ideological symbolism of the Andes. Factors related to the construction of power or ritual violence was found in the Inca expansion into Northwestern Argentina (Acuto, 1999; Nielsen and Walkers, 1999). Also, discussions about the transmission or imposition of symbols, often associated with the legitimation of positions of power (e.g. through iconography and morphology in ceramics) (Bray, 2003, 2004; Giovannetti and Páez, 2009; González Carvajal, 1998; Páez and Giovannetti, 2008) have become an important focus of Andean archaeology.

In recent years, the political interests of the Inca Empire have only recently ceased to be the centre of attention, making way for the inclusion of the social organization, historical processes and interests of local societies in the interpretation of the imperial dynamic, thus allowing a more comprehensive vision of society as a whole (Williams, 1999, 2002–2005; D'Altroy, 2003; González and Tarragó, 2004, 2005; Tarragó and González, 2005). This perspective visualized social sectors that were not represented in the traditional studies, incorporating a complex social scheme, where negotiations, conflict and cooperation defined a variety of situations within the expansionary policy of the State. From this perspective, the *Tawantinsuyu* operated as a unifying State system within which many elements of local identities remained untouched or with minor alterations (Williams, 2002–2005). The political, economical, and religious spheres were not conceived as mutually independent elements within the organization of the State. In direct relation with this last point, the ceremonial platforms or *ushnus*,

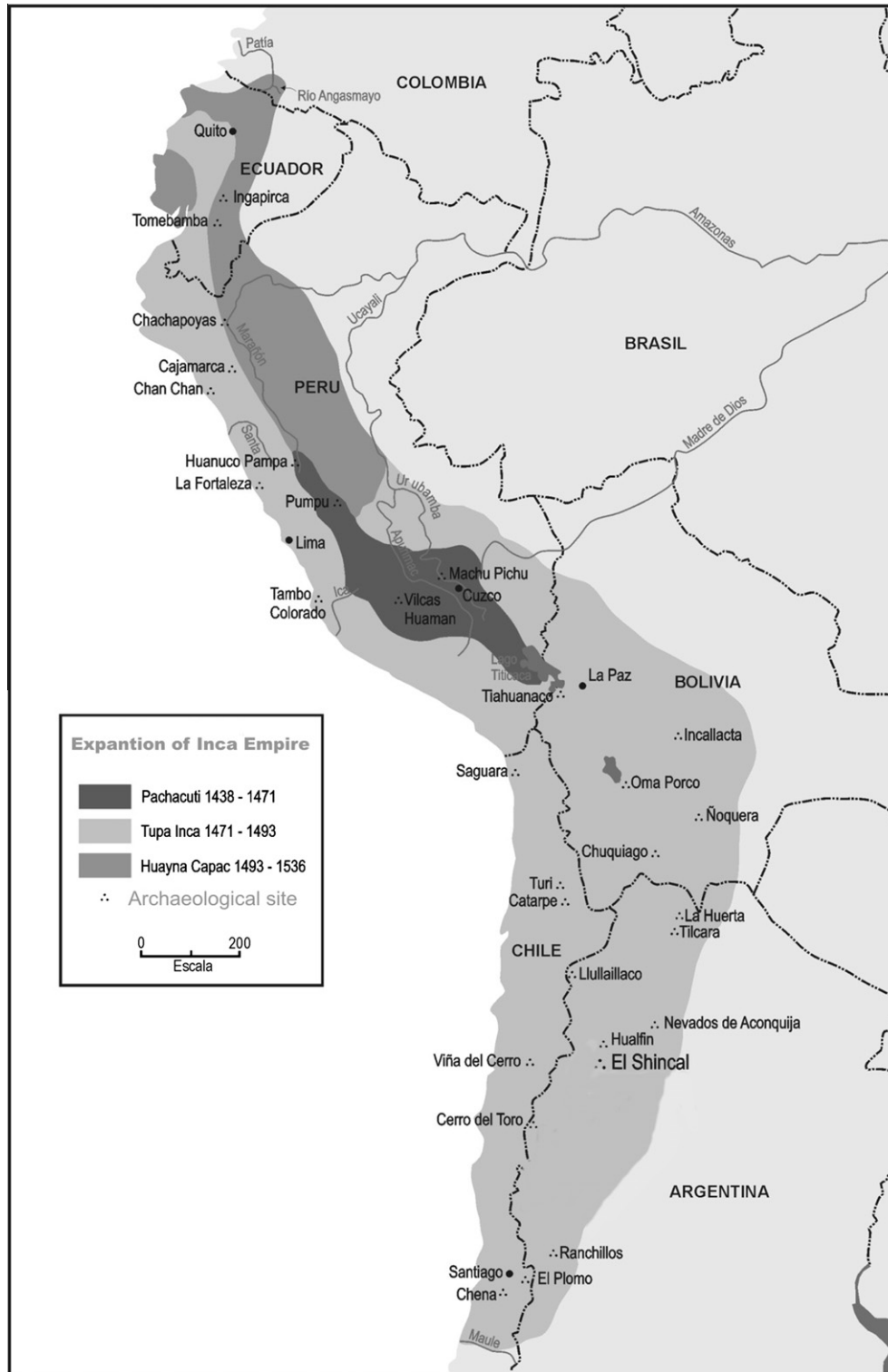


Fig. 1. Location of archaeological sites in Catamarca, Hualfín Inka and El Shincal de Quimivil.

were hierarchical spaces that carried out particular meanings and relevant symbolism.

3. The ushnu: significance in the Inca world

As stated by Zuidema (1980) and Hyslop (1990), to understand the meaning of the *ushnu* concept is not simple because of its

multidimensional nature, which is inherent to the complexity of Inca cosmology. These diverse meanings would include functions such as government site, an area for libation of *chicha* and production of ceremonial offerings included in the ritual calendar, a place for the conduction of astronomical observations, and a central base for urban planning. Although Cuzco present a different situation (Zuidema, 2010), in the provinces constitute a scenographic performance, contributing to creation and recreation of

the relationships with great implications for social, political and religious life of the groups in the Tawantinsuyu (Monteverde Sotil, 2008).

Exist too many clues that take us to think about the space of the ushnu with a high level of diversity and complexity in spatial and temporal spheres. A relatively recent work for the Chinchaysuyu Inca zone indicates that the policies employed by the state implied certain ideas already contained in the *ushnu* concept as understood by local societies (Pino Matos, 2005). At first, it had been a place destined for (generally liquid) offerings, but later on it had become more important as the state ideology took hold. By then, it was associated with functions of astronomic and calendar observations becoming one of the fundamental elements of the planning of province capitals or *wamani*. However, there also seem to be differences between the nuclear zones of the empire and the outer territories (Zuidema, 2010). According to Hyslop (1990), the *ushnu* concept, strongly associated to the platforms in the plazas, is clearly evident in non-Inca territories, even more so than in Cusco. This could be related to the efforts of the nobility to symbolically unify themselves with the commons, unification that was associated to this space in the plaza.

The *ushnu* complex did not only include rock platforms. Several elements of the landscape participated in direct connection with the platform. For example, canals were dug to run through the plazas and into the *ushnu* in many Inca sites. Meddens (1997) suggests that the real and metaphoric relationship between mountains, water, and the artificial platforms was essential to Inca cosmology. The mountain played a crucial role regarding agricultural prosperity, and was perceived to be the connection of two different worlds, the world above (*Hanan Pacha*) and the world below (*Uku Pacha*). The connection between both is seen through a symbolic nexus represented in the mountains that lie between the oceans, the earth, and the sky (Reinhard, 1985). Similarly, the *ushnu* represents an area where the rulers could act as intermediaries of the different levels of Andean reality (the world above, this world, and the world below), assuring fertility and water circulation (Meddens, 1997: 8). The latter played a fundamental, sacred role and was an important part of the Ushnu concept. Brown (1998) explains, for example, that water springs were considered sacred as nexus between the different worlds and were generally guarded by protective spirits. The most notable case to illustrate the sacred value of these water sources is observed at the site of Pumpu, where the water was channeled from a spring along 4 km, even though the settlement is located adjacent to the Upumayo River, one of the major tributaries of Mantaro. Meddens is very clear when establishing a correlation between the mountains and the water in the realm of the unearthly. According to this author, the *ushnu*, as truncated pyramid functioned as an alter ego of the hills. Meddens also states that, in many cases, the *ushnu* was lined by water canals that connected to water springs emerging from the mountain rock, thus establishing an extraordinary parallelism between both spaces. Pino Matos (2004), when compiling the multiple sacred functions and meanings of the *ushnu* in the *Tawantinsuyu*, emphasizes one that could explain the others: a place made of stone where the water is filtered. The libations of *chicha*, for example, would be introduced within this space as “axis mundi” of the Incás universe.

We stated above the *ushnu* concept as a seat of the Inca. This concept is not limited to the strictly material, but it is linked to a powerful metaphor. The *ushnu* seems to be constituted as an alter ego of the Incas themselves. The Incas represent the connection between the past or the ancestors (world below), the present reflected in their position of rulers of the ordinary world (*kay pacha*), and the world above in their role as children of the Sun (Meddens, 1997). According to this author, “the *ushnu* was a part of the rulers’ control over water, particularly for agricultural pur-

poses. Water comes from the sky and the cosmos, via the mountain and the ruler, to the earth and ancestors, ensuring continued fertility and order in the cosmos and state. The role and function of the *ushnu* is therefore borne out of the agricultural and hydraulic roots of Andean culture” (Meddens, 1997: 12).

From a strictly architectonic point of view, in general terms, these structures are identified as elevated platforms that can be accessed through steps. They generally have orthogonal plans and several levels; the top levels smaller than the ones below (similar to a truncated pyramid). They are built through the erection of dry-stone walls, fitted with a staircase that leads to the superior platform, where at times access-ways and *tianas*, or seats, can be observed. They are found mostly in direct connection to the main square, usually inside the square’s limits. This could be connected, as well, with the idea of central axis (axis mundi) within the design of the Incas’ settlement.

However, great diversity is observed in the functional, morphological, and spatial dimensions. Their size varies and it is very difficult to find two platforms of similar magnitude. We can find extreme examples in Huánuco Pampa, measuring 48 m by 32 m or in *Q’ enqo Huasi*, measuring 6.4 m by 5.8 m (Oberti, 1997). Heights also vary proportionately. Similarly, the number of access steps varies, from just a few to more than 50. Also the numbers of overlapping platforms that compose it are different.

Monteverde Sotil (2008) has been identified two different types of *ushnu*, such as in the coastal regions and in the mountains regions. The last are similar to those cited before. For the coastal *ushnu* based on the sites of Inkahuasi en Cañete, Tambo Colorado en Ica, San Juan de Pariachi, La Puruchuca y Huaycan de Pariachi en Lima, the author observed significant differences. The walls could be more than a combination of stone and adobe, this last predominating. The stairs are replaced for ramps of this last material. There are cases in which the platforms cannot be accessed through stairs or ramps. The external walls could present paintings decoration, common in Peruvian coastal architecture. These are generally single, small or medium platforms, built as independent solid blocks, in the centre of a plaza. Sometimes, they are attached to architectonic structures that precede the Inca occupation, in which case the *ushnu* is situated on the side of the plaza.

As Hyslop pointed out in terms of Inca settlement planning, second only in importance to an *ushnú* centrality is its alignment with an important ceremonial area. That link – expressed architecturally by doorways, stairs, roads, or drains – ties the prominent *ushnu* platform to the site’s general layout. The platform *ushnu*, while crucial for some of the most public ceremonies, was poorly equipped for more private rites. Platform *ushnu* were thus often aligned with enclosed quarters where such exclusive rituals took place (Hyslop, 1990).

4. Hualfin Inka site: a brief description

The archaeological site of Hualfin Inka is found towards the North of the Hualfin Valley sector, province of Catamarca (Argentina), at 27°13’46”S and 66°48’55”W. It is located on the left bank of the Hualfin River, on a quaternary alluvial terrace at 1880 m a.s.l. It is flanked by the Northwestern *Sierras Pampeanas* that reach a maximum altitude of 3500 m (Lynch et al., 2006).

We owe the first records of the site to the expedition lead by entomologist Carlos Bruch to carry out investigations in the locality of Hualfin. Based on his observations, an approximate but non-scale sketch of the site was published in 1904. In the 1980s, Raffino et al. (1982) made a new plan of the settlement and a preliminary architectonic representation of it. Their work showed that the spatial organization of the site was consistent with the Incás urban pattern.

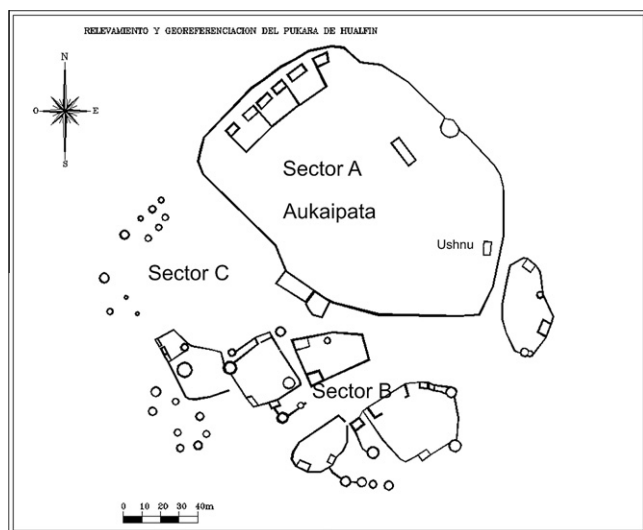


Fig. 2. Map of Hualfin Inka site.

Recent research conducted by one of the authors of this work describes particular architectonic characteristics that combine an organization of space according to state standards with local construction techniques. The walls were built with sub-angular to sub-quadrangular rocks arranged in double rows, filled with gravel, and while cut stones have not been found, the rocks used for the construction were arranged in such a way that the flattest sides face the exterior of the enclosures (Lynch et al., 2007).

To systematize the study of the site, it was divided in three sectors, A, B, and C, whose altitudes vary between 15 to 20 m from the lowest to the highest area (Raffino et al., 1982: 481).

Sector A is located at 1884 m a.s.l. towards the NE of the site. It takes up approximately 15,000 m² with an irregular polygon shape and delimited by a peripheral wall. This structure corresponds to a great plaza within walls or *hawkaipata*, with structures in the interior that include a *kallanka*, and *ushnu* (Fig. 2).

Sector B is set at 1895 m a.s.l. It contains a set of three *kanchas* or C.P.R. (Compound Perimeter Rectangle), arranged at an approximately straight line, that contain rectangular and circular enclosures. These structures have irregular floor plans that do not seem to relate to topographic conditioning. In the group of intermediate constructions four rectangular enclosures are found, one of which is larger and is possibly a *kallanka*.

Sector C is located towards the SW end of the plaza and comprises four *kanchas*, of a more regular perimeter than the ones in Sector B, and three groups of aggregated circular enclosures that were interpreted as *collcas*.

The size, spatial disposition, and constructive features of the site structures fits with a scenario of detailed planning. Some sectors are mostly targeted to state functions, others were purely residential (perhaps intended for the local elite), and some can be related especially related to the storage of products. Consequently, in previous investigations Hualfin Inka has been interpreted as an administrative centre of the southern regions of the Tawantinsuyu (Raffino et al., 1982). However, new research (Lynch, 2010) has revealed that even though the site responds to the Inca urban plan, there are also certain features that point towards the continuity of local practices. It is very likely that local hierarchies played a fundamental role in the changing socio-political context of the recent pre-Hispanic decades in Northwestern Argentina, perhaps as a point of contact between two spheres of different hierarchy, one that is associated with the continuity of pre-Inca practices and another that emerges in consonance with the interests of the Imperial sector.



Fig. 3. A panoramic view of the plaza showing: (1) perimeter wall of the Inca plaza; (2) the Ushnu; (3) the plaza of Hualfin Inka.

5. The description of the first ushnu

In the SE sector of the plaza (Sector A) there is a medium-sized rectangular structure, measuring approximately 3.50 m by 7.50 m (Fig. 3). This artificial platform has been identified as an ushnu because of its characteristics and location. The platform is raised approximately 1 m from its surroundings, and it is separated from the perimeter wall by approximately 4 m. The double dry-stone walls are filled with mud and gravel, with a fluctuating diameter that averages between 0.50 and 0.60 m. This enclosure can be accessed using a staircase (at least three steps) fitted in the wall that faces the plaza (Fig. 4). This and the other structures that constitute the site share characteristics such as constructive techniques and the materials used.

Throughout various excavation campaigns inside the ushnu platform, a variety of archaeological materials have been recorded, including ceramics, bone, stone, and archaeobotanical remains. These materials were found in 13 construction levels (1.20 m depth) and the material was distributed regularly in the grid. Although scarce, remains of shellfish were also identified, such as small nacre (mother of pearl) beads.

An important fact is the relative abundance of material recovered of the ushnu, in comparison to the rest of the excavated structures in the archaeological site (Fig. 5). In the latter, few archaeological materials were recorded, considering the total area of the excavation (Lynch et al., 2006, 2007; Lynch, 2010). The main features of the different kinds of remains recovered in the ushnu are detailed below.

Ceramic material: The total amount of materials recuperated in an area of 26.25 m² consists of 71 fragments ($n = 71$). Local ceramic styles associated to the Late Period or of Regional Developments (900–1470 AD) are much better represented than the ones associated with the Inca period. In this regard, we have observed a higher percentage of sherds bearing features of the local style known as Belen and Santa Maria, while the Inca style (1470–1532 AD) is only present in 7% of the sample obtained. Nevertheless, coarse ceramic fragments without decoration are the most numerous (Lynch and Páez, 2009). Morphologically, the sample recovered shows a predominance of closed containers (Shepard, 1968), *aribalos* (long-necked jars with low-set handles and a pointed tip for insertion into holes in the ground) an Inca form prevailing in the Inca style, while among the local styles urns prevail. Also, coarse materials were identified as corresponding to pots and other closed forms whose precise morphology remains unclear. The open forms in-



Fig. 4. (a) A view of the ushnu of Hualfin Inka; (b) another perspective of the ushnu; (c) the construction's stile of the ushnús walls.

clude mainly *pucos*, a kind of bowl, following the local styles of Belen and Santa Maria, which represent 13% of the sample, percentage to which both styles contribute in similar proportions.

Both the external and internal surfaces of the fragments present traces of soot and burning (52% of the sample); nevertheless, we have not observed any association of these characteristics with particular ceramic forms. Of this percentage, 12.65% ($N=9$) is burnt on the fractured edges, revealing that the fragment was exposed to fire after its breakage, although this does not exclude the possibility of a previous exposure to heat. This last subset does not show any tendency, neither from the decorative nor the formal point of view, since it comprises ceramic fragments of open and closed shapes, stylistically associated to Santa Maria, Belen, and Inca, as well as coarse types (Lynch and Páez, 2009; Páez and Lynch, 2012).

Bone material: Traces of animal bone were found associated to the ceramic group described. Some presented clear evidence of exposure to fire (charred and/or burnt) and others were very fragmented or chipped, possibly due to a post-depositional process (root activity, trampling, water runoff). The osteological analysis showed that the taxa represented in the sample are within the medium mammalian group, with predominance of the Camelidae and Cervidae families (Lynch et al., 2007). In some cases the identification of taxa was difficult due to the fragmentation mentioned. Also, cut marks were found on bones belonging to body parts with high meat content.

Botanical remains: The botanical record from the site includes many different sized charcoals, including remains of corn (*Zea mays*). An interesting point arises from these analyses. Upon carrying out the specific identification of these remains we obtained a few grains belonging to floury varieties and popping-corn² (Oliszewski, 2008), 10 and 3 units respectively, within a total of 520 cm³ of sediment. The recovery of these carbonized remains was possible thanks to sifting with very fine mesh sizes. The high incidence of charred and fractured cob remains is striking. The high incidence of fracture among the corn cob sample is probably due to post-depositional processes, considering the high fragility of these

materials. The evidence of cobs is very high if compared to the grains recovered of the same species. Within the cultivated plants group we must point out the finding of a bean grain (*Phaseolus vulgaris*). With low incidence, wild vegetables such as *chañar* (*Geoffroca decorticans*) and carob (*Prosopis* sp.) were also identified. Nevertheless, the most abundant botanical remains were charred logs. This shows a remarkable presence of fire-pits within this architectonic structure.

Lithic material: The excavation of the site also produced lithic fragments corresponding to flakes of different sizes, cores, and mostly debitage. Formatted instruments were not found in the excavation, although a few chalcedony projectile points and cores of basalt and silica were recovered at the surface level. The different raw materials represented in the lithic assemblage include basalt, quartz, quartzite, silica of different colouration, and sandstone. Among the carved artifacts, those made of basalt indicate the exploitation of secondary raw material deposits, given the evidence of rolling and the presence of cortex.

6. The Shincal of Quimivil

Few Inca sites located in Northwestern Argentina present the characteristics of this settlement located at the centre of the province of Catamarca, at only 1 km from the Quimivil River. It stands out from other sites in the region from the architectural point of view, taking in consideration its size and the particular manifestation of symbolic ritual elements. This is consistent with some interpretations that identify the site as a *wamani* or provincial capital, central nodes that were established in different regions of the *Tawantinsuyu* (Farrington, 1999; Raffino, 2004).

The site is located at the extreme NW of an alluvial cone formed by the action of the permanent river Quimivil and the Río Hondo, which has an intermittent regime. The natural landscape is characterized by the presence of a variety of trees and shrubs with predominance of *Prosopis* sp., genre that includes the carob tree. The Inca site takes up 21 ha, including major public buildings; however, at the ruins' immediate surroundings, material remains that must have been articulated within the site's dynamic have also been located.

Several buildings that representative of government politics of the provinces stand out, from an architectural point of view. On the immediate periphery of the great central plaza or *hawkaipata* (175 m × 175 m), four rectangular buildings are arranged similarly to those classified as *kallanka*. A fifth similar building is positioned

² The difference between popping-corns and floury corn depends on the proportion of hard and soft endosperm in the interior of the grain. Corn with a greater proportion of hard endosperm is generally utilized for preparing popcorn. However, corn varieties that have softer endosperm are grinded and used to prepare flour, foods, and drinks with fragmented grains.

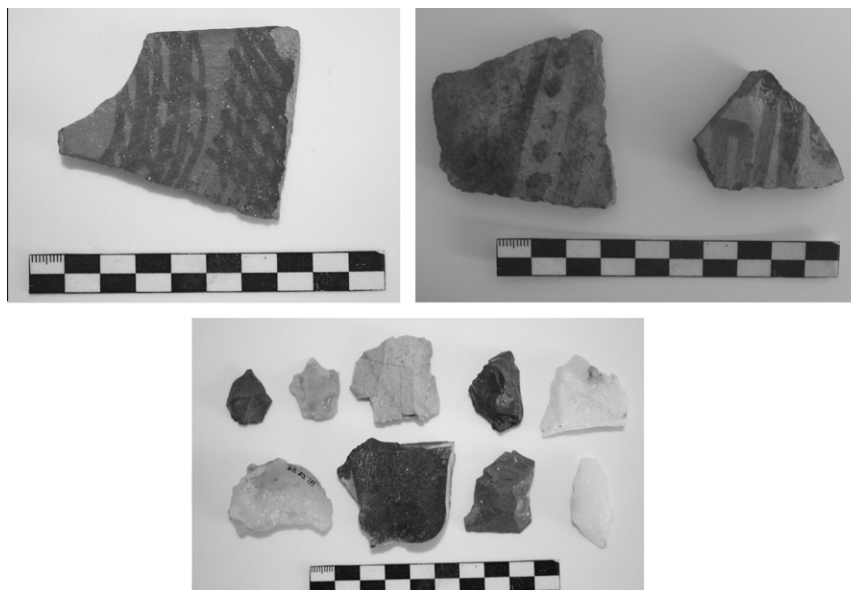


Fig. 5. Archaeological material from Hualfín Inka.

to one side but within the plaza's limits, at its South end. It can be accessed by four doors or openings that face the interior of the *hawkai-pata*. Several CPE (compound perimeter enclosures) are dispersed in the area at different distances from the centre of the site. All these buildings were constructed with cut stones. This means that the classical construction technique used for the late Inca sites of Northwestern Argentina, dry-stone walls and un-worked river boulders from the river not worked by man – was not utilized at this site. The well-known mortar, a mix of mud and rubble, was used as cement. For the outer faces of the walls flat sides were generally chosen.

East and West of the plaza and less than 100 m away, two small hills rise 30 m high. Both peaks were artificially flattened by removing large quantities of earth and rock. The most remarkable features are the stairs with hundreds of steps to reach the top. The western hill presents perimetral complex walls, and there is also a small agricultural area at its foot that is worth noting given its unusual constructive characteristics (Giovannetti, 2009). Seven platforms with very solid containment walls represent an effort to reflect some aspects of the agricultural practice, but due to their small dimensions it is likely that they were linked to ritual practices; they must have contributed little to the actual production of crops. A small canal that comes from a spring from a distance of 2 km crosses the platforms. This same canal then heads to the central plaza grazing the *kallanka* and projecting towards the *ushnu*. The west terraced hill is topped by a large rock with notable artificial marks. Also, on another side of the hill, a large rock is set with four artificial cavities in the manner of mortars. According to research, these were connected more to the ritual world than to routine milling (Giovannetti, 2009). Both hills, the east and west, had an important role within the rituals and multiple evidences indicate that they were considered sacred spaces.

The sectors that have been identified as residential structures present a complex panorama. Some are compound enclosures, with three or four rooms and a central patio, and others comprise more than a dozen rooms arranged in a row. However, the sector named "house of the *kuraka*" is the most noteworthy and merits a detailed description. It is situated SW of the plaza, hidden behind a low hill. It comprises several structures that display typical features of Incan architecture such as niches on the walls and

benches. This area in particular has been interpreted as an Inca elite residence (González, 1966; Raffino, 2004).

Excavations in different sectors of the site have given information on hierarchies and uses of different areas. The *Kallanka 1* (the one located outside of the plaza) recorded a high percentage of ceramic fragments, some of them from distant regions like the Bolivian plateau (Raffino, 2004). Also, apart from the undeniable Inca occupation an event that was dated to the late sixteenth century could be registered, well after the fall of the Inca Empire. We will later show that in the *ushnu* this phenomenon is accentuated. On the other hand, excavations in other sectors, like the denominated F5, provided access to the "everyday life" within the domestic spaces. Here, the majority of the ceramic is associated with coarse styles, not decorated, and with signals of exposure to fire. However, in other sectors where broken ceramics were discarded, the majority corresponds with *aribalos* decorated with Inca or Syncretic style (a combination of local and Incan elements) (Giovannetti, 2009). These are the vessels that Bray (2004) has identified as specific to the transport of *chicha* and are very common in regions distant from Cusco due to the importance of state-sponsored celebrations. In this sense, the new interpretations that are arising for El Shincal point to its relevance as a central node that gathered a significant amount of people for state celebrations and rituals (Giovannetti, 2009). In the alluvial cone of Quimivil 20 sets of multiple grinders were found at the surface level, and they have been associated with the Inca period of the region. The excavation of a few of these multiple grinders has shown more than just the grinding of vegetable products. It has been possible to recognize fire-pits near to the mortar where ceramic and botanical remains demonstrate the production of *chicha* at a large scale (Giovannetti, 2009; Giovannetti et al., 2010). The predominant vegetable species was the carob. The carob pod was long used by the local community for the preparation of different foods, but above all for an alcoholic drink known as *aloja*. Thus, the great amount of food and drink produced in dispersed sectors could be linked to the main buildings of the site, that according to their architectural dimensions seem to have housed many people. The size of the central plaza underscores the relevance of public practices and festivals, as demonstrated in studies of other Inca plazas (Moore, 1996). In

this context it makes sense to highlight the great *ushnu*, in the centre of the central plaza, which will be described below.

7. The description of the second *ushnu*

From approximately 20 structures identified like *ushnus* in the region of the ancient *Kollasuyu*, the platform of El Shincal of Quimivil stands out because of its size, architectural style, and constitutive symbolic elements. It is shaped as an almost perfect square, each side measuring 16 m, and 2 m above the surrounding terrain. It is only interrupted on the west side by a staircase composed of 9 steps that raise a total of 1 m, ending in a trapezoidal opening that leads into the interior of the platform (Fig. 6). The walls are double (between 0.80 and 1 m thick), filled with mud for consolidation purposes, and are slightly tilted towards the interior. Because of this, they give to whole structure the appearance of a truncated pyramid. All the rocks with which were used to build the walls were cut to achieve straight and flat sides. As in the case of Huánuco Pampa, a *Tiana* or interior bench (Raffino, 2004) could also be found, very near to the north wall of the structure and set in east-west direction. The *tiana* is over 3 m long, 0.80 m thick and 0.80 m high.

The position of the platform is almost central in relation to the *Hawcaipata*, the main plaza, slightly skewed in relation to the cardinal points; therefore the walls are almost parallel to them. We should mention that although some of the site's structures were rebuilt in recent years, the *ushnu* was found to be one of the best preserved since it was only lightly manipulated. During the years 1995 and 2004, the *ushnu* of The Shincal was archaeologically excavated (Raffino et al., 1997; Igareta et al., 2008). The results of these works have been very fruitful, since they have offered a body

of information that transcends the temporary limits of the Inca occupation in Northwest Argentina (the end of which is dated in 1534 in accordance with the arrival of Diego de Almagro to these lands), extending throughout the Native-Hispanic period. Two distinctive archaeological events were identified, relative to the effective Inca occupation and a subsequent irruption in the times of the Calchaqui wars in the 17th century.

Inca Event: at 0.60 m deep, a series of mounds – piles of small rocks – appear suddenly at least in two places within the excavated area. Below this, a consolidated sedimentary ground is found. The material record at this level includes abundant ceramic fragments, mainly of provincial Inca styles (ornithomorphic and aribaloid plates, $N = 134$); Diaguíta Chileno style from northern Chile ($N = 2$); Belén, a characteristic style of the local diaguítas groups ($N = 82$), and *Famabalasto black/red* (a style associated to distant regions of the province of Santiago del Estero). The majority of fragments correspond to ordinary ceramic pieces without decoration. Several of these could be associated to the post Inca event, which makes it very difficult to establish proportions of styles in each period. Even so, an estimate of at least 1110 ceramic fragments could be attributed to this event, and the percentage of provincial Inca ceramic is estimated at over 12%. The bone remains may be one of the most striking components of this archaeological record. Fragments of human vertebrae and molars have been recovered. Some researchers have related these remains to the ritual of *Qhapaq Hucha*, fundamental within the state ceremonial complex to connect the provinces with Cusco (Farrington, 1999). Furthermore, remains of non-native animal species or of little daily use have been recognized. These include *Platalea ajaja*, known as the Pink Spatula, a bird from the high lagoons of the plateau (Igarreta et al., 2008), gray fox (*Lycalopex gymnocercus*); different kinds of frogs, serpents, and birds, such as *Buteo* sp. Also, armadillo remains (*Chaetophractus vellerosus* among others) that are very common in other parts of the site, along with *Camelidae* and rodents, are also represented here. It is worth noting the presence of fish scales (Raffino, 2004). In addition to the skeletal remains, there are also projectile points made of bone. These are of Chaco tradition, a region localized to the East with typical flat topography, but in the Inca period they are also common in the Argentine Northwest (Fig. 7).

The shell remains constitute irrefutable proof of the wide geographical range of circulation of objects with high symbolic value in the times of the Inca. In fact, remains of bivalves and gastropods (commonly known as *mullu*) from the Pacific Ocean were recorded, along with other objects showing the importance of ritual offerings in this space. Within this broad range of material diversity, several metal objects such as *tumis* (ceremonial knives) and bronze plates have also been found. Finally, it is worth mentioning the large quantity of archaeobotanical remains recovered using the flotation technique (Capparelli et al., 2004). These include a significant amount of complete corn cobs along with corn grains, and fragments of wild fruits such as carob and chañar were found (*Geoffroea decoticans*). Remains of cultivated beans (*Phaseolus* sp.) and pumpkin (*Cucurbita* sp.) were also recovered.

Native-Hispanic event: An unusual interpretive phenomenon was presented at the moment of evaluating the artificial strata through which the *ushnu* was excavated. Levels 7–9 provided the greatest amount of elements assignable to the Inca period and this time frame is supported by radiocarbon dating (Raffino et al., 1997). But well below, from level 18 down, materials with European roots were recorded. Another radiocarbon date accounts also confirms this time frame. It seems that the Inca event was performed in the 17th century and certain ritual practices were conducted above the Incas' previous ones. Several fire-pits with clear indications of offerings and burning rituals were concentrated in holes that were then covered neatly with rocks extracted from

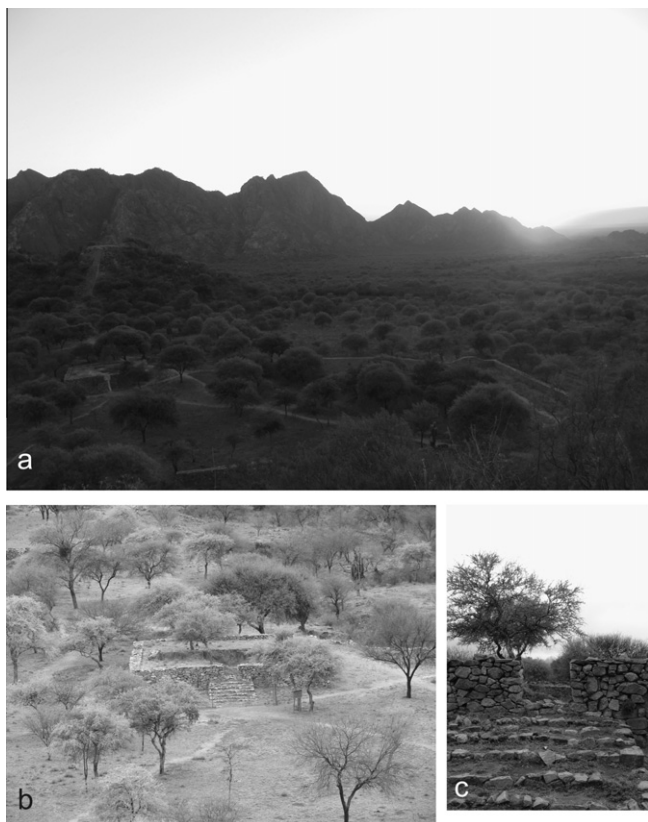


Fig. 6. Ushnu at El Shincal of Quimivil: (a) Panoramic view from West Terraced Hill taken on 21st December 2011. Left and below of picture lies the ushnu (within the large square), above lies the East Terraced Hill. (b) Ushnu. Front of west face. (c) Detail of ushnu west face where is observed the access stair and the entrance.



Fig. 7. Archaeological material from El Shincal de Quimivil. Above: Projectile point and diaguita chileno pottery. Below: Burnt cobs of maize.

the walls of the platform (Capparelli et al., 2007). It is very interesting to note that various elements of European origin were introduced in the native rituals, demonstrating certain symbolic appropriation (Giovannetti and Lema, 2005). Wheat seeds (*Triticum* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.), and peach (*Prunus* sp.), along with American cottonseeds (*Gossypium* sp.) manipulated in Hispanic times (Lema and Capparelli, 2007) also appear. They seem to have been charred in an anaerobic ambient, which points to rapid burial after initial combustion. This has been compared to similar practices observed within the Andean rituals of offerings to the *pachamama* (Capparelli et al., 2007). Among the most notorious Hispanic objects, archaeological excavation has recovered iron, nails, needles, and a musical instrument known as the *birimbao*. Also, remains of earthenware from the 17th century and vitrified ceramic were found, as well as glass beads and fragments of other glass objects (Raffino, 2004). Bones of animals brought by the Spanish are present in great quantity, such as cow (*Bos taurus*), goat (*Capra hircus*), and sheep (*Ovis aries*). Several of these bones appear in the middle of the mound of rocks that used to be part of the walls (Igareta et al., 2008). Many have cut marks as evidence of the process of meat extraction. This last phenomenon has been interpreted as an event with sacred and political meaning within the wars by the diaguitas before the Spanish colonization during the 17th century (Giovannetti and Lema, 2005). Apparently the *ushnu*, once a platform of political and ritual legitimacy in the Inca world, was reoccupied with similar purposes appealing to the Inca past to legitimize practices after the fall of the empire. As a corollary of this section we wish to highlight the strong role of the *ushnu* as a receiver of local and exotic offerings, both at Inca times and

after. No other structure of the Shincal site presented such a wide range of objects as did the *ushnu*.

8. Discussions

Having described the most significant features of the architectonic structures identified as *Ushnus* in the two sites studied, it is now time to conduct a comparative analysis between them in order to shed light on the nature of the elements related to the universe of Inca practices. To achieve this goal it is necessary to identify not only the similarities, but also the differences that they present, in order to better understand the spectrum of variability within these structures, since ethnohistorical literature has underscored their central role within the ritual and political spheres of the Inca cosmology. A summary of their characteristics at the Shincal and Hualfín Inca site are presented in Table 1.

Given its self-evident importance we will start by describing their architectonic particularities. We have observed the differences of the spatial disposition in the plaza and the relative dimensions in each case. The Shincal's *ushnu* is in a central position – always in relation to the main plaza – while the Hualfín Inca's structure is located laterally, towards the SE. Furthermore, in Hualfín Inca the *ushnu* is separated from the perimeter wall by 4 m. Their sizes vary significantly: the first has a surface of 256 m² and the second, 26.25 m².

Other elements that identify the *ushnus* and embody an important symbolic dimension are the steps of the access staircases. In general, the *ushnus* of higher hierarchy present more steps, for this reason El Shincal's *ushnu* is elevated 2 m, with a staircase comprising 9 steps. Meanwhile, the *ushnu* of Hualfín Inca is raised only 1 m from the ground level of the plaza and it is entered by climbing a set of 3 steps.

In respect to the type of construction, in El Shincal the use of stonework (stones that are cut to obtain flat sides) to lift the walls is total and complete while at Hualfín Inca this technique has not been recorded. Instead, the perimeter wall was built using large sub-angular boulders of fluvial origin. In both cases, the construction techniques employed are consistent with that of the other structures. In other words, from a constructive point of view, the *ushnu* does not stand out from the rest of the site.

After this presentation of the most remarkable differences, we will now focus on the similarities in terms of religious symbolism that transcend the merely architectural. In order to do this we must resort to illustrative examples found throughout the *Tawantinsuyu*. Upon investigating the characteristics and the variability found among ceremonial platforms, there is a wide range that goes beyond the purely constructive character. Certain natural elements of the landscape, such as large rock outcrops were structured around the *ushnu* concept. In Northwestern Argentina, the case of the *Ampajango* II site, in the *Yocavil* Valley, is paradigmatic of this phenomenon, where one of these outcrops was surrounded by stone walls and connected to the plaza through an access ramp (González and Tarragó, 2004; Tarragó and González, 2005). In distant but neuralgic regions of the Inca Empire, Hyslop (1990) mentioned the several rock outcrops that stand out from the surrounding landscape were considered *ushnus*. They are located in the centre of the plazas. The *Isla del Sol* in Lake Titicaca or *Inkal-lacta* in Bolivia is one of the best examples.

Even though in the Argentinean Northwest the elevated quadrangular structures are the most frequent – variable in size and shape – we were able to mention at least two cases where it is this way. In the cases described here, there is no use of natural elements from the landscape like it was seen in *Ampajango* II or other sites studied by Hyslop (1990) in the Nevados de Aconquija. The built or artificial character of the *ushnus* is a common feature of

Table 1
Comparative table of both *ushnus* (architecture, remains).

Characteristics/site	El Shincal	Hualfin Inka
Size	16 m × 16 m	7.5 m × 3.5 m
Location on the plaza	Central	Lateral
Architectonic characteristics	Cut-stone. Stairs (9 steps). Tiana, stone floor	Un-worked stone. Stairs (3 steps)
Archaeological material	Ceramic	Belén, Santa María, Inca provincial, ordinary ceramic
	Bone remains	Camelidae, cervidae, artiodactilos and medium-sized mammals (not determined)
	Metal	No
	Lithic	Flakes, cut-stone debitage, projectile points, cores (basalt, silica, quartz, sandstone, and quartzite)
	Archaeobotanical remains	Maize (grains and cobs), kidney bean, carob tree
	Others	Shell beads

the two sites. This means that the erection of the two *ushnus* responded to structural planning and it represented deliberate modification of the landscape, in collusion with the rest of the structures that make both sites.

In regards to the excavations, the abundance of material recuperated in both contexts is remarkable. However, the variety and diversity found is different in each case. As we described in the previous paragraphs regarding Hualfin Inka, local styles of ceramics (Belén, Santa María) were more abundant than state ceramics. A significant amount of charred bone and botanical material was also recovered. Even so, the carpological remains comprise only a few grains of corn and bean. The rest of the sample corresponds to firewood from the fire-pits. There are a few remaining elements associated to carved lythics and just three beads from a shell necklace. This description shows that the material record from the Hualfin Inka site is relatively concise and not very diverse, compared to the material remains recorded at the *ushnu* of The Shincal. As to the latter, the abundance of archaeological remains is remarkable, both in terms of the types of material identified and the diversity within each group. In relation to the ceramic material, the large amount of *aribalos* fragments and plates belonging to the Inca provincial style must be noted ($N: 134$); there are also a few fragments of Cusco Polychrome ceramics, possibly transported from the Central Andes in this case, as well as Diaguita Chileno ceramics from northern Chile. In smaller numbers, the same local style ceramics as in Hualfin Inka were found in El Shincal, adding other styles like the *Black and Red Famabalasto*. As to the faunistic record, it also presents high variability. Bone remains from exotic species along with others of local origin were found in the excavation. The remains of fruit products from the carob tree (*Prosopis* sp.), *chañar* (*Geoffroea decorticans*), and *mistol* (*Sisypus mistol*) appeared with an unusual abundance, that as a whole surpass the number of remains from cultivated vegetables such as corn, bean, and pumpkin (Capparelli et al., 2004). The lithic record does not seem to correspond to the practice of carving instruments. It comprises mainly fragments and eye-catching crystals of quartz. The same can be said of the shell remains of species brought from the Pacific Ocean (*mullu*). Also, a large amount of necklace beads have been found.

Another important difference worth noting is the temporal continuity of the use of the *ushnu* of The Shincal, not observed in the Hualfin Inka. The abundance of material of Hispanic origin, product of the burying of offerings in times posterior to the fall of the Empire (Capparelli et al., 2007), provides evidence of this continuity.

However, how could we interpret these contexts and from these dissimilar corpus of evidence? Regarding the Shincal site, its role as a recurrent place of offerings has already been suggested by other authors (Raffino, 2004). Many of the offerings consisted of exotic goods brought from distant places, while for the Hualfin Inka it is difficult to distinguish possible offerings, since the context is far

less clear in this sense. The excavated contexts in Hualfin Inka seem more consistent with domestic or daily-type practices. Furthermore, comparing different excavated sectors within the site, it has not been possible to identify significant differences.

It is necessary, therefore, to view the broader context of the space where both *ushnus* are located and to verify the importance of each of the sites in the Inca scheme for Northwestern Argentina. Also, it is necessary to contemplate the temporal factor, because it is likely that it plays a role in the explanation of these differences and similarities between the sites and its *ushnus*.

9. Conclusion

The evidence presented in this article allows us to address some ideas about the nature of the Inca dynamic in distant provincial regions of the Central Andes.

The *ushnu* of Hualfin Inka cannot be isolated from the general interpretation of the site. Lynch (2010) proposes that the settlement had been planned have a more prominent role than it actually had later on when El Shincal site became contemporary. In this case, the construction of the site could not have pursued the idea of geographic isolation proposed by other investigators for the most important Inca sites (Acuto, 1999), since numerous settlements assigned to late local populations have a close spatial relationship with the site (Pozo Verde and Lomas del Maray).

Full functionality of Hualfin Inka during the first decades of the Inca occupation in Northwestern Argentina is supported by radiocarbon dates obtained from the *ushnu* and other main structures of the site. In addition, the scarcity and characteristics of the material records are consistent with low intensity occupation in which state practices would have had little relevance. This notably contrasts with a highly-structured site plan in strict accordance with the *Tawantinsuyu's* rules, as the main square and the abundance of little round structures, probably *qollqas*. It seems likely that, with time, the site became less important, encompassing the opposite trajectory of growth undergone by the Shincal. The Shincal seems to have had a transcendental importance in the interior of the *Kollasuyu*. Large central plazas planned architectonic structures designed to host many people, both amidst numerous symbolic-ritual elements, constitute strong evidence of feasting very similar to that of the Central Andes (Moore, 1996; Morris, 1985; Kaulike, 2005). The most recent research has produced solid empirical support for the conduction of festivities and congregational events sponsored by the state (Giovannetti, 2009). Over 20 sets of multiple mortars, containing almost 360 individual mortars in total, may have allowed the simultaneous work of 150–170 people in the grinding of products (Giovannetti, 2009). The amount of *aribaloides* and discarded plates in specific sectors like the SD shows that these objects were used mainly for the serving of *chicha* and the con-

sumption of solid food (Giovannetti et al., 2011). The size of public spaces and the reading of this type of evidence lead us to conclude that communal celebrations must have been very important in The Shincal. This evidence fits well with the strategies employed by the state to legitimize its political supremacy through practices of clear ideological manifestation, as Alconini (2007) pointed out, the hegemonic control inside Incás domination in the provinces. The celebrations must have had a major role in these strategic senses (Berenguer, 2010; Uribe, 2004). In this context, the *ushnu* of The Shincal might have played a fundamental role in promoting the concentration of rituals and offerings closely related to the Inca cosmology and a strong link with the Cusco (Farrington, 1999).

From this perspective, the relation between performance, act, rituals and scenery has a profound implication, not only in the development of the first state societies but in the totality itself of the social relations. From here we can delineate a relationship with Incás world through ethnohistoric studies (Ziolkowski, 1996), which account for scenographic ritual practices for the whole society which must have gone beyond Cuzco.

We would like to reflect upon the architectural differences of both types of *ushnus* compared above; introduce the different intentions of their builders with different practices at the moment of constructing them. Although the material records found in both structures are very different from each other, this materiality allows us to identify the actions they were intended to perform in each case. Despite the fact that the Hualfín Inka's *ushnu* is small and just a few metres above the ground, and on one side of the main square, it is easy to recognize from other structures as the *kallanka*, all these structures over the level of the square. If we want to emphasize all the study about the *ushnus* in the *Tawantinsuyu*, taking into consideration its multiple functions, it is important to see the rituals of Pachamama and the communication about the political legitimacy of the subjects who entered these spaces and worked as a masters of ceremonies (Raffino, 1999), in this case Hualfín Inka showed relatively small stage facilities. The ritual staging and execution of political-religious communication practices only allowed few people inside with a short visual range of their movements. It seems unlikely that practices performed in this structure may have been performed for a numerous public. On the other hand, the opposite happens with the *ushnu* of El Shincal. It presents a highly visible structure from different points of the site (every angle of the square, surrounding buildings, lateral terraced hills and even more distant hills as the Divisadero), standing out in a central position inside the square. Its performance level is also evidenced for its height over the plain level, internal platform altitude, intramural total area, stair size and inside tiana.

Moreover, the excavations of the *ushnu* of El Shincal, the votive practices that had taken place, ritual fires, and the presence of the subjects – with high social hierarchy – taking part of the ritual scene or even seated on the tiana looking around, were observation and listening acts for all those present in the site. We must discount that these performances were played for this purpose and at the same time they established communication to sacred world. This communication contained a material base that we can interpret through architecture, the strategic position of the *ushnu* and the gifts found in the excavations.

Many requirements of the Inca politics were transmitted not only through the word (maybe as sceneries in the form of local assemblies as Sternfeld (2007) pointed out and in El Shincal this could have been done in the *kallanka* for example), but through corporal movements, objects of votive value and prayers to supernatural deities, all of this was carried out in the *ushnu*.

We must highlight the great differences found between the constructions of the Inca geopolitical landscape in different areas. These differences could respond to two factors: time and the geographical and social scope of Inca control over the two areas. The

evidence suggests that the *ushnu* and therefore the Hualfín Inka site were dominant immediately before the rise of El Shincal, the first losing importance as the second became more powerful. Also, the extension of Inca control over the territory and the local populations was different, and therefore different as regards both infrastructure and political practices. Considering that that the preponderant local groups in both regions were ethnically related, perhaps we should draw attention to the proposal of the search for isolated spaces for the most important control centres of the *Tawantinsuyu*. Perhaps the Hualfín Inka site lost part of its importance due to the proximity of other native group settlements. On the other hand, the available evidence suggests that El Shincal could have been geographically isolated, since no local settlements have been found in the alluvial cone of the Quimivil River. Probably the changing politics of Inca domination in the southern provinces favoured the isolation of the most strategic political centres. Thus, the analysis of these central structures within the political-ritual dynamic of the state accounts for, not only the differences in the way in which the State had operated in the different territories and the nature of the relationship with local populations, but also the nuances of the historical process involved in the Inca establishment in this region of the Argentine Northwest.

Finally, one of most interesting phenomena in reference to the temporal dynamics in the *ushnu* of the El Shincal is that its leadership had not been exhausted in the Inca period. As we pointed out, the great number of objects found in the excavation shows the continuity of utilization of the *ushnu*, by native groups that resisted the Spanish domination, even several decades after the *Tawantinsuyu* collapse. This marks an interpretative direction that conducts us to the social memory of the groups that lived in XVII in the region of the Argentinean Northwest. These groups would inherit a political structure by the Inca State that would have required sacral spaces that played an important role in the legitimation of social legitimation before invasive threats. This dimension of social memory would appropriate the Inca past identified with the unification of the partialities and the incorporation of local traditions in the state structure (Páez et al., 2011). This was, probably, one of the latest strategies used by non-dominated groups in the colonial period to face the hostile context imposed by Spanish conquerors.

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