SETTLEMENT ORGANIZATION AND ARCHITECTURE IN LATE INTERMEDIATE PERIOD CHACHAPOYAS, NORTHEASTERN PERU

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Chachapoya societies that lived on the forested eastern slopes of the Andes in northern Peru between A.D. 1000 and 1450 remain largely absent from broader narratives of the Andean Late Intermediate period (LIP). This paper argues that environmentally deterministic frameworks and lingering Inka biases have led scholars to problematically isolate Chachapoyans from their highland contemporaries. This work reviews three aspects of Chachapoya built environments—settlement patterning, internal organization, and architectural style—in order to provide a baseline for comparison with other regions. Chachapoyas shared a pattern of hilltop settlement locations with nearly all of the highlands, which suggests that its inhabitants faced the same shared factors that prompted changes in settlement organization on a massive scale in this region during the LIP. At the same time, comparison of Chachapoya built environments with others of the northern, central, and southern highlands highlights the considerable diversity within and between regions. This demonstrates that Chachapoyas is best interpreted as simply one of many regions that were characterized by distinctive spatialities and architectural forms. These reflected locally specific cultural practices and social institutions. Including Chachapoyas and other regions of the Eastern Andes in accounts of the LIP underscores the diversity and dynamism that characterized this period of significant change in Andean history.

Las sociedades chachapoyas que habitaron en las vertientes orientales de los Andes del norte de Perú entre 1000—1450 d.C. siguen ausentes de la historiografía general del Período Intermedio Tardío. Este trabajo plantea la idea de que el determinismo ambiental y la influencia de la ideología inka han resultado en el aislamiento analítico de los chachapoya de sus contemporáneos en la sierra, a pesar de que las investigaciones regionales siguen brindando más evidencias de las interconexiones que existieron entre la sierra y las vertientes orientales de los Andes. En este artículo se examinan tres aspectos de los paisajes construidos de Chachapoyas—los patrones de asentamiento, la organización interna y el estilo arquitectónico—para producir una base de comparación con otras regiones. Chachapoyas compartió con casi toda la sierra un patrón de asentamiento en lugares elevados, el cual sugiere que los habitantes de esta región enfrentaron los mismos factores que provocaron cambios a gran escala en los asentamientos durante esta época. A la misma vez, la comparación de los paisajes construidos de Chachapoyas con otros de la sierra norte, central y sur, muestra la gran diversidad entre y dentro de cada región. Ésta implica que Chachapoyas presenta sólo un ejemplo de muchas sociedades regionales que se caracterizaron por espacialidades y formas arquitectónicas distintas, las cuales evidencian prácticas culturales e instituciones sociales locales. De este modo, la integración de Chachapoyas en las historias arqueológicas ayuda a poner énfasis en la diversidad y el dinamismo que caracterizaron esta época de cambios importantes en el pasado andino.

The Chachapoyas region, located east of Cajamarca in northern Peru, remains a place set apart (Figure 1). Despite being home to some of the most famous archaeological sites in Peru—including Kuelap, Gran Pajatén, and Laguna de los Cóndores—as well the subject of an increasing amount of research in the past 15 years, rarely does this region find its way into archaeological accounts of the social and cultural processes that took place during the Late Intermediate period (LIP) in the highland Andes (e.g., Conlee et al. 2004; Covey 2008; Dulanto 2008).1 This paper addresses some of the reasons why this situation has come about and why it should be of concern to researchers who work elsewhere in the Andes.

I argue that LIP Chachapoyas has been undeservedly “othered” in relationship to contempo-
raneous highland societies, when in fact its inhabitants confronted circumstances similar to those of other Andeans as they created new built environments during this period of change. Furthermore, a comparison of settlement organization and architecture in Chachapoyas and other regions of the northern, central, and southern highlands demonstrates the diversity seen throughout the highlands, rather than revealing some fundamental distinction separating Chachapoyas from all other areas. By comparing Chachapoyas with the rest of the highland Andes, this paper joins existing calls to move beyond generalized narratives of the LIP as a time of conflict, collapse, and hardship in order to examine the vibrant social and material traditions that were developed by local groups (e.g., Bonnier 1997; Kosiba 2011; Zovar 2007).

I begin by discussing existing models of Chachapoya social organization and material culture, examining in particular how scholarship has shaped and been shaped by a perception of this region as qualitatively unlike the rest of the Andes. This is followed by an overview of the space and architecture of Chachapoya settlements. This dataset facilitates comparison with other parts of the Andean highlands, where research on the LIP has often taken the form of survey and studies of spatial organization. This discussion builds in particular on recent research at the settlement site of Monte Viudo, a village that was home to one to
two thousand people between A.D. 1250 and 1450 (Guengerich 2014a). The paper concludes by contextualizing Chachapoya built environments in relationship to other regions of the LIP highlands, with the aim of demonstrating the potential contribution of the Eastern Andes to a more robust understanding of social process in the prehispanic Andean world.

**Chachapoya Societies, A.D. 1000–1500**

Chachapoya material culture extends from the Marañón River on the west to the upper drainages of the Huallaga River on the east, and south from modern Baguas to Pataz and Pías in northern La Libertad (Figure 2; Schjellerup 2005:53–58). Characteristic cultural materials include cliff burials in *chullpas* and in unfired clay sarcophagi (Kauffman 2009; von Hagen 2002a), circular stone buildings with friezes and platform bases (Fabre 2006; Guengerich 2014b), appliquéd brownwares and red-painted whitewares (Reichlen and Reichlen 1950; Ruiz 2009), three-dimensional and bas-relief sculpture in stone and wood (Lerche 1995), and red ochre rock paintings (Koschmieder 2011, 2012; Ruiz 2009). These material forms

![Figure 2. Chachapoyas, with sites mentioned in text. Shading indicates the distribution of Chachapoya material culture.](image-url)
appeared in the region by A.D. 1000 and continued under Inka domination (Church and von Hagen 2008).

The immediate processes leading to the development of Chachapoya culture remain murky. Radiocarbon dates spanning the Early Intermediate period (EIP), the Early Horizon, and the preceramic (e.g., Church 1994, 1996; Guengerich 2014a:95–104; Koschmieder 2012:35–40; Narváez 2013; Schjellerup 2005:347–354) attest that this region had long been a locus of cultural development. The limited extent of most excavations, however, means that our knowledge of earlier populations and their relationship to LIP Chachapoyans remains fragmentary. Some stylistically Wari artifacts have been found (Church and von Hagen 2008; Narváez 2013:117, 131; Ruiz 2009:74–77), but these were likely the result of interaction rather than incorporation into the empire, given the absence of Wari architecture and state-built facilities (Church and von Hagen 2008:911–913; Schjellerup 2005:453).

Like many areas of the Eastern Andes, Chachapoyas spans a great variety of environmental zones. These range from treeless puna (jalka) as high as 4500 m asl to temperate kichwa and warm, forested yungas or temple below 1800 m asl (Schjellerup 2005:33–50). In addition, large expanses of dense cloud forest also cover many areas. Accordingly, late prehispanic Chachapoyans probably practiced a variety of subsistence regimes, often in quite close proximity to each other as in the modern period (Brush 1977). Recent research suggests that communities throughout the region relied on different staple crops (Koschmieder 2015), such as tubers in the high-altitude Atuén drainage (Guengerich 2014a; Schjellerup 2005), maize in the kichwa-predominant Luya area (Koschmieder 2014), and possibly manioc in still lower areas.4 Camelid remains (Guengerich 2014a; Narváez 2013; Schjellerup 2005) and their representations (Koschmieder 2011) are found across Chachapoyas, suggesting that they formed an ideologically and economically important resource across ecological zones.

Sociopolitical Organization

Existing models of Chachapoya political organization derive essentially from Spanish chronicles and ethnohistoric research, particularly by Waldemar Espinoza (1967). According to these models, Chachapoya political landscapes consisted of small, autonomous polities made up of one village or several small villages coupled with a larger principal one (Church and von Hagen 2008; Koschmieder 2015; Schjellerup 2005:449–450). Authors often claim that village groups occasionally formed ephemeral alliances for military ends (e.g., Espinoza 1967:234; Koschmieder 2015:6; Lerche 1995:33–34), but there is no archaeological or documentary evidence to support this assertion.5 Site patterning studies capable of validating these models, for example, have not yet been undertaken. The size of sites did vary considerably, from several dozen to several hundred buildings (Schjellerup 2005:305), but it is not clear how these were organized spatially or whether their size distributions were multimodal. The presence of relatively monumental masonry constructions at a number of sites, including Pirka Pirka (Vega 1982), La Joya (Muscutt 1998:39–41), La Meseta (Muscutt 2013), and Cerro Las Cruces (Bueno and Cornejo 2009) does, however, suggest that some settlements may have been ritually or politically important for multiple communities.

The enormous site of Kuelap, with its 20-m-high platform walls, remains a particular puzzle for understanding regional power structures. On the basis of size, a few scholars have suggested that it stood at the apex of a regional state (Brush 1977:43; Narváez 2013). Others have argued that its importance was grounded in its role as a ritual center, perhaps serving as a pilgrimage center (Narváez 2013) or the seat of a regional shrine (von Hagen 2002b:62). The scale and the labor invested in Kuelap—among the largest stone constructions of precolombian South America—certainly suggest that it was a major center of gravity for regional power dynamics, but it remains difficult to specify the nature of that role until further research addresses this question from the perspective of additional sites.

Historical sources indicate that greater Chachapoyas was made up of multiple subregional groups with ethnic-like characteristics, including the Chillaos, Chilchos, Pacllas, and Chachas (Espinoza 1967; Zevallos 1995). This is increasingly supported archaeologically by evidence of geographical patterning in material culture, including
frieze motifs (Fabre 2006:116–117; Lerche 1995:30–31; Schjellerup 2005:448), cliff burial interments in sarcophagi or *chullpas* (Reichlen and Reichlen 1950; but see critiques by Nystrom et al. [2010]), and the predominance of appliquéd brownwares or red-painted whitewares in ceramic assemblages (Koschmieder 2015). This raises the question of the extent to which the inhabitants of this region acted, or perceived themselves, as a common group. Schjellerup (2002), for example, argues that a sense of pan-regional identity developed only following the incursion of the Inka.

Chachapoyans have been associated with a culture of warfare to a degree that other Andeans have not. They are regularly portrayed as warriors, in contrast to the people of other regions of the Andean highlands, where LIP warfare is explained as a historically specific set of conditions responding to social or natural changes (e.g., Arkush 2008; Hyslop 1976; LeBlanc 1981). As Nystrom and Toyne (2013) argue, however, this view derives principally from Spanish chronicles, which were heavily structured by Inka ideological narratives and reflect their experience of trying to subdue a strongly resistant population. It likely also has gained momentum from a common perception that Chachapoyans were culturally linked to the Amazon, which Western—and Inka—historiography has portrayed for centuries as a land where intertribal warfare flourished in the absence of law and political authority. Jivaroan groups in nearby Ecuador, for example, have often served scholars as a ready parallel for interpreting various aspects of Chachapoya cultural practice (e.g., Bueno and Cornejo 2009; Koschmieder 2014; Taylor 1989).

To be sure, Chachapoyas is characterized by many of the same attributes used to infer the presence of warfare in other regions, namely hilltop settlement patterns and high rates of cranial trauma (Arkush and Tung 2013). Trauma rates, however, are comparable to those encountered elsewhere, and Chachapoya sites are, in fact, rarely characterized by the perimeter walls, ditches, and parapets common to other areas (Church and von Hagen 2008:913; Lerche 1995:30; Nystrom and Toyne 2013). The massive wall of Kuelap presents a notable exception, to be sure, but researchers now recognize that many of its attributes are better explained by ritual functions designed to integrate people than by defensive ones intended to keep them out (Narváez 2013).

Extra-regional Interaction

Chachapoyas and other regions of the Eastern Andes have further been marginalized from narratives of Andean social and cultural development as a result of the environmentally deterministic assumption that access to these regions would have been as difficult for ancient peoples as it is for us today (Church 1996; Lyon 1981; Raymond 1976). Many scholars have asserted that Chachapoyas developed in relative isolation from other parts of the Andes, cut off by dense forests and the deep gorge of the Marañón River (e.g., Kauffman 2009:26–27; Lerche 1995:23; Schjellerup 2005:377, 452). Others have attributed the origins of Chachapoya culture to regional groups from elsewhere. Bonavía (1968) and Kauffman (2009) have argued that this area was first colonized by Inka or other highland groups in search of new agricultural lands. Some scholars contend that it was settled by Amazonian groups who displaced indigenous populations around A.D. 1000 (Koschmieder 2015; Lerche 1995), or that Chachapoya culture resulted from indigenous Jivaroan-related groups emulating neighboring Andeans (Bueno and Cornejo 2009). None of these models have yet been validated through archaeological evidence, however, and migrationist arguments in particular are challenged by increasing evidence of long sequences of autochthonous cultural development (e.g., Church 1994; Guengerich 2014a; Ruiz 2009; Schjellerup 2005:347–354) similar to what is seen in most of the Andean highlands (e.g., D’Altroy and Hastorf 2001; Herrera 2003; Julien 1988; Parsons et al. 2000, 2013).

The idea that the inhabitants of this region were either cut off from the rest of the highlands or only passive recipients of cultural changes originating elsewhere is particularly belied by a growing body of data demonstrating that they participated in far-flung networks of trade and interaction beginning in the Early Horizon (Church 1996; Church and von Hagen 2008). Ceramics spanning the Initial to Late Cajamarca periods (100 B.C.–A.D. 1200) have been found at many sites (e.g., Narváez 2013:130; Ruiz 2009:70–71; Schjellerup 2005:352–354, 359), and *Spondylus* shell was present in an EIP ritual
context at Monte Viudo (Guengerich 2014a:101). Interaction with Amazonian societies is attested by unusually well preserved organic materials from the LIP/Late Horizon site of Laguna de los Cóndores, including feather headdresses and mummified forest felines (von Hagen 2002a), as well as by lowland gourds from a late LIP ritual deposit at Monte Viudo (Guengerich 2014a:274) and caiman vertebrae in domestic contexts of an unspecified date at Kuelap (Narváez 2013:117). Outside of Chachapoyas, at the late EIP/Middle Horizon coastal site of San José de Moro, archaeologists have found miniature models of Chachapoya sarcophagi (Fabre 2006:163). Chachapoyas was also the primary source of espingo, a psychotropic nut that has been used by Andean groups ranging from the Moche to the Kallawaya curanderos of modern Bolivia (Wassén 1979).

Unwarranted emphasis on endemic warfare, migration, and geographic isolation, coupled with, until very recently, a shortage of survey, excavation, and bioarchaeological data, has given scholars little reason to assume that cultural developments taking place in Chachapoyas were germane to those elsewhere. As a consequence, Chachapoyas has suffered a fate common to the Eastern Andes of remaining stranded between two artificially polarized bodies of scholarship—the Andes and the Amazon (Kojan 2002; Saignedes 1985). Increasing attention being paid to evidence of extra-regional exchange is beginning to change this narrative (e.g., Church and von Hagen 2008), offering a productive avenue for tracing the social mechanisms that connected cultural macro-regions. In the following section, I turn to another body of data that likewise helps to illuminate the nature of the relationship between Chachapoyans and other Andean groups that underwent major social and cultural changes during the late pre-Inkaic period.

**Chachapoya Built Environments**

Archaeological research in Chachapoyas began in earnest only in the late 1960s, and spatial organization and architecture are among the last datasets to be scientifically studied. To date, most research has focused on the monumental regional center of Kuelap (Narváez 1996a, 1996b, 2013; Ruiz 2009) and on mortuary archaeology and bioarchaeology (Fabre et al. 2008; Guillén 2002; Nystrom et al. 2010; Nystrom and Toyne 2013). Kuelap, Gran Pajatén (Bonavía 1968; Church 1994), and Monte Viudo (Guengerich 2014a) represent the most extensively mapped and excavated settlement sites; besides these, sketch or scale maps, architectural descriptions, and more limited excavations have been published from the areas of Luya (Koschmieder 2012, 2015), Cheto (Fabre 2006; Ruiz 2007; Ruiz 2004), south of Mendoza (Schjellerup et al. 2003, 2009), the Huabayacu drainage (Bueno and Cornejo 2009), and the Utcubamba-Atuén drainage (Langlois 1939, 1940a, 1940b; Muscutt 1998; Muscutt et al. 1993; Schjellerup 2005:307–377; Thompson 1973, 1976).

Kuelap remains by far the best studied settlement site, yet we should be cautious in using its many unusual features as a baseline for generalizations about Chachapoya built environments. Its perimeter wall is exponentially larger than any similar feature in the region; it houses the Tintero, a solid structure with a central shaft that is dissimilar to any other construction in Chachapoyas; it contains an unusual number of exotic materials, such as obsidian and ceramics; and it contains hundreds of human remains, which were placed in pits, house floors, terraces, chullpas, and in the perimeter wall (Narváez 2013). In contrast, Monte Viudo provides a more representative view of architecture, spatial organization, and quotidian practice in most Chachapoya villages (Guengerich 2014a). This site exhibits attributes common to settlement sites, including mountaintop location, steep topography, and the absence of perimeter walls and monumental architecture. At 300 structures, it is slightly larger than average in size. Its built environment consists almost entirely of circular limestone buildings that extend along four ridges that intersect in the form of an X (Figure 3). The earliest date associated with a domestic structure at the site is A.D. 775–975, but a set of dates beginning around A.D. 1250 indicates that the principal occupation was during the second half of the LIP (Guengerich 2014b:7). Monte Viudo was abandoned around the time of Inka incursion into Chachapoyas, as suggested by a terminal cluster of radiocarbon dates around A.D. 1450 and the near-total absence of Inka-style artifacts or architecture (Guengerich 2014a:106–114).
Settlement Locations

Chachapoya settlements were located on mountaintops, peaks, and ridges, with only a handful of exceptions known (Langlois 1940a:68; Schjellerup 2005:308–319). Unfortunately, our currently poor understanding of EIP chronology and our complete lack of knowledge of both EIP and LIP settlement patterns give us little sense of when and why people began to move to hilltops. Of the dozen settlement sites that have been radiocarbon dated to the LIP, three have also produced dates from the EIP. Nonetheless, in two of these sites the dates come from ritual contexts of limited extent (Guengerich 2014a:98–104; Narváez 2013:150), while the lack of primary depositional contexts at the third makes it difficult to ascertain the nature of EIP occupation (Church 1994).

As in other parts of the LIP highlands, the impetus for the hilltop settlement pattern has most commonly been attributed to defensive concerns in conditions of heightened violence (Espinoza 1967:235–236; Langlois 1940b; Narváez 1988). Many of the additional defensive features present in other regions, however—such as ditches, baffled entries, and concentric sets of walls (e.g., Arkush 2008; Covey 2008; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Nielsen 2002; Schreiber 1987; Toohey 2009)—are not found in Chachapoyas. Parapets have only been identified at Vira Vira (Muscott et al. 1993). Perimeter walls have been recorded at five sites (e.g., Langlois 1939; Muscott et al. 1993; Schjellerup 2005:347–354; Thompson 1976). In several of these, substantial portions of the settlement are located outside the wall.

The absence of these features, of course, should not be taken to imply that defense was not a determining factor in site location (Arkush and Stanish 2005). Yet it is important to recognize that, at the same time, hilltop settlements offered a number of advantages. Since flat terrain is scarce in this region, communities may have sought to reserve
Figure 4. Chachapoya settlement sites: (a) Patrón Samana, (b) Yálapa, (c) Kuelap, and (d) Vira Vira (adapted from Schjellerup 2005, Ruiz 2007, Narváez 1996a, and Muscutt 1998).
more gently sloping areas for crops and camelid flocks (Church and von Hagen 2008:913). Many settlements, in fact, are associated with extensive terrace systems on lower slopes, many of which were likely pre-Inkaic (Schjellerup 1992a). Hilltop location also prevented erosion, kept villages out of the path of landslides (Church and von Hagen 2008:913), promoted inter-visibility for surveillance or communication (Fabre et al. 2008:275; Schjellerup 2005:448), and kept inhabitants close to supernatural entities like *apus* that inhabited mountain peaks (Schjellerup 1992b:361).

**Internal Settlement Organization**

The built environments of Chachapoya settlements consisted almost entirely of freestanding buildings, the vast majority of which were houses (Figure 4). These vary from circular to elliptical in form and are distributed in patterns that have been described as “agglutinated” or “organic” (Narváez 1996b:93; von Hagen 2002a:139). Narváez (1996b:95) has identified two patterns that also characterized some buildings at Kuelap: “radial” (buildings face a shared open space) and “linear” (buildings are distributed in a line, facing one direction). Nonetheless, these patterns are not present at all sites. Agglutinated organization was probably in large part a response to the physical constraints of the steep, restricted terrain on which Chachapoya settlements were built. At Monte Viudo, squeezing several thousand inhabitants onto a set of rocky ridges meant that open space was at a premium, and patios were reserved for the houses of high-status residents (Guengerich 2014a:154). At other sites, terraces were often used to increase the amount of flat space within villages (e.g., Fabre 2006; Koschmieder 2015; Muscutt et al. 1993; Ruiz 2007; Schjellerup 2005).

Although agglutinative organization suggests that site layouts were not centrally planned, this does not signify that settlements were unplanned. Instead, spatial organization was likely determined through low-level negotiations between neighbors, which may have become heated as the amount of open space at the site decreased over time. At Monte Viudo, the main principle behind the spatial organization of the settlement was the need to keep the freestanding house separate from those around it. Doors are offset, blocking lines of sight between them, houses are not grouped into dis-

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**Figure 5. High-status architecture in Upper Sector West, Monte Viudo:** (a) Structure 190; (b) Structure 199; and (c) Structure 195.
crete clusters or terrace groups, and only in the case of Upper Sector West—probably a high-status neighborhood—are some houses connected by short walls. Only one clear patio group is present, located near the western end of the site. These spatial attributes correlate with data from excavation: each excavated house contained its own hearth and shared a repeated suite of domestic activities (Guengerich 2014a:177–181). This suggests that a household group occupying a single, physically independent house was the most meaningful basic social unit at Monte Viudo. This form of domestic organization, however, may not have characterized all Chachapoya communities. For example, at several sites, houses share terraces (e.g., Koschmieder 2015; Ruiz 2007; Schjellerup 2005:346), and possibly comprise extended household groups.

High-status residential sectors have been identified at two of the best studied Chachapoya sites. At Kuelap, two areas (the “Pueblo Alto” and the “Circular Platform”) located near ritual sectors were elevated on retention walls that separated them from the rest of the site (Narváez 1996a:98; Toyne and Narváez 2014). A high-status sector at Monte Viudo, by contrast, was not distinguished spatially through formal features such as walls but instead by the qualities of its residential architecture. Houses in “Upper Sector West” (Figure 5) stand out for their greater size, more labor-intensive masonry, and higher platform bases than the rest of the site. These houses also are the only ones with frieze decorations and possible mortuary structures in their interiors (Guengerich 2014a:153–155). The households that resided here probably had access to larger kin pools and experienced artisans needed for the construction process. They also were sanctioned to use architectural symbols of identity—friezes—that other community members were not. Notably, though, their domestic assemblages differed minimally from those of other sectors. This suggests that residential architecture was the principal material means by which household status was constituted, rather than the goods they owned or the practices they carried out there. This contrasts markedly with regions such as Xauxa, for example, where elites not only built finer residences, but also used finer serving wares, brewed more chicha, ate greater quantities of meat, and owned more imported and high-quality goods (DeMarrais 2001).

In addition to houses, Chachapoya built environments contained various kinds of ritual and communal structures. Platform constructions that could legitimately be described as monumental have been observed at some settlement sites (e.g., Muscutt 2013; Ruiz 1979; Vega 1982). At the majority of sites, however, special-purpose buildings were relatively similar in scale to houses and, in fact, often shared their features. For instance, researchers have identified circular buildings at a number of sites that were used occasionally or exclusively for ritual practices and intimate communal gatherings (e.g., Bonavía 1968:18–25; Koschmieder 2015:27–29; Muscutt 2013:204–205; Thompson 1973:366). They are set apart by features such as murals, distinctive masonry, and relatively larger size, as well as by the presence of distinctive artifacts like quartz, fossils, and unusually shaped stones. One such building is Structure 90 at Monte Viudo, which at 6.9 m in diameter is comparable in size to most houses. Nonetheless, it features two adjacent doorways, an anthropomorphic tenoned head, and a bas-relief human face on an interior wall (Guengerich 2014a:222–230). Two-door structures have been identified at three other Chachapoya settlements as well—Llaqtacocha (Guillén 2000), Kuelap (Narváez 1996a:100), and La Joya (personal observation). In two of these instances, they are likewise characterized by unusual decorative features, such as a bas-relief depiction of monkeys, a very large niche, and anthropomorphic tenoned stones.

Monte Viudo, in fact, contained an entire sector dedicated to ritual practice, and it was likely typical in this regard. The “Central Sector,” located at the highest part of the site where the four residential sectors meet, contained at least three freestanding structures dedicated to ritual purposes, as well as a complex of two superimposed platforms that were built during the EIP. The Central Sector was partially set off from the domestic sectors by a freestanding wall on its east side (Guengerich 2014a:219–238). Ritual buildings here included Structure 90, Structure 33 (a circular platform with a circular central shaft), and Structure 120. The latter is a staple-shaped, unroofed structure that probably served as a shrine where offerings were presented to a boulder looming behind it, likely a wak’a (a powerful, animate landscape feature). At
many Chachapoya sites, the highest or centralmost areas often contain natural features and associated constructions such as terraces, platforms, and circular structures whose distinctive attributes suggest that they were non-domestic in nature and used for small-scale community rituals (e.g., Muscett et al. 1993; Schjellerup 2005:307–368). Rectilinear buildings are found near the center of many sites. Although several have been excavated, their function remains unclear and it is possible that they were related to Inka presence (Guillén 2000:4; Koschmieder 2008:17; Langlois 1939; Thompson 1976).

Other ritual spaces were more variable. Plazas have been identified at a few Chachapoya settlements, but they may have served different functions among different communities. At Cerro Las Cruces, a multileveled paved plaza is surrounded by sets of circular buildings embellished with recessed cross motifs; Bueno and Cornejo (2009) argue on this basis that this site was a locally important center. At Monte Viudo, in contrast, a small walled plaza at the periphery of Sector West was probably used only by residents of this sector (Guengerich 2014a:238–240). At some sites, flat-tish central open spaces may have served as informal plazas (e.g., Schjellerup 1992a:361, 2005:341). The majority of recorded sites, however, were not characterized by plazas or plaza-like spaces. Mortuary structures also are rarely present at Chachapoya settlements, in notable contrast to much of the LIP highlands. Within settlements, individuals were interred in house floors, wall niches, terraces, or in natural rock clefts (Guengerich 2014a:93; Koschmieder 2012; Narváez 2013; Nystrom et al. 2010; Ruiz 2007, 2011:103). Shared, constructed mortuary facilities, such as chullpas and cave burials, were located outside settlements (Fabre et al. 2006; Kaufman 2009; Koschmieder 2012; von Hagen 2002a). The chullpas at Kuelap represent the only recorded exception (Ruiz 2011:45–64). Communing with ancestors evidently required special—and in the case of cliff-tombs and caves, arduous and even perilous—visits to extra-settlement sites. Thus, in most of Chachapoyas, inclusive public rituals important to community integration likely took place outside the settlement.
such as at powerful landscape features or chullpas (Crandall 2014) or else in relatively intimate settings of the house or small communal buildings (Guengerich 2014a:245–254).

**Architectural Style**

Chachapoya houses were large and elaborate constructions. At Monte Viudo, walls stood at least 2 m high. At other sites, walls still standing as high as 5 m have been recorded (Koschmieder 2012:70). Building diameters were typically 4–10 m, with averages around 5 m (e.g., Guillén 2000; Koschmieder 2015; Narváez 1996a:101; Schjellerup 2005:370). At Monte Viudo, they ranged from 2 to 7 m, with an average of 5 m; 90 percent fell between 3 and 6 m (Guengerich 2014b). House interiors were, therefore, spacious, and many daily activities probably took place indoors, which would have been ideal due to the rainy climate. This is further suggested at Monte Viudo by the scarcity of open spaces and patios. House roofs were probably made of logs and thatch. Drawing on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century descriptions of the last circular structure in use in Chachapoyas, in the town of La Jalca, Davis (1996) proposed that prehispanic roofs were conical in form, with the wooden frame resting directly on the structure walls. This model is supported by archaeological evidence, such as the absence of internal postholes at pre-Inkaic sites (e.g., Guengerich 2014b; Koschmieder 2015:27), and the use of thatch is confirmed by the presence of burnt wood and straw in houses at Kuelap (Narváez 2013:152).

Chachapoya circular architecture is distinguished by three features unique to this region: platform bases, cornices, and friezes (Church and von Hagen 2008:914; Schjellerup 2005:203). Platform bases (see Figure 5) are found at most sites and usually characterize the majority of structures. They are solid constructions filled with earth and rubble and do not form a lower story of the building. At Monte Viudo, they vary from .5 to 4 m in height. Platform bases fulfilled the same engineering function as domestic terraces, enabling individual structures to be built on steep and rocky terrain. They also had the aesthetic and social role of aggrandizing and embellishing the house and—by extension—its inhabitants, as seen in the unusually high platform bases of Monte Viudo’s high-status Upper Sector West (Guengerich 2014b). Platform bases are usually circular in plan, but rectilinear ones have been found at a number of sites.
Cornices were always paired with platform bases (Figure 6c). They consist of a ring of flat slabs extending outward from the structure walls at the juncture between the platform base and the superstructure. Cornices served as walkways to enter buildings, given that doorways were usually a considerable distance above the ground surface (e.g., see Figure 5), and they may have also diverted rainfall outward from foundations of buildings (Narváez 1996a:102; von Hagen 2002b:92). They probably had aesthetic aspects, too, and at some sites they are too thin and fragile to have served a functional purpose as walkways (Fabre 2006:102, 122).

Friezes are probably the best-known feature of Chachapoya architecture. They are made of mosaic-like patterns of small stones that run in a horizontal band either around the platform base or above the doorway (Figure 6). In addition to circular structures, they were also used on domestic terraces (e.g., Koschmieder 2015:9) and chullpas (e.g., von Hagen 2002a). Friezes are found in four geometric motifs: zigzags, rhombuses, volutes, and checkerboards (Schjellerup 2005:448). Lerche (1995:46–51) has proposed that each motif was iconic of powerful animals—e.g., the zigzag represents a serpent, the rhombus a feline eye, etc. More broadly understood, frieze motifs were likely associated with various aspects of social identity. The geographical distribution of motifs, for example—rhombuses occur north of Leymebamba, volutes to the south, and zigzags throughout Chachapoyas—has led some researchers to propose that they signified ethnic affiliation (Schjellerup 2005:448). Friezes were also likely linked to intra-community status, since they are always found on a small number of structures at a given site. At Monte Viudo, their use was probably subject to sumptuary restrictions, given that they characterize only 2 percent of structures, all of which were either ritual buildings or high-status residences in Upper Sector West. By contrast, other features of houses at Monte Viudo—such as platform bases, cornices, and niches (found on 51 percent, 16 percent, and 10 percent of buildings, respectively)—were executed with varying degrees of skill and are found throughout the site (Guengerich 2014c).

Residential architecture had a variety of additional features (Figure 7), such as niches, benches, sleeping platforms, storage bins, subfloor burials or storage chambers, canals, ovens, stone-lined hearths, permanent grinding stones (batanes), semicircular stoops, entrance stairs, rectilinear chambers (possibly for temporary burials), wall plaster, interior murals, and antlers and camelid bones affixed to the walls (Guengerich 2014a:143–146, 170–194; Koschmieder 2012:65–76, 2015; Narváez 1996a; Ruiz 2007; Schjellerup 2005:307–368; Thompson 1973, 1976). Many features varied by site and subregion. Koschmieder (2015), for example, argues that subterranean storage chambers were characteristic of the higher-altitude, potato-growing areas south of Kuelap and were absent in the lower Luya area to the northwest, where warmer conditions prevented long-term storage of the staple crop, maize. Masonry style also varies across Chachapoyas (see Figures 6 and 7). It remains to be investigated whether this reflects chronological change (Schjellerup 2005:370,
448), sub-regional and possibly ethnic differences, or other factors. The use of limestone or sandstone for construction tends to vary with local geological composition; usually, native materials were used for the bulk of masonry, with decorative elements created out of contrasting stone (Church 1994; Guillén 2000; Muscutt et al. 1993; Schjellerup 2005:307–368).

Masonry variation within sites, however, was likely related to status differences, as suggested by research at Monte Viudo. Six masonry types were identified based on variation in the size, shape, and extent of modification of stones and in the presence of coursing, mortar, and chinking stones (Figure 8; Guengerich 2014a). These types index a gradually varying amount of labor required for their construction, which, I argue, was a product of the size of the social networks in which the builder-household was enmeshed. Better-connected, higher-status households were able to create more durable, beautiful houses, which in turn materialized this status for future generations (Guengerich 2014b). Since all masonry styles were used contemporaneously, they cannot be interpreted as products of chronological change.

Discussion

At this point, I turn to the broader social and cultural milieu within which Chachapoyans created their physical landscapes. How do Chachapoya built environments inform our understanding of historical processes taking place in the rest of the Andean highlands during this period? How does a comparison with other areas illuminate our understanding of Chachapoya built environments?

In the first place, Chachapoyas shared a basic attribute with the rest of the highlands—namely, a hilltop-based settlement pattern. Between A.D. 1000 and 1300, Andeans across this greater region relocated their settlements upward, usually to altitudes of 3000–3500 m asl and above. By the latter half of the LIP, the majority of the population in virtually every region but Cuzco (Bauer and Covey 2002) lived in concentrated villages located on hilltops and ridge tops (Arkush 2008; Bonnier 1981, 1997; D’Altroy and Hastorf 2001; Dean 2005; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Hastings 1985; Herrera 2003; Ibarra 2014; Julien 1988; Kellett 2010; Kosiba 2010; Krzanowski 1977; Lavallée and Julien 1983; Mantha 2006; Morris and Thompson 1985; Parsons et al. 2013; Pérez 1988; Pineda 1989; Salcedo 2010; Schreiber 1987). Most researchers have contended that this extremely widespread phenomenon was a response to increased inter- or intra-regional conflict following the collapse of the Wari and Tiwanaku states around A.D. 1000 (Arkush 2008; Covey 2008; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Hyslop 1976; LeBlanc 1981; Nielsen 2002; Schreiber 1987; Toohey 2009) or to major climate changes precipitated by a severe drought that set in throughout much of the Andes, at least in the southern and central highlands, early in the second millennium A.D. (D’Altroy and Hastorf 2001; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Graffam 1992; Kellett 2010).

This shift to a hilltop location likely helped shape several additional architectural features that Chachapoya settlements shared with many regions. These include stone masonry and “agglomerated” or “organic” site layouts comprising repetitive, cellular, single-room buildings (Arkush 2005; Bonnier 1981, 1997; Dean 2005; DeMarrais 2001; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Hastings 1985; Ibarra 2014; Kellett 2010; Kosiba 2010; Lavallée and Julien 1983; Mantha 2006; Morris and Thompson 1985; Nielsen 2002; Parsons et al. 2000, 2013; Pérez 1988; Salcedo 2010; Schreiber 1987; Zovar 2012). Limited space and steep topography made it not impossible, but certainly costly, to modify the terrain in order to create plazas, streets, orthogonal layouts, and extensive household groups or room blocks. Rocky outcrops at many hilltop sites may have encouraged stone construction by providing a ready supply of building material, whereas wood or water and soil for tapial (rammed earth) had to be brought uphill. Thus, by the end of the first half of the LIP, Chachapoyans had developed many of the same architectural forms as their Andean contemporaries. Although the factors that led to the cultural changes around A.D. 1000 remain poorly understood for Chachapoyas, the similarity of changes in settlement patterning suggests that the inhabitants of this region confronted problems shared by the rest of the Andean highlands at this time, such as warfare, climate change, or political upheaval.

Beyond these generic similarities, however, what Chachapoyas adds most to narratives of the LIP is that it forces us to acknowledge the diversity
and dynamism that characterized this period. As local groups confronted common challenges, they drew on their existing traditions, beliefs, and institutions to formulate solutions that responded to their own needs and to their anticipation of what might lie ahead for themselves and their descendants. Chachapoya built environments stand out for their emphasis on the aesthetically elaborate, freestanding house, with a corresponding de-emphasis of open public space, and for the placement of mortuary facilities at a distance from residential areas. Built environments throughout the northern, central, and southern highlands reveal equally distinctive spatial and architectural sensibilities unique to their region and community. When looking within, rather than across sites, this becomes particularly evident in attributes such as household organization, architectural style, and site layout. For example, although houses were most often circular, rectilinear forms were used in many regions (Kendall 1985; Mantha 2006; Matos 1972; Morris and Thompson 1985; Nielsen 2002; Wernke 2013). Considerable variations in house size—from as little as 3 m in diameter (Arkush 2005; Dean 2005; Frye and de la Vega 2005; Zovar 2012) to over 6 m in areas such as Chachapoyas and Wamalí (Morris and Thompson 1985)—suggest different ideologies of, and practices associated with, domestic space.

Different ideologies of the domestic are furthermore seen in the varying ways in which the household was spatially constituted. Patio groups in some regions were formally created through shared walls or domestic facilities (DeMarrais 2001; Morris and Thompson 1985; Nielsen 2002), whereas elsewhere houses simply shared a terrace or flat open space (Dean 2005; Kellett 2010; Lavallée and Julien 1983; Pérez 1988). Other areas, in contrast, were characterized by independent single houses similar to Monte Viudo (Bonnier 1997; Mantha 2006). In Cajamarca and Huarmachuco, domestic buildings were not freestanding at all, but organized into long blocks of rooms, each with its own entrance (Krzanowski 1977; Pérez 1988; Pineda 1989; Toohey 2009). Vernacular architecture also varied regionally in construction techniques and in the presence and style of features such as niches, benches, door shape, roofing materials, internal subdivisions, upper stories, and so on (Arkush 2005:231–237; Bonnier 1981; DeMarrais 2001; Krzanowski 1977; Lavallée and Julien 1983; Mantha 2006; Matos 1972; Morris and Thompson 1985; Nielsen 2002; Salcedo 2010; Thompson 1983; Wernke 2013; Zovar 2012:176–186).

The kinds of ritual and public spatial practice that produced communities also varied regionally. In some areas, platforms, shrines, and powerful natural features were located in high and prominent parts of sites, as in Chachapoyas (Dean 2005; Hastings 1985; Ibarra 2014; Matos 1972; Pérez 1988). Communal mortuary facilities were an especially common feature of LIP landscapes, but their variable placement corresponds to different understandings of their relationship to living kin. They might be grouped as special sectors within settlements (e.g., Bonnier 1981; Hastings 1985; Kosiba 2010; Mantha 2006; Matos 1972; Nielsen 2002; Parsons et al. 2013) or adjacent to them (e.g., Arkush 2005; Kellett 2010; Nielsen 2002; Wernke 2013:139–140; Zovar 2012), distributed throughout residential sectors (e.g., Dean 2005; Morris and Thompson 1985; Parsons et al. 2013; Salcedo 2010), or—as in Chachapoyas—located at some distance from villages (e.g., Herrera 2003; Pérez 1988). In a number of regions, including at many Chachapoya villages, households kept deceased family members close, within the domestic space (D’Altroy and Hastorf 2001; Mantha 2006; Toohey 2009:300–303).

A vision of the LIP that includes Chachapoyas, then, is one of diversity and cultural dynamism. It is important to recognize that this was a period not merely of hardship and rapid change, but also of cultural regeneration (Janusek 2005; Zovar 2007) and local social and political production (Kosiba 2011). As local groups embarked on the endeavor of reconstructing their physical surroundings in new environmental settings, this resulted in a kaleidoscope of built environments with distinctive features, ranging from the massive fortress walls of the Colla to the multistoried mortuary towers of the Upper Marañón, the plaza-based room blocks of Cajamarca, and the friezes of Chachapoyas. A vision of the LIP that includes Chachapoyas is, furthermore, one that acknowledges the porosity of “the Andes” as a cultural unit. The cultural practices and social institutions of highlanders not only varied across regions and changed over time (Isbell 1997; Starn 1991), but
also were never rigidly bounded. Peoples of the Eastern Andes faced similar forces of change and shared many cultural practices with highlanders (Hastings 1985; Maullama and Perales 2005), but, at the same time, they sustained ongoing engagements with their lowland neighbors to the east. In fact, the goods that Eastern Andeans procured—hard chonta wood for staffs of office, feathers for luxury textiles, esoteric knowledge, ritual paraphernalia, and especially coca—had for millennia formed part of the cultural toolkit through which highland and coastal societies constituted themselves (Lathrap 1971; Tello 1942). Categorizing Eastern Andeans as “other” or as peripheral is, therefore, doubly problematic: not only does it deny the fundamental interconnectedness of prehispanic South America (Church 1996; Kojan 2002; Lyon 1981; Saignes 1985), but it also implicitly externalizes the panoply of unique societies that made up the Andean highlands.

**Conclusion**

Archaeology in Chachapoyas still awaits development in many respects, and, unfortunately, a number of questions cannot be addressed using existing data. Nevertheless, the significant advances that have occurred in recent years make it possible to begin integrating knowledge of social processes in this region with broader changes afoot in the pre-Incaic highlands. Like other regions of the Eastern Andes, Chachapoyas has long been represented as somehow different, a place of half-Amazonian groups who do not fit comfortably within the tripartite model of the Andean world as “costa, sierra y selva.” But to exclude Chachapoyas on this basis is to deny the diversity that characterized contemporaneous societies of the central and southern Andes and affirm the notion that they, by way of contrast, participated in some essential “Andean-ness” in which Chachapoyans did not. Distinctive features and spatialities of Chachapoya settlements did not set this region apart from the more southerly highlands in some fundamental manner; instead, they were among many locally specific solutions that communities creatively developed during a period of innovation and change.

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Notes
1. The Late Intermediate period corresponds approximately to
the period of A.D. 1000–1450. The Early Intermediate
period (EIP) refers to the period of A.D. 200–600, and Middle
Horizon to the period of approximately A.D. 600–1000, asso-
ciated in many areas with Tiwanaku and Wari expansion.
2. “Chachapoya” refers here to the societies who lived in
this region during A.D. 1000–1500 and shared overarching
forms of material culture. Terminology has not yet been gen-
erally established to refer to cultural complexes associated with earlier periods.

3. The local use of the term *chullpas* refers to a rectilinear tomb structure, whether freestanding or abutting cliffs or outcrops. In most parts of the Andes, particularly in southern Peru, it refers to freestanding structures (Isbell 1997).

4. Manioc starches have been found in domestic contexts at Kuelap (Narváez 2013:145) and Lámda Urco (Koschmieder 2010:51). Neither site is low enough for manioc cultivation, but both lie in close proximity to lower areas of Chachapoyas where this would have been possible.

5. The source from which this idea derives refers to an event that took place during the context of Spanish incursion. Cieza de León (1996:304) describes how, near the Levanto area, Alonso de Alvarado visited a “land in which there were large, densely populated villages, which had united one with the other to form a league for the purpose of war” (my translation).

6. Although the anthropomorphic and avian friezes of Gran Pajatén (Bonavia 1968) are most famous, they are the only known examples of figurative friezes. Their unusual form may be either a local variant or related to the Inka presence at this site.

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