

Chapter 15

Altars and Altitude: The *Ushnu* and the *Puna* during the Late Horizon

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The Highlanders particularly worship the Flash of Lightning [relámpago], the Thunder, the Lightning [rayo], calling it Santiago.

(Anónimo, *Confessionario Para los Curas de Indios*, 1585: 1r)

Are you a [llama] herder? Who do you usually worship...?

(Juan Pérez Bocanegra, *Ritual, Formulario y Instrucción de Curas*, 1631: 132)

T'unupa, Lliviac, Catequil or more generally, what Ana María Mariscotti de Görlitz (1973, 1978) named 'the lord of meteorological phenomena'.

It is common knowledge that in the Andes ecological zones are linked to subsistence activities. Decades ago, working with non-portable sacred monoliths (*huancas*), Pierre Duviols (1979: 23–6) proposed their variability according to their location, opening a path for material culture studies. Following this approach, here I go a step further, relating ecological zones with pantheons, and finally *ushnus*, conceived as altars. In general, I aim to show that when exploring pre-colonial sacred sites we must incorporate apparently mundane dimensions, which are all too often overlooked.¹

To start, I will present my methodological considerations and the main lines of discussion surrounding the *ushnu* (also spelled: *husno*, *husnu*, *osno*, *osño*, *ozño*, *usno*, *usnu*, *uzno*, *vsnu*) in relation to the *puna*.²

Introduction

These two statements made by religious authorities during the early colonial period suggest a research area, thus far under-investigated, that I will explore here. First, that if we are interested in the cultural history of the higher zones of the Andes with human occupation, that is, the *puna*, we need to pay special attention to lightning and thunder. Second, that the Andes were (and are) characterised by a multitude of religious beliefs, and that the best way to approach them and their associated material evidence is by considering potential diversity.

For archaeologists, both statements are particularly important since there is a frequent impulse to link all manifestations of pre-colonial Andean religion to the sun, particularly for the Inca period or Late Horizon. Potential candidates for such connections are the numerous rectangular platforms found in the ecological zone named *puna* (over 3800–4000 m above sea level (masl)), particularly in Arequipa and Ayacucho in southern Peru. In order to avoid the artificial homogenisation of all pre-colonial religion in the Andes, I will approach these structures from another angle. I argue that it is more comprehensive to employ a framework that, without excluding the Sun, also considers the other sacred entities frequently mentioned in early colonial documents. For instance, lightning (*Yllapa*,

Framing the *ushnu*

The first archaeologist to use the term *usno* to refer to an Inca rectangular platform with a staircase on one side was Julio César Tello (1939: 707), dealing with the huge structure at the centre of the main plaza of Huánuco Viejo, or Huánuco Pampa, in the Department of Huánuco, Peru. However, the classic version of *ushnu* (as both concept and form) comes from the article by Tom Zuidema (1980), who defined it in an interdisciplinary way, using archaeology, ethnography and history. One of the most evident corollaries of Zuidema's study is that in the main Inca plaza of Cusco, there was an *ushnu* but there was not necessarily a rectangular platform with such a name (see also Zuidema, this volume). From the beginning, then, we must recognise (at least) potentially two forms for a single name. Therefore how may we define the *ushnu latu sensu*? And how may we define the Inca *ushnu* in particular? No less than four



Figure 15.1 Some *ushnus* from Peru and Ecuador belonging to the category *capac ushnu*.

options are available: (a) early colonial descriptions of the Cusco plaza (a pillar and a basin/drain); (b) early colonial descriptions of *ushnus* in the main Inca settlements outside Cusco such as Huánuco Pampa; (c) modern definitions (dictionaries, ethnographic reports); (d) the least common denominator of the three previous options (a, b, c). As revealed at the *ushnu* conference in London (November 2010) and in the chapters in this volume, there is no consensus on this issue.³

In his abovementioned article, Zuidema used ethnography to support his conceptual and material definition of the *ushnu* as a ceremonial conduit associated with libation rituals. This *ushnu* was not necessarily accompanied by or part of a platform. A sort of pragmatic solution among archaeologists is to consider the Inca platforms with a drain to be *ushnus* (Hyslop 1990: 70). However, in many cases only the platform is used as the basic requisite (see Coben, this volume). With this panorama of definitions, I will present three basic features to situate my proposal.

Function

According to early colonial sources and religious ethnography, the *ushnu* was an altar (Santo Thomas 1560; Bertonio 1984 [1612]) and the Inca *ushnu* placed in the main provincial plazas was a political altar used to perform state rituals, hereafter *capac ushnu* (royal *ushnu*) (Pachacuti Yamqui 1993 [1613]). In addition, the term *ushnu* is linked to multifarious meanings and uses (such as conduit, seat, cave, illness, stele, gnomon, sugarloaf, hole, court, among others).⁴

Form

Archaeologists have recognised the huge formal diversity of the Inca *ushnu*, with the range of forms defined by two kinds of sites. First, the widely accepted ones such as Aypate (Piura), Pumpu (Junín), Huánuco Pampa (Huánuco) and Tambo Colorado (Ica) (Protzen, this volume). These structures are platforms on one or several levels with a

staircase at one side, sometimes with a relatively small hole identified at the top. The first three examples are built with stones, the last one, which is located on the coast, with mud. Second, several less canonical sites – located at higher altitudes – such as Huamanillo (Ayacucho) and Maucallacta (Arequipa). The former is just a simple and small platform (comparable in size with the Tambo Colorado example of the previous group), with a staircase on one side; the second one is partially destroyed, smaller still and also has a small access staircase (see Ziolkowski, this volume) (for other examples, see Fig. 15.1, and for general features see Plates 15.1–15.4). Finally, there is a third group where no clearly comparable formal indicators are available, for example, Choquequirao (Cusco), Incallajta (Bolivia) and Macchu Picchu (Cusco). In these latter cases the formal evidence is insufficient, so I will apply the term *ushnu* to them only if colonial documentary evidence is available.⁵

Chronology

The category *ushnu* surely predates the Incas, but it is premature to project it before the Late Horizon. Moreover, within that period, we lack temporal indicators to distinguish among *ushnus*: a relative chronology based on formal criteria, such as the number of platform tiers, stone masonry, or other stylistic details, is still a goal (Kendall 1985: 272–5). Along the same lines, the linguistic conjectures about ‘original areas’ of the term in question must be properly supported (Zuidema 1989a [1980]: 424; Gentile 2003: 240; Pino Matos 2004a: 304–5). Having framed our concept, we must consider its presence in a higher altitude context, the *puna*.

Recent studies on platforms in the *puna*

A perceptive Jesuit made the first explicit reference to the kind of *ushnu* examined here: ‘Altar of the *huacas* made with worked stone, as one can see in the *puna*’ (Bertonio 1984 [1612], emphasis added).⁶ Nowadays, several archaeologists are dealing with these rectangular platforms. A team from the University of Varsovia in Poland that, with colleagues from Arequipa, works in the area around the summits of Coropuna and Solimana has identified 17 of these structures, most of them in the *puna* (Ziolkowski 2008:134–6; Ziolkowski, this volume).⁷ Yuri Cavero Palomino (2010) has published introductory work on the topic, based on his thesis. Meanwhile, Cirilo Vivanco Pomacanchari has reported on more platforms from the *puna* of Ayacucho, including a presentation at the symposium in homage to Craig Morris (‘Los ushnus de la región de Ayacucho’, Lima, June 2010). Vivanco Pomacanchari is also a member of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded multinational project on the high altitude *ushnus* of Ayacucho, and I was also part of this project for two years. Publications include Meddens *et al.*



Plate 15.1 Aypate, 2827 masl, Ayabaca, Piura (photo © G. Ramón).



Plate 15.2 Huánuco Pampa, 3658 masl, La Unión, Huánuco (photo © G. Ramón).



Plate 15.3 Huamanillo, 4350 masl, near the village of Putaccasa, Huancasancos, Ayacucho (photo © G. Ramón).



Plate 15.4 Tambo Colorado, Pisco, Ica. 1928. The *ushnu* is at the extreme right of the image (Palmer 1928).

(2008), Branch *et al.* (this volume), McEwan (this volume), Meddens (this volume) and Vivanco Pomacanchari (this volume).⁸ Finally, the work of both Margarita Gentile (2003) in the *puna* of Jujuy, Argentina, and José Luis Pino Matos (2010) who also examined the *yllapa usno*, are crucial for our discussion here.

Two interpretative tendencies on the Andes, the Incas and the *ushnus*

As mentioned above, Zuidema presented the main features of the *ushnu*. He based his model on evidence from the principal plaza of Cusco, which was actually an exception, and then extended this model across the entire Andean region. This approach is not rare among Andeanists. However, as we know, imperial plans commonly demonstrate changes and adjustments as they are implemented in different contexts from the centre (Cusco) to the many peripheral areas (a recent example from Arequipa can be found in Wernke 2007: 135).

A second tendency is represented by the work of John Rowe and his collaborators. They insisted on *difference*, that is, the semantic value of chronological and geographical variability. While the former tendency emphasises the *longue durée*, the latter specialises in detecting indices of transformation. To reconcile the most fruitful aspects of both approaches and to better understand the *ushnus*, it is necessary to focus on how long-term patterns are historically constructed.⁹

The tension between these two approaches transverses much of pre-colonial Andean historiography and can be detected in the current controversy about *puna* platforms as materialisations of specific religious cults. Two positions may be identified. First, it is possible to recognise common features of the *ushnu* throughout the Andes and therefore to suggest that these structures had the same function disregarding their location. Second, if we consider the importance of locality we could propose that the pantheons related to different *ushnus* change according to their location. To show the relationship between the religious affiliation of these *ushnus* and our overall conception of *Tahuantinsuyu*, I start by quoting Hermann Trimborn (1968: 115):

Luis Valcárcel sees the bewildering multiplicity of Inca gods as an array of 'facets' of one god, of whom the others are merely symbols; but this is probably an over-simplification. The gods of the Central Andes do, however, have a certain number of shared characteristics; many of them for instance are also culture heroes. Typical too is the linking of gods with natural (and especially astral) phenomena and the existence of plural deities with several (usually three or five) aspects.

For Trimborn, the size and diversity of the Inca pantheon was a result of the constitution of *Tahuantinsuyu* as an

empire that assimilated many local entities as it expanded. The pantheon materialised negotiations (Inca plus local), not only impositions (Inca over local), as perceptively suggested by Adolph Bandelier (1910: 277). This approach also fits with Martti Pärssinen's (1992) valuable synthesis that argues for political variability within *Tahuantinsuyu*, and therefore suggests historical contingency. Regarding the available material evidence of the Late Horizon we need to start considering at least three levels of negotiation: the imperial capital (Cusco), administrative centres (such as Huánuco Pampa or Pampu) and the host communities (Stein 2005: 11, 13).¹⁰

Within this multilayered empire, what happened with the *puna* platforms? Were they simply materialisations of the imposition of the Inca imperial message, or did they represent negotiations with local contexts? If we already know that there are differences (at least formal) between the *ushnu* in the plaza of Cusco and the *ushnus* from the provincial centres, what are the expected functional differences between the *ushnus* from the Quechua and *puna* ecological zones?

Ecological zones and subsistence

Geographers have divided the Andes in several ways. All of them recognise the high ecological variability related with altitude change and the direct relationship between this variability and Andean lifestyles. To explain the geographical setting of our archaeological sites, I will employ research by Carl Troll (1958 [1943]) and Javier Pulgar Vidal (1946).

In a latitudinal sense, from north to south, Troll (1958 [1943]) distinguished two main areas characterised by different landscapes. The *paramo* Andes and the *puna* Andes, named after the highest ecological zones with permanent human occupation. The *paramo* Andes includes the highlands of Ecuador and the northern Peruvian departments (Piura, Cajamarca, Lambayeque, La Libertad). The *puna* Andes range from central Peru to Bolivia. Year-round rain and low direct solar insolation characterise the *paramo*. Meanwhile, the *puna* has strong solar insolation, low humidity, seasonal precipitation and high diurnal temperature variation. Differences between these two areas have been associated with different cultural complexes (Troll 1958 [1943]). The *puna* has been characterised by the herding of camelids, and the cultivation and preservation of tubers through dehydration. Occasionally these practices are associated with the use of artificial irrigation. The alternation between dry, sunny days and frozen nights provides the setting for producing *chuño* (dried potato). These features are absent in the *paramo*, and have been considered significant for understanding the historical differences between the social formations of the two zones (Salomon 1980: 52–61).

A complementary division of the Andes, regarding both altitude and ecology, identifies eight regions or ecological

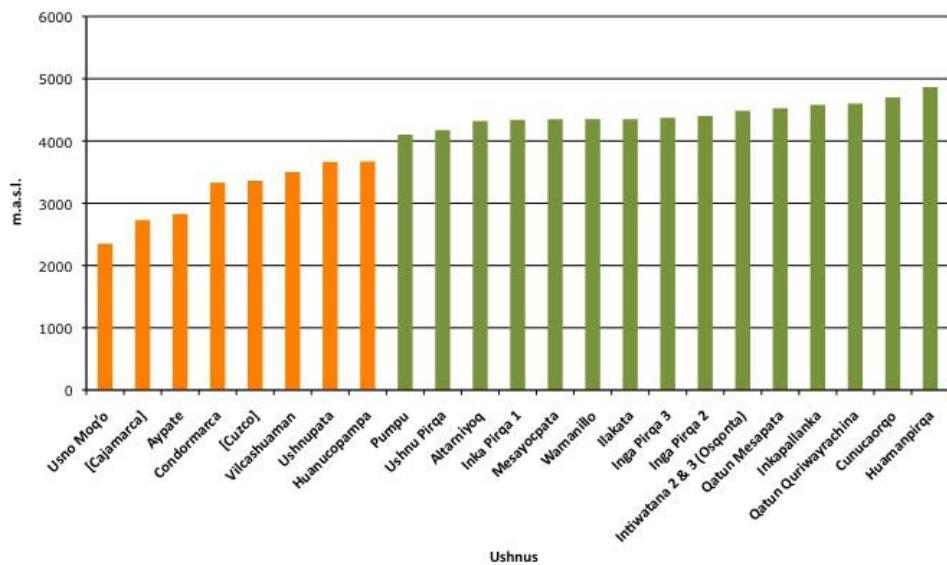


Figure 15.2 *Ushnus*, altitudes and ecological levels (*quechua*, *puna*): comparative sample (based on data from Meddens et al. 2008; Ramón 2009: 112; Caverio Palomino 2010).

zones from west to east: coast, *yunga*, *Quechua* [*quichwa*], *suni*, *jalca* or *puna*, *janca* or *cordillera*; and high and low Amazonian forest (Pulgar Vidal 1946). While this model has been subject to justifiable criticism, it remains popular among archaeologists. Thus, we must handle it carefully.¹¹ With the exception of the Aypate *ushnu*, located in the *paramo* Andes, all the Inca platforms that I visited are situated in the latitudinal range of the *puna* Andes. They are found on the coast (Tambo Colorado, Ica), the *quichwa* (2500–3800 masl) and the *puna* (3800/3900–4500 masl) (see Fig. 15.2)

While people frequently cross the boundaries between these areas, it is easy to observe certain differences in the subsistence activities that characterise each ecological zone. For instance, the central area of the *quichwa* is the region of maize agriculture, a crucial staple for Andean societies. Climbing upwards to the lower parts of the *puna*, maize is gradually replaced by potato varieties. The *puna*, especially its higher part, is mostly characterised by herding. Decades ago, John Murra (1960) noticed the differences between the ritual cycles of maize and potato, emphasising the relation between ecological zones and religious beliefs. Along these lines, in order to better understand the context of the *puna* platforms, I argue that we must pay attention to the cultural changes related to herding. *Quichwa* and *puna* are not isolated areas with no movement or communication between them, but they are different and are recognised locally as such. During a conversation near Huancasancos (Ayacucho) one of our respondents distinguished between people from the *quichwa* and the *sallka* (*jallka*), the inhabitants of the *puna* (Ramón 2009: 81–2; Ferreira, this volume). In other parts of that department they are also called '*salljaruna*' ('people from the *sallja*') or '*chutoruna*' (Urbano and Macera 1992: 59, 73). In Huancavelica this group is called '*qorpa*' (Taipe 1991: 106). In colonial sources from

the central Andes (Ancash and Lima) they are known as '*llacuash*' who, in certain areas, have a distinctive dialect and material culture (Duvíols 1972/1973; Adelaar 1982: 1–3; Ramón 2011: 168–9).¹²

The *puna* is an area with its own cultural complexes (Flores Ochoa 1975; Urbano and Macera 1992; Ricard 2007). Politically and economically, the *puna* was an important area in the past, not peripheral as it is today (Flores Ochoa 1970; Browman 1974; Assadourian 1987). With the exception of the summer months, the *puna* is characterised by frequent thunderstorms with lightning that directly affect the lives of people and livestock (Tsopchik 1968: 130–31; Valderrama and Escalante 1992: 52–4, *passim*; Bolin 1998: 13, 44–5, 49, 50, *passim*).¹³

In sum, and confirming the early observations by Troll, ethnographic studies in the Andes show that when ecology changes, subsistence activities also change. In this scenario, what happens with religious conceptions in relation to altitude?

Subsistence and pantheons

When analysing Mexican *retablos* (portable altars) Gloria Giffords noticed that the patronage of a saint influences his geographical popularity:

Occupations frequently had their special patrons. For example, a farmer might pray to San Ysidro el Labrador, patron of farmers, or a stockman to Santiago [Saint James], for fertility of mares. *Naturally an area with a large farming population would show a strong preference for San Ysidro, while in a ranching area*

Santiago might be the favourite (Giffords 1992: 71, emphasis added).

Since each ecological zone of the Andes can be related with a main economic activity, we may also be able to recognise links between ecological zones, subsistence activities and deities. We can then interrogate the archaeological evidence considering these relations.¹⁴ Andean ethnography frequently shows the association between saints' areas of influence, ecological zones and primary subsistence activities in the same way Giffords described for Mexico. It was clearly stated by an artisan from Ayacucho: 'These portable altars of the landlords have *no Santiago* because the landlords have *no llamas*' (Urbano and Macera 1992: 61, emphasis added).¹⁵ Along the same lines, the work of the anthropologists Carmen Escalante and Ricardo Valderrama among herders from the province of Cotabambas (Department of Apurímac) shows the important presence of Santiago in the *puna*. Santiago is the patron saint of the village, of herders in general, and has also replaced God the Father (*Taytacha Dios*) in the celestial hierarchy. According to the testimony of Victoriano Taparaku:

Here in Apumarka, there is *no one who does not serve Santiago* or the *Llaqtayuq-machu* [the town's lord] (Valderrama and Escalante 1992: 134, emphasis added).

Moreover, *taytacha Dios* [God the Father] has gotten old. Because of that *he is transferring his powers to Santiago*. As a consequence, *taytaku Santi*, with the little mother [Virgin Mary] and the little angels, are helping him to sustain the world (Valderrama and Escalante 1992: 122, emphasis added).¹⁶

This association documented in Apurímac can also be observed in many other *puna* areas, including Bolivia, which is characterised in particular by the high altitude of its human settlements. In Bolivia, 'Santiago is the patron of more parishes than any other saint' (Berg 1989:190 n. 84; see also Paredes 1964: 19–20; Monast 1966: 52–5, 57, 59, and the images in *Museo Nacional* 2009). This presence can be traced back in time. During the early colonial period, the Jesuit priests who worked in the *puna* of what is now the Department of Cerro de Pasco (central Peru), declared:

In the town of Hua[y]llay no [person] was found that worships a god other than the lightning, that they call Santiago ... This is the universal god and the most venerated in all the towns, it is a rare Indian that does not worship him, and believes that it is from him that bad events come (*Cartas Annuas* 1900 [1620]: 74).¹⁷

During early colonial times, Santiago quickly came to occupy a major part of the sphere of influence of *Yllapa*, a pre-colonial deity related to lightning. Following colonial sources we can observe the common presence of *Yllapa* (in the southern highlands), *Lliviac* (in the north-central

highlands, between Ancash and Lima) and *Catequil* (in the northern highlands, particularly Cajamarca). Reading this historical corpus with regard to ecological zones confirms that the Sun god (or its Christian correspondent) loses status as the most important deity as one moves upwards to the *puna*.¹⁸

Digging pantheons: the *puna* case

Based on my previous remarks, I suggest two hypotheses. First, during the Late Horizon the pantheon of the *puna* was different from that of the *quichwa*. Second, in that period, the lightning (the 'lord of meteorological phenomena') was the main figure of the *puna* pantheon. Yet, how might this point be demonstrated from an archaeological perspective or, how can one provide material visibility for the cult of lightning?

The intense debate about the pre-colonial traces of a concept as apparently easy to understand as the *ayllu* (Isbell 1997) shows the difficulty of connecting concepts and objects in Andean archaeology. Something similar happens with many of the Andean deities, with the exception of those richly illustrated in decorated pottery of the Early Intermediate Period/Middle Horizon. In the case of the Sun, for instance, archaeologists can analyse iconographic representation and the relationships between the annual solar cycle and the astronomical alignment of pre-colonial architecture. However, cases such as *Yllapa* remain elusive even though there are some traces we may follow in order to increase their pre-colonial visibility.

First, in his climatology manual, W. Schwerdtfeger (1976: 192–3) noticed that travellers during the nineteenth and twentieth century described thunderstorms in the Bolivian *altiplano* and the southern Peruvian *puna* as almost constant between November and March (see also Tschudi 1847: 304, 362; Bandelier 1910: 15). From a more quantitative perspective, this testimony is confirmed checking data on diverse meteorological stations located at high altitudes. For millennia, lightning has been a common feature of afternoons and evenings during those months, which helps to explain its symbolic relevance.¹⁹

During his trips in the Peruvian and Bolivian *puna*, Adolph Bandelier (1910: 17) noticed that 'Lightning strikes are locally frequent; they descend with much greater frequency at certain places than others.' Longstanding knowledge of the landscape, a crucial element of *puna* culture, helps local people to understand the spatial patterns of lightning strikes. Our ethnographic work in the *puna* of Ayacucho gave us some clues on this topic. One long conversation with Francisco Bautista (Plate 15.5), a herder who works near the area of Putaccasa, a small village an hour by car from the town of Huancasancos (Ayacucho), was particularly enlightening (Ramón 2009: 64–85).

Like many other *puna* landscapes, Putaccasa is in a flat area surrounded by mountains (Plate 15.6). While



Plate 15.5 Francisco Bautista Cayampe, with his flocks in the background near Putaccasa, Huancasancos, Ayacucho (photo © G. Ramón).



Plate 15.6 General view of the *puna* area from the top of the platform at Huamanillo, around Putaccasa, Huancasancos, Ayacucho (photo © G. Ramón).

Mr Bautista explained to us the features of the mountains around the grazing area of his flocks, he indicated that some peaks were powerful or '*bravos*' (strong, powerful). One of those mountains was Huamanillo, where a rectangular platform was placed. He did not call it *ushnu*, but *bovete*, probably an old Spanish term.²⁰ Huamanillo was characterised by the frequent presence of hail – '*Bravos siempre ahí, ahí paran chickchi, granizo, porqué es bravo pues*' ('it is dangerous there, there falls cold rain and hail, because it is dangerous') – and other associated atmospheric phenomena such as lightning (Ramón 2009: 84–5).

Within the *puna* landscape there are certain points that stand out because of their location, which is associated with the presence of meteorological phenomena. It is no coincidence that this kind of platform, a potential altar, often referred to as a ritual table or *mesa* by local people, was built precisely at the top of Huamanillo. Certainly, we will need to find complementary evidence, however now there is a clear starting point for the southern Andes (Plate 15.7).

The ritualisation of ecology has a selective character, with an emphasis on the unpredictable (Sopher 1967). For



Plate 15.7 View of Huamanillo peak, from the plains of the *puna* (Putaccasa, Huancasancos, Ayacucho) (photo © G. Ramón).

<i>location</i> (placement/altitude)	<i>alignment</i> (in relation with landscape, astronomical features)
<i>structure</i> (general form, evidence of function)	<i>content</i> (elements in the fill, evidence of use)

Figure 15.3 Four basic criteria to consider when examining *puna* platforms.

instance, the Trobrianders, from Papua New Guinea, had many rituals related to risky deep water fishing, but few regarding safe fishing in lagoons (Sopher 1967: 18–19). The same could be said about pottery production in the Andes, where most ritualistic activity is linked to the firing step (Ramón 2008: 78–9). Something similar happened with lightning: those rare places where its presence is common are ideal sites for worship since they combine unpredictability with regularity. One does not know precisely when the lightning will strike, but one may guess in broad terms when and where it will happen. Interested in the idolatric consequences of this pattern, the priest Juan Pérez Bocanegra (1631: 137) asked his parishioners: 'When lightning falls in a place, do you usually put food and *chicha* there for the lightning?'.²¹

The previous data are related with the location of the *puna* platforms. However, we also need to explore other complementary criteria. First, we must determine if the *puna* platforms have any orientation related to either the herding or the agricultural calendar. Second, we must look

for traces in the structure linked with lightning. Third, we must try to identify vestiges of rituals associated with the lightning cult, starting by revising historical documentation and ethnographic cases, distinguishing between paraphernalia for the sun and for the lightning.²² This future search is schematised in Figure 15.3.

In general, the previous steps are not only necessary for relating the *puna* platforms to lightning – they are also imperative if we want to link these platforms to astronomical features. Moreover, they are fundamental if we want to confirm that we are dealing with *ushnus*. Until now not a single one of the functions attributed to the *ushnus* of the *quichwa* region has been confirmed for the *puna* platforms. Beyond location, the published evidence on the three complementary criteria (alignment, structure and content) is still preliminary. However, relevant information connecting *ushnu* and *puna* comes from rituals related to livestock. As we know, the central point in the herding calendar is the marking of the flocks (*señalakuy*), the main resource of the *salljaruna*.

Table 15.1 Comparative features: *capac ushnu* and *yllapa ushnu*.

Capac ushnu	Illapa ushnu
Quichwa (2400–3800–4000 m)	<i>Puna</i> (3800–4000–5400 m)
At the centre of a major Inca settlement ('other Cusco') and/or Inca province (<i>Huamani</i>). In colonial times, several of these <i>ushnus</i> ended up in the middle of or immediate to the main square (<i>Plaza Mayor</i>)	Architectonically isolated. In colonial times, none of these ended up in a <i>Plaza Mayor</i>
In the middle or on one side of a plaza	On a high flat area (- <i>pata</i>), or at the top of a mountain
Usually bigger than 20 × 20 m; the wall of the main level usually higher than 2 m	Smaller than 20 × 20 m. Usually only one level, but extra levels are added when it is necessary to have an even surface
Agriculture (<i>huari</i> , <i>quichwa</i>)	Herding (<i>llacuaz</i> , <i>sallja</i> , <i>chutoruna</i>)
<i>Inti</i> , the sun	<i>Yllapa/Santiago</i> , 'lord of meteorological phenomena', lord of the <i>puna</i>
Related with the <i>citua</i> (August), when the earth opens	Related with the marking of the cattle (<i>herranza</i>); near to or inside corrals. Associated with the <i>cajón de Santiago</i>
Planned considering annual movements of the sun	Probably related with type of mountain: for example <i>cerro bravo</i> , characterised by frequent hail or intense rain with lightning
Frequently described by <i>cronistas</i> : early colonial writers who emphasise Cuzco and official Inca religion (Cieza de León, Cabello de Balboa, Pedro Pizarro, <i>inter alia</i>)	Described by priests with long experience in peripheral areas, especially the <i>extirpadores de idolatrías</i> (Hernández Príncipe, Albornoz, Noboa, Ávila, <i>inter alia</i>)
Ref: Zuidema 1980; Hyslop 1990; Pino Matos 2005	Ref: Delgado de Thays 1965; Cavero and Yuri 2005; Meddens et al. 2008

Two ethnographic references help to consolidate the link between the abovementioned elements. First, in the *puna* of Chumbivilcas, Department of Cusco, the ceremonial burial of animals is called '*usnuy*', and '*usnu*' is the grave over which stones and a cactus named '*waraq'o*' are placed (Roél Pineda 1966: 29). If a person dies suddenly, his relatives will ask Santiago for guidance using a wizard (*paqo*). In the case of an animal, by reading coca leaves the *paqo* will determine if Santiago wants it to be buried or to be used for meat. Finally, the bones of the victim go to the *usnu* (see also Nachtigall 1966: 280–82 and Tschopik 1968: 31). This religious performance from Chumbivilcas is a potential answer to the question posed by the priest Pérez Bocanegra, who also worked in Cusco.

The second reference comes from the southern highlands of Lima, from the village of Tupe (Yauyos) where locals speak *jaqaru* (Delgado de Thays 1965). The term in question appears several times as '*usño*', and it is also called '*caja*' (box) or '*kanlle*'. The rituals associated with the *usño* vary according to location, but in all the cases it can be translated as altar (Belleza 1995). Carmen Delgado de Thays deals mainly with two kinds of *usño*: one related to agriculture, another to herding. An *usño* of the first kind was used until the 1930s: it was located in an annex to Tupe, Aysa, in one of the *andenes* (terraces) for corn and was related to the agricultural celebrations of the *quechua* zone (Delgado de Thays 1965: 243, 256). The second kind of *usño* was linked to a ritual complex of the livestock marking, and was located on the *puna* (Delgado de Thays 1965: 247, 249, 250, 251, 312–13).²³

These two references, along with others from the *puna* Andes, support the link between the mentioned elements (Santiago, herding, *puna* and *ushnu*). Moreover, the testimony from Tupe further supports the argument made for the ethnographic present: that rituals associated with *ushnu* change with altitude. A synopsis of the information presented up to this point as well as a preliminary

typology of *ushnu* can be found in Table 15.1. Before concluding, however, I will address some controversial evidence on *ushnus* from the *puna* identified in early colonial sources.

Relating names and things in the *puna*

What is the *yllapa usno* or *yllapa ushnu*? At least two interpretations are at hand. José Luis Pino Matos (2010) insists on *yllapa* as ancestor. I will suggest a more comprehensive alternative based on the environmental considerations that I have been emphasising.

The term '*yllapa*' can be found in many colonial sources. However, until now, it appears together with the term of interest (*usno*), only in the 'Relación de la visita de extirpación de idolatrías' by Cristóbal de Albornoz (1996 [1581–5]). Albornoz was a renowned *visitador* (religious inspector) who worked in the district of Huamanga, in what is now the Department of Ayacucho. Among his few but superb reports, this Spanish priest includes an inventory of items destroyed or collected during his campaign. In his 'Relación', the term used (*yllapa*, *usno*) appears no less than 17 times.²⁴ I argue for the use of the term *yllapa* in this context in its common meaning of lightning and being used as a classifying term referencing the *ushnu* (see also Staller, this volume).

First, when finishing his inventory Albornoz (1996 [1581–5]: 287) explains 'And *oznos* [ushnus] that were more than ninety, including *yllapas*, flashes of lightning, thunder, that by their name are listed in the report'.²⁵ Second, projecting the findings of many ethnographers, this term allows us to associate the main deity of the *puna* with the *ushnu*: an altar linked to lightning. This association is not limited to Ayacucho – it may be observed in other

puna regions. In the area of Recuay (present Department of Ancash), the *visitador* Rodrigo Hernández Príncipe identified an analogous structure, the *illahuasi*: 'The house of the sacred stones, called *illahuasi* offered to Lightning for the increase of llamas' (2003 [1621–2]: 757).²⁶ When visiting Santa María Magdalena, a village near Recuay in 1621, the same extirpator made an altitudinal distinction justifying the suggested relation: 'Even if all have *huacas*, as I will say, even though, being adjacent to the *Sierra*, they all have the *Lightning* as their main *huaca*' (Hernández Príncipe 2003 [1621–2]: 749, emphasis added). Confirming my suggestions, altars for lightning were common in the *puna* during the early colonial period and lightning was the main deity of the pantheon.²⁷

Third, the 'Relación' of Albornoz deals with Ayacucho. This department is characterised by two features: 45% of its territory is *puna* (Díaz Martínez 1985 [1969]: 4), and, as recent findings demonstrate, many rectangular platforms are found in this ecological zone. Cirilo Vivanco Pomancanchari (this volume) highlights that more than 40 have been identified in Ayacucho.²⁸

To avoid misunderstandings, it must be said that the association with lightning defines the main function of the altar (*ushnu*), not its associated paraphernalia. The latter could receive that name (*yllapa*) only by association. In all probability, these altars for lightning (*yllapa*, *ushnu*) included portable objects that still need to be identified. We do not know their concrete form, since the textual traces in the 'Relación' are vague. Fortunately other scholars have already dealt with this issue. When commenting on another document by Albornoz (that includes an association between *yllapa* and the embalmed ancestors), a specialist on Andean religion and *puna* culture concurs with the interpretation proposed here:

Even if Albornoz does not say it explicitly, I believe that there is no reason to doubt that these ancestors derived their importance and were *named that way* because they were mythologically akin to the Lightning, that is, with the lord of meteorological phenomena (Mariscotti 1978: 369, emphasis added).²⁹

Outside Ayacucho, in the north-central Andes, it is possible to identify ancestors who include the term *llivi* in their names (the local equivalent to *yllapa*). These ancestors were *llacuaces* or *puna* herders similar to the *salljaruna* from Ayacucho (Noboa 2003 [1656–64]: 226, 268, 274, 290, 402, *passim*). Additionally, although many mummified ancestors have been found in the *quichwa* ecological zone and on the coast, none of them received the designation *yllapa* as far as can be deduced from the available archival material and published sources. How to explain this absence? I argue that in the *puna* mummified ancestors could be named *yllapa*, but this is because these were located within the sphere of influence of the lightning. In other words, this document confirms the association between ecological zones and specific rituals.

Closing remarks: categories and diversity

The discussion of *yllapa usno* is an example that demonstrates the difficulty of abandoning essentialisms regarding the pre-colonial past in the Andes. As Pablo Macera (1988: XLIX) observed, one of the paradoxical privileges of pre-colonial archaeology is that 'it has no proper names' and consequently that it forces us to think with categories. The *yllapa usnu*, or *puna usnu*, or however we prefer to name it, is a working category. It could be contrasted or corrected with future archival or archaeological work.

The ethnographic and historical data presented above suggest we should avoid projecting models already established for the *ushnus* in the *quichwa* zone to those located at higher altitudes. Instead, we should use these *quichwa* models as a set of questions for the *puna ushnus*. These structures must be explored without ignoring local culture and especially the sacred beliefs linked to subsistence activities. We still need to define how altars materialised the relations between Cusco (in the *quichwa* zone) and the conquered *puna* territories. Significantly, the three kinds of *ushnus* identified here correspond to three different political levels in the empire: the Cusco *ushnus*, those from the main administrative centres, and those from the *puna*.

In general, there are several lines that we can follow to document the variability of *ushnus*, and pre-colonial altars. First, besides the suggested typology based on ecological zones, it is necessary to use complementary classifications (based on formal features, constructive details and/or stylistic details of the platforms). Second, we need to consider the possibility that coastal cases are aligned according to a different calendar (as for example the *ushnus* from Tambo Colorado or Incawasi). Beyond *ushnu* studies, I hope these observations might help more broadly to avoid the homogenisation of the pre-colonial past.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the 'Ushnu team' and the librarians from the Centre for Anthropology (British Museum) who created the perfect environment for my research. The ethnographic work in the *puna* of Ayacucho was conducted with Francisco Ferreira alongside conversations on Buñuel. I am grateful to Martha Bell and Sara Joffré for checking previous versions and to Frank Meddens and José Pino for sharing their knowledge on the topic. Specific recognitions are included in the text.

Notes

1. The anthropologist Bruce Lincoln (1991) proposed a similar approach in order to relate specific economies and certain religious beliefs using the case of cattle herding in eastern Africa, and comparing this cultural complex with other societies with similar features. This tendency is known as the

ecology of religion. Within it, I would like to highlight the linkages between the two previous components (economy and beliefs) and material culture, an aspect also important for Lincoln (1991: 207–12).

2. Hereafter I will use the most common academic spelling, *ushnu*, however I will incorporate local varieties when necessary. The list of spellings is derived from early colonial sources and ethnographic reports. In Quechua words are pluralised using the suffix *-kuna*. However to avoid confusion, here I will only add an *-s* to pluralise Quechua terms. For reasons of space limitation I am working only with a selection of sources on the *ushnu*. See a handy list of references in Pino Matos 2010.
3. In an interview, Zuidema (2004: 223) added: '*Lo malo con los arqueólogos es que usan un término para denominar un[a] cosa que está en ruinas, entonces en forma fácil aplican un nombre a cualquier plataforma y no sabemos que son en sí. Para aplicar el nombre de ushnu, se debe buscar el hueco, si existe es más probable de que lo sea*' ('The bad thing is that archaeologists use a term to identify something which is in ruins, so it is easy to apply a name to any platform and we don't know what it is. To designate something *ushnu* you need to look for a hole; if it exists then **it is more probable** that it is') (emphasis added). However, the *ushnu* is not only a hole (*hueco*), and at times this feature has already been destroyed by the time archaeologists arrive at the site.
4. A good way to check the diverse materialisations of the term in question is to compare the different meanings that modern translators (from H. Trimborn to G. Taylor) gave to the only mention of *usno* in the renowned *Manuscript of Huarochirí*, from the early seventeenth century. The translation ranges from 'memorial stone' to 'step-pyramid' to 'deep hole' (Ramón 2009: 108–10).
5. On the formal limits of the *ushnu* as a platform see Hyslop (1990: 69–101) who cites several cases including some border ones. For a good sample of rectangular structures of the *puna* see Cavero Palomino 2010, Meddents *et al.* 2008 and Ramón 2009: 125–8.
6. '*Altar de las huacas hecho de piedras labradas, como se ve en la puna.*' A *huaca* is a sacred entity that can be materialised in many forms – from the peak of a mountain to a pebble. For a contemporary definition of *puna* see the geographical descriptions of another Jesuit, Bernabé Cobo (1964 [1653]).
7. Many thanks to Janusz Wołoszyn for providing me with information about this project. See Ziolkowski (this volume) for further details.
8. On this project, see http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/projects/featured_project_inca_ushnus.aspx.
9. On the debate see Hammel 1965, Urton 1996 and Urbano 1989. A direct counterpoint between Rowe and Zuidema on the archaeoastronomy of the Cusco plaza can be found in *Latin American Research Review* 14(2) 1979 and 16(3) 1981. The confrontation between these kinds of tendencies is not restricted to the Andes. For a good introduction to this topic see Anderson 1983: 32–55.
10. Trimborn's criticism is still relevant because it can be applied to more recent works, such as Demarest (1981), who overlooks (or more accurately does not make explicit) the impact of altitude when dealing with Andean deities.
11. The main criticism is that Pulgar Vidal overlooked the latitudinal variability, emphasised by Troll. There is also an empirical issue: in my fieldwork, local people only used some of the emic names applied by Pulgar Vidal. I never heard the term *suni* applied. Perhaps this ecological zone is recognised in some regions, but not in the areas where I worked (Ancash, Ayacucho, Huánuco and La Libertad). Two clues confirm my suspicions: first, when dealing with Chucuito (Puno), Tschopik (1968: 132, 382) defined *suni* as 'the region of high *puna*' and 'high plains of the Andean *altiplano*'; second, when talking about southern Bolivia, Arnold *et al.* (1992: 255) add a valuable detail: 'The higher parts of the *altiplano*. It is *puna* in *quechua* [language].'
12. An illuminating introduction to this difference between ecological zones can be found in Urbano and Macera 1992. *Sallqa* also means wild (Arnold *et al.* 1992: 177–8).
13. In his presentation during the *ushnu* conference in London (November 2010) the ethno-musicologist Henry Stobart compared the soundscapes of the Amazonian forest and the *puna* (see Stobart, this volume). Significantly, for the *puna* he chose the quiet summer, and not the noisy winter, as documented, for instance, by Bolin 1998.
14. In an initial study on the alignment of archaeological sites on the Peruvian coast, Urton (1982) recognised the need to avoid projecting the calendars of the *quichwa* onto this ecological zone. At a conference in Lima in 2010, Jeffrey Parsons, an archaeologist with long *puna* experience, accepted the necessity to consider the cultural particularities of each ecological zone when interpreting archaeological sites (Daniel Dávila, pers. comm.).
15. '*Estos cajones de los hacendados no tienen Santiago porque los hacendados no tienen llamas.*'
16. '*Aquí, en Apumarka, no hay ni un hombre que no sirva a Santiago o al Llaqtayuq-machu.*' 'Además el taytacha Dios se ha envejecido ... Por eso a Santiago le está transfiriendo sus poderes. Por eso el taytaku Santi, con la mamita y los angelitos, le ayudan a sostener el mundo.' In Chucuito (Puno) at 3960 masl, Tschopik (1968: 130–31) noticed an analogous process of replacement: '*En su lugar el rayo está ahora asociado tanto con Dios (particularmente en Chucuito) cuanto con Santiago.*'
17. '*En el pueblo de Hualyllay no se halló que adorasen otro dios mas que el rayo que llaman Santiago... Este es dios universal y el más venerado en todos los pueblos, siendo raro el indio que no le adora, creyendo que de él les vienen todos los malos sucesos.*'
18. The literature that deals with *Yllapa/Santiago* and its equivalents is vast, and the altitudinal transition is clear. To characterise this deity and support the altitudinal transition, I used: Lunardi 1946; Rowe (1946: 294–5); Angeles 1955; Nachtigall 1966; Favre 1967; Escobar 1973: 98–101, 108–10; Mariscotti de Görlitz 1973; Mariscotti 1978; Yaranga 1979; Fuenzalida 1980; Gisbert 1980: 28–9; Gade 1983; Quijada 1985; Arroyo 1987; Rösing 1990; Taipe 1991; Schenone 1992: I: 22; II: 707–13; Urbano and Macera 1992; Valderrama and Escalante 1992; Decoster 1997; Bolin 1998; Forjione 1998; Hernández 2006. Particularly illustrative is the document from the late colonial period on Lircay, Huancavelica (in Pease 1974), as noticed by Hernández 2006: 328–9.
19. Besides the illuminating observations by Gade (1983), there is no exploration on the history of the impact of technology on the decline of Andean deities.
20. The closest being *bóveda* (vault). See Real Academia Española 1947.
21. '*¿Quando cae rayo en algún lugar, sueles poner en él comida, y chicha para el rayo?*' Among many other cases see the tale by Catalino Chuquimango, from Yamagual, San Juan, Cajamarca, about the place called Cruzrumi where lightning strikes regularly, in *Biblioteca Campesina* 1988: 194. See also Paredes 1964: 20.
22. To gain insight on these points (structure and content) we need to start examining the vast ethnographic and travel literature that deals with ceremonies related to lightning and its associates in the *puna* in order to be able to propose models of their potential material imprint.

23. In addition to the two types of *usño*, Delgado de Thays (1965: 253) mentioned a potential third one. Matos (1951) provides complementary information on herding and the *usño* in Tupe. Quispe (1969: 98) compared the *usño* described by Delgado and his own ethnographic findings in Ayacucho. See also the observations by Pinto (1971: 262–3) on Tomanga, Ayacucho.
24. The term *yllapa usno* in the 'Relación' includes an additional detail. Both terms are often divided by a comma (e.g. 'dos *yllapas*, *usnos*'). However, there is always coincidence between both parts (plural/plural, singular/singular), as noticed by José Pino (pers. comm.). After checking the photocopy of the original manuscript from Archivo General de las Indias, thanks to Francisco Ferreira, I suggest that the person who copied the document added the sign between the terms.
25. 'Y oznos que fueron más de noventa, donde abía *yllapas*, *relánpagos*, *truenos*, que por sus nombres están asentados en la visita.' Cf. with the epigraph, Anónimo 1585:1r.
26. 'la casa de piedras besares, que llaman *illahuasi* ofrecida al Rayo por el aumento de los carneros de la tierra'.
27. 'Aunque todos tenían huacas, como diré, con todo, por estar junto a la Sierra, tenían todos por su huaca principal al Rayo'. In this case the sense of the word *sierra*, as in the anonymous *Confessionario* quoted in our epigraph, is *puna*. It is basically the same observation included in the *Cartas Annuas* (1900 [1620]: 74), already quoted.
28. Cavero Palomino (2010), Meddents et al. (2008), and Vivanco (this volume) have all agreed to call these platforms '*ushnu*'.
29. 'Aunque Albornoz no lo diga expresamente, creo que no hay razón para dudar de que estos antepasados derivaban su importancia y se denominaban así por hallarse mitológicamente emparentados con el Rayo, es decir, con el señor de los fenómenos meteorológicos.'