

# Landscape and Politics in the Ancient Andes

## Biographies of Place at Khonkho Wankane



SCOTT C. SMITH

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SCOTT C. SMITH

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Biographies of Place



In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat's progress along it as he slips into the same window; the firing range of a gunboat which has suddenly appeared beyond the cape and the bomb that destroys the guttering; the rips in the fish net and the three old men seated on the dock mending nets and telling each other for the hundredth time the story of the gunboat of the usurper, who some say was the queen's illegitimate son, abandoned in his swaddling clothes there on the dock.

As this wave of memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira's past. The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the street, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

—Italo Calvino (1974)

Calvino's description of the fictional city of Zaira draws us to the importance of the historical trajectories of people, objects, and ideas and the ways they become entangled to form place. In this passage Calvino plays with our notion of time and in doing so highlights a fundamental tension inherent to place—that while seeming to be timeless and stable, places are in fact dynamic palimpsests of meanings and practices. Though appearing as coherent entities, places gather diverse, heterogeneous, and often contested experiences (Ashmore 2002; Ashmore and Knapp 1999a; Bender 1993, 1998; Bender and Winer 2001; Erickson and Walker 2009; Massey 2005; Patterson 2008; Pauketat and Alt 2003; Rodman 1992; Walker 2012; Zedeño and Bowser 2009). This emphasis on the history and multivocality of place is nicely captured in the concept of the biography of place (Ashmore 2002, 2009; A. A. Joyce 2009). Biography of place describes the variable meanings attached to a place by the different people who experience it and also the sense that a place is dynamic and always becoming. The concept illuminates the importance of history in the constitution of place. Places are continuously created and re-created as the historical trajectories of diverse entities are knotted together in practice and memory (Ingold 2007, 2011; Pauketat 2013; Stern 2004).

This book is a study of the ways that meaningful places emerge out of the dynamism of movement and the entanglement of a wide range of biographies—of people, of animals, of objects, and of ideas. This is also a study of the political dynamics of place-making. If we consider place to emerge out of the lines along which life is lived, lines that perforate wide-ranging social landscapes, then we must rethink our notion of the politics of place. Thinking of place topologically, rather than territorially, requires a notion of politics that traces the ways that power and influence flow along circuits connecting dispersed geographies, while at the same time considering the ways in which social relationships are negotiated between diverse people whose biographies become entangled in place (Harvey 1989; Massey 2005; J. D. Moore 2005a). In short, we require a relational politics of place.

In this book I explore the relational politics of place at one politico-religious center in the southern Lake Titicaca basin of the Bolivian Andes, a place called Khonkho Wankane (figure 1.1). Khonkho Wankane is located in the upper Desaguadero valley, in a region known as Jesús de Machaca, roughly 30 km east of the Desaguadero River, which drains Lake Titicaca (figure 1.2). The upper Desaguadero valley, a broad plain extending over roughly 4900 km<sup>2</sup>, is separated from the Tiwanaku valley by the

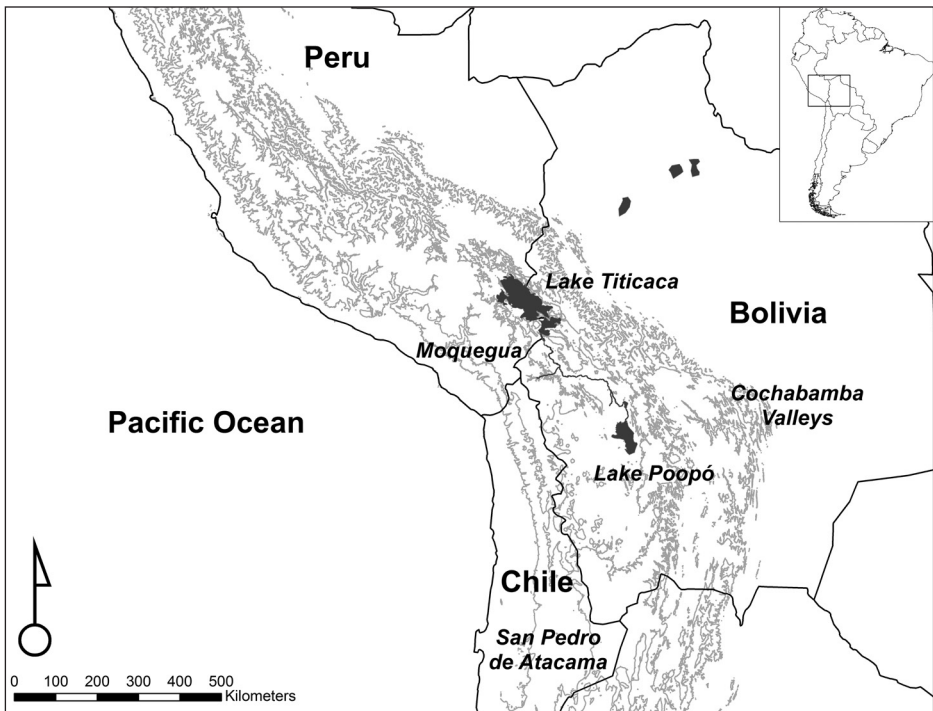


Figure 1.1. Map of the south-central Andes. Contour interval = 2000 m. Map by author.

Quimsachata-Chilla mountain range. At its height between AD 50 and 450 Khonkho Wankane was one of the largest centers in the region, rivaling Tiwanaku, its neighbor 28 km to the north (figure 1.3). The site attracted visitors from throughout the Lake Titicaca basin and, indeed, the south-central Andes. This period, part of the Late Formative, was a particularly dynamic time in the history of the region (figure 1.4). In the southern part of the basin, older religious centers had declined in influence, and a network of new and more widely influential politico-religious centers had emerged. These centers became gathering points for different trajectories, bringing people, animals, objects, and ideas into articulation and connecting wider social, political, economic, and religious landscapes. These Late Formative politico-religious centers were hubs frequented by wide-ranging llama caravans that moved goods and ideas regionally and interregionally, connecting the southern Lake Titicaca basin with areas throughout the south-central Andes.

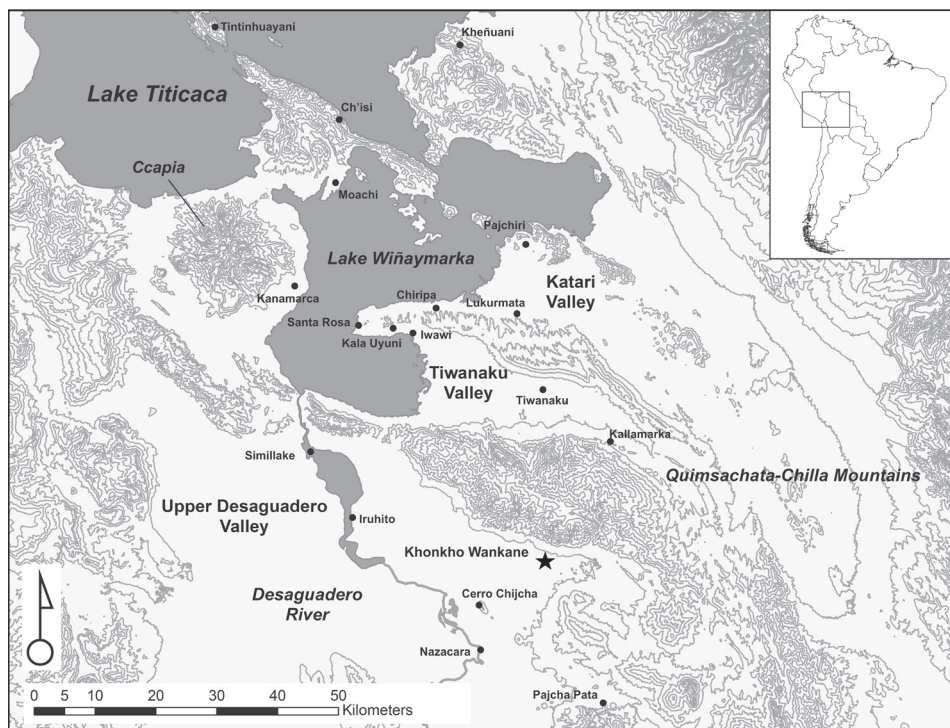


Figure 1.2. Map of the southern Lake Titicaca basin. Map by author.

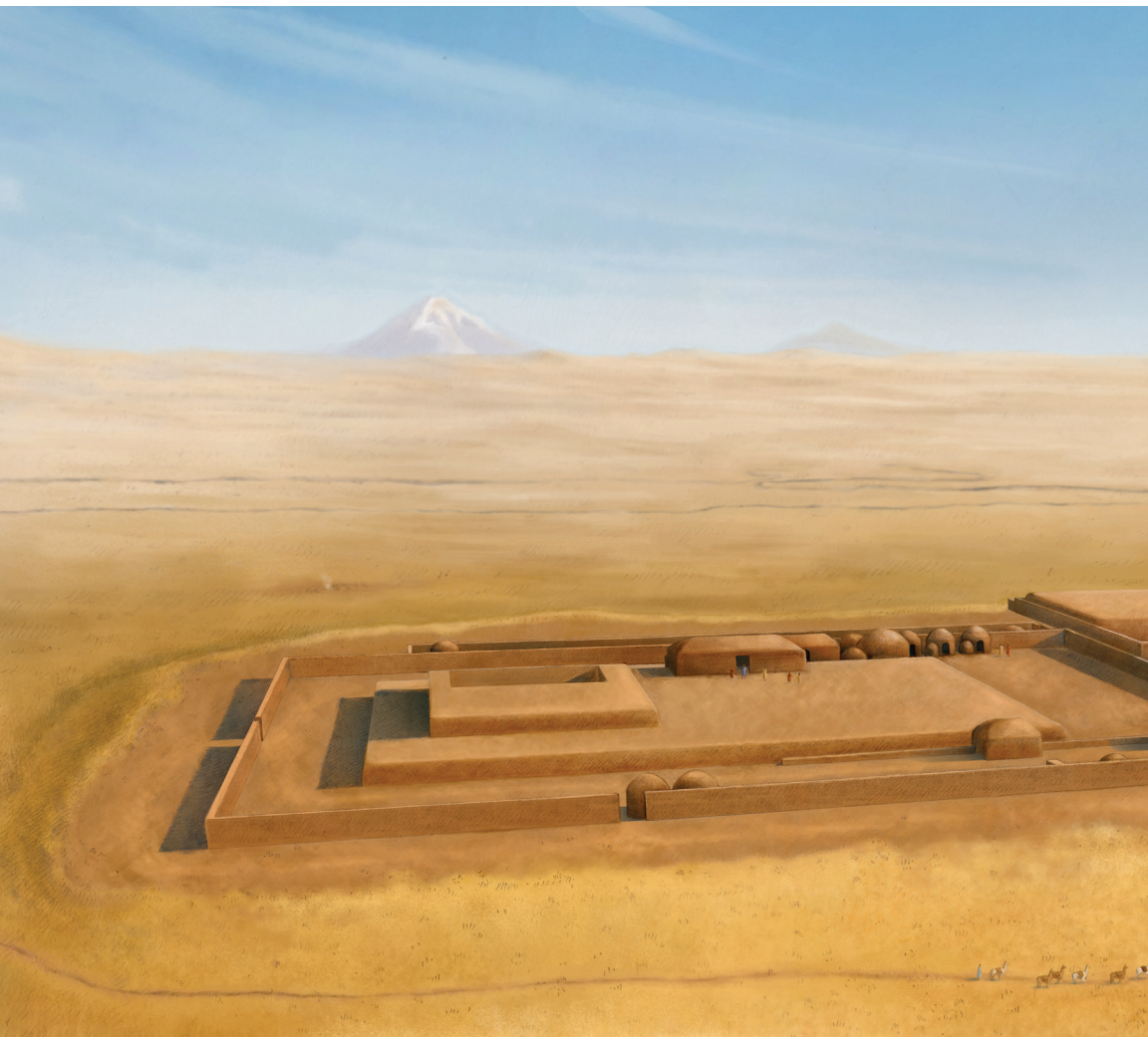
This book builds on recent advances in the archaeology of ancient political dynamics. Scholarship has shifted from conceptualizing past politics in terms of static institutions associated with idealized political types to analyses that seek to understand the historically contingent, fluid, and dynamic nature of political authority (Bauer 2011; Conlee 2005; Johansen and Bauer 2011b; Kosiba 2011; Schortman and Ashmore 2012; A. T. Smith 2003, 2011; M. L. Smith 2005). Archaeological studies since the 1990s have investigated the ways that political relationships were constructed, negotiated, resisted, maintained, and deconstructed in a variety of social contexts (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995; Stein 2002, 2005; Vogel 2012; Wernke 2007, 2013). The focus has become understanding how people mobilized resources, conceptual and material, along entangled trajectories in pursuit of political projects and objectives (Schortman and Ashmore 2012; M. L. Smith 2005). These political networks may have crosscut wide geographic regions and connected a diversity of sites and landscapes (Stahl 2004). A focus on places as emergent loci in which diverse biographical

trajectories articulate prompts us to be sensitive to the inherent fluidity of political networks and the embeddedness of politics in diverse modes of sociability. The question becomes less one of categorizing or characterizing the institutions of governance and more one of understanding the implications of power relations for the articulation of these diverse trajectories. How are power relations embodied and instantiated in the knotting of these lines in place? This framework has important implications for the ways that we study the development of political complexity and social inequality in the past. Among other things, it suggests that we need to focus on the historical dynamics of political practices as they constitute and reconstitute place.

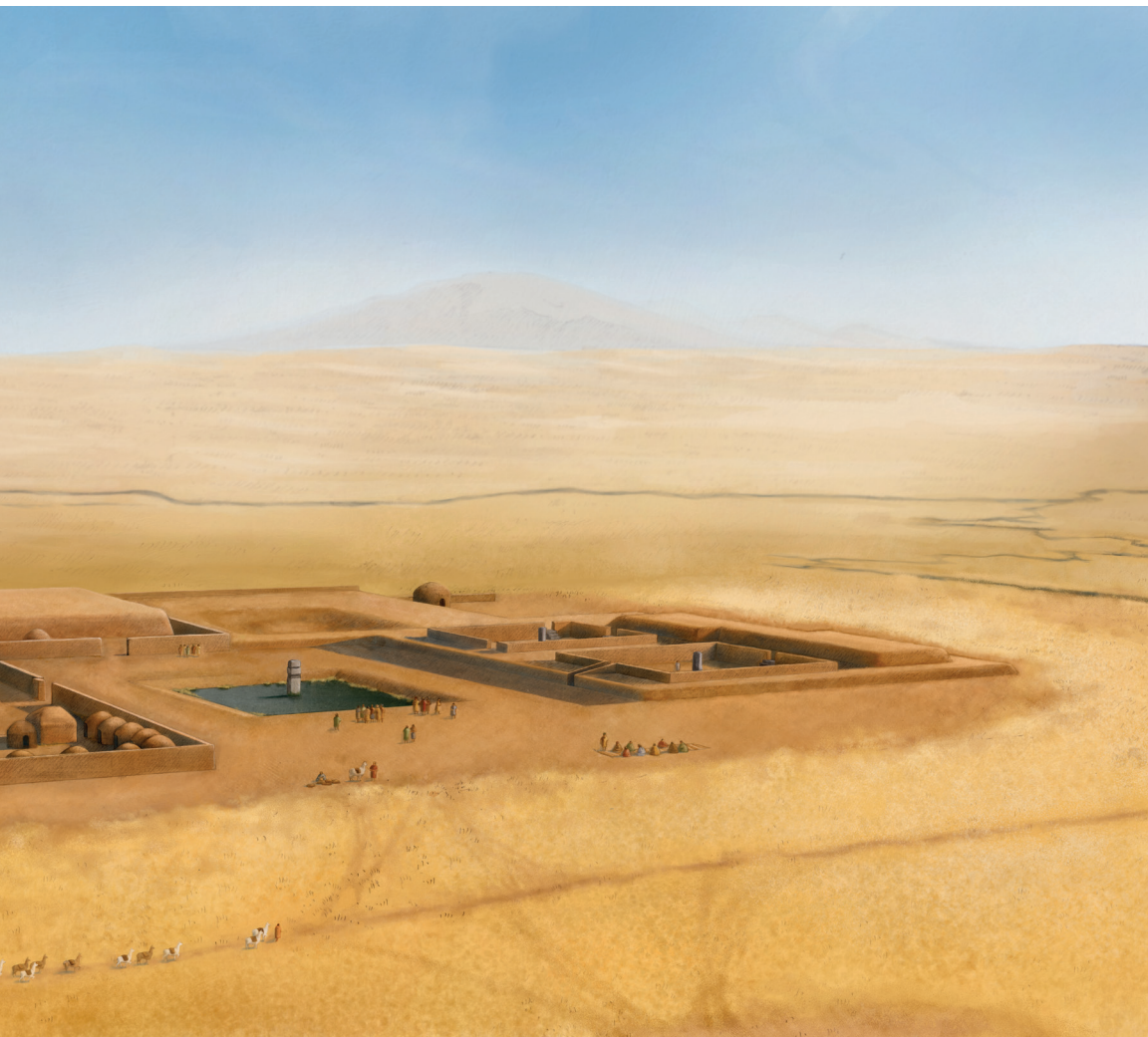
In the Lake Titicaca basin, political projects and effects often played out in the context of periodic ceremonies and rites. Ritual events were the setting for a wide range of activities and practices beyond the immediate concerns of the rite. Exchanges of food, drink, and other goods occurred. Regional and local political relationships were negotiated, and agreements were made. Social relationships of all types were forged, renewed, or broken in these contexts. Diverse modes of sociability were embedded in ritual practices such that ceremonial events were “total social phenomena” that expressed a wide range of social institutions and dynamics (Mauss 1990 [1950]:3). These events were moments in which all types of social relationship were negotiated. I focus in this study on the ways that relationships of power were instantiated in the context of ritual practice. Political rituals, as Geertz (1980:134–136) argues, are not simply representations of power but actively construct power relations (Bell 1997:128–129).

I consider how diverse sets of movements, practices, and circuits became entangled at Khonkho Wankane during periodic politico-religious events, bringing wider landscapes into articulation. These events brought llama caravans, agropastoralists, and local ritual specialists into contact. I focus on the ways that this important place was experienced and how politico-religious practices changed over time. This provides insight into the ways that social relationships were constituted and continually negotiated during the Late Formative period and how power relations were variably and contingently instantiated at politico-religious events. The broad questions that guide this study then are twofold: (1) How are powerful places like Khonkho Wankane created as life unfolds along lines of movement and flux? (2) What forms do power relations take in societies, like those of the Lake Titicaca basin during the Late Formative period, that are defined by topologies rather than territories?

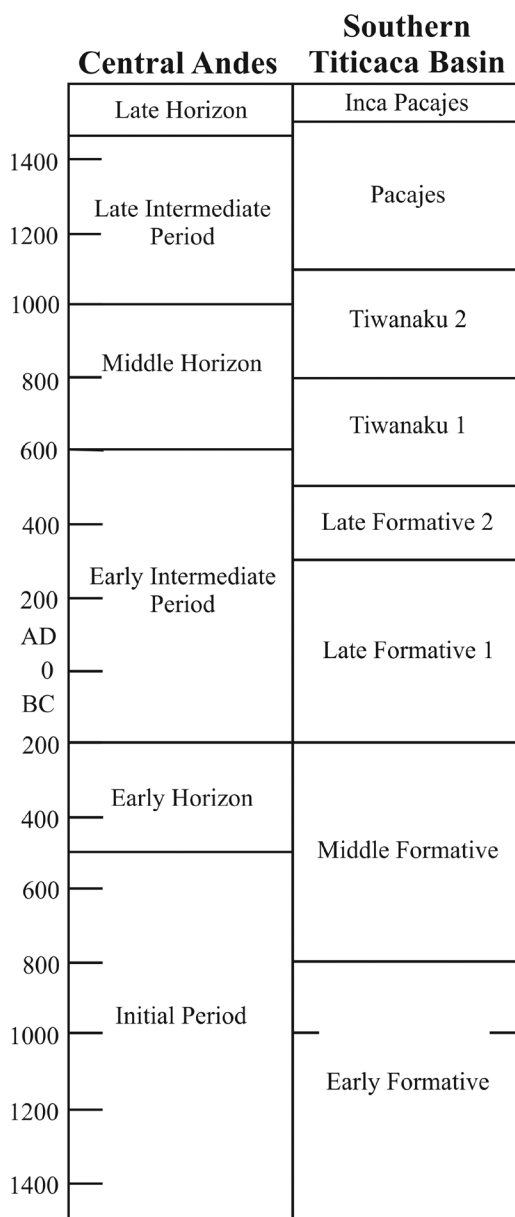




*Figure 1.3.* Artist's reconstruction of Khonkho Wankane at the height of its influence.  
Illustration by Kathryn Killackey.







*Figure 1.4.* Comparison of the southern Lake Titicaca basin chronology (*right*) and the widely used central Andes chronology (*left*). In this book I follow Janusek 2008 and use Tiwanaku 1 and Tiwanaku 2, rather than Tiwanaku IV and Tiwanaku V. Chart by author.

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RETHINKING HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES  
IN THE LAKE TITICACA BASIN

Until relatively recently political trajectories in the southern Lake Titicaca basin were understood to have proceeded along fairly familiar evolutionary lines. Soon after the emergence of the first sedentary communities in the region during the Terminal Archaic period, the first politico-religious centers in the region developed. These centers were characterized by stone stelae carved with a common set of religious iconography and by monumental architecture, including earthen platforms that incorporated sunken courts or enclosures. Karen Mohr Chávez and Sergio Chávez argue that many of these changes overlapped spatially and chronologically, and they have dubbed this cluster of attributes the Yaya Mama religious tradition, drawing on the Quechua terms for father and mother (S. J. Chávez 2004, 2012; Chávez and Chávez 1975). These centers have been conceptualized variously as simple chiefdoms, ranked societies, and temple dominions. They were characterized by higher population density and political influence over neighboring villages.

Many scholars suggest that these early processes—demographic concentration and the centralization of political influence—intensified during the Late Formative period (Bandy 2001; Stanish 1999, 2003). Increasing competition among centers led to the abandonment of some and the growth and political expansion of others. The new Late Formative centers are described as complex chiefdoms or multicomunity polities, and they are understood to have been characterized by population concentration at the centers themselves and political hegemony over wider areas containing smaller communities. Eventually two polities, Pukara in the north and Tiwanaku in the south, became the dominant centers. Pukara then declined in influence during the Late Formative, and Tiwanaku emerged as a regionally hegemonic state, rivaling in influence the contemporaneous Wari state located to the north.

Scholars have extensively debated the processes that underwrote the development and expansion of Tiwanaku's influence during the Late Formative period (S. C. Smith and Janusek 2014). Ponce Sanginés, who began systematic scientific investigations at Tiwanaku in the late 1950s, envisioned Tiwanaku as a militaristic state and likened its expansion to an oil slick spreading over much of the south-central Andes (Ponce Sanginés 1981, 1991:13). For Ponce Sanginés, urbanization and expansion began during the

Late Formative period and intensified around AD 500. Tiwanaku reached its apogee around AD 800 during the “Imperial Stage” (Ponce Sanginés 1981:85–88). Kolata (1986, 1991, 1993, 2003a; Kolata and Ponce Sanginés 1992) developed a similar model, describing Tiwanaku as the densely populated and highly stratified urban capital of an expansionary state. For both Ponce Sanginés and Kolata, the development and political expansion of Tiwanaku was underwritten by the intensification of agricultural production during the Late Formative.

More recent data, some of which are presented in this book, are forcing us to rethink how we conceptualize the Late Formative period and, specifically, processes of political centralization. Rather than an intensification of evolutionary forces that began in the Early and Middle Formative periods, new data suggest a massive disjuncture in social dynamics between the Middle Formative and the Late Formative. Many of the Late Formative centers were founded in areas with little Middle Formative occupation. As I discuss in chapter 5, our deepest excavations at Khonkho Wankane have shown no evidence of an earlier Middle Formative occupation at the site. Despite earlier suggestions of a Middle Formative occupation at Tiwanaku (Ponce Sanginés 1970), recent research has encountered no clear evidence of an earlier occupation (Marsh 2012a). Other important Late Formative centers, such as Lukurmata, show little evidence of earlier occupations (Bermann 1994). Further, settlement surveys suggest that there is very little Early or Middle Formative occupation in the wider regions surrounding many of these Late Formative centers. Many of the most influential Late Formative centers seem to have been founded in areas that were largely empty of sedentary occupation, and many of these, including Khonkho Wankane, Tiwanaku, Kallamarka, and Pajcha Pata, were located farther inland than the earlier lake- and riverside Middle Formative centers.<sup>1</sup> There is evidence to suggest that this settlement shift reflected, in part, an increased emphasis on camelid pastoralism. As I discuss in chapter 5, the evidence from Khonkho Wankane suggests that shifting caravan routes were important to the formation of the new Late Formative politico-religious centers. These centers may not have controlled larger territories in the classic sense, but they do seem to have become connected to wider social and political landscapes in complex ways. The data from Khonkho Wankane suggest that the population of the center fluctuated periodically, probably growing and shrinking in concert with the occurrence of periodic politico-religious events.

These data support alternative models of the development of social complexity in the south-central Andes that have been advanced since the late 1970s. These models emphasize the importance of the development of economic and political relationships that crosscut regions and linked together diverse landscapes. For example, Browman (1978, 1981) suggests that altiplano groups relied on llama caravans to gain access to resources from other regions and especially from lower altitudes. During the Middle and Late Formative periods, key altiplano centers like Tiwanaku developed as craft specialization centers and trading hubs that imported raw materials and exported finished products. As Tiwanaku sought to engage wider areas in exchange, Browman reasons, it extended its political influence (1981:416).

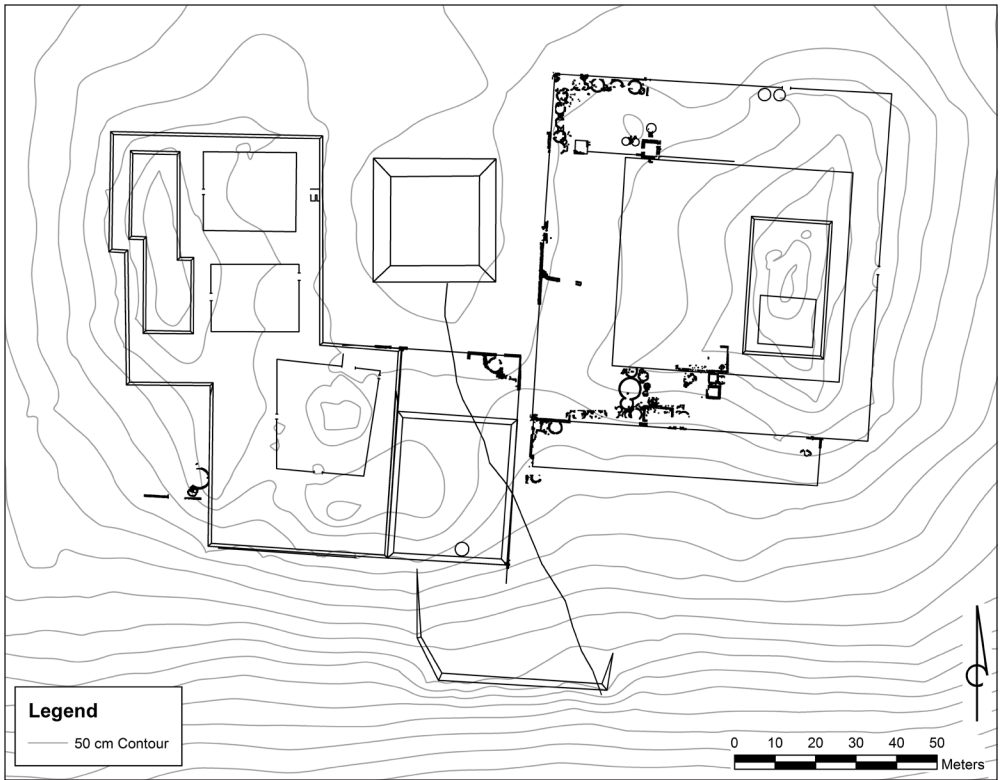
Núñez Atencio and Dillehay (Dillehay and Núñez Atencio 1988; Núñez Atencio 1996; Núñez Atencio and Dillehay 1995 [1979]) propose a model, often referred to as the “circuit mobility model,” which directs attention to the caravan circuits, which presumably facilitated exchange and the spread of political influence. They argue that principal herder-caravan circuits linked influential “axis settlements” during the Formative period and spurred the development of increasingly dense and extended interaction networks. Axis settlements were semi-sedentary or sedentary settlements that served as stable nodes where goods from different ecological zones were exchanged, caravans were rested and resupplied, and, as I argue in this study, politico-religious ceremonies occurred. Núñez Atencio and Dillehay suggest that the articulation of circuits at various scales and periodicities created linkages among diverse groups.

Additionally, as more radiocarbon dates associated with the Late Formative centers in the southern Lake Titicaca basin are published, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there was a temporal gap between the decline of the Middle Formative temple centers and the development of the new Late Formative politico-religious centers. Most Middle Formative centers declined in use by around 250 BC. Khonkho Wankane was first occupied around AD 50 (Janusek 2013), and Tiwanaku seems to have been first occupied around the same time (approximately AD 1–100) (Marsh 2012c). Work at Kala Uyuni on the Taraco peninsula demonstrates a somewhat shorter break in occupation between the Middle and Late Formative periods at that center (Bandy and Hastorf 2007; Roddick, Bruno, and Hastorf 2014). At present, however, the period of time between 250 BC and AD 1 in the southern Lake Titicaca basin remains poorly understood.

These data lead to a set of important questions about the nature of Late Formative period political dynamics. First, how and why did these new centers develop? Second, if these politico-religious centers were characterized by fundamentally dynamic and mobile populations of agropastoralists and caravan drivers, how did these places come to acquire meaning for people? How were these meanings different from the meanings attached to Middle Formative period centers? Finally, in this mobile context, where populations fluctuated during the year, what form did political strategy take? How were power relations instantiated and embodied at politico-religious events? One of the key problems with the circuit mobility model is the underdeveloped exploration of the social and political contexts and implications of caravan exchange. In this study I help to resolve this problem through an exploration of the ways that power relations were embodied and contested in ritual practice at Late Formative axis settlements. Ultimately, this provides a window into a dynamic social landscape characterized by political centralization, incipient urbanism, and state formation at Tiwanaku.

To examine these questions I explore the Late Formative politico-religious history of Khonkho Wankane. The core of this study is a fine-grained architectural sequence of the development of Khonkho Wankane, which builds on data recovered from area and penetrating excavations as well as geophysical surveys (figure 1.5). These data were anchored in time using stratigraphic relationships and a suite of 15 radiocarbon measurements. Khonkho Wankane is particularly conducive to intrasite spatial analysis because most of its architecture is only shallowly buried. This facilitated geophysical surveying and allowed us to expose a greater proportion of the architecture. At other Late Formative sites, such as Kala Uyuni and Iruhito, Late Formative occupations are deeply buried, which makes analysis of the spatial relationships in the built environment difficult.

Further, there was little occupation in the central ceremonial core of the site that postdated the Late Formative period. As a result, Khonkho Wankane provides a snapshot of a Late Formative site. This is important because at other sites Late Formative period occupations are often truncated by later Tiwanaku period deposits or covered by later monumental construction, making architectural patterns very difficult to study (Protzen and Nair 2000). At Tiwanaku in particular earlier deposits are difficult to access, which hampers efforts to understand how hierarchical social relationships developed out of a dynamic and fluid Late Formative social context (but see Janusek 2004a; Koons 2013; Marsh 2012a; Ponce Sanginés 1993). Khonkho



*Figure 1.5.* Overview of the architecture in the central ceremonial core of Khonkho Wankane. Map by author.

Wankane is unique among archaeological sites in the region because the architectural remains are well preserved and very accessible. Using geophysical surveying and excavation the Proyecto Arqueológico Jach'a Machaca (PAJAMA) directed by John Janusek investigated 27% of the 4 ha ceremonial core of the site. In addition to architectural data, I draw on ceramic data (Janusek, Smith, and Ohnstad forthcoming; Marsh 2012b; S. C. Smith 2009a, b), iconographic data (Janusek 2006; Ohnstad 2011, 2013; Ohnstad and Janusek 2007; S. C. Smith 2009b, 2011, 2012), settlement data (Lémuz Aguirre 2011), and some lithic data (Giesso 2006).

Since I am interested in understanding how people experienced politico-religious events, I employ analytical methodologies that help to reconstruct the sensory and experiential characteristics of the built environment and