

# NEIGHBOURHOODS AND INCIPIENT URBANISM IN THE NEPEÑA VALLEY, NORTH-CENTRAL COAST OF PERU CIRCA 500 BCE

MATTHEW HELMER<sup>1</sup> AND DAVID CHICOINE<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of East Anglia, Sainsbury Research Unit, Norwich, United Kingdom. E-mail: m.helmer@uea.ac.uk*

<sup>2</sup>*Louisiana State University, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.  
E-mail: dchico@lsu.edu*

## Abstract

Toward the end of the first millennium BCE, the coastal Andes of modern-day Peru witnessed a widespread trend toward early urban life styles. This article examines early Andean urbanism in the Nepeña valley after the decline of the Chavín-Cupisnique religious influences. Based on excavations carried out at three lower Nepeña valley sites, we analyse the architectural, spatial and material data to reconstruct early urban forms of community organisation. We suggest that the concept of neighbourhood is useful to characterise early processes of urbanism in the region. More specifically, our comparative study indicates that neighbourhoods were derived from patio and plaza groups which formed the backbone of urban transformations. Public ceremonial events, including feasts inside benched plazas, and especially daily tasks inside colonnaded patios represented key moments when neighbourhood identities and communal ties were negotiated, re-affirmed, and transformed. Settlements were networked on a tiered system, with primary urban centres and smaller satellites built in identical forms of stone patio groups agglutinated into compounds.

**Keywords:** coastal Andes, urbanism, Salinar, social life

## Resumen

Hacia los finales del primer milenio AEC, los Andes costeros que hoy pertenecen al Perú fueron testigos del desarrollo generalizado de los procesos de temprana urbanización. El presente artículo estudia el temprano urbanismo andino del valle Nepeña, correspondiente a la época posterior al declive del culto religioso Chavín – Cupisnique que se considera la primera tradición cultural panandina. Basándonos en las excavaciones realizadas en tres sitios ubicados en la parte baja del valle Nepeña, analizamos los datos arquitectónicos, espaciales y materiales con el fin de reconstruir las tempranas formas urbanas de la organización social. Sugerimos que para caracterizar los procesos tempranos de urbanización de esta zona es útil el concepto de vecindario. Más en concreto, nuestro estudio comparativo indica que los vecindarios derivaban de los grupos que surgían alrededor de un patio o una plaza y que formaban la columna vertebral de las transformaciones urbanas de la región. Las ceremonias públicas que incluían banquetes en las plazas con bancos y en especial las tareas diarias realizadas bajo los soportales de los patios eran momentos clave en los se negociaban, reafirmaban y transformaban la identidad del vecindario y los lazos de la comunidad. Los asentamientos formaban una red basada en un sistema escalonado, con centros urbanos primarios y satélites más pequeños, construidos según un esquema idéntico que consistía en grupos de patios de piedra que se juntaban formando complejos más grandes. .

**Palabras claves:** Andes costero, urbanización, Salinar, vida social

## INTRODUCTION

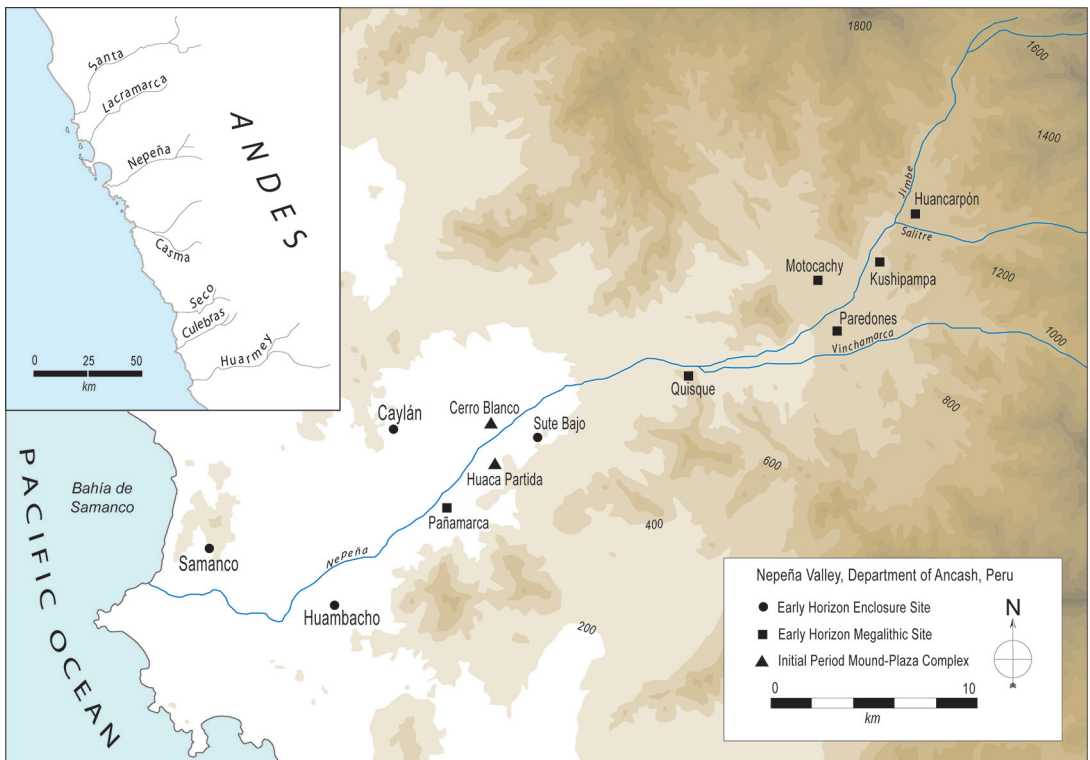
Urban transformations have long been seen as one of the most significant sociopolitical changes within complex societies (Childe 1950). Archaeologists world-wide have explored the origins and forms of early urban systems for quite some time (e.g., Adams 1966; Flannery 1972). Recently, there has been a renewed interest in comparative perspectives of ancient urbanism among different geographic regions (e.g., Cowgill 2004; Marcus and Sabloff 2008; Smith 2003; Smith 2007; Storey 2006; Yoffee 2005), which have laid the groundwork for understanding the diversity of ancient urban life. Yet, the concept of the neighbourhood in urban archaeological studies remains under-explored (see Smith 2007, 2010; Smith and Novic 2012). In this article, we investigate early urban neighbourhoods in the ancient coastal Andes.

In the Central Andes, urban civilisations developed in ways quite different to Afro-Eurasian societies, due in large part to unique sets of environmental and geographic conditions, as well as their original trajectories of cultural developments. In fact, some of the most iconic Andean societies, such as the Inca, did not rely heavily on cities, and many areas remained non-urban (Kolata 2013). The variability in types of ancient urban systems provide intriguing cross-cultural perspectives in terms of how human societies nucleate and develop, both socially and spatially.

Here, we concentrate on the early contexts of Andean urbanism along the north-central coast of Peru (Figure 1). Using architectural, spatial and material data from our ongoing field research in Nepeña, a small valley located in the modern Department of Ancash, we focus on urban developments associated with the Salinar phenomenon, a cultural development dated to the second half of the first millennium BCE. Although traditionally associated with the emergence of state societies during the Early Intermediate Period (200 BCE–600 CE) (Brennan 1980; Mujica 1975), recent research suggests that the foundations of Salinar can be found in the Early Horizon (800–200 BCE) and associated with the developments of societies of different levels of complexity and integration (Ikehara and Chicoine 2011).

In comparison to other Andean cultures and time periods, little effort has been made to document and understand Salinar settlements, their organisation, and associated social formations (Brennan 1980; Larco 1944; Mujica 1975; Willey 1945). Yet, Salinar centres, by their density, complexity, and organisation, hold vital clues into the development of ancient urban life styles in the Andes. Based on recent excavations at three neighbouring Early Horizon archaeological complexes of the lower Nepeña Valley, we analyse architectural, spatial and material data to reconstruct Salinar forms of community organisation. We suggest that the concept of neighbourhood is useful to characterise the early processes of urbanism in the region. More specifically, our comparative study indicates that Early Horizon neighbourhoods were derived from patio and plaza groups which formed the backbone of urban transformations in Salinar times. Public ceremonial events, including feasts inside benched plazas, and especially daily tasks inside colonnaded patios represented key moments when neighbourhood identities and communal ties were negotiated, re-affirmed, and transformed. Settlements were networked on a tiered system, with primary urban centres and smaller satellites built in identical forms of stone patio groups agglutinated into compounds.

In his seminal study, V. Gordon Childe (1950) suggested the following ten criteria to identify early urban societies: (1) increase in settlement size toward dense proportions, (2) centralised accumulations of capital resulting from the imposition of tribute or taxation, (3) monumental public works, (4) invention of writing, (5) advances towards exact and predictive sciences, (6) appearance and growth of long-distance trade in luxuries, (7) emergence of a class-stratified society, (8) freeing of a part of the population from subsistence tasks for full-time craft specialisation, (9) substitution of a society based on kin ties with one that is politically organised and based on territorial principles and the state, (10) appearance of naturalistic or representational art. With the exception of writing, all of these



**Figure 1.** Map of the Nepeña Valley, with three case study sites bolded. In-set shows Nepeña's location on the North-Central coast of Peru.

socioeconomic and material features have been documented in some variants on the northern coast of Peru in ancient times (Kolata 1983; Lanning 1967; Rowe 1963; Schaedel 1972).

Andeanists, similar to most archaeologists studying urban complex societies (Marcus 1983: 196), have developed many classificatory systems in which there are almost as many definitions as there are cities. Indeed, as pointed out by Henri Lefebvre (2003: 1), the concept of city has become an umbrella term for many different forms of spatial and social arrangements, from “the Greek polis, the oriental or medieval city, commercial and industrial cities, small cities, [and] the megalopolis.” This has led scholars to underestimate the economic, social and political relationships typical of each type of urban phenomenon. Hence, the use of the concept of urbanism, instead of city, allows to move beyond cities as objects, and actually investigate the interrelated processes at play in the creation, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of urban formations (Lefebvre 2003: 16; see also Cowgill 2004: 526).

Although several different claims have been made by Andean scholars regarding the earliest forms of urbanism (Haas and Creamer 2006; Pozorski and Pozorski 2008; Shady 2006; see Makowski 2008), most agree that large-scale, formal urbanism on the northern coast of Peru is best documented during the Common Era in association with the Gallinazo, Moche, Casma, Lambayeque and Chimú cultural developments (Bennett 1950; Chapdelaine 2003; Moore 2003; Rowe 1963; Schaedel 1978; Shimada 1994). In this article, we are interested in the forms of urbanism that developed during the Early Horizon, mostly in association with the Salinar cultural phenomenon on the northern coast of

Peru during the first millennium BCE. We focus primarily on urban morphologies as seen through the excavations of urban enclosures at three settlements in the lower Nepeña Valley. We postulate that Early Horizon residences are best understood as supra-household compounds or neighbourhoods (Smith and Novic 2012), where co-resident communities conglomerated together on the one hand, while maintaining social and spatial autonomy on the other.

As highlighted by Michael E. Smith (2007, 2010: 171), urban archaeologists should aim at developing middle-range theories to bridge architectural, spatial and material data with classes of social behaviour and provide empirical grounding for archaeological interpretations. With this in mind, we favour a descriptive, urban morphology approach (see Conzen 1978; Moudon 1997) to examine the ground layouts and the use of buildings at different settlements during the Early Horizon. We are particularly interested in the micromorphology of urban systems including households, townscapes, and neighbourhoods, as well as the relationships between decision-making and social institutions.

Our case study investigates early or proto-urban forms currently dated between 600 and 100 BCE. These developments appear to have influenced later Andean urban systems associated with expansive kingdoms and empires (Moore 2003; Warner 2010). Hence, the settlements could potentially be considered transitional or “semi-urban” settlements — in other words, dense, centrally planned, and permanently occupied centres divided into heterogeneous units, yet lacking formally stratified social institutions. As M.E. Smith (2010; Smith et al. 2015) highlights, the archaeology of such semi-urban or proto-urban settlements is rare and can bring important insights into the development of urban archaeology.

In Early Horizon Nepeña and elsewhere during the Salinar phenomenon, urban centres appear to be “synchoritic” (Rowe 1963: 3) in nature. This means that the urban centre was closely linked to other communities, rather than being an isolated, autonomous entity such as a city-state. Here, we present excavations from the urban centre of Caylán, in the centre of the Nepeña Valley. Additionally, understanding sociopolitical dynamics, including urbanism, is contingent upon an understanding of peripheral communities (see Lau 2002, 2005). Therefore, we also present data from two Nepeña satellites contemporary to Caylán, the maritime town of Samanco and smaller elite centre of Huambacho. The results indicate a vibrant, multi-tiered network in which Nepeña communities developed early urban life styles.

### **EARLY HORIZON NEPEÑA: SETTLEMENT SHIFTS AND URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS**

The Nepeña Valley is located 400 km north of Lima, within a narrow strip of cultivable land between coastal deserts, the high peaks of the Andes, and the Pacific Ocean. Like most of Peru’s dozens of coastal river valleys, the Nepeña River provides a seasonal stream of water flowing from the highlands. Sea resources and irrigation farming are the two most productive and predictable engines for ancient and modern subsistence economies alike. Nepeña saw particularly dense occupation during the Early Horizon, making it an attractive area for an urban case study.

Before the Early Horizon, monumental buildings in Nepeña focused on mound-and-plaza ceremonial complexes decorated with animistic supernatural characters which were commonplace throughout the early Andes. These temples were eventually abandoned between by the end of the local Nepeña Phase around 500 BCE (Shibata 2011), and replaced by larger and completely different settlement systems with expansive stone walled enclosures. This period, locally known as the Samanco Phase (450-150 BCE) marked the beginning of settlement nucleation. Data from architectural mapping and excavation efforts suggest that neighbourhoods became a key form of community organisation at the time.

Our investigations focus on Nepeña's three best preserved Early Horizon enclosure complexes: Caylán (Figure 2), Samanco (Figure 3), and Huambacho (Figure 4). Chicoine and Ikehara (2010, 2014) have suggested that Caylán, due its size and complexity, acted as the primary centre of a multi-tiered settlement system. With a total extent of over 100 ha, Caylán stands in contrast to its contemporaries Sute Bajo (5 ha), Samanco (40 ha) and Huambacho (12 ha), although all of these settlements share nearly identical architectural and material signatures. Combined, population estimates for the lower valley suggest a total populace of between 8,000 and 15,000 inhabitants during the Early Horizon.

On the northern coast of Peru, Grupo Gallinazo, Huacas de Moche, Galindo, Pampa Grande, and Chan Chan stand as obvious points of comparison to begin unraveling ancient Andean urban life and social fabrics. In terms of time-depth, Grupo Gallinazo is the most closely linked to Early Horizon Nepeña, having been occupied between 100 BCE and 700 CE. The site's 40 hectare urban core is divided between civic-ceremonial mounds fronting mud brick residential complexes, which show both central planning and organic expansion over time (Millaire 2012; Millaire and Eastaugh 2014). Huacas de Moche, Galindo, and Pampa Grande — the urban hearts of the Moche kingdoms — were organised in a similar fashion with temples fronted by residential precincts. Research on Moche urbanism has indicated significant social hierarchies and classes at play in political organisation (Bawden 1982; Shimada 1994), manifested primarily in mortuary practices (Chapdelaine 2001; Millaire 2002) and architectural differentiation. Urban social classes probably included noble families and spiritual and political leaders, as well as craftspeople, merchants, and labourers (Chapdelaine 2001: 83; Shimada 1994, 2001).

The spatial layout and social organisation of the urban traditions that develop during the Common Era on the northern coast differ markedly from what is found in Salinar contexts. The existence of palaces, monumental temples, and pervasive social inequalities contrast with our findings in earlier Salinar times.



**Figure 2.** Map of Caylán, Early Horizon Nepeña primary urban centre.

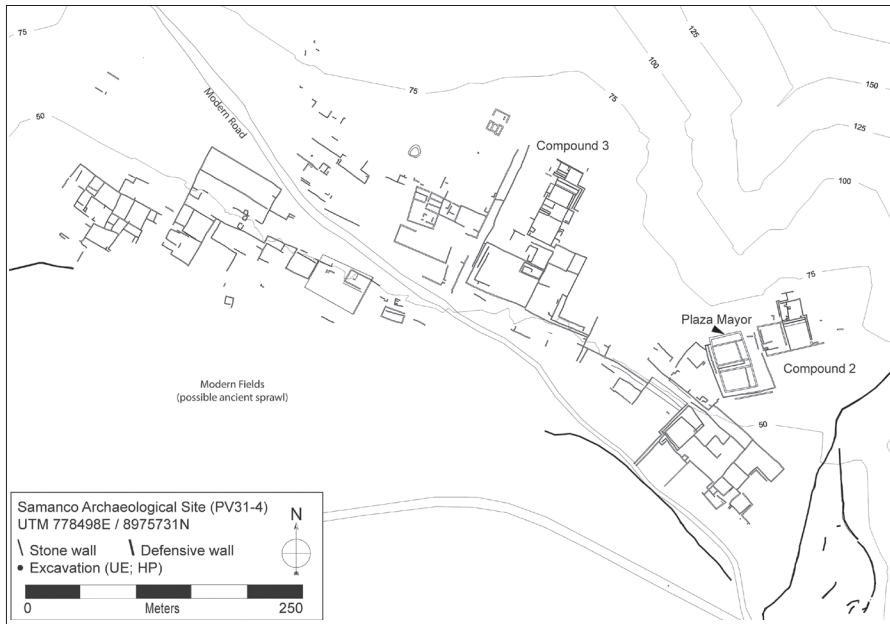


Figure 3. Map of Samanco, Early Horizon Nepeña maritime satellite town.

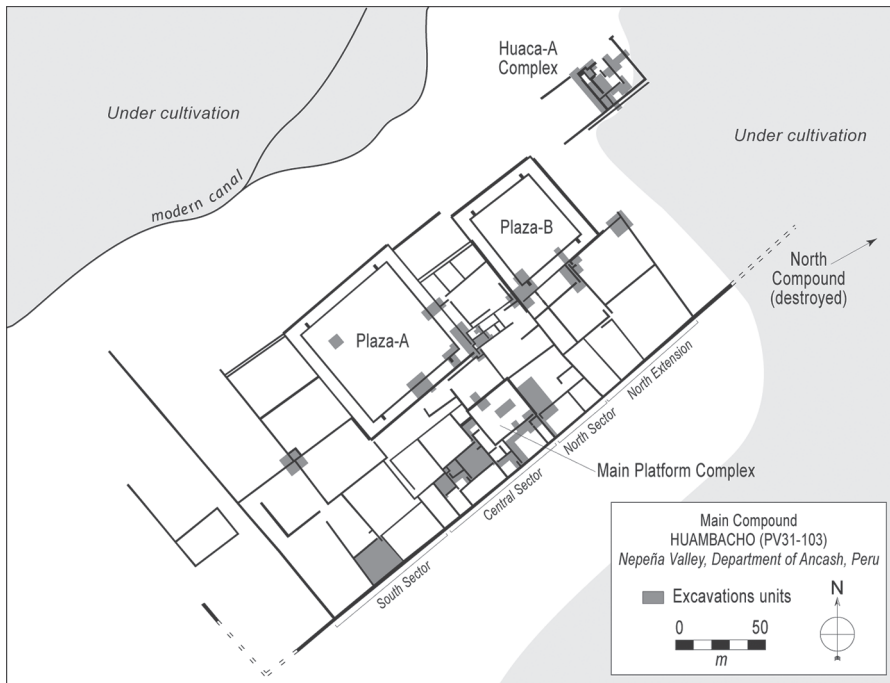


Figure 4. Map of Huambacho, Early Horizon Nepeña elite residential.

Furthermore, a preponderance of recent discoveries of “empty” ceremonial centres which resemble vast urban complexes (e.g., Cahuachi, Huánuco Pampa, Pikillakta, and others) necessitates a case-by-case investigation of Andean urbanism through time, and the ground-truthing of residences beyond spatial data. Below, we present a synthesis of archaeological data from Early Horizon Nepeña residences, shedding light on incipient urbanism and the construction of neighbourhoods in the coastal Andes.

### **NEPEÑA'S SALINAR RESIDENCES: MAPPING AND EXCAVATIONS AT CAYLÁN, SAMANCO, AND HUAMBACHO**

Over a decade of archaeological investigations have targeted Early Horizon Nepeña in an effort to understand rising social complexity in the ancient Andes (e.g., Chicoine 2006; Chicoine and Ikehara 2010, 2014; Helmer 2015; Ikehara 2010). Field operations have focused on the complete mapping of site extents, followed by targeted excavations in plazas, residences, mounds, and surrounding middens. Data from residential contexts are presented here.

Mapping of sites is fortuitous in that most standing structures are still partially visible from the surface. Mapping was conducted by systematically clearing wall faces of surface debris, then plotting all structures where two wall faces are visible. In some cases, all the surviving architecture could be mapped, while in others, such as Samanco, only the prominent walls were visible without excavation. Results indicate spatial regularities composed of rectilinear structures of varying sizes clustered around central patios and plazas with encircling platform benches. Rows of interior columns are built upon the platforms and inside residences, and accesses are located in small one meter wide entrances in corners. Access ways extend the experience of movement through long, zigzagging corridors and sometimes streets (Chicoine 2006; Helmer et al. 2012).

Residences are made up of stone structures agglutinated into compounds, known locally as *cercaduras* (see Moore 2003). The structures show a significant level of central planning, and are organised semi-orthogonally. Semi-orthogonal settlements are recognised by M.E. Smith (2007) as intermediate-level planned urban settlements with clusters of contiguous residential blocks. Comparatively, semi-orthogonal settlements span from nucleated villages like Catal Hoyuk to large cities such as Mohenjo-Daro and Ur. Larger Salinar settlements, like Caylán, show higher levels of central planning, associated with M.E. Smith's (2007) integrated orthogonal layout. Integrated orthogonal settlements are built around central features. In the case of Caylán, criss-crossing avenues form a centrally planned site core, with semi-orthogonal urban blocks radiating outward. Salinar styles of urban planning differ markedly from western historical traditions of modular orthogonal blocks between streets, borne out of Greco-Roman traditions. Rather, access ways emphasise movement within walled compounds and between rooms, further pointing toward the importance of neighbourhood interactions.

Defensive walls also play a key part in Salinar urban design. Both Caylán and Samanco (Figure 2) are nestled into hillsides probably due to increased conflict occurring alongside population increase (Ikehara 2010; Brown-Vega 2009). Urban planning also relied significantly upon topography. Hillsides appear to have been used as reference points for plotting the orientations of compounds.

The most pertinent spatial characteristic of Early Horizon Nepeña settlements are central patios and plazas, which hold the key to understanding Salinar residential organisation. Rather than being centrally located in open space, communal areas are fragmented and built into the heart of residential compounds. These spaces range in size from 100 m<sup>2</sup> to over 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, and probably performed a variety of functions. Larger, more monumental communal spaces with rows of platforms, public art, and high walls are called plazas. Excavation data indicate plazas as venues for feasts, festivals, and every day public gatherings (Chicoine 2011; Helmer et al. 2012; Helmer and Chicoine 2013).

Meanwhile, patios are more numerous and appear to function as smaller scale versions of plazas, and were probably linked to groupings of households. Patios normally measure no more than 25 m on a side and have colonnaded platform benches on one or more sides. Larger patios are connected to smaller patios and back rooms, which are the most exclusive spaces of residential compounds. Most roads in and out of the compound lead through the central patio or plaza at the compound centre, suggesting heavy traffic and usage. Compounds are composed of one or more patios and their associated residential spaces, referred to here as patio groups. Patio groups formed the heart of daily social interactions, and were likely the key to the construction of early neighbourhoods in Early Horizon Nepeña and elsewhere.

Caylán is by far the densest community, with upwards of 40 compounds identified, comprising over one hundred patio groups. The identified compounds range between 800 and 8400 m<sup>2</sup>, with an average of 4500 m<sup>2</sup> (n=42,  $\sigma$ =1713). Caylán's compounds all about one another, making the clear separation of patio groups and compounds difficult to discern. All of Caylán's compounds have single entrances which funnel into one of the site's major avenues, which terminate in a large open space paved with gravel, labeled Plaza C or Main Plaza. This plaza space faces a central mound, and is interpreted as Caylán's gateway and epicentre.

In contrast, Samanco's compounds are more dispersed throughout hillsides, ravines, and terraces, making distinct neighbourhoods easier to identify. Samanco has at least six large compound sectors ranging from 3000-21000 m<sup>2</sup>, made up of approximately 40 patio groups. Huambacho has two compounds, two monumental plazas, and is made up of much higher numbers of patios in relation to smaller domestic architecture, likely reflecting a more public-ceremonial use.

Each site, although built in the same style, exhibits interesting morphologies related to urban planning. At Caylán, neighbourhoods were in closest contact within dense zones. Samanco's compounds are larger but occur in lower density, suggesting more neighbourhood autonomy. Huambacho utilises the same style of urban compound building, but this was more likely for hosting than permanent habitation.

Excavations from patio groups at Caylán, Samanco, and Huambacho bring significant insights into early urban social make-up. Area excavations and horizontal clearings of patio groups provide the best avenue for divulging the nature, function, and occupational history of Nepeña's early urban neighbourhoods. Excavations targeted patio groups and compounds with clear boundaries. In some cases such as Huambacho, rooms were completely excavated, while at the larger complexes of Caylán and Samanco, the corners and centres of rooms were sampled. Typical stratigraphy comprised a surface layer of windblown sand and wall collapse above a variable sequence of plastered floors separated by layers of sand, ash, and refuse. These construction fill layers held the bulk of the materials recovered, alongside secondary refuse pits located around the periphery of the compounds.

Excavation data from Caylán and Samanco are still preliminary, given the large size of the complexes, while Huambacho contained much lighter artefact densities and could be excavated more completely. In fact, the dense artefact assemblages from Samanco and Caylán, namely domestic remains, were further indicators of intense habitation. At Caylán, 564 m<sup>2</sup> (~830 m<sup>3</sup>) of excavations yielded over 48,000 pottery sherds, 220 kg of shells, 10 kg of animal bones, and 15 kg of plants, all of which are currently under analysis. At Samanco, 450 m<sup>2</sup> (~675 m<sup>3</sup>) of excavations yielded 27,000 pottery sherds, 470 kg of shells, 8 kg of animal bones, 28,000 fish bones, and 30 kg of plants which reflect similar intense domestic activities on-site, albeit with more of a maritime focus. Huambacho excavations were much more extensive. Excavations investigated ca. 50 rooms and sampled an area of approximately 4500 m<sup>2</sup>, with much more limited artefact assemblages. As mentioned, most remains occurred in middens and construction fill layers, while many floors, especially floors from patios and plazas, were kept clean. However, interior compound excavations yielded significant data on activity areas and the socio-political organisation of early urban neighbourhoods.



At Caylán, excavations of residential sectors have primarily focused on Compound E (~2500 m<sup>2</sup>), a smaller compound in the centre of the site (Figure 5). Compound E excavations revealed a close connection between a plaza, communal patios, and back rooms via zigzagging corridors. Excavations focused primarily on the southern patio group from Compound E. Patio excavations yielded evidence of food and craft production. Reed mats located in a small roofed back room indicate that sleeping areas were located in the most exclusive areas behind the patios. Latrines were also located throughout the compound. Stone tools throughout Caylán include large grinding stones located in communal areas, suggesting food processing. The distribution of hand-held and stationary grinding stones suggest the sharing of stone tools among different co-resident groups.

Excavations from Samanco yielded further insights into Salinar urban life. Here, block excavations were conducted to compare Compounds 2 and 3. Compound 2 (3000 m<sup>2</sup>), located in the northeast of the site, is composed of two patio groups adjacent to the site's only monumental plaza, the Plaza Mayor. The eastern portion of Compound 2 was excavated, revealing a large, benched patio connected to an upper one leading to smaller back rooms. Excavations in the upper patio revealed that smaller patios were likely used for communal meals. The patio was connected via two ramps to a platform containing rows of stone-lined hearths (Figure 6). Each hearth contained more than a meter deep of charcoal refuse suggesting successive episodes of burning. Surrounding the hearths were scatters of food remains, including fish bones, piles of shells, bird, canine and camelid long bones, and plant refuse. This was likely a formal kitchen which, given its size, suggests that meals were conducted at the neighbourhood level, beyond the immediate household. In other words, the production, flow, and consumption of food might have been organised at the compound or neighbourhood level. Moreover, the kitchen-patio connection reveals that meals were probably key moments when neighbours came together to negotiate identities and community maintenance. Similar patterns were documented in Samanco's Compound 3 (Figure 7), suggesting conformity in neighbourhood practices.

Excavations at Samanco also revealed that mortuary practices were closely associated with neighbourhood life. Eight burials were located underneath domestic structures. The burials were associated with simple offerings, suggesting little social differentiation. Burials were placed underneath back room floors, in construction fill layers between building episodes. Families may have desired to keep loved ones close to home, which contrasts with formal cemetery precincts one encounters in other Andean contexts.

Huambacho excavations sampled 18 patios and their associated rooms from the lone surviving compound, revealing data similar to what was encountered from Caylán and Samanco. In contrast, however, floor surfaces at Huambacho were kept clean while sub-surface construction fill deposits contained limited artefacts. Middens appear limited to a small area (Huaca-A) adjacent to the Main Compound suggesting less intensive domestic activities and/or a restricted permanent population. In one back room adjacent to a patio, eight gourd containers were found which were likely used to serve food and drink during feasts and festivals (Figure 8). Festive paraphernalia associated public contexts include ceramic panpipes, shell jewellery, maize beer, and decorated stirrup spout bottles. Again, meals appear to be integrally tied to socio-political life (Chicoine 2011). The fine quality and frequency of public art at Huambacho further emphasise the site as a venue for ceremonial gatherings. Huambacho stands out as a case in which urban-style architecture is associated with non-urban functions. This should act as a reminder that compounds may have served a range of functions depending on the size, scale and complexity of their respective groups.

Our excavations of Early Horizon contexts in Nepeña bring important data into demography and settlement growth. Radiocarbon assays and archaeological materials indicate contemporary occupations at Caylán, Samanco and Huambacho for a period of perhaps 500 years, between 600 and 100 BCE. Samanco may have seen a slightly shorter occupation later in time, between 450 and 100 BCE. This would suggest that Salinar urban centres may have developed first, followed by expansion

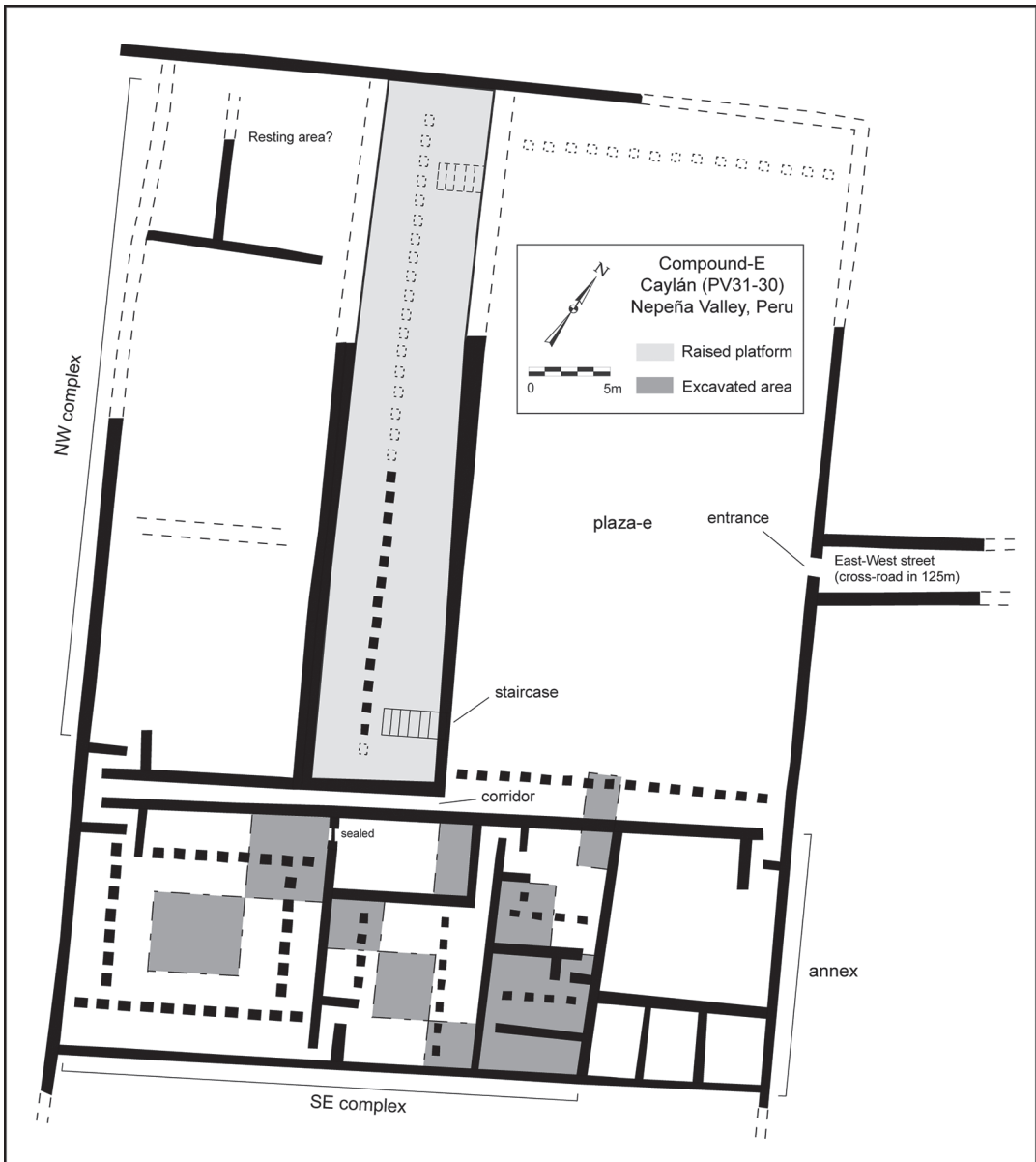
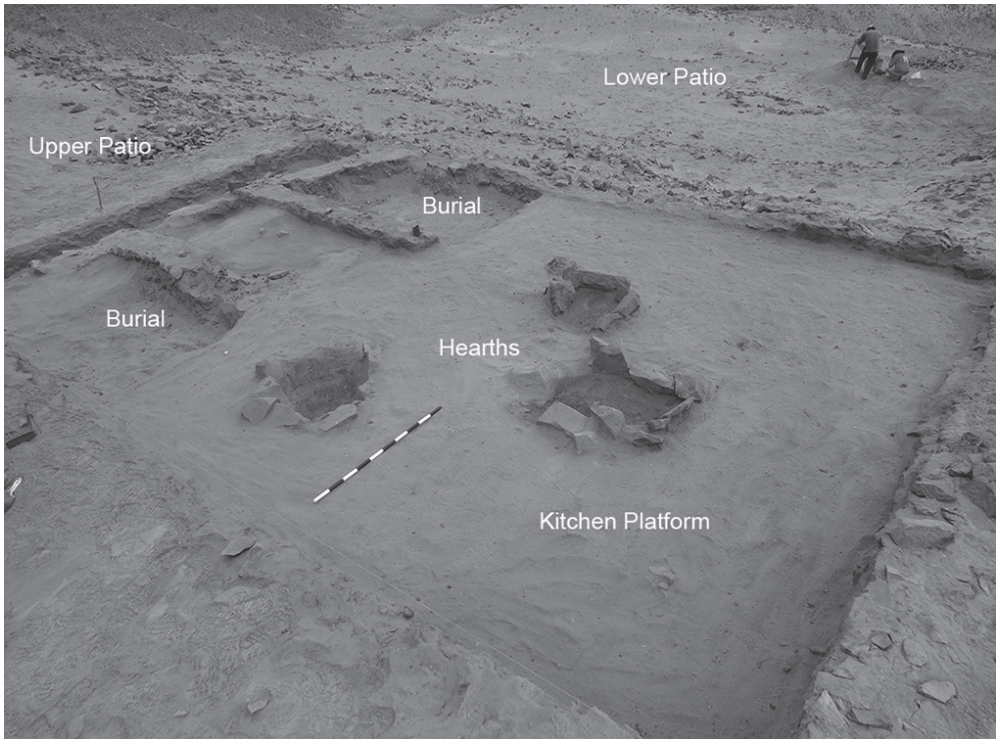
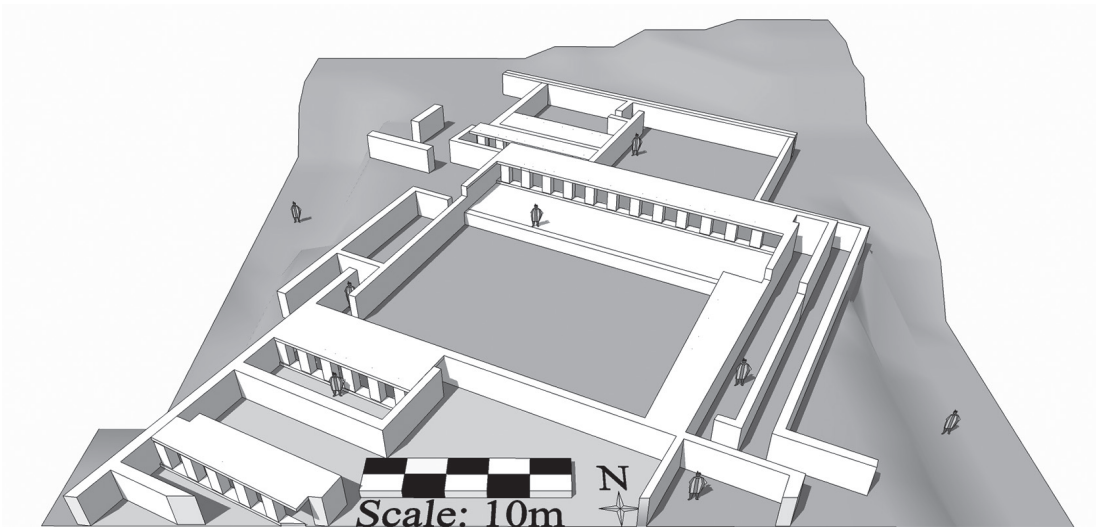


Figure 5. Plan-view drawing of Compound E south patio group sector from Caylán.

and settlement growth into satellite communities. At Caylán, urban growth probably expanded beyond the site core and into surrounding peripheries as suggested by the extent of surface ceramic scatters. A delimitation of surface remains indicates a site extent over 100 ha, double the area of the site core. Yet, rather than expand outward, stone compounds were built up and renovated over time, indicating sustained and long-term occupation over hundreds of years. In some areas, as many as five renovation



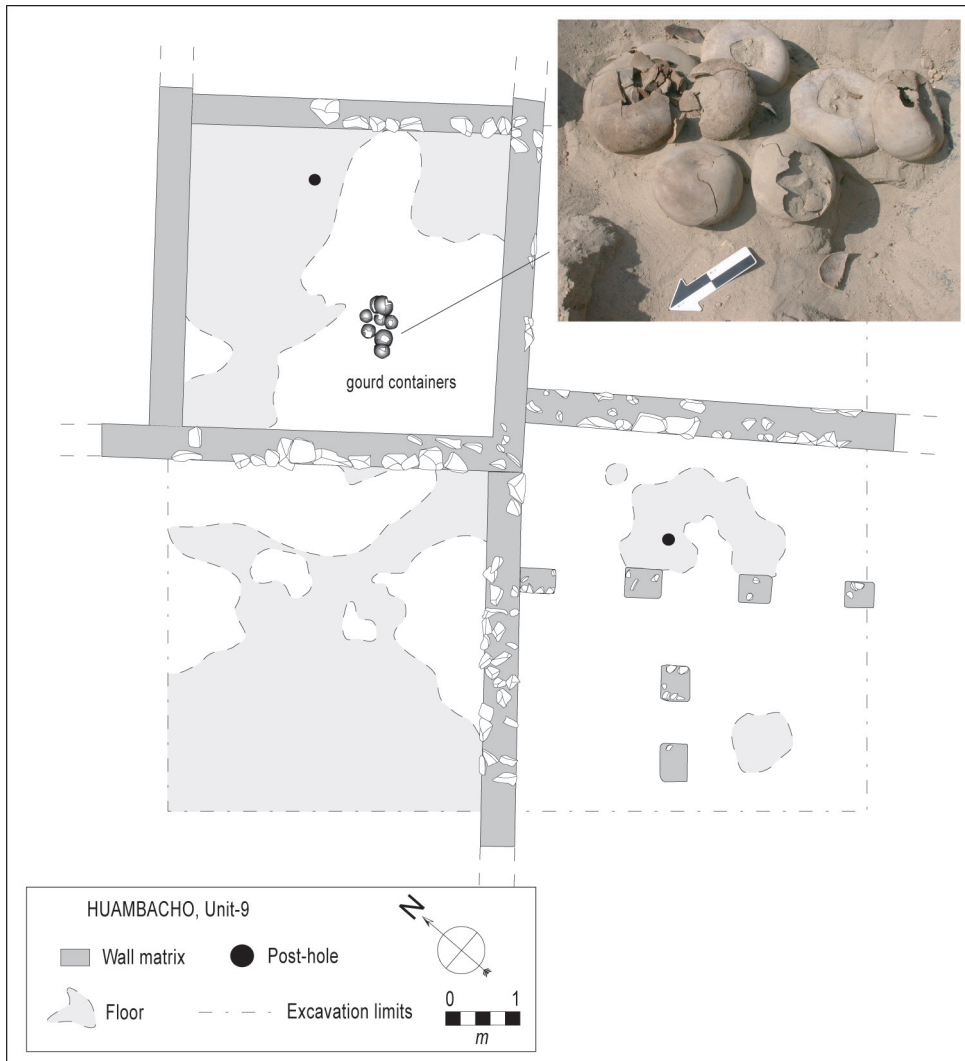
**Figure 6.** Photograph of Compound 2 kitchen platform from Samanco.



**Figure 7.** Isometric reconstruction of Compound 3 north patio group from Samanco.

phases were noted during which floors were raised, new platforms built inside plazas and patios, patios partitioned off into smaller rooms, and entrances sealed. Increased conflict may have resulted in site expansion into ridge-top areas, associated with the walling off of the site centre. During final phases of use, columns were toppled over, perhaps symbolically destroying neighbourhoods prior to abandonment.

At Samanco, strikingly similar patterns were observed, indicating the close connection between networked communities. Numerous renovation events were documented, including a major renovation correlating with the destruction of large plastered columns throughout the site in favour of rudimentary pole-and-thatch roofing. Correlations with Caylán's final moments of occupation suggest regional



**Figure 8.** Storage room containing gourd vessels from Huambacho's Main Compound.

upheaval. The pole-and-thatch phase at Samanco could indicate that the site survived slightly longer than its larger counterpart.

## DISCUSSION: NEIGHBOURHOODS AND INCIPIENT URBANISM

Early contexts of Andean urbanism, seen here in light of the Salinar phenomenon, appear closely linked to patio groups. Patios are commonplace in wide-ranging ancient American domestic habitation, yet their association with neighbourhoods presents an intriguing basis for urban settlement. Namely, the division of communal space into residences suggests exclusionary social activities tied mainly to separate neighbourhood groups. The Andes enjoyed a rich tradition of extended household communities who were fragmented into competing political moieties, variously referred to as *ayllus*, *parcialidades*, and *señorios* (depending on type), the remnants of which can still be found today. These systems formed the basis of networking, trade, occupation, and power for later Andean groups such as the Chimú and the Inka. This history of divided rule may be rooted in early social boundaries and extended household neighbourhoods seen at early urban sites.

Excavations from Caylán, Samanco, and Huambacho bring important insights into how neighbourhoods might have shaped the development of early urban societies in coastal Peru. In some instances, minimal communal interaction occurred between neighbours, who spent most of their time working and socialising in areas separate to the residence. In others, and probably in most pre-modern societies, neighbours conducted similar tasks, were of similar status, and were likely inter-related at some level. In Early Horizon Nepeña, frequent face-to-face interaction between neighbours was critical to the maintenance of diverse groups living in close proximity to one another. Neighbourhood autonomy seems to have outweighed community-wide solidarity, with public spaces largely fragmented into residential spaces. Rather than residences opening up directly to streets, they were interconnected inside walled compounds. Movement was dictated in a way that emphasised traffic between patios and the graded access of rooms. In other words, urban planning shaped the built environment by facilitating interaction among households inside the same compound, while complicating interaction among outsiders as well as members of different compounds.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study of incipient urbanism on the coast of Peru during the Early Horizon brings insights into neighbourhood forms of community organisation and settlement nucleation. In this article, we have focused on spatial and excavation data from three sites associated with an early urban system that developed in the lower Nepeña Valley ca. 500 BCE. Fieldwork at Caylán, a small city and centre of the network, Samanco, a maritime satellite town, and Huambacho, a small elite complex, points to the existence of a multi-tiered urban polity. Data indicate a unique style of urbanism divergent from western historical traditions.

The Nepeña settlements were built on semi-orthogonal and integrated orthogonal layouts, rather than modular streets and blocks. Expansive walled compounds emphasised graded movement between houses, patios, and plazas. We argue that this style of urban planning maximised opportunities for neighbourhood interaction, which focused primarily on fragmented communal spaces embedded in the residences. Patios and plazas were venues for neighbourhood-based activities, where learning, socialising, and administration strengthened urban social ties. At the same time, the fragmented nature of the neighbourhoods likely provided some levels of privacy and autonomy. Compounds are both spatially and materially homogenous, suggesting a lack of marked social inequality among early

urbanites. Rather, it is possible to hypothesise leadership as tenuous, fragmented, and likely based on neighbourhood prosperity and hospitality. Our results shed light on an under-explored time period in Andean prehistory, when nascent urban communities existed before centralised states and empires. This study encourages the further exploration of neighbourhoods in urban archaeology and a better understanding of the origins of city life.

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