

**WHAT WAS CHIMÚ AND WHEN WAS CHIMÚ?: RETHINKING
CHRONOLOGY, MATERIAL SIGNATURES OF CHIMÚ RULE, AND CHIMU
IMPERIALISM IN THE JEQUETEPEQUE VALLEY**

**¿QUÉ FUE CHIMÚ Y CUÁNDO FUE CHIMÚ?: REPENSANDO LA
CRONOLOGÍA, LAS MARCAS MATERIALES DEL DOMINIO CHIMÚ Y EL
IMPERIALISMO CHIMÚ EN EL VALLE DE JEQUETEPEQUE**

Robyn E. Cutright

Abstract

One challenge in reconstructing Chimú rule in the Jequetepeque is that we observe many continuities in agricultural landscapes, settlement patterns, domestic ceramics, and rural or peripheral sites across Lambayeque, Chimú, and Chimú-Inca periods. Public administrative architecture based on rectangular compounds, canal and field infrastructure, mold-made blackware ceramics, and utilitarian ceramic assemblages featuring paleteada ceramics, bowls, and carinated ollas persisted in some form throughout the Late Intermediate and Late Horizon periods. This article represents an attempt to be more precise about the nature and timing of Chimú conquest by identifying archaeological markers of Chimú administration in the Jequetepeque valley, using data from Pedregal, Ventanillas, and other published sites to link calibrated radiocarbon dates with excavation data, with the goal of considering the process of Chimú imperial expansion in a regional context. While traditional models for the timing of Chimú conquest are upheld by recent dates, variability both within the Jequetepeque and across the northern provinces suggests that Chimú expansion was likely territorially discontinuous and occurred in multiple stages.

Robyn E. Cutright, Anthropology and Sociology Program, Centre College, Danville KY, USA (robyn.cutright@centre.edu), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2493-6092>

Keywords: Chimú, Jequetepeque, radiocarbon dates, imperial expansion.

Resumen

Un desafío en la reconstrucción del dominio Chimú en Jequetepeque radica en la observación de numerosas continuidades en los paisajes agrícolas, los patrones de asentamiento, la cerámica doméstica y los sitios rurales o periféricos a lo largo de los períodos Lambayeque, Chimú y Chimú-Inca. La arquitectura administrativa pública basada en recintos rectangulares, infraestructura de canales y campos, cerámica negra moldeada y conjuntos cerámicos utilitarios que incluyen cerámica paleteada, cuencos, y ollas carenadas, persistieron de alguna forma a lo largo del Intermedio Tardío y Horizonte Tardío. Este artículo busca precisar la naturaleza y la cronología de la conquista Chimú mediante la identificación de marcadores arqueológicos de la administración Chimú en el valle de Jequetepeque. En este sentido, utiliza datos de excavación de Pedregal, Ventanillas, y otros sitios publicados para vincular las fechas de radiocarbono calibradas con los datos de excavación. A pesar de los persistentes problemas en la manera en que las fechas y asociaciones fueron publicadas, y la falta de precisión en las curvas de calibración del siglo XIV, el análisis finalmente respalda un escenario según el cual el dominio Chimú en Jequetepeque no se consolidó hasta principios y mediados del siglo XIV. Sin embargo, la variabilidad cronológica, tanto dentro de Jequetepeque como en las provincias del norte, sugiere que la expansión Chimú probablemente fue territorialmente discontinua y se produjo en múltiples etapas.

Palabras clave: Chimú, Jequetepeque, fechados radiocarbónicos, expansión imperial.

People living on the north coast of what is today Perú experienced a series of conquests by progressively more expansive empires between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the middle of the Late Intermediate period, the Chimú Empire expanded from its Moche valley heartland, bringing coastal valleys from at least Casma to La Leche under imperial control. After a century or more of Chimú administration, Inca conquest of chimor brought these valleys under Inca rule, which endured only half a century before Spanish arrival. While each successive imperial project imposed new cultural, political, and economic regimes, building up what Parker Van Valkenburgh (2021) refers to as alluvial deposits of empire, many aspects of everyday life remained the same.

To address complex and theoretically interesting questions about the nature of Chimú expansion and imperial administration, archaeologists first need to be able to *identify* Chimú imperial presence in the provinces, and to distinguish provincial administration from contact, influence, and exchange. Careful consideration of the material record and solid radiocarbon dates must ground any model of Chimú expansion. In this paper, I attempt to identify key archaeological markers of sustained Chimú administrative presence in the Jequetepeque valley and use published and new radiocarbon dates to peg the appearance

of these markers to the most recent calibrated chronologies of Chimú expansion. Clear material correlates of Chimú rule in the Jequetepeque seem to appear in the early 1300s, supporting the frequently cited scenario proposed by Moore and Mackey (2008). However, recent dates complicate the notion of an orderly, stepwise expansion. This messiness might be attributed to the challenges of using the Southern Hemisphere calibration curve in the fourteenth century or to difficulty distinguishing archaeologically between influence and imposition. However, it also might be suggesting something interesting about the nature of Andean empires, and I consider various scenarios for Andean imperial expansion at the end of this article.

Existing Models for Chimú Expansion

Chronologies

John Rowe's seminal 1948 article summarized ethnohistorical accounts of the Kingdom of Chimor's rise and fall. Based on the number of kings mentioned in dynastic lists, he proposed that the valleys between Zaña and Santa were conquered by AD 1370 (**Figure 1**). Rowe (1948:29) placed the empire's frontiers as far north as Tumbes and as far south as Huarmey or Huaura by Inca conquest 100 years later.

Over the subsequent six decades, archaeologists refined this narrative to arrive at a general consensus that Chimú expansion occurred in multiple stages. After founding Chan Chan around AD 900 and consolidating the heartland, the Chimú expanded first to Chao and Jequetepeque, then south to Casma, and then north again to conquer the Lambayeque region (Mackey 2009; Moore and Mackey 2008; Tantaleán 2021; Topic 1990).

Proposed dates for this expansion vary. According to Keatinge and Conrad (1983), Chimú conquest of the Jequetepeque occurred in the mid-1200s. Through the first decade of the 2000s, authors (Conlee et al. 2004; Dillehay and Kolata 2004; Dillehay et al. 2004; Swenson 2007:65) typically used this date when discussing Chimú expansion. In 2008, Moore and Mackey suggested that this timeline should be pushed back about a century, returning to a chronology more in line with Rowe's. They argued that consolidation of the Virú-Moche-Chicama heartland was a relatively long process still underway at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The first stage of expansion north to the Jequetepeque occurred around AD 1320, the second south to Casma took place around 1350, and the third phase incorporated the La Leche-Lambayeque region by 1370 (Moore and Mackey 2008: 789). They state that direct Chimú political control was never established in far northern Tumbes despite interest in *Spondylus* production (2008: 796). Richardson et al. (1990) proposed that Chimú influence reached the Chira and Piura region sometime in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries. Since Inca conquest occurred around 1470, this means that Chimú influence would have lasted perhaps only 2-3 generations in the far north, but 100-150 years in provinces closer to the core. Moore and Mackey's chronology has been widely adopted (e.g. Cutright 2015; Hahn 2014; Prieto 2010; Sapp 2011; Tantaleán 2021; Vogel 2012, 2018).

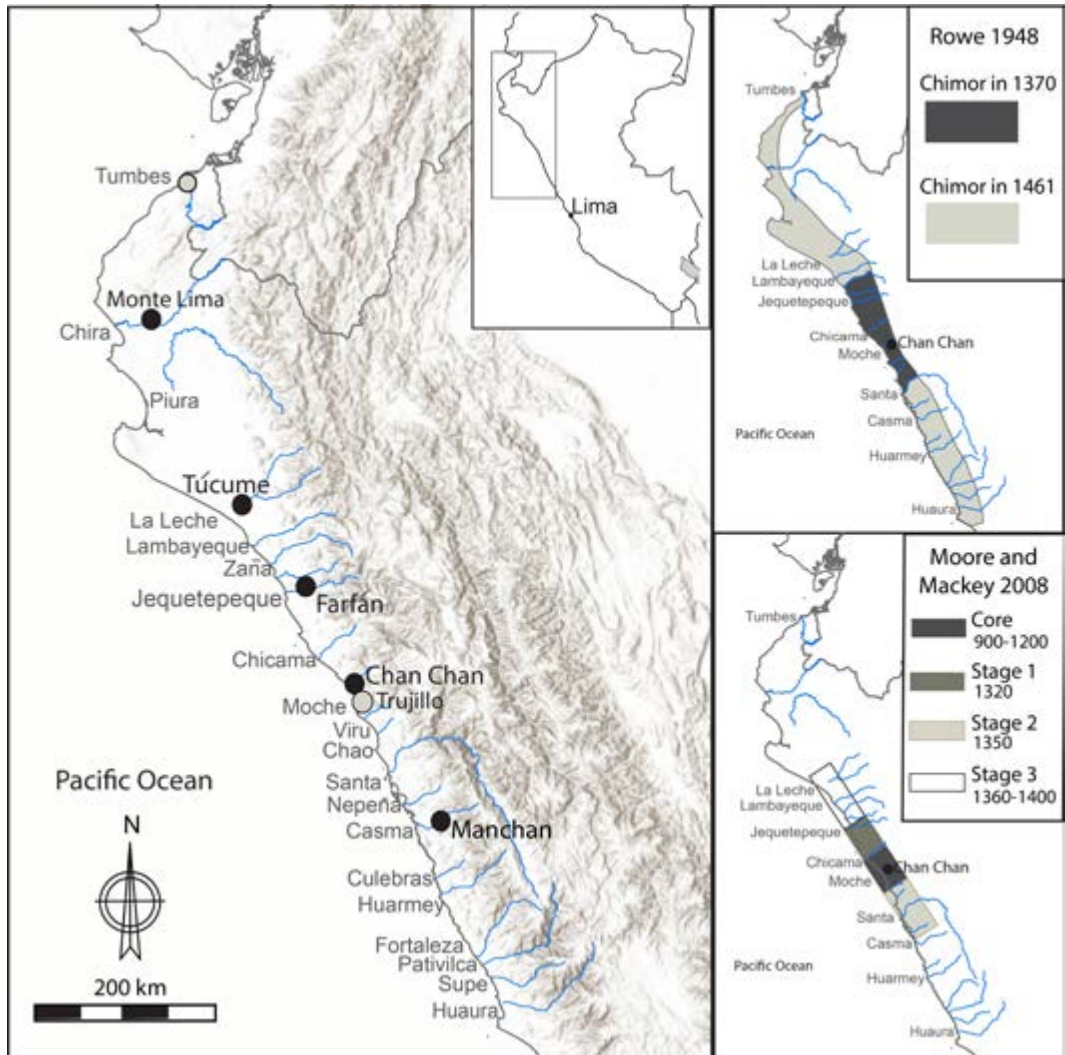


Figure 1. Important Chimú sites and comparison of Rowe's (1948) and Moore and Mackey's (2008) models for Chimú expansion on the north coast of Perú.

These two models propose dates for Jequetepeque conquest only 70 years apart, well within error ranges of legacy radiocarbon dates. Yet I believe it is important to put a finer chronological point on the matter. Leaving aside the important implications for rapid or slower processes of consolidation in the Chimú heartland, the earlier model gives the Chimú several additional generations to transform the Jequetepeque landscape; the later model implies that large irrigation projects, construction of Farfán and other administrative centers, and intensification of rural agriculture (Cutright 2015) occurred along a more rapid timeline.

Better understanding the timing of Chimú expansion also helps us evaluate the extent to which Inca analogies apply to Chimor. Inca expansion has been thought to be similarly rapid, with each new sovereign pushing the borders of the empire outward. Moore and Mackey's timing would make the Chimú very similar, with multiple provinces across hundreds of kilometers conquered within a century. Recent Bayesian analysis of accumulated radiocarbon dates, however, has suggested that Inca expansion began earlier than previously thought and consolidation was more drawn out (Lane and Marsh 2024; Marsh et al. 2017; Ogburn 2012). If the Jequetepeque was initially incorporated in the 1200s rather than the 1300s, there would be a gap of more than a century until the Chimú pushed north to Lambayeque, a scenario more similar to these recent proposals for Inca expansion.

How confident can we be about when Chimú conquest of the Jequetepeque (and by extension the rest of the empire) occurred? In this article, I review the scholarship on the Late Intermediate period Jequetepeque to summarize reported radiocarbon dates with published contextual associations. I also discuss the basis for the dates used by Keatinge and Conrad (1983) and Mackey (2009; Moore and Mackey 2008) to propose timelines for Chimú conquest. I suggest that the later timeline is best supported by a rigorous assessment of existing dates but also highlight significant gaps in the foundations of the original proposal and in the available data. First, however, I summarize some of the central lines of evidence used to explore Chimú administrative strategies in conquered provinces such as Jequetepeque and associate them with available published and unpublished dates.

Imperial Strategies

Chimú expansion focused on gaining control over desired resources, including territory, labor, trade routes, and key goods such as copper and *Spondylus* (Mackey 2009:341). State control was enacted by personnel based at administrative centers at a variety of scales, from provincial centers such as Farfán, Manchán, and Túcume to lower-level installations overseeing canals and field systems. Early publications (e.g. Moseley and Day 1982; Ravines 1980) emphasized the tight economic control exerted over subject populations. Provincial centers with a standardized architectural canon based on Chan Chan's distinctive high-walled compounds and mass-produced blackware vessels reflected state control over production, and even the diets of rural commoners were products of Chimú redistributive economic systems (Pozorski 1982).

In contrast, recent research has emphasized the variety of administrative strategies and local experiences of Chimú rule. The Chimú adopted a distinct mix of direct and indirect control in conquered valleys (Mackey 2009; Vogel 2018). This patchwork of strategies extended to the local level, where some communities adapted to new demands while preserving continuity along some dimensions of daily life (Cutright 2015). In some cases, it is clear that the Chimú emphasized exclusionary extractive practices alongside a military presence (Cervantes Quequezana and Higuera 2025). Often, Chimú rule seems

to have been mediated through existing institutions such as local elites and ceremonies at hinterland ceremonial centers (Cutright and Osorio Mendives 2024; Swenson 2007). Even in the Moche valley, rural commoners may have been more self-sufficient (Billman et al. 2020) than tightly organized into top-down redistributive networks.

As the first valley outside the heartland to be subjected to Chimú rule, the Jequetepeque should offer the richest perspective on Chimú imperial strategies. Chimú administrators had at least 150 years to build infrastructure, reorient rural production, and consolidate power. The material signatures of Chimú rule should be relatively clear and easy to date here, potentially unlike more distant valleys where the Chimú would have had to grapple with consolidating the heartlands of the Lambayeque and Casma polities and had less time before Inca conquest. In the next section of this article, I review past foundational research on the Chimú in the Jequetepeque.

Chimú in the Jequetepeque

The Jequetepeque is a broad, well-watered valley that Cieza de León (1959 [1533]) described as a fertile and flourishing agricultural landscape on his sixteenth century travels along the coast. (**Figure 2**). After the Late Moche collapse, the Jequetepeque was home to what Sapp (2011) has described as a southern Lambayeque¹ polity centered at the monumental site of Pacatnamú (Donnan 1986). During this time, Farfán had several elite compounds, a ceramic workshop, and a cemetery (Mackey and Nelson 2020). Cabur, on the south side of the valley, was a local lord's palace (Sapp 2002, 2011), and San Jose de Moro, once the center of Moche elite burial rituals, had become a site for elite gatherings fueled by beer brewed at an adjacent workshop (Prieto 2011). Beyond the valley neck, communities with coastal and middle valley affiliations interdigitated along the river; a multiethnic population lived at the bases of platform mounds at Ventanillas (Cutright 2021; Cutright and Osorio Mendives 2024) next to the more *chaupiyunga*-inflected community of Las Varas (Tsai 2012, 2020). Other villages, pyramids, and hinterland ceremonial precincts studded the landscape of the Lambayeque-period Jequetepeque (Cutright 2015; Hahn 2014; Swenson 2007). Many of these communities would continue to thrive through Chimú and later Inca conquests.

At the beginning of the 2000s, Mackey's excavations revealed Farfán was first a Lambayeque center, then Chimú, and later remodeled and used by the Inca as an administrative center and *aqllawasi* (Mackey 2006, 2009; Mackey and Nelson 2020). Ethnohistoric accounts preserve the memory of a fierce battle of conquest. Mackey found evidence of this violence: Lambayeque compound walls had been razed to their foundations, sacrificed women with local Lambayeque cranial modifications were placed on the foundations, and then the walls of a Chimú compound were built above (Mackey 2009: 337-338). The AD 1320 date proposed by Moore and Mackey (2008) for Chimú conquest of the Jequetepeque is based on radiocarbon assays from wooden spindles associated with one of these women (Mackey 2009: 342).

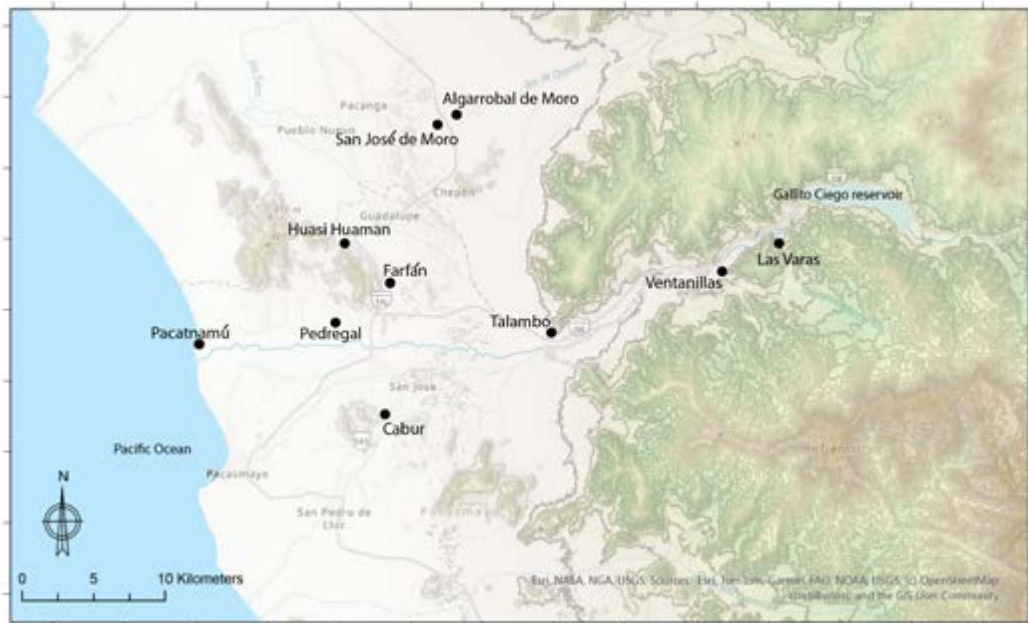


Figure 2. The Jequetepeque valley, showing sites mentioned in the text.

Mackey's work seems to clearly define the transition from Lambayeque to Chimú rule at Farfán, the primary Chimú provincial administrative center in the Jequetepeque. Yet the picture is less straightforward than it first appears. Rectangular, restricted-access compounds were constructed during all three occupations – Lambayeque, Chimú and Chimú-Inca— at Farfán. Mold-made blackware is present in Lambayeque and Chimú-Inca burials there, though stylistic references shift over time². These continuities complicate attempts to use data from Farfán as a template for identifying Chimú administrative presence across the valley. In response, some researchers have used radiocarbon dates to determine whether to place excavated contexts in the Lambayeque, Chimú, or Inca occupation (Dillehay and Kolata 2004; Hahn 2014; Sapp 2002).

However, the conquest date of AD 1320 was derived from a two-sigma calibrated date range of AD 1220-1310 for the wooden spindles associated with the sacrificed woman³. The dates were not reported as uncalibrated radiocarbon measurements, only as one calibrated range, meaning that they cannot be meaningfully compared with dates calibrated on newer versions of the curve. Spindles would have been used for an unknown number of years before being deposited with the sacrificed woman (and may have been carved from even older wood). The actual destruction and sacrifice event could have occurred as early as the first decades of the thirteenth century, but also well after AD 1310 depending on how long the spindles were in use.

My goal is not to critique Mackey's pioneering work in the Chimú provinces, but to demonstrate that current scenarios for the timing of Chimú conquest and administration in the Jequetepeque are based on shaky foundations. New dates and excavation data offer opportunities to strengthen these foundations and identify a few architectural and ceramic characteristics that might reliably reflect sustained Chimú administrative presence. Interestingly, dates associated with these characteristics do seem to cluster around calAD 1320-1350, suggesting that more recent data from the Jequetepeque could in fact support Mackey's initial estimates.

Dates and Material Correlates of Chimú Administrative Presence

This article is based on my fieldwork at Pedregal and Ventanillas, as well as published data from sites across the Jequetepeque. Site locations are indicated in **Figure 2**. **Table 1** contains information and references for each site discussed and reports all the dates discussed here. In the next sections, I discuss some architectural and ceramic associations for these dates. Unless otherwise noted, dates were calibrated using the SHCal20 curve in OxCal version 4.4.4 and expressed using the median and the error ranges at 95% confidence (Bronk Ramsey 2021; Hogg et al. 2020).

Chimu Administrative Architecture

One of the most frequently cited markers of Chimú expansion is administrative architecture that replicates key features of Chan Chan palaces: high-walled rectangular compounds containing U-shaped audiencias, storerooms, plazas and patios reached through twisting corridors and baffled entryways (Keatinge and Conrad 1983: 264; Mackey 2009). This architecture is usually seen as promoting social control and reiterating social stratification by restricting visibility and access. These features are found at all provincial centers like Farfán, Manchán, and Túcume; secondary or tertiary installations typically have at least audiencias plus some combination of the other characteristics at a reduced scale (Mackey 2009: 337).

Rectangular compounds, however, have a deep history in the Jequetepeque valley. Warner's (2010) excavations at Jatanca documented high-walled rectangular compounds dating to the late Formative period. Visitors entered these compounds from the north and passed through a series of increasingly private patios, platforms, and ramps. Later, in the Middle Horizon, the nearby site of Tecapa's orthogonal site plan featured high-walled galleries with niches surrounding large central patios (Swenson and Berquist 2022).

In the Late Intermediate period, Pacatnamú was the largest political and religious center in the valley. Pacatnamú's urban core was made up of multiple monumental huaca-quadrangles (**Figure 3**). These high-walled compounds were accessed through a narrow doorway opening into an entrance patio, flanked by low ramped platforms and

Table 1.

Calibrated radiocarbon dates with contextual associations from the Jequetepeque valley. Samples associated with Lambayeque materials in light gray, samples associated with Chimú materials in dark gray.

Date	Site	Sample context	Lab number	Material	Source	Notes	Proposed association	C14 age	Error	Median (calAD)	Calibrated range (95.4% probability unless otherwise indicated)
1	Algarrobal de Moro	Lintel in audiencia C1, Sector 3	Beta 87966	wood	Mackey and Sapp 2022: 54	Chimú-style audiencia	Chimú (architecture)	540	50	1425	1320-1484
2	Cabur	West Quadrangle	AA-35183	charcoal	Sapp 2002: 166	Feature with paica under Lambayeque floor	Lambayeque (architecture)	880	45	1205	1144-1280 (89.4%)
3	Cabur	Huaca Quadrangle burial (2)	AA-35181	bone	Sapp 2002: 137	Juvenile in seated flexed position with Spondylus, no ceramics. Similar to sacrifices found in Huaca 1 at Pacatnamú. No stratigraphic position given.		550	50	1421	1385-1462 (84.2%)
4	Cabur	Huaca Quadrangle combined burials		bone	Sapp 2002: 137	R_Combine assuming burials occurred at the same moment		525	36	1432	1400-1458
5	Cabur	Huaca Quadrangle burial (1)	AA-35181	bone	Sapp 2002: 137	Juvenile in seated flexed position with Spondylus, no ceramics. Similar to sacrifices found in Huaca 1 at Pacatnamú. No stratigraphic position given.		500	50	1445	1394-1508 (88.7%)
6	Cerro Serrano	Unit 5 below level 4	AA-9240	charcoal	Swenson 2011: 142	Hinterland ceremonial platform; Chimú and Cajamarca costeña ceramics illustrated but not from this specific context		673	28	1346	1296-1396
7	Cerro Serrano	Unit 11 level 2	AA-49241	charcoal	Swenson 2011: 142	Terrace 4 at hinterland ceremonial site; Chimú and Cajamarca costeña ceramics illustrated but not from this specific context		563	47	1415	1320-1354 (14.5%), 1386-1455 (80.9%)
8	Farfán	Compound 2 burial platform	GX-6832	wood	Keatinge and Conrad 1983: 276	Post hole on east tier of platform, sealed by later construction	Before Chimú-Inca	795	130	1249	1025-1420
9	Farfán	Compound 2 storeroom	GX-6833	wood	Keatinge and Conrad 1983: 276	Post hole in storeroom 5 behind burial platform, accessible throughout occupation		535	125	1439	1270-1662 (95.3%)
10	Farfán	Compound 2 under audiencia	GX-6831	carbonized botanical	Keatinge and Conrad 1983: 276	trench under audiencia (authors reject as too late for stratigraphic position under Chimú audiencia)		530	130	1445	1266-1669 (94.4%)
11	Farfán	Compound 2 main entrance	GX-6829	wood	Keatinge and Conrad 1983: 276	Carved cat statue near entrance, accessible throughout occupation		450	120	1520	1376-1682 (84.9%)
12	Farfán	Under Compound 2 foundations		wood	Mackey 2009	Associated with women sacrificed and buried on top of Compound A, under Compound 2; only reported as calibrated range (unknown curve)	Potential moment of Chimú conquest				1220-1310
13	Huasi Huaman	Platform N	UCIAMS-119907	charcoal	Hahn 2014: 338	Lambayeque platform (cultural affiliation assigned via date)		760	20	1286	1267-1309 (78.5%), 1360-1382 (13.7%)
14	Huasi Huaman	Platform I	UCIAMS-119906	charcoal	Hahn 2014: 338	Lambayeque platform (cultural affiliation assigned via date)		730	20	1311	1279-1318 (53.7%), 1356-1384 (41.8%)
15	Huasi Huaman	Sector K	UCIAMS-119905	charcoal	Hahn 2014: 338	Household, sample associated with piel de ganso blackware sherd	Chimú (ceramics)	615	20	1383	1320-1353 (47.9%), 1386-1415 (47.6%)
16	Huasi Huaman	Huaca A	Beta 143882	charcoal	Swenson 2007: 75	Hearth on platform with central ramp		580	35	1409	1322-1350 (16.3%), 1388-1445 (79.2%)

17	Las Varas	Llama House Unit 4 Layer D	Beta 287770	carbonized maize	Tsai 2012: 71	Maize from guinea pig pen; associated with press-molded ollas (p 112)	Lambayeque (ceramics)	1030	40	1083	992-1153
18	Las Varas	Llama House Unit 12 Layer C	Beta 287771	carbonized maize	Tsai 2012: 71	Associated with cajamarca costena bowl offering	Cajamarca costena (ceramics)	940	40	1145	1036-1219
19	Pacatnamú	Pooled bone from uppermost layer of burials		bone	Verano and DeNiro 1993	Sacrificed captives or defenders of Pacatnamú; potential date for conquest	Potential moment of Chimú conquest	880	110	1183	993-1321 (91.6%), 1352-1387 (3.8%)
20	Pedregal	Sector B Area 3 PP14 Nivel 10	AA-88401	maize	Blake and Benz 2010	Corn used in platform construction; platform used loaf-shaped adobes characteristic of Lambayeque architecture	Lambayeque (architecture)	766	34	1284	1226-1316 (78.9%), 1358-1383 (16.5%)
21	Pedregal	Sector A Area 2 UE 4 Nivel 9 Rasgo T	OS-179403	carbonized maize	unpublished	Early occupation, features cut in sterile, press-molded band and ring base in similar stratigraphic positions	Lambayeque (ceramics)	675	15	1349	1296-1370 (74%), 1375-1394 (21%)
22	Pedregal	Sector A Area 4 UE 6 Rasgo H	AA-84943 and AA-84942	maize	Blake and Benz 2010	Early occupation; R. Combine of two dates (514+/-35 and 574 +/-34) on different corn samples from same context, possible Lambayeque olla in association		545	25	1425	1404-1446
23	Pedregal	Sector A Area 2 UE 4 Rasgo E	OS-179402	carbonized botanical	unpublished	Late occupation, sample from a hearth in a kitchen. Associated ceramics include a carinated olla, incurving (neckless) olla, and a blackware plate	Chimú/Chimú-Inka (ceramics)	415	15	1489	1455-1507 (69%), 1590-1619 (26.5%)
24	Ventanillas	CA-3 UE-14 Amb B Nivel 6 Rasgo A	AA10359	charcoal	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Context sealed between floors of a patio associated with a small platform in domestic area; post-dates jar with lug, paletaada, geometric band, lightly carinated olla, grater bowl		847	38	1236	1179-1282 (93.6%)
25	Ventanillas	CA-3 UE-7 Nivel 6	Beta-445172	charcoal	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Context sealed by floor running under surface walls, ceramic associations include ring-base bowl and paletaada (spiral and squares with dot)	Lambayeque (ceramics)	830	30	1247	1210-1284 (94.1%)
26	Ventanillas	CA-5 UE-24 Nivel 8	D-AMS 028729	maize	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Early in stratigraphic sequence of huaca-quadrangle. Ceramics include press-molded geometric band and Lambayeque olla rim	Lambayeque (ceramics)	814	22	1249	1222-1281
27	Ventanillas	CA-3 UE-9 Nivel 7	Beta-445173	charcoal	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Floor earlier than surface walls, Ceramics include cajamarca costena, ring-base bowls, press-molded bands, and paletaada (squares with dot), round-lipped blackware bowl	Lambayeque (ceramics)	800	30	1256	1220-1292
28	Ventanillas	CA-1 UE-18 Poste C	D-AMS 028727	wood	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Post associated with low platform in domestic area; associated ceramics include carinated ollas and blackware plates	Chimú (ceramics)	651	24	1344	1300-1364 (71.5%), 1378-1402 (23.9%)
29	Ventanillas	CA-7 UE-20 Nivel 5 Rasgo B	D-AMS 028728	wood	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Pedestal base, Lambayeque olla, cajamarca costena in earlier strata		662	21	1345	1298-1365 (73.8%), 1377-1398 (21.7%)
30	Ventanillas	CA-2 UE-15 Nivel 8 Rasgo I	D-AMS 007338	wood	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Post from domestic context, in associated with ring-base bowl, Lambayeque olla, and middle valley domestic wares; carinated ollas in later strata	Lambayeque (ceramics)	658	21	1345	1299-1365 (73.2%), 1378-1400 (22.2%)
31	Ventanillas	CA-3 UE-6 Nivel 6	Beta-445171		Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	redware and blackware bowls	Chimú (ceramics)	680	30	1347	1292-1394

CUTRIGHT/What was Chimú and when was Chimú?

32	Ventanillas	CA-2 UE-10 Nivel 8 Rasgo A	AA106435	charcoal	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	light/high carinated olla, pedestal base		690	25	1349	1290-1328 (41.3%), 1339- 1393 (54.1%)
33	Ventanillas	CA-3 UE-8 Nivel 4 Rasgo D	D-AMS 007337	charcoal	Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024: 280	Domestic hearth in floor associated with surface walls. Piel de ganso and monkey on spout in later stratum, paletada and a pierced lug in association, blackware plate, press- molded band, and ring- base bowl in earlier stratum	Chimú (ceramics)	651	23	1383	1320-1353 (47.9%), 1386- 1415 (47.6%)

low altars, that led to a large principal platform mound. Behind and to the sides of the mound was a quadrangle, entered through a north-facing baffled doorway that contained a labyrinth of patios, niched storerooms, and food preparation areas linked by narrow corridors. Donnan's team dated this occupation to AD 1100-1370 (1986: 22), but Donnan later communicated to Mackey (2009: 342) that relevant dates from Pacatnamú "cluster around AD 1310-1340."

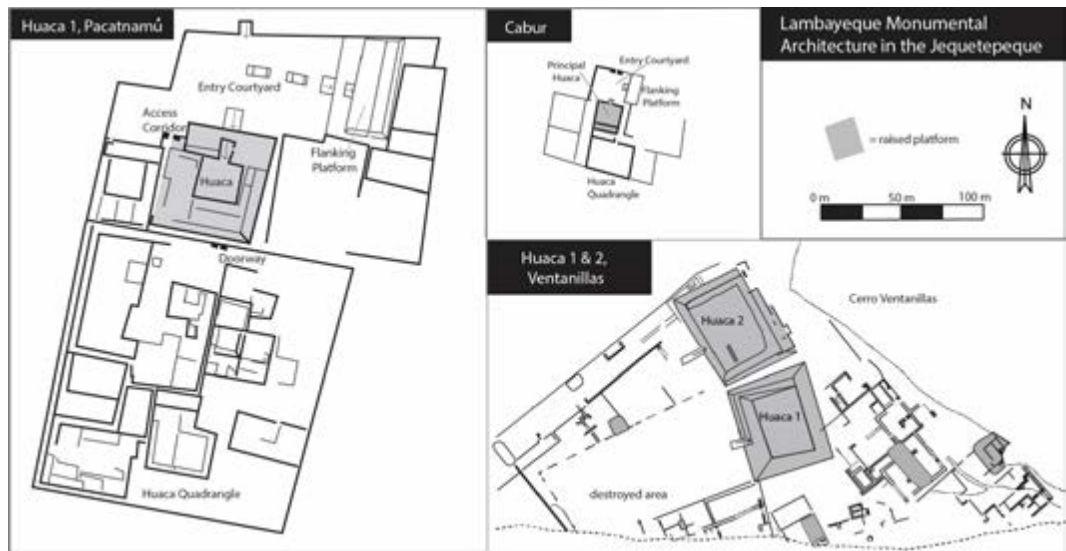


Figure 3. Examples of Lambayeque huaca-quadrangle architecture in the Jequetepeque valley: Huaca 1, Pacatnamú (Donnan 1986); Huaca 1, Cabur (Sapp 2002); Huacas 1 and 2, Ventanillas (Cutright and Osore Mendives 2024). Figures redrawn by author.

Across the valley, other versions of huaca-quadrangle style architecture date to the first half of the thirteenth century. At Cabur (Sapp 2002, 2011), a radiocarbon sample from an early stratigraphic position in a huaca-quadrangle has a median date of calAD 1205 (Date 2, **Table 1**). Sapp (2011) argues that huaca-quadrangles represented a southern Jequetepeque variant of Lambayeque architecture. Several architectural features, such as entry courtyards with low flanking platforms with ramps and altars, are repeated at Pacatnamú, Cabur, and the Lambayeque compound at Farfán (Mackey and Nelson 2020:19).

Ventanillas, in the middle valley, is something of an architectural hybrid; large, ramped platforms in a style similar to Chotuna (what Sapp (2011:100) calls the northern Lambayeque style) are enclosed in what could be a version of a huaca-quadrangle with narrow corridors, patios, and low mounds (**Figure 3**; see also Cutright 2021 figure 8.2 and 8.4). The architecture surrounding the huacas was remodeled multiple times during the site's occupation. A date places the early moments of use of this space in the mid-1200s (Date 26, Table 1).

Rectangular compounds without large huacas are present at a variety of hinterland communities with dates spanning the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At Pedregal, one such rectangular compound was built in a single architectural moment directly over strata containing late Moche ceramics (Cutright 2009). A sample of maize from an associated low platform dates this construction to the latter half of the 1200s (Date 20, **Table 1**). Swenson (2004, 2007, 2011) registers a number of these compounds on the Pampa de Faclo and at Cerro Serrano. These smaller compounds have restricted, north-facing entries, internal divisions restricting movement between internal patios, and narrow raised platforms in a layout Swenson (2007:69) compares to the famous model of Chimú ceremonial space found at Huaca de la Luna.

While dates from Cerro Serrano (Dates 6 and 7, **Table 1**) associated with Chimú ceramics place these compounds in the mid-1300s to early 1400s, other compounds including the one at Pedregal date to the 1200s. Political and ceremonial architecture featuring rectangular compounds with north-facing entries, low platforms, and restricted entry were an enduring tradition in the Jequetepeque, with variants widespread in the Jequetepeque in the thirteenth century. Are they marking Chimú conquest in the early 1200s?

This is the argument advanced by Keatinge and Conrad (1983) on the basis of their excavations at Farfán (**Figure 4**). They report several dates from Farfán but consider one to fix the date of Chimú conquest. A wooden post in the burial platform of Compound 2, sealed by later Inca remodeling, has a median date of calAD 1249 (but a very long range of calAD 1025-1420, Date 8, **Table 1**). Given the potential for reuse of beams and posts, construction might post-date the post's original procurement. A post from a storeroom had a later median date of calAD 1439 (Date 9, **Table 1**), and a wooden feline figure dated to calAD 1520 (Date 11, **Table 1**); these two samples came from contexts that would have been accessible throughout the Inca period. Other dates were discarded as far too early or suspect —these were, after all, the early days of radiocarbon dating.

Mackey's (2009) Farfán date also is problematic, as discussed above, but suggests a later conquest in the first decades of the 1300s. We have no direct dates on audiencias from Farfán, or from the provincial administrative center of Talambo (Keatinge and Conrad 1983, figure 4). Another provincial administrative center, El Algarrobal de Moro, was excavated by Mackey in the late 1990s (Mackey and Sapp

2022); a sample from an *audiencia* there has a median date of calAD 1425 (Date 1, **Table 1**). Within El Algarrobal's high-walled restricted-access compound (this one with entry from the west, see **Figure 4**) are a series of patios, pilastered doorways, and—importantly—a section of storerooms associated with the *audiencia*.

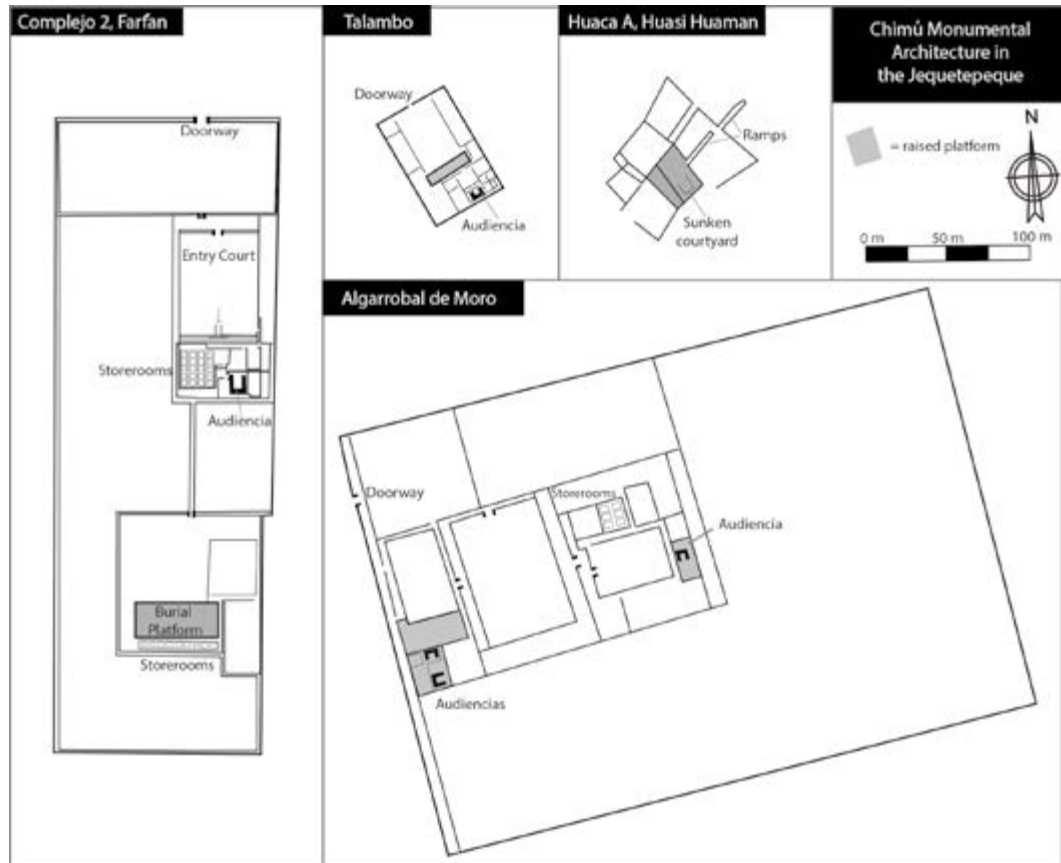


Figure 4. Examples of Chimú architecture in the Jequetepeque valley: Compound 2, Farfán, and Talambo (Keatinge and Conrad 1983); Huaca A, Huasi Huaman (Hahn 2014); Algarrobal de Moro (Mackey and Sapp 2022). Figures redrawn by author.

While the *audiencia* has been considered the quintessential symbol of state control, Moore (1992: 110) questions whether *audiencias* were associated with administrative control at all, or whether Chimú provincial political authority would have been articulated solely through the *audiencia*. Despite the deep time-depth of restricted-access rectangular compounds in the Jequetepeque, we have no dates earlier than the 1400s for U-shaped *audiencias* with associated storerooms. While the absence of *audiencias* may not prove that Chimú political authority was absent, the presence of *audiencias* may indeed be a marker of a defined political presence.

This observation needs support from a more robust series of dates, for example on more perishable organic items associated with the destruction of the Lambayeque compound at Farfán or from audiencias excavated at Farfán, Talambo or El Algarrobal de Moro. The dates that we have, however, could support a scenario in which Chimú administrative presence either began, or was enacted more clearly in the built environment of the Jequetepeque, in the late fourteenth century.

Chimu Imperial and Domestic Ceramics

Like architecture, ceramics have been used as a key chronological and cultural marker. The most recognizable Chimú corporate ceramics are reduction-fired, highly burnished, mold-made blackware bottles, plates, and cooking vessels (*ollas*). While there are Moche blackware bottles and Chimú redwares, Late Intermediate period potters perfected the mass production of reduction fired vessels. During the end of the Middle Horizon and beginning of the Late Intermediate period, characteristic middle Sicán “huaco rey” blackware bottles spread across the northern valleys. Chimú blackware vessels featured a variety of human, plant, animal, and geometric motifs. During the Inca period, a distinctive hybrid Chimú-Inca style was forged, incorporating Inca features like strap handles and flared rims into classic Chimú burnished blackware vessels (Mackey and Nelson 2020).

Fineware vessels in corporate styles and ceramics used in daily household activities both changed after the end of the Moche period in the Jequetepeque (Cutright 2022). During the subsequent Lambayeque, Chimú, and Chimú-Inca periods, however, there are more continuities in vessel form, finish, and manufacture. Stratigraphic sequences and burial assemblages from San Jose de Moro (Prieto 2008, 2011) and Farfán (Mackey and Nelson 2020; Mackey 2011) have not been pinned to absolute chronologies, but do suggest a few Lambayeque, Chimú, and Chimú-Inca diagnostic elements present in Jequetepeque valley assemblages.

At Farfán, ollas with paddle-stamped (*paleteado*) bodies, geometric bands around the vessel shoulder, and high compound necks (**Figure 5**) were present in Lambayeque-period burials, along with pedestal and ring-based bowls with similar geometric bands, and jars and ollas with pierced shoulder lugs (Mackey 2011:155, 164). Finewares include double-spouted bottles and other bottles and jars with high pedestal bases, shoulder decorations, and other features reminiscent of Sicán bottles (Mackey 2011:155). No Chimú burials were registered at Farfán. Mackey and Nelson (2020) describe a large set of Chimú-Inca period burials, including burials of women who likely served at an *aqllawasi* there. Chimú-Inca vessels include blackware bottles and jars with flared rims and other Inca features, small mold-made ollas with carinated or incurving necks, and flat-lipped plates which often have geometric molded designs on the bottom of the base (**Figure 6**).

Prieto’s excavations at San José de Moro show that some Lambayeque elements such as geometric paddle-stamping and pierced shoulder lugs continued to be used during

the *Chimú* period (2011:116). Ollas with high compound necks remained exclusively associated with Lambayeque contexts (Prieto 2008:118), and ollas with a variety of carinated rims, a classic *Chimú* diagnostic form, became common. Plates with rectangular lips and bowls with flat or low ring bases were also quite common. Prieto (2008:125-126) proposes two Late *Chimú* phases at Moro, each with a slightly different set of utilitarian ceramics. In Phase A, carinated ollas were the most common type, and while bowls were common, plates (*escudillas*) were absent. In Phase B, polished blackware plates appeared (making these potentially a marker of later moments of *Chimú* control), and more softly-curved (*media campana*) olla rims became popular. High, lightly carinated rims (*carenado alto*) persisted throughout the *Chimú* occupation.

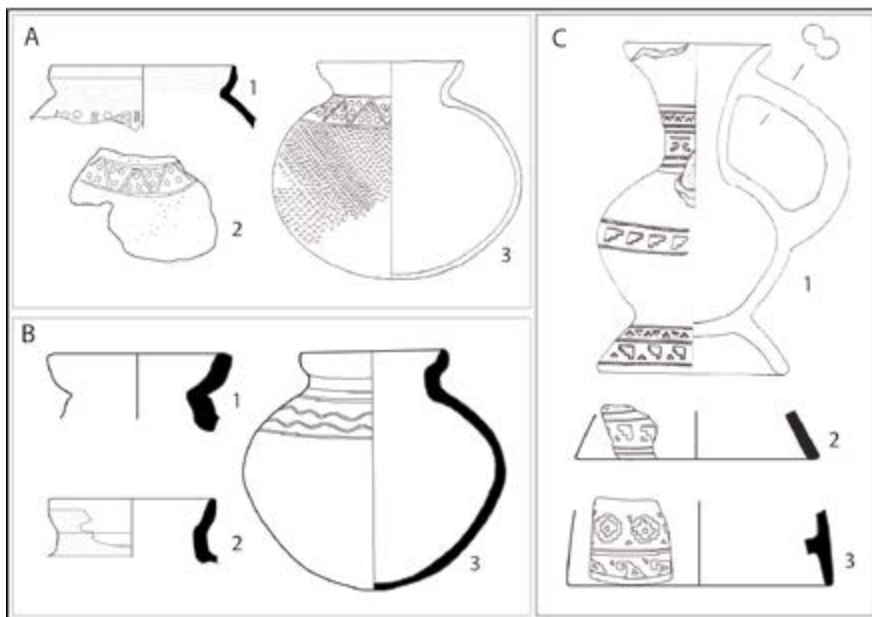


Figure 5. Examples of Lambayeque ceramics from the Jequetepeque valley. A1: Olla with press-molded band from Pedregal; A2: Olla with press-molded band from Ventanillas; A3: Olla with press-molded band and paleteada body from a Lambayeque burial in Mound G, Farfán (Mackey and Jáuregui 2003). B1: Olla with high compound neck from Ventanillas, stratigraphically earlier than Date 29, Table 1; B2: Olla with high compound neck from Pedregal; B3: Olla with high compound neck from a Lambayeque burial in Mound G, Farfán (ibid). C1: Blackware bottle from a Lambayeque burial in Mound G, Farfán (ibid); C2: Blackware pedestal base from Ventanillas; C3: Blackware pedestal base from Ventanillas, stratigraphically earlier than Date 29, Table 1.

Unfortunately, the rich stratigraphic and burial data from Farfán and San José de Moro are not linked to absolute dates. Elsewhere in the valley, radiocarbon dates have been associated with strata containing Lambayeque diagnostics. At Ventanillas, a blackware pedestal base with geometric motif and a high-necked olla were recovered in a stratum deposited sometime before calAD 1345 (Date 29, **Table 1**). At neighboring middle valley site, Las Varas, Tsai (2012:71, 112) has a date associated with press-molded and paleteada ollas with a median of calAD 1083

(Date 17, **Table 1**) and one associated with Cajamarca Costeña bowls with a median of calAD 1145 (Date 18, **Table 1**). At Pedregal, sherds including a pedestal base, a ring base, and a mold fragment for a geometric band were associated with a median date of calAD 1349 (Date 21, **Table 1**), as was a high, lightly carinated olla rim. Because ring bases and carinated ollas are found in Chimú assemblages, this stratum could be marking a transition between Lambayeque and Chimú stylistic preferences around the mid-1300s.

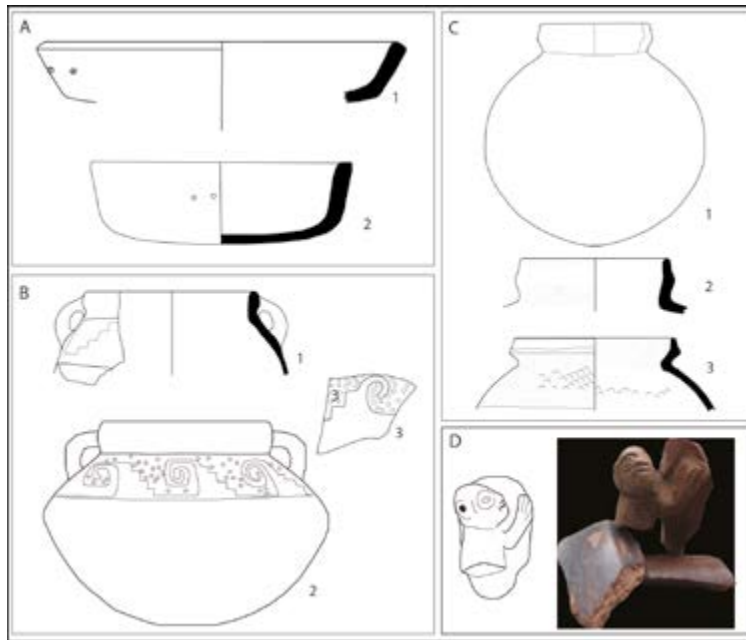


Figure 6. Examples of Chimú ceramics from the Jequetepeque valley. A1: Blackware plate with flat lip from Ventanillas, Table 1, Date 28; A2: Chimú-Inca period blackware plate with flat lip from Farfán (Mackey and Nelson 2020). B2: Mold-made blackware olla from Pedregal, stratigraphically between Date 21 and Date 23, Table 1; A2: Chimú-Inca period blackware olla with piel de ganso from Farfán (Mackey and Nelson 2020); A3: fragment of redware piel de ganso from Ventanillas, Date 28, Table 1. C1: Carinated Chimú olla from Farfán (Mackey and Nelson 2020); C2: high carinated olla from Pedregal; C3: Carinated olla with paletteada body from Pedregal. D: Bottle spout with monkey from Ventanillas, Date 28, Table 1.

We also have a few dates for diagnostics typically associated with Chimú. Hahn (2014:338) reports a fragment of piel de ganso⁴ blackware associated with a median date of calAD 1383 (Date 15, **Table 1**). At Ventanillas, piel de ganso redware, a bottle with a monkey applique, and a flat-rimmed blackware plate date to median calAD 1344 (Date 28, **Table 1**). At Pedregal, a piel de ganso sherd, an incurving molded blackware olla sherd with a wave motif, and a Chimú-style face fragment date to later in the Chimú period, median calAD 1489 (Date 23, **Table 1**). A small, blackware olla with a stepped geometric motif was deposited at Pedregal at some point before the previous sample, but after calAD 1349. Notably, none of these diagnostic features were present on ceramics associated with dates prior to the mid-1300s.

Carinated ollas are more difficult to place as a diagnostic marker. At Pedregal, the shape of carinated rims changed over time to become lower and more triangular (Cutright 2009:518). While low carinated rims with a distinct point do seem reliably associated with Chimú or Chimú-Inca contexts, high rims with only a light carination, almost a c-shaped curve, are found in earlier contexts. Unfortunately, these observations from Pedregal differ from Prieto's observations at San José de Moro, where it appears that high carinated rims were present throughout the sequence, while low carinated rims were more common earlier and gave way to a more C or bell shape later (Prieto 2008:125). Clearly there is space to develop utilitarian ceramic typologies that link stratified deposits or burial assemblages with absolute dates.

Discussion

It is worth highlighting some of the limitations of the dates and other data presented here before discussing the results further. Dates and contextual associations were reported by the original authors, with varying levels of detail about the architectural and ceramic features in direct association with the dates. Dates from Pedregal and Ventanillas are associated with ceramic sherds from fill rather than primary contexts such as burials. Few sites in the Jequetepeque have both radiocarbon dates and deep stratigraphic sequences, and no published radiocarbon dates are associated with burial assemblages.

Legacy radiocarbon dates also present problems. They typically have long error ranges that make it difficult to pinpoint specific events. This is made more difficult by the bumpy Southern Hemisphere curve in the 1300s. Many new dates with very tight error ranges nevertheless intersect the curve at multiple points (**Figure 7**), creating ranges of almost a century. Dates are not reported consistently in the literature. Calibrated ranges are less useful than the radiocarbon age and error range because they cannot be adjusted to new calibration curves. Calibration curves are not always specified and given that dates calibrated with IntCal and ShCal can be offset as much as fifty years in the 1300s, the curve makes a difference. Even with these drawbacks, it is worth making as much use as possible of existing data, especially since many sites (including Pedregal) have been destroyed.

Absolute Chronologies of Chimú Rule

Bayesian modeling can predict more precise beginning and end dates for Ventanillas and Pedregal, where I have more dates and some stratigraphic sequences, than for sites with only one or two dates. Based on available dates, occupation at Ventanillas is estimated to start between calAD 1170 and 1275 and end between calAD 1325 and 1450⁵; these predictions fit with the absence of Inca ceramics at the site. Inca administrative focus likely shifted higher upvalley along the route to Cajamarca. As I have argued elsewhere (Cutright 2021; Cutright and Osorio Mendives 2024) Ventanillas likely represented the easternmost extent of coastal control during the Late Intermediate period⁶. The Chimú

did not place distinctive administrative architecture there, despite Ventanillas' strategic location near canal intakes and coastal-highland routes, suggesting a more locally conciliatory stance than previously suggested for the Chimú (e.g. Mackey 2006, 2011).

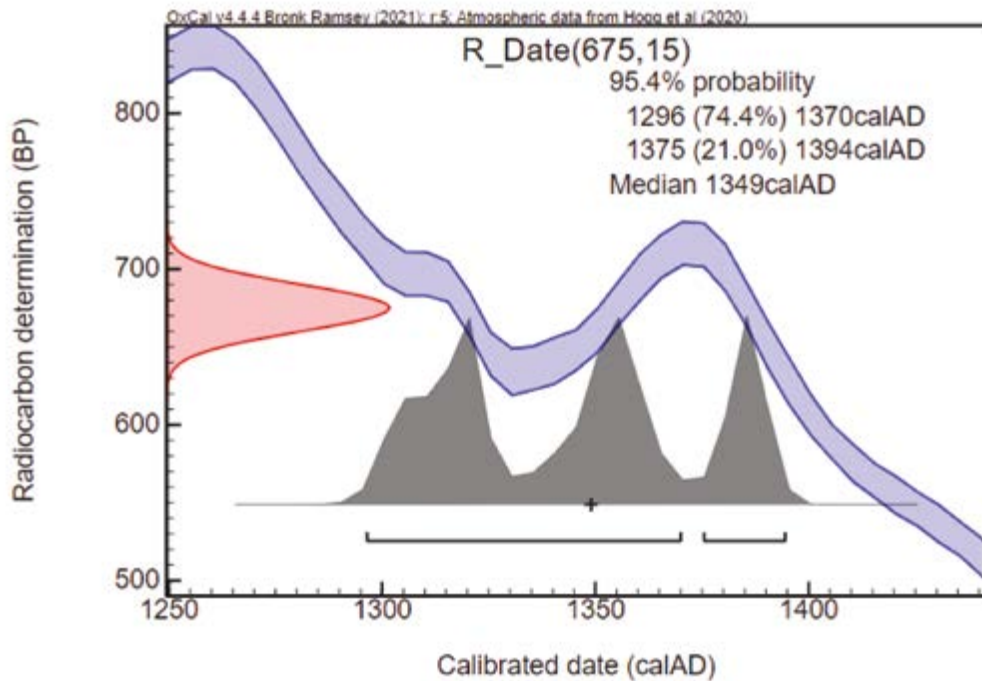


Figure 7. Example of the Southern Hemisphere curve in the 1300s.

Pedregal's modeled occupation ranges are wider, with a start date estimated between calAD 1093-1385 and an end date between calAD 1448-1720. Construction of the platforms and earliest LIP domestic occupation probably began prior to Chimú arrival, and likely grew as the Chimú intensified agricultural production at nearby field systems. At least some parts of Pedregal fell into disuse during the Inca period—an Inca road cuts across one household compound—and I found no artifacts that confirm a colonial occupation.

Widening focus to the valley as a whole, **Figure 8** shows all dates from **Table 1**. Immediately, issues of long error ranges of legacy dates and multiple peaks of fourteenth century dates become apparent. **Figure 9** includes only dates for which I have been able to pinpoint an association with specific diagnostic ceramic or architectural features (audiencias, adobes, or the handful of ceramic attributes discussed above)—in other words, dates for which there is an independent reason to place them in either Lambayeque or Chimú periods. Light gray dates are associated with Lambayeque

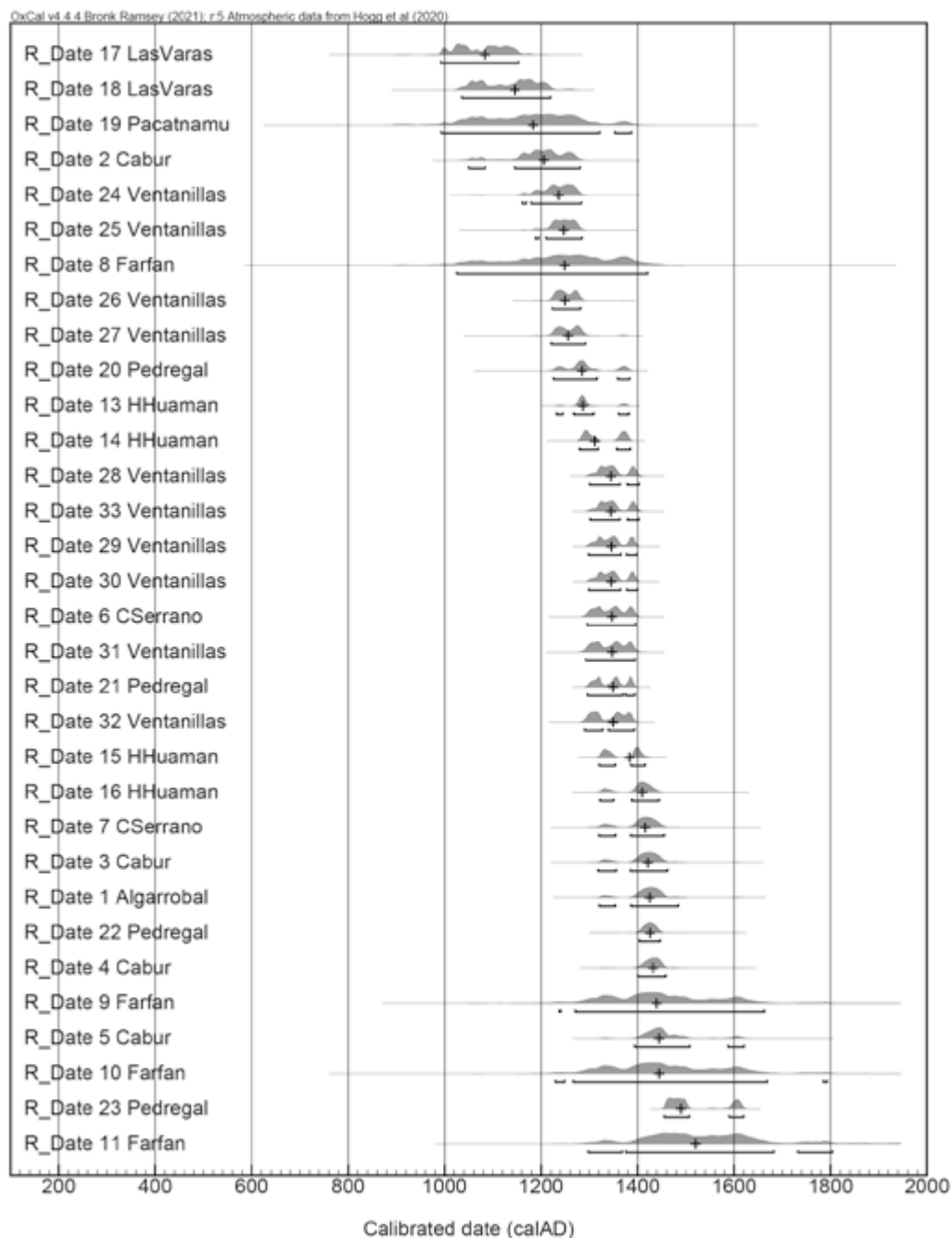


Figure 8. Published dates from the Jequetepeque valley calibrated using OxCal v. 4.4.4 and SHCal20 (Bronk Ramsey 2021, Hogg et al. 2020). See Table 1 for contextual information.

features, dark gray with Chimú. The picture is still messy, with a period between 1300-1380 where Lambayeque and Chimú dates overlap. In this context, Mackey's proposed date of AD 1320, marked in **Figure 9**, does not seem like a bad guess for Chimú conquest. It does seem that a transition occurs in the mid-14th century, when securely Chimú features begin to appear. While we lack precision, I believe that the current data better support a scenario in which Chimú administrative presence began in the early to middle 1300s.

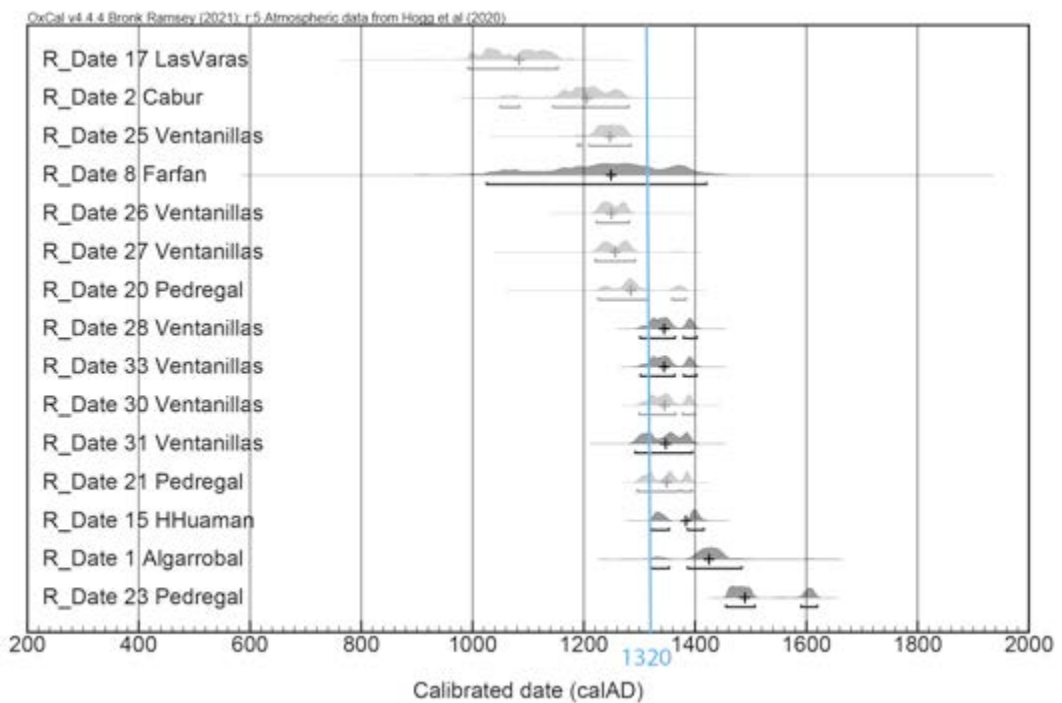


Figure 9. Selected dates with Lambayeque (light gray) or Chimú (dark gray) associations.

Regional Context

How does this scenario fit with other recent discussions of Chimú expansion? Some recent work in the northern provinces⁷ has suggested earlier dates for Chimú conquest, consistent with expansion into the Jequetepeque around AD 1250, to Lambayeque in the late 1200s, and the far north in the 1300s. In Lambayeque, Luis Chero's (2020) investigations at Cerro Saltur revealed a Chimú platform with a painted façade facing onto a patio with a ramp and a bench superimposed over an earlier Lambayeque building. The Lambayeque occupation was sealed by a chamber and fill layer that provided two dates (AD 1268-1320 and AD 1293-1393, calibration unknown, Chero 2020:417) which would place the beginning of the Chimú period earlier than the anticipated AD 1375. Chero (2020:418) reports another date, associated with the second phase of Chimú construction, in the 1300s (calAD 1290-

1400, calibration unknown). In Sechura, even farther north, Nicolas Goepfert's team dates the Chimú occupation at Huaca Amarilla to the early 1300s (Goepfert et al. 2024).

Interestingly, this scenario is consistent with Prieto et al.'s (2024) new analysis of human and camelid sacrifices at Pampa La Cruz, Huanchaco. Sacrifice Episode 3, dated to calAD 1220-1300, has the greatest diversity of cranial modifications, adult victims, and valuable *Spondylus* and metal offerings. Prieto et al. (2024:54) suggest that this episode, which highlights a wide network of connections, could be associated with a period of active military and/or political territorial expansion beyond the Virú-Moche-Chicama heartland. If so, these sacrifices would have occurred perhaps a century before sustained Chimú administrative presence seems to appear in the Jequetepeque.

However, other evidence from the northern part of the Chimú Empire supports a more delayed timeline. Scholars in the Lambayeque region (Cervantes Quequezana 2020, this volume, issue 2; Hayashida 2006: 252) have remarked on the difficulty of distinguishing Chimú and Chimú-Inca ceramics and settlements given the very short time elapsed between the two imperial conquests of the region. Farther north, in the Chira valley, recent excavations at Monte Lima (Cervantes Quequezana 2024; Cutright et al. 2024) have returned very late dates for apparent Chimú presence there. A small rectangular compound with hallmarks of classic Chimú administrative architecture (tripartite internal subdivisions built in a single construction sequence associated with piel de ganso blackware ceramics, though no audiencia remains visible) dates to calAD 1456-1504⁸, a range that falls largely within the Chimú-Inca period. Research at Monte Lima is ongoing, but these preliminary indications both confirm Chimú administrative presence farther north than previously thought but also place it very late in the LIP, if not the Late Horizon. In sum, evidence from other northern provinces is inconclusive, with some findings supporting an earlier expansion and others favoring a later one.

Andean Imperial Territorialities

How can we rectify the apparent disagreement between evidence for early (initial expansion in the 1200s) and late (initial expansion in the early to mid-1300s) models? One possibility is that there is no disagreement. There are multiple sources of uncertainty: dates on old wood from posts or spindles, long and overlapping error ranges, and assumptions linking those dates to events interpreted to represent the early stages of Chimú conquest and control. The real date might lie somewhere in between the two models. Strategically running additional dates on short-lived organic materials embedded in rich contexts such as burial assemblages or stratified deposits would improve the resolution of statistical models and could certainly change the analysis presented here.

These dates might also be telling an interesting story about how Andean empires worked. While past models envisioned conquest proceeding in an organized, stepwise

fashion (e.g. Moore and Mackey 2008 or Topic 1990), ethnohistorians and archaeologists have highlighted the disconnect between territoriality and political power in the Andes. Susan Ramirez (2005:55) argues convincingly that the Inca Empire never conquered land defined by strict territorial boundaries. Rather, it conquered labor, defined by networks of kinship, affiliation, and reciprocal obligation linking elites and those they ruled. Power was expressed through the ability to call on labor, not physically control specific territories. This could mean that residents of the same physical community might owe labor and tribute to different lords based on kinship obligations and ethnic identity

Models of verticality and zonal complementarity developed initially by Murra (1972) suggest that Andean ethnic or political groups accessed diverse resources by establishing enclaves in different ecological zones arrayed vertically from coast to highlands. Shimada (1987:130; 1982) has argued that in emphasizing the verticality of Andean ecological diversity, archaeologists have tended to overstate the ecological homogeneity of the coast. He suggests that considerable diversity did exist along the coast due to variation in natural resources and local economic specializations. Coastal states like the Chimú could have maximized economic self-sufficiency by establishing horizontal archipelagos, islands of control in regions along the coast that offered access to resources or trading networks. Like a vertical archipelago, this kind of horizontal complementarity would be visible archaeologically as islands that look ethnically or politically distinct from neighboring areas, linked together by flows of resources and networks of political control.

Scholarship on other expansive polities in the Andes has recently called into question the extent to which imperial power and territorial control were linked. For example, Jennings (2025) argues that while Wari elites certainly intended to build a regionally dominant empire, they depended less on administration of extractive colonial economies than on collective, kin-based governance strategies and small-scale, face-to-face, commensal politics. Jennings characterizes Wari political power in the provinces as based on “not the word of administrators following directives from central command – there was no state government to pull the strings— but rather the actions of great houses competing for wealth in people,” (Jennings 2025: 269). These dynamics resulted in a heterogeneous network of “Warified” communities that often leapfrogged over relatively unincorporated areas to establish more distant outposts. New scholarship on the Inca Empire (e.g. Garrido 2025; Marsh et al. 2017) continues to emphasize nonlinear and discontinuous expansion that involved hyperlocal negotiations. In the Andes, as elsewhere, imperial politics played out in the interactions between human and non-human agents, including imperial representatives, local residents, landscapes, and material culture (e.g. Khatchadourian 2016; Van Valkenburgh 2021).

Taken together, these models suggest that Andean empires looked less like evenly shaded areas on a map and more like messy mosaics of control, influence, and affiliation. The lack of orderly progression in dates for Chimú conquest supports this scenario. During the first part of the Late Intermediate period, three polities of similar size (Lambayeque, Chimú, and Casma, see Pacifico this volume, issue 2 and Vogel 2018) interacted and perhaps

competed for regional authority. Only one would establish an empire. Chimú influence might initially have leapfrogged north, establishing an outpost somewhere like Cerro Saltur near a southern access point to the Lambayeque valley. During the 1200s, the Chimú might have been actively expanding their economic and political networks throughout the region, creating islands of affiliation or control in places like coastal Sechura (Goepfert et al. 2024) and seeding Chimú stylistic influences in local material culture traditions, such as the limited Chimú elements Vogel (2012) reports at the Casma frontier site Cerro la Cruz. The cosmopolitanism of Huanchaco sacrifices in the 1200s noted by Prieto and colleagues could also be reflecting this period of regional alliance-building.

If recognizable material correlates of Chimú *administration* in the Jequetepeque begin to be seen in the mid-1300s, this could represent a secondary process of infilling the gaps, exerting more direct control via the emplacement of administrative facilities to intensify agricultural production or assert authority. In fact, if the later dates from administrative compounds like those at Farfán, El Algarrobal de Moro, and Monte Lima hold up, then perhaps what archaeologists have considered to be the classic hallmark of the Chimú Empire—administrative compounds built on the model of Chan Chan and burnished blackware bottles and plates—in fact represent the use of material culture to consolidate a discontinuous patchwork of alliances, influence, and military excursions. Audiencias and storerooms might mark not Chimú conquest, but a particular kind of political strategy and/or ceremonial practice that spread through already-established provincial imperial networks. This line of thinking asks us to consider audiencias, baffled entries, and blackware piel de ganso bottles with monkeys on the stirrup spout not as clear diagnostic footprints of Chimú affiliation, but rather as complicated results of the various relationships and strategies that constituted empire over time (Khatchadourian 2016).

Conclusion

In this article, I have presented a series of published and previously unpublished dates from Jequetepeque valley sites in order to evaluate the timing of Chimú conquest and identify reliable material markers of Chimú presence. While rectangular compounds have a deep time depth in the Jequetepeque, audiencias with associated storerooms do seem to be a hallmark of clearly Chimú imperial presence in the provinces, as does the presence of blackware plates, mold-made piel de ganso, and sharply carinated ollas in domestic contexts. While radiocarbon dates are not as numerous or securely linked to primary contexts as they could be, I do detect a shift toward clearly Chimú contexts in the middle of the fourteenth century, which agrees with Moore and Mackey's (2008) widely adopted proposal.

Yet some messiness remains—dates both within the Jequetepeque and from other valleys do not permit us to discard the potential that initial conquest occurred in the mid-1200s. While this discrepancy could reflect the uncertainty and paucity of dates to this

point, it could also be telling us something interesting about the territorially discontinuous and politically contingent nature of Chimú (and perhaps, more broadly, Andean) imperial expansion.

Ethnohistoric accounts of the violent battle for conquest of the Jequetepeque, the bodies of sacrificed combatants or local dissidents at Punta Lobos (Verano and Phillips 2016), and the hundreds of sacrificed people and llamas at Pampa la Cruz and elsewhere testify to Chimú use of political and military violence, alongside other forms of diplomacy and alliance-building. For many, Chimú imperial expansion had dire lived consequences. Elsewhere, however, other communities like Ventanillas and Pedregal seem to have been able to negotiate or buffer the impacts of conquest. Cities like Sicán thrived and grew under Chimú rule without losing their distinctive character (Cervantes Quequezana this volume, issue 2). Chimú rule was spatially uneven. Being more precise about the timing of conquest and expansion may reveal a new sense of temporal unevenness alongside that spatial variation. It may also suggest that the architecture and ceramics that have for so long been seen as straightforward material markers of Chimú control might better be understood as agents of particular kinds of Chimú empire-making, deployed throughout a varied sociopolitical landscape at distinct moments.

Acknowledgements. This paper draws on several seasons of fieldwork at Ventanillas and Pedregal, which were co-directed by Jorge Terrones, Gabriela Cervantes Quequezana, and Carlos Osore Mendives and funded by grants from Fulbright, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Social Science Research Council, the Brennan Foundation, and Centre College. I would like to thank the students and local community members who participated in this research, fellow archaeologists of the Jequetepeque valley, and conference co-organizers Gabriel Prieto and Feren Castillo for making this work possible. This paper owes a deep debt to the work of Carol Mackey and is dedicated to her memory.

Notas

¹ Here, I use the term “Lambayeque” to refer to the polity that occupied the Jequetepeque during the early part of the Late Intermediate period, following use by other researchers such as Mackey, Sapp, and Prieto. I reserve the term Sicán to refer to specific styles associated with the polity centered at the site of Sicán in what is now the Bosque de Pomac. I do not think that an expansive middle or late Sicán state conquered the Jequetepeque, but I do think that there were close economic and social ties that linked Jequetepeque and Lambayeque-La Leche valleys at this time.

² Across multiple seasons of fieldwork that tested each of six compounds at Farfán and multiple platforms and cemeteries, Mackey’s team never excavated a burial attributed to the Chimú occupation (see Mackey and Nelson 2020 for an overview).

³ “Wooden spindles excavated with one of the sacrificed bodies atop the destroyed Lambayeque walls, directly under Farfán’s Compound II, have been dated between AD 1220-1310 (with 2-sigma calibrations)” (2009:342). Mackey did not specify the calibration curve used or the number of samples. Elsewhere (Mackey 2006:323), she specifies that tests were run in 2004, so the dates could have been calibrated with SHCal 04. In that instance, she reports the date as AD 1310. As of August 2025, Beta Analytic could not locate the results of these tests.

⁴ Piel de ganso refers to a design motif in which areas of mold-made vessels are filled in with raised stippling. It is often considered a diagnostic characteristic of Chimú ceramics; while piel de ganso also occurs on earlier Lambayeque vessels, it tends to be either larger, like rice grains, or smaller and more tightly packed.

⁵ Branden Rizzuto kindly ran Bayesian analyses of both Ventanillas and Pedregal dates.

⁶ This statement is supported by the current archaeological landscape, though there are tantalizing hints of a Chimú administrative presence which included adobe friezes at sites excavated in the late 1970s before the construction of the Gallito Ciego dam just upvalley from Ventanillas (Rothschild 1982:210-211). As far as I can tell, these have not been published.

⁷ My focus here is on further northern expansion beyond the Jequetepeque. Pacífico (this volume, issue 2) offers an updated assessment of data from Casma. In Chao, Vogel (2012) reports that the Casma frontier community of Cerro la Cruz experienced a period of interaction and Chimú stylistic influences and was abandoned after a series of closing rituals and burning at the end of the 1200s. Detailed analysis of dates from the southern Chimú provinces, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

⁸ Radiocarbon age 416 +/- 11, a range of 1456-1504 at a 73% confidence level, with another possible overlap with the curve in the early 1600s.

REFERENCES CITED

Billman, Brian R., Dana Bardolph, Jean Hudson, and Jesús Briceño Rosario

- 2020 Fisherman, Farmer, Rich Man, Poor Man, Weaver, Parcialidad Chief? Household Archaeology at Cerro la Virgen, a Chimú Town within the Hinterland of Chan Chan, In *Maritime Communities of the Ancient Andes*, edited by Gabriel Prieto and Daniel H. Sandweiss, pp. 267-300. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

Bronk Ramsey, Christopher

- 2021 OxCal v.4.4.4. [software] <https://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/oxcal.html>

Cervantes Quequezana, Gabriela

- 2020 Urban Layout and Sociopolitical Organization in Sicán, Perú. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.

- 2024 Informe Final, Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológica Chira (PIAChira) 2023. Report submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Lima, Peru.

Cervantes Quequezana, Gabriela and Álvaro Higuera

- 2025 Entre bosques, ríos, y desiertos: el dinámico paisaje del complejo Lambayeque. In *Vida, tierra, y agua: Los paisajes humanos, ecológicos, y arqueológicos en los Andes*, edited by Alvaro Higuera, Rafael Vega-Centeno, and Viviana Siveroni, pp.93-124. Fondo Editorial PUCP, Lima.

Chero Zurita, Luis

- 2020 *Cerro Saltur: Resultado de la investigación arqueológica, la ocupación chimú*. Museo de Sitio Huaca Rajada-Sipán, Ministerio de Cultura, Perú.

Cieza de León, Pedro

- 1959[1553] *The Incas of Pedro Cieza de León*. Translated by H. de Onis, edited by Victor Von Hagen. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Conlee, Christina, Jalh Dulanto, Carol J. Mackey, and Charles Stanish

- 2004 Late Prehispanic Sociopolitical Complexity. In *Andean Archaeology*, edited by Helaine Silverman, pp. 209-236. Blackwell, Malden MA.

Cutright, Robyn E

- 2009 Between the Kitchen and the State: Domestic Practice and Chimú Expansion in the Jequetepeque Valley, Peru. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 2015 Eating Empire in the Jequetepeque: A Local View of Chimú Expansion on the North Coast of Peru. *Latin American Antiquity* 26(1):64-86.
- 2021 Continuity and Change in Late Intermediate Period Households on the North Coast of Perú. In *Ancient Households on the North Coast of Perú*, edited by Ilana Johnson, David Pacifico, and Robyn E. Cutright, pp. 237-258. University Press of Colorado, Louisville, CO.
- 2022 Reconstituting Cuisine: A Culinary Perspective on Collapse, Conquest, and Resistance from Pre-Columbian Perú. *Food Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12(2):19-31.

Cutright Robyn E. and Carlos Osorio Mendives

- 2024 Andean Urbanism, Social Identity, and Neighborhoods at Ventanillas. In *Neighborhood and District Integration in the Andes and Mesoamerica*, edited by Gabriela Cervantes Quequezana and John P. Walden, pp. 273-296. University of Pittsburgh Center for Comparative Archaeology, Pittsburgh, PA.

Cutright, Robyn E., Sarah Taylor, and Gabriela Cervantes Quequezana

- 2024 El periodo prehispánico tardío en Chira: una visión desde Monte Lima. Paper presented at the XI Congreso Nacional de Arqueología, Lambayeque, Perú.

Dillehay, Tom D. and Alan L. Kolata

- 2004 Long-term Human Response to Uncertain Environmental Conditions in the Andes. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101(12):4325-4330.

Dillehay, Tom D., Alan L. Kolata, and Mario Pino Q.

- 2004 Pre-industrial Human and Environmental Interactions in Northern Peru during the Late Holocene. *The Holocene* 14(2):272-281.

Donnan, Christopher D.

- 1986 The Huaca 1 Complex. In *The Pacatnamú Papers Vol I.*, edited by Christopher D. Donnan and Guillermo Cock, pp. 63-84. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, Los Angeles.

Garrido, Francisco

- 2025 A Chronological Model for Inca Provincial Expansion: The Case of the Copiapo Valley. *Latin American Antiquity* 36(1):100-119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2023.66>.

Goepfert, Nicolas, Belkys Gutierrez, Segundo Vasquez, Lucie Dausse, Elise Dufor, and Antoine Zazzo

- 2024 La presencia chimú en el extremo norte de Perú: una vista desde el desierto de Sechura. Paper presented at the Segunda Mesa Redonda de Trujillo, August 2024, Trujillo.

Hahn, Randy

- 2014 Colonialism, Architecture, Domestic Space, and the Creation of Subjects in the Chimú Empire. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal.

Hogg Alan G, Timothy J. Heaton, Quan Hua, Jonathan G. Palmer, Chris SM Turney, John Southon, Alex Bayliss, et al.

- 2020 SHCal20 Southern Hemisphere Calibration, 0–55,000 Years cal BP. *Radiocarbon* 62(4):759-778. <https://doi:10.1017/RDC.2020.59>

Jennings, Justin

- 2025 Wari: Imperialism, Low Power, and Globalization in the Middle Horizon Central Andes. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 33:249-296. <https://doi:10.1007/s10814-024-09199-1>

Keatinge, Richard W. and Geoffrey W. Conrad

- 1983 Imperialist Expansion in Peruvian Prehistory: Chimú Administration of a Conquered Territory. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 10(3):255-283.

Khatchadourian, Lori

- 2016 *Imperial Matter: Ancient Persia and the Archaeology of Empires*. University of California Press, Oakland.

Lane, Kevin and Erik Marsh

- 2024 Absolute Chronology Revisited: Integrating Precise Bayesian Models from Machu Picchu with Inca Ethnohistoric Praise Narratives. *Quaternary International* 703:21-31.

Mackey, Carol J.

- 2006 Elite Residences at Farfán: A Comparison of the Chimú and Inca Occupations. In *Palaces of the Ancient New World*, edited by Susan Toby Evans and Joanne Pillsbury, pp.313-352. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC.
- 2009 Chimú Statecraft in the Provinces. In *Andean Civilization: A Tribute to Michael E. Moseley*, edited by Joyce Marcus and P. Ryan Williams, pp. 325-349. Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, Los Angeles.
- 2011 The Persistence of Lambayeque Ethnic Identity: The Perspective from the Jequetepeque Valley, Peru. In *From State to Empire in the Prehistoric Jequetepeque Valley, Peru*, edited by Colleen Zori and Ilana Johnson, pp.149-168. British Archaeological Reports International Series #2310. Archaeopress, Oxford.

Mackey, Carol J. and César Jáuregui

- 2003 Proyecto Arqueológico Farfán: Informe Final. Report submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Trujillo, Perú.

Mackey, Carol J. and Andrew J. Nelson

- 2020 *Life, Death and Burial Practices during the Inca Occupation of Farfán on Perú's North Coast*. Andean Past Special Publications. 6. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/andean_past_special/6

Mackey, Carol J. and William D. Sapp

- 2022 El Algarrobal De Moro: A Lower-Level Administrative Center in the Jequetepeque Valley on Perú's North Coast. *Ñawpa Pacha* 42(1):33-61.

Marsh, Erik J., Ray Kidd, Dennis Ogburn, and Víctor Durán

- 2017 Dating the Expansion of the Inca Empire: Bayesian Models from Ecuador and Argentina. *Radiocarbon* 59(1):117-140.

Moore, Jerry D. and Carol J. Mackey

- 2008 The Chimú Empire. In *The Handbook of South American Archaeology*, edited by Helaine Silverman and William Isbell, pp. 783-808. Springer, New York.

Moseley, Michael E. and Kent Day (editors)

- 1982 *Chan Chan: Andean Desert City*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Murra, John V.

- 1972 El “control vertical” de un máximo de pisos ecológicos en la economía de las sociedades andinas. In *Visita de la provincia de León de Huánuco en 1562, Iñigo Ortiz de Zúñiga, visitador; Vol. 2*, edited by John V. Murra, pp. 427-76. Universidad Nacional Hermilio Valdizán, Huánuco, Perú.

Ogburn Dennis E.

- 2012 Reconceiving the Chronology of Inca Imperial Expansion. *Radiocarbon* 54(2): 219-37.

Pozorski, Shelia

- 1982 Subsistence Systems in the Chimú State. In *Chan Chan: Andean Desert City*, edited by Michael Moseley and Kent Day, pp. 177-196. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Prieto, Gabriel

- 2008 Cerámica utilitaria chimú de San José de Moro: Tipología de formas y modelos interpretativos. *Revista del Museo de Arqueología e Historia* 10:111-154.
- 2010 Aproximaciones a la configuración política Lambayeque: una perspectiva desde el sitio de San José de Moro, Valle de Jequetepeque. In *Comparative Perspectives on the Archaeology of Coastal South America*, edited by Robyn E. Cutright, Enrique López-Hurtado, and Alexander Martin, pp. 231-246. University of Pittsburgh Memoirs in Latin American Archaeology, Pittsburgh, PA.
- 2011 Chicha Production during the Chimú Period at San José de Moro, Jequetepeque Valley, North Coast of Peru. In *From State to Empire in the Prehistoric Jequetepeque Valley, Peru*, edited by Colleen Zori and Ilana Johnson, pp. 105-128. British Archaeological Reports International Series #2310. Archaeopress, Oxford.

Prieto, Gabriel, John Verano, Ann Pollard Rowe, Feren Castillo, Luis Flores, Julio Ascencio, Alan Chachapoyas, et al.

- 2024 Pampa La Cruz: A New Mass Sacrificial Burial Ground during the Chimú Occupation in Huanchaco, North Coast of Perú. *Nawpa Pacha* 44(1):69-154.

Ramírez, Susan Elizabeth

- 2005 *To Feed and Be Fed: The Cosmological Bases of Authority and Identity in the Andes*. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.

Ravines, Rogger

1980 *Chanchan: Metrópoli Chimú*. Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Lima.

Richardson, James B., Mark A. McConaughy, Allison Heaps de Peña, Elena Decima Zamecnik

1990 The Northern Frontier of the Kingdom of Chimor: The Piura, Chira, and Tumbes Valleys. In *The Northern Dynasties: Kingship and Statecraft in Chimor*, edited by Michael Moseley and Alana Cordy-Collins, pp. 419-445. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.

Rothschild, Nan A. (editor)

1982 Current Research. *American Antiquity* 47(1):202-232.

Rowe, John

1948 The Kingdom of Chimor. *Acta Americana* 6(1-2):26-59.

Sapp, William D., III.

2002 The Impact of Imperial Conquest at the Palace of a Local Lord in the Jequetepeque Valley, Northern Peru. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles.

Sapp, William D., III

2011 Lambayeque Norte and Lambayeque Sur: Evidence for the Development of an Indigenous Lambayeque Polity in the Jequetepeque Valley, Peru. In *From State to Empire in the Prehistoric Jequetepeque Valley, Peru*, edited by Colleen Zori and Ilana Johnson, pp. 93-104. British Archaeological Reports International Series #2310. Archaeopress, Oxford.

Shimada, Izumi

1982 Horizontal Archipelago and Coast-Highland Interaction in North Perú. In *El hombre y su ambiente en los Andes centrales*, edited by Luís Millones and Hiroyasu Tomoeda, pp. 137-210. Senri Ethnological Studies 10. National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka.

1987 Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Prehistoric States in North Peru. In *The Origin and Development of the Andean State*, edited by Jonathan Haas, Thomas Pozorski, and Shelia Pozorski, pp. 130-144. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Swenson, Edward R.

- 2004 Ritual Power in the Urban Hinterland: Religious Pluralism and Political Decentralization in Late Moche Jequetepeque, Peru. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- 2007 Local Ideological Strategies and the Politics of Ritual Space in the Chimú Empire. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14(1):61-90.
- 2011 *Stagecraft and the Politics of Spectacle in Ancient Peru*. Cambridge Archaeological Journal 21(2):283-313.

Swenson, Edward R. and Stephen Berquist

- 2022 Highland-Coastal Relations and Transformations in Dualistic Political Ideologies in Middle Horizon Jequetepeque. *Ñawpa Pacha*, 42(1):97-134.

Tantaleán, Henry

- 2021 *Los antiguos estados andinos. Una arqueología de las formaciones políticas del Perú prehispánico*. Instituto de Estudios Andinos, Lima.

Topic, Theresa L.

- 1990 Territorial Expansion and the Kingdom of Chimor. In *The Northern Dynasties: Kingship and Statecraft in Chimor*, edited by Michael Moseley and Alana Cordy-Collins, pp. 177-194. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

Tsai, Howard I.

- 2012 An Archaeological Investigation of Ethnicity at Las Varas, Peru. Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
- 2020 *Las Varas: Ritual and Ethnicity in the Ancient Andes*. University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa.

VanValkenburgh, Parker

- 2021 *Alluvium and Empire: The Archaeology of Colonial Resettlement and Indigenous Persistence on Perú's North Coast*. The University of New Mexico Press, Tucson.

Verano, John W. and Sara S. Phillips

- 2016 The Killing of Captives on the North Coast of Perú in PreHispanic Times: Iconographic

and Bioarchaeological Evidence. In *Ritual Violence in the Ancient Andes: Reconstructing Sacrifice on the North Coast of Perú*, edited by Haagen D. Klaus and J. Marla Toyne. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Vogel, Melissa

2012 *Frontier Life in Ancient Peru: The Archaeology of Cerro la Cruz*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville.

2018 New Research on the Late Prehistoric Coastal Politics of Northern Peru. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 26(2):165-195.

Warner, John P.

2010 Interpreting the Architectonics of Power and Memory at the Late Formative Center of Jatanca, Jequetepeque Valley, Perú. Doctoral dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky.