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# PART I

## *Introduction*

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*Andean Wak'as  
and Alternative  
Configurations of Persons,  
Power, and Things*

TAMARA L. BRAY

[Wak'as] are made of energized matter, like everything else, and they act within nature, not over and outside it as Western supernaturals do.

(SALOMON 1991:19)

In contrast to the plethora of archaeological studies focused on presumably secular aspects of society like subsistence practices, the economy, and political organization, investigations into the realm of the sacred have been much less common. This is not to suggest that all peoples past and present compartmentalize the sacred and secular in the way we tend to do in the West (e.g., Brück 1999; Fowles 2013). Rather, it is acknowledgment of the fact that archaeologists have tended to steer clear of anything beyond the quotidian material concerns of human societies. Yet today, a decade and a half into the twenty-first century, it remains abundantly clear that much of the world's population lead lives in which basic questions about diet, housing, education, social interaction, and so on are structured by the dictates of religion and spiritual devotion (see Hecht and Biondo 2010). As Insoll (2004) and others have argued, if we fail to consider and theorize the influence of the sacred (in a broad rather than restricted Judeo-Christian sense) on peoples in the past, then many of the questions we frame—as well as the answers we derive—are likely to be incomplete. This book on the archaeology of *wak'as* aligns with emerging theoretical interests in the role of the sacred in the past—and the

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insights such orientations may offer into alternative (e.g., nonwestern) ontologies and logics—within the specific context of the Andes.

Over the past twenty years, there has been a slow but steady resurgence of interest in what has generally been characterized as “the archaeology of religion” (Brown 1997; Carmichael et al. 1994; Fogelin 2008; Hall 1997; Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 2008; Hodder 2010; Insoll 2001, 2004; Lewis-Williams 2002; Renfrew 1994). During the mid- to late twentieth century, attention to the ideological realm of human experience was largely proscribed by the dictates of positivist science and processual archaeology, which emphasized the empirical, the techno-functional, and the economic. Within the dominant materialist framework of the time, religion and ideology were labeled “epiphenomenal” (Harris 1974, 1977) and essentially relegated to the status of the unknowable (Hawkes 1954). Given that archaeology inevitably responds to contemporary concerns, however, it is little surprise that research orientations have turned back to some of the more metaphysical interests that originally animated the discipline. As modern religious identities, politics and conflicts take center stage on an ever more frequent basis, it seems almost natural that archaeology would follow suit by developing parallel interests in past societies. Regardless of the ultimate reasons for the renewed interest, extending the reach of archaeological inquiry to acknowledge and encompass what we may consider nonsecular aspects of human existence adds a critical dimension to our narratives of the past that enriches and balances our understanding of pre-modern lifeways as well as our own.

In this book, Andean wak'as provide a point of entry for investigation of pre-Columbian notions of the sacred that lead, in turn, to considerations of the nature of beings and being. Wak'as, which may be glossed for the moment as “sacred things,” constitute a fascinating point of intersection with respect to notions of materiality, agency, and personhood—concepts at the forefront of current anthropological theorizing (e.g., Fowler 2004; Gell 1998; Hodder 2012; Keane 2003; Latour 1993; Miller 2005; Watts 2013). In recent archaeological discourse, these three conceptual strands are often closely intertwined and logically entrained. Materiality is understood as the productive entanglement between humans and the material world that constitutes the basis of social life, or sociality (Meskell 2005; Tilley 2007; Watts 2013). The notion that objects or things have agency—inclusively defined as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:110)—is a key aspect of theories of materiality (DeMarras et al. 2004; Miller 2005; Tilley et al. 2006). Also emergent within the framework of materiality is the idea of personhood as a contingent, relational, and distributed phenomenon in which both human and nonhuman entities are implicated

(Brück 2001; Fowler 2004; Knappett 2005; Strathern 1988). These theoretical concepts are further developed and illustrated in the discussion of wak'as that follows as well as in many of the papers included in this volume.

The Andean phenomena known by the Quechua (and Aymara) term *wak'a* (*waqa*; also written as *huaca*, *guaca*) are the focal point of the present work.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the cultural and presumed religious significance of the term early on, the ecclesiastical writers of the early colonial period devoted considerable effort to apprehending what it meant—not for reasons of intellectual curiosity but for purposes of eradication (Acosta 1954 [1590]; Albornoz 1984 [1581–85]; Arriaga 1968 [1621]). Their writings form the point of departure for our understanding of the concept as well as one of the principal reasons why an “archaeology of wak'as” is so necessary.

In the earliest references, which date to the latter half of the sixteenth century, the notion of wak'a was typically construed in material terms (van de Guchte 1990:239–57). In these early works, a wak'a was usually described as or associated with one of two material entities: an idol, statue, or image (*idolo*; *bulto*) or an oratory or shrine-like place (*adoratorio*), with the two typically closely linked (Agustinos 1952 [1557]:55; Betanzos 1996 [1551–57]:10; Cieza 1967 [1553]:100; Pizarro 1968 [1571]:492; Sarmiento 2007 [1572]:66; Zarate 1963 [1555]:22–28). The need to employ two (or more) Spanish terms in attempts to capture the meaning of “wak'a” points to significant ontological differences regarding understandings of matter and materiality among Andeans and Europeans (see Mannheim and Salas, this volume). The notion of wak'a-as-oratory entailed spatial fixity, while wak'a-as-idol suggests a degree of motility. This combination of properties (e.g., simultaneous fixity and portability) within one entity does not fit easily within a conventional western ontology and seems to have been a source of confusion for early authors.

We can see attempts to reckon with the metaphysical conundrum of fixed place as both animate and motile expressed visually in Martín de Murúa's (2004 [1590]) illustrated manuscript wherein wak'as are depicted as landscape features (e.g., outcrops or mountains) physically conjoined with anthropomorphic beings (Figure 1.1). What the chroniclers seem to have struggled with was the apparently partible nature of wak'as—that is, the ability of a (presumed) material entity to be simultaneously spatially fixed and spatially (as well as temporally) distributed and distribute-able (see Chase, this volume). In this sense, the “wholeness” of wak'as seems to have extended beyond their corporality or materiality to encompass the broader field of relations within which they were embedded—an aspect that may, in fact, have figured into their “holiness.”

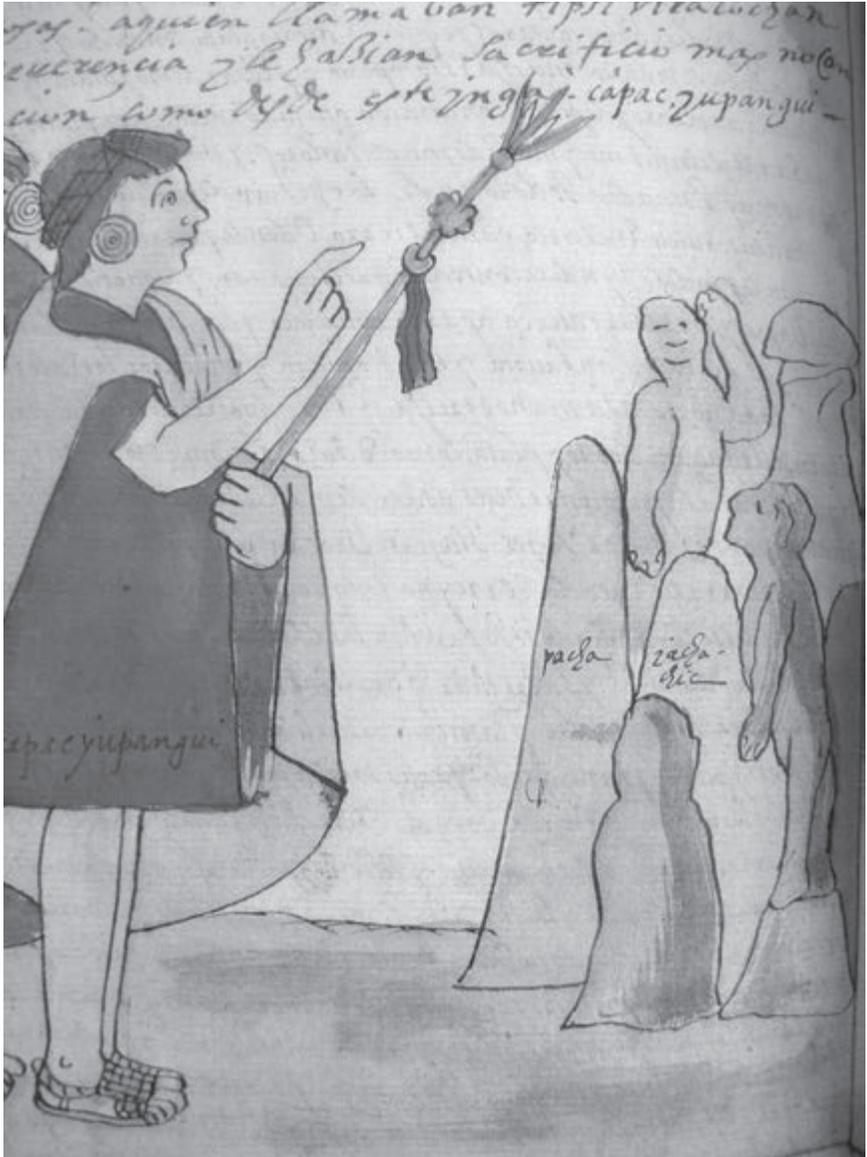


FIGURE 1.1. *The Inka Capac Yupanqui consulting with the wak'a Pachayachachic (Códice Galvín) (Murúa 2004 [1590]:96v).*

As the religious extirpators learned of ever more entities that were classified as wak'as, their definition of the term broadened even if their comprehension did not. Albornoz (1984 [1581–85]:194–97), for instance, compiled a long and seemingly disparate list of phenomena considered to be wak'as that included aphrodisiacal flies and birds, places where lightning had struck, ancestral mummies, local *pacariscas* (origin points on the landscape), ushnus, mountain passes, replicas of plants, bezoar stones, and the hallucinogen known as vilca, among other things.

In his treatise on the Inka, the mestizo writer Garcilaso de la Vega (1943 [1609]:72–73) sought to correct what he perceived to be a biased and bungled understanding of Andean wak'as (MacCormack 1991:335–39). Like Albornoz, he attempted to convey the meaning of the term by first enumerating the kinds of things considered as such by native peoples. He initiated his discussion by stating that “wak'a” referred to “sacred thing,” be it idol, object, or place, through which “the devil spoke” (Garcilaso de la Vega 1943 [1609]:72). His list included “rocks, great stones or trees,” as well as things made, such as “figures of men, birds, and animals” offered to the Sun, as well as places built, such as “any temple, large or small, . . . sepulchers set up in the fields, . . . and corners of houses” (*ibid.*). It also included things of extraordinary beauty or ugliness, and exceptional phenomena or occurrences—such as twins or ancestors. After listing the range of phenomena encompassed by the term, Garcilaso went on to state that the Inka called these things wak'as “not because they held them as gods or because they worshiped them but rather for the particular advantage they provided the community” (*ibid.*: 73). This is an important point that hints at an understanding of wak'as as having the capacity for personal interaction and the performance of beneficial acts—in other words, as having agency. The communicative aspect and the ability to speak included in Garcilaso's definition are also key.

Another seventeenth-century writer, the Jesuit priest Bernabé Cobo, following Acosta (1954 [1590]:141), suggested that wak'as could be divided into two categories: works of nature unaltered by human intervention, and “idols that did not represent anything other than the material from which they were produced” (Cobo 1990 [1653]:44). In the first category were natural things that differed in some significant way from other members of the same class, often in terms of size, shape, or genesis. Examples would include a peculiarly shaped potato, an exceptionally large tree, or an individual marked by a birth defect (*ibid.*:44–45). In the second category were statues and images made in the close likeness of the thing they represented, consisting mainly of miniature replicas of plants, animals and people (*ibid.*:45–46; McEwan, this volume).

With respect to these idols, the priest noted that they “*were worshiped for their own sake*” and that “the people never thought to search or use their imaginations *in order to find what such idols represented*” (Cobo 1990 [1653]:45; emphasis added). Cobo seems to suggest that native people understood wak’as as powerful in and of themselves—not as the containers of unearthly or supernatural divinities but rather as efficacious agents in their own right.

In his discussion of wak’as, Garcilaso de la Vega alluded to the fact that Inka concepts of the sacred and the holy—which he extended to Andean peoples in general—differed significantly from European notions of the same (MacCormack 1991:337; Mannheim and Salas, this volume). Many scholars have since noted that though wak’as have traditionally been construed as “sacred,” they are not the kind of “abstract sacred” that characterizes western connotations of the term (Astvaldsson 1998, 2004; Rostworowski 1983; Salomon 1991). As can be seen from the lists given above, Andean wak’as were very much concrete, material phenomena, not bodiless, abstract notions. As exceptional members of their “species” or class, they were naturally more powerful, thus compelling both recognition and respect. Here power is construed not in some abstract or ideal sense but rather as a type of natural force having a specific and immediate local referent. Approaching wak’as as physical embodiments of power, rather than as representations of other-worldly beings, highlights the importance of their materiality (see Janusek, this volume). It is the physical concreteness of wak’as that enabled the concept of power to have a presence and be efficacious in the world; it is also what enabled the wak’as’ participation in the network of relations that comprised the social and political worlds of Andean peoples.

Focusing on the materiality and agency of wak’as challenges western ontological assumptions and commonsense understandings of objects and subjects as discrete and essentialized entities inhabiting distinct and impermeable worlds, in the same way it challenges the division between sacred and secular. In the Andean context, various ethnographic studies suggest that “all material things (including things we normally call inanimate) are potentially active agents in human affairs” (Allen 1998:20; also Allen 1982, 1988, 1997, this volume; Bastien 1978; Gose 1994; Salomon 1998; Sillar 2009). This would suggest that native Andean people operate with a significantly different set of ontological premises than the ones we normally take for granted (see also Alberti and Marshall 2009; Bray 2009; Haber 2009). The ethnographic data point to the legitimacy of considering native Andean ontology as privileging a relational perspective. Within such a framework, following Gell (1998), the nature of something is understood to be a function of the social-relational matrix

within which it is embedded. When objects or places participate in human affairs, e.g., when they become “targets for and sources of social agency” (Gell 1998:96), they must be treated as person-like,—or, if you will—as “other-than-human persons” (after Hallowell 1960). In other words, it does not matter in ascribing social agent status what a thing or a person “is” in and of itself. What matters is where it stands in a network of social relations (Gell 1998:123; also Latour 1993). Equally important within this framework is the conditional and transactional nature of the relationship between persons and things, each being necessarily constitutive of the other’s agency at different moments in time (see, for example, Dean, this volume).

There are various indications throughout the ethnohistoric record that native Andean peoples understood wak’as to be persons. For instance, wak’as often shared kin relations with members of the communities with whom they were associated. There are various reports, for example, of young women being wed to local wak’as made of stone (Arriaga 1968 [1621]:36–37; Avila 1918 [1645]:69–70). Elsewhere wak’as were said to have sons and daughters who were typically identified as the mummified remains of revered community ancestors (Arriaga 1968 [1621]:89). In other cases, wak’as were known to be siblings, as in the example of Guanacauri, a stone pillar situated on a hilltop above Cuzco who was called the brother of Manco Capac, the first Inka king.

Wak’as were also able to speak, hear, and communicate—both among themselves and with human persons. That a wak’a’s ability to communicate and vocalize was a key aspect of its identity is suggested by the closely related verb *wakay*, which means to cry or to wail (Santo Tomás 1951 [1560], cited in van de Guchte 1990:247). Wak’as were consulted on a regular basis—often though not always through intermediaries—by people of all ranks, from king to commoner (Curatola 2008; Gose 1996), and their function as oracles was recognized early on by the chroniclers (e.g., Cieza 1967 [1553]:98; Matienzo 1967 [1567]:129). Other aspects indicative of their personhood include the fact that they were often named, had personal biographies, and, in quintessential Andean fashion, were often clothed or dressed in woven garments (Albornoz 1984 [1581–85]:217; Arriaga 1968 [1621]:76). Sarmiento’s (2007 [1572]:66) account of Guanacauri, the principal wak’a of Cuzco, offers a particularly vivid image of the agency of wak’as. In describing the Inka Ayar Uchu’s encounter with Guanacauri, he states that the Inka approached the wak’a to query it regarding its presence there. “At these words,” Sarmiento writes, “the huaca turned its head to see who addressed it, but was unable to see Ayar Uchu because his weight bore down upon it” (Ayar Uchu had seated himself atop the wak’a).

In an in-depth analysis of the Huarochiri manuscript—a document written in Quechua circa 1598 containing important insights into native ontologies—one of its principal exponents was led to conclude that wak'as were clearly living beings, “persons in fact” (Salomon 1991:18–19). I would suggest, though, that we are not talking here about “persons” in the familiar sense of western individualism but rather in the relational sense described above. Within such a relational framework, persons are seen as multi-authored, distributed, pluralistic entities defined on the basis of what they do rather than how they appear, conformed of their various interactions within a diverse field of social relations involving humans, animals, things, and places (Brück 2001; Chapman 2000; Fowler 2004; Strathern 1988). From this perspective, social relations can be understood to provide the grounds for and the context within which persons take (temporary) shape. Given this, it seems reasonable to suggest that a key to the recognition of “persons” within a given cultural milieu would be the identification of involvement in relations of sociality (see Allen, this volume; Bray 2012; Mannheim and Salas, this volume).

Within the Andean context, the exploration of alternative forms of personhood and types of persons articulates closely with notions of power, agency, reciprocity, and ethical obligation. Given a dominant relational ontology, the interactions and relationships that establish one's personhood entail mutual obligations of respect and reciprocity involving not only a strong moral dimension but a material one as well. The moral imperative of sharing and the ethical obligations of reciprocity are most typically realized through material transactions—be they in the form of offerings, exchanges, or some manner of caregiving. What archaeology brings to the table in terms of exploring alternative ontologies in general, and the investigation of Andean wak'as more specifically, is a retraining of the anthropological gaze on the materiality of social interactions and relations. In so doing, it offers the possibility of stretching our understandings of what constitutes the social by looking at what is assembled or gathered together at different moments in different places—an orientation that brings forward the nonessential nature and temporal contingency of the agents (or “actants,” after Latour) comprising the social relational matrix.

Archaeology's necessary engagement with things and contexts arguably holds unique potential for the investigation of sociality and ontological diversity (Alberti et al. 2011; Holbraad 2009:438–40; Tilley 2007). Identifying material phenomena that defy explanation within a conventional western ontological framework is one way that archaeologists may set up productive challenges to commonly held assumptions about agency, personhood, and causation (Holbraad 2009:438). The concreteness of archaeological remains, even in



**FIGURE 1.2.** *A large, natural rock outcrop housed within its own structure at the Inka site of Urcos in the Urubamba Valley near Cuzco in south-central Peru (photograph by Edward Ranney, printed with permission).*

their incompleteness, constrains interpretive possibilities. Rather than hewing to mainstream anthropological aims of description and explanation (always within our own frame of reference), focusing on the materiality of the archaeological record—and in particular on the material anomalies that confront us on a fairly regular basis (think here of such things as anthropomorphic pots, the special interment of figurines, the treatment of the dead as living beings, or the cultural housing of “natural” features)—provides a point of departure for exploring novel conceptualizations that may disrupt our common sense or everyday understandings (e.g., Alberti and Marshall 2009) (Figure 1.2). Seen from this vantage, archaeological phenomena may offer unique analytical purchase for the investigation of alterity and sociality.

This volume brings together specialists in Andean studies from a variety of different backgrounds, including archaeology, art history, ethnography, linguistics, and history. The collective goal of the authors is to advance our understanding of the nature and culture of wak’as as well as contribute to larger theoretical discussions on the meaning and role of “the sacred” in ancient contexts and ways of recognizing and appreciating divergent ontologies. The assembled papers explore what a materially oriented study of wak’as can add to our current understandings of this vital Andean phenomenon that seems to conflate the boundaries between person-thing-concept. Some of the key

themes addressed by the authors include how we might identify “persons” of the other-than-human variety archaeologically, how social relations are materially expressed, the ways in which identity and power are recursively constituted through human-wak’a engagement, the issue of presentation versus re-presentation, the partitive or distributed nature of wak’as, and what the study of these phenomena can contribute to our general understanding of materiality, sociality, and ontological diversity.

Several of the authors explore the notion of wak’as from an emically informed point of view though they situate their discussions within distinctly different theoretical frameworks. Allen (Chapter 2) finds utility in recuperating the notion of animism and infusing it with recent, ethnographically based insights into Amerindian ontologies. As described by Viveiros de Castro (1992, 2004), many Amerindian peoples view all beings as sharing in a universal culture and as having an interior subjectivity—the key difference among entities being the fact that they have different, bodily induced points of view that cause them to see the world differently—hence the label “ontological perspectivism.” In discussing perspectivism in the Andean context, Allen highlights the reciprocal and moral aspects of “seeing” as well as the partitive nature of personhood. Mannheim and Salas in Chapter 3 take a different emically oriented approach to the analysis of “wak’a” that emphasizes both the grammatical affordances of the term within the Quechua language and social praxis. While they also advocate for the importance of reciprocal, recursive relations of sociality in recognizing wak’as as (nonhuman) persons, they prefer to work from the ground of specific material practices through which such relations are constructed and reject the generalized application of the term “animism” to describe Andean metaphysics.

Given our knowledge of sociality in the Andes, a variety of possibilities can be offered with respect to how we might identify nonhuman persons in the archaeological record. One approach would be to analyze the material evidence for social relationships as traditionally constructed via ritual commensality and the exchange or offering of gifts (Bray 2012; Mannheim and Salas, this volume). Another relates to the importance of co-residence and the notion of “domestication”—conditions of being potentially visible through architectural containment (see Figure 1.2; Dean 2010) or the spatial analysis of features and sites (Makowski, this volume). Social relations can also be expressed through their clear negation, as might be manifest in acts of violence or destruction (Janusek, this volume; Kosiba 2012). Another significant marker of social personhood in the Andes involves the use of clothing, which, in the case of other-than-human persons, we could think of approaching in a metaphorical as well as a literal sense (Cook, this volume).

As with Allen, the contributions by Dean (Chapter 7) and Meddens (Chapter 8) highlight the significance of vision—the acts of seeing and being seen—in the construction of social relations and personhood. These authors suggest that the significance of sight is materially expressed in various ways, including the construction of permanent markers on the landscape, the physical demarcation of sighted features, the creation of specific alignments, and the physical conjoining of material elements. Similar observations at Pachacamac and Pueblo Viejo-Pucará inform new interpretations of these sites, which are presented by Makowski in Chapter 5. Such specifically constructed and/or demarcated landscape features not only materially express networks of social relations but also create and instantiate these by giving them substantive existence through their material form. This key point is further developed by Kosiba in the context of Ollantaytambo (Chapter 6) and by Chase for the Huarochirí region (Chapter 4), while McEwan (Chapter 9) extends these ideas to the realm of portable wak'as.

Several of the chapters in this volume emphasize the inherently political nature of human-wak'a engagements. As suggested by various authors, the power and prestige of wak'as and the human communities to which they were linked were co-constructed, mutually dependent, and temporally contingent. Focusing on the carved monoliths at the Formative period site of Khonkho Wankane, Janusek (Chapter 11) explains the political importance of this site as a function of both the wak'a-like stones emplaced there and the people that venerated them, each reciprocally constituting the power and agency of the other through dynamic, recursive, and material articulations. In similar fashion, Chase (Chapter 4) argues for the significance of performative acts involving wak'as, people, and places in the creation of both new pasts and changing presents. All the contributors to this volume see the material acts that constituted the matrix of Andean sociality and encompassed both human and nonhuman persons as vital to the construction of new social relationships, collective identities, and political projects.

In the Andes it is clear that not every rock, tree, or mountain was considered a wak'a—that is, superlative in its class, possessed of special power, and having personhood. For us, the ability to identify such entities is dependent on identification of the material practices that constituted these as members of the social matrix. As demonstrated in this volume, archaeology as a material enterprise does have access to past relations of sociality that permit the identification of wak'as. Recognizing which entities were so construed offers a potent mechanism for reconstructing cultural landscapes of the past, furthering our understandings of community boundaries and regional politics, and

gaining new insights into the social relational universe of Andean peoples and the ontological modalities within which they operated. Through the material analysis of wak'as as "sacred" substance and force, this volume contributes to the growing corpus of archaeological works concerned with the exploration of alternative ways of configuring the (social) world across both time and space, the types of entities that through their participation create this world, and the metaphysics that companion these different modalities. By focusing on wak'as as significant nonhuman members of Andean social configurations, we expand our anthropological acuity and highlight the possibilities archaeology offers for seeing into alternative worlds.

## NOTE

1. In Quechua the plural form of a noun is typically indicated by the suffix *-kuna*. However, we have elected to use the English suffix *-s* when referring to wak'a in the plural to avoid unnecessary confusion.

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