

Symbols and Control in a High Altitude Andean Community*

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1. The Context of Ritual Performances

From an agricultural point of view, the province of Chumbivilcas, Peru, consists of three vertical production zones. The highest of these, labeled here the upper puna, is restricted to the extreme southern portion of the province. This zone lies above the upper limits of agriculture and is therefore useful only for the herding of alpacas, llamas and sheep. The altitude range of the upper puna is from roughly 4,200 to 5,000 m. above sea level. The lowest production zone is located along the lower slopes of the Santo Tomas River valley where the agricultural specialty is corn. Such corn zones are called *qheswa* in the Quechua language. The altitude ranges defining the *qheswa* zone in Chumbivilcas are from roughly 2,300 to a little over 3,600 m. in elevation. The third production zone extends from the upper limits of corn cultivation to the absolute upper limits of all agriculture where the upper puna zone begins. The elevation range of this zone is from roughly 3,600 to 4,200 meters. This zone, labeled here the lower puna, is in the form of an extensive grass-

* This paper is concerned with a highly visible and frequently performed peasant ritual observed in the Quechua-speaking province of Chumbivilcas, department of Cuzco, Peru. The data for this study were collected in the high altitude zones of the province during the months of May through August, 1970. Subsequent data were gathered in the lower elevations from July through September of 1974.