

## Introduction

**Abstract:** A sequence of Middle and Late Engoroy ceremonial structures dating to 600–100 BC that were excavated at OMJPLP–141B Salango, on the central coast of Ecuador, presents the most detailed and complete examples of architectural settings for ritual practice so far known for the Late Formative. Ecuadorian coastal Late Formative cultures such as Chorrera and Engoroy are best known for their often brilliant ceramics, and the socio-cultural traditions behind this pottery are relatively understudied. Likewise, architecture is principally understood based on looted pottery models of houses. Salango thus offers a major addition to knowledge of Late Formative ceremonial architecture and the sequence of change in ritual practices. Salango sits midway between the Santa Elena Peninsula and Cabo San Lorenzo, in a zone of deciduous tropical dry forest, and its Pre-Columbian settlement lay at the south end of a sandy bay opposite Salango Island. Evidence for Engoroy occupation shows, especially at sector OMJPLP–141B, that Middle Engoroy saw reconfiguration of the site for ceremonial purposes. Excavation of OMJPLP–141B from 1983 to 1986 focused at Trench 3 (T3) on a series of Regional Development and, under these, Late Formative ceremonial structures. Seven main structures were identified for the Late Formative Middle and Late Engoroy phases at T3. From October 1988 to May 1989, the Late Formative components at Trench 4 (T4) were excavated. Details of the rear left quarters of the structures identified at T3 have previously been published. This monograph now presents the evidence for the front, northeast-facing halves recovered at T4, reconstructs the overall design of each of the structures at OMJPLP–141B, and assesses their meaning and function.

**Resumen:** Una secuencia de estructuras ceremoniales Engoroy Medio y Tardío fechadas en 600–100 a.C. que se excavaron en OMJPLP–141B Salango, en la costa central del Ecuador, presenta los ejemplos más detallados y completos de escenarios arquitectónicos para prácticas rituales conocidos hasta ahora para el Formativo Tardío. Las culturas Formativo Tardío de la costa ecuatoriana, como Chorrera y Engoroy, son mejor conocidas por sus cerámicas a menudo brillantes, y las tradiciones socioculturales detrás de estas cerámicas son relativamente poco estudiadas. Asimismo, la arquitectura Formativo Tardío se entiende principalmente a partir de huaqueados modelos cerámicos de casas. Salango ofrece así una importante contribución al conocimiento de la arquitectura ceremonial del Formativo Tardío y la secuencia de cambios en prácticas rituales. Salango se encuentra a mitad de camino entre la Península de Santa Elena y Cabo San Lorenzo, en una zona de bosque seco tropical caducifolio, y su asentamiento precolombino se encuentra en el extremo sur de una bahía arenosa frente a la Isla Salango. La evidencia de la ocupación Engoroy muestra, en particular en el sector OMJPLP–141B, que Engoroy Medio vio la reconfiguración del sitio con fines ceremoniales. La excavación de OMJPLP–141B desde 1983 a 1986 se centró en la Trinchera 3 (T3) en una serie de estructuras ceremoniales Desarrollo Regional y, debajo de estas, Formativo Tardío. Se identificaron siete estructuras principales para las fases Engoroy Medio y Tardío del Formativo Tardío en T3. Desde octubre de 1988 hasta mayo de 1989, se excavaron los componentes Formativo Tardío de la Trinchera 4 (T4). Los detalles de los cuartos traseros izquierdos de las estructuras identificadas en T3 se han publicado anteriormente. Esta monografía ahora presenta la evidencia de las mitades delanteras orientadas al noreste recuperadas en T4, reconstruye el diseño general de cada una de las estructuras de OMJPLP–141B, y evalúa su significado y función.

### 1.1. Aims and Scope of the Study

The multi-component archaeological site at Salango, on the south coast of the province of Manabí, Ecuador, has previously been reported for a sequence of ceremonial structures belonging to the Late Formative and Early and Middle Regional Development periods excavated in sector OMJPLP–141B (Luniss 2001, 2022; Norton et al. 1983).

These structures comprise the most detailed and completely excavated examples of architectural settings for ritual practice on the central coast so far available for this time span. Specifically, they are associated with Middle and Late Engoroy ceramics (Beckwith 1996; Bischof 1982; Bushnell 1951; Paulsen 1982; Paulsen & McDougale 1974, 1981; Simmons 1970; Zeller & Bischof 1960), dating to 600–300 BC and 300–100 BC respectively, for the Late

Formative, and with Bahia II (Huerta 1940; Estrada 1957, 1962) and Early Guangala (Bischof 1982; Bushnell 1951; Estrada 1957, 1962; Masucci 1992; Paulsen 1970; Simmons 1970; Stothert 1993), and then Middle Guangala (Zeller & Bischof 1960; Paulsen 1970) ceramics, at 100 BC–AD 300 and AD 300–600 respectively, for the Regional Development.

Remains of the rear southwest quarters of the structures were excavated as Trench 3 (T3) of OMJPLP–141B, and these have already been described (Lunniss 2001). This monograph now presents evidence of the northeast-facing front halves of the buildings of the Late Formative stage of the sequence, excavated as Trench 4 (T4) of OMJPLP–141B, reconstructs the overall design of each of the structures, and assesses their meaning and function.

The rest of the chapter reviews previous research into the Ecuadorian coastal Late Formative and its ceremonial architecture and practice, describes the general setting of Salango, considers local topography and Engoroy settlement pattern, summarizes the results of excavation at OMJPLP–141B–T3, and introduces OMJPLP–141B–T4. Chapter 2 then describes the methodology applied to the analysis and interpretation of the data from T4. In Chapter 3, the stratigraphic sequence for T4 is described, treating first of the building sequence and then of features and artefacts associated with the structures. In Chapter 4, the data from T4 are combined with those from T3 in a reconstruction of the overall design and dimensions of each of the structures, with summary accounts of the human burials of the later episodes and of the anthropomorphic figurine depositions. In Chapter 5, these results are then assessed in terms of the likely use of the site, the principles of spatial organisation that underlay the structures, and the meaning of the site for those who created and used it. Finally, in Chapter 6 I consider the significance of Salango for understanding of Late Formative ceremonial architecture, ideology, and ritual practice.

## **1.2. Previous Research into the Late Formative of Coastal Ecuador**

The Late Formative period of coastal Ecuador is represented by a mosaic of diverse cultures themselves largely defined based on often brilliantly decorated and technically superb pottery vessels and pottery figurines (Beckwith 1996; Cummins 2003; Lunniss 2001; Meggers 1966:55–66; Marcos 2003; Zeidler 2003; Zeidler & Isaacson 2003; Zeidler & Sutliff 1994). General dating remains problematic on account of the variability (and availability) of the start and end points of the different cultural manifestations, including Chévele, Tachina, Mafa, Early Selva Alegre, Early Tolita, Tabuchila, Bahía I, Chorrera, Engoroy, San Pedro de Guayaquil, and Bella Vista, that are gathered under this umbrella term, but Chorrera and related cultures of central and northern Manabí can be placed at ca. 1300/1200–300 BC, while in south Manabí and down to the Santa Elena Peninsula, Engoroy can be dated overall, though with caveats, to 900–100 BC (Zeidler 2003). Likewise, after decades of mostly sporadic

field work, beginning with Bushnell's isolation of Engoroy ceramics on the Santa Elena Peninsula in the 1930's (Bushnell 1951), and Evans and Meggers' identification of Chorrera ceramics at Hacienda La Chorrera, upriver from Guayaquil, in the 1950's (Evans & Meggers 1957), we are still far from an understanding of the inter-relationships that held between the different socio-cultural traditions implied by the ceramics, and even, for the most part, of the nature of those traditions themselves (Figure 1.1). The most systematic analysis of the coastal Late Formative so far has been undertaken by Zeidler and colleagues (Zeidler & Pearsall 1994) in research into the Tabuchila complex of the Jama Valley of north Manabí, up and down river from San Isidro, where extensive surveys and sampling have allowed identification of settlement patterns through time and of a major ash fall, produced by the eruption of the highland Pululahua volcano around 467 cal BC, that brought about the end of Late Formative occupation of that region (Zeidler & Isaacson 2003; Zeidler & Sutliff 1994).

One of the striking, indeed definitive, aspects of the coastal Ecuadorian Late Formative was the intensification of ceremonial activity and the foregrounding of sacred power and authority, supporting the idea that this period saw the emergence of incipient chiefdoms (Stothert 2003a; Zeidler & Isaacson 2003:92). Much of the evidence comes in the form of looted artefacts probably taken in most cases from unregistered burial grounds in Manabí. Some reconstruction of coastal Late Formative ideology has been carried out with reference to such objects, using ethnographic analogy as well as stylistic and iconographic analysis to provide clues as to their cultural significance (Lathrap et al. 1975; Cummins 1992, 2003; Weinstein 1999; Stothert 2003a). More specifically, certain of these vessels perhaps represent ceremonial houses (Holm 1985:12–15; Cummins 2003:451, 452, Fig. 32). Meanwhile, the Chorrera type site (Evans and Meggers 1954, 1957) appears on the basis of artefacts recovered there to have been the village of a local chief (Stothert 2003b:44), and San Isidro, in northern Manabí, was evidently a major political and ceremonial centre for Tabuchila occupation of the Jama valley with a large central ceremonial platform (Estrada 1957; Zeidler 1994).

Nevertheless, the absence of information on Chorrera or Chorreroid ceremonial structures has been a leitmotif of recent Ecuadorian Formative studies (Stothert 2003a:347, footnote 5; Cummins 2003:424, 451 footnote 29; Burger 2003:479). And although the already large Piquigua (Valdivia) phase platform mound at the centre of the San Isidro site was enlarged (Zeidler & Isaacson 2003:93), the nature of the new, Tabuchila phase mound at San Isidro and of any accompanying structures on top of it remain to be determined. Thus, Late Formative ceremonial houses and platforms, with clear evidence for them, are so far best represented at Salango.

Meanwhile, several Engoroy cemeteries have been documented along the coast at La Libertad (Bushnell

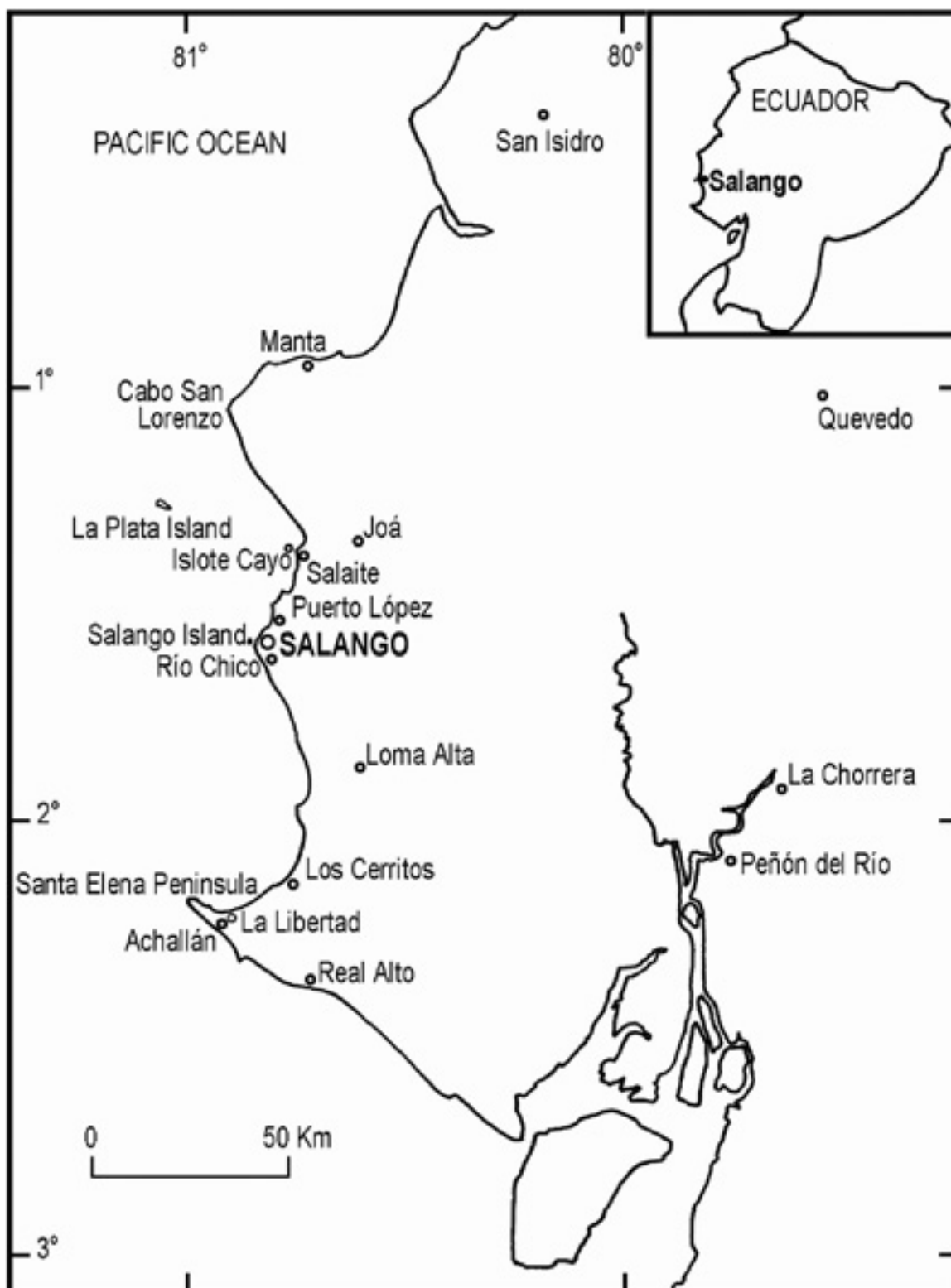


Figure 1.1. The Ecuadorian coast with sites mentioned in the text. Reprinted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: Springer, *Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin*, by J. Staller, ed. © (2008).

1951; Ubleaker 1988), Los Cerritos (Zevallos 1965/66; 1995) and Loma Alta (Beckwith 1996:47, 48, 83, 84), and the Guayaquil Phase settlement and cemetery at San Pedro, Guayaquil (Parducci & Parducci 1970, 1972, 1975), appear to correlate with very late Engoroy as well as Early Regional Development at Salango, as does a

cemetery at Joá (Holm 1969). A cemetery at Bahía de Caráquez was partially excavated (Huerta 1940; Estrada 1962:19, 20), though it is unclear whether it was of Bahía I or Bahía II affiliation, or both. Evidence for other forms of Late Formative ceremonial activity has been reported elsewhere. At the Achallán *albarrada* (Stothert 1995),

Engoroy offerings of pottery and shell were deposited in the body of the massive reservoir wall to ensure successful capture and retention of water (Stothert 2003a:364). And on La Plata Island, Bahía cliff-top rituals culminated in the breaking of hundreds of anthropomorphic whistling figurines and their deposition in caches along with decorated and undecorated stone plaques and beads as well as blocks and beads of exotic coloured stone (Dorsey 1901), while at the back of the single beach where a landing could be made, there were further offerings of stone and pottery figurines, stone plaques, coloured stone beads, and fishhooks (Carlucci 1966; Marcos & Norton 1981, 1984).

Many of these and other Late Formative artefact types, often identified elsewhere in isolated fashion or recovered with no record of archaeological context, appear at Salango as integrated elements of a complex yet ordered and fully documented architectural setting. The register of the sequence of ceremonial structures at Salango is itself a major addition to knowledge of ceremonial architecture of the period. But as the site was occupied over the entire Middle and Late Engoroy span, a time of great ideological experiment among coastal society, it is also possible to

use Salango as a point of reference for a more precise definition of the sequence of change in ritual practices, thus providing a more solid base for subsequent interpretation of their significance.

### **1.3. Salango: The Setting and Engoroy Settlement Patterns**

The fishing village of Salango sits at 1° 35' 30" S, 80° 50' 30" W (IGM Map CT MIV-3), roughly halfway between the Santa Elena Peninsula and Cabo San Lorenzo, each approximately 70 km away. It lies on the north side of Punta Piedra Verde, the headland, which, with Salango Island, constitutes the most westward point of the shoreline between those two larger promontories. The coastal strip itself is mostly vegetated with deciduous tropical dry forest and scrub, with wetter regimes further inland and at the higher altitudes of hills which reach 800 m asl. But a few miles south of Salango, the Cinco Cerros, a westward extension of the Cordillera Chongón-Colonche, attracts enough rainfall to support permanent tropical cloud forest right to the cliffs above the ocean. The effects of this relatively high precipitation reach as far as Salango, whose year-round greenery is in refreshing and colourful contrast



**Figure 1.2. Salango: view of the bay, the island, and the headland, Punta Piedra Verde. The site lies under the factory installations visible at the base of the headland to the left. Reprinted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: Springer, Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin, by J. Staller, ed. © (2008).**

to the more arid conditions that prevail from Puerto López northwards.

The Pre-Columbian settlement, throughout its history, was focused on the south end of Salango's sandy beach (Figure 1.2). From this site, now largely occupied by a fish meal factory, the view is dominated by the ocean and points of land that mark its limits. While Salango Island, a few hundred metres offshore, marks the horizon to the west, La Plata Island, 44 km to the northwest, and Cabo San Lorenzo, just west of north, are also visible on clear days. Otherwise, cliff promontories block off the view of the northern shoreline immediately beyond, just as Punta Piedra Verde shuts the bay off from the coastline to the south.

Salango is pressed close by low hills reaching down from the east, and the flat land of the Río Salango flood plain is not extensive. In earlier times, much of this land was rather lower than it is now, and the details of the beachline have altered also, partly through natural processes, partly as the result of human action. It is clear, though, that there was never any large area of land suitable for settlement within these confined spaces.

The evidence for Engoroy occupation of Salango derives from various sources. In the first place, there are the results of excavation at sectors OMJPLP-140, OMJPLP-141A, 141B, including both T3 and T4, and 141C (Allan 1988; Beckwith 1996; Kurc 1984; Lunniss 2001; Norton et al. 1983). Second, there are two sets of data gathered during field surveys of the Salango valley (Allan & Allan 1989; Graber 2004). Third are observations made by the author during two community construction projects undertaken in the village of Salango in 2004-5.<sup>1</sup> There are no data available for the area between 141B and the beach since this is occupied by the main fish factory buildings, which were constructed in 1975.

The focus of Engoroy occupation lay at the foot of Punta Piedra Verde, an area excavated as sectors OMJPLP-140 and OMJPLP-141A, 141B, and 141C (Figures 1.3, 1.4). Its full extent was about 3 ha and corresponds to the land from the base of the headland to the top of the slope leading down to the old estuary of the Río Salango 300 m to the northeast, reaching at its widest point 200 m in from the beach.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, four small Engoroy habitation sites have been identified on low spurs along the north side of the valley of the Río Salango (Allan & Allan 1988).<sup>3</sup>

There were three distinct phases of Engoroy occupation for the main site, each characterised by different ceramics, and with different patterns of use. For Early Engoroy, the main evidence is habitation refuse and one or more human graves located at OMJPLP-141C. Almost no Early Engoroy ceramics have been identified amongst the material examined from 141B-T3.<sup>4</sup> Early Engoroy ceramics did not appear either in the material recovered from non-archaeological pits and trenches dug to the north and east of 141C, 141A, and 141B. It appears that in its early phase, Engoroy Salango was a relatively small settlement dedicated to the same fishing activities as characterised the preceding Machalilla period.

With Middle Engoroy, there was a major change in settlement organisation and use. Most important of all, at 141B, to the southwest of the earlier habitation site identified at 141C, there was constructed first a ceremonial floor, and then over that a northeast-facing ceremonial house.<sup>5</sup> This house was to be the first of the series of ceremonial structures that dominated Salango from 600 BC to AD 600.

While refuse layers surrounded the house and subsequent Engoroy platforms at 141B, no Middle or Late Engoroy refuse was identified at site 141C. However, Engoroy period floors of yellow clay with posthole alignments, apparently oriented northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast, and hearths, were found at 141A.<sup>6</sup> Their similarity with contexts excavated at 141B suggests that they may have formed part of a sequence of structures of middle or late phase Engoroy closely associated with those at 141B. Late Engoroy pottery was recovered both northeast from 141C, at 141A, and a little to the east beyond 141A. Additionally, ritually deposited stone figurines, such as those found in the floor surrounding the final Late Engoroy platform at 141B, were recovered at 141C and 141A, and also from private land 80 m to the south.<sup>7</sup>

The overall pattern of artefact distribution and of excavated structures suggests that by Late Engoroy the ceremonial precinct or centre consisted of the main platform at 141B and a surrounding plaza, also dedicated to ceremonial performance, that extended at least 50 m to the northeast as far as 141C, at least 20 m east, reaching or perhaps passing beyond a secondary structure at 141A, and at least 80 m to the south. Beyond that, a further zone as far as the edge of the settlement was possibly occupied by habitation structures.

<sup>1</sup> In one case, 200 holes, 2 m deep and 1.20 m across, were dug at various spots throughout the village as latrine pits. Artefacts from nine of these pits were brought to the museum for me to see. In the second case, every street in the village was trenched along one side to accommodate new water pipes, and I was able to inspect over 2 km of trenches so created.

<sup>2</sup> This spot lies close to the Bongo restaurant, owned by Rita Guillén, where the largest sample of Late Engoroy and Early Regional Development pottery was found during the latrine project.

<sup>3</sup> Graber (2004:151-152) casts doubt on the existence of these sites, indicating that he was unable to confirm the cultural affiliation of any of them as Engoroy. He was also unable to identify any other Engoroy sites in the Salango valley (Graber 2004:163).

<sup>4</sup> No ceramic analysis has been carried out yet on the Engoroy material from OMJPLP-141A.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the space occupied by the Middle Engoroy structures had in Early Engoroy times been some sort of plaza, itself given over to public events. Equally, although there is no sign of Early Engoroy structures under the Middle Engoroy house, there may have been some ceremonial building elsewhere in this area during that phase.

<sup>6</sup> This material has not yet been systematically analysed.

<sup>7</sup> These figurines were found in the yard of Sr. Colón Figueroa during a latrine project conducted in 2000 by the Programa de Manejo de Recursos Costeros.

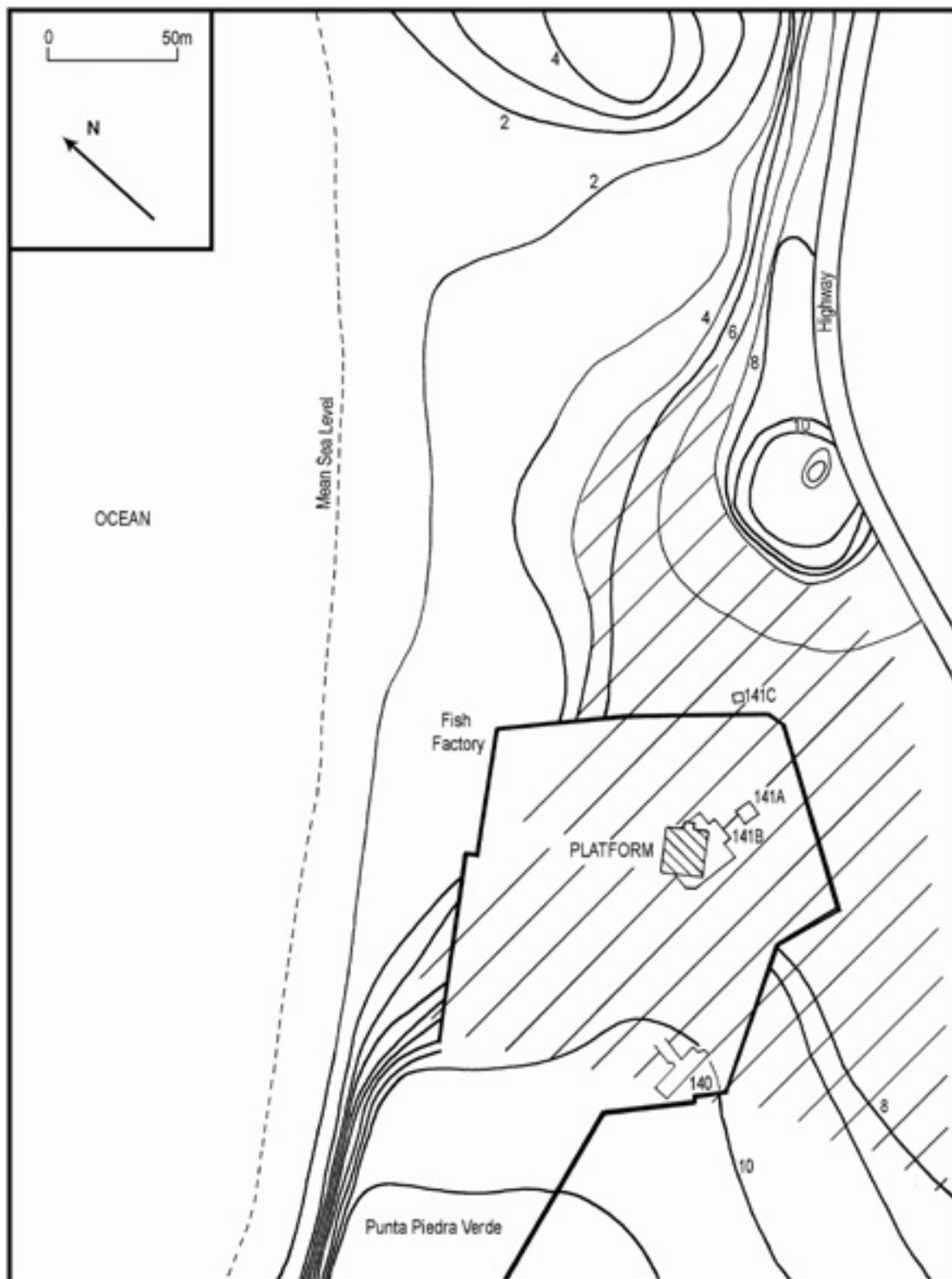


Figure 1.3. Salango: approximate area of Engoroy occupation (shaded) in relation to sectors OMJPLP-140, 141A, 141B, and 141C, and to the local topography (contours at metre intervals). Reprinted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: Springer, Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin, by J. Staller, ed. © (2008).

#### 1.4. OMJPLP-141B-T3 Salango

Sector OMJPLP-141B was opened for excavation in June 1982 as part of the field research currently being undertaken by the Programa de Antropología para el

Ecuador (PAE). Initially, it took the form of a series of small and independent units, which were subsequently amalgamated within a broader area excavation ultimately covering 550 m<sup>2</sup>. Beneath Manteño period surface remains was a culturally sterile layer that in turn capped



**Figure 1.4. OMJPLP-141B in May 1983. View to the southwest showing the headland rising behind the site, the beach, and the fish factory installations.**

the Regional Development contexts. Principal amongst the latter were elaborate primary burials set within a low platform comprised by a complex arrangement of rectangular clay structures oriented to the northeast. However, certain units reached Late Formative levels, and while the evidence is partly compromised by the presence of intrusive Regional Development tombs, in unit L-82, which area was subsequently included as part of Trench 4, there was clear indication of the yellow clay layers typical of the Late Formative structures to be described below.

From 11<sup>th</sup> November 1983, investigation focused on the westward rear corner of the platform with the aim of defining the nature of the structures, their relation to the burials, and their cultural affiliations. This area of the site, encompassing 88 m<sup>2</sup>, was designated Trench 3 (T3). The results of the field work, which continued more or less without interruption through to 7<sup>th</sup> October 1986, are reported in detail elsewhere (Lunniss 2001; Lunniss & Mudd 1987). Here, a summary of the evidence at T3 for the Late Formative period occupation will help explain the specific goals of this paper.

A sequence of seven Late Formative period structures was identified, Structures 1 to 5 corresponding to Middle Engoroy, and Structures 6 and 7 corresponding to Late Engoroy. Each structure was oriented on a northeast-

southwest axis, with the entrance assumed to be to the northeast. In the case of Structures 1, 2, 3, and 6, it was possible to recover direct evidence for both their southwest and their northwest sides. For Structures 4, 5, and 7, only the southwest side lay within the confines of the excavation area. Between Structure 7 and the first of the Regional Development structures was a brief transitional phase with no building carried out.

The structures showed considerable changes in overall configuration as the sequence evolved. Structure 1 consisted of a yellow clay floor with a rectangular wooden superstructure. For Structure 2, the floor was replaced with a low platform of the same material. With Structure 3 the platform was extended, and its perimeter was defined by a sunken wall of a different coloured clay, this in turn connecting to an area of clay floor around the outside of the wall. With Structures 4 and 5, further clay walls were built, and the platform edge was recapped. With Structure 6, a much more substantial clay wall extended away from the platform as a deep, tapering layer, so creating a broader expanse of exterior clay floor than had previously existed, and the platform centre was recapped. Structure 7 consisted of another large wall, set flush with the Structure 6 wall and exterior floor surface, with further recapping of the platform. No large rectangular wooden superstructures were found for Structures 4 to 7.

In addition to the elements of the structures themselves, there were many associated features of different types, including, principally, human burials, stone figurine depositions, animal and bird burials, and structured depositions or offerings of a variety of other artefacts and materials. There were two groups of human burials. One was associated with Structure 1. The other corresponded on purely stratigraphic grounds to Structures 3 to 7 and the transition phase, though it is likely that all the graves post-dated Structure 6. This second group was also associated with funerary fire pits and rubbish pits. The stone figurine depositions were all associated with Structure 7. The other depositions fell at different points through the sequence.

In short, there was evidence not only for a unique sequence of ceremonial structures, but also for a wide variety of features and artefacts in direct and intentional association with them. However, the view gained of the site was obviously far from complete. It was just a rear quarter that was in each case recovered of the structures, and the building elements were in some cases either only partially preserved or not present within the excavation area. To achieve a more complete view of the configuration and design of each of the structures of the entire sequence, along with their entrance ways, it was necessary to excavate their front halves to the northeast. Accordingly, Trench 4 (T4) was opened for excavation on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1987 (Figure 1.5).

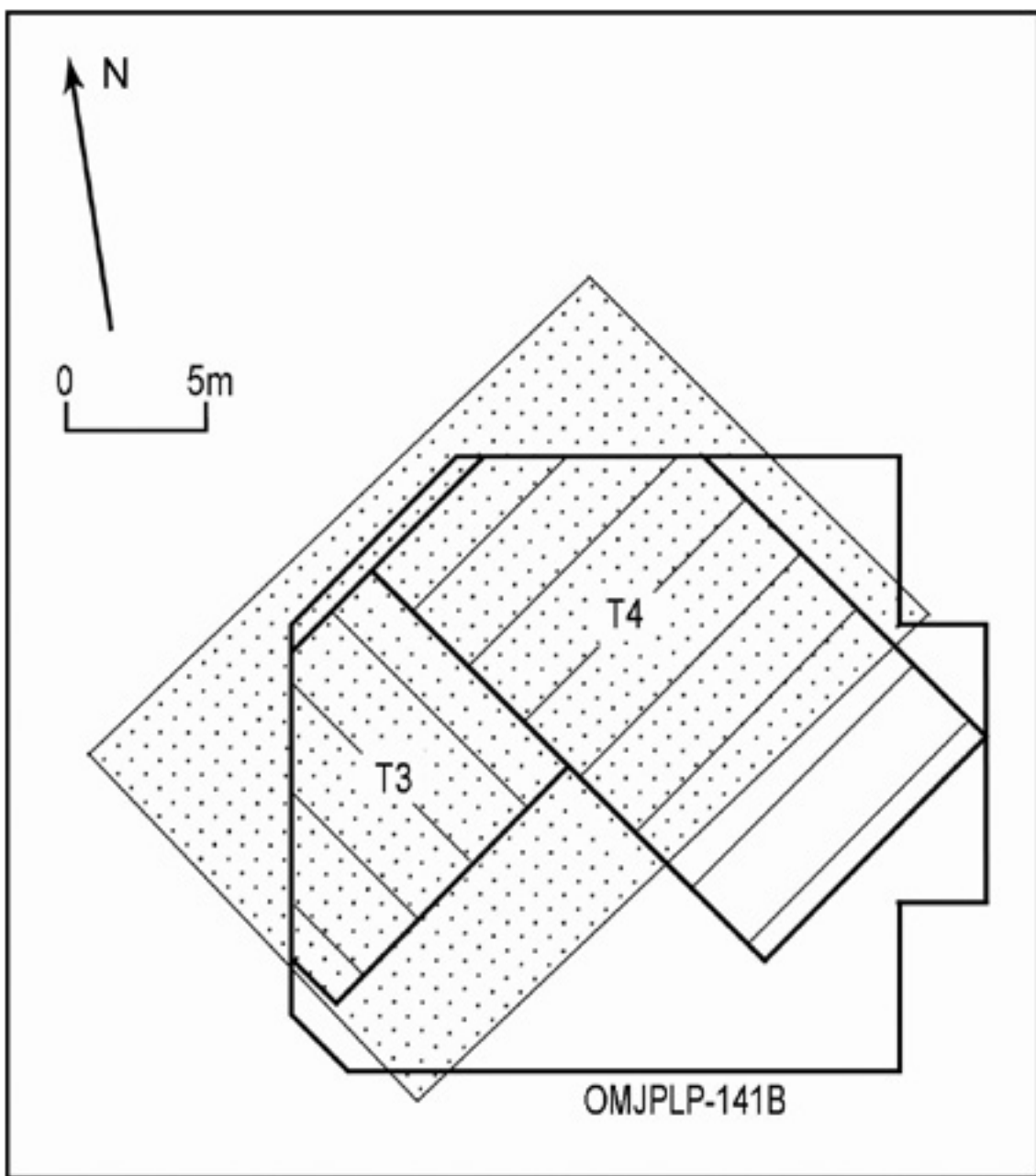


Figure 1.5. Site OMJPLP-141B, with Trenches 3 y 4, and the area (stippled) represented by the reconstructed building plans. Reprinted by permission from Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH: Springer, Pre-Columbian Landscapes of Creation and Origin, by J. Staller, ed. © (2008).



### **1.5. Excavation of OMJPLP-141B-T4 Salango**

The excavation of T4, like that of T3, began with the structures of the Regional Development Period, and by June 1988 these had been mostly removed, under the direction of Andy Mudd and Ian Mays. Later that year, John Johnson was appointed field director, with the brief to follow the sequence down through the Late Formative levels as far as that of the first building identified in T3, i.e., Structure 1. Beginning field work on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1988 and assisted by local workers as well as professional archaeologists and archaeology students, Johnson completed his task on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1989. The site was then handed back to the Empresa Pesquera Polar, which owns the land, and subsequently buried under the foundations of a fish meal warehouse. Any visitor to the site today would not be able even to guess from the appearance of things that the modern factory hides from sight and enquiry one of the most interesting and informative archaeological sites to have been identified on the Ecuadorian coast.

For T3, the very complex stratigraphic sequence had been excavated and recorded using single context planning (Harris 1979; Lunniss 2001:55–61). The same methodology was applied to the excavation of T4. Contexts 10001 to 11986 having been excavated by Mudd and Mays, Johnson proceeded to excavate contexts 11987 to 13397.

