



Edgardo Civallero  
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The *kamacheña* (also spelled *camacheña*) is a somehow mysterious Andean musical instrument. At the root of this veil of secrecy might be its reduced geographical distribution, compared to other popular wind instruments of the Andes. Or perhaps it is due to its use being limited to traditional contexts, its poorly known repertoire, or its difficult playing technique.

It is a vertical flute made from a segment of giant reed (*Arundo donax*) or any other similar *Bambusaceae*, about 30-35 cm long. At the distal end the tube is closed by the natural node of the cane, while at the proximal end the node is removed and a mouthpiece is cut with a knife. This mouthpiece consists of a semicircular shaped notch flanked by two "wings" carefully carved from the wall of the cane, which gives the instrument its unique identity. The musician has to introduce both of them into his mouth, and direct a concentrated stream of air against the sharp edge of the beveled notch. The



Image 1.  
*Kamacheña.*  
[Photo: E. Civallero].



Images 2 to 4.  
Details of a *kamacheña*.  
[Photos: E. Civallero].

sound produced can be modulated by the three or four fingering holes the *kamacheña* has on its front side.

Such a limited number of holes make it possible to play the flute with one hand (usually the left one), while the other to beats a small double-headed





drum (named *caja*) with a drumstick. It is not unreasonable to suppose that by providing the *kamacheña* with its curious "side flaps" their creators would have meant to permit its manipulation with a single hand. In general, wind instruments played in a pipe-and-tabor fashion in Latin America are duct flutes — e.g. Ecuadorian *pingullos*, Peruvian *roncadoras* and Bolivian *waka-pinkillos*, to mention just a couple of the Andean ones. Their mouthpieces allow the performer to hold the proximal end with the lips in order to maintain, to some extent, the stability of the instrument. Anyway, at least one *quena* (Andean typical notched flute, without "lateral wings") has been documented to be also played with one hand in Cajamarca (Peru) (Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1978).

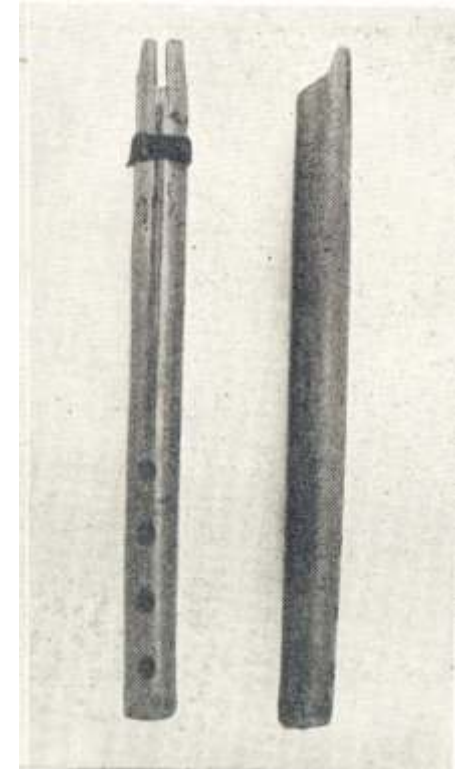
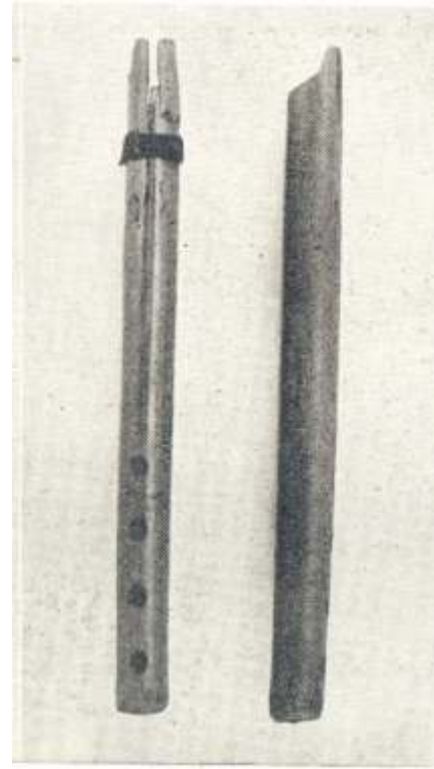
Images 5 and 6.  
Details of a *kamacheña*.  
[Photos: E. Civallero].

The geographical area where the *kamacheña* is built and used comprises northwestern Argentina (the eastern portion of the provinces of Jujuy and Salta, especially the departments of Iruya, Santa Victoria and Orán; Vega, 1946; Pérez Bugallo, 1996), and southern Bolivia (the northwest of the department of Tarija; Cavour, 1994; Goyena, 1997).

In Argentina, the flute receives many names: from *flautilla de Pascua* (Spanish for "Easter small flute") and *cuello de llama* ("lama's neck") to *quenilla* ("small quena") or *flautilla jujeña* ("Jujuy's small flute"), although the preferred is *quena*. Pérez Bugallo (1996) points out that, in Argentina, it would be related to a number of archaeological wind instruments (e.g. those found at the site of Inca Cueva, Jujuy, dating to 2130 BC), and that it would be the only native flute with a *quena*-like, notched mouthpiece. This author also explains that the flute which is currently known as "standard *quena*", very popular nowadays in northwestern Argentina, was intro-

duced in the country from Bolivia in recent times (mid-twentieth century). Likewise, the denominations *quena* and *quenilla* are also used in Bolivia, although the instrument is best known as *kamacheña* or *camacheña*, a name probably derived from Camacho, one of the most important rivers of Tarija's central valleys.

The *caja*, which provides the beat to the melody of the *kamacheña*, is a very popular membranophone in the Andes. It has a long tradition among indigenous societies, and it is documented in the early Hispanic vocabularies and documents printed in Peru under its Quechua name *tinya*, still in use. Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, in his famous *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* ("The First New Chronicle and Good Government", ca. 1615) draws it in the hands of some of the inhabitants of the *Tawantinsuyu*, the old "Inca Empire". Throughout the Andean range, the *caja* receives different names, having also different sizes and proportions. Although

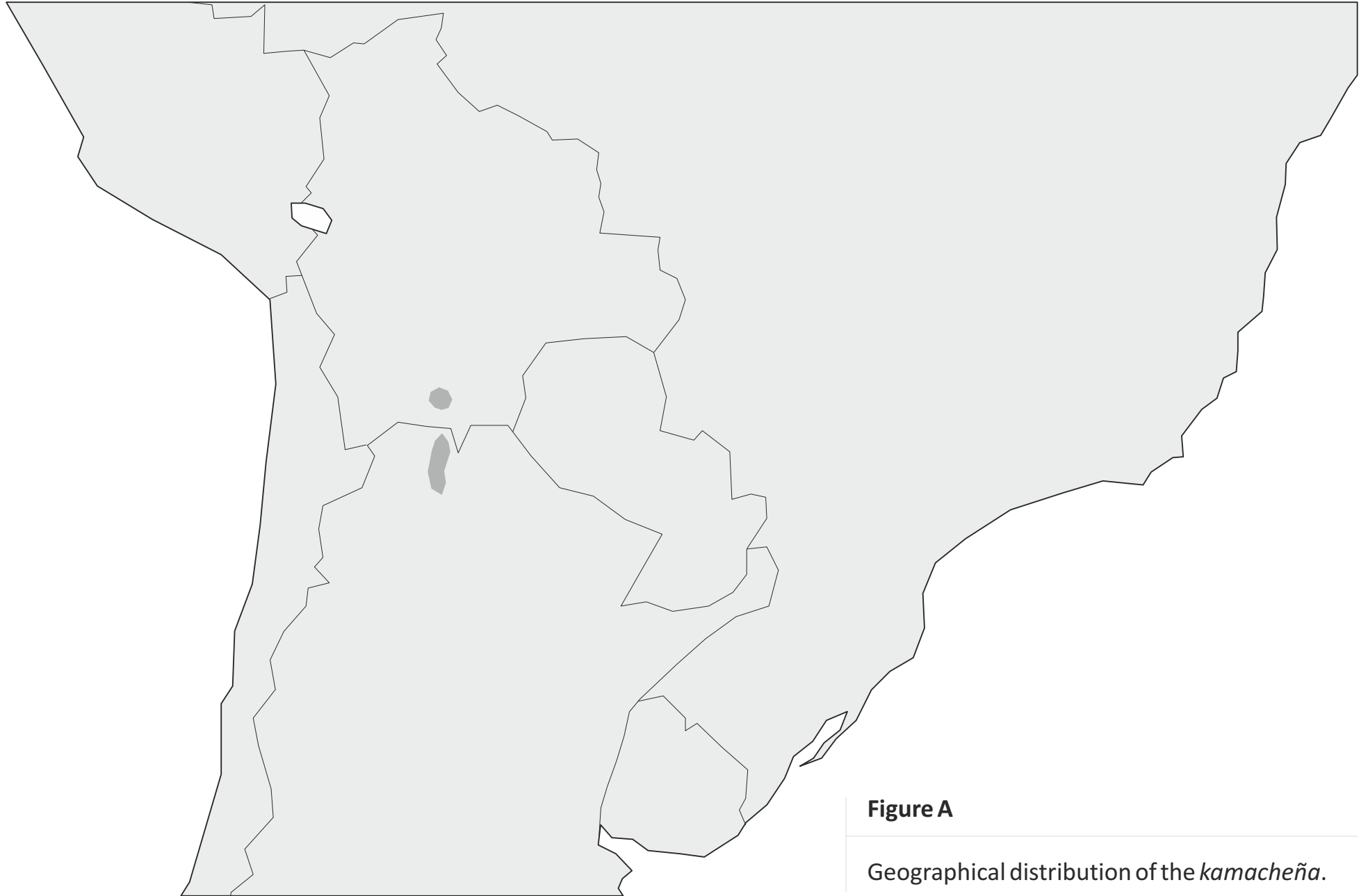


Images 7 to 11.

*Kamacheñas* (Argentina).

[Photos: Instituto Nacional de Musicología, Argentina].





**Figure A**

Geographical distribution of the *kamacheña*.



Image 12.  
*Kamacheña* and *caja*.  
[Photo: E. Civallero].

the materials and manufacturing may change from place to place, it is generally made of a wooden frame (about 40 cm in diameter and 10 cm high) over which two hairless skins (usually from two different animals or two different parts of the same animal) are stretched. Each head is sewn to a willow rod or to

a wire, and both rods are joined together and fastened to the drum's body by a string that zigzags from one to the other all around the frame. The tension of the skins is either increased or decreased by



several leather loops attached to the string. Like most of the drums of pre-Hispanic origin, the *caja* has neither over-loops nor a decompression hole. Finally, a snare (*bordona* or *chirlera*) is stretched across one of the skins: traditionally made of horse-hair, it has nowadays been replaced by a simple guitar wound string. As the head is struck, the skin vibrates against the *chirlera*, adding a very distinctive buzz to the deep sound of the instrument. When performed together with the *kamacheña*, the *caja* is usually fastened by a loop of leather to the right wrist of the musician, who holds the *waqtana* or *guastána*, the stick or mace, in the same hand.

According to the Andean traditional calendar, which lays down that each musical instrument can only be performed during a specific time of the year and for

Image 13.

Detail of *caja*, *kamacheña* and *waqtana*.  
[Photo: E. Civallero].

specific purposes (usually related to agriculture and other traditional practices), the *kamacheña* is played during the *awti pacha* or "dry season" (comprising from Carnival to All Saints' Day). Hence, its sound will be heard at winter festivals, e.g. during the feast of San Roque (mid-August) and, of course, All Saints celebrations (early November) and Carnival (February and March).

The music provided by male performers beating the *caja* and blowing the *kamacheña* (Andean traditional gender taboos do not allow women to play aerophones) typically accompanies the *rondas* or round dances. They are performed by a dozen or more male and female dancers in a circle, holding hands and turning around the flutist/percussionist (called *quenero* in Argentina). While dancing, female dancers may start to sing *coplas* (short stanzas), sometimes back and forth to each other (*contrapunto*). In addition, the *kamacheña* is used to play *tonadas* or *puntos*, short instrumental pieces

that are performed out of choreographic context, sometimes imitating the melodic lines of the most popular *coplas*.

Related to the *kamacheña* —and probably derived from it— are the *flautillas chaquenses* ("small flutes from Chaco") found in the hands of several peoples indigenous to the region known as southern Chaco, comprising northeastern Argentina, southern Paraguay and southeastern Bolivia. These wind instruments, made of different materials and using different techniques, are of great variety in structure, size and decoration (they are usually filled with abun-

Image 14.  
*Nashiré koktá* (Pilaqá people).  
[Drawing: Métraux Collection].





dance of it). In the past, these flutes used to have 3 fingering holes; today, perhaps influenced by the flutes of the neighboring Ava ("chiriguano") people, they have 6, and therefore they cannot be played with a single hand. Traditionally, they are male instruments, and are devoid of any ceremonial significance. Pérez Bugallo (1996) notes that the Eastern Qom ("toba") and the Pitlaxá ("pilagá") peoples call the flute *nashiré koktá*; the Western Qom people, *nahaidé*; the Yofwaja ("chorote") people, *wosók sisé*; the Nivaklé ("chulupí") people, *vat' anjantché sisé*; and the Wichi ("mataco") people, *kanohí* or, more rarely, *tanowhós*.

The geographic and temporal distribution of the *kamacheña* is limited to the specific region and period of the year described above. The instrument

Images 15 and 16.

*Nashiré koktá* (Pitlaxá people).

[Photos: Instituto Nacional de Musicología, Argentina].

will neither be found in commercial recordings nor in the hands of urban musicians or ensembles; moreover, photos and videos documenting its construction and use are scarce. While available information is not abundant and there is also a seeming lack of interest in spreading it, the flute continues to sound —like many others in South America— in those communities where the tradition is kept alive to date.



Images 17 and 18.  
Player of *kamacheña* and *caja* in Argentina.  
[Photos: "Awka Liwén". Documentary.  
O. Bayer, M. Aiello, K. Hille (2010)].



Image 19.  
Player of *kamacheña* during the Feast of San Roque in Tarija (Bolivia).  
[Photo: Unknown source].

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