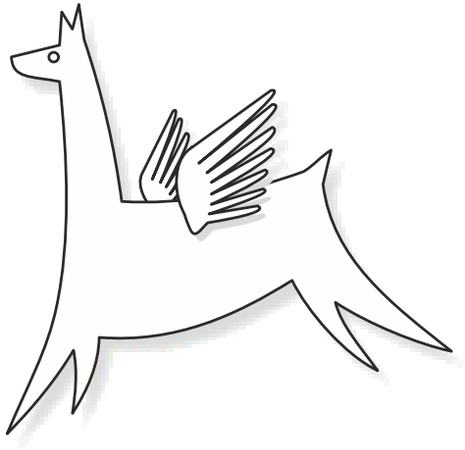
Yanawan yuraqwan

Andean musical instruments
in black and white

Edgardo Civallero



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~ Photographies in black and white ~

Edgardo Civallero

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Yanawan yuraqwan.
In runasimi (Quechua language): "black and white".

Photographs and texts: Edgardo Civallero.
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Yanawan yuraqwan

Black and white photography strips the world of color, reducing it to simple forms, to volumes, textures, chiaroscuros, lights and shadows.
Without the warm hues that characterize cane, wood, horn, and leather, Andean traditional musical instruments – quenas and zampoñas, bombos and charangos, tarkas and mohoseños – are reduced to lines, surfaces, cracks, bumps betrayed only by light or its absence.
Devoid of everything but their immediate essence, these flutes, drums, and horns tell their centuries-old stories of sounding in the hands of men and women from different communities. They speak without a sound, but with their very presence, and that of the many scars scratched on their skins.

The musical instruments of the Andes

Andean archaeological sites allow reconstruction of a history of membranophones and idiophones which provide rhythmic background for a vast and varied set of aerophones to roar, whistle or whisper their melodies. The arrival of Europeans brought chordophones to the Americas, where they were quickly adapted to local customs and traditions.

Among aerophones, the largest family of Andean musical instruments, there are horns, natural trumpets, whistles, globular flutes, vertical notched and fipple flutes, transverse flutes, panpipes, oboes, and idioglot clarinets. Membranophones include drums and snare drums, while guitars, violins, harps, bandolas, mandolins, guitarrillas, and charangos make up the group of chordophones.

Many of these instruments are still constructed and played using traditional techniques and patterns, combining pre-Hispanic and Iberian influences, in the myriad of rural and urban communities dotting the Andes.

In silence

Waiting for the next festival, a siku – a medium-sized one, known as malta – rests voiceless on the head of a wank'ara.

The siku is a double-row Andean panpipe consisting of two halves or "amarros" – arka and ira –, one supplying the alternate notes of the scale that are missing in the other. It is traditionally played by two men who interlock their notes to create a melody (hocketing technique). Sikus are accompanied by different drums, including the modern wank'ara, beaten by flutists themselves whilst blowing their panpipes.
Flutes played over the sound of drums dates back to pre-Hispanic times and continues to this day in the Andes.

4~holes

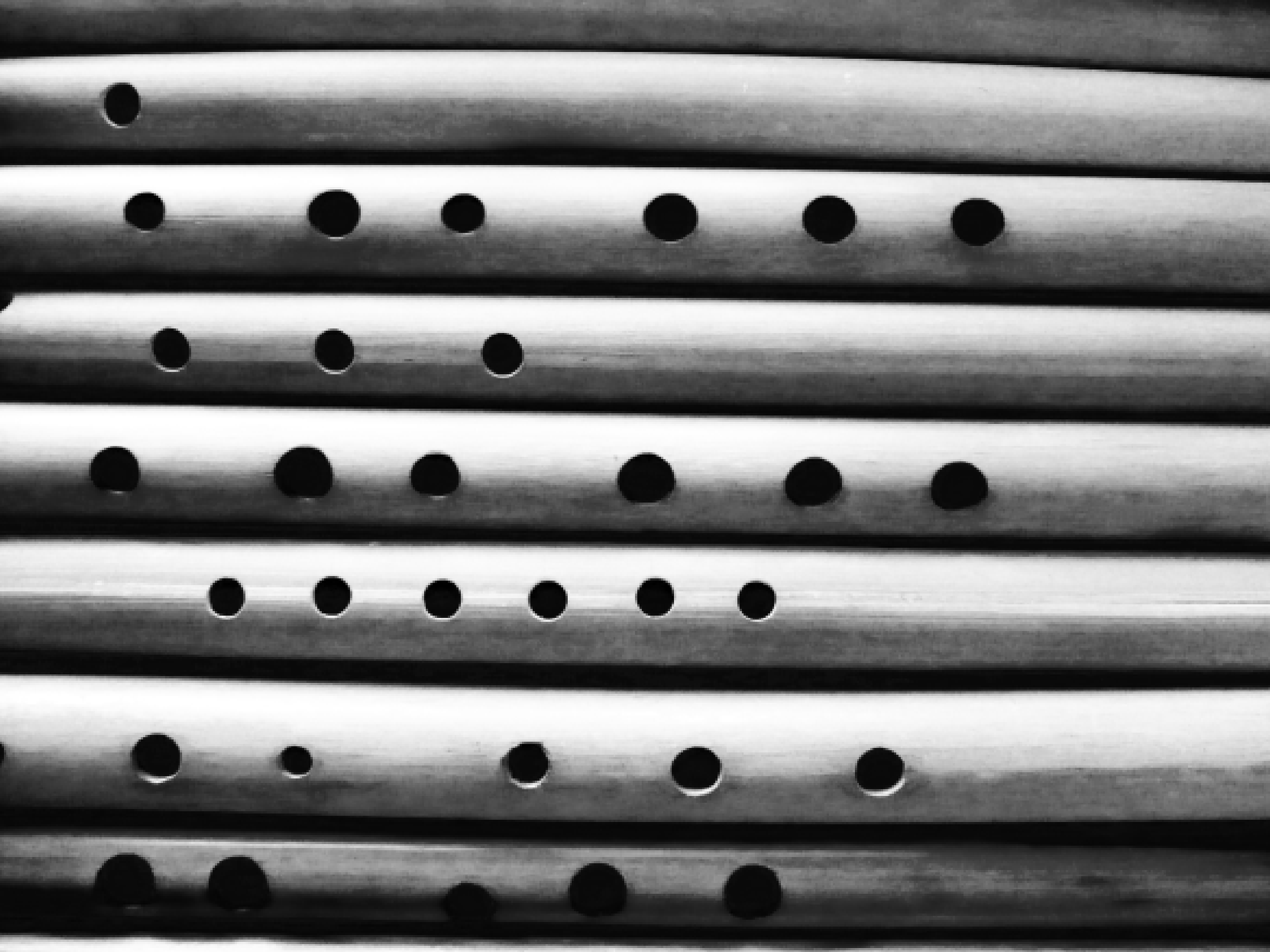
A couple of pusi p'ias – tayka and mala – show the scars left on the tuquru reed from which they were built.

Native to the Bolivian highlands, the pusi p'ias (in Aymara, "four holes") are vertical notched flutes (quena type) with four finger holes along the front. They are played in pairs drawing two pitches a fifth apart.
Most of the Andean aerophones are played in "tropas" or consorts, large ensembles comprising 2 to 9 different sizes of a single type of instrument separated by fixed intervals. When played in community, their music creates harmonies unique to each instrument.

Scales

Traditional quenas and pinkillos show their holes, the mouths that hold and release their melodies.

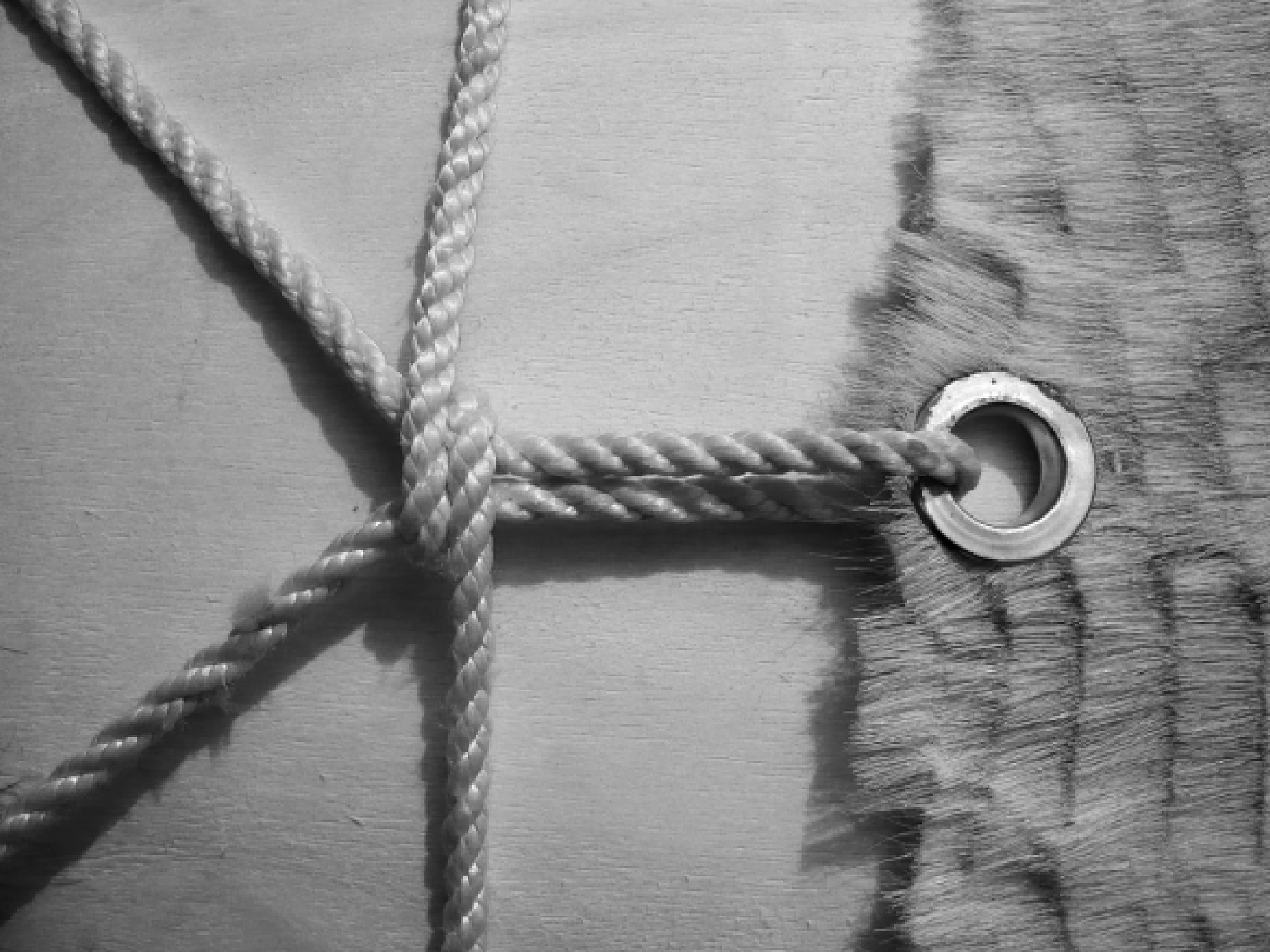
Andean vertical flutes include, in general terms, quenas or notched flutes and pinkillos or fipple flutes. Originally, each type of aerophone produced a particular scale, which could vary from community to community, and from builder to builder.
Despite the ubiquitous presence of Western diatonic (equally tempered) scale in Andean music, the older indigenous scales continue to be very much in use today, giving the sound of the different instruments a unique and inimitable touch.



Voice of the Earth

The binding that holds one of the wank'ara heads firmly and tightly in place.

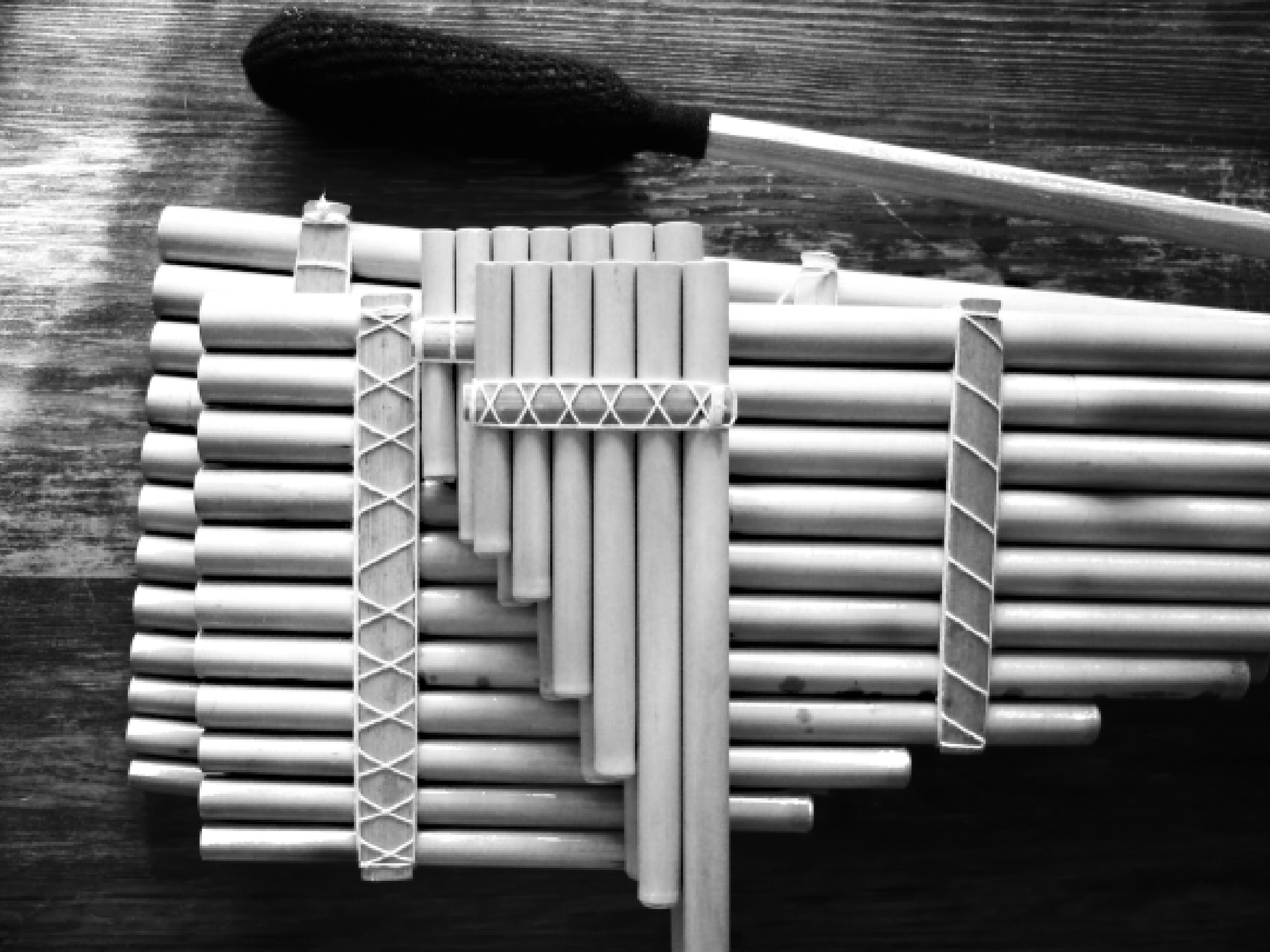
Drums hold Andean music's pulse and beat. Double-headed, with bare or hair-covered hides, and coming in every imaginable size, they have become almost a mandatory element of any group playing traditional or modern Andean music. Their predecessors have been found in Nasca and Moche tombs buried under the sands of the Peruvian coastal desert, their clay bodies elaborately decorated with polychrome motifs.
It is said that their voice is that of the Earth's spirits; thus, when drums are beaten it is the Earth who sings.



Reed bunches

The smallest – ch'ili – and the largest – toyo – sizes included in a "tropa" of sikus ch'alla, the simplest and most widespread type of Andean panpipe.

Native to the lands surrounding the Lake Titicaca and spread over the southern Andean highlands, sikus, phusas, phukunas or zampoñas are arranged in a multitude of "tropas", almost as many as there are communities playing them and luriris (musical instrument builders) making them. Each "tropa" is distinguished from another by the number of instruments, the number of tubes in each instrument, their scale and tuning, their size, and even their material. A kaleidoscope of names and sounds.



Rounds

The irregular arrangement of tubes gives the rondador its characteristic zig-zag shape. One that makes it absolutely unmistakable.

The rondador is a single-row panpipe, traditionally used in the Ecuadorian Andes, which belongs to the same family of musical instruments as the yupana from northern Peru and the capador from Colombia.
Originally played by night watchmen as they made their "rounds" during the colonial period, the rondador consists of several pipes of alternating short and long lengths (hence its shape), sequenced in musical thirds and played by blowing two at a time.

Tras-tras-tras

A wank'ara's head with a snare string bristled with churqui's thorns.

Andean membranophones include drums – wank'ara, wankar, bombo –, one-hand drums – caja, tinya –, tabors, and snare drums. In traditional settings, many of them have a snare string – bordona, chirlera – stretched across one of the heads. The string changes the sound of the instrument, making it more vibrant and, according to the Andean aesthetic which prefers complex, harmonic full sounds, richer.
To multiply this rattling sound, sticks or long thorns can be inserted into the fibers of the snare string.

Roaring

Tayka, malta and ch'ili: the three sizes that make up a "tropa" of tarkas kurawaras.

The tarkas are fipple flutes native to Bolivia, made out of a piece of wood. The more rustic ones, from Oruro, are carved in white tarko wood and have an octagonal cross section, while "urban" ones, from La Paz, are made of brown mara wood and have a quadrangular section. "Tropas" of tarkas usually include three sizes, and among the most famous ones are the potosinas, the salinas, the kurawaras and the ullaras.
Their sound is very vibrant and shrilling like a guttural bellowing cry. If a tarka doesn't sound like that, it is immediately discarded.


Cultura Volata
M.N.

Giants

Three pinkillos mohoseños, salliba size, show their different faces. And their palt'jatanaka.

The pinkillos mohoseños or moxeños (from Mohosa or Muqsa, in Bolivia) are among the most popular flutes of the Andean southern highlands. Heritage of the Aymara people, each "tropa" usually includes between 4 and 5 different sizes, their pitch set a fifth or an octave apart, and accompanied by cajas.
The largest size within the "tropa", called "salliba", is also one of the largest Andean aerophones; its length is such (up to 2 m.) that an external supplementary air duct – the palt'jata – is required to blow the flute.

With one hand

A couple of waka-pinkillos along with a waqtana, a drumstick with the stick head wrapped in raw-hide.

Among the Andean pinkillos there is a very large family: the three-holes or one-hand flutes. These aerophones are played with one hand while the other beats a membranophone – drum, caja – hanging from the shoulder or hand. There are a number of varieties, the best known ones being the Bolivian waka-pinkillo, the Peruvian roncadora and the Ecuadorian pingullo.
The waka-pinkillos accompany the waka-tinti or waka-tokhori dance, mocking the colonial Spanish bullfighters.

The flutes

A couple of pinkillos; a modern Peruvian one, above, and an almost century-old Argentinean one, below.

The most common Andean pinkillos are fipple flutes made of cane, with a variable number of finger holes. They are the flutes par excellence, and in many cases show clear influences of the Iberian duct flutes. They are played throughout the Andes, both as a solo instrument and in "tropas".
In Bolivia and Peru there are also pinkillos made of a tree branch (pinkillus and pinkhuyllus, respectively), whose sound resembles more the tarka than the recorder.

Clay bellies

A couple of ocarinas, instruments with roots on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The globular flutes are the least abundant of Andean instruments, and the most curious and peculiar, both in their shapes and materials, and in the many ways they are played. Members of this family include deer skull whistles, bitonal stone and gourd flutes, clay wauqus and wislulus, and the much more popular ocarinas or isocas. The ones that can be found today in the Andes and the rest of South America come with mixed features inherited from pre-Hispanic and European predecessors, and are used, in a variety of forms, for playing traditional and modern melodies.

Triangles

Chap isquin caja, Chipaya people's triangular drum native to the Bolivian highland lakes and salt flats.

The best known and most widespread Andean instruments belong to the cultural heritage of the demographically majoritarian indigenous societies: Quechua and Aymara. However, there are smaller aboriginal groups whose cultural assets represent true gems.
One of them are the Chipaya, Jas'shoni or Kot'suña, the "people of the water", who live around the lake Coipasa in the Bolivian highlands. The triangular shape of the box makes these drums unique in the Andes.

Song of the sea

Waylla qhepa, a shell trumpet similar to those used by chaskis, the runners who delivered messages throughout the Tawantinsuyu.

Large seashells were considered luxury items among Andean pre-Hispanic cultures, mostly because of their rarity. Obtained by trade with northern coastal peoples, they had a highly regarded ceremonial value but were also important in daily life. They were used by messengers to announce their arrival, and by communities to call people to meeting.
Seashells retain, even today, their sacred meaning, and continue to cry out for rebellion among Andean indigenous peoples.

Strings

Ten thin black strings over the sound hole of a small "lauqueado" charango.

The charango is the best known member of the family of Andean small guitars, which includes an amazing number of varieties, from the qunquta to the chillador. All of them derive from the string instruments that Europeans brought to America during colonial times.
In its standard form, the most widespread one, the charango has five double strings. Its sounding box, traditionally made with a dried kirkinchu or armadillo shell for the back, is carved today in a single block of wood ("lauqueado" charango) or made of several pieces ("laminado" charango).