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Transverse flutes
of the Andes

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Introduction

Transverse flutes — those played horizontally, with the mouthpiece and most of the finger holes located on their upper surface — are, along with recorders and panpipes, one of the most popular categories of traditional aerophones in the Andes. However, with the exception of those played in Colombia, these instruments have not received as much attention as some of their counterparts.

In the Hornbostel-Sachs decimal classification, the transverse flutes currently used in the Andean region correspond to code 421.121.12: flutes (true wind instruments) without a blowpipe or channel, transverse, single or isolated, with an open or semi-open distal end and equipped with finger holes.



Image 1.
Archaeological transverse flute.
[Photo: Díaz S., 2013].

Until relatively recently, and mainly due to the lack of archaeological evidence to the contrary, it was assumed that Andean transverse flutes were inherited from instruments brought by Europeans from the 16th century onwards, particularly the military band fife. However, the discovery of cane and wooden examples in

northern Chile (San Pedro de Atacama) changed this situation (Grebe, 1974; Fernández, 1993; Díaz, 2013). Currently, with increasingly more archaeological evidence available, it is known that this type of aerophone already existed (in South America in general and in the Andes in particular) before the arrival of Europeans, that it had numerous variations, and that, like many other Latin American musical instruments, it was strongly influenced by Old World transverse flutes.

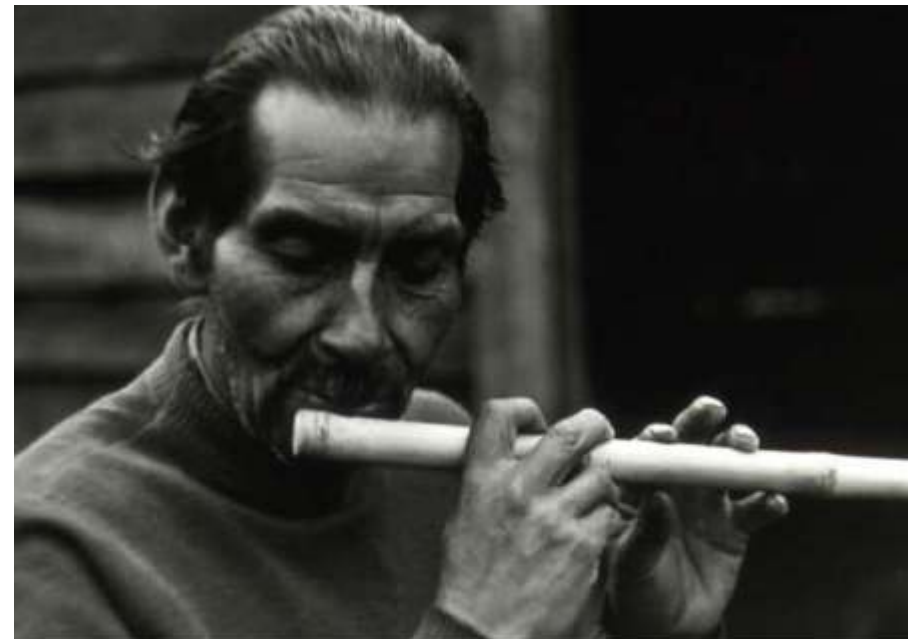
In the following sections, a brief overview of the main Andean transverse flutes will be given, traversing the mountain range from south to north and organizing the results by country.

Argentina and Chile

In the southern Andes, transverse flutes are found only among the Mapuche of Argentine Patagonia and southern Chile. In Argentina, the instrument is known as *kina* or *kiná*; it is a segment of cane, hemlock, or other similar plant material (including the *küna*, *koenl*, *koenü*, or *yungtu* plant, from which the aerophone's name is thought to derive) with 4-6 finger holes. Its appearance in Argentine territory seems to be relatively recent, and its use is limited (Pérez Bugallo, 1985, 1993). In Chile, González Greenhill (1986) refers to it as *pingkullwe*: a flute 25-40 cm long and 2.5-3 cm in diameter, with 4 finger holes. It is made from a piece of *quila* (*Chusquea quila*) or *colihue* (*Chusquea culeou*), which is hollowed out and coated with chicken fat. It is a melodic instrument that, apparently, remains somewhat in use



Image 2.
Mapuche artisan (Argentina) playing the *kina*.
[Photo: Pérez Bugallo, 1993].



Images 3 and 4.
Pinkullwes Mapuche (Chile).
[Photos: González, in Molina Moebis, n.d.].

Bolivia

(Molina Moebis, n.d.). Pérez de Arce (1986) compiles the variants *pinculhue*, *pincullhue*, *pincullwe*, *pinküwe*, *pincuhe*, *pincuve*, *pinquilhue*, and *pichrucahue* from various historical sources.

In the Chilean Norte Grande and the Argentine Northwest, with the exception of some comparsas of Bolivian origin that participate in certain popular festivals (e.g., La Tirana), transverse flutes are not used. Curiously, in the neighboring Chaco region (northwest Argentina and southern Bolivia), they do appear among the Ava (or "chiriguano"), who call them *temimbĩ ie pĩasa* (literally, "crossed flute").

In the Bolivian highlands, transverse flutes are commonly referred to as *pífano* (*pífano chunchu*, *pífano awki*). They are also called *flauta* or *pito*, or *phalahuata* (an Aymara derivative of the Spanish word "flauta") or one of its variations (*phala*, *pfala*, *phalauita*, *pfalawita*, *palahuata*, or *palauita*).

They are generally cane instruments (or, more rarely, wooden ones) with six finger holes. They are usually played in groups, accompanied by *wank'ara* bass drums and/or snare drums. They can serve as alternatives to *pinkillo* and *quena* bands: Andean vertical flutes with and without air ducts, respectively.

Traditional dances such as the Puli Puli, Machu Machu,



Lecos, and the Sembrador dance in the Apolo region (Franz Tamayo province, La Paz department), the Auqui Auqui or Awki Awki dance (Bautista Saavedra and Camacho provinces, La Paz department), the Chunchus and the Bárbaros dances in much of the country, and the dances of some Morenada groups (e.g., in Charazani, Bautista Saavedra province, and in Chuma, Muñecas province) are also featured (Sigl, 2012; Sigl, López, and Ordóñez, n.d.).

Sigl (2012) notes the presence of Pifanada ensembles in some areas of Bautista Saavedra province (e.g., in the town of Curva for the San Pedro and San Pablo festivities, or in Chulina). In other sources (GADLP, 2012), the dance

Image 6.
Pifanos from Bolivia.
[Photo: Unrecorded origin].

Image 5 (prev. page).
Pifanos from Bolivia.
[Photo: Unrecorded origin].





Image 7.

Phalauitas from Bolivia.

[Photo: Unrecorded origin].

is associated with the Kallawaya people of Charazani and is called "pifaneada." It is performed using instruments of two sizes (45 x 3.5 cm and 30 x 3 cm) made of *suqusa* cane.

The *pífano* is also present in the Alférez dance in the Pelechuco region (Franz Tamayo province), and it accompanied the now-extinct Loco Palla-Palla dance of the

Yungas region, in Coroico and Coripata (Nor Yungas province, La Paz department) (Sigl, 2012).

Cavour (1994) adds that they are sometimes played alongside the large *pinkillos* or rollanos of the Calcha area (Nor Chichas province, Potosí department).

Peru

In Peru, Andean transverse flutes are commonly called *pitos*, *pífanos*, or *flautas* (National Institute of Culture, 1978). In some areas, they may be known as *quena través / travesera* or *pinkillo través / travesero*.

In the province of Pomabamba (department of Áncash), the *quena través*, made of cane and with five circular finger holes, is used. Similar instruments, but with six holes, are used in the provinces of Anta, Calca, Cusco, and Chumbivilcas (department of Cusco), accompanied by a drum. Generically referred to as *flautas*, they are usually played in pairs, with the lengths of each being 35-40 cm and 80 cm, respectively. Meanwhile, in the region inhabited by the Aymara people, in the department of Puno, the same type of aerophone can be played either



in pairs or solo. In the first case, it is called a *phalahuita* or *phala* (*pfalawita*, *pfala*, an adaptation of the Spanish "flauta"), and the lengths of each instrument are 30 and 45 cm respectively, tuned in parallel fifths. In the second case, it is called a *pito* and measures 30 cm in length.

With five upper holes and one lower hole, the transverse flute is played in the provinces of Puno, Sandia, and San Román (Puno Department); there, it reaches lengths of 30–40 cm and diameters of 2–3 cm. In the provinces of Anta, Calca, Canchis, Cusco, Chumbivilcas, Paucartambo, Quispicanchi, and Urubamba (Cusco Department), they are played in pairs and are known as the *pífano* (the larger flute) and the *pito* (the smaller one). In Andahuaylas (Apurímac Department), it is called a *pito*.

Among the transverse flutes with six upper and one lower finger holes is the *pífano* of the Cusco region,

Image 8 (prev. page).
K'achampa from Paucartambo.
[Photo: Unrecorded origin].

which in the Cajamarca region is called a *travesera*. It is made from a 30 cm long and 2 cm diameter piece of cane, elderberry, sandalwood, or plastic, and is played accompanied by drums and a bass drum, sometimes in pairs. In Sandia (Puno), instruments with these characteristics are called *pitos*.

A curious flute with five upper and two lower finger holes, also known as a *pito* (or *pífano*), is played in certain areas of the Puno region. Similar in structure, but with six upper and two lower finger holes, a 25-30 cm long flute is documented in the San Martín and Amazonas regions, in the Peruvian lowlands.

The instruments described so far have a completely open distal end. While transverse flutes are the most common, some flutes with a "semi-closed" end are also made in Peru. This is the case with the *chuncho pito* from Sandia (Puno Department), made from a 45 cm piece of cane with six finger holes, used, as in neighboring Bolivia, in the dance of the Chunchos. Another example is the *pinkullo*, also known as *pincullo*, *traves*, or *pito*, a



Image 9.
Wayri ch'unchu from Ocongate (Cusco).
[Photo: YouTube].

cane flute (made of *mamac*, *carrizo*, or *caña brava* cane) or wood, 20-30 cm long, with five finger holes at the top and one at the bottom. It is accompanied by a drum and played in the provinces of Huamanga (Ayacucho Department) and Huamalíes (Huánuco Department).

In the Lambayeque Department, there is a little-known

transverse flute, the *kinran pinkullu*, played exclusively by women (Rivera Andía, 2012).

Peruvian transverse flute bands are known by various names. In the provinces of Pomabamba, Yungay, and Huaylas (department of Áncash) and in neighboring areas of the department of La Libertad, the *banda de carrizos* accompanies local dances. In the department of Cusco, transverse flutes are widespread and are part of one of the most popular traditional ensembles, the *banda de guerra*, so named because it accompanied the guerrillas during the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). It includes three *pitos* (80 cm long, made of cane or plastic) and drums (Cánepa-Koch, 1995), and despite its gradual replacement by brass bands, it remains an essential part of such celebrated cultural expressions as the Qhapaq Ch'unchu of Paucartambo or the famous K'achampa (accompanied by two *pitos*, a drum, and a bass drum). The Q'eros have Wayri Ch'unchu ensembles that bring together musicians with *pitos*, drums and bass drums (Wissler, 2010).

Ecuador

In the Ecuadorian Andes, there are different versions of the transverse flute, made from various materials (*carrizo* or *tunda* cane, vine, bone, wood, plastic, metal, etc.). Mullo Sandoval (2009) emphasizes its importance in traditional Ecuadorian music.

They appear solo, in pairs or in trios during the San Juan festival in the northern Andean region (Imbabura and Pichincha provinces); in duets, accompanied by a snare drum, during the Corpus Christi festival (Cotopaxi province); and in groups of up to six during Holy Week (Cotacachi province). Traditionally, they are not accompanied by guitar, and when they appear in groups, one flute carries the main melody while the other(s) play a rhythmic pedal.



Image 10.

Performer of *tunda* or *yacuchimba*.

[Photo: Unrecorded origin].

The *flauta de carrizo*, also known as the *flauta de zuro*, *traversa*, or *pífano*, measures between 30 and 50 cm and has 6 finger holes. It is generally played in pairs, with a male and a female flute. It is found throughout the Andean highlands, including the provinces of Cotacachi, Cotopaxi, Pichincha, and Imbabura.

In the latter two provinces, *tundas* or *yacuchimbas* are also used. These are large flutes, especially in the Cayambe area (Pichincha) during the San Juan and San Pedro festivities. Coba Andrade (1981) indicates that there are large *tundas* (120 cm, 3 holes), medium *tundas* (100 cm, 4 holes), and small *tundas* (70 cm, 2 holes).

Perhaps the best-known Ecuadorian transverse flutes are the Imbabura flutes or *gaitas*, crafted by the Kichwa-speaking communities in the Otavalo region and played during the Inti Raymi celebration and the traditional activities associated with that festival.

Gaitas are flutes with six finger holes that produce a non-tempered scale. They are made from a piece of *sukus* cane or reed, which usually includes a *muku*, or natural node, in the middle, giving the instrument one of its characteristic features. In fact, the original name of the aerophone seems to have been *muku pinkillu* (flute with a node) or *sukus pinkillu* (cane flute).

It is said that the *gaitas* "converse" with each other and



that, like people, they can "manipulate" people's emotions. There are three possible sizes (and therefore three sound registers): *ñañu* (small, high-pitched flute), *pariku* (medium-sized flute, middle register), and *raku* (large, low-pitched flute). Traditionally, any of these sizes is played in pairs, the two flutes separated by a small interval: the "first" flute (the lower-pitched one of the pair, considered masculine) carries the main melody, while the "second" flute (higher-pitched and considered feminine) produces the accompanying melody. Nowadays, they also appear in trios, with the "second" flute doubled. The instruments are periodically moistened with *aswa* or *asua* (corn beer) to "quench their thirst" and improve the sound.

The repertoire played on the *gaitas* is traditional, and while it may seem simple at first glance, mastering it requires many years of practice and experience (and,

Image 11 (prev. page).
Performers of *gaitas* in Otavalo.
[Photo: Unrecorded origin].



Image 12.
Performers of *gaitas* in Kotama.
[Photo: World Music Store].

according to tradition, the help of mythical entities like the *sereno*). The musicians execute entire musical phrases with a single breath, adding a delicate vibrato; at the same time, they dance and stamp their feet to the rhythm, competing with the ambient sounds of the boisterous local festivals and with other performers, all for hours.

Colombia

The *gaitas* are accompanied by the *kachu* (horn), the *churu* (conch shell), the harmonica or *rondín* (adopted in the 1950s, replacing the panpipe), the guitar (incorporated into this repertoire in the 1980s), whistling, footwork, shouts, and singing. In addition to the *gaitas*, another transverse flute, thinner and longer, with a higher pitch, is played in the same region: the *kucha*. Made of *tunda* cane without a *muku* knot, instead of being associated with a human voice, it is identified with the voice of the *chuzalunku*, a male spirit, son of the mountains. The *kucha* is usually played solo, and its repertoire is limited to two songs.

Currently, bands of "flauteros" or "gaiteros" can be seen during the Jatun Puncha or Inti Raymi celebrations (between June 21 and 26) in various parts of the Otavalo canton and neighboring areas (e.g., the Cotacachi, Antonio Ante, and Ibarra cantons).

In the central and southern areas of the Colombian Andes, the *chirimías*, or traditional transverse flute bands, are renowned.

Generally speaking, a flute band consists of a first flute and one or more second flutes, along with percussion instruments in various combinations and quantities (bass drum, snare drum, maraca, scraper, triangle, etc.). Until 15 years ago, traditional flutes were made from a segment of cane with six equidistant finger holes, producing untempered scales; currently, with few exceptions, the scales are tempered (Ministry of Culture, 2005). These groups perform traditional Andean musical genres, especially bambucos and marches. Despite their popularity and long history, they are gradually being



replaced by more modern musical ensembles. Romero Garay and Miñana Blasco (2005) provide detailed descriptions of the different types of bands found throughout the Colombian Andes.

According to these authors, among the Yanakuna or Yanacona of the Colombian Massif (southwest of the department of Cauca) and neighboring areas (especially the department of Huila), the flute band includes a first flute, five or more second flutes, a *tambora* drum, snare drums, maracas, *charrascas* (a type of scraper), and sometimes a triangle. These groups generally play bambucos, both in festive and ritual celebrations.

The Nasa or Paez of the Tierradentro region (department of Cauca) and surrounding areas have groups with

between two and four *kuv' nuch* and *kuv' newish* flutes, a *kut* drum, a *caja* (a type of drum), and some additional idiophones. Bambucos are played in private or community settings, at festivals or rituals (Miñana Blasco, 2003).

The bands of the Misak or Guambiano people (Cauca department), for their part, comprise a drum (*nubalé*), two flutes (*lus* or *loos*, *pegatés*), and a snare drum (*cuchimbalé*), and have their own local repertoire (see Abadía Morales, 1993).

In Popayán, the famous Caucan *chirimías* (urban flute bands) are made up of a first flute, one or two second flutes, two or three drums, *charrascas* (scrapers), maracas, and a triangle, with numerous regional variations. They primarily play bambucos and *pasillos*.

Among the Pasto people (Nariño department), the so-called "yegua" bands perform bambucos and *sanjuanés* at religious festivals. They include a bass drum, snare drum, flute, and a mare's jawbone, the latter being the instrument that gives the ensemble its name.

Image 13 (prev. page).

Performers of *flautas* of the Guambiano people.

[Photo: Ruta de la Chirimía Caucana].



Bibliography

The Embera-Chamí bands of Riosucio (Caldas department) include a first and second snare drum, a bass drum, a snare drum, maracas, and a scraper. With all these instruments, they play pasillos, marches, and bambucos.

Finally, a very curious ensemble is the *chirimía* of the Napi River, the only Andean-style flute band played by Afro-descendant communities in the lowlands of the Chocó department.

Image 14 (prev. page).
Performers of *flautas* from the Macizo Colombiano.
[Photo: Ruta de la Chirimía Caucana].

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Images

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Image 08

<http://www.consentido.nl/wp/wp-content/uploads/K%E2%80%99achampa.jpg>

Image 09

<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/rv99gUXWAWw/maxresdefault.jpg>

Image 12

https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/0252/7921/products/SFW40564_large.jpeg

Images 13 and 14

<https://sites.google.com/a/cauca.gov.co/rutachirimiacauca/ruta>

