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This study uses data from iconographic and (bio)archaeological analyses and literature from ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources to investigate the significance of spoons in burials from Tiwanaku colonies in Moquegua, Peru (ca. AD 500-1150). Feeding and eating are highly significant in the Andes, for the living and the dead, including during age-class transitions associated with the feeding of solid food and eating independently. In this study, a sample of approximately 267 wooden spoons from intact tombs of the Chen Chen site were used to examine the potential role of spoons in differentiating various identities, namely age, sex/gender, and community-level social identities for the Tiwanaku.

Analysis was performed over the Summer of 2014 at the Museo Contisuyo in Moquegua, Peru as a sub-study of Dr. Deborah Blom’s NSF funded research on social identities and childhood in Tiwanaku.