

What Did People Do at Pachacamac?:

Identity, Form, Timing and Meaning of Offerings

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ABSTRACT

The site of Pachacamac is has long been known as a pilgrimage and more broadly as a religious center. But, in concrete human behavioral terms, what did people do at Pachacamac in pre-Inca times? We examine this basic question from the complementary perspectives of botanical, faunal, and artifactual remains that were excavated at the site, particularly in the Pilgrims' Plaza in 2004 and 2005. We documented thousands of diverse offerings ranging from whole guinea pigs and maize kernels intentionally embedded into wet clay surfaces to stones and fish. The varied plant and animal species represented in offerings and other contexts are predominantly local in character. Fauna range from deer, llamas, sea lion, and whale to a range of bird, fish, rodent and insect species. Taken together, these offerings and organic remains from other contexts definitely have temporal and spatial order; they appear to have been placed mostly in the austral spring, and their intensity and formality seems to inversely correlate with distance to the Pachacamac (Painted) and Old Pachacamac (Lima) temples. As was the case with the cemetery at the Pachacamac Temple, competition for access to and retention of ritual spaces was apparently intense and retained by regular visits and offerings. Variation in the form and substance of offerings in space, together with stylistic, paste and chemical composition of associated ceramics, point to the co-existence of multiple groups from different areas of the Central Coast.

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INTRODUCTION

The site of Pachacamac (Fig. 1) near the city of Lima has long been characterized as a preeminent and longstanding pre-Hispanic pilgrimage and/or religious center. Early historical descriptions, however, offer a seemingly contradictory picture: filth, stink, and deteriorating structures coexisting with the Pachacamac deity with the power to create, cure, bring havoc and demand tribute, sought after by both social elites from all over the Andes who made pilgrimages and longed to be buried there and by those whom Cieza de León called “wretched simple folk.”

In this paper, we address basic questions to help us reconcile these contradictory features. What did people do at Pachacamac in pre-Inka times and what significance did their activities have? Were residents permanent or transient? Where did they come from? We examine these questions from the complementary perspectives of botanical, faunal, and artifactual remains that we excavated at the site in 2004 and 2005. Our aim is a fine-grained picture of the site in operation and its participants.

RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

Surface survey (Fig. 2a, b, c, and d) and accompanying test excavations and large-scale ground- penetrating radar survey (GPR) in 2003 revealed that the extensive sand-covered area (850 x 1100 m) known as Sector III (Fig. 3) had widespread habitational remains that were superficial and Late Horizon in date.

In the eastern half of the Pilgrims’ Plaza close to the Pachacamac Temple, GPR survey and test excavation revealed some 3 meters of stratified pre-Inka deposits rich in organic and artifactual materials together with superimposed occupational surfaces and architectural remains (Fig. 4). GPR survey indicated considerably less dense cultural remains and a simpler stratigraphy in the western half of the Plaza (Fig. 5). Thus, our 2004 and 2005 seasons were directed toward detailed characterization of the nature and organization of pre-Inka remains in the Pilgrims’ Plaza by means of an additional GPR survey and excavation of six loci ranging from 5 x 5 to 10 x 10 m (Fig. 6a, b, c, and d).

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Contrary to our initial impression of both extensive and intensive domestic habitation, it now appears that, at least since the terminal Middle Horizon, ca. A.D. 1000, up until Inka arrival around A.D. 1460, the eastern half of the Plaza was the scene of numerous, episodic construction and renovation of ritual structures and placement of diverse offerings, and associated temporary occupations by various social groups from coastal and inland portions of

the Central Coast. It has become apparent that the intensity and manner in which these activities were conducted varied considerably in contiguous areas separated by as little as 10 to 15 m.

A sense of the intensity, complexity, and continuity of these construction and ritual activities can be gained from the over 800 features in Trench 1 (T-1) that we documented in a 10 x 10 m area ca. 2 m in depth (Fig. 7). Trench 8, 30 m east of T-1, yielded 465 features of similar nature and scale in a 7 x 5.5 m area less than 1.5 m in depth (Fig. 8). Literally thousands of offerings and associated structures are concentrated in the eastern half of the Plaza.

Our inference that at least several social groups utilized the area encompassed by T-1 is based on several lines of evidence.

For one (Fig. 9), the excavated ceramic figurines exhibit a wide range of stylistic and technical (including paste) variation.

Another line of evidence (Fig. 10a, b, c, and d) derives from a complementary set of archaeometric analyses on excavated *cántaros* (short-necked jars). The samples are largely homogeneous in form, manufacturing technique and paste, most having a coarse paste with a lot of quartz inclusions. (Fig. 11) NAA analysis of 54 sherd samples from T-1 sorted out three groups (A-C), with the majority (i.e., n=45) forming a very cohesive group (“Pachacamac Main Group”) that we infer to have been local in origin. (Fig. 12) Four additional samples seem peripheral to this main group, and the remaining five apparently non-local to Pachacamac. Two clay samples fall into the Pachacamac main group. One of these clays was used as model material for our Mössbauer studies.

There is a very subtle separation of the core group into subgroups A and B (Fig. 13), which may reflect differences in the amounts (or types) of temper, temporal differences in pottery production or pottery production at different workshops. Alternatively, this may prove to be a natural continuum in variability so that division of the pottery into subgroups is not justified.

Five sherds, however, are nonlocal, including one taken from a highly diagnostic Ychsma style face-neck jar (Fig. 14) and sample from a spindle weight. The fact that the main and a “nonlocal” group both contain a sample of the Ychsma style decorated jars implies that there was more than one workshop producing this style pottery, an inference that should not surprise anyone.

Given that the overall size of this NAA analysis is small, we will analyze additional samples from the 2005 season to ascertain if the grouping discussed here are valid. It is worth noting that the postulated groups are distinct from the five groups previously identified (Fig. 15) by NAA for samples from the nearby Early Intermediate Period site of Villa El Salvador. In fact, one of our nonlocal sample has the distinct paste and reddish slip that is relatively

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common in vessels found in the middle to upper reaches of the Lurín Valley. This type of vessel was part of the grave lot of a burial we excavated in front of the Pachacamac Temple. As seen here (Fig. 16a, b, c, and d), this grave lot included vessels that in various respects distinguish themselves from those associated with nearby Ychmas burials.

A strong line of evidence for the co-existence of different social groups in the Plaza is the spatial differentiation of ritual activities and variation in construction and use of associated structures. T-10 (Fig. 17a and b) revealed that much of the 6.5 x 6.5 m area was walled-in with clearly demarcated, restricted access and relatively well-prepared floors. Inside the walled-in area were three roofed subterranean chambers each associated with carefully made wooden implements (Fig. 18a and b) that either had been incorporated in the elaborately built roofs or been carefully laid inside. Above ground, equidistant posts demarcated the perimeter of one chamber. The other chambers were defined by thin *quincha* walls.

In the east end of T-8 (situated ca. 27 m east of T-10), we have two other roofed subterranean chambers not associated with any wooden implements. One well-preserved, stone and adobe chamber (Fig. 19) measured ca. 2 x 1.3 m and 1 m deep. It had a carefully built and plastered, small stone stairway that would have been too narrow for human use. The fact that the stone steps were all tipped downward and that the floor had at least five thin, superimposed layers of fine silt, each covering a thin layer of compacted *cuy* dung, suggests that water or some other liquid flowed down the stairway. The presence of alternating layers of silt and *cuy* dung is one feature that is shared by these chambers and those of T-10. Two enclosures in the west end of T-8 differ from those described above in having been built of tabular local stones (Fig. 20a and b), and their floors partly or entirely covered with small, whole fish the size of anchovy and sardine. This area of the trench also had preserved stone wall segments that indicate earlier stone enclosures that were largely destroyed by later chambers (Fig. 21).

T-1 yielded yet another type of subterranean enclosure described elsewhere (Fig. 22): open, out-flaring, circular and oval structures built of carefully whittled adobes. The best-preserved examples had at their center one or more *cántaros* and the remains of earlier enclosures in their immediate vicinities. One was overlain by 5 enclosures that were built one over the other in exactly the same location, spanning upwards of 400 years.

In contrast to the intensity, variability, and continuity of ritual activities documented in the eastern portion of the Plaza close to the Pachacamac Temple, the western half of the Plaza appeared to have had limited and brief usage. Trench 9 (5 x 5 m and ca. 2 m deep; Fig. 23) placed near the middle of the western half of the Plaza revealed that the only pre-Inkaic usage was eight oval and rectangular enclosures in varied states of preservation over 1.5 m below surface; these were built on sterile sand and used only briefly during the late Ychsma period. These enclosures were buried by ca. 1 m thick sand fill in the process of constructing the Inkaic Pilgrims' Plaza. This is the only area within the Plaza where we have documented Inka period *quincha* structures and domestic occupations.

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It is also becoming clear that pre-Inka use of the Plaza area had a strong seasonal character. For example, patches of preserved occupational surfaces and prepared floors in all but one trench revealed numerous burrows created by wasps and scorpions suggesting that, during the hot summer months, much of the Plaza was not utilized.

Determination	Context(s)	Plant Part Recovered	Habitat	Ecological Indications (Lurin Valley)	Season
Phragmites sp.	Space Dividers/ Temporary Wall	Stem/Seed	Wetland	Flowers after Fog/ Post-Innundation	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Scirpus sp.	Burial/ Activity Areas	Stem/ Seed	Wetland	Flowers after Fog/ Post-Innundation	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Typha sp.	Burial/ Activity Areas	Stem/ Seed	Wetland	Flowers after Fog/ Post-Innundation	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Nolana sp.	All Floors	Seed	Desert/ Lomas	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Rudbeckia sp.	Temporary Occupation Floors	Fruit/ Seed	Disturbed Areas	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
cf. Helianthus sp.	Temporary Occupation Floors	Fruit/ Seed	Disturbed Areas	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Gossypium sp.	Floors/ In Floor Features	Fruit/ Seed	Agricultural Areas	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Passiflora sp.	Floor	Flower	Gardens	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Zea mays	Burial/ In Floor Feature/ Garbage	Flower	Agricultural Areas	After ca. 40 Days	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Tillandsia sp.	Garbage Pit	Flower	Desert/ Lomas	Flowers after Fog	Late Winter/ Early Spring
Heliotropum sp.	Floor/ In-Floor Feature	Seed/ Flower	Canals Sides/ Disturbed Areas	Flowers Annually or With Canal Flooding	Late Winter/ Early Spring

Table 1. Archaeobotanical Seasonality Indicators at Pachacamac.

Archaeobotanical remains are excellent indicators of seasonal use of the site (Table 1). We see a variety of Cyperaceae (reed) and Poaceae (grasses) present as materials for making a wide variety of mats, ropes, sacks, roofs and *quincha* walls. In cases of cattail (*Typha* sp.) and totora reeds (*Scirpus* sp.), we have also recovered fruits and flowers from these plants. These plants were clearly in the prime of their reproductive season, probably Late Winter to Early Spring when the *lomas* fogs are ending. Further evidence comes from *Nolana* (a part of the Solanaceae [nightshade] family; *Nolana* sp.). At present this plant only exists in *lomas* type formations,

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which we believe were more extensive in the past in the Pachacamac region. We find seeds of these plants in almost every context at the site. These plants go to seed just after the end of the *lomas* fog cycle, Late Winter and Early Spring. It is likely that they were transported into the Pilgrim's Plaza with people and animals traveling to the site at this time. An additional line of evidence comes from activity areas and fire use features where Asteraceae (aster family) and Malvaceae (mallow/cotton family) flowers are present. These plants had recently set seeds and/or fruit indicating Late Winter to Early Spring occupation. This table shows a variety of flowers from domesticated plants point to the same conclusion.

Documented plant usage patterns also point to intermittent use of the Pilgrims' Plaza. The majority of the plants identified come from the four major subsistence families, Poaceae (maize), Fabaceae (beans), Cucurbitaceae (squash), and Solanaceae (potato). Their remains indicate not only limited processing and consumption, but also utilization in ritual or expedient food consumption contexts. For example, while potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), manioc (*Manihot esculenta*), and camote (*Ipomoea batatas*) remains are found in most of our excavations, their seeds and processing remains are rare, indicating that processed tubers were brought to the site probably for ritual interment rather than consumption. Overall, outside of eating peanuts, *pacay*, and *lúcuma* (*Pouteria lucuma*), the occasional shucking of maize, and eating squash from time to time, investment in food preparation and consumption was limited.

Zooarchaeological data complement the above paleoethnobotanical data on the range and provenience of natural resources. An impressive array of marine and terrestrial fauna has been identified (Fig. 24a, b, c, and d), ranging from llamas, *cuy*, dog, a variety of rodents, and deer to seals and large and small marine fish. Also tentatively identified are condor (*Vultur gryphus*), Humboldt penguin (*Spheniscus humboldti*), sea otter (*Lontra felina*), sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*; tooth) and sea lion (Pinniped, Otariidae; probably *Otaria byronia*). Pachacamac with the flesh of its offerings left exposed to decompose is likely to have attracted carrion eating birds such as the condor, vulture (*Cathartes aura*), and grey gull (*Larus moestus*), all of which are known to occur near the site. There were impressive quantities of maggot casings in many contexts. Their presence in direct association with some bones suggests that whether animals were killed on site or elsewhere, some parts were left exposed for at least 2 to 3 weeks. While the sample size is relatively small, zooarchaeological examination suggests that processing and consumption of fauna, including llamas, was quite limited.

CONCLUSION

Overall, in spite of the seemingly chaotic appearance of the remains of ritualistic activities, there was a patterned order that cut across time and space. Much of the eastern half of the Plaza was intensely used for ritual activities that centered on subterranean enclosures and chambers. The pervasive use of mundane objects such as weaving and metalworking tools, sorted groups of natural stones and sherds of domestic vessels, and daily subsistence items as offerings

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suggests that the performers of these ritual activities were predominantly commoners, not social elites. Taken together, these offerings and organic remains appear to have been placed mostly in the austral spring when a new agricultural cycle begins, and their intensity and formality seems to inversely correlate with distance to the Pachacamac (Painted) and Old Pachacamac (Lima) temples. As was the case with the cemetery at the Pachacamac Temple, competition for access to and retention of ritual spaces was apparently intense and retained only by regular visits and offerings. Variation in the form and substance of offerings in space, together with stylistic, paste and chemical composition of associated ceramics, point to the co-existence of multiple groups from different areas of the Central Coast. At the same time, there are certain similarities that suggest that all the groups that utilized the Plaza area shared basic beliefs. Examples of such similarity (Fig. 25a, b, c, and d) are the widespread occurrence of *cuy*, vertically planted tabular stones with inscribed circles, and the use of subsurface structures that were periodically renovated or rebuilt and received offerings as if to represent a surrogate focus of veneration.