

Rethinking Funerary Analysis in Andean Archaeology:

Perspective from Sicán and Pachacamac

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Introduction

Through his work at Pachacamac (Fig. 1) and elsewhere, Max Uhle (1903, 1906, 1910, 1913a, 1913b; Menzel 1977; Rowe 1954) established the undisturbed gravelot as the cornerstone of chronology building and stylistic identification in Andean archaeology. Subsequent generations of Peruvian and Peruvianist scholars, working on the coast in the first half of the 20th century, closely followed Uhle's research aims and methods. Thus, excavation of undisturbed burials became a pervasive and persistent fixation in Andean archaeology. Although the aims and scope of burial analysis have significantly expanded over the past few decades under the influence of processual, postprocessual, and bio-archaeologies (Dillehay 1995; Kaulicke 2000; Kaulicke [ed.] 1997; Olaya and Romero 2005; Shimada et al. 2004a), the pre-hispanic burial on the coast has remained widely regarded as a permanently sealed context that encapsulates material variation representing a brief period of time (Rowe 1962). Isbell's (1997: 143-144) North and Central Coast "huaca cemeteries" with bodies sealed in underground graves "never intended to be

opened” is representative of the above supposition. In addition to the assumption that the dead and their gravelots were synchronous, their interment implicitly has been seen as closely following a period of mourning (cf. Hertz 1960[1907]).

Archaeological research on the coast over the past decade has shown that the above supposition is no longer tenable and that re-entry and other post-primary interment activities significantly affected the original burial structures and/or their corporeal and artifactual contents (e.g., Klaus 2003; Klaus and Shimada 2003; Shimada et al. 2004, 2006; also Millaire 2002, 2004).

In this paper, we will show that rituals symbolizing enduring bonds between the dead and the living were, in some cases, extensive in time and space and even conducted without the physical remains of the dead. Accordingly, we argue that the temporal and spatial scope of funerary analysis needs to be broadened to encompass activities preceding and persisting long after the interment together with their social and symbolic dimensions. At the same time, our notion of what constitutes appropriate funerary contexts needs to be modified.

We illustrate the above thesis with data and observations from recent excavations of an intact cemetery at the west base of the Huaca Loro temple (Fig. 2) at Sicán in the mid-La Leche Valley on the north coast and a well-preserved portion of the famed cemetery (Fig. 2) in front of the Pachacamac Temple (aka Painted Temple) at Pachacamac just south of Lima.

Interment Process

Tomb 2, T-3-'06, Huaca Loro

The potential complexity and considerable time span encompassed by activities that followed primary interment are effectively exemplified by Tomb 2 (Fig. 3) in Trench 3 of the 2006 excavation at the Huaca Loro temple. This 7.2 x 3.5 meter tomb had a split-level construction with much of both floors covered by a series of painted clothes laid carefully face down (Fig. 4). The painted cloth on the upper level overlay a large cluster of crude, handmade *crisoles* (Fig. 5), both plain and decorated. The cloth in the lower level covered an impressive array and quantity of offerings (Fig. 6). They were clustered in the northern half and included cinnabar paint, a small gold ingot, camelid heads and feet, single spout-handle and stirrup-spout bottles, 963 *crisoles* of diverse shapes (Fig. 7), and orderly bundles of *naipes*, inferred currency of standardized size and shape cut out of thin arsenical copper sheets.

A slightly sunken area, designated Chamber 1, at the north end of the lower level (Fig. 8) had three superimposed layers of painted cloth each overlying an offering, as well as two nested rectangular chambers lined with painted cloth. The larger, Chamber 2, was prepared first. After the chamber was filled in, numerous offerings that stylistically date to early Middle Sicán close to A.D. 1000 were placed along its margins (Fig. 9). These included dozens of *crisoles*, 13 fine bottles, five clusters of arsenical copper *puntas*, and a seated and cross-legged individual (Fig. 10). At some point later, much smaller Chamber 3 lined with painted cloths with sheetmetal backing was constructed within Chamber 2.

Apparently, most of contents inside Chamber 2 were largely destroyed with the intrusion of Chamber 3. Numerous fragments of a relatively small gilt copper mask (Fig. 11), for example, were found mixed in the fill of both

Chambers 2 and 3, and in association with the badly damaged and partial skeleton of a juvenile that was found in the south-central portion of Chamber 2 (Fig. 12).

The identity and whereabouts of the individual or individuals for whom Chambers 2 and/or 3 were built remain unresolved. The dimensions of these chambers suggest they were prepared for either extended juveniles or flexed adults position oriented north-south. If the aforementioned, partially preserved juvenile was the principal personage of Chamber 2, why was he or she seated facing east in this north-south rectangular chamber when all documented Middle Sicán seated burials have been found in square chambers. It is possible that the smaller Chamber 3 was, in reality, a kind of coffin. Given the absence of another principal personage in Chamber 3, we must raise the possibility that Chamber 3 was dug simply to refurbish Chamber 2 with attendant partial reassembly of the juvenile skeleton.

The “biography” or sequence of events that occurred in Tomb 2 is even more complex. Our excavation clearly showed that the tomb intruded into an area that was already densely occupied by early Middle Sicán extended burials (ca. A.D. 1000; Fig. 13). Chamber 1 preparation, for example, intruded into the existing burial of an adult, removing the right arm in the process. At the other end of the tomb “biography” is the deposition of elaborate offerings described earlier sometime during late Middle Sicán, close to A.D. 1100. If our working hypothesis that the hundreds of highly variable *crisoles* found at different levels of Tomb 2 represent the handmade offerings of individuals who participated in the interment and post-interment rituals (Shimada et al. 2004; also Costin 1999) then the large number and multiple clusters of *crisoles* implies the considerable

and durable social significance of the individual(s) interred there, perhaps over a span of ca. 100 years.

Cemetery in Front of the Pachacamac Temple

We found a similar range of post-primary interment transformations in the major chamber tomb and surrounding burials excavated in 2005 in the cemetery in front of the Pachacamac Temple (Fig. 14). A brief summary of pertinent findings is offered here for comparative purposes; this excavation has been reported elsewhere in detail (Segura et al. 2005; Shimada et al. 2005, 2006).

This large, late pre-Hispanic (ca. A.D. 900-1532) double-chamber tomb (2.25x over 3.27m) (Fig. 15) had a complex and long use history. The largest, most elaborate funerary bundle was first placed in the innermost cove (Fig. 16). At least 33 subsequent bundles were added at different times, the latest unceremoniously dumped in sometime during the Late Horizon (Fig. 17). One bundle had been partially opened and the skull removed presumably sometime after its placement in the tomb. The rooftop of the tomb was only about 15-20 cm below the cemetery ground surface throughout its use. The presence of the nest and excrement of burrowing owls inside the tomb adds credence to the notion that the tomb was readily accessible for a long time.

Just outside this tomb were two pedestaled circular basins (Fig. 18) standing ca. 70 cm high among various Ychsma funerary bundles. These basins also were just below the cemetery surface, leading us to suggest that they served as receptacles for post-interment libations and other offerings (Segura et al. 2005; Shimada et al. 2005, 2006).

Important to our discussion of burial transformations and enduring living-dead interaction is evidence for the translocation of funerary bundles. As seen here (Fig. 19), we found three circular or oval patches roughly 30 to 35 cm across of a gray, powdery substance that contained recognizable fragments of decomposing cotton cloth and raw cotton bolls as well as foot bones, and other items that are commonly found at the bottoms of funerary bundles – the telltale signs left behind of decaying funerary bundles that had been removed (Segura et al. 2005; Shimada et al. 2006). Wherever these bundles were destined to go, given their poor preservation, it seems likely that they would have been first repaired or re-wrapped unless they were going to be discarded. We suggested elsewhere (Segura et al. 2005; Shimada et al. 2006) that funerary bundle preparation and/or renewal and associated ritual offerings and veneration occurred inside numerous circular and rectangular sunken enclosures (Fig. 20) in the open area just to the east of the Pachacamac Temple cemetery, what became the Pilgrims' Plaza in Inka times. Made of specially prepared adobe bricks, local tabular limestone blocks and/or large cobbles (Shimada et al. 2004), most of these chambers are of a size to have temporarily sheltered a funerary bundle for veneration, re-wrapping or re-assembly. Not only are these enclosures associated with a wide variety of offerings, we also encounter (Fig. 21). sewing needles, cloth swatches, metal working stones, scraps of copper alloy sheetmetal, and cinnabar in shell containers, perhaps some items from the toolkits of those who worked on funerary bundles.

At the Huaca Loro cemetery, along with 23 tombs of various sizes and shapes, we documented two square vertical shafts (Figs. 22, 23), each with a wall niche, that contained carefully placed offerings but without any

accompanying human remains. They are boot-shaped tombs in form alone. Given that we have no evidence of post-interment re-entry or prior existence of corpses, we raise the possibility of surrogate or symbolic burials for those individuals whose corpses are no longer accessible or lost.

Enduring Living-Dead Interaction

Various features noted above at both Pachacamac and Sicán point to long-term living-dead interaction. The impressive magnitude and duration of such interaction was documented in our 2006 excavation at Huaca Loro. Taking advantage of the largely intact cemetery at the west base of the Huaca, we conducted an extensive excavation covering ca. 320 m² (31 m N-S and 15 m E-W) searching for evidence of such interaction. Most striking in this regard, are at least 20 instances of intentional burning of the ground surface (Fig. 24) from less than a meter to just above the mouths of many burials ca. five meters below the present surface. Associated ceramics suggest a time span from early Middle Sicán, ca. A.D. 1000, to Chimú-Inka, ca. A.D. 1460-1532. Examination of associated burnt materials (Fig. 25) indicates the fuel was *poña*, fallen dried leafs, fruits, and tiny branches of *algarrobo* trees (*Prosopis spp.*) that abound in this area. The Intensity of fire varied but the reddish heat-discolored surfaces can be easily traced over much of (and probably extend beyond) our excavation area.

Scattered across the extensive burnt surfaces were a number of firepits and buried *ollas* and *cántaros* (Fig. 26). Many of these firepits contained carbonized algarrobo fruit (sweet bean pods), maize kernels and plant parts and, in a few cases, burnt cloth. It is notable that these firepits and buried vessels at

various depths are spatially clustered around and atop the two largest tombs we excavated, Tombs 1 and 2, suggesting an important and persistent symbolic connection. Near the SE corner of our excavation area near Tomb 2, ca. one meter below modern surface and directly associated with ash, charcoal bits and a burnt surface, we recovered an almost complete but disarticulated puma (*Felis concolor* Fig. 27) skeleton including its skull. A few of its bones were partially burnt. Specifics of what was done with the animal remain unclear; however, the presence of this rare animal here attests to the significance of rituals associated with burning.

Conclusion

What we presented above has a number of important implications for approaches to and conceptions of funerary analysis. Physical association within a funerary context does not necessarily denote deposition in a single moment in time and may belie a complex life history shaped over a considerable time span by the living and other factors. In the Andes, unlooted burials are relatively rare and their discovery often accidental. The ethical and moral considerations of burial excavation aside, we suggest those who excavate unlooted burials or cemeteries adopt a processual vision of burial as a multi-agency social practice over time and, accordingly, a more flexible or broaden vision of what constitutes an appropriate context for study. We need to balance the widespread emphasis on synchronous iconographic/stylistic and material analysis of grave goods with efforts to elucidate “life after death” or the “social life of the dead.” The latter redirects our attention to varied and variable interaction between the dead and the living perhaps over many generations as with the case of repeated ritual

fires at Huaca Loro. Recent bioarchaeological advances in illuminating pre-mortem life needs to be complemented by archaeological investigation of life after death. We also must examine the broader context of graves and cemeteries as with the case of the remains and activities in the Pilgrims' Plaza at Pachacamac. Many pre- and post-interment activities can and do occur away from the actual burial location, and urge sampling of broader areas. Only with such a broader conception of funerary contexts can we understand graves with partial or no skeletons. Lastly, the approach we advocate will provide more definite basis for assessing or inferring ancestor worship, an idea that has been frequently invoked without sufficient supportive evidence.

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