The Late Preclassic period: Massive monuments in simple societies

- Late ("Cotton") Preclassic period (3,200-2,200 cal BC)
  - This is a subdivision of the Preclassic period, roughly the later half of it
  - little obvious change in settlement, subsistence, or technology
  - although population was probably increasing
  - and a gradual trend towards more cultivated plants on naturally-watered floodplain
    - especially cotton and gourds for fishing gear on the coast
    - both greater variety of plants, and greater quantity
    - but still not a large part of diet
    - with the exception of Supe valley sites like Caral and possibly others in the neighboring "Norte Chico" valleys
  - some simple irrigation at some valley sites
    - at La Galgada, Caral, possibly some other sites
    - these seem to be unusual, early examples
    - with irrigated agriculture becoming common on the coast only in the Initial period, starting around 2,200 cal BC or a little later
  - Moseley uses the term “mortuary population” in discussing Preclassic villages
    - that refers to the number of bodies in a cemetery area
    - the living population at any given time would be much less
  - a few Late Preclassic groups built big, monumental constructions
    - this is our focus today
    - what did they do?
    - why did they do it?
    - what sorts of society supported and encouraged it?
  - Burger clarifies why these monuments are so surprising:
    - such monuments are often thought to be possible only in complex societies that can marshal and organize a lot of labor
      - typically using coercion
    - and complex society is thought to only be possible with an agricultural base
    - he suggests that Late Preclassic Peru may be one of those valuable archaeological cases that documents a kind of society that we simply have no historical or modern examples of

- some features common to many early Andean monumental constructions
  - repeated rebuilding, resulting in the accumulation of a larger, higher structure than what was actually built in any one episode
    - often with “ritual interment” of the old walls
  - platform mounds, open plazas, and sunken courts
    - the "3 planes" that Moseley refers to
      - plazas at ground level
      - below-ground sunken courts
      - mound-top buildings above ground level
– concern with impressive entrances, stairs, doorways
  – possibly creating a route that a pilgrim or procession would follow, with associated meanings along the way and increasing sacredness towards the top of the mound
  – lots of open, unroofed spaces
  – kept “ritually” clean (like a church, versus a peasant's house)
  – some orientations might be to Milky Way and summer/winter solstices; others up and down valleys, etc.

– Moseley mentions Valdivia sites in Ecuador
  – we won’t pursue those further here

– Coastal preceramic traditions of monumental architecture (following Moseley's classification)
  – Sunken plaza (Plaza Hundida) tradition
    – circular sunken courts, often with two opposed stairways
    – Moseley argues that this form was an independent conceptual package (a "cult" or "set of beliefs and rituals")
      – since it occurs all by itself at at least one site (Alto Salavery)
      – but it usually occurs in combination with other elements, especially platform mounds of the Supe tradition (below)
    – the sunken form hints that these could have served for rituals referring to
      – the earth (a preceramic ancestor of Pachamama?)
      – or/and origin myths in the same vein as the historically documented myth about people emerging from caves?
      – or something else?
  – Supe tradition (first identified in the Supe valley)
    – general pattern
      – platform mounds with stairs up the front
      – interconnected complexes of courts, hallways, and rooms on top
      – apparently stages for rituals to be viewed by crowds in the open space in front of the platform
      – plus rituals for smaller groups in the walled courts on top
      – and even smaller groups in the interior rooms
    – Aspero
      – we can take Aspero to represent a tradition also seen at other, presumably contemporary sites like Río Seco, Bandurria, Culebras, Salinas de Chao…
      – construction possibly started around ~ 3,200 cal BC
      – first date ~3,000 cal BC, but this is not on the earliest levels
      – 15 ha of dark midden (a bit more than 2 times the area of the central SSU quad)
      – 11 small mounds, 6 larger ones up to 4 m high
        – 10 are modified natural hills or slopes
        – only 1 is apparently mostly artificial
    – Huaca de los Idolos
      – “Huaca” means a sacred place, usually an artificial platform mound, but sometimes a peak, a special rock outcrop, etc.
two dates on late construction, 3,030 cal BC and 2530 cal BC, average 2,800 cal BC
- building probably started a few centuries earlier (3,200 cal BC?)
- on a platform 10 m high (32 feet), 30 X 40 m base (about 100 X 130 feet)
- stairway up the front to a central entrance
- top covered by rooms, inside walls plastered and painted red and yellow
- central room divided by “clapboard” wall with T-shaped doorway
- next to it, but entered by a separate system of hallways, a room with a central niche
  opposite the entry, with a bench or altar built up to the level of the base of the niche
- “Idolos” are at least 13 intentionally broken figurines found in one of the niches
  (carefully filled for a later reconstruction).
  - 11 are female, 4 possibly pregnant
  - some have flat-topped hats; others have bead necklaces; wear thigh-length skirts
- other offerings include yarn “god’s eyes”, a colorful “feather arrangement”
- Huaca de los Sacrificios
  - date of 2,900 cal BC, construction probably began up to 200 years earlier (3,100 cal BC?)
  - burial of an adult with just a gourd
  - burial of an infant with a beaded hat, cotton textile, and gourd bowl, all in a basket
    wrapped in cloth and a cane mat, buried with two more cotton textiles, and covered by
    an upside down stone grinding basin with red pigment
- Caral
  - 23 km (14 miles) inland from the mouth of the same river (Supe) where Aspero is
  - grossly similar to Aspero, but
    - much bigger mounds, much more labor-intensive
    - much bigger total area (65 ha total, vs. 12 ha for Aspero)
    - residential areas with well-preserved architecture
    - inland location for farming, vs. Aspero’s coastal location for marine resources
  - 2,700-2,000 cal BC
    - started a few centuries after Aspero… or so it looks for now
- Described in readings
- 65 hectares: about 3/4 the size of the entire SSU campus
- 6 large platform mounds with rooms on top
  - much larger than Aspero mounds
  - largest is about 140 x 150 meters at the base (450 x 500 feet), and about 20 meters tall
    (60 feet)
  - fully artificial, built of bagged stone fill, called *shicra*
  - stepped sides, stairways up the front
  - surfaces had been covered in smooth, colored plaster
  - several natural stones set upright on these mounds, may have been the focus of ritual
    - one located in a central sunken space atop the main mound
    - another at ground level, aligned with the stairway of another mound
  - plus some sunken circular courts
  - "fire altar" at one side of the plaza in front of the "amphitheater" mound
– adjacent complexes of well-built rooms
  – some probably for ritual activities
    – some have ceremonial (not cooking) hearths
    – maybe also for collecting offerings, instructing visitors, etc.
  – but many probably dwellings
    – Shady Solis suggests for high-status people associated with ritual
  – three different "qualities" of these rooms
    – several areas of mud-daube cane houses, considered to be low-status dwellings
    – several areas of adobe-walled rooms, considered to be middle-status dwellings
    – one area of stone and adobe walled rooms on low mounds, considered to be high-status dwellings
  – the excavators guess that the population was in the thousands, and call this urban - a city
    – they may be overstating the case a bit
  – inland location pretty much requires that the people practiced irrigation agriculture
    – evidence of beans, squash, guava, and cotton (no maize yet)
    – but lots of fish bone and shell were also found
  – two possible explanations:
    – Caral people regularly traveled 14 miles to the coast, or had family members who spent time at the coast
    – large-scale exchange of food with coastal people, perhaps those living at Aspero and/or similar sites
  – overall impression:
    – monumental architecture implies mobilization of lots of labor, which usually implies leadership and status differences
    – but were the mounds built all at once, or did they grow through many repeated, more modest rebuildings that required less impressive labor control?
    – excavators argue that the large mound was, in fact, built in just one or two episodes
    – ceremonial architecture (and paraphernalia found at Aspero) suggests presence of ritual specialists
    – differences in residential architecture may imply differences in status
    – but probably not really "urban" in density or scale
    – if there was large-scale exchange of staple foods with coastal people, that would suggest a fairly complex economy
      – that could have created opportunities for some people to profit and become better off
      – or that could have created opportunities for control, taxes/tribute/tithes, etc.
  – The region around the Supe valley is called the Norte Chico, and is still not well studied
    – There may be other nearby valleys with developments comparable to Aspero and Caral
  – El Paraiso tradition
    – El Paraíso: terminal coastal preceramic
      – first date ~2,200 cal BC, presumably started a bit earlier
      – this is many centuries after Aspero and Caral
      – huge: just slightly smaller than Caral
− 58 ha complex with 9 main stone buildings
  − 2/3 the size of the entire SSU campus!
  − mounds up to three stories high
  − total over 100,000 tons of rock fill, quarried from surrounding hills
  − estimated 2 million person-days to construct
− bagged fill (shicra), often filling “cribs” (walled compartments that contain and support the fill)
  − possibly a means of keeping track of labor provided
  − average size of shicra bags varies from one crib chamber to the next, suggesting separate work groups?
  − remember the recent Andean practice of dividing up work projects
  − irregular plan suggests accumulation over a long time
  − but overall pattern suggests later U-shaped mound complexes
− restored platform is just a small part of the site
  − 8 m (26 feet) high
  − stone walls were plastered with mud
  − and painted red and yellow
− complex of rooms with restricted access
  − central “reception court” space was presumably the focus of the whole construction
  − central court with red clay floor, red painted walls, and four 1-m diameter fire pits around a sunken central area
− rooms generally kept clean, not lived in
  − grinding stones with red pigment
  − figurine fragments
  − colorful feathers
  − fruit tree twigs
− Quilter describes an offering found in a wall
  − a large stone, covered in red pigment, wrapped in cotton cloth, accompanied by gourd bowls of food and a miniature shicra containing cakes of lime wrapped in leaves
  − (lime is chewed with coca, although no coca leaves were found here)
  − is this related to the standing stones at Caral?
  − Antecedent to Inka huaca concepts?
− debate about whether El Paraíso served just the people who lived there, or those in a larger area
  − Moseley
  − not much midden, so it must have drawn labor from more distant settlements
  − this may have contributed to integrative institutions
  − Quilter
  − not so; El Paraíso really was the big population center of its region at the time
  − based on
  − his impression of more midden than previously recognized
  − absence of nearby contemporary sites
  − shellfish are mostly from nearby sandy shore
– if people were coming from a larger area, some would bring the rocky shore shellfish available elsewhere
– generalizations about coastal Late Preceramic society
  – subsistence
    – mostly fishing and shellfish
    – sea birds, sea mammals
    – some wild plants
    – some cultivated plants
      – mostly cotton, gourds, reeds
      – for fishing equipment (nets, lines, boats, bags)
      – housing, bags, clothing, etc.
      – sweet potatoes, manioc, achira
  – the Supe valley may have been exceptional
    – probably started as a marine adaptation with the smaller center at Aspero
    – but added inland irrigation farming sites like Caral earlier than elsewhere
    – from that point on, subsistence was based on large-scale exchange between coastal fishers and up-valley irrigation farmers
    – supporting the huge monument construction at Caral
  – settlement
    – mostly small, uniform hamlets, few larger settlements or centers
    – inland towns (still within walking distance of the coast) probably produced more plant food, but have just as much marine debris
    – suggests either exchange or dispersed kin groups who shared their products
    – relatively large total populations within restricted areas of valleys
      – plenty of labor
      – made possible by marine resources
      – surplus production to support ritual and monument-building without a neolithic (agricultural) revolution?
    – some ceremonial sites have settlement around them, others do not
      – some estimated between 1000 and 3000 people - maybe enough to build the monuments
      – others, if not all, probably had to bring together people from multiple settlements for labor
      – possibly encouraging social complexity
  – Who built and used the monuments?
    – it probably varied.
    – the people who lived at the sites
      – some of the smaller sites have modest residential areas around them, maybe enough to have built the sites over a long period of time (many cumulative rebuilding episodes)
    – the people who lived at the sites, plus others from neighboring sites
      – Aspero, El Paraiso, and other sites seem too substantial to have served only the people who lived there
    – Burger disagrees: Aspero is just 2.5 km from Piedra Parada, a comparably large site
so, he argues, each must have drawn labor from a relatively small region that did not extend even 2.5 km in the direction of the other site
the people who lived there, plus large numbers of visitors not only from the same valley, but also from other valleys
Shady suggests this for Caral and the 16 other Preceramic monumental sites in the Supe valley
the total labor to build and operate all these sites seems far too much for just the population of the Supe valley
so maybe they served lots of pilgrims from a large region
who brought their labor and offerings to one or another of the Supe sites
maybe depending on the cult or deity associated with each complex
could have contributed to forming substantial, integrating institutions and regional organization
this would be an answer to Burger:
he noted that ceremonial sites were close together, so he figured they served very small areas
Shady's regional pilgrimage hypothesis has the labor came from many, distant places, not from non-overlapping areas right around the sites

virtually no evidence of it
sites not in defensible locations, no site walls
but some hints at Asia
Asia is a central coast site, nothing to do with China!
8 trophy heads
severed human heads, typically with a hole in the forehead with a rope coming out like a carrying handle
wooden clubs with sharks teeth
is this real conflict or ritualized?
could ritual conflict imply real (or justifiably feared, or remembered) warfare?
how would this ritualized or real conflict have affected daily life?

social stratification
at some sites, possibly some minor elites; at other sites, no evidence of any notable social status differences
few goods that could not have been produced by any household
little that could serve as distinctive wealth
monumental architecture of coastal centers suggests some stratification
all have a focal, central area with restricted access
suggesting that a minority within the society had access to some rituals, while a majority had to watch just the public aspects performed outside the summit walls and on the steps
residential architecture
poorly preserved, poorly studied at most sites
Caral
extensive areas of cane-walled houses
areas of rooms associated with each major mound, with stone and mortar walls, both floors and walls plastered
− some apparently used for cooking and living in
− presumably dwellings of higher-status people
− burial evidence
− at various sites, minor differences in grave goods are mostly by sex: males tended to be buried with more stuff
− no markedly elite burials, but some were definitely richer than others
− Asia
− 28 burials (according to Moseley; 49 according to Quilter)
− most had 2 to 4 textiles
− a few had up to 8
− one had 12, plus various gourds, bone tools, wooden tubes, a comb, a sling, etc.
− all were sub-floor burials in a single structure, suggesting that any status differences were within a single group, maybe a kin group
− La Galgada
− Some males and females buried in chambers within the ceremonial platforms
− with numerous mats, textiles, gourds, combs, etc.
− these could be higher-status people, compared to others who must have been buried elsewhere
− Huaca de los Sacrificios at Aspero
− plain burial of adult male
− vs. very rich burial of infant
− but maybe the infant burial was a dedicatory offering, not a sign of high status in life
− overall, the burials do not suggest very pronounced differences in wealth or ability to command labor to make personal items
− so these "elites" do not resemble the sort of well-off, powerful leaders we associate with monumental architecture in the Old World
− monumental architecture
− what were the Preceramic monuments for?
− they have no storage features or craft workshops
− so they have no obvious economic function
− not residential
− not mainly mortuary
− mainly used for ritual
− how could such monuments be possible without:
− much agriculture?
− notable social stratification that would suggest leaders
− or maybe there were some at Caral?
− concentration and redistribution of surplus production to finance the work?
− cities, warfare, craft specialization...??
− recordkeeping or writing?
− closest thing to recordkeeping is the possibility that bagged fill (bag included) may be a way of keeping track of work provided to the project
− how was the labor to build them mobilized without much social hierarchy to arrange it?
− a possible alternative to permanent status hierarchy: “cargo” system, rotating capable people through offices
  − “cargo” = “responsibility” or “task” assigned to someone
  − rotating capable people through offices of leadership
  − this is a way to coordinate group activities (like building monuments) without establishing a permanent status hierarchy
  − although people who have successfully completed numerous cargos become generally more respected and important
  − suggested because it is still in common use in the Andes and Central America
− can we project this 4000+ years into the past? Not for sure, but we can at least suggest the possibility
− Burger suggests how labor could be mobilized for corporate projects (regardless of whether or not a cargo system was used to organize it)
  − egalitarian societies often have an ideology of community ownership of resources that would encourage participation
    − based on descent from a founding ancestor or supernatural
    − participating in projects validates one's membership in the community
    − failing to participate brings social sanctions
  − also, monument-building was probably perceived as practical and useful
    − they probably served for community rituals
    − that would be considered necessary for successful fishing, farming, health, preventing disasters, etc.
  − monuments also demonstrated a community's power, validity, and prestige: working on them would be a source of pride

− Highland preceramic tradition of monumental architecture
  − Meanwhile, a completely different tradition developed in the highlands
  − Ceremonial centers apparently without any people living at them
    − ceremonial centers in the highlands were accumulations of separate, single ceremonial rooms built and rebuilt near each other, rather than one large complex
    − each with a ventilated fire pit
    − probably each room was built and used by a separate family or village group
  − people would come to these sites for a brief stay to build or fix up their ritual room and do their ceremonies in them, then go back to normal life in small, dispersed settlements
  − subsistence based on
    − probably rain-fed agriculture, possibly small canals
    − probably supplemented by gathering and hunting
  − Kotosh tradition
    − Kotosh 2,400-2,000 cal BC, continuing into later periods
      − not the earliest, but the most extensively excavated
        − serves as a prototype and comparison for understanding others
provides the name for the “Kotosh Religious Tradition”

located on route from highlands to jungle, down the upper Huallaga drainage

so maybe this tradition involved some combination of influences from the jungle as well as the highlands

two mounds ("Andean duality")?

accumulation of repeatedly rebuilt detached, single-room rectangular ceremonial structures

dependent, separate, not interconnected

each could have been built by an extended family in perhaps a month

well-preserved examples of ritual rooms have a step around the inside top of the wall that probably supported beams of a solid roof

one doorway

interior niches

Temple de los Manos Cruzados: modeled hands below two of the niches

Temple Blanco niches contained small, crude unbaked clay figurines, a small vessel, and a possible clay representation of a squash or gourd

bench around walls

central hearth with underground flue that drew air into the hearth from outside

kept clean

ritual uses:

plant, animal, lithic materials burned in the hearth, presumably as offerings

based on work at various similar sites

used by individual families or kin groups?

big enough for only a few to maybe 12 adults

but sizes do vary

emphasis must have been on intimate, personal, small-group ritual

benches may imply seating, which implies relatively long ceremonies (hours)?

snuff trays were in use at this time for inhaling hallucinogens...something similar used in sealed rooms?

rooms were intentionally buried ("ritually entombed") in order to build a new one above

floor and walls carefully protected with sand before filling with rocks and dirt

Kotosh built and used by highland forager/hunters, not farmers?

no evidence of domesticated plants

but lots of camelids, deer, and cuyes

Moseley argues that the beliefs and rituals connected to these rooms were a discrete "cult" that could be combined with other kinds of rituals and their facilities

like those associated with the sunken plazas

Huaricoto 2,800-2,500 cal BC, continuing into later periods

An earlier, smaller-scale version of Kotosh
presumably an earlier expression of the same general beliefs
Kotosh-like small rooms with benches and ducted hearths
many had wattle-and-daub walls, apparently did not last long
but these rooms were built and rebuilt again and again over 2000 years
La Galgada 2,720-2,500 cal BC
on tributary to the Santa river
route from coast into mountains, Callejon de Huaylas
two large platform mounds, several small ones
with Kotosh-type chambers on top
but with rounded corners, not rectangular
fire pits have remains of plant offerings, including burnt chili peppers (imagine the smoke!)
small white, orange, green feathers, deer antlers on some chamber floors
burials
the only Kotosh-style site known with burials
in disused chambers before “entombment” of the chamber
some reentered several times, maybe over several generations
probably a very early example of ancestor veneration, comparable to Inka practices
men and women, mostly small children or old adults
grave goods become more elaborate over time, eventually including baskets, bags, gourds, mortars and pestles, salt crystals. Some shell beads and pendants.
remember, this is before they made ceramics or used metals, so this stuff was the best they had
but the various goods were found equally with males and females, young and old
Burger suggests that this means no stratification
Moseley and others (including me) wonder about the people who weren’t buried in these chambers
maybe the ones in the chambers are high-status families, while lower-status burials were located off the mounds
Jeffrey Quilter argues the same thing - but that the status was of a limited sort
he notes that multiple people were buried in each chamber, for a total of numerous high-status people
suggesting that high status was shared by multiple people at the same time, including women and children
rather than being limited to one or a few leaders
so maybe these are high-status families?
if so, status was based on birth - it was hereditary
also, buried adults show signs of hard labor during their lives
and the goods themselves are not remarkable
they do not suggest significant control of wealth, labor, or access to exotic goods
cultivated plants: beans, squash, fruits, chili peppers, gourd, cotton
irrigation was necessary for these crops
some remains of canals thought to be preceramic
very little maize at any sites prior to the Initial period and introduction of ceramics
considerable evidence of exchange or direct access to distant goods
marine shell beads
colorful feathers thought to be from Amazonian birds
generalizations about highland Late Preclassic society
These traditions began in the Late Preclassic but continued on, with only minor changes, through the following Initial Period.
subsistence: mixed agro-pastoral-hunting-gathering
breeding llamas and alpacas for cargo and wool
breeding cuyes for food
hunting deer
small-scale irrigation agriculture
settlement
no evidence of occupation around centers (except La Galgada)
people presumably lived scattered closer to fields, not in towns
in contrast to the coast, where there are villages and towns
stratification
ambiguous evidence from La Galgada
“cellular” ritual structures suggest decentralized, egalitarian organization rather than hierarchical organization?
monuments were not planned, nor built in major episodes, did not require much organization nor mobilization of much labor at once
generalities about the Late Preclassic overall
apparent coast-highland trade
fish and shell to mountains
obsidian, beads, some types of wood to coast
not large in quantity, but indicates contact
contrasting ritual traditions
multiple single-room, individual structures (sierra) vs. complex compounds with unique focal spaces (coast)
easy access (sierra) vs. highly restricted access (coast, with exceptions)
agglutinated, unplanned layouts (sierra) vs. planned monuments (coast)
small group, private (sierra and coast) vs. large group, public activities (coast)
people in both regions built up large monuments very gradually by carefully burying older parts and building new parts on top and around the old
concepts of renewal?
calendarical ideas?
contrasting settlement patterns
scattered in highlands, vs. villages, towns, some around monumental centers on the coast
overall pattern: significant monumental architecture and ritual activity
based on foraging, fishing, herding, small-scale agriculture
probably with a little small-scale irrigation in the highlands
– although the very biggest monuments, in the Supe valley, were based on irrigation agriculture combined with marine resources
– without large settlements
– without marked stratification (?)
– without notable warfare
– without evident economic roles for the centers
  – centers lack significant storage facilities
  – some centers are not associated with productive areas or investments like canals
    – exceptions: La Galgada; Supe valley sites like Caral
  – centers lack evidence of craft production
  – maybe centers had a function in large-scale exchange of marine products for agricultural ones

– next time:
  – Dillehay
    – can these modern practices suggest anything about preceramic monumental architecture?
    – what people might be thinking of when they build them?
    – how construction is organized and actually takes place?
    – what do you think about using historical to modern Chilean practices to illuminate northern Peruvian practices of 2500 BC?