

The Late Preceramic period: Massive monuments in simple societies

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- Late ("Cotton") Preceramic period (3,200-2,200 cal BC)
 - This is a subdivision of the Preceramic 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 Preceramic 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 Preceramic 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 Preceramic 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 a 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-daubed 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 Paraiso: 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 Paraiso 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
 - this 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 come from many, distant places, not from non-overlapping areas right around the sites
- warfare
 - 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”
- several other, similar sites known, possibly many
- 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
 - several to many in use at any one time
 - independent, separate, not interconnected
 - each could have been built by an extended family in perhaps a month
 - sites are *not* big, planned complexes that required big labor investments
 - 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
 - Templo de los Manos Cruzados: modeled hands below two of the niches
 - Templo 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 Preceramic society
 - These traditions began in the Late Preceramic 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 Preceramic 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?
 - calendrical 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?