

The Initial period: The state debate

© Copyright Bruce Owen 2006

- The debate about the Casma valley in the Initial Period 2000-800 cal BC
 - Tom and Sheila Pozorski (with a little reading between the lines):
 - The whole valley was a single state
 - with cities
 - at least three social classes that differed in prestige and personal wealth
 - (commoners, officials/administrators, and rulers)
 - a political hierarchy with leaders in charge of commoner labor
 - supported by the large-scale centralized storage and redistribution of food and possibly other goods
 - this is a radical view that only a minority agree with, but it is worth considering
 - Richard Burger, as a representative of the standard, majority view (again, reading between the lines a little):
 - the Casma valley was like others at the time, with a number of separate social groups, each with its own canal system, territory, and ceremonial center
 - no cities
 - very minimal social status and wealth differences (no classes)
 - little or no permanent political hierarchy
 - they had developed ways of organizing monument building and canal work without obvious self-aggrandizing leaders
 - no big, powerful corporate institutions capable of storing and redistributing food
- First, what is a state?
 - many definitions; for our purposes, I will just mention a few main themes
 - a kind of political organization
 - of people in a relatively defined territory
 - most or all states are largely concerned with maintaining their control over that territory
 - the group of people is large
 - a typical cutoff might be 20,000 people or more, although there is no hard and fast rule
 - people are divided into social classes with different access to resources
 - this can involve both differences in prestige or social standing
 - which affect one's access to (or control of) other people's labor and the products of it
 - and differences in wealth
 - which describes the actual things one owns or controls
 - which in turn, like prestige, affect one's access to (or control of) other people's labor and the products of it
 - social interactions are based on a political hierarchy, in which roles such as "king", "priest", and "worker" are clearly defined and institutionalized
 - that is, they are positions that are filled by someone else with little change when their occupant leaves or dies, rather than being specific to particular people

- the upper parts of this hierarchy constitute a permanent, specialized, professional government that makes decisions directing the entire state
- the state has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force
 - internal policing and external war-making
- the state pays for it all by extracting taxes from the populace and directing that wealth for its own ends
- a typical feature that goes along with states is a complex division of labor
 - people can have many different roles or specializations
 - not just farmers and fishers, but also full-time potters, weavers, builders, stone carvers, etc.
 - full-time specialization is not the core concept of statehood, but it may simply be necessary for a state to function
- another feature that is often associated with states is the presence of a capital city
 - surrounded by smaller cities or towns
 - again, this is not the core concept, but it seems to come with it in practice
- What's a city?
 - a large, dense, permanent concentration of people and their homes
 - at least 5,000 people is a common rule of thumb
 - that is economically complex
 - people have different specialties (many are not farmers), and depend on each other for different goods and services
 - the city is dependent on a rural hinterland around it
 - people in the city consume food produced by people who live outside it
 - and provide craft goods and services to those people in exchange
 - so the city is not only economically complex internally, but is also part of a larger web of economic interactions with other settlements
- Why do people care whether there were cities or a state in the Casma valley in the Initial period?
 - because cities and states are hallmarks of societies like ours
 - people are curious to see when and how they arose and developed
 - and to see whether impressive archaeological evidence like Initial period centers can be explained in terms of cities and states
 - or whether we have to look for other, less familiar kinds of social organization to explain them
- A typical, consensus view of the Initial Period in general, based on Burger readings
 - Lots of variation in pottery styles from area to area
 - Burger sees these varying styles as products of many independent social units with only limited interaction between them
 - the variation in ceremonial architecture from site to site suggests the same sort of limited interactions
 - leadership and social structure in the Initial period

- Burger argues (as almost anyone would) that the huge Initial period centers required leaders to manage construction and logistics
 - and he notes that some people were indeed treated differently in burials, like the old man buried on top of Cardal's main mound
 - a special location
 - some special goods
 - but minimal: porpoise vertebra earspools, sealion tooth necklace, an unspecified bone tool
 - also that some buildings on top of Cardal's main mound might have been high-status residences
- But he notes that these leaders do not seem to have made much obvious personal gain out of their positions
 - garbage in the "high status" residences on top of Cardal's main mound is not notably different from that in the "common" residences below
 - and distinguishing grave goods do not involve concentration of labor or exotic materials
 - that is, they are not really wealth
 - because in principal any individual could have made or acquired them
- also, there was little craft specialization in the Initial period
 - that is, virtually everything was made at the household level
 - family units produced all the food, textiles, tools, etc. they needed
 - they simply had very few goods that would require specialists to make
 - one exception might the ceramics of the Initial period
 - very rare examples were very finely made, presumably by skilled specialists
 - presumably not everyone knew how, nor wished to, make the elaborate ceramic figurines or decorated serving wares found at some sites
 - more common, but still scarce, are simple globular utilitarian vessels for cooking and storage
 - these still require some specialized knowledge to make, and were probably made in batches much larger than any one family would need
 - but both kinds of ceramics are rare enough that just a few households of part-time specialists per valley were probably sufficient to produce all of them
 - this lack of specialization contrasts with the occupational specialization seen in more complex societies
 - in which some people specialize in producing certain foods or craft items
 - and then get the other things they need by exchanging their products for different ones made by others
- overall picture according to Burger
 - many weakly stratified societies with limited interactions between them
 - such interactions were probably through connections to regional ceremonial centers that people traveled to visit
 - each of these societies was divided into inland agriculturalists and coastal fishers, mutually interdependent
 - but within these two groups, everyone's activities and roles were pretty much the same
 - with highly developed religious institutions

- that managed corporate labor for building and maintaining monuments and canals
- without much effect on social organization in other ways
- The Pozorskis' radical view of the Initial period Casma valley
 - a minority opinion, but worth considering
 - They see the Casma valley as exceptional, with a very high density of huge centers
 - and with cities and a "civilization" at 2000 - 1500 BC
 - The Pozorskis see all the centers of the Casma valley as being parts of a single political-religious system: a state
 - they consider the differences in size and details of the sites to mean that they had different functions
 - implying many different specialized roles for people
 - probably with differing degrees of status, power, wealth
 - and complex political and economic interactions between the different centers
 - the big tipoff: Pampa de las Llamas and Huaca A, which they see as a facility for accepting, storing, and redistributing crops and other goods
 - providing the people in charge with "staple finance" to carry out construction and other plans
 - complete with bureaucrats, workers, and a small town to house them
 - Moxeke: a setting for ritual performances to be watched by crowds in the plaza
 - Cerro Sechin: a different kind of ceremonial center that people would get closer to, and that involved themes of human violence, rather than supernaturals
 - Sechin Alto: ritual setting comparable to Moxeke, but bigger and different in details
 - another key: Taukachi-Konkan, which they interpret as the residence, storehouses, chapels, meeting rooms, and offices of very high-status leading family, like the palace of a king
 - Pozorskis' view of Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke
 - estimate Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke held 2500 people of various economic statuses
 - they see this as sufficiently large and complex to call it a city
 - lots of planning, symmetry in layout - not a casual accumulation of rebuildings, but organized and controlled
 - suggesting an institution of leadership that effectively coordinated large projects
 - they see Huaca A as a warehouse for storing large quantities of food and luxury goods
 - this sort of storage is typical of early cities and states in Mesopotamia, which is clearly on their minds
 - no evidence of people living in Huaca A
 - no cooking hearths or food garbage
 - lots of repetitious square rooms suitable for storage
 - large niches 1.25 to 2.0 m above the floor (high up)
 - floors plastered but covered with woven mats
 - connected by corridors without matting on floor or niches
 - elaborate systems for controlling access, appropriate for a warehouse
 - some real barriers

- rear main entrance could be closed by a massive gate of horizontal logs stacked between vertical log jambs on either side of the entrance
 - a real, formidable barrier
- pilasters narrowed doorways like a doorframe
 - maybe supported some kind of barrier?
- but most control of access was based more on authority than physical barriers
 - entries flanked by impressive friezes, maybe serving to remind people of the power that enforced the rules there
 - front has two huge painted felines
 - 6 m high and 10 m long!
 - also feature circular reliefs with four rectangles
 - similar to clubs and hats on warriors at Cerro Sechín
 - this may be a symbol of authority or the state?
 - one or two probable stone altars (or lintels?) in an atrium may have added supernatural sanctions to control people's behavior inside
 - 93 other entrances were controlled by sliding bar closures about 50 cm above the floor
 - these would not physically block anyone
 - but would indicate what the authorities wanted you to stay out of...
- very little evidence of what would have been stored there
 - not surprising; if it had any value, it would have been removed
 - a few textile fragments in niches
 - either stored cloth
 - or cloth wrappings of something else
 - pollen from niches indicates
 - cotton, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, peanuts
 - but no maize!
 - lots of rodent bones suggest food storage
- probably frequented by high-status people: presumably administrators, government officials, etc.
 - finest textile bits found at Huaca A
 - turquoise beads
 - a wooden figurine
 - no evidence of goods associated with lower class
 - like what?
 - would these things be left laying around, anyway?
- subsidiary platform mounds along the sides of the main plaza
 - each with one room like the ones on Huaca A
 - the Pozorskis see these as "offices and storage areas used by mid-level officials" who directed the flow of goods in and out of Huaca A
 - not clear exactly why they think so
- some of the subsidiary mounds have high-status residences behind them
 - aligned with Huaca A and the mounds flanking the plaza

- built like the Huaca A rooms, fieldstone in mortar, plastered
- some have red-painted walls
- but unlike Huaca A, they have hearths and domestic refuse
- storerooms with
 - large jars
 - niches
 - storage pits
 - for personal wealth of occupants?
- presumably residences of the elite "bureaucrats" working at that mound
 - pottery figurines
 - stone mortars and pestles for red pigment
 - wall and body paint?
 - stamp and cylinder seals
 - 2 stamp seals have red pigment, suggesting stamping on cloth or skin
 - possibly markers of authority (again, something Burger does not see)
- low-status housing in two areas a little away from the mounds and plazas
 - perishable probably cane walls with stone footings
 - less regular plans, with smaller rooms
 - not aligned to public architecture
 - hearths smaller
- these two kinds of residential architecture suggest two classes of people
 - a more complex, hierarchical society than before
 - the kind typically thought to be associated with states
- Pozorskis' view of Taukachi-Konkan
 - only 5 km from Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke
 - contemporary with Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke
 - same pottery
 - generally similar architecture
 - square rooms
 - wall niches
 - restricted entrances, even identical sliding pole door closures
 - these similarities suggest that they could have been parts of a single system, not completely isolated in different political units, as Burger might claim
 - has the unique "Mound of the Columns"
 - big columned, roofed patio spaces
 - high-niched probable storerooms
 - low-niched possible meeting rooms
 - two round "sweathouses" for small-group rituals
 - connected to the more inner, less public parts of the building
 - irregular rear rooms that they consider to be for residence
 - located at the highest part of the mound, so presumably high status
 - hidden side stairway entrance from area with signs of food preparation - the court's kitchen?

- for the ruler of Sechín Alto or the whole valley system?
- Burger's view of Initial period Casma valley sociopolitical organization
 - suggests that the Casma valley is not as exceptionally stuffed with monuments as it appears, because we should count the Casma as two valleys together
 - in that case, the number of large monuments falls in a similar range as do any two of the other most developed Initial Period valleys
 - and thus the Casma valley is not anomalous, but could be just another example of a broader pattern
 - doubts that a state organization unified the Initial Period Casma sites
 - instead, sees the Casma valley as being like other Initial period valleys
 - a patchwork of independent but similar "pre-state polities"
 - each with its own territory, canal system, and ceremonial site slightly different from the others
 - does not see evidence of features he would expect in a state, especially an Andean one:
 - no standardized government architecture style
 - like Inka plazas, ushnus, kallankas, double-jamb doorways, etc.
 - (the Pozorskis would say that the sculptural style, building plans, doorway bars, etc. that occur at several of the sites do represent such a "government" style)
 - no artifacts emblematic of state bureaucracy
 - like Inka ceramics, metalwork, or textiles
 - (the Pozorskis point to the motifs with 3 and 4 squares as just such state emblems)
 - says that the variation in scale and style of monuments may not reflect hierarchy and functional differences in a single system
 - but rather normal variations between relatively separate groups centered on each
 - that is, all the monuments are ceremonial; their differences reflect local idiosyncrasies in ritual beliefs, not significantly different functions
 - is not convinced of the bulk storage function of Huaca A
 - which is central to the claim that there was an elite that controlled the stored surplus in part for their own aggrandizement
 - no stored goods found in excavations (of course not!)
 - no fragments of ceramic storage vessels that might be expected
 - instead, he notes the ceremonial features of Huaca A
 - the felines flanking the entrances
 - the "altar" stone found inside
 - if the rooms were for storage, maybe it was for ritual paraphernalia, rather than food to support workers or wealth accumulated by leaders
 - that is, he thinks Huaca A can be understood as just another kind of ceremonial site, without implying storage of goods for redistribution
 - sees little evidence of economic or social stratification that is usually associated with states
 - other than fishers vs. farmers, little evidence of occupational specialization
 - no craft workshop areas known
 - few artifacts that would require specialists to make

- these might suggest specialized labor and probably some differences in social status and wealth -- but they are not found
- Burger argues that the variation in housing at Pampa de las Llamas is *not* evidence of two socioeconomic classes
 - he is not impressed by the difference in lifestyle implied by the different building materials, finishing, and alignment with the ceremonial buildings
 - functionally, both kinds of residences are similar
 - both have clustered small rooms with central hearths
 - garbage is similar
 - although the essential quantitative comparisons have not been done
 - he explains away the few differences:
 - all the ceramic figurines are from the "high status" area, but
 - they could be related to ritual activity, not high-status people living there
 - most of the stamp and cylinder seals are from the "high status" area, but
 - they could be related to painting textiles or bodies, not the high status of people living there
 - stone bowls and pestles mostly from the "high status" area, but
 - they might be there simply because that is where they were needed to prepare red paint
 - in short, if these really were homes of elites who had better access to desired goods, we should see clearer evidence that they lived better than the others
- no clearly high-status burials
 - one burial in a "high status" area and one in a "low status" area
 - both were in simple sub-floor pits with only broken pottery as offerings
 - this sample is somewhat limited...
 - the Pozorskis would probably say we have not looked in the right places yet, like in or near Taukachi-Konkan, where the ruling family supposedly lived
- A few other doubts about the Pozorskis' view
 - the population of Pampa de las Llamas (maybe 2500) is very small to be called a city or to be the center of a state
 - no sign of record-keeping devices for keeping track of goods stored in Huaca A
 - Old World societies that developed large-scale, bureaucratic storage systems developed ways to label and track the goods
 - Later Andean storage involved khipus for that purpose
 - the absence of such devices does not disprove anything, but it would make a much stronger case if they existed
 - the evidence for identifying the supposed royal residence area at Taukachi-Konkan as residences at all is weak
- The stakes
 - The Casma is the most complex-looking region in the Initial Period; if there was no state in the Casma valley during the Initial Period, presumably there was none anywhere.