

Assessing Recuay Ceramics and Feasting in the Andean Highlands at the Site of Hualcayán

1. Proposal Narrative

A. Abstract

The Recuay culture thrived in the Andean Highlands of Peru during the Early Intermediate Period from about 250 to 650 A.D. Recent studies have shown that the Recuay were agropastoralists who worshiped their ancestors through feasting, however, specific information about their feasting practices are still unclear. Therefore, I propose to examine the feasting rituals of the Recuay culture through the analysis of ceramic vessel remains at the highland site of Hualcayán in Peru. While decorated ceramics associated with feasting at Hualcayán have been analyzed, non-decorated diagnostic ceramics have yet to be analyzed. To reveal more about the feasting practices, I will analyze the non-decorated ceramics from one excavation unit in a Recuay ritual enclosure of Hualcayán. Combining these data with the already analyzed ceramics will allow me to reconstruct food consumption practices and ceramic production techniques used to produce the Recuay feast at Hualcayán.

While I am studying the ceramics at Hualcayán to better understand the specific activities and organization of the Recuay culture specifically, I will consider my results against the current knowledge of feasting throughout the Andes to gain a broader understanding of these practices. My analysis will be permanently stored in the project database, available for scholars in the future to build upon, and I intend to present and publish my findings in various contexts.

B. Background/Statement of the Problem/Significance of the Project

When people think about the past of South America their minds are often drawn to the grandeur of the Inca Civilization that was characterized by huge monumental architecture and an empire of gold. What many do not often know or think about is the fact that cultures had thrived in South America for thousands of years before the rise of the Inca Empire. One of these

early cultures was called the Recuay. According to research done by George Lau, the Recuay culture thrived in the Andean Highlands of Peru during a time known as the Early Intermediate Period from about 250 to 650A.D. (Lau 2002-2004: 178,181). The Early Intermediate Period was characterized by the rise of a number of different regional cultures including the Moche, Nasca, and Lima on the coast and the Recuay in the North-Central highlands (The Department of Ancash) of the Peruvian Andes in the Callejón de Huaylas (Lau 2002-2004:177-78).

The Recuay have not been studied in great depth except for the excavations carried out by George Lau focusing on art and architecture. Lau has shown, however, that the Recuay focused heavily on ceremonial rituals many of which included large feasting events (Lau 2002-2004:178). Feasts, or large gatherings with food and drinks, have been used for a variety of reasons in many societies throughout history including for the organization of collective labor, marking elite status, or with ritual activities such venerating deceased ancestors (Dietler and Hayden 2001). Research has led to the identification of Recuay sites with feasting activities based on the architecture, key characteristics of feasts, and iconography (Dietler and Hayden 2001:404). Now further analysis must be done to figure out more about the feast itself.

The site of Hualcayán, located in the Northern highlands, is an ancient ceremonial center that was occupied continuously from around 900BCE to 1450CE when the Inca Empire rose to power. With such a long occupation, clear changes in dominating cultures can be seen through the styles of ceramics and architecture left behind. Excavations have revealed several structures clearly associated with the Recuay culture located at the site including a tomb and a



D-shaped plaza that appears to have been used ceremonially. It is from this plaza that feasting practices are seen archaeologically at Hualcayán through the ceramics left behind.

C. Objectives

My research project at the site of Hualcayán will serve to uncover more information about the feasting rituals of the Recuay culture. To achieve this goal, I will be carefully studying a Recuay ceramic assemblage found during the excavation of the D-shaped plaza, examining the form and composition of the ceramics. Ceramics often reveal specific information about a culture's ideology and practices through the iconography present in decoration, but many important attributes are often overlooked such as vessel size, form and composition when a decoration is present. These analyses can reveal the size of the feast (i.e. large versus small containers), the type of food consumed (i.e. jars for liquid storage), and the range of ceramic manufacturing techniques (i.e. one type of paste means one person or group producing).

By the end of my summer research I will have analyzed these attributes on all non-decorated diagnostic ceramics from the D-shaped plaza structure and collected the data in a digital database designed by PIARA. I will then go on to assess this data to find correlations and patterns in the feasting ritual performed in this structure. Research by the PIARA team has already given us a clear indication of where Recuay feasting was occurring by identifying specific attributes, such as smashed vessels, that are associated ritual spaces. My research goals will be to answer the questions of who?, what? and how? associated with Recuay feasting.

The question of who? will reveal who was manufacturing the ceramics used for the feast as well as who was engaging in the feasting. This can be accomplished by looking at the techniques made for manufacturing vessels to see if they are uniform indicating one group, such as a family lineage, was creating the ceramics, or if it was varied. I will also look at the sizes and quantities of vessels to judge how many people were involved in the feast thus judging the

size of the feast. The what? question, will ask what types of food and drink were being served. Botanical analysis would reveal specific foods, but certain vessel sizes and types often reveal functions and what could be contained. For example, jars with narrow openings likely held a liquid as larger foods would not fit. There are also a variety of new vessel forms that are coming from the excavations of Hualcayán that will be identified through my research. Answering these more specific questions about Recuay feasting will lead to a better understanding of the reasons for feasting as well as how the ritual was carried out. This project will also help in understanding the Recuay culture in general adding to the scarce knowledge of the culture and opening the door for further research.

D. Research Methods

To answer my research questions I will be continuing the analysis of ceramic pieces that have been found at the site. Last summer I helped to analyze the ceramics that were considered diagnostic and decorated meaning they had some sort of design on the piece that ties them to a specific time-period or culture based on key, identifiable characteristics. For my current research I will analyze the pieces that are not decorated, but still considered diagnostic. These pieces contain valuable information about the feasting event and can help me answer my questions about Recuay ritual practices; however, they are often ignored as they are not considered “pretty” or special.

In analyzing these ceramic pieces, I will enter information into a database that has been specifically designed for analyzing ceramics of the region. The database records specific attributes of each piece including measurements such as weight, size, and thickness; surface characteristics such as a design type or color; and interior characteristics such as material and firing techniques that tell how the ceramic was made. I will also complete detailed drawings of specific diagnostic pieces such as parts of the tops of vessels called rims which will allow for a

view of what the entire ceramic may have looked like and help to determine the function. The measurement data will help to determine the size of vessels, the drawings will help determine the types of vessels that were present, and the interior and surface characteristics will show how vessels were made and by whom all of which will contribute to the understanding of Recuay feasting rituals.

Recording all of this information will help me to answer my questions about Recuay feasting rituals. I will also be open to any unanticipated questions or patterns that arise during my research. In the final stage of my analysis, I will look for patterns among all of the ceramic pieces from the plaza, both non-decorated and decorated, to determine specifically what was happening at this feasting site. My analysis will also be permanently stored in the project database, available for scholars in the future to build upon and answer their own questions.

E. Final Products and Dissemination

My research project in Hualcayán will serve as the foundation for my senior thesis paper for the Archaeology department. I will present my project in either a poster or oral presentation at the UW- La Crosse Celebration of Student Research and Creativity in spring of 2015 and I also plan to submit my findings to the *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research* for publication. On the advice of my mentor, I also plan to submit an abstract to present my work as a poster at the annual conference meeting for the Society of American Archaeology in 2015. These methods of presenting my findings will allow those at the local level as well as at the national level to benefit from my research and findings.

F. Budget justification

For this research project I am requesting the maximum funding for international travel of \$3,500.00. I plan to use \$2,500.00 of this allotment to cover my travel and lodging costs. \$1,000.00 of this money will be put toward the purchase of a plane ticket. This number is based

on what I had to pay last summer to purchase a ticket from Chicago to Lima, Peru and preliminary searches for flights leaving during my estimated departure and return times of the last week in June and the first week in August. The other \$1,500.00 allotted for this section will be used to pay for accommodations at the field site of Hualcayán where I will be completing my research. The field director has requested that students wishing to complete research at the site pay this fee to cover living expenses while they are staying in the field house. The fee will cover the cost of shelter, water, electricity, and food for the duration of my research. It is imperative that I pay these fees to travel to and live at the site as this research is truly unique and cannot be done elsewhere. Little is known about the Recuay culture in general and this site contains a wonderful snapshot of Recuay life that I will have the opportunity to discern through this research project and then contribute the information gained to further Recuay studies.

The remaining \$1,000 of the budget I wish to receive as a stipend. I will be at the site for about a month and if I work every weekday for about six hours per day I will roughly put in 138 hours of work total and be provided with the current minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. I have estimated that this will be enough time to complete my research project based on what I could accomplish per day in the lab last summer during my field school. Working these hours will also allow time to contribute to additional tasks in the community that is permitting me to do my work. I will extend my hours if necessary to complete my project. I do not require additional funds for materials as the field site has all of the necessary equipment I need to do my research and analysis including a database, measuring tools, and reference books.

References Cited

Dietler, Michael and Brian Hayden

2001 *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*.
University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa.

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