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PERU

A Low Status Late Intermediate Period Offering Pit in Andahuaylas, Apurímac, Peru

Joel W. Grossman (Pace University: jwgnyny@gmail.com) reports on field-work accomplished in 1971. The present tense used in this report is the ethnographic or historical present. That is, it refers to conditions as they were in 1971.

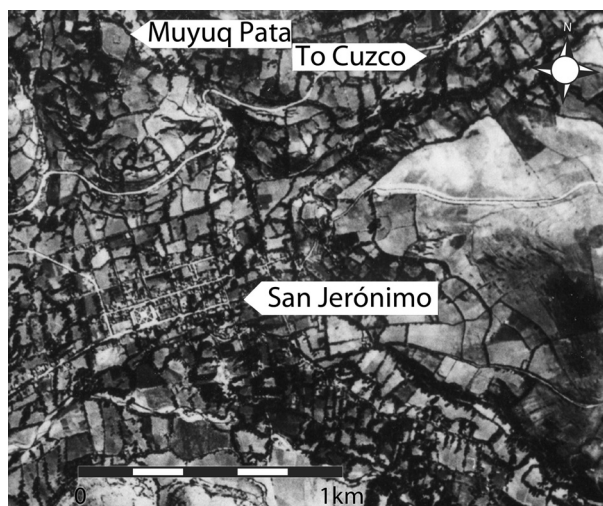


Figure 1: Aerial photograph showing the site of Muyuq Pata (Ap2-58) above the modern town of San Jerónimo east of Andahuaylas, Apurímac Region.

Grave lots have long been seen as units of association and contemporaneity for the study of stylistic variation through time (Rowe 1962). While not necessarily associated with human internment, ritual offerings can often serve the same analytical purpose. The vessels found together in such an offering represent a stylistic unit of contemporaneity and range of stylistic variation for a single period of time associated with the deposition of the feature contents.

Such a find was made through a chance encounter in August 1971 towards the end of my stay in Andahuaylas following the stratigraphic excavation of the site of Waywaka on a hill-top ridge across the valley (Grossman 1972, 1983).



Figure 2: View of offering pit exposed between furrow of modern cultivation zone and LIP refuse on the surface of Muyuq Pata.

While making surface collections at the site called Muyuq Pata (Figure 1) at an elevation of 3168 m.a.s.l. and above the north slope of the Andahuaylas Valley, overlooking the valley, and immediately north of the district of San Jerónimo, I came across a small open pit which had been accidentally struck by a farmer's plow or hoe (Figure 2). The hole or pit contained large ceramic fragments with chunks of burned corn. Both the stylistic characteristics and the ensuing radiocarbon determination dated this find to the time of the Chanka occupation in Andahuaylas, at the end of the Late Intermediate Period (LIP;

Bauer *et al.* 2010; Rowe and Menzel 1967). Although small and humble in appearance, this find provides a unit of contemporaneity and association for the study of stylistic range of variation in Chanka Phase ceramics from the Late Intermediate Period (Bauer *et al.* 2010:73-95).

This chance discovery is also important for another reason. Several lines of evidence (archaeological, ethnographic, and ethnohistorical) support the idea that this association of ceramics and corn represents a ceremonial or religious offering.

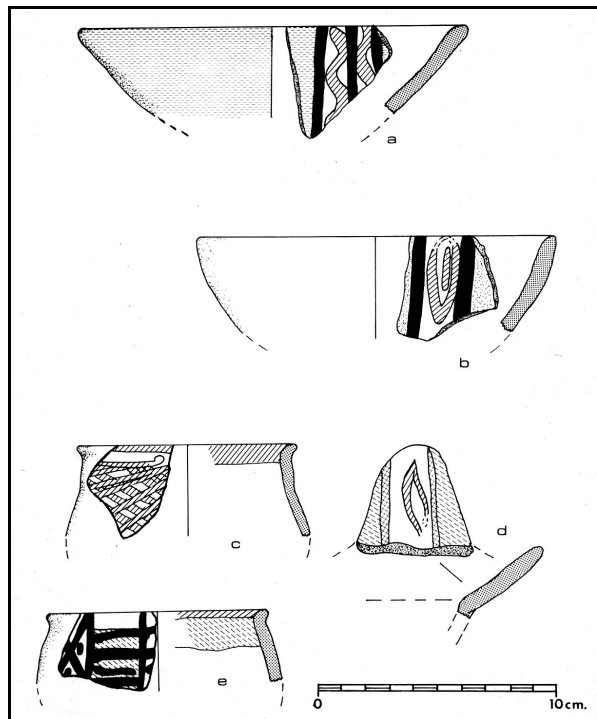


Figure 3: LIP Waywaka style (Rowe 1956) or Chanka Phase (Bauer *et al.* 2010:176-177) sherds from the surface of Muyuq Pata.

The site of Muyuq Pata and evidence of associations

From the air, Muyuq Pata is a large tear-shaped area covering approximately three acres, on a ridge immediately above and to the north

of the modern town of San Jerónimo (13°38' 34.42"S, 73°22'1.71"W). It is also locally referred to as Chacra Zuñiga, because the entire site is under cultivation and is presently the home of a farmer, Sr. Zuñiga. The surface of the site, coinciding with the modern plow zone (c. 10-12 centimeters deep), is covered with a thin, heavily mixed stratum of refuse. Although badly broken, much of this surface pottery coincides stylistically with Waywaka ceramics and is also the same as Chanka Phase pottery (Bauer *et al.* 2010:176-177). Both designations can be placed somewhere within the Late Intermediate Period (Figure 3).

Muyuq Pata was also the site of earlier occupations. A modern embankment cut on the eastern side of the crest exposed nearly a meter of subsurface refuse, or midden. In the center of the site there is a large rectangular compound, heavily overgrown with bushes and weeds. The walls of the platform or compound were constructed of two rows of uncut fieldstones which presently rise approximately twenty to thirty centimeters above the surface. The small amount of wall debris in the vicinity suggests that the double-element field stones represent the remains of a foundation that may have been topped with adobe walls in antiquity.



Figure 4: View of surface of Muyuq Pata showing assistant collecting sherds at offering pit.

The pottery cache was found in and alongside a hole on the northern edge of the rectangular building foundation (Figures 2, 4). It was a freshly opened shallow pit which extended from the surface to a depth of fifty centimeters. The pit was irregular in shape and slightly wider at the bottom than at the opening. When my field assistant, Roque Lizunde Cordova, and I arrived, the soil was damp and Sr. Zuñiga was in the process of turning this portion of the site with a hand hoe. We asked Sr. Zuñiga about the pit and he explained that he came across it while turning over the soil the day before. The condition of the soil and the soil cuts around the edge of the pit or cavity supported his assertion. Fresh blade marks were clearly visible at the edge of the pit (Figure 2).

Large sherds of several vessels were piled at the edge of the cavity and some could still be found inside it. The sherds both in the pit and at the edge are similar and represent a unit of contemporaneity. Examination of the sherd edges at the site revealed that the pottery had been broken in antiquity and not recently by Sr. Zuñiga's cultivation.

At the edge of the pit was a large fragment of an undecorated neckless olla (about half the original vessel) that was charred on the inside. Resting in the large sherd were several large (10-15 centimeter) nodules of completely carbonized maize kernels, tightly packed together in a solid mass, which amounted to several hundred grams of carbon. The corn sample yielded a radiocarbon determination of 600 +/- 50 years BP (uncalibrated), or the fourteenth century A.D. (UCLA 1808H). It is published here for the first time. Both the stylistic characteristics of the pottery and this fourteenth century determination identify the pit and its contents as being very late in the Late Intermediate Period.

The Offering Pit Contents

The pit contained the broken remains of four large vessels designated vessels 1 through 4 (Figures 5-10). Three of these vessels are partially complete, large, decorated, necked jars. The fourth vessel is a large neckless olla without surface decoration. The three large jars share common features of form, decoration, and technology and are closely related in style. Each of the jars shows a fragile, granular, friable paste that nearly crumbled when handled. I found it impossible to extensively reconstruct any of the sherds into whole vessel forms. As soon as two large sherds were glued together, their combined weight would cause the partially reconstructed vessel to break at some other point. As a consequence, it was only possible to illustrate the more complete upper portions of each jar.



Figure 5: Vessels 1-3, large jar neck fragments recovered from the edge and inside of offering pit.

In most sections, the large jar fragments show a uniformly light tan to light brick-red cross section. At other points, however, some of the sherds are light gray in color, indicating that the vessels were poorly fired in a non-uniform atmosphere. Some parts of the vessel are oxidized and others are not. Each of the jar fragments shows a characteristic, ten to thirty percent density of small irregular (1-1.5 mm.) white quartzite-like inclusions. Each of the jars is decorated with thin watery slip which varied in color depending on the density of each application. These slip colors include a thin rust-red, a thin dark purple, and a uniformly thicker off-white or light cream slip.

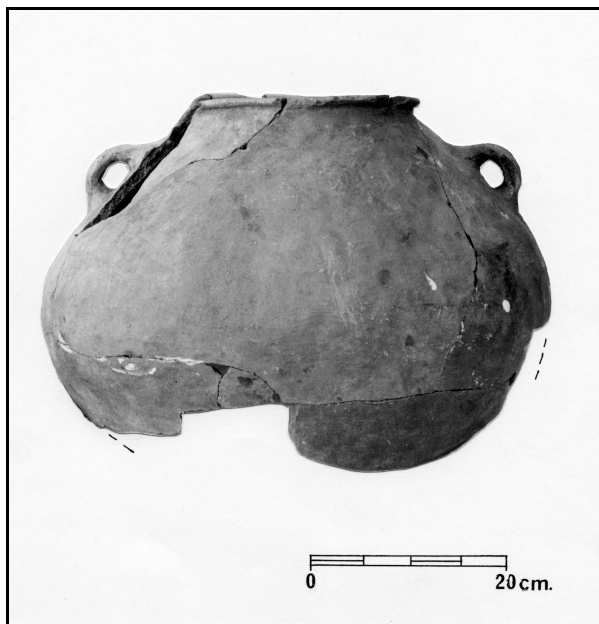


Figure 6: Vessel 4, side view of partially restored olla. Fragments were found both in, and at the edge of, the offering pit.

The three large jars are similar in form. The necks have straight or slightly convex sides with flaring rims. The necks are as high, or slightly higher, than they are wide. The degree of flair varies for each jar. Two of the rims flare outward in a downward curve. The lips are uni-

formly rounded and without any internal or external thinning at the edge.

Each of the vessels has a similar decoration on the top and inside of the rim. Irregular vertical lines extend from the outer lower edge of the lip across the top of the rim to a depth of 1 to 1.5 centimeters below the lip on the inside of the neck. On two of the jars, these vertical lip lines are painted over a thin horizontal band of red background slip extending around the inside of the rim (Figures 5, 7, 8). The third jar lacks this band (Figure 5, 9), and the vertical rim lines are simply applied onto the unslipped clay surface.

Two of the jars have vertical strap handles applied to the center of the neck. They are similar in size, proportion, and placement to Inca style strap handles. However, in contrast to the Inca handles, the Muyuq Pata cross sections are convex-concave instead of being flat or slightly convex-convex. In addition, the Muyuq Pata handles are rounded at the edge instead of squared off or angled, as was the custom among Inca potters.

Instead of handles, the Vessel 1 neck (Figures 5, 7) has two of what must have been three nubs just below the midpoint of the neck. These nubs divide the neck into three sections which are in turn decorated with three vertical design panels in the spaces between the nubs.

Beyond these common features, the three jars have distinct design compositions. However, while the actual compositions vary, all three of the designs show a seemingly careless application of the slips. The juncture of distinct colors of slip, or wash, are irregular and often separated by a space, or are sometimes overlapping. The designs consist of straight and curvilinear lines, which follow the same rules of composition, with an apparent lack of concern for detail.

All of the offering-pit vessels are much larger than the size of the other Late Intermediate Period Waywaka style (Rowe 1956:143; Grossman 1972:133, 1983:74) or Chanka Phase (Bauer *et al.* 2010) sherds commonly found at LIP sites such as the surface midden at the site of Waywaka (Ap2-2; PAA72) and at the surface of Muyuq Pata itself; (Figure 3). The neck diameters of each vary from fourteen to seventeen centimeters, indicating that the original vessels may have been as tall as seventy centimeters, or perhaps even taller. While it is not possible to reconstruct their overall shape, fragments indicate that at least two of the jars had rounded conical bases and probably oval bodies.

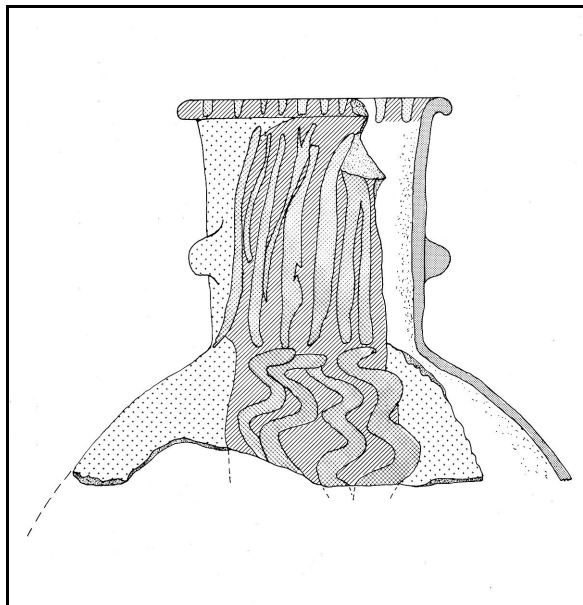


Figure 7: Vessel 1, necked jar.

Vessel 1, Necked jar fragment (Figures 5, 7)

This vessel has three vertical design panels which extend down from the rim and over the shoulder of the jar. The three panels of thin red slip are applied over, and separated by, undecorated zones of equally wide and thick off-white background slip. On the neck portions of the red design, panels are filled with slightly

undulating vertical purple lines which join and overlap at irregular points. These vertical lines stop at the juncture of the neck and the shoulder. Here the red panel is slipped with four distinct and slightly wider purple lines. These shoulder lines are applied in parallel rows in a series of zig-zag curves. Again their application was done with apparently little concern for the limits of the panel. One of the lines overlaps onto the white background covering the majority of the jar surface.

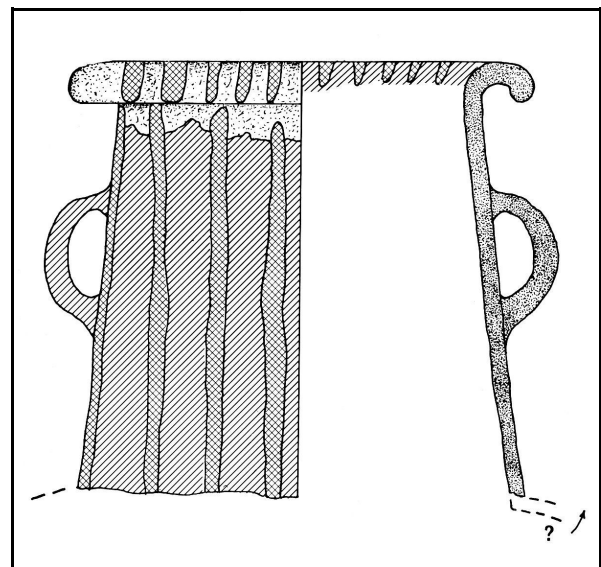


Figure 8: Vessel 2, necked jar.

Vessel 2, necked jar fragment (Figures 5, 8)

This neck fragment lacked the thick background off-white slip of the first jar and showed only vertical design panels applied to the unslipped surface. Within each of these design panels were wavy vertical purple lines (0.5 centimeters wide) spaced 1.3 to 1.5 centimeters apart. Only a relatively small neck portion of the jar fragment was recovered and it is not clear how many panels were originally present or how far they extended down onto the body of the jar.

Vessel 3, necked jar fragment (Figures 5, 9)

Like vessel No. 1, this jar fragment has a background slip of thick off-white or cream applied over the entire surface of the neck. Over this are a series of wavy, roughly parallel lines which are similar to those on the shoulder portion of vessel 1.

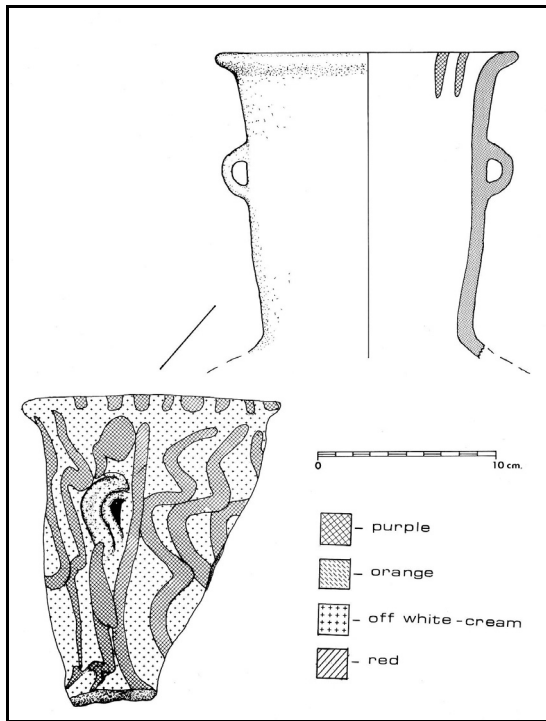


Figure 9: vessel 3, necked jar.

Vessel 4, complete olla (Figures 5, 10)

In terms of technical features the large olla can be contrasted with the three jars. It measures 21.6 centimeters on the outside of the lip and has a diameter of 51 centimeters at its widest point. The rim flares outward to form a slightly angled horizontal lip. The lip tapers abruptly to form a sharp edge. The olla lacks any decoration and appears to have been smoothed over while leather hard, because no burnishing marks are apparent. The olla is a light brick-red color and is harder and stronger than the three jars. Its hardness and color suggest that it was better fired and more oxidized than the jars.

While it is contemporary with the jars, technical contrasts suggest that the olla came from an altogether different source.

The base of the olla is slightly conical. The sides are nearly straight below the lip and curved gently below the midpoint to form a smooth curve with the shoulder. Two large 2.0 centimeter thick and 4.5 centimeter wide strap handles oppose each other on the straight upper portions above the shoulder. Like the jar handles, a cross section is convex-concave with rounded edges.

Discussion

Several lines of evidence suggest that these four large vessels represent a religious or ritual offering. This interpretation is based on correlations between ancient and more modern examples of religious offerings in the Andes and the association of charred corn with the pottery.

In the first place, the four vessels are all large and show evidence of burning before burial. Offerings of oversized vessels with indications of burning are significant features of the Middle Horizon Wari around the eighth or ninth centuries A.D.

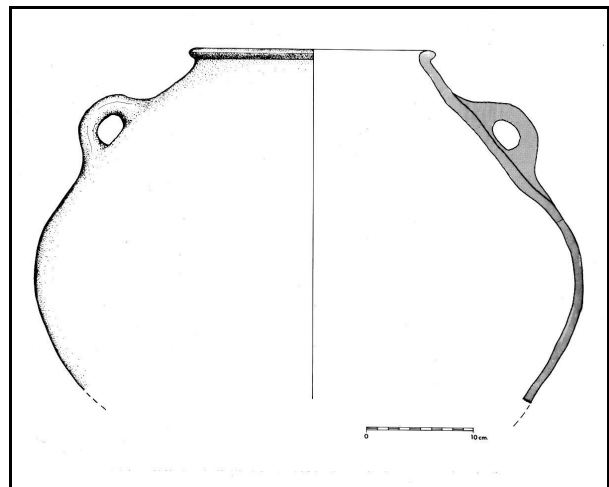


Figure 10: Vessel 4, neckless olla.

Both on the coast and in the highlands, large deposits of elaborately made elite vessels have been encountered. Broken fragments of over-sized and smashed jars indicate that they are the remains of offering ceremonies (Cook 1987, 2001; Cook and Glowacki 2003; Glowacki 2012; Menzel 1968:49-52). During the Middle Horizon, the practice of making offerings was apparently restricted to members of Huari society holding high positions in the social structure (Menzel 1968:90-92). Glowacki observes that the oversized vessels from Middle Horizon contexts were manufactured for “immediate and short term ritual purposes” (Glowacki 2012: 146), a practice that appears to be replicated by the Muyuq Pata find, and that the ceramic smashing tradition “continued to the late phase of the Wari period.” (*ibid.*:153). Although the Muyuq Pata examples lacked either face-neck or elaborate human or mythical depictions, their friability does suggest that they had been specifically manufactured for ritual purposes. In addition, both their stylistic characteristics and radiocarbon determination suggest that the offering tradition of shattered ceramics was not limited in time to the Middle Horizon.

While the Muyu Pata deposit or cache is clearly too small and not fancy enough to be classified as an elite offering, it most likely reflects a continuation of a Middle Horizon religious practice into the Late Intermediate Period. In addition, the probably ceremonial function of the offering pit and its contents is indicated by the similarity in appearance of the charred corn to what is described in ethnohistorical accounts as a special kind of ritual corn offering made in the highlands. The charred corn in the Muyuq Pata offering was preserved as large agglutinated nodules of whole kernels. It was not ground. Neither does it seem to have been burned as a soup or broth. A broth would have left a lens or flat layered deposit, not large globular chunks. Because of this, the Muyuq Pata charred corn seems to conform to

early sixteenth century descriptions of a special maize preparation called *sancu* used only in ritual contexts, often specifically offering deposits.

Sancu is variously described as a corn pudding, porridge, or ball of unground or coarsely ground maize (Arriaga 1968 [1621]:46; Molina 1973 [1570-1584]:24). In his description of Inca rituals, Cristobal de Molina related how the high priest of Inca Cuzco made offerings of *sancu* during the festival of *Situa* in August to bless the llama herds and to ward off evil and sickness (*ibid.*). In addition to its association with official Inca religious ceremonies, *sancu* was also used in the provinces by non-elite members of Inca society for more humble individual and household offering ceremonies (Arriaga 1968 [1621]: 46; Molina 1973 [1570-1584]:25). While the Muyuq Pata deposit was in all probability neither an Inca, nor an elite offering, it may represent a small community or household ceremonial offering.

This interpretation based on ethnohistorical sources receives some support from the observations of ethnographer, William Mitchell, who has worked with the inhabitants of Quinua, a town in Ayacucho approximately one hundred kilometers north of Andahuaylas). I described the Muyuq Pata find and its associated corn, and showed Mitchell photographs of both the small pit and its contents. I asked him if it looked like anything he had seen in Quinua. His reaction was immediate and definite: “Ah!” he said, “that’s a *pagapu*” (from the Spanish word *pagar*, to pay). “. . . one has to give a *pagapu* to the mountain spirit *Urqu tayacha* whenever one disturbs the soil” (Mitchell, personal communication, 1971; see also Mitchell 1991:132-133).

While the Muyuq Pata deposit may not have been an offering to *Urqu tayache*, its similarity to both past and modern offerings suggests that it too represents a ceremonial or ritual deposit.

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