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PAÑAMARCA COLLECTIONS STORAGE MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Stahl Field Report

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Funding from the Stahl Endowment of the Archaeological Research Facility at the University of California, Berkeley is making possible the essential work of managing the archaeological collections from the ancient Moche (ca. 200–850 CE) site of Pañamarca on the north coast of Peru. The physical management and maintenance of these materials, their packaging, and shelving within the Museo Regional “Max Uhle” at the site of Cerro Sechín, outside of Casma, Peru, is essential to preservation of the site’s material culture, and will be a necessary step in the next phase of research.

Art and Archaeology at Pañamarca

The excavated materials from Pañamarca were recovered from the excavations of painted architecture within the monumental core of the religious center. These excavations were designed to document polychrome mural paintings of Moche mythology and scenes of religious performances and presentations. That work began with locating the remains of mural paintings first uncovered by archaeologists between 1934 and 1976. From there, the project proceeded to discover additional areas within the site’s adobe architecture where walls and pillars were painted—sometimes up to eight different times—with figural imagery of myth, ceremony, and martial culture that had not been seen in more than a millennium since they were buried. This field research and the visual documentation that followed have significantly expanded the corpus of Moche mural painting at Pañamarca. At the same time, this work has produced a corpus of contextual data on architectural sequences, archaeological depositions, and associated artifacts found within the spaces of the painted buildings. The field project’s architectural and mural painting findings have recently appeared in the volume *The Archaeology of Mural Painting at Pañamarca, Peru* (2017). A selection of the newly discovered paintings was featured in an [article](#) in the October/November 2017 issue of *Archaeology* magazine. Although the corpus of mural paintings and architectural drawings has now been published in full, in-depth analysis of the collections of ceramics, lithics, metals, and organic materials remains for a subsequent phase of research.

Prior Stahl-Supported Research

A previous grant from the Stahl Endowment in 2014 supported the carbon dating of twelve samples of organic materials exported to the United States from the Pañamarca excavations. The AMS dating was conducted at the Center for Accelerator Mass Spectrometry at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Four of the twelve samples were dated twice for quality control, yielding a total of sixteen new radiocarbon dates from the architectural core of the site. The dating of those materials revealed that extraordinary painted, pillared architecture at Pañamarca was constructed around 650 CE with three major renovations and multiple re-paintings between then and the end of the eighth century. Subsequent dates from the late eighth to early thirteenth century came from botanical remains left with overturned vessels, and from other contexts that suggest long-lasting patterns of visitors and offerings at the site. An earlier,

mid-sixth-century date of a basketry shield with textiles and feathers was somewhat surprising, given the artifact's discovery within an architectural context that we believe to be part of the site's eighth-century construction. We suspect that the small shield, which showed no physical evidence of having been used in battle, had been kept—or even curated—for several generations before it was deposited in a painted niche prior to the temple's closure and renovation. These dates have allowed us to begin to build the first absolute chronology for Pañamarca and for the Moche presence in the Nepeña Valley.

Future Research

Further research at Pañamarca is now in the planning stages. Future objectives include thorough analysis and seriation of ceramic sherds discovered in the earlier excavations, in light of recent excavations elsewhere in the Nepeña Valley and the new absolute dating of the site. The collection management project funded by the Stahl Endowment in 2017 will greatly facilitate this subsequent phase of field research. The major task that we face now is putting the ca. 550–1200 CE chronology from Pañamarca, which is most reliable for 650–800 CE, into a longer-term chronology for the region of the Nepeña Valley. Because of the great strengths of archaeological research focused on the Formative Period (also known as Early Horizon to Initial Period) sites in the valley, conducted recently by Koichiro Shibata, David Chicoine, Hugo Ikehara, and others, there are already well-formed local chronologies for that earlier period of 1500–150 BCE. But the period from 150 BCE to 600 CE has not been documented with radiocarbon. The major transformations from Final Formative to Moche times in the valley are poorly understood. Future research in the area will include targeted test pits and full-coverage pedestrian survey in order to recover cultural materials and record relative sequencing for this lacuna in the existing chronologies. With that future work, we hope to address the questions of when and how Moche culture arrived in the Nepeña Valley from the north, how Moche interacted with earlier traditions of Salinar and Gallinazo as well as contemporaneous Recuay groups from the middle and upper valley, and how the vivid Moche presence in the painted architecture at Pañamarca came to be.



Figure 1. Arrangement of the Pañamarca collections in the Museo Sechín



Figure 2. Archaeologist and painter Pedro Neciosup illustrates one of the painted pillars at Pañamarca



Figure 3. Detail of the Moche priestess discovered painted on a pillar dated to ca 650 CE at Pañamarca