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Transformations of Society and Power in Ancient Nasca

Christina A. Conlee

During the several millennia of cultural development in the Nasca region there were many transformations in society that were tied to changes in the foundations, structures, and relationships of power. From semi-sedentary hunters and gatherers of the Archaic to the incorporation of the region into the Inca empire, this paper explores changing aspects of ancient society over a period of five thousand years. Much of this information comes from a long-term research project at the ancient settlement of La Tiza in the southern Nasca drainage.

The Site of La Tiza

La Tiza is located near the convergence of the Aja and Tierras Blancas valleys in the middle Nasca Valley (Figure 1). The settlement is situated on a hillside on the Aja river side of the valley in an area with good amounts of arable land with fertile alluvial soil. There is also good access to water in this part of the valley, and within the southern drainage, the Aja tributary has the greatest annual discharge of water (ONERN 1971; Schreiber and Lancho 2003:25). However, as with other rivers in the south, there is generally no surface water between the months of May and December in the middle valley (ca. 400-1000 m asl) where most of the good agricultural land is located (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:31). There is year-round subsurface water that people were able to utilize during the dry season by digging wells and building aqueducts. Near La Tiza the underground water is closer to surface (ca. 4m) than in many areas of southern Nasca so it would have been easier to access (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:94). There were also probably aspects of sacred geography that led to the establishment of a settlement in this particular location since Cerro Blanco, a distinctive white sand mountain, and the most important mountain deity in Nasca (Acosta 1962; Reinhard 1988), sits across the valley from the site.

Research began at La Tiza in 2002 when the site was mapped and 30 hectares of architecture was recorded. Subsequent excavations in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2009 revealed it to be a multi-component site with the earliest habitation extending back into the Archaic with occupation spanning several thousand years until the Inca conquest of the region (Table 1). The nature of the settlement during each of the major periods in which it was occupied will be discussed in the following sections and the history of the site will be tied in with broader regional developments.
Figure 1 Map of the Nasca drainage with the site of La Tiza.
## Radiocarbon dates from La Tiza.

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Table 1
Archaic

The earliest occupations of La Tiza were during the Middle (6000-3000 BC) and Late Archaic (3000-1800 BC). During this period there are indications that the region experienced increased aridity after the early and mid-Holocene when conditions were more humid (Eitel and Mächtle 2009:23). People began to settle in areas along the rivers where there was more reliable water. As discussed above, La Tiza is situated in a particularly good location to take advantage of water and other resources. The Archaic occupation was concentrated in the eastern area of the settlement in the lowest elevations of Sectors I and II (Figure 2). The earliest date is around 3600 BC in a deflated area inside of a large square structure that was mostly constructed in later periods (Units 50, 52, and 53). In this Middle Archaic area there were no ceramics and the contents included ash, charcoal, shell beads, obsidian, ground stone, shell, a corn cob, unidentified botanical material, and unidentified animal bone (Figure 3). There was also one small cotton textile fragment. In Unit 52 a hearth was dug into the sterile soil and consisted of a semi-circle of fire cracked rocks with charcoal and burnt bone in the interior and a piece of ground stone similar to a mano. Twelve pieces of obsidian from Unit 50 were analyzed using x-ray fluorescence (XRF) in order to determine the source from which they were obtained. All of the pieces were sourced to Quispisisa, which is the closest obsidian source from the Aja Valley with a straight line distance of 85.7 km (Eerkens et al. 2010: Table 2). The small corn cob in Unit 50 was identified as Confite Chavineneese, which is one of five early or primitive races of maize in the Andes and is a popcorn (Grobman et al. 1961:138). The earliest corn recorded in the coastal Andes comes from the sites of Paredones and Huaca Prieta on the north coast of Peru and has Middle Archaic dates (ca. 6700 BP) (Grobman et al. 2012). The context the corn was found in at La Tiza was not in a feature but from the top of the Middle Archaic level, which may have had some mixing.

Late Archaic dates come from the bottom levels of two structures (Unit 49 and 51) that are just to the west of the Middle Archaic contexts and range from 2580-2300 BC. The material in these contexts is similar to that found in the Middle Archaic ones with the addition of chalcedony lithic material although there was quite of bit of mixing since this area was occupied by later Nasca culture and Late Intermediate Period people. There is no clear evidence of change in local society during the Late Archaic although there is currently not enough data to sufficiently evaluate. In other coastal areas of Peru people intensified fishing and cotton growing by the end of the Middle Archaic (Stothert and Quilter 1991:41). In Nasca, by the end of the Late Archaic there was probably more of a focus on plant cultivation. It is likely there was sporadic occupation of the eastern area of the settlement by hunters and gatherers throughout the Archaic.

The Archaic occupation at La Tiza is similar to that found at other interior sites in Nasca such as Pernil Alto, La Esmerelda, and Upanca (Isla 1990; Reindel 2009; Vaughn and Linares 2006). Foraging groups were hunting various animals and collecting plant remains. Tools included ground stone for processing plants, and lithic artifacts that were used for hunting and processing food. Obsidian was obtained from the Quispisisa source in Ayacucho possibly as part of a seasonal round or from trade with groups in the higher elevations of the drainage. Shell beads
Figure 2 Map with the Archaic units excavated at La Tiza.
were used for ornamentation. There is possible evidence for cultigens such as cotton and corn. The people at La Tiza may have been semi-sedentary, occupying the settlement for part of the year and moving to the coast, lomas, and highlands during other times. However, the extent of their mobility and the size of territory that they covered are unknown. During the Archaic it is possible that people came together at certain times of the year for ritual and social activities at places such as Cahuachi. People in the Nasca region practiced Archaic ways of life longer than in other areas of the Peruvian coast probably because of the greater distances between resource zones and the overall sparse nature of the resources. Little can be said about the development of power relations during this time period.

**Formative**

There are no indications of occupation in the southern Nasca drainage or at La Tiza in the following Initial Period (1800-800 BC) although habitation of this time has been documented in the northern drainage (Reindel 2009:444). The first large and widespread occupation to be found throughout the Nasca drainage was during the Early Horizon (800 BC-AD 1). In the north, there is evidence for occupation from early in the period with a dramatic increase in population by the end. In the south, there does not appear to have been significant occupation until Epoch 8, which begins around 400 BC (Schreiber and Lancho 2003: 13). Some researchers such as Van Gijsegem and Vaughn (2008:115) use the term Formative for this period before the florescence of the Nasca culture because the region was outside of the Chavin area of influence, which is how the Early Horizon has traditionally been defined. That precedent is followed here. There is no evidence for
Early or Middle Formative at La Tiza as there is at sites in the north. Occupation begins in the Late Formative, a period called Late Paracas (370-200 BC) and Initial Nasca (120 BC-AD 90) in the north (Reindel 2009), and Puntilla (400-200 BC) and Montana (200 BC-AD 1) in the south (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:13-14).

The first substantial and permanent habitation at La Tiza dates 370 BC to AD 75 when the first farmers lived at the settlement. The site is not situated defensively like many others of the time; however, piles of sling-stones are located on the ridge overlooking Sector I where the majority of the Late Formative architecture is found (Figure 4). In this sector there is agglutinated compound architecture constructed of angular fieldstone without mortar and perishable material for the roofs and parts of the walls. There is a series of free-standing round storage structures located along the base of the ridge next to the domestic structures. Adjacent to the Late Formative compound architecture to the south are two plazas that may have first been used in this period. In Sector II to the west the architecture is more variable and consists of both compound areas and free standing round patio groups.

During the Late Formative La Tiza people were growing most of the crops they would continue to farm throughout prehistory. Besides farming, people also kept camelids and guinea pigs at or near the site as well as procured wild resources such as deer, bird, and shellfish. They were manufacturing and using a variety of goods such as pottery, textiles, and lithic tools. They obtained obsidian through long distance trade with all but one of the sampled obsidian artifacts (n=16) coming from Quispisísa. One point fragment was identified from Jampatilla, which after Quispisísa is the next closest source to Nasca, although it is a relatively minor one. The people of this period also participated in regional trade involving marine resources and pottery.

There was a variety of ceramic styles in use at La Tiza during the Late Formative including Paracas fineware, plainwares that were produced locally, Tajo plain and incised, and Nasca 1 (Figure 5). There is evidence of social differentiation with the Paracas finewares restricted to Sector II, although they were found in very small numbers. Compositional analysis using Instrumental Neutron Activation (INAA) on a small sample of 28 sherds identified three compositional groups. The most common was the Group 1 Macro, which comprised 64% of the sample (n=18). This group is described as representing the compositional variability of clay resources from southern Nasca and can be considered local from a regional perspective (Boulanger and Glascock 2008). This group contains a variety of pottery types including Tajo decorated, Tajo plainware, Ocucaje 8 red-slipped, and Nasca 1 red slipped bowls. Sherds classified as outliers or unassigned make up the second most common category, and consist of 22% of the assemblage (n=6). This group also includes a variety of types including Paracas fineware, an Ocucaje red-slipped vessel, Tajo decorated sherds, and a Nasca 1 red-slipped bowl. These are vessels that were likely produced outside of the southern Nasca region or come from unidentified sources. The third most common group was Group 1 (n=4) at 14%, which has been identified by previous research as possibly coming from a clay source near Cahuachi (Vaughn and Neff 2004; Vaughn et al. 2006). This group also contained a variety of types including an Ocucaje 8 red slipped vessel, an unidentified Late Formative sherd, a Nasca 1 bowl, and an incised Tajo sherd.
Figure 4 Map with the Late Formative units excavated at La Tiza.
During the Late Formative the foundations were laid for the large, complex regional culture that flourished during the ensuing Early Intermediate Period. This was a transformative time when there was a continuation of older traditions, along with new innovations, and waves of people settling the region. The site of Cahuachi appears to have had a ceremonial function by the time Nasca I ceramics were being produced in the Late Formative (Silverman and Proulx 2002:164; Vaughn and Van Gijseghem 2007:816). There was a variety of communities that were established during this time with relatively small sites such as La Tiza and larger ones such as La Puntilla that was located just across the valley and had more evidence of social differentiation (Van Gijseghem 2006).

It has been proposed that Nasca society was born from the frontier process that allowed for experimentation, innovation, and perhaps dissent (Van Gijseghem 2006:439). When colonization was complete and population had increased, negotiation and cooperation was needed, and it was out of this scenario that the Nasca regional culture developed. There is certainly evidence for this at La Tiza where there was social differentiation between Sector I and Sector II, and evidence of conflict or threat of conflict in the piles of sling-stones found on the ridge separating these sectors. Paracas textiles and pottery of the Early Horizon were decorated with images that would become integral to Nasca ideology. This religion was brought to the area by immigrants and then reformed to become the religion that would be centered in the area for several hundred years to come. The Late Formative did not see the development of really powerful leaders or large centers. However, the social and political milieu of this period was complex and created the opportunity for hierarchical and centralized political forms to develop.

**Nasca Culture**

Interpretations of the subsequent Nasca culture (AD 100-650) vary greatly in terms of level of integration and type of sociopolitical organization, and it has been described as a heterarchy, middle-range society, simple chiefdom, theocracy, confederacy, paramount chiefdom, state, and
empire (Carmichael 1995; Isla and Reindel 2006; Massey 1986; Orefici 2011a,b; Reindel 2009; Rowe 1960; Schreiber 1999; Schreiber and Lancho 2003; Silverman 1993; Silverman and Proulx 2002; Vaughn 2009). There are differences in how archaeologists who work in the north versus south have viewed political complexity and power relations during this period. The south during Early Nasca has been depicted as populated primarily by small villages located in the upper valleys where water was available (Schreiber 1999; Schreiber and Lancho 2003, Silverman 1993; Silverman and Proulx 2002; Vaughn 2009; Vaughn and Linares 2006). These villages are described as self-sufficient, with some evidence of social differentiation, and integrated through the ceremonial center of Cahuachi, and a shared religious tradition. The assessment of sociopolitical organization from the south has generally been that Nasca was a chiefdom or other type of “middle-range society.” This is in contrast to the north where researchers have recorded a hierarchy of sites with hamlets, small villages, and centers with civic-ceremonial functions (Browne 1992; Isla and Reindel 2006; Reindel 2009). The archaeologists who work in this area conclude that Nasca was more complex and stratified. Scholars whose research is focused at Cahuachi (Orefici 2011a,b; Strong, 1957), with the exception of Silverman (1993), propose Nasca was more likely a state level society.

The Nasca culture occupation of La Tiza began in Early Nasca and extended through Middle Nasca. Much of what initially appeared to be cemetery was found to be domestic and ritual areas, and the size of the Nasca settlement is at least three times what was initially thought before it was excavated (Conlee 2014). In Early Nasca, the site grew in size from the Late Formative and included areas of Sectors II, III, and V totaling over 8 hectares (Figure 6). Radiocarbon dates place the occupation at AD 80-550. The majority of the Early Nasca pottery is Nasca 3 and 4, and the two phases are found together in most contexts suggesting that they are contemporary. The Middle Nasca pottery is in the Nasca 5 style and is associated with burial and ritual areas and often mixed with the Early Nasca pottery. Architecture of this period was different than during the Late Formative. People in both eras used agglutinated compounds but the Nasca architecture was more regular, and there was use of cut or shaped stone in addition to natural fieldstone, and the first use of double coursed walls. There is also a greater deal of architectural diversity with different types of architecture in different sectors of the site.

Subsistence evidence indicates a continuation of practices from the Late Formative with farming the central part of the economy. Botanical remains from Nasca contexts include corn (Zea mays), lima bean (Phaseolus lunatus), peanut (Arachis hypogaea), pacay (Inga Feuillei), yucca (Manihot esculenta), guava (Psidium guajaba), sweet potato (Ipomoea batatas), squashes (Cucurbita maxima, Cucurbita moschata), huarango (Prosopis sp.), and industrial plants such as cotton (Gossypium barbadense), gourds (Langenaria sicaria), and reeds (Phragmites communis). Carbon and nitrogen isotopic analysis of enamel and bone carbonate on all of the excavated burials at La Tiza found that C4 plants, maize being the most prevalent, made up the majority of the food sources of people living at the site (Buzon et al. 2011, 2012). Farming was supplemented by the use of domestic animals primarily camelids and guinea pigs with the continued consumption of shellfish.
Figure 6 Map with the Nasca culture units excavated at La Tiza.
Given the size of the settlement during Early Nasca, irrigation agriculture would have been necessary to farm the area and support the population. Because of La Tiza’s location in the middle valley, there would not have been year round water on the surface and a means of obtaining subterranean water would have been essential. Previous research has established that a system of horizontal aqueducts called puquios was constructed by Nasca people to bring the year-round subterranean water supply to the surface (Schreiber and Lancho 2003). Subterranean water is relatively close to the surface in this part of the valley and the nearby Orcona puquio is one of the shallowest in the region at four meters below the river bed at its upper reach (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:94). Wells and surface canals were likely used for irrigation but canals would have been short because of the low volume of water (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:32). It is also possible that the Orcona puquio was first built in Early Nasca by people at La Tiza in order to intensify agricultural production.

During Early Nasca people continued to use, manufacture, and trade various goods. Ceramics changed dramatically with a switch to polychromes and elaborate iconography. Ceramics were being produced more centrally by skilled artisans who were probably based at Cahuachi. The polychromes were the dominant type of pottery at all sites, including small villages that were quite a distance from Cahuachi. At La Tiza 53% of the pottery assemblage consisted of finewares (Noell 2014). There were different types of high status pottery including headjars (n=4), cup bowls (n=5), stirrup spout vessels (n=1) and miniatures (n=4) all in greater numbers than found at other village sites in the south (Figure 7). INAA analysis on a small sample of Nasca sherds (n=28) assigned 46% to Group 1, which was previously identified as the clay source used in much of the Nasca polychromes, and associated with a source near Cahuachi (Vaughn et al. 2006; Vaughn and Neff 2004). An additional 25% were from Group 1 Macro that is considered local from a regional perspective and related to Group 1. All of the polychromes were assigned to Group 1 or Group 1 Macro.

There is evidence of textile manufacturing in the form of textile fragments, spindle whorls, and bone tools that were likely used in weaving. Although the sample of textiles from this period is small, it demonstrates that people at La Tiza made cloth of cotton and camelid fiber, and that some of the camelid fiber was dyed. The Nasca examples were typical of the overall assemblage from the site with cotton warp-faced plain weave the most common textile type, and with yarns overwhelmingly Z spun and S plied (Mills and Conlee 2014). Lithic tools continued to be made of the same materials as they were in the Late Formative with the majority manufactured from obsidian. Overall, there is a greater amount of obsidian found in the Nasca units than in earlier ones indicating long-distance trade of obsidian increased. Of the obsidian samples analyzed by XRF from this period (n=55), one biface came from the minor Potreropampa source 70 km farther than Quispisipa, and the rest were from Quispisipa (Eerkens et al. 2010). There was less bipolar reduction, a technique used when there is an intensive reuse of material, indicating that there was likely more access to the material in this period than the Late Formative (Johnson 2009:57-58). The presence of shellfish and fish at the site suggests there was trade with coastal populations or the frequent direct procurement of these items.
In addition to the use of La Tiza as a domestic settlement, the site was an important burial and ritual location during Early and Middle Nasca. There are burials contemporary with the Nasca 3 and 4 domestic areas, such as a child from Unit 46 (Burial 8) who was buried in a seated and flexed position with a fragment of a large polychrome vessel. This is a common burial style for the period. There are no public ritual spaces that date to Early Nasca although there is evidence for household level rituals evidenced by the presence of paired offering deposits in house foundations and panpipes in domestic contexts. Ritual locations were found associated with the site in the form of nearby geoglyphs. There are a series of straight line geoglyphs just past the eastern boundary of the site. A line center has also been recorded further east of the settlement (Johnson et al. 2002: figure 10.3) In addition, a very large trapezoid is clearly visible across the

Figure 7 High status Nasca culture pottery from La Tiza; a) fragment of a head jar; b) cup bowl; c) head jar from headless burial.
valley to the south on an alluvial fan just above the Tierras Blancas river.

There is a Middle Nasca component associated with Nasca 5 pottery that is primarily found with burials but there are no documented Middle Nasca domestic areas (Figure 8). The highest percentage of fine ware at the site was in Unit 8 (81%), where a decapitated body was buried in a circular stone lined tomb with a Nasca 5 headjar (Conlee 2007). The individual was male aged 22-29 years and strontium and oxygen isotopic analysis indicates he was from the local region, and his head was likely made into a trophy head although no trophy heads have been found at the site (Conlee et al. 2009). Adjacent down slope was another tomb of similar size, shape, and construction, which had been looted. Only the feet of the body buried in the tomb were intact but other bone was scattered throughout the structure. It was estimated that the individual was 18-22 years old and possibly female (Buzon et al. 2012). Because of the similarity in ceramics, and tomb types, the two burials were likely contemporary.

Excavations further down the slope revealed that the tombs were placed on an artificial terrace, and that there was probably a ramp leading up to them. Two enormous intact ceramic vessels were found that appear to have been placed when the ramp and terrace were constructed. Paired offerings are found in other Nasca culture contexts at the site and are interpreted as dedicatory offerings. It is probable this was an area where rituals continued after the initial interments. In addition to the ritual area associated with these burials, there are two plazas in the lower elevation of Sector I that appear to date to Middle Nasca. No excavations were conducted in the plazas but the pottery found in

![Image](Figure 8 Two Middle Nasca tombs found in Sector II: top Unit 8 with decapitated body; bottom Unit 55 with intact feet.)
looters pits and on the surface was primarily Nasca 5. Inspection of the looters pits revealed that the plaza areas contained quite a bit of material including ash and organics. This suggests these spaces were the foci of frequent and continued activity.

There are several lines of evidence from La Tiza that have implications for the nature of integration and sociopolitical complexity of the Nasca culture. One of the most striking is that the Early Nasca occupation of La Tiza spread over at least 8 ha, making it larger than other contemporary habitation sites recorded in the south. It contrasts with other southern sites such as Marcaya (1 ha), Upanca (5 ha.) and Uchuchuma (2 ha) that are considered villages (Vaughn 2009; Vaughn and Linares 2006). La Tiza was a different kind of settlement and could be considered a town during this period. The large size of La Tiza and the presence of a different type of architecture, and greater amount of high status pottery, indicate the settlement was the home of people with a greater degree of social differentiation than at the small villages located in the upper elevations. La Tiza may have grown larger because of its position in an area with a lot of arable land and easier access to groundwater. The construction of *puquios* or other complex irrigation systems by the people of La Tiza during Early Nasca may have contributed to the development of more differentiation among settlements in the region than previously proposed.

More information about farming and irrigation practices of the period are necessary to assess this idea but it is quite possible that people here gained more wealth and prestige because of the advantageous location and intensified agricultural practices.

On a regional level, the research at La Tiza indicates that Early Nasca population has been underestimated in the south. Particularly, sites in the middle valleys are hard to recognize and are probably underreported. It has been noted that the Nasca people often buried their dead in earlier settlements and that traces of habitation are destroyed by looters looking for tombs (Carmichael 1995; Hecht 2009:227; Silverman 2002:46). Destruction of earlier habitation would be particularly notable where houses were constructed primarily of wattle-and-daub, which may have been the case in parts of the middle valley. It is likely that many places that have been recorded as Nasca cemeteries were actually domestic sites as well, and that population has been underestimated. In addition, the middle valleys are where modern population is concentrated and have been the most impacted by disturbance from expanding towns and modern agriculture.

La Tiza was not the only larger settlement in the south that likely had other functions than habitation. There are some larger settlements such as Cantalloq, Jumana, and Pueblo Viejo that have been characterized as ceremonial centers (Orefici 2011a:87; Reindel 2009:452; Schreiber and Lancho 2003:146) but whose roles in integration of the region remain unclear. A closer examination of these sites would aid in developing a clearer view of Early Nasca sociopolitical organization.

The investigations at La Tiza indicate that besides a larger population and more diverse types of sites in the south than formerly proposed, there was also likely a greater degree of inequality than previously described (Conlee 2014). There are also implications for the perceived differences between the northern and southern drainage. The north had far more settlements and more locations with civic-ceremonial loci and this may in part be because the north was more
heavily populated during the previous Formative with significant migrant populations settling the southern drainage only late in that period. The smaller number of sites with civic-ceremonial areas in the south is also probably due to the closer proximity of the large ceremonial center of Cahuachi. However, the research at La Tiza suggests the differences between north and south may not be as pronounced as has been previously indicated by researchers.

An examination of the region as a whole would suggest it was more integrated than simple chiefdoms loosely tied through religion and pilgrimage activities at Cahuachi (Conlee 2014). There is evidence in the north for a variety of site types and regional civic-ceremonial centers. The same could also be said for the south with the presence of many small villages, at least one town (La Tiza), three potential small ceremonial centers, and of course the site of Cahuachi itself. Cahuachi was undoubtedly an important center that integrated the Nasca region as well as probably areas to the north. It was certainly the main religious and ritual center although the geoglyphs located throughout the region were also important ceremonial locales. There seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest large scale craft production and storage of surplus, along with the presence of various types of people at Cahuachi, which indicates it was more than a religious center, and also served as an economic and political center (Bachir Bacha 2007; Isla and Reindel 2006; Orefici 2011a,b ; Reindel 2009). It is possible that Nasca was a confederacy with a paramount leader based at Cahuachi with another powerful leader centered in the north at Los Molinos in Early Nasca and then later at La Muña during Middle Nasca. In the south, the proposed smaller civic ceremonial sites may have been the homes of secondary leaders. It seems possible there were the beginnings of stratification and that the region was developing into a more hierarchical type of political integration when the Nasca culture began to decline (Conlee 2014).

There is no evidence of Late Nasca occupation at La Tiza showing a serious disruption at this time, which is curious given its favorable geographic location. Climate change, specifically increased aridity, has been cited as a major cause of change and eventual collapse of the Nasca culture (Eitel and Mächtle 2009; Eitel et al. 2005; Reindel 2009; Schreiber and Lancho 2003; Silverman and Proulx 2002). In the fifth through seventh centuries AD, during Middle and Late Nasca, there was an increase in aridity and the rivers became less reliable and droughts more frequent. Another factor in the decline of the Nasca culture was the rise and expansion of the Wari state in the central highlands to the east.

Middle Horizon

By AD 650 the site of La Tiza was inhabited by Middle Horizon people and it was once again used as a domestic site, and also as an extensive burial ground. At this time great changes occurred in terms of political organization and power relationships. Nasca was incorporated into the larger Wari state, based in the highlands of Ayacucho, and new types of alliances, entanglements, and resistances were created with important aspects of local society remaining intact. There was a close relationship between the two regions going back to the period before Wari expansion when in the Early Intermediate Period Huarpa people adopted much of the
Nasca ceramic tradition (Cook 1984-85; Knobloch 1983; Menzel 1964). The Wari imperial styles also incorporated aspects of the wide-spread and prestigious Nasca style and suggests they adopted parts of the Nasca religious tradition as well (Conlee 2006; Menzel 1964). In Nasca there was a diversity of responses to and interactions with the Wari state. Notable differences existed between the north and south valleys in the number and type of settlements both in terms of local sites and intrusive Wari sites. In the south, in the Nasca Valley proper there is evidence of a fairly direct relationship between Wari and local people. In the upper elevations new Wari sites, Patarya and Incawasi, were established that may have functioned as important outposts along a major road controlling trade between the highlands and the coast (Edwards 2010; Edwards and Schreiber 2014; Schreiber 2001). In the lower valley, not far from Cahuachi, the site of Pacheco was established that was a ritual center that contained a large ceramic offering deposit but was also likely an administrative site (Menzel 1964; Schreiber 2001).

At La Tiza there was a small Middle Horizon habitation area measuring around three hectares in size that consists of much of Sector IV and a small area in eastern Sector V (Figure 9). The domestic structures are rectangular houses built on terraces and variable in size. The pottery found in these contexts was local Middle Horizon and restricted to styles that Menzel (1964) proposed were from the first half of the period. New mortuary practices were established that consisted of family mausoleums that were plastered and painted. A total of 70 have been identified at the site and they span an area of about 4 hectares between Sectors III and V (Conlee 2010, 2011). In these tombs multiple individuals were interred including adult men and women, children, and infants (Figure 10). Elite grave goods in the tombs included Spondylus shell, fine pottery, and textiles. Also for the first time metal artifacts made of arsenic bronze or copper were found at the site and included shawl pins, ornaments, tweezers, and figurines with most associated with this new tomb type. There were also access ways documented in many of these structures. Tombs with multiple internments are reported in other areas of Nasca at this time and this became a common new burial type (Carmichael 1995; Isla 2001). Elaborate tombs with multiple burials and evidence of reentry to place additional bodies and grave goods were also common in the Wari heartland (Isbell 2001, 2004; Isbell and Cook 2002). These new practices are thought to be indicators of ancestor veneration or worship, which was focused on the deceased elites (Isbell and Cook 2002:287–288). An elite identity may have developed in the Middle Horizon that was shared across a vast area that included Nasca, and Wari, and was reflected in the new burial practices. Strontium and oxygen isotopic analysis suggests there were actual foreigners living at La Tiza who were buried in the mausoleums during this period (Buzon et al. 2012; Conlee et al. 2009). Two women in their early 20s were identified as nonlocal and of possible highland origin. They may have married into the community as a way of establishing alliances between the highland Wari state and local elites.

Other areas of the Nasca drainage had dramatically different responses to Wari. In the north there were no Wari sites and there was a decrease in local settlements, and the majority of those identified are cemeteries with little evidence for habitation (Browne 1992; Reindel 2009; Silverman 2002). Despite the low density of Middle Horizon sites in the north, there were new mortuary
Figure 9 Map with Middle Horizon units excavated at La Tiza.
practices similar to those documented at La Tiza that consisted of large tombs with multiple burials of adults and children, and suggests a new political and social order that was influenced by Wari (Isla 2001, 2009). In the very far south new settlements, including the large local site of Huaca del Loro were established indicating that a faction of the population moved away from Wari sites, perhaps resisted the state, and never came under its control (Conlee and Schreiber 2006; Schreiber 2001).

Evidence from La Tiza and other sites in the region indicate that agricultural and irrigation practices remained stable in the Middle Horizon with the health and diet of people relatively steady although there is some evidence to suggest that at La Tiza maize consumption and the dietary breadth of the population increased (Buzon et al. 2012; Kellner and Schoeninger 2008). The puquios constructed during the Nasca culture continued to be in use in the south. The abandonment of much of the north may be related to the lack of a puquio system in this area, which left people reliant on surface (as opposed to surface and subsurface) water, which decreased starting at the end of the Nasca culture.
Economic incentives probably played an important role in Wari's interest in Nasca where crops desired by the state, such as cotton and coca, were grown and whose cultivation involved local people. Much of this agriculture may have been locally managed since the highland state would have had little experience with local coastal farming practices. There is evidence for increased interaction across large areas of the Andes during the Middle Horizon with Wari pottery and textiles traded and copied in many regions. During this period there was intensified trade of items such as obsidian and *Spondylus* (Burger et al. 2000; Pillsbury 1996). Metallurgy expanded with the development of bronze alloys and metal artifacts were also traded across large areas (Lechtman 2005). Intensified trade of these items is seen at La Tiza where the quantity of obsidian increased from the Nasca culture and there was even less bipolar reduction indicating they had good access to the material. All of the obsidian tested from this period came from the Quispisisa source, which was located in Wari territory and likely under its control. A new pottery compositional group was defined through INAA that was restricted to the Middle Horizon at La Tiza. This Mica Tempered group represents 15% of the tested Middle Horizon assemblage (n=54) and is distinctive for the high quantity of mica, and was not present in the earlier Nasca culture assemblage nor was it found in the pottery of later periods.

Wari appears to have invested in some areas, in particular the Nasca Valley of the southern drainage, and not in others. Here the state likely ruled through local leaders and new types of intermediate elites were established who obtained power through their association with Wari. The people of Nasca became part of a state level society for the first time and were exposed to power and political organization on a large scale. The local political hierarchy was changed to include new types of elites who acquired power in different ways than previously and this probably forever changed the nature of local sociopolitical organization and power relationships (Conlee 2003, 2006). Immigrants are identified in the region during this period and intermarriage with foreigners was a practice possibly newly established.

The disintegration and political collapse of Wari by AD 1000, combined with local issues, led to great disruption in Nasca that resulted in abandonment of the region. The last currently known date for the Middle Horizon in the northern drainage is AD 820 (Reindel and Wagner 2009: Figure 1.2) and in the southern drainage it is around AD 920 with evidence of some burials as late as AD 1000 (Conlee 2011; Edwards 2010). It is unknown how long the process of abandonment took place, and it appears to be variable in different areas of the drainage with the north having earlier abandonment and reoccupation dates than the south. At Patarya the Wari site was ceremonially closed in an event at which time corridors were sealed, ceramics were placed in caches, fires were lit in corners, and a fine layer of sand was placed over the surface. The latest radiocarbon date from the site is AD 922 and it is proposed that after this period the site was abandoned (Edwards 2010:44). There is no evidence at La Tiza to suggest a similar type of event but it too had been abandoned by AD 1000. It is unclear where people moved to at this time although it is suspected that many migrated to areas in the higher elevations, or further north up the coast where the rivers are larger and have more regular water.

The relatively sudden and severe change that occurred as the result of a breakdown in the
Wari political system was likely coupled with more local issues, including increased aridity. Paleoclimatic data from Eitel et al. (2005) show that beginning around AD 600 until the 14th century in some areas of Nasca there was increased aridification and the desert margin shifted east, which limited agricultural land. Lake cores from Laguna Pumacocha in the Central Andes also indicate a period of “marked aridity” from AD 900-1100 (Bird et al. 2011: 8587). Instability was created by these climatic changes and local social issues that included possible rejection of the religious system since it was intertwined with the Wari religion, and distrust of some local leaders, especially those closely associated with Wari (Conlee 2015). This could have led to a situation where certain leaders and families lost power and prestige, and led to fragmentation of the local political hierarchy, a process that has been noted in other areas after collapse (Faulseit 2012:421).

Late Intermediate Period

After a period of 200 years the Nasca region was once again inhabited and despite the severe disruption there was a fluorescence of local society. In northern Nasca, settlements were established by AD 1155 (Reindel and Wagner 2009: Figure 1.2) and in the south between AD 1200 and 1300. A greater number of sites were established in this period than ever before and many consisted of large villages and towns that ranged from 8 to 25 hectares (Browne 1992; Conlee 2003; Reindel 2009; Schreiber and Lancho 2003). Settlements were more varied in location with sites found on hillsides, hilltops, and the valley bottom. Site type varied from large settlements with several internal divisions to smaller relatively homogenous settlements. Many sites during this period are in defensive locations, and large walls, and piles of sling-stones are common.

Resettlement of the drainage during this period may in part be due to improved climatic conditions. This period is classified as semi-arid with reliable rainfall in the highlands as the summer monsoonal rains increased (Eitel and Mächtle 2009; Eitel et al. 2005:153; Ortloff and Kolata 1993). The favorable climatic conditions led to a narrowing of the desert and this likely played a role in the repopulation of the region as agriculture became more viable. Fields and irrigation systems used previously were revived. There is some evidence that the number of puquios increased during this period and reached their maximum number (Schreiber and Lancho 2003:150). The irrigation system would have been central in reestablishing successful agricultural yields and in the growth of population.

La Tiza was at its largest, at least 15 ha, during the Late Intermediate Period. Architecture extended into the highest elevations of the site and up the large quebradas in Sectors V and II, which were densely occupied (Figure 11). Both of these sectors contained large walls that spanned the middle elevations and protected areas of domestic architecture. There are piles of sling-stones associated with the Late Intermediate Period architecture in both Sectors II and V, and they are especially abundant around Unit 41 a ritual/lookout area at the top of the site. In addition to the sling-stones, a stone mace head (doughnut stone) possibly used as a weapon was found in Unit 13. This all suggests more conflict or threat of conflict during this period than
Figure 11 Map with Late Intermediate Period units excavated at La Tiza.
previous eras at the site.

There was a variety of architectural styles at La Tiza during the Late Intermediate Period, more so than identified during earlier periods. The domestic areas have a general layout of rectangular structures built on large terraces. Non-domestic architecture is found in the upper elevations of the site and consists of platforms and round structures. There were many different architectural features and masonry styles. Features included stairways, external square storage bins, external large round storage structures, and round storage bins found in the interior of houses. Patterns of masonry vary from relatively simple stacked stone, to double coursed walls with shaped stones and rubble fill. Mud plaster was found remaining in few places in Sector V but there was likely wider use of this material that has since eroded. It must be noted though that the architecture of this period is much better preserved so variation is easier to recognize.

Subsistence practices were similar to those during the Nasca culture and the Middle Horizon with the same types of plants being farmed, animals being raised, and wild resources procured. The carbon and nitrogen isotopic analysis of the Late Intermediate Period burials indicates the diet remained constant with a lot of maize consumed (Buzon et al. 2012). Evidence of high maize consumption was also found in the caries and dental abscesses in an adult female (Burial 3) and indications of infectious disease was found in an infant (Burial 6) with orbital lesions. There are some indications of surplus production, perhaps of agricultural products. This is evident in the increase in the number, type, and size of storage areas at La Tiza during this period.

Previous studies indicated that new economic activities and relationships developed in the Late Intermediate Period when many different communities produced goods and exchanged them more intensively than in previous times (Conlee 2000, 2003; Vaughn et al. 2006). There was a focus on the production of utilitarian goods such as plainware pottery, cotton yarn, and plain textiles. This contrasts with earlier periods when there was focus on fine pottery and textiles. Compositional studies (INAA) of pottery indicate there were more clay sources being used than previously and more communities producing pottery. At La Tiza a new Plainware/Utilitarian compositional group was defined and comprised 11% of the sample that was analyzed. It is possible that this group comes from a clay source nearby and may have been produced at the settlement but more data is necessarily to assess this idea.

Obsidian continued to be the most common material used for stone tools at La Tiza. There was a decrease in quantities of obsidian but there was little evidence of bipolar reduction and the assemblage was dominated by informal tools suggesting that there was a sufficient supply of the material (Johnson 2009). All of the samples of obsidian tested using XRF (n=27) were from the Quispisisa source. Spondylus continued to be obtained through long-distance trade and was associated with a high status household and a ritual area at La Tiza. There were no metal objects found in any of the Late Intermediate Period contexts, in contrast to the Middle Horizon when they were found in several tombs and some domestic areas. Overall, there was less self-sufficiency among communities and households, and more involvement in regional trade. This is a pattern found throughout the Central Andes at this time.

Many of the religious practices associated with the Nasca culture and the Middle Horizon
culture were abandoned in this period. These include the elaborate iconography (including depiction of supernatural beings) on pottery and textiles. In the Late Intermediate Period art is simple, non-representational, and geometric, and a three color scheme of black, white, and red predominates. There is little evidence that the practice of trophy head taking continued and it appears the geoglyphs were no longer in use in the northern drainage (Lambers 2006) although there is some indication of their continued use in the south (Clarkson 1990). There were also no large ceremonial centers with monumental architecture. Instead, small ritual areas are found at many sites where primarily community or family based activities took place (Conlee 2003). Ritual activities at La Tiza appear to be confined to small ridge and hilltop structures that overlook the valley and Cerro Blanco (Units 38, 39, 41, 42). One round structure (Unit 41) located at the highest point of the settlement had a firebox in the center which contained Spondylus. From this structure there are unobstructed views up and down the valley as well as of Cerro Blanco. It seems likely this was both a lookout and a place for ritual activity that may have involved mountain worship. Another round structure (Unit 39) also with excellent views of the mountain and valley, had several large grinding stones inside and nearby (Figure 12). Ridge tops throughout the Late Intermediate Period sectors had large quantities of broken bowls and jars. Burial practices returned to the local style of flexed individuals buried in pits with minimal grave

Figure 12 Late Intermediate Period ritual structure (Unit 39) with grinding stones.
goods that was used by the Nasca culture. The multiple burials and mausoleums of the Middle Horizon were no longer a part of the mortuary tradition.

Two different domestic areas of La Tiza have been identified as inhabited by high status people. In Sector II, Unit 23 was a well-preserved house with stairway and large walls that would have taken more time and skill in construction than most of the other houses at the site (Figure 13). This structure had been kept clean so there was not a lot of cultural material but it was associated with other structures (a cooking area, ritual area, and storage structure) that were probably used by the same family, and which contained a greater amount of material. In addition, this house and associated structures were located high up in Sector II and in a good defensible position. In Sector V the house associated with Unit 35 is notable because of the amount and kinds of cultural material found within it. It is the only place during this period besides the ritual/look out area (Unit 41) where Spondylus was found, it had the largest faunal MNI, there were antara fragments, a piece of a whistle or trumpet, a figurine (the only one from this period) and six Ica dishes (an imported pottery style), which was more than any other unit. It is proposed that this house and associated structures were also occupied by a high status family.

In the Late Intermediate Period religious resources were no longer the primary means to build power as they were during the Nasca culture, possibly because such resources were seen as unstable and too intertwined with the breakdown of the Wari political system. It is likely that the syncretism between Wari and Nasca resulted in a severe disruption to the Nasca ideological system when Wari collapsed. This situation may have led future populations to restructure the...
relationship between religious beliefs and the political system (Conlee 2006). Specifically, there may have been a concerted effort to disentangle religious power from political power. The fall of the Wari empire would have weakened the powerful religious system that had coalesced around the state and the prestigious older religious tradition of the Nasca culture. This religion is known to have expanded over much of the Central Andes during the Middle Horizon. With the breakdown of the Wari political and economic structures the influence of the religion would have waned as well. Instead the religion of the Late Intermediate Period focused on more pan-Andean beliefs and rituals including mountain worship.

The political and social hierarchy was also transformed in the Late Intermediate Period. On a region level there were major centers and secondary centers in both the north and south and two levels of hierarchy above the village level (Conlee 2006). Urton (1990:195) has documented that people living in the Nasca region at the time of Spanish contact were grouped into ayllus, parcialidades, and moieties. He suggests that in late prehispanic and early colonial times there were at least four parcialidades that consisted of many ayllus. The parcialidades were then grouped into two moieties, one in the north and one in the south, each with a cacique principal. Urton also proposes that two additional moieties existed that divided upper and lower valley ayllus and crosscut the north/south moieties. The implications for prehispanic sociopolitical organization are that there were at least three levels of integrated organization during the late prehispanic and early colonial period (Urton 1990:196).

Given the complexity of regional settlement patterns, and greater levels of social differentiation at all sites, it appears as if the number and kinds of statuses increased during this period. There was an expanded, and probably diffused, political hierarchy and elites of different types participated in a broad range of activities such as the production of utilitarian items, exchange, feasting, community/exclusive ritual, and warfare and defense (Conlee 2003). During this period the resources of power were more variable resulting in a more segmented society with diverse ways of ranking and classifying people (Conlee 2005a). In the absence of religion playing such an important centralizing role, expanded economic relationships and regional trade, along with new political structures worked to integrate the region. Overall, the political structure was fundamentally different than it was during the Nasca culture and the Middle Horizon.

One of the key questions in the resettlement of Nasca in the Late Intermediate Period is whether these people were related to the people that lived here before. Recent mitochondrial and Y-chromosomal DNA research suggests there were major changes that occurred early in the Late Intermediate Period. Genetic distinction between coast and highland populations was very marked during the Nasca culture and Middle Horizon, and there were no significant genetic changes between these two periods as measured by coastal populations in the northern Nasca drainage (Fehren-Schmitz et al. 2010, 2011). Comparisons of Middle Horizon and Late Intermediate Period highland populations (in areas adjacent to the northern Nasca drainage) to modern Peruvian populations show low genetic distances, and there is no distinction between modern Peruvian coastal and highland populations, which suggests there was some population process that led to the homogenization of the region starting in the Late Intermediate Period.
(Fehren-Schmitz et al. 2011:279). No coastal populations of the period have been analyzed for comparison so it is unknown how these populations compare to the adjacent highland areas and what these homogenization processes were. The genetic evidence does suggest change in the Nasca coastal population during this period, and given overall differences in society that are found archaeologically, it seems quite possible that the people who resettled the region were not the direct descendants of previous occupants.

**Late Horizon**

There is little evidence of occupation at La Tiza during the Late Horizon. One domestic area in the western part of Sector V had a date of AD 1435-1624. This context, Unit 13, was inside of a large structure in an area surrounded by areas with Late Intermediate Period dates. There was a great deal of decorated pottery here compared to other contexts nearby but other than that the assemblage was similar to the Late Intermediate Period contexts. No Inca style pottery was found here or anywhere else at the settlement, and this contrasts with the findings at the small village of Pajonal Alto where one Inca style plate was found and several Late Horizon design motifs were identified (Conlee 2005b). It may be that people moved away from La Tiza after the Inca conquered the region. La Tiza was the largest local site in the southern drainage and located across the valley from where the Inca established their settlement of Paredones. It is possible that the Inca resettled the La Tiza population to a different area in order to diffuse the population and/or take advantage of resources elsewhere. The *Visita de Acari* written in 1593 states that *mitimaes* from Nasca were living in Acari, and Nasca *mitimaes* were also said to have been found in the coastal valleys of Arequipa (Espinoza Soriano 1976; *Visita de Acari* 1973 [1593]: 186-187 from Urton 1990).

**Conclusion**

The evidence from La Tiza and other settlements in the region indicate a long dynamic history of sociopolitical organization and power relationships in Nasca. The transformations that occurred in the region are mirrored in other areas of the Central Andes and at times Nasca was more connected to broader developments than others. Complex internal and external factors led to these changes and continued archaeological investigations will help us to better understand these factors and the development of ancient society in Nasca.

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