

ANNUAL REPORT: VITOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students setting up an excavation unit in a Ramada cemetery

General

During the 2014 season, the Vitor Archaeological Project (VAP) had a very successful year completing most of the teaching and research goals. Supported by the IFR and a grant from National Geographic, our twelve students participated in systematic archaeological surveys and mortuary excavations. In addition, students were able to engage in post-excavation training by analyzing and assisting with the conservation of the archaeological materials excavated this year. Community outreach was also an integral part of the program as it connected our project with the local community of the Vitor Valley.

Pre-excavation activities

During the first week of the program, students were introduced to the fundamentals of the prehistory of the South Central Andes. This introduction included a combination of lectures and small group discussions. Readings were selected to provide students with a solid foundation in several key areas that are crucial to understand the context of the valley. These included the socio-political, economic, and ideological factors involved in the emergence and expansion of both Wari and Nazca, as well as an in-depth discussion of Andean mortuary treatments and ritual among these societies. Ultimately, the goal of these discussions was to illustrate main concepts in Andean prehistory, as well as to familiarize students with current debates regarding these traditions in the region. A second set of readings regarding the history of archaeological research in Peru was also discussed so that participants could situate the VAP research and

theoretical approach within the larger intellectual traditions that have shaped – and continue to shape – archaeological investigation in the Andes.

We believe strongly that understanding the past requires exposure to and interaction with the contemporaneous local communities. With this in mind, students conducted a brief ethnographic practice by observing different aspects of the daily life of *vitoreños*. Observations were presented to the entire group, followed by a Q & A period.

Survey and Excavation Activities in the Field

Two field modules were offered to each of our students: survey and mortuary excavation. Dr. Hans Barnard visited a number of archaeological sites throughout the valley and students helped with recording site location and size as part of our systematic survey of the valley. This module allowed students to gain a broader and diachronic perspective of Wari, Inca and colonial settlement patterns. They were then asked to use these data to address key issues regarding the organization and use of space, as well as human interaction with the local environment during different time periods. Students assisted with the production of detailed maps for the VAP, which represented an invaluable context within which to learn architectural and construction patterns that characterized each occupation. In the field, each student learned to use surveying instruments such as Total Station, and stored data. In the laboratory, students transferred data to a computer to generate digital maps.

Mortuary excavations were conducted under the direction of Dr. María C. Lozada. In this module, students learned the basics of archaeological excavation. As a first step, the mortuary team set up of the excavation unit, learned the principles of stratigraphy and helped with the excavation, mapping and recording of tombs, human remains, and grave goods. The excavated Ramada cemetery was ideal for teaching students about archaeology, since the preservation is excellent and it represents one of the first systematically excavated Ramada cemeteries in the Andes. Together, the survey and excavation modules combined to offer each student a comprehensive fieldwork experience.

Post-excavation Activities

With the assistance of specialists, VAP project members examined, documented, photographed and housed human skeletal remains, ceramics, textiles, baskets and other artifacts excavated this season. The laboratory portion of this field school was organized into three hands-on modules that included osteology (María C. Lozada), ceramics (Hans Barnard), and conservation (Dawn Lohnas). As we had a textile team (Michele Smith, Juana Lazo and Alan Coogan) students were also introduced to the basics of pre-Hispanic textile analysis and conservation. All together, students spent the last 2 weeks of the field school in the lab conducting cutting edge archaeological and bioarchaeological research with the materials they helped to excavate.

Community outreach

All members of the VAP field school participated in programmed community outreach activities initiated two years ago. This year the community outreach team visited local schools every Friday to explain our work and disseminate our findings, focusing on middle and high school students. A contest was also designed to encourage community engagement. Local students from schools throughout the Vitor valley were asked to produce a poster that summarized our activities, with a prize going to the top submissions.

Communication and Dissemination of VAP Research

This year VAP directors and faculty have participated in multiple professional meetings in Peru and the US. We are currently working in academic articles that will serve as the cornerstone for future research in Vitor Valley and southern Peru. Furthermore, since the inception of the VAP, we have encouraged participants to conduct independent research with our faculty. So far, eight students have based their BA papers on their work in the VAP and these data have been presented at the SAA meetings, and used to apply to graduate school.