Burial Excavations in Plaza 1 of Los Pilarillos, Zacatecas, México

Research Year: 1997
Culture: Zacatecan
Chronology: Epi-Classic
Location: Zacatecas, México
Site: Los Pilarillos

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Summary

Recent work has shown that multiple, disarticulated burials are one of the hallmarks of the Epiclassic (A.D. 600-900) northern Mesoamerican frontier. Our 1997 FAMSI-funded excavations at a Malpaso Valley village were designed to assess models of human sacrifice and cannibalism, catastrophic attacks, ritualized warfare, coercive local social control, and ancestor veneration. The excavations revealed a secondary multiple burial; another burial containing two individuals; an ovoid pit of unknown function; a circular, stone-lined hearth; a midden deposit, and fragments of a possible plaza floor.

ASU graduate students John Millhauser and Denise To excavated the burial. Their training in human osteology permitted them to identify and measure many bones in the field that disintegrated upon removal. In the secondary multiple burial, 25 crania as well as all other elements were packed into a 1.2 × 1.2 × .25 m squarish pit, showing no discernible pattern. Almost all bones of the human skeleton were found, including the delicate ones, but only four long bones were found in articulation. Both males and females were included in the deposit; adults and subadults were identified as well. Burning, crushing, peeling, cut marks, and abrasion striae were all observed. Notable artifacts included the parts of a pseudo-cloisonné and a black burnished olla, artifacts which parallel the copa-olla complex found in a multiple, disarticulated burial beneath the Hall of Columns at Alta Vista. Holien and Pickering interpret that burial as evidence of Tezcatlipoca-related ritual.

Another rectangular pit, about the same size, contained only two individuals resting in sub-pits separated by remnants of adobe material. The first skeleton was in a flexed position on its right side and a Santa Rosa White-on-red olla placed near the head, which was oriented to the southeast. The second individual, a large male aged 30-32, was disarticulated and accompanied only by an extra skull and femur. Both the trophy skull and that of the large male exhibited evidence of possible perimortem wounds.

Plaza 1 is a new kind of burial context in the valley, the only example of a formal cemetery and the only multiple burial outside of La Quemada. The fact that villages, in addition to major ceremonial centers, participated in complex mortuary programs may rule out internal social control as the main explanation for the skeletal deposits. Furthermore, not all individuals who came to rest in multiple burials were young male warriors. Whole (though disarticulated) bodies of females and males, ranging from infancy to old age, contradict the proposition that all multiple burials in the region are related to ritualized warfare or sacrifice. The decedents might have been victims of an attack, or they could have been placed in the graves after a period of above-ground curation, as might occur in ancestor veneration. These possibilities, as well as that of cannibalism, are the subjects of ongoing analysis at the ASU laboratory in Zacatecas.

Submitted 12/07/1998 by:
Ben A. Nelson

Introduction

Recent work has made it clear that multiple, disarticulated burials are one of the hallmarks of the northern Mesoamerican frontier. Archaeologists and physical anthropologists have raised a number of unanswered questions about the meaning of these deposits, suggesting that they might represent human sacrifice and cannibalism (Kelley, 1978), catastrophic attacks (Pijoan and Mansilla, 1990; Weigand, 1975), ritualized warfare (Hers, 1989), coercive maintenance of the social order (Nelson *et al.*, 1992), or ancestor veneration (Nelson, 1998). The 1997 FAMSI-funded excavations were concentrated on a secondary multiple burial located in Plaza 1 of Los Pilarillos (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Los Pilarillos is the second-largest site in the Malpaso Valley and consists of two major mounds, one of which has a large internal patio; four smaller mounds; a processional entrance flanked by small pyramids; and a large ceremonial hall. The investigation of the site is part of the La Quemada-Malpaso Valley Archaeological project, a general attempt to understand the social, cultural, and economic forces responsible for the expansion of the Mesoamerican tradition into the Zacatecas from A.D. 500-900.

Figure 1. Location of Los Pilarillos.

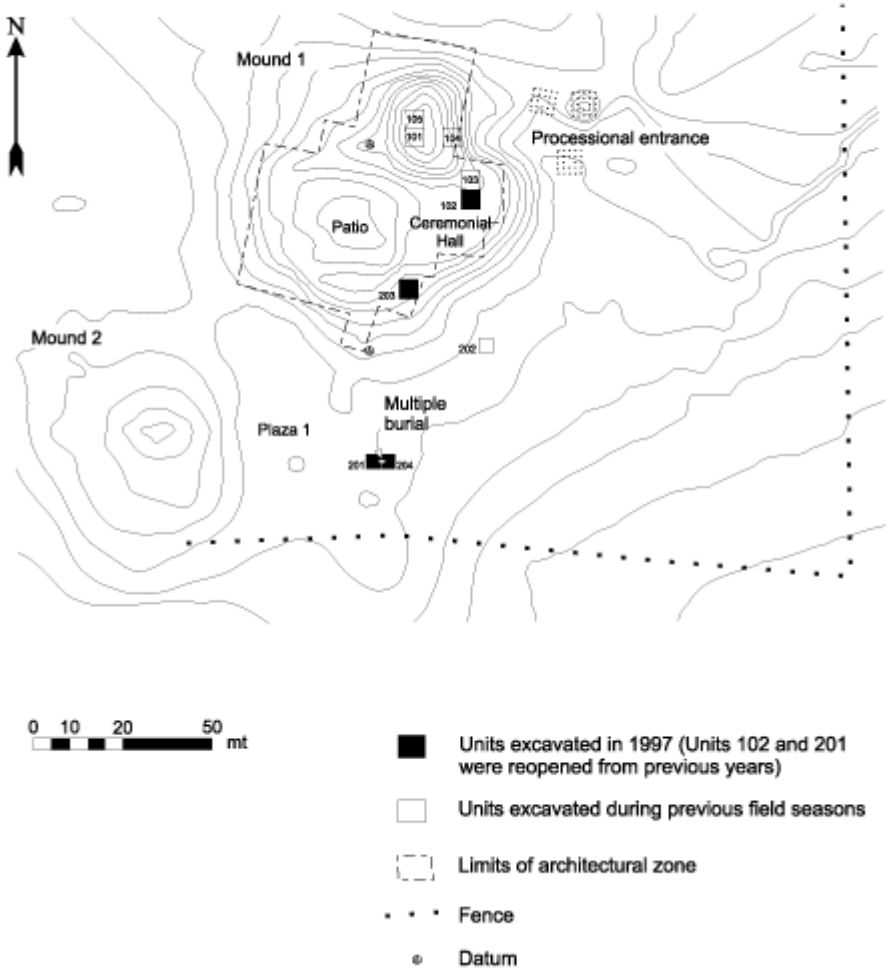


Figure 2. Excavation Units of the 1997 Field Season at Los Pilarillos.

We expected that the recovery of the burial would provide information on the deposition of human bone during the Epiclassic period on the northern frontier. We also thought that excavations in this part of the site might turn up additional features, besides the burial, that could be related to the practices surrounding the treatment of multiple, disarticulated skeletons. A 4 × 4 m test pit excavated in 1995 (Unit 201) cut into the edge of the burial, affording a cross-sectional view from the west. It was evident that the burial contained disarticulated human remains, possibly representing a large number of individuals. The exposed portions of the feature bore some similarities to the "Tezcatlipoca burial" of Alta Vista in the Chalchihuites region to the northwest of La Quemada (Holien and Pickering, 1978). The latter feature contained a number of disarticulated individuals who had been deposited above a single individual, who was decapitated but whose bones were otherwise articulated, and who was accompanied by an offering of a ceramic flute, a pseudo-cloisonné copa, and pseudo-cloisonné ollas.

The Los Pilarillos burial feature was seen as an opportunity to amplify knowledge about regional burial practices, either by providing a parallel to the Alta Vista case, or by revealing further variation.

The burial excavations were conducted during a six-week period in May and June, 1997. Ben Nelson was Principal Investigator of the project, which ran concurrently with other work in the site. Ian Robertson served as Field Director. Archaeologists John Millhauser and Denise To were immediately responsible for the excavation of the burial area. Denise To is preparing an M.A. thesis on the burial under the supervision of a committee that includes Nelson and physical anthropologists Christy Turner and Don Morris. Debra Martin, a biological anthropologist who is collaborating with Nelson on a general study of the La Quemada skeletal material, also participated in the planning of recovery procedures and briefly examined the human bones after excavation.

Excavation Techniques

The 1997 excavations in Plaza 1 took place within Unit 204, a 4 × 4 m test unit placed immediately to the east of the earlier unit. The unit encompassed not only the targeted burial, but several other features, as described below.

The excavators used the project's standard methods. All soil was sifted through 0.625 mm (1/4 in) screen unless it was taken as a pollen or flotation sample. The southwest corner of the unit was located 31 m south and 25 m east of Datum a, the main site datum located at the southern end of Mound 1. Vertical control was established in relation to Datum H, a temporary datum which was placed near the northeast corner of the unit at an elevation of 97.59 m. Excavation was done in natural and cultural levels not exceeding 15 cm in thickness, and individual items of import were point-provenienced in three dimensions to the centimeter. During excavation, areas were given level-locus designations (Nelson and LeBlanc, 1986); once the stratigraphy was understood, those subunits were combined into the Analytical Units (AU's) that serve as the main organizing devices of the present report. Although the level-locus designations are not used to present data in this report, they are important to anyone who wishes to work with the materials, which are bagged and boxed according to that system. Interested scholars should consult the field notes for details.

The burials were excavated by graduate students John Millhauser and Denise To, both trained in human osteology. Their training was important because it permitted them to identify and measure many bones in the field that disintegrated upon removal; field archaeologists with less extensive osteological background might have removed them without recording those detailed observations. Still, because decisions had to be made to keep the excavation time within reasonable limits; only identifiable long bones and cranial parts were individually mapped and numbered. Other, smaller elements were collected in lots. Photographs, including informal Polaroid shots, were taken to supplement the record. The multiple burial was bisected after the upper layer of bones was exposed, and then dug in two halves, north and south, in order to facilitate field

observations of the bones themselves. Pollen and flotation samples were taken from within the burial, and the soil remaining after bone removal was sifted.

Depositional History

Modern agriculture has eradicated several of the stratigraphic interfaces critical to deciphering the order of deposition. The majority of contacts between the pits and the deposits above them no longer exist because of soil mixture by the plow. The major features, pits which do not overlap with one another, must be described in a speculative stratigraphic order (Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, and Table 1). The general principle of numbering stratigraphic (analytical) units is to give the lowest numbers to the first-encountered and latest deposits (Harris, 1989). The units are then described in order of deposition, or in descending numerical order. In this case, for reasons discussed above, there is little confidence about the order of deposition, nevertheless, there are suspicions as to correct depositional order, and the analytical unit numbers are used to order the descriptions accordingly. Nevertheless, the pits and their contents provide rich information on life, death, and ritual at Los Pilarillos.

In general, the sequence includes: (1) the sterile soil; (2) an ovoid pit of unknown function; (3) a circular hearth; (4) a rectangular pit, which contains the secondary multiple burial; (5) another rectangular pit containing two additional burials, one primary and the other disarticulated; (6) a diffuse trash deposit that includes fragments of a decomposed floor; (7) the plow zone; and (8) the contemporary surface of the plowed field.

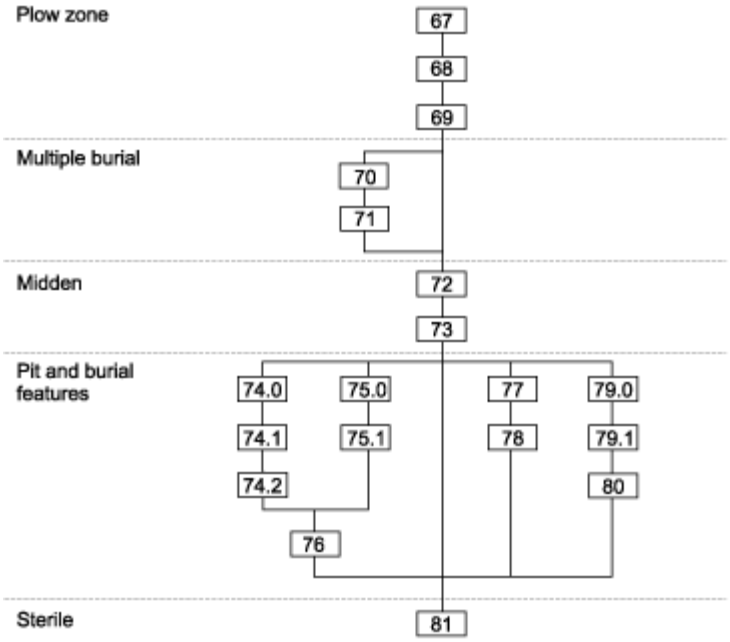
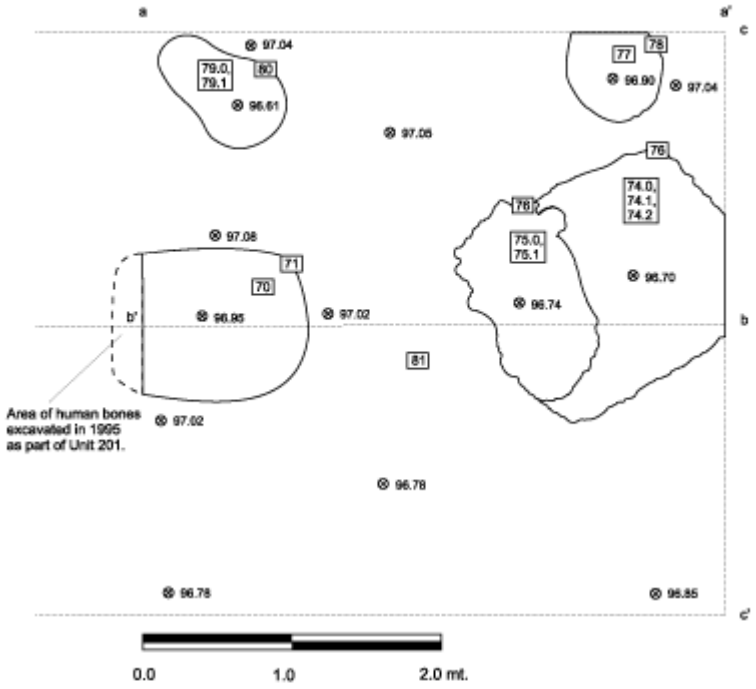
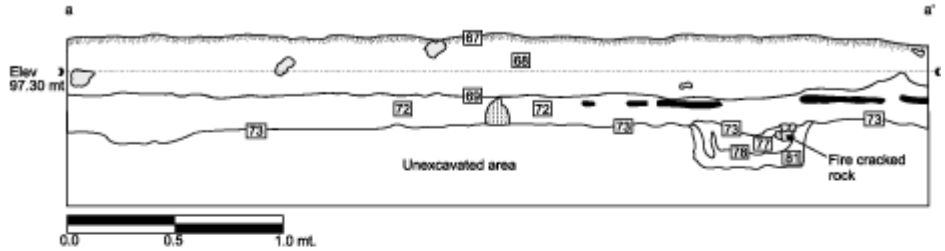


Figure 3. Harris Matrix of Analytical Units in Excavation Unit 204.



70	Multiple burial
71	Interface between multiple burial and surrounding midden deposit
74.0, 74.1, 74.2	Disarticulated burial, fill and adobe lining
75.0, 75.1	Flexed burial, fill and adobe lining
76	Interface between rectangular pit containing two burials and sterile soil
77	Stone lining, fill, and carbon in circular pit
78	Interface between circular pit and sterile soil
79.0, 79.1	Fill of pear-shaped pit
80	Interface between pear-shaped pit and sterile soil
81	Sterile soil
⊗	Elevation in meters. Differences in elevation are due to rodent disturbance. Elevations inside features are bottom elevations

Figure 4. Unit 204, Plaza 1, major features.



67 Ground surface

68 Plow zone -- brown sandy loam

69 Interface between plow zone and less disturbed midden deposit

72 Midden deposit -- gray brown sandy loam

73 Interface between midden deposit and the underlying features and sterile soil

77 Fill of circular pit -- stone lining and gray-brown sandy loam with ash

78 Interface between circular pit cut and sterile soil

81 Sterile soil -- orange-brown sandy clay

Stone

Area of disturbance

Plaster floor consisting of gray-brown sandy loam with pieces of orange-brown sandy clay

Figure 5. Unit 204, Profile a-a' (North Wall of Unit).

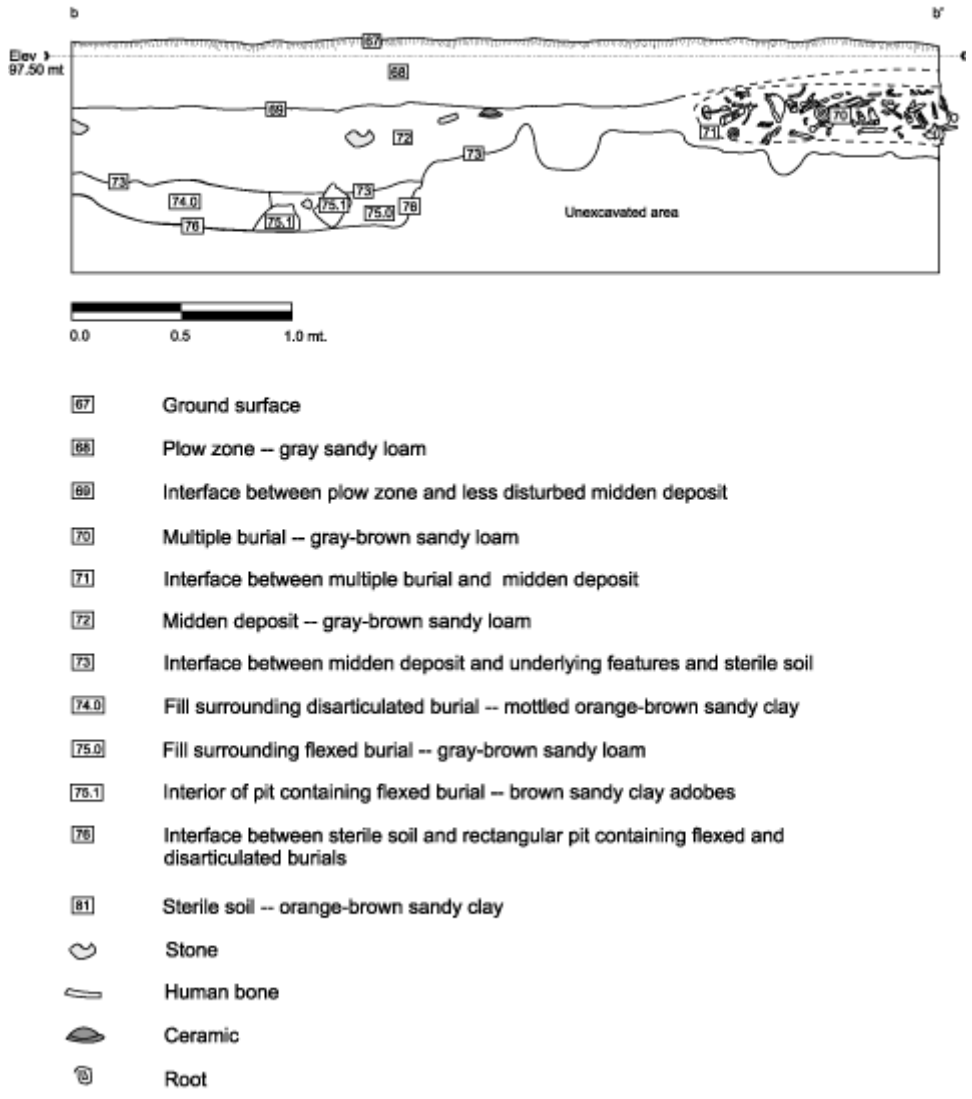
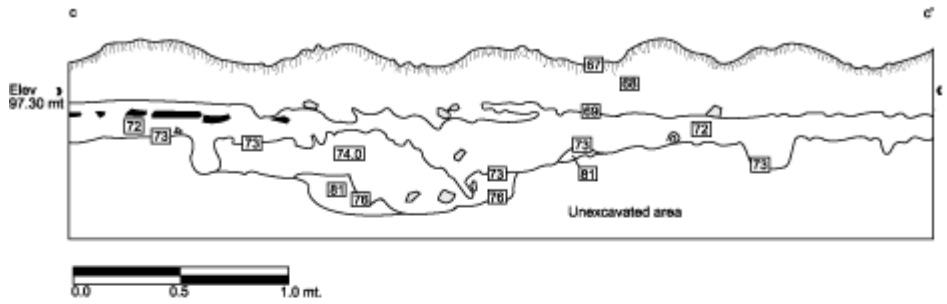


Figure 6. Unit 204, Profile b-b' (East-to-west Cross-section of Unit, Facing South).



67 Ground surface

68 Plow zone -- brown sandy loam

69 Interface between plow zone and less disturbed midden deposit

72 Midden deposit -- gray-brown sandy loam

73 Interface between midden deposit and underlying features and sterile soil

74.0 Fill of disarticulated burial -- mottled orange-brown sandy loam

76 Interface between sterile soil and rectangular pit containing flexed and disarticulated burials

81 Sterile soil -- orange-brown sandy clay

Stone

Area of disturbance

Plaster floor consisting of gray-brown sandy silt with pieces of orange-brown sandy clay

Root

Figure 7. Unit 204, Profile c-c' (East Wall of Unit).

Sterile Soil

As in other parts of the site, the sterile soil (AU 81) was an easily recognized reddish brown sandy clay, which formed a marked contrast to intruding features. The contact (AU 73) between the sterile soil and the gray-brown sandy loam above it (AU 72) undulated considerably in most excavated areas apparently owing to a long history of rodent activity.

Pit

This pit (Figure 8) may have contained a burial that was removed at some point. Located in the northwest corner of Unit 204, it was pear-shaped or double-oval in plan. Three analytical units were assigned to it, one for the contact of the pit with the sterile soil (AU 80) and two for the contents of the pit (AU 79.1, 79.0). Although the walls of the pit were unplastered, the form was clear because of the difference between the sterile soil, described above, and the sandy gray sediment that made up the trash zone. The latter soil had entered the pit, possibly after removal of a burial from the pit at a time prior to excavation. With horizontal measurements of 50 × 80 cm and a depth of 30 cm into the sterile soil, the pit was about the right size for a flexed burial, and it contained a worked greenstone object of either chrysocolla, malachite, or turquoise, which had been shaped into the outlines of a pendant but was not drilled. The object may have been a pendant blank, or perhaps a fetish. In spite of these suggestive indications, not a single fragment of bone was recovered from the pit.

Hearth

Near the northeast corner of Unit 204 was a circular, stone-lined hearth or brazier (Figure 9) consisting of two analytical units, its interface with the sterile soil (AU 78) and its contents (AU 77). The feature measured 60 cm in diameter and intruded into the sterile soil to a depth of 20 cm; it appeared to be sealed by an accumulation of trash that covered the area, and also by a badly weathered floor, possibly a plaza floor (see "Midden Deposit," below). Deeper, at the level of the sterile soil, the edges of the pit were clearly observable because of the contrast between the reddish brown of the sterile soil and the dark gray sandy loam of the pit fill, which contained a high concentration of disintegrated charcoal. Small, flat stones, which exhibited signs of thermal alteration, marked the edges of the pit. The stones were somewhat informally placed and did not reach the base of the pit. Rodent disturbance was evident in the center of the pit; the fill contained no chunks of charcoal nor any bone. Although such a feature might have been used to cremate infants, the data are only vaguely suggestive of the possibility that the pit had some ritual, mortuary-connected function.

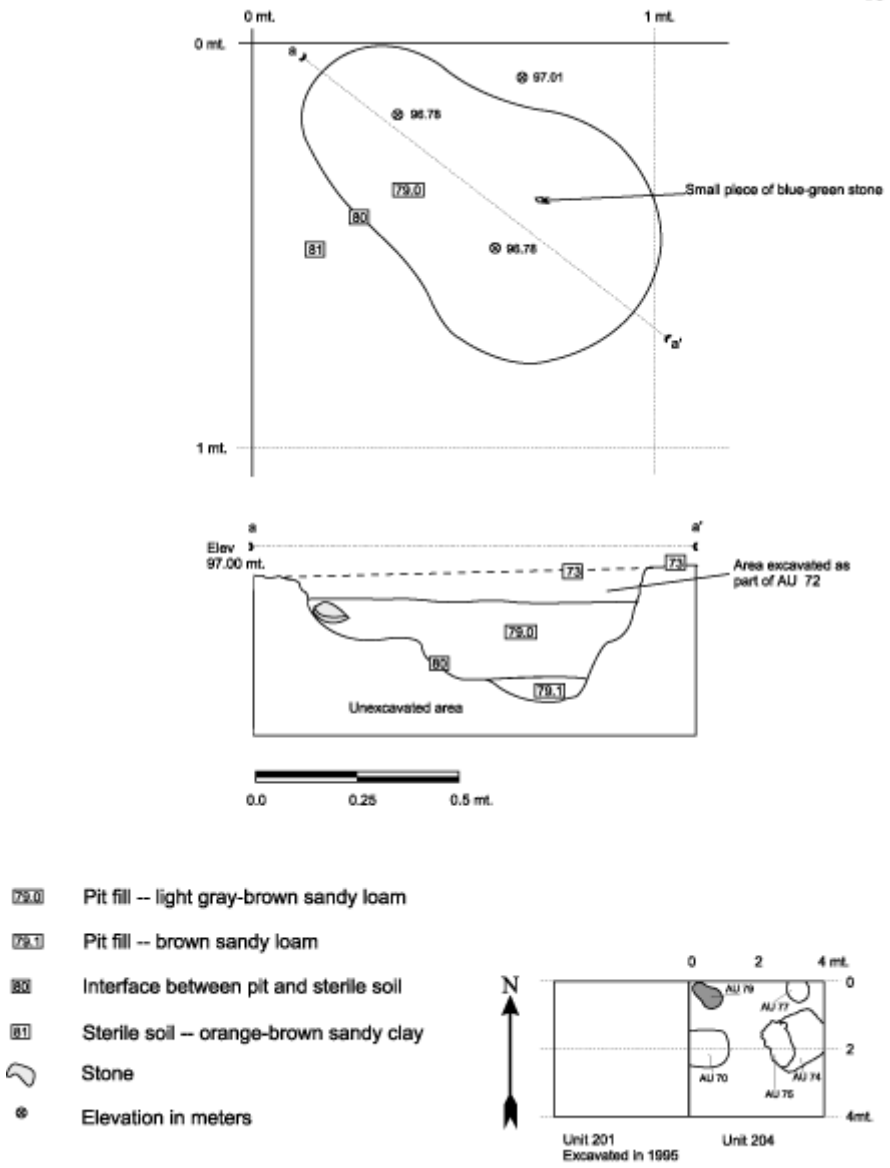
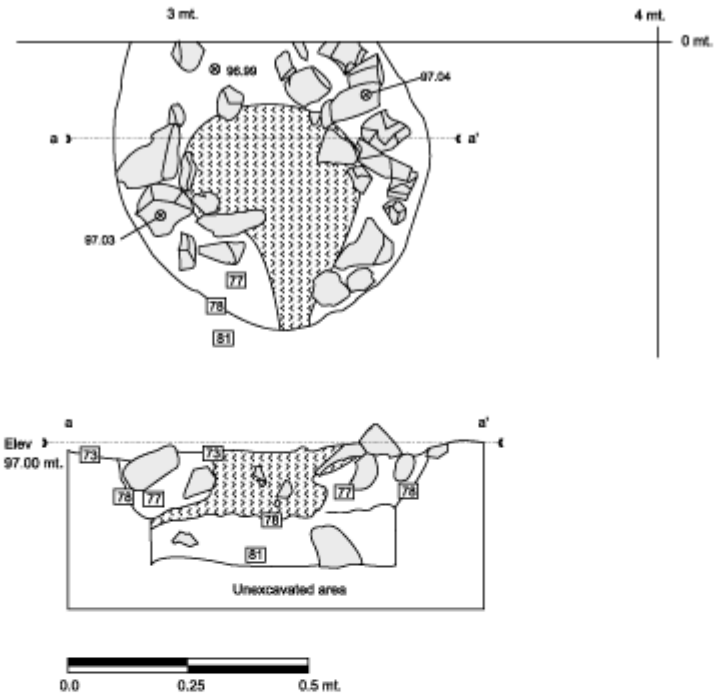


Figure 8. Analytical Unit 79.0, Empty Pear-shaped Pit.



73 Interface between midden deposit, circular pit fill, and surrounding sterile soil

77 Circular pit fill -- gray-brown sandy, ashy loam

78 Interface between circular pit and sterile soil

81 Sterile soil -- orange-brown sandy clay

Stone

Area of disturbance

Elevation in meters

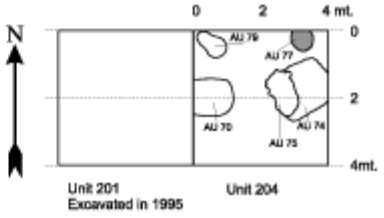


Figure 9. Analytical Unit 77, Circular Pit Feature.

Burials[1]

On the east side of Unit 204 we found a large, rectangular pit (AU 76; Figure 10) that included two burials, a flexed inhumation and a disarticulated burial. The latter two were separated by remnants of adobe material (AU 74.1). The rectangular pit, which measured approximately 1.5 × 1.8 m with its long axis oriented southeast-northwest, was visible in plan as a contact between the reddish-brown sterile soil and various darker fills. The edge of the pit was barely discernible in places owing to rodent disturbance, the subtlety of color distinctions, and the presence of the scattered construction materials mentioned above. The large pit was unplastered and appeared to originate somewhere in the trash zone; both burials were intact and undisturbed by the plow.

AU 75.0 was the flexed burial of an individual resting on the west side of the large pit. This individual also lay in a pit-within-a-pit arrangement, such that the burial was in a sub-pit about 1.2 × 0.8 m area and, at a maximum, 10 cm deeper than the adjacent part of the larger pit. The skeleton lay on its right side with the head oriented toward the southeast and was accompanied by a small white-on-red olla (Figure 11), which was placed near the head. Sex was indeterminate due to the fact that many of the specific bones and element parts used to assess sex were not recovered. The mandible was too fragmented to assess sex using the mental eminence and gonial angle, nor was enough skeletal material recovered from the orbits to assess sex. The only discriminator available was the left mastoid process (26.8 mm in height) and the occipital bun. Because these characteristics are normally used in concert with many other variables to create an overall robusticity index of the cranium, they alone cannot be used to determine sex. Contextual evidence, such as the accompanying olla and the smaller stature relative to the other main individual, would be consistent with female sexing. Age of the skeleton is unclear as well. Epiphyseal closure and cranial suture closure indicated an adult, and the few remaining teeth suggested an individual of at least 25 years of age. There was slight osteophytic lipping on the vertebrae. The recovered cranial fragments included the almost complete calvarium, of which the sutures are completely fused. There were unhealed lesions on the parietal and pitting on the vaults, suggesting a pathological insult of some kind. Preservation of the calvarium and several other bones was excellent, while some other bones had suffered due to weathering, roots, and exfoliation. Conspicuously absent were the innominates, the sacrum, the face, the fibulae, and the patella. No cut marks were visible.

AU 74.0 was the disarticulated burial on the east side of the large rectangular pit. All of the bones in this deposit appeared to be from the same individual, except for an extra femur, interpreted as a trophy bone, and several extra cranial fragments. The bones rested in a mottled gray-brown sandy loam, the origin of which is uncertain. One

[1] The following descriptions are based on field observations only; more detailed analyses of the skeletal materials will be presented in journal articles when the laboratory work is completed. At that time, some conclusions will undoubtedly be altered; for example, the minimum number of individuals in the multiple burial is based on the number of crania that were excavated as single elements, each representing one individual. The actual number of individuals is expected to change based upon laboratory analysis. Also, the counts for female-male distribution, left-right siding, and adult-subadult aging are not available.

possibility is that it is simply pit fill. Surrounding that matrix, however, was a subtly distinct gray sandy loam (AU 74.1), which we consider to be melted adobe material originating from some sort of structure that surrounded the burial and separated it partially or entirely from the adjacent flexed burial. The burial may have been inside a crypt or other structure that collapsed post-occupationally and was further damaged by recent plowing. This inference is based on the presence of 11 fragmentary and highly disintegrated adobe blocks in the area surrounding the bones, plus the adobe-like texture of the gray sandy loam. The fill in which the bones rested extended into the sterile soil about 10 cm deeper than the surrounding area within the rectangular pit, revealing a squarish pit of about 60 × 70 cm within the larger rectangular pit.

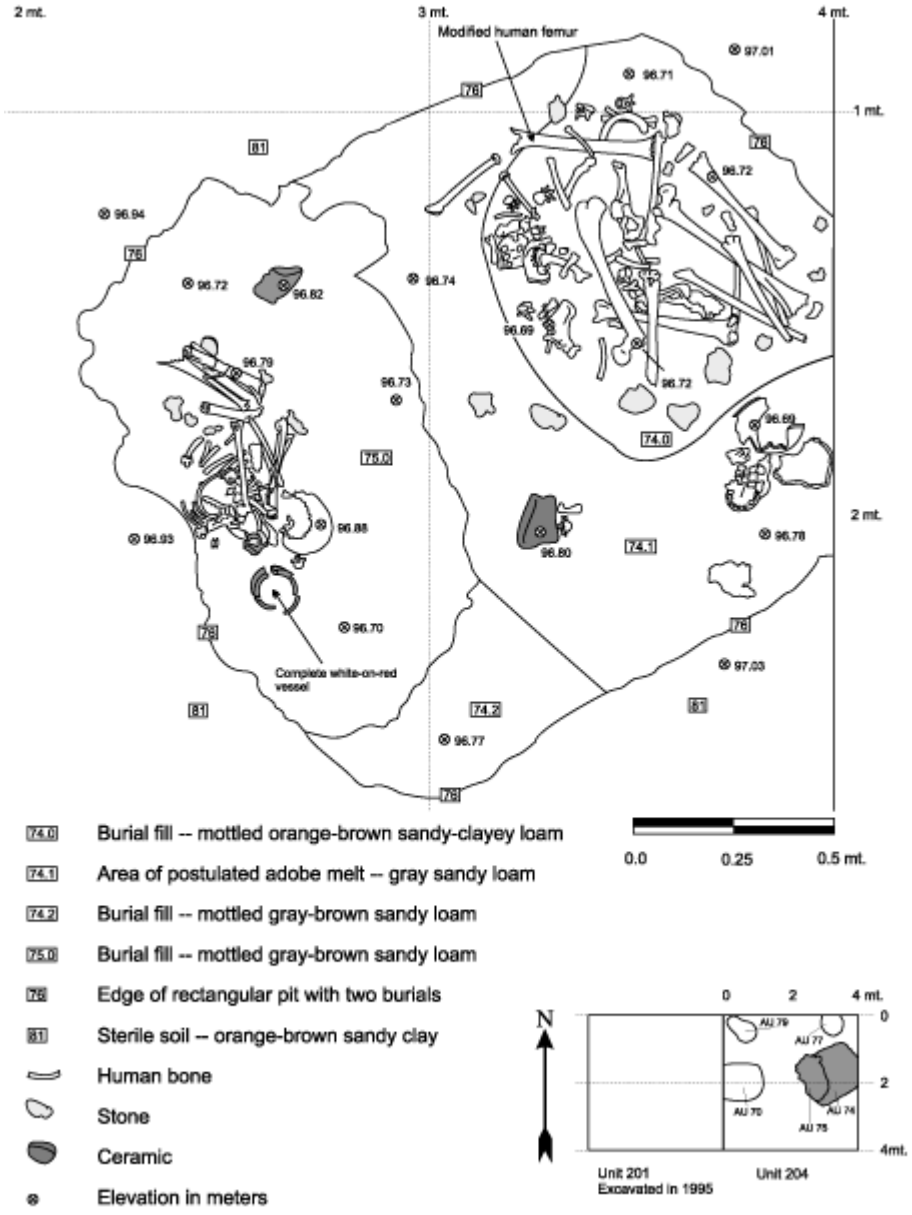


Figure 10. Analytical Units 75.0 and 74.0, Flexed and Disarticulated Burials.

Figure 11. Unit 204, Complete Santa Rosa White-on-red Vessel from Flexed Burial.

All of the limb bones of the disarticulated individual were recovered, as well as the sacra and both innominates. The bones were not, however, in anatomical position. The bones were not grouped in a way that suggested bundling, nor were any perforated as might be expected if they had been suspended from a roof or wall, as is frequently the case in the Malpaso Valley (Nelson *et al.*, 1992; Pijoan and Mansilla, 1990). The individual was a male of large stature as indicated by long bone measurements, aged 30-32 years based upon deterioration of the pubic symphysis and dental wear. All of the bones of this individual were poorly preserved, white and yellowish in color with an extremely hard of clayey, gravelly soil adhering. All were very brittle, flaky, and crumbly, with most of the cancellous bone crackling away. On the postcranial skeleton, no cut marks or trauma were observed, but what may have been a perimortem wound was visible on the left frontal and parietal, and there was a slight porosity throughout the entire vault.

An "extra" or "trophy" skull is inferred from the presence of duplicate cranial bones, including the squamosal portion of the occipital and the posterior portion of the right parietal. Unlike the bones of the main individual, the extra cranial fragments were well preserved and had a near 90% intact external and internal surfaces. The differential preservation may be due to the fact that the cranial fragments were found in a different soil matrix, i.e., melted adobe material, than the whole, disarticulated individual. These differences lend some support to the existence of a crypt; perhaps the extra cranium was in a wall niche some other protected position, while the disarticulated skeleton lay more exposed to changes in light, temperature, and humidity. The extra cranial fragments exhibited perimortem peeling next to what may be a perimortem traumatic wound on the occipital bone. The extra femur or trophy bone was worked, burned, cut, hollowed, polished, and broken shortly after death. The articular ends of the bone had been removed, and the shaft of the bone reduced lengthwise in a pattern also seen in

La Quemada (Debra Martin, personal communication, 1997), using lithic-reduction techniques to systematically remove small flakes of bone. The medullar cavity of the bone was reamed, not in the fashion expected in the case of marrow extraction, but rather as if to form a specifically designed implement or instrument. The hollowed-out bone could have served as a musical instrument, a vessel, or as a symbol of success in war, and probably marked the individual's status in life or perhaps some aspect of his manner of death.

AU 71 is the interface between the secondary multiple burial (Figure 12 and Figure 13) and the surrounding sterile soil and midden; the fill and skeletal material were designated as AU 70. As noted above, a part of this feature was dug during the 1995 season when the edge of it was detected in Unit 201. The feature was unlined and in fact quite difficult to distinguish from the surrounding soil until the red sterile zone was reached, except that the bones formed a clear edge suggesting that they were originally contained in a pit or other structure. No structural remnants were found, however. The outer dimensions of the bone deposit measured about 1.2 × 1.5 m by 25 cm deep, though importantly, the upper parts of the deposit had been removed or at least disturbed by plowing. A few small fragments of human bone were found in the plow zone, indicating that some amount of plow damage had occurred to the burial, but it was unclear how much of the grave had been removed. The landowner reported having recovered a complete cranium from the area. Very much like the double burial described above, the rectangular pit of the multiple burial intruded just a few centimeters into the sterile soil, forming a "canoe-shaped" depression at the bottom. The soil matrix within which the bones rested was a fine gray-brown sandy loam, whereas the surrounding midden deposit was a slightly coarser gray-brown sandy loam.

In the upper layer, several crania were found in the east side of the north half, with long bones concentrated toward the west, but upon removing the rest of the layers, it appeared that crania as well as all other elements were deposited throughout, showing no discernible pattern. Only four long bones were found in articulation. One tibia was articulated with its respective fibula, and one humerus was articulated with its respective radius. Several mandibles may have been articulated with crania found close by, but the deposit was so compact and mixed that articulation was hard to determine. Many teeth were found, some still articulated within the mandible or maxilla. Almost all bones of the human skeleton were found, including the delicate ear bones, the vomer, the inferior nasal conchae, the palatines, and the lacrimals. The only ones not found were the hyoid and several carpals and tarsals. Ribs, vertebrae, and phalanges were so numerous that very few of them were point provenienced; almost every square decimeter contained at least one of the three. The bones were highly fragmented, so that unidentifiable long bone splinters and bone fragments were extremely abundant. Except for the smaller bones of the body such as carpals and tarsals, very few bones were found intact; almost all were fragmented postmortemly, and almost none was complete.

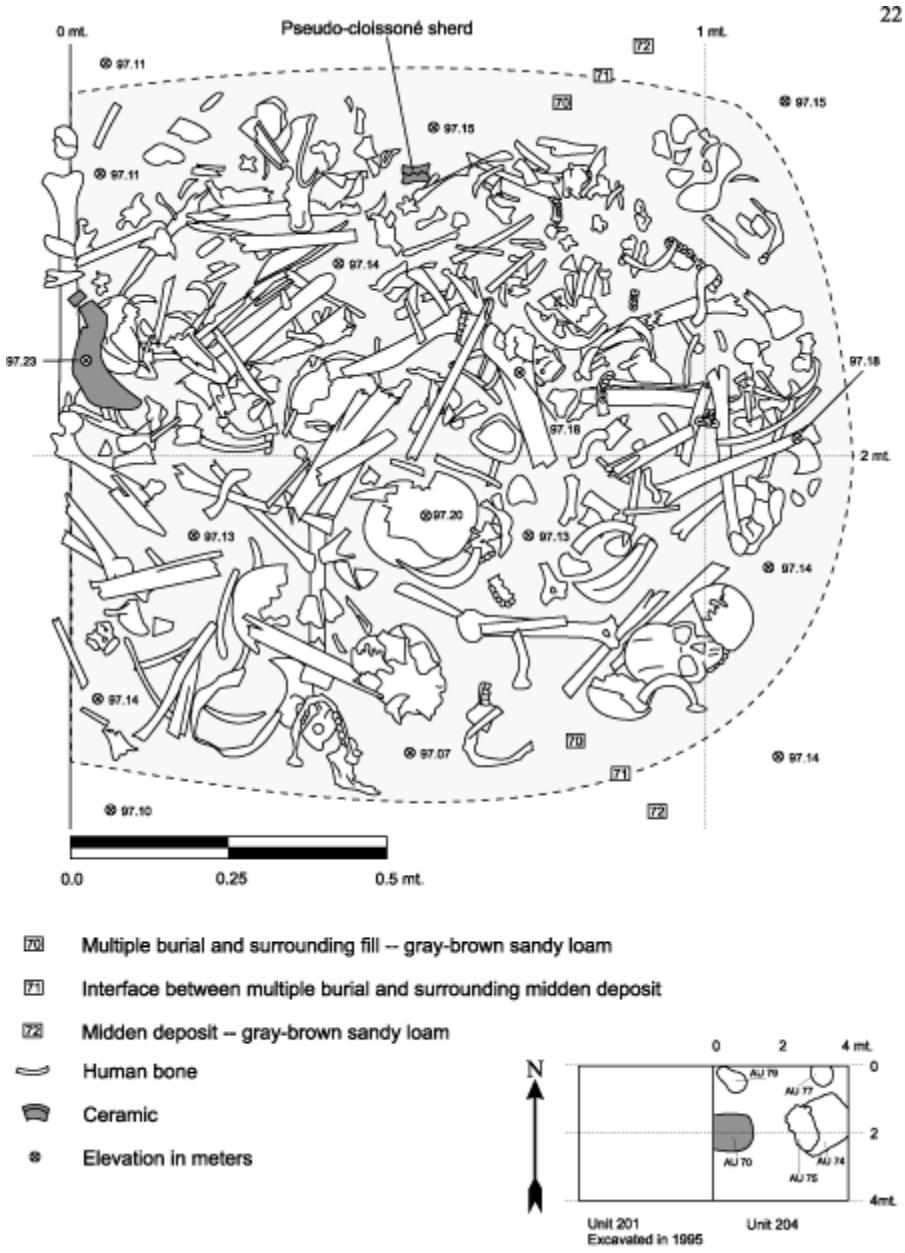


Figure 12. Analytical Unit 70, Secondary Multiple Burial.

Figure 13. Unit 204, Secondary Multiple Burial.

Both males and females were included in the deposit, judging from the shapes of some pelves, the robusticity of some crania, and the sizes of some femoral heads. Both adults and subadults were identified as well. The articular ends of many long bones were observed to be in the process of fusing, indicating adolescent youths. More precise determination of age will be possible after laboratory analysis of some of the still-articulated teeth. Several bones were so small that they could only have belonged to infants; these bones included two tiny mandibles and several tiny clavicles, ribs, and long bones.

Four hundred thirty-two bones were individually point-provenienced; Table 2 includes these plus field counts of smaller bones that were not point-provenienced. Crania, while consisting of many different bones, were treated as one specimen when they appeared to derive from a single individual. In total, 25 complete or semi-complete crania were found, in addition to 62 cranial parts that were mostly vault fragments. The preliminary counts of other bones are compatible with the number of individuals implied by the crania. Fifteen clavicles were among the few bones that were complete and intact. Sixty-two unidentifiable long-bone shaft fragments were found, some being either ulnae, radii, or fibulae, others being femora, humeri, or tibiae. Fifty-nine bags of identifiable fragments and small bones were recovered. The bones in those bags were separated by element, then separated again according to completeness. The counts in the table represent only the complete specimens. Counts for female-male distribution, left-right siding, and adult-subadult aging will be available after further laboratory analysis.

Field observations of cut marks and trauma were limited, since such inferences require careful and close analysis. Burning, crushing, peeling, cut marks, and abrasion striae

were all observed. In addition, there was evidence for rodent gnawing on some specimens.

Several non-human bones were found in the burial. One was an astragalus, but the rest were unidentifiable.

The only notable artifacts found in the secondary multiple burial were the neck of a pseudo-cloisonné copa that was resting in the north half of the deposit (Figure 14), a body sherd possibly belonging to the same vessel, and a large fragment of a burnished black olla, which was found in the western end. The pigment had disappeared from the pseudo-cloisonné vessel, leaving only the panel-dividing lines visible. All lay near the top of the bone concentration. These artifacts are potentially significant as parallels to the copa-olla complex found in the multiple, disarticulated burial at Alta Vista (Holien and Pickering, 1978), though if so, it is difficult to understand why only fragments were recovered. Perhaps the other parts of the vessels were lost to plowing. The burial contained over 100 other ceramic sherds, which were probably included inadvertently as part of the fill that eventually became mixed with the bones. The most frequent diagnostic types are incised-engraved wares (Figure 15), but their frequencies are too low to allow a secure temporal placement. Styles belonging to the early and late, but not the middle, periods of occupation were found in the burial (Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5). The deposit included no figurines or other special artifacts (Table 6), and only one piece of obsidian, a tertiary flake (Table 7).

Figure 14. Unit 204, Pseudo-cloisonné Sherds from Secondary Multiple Burial.

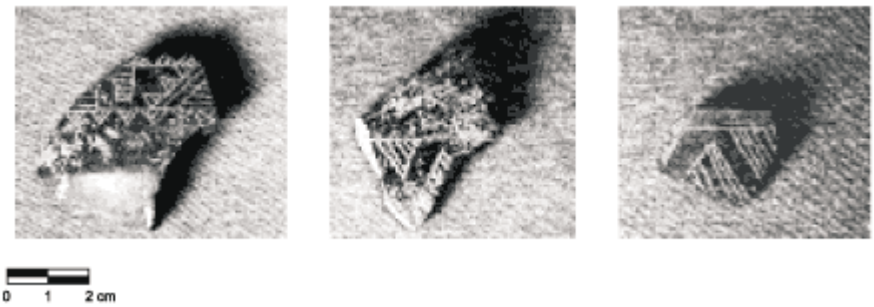


Figure 15. Unit 204, Incised-engraved Sherds of the La Quemada complex.

Midden Deposit

Excavation was originally begun in this part of Los Pilarillos because a dense surface scatter of artifacts suggested the possible presence of intact trash middens, i.e., discarded materials that were intentionally dumped in a place where they could be recovered archaeologically. We are currently in doubt as to the degree of intactness of the midden (AU 72), as well as its interface with some of the surrounding and underlying features (AU 73). We tentatively regard the contents of the midden as material that gradually accumulated around the site by unspecified depositional processes. The hearth, the flexed burial, and the disarticulated burial may largely pre-date the midden. As noted above, the relationships between the above-described features and the trash zone were difficult to discern, both because the soils included in the features were very similar to that in the trash zone, and because of plowing disturbance.

Our inference is that the secondary multiple burial may post-date some of the trash accumulation, but that trash continued to accumulate after it was created. An important bit of evidence that might be followed out in future excavations is a broken line of orange clay material, similar to that which comprises some floors in Mound 1, that apparently corresponds to a disintegrated floor mid-way in the trash zone. The only feature that can be related to the postulated floor is the stone-lined hearth, which was sealed by the floor, inasmuch as traces of the material clearly appeared above the hearth. The broken orange line could represent a plaza surface that accompanied the ritual use of the area where the burials were deposited, or that was in service after the time of the burials. The orange line was only faintly perceptible in plain view during excavation, and covered only the northeastern part of Unit 204. Materials above and below it were collected separately.

Plow Zone

The upper 25 cm of the deposits (AUs 69, 68, and 70) were thoroughly stirred by mechanical plowing, which continues today, regularly bringing artifacts to the surface. The soil in this zone is a brown sandy loam that may differ in color from the midden

deposit only because of the inclusion of decayed plant matter that is plowed back into the soil.

Conclusions

The proposition that the secondary multiple burial might be another example of the Tezcatlipoca-centered ceremonialism inferred by Holien and Pickering (1978) at Alta Vista, can be evaluated and modified in the light of the above findings. The Los Pilarillos multiple burial had attributes that both paralleled and diverged from the Alta Vista burial. The mass of disarticulated skeletal material was configured much like the Alta Vista example, but unlike the mass at Alta Vista, did not prove to overlie an isolated, decapitated individual with a rich, symbolically significant offering. Yet in partial conformance to the Alta Vista model, a large, fighting-age male was buried nearby along with a more gracile individual, conceivably a female relative. The "trophy skull" and "trophy femur" that accompanied him are plausible artifacts of war. Also, the presence of the fragment of a pseudo-cloisonné copa amongst the disarticulated remains, along with a partial olla, is consistent with the Alta Vista case.

Although detailed analyses will provide more insights, the above observations add considerably to our knowledge of site structure, mortuary practices, and social organization in the La Quemada-Malpaso Valley area. First, Plaza 1 is a previously unrecorded kind of burial context, both on the intra- and inter-site levels. It is the only example of a cemetery area in the Malpaso Valley and the only multiple burial recovered outside of La Quemada. All previously known multiple skeletal deposits are located in ceremonial facilities, such as the Hall of Columns (Pijoan and Mansilla, 1990), in the Temple at Terrace 18 (Nelson *et al.*, 1992), around the pyramid at the Cuartel area (Jiménez Betts, 1989), or in the ballcourt of La Quemada (Jiménez, personal communication, 1993). The occurrence of such burials outside the main ceremonial center shows that the population in the valley at large participated in the complex, ritualistic practices of multiple burial; these practices were not restricted to the main ceremonial center.

Furthermore, the excavated remains demonstrate that not all individuals who came to rest in multiple burials were young male warriors. Previous indications had been that the demographic profile of the deposits was male, post adolescent, and pre-senescent, their skeletons primarily represented by skulls and long bones while smaller body parts were discarded in middens (Nelson *et al.*, 1992). Whole (though disarticulated) bodies of males and females, ranging from infancy to old age, raise new interpretive possibilities, and force a questioning of the proposition that all multiple burials in the region are related to ritualized warfare or sacrifice. The individuals in the multiple burial, if related to warfare, must have been victims of an attack rather than contestants.

There are other, equally plausible explanations of such demographic distribution that do not require reference to warfare. For example, many scholars emphasize the importance of ancestral spirits to the living Huichol, who believe that their ancestors,

though physically deceased, are full participants in ongoing matters (Fikes, 1985; García de Weigand and Weigand, 1988; Lumholtz, 1902). In view of the inclusion of people representing a range of demographic categories, one can imagine that the remains could have been the product of charnel behavior in which ancestral remains were kept above ground for a period or time before burial, or possibly removed and reburied, or moved aside as the burial place was reopened to receive new remains, as is often inferred for West Mexican shaft tombs. The theme of "living with the ancestors" (McAnany, 1995), now coming to the fore amongst Maya archaeologists, deserves continued consideration on the northern frontier.

Following out that line of reasoning, it is interesting to observe the contrast between the contents of the two rectangular pits; one holding just two principal burials, the other about 25. The pattern allows the suggestion that the two features represent different stages in a long-term process of human bone curation, the two-person burial representing an early stage of bone accumulation and the multiple burial a more advanced stage. In other words, it is possible that both rectangular pits were small crypts that were opened periodically to receive the remains of the deceased, and that the multiple burial simply represents a longer enactment of that process than the double burial.

Alternatively, the two features may represent distinct mortuary patterns, in which case the relatively special treatment accorded to the two individuals would imply that they were of different social status than the other people.

Further osteological analysis of the skeletal material should make it possible to eliminate one of these competing conceptions, along with others that can be imagined to account for the disarticulated remains. An M.A. thesis by Denise To, which is currently in progress, will deal in depth with more of the pathological and taphonomic observations that seem to be so promising. Biological anthropologist Debra Martin is also collaborating with the principal investigator in a larger study of the human remains from the La Quemada-Malpaso Valley Archaeological project. From the above observations, however, it should be clear that the 1997 FAMSI-funded excavations at Los Pilarillos were highly productive of information about cultural practices on the northern frontier of Mesoamerica.

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TABLE 1. Descriptions of Analytical Units in Excavation Unit 204

AU	Phase	Cultural Interpretation	Soil Matrix
67	Overburden	Ground surface	n/a
68	Overburden	Plow zone	Brown sandy loam
69	Overburden	Interface between plow zone and midden	n/a
70	Multiple burial	Multiple burial	Gray-brown sandy loam
71	Multiple burial	Boundary of multiple burial	n/a
72	Midden	Midden	Gray-brown sandy loam
73	Midden	Interface between midden and sterile soil and intrusive features	n/a
74.0	Disarticulated burial	Burial fill	Mottled orange-brown sandy loam
74.1	Disarticulated burial	Adobe lining	Gray sandy loam
74.2	Disarticulated burial	Pit fill not clearly associated with either burial	Mottled grey-brown sandy loam
75.0	Flexed burial	Burial fill	Gray-brown sandy loam
75.1	Flexed burial	Adobe lining	Gray and brown adobes
76	Disarticulated and flexed burials	Rectangular pit containing disarticulated and flexed burials	n/a
77	Hearth	Hearth fill	Gray-brown sandy loam with ash
78	Hearth	Circular hearth pit	n/a
79.0	Pit of unknown purpose	Pit fill	Light gray-brown sandy loam
79.1	Pit of unknown purpose	Pit fill	Brown sandy loam
80	Pit of unknown purpose	Double oval or pear shaped pit	n/a
81	Sterile soil	Sterile soil	Orange-brown sandy clay

Abbreviation: n/a = Not Applicable

TABLE 2. Osteological Remains in Analytical Unit 70 (Secondary Multiple Burial)

Bone		Count
Cranium	Crania	25
	Cranial fragments	62
	Ear ossicles	3
	Maxilla	21
	Mandible	30
	Teeth	>90
Arm	Humerus	35
	Ulna	13
	Radius	14
	Capitate	1
	Trapezium	1
	Hammate	2
	Metacarpal	17
	Phalanges	35
Leg	Femur	30
	Tibia	30
	Fibula	15
	Patella	3
	Foot navicular	8
	Talus	8

	Cuneiforms	5
	Calcaneous	1
	Cuboid	4
	Metatarsal	21
Torso	Clavicle	15
	Scapula	18
	Vertebrae	89
	Pelvis	16
	Saccrum	5
	Ribs	41
	Sternum	1
Faunal		4
TOTAL		**573**

TABLE 3. Ceramic Types by Analytical Unit

Type			**Analytical Unit**										**TOTAL**
			67	**68**	**70**	**72**	**74.0, 74.2**	**75.0**	**77**	**79.0, 79.1**	**81**	**Mixed**	
Plain	Matte		0	60	1	22	0	0	1	2	0	0	86
	Impressed		0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
	Burnished	0											
		Plain	17	1134	43	585	6	4	0	14	0	3	1806
		Black	1	264	10	161	4	1	1	14	1	2	459
	Brushed	0											
		Plain	6	622	19	232	2	0	0	5	0	4	890

		With Mud	6	488	19	248	0	4	3	2	0	3	773
		Sub-total	30	2569	93	1248	12	9	5	37	1	13	4017
Painted	Monochrome												
		Red Slipped	0	9	1	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	16
		Other Slipped	5	365	13	169	1	2	3	4	0	2	564
	Bichrome												
		Huanusco Red-on-White	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Morones Black-on-Purple	0	8	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
		Romos Red-on-Buff	1	176	4	106	0	1	0	4	0	0	292
		Santa Rosa Red-on-White	0	12	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
		Santiago White-on-Red	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
		Sierra Brown-on-White	0	8	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
	Polychrome												
		Borde	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
		San Juan	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Negative												
		Angeles Black-on-White	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Angeles	0	15	1	5	1	0	0	1	0	0	23
		Tepozan	0	7	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
		Indeterminate	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Indeterminate		0	18	0	13	1	0	0	0	0	2	34
		Sub-total	6	629	19	322	4	4	3	10	0	4	1001
Incised-Engraved	Huizache Complex												
		Coyotes	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
		Malpaso	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Quisillo	0	14	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
		Trujillo	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Villanueva	1	10	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
		Unidentified	0	8	1	12	0	0	0	1	0	0	22

	La Quemada Complex												
		Atitanac	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
		Noria	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Tuitlan	0	4	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	8
		Unidentified	0	11	0	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	19
	Murguia Complex												
		Unidentified	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Indeterminate		0	61	2	15	0	0	1	0	0	1	80
Sub-total			1	117	5	53	0	2	1	1	0	1	181
Pseudo-Cloisonné			0	2	1	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	8
Indeterminate			2	178	3	57	0	0	0	1	0	0	241
TOTAL			**39**	**3495**	**121**	**1684**	**16**	**15**	**10**	**49**	**1**	**18**	**5448**

TABLE 4. Ceramic Types by Vessel Form

Type			Vessel Form									TOTAL
			Jar	Bowl	Flaring Rim Bowl	Tripod Bowl	Plate	Plaque	Copa	Worked	Unknown	
Plain	Matte		51	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	30	86
	Impressed		2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Burnished											
		Plain	931	342	1	21	1	0	0	37	473	1806
		Black	212	123	0	11	0	0	0	8	105	459
	Brushed											
		Plain	721	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	164	890
		With Mud	642	3	0	0	0	0	0	8	120	773
Sub-total			**2559**	**475**	**1**	**32**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**57**	**892**	**4017**
Painted	Monochrome											
		Red Slipped	332	117	0	0	0	0	0	7	108	564
		Other Slipped	9	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	16
	Bichrome											
		Huanusco Red-on-White	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
		Morones Black-on-Purple	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12
		Romos Red-on-Buff	216	63	0	0	0	0	0	9	4	292
		Santa Rosa Red-on-White	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
		Santiago White-on-Red	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Sierra Brown-on-White	14	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	17
	Polychrome											
		Borde	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

		San Juan	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Negative											
		Angeles Black-on-White	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Angeles	20	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	23
		Tepozan	2	4	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	12
		Indeterminate	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Indeterminate		23	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
Sub-total			**650**	**207**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**3**	**0**	**17**	**118**	**1001**
Incised-Engraved	Huizache Complex											
		Coyotes	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
		Malpaso	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Quisillo	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	2	18
		Trujillo	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Villanueva	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	17
		Unidentified	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
	La Quemada Complex											
		Atitanac	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
		Noria	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Tuitlan	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
		Unidentified	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	1	19
	Murguia Complex											
		Unidentified	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Indeterminate		0	1	0	52	0	0	0	0	27	80
Sub-total			**0**	**1**	**0**	**150**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**30**	**181**
Pseudo-Cloisonné			1	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	3	8
Indeterminate			13	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	224	241
TOTAL			**3223**	**683**	**5**	**184**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**77**	**1267**	**5448**

TABLE 5. Ceramic Types by Vessel Portion

Type			Vessel Portion								TOTAL
			Body	Rim	Rimtab	Handle	Base	Tripod Support	Partial Vessel	Complete Vessel	
Plain	Matte		73	10	0	2	1	0	0	0	86
	Impressed		3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	Burnished										
		Plain	1645	139	8	0	0	14	0	0	1806
		Black	427	21	3	0	0	7	1	0	459
	Brushed										
		Plain	878	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	890
		With Mud	753	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	773
		Sub-total	**3779**	**202**	**11**	**2**	**1**	**21**	**1**	**0**	**4017**
Painted	Monochrome										
		Red Slipped	464	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	564
		Other Slipped	15	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
	Bichrome										
		Huanusco Red-on-White	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Morones Black-on-Purple	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
		Romos Red-on-Buff	268	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	292
		Santa Rosa Red-on-White	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
		Santiago White-on-Red	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
		Sierra Brown-on-White	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
	Polychrome										
		Borde	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
		San Juan	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Negative										

		Angeles Black-on-White	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Angeles	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
		Tepozan	7	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	12
		Indeterminate	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	Indeterminate		31	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
		Sub-total	**864**	**131**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**5**	**0**	**1**	**1001**
Incised-Engraved	Huizache Complex										
		Coyotes	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
		Malpaso	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
		Quisillo	10	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
		Trujillo	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		Villanueva	7	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
		Unidentified	8	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
	La Quemada Complex										
		Atitanac	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
		Noria	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
		Tuitlan	0	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	8
		Unidentified	6	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
	Murguia Complex										
		Unidentified	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Indeterminate		46	32	2	0	0	0	0	0	80
		Sub-total	**79**	**98**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**181**
Pseudo-Cloisonné			6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Indeterminate			237	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	241
TOTAL			**4965**	**435**	**15**	**3**	**1**	**27**	**1**	**1**	**5448**

TABLE 6. Figurines and Other Small Artifacts

Artifact		Analytical Unit										TOTAL
		67	68	70	72	74.0, 74.2	75.0	77	79.0, 79.1	81	Mixed	
Figurines	Unidentified type	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Malacate (spindle whorl)	Ceramic	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Minerals	Blue-green stone	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Shell	Unworked	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Ornaments	Possible stone bead	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Ceramic bead	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL		**0**	**2**	**1**	**4**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**8**

TABLE 7. Obsidian Artifacts

Artifact		Analytical Unit										TOTAL
		67	68	70	72	74.0, 74.2	75.0	77	79.0, 79.1	81	Mixed	
Flakes	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Secondary	0	5	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	Tertiary	0	20	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	26
	Fragmentary	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sub-total		0	26	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	35
Retouched Flakes		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tools		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Cores	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shatter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	**0**	**26**	**1**	**8**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**35**

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