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Oral health in prehistoric San Pedro de Atacama oases, Northern Chile



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ABSTRACT

After almost 2000 years of local development, including limited trading with neighboring ethnic groups, the societies that occupied the oases of San Pedro de Atacama, Northern Chile, became part of the trade web of the Tiwanaku empire, between 500 and 1000 CE. Archaeological evidence tends to support the idea that the period under the influence of the *altiplano* (high plane) empire was very affluent. Here we investigate the possibility that this affluence had a positive impact on the health status of the Atacameneans, using the oral health as an indirect indicator of quality of life. Dental decay, dental abscess, dental wear, linear enamel hypoplasia, periodontal disease and dental calculus were analyzed on 371 skeletons from 12 sites from San Pedro de Atacama oases. We believe that if, indeed, there were better biological conditions during the *altiplano* influence, this could have been caused by the access to a more diversified food intake promoted by the intensification of the trading network established by Tiwanaku in the central-south Andes, of which San Pedro de Atacama became an important node.

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Introduction

The region of San Pedro de Atacama, Northern Chile (Fig. 1), is characterized by a very dry climate and a very arid soil (Pimentel, 1976). This aridity facilitates the conservation of archaeological

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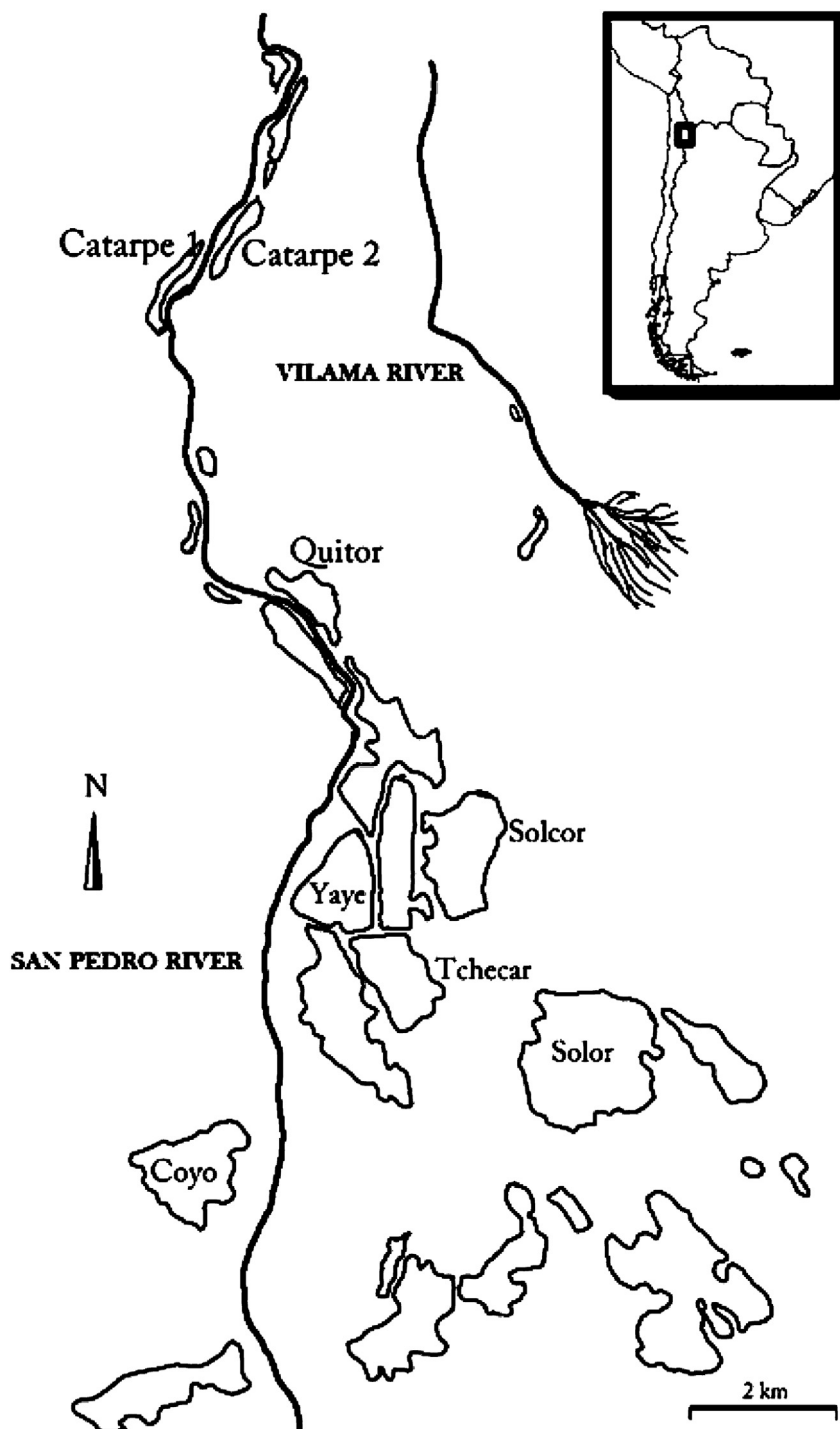


Fig. 1. Location of San Pedro de Atacama oases where the skeletal samples were exhumed, except Toconao Oriente site, situated at 40 Km to the south (designed by Diane Cossermelli).

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