



## Preliminary molecular evidence of feasting in the Inca site of Fuerte Quemado-Intihuatana, Catamarca, Argentina



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### ABSTRACT

Feasting was an important aspect of the domination strategy designed by the Inca Empire in the provinces. Hospitality banquets were the setting for negotiations between Cuzco and the annexed populations. Consumption of food and drink played a fundamental role in these feasts. In this paper we present the first study of organic residues recovered from ceramic vessels from the archaeological site of Fuerte Quemado-Intihuatana (Catamarca, Argentina), an important settlement of the *Collasuyu* province. Earlier functional studies proposed that these vessels were used to store and serve food and drink in commensal contexts. Results from this preliminary molecular study support this hypothesis because all the containers yielded organic residues. Chemical and isotopic studies suggest that food and different kinds of beers were held in these containers during festive events.

### 1. Introduction

Feasting was an important part of the Andean pre-Hispanic world-view and played a fundamental role in social cohesion, both in domestic and communal spaces. Festive events were total social facts that knit the fabric of economic, politic, and symbolic consumption practices (Dietler, 2006; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). In pre-State decentralized Andean societies, food and drink for festive events were produced at a domestic or communal scale, and consumption practices were rooted in symmetric commensality and reciprocity (Logan et al., 2012). However, during the Inca expansion festive events were hosted by the State and consumption practices shifted towards asymmetrical commensalism (Bray et al., 2009; Dillehay, 2012; Moore, 2013). Production became specialized and organized by a central power, distribution was monopolized, and consumption took place in contexts of social segregation which crystallized hierarchies and unequal power relations (Bray, 2003; Hastorf, 1990).

Northwest Argentina was part of the *Collasuyu* southern Inca province during the 15th and 16th centuries AD, and festivities involving food and drink were often sponsored by the central State (Giovannetti

et al., 2013; Leibowicz, 2013; Williams et al., 2005). Ethnohistorical accounts suggest that the Inca drink of preference was *chicha* made from maize (*Zea mays*), although other fermented beverages were produced and consumed (Cobo, 1964). These beers were made from local resources such as mesquite or algarroba (*Prosopis*), mistol (*Ziziphus mistol*), chañar (*Geoffroea decorticans*), aguaribay or molle (*Schinus*), quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa*), amaranth (*Amaranthus*), and peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*) (Biber and VanDerwarker, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2009; Laffey, 2015). The availability of cultivated or gathered plants may have determined which raw material was used to produce drinks in each region. Also, the native fermentation recipes could have coexisted with the specialized production practices introduced by the Inca, such as the production of maize *chicha* at a large scale. As a consequence, one of the State's strategies was the uprooting and resettling of *mitimae* populations assigned to intensive agricultural production (Williams, 2000). The State offered sustenance-intoxication in the form of food and *chicha* beer in ritual contexts in order to mobilize workforce, to settle agreements with local authorities, and to destroy or re-signify local worship to the ancestors and other-than-human entities (Bray, 2012; Malpass and Alconini, 2010; Nielsen, 2010; Orgaz and Ratto,

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2015; Shimada, 2015; Sternfeld, 2007). Also, a syncretism between the local festivities and the new commensal practices introduced by the Incas has been proposed (Orgaz, 2012). Some local festivities with pre-Hispanic roots such as the *Chiqui-* where large amounts of *aloja* made from mesquite were consumed- have even survived up to the Colonial and Republican eras (Carrizo, 1942; Gentile, 2001; Karlovich, 2005).

The change in the scale of food and drink consumption during feasts implied a more complex organization of labor in order to carry out each of the many steps involved in raw material procurement and production. In the case of beers it included selection of seeds/pods/fruits, grinding, kneading, boiling, brewing, fermenting, decanting, straining, separating, storing, transporting, and serving (Cremonte et al., 2009; Hayashida, 2008; Parker and McCool, 2015). Simultaneously, large quantities of food were prepared for the banquet, including different kinds of roasts and stews (Hastorf, 2003).

The complex chain of food and drink production also implied the development of a specific ceramic assemblage for each step of the elaboration, storage, transport and service of foods and drinks. The Inca ceramic “culinary equipment” was designed not only to efficiently carry out its functional purpose, but also in some cases to be publicly exhibited during the libations and feasts. This was particularly true with the morphological types that were meant to be seen, such as the *aribalos* and aribaloids, which boasted intricate decorations (Bray, 2003). Some local fineware such as *Santa María* vessels and *pucos* (bowls) could have also been used to serve food and drinks (Greco et al., 2012; Lantos et al., 2015; Orgaz, 2012). Other containers which were used for the first stages of production and decantation had no decoration. Because of their function, these vessels often had signs of soot and/or heavy stirring (Cremonte et al., 2009). Some of these pots may also have been multifunctional, and could have been used to both prepare stews and fermented drinks.

### 1.1. The archaeological site of Fuerte Quemado-Intihuatana in the Yocavil valley

The Yocavil valley is part of the Calchaquí valley system that is defined by the Sierra del Cajón mountainous chain to the West and the Calchaquí and Aconquija ranges to the East. The Santa María river runs along the valley North to South, and on each margin there are numerous alluvial cones from tributary streams that run into the main drainage system (Ruiz Huidobro, 1972). The valley is known for its numerous archaeological sites with prominent monumental constructions. During the 11th to 15th centuries, a complex social and political system developed in this region, which materialized in many large and highly populated settlements, increasingly complex organization of labor, specialized artisanship, and intricate funerary traditions (Tarragó and González, 2004; Tarragó et al., 1999). This was the social setting when the Inca Empire arrived at the end of the 15th century AD to the Yocavil valley. The domination strategies from Cuzco defined a new cultural pattern and a different spatial distribution of imperial assets in the annexed territories. This suggests a significant variability in the strategies and negotiations that took place between local and imperial societies, resulting in specific archaeological records in each of the sites located along the valley (González and Tarragó, 2005; Orgaz, 2014; Reynoso, 2003).

Fuerte Quemado-Intihuatana was a densely populated settlement located in the northern section of the Yocavil valley, Catamarca province, at an altitude of 1900 m.a.s.l. (Fig. 1). It was one of the largest administrative Inca sites in NW Argentina, and was declared Provincial Historical Site in 2006. In this place local and Inca cultures were negotiated and re-signified. It is. The site is defined by a building conglomerate that extends in a West-East direction from the summit of a rocky outcrop that is part of the Cajón chain to the slope and alluvial plain of the Simonita and Santa María rivers, covering a total area of three squared kilometers (Fig. 2A).

The site's architectural remains were first described in the late 19th

and early 20th centuries (Bruch, 1911; Lafone Quevedo, 1904). After a long hiatus, the investigations at Fuerte Quemado were resumed in the late 1970s and 1980s (Kriscautzky, 1999). In 2006 the locality was declared Provincial Historical Site by the government of Catamarca, Argentina. The extensive research at the site established that Fuerte Quemado-Intihuatana had a complex history of interaction between the local political entities and the Inca Empire. These interactions included both domestic activities related to the social reproduction of the inhabitants, as well as activities carried out in ceremonial contexts related to the Inca domination strategy (Kriscautzky, 1999; Orgaz and Kriscautzky, 2012; Orgaz, 2014, 2012).

Two types of occupation were established by cultural indicators such as architectural and ceramic styles: Local pre-Inca and Inca (Kriscautzky, 1999). Sectors I, II, III, V, and VI were built during the pre-Inca Late Intermediate period (11th to 15th centuries AD) by local societies and their occupation continued into the Inca period (15th and 16th centuries AD). These sectors are dispersed along the slopes and hillsides of the valley. Sector IV is located in the central urban area and sector VII is placed in the summit of the granitic outcrop. These last two sectors were built by the Inca when they expanded into the Yocavil valley.

In this paper we focus on samples from the ceramic assemblages recovered by Dr. Néstor Kriscautzky during the 1970s and 1980s excavations of two architectural features: Enclosure R-51 and Enclosure C-43 (Fig. 2B, C and D). Previous studies of the architecture, ceramic assemblage, botanic remains, and recovery of foreign objects, showed that these enclosures were specifically used for feasting (Orgaz, 2012, 2014).

Enclosure R-51 is located in the Sector V. It is a spacious elliptical construction made from well finished stone walls, and it has no direct access in or out (Fig. 2B and C). A ceramic MNV (minimum number of vessels) of 31 was calculated in this assemblage, including fineware (three *aribalos*, five aribaloids, eleven *pucos*, three *Santa María* vessels) and coarseware (two pedestal pots, two cone based globular pots, five globular pots) (Orgaz, 2014). The assemblage pointed towards storage and consumption of food and drinks. The small amount of cooking pots coupled with the existence of only one small hearth and no other cooking implements, suggested that food was not prepared in this enclosure. The food consumption practices carried out in Enclosure R-51 indicated a high level of social hierarchy and segregation, due to the low accessibility of this closed private space, the high amount of fineware (71%) versus coarseware (29%), the locally manufactured pottery that imitated Inca styles (aribaloids and pedestal pots), and the provincial style Inca pottery (*aribalos*). It was proposed that this space was used for private commensal practices within a local elite residence (Orgaz, 2014).

Enclosure C-43 is located in sector IV (Fig. 2D). It is an open rectangular space built with stone and mortar with one wide opening on the Eastern side. In this space a ceramic MNV of 19 was calculated, including fineware (one *aribalo*, five aribaloids, 12 *pucos*) and coarseware (one pedestal pot) (Orgaz, 2012). This assemblage was exclusively used for serving and consuming food and drink. No cooking pots or large storage vessels were found, and only a small hearth was detected, indicating that this space was not used to prepare food (Table 1). It was proposed that this building was dedicated to public commensal practices where food and beverages were shared (Orgaz, 2012).

Functional studies of the vessels found at R-51 and C-43 provided insight into the size, surface treatment, decoration, and use-alteration marks of the assemblage (Orgaz, 2014, 2012). Initial results indicated that:

- a) *Aribalos* and aribaloids may have been employed to store liquids due to their conic or semi-conic bases, constricted bottle-like necks, smoothed inner surfaces and slipped, polished, and painted outer surfaces (Fig. 3A). Various authors, based on ethno-historical records, have stated that *aribalos* and aribaloids were designed and

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