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The production and circulation of indigenous lead-glazed ceramics in northern Peru during Spanish colonial times

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we characterize the production and circulation of Early Green Glazed (EGG) Ware, an innovative variety of lead-glazed ceramics produced in Peru's North Coast region in the wake of the Spanish colonization of the Andes. INAA of pastes and LA-ICP-MS of glazes of EGG Ware samples collected from sites in Peru's Zaña, and Chicama river valleys reveal contrasting patterns of composition. While paste characterization via INAA identified a great deal of compositional diversity, LA-ICP-MS data from glazes falls into two discrete groups. We interpret these results as evidence of 1) disperse production of pastes, employing either a wide variety of source materials and/or recipes, mirroring the production of Late Prehispanic paddle-stamped wares, and 2) more nucleated collection of materials for glaze production, perhaps from distinct sources of lead ore. We interpret the presence of small numbers of samples with glaze compositions characteristic of the Zaña valley in Chicama Valley assemblages as evidence of possible trade between indigenous communities in artisanal goods and/or raw materials during the late 16th century CE.

1. Introduction

During the 16th century CE, potters living in what is now northern Peru produced a curious variety of ceramics – vessels with predominantly pre-Hispanic forms covered with lead glaze, a surface treatment that appeared in the Andes only after the Spanish invasion of 1532 CE. Previous discussions of these vessels have seen them as icons of the transformation of native craft and technology under Spanish rule (Acevedo Basurto et al., 2004; Acevedo, 1986; Bushnell, 1959; Hecker and Hecker, 1988; Mayer, 1984; Mogrovejo Rosales, 1996). However, only recently have samples been recovered in archaeological context, permitting discussions to push beyond general speculation about where, when and how this pottery was produced and utilized. Some observers have argued that such vessels were made by native artisans who learned glazing techniques through explicit instruction from Spanish artisans (Bushnell, 1959; Mayer, 1984), while others have emphasized how they attest to the continuity of native ceramic technologies during colonial times (Acevedo Basurto et al., 2004; Tschopik, 1950).

We label these ceramics Early Green Glazed (EGG) Ware, and argue that they were produced by indigenous artisans who incorporated glazing into their existing decorative programs in the 16th century. Rather than being the products of one or two workshops overseen by Spanish ceramicists, we argue that EGG Ware was produced in dispersed locations, not unlike the paddle-stamped ceramics found in domestic assemblages throughout much of the North Coast region since 1000 CE (Cleland and Shimada, 1998; VanValkenburgh, 2012, n.d.). The results of the analyses presented in this study suggest that some North Coast potters incorporated glazing into their decorative programs relatively quickly. At the same time, they likely obtained the lead ores needed to produce glazes from a limited number of sources (perhaps two).

In this study, we present chemical characterization data of both glazes and pastes of samples recovered from Peru's Zaña and

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Chicama valleys. The samples of EGG Ware were collected from excavations at three sites – Carrizales (Zaña Valley), Mocupe Viejo (Zaña Valley), and Magdalena de Cao Viejo (Chicama Valley), as well as surface collections from three additional single-component sites in the lower Zaña valley – Puerto de Chérrepe, Conjunto 216 and Conjunto 271 (Fig. 1). Analysis of glaze composition suggests that the artisans who produced these materials used two distinct lead ore sources, while the diversity of paste composition suggests that the type's producers employed a variety of clay sources and/or paste recipes – a pattern that may reflect their organization into dispersed workshops. Together, these results underscore the socially and geographically complex nature of technological change in Spanish colonial Peru.

2. Background

2.1. Early Green Glazed Ware: form, context and chronology

The glazed surfaces of EGG Ware vessels readily mark them as products of artisans working after the Spanish invasion of the Americas. Current scholarly consensus is that true glazes – thin layers of glass fused onto the surface of ceramics, containing both silica and fluxes – were never produced by Prehispanic potters (Rice, 1987, p. 20). In isolated cases (particularly, the American southwest and Southern Guatemala), ancient American ceramicists produced surface treatments with glassy appearances, but compositional research suggests that these treatments are the products of alternative technologies (Fenn et al., 2006; Habicht-Mauche, 2006; Herhahn, 2006; Neff, 2003; Neff and Bishop, 1988; Shepard, 1948; Van Keuren, 2006; Van Keuren et al., 2013).

Among ceramics from Prehispanic South America, no similar examples of "subglazes" or "pseudoglazes" are known. EGG Ware vessels held in museum collections, which are wholly covered with a thin yellowish to light green glaze underlain by either buff-colored or gray-black paste, have therefore been interpreted as the products of artisans working after the Spanish invasion of the Americas – most likely following the first concerted wave of European colonization of Western South America in 1532 CE. The majority of their forms are almost identical to ceramics of the Chimu–Inka style – a short-lived artistic tradition believed to postdate the establishment of Inka hegemony in the region, circa 1470–1532 C.E., and which we discuss in further detail in section

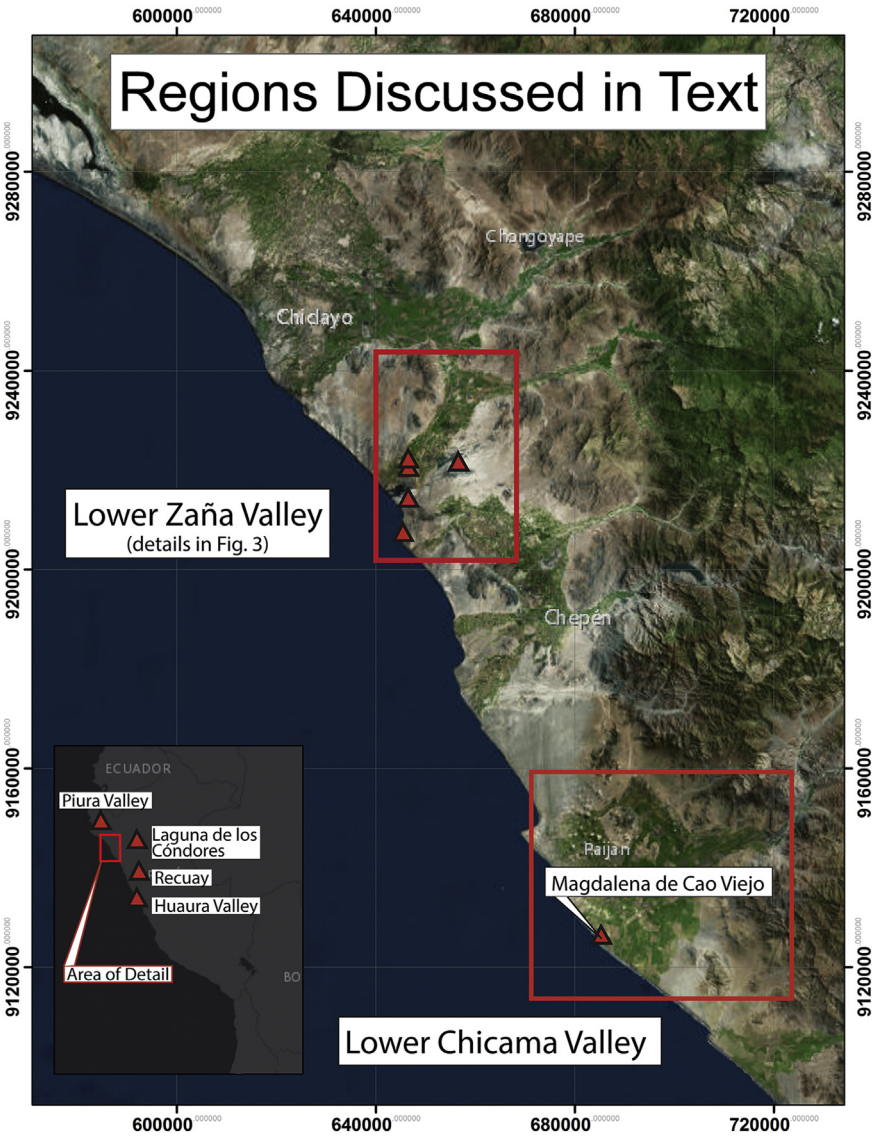

Fig. 1. Regions and sites discussed in text.