Chapter 7

Pots, Politics, and Power
Huari Ceramic Assemblages and Imperial Administration

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In this paper, we assess early state feasting practices associated with the Huari of Middle Horizon Peru: We consider the types of food and drink served and consumed by the political elite of the Huari state, the ceramic vessels that mediated this process, and the architectural spaces in which such activities occurred. Our goal is to reveal how feasting figured in the negotiation of identity, status, power, and prestige among Huari administrators and between administrators and subjects. Additionally, we wish to show that such practices occurred under certain circumstances in prescribed architecture with selected ceramic assemblages that underscored imperial Huari rule.

The Middle Horizon (A.D. 540–900) Huari empire of the central Andes is the focus of our study. Huari is one of the least known Andean polities and has confounded researchers since the first references to it were published by the Spanish soldier, Pedro Cieza de Leon 1986 [1553], in the early colonial era. The site of Huari was only rediscovered by archaeologists in the 1950’s. Prior to this time, Huari materials tended to be mis-classified or confused with those of Tiwanaku, a contemporary rival polity centered in the altiplano of modern day Bolivia (see Goldstein, this volume). Since the early 1970s, archaeological investigations have greatly advanced our knowledge of the Huari empire. With the growing amount
of data available, one subject we may now usefully consider is the role of feasting in the rise of the Huari state.

This paper will examine the ways in which feasting is believed to have generated power among Huari political elite. While different forms of feasting have been identified in Andean prehistory (i.e., Gero 1992; Moore 1989), we focus on the kinds involved in entertaining and honoring other elite and in reciprocating laborers, a practice noted in the case of the Inca (see Bray, this volume). We explore whether evidence from several important Huari sites supports an interpretation of Huari feasting and discuss the implications of our findings with regard to current views of Huari imperial administration. Although Inca administrative feasting has been used as a model by various Huari scholars, we first consider the Huari data presented here on its own terms. We concentrate on discerning Huari feasting through the analysis of certain types of Huari architecture and identify the main vessel forms that comprised the Huari imperial ceramic assemblage. To conclude our study, we compare our findings of Huari feasting to that of the Inca. Since the Huari are believed to have laid the foundation for Inca statecraft, our comparison offers insights into the evolution of Andean imperialism as played out in the context of ceremonial eating and drinking.

HUARI IMPERIALISM

Pottery and architecture form two of the most durable elements of the archaeological record and can provide us with important information on civic and ceremonial activities. Although a great deal of attention has focused on ceramics as a medium for assessing chronology and ethnic affiliation, few studies have explored pottery as culinary equipment or as an important component of the pomp and ceremony of elite events in any great detail (see Dietler and Hayden 2001; Junker 2001).

A key aspect to understanding Huari culinary wares is to unravel the question of Huari imperial cuisine. To accomplish this, we require detailed faunal and floral analyses as well as residue analysis of ceramic vessels, which would establish the types of foods consumed and their preparation and consumption patterns. Such studies are in their infancy though recent work at both coastal (Cook and Parrish 2003) and highland sites will soon provide much needed information on this subject. In the absence of such data, however, we can still infer the nature of Huari elite cuisine based on our knowledge of Inca food practices (see, for example, Cobo 1890–1895 [1653], Book 14, Chapter 5), and even those of contemporary traditional highlanders (e.g., Gade 1967:120–121, 1975:76).

Additionally, we examine the architecture where we believe state sponsored administrative activities were carried out. The buildings in which these events most likely took place were open patios flanked by narrow chambers referred to