

ON REVISITING HUACA DEL LORO: A CAUTIONARY NOTE

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In 1957 the Society for American Archaeology published William Duncan Strong's report of his 1952-53 field investigations in the Rio Grande de Nasca region on the south coast of Peru (Strong 1957). This report, entitled "Paracas, Nazca, and Tiahuanacoid Cultural Relationships in South Coastal Peru", is one of very few survey and excavation reports ever to be published about the Nasca region, and as such is an invaluable resource. Although Strong's survey was not systematic by current standards, his results are still the primary source on sites and settlement patterns for this region.

One of the sites excavated by Strong was Huaca del Loro, located in the Tunga (Trancas) Valley, the southernmost of the Rio Grande de Nasca tributaries (see Figure 1). Following the detailed seriation of Nasca style pottery developed by Lawrence E. Dawson, Allison Paulsen (1965) was able to place Strong's collections of ceramics found at Huaca del Loro into Nasca phases 7, 8, and 9, that is, the last two epochs of the Early Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Middle Horizon. More recently, Paulsen (1983) has taken a closer look at certain aspects of the architecture at Huaca del Loro, specifically the presence of a round stone building, and has used these data to suggest direct colonization by people from Ayacucho during Early Intermediate Period epoch 8, and perhaps as early as epoch 7. However, recent research in Nasca and the central highlands indicates that the architectural data do not support this interpretation.

The Site of Huaca del Loro in the 1980's

I visited the site of Huaca del Loro in May of 1984, and revisited the site several times in October and November of 1986 while doing fieldwork in the Trancas Valley near the site.¹ The site today looks substantially different than it did three decades ago when Strong worked there. In the intervening years large portions of the site have been levelled with heavy machinery, covering some sections mapped by Strong (1957: 38, Figure 16, reproduced as Figure 5 in this article). This disturbance is a mixed blessing in that it certainly destroyed portions of the site, but other portions were covered over with a meter or more of sand and gravel, and are actually protected from looting and other disturbance. A photograph (Figure 2) was taken of the site from the same angle as the photograph published by Strong (1957: 37, Figure 15A) and reprinted here as Figure 3. When the two photographs are compared one can see some of the

¹ Permission to carry out the 1986 "Proyecto Arqueológico Los Pukios de Nasca" was granted by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura, Lima, Oficio number 353-86-CNA/INC. Funding was provided by University Research Expeditions, Berkeley.

extent of the disturbance, and the differing aspects of the site between 1952 and the present.

A comparison of a sketch map made in 1984 (Figure 4) with Strong's 1952 plan (Figure 5) shows that much of the rectilinear architecture to the northwest and northeast of the round structure is now covered. An area farther north, against the hillslope, is shown on Strong's plan to be an area of some rectilinear architecture and many tombs. This area is extensively looted, as it was in Strong's time. Judging by the extensive distribution of surface remains, largely sherds and bone, the site extends a few hundred meters farther to the east and west than Strong estimated.

The remains of the round building, the so-called "Temple", stand today much as they were when Strong's photo was taken. The remains have deteriorated somewhat over time, but one can still see some details of the architecture exposed. It is this round "Temple" that has led Paulsen to suggest a direct connection with Ayacucho in the last epochs of the Early Intermediate Period.

It is probably worth noting that Strong gave no reason for designating the round structure as a temple. Perhaps the large piece of fossilized whalebone in an adjacent room influenced him (Silverman, personal communication). But he apparently regarded the round form as unique, and thus accorded it special status. The remains found in the round structure give little hint as to its function. Strong suggested that animal remains located in the structure appeared to be sacrificial (Strong 1957: 36). However, the presence of guinea pig pens (*ibid.*) might suggest a more domestic function. Regardless of the function of the building, it is its round shape and construction of stone that are of interest here.

The Ayacucho Connection

Paulsen (1983: 100) has argued that, "the shape and dimension of the round Temple and the extensive use of stone in its construction stamp this building, and the whole site, as the work of highland builders". She bases this interpretation on two lines of architectural evidence: first, that round structures are rare on the south coast during the Early Intermediate Period, and second, that round structures are found in the Ayacucho Basin at Wari and Nawim Pukio. This argument has been cited by various authors (e.g., Isbell 1987) as evidence for influence, and perhaps direct colonization, in Nasca from the Ayacucho Basin prior to the actual expansion of the Wari Empire in the Middle Horizon. I will try to show that this interpretation is not justifiable, based on the architectural data.

Round buildings in the Nasca region

In the case of the south coast Paulsen points out that round structures are found at Tres Palos II and Pacheco, with the implication, following Strong, that these are uncommon features. Recent efforts to locate Tres Palos II by Helaine Silverman and William Isbell were unsuccessful, and it appears that the site has been destroyed in the years since Strong's survey (Silverman, personal communication). Pacheco is a site (also now destroyed) in the Nasca Valley at

which a very large and elaborate Wari offering deposit was located, and the presence of a round structure there may be associated with the Wari occupation. However, the crux of Paulsen's argument is based on the belief that round stone buildings are not found on the south coast during the Early Intermediate Period. Recent work in this area indicates that this is not the case.

The 1986 "Proyecto Arqueologico Los Pukios de Nasca" had as its primary goal the mapping and recording of the system of aqueducts found in the southern three tributaries of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage. As part of this project systematic regional survey was undertaken in the Middle Nasca Valley² (Schreiber 1987b).

The Nasca Valley, as well as the other valleys of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage such as Taruga and Trancas, may be divided into Upper, Middle, and Lower sections based on topography and cultural adaptation (Figure 1). The Upper Valley is defined as the Andean and Cisandean portion of the valley, where highland forms of agriculture are characteristic. That is, crops are grown on the valley sides flanking the river bottom, which is generally too narrow for cultivation. Terraces are common, and irrigation water comes from long canals extending from higher sections of the river or other water sources at higher elevations.

The Middle Valley is that portion of the valley with coastal patterns of agriculture, with fields in the flood plain of the river, yet where the valley is flanked by the foothills of the Andes. The Lower Valley is that portion of the valley that extends out and across the desert pampa. Although numerous visits were made to sites in the Lower Valley, and a brief reconnaissance was made to the Upper Valley, systematic survey was limited to the Middle Valley (Figure 6).

The survey located some 27 habitation sites, ranging in date from (possibly) preceramic times through the Late Horizon (Schreiber 1987b). Six sites date to Early Nasca (EIP phases 2 through 4), and nine sites date to Late Nasca (EIP phases 5 through 8) and the Middle Horizon.

The most common forms of architecture at all sites dating to the Early Intermediate Period are round stone buildings. These are typically located on artificially leveled areas on hillsides. They range from round to ovoid in plan, are 4 to 9 meters in interior diameter, and are generally made of angular broken stone set in mud mortar. As none of these have been excavated, the presence or absence of adobe and plaster covering on the walls is unknown at this time. Some sites also make use of adobe, but stone is the preferred material of construction.

The use of stone at these sites is probably due to the availability of construction material. In the Lower Valley most sites are predominantly adobe; good nearby sources of stone are rare. For example, the architecture at

² David Robinson surveyed much of the Nasca Valley in 1954-55, including some of the portions of the valley subsequently surveyed by us in 1986. However, Robinson's survey was aimed at cemeteries, while we were seeking habitation sites. Thus, although the survey areas overlap, the data do not.

Cahuachi, the major Nasca center located in the Lower Nasca Valley, is primarily rectilinear adobe walls. On the other hand, the preferred material at all sites in the Middle Valley is stone, with some adobe construction. And sites in the Upper Valley are made exclusively of stone. Huaca del Loro is located in the Middle Trancas Valley, that is, the portion of that valley flanked by Andean foothills. As in the case of sites in the equivalent Middle Nasca Valley, stone is the preferred material for construction.

Summary

It is clear that round buildings were common in the Nasca region since at least Nasca 2 times, long before the occupation of Huaca del Loro in Nasca 7, 8, and 9. Therefore, the presence of a round stone building at that site may simply be the result of a long tradition of this form of architecture in the Nasca region, rather than evidence of intruders from the sierra. Likewise, the use of broken stone as construction material is not uncommon. Given the location of the site in the Middle Trancas Valley, we expect the architecture to be primarily of stone construction. There are also rectilinear stone and adobe buildings at Huaca del Loro, similar to constructions in the Lower Valley. As the bulk of Strong's survey, and his excavations at Cahuachi, were located in the lower valleys, it is not surprising that he saw the circular building at Huaca del Loro as something of an anomaly. However, recent research demonstrates that round stone buildings are actually quite common.

Round buildings in the sierra

Turning to the second line of evidence presented by Paulsen (1983: 103), she states that "round structures are common in the sierra and so are stone structures". She points to round structures at the sites of Nawim Pukio and Wari as evidence that the round building at Huaca del Loro may have been built by people from the Ayacucho Basin. Paulsen is correct that round stone buildings are ubiquitous in the central and south highlands of Peru. Recent research in the Carahuarazo Valley (located in the Province of Lucanas, across the Continental Divide from the Nasca drainage) has shown that round stone buildings were the dominant form of architecture from at least the beginning of the Early Intermediate Period, and continued through the Late Horizon (Schreiber 1987a). Round houses are found widely distributed throughout the central and south highlands, and over a long span of time.

The implication that the round form at Huaca del Loro was introduced specifically from the Ayacucho Basin, brought during a late Early Intermediate Period expansion from Wari, therefore does not follow logically. If round stone buildings came from the highlands, there is no compelling reason to believe they must have come specifically from Wari, since they are ubiquitous throughout the southern sierra. That is, if they came from the sierra they could have come from anywhere in the central or south highlands. However, since round stone buildings were common in the Nasca region, there is probably no reason to assume that they were introduced from the highlands late in the Early Intermediate Period.

Conclusion

I argue that the architectural evidence does not support Paulsen's suggestion that the round stone building at Huaca del Loro indicates colonization by people from the sierra prior to the Middle Horizon. Antecedent forms do exist in the Nasca region during the earlier epochs of the Early Intermediate Period. And the suggestion that such forms on the coast come from the Ayacucho Basin does not hold when one considers the fact that round stone buildings are not restricted to the Ayacucho Basin, but rather are found widely distributed in time and space throughout the central and south highlands of Peru. In conclusion, the suggestion that Huaca del Loro was built by outsiders from the highlands is not supported by the architectural evidence presented.

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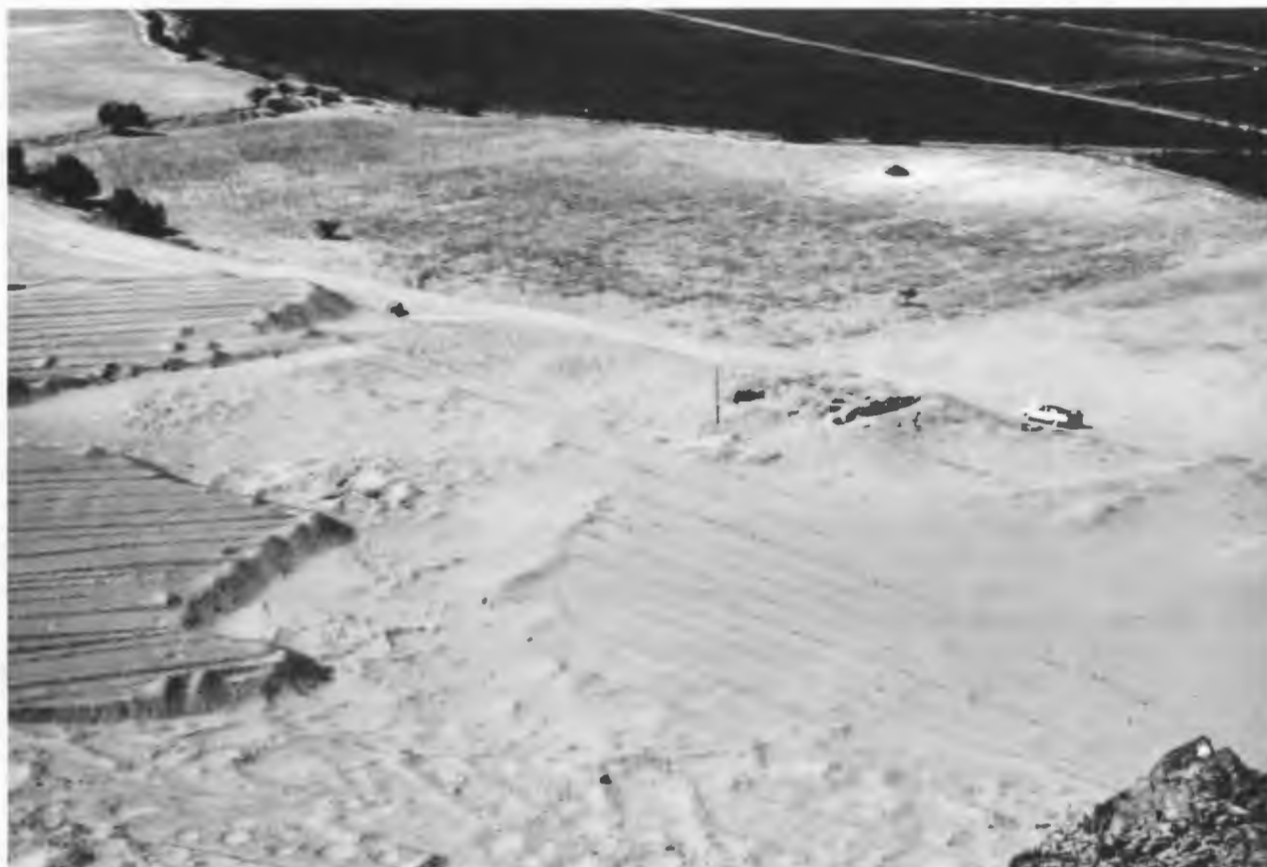
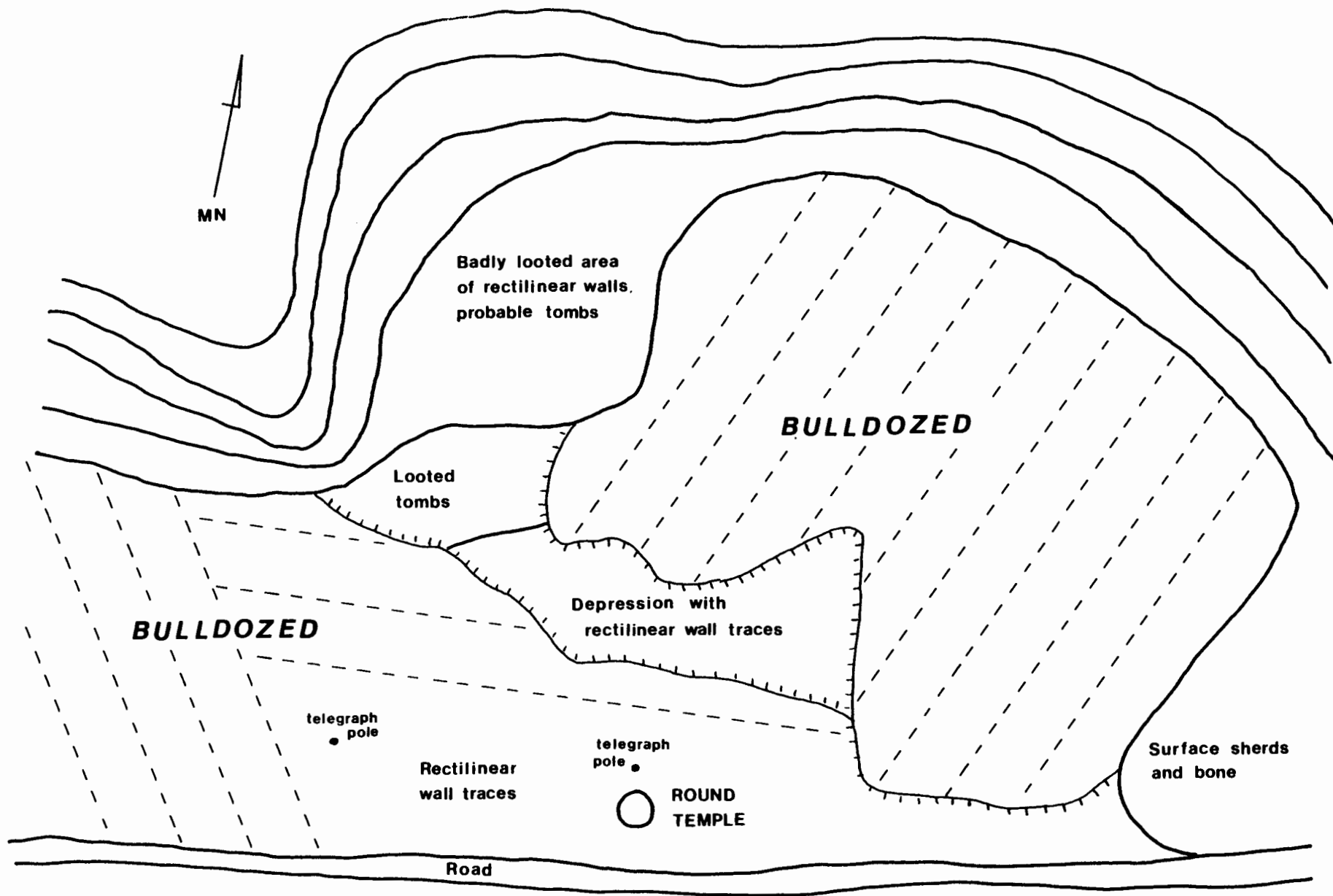


Figure 1. Photograph of Huaca del Loro taken in May 1984, showing the round Temple and the extent of bulldozing at the site. Compare with Figure 2 (Strong 1957: 37, Figure 15A).



Figure 2. Photograph of Huaca del Loro taken by Strong (1957: 37, Figure 15A) in 1952. Reprinted from the original negative by permission of the Society for American Archaeology and Columbia University.



NOT TO SCALE

Figure 3. Sketch map of Huaca del Loro as it appears today. Compare with Figure 4 (Strong 1957: 38, Figure 16).

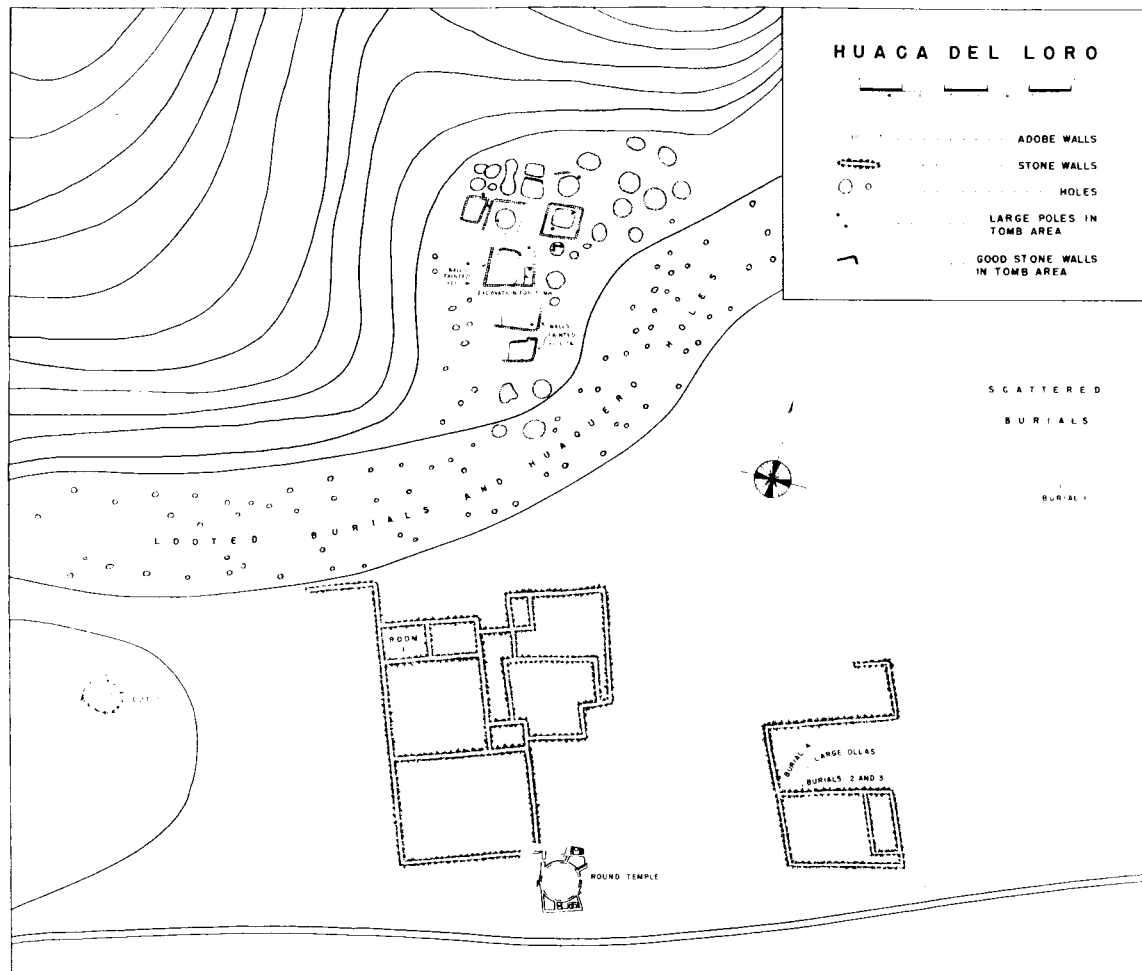


Figure 4. Sketch map of Huaca del Loro made by Strong (1957: 38, Figure 16) in 1952. Reprinted by permission of the Society for American Archaeology and Columbia University.

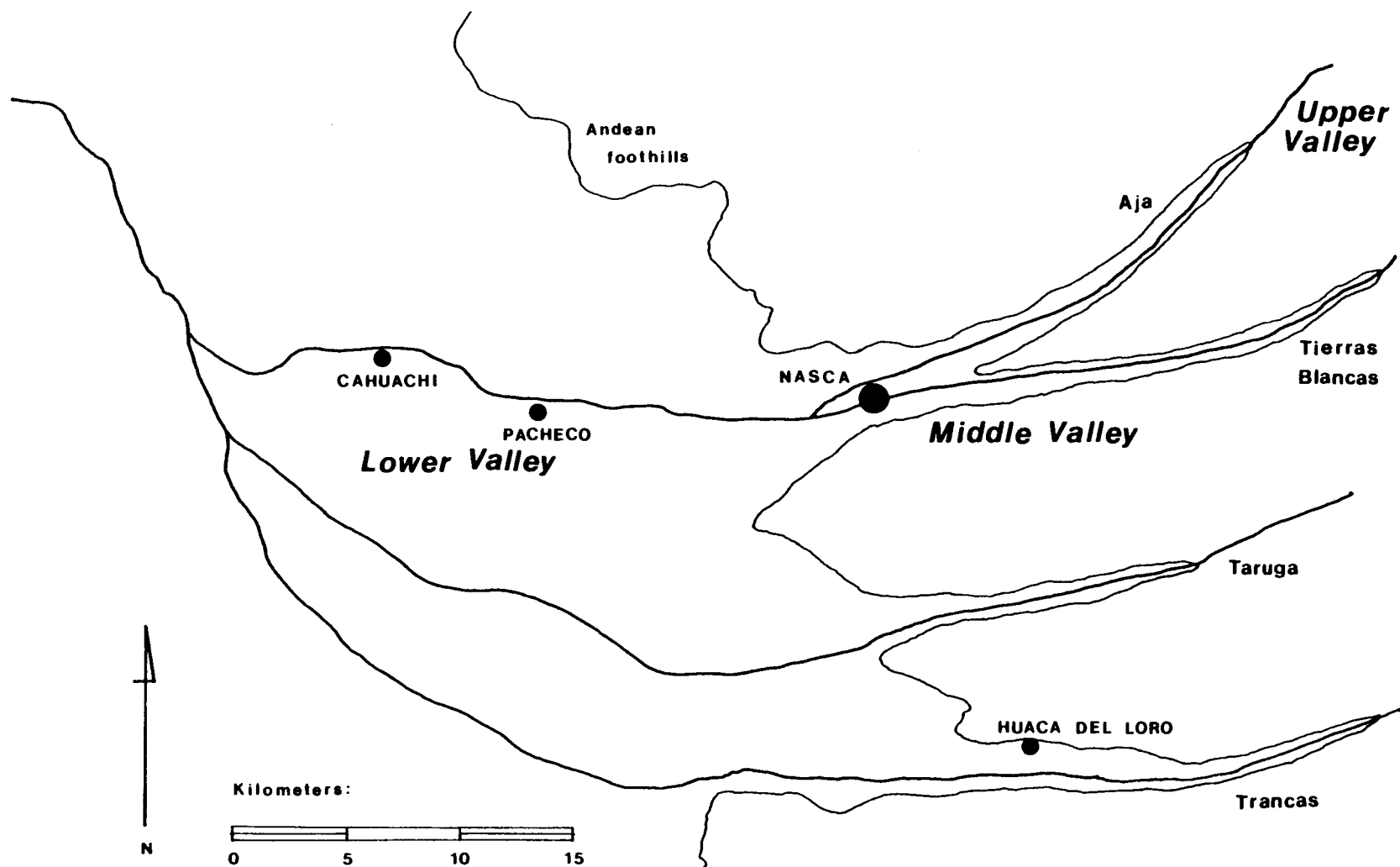


Figure 5. Map of the southern tributaries of the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage, showing locations of sites mentioned in text.

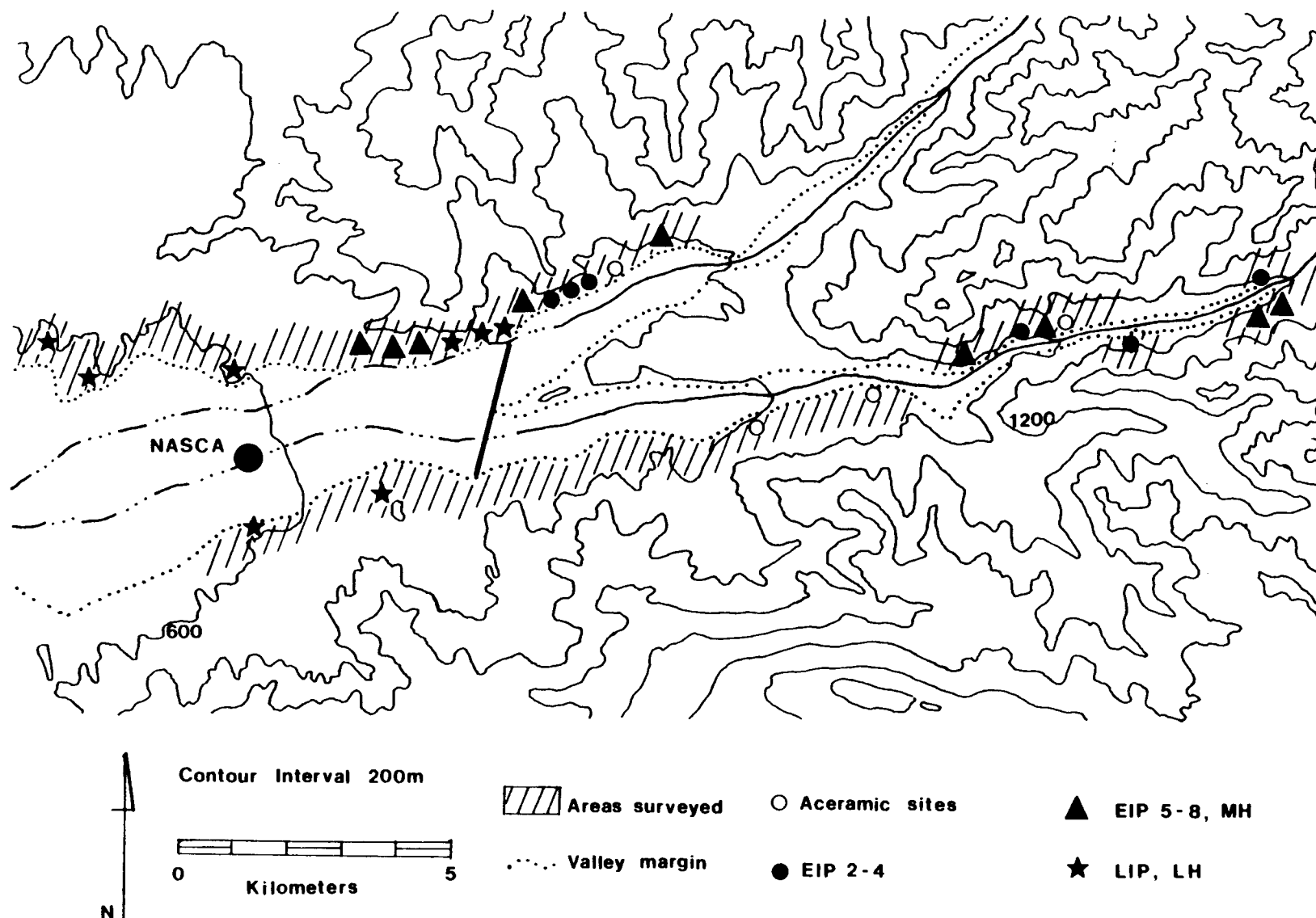


Figure 6. Map of the Middle Nasca Valley showing areas surveyed and sites located. The bold line divides the valley bottom into two ecological provinces: above the line surface water is available for irrigation; below the line irrigation relies primarily on the system of man-made aqueducts (pukios).