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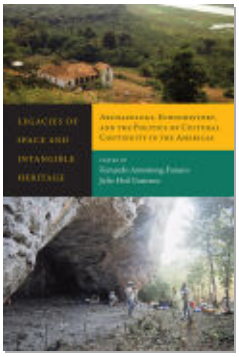

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9

A Culturescape Built over 5,000 Years, Archaeology, and Vichama Raymi in the Forge of History

Winifred Creamer, Jonathan Haas, and Henry Marcelo Castillo

The Norte Chico region of Peru was home to some of the earliest large-scale monumental mound construction in the Andean region and the New World. The myth of Vichama, collected in this region in 1617, explains human origins and naturalizes status distinctions as well as relating archaeological features of the landscape to local origins. The archaeological record shows the emergence of a system of agriculture, complex economic and social relations, and centralized decision making. The myth of the young gods Vichama and Pachacamac describes the arrival of cultigens and the creation of ruling and working classes. Together, archaeology and myth provide a local context for the region's history, both ancient and recent. The myth's depiction of inequalities of class and gender has enduring resonance, even though it was recorded in the seventeenth century. The myth of Vichama has been adopted as documentation of distinctive regional history and celebrated in community pageantry, helping form a regional identity through which local stakeholders can lay claim to elements of the archaeological heritage that surrounds them.

After presenting a condensed version of the "Myth of Vichama," we sketch the archaeological components of that same landscape at around 2000 BC. Almost 4,000 years later, the myth was published by Henry Marcelo, director of the museum at the Universidad Nacional José Faustino Sánchez Carrión (UNJFSC) in Huacho, Peru. A pageant of the myth was enacted at the Fortress of Paramonga, an imposing archaeological site. The graphic novel format of the publication, the pageant, and

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the well-known, imposing venue were all intended to capture the interest of young people and foster pride in the region's history. The pageant has developed a popular following, stressing the symbolic value of archaeological mounds and monuments as a component of deep cultural continuity across the region, despite the relatively high mobility of the contemporary population.

In presenting the myth and the archaeological associations it describes, we illustrate the value of myth in forging history. The myth of Vichama intimates that agriculture and fishing have an ancient past represented by archaeological settlements. The myth depicts agriculture and fishing as fundamental parts of the regional economy. Young people may not want to follow in their parents' and grandparents' footsteps in these pursuits, but they seek validation from their forebears. Crowds visit an archaeological site to witness reenactment of the myth that reflects rural memory, connecting the current generation to ancient sites as places where they can acknowledge older values without ceding their current lives.

THE REGION

The Norte Chico is a segment of the Peruvian coast consisting of four adjacent valleys, from south to north: Huaura, Supe, Pativilca, and Fortaleza (figure 9.1). This region has long been a zone of natural and cultural transition between the areas further to the north and south. Biologically, the area represents a mixed transitional zone between northern and southern coastal biotic regimes (Dillon et al. 2003). Brian Billman (2001) has also argued that this portion of the coast marked a natural transition between the larger northern coastal valleys with more frequent El Niño events and the smaller southern coastal valleys, where El Niño effects are less frequent. Historically, the label "Norte Chico" itself is indicative of its provincial role as an intermediate sociopolitical zone between the Peruvian capital of Lima on the Central Coast and regional center of Trujillo on the North Coast. Culturally, the Norte Chico was also a frontier zone. During the Late Intermediate Period (AD 1000 to 1400), the enormous Chimú fortification of Paramonga in the northern Fortaleza Valley represented a southern frontier of the empire (Rowe 1946) and stood in opposition to the contemporaneous Chancay fortification of Acaray (Brown Vega 2009; Ruiz Estrada and Domino Torero 1978;) in the southern Huaura Valley.

During the third millennium BC, however, this region was a center of early irrigation agriculture combined with trade between inland farmers and coastal fishermen. The pyramidal structures, sunken courts, and upright stones erected across the region during this period were unique, and they kicked off the development of a distinct and complex coastal culture. Although the connection is distant, it is

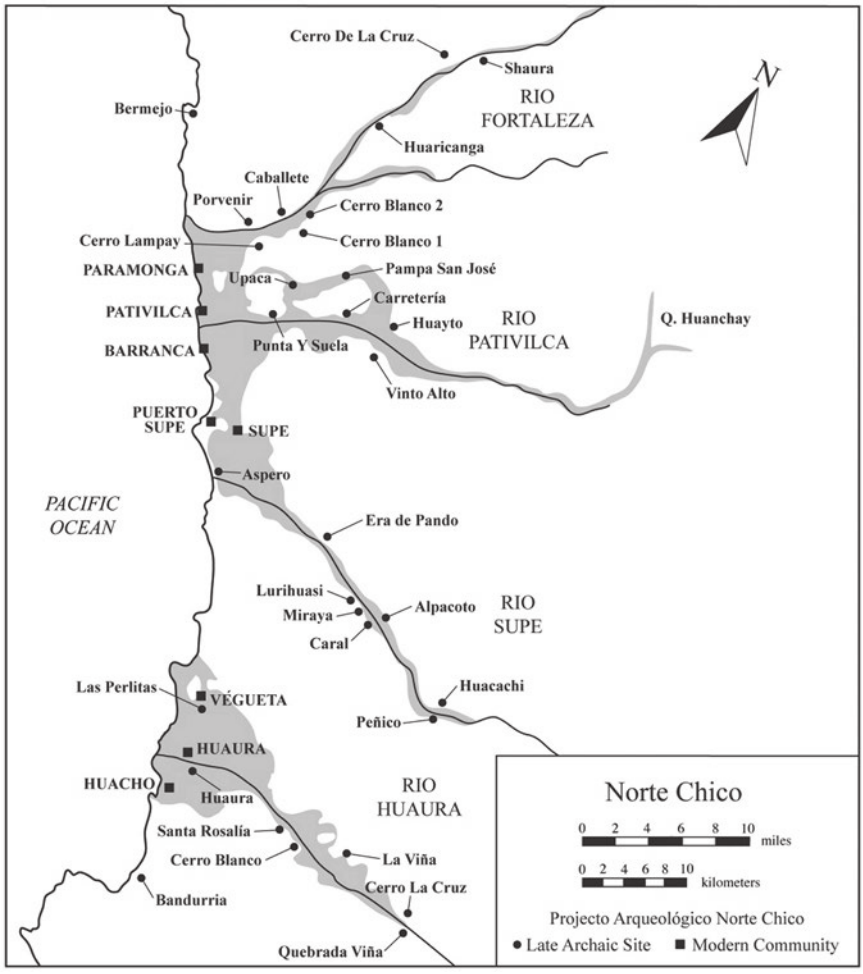

Figure 9.1. Map of the Norte Chico region.

possible to see the archaeological sites of the Norte Chico as indicators of a glorious past, which the myth both explains and celebrates.

THE MYTH OF VICHAMA

The myth of Vichama was collected by a Jesuit priest, Father Luis Teruel, living in the Norte Chico in 1617 and was reported by Fray Antonio de la Calancha (1638). A condensed version is as follows:

There were so many *huancas* (upright monoliths) along the coast that Teruel and his assistant (Jesuit Father Pablo Josef de Arriaga) asked about their origin in several towns, and this is what he was told.

At the beginning of the world there was no food for a man and a woman that the god Pachacamac had made. The man died of hunger and only the woman was left, looking for sustenance among the thorns and cactus, and digging up roots, crying piteously to the Sun. Hearing her lament, the Sun came down to console her. He told her to continue pulling the roots, and while she was doing this, the Sun sent his rays and a boy was conceived, who within four days was born, insuring that she would see good fortune and an abundance of food; but the contrary occurred, because the god Pachacamac was indignant that the Sun would favor another. He took the newly born semigod, and disregarding the cries of his mother, he killed his brother and tore him into small pieces. He then sowed the teeth of the dead child and corn [maize] was born (figure 9.2a), whose seeds resembled teeth. He sowed the ribs and bones, and yucas and other fruits of the earth with similar roots were born (figure 9.2b), roots whose roundness has the proportions in length and whiteness of the bones. From the flesh was produced the pepino (*Solanum muricatum*), *pacae* (*Inga feuillei*) (figure 9.2c), and the other fruits and trees, and from that time the people of the coast never suffer the previous kind of extreme hunger.

This did not placate the mother, because in every fruit there was a memory of her son. She asked for either punishment or resolution. The Sun came down, and though he was not powerful enough to go against his son Pachacamac, he consoled the woman, and he asked her for the belly button of the dead child. She showed it to him, and the Sun gave life to the belly button, and out of it grew another son, and he gave the baby to the mother, telling her that his name was Vichama. The child grew up and was a beautiful, strong young man, who, in imitation of his father the Sun, wished to walk the world and see everything grown on the earth. He consulted his mother and departed on his trip, but Pachacamac killed the now aging mother and divided her up into small pieces. When Vichama returned to his homeland, he wanted to see his mother but could not find her, and the chief told him the cruel treatment of his mother.

At that, furious flames came out of his eyes, and from his heart came cries of his feelings. He brought together the people who inhabited these valleys, asking for the bones of his mother, and they knew where they were and they brought them together as they were before, and he gave life to his mother, and in doing so he calmed his sense of revenge. He still wished to destroy the god Pachacamac, but Pachacamac did not want to kill his brother Vichama and, angry with the men, went into the ocean at the site where today his temple is, and the town and valley are called Pachacamac. Vichama, seeing that Pachacamac had escaped, angry that

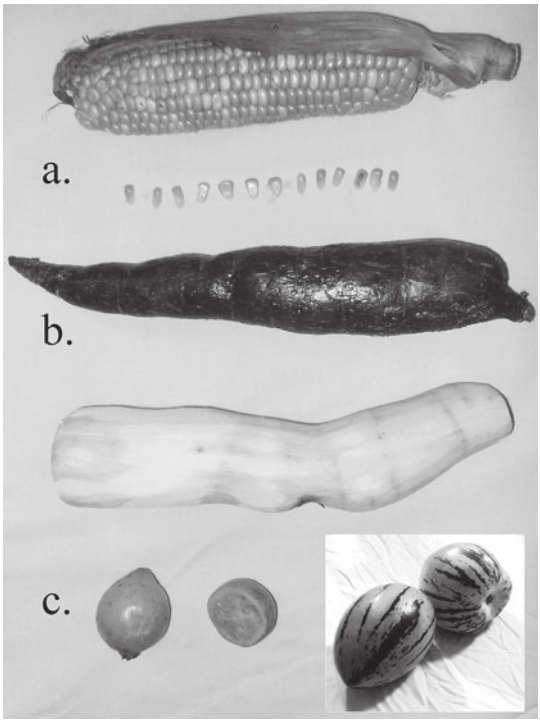

Figure 9.2. (a) From the teeth of the murdered child grew maize whose seeds resembled teeth; (b) the ribs and bones yielded yuca and other fruits of the earth with similar roots whose roundness has the proportions in length and whiteness of the bones; (c) from the flesh was produced the pepino, pacae, and the other fruits and trees.

the people had allowed this to happen and that they did not cooperate in punishment of Pachacamac, asked his father the Sun to turn the people into stones.

After having carried out the punishment on the people, the Sun and Vichama repented the actions taken in anger and repented that they could not correct the punishment. The Sun and Vichama wanted to mend the grief they had caused and, determined to give the honor of divinity to the chiefs and leaders, to the nobles and powerful ones, they carried them to the coast and ocean beaches. They left some of them to be adored as shrines (*guacas*) (figure 9.3a) and others they put into the sea, where they are the peninsulas, rocks, and islands (figure 9.3b) and to whom they gave titles of divinity. Every year they were offered sheets of silver, corn beer, and native fruit, with which the converted one would be placated.

Vichama, seeing the shrines and the world without men and the Sun without anyone to worship him, begged his father the Sun to create new men. The Sun sent three eggs, one of gold, another of silver, and the other of copper. From the gold egg came the chiefs, the leaders, and the nobles who were secondary persons and principals, and from the silver egg were engendered the women of these men, and from the copper

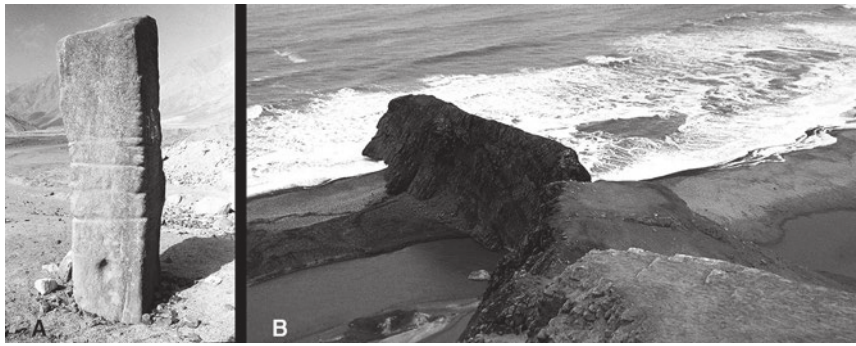

Figure 9.3. (a) Huanca, or monolith, at Huaricanga, Fortaleza Valley: "Dead chiefs and nobles were carried to the coast and ocean beaches to be adored as shrines [guacas]" (de la Calancha 1638). (b) Headland at the mouth of the Fortaleza River: "Others they put into the sea where they are the peninsulas, rocks, and islands" (de la Calancha 1638).

egg came the people of the lower classes, who were called Mitayos, and their women and families. This conviction was taken as an article of faith by the Indians of Huaura, Supe, Barranca, Aucallama, Huacho, Vegueta, and those who inhabit the coast, and they believed this more than they believed the articles of faith (de la Calancha 1638).

The myth of Vichama explains the origin of men and women, domesticated plants, social classes, the rocky coastline, and veneration of monoliths. In the myth domesticated plants first grew from the bones and teeth of a child murdered by Pachacamac. Peninsulas, rocks, islands, and monoliths represent the remains of chiefs and leaders murdered by the Sun and Vichama, while social classes of men and women emerged from three eggs sent by the Sun in reparation. In his account of the myth of Vichama, de la Calancha stressed that the people of the region, supposedly converted to Christianity, believed in the myth more fervently than they believed in the tenets of their new faith. The myth built on familiar local tradition and had been repeated over generations. Archaeological data provides evidence that an agricultural society with hierarchical leadership similar to that described in the myth may be more than 4,000 years old in this region, suggesting the myth articulates long-standing relationships between man and the environment.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MYTH

Myths are sometimes absorbed into national consciousness, such as the cactus, eagle, and snake of the Aztec origin myth that appear on the flag of Mexico. Archaeological finds, too, suggest connections between current populations and the ancient past and have contributed to revitalization of the myth of Vichama.

Figure 9.4. Figurine of a woman with white paint streaked on her cheeks, and a figure of the sun inscribed on the back of her head from the site of Huaricanga, Fortaleza Valley, Peru.

In 2007, excavations at the Late Archaic site of Huaricanga in the Fortaleza Valley turned up a small (four centimeters tall) clay figurine of a woman (figure 9.4) associated with a temple dating to the middle of the third millennium BC. While clay figurines have been found at other sites in the Norte Chico (see Shady 2004), this one had attributes that seemed in their own tenuous way to link the archaeological record of the distant past to the historical record of the seventeenth century.

The figurine is a woman who appears to have tears flowing from her eyes, and on her back in the center of her long hair is a clear symbol of the sun. Although the original significance of this person is hidden in prehistoric memory, the woman brings to mind a key figure, the mother of Vichama, whose tears brought the Sun to save her. A symbol of all mothers, she was reborn in the myth through the efforts of her devoted son. The myth may be seen as a universal message of a compassionate god. The crying woman may also be interpreted as referencing an ongoing belief system, a symbol such as La Llorona or the Virgin Mary rather than a relic of an unknown, irrelevant past. Finds like this one can alter public perception of sites and artifacts as having a real connection to present-day residents based on individual or even imagined themes.[1] The image of the "crying woman" figurine subsequently appeared on posters and other publicity associated with the Vichama pageant. This convergence of a third millennium BC figurine, a seventeenth-century myth, and a contemporary celebration is an especially eloquent testament to the often convoluted trajectories through which diverse elements of archaeological heritage are made intelligible to stakeholders today.

NORTE CHICO ARCHAEOLOGY

This convergence of archaeological remains, myth, and contemporary identity offers some especially rich possibilities for narrating the longer history of human interactions with the environment of the Norte Chico. Beginning in the third millennium BC, the Andean region underwent a deep and lasting cultural transformation that not only distinguished it from other parts of the Americas but ultimately led to the florescence of one of the world's six independently developed civilizations. For over a thousand years, the Norte Chico region served as the focal point or "crucible" for the development of the earliest expressions of Andean civilization (Haas and Creamer 2006). Work in recent years has discovered thirty major ceremonial and residential centers in the four valleys of the Norte Chico, all occupied in the time between 3000 and 1800 BC. (Creamer et al. 2007; Creamer et al. 2013; Haas et al. 2004; Shady 2004; Shady and Leyva 2003d; Shady et al. 2001) (figure 9.1).

Archaeological research over the course of the past fifteen years has demonstrated that a distinctly Andean pattern of economy, society, and ceremonial architecture emerged in the Norte Chico region in the first centuries of the third millennium BC. (See Haas and Creamer 2004, 2012; Haas et al. 2013; Shady and Leyva 2003a, b, c, d). Elements of this societal framework are employed in the myth of Vichama. The body parts of the first son yield corn and other crops that are still the economic engine of the coastal valleys. Marine resources come from the "peninsulas, rocks and islands" of the coast. The description of monoliths, or huancas, as the remains of errant chiefs and nobles blurs the boundary between man and nature, where punishment can be harsh and the social order as timeless as the rocky coastline.

PLANT CULTIVATION

Norte Chico occupation from 3000 to 1800 BCE is marked by a number of characteristics that differentiate it from the preceding pattern of smaller settlements and mobile groups of hunters, foragers, and fishermen. One of the greatest distinctions of the occupants of these early sites is that they were economically dependent on irrigation-based agriculture and domesticated plants (Haas et al. 2013). Analysis of pollen, phytoliths, starch grains, coprolites, and macrobotanical remains has shown the presence of maize, cotton, gourds, beans, pacae (a legume), lucuma (a fruit), avocado, *chile*, squash, guava, and achira (purple arrowroot) (Alarcon 2005; Haas and Creamer 2004, 2006; Huaman et al. 2005; Shady 2003d, 2006; Vergel 2009; Zechenter 1988). As with people elsewhere in Peru (Dillehay et al. 2007), the residents of the Norte Chico were moving from harvesting natural resources to producing their own harvest. The transition to an agriculturally based economy happened relatively quickly in the Norte Chico region, as the local residents adopted

a comprehensive suite of domesticated plants in the course of only several hundred years. Most or all of these plants were independently brought under human control elsewhere (see Dillehay et al. 2007; Piperno and Pearsall 1998), but a fully sedentary, agriculturally dependent economy emerged very rapidly and early in the Norte Chico itself. The people of the Norte Chico took advantage of small-scale experimentation or tinkering with plant domestication in other areas and then brought them together in an interconnected regional economy (Haas 2001; Haas and Creamer 2004, 2006, 2012; Haas et al. 2013).

MARINE RESOURCES

Crucial to the growth of society during the Late Archaic period was exploitation of marine resources. Although there is ample evidence of plant cultivation, the protein requirements of Late Archaic people living on the coast were met with marine resources of fish and shellfish. Excavations at sites from a few to more than twenty kilometers from the coast reveal large quantities of fish bone in midden and in coprolites, and few or no remains of terrestrial fauna. Twenty species of shellfish have been identified at each site tested (Creamer et al. 2011). Although bone from some large fish was recovered, the vast majority of fish bone comes from small species such as anchovy and sardine. The widespread presence of fish and shellfish remains, as well as of net fragments, indicates that a portion of the population of each site was involved in obtaining marine foods, whether directly traveling to and from the coast or by means of exchange.

MONOLITHS—*HUANCAS*

Coupled with the transition to an agricultural economy was an explosion in the occupation of large sites and the construction of monumental architecture in the Norte Chico region in the third millennium BC. The thirty early sites recorded in surveys of the four Norte Chico valleys are all quite extensive, ranging from 10 to over 100 hectares in area, and have monumental communal architecture. Each of the sites has from one to seven terraced platform mounds that range from 3,000 to over 100,000 cubic meters in volume. The large majority have at least one and up to four sunken circular courts fifteen to forty-five meters in diameter (figure 9.5). In addition to the consistent plan of the mounds, the circular courts also show strong patterning, centered on the atrium of the adjacent mound with a stairway leading from the atrium to the base of the mound and then to the floor of the circular court. There is commonly an opening on the opposite side of the circular court that leads into the public space beyond. Upright stone huancas are associated with many of

Figure 9.5. Photo of the mounds, circular courts, and U-shaped layout at Caballete, Fortaleza Valley, Peru.

the circular courts. These stones range from one to three meters in height and cluster between 0.75 and 1.00 meters across. The largest of these weighs several tons and required a significant workforce to transport them from their quarry (Authier 2005) to the site and then to lift them into position (figure 9.3a). While the use of huancas is common throughout the Norte Chico, they appear to have different roles at different sites. At Caral and Chupacigarro Grande, huancas were used to mark the openings into circular courts. At Caballete and Pampa San José, the entire diameter of the court was outlined in huancas. There are also isolated huancas at many sites that stand as independent features (see Shady 2004).

Later sites with similar terraced platform mounds, sunken courts, and monolithic stones are found to the north and south on the coast, as well as to the east in the highlands, and all of these can be traced back historically to Norte Chico antecedents. Such platform mounds with associated sunken courts, for example, appear at Initial Period (1800–1000 BC) sites such as Sechin Alto and Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke in the Casma Valley (S. Pozorski and T. Pozorski 1986, 1987, 1990; T. Pozorski and S. Pozorski 2000) to the north and Cardal in the Lurin Valley to the south (Burger 1995; Burger and Salazar-Burger 1991). The same pattern is also a dominant element in the site layout of the Early Horizon (1000 to 200 BC) highland center of Chavín de Huantar (Burger 1995; Lumbreras 1970, 2007) to the northeast of the Norte Chico region as well as at the contemporary site of Chiripa in the southern highlands (Hastorf 1999). Terraced platform mounds and sunken

courts are an integral part of the Andean architectural landscape up until the time of the Inca Empire. Overall, the historical continuity of public architecture appears to indicate that the beginnings of a distinctive Andean pattern of ceremonialism and associated ideology can be traced back to the third millennium occupation of the Norte Chico.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The Norte Chico also appears to mark the beginnings of a stratified, centralized political organization in the Andean region. The people who occupied and used these sites appear to have been socially ranked. Based on her excavations at Caral, Shady and colleagues (Blanco Flores 2006; Noel 2004; Shady and Leyva 2003a, 2003c, 2005:183–84) have asserted the presence of at least two and perhaps as many as four separate social classes based on architectural differences. Similar patterns of distinct architectural differences are found at other sites in the region (Haas and Creamer 2006; Rubio Ruiz 2007), where complexes of large formal residential units with well-plastered stone walls and floors are juxtaposed with much smaller wattle-and-daub residential structures. The formal construction of platform mounds by itself indicates a centralized organization (Haas and Creamer 2006). These monumental mounds are not simply piles of stone and dirt but carefully engineered with large formally shaped and plastered retaining walls; fill of stone-filled fiber bags, or *shicra*; and a consistent plan from one mound to the next. The outside surfaces of the mounds were coated with fine clay of varying colors—shades of pink, red, white, yellow, and beige. The U-shaped site layout aligns a raised atrium with a sunken circular court (figure 9.5). Rooms with restricted access lay behind the atrium and off to the sides.

The combination of carefully engineered construction of the mound and court complexes, the monumentality of these structures, the ubiquity of monolithic huancas, and the formal layout of site architecture around a central court is highly indicative of centralized organization and direction (Billman 1999, 2002; Feldman 1980, 1987; Haas and Creamer 2004, 2006; Moore 1996; Moseley 1975, 1985; Shady and Leyva 2003a, 2003c, 2003d, 2005; cf. Vega Centeno 2005, 2007). Altogether, the transformation of culture in the third millennium BC involved significant numbers of people living in residential-ceremonial centers, centralized organization of labor for monument construction, organized religion as manifested in prescribed canons of public ceremonial architecture and the use of huancas, and distinct differences in social ranking or classes (Haas et al. 2005; Shady 2004).

At the end of the Late Archaic, after 1,200 continuous years of building, remodeling, and using these numerous platform mound/court sites, the Norte Chico

cultural landscape began to change and its preeminent role in the Andean region declined (Sandweiss et al. 2009). A few smaller Late Archaic sites continued to be occupied after 1800 BC, but most were abandoned, and new sites were built in the subsequent Initial Period (1800–1200 BC). Following the Initial Period, and for the ensuing 2,500 years, the Norte Chico appears to have played a role mostly as a frontier zone between much larger and more powerful polities to the north and south. There are no major cities, political or religious centers, or royal cemeteries. Indeed, the monumental architecture of the numerous Late Archaic sites was the largest-scale construction ever to appear in the Norte Chico.

Just as ceremonies carried out on platform mounds and in sunken courts served to materialize the political and ideological organization of the Late Archaic (see DeMarrais et al. 1996), these monumental constructions also materialized power and ideology for subsequent generations (Earle 2001; Moore 1996). Mounds were originally designed to be seen by people coming into the valleys from different directions, and they still stand in salutation to visitors entering the valleys by paths, roads, and highways (Rutherford 2008). These monuments loom from open *quebradas*: broad, dry alluvial fans reaching back into the foothills bordering the valley bottoms. There are also indications that these large early sites were recognized as exceptional places in later time periods. There was remodeling and reuse of some Late Archaic sites during the Early Horizon (1000 to 200 BC) and the Middle Horizon (AD 600 to 1000). Circular courts were intentionally selected as cemetery locations (Haas and Creamer n.d.). Today, a number of these sites are the focus of "magic" and local mythology. Empty bottles of alcohol-based "elixirs" are discarded on a hillside overlooking one Late Archaic site amid candles, coca leaves, and a heap of skulls retrieved from looted burials. A black candle in the form of a female torso, stuck with pins, was among items left behind. Overall, the selective reuse of these early sites and their physical prominence on the Norte Chico landscape over more than 4,500 years points to a lasting place in the cultural memory of the region. This association is an indirect one. Most visitors could probably say very little about the age or history of a mound site, yet many visitors would agree that an unspecified "power" or "spirit" is associated with archaeological sites where large structures can still be seen. We argue that this is a materialization of power as transmitted from one generation to the next.

FORWARD TO THE PRESENT, VICHAMA RAYMI

Revival of the myth of Vichama began in 2002. After a presentation on the myth at a conference in Paramonga during the Fiestas Patrias national holiday in July 2002 by Arturo Ruiz Estrada (1979; Ruiz Estrada and Haas n.d.), regional authorities

became interested in sharing the story with a public audience. A popular version of the myth, described as an "epic prose poem," was written by Henry Marcelo Castillo (2002), director of the museum at UNJFSC in Huacho, Peru, assisted by students in the Department of Communication Science. The work was part of a project called "Recovery of Cultural and Natural Patrimony as Sustainable Ecotourism for Regional Development." Popularization of the myth was intended to help strengthen regional identity in an area of considerable population mobility.

The following July, a pageant called Vichama Raymi was held. The pageant presented the myth of Vichama with a cast of costumed participants, music, and folkloric dance groups in a historic setting, the Fortress of Paramonga. Visitors began arriving around 1:00 PM, taking advantage of booths selling food and crafts. Regional dance groups began performing traditional dances from the highlands of Ancash, source of most recent migrants. Shortly after 4:00 PM the pageant began on the summit of the fortress, with the principal characters announced by a large sound system. The highlight of the pageant is the return of Vichama from his travels to seek restoration of his mother and the repopulation of the world (figure 9.6). The event was enthusiastically adopted by people of the region, who seem to accept the myth as a way to renew their connection to the landscape. Those involved include individuals whose families no longer farm and city dwellers who seek a sense of connection with the region. Others are among the thousands of migrants from the highlands to the coast who are creating new traditions of belonging.

ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHNOHISTORY, LANDSCAPE, AND CULTURESCAPE

The myth of Vichama demonstrates the value of ethnohistory in linking the ancient past to the present day with documentary accounts. In this case we suggest that the myth collected by de la Calancha from the Norte Chico region conveys an awareness of the ancient past that endured for many centuries. Bringing the myth to public attention in association with recent archaeological research further expanded the impact of the document. The tale of Vichama reminds us that archaeological features are still present on the landscape as reminders of people of the past. In the myth, huancas are literally people from the past, though they may be viewed differently today. Further, the myth is a focus of regional solidarity, bringing people together to witness a pageant that reenacts the initial peopling of the coast and reaffirms the long-term importance of agriculture and the sea. This reenactment of myth has proved successful in highlighting solidarity in a region where many today see themselves as newcomers and seek a sense of belonging.

Figure 9.6. The triumphant return of Vichama, highlight of the pageant held at the Fortress of Paramonga, Peru (2006).

NOTE

1. There is a negative side to the adoption of archaeological sites or artifacts as contemporary icons such as looting to find "lucky" objects, or the use of an archaeological site for contemporary ceremonies such as a *pago* (Au: Possible to translate?) or as a shrine (cf. Haas and Creamer n.d.).

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