

**THE COLLECTIVE BURIALS OF TABLADA DE LURÍN,  
LURÍN VALLEY, PERU (AD 1-300)<sup>1</sup>**

**LES TOMBES COLLECTIVES DE TABLADA DE LURÍN,  
VALLÉE DE LURÍN, PÉROU (1-300 AP. J.-C.)**

Karina GERDAU-RADONIC<sup>2, 3, 4</sup>

RÉSUMÉ

La nécropole de Tablada de Lurín a fait l'objet de deux occupations successives durant la première moitié de l'Intermédiaire Ancien. Les objectifs de ce travail étaient de reconstituer le rituel funéraire de la deuxième occupation, très différent de celui de la première occupation, ainsi que de se renseigner sur les modalités de décomposition en position assise. La fouille et l'étude des documents de fouilles précédentes ont permis de rétablir le rituel funéraire. Le terrain a offert la possibilité d'observer les modalités de décomposition. L'analyse en laboratoire des restes squelettiques a confirmé les observations taphonomiques faites sur le terrain et a rapporté des informations supplémentaires. En conclusion, la deuxième occupation de Tablada se caractérisait par des sépultures primaires et secondaires collectives, sans distinction d'âge et de sexe (à l'exception des immatures de moins d'un an), dans des chambres funéraires souterraines en pierre. Les individus étaient assis/accroupis dans des paniers, l'ensemble enveloppé dans un linceul. Cette position d'ensevelissement facilite des observations quant à l'ordre dans lequel disparaissent certaines connexions anatomiques pendant la décomposition du cadavre.

*Mots clés* : Pérou, Intermédiaire Ancien, archéologie funéraire, sépultures collectives, taphonomie.

The archaeological site of Tablada de Lurín, in the Lurín valley of the Peruvian central coast, is known for its important necropolis dated to the first half of the Early Intermediate Period (EIP; 300 BC-AD 300) (Makowski 2002). The funerary occupation presents two consecutive but very different phases. The aims of this dissertation were

to elucidate the funerary ritual that was associated with the collective funerary stone structures of the second phase of occupation, and to observe and understand the mechanisms of decomposition for a body in a sitting/squatting position.

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1. Cette note présente les principaux résultats d'une thèse de Doctorat, en co-tutelle entre l'Université de Bordeaux 1 et la Facultad de Letras y Ciencias Humanas de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, réalisée sous la direction de H. Duda et K. Makowski et soutenue publiquement le 26 octobre 2007, à l'Université Bordeaux 1.
  2. UMR 5199, PACEA, Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Populations du Passé, Université Bordeaux 1, avenue des Facultés, 33405 Talence CEDEX, France, e-mail: karina.gerdau@idarcq.org
  3. Instituto de Investigaciones Arqueológicas (IDARQ), Lima, Peru.

Research included both fieldwork and laboratory analyses of the human remains. First, a funerary stone structure (EF 4, sector NE-B) was excavated, following the recommendations of the French school of “*archéothanatologie*” (Duday 2005). Taphonomical and anatomical observations of the remains *in situ* were made. An osteological study of the human remains found within structure EF 4 and within those excavated during previous field seasons (EF 1, EF 2, EF 3, EF 6) was also carried out. The funerary architecture was also studied. Finally, field data recorded by the team led by Dr K. Makowski (1990-1997) of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú provided complimentary details.

## FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE

The funerary structures were semi-subterranean, not readily visible from the surface. The bottom half of an excavated pit had been arranged as a funerary chamber. The walls had been covered with large slabs, held together with clay-based mortar. Large slabs and mortar had also been used to roof the structures. An earthen ramp had been built into the eastern side of the pit, leading down from the surface to the chamber. Each structure had an entrance on the east side (*fig. 1*). The burial chambers could measure from 1 to 3.5 sq. Their internal height was approximately 1 m.

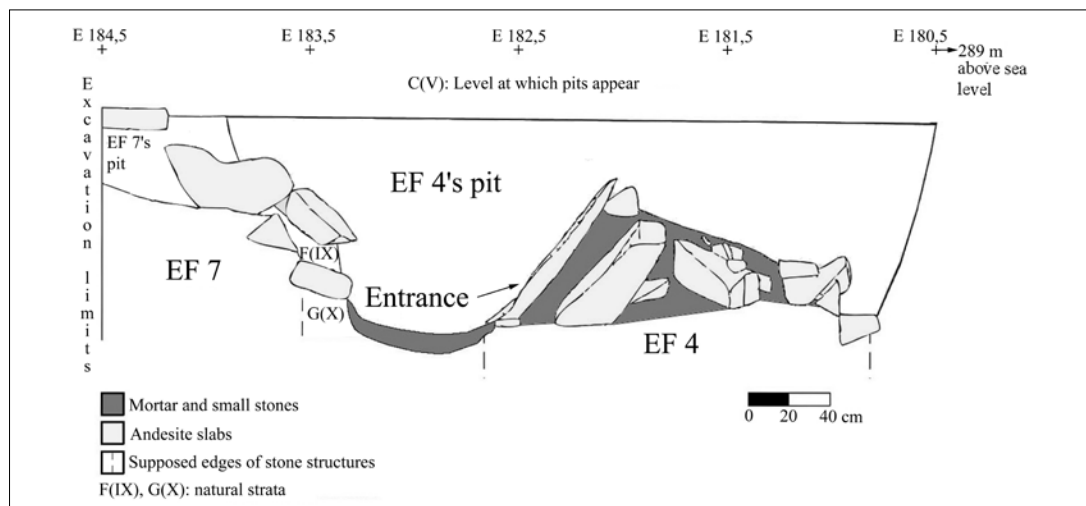


Fig. 1—Access to funerary structure EF 4, southern cross-section.

Fig. 1 - Fosse d'accès à la structure funéraire EF 4, coupe sud.

## FUNERARY RITUAL

First, a funerary bundle (“*fardo funerario*”) was prepared. The deceased was placed in a sitting/squatting position in a vegetable-fibre basket and possibly wrapped in one single shroud. Some individuals wore jewellery, and small objects could be placed within the shroud. Larger artefacts were set beside it. Thus, the funerary bundles were small and simple. Once the bundle was ready, the deceased could be brought directly to Tablada or placed in a temporary tomb. Finally, those initially deposited elsewhere were brought to the necropolis after a certain lapse of time, where they were laid in their final resting place.

The laboratory work provided additional information as to the ritual. Bone frequencies (method: Gally, Chaix 1984) were used to determine the presence of both primary and secondary burials within the tombs. Although all body parts are present among the remains, smaller bones, such as those of the hand and foot, represent less than half the number of individuals estimated through the count of larger bones.

Second level macroscopic osteological associations (Duday 2005) revealed how the remains of one individual could be dispersed throughout the structure. As the chambers were collective, the remains were frequently displaced in an effort to tidy the interior of the structures and make room for other funerary bundles. This constant

motion erased almost all traces of primary burials and blurred the differences between displaced primary burials and secondary burials.

Sex identification (Bruzek 2002) showed that both men and women were buried within the structures. Nevertheless, the number of individuals whose sex could be identified was insufficient to draw any conclusions as to differential burial practices based on sex distinctions.

Age-at-death estimates (Ferembach *et al.* 1979; Murail 1996; Ubelaker 1989) showed a marked absence of juveniles under 1 year of age. Moreover, fieldwork and data collected during previous field seasons demonstrated that no one funerary pattern was reserved for children under 5 years of age during the second phase of occupation. Their burials could be single or collective, primary or secondary, within or outside the structures. However, during the first phase of occupation, children under 5 years of age were buried in the cemetery, alongside adults and elder children, although with a different mortuary ritual (Tomasto, Makowski nd). Thus, the second phase of occupation differed from the first one not only in the burial practice used but also in its demographic profile, as most children under 5 years of age appear to have been deposited elsewhere.

The remains of some individuals within EF 4 seem to have been the object of a particular kind of displacement. Individual X of EF 4 had had his left tibia and fibula removed after decomposition, with his left femur, patella and foot remaining perfectly in place, undisturbed by the removal (*fig. 2*). It is possible that the act of recovering body parts or bones from burials was linked to an ancestor worship cult, a tradition well-documented and recorded historically and archaeologically within the region. Moreover, a comparison with other burial practices, particularly Nasca and Moche, reveals that recovering selected body parts from tombs is not unusual behaviour in the central Andes (Carmichael 1995; Millaire 2004; Delabarde 2005).

Finally, the study of osteological non-metric traits revealed the presence of two post-cranial traits at unusually high frequencies within one structure (EF 4: perforated olecranon fossa and vastus notch (definitions from Finnegan (1978)). A chi-square test showed that the distribution was not random. It is therefore likely that individuals within EF 4 were related.

Once the structures were closed and sealed, their access ramp was buried. Each structure received a final offering. On the surface, large slabs marked the location of the buried structures, allowing the renewal of

offerings, an event that took place for EF 6 (Makowski *et al.* 1996).

Given the size of the cemetery (52 ha; Makowski *et al.* 1996), it is likely it was used by several communities. That is, more than one village would have buried their dead in the necropolis. Research and surveys conducted by Dr Makowski's team have not revealed any EIP settlements in the immediate vicinity of the cemetery (Makowski 2002). However, the ceramics study for the first phase of occupation demonstrated that communities from the region of Cieneguilla and Pachacámac (20 km from Tablada upriver) buried their dead in the necropolis (Makowski 2002). It is therefore possible that, as during the first phase, inhabitants of villages at a distance came to deposit their dead in the stone structures of Tablada.

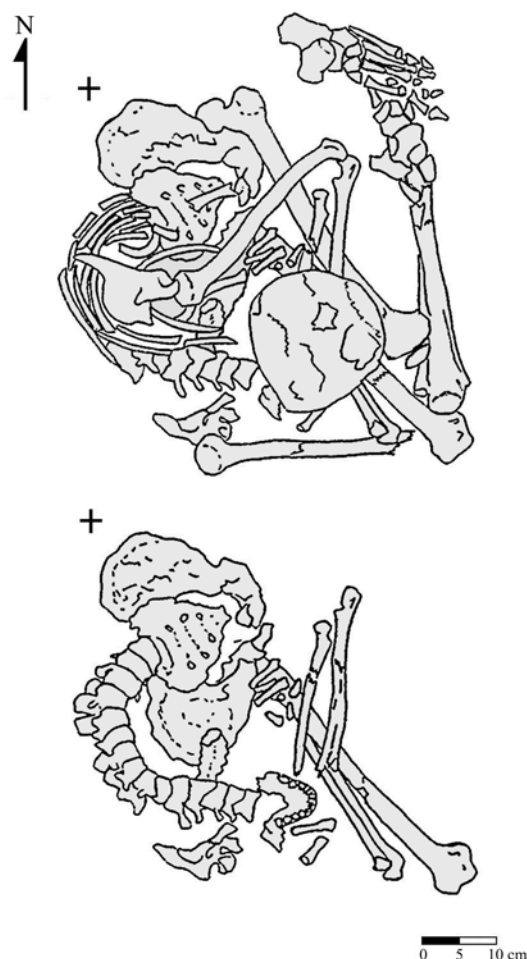


Fig. 2—Individual X (funerary structure EF 4).

Fig. 2 - Individu X (structure funéraire EF 4).

The presence of both primary and secondary burials can be explained by two different hypotheses. On the one hand, a ritual calendar may have dictated a specific date or period of time for the funeral. Thus, days, weeks or even months could go by before the funeral was performed, explaining why some individuals would have been entitled to an immediate funeral in Tablada (primary deposits) and others to a delayed one (secondary). On the other hand, the distance between the settlement sites and the burial ground may have pushed the “burying” population into performing grouped funerals, so as to avoid having to cover a large distance too often.

#### DECOMPOSITION IN A SITTING/SQUATTING POSITION

Fieldwork provided details on the displacement undergone by different body parts during decomposition of an individual interred in a sitting/squatting position, with both upper and lower limbs flexed, knees and hands placed near the face. This position causes instability of the head, thorax and limbs once the flesh and internal organs have disappeared. It is therefore natural to find the skull and mandible, most of the vertebrae, the ribs and the hand bones disarticulated within the now empty abdominal and pelvic cavities. The long bones of the limbs also find themselves in an unstable position after decomposition of soft tissue, and will fall where possible, their movement affected by the empty space available around them.

In addition, certain details are noteworthy, as the individuals at Tablada were interred as funerary bundles. The baskets upon which they sat held in place the pelvis and the feet. The bones of these two body parts suffered little or no displacement after decomposition. Moreover, on occasion, the basket, shroud and/or some other external support also held in place, at least partially, some of the vertebrae and the ribs, as well as the femoral heads within the acetabula (*fig. 2*).

Tablada also provided evidence to confirm previous observations on the decomposition of the shoulder girdle, as well as the knee and ankle joints. On some subjects, the different components of the shoulder girdle were found loosely connected despite the fall from their shoulder position to the ground. This means that the clavicle, scapula, and proximal humerus may detach themselves

from the rest of the body in unison, before complete disappearance of the different elements that join them. These same observations were noted by G. Pereira for the site of Potrero de Guadalupe (Mexico; 1996: 158-163).

At the latter site, Pereira (1996: 158-163) also observed that the bones of the feet remained articulated despite the fact that the leg bones (tibia and fibula) had fallen sideways. The author deduced that the tibio-tarsal articulation decomposed more rapidly than the knee joint. That is, the leg bones did not pull the tarsal bones with them into the fall, as the ankle joint had decomposed before the knee joint. The taphonomical observations made at Tablada support Pereira’s conclusions.

#### FINAL COMMENTS

This research stresses the importance of taphonomical and osteological observations made in the field. A certain number of details would have been lost (primary deposits, associations, sex, age-at-death, *inter alia*) had they not been carefully recorded during excavation. It is therefore important to record the three-dimensional position as well as the osteological information on each fragment recovered within a collective tomb, in order to reconstruct as completely as possible each individual and its burial.

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