

Casma Incised pottery: an analysis of collections from the Nepeña Valley

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The title 'Casma Incised' seems to have been coined by Donald Collier (1962) to describe a redware, predominantly ollas with strap handles, decorated with combinations of the following techniques: incision, punctation, zoned punctation with incising, dentate stamping, rocker dentate stamping, stamped circles and dots, applique bumps, welts, serpentine ridges with punctations and small zoomorphic adornos usually applied to the rim, shoulder and handles of the vessel (ibid.: 415). He equates this pottery with Tello's 'Casma Style' and Kroeber's 'Sechin Style' (ibid.). In their report on Chanquillo, Fung and Pimentel (1973) call for a Casma Culture represented by this ceramic type which also seems to have a fairly wide distribution outside of Casma (Figure 1) as far north as the Nepeña Valley and as far south as the Fortaleza Valley. The principal decoration of this ware consists of circles and dots deeply impressed (ibid.: 77).

As a result of an archaeological survey of the Huarmey Valley, Donald Thompson designates a Huarmey Incised pottery type which he describes as "a rather rococo incised and punctated pottery, which is also found in Casma and Fortaleza" (1964: 545). A northern boundary is suggested by Richard Schaedel who writes: "... beginning with the south bank of the Santa ... a rather uniform surface collection pertains, at least of utilitarian ware. This ware is usually unslipped, is extravagantly decorated with reed punch marks, gouge marks and incisions, and presents a high proportion of modeled nubbins, as well as vertical and horizontal handles" (1951: 241). At this point I would like to add that in 1981 I saw Casma Incised sherds at the site of Las Salinas in the

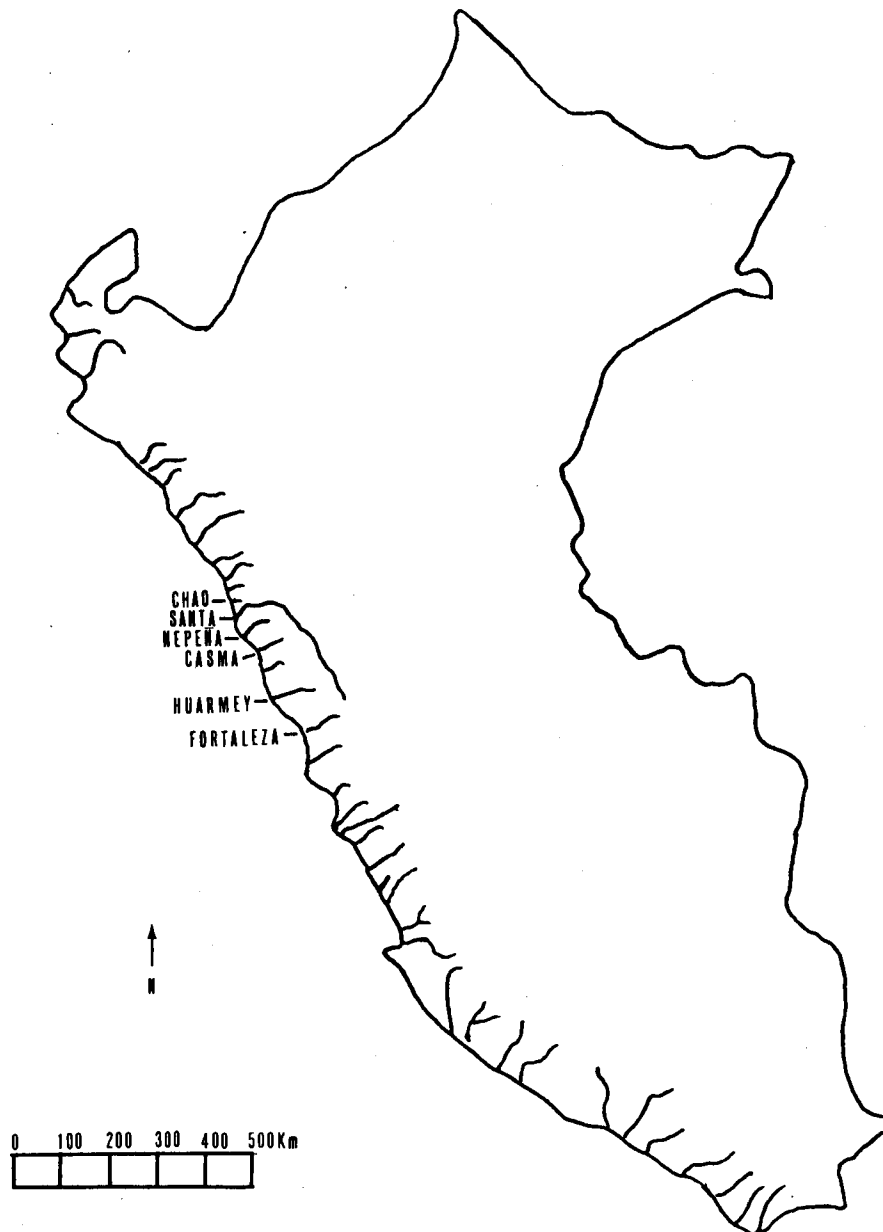


Figure 1. Map of Peru.

Valley of Chao just north of the Santa Valley. This would make the distribution of Casma Incised pottery known to me to be from the Chao Valley on the north coast to the Fortaleza Valley on the central coast, an area roughly 300 km in extent.

From August of 1980 to July of 1981 I helped to carry out an intensive surface survey¹ of the mid and upper portions of the Nepeña Valley². My interest in this 'rococo' or 'extravagantly decorated' utilitarian ware developed as I looked more closely at our sherd collections and noted that all Casma Incised sherds were not as gaudily decorated as was presupposed. From the literature I came to realize that Casma Incised pottery was believed to be an important local ware in a number of north and north-central coast valleys.

In this paper I would like to briefly describe the Casma Incised pottery type as represented in Nepeña collections, noting a distinction between what I am calling Casma Incised (Figure 2a) and a similar, yet quite different, second type which I am calling Serpentine Applique (Figure 2b). I will deal with general shape categories as well as decoration and I will correlate specific decorative techniques to particular parts of the vessel. Towards the end of this paper I will note an association between these pottery types and others thus providing a temporal framework. I will then briefly discuss the distribution of sites where the above types are to be found in Nepeña.

While conducting a preliminary analysis of Casma Incised sherds collected during the 1980-1981 field season and later during my review of slides containing Casma Incised sherds from all Nepeña collections³, I noted two major vessel categories: a necked olla or jar and a large bowl. The more dominant vessel form is clearly the necked jar. Its shape is

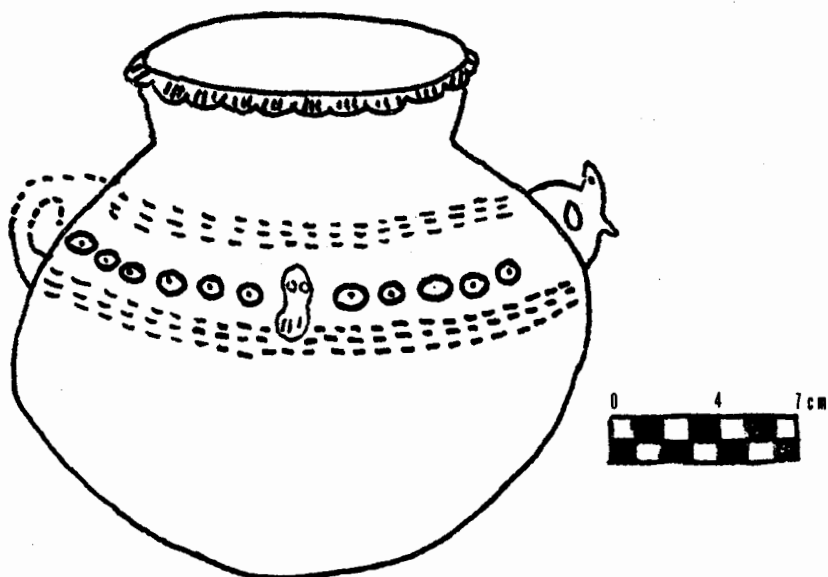


Figure 2a. Casma Incised jar.

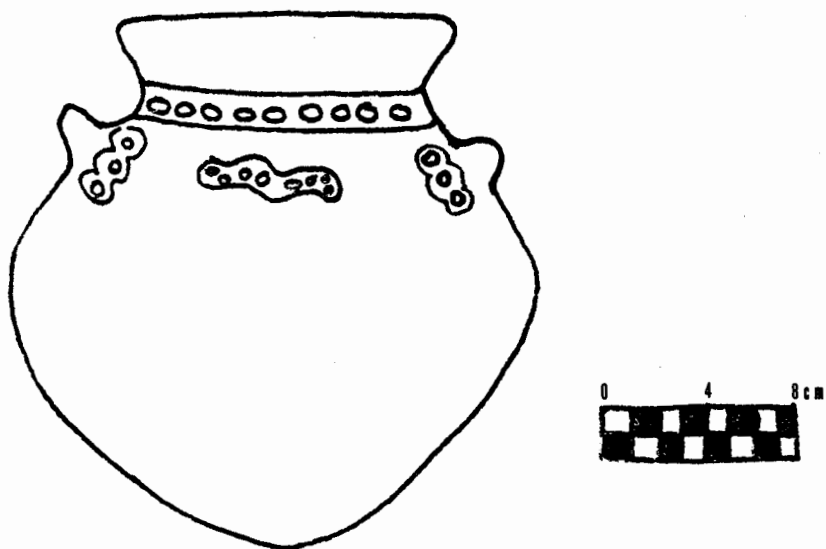


Figure 2b. Serpentine Applique jar.

simple, the body of the vessel being spherical and tending towards squatness. Small, thick handles, almost ellipsoid in cross-section, are attached either horizontally or vertically to the shoulder of the vessel and the overall height of the vessel tends to range between 24 to 42 cm. The major distinguishing feature for these jars was the treatment of the rim.

In my sample of over 200 identifiable rim sherds, the flare rim (Figure 3a) comprised 38% and this makes it the most common rim type. The flare rim rises from the juncture of the rim and the vessel shoulder at a gradual angle and it ranges between 20 and 53 mm in height. The rim edge is usually either rounded or tapered. The diameter of the rim opening ranges between 7 to 14 cm and the diameter of the mouth opening ranges from 6 to 10 cm. The degree to which a vessel flares is not consistent, for the difference between rim opening and mouth opening in some vessels was as slight as only 1 cm while in others it was a prominent 4 cm.

The flare rim is followed in frequency by a lipped-flare rim (Figure 3b) and it comprises 27% of my sample. Similar to the flare rim, it rises from the juncture of the rim and the vessel shoulder at either a gradual angle or, more often, a vertical angle. The rim edge is altered either by a sharp everted turn, which produces a rounded lip on the rim edge, or by a change in the flare angle to a vertical edge, which produces a stand-up lip. This lip is often decorated with applied clay nodules which are then incised with short lines. The diameter of rim openings range from 9 to 14 cm while the diameter of mouth openings range between 8 and 12 cm.

A rim type comprising 14% of my sample and more commonly found in

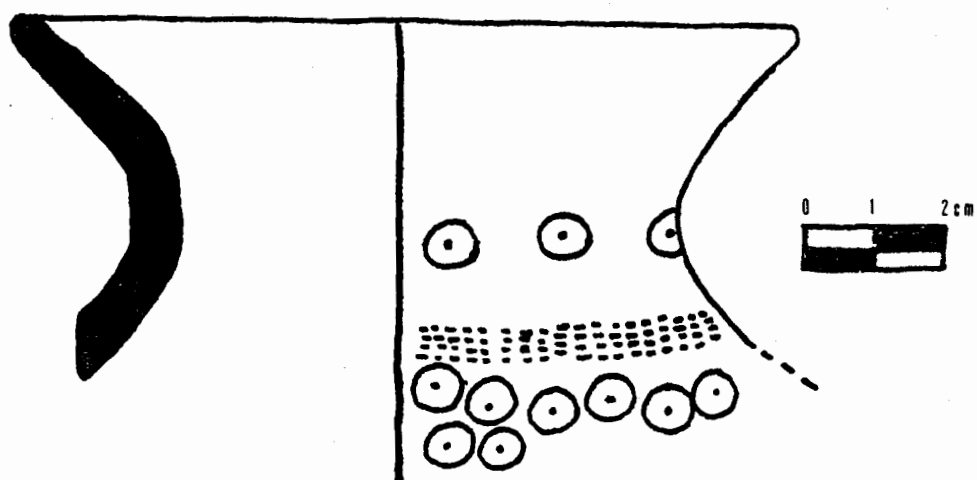


Figure 3a. Casma Incised flare rim.

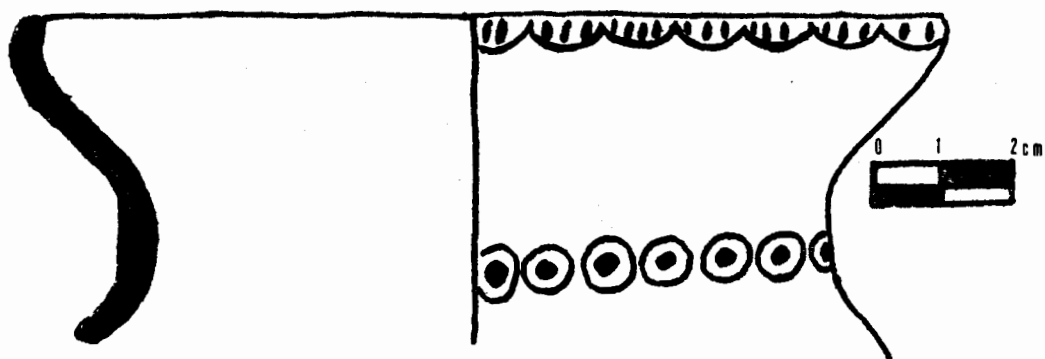


Figure 3b. Casma Incised lipped-flare rim.

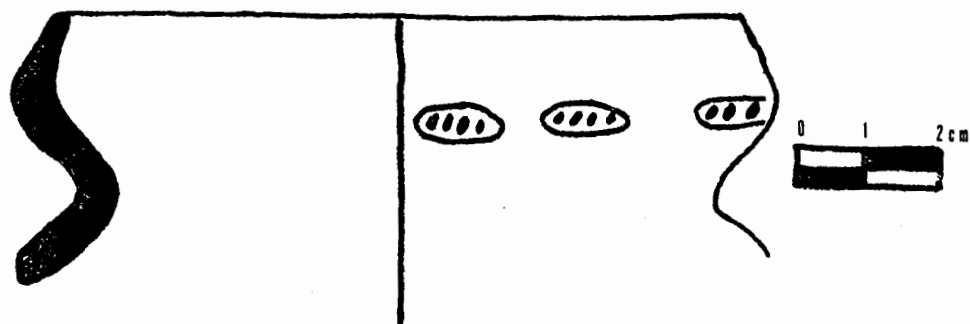


Figure 3c. Casma Incised short, incurving rim.

the middle and upper parts of the valley is a short, incurving rim form (Figure 3c). The rim's distinguishing feature is a point of vertical tangency (Shepard 1956: 224) at its mid-section, thus the maximum diameter of this rim type is neither the rim opening nor the mouth opening. In the few examples recorded, rim openings range between 9 and 11 cm while mouth openings range from 7 to 10 cm, the maximum diameter of the rim being estimated as between 13 to 14 cm.

A variant of the incurving rim is the high-collar rim (Figure 4a) and it comprises 6% of my sample. Generally a thicker ware, this form is most often found in the upper valley. The thickness of these sherds leads me to believe that we are dealing with a large vessel. A larger vessel, too, could proportionately accept the greater height of this rim type, which ranges in this case from 65 to 72 mm. The high-collar rim also has a point of vertical tangency which most often is at a point close to the neck of the vessel thus giving the rim a sagging or baggy appearance. This particular rim is almost always decorated with applique nodes at the point of vertical tangency.

The second shape category for the Casma Incised type is what I surmise to be a large thick bowl (Figure 4b). Although no complete or nearly complete vessels have been found, a combination of the curvature of the vessel's body wall on a few examples, the placement of decoration flush with the rim edge and diameter measurements of the rim edge ranging between 28 and 38 cm lead me to believe that this was a large unrestricted vessel. Because of the applied rim decoration we came to refer to this as a rope-design bowl and I have decided to retain this designation. The rim edge is characteristically flattened and rim thickness varies greatly from 14 to 33 mm. Finally, the body wall decreases

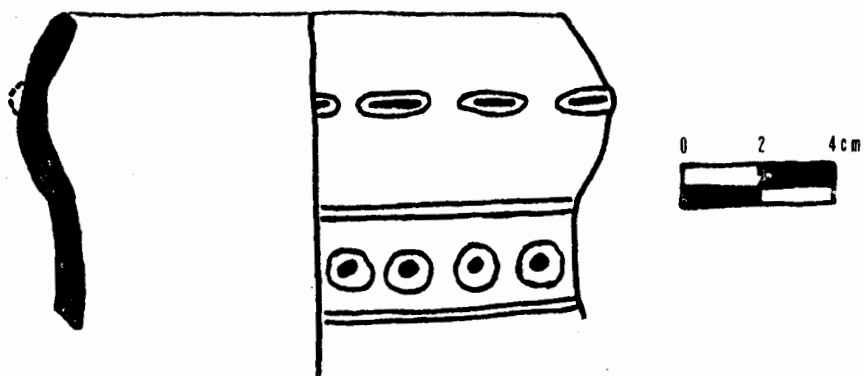


Figure 4a. Casma Incised high collar rim.

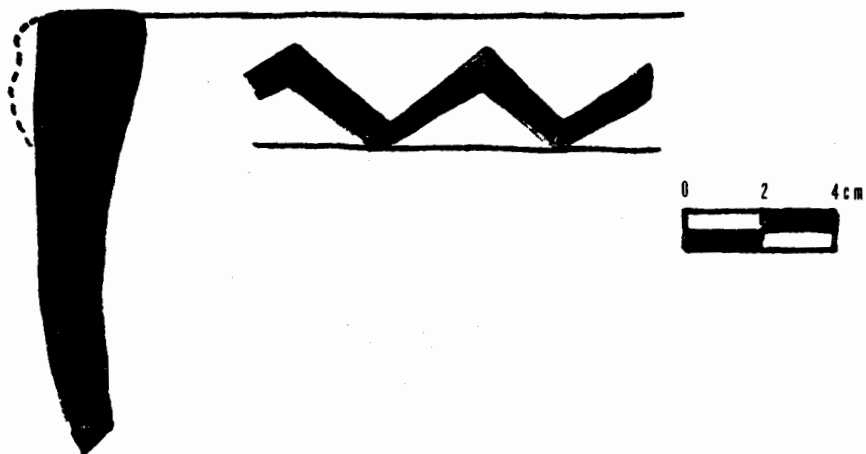


Figure 4b. Casma Incised bowl.

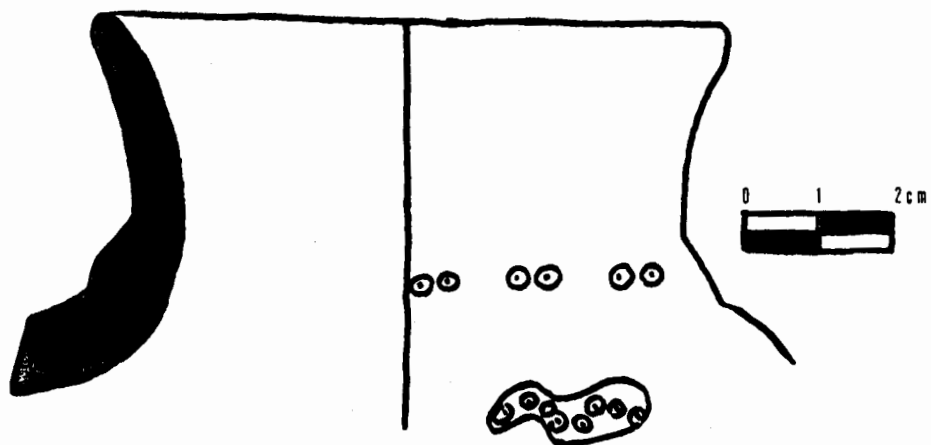


Figure 4c. Serpentine Applique flare rim.

quickly to a thickness of only 10 to 13 mm.

In general, Casma Incised pottery may be described as an oxidized redware. The basic shape is the jar and it was probably made by a molding technique. The paste is medium to coarse in texture and both the interior and exterior surfaces are smoothed. The decorative techniques are plastic and occur as punctation, incision, stamping, combing, applique and modeling. Through my analysis I have noted that certain decorative techniques are executed primarily on specific parts of the vessel.

The rim edge of the jar form is often decorated with applied nodes of clay closely spaced and accentuated with short incised lines (Figure 3b). The nodes protrude from the vessel surface only slightly and the visual impression is of a more sharply defined rim edge. As for the rim surface, applied nodules of clay may also be attached there, this being most common on the incurving and high collar rims (Figure 4a). These nodes average 20 mm in width and they are accentuated by either short incised lines or marks made by finger impressions.

On jars there is a neckband and small fragments of neckbands are what are found in greatest abundance in our surface collections. These neckbands are defined by incised lines or by a change in the angle of the vessel surface (Figure 3b). The width of the neckband ranges between 10 and 15 mm and often it is equivalent to or slightly smaller than the diameter of the circles stamped on it. There is usually a contiguous line of circles with central dot but a few examples exhibit groupings of circles or more widely spaced circles.

The shoulder and upper portion of the body of jars are characteristically decorated with encircling bands of punctation (Figure 2a).

This has been described as combing and the difference in pressure and pull on the instrument causes variations in the depth and length of punctation marks which, upon closer inspection, appear almost rectangular in shape. In most cases the design on the jar body consists of an upper and lower band of combing bordering a pattern composed of the circle and dot motif. This combination is generally restricted to the upper half of the body but in one specific instance the combination of combing and stamped circle and dot extends below mid-circumference of the vessel.

The use of adornos on the vessel body is another decorative technique typical of jars. The most common shape assumed by adornos is that of the bird (Figure 2a). It consists of added clay for the head and tail, the eyes are stamped with circle and dot and the tail is detailed by small incised lines. Modeling of this type is often used to decorate jar handles and the bird and serpentine adornos are the ones most commonly found.

As for large bowls, they too are decorated in a plastic manner. I have previously noted the rim thickness of these bowls and this thickness is due to the fact that wide bands of clay were applied to the rim edge. In most instances long diagonal impressions were spaced at intervals around the applique band. Two examples, however, are more complex in design. The first joins together alternating diagonals to form a continuous pattern (Figure 4b) and the second also includes cylindrical stamps to fill the resultant triangular shaped spaces. Another example exhibits the remnants of applique arms and an obvious place of attachment for a head or a modeled figure on the body of the vessel.

From the Casma Incised collections I have been able to seriate out a second pottery type which I am calling Serpentine Applique. The major

identifiable shape category is the jar and the overall shape of this form is ovoid (Figure 2b). Three rim categories can be identified and these are the flare, lipped-flare and short vertical rim types. Handles, very similar to those found on Casma Incised jars, are horizontally attached to the upper shoulder of Serpentine Applique jars. Again, like Casma Incised, Serpentine Applique is a utilitarian ware.

The sherds collected during the 1980-1981 field season were red-brown to brown in color. The paste was medium to coarse and, unlike Casma Incised sherds, more care seems to have been taken in the manner of finishing for these sherds. There are examples of these latter sherds which have been surface rubbed to a slight polish. Stamping and the use of applied clay nodules predominate in the decoration of these sherds and, unlike Casma Incised jars, decoration of Serpentine Applique jars is not from rim to handle.

Both the flare (Figure 4c) and the lipped-flare rim edges are left plain. At the point where the rim and vessel body come together there may be no decoration or there may be a small neckband defined by incised lines. Small circles are then stamped onto the neckband in either a continuous line or in groupings of two or three. Decoration of the shoulder area of these vessels consists of small pieces of linear applique in the shape of a crescent or squiggle upon which small circles are stamped (Figure 4c). It is quite possible to define two end points for the applique and it is because of the serpentine appearance of these squiggles that the descriptive term Serpentine Applique came to mind.

To summarize, I have shown that there is a utilitarian pottery type known as Casma Incised which extends along the northern Peruvian coast. This type is easily identified by its tendency to be overly decorative. A second type called Serpentine Applique can now be distinguished from

Casma Incised by its tendency toward simple and uncluttered decoration as well as its emphasis on the technique of linear applique.

On the basis of a preliminary analysis of surface sherds collected by him in the Nepeña Valley, Donald Proulx placed the introduction of Casma Incised pottery there during Epoch 4 of the Middle Horizon (1973: 60). This he saw as continuing on through the Late Intermediate Period given its association with Chimú style ceramics (*ibid.*: 76). My own analysis tends to support these conclusions but it also indicates a heavier emphasis on the latter period than was thought.

In general, Serpentine Applique pottery is to be found in association with a red press molded ware and a red, white and black painted ware. Both of these wares have been identified in the Moche Valley and they are dated there to the Early Chimú period by Donnan and Mackey (1978). The absolute time frame for Early Chimú is given as 800-1000 A.D. and this would include Epoch 4 of the Middle Horizon (*ibid.*: Chart 1: 6).

A total of 98 sites in the Nepeña Valley are known to include red press molded and/or red, white and black painted sherds in their surface collections. These sites clearly tend to locate in the lower and middle parts of the valley, this being true both in terms of the numbers of sites as well as the size and complexity of individual sites. On the other hand, Serpentine Applique pottery is much more limited in its spatial distribution having been documented at only 16 sites (Figure 5). Three major concentrations of these sites are to be noted, one each for the lower, middle and upper parts of the valley.

In the upper valley Serpentine Applique pottery has recently been discovered in exclusive association with Early Chimú diagnostics. This

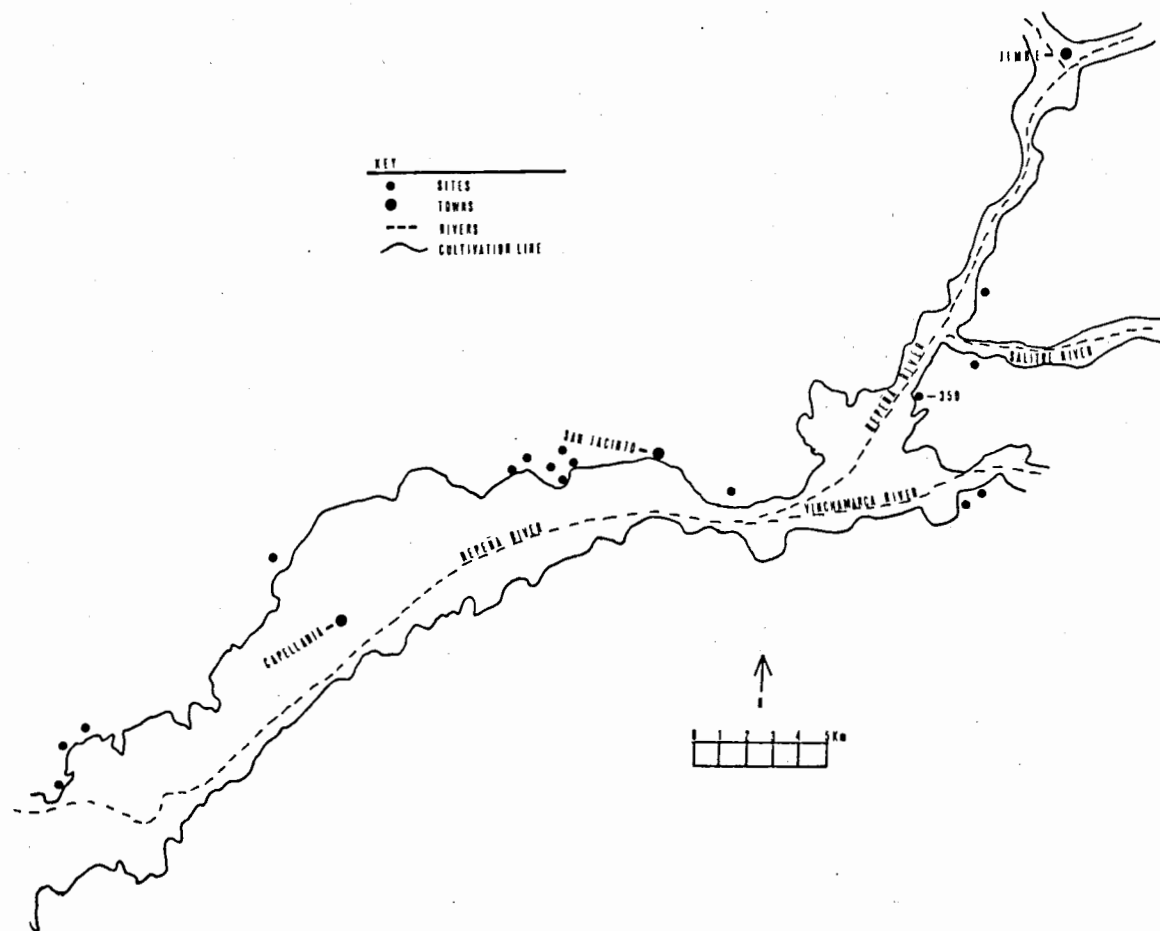


Figure 5. Serpentine applique sites, Nepeña Valley.

site (PV31-350) appears to have been a small village given the remains of low fieldstone structures on three levels and terraces going up the mountainside to the rear. This site is offered in support of the contention that Serpentine Applique pottery was being manufactured at the same time that Early Chimu pottery was.

As for Casma Incised pottery, it has been found at 97 sites (Figure 6), generally in tandem with Middle Chimu blackware and often exclusively so. In the lower valley sites principally fall into the category of cemetery though there are two large habitation areas. Major concentrations of sites with Casma Incised and/or Middle Chimu pottery exist in the upper part of the middle valley and in the lower part of the upper valley. These are indicative of large population centers.

A shift away from the lower to middle valley locational preference noted for the Early Chimu period is reflected by this latter population center as well as by an extensive reoccupation of the upper valley as a whole. In the far upper valley Casma Incised/Middle Chimu sites are ridgetop platform mound in type and the fact that many of these sites are defended by stone walls and ditches suggests that this part of the valley was under considerable stress at this time. Finally, that this stress may have been felt throughout the valley is indicated by the presence of fortified sites in all parts of the valley.

In conclusion, I have identified two distinct utilitarian pottery types, Serpentine Applique and Casma Incised, which I have placed within the Early Chimu and Middle Chimu time frames respectively. Though I have found it convenient to use the Moche Valley terminology I do not mean to imply a northern source of influence only that pottery found in the Moche and Nepeña Valleys is comparable for this time period. This report is based upon data from Nepeña and, until such time when a

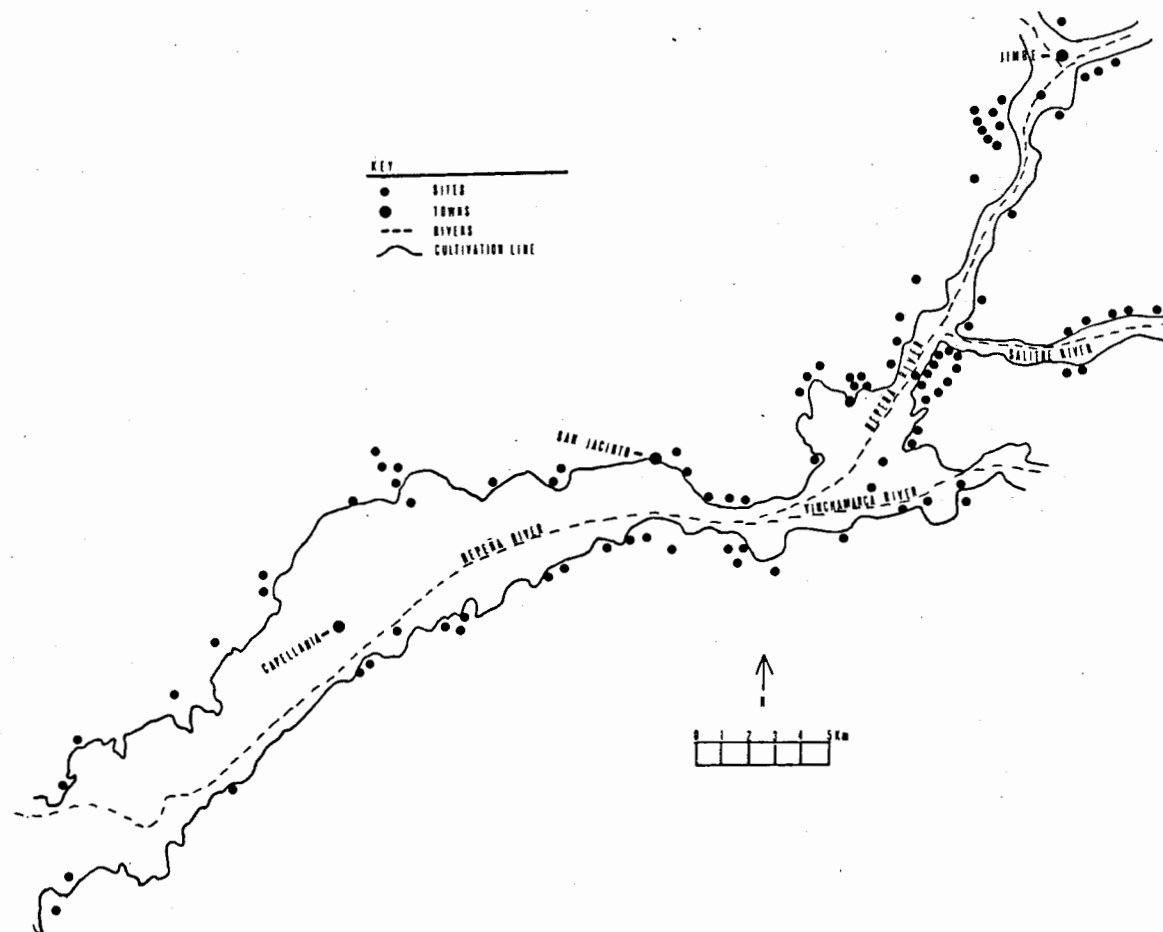


Figure 6. Casma Incised sites, Nepeña Valley.

ceramic sequence has been better defined for the valleys to the south of it, little can be said about the wider context of developments for it.

Footnotes

¹ Dissertation field research was conducted by Richard E. Daggett under the auspices of Credenciales No. 112-80-DTCPMC and 029-81-D-OMA issued by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura. Funding for this research was provided by a Fulbright-Hays grant for graduate study abroad and a Sigma Xi grant-in-aid of research.

² The Nepeña Valley has been divided into lower, middle and upper parts for the purpose of research. The lower valley begins at the shore line and ends at Capellania. From that point to the bottleneck of the valley just above San Jacinto marks the middle valley while the upper valley extends from the bottleneck to above Jimbe (Proulx 1968: 5). During the 1980-1981 field season it was determined that there was a marked break in prehistoric settlement of the valley at about 1550 m in elevation and this was interpreted to mean that the valley proper ended at this point (Daggett 1982).

³ I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Dr. Donald A. Proulx for the generosity he showed in permitting me full access to his slides of the valley.

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