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WARI EMPIRE

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The Wari Empire (AD 600–1000) had its capital city at the site of Huari in the Ayacucho Valley of the central Andean highlands of Peru. During this time, known as the Middle Horizon, Wari political and economic control covered much of what is now highland Peru and perhaps portions of the coast. In the early years of research, Wari culture was thought to be directly derived from Tiwanaku, another powerful and influential Middle Horizon polity centered at the eponymous site, Tiwanaku, in highland Bolivia; Wari was first called Coastal Tiahuanaco or Tiahuanacoid. It was not until the 1930s that the Peruvian archaeologist Julio C. Tello investigated the site of Huari and determined that it was the center of dispersal of the so-called Tiahuanacoid styles.

Prior to the emergence of Wari, during the Early Intermediate Period (AD 1–600), the Huarpa ceramic tradition characterized the Ayacucho Valley. Toward the end of the Early Intermediate there is evidence of interaction with coastal populations, particularly the Nasca culture of the south coast, as evidenced by iconography and a new trophy head tradition in Huarpa/early Wari sites.

Early in the Middle Horizon, Huari emerged as an urban center and capital of the local state, with a secondary site, Conchopata, located about 7.5 miles (12 km) to the south. From the Ayacucho Basin, Wari began to expand its economic and political control across segments of the Andes. This control may have been partly established through ritual authority and military might, for example, when Wari military personnel raided other communities, taking prisoners for sacrifice and subsequent transformation into trophy heads (war trophies). Only men and children were treated in this manner. The Wari practice of head taking was likely influenced by preceding interaction with Nasca, but the Wari trophy heads were uniquely designed, making them distinguishable from the Nasca-style trophy heads. Nasca trophy heads exhibit a hole on the forehead for the carrying cord, while Wari trophy heads have a perforation on the apex of the skull, ideal for displaying the heads upright and facing forward.

Wari is also characterized by a distinctive style of architecture and artifacts, which aids in identifying the geographical extent of Wari. The typical Wari architectural form was orthogonal in plan: great rectangular enclosures, laid out according to a rigid grid plan and subdivided into square or rectangular units called patio groups. Each patio group

comprised a central open patio, surrounded on its perimeter by long, narrow rooms called galleries. Sometimes the galleries were two or three deep, and they were usually two, or even three, stories tall. An interesting characteristic of the architecture is that although doorways allow access between each patio and its associated galleries, there are few doorways allowing access from one patio group to the next. It is clear the Wari architecture was designed to severely restrict movement within each enclosure.

While Huari covers several square kilometers and the architecture is aligned to conform to the local topography, its provincial centers were much smaller, and each comprised a single rectangular unit. Provincial centers probably served as local political capitals, regional administrative centers within the imperial bureaucracy. The largest provincial center known is Pikillaqta, located just southeast of the city of Cuzco. The great rectangular enclosure there measures some 2,600 feet (800 m) on a side and is subdivided into many patio groups. While the central portion of the site was occupied for a century or more, other portions of the site were still under construction when the empire collapsed ca. AD 1000 and the site was abandoned.

Another provincial center was Jincamocco, located in southern Ayacucho. This enclosure originally measured about 427 by 853 feet (130 by 260 m) and was expanded during the latter part of the Wari occupation. Archaeological investigations in and around this site indicate that the valley in which it was located was reorganized by Wari to increase maize production. The valley was extensively terraced at the time, probably under Wari direction.

In the Moquegua Valley of far southern Peru, the Wari established an administrative and ceremonial center at Cerro Baúl, and they significantly increased agricultural output in the upper valley by constructing new canal systems and agricultural terraces. This incursion into the valley put them in direct contact with Tiwanaku, which also had settlements in the region, but current data show no indications of violence between the two polities.

North of the Wari heartland, provincial centers were situated along the spine of the Andes as far north as Cajamarca. Construction at the large center of Viracochapampa was started but never finished. Either the local polity capitulated and agreed to cooperate with Wari, making an imposed capital unnecessary, or the Wari never succeeded in conquering the region. Archaeological survey shows that most Wari centers were linked together by a system of roads, many of which were later incorporated into the well-known royal highways of the Incas.

Evidence for Wari control of the coast is less clear. On the north coast of Peru, the Moche polity fragmented around the time that Wari influence was first experienced. The collapse of Moche might be related to Wari influence in the region, or it may have been entirely independent of Wari expansion. The presence of Wari artifacts on the north coast might be explained as the result of trade rather than conquest.

A major religious center was established at the site of Pachacamac, located just south of the modern capital city of Lima. Artifacts of Pachacamac style are clearly related to Wari styles and probably represent a regional variant of Wari-related styles. It is unclear whether Pachacamac was an independent polity, with wide-ranging influence on the coast, or a province within the Wari Empire.

On the south coast several major Wari offerings, but few actual Wari centers, are found. Associated with the Wari expansion was the diffusion of a religious practice that involved the offering of large quantities of high-quality and exquisitely decorated ceramics. Typically, a large pit was dug into the ground, and fancy polychrome pots were smashed and thrown into it. Large vessels depicting supernatural creatures or humans were ritually “killed” with blows aimed first at the head or chest of the being depicted on the pot. Such offering deposits are known in several locations in the highlands, such as at Conchopata, Nawinpukio, and Huari. At Conchopata, these offering smashes are associated with sacrificed camelids and human trophy heads. Elaborate ceramic offerings have also been documented on the south coast: Maymi in the Pisco Valley and Pacheco in the Nasca Valley.

Pacheco may have also included a large area of rectilinear architecture, but investigations in the 1920s were focused on the offering deposit, and the site has since been destroyed by modern agriculture. Nasca settlement patterns were completely disrupted when Pacheco was established, and new burial practices are observed during this time; this suggests intense interaction with Wari and perhaps the establishment of Wari control.

[See also [ANDEAN PRE-INCA CIVILIZATIONS, THE RISE OF: INTRODUCTION](#); [MOCHE CULTURE](#); [NASCA CIVILIZATION](#); [SOUTH AMERICA: HIGHLANDS CULTURES OF SOUTH AMERICA](#); [SOUTH AMERICA: THE RISE OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES IN SOUTH AMERICA](#); [TIWANAKU EMPIRE](#).]

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