

INITIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LA PUNTA SITE, ENSENADA, BAJA CALIFORNIA

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These are the results obtained from archaeological excavations at the La Punta site, where the three-month excavation season is part of an extensive program of investigations in the state of Baja California. The team that participated in the field season consisted of archaeologists Danilo Drakíc Ballivián, Luís Ramón Delgado, and Isaac Aquino Toledo; oceanographers Paulina Balbontin Duron and Emmanuel Vizcaíno Pérez from UABC; physical anthropologists Carlos Serrano Sánchez (IA-UNAM) and Liliana Torres Sanders (DAF-INAH); and the sponsors, Inmobiliaria BVG Bajamar S.A. de C.V. de S.R.L.

The site of La Punta, which was recorded by Mora and Rodríguez in 1991, is located 30 km northwest of the city of Ensenada, Baja California, at the mouth of Jatay canyon, on a small marine terrace that forms its left bank (Figure 1).

The area contains two marine terraces with coastal scrub vegetation, very characteristic of the state's coastal plains. The settlement is situated on the first of the two marine terraces, completely covering it and measuring approximately 400 m north-south and 50 m east west at its widest (Figure 2). We also note the presence of an old source of fresh water in the canyon, supplying a vital resource for the site's inhabitants. The large amount of discarded shell and artifacts throughout the terrace testifies to the site's importance, as well as the distinct periods of occupation that occurred.

The area of the settlement was delimited and subdivided into potential subareas (camps) where the sampling was done to characterize the site as a whole. Seven camps were excavated in five phases of work at the site, amounting to 14 areas of excavation, a total of 267 2-by-2-m units, and an excavated area of 1,068 m² (Figure 3). Each area is an important sample from the people of this coast, showing us site's different stages and development through time.

The method of excavation method applied to the site was extensive areal excavation, with the objective of encompassing the largest possible area of the settlements, opening up several fronts of work simultaneously (Figure 4).

Areal excavations were done with 2-by-2-m units, and with 20-by-2-m trenches that were each subdivided into minimal 2-by-2-m units. The excavation was carried out in 10-20-cm metric levels, attempting as far as possible to detect distinct contacts within the deposits and trying to cover the greatest possible extent of the shell midden. The grid was oriented to magnetic north to better control all the units and to situate them on the topographic plan.

Recovered materials, representing a significant sample of the settlement, were analyzed as including:

- 18,215 flakes
- 136 projectile points
- 471 cores
- 190 hammers
- 265 scrapers (*raspadores*)
- 726 scrapers (*raederas*)
- 172 burins
- 62 drills
- 79 knives



Figure 1. Photo of the La Punta Site.



Figure 2. Profile of the marine terrace.

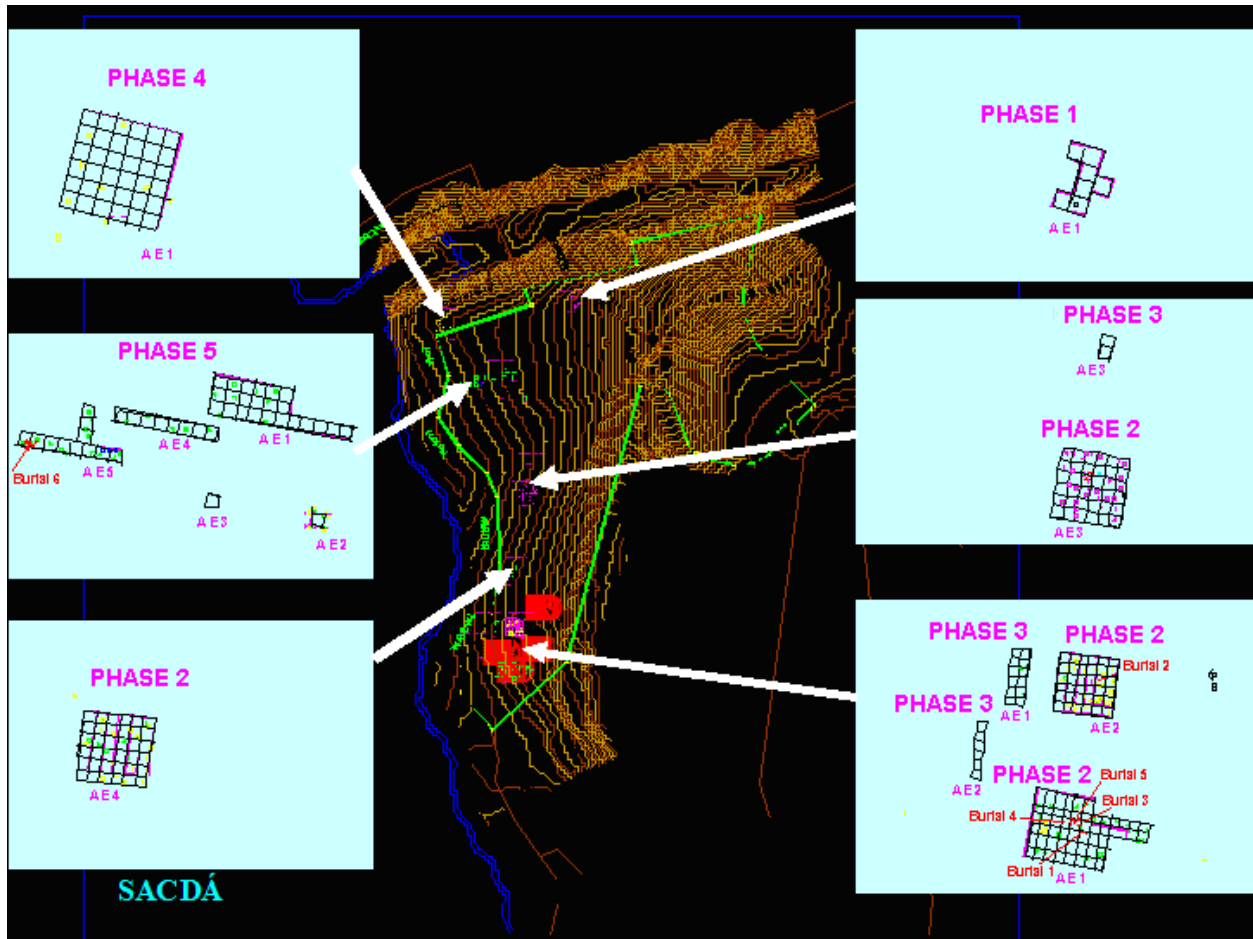


Figure 3. Map of the excavations.



Figure 4. Photos of the excavations in progress.



Figure 5. (a) *Hearth*; (b) *metate*.

- 247 blades
- 5 potsherds

Based on important archaeological remains found in the excavations, it is possible to define at least four major activity areas at the site: three areas related to food processing, including hearths, an area for seed grinding, and an area where material were discarded (i.e., a large refuse deposit); and a fourth activity area related to burials at the site (a cemetery). Ninety-two hearths were recorded, classified into three types according to their diameters: small hearths with diameters of 60 cm; medium, 80 cm; and large, 100 cm (Figure 5a).

Also recovered were 21 metates, in a large variety of forms and sizes (Figure 5b). These attest to the important of milling in the adaptation of these groups to their environment, as well as serving on occasion as mortuary offerings.

Among the human remains found in the excavations, it was possible to identify six primary interments; a seventh burial was recovered during mechanical grading, thus having lost its contextual information. Four of these burials belonged to female individuals, and two to males. For the burial of a child of approximately six years of age, it was not possible to identify the sex. The age ranges for the individuals varied between 20-24 years, 25-35 years, and 35-40 years.

It was possible to identify three distinct types of burials in accordance with their positions, the funerary deposits that covered them, and the offerings that accompanied them. Based on these data, we are able to recognize that all of them reflected a single funerary custom, with three distinct traditions for burial:

- Type 1, well-flexed (tied), covered by mounds of large basalt rocks (Figure 6a)
- Type 2, well-flexed, covered by medium-sized to small rocks (Figure 6b)
- Type 3, semi-flexed, covered by small rocks (Figure 6c)

Also recovered were two canid (dog) burials, representing two distinct breeds of dogs, including a female and a male, associated as a mortuary offering with a Type 3 burial (burial #2) (Figure 7).

In a large refuse deposit were recorded 26 shellfish species, as well as a wide diversity of other faunal remains, such as seals, sea otters, shark, whale, manta ray, a variety of fish, deer, rabbits, birds, etc. There was also a wide variety of lithic tools and artifacts, some metates, and anvils (Figure 8). These provided important information on the diet and lifeways of the early groups that lived on this coast.

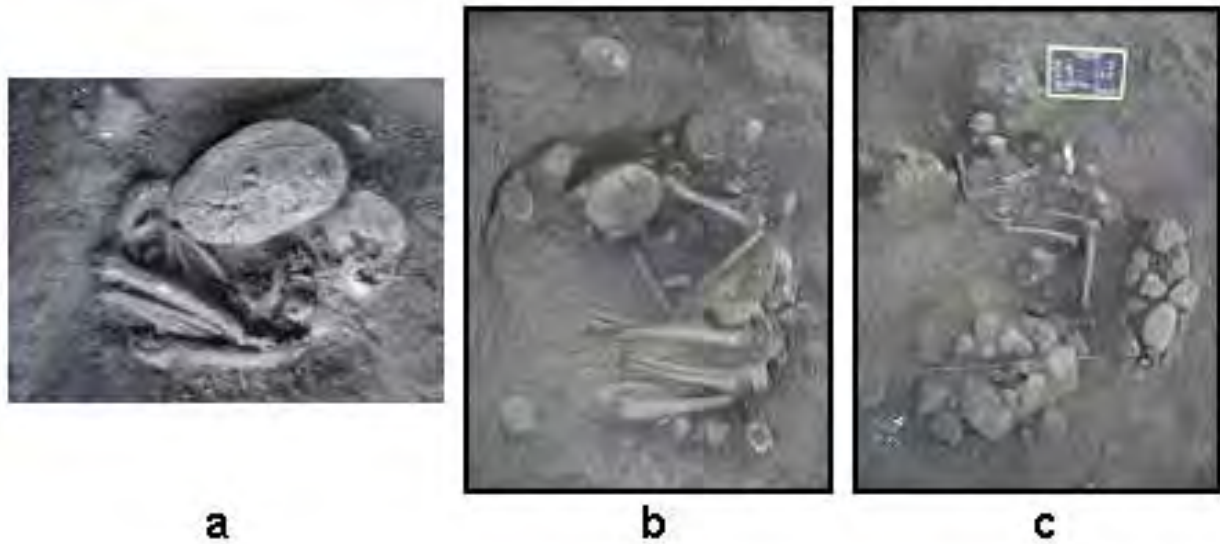


Figure 6. Photos of the burial types: (a) Type 1; (b) Type 2; (c) Type 3.



Figure 7. Photos of the dog burials.

CONCLUSIONS

We can observe that the wide diversity of archaeological materials and the elements that compose the site reflect an occupation over a long period of time and by distinct groups that came to the area on different occasions. Possibly more than one group came together in the area at the same time, or perhaps groups with different cultural and ethnic affiliations were involved. Based on information from the physical anthropologists, it seems to me to be useful to classify the different population types as follows (Figure 9):

- Early Population -- consisting of burials 1, 4, and 6, with dolichocephalic crania showing traits very characteristic of groups that have inhabited the continent for a long time, known as Paleoindians or the first people. We still do not know exactly when this population came to the site, but we can infer that it was long ago. We see how the first people coming to this coast were specialized hunters of terrestrial fauna, with very little specialization for hunting marine fauna, as



Figure 8. Photo of the distribution of refuse and burials (Camp 2).

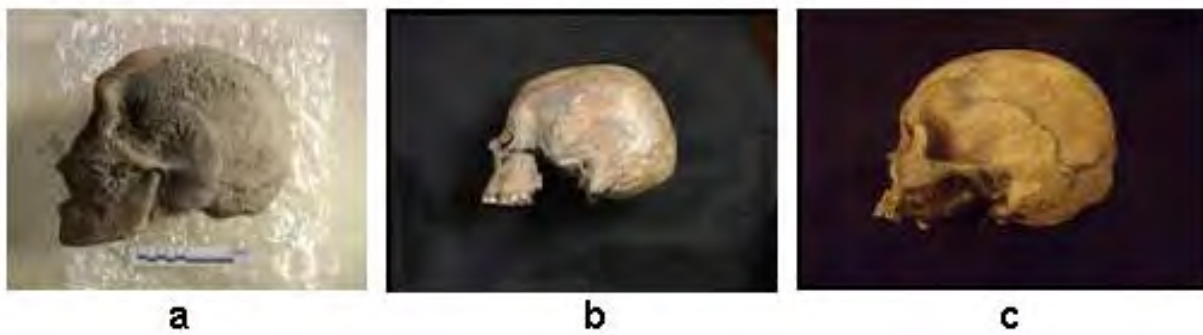


Figure 9. Occupations of the La Punta Site: (a) early occupation, ?-5300 B.P.; (b) middle occupation, 4610-2110 B.P.; (c) late occupation, 1100-108 B.P.

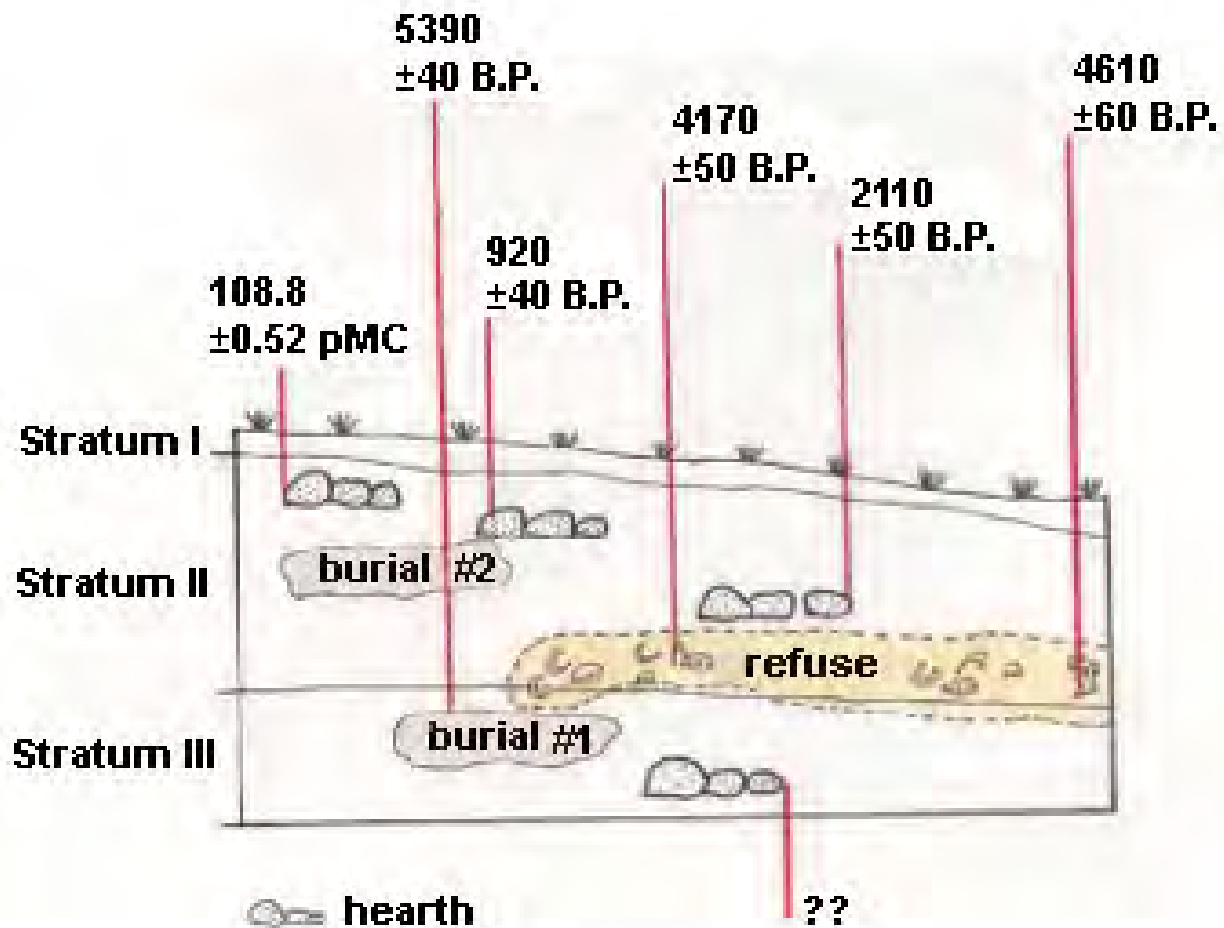


Figure 10. Stratigraphic profile.

shown by the scarce faunal remains found in those contexts, and some of which were almost fossilized.

- Middle Population -- consisting of burials 3 and 5, clearly seen as the same dolicocephalic population with some changes in certain physical traits of the crania (mixed with another population). A greater adaptation to the marine environment is detected, with a greater diversity of vertebrate fauna and mollusk species in comparison with the early occupation.
- Late Population -- consisting of burial #2, an individual that would correspond to the groups related to those of the southwestern United States, with brachiocephalic crania. Their appearance on this coast was late compared to that of the first two populations.

In the stratigraphic profile (Figure 10), we can see the archaeological correlation at the site among its representative elements in each level, these being the hearths, refuse deposit, and burials from which the site's dates have been obtained up to the present:

- We have the oldest dates in burial #1 (5390 B.P.) and burial #6 (5070 B.P.). (More samples will be processed from these burials to confirm the dates.)
- Next is a date of 4610 B.P. from a shell in the lower portion of the refuse deposit.
- This is followed by another shell in the upper portion of the refuse deposit, dated to 4170 B.P.
- A hearth gave us a date of 2110 B.P.
- Another hearth was dated to 920 B.P.

We hope soon to receive additional pending dates from the La Punta site that are contributing to our knowledge and understanding of the region's interesting social phenomena.

Since very early times, a sacred space has been considered an appropriate place to leave the dead in their eternal rest and to consecrate as a cemetery. Based on the discovery of distinct individual burials that have been recorded at the site, specific offerings for each individual, and the use of the same location by different groups, showing differences in tradition among the burials, this evidence leads me to define this space as sacred. Another argument for recognizing it as a cemetery is the different occasions upon which the bodies were deposited.

It is important to give a short description of each burial and the elements that compose it.

The early population, considered as the first type of burials at the site, consists of burials #1, #4, and #6:

- Burial #1 -- a middle adult male individual of 25-35 years, deposited on the left side, well flexed (tied up), oriented east-west in a small grave, and covered with large rocks; accompanied by offerings of worked shell (a pectoral), lithic tools, and a deer bone.
- Burial #4 -- a female individual of 35-40 years, deposited on the right site, well flexed, oriented south-north, and covered with large rocks; accompanied with offerings of worked shell, lithic tools, and a deer bone.
- Burial #6 -- identified as a child of about 6 years, deposited on the left side, oriented south-north, and covered with large rocks; offerings consisted of shells and a mano.

The middle population was associated with the second type of burial at the site, including burials #3 and #5:

- Burial #3, a female individual of 30-34 years, deposited on the left side, well flexed, oriented south-north, covered with medium-sized and small rocks; offerings in this case were worked shell, lithic tools, and a worked bone tool (an awl).
- Burial #5, a female individual of 35-39 years, deposited on the right side, well flexed, oriented south-north, covered with medium-sized and small rocks; offerings consisted of worked shell, a net weight, a metate, and a mano.

The third type of burial, assigned to the site's late population, is represented by burial #2:

- Burial #2, a female individual of 30-35 years, deposited in supine position with semiflexed lower limbs, oriented south-north, covered with small rocks; offerings accompanying the burial were worked shell, a pipe (Figure 11), two canids (dogs), and various faunal remains.

This is an initial interpretive approach to the site. The investigations are still in the progress. We hope in the future to be able to further deepen our understanding of the region's cultural development and the special characteristics of each of the groups that inhabited this coast and this site in particular.

REFERENCE CITED

Mora, Jesús, and Oscar Rodríguez

- 1991 *Informe del recorrido de localización de sitios arqueológicos costeros en el Estado de Baja California, Sector Punta Banda – Playas de Tijuana*. Subdirección de Estudios Arqueológicos, INAH, Mexico City.



Figure 11. Photos of the pipe.