

Jeffrey Quilter - Current Research

<http://140.247.102.177/mcv/index.htm>



The Moche temple of Huaca Cao Viejo viewed from the Colonial Period Church of Magdalena de Cao.

In 2002, I began a collaboration with Peruvian archaeologists at the El Brujo Archaeological Complex, a 4 km.² terrace at the mouth of the Chicama River Valley. El Brujo is filled with many sites stretching from the Preceramic Period (ca. 4,000 B.C.) into the Colonial Period (ca. 1532 - 1821). When I joined the team, the Peruvians had devoted more than a decade of research concentrating on the excavation of a large Moche (ca. A.D. 100 - 800 B.P.) temple mound, the Huaca Cao Viejo (pictured above).

After two years during which I focused on the excavation of a "ceremonial" well, I shifted my attention to the excavation of the colonial occupation at the site, known from historic records as Magdalena de Cao. A Spanish-style church had been built in the ruins of the main plaza of the Huaca Cao Viejo and a town established nearby. Thanks to historical records, we know that the town was established in 1578, when the inhabitants of an earlier settlement, located on the floodplain, fled to the high Brujo terrace during torrential rains and floods caused by a severe El Niño event. The town was abandoned some time in the mid-18th century, based on our current research.

Funded by grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, we conducted four major field seasons (2005-2008) at Magdalena de Cao. We are currently seeking funds to conduct a fifth field season and to support laboratory analysis of the great assemblage of materials we have retrieved in our work. In addition, we plan to integrate our findings into a future project which will examine human-environmental interactions in the Chicama Valley. The work at the colonial site, combining archaeology and historical documents as data sources, offers a unique view for understanding the interactions between natural phenomena (El Niños, earthquakes, coastal uplift) and human activities (changes in water distribution patterns, introduction of domestic animals and crops, population movements). These can serve as baselines for extending our understandings in one of the most culturally and environmentally dynamic valleys on the coast of Peru to provide a diachronic perspective deep into the past.