

Public Abstract

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It is possible to assess important archaeological questions about prehistoric individuals and groups, learning a great deal about their lives through bioarchaeological analysis of human skeletal remains. This dissertation analyzes a skeletal collection from a major archaeological site in south-central coastal Peru, Chongos, to investigate the health and diet of the people buried there. The population was hypothesized to have engaged in intensive agriculture. Health data, such as skeletal and dental pathology, trauma, and degenerative joint disease were analyzed. Dental calculus and hair samples were examined for phytolith, trace element and isotope analyses to reconstruct diet. These data permitted evaluation of the predicted health impacts of intensive agriculture.

Results of the study demonstrated that the people buried at Chongos had poor community health that reflected a population newly reliant on agriculture, a pattern seen in Peru and around the world with the origins of intensive agriculture. Some individuals, nonetheless, had a diet similar to that of marine foragers. Thus, an unexpected finding was that the cemetery, like others at the time period, likely contained the remains of two ethnic groups, possibly farmers and fishers whose economy was a dual one based on exchange.