

ARTÍCULOS DE REVISIÓN

Early Prehistoric Maize from the Casma Valley, Perú

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Abstract

We report the discovery of 56 cobs of maize cut 6 on the northeast corner of San Diego site, recovered in the 1980 field season. The radiocarbon dates associated with maize remains have a range of 1040 to 160 years BC. Measurements of the length of these cobs have ranges from 36 to 84 mm, and a median length of 56 mm. The number of rows of kernels varies from 14 to 22 rows, with median of 18 rows, and the kernels of these cobs have ranges in length from 3,3 to 6,8 mm, with an median length of 5,8 mm. Excavations carried out by our project found no traces of maize for the Initial Period (2100-1000 BC) and Late Preceramic period (3000-2100 BC).

Keys Word: maize, cobs, Early Horizon, San Diego

Resumen

Se reporta el hallazgo de 56 mazorcas de maíz del corte 6 de la esquina noreste del sitio San Diego, recuperadas en la temporada 1980. Los fechados radiocarbonicos de los restos asociados al maíz tienen un rango de 1040 a 160 años a.C. Las mediciones de la longitud de estas mazorcas tienen intervalos entre 36 a 84 mm, y un promedio de 56 mm. El número de hileras de granos varia entre 14 a 22 hileras, con un promedio de 18, los granos de estas mazorcas tienen rangos de longitud de 3,3 a 6,8 mm, con una longitud promedio de 5,8 mm. Las excavaciones de nuestro proyecto indican que no hay vestigios de maíz para el período inicial (2100-100 aC) y período tardío precerámico (3000-2100 aC).

Palabras Clave: maíz, mazorcas, Horizonte Temprano, San Diego

This is a brief report on the earliest maize that has been encountered during excavations conducted by the Proyecto Casma Temprano from 1980 through 2011. Various stratigraphic excavations and architectural clearings were conducted at several sites in the Casma Valley area that range in date from the Middle Prececeramic (6000-3000 B.C.) through the Early Horizon (1000-200 B.C.). These sites include the coastal sites of Huaynuná, Tortugas, Bahía Seca, San Diego, Almejas and Las Haldas as well as the more inland sites of Taukachi-Konkán, Sechín Alto, Pampa Rosario, Pampa de las Llamas-Moxeke and Huerequeque. The earliest maize is present in the Early Horizon components found at Tortugas, Bahía Seca, San Diego, Las Haldas, Sechín Alto, and Pampa Rosario. No maize remains dating to the Initial Period (2100-1000 B.C.), Late Prececeramic Period (3000-2100 B.C.) or Middle Prececeramic Period have been found by our project excavations. The radiocarbon dates associated with the maize finds range from 1040 to 160 B.C. (Pozorski and Pozorski 1987:10-11, 2005:150).



Figure 1. Cobs of *Zea mays* “maíz” from cut 6, San Diego

Most of the maize remains found have been in the form of partial or whole maize cobs without kernels preserved. Occasionally, other plant parts have been found including stalks, leaves, whole kernels and cobs with kernels still attached. The most remarkable find of maize was a cache of 51 whole cobs with attached kernels adjacent to a stack of whole maize stalks in cut 6 in the northwest corner of the site San Diego in 1980 (Figure 1; Pozorski and Pozorski 1987: Figure 28; 63).



Figure 2. Cobs of *Zea mays* "maize" from of San Diego, with a length of 36 a 84 mm and mean of 56 mm.



Figura 3. Cobs of *Zea mays* "maize" has the rows of kernels ranged in number from 14 to 22 rows with a median row count of 18.

It appears that this cache of maize lay near a *quincha* house at the site, perhaps laid on the ground to dry in a manner similar to maize remains drying near modern *campesino* houses in the Casma area. At some point in time,

these maize remains became covered by a thin layer of sand that protected them from weathering up until the time of their discovery in 1980.

Measurements of these maize remains from San Diego revealed the following information. The length of the cobs ranges from 36 to 84 mm with a median length of 56 mm. The rows of kernels ranged in number from 14 to 22 rows with a median row count of 18. These rows typically spiral around the length of the cob instead of being straight along the cob length (Figures 2-6).



Figure 4. Cob of *Zea mays* "maize" has 62 mm in length



Figure 5. Cob of *Zea mays* "maize" has 60,5 mm in length, kernels have a deep purple color

A total of 1005 loose kernels were also recovered. All of these kernels are much smaller than maize kernels observed from maize remains at later sites in the Casma. All of the kernels observed, both on cobs as well as loose kernels, have a deep purple color. Each of these kernels weighs approximately 0,05 grams. Measurements of these kernels shows that the kernel length ranges from 3,3 to 6,8 mm with a median length of 5,8 mm; kernel width ranges from 3,8 to 6,0 mm with a median width of 4,6 mm; and kernel thickness ranges from 3,0 to 5,1 mm with a median thickness of 3,8 mm.



Figura 6. Cob of *Zea mays* "maize" has 72 mm in length, the rows typically spiral around the length of the cob.

Reference Cited

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