

'New' ancient buildings discovered in Peru

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The buildings are yards with stone walls located in the middle of an ancient hilled village. The buildings were used for centralised work, including crafts, and large numbers of tools have been discovered at the site.

Dr Pedro Castro Martínez from the Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona is leading the research, and spoke to CORDIS news. 'The central building in El Trigal is built with blocks of stone, using the same material that forms the geological base of the hill. The blocks are larger than those used by the employees in the construction of the domestic units. The central building is situated in the top of the hill in the centre of the settlement, with dwellings located in terraces on the slopes of the hill. The central building is formed by various courtyards, one next to another.'

The construction of the courtyards would have been phenomenally labour intensive, and will be the subject of further excavations to better determine the structure and means of construction, but the technique is thought to be consistent for both the central building and houses.

Spondylus (thorny oyster) shells and obsidian found at the site were crafted into elegant jewellery, and tool-making tools respectively. The shells would have been transported to Nazca from an area in what is now Ecuador - some 1,500 km away

along the coast. This clearly shows that the community thriving during this timeline, referred to as Ocucaje 8, traded, and covered large distances in order to trade.

As homes have also been found, archaeologists hope to analyse the way in which manufacturing and living were distributed, and so discern whether there was a dominant class that controlled the production.

The El Trigal site is one of two archaeological sites in the area. The other, Puntilla-1, was excavated in 2001 and has a similar central building to the El Trigal site, but is not so ancient.

Dr Castro Martinez' team will now continue its excavations on the El Trigal and La Puntilla sites. 'The next campaign, besides continuing excavating in the settlements, will be the start of excavations in the associated burial areas. We hope for the continued support of the Spanish Ministry for Culture and the authorisation of National Institute of Culture of Peru to do this,' he said.

The team is also trying to precisely date the El Trigal site. Palaeobiological remains and artefacts obtained in the excavations at the site have been submitted for carbon-dating to the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique (IRPA-KIK) in Brussels. The results of C14 depletion will give an accurate date.

Ultimately, the team wants to extend its excavations of the area, and move to further sites in present day Peru and Ecuador. The team hopes to develop links with more Peruvian universities as the project extends. Researchers and archaeologists from Peru, Spain, Chile, Argentina and Italy are already working with the team in its attempts to throw light onto this mysterious and ancient civilisation.

The culture under investigation at El Trigal predates the more well-known Nazca civilisation, which was noted for its still-working aqueducts, and the famous Nazca lines, and established itself in the area in the first century AD.

Countries

Spain, Peru

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