

Audio Guide excerpt: Huaca Loro
From Ancient Peru Unearthed exhibition
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[Audio ROM sound sting]

My name is Justin Jennings. I'm the Associate Curator in the Department of World Cultures here at the Royal Ontario Museum.

The platform mounds that tower over the Sicán ceremonial center are an imposing reminder of the labour and material invested in the worship of the Sicán Deity. At a height of 35 metres, Huaca Loro was one of the tallest of the mounds, and was likely one of the more important huacas at the site. *Huaca* is a Quechua word for an object that represents something that is revered, like a monument. Like other huacas, Huaca Loro is a multi-level, steep-sided structure. The huacas were made by constructing adobe brick chambers and then filling those chambers with sand and refuse. The mound top at Huaca Loro was enclosed by a wall and accessed by a long narrow ramp. Within the mound top enclosure, ramps led up through a series of terraces containing roofed colonnades. The columns and surrounding walls would have been brilliantly decorated with polychrome friezes, and murals of the Sicán Deity and other Middle Sicán imagery. Sheets of gold and silver likely also decorated the mound top.

The Middle Sicán elite would have participated in rituals on Huaca Loro. The ceremonies would have closely linked the elite as a group, to the Sicán Deity and to his relationship with the forces of nature. The rituals would have been visually stunning because of the brilliant colors of the murals, the reflection of the sun off of the precious metals on the temples, and the vibrant costumes of the participants.

Unlike Maya and Aztec pyramids where rituals were played out for an audience below, the ceremonies on the mound top at Huaca Loro were likely held for smaller audiences that moved up the entrance ramp and into the enclosure on top of the pyramid.

The ceremonial items used in these displays were likely collected at the time of a ruler's death. These items were then deposited into shaft tombs, like the East Tomb. At Huaca Loro, excavation and ground-penetrating radar surveys by Izumi Shimada's team have revealed as many as three rows of possible shaft tombs along the huacas's north-south axis. An additional tomb appears to have been constructed underneath the huaca. DNA and dental analyses have led Shimada to suggest that Huaca Loro may have belonged to a particular kinship group, and that the burial at the base of the huaca contains the remains of the group's founding ancestor.

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