

Moche Politics, Religion, and Warfare

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In this essay I briefly review the history of Moche studies, the essential features of this archaeological culture of the North Coast of Peru (ca. 1900–1100 B.P.), and its general economy. I then present current issues, discussions, and debates on Moche regional political organization, religion, warfare, and their interrelations. I suggest that the interpretation of Moche art has been undertheorized and the interpretation of archaeology has lacked nuance. I question the proposal of warfare as “ritual,” that the temple mound complexes were centers of political power, that the elite buried in them were rulers, that the compounds and streets near them were cities, and whether proposals for a conquest Moche state are plausible. I suggest that these and other interpretations about the Moche are becoming accepted as facts without considering alternative interpretations of the data and that much information is lacking. Rather than having reached a stage when we can synthesize concepts about Moche culture we are only just beginning to understand it.

KEY WORDS: Andes; Moche; politics; religion; warfare.

INTRODUCTION

From many perspectives, the Moche resemble the Maya. Like Maya studies, Moche research boasts a venerable historiography, having attracted some of the most energetic and creative national and foreign scholars to the ancient relics of Peru’s North Coast. Like the Maya, Moche material culture is distinct and attractive to Western eyes and tastes, eliciting terms such as “classic” and “florescent.” Moche and Maya architecture and portable objects are compelling to art historians, archaeologists, and laypeople in ways

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that the arts of other cultures are not, and much research has been done through studies of objects lacking precise archaeological provenance. Maya art emphasizes line and “realism” as does Moche art, often portraying human figures arrayed in fancy warrior dress or priestly costumes. As the summits of Maya pyramids protrude above the tropical forest canopy, Moche mounds sweep up from the river valley plains (Fig. 1). For both cultures, temple complexes were central places of ancient life and focal points for archaeological research. Both Maya and Moche had short roots connected to “Mother Cultures”: the Olmec and Chavín/Cupisnique, respectively. Both flowered, developed distinct ways of life within their cultural universes, and then rapidly transformed within a century of each other. Both transformations have been viewed as “collapses” by archaeologists.

The current state of Moche studies resembles Maya archaeology in the early 1970s. After decades of investigations, as the twentieth century sped towards its last quarter, Maya scholars began to address questions of politics, society, and ideology with considerable success as measured in a growing consensus among many investigators on key topics. The reasons for this progress lay in a convergence of vectors in both nonacademic and academic realms. Chief among the latter was the growing success in the decipherment of hieroglyphic texts. As but one example, the identification of place names provided the opportunity to define alliances between peer polities and allegiances between subordinate and dominant centers even when relatively complete text readings could not be done (e.g. Marcus, 1976). In the last 15 years similar accelerations in the gathering of data and the development of explanatory models have occurred for the Moche.

Whatever analogies may be drawn between the Moche and the Maya, the opportunity for a prehistoric culture to be transformed into an historic one will always elude the Moche, at least in the strict sense of “historic.” This debit may be turned into an asset, however, for the Moche provide a test case for the power of archaeological interpretation to illuminate the societal structures and cultural dynamics of an ancient civilization. What can we say about a society when we have no texts for it and when it is separated from the closest written sources by seven centuries? The answer to that question, by most anthropologically trained archaeologists, always has been, “Quite a lot!” It is a challenge to the field, however, to demonstrate what “a lot” is.

The exponential growth in Moche field archaeology began after the 1987 discovery and excavation of the Sipán tombs. Currently, the North Coast of Peru hosts many field projects, great and small, as well as ongoing laboratory analyses of previous studies at an order of engagement probably higher than any other region in Latin America except for the Maya realm. It thus might be an inopportune time to attempt to write a summary article on the state of Moche studies. It may take more than a decade, however, before

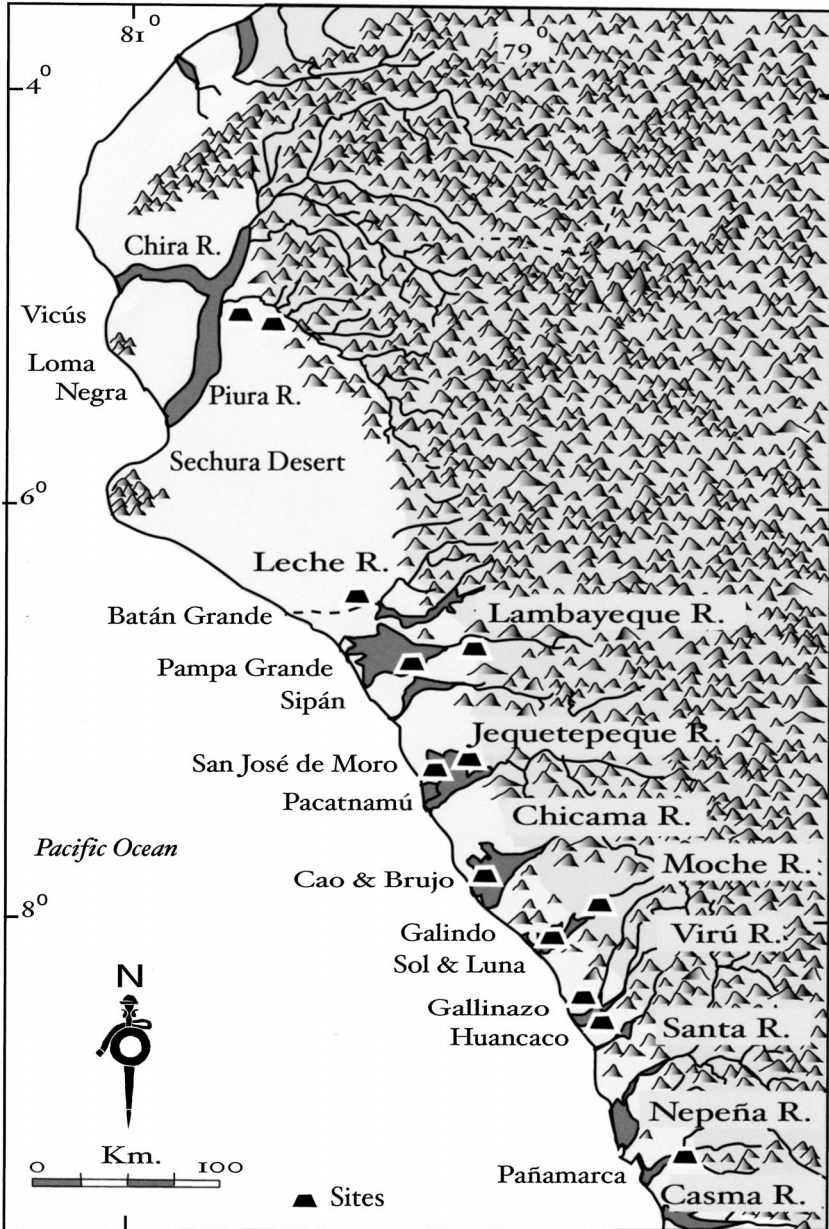


Fig. 1. Map of the North Coast of Peru, with major Moche sites shown. Mountain icons represent general highlands and not specific peaks. Floodplain/irrigation land shown as shaded near river mouths.

a full assessment of the results of this intense period of research can be appropriately evaluated. And, as research always generates new questions, ten years hence, a future author may feel as uneasy at attempting a synthetic statement on “Mocheology” as I do now. My essay may nevertheless serve a useful role as a wayside marker in a long journey of inquiry with no end in sight.

Because space is limited, I will only provide a brief description of the history of Moche studies (see also Castillo and Donnan, 1994a,b; Shimada, 1994a, pp. 13–34; Uceda and Mujica, 1994, pp. 11–27), define what “Moche” is, and describe Moche culture in general. I shall use most of my allotted space to address issues of the interrelations between Moche art, religion, and politics. In doing this, I hope to present some of the current discussion on these topics and offer commentary on the way in which discourse on Moche culture has been formed in the last few decades.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

In Peru the past is inescapable. The ruins of adobe structures tower high above desert plains, yet, with their walls degraded through time, some have been mistaken as hills for centuries. The shadows cast by the past are especially strong and long on the North Coast. Of the many regions of Peru, it is among those with the greatest historical depth. This is largely due to the fact that the Kingdom of Chimor (or Chimú) had been conquered and under Inka control for only a brief time when the Spanish arrived. The Inka were engulfed in Western History, but the Chimú were only a generation distant. Consequently, myths of conquerors and conquered were layered and mixed with very real opportunities for the new arrivals to seize the past. Perhaps the most infamous episode of seizure is the 1602 diversion of the Moche River to erode most of the huge adobe complex of the Huaca del Sol, yielding a huge quantity of gold.

Coastal populations suffered from the diseases brought by the Spanish to a much greater degree than highlanders, and the North Coast was hit particularly hard. Despite or perhaps because of the decimation, pre-Inka cultural identity and behaviors survived or reemerged. In the colonial period through the republican era to today, *Norteños* have maintained a distinct cultural pose and an ethos of strong regional identity, territorial integrity, and independence of spirit.

The local language when the Spanish arrived, and probably that of the Chimú, was Muchik (or Yunga) (Villareal, 1921). This term also referred to the valley and river closest to the city of Trujillo. A Muchik dictionary was compiled in the first half of the seventeenth century by Fernando de Carrera

(1939 [1644]) and the same era saw extensive documentation of local customs by the Jesuit, Antonio de la Calancha (1976 [1638]). In the next century, the Archbishop of Trujillo made detailed maps of ruins and carefully examined ceramics (Martínez de Compañón, 1978–1993 [1782/1788]).

Three generations later, the great era of the world-travelling naturalists and adventurers saw many of them visit the north coast. Among the most significant were Rivero and von Tschudi (1851), who published the first extensive antiquarian report on Peruvian artifacts. E. G. Squier (1877) had conducted extensive research at mound sites in the U.S. Midwest and used his post as Diplomatic Commissioner for the United States to Peru to tour extensively. Squier brought the same powers of observation he had developed in Ohio to Peruvian ruins and his book helped disseminate information on Peruvian antiquities to the English-reading world, inspiring others (e.g. Markham, 1910; Middendorf, 1892) to follow in his footsteps. The German, Max Uhle (1892), however, was the first professional archaeologist to conduct excavations in Peru and the first to excavate a Moche site (see Menzel, 1977).

Uhle's excavations at the Huaca de La Luna and the Huaca del Sol, at the Moche Site, close to the departmental capital, Trujillo, yielded a three-phase cultural sequence based on similarities and differences between Moche ceramics and those from Pachacamac on the central coast. Regional styles, including Moche, were followed by ones that shared traits which seemed to be derived from the Bolivian center, Tiahuanaco. This period of widespread stylistic unity was followed by a time of regionalization, when Chimu styles dominated the north coast. The period when the Inka Empire covered much of Peru was added as a fourth era. These four phases are now known as the Early Intermediate Period, the Middle Horizon, the Late Intermediate Period, and the Late Horizon. Although views of cultural dynamics have grown more complex and more time periods (Preceramic Period, Initial Period, and Early Horizon) have been added to the Central Andean sequence, the basic framework is still used.

For the next half-century, virtually no excavation projects of the scope of Uhle's work took place on the Peruvian north coast. Alfred Kroeber published and analyzed Uhle's pottery collection, housed at the University of California, Berkeley, producing important syntheses of ceramic chronology and, later, culture history (Kroeber, 1925, 1927, 1944). Kroeber's publications were particularly important in disseminating information on Peruvian prehistory to other archaeologists who did not have command of Spanish. Significant field research by Germans Heinrich Ubbelohde-Doering (1933, 1951, 1957), at Pacatnamú, and Hans Disselhof (1939, 1958, 1972), notably at Huaca Negra and San José de Moro, mostly were known only to Andeanist scholars.

Great advances were made by the pioneering efforts of Rafael Larco Hoyle. Owner of one of the largest sugar plantations in the region, Hoyle was an avid collector and excavator of archaeological remains. Over the course of many decades he built a large collection of artifacts, excavated sites, and wrote and published extensively. He also organized an important conference at his hacienda, Chiclín, in 1946 (Willey, 1946), which consolidated previous work, and established a Moche chronology (Larco Hoyle, 1946, 1948). Like Uhle, much of Larco's work remains as a foundation upon which contemporary Mochicólogos are still building. Larco published much more than Uhle, including books for the general public as well as more specialist writings (1938/1939). While Uhle was the first professional archaeologist of a Moche site, Larco was the founding father of Moche studies in a broader sense, especially given his interest in subjects ranging from ceramic sequences to religion. He was, in fact, the first "Mochicólogo," a term coined by Luis Jaime Castillo, which aptly refers to scholars who use a variety of investigation methods to study the Moche.

In 1946, the Virú Valley Project was the first large-scale, multisite project in South America, involving many of the leading North American scholars of the day engaged in a cooperative effort to investigate grand research questions throughout an extensive area. The first Preceramic site to be excavated in Peru was carried out in the allied Huaca Prieta project (Bird *et al.*, 1985) while Gordon Willey's settlement survey (1953) underscored the value of examining cultural patterns through the lens of a form of landscape archaeology. That research pointedly noted Moche expansion from its Moche-Chicama core to other valleys. An even broader coastal survey, employing aerial photography, was soon undertaken by Paul Kosok (1965). It documented hundreds of sites, many of which still remain to be investigated.

The postwar era was the beginning of a steady growth period in Moche studies. Both foreign and domestic archaeologists visited the North Coast in greater numbers and more frequently than ever before and they published a steady stream of articles. Much basic reporting was done and the prehistoric cultures of the North Coast began to be appreciated as examples of the rise of "complex" societies. Here, in irrigated valleys, bounded by harsh deserts, archaeology could address questions of human adaptation and responses to the environmental engines believed to drive culture change (Carneiro, 1972; Moseley and Day, 1982; Wilson, 1988). Archaeologists interested in the issue of urbanism as a worldwide phenomenon also saw the region as a testing ground (Schaedel, 1951, 1972). Although many of these investigators had large, theoretical questions, they were consistently forced to work with complex empirical data and to address Peruvian culture history on a more regional and local level.

The Chan Chan–Moche Valley Project (Moseley and Day, 1982) included a focus on Chan Chan, the Chimu capital, and the irrigation system that supported it. Work at the Moche Site and consideration of how the Moche occupied the land before the Chimú also was an important part of the project. Furthermore, this period of research also saw the first systematic study of Moche burial practices (Donnan and Mackey, 1978). Somewhat later, a long-term study in the La Leche and Lambayeque valleys investigated sites from the Moche to later eras with a particular focus on the large Moche V site, Pampa Grande (Shimada, 1994a).

In the 1980s, the series of events that began with looting and ended with the excavation of spectacular burials at Sipán, in the Lambayeque Valley, marked one of the most important turning points in Moche archaeology (Alva, 1994, 2001; Alva and Donnan, 1993). Previous reluctance to excavate adobe architectural complexes for fear of disturbing upper layers of construction yielded to the pressures of retrieving important, and often spectacular, grave assemblages of Moche elite before they were looted.

The richness of Moche material culture permitted the development and growth of scholarship that concentrates primarily on symbolism through the study of art. Since Larco Hoyle, a number of scholars had used the collections of Moche objects stored in museums and, unfortunately, sold on the black market, throughout the world. Rather remarkably, though, no investigator with a Ph.D. in Art History has made the Moche his or her specialty. Substantial contributions have been made, though, by many. In the United States, Elizabeth Benson (1972), for example, has made many contributions to Moche studies, including a monograph that provided a rare synthesis in a single volume, in English. For the most part, anthropologically trained archaeologists have been at the forefront of interpreting images in, on, or made of ceramics, murals, and metals. Indeed, many students of Moche iconography have made substantial contributions to the field. In particular, the work of Christopher Donnan (1976, 1978), beginning in the mid-1970s, revolutionized interpretation of Moche art through his “Thematic Approach.” One of the great contributions of the Sipán investigations, beginning a decade later, is that it provided a link between the results of field archaeology and art studies in an unprecedented manner. Rituals tied to myths known mostly through images could now be understood through a wealth of archaeological data in good association and context.

The other significant advance in Moche studies is part of a much broader change in archaeology: the improvement in radiocarbon dating techniques and the correlation of laboratory dates with other chronometric measurements, especially calendar dates. In addition to improved accuracy, a simple increase in the number of radiocarbon dates also has helped to refine chronometric dates for Moche. Furthermore, linkage of archaeological data,

inferred cultural events, dates, and environmental cycles and changes have been accomplished through study of ice cores from the Quelccaya ice cap, in the south Peruvian highlands (Thompson, 1980). Better dating has permitted more precision in discussing the “Last of the Mochica” (Castillo, 2001), while data on prolonged droughts have been cited by some as evidence for environmental stress as a leading cause of the Moche demise (Moseley, 1992; Moseley *et al.*, 1981; Shimada, 1994a; Shimada *et al.*, 1991).

The Shining Path guerilla movement inhibited the development of field projects in Peru during the late 1980s and much of the 1990s, although the North Coast was relatively quiet and some projects, particularly those directed by Peruvians, were carried out. Indeed, the growth in numbers of highly trained professional Peruvian archaeologists has proven increasingly important in sustaining long-term research in the region. So too, an increasing awareness by the Peruvian government and private businesses of the intellectual value of the past and opportunities for cultural tourism has led to an exponential growth in research projects on the North Coast. Financial resources for long-term investigations at the Huaca de La Luna and the Huaca Cao Viejo were provided by a leading Peruvian brewery and a bank, respectively. At the time of writing, more than a dozen professional archaeologists are engaged in active Moche field projects, with many more involved in laboratory studies, iconographic analyses, and other investigations.

MOCHE DEFINED

“Moche” refers to an archaeological culture defined by distinctive characteristics within formal, spatial, and temporal dimensions. In terms of form, Moche was first and has continued to be mostly defined by its distinctive ceramics. These are earthenwares made through use of molds and handwork. Forms include stirrup spout bottles, *floreros*, sculpted pieces, and many others. A distinctive decorative technique was the use of cream-to-white slipped surfaces as canvases on which to paint designs or veristic (representational) depictions of deities, humans, animals, and other natural forms. Painting, and sometimes, inlays, also were employed on three-dimensional modeled pieces.

Metal work, principally in gold and copper (Jones, 2001; Lechtman, 1996a), textiles (Prümers, 1995), and beautiful objects in wood, gourds, feathers, stone, and other materials all were executed in distinctive styles that are recognizably Moche. Influences from other cultures are occasionally apparent, but the Moche style is distinct and easily recognizable. The Moche may have learned to build large complexes of platforms and flat-topped pyramids from the Gallinzao culture (Hastings and Moseley, 1975; Shimada

and Maguiña, 1994) and borrowed or inherited other ideas and behavioral patterns from their predecessors, but they soon developed their own styles.

The relatively clear boundaries of the distribution of ceramic and other hallmark objects partly contribute to giving the concept of Moche culture coherence. Its “heartland” has been traditionally defined as the Moche Valley, where the largest pyramids are located, and the neighboring Chicama Valley to its north. Moche sites and artifacts are clearly in evidence from the Lambayeque Valley, in the north, to the Nepeña Valley, in the south. Influence and shared culture, of some sort, as measured by the presence of Moche artifacts, stretched through the northern Sechura desert and the Vicús drainage, and as far south as the Huarmey Valley at Moche’s greatest expanse in the early sixth century.

Moche is fairly well defined temporally, although its origins are less clear than its demise. For many years, the foundation of Moche chronology was a five-phase ceramic temporal seriation of Moche-style vessels established by Larco Hoyle (1946, 1948) (Fig. 2). Only recently has a closer look been taken at contemporary variation in ceramic styles within the Moche era and its potential significance for cultural dynamics. (Castillo, 2001; Donnan, 2001; Donnan and McClelland, 1999; Russell and Jackson, 2001). Nevertheless, changes in ceramics still are key in working through internal development, regional variability, and external influences through time.

The recovery of more examples of early Moche pottery suggests that it shares features with the preceding Salinar style (Larco Hoyle, 1944), which, in turn, is related to the earlier Cupisnique style. It also has been suggested that Moche ceramics in the Virú Valley could have derived from the Gallinazo culture (also known as Virú) (Donnan and Cock, 1997, cited in Castillo, 2001). Although the Moche style is distinct, some external influences or shared features occurred between it and other contemporary cultures such as Recuay and early Cajamarca wares, of the highlands, and the Lima style of the Central Coast.

To establish an exact date for the emergence of Moche is still a difficult task because its development appears to have been gradual or varied in different valleys and regions. Peter Kaulicke (1992) has attempted to correlate dates with the Larco five-phase ceramic sequence, from A.D. 50 to 800. The orderly evolution of ceramic styles has recently been called into question, however, with Gallinazo ceramics found alongside Moche wares at the early huaca (platform mound) site of Dos Cabezas, by Christopher Donnan (cited as personal communication to Pillsbury in Pillsbury, 2001). For the northern Moche, Luis Jaime Castillo (2001) suggests adoption of a tripartite chronology of Early, Middle, and Late Moche periods, not correlated to the Larco sequence. Through his work at San José de Moro, he has produced convincing evidence of a gradual fading of the Moche style at the site in

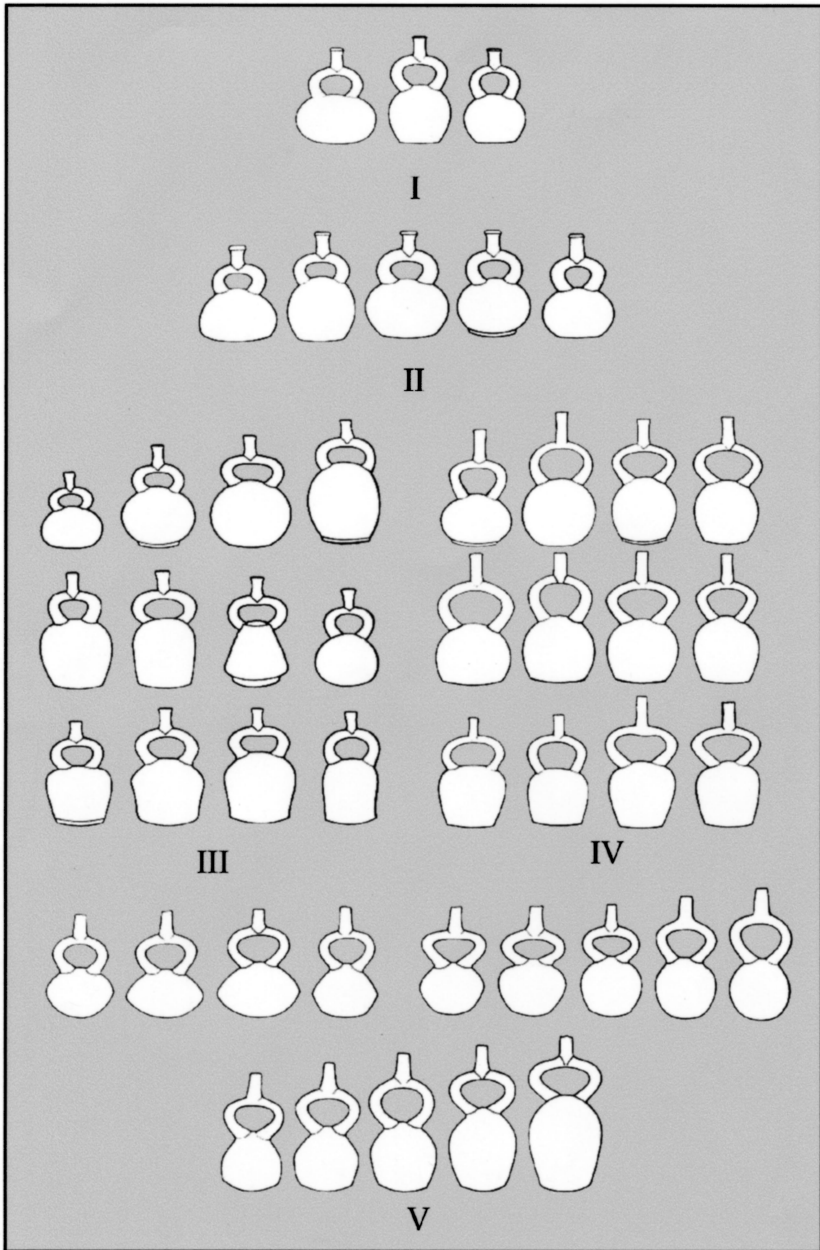


Fig. 2. The Larco Hoyle ceramic sequence for stirrup spout vessels. Phases noted by roman numerals. (After Shimada, 1994a, fig. 2.6, p. 21).

a Transitional Period (A.D. 800–950) by the end of which the Moche style no longer existed. And, in another case, research in the far northern Vicús area has suggested that Moche in this region also sprang from local roots (Makowski, 1994).

The collapse of Moche is one of the most actively debated topics in Moche studies and is linked to how different scholars interpret Moche politics: a single expansive state, two distinct regions, or multiple polities. These issues will be discussed, below. Briefly, however, the agents for transformation that are cited are environmental stress (El Niño events, droughts, floods), their impacts on agriculture (canals, fields, harvests), and loss of faith by lower classes in ideology propagated by elites. Garth Bawden (1982, 1996, 2001) sees class struggle as the primary cause of the end of Moche. Other considerations are the role of the Wari empire as an expansive state that directly or indirectly weakened the Moche.

A final point to consider in defining Moche is the terminology used to refer to this culture. From the late nineteenth century until well into the twentieth century, many scholars referred to the style as Chimu or “Proto-Chimu” (e.g. Kutscher, 1954). The Chimu style, in distinct black ceramics, was known as immediately precedent to the Inka and, projecting back in time, earlier oxidized wares clearly were similar in many ways, thus suggesting they comprised a prior, “proto” style to Chimu. Larco Hoyle (2001 [1938/1939]), however, named the culture “Mochica,” on the presumption that the earlier style was made by the original speakers of the Muchik language. The members of the Moche Valley Project, with ties to the perspective of John Rowe used “Moche” following archaeological nomenclature procedures by naming the culture after a geographical feature, in this case, the river valley, in which the type site is located. While most scholars adopted this term, recently, some (Shimada, 1994a) have returned to the former “Mochica.” If both “Moche” and “Mochica” derive from Muchik, then it might be claimed that which term one chooses matters little except for the needs of consistency. “Mochica” does seem to carry the sense of referring to an ethnic group and ongoing tradition, however, while “Moche” seems more objectively distanced with its link to the contemporary term for the valley and river. Perhaps not settling on a single term is a healthy reminder that both references are modern constructs for a phenomenon that may or may not have been recognized as valid or meaningful by the people who left the archaeological remains.

ENVIRONMENT, RESOURCES, AND ECONOMICS

It is well known that three great environmental regions run parallel to the Pacific shore of Peru: coast, sierra, and tropical forest. Variations within

these zones, however, are significant. Thus, on the central coast, where some of the earliest large monumental complexes were built (e.g. Quilter, 1991), river valleys are relatively narrow and the Andean foothills extend from the heights down to the sea. On the north coast, though, hills often are much farther away from the littoral and river valleys are wide in their lower reaches. Extensive areas of flatland form as one valley mouth merges into the other, facilitating intervalley travel and large-scale field irrigation.

With the exception of the Sechura Desert, the relative aridity of the coastal desert decreases northward. The effects of the overriding of the Humboldt Current by the El Niño Counter Current are more frequently felt on the north coast than farther south, providing periodic moisture sometimes in the form of disastrous rains and floods. Despite these occasional disasters, the land of the Moche generally is a milder environment than others in the coastal Andes although the desert still offers formidable challenges to humans. Some of the moister, northern valleys supported extensive forests of acacia and other trees, and tropical forest zones spilled across the Andes to the Western flanks in the northernmost parts of the Moche realm. The north coast was thus a particularly rich region hosting a wide range of environmental zones and with abundant and diverse resources from the ocean, forests, hills, and valleys. These included not only foodstuffs but also woods, feathers, stones, and ores for metals, all of which were used in the production of sumptuary goods.

By the Early Intermediate Period, all of the major domesticated plants and animals, consumed to this day, filled the larders of ancient Peruvians. These included maize, potatoes, sweet potatoes, avocados, beans, manioc, peanuts, and fruits (Lúcuma [*Pouteria lucuma*], Chirimoya [*Annona cherimola*], Papaya [*Carica papaya L.*]) (See Larco Hoyle, 2001, Table 1, p. 263). Cotton and gourds were industrial crops for textiles and cordage and containers and net floats, respectively. Some root crops from high altitudes likely were less favored and may have been less successfully grown on the coast than in their native lands, however. The chief domesticated animals were guinea pigs, muscovy ducks, dogs, and camelids.

Llamas are native to high altitudes and although they are depicted in Moche art the question of whether they were bred on the coast was uncertain for some time. Research by Melody and Izumi Shimada (1985) has shown that such breeding did take place. The ability to control the production of beasts of burden in the coastal environment must have greatly increased the ability of the Moche to control long distance procurement and transportation of goods.

The proximity of the Moche lands to sources of beds of precious Spondylus shells (Zeidler, 1991) off the Ecuadorian coast provided another source of wealth. The later Chimu culture exploited the shells or the

trade in them as part of its strategy of power (Pillsbury, 1996). As an active seafaring culture it is likely that some, many, or most of the Moche centers also capitalized on Spondylus trade, although the subject remains to be studied in depth. Further evidence of Moche seafaring capabilities is the presence of Moche wooden artifacts on the offshore Chincha Islands (Kubler, 1948) left as part of activities associated with mining the rich guano beds for use as fertilizer in agricultural fields.

The manufacture and use of elaborate gold ornaments is a distinguishing characteristic of Moche culture. As in so many other things, metal working began early in the Andes (Burger, 1998) and significant achievements in metal craftsmanship were already being accomplished by Chavín artisans, centuries before Moche. Because there are so few tombs of high-ranking Moche lords scientifically excavated and documented in relatively undisturbed conditions, we have few cases for comparative studies. It is clear, however, that Moche elite were able to exploit the labors of many to produce great numbers of gold adornments, ritual paraphernalia, and other goods.

The Moche appear to have produced most of their gold themselves. Local rivers are rich in ore, and all of the other materials necessary for mining, smelting, and otherwise working with metal were available in the greater region. In addition to making quantities of gold, the Moche also produced copper and some bronze. Moche metallurgy produced decorative and utilitarian items although weaponry, for example, mostly did not rely on metal. Izumi Shimada and colleagues excavated a workshop for the production of copper alloy goods (Shimada and Merkel, 1991). Their studies, including replication of ancient techniques, has given us much information on the technical and social organization of Moche metal working. In the laboratory, research by Heather Lechtman has demonstrated that the Moche had command of cast and sheet metal techniques developed centuries before and also contributed two alloying techniques to Andean metallurgy: depletion silvering and depletion gilding (Lechtman, 1996a, pp. 39–40). Arsenical bronze also appears in Moche times, although it is relatively rare, becoming more common after the Moche demise (Lechtman, 1996b).

While llama caravans and balsa rafts carried goods over great distances, it was the movement of water through irrigation canals that was key to Moche success. Rich soils were laid down by large rivers during the late Pleistocene and early Holocene but the subsequent decrease in river flows, as modern conditions were established, left rich soils high and dry above the floodplains as the Moche encountered them. But once watered, these soils produce crops in abundance. Peru's first irrigation systems likely were built in the Late Preceramic Period (Quilter, 1991). Although continued use and repair often blurs or even eliminates earlier constructions, it seems safe to state that every succeeding generation expanded irrigation networks; only social

disruptions, including depopulation of some areas, halted or slowed such work. The North Coast was particularly favored by nature in having broad areas suitable for irrigation, slight gradients, and, usually, hills and other heights that could serve canal construction to carry water long distances. The Chan Chan–Moche Valley Project spent considerable time investigating Chimu canals that often obliterated earlier constructions. The researchers suggested, however, that El Moro, one of the major Chimu water conduits for the Moche valley, likely was preceded by a Moche one in the same location (Ortloff *et al.*, 1985, p. 79).

As a society of engineers and traders, the Moche likely had standardized systems of weights and measures yet little has been done to investigate these issues. Larco Hoyle (2001, Vol. 1, p. 137) noted that the Muchik language had terms for counting in tens, and Christopher Donnan (Schuster, 2001, p. 19) observed that jars, bricks, and other materials were grouped in sets of fives, tens, and twenties at the site of Dos Cabezas. If data were collected and studied on the lengths, widths, and heights of adobe bricks, walls, and the like we should be able to determine what kinds of measuring systems were used and the degree of consistency maintained in them through time and space.

The Moche drew upon extensive resources. They exploited the land and sea for food and extracted raw materials from the earth, both near and far. They were industrious, building large canals and turning their dry landscape into fertile fields. They were powerless in the face of grand catastrophes such as earthquakes and disastrous rains and floods brought by El Niño events. In the aftermath of such upheavals, however, they rebuilt their infrastructure and started anew, at least until the waning days of their existence as a distinct culture.

REGIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The range of interpretations of Moche regional political organization run the gamut from a single conquest state to independent kingdoms or even chiefdoms. Larco Hoyle (2001, p. 178) thought that the occurrence of similar portrait head vessels in different valleys indicated a single Moche ruler, a *Gran Señor*, or *Cie-Quich*, in Muchik. The *Alaec* were the equivalent of *caciques*, lesser lords in fealty to the *Cie-Quich*. He also noted that in addition to portrait heads of mature rulers, the same individuals were portrayed as young adults, suggesting to him that rulership was hereditary (Larco Hoyle, 2001, Figs. 201–205).

Presently, views vary widely on the nature of Moche political organization (see Shimada, 1994b). Building upon earlier scholarship (e.g. Schaedel,

1972), Michael Moseley and others (see Moseley and Day, 1982) believe that Moche was a conquest state, based at the Moche site, which spread its power up and down the coast. Luis Jaime Castillo and Christopher Donnan (1994a) have suggested that the expansive polity based at the Moche site extended no farther than the Casma Valley while another polity or polities occupied the northern valleys of Jequetepeque, Zaña, and Lambayeque and the Vicús area. Others suggest that Moche polities were small, centered in a single valley (Alva, 2001; Donnan, 1996).

The members of the Virú Valley project most energetically developed the idea of Moche as a conquest state because the Moche presence in the valley seemed so strongly intrusive (Willey, 1953; Collier, 1955). Later surveys, in the Nepeña Valley by Donald Proulx (1968) and in the Santa Valley by Christopher Donnan (1973), confirmed an intrusive Moche presence, as was the case in a later survey of Santa by David Wilson (1988). The overlay of the distinctive Moche ceramics on top of local styles, particularly Gallinazo, and the presence of Moche huacas, when combined with the ubiquity of martial themes in Moche art all suggested that the Moche arrived in force.

The similar, often duplicate patterning of ceremonial centers, particularly in the southern Moche region is interpreted as a pattern of replications of the huacas del Sol and de La Luna, in the Moche Valley. Because the Sol and Luna structures are many times larger than any others the single-state school sees the capital of the polity in the Moche Valley. This view was elaborated by members of the Moche Valley Project. The distinctiveness of Moche ceramics is the hallmark of a “corporate style” (Moseley, 1992, p. 73), with rulers directing the production of ceramics and other art and the dissemination of the ideology contained in the images placed on them. In this view, the Huaca de La Luna was the home of a theocratic ruler whose wishes were carried out by administrators at the Huaca del Sol (Topic, 1982, pp. 279–280). More recent research in the plain between the two huacas has revealed an extensive complex of streets and structures (Chapdelaine, 1997, 1998, 2001). This has led to considering the lower valley as a populous city bounded by the Huaca de la Luna, as the chief religious shrine, and the Huaca del Sol as the administrative center of the state.

A number of additional observations have helped construct a model of the rise, expansion, and fall of a single Moche state. In this view, after its greatest expansion, the state suffered a number of troubles mostly due to imperiled agricultural and supporting irrigation system, plagued by disastrous El Niño rains and floods. Natural disasters undermined the ruling elite’s authority, perhaps even inducing a revolt (Haas, 1981) or other social instability. The state lost its grip on its southernmost provinces and, eventually, the capital itself was abandoned and a new settlement established further up the valley at the site of Galindo. Garth Bawden’s research at this

site led him to infer that there were great inequalities between rich and poor and a high degree of social tension between the two classes (Bawden, 1982). Walls separating rich and poor and surrounding the entire site suggested internal and external strife, and the lack of a grid pattern in the settlement suggested a breakdown of previous order.

The imperial ambitions of the Wari Empire, with its center in the southern highlands may also have contributed to increased instability. While some once postulated direct conquest or military confrontation between Wari and Moche (Shady, 1982; Shady and Ruiz, 1979) most scholars now see Wari's frontier as more distant (Topic, 1991), and its influence as indirect and likely much more complex than simple conquest (see Castillo, 2001; Shimada, 1994a, pp. 250–251).

As troubles mounted among the southern Moche, the capital may have even been relocated to the growing site of Pampa Grande in the Lambayeque Valley, allowing for a short invigoration and resurgence before final collapse (Shimada, 1994a). As in the case of the Inka Empire, several centuries later, evidence of conquest is hard to identify in the archaeological record. Izumi Shimada (1994a; see Haas, 1985) found selective burning of all adobe enclosures and most of the adobe mounds at Pampa Grande, with little sign of conflagration elsewhere at the site. He therefore inferred that a revolt led to the burning of the temple.

The single state model has been challenged following a number of lines of evidence but chiefly through excavations in the Jequetepeque Valley, at San José de Moro (Castillo, 2001; Castillo and Donnan, 1994a,b; Donnan and Cock, 1986), where the Larco Hoyle five-phase ceramic sequence could not be successfully employed. This alternate model sees two distinct Moche regions that coexisted relatively independent of each other. In the two-region model, the Southern Moche core consisted of the Moche and Chicama valleys, with the Virú, Chao, Santa, and Nepeña valleys incorporated by military conquest. In this realm, the Larco Hoyle sequence generally holds. The Northern Moche included the valleys of Jequetepeque, Lambayeque, and Piura and had a three-phase ceramic sequence different from the Southern Moche.

This model is most developed for the Jequetepeque valley. Northern Late Moche is succeeded by a Transitional Period followed by the Lambayeque occupation, a distinct break from Moche style and signaling a new cultural era. The troubles of the Southern Moche evidenced by the abandonment of the Moche Site complex and the establishment of Galindo seem to have been avoided by the Northern Moche. In this view, the late florescence of Pampa Grande was not due to a relocation of the Moche capital but to gains in the prosperity of the Northern Moche in the wake of the difficulties experienced by the Southern Moche. Furthermore, the

Transitional period was relatively pacific, with the adoption of Wari ceramic styles filtered through contact with the Lima Culture, on the Central Coast, where Wari had come to dominate Pachacamac, the great pilgrimage center of later antiquity, and other centers (Castillo, 2001).

The third model of regional political organization posits no strong centralized authority in the Moche realm. A point-by-point argument has not been presented for this view. John Verano (2001, pp. 122–123) likens Moche combat scenes to Maya depictions of intercity strife in which kings are shown defeating one another. Each huaca center was a royal court, holding sway over its own valley and resources. Through their study of ceramic production, Glen Russell and Margaret Jackson (2001) also suggest, valley-based power centers with networks of patronage and reciprocal obligations stretching within local kin groups. In a similar vein, Tom Dillehay (2001) notes the lack of attention given to rural settlements and suggests that the “huaca communities” may have been partly seasonal, with real power located elsewhere.

The advantage of the single conquest state model and the dual kingdom model is that they both provide clear, testable hypotheses on the nature of Moche political organization. The multiplicity model is perhaps more difficult to demonstrate although it also is testable. A fourth proposal is that the Moche may have allied themselves in a federation, for a time, with the Moche site as the *primus inter pares* (Uceda, 2001). This is a rather difficult proposition to test since the archaeological signatures of such a union would have to be determined or identified and be distinct enough that a federation could be distinguished from a conquest state or some other form of corporate or formal organization.

As work continues it is likely that Moche politics will prove to have been a complex business over its span of several centuries. It is quite possible that all or some of these models may be true for some periods during the Moche era. For example, the careful, detailed, and intense research in the Jequetepeque Valley has helped to identify its differences from other valleys, leading to the proposal of a Northern Moche polity. We may ask, however, if the same kind of sustained and dedicated research were carried out in other valleys whether similar distinctions would be identified, thereby further complicating but also enriching our understanding of variations within the generic concept of “Moche.”

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE IN MOCHE ART

Much of Moche field archaeology has been driven by studies of iconography. The veristic depiction of animals, plants, and anthropomorphic figures has led to field checking whether what was depicted in art actually existed,

in one form or another. One of the great contributions made by Christopher Donnan (1976), however, was his convincing argument that the seemingly ordinary images of creatures and plants were expressions of a religious symbol system. Thus, pots in the shapes of potatoes or llamas were just as highly charged with esoteric knowledge as more recognizable supernaturals distinguished by fangs or other fantastic features. Furthermore, while middens might yield deer bones and deer hunting was depicted in art, the relationship between the archaeological data and the iconography was not as straightforward as had been assumed by earlier scholars, according to Donnan. The art both depicted (some) aspects of everyday life and yet was not fully “representational.” It was selective in what it showed. While deer hunts were interpreted as having taken place more or less as portrayed in art, what the art depicted was a deer hunt done for religious or ceremonial reasons, not to portray how a valued food was procured.

The bivalent mode of interpreting art as both revelatory of everyday life and yet not depicting everyday life, but rather expressing religious concepts, has been a constant issue in Moche studies and, in essence, is contradictory. The art is used both to gain insights into how living Moche people did things such as hunt, travel by boat, or make war and as a window into religious beliefs. Admittedly, these two different interpretive vectors are easy to follow because of the nature of the Moche pantheon. Like the gods of Mount Olympus, Moche deities spent their time in activities that were analogous to human behavior. But, like Zeus or Aphrodite, they had powers to do more than humans, such as descending into the depths of the ocean to battle sea monsters (Fig. 3).

The contradictory proposition that the art depicted scenes from daily life yet was a symbolic code seemed to be resolved at Sipán. There, the burials of two Moche lords were found in the costume of a principal character depicted in art who was once called The Rayed Deity but subsequently was dubbed The Warrior Priest (Alva and Donnan, 1993). In excavations at San José de Moro, archaeologists encountered the remains of individuals who had been buried with the regalia of another supernatural depicted in art, The Woman, now called The Priestess (Fig. 4). Rather than clarifying the nature of Moche art, however, the new information from elite burials has complicated interpretations.

The Sipán discoveries combined with other studies started to shift interest away from viewing the art as a symbolic system to seeing it as representing social behavior, albeit often ritual acts, and even specific historic events. The degree to which the impetus for this change was influenced by the increased historicity of Maya archaeology must be left for another discussion, but the trend is obvious. The “Presentation Theme” was renamed the “Sacrifice Ceremony,” because individuals who could reasonably be interpreted as



Fig. 3. A Moche painting from a ceramic vessel. We may reasonably interpret this scene as mythological; a hero or deity battles a monster (After Kutsher, 1954, pl. 54 B, right).

having participated in rituals depicted in art had been discovered. Additional evidence was found in analyses of goblets shown to have contained human blood (Bourget and Newman, 1998) and in the remains of sacrificed warriors, complete with cut marks to their cervical vertebrae (Bourget,



Fig. 4. Perhaps the most reproduced and discussed Moche ceramic painting. On a stirrup spout vessel at the Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich. Originally called the Presentation Theme, it is now known as the Sacrifice Ceremony. (1) The Rayed Deity, now called the Warrior Priest. (2) Owl Deity or Priest. (3) The Woman, now called The Priestess. (4) A figure with a plaque shirt. The top scene depicts the presentation of a goblet of blood. The bottom scene depicts prisoner sacrifice.

1998a,b, 2001). Although these ritual acts were almost certainly carried out to imitate divine archetypes, with the priests assuming the roles of deities, the emphasis has been on the arena of human affairs and not the celestial prototypes.

Although Donnan (1976, 1978) originally proposed that all Moche art expressed religious concepts, current interpretations are not so squarely based on that proposition. Donnan (2001) himself has begun to consider some art as historical, as in his interpretation, following Larco Hoyle (2001, pp. 178–185), of the famous “portrait head” vessels as representations of historic personages, probably elite captives who were sacrificed. Similarly, Alana Cordy-Collins (2001) interprets Moche figurines of women with distinctly northern features (hairstyles, costume, labrets) as evidence of the historic arrival of northern women into the Moche realm in the early eighth century.

At the present time, then, the issue of whether Moche art only engages with supernatural concepts or is a vehicle for other purposes is not fully settled. This places the study of Moche art in a precarious situation, however. Cut from its safe moorings to religion, Moche iconographical studies may drift where the winds of scholarly whim blow them. Scholars now interpret particular depictions or themes as sociological (in the sense of portraying generic suites of behavior), religious, or historical but with no standards for others to evaluate the strength of the argument for one mode of interpretation as opposed to another.

It is worth remembering the archaeological truism that the farther our interpretations are removed from the human behavior that produced the artifacts we study, the more tenuous our conclusions. Although metal objects and wall art play significant roles, most interpretations of Moche art are based on ceramic analyses. Despite the existence of tens of thousands of Moche pots in museum collections around the world we have relatively little evidence of the contexts in which they were found, although recent investigations are adding to our knowledge. Recently, detailed study of the pots themselves has helped shed light on “schools” of fine-line painters of late Moche Ceramics (Donnan and McClelland, 1999). Luis Jaime Castillo’s research at San José de Moro (Castillo and Donnan, 1994b; Castillo, 2001) also is adding to understanding this late northern painting tradition. Nevertheless, how ceramics were used is still uncertain.

We know that a suite of ceramic forms likely comprised a set of service vessels for food consumption (Russell and Jackson, 2001) as has been discussed for ceramic assemblages in southern Peru (Menzel 1976). The hallmark Moche stirrup spout pots are awkward vessels: their narrow mouths are difficult to pour into and out of and practicably only can be used for liquids. It seems reasonable to suggest that it was the vessels themselves and the

images they carried that were prized and not their utilitarian function. And, their presence in burials suggests that whatever purposes they had in life were such that they also made useful grave offerings. Steve Bourget (2001) found evidence that human effigy vessels were ritually smashed around the sacrificial victims at Huaca de La Luna and sherds also were placed with or thrown at them. This suggests that pottery vessels may have been active components of ritual.

Turning to the images on the ceramics themselves is where we confront issues of competing sociopolitical, religious, and historical interpretations. The production of pottery, its distribution among members of society, its manipulation in ceremonies, or placement in graves are all social matters. As previously noted, a guiding principle of analysis is that if a scene depicts hunting, boat travel, or ceremonies of burial or sacrifice then Moche real life activities must have been generally analogous to what is depicted. This is a reasonable assumption to make, although we must be careful not to interpret archaeological data to fit the models depicted in art. Rather, the archaeological evidence should take precedence, with the art serving to corroborate or amplify our understandings drawn from archaeological data whenever possible.

But giving precedence to archaeological data must be done with caution. At Sipán and San José de Moro, when burials were found dressed in costumes depicted in art, the Presentation Theme was renamed the Sacrifice Ceremony. Presumably, this was because the art was seen to represent a ritual act. But, as I have argued elsewhere (Quilter, 1997), this wrongly shifts the emphasis from the divine archetype being played out in both the art and the ceremony itself. It is reasonable to argue that the priests and priestesses were dressed as gods and acting out a mythological or divine drama and the ultimate reference was to that act: not the *ceremony* but the *myth* that the ceremony reenacts. This distinction, however, becomes awkward when we are confronted with art in which the actors portrayed are not clearly supernatural, such as in scenes of sea lion hunting or, as I will discuss, below, of warfare. Until some better way to discriminate between portrayals of mythic events, ritual behavior, and quotidian acts can be found, our only guide is to distinguish between scenes or themes in which the characters are clearly supernatural and those in which they are not.

Scenes of marching naked prisoners bound by rope *may* have a religious archetype or they may simply portray what happened to Moche prisoners of war. The scene *may* be the portrayal of the penultimate scene in a highly ritualized form of warfare or it may be only standard operating procedure for marching captives to their deaths by sacrifice. We cannot make that distinction, at present. When scenes show human-animal creatures we can reasonably interpret as divinities, however, we should pursue understanding

the actions of the gods on the ideological level as the primary focus of investigation. Even if we find the remains of mortal humans dressed as these fantastic creatures, they too were focusing on the actions of gods, expressed in ritual form. Of course, some scholars might choose to focus only on the sociological implications of elites who wielded power through their god portrayals. Such an exercise is a particular mode of investigation—a sociological one—in interpreting the meaning and importance of portraying these scenes, whether in art or in real life.

Attempting to find specific historical acts or persons in prehistoric art is even more difficult than sorting out ideological from sociological meanings. In order to be confident that art depicts an historic event or person we need to have corroborating evidence independent from the art that such events or persons did indeed exist. No matter how distinctive a portrayal may be we have no way to judge whether apparently idiosyncratic features that might denote a specific person, place, or thing are the result of unique historical circumstances or the result of the artist's whim, or some other explanation. The same holds true for events such as the arrival of northern women into southern Moche realms. Such a proposal is intriguing and a guide for directing field research, perhaps. Until such corroborating evidence can be found, however, the idea is only a proposal, suggestion, or hypothesis.

Only by clearly stating the assumptions brought to any inquiry of Moche art concerning how art links with history, sociology, or religious ideas will we be able to unravel multiple explanatory modes that sometimes run counter to one another. It is possible, of course, that art can be simultaneously historical, sociological, and religious, such as a painting of Byzantium falling to the Turks. But in this case, as in others in many art styles, we have extensive information external to the painting itself to aid us in assessing how these aspects of the painting are weighed in the depiction. For Moche art, however, we usually lack such resources. Because of its veristic mode of representation we have alternated between assuming that the meanings of Moche art are straightforwardly understood, then thought that its transparency was illusory, only to oscillate back again. Moche art was likely doing different things at different times and places and we must be willing to seek out such diversity and be clear about what we bring to our studies. This is particularly true when we try to use the art to build arguments for larger understandings of Moche culture, such as the relations between sacrifice, warfare, and politics.

SACRIFICE, WARFARE, AND POLITICS

While many Mochicólogos increasingly wish to see Moche art as representing human action, much of the action portrayed is still viewed as having

been carried out within ritualized behavioral forms. Those rituals occurred at huaca complexes, and current debates revolve around the issue of the means by which sacrificial victims, some of whom were tapped for ritual blood drinking, were obtained. Was warfare purely ritual, to supply prisoners for sacrifice or was the sacrifice of prisoners the result of warfare conducted for other reasons? The answer to the question leads to different interpretations of Moche politics. A view of warfare as ritual makes politics theocratic. Warfare for political ends relegates sacrifice to lesser importance, the end product of more serious business, elsewhere. Currently, views are polarized, with many prominent Mochicólogos supporting the ritual warfare hypothesis (Alva and Donnan, 1993; Bourget, 1998a, 2001; Castillo, 2000; Donnan, 2001; Hocquenghem, 1987; Topic and Topic, 1997). As in the case of issues of larger political models, however, the situation may not have been as starkly religious or political in the minds of the actors as it is in the interpretations of modern day scholars. A review of the evidence and consideration of the nature of warfare and of ritual is in order.

One of the most cited depictions of ritual sacrifice is known as the Presentation Theme or Sacrifice Ceremony (Fig. 4). A vase in Munich displays one of the most elaborate portrayals of this rite. The imagery consists of an upper band depicting the presentation of a goblet by a set of deities/costumed priests to another individual. The lower register shows bound, naked prisoners having their throats cut to procure the ritual blood. Other scenes show naked prisoners linked by a rope around their necks being marched by warriors who hold a representative bundle of the weapons and costumes of the defeated. The most spectacular rendition of this procession is a life-sized, painted frieze at Huaca Cao Viejo, overlooking its north courtyard (Franco *et al.*, 1994, 2001). It is likely that the frieze was located overlooking the courtyard because it replicated an actual event that took place in front of it. The remains of sacrificed men were found underneath the courtyard itself.

The Huaca de La Luna is another site where sacrificial victims have been found, in an enclosed plaza (Plaza 3A) behind the main structure, on the flanks of an adjoining hill, Cerro Blanco. Forensic analyses (Verano, 2001) revealed several interesting facts about the victims, at least 70 men between the ages of 15 and 39. All had been in robust health prior to their deaths although many had healed bones, interpreted as old combat wounds. Fractures that had been healing for a few weeks to a month revealed the kinds of damage sustained in battle, such as “parry” fractures of the left ulna, and broken noses. Evidence of cut marks to eye sockets, toe bones, and hand bones indicate that the prisoners were mistreated by their captors prior to their deaths (Fig. 5).

At least three quarters of the recovered cervical spines showed cut marks indicating that mortal wounds had been caused by the cutting of



Fig. 5. Painted ceramic scene of prisoner mistreatment. The scene is rare in Moche art but the severed limbs and head may reflect practices found at the Huaca de La Luna. (After Kutscher, 1954, p. 25B)

throats. The other common mortal injury was a massive blow to the head. Most such death blows were inflicted by one or more blunt instruments, and large clubs have been found both at Huaca de La Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo. One at Huaca de La Luna yielded evidence that it had been repeatedly drenched in blood in antiquity (Bourget 2001, p. 97; Bourget and Newman, 1998). Variation in methods of slaughter included a fatal stab wound to the skull, and some cranial fractures appeared to have been made with mace heads rather than clubs (Verano, 2001, p. 119).

After death, the remains of the victims were dismembered and manipulated. Bodies were cut up and parts were stuck into others, such as a toe shoved into the pelvis of another corpse. One skeleton was found with a large rock in its pelvis. Lower jaws were removed and cut marks on one cranium suggest that the face had been flayed (Bourget, 2001, p. 100). Many of the disarticulated corpses were left to rot in the sun or in winter fogs.

This evidence suggests that the sacrifice scenes shown in art had real life counterparts. But many of the details revealed in the archaeology are not shown in the depictions. For example, as Bourget (2001, pp. 99–100) notes, jaws receive much attention in Moche art, but the act of cutting off the mandibles of victims is not specifically portrayed although evidence of the practice was found in the skeletal remains at the huaca. And, while archaeology can fill in some of the blanks of rituals as portrayed in art, art can sometimes inform archaeology. Post holes found near the edges of the killing ground at Huaca de La Luna suggest that they may have supported racks for the display of prisoners as shown in an effigy vessel but not portrayed in larger scenes of sacrifice (Bourget, 2001, p. 101).

As archaeology reveals more of the sacrificial rites at the huacas, it is becoming increasingly clear that Moche art only provides a selected, limited view of these events. Verano (2001, p. 120) notes, for example, that

an analysis of bones from a different Huaca de La Luna plaza, 3C, revealed deliberate dismemberment and defleshing of corpses. Although dismemberment is shown in some Moche art, and skeletons are sometimes portrayed, defleshing is not clearly depicted nor is the apparent spatial separation of two different forms of sacrifice shown.

I have made this detailed review of various lines of evidence of Moche sacrifice in order to underscore the difficulties we face in attempting to find simple explanations for the rich and complex archaeological record being uncovered on Peru's north coast. The combined archaeological and artistic records do suggest, however, that most of the people sacrificed at the huacas were treated as war prisoners. The question remains as to what kinds of wars were being fought to obtain these prisoners and the implications of such wars for interpreting Moche political organization.

Those who argue that warfare was ritual advance several points for their position. Bourget (2001, p. 94) notes the fragility of shields and clubs, inadequate for real combat but consistently shown in art, while other weapons of war (slings and lances) are depicted less frequently. Furthermore, most depictions of combat show Moche versus Moche (judging by costumes), instead of Moche fighting against foreigners (Bourget, 2001, p. 94). Bourget recognizes that real warfare may have taken place; his point is that what is depicted in the art is a form of ritualized combat designed to provide prisoners for sacrifice.

Donnan (1997) notes that Moche art depicts the main purpose of combat as the incapacitation of one's opponent, inferentially to take him prisoner for sacrifice. So too, the portrayal of disarmed warriors grabbed by the hair further emphasizes the importance of capture (Alva and Donnan, 1993, p. 129). In his study of portrait vessels, he notes that these ceramics are found only in the Moche, Chicama, and Virú valleys. Because a sequence of life phase portrayals are known for specific individuals, often ending the series with their depiction as captives, he interprets this as further support for the idea of warfare as ceremonial (Donnan, 2001, pp. 127; 137–138).

Anne-Marie Hocquenghem (1987) and John and Theresa Lange Topic (1997) also are proponents of Moche warfare as ritual. The former suggests that depicted battles were in synchrony with calendrical observances and agrarian rituals. The Topics expand on this theme, noting that ceremonial combat occurred among the young nobles of Inka Cuzco while ritual battles among highland groups in Ecuador and Peru take place today.

Luis Jaime Castillo (2000) similarly has argued for a reading of fine-line painted ceramics in which he links scenes of what he interprets as ritual combat as part of a narrative sequence followed by the Sacrifice Ceremony. Interpreting scenes or themes displayed in Moche art as sequences in narratives holds great promise for Moche studies (see Quilter, 1990, 1997) but

presents many challenges. There is a general consensus of opinion that the depictions of bound, naked, marching prisoners are defeated warriors on their way to be sacrificed. Therefore, we can infer that combat took place prior to the prisoner march and sacrifice and this seems straightforwardly logical. The issue is not whether combat occurred, however, but whether it was *ritual* combat, what is meant by “ritual,” and the implications of these interpretations for understanding Moche politics and society.

The only scholar who has offered an extended argument that the prisoners represent captives of nonritual warfare is the one who knows them intimately, John Verano (2001), who conducted forensic studies of both the Huaca Cao Viejo and Huaca de La Luna skeletal remains (Verano, 1998; Verano *et al.*, 1998). Verano (2001, p. 122) cogently argues that scenes depicting one-on-one combat may be following an artistic convention to represent larger conflicts. He notes that both the Maya and Aztecs employed this artistic device, including emphasis on the moment of capture, often by grabbing the loser’s hair. Indeed, the comparison could be extended to many other cultures and the additional point made that depicting common foot soldiers in battle is a relatively rare phenomenon. Even when portrayed, commoners often play minor roles in scenes or are shown en masse as filler while rulers are portrayed at large scale and in detail.

In addition to Verano’s observations several other issues may be raised. Although research at Huaca de La Luna has revealed an instance of the co-occurrence of sacrificing victims and the breakage of portrait-like vessels, does this necessarily imply that warfare was strictly ritual? Does the apparent fragility of clubs and shields necessarily indicate ritual warfare? Perhaps the thin shafts of clubs allowed for a whip-like effect to deliver more striking power while shields were designed more to conceal movement of the weapon arm than to ward off blows. Planning warfare to coincide with patterns in agricultural (and therefore, necessarily, celestial) cycles is widespread throughout agrarian communities but does not mean that such wars were not serious in nature (Fig. 6).

As for ritual conflicts played out today in Ecuador and Peru, Verano (2001, p. 112) notes that these result in few injuries and fewer deaths, and captives are returned to their homes. Longevity of practice is commonly supported in Andeanist studies but one could equally argue that today’s ritual combats might be “devolved” versions of more deadly ancient feuds as that they are continuities of old rituals.

One way out of the impasse of arguing for warfare as *either* ritual or political is to not think that the two are mutually exclusive. We may also consider that some of the combat portrayals might represent gladiatorial sacrifices such as practiced by the Aztecs in at least two different ceremonies (Brown, 1984). While many of the victims in the huaca precincts were dispatched



Fig. 6. Whether these warriors are fighting or gathering in preparation for battle is hard to determine. They likely are all elite warriors, however. Common soldiers do not appear to be depicted in Moche art. (After Kutscher, 1954, Pl. 19B)

by having their throats cut, some of the other dead could have died in ritual combat in which the odds were stacked against them, such as providing them with ineffective weapons (fragile clubs?). These may have been pitted against warriors armed with lethal maces. The dead were found in enclosures that would have prevented escape, and the disposition of corpses, left exposed, replicated a field after a battle. Verano (personal communication, March 2002) notes that some of the parry fractures could have been incurred shortly before death. This offers the possibility that they were received in combat sacrifice.

Religion and ritual cannot escape the snares of historical contingency and social forces. Even if ritualized warfare occurred, whether in the plaza or far from the huaca, it is likely that it was rooted in some larger political arena that included the use of deadly force on a large scale. Brown (1984, pp. 196–198) notes that the two Mexican mock warfare sacrificial rites, the *Tlacaxipehualiztli* and the *Ochpaniztli*, were both claimed by the Aztecs to have been inaugurated after historic events. Even for the Aztecs, though, “history” and “myth” are not easily separated. What we know is that they claimed that the rituals had been established in a past they viewed as historic. The Moche may have, likely did, conceive of mythic events as historic times in the sense that ancient eras were thought to have been populated by gods walking on earth or by hero-ancestors.

The Aztec Flower Wars are the classic example of ritualized combat in the New World. Ross Hassig’s study of these contests suggests that they were carried out against enemies who were too strong to conquer easily but worth keeping under pressure (Hassig, 1988). Any change in political or military circumstances, such as success in another campaign, against a

different enemy, or a perceived weakening of the Flower War opponent, could elicit a change from a “cold” Flower War to a “hot” all-out campaign of conquest. Collective violence, especially the lethal kind, is hard to organize and even harder to control. It thus seems dubious, even if ritual warfare was practiced at some times and places among the Moche, that it represented a steady state of political affairs.

There also is the question of the emotional power of participating in or watching fellow human beings transformed into chunks of rotting flesh, flayed skins, and dismembered carcasses. Perhaps it is a relic of the era when archaeology attempted to be objectively scientific that consideration of emotions seems to have no place in our studies of the past. Ancient sacrifices in which one group of people did nasty things to another are described as if victims and victimizers were members of the congregation at an Anglican evening prayer service. But in stripping the emotion out of these acts we lose a perspective in understanding them (see Carrasco, 1999).

Granted, cultural constructs may channel the increased pulse rate and raised blood pressure produced by seeing copious amounts of the blood of others flow. Concepts of serving a higher power or greater good may turn gore into holy substance, but such a highly abstract concept is only maintained in the face of the existential fact of human frailty and mortality (Clendinnen, 1991). Information available on the ritualized torture and murder of captives in the New World, such as among the Iroquois and Huron, suggests that pain and humiliation were the cards by which the tortured and the executioner played out their last hands with each other. Such deadly games often were couched within bonds of fictive kinship. Death on the sacrificial stone or in the dust of the plaza as some kind of divine grace was as much believed, certainly, as the notion that it is noble to die for one’s country. It may have been a consolation when facing the inevitable, but the warrior’s goal was to offer the opportunity of transfiguration to as many of the enemy as possible rather than leap at the chance for himself at the first available opportunity. Following the latter path surely would have given Moche a much shorter chronology than it had.

Learning more about who the prisoners/sacrificial victims were and who witnessed the sacrifices would also add much to our knowledge. The idea of “lords” dressed as gods follows a theocratic model. But were the god-impersonators lords or were they temple priests devoted solely to rituals on temple tops, with little power outside of their religious duties? The human remains of the main burials at Sipán were too poorly preserved to determine if they had lived active lives, as warriors perhaps. How the temple rites and the people who carried them out related to other communities is a key question to be investigated in the future if we want to understand Moche politics.

HUACAS NEAR AND FAR

The huacas have surrendered spectacular and dramatic evidence of sacrifice rituals but they have not yet been fully interpreted within any larger matrix of Moche society. The prevailing view has had the priests at the huaca centers as the highest ranking, primary actors in the drama of Moche politics-as-ritual. But we lack much information. From where did the sacrificed prisoners come? Perhaps the prime conditioning of sacrificial victims is evidence of elite prisoners selected from a much larger pool and brought to the huaca for sacrifice by parties other than members of the huaca priestly class. Instead of the major players in Moche politics, the huaca centers may have been only single points of power, albeit important ones, among many competing loci in a complex web of power relations.

In the view of the conquest state theorists, the huaca complexes housed the bureaucratic offices, both religious and civil, of corporate power. The discovery of the Warrior Priest and Priestess has provided the remains of theocratic leaders and the identification of a city, at the Moche site, has offered the population that could carry out the will of its leaders. All of this may very well be how Moche society operated but it seems overly forced into a top-down management scheme of some idealized European principality.

Several years ago, excitement mounted among the excavators at the Huaca Cao Viejo as the huge logs covering a tomb were removed. When exposed, however, the chambers underneath did not reveal the splendor of a Moche burial equal to or exceeding the riches of the Sipán lords, but an empty main chamber (Franco *et al.*, 1998, 2001). A side chamber was filled with sacrificed humans and llamas and a mass of burial offerings, but all signs suggested that the occupants of the primary tomb had been removed and taken elsewhere, along with their grave goods, after which the tomb was resealed.

There could be many reasons why the chamber was empty, including, perhaps, some event that precluded the intended occupant of the tomb from ever having reached his or her final destination. Given that there were offerings in the side chamber, it seems more likely that the sepulchre had been occupied but the dead subsequently had been disinterred. A single instance of this practice is thin evidence on which to build a case. But in his study of the Sipán human remains, Verano (1997) noted that some of the better preserved burials exhibited evidence that they had deteriorated due to exposure and handling, possibly during transport, for some time before they finally were buried in the huaca. And, at San José de Moro, similar forensic signs of delayed burial were found in skeletal remains (Nelson, 1998; Nelson and Castillo, 1997). Taken together, the data from these three sites suggest



Fig. 7. Tomb construction at the Huaca Cao Viejo. Earlier excavations profiled the shaft of a tomb. The skull has been replaced after falling.

that elite burials in the huacas involved the movement of the dead to the huaca and, perhaps sometimes, away from it, again.

Huaca tombs were made by removing adobe bricks from solidly built areas of construction (Fig. 7). Thus, it appears that these chambers were not

made with knowledge aforethought of their future occupants but probably were constructed on an ad hoc basis as the need for a tomb arose. We also know that elite burials are to be found in places away from huaca complexes altogether. An example is the tomb of La Mina, in the Jequetepeque Valley, which, although previously looted, revealed an elaborate, richly decorated and appointed burial chamber on the side of a hill when excavated by archaeologists (Narvaéz, 1994). It may thus be that the huaca centers were not the residences of powerful lords but only the final resting place of some of the elite for limited periods of time. As Uceda (2001) suggests, perhaps those who were buried at the huacas permanently were priests, contributing their power as ancestors as regenerating forces to the huaca and society (see also Quilter, 2001).

Despite the common patterning of two-huaca complexes, such as Sol and Luna in the Moche Valley and Cao Viejo and Brujo in the Chicama Valley, at almost all such sites, only one of the mounds has been excavated, usually the smaller of the pair (Fig. 8). Instead of the pyramids representing a division of labor between holders of divine office and bureaucrats an equally valid proposal is that both huacas carried out similar activities, or overlapping ones, organized on the principle of asymmetrical dualism so common for the Andes. Only thorough investigation of both pyramids in such a complex will clarify the issue; although, granted, architectural differences and the presence of subsistence remains at the Huaca del Sol, as Moseley (1992) notes, do leave open the possibility of different functions for each platform mound in a pair.

In a similar vein, there may be a rush to judgment in classifying the room complexes and streets in the area between the huacas at the Moche site as a city (Chapdelaine, 1997, 1998, 2001). One of the compulsions among some New World archaeologists, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, was to demonstrate that Old World political and social forms had been present in pre-Hispanic America. It was part of a “me too,” syndrome born of neo-evolutionism. Attempting to classify a settlement as a city immediately runs into problems of how urban centers are defined. One of the more recent attempts, in reference to the Andes, is that a city is a settlement where “activities . . . take on the more strictly economic, political and bureaucratic aspects that lie between the pillars of religious and domestic life. . . .” (Von Hagen and Morris, 1998, p. 86). Such a broad definition might allow the Moche room complexes to be classed as urban but it still begs the question of how such places operated and their relevance to larger political issues in their times and places.

Agglutination of populations around ceremonial centers was practiced for centuries before the Moche, such as in the Initial Period Lurín valley (Burger and Salazar-Burger, 1991, 1999) and at the highland temple complex of Chavín de Huantar in the late Initial Period and Early Horizon (Burger,

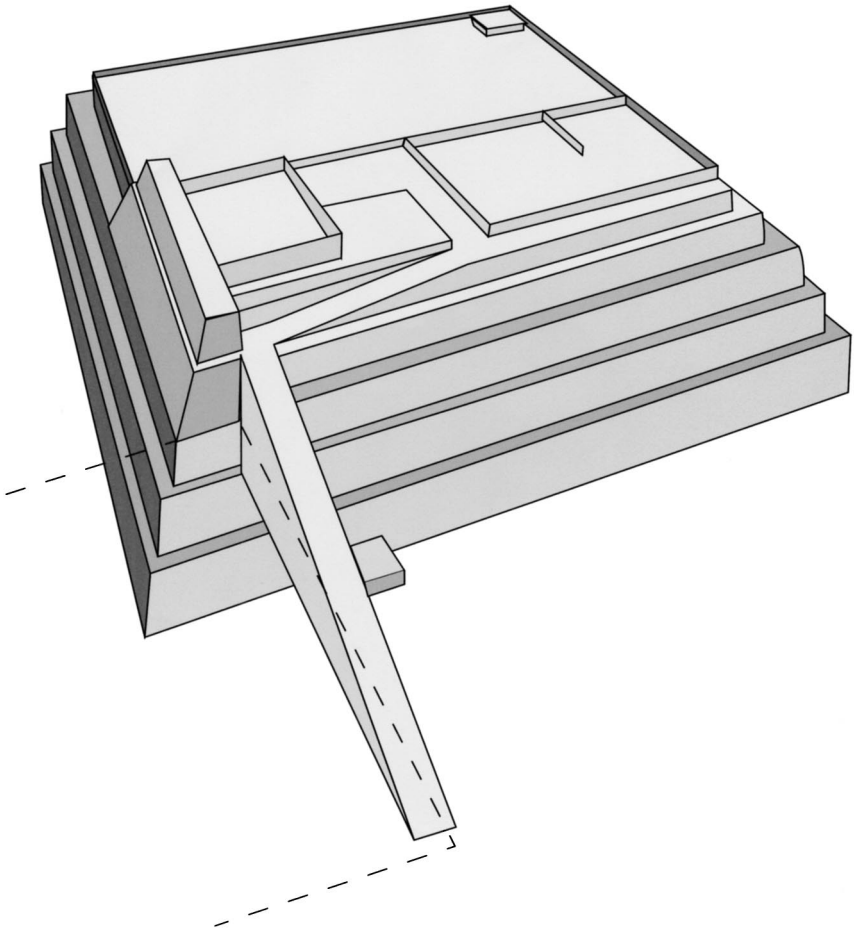


Fig. 8. Schematic illustration of the form of huacas in the Moche and Chicama valleys. The dotted line indicates where a plaza abuts the entry ramp.

1992). In both cases, however, the resident population appears to have supported temple activities that were centripetal forces, pulling the faithful in, rather than centrifugal vectors spreading out to impose their wills on others.

The evidence from excavations in the Moche site urban zone (Chapdelaine, 2001) indicates the production of high quality craft goods and great quantities of *chicha* (maize beer). At the Huaca Brujo complex, similar data have been retrieved but the evidence for a semi- to fully sedentary resident population is more in doubt (Gumerman, 2002). There, activities seem to be focused on the production of goods and services for funeral rituals. San

José de Moro is another site that has hosted sustained, extensive excavations. Again, the pattern for the area next to the largest Moche huaca indicates extensive activities for the preparation of food and drink for funeral rituals but little clear evidence of permanent habitation of the immediate area (Castillo, 2001).

Could the density and nature of the remains at these sites indicate that the huaca complexes were not true cities; that the emphasis was not on these compounds and streets as places where people lived but as holy sites to which people came? Another trend since the rise of the New Archaeology, in the 1960s, has been to refute the concept of the “empty ceremonial center,” held by earlier generations of archaeologists. But urban complexes with great numbers of socially stratified people are hard to maintain in any agrarian society with limited means of moving food and other essential resources to them. Even if the compounds and streets were urban-like centers, true wealth and power lay in the countryside.

People prefer and indeed often are required to live in close proximity to their fields by the necessities of raising food. We should expect that the majority of the Moche population lived in the country, just as in all agrarian societies. Perhaps the Moche site was so important and prestigious that it could maintain a city-like complex between its two grand huacas, but it seems that few other temple complexes were able to do so. Even if Moche was a city, it ultimately must have been highly dependent on those who came to the site for rituals. Entranced by the holy shrines and awed by the rituals, pilgrims’ obligations to offer their labor and services to the high-ranking members of their corporate group who had closer connections to the priests and chicha providers may have been reinforced. The magic of the huacas had to entrance the leaders as well as the followers. The empty tomb at Huaca Cao Viejo may be the trace of a regional lord who was buried for a time at the sacred place but later removed for burial at home.

European Medieval cathedrals and other religious communities offer food for thought in considering huaca complexes, although it would be dangerous to think of them as analogous beyond general features. Cathedral complexes were busy places with many permanent residents and attendants. But they also were “empty ceremonial centers” insofar as the numbers of people they held during quiet times were considerably fewer than the crowds that swelled the courtyards and religious shrines on festival days. There was a large force of clerics and laypeople who maintained and tended the structures and grounds of the complexes, with an internal hierarchy in a range of authority and responsibility for religious and secular aspects of the organization that were not always sharply defined.

The concept of the “empty ceremonial center” has fallen out of fashion in Americanist archaeology, partly as a reaction to the discovery that Maya

architectural complexes were urban centers. But we should not throw out the theoretical baby with the empirical bath water, especially water drawn from *cenotes*. Helaine Silverman (1986) has suggested that the Nasca center of Cahuachi was a form of empty ceremonial center and there is no reason to believe that no others existed in Ancient America. The term “empty ceremonial center” is a general statement that may be refined in particular cases when warranted.

Izumi Shimada (1990, p. 339) has suggested that north coast sites may have been polities similar to the Vatican: religious polities promoting ideology, social unity, and economic growth. His is a theocratic model. I am trying to suggest that huaca centers may have operated more as religious centers than states although a range of variation in their activities and attempts by them to gain power is likely. Pharaonic Egypt was a place where theocracies existed, at times. The issue is not whether the Moche were one or more theocracies but how we can reasonably test such propositions through archaeology.

Today, cathedrals are associated with true cities, but when cathedrals started to rise across the Medieval countryside a hamlet often grew into a city *because* of a religious shrine or a cathedral built over one. Abbeys, monasteries, nunneries, and pilgrimage centers often combined “ceremonial center” and “urban” aspects, including the production of great amounts of alcoholic beverages, with no “true” urban ancillary complex. While commanding great authority and often wealth, the political power of these religious centers varied and was often contested by regional lords whose power was securely based on agricultural lands and the populations of serfs who farmed them and who could be mobilized into armies.

The Moche case likely differed considerably from this European model, especially since feudalism is a distinct form of political and social organization. I do not propose that the North Coast of Peru and Medieval Europe followed the same pattern beyond the suggestion that the general structural arrangements may have been somewhat similar. The similarities reside chiefly in the fact that both societies were agriculturally based and had relatively poor transportation systems. The fact that Europeans had draft animals was not necessarily an advantage as roads were often of little use because of their poor maintenance and deterioration in harsh climes (Manchester, 1992, p. 64). The Medieval European model is intriguing as a comparative case study because of two factors: both celebrated militarism and both constructed large temple complexes. In addition, both the European Middle Ages and the ancient Andes shared the common feature of pilgrimage centers so that cathedrals and huaca centers may have shared analogous features in hosting long-distance travelers who came to them and as centers for the distribution of surplus labor and goods. Richard Burger (1992) has

argued convincingly that the urban sectors surrounding the temple complex at Chavín de Huantar were a result of the growth of a kind of service industry to support temple activities and pilgrims. We also might consider such a possibility for some of the Moche centers.

Barons and earls sought approval from bishops and yet vied with them when it was to their advantage. Such complexities should at least give us an appreciation of the overlapping and interweaving of relations between religious powers and secular ones in agrarian societies. The gods of the Moche pantheon drew upon older religious patterns but expressed, in many ways, a new epiphany of the divine made manifest, and the distinctive Moche art style furthered the propagation of the tenets of the new cult which recast political relations on the North Coast. We then may ask where centers of power were located.

It is significant that the Huaca de La Luna sits at the end point of the irrigation system of the Moche Valley. The Huaca Brujo complex is in an analogous location, at the mouth of the Chicama River, at the edge of the sea (Fig. 9). In the Santa Valley, the Huacas Tembladera, part of the Pampa de los Incas Complex, also sit near the end of the irrigation system. These are fine places to be located if the concept of the recycling of waters, down from the mountains and up again (Bastien, 1978) was a tenet of Moche religion. The emphasis on flowing blood may be a metaphor for divine fluids in a variety of forms (Donnan, 1996, p. 146; Quilter, 1997). Standing on the summits of adobe structures, the modern viewer, like the ancient priest, views the lush scenery of water and crops. But these are not good locations from which to forcibly control the life-giving waters. Perhaps those who acted out the roles of the gods were impressive enough to exert their will—through divine edict and any military might accrued through such authority—but they were not in a position to directly control water supplies through military might.



Fig. 9. The Huaca Cao Viejo, center, taken from the foot of the Huaca Brujo, at the mouth of the Chicama Valley, which can be seen as the dark strip in the far distance. The sea is at far right.

It is of considerable interest that in his recent research at the large complex of Huancaco, in the Virú Valley, Bourget (2002) has reached the tentative conclusion that the inhabitants of the site were not full participants in Moche culture. They lived apart from the Moche sphere, nearby, at the site of Huaca de La Cruz. Perhaps these different centers indicate an absence of imperial ambitions by the Moche and the spread of a cult rather than an army. At the Inka site of Huánuco Pampa dense accumulations of imperial ceramics lay in stark contrast to the non-Inka wares in outlying sites (Morris and Thompson, 1985). Different expressions of identity were in play at Huánuco Pampa and outside it. Complex shifting of social roles and ideological expressions in different contexts could have also occurred in Mochelandia.

Turning to other Moche huaca complexes, the early site of Dos Cabezas sits on the south side of the Jequetepeque Valley and on the edge of the sea, similar to Huaca Brujo. Across the Jequetepeque, on its north margin, lies the long-lived, multicomponent, large complex of Pacatnamú. San José de Moro occupies a major secondary artery of the same river system, away from the main branch, but fairly high up in its part of the drainage. Farther out on the Moche periphery, Pañamarca, in the Nepeña Valley, and the late sites of Pampa Grande and Batán Grande, in the north, all occupy positions well up their valley systems.

Why these sites are located where they are may be due to a number of reasons and, furthermore, the dates of their establishments are not all known. Nevertheless, the patterning suggests that early on, huaca complexes in the Moche heartland were in places of high symbolic power but relatively weak in terms of direct political control. Later, the huacas that grew to power boasted prestige as cult centers but also had immediate command of the precious waters of the irrigation canals.

Bawden (1982, 1996, 2001) has developed an interpretation of late Moche politics in which a disenchanting lower class fled up-valley to Galindo, the Moche site falling into ruin, as the old gods died. Recent evidence that the Moche site may have continued to prosper even as the fortified, internally divided Galindo was built and occupied complicate the picture but do not necessarily rob Bawden's focus on class or intracommunal antagonisms as an important point to consider. What the evidence may force us to reevaluate, however, is the role of the Moche huacas as the primary centers of political agency in the valley. If they were religious centers that served as neutral grounds where outside communities came to participate in rituals, they may have been able to continue for a while amidst severe political disruptions around them.

Carefully delineating patterns of cult rituals and the establishment of Moche huaca complexes on the North Coast, through time, will be one way

of providing a detailed view of how religion and politics played out in the region. Currently the greatest amount of information is available for the Huaca de La Luna and the Huaca Cao Viejo where extensive excavations not only have revealed sacrificial victims but also the architectural formats and religious art that displayed the cult images to those who came to the huacas. The evidence reveals very similar patterns: both have corner entry ramps to the huaca summits, yielding the central axis to large plazas low and in front of the main mound. These plazas display warrior and prisoner imagery while smaller enclosures on the huaca summits bear repeated images that served more as decorative backdrops to the rituals that took place in front of them than as didactic displays (see Quilter, 2001). Similar ritual programs are in evidence not only in the remains of sacrificed victims but also in architectural details such as small, single-entry rooms in the corners of the large plazas.

We have no comparable published information for other huacas at the level of architectural and decorative detail available for the Moche and Chicama valley sites. Available maps vary in their level of detail. Sometimes severely eroded but still towering tens of meters in height, the huacas have challenged the single archaeologist or small group, which until recently was the most common field project on the North Coast. We therefore cannot be overly confident that archaeologists' interpretations of the original forms of the structures are close to accurate. Still, those reconstructions that are available suggest general conformance to the Moche–Chicama huaca formats but variations as well. In most cases, entry ramps are not given central roles (Fig. 8). In others the ground-level plazas were raised to form secondary, lower platforms and some sites appear to have three different levels of plazas (Fig. 10). Sites on the peripheries seem to exhibit the greatest variation. At Pañamarca, for example, the highest structure is relatively square in its ground plan, ziggurat-like in construction, and its summit reached by a zigzag ramp placed on its central axis (Fig. 11; see Bonavia, 1985). In addition, a complex of courts and plazas are laid out in front and to the side of this main structure in a pattern very different from the Huaca de La Luna and the Huaca Cao Viejo. Even if the Pañamarca reconstruction is somewhat inaccurate, these various features are distinct enough to suggest that the plan of the main building at the site was considerably different from the Moche and Chicama huacas. Nevertheless, many of the murals found at the site are “classic” Moche in style.

It is hard to conceive of an expansive Moche conquest state making compromises with the people of Nepeña. Although the site has never been excavated extensively, a future investigator might raise the question of whether the Moche ceremonial system was laid as a veneer onto the pre-existing religious center of the valley, utilizing old buildings for the new

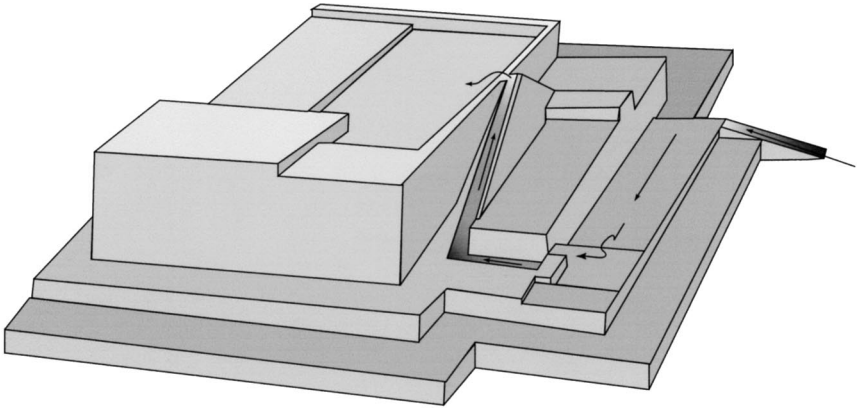


Fig. 10. Huaca Grande at Pampa Grande. Arrows show access path. (After Haas, 1985, Fig. 5, p. 395)

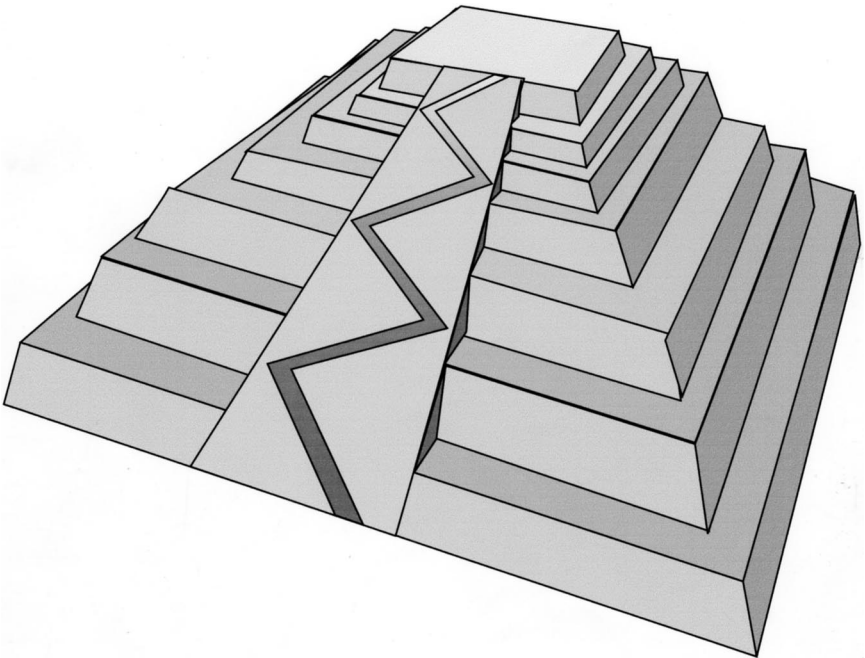


Fig. 11. Reconstruction drawing of the largest huaca at Pañamarca. (Based on Bonavia, 1985, Fig. 28, p. 48)

cult. Such a scholar would also be forced to consider how to distinguish between the *imposition* of a religious system onto a local population and the *adoption* of that system by local elites. Alternatively, whether the Moche cult center was built anew or came about by extensive remodeling of an already built ceremonial complex, the future archaeologist would still be faced with the problem of how to determine the cause of that construction project. And if Bourget's tentative interpretation of the Moche presence in the Virú valley as contemporaneous with the separate, non-Moche center of Huancaco holds true, the proposal of a Moche conquest state will be seriously undermined.

The sudden appearances of Moche artifacts at sites in distant valleys coupled with the militaristic themes of Moche art are seductive in suggesting military conquest. But they do not offer conclusive proof of conquest. A cult with strong military symbolism might have been attractive to local elites for a number of reasons, leading them to adopt Moche religion and the social and economic ties that went with it. Indeed, one of the critical questions to be addressed is how deeply did the acceptance of Moche ideology penetrate local societies. A model of the development of competitive religious centers is available for the Initial Period on the Central Coast and the spread of the Chavín religious cult for the Early Horizon (see Burger, 1992). These might well be considered as alternative hypotheses to the idea of military expansion as the prevalent and current explanation for the spread of Moche huacas. These grand complexes need extensive excavation in order to interpret them while at same time, their place in the larger Moche world should be examined.

THE LAND BEHIND THE HUACAS

Food and the means to procure it are the essential and valued stuff of life, less important only than the lives of people. In coastal Peru, fertile land and water and the means to gain access to them are key building blocks of social institutions. Understanding how people were spread across the landscape to use or control those resources is essential to investigating political organization.

Although Gordon Willey's 1946 survey during the Virú Valley Project was a landmark project, time passed before more surveys and valley-wide studies were carried out (Billman, 1997; Dillehay, 2001; Donnan, 1973; Gálvez and Briceño, 2001; Proulx, 1968; Wilson, 1988). Even with a more recent increase in attention to surveys and some testing the number of sites and the size and complexity of the larger ones have tended to limit our knowledge. Many rural sites probably are classed as mid-to-late Moche because

later diagnostic sherds tend to be more common on the surface while earlier artifacts and structures are buried.

Detailed knowledge of changing settlement patterns will require prolonged investigations although they have begun to occur. In the lower Jequetepeque Valley, for example, three survey field seasons, directed by Tom Dillehay and Alan Kolata, identified 322 Moche II-V sites, with the majority dating to Moche V (Dillehay, 2001, p. 265). In an area including portions of both the Zaña and Jequetepeque valleys, a total of 412 Moche sites were found. There were four sites of 50–80 ha in area, intermediate sites of 20–40 ha, and smaller (<20 ha) villages and farmsteads as well as fortresses, isolated cemeteries, and other features (Dillehay, 2001, pp. 265–266). Such a quantity of sites, density of occupation, and variation in settlement size are a clear indication that a full appreciation of Moche politics must be sought through study of these locales.

In the “Moche Heartland” valley of Chicama, occupation also was intense and extensive, at least in middle-to-late Moche times (Gálvez and Briceño, 2001) (Fig. 12). There were three major sites in the upper valley, seven major sites in midvalley, and three large sites in the lower valley, one of which, the El Brujo Complex (consisting of Huaca Cao and Huaca Brujo), has already been discussed at length. The three up-valley sites were in contact with highland cultures, such as Cajamarca, as revealed through diagnostic sherds. At least one of them, Cerro Grande, could have controlled communications between coast and highlands. The midvalley sites, with a couple of exceptions, are located in a line that parallels the route of the modern Panamerican highway and range between 6 and 12 km apart. Is this arrangement due to some sort of deliberate planning by a centralized authority, perhaps supporting a single-state model for the Moche? Perhaps the location of these sites is due to some other factor, such as placement of earlier sites in relation to water, fields, or an ancient highway. The possible explanations are many but cannot be addressed until we know the nature of the sites and their periods of occupation in greater detail. Thus, while site surveys are important, we need to know not only the settlement pattern, but also the settlement system and that requires excavations.

Although full reporting awaits publication, ceremonial architecture is present at many of the Chicama valley sites, including La Campanilla and Tres Huacas, in the lower valley, and Mocollope, in mid-valley. Indeed, Mocollope is one of the largest sites in the valley, estimated to consist of ca. 500,000 m³ of construction (Attarian, 1996, cited in Gálvez and Briceño, 2001). This figure likely compares favorably to the El Brujo Complex, for which total figures are not available. A critical question, of course, is the temporal phasing of these construction phases in relation to one another

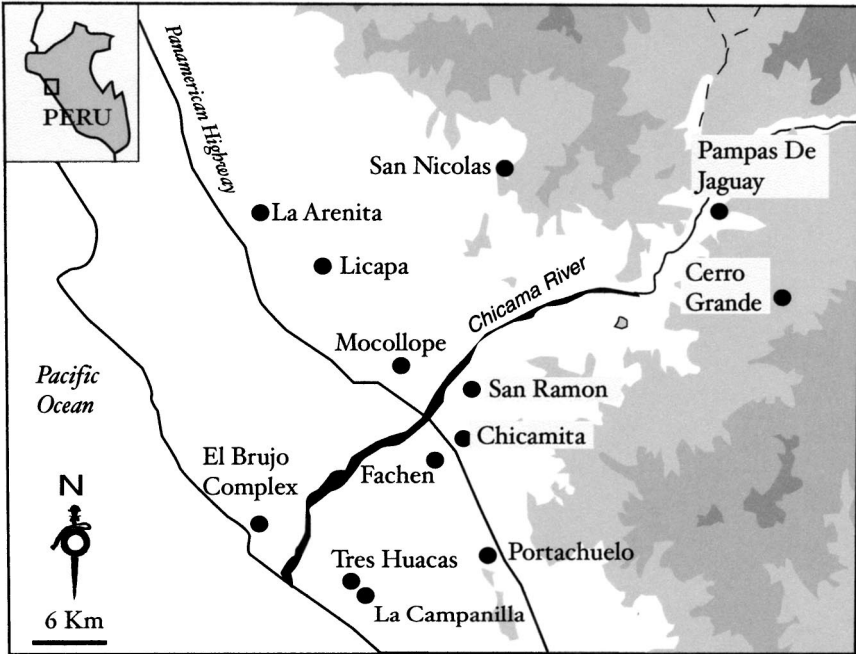


Fig. 12. Map of major Moche sites in the Chicama Valley. (After Gálvez and Briceño, 2001, Fig. 1, p. 142)

and to the Moche temples at the El Brujo Complex. Presumably, at least some of the ceremonial complexes were contemporary with one another. If that is so, then we must infer that the politico-religious landscape in the Chicama Valley, and very likely elsewhere, was a complex one.

César Gálvez and Jesus Briceño (2001, p. 142) recently reported that the Moche IV site of Cerro Grande, in the upper Chicama valley, was constructed on the same pattern as Galindo, with a large wall apparently separating commoner and elite areas. This suggests that the troubles that beset the later Moche may not have been a phenomenon exclusively associated with the collapse of power at the Moche site, but a much more widespread phenomenon. In this, the huaca cults appear to have continued, for a while, at the same time that residential sites were increasingly under stress. Gálvez and Briceño (2001, p. 156) also suggest that during Moche IV, the ceramics at Huaca Cao Viejo, differ from earlier wares, and that perhaps they are imports from the Jequetepeque valley. Whatever the specific dynamics, these patterns suggest a degree of political independence from valley affairs for the huacas. Perhaps they served as vehicles to link

the peoples of different valleys through shared religious convictions and rites.

Very probably, the complexities of Moche society included both heterarchy and hierarchy, both diversity and rank (see Marcus, 1998) on many planes of human relationships and identity. While people, water, and land were critical resources, the power of the huacas and the gods they contained clearly exerted great force at various times and places by convincing people, or coercing them to pretend, that their lives and fortunes were dependent upon forces that were beyond their everyday experiences.

No matter how many huacas, towns, farmsteads, or craft workshops are excavated in the future, the data recovered will have to be interpreted in light of models of social and political organization in order to give them order and meaning in some kind of conceptual framework. Rather than imposing general categories such as “states,” “cities,” and the like on the Moche, I believe that the most appropriate models can be drawn from nearer to hand. Patricia Netherly (1977) documented the existence of a moiety-like system composed of four major *parcialidades* for the Chicama valley in the sixteenth century (see Ramirez, 1998; Russell and Jackson, 2001; Shimada, 2001). This system of nested hierarchies organized on a complimentary, binary system was widespread in the Andes. Dualism certainly seems to be present in the dual-huaca architectural program while some kind of social segmentation is manifest in wall sections of the huacas, with their enigmatic and distinctive adobe brick markings, so there is much potential material with which to work. Although care must be taken not to assume continuities in the details of particular systems over long periods of time, there is every reason to consider the general structural features of such organizations as a starting point for examining Moche political economy. We have barely begun to address such issues, however.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The wealth of archaeological data on the north coast of Peru presents both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities lie in the great amount of detail we potentially can retrieve about the Moche. Sites are fairly easily recognized and preservation is good, providing deep and extensive records of past behavior. The challenges lie in attempting to wield such a wealth of information with analytical dexterity.

If recent research suggests that the Moche end may have been a complex process occurring at different paces in different areas, we can expect that the same is true for its beginnings. As more detailed research is done on the ceramics of each valley on the north coast, more evidence of the influence

of earlier local styles on the regional variant of Moche comes to light. This suggests that the emergence of Moche as a distinct archaeological culture and artistic style was a process that involved the adoption of a set of beliefs and behaviors. This shared culture was adopted because there were social gains to be made in participating in those beliefs and behaviors. What subsequently occurred in terms of warfare and politics took place within an ecumene in the ways similar to the city states of Ancient Greece, a millennium earlier, or for that matter, the contemporaneous Maya. Very likely, one or more Moche polities may have arisen with enough power to assume the role of an Athens or a Sparta, a Tikal or a Calakmul (Martin and Grube, 2000) attempting to dominate the others. But how the particulars of such events played out remain to be determined in the future as does any attempt to generalize the Moche as a state or chiefdom.

Relatively recently, Kent Flannery (1998) presented four archaeological signatures of states: settlement hierarchies of four levels or more, palaces of rulers, temples with associated priests' residences, and royal tombs. For all of these signatures or "ground plans," we might seem to have evidence or strong indications that the Moche measure up to statehood. On close inspection, however, the case may be weaker than it seems as I hope I have shown with some of the issues I have raised.

The evidence of surveys suggests settlement hierarchies of four tiers or more, but we need to know how the people of one site related to others. We need to demonstrate that the ranking we assign to sites on the basis of size is directly correlated with their political ranks and, furthermore, that the elite of larger sites had power over those at smaller sites. We have no clear evidence of palaces, *per se*. It is also worth noting that palaces are extremely difficult to recognize, archaeologically.

Structure complexes have been interpreted as cities and some thought has been given to the relative ranks of residents in one area as opposed to another, or the relation of the urban complex to rural populations. At Galindo and Cerro Grande, evidence does suggest a two-class system, but this is very late in Moche times, and still, there are no palaces there or elsewhere to indicate the presence of a ruling family.

We certainly have temples. Bourget (2001, p. 97) found a burial at Huaca de La Luna of what was very likely a priest-sacrificer; an old man, in his sixties, buried with an adolescent and a sacrificial club. As he was buried at the huaca, we may infer that his social identity was linked to the huaca, although this is not the only possible explanation. It does suggest, however, that the priest may have lived nearby. Nevertheless, we have no clear evidence of priests' residences at temples.

Finally, are we sure we have royal tombs? Were the Lords of Sipan political rulers or were they resident priests, like the sacrificer at Huaca de

La Luna, possibly with much less political power than their fancy garments and burial offerings suggest? If they were political rulers but were not residents of the huacas, as I suggested, above, then where were their seats of power?

In my opinion, we do not have overriding proof that the Moche were organized as state societies. We have a lot of tantalizing bits of evidence. They may have been one or more states, depending on the definition of the term, or they may not have been. We must be careful in not too quickly attempting to fit the evidence we have into interpretive straightjackets. It is not a question of waiting for more evidence, for more evidence will always be arriving in our journals and on our desks. We should just be very careful not to allow the tentative conclusions, the conjectures, suggestions, and hypotheses to become reified into “facts” that are then used to develop more “facts” that are equally shaky because of the poorly developed foundations on which they rest.

In my opening sentences I noted that the Moche have many times been compared to the Maya. If we can learn anything from Maya studies, it is to avoid the reification of concepts such as the “peaceful Maya” of Sir Eric Thompson (1954). We will not have the opportunity to rectify our mistakes because glyphs are one day translated.

But I will end this essay with one more comparison. The Maya and the Moche share something in common, today: they are the subjects of intense national pride and international interest and they are readymade attractions for tourism. Mochelandia lags considerably behind tourist development in comparison with the Maya world but tourism has steadily increased in recent years, especially since the tour of the exhibition of the Sipán treasures and increased attention to Peruvian prehistory by such popular journals as *National Geographic* (Cock, 2002; Morell, 2002) and *Archaeology* (Popson, 2002). Moche archaeology will increasingly be done with awareness by excavators and other interested parties that tourists will come bringing money and seeking answers to simple questions about who these ancient people were. Mochicólogos could learn much from their Mayanist colleagues about the prospects and perils of such work. The bloody sacrifices in the huaca plazas are attractive to laypeople seeking thrills in the exotic, even if the average Moche, like the average Maya or Aztec, probably had a very low chance of being sacrificed. Framing Moche sacrifices as ritual acts and the products of “ritual warfare” provides a very handy trope for tourism. The blood and gore are present for the titillation of tourists, but since the slaughter is done for the sake of religion, tolerance must be allowed, the T-shirts can be bought in good conscience, and the tourist may consider that the Moche were really very nice people, after all. As we seek fuller and richer understandings of the Moche we must be true to the anthropological mission

of appreciating people from long ago as part of a common human enterprise yet very different from ourselves.

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