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Moche representational art

Introduction

With their contemporaries, the Maya of Mexico and Central America, the Moche (a.k.a. Mochica) of Peru (**Fig. 1**) are distinct among the archaeological cultures of the Prehispanic New World in their use of veristic (~ ‘representational’) art. While discoveries at Moche *huaca* (temple) sites in the last 20 years have exposed a virtually new form of Moche artistic representation, however, the art of this Peruvian archaeological culture has been mostly known for its elaborate ceramics. Some of these ‘finewares’ are remarkable in their apparent skill in representation such as the famous ‘portrait heads’ that seem to be true depictions of the ancient dwellers of the North Coast of Peru.¹

It seems clear that the great appeal of Moche ceramics is mostly due to the representational art style employed by their creators. Surveys² commonly depict Andean art as generally quite abstract and thus difficult to interpret and relate to whereas Moche art is replete with images of animals and plants, gods and humans. Moche art thus offers us opportunities to interpret it in ways that other Andean art seems to not allow. Scholars and the public have been so enthusiastic about Moche representations that they have sometimes compared their ceramics to Attic vases and, closer to home, with Maya painted vessels.

Before proceeding, then, a corrective statement is in order. First, Moche art seems unique only if seen from the perspective of *Peruvian* prehistory. Looking northward, Moche visual culture fits in very well with earlier and contemporary Ecuado-

¹ Woloszyn 2008.

² Pasztory 1998.



Fig. 1: Map of the Moche region with sites mentioned in the text (by author).

rian ceramic traditions in which representational styles were quite common.³ Still, Moche was equally involved with contemporary Peruvian cultures and ultimately more influenced by them than by their Ecuadorian neighbours. Ultimately, Moche was distinct, in and of itself, in comparison to peoples in these and other regions because it used representational art in new ways never done before and, interestingly, never done after Moche ended, as will be discussed, below.

The contributors to this volume have been asked to consider the subjects of their expertise as to how they might (or might not?) bridge the gap or play in the space between the study of the history of the development of writing systems and the role of images in expressing thought processes. Moche art is an appropriate case study chiefly because of its representational style and, even more so, because it employed narration. Nevertheless, there is no space between a period before writing systems and a time when writing was used in the Andes. Andeans never invented systems of writing. But they did invent the quipu (a.k.a. *khipu*), a radically different form of ‘writing’.

Two major edited volumes have been published that discuss writing “without words” and “alternative literacies” in the ancient Americas.⁴ It thus is not my intention, here, to review the issue of how forms of literacy may or may not have existed in the prehispanic New World or the relative values between different forms of recording human thoughts or speech. Rather, here I wish to concentrate on a few examples of how one particular Andean archaeological culture, the Moche used various means by which to apparently (in some cases) or certainly (in other cases) make such records. As quipu generally are recognized as the most certain and, perhaps, most sophisticated form of record keeping in the Andes, however, I begin by briefly discussing them after which I will discuss examples of Moche marking and messaging followed by a summary discussion.

To provide some background for readers unfamiliar with the Moche, I offer a thumbnail review of this archaeological culture. I then shift to discuss the most developed recording system in the Prehispanic Andes, the quipu of the Inca, and other Inca symbolic systems. I also shift far back in time to the Initial Period (ca. 2000–1000 BC) to discuss some issues of long-term symbolic systems that appear to have endured over many centuries in the Central Andes.

3 On Ecuadorian arts see Klein – Cruz Cevallos 2007. Of course, the distinctions between Peru and Ecuador did not exist in prehistory. Cultures prior to Moche in the larger region also shared artistic styles including representational modeling by ceramic styles such as Cupisnique. See Burger 1992.

4 Boone – Mignolo 1994; Boone – Urton 2011.

Moche defined

Moche is an archaeological culture, only existing in the minds of archaeologists and those who listen to them or read their writings. As such, it is defined as a distinct set of archaeological remains in a delimited time and space. The chronological span is *circa* AD 300 to 800, and the space consists of about nine river valleys on the North Coast of Peru. The distinct archaeological remains consist of a range of things, but of special note are large, brightly painted temples (*huacas*); the burials of elite ruler-priests and priestesses with fancy regalia, including gold objects; and elaborately painted and modelled ceramic finewares.

The Moche have been studied for more than a century although they were only defined as a distinct culture in the 1930s through the work of a North Coast *hacendado*, Rafael Larco Hoyle.⁵ Larco also thought of the Moche as a distinct social culture with a hierarchical government that ruled over the entire North Coast. His view was adopted by both Peruvian and foreign archaeologists and it was only in the 1990s when new information led to an undermining of the concept of Moche as a nation-state as Larco envisioned it. For much of that time, too, most studies of Moche relied on studying finewares that were thought to represent a single developmental sequence of ceramics produced through state control (**Fig. 2**). These ideas, also, have recently been challenged and generally are no longer supported.

Today, Moche seems less like a single cultural and political system and more as a social and religious system that included a political and economic dimension but which was not uniform throughout the North Coast nor through the many centuries of its recognized existence. A full coverage of issues on the nature of Moche cannot be adequately covered, here, but some clarifications will be forthcoming in the following discussion. For now, it can be noted that by the time of Moche, people throughout Peru had most of the domesticated plants and animals that continued to be relied upon to and beyond the arrival of Spaniards in the sixteenth century. The Moche and their contemporaries also built impressive irrigation canals and maintained roads in and between river valleys. They were skilled in many arts and crafts as can be followed in the literature.⁶ Here, however, we turn our attention to Moche signing. In order to best appreciate the Moche case, however, we must review the best known and most advanced symboling systems known for the pre-historic Central Andes, that of the Inca, the last independent Andeans.

⁵ Larco Hoyle 2001 [1938].

⁶ See Quilter 2010; Castillo – Uceda 2008.

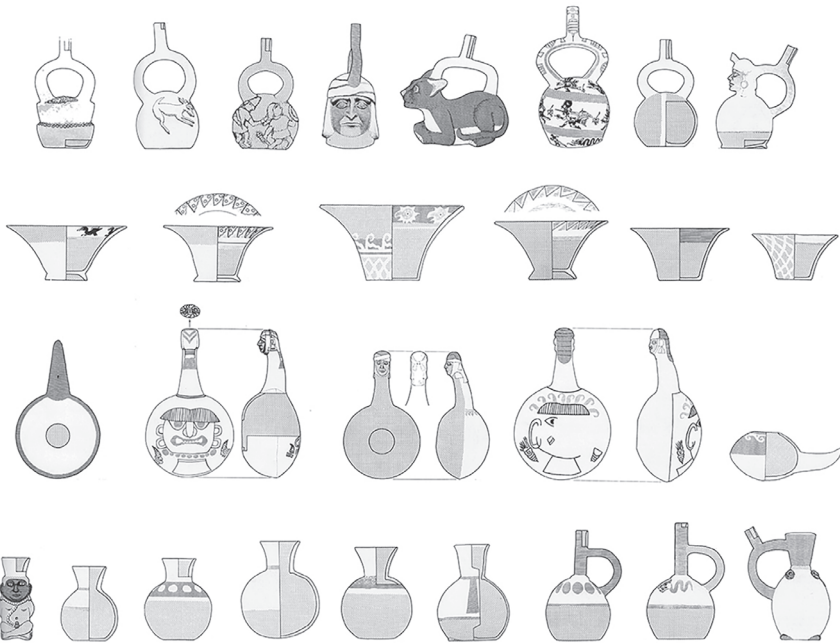


Fig. 2: Moche finewares consist of four major forms (top to bottom): stirrup spout bottles, floreros, cancheros, and cántaros (after Donnan – Mackey 1978).

Quipu

Quipu (**Fig. 3**) are a sophisticated means by which to record all sorts of information.⁷ Although hundreds are known from museum collections around the world and while they are mentioned in Spanish chronicles from early times, we do not have a specific guide as to how they were used in antiquity. Recent scholarship has revolved around the issue of whether these knotted string records were only memory aids that recorded numbers or whether they were able of recording narratives, as some early Spanish chroniclers stated. The evidence, including both archival and archaeological breakthroughs, increasingly demonstrates that some quipu indeed held narratives.⁸

7 Andeanists differ whether to use older spellings, such as *quipu*, and Inca or newer ones (*kipu*, Inka) and, as might be expected, there are all sorts of political ramifications in choosing one or the other. My preferences are obvious. Similarly, my choice to use *quipu* and Inca for both singular and plural forms is common though also contested by some.

8 Hyland 2017; Quilter – Urton 2002; Urton 2017; Urton – Chu 2015.



Fig. 3: A *quipu* from Leymebamba, Centro Mallqui, Lake of the Condors, Peru. Some consist of only a few cords while other have many (photograph courtesy of Gary Urton).

Thus, depending on how one defines ‘writing’ the Inca may be said to have had such a system: a means by which to record and present speech in another medium. This three-dimensional form of writing, however, did not emerge from a graphic or painterly artistic tradition as was common everywhere else writing developed but rather from Andean mastery of the textile arts.

The majority of the 923 *quipu*⁹ currently available for study date to late prehistory, based on archaeological finds and Spanish accounts.¹⁰ Currently, the earliest identified and generally agreed upon *quipu* are from the Middle Horizon, ca. AD 650–1000. The nature and styles of the few such *quipu* known from that time are radically different than the long pendant cords hanging from a main cord of Inca times and, at present are completely uninterpretable.¹¹ No subsequent *quipu* are known from the time between the end of the Wari and Tiawanaku cultures of the Middle Horizon and the time of the Inca, a span of four centuries, although it is well recognized that the highland climates where quipu may have been made by members of any of these archaeological cultures is not conducive to preservation of organic remains of threads and cords. So, again, contemporary scholarship considers

9 Urton 2017, 4.

10 For example, Guaman Poma de Ayala 2006 [ca. 1599].

11 Splitstoser 2019.

that the *quipu* only became elaborated by the Inca in the century or so prior to the arrival of the Spaniards.

If we accept *quipu* as a legitimate form of writing, then asking how art might have led to or was related to writing in the ancient Andes raises different and interesting points than discussing the origins of cuneiform, hieroglyphs, or logograms.¹² For it seems obvious that the origins of *quipu*, being strings, lie in cordage, a ubiquitous technology yet one of the most ignored. Fibre technology has been described as “the unseen weapon that allowed the human race to conquer the earth”,¹³ and one of the earliest of technologies, dating to the Paleolithic Period, and recently shown to have been a technology used by Neanderthals.¹⁴ Karen Hardy¹⁵ points out that fibres, rolled into string, provide a means of holding things together, physically and metaphorically, as the social demands for processing fibres and making tools (bags, slings, lassos, clothing) from them helped shape societies, as well. The Paleolithic migrants to the New World certainly had advanced fibre technologies in order to get to the Americas, however they came. Once in South America, specialized fibre crafts devoted to coastal fishing and highland hunting and, eventually, camelid pastoralism, were in high demand.

Be that as it may, however, and although many people have used knotted strings to keep accounts, they did not become elaborated as *quipu* anywhere other than the highlands of Peru and, as best we can judge such things, by the most ‘civilized’ and ‘urbanized’ peoples of the Central Andes, compared to many others. This bears repeating for emphasis: while fibre arts began in remote antiquity it was only when complex social organizations emerged that ‘writing’ in strings and knots developed. Before going on with this theme, however, let us return to look at Moche art and culture for a comparison with these other developments.

Despite the line of argument that I have just presented, it is worth noting that Gary Urton, the leading contemporary scholar on *quipu* believes that they were not a form of writing but rather a means of record keeping using a standardized, complex set of ‘semasiographic’ signs.¹⁶ This point has great merit for many of the symbol systems I will discuss for the ancient Andes appear to be just that, record keeping systems or systems of communication by the use of signs rather than a means of inscribing speech, per se. Nevertheless, sets of numbers can narrate as much as words can. *Quipu* scholar Marcia Ascher¹⁷ points out that by knowing a person’s

12 Senner 1991.

13 Barber 1994.

14 Hardy et al. 2020.

15 Hardy 2008.

16 G. Urton, personal communication to Quilter, 18/1/2020.

17 Ascher 2002.

postal code, date of birth, street address, credit card number, and the amount due on that card, a very precise and detailed narrative of a person's recent history can be constructed and, depending on the numbers in question, much more.

Moche inscriptions

The Moche did not have *quipus* but they did have math. *Quipus* work on a base-ten numerical system. The Moche had either a base-ten or a base-five system as in evidence in its art and in groupings of things.¹⁸ It would have required a considerable amount of planning and organization including a system of measurements and, likely, weights, to build large temples made of adobe bricks as well as to carry out many other complex tasks such as urban planning or the industrial processes involved in metallurgy. Still, the lack of *quipus* in Moche society suggests that keeping track of great numbers of people, animals (llamas, guinea pigs), or materials at the kind of scale that the Inca did was not part of Moche culture. It is one of the reasons why Moche does not appear to have been a complex state organization.¹⁹

The Moche also marked adobe (sun-dried clay) bricks used in the construction of their temples (**Fig. 4**). The marks were made when the brick had been formed but the clay still wet as it was drying. Marks are decidedly simple: a handprint, a circle, a diagonal line, an X, dots (made with fingers) of various numbers. The design styles are similar from site to site but there is no indication of a standard set of symbols throughout the Moche region. Marked adobes usually are found in large temples known as *huacas*, made of solid blocks of adobes, often built in wall sections.

Identifying, analysing, and discussing the nature and meaning of marked adobes has been a minor academic industry at various times in the past.²⁰ It was suggested that laborers of different social groups built different sections of the Huacas de Moche as a form of labour tax and may have used marked adobes to keep track of their contributions of bricks or work. This does not appear to have been true for all sites, however. Specific styles of marked adobes are not always confined to distinct wall sections and accounting of the contribution could have been done when bricks were delivered after which they could be mixed in the construction of the *huaca*. In sum, then, marked adobes very likely frequently did serve to keep track of a particular social group's contributions of bricks to the building of a corporate structure, a temple, in which different groups had an interest.

18 Donnan 2007, 199–202.

19 Quilter – Koons 2012.

20 Hastings – Moseley 1975; Shimada 1994, 98–100; 162–166.



Fig. 4: Moche marked bricks from Huaca Cao Viejo, Chicama Valley (by author).

This system did not last very long and the degree to which it could have been related to the development of a signing-systems is dubious, at best, given that, indeed, such a system never developed. This underscores the fact that people do need to keep track of things and so marking and inscribing materials and objects is a widespread phenomenon but it is not writing which is qualitatively a different thing than accounting.

Moche markings and representations

Moche fineware vessels were made by using piece-moulds, sections of a complete vessel that were made and then ‘glued’ together using a slurry of clay and water.²¹ Based on excavations at two well-studied workshops and via studies of ceramics, themselves, it is evident that Moche potters had a set of clay moulds that they could employ in different combinations. A set of moulds could produce two warrior figures, for example, that shared basic features with differences provided by switching out some moulds for different effects, adding a few details through hand-done details as well as by different painting on the figures.

²¹ Donnan – McClelland 1999.

Now, art historian Margaret Jackson, who participated in the excavation of one of the Moche workshops, Cerro Mayal, made a careful study of moulds found there and at the Huacas de Moche and in museum collections.²² She discovered that moulds used for making Moche fineware vessels had marks on their surfaces of different types. Register marks were non-representational, straight-line incisions leading off the edges to help artists align two- or multiple-part moulds.

Pictorial alignments are marks on the rough, lumpy surfaces of moulds that express the moulds' interiors in a one-to-one correspondence. For example, the detailed face of an elite man was indicated by a rough sketch of an eye and a mouth, an owl's face is represented by the outline of the face and another eye, and a grimacing deity figure again is represented by a sketch of the face. Presumably, these markings were for the convenience of the potter so that he or she could quickly know which mould was which.

There was a third type of marking on moulds for which the mark did not represent a shorthand version of the design of the actual mould. Instead, the images on the exterior are more abstractly related to the image that would be produced by using the mould. Thus, a mould for a rattle did not show the object but, rather, a sketch of a man with a rattle apparently in his hand. A rattle is shown, however, on a mould for a figure of a woman giving birth and Jackson suggests that some relationship may have been understood between rattles and giving birth.²³ She suggests that another motif may have been for "ritual vessel assemblage" and that geometric "textile-style" patterns are associated with a set of moulds of human faces.

We have some information on languages spoken on the North Coast seven centuries after the Moche.²⁴ We do not know the degree to which the languages of remote prehistory were related to those of the Colonial Period, when the Spanish first started to record them although there are various suggestions that there could very well have been some such continuities over the centuries. We also know that there were other languages about which we know very little, however. Thus, we have no way to know if there was some linguistic relationship between some of the symbols shown on the Moche mould exteriors and what was represented inside.

A visual use of synecdoches is also in evidence in these mould marks. The crest of a warrior's helmet stands for the whole warrior or the head of a war club symbolizes the entire club. In sum, the marking of piece-moulds on their exterior offers us a lot to consider concerning Moche conceptions of how parts relate to wholes and how different segments or sections of narrations and of things relate one to another. Indeed, it is interesting that Moche signing on the outside of clay containers with

22 Jackson 2002; 2008.

23 Jackson 2008, 102–103.

24 Cerrón – Palomino 1995.



Fig. 5: Stirrup spout bottle with painting of marked beans (courtesy Museo Rafael Larco Herrera, Lima, Peru. Catalogue No. ML002474).

their more important features on their insides – the actual working imagery to be used – has resonances with Denise Schmandt-Besserat’s²⁵ observations on how Mesopotamian cuneiform writing may have developed from shorthand markings made on the outside of clay envelopes containing symbolic tokens on their insides.

The Moche also marked beans (**Fig. 5**). They depicted the beans, themselves, as well as runners carrying bags with marked beans in them, and there are representations of deities with marked beans, as well. There are actual examples of the distinctive bags as shown in art with marked beans in them in various museum collections and even beans with marks on them. Many people have thought that the marked

25 Schmandt-Besserat 2010.



Fig. 6: Moche stirrup spout bottle depicting the 'Revolt of the Objects' (courtesy Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich).



Fig. 7: A roll-out drawing of the imagery on the 'Revolt of the Objects' vessel shown in Figure 6. (Christopher B. Donnan and Donna McClelland Moche Archive, 1963–2011, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.).

the marked beans were a writing system and Rafael Larco Hoyle thought that the marked beans were hieroglyphic signs.²⁶ While the idea of the beans as carrying some kinds of messages is tantalizing, no one has found a way to interpret them.

The Moche also made marks on themselves – tattoos – but, to date, no one has conducted a study of them. We only have a few examples of tattooed skin. Known tattoos tend to be images similar to those found in other art, such as depictions of supernaturals. What is quite clear from these different examples is that the Moche were quite interested in keeping accounts of things and using systems by which to do so.

Moche narrativity

In the early 1990s, three scholars independently concluded that Moche art expressed narration. Jürgen Golte of the Freie Universität Berlin, had been working on this topic longer than anyone, since the 1980s, but his publications only became widely known in the early 1990s.²⁷ His work led him to claim that he had found a long mythic narrative that involved a culture hero identified as 'Wrinkle Face'. Meanwhile, in Peru, Luis Jaime Castillo was exploring narrativity in linking various scenes shown on ceramics and murals in what he referred to as the 'Warrior Narrative'.²⁸ And, I was concluding that a version of the 'Revolt of the Objects', as recounted

²⁶ Larco Hoyle 2001 [1938], 1942.

²⁷ Golte 1994.

²⁸ Castillo 1989.

in Peruvian early colonial documents and elsewhere in the New World, was also expressed in Moche ceramic and mural art (**Fig. 6 and 7**).²⁹

The relative merits of these three different approaches are not of great importance, here. Indeed, one of the points I have been making for some time, now, is that there has been too much insistence by many scholars that Moche art should be interpreted in one way and in one way only. A unitary model for interpreting Moche art was common when the art was thought to be ‘corporate’ – the product of a single state entity.

When Moche was considered to have been an expansionist state ‘Moche art’ was thought of as a single phenomenon produced by the state in a ‘corporate’ style. While style differences through time were acknowledged, the assumption of a uniform Moche style meant that scholars could ‘cherry-pick’ art without much regard to where artefacts (mostly ceramics) had been found and not even too much concern about their relative dating in the 5-phase sequence developed by Larco Hoyle. The single state model also allowed for the iconographic studies of pottery in museum and private collections that had been purchased from looters because the provenience details were seen as not too important given the assumed standardization of Moche ceramic styles and the messages their art may have carried. Still, while we now are more concerned about the variability of Moche styles based on an interpretation of a heterogeneous Moche political landscape, there were shared cultural styles through time and space.

Narrational strategies

For present purposes, the most important point to consider is that the Moche representational art style did not simply *allow* for narration to be made but (admittedly, taking a utilitarianist and functionalist approach), that there was a *need* to express narration that led to the Moche veristic art style (**Fig. 7**). There was something about what Moche was, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, that made advantageous or useful for employment in art. I believe that the main impetus for narration and, indeed, for the creation of fineware ceramics with fineline painting of narrative scenes on them, was that Moche, especially early Moche, ca. AD 250 to 450 or thereabouts, was a distinct social, political, and religious system (with concomitant economic and other consequences) that actively recruited people, elites and commoners, to join it. My argument for why I believe this was so is too long to present, here, but includes the very fineware vessels, themselves, that are so emblematic of the archaeological

29 Quilter 1990.

culture. These objects were consumed by people in the hinterlands and the apparent desirability to acquire such items strongly suggests that ‘becoming Moche’ was a key aspect of what the archaeological culture was all about.

Now, an interesting aspect of Moche narration is how that story-telling was abbreviated and segmented. While walls allowed for presentation of long narrations of various kinds,³⁰ painted ceramics had relatively limited surface space, resulting in three approaches to resolve this problem. The first approach was to paint figures smaller so that more could fit on the pottery vessels. The second approach was to produce symbolic short-cuts to reference larger concepts, graphic versions of metonymy and synecdoche. And the third approach was to present segments of longer narratives, basically editing the story so that a significant scene was presented that could be understood as part of a longer story.³¹

All three of these graphic solutions to decorating ceramic vessels are techniques that might have led to the development of writing but did not. While painting figures smaller seems to not take a great amount of thought, the development of ‘short-hand’ representations to refer to longer concepts does seem like it is only a few steps away from some form of writing as does the editorial process of choosing key scenes from a longer narrative to depict.

Moche’s use of veristic art styles on ceramics served a number of purposes and the presence of segments of narratives suggests two impulses. For the producers of these vessels there is the impulse to promulgate ideas while for the consumers of the ceramics there is a sense of an opening up of conversations. Fineware ceramics were made at and obtained from temple sites (*huacas*) by pilgrims who lived elsewhere. The stories narrated in Moche art thus served to create Moche. As I suggested above, Moche was a process of ethnogenesis based upon a religious system that promulgated itself through artwork; people became Moche, especially early on. Not all art that we call Moche was part of that effort but a lot of it was. The stories told by the art and the religious system it expressed with its political, social, and economic ties were apparently well enough understood by the consumers of those ceramics, that they did not need to have the whole story, as it were, on a single vessel.

In this way, I believe that the narrative scenes on Moche ceramics served similar roles to the scenes on Attic vases as considered by Robin Osborne:³² the scenes

³⁰ Quilter 2007.

³¹ Margaret Jackson (2008; 2011) has proposed that Moche artistic conventions carried much more specific information than most scholars have recognized. For example, she interprets secondary images such as plants or birds, on the peripheries of battle scenes as being modifiers to the meanings of the depicted warriors who, themselves may be historical figures identified through details of their clothing. While an intriguing hypothesis, no one has found a way to independently confirm Jackson’s proposals.

³² Osborne 2007.

served as a starting point for a discussion of what was represented. There *was* narration in Moche art but not all pots could be ‘read’ and while *we* may be attempting to read narratives in Moche art *they*, who made, obtained, and used these ceramics, knew the stories so they may not have been reading them so much as referencing them like those Classical Greek symposium participants using the images as starting places rather than as strict narrations. This is just as true for modelled vessels as well as fineline-painted ones while, at the same time, many Moche fineware vessels may have had functions that had little to do with narration. But there is more to marking an inscribing in Moche art than the expression of narration on fineware ceramics.

Tocapu and place signs

There are two other representational systems that consideration of might help us to appreciate issues of non-verbal communication in the ancient Andes. One appears late, the *tocapu* of the Inca and the other is very early, apparent place signs or something like them, which first appear in Initial Period (ca. 1700–1200 BC) temples. *Tocapu* (Fig. 8) are quadrilateral figures with geometric designs (Fig. 4). They are most often found on textiles and *qeros* (drinking tumblers) but are also known to have been painted on burial towers and other media. They have been interpreted as hieroglyphs but they were not. Some of them may have been like European heraldry in representing specific places, peoples, or Inca bureaucracies, such as an elite army corps. But they do not seem to have been logograms; they did not represent words or phrases but, rather, the thing, itself. In his review of both scholarship on *tocapu* as well as the images, themselves, Thomas Cummins observes that there are Moche mural images that seem very much like *tocapu* while other murals are organized on grids that suggest that *tocapu*-like arrangements were of interest to the Moche.³³ Nevertheless, the Moche did not have a clearly developed system of logograms. The stylized rectangles could have been something like *tocapus* but these kinds of symbols apparently were widespread and quite ancient in Peru.

The Garagay temple complex in the Rimac Valley dates to the Initial or Formative Period and was occupied ca. 1000 BC. It was excavated in the 1970s³⁴ and recently has been opened for more investigations. Moulded clay friezes in the atrium of the main temple at Garagay have attracted attention for many years. Interspersed between representations of deities or mythological creatures are moulded elements with an apparently abstract design of a feather-like element and a stepped motif

³³ Cummins 2011, 293–297.

³⁴ Ravines – Isbell 1975.



Fig. 8: An all-tocapu tunic (© Dumbarton Oaks, Pre-Columbian Collection, Washington, D.C.).

(Fig. 9).³⁵ The same image or similar images appear elsewhere in prehistoric Andean art including Moche, more frequently a stepped motif and a curled element. I believe that the image may represent the union of sea and land with the stepped design possibly a representation, in profile, of the *andenes*, the terraces that were the basis of Andean agriculture and that also were used to build the early temples. Whatever

35 Quilter 2001, 24–25.



Fig. 9: The Garagay stepped motif and wave elements as seen on an atrium wall at the ceremonial complex. At right is an interpretation of how the original image may have appeared (by author).

its true meaning, the long duration of use of this image suggests that it had staying power and that it was associated with an idea, a concept.

The Garagay icons are not *tocapu* but seem similar. As noted above, *tocapu* were not only images on textiles but also found on ceramics and architecture. Still, there is a strong link in Colonial Period references between the term and textiles and Cummins, himself, states that *tocapu* are geometric designs framed and arranged in grid patterns, something not the case at Garagay and neither at other sites with similar presumable emblems. Nevertheless, the *tocapu* and step-and-wave emblem partake of the same signing strategy of presenting abstracted designs that have variable degrees of similitude to what they represent but, in all, are abstract references to concrete things. Perhaps *tocapu* derive from the kinds of emblems that first appeared at Initial Period temples such as Garagay.

The issue concerning textiles and *tocapu* is an interesting one because Andean textiles are filled with symbolic images. Textiles are considered by many as the greatest Andean art form and they were highly prized by the Inca and others. One of the greatest honors that the Sapa Inca could bestow on someone was to give them a garment of *cumbi* cloth made of the finest camelid hair and praised even by the Spaniards as an exceptional fabric. The famous Dumbarton Oaks ‘all-*tocapu*’ tunic is doubly significant not only because it is covered in *tocapu* but also because it almost certainly is an example of *cumbi*. Weavers throughout the Conquest Period down to the present day continue to use motifs in their textiles that have specific symbolic meanings even if they no longer use *tocapu* as their ancestors once did.³⁶

³⁶ Callañaupa Alvarez 2013.

Summary

Moche art employed “technologies of enchantment”.³⁷ Temple murals pulsed with colour and movement such as the dramatic ‘Maritime Frieze’ at the Huaca Cao Viejo in the Chicama Valley, appearing to continue, to move, beyond the confines of its frame or the marching warrior and prisoners around the plaza floor. This art moves by itself but would have moved all the more when viewed with the aid of the alcohol in *chicha* (maize ‘beer’) and the mescaline of the San Pedro cactus. So too, Moche fineline painted and modelled vessels were an entirely new medium that must have been seen as extremely exciting and innovative in their day.

While there were precedents for the kinds of representations we see on vessels, the Moche took the art of portable imagery to new levels and, more importantly, the franchise was enlarged to include many more people than before who had access to fancy ceramics, probably receiving them as members of a particular temple group. Michele Koons³⁸ has identified a distinct Moche ceramic sub-style that she believes was shared by the communities that were on the same branch of the irrigation canal network the members of which presumably considered the main temple complex on it, Licapa II, as their religious centre. It is quite likely that this is how Moche ceramic art styles worked, in general, as both makers and signs of social identity and in a nested way so that the general style that we think of as Moche was a project in ethnogenesis while the sub-styles gave meaning to and reinforced the corporate identity of smaller social units.

The Moche marked many things to make symbols and to keep track of human affairs. As Jeffrey Splitstoser notes “[i]n a society without writing, colour most likely held far more importance as a messaging medium than it does today.”³⁹ Indeed, there may have been many other ways that the Moche and other prehistoric cultures were making messages with material objects that we just have not yet recognized. Scholars note that Middle Horizon (ca. AD 600–1000) tapestry woven tunics – some of the most technically complex textiles of the ancient world – exhibited compression of design fields. It was only after careful study, however, that it became clear that tunics of the Wari polity had vertical designs that narrowed towards the edge while (at least, late coastal) Tiwanaku tunics narrowed towards their centres.⁴⁰ Wari and Tiwanaku were contemporary cultures that were somehow related in ways which we still do not fully understand. The styles of the textiles indicate that they were consciously distinguishing themselves from each other via the style of compressed designs on

37 Gell 1998.

38 Koons 2015.

39 Splitstoser 2019.

40 Bergh 2012.

elites' garments which were sending messages to anyone who saw an official wearing such a garment. It is these kinds of highly sophisticated, highly visual, and highly communicative manipulation of objects that are examples of the non-writing literateness of the ancient peoples of the Central Andes.

The Moche did not have a writing system if we take that to mean a standardized means by which to render verbal speech into another medium. Like many others in the ancient New World and throughout the non- or pre-literate world, in general, the Moche had highly developed symbol systems that communicated many ideas even if they did not write. They and many other ancient cultures of the Central Andes were very close to developing writing, however, given that the Inca finally did in the form of their quipus.

Why the Moche did not write perhaps is even more curious than it might be given all of the examples we have seen of marking and sign-making. I think that the answer as to why they did not is relatively simple, however: Moche was not a single socio-political system over a wide geographic area as were the Inca. As noted previously, Moche was primarily a religion with political, social, and economic aspects but politics and economics were locally based, within a river valley or two. The state of research on Moche is so elemental that we do not really know with any precision what kinds of economic exchanges of prestige goods took place between one Moche royal court and another. Rather than a single united polity, Moche seems to have been politically more like the European Middle Ages or many other cases, such as Pre- and Classical Greece in which there was a common religion (with local variants) but political power was locally based. In Medieval Western Europe, the (Roman Catholic, and thus 'universal') church was active, politically, but was ignored, challenged, and even fought. Religious heresies arose to challenge established authority and these were as much social and even ethnic movements as they were spiritually based.

Sometime in the ninth century and possibly into the tenth, Moche culture ended. How and why that occurred are matters that are still unclear to us. What we do know, however, is that the end of Moche occurred as highland cultures of the Middle Horizon, Wari and Tiahuanaco, arose and strongly influenced much of Peru. Although post-Moche culture, known as Lambayeque, on the farther North Coast, seems to have been something like a version of Moche, it was conquered by the Kingdom of Chimor (a.k.a. Chimú) based at the city of Chan Chan, farther south. Both of these cultures were organized on very different principles than Moche.

What seems to be the most important aspect of these cultures, especially Chimú, is that the propagation of a religious system that was also a nested hierarchy in which each family kept its own ancestral mummies with higher-order social groups (*ayllus*) maintaining more important mummies. In other words, every family was its own re-

ligious unit nested within a matrix of larger and larger units. This kind of system did not need to narrate anything because any narrations in revering or celebrating ancestral figures could be done as easily by recounting their deeds or personalities. There was no need to ‘sell’ an ideology, creed, or set of deities because the deities were one’s grandparents or great-grandparents or the great lord who was like a parent.

Moche sold. It promulgated its deities and ideas and it was quite successful in doing so for a century or two and that is why it needed to produce narratives and representational art that expressed the religious narrative. When Moche ended, replaced by structurally simpler though organizationally larger systems, those narrative devices were no longer needed and so were no longer used. Only later, with the rise of the Inca Empire were accounting and recounting needed. The Inca sold their new approach to society, culture, and religion and forced it on conquered peoples, practices that likely had been carried out in earlier eras. As best we can tell, the Inca were the most organized, most expansive, and most bureaucratic political system that the Andes had ever experienced and so the *quipu* system was refined and instituted as an apparatus of the conquest state.

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