

**THE BURIAL THEME IN  
MOCHE ICONOGRAPHY**

**CHRISTOPHER B. DONNAN  
DONNA McCLELLAND**

Copyright © 1979 by Dumbarton Oaks  
Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D. C.  
Library of Congress catalog number 79-63727

#### A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

We would like to express our appreciation to the following individuals who contributed to this research: Yoshitaro Amano, Lawrence Dawson, Guillermo Ganoza, Alan Lapiner, Diane Latham, Herbert Lucas, Luis Lumbreras, Donald McClelland, Dorothy Menzel, Oscar Rodriguez, John Rowe, and Alan Sawyer.

# The Burial Theme in Moche Iconography

The Moche Kingdom, which flourished on the north coast of Peru between 100 B.C. and A.D. 700, produced one of the most remarkable art styles of Pre-Columbian America. Although the Moche people had no writing system, they left a vivid artistic record of their activities and their environment. Their art illustrates their clothing, architecture, implements, supernatural beings, and a multitude of activities such as warfare, ceremony, and hunting. Although Moche art gives the impression of having an almost infinite variety of subject matter, analysis of a large sample of it has suggested that it is limited to the representation of a small number of specific events, or activities, which are referred to as themes (Donnan 1975). One of the most provocative of these themes has recently been identified on the basis of an extremely complex and detailed scene, painted on the chambers of six different ceramic bottles. Since the scene painted on each of the bottles depicts a burial, we refer to it as the Burial Theme.

The six examples of the Burial Theme are among the most complex representations ever produced by Moche artists. Analysis of these representations provides a number of important insights into the nature of Moche iconography, the development of Moche artistic canons, and various aspects of Moche ritual. Moreover, it generates some rather profound implications about the potential of utilizing ethnohistoric documents to reconstruct the Pre-Columbian past.

The six examples of the Burial Theme are located in various public museums and private collections. None of them was excavated archaeologically, and thus there is no good evidence of where they were

found, or of their archaeological associations. One of the pieces (Figs. 9, 10), however, is said to have been found at Huaca Moro in the Jequetepeque Valley.

We were able to make a complete photographic record of five of the six vessels (Figs. 1-10). Roll-out drawings were made of the chamber designs on these five, omitting the background filler elements, such as circles and dots, so that the depiction would stand out more clearly. Only two photographs of the sixth vessel (Figs. 11, 12) were available. Drawings were made from these photographs, again leaving out the background filler elements for clarity. Five of the vessels (Figs. 1, 5, 8, 9, 12) are in a remarkably good state of preservation; they exhibit no evidence of major reconstruction or restoration. Some of the clay slip has spalled off the chamber of the other vessel (Fig. 4), and thus a portion of the original design is missing.

Although the paintings on these six bottles clearly portray the same related events, certain aspects of design, art canons, and composition are unique to each vessel. By comparing the similarities and differences, we have learned which features are always shown, and which could be omitted or greatly altered by the individual artist. Having the six examples has thus been crucial in deciphering the basic nature of the Burial Theme.

The Moche style can be divided into five sequential phases, defined on the basis of changes in the form and decoration of ceramic vessels. These phases are numbered I through V, with Phase V being the latest. All of the bottles with representations of the Burial Theme are Phase V.

## Activities

Each of the six bottles in our sample depicts four distinct activities: burial, assembly, conch-shell transfer, and sacrifice. The key to separating the complete drawing into these four activities is the set of double lines found on each bottle. These double lines are consistently used to circumscribe the four activities, and their importance to understanding the overall depiction cannot be overemphasized. To make it easier to visualize the four activities, the roll-out drawing in Figure 2 has been separated into its four components, and each is shown individually in Figures 13–16. Since the four activities provide the basic structure for understanding the Burial Theme, we will analyze each of them separately.

### BURIAL

One of the activities shown on each of the five bottles is burial (Fig. 13). There are two major figures in the upper part of this scene: an anthropomorphized iguana and an individual with lines on his face that look like wrinkles. These two figures have extremely important roles in the Burial Theme. We will refer to them as Iguana and Wrinkle Face.<sup>1</sup> Iguana has a lizardlike face and a long pointed tail with serrations along the upper edge. He generally has a sashlike bag tied over his shoulder or around his waist and wears a bird headdress. He almost invariably has an almond-shaped eye, which seems to be pendant from the bottom edge of his headdress.

Wrinkle Face has a round rather than an almond-shaped eye, and the eye is not contiguous to the headdress. He generally wears a short-sleeved shirt with a step design on the front. The shirt is cinched at the waist with a long belt or sash, which terminates in serpent heads. He invariably wears a feline headdress.

Iguana and Wrinkle Face are major figures in Moche art, and often appear together. Figures 17, 36–

<sup>1</sup> Moche artists depict many people with what appear to be wrinkles on their faces, and they should not be confused with this particular individual. The term Wrinkle Face, as used in this study, refers only to those individuals who combine most, if not all, of the characteristics which follow.

37 are typical representations of Iguana and Wrinkle Face in fineline drawing.<sup>2</sup> Figure 17 is a Phase IV representation, while Figures 36–37 are Phase V. Iguana and Wrinkle Face are also represented in modeled form (Figs. 18, 19). Their representation in Moche art suggests that they are specific individuals who frequently accompany one another, and who engage in a variety of activities.

In the burial activity (Fig. 13), Iguana and Wrinkle Face are using ropes to lower a long horizontal casket into a grave shaft. The casket is shown at the bottom of the scene, and it usually has a face drawn on one end. As will be discussed below, this casket conforms to the shape of wicker caskets that have been excavated in Moche graves, and the face may be a metal mask. A variety of grave goods surrounds the casket and extends above, between the ropes. In Figure 3, anthropomorphized birds are substituted for Iguana and Wrinkle Face, apparently without changing the nature of the activity.

In four of the examples (Figs. 5–12), Iguana holds a llama with a rope. A llama with a rope around its neck is also being held by Wrinkle Face in Figure 6. These llamas may have been used to transport the casket and/or burial goods to the grave site. Alternatively, they may have been intended for sacrifice and inclusion in the grave.<sup>3</sup> The animals in front of both Iguana and Wrinkle Face in Figure 6 are dogs. These dogs frequently accompany Iguana and Wrinkle Face, and probably were not sacrificed and interred.

The details of the burial conform closely to what is known archaeologically about Moche burial practices. Some elaborate Moche burials are in deep, narrow grave pits (Donnan and Mackey 1978; Strong and Evans 1952: 151), and lowering a casket to the bottom of one of these would have been practically impossible without the use of ropes. The form of the casket itself is reminiscent of some that have been

<sup>2</sup> The scene in Figure 17 is remarkably similar to one published by Lavallée (1970: Pl. 78a), from a bottle in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> Many Moche graves containing llama remains have been excavated, indicating that the Moche people placed parts of llamas in graves as part of the burial goods.

found in Moche graves. The casket of the “Warrior-Priest” measured 2.35 meters long, .57 meters wide, and .35 meters high, and had a lid which was tied shut with cordage (*ibid.*: 153). Its rigid structure of reinforced heavy canes would not have bowed when it was lowered with ropes into the grave, even with the human body inside. The casket was wrapped with twilled cloth, which covered the cane. This may explain why the artists did not show the cane in drawing the caskets.

The faces shown on the caskets in Figures 2, 6, 7, and 10 may well be hammered metal masks. Such masks were made of copper and gold by Moche craftsmen (Fig. 20). If the faces on these caskets are metal masks, it would appear that they are somehow attached to the outside of the casket. They would probably have been attached to the lid or upper surface; however, the artists may have rotated the casket 90° to make the mask visible.<sup>4</sup>

The grave goods depicted on the Burial Theme vessels are nearly all items frequently found in Moche graves. Ceramic vessels—stirrup-spout bottles, jars, and pedestal-base bowls—are particularly common. The shallow bowls filled with food are less common. They are made of gourd, and would tend to decompose through time. However, gourd bowls filled with corn and beans have been reported from one of the better-preserved Moche graves (Strong and Evans 1952: 153). The shallow gourd bowls shown in the drawings generally appear to be stacked in pairs. This was apparently the way gourd bowls were presented in ceremonial contexts, with the stacked gourds usually tied together on one side (Figs. 21–22). Conch shells are included among the grave goods in Figures 2, 3, and 6. Although there are no reports of conch shells actually having been found in Moche graves, they might have been placed in the graves of some high-status individuals.

Several of the other grave goods are difficult to

<sup>4</sup> Turning an object 90° so that it is more recognizable is a common feature of Moche fineline drawing (see Donnan 1976: 24).

identify from the fineline drawings. The object to the left of the casket in Figure 2 may be an elaborately woven textile, while the object to the right may be a necklace or collar of beads. Particularly puzzling are the oblong objects, with lines across their width, in rows above the right side of the coffin in Figures 7 and 11. Nothing of a similar form has yet been reported from a Moche burial. However, other Moche V vessels illustrate similar objects; figures wearing a net shirt and seated in tule boats (Figs. 23–25, 27, 28) are frequently shown with these oblong objects on their torsos (Figs. 24, 25).

#### ASSEMBLY

A second activity shown on each of the five bottles in our sample is what might best be termed assembly (Fig. 14). It is divided in the middle by the ropes that lower the casket. The assembly activity involves a grouping of human, animal, and anthropomorphized figures. The primary figures, judging from their large size, are Iguana and Wrinkle Face. Each is shown holding a stafflike object—possibly a rattle. Figure 29 is a modeled representation of Iguana holding a similar staff. An anthropomorphized feline in Figure 10 and a human figure in Figure 11 have been substituted for Wrinkle Face, apparently without changing the nature of the activity.

In horizontal bands above Iguana and Wrinkle Face are various smaller figures holding long vertical staffs in front of them. Each faces the center of the scene.<sup>5</sup> On one side are human figures, all of whom

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Menzel (personal communication) has suggested that the assembly section may reflect Huari influence. She has stated that it “. . . is remarkably similar to a typical Huari arrangement (and also Tiahuanaco). On Huari (i.e., Conchopata-style) offering urns of Middle Horizon 1A figures I refer to as ‘Angel’ figures, that is, the ‘Feline-headed Angel,’ are shown running toward a central deity figure, in a row, each figure carrying a staff in front and shown in profile, each appearing to form a small panel, as in your ‘assembly’ scene. . . . Of course, the Middle Horizon 2 example from Tiahuanaco, the so-called ‘Gateway of the Sun lintel,’ is also a good example. There the figures appear in three rows, just as in your design, mythical humans and mythical bird figures in alternating rows.”

are dressed in long, netlike shirts and wear head-dresses apparently made of clipped feathers projecting up from a headband. Each of these figures wears a tiered item of attire extending down his back. We will refer to these figures as Net Shirts.

The representation of groups of Net Shirts standing together in the same scene indicates that they are a group of people who wear similar garments and perform the same roles. It is interesting that Net Shirts are not depicted in Moche art until Phase V. During that phase they are found in only two contexts: in the Burial Theme and in tule boats. Almost every Moche V representation of a tule boat, whether realistic (Figs. 23, 26–28) or stylized (Figs. 24, 25) has a Net Shirt inside it (Cordy-Collins 1977, n.d.). As mentioned above, some of the most enigmatic of the burial goods shown around the coffins in the burial activity are the oblong objects with lines across their widths. It is curious that the only representation of similar objects in Moche art are on the torsos of Net Shirts seated in the tule boats (Figs. 24, 25). Moreover, the jars above the right side of the casket in Figure 10 are remarkably similar to those shown in tule boats (Figs. 26, 28). Possibly both the oblong objects and the jars shown adjacent to the casket in the Burial Theme (Figs. 7, 10, 11) were brought to the grave site by the Net Shirts who are shown standing to one side in the assembly activity.

Opposite the Net Shirts in the assembly are animal figures. These are depicted either as natural animals or as part animal and part human, apparently depending on the choice of the artist. It is interesting that, of all the animals depicted in Moche art, only felines and male deer are found in this context. All of the figures in the assembly seem to be engaged in a ritual at the grave site which is performed as part of the burial ceremony.

#### CONCH-SHELL TRANSFER

The third activity shown on each of the six bottles in our sample involves the transfer of conch shells (Fig. 16). This activity is being conducted under the gabled roof of a large and very elaborate structure.

The structure is approached by a set of stairs, suggesting that it is located on the upper part of a high platform or pyramid.

Inside the structure is a major figure that we shall refer to as Kneeler, because of his posture. The appearance of Kneeler can vary much more than that of Wrinkle Face or Iguana. The only element that he wears on all six vessels is the crescent-shaped ornament in his headdress. By itself, the crescent-shaped ornament does not constitute a means of identifying Kneeler outside of the Burial Theme vessels, since it is worn by many different Moche figures. Kneeler also wears a tiered item of attire which extends down his back and is similar to that worn by the Net Shirts. The tiered item of attire is replaced by a wing in Figures 5 and 6, but, since the wing is also tiered, it may be a substitute for the tiered item on the other vessels.

The most distinctive aspect of Kneeler is his posture. A kneeling posture is rarely found in Moche art. Inside tule boats, however, figures holding paddles are frequently shown kneeling (Figs. 26–28).<sup>6</sup>

In the Burial Theme, Kneeler is consistently shown reaching forward with one hand, which often holds a conch shell. Facing him on the stairway below are Wrinkle Face and Iguana (Figs. 1–4), Iguana and a Net Shirt (Figs. 5–8), or a Net Shirt (Figs. 9, 10). It is not clear whether Kneeler is giving the conch shells or receiving them.

In one example, Iguana wears conch shells in his headdress (Figs. 1, 2) and, in two examples (Figs. 1–4), Iguana stands in front of llamas that have backpacks filled with conch shells. One Phase V stirrup-spout bottle (Figs. 31, 32) depicts this activity in modeled form—Iguana wears a conch shell on top of his bird headdress while leading a llama with a rope. The llama carries rope saddlebags filled with conch shells, and Wrinkle Face lies on top holding a spearthrower in one hand and two spears in the other.

One representation of the conch-shell transfer (Figs. 5, 6) is unique because a Net Shirt and a small gabled

<sup>6</sup> When a kneeling paddler is shown in a tule boat on one side of a bottle, a Net Shirt is usually shown in a tule boat on the opposite side of the bottle.

roof structure are positioned behind Kneeler. These were possibly drawn by the artist to fill the large extra space behind Kneeler in this representation.

Conch shells are obviously the focus of activity in conch-shell transfer, and may be related to those seen as part of the grave goods in the burial activity. Conch-shell monsters are even used to decorate the gabled roof in Figures 1–4. The representations showing llamas with pack bags full of conch shells (Figs. 1–4, 16, 31, 32), and the large number of conch shells drawn in the background, suggest that considerable numbers of shells are involved. Since both iguanas and conch shells are native to the coast of Ecuador, and not to the north coast of Peru, Iguana may have an inherent association with conch shells.

The importation of conch shells from Ecuador to Peru is documented to have occurred as early as 900 B.C., and appears to continue until the European contact in the sixteenth century (Paulsen 1974). Llamas may well have been used as pack animals for transporting these shells. Unfortunately, we cannot determine whether the llamas in the Burial Theme were used to transport the shells to the gabled structure, or are being loaded with shells from the gabled structure which they will then take elsewhere.

The area beneath Kneeler in the conch-shell transfer activity is outlined with parallel lines, and therefore it is possible that this area represents another distinct activity. We have been unable to define what that activity is, however, and thus we have included it as part of the conch-shell transfer. Small structures are shown in this area on five of the bottles (Figs. 1–8, 11, 12). The small structures appear to be miniature or stylized versions of the major structure above. In two instances (Figs. 1, 2, 5, 6), a row of seated figures replaces a row of small structures. The seated figures in Figures 5 and 6 are Net Shirts. In Figures 1 and 2 they are probably females wearing long dresses and shawls. Secondary figures similar to the latter are frequently shown in Moche art, and are usually associated with gabled roof structures.

#### SACRIFICE

The fourth activity shown on each of the five bottles in our sample involves sacrifice (Fig. 15). It is always located in the area above the conch-shell transfer activity. Although most of this scene has spalled off of one bottle (Figs. 3, 4), and there is limited documentation of it on another (Figs. 11, 12), Iguana and Wrinkle Face can be easily recognized. Iguana holds a *tumi* knife in one hand, and may hold a rope of birds in the other. Wrinkle Face stands nearby, holding a spearthrower and several spears. On the far left is a splayed, nude female, lying on her back, being attacked by birds. On the far right is a group of birds tied together with rope. These are the same type of birds seen pecking at the nude female figure. In at least four of the examples (Figs. 2–4, 7–10), the rope of birds is held by an anthropomorphized spear.

Another feature found in the sacrifice activity is a bird on a rack (Figs. 2, 5–10). Again, the bird is similar to those pecking at the nude female figure. In Moche art, there are a number of representations of individuals tied to racks (Fig. 30). Frequently they are being pecked by birds. Ethnohistoric sources indicate that this was a form of punishment used by people living on the north coast of Peru prior to European contact.<sup>7</sup>

The six vessels in our sample show the wide range of variation used by Moche artists in reproducing a fine-line drawing of the same theme. Although each of the six vessels is divided into the same four scenes, many

<sup>7</sup> Father Antonio de la Calancha states that the native people of the north coast of Peru were preoccupied with stealing and that the punishment of thieves was a religious as well as a civil matter, as if property ownership were a divine right. Diviners were consulted and sacrifices were made to the Moon and to the constellation of Patá (our constellation Orion) to entreat their aid in finding thieves. When the moon was dark, they said that it was in the other world, punishing thieves. In the constellation of Patá (Orion), the row of three stars (Orion's Belt) was seen as a thief flanked by emissaries of the moon who were sent to feed him to the buzzards. The latter were represented by the four stars immediately below Orion's Belt (Calancha 1638: Book III, 553).

elements vary from vessel to vessel. There are omissions and substitutions of both major figures and minor elements, such as background objects.

A comparison of the details—such as the hands of the same figure—on the vessels in Figures 9–12 suggests that they were created by the same artist. These two vessels provide an unusual opportunity to examine the range of variation on a single theme by an individual artist. The two vessels vary in many details. For example, the artist placed jars in the grave on the vessel depicted in Figure 10, whereas he drew the oblong objects instead of jars on that in Figures 11 and 12. In Figures 10 and 11, in the assembly activity, he replaced Wrinkle Face with another figure. He drew an anthropomorphized feline on the vessel in Figure 10 and a Net Shirt on the one in Figure 11. In the conch-shell transfer activity, the area beneath Kneeler provides another interesting variation. The artist drew small structures in this area on the pot depicted in Figure 11, structures similar to those depicted in Figures 1–8. On the vessel in Figures 9 and 10, however, he filled the area with geometric designs and created a stepped dais similar to those in Figures 33–35. The range of variation between these two vessels, and among all six vessels, would indicate that the Moche artists were not slavishly reproducing a fineline drawing of the Burial Theme, but were enjoying a degree of artistic freedom.

## Chronology

Although all six bottles with depictions of the Burial Theme belong to Phase V of the Moche style, only two appear to have been made by the same artist (Figs. 9–12). It is quite possible that the five artists were not contemporaneous, and that the bottles were made at different times. A chronological sequence for the six bottles can be suggested, based on the style of painting and the features of the vessel forms. The vessels, as shown in Figures 1–12, are arranged in that sequence. The vessels in Figures 1–4 are probably the earliest, since the style of the fineline drawing is most similar to that of Phase IV. This is particularly evident

in the depiction of the major figure, Kneeler, seated under the gabled roof. The Phase IV Moche artistic canons for drawing a human figure have been followed by the artists, i.e., a front view of the chest and a profile view of the rest of the body (Donnan 1976: 24). In Figures 5 and 6, Kneeler's chest is drawn in profile (as are the chests of the two figures wearing net shirts). In Figures 7 and 8, Kneeler's profile chest is greatly exaggerated, and, in Figures 9–11, his torso has been reduced to a U-shape.

The depiction of the crescent-shaped ornament in Kneeler's headdress reflects the same chronological sequence. In Figures 1–4, the ornament is similar to Phase IV fineline drawings, but, in Figures 5–11, the tips of the crescent broaden. In Figures 9–11 the crescent assumes a shape which, although aberrant for the Moche style, is similar to the form of crescents depicted in the Chimú art style, which succeeds the Moche style on the north coast of Peru. The way in which the hands are drawn on the major figures further supports the chronological sequence of the bottles as they are arranged in Figures 1–12.

The monkeys modeled on the stirrup spout of the vessel in Figure 12 are additional evidence for its placement at the end of the chronological sequence. Modeled figures are not found on the stirrup spouts of the earlier Moche phases, but are very common on later Chimú pottery. In this regard, it is interesting to examine the bottles in Figures 33–37, which are very similar in form to those in Figures 9 and 12, and which have monkeys modeled on their stirrup spouts. The vessel in Figures 33–35 is particularly interesting since the drawing on its chamber shows Iguana and Wrinkle Face lying in a prone position on top of a stepped platform. A nearly identical representation is found on several double-spout-and-bridge bottles, painted with polychrome slip, and generally thought to postdate the end of the Moche style.<sup>8</sup> Figure 38 illustrates one of these vessels, and Figure 39 shows the roll-out of the drawing on its chamber. The two

<sup>8</sup> One bottle of this type has been discussed in detail by John H. Rowe (1942).

figures on these double-spout-and-bridge bottles can be clearly identified as Iguana and Wrinkle Face who, in most examples, are represented with all of their characteristic features. The similarity between the drawings on bottles such as that depicted in Figures 38 and 39 and the drawing on the vessel shown in Figures 33–35 is evidence that the latter dates to the end of Moche V, as would the three similar vessels shown in Figures 9–12, 36, and 37.

From the chronological sequence of the five bottles representing the Burial Theme, it appears that the earliest (Figs. 1, 2) would date to the beginning of Phase V, when the artistic canons for fineline representation were nearly identical to those characteristic of Phase IV. The bottles subsequently define a sequential evolution in the representation of this theme through what appears to be the very latest part of Phase V, when not only has the fineline representation greatly changed from its earlier style, but also the vessel form has developed features that are clearly antecedent to Chimú pottery. The implications of this chronological sequence are very important. The sequence, if reliable, offers a basis for dividing Phase V into subphases on the basis of both the evolution of fineline drawing and the evolution of vessel form. Such a division would be particularly useful, since the end of the Moche style and the transition into the earlier part of the Chimú style constitute an extremely important problem in Andean culture history, one whose solution has been particularly elusive because of the inability of scholars to develop a reliable chronology.

## Interpretation

It is clear that the Burial Theme consists of at least four distinct activities: burial, assembly, conch-shell transfer, and sacrifice. The artists who painted the bottles consistently used parallel lines to separate these four activities. Moreover, since Iguana and Wrinkle Face are specific individuals, their presence in each of the four activities indicates that the activities are sep-

arate events, which are not occurring at the same time. This suggests that the artists were depicting a sequential narrative of the four activities.

It is **difficult**, if not impossible, to reconstruct the chronological sequence in which the four activities took place. There is, however, some evidence that burial was the most important activity. First, the stirrup-spout bottle with monkeys modeled on the stirrup spout (Figs. 11, 12) has both of the monkeys facing out over one side of the bottle. Presumably, this is the front and most important side, and it is significant that the burial activity is centered on this side of the chamber. Second, examination of the bottles indicates that the burial activity was drawn on the bottles first, at least in its overall layout, and then the assembly section was added. Only then were the sacrifice and conch-shell transfer activities painted, and they appear to have been condensed to fill the remaining available space. The dominance of the burial and assembly sections over sacrifice and conch-shell transfer is particularly noticeable in Figures 7 and 10, where the burial and assembly sections occupy about two-thirds of the available space.

If burial and assembly are the primary activities, how might they have been related to the conch-shell transfer and sacrifice activities shown on the opposite side of the bottle? One explanation is suggested by the writings of Father Antonio de la Calancha, a little-known Augustinian monk who lived on the north coast of Peru during the early part of the seventeenth century. He wrote an account of the native customs of that area, which was published in Spain in 1638. In that account, Calancha states that, prior to the arrival of Europeans, curers (*Oquetlupuc*) were public officials of high privilege, and were paid a regular wage by the state. If a curer lost a patient through ignorance, however, he was put to death by beating and stoning. His body was tied by a rope to that of his dead patient, and the latter was buried. The curer, however, was left above the ground to be eaten by birds (Calancha 1638: Book III, 556).

There is evidence that some of the curers in Moche

society were women<sup>9</sup> (Sharon and Donnan 1974:52–3), and thus it is possible that, in the Burial Theme representations, the nude female being consumed by birds was a doctor. Although there are no ropes shown tying the nude female to the person in the grave, the other details are so similar to those of the practice described by Calancha that it seems fair to suggest that the two may be related. But is it possible that the customs described by a Spanish chronicler in 1638 could relate back to an event that happened perhaps a thousand years earlier?

Recent archaeological work on the north coast of Peru has indicated that there was a continuing cultural tradition in this area that developed at least as early as the first century B.C. and continued into the Spanish colonial period. No major effect on the art style, architectural pattern, technology, or economic relationships can be attributed to any outside influence. Many of the customs, beliefs, and religious practices also appear to have been maintained without significant change.

It is known that oral traditions were kept by the Inca at the time of first European contact. "Mythology, legend, historical romance, and history were handed down from generation to generation in the form of long poems . . . which were learned word for word and repeated at public gatherings" (Rowe 1946: 321). We know that there was a similar practice among the native people of the north coast of Peru, and some scholars have even suggested that it was from the latter that the Inca obtained their interest in the preservation of oral traditions (*ibid.*: 202).

It should be pointed out that the Spanish chroniclers, who recorded these oral traditions during the early part of the colonial period, had little awareness

of the long sequence of cultural development in Peru, extending back thousands of years before European contact. Indeed, it was not until the beginnings of this century that an adequate picture of the chronology of cultures in the Andean area began to be assembled. Similarly, the native informants who related the oral traditions to the Spanish chroniclers were more than a generation removed from the events they were describing, and thus in many instances would have had little way of knowing exactly how far back in time a particular part of the story took place.

Since some of the information recorded by Father Calancha was derived from oral traditions that had survived from earlier times, it is quite possible that portions of the information contained in his chronicle had been carried on not just for the period immediately prior to Spanish contact, but rather for more than a thousand years! If so, it is interesting to consider what may have been the genesis of such a story. One possibility could be that, when a patient died, it was common practice to kill the doctor and have the doctor's body consumed by carnivorous birds. The five representations of the Burial Theme, however, are so similar to one another as to suggest that all are representing the same specific occurrence, rather than a generalized practice. It is more likely that we are witnessing events associated with the burial of one extremely important individual. On the occurrence of his death and burial, a female, presumably a doctor held responsible for the death, was sacrificed and her body was consumed by carnivorous birds. These events were commemorated by elaborate representations in ceramic art. They may have also entered into the oral tradition of the local people, who told and retold the story for generations.

If there is a correlation between the Calancha account and the Burial Theme representations, there is, of course, no way of knowing whether we are witnessing the burial of a real or a fictitious individual. Oral traditions frequently develop around entirely fictitious figures, which through time take on an air of reality and are believed in by the people of subsequent generations. Alternatively, oral traditions can

<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned that there is some archaeological evidence for the practice of killing females and placing their bodies in, or adjacent to, the grave pit. The famous "Tomb of the Warrior-Priest" contained two middle-aged females who had been crowded in at the head and foot of the large cane casket (Strong and Evans 1952: 152). Another tomb, which was similar to that of the "Warrior-Priest" had a female body on the surface of the ground above the burial pit (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 208).

develop around real people, and later be overlaid with so much conscious and unconscious fiction, and combined with so many alien elements, that the original facts cannot be recovered by any critical analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, whether the Burial Theme representations are showing an actual event or one that is fictitious, the event must have had a particular importance to the people living during the later part of

<sup>10</sup> For good discussions of the difficulties of using oral tradition to reconstruct historical events, see Forsdyke (1964) and de Vries (1963).

the Moche Kingdom. We witness the impressive burial of the principal figure through the art of the Moche. Whether real or fictitious, he must have held an important position to have received such a distinguished burial. The stories surrounding his burial—elaborate graveside rituals, offerings of rich burial goods, the transfer of conch shells, and perhaps the unusual circumstances of his death—apparently related an event that was important during Phase V, late in the Moche culture sequence. The six complex stirrup-spout bottles serve as testimony to the importance of this event.

## A D D E N D U M

SHORTLY AFTER THIS REPORT had been sent to the typesetter, a seventh bottle with a fineline representation of the Burial Theme was located. Since it clearly relates to the six examples discussed in the report, it was determined that a note of its existence and several photographs of it (Figs. 40–44) should be included in this publication. We are very grateful to Elizabeth Benson and Anne-Louise Schaffer for making it possible for us to add this section to the original manuscript.

This bottle has three features that are not found on any of the other six. The first is the hole that perforates the chamber from front to back at the equator. This hole was made before the bottle was fired, and was built into the chamber with a tube of clay connecting both openings so that liquid could be contained in the chamber without escaping through the holes.

The second unusual feature is the pair of low-relief figures placed immediately above the openings of the hole through the chamber. Each figure has a large rounded head with large eyes and mouth, a short body, and long arms and legs. Although it is not clear what the artist intended these figures to be, it is possible that they were meant to be frogs.

The third unusual feature is the fineline drawing that covers the bottom of the bottle (Fig. 44). The drawing illustrates an anthropomorphized bird-warrior holding a club and shield in his left hand and what appears to be a goblet in his right hand. In an arc around the head and shoulders, there is a series of clubs and shields similar to those painted on the stirrup spout of this bottle.

It should be noted that each of these three features—the hole through the chamber, the modeled figures in low relief, and the fineline drawing on the bottom of the chamber—are rarely found on Moche ceramic vessels, although a few rare examples of each do exist.

The **fineline** drawing of the Burial Theme on the chamber of this bottle conforms in nearly all respects to the other six examples, and is consistent with our interpretations as stated in the body of the report. There are, however, a few distinctive features that should be noted. The most significant anomaly can be seen in Figure 41. The artist apparently lacked sufficient space to depict all aspects of both assembly and conch transfer on this part of the chamber, and chose to omit Wrinkle Face from the lower part of the assembly section. He also omitted the double lines that divide assembly from conch transfer on each of

the other six bottles, although his use of the double lines elsewhere conforms to their use on the other examples. Another anomaly is the stafflike object held by Iguana in the lower part of the assembly section (Fig. 43); it is unique in having a face at the upper end. Finally, the oblong objects placed above the left side of the casket in the burial section (Fig. 43) are unusual in being placed horizontally instead of vertically.

With regard to chronological placement, this bottle would clearly be late in our sequence, and appears to fit between the bottle shown in Figures 7 and 8 and that shown in Figures 9 and 10. Such a placement is based largely on the inventory of grave goods, the manner of representing the body and headdress of Kneeler, and the scroll motif that decorates the ring base on this bottle.



Fig. 1 Stirrup-spout bottle. Private collection, Trujillo. Photo courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Fig. 2 Roll-out of bottle in Figure 1. Drawing by D. McClelland.



Fig. 3 Roll-out of bottle in Figure 4. Drawing by D. McClelland.

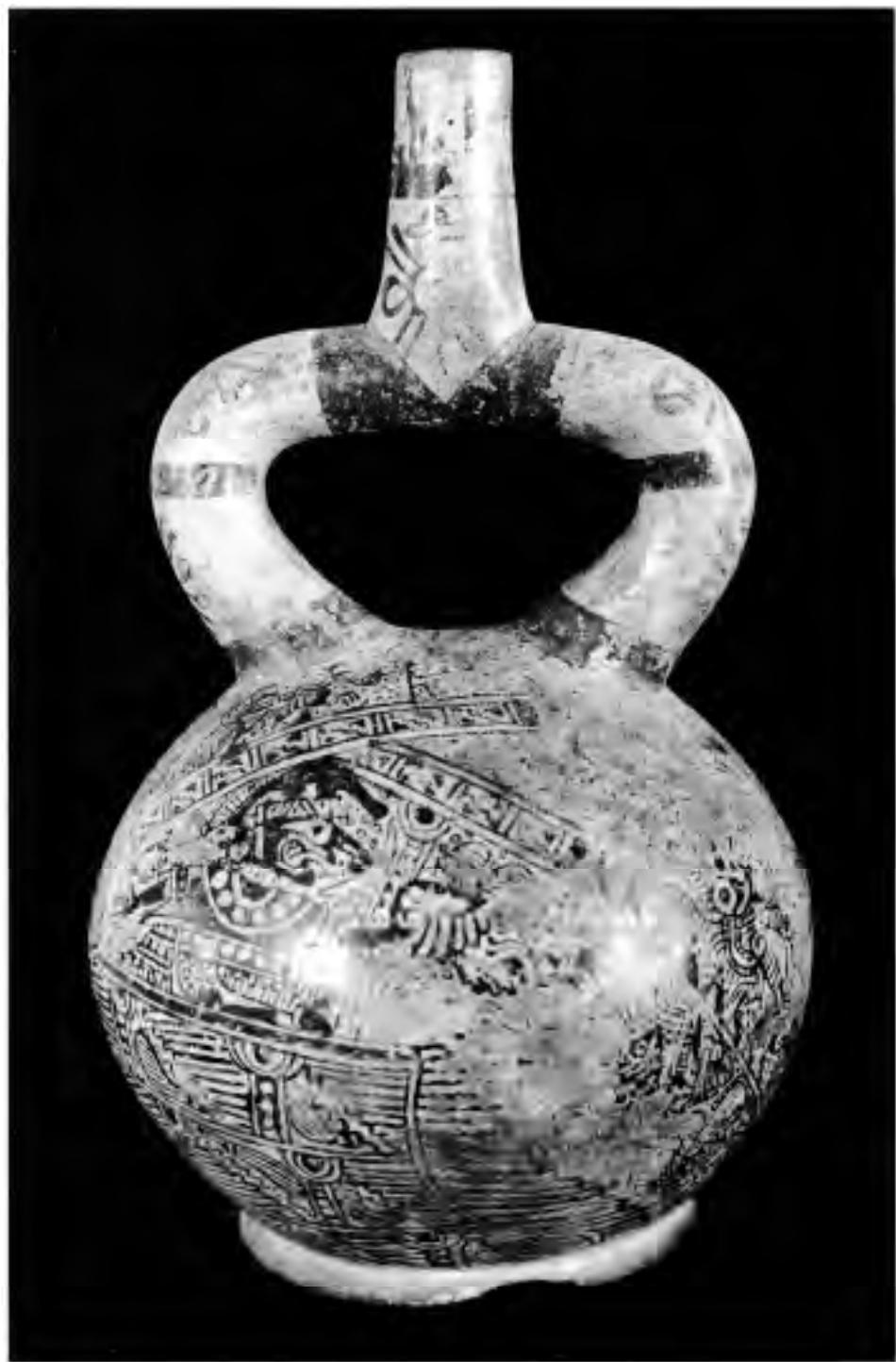


Fig. 4 Stirrup-spout bottle. Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima. Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 5 Stirrup-spout bottle. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.



Fig. 6 Roll-out of bottle in Figure 5. Drawing by P. Perlman and D. McClelland.



Fig. 7 Roll-out of bottle in Figure 8. Drawing by D. McClelland.



Fig. 8 Stirrup-spout bottle. Collection of Herbert Lucas, Brentwood, California. Photo by S. Einstein.



Fig. 9 Stirrup-spout bottle. Collection of Oscar Rodríguez Razzeto, Chepén Perú Photo by C. Domnan



Fig. 10 Roll-out of bottle in Figure 9. Drawing by D. McClelland.



Fig. 11 Front and back views of bottle in Figure 12. Drawings by D. McClelland.



Fig. 12 Stirrup-spout bottle. Private collection, Lima. Photo courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

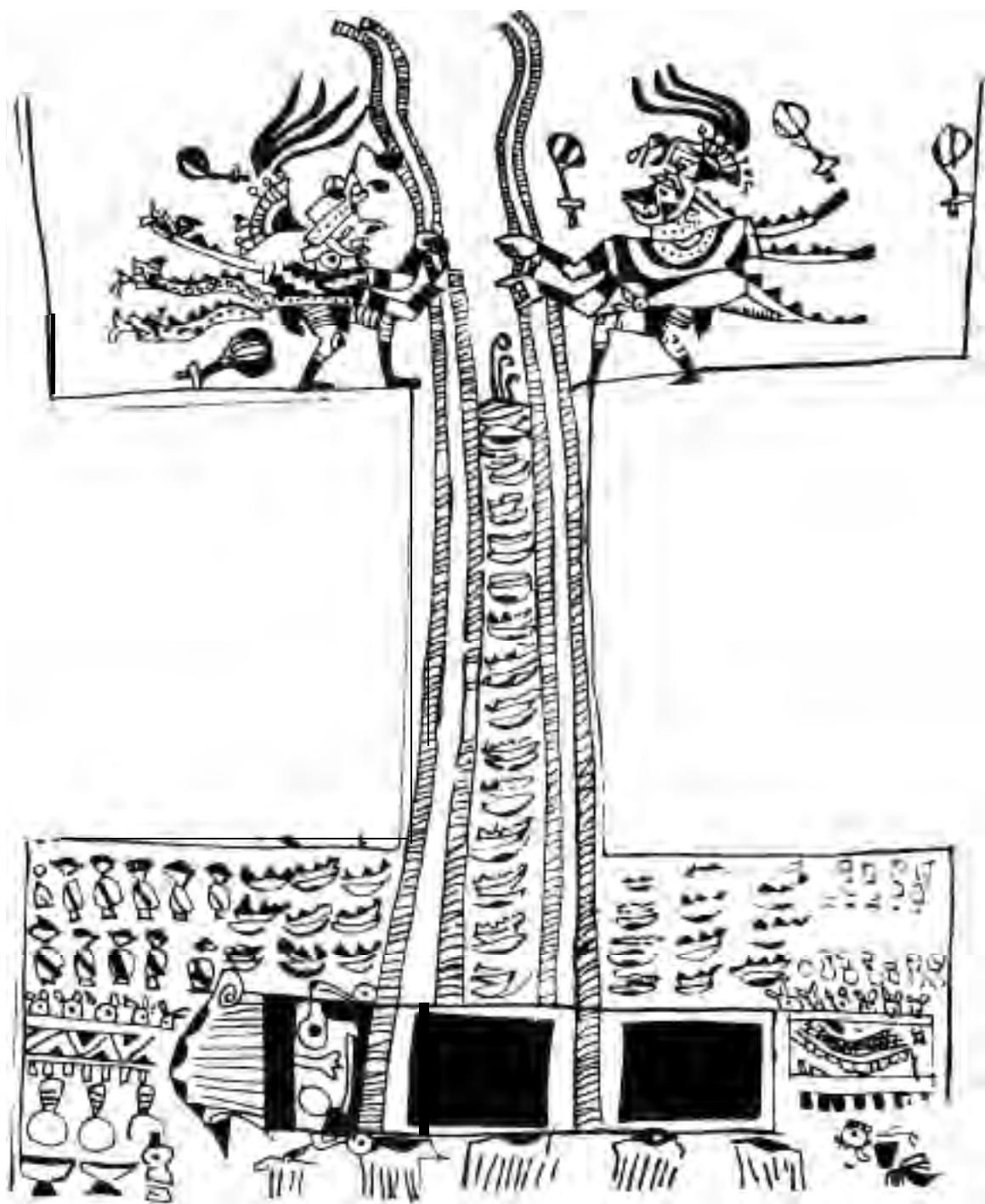


Fig. 13 Detail of the burial scene from Figure 2.

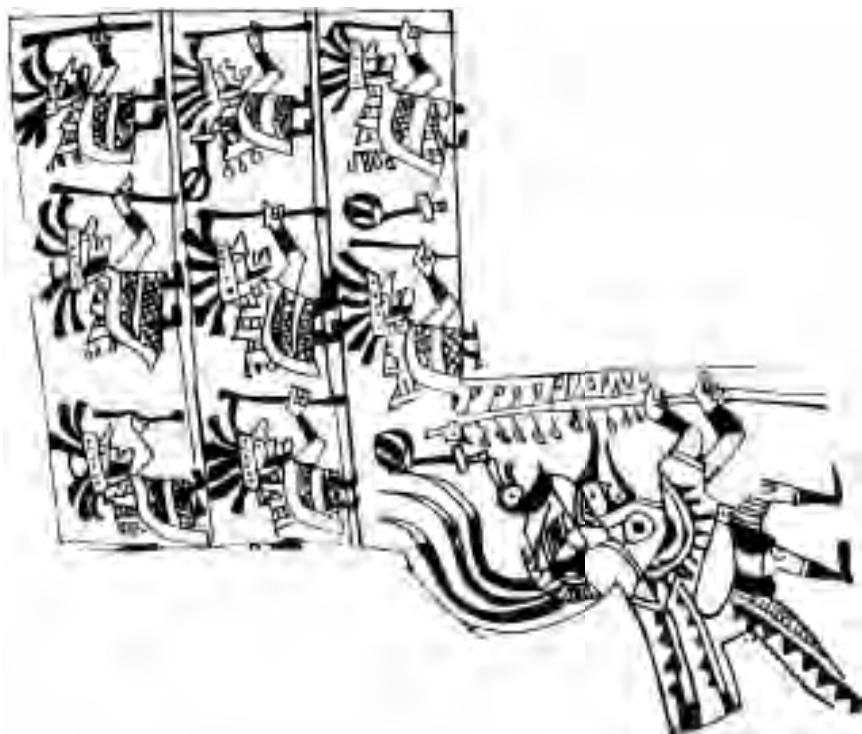


Fig. 14 Detail of the assembly scene from Figure 2.

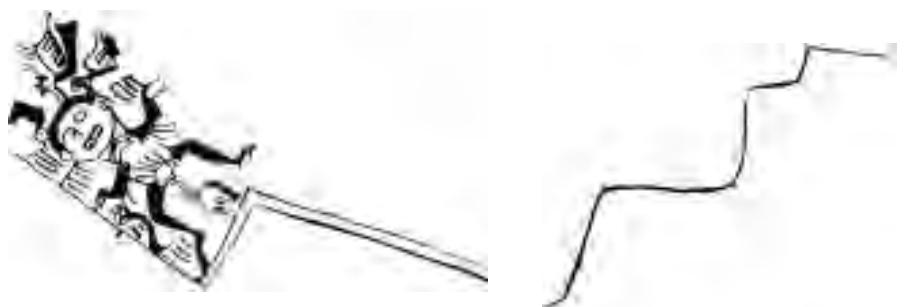
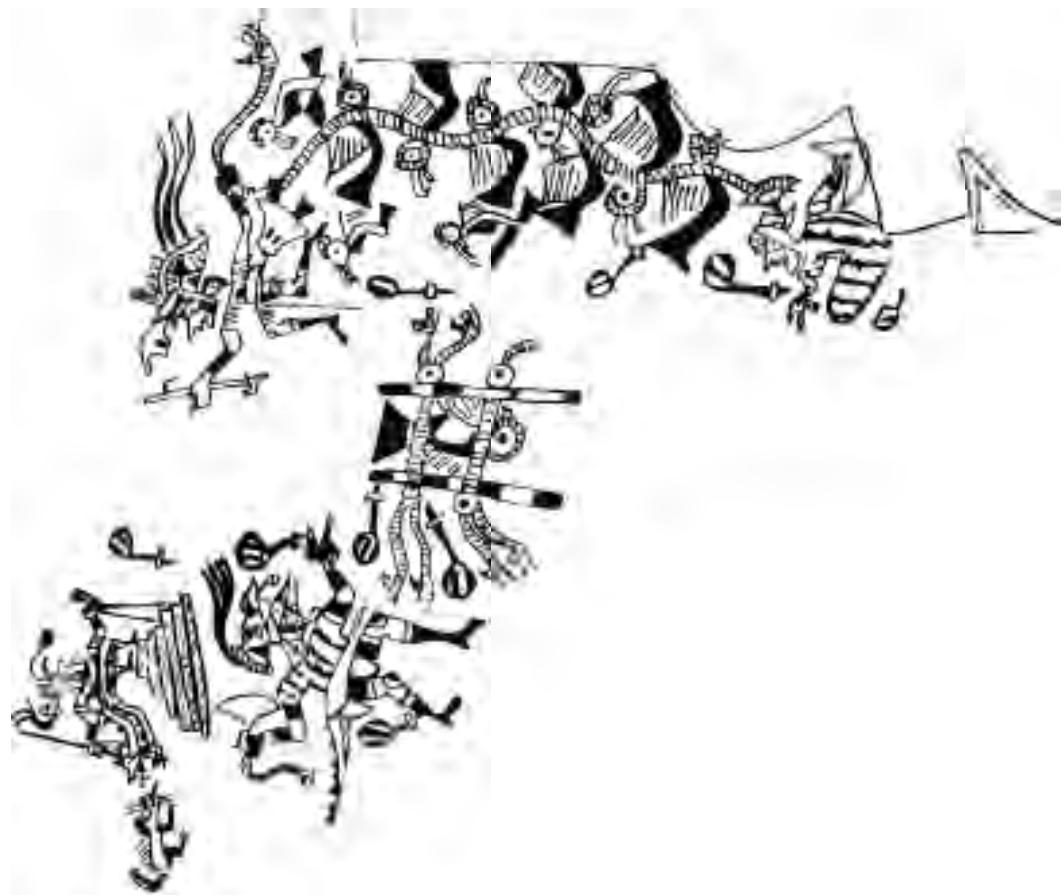


Fig. 15 Detail of the sacrifice scene from Figure 2.



Fig. 16 Detail of the conch-shell transfer scene from Figure 2.



Fig. 18 (left) Wide-mouthed jar.  
Museum für Völkerkunde, München.  
Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 19 (above) Wide-mouthed jar.  
Museum of the American Indian,  
Heye Foundation, New York.  
Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 17 (above) Stirrup-spout bottle. Art Institute of  
Chicago. Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 20 Hammered metal mask. Photo courtesy of Alan Lapiner.



Fig. 21 (above) Detail from vessel. The British Museum, London.  
Drawing by D. McClelland.

Fig. 22 (right) Stirrup-spout bottle. Art Institute of Chicago.  
Photo by R. Wooldard.

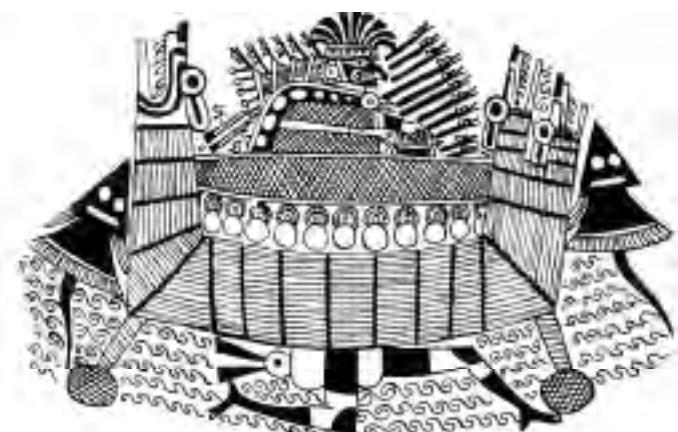


Fig. 23 (opposite, above, left) Detail from vessel (after Kutscher 1950: Fig. 69).

Fig. 24 (opposite, above, right) Stirrup-spout bottle. Museo de América, Madrid. Photo by C. Donnan.

Fig. 25 (opposite, below, right) Stirrup-spout bottle. Museo de Arqueología, Universidad Nacional de Trujillo, Trujillo. Photo by C. Donnan.

Fig. 26 (opposite, below, left) Stirrup-spout bottle. Museo de América, Madrid. Photo by C. Donnan.

Fig. 27 (right) Stirrup-spout bottle. Drawing by D. McClelland (after della Santa n.d.: front cover).

Fig. 28 (below) Roll-out of bottle in Figure 26. Drawing by A. Cordy-Collins.





Fig. 30 Vessel. Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. Photo by R. Woolard.



Fig. 29 Stirrup-spout bottle. Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 32 Right side view of bottle in Figure 31.  
Berkeley. Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 31 Stirrup-spout bottle, left side view. Private collection,  
Berkeley. Photo by C. Donnan.



Fig. 33 (opposite, above, left) Stirrup-spout bottle, front view. Collection of Herbert Lucas, Brentwood, California. Photo by S. Einstein.

Fig. 34 (opposite, above, right) Side view of bottle in Figure 33. Photo by S. Einstein.

Fig. 35 (opposite, below) Roll-out of bottle in Figures 33 and 34. Drawing by D. McClelland.

Fig. 36 (right) Stirrup-spout bottle. Museo Amano, Lima. Photo by A. Cordy-Collins.

Fig. 37 (below) Roll-out of bottle in Figure 36. Drawing by D. McClelland.



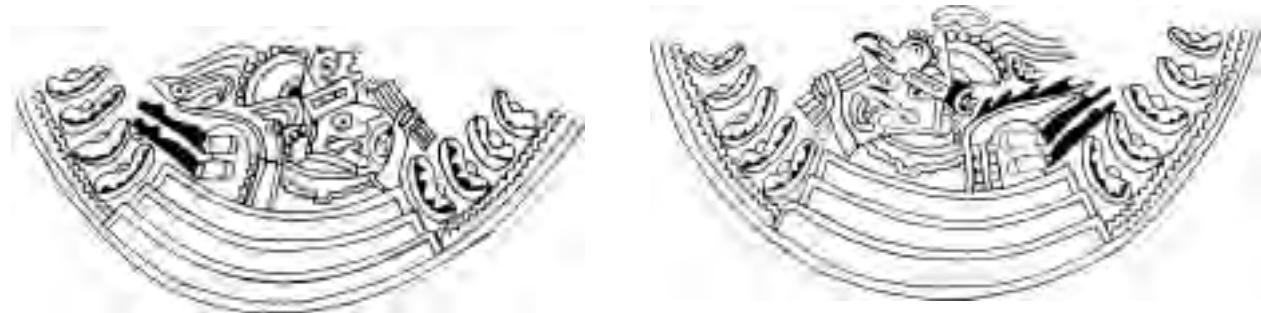


Fig. 38 (above) Stirrup-spout bottle. Private collection, Chiclayo, Perú. Photo by C. Donnan.

Fig. 39 (below) Roll-out of bottle in Figure 38. Drawing by D. McClelland.



Fig 40 Stirrup-spout bottle. Collection of Herbert Lucas, Brentwood, California. Photo by R. Woolard.



Fig. 41 Side view of bottle in Figure 40. Photo by R. Woolard.



Fig. 42 Back view of bottle in Figure 40. Photo by R. Woolard.



Fig. 43 Another side view of bottle in Figure 40. Photo by R. Woolard.



Fig. 44 Bottom of bottle in Figure 40. Photo by R. Woolard.

## Bibliography

CALANCHA, ANTONIO DE LA

1638 *Corónica moralizada del orden de San Avgystin en el Perv, con svcesos egenplares [sic] vistos en esta monarquia*. Pedro Lacavalleria, Barcelona.

CORDY-COLLINS, ALANA

1977 *The Moon Is a Boat!: A Study in Iconographic Methodology*. In *Pre-Columbian Art History: Selected Readings* (Alana Cordy-Collins and Jean Stern, eds.), pp. 421–434. Peek Publications, Palo Alto.  
n.d. *The Tule Boat Theme in Moche Art: A Problem in Ancient Peruvian Iconography*. Master's thesis, Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1972.

DELLA SANTA, ELISABETH

n.d. *La collection de Vases Mochicas des Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire*. Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Bruxelles.

DONNAN, CHRISTOPHER B.

1975 *The Thematic Approach to Moche Iconography*. *Journal of Latin American Lore*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 147–162. Latin American Center, University of California, Los Angeles.  
1976 *Moche Art and Iconography*. Latin American Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles.

DONNAN, CHRISTOPHER B., and CAROL J.

MACKEY

1978 *Ancient burial patterns of the Moche Valley, Peru*. University of Texas Press, Austin and London.

FORSDYKE, [EDGAR] JOHN

1964 *Greece before Homer: Ancient Chronology and Mythology*. W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., New York.

KUTSCHER, GERDT

1950 *Chimu: Eine altindianische Hochkultur*. Verlag Gebr. Mann, Berlin.

LAVALLÉE, DANIÈLE

1970 *Les Représentations Animales dans la Céramique Mochica*. Université de Paris, Mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, IV. Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

PAULSEN, ALLISON C.

1974 *The Thorny Oyster and the Voice of God: Spondylus and Strombus in Andean Prehistory*. *American Antiquity*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 597–607. Society for American Archaeology, Washington.

ROWE, JOHN HOWLAND

1942 *A New Pottery Style from the Department of Piura, Peru*. *Notes on Middle American Archaeology and Ethnology*, vol. 1, no. 8, pp. 30–34. Carnegie Institution of Washington, Division of Historical Research, Cambridge.

1946 *Inca Culture at the Time of the Spanish Conquest*. In *Handbook of South American Indians* (Julian H. Steward, ed.), vol. 2, pp. 183–330. Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 143. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington.

SHARON, DOUGLAS, and CHRISTOPHER B. DONNAN

1974 *Shamanism in Moche Iconography*. In *Ethnoarchaeology* (Christopher B. Donnan and C. William Clellow, Jr., eds.), pp. 49–77. Archaeological Survey, Monograph IV. Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles.

STRONG, WILLIAM DUNCAN, and CLIFFORD

EVANS, JR.

1952 *Cultural Stratigraphy in the Virú Valley, Northern Peru: The Formative and Florentine Epochs*. *Columbia Studies in Archeology and Ethnology*, vol. IV. Columbia University Press, New York.

VRIES, JAN DE

1963 *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*. (Trans. by B. J. Timmer.) Oxford University Press, London and New York.