



Anthropomorphic Jar

Date

100 AD- 600AD

Medium

Blackware

Description

Fired blackware, burnished, chipped lip. ____ This burnished blackware Moche human effigy face-neck jar of a man carrying funerary offerings from the north coast of Peru has a flaring spout and rounded vessel body modeled roughly into a human form with arms bent at the elbows. The human figure has finely detailed facial scarification (possibly tattoos), carries a bundle on its

back, and holds a stirrup-spout vessel in its right hand, a dipper, possibly in the form of a crookneck squash or gourd, in its left hand, a woven mat (possibly a corn cob) under the right arm, and a kero (flared drinking vessel) under the left arm. The figure wears a cloth headdress with straps tied under the chin and a twisted band across the forehead, a long-sleeved tunic, and a loincloth. The figure also has legs and feet with toes roughly indicated. The crookneck squash or gourd likely belongs to the species *Cucurbita moschata*, whose remains have been identified from archaeological sites in the region and which has been depicted in other pottery from this culture (Whitaker and Cutler 1967: "Pottery and *Cucurbita* Species," *American Antiquity* 32 (2): 225-226). More typically Moche-style red and white stirrup-spout bottles with similar themes of people carrying nearly identical funerary offerings are found in Bourget 2006, p. 59 (figures 1.55 and 1.56). Moche vessels generally have heads which are angled slightly upward and which are larger in proportion to the rest of the vessel body, but this vessel's offerings, clothing, and bundle bindings are typical of Moche bottles. The function of pre-Columbian ceramic vessels is not easy to ascertain. On the one hand, the vessels in the Johnson Museum's collection are lovely pieces of art, often with detailed imagery which makes their appearance of interest apart from any mundane functionality. On the other hand, these lovely vessels were still created as vessels rather than as figures, so presumably their functional aspect was important to the maker. Because these pieces of pottery were deposited in graves, the question also arises as to whether or not similar items were used on a daily basis. Were these vessels made for the dead, fancy grave goods with specific religious or mythical imagery, or were they treasured possessions used in life? Many of the ceramics found in the Johnson Museum are highly decorated, but it should be remembered that in any archaeological site, these fancy vessels are only a small fraction of all the pottery found. Although the vast majority of pottery made in the past was functional ware used to cook, store, or serve foods, more elaborate pieces served the additional purpose of conveying social information. Just as your grandmother might have kept her fancy china on display in a

cabinet to show it off to friends and family, it appears that pre-Columbian people may have similarly had special items for display in their homes. According to the earliest chroniclers after the Spanish conquest, people put pottery on display in their homes which reflected what they did to make a living; for example, fishermen displayed pots with sharks in their homes, while hunters displayed pots with deer and other land animals. Perhaps the many pots made in the shape of common fruits and vegetables, such as squash and corn, were displayed in the homes of farmers. Moche pottery depicts a series of recurrent themes, and although each individual vessel may depict only one character, they may have served as mnemonic devices somewhat analogous to that of stained glass windows in a Christian church, where often only a single recognizable character from a familiar story is represented, with the expectation that the viewer will fill in the rest of the story from memory. In the same way, it appears that viewing specific images from the Moche "presentation theme" or warrior saga (also known as the sacrifice theme) may have reminded viewers of a specific story whose details are depicted (rarely) as a whole or (more usually) only in part on Moche pottery and textiles. Bottles of either the stirrup-spout type, straight-spout type, or double-spout-and-bridge type may have been used to carry and serve liquids, since the narrow-necked bottle shape would have reduced losses from accidental spills and evaporation. Although water is vital in desert environments such as those found in many parts of the Andes, alcoholic beverages such as beer are universally popular. Recent analyses of residues from Peruvian bottles and jars suggest that these vessels were used to serve corn (maize) beer or chicha. Chicha was both an everyday beverage, made in households for family consumption, and an essential element in ritual and social interactions. Alcoholic beverages may be made from a wide variety of starchy foods, but pre-Columbian beer was most frequently made from corn or maize (*Zea mays*). The traditional method of making beer involves spitting into a large vat or olla of starchy corn and water mixture, after which the enzyme amylase (found in human saliva) begins converting the starch in the corn into sugars, some of which subsequently ferment into alcohol. Beer was an important part of rituals in the Andes at European contact, and is still used by traditional people to make offerings to the mother earth spirit or Pachamama. Beer was undoubtedly served in wooden, ceramic, or gourd cups or beakers, but may also have been put into stirrup-spout (and other) bottles, especially when carried any distance, since the narrow-necked bottle shape would have reduced losses from accidental spills and evaporation. Moche (200 BC to AD 700) Arguably one of the finest technological manifestations of the pre-Columbian potter's art, Moche ceramics have charmed generations of archaeologists and collectors with their finely executed painting and exquisite sculptural forms. Moche (formerly known as Mochica) pottery is characterized by red painting executed on a white or cream-colored slip ground. Moche stirrup-spout bottles represent a wide variety of sculptural forms, including human portraits, animal effigies, domestic scenes, or graphic human sexuality. The core area of Moche cultural influence extended from Lambayeque in the north to Nepeña in the south, and likely reflects militaristic conquest and political control by a state-level polity centered in the Moche Valley. The Moche united many coastal groups, built and controlled extensive irrigation networks, and produced ceramic vessels using molds, a technological innovation which enabled the production of vast numbers of highly detailed ceramics, including portrait head vessels so finely detailed that individual faces can be recognized. Fineline paintings depict detailed, elaborate scenes now thought to be part of the "warrior sacrifice" or "presentation theme" story central to the Moche religion. Moche metalwork also achieved remarkable levels of sophistication, with precious stones inlaid in ornaments made of copper, silver, and

gold alloys. Suggestions for further reading about Moche: Bankes, George (1980): "Moche Pottery from Peru." British Museum: London. Short, pamphlet-length booklet in English with excellent discussion of Moche pottery technology and vessel forms. Bawden, Garth (1996): "The Moche." Blackwell: Cambridge, MA. Bourget, Steve (2006): "Sex, Death, and Sacrifice in Moche Religion and Visual Culture." University of Texas Press: Austin.

Dimensions

8 1/4 x 5 3/4 x 5 inches (21 x 14.6 x 12.7 cm)