



Crouching Feline Effigy Jar

Date

ca. 1300-1470 AD

Medium

Blackware

Description

Middle Chimú stirrup-spout vessel of burnished blackware, slipped, with the body of the jar in the form of a crouching jaguar or puma. The rim of spout has small chips, and body of vessel has one small chip but otherwise condition is good. Cats of all sorts are common motifs on Peruvian

ceramics from all time periods; the snarling feline is a symbol of power and prestige. For a series of nearly identical feline bottles, see page 381 in Martínez, Cruz (1986): *Cerámica Prehispánica Norperuana: Estudio de la Cerámica Chimú de la Colección del Museo de América de Madrid*. BAR International Series 323: Oxford. Also see page 61, #85, in Alan Sawyer's *Ancient Peruvian Ceramics* (1966) for a similar vessel.

_____ This Middle Chimú stirrup-spout bottle is made of burnished blackware, with the body of the jar in the form of a crouching jaguar or puma. Cats of all sorts are common motifs on Peruvian ceramics from all time periods; the snarling feline is a symbol of power and prestige. For a series of nearly identical feline bottles, see page 381 in Martínez, Cruz (1986): *Cerámica Prehispánica Norperuana: Estudio de la Cerámica Chimú de la Colección del Museo de América de Madrid*. BAR International Series 323: Oxford. Also see page 61, #85, in Alan Sawyer's *Ancient Peruvian Ceramics* (1966) for a similar vessel. Feline (or cat) imagery was commonly employed on a wide range of Pre-Columbian artifacts, including pottery, textiles, metalwork, and even in site planning (the archaeological ruins on the slopes of Mount Sangay, Ecuador, consist of tolas mounds arranged in the shape of a jaguar, and the Inca capital city of Cuzco, Peru, was laid out in the form of a puma). Recognizable by a typically snarling face with prominent fangs, cat-like elements are often blended with human characteristics as well as features from other animals such as snakes and birds to form a variety of fantasy creatures, including "monsters" and "dragons". Jaguars are the largest and strongest spotted cats in the Americas, and have had a profound influence on prehistoric art. Because jaguars are equally at home in trees and on land, they are seen as mediators between ground-dwelling humans and the divine; deities communicate to the world of mortal men through the jaguar. Both studies of modern people from lowland South America and writings from shortly after the Spanish Conquest emphasize the close association of shamans with jaguar spirits and the recurrent themes of jaguars as procreators, sexual unions with jaguars, jaguar-men and jaguar clans. Jaguars are usually depicted with curly tails in Pre-Columbian art. For more information, please see *The Cult of the Feline* (1972), edited by Elizabeth P. Benson, Dumbarton Oaks: Washington, DC. Blackware is a generic term used to describe the dark-colored ceramics fired in a reducing atmosphere,

that is, without oxygen. A reducing atmosphere is produced in several different ways, but usually involves smothering the fire just enough to remove excess oxygen while still allowing it to burn hot enough to successfully fire the pottery. Unlike ceramics fired in an oxidizing atmosphere with plenty of oxygen, which may be various shades ranging from creamy buff to orange or red depending on the color of the clays used, ceramics fired in a reducing atmosphere will be gray or black in color. The process used to produce blackware is also called smudge-firing. Burnishing is the process of producing ceramics with a shiny surface without using a glaze. To produce burnished surfaces, potters must wait until the ceramics are nearly dry, and then must rub the surface to align the surface clay particles with a smooth object, usually a round, flat-sided stone. Sometimes only certain areas of a pot or a figure are burnished, since the contrast between glossy burnished surfaces and matte unburnished areas can produce a variety of decorative effects. What was this used for? 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? 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. Pre-Columbian Drinks-Beer

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. Chimú (AD 900-1470) The Chimú Empire, or Kingdom of Chimor, was established in the Tenth Century in the Moche Valley on the north coast of present-day Peru. By 1400 AD, the Chimú ruled an empire 800 miles long, encompassing the fertile, agriculturally productive irrigated coastal valleys stretching from Tumbes to Chillón. The imperial capital of Chan Chan, located near the modern city of Trujillo, covered 20 square kilometers, housed a population of 50,000 to 100,000 people, and included pyramids, residences, markets, workshops, reservoirs, storehouses, gardens, and cemeteries. Chimú architecture is made of adobe decorated with geometrically patterned mosaics or molded bas-reliefs of stylized animals, birds, and mythological figures. Chimú artisans used similar decorative elements in their pottery, metal ornaments, and finely detailed textiles,

many of which are embellished with ornate featherwork. Chimú pottery was mass-produced in molds by craft specialists and is typically highly burnished blackware, with a wide variety of decorative motifs including birds, fish, animals, fruits and vegetables, and people. The most common shape was the stirrup-spout bottle, which often has a small monkey figure located on the spout. After the Inca conquest of Chimor in 1470, during the reign of Pachacutec Inca Yupanqui, Chimú vessels tend to have broad, flaring spouts similar to those on Inca aryballoid jars. Chimú-Inca vessels often have shapes similar to the Inca aryballos or urpu, but are made of typically Chimú blackware and are decorated in characteristically Chimú style. Suggestions for Further Reading about Chimú: Cabello, Paz and Cruz Martínez (1992): Catálogo de la Colección Arqueológica Norperuana del Museo Casa de Colondel Cabildo Insular de la Gomera. Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes Gobierno de Canarias: Tenerife. Short, pamphlet-length Spanish language text includes Sicán and Chimú objects. Cornejo B., Luis E. and Carole Sinclair A. (Eds.) (2005): Chimú: Laberintos de un Traje Sagrado/Labyrinths of a Sacred Costume, Museo Chileno de Arte Precolombino : Santiago. Text in both Spanish and English; excellent review of Chimú textiles. Martínez, Cruz (1986): Cerámica Prehispánica Norperuana: Estudio de al Cerámica Chimú de la Colección del Museo de América de Madrid. BAR International Series 323: Oxford. Text in Spanish; many vessels illustrated in black and white; compendium of Chimú ceramics with Sicán vessels mixed in. Moseley, Michael E. and Alana Cordy-Collins, Eds. (1990): The Northern Dynasties: Kingship and Statecraft in Chimor : a Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks 12th and 13th October 1985. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection: Washington, DC.

Dimensions

Height: 8 inches (20.3 cm)