



Animal Effigy Head Pot

Date

ca. 1300-1470

Medium

Blackware

Description

Burnished Chimú blackware pot with flared spout, animal effigy head (possible camelid?) and blind spout or tail on shoulders of vessel, and two small round handles at base of spout. Body of vessel is squat and globular. Chips along edge of rim, otherwise good condition.

_____ This burnished Chimú blackware animal effigy vessel has a flared spout, an animal head (possibly a fox or a camelid), a blind spout or tail on the vessel shoulder, and two small round handles at the base of the spout. The body of the vessel is squat and globular. Zoomorphic (animal) motifs were commonly employed on a wide range of Pre-Columbian artifacts, including pottery, textiles, and metalwork. Pre-Colombian works of art depict both wild and domesticated animals, creatures commonly encountered in everyday life, and creatures found rarely--or not at all--in the natural world. Aspects of many different animals can be found in Pre-Colombian art, often mixed with human attributes in what may appear to us to be startling and fantastic combinations. Many works of art feature animals such as the great cats (jaguars or pumas), which possessed great spiritual power and were key elements of Pre-Colombian religious traditions. Foxes (*Dusicyon culpaeus*) are small predators, still found in the Andes. They are often associated with agriculture. During Inca times, fox-skin headdresses were worn by people guarding the agricultural fields. Llamas and the closely related alpacas were the largest domesticated animals in the Andes. Llamas were the principal beast of burden, transporting goods in caravans over long distances, while alpacas were prized for their soft wool, which was woven into the finest textiles. Llamas are hardy creatures able to survive on poor forage, and they were also an important source of meat and fiber (for the coarser textiles such as blankets). Llama fetuses were prized for their role in religious ceremonies; for example, they have continued to be an important source of offerings to the mountain gods into modern times. None of the domesticated camelids were common on the coast, since they prefer a cooler mountain climate (and vegetation). 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? 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 (fancy) 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. 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

6 1/2 x 6 3/4 inches (16.5 x 17.1 cm)