



Face-Neck Jar

Date

ca. 100-600 AD

Medium

Redware

Description

Redware Moche human face-neck jar. Figure wears headdress and has detailed hair or cloth headcovering down back, protruding out from under hat. Figure also wears a stole or two long thin strips dangling from either side of neck, with animal heads on ends. Body of vessel is ovoid, with two rounded bulges on each side in the general vicinity of human shoulders and arms. Similar (but taller) bulges on other vessels represent mountain peaks.

Vessel is intact but has chips along rim and nose; one "bulge" area is cracked. _____ This redware Moche human face-neck effigy jar shows stylistic similarities with Middle Horizon Wari ceramics, so it probably dates from late in the Moche sequence. The figure wears a headdress and has detailed hair or a cloth headcovering down its back, protruding out from under the hat. The figure also wears a stole or two long thin strips dangling from either side of its neck, with animal heads on the ends. The body of the vessel is ovoid, with two rounded bulges on each side in the general vicinity of human shoulders and arms. Similar (but taller) bulges on other vessels represent mountain peaks, whose spirits ("Apus") were venerated as gods because their snow-capped peaks are the source of the life-giving rivers flowing through the otherwise barren desert of coastal Peru. Peruvian Geography The modern country of Peru contains three very different climate zones: the arid west coast, the high mountainous sierra, and the eastern rainforest selva. The coastal desert is one of the driest deserts in the world; in an ordinary year, virtually no rain falls in many areas, and agriculture can only be supported by irrigation in some parts of the 50 river valleys which may carry water from the mountains to the sea. The rugged terrain of the highlands, much better-watered than land along the coast, has traditionally supported the bulk of the area's population despite the challenges of living at high altitude. The eastern rainforest has traditionally been the center of production for tropical fruits and other crops such as coca. Extensive trade between the different ecological zones was widespread in prehistoric times and has continued to the present day. Because wheeled vehicles were impractical along the rugged roads traversing the Andes Mountains, goods were transported using llama caravans or were carried on the backs of human porters in large baskets or bundles. 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. 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 Vessel Function-Pottery Tells A Story

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. When a viewer in our culture sees an image of Darth Vader, the Star Wars story will come to mind. 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.

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.

Moche (200 BC- 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, Mass. Bourget, Steve (2006) Sex, Death, and Sacrifice in Moche Religion and Visual Culture, University of Texas Press: Austin. Donnan, Christopher B. (2004): Moche Portraits from Ancient Peru. University of Texas Press: Austin. Donnan, Christopher B., and Donna McClelland (2000): Moche Fineline Painting: Its Evolution and Its Artists. UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History: Los Angeles. Excellent reference with spout shapes by phase on p. 21, instructions for making stirrup-spout vessels on pp. 44-45, and attributions of various vessels to work by specific painters.

Dimensions

5 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches (14.6 x 11.4 cm)