



Effigy Jar with Man and Bird

Date

ca. 100-700 AD

Medium

Redware

Description

Redware Moche vase with seated male figure flanked by two smaller figures, one broken off, the other a bird. Central figure wears a crested headdress with a feline face, collar, bracelets, and belt. A small animal (feline?) crouches at the foot of the central figure below the bird. White paint over red slip. Severely damaged with extensive restoration. Ai-Apaec iconography. _____

This redware Moche vessel has a seated male figure flanked by two smaller figures, one broken off, the other a

bird. The central figure wears a crested headdress with a feline face, collar, bracelets, and belt. A small animal, possibly a feline, crouches at the foot of the central figure below the bird. The fanged human figure may represent Ai-Apaec, a Moche god who is thought to have been the son of the supreme deity or mountain god, since he is often pictured on vessels seated below mountain peaks. 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. In Central America and in northern South America, the animal triad of harpy eagle, jaguar, and cayman (similar to an alligator or crocodile) was cosmologically important. Birds are creatures of the air, while caymans are creatures of the water; jaguars can move between the trees, water, and ground and thus serve to mediate the supernatural forces found on land, air and water. Birds and felines are among the most common shamanic helper spirits. Birds are often symbolic of the spirit flight taken by a shaman or religious specialist during a vision quest, when the shaman is said to transform into a bird in order to transcend the material world and communicate with ancestor spirits. Often aided by hallucinogenic drugs, a shaman's spirit would fly out from his body in search of knowledge and spiritual fulfillment. Birds of all sorts are commonly depicted on Pre-Columbian works of art. Some birds, such as the harpy eagle, are said to "possess all the wisdom of the spirits." Brightly-colored feathers were often added to clothing both for decoration and to symbolize shamanic transformation during vision quests and

/or chiefly wisdom. 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.

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

9 1/2 x 6 inches (24.1 x 15.2 cm)