



Double-Chambered Whistling Seal Pot

Date

ca. 1300-1470

Medium

Burnished blackware ceramic

Description

Double-chambered Chimu whistling pot in the form of a seal or sea lion with an upturned, snarling face. Two large, rounded chambers are conjoined below, with a strap

handle connecting the slightly flared spout above the rear chamber to the neck of the animal figure above the front chamber. Vessel chambers have raised relief animal legs and paws or flippers. Burnished blackware, in excellent condition. The ear flaps and four flippers portrayed on this vessel almost certainly identify the pinniped as belonging to one of the two species common to the coast of Peru, the South American fur seal (*Otaria flavescens*) or the South American sea lion (*Arctocephalus australis*). The larger South American sea lion (*Otaria byronia* or *Otaria flavescens*) prefers sandy beaches while the more gracile South American fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*) is more likely to be found near rocky outcrops. Both species are members of the Otariidae or "eared seals," which unlike the true seals have exterior ear flaps and walk on land using all four flippers. Seals and sea lions prey upon the abundant fish which thrive in the cold waters of the Humboldt current along the west coast of South America, and are in turn preyed upon by killer whales. As predators, seals and sea lions compete directly with people for available fish, with sea lions often following boats and ships. These animals are often accused by fishermen of fouling their nets and stealing their fish. Populations of seals and sea lions may drop dramatically in tandem with declining fish populations during severe El Niño events. Bezoars, the stones found in the stomachs of seals and sea lions, are prized by shamans in the Andes for their curative properties in healing rituals.

_____ Whistle Pots Whistle pots get their name from the sound they make when air is blown into them or when liquids move around inside them, for example from one side to another in the case of a double-chambered whistling pot. Whistling sounds are associated with rainfall and renewal--an important theme for agricultural people living in the barren desert of coastal Peru. Although they are not used as musical instruments per se, their noisemaking character is an integral part of a whistle pot's function, since they are complicated to manufacture. In order to create a whistling mechanism, the finial (or head) on the false spout of a double-spouted vessel is formed around a hollow clay ball, leaving an air space whose shape and size influences the sound produced by the vessel. Sea Lions and Seals Two species of pinnipeds are common along the Peruvian coast. The larger South American sea lion (*Otaria byronia* or *Otaria flavescens*) prefers sandy beaches while the more gracile South American fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*) is more likely to be found near rocky outcrops. Both species are members of the Otariidae or "eared seals," which unlike the true seals have exterior ear flaps and walk on land using all four flippers.

Seals and sea lions prey upon the abundant fish which thrive in the cold waters of the Humboldt current along the west coast of South America, and are in turn preyed upon by killer whales. As predators, seals and sea lions compete directly with people for available fish, with sea lions often following boats and ships. These animals are often accused by fishermen of fouling their nets and stealing their fish. Seals and sea lions were hunted for food, fat, and hides; oil made from their fat was used in lamps and torches, while their hides were used to make inflated rafts, particularly on the south coast. Bezoars, the stones found in the stomachs of seals and sea lions, are prized by shamans in the Andes for their curative properties in healing rituals. Populations of seals and sea lions may drop dramatically in tandem with declining fish populations during severe El Niño events.

Maritime Resources The sea has always been important in the economy of coastal Peru. The west coast of South America is one of the richest fisheries in the world thanks to the cold upwelling of nutrient-rich waters known as the Humboldt Current. These cold waters support an abundant population of plankton, which in turn supports large fish populations and those preying on fish, including birds, sea mammals such as sea lions and whales, and human fishermen. Although we usually think of maritime resources as sources of human food, such as fish and shellfish, even the guano or droppings left by seabirds has an important use as fertilizer for crops.

El Niño/Southern Oscillation Although the rich waters of the Humboldt Current provide roughly 20% of the world's fish in normal years, fish populations are dramatically affected by the changes in water temperatures and weather patterns known as El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events. During an El Niño year, the typically cold waters warm up, leading to species changes and catastrophic crashes in sea life. Consequences for those who prey on sea creatures (such as birds and people) can be dire, as their normal source of food vanishes. For people, the reduced level of maritime resources may be offset or worsened by the additional rainfall which typically falls in the coastal desert during an El Niño year. If the rains are light, then the increase in wild and cultivated plant foods may be enough to enable a group to survive without too much stress. However, El Niño can bring devastating rains which wash away land-based resources, leading to widespread destruction and famine. Particularly severe El Niño events have been blamed for destroying several pre-Columbian Peruvian cultures, including the Moche on the north coast and the Chiribaya on the south coast.

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 all be gray or black in color.

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.

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 la 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

8 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches (21.6 x 24.1 cm)