Basic Detail Report

Ai-apaec Jar

Date

ca. 100-600 AD

Medium

Redware

Description

Moche vessel in the form of a fanged central figure(Ai-apaec deity) holding snakes with feline heads. Fired clay, redware with white paint. Vessel is whole except for chips missing from rim, but has been broken and badly restored. _____ This Moche vessel is made in the form of a fanged central Ai-apaec deity figure holding snakes with feline heads. Ai-apaec was the son of the aloof supreme deity or mountain god, and is often depicted seated under the peaks of the mountains, as in this vessel. The rounded peak-like protruberances at the sides of the vessel, near the figure's arms, represent these mountain peaks. Ai-apaec is generally pictured with fangs, a supernatural characteristic shared with the great cats (felines and pumas). 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. 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. 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 portaits, 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

10 x 9 inches (25.4 x 22.9 cm)