

REINTERPRETING MOCHE WARFARE: REGIONALITY AND MULTIPLE IDEOLOGIES IN MOCHE FINELINE PAINTED IMAGERY

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Recent advances in the physical analysis of human remains, models of political organization, as well as the comparison of architectural designs provide exciting new avenues for examining Moche warfare. Previous studies of Moche warfare that relied largely on the interpretation of the visual record found on decorated portable objects led to contrasting opinions over the ritual versus secular nature of Moche (North Coast, Peru, 200–900 CE) warfare practices.¹ This essay contributes to the understanding of Moche culture through a reexamination of warfare imagery by taking into account some of the revelations that have taken place over the past decade. By complementing a reinterpretation of fineline painted decorations in regards to newly identified regional substyles of Moche art, with data from physical anthropological investigations, models of political organization, as well as the comparison of architectural designs, I find there to be overwhelming evidence that real battles were indeed fought by this ancient group.

MOCHE IDEOLOGY

The Moche, who settled the North Coast of Peru around 100 CE and remained dominant until about 900 CE, produced exquisite art works ranging from finely made gold and silver jewelry, to wall-sized murals of painted plaster. Moche artists also developed a tradition of skillfully decorated ceramics that range from vessels modeled to realistically represent real life objects such as human portrait heads and life-like figurines of local fauna, to superbly painted mythical narrative scenes in a technique referred to as “fineline painting.” It is widely believed that the manipulation and control of an ideological program was one of the basic power strategies utilized by Moche leaders.² By materializing ideology into tangible forms or experiential events, the governing regime was able to formulate a belief system that could not be easily replicated or replaced by their rivals. The ability to obtain and coordinate large amounts of labor and exploit exotic resources was thus propagated by Moche elites through the erection of monumental architecture, the production of portable objects (including

fineline painted ceramics) and the periodic enactment of rituals. Fineline painted ceramics are some of the most enduring and readily accessible manifestations of Moche ideology. Painted scenes depicting symbols of the state, sometimes in the form of elaborate ceremonies and mythological events dominate the subjects of Moche artistic motifs. Although there are several examples of domestic activities represented that appear to be of a secular nature, most decorations have a mythical and/or religious character and depict supernatural and human figures involved in ceremonial events. Christopher Donnan observed that over sixty percent of all Moche artistic decorations relate to symbols of what he described as the "Moche state religion."³

The circumstances of the production of fineline painted ceramics provide support to the notion that the creation of these images was controlled by the ruling regime. The most impressive evidence that fineline painted ceramics were produced under the auspices of elite rulers comes from the discovery of a pottery workshop in the heart of the Huacas de Moche site in the Moche Valley. Once considered the capital of a monolithic state, Huacas de Moche was dominated by two monumental structures, the Huaca del Sol and the Huaca de la Luna, which have been interpreted as religious and administrative centers respectively. Examples of unfired fineline painting as well as relief sculpture and molds for appliqué depicting major themes in Moche art were discovered within the confines of the workshop. Excavations further revealed that all of the activities related to ceramic production—from the mixing of clays to firing—took place within a single compound, highlighting the centralized nature of the production process. Santiago Uceda and Jose Armas suggested that the location of the workshop at the ceremonial center of the site, and its affiliation with the production of elite wares, demonstrated a connection to Moche rulers.⁴ The discovery of elite burials under the floors of the workshop provided evidence that the workshop not only produced wares *for* the elite, but that it was utilized by members of the elite.⁵

Tomb I from the main patio of the second phase of construction of the workshop contained the remains of a male aged approximately forty years upon death. Osteological analysis of the remains provided evidence that the individual was of good health overall, alluding to access to an ample diet

enjoyed only by the elites, but that this individual suffered from rheumatism in his hands and arthritis in his back. These injuries are consistent with the repetitive activities of a potter. The result of this finding is that a member of the Moche elite has been linked to the workshop, suggesting that it was populated by elite artisans. Similarly, Tomb II contained the remains of a female aged forty to fifty years. Analysis of her bones found arthritis in her hands, back and knees, which identifies her as a potter.⁶ The woman in Tomb II was interred with an elaborate offering that included forty-two ceramic vessels, copper objects and a guinea pig, suggesting that she too was a member of the Moche elite.⁷ The fact that these artisans worked within sight of administrative centers suggests that the workshops performed official business and existed under the influence of the state. Furthermore, their elite status suggests that the artisans would likely have been initiated into the meaning of the images they created, allowing them to function as a government apparatus for promoting official ideology as they manipulated and controlled images used to disseminate the ideas maintaining the power base of the elite class.

THE CASE FOR MULTIPLE MOCHE IDEOLOGIES

It is noteworthy that "ideology" tends to be treated in singular terms by Moche scholars.⁸ This was most recently demonstrated in Christopher Donnan's proposal of a "Moche State Religion." Although he did not explicitly state that Moche ideology itself was a singular uniform program, Donnan discussed Moche art as an aspect of a pan-Moche religion. For instance, he found the Warrior Narrative (detailed below) to be the focus of a "highly organized religious institution," of a "Moche state religion."⁹ Donnan's reference to Moche religion in its singular form, as opposed to using the plural, signals his perception that the ideological program present in Moche art is monolithic in nature.

Only in rare instances has the possibility of multiple Moche ideologies been addressed. Garth Bawden suggested that the Middle Moche period (300–600 CE) represented the florescence of Moche political ideology.¹⁰ Having grown out of earlier local cultures such as the Cupisnique, Gallinazo and Salinar, the artistic designs that we now commonly associate with the "Moche" took form during the Middle Moche period. Powerful symbols ranging from human portrait heads, presumably the faces of actual leaders,

to complex narrative motifs were thought to have been utilized by Moche elite to both distance themselves from the commoner class, and associate themselves with the supernatural realm. Although Bawden suggested that a central ideology was shared among the elites from different sites, he noted that during the Middle Moche period there was "differential local emphasis" on how it was disseminated, whether through monumental architecture, murals, burial techniques or portable objects.¹¹

Bawden observed that following a collapse of Middle Moche ideology, new variations took form, suggesting that north of the Moche Valley, Moche leaders incorporated new foreign beliefs into their ideological program in order to retain power from a lost base. He found that changes also took place at sites within the Moche Valley. For instance, Bawden proposed that the Moche population at Galindo, located at the neck of the Moche Valley, created a new ideology, arguing that the near absence of Moche narrative decorations and portrait head vessels from Galindo represented an intentional departure from the program in use at the Huacas de Moche site.¹² In contrast to the narrative designs that populate the majority of decorated vessels elsewhere, Bawden observed that the ceramics at Galindo tended to be decorated with geometric designs. Greg Lockard's study of ceramic fragments excavated from the site supported Bawden's hypothesis. Lockard found that seventy percent of recovered fineline ceramics at Galindo contained geometric designs, whereas only twelve to thirteen percent had figural (narrative) motifs.¹³ Bawden believed that decorating fine ceramics with geometric designs, as opposed to narrative motifs, was an intentional act utilized in the promotion of a new ideological program instituted by the rulers at Galindo.

Bawden also proposed the existence of competing ideologies among different social classes within the site of Galindo. Although it is often difficult to detect non-dominant forms of ideology (see discussions by Bawden and Tom Dillehay), Bawden suggested that certain key distinctions in burials of individuals from lower social classes suggest that they followed a contentious system of beliefs to that which dominated the site.¹⁴ Dillehay suggested that the Moche's unified ideological system described above was the exception, not the rule, as the North Coast likely played witness to multiple ideologies at all levels of society.¹⁵ He proposed that there may

have been multiple competing ideologies among the elites as well as others among the commoner class. Although Dillehay opened up the possibility for multiple ideologies, with one at each polity, he followed the dominant Moche as a single unified ideology paradigm, without further exploring different programs among distinct Moche populations.

In a discussion of intermediate-scale ceremonial sites in the hinterlands of the Jequetepeque Valley, Edward Swenson also found evidence for the existence of multiple Moche ideologies.¹⁶ He argued that sites throughout the valley performed unique ceremonies, each of which was suited to the spread of local ideologies supporting a local power base. Although excavations and surface surveys of these sites yielded fragments of San Jose de Moro fineline painting, suggesting participation in a pan-valley ideological program, variant designs of the ceremonial platforms at these sites suggest that rituals were performed according to local custom. For instance, observed that platforms at the site of San Ildefonso suggest straight movements of participants along ramps, whereas those at Catalina, a site of comparable size, contain ritual architecture indicative of processions along a winding path of lateral movements along ramps and across terraces. He found this to be evidence of local leaders inventing new traditions that "constituted a viable ideological strategy."¹⁷ Furthermore, Swenson suggested that local variations in ideologies are endemic to the Moche area, and that the Jequetepeque Valley was but a "microcosm" of the Moche's utilization of ideology as a whole, although he never applied this idea to help explain differences in Moche fineline painting styles. Whereas Swenson utilized architectural differences to suggest differences in ideology within the Jequetepeque Valley, I argue that differences within the fineline painted decorations reflect differences in Moche ideologies among Moche groups throughout the North Coast.

REGIONAL SUBSTYLES OF MOCHE FINELINE PAINTING

The Moche were once conceptualized as a single society with its capital at the site of Huacas de Moche in the Moche Valley. This idea was supported by Rafael Larco Hoyle, a hacienda owner and Moche enthusiast working in the early to mid-twentieth century. Having amassed a collection of Moche artifacts, largely through the purchase of smaller collections as well as through amateur excavations in around his property in the Chicama Valley,

Larco created the first chronology of Moche ceramics. He observed that the upper spouts on stirrup spout bottles appeared to correspond to differences in the vessels' decorations. Believing that there was a single Moche artistic style, Larco attributed these differences to evolutionary changes through time, and organized his ceramics collection into five temporal phases (I–V).¹⁹ Larco's chronology was widely accepted, and it was not until the mid-1990s, after large-scale archaeological projects in the Northern part of the Moche area were initiated, that it became clear that Larco's seriation for Moche ceramics was not applicable to all Moche sites. Although Larco's chronology was supported by excavations in and around his hacienda in the Chicama Valley, excavations at distant sites did not demonstrate continuity. For instance, at the Jequetepeque Valley site of San Jose de Moro, Luis Jaime Castillo and Christopher Donnan found that certain ceramic forms common to Southern Moche sites were absent from the archaeological record.²⁰ This led them to introduce a chronology specific to the Northern Moche Region, which they defined as sites above the Pampa de Paiján, a forty kilometer stretch of barren desert.

Continued work at sites in the Northern Moche area has indicated that the two-Moche model is also overly simplistic. Recently, Luis Jaime Castillo and Santiago Uceda suggested that Moche populations living in different river valleys across the North Coast experienced individual trajectories of evolution.²¹ They found that regional variations in Moche burial patterns, construction techniques and ceramics indicated that Moche populations at different sites were distinct, apparently resulting from unique local conditions, and must be studied as individual units. This approach—the study of multiple trajectories—has also been adopted in the study of Moche ceramics. In 2007, Donna McClelland, Don McClelland and Christopher Donnan identified what they referred to as the San Jose de Moro substyle of Moche fineline painting. They proposed that certain attributes present on a number of artifacts suggested that they represent distinct subgroups of the overall sample. At present, only four substyles—the San Jose de Moro fineline substyle, the Huacas de Moche fineline painting substyle and the so-called Dos Cabezas and Huancaco style ceramics—have been formally recognized.²² In my dissertation, I provided an in-depth comparison of the San Jose de Moro and the Huacas de Moche fineline painting substyles in order to discuss the potential cross-influences and political ramifications

of distinct artistic styles. Since a full comparison of the forms, content and style of these substyles is beyond the scope of the present study, in this essay I focus only on a single example, the absence of human warfare imagery from the San Jose de Moro substyle in order to demonstrate the intentional nature of its aversion to depicting human warrior imagery, and its ability to speak to differences between the populations that created fineline painted substyles.

MOCHE IMAGES OF WAR AND THE EFFECTS OF ARTISTIC AGENCY

Of the few publications that discuss Moche warfare imagery, most debate the nature of warfare, with authors falling into one of two camps, those who view it as ritual versus those who believe there were secular battles. Many scholars suggested that Moche warfare was a ritual activity tied to religious practices.²³ These authors often utilized warfare imagery, as opposed to archaeological data, as the foundation for their ideas, in which they interpreted battles to be prescribed rituals. Walter Alva and Christopher Donnan observed that warriors nearly always engage in one-on-one combat while dressed in elaborate garb, which they suggested indicates that battles were fought between Moche elites (Figure 1).²⁴ Furthermore, Donnan noted that the location of these scenes, which often take place in desert landscapes, as well as the absence of siege weapons and violence against civilians provide additional support to the notion that the Moche did not participate in conquest warfare.²⁵ Finally, battle scenes interpreted to represent Moche-on-Moche combat have been used to suggest that these battles took place among Moche groups (viewed as a sign of voluntary conflict in which sacrificial victims could be traded), rather than foreign forces (thought to be a sign of involuntary conflict).²⁶

The most often cited argument for ritual warfare is what has come to be known as the "Warrior Narrative." Initially outlined by Walter Alva and Christopher Donnan, the Warrior Narrative is composed of a series of images in which the lives of Moche soldiers are traced from battle to the ceremonial drinking of the blood of their captives. The narrative, as proposed by Alva and Donnan, begins in the battlefield where enemies are stunned by a blow to the head with a war club, after which they are stripped of their arms and wardrobe and led by their captors to be arraigned. Eventually the nude captives are brought to a climatic rite, dubbed the Sacrifice Ceremony,



FIGURE 1. Artist unknown, rollout drawing of a typical example of Moche painted warfare imagery depicting hand-to-hand combat on a ceramic stirrup spout bottle, 600-900 CE (Late Moche Period), slip painting on a ceramic vessel. Courtesy of Donna McClelland.

where their throats are slit, and their blood is collected and drunk by high ranking officials. Archaeological evidence from tombs at the sites of Sipan in the Lambayeque Valley and San Jose de Moro in the Jequetepeque Valley suggest that some of the figures in depictions of the Sacrifice Ceremony had real life counterparts.²⁷ Thus, this sequence, which includes images depicting elaborately dressed warriors engaged in hand to hand combat, has been used as evidence that warfare had cosmic objectives in the Moche world and was likely ritually prescribed.

Alternatively, several scholars have argued that Moche warfare had a secular nature.²⁸ Jeffrey Quilter suggested that fineline paintings of warriors engaged in one-on-one combat in desolate environments reflected decisions made by Moche artists, rather than accurate records of real life events.²⁹ He noted that, in general, rank and file soldiers are rarely depicted in portrayals of battle scenes around the world. Thus, he believed the naturalistic images in Moche art may misleadingly suggest that most Moche battles were fought among elaborately adorned elite warriors, when in fact lower ranked soldiers who were not painted did much of the fighting. John Verano equally warned against reading these images at face value, and pointed to Maya and Aztec examples of warfare for comparison.³⁰ He observed that both cultures employed an artistic convention for military conquest in which victory was expressed through the grasping of an enemy's tuft of hair. Verano noted that *Lintel 8* (755 CE) from Yaxchilan, Chiapas, Mexico, and the sacrificial stone of the Aztec ruler Motecuhzoma I (ca. 1455-1469 CE) represent large

military campaigns with a single figure depicting a handful of participants.³¹ Furthermore, George Lau's examination of an often published Moche painted war scene on the *Lührsen vessel* from the Museum für Völkerkunde suggested that it provides evidence for battle between local and foreign soldiers.³² He proposed that the headdresses, weapons and accessories used by several of the defeated warriors are reminiscent of those associated with the Highland Recuay culture, and thus provides evidence of battles between these two distinct cultures.

It is clear that the artist involved in the creation of warfare imagery played a significant factor in the appearance of the compositions we study, and must be recognized accordingly. When analyzing Moche imagery we must take care to acknowledge the artistic decisions that went into the creation of the images we study and their implications for our (mis)interpretations of this ancient group. Since the Moche had no discernable written language, and no recorded oral tradition, our knowledge of them comes largely through archaeological and art historical inquiries. Archaeologists have observed that martial activities such as battles are often difficult to identify in the archaeological record, since they are fleeting moments in time and generally leave few material traces.³³ Largely as a result of this, much of our current understanding of Moche warfare practices comes through analyses of their art. This highlights the importance of recognizing that the images depicted on Moche artifacts should not be considered objective recordings of history. Jeffrey Quilter reflected this in his acknowledgement that the Moche artists were able to select from many aspects of war for their creations. Rather than telling us about Moche warfare, the focus of the composition, manner of depiction, perspectives, and subjects of Moche battle scenes may be more informative of Moche ideological ambitions, and the audience they were meant to please, than of what Moche warfare may have actually looked like. The fineline decorations from San Jose de Moro provide an excellent case study in regards to interpreting the nature of Moche warfare through art. Since San Jose de Moro's fineline depictions of warfare differ from those of other fineline painting substyles, particularly those of the Huacas de Moche substyle, it represents a unique opportunity to reexamine Moche warfare.

EVIDENCE OF "REAL" WAR IN THE JEQUETEPEQUE VALLEY DURING THE LATE MOCHE PERIOD

Several recent studies questioned the dichotomy between "ritual" and "secular" (or "real") warfare, recognizing that secular warfare of many cultures include ritual aspects and ceremony.³⁴ Acknowledging that there were likely ritual aspects involved in the martial activities that took place in the Jequetepeque Valley during the Late Moche Period (approximately 600–900 CE), I contend that there existed at least the threat of "real" battles. Late Moche settlements in the Jequetepeque Valley provide some of the best evidence of warfare in the pre-Hispanic Andes. Many of the sites in this area overlook cultivated lands and irrigation canals, and such locations would have proven advantageous in the defense of these settlements from invading forces. Defensive walls, some standing several meters in height at these sites, also suggest that there was at least a perceived threat of invasion. That these walls were defensive in nature (as opposed to functioning primarily as divider of ceremonial space) is supported by the fact that they often contain parapets and piles of sling stone projectiles.³⁵ For instance, San Ildefonso, a fifty hectare (0.5 kilometers²) site located on the hillside of Cerro San Ildefonso by the Chaman River, contains four perimeter walls, each of which measures up to three meters high. The presence of sling stone piles along their lengths led to propose that these walls had a decidedly defensive function and are "associated with 'real' combat."³⁶

The choice of weapons depicted in local art provides further indication that real warfare was present in the Jequetepeque Valley during the Late Moche period. There are two common types of warfare-related decorative motifs in the San Jose de Moro substyle of fineline painting. One, referred to as the "Supernatural Confrontation Scene," involves two anthropomorphic creatures engaged in hand-to-hand combat. These scenes illustrate a deity known as Wrinkle Face, who battles a variety of sea creatures who have taken on human attributes, such as arms, legs, hands and feet. It is noteworthy that the weaponry in these scenes is limited to the use of *tumi* knives. *Tumi* knives, hand-held knives with a crescent-shaped blade, appear to have been the weapons of choice in Moche ceremony, as they are frequently portrayed in scenes depicting ritual activities, such as drawing blood for consumption in the Sacrifice Ceremony. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that *tumi* knives are commonly depicted in the Supernatural Confrontation Scene

and are used to draw blood of captives for ritual, they are not associated with warriors in neither the San Jose de Moro substyle nor any of the other fineline painting substyles.

A second type of warfare imagery of the San Jose de Moro fineline painting substyle presents anthropomorphic warriors carrying so-called "weapon bundles." These figures, which often take the form of birds or crayfish, have humanoid limbs in which they carry weapon bundles. Weapon bundles are compound artistic elements composed of the wardrobe and accessories of warriors, and are often associated with captives. They tend to have a circular or rectangular shield in its center, with a war club directly behind it. Several elements can appear on sides of the war club including headdresses, backflaps, tunics, spears, spear-throwers, and slings. The weapon bundle is the most frequently depicted element in San Jose de Moro fineline painted decorations, and is found on over fifty percent of known examples of this substyle. Unlike the *tumi* knives used in the Supernatural Confrontation Scene, the weapons carried by anthropomorphic warriors are consistent with those wielded by naturalistic depictions of Moche warriors engaged in combat.

Although they are depicted with far less frequency, weapon bundles are also found in the Huacas de Moche fineline painting substyle. A comparison of the weapon bundles depicted in San Jose de Moro with examples from the Huacas de Moche substyle demonstrates a great deal of continuity (Figure 2). They tend to share the same general composition, with a club placed vertically behind a shield, and spears located at diagonals. The weapons depicted in the bundles of these distinct substyles are similar, suggesting that those utilized in real life by warriors from San Jose de Moro also paralleled those used by other Moche populations. Jeffrey Quilter speculated that the Moche likely utilized tactics both for long-range and close-range confrontations.³⁷ Projectiles such as sling stones and darts were likely used to thin attacking lines, while clubs and shields would have been used in hand-to-hand combat. That the same weapons are portrayed in the Huacas de Moche and San Jose de Moro fineline painting substyles implies that the populations producing these subcategories of Moche art also used similar battle tactics.

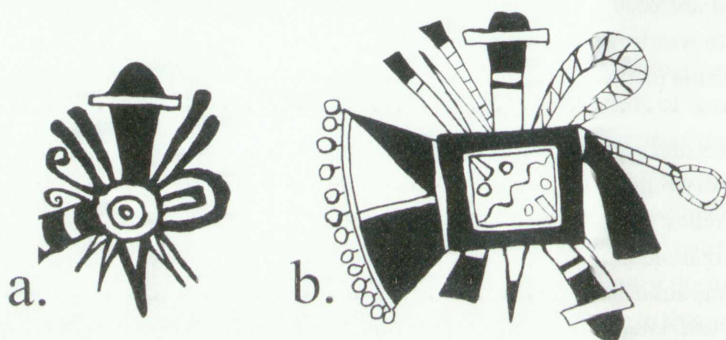


FIGURE 2. Artists unknown, rollout drawing comparing weapon bundles between the San Jose de Moro and Huacas de Moche substyles of fineline painting in stirrup spout ceramic bottles, 600–900 CE (Late Moche Period), slip paintings on ceramic vessels. Courtesy of Donna McClelland.

A CASE FOR “REAL” WARFARE AMONG THE SOUTHERN MOCHE

“Moche-on-Moche” battle scenes tend to be interpreted as ritual because warriors appear to be in Moche dress, yet such an assertion may be challenged for two reasons. First, the assumption that battling Moche warriors were of the same population could result from our own limited ability to identify ethnic markers. Astonishing advances within the past few years in identifying Moche fineline painted substyles has demonstrated that the field of Moche studies is still developing. In the course of a little over two decades, the field has shifted from conceptualizing the Moche as a single unified state, to one made up of regional (and possibly intervalley) polities, each with their own substyle of Moche art. As a result, it is not beyond the realm of possibilities that, at present, we simply cannot distinguish between members of distinct Moche communities within Moche art. It is noteworthy that in nearly all scenes of one-on-one combat, the dress of the aggressor and that of the defender are different. These distinctions likely held meaning that could be identified by Moche viewers, but are presently indecipherable to modern investigators.

Ethnohistoric accounts suggest that in the pre-Hispanic Andes, ethnicity was communicated through dress. Father Bernabe Cobo noted that each subject of the Inca Empire was forced to wear the “insignia or emblem” of their respective community on their clothes and headdresses in order to aid in their identification by the Inca administrators.³⁸ Furthermore,

Guaman Poma de Ayala observed that Inca subjects were ordered to wear only garments "customary in the tribe."³⁹ Archaeological evidence from the Azapa Valley, in Northern Chile, also supports the notion that textile design was linked to ethnic identity in the ancient Andes. Vicki Cassman's study of textiles from that area revealed the existence of only a single textile style from sites throughout the valley, which she found to be evidence that there was only a single ethnicity in the region.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that Cobo stated, "Since the Indians were beardless and of the same [skin] color, aspect and [physical] features, and since they used the same language and dressed the same way, it would be impossible to distinguish each nation in any other way [than their clothing]."⁴¹ This statement suggests that that neighboring communities are so closely linked genetically, that it can be difficult to distinguish members of one from another. Thus for the uninitiated, it may be impossible to comprehend the significance of the varied wardrobes and headdresses donned by Moche warriors, but a Moche viewer may have been able to identify rival soldiers according to the patterns and styles of their wardrobe.

A second point of contention against the interpretation of ritual warfare based on "Moche-on-Moche" battle scenes comes in the potential that these scenes may represent real battles between different Moche populations. An analogy to Maya depictions of warfare proves useful here. In many of their representations of war, Maya artists depicted "Maya-on-Maya" scenes, in which both sides of warriors share distinctly Maya traits. Returning to *Lintel 8* (date) from Yaxchilan, a scene depicts Yaxchilan's ruler Bird Jaguar capturing a rival ruler named Jeweled Skull. Bird Jaguar and Jeweled Skull both demonstrate characteristically Maya morphological features such as flattened foreheads. Additionally, capturer and captive each wear garments that are similarly crafted in a distinctly Maya way.⁴² Aided by the lintel's hieroglyphic inscriptions, we are able to learn that this scene commemorates an actual military victory that took place on May 9, 755 CE. Despite the propagandistic nature of this monument dedicated to Bird Jaguar's military prowess, this scene attests to the fact that there was Maya-on-Maya warfare.

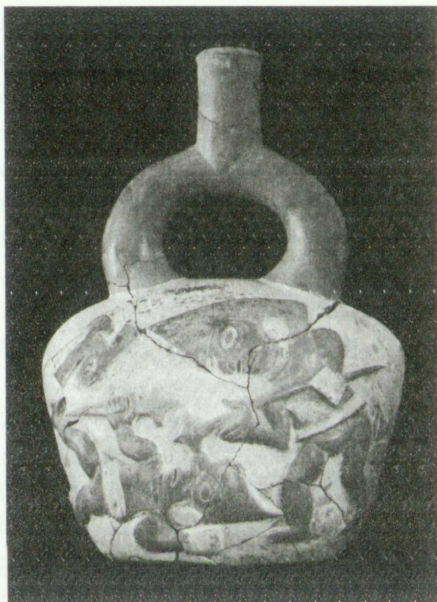
The notion that one-on-one battle scenes represent clashes between different Moche groups is supported by biodistance data of human sacrifice at the Huaca de la Luna Plaza 3A, a recessed plaza in the Huaca de la Luna notable for its integrated rock outcrop, was the location of a massacre of seventy

individuals.⁴³ Bodies of the victims were found strewn across the plaza floor with various degrees of disarticulation. Some were heavily mutilated, missing key body parts such as heads and limbs, while others appear to have had foreign objects inserted around the time of death.⁴⁴ Osteological analysis revealed that the victims were male and were all between the ages of fifteen to thirty-nine and were found to be of robust health, but several demonstrated evidence of recently healed bone fractures. These characteristics led to their identification as warriors. Subsequent analyses of the remains of the Plaza 3A victims focusing on their geographic origin have led to contentious results. A comparison of mtDNA from human remains in the Lambayeque and Moche Valleys (including samples from Plaza 3A) suggests that the victims came from the local population at Huacas de Moche.⁴⁵ Alternatively, a study of the epigenetic dental traits of the same sample of Plaza 3A victims was found to support the notion that these individuals came from Moche populations in distant valleys.⁴⁶ An additional study by Richard Sutter and John Verano using the same techniques but including victims from nearby Plaza 3C at the Huaca de la Luna also suggests that the sacrificed warriors were nonlocal. Sutter and Verano find that the victims of the earlier Plaza 3C were more closely related to the local population than those of Plaza 3A.⁴⁸ They propose that the sacrifices at Plaza 3C resulted from early military expansion of the Huacas de Moche site into neighboring valleys, and that the Plaza 3A victims were captives from a second campaign from even more distant ethnically Moche valleys.

DIFFERENCES IN REPRESENTATION OF WARFARE AS DIFFERENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS WARFARE

The emergent picture suggests that the two Moche populations associated with the Huacas de Moche and San Jose de Moro substyles represented warfare in contrasting manners. Although they both appear to have fought largely through hand-to-hand combat, the Moche from Huacas de Moche emphasized naturalistic human warriors, while at San Jose de Moro warfare imagery was abstract and relegated to the supernatural realm. It is noteworthy that human warfare imagery was not wholly absent from the site of San Jose de Moro. The excavation of a Middle Moche burial (MU-813) by the San Jose de Moro Archaeological Project, which pre-dates the appearance of fineline decorations at the site, produced a stirrup spout bottle with a low relief, polychromatic decoration depicting two human

FIGURE 3. Artist unknown, an example of human warfare imagery on a Middle Moche stirrup spout bottle from San Jose de Moro, 400–600 CE (Middle Moche Period), ceramic stirrup spout bottle. Courtesy of the San Jose de Moro Archaeological Project.



warriors engaged in battle (Figure 3). The warrior on the right hovers above his enemy, as he strikes down a punishing blow with his club. The presence of this scene at San Jose de Moro demonstrates that local Moche artists were familiar with themes of human warfare, and speaks to the intentional nature of the absence of such designs from its fineline painting substyle.

It is possible then that the differing representations of warfare reflect variant attitudes towards war itself. In other words, war may have had a different meaning and significance on Huacas de Moche society than that of San Jose de Moro, which then resulted in differing modes of representation. For instance, war for the Moche living at Huacas de Moche may have been a manner of securing precious labor from newly conquered peoples needed for large-scale projects such as the erection of the Huacas de Moche, or perhaps enabled the acquisition of new arable farmlands. Alternatively, for the Moche in the Jequetepeque Valley, where sites had fortified walls, indicating a preoccupation with defense, warfare may have had negative connotations. For the Huacas de Moche polity, war functioned to support their society. In contrast, for Moche populations in the Jequetepeque Valley war may have had a negative impact and was a means for concern.

I propose that these divergent attitudes were reflected in the warfare imagery of both societies. Noble expressions of warfare and warriors that populate Huacas de Moche ceramics is contrasted by the notable absence of humans in San Jose de Moro's ceramic decorations. Instead of depicting the human face of war, San Jose de Moro relegates warfare to the gods. This may have been done as a means to solicit the gods for their help in battle. Perhaps the frequently depicted anthropomorphic bird warrior deity on San Jose de Moro fineline decorations was a patron deity for the polity. Like Athena, who was called upon to protect Athens, the San Jose de Moro Bird Warrior was invoked to prevent wars and to help drive away enemies in battle.

CONCLUSIONS

In his critique of Maya scholarship of the 1950s, David Webster stated that the Maya "achieved the singular reputation of being the only nonindustrial civilization not plagued by war and conflict, despite the fact that warriors, weapons, and captives or sacrificial victims were prominently displayed in their art."⁴⁹ When the word "Maya" is substituted with "Moche," Webster's statement becomes an apt description of our current understanding of this ancient Andean group. For Mayanists, the watershed moment, when the traditional perception that the Maya were a pacifistic society became obsolete, was realized when hieroglyphic inscriptions describing warfare among different polities were deciphered.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, at this point we have no decipherable Moche written language, perhaps recognizing that the Moche were composed of many polities each with its own socio-political organization and local traditions may serve as a turning point in Moche scholarship.

In this essay I have presented new perspectives on analyzing Moche images of war and provided new interpretations of Moche warfare. I have supported the position brought forth by previous scholars that real battles took place on the North Coast between different Moche factions by comparing different modes of representation present in two regional substyles of Moche fineline painting.⁵¹ Whereas examples in the Huacas de Moche substyle frequently depict human warriors, those of the San Jose de Moro substyle are limited to arms-bearing supernatural warriors that are never depicted engaged in battle. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that viewing substyles of fineline painting as distinct ideological programs produced by independent Moche

polities enables an unprecedented ability to compare Moche populations. Although this study focused on the subject of warfare, future inquiries will likely result in additional opportunities to differentiate between Moche polities. For instance, my dissertation traced the points of intersection among the San Jose de Moro substyle, the Huacas de Moche substyle as well as another fineline painting substyle that may have come out of the Chicama Valley in Late Moche times (which I call the Late Chicama substyle) as a means to speak to potential interaction among the Moche groups that produced them.

This is a very exciting time for the field of Moche studies. With unprecedented advances made each year, our ability to comprehend the ancient activities portrayed in their art is expanding beyond what was believed to have been impossible only a decade ago. This essay has utilized resources that were simply not available in many previous studies, including the revelation that there was no single Moche art style. When investigating the past of a culture such as the Moche that had no decipherable written language or known oral history, scholars are often faced with the problem of making the best interpretations possible with the available data. While in the past, evidence supported the model that Moche warfare was prescribed ritual; the current data indicates that there were indeed “real” battles depicted in Moche fineline painted decorations.

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NOTES:

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⁷ Ibid, 201.

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⁹ Donnan, "Moche State Religion," 58.

¹⁰ Bawden, "The Art of Moche Politics," 127.

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¹² Ibid, 291, 296.

¹³ Greg Lockard, "A Design Analysis of Moche Finesline Sherds from the Archaeological Site of Galindo, Moche Valley, Peru," *Andean Past* 9 (2009), 200.

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²⁵Donnan, "Deer Hunting," 51–2.

²⁶John Verano, "War and Death in the Moche World: Osteological Evidence and Visual Discourse," in *Art and Archaeology in Ancient Peru*, edited by Joanne Pillsbury (Washington D.C.: Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, Symposium Papers XL.2001), 113.

²⁷Walter Alva, "Discovering the New World's Richest Tomb," *National Geographic* 174 (2), 1988; Alva and Donnan, *Royal Tombs of Sipan*; Christopher Donnan, "Iconography of the Moche: Unraveling the Mystery of the Warrior Priest," *National Geographic* 174(4): 1988; Christopher Donnan and Luis Jaime Castillo, "Finding the Tomb of a Moche Priestess," *Archaeology* 45(6): 1992.

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- ³² Lau, "Object of Contention," Fig.3.
- ³³ See discussions by Elizabeth Arkush and Charles Stanish, "Interpreting Conflict in the Ancient Andes" *Current Anthropology* 46 (1): 2005; Topic and Topic, "Hacia una comprension."
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- ³⁷ Quilter, "Moche Art of War."
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