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## Mythical and ritual representations depicted on the pottery from the Peruvian coast of the Early Intermediate Period - a study based on the collection of the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona

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# **MYTHICAL AND RITUAL REPRESENTATIONS DEPICTED ON THE POTTERY FROM THE PERUVIAN COAST OF THE EARLY INTERMEDIATE PERIOD. A STUDY BASED ON THE COLLECTION OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN BARCELONA**

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## **Abstract**

The paper discusses Moche and Nasca pottery featuring forms of religious representation. In the Andean cultures, pottery was the means of information transfer and even played the role of a script. The vessels included in the Barcelona collection present splendid examples of ritual pottery decorated with forms of mythological representation. Anthropomorphic representations, as well as vessels depicting erotic and narrative scenes functioned as a specific tool used for transferring cultural messages. The variety of complex representations of mythical creatures, hybrids and trophy heads used by the Nasca society reflected the complexity of Nasca religious life, while the frequently reoccurring figure of the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being may suggest that the Nasca culture was in fact a theocracy. Moreover, a detailed analysis of decorative motifs leads us to a deeper understanding of the rules according to which pre-Columbian civilizations functioned and provides ample information about the various aspects of life as it was lived by the societies of the Early Intermediate Period.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The history of Peruvian civilization's development is as much about economic adaptation as it is about social adaptation to the conditions of an environment characterized by both climatic and topographical extremes. The Peruvian part of the Middle Andes is divided into two major geographical units: the coast and the mountains, and it was this geographic diversity which played a substantial role in the formation of local cultures. The densely populated coastal valleys existed thanks to their complex irrigation systems, subordinating the structures of local communities to the control of water resources (the so-called "hydraulic societies" (Lanning 1967), whereas the economy of the mountainous region was based on natural rainfalls, with irrigation and the construction of terraces playing only a secondary role.

The Peruvian coast is one of the most desert-like regions in the entire South America. Due to the scarcity of rainfalls and heavy clouds, the life of the region concentrated in the river valleys divided

by the foothills and the straps of desert land, each of which was about 40 kilometers wide. The rivers, flowing down from the mountains, brought water to the valleys, thus facilitating the construction of artificial irrigation systems. From time to time, cyclically occurring rainfalls led to the flooding of the coastal areas. The north coastal region comprises the river valleys stretching from the River Piura in the north to the Casma in the south, while the area of the south coastal region is delineated by the river valleys spanning from the River Cañete to the River Rio Grande (Nasca) (Menzel 1977). This kind of geographical division is also reflected in the analogical division of archaeological regions. The area of north and south Peruvian coast of the Early Intermediate Period (the period of 200 BC to 600 AD, Moseley 1994) was inhabited by two cultures – Moche and Nasca – both famous for their rich vessel ornaments which often carried religious content.

Both Moche and Nasca used the experience of earlier archaeological units. Among the most frequent examples of this kind of borrowing is the continuation of decorative motifs. Also, in the area inhabited by these cultures – the north and south coast – settlement hiatus did not exist. The region underwent a long-lasting process of settlement and cultural change. The Moche came into existence as a totally new archaeological unit which used certain technological and ornamental features of the neighbouring or earlier cultures in its style (compare with the Salinar culture – Shimada 1994:72; the Recuay culture – Coe, Snow, Benson 1997:187; or the Cupisnique culture – Shimada 1994:71-72) whereas the Nasca gradually evolved from the Paracas foundations, almost as a continuation of the Necrópolis phase (Cook 1999:68-69, 78-79; Coe, Snow, Benson 1997:182).

## THE POTTERY AS A MEANS OF INFORMATION TRANSFER

Among the Andean civilizations, the pottery became a means of information transfer, and the symbols depicted on the ceramic artifacts in the form of decoration acted as a substitute for a script (Rice 1994:505-509). Moche and Nasca vessels form a unique book of life which can act as a rich source of information about the religious life of the people who created these cultures. Let us now put the technological questions aside and focus on the ornate decorativeness of those vessels.

In the Moche culture the richness of representations was expressed mostly in their shapes, while painted or relief ornaments played a secondary role, unlike in the Nasca culture, where it was precisely the colourful decoration that the whole weight of artistic expression rested on, whereas modelled vessels were rather rare. Both cultures developed as coastal civilizations and their development took place over a similar period of time. Therefore, there are examples of syncretic vessels in which both the features of Moche art (the stirrup form of the vessel) and of Nasca art (typical iconography) are combined (Proulx 1994:93).

The similarities between the Moche and Nasca cultures were first discovered by A. K. Kroeber and A. H. Gayton. L. Dawson conducted a study of the convergence of representations and distinguished several analogous motifs in the two cultures' iconographies, such as: ritual or battle scenes connected with the representation of birds; figural vessels on which the depicted figure is wearing a mask and is equipped with the ritual *tumi* knife; vessels depicting tied captives. Another group of representations – convergent in both cultures, yet occurring in a whole range of varieties – are the trophy heads, which are often found together with the step pyramid motif (Proulx 1994:92-93).

The pottery featuring the above mentioned representations constitutes a part of the collection gathered by the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona. The present study presents several vessels (out of the several dozens of this kind of artifacts in the collection) which have been selected due to the common theme – mythological and ritual scenes from the Moche and Nasca cultures – that they represent.

## SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE IN MOCHE ART

The multitude of themes used by the Moche artisans is so vast that it would be difficult to enumerate all the forms of representations and thematic scenes presented. With such a wide range of motifs, and considering the fact that certain artistic formulas, which allow us to recognize the cultural unification of the pottery, have been kept intact, we might venture to say that in many aspects it reminds us of the structure and symbolism of a language. The motifs were presented in the form of specific figures (human, supernatural, animal, plant, anthropomorphic, geometric), objects or details (for example, ornaments, face paintings, or clothes), while at the same time a certain role and meaning was ascribed to them. A specific group of motifs is used to explain the meaning of the whole scene. Each of these motifs has a specific function and, consequently, a specific meaning, too; in many cases the motifs function as attributes – thus the sense of the representation may come out more clearly (Benson 1976:291). By following the parallel between pottery art and language, we might say that just as every language user uses it in a way specific only to himself, so did every Moche artist possess his own style of expressing certain symbols or motifs which possibly underwent changes and transformations throughout the artist's life. Still, the message itself always remains clear and comprehensible for the audience (Donnan 1991:259). Thanks to the meanings that this pottery carries, it becomes a means of artistic expression – the most general and commonly recognized in the entire Moche art.

The most characteristic feature of the Moche artistry is the high degree of naturalism which culminates in the individualization of portrait representations. The artisans' imagination could be expressed in the forms of fantastic representations or mythological scenes. One of the typical features is the adjustment of the representations' size to the role they play in the whole scene. Thus, the most prominent figure will dominate over the others as far as size and localization is concerned. The same hierarchy is also present in the scenes where both human and animal, as well as plant and geometric figures appear – the human figure is usually the dominant one there. Ch. Donnan points out to three exceptions to this general rule. The first exception appears in a situation where the figure is located on the base of the vessel and, as a result of the reduction of space, becomes smaller than the rest of the ornaments. Another exception can be noticed when the main scene is complemented by a variety of smaller figures in order to create the impression of a kind of perspective. And, last but not least, the third exception takes place when the artist wishes to stress the figure's rank (Donnan 1991:261-262; Donnan 1978:33).

Moche art is by no means free from distortions. The most frequently observed relation is the special inclination towards natural, three-dimensional forms of representation, and at the same time the tendency to deform two-dimensional or low relief forms of representation. Human and anthropomorphic representations follow a certain artistic canon: the arms, legs, heads and feet are conventionally rendered in profile, while the torso, eyes and hands are presented in the frontal position. In the painted representations of animal and plant details there is a tendency to present them in profile.

The above-mentioned question of perspective becomes apparent in two-dimensional and low relief representations. The first technique used to express perspective is locating the smaller figures in the upper parts of the scene, which is supposed to create the impression of spatial distance; the second way of presenting perspective is the use of specific layout (layered straps) (Donnan 1991:262).

Rendering the hierarchy and the social rank of specific figures – apart from the techniques which have already been mentioned, such as location or size – is expressed mainly through the elaborateness of dress and the rendering of specific details, such as: sophisticated ornaments, presentation of the figure on a platform or in a sedan chair (Benson 1976:291-292).

The interpretation of representations of the winning and the losing party in the war scenes also to a large extent depends on the figures' dress. Figures stripped of their clothes represent the defeated

party (apparently the ritual of stripping the defeated warriors of their clothes was used by the winning party to emphasize their victory in the battle). The idea of the captive and of the defeat is additionally emphasized by such details as: a rope wrapped around the captive's neck, hands tied on the captive's back, the pulling of the captive by his hair and blood dripping from the captive's nose (Donnan 1991:263; see also Castillo 2000).

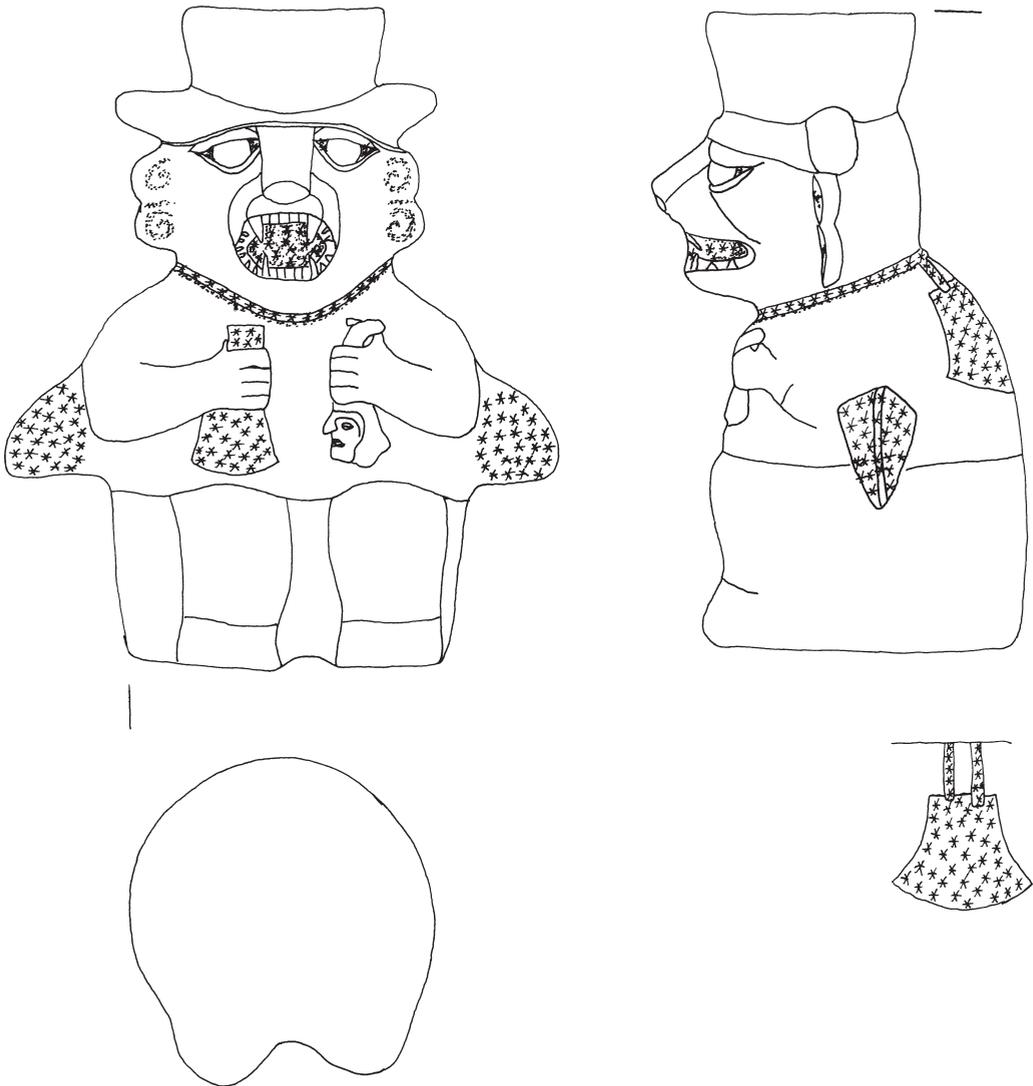
Interestingly, it would be difficult to find scenes whose meaning would be other than ritual in Moche iconography. Even the seemingly lay scenes, such as hart or sea lion hunting carry a ceremonial message and are often connected with shamanism (a conclusion which can be drawn from the elaborate dress of the figures portrayed). Erotic art, too, was most probably connected with a fertility cult, which makes itself apparent in the whole variety of copulation scenes (relationships which could be interpreted as leading to conception are, however, absent here) (Donnan 1991:269-270).

### RITUAL MOCHE CERAMICS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ETNOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN BARCELONA

One of the Moche artifacts which constitute the collection of the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona is a vessel found near Trujillo (Fig. 1: inventory No. 1853-16-708). The vessel represents classical features of the late Moche phases (see analogies: Donnan, 1990:30-32; Larco Hoyle 2001: Fig. 353, 078-004-007). The anthropomorphic figure wears the signs of cream-coloured painting in several places. The colour is used to emphasize parts of the figure's eyeballs, and the eyeballs themselves are meticulously modelled, with the eyelids carefully outlined. The wide-open jaws reveal a cream painted, concave tongue (?) between the teeth and the fangs. Around the neck, we can see a painted band from which a trapezoid plaque hangs down the figure's back. The outgrowths sticking out from the figure's sides (probably wings) are also colour-painted, just like the ritual knife which the figure holds in its hand. The vessel's shape and its symbolism play a decisive role in its decorativeness. The dragon creature (this interpretation is suggested by the attributes which the figure holds in its hands; the outgrowths in the form of dragon wings; the spikes on the monster's head which can be found in analogous representations (Donnan 1990:31) has a menacing countenance – an effect which is made even more threatening by the horrific attributes: a *tumi* knife and a trophy head, held by its hair. The relief ornamentation used to render the volute representations of the creature's ears and the massiveness of its legs makes these details stand out even more. The vessel's spout can be described as a typical one, enriched only by the outgrowths sticking out on the sides (horns perhaps?), which can also possibly be interpreted as a unique kind of headdress – an original hat. It seems more reasonable, however, to opt for the former proposition.

The vessel represents a demonic figure. The knife and the human head which this creature holds may suggest that these are the trophies gained in a battle which has just been fought. This interpretation is suggested by the narrative scenes in which the mythological protagonist (often a demon, or a vampire) is about to attack the figure he is holding by the hair with his *tumi* knife. Such representations are accompanied by snake beings (Larco Hoyle 2001:236-238). If we manage to understand the context of the ceramic figure, the reconstruction of the myth of the fight with the monsters (which usually closes with the ritual cutting of the head) becomes possible.

J. Tello believed that human sacrifice in itself was closely connected with the fertility cult. The ritual *tumi* knife which was thrust into the victim's body symbolized the act of procreation. Anthropological research conducted on the Huaca de la Luna site has also proved that human sacrifice was practiced there; the victims were young males of 15 – 20 (or, less frequently, 20 – 30) years of age. A similar ritual is known to have existed on the Huaca de Cruz, Pacatnamú, San José



**Fig. 1.** Vessel with inventory No. 1853-16-708. Height: 22.5 cm

de Moro and Sipán sites (Prządka 2001:166-170). We do not know what the context of those rituals was, whether they were connected with calendar festivals, important events, or wars waged against the neighbouring peoples. K. Makowski gives one of the possible explanations for this kind of conduct. The explanation of human sacrifice he proposes is the fear of the approaching Pachacut – a catastrophe which may strike any moment and disturb the ancient world order. A tragedy of this kind may happen as a result of the mistakes people make. In order not to allow this situation to take place, the Moche tried to propitiate the gods by offering them bloody sacrifices and offerings made of shells – *mullu* (Makowski 1996:106).

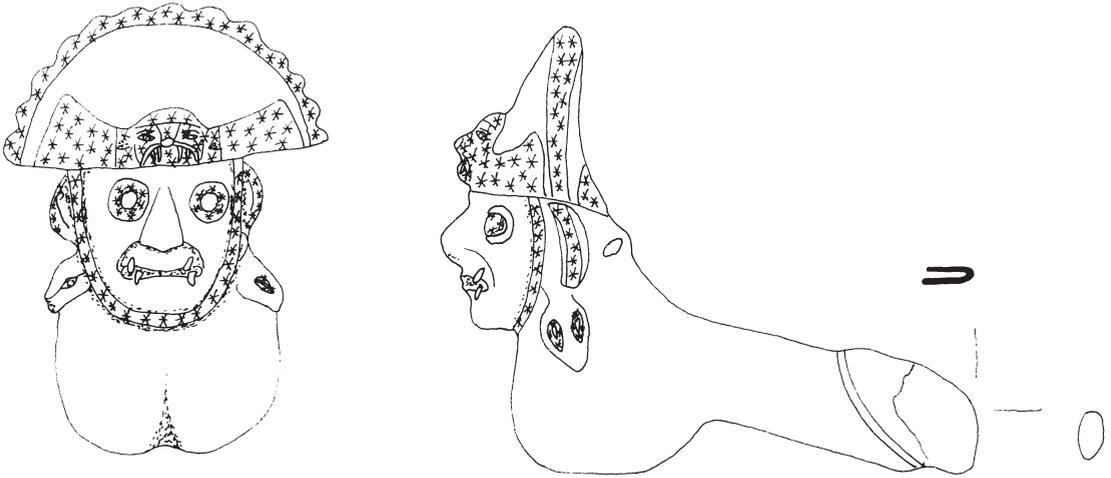


Fig. 2. Vessel with inventory No. 7000-73-1. Height: 13.3 cm

A picture of the pre-Inca peoples' religious life and their acts of sacrifice is presented in Garcilaso de la Vega's chronicle. Some of the rituals he describes can by all means be descriptions of Moche customs. The motifs of the animal and plant pantheon, the deification of the sea creatures and human sacrifice reappear here (de la Vega 2000:34-39).

As has been mentioned before, erotic art often had a religious character too. An example of this kind of art is a whistle from the collection of the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona (Fig. 2: inventory No. 7000-73-1) (see analogies: Benson 1972: Fig. 2-8). It comprises of two parts – the anthropomorphic representation and the phallic element. The anthropomorphic segment seems to depict the head of a mythological deity, or a demon reminiscent of Ai-Apeac.

Ai-Apeac was the second deity in the divine hierarchy, with the Moon being the first one. He was always represented with an attribute in the form of a snake hanging down from his waist. He can also be easily identified by the fangs sticking out of his mouth and by his wrinkled face. His name is supposed to mean "the Omnipotent" (*Hacedor* in Spanish). He is the leading protagonist of the mythological scenes in which he goes through a number of initiation rites, fights with his opponents, dies and is resurrected from the dead (Larco Hoyle 2001:273).

The figure's half-moon shaped headdress is additionally decorated with a representation of a face baring its teeth. The deity's eyes and nose have been carefully modelled. Its mouth reveals protruding fangs. On the sides of the head we can see ears, with animal maws underneath. The anthropomorphic representation crowns the phallic part, presented together with the testicles. The hole in the phallus, together with the two little holes situated on the back of the deity's head probably enable air circulation, thanks to which the object can be used to whistle (what is problematic about this vessel is its age. The fact that the shade of the anthropomorphic representation is somewhat different from the colour of the phallic part of the whistle seems to suggest that the former does not constitute an integral part of the ceramic vessel. My own guess about the erotic whistle from the Museu Etnologic is that perhaps what we have here is in fact either an exemplification of the rather common practice of producing falsified copies of ancient pottery, or an assemblage of some original elements of Moche pottery with presently produced ceramic elements (again, a frequently used method).

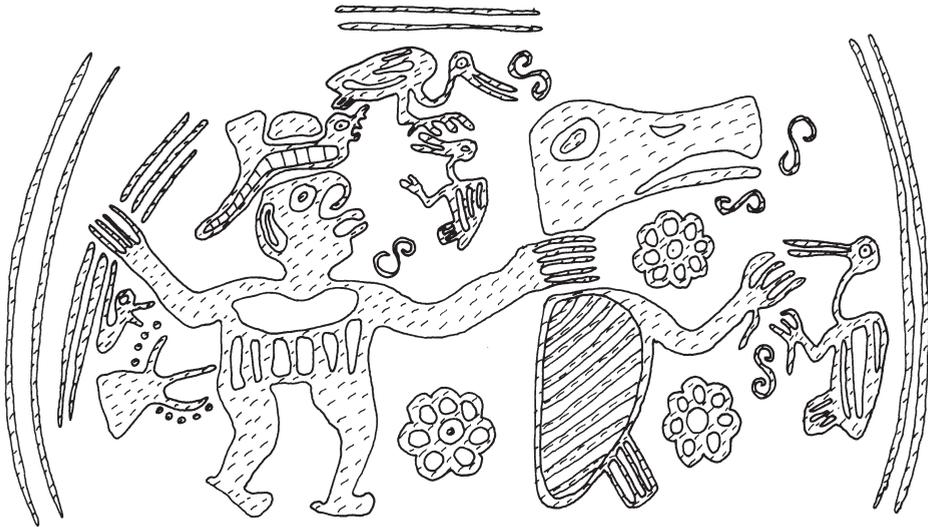
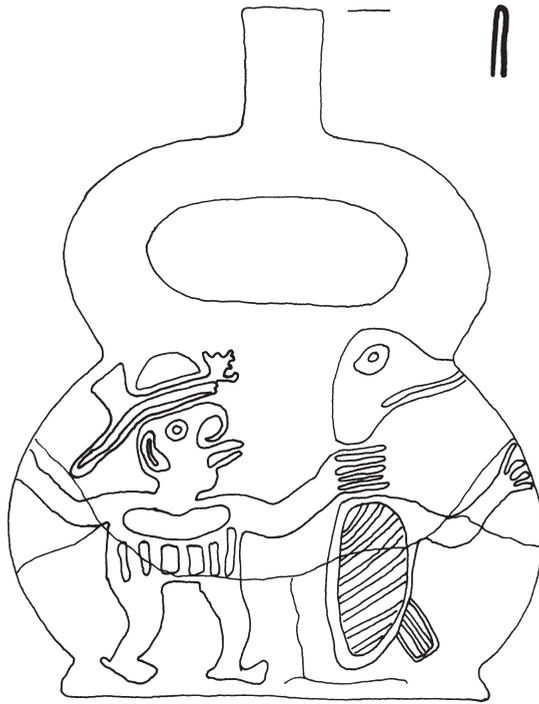


Fig. 3. Vessel with inventory No. 3884-56-58. Height: 20.4 cm

The last Moche vessel in the museum's collection which can be included in the ritual scenes category is an example of narrative pottery. It is a bottle (Fig. 3: inventory No. 3884-56-58) with a stirrup handle, found in the Chicama valley. The classical form of the vessel, covered by cream-coloured slip is a typical example of Moche Phase 3 pottery (see analogies: Larco Hoyle 2001: Fig. 209; Lehmann 1959: Fig. 47; Willey 1985: Fig. 392; Kauffmann Doig 1978: Fig. 3). The scene, rendered in brown fineline painting technique, is painted twice, on both sides of the vessel and represents a bird hunting episode. The hunter is equipped (he is probably holding arrows) and has a hooked nose, he also wears an elaborate headdress with a bird decoration on it. The bird (whose species is difficult to distinguish) possesses some anthropomorphic features, i.e. five-fingered limbs, where one of the fingers is not an integral part of the entire hand. The bird's head is relatively big, and the massive beak is ajar, which suggests an impression of pain and fear felt by the creature. The background of the scene is filled by complementary representations of smaller birds, as well as S-shaped patterns, floral and, possibly, starfish motifs. The whole scene is framed by double lines on the sides and on the top which close the whole complex.

Narrative representations were a popular means by which mythological, ritual and social content of the Moche culture could be expressed. The ornamentation of vessel (Fig. 3: No. 3884-56-58) from the Museu Etnologic is rather scarce. A single scene depicting the catching of a bird could not even be considered as worthy of the name "narrative" had it not been repeated, for it is the very fact of repetition which may mean further development of the hunting sequence. The most frequently painted mythological scenes belong to such complexes as the cup offering, the boat crossing, the revolution of inanimate objects, etc. (Makowski 1996:16-20; Giersz 2001:138-150). Religious and ritual scenes are a wonderful source from which we can learn a lot about Moche social structures, dress and customs of the time (Quilter 1997:113-133).

## MYTHOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS ON THE NASCA POTTERY

Equally rich repertoire of mythological and ritual meanings can be found in the ornamentation of the Nasca pottery. The complex painted Nasca decorations suggest the existence of an elaborate religious life; the Nasca culture is also considered to have formed a theocratic community.

The major Nasca deity can be relatively easily identified and the representation thereof is an element which frequently reappears in the pottery ornamentation. It is an anthropomorphic feline deity (Disselhoff 1978:174). Since there have been many controversies concerning the species of this animal (M. Uhle believed that the major Nasca deity was a combination of human features and those of a woodlouse. T. A. Joyce argued that it was a mixture of various creatures, including insects, to which divine features had been attributed, and which played the role of an agriculture totem. E. Seler described it as a toothed snake with distinct feline features. J. Tello argued that the major role in the Nasca pantheon was played by a feline deity – possibly a jaguar, Pezzia Asserto 1962:46), the term which is usually used to describe this creature is Anthropomorphic Bespectacled Being.

Particularly interesting are the attempts to adjust some of the old-Andean legends to fit the mythical Nasca deity. M. Rostworowski tries to adjust three myths about the same deity to the representations which can be found on Nasca pottery. The chronicler, López de Gómara, mentioned the creator of the earth and of the human race. The god named Kón was the son of the Sun and the Moon and, by transforming sometimes into a man, and sometimes into a cat, he used to help the people. The Kón deity's place of worship became Pachacamac. Another version of this myth is given by Andrés de Zárate, according to whom Con – the son of the Sun and the Moon – provides the people with wine, tea and wild fruit, whereas in Gutiérrez de Santa Clara's description of the myth the divine being – Cons

– is the creator of heaven, the sun, the stars and the earth who gives life to people, animals and plants (Roztworowski 1993:195).

The comparison of the features of the deity described by the chroniclers with the sacred place of worship at Pachacamac and the decorations on Nasca pottery may lead us to the conclusion that the Anthropomorphic Bespectacled Being is in fact god Kón (Roztworowski 1993:197).

### MYTHICAL REPRESENTATIONS ON THE NASCA CERAMICS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN BARCELONA

The pottery from the collection of the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona is a good exemplification for the analysis of the Nasca mythological representations.

The bottle-shaped vessel with a double spout and a bridge handle (Fig. 4: inventory No. 1095-10-9) has a very unique painted decoration which can be interpreted either as the Anthropomorphic Mythical

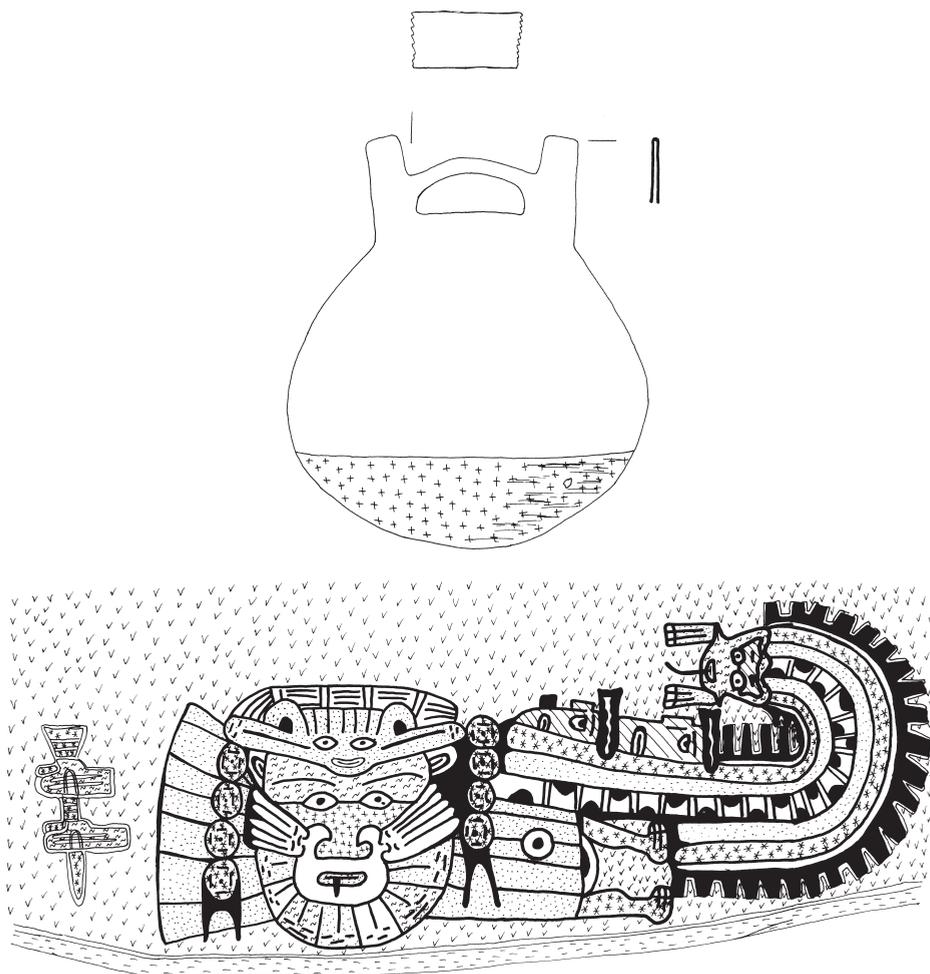


Fig. 4. Vessel with inventory No. 1095-10-9. Height: 19.3 cm

Being with the snake attributes (Such an interpretation may be suggested by the human representation of the figure's legs, the detail in the mythical being's torso interpreted as the navel, as well as the typical head and ear ornaments and the club (ceremonial staff) held in the figure's hand), or as the Snake Being in the feline mask (see analogies: Carmichael 1994: Fig. 17; Eisleb 1977: Fig. 47-48; Guarnotta 1985: Fi. 267; Pezzia Asserto 1962:79; Proulx 1989: Fig. 1-A; Proulx 1968: Fig. 19; Schmidt 1929:342). We could also venture to say that the mythical being painted here has some features of the Spotted Cat, which is reflected in the spotted belt – one of the elements constituting the hybrid's body. The figure is symbolically holding a club – an attribute of power. Particularly interesting is the representation of the trophy heads sticking out from behind the snake-monster's back. These have been presented in the shape of conventionalized profiles – we can distinguish an ear, an eye and a part of the mouth. The "snake-part" is crowned by a head wearing a mask, inscribed into the shape of a star.

By the term "mythical being" we usually understand the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (The term used in the present study reflects the sense of the Spanish *Ser Mitico Antropomorfo* and is commonly used in English terminology. However, we can also find such terms as "the feline predator", or „the syncretic deity", see Berezkin, 1975:71; the mythical being is also sometimes considered as a human fantastic figure which absorb the features of supernatural animal beings, see Blasco Bosqued, Ramos Gómez, 1985:17-21). This deity becomes the protagonist of many representations featuring on the Nasca pottery and appears with both human and feline attributes. It is additionally equipped with a characteristic mask covering the mouth and adorned with ornaments. In the early phases the Being was presented in the erect position, holding a trophy head in one hand and a club in the other. In the later phases the representation becomes more conventionalized – the body of the supine figure is partly presented in the frontal position (head, attributes, torso), and partly in profile (legs, feet).

Among the Nasca mythical representations, the hybrids – the compilations of various creatures' features – were rather a frequent kind. However, the development of this kind of motifs was relatively



Fig. 5. Vessel with inventory No. 178-16. Height: 16 cm



Fig.6. Vessel with inventory No. 7002-73-3. Height: 13.3 cm

short: its evolution began in phase 3 and reached its apogee in phase 5. One example of this kind of syncretic being is the spotted cat, initially identified with the water cat, and presently thought to be a representative of a feline species living in the pampas. It is usually accompanied by details symbolizing agriculture and fertility. Another example of a hybrid is the snake being, which is a combination of the body of a snake with a human or a feline head, sometimes depicted with a mask covering its mouth. This being was supposed to take care of vegetation and fertility (Proulx 1991:248-250).

A close analysis of all the details depicted on the vessel No. 1095-10-9 (Figure 4) leads us to believe that what we are dealing with here is a deity responsible for governing the Earth and providing fertility. The technical features of the painting seem to suggest that the vessel was produced in Nasca Phase 3 or 4.

The next vessel to be discussed here (Fig. 5: inventory No. 178-16) also presents a syncretic representation of a mythological deity (see analogies: Eisleb 1977: Fig. 59 (V A 33260), 67 (V A 33265); Lothrop, Mahler 1957:Plate IV d). It takes the shape of a jar, with a distinct neck. The major decoration covers the upper half of the vessel's belly and reveals a dualistic representation of mythical beings; the interpretation thereof may be double as well. Similarly as in the case of vessel No. 1095-10-9 (Fig. 4),

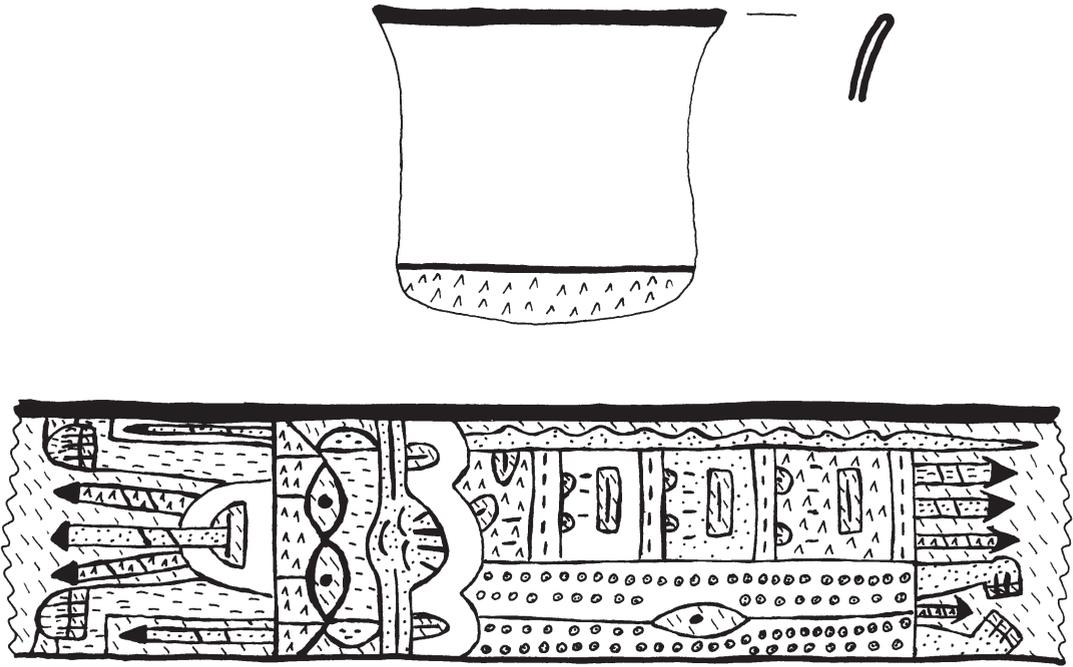


Fig. 7. Vessel with inventory No. 1097-10-11. Height: 8.1 cm

some of the features lead us to identify the depicted figure with the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being. On the other hand, the conjoint representations of demons wearing volute (cactus?) crowns correspond with the representation of the so-called “bloody mouth” which is a metamorphosis of the Killer Whale figure. Both the shape of the vessel and the modification of the representation of the monster depicted on it suggest that this piece of pottery was produced in Nasca Phase 5.

The Killer Whale (another term, apart from the one used in English - the Mythical Killer Whale, is the Spanish *la orca mítica*), in the initial Nasca Phase (1) was presented in a naturalistic form, with human arms, gradually, however, its figure became “mythicized”. It was equipped with such attributes as the knife, or the human head, held as a trophy in the figure’s anthropomorphized hands. This form was further modified in Phases 5 and 6. The maw, gaping ajar, and the trophy head symbolizing blood initiate the use of a new term: the “bloody mouth” to describe the new variant of the Whale. The increasing stylization of the representations and the act of merging with the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being is now only signalled by the characteristic shape of the tail (Roark 1965:25, 44).

The next vessel (Fig. 6: inventory No. 7002-73-3) is an example of a figural vessel (see analogies: Kauffmann Doig 1978: Fig. 4) – this kind of ceramic pottery was rare in the Nasca culture. The modelled head is connected with the spout by a bridge handle. The shape of the figure’s torso is determined by the shape of the vessel’s belly. The painted decoration covers the whole surface of the product. The head is equipped with a pair of outgrowths in the shape of horns, with a decorative headband “hung” on them. Plaited strands (of hair perhaps?) fall on the figure’s shoulders, and the figure’s arms are decorated with painted ornaments in the shape of snakes. Representations of trophy heads decorate the demon’s torso (rendered in a very schematic shape) and the vessel’s base (modelled in a conventionalized form). The most interesting detail is situated on the figure’s back. It is the

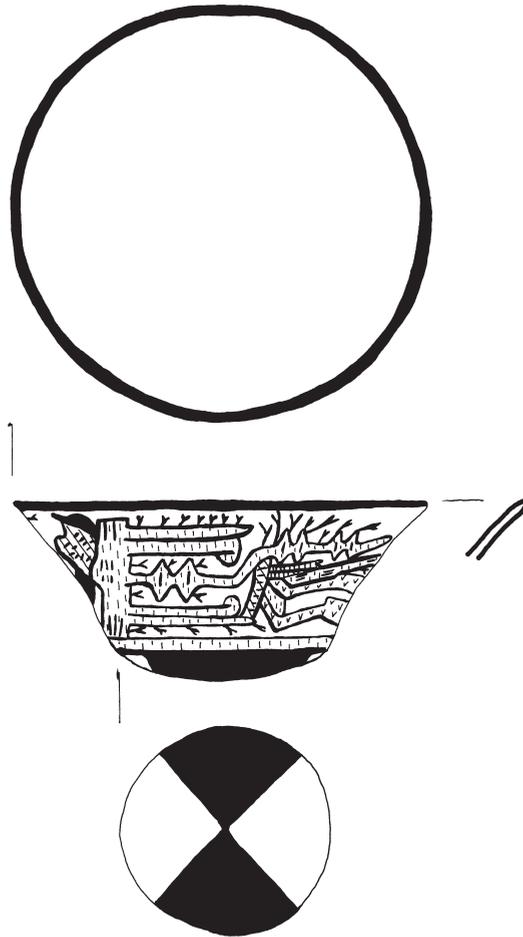


Fig. 8. Vessel with inventory No. 130-1. Height: 6.9 cm

“bloody mouth”, or the star-shape being with volute outgrowths. This allows us to present a possible interpretation of the representation and helps us to estimate the vessel’s age. Perhaps the demon thus presented is somehow connected with the water world – the snake and the Killer Whale motifs would suggest that – and the vessel was produced in Nasca Phase 5.

The next piece of pottery is a cup (Fig. 7: inventory No. 1097-10-11). The entire surface of the vessel is covered by painted decorations depicting another mythical being. In this case the deity’s identity is by no means problematic (see analogies: Eisleb 1977: Fig. 57 (V A 61644), 58 (V A 33264), 59 (V A 33260); Roark 1965, Plate II, Fig. 11). It is the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, painted here with the arrows, the classical body with the clearly visible navel and human legs, and with representations of geometricized trophy heads. The cup, judging by the typical representation of the deity, belongs to one of the intermediate phases of the culture – to be more precise, it belongs to Nasca Phase 5.

The next vessel from the Ethnological Museum in Barcelona adorned with a mythical decoration is a bowl (Fig. 8: inventory No. 130-1). The motif of the supernatural being is tripled here and decorates

the surface of the vessel with repeating representations of demonic figures with anthropomorphized features, such as legs and trophy heads, the latter acting at the same time as the beings' own heads. Possibly, the decorative scene rendered here presents the sacrifice motif, which would explain the multiplication of representations. The vessel may be identified as representative of Nasca Phase 6 (see analogies: Eisleb 1977: Fig. 226 (V A 33218), Fig. 214 (V A 33262); Lothrop, Mahler 1957: Plate VI, Fig. f).

The last vessel depicting mythical representations to be discussed here is a tall cup (Fig. 9: inventory No. 1867-16-722). The painting covers the entire surface of the cup, and the decoration is contained in two strips. The central strip is filled with repeated motifs depicting mythical beings, most probably Killer Whales, whereas the other, lesser strip is located close to the rim and is decorated with trophy head motifs. The central pattern of supernatural "whales" has been enriched by volute details in complex contaminations. The schematic trophy heads, situated next to the beings' maws suggest that these are representations of the "bloody mouth". The whole ornamentation is so multi-faceted and complex that it makes the impression of *horror vacui*. The form and the decoration of the vessel suggest that it belongs to Nasca Phase 6 (see analogies: Eisleb 1977: Fig. 219 (V A 7827), 220 (V A 63459); Guarnotta 1985:263–264 Fig. 293; Lumbreras 1974:130; Lumbreras 1981:238; Vessel 1867 – 16 – 723 from Museu Etnològic de Barcelona from the Leopoldo Gómez Alonso's collection from 1952).

The next vessel whose decoration conveys mythological meanings is a jug with a bridge handle and a single spout (Fig. 10: inventory No. 1096-10-10). The vessel represents a human figure – a fisher – which may be interpreted as the Fisher Being with the fishing net full of fish. The fisher has a fishing net thrown over his shoulders, and underneath the fishing net there are eight small fish (four on each side of the figure). The object which the fisher holds in his hand may symbolize the fishing rod, or act as an attribute of power (in this case over the water world). The representation, corresponding with the naturalistic Nasca style, suggests that the vessel dates back to Phase 4 (see analogies: Anton 1978: Fig. 80; Basziliow 1972: Fig. 4; Eisleb 1977: Fig. 35 (V A 50923), 36 (V A 50924), 37 (V A 32498), 38 (V A 64023); Alcina Franch 1986: Fig. 9.19; Lumbreras 1981:129).

There were also many other forms of fauna and flora which were the objects of adoration in Nasca society, such as the ají peppers, pacaes, tomatoes, pallar, jiquima, beans and cactus among plants, and the jaguars, harts, foxes, parrots, llamas, pelicans, seagulls, condors, falcons, fish, starfish, shrimps, spiders, lizards and snakes among animals (Pezzia Asserto 1962:45).

The next vessel from the Barcelonian collection (Fig. 11: inventory No. 1857-16-712) exemplifies the kind of representation in which renderings of plants, as well as anthropomorphic beings convey mythological senses. It is a jug with a single spout and a bridge handle, depicting a female figure with her hair loose. The figure has unnaturally large hands in which she holds some plants. The floral motifs probably depict representations of beans and pepper. The classical form of the vessel, the richness of its colours and decorative motifs suggest that it dates back to Nasca Phase 4 or 5 (see analogies: Eisleb 1977: Fig. 210 (V A 63366), 211 (V A 769); Lothrop, Mahler 1957: Plate II, Fig. b; Blasco Bosqued, Ramos Gómez 1991:18-19, Lamina I, 5, Lamina II, 3).

Among the typical representations connected with ritualism in the Nasca culture are the representations of trophy heads, which appear on vessels we have discussed so far. The origins of this kind of representation date back to the Chavín and Paracas cultures, and hunting for heads during wartime is in itself a phenomenon which has a long tradition among the Andean civilizations. Most frequently, such representations accompany mythical beings and may appear in a whole range of varieties; there are representations in the vertical, as well as in the horizontal position, with the eyes wide open, and with the eyes tight shut, with varied degrees of schematism (Blasco Bosqued, Ramos Gómez 1991:113-120). The trophy head motif was so popular that in Nasca Phase 6 this kind of

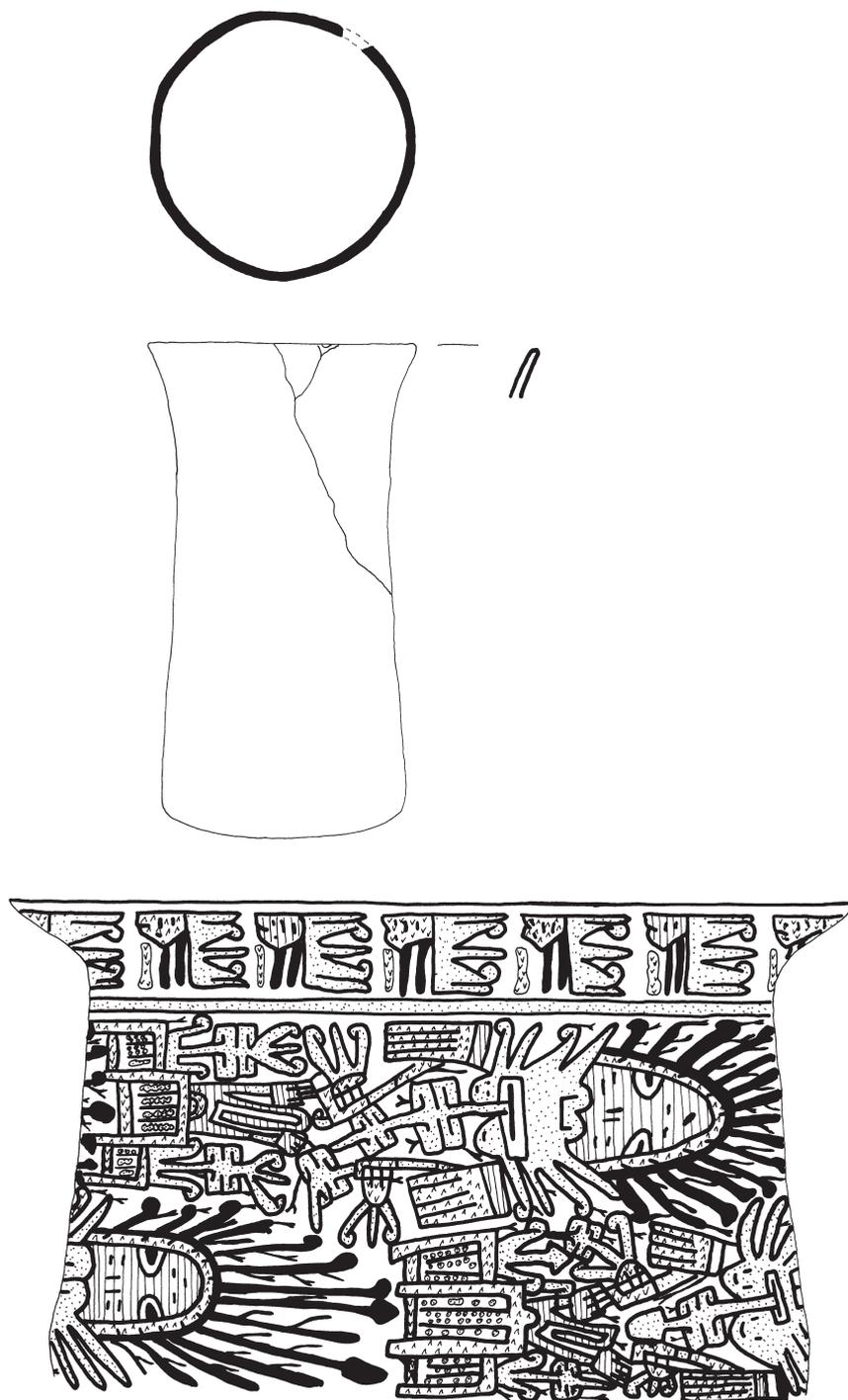
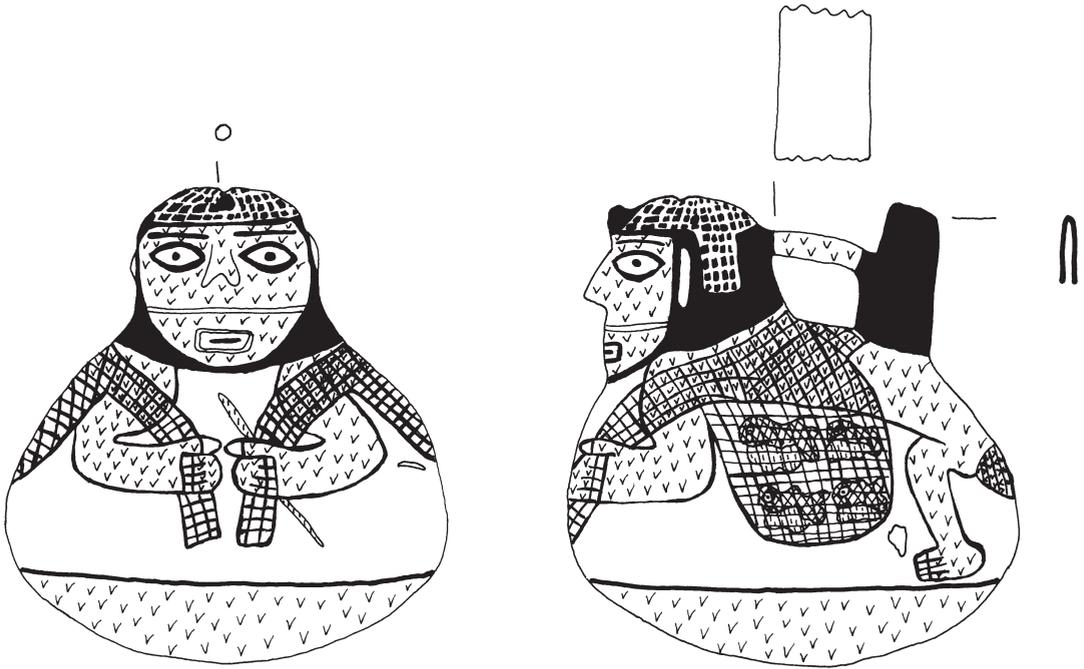


Fig. 9. Vessel with inventory No. 1867-16-722. Height: 20 cm



**Fig. 10.** Vessel with inventory No. 1096-10-10. Height: 14.9 cm

representation constituted no less than one fifth of all the representations produced. The unrivalled frequency of these elements allows us to formulate certain conclusions which could explain this phenomenon. Possibly, for the Nasca cosmological representations these were the indispensable attributes of divinity, or maybe the trophy heads themselves possessed some kind of magical power and had an apotropaic function (Berezkin 1975:83-84).

The Barcelonian collection contains four vessels with the dominant trophy head elements. One of these vessels – a cup (Fig. 12: inventory No. 3845-56-19) – is profiled, its shape narrowing towards the spout. It is reminiscent of an anthropomorphic vessel and was probably used for ritual purposes (as a tomb gift). The cup, with some three-dimensional elements (the nose) is decorated with a painted depiction of a human face, with the eyes shut (a rather frequently used conventional rendering of a head) (Blasco Bosqued, Ramos Gómez 1991:114). Two symmetric holes are made in the upper part of the vessel. The custom of wearing trophy heads tied at one's belt found its continuation in the burial rites, too. Very often, instead of typical trophy heads, stylized ceramic vessels were worn. The little holes mentioned above could help to tie the trophy head onto the deceased person's body (Roark 1965:13). The vessel's age may be estimated as roughly Nasca Phase 4 or 5 (see analogies: Blasco Bosqued, Ramos Gómez, 1991:Table VIII, Fig. 2 and 5; Eisleb 1977: Fig. 129 (V A 8072), 130 (V A 33252), 131 (V A 33253), 141 (V A 61665); Guarnotta 1985: Fig. 277; Lehmann 1960: Fig. 76; Pezzia Assereto 1962:43).

The next vessel (Fig. 13: inventory No. 1866-16-721) is also a cup. The painting covers the whole surface of the vessel and is an example of a combination of geometric motifs and stylized trophy heads. Repetitive sequences of human heads are inscribed into rectangular fields making a kind of an artistic frame, uniting the entire ornamental design of the vessel – they appear in the upper stripe near the rim,

as well as in the bottom stripe. The decorative style of the cup and its classical shape suggest it was produced in Nasca Phase 4 or 5 (see analogies Eisleb 1977: Fig. 89 (V A 51108), 143 (V A 51033); Schmidt 1929:339).

Another vessel – again, a cup (Fig. 14: inventory No. 3844-56-18) – has a clear decoration, featuring the “cross” ornament, repetitively painted in the central part of the vessel. Its most important ornamental form (looking from the ritual practice perspective) is the eight identical figures of smiling human heads which encircle the upper part of the vessel. The artifact’s age can be estimated around Nasca Phase 4 or 5 (see analogies Rossel Castro 1977: Fig. 32; Roark 1965: Fig. 52, 53; Eisleb 1977: Fig. 124 (V A 32653), 132 (V A 33241).

Finally, the last of the cups (Fig. 15: inventory No. 1868-16-723) which has a painted decoration of stylized trophy head motifs and geometric ornaments. The first section of the decoration, situated in the upper part of the vessel, depicts a sequence of “crowned” heads (the “crowns” have a volute form). The central part of the vessel is covered by geometric decoration divided into layered strips: the first, uppermost strip is filled by multiplied, small, zigzag geometric patterns; the second, middle strip is much wider, and is covered by a bigger, multicolour, zigzag sequence of patterns into which smaller, triangular details have been incorporated; finally, the third, bottom strip of the decoration which is filled by meandering, step-like motifs. All the segments have been separated from each other by narrow strips, framed with black lines. The high degree of schematization of the representations of the trophy heads, as well as the form of the vessel suggest that it was produced during the period when Nasca style reached its most developed stage, that is Phase 6 or 7 (see analogies Eisleb 1977: Fig. 186 (V A 33261), 187 (V A 51126); Vessel No. 1867-16-722 from Museu Etnològic de Barcelona from the Leopoldo Gómez Alonso’s collection from 1952; Willey 1971: Fig. 73-76).



Fig.11. Vessel with inventory No. 1857-16-712. Height: 16.2 cm

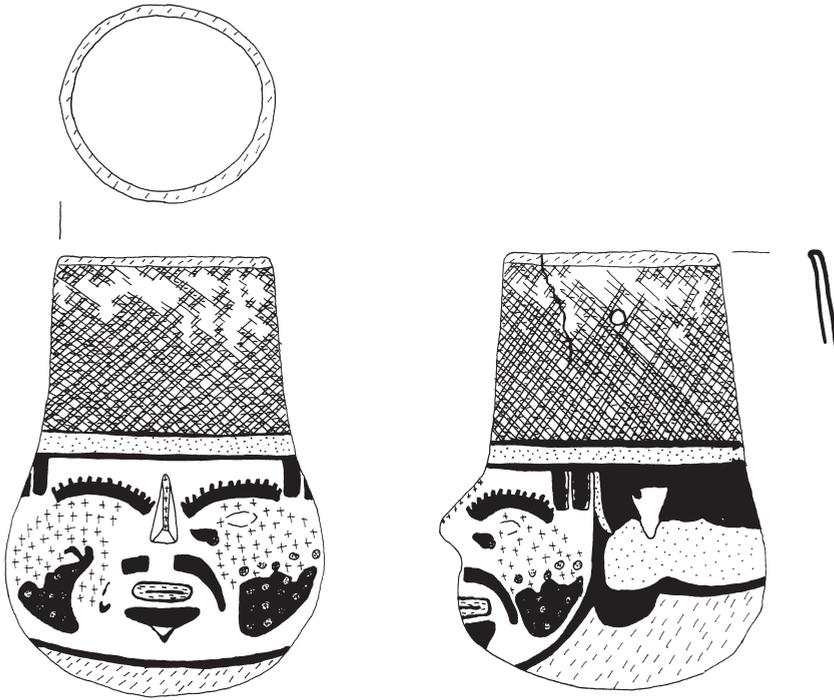


Fig. 12. Vessel with inventory No. 3845-56-19. Height: 17 cm



Fig. 13. Vessel with inventory No. 1866-16-721. Height: 14.5 cm

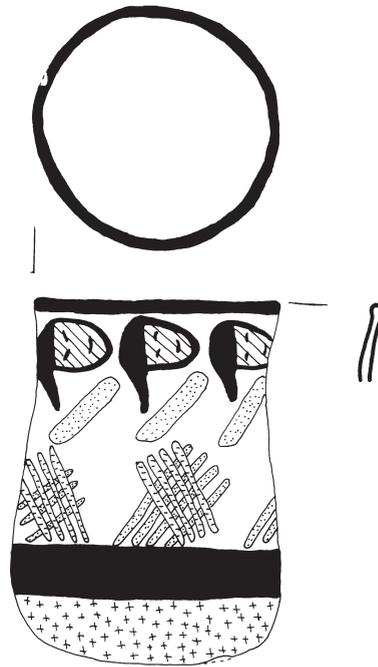


Fig. 14. Vessel with inventory No. 3844-56-18. Height: 15.1 cm



Fig. 15. Vessel with inventory No. 1868-16-723. Height: 21.7 cm

## CONCLUSIONS

Similarly as in the case of the Moche culture, the relationship between man, nature and supernatural powers was very strong in the Nasca culture. The Nasca believed in the sacred relationship between man and nature and, due to that belief, the sacred order of the universe has been reflected in the structure of Nasca society and in all forms of human activity. The major elements of nature were, according to the Nasca beliefs, the Earth, the sea, water and the sky. Nasca iconography perfectly corresponds to this system of beliefs by representing the figures that are the powerful rulers of these elements – the Killer Whale, as the ruler of the sea; the condor (the Scary Bird), as the ruler of the sky (the air), the Spotted Cat and the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being who play the major role on Earth, and the Snake Being who is responsible for the water element. The very fact that all of these deities are represented in syncretic forms tells us that their meaning was symbolic, and not naturalistic (Proulx 1991:255-256).

With such a developed religious and ritual sphere as the cultures of the Early Intermediate Period of the Peruvian coast presented, we may suppose that the supernatural figures were in fact allegories of myths, and a more in-depth understanding of the mythological sphere may be achieved through an analysis of other cultures in which totemism, shamanism and the use of hallucinogens in the pursuit of a religious union with the deity were dominant.

The study of the development of the Moche and Nasca cultures reveals that one of the crucial forms of artistic expression – if not the most important one – was the pottery, which achieved an incredibly high degree of artistry and the top quality of workmanship in the Peruvian coast during the Early Intermediate Period. Analyses of iconographic themes still remain a bottomless source of academic knowledge and at the same time allow us to gain new insights into the social structure of archeological cultures. Moreover, such analyses define the Peruvian cultures as polytheistic societies in which religion constituted the most important element of human existence. A careful analysis of the decorative themes gives us a fuller understanding of the rules which regulated the functioning of the pre-Columbian civilizations and informs us about the various aspects of life in these societies.

The analysis of the ceramic art of these two coastal societies may also become a starting point for the further discussion of the possible cultural infiltration of the Moche and Nasca cultures, although theories about the convergences and analogies between them have been treated very cautiously.

The pottery which has been analysed above constitutes only a part of a larger collection from the Museu Etnologic de Barcelona (see Borsiak 2002). The vessels gathered in the collection have been bought from private collectors; over the period of twenty years (1952-1972) the Museum managed to collect artifacts from eleven collections which included Moche and Nasca pottery. Unfortunately, the context of the pottery remains unknown, which makes the question of its systematization far more difficult.

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