

## **The Early Intermediate Period: Eduardo the *curandero* and Moche iconography**

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- The notes for this class are brief, because the reading is very straightforward.
- Most of this comes directly from Donnan 1978, *Moche Art of Peru*, highly recommended, and not only the excerpts in the course reader. The Bawden extracts are also good.
  
- Moche ceramics were clearly made by highly trained specialists
  - who turned out many copies or variants of the same vessels, in virtually mass production
  
- Eduardo the *curandero* (healer) is a modern north coast healer, whose practices and knowledge retain ideas that help to interpret some Moche iconography
  - Eduardo uses a staff with a carved owl, and another with a woman (an unmarried woman, he says)
    - he explains the symbolism of both
    - curers in Moche art often combine owl and female aspects
  - he uses strands of espingo seeds, much as shown on Moche pots and described in ethnohistorical accounts
  - likewise "bull roarer", cones of lime, slices of San Pedro cactus
  - bird imagery may relate to "ecstatic flight" experienced by healers
  - deer is a symbol of speed and elusiveness used today and shown in Moche art, often associated with images of a bush (*Adenantha colubrina*) used to make *Vilca*, a hallucinogenic additive to chicha beer, still used by healers
  - sea lion stones used today, clearly shown in Moche pots
  - cat symbolism; fox symbolism; dog symbolism; serpent as mediator between opposing forces and realms
  
- Mountain scenes
  - usually, but not always, five peaks, highest in center
  - most elaborate have a figure draped face-down over the highest peak, with hair hanging down, along with other small figures and a larger fanged figure
  - mountains as places where shamans are trained; herbs grow; spirits live that are invoked in curing sessions
  
- Half fist hand position
  - shown by itself, or people making this gesture
  - seems to imitate the five-peak mounting scene
  
- Repeated themes (scenes, myths, etc.) in Moche art
  - a lot of Moche art seems to repeat all or parts of a handful of standard scenes, or "themes"
    - analogous to the Nativity scene in Christian iconography
    - with a set cast of characters, objects, etc. that viewers associate with a specific story, even if not all of it is shown in a given example

- The Presentation Theme
  - Figure A: Large figure with rays from head and shoulders, conical helmet with crescent ornament on top, backflap, etc., receiving a goblet from figure B
  - Figure B: Part bird, part human, with either a conical helmet or a headdress like figure D's, presenting a goblet to figure A.
  - Figure C: Headdress with two tassel ornaments (like a court jester's), long shirt, sash or scarf with serpent heads hanging down back, holds a goblet and a disk or plate. Donnan refers to this figure as "him" in Donnan 1978, but we now know for certain that it was female... more on this later
  - Figure D: Two characteristic scarves or sashes hanging down back, headdress with a half-circle with an animal face (archaeological examples of this item itself are metal with the animal face pushed out in high relief), etc.
  - additional specific figures: a human drawing blood from a bound prisoner, a anthropomorphic cat doing the same, a bound, nude prisoner, various dogs, serpents, animal warriors, the classic Moche club and shield motif, a litter or a throne, an *ulluchu* fruit...
  - knowing the "identities" of these figures means that many Moche pots, murals, etc. can be understood as representing one or more of these specific characters, not just random combinations of features
    - so much of the art has very specific religious or mythological meaning, rather than just showing odd figures or daily life
- Payoff for understanding Moche society
  - Long after Donnan figured out the Presentation theme and others, excavations of very high-status tombs found individuals who had been buried with objects associated with specific figures in the Presentation theme
    - Figure A: the "Lord of Sipán" burial, and also the earlier "Old Lord of Sipán" burial
    - Figure B: a lesser burial at Sipán
    - Figure C: two burials from San José de Moro
  - that is, actual, living people had the paraphernalia to impersonate the various figures in the Presentation theme
  - the people buried with metal ornaments representing the "court jester's" headdress of figure C were women
  - multiple examples have been found of burials of some of these figures
  - and items such as the goblets, bowls, headdresses, etc. have long been known among looted Moche artifacts
  - interpretation: people actually dressed for the roles in the Presentation theme, and presumably carried them out
    - these roles were evidently offices that were filled by a sequence of individuals, as the role of Pope is filled by a sequence of individuals who use the same general paraphernalia and perform the same general rituals
  - these people's burials are among the richest known from Moche times
  - they presumably represent some sort of elite based on, or legitimized by, performing these highly formalized, symbolic, but real rites

- were all the wealthy, powerful elite based on such ritual roles, or were these specialists alongside of more secular leaders whose roles were based more on administration, militarism, etc.?
- that is still up for debate