

Good example of essay on ritual sacrifice in the art of the paracas, nazca and mo...

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



Moche

Moche were considered to be the most interested in the Cupisnique iconographic message. Like their predecessors, Moche chose to include - the spider, bird of prey, monster, fish, and humans - in their religious art. In addition, they added supernatural crab and scorpion. However, the decapitation depiction is extremely circumscribed. Although the variety of decapitators is small, all of them perform the identical task, which is of severing of head. There are several theories that have been proposed to explain the reason behind the several characters that represented the head-takers. The first one is temporal theory. According to this theory, each decapitator presided over a segment of Moche ritual calendar. The other is spatial theory, according to which different locales may have their own patron head-taker. There also is a possibility that these decapitators were group specific. These groups could be lineages or occupations.

It can be further inferred that the seven Moche decapitators were patrons of specific valleys, settlements, or groups. However, this proposal couldn't be developed further due to limited amount of archeological recovery. But it is sufficient for the development of basis against which future discoveries can be tested. At this point of time, three major items are worth mentioning.

- Only one kind of decapitator has been found at any single site. And prior to 1994, another Supernatural Fish Decapitator was found at Dos Cabezas.
- The presence of Supernatural Spider Decapitator images at three different sites does not necessarily undermine the lineage- or occupation-specific rationale. There is some evidence that the Super-natural Decapitator was considered to be more important than the others.

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- Also, in the Moche samples there are multiple scenes of the Supernatural Human and Monster in combat. It can be inferred that they refer to two Moche settlements, each with a different decapitator patron.

For example the excavations at Dos Cabezas not only found the Supernatural Fish Decapitator bowl mentioned above, but made a startling discovery in one room of a small temple. At the south end of the chamber lay eighteen human heads. Although the heads were completely fleshless when found, their structure indicates that they may have been freshly severed when placed in the room. Upon close inspection of the cervical vertebra it was revealed that showed marks across the throat of at least four individuals. If the cuts resulted from attempts to remove the heads, then in these cases the procedure wasn't successful in the first attempt. Conversely, those heads without cut marks on the vertebra may have been clearly severed through the disc cartilage on the first try.

In another such example, a single piece of pottery was found near the body on the north side: the snapped-off head of a small jar with a little modeled human head. It was considered a puzzle as it seemed so inconsequential an item to be the only ceramic object with an individual of such high rank. Then there were these long nose structures performing ritual sacrifice. There were also similar artifacts depicted as prisoners. There were also other head structures called the Black Stripe because of the distinctive stripes on the head. Also there were with dimples on the face. Then there were these artifacts that depicted the whole mountain sacrifice, and here their faces were shown to be wrinkled. Besides them, there were whole narrative being shown as art form, particularly the phase III paintings. They showed

warriors, combat, capture, and the bleeding, parading and arrangement of the captives. These sequential activities can be compiled into what is called warrior narrative. These were even more prevalent in phase IV paintings. On the ceramic pottery ware you also find examples of fine painting depicting the sacrifice scene.

Nasca

One of the most distinctive features of the Nasca culture was frequent depiction of severed human heads in the ceramic and textile art. They are referred to in literature as “ trophy heads”, and can be displayed as single elements, held in the hands or attached to the belts of warriors or shamans, or associated with a wide of “ mythical creatures”, which represent spiritual forces in the society. The most commonly depicted creatures in early Nasca art is the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being, displayed in a number of variations. In one such variation, the creature has a club and trophy head in its hand and is wearing a long cloak, probably derived from the animal skins once worn by religious leaders in the society. In the other type, a masked standing figure is holding a trophy head in its hands, with still other attached to its belt. In the third type, the “ trophy head taster”, has wings like a falcon and has its tongue protruding into a severed head. The other mythical beings with direct trophy-head associations are the Mythical Killer Whale, which represents the powerful forces of the sea. There is also a Horrible Bird, which is a condor like creature, representing the focus of the sky. Of all the cultures that practiced head-taking in ancient Peru, only Nasca and Paracas are known to have meticulously prepared heads for ritual use.

The preparation of the trophy heads was only the first step in the final ritual use and disposition of these remains. The main practitioner in such rituals was the shaman, who also acted as an intermediary between the spirit world and the everyday world. From the archeological evidence and the ceramic iconography, the major components of the Nasca rituals were; (a) music provided by clay panpipes, clay trumpets, drum, and rattles, (b) ritual drinks, which may have been included chicha (corn beer); (c) use of trophy heads; and (d) processions to the sacred places. Trophy heads were also used in ceremonies in honour of the dead. Several vessels have been depicted a mummy bundle being honored by a figure playing panpipes and holding a trophy head. Also, ceramic jars modeled in the form of a trophy head are common in all the collections and could have been used in all the ceremonies. A ceramic vessel in the form of a head had been placed in the tomb as if to serve as a substitute. These Nasca head jars came in wide range of sizes and forms. Some have been clearly modelled with the intention of depicting all the salient features of a trophy head such as; pinned lips; carrying rope; bloody foramen magnum; skin flaps etc. Then here are other examples, such as that of male effigy with trophy head. Then various head jars were also found. Most significant were the Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (AMB), and also the Nazca drums. The drums also had fine painting depicting such rituals. Then there were effigy variant, trophy head taster variant, killer whale variant, and horrible head variants.

Elaborating on the significance of the trophy heads in a Nasca society, unlike theocratic state religion of cultures of Egypt, Sumerians, Aztec, or Inca, their

religion existed at a more primitive level. The spirit world of the Nasca included the most powerful creatures of the; air, such as condor and falcon; earth, such as jaguar and puma, and water, such as killer whale and shark. They are reflected in symbolic form in their art. Similarly, the mythical beings should also be viewed as symbolic representations of either the nature spirits themselves. The religious practitioners of the Nasca were shamans, who were the intermediaries between the spirit world and the everyday world. They used a variety of means to contact the spirits, including hallucinogenic drugs to induce vision and to gain control of supernatural forces. Most of the ceremonies were conducted by these individuals. It is quite likely that such ceremonies were conducted at sacred places like mountains. And they also used paraphernalia like panpipes, mouth masks, animal-skin clothes, and Spondylus-shell necklaces as a part of these religious complexes. The religion of the Nasca people was complex and their ideology and worldview was very different from today's complex societies. The Nasca felt unity between the nature and the everyday events. The trophy heads were more than just the symbols, and they tried to exemplify these attributes in an attempt to control the supernatural forces which affected their lives.

Paracas

Regarding the Paracas, numerous studies have been devoted to describe the intriguing imagery on more than one thousand fabrics with figurative embroidery. Researchers have used the mythological beings, demons, impersonators, trophy-head warriors, supernaturals, and cult objects to

describe the human- and animal-like figures' meaning. However, little work has been done to describe the interrelationship between figures and the underlying themes.

We will look at the three layers of references that are depicted in embroidered textiles in the block coloured style; blood, fertility, and transformation. Bloodletting is implied in many figures through the severed heads and knives they carry. Images also show predation, autosacrifice, and evident wounds to show bleeding. Fertility is depicted is shown with reference to plants. Sprouts from seeds, particularly of beans are particularly meaningful. The references to blood and fertility, though not fully developed, are depicted as pervasive themes from different bundles. The third theme, transformation, has been illustrated by groupings on textiles from different bundles. " Varied figures with overlapping, but not identical, traits can be ordered to show transitions and transformations." These overlapping traits in the pictures suggest sequence of narrative in pictorial form. The general drift of sequence of these images appears to be the mythical transformation of the dead to ancestor and the animal counterpart. The reference to fertility and blood, which are interconnected, interweave with the narrative.

On the garments, the seminal figures of the mythic transformation sequences is acutely backbent and nearly naked. This acutely bent posture is also that exposes the most vulnerable parts of the body, the neck and the viscera, and the figures exhibit signs of wounds. Some figures of this type have a neatly defined square at the throat and a projection from the uptilted chin. There are other depictions of the backbent figure flick back and forth between two representations, one with its hand on top of its greatly

expanded chest and other with a skinny torso and arms outflung. In some other representations of the backbent figure, the fan is much smaller and could be seen as a knife. The Paracas narrative will be incomplete without the mention of mummy bundle, trophy head, standing anthropomorphic figure with trophy head, standing anthropomorphic figures with weapons and Tumi Knife. Finally, the various back-bent figures and the ritual figures with fertility symbols.

Bibliography

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