There is great Moche art; there are many media for Moche art; and the archaeology of the last fifteen or so years has made a critical difference in knowledge of Moche art. Beginning with Max Uhle, a little over a hundred years ago, many contributions to Moche studies have been made, but the concentration and achievement of the recent work are unparalleled.

Dependent largely on the sea and irrigation farming, the Moche people, in most of the first three-quarters of the first millennium AD, lived in river valleys that cut through expanses of sand on the desert north coast of Peru, a narrow, over 400-mile-long strip between the Pacific Ocean and some of the world’s highest mountains. The Moche domain included ties with offshore islands and the sierra. Distinct northern and southern Moche regions are defined, in part, by major differences in art. The southern ceramics, with line drawing or sculptural forms, richly display gods, people, ceremonies, and environmental elements, presented usually on distinctive stirrup spout bottles. Thanks particularly to recent investigations of architecture at Huaca de la Luna (in the Moche Valley) and Huaca Cao Viejo (Chicama Valley), a quantity of striking murals and painted reliefs is now known. Moche textiles, which are expertly and inventively woven, though often poorly preserved, will not be discussed here, and I will say little about the remarkable Moche metallurgy. I would like to note that various craft workshops have been discovered and that knowledge of craft production has increased through recent excavations.

Moche architecture, murals, and fine crafts mirror developments in Moche political history, for they embody the will and the administrative and cosmological needs of rulers, for whom the arts were an important part of their politico-religious power structure. The subject matter of the ceramics sometimes seems only naturalistic—a portrait, a llama, maize, or potatoes—but it probably always has symbolic, ritual, and/or mythic significance. The rules for what was shown and how it was shown must have been quite strict, yet there was allowance—and perhaps need—for the fresh and creative spirit that gives life to any fine art; enlivening seems to have been very much a part of Moche artistic endeavor. For many years, attempts to understand the Moche world were dependent largely on the rich iconography of the ceramic bottles. After the last fifteen years of field investigation, the archaeology is beginning to explain the ceramic iconography.

**Abstract**

For many years, attempts to understand the Moche world were largely dependent upon the rich iconography of the ceramic bottles. After the last fifteen or so years of fairly constant archaeological investigation, archaeology is now being used to explain the iconography. In some instances, archaeology has provided for the first time actual examples of objects known only from ceramic depictions. In other instances, architectural excavations have revealed structures and rooms of types that appear on the ceramics in abbreviated form. These comparisons instruct us in the ways that the Moche put their realities into compact visual expression, and they give evidence of what in the iconography actually existed and what was a gloss to express the numinous quality of the art. Archaeology has further uncovered new forms and new concepts within Moche metallurgy and mural art, and it is pointing out differences in the northern and southern regions in Moche approaches to art and iconography. Archaeology also raises many new questions as it expands and enriches our knowledge of iconography.
Although the ceramics yield many kinds of information, it has long been obvious that certain important subjects were missing; now the tables are turned, and archaeological evidence exists for ritual activities for which there are no obvious images. For example, subjects such as the offering-room group at Pacatnamú and the room with skulls at Dos Cabezas (both Jequetepeque Valley sites) described by Alana Cordy-Collins (1997, 2001a) do not appear in ceramic scenes, nor does a burning event that took place at Pacatnamú. That funerary rites were a significant activity is obvious from the archaeology, yet ceramics tell little about them except for examples of the very late Burial Theme in the northern region (Donnan and McClelland 1979) and middle-period depictions of probable grave goods in the south. On the other hand, some depicted rites are not obvious in the archaeology. Evidence for the deer hunt, for example, a major middle-period theme (Donnan 1997; Donnan and McClelland 1999; Kutscher 1983: Abbn. 69–87), has not yet been found in excavations and would perhaps be difficult to identify; deer remains are rare. Some ceremonies are not obvious in either art or archaeology. The enthronement of a ruler was surely a major rite, but one difficult for archaeology to reveal and not distinguishable in iconography. Are effigy portrayals of an important man, seated on a platform, sometimes with a small feline, condensed/shorthand descriptions of accession? Is one of the depicted rites an unrecognized accession ceremony—the ritual chewing of coca leaves, for example, or a sacrificial libation rite?

The confrontation of archaeology and iconography raises new sets of questions and categories. Indeed, archaeological discoveries rarely match exactly what we are seeking on the basis of the iconography, which has special symbolic-language rules. This very observation teaches us something about the Moche mind. I would like to explore this subject, first noting some instances of matching iconography and recent archaeology.

**Correspondences**

Twenty years ago, in a manuscript for the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (Benson 1984a), I wrote that certain sacrifice-associated figures in the art wear a tunic of metal platelets sewn onto cloth. Julie Jones, the Metropolitan curator, looking at the manuscript, asked if I had ever seen such a garment. I had seen an actual Chimú example, but not a Moche one; I could not prove that was what it was. I was relieved to learn soon afterwards that Walter Alva had found one at Sipán, the first example known (Alva and Donnan 1993: figs. 57, 245).

A correspondence noted by many people is that between a figure in a sacrificial rite that Christopher Donnan first described in 1975 as the Presentation Theme, a figure identified by several people (Berezkin 1980 [1981]; Hocquenghem and Lyon 1980) as a woman, whom I believe to be a supernatural being. She wears a variable but distinctive headdress with a projection at either side. In 1991, Donnan and Luis Jaime Castillo (1992, 1994; see also Donnan, this volume) excavated at San José de Moro (Jequetepeque Valley) the burial of a priestess with the same accessories; the following year they excavated another.

The supernatural woman—I think that she is a moon goddess (Benson 1985)—is also depicted seated in a crescent that is sometimes a raft. The many examples of this scene excavated at San José de Moro fit Donna McClelland’s (1990) finding of an increase in marine subject matter in her sample of Late Moche vase drawings. The late marine scenes show supernatural beings on possibly sacrificial missions; the “hold” of the raft is often occupied by captives. Unlike earlier scenes, in which anyone in a raft usually has a fishing line, almost no one in the last Moche phase is fishing. Drop nets are often attached to the goddess’s raft, and Cordy-Collins (2001b) points out the probability that a weight for a net is attached to the goddess’s garment. A possible argument against the weight interpretation is that, as far as I know, fishing gear has not been excavated in female burials. Nevertheless, this female was a goddess strongly associated with the sea, and in one Late Moche-Huari scene, she is fishing (Donnan and McClelland 1999: fig. 5.39). Instead of the weight, or in addition to it, she can have what looks like a small, wrapped and tied gift, or she holds a cloth or bag in which there is an object not yet tied (Donnan and McClelland 1999: figs. 5.19, 5.58). We now know that many burial offerings were wrapped or tied. If her raft trip relates to the voyage to the other world through the sea, these images are appropriate to her journey. In fineline ceramic scenes, apparent grave goods are tied together. Dancers holding a cord or cloth (Donnan 1982: figs. 7–12) may belong to the funerary rite; this fiber or cloth is possibly intended for burial
offerings. As for the wrapping, cloth was precious and added preciousness. Wrapping gave an offered object a special ambience.

An object previously known only on ceramics appears usually in scenes related to the coca-chewing rite, where it is suspended on a cord around the neck of a figure that I take to be the patron god of the rite. The object has a metal-platelet body, arms, wings, or hands, and a feline or batlike head (Donnan and McClelland 1999: figs. 4.19, 4.90; Uceda, this volume). On fineline bottles, it usually swings out to the back from the god’s body or floats in space; on a modeled bottle, it lies against the god’s back (Figure 1.1) or, in at least one case, the side (Figure 1.2). I had surmised that it was a bag, because coca leaves are carried in a bag and because the object looks like a god’s superbag.

In 1999, the Museo Arqueológico de la Universidad Nacional de Trujillo exhibited the contents of a burial cache excavated in Platform I of Huaca de la Luna that included the first actual example known of the pictured pendant (Morales, Asmat, and Fernández 2002; Uceda, this volume). It is much more complex than the pottery drawings, but it is clearly the same object, and it is not a bag (Figure 1.3). It has a gold-encased, wooden feline

**Figure 1.1.** Middle Moche stirrup spout bottle with the god of the coca rite wearing the pendant. With him are a captive and a man holding a lime gourd for use in the coca rite. Courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian (23/4865).
head; the long body with four clawed feet is made of hide and cotton cloth with gilded silver, gilded copper, sea shells, feathers, cinnabar, and resin. A step design—a symbol of importance—is formed in its center.

On the ceramics, the pendant is normally worn by the god, but it can appear on a human. One human effigy wearing this object has a bag and Maltese-cross face paint (Donnan and Donnan 1997: fig. 43), both associated with the coca rite, and another has a raised-hands headdress, which also belongs to the rite (Figure 1.4; see Benson 1979). In some coca scenes (Bourget 1994: fig. 3.29; Hocquenghem 1987: fig. 70), the god wears a headless version, and a simpler example may float before the enthroned human ritualist on the other side of the vessel. A bottle in the British Museum depicts a human with this object on his back but no other coca traits (Figure 1.5). His unusual headdress and a similar object can appear in another ceremony (the “waterlily” or “badminton” rite [De Bock 1998: fig. 3; see also Donnan 1978: fig. 114]). Ordinarily, the two ritual complexes do not share traits. When one problem is solved, another puzzle appears. The excavated object, however, exhibits a reasonably simple relationship between archaeology and iconography.

In comparing archaeology and ceramic imagery, it becomes clear that the iconography usually speaks in a kind of shorthand: the ceramics do not reproduce scenes or objects in detail; they present certain basic material
Figure 1.3. Multimedia pendant from burial cache in Huaca de la Luna. Photograph by Steve Bourget, with thanks to Ricardo Morales and Miguel Asmat.

Figure 1.4. A man with facial hair and raised-hands headdress wearing the pendant in front. Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología, e Historia del Perú, Lima. Photograph by author.
information and certain basic numinous information, often quite minimally. Moche images seem not intended to describe, explain, or explore, but to convey core meaning. I find that I have used the term shorthand in the past without seeing its implications. Now I realize that it is significant in terms of how the Moche were thinking and how we are to read their art. (One must not forget, of course, that the archaeological object is also iconographic, but the iconography is somewhat different from that of its ceramic depiction.)

Architecture
Now I would like to enter a more complicated maze. Architectural depictions are a frequent ceramic theme, drawn in fineline scenes or modeled in fired or raw clay; examples exist also in stone and wood. Some may have been models for, or of, actual structures (Castillo 2001: fig. 8; Castillo and Donnan 1994; Castillo, Nelson, and Nelson 1997; see also Donnan 1978: figs. 132–139; Donnan and McClelland 1999; Franco and Murga 2001). There are elaborate Early Moche examples of effigy architecture, often in a compressed form (see Morales 2003: fig. 14.2). Effigies with provenience come mostly from late burials. Some appear to depict temples, some tombs. All may be cosmic models.

A high official (or perhaps an ancestor), seated in a structure at the top of a pyramid or platform in a small space just large enough for him, is portrayed in ceram-
ics, sculptural or fineline, often those depicting sacrifice (Figure 1.6). Actual structures generally resembling the ceramic ones have been excavated at Huaca de la Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo (Figures 1.7, 1.8). What the ceramics do not show is that the small spaces like those on bottles were part of a much larger architectural scheme. There are no huge structures or plazas in the ceramic art. Again, we learn something about ceramic shorthand. A reconstruction drawing of Luna shows a large area adjacent to the node space (Figure 1.7). The node space has been called an altar. If it is an altar, it points out a drastic difference between archaeology and iconography, for the latter does not depict altars but does show a ruler or a supernatural being seated in such a space on ceremonial occasions.

Until recent excavations, Moche architecture had not been much studied, certainly not sacred precincts like those at la Luna and Cao Viejo with their successive building stages. The ceramic representations give little idea of architectural complexity and of the process of ritually “burying” and re-creating sacred structures. Santiago Uceda has written: “We now feel that the rebuildings were linked to veneration of ancestors, and that the architectural renovations served to reinforce ancestral and priestly power at Huaca de la Luna” (2001:62). This building activity, discussed particularly by Uceda (1997, 2001) and also by the Cao Viejo team (Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 1998a, 1999a, 2001), is not obvious in the iconography.
Figure 1.7. Huaca de la Luna. Reconstruction drawing of the upper platform of Platform I, with the "royal pavilion" at the upper left. Photograph courtesy of Proyecto Puesta en Valor Huacas de Moche.

Figure 1.8. Huaca Cao Viejo, showing the upper structure. Photograph by Steve Bourget.
Roofs of ceramic buildings often have motifs that likely relate to ritual activity. The step motif is easy to form with adobes; the practice probably existed but might be hard to identify from fallen structures or eroded adobes. Foxes or felines occasionally prowl roofs or ramps (Donnan and McClelland 1999: fig. 4.48); these likely express a numinous concept not to be found in excavation. Moche art uses not only shorthand but additional glosses on subjects; it is often hard to know whether the reality was more than meets the eye—or less.

The Mace, or War Club, As a Symbol
On Moche ceramics, the roofs of temples and sacred precincts, where a lord sits or sacrifice takes place, are often lined with mace heads (Figures 1.6, 1.7). Maces may symbolize sacrificial offerings. A large copper scepter from Sipán displays a striking example of maces lining the roof of a sacred, elite-structure model (Alva 1994: Láms. 79–82; Alva and Donnan 1993: figs. 47, 48). A question used to be asked: Were maces put into the picture to symbolize the associations of the structure or the rite, or were they real architectural features? Clay maces from structures have now been found as offerings in a very early level (Edifice E) at Huaca Cao Viejo (Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 2002:95) and at Sipán, Dos Cabezas, and Huacade la Luna in building remains and offering caches. From evidence at Huacade la Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo, important buildings atop the platforms probably had maces on the roof (which could be seen from afar); the pavilion with the Complex Theme murals in the plaza at Huaca Cao Viejo also had them (Figures 1.8, 1.9; Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 2001; Uceda 2001).

The motif is a war club; men with clubs and shields march or face each other in murals at Huacade la Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo, in earlier-published paintings at Pañamarca (Bonavia 1985), and on fineline bottles,

**Figure 1.9.** Huaca Cao Viejo. Reconstruction drawing of the pavilion with Complex Theme murals. Courtesy of Régulo Franco Jordán and the Programa Arqueológico Complejo El Brujo.
where warriors carry clubs of varying proportions and sometimes use them. Modeled-ceramic kneeling warriors hold a club and a shield. Hunters in ritual deer and sea lion hunts wield a club. I use the word *mace*, however, because the implement is much more than a club; it is a symbol of power or office, a kind of scepter, and all that a scepter signifies. The mace is one of the most important symbols in Moche iconography and a recurring theme in this book.

Steve Bourget found a hefty wooden mace in a tomb in the sacrificial area that he excavated at Huaca de la Luna (Bourget 1997, 2001; Bourget and Newman 1998). Tests revealed that it had been “repeatedly drenched” with human blood, vivid evidence for the realism of ceramic images of warriors hitting opponents on the skull. Other wooden maces, some of which had been sheathed in copper, have turned up in excavations—in a grave at Dos Cabezas, for example (Donnan 2003:62). Some wooden ones look sturdy; others are long and thin, useful in ritual but not for serious bashing. At Huaca Cao Viejo, wooden maces were offerings (Figure 1.10). Basing their study on shape and manufacture, Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez (1999b) established a chronological sequence of maces at Huaca Cao Viejo. The authors call them emblematic clubs, noting that they are objects of command and magico-religious power; a mace is the principal ritual baton.

In the tomb of the Lord of Sipán, Alva excavated one metal knife-scepter bearing a large mace at either side of a shaft, which displays warrior garments in relief; another scepter with a figure standing over a captive, holding a prominent mace; and a pair of intricately made ear ornaments, remarkable pieces of gold work, featuring a man holding a mace and a shield (Alva 1994: Láms. 39-41, 79–83; Alva and Donnan 1993: cover and figs. 86–88, 104–106). At the bottom of the tomb lay miniature copper maces, along with miniature shields and spears. Maces appeared also in other Sipán tombs (Alva 2001).

A major motif in fineline ceramics consists of a mace as the center and support of a “weapons bundle,” which commonly contains emblematic Moche weapons (Hocquenghem 1987: figs. 84–93). A weapons bundle may show a captured mace hanging upside down from an erect Moche one. The bundle can be the center of a ritual scene or the only motif on a bottle; many of the fineline bottles that appeared in Late Moche at San José de Moro have a weapons bundle on the spout above the primary design (Castillo 2003: fig. 18.17). It seems to be a kind of logo for that site in the late period. Indeed, it may be a logo for the Moche.

Some mace heads in fineline scenes have human-like heads. The human-headed mace is often stuck into the sand in scenes of the presentation of captives for sacrifice; it also appears in supernatural scenes. An effigy bottle in the form of a mace may have a god or animal head. Sometimes a mace is additionally animated with legs and arms. A human-headed mace may even take a captive. No actual human-headed mace has been found. It was likely a philosophical concept; the head was a
gloss to enliven the mace, to express spirit and power, and probably to indicate sacrifice—by beheading or throat-slitting—that achieved that spirit and power. Many writers have commented on the face-to-face battle depicted in Moche art (see Verano 2001a:112). This may have been an actual fighting method, especially in what was surely ritualized battle. But this might be another example of a kind of metonymy in Moche art. Slings and spear-throwers are shown but not used. This rather fits the pattern of other shorthand depictions. It probably should not be an argument against serious warfare.

**Sacrifice and the Disposition of Body Parts**

“Until recently most of our information on the subject of human sacrifice in the Moche culture came from the study of its iconography,” Bourget has said (2001:89). Evidence of sacrifice is seen in Early Moche ceramics. In the larger scenes of the middle period, a depicted ritual sequence begins with a battle in which captives are taken; the stripped captives are then led to be presented before rulers, captains, or priests. Two victims often appear in a scene, but little archaeological evidence has been found for this pairing. It may reflect Andean dualism; it may be an abbreviated depiction of larger-scale sacrifice. Warriors and priests work together in these scenes, and warriors often wear some priestly garment. It is interesting that Alva (2001:24.2) has found priest and warrior types interred in somewhat different parts of the same burial mound at Sipán. In this sacrificial rite, a throat was slit for blood to be offered to the gods or ancestors. Throat-slit or decapitation is performed by an anthropozoomorph or a disguised or transformed human in warrior garments. A normal mortal is never pictured in this act, but remains of what seem to be mortal sacrificers have been found at Huaca de la Luna and Dos Cabezas (Bourget 1997, 1998; Bourget and Millaire 2000; Cordy-Collins 2001a). Human victims in ceramic scenes are sometimes placed in the context of a mythic event—the Presentation Theme, or Sacrifice Ceremony—with gods who hold and pass a stemmed cup, or goblet, presumably filled with blood. The process can also be shown with humans (all but the sacrificer); an enthroned ruler holds the cup or is presented with it. A cup of this kind from the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, proved, on testing, to be positive for human blood (Bourget 2001; Bourget and Newman 1998). Whether the blood was drunk or offered in some way, whether some cups held blood and some chicha, or when the libations or offerings might have been performed is still unknown. A cup of this type, apparently bloodless, was excavated at San José de Moro; painted on it is a series of human-headed clubs holding cups like the one on which they appear (Castillo 2001:314; Donnan and McClelland 1999: fig. 5.21). The cup is sometimes held to the face of a human-headed mace, or the mace holds it to its own mouth (Kutscher 1983: Abb. 269). Apparently, no other figure in these scenes is shown drinking the contents of the cup. In the last period, the goddess in the raft may hold such a cup to her mouth (Donnan and McClelland 1999: figs. 6.163, 6.166).

The first known large-scale Moche sacrifices were found in 1995 in Plaza 3a, Huaca de la Luna, by Bourget (1997, 1998, 2001; Bourget and Millaire 2000; see also Uceda 2001; Verano 1998, 2001a, 2001b, and this volume). The site includes part of a rock outcrop that was surely sacred. Embedded in clay around it, associated with El Niño rains, the approximately 70 individuals, from at least five sacrifice episodes, were males with an average age in the mid-twenties; there were few complete skeletons but many partial skeletons and isolated bones. The victims had been strong and physically active, with fractures that were well healed; some had recent injuries. The skeletons show traces of torture, throat-cutting, and dismembering of arms, legs, and feet. The use of rocks and metal knives is indicated. Ceramics picture supernaturals using crescent-shaped knives; a few scenes show human rock-throwers.

In some ceramic scenes with a sacrificial victim or victims (and in certain scenes without a victim), cut-off arms, legs, and heads (often with rope ties) float in space, seeming to indicate what happened or will happen. In at least one instance, detached limbs are the sole, repeated motif on a vessel (Figure 1.11). The excavation of Plaza 3a and burials and offerings at several sites provide new data: the Moche moved body parts from one burial to another, the entombed as well as the sacrificed (Alva 2001; Bourget 1997, 2001; Cordy-Collins 1997; Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 1998a, 1999a; Heater and Hecker 1992; Uceda 1997:186; 2001; Verano 1997, 2001a). Some burials have extra skulls; some are missing an arm or a leg, or have an extra limb. Mandibles in burials might
have been removed, since disarticulated mandibles were found in Plaza 3a.

Bone mixing and offering had many variations. Uceda and Tufinio (2003:218) have written that the offering of bones from old burials was related to the renovation of the temple, and that burial of officials in a temple was tied to renovation of ancestors in the world of the living. Bones and burials were offered for renewal of power and legitimacy. The Plaza 3a remains roughly match ceramic scenes of captured-warrior sacrifice, but the iconography barely hints at scattering.

Pottery also was found broken up and distributed in excavated burials—a sherd here, most of a bottle there (Donnan 2001, 2003; Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 1998a:13, 1999a). With the human remains in Plaza 3a, Bourget (1997, 1998) found at least fifty shattered, unfired clay effigies of seated, nude, human males with ropes around the necks and painted designs on the body and face, including the mandible. The effigies are exceptionally well made, detailed, and sometimes quite beautiful; the heads are idealized or portrait-like. In ceramic iconography, whole vessels appear in most ritual scenes, possibly marking the scene as funeral- or sacrifice-related. Pottery was itself an iconographic symbol. Breaking it and moving broken pieces would be a part of its symbolism and part of a rite, but the iconography gives no indication of breaking ceramics.

Skeletons, treated somewhat differently from those in Plaza 3a, were encountered in a nearby, earlier (but more recently excavated) sacrificial site at Huacade la Luna, Plaza 3c (Orbegoso 1998; Uceda 2000; Verano 1998, 2001a, this volume). The victims in both plazas had cervical and other cut marks and healing injuries; several weeks had passed between injury and death. Both groups had sherds of ceramic captives with them. The Plaza 3c bodies had received intentional, complicated post-mortem treatment. Bodies had been flayed, partially disarticulated, and arranged; in some instances, bones had been tied together with rope. Plaza 3c was sealed over when Plaza 3a was in use. There was no obvious tie with an El Niño event in Plaza 3c.

Both excavation and iconography indicate that there was more than one occasion for, or one type of, sacrifice, but the archaeological remains do not exactly match the depicted rites. The awkward fit may be a matter of shorthand or of chronology. An apparent acceleration of sacrificial rites occurred during the last decades of Moche power, when the Moche were confronted not only with serious Niño events but also with periods of drought (see Moseley, Donnan, and Keefer; Quilter; and Verano, this volume). Most of the examples of depicted sacrifice are earlier. The ceramics show, in addition to sacrifices related to the Presentation Theme and its human version, a probable sacrificial occasion with captives who have attributes of the coca rite, pendant-disk ear ornaments or Maltese-cross face paint (Benson 1984b; Uceda, this volume).

A different interpretation relates to a ceramic subject often called the Dance of the Dead, commonly rendered in relief technique: partially skeletal figures, accompanied by skeletal musicians, dance in a line. Uceda
als on ceramics generally have certain headgear that superficially simpler but, I think, suggestive. Portrayals on ceramics generally have certain headgear that is informative of status and activity. The archaeology, however, reveals some distinctive headgear that is seemingly peculiar to a site, which suggests that they might symbolize dynastic power and lineages. Burials at Dos Cabezas, excavated by Donnan and Guillermo Cock (Donnan 2001, 2003), contain multiple examples of a fairly tall, straight-sided crown not yet found elsewhere. An Early Moche–style bottle in one of the tombs portrays a man with a generally similar headdress (Donnan 2003: Lám. 2.2c). At Huaca Cao Viejo, the Complex Theme murals are late and very differently composed from other murals there and elsewhere, although they include motifs familiar from ceramics: priests, animals, vegetation, nets, and boats (Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 1994, 1998b; Franco and Vilela 2003; Gálvez and Briceno 2001: fig. 21). A candidate for a lineage symbol in the murals is unusual headgear, topped with tapered projections ending in circles, that resembles a medieval European crown; it is worn by a recurring figure who might be an ancestor introduced toward the end of occupation of the site by a new ruling family (Figure 1.12).

An earlier, large human figure on a post, all carved from a single piece of lúcumo wood (Figure 1.13), was buried, probably as an offering, in a new construction stage at Huaca Cao Viejo (Franco and Gálvez 2003; Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 2003: Lám. 19.4). It would seem to be a previous ancestor standing under the protection of two large-scale, facing images of a mythical creature that goes by many names (Figure 1.14). Most commonly referred to as the Moon animal or crested animal, it has long been known on ceramics, including several early bottles in the Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera that likely came from the Chicama Valley, where the Larco collection was formed (Benson 2003: Láms. 15.2, 15.3; Larco 2001). The creature is prominent in Early Moche. The lineage of Huaca Cao Viejo and the surrounding El Brujo site may have considered it ancestral. Small wooden scepters excavated at Cao Viejo show the creature with shell inlay at the top (Figure 1.15; Franco, Gálvez, and Vásquez 2001:161, foto 25), and recent work at the site revealed a wall of repeated images of the motif in an early phase of the structure (Figure 1.16).

The animal appears as a design on the rear wall of the temple bottle in Figure 1.16 and on the rear wall of the copper architectural staff from Sipán (could this have been a mace captured from Huaca Cao Viejo?); in both

**Dynastic Possibilities**

I would like to finish with a few subjects that are superficially simpler but, I think, suggestive. Portrayals on ceramics generally have certain headgear that...
**Figure 1.12.** Huaca Cao Viejo. Detail of Complex Theme mural showing crowned figure. Photograph by author.

**Figure 1.13.** Wooden sculpture excavated in Huaca Cao Viejo, seen on exhibit in Banco Wiese, Trujillo, Peru. Photograph by Steve Bourget.

**Figure 1.14.** Detail of the crested animal pair above the head seen in Figure 1.13. Photograph courtesy of Régulo Franco Jordán and the Programa Arqueológico Complejo “El Brujo.”
**Figure 1.15.** Small wooden staff with crested animal in shell, seen on exhibit in Banco Wiese, Trujillo, Peru. Photograph by Steve Bourget.

**Figure 1.16.** Detail of wall in Huaca Cao Viejo (Edificio D), showing one of the repetitions of the crested animal. Photograph by Steve Bourget.
instances, the animal is associated with multiple maces. The image has a wide distribution, however. It is seen in the form of effigy bottles excavated by Donnan at Dos Cabezas (Donnan 2001, 2003) and on many objects without provenience; it is prominent in Recuay art (uphill from the Moche region). Widespread as a ceramic design, it appears on murals and large sculpture only at Huaca Cao Viejo, as if it had special significance there.

North and South
Finally, I would like to speak briefly to differences between north and south. The complex fineline iconography of the middle period appears only in the southern region. The sequence of ceramic chronology devised by Larco (1948) indicates how form, technique, and subject matter developed in the south (Benson 2003). If the middle-period dates that Donnan (2003) has found for Early Moche–style ceramics at the northern site of Dos Cabezas are correct (and I hope that they are), the anachronism tells a great deal about north-south differences and fills the gap created by the dearth of middle-period fineline. The north was little known until recent times, but it clearly did not require the complex development of human-ritual ceramic iconography, which was closely involved with the power of southern rulers, the political and ecological problems they encountered, and the artistic exuberance that expressed their power. Late dates for the early ceramic style in the north may imply less need for change and a particular kind of respect for the ancestral in the north. Northern pottery is generally simple; elaborate iconography was not called for. Instead of stirrup spout bottles with fineline scenes, northern ceramics tend to be globular jars with a face in relief at the neck, simple figure vessels, or bottles with two small suspension hooks at the neck and sometimes a painted design on the body (Alva and Donnan 1993; Castillo 2001, 2003; Donnan and McClelland 1997; Makowski et al. 1994). Only in Late Moche times do fineline narratives appear in the north.

Northern middle-period iconography was displayed mostly in metallurgy and usually dealt with mythic characters and occasions. Most known metallurgy comes from the north, from excavations at Sipán and from looting at Loma Negra (farther north, in the Piura Valley), a region that produced exceptionally handsome Early Moche ceramics (Makowski et al. 1994). The opening of the Sipán graves was a dramatic eye-opener. Rich tombs produced quantities of spectacular metalwork and many quickly produced crude ceramic vessels, along with a few fine ones (Alva 1994, 2001; Alva and Donnan 1993). There was surely exceptional metalwork in the south—a few examples exist, after looting since Colonial times—but there may have been more emphasis on metal in the north, where metal sources may have been better (see Shimada 1994:200–202).

Among regional differences is the prevalence of mural painting in the south. There are many possible reasons for its comparative scarcity in the north. Pacatnamú and San José de Moro, for examples, had long post-Moche occupations that surely would have destroyed what murals there might have been. Murals existed at Pampa Grande (Shimada 1994), and fragments of painting from Sipán are on exhibit at the Museo Tumbas Reales de Sipán.

New Kinds of Iconography
Some murals were discovered in the past and are well published by Duccio Bonavia (1985), but the murals unearthed at Huaca de la Luna and Huaca Cao Viejo in the last fifteen years are perhaps the most exciting recent discoveries in Moche art (Figures 1.16, 1.17). With architectural excavation, not only have murals been found, context has been found for them. The extent of their presence on walls, ceilings, and columns is exhilarating; the painted north facade of Platform 1 is spectacular (Figure 1.17). The mural art also opens new worlds for scholarship. Ricardo Morales and others, through meticulous examination of the murals, are revealing not only technical information but evidence of new dimensions of iconography, including large scale, the symbolic value of color (instead of the usual bichrome or trichrome of the ceramics), structures of the painting/relief surface, and the chemistry of the painting procedure. Color change in the overpainting of a god’s face is one example of the new kind of information. Perhaps significant is the apparent use, as a binder for pigment, of the psychoactive San Pedro cactus or a relative (Morales, Solorzano, and Asmat 1998). Morales points out that referring to the murals as “wall decoration” is incorrect, for they employ an ideographic language closely related to the liturgical connotations of the space of which they are a vital part (Morales 2003;
Figure 1.17. Huaca de la Luna, detail of north facade mural. Photograph by Steve Bourget.
Figure 1.17 is a partial view of the last phase of the horizontal panels on the north facade of the Huaca de la Luna; a line of monsters fills the tier below the snake on the upper part of the ramp. Seen for the first time in many centuries, all of this is wonderful to look at, loaded with new questions and answers, contributing to a growing sense of who and what the Moche people were.

Today careful and knowledgeable excavation of buildings and tombs shows (or does not show) relationships with known iconography. Moreover, a new iconography is growing out of the archaeology based on interpretation of various kinds of technical examination, including osteological and geological evidence. We are not only acquiring a new view of ceramic iconography, but also learning about new kinds of iconography. John Verano has earned appreciation for his reading of the skeletal material—and sometimes of the iconography. In addition to his analytical work and that of Morales are the vitally significant findings of Izumi Shimada and his group (this volume) in solving mysteries of mitochondrial DNA identification of human remains, which will support a quantum jump in interpretation, leading into another depth of iconography. Work like that of Michael Moseley (this volume) points out some causes for change in the iconography. Ceramic iconography no longer exists in a vacuum with dashes of excavation; it is beginning to be seen as a response to known, postulated, or implied natural and political events. These are indeed exciting times to work with Moche art and archaeology. Between archaeology and ideology, and the synergy of their encounter, we are coming much closer to a recreation of the Moche world.

Notes
1. Verano’s 2003 article on foot amputation relates to this.
2. Since this was written, almost-identical murals have been excavated at Huaca de la Luna, which implies a very close relationship between the two sites.
3. Rafael Larco Hoyle did some of the earliest Moche archaeology and was arguably the first Moche iconographer.
4. As far as I know, this bottle has no provenience.

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