

STYLISTIC VARIATION
IN MOCHE AND NASCA
ICONOGRAPHY

By

Roberta Noel Vickroy

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STYLISTIC VARIATION IN MOCHE AND NASCA ICONOGRAPHY

Roberta Noel Vickroy, B.A.

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Two of the most well-known ancient Peruvian populations, the Moche and Nasca, have been viewed as contemporary yet with little in common by most archaeologists and historians alike. With the differences of these societies addressed by many researchers of the past, the following research provides a new way of looking at the similarities of Moche and Nasca ceramic iconography and examines how similar icons can be found and were used in both cultures. By investigating the locations in which the ceramics were found, the variation of certain stylistic attributes, and what it is the icons actually represent, this study helps to interpret what functions similar icons, namely the Nasca Killer Whale Motif and the Moche Fish Decapitator, had within two extremely diverse societies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nasca and Moche societies of the Peruvian coast may be two of the most well known archaeological cultures of the Andean mountain range. The fact that these two societies coexisted, from approximately 100 B.C. until A.D. 600, gives archaeologists an opportunity to explore the interesting dynamic of what may have happened over this 700-year time span between these two cultures (Proulx 1994). Because of the vast amount of ceramic remains that have been recovered from both Moche and Nasca sites, along with the excellent preservation caused from the arid environment, much research has been done to interpret the meaning behind individual motifs, to explore the means of ceramic creation, and to investigate the functional use of ceramics for each society (Proulx and Silverman 2002:3-11, Bawden 1996:17-29).

Each archaeological culture contains a unique set of symbols and attributes that are distinctly their own. While the Moche are widely known for their intricate sacrifice ceremony motif, documented on numerous occasions by Christopher B. Donnan (Bourget 2006: 188), the Nasca are legendary for the creation of giant lines and iconographic motifs in the desert sand that have been thoroughly investigated by Maria Reiche (Proulx and Silverman 2002: 165). Because of the vast differences in both icons and artistic mediums between the Moche and Nasca, most interpretive research in the past has been done to compare the differences between the two cultures rather than their similarities.

Various research done by Donald Proulx from 1990 onward has shed light on some of the similarities that one can see through examination of Moche and Nasca iconography. Proulx has

recorded a significant number of iconographic motifs and stylistic attributes that can be found in both Moche and Nasca art and describes the Nasca Phases 5 and 7 as periods of “rapid innovation and change” in the Nasca ceramic style (Proulx 1994). Proulx presents a number of icons that appeared in Nasca art during these two periods and concludes that although there is little archaeological evidence for direct overland contact between Moche and Nasca, foreign traits that were introduced into Nasca pottery during this time were most likely the result of indirect diffusion from the Moche (Proulx 1994). Other scholars who have studied Nasca art argue against the idea of outside influence as a cause of change in pottery style, including Mary Blagg who suggested that the introduction of new motifs in Nasca Phase 5 was caused not by indirect outside influence, but by an internal religious revolution put into motion by the elites of society (Proulx 1994).

My investigation seeks to understand the meaning of specific icons in relation to the two different societies. Although some icons, or very similar motifs, are present in the archaeological record of both groups, each icon may have had a different role in each civilization. I have sought to uncover the connection between a specific motif and its function in society. If a societal function is able to be assigned to an icon, it may allow for further interpretation of the differences between the societal structure of each group.

This study differs from others through its’ examination of a set of icons based on their stylistic attributes over the entirety of both civilizations rather than focusing on the change within a specific phase. By examining the similar Moche Fish Decapitators and Nasca Killer Whale icons from different chronological phases and from numerous sites, it may be possible to more effectively determine the meaning behind these icons based their provenience, what attributes the icons may or may not have shared, and the chronological phase from which they were found.

This study yields a variety of information concerning connections between the Moche and Nasca, and the structure of each individual society. First, my investigation provides evidence against diffusion of ideas from one culture to the other by means of direct or indirect diffusion. Second, based on research I conducted, I discuss how similar icons may have been used for similar purposes in Moche and Nasca society. Third, results provide insight on the structure of each society as reflected in decapitation mythology and practice. Ultimately, I hope to illustrate the significance that iconography has for a culture, in general, and contribute to a fuller understanding of the functions served by some iconographic elements of the Prehistoric Andean civilizations of Moche and Nasca.

BACKGROUND

Environment

The Coastal Peruvian valleys in which the Nasca and Moche civilizations flourished are confined by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Andean Mountain chain to the east. Surface water that collects in the Andean Highlands during the summer rainy months eventually flows down the mountain and fills the rivers flowing towards the ocean creating isolated oases in the midst of the world's driest desert; and it is here where two of the most celebrated Andean societies emerged (Proulx and Silverman 2002:41). The Nasca heartland is located in the Rio Grande de Nasca drainage of the southern Peruvian coast, while Moche influence spread from the northern Moche Valley (Silverman 1993:1). Although these societies emerged in some very harsh environmental conditions, the environment lent itself to the manipulation of the populations that survived in it by providing a diverse array of resources. The Rio Grande de Nasca drainage is poor in

comparison to the valleys of the Northern coast where the Moche civilization flourished, and many believe that the scarcity of arable land and water may have kept the Nasca from developing into a fully developed complex society (Silverman 1993:9).

The coastal environment in which the Moche and Nasca prospered is comprised of three ecological zones, the shore, the sea, and the inland arable valleys. A continuously renewed marine food supply is just one advantage of life near the Pacific Ocean. The abundance of maritime life was supported by the nutrient rich and very cold Peruvian Coastal Current, also known as the Humboldt Current named after the explorer Alexander von Humboldt (Bawden 1996:39). Resources from the ocean include not only fish, shellfish and mussels, but also marine bird and mammal species. The oceanic shoreline is situated adjacent to a narrow stretch of the Atacama Desert. The extremely dry desert environment preserves materials that would normally perish such as cloth, basketry, and even food remains (Bawden 1996:15,43).

The Central Andes often fall victim to a number of natural catastrophes including earthquakes, droughts, and the most well known, El Niño. The warm temperature that El Niño brings drives off many cold water fish and mollusk species that are used to the cold Humboldt Current (Proulx and Silverman 2002:49). El Niño is not merely an oceanic phenomenon, but it also leads to violent thunderstorms that bring heavy rains that can cause massive flooding and mudslides resulting in severe damage of roads, bridges, towns, and the environment itself (Bawden 1996:58-59).

Nasca Society

The archaeological culture that is known as the Nasca emerged on the southern Peruvian coast during the era that archaeologists have named the Early Intermediate Period (100 B.C. – A.D. 650) of Peruvian prehistory (Proulx 1990). In the river valleys of the Rio Grande de Nasca

and the nearby Ica Valley (See Figure 1), the civilization thrived from approximately 200 B.C. until A.D. 600 (Proulx and Silverman 2002:1). While early explorers found little interest in Nasca sites because of their lack of monumental architecture compared to that of other societies such as the Tiwanaku or Moche, Max Uhle's interest in Peruvian pottery and later activities on the southern coast allowed for the spread of knowledge of the Nasca civilization (Proulx and Silverman 2002:3). Since then, expeditions led by well-known archaeologists such as Julio Tello and Alfred Kroeber have uncovered numerous secrets once lost in time



Figure 1: Map showing the location of the Ica and Nasca Valleys in Peru. (Peru Travel 2011).

The Nasca civilization seems to have emerged out of the Paracas culture, named after the Paracas Peninsula which these people inhabited. It is common belief, based on confirming

paleobiological studies, that the Nasca people were the direct descendants of the Paracas. Art and ceramics also show continuity in both vessel form and iconographic representation (Proulx and Silverman 2002:14-16).

The Nasca Ceramic Tradition

The Berkeley Relative Chronology of Nasca ceramic typology was developed in the early 1950's by Lawrence Dawson, a ceramicist and student at the University of California Berkeley. The nine phases he created were based upon ordering by continuity of theme and feature (Proulx and Silverman 2002:22). This system of chronology for Nasca ceramics is the one used by most archeologists today, and for that reason will be used in the following analytical discussion (Kroeber and Collier 1998:21). The Nasca style persisted over 800 years, a time period through which its art changed from a more naturalistic style, to those which are more ornamental and abstract, and then, to a final stage of "abbreviated simplification" (Proulx 1990).

Themes that are often seen in Nasca ceramic art can be divided into three categories: naturalistic, religious and mythical motifs, and geometric designs. The individual is rarely depicted in iconography; therefore, indications of individual rank are almost never seen in Nasca ceramic art (Proulx 1990). Interpretation of artwork in a nonliterate society can be a major challenge to the anthropologist, so many diverse interpretations have been proposed (Proulx 2006: preface). Alan Sawyer argues the varied iconography that can be seen on Nasca pottery reflected the parallel development of a new religion that revitalized Paracas art, and added new motifs of its own (Sawyer 1966:122).

Trophy Heads

The Nasca trophy head motif is often depicted in iconography and is one of the main icons that I examine in the current research. Material remains of trophy heads have been recovered from the archaeological record and all trophy heads recovered archaeologically have been treated in the same way. After the head was decapitated using an obsidian blade hafted onto a wooden handle, a large hole was created in the foramen magnum at the base of the skull in order to remove the brain, while a small hole in the frontal bone allowed for a piece of string to be tied around the skull and connected to an inner wooden shaft. Often, the lips were sealed with cactus spines, and eyes were stuffed with cotton for a more naturalistic appearance (Proulx and Silverman 2002:77).

Although archaeologists have vast amounts of evidence for decapitation, there is still debate on why and how the trophy heads were obtained. Julio Tello argued that because trophy heads of women and children were present in the archaeological record, they could not have been obtained through warfare (Proulx and Silverman 2002:233-234). Sawyer argued that the trophy-head cult of the Nasca provided a ceremonial means of “gathering the life-force of enemies” to be used for the benefit of the collective group (Sawyer 1966: 122), while Verano noted that archaeological evidence supports the notion that the Nasca collected trophy heads through warfare because the vast majority of trophy heads that have been found come from young adult males (Proulx and Silverman 2002:233-234).

Donald Proulx agrees that the trophy heads were obtained through warfare or raiding because of the numerous depictions of warriors holding weapons and decapitated heads on art and architecture. He believes that after the heads were obtained they were used for ritual purposes as offerings, often in the form of caches, to the powerful beings that controlled resources such as water or agricultural fertility (Proulx and Silverman 2002:233). Evidence of a

link between trophy heads and agriculture can be seen in various motifs in which trophy heads sprout plants from their mouths, some being metaphors of the plants themselves (Proulx 2006:9).

The Geoglyphs

Possibly the most famous iconography of the Nasca come from the enormous geoglyphs that are still present in the desert sand. Paul Kosok and Maria Rieche, who researched the lines during the mid 20th century, argued that the lines had a certain calendrical or astronomical purpose. Their theory suggests that the geoglyphs served as a calendar, the glyphs being sight lines that would correspond with the position of the sun, equinoxes, and constellations, to keep track of the seasonal change that was ever so important for the Nasca agricultural society. Astronomers Gerald Hawkins and Anthony Aveni have debunked this theory stating that an alignment of a celestial being and a mark on the ground is insignificant because so many stars are visible from the Nasca site (Proulx and Silverman 2002:166). Though many theories of why the geoglyphs were created have been proposed, including of the farfetched speculations of Erich von Däniken in his famous *Chariots of the Gods*, their purpose is still an archaeological mystery.

The glyphs themselves include objects such as spirals, a dog, a killer whale, a tree, a monkey, a spider, humming birds, and even a humanoid figure. The lines were created by sweeping away the exterior Pampa surface which was covered with a dark rock layer to expose the lighter subsoil beneath. The rock that had been swept away was consequently used to boarder the newly created line in the sand (Proulx and Silverman 2002:172, Proulx 2006:11).

Nasca Sociopolitical Organization

The kin-based unit that has been recorded throughout many Andean civilizations is the ayllu.

This social unit is comprised of two dual organizations, moieties, based on the lineages of which it is comprised. Members acquire different ranks based upon how far away in their lineage they are from an important ancestor (Proulx and Silverman 2002:239-241). Mutual labor and ritual responsibilities between members of these social groups connect them in a network of reciprocal obligation that helps to support not only self-sufficiency, but also group solidarity (Bawden 1996: 15). Helaine Silverman argues, through ethnographic research, that the Nasca people operated under the allyu system (Proulx and Silverman 2002:239-241). Other evidence, such as settlement patterns, can also help in the interpretation of social organization (Bawden 1996:15).

Interpretations about the nature of Nasca sociopolitical society have changed drastically in the past few decades. It had been believed that the Nasca culture represented an early state level society controlled at the major site of Cahuachi (Proulx 2006:7). The ceremonial site of Cahuachi is probably the most well-known Nasca site because of its sheer size. It is located on the south bank of the Nasca River and covers approximately 150 hectares (Proulx and Silverman 2002:98). Roughly 40 mounds have been recorded at the site, along with numerous plazas, temples, and other structures. Although Cahuachi is a relatively large site, little evidence of an urban environment is present from archaeological data. Few permanent residences or signs of domestic activity have been recorded throughout the 20 years of excavation done by Giuseppe Orefici. This evidence again suggests that the site was strictly ceremonial (Proulx and Silverman 2002:101, Proulx 2006:7).

Helaine Silverman argues that a lack of standardization of mounds suggests that they were created during pilgrimages to this central site by different social groups of the Nasca

population over a long period of time (Proulx and Silverman 2002:99). The hyperceremonial nature of Cahuachi can be seen through the abundance of iconography and pottery recovered from the site (Proulx and Silverman 2002:103). At such a large ceremonial site, one would expect elaborate ritual items to be found. Unlike the artifacts found in the Tombs of Sipan, no gold ornaments were found; however, mouthmasks, and nose and forehead ornaments have been recovered in tombs of supposed Nasca shamans or elites (Silverman 1993:216).

The Moche Society

The Moche society (See Figure 2) prospered on the Northern Peruvian coast for nearly seven hundred years during the time period of approximately A.D. 100-750 (Bawden 1996:6). Moche origin, history, and the nature of their social and political structure are still a matter of debate. The Moche did not possess a system of writing, but were active in long distance trade relationships for exotic goods that were crucial in religious ceremonies (Bourget 2006:1-2). Subsistence was primarily based in agriculture, but was often supplemented with maritime resources and to a lesser degree, the hunting of land animals and birds. Domestication of animals included llama, alpaca, guinea pig, and Muscovy duck (Donnan 1976:2).



Figure 2: Map of Moche influence in Peru and Major Archaeological Sites.
 (Donnan and McClelland 2007: Figure 1.1)

Moche Social Organization

Similar to the Nasca peoples, the Moche have been interpreted as functioning within the ayllu social unit. This state-level society operated by minimizing the effect of social opposition by making the public believe that social asymmetry was inevitable, supernaturally sanctioned, and in the greater interest of the general population. The elites manipulated religious ideology, and used it as a mechanism for control of power; exclusive control of the manufacture and manipulation of symbols of power drove political and economic development. The labor force required to create such magnificent symbols of power required the creation and management of intensive agricultural systems and economic networking.

The center of Moche political power was the site of Cerro Blanco, which is home to two massive architectural structures, the Huaca de la Luna and the Huaca del Sol. The sheer size of these edifices is evidence in and of itself that Moche elites controlled a massive labor work force (Bawden 1996:225, 228-229). Evidence of the wide gap between elites and the general population can be seen in the well-known iconography of the Sacrifice Ceremony and the artifacts with which this iconographic scene is associated. The Sacrifice Ceremony, held in a pyramid area of the city, was an elaborate display in which bound prisoners were sacrificed and their blood ceremonially presented to ornamented religious officials (Bawden 1996:109,114). Iconography of Moche sacrifice is almost always accompanied with the presence of a decapitator motif holding a decapitating *tumi* knife in one hand and a human head in the other (Bawden 1996:151). Decapitators come in a variety of human and nonhuman forms.

Moche Art and Iconography

The Moche civilization is most often remembered by their elaborate ritual ceramic vessels and their detailed depictions of humans and nonhumans alike (Bourget 2006:2). The most well-known scholar on Moche art and iconography is University of California-Los Angeles Professor, Christopher Donnan. His work through archiving countless specimens of Moche pottery has led him to believe that Moche art is primarily religious in nature and communicates tenants of religious belief that were used in political ideology (Bawden 1996:24-25).

The problem of determining whether Moche iconographic depictions were representations of actual rituals or mythological stories has been an issue of much research. In 1987, the discovery of the Royal Tomb of Sipan, and the artifacts it contained, shed light onto the fact that the Sacrifice Ceremony depicted on numerous Moche ceramics was probably fact rather than fiction (Bourget 2006:11).

Interaction

There has been much debate about whether or not the ancient Peruvian civilizations of the Moche and Nasca had interaction with one another and if attributes from one society were diffused to the other. There is some evidence that the Moche culture extended its sphere of influence down to the Nasca territory. Recent studies suggest that certain iconographic traits and motifs from the Moche IV and V phases may have formed the basis of Nasca innovations as a form of selectively adopted motifs rather than total replication (Shimada 1994:91). During the Nasca phases 6 and 7 Moche traits began to appear in Nasca iconography. These traits included form shape with the introduction of the single spout bottle and face neck jar as well as new ways of depicting humans such as warriors in the running stance, Moche ornamentation, and facial expressions. The inclusion of scenery and terrain is found for the first time during this period

(Proulx 2006:11). It has been argued that there is no reciprocal influence on Moche art from Nasca (Shimada 1994:91).

The mechanism for the exchange of ideas is still up for debate. Donald Proulx argues that direct overland contact seems unlikely because of the large geographic gap between the two regions. In contrast, he seems to think that diffusion occurred through maritime interaction and trade (Proulx 2006:12). The Moche influence on Nasca pottery is strong enough to suggest that they saw Moche pottery up close; further, Moche artifacts have only been found on the Nasca coast (Proulx and Silverman 2002:86). Moche reed boats used for fishing and maritime exploitation are frequently depicted in Moche iconography, and it would have been possible for Moche fishermen to sail to the South coast and introduce the Nasca to a new form of art from the north (Proulx 2006:12). It would seem that the Moche came to Nasca and not vice versa because there is no record of seafaring in Nasca iconography or archaeological evidence of Nasca iconographic influence in the Moche region (Proulx and Silverman 2002:86).

METHODOLOGY

The sample that was used for the following research is a very small proportion of the total ceramic assemblage illustrated and described by Moche and Nasca scholars. A literature review was necessary in order to accumulate a sample of icons that could be used. The sample used in this research is clearly biased as the icons are primarily from objects recovered almost certainly from elite burial contexts. It is not unreasonable to assume, however, that the icons discussed in this study are somewhat representative of those present on rare items found in elite burials. Furthermore, my interpretations do not rest on the need for a statistically representative sample. Rather, my interpretations are primarily based on subjectively selected iconographic motifs from

Nasca and Moche artifacts that are comparable in form and themes, namely the Nasca Killer Whale motif and the Moche Fish Decapitator motif.

The pieces used in this research were specifically selected because of the iconographic attributes that aid in the interpretation of similar icons from diverse societies. As a control for the selection of iconographic motifs, a minimum requirement of specific attributes was created. In order for an icon to be selected for this study, it was required to possess dorsal or ventral fins, a decapitation knife and/or a trophy head, and some sort of anthropomorphic limb(s). The presence of dorsal and ventral fins ensures that the icon was indeed a sea creature. The presence of a knife or trophy head in the figure allows us to infer that the icon was somehow representing the act or importance of decapitation in that society. The anthropomorphic limbs suggest that the figure depicted was related to mythology or religious beliefs and was not created merely as a naturalistic representation of maritime creatures.

The reason that this research is focusing on the Nasca Killer Whale motif and the Moche Fish Decapitators rather than other icons is because although similarities between Moche and Nasca iconography have been documented, these two types of icons have never been compared before. Because ocean resources were very important to both societies, it is particularly interesting to explore how the Moche and Nasca viewed the creatures that lived in the sea, and the role these creatures played in their respective ritual and religious iconographic contexts.

To be consistent in the comparison between Moche and Nasca iconography, I have decided to use Dawson's Ceramic Phases (see Table 1) as a relative chronology for the Nasca (Proulx 1990) and Larco's five-phase ceramic chronology for the Moche (Donnan and McClelland 2007) which does not have associated calindical dates (see Figure 3). By dating the

vessels that contain these icons, a link between Moche and Nasca by way of indirect or direct diffusion may be more easily traced.

Table 1: Nasca Ceramic Chronology and associated calindrical dates.

PERIODS	ESTIMATED DATES	STYLISTIC STRAINS	DAWSON'S PHASES	SAWYER'S PHASES
MIDDLE HORIZON	650 A.D.	Disjunctive	9	Nasca-Wari
EARLY INTER-MEDIATE PERIOD	550 A.D.	Proliferous	8	Late Nasca
	425 A.D.		7	
	300 A.D.	Transitional	6	Middle Nasca
	175 A.D.	Monumental	5	
	50 A.D.		4	
	75 B.C.		3	Early Nasca
	100 B.C.		2	Proto-Nasca
		1		

(Proulx 1990: Table 1).

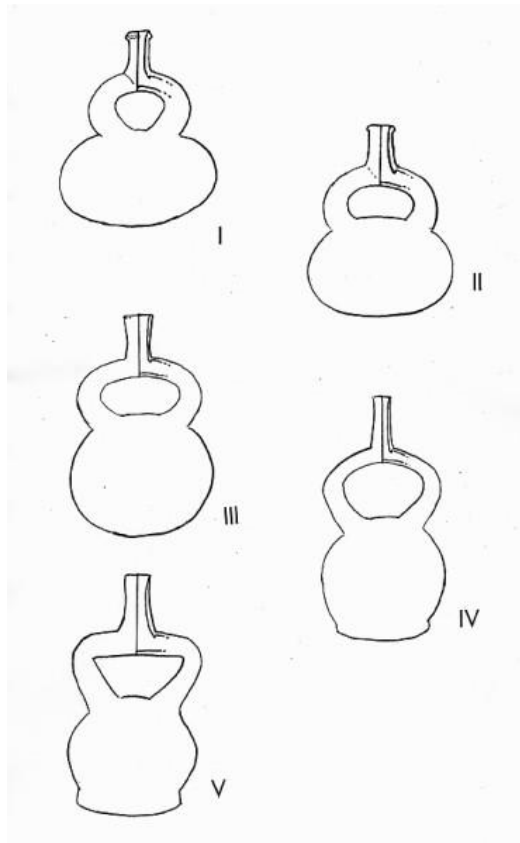


Figure 3: Larco's Moche Chronology.
(Donnan and McClelland 2007: 23).

In order to adequately compare icons from the two societies, it was necessary to break down the larger icons into subcategories of individual motifs that could also be evaluated. The bulk of my analysis involved the documentation of differences and similarities between occurrences of the subcategories of iconographic motifs in relation to the motif as a whole. To understand the meaning of a large, complex icon, it is imperative that the meanings of the smaller attributes within the icon are known first.

The shape of an iconographic motif is very distinctive. When looking at pottery, one often notices the general shape of the motif first. The shape can infer attributes including movement, action, or intent. By understanding what is happening in the iconographic scene through shape, archaeologists are able to connect the motif with known religious or ritual

practices, scenes from everyday life, and get a sense of the importance of the motif within society.

One of the major attributes that was distinctive from Moche to Nasca decapitator motifs was the direction in which the motif was facing on the pot. Also, as mentioned before, the importance of anthropomorphic limbs is central to the idea that the motif does not represent a naturalistic scene. Dorsal and ventral fins, along with their indication of maritime life can also be used as an insight on the specific species that were seen and important or powerful to the Moche and Nasca. The teeth, which are often emphasized, may serve as a link between human characteristics and the perception of the animal depicted. We can see if these ancient people saw maritime creatures as ferocious warriors or as harmful threats to their maritime practices. The presence of ritual objects, besides decapitation knives or everyday items, can allow archaeologists to interpret that the figure depicted had more importance if it is associated with prestige goods or can indicate what daily tasks it was associated with the presence of objects associated with daily activities.

Once the subcategories of icons were documented, they were compared to iconographic frequency charts recorded in archeological works. Nasca ceramic and iconographic proportions have been documented from sources such as the Uhle Collections interpreted by Gayton and Kroeber, Nasca burial ceramic proportions by Donald Proulx, and Helaine Silverman's Cahuachi ceramic and iconographic proportions (Kroeber and Gayton 1927:6-7, Silverman 1993:228, 243). Proportions of Moche ceramic types and styles were compared to analyses completed by Donnan and Chapdelaine in the Santa Valley, and Jackson in the Cerro Mayal region. (Bourget and Jones 2008: 138, Jackson 2008:54,160-161).

For as many specimens as possible, the context of the iconographic specimen was taken into consideration for the most accurate interpretation of function and significance.

Unfortunately, more than 95 percent of Peruvian ceramics that reside in museums and private collections were looted, and the provenience information remains unknown. We can be confident that nearly all of them came from graves; however, they were not made for funerary purposes, but made to be used since most show signs of wear that occurred prior to their deposition (Donnan and McClelland 1999:18). Although the majority of the provenience information for the ceramics in the sample used for this study was not available for public use and research, the information that was found provided a better understanding of how the vessel was used.

The medium in which an icon is found can be imperative to its function and significance. The Killer Whale Motif pictured in Figure 4 is the only one that is not found on ceramics; this massive Killer Whale geoglyph in the Nasca region provides insight into possible mythological significance to the Nasca. With respect to ceramic artifacts containing icons, vessel form is a significant associated attribute to consider. The vast majority of the vessels in the sample come from stirrup spouted vessels, and therefore were probably used in a similar fashion.

Since the meaning of iconography can be inferred in many different ways, it was important to look at previous research of specific Moche and Nasca icons and their meanings. By using the interpretations of iconographic motifs from other scholars, I was able to get a more comprehensive view of how the Moche and Nasca societies have been interpreted up to now, and how my interpretations fit in comparison to theirs.

NASCA KILLER WHALE MOTIFS

Proulx argues that for the ancient Nasca peoples, the Killer Whale was the most powerful and feared creature of the sea (Proulx 2006:83). Killer whales in Nasca iconography are often identified by their square jaws, prominent teeth, dorsal fins, and bifurcated tail. The mythical forms that pertain to this research often are anthropomorphic and contain a human arm that holds a decapitation knife and/or a human trophy head. Since the killing of individuals and the use of their heads in ritual have been associated with agricultural fertility rites, the Mythical Killer Whale represents concepts of power, blood, and fertility.

There have been many different views on the interpretation of the Mythical Killer Whale. Yacovleff considered the Mythical Killer Whale to be the supreme deity of the Nasca. His argument was based on ethnographic data collected from interviews with fishermen living in central coastal Peruvian valleys. Thousands of years have passed between Yacovleffs study and the height of Nasca society; so many scholars have trouble with his methodological approach for research. In his research, he argues that the iconographic motif was not created to represent the killer whale itself, but was a composite creature that represented the “Master” of the sea who was in charge of all water creatures and who was able to provide rich fishing for those who pleased it (Proulx 2006:83).

The origin of this motif can be traced back to the Paracas culture where representations of naturalistic killer whales can be seen on both ceramics and textiles. By the early phases of the Nasca style, the Killer Whale had emerged as the only mythological marine creature in its art. The earliest Mythical Killer Whales were found in Phase 2 and multiply up through phase 5 when the largest number and variety are found (Proulx 2006:84). At least ten varieties of the Mythical Killer Whale have been identified; the variation that this research focuses on is what

Proulx describes as “Traditional Mythical Killer Whale Holding a Weapon and/ or Trophy Head.” He refers to these under the category of KW-2 (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: An example of a KW-2 Motif.
(Proulx 2006: Figure 5.46)**

KW-2 motifs are identical to the naturalistic killer whales seen in earlier phases with the exception of the pointed obsidian blade or trophy head in its hand. The primary cutting instrument used by the Nasca to take trophy heads has been identified as a hafted obsidian blade which proved to be very sharp and effective for this purpose. The killer whale, with its own natural ferocity, was thus converted into a Nasca warrior. This variety of Killer Whale Motif is found primarily in phases 2 through 4 and is seldom associated with blood (Proulx 2006:85). Sawyer argues that although this motif may have personified warrior courage and ferocity, it most likely represented sea fertility (Sawyer 1966:124).

The Nasca Trophy head cult provided a ceremonial means of gathering life force of enemies to be used for the benefit of the collective group. The Nasca created a pantheon of deities with human and animal attributes associated with fertility trophy-head symbols; hence, the Killer Whale Motif is a representation of the most powerful sea animal (Sawyer 1966:122). Early motifs, such as the KW-2, are especially noteworthy because of their persistence throughout the entire Nasca stylistic sequence.



**Figure 4. The Nasca Killer Whale.
(Nasca Geoglyphs 2011).**

The Nasca Killer Whale geoglyph located near the Ingenio Valley (Figure 4 and 5), is the largest representation of the Killer Whale motif from the Nasca society that is included in this study. This motif possesses two dorsal and ventral fins in addition to its tail. Although there is not much detail in this motif, as it was made from a series of lines drawn in the sand, a trophy head shape is still identifiable. This motif, like many other Killer Whale motifs, possesses the “S” shape in its body that depicts movement through water.

No clear anthropomorphic limbs can be seen from this geoglyph; however, since all other Killer Whale motifs that contain similar attributes include an anthropomorphic hand, we can assume that this Killer Whale possesses a more stylized hand that holds the trophy head. There is an absence of an eye or teeth in this icon, however, I would like to assume this is only because of the sheer scale of the Killer Whale and does not represent a deliberate deficiency in these attributes. The direction of the whale is clearly facing towards the left which would face Northeast, neither to nor away from the ocean.

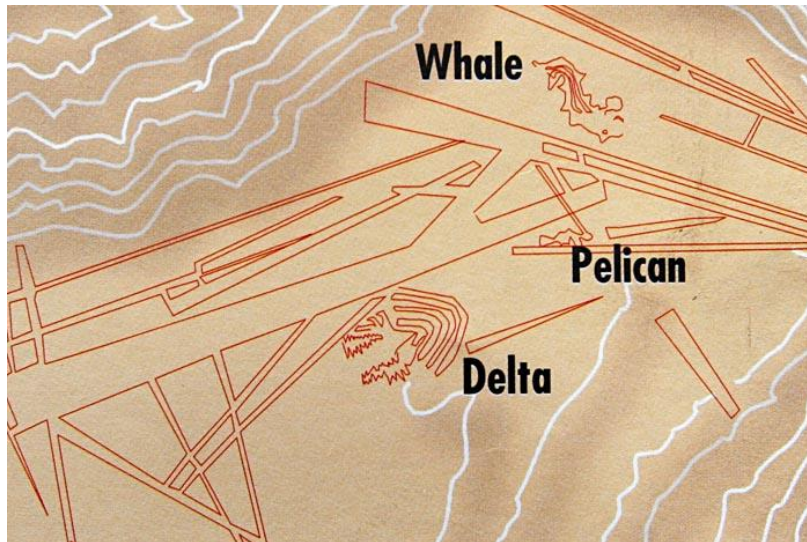


Figure 5: Killer whale Placement and Direction.
(Nasca Geoglyphs 2011).



Figure 6: Nasca Killer Whale on Double Spout Vessel.
(Metropolitan Museum of Art:64.228.70).

The Killer Whale Motif in Figure 6 appears on a double-spout and bridge vessel against a white background. This icon depicts the spirit and movement of the animal with an “S” shaped

curved body. Its eye and fangs are emphasized, and a human arm holds a trophy head by the hair. Again, this motif is facing towards the left similar to most other Killer Whale icons. This vessel was a gift to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1964 by Nathan Cummings and unfortunately does not have provenience data associated with it. The dimensions of the bottle are 6 ¾ inches in height with a diameter of 6 ¼ inches.



**Figure 7: Nasca Apogee Epoch Killer Whale Vessel.
(Larco Herrera Museum).**

The Killer whale depicted in Figure 7 has all the hallmark characteristics of the previous Killer Whale motifs in this research. It possesses three dorsal fins and one ventral fin along with its tail, which is shaped differently than the others that were discussed in this research. It seems to be holding an obsidian decapitation knife in its anthropomorphic hand and has depictions of trophy heads painted on its body. This vessel has anthropomorphic feet, a grimacing set of teeth, and large round eye. The “S” shape seen in previous motifs of Killer Whales has also been transferred into the actual shape of this particular vessel.

MOCHE FISH DECAPITATORS

The tradition of supernatural head-takers seems to have been borrowed by the Moche from their Cupisnique predecessors. The Moche decapitators - the spider, bird of prey, monster, fish, and human - are the same in the Cupisnique style, suggesting a continuing tradition of belief (Benson and Cook 2001:23). Alana Cordy-Collins suggests that each temporal region may have had their own patron decapitator; regions could be split into valleys, settlements, or groups. She also claimed “there is only one single example of a Fish Decapitator” (Cordy Collins 1992). She did not mention in her article what her qualifications for a Moche Fish Decapitator were, however, by the other three possible Fish Decapitators pictured below we can be certain that more have been discovered since the date at which she published her article in 1992.



**Figure 8: Moche Fish Monsters, possibly Bonito.
(Shimada 1994: Figure 9.7).**

Figure 8 depicts a Moche Fish Decapitator, from a Moche V stirrup-spout ceramic bottle. It was excavated in Sector D of the Pampa Grande ceremonial and administrative site in the Lambayeque Valley (Shimada 1994:231). Two dorsal and ventral fins can be seen on the fish's bodies, which lack the “S” shape previously seen in Nasca iconography. The fish monsters have pronounced teeth and eyes and possess both anthropomorphic arms and legs that hold both a

tumi decapitation knife and a trophy head by the hair. These creatures face towards the right.

These fineline fish have more detail than is usually seen in the Nasca depictions. Numerous dots, lines, and zigzags were used to give the fish emotion and movement.



Figure 9: Moche Fish Decapitators.
(Cordy-Collins 1992: Figure 12).

“There is only one example of a Fish Decapitator” Alana Cordy-Collins argued in reference to this motif (seen in Figure 9) that was found on a painted stirrup spout vessel (Cordy-Collins 1992:215). The creatures hold a *tumi* knife in one hand and a severed head in the other by the hair. The beings have anthropomorphic arms, legs, and heads in which the fangs are emphasized. They possess both dorsal and ventral fins and the “S” shaped curve that conveys motion and movement while the Decapitators swim towards the right of the scene. Dots and lines within the body add to the decoration.



Figure 10: Moche Fish Decapitator found at the Dos Cabezas Site. (Benson and Cook 2001: Figure 2.3).

The motif pictured in Figure 10 was discovered in an excavation in 1994 through the Dos Cabezas Project in the Jequetepeque Valley. What is really fascinating about this bowl was that it was discovered in what seemed to have been a fishermen's barrio. Local informants from the area claim that prior to the 1994 excavation, one other Supernatural Fish Decapitator had been located at the site (Benson and Cook 2001:23,26). The eyes and fangs are clearly depicted in this motif. The Decapitator holds a *tumi* knife in his anthropomorphic hand and swims towards the right. The motif lacks the "S" shaped curve seen in other motifs, however possesses unique decorative shapes in its body, such as triangles.



**Figure 11: One Example of a Demon Fish.
(Donnan and McClelland 1999: Figure 4.2).**

The motif pictured in Figure 11, the so-called Demon Fish, was taken off a Moche stirrup spouted vessel that had been dated from the Moche III Phase. The Demon Fish, who appeared during the Moche III phase and continued into Moche V, is often seen in Moche fineline painting holding a *tumi* knife in an anthropomorphic hand (Donnan and McClelland 1999:67). During Moche Phase IV, the Demon Fish was the most prevalent anthropomorphic being depicted alone, or in combat with other supernatural creatures (Donnan and McClelland 1999:112).

DISCUSSION

Because many of the specimens in this sample were retrieved from museum settings, or simply because the provenience data is unavailable, only three of the specimens in this study have an associated time period assigned to them by the archaeologists who excavated them. Strangely enough, the two specimens with associated dates seem to lack many of the common attributes that the majority of the other icons contain. The Moche V vessel (See figure 8) and the Moche

III Demon Fish vessel (see Figure 11) both lack the “S” shaped curve that was seen in all of the Nasca Killer Whale Motifs and in one Moche vessel (see Figure 9). The Nasca Killer Whale pictured in Figure 6 has been described as a “KW-2” by Proulx (see Proulx 2006) and therefore is associated with the Nasca 2 Phase as described by Dawson.

Ceramics from the Nasca 2 phase date from approximately 75 B.C. to A.D. 50 (see Table 1); while there is too little information at this time to put absolute dates to Larco’s Ceramic Phases (Donnan 1975:13). Moche Phases III and IV have been estimated to date in the proximity of A.D. 400- 700 placing Moche V ceramics somewhere around A.D. 700-800 (Bawden 1996:23). The only way to possibly make interpretations for this research is by assuming that all of the Killer Whale Motifs presented in this thesis, with the exception of the Killer Whale Geoglyph, are KW-2 because of their stylistic attributes described by Proulx. If we assume that these ceramics date to approximately 75 B.C. to A.D. 50, it would be highly unlikely that the Killer Whale Motif spread either through direct or indirect diffusion to the Moche population where it would have been presented as the Moche Fish Decapitator because of the massive time lapse. The spread of stylistic attributes from Moche to Nasca can be seen, but only during the later “Proliferous” strain of Nasca iconography dating from approximately A.D. 425-650.

Location of an artifact can tell a lot about what the item was used for, as well as give information about the significance of the motifs on that artifact. The Nasca Killer Whale geoglyph located near the Ingenio Valley (see Figure 4) is the largest representation of the Killer Whale included in this study, and for that reason alone holds some significance. Although the exact use and purpose of the Nasca lines are still unknown, as discussed earlier, we can be sure

that since the Nasca invested so much time creating this spectacular figure it was most likely a prominent icon in their mythology.

Unfortunately, because the other samples of Nasca Killer Whale were recovered from museum collections, no provenience information is available from the other two Nasca samples. This means that I am not able to make any solid conclusions about the importance of the Nasca Killer Whale from the locations that these items were found. As was stated before, I do feel that the sheer size and labor force required to create the Nasca Killer Whale geoglyph lends evidence towards this motif having a significant amount of importance in Nasca society. Because many early Nasca motifs look similar and almost identical to it, I would suggest that the Killer Whale is an important figure in early Nasca mythology.

Much more provenience data was recovered from the Moche sample than the Nasca sample; therefore, a general conclusion of importance of Moche Fish Decapitators can be made far more easily. The Moche Fish Decapitator seen in Figure 8 was excavated from Sector D of the Pampa Grande site in which excavations yielded evidence of small-scale craft production and food and beverage preparation. There was evidence of strategically placed formalized hierarchical terraces that held throne like seats from which elites controlled access to and from workshops and storerooms (Shimada 1996:144). The Pampa Grande site itself has a very high status, and this sector too, shows importance with the restricted and controlled access to storage areas. The vessel found in Sector D could be associated with an elite status because of its association to the restricted areas of the site.

The Fish Decapitator in Figure 9 was not associated with any provenience data because it was a gift given to the National Museum of Archaeology in Berlin, Germany. The motif pictured in Figure 10, however, was excavated in the Jequetepeque Valley in what seems to have

been a fishermen's barrio. The presence of a Fish Decapitator in a fishermen's barrio would make sense if that motif was used as a symbol of fertility of maritime resources similar to the way the Nasca may have used the Killer Whale motif described by Sawyer and Proulx.

The Demon Fish depicted in Figure 11 has no provenience data associated with it as it was taken from Museo Arqueológico de Rafael Larco Herrera in Lima. However, it has been described as being frequently depicted in Moche Phases IV and V therefore giving insight on its importance in Moche society (Donnan and McClelland 1999:112).

In trying to more accurately understand the sample and to infer more about the relative importance of the vessels in the sample, information from previous excavations at Nasca sites gives insight into the relative percentages of vessels and vessel forms found. Table 2 illustrates a combined table of vessel shapes between the Cahuachi assemblage and the ceramic assemblage found in graves dating from Nasca phases 3 and 4. Although the vessels used in this research most likely dated from the Nasca 2 phase, this information provides comparative data.

By looking at Table 2, it is clear that Double Spout and Bridge Vessels make up approximately 9 percent of grave findings and 1.8 percent of the Cahuachi findings. This indicates that these vessels were less common than others, especially in the case of the important Nasca ceremonial site of Cahuachi.

Table 2: Comparison of Decorated Vessel Shapes at Cauhachi and in Graves

Vessel Form	No. of sherds	Cahuachi Percentage	Proulx's Grave Percentage
Double Spout and Bridge	11	2.813	9
Bowls	251	64.194	23
Dishes	37	9.462	10
Cup Bowls	15	3.836	15
Deep Bottom Bowls	1	0.255	10
Bulbous Vases	23	5.882	11
Head Jars	1	0.255	3
Collard Jars	1	0.255	3
Modeled Vessels	36	9.207	1
Other	15	3.836	15
Total	391	100	100

(Siverman 1993:242: Table 16.7).

Table 3 provides comparative information regarding the subject matter of the vessels. As discussed earlier, we have established the Killer Whale Motif as a mythological one. In both Proulx's Graves and the Cahuachi assemblage, the Mythological Theme is the least common. This could lead to the interpretation that the Killer Whale Motifs in this study may have been prestige items because they come from the theme category that is the least representative.

Table 3: Frequencies of Design Themes at Cahuachi and in Cemeteries

Motifs	Cahuachi		Proulx's Graves	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Mythical	75	22	112	19
Natural	133	39	284	47
Geometric	132	39	205	34

(Siverman 1993: Table 16.8).

Location of Moche vessels used in this study gives a very interesting interpretation of their importance as well. The Moche Fish Decapitator has been found in ceremonial locations and a fishermen's barrio, two of the most contrasting sites on a social hierarchy. Therefore, it can be suggested that the Moche Fish Decapitator was an important icon for people of all status since it was found in both contexts, or at least that it was known in all levels of social hierarchy. The location of the vessels used in this study have also given evidence that the Moche Fish Decapitator was probably not a patron deity from a specific valley because of its location in both the Lambayeque and Jequetepeque Valleys.

With the exception of the Nasca geoglyph and the Moche bowl found in the Jequetepeque, all of the other ceramics that portray either the Nasca Killer Whale or the Moche Fish Decapitator are found on stirrup spouted vessels. Because all but one vessel in the ceramic assemblage are stirrup spouted, we can assume that stirrup spouted vessels served a similar function in both societies.

Stylistic attributes can be compared much more easily than any other aspect of Killer Whale and Fish Decapitator Motifs because there is no other data needed than the presence or absence of an iconographic feature to make comparisons. As stated earlier, all motifs selected for this research project were required to possess at least ventral or dorsal fins as well as a decapitation knife and/or severed head. After comparing iconography from both the Nasca and Moche we see various similarities and differences in stylistic attributes.

100 percent of the sample possessed anthropomorphic arms that were used to hold either a decapitation knife or severed head, this is because it was a minimum requirement for being part of this research. In concerns to the other minimum requirements, 71.4 percent of the sample possessed anthropomorphic legs, decapitation knives, and trophy heads. 42.9 percent of the

sample possessed both a decapitation knife and trophy head. Various stylistic attributes that were not recognized during the selection of the sample icons have been compared and show interesting results pertaining to the similarities in iconographic motifs.

With the exception of the Nasca geoglyph, every motif in the entire sample assemblage have sharp, pointed teeth. As was discussed earlier, this could lead to an interpretation of these creatures as supernatural warriors as suggested by Proulx. What is clear from the continuity of this trait on every example in the sample is that these creatures were intentionally depicted to be ferocious creatures of the sea. Although I believe not enough information is available to be certain about any explanation of the nature of this trait, I do believe that the continuity can lead to a more probable interpretation.

One intriguing result of this study was the observation that 100 percent of Nasca Killer Whale motifs faced towards the left, while 100 percent of the Moche Fish Decapitators faced towards the right. A literature review showed that Nasca art can be found facing to both the right and the left; therefore, the continuity in the direction of the Killer Whales in my sample may be noteworthy. Similarly, Moche ceramic art is not constrained to facing one way or the other, though all icons in my Moche sample face the right, which is similarly notable. Though I am not able to formulate a specific hypothesis that explains the patterns evident in the direction of motifs in Killer Whale and Fish Decapitator icons in Nasca and Moche iconography, respectively, the continuity within each culture is suggestive of a ritual (i.e. repeated, liturgical) practice.

The prevalence of details found on Moche Fish Decapitators in the form of dots and other shapes can be attributed to the Moche Fineline Tradition of painting (see Donnan and McClelland 2007 and Donnan and McClelland 1999), however, it may also be useful to take into

consideration the influence that the natural forms of the animals had on the iconographic representation. The motif pictured in Figure 7 has been described as a possible representation of the Bonito, a fish that was one of the most exploited by the Moche civilization (Peregrine and Ember 2002:270).

The dorsal and ventral fins of the Bonito have the same shape as those depicted in Figure 8, but the Moche artist seems to have exaggerated their proportions. Besides the presence of sharp teeth, the details that were painted in the body of the fish do not have any naturalistic correlates. This means that if the artist was trying to depict the Bonito, the artist added in various stylistic attributes perhaps to emphasize the anthropomorphic and mythical nature of the Bonito monster itself.

The variation between the Moche Fish Decapitator Motifs used in this research is astounding. Each fish icon has its own, unique shape and detail. Again, this could have been due to the Moche Finesline Painting Tradition, however, I would like to suggest that this amount of variation suggests that the Moche Fish Decapitators served as composite icons, similar to that described by Yakovlev in his research of the Nasca Killer Whale Motif. It would make sense for the fish to be varied if they were indeed composite creatures. Similarly, they could have served as part of a fertility ritual in which the fish they exploited, such as the Bonito, were painted to represent a mythological variation of the species to which sacrifice and ritual would ensure fertile maritime resources.

When looking at the anatomy of actual killer whales, one begins to notice the dissimilarities between the Nasca depictions and their live counterparts. While the Nasca KW-2 Motif, such as that pictured in Figure 6, possess three dorsal fins and two ventral fins, excluding the arms, actual killer whales only possess one dorsal fin and two ventral fins on its lateral sides.

The large, round eye that is located within a white circle on KW-2 motifs could be a representation of the large white spot that killer whales possess just behind their eyes. While the iconographic motifs show killer whales with a series of lines down their bodies, real killer whales have a white stripe down their ventral side as opposed to their lateral sides. The Killer Whale Motif does, however, possess a lighter colored ventral side and darker dorsal side which is similar to the colors of real killer whales. Also notable is the fact that the Killer Whale Motifs possess a horizontal tail, similar to that of a shark, while live killer whales have a horizontal tail similar to their dolphin relatives. The lack of continuity between killer whales and the KW-2 motifs give more evidence towards Yakovleff's interpretation that this motif represents a composite "Master" of the sea rather than a naturalistic killer whale.

CONCLUSIONS

What was found in regards to the similarities and differences between the Moche Fish Decapitator and the Nasca Killer Whale motifs is that while the icons have similar attributes, it is unlikely that the icons spread from one group to the other. Since the Nasca Killer Whale Motif that was used in this study, the KW-2, was created and used hundreds of years before the Moche Fish Decapitator, it is highly unlikely that the motif was spread from Nasca to Moche. Further, no evidence of Nasca stylistic influence has been seen on Moche art, while the Moche seemed to influence Nasca art in the later phases of the Nasca chronology.

Unfortunately, because accurate dates could not be associated with some of the ceramics in the sample, a direct chronological sequence was not able to be formed. However, by using the ceramics that were dated from the Moche assemblage and estimates of dates for the Nasca 2

phase, it was clear that the time lapse between the Nasca use of the KW-2 and the Moche use of a Fish Decapitator was far too long to suggest direct or indirect diffusion. Without datable ceramics, I was also unable to identify any instances of change over time for either icon.

The location data that was available was less than I had hoped for. Because no provenience data was available for any Nasca ceramics, I was unable to accurately interpret the importance of the motif in society; however, the Killer Whale geoglyph, because of its size and position close to other geoglyphs suggests importance, while the presence of the Mythological Killer Whale emerging as the sole mythological creature in early Nasca iconography aids this interpretation.

The Moche ceramics used in this research came from different valleys, and different levels of sites within a site hierarchy. The fact that the Fish Decapitator was recovered from a complex ceremonial site as well as a fishermen's barrio suggests that this icon was known throughout the Moche realm and may have had importance to all levels of society. A more believable interpretation proposes that because of its nautical themes and its association with anglers, the Fish Decapitator may have served as a composite mythological creature linked to the fertility of maritime resources.

The stylistic attributes were the easiest to recognize but give the smallest amount of concrete evidence for interpretation. The correlation found between the Nasca icons facing left and the Moche icons facing right suggest there was a reason for this continuity. At this point, there has been no hypothesis formed as to why these icons would face a distinct way, though the standardized directional depiction of the motifs in both Moche and Nasca killer icons does suggest ritual behavior.

Common stylistic attributes on the icons as compared to their living counterparts, show that although the icons may be “naturalistic” in style, in the sense they may depict a specific species of animal, the icons may in fact be mythological in nature because of the high frequency of differences noted between the icons and the actual animals. The dissimilarities give evidence towards the interpretation of Yakovleff, that the Killer Whale Motif was not actually representing a killer whale, but a composite creature that was the “Master” of the sea. It is possible to interpret the Moche Fish Decapitators in a similar way since there are many variations of Moche Fish Decapitators.

For future research on this topic, I would suggest that a larger sample of ceramics be investigated. However, as archaeologists we will never have the full picture of the past and must make do with the available evidence. If a larger sample were acquired with more associated provenience data, some of the hypotheses proposed in this paper could be evaluated further and interpretations made stronger.

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