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The social roles of musicians in the Moche world: an iconographic analysis of their attributes in Middle Moche period’s ritual pottery.

Abstract

The Moche inhabited the north coast of Peru during the Andean Early Intermediate Period (0-700 CE). One of the most distinctive features of Moche ritual pottery is the depiction of highly ranked individuals usually described as priests, warriors, deities, and supernatural beings. They are mainly present upon Middle Moche period vessels (100-400 C.E), which were probably produced in the context of deep social and political transformation. Supposedly, this was a time marked by the rise in social standing of some of the southern Moche valley’s elites. It was precisely during this period that a large number of musicians, playing a great variety of sound instruments, were recurrently depicted in artifacts such as figurines, whistles, stirrup spout bottles and jars. Interestingly, in many cases, they appear carrying similar attributes of high status individuals or garments of important supernatural beings. The similarity of the attributes carried by musicians and empowered individuals are easily recognized in the iconography of the ceramic archaeological vessels or in funerary contexts.

Detailed iconographic analysis shows us that the musicians are present in most of the important ritual and political thematic scenes of the Moche iconography. They seem to maintain a very close relationship with the protagonists of the Moche world’s visual narratives, such as the Presentation Theme, the Bycephalus Arch Theme, the

Burial Theme, and others. The focus of this presentation is depictions of musicians who play panpipes: these images will be compared with high-ranking characters depicted in Moche art, in order to identify the instrument players' respective social roles in Moche society.

Introduction

This presentation intends to briefly present and discuss the specific political-religious roles of musicians in Moche ceremonies, as well as the relationship between them and the elites during the Middle Moche Period, based on two case studies of our currently doctorate research. Our main hypothesis is that there probably was a hierarchical relationship between specific kinds of musicians and specific kinds of sound instruments (panpipe players, drum players, rattle players, etc) which reflect their political and religious status. For this purpose not only will the iconography be analyzed, but also the burial patterns related to the Moche power structures excavated in the last three decades.

For the last thirty years, scientific excavations in the Peruvian northern coast have unearthed different architectonic, stylistic and iconographic patterns for each of the eight valleys inhabited by the Moche (Quilter & Castillo, 2010). In the 90's, specialists started to question the model of an unified Moche State, created by Peruvian archaeologist Rafael Larco (Larco, 1938: 176-185; Castillo & Donnan, 1994: 144). They also started to re-evaluate the five-phase ceramic chronology, also formulated by Larco, as new ceramic findings in sites north of the Jequetepeque valley, as Sipán, Pampa Grande and San Jose de Moro, didn't fit Larco's sequence (Castillo & Donnan, *ibid*). All evidence pointed to two great areas of Moche influence, separated by the Paiján Pampas: The Southern Moche sphere (including the valleys from Chicama to Nepeña) and the Northern Moche sphere (including the valleys from Jequetepeque to La Leche).

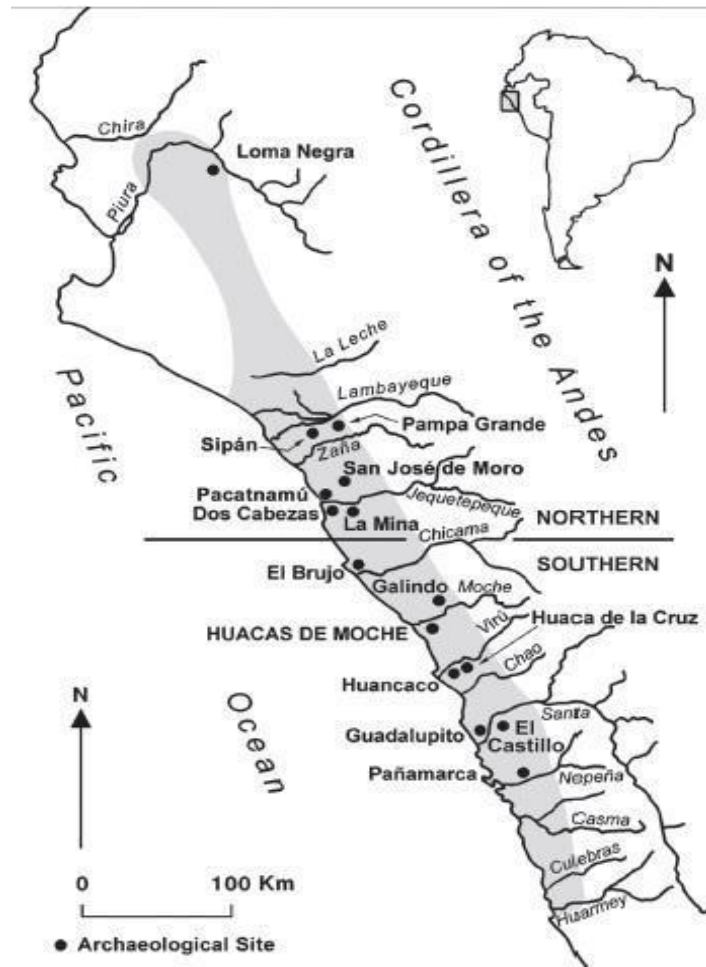


Fig. 1. Map of the North Coast of Peru with all Moche Valleys and main sites. Taken from Chapdelaine *apud* Bourget, 2008.

Castillo & Donnan (*ibid.*) developed a three-phase chronology for the Northern Moche region. However, archaeologists working with data from southern Moche sites still use the Larco chronology, since it fits well in such valleys. We will use Larco's sequence in this presentation, since the greatest part of pottery with depictions of musicians comes from the southern Moche area.



Fig. 2. Board showing the two different chronological sequences developed by archaeologists for Moche ceramics. The Northern Moche chronology was developed by Donnan and Castillo in 1994, and the Southern Moche sequence was developed by Rafael Larco in 1938 (Image from Donnan & Castillo, 1994).

Data and Methods

Our data is composed of approximately eight hundred Moche ceramic artifacts depicting musicians. The majority of these objects belong to Peruvian institutions as the *Rafael Larco Herrera Museum* and *The National Museum of Anthropology*, both in Lima and *The Bruning Museum*, in Lambayeque, amongst others.

Our methodological standpoint is based on semiotics and visual semantics, or, according to Brotherston (1992: 44): “the visual language”. Under this approach, a systematic analysis of the images is assembled by organizing and comparing the minimal parts of the visual composition.

We have chosen three main criteria of classification in order to find groups of musicians. They are:

1. The morphology of the artifact support, that is, the kind of vase that holds the representation. Iconographic depictions were not made randomly in the

Moche world. We can see a clear relationship between certain types of pottery and certain scenes, narratives and characters (Golte, 2009: 82). Thus, we have the premise that specific types of musicians are depicted in figurines, stirrup spout bottles, chambers or jars.

2. The sound Instrument played by the character.
3. Physical characteristics and power attributes. Organizing these musicians based on their features and attributes can indicate specific activities and roles played by them in the sound production of the Moche world.



Fig. 3. The three main criteria of analysis. Image: Larco Museum, Lima.

Following the criteria defined (fig. 3), we have found 45 groups of musicians represented in sculptured vases, jars, figurines or in stirrup spout bottles, sculptured or pictorial, playing a variety of sound instruments.

This presentation will discuss two case studies focused on Middle Moche paintings depicting musicians playing *antaras*, that is, the andean aerophone analogous to the western Pan Flute (Sachs & Hornbostel, 1992: 452).

Sound production and religious-political power: The case study of the “Warrior Priest”.

According to recent archaeological studies in the Moche valley, “sometime between CE 200 and 400 a series of social transformations occurred that profoundly

altered the lives of the people of the Moche Valley.” (Billman, 2010: 181). It was precisely at this moment that the pyramids of the Sun and Moon (*Huacas del Sol y de la Luna*) were built. These new buildings were innovative and sumptuous power centers, differing in many aspects from the first architectonic structures of the valley.

The period’s significant transformations, evidenced by a variety of archaeological data (ibid), indicate an important change in the relationships of the valley’s inhabitants and the new sovereign elites, as well as the rise of a specific group to power. This new political organization expanded gradually to all valleys south of the Jequetepeque valley, shaping what specialists would call “The Southern Moche State” (ibid).

In Larco’s phases I and II the ceramics and pyramid’s murals iconography portrayed simple themes like plants, animals and abstract designs. In the period mentioned by Billman, known as Middle Moche (100 – 450 CE), a great variety of characters bearing many power attributes, as well as “extraordinary” beings, rise to greater prominence in ceramic and ceremonial center’s iconography.

Phase IV pottery, distinctive of this period, is rarely found north of Jequetepeque, ratifying the rise of these elites as a phenomenon of the southern Moche valleys, particularly Moche, Chicama and Virú. Middle Moche artifacts are the likeliest to be found in museum’s collections around the world due to the intensive mold technique production, a distinctive feature of the period. The art produced in the Middle Moche period conforms to an authentic iconography of power, not observed in the previous phases. Themes such as “The Presentation Theme”, “The Bicephalus Arch Theme”, “The Dance of the Warriors Theme”, “The Sacrifice Ceremony Theme” are amongst the most portrayed narratives, showing a variety of authority figures. In this context a large amount of musicians are depicted in art, also wearing important power attributes.

Archaeological excavations in the northern coastal valleys have also been unearthing evidences of the intrinsic relationship between high status individuals buried in funerary contexts and specific characters portrayed in ritual ceramic iconography. Many of the individuals depicted on them have been gradually found in burial contexts (as seen in Sipán, San Jose de Moro, El Castillo, Pampa Grande, Huaca Cao Viejo, etc). They often hold exactly the same attributes shown in the iconographic representations (Donnan, 2010: 47-66; Arcuri 2014).

High status characters can be identified on Moche iconography based on the combination of specific power attributes and garments. These elements endow these individuals with qualities and powers that are mostly present in deities and supernatural beings (Donnan, 1978, Donnan&McClelland, 1999; Hocquenghem, 1989; Castillo, 1989, 2000; Golte, 1994, 2009; Makowski, 1994, 1996, 2000; Bourget, 2006; Jackson, 2008). Researchers have given them names as Owl Warrior, The Warrior Priest (Chero, 2012), The Coca Taker and the Worshipper (Uceda, 2008: 156).

In Moche cosmivision, deities and supernatural beings share their authority attributes and magic powers with human beings of important hierarchical position who command the *huaca*'s public rituals and ceremonial events. These events should be closely related to the mythical narratives that legitimate and sustain the power of the elites. Quoting De Marrais et.al., 1996: 17:

“In Moche ceremony each social segment was ascribed a role that reflected its position in the Moche pantheon of deities and supernatural beings. Only high status elites could perform the leading roles which legitimated their privileged position in society” (ibid.).

In fig.4 we notice a figure, highlighted with the red circle, called by some specialists the “D” character (Bourget, 2008). He presents as attributes the quadrangle plaque long shirt, the headdress in “V” shape, a kind of tail similar to a net coming out of the back part of his tunic and appendices coming out of his headdress. He is shown many times clapping, with his mouth open and holding a war club (as seen in Bourget, 2008: 278).

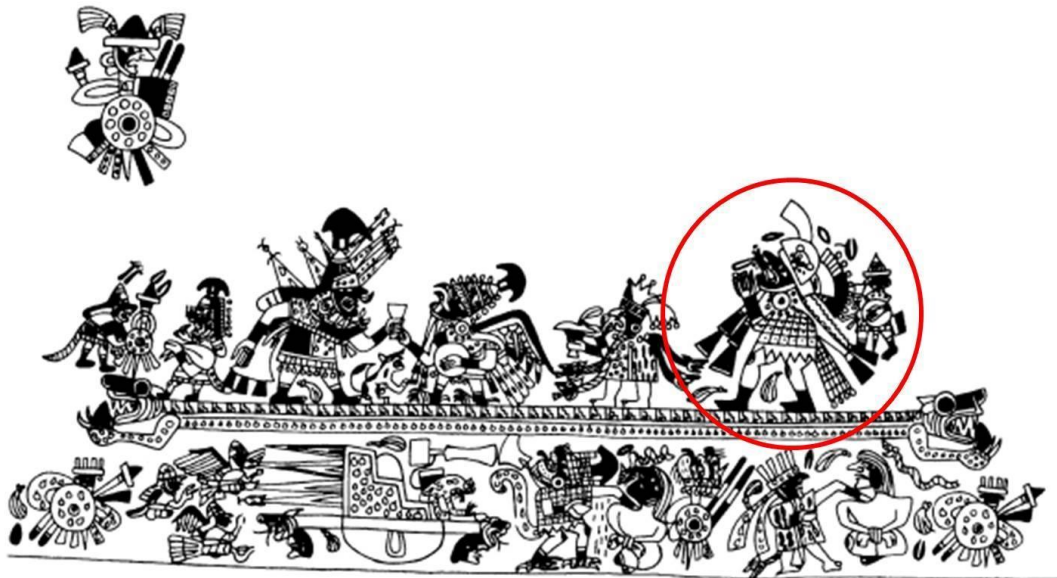


Fig. 4. The Presentation Theme. Roll out by Donna McClelland. In: Bourget, 2008: 237.

One of the most important Moche sites, Sipán, is located in the Lambayeque Valley, Northern Moche region. Its main building is Huaca Rajada, an adobe pyramid where burials of high status individuals were found in continuous field seasons from 1987 to 2007. Each one of these tombs held elite individuals who certainly maintained important religious and political power since they held sophisticated gold, silver and turquoise artifacts, as well as many other power attributes. The individual found in Tomb 14, excavated in 2007, presented the same attributes of the character “D”. He was called by the archaeologists Walter Alva and Luis Chero as “The Warrior Priest” (Chero, 2012). His attributes, such as the headdress in “V” and the shirt with quadrangle plaques are closely related to “D” character’s attributes, and are currently on display in the Huaca Rajada Site Museum.



Fig. 5. Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles. Donnan, 1998: 53. Donna McClelland: Alva & Donnan, 1993: 18.

Fig. 5 shows an outline of a vase from the *Fowler Museum of Cultural History* collection, Los Angeles, in which six characters play sound instruments: four antaras and two trumpets in the shape of a snail. There is also a *pututo* (*Strombus galeatus* shell trumpet, very common in the Andean world) beside the first musician (from left to right). The last musician (highlighted with the red circle) displays the same exact attributes of character “D” and of the “Warrior Priest”, found in Tomb 14.

It’s not only the garments that the Warrior Priest and the musician of the Fowler Museum vase have in common. Tomb 14’s individual was actually found associated to exactly the same instruments depicted in the vase: two ceramic *antaras*, seven ceramic trumpets in shape of snail (the same played by the smallest musicians), and nine ceramic *pututos* (fig. 6). Likewise the image of the Fowler Museum, ceramic anthropomorphic faces found in Tomb 14 can be seen at the center of the showcase. These are identical to the antara’s appendices in the Fowler Museum depiction, only without the headdresses in “V”.

It is possible that the pututos and trumpets, which are miniatures, don’t produce sound, but there is a strong possibility that the antaras, which are not miniatures, do (Carlos Mansilla Vásquez, personal communication, January 2014).



Fig. 6. Sound instruments found in Tomb 14. Museo de Sítio Huaca Rajada, Sipán. Lambayeque, Peru. Picture by Daniela La Chioma.

Physical anthropology studies seeking for jawbone alterations could elucidate if the individual actually played these instruments. In 2007 a study conducted by Elsa Tomasto, of the National Museum of Anthropology in Lima, confirmed that a Nasca man, buried with 14 antaras, actually played them. This study was based on the alterations of the individual's mandible (Tomasto, 2006). Even if this information can't be confirmed for Sipán, the burial of Tomb 14's Warrior Priest, holding the same instruments showed in the iconographical depictions of him, show a connection of this social persona with the function of officiating ceremonies, and, particularly, producing sound.

Under our perspective, these characters can't be categorized simply as "musicians" only for being associated to sound instruments. Such simplification is not enough to explain the roles sound and its makers fulfilled in the Moche world. The most accepted hypothesis is that these characters represent "officiants", terminology used by

Makowski (1994:55-56) when referring to individuals who play central roles in the official cults:

“The narratives allow us to define the characters wearing large tunics as officiants. They don’t fight, hunt, fish or collect land snails. Music and dance are the only collective activities in which they appear engaged (...). They assume protagonist roles in the culminant moments of official ceremonies, when the act implies a direct communication with the *numen*.” (ibid)

It seems clear that sound and music were extremely important in the ceremonial context of the Middle Moche period, when Huaca de la Luna, Huaca Cao Viejo and other important temples were in their apogees. Fieldwork attests the high status of the religious elites, showing that these individuals matched the characters depicted in ceramics (Uceda, 2010: 134). Excavations also show a large amount of ceremonial evidences in these buildings, suggesting that this period’s rites had strong spectacle characteristics. This would have demanded a lot of attention to sound making; which would be an indispensable element considering the elevated degree of “theatralization” of the ceremonies officiated by the elites.

It’s interesting to observe that, although the tombs of Sipán are located in the northern Moche context, the social roles and sound instruments found there are represented in the southern Moche iconography (as the Fowler Museum vase), suggesting that in both regions these leading roles were equally related to sound and music.

The Bicephalus Arch Theme

Another example of the relationship between musicians and important political-religious characters in the Moche world can be seen in the case of the Bicephalus Arch narrative. Fig. 7 shows a stirrup spout bottle vase with relieve depictions of dancers in its chamber. It also has a sculptured appendix shaped like a high ranked musician playing an *antara*. He is adorned with a mantle, tunic, circular earrings and a “V” shape headdress with human hand appendices. He also shows facial painting in the shape of a cross. Some Larco’s Museum sculptured vases present a character with the same attributes, only carrying a bag (lime container) and a spatula instead of the musical instrument (fig. 10).



Fig. 7. Stirrup Spout Bottle with appendix depicting musician. Larco Museum Lima.



Fig. 8. Detail of the Larco piece.

In fig. 9 we see a well-known Moche scene in which four characters interact. One of them is under the double headed serpent arch, an element known among specialists as the “bicephalus arch” (Bourget, 2006: 41, Uceda, 2008: 154). Uceda (ibid.: 156) points to the fact that the character wears a shirt of quadrangle plaques and has his hands up. He also has the “V” shape headdress containing appendices that represent *ulluchus*, a species of fruit from the Peruvian northern coast, now extinct, widely related to the Warrior Priest in the iconography. These characters were named “worshippers” by Uceda (ibid. 154-155) and his attributes are very similar to the ones presented by the Warrior Priest.

The figures out of the arch wear tunics with stepped elements and volutes. They also carry their bags and the spatulas, which they take to their mouths. Uceda (ibid.) names them as “coca takers”. These individuals, wearing exactly these garments and associated to these artifacts were found in Huaca de la Luna’s burials (ibid. 163-164).

They were probably shamans responsible for religious practices which included hallucinogenic elements, and must have held great religious power, attested by their power attributes and the great amount of Middle Moche ritual ceramics in which they were represented. The antara player of the Larco Museum's vase presents exactly the same attributes and garments, including the facial painting, of the "coca takers".



Fig. 9. The *Bicephalus Arch Theme*. Roll out by Donna Mc Clelland. In: Uceda, 2008.



Fig. 10. A sculptured "coca taker". Larco Museum, Lima.

Final thoughts

These two examples, selected from many we have studied, seek to demonstrate that certain sound instruments are associated with certain important social roles reserved

to individuals who concentrate significant functions inside the Moche political and religious power spheres. The antara is currently associated with leading social roles and elite characters. Officiants, shamans and priests were probably involved in sound producing. The iconographic analysis of other categories of musicians, playing membranophones, idiophones and other kinds of aerophones, demonstrate that only the antara is associated to individuals of such a high position.

This question is being developed in depth in our doctorate investigation (Universidade de São Paulo) which counts with almost 800 images of Moche musicians, now sorted in a *Microsoft Access* database.

Regardless of the limits of archaeological investigation in terms of precisely reconstructing social circumstances, under an anthropological point of view of ancestry and kinship relations, we intend to analyze our data guided by the questions: would a hierarchical relationship among sound instruments, reflecting a political-religious hierarchy held by musicians, have occurred in the Moche world? How would these associations work in the rituals and ceremonies in which different categories of instruments appear together? Would the greater occurrence of musician's depictions produced in a context of ascension of the Southern Moche State express the rising of a particular class of musicians in the Moche power structures?

We observe incoherencies if we take into account the significant place these musicians and instruments occupy in the Moche archaeological data and the timid place they hold in the academic discussions concerning Moche social roles, ceremonies and the exercise of power. We have been finding musicians depicted with power attributes and garments, as well as unadorned musicians without any of these features. Would it show the existence of high and low status musicians? These questions will direct our analysis and allow us to elucidate the spaces that music and its players occupied in Moche valleys in the Middle Moche Period, south and north of the Jequetepeque.

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