

# **Tearing Down Old Walls in the New World: Reconsidering a Moche Site in Northern Peru**

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The country of Peru is an interesting area, bordered by mountains on one side and the ocean on the other. This unique environment was home to numerous pre-Columbian cultures, several of which are well-known for their creativity and technological advancements. These cultures include such groups as the Chavin, Nasca, Inca, and Moche. The last of these, the Moche, flourished from about 0-800 AD and more or less dominated Peru's northern coast. During the 2001 summer archaeological field season, I was granted the opportunity to travel to Peru and participate in the excavation of the Huaca de Huancaco, a Moche palace. In recent years, as Dr. Steve Bourget and his colleagues have conducted extensive research and fieldwork on the site, the cultural identity of its inhabitants have come into question. Although Huancaco has long been deemed a Moche site, Bourget claims that it is not.

In this paper I will give a general, widely accepted description of the Moche culture and a brief history of the archaeological work that has been conducted on it. I will then discuss the site of Huancaco itself and my personal involvement with it. Finally, I will give a brief account of the data that have, and have not, been found there. This information is crucial for the necessary comparisons to other Moche sites required by Bourget's claim that Huancaco is not a Moche site, a claim that will be explained and supported in this paper.

For nearly fifty years the Moche have been interpreted in essentially the same way, and this is how I will introduce them in this

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paper. These interpretations represent the older school of thought on Moche culture, which is not being disputed, just revised thanks to recent extensive fieldwork and careful research. This recent work challenges many of those long-standing ideas about this ancient culture. While it may still be some time before scholars' view of the Moche change, I think it is important to discuss the possibility of a changing perspective on an entire culture.



**The People: Who They Were and What They Did**

According to traditional archaeological interpretations, the Moche (or Mochica as they are often called) were a remarkable and distinct culture that flourished primarily during the Early Intermediate Period of Peru (approximately 1-650 AD). They lived along the northern coast of Peru and are best represented in the Moche and Chicama Valleys, although traces of their culture have been found all the way from the Piura Valley to the Nepeña Valley. Although a unique culture, their artifacts reveal that they shared common traits with both their neighboring and preceding cultures. They incorporated many technological and stylistic aspects of the earlier, highland-dwelling Chauvin into their ceramics.

However, it was the Gallinazo people, who immediately preceded the Moche, who were both the most influential on, and the most affected by, the Moche culture. The Gallinazo occupied the north coast of Peru immediately before, and to some extent during, the earlier phases of the Moche occupation of the same area. One might assume, therefore, that the Moche were a branch of, or a group within, the Gallinazo culture, but that is not the most widely accepted interpretation. It is generally believed that the Moche were a militaristic people who came into this area of Peru, conquered it, and incorporated the local population into their own Moche culture. According to archaeologist Elizabeth Benson, the militaristic depictions on the artifacts themselves suggest this behavior.<sup>1</sup> Edward Lanning suggests that the stylistic uniformity seen in their architecture, pottery, and other art forms also supports this interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Despite this militaristic bent, however, it was not until the late/middle period of the "Moche reign" (roughly 250-600 AD) that a "distinctive Moche presence" appears to have been fully developed.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the general uniformity characteristic of Moche sites, variation does exist. The Chicima Valley is the generally accepted marker that divides the north coast of Peru into northern and southern regions.<sup>4</sup> Distinct differences between these two regions have been noted in the appearance of ceramics and in the architecture. This point will be discussed in more detail later. Also during this time (the Early Intermediate Period) the southern coast was developing urbanized cities

while the north continued the older pattern of a dispersed population living around ceremonial centers.<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that the Moche may even have had a system of roads and runners similar to those known to have existed among the later Inca culture of Peru. This information is based on depictions of roads and runners on pottery, and supports the theory that the southern coast was more urbanized.<sup>6</sup> This variation in settlement patterns supports Benson's theory that although the Moche were a generally unified group, there were many "sociopolitical and artistic differences."<sup>7</sup> These differences included such aspects of Moche life as trade and political unity (or lack thereof).

Not only did the Moche culture have a strong militaristic component; but it appears to have had a strong religious ideology as well. According to Victor W. Von Hagen, the Moche were moon worshippers.<sup>8</sup> Evidence for this can be derived from the construction of the Huaca de Luna and the Huaca del Sol, enormous structures that are believed to have been temples or religious/administrative centers. According to Benson there were two main gods worshipped by the Moche: a "creator god" who lived in the mountains and considered by some to be the supreme deity (god-the-father), and the "fanged god" who traveled down the coast. The latter was largely associated with the ocean, and was probably the more powerful of the two (god-the-son).<sup>9</sup> The Moche participated in acts of divination, ritual burial, and both human and animal sacrifice. It was a common practice for the Moche warriors to capture their enemies alive and to bring them back for ritual sacrifice.<sup>10</sup>

Although there is no evidence that the Moche used hallucinogens in their rituals, there were foods that were used ceremonially. Chicha, for example, is a fermented corn beverage associated with the rituals surrounding death and human sacrifice. (Chicha is still made by Peruvians today, but is commonly consumed outside of specific ritual contexts.) The coca leaf was another popular "food" used for sacred purposes. It was most commonly associated with the deity of the mountains but was also chewed by warriors for courage and endurance before going into battle.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Moche did not practice mummification, their burial sites portray a concern with proper burial. Moche burial sites

are typically shallow, rectangular graves lined with adobe bricks.<sup>12</sup> The dead were customarily buried lying flat on their backs with their arms by their sides, accompanied by grave goods of shell, pottery, gold, and copper.<sup>13</sup>

Another important aspect of Moche culture was its emphasis on the notion of duality. This is revealed in numerous ways through both the sacred and mundane aspects of Moche life. The most obvious duality, as expressed through their primary gods of worship, is between the mountains and the sea. The sea provided them with their main sources of protein; however, they lived along the base of the mountains and farmed the land for the bulk of their food. This duality is further depicted through the use of the step-wave artistic motif that implies a connection between the land and the sea. Benson tells us that “the step-wave is one of the most widespread motifs in pre-Columbian art and must have had many levels of meaning.”<sup>14</sup> The swirl was also commonly associated with water and is often repeated in succession (i.e. “doubled”) when represented in art.<sup>15</sup>

The Moche not only doubled symbols, they often reversed them as well. This reversal created a mirror image of the original design on the artwork. It helped to create a positive/negative, or light/dark imagery that was incorporated on some level into nearly all artistic forms. For example, the emphasis on duality can be seen in the depictions of face painting and clothing found on the pottery vessels. Pots were painted on both sides, often with patterns of half light/half dark that were commonly repeated in reverse (creating a 4-square design), and the pots were generally made in pairs. The concept of duality is also expressed in depictions of two victims for most mountain sacrifices.<sup>16</sup>

The Moche were obviously an extremely organized, class-based society. At the top were those in positions of sacred and secular power. Benson indicates that priests performed rituals that “guided the fate of agriculture, water supply, fishing voyages, trading journeys, warfare, and astronomy,” all of which appear incorporate secular as well as religious types of activities.<sup>17</sup> Musicians, although artisans of a sort, were most often portrayed in fine attire, suggesting that they might also have been priests. Below this group were the warriors. Due to the Moche culture’s heavy emphasis on militaristic endeavors, this was a well-respected class.

As time wore on and militarism increased, the warriors became even more important to the Moche people.<sup>18</sup>

Below the warrior class were the commoners. This class consisted of several categories of people. There were farmers, fishermen, traders, and builders. As with most prosperous cultures, these people formed the backbone of society and made life possible. Their existence, like the existence of priests, royalty and warriors, has been recorded in Moche art. Within this class, however, there was one final group, the artisans. Due to the nature of their work, some artisans received higher social prestige than others. While some mass-produced pottery and textiles for everyday use, others worked exclusively on fine-ware for royal or ceremonial uses. In some ways, the artisans were the most essential class within the Moche culture.<sup>19</sup> Because the Moche had no written language, it is through the work of the artisans that we are able to interpret anything about their culture and actual beliefs.<sup>20</sup> It is the artisans who immortalized the image and dress of the people, the rituals they performed, the tools and instruments they used, the animals that surrounded them and the foods they ate. These craftsmen (and women) have given us images of their old, their sick and deformed, their gods, and even their sexual habits.

Metallurgy was a common practice in Peru before and during the Moche occupation along the northern coast; however, Benson claims that their metallurgy was the most advanced in Peru at that time.<sup>21</sup> The Moche used a wide variety of materials in their metallurgy work; their basic raw materials included gold, silver, and copper, and they often incorporated inlays of shell or stone.<sup>22</sup> Edward P. Lanning states that the metallurgy of the Moche was quite sophisticated indeed, using not only the basic raw materials mentioned above, but also including alloys of gold, silver and copper. For production they used the old methods of hammering, annealing, cutting, embossing, soldering, and repousse; yet they also introduced the new techniques of turquoise mosaic inlay, gilding, simple casting, and "lost wax" casting.<sup>23</sup> Although there are no known large stone sculptures associated with the Moche culture, archaeologists have found small, carved stones, as well as carved pieces of wood and gourds. Additionally, there is evidence to prove that the Moche were skilled in the ways of granulation - the process by

which one forms/ crystallizes a substance into grains or granules<sup>24</sup> — and fine braiding.<sup>25</sup>

The most distinctive trait of the Moche culture is their impressive pottery. As Elizabeth Benson noted, “The Moche surely told more about themselves on their ceramics than any other culture in the world, possibly excepting Maya and Greek civilizations.”<sup>26</sup> It is not only the stylistic diversity found in technological and functional methods of Moche pottery making, but also the individual images depicted on the pots themselves, that make it so unique. Their most common pots were the stirrup pots, a design introduced by the Chavin culture and later perfected by the Moche. These pots are mostly associated with Moche burials, but are found in other contexts as well.<sup>27</sup> The pots are believed, based on interpretations made from the artistic motifs found on them, to have served a sacred purpose.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the finest pottery vessels, both molded and painted forms, are found in the burials of the elite and in the Moche administrative and ceremonial centers.<sup>29</sup>

The most widely used method for describing Moche pottery is the one developed by Raphael Larco Hoyle. He divides the Moche period into five phases, based on stylistic changes in the ceramics. The Moche I forms (50-100AD<sup>30</sup>), are characterized by a compact vessel form possessing a short spout with a thickened lip. The Moche II forms (100-200 AD) have a longer spout and a thinner lip. In the Moche III forms (200-450 AD) the spout is slightly flared out. The Moche IV forms (450-550 AD) incorporate a long, straight spout. And finally, the Moche V forms (550-800 AD) are characterized by a stirrup handle with sides that curve inward, to the extent that they almost meet.

Although this is the most widely accepted and used method for defining the periods of Moche culture, there are those who disagree with its credibility. Garth Bawden claims that although the dates for these phases become more reliable after about 600AD, they are still insufficient for chronological purposes. He asserts that although careful attention is paid to differences *between* phases, not enough attention is given to differences *within* phases. Bawden finds a great amount of overlap within the styles, which contrasts with the clear divisions that

Hoyle's typology would seem to suggest. Also, within each phase there are geographical variations for which Hoyle does not account.<sup>31</sup> If, as previously stated, the Moche living in the north had different settlement patterns from those in the south, it seems likely that they might have different styles and methods of pottery production as well. However, for our purposes, the Hoyle method will suffice. Accordingly, therefore, the Moche culture was apparently developing slowly yet consistently during Hoyle's Moche I and II phases, reached its peak during the Moche III and IV phases, and then quickly declined during the Moche V phase.

Most Moche pots were globular, but there are examples of box-shaped ones as well. The majority of the pottery found seems to have been made in 2-piece molds; not surprisingly, archaeologists have even found some of these molds. Furthermore, the pottery was almost always painted. Sometimes the clay would be cut away to leave tracks that could be painted later, or in the reverse, the clay would be cut in order to leave a raised area of design that could then be painted.<sup>32</sup> The Moche generally painted with an "Indian red and a yellowish tint that looks like ivory on the finely cast pottery;"<sup>33</sup> thus it is classified as white-on-red, red-on-white, and sometimes red, white and black. Occasionally earth colors such as ochers, pinks and purples are found, but these are far less common. There are even more rare, unpainted Moche ceramics that are either entirely black or entirely white.

The painted images and the sculpted forms of their pottery reveal countless facets of their daily lives and beliefs. There are images of plants, people, animals, architecture, clothing, mythological creatures, mountains, sacrifice and ritual, tools, musical instruments, weapons and geometric designs.<sup>34</sup>

Animals are one of the most common themes and, as mentioned previously, they are sometimes realistic and at other times more anthropomorphic. Within this theme, sea animals are some of the more prominently depicted. This reflects the importance that the sea must have had in the daily lives of the Moche. Fish are typically depicted as giant monsters; hence, depictions of realistic looking fish are rare.<sup>35</sup> Based solely on these pottery portrayals, the Moche were familiar with at least thirty-five different species of birds, sixteen different

mammals, and sixteen types of fish.<sup>36</sup>

Mythology is also incorporated into this art form. There are scenes of sacrifices and religious ceremonies, scenes that appear to tell stories about the gods, or which depict events they probably believed had occurred in the past or would occur in the future. There are some high-relief stirrup-spout vessels that show people being thrown off mountains as a form of sacrifice. It is possible that these vessels may have been considered a link to their ancestors.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the Moche created images of themselves and their daily tasks and pleasures. As mentioned previously, there are images of people working — fishing, farming and building. There are images of fighting and war in addition to those of feasting and dancing. There are images of the instruments played at these and other occasions, as well as the types of people who played them. We know how they dressed because the clothing is so realistically painted on the people on the pottery. The Moche left nothing out.

During Moche IV we find a large abundance of portraits. These are very individualized and likely represent important figures, such as rulers and high priests. The “common official” portrait was a ceramic head, generally in the form of a stirrup-spout bottle.<sup>38</sup> Not only are there images of beautiful and powerful people, but there are images from the opposite end of the social spectrum as well — people suffering from severe deformities and diseases, blindness, venereal diseases, and even amputees. There are scenes and sculptures of medical examinations, surgeries, and childbirth. Furthermore, there are numerous ceramics expressing the daily activities of life often neglected in other cultures, most notably sexual relations. From these pottery vessels it is known that the Moche engaged in both heterosexual and homosexual fellatio, sodomy, and intercourse. There are even images of women engaged in varying levels of intimacy with skeletons (representing the dead), the meaning of which is still not fully understood.

### **Prominent Research in the Area**

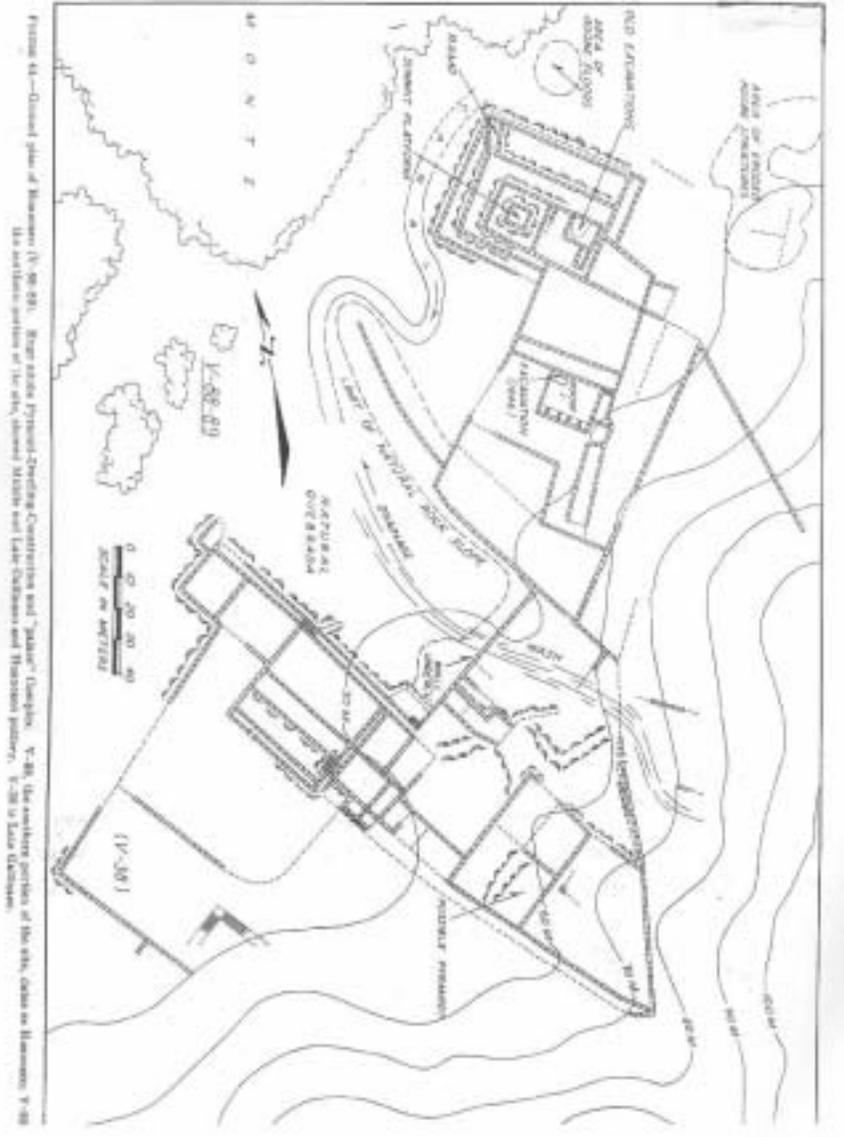
Although the Moche peoples were fairly widespread along the northern coast of Peru, the main focus of interest for this discussion is the Viru Valley. Few detailed archaeological studies have been con-

ducted in the Viru Valley. Most of the ones previously carried out have consisted primarily of surface collection of ceramics over relatively small areas.<sup>39</sup> While this has allowed some insight into the lives of these interesting people, this type of study has yet to lead to a very detailed interpretation of social development in this valley.

In 1946 Gordon Willey launched the Viru Valley Project. Today Willey is considered one of the leading archaeologists and theorists of New World prehistory. He is especially known for his studies regarding settlement patterns of native societies.<sup>40</sup> His South American expedition was a pilot project designed to systematically survey the entire Viru Valley. Willey and his associates were looking at the chronology and settlement patterns over the entire area, and it was the first time such an extensive project had been undertaken. Due to the nature of the project and the large area being covered, few actual excavations were conducted. Never the less, this approach of surveying an area prior to excavation has become something of a standard among archaeologists today.

Upon completion of this project, Willey and his team summarized their findings. They identified five major ceremonial/administrative sites: Huancaco, Gallinazo Group, Santa Clara, Castillo Tomaval and Sarraque. In addition they divided all the surveyed sites into four functional categories: living sites, community or ceremonial centers, fortified strongholds, and cemeteries. Of these, we are most interested in the community and ceremonial centers, which are subdivided into even more detailed classifications: community buildings, pyramid mounds, or pyramid-dwelling-construction complexes. The team was able to provide detailed descriptions of many sites (about 300) and stated their general conclusions concerning what happened in the Viru Valley during this period of Gallinazo/ Moche occupation. The most important of these, for our purposes, was his conclusion that Huancaco was a Moche site. Willey's Viru Valley survey has been the basis of scholarly discussions of the area ever since.<sup>41</sup>

Another important name to mention when discussing the Moche and the Viru Valley is Elizabeth P. Benson. Benson is a pre-Columbian specialist and one of the most well-respected names in the field today. Like many other Moche scholars, she has based her work



published numerous books on Andean and Mesoamerican topics. In addition to her scholarly accomplishments, she has held several prestigious teaching and directing positions at well-respected educational institutes.<sup>42</sup> During the 2001 field season, Elizabeth Benson visited the

site of Huancaco for several days. After numerous discussions with Bourget she became inclined to believe his claim that the inhabitants of Huancaco were not in fact Moche.

Steve Bourget is currently a professor of art history at the University of Texas at Austin and is also a prominent archaeologist. He is a Moche specialist and has been conducting archaeological excavations in the Viru Valley for several years. His introduction to excavations in the area began with postdoctoral work conducted at the Huaca de la Luna site. This work was done primarily in conjunction with Santiago Uceda who was directing the Peruvian project at the time. He continued extensive excavations at the Huaca de la Luna site, which quickly directed him to work at the adjoining Huaca del Sol site. These endeavors began in 1994 with Salinar and Chimu excavations on the flanks of the Cerro Blanco (the mountain at whose base the Huacas de la Luna and del Sol were built). His work at these sites continued until 1998 with excavations of a sacrificial site and a series of priestly burials. It was at this time that Bourget moved to his current location, the Huaca de Huancaco.

He has been working at the Huancaco site with a team of archaeologists over the past four years. The first year consisted primarily of mapping the site, but also included the discovery of an extensive metallurgical workshop. This workshop indicated that metallurgy was one of the main economic activities undertaken at the Huancaco site. The second and third years were spent conducting more extensive excavations, which helped the team to gain a better understanding of all the areas within the site. They were also able to make preliminary interpretations about the final days of the site's occupation by examining the erosion and destruction of several parts of the main building, largely due to the El Niño conditions occurring at that time. The fourth year focused more exclusively on the cultural identification of Huancaco and Bourget's belief that the site was most likely *not* Moche.<sup>43</sup>

### **Huancaco: The Current Data**

Huancaco was one of the many sites surveyed in Gordon Willey's Viru Valley Project, through which it came to be known as the Pyramid-Dwelling-Complex of V-88 and V-89. The Castillo de

Huancaco is located at the base of a mountain, in lower-Viru South. Willey and his team provided several dates for this site, the most general of which dates it to the Huancaco Period, an extension of the Mochica culture. Surface collections from V-89 dated it to the Middle/Late phases of the Gallinazo Period, whereas surface collections from the rooms of V-88 cover the entire spectrum of dates (Middle Gallinazo to Huancaco). According to Willey, “[Huancaco is the] largest, best preserved adobe ruin in the Valley.”<sup>44</sup> He believed that the construction for this structure was begun during the Late Gallinazo Period and then added onto during the Huancaco phase.

The actual construction of the building was not at all uniform. It is obvious that the builders were attempting to use the topography of the land to its fullest advantage. There are five terrace levels, the walls of which slope. All the large, freestanding walls taper toward the top. Mud mortar was used in conjunction with adobe bricks to build the walls, and Willey claimed that no rubble fill or stone foundations were used in its construction. There are exterior walls, probably built for defensive purposes, which run along either side of the building and are somewhat less well constructed than either the terraces or platform walls.<sup>45</sup>

This was all that was really known about the site until the commencement of Bourget’s most recent Huancaco Project. Bourget began this project, sponsored by grants from the Gatsby Foundation and the Sainsbury Research Unit, in 1998. The short-term goal of this project was to “study the nature and the evolution of [Huancaco] itself, the position of Huancaco as one of the principal ceremonial, habitational and administrative centers of the region during this period, and its relation with four other major sites in the Viru Valley.”<sup>46</sup> Some of the longer-term goals were to take a closer look at the history of the Early Intermediate Period in the Viru Valley, and to analyze the transition from Gallinazo to Moche.

I became involved with the Huancaco Project during its fourth year, the 2001 season (late May to early August). During this field season Bourget had two graduate students, Jean-Francois Millaire and Genvieve Dionne, working with him and conducting complementary research. Millaire had just completed his own doctoral research on

Moche burial patterns and was primarily there to prepare the ground for a project at a coeval site, Huaca Santa Clara. The excavation of which is intended to test the presence of the Moche culture in the Viru Valley. He also did some analysis of the llama burials in room A-20, but was essentially just a general assistant to Bourget. Dionne was there with the intent to study the botanical remains of the site. Her research will provide new data concerning daily life and the environment in which the Moche people lived. By studying the botanical remains, Dionne will be able to learn what plants were in the area and, of those, which ones were actually eaten. Of the ones eaten she will be able to tell how they were prepared and in what relative amounts, assisting in a general understanding of Moche daily life.

The group present during my participation consisted of undergraduate and graduate students, eight in all. We worked six days a week for one month. One of the six days each week was spent doing lab work, generally washing and labeling ceramics, sorting through soil samples, and cleaning llama bones; the other five days were spent on the excavation site. The fieldwork was designed so that we, as students of archaeology, could be exposed to all aspects of the job while still helping Bourget with the work that needed to be completed by the end of the season. We were, therefore, often moved to different areas around the site, each requiring a different focus or method of excavation. Upon our arrival, the first group had just begun uncovering several llama burials in V-89, room A-20. There were a total of 15 llama burials, and they were all done ritualistically. The llamas were found in similar positions and each ritual burial contained some sort of sacred ornament, such as a spondylos shell. In Bourget's opinion these llamas were probably sacrificed as part of a sanctification ceremony for the newest floor. (As mentioned previously, Huancaco is a site that was built in phases.)

V-89, room A-20 was also interesting because as the most recent floor was removed, a large winding ramp was uncovered. The archaeological team hoped that it might lead to a tomb, but alas it did not. Instead, it leads to what was probably the outside of the palace during an earlier phase of construction.

Another area in which we worked was V-88, room A-3. This

was a kitchen area and was, therefore, rather interesting for Dionne's work. We uncovered hearth areas and soon found more than just fish bones. There were human bones as well, including a fully intact human skeleton and several unarticulated ones. The strange thing about the intact skeleton, other than the fact that it was buried in the kitchen, was its positioning. The Moche typically buried their dead in the same extended position that we do today; however, this skeleton was curled into a fetal position with no grave goods, or even a real grave. To the best of my knowledge, neither Bourget nor any of his team members could deduce a logical explanation for this skeleton.

V-88, room A-10 was another area in which we spent a lot of time. It was one of the larger rooms, and appears to have been used primarily for storage. There were rows and rows of uniform, circular indentations where large storage vessels had been kept. The indentations were of several sizes, but were arranged in an orderly fashion. There were several smaller rooms and corridors connected to A-10 in which we also worked. These corridors and rooms revealed several layers of adobe and/or rubble fill. They also showed signs of collapse due to sinking of the rubble fill, as well as evidence of a fallen and burnt roof.

### **Is Huancaco a Moche Site?**

According to Steve Bourget, the Huancaco site is not Moche. If this is true, then what is it and upon what evidence is this interpretation based? In 1999 Bourget's team took three Carbon-14 dates: 1) from charcoal, 350-550 AD; 2) from a burned roof, 530-670 AD; and 3) from a preserved roof, 520-650 AD. Of the three samples the one from a section of the burned roof is perhaps the most relevant to human activity because as the inhabitants of Huancaco deserted the temple, various sections of it were burned. Although it is still not fully understood what drove them to do this, Bourget is confident in his deductions that the burning of various rooms was definitely one of the final activities to occur here. The resulting dates would imply that Huancaco is a Moche III/IV site; still Bourget has yet to find any ceramics that are contemporaneous with that time period's style. Instead he has found ceramics that could be classified as Moche I/II

forms, and he has also found forms that do not exist anywhere else in the Viru Valley (both domestic ceramics and fine ceramics from the temple itself).

Another distinctive feature of the Huancaco site is the architecture. While Bourget does agree with Willey that Huancaco was built in phases, his extensive excavations have led him to conclude that it was built in 2-3 phases over a 200-300 year period; Willey's preliminary survey had estimated that the temple was built in 6-7 phases over a 700-year period. At first glance Huancaco appears to be quite similar to the neighboring palaces of Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna; however, upon closer inspection there actually is quite a notable difference. The Moche were a people who liked to use ramps as their primary means of connecting nonlinear levels. Bawden observes that in northern Peru these ramps tended to be long and to zigzag across a temple, whereas in the south they were typically straight.<sup>47</sup> However, as one walks around the site of Huancaco, the large number of stairs, and the subsequent scarcity of ramps, quickly becomes evident. The ramps that are found in Huancaco are associated with the earlier (prior to Moche occupation) phases of construction.<sup>48</sup> The stairs are found throughout the structure, in both ceremonial areas and in the more domestic ones.

On the other hand, the method (rather than the *style* just discussed) of construction at Huancaco is similar to that found at other Moche sites. The people at Huancaco used adobe bricks as their primary building material. Adobes are molded clay bricks of a rectangular shape, sometimes cane-marked and sometimes smooth. According to Christopher Donnan, mold-made adobes were typical of the Santa Valley Moche. Those adobes, associated with Moche III, were typically long and wide as well as being thicker than the earlier adobes. During this phase both cane-marked and smooth adobes were common, but in Moche IV the cane-marked ones had almost entirely disappeared and the adobe bricks had become smaller.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the easiest way to actually discuss the site of Huancaco and its relation to the Moche is through detailed comparisons with other specific known Moche sites. The most obvious of these are Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna, but could also include the site of

El Brujo. El Brujo was a Moche political and ceremonial center located relatively near Huancaco in the Chicama River Valley (about 50km north of Trujillo, Peru). This site complex contained two primary pyramids: the Huaca Cao Viejo and the Huaca Cortada. Habitation areas surrounded these central pyramids. The findings excavated at the site of El Brujo are consistent with the expected norms for a Moche center such as this one was.<sup>50</sup> Huaca del Sol is the larger of the first two sites mentioned, measuring approximately 145 feet tall with a base platform of 75 by 450 feet. It has five stepped terraces that are accessible by a 290-foot ramp. It was built in phases out of adobe bricks, and was the royal and administrative center for the local area. Bawden describes it as “the single most prominent symbol of Moche power ever erected.”<sup>51</sup>

Huaca de la Luna, while still one of the largest man-made structures on the northern Peruvian coast, is slightly smaller. It is terraced against the mountain called Cerro Blanco and is believed to have been the living quarters for priests and their female attendants.<sup>52</sup> Both Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna, like Huancaco, contain numerous murals. These murals are composed of a total of only seven colors, whereas the murals uncovered in the Huaca de Huancaco boast ten distinct colors.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, several objects that are commonly found at Huaca de la Luna and similar sites such as El Brujo and Mocollope were not found at Huancaco at all. These missing objects include items such as figurines, musical instruments and spoons.<sup>54</sup> Other items, such as murals and pottery, found at Huancaco are of such a distinct nature and style that they cannot be considered to be part of the Moche tradition represented by other Moche sites in the region. For example, the edges of spout and bowl ceramics tend to have a straight-sided rim, whereas the Moche are known for their curved style. Also, some of the motifs discovered on the murals at Huancaco are quite unique. The Huancacans used spiral motifs, like the Moche, but differed by their utilization of images such as catfish and scenes containing human figures. Much of the pottery found at Huancaco has big, bright patterns of swirling red-and-white.<sup>55</sup> Bourget clarifies that the Moche, especially at Huaca de la Luna, used a subtly different color scheme — ochre-on-cream.<sup>56</sup> The

site also possesses numerous ceramic examples expressing a very distinct local tradition, such as highly polished blackware bottles with incised designs and vases that have been incised and painted with green, red, yellow and white paint.<sup>57</sup>

So how then can we explain this uniquely different site, one that was built in an area that is generally considered to have been so dominated by the Moche that it was deemed highly unlikely (if not impossible) for any other culture to have coexisted? It is not easy, and the issue has still not been satisfactorily resolved. To begin with, it is necessary to specify what exactly Huancaco was: its basic function. This will help to explain the type of people that were most likely living there and facilitate the discussion of who they were culturally. Bourget has defined Huancaco as a “palace with public rooms to the front dedicated to feasting activities such as a number of cooking areas in the lower part of the building, leading to a preparation area and, eventually, to a banquet hall some 35m long in the middle section.”<sup>58</sup> So far the Huancaco Project has uncovered fifty-eight rooms, connected by stairs and ramps. The palace includes private quarters as well as the public feasting/banquet halls. There are also several craft working areas and extensive metallurgical workshops.<sup>59</sup>

Donnan, however, continues to believe that the site of Huancaco is a Moche site. He claims that it could have been one aristocratic Moche family that preserved its own style of pottery making. The changes observed in style would not, therefore, represent a technological adjustment, or stylistic and artistic variation. Instead the changes were probably associated with shifts in political power.<sup>60</sup>

Bourget does not agree. He believes that it is entirely possible that the Huancaco were a separate people. It is obvious that they were incredibly skilled in the art of metallurgy, perhaps even more so than the famed Moche. Hence, they could have been rather beneficial to the economy of the region, and thus tolerated by the Moche. They were more valuable to the Moche as an independent group, with the technology they possessed, than as a conquered group with the Moche's same methods and levels of skill.<sup>61</sup> It has been suggested that perhaps the inhabitants of Huancaco were a group of immigrants, comparable to those known to have lived at Teotihuacan in Central Mexico.

Although Teotihuacan has many characteristics that are quite different from Huancaco, it does make for an interesting comparison when discussing the Moche culture. Teotihuacan was a thriving metropolis of the ancient world that dominated the Valley of Mexico for nearly a millennium. The city experienced its peak from about 100-600BC and was host to a population of 100,000 — 200,000 people. It spanned an area of approximately 13 square miles and was the religious center of Mesoamerica, possessing a planned design, drainage systems and over 200 structures. Like the Moche, the inhabitants of Teotihuacan worshipped the sun and moon and erected individual pyramids for each. Also, they were artistically inclined and had their houses painted with colors and murals. In addition to the large local population, there were whole neighborhoods of immigrants who brought artistic traditions with them, and practiced their individual crafts and styles at Teotihuacan.

These immigrants were people such as traveling artisans and traders who brought their own styles and traditions into the city with them and settled down, thus introducing new styles and methods. While this is always an option for the site of Huancaco, it is an unlikely reality. There is strong evidence of localized traditions and artifacts at Huancaco that are so unique to the area, yet uniform in production, that it is difficult to propose that resident foreigners would have created them. Furthermore, while the Moche culture as a whole is comparable to Teotihuacan, the site of Huancaco is not. There were not nearly as many inhabitants and the site itself is much smaller.

Bourget has another theory to support the hypothesis of a non-Moche people living contemporaneously with the Moche, who have many similar, yet many different, traditions. He claims that the presence of the Huancaco people during this time period could be explained if the “invasion” was less destructive than originally believed,<sup>62</sup> and thus the region was comprised of contemporary, yet still distinct cultures. Support for this idea lies in the theory of Cultural Identity. This theory states that groups living in close proximity to one another are likely to have similar practices and traditions. This may be due to a common ancestry and, therefore, common religious and/or social beliefs as well as styles of art and architecture. It may also be due to

regional proximity, which could produce similar subsistence patterns or architectural methods. Therefore, as may be the case at Huancaco, it becomes difficult to distinguish between/among the various groups.

As mentioned, the question, "Is the site of the Huaca de Huancaco Moche or a unique culture of its own?" currently remains unanswered. The only way we have of finding an answer is to keep exploring. Because the Moche domination of the Viru Valley remained undisputed for so long, it is going to take some time to disprove. Dr. Bourget's work during the past four years points toward an exciting yet puzzling possibility. Perhaps the Moche were not a "super culture" after all. Perhaps there were other cultures still living in the valley, unthreatened and unharmed by the militant Moche. And if Huancaco truly is a non-Moche site, perhaps there are others in the region as well. In the next few years, Bourget and his colleagues have plans for further excavations within the region at such sites as Santa Clara. They are hoping that these sites will support their current findings and ideas, thus overturning nearly sixty years of interpretations.

Personally, I find that while the arguments and evidence are still somewhat preliminary, they are also rather convincing. While the excavations at Huancaco have revealed a great number of artifacts, as well as artistic and structural styles that closely resemble those of the Moche culture, none seem to adhere very closely to the standard defining traits of the Moche. The individuals at Huancaco used similar methods of construction, similar methods and styles in ceramics, similar artistic designs, and possessed much of the same technologically advanced knowledge of metallurgy as the Moche; however, the amount of discrepancy between the two styles is enough to cause sufficient and well-supported doubt. The uniqueness of the Huancaco artifacts makes it hard to believe that it could be Moche.

The Moche people have been studied in detail based on the sites excavated so far, but there are many more unexcavated sites, so perhaps we do not truly understand these people at all. I believe that our understanding of these people and their neighbors is only beginning to materialize, and that there is still much work that can be done.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth P. Benson, *The Mochica: A Culture of Peru* (Praeger Press, 1972), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> This uniformity supports such conclusions because prior to the Moche invasion, there were several different groups of people, with their own style and cultures, in this region. The Moche essentially incorporated them all into one. See Edward P. Lanning, *Peru Before the Incas* (Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Garth Bawden, *The Moche* (Blackwell Press, 1996), p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> Bawden, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Lanning, *Peru Before the Incas*, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Bawden, *The Moche*, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth P. Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," in *The Spirit of Ancient Peru: Treasures from the Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Hoyle* (Thames and Hudson, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Victor W. Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru* (NY Graphic Society, 1964), p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> In later Moche times the "radiant god" appeared. This deity was associated with a raft and is believed to represent/reflect an increase in militaristic sentiment. See Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru*, p. 102

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth P. Benson, and Anita G. Cook (eds.), *Ritual Sacrifice in Ancient Peru* (University of Texas Press, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, pp 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>19</sup> Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru*, p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Larco has proposed, however, that they did indeed use hieroglyphics, but has yet to convince the general archaeological community. See Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru*, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 22.

- <sup>22</sup> Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," p. 42.
- <sup>23</sup> Lanning, *Peru Before the Incas*, p. 126.
- <sup>24</sup> Frederick C. Mish (ed.), *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, 1998), p. 532.
- <sup>25</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, pp. 108-109.
- <sup>26</sup> Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," p. 43.
- <sup>27</sup> Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru*, p. 76.
- <sup>28</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 124.
- <sup>29</sup> Bawden, *The Moche*, p. 97.
- <sup>30</sup> As with nearly all archaeological dates, the ones given here are approximations. There are countless scholars who would and could argue for both earlier and later periods, but these dates seem to be conservative and within about a 50-year range in any direction of most of the dates I found.
- <sup>31</sup> Bawden, *The Moche*, pp. 193-196.
- <sup>32</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 119.
- <sup>33</sup> Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru*, p. 76.
- <sup>34</sup> Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," pp. 94-168.
- <sup>35</sup> Benson, *The Mochica*, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> Lanning, *Peru Before the Incas*, p. 122.
- <sup>37</sup> Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," pp. 42-47.
- <sup>38</sup> Benson, "Moche Art: Myth, History, and Rite," p. 47.
- <sup>39</sup> Steve Bourget, Berkeley draft, 12-26-99.
- <sup>40</sup> <[www.anthromankato.msus.edu](http://www.anthromankato.msus.edu)>
- <sup>41</sup> Gordon Randolph Willey, *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953).
- <sup>42</sup> <[www.precolumbian.org](http://www.precolumbian.org)>
- <sup>43</sup> Personal e-mail received by the author from Steve Bourget, February 28, 2002.
- <sup>44</sup> Willey, *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru*, p. 205.
- <sup>45</sup> Willey, *Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru*, pp. 140, 178-181, 205-210.
- <sup>46</sup> Steve Bourget, *Santa Fe Paper*.
- <sup>47</sup> Bawden, *The Moche*, p. 136.
- <sup>48</sup> Bourget, informal lecture given in Trujillo, Peru, 07-21-01.
- <sup>49</sup> Christopher B. Donnan, *Moche Occupation of the Santa Valley, Peru*

(University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>50</sup> <moche.nau.edu>

<sup>51</sup> Bawden, *The Moche* (Blackwell Press, 1996), p.232.

<sup>52</sup> Von Hagen, *The Desert Kingdoms of Peru* (NY Graphic Society, 1964), p. 122.

<sup>53</sup> Bourget, informal lecture in Trujillo, Peru, 07-21-01.

<sup>54</sup> Steve Bourget, *Challenging the Moche Paradigm: Recent Archaeological Research at Huancaco, North Coast of Peru* (2002), p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Dan Vergano, "Dig Turns Up in Spades," *USA Today*, November 19, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Bourget, informal lecture in Trujillo, Peru, 07-21-01.

<sup>57</sup> Bourget, *Challenging the Moche Paradigm*, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Bourget, *Challenging the Moche Paradigm*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Vergano, "Dig Turns Up in Spades."

<sup>60</sup> Vergano, "Dig Turns Up in Spades."

<sup>61</sup> Bourget, informal lecture given in Trujillo, Peru, 07-21-01.

<sup>62</sup> If the Moche invasion truly was as hostile as scholars claim, then one would expect to find obvious signs of ruin and destruction at the site of Huancaco. Also, one would expect to see a rapid change in style and perhaps technique in ceramics, art, and architecture. Since neither seems to exist at Huancaco, it presents an alternative to the given model. (Bourget, informal lecture given in Trujillo, Peru, 07-21-01.)