A PICTURE’S WORTH:
INTERPRETING MOCHE CULTURE IN THE “WEAVING SCENE”

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The Moche, who occupied the North Coast of Peru from about AD 1 to 800, created a remarkable ceramic tradition manifested by examples in private collections, and museums throughout the world. Intricately painted slip, sculpted relief, and modeled decorations realistically depict flora, fauna, and human activity described as a “picture book of the culture” (Bennett 1963: 102). Lacking archaeological provenience, these artifacts cannot be scientifically assigned to a specific place and time: a problem that prevents the establishment of a direct link between these representations of the past and real locations. Despite this hardship, the subjects of Moche decorated ceramics can be “read” for their content, making them valuable sources of information.

My analysis of a well-known ceramic vessel from the British Museum (popularly referred to as the Weaving Scene) resulted in the following observations: 1) the discovery of an artistic convention for indicating elite status, 2) the identification of an elite group
of weaving instructors related to the *Mamakonas* of the Inca Empire, and 3) evidence for the concurrent use of several different ceramic vessel types.

Interpretation of Moche art is discussed in terms of an interdisciplinary approach. A combination of iconographic, archaeological, and ethnohistoric research used in my study was extremely helpful for understanding the past. My study concludes with a look to the future of Moche studies, suggesting that Moche art may act not as a “picture book,” but as a “map,” or a visual reminder of artistic elements that future investigations may one day allow us to understand.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO MOCHE CULTURE AND CERAMICS

The Moche, who occupied the North Coast of Peru from about AD 1-800, created a remarkable ceramic tradition with examples found in private collections and museums throughout the world. Intricately painted slip, sculpted relief and modeled decorations present realistic depictions of flora, fauna and human activity that have been described as a “picture book of the culture” (Bennett 1963: 102). Lacking archaeological provenience, these artifacts cannot be scientifically assigned to a specific place and time; a problem that prevents the establishment of a direct link between these representations of the past and real locations. Despite this difficulty, the subjects of Moche decorated ceramics can be analyzed for their content, making them valuable sources of information on this ancient group.

My analysis of Moche images results in the following observations: 1) the identification of an elite group of weaving instructors related to the Mamaconas of the Inca Empire, 2) the discovery of an artistic convention for indicating elite status, and 3) evidence for the concurrent use of several different ceramic vessel types.

These interpretations are the result of a detailed iconographic analysis of a well-known ceramic vessel from the British Museum. Popularly referred to as the “Weaving Scene” (Figure 1.1), this piece has been recognized for its unique depiction of artisans at work and provides a detailed picture of Classic Moche culture (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 126). Now considered a major art form, Moche ceramics depict naturalistic motifs comparable to those of Ancient Greece (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 13). Before
Moche decorated ceramics can be properly interpreted, an introduction to the Moche and their cultural influence on the North Coast is necessary.

**The Spread of Moche Ceramics in Peru**

The Moche cultural tradition, dating from about AD 1-800, is evident in large earthen structures, complex irrigational systems and seaworthy water craft that were used by the Moche to travel along the coast and the offshore islands. The distinctly Moche ceramic style extends from the Huarmay Valley in the south to the Piura Valley in the north (Figure 1.2). The extent of their influence on Peru’s cultural landscape can be traced through the presence of their ceramic vessels across the North Coast.

In the past, scholars believed that the Moche ceramic style was indicative of a centralized state based out of the Huacas del Moche near modern day Trujillo (Pillsbury 2001: 11). Nestled in the Moche Valley, the Huacas del Moche is dominated by two large earthen structures: the Huaca del Sol and the Huaca de la Luna. The Huaca del Sol, which may have been an administrative center, is 340 meters long, 160 meters wide, and over 40 meters tall and was likely constructed with over 100 million adobe bricks (Moseley 2001: 178-179). Since many of the bricks contained pressed designs that have been referred to as “maker’s marks,” and evidence exists for construction in segmentary phases, archaeologists believe that the Huaca del Sol is the product of organized, pooled labor, related to *mit’a* labor of the Inca Empire (Millaire 2002: 8; Moseley 2001: 179).

The Huaca de la Luna is a smaller structure and stands 25 meters tall, 95 meters long and 85 meters wide. This building is characterized by numerous polychrome murals and is believed to have been a religious center. Because of the immense size of these structures, the Huacas del Moche site is believed to have been the epicenter or “core area” of Moche culture (Bawden 1996: 17). Support for this claim comes from the fact that this valley
and the adjacent Chicama Valley to the north, most closely adhere to a five-phase sequence for Moche pottery proposed by Rafael Larco Hoyle (Millaire 2002: 3).

Rafael Larco Hoyle (1948), who was an hacienda owner and Moche enthusiast, created a chronology for dating Moche ceramics based on his archaeological excavations in the Chicama Valley. He proposed that a ceramic type, the stirrup spout vessel, could be organized into temporal phases according to differences in the height, width and construction of their upper spouts. Larco Hoyle’s five-phase chronology became the benchmark for Moche studies, and was quickly adopted by the archaeological community. This seriation was widely accepted, and its accuracy was confirmed by later excavations in the Moche Valley (Donnan and Mackey 1978).

The Moche and Chicama Valleys are separated from the Jequetepeque and the upper valleys by the Pampa de Paiján. This stretch of barren desert likely stood as a cultural barrier for the southern Moche, for many ceramic traditions identified in the “core area” and valleys to the south are, for the most part, not present north of the Pampa de Paiján (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 158). Although the Jequetepeque Valley was home to a number of important Moche centers at Pacatnamu, San José de Moro, and Dos Cabezas, their relation to the “core area” remains unclear.

Luis Jaime Castillo and Christopher Donnan (1994) note that although a few examples of Moche-style stirrup spout vessels are present in the archaeological record of the northern valleys, they frequently do not conform to Larco’s five-phase sequence. Deviation from southern ceramic traditions is also evident in the general absence of common Moche IV ceramic types, such as flaring bowls and dippers, as well as the exclusively northern development of Moche V ceramics. These observations led Castillo
and Donnan (1994: 159) to conclude that the Moche to the south were organized in a wholly different manner than those of the northern valleys. Whereas the people of lower valleys of the North Coast were likely loyal to a Moche state based in the Moche Valley, those of the upper valleys were free from centralized rule (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 161). Although there is unmistakable Moche influence in the north, the argument for a centralized Moche state has become a topic of debate.

**Moche Decorated Ceramics**

Moche-style ceramics are easily recognized as they tend to conform to a standard repertoire of forms and decorations. Although variations exist among individual vessels, Moche ceramics are decorated by one of only a few techniques. These include fineline painting, bas-relief sculpture, modeling or any combination of the three. Fineline painted decorations were created by applying a red slip to a cream base on what would otherwise be a red clay vessel. In the early stages of Moche culture, the fineline decorations were thick and blocky, but in time Moche artists perfected their craft, and were able to create thinner brushstrokes that allowed for greater levels of detail. The fineline technique was most frequently applied to stirrup spout bottles, although it also adorned the other Moche decorated ceramic types: spout and handle bottles, flaring bowls, dippers, and jars (Figure 1.3).

Stirrup spout bottles consist of four major parts; the base, chamber, arch and upper spout (Figure 1.4). The chambers of stirrup spout bottles can take one of many forms. They can either be globular, or modeled. Modeled vessels take the shape of their subject,

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1 One form of decorated ceramic not described here is the double-spout and bridge bottle. These curious vessels appear only in the upper valleys of the North Coast and are likely examples of influence from Huari culture (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 150). Due their general aberration from the standardized, bichrome style present in the other vessel types discussed in this study, and their absence in the Weaving Scene, double-spout and bridge bottles have been omitted from this investigation.
with examples ranging from realistic portrait heads to effigies of anthropomorphized figures and natural depictions of many species of flora and fauna native to the North Coast as well as neighboring ecological zones. The chambers of stirrup spout vessels in the later phases of Moche culture were produced in molds; a clear sign of the importance of standardization of vessel forms (Donnan and McClelland 1999).

Spout and handle bottles appear to be closely related to stirrup spout bottles. The chambers of these vessels take the same shape of globular stirrup spout bottles, and in some cases the two ceramic were found to have been produced in similar molds (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 82). The distinguishing feature of the spout and handle bottle is its cylindrical shaft, which generally provides a larger opening than the upper spouts of a stirrup spouted vessel. Although, they are found to be similar to stirrup spout vessels, the spout and handle bottle came late on the Moche scene and was not introduced until the Classic period, known as Phase IV in the Larco sequence (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 80).

Flaring bowls, or floreros, constitute another popular form of Moche decorated ceramic. These vessels have narrow bases with walls that flare out concavely and appear to have been introduced during Phase III (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 42). They are most commonly decorated with fineline paintings on either their inner rim or around the outer circumference midway between the base and the flaring wall. Flaring bowls can be viewed as prestigious goods since their presence has been identified as a marker for elite areas, while the absence of this and other decorated ceramics has been used to recognize locations associated with low-status individuals and activities (Shimada 1994: 96, 171).
Dippers are another class of Moche decorated ceramic. Referred to in the past as “corn poppers,” this appears to be a misnomer as they were not constructed to be used as a cooking implement (Donnan 1976:44). Dippers consist of a central bowl-like portion connect to a hollow neck. Fineline decorations can adorn either face of the dipper, while its neck usually ends in a modeled human or animal face. Although dippers were introduced in the earliest phases of Moche ceramics, and were popular during Classical times, they are absent in the Terminal, Moche V ceramic phase of production (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 150).

Jars are the most broadly defined type of Moche decorated ceramic. Jars can take one of any number of forms with their most diagnostic trait being an open container. Jars can be decorated with fineline painting; added modeled elements that can take the form of limbs, or can even have portrait heads depicted on their necks.

It is noteworthy that despite the range of decorative forms and ceramic vessel types, Moche ceramic art appears to belong to the same stylistic cannon. That is to say, recognized characters and repeated images can appear just as frequently in fineline paintings on a flaring bowl or spout and handle bottle as they would on a modeled stirrup spout vessel.

**Dating Moche Ceramics**

**The Larco Chronology**

The chronology of Moche ceramics serves as a baseline for all discussion of changes in Moche art and culture. As noted above, Larco Hoyle (1948) determined that Moche vessels represented five temporal phases designated I-V (Figure 1.5). He developed a method of analysis for assigning each vessel to a specific phase according to the characteristics of the shape of the upper spout. Half a century later, Christopher
Donnan and Donna McClelland (1999) of the University of California, Los Angeles, investigated the evolution of fineline decorations and added several more diagnostic traits to aid chronological identification of Moche ceramics.

**Phase I-II**

Moche Phase I vessels are characterized by a short, thick spout with thick lips at the rims. Larco (1948: 29) suggested that these differed from Phase II vessels due to less pronounced lips in the latter period and the fact that, unlike examples from Phase I, those of Phase II do not have spherical chambers. In their study of Moche fineline decorations, Donnan and McClelland (1999) found no compelling evidence to substantiate a division between Phase I and II. Instead, they combined these phases into one they termed Moche I-II. The ceramics from this period were characterized by fineline decorations that generally either contain geometric designs or rudimentary depictions of animals and supernaturals (although one vessel is noted for depicting human subjects; Donnan and McClelland 1999: 33).

**Phase III**

Larco (1948: 31) proposed that the upper spouts of Phase III stirrup spout vessels were taller, thinner and took on a concave hourglass-like contour. Donnan and McClelland (1999: 68-69) observed that fineline decorations from this phase demonstrated an increase in human subjects, with warfare motifs being the most frequently depicted activities. The figures themselves are painted in silhouette, and new techniques were created to show depth by means of overlaying one subject over another (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 56).
Phase IV

By Larco’s Phase IV, the upper spouts had reached their maximum height. These spouts had parallel sides (with little or no curvature), no distinguishable lips, and the interior of the rims flared out. Phase IV marks the florescence of Moche ceramics. Artists began work in thinner lines, which in turn allowed them to fit more decorations on the vessels’ chambers. Phase IV fineline decorations exhibit a shift from figures depicted in silhouette to those in outline (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 82). Artists were able to create depictions of animals and humans in a much more realistic form than earlier phases. In addition, new techniques introduced during this period include the use of a third, light orange pigment, and the contrasting of larger and smaller figures to indicate depth. Depictions of human activities reach their apogee in Phase IV, ranging from musical processions to deer hunting scenes. Phase IV also marks the appearance of females and erotic scenes in Moche fineline decorations (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 124). Finally, complex scenes depicting various related actions first became common in this period. Later, we will see that these scenes can be organized into themes, a method that has proved useful for interpreting Moche artistic decorations.

Phase V

The spouts of Phase V are similar to those of IV in that their interior rims were beveled, but are shorter and had their sides tapered towards the rim (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 20-21). The fineline of Phase V is characterized by even thinner lines and more complex compositions than those of the past. Another diagnostic feature of Phase V ceramics is the decoration of upper spouts. While in the previous phases the upper spouts had been painted with either red or white designs, those of Phase V are always decorated with a red slip on a white background (Donnan and McClelland 1999:
168). The realism seen in Phase IV seems to have declined in Phase V as there is a
greater focus on supernatural subjects and natural subjects in abstract forms (Donnan and
McClelland 1999: 171).

**Problems in the Larco Chronology**

Problems in the Larco chronology have come on two fronts. As noted above,
Donnan and McClelland (1999: 21) found that the defining stylistic elements and subject
matter, of Phase I and II vessels tend to overlap which is why they combined the two as
Phase I-II.

In addition, the Larco sequence has not proved useful in the in the upper valleys of
the North Coast. Also noted above, the valleys north of the Pampa de Paiján have failed
to produce ceramics consistent with the five phases proposed by Larco. This led Luis
Jaime Castillo and Christopher Donnan (1994) to propose a new serriation that could also
incorporate aberrant ceramics from the northern valleys. The new chronology is
organized into Early, Middle and Late periods (Figure 1.6).

**The Northern Chronology**

**Early Moche**

Ceramics from the Early phase generally conform to Larco Phase I and II-shaped
upper spouts, although these vessels also demonstrate certain distinctive characteristics.
Excavations from Dos Cabezas and La Mina provide evidence for this phase, which is
characterized by high quality modeled stirrup spout vessels fired with reduced levels of
oxygen to create a red hue. They are often decorated with red and white slip in addition to
shell and precious stone inlay (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 162-164).
Middle Moche

Ceramics of the Middle Moche period have been seriated based on burials from Pacatnamu and San Jose de Moro. Castillo and Donnan (1994: 169) divided the ceramics from this phase into three sub-categories: high quality vessels, medium quality vessels and domestic ware. The high quality vessels are characterized by spouts that correspond to Larco Phases III and IV. In general, examples from the Northern regions can be distinguished from their southern counterparts by their distinctive purple slip, and a pronounced lenticular shape. Middle Moche vessels of medium quality tend to be simple and modeled jars. They have globular or oval shaped bodies and can depict animals or humans in profile, an artistic convention that is not present in southern fineline tradition (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 170). The domestic ware category is comprised of pots with short pronounced necks and crucibles that tend to be found archaeologically in pairs of three.

Late Moche

In the Northern valleys, the Late Phase marked the fluorescence of ceramic arts. It generally corresponds to Moche V in the Larco sequence. A great number of technological and artistic advances are visible in the vessels from this period. Of note is the introduction of polychrome painted decorations and the appearances of double-spout and bridge vessels. The iconographic content of this period ranges from depictions of animals, humans and supernaturals. The stirrup spout vessels of Late Moche tend to conform to standardized shapes and decoration consistently have conical upper spouts (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 171-176).
Studies in Moche Iconography

Although Moche art has been a topic of academic inquiry for over a century, it was not until the 1970s that a consistent methodology for iconographic analysis was adopted. This came with the introduction of a thematic approach to interpreting Moche iconography.

The thematic approach.

In the early 1970s Donnan created a photographic archive of Moche artifacts from museums and private collections throughout the world. His analysis of thousands of decorative motifs revealed that a large number of images were repeated. Donnan also observed that the same meaning appeared to be conveyed in a variety of ways, which led to the suggestion that Moche art depicts only a limited number of different subjects (Donnan 1977: 407). He proposed that the recurring images belonged to larger themes, and noted that in some cases Moche artists were able to convey the message using only a few of its essential elements. This was compared to a convention common to in Christian art where the sanctity of the Nativity Scene can be invoked with an image of the Christ child (Donnan 1977: 407-408).

The first recognized and most frequently published theme in Moche art is the Presentation Theme, which was later renamed the Sacrifice Ceremony (Alva and Donnan 1993; Donnan 1976, 1977, 1978; Donnan and McClelland 1999). This scene in its complete form (Figure 1.7) shows a congregation of figures surrounding a central character, Figure “A,” who receives a goblet from another, Figure “B.” Figure A, dubbed the Warrior Priest, consistently wears a warrior’s backflap, a conical headdress decorated with a crescent-shaped ornament, and a similarly shaped nose ornament (Alva and Donnan 1993: 132). Figure B, the Bird Priest, is always depicted with both bird and
human attributes. He normally wears either a conical headdress similar to that of the Warrior Priest or one decorated with an owl motif. A number of other characters, Figures “S,” “D,” “U,” and “C,” flank the central pair in this example. Beneath a double-headed feline, attendants collect the blood of bound captives. Due to the presence these bleeding captives, it has been suggested that the goblet presented to the Warrior Priest contained human blood (Donnan 1976: 117). Donnan noted several examples in which the Sacrifice Ceremony was depicted by only a few of the main elements. One such example decorates a ceramic dipper (Figure 1.8). Since the artist had a limited amount of space to work with, he restricted this rendering of the Ceremony to Figures “A,” “B,” and a bound prisoner being drawn for his blood. Here we find that the meaning of the Sacrifice Ceremony was effectively conveyed using only its most diagnostic elements.

Following the 1975 study by Donnan (repeated in 1977), several other studies of Moche themes have been published. These include descriptions of the Burial Theme (Donnan and McClelland 1979), the Boat Theme (Cordy-Collins 1977, McClelland 1990), and one called the Revolt of the Objects in which roles are reversed and inanimate objects spring to life and attack their owners (Quilter 1990).

**Parallels in Moche Art and Archaeology**

In 1987, the study of Moche iconography changed dramatically when looters revealed the existence of an elite tomb in a platform next to the Huaca Rajada at Sipan in the Lambayeque Valley. On February 16, looters unearthed a mass of gold, silver, copper and other valuable items from the ancient platform. Based on an informant’s tip, the Sipan police captured the perpetrators but were only able to recover a small number of the stolen artifacts. Walter Alva (Alva and Donnan 1993: 30) immediately initiated rescue excavations in order to preserve any remaining data available from the looted
tomb. Although Alva was able to archaeologically excavate a few artifacts that were overlooked by the looters, it was the discovery of adjacent tombs containing individuals associated with the Sacrifice Ceremony that forever changed the study of Moche art and culture.

Tomb 1 at Sipan proved to be the richest tomb ever excavated in the New World (Alva and Donnan 1993: 57). This burial produced Moche masterpieces in gold, silver and shell on a level that was only matched by those of the looted tomb of the same site. Analysis of the artifacts led Alva and Donnan (1993: 141) to suggest that this burial belonged to an individual who played the role of the Warrior Priest in the Sacrifice Ceremony. This interpretation was made possible by the presence of a number of accoutrements directly associated with iconographic depictions of this figure, such as a crescent-shaped headdress ornament and warrior backflaps. Also, the Warrior Priest’s characteristic nose ornament was recovered from Tomb 1. The immense wealth demonstrated by the abundance of gold artifacts also helped the researchers recognize that this man was a person of high status.

In addition to the identification of the Warrior Priest, Alva’s excavations of Tomb 2 at the same site produced evidence that the Bird Priest from the Sacrifice Ceremony was not merely a mythological figure. This burial, which supplied objects of similar quality but on a lesser scale than Tomb 1, contained artifacts linked it directly to the Sacrifice Ceremony. These included a warrior backflap and an owl headdress that are commonly associated with fineline portrayals of the Owl Priest. Furthermore, a copper cup shaped like those in iconographic depictions of the Sacrifice Ceremony was found resting near the right hand of the buried individual (Alva and Donnan 1993: 163).
While excavations at Sipan provided evidence of Figures “A” and “B,” a third figure in the Sacrifice Ceremony was found at San Jose de Moro in the Jequetepeque Valley. This tomb produced evidence of Figure “C,” also referred to as the Priestess. Most depictions of the Sacrifice Ceremony show a female figure wearing a tasseled headdress standing next to the Bird Priest. Donnan and Castillo (1994) discovered a female buried with a headdress remarkably similar to those of the artistic depictions. Further evidence for her identification came in a set of ceramic vessels deposited in her tomb. These ceramics, which included a large dish and a smaller goblet decorated with a fineline depiction of animated warrior bundles, were found to be nearly identical to those painted on a polychrome mural of the Sacrifice Ceremony at the site of Pañamarca in the Nepeña Valley (Donnan and Castillo 1994: 42).

Another example of real artifacts that are similar to images from Moche art comes from the excavations of a mass sacrifice at the Huacas de Moche site. Steven Bourget (2001) discovered the remains of over seventy disarticulated bodies in Platform II and Plaza 3A of the Huaca de la Luna. Analyses of the bones revealed that the bodies belonged to males of particularly good health between the ages of fifteen and thirty-nine (Bourget 2001: 92). Scattered among the bones were fragments of unfired clay effigies of bound, seated captives, most probably representing the men just prior to sacrifice. Stones found strewn throughout the bones and broken vessels provide evidence of how the vessels were destroyed. Bourget observes that several examples from Moche fineline decorations depict stoning as a form of ritual killing. This led him to conclude that the massacre at the Huaca de la Luna was related to sacrifices represented in Moche art (Bourget 2001: 99).
Figure 1.1 Reconstruction of the “Weaving Scene.” (Shimada 1994: 210, 2001: 178)
Figure 1.2 Map of Moche influence on Peru’s North Coast. (Castillo and Donnan 1994: 156)
Figure 1.3. From Left to Right: Spout and Handle Bottle, Flaring Bowl, Dipper, and a Jar. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 80, 77, 79)

Figure 1.4 Diagram of a Stirrup Spout Vessel. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 20)
Figure 1.5 Larco’s Sequence for Moche Ceramics. (Millaire 2002: 5)

Figure 1.6 Chronology of Northern Peru (Millaire 2002: 6)
Figure 1.7 Complete Depiction of the Sacrifice Ceremony. (Donnan 1977: 409)

Figure 1.8 Abbreviated Version of the Sacrifice Ceremony. (Alva and Donnan 1993: 134)
CHAPTER 2
INTERPRETING MOCHE CERAMIC DECORATIONS

The preceding chapter provides an overview of Moche ceramics and their distribution in time and space. This introduction also provides examples of published analyses of the representational images and identifies several instances in which Moche art is found to have real life correlates. The remainder of this study will be devoted to the analysis and interpretation of a specific artifact that seems to reveal key information about Moche art and society.

The Weaving Scene

Following the tenets of Donnan’s thematic approach, my study deconstructs the Weaving Scene (Figure 2.1) to establish relevant patterns. Repeating images are compared and contrasted to identify trends. These trends are then tested against other examples of Moche iconography in an attempt to provide a greater understanding behind the similarities and differences between the two.

The Weaving scene appears to have two different types of repeating scenes: individual weavers at work, and non-weavers interacting with each other. Figure 2.2 shows a rollout drawing of the scene created by Donna McClelland with added labels to help identify the characters. Although the original vessel is damaged and is difficult to read, McClelland’s reconstruction is the most clear and varies only slightly from other published versions.

Due to the poor preservation of the Weaving Scene, a number of different artistic reconstructions have been published (Figure 2.3 Campana 1983; Figure 2.4...
Hocquenghem 1987; Figure 1.1 Shimada 1994, 2001). This vessel, which belongs to the British Museum, has four areas of significant damage. These include the area between Figure J6 and stirrup spout vessel J4, the roof in sub-scenes H and I, the area between Figure F1 and F2, and a significant portion of sub-scenes C and D. Despite missing the fineline decoration from these areas, the artistic reconstructions of this scene are remarkably similar. With the exception of sub-scenes C and D, the main elements of these versions are generally in agreement and the overall nature of the scene can be identified.

A problem is faced when the individual elements are analyzed. For instance, Izumi Shimada’s (Figure 1.1) version shows more confusion in the textile designs than McClelland’s (Figure 2.2). In the case of textile swatch E3, Shimada’s version barely presents a distinguishable pattern, whereas that of McClelland closely resembles the one published by Hocquenghem. Furthermore the individual in sub-scene E (E4) is noticeably different in this rendering because her hair is less messy and her face shows fewer signs of advanced age.

Since McClelland’s version presents the Weaving Scene with the most clarity and it generally correlates to the other artistic reconstructions, this version serves as the primary source of analysis in this investigation. To aid iconographic analysis, I assigned a letter for each sub-scene and numbered each of its individual elements. For the sake of objectivity, the element in the highest position of each scene (closest to the vessels edge) was designated “1,” with each element below assigned a subsequent number. As will be noted, the photo shows that sub-scenes C and D are largely reconstructed in McClelland’s drawing; caution must be used in interpreting these scenes.
Weavers at work.

The Weaving Scene is composed of what appear to be ten sub-scenes. Those designated in sequence A, B, C, D, E, G, H, and I, depict figures weaving. F, and J, portray a different activity taking place and seem to be key scenes because they occupy more space than the weaving scenes. In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of the weavers, each scene will be described individually before comparisons are made.

Sub-scene A. A seated weaver, facing right or clockwise, working on a backstrap loom, linked with sub-scene B by a straw roof and a shared support post to which their looms are attached.

1. A spout and handle bottle with the top half of the chamber painted and a single line below creating a stripe around the center.

2. A swatch from the textile being created on the backstrap loom. The swatch is decorated with what appears to be a bird above a stepped design rendered in a dark pattern. This textile also has the outline of another stepped design with a pair of dots both above and below. The loom fabric shows only the stepped design of a dark pattern.

3. A backstrap loom. One end is tied to a support post of the structure.

4. Six spindles, possibly of different colors.

5. A seated figure at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in the right hand, and the textile in the left. This figure (and the other weavers) can be identified as female due to her haircut that is similar to those of clear depictions of females found in Moche erotic art (Hocquenghem and Lyon 1980: 27). Two short lines below her eye likely represent wrinkles indicative of advanced age.

6. A flaring bowl vessel with the exterior decorated with cross-hash mark below the flaring lip and base. A narrow line above the cross-hatched motif creates a stripe.

Sub-scene B. A seated weaver, facing left or counterclockwise, working on a backstrap loom linked to sub-scene A by a straw roof overhead and a shared support post to which their looms are attached.
1. A backstrap loom. One end is tied to a support post of the structure.

2. A flaring bowl vessel similar to A6 with the exterior decorated with cross-hatch marks below the flaring lip and base. A narrow line above the cross-hatched motif creates a stripe.

3. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her left hand, and the textile in the right. She wears a striped mantle on her back. Two curved lines below her eye represent wrinkles indicative of advanced age.

4. A swatch from the textile identical to the one being woven on the backstrap loom. The design of the textiles is composed of a geometric S-curve and triangle fringes on one end. This design appears similar to those found on headdresses in other examples of Moche art, especially those on portrait head vessels, and will be discussed below in greater detail.

5. Eight spindles, possibly of different colors.

Sub-scene C. A seated weaver, facing left or counterclockwise, working on a backstrap loom linked to sub-scene B by a support post and to sub-scenes D and E by a straw roof overhead. She appears to be seated between two structures, with her loom tied to one, and her body sheltered by another.

1. A backstrap loom tied to the post of the preceding structure. No swatch is present in this scene but the design of the woven textile is visible. The decoration of the textile has two dots below a diagonal connected triangle motif. Two more dots are located in between the sides of the adjacent triangles.

2. A spout and handle vessel. This vessel is decorated with dots that appear to span the circumference of the upper chamber, though only one half is visible. A band is formed by two narrow lines that decorate the equator of the chamber.

3. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. Her hair appears longer than the weavers A5 and B3. Two curved lines below her eye likely represent wrinkles indicative of advanced age.

4. Seven spindles, possibly of different colors.
Sub-scene D. A seated weaver, facing right or clockwise, working on a backstrap loom linked to sub-scene C by a straw roof and sub-scene E by a straw roof and a shared Y-shaped support post to which their looms are attached.

1. A flaring bowl vessel with the exterior decorated with cross-hatch marks below the flaring lip and base. A narrow line above the cross-hatched motif creates a decorative stripe.

2. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. Two curved lines below her eye likely represent wrinkles indicative of advanced age.

3. A backstrap loom tied to a Y-shaped support post shared with sub-scene E. No swatch is present in this scene but the design of the forming textile is visible. The decoration of the textile has an inverted diagonal connected-triangle motif. Above this element are three small isolated triangles. The edge of the textile is decorated with triangle fringes.

4. Four spindles, possibly of different colors.

Sub-scene E. A seated weaver, facing left or counterclockwise, working on a backstrap loom, linked to sub-scene D by a straw roof and a shared Y-shaped support post to which their looms are attached.

1. A spout and handle bottle decorated with an outlined stripe around the circumference of the upper chamber. Outlined isosceles triangles protrude from this stripe.

2. A backstrap loom. One end is tied to a Y-shaped support post of the structure which she shares with the figure in sub-scene D.

3. A swatch of the textile produced on the loom. The design is not entirely clear, but from the work in progress on the loom it is possible to suggest that this design is composed of an indiscernible shape below a diagonal connected-triangle motif. Above the triangles are two outlined dots. A vertical line of connected-triangles acts as a border.

4. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. Unlike the other weavers of this scene this woman’s hair is disheveled. She has wrinkles below her eyes, on her chin and on her upper lip indicating extreme old age.

5. Five spindles, possibly of different colors.
Sub-scene G. A seated weaver, facing right or clockwise, working on a backstrap loom, linked to sub-scene H by a straw roof and a shared Y-shaped support post to which their looms are attached.

1. A spout and handle bottle. An outlined stripe decorates the upper chamber. Below, outlined dots appear to surround the circumference of the chamber.

2. A backstrap loom. One end is tied to a support post of the structure. Here, the post has a Y-shape like the posts in sub-scenes C, D and E.

3. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. This woman has wrinkles below her eye and on her upper and lower lips. Like Figure E4 she is of an extremely old age.

4. A swatch from the textile produced on the loom. The design, though particularly difficult to interpret, appears to be composed of a pair of dots above an inverted diagonal connected-triangle design. A vertical connected-triangle column acts as a border. An outlined triangle protruding from the column points towards the diagonal connected-triangle design.

5. Five spindles, possibly of different colors.

Sub-scene H. A seated weaver, facing left or counterclockwise, working on a backstrap loom, linked to sub-scene G by a straw roof and a shared Y-shaped support post.

1. A backstrap loom. One end appears to be tied to the rafters of the structure, in contrast to the supporting posts in all other sub-scenes on this bowl. No swatch is present in this scene but the design of the forming textile is discernable. The decoration of the textile contains a pair of outlined dots below a diagonal connected-triangle motif. A colored triangle floats above the diagonal connected-triangles.

2. A stirrup spout bottle modeled in the shape of a feline head.

3. A flaring bowl. This vessel may be decorated differently from the others in the Weaving Scene. It has a colored base, with an indiscernible design on the center and an outlined stripe just above it.

4. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. Two curved lines below her eye likely represent wrinkles indicative of advanced age.

5. Six spindles, possibly of different colors.
**Sub-scene I.** A seated weaver, facing left or counterclockwise, working on a backstrap loom and has no links to the other weavers.

1. A stirrup spout bottle decorated with an outlined stripe around the circumference of the upper chamber. Outlined isosceles triangles protrude from the stripe.

2. A swatch from the textile created on the loom. The design of which is composed of a small outlined rectangle protruding from the corner of the swatch, emanating towards a pair of outlined dots. These elements are above an inverted diagonal connected-triangle design. Below the triangles are a dot paired with an indiscernible element. An extension to the swatch block contains inverted opposing stepped design, of which the upper example is outlined and the bottom is colored.

3. A backstrap loom. One end is tied to a Y-shaped supporting post of the structure.

4. A seated woman at a backstrap loom, holding a spindle in her right hand, and the textile in the left. Unlike the other weavers in this fineline decoration, the woman has no signs of advanced age. She has no wrinkles on her face and has a well-kept hairdo.

5. Six spindles, possibly of different colors.

**Analyzing the Weaving Scene**

These eight sub-scenes appear to portray activities surrounding Moche textile production. A detailed analysis may help better understand the role of weavers, weaving activities and the techniques Moche artists used to convey information about these subjects.

**Textile Designs**

It is noteworthy that the artist of this fineline decoration took pains to provide an example of the textile designs produced by each of the weavers. In most cases, the weaver’s work on the loom is visible, but when the artist could not provide an accurate representation within the limited space, they provided a detailed example in the form of a swatch that floats either above or below the loom. The fact that the artist made an effort
to allow viewers to see the designs indicates the patterns of the textiles had great significance. Since each of the designs is different, it becomes possible to conjecture the significance behind them.

In Inca times, one’s dress was used as an indication of identity. Fray Bernabe Cobo (2005 [1653]: 196) observed that each member of the Inca Empire was forced to wear the insignia of his or her community on their person. The insignias, which could not be traded or worn by members of another group, consisted of a specific geometric design that decorated their clothes. Cobo notes that men wore their most distinguishing insignia on their headdress and that ethnicities could be identified based on headdress designs. In addition to ethnicity, Inca textiles indicated status as certain geometric designs, known as tocapus, were restricted to the elites (Stone-Miller 2002: 212). Garth Bawden (1996: 95) suggests that the same was true for the Moche. He believes that one’s clothing was a marker of Moche social status. This is supported by further analysis of the textiles being produced in the weaving scene.

The designs created by the weavers appear similar to several examples on warrior regalia in various fineline decorations. Figure 2.5 shows two examples in which a warrior’s tunic and headdress resemble the textiles prepared in the Weaving Scene. In another example, a shield that is also found to have a stepped design like those produced on the weavers’ backstrap looms.

Further correlations between the textiles created on the weavers’ looms and those worn by figures in Moche art come from evidence of similar designs found on portrait head vessels (Figure 2.6). These true to life depictions of Moche leaders often wear headdresses decorated with fineline geometric shapes that probably represent cloth
headbands. Several of these designs closely match those produced in the Weaving Scene. Figure 2.6 provides an array of portrait heads and designs from the Weaving Scene. Here, we find that the design represented in the B4 swatch is identical to the headdress of one of the portrait vessels.

It is of interest that correlations for patterns on the Weaving Scene come from warrior regalia and portrait head vessels, both representations are believed to belong to the Moche elite. The notion that warriors were elites is supported by evidence from sacrificial victims at Plaza 3A from the Huaca de la Luna in which the victims, presumably captured warriors, were of noticeably good health (Bourget 2001: 94). In fact, Donnan (2004: 113) suggests that individuals depicted in portrait head vessels were both members of the elite and warriors themselves. He identifies several vessels that appear to depict the same individual at different ages. Since the individual is traced from childhood through middle age, Donnan (2004: 156) proposes he belonged to a hereditary elite group. Portraits of another individual clearly depict him first as a dignitary, but later as a bound nude captive. Donnan (2004: 120) believes the latter indicates that this individual participated in ritual warfare, but met his death as a victim of the Sacrifice Ceremony after a defeat on the battlefield. Thus, the textiles produced in the Weaving Scene not only had correlates in Moche art, but were probably prestigious goods created for the Moche elite.

**Decorated Vessels**

Another common element in the eight weaving sub-scenes is the presence of one or more decorated ceramic vessels. These vessels are found floating either directly above the head of the weaver or to her side. Since they are always depicted within the confines of the individual’s workspace, they appear to be associated with the weaver represented
below. Little is known of the function and significance of decorated vessels in the lives of
the Moche, but the Weaving Scene may help to decode their role.

**Decorated Ceramics in Moche Archaeology**

Archaeological contexts of Moche decorated ceramics provide important clues into
the role of ceramics in Moche culture. Although high quality ceramics are best known
from looted artifacts in museum collections, some examples have been excavated from
sites throughout the lower valleys and a few locations north of the Pampa de Paijan.

Donnan and Mackey (1978) published an analysis of their excavations of burials in
the Moche Valley. Their sample included over three hundred examples of decorated
ceramics. Stirrup spout vessels, flaring bowls, dippers and jars were among the artifacts
produced by their excavations. They found great variety not only in the quantity and
quality of the vessels but also in the individuals they were buried with as well. Analysis
revealed no clear correlation between the ceramic vessel types and age or gender of the
buried individual.

In the North, examples of Moche decorated ceramics were found at Sipan, San Jose
de Moro and Pampa Grande, as well as at other smaller sites. Vessels from burials at
Sipan and San Jose de Moro indicate their status as elite objects. The tombs of the
Warrior Priest, the Bird Priest and the Priestess each produced stirrup spout vessels.
Since these individuals were clearly of high status, their association with these decorated
ceramics is a testament to their value within Moche society. Although decorated ceramics
are most often found in burials, examples have been produced in other contexts. For
instance, Shimada (2001: 188-189, 186) recovered a flaring bowl and a stirrup spout
vessel from a copper workshop at Pampa Grande and a painted flaring bowl from a
weaver’s workshop at the same site. The importance of the latter discovery will be discussed in greater detail below.

**Decorated Ceramics in Moche Iconography**

Analysis of decorated ceramics in the iconography also indicates their function as prestigious goods in Moche society. There are several examples of Moche art in which important figures are associated stirrup spout vessels. Figure 2.7 depicts one such example that is believed to portray the arraignment of captives in front of a Moche elite prior to their deaths in the Sacrifice Ceremony (Alva and Donnan 1993: 131). A stirrup spout bottle floats next to the back of the important individual. The bottle is decorated with fineline painting in a repeating stepped grec motif. As in the Weaving Scene, the vessel is unrealistically portrayed here in a floating position. It is possible that the floating vessels acted as an artistic convention indicating high status in Moche society. Such an interpretation is supported by analysis of another scene, Figure 2.8. In this scene a stirrup spout vessel floats next to another member of the Moche elite. This figure’s status is indicated by the fact that he sits on a raised platform, wears an elaborate headdress, and is covered by a gabled structure. Furthermore, he is the recipient of a large offering of gourd bowls and is the focus of attention of the other figures in the scene. It is noteworthy that a flaring bowl is located on the ground below the floating stirrup spout bottle but both are within the confines of the gabled structure. Also, a number of gourd containers with “feet” appear on ground lines or shelters along the side, which clearly distinguishes the stirrup spout for its lack of a ground line.

Two sub-scenes, A, and H of the Weaving Scene depict flaring bowls below floating vessels. Although the vessel in A is not a stirrup spout vessel, the fact that spout and handle bottles generally contain similar decorative content and in some cases were
produced from the same molds as stirrup spout vessels, suggests that they may have been substituted interchangeably (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 82). The association of the two bottles with flaring bowls may prove to be significant. An examination of other examples in which stirrup spout (or spout and handle) vessels are found in association with flaring bowls reveals that the different vessel types were intentionally linked.

Other examples of scenes in Moche iconography depict flaring bowls in close proximity to stirrup spout vessels. One scene identified by Bourget (ms.) as relating to a copulation narrative depicts a floating flaring bowl adjacent to a floating stirrup spout vessel (Figure 2.9). Bourget (ms.: 96) suggests that this scene is part of a larger story in which a human female copulates with a prominent supernatural in Moche art known as Wrinkle Face. In several depictions of this scene, stirrup spout vessels float above the female’s head, which he suggests conjure scenes of burial and sacrifice (Bourget ms. 96). In addition to their relative proximity, the analogous animal motifs decorating the flaring bowl and stirrup spout vessels in this scene indicate that the two vessels were meant to be viewed as a pair. Further evidence for the use of stirrup spout vessels in conjunction with flaring bowls comes from an example in which their decorations are identical (Figure 2.10). Again, their related decorations suggest concurrent use.

It is worth noting that two sub-scenes (B and D) contain floating flaring bowls that are not associated with other ceramic types. This demonstrates that not all depictions of flaring bowls were represented as part of a set, although it is also possible that the presence of complementary vessels were assumed in these cases.

**What Can Be Learned From Decorated Ceramics In The Weaving Scene?**

The presence of decorated ceramics in burials and non-funerary archaeological contexts indicates that they held multiple functions in the Moche world. In terms of their
depictions in art, we have seen that one function could have been their use as a
convention for indicating elite status. In addition to their use as an artistic convention, the
iconographic depictions of decorated ceramics may also aid in our understanding of their
use by Moche people. When read as reflections of real life objects, ceramics within
Moche art may help lead to a better understanding of their real life use.

There are three classes of individuals that are often depicted carrying ceramic
vessels. One such class is best demonstrated in the effigy of an individual that can be
described as the “Whistler” (see Figure 2.11) The Whistler is depicted standing with his
arms full of ceramics and his lips pursed as if he is carrying a tune. This individual holds
a stirrup spout vessel and a mat in his right arm and a flaring bowl and a dipper in his left.
Donnan (1978: 156) notes that although this individual was originally identified as a “pot
vendor” he more likely represents a ritual healer. Donnan proposes that the “Whistler” is
related to a class of anthropomorphized bats who are also commonly depicted carrying
decorated ceramics. Bats were thought to have held beneficial properties in Pre-
Columbian times, and bat fetishes are even found on curers’ *mesas* in modern Peru
(Donnan 1978: 156). Since both the Whistler and anthropomorphized bats are found
carrying similar vessels, it is possible that they were both involved in similar activities.
Another class of Moche individuals who often carry ceramic vessels is referred to by
Larco Hoyle (2001[1938]: 191) as “mutilated” figures. He proposed that this group of
figures who are missing their lips and noses were subject to corporal punishment.
Elizabeth Benson (1972: 68) disagrees with this interpretation. Instead of punishment,
she suggests the individuals’ deformities result from disease, most likely, leishmaniasis
or leprosy.
She then suggests that these figures were ritual healers. Benson notes that several American cultures viewed individuals with physical abnormalities as having supernatural qualities that could aid in the ritual healing process.

Thus, we have three classes of figures identified as relating to ritual healing. The fact that they each carry similar ceramic vessel types suggests the use of ceramics in curing rituals. Although stirrup spout vessels, flaring bowls and dippers are not among the objects recorded on the mesas of modern folk healers, bottles containing sacred substances are plentiful, and these may take the place of ceramic vessels used in antiquity (Gillin 1947: 124-125; Sharon and Donnan 1974).

**Weaving Implements**

Another similarity in the sub-scenes examined here is the depiction of objects related to weaving. Examples of weaving implements can be found in other iconographic scenes. In Figure 2.12, we find fineline depictions of what appear to be the frame for a backstrap loom, associated with a spindle of thread. This fineline decoration is found on a stirrup spout vessel with a figure that is clearly female due to her long braided hair (Hocquenghem and Lyon 1980: 27). In a similar scene (Figure 2.13) we find two seated females facing each other. Like the deck figure in Figure 2.12, their faces are painted and their hair is braided. A spindle floats in front of each woman while their backstrap looms are attached to structures similar to those in the Weaving Scene. These women seem to be in conversation, possibly on a break from their textile production. The idea that weaving was a social activity could present itself here. As noted above, some of the females in the Weaving Scene are oriented clockwise while others are counterclockwise, which results in three instances of adjacent weavers facing each other. This was likely an effort to represent imagery of social behavior rather than to conserve space. Although it may be
argued that the weavers faced each as the result of sharing a support post, it seems that
the decision to face a fellow weaver was intentional. Each of the weavers A, B, D, E, G,
and H, could just as easily have set up their loom on the opposite post, facing away from
the adjacent weaver and providing more privacy. This is not the case, and as in Figure
2.13, the women of the Weaving Scene all have parted lips indicating they are speaking
to one another, or possibly singing while they work.
Archaeological evidence suggests that weaving was an activity commonly associated
with females. Excavations from Pacatnamu produced twenty burials with objects related
to weaving. Of these, seventeen were associated with adult females and three others were
adults of undetermined sex (Millaire 2002: 147).
Figure 2.1 Photos of the Weaving Scene Vessel. (Benson 1972:103; Boston 1980: Plate 88)
Figure 2.2 Donna McClelland’s Reconstruction of the Weaving Scene with Labels Added. (After Donnan and McClelland 1999: 126)
Figure 2.3 Cristobal Campana’s Reconstruction of the Weaving Scene. (Campana 1983: 96)
Figure 2.4 Anne Marie Hocquenghem’s Artistic Reconstruction of the Weaving Scene. (Hocquenghem 1987: Figs 37a, 37b)
Figure 2.5 Warrior Regalia with Designs Similar to the Weaving Scene. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 107, 88)
Figure 2.6 Head Cloths on Portrait Head Vessels Similar to Designs from the Weaving Scene. (Donnan 2004: 97, 165, 96; Donnan and McClelland 1999: 126)
Figure 2.7 Arraignment of Bound Captives. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 245)

Figure 2.8 Presentation of Food to a Moche Elite. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 113)
Figure 2.9 Copulation Scene Including Stirrup Spout Bottle Associated with a Flaring Bowl. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 127)

Figure 2.10 Stirrup Spout Vessel and Flaring Bowl Decorated with the Same Design. (Photograph by Christopher Donnan.)
Figure 2.11 Three Classes of Figures Interpreted as Ritual Healers. (Top left photograph by Christopher Donnan. Top right and bottom photographs by Ethan Cole.)
Figure 2.12 Weaving Implements Painted on a Stirrup Spout Vessel. (Drawing by Donna McClelland. Photograph by Christopher Donnan.)

Figure 2.13 Two Female Weavers on Break. (Drawing by Donnan McClelland.)
CHAPTER 3
DECORATED CERAMICS IN MOCHE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The second set of sub-scenes discussed here depicts activities that are not associated with the physical act of textile making. Instead, the individuals in sub-scenes F and J appear to be engaged in some form of interaction. Like that of the weaving sub-scenes, a detailed description of these images and their subsequent interpretation helps provide insight into their ancient meaning.

**Sub-scene F.** Two seated figures interacting.

1. A seated figure holding their left hand out with three outlined dots in between the thumb and pointed finger. This figure is nearly twice as large as the weavers, and wears a more elaborate dress. A full length striped tunic adorns their body, while they wear a geometric decorated headdress.

2. A seated figure holding a chili pepper close to their mouth, as if to eat it. This figure is smaller than its counterpart (F1), and is more proportionate to the weavers. The individual is wearing a headdress, a plainly decorated tunic and a striped skirt.

3. Prepared food in double-gourd containers. These two elements are similar in overall shape to a number of ceramic effigies. These vessels clearly demonstrate that such containers were meant to hold two different types of food served at once (see Donnan 1978 Fig 261).

4. A jar with a vegetive element necktie and a diagonal outlined stripe decorating its chamber.

5. A jar with an outlined stripe decorating its upper chamber.

6. A small vessel, likely a *cuenca* (a small undecorated domestic ceramic vessel).

7. An unidentifiable bowl-shaped object.
Sub-scene J. A more elaborate scene depicting two figures involved in an exchange, with two other seated figures observing.

1. A seated figure. Their hands are facing palm up, with their right arm extended and their left tucked-in towards the side. The figure wears a geometrically decorated headdress, a tunic and a striped skirt.

2. A jar with vegetive elements around the neck and an outlined stripe that decorates its chamber.

3. A jar with a rope tied around its neck. It is decorated with an outlined diagonal stripe on its chamber.

4. A floating stirrup spout vessel. This vessel is larger and depicted in a superior quality than the others in the Weaving Scene. Its upper chamber is decorated with inverted stepped grec designs protruding from an outlined stripe.

5. A standing figure who appears to be the best dressed of the Weaving Scene, he wears a tunic with decorated sleeves, a swatch of design on the chest and tassels at the knees. The figure also wears an elaborately decorated headdress and holds his right hand open, either passing or receiving a small bowl from Figure J6.

6. A figure seated under the cover of a structure. The figure wears a headdress, has a tunic with a swatch on it and a striped skirt. This figure is either passing or receiving a bowl from Figure J5.

7. A figure seated on the base of a structure, but is not under its roof. This figure wears an elaborate headdress, and a tunic with decorated sleeves. The arms of this figure are positioned like those of Figure J1.

8. A long fish, possibly belonging to Figure J7.

Despite their different modes of dress, and variant headdresses, the figures of sub-scene F and J have all been identified as males (Shimada 1994: 209; 2001: 187). This interpretation is supported by the fact that the figures do not adhere to the list of distinctly feminine features proposed by Hocquenghem and Lyon (1980: 27, 29).

Although the details of both sub-scenes are different, it appears that the activities depicted in F and J are similar. These sub-scenes appear to depict the exchange of foodstuffs. Due to their relative locations it is possible to argue that the long fish (J8) is
associated with Figure J7, and that vessels J2 and J3 are associated with figure J1. Since, Figure F1 is seated prominently next to the structure, it appears that he is the proprietor of the contents of the adjacent gourd containers (F3).

**The Exchange**

Figures F1 and either J5 or J6 appear to be caught in the act of serving substances in containers, Figure F1 holds his left hand out with three outlined dots in between his thumb and forefinger, whereas J5 and J6 are passing a bowl between the two; although it is unclear who is the recipient. It seems that this exchange in a domestic setting is unique to the Weaving Scene for my study turned up no other clear examples of a presentation, with the exception of ritually charged contexts such as the Sacrifice Ceremony. Thus, it is possible that the Weaving Scene is linked to such ceremonial offerings. As noted above in Figure 2.8, a Moche elite is presented with animated double-gourd containers in one scene and the main event of the Sacrifice Ceremony is the passing of a goblet that may contain human blood. It seems more likely, however, that the exchange between J5 and J6 appears to be of a secular nature as there are no supernatural elements in this scene and the participants seem to be dressed in ordinary elite attire. This does not preclude ritual significance from this scene, as Donnan (1978: 178, 1997) has demonstrated that even scenes that appear secular may have religious undertones, but at this point there is no evidence to suggest religious significance in this exchange.

Although J5 and J6 have no clear parallel in Moche art, there may be a correlate for F1 as there is one depiction that also seems to relate to the distribution of food (Figure 3.1). In sub-scene J, we find four individuals interacting. The individual to the extreme right wears a striped loincloth and wears a similar headdress to figure F1. In addition, this figure stands next to a double-gourd container. To his left is a seated figure whose neck
garment appears to have held a series of dots. He appears to be involved with a kneeling figure. Between the two, alongside the platform, is a long fish. To the extreme right is another figure observing the conversation. The focus of this scene appears to be the interaction between the two facing figures. Both of these figures have the thumb and forefinger touching on their extended hands. Donnan and McClelland (1999: 108) note that this hand gesture was commonly depicted in Moche iconography, although its message remains enigmatic. What is clear is that this scene and the sub-scene designated F are related because both depict figures wearing similar headdresses and are positioned in relative proximity to double-gourd containers. The nature of the exchange must be elaborated in future investigations before we can understand what these images portray.

Evidence for Elite Status

An analysis in the participants of the exchange in the Weaving Scene may benefit interpretation of its meaning. It seems that the individuals J5 and J6 are members of the Moche elite. Evidence for this identification comes from the textile swatches on their tunics and the stirrup spout vessel floating between them.

Shirt Patches

Two of the largest and most prominent figures of the Weaving Scene, J5 and J6, have swatches of elaborate textiles, adorning their shirts just below the neck. Although the designs of these fragments do not appear to correspond to those on the backstrap looms, similar depictions of swatches occur in other examples of Moche art. Described as “badges” by Benson (1972: 108) and “shirt patches” by Donnan and Donnan (1997: 226), these adornments may have designated high social status. This interpretation is supported by the fact that these textile fragments almost always occur on the chests of seated males (Figure 3.2). My study produced only one example in which a shirt patch was found on a
standing figure. This individual turned out to be a male amputee and is shown with a prosthetic right foot (Figure 3.3). The amputee was likely an important individual because a great degree of labor and medical attention was involved in creating and attaching a prosthetic limb.

**A Floating Stirrup Spout Vessel**

In addition to shirt patches, the presence of a floating stirrup spout vessel (J4) appears to mark the elite status of Figures J5 and J6. Although the central location of the vessel makes it difficult to determine which figure it is associated with, the high quality of its decoration indicates that the owner was of particularly high status. Strong and Evans (1952: 221) noted that a great range exists in the quality of craftsmanship and decoration in ceramic vessels. Here, we appear to have an example of an object of particularly good quality as its chamber and spout are symmetrical and the inverted stepped grec design was carefully depicted. Other examples of this motif can be found on vessels such as that in Figure 2.5. In this case, stepped grecs decorate the flaring bowl belonging to an important individual. It seems that his association with the stepped grec decorated flaring bowl indicates the value the ceramic piece.

The stepped-grec motif itself may provide insight into the significance of the vessel it decorates. Stepped-grec’s are formed by two separate but linked elements: a step and a scroll. The stepped element of this geometric design refers to the sea or maritime activities because similar scrolls are used to depict waves and some examples of stepped-grec designs end in fish heads (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). On the other hand, steps may refer to man-made or natural mountains as similar designs can be substituted for steps to platform mounds or natural hills (Figures 3.6 and 3.7). Thus, it seems that the combination of the two elements speaks to the Moche’s dual reliance and mutual reverence for both the
mountains and the sea. This may be indicative of a connection between the owner of the vessel and Moche corporate ideology. That is to say, since the stepped-grec design integrates aspects important to the Moche pantheon, it is likely that the owner of this vessel had ties to the Moche religious institution and was indeed a member of the elite.

Examples of Jars With Neck Ties

The stirrup spout vessel discussed above is not the only significant ceramic vessel in the only two sub-scenes that do not show weaving. A pair of jars designated J2, J3, F4 and F5 are adjacent to one another, yet their decorations differ in sub-scenes F and J. In sub-scene J, the jar with vegetive neck tie has an outlined stripe around the circumference of its chamber whereas that of F has a diagonal stripe. Jar J3 which has a twine neck tie is similarly decorated. This variation of design suggests that the jars were not meant to be distinguished by their designs. This becomes clear when one observes other examples in which jars have both vegetive elements and twine decorating their necks and one has a diagonal shape whereas the other has a horizontal band. Figures 3.8 and 3.9 present jars that appear similar in shape to those of the Weaving Scene, although instead of having either a vegetive or twine neck tie, they exhibit both. It is interesting that these scenes contain elements of ritual, a topic that will be discussed later as part of Benson’s (1972) interpretation of the Weaving Scene. In addition to examples of twine and vegetive neck tie jars, there are an abundance of vessels with only the twine neck ornamentation.

Returning to two images previously discussed in this study, Figures 2.12 and 2.13 present jars in scenes related to the Weaving Scene. In Figure 2.13, the two women who have temporarily halted their textile production have three such jars resting between them. The importance of this will be discussed in a section on the archaeological excavation of a
weaving workshop at Pampa Grande, a site that produced examples of similar ceramic jars.

**Interpretations of the Weaving Scene**

Now that each sub-scene and its individual elements have been identified, the significance of the Weaving Scene as a whole needs to be interpreted. A number of previous authors have offered their interpretations of this scene. Although he avoids providing a detailed account of the activities shown, Bawden (1996: 95) notes the high level of organization involved in textile production depicted in the Weaving Scene. He observes that like the Inca, the Moche valued high quality textiles. The individuals of sub-scenes F, and J are thought to be supervisors who oversaw the weavers in order to control the quality and production of these prestigious goods (Bawden 1996: 93-94). Cristobal Campana (1983: 21, 1994) echoes this assertion that the Weaving Scene indicates elite organization of craft production. He describes the largest figure in this scene as, “Señor del taller” who is a patron sponsoring the artisans of the weaving workshop depicted in this scene (Campana 1994: 454). The Señor del taller is suggested to control the production of the textiles, and had the authority to choose the textile designs being created on the weavers’ looms. Benson (1972) believes that this scene is not representative of common textile production activities; rather she asserts it held ritual meaning. She recognizes that jars with vegetive elements or rope tied around the neck are characteristic of funerary scenes. Since examples of these are present in the fineline decoration of the British Museum piece, she believes that the Weaving Scene is ceremonial, and possibly related to the production of grave goods for a specific individual (Benson 1972: 106).
Hocquenghem (1987: 85) also interprets this scene as holding ritual significance. She believes that the activities of the Weaving Scene may relate to celebrations of the September solar zenith. Cristobal de Molina, a Spanish chronicler who from in the early years of Spanish colonial rule, observed that in September, the Inca celebrated a festival known as *omac raymi*, in which women pierced the ears of their children and produced clothing for the festival. The weaving was said to have been done with the help of relatives and the festival was preceded by several days of drinking within the house. Although this scene has no indications of solar imagery, Hocquenghem suggests that the production of textiles by the women and an interpretation that men prepare metal ornaments (the individuals in sub-scenes F, and J) relate to the festival described by Molina.

Larco (2001[1938]: 184) compares the Weaving Scene to practices of pooled labor from modern day Peru. He notes that often times a salesman will travel to distant villages to collect orders for clothing. Upon completing a number of sales, he will return home where he has set up a pool of labor among local females. He then tells the women what he needs and they produce textiles to fit the order. In addition to monetary compensation, the salesman is also expected to provide the women with food and drink. Larco suggests that a similar situation exists in the Weaving Scene. The two non-weaving scenes are found to depict the provisioning of food and beverage to the artisans, while the vessels associated with each weaver represent beverages they have received from their patron. This type of reciprocal relationship between the individuals in sub-scenes F and J and the weavers is also proposed by Shimada.
Archaeological Evidence for a Weaving Workshop at Pampa Grande

In his excavations of the Northern Moche site, Pampa Grande in the Lambayeque Valley, Izumi Shimada recovered evidence for a weaving workshop. Shimada (1994: 206-210, 2001) found artifacts related to weaving in two separate locations. A courtyard in Compound 14 (referred to as “Deer House”) produced the charred remains of cotton in the early stages of being processed into thread. Although he recovered large amounts of cotton fiber from the courtyard, which apparently had been destroyed by fire in antiquity, Shimada found no evidence that weaving took place there. Alternatively, Room-Block 70 in Section H of another compound revealed only evidence for textile production. Citing an investigation by John Topic, Shimada (2001:193) notes that evidence for modular craft production was present at the Chimu capital of Chan Chan. Topic found that the preparatory stages of weaving and metalworking were performed in a barrio associated with commoners, while another more prestigious area provided evidence for the final stages of production. Using the Chan Chan example as a model, Shimada (2001: 193) proposes that the two locations at Pampa Grande represent activities performed by two different groups, as the weavers created textiles in Room-Block 70 while others processed cotton and prepared thread at Deer House.

Shimada relates the activities in Room-Block 70 to the Weaving Scene. He notes that among the artifacts recovered from this room were a painted flaring bowl, two jars and well-worn batten, a tool necessary for weaving with a backstrap loom (Shimada 1994: 209, 2001: 186). Additional architectural elements suggest a connection with the fineline decoration. Room-Block 70 contained remains of two structures. In the northeast corner of the room stood a raised platform with a ramp and postholes. The center of the room was dominated by a structure with a single adobe wall, leaving three open airways.
to the courtyard; an optimal setup for manipulating a backstrap loom. Shimada compares these to the structures in the Weaving Scene. He identifies Figures F1 and J6 as elites who oversaw the weavers as they sat in the ramped structure which provided an excellent view of the activities in the center of the room (Shimada 1994: 209; 2001: 186).

Shimada also provides a discussion about the relationship between the artisans and the elite patrons they worked for. He observes that there was likely no contractual obligation for the artisans to work for a particular lord. As a result, the elites were forced to maintain good relations with their workers and often provided food and chicha in reciprocation for services rendered. Shimada suggests that at Pampa Grande, such a relationship existed as evidence for a chicha kitchen was found in a room adjacent to the weaving workshop. Furthermore, Shimada suggests that such a relationship would help explain the presence of food and the passing of a bowl between Figures J5 and J6 in the Weaving Scene. He identifies the two jars J2 and J3 as chicha containers and compares them to jars present in Pampa Grande’s archaeological record. Such an interpretation of the Weaving Scene not only aids in the explanation of the presence of the ceramic vessels associated with each weaver, but also accounts for their pleased facial expressions. Apparently, the weavers were rewarded with alcohol for their labor and were perhaps even embibed while they worked.
Figure 3.1 Possible Example of Exchange. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 108)

Figure 3.2 Stirrup Spout Vessel Showing a Shirt Patch on a Seated Individual. (Larco 2001[1938] Fig. 263)

Figure 3.3 Amputee with a Shirt Patch on Chest. (Larco 2001[1938] Fig. 279)
Figure 3.4 Fineline Depiction of Waves. (From Donnan and McClelland 1999: 122)

Figure 3.5 Stepped-Grec Motif Ending in a Fish Head. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 77)

Figure 3.6 Stepped Designs Substituted for Platform Mound Steps. (Donnan and McClelland: 100)
Figure 3.7 Stepped Designs Representing Natural Topography. (Donnan and McClelland: 123)

Figure 3.8 Jar with Vegetive and Twine Neck Ties. (Drawing by Donna McClelland.)

Figure 3.9 Jars with Vegetive and Twine Neck Ties. (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 117)
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS

Realistic depictions of life on the North Coast of Peru have prompted researchers to propose links between Moche decorated ceramics and archaeological remains. My study focuses on decoding cultural information from a unique piece noted for its naturalistic representation of human activities. The Weaving Scene provides a glimpse of the activities surrounding organized textile production in Moche society. An analysis of this piece has produced a number of observations. The most significant is the identification of floating vessels as an artistic convention for indicating elite status. The Weaving Scene contains several examples of stirrup spout bottles, spout and handle bottles and flaring bowls that hover above the seated females and between Figures J5 and J6. Similar scenes of floating vessels in Moche art were found to be associated almost exclusively with prominent human figures, recognized by their large size or position in architectural contexts such as palaces or temples. Recognizing the floating vessels to be a symbol for high social status, the weavers in this scene were identified as members of the Moche elite. This suggestion was supported by archaeological excavations of a weaving workshop at Pampa Grande, which produced artifacts similar to those depicted in the Weaving Scene, such as a flaring bowl and a pair of jars.

Evidence from the Pampa Grande weaving workshop also led to the proposition that the weavers represented on the British Museum piece were not contractually obligated to work for a specific patron, but were enticed by offerings of food and alcoholic beverages (Shimada 2001: 196-198). Although this interpretation links the
Weaving Scene to the archaeological record at Pampa Grande, another explanation better incorporates aspects of the Weaving Scene discussed in this study.

**Identification of Moche Mamakonas in the Weaving Scene**

The flaring bowl from the British Museum depicts a group of highly skilled women who represented the last and most prestigious line in a chain of textile production. Having their thread delivered to them on prepared spindles, these weavers focused on the production of woven items that, once completed, would be worn by members of the elite. In addition to weaving prestigious clothing they were probably also responsible for the education of young weavers, like one seen on the vessel (I4), the Moche version of the Inca Chosen Women.

In Inca times, young girls of striking beauty were taken from their families to become trained members of the *aqllakunas*, or Chosen Women. The *aqllakunas* were educated in activities normally devoted to women, with the intention of becoming either the wives of prominent Incas or *Mamakonas*, the instructors of the *aqllakunas*. *Mamakonas* were lifelong virgins of varying age who devoted their lives to training the *aqllakunas* (Cobo 2005[1653]: 236). Living in seclusion within the House of the Chosen Women, the *Mamakonas* only contact with outsiders was restricted to Imperial administrators who oversaw the training of the *aqllakuna*. Responsibilities of the *Mamakonas* included teaching the Chosen Women valuable elite skills such as weaving, preparing food and brewing chicha.

It seems that nearly all of the characteristics of this description are present in aspects of the Weaving Scene. First, the relationship between the *Mamakonas* and the Weaving Scene helps to explain the range of the weavers’ ages apparent in this scene. As previously noted, the number of wrinkles varies among the seated females on the British
Museum vessel. Although some show indications of extreme old age, such as figures G3 and E4, others show fewer signs of aging, especially the wrinkle-free weaver in sub-scene I. In addition to variance in the ages of the weavers, their identification as *Mamakonas* helps to explain the presence non-weaving activities on this vessel.

Archaeological evidence for a chicha kitchen adjacent to the weaving workshop at Pampa Grande also supports the link between the Weaving Scene and the *Mamakonas*. Here, we find direct physical evidence for a connection between textile weaving and chicha brewing. Although Shimada (2001: 196-197) suggested that the chicha kitchen functioned to provide libations in exchange for manual labor, an alternative explanation is that the close proximity of the chicha kitchen to the weaving workshop allowed the elite females to multitask; passing their time weaving while waiting for the chicha to ferment. In addition to weaving instruction, the Mamakonas were also responsible for chicha production, according to accounts from historic sources (Cobo 2005[1653]: 236).

Cobo’s description of Imperial overseers also presents a strong connection between *Mamakonas*, the Weaving Scene and the Pampa Grande excavations. Shimada (1994: 208-209; 2001: 186) notes that a structure found within the weaving workshop likely functioned as an overseer’s observation platform. He suggests that this administrator was in charge of ensuring the quality of the textiles. Such an interpretation is in agreement with Bawden (1996: 93-94) who similarly identifies the seated figures in sub-scenes F and J as quality-controlling administrators. Here, the description of the *Mamakonas* adheres to both iconographic and archaeological evidence for Moche organized weaving activities.
Finally, the identification of the females in the Weaving Scene as the Moche equivalent of *Mamakonas* speaks to their raised status as indicated by floating decorated vessels. Upon reaching fourteen years of age, the Chosen Women either married men in service to the Inca, became sacrificial victims or servants to the Inca, or they became *Mamakonas* themselves (D’Altroy 2002: 189). Therefore, in order to serve as *Mamakonas*, one was first a member of the Chosen Women. Both positions were highly valued in Inca society as the Chosen Women created royal textiles, while the *Mamakonas* served as their teachers as well as Priestesses of temples dedicated to Thunder and the Sun (Cobo 2005[1653]:236). It is thus, not surprising to find an elite status of *Mamakonas* indicated in the Weaving Scene by associated floating vessels.

The connection between the Weaving Scene and a description of the Inca *Mamakonas* was first noted by Rebeca Carrión Cachot (cited in Larco 2001[1938]: 182), but, her interpretation failed to include archaeological evidence to substantiate her claim. It could be for this reason that her idea has been largely ignored in modern interpretations of this scene. My study finds strong iconographic, archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence to support linking the Moche weavers’ to the Inca royal institution of weaving. The style of the fineline decorations is characteristic of Moche Phase IV, which has been described here as belonging to a southern Moche. Further, the flaring bowl ceramic form that the Weaving Scene decorates suggests that this piece originated near the core area.

It is not surprising that the Moche could share a weaving tradition with the Inca despite their great geographic and temporal differences. Andean cultures have been noted for maintaining longstanding traditions across time and space. For instance, the stirrup spout bottle, though the hallmark of Moche art, was neither a Moche invention nor was it
discontinued after their fall from power around AD 800. This ceramic form proved extremely enduring as examples can be traced as far back as the Machalilla culture which settled Ecuador’s Pacific coast from BCE 1200-800, and lasted well into the fifteenth century AD in the Peruvian coastal kingdom of Chimor (Bruhns 1999: 93, 111).

**Ceramic Vessel Use in Moche Society**

In addition to recognizing floating vessels as elite markers and identifying the females of the Weaving Scene as the Moche equivalent of *Mamakonas*, my study also reveals valuable information concerning the Moche’s use of decorated ceramics.

Despite the fact that these artifacts have received more scholarly attention than any other aspect of Moche culture, the function of decorated ceramic vessels remains a mystery. Early scholars suggested that they were created primarily to be grave goods (Kroeber 1925: 202), although recently authors have provided evidence for the use of decorated ceramics in other contexts (Donnan and McClelland 1999: 18-19; Millaire 2002: 130; Shimada 1994: 209). Donnan and McClelland (1999: 18-19) note that many stirrup spout vessels exhibit evidence of chipping and mending that indicate frequent use and, Shimada (1994: 209) excavated a painted flaring bowl from the weaving workshop at Pampa Grande, clearly a non-funerary context. In this study, I provide iconographic evidence for the frequent use of decorated ceramics in a number of different ritual and non-ritual contexts.

Several examples of use in quasi-ritual context can be seen in modeled effigies of ritual healers. As noted above, depictions of the Whistler, an anthropomorphized bat and a “mutilated” figure have each been identified as relating to curing rituals (Figure 2.11). These individuals all carry decorated ceramics in their hands. The Whistler holds a stirrup spout vessel and a mat in his right arm and a flaring bowl, a dipper in his left and wears a
jar on his head. The “mutilated” figure carries a stirrup spout vessel in one hand and a
dipper in the other, while the anthropomorphized bat wears a flaring bowl on his head,
and carries a stirrup spout vessel and what appears to be a flaring bowl in his hands.
Since these figures are actively engaged in handling these different ceramic types, they
likely intended to use them in close proximity to one another.

It is also noteworthy that each of these figures carries a different combination of
vessels. Recall that stirrup spout vessels spout and handle vessels, flaring bowls and
dippers were the most commonly decorated Moche vessel types. The reason for this may
lie in the fact that the four ceramic types were meant to be used as a set. Iconographic
evidence supports this as examples of erotic scenes contain fineline depictions of several
different vessel types (see Figure 4.1). Their presence in this scene indicates that 1) they
were used by the couple prior to or after copulation, or 2) these wares were commonly
stored in close proximity to sleeping quarters, suggesting daily use. Although future
investigations will be required to better understand the exact function of each of these
types, it is clear that the vessels had related functions and ritual significance.

The Significance of Interpreting Moche Culture through Images

This investigation produced a number of conclusions regarding Moche culture,
analyzing the way the Moche artists conveyed meaning through their art. My research
suggests that their decorated ceramics were used as sets in related activities and examined
some of the contexts these sets are seen in. The most significant finding seems to be their
association with elites as well as activities related to ritual healing.

Difficulties arise when attempting to extract cultural meaning from a society
without a recognizable writing system. Since the Moche left no written record of their
beliefs and no “blueprint” of their social system survives in the ethnohistorical record,
scholars must piece together the past using all available materials. This study employed examples from iconography, the archaeological record and an Inca ethnohistoric account in order to assemble supporting evidence to substantiate a range of arguments. It is this type of interdisciplinary approach that most effectively advances the field of Moche studies. When used in tandem, these sources provide a better perspective of the past than any one alone.

The years ahead will present great advances in the study of Moche culture. Expanding archaeological investigations will no doubt produce more data and artifacts that will likely inspire new perspectives of life on the ancient North Coast. This investigation has followed precedents for interdisciplinary analysis that have had great success in previous studies of this enigmatic culture. Working between set disciplines, Moche scholars have benefited by taking advantage of the strengths of each discipline and cross-checking the lines of evidence against each other. A continued effort to connect artistic images with, historic accounts and the archaeological record may reveal that the realism in Moche art does not act as a “picture book,” rather it is more like a “map,” or a visual reminder of ancient traditions that remain to be decoded.
Figure 4.1 A Copulation Scene with Associated Ceramic Vessels. (Image from the Moche Archive at UCLA)
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