

THE MOON ANIMAL IN NORTHERN PERUVIAN ART AND CULTURE

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One of the most fascinating aspects of the culture history of the north coast of Peru is the great longevity of cultural traditions in that area. Although there seem to have been several major reorientations of the local culture(s) in terms of settlement patterns and architectural styles (and probably political organization as well), aspects such as the art style and certain mythical or supernatural figures remain easily recognizable for hundreds of years. This is, of course, partly due to the fact that the artistic tradition of northern Peru maintained a representational mode for most of its existence, but is also due to an inherent conservatism in the depiction of important figures. The changes which occur inevitably in any art style over the centuries, in this area tend to occur as a series of smooth changes which can be followed if they are looked for, changes, for example, not so much in the major lineaments of a figure as in accompanying attributes which may be important signifiers, or simply nonessential or semiessential elements. The following paper is a discussion of one example of this phenomenon, the introduction, adoption, and adaptations of a figure of north coast religion, the Moon Animal.

The Animal in Moche III and IV

The Moon Animal, a crested dragonlike quadruped, is actually a very minor figure in the pantheon of the Moche culture of the Early Intermediate Period (ca. 200 B.C.- 550 A.D.). Compared to the frequency of appearance of other mythical zoomorphic creatures such as the strombus monster, fish monsters, or bird warriors, it is relatively rare. Yet this uncommon figure, unlike these other supernaturals, is persistent throughout the centuries, surviving the vicissitudes of history and new religious ideas even up to the obliteration of mainstream indigenous religion by the conquering Europeans.

Although figures which are certainly the prototypes of the Moon Animal appear at the very beginning of the Moche cultural tradition, the first representations of this animal in primary association with lunar or astral symbols are much later, occurring first in Moche III.¹ At this time a fair number of painted and painted, press molded pieces showing the Moon Animal surrounded by starlike shapes or standing in the crescent moon, or both, appear. Since these pieces are the first evidence of the meaning or the cult associations of this figure, any definition of the Moon Animal as a moon animal must be based upon these Moche III and IV depictions (figs. 1-5).

Basic description

As shown on Moche III and IV vessels the Moon Animal is a quadrupedal figure with a long tail and a crest rising out of the head. As is common in Moche painted animal representations it is shown in profile

and, in accordance with the local conventions of representing profile figures, only one pair of legs (one front, one rear) is shown. Although there is variation in decorative detail, as documented below, the figures are remarkably alike in all but superficial detail and there is little amalgamation with other fanciful zoomorphic creatures.

Head: The head of the Moon Animal has a long snout or muzzle with an open mouth, a prominent eye, and a large pointed ear.

Muzzle: Certain variations in the representation of the muzzle are common, but seem to be more stylistic than meaningful. For example, the muzzle may be represented as solid in color or it may be drawn in outline with thin lines. In the latter case there is often a double line showing the elevation of the nose.

Nose: The nose itself may be shown as a solid color area on the end of the muzzle, as a slightly bulbous protrusion in the same location, or as a slight elevation of the upper line of a muzzle drawn in outline. Some examples have a curlicue rising from the nose (fig. 2). Fig. 5 shows a variation on this nasal curlicue in which the curlicue is placed at the junction between the nose and forehead rather than at the extreme end of the muzzle. Other examples (such as fig. 3) have the crest rising from the nose rather than from the top of the head and in such cases there is never a nasal curlicue. From these depictions of the Moon Animal it is apparent that the nasal curlicue can be considered an optional elaboration or decoration of the head; it is not significant in itself.

Mouth and teeth: The mouth of the Moon Animal is shown as open and is usually filled with large teeth. The teeth are shown as solid color or outlined triangles or as short lines perpendicular to the gum line. The Moon Animal does not have the long frontal fangs that are characteristic of both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic deity figures in Moche, and all of the teeth are of the same size. Very occasionally the Moon Animal is shown without teeth so that these, while important enough to appear in the great majority of representations, cannot be considered an absolutely essential attribute.²

Tongue: A long tongue, however, is essential, at least in painted versions of the Moon Animal. This tongue may be either thick or thin and in one example it is forked like that of a snake or lizard (Baessler 1902-1903, fig. 237). More commonly the tongue is shown as long, slightly thicker at the tip than it is at the base, and protruding beyond the end of the open mouth.

Eye: The eye is prominent and is usually shown as a circle with a large center dot (for example, figs. 1, 2). Often the eye is not entirely contained within the head but is shown as protruding above it, forming an orbital vault. A slightly more almond shaped eye seems to be an acceptable variant. Kutscher illustrates a piece in which figures identical save for the eye form are painted on opposite sides of a stirrup spout bottle (1954, lám. 46B). The difference may be due to slovenliness on the part of the artist, but is interesting in that it suggests that the round eye was somehow foreign to Moche artistic

canons. Later figures, in fact, show an increasing tendency to depict the eye of the Moon Animal in accordance with the more common Moche convention of an oval shape with pointed ends. However, the round eye remains the most common throughout the Moon Animal's history.

Ear: Behind the eye socket the pointed ear is placed. This is similar in form to those shown on Moche dog, fox, or feline representations. The ear may be attached to the back of the neck or the head, or to the eye socket itself. Although the ear is prominent by virtue of its size relative to the head, it is seldom represented in detail. It is always shown in outline and often has a center line, apparently indicating the fold or edge curl typical of animal ears.

Crest: The most prominent characteristic, as well as the least naturalistic feature of the head is the crest. This crest is totally unlike any structure found on a living animal and must therefore be considered an indication of mythological or supernatural status. All Moon Animal representations have this crest and variations in its form are apparently idiosyncratic. The crest rises vertically from either the nose or the top of the head. After a short vertical distance it makes a right angle and continues to the rear of the animal a distance of from one half to more than the total length of the animal's body. In Moche III and Moche IV painted representations the crest more or less parallels the body of the animal (fig. 1-5). The crest ends in a curlicue or half spiral which curls either up or down. There seems to be a slight preference for downward curling spirals. Considerable variation is visible in the way in which the terminal curlicue issues from the end of the crest. It may simply be an extension of the bottom line of an outline crest or it may be an extension of an entire crest. An occasional example has a double curl, one facing up, the other down. These are associated with crests drawn with a double outline, each line ending in its own curl. The curlicue or spiral ranges in size from quite small to large enough to meet or to intersect the animal's head or body. The crest proper may be drawn as a single line, a double line, or a thick solid line. The horizontal portion of the crest is often further decorated. Very infrequently the vertical part is also decorated, always with elements identical to those on the horizontal section of the crest.

Crest embellishments: The decorative elements used on crests are mainly solid color or outlined stepped triangles. A variation on these is a plain solid or outlined triangle with a line of smaller triangles arranged along the hypotenuse creating a slightly more elaborate stepped triangle effect. The other common crest ornament is a row of wave elements. Both the stepped triangles and the wave elements are common geometric motifs in Moche art and are found in many contexts and media, generally used as linear dividers of major design zones or as an edging on borders.

Minor nonessential elaborations: There are further decorations which may appear on the head of the Moon Animal and seem to be related to the style and elaboration of the individual painting rather than to any essential feature of the creature. Among these features are elements such as lip lines and a teardrop shape or a line extending from the eye onto the cheek. A zigzag may occur in the same place and the cheek

may be striped as if it were wrinkled. All of these patterns occur mainly on the more elaborately drawn outline Moon Animals and the majority of depictions do not show such elaborations.

Body: The body of the Moon Animal is long and sinuous. There is a certain amount of variation in the length of the neck which is sometimes so long as to be almost reptilian and at other times is relatively short and thick. The entire body is shaped essentially like a horizontal "S" with the head high on one extreme and the back formed by the downward curve which then rises to form the haunches. The hindquarters are heavy as is common on quadrupedal mammals. The body of the Moon Animal in these Moche III and IV representations is dark in color. Several examples are known which show a white back or belly stripe (Kutscher, 1954, lám. 45 and 46A).

Legs: The hind leg is frequently formed by a smooth continuation of the line forming the haunches, but may be painted as a long, separate addition. The foreleg is sometimes a smooth continuation of the neck and sometimes a separate addition (figs. 1-5; Kutscher, 1954, lám. 47). The limbs, like the body, are solid color although the exact form is quite variable. What seems to be essential in depicting the limbs is that they be bent as if the animal were sitting or crouching and that there be large claws on the feet.

Feet and claws: On some examples of the Moon Animal the feet are shown in a detailed manner in the form of feline-like paws with five distinct claws (fig. 1), on others the claws are simply lines extending from the main part of the foot, itself simply an extension of the leg (fig. 2). The extreme form of this stylization of the foot indicates feet and claws as no more than a series of curved lines attached to the ends of the legs. Feet have no more than five and no fewer than three claws.

Leg and foot variant: Only one known example shows any variation from the pattern described. This piece, illustrated by Kutscher (1954, lám. 46A), shows a Moon Animal with a humanlike rear leg and foot of the same form as is seen on contemporary illustrations of slightly anthropomorphized fishes and on bean warriors. The front leg is the normal animal form but a triangular object is held in the hand/paw. Similar objects are often seen in the hands of deity figures engaged in battle or in the display of a trophy head, or in the hands of various monstrous creatures.³ There seems to be little reason to doubt that the triangular object is a stylized representation of a variant form of the well known Peruvian tumi or transverse bladed knife. In more detailed representations in Moche art the knife is shown as being rather triangular and as having a carrying (?) cord, often ornamented with a zoomorphic tassel. Knives such as these, either detailed or stylized, are a common attribute of supernaturals in Moche art. Some of these supernaturals, represented with human limbs and nonhuman bodies, are shown with other human artifacts such as trophy heads, as well as these knives. It is possible that the artist was simply improvising on the Moon Animal theme by adding other mythic attributes. Such addition of mythical attributes is rare in Moon Animal depictions and this single known example shows clearly what are the important, immutable attributes of the Moon Animal and what are

elements which are subject to artistic license.

Tail: The tail of the Moon Animal is large, often as large as the crest. It issues from the general area of the hip joint and either curves smoothly upward (Kutscher, 1954, pls. 45, 46A) or makes an abrupt angle and rises straight up (figs. 1-4). It rises to a point above the level of the haunches and then either curves or makes a right angle, extending toward the head. Often the crest and tail are on the same level and almost touch above the middle of the back of the animal. The tail is generally of the same form as the crest even to the terminal curlicues. This tendency is particularly evident on the painted examples wherein the crest and tail are of much the same size and are represented in a nearly identical manner with the same set of decorative motives, if there be any further decoration of the crest and tail. Press molded Moon Animals generally have a somewhat simpler and smaller tail which may not turn toward the head, but simply end in a curl (fig. 3).

Essential attributes and permissible variants

From these Moche III and Moche IV painted depictions, all associated with astral and/or lunar symbols, we can define what attributes the Moon Animal must have to be a Moon Animal and not some other composite zoomorph. It must have a long muzzle with an open mouth and a protruding tongue. The teeth are important, but not absolutely essential as shown by the example illustrated in fig. 5. The eye must be large and the head must have a pointed ear. The long body is also characteristic, but its exact form and body markings, as well as details of the formation of the limbs are again matters of style, not of identity. Long claws are essential, although their exact form and number may vary. Finally the crest and tail are essential. These are large, together usually occupying as much space as the body and limbs of the animal. The terminal curlicues are important features but their exact design is apparently dependent on stylistic factors as is the decoration of the crest and tail. Decoration, in the form of common geometric motifs, may be placed on either crest or tail. If only one is decorated it is the crest. The motifs used and their elaboration as well as small decorative touches such as the lines around the mouth, on the cheek, in the ear and stripes on the body seem to be related to the overall elaboration of the vessel rather than serving to identify this figure as distinct from all other mythical animal figures.

Additional variants on press molded examples

A further set of allowable variations are apparent in those Moon Animals which are press molded rather than painted. Better put, these examples are press molded and painted, with the shape of the animal and major features indicated by relief and the details shown in paint. Press molding was largely a mass production technique in Moche ceramics, commonly used for making rather ordinary vessels. Because of this we have little idea how common the Moon Animal may have been as a motif on these vessels as they do not find their way into exhibits or illustrated art books. The variations in depiction that can be documented from the small sample available seem to be due more to the technique of manufacture than to any major differences in iconographic

elements. Baessler (1902-1903) and Kutscher (1954) illustrate two of these vessels, both apparently early Moche III in style. These pieces are in the same collection and seem also, from details of painting, etc., to be rather close to each other in time of manufacture. The piece illustrated by Kutscher (1954, lám 48A) and reproduced here as fig. 3 clearly shows the animal standing in its moon. An identical scene is shown on both sides of the vase. The depiction is quite simple in silhouette and details shown may have suffered from some loss of the fugitive black paint.⁴ The animal is obviously the same entity represented in the painted examples since the identifying characteristics are all the same except for the shape of the body, which in the press molded example is shorter and thicker. Facial detail and wave decorations on the crest are painted rather than molded. The moon is striped horizontally. Another interesting variation is that the animal's body is shown with spots.

The piece illustrated by Baessler as fig. 238 and reproduced here as fig. 4 is again very definitely a Moon Animal, although the association between it and celestial symbols is secondary. In this piece the press molded pattern is different on the two sides, although both designs are enclosed in raised frames of identical semicircular shape. Here the Moon Animal has a relief ornamented tail and crest but again details of the body and other features are painted in fugitive black on the basic red-brown and white color scheme of Moche pottery. The designs on the body include stripes, dots, and curved elements (which are somewhat erased). This figure does not have a protruding tongue although the possibility exists that the tongue was originally painted in fugitive black (as on Kutscher's example) but had been erased to the point that Baessler's artist did not notice it.⁵ The other side of the vessel shows two stars. The exact form and details of these are unclear because the drawing indicates that they were damaged. The artist attempted to reconstruct the painted decoration on the star faces but did so within the confines of European style, putting little faces of a totally non-Moche type on them. The preservation of the outlines, due to the press molded technique, shows clearly that the figures were stars. As Moche ceramic decoration commonly shows figures which are either identical or closely related on opposite sides of vessels, one cannot really doubt that there was some connection in the artist's mind between stars and the Moon Animal. The unusual shape of the semicircular frame around both motifs may even have been meant to suggest the moon.

A third press molded Moche III vessel is illustrated by Benson (1972, fig. 2-15). This is a more elaborate press molded vessel with a cubical body. The stirrup and spout, to judge from the photograph, seem to be reconstructed. The clear lines of the press molding and the dot and circle stars suggest a placement rather early in Moche III. Four identical Moon Animal figures are placed, one on each side of the vessel body, each within a raised square border. The Moon Animals were once painted and a bit of fugitive black paint is visible on one of the two figures shown in the photograph. The raised border has row of painted stars all the way around. The Moon Animals shown on this piece share all the diagnostic characteristics with those already described. The fugitive black paint, now almost erased, suggests a spotted body pattern. The major difference between these Moon Animals and those described

earlier is that instead of standing on all four legs as do their later counterparts they are sitting on their haunches with their front legs held in the air. In this pose the Moon Animals entirely fill the square design areas.

When we compare the representations that are only painted to those that are both press molded and painted we see that, aside from variation in the thickness, decoration and position of the body, the vital attributes of the Moon Animal are the same.

Associated symbols

The stellar and lunar symbols associated with the Moon Animal show a somewhat greater range of variation. The moon itself is a solid color (occasionally striped) crescent with the concave side uppermost. The animal stands in it as if it were a boat. Star symbols may be outlined four-pointed stars with a dot and circle center, outlined five-pointed stars with the same center, four-pointed stars with rays, or any of several other forms (see figs. 1 and 2 and Kutscher, 1954, láms. 45, 46A, 47). There can be little reason to consider these motifs as anything other than star representations, occurring as they do about the moon. In some pieces they occur alone, around the animal, but without the moon (fig. 5). The number of stars is apparently not significant so that they must be taken as a general symbol for the night sky, not as the representation of a specific constellation.

Origin of the Moon Animal

The pieces described above, and others similar to them, are the earliest known associations of the Moon Animal with astral and/or lunar symbols. They are all Moche III or later. From Moche I and II there are a number of painted, press molded, and full figure modeled vessels which show a figure which has the same attributes as the Moon Animal and is certainly to be identified as that being. None of these figures has any indication of associated stars or moon. It is, of course, possible that the association of the Moon Animal and the moon was a later phenomenon. However, none of the early (Early Horizon and early EIP) styles depicts background detail or other elements which clearly delineate the context of the main figure. The earlier representations do show that there was no important change in form between the figures without astral/lunar symbols and those without them. Since there is even some temporal overlap between the depiction of figures with the stars and moon shown and those without, we may be dealing simply with a stylistic shift to elaboration of scenic context. One might also advance the hypothesis that it was considered necessary to underline the association of this creature when it began to be depicted in areas farther afield than the home of its original appearance or cult. However, we know so little of regional Moche styles that this hypothesis is not testable.

What we do know of Moche ceramic chronology shows us that the Moon Animal made its appearance as a complete entity; there are no formative versions of the Moon Animal known. Many Moche themes (and individual motifs) can be shown to have had direct antecedents in either the

earliest Moche phases or in the Salinar and Gallinazo styles which immediately preceded Moche on the north coast. Others can be demonstrated to have had an even greater antiquity, appearing first in the Early Horizon (ca. 1200 B.C.- 200 B.C.) with one or another of the coastal Chavin related styles. Still other elements can be shown to have developed within the Moche style itself. But not the Moon Animal.

Relationship between Moche and Recuay

To anyone even remotely familiar with the archaeology of northern Peru a single look at the Moon Animal, especially the one which sits on its haunches, suggests its origin. The Recuay culture of the highlands behind the north coast valleys flourished and probably reached its fullest development during the early centuries of the Early Intermediate Period, contemporary with the formative period of the Moche culture. Recuay and Moche territories were not only contiguous; Moche took over part of the Recuay area during phases III and IV.⁶

If one looks at early Moche ceramics with Recuay in mind one can see quite a lot of Recuay influence on the art style or, perhaps better put, on elements of Moche material culture which are then represented in the art style (headdress ornaments, jewelry, textiles, etc.). The relationship between Moche and Recuay is unknown in concrete terms. Recuay sites are largely unexplored. The Santa Valley, where these two cultures are known to meet has been the object of an intensive survey (Donnan, 1973). Here, although only the Moche periods have been described in published form, it is obvious that by Moche III-IV Recuay was definitely on the wane and that certainly Recuay influence in Moche art from this time on is much diminished, if not entirely absent.⁷

Recuay stylistic elements

Recuay art is very different in its overall conception from that of Moche. Recuay pottery, which is the aspect of the art we know the most about, is basically a painted style with the modeling subordinate to the painted decoration. Although modeling is common it is neither so detailed nor so realistic as that of Moche and depends for most of its effect on the painting which defines the relief, or specific aspects of the relief, and sets the relief off from the body of the vessel. Full figure modeled pieces in Recuay similarly depend upon painting for most detail.

Painted decoration: Recuay painting is in red and white slip with a black resist paint being used to form elaborate positive and negative patterns upon the slipped areas. The slip is used mainly to delineate areas which are then filled with this postfired black painting. The decorations are arranged in squares and rectangles separated by narrower rectangles or bands of various ornaments.

Recuay zoomorphs: The major rectangular areas are usually filled with a single design element, most often a stylized zoomorphic figure, commonly a bird or a quadruped. The mammalian figures are generally shown in profile, sitting with a humped back and a raised front paw. Other characteristics include the long muzzle which is squared off on the end and filled with teeth and a tongue, often an

outlined nose with a curlicue decoration on it, and a large circular eye. Many figures have large pointed ears as well. The feet end in long claws. However, the single most original element of Recuay representations of (apparently) supernatural birds and quadrupedal animals is that they have a crest issuing from the head. The crest, plain or decorated, seems to be the common supernatural signifier and many types of animals are shown with it.

Recuay and early Moche Moon Animals: When one begins to sort Recuay painted figures one can see that the commonest motifs are a bird, a double headed snake, and a figure which is basically identical to the Moche Moon Animal (fig. 6). It shares with the Moche figure all of the essential elements and most of those elements which are common but not essential in the Moche figure, elements such as the crest and tail decorations, nasal curlicues, and body spots and stripes. Recuay Moon Animals are usually shown in the seated posture because of the specific aesthetic canons of Recuay decoration (but cf. Tello, 1923, figs. 3, 5, 10), particularly that a given space must be filled by the major figure it contains. Early Moche Moon Animals, it should be noted, are themselves usually shown seated rather than standing on all fours. Even the full figure modeled pieces which are a Moche innovation are shown seated.⁸ The adaptation of a Recuay painting to Moche full figure modeling is evident in fig. 7 where a Moche I vessel in the form of the Moon Animal has been modeled with the crest and tail shown in painted relief on the body of the container. The body of the Moon Animal is indicated by painting and the effect is a curious amalgamation of Recuay and Moche ideas of how painting and modeling should be combined.

The Moon Animal in Recuay art

Unfortunately we know nothing of the identification of the Moon Animal in Recuay art. The Moon Animal is one of a series of supernatural figures used to decorate, generally speaking, the more elaborately painted and modeled pieces. It is possible that there is some association between the painted and modeled decoration, that birds are associated with one sort of scene, animal, etc., Moon Animals with another and snakes with yet a third.⁹ The detailed iconographic study of Recuay art that might give us this kind of information remains to be done.

From what work has been done it is known that circles, crosses, or other supposed star symbols are associated with various animals in Recuay ceramic decoration. Despite Tello's allegations of consistent associations between the Moon Animal and these symbols, a cursory check by the author of both Tello's illustrations (Tello, 1923) and photographs of approximately 200 Recuay pieces showed no such consistency.¹⁰ Rather, the crosses, etc., seem to appear as filler ornaments on those Recuay painted vessels which show a complex and crowded arrangement of resist motifs.

The origins of the Moon Animal within the Recuay style are also unknown. The Recuay culture occupied some of the same area as the Early Horizon civilization of Chavín. The precise relationship of these two cultures is not known, although a certain amount of continuity of symbols is evident. Supernatural birds, felines, perhaps the double headed snake

and a series of geometric ornaments which are common in Chavin art also appear in Recuay.¹¹ However, there is no immediately recognizable antecedent for the Moon Animal in Chavin ceramic or sculptural art.

Recuay origin of the Moche Moon Animal

The Recuay origin of the Moon Animal in Moche, though, is very evident. No other Moche representations of supernatural animals commonly have crests whereas this is the commonest form of supernatural signifier for animals in Recuay art.¹² Recuay design is balanced and geometric with individual patterns filling a given quadrilateral area. In early Moche art there was some attempt to delineate rectangular design areas (usually by stripes) and to fill these with balanced patterns but, as the common Moche globular forms do not lend themselves to this sort of layout, the attempt was soon largely abandoned. Most Moche vessels are balanced in pattern layout, but by having one to three (occasionally four or five) repeats of the same single motif. Design areas may be delineated by a painted line or a raised frame but the strict division into squares, rectangles and border bands of Recuay is seldom met with. One can see that the tendency in Moche design to place a single figure within an area that is wider than it is tall was probably instrumental in bringing the Moon Animal down onto four feet and lengthening his body. The earliest Moche Moon Animals (for example fig. 7) are seated in the same pose as their Recuay forebears. Even here there is a tendency to lengthen the body and to minimize the humped back. A Moche I vessel formerly in the Wassermann-San Blas collection (Wassermann-San Blas, 1938, no. 64) shows that the horizontal form of the Moon Animal had already appeared very soon after its original introduction into Moche art. The seated, hump-backed form does linger, however, and is used wherever a vertical design is desired. The Moon Animal appears to the end of its days in both poses, seated and standing, although the exigencies of standardized design areas soon made the standing form the more common.

Changes in the Moon Animal

The Moon Animal reaches the height of its popularity (as far as can be told) in Moche III and Moche IV in which phases it is generally painted or painted and press molded on stirrup spout bottles. At this time a figure which is probably the Moon Animal appears on textiles. As a decorative figure on ceramics, though, it occurs on pieces from most of the north coast.

The ceramic phase designated Moche V seems to coincide with some sort of breakup of the Moche state in the early Middle Horizon, reflected in the great diversity of local styles which rapidly evolved from a common Moche IV stylistic base. There is evidence of strong Huari influence, either from the sierra or from the central coast, in many of these styles. The relative chronology of Moche V and of the Middle Horizon in general on the north coast is not well understood although it is possible to delineate several regional substyles in a very general manner. In one of these substyles, probably from Moche or Chicama, a new variant of the Moon Animal appears. A vessel from the British Museum, illustrated by Tello (1938, pl. 10) and reproduced here as fig. 8, shows the Moon

Animal as part of a composite feline figure on the headdress of a portrait vessel. The form of the stirrup and the style of the painting leave no doubt as to the temporal placement of this vessel. A headdress formed by a triangular scarf over a pillbox cap is decorated with a very low relief painted representation of a feline figure. This feline is shown with the face of a humanlike fanged deity. The body and the headdress of this figure are painted with small outlined rectangles arranged in a regular manner, a type of decoration which is common in the Middle Horizon on the north coast. However, the unusual aspect of the headdress decoration is the headdress of the feline figure itself. One of the typical headdresses of the fanged deities (or one of the fanged deities) is a plain band with two streamers or hanks of hair issuing from it. These are often shown as curving upwards and then to the sides in two dimensional painted or press molded designs. During Moche V and into the Chimu culture of the Middle Horizon-Late Intermediate Period this type of headdress becomes very common and is usually associated with supernatural figures. These figures are probably related to or descended from one of the fanged deities of Moche although the fanged mouth itself becomes much less common in later MH and LIP pieces.¹³ In early representations the headdress with double tresses or streamers tends to be associated with a deity in animal or monster form (for example, Kutscher, 1954, lám 50B). The origin of this sort of headdress is not known. Streamers with animal or trophy head terminations are common in both coast and sierra art from the Early Horizon onwards. However, the Moche form may equally have evolved from the type of hair style clearly shown on some of the anthropomorphic monsters of Moche III and Moche IV or may be a later amalgamation of ideas from several sources. It is clear, though, that the double tress headdress becomes more and more common in the MH and LIP where it is associated with a number of important figures in the ceramic art. In the probably early Moche V painting of a feline bodied deity shown in fig. 8, the double tresses take the form of two Moon Animals rising from the top of the head of the feline. The Moon Animals are rather rectilinear, in low relief as well as painted and are attached to the head of the feline by both their tails and their crests. The only available photograph does not show the entire painting but is adequate to show the essential features of the Moon Animal. On the visible Moon Animal itself, the large ears, the triangle decoration of the crest, as well as details of the mouth and claws are painted in solid color. Although the crest has an unusual double form, being attached to the nose as well as to the back of the head, it would seem that this is to be interpreted as being more stylistic than meaningful. Horror vacui is a prominent feature of Moche V painted decoration and designs are commonly arranged to fill the available space as completely as possible. The use of the Moon Animal as a headdress is unprecedented in Moche art (as far as I know) and may be related to the personage depicted in the portrait.¹⁴ It seems more likely, though, that the unusual double Moon Animal is related to the double tress headdress of the supernatural feline and is not evidence of new influences from the, now defunct, Recuay culture.

A somewhat later (probably) and much different rendition of the Moon Animal is shown in fig. 9. This figure comes from a double spout and bridge bottle of a type which appears on the north coast apparently as a result of cultural influences from Pachacamac, at this time a very

important religious center of the central coast. In this example the Moon Animal is clearly shown in its moon in a manner which illustrates definitively the continuation of the Moche painting style well into the Middle Horizon. The provenience of the piece is undetermined.

Middle Horizon pottery from the north coast is not well known because of the paucity of controlled excavation in sites of this period and because of greater interest in the more spectacular earlier Moche and later Chimu styles. The occasional illustrated piece of this period gives some indication of a number of cultural influences from the sierra, from the central coast and, perhaps, from even farther away.¹⁵ These all work on a series of local styles which had a common origin in Moche IV. The result of these influences is the series of closely related ceramic styles which became united again under the aegis of the expanding Chimu kingdom. Regional differences are always quite apparent in Chimu pottery, although little has been done towards separating out local styles. One new iconographic device, apparently originating in the Lambayeque area is the crescent shaped headdress.¹⁶ This headdress grows steadily in importance as a signifier of important and/or supernatural status. The headdress seems to have originated in the crescent shaped ornament placed on top of the helmet in Moche costume. During the Middle Horizon the crescent becomes much enlarged until it, without the helmet, becomes the important element in the headdress. Although the crescent headdress began as a part of the outfit of humans and minor supernaturals, it becomes one of the two major headdresses seen on supernaturals in general.¹⁷ In this context we see it applied to the Moon Animal (figs. 10, 11).

Chimu representations of the Moon Animal are not uncommon and appear throughout the entire course of that style. Fig. 11 shows a stirrup spout bottle of the period just before the Inca conquest of the Kingdom of Chimor. This bottle has a typical Chimu representation of the Moon Animal. Here the crest has been replaced by the crescent headdress, which is somewhat toothed in a manner reminiscent of the decoration of the more conventional crest. The animal itself is shown sitting up with a slightly humped back and with tail and limbs curved to fit into the circular medallion. This layout of animal patterns is common on Chimu ceramics and the Moon Animal once again is usually shown seated rather than standing. The change of stance in response to standard design area form is clear proof that the position of the Moon Animal is a matter of pattern layout, not of meaning. The Moon Animal of fig. 11 is somewhat different from the earlier depictions, but its identity with the earlier representations is evident in the combination of individual features: the large eye, the pointed ear, the prominent claws, etc. Further proof of the identity of these somewhat modified figures with the earlier Moon Animal is presented in fig. 10 taken from Baessler (1902-1903, fig. 241), probably from a Chimu-Inca vessel. Here the Moon Animal is shown seated in its moon, placed within a circular medallion. The medallion is covered with the small raised bumps which are a common Chimu background decoration. This depiction of the animal in the moon is the latest known of the series. Shortly after this vessel was made the European invasion of Peru spelled an end to native religion, at least as manifested in ceramic decoration, and the Moon Animal passed into oblivion.

Interpretation of the Moon Animal

The significance of the Moon Animal in local religion can only be guessed at. Many of the Recuay and early Moche representations have spots on the body, a fact which led Tello to identify the Moon Animal as a feline, specifically as a jaguar (1923, pp. 204-255). This identification has been more or less accepted ever since, although there has been a certain amount of confusion concerning when a figure is a Moon Animal and when it is some other mythical zoomorph.¹⁸ Tello's identification was based on an analysis of both Recuay and Moche forms, but he is not explicit about the specific reasons which led him to make this identification. He identified the Recuay Moon Animal as a "felino idealizado" and related the Moon Animal figures to those of more realistic felines on the basis of the large claws and the arched body (Tello, 1923, pp. 206-209, figs. 1 and 2). Presumably the existence of spots on some of the Moon Animal depictions was also important in this identification of Moon Animal with feline, although the basis of his inference is never made explicit.

The prominent place of the jaguar in native South American folklore and mythology is well known.¹⁹ Most of the evidence comes from the tropical lowlands, but Tello constructed a complex argument that it was at least equally important in the Peruvian sierra (Tello, 1923). He argued further that the jaguar was associated with the sun, the moon, and the Pleiades, an argument which he used to strengthen his identification of the Moon Animal. There are some problems with this argument which need not concern us here.

There is some small evidence that in Recuay the Moon Animal and more realistic felines were equated in certain circumstances. Numbers of low relief sculptured stones, both lintels and wall plaques, have been found in the Recuay area (Tello, 1923, figs. 33-35, 37). Some of these have representations similar to those of Recuay pottery and they include the Moon Animal in a form identical to that shown on the ceramics. A common theme in both ceramics and stone is a human figure flanked by felines. In stone sculpture the felines are occasionally replaced by Moon Animals, arguing a certain amount of equivalence between felines and Moon Animals. However, as none of these plaques can be placed temporally (aside from a very general EIP attribution) there is no way of deciding if there was some evolution of one type of figure into another or if one is merely dealing with two similar types of illustration of entirely different mythological figures.

Lavallée has identified certain of the Recuay and Moche Moon Animals as a "dragon crêté" (1970, pp. 104, 106-107 and pl. 81), noting the resemblance of the former to the so-called crocodile god of the late prehispanic Panamanian Coclé culture.²⁰ The role of the reptile in Peruvian and other South American mythology is only now coming to be appreciated.²¹ That some association of the Moon Animal with water may have been considered is borne out by one depiction of the creature in which its moon has pendants hanging from the two cusps. These are shown as serpent forms in exactly the same manner as the double headed serpent, a figure which is usually interpreted as the rainbow (Kutscher, 1954, lám. 47).

It is evident that the folkloric arguments can be used to support either the crocodilian or the feline interpretation of the original model for the Moon Animal. A third possibility is simply that the Moon Animal is an imaginary creature with some features taken from various living animals and others being invented out of whole cloth, as it were. Certainly there is no doubt that some features, such as the crest, are imaginary. No animal living or extinct is known to have or to have had this sort of appendage. The decorations which are commonly placed on the crest and the tail are likewise not paralleled by any natural feature of either a feline or a reptile. The form of the body seems to be more dependent upon external factors such as the shape of the space to be decorated than upon any veracity of rendition of either a feline or a reptilian body. Even the spots, prima-facie evidence of jaguardom according to many are not placed in such a manner as to suggest that they are anything but further decoration.²²

There is no lack of precedent for imaginary animals in northern Peruvian art. From the Early Horizon on, that is to say, from the first appearance of representational art styles on pottery, numbers of animal figures with mythological attributes appear. In both Recuay and Moche art there are composite creatures such as the toothed raptorial bird of Recuay and the Strombus monster of Moche. An identification of the Moon Animal as an imaginary creature would relieve both the proponents of the reptilian and the feline schools from the necessity of explaining motifs such as the rather nonreptilian body or the nonfeline ear.

The association with astral and lunar symbols is something else entirely. The Moon Animal may be imaginary; in sensu strictu it most certainly is. There is no denying the association of the Moon Animal with the moon from Moche III on. Arguments for the same interpretation of this figure in Recuay art are not so convincing. The very large round eye may possibly be a luminous symbol as may be the crest (Tello, 1923, pp. 209 ff.), but the various circles, crosses, hook shaped devices, and zigzags that are occasionally found in the space surrounding a painted Moon Animal may just as well be filler ornaments as luminous symbols. Also, the crest is found on many other figures in Recuay art. Are we to identify them all as luminous figures associated with the heavenly bodies? Perhaps we are, but the case has not been proven or even presented.

In any event some sort of association of the animal with the moon, as a guardian, as a devourer, or perhaps simply as a figure seen in the moon's markings is evident from Moche III on. As the figure was borrowed with few, if any, changes from Recuay and as it kept its basic Recuay form for centuries in spite of this being at variance artistically and iconographically with Moche conventions, we can probably assume with a certain degree of security that there was an association with the moon in the Recuay culture, too. Until Moon Animals are found associated with the moon in Recuay art, though, this suggestion can only have the status of speculation. Whatever its exact meaning in Recuay, once adopted by the coastal dwellers, the Moon Animal seems to have been remarkably conservative. Aside from a change in the headdress during the latter part of the Middle Horizon and some rearrangement of the body posture to

fit the ground being decorated, the Moon Animal retained the same attributes and apparently the same meaning for at least 1000 years. This longevity is not known to be equalled by any other mythical figure on the north coast.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Margaret A. Hoyt of Wesleyan University, Connecticut, for information concerning the history and development of the later Middle Horizon and Late Intermediate Period Chimú pottery styles especially as regards specific figures and motifs. I am also indebted to Raphael X. Reichert of California State University, Fresno, for reading and criticising an earlier version of this paper and to Patricia J. Lyon for nagging me to finish the manuscript. None of these people is, however, to be held responsible for the conclusions I have drawn from the information so kindly made available to me.

June 15, 1976
revised January 3, 1977

NOTES

¹All phase attributions of pieces discussed are by the author.

²Only one example from Moche III-IV without teeth is known to the author, the piece shown in fig. 5. As all of the other attributes of the Moon Animal are present and the figure is surrounded by stars, there can be little doubt concerning the identification of this figure.

³For example, Kutscher, 1954, láms. 50B, 51A, 51B, 53 inter alia.

⁴Fugitive organic black paint is common on Moche I-III vessels. It is very fragile and usually in a poor state of preservation even when the huaquero, the antiquities dealer/collector, or the museum staff have not washed the vessel in soap and water, a practice which is all too common and which removes organic black paint.

⁵It is important to remember, when looking at any reproduction of an art style foreign to the reproducer, that there may be omission or distortion of minor or damaged elements of the original.

⁶See Larco Hoyle, 1963, who discusses Recuay territory later incorporated into the Moche "kingdom."

⁷The appearance of Recuay elements in later Moche pieces is probably due to these elements having been incorporated into the Moche style or to their occurrence being purely incidental and tied to the depiction of historical and legendary figures or events.

⁸In Recuay the Moon Animal is a painted motif, not a modeled one.

⁹Recuay elaborate ceramics tend to have figures modeled in the round arranged in a scene on top of a painted vessel.

¹⁰The author's sample includes photographs of pieces from the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima, the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, and various private collections in Peru, Colombia and the United States.

¹¹Again no systematic comparison of motifs, and frequencies and associations of these motifs, has been carried out. The double headed snake appears in coastal ceramic art of the Early Horizon.

¹²In Moche I and Moche I-II one sees an occasional crested animal of some other type. These, too, obviously have Recuay origins which can be determined on the basis of attributes other than the crest, but all drop out of the Moche repertoire very rapidly.

¹³I am indebted to Margaret A. Hoyt for specific information on the headdresses and headdress changes of Middle Horizon north coast ceramics. She is not, of course, responsible for the conclusions I have drawn from the pictorial material which she has provided.

¹⁴Lawrence E. Dawson of the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, who has studied Moche portrait vessels extensively, says that the subject of this one is unique.

¹⁵One of the origin myths of the Late Intermediate Period north coast cultures can be interpreted as indicating contact with Ecuador. See Rowe, 1948, p. 39.

¹⁶Margaret A. Hoyt, personal communication 1976.

¹⁷The other is the above mentioned double tress headdress.

¹⁸For example see Lavallée, 1970, pl. 91 in which the Moon Animal is misidentified as a simple form of the felinized iguana (Ravines, n.d., p. 42).

¹⁹See, for example, Furst, 1968; Tello, 1923; Kunike, 1923.

²⁰Lavallée, however, identifies both the Panamanian and Recuay figures of the "dragon crêté" as actually representing felines (1970, p. 104), repeating the same with regard to the Moche representations which she identifies as the crested dragon (1970, p. 107).

²¹See Lathrap (1973) and Rowe (1962) for discussions of crocodilians in Chavín and other cultures.

²²Spots are usually placed three on a side and depicted as solid or outlined circles, not as the rosettes of a jaguar.

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KEY TO ILLUSTRATIONS

Plate XI

Fig. 1. Moche III or IV painted Moon Animal. After Baessler, 1902-1903, fig. 237. This and all other drawings are by Thomas W. Weller.

Fig. 2. Moche III or IV painted Moon Animal. Redrawn from Kutscher, 1954, lám. 44B.

Fig. 3. Moche III painted and press molded Moon Animal. Redrawn from Kutscher, 1954, lám 48A.

Fig. 4. Moche III painted and press molded Moon Animal. Redrawn from Baessler, 1902-1903, fig. 238.

Plate XII

Fig. 5. Moche III painted Moon Animal. Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, 4-3134, Site F, Grave 22. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 6. Recuay resist painted Moon Animal. Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, 16-12114, no provenience. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 7. Moche I modeled and painted Moon Animal. Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima. Photograph by the author.

Plate XIII

Fig. 8. Moche V portrait vessel with relief painted Moon Animal on headdress. From Tello, 1938, pl. 10. Original in the British Museum.

Plate XIV

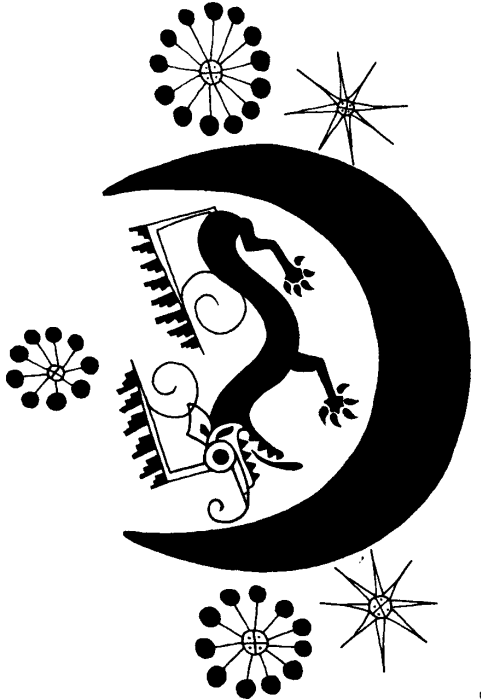
Fig. 9. Moche V painted Moon Animal from double spout and bridge bottle. Redrawn from Kutscher, 1954, lám. 49A.

Fig. 10. Chimú blackware press molded Moon Animal. Redrawn from Baessler, 1902-1903, fig. 241.

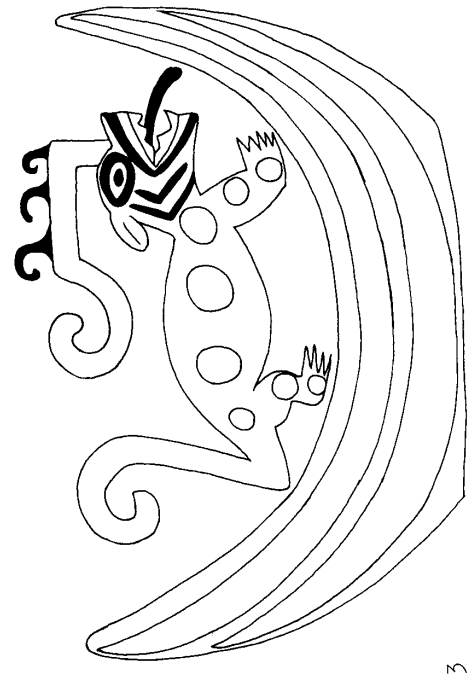
Fig. 11. Chimú blackware press molded Moon Animal. American Museum of Natural History, New York, B/3908. Photograph courtesy of Margaret A. Hoyt.



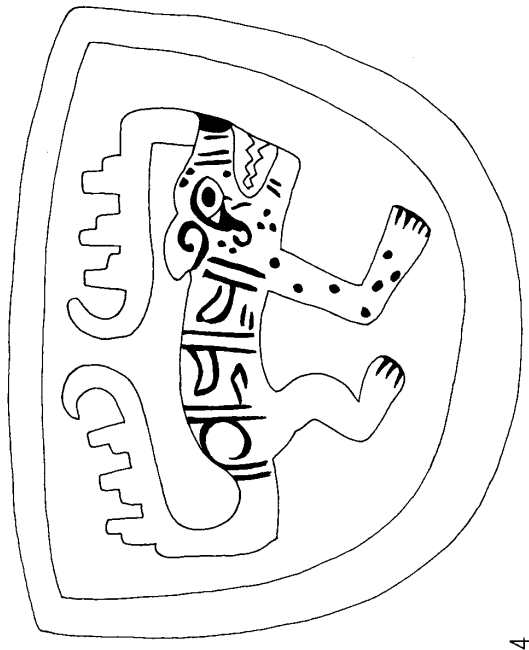
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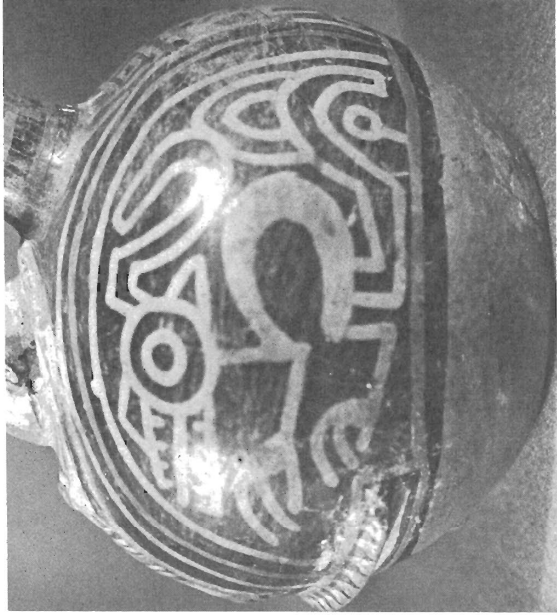


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Plate XI. Painted Moon Animals. Figs. 1, 2, Moche III or IV; figs. 3, 4, Moche III.



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Plate XII. Moon Animals. Fig. 5, Moche III; fig. 6, Recuay; fig. 7, Moche I. See Key to Illustrations.

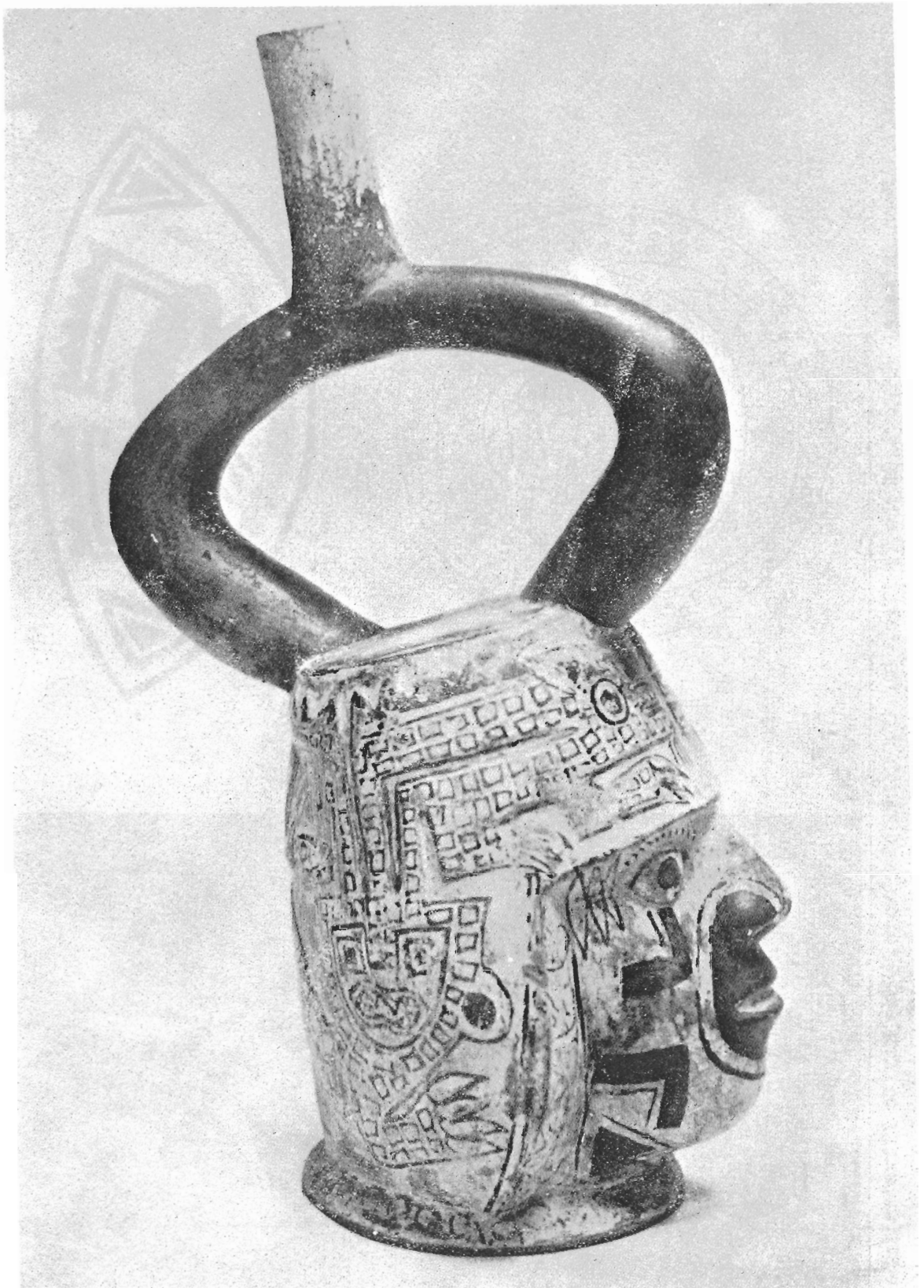
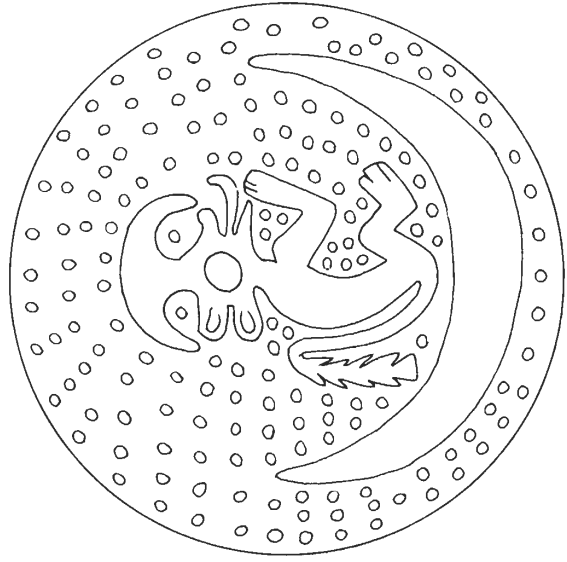


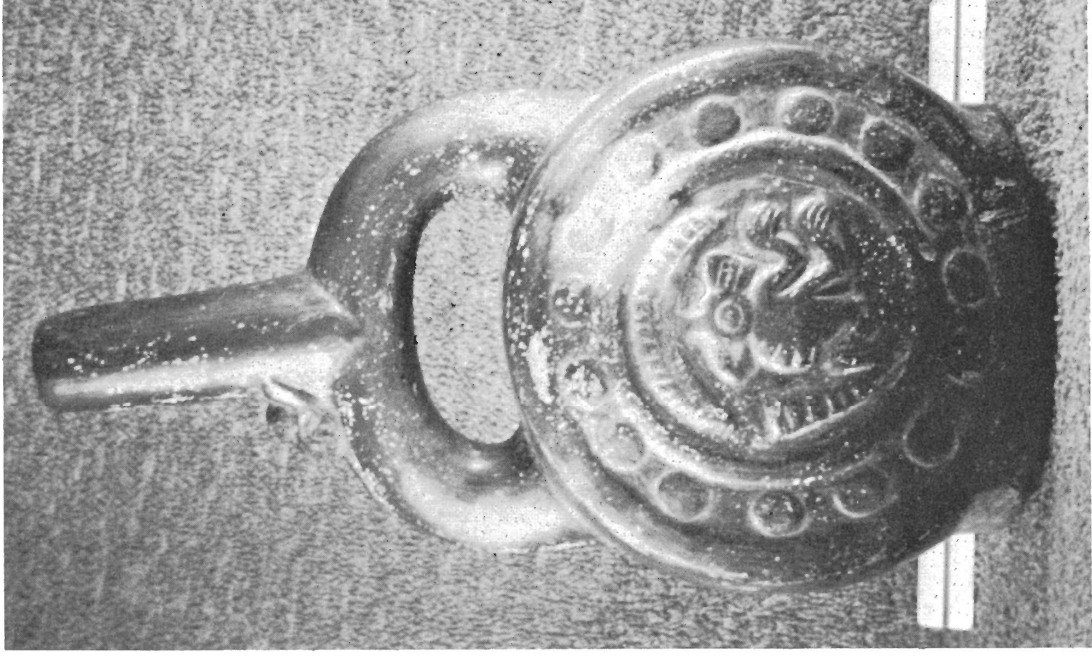
Plate XIII. Fig. 8, Moche V portrait vessel. See Key to Illustrations.



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Plate XIV. Moon Animals. Fig. 9, Moche V; figs. 10, 11, Chimu blackware. See Key to Illustrations.