

STYLISTIC VARIATION IN PROLIFEROUS NASCA POTTERY

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Although the evolution of the Nasca ceramic style throughout its 800 year history was marked by remarkable continuity and incremental modifications, there were two time periods when there were bursts of rapid innovation and change. The first of these was in Phase 5 when the first proliferous elements were introduced into the style. As defined by Roark (1965:2) "...in the Proliferous substyle the proportion of geometric designs is greater, and representational themes often include abstract elements as part of the design. Large numbers of rays and tassels are appended to many of the designs, particularly those depicting mythical subjects, producing an impression of almost infinitely multiplied elements...". Mary Blagg (1975) went on to discuss further the introduction of bizarre themes in Nasca Phase 5 and suggests that initially, three contemporaneous "substyles" existed: a conservative substyle that maintained the strongest continuity with the past by depicting gradual changes in form and design; a progressive sub-style which sees proliferous elements added to the traditional themes; and a bizarre sub-style which is marked by the introduction of radical new motifs and changes in the formal canons of style. Blagg argued against outside influence as a factor in the bizarre innovation of Nasca 5, suggesting that the change was produced by an internal religious revolution initiated by the elite (Blagg 1975:67-68). The short life of this bizarre sub-style is attributed to the conservatism of the populace who "preferred a more 'classic' iconography and who probably also rejected the esoteric cult on which the bizarre style may have been based" (Blagg 1975:69).

While Blagg's theory about an internal religious revolution by the elite needs further substantiation, her argument for an internal source of the bizarre innovation in Phase 5 seems valid. The main changes that occurred in the art were modifications to an existing corpus of designs, not the sudden introduction of new traits traceable to other outside artistic traditions.

The second period of rapid innovation occurred in Nasca Phase 7, a time when Nasca prestige and influence appears to have reached its greatest extent. Nasca influence ranged from the Cañete Valley in the north to Acarí in the south, and up the tributaries to influence the Ayacucho region of the highlands, an area extending 300 kilometers along the coast and 220 kilometers inland (Fig. 1). I will attempt to demonstrate in this paper that at the same time the Nasca Culture was influencing those groups with which it came in contact, foreign influences were also affecting Nasca, causing much of the variation seen in the pottery. Unlike the earlier Nasca Phase 5 spurt of innovation which Blagg argues was internal, there is ample evidence to suggest that the changes taking place in Nasca Phase 7 pottery were stimulated by contacts with, or ideas flowing from sources outside the Nasca realm. This paper will concentrate on the variation within Nasca Phase 7 and the probable sources of this phenomenon.

continuations of forms found in earlier phases, but some of these major shape categories disappear from the sequence during Phase 7 and other new shapes make their debut (Fig. 2).

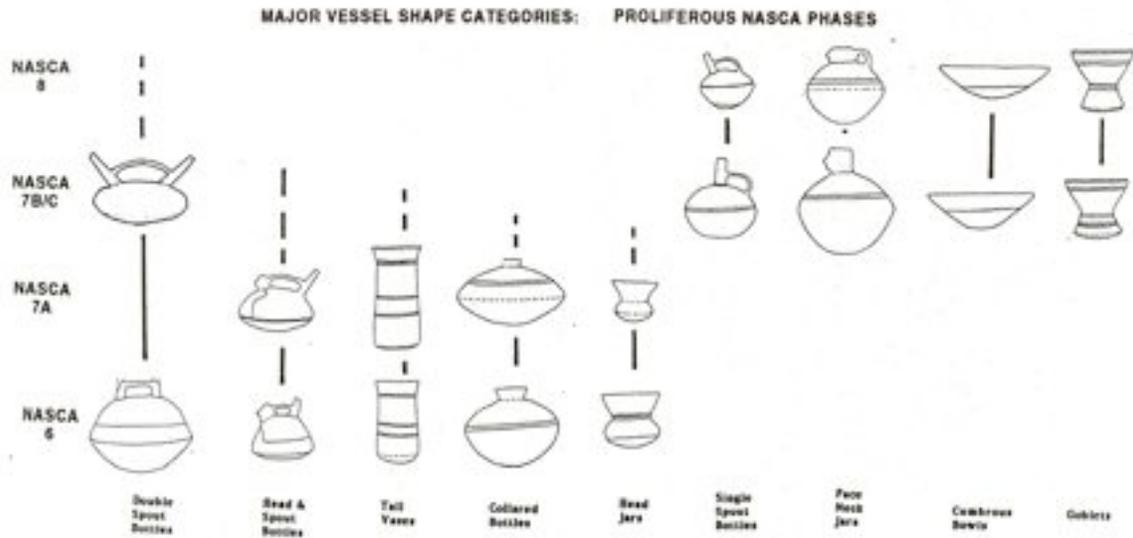


Fig. 2

The appearance of new traits in an art style can usually be attributed to one of three mechanisms: local innovation, archaism or the revival of earlier themes, or the effect of foreign influences. While all three vehicles were operative in Nasca Phase 7, I will argue that the major changes in the style were due to foreign influences coming mainly from the coastal region. Space constraints do not permit a complete elaboration of this data, but as an example I will discuss variation in the depiction of the human form in Nasca 7A.



Fig. 3

Themes of warfare are very common in Nasca Phase 7 as they had been in Phase 5, suggesting that conflict and expansion had some effect on the propensity for innovation and stylistic change during these times. Warriors are among the most common themes, and they afford a prime example of the variation I have referred to. In the earlier Nasca phases, warriors were almost always portrayed in a frontal or full-faced mode (Fig. 3). In Nasca Phase 5 warriors were drawn in profile, often with the combatant dressed only in a loincloth

holding an atl atl upon which is perched a parrot (Fig. 4). These human figures are a direct continuation of the human form as seen in the earlier phases.



Fig. 4

have changed from the more curvilinear Nasca expression to a more angular type of expression, including a hawk-like nose and open mouth, sometimes exposing teeth. Finally, the warriors in these scenes are surrounded by flying missile stones, clothing, and many other unidentifiable elements (Figs. 5 and 9).

By Nasca Phase 7, warriors appear in a variety of forms, some in manifestations which are quite alien to the style. For example, many warriors now are depicted holding "feather staffs" in their hands, along with round-headed clubs in addition to the more familiar atl atls and spears (Figs. 5 and 7). The clothing worn by these individuals is a combination of traditional Nasca style loincloths and fringed shirts, with the addition of new varieties of head ornamentation. These warriors are often drawn as if running, or in motion, a concept heretofore alien in the Nasca style (Figs. 7 and 9). In addition, elements of the terrain (mountains, plants, and earth) are painted between the outstretched legs (Figs. 5, 7 and 11). Facial features



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Like others before me, I will argue that many of the "alien" traits just described are derived from the Moche style, not necessarily through direct or continuous contact, but by means of indirect diffusion. Gayton and Kroeber were the first to note resemblances between Moche and Nasca iconography in the 1920's (Gayton and Kroeber, 1927:16). Much later, in the 1960's, Lawrence Dawson of the Lowie Museum of Anthropology (now the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology) made great strides in examining the similarities and differences of the two styles. Unfortunately Dawson has not published his ideas, but he did compare representations of human activity in Moche IV and Nasca 7 pottery in a paper presented at the 13th annual meeting of the Institute of Andean Studies, Berkeley, California (Dawson 1973). Allison Paulsen in a paper presented in 1986 described a number of convincing attributes which suddenly appeared

in the Nasca style during Phase 7 which could only have been derived from Moche prototypes (Paulsen, 1986).



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Returning to the example of the warriors just discussed, Moche traits which appear to have been introduced into the Nasca style include the running stance of the figures (compare Figs 8 with 10), the depiction of the terrain, particularly between the legs of the running warriors (figs. 10, 11 and 12), flying objects on the battlefield (compare Figs. 5, 6, 8 and 9), the profile view of warriors, and certain facial features and elements of the costume (Figs 8 and 9). On the other hand, local innovation seems to account for other new traits, such as the use of different skin colors and the depiction of two or more different varieties of humans on a single vessel (fig. 13).

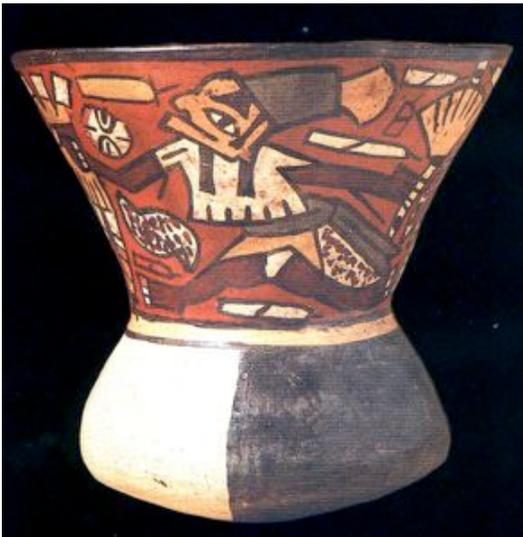


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

My own research incorporating a sample of 664 Nasca 7 vessels confirms the importance of Moche contact during Nasca Phase 7 and adds additional points of comparison. A unique vessel, but one definitely in the Nasca style, has been which

displays a stripped prisoner, his throat cut for decapitation, being attacked by predatory



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

birds (Fig. 14). This same motif is seen on several Moche vessels where the bound corpses of prisoners are being eaten by vulture-like birds (Fig. 15). The association of birds with ritual or battle scenes may also be attributed to Moche influence (Fig. 6). An unusual Nasca vessel portrays figures with birds flying around the masked principal actors (Fig. 16) who in turn hold copper decapitation knives. This vessel too has close



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

analogies in the Moche style (fig. 17) where the use of copper knives of the same form are common. Ritual scenes in which caches of trophy heads are enclosed in stepped pyramids (Fig. 18) demonstrate a blend of Nasca traits (the style of trophy head) and Moche traits (the depiction of pyramids and other architectural features).



Fig. 18

Other Moche traits include two new shape categories introduced in Nasca Phase 7: the single spout bottle and face-neck jars. Both forms are common in the Moche style but entirely lacking on the south coast until their introduction in Phase 7. A unique Moche-style stirrup spout bottle from the Nasca Valley painted with typical Nasca Phase 7 designs is further proof of Moche influence (Figs. 19a). Tello (1959: Fig. 120) illustrates another example, this one painted with the Phase 7 *affendämon* motif (Fig. 19b).

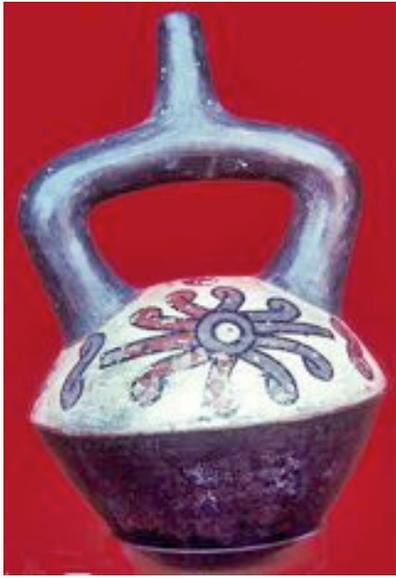


Fig. 19a



Fig. 19b

Moche influence seems to have been confined mainly to Nasca Phase 7 which corresponds to Moche Phase IV (Patterson 1966:102), a period of major Moche military expansion on the north coast. At one time it was believed that Moche influence extended only as far south as the Nepeña Valley (Proulx, 1968, 1973; Donnan, 1973), but recent work by Wilson (personal communication, 1990) in the Casma Valley has revealed the presence of many Moche sites there as well. Tabio (1977:112) reports the discovery of at least a half dozen vessels in the Moche style from the Huarney Valley. He also illustrates several vessels which he suggests were influenced by this style which he refers to as "Huarney-Mochicoide" (Tabio 1977: illustrations). The mechanism for the interchange of ideas between Moche and Nasca cannot be determined conclusively on the basis of the available archaeological evidence. One possibility was maritime contact between the two cultures.



Fig. 20

Moche iconography clearly depicts the presence of reed boats of a type that is still found in the same area of the north coast. Today these boats (known as caballitos or "little horses") are found principally in the village of Huanchaco in the Moche Valley, but they are small in size, ranging from 9 feet 8 inches to 11 feet 4 inches in length and 20 to 28 inches in width, and are designed to be occupied by a single fisherman (Gillin 1947:35; Benson 1972:72 for illustration). Judging

from the iconography, the Pre-Columbian Moche reed boats were much larger, capable of carrying 8 to 12 individuals along with provisions (Fig. 20; also see Kutscher 1983: figs. 314, 316, 318, and 319; Benson, 1972: Fig. 4.3 and 4.4). Today, Peruvian fishermen in wooden boats often go out to sea sixteen to twenty miles, stay overnight, and return the next day (Benson, 1972:71). The ancient Moche almost certainly had the same ability with their larger reed boats. Moche artifacts have been discovered buried deep in the guano deposits on several of the offshore islands such as Macabí, located approximately 9 kilometers off the north coast, between the mouths of the Chicama and Moche rivers (Kubler, 1948). Kubler also illustrates a Moche vessel in the Larco collection which appears to depict a group of Moche reed boats visiting the Guano Islands (1948: fig. 29). Unfortunately, claims by Hutchinson (1873, Vol. 1: 104-108) and later repeated by Kubler (1948:32 and Fig. 21) that Moche objects were found buried under 62 feet of guano on the Chincha Islands off the south coast of Peru have proved to be incorrect (Haberland, 1958). The objects illustrated by Hutchinson (1873, Vol. 1: 104) actually came from Macabí Island. The discovery of Moche objects on islands off the south coast of Peru would certainly strengthen the argument for a direct maritime contact between Moche and Nasca, but the lack of objects in the south does not categorically rule out the possibility.

Indeed there is some evidence that in addition to the well documented *titora* reed boats, the Moche may also have used balsa log rafts. Many scholars have argued that the Moche were unfamiliar with balsa rafts (which were present in south coastal Ecuador at this time), lacked the material with which to make them, and had no representations of them in their art to demonstrate their presence (Kosok 1951; Larco, personal communication, 1966 cited in Buse 1975:197; von Hagen 1966: 164). However, several Moche vessels have been illustrated which clearly depict the use of balsa log rafts, infrequent as this may have been (see Bird 1962: Fig. 42B; Buse *et al.* n.d.: Fig. 146; and other examples cited in Buse 1975:218-219). All the above evidence suggests that the Moche were proficient seamen capable of navigating the coastal waters off the Peruvian coast for both subsistence and commerce. How far south they traveled in their activities cannot be answered at this time, but the strong Moche influence seen in Nasca 7 pottery suggests they may have reached the south coast.

There is little archaeological evidence for direct overland contact between Moche and Nasca if one looks for Moche influence on the intervening cultures of the central coast. The principal central coast cultures during the Early Intermediate Period are known as Miramar and Lima (Patterson 1966), whose stylistic influences are found from Chancay in the north to Lurin in the south (Lumbreras. 1974:15). A review of the main ceramic attributes of these cultures, especially phases 5 and 6 of the Lima Style which is contemporary with Nasca Phase 7, reveals little that appears to have been derived from Moche, nor have any Moche trade pieces been reported from this part of the central coast. On the south central coast (the Cañete, Chincha and Pisco Valleys) the Carmen and Estrella Styles are contemporary with the Nasca sequence (Wallace 1977: Fig. 1). Specifically, Nasca Phase 7 is contemporary with the late Estrella style (Patterson, 1966:98-103). Although little has been published on these ceramics, there again appear to be no stylistic traits in this style which can definitely be traced to Moche influence. The

lack of a Moche presence in the valleys from Huarney to Ica gives added plausibility to the maritime contact hypothesis discussed above. Other possibilities to account for the influx of Moche traits on the south coast include stimulus diffusion, trade pieces and possible Nasca travels to the north. Whatever form the contact may have been, it is obvious that certain segments of Nasca society were familiar with the Moche artistic tradition and attempted to imitate it for reasons of prestige.

Early in Phase 7, Nasca influence spread out of the Nasca "heartland" of the Ica and Nasca valleys to include parts of the Chincha and Cañete valleys, especially the ancient cemetery site of Cerro del Oro in Cañete. Kroeber illustrates several Nasca 7 sherds, including one with a typical Nasca warrior (Fig. 21). A head and spout bottle from this site (Fig. 22) reflects the strong Nasca influence on this valley as does a figurine with a Nasca type head (Fig. 23). Although it is often considered outside the traditional boundaries of the Nasca interaction sphere, the Cañete Valley was clearly influenced by Nasca in Phase 7, just as Cañete and Chincha, with their "Topara" and "Carmen" traditions, contributed to the formation of the earliest phases of the Nasca sequence.



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

Estrella, the local style in Cañete, Chincha and Pisco during the latter half of the Early Intermediate Period, is characterized by the use of a white background, especially on the interior of bowls, scallop designs on the interior rims of bowls, and the use of black and white diagonal lines on an unslipped ground on the exterior of bowls (Wallace 1977:39). Estrella exerted much less influence on Nasca 7 pottery than the reverse, yet it is possible that the concept for cumbrous bowls, which start in late Phase 7, and the designs used on them, may have originated in the scalloped geometric designs seen on many Estrella bowls of Chincha and Cañete (Kroeber, 1937: Plate LXXII; see Kelly 1930 for a more complete analysis of cumbrous bowls).

Other significant changes occur in the latter half of Nasca Phase 7 corresponding to sub-phase 7B/C. The changes I refer to include the disappearance of several traditional shape categories including the popular tall vase, tall head jars, the head and spout bottle, and the collared bottle. New shapes that emerge include single spout and handle bottles, face neck bottles, cumbrous bowls, and goblets (Fig. 2). While many

traditional Nasca stylistic traits continue in this sub-phase, it is my contention that the major outside influences affecting the style now begin to shift from Moche to Highland sources.

Menzel coined the term "Trancas Strain" to describe highland influences affecting the Nasca style. These influences included background stippling of design areas, black line spirals attached to bars, and special patterns of zigzag lines along with a shift from white to red or black background colors on vessels with flat rather than rounded bottoms (Menzel, 1964). While first discovered on pottery from the Trancas tributary of the Nasca River, these influences were widely distributed in the Nasca Valley starting in late Phase 7 but exploded in number and variety in the succeeding Phase 8. Menzel argued that the source of these traits was the highland area near Ayacucho, and specifically in the Huarpa style. Huarpa was a local highland style that preceded Tiahuanaco influence in the Ayacucho area. Bennett, (1953), Benevides Calle (1971), Lumbreras (1960), Knobloch (1976) and Paulsen (1983) have all worked on Huarpa pottery. Paulsen identifies five "units" or phases of Huarpa pottery, the first three of which correlate with Nasca Phase 7. Huarpa 1 consists of vessels painted with solid rectangles and narrow parallel framing lines painted in black on a white slip. Huarpa 2 is marked by black and white vessels that contain Nasca Phase 7 elements such as spirals, hooks and dots. Huarpa 3 adds red paint to the previous black and white producing what Lumbreras calls Huarpa Tricolor (Paulsen, 1983:105-106). Nasca parallels are common. Paulsen (1983, Fig. 7a-d) illustrates Huarpa 2 potsherds with "zigzag" motifs which consist of triangular elements formed by a broad line which are then often decorated with small dots or fillers. Although zigzag lines are present in the Nasca style prior to Nasca Phase 7, a number of vessels with motifs similar to the Huarpa examples are found in Phase 7. Bennett (1953, Plate 12) illustrates Huarpa pottery with bars and spirals as well as black grid designs, all of which can also be seen on Nasca pottery of Phase 7 (Fig. 24). The use of triangular elements filled with dots as illustrated by Benavides (1971, Lámina 4) is also shared with Nasca. Finally, the shift to darker backgrounds, specifically red and black, can also be attributed to highland influences according to Menzel.



Fig. 24

elements suddenly appear on Huarpa ceramics, clearly demonstrating the contact between the cultures. As Nasca power waned in Phase 8 these foreign elements from the highlands

The case for Huarpa influence on Nasca during the latter half of Phase 7 is not nearly as strong or convincing as the case for Moche influence during the first half of the phase. However highland influences continue to grow much stronger in Nasca Phases 8 and 9 when the interaction between coast and highlands increases. It would appear that the first contacts with the Ayacucho area occurred toward the end of Phase 7 with the result that some Huarpa traits diffused to the coast and were incorporated into the Nasca style. At the same time, Nasca stylistic

became more prestigious and consequently more frequent on Nasca ceramics. Although Moche influence diminishes greatly in Nasca Phase 7B/C, it can still be seen in the sudden introduction of two new shape categories which are very characteristic of the north coast: the single spout bottle with handle and the face necked bottle.



Fig. 25

experimentation in the various tributaries.

Other foreign traits from yet to be determined sources also appear on Nasca pottery during phase 7, further complicating the scenario just presented. These include depictions of some humans in unusual masks (Figs 16 and 18), others dressed in mummy-like shrouds (Fig. 25), and a wide range of geometric designs with few antecedents in the style. An investigation of these traits will be the subject of another paper. As in Phase 5, there is a great deal of variation seen in the pottery of Phase 7 suggesting the presence of several yet to be defined sub-styles. Some of the variation may be local, reflecting

Conclusions

Nasca Phase 7 was a volatile time both with respect to the expansion of Nasca influence over a wide area, perhaps by military means, and in terms of the great amount of innovation seen in its ceramic style. I have argued that the primary source of this innovation was the Moche Culture of northern Peru, which either directly or indirectly influenced the Nasca region, and I believe that the motivation for the acceptance of the new traits was probably based on prestige. Although local innovation is present to a limited extent, it does not account for the broad range of new traits that begin suddenly in Phase 7. While Moche influence continues through most of Phase 7, it was strongest in Phase 7A. During the latter half of Phase 7, new influences begin to be seen in the Nasca style, this time coming from the highland area near Ayacucho which was now in direct contact with the coast. Further research is necessary to clarify the degree and nature of these outside contacts.

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Notes on the Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Map showing distribution of Nasca influence during Phase 7. Modified from Menzel 1977, Map 2b.
- Fig. 2 Chart showing changes in major shape categories from Phase 6 to Phase 8. Most outline drawings taken with permission from an unpublished paper by Steven Wegner entitled "An Analysis of Vessel Shapes and Shape Changes in Phases 6 Through 9 of the Nasca Sequence" (1975).
- Fig. 3 Nasca Phase 3 bowl painted with a typical frontal facing warrior. American Museum of Natural History specimen 41.2/7988.
- Fig. 4 Nasca Phase 5 warrior in profile view holding spears, a bola, and an atlatl on which is perched a parrot. After Seler 1923, Fig. 134.
- Fig. 5 Nasca Phase 7 double spout flask with "Feather Staff" warrior. Note the running position of the legs, the attempt to show terrain between the legs, the crested helmet, the round headed club, and the "floating" objects in the background.
- Fig. 6 Painting of warriors from a Moche IV bottle depicting the running stance, terrain between the legs, rounded helmet, and "floating" elements. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 98.
- Fig. 7 Close-up of Nasca Phase 7 "Feather Staff" warrior. Compare with Moche example in Figure 8. Museum of the American Indian 11/2758.

- Fig. 8 Moche IV warrior with features similar to the Nasca example in Fig. 7. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 81.
- Fig. 9 Nasca Phase 7 running warrior. Compare liver-shaped "floating" element (bloody clothing?), the form of the headdress, and the spotted "terrain" between the legs with similar elements on the Moche example in Fig. 10. After Lavalle 1986, Page 164.
- Fig. 10 Moche IV warrior with traits similar to the Nasca example in Fig. 9. After Donnan 1976, Fig. 37.
- Fig. 11 Nasca Phase 7 vase painted with "Feather Staff" warriors in a mountainous terrain. Private Collection.
- Fig. 12 Moche IV/V warriors in motion over a mountainous terrain. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 94.
- Fig. 13 Nasca Phase 7 vase with battle scene. Note the differing use of body colors and features which I am arguing are local innovations in the Nasca region. After Carmichael 1988, Illustration 19. Drawing by Elizabeth LeMoine. Field Museum of Natural History specimen 171355.
- Fig. 14 Nasca Phase 7 vessel depicting a decapitated prisoner of war whose body is being devoured by birds. Compare with Moche IV example in Figure 15. After Lavalle 1986, Page 166.
- Fig. 15 Moche IV painting of a dead prisoner being consumed by birds. Compare with Nasca example in Fig. 14. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 121.
- Fig. 16 Nasca 7 double spout bottle with unusual scene of a masked figure holding Moche style copper knives, strange birds, and trophy heads in a cache. After Lapiner 1976, Fig. 513. It is very likely that this vessel is a fake.
- Fig. 17 Moche IV mythical warrior holding a trophy head in one hand and a copper decapitating knife in the other. Compare with Nasca example in Fig. 16. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 219.
- Fig. 18 Detail of a scene on a Nasca Phase 7 double spout bottle portraying a ritual scene with a masked figure and a cache of trophy heads beneath a pyramid. Lima, Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, specimen C-13466.
- Fig. 19a Nasca Phase 7 stirrup spout bottle obviously copied from a Moche prototype but decorated with a typical Nasca 7 geometric motif. Lima, Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, specimen C- 4977.

- Fig. 19b Stirrup spout bottle with Nasca Phase 7 Mythical Monkey or Affendämon clearly demonstrating Moche influence during this phase. Tello 1959: Fig. 120.
- Fig. 20 Painting of a Moche V totora reed boat with several passengers and a cargo of pottery vessels. After Kutscher 1983, Fig. 318A.
- Fig. 21 Nasca style sherd (Phase 7) from the site of Cerro del Oro in the Cañete Valley showing a Nasca style warrior.. After Kroeber 1937, Plate 72-2.
- Fig. 22 Nasca style head and spout bottle from Cerro del Oro, Cañete Valley. After Kroeber 1937, Plate 73-4.
- Fig. 23 Nasca style figurines from the site of Cerro del Oro, Cañete Valley. After Kroeber 1937, Plate 70-3 and 4.
- Fig. 24 Nasca Phase 7 bottle with Huarpa influenced motif in the form of bars with attached spiral elements. Museum für Völkerkunde-Berlin specimen VA 50713.
- Fig. 25 Nasca Phase 7 vessel painted with human figures exhibiting foreign influences of unknown origin. Lima, Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, specimen C-10128.

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