



Introduction: The Lords of the Moche

- The site of Sipán in Peru is a dramatic example of archaeological research into the ancient Moche culture.
 - A series of spectacular tombs at dated at approximately AD 300.
 - The Moche also left pyramids, towns and villages, pottery and metalwork, and many other artifacts.
 - Looters discovered the first tomb at Sipán and would have destroyed the others if the police and archaeologists had not intervened.
 - The excavation at Sipán was not typical.
 - The contents of these tombs documented the wealth and power of the rulers of the Moche civilization.

Peru and the Moche

- The combination of the cold Pacific waters and the massive Andes Mountains works together to create one of the driest places on earth.
 - Preservation is very good in such dry conditions.
 - River valleys were the focus of a series of prehistoric societies before the Spanish arrived in AD 1533 and conquered the indigenous populations.

Peru and the Moche



Peru and the Moche

- Beginning around the time of Christ, a major civilization emerged in the Moche River valley on the north coast of Peru and rose to dominate the region over the next 500 years.
 - The center of this civilization was at the site of Moche itself, with a population of perhaps 10,000 people.
 - Two major pyramids — the Huaca del Sol and the Huaca de la Luna — dominate the horizon at Moche.
 - The Moche civilization encompassed a series of coastal valleys over a distance of 550 km from the north to the south.
 - Trade relations extended even further.

Peru and the Moche



Peru and the Moche

- There were large Moche centers with major construction in six of the river valleys.
 - Adobe bricks were used to build pyramids, temples, palaces, and fortresses.
 - People also lived in farmsteads and villages. They dug irrigation canals up to 100 km long to bring water from the Andes to their fields.
 - Corn, beans, guava, avocados, squash, chili peppers, melons, cotton, and peanuts were cultivated.
 - The sea and its estuaries provided an abundance of fish, shrimp, crabs, crayfish, and mollusks.
 - Domesticated animals included llama, guinea pigs, and ducks.
 - Wild plant and animals were collected and hunted as well.

Peru and the Moche

- The Moche created a variety of arts and crafts made of many different materials.
 - They left no written records.
 - Much of the art was associated with ritual and ceremony and with the upper crust of this society.
 - Textiles of cotton and wool were spectacular.
 - Moche pottery is among the most spectacular produced anywhere at anytime.

Peru and the Moche



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Peru and the Moche

- Moche society appears to have collapsed suddenly around AD 800.
 - The cause of their demise is unknown, but thought to have involved either conquest by outsiders or some kind of environmental or climatic catastrophe.

Discovery

- An important Moche center is found near the village of Sipán in the Lambayeque Valley

Discovery

- There are three massive pyramids and adobe structures known collectively as the Huaca Rajada.
 - The largest structure covers an area the size of a soccer field and rises almost 60 m, the height of a 20-story building.

Discovery

- The looting of archaeological treasures been probably been going on in Peru at least since the time of the Inkas.
 - People at Sipán have been robbing archaeological sites in the area for generations.
 - The Peruvian government outlawed looting and trafficking in prehispanic artifacts almost 50 years ago.

Discovery

- In November 1986, local looters started tunneling into the third and smallest pyramid at Sipán.
 - They dug deep into the structure and beneath the royal tomb of a Moche ruler.
 - The looters removed at least 10 large sacks full of extraordinary gold, silver, and gilded copper objects and destroyed other materials that were of no interest to them.
 - The director of the Museo Nacional Bruening in Lambayeque, Walter Alva, was called in by the police to help identify the stolen materials.
 - Alva decided to immediately organize an archaeological project.

Excavation

- Archaeologists uncovered three fabulous tombs in the small adobe pyramid at Sipán.
 - In each case, the central figure was elaborately costumed
 - The tombs were named after the presumed role of the individual in the central burial.
 - The tombs belonged to the Lord of Sipán, the High Priest of Sipán and the Old Lord of Sipán.

Excavation

- When the excavations began, the skeleton of a twenty-year-old man wrapped in a cotton cloth was found.
 - He was probably a warrior, intended as a guardian for the treasures below.
 - Beneath the warrior was a coffin.
 - The three shrouds were wrapped completely around the contents of the coffin.

Excavation

- The coffin yielded many artifacts.
 - There were spear points, a headdress with feather ornaments, an **ingot** of pure gold about the size of child's hand, and human figures of gilded copper.
 - There was also a large, headless figure of gilded copper with arms and legs.
 - Several complete pectorals were removed in a painstaking excavation process.

Excavation

- Some artifacts were found near the skeleton in the coffin.
 - There were four large nose ornaments, along with three pairs of ear ornaments.
 - It appears that the entire ceremonial wardrobe of the warrior-priest was buried with him.
 - The lower face was covered with a gold sheet shaped into a life-size replica of the upper neck, chin, mouth, and cheeks.
 - Many gold and silver artifacts were placed on or around the body.
 - Two elaborately decorated scepters were found.

Excavation

- More treasures were found below the body.
 - There was an enormous crescent-shaped gold headdress ornament, more than 60 cm in width.
 - Also found was a gold and a silver back flap, large metal fins about 45 cm in length that hung from the back of the costume.
 - Both backflaps depict a fanged human figure holding a sacrificial knife in one hand and a human head in the other.
 - There is a sense from the coffin and its contents that every item, every color, every material, every location was fraught with meaning.

Excavation

- The other finds in the tomb, surrounding the coffin, were also remarkable.
 - The tomb itself was a large chamber cut into the pyramid, approximately 12 x 10 m in area and about 6 m high.
 - Eight other individuals were buried in the tomb.

Analysis

- Much of the conservation of the materials from the tombs at Sipán will continue for years and the results are gradually being reported.
 - Various specialists are involved in the conservation and analysis of the materials.

Analysis

- John Verano of Tulane University was responsible for studying the human remains from the Sipán investigations.
 - He analyzed several hundred Moche burials from this area.
 - Most individuals who survived infancy and childhood eventually died between the ages of 35 and 40.
 - The average height for Moche males was 5' 3" and 4' 11" for females 147.

Analysis

- The skeleton in the coffin was a male, approximately 35-45 years of age and 5' 5" tall.
 - The teeth were in good condition.
 - The skeleton was badly preserved.
 - The back of the head was flat showed occipital flattening.
 - There is no evidence of the cause of death.

Analysis

- The metal objects in the tomb are both spectacular and technologically quite sophisticated.
 - The Moche were extraordinary metal workers.
 - There were hundreds of metal objects in the lord's tomb.
 - Many were gilded copper, made using a technique apparently known only to the Moche.

Analysis

- Science in Archaeology: The Center for Materials Research in Archaeology & Ethnology
 - Heather Lechtman is an archaeologist at MIT and an expert on ancient metallurgy.
 - She analyzed the plated artifacts and was able to determine how they were made.
 - Lechtman is one of the founders and the director of the Center for Materials Research in Archaeology & Ethnology.
 - The goal of the organization is to promote the use of science and engineering in the pursuit of archaeology and ethnography.
 - Members provide faculty, staff, and laboratory facilities for research and education in the technological study of cultural materials.

Interpretation

- The contents of the tomb and coffin are evidence of the indisputably high status and power of rulers who controlled the lives of their subjects.
 - The grave contents of the Lord of Sipán suggest he was a warrior and priest.
 - This individual was often depicted in paintings on Moche ceramics as the overseer of sacrificial ceremonies.

Interpretation

- Sacrificial offerings seem to indicate that key participants in the Sacrifice Ceremony were buried in the pyramid and that the event itself probably took place on or near the pyramid.
 - A series of small rooms contained ceramics vessels, quantities of wood ash and organic residues, llama and human bones, and a number of miniature copper objects.
 - These materials suggest the remains of feasting.

Interpretation

- Information on the nature of Moche society can be garnered from the burials in the tombs and those found in cemeteries and villages.
 - The important burials from the tombs reflect four different categories of individuals, including ruling lords, priests, military leaders, and the retainers and assistants to these individuals.
 - There was a series of sacrificial victims in the tombs that may represent slaves or prisoners or volunteers.
 - The most numerous burials in Moche society are of common people, interred in simple graves.

Interpretation

- Knowledge of the ideology of the Moche also comes from the finds and other sources of information.
 - Several different groups in South America associate color, metals, and concepts of the cosmos and afterlife.
 - Silver and gold had complementary cosmological meanings.

Interpretation

- Protecting the Past: Tourism and a New Museum in Lambayeque
 - Peru has benefited greatly from the discoveries in both material and ideological ways.
 - The Royal Tombs of Sipán Museum provides access to the most important archaeological finds from the site.
 - The Lambayeque region is now on the tourist route and Sipán is a major attraction, helping the economy of the region.
