

Recent Advances in Moche Archaeology

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Abstract The discovery of the royal tombs at Sipán in 1987 propelled Moche archaeology to the forefront of Andean studies. In the last decade, the study of Moche political organization and ideology through public architecture, cultural remains, funerary patterns, and iconography has forced the revision of previous conceptions about Moche state formation, urbanism, and the functioning of this complex society. Major advances in iconography, internal organization of urban centers, temples and domestic architecture, craft production, and mortuary patterns are embedded in a new chronology that supports a longer development and a more gradual collapse. The recognition of Moche as the first state in South America is still valid, but its monolithic character is rejected in favor of several autonomous polities. The number and size of potential Moche states are currently debated, as is the role of warfare and ideology in Moche state formation.

Keywords Moche · Chronology · Urbanism and state formation · Iconography · Collapse

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Moche civilization has attracted worldwide attention as a result of spectacular discoveries that include the royal tombs at Sipán, San José de Moro, Dos Cabezas, and, more recently, at Ucupe in the Zaña Valley. Emerging from the arid sand plains that border rivers flowing from the Andes, Moche civilization relied on irrigation to support a stratified society and the growing needs of its elite. Such control of water, which was seen as a gift from the gods, involved

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