

Parallels between Moche and Maya or other Mesoamerican Iconographies

This is my attempt [Lloyd Anderson] to pull together my personal view of some results of the Moche-Maya symposium, and to distinguish two classes of parallels.

I am more generous than many would be in including parallels in part B here, for two reasons. The first is that it encourages more research on the possible origins of the parallel. The second is that our research is almost always biased towards isolating cultures because of the loss of information from earliest stages (as iconography or writing on perishable materials, or simply not dug up yet).

So we should keep open the possibilities of historical connections unless there is apparent disproof (showing for example that older forms look less alike, therefore proto-inheritance from a common source is less likely).

Personally, I suspect that a better candidate for Mesoamerican connections with Moche is Teotihuacan rather than the Maya. Maya-Moche parallel features would then be a consequence of an older shared cosmology, and would preserve some cultural elements which we accidentally do not have from Teotihuacan.

Part A. Parallels which are most likely independently developed, not signs of historical connection whether in deep prehistory or borrowing.

(If a given choice is made the same way around the world in a majority of cultures of the same general type, then we would attribute to chance any similarities between any two such cultures. We would consider these to be independent developments.)

Part B. Parallels which might reflect either a deep connection in prehistory, as for cosmological concepts or early technologies, or else a later transmission through trade etc. "Might" here means that the parallels concern items which seem to me not completely obvious, at a minimum, that they are not the choices made in a majority of cultures of the same general type around the world (estimated, whether or not we actually have a survey of all such cultures).

Part A. Chance independent parallel developments

1. The three most elaborated narrative pottery traditions are
Greek, Mayan, and Moche. Independent developments.
2. Fineline drawings rather than filled areas on pottery.
Similar techniques on the NW Coast, Mimbres, etc?
(Filled areas occur in Paracas, Nazca, Huari, Tiahuanaco, Inca.)
Independent developments.
3. Developments towards elaborate filling of "negative spaces"
between the figures. Occurs in the latest level of Moche
more than in earlier Moche; also in NW Coast,
Cocle (Pacific coast of Panama), Izapa? and some Maya.
Independent developments. "Zoned" pottery links Maya with
Greater Nicoya, not with Moche.
4. Dominance over men and over animals is a prominent theme among
societies at the level of chieftanships (Donnan notes this).

So analogies between captive-taking and deer-hunting can easily arise independently. (Certain details might nevertheless show closer historical connections.)

5. Nudity as an iconographic tradition to signal vulnerability -

This is more marked among the Moche, but the famous Mayan pot with the rabbit holding the headdress and clothes of God L could reflect a similar tradition. Is it common world-wide?

6. Features typical of any pictorial writing system not too far from becoming writing. These are shared among Moche and Mixtec and Aztec, can have developed independently. (Certain details might nevertheless show closer historical connections.)

7. Iconographic element for "rain":

Pueblo Southwest of USA (stacked mounds); Chalcatzingo in Mesoamerica (layered clouds); Proto-form of Chinese, Sumerian hieroglyphs. Similarity is only that shared with the original seen object, not between the artistic representations of the different cultures.

Part B. Parallels which might reflect either a deep connection in prehistory, or else a later transmission through trade etc.

1. Double-headed serpent sky-band

Separating for example the upper and lower registers on the most famous Moche "Presentation Scene". Very common in Maya iconography, through codices. Also occurs in Greater Nicoya pottery.

2. Double headed serpent belts on Moche figures (K314-2-right, K316a) compared with the double-headed ceremonial bar held by Maya rulers.

These two items (1,2) may reflect a very ancient cosmology common to much of Mesoamerica and South America.

3. Heads tilted back as indication of being vanquished or sacrificed.

Moche pots a few; Mayan codices

4. Specific display of genitals of both humans and deer as indication of being vanquished or sacrificed. Moche common;

Maya on deer, or famous pot with rabbit holding cloths of God L.

5. Bat-decapitator common among Moche, Maya some; also similar poses in the Pueblo Southwest of the USA and in the Southeast Ceremonial Complex.

[Perhaps universal, bats pluck fruit as birds also do.]

6. Owl is chief of military on Moche pots.

Compare Mayan Tikal influenced by Teotihuacan: Owl Atlatl-Shield, military, and Chac Te title. Source is Owl as predator.

7. Shape of the headdress with a central half-circle and two side arcs.

Moche headdress of the owl or jaguar warrior general.

Teotihuacan similar headdress.

8. Do deer volunteer to be captured? Is this a universal of Shamanism, so belongs in Part A above? Moche animated objects, is that a cosmological parallel? Compare arctic hunters (Eskimo) believing that a whale or other animal *consents* to be captured.

9. Deer with their tongue hanging out. This could be a universal, since deer have a gap between teeth and this behavior is characteristic.

Question: does iconography show it world-wide?

10. Vanquished warriors with heads tilted (up):
Moche pots AD137, AD138, K276; many Mayan codex examples
11. Sacrifice victims with a line through eye (symbolic of bleeding or crying?) and bloodied mouth: Moche pot AD140. Contrast victors with two halves of the faces painted different colors (pots AD140; K118 captors; etc.). Compare Mayan codices.
12. *Asymmetrical* stairstep shape for mountain or high place, Moche on cornices of temples and on paths climbing towards them. Teotihuacan also. (Sumeria, China use a *symmetrical* three-peaked form with the central peak higher, so not universal.)
13. Shields possibly used to distinguish groups. Round and Square shields. Aztec clearly used to distinguish groups. Moche perhaps so used. This could be universal.
14. Nose-piercing and nose ornamentation. Specific iconographic marking of "jewel", Moche and pre-Mayan Mesoamerican. Mixtec similar. La Mojarra. Others. (How common is this, or particular styles of it, in the world?)
15. Face-painting marked by IL sign on cheek, signifying 'woman'. Maya general. Moche one flat plate with several women weaving, contrasting on that plate with higher status figures. In this Moche example, presence of IL marks are on cheeks only of lower status women.

16. Sun-God (Benson's interpretation) or Warrior Priest (traditional interpretation), at least the figure normally receiving the cup in the Moche "presentation scene", is portrayed rayed, with the rays often as snakes, and sometimes on a rayed throne.
Are there specific features of this which are not world-wide but are particularly Moche and Mesoamerican? (Borgia codex group, Mixtec codex group)
17. Wing feathers have parallel edges (very long parallelograms)
Northwest Coast of the USA, Borgia codex group, Moche as pictured and as found in tomb headdresses. Southeast Ceremonial Complex?
18. Compare spread of Eagle Man of Southeastern Ceremonial Complex
Flint-Eagle of Mixtec codices, club-winged Moche figure, etc.
19. Small circle attached to figures by simple line
(or on the most famous "Presentation Scene" pot, sceptre attached to the jaguar on throne in lower register)
This is a method used to attach names in the Mixtec codices.
Is it a labeling of name or office among the Moche pots?
Too universal to have much value in reconstructing connections.
20. Use of Atlatl (throwing-stick). Moche pot K150, Mesoamerica.
21. Use of interlocked fangs to indicate supernaturals or chiefs,
Compare K205 and preceding. Extensive in Maya and earlier.
Could be independent parallel developments.
22. Tlaloc - Huari turquoise eyes and tear channel ending in a bird.
Connect to Mesoamerican Tlaloc?

23. Argument that there may be a Moche figure corresponding to the Yawi of the Mixtecs. (Counterargument, these Moche figures are simply Muscovy ducks, which are in fact very aggressive good fighters.)
- a) The decapitator holding knives identifies the shape as a knife
 - b) The "backflaps" on soldiers are therefore (metal) knives
(later confirmed from excavated tombs)
 - c) A flying being with such a backflap knife and a similarly shaped nose or beak, therefore ambiguously also a *metal knife* as nose or beak. [If not the beak of a duck]
 - d) Compare the Mesoamerican Mixtec Yahui = Mayan Xux Ek' = Venus, with flint knives at nose and at rear.
 - e) The knife shape is not really a duck's beak shape (which is more rounded corners, not pointed ones).
24. A Moche Warrior chief depicted standing over a serpent, therefore similar to examples noted by Linda Schele at the Dumbarton Oaks conference, from Uxmal Nunnery Quadrangle and from Teotihuacan. Moche pot Kutscher #267, top center.
25. Patricia Anawalt has studied clothing from the Pacific Coast of Guerrero, Mexico, in relation to clothing of South America, and found strong parallels.
26. Metallurgy is thought by many investigators to have been introduced into the Pacific Coast of Mesoamerica from Ecuador.
27. There is a cluster of relatively late sudden changes in the Moche culture, including such things as introduction of the Mexican hairless dog, which seem to strongly imply contact with Mesoamerica (around 800 A.D.)
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Here follow some possible links of Moche with their closer neighbors.

28. The Moon Animal (see Elizabeth Benson article "The Moche Moon")

Connects Moche with other nearby cultures

29. Paired correlations (work of Alana Cordy-Collins) Moche with neighbors

Female - Silver - Moon - Spondylus (spiny oyster) - Blood Sacrifice

Male - Gold - Sun - Strombus (conch shell)

(The Male/Female pairing is universally common for Sun/Moon.)

Here follow links between Mesoamerica and the Pueblo Southwest of the USA or the Northwest Coast.

30. Wind-God. Borgia style, compare long-beaked birds on North West Coast of USA.

31. Figures or faces emerging from within an animal head (beak or etc.)
Mayan common, Northwest Coast of USA, Siberia.

32. Serpents = lightning (connecting Mesoamerica with Pueblos, Taube)

33. Serpents = blood (Borgia, Izapa, Maya?)