

Moche Politics in the Jequetepeque Valley: A Case for Political Opportunism



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Introduction

The political organization of the northern Jequetepeque Valley in the Moche era (ca. 200–800 C.E.) does not appear to conform to any of the models proposed to date for this society (Fig. 1) (Bawden 1996, 2004; Castillo 1999, 2001a, 2004; Castillo and Donnan 1994b; Dillehay 2001; Larco 1945b, 2001; Shimada 1994a; Uceda and Mujica 1998; Willey 1953; Wilson 1997). Its principles of organization, relations between territorial units, levels of social complexity, and structures of political power, all of which have been interpreted through archaeological data, indicate neither a centralized state nor a series of regional polities, but rather a combination of both. The Jequetepeque Valley appears to have been fragmented into a number of political territories, each of which had a high level of political and economic autonomy. Each territory appears to have undergone different evolutionary and developmental processes that could have resulted in a generalized cultural drift, expressed in different regional material cultural manifestations. Cultural differentiation seems to have been prevented by mechanisms that culturally harmonized and articulated the entire valley. The communities of the interior valley sectors and their populations appear to have been economically and politically independent (Dillehay 2001). In this chapter I will argue that the political and economic

mosaic was sustained by complex and redundant irrigation systems (Eling n.d. [1987]). The division of the valley into territorial sectors was both a cause and a consequence of marked factionalism and confrontations between independent political entities (Castillo 2001a). These independent territorial units were manifested in the defensive nature of the most important sites during the Middle and Late Moche Periods (Castillo et al. n.d.; Swenson n.d. [2004]). Nevertheless, while autonomous political units coexisted in the Jequetepeque, there was also a high level of political integration through rituals celebrated in regional ceremonial centers like San José de Moro. Such integration of independent units would have occurred in cycles of centralization, which were characterized by the need to confront exterior threats or to jointly take advantage of opportunities and circumstances as they arose. As was the case in all Moche political entities, ideology, more than coercion or economics, was the principal factor fostering social cohesion and cultural harmonization. Such integration appears to have been indispensable to the viability of the system. It supported economic and social interchange, generated social and economic relations, and promoted positive political interactions among communities; in short, it broke tendencies towards isolation.

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New Perspectiva in the Political Organization of the Moche. Actas del Congreso «Nuevas Perspectivas en la Organización Política Mochica» (Lima, 6 al 8 de Agosto del 2004) Luis Jaime Castillo y Jeffrey Quilter, editores. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Dumbarton Oaks y Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera, 2008.

Thus, in the archaeological evidence we see coexisting forces of disintegration, confrontation, and integration. Specifically, the integrative forces and structures included the existence of supra-community Moche identity, coexisting with social stratification within each community. Intra- and inter-regional mythological and ritual practices, shared funerary rites (at least among elites), and common technologies, including irrigation systems, and the proximity of other Moche communities with state-like political systems are all lines of evidence supporting an integrative view of the Moche. These various lines of evidence have made us consider that it is possible to speak of a Moche state in the Jequetepeque Valley, but a state that took a distinctive form as well as a distinctive range of strategies and variables in its organization.

In this chapter, I will attempt to reconcile archaeological data relating to the political organization of the Jequetepeque Valley with a theoretical framework that takes into account the nature of such data. I wish to stress this approximation while being fully aware of the risks of falling into simplistic inductionism, but I have come to the conclusion that we must refine our interpretations of currently-available data to model Moche political organization. The alternative is to force the data into ideal models, which may lead us further away from the results of research. This is particularly serious because in the past we have had incomplete views that were too easily adjusted to fit hypothetical reconstructions. Too frequently we have based our interpretations on essentialist thinking where, for instance, radiometric data have been privileged over other approaches even when they have no clear coherency.

In essence, I believe that the political organization of the Jequetepeque Valley was extremely fluid and flexible, at times and under certain conditions or opportunities reaching high levels of complexity and centralization, and at others returning to a less complex state marked by the consolidation of smaller, independent regional polities. I call this form of social and political organization which exhibits characteristics of centralization, while at the same time maintaining a high degree of local independence, «Opportunistic States.»

In Opportunistic States the condition of statehood was neither inevitable nor was its nature stable. The political entities of the Northern Moche, like many early states (Feinman and Marcus [eds.]

1998), were not inevitably condemned to a single political formation, state, or chiefdom, during its entire history (Quilter 2002), but rather were involved in a process of experimentation and adaptation. In sum, Moche centralization and the consolidation as states seem to have been more opportunistic than structured organizations. Ideology, religion, and ceremony appear to have been the only unifying forces that brought and held together different social units throughout long periods of time allowing the Moche to negotiate and adapt their political and social interactions according to circumstances and necessities.

Moche Political Organization

The study of Moche political organization, whether in terms of its governance, its political complexity, or its inter-regional relations, has been discussed for almost a century. In order to adequately understand this long history of investigation we must return to the ideas of Rafael Larco who began the discussion and established the model that scholars have dealt with since his time. The current state of our understanding is the result of problems and weaknesses in Larco's views that have been encountered as new evidence has emerged. Recognition of these weaknesses demands more complex perspectives and theories.

In 1945 Larco characterized Moche political organization as follows:

The traces of urban and rustic constructions, agricultural expansion, great irrigation works, works of monumental architecture, and road networks speak eloquently of life organized by means of mature, well-developed methods of government. Furthermore, the presence of marvelous artistic productions demonstrates that the rulers were not solely dedicated to the realization of grand material works but also strongly influenced the dissemination of culture. Moche government—dynastic, theocratic and omnipotent—was forged in the heat of a vigorous, well developed faith producing a civilization which today is the pride of our pre-historic past (Larco 1945b: 21–23, translation by the author).

Larco believed that Moche politics focused on an omnipotent and centralized authority that held political, military, and religious power, which was imposed on subjects who blindly obeyed out of conviction or fear. For Larco, power was essentially in the hands of government and governors whose control lay in their ability to act upon other

individuals, to impose the law of the state. He did not give much importance to the nature of Moche political organization, the size and form of the territory under its control and possible subdivisions, the relative degree of political centralization, and the social relations that derived from or contributed to political forms. From his perspective, centralization and the strength of the Moche state was evident in its monuments and infrastructure, and particularly in its rich iconography, without questioning how it came about or how it managed to maintain itself.

Now, almost seventy years since the first publications by Larco on the Moche, our view of the problem of political organization raises more precise questions. Were they chiefdoms or states? Was Moche a single polity or several? Whether it was one or several states, what was the degree of political centralization? How was government organized? What were the structures of leadership and of administrative systems? What were the relations between power centers and peripheral populations? What was the relationship between Moche politics and religious ideology?

My vision of the nature of the Moche «state» diverges from the older model formulated in the era of Uhle (1915), Larco (1945b) and Willey (1953). These investigators, working with relatively little empirical, contextualized information, created idealized images of Moche society, particularly in regards to its internal structural organization. According to these models, Moche political organization was a single phenomenon, rather than plural phenomena with different regional manifestations. As such, it evolved through time through a single line of successive phases, rather than manifesting multiple evolutionary and adaptive trajectories. That is to say, they viewed it as being a single Moche state whose development was straightforward and whose condition of statehood was maintained for centuries until it was displaced by another state through conquest. Stability and political homogeneity were the result of long-lasting dynasties. The same royal houses and their courts were kept in charge thanks to a powerful military and an efficient religion that emphasized the legitimacy of the regime.

In this view, the Moche state was conceptualized in contrast to simpler neighboring chiefdoms, such as Virú or Recuay. The Moche state provided its citizens a high level of political, economic, and social centralization. These were expressed in a grand capital that served at the same time as a political, social, and cultural center. Finally, the Moche state

carried out these practices over a wide territory and propagated itself through the incorporation of new regions, often through conquest (Donnan n.d. [1968]; Proulx 1968, 1982; Willey 1953).

Contrary to this traditional, utopian vision of the Moche state, I believe that a plethora of archaeological data speak precisely to the lack of stability and homogeneity in political formations. Instead of a single, centralized state, different political forms coexisted with various degrees of complexity, sometimes as independent polities, sometimes subsumed by others. From a diachronic perspective, political formations never evolve so as to become and remain stable. Rather, their histories were a constant struggle between the factions that comprised them; centripetal forces personified by the state worked against centrifugal forces represented by peripheral communities (Dillehay 2001). These struggles occurred in states of permanent conflict between the «haves» and the «have nots,» where consensus was replaced by negotiation or outright conflict.

As such, periods of stability were more the exception than the rule, and centralization appears to have been more opportunistic than the result of an inherent quality of statehood. Societies consolidated into unified entities as a result of the necessity to develop or implement common strategies perceived to be of common interest and that required the combined force of many groups of people. But centralization and cohesion were not permanent in lack of mechanisms that could have prevented political fragmentation. This resulted in constant regressions to simpler, less-centralized, forms of organization, once immediate needs were met or dangers had passed (Feinman and Marcus [eds.] 1998).

It might be said that we now have two extreme views of the origins, structure, and development of political formations on the North Coast: one clearly idealistic, which assumes centralization and consensus, harmony and efficiency (Larco 1945b), and the other catastrophic, which assumes fragmentation and contradiction, animosity and perpetual crisis (Dillehay 2001). Reality, as always, is located at some point between these two extremes. It is possible, however, to suggest conditions of alternation between these extremes, a swing of the pendulum. It is quite possible that the condition of statehood, centralized and unified, existed for varying periods of time and in specific circumstances, only for political structure to return to a system less



Lam. I. Peruvian north coast and the main Mochica sites (Quilter & Castillo).

integrated as conditions changed.

In the case of the Moche the situation is more complicated than any ideal schema because we are not discussing a single political entity on the North Coast but, rather, various entities, each one in a valley, or even more than one polity within a single valley (Castillo 2001a; Castillo and Donnan 1994a). Thus, while one region or territory may have experienced

a period of centralization, at the same time another could have been disintegrating into smaller units, entering a period of intense factionalism (See Quilter and Castillo this volume, Fig. 1).

A true state with all of the powerful centralization and concentration of power appears to have existed in the south, centered in the Moche and Chicama Valleys (Bawden 1996). With a concomitant high



Lam II. Ceramic sequence of Northern Mochica and Southern Mochica territories (Quilter & Castillo).

degree of social complexity, it is logical to assume that these populations formed efficient political units within the limitations I have already mentioned (Chapdelaine 2001; Uceda 2001; Uceda and Mujica [eds.] 1994; Uceda and Mujica 1998).

In the Jequetepeque Valley a different pattern existed, one that was decentralized and opportunistic, but not necessarily applicable to the entire Northern Moche region. In other words, Moche political formations were adaptations to the needs and possibilities of their historical context; they were both adapted and adaptable, maximizing the capacity for survival in a fluctuating environment in which they were confronted with distinctive, unforeseen, and new conditions.

It will not be possible to advance our understanding of Moche political organization if we

do not take into account the distinctive characteristics of each region and consider the historical processes in each of the valleys. It is certain, in my opinion, that we cannot develop a general history or understanding of Moche political organization without addressing regional processes in depth.

Despite the limitations of scarce data, some characteristics of complex, state-like societies are present in the archaeological inventory of the Moche of Jequetepeque. All indications suggest marked social stratification manifested, in particular, in highly differentiated mortuary practices (Castillo and Donnan 1994b; Donnan and McClelland 1997; Ubbelohde-Doering 1983). In some cases it has been possible to determine that elite individuals played important roles in the ritual liturgy (Donnan this volume) and that they must have based their power

and legitimacy in these personifications (Alva 2004; Alva and Donnan 1993; Castillo 2005; Castillo and Rengifo n.d.; Donnan and Castillo 1994). The requirements for the rituals of this religious elite (costumes, jewelry, paraphernalia, and more ephemeral items) fomented specialized craft production creating a true prestige economy, which was complemented by the importation of sumptuary goods such as spondylus, obsidian, ceramics, and semi-precious stones. This economy of prestige can be seen in the Early Moche Period in ceramics and metallurgy (Donnan 2007) and in the Late Period in the evolution of the fineline ceramic style and Moche polychrome ceramics (Castillo 2000a).

Elite ritual practices enacted an ideology of domination, in relation to society in general. They supported elite solidarity and superiority in relation to the rest of the population while, at the same time, broadcasting a message of common identity and tradition for all of the population, rich and poor. These messages were validated by regional rituals involving shared ancestors that legitimized the political system.

The Territorial and Political Development of the Jequetepeque Valley

As mentioned at the onset of this paper, during the Early Intermediate Period and the Middle Horizon the Jequetepeque Valley experienced a political development that is not analogous to any of the processes found in the other valleys in the North Coast, where the establishment of centralized states has been postulated as the dominant tendency (Larco 2001). In Jequetepeque archaeological evidence shows signs of two parallel developmental processes. On one hand, processes of centralization, with great cohesion among the regional polities and sectors that united the valley's populations, with the development of sizable infrastructures and the concomitant needs for organizational capacities. On the other hand, processes of fragmentation and factionalization, where each region/community seems to have isolated and developed confrontational relationships with the others. The paradox of this situation is that both scenarios are apparently contemporaneous, implying that they might have happened in short and continuous intervals. Communities may have been centralized under a single leadership to take advantage of certain opportunities for collaboration, for instance to participate in regional ceremonial

events, and might have had a high degree of integration in certain aspects, for example in water management. At the same time they might have remained autonomous in most other aspects, such as self defense, control of their own agricultural fields and their secondary irrigation systems.

An attempt to reconstruct the valley's territorial and political configuration might be useful in order to illustrate how this paradox came about. In summary, the Jequetepeque Valley seems to have been developed in three consecutive stages: first, the consolidation of the central valley; second, the extension into the southern valley; and third, the development of the northern valley (Figs. 2, 3, and 4). The absolute dates and cultural affiliations of this process are still under scrutiny, but a somewhat detailed image is emerging. The first stage clearly predates the Moche phenomenon; the second stage seems to be related to Gallinazo and Early Moche, while the third stage is related to the Middle and Late Moche Periods.

The first stage in the development of the Jequetepeque was the consolidation of the central or old valley, which consists of three sections: the lower (western), central, and upper (eastern) valley. Even before Early Moche times, settlements in the Jequetepeque Valley were concentrated in proximity to the river (Fig. 2). Most of the earliest sites found by means of archaeological surveys in this region are Early Moche or Gallinazo, but earlier occupations dating back to the Formative Period, or even before, are likely (Dillehay et al 2005). It was in this setting that complex irrigation technology was developed, either independently or as a case of peer polity interaction (Eling n.d. [1987]; Renfrew and Cherry [eds.] 1986). The old valley, in its three sections, was irrigated with a fairly simple system consisting of sets of canals, one serving the northern bank, the other the southern. Some of these, like the Faclo and Tolón canal still are in use, serving approximately the same fields for the last two thousand years. Land in the lower and upper sections of the valley is absolutely restricted because it is confined within a narrow and deep valley. As long as the populations stayed in this section, their growth was severely limited. It is at this time that we find the first evidence of attempts at expansion through the development of the central section of the valley, which opens south to the San Pedro region, and north to the Chamán Valley.

The end of the first stage should coincide with the full consolidation of the central valley and with the initiation of the first extension, towards the south,

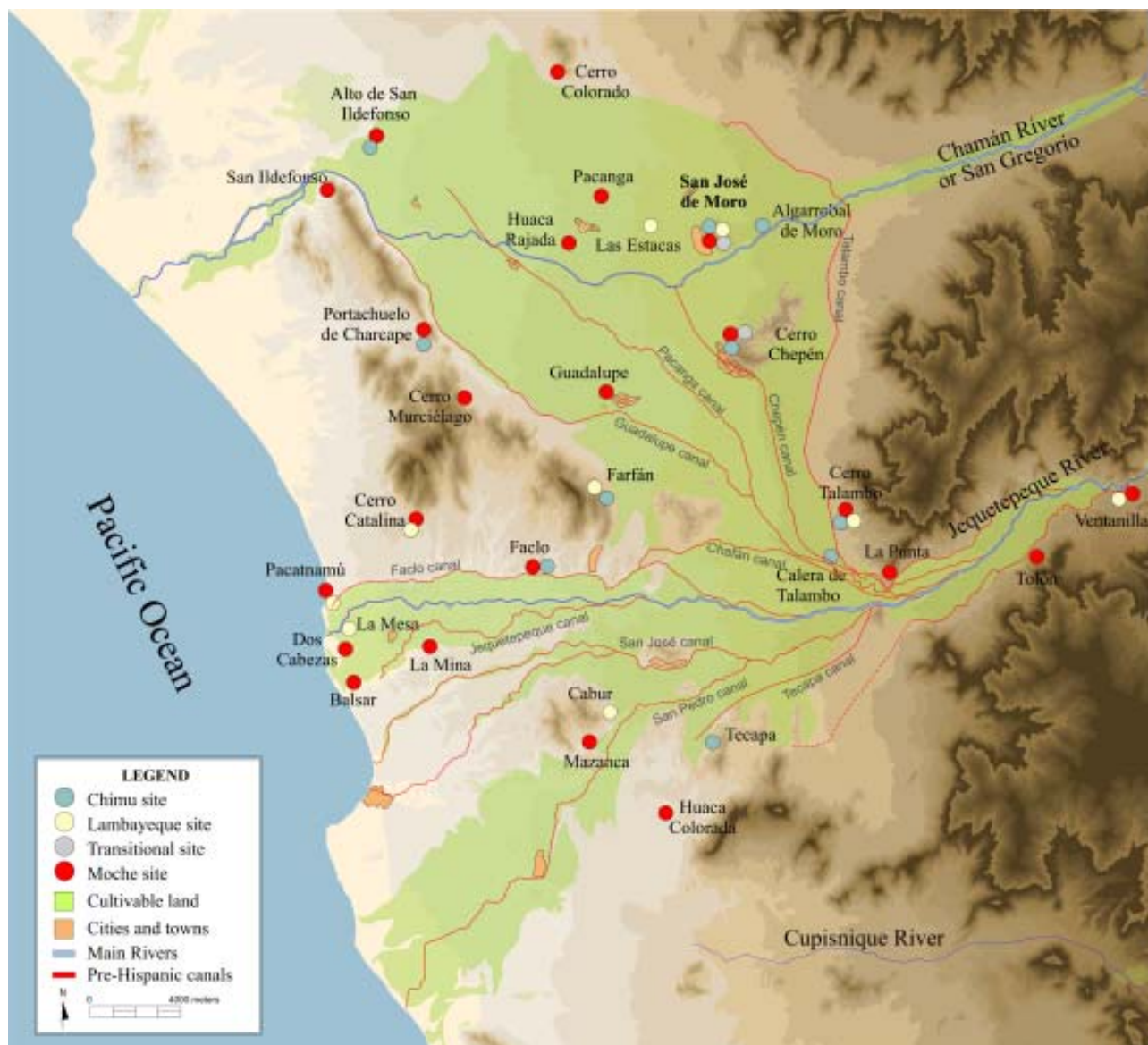


Fig. 1 Map of the Jequetepeque Valley including the most important sites for the Moche, Transitional, Lambayeque, and Chimú. Map created by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

marking the initiation of the second stage (Fig. 3). It was at about this time that the Moche emerged, evolving as an elite culture from a Virú or Gallinazo substratum. It is likely that only one polity controlled the entire Jequetepeque Valley at the onset of the second stage, from a capital/ceremonial center at Dos Cabezas, and some subordinate settlements up river (Donnan 2001). The degree of development of the Early Moche is not clear, although wealth and social distinctions are quite evident (Narváez 1994). They had the strength to organize and build large ceremonial infrastructure, for instance at Dos Cabezas, and had enough production specialization to obtain the raw materials they needed and to manufacture from them exquisite ceramic and metal artifacts (Donnan 2007). During this second stage it is likely that the

likely then was mostly arid lands. This section had twice as much land with agricultural potential as the south, but had little or no water due to irregular flow of its river. The development of the irrigation potential of these two sectors resulted in different layouts and distribution of canals, thus influencing settlement patterns and peculiar configurations of sites.

The development of the southern Jequetepeque during the second stage of expansion was possible through a centralized irrigation system that started in Ventanillas and Cerro Pitura, in the neck of the river valley, branching into secondary and tertiary canals to cover the entire territory (Fig. 3). The administration of such a system must have been centralized, while social relationships derived from its administration could have produced heterarchical

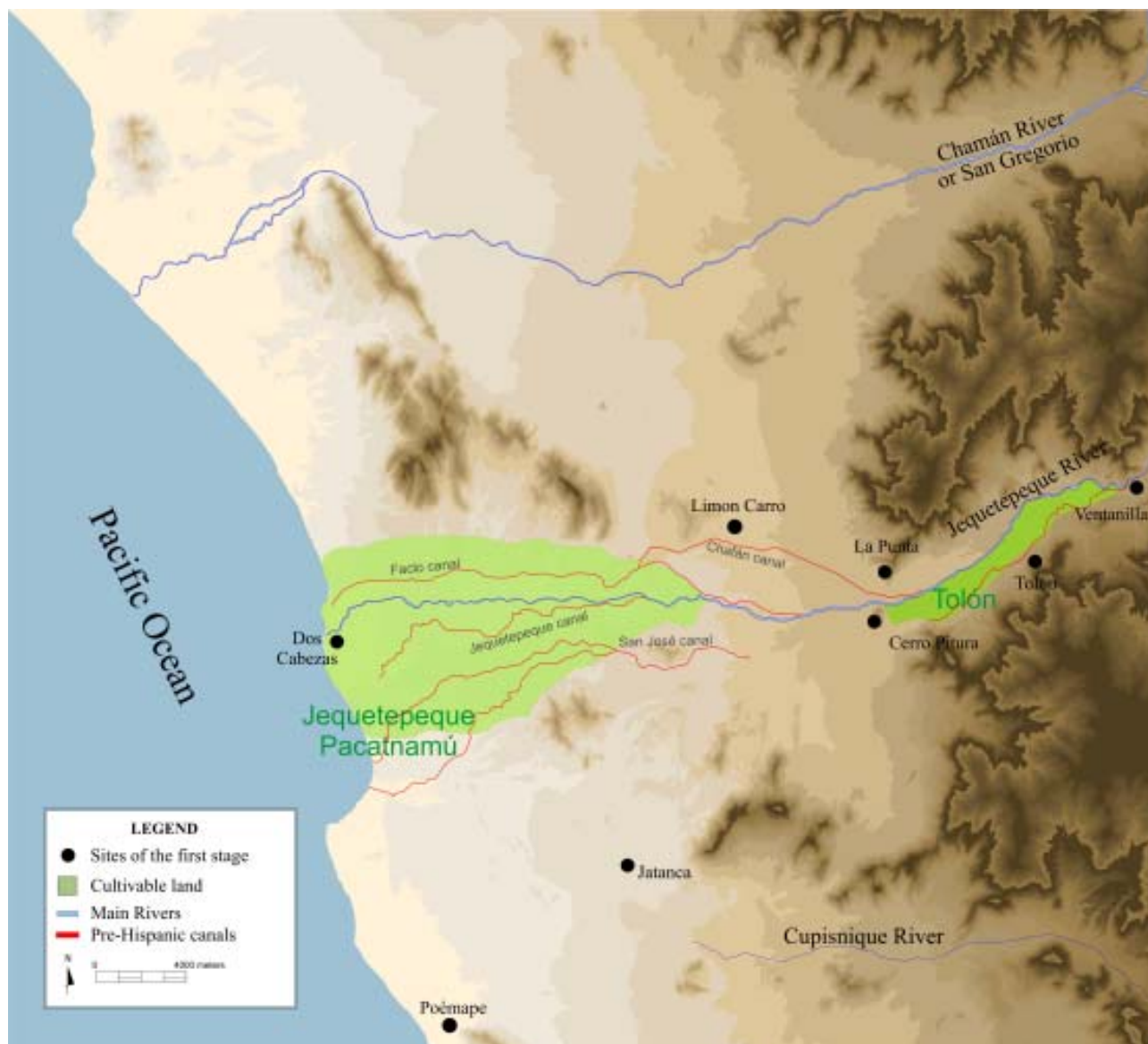


Fig. 2 The first expansion stage in the center of the Jequetepeque Valley. Graphic created by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

lower classes were still producing the «Virú» wares that are characteristic of the North Coast societies of that time. Development and growth, especially the increasing social demands of a growing population, could only be coped with by the expansion of agricultural lands, but this could not happen if irrigation systems were not enlarged. The task of the newly developed Moche was thus the extension of the agricultural land, first to the south, and subsequently to the north of the valley.¹

It is likely that vast extensions of land that could be irrigated existed south of the valley, in the San José and San Pedro sectors and in other minor sectors. The northern part of the valley, including the Chamán River drainage, was clearly underdeveloped, and

forms of organization. Unfortunately, a large portion of the southern valley was apparently destroyed by a severe El Niño event that affected the entire North Coast just prior to the end of the Late Moche Period. In consequence, only a few Moche sites have been investigated in the southern part of the valley. However, and with the exception of Huaca Colorada (Fig. 4), until now there has been a notable absence of large sites belonging to the Middle and Late Moche Periods, particularly fortified regional centers that would not have been destroyed even by heavy rains. Recent excavations in Jatanca by Edward Swenson, John Warner, Jorge Chiguala (personal communication, 2008) have discovered an impressive Gallinazo ceremonial center, that places the date of

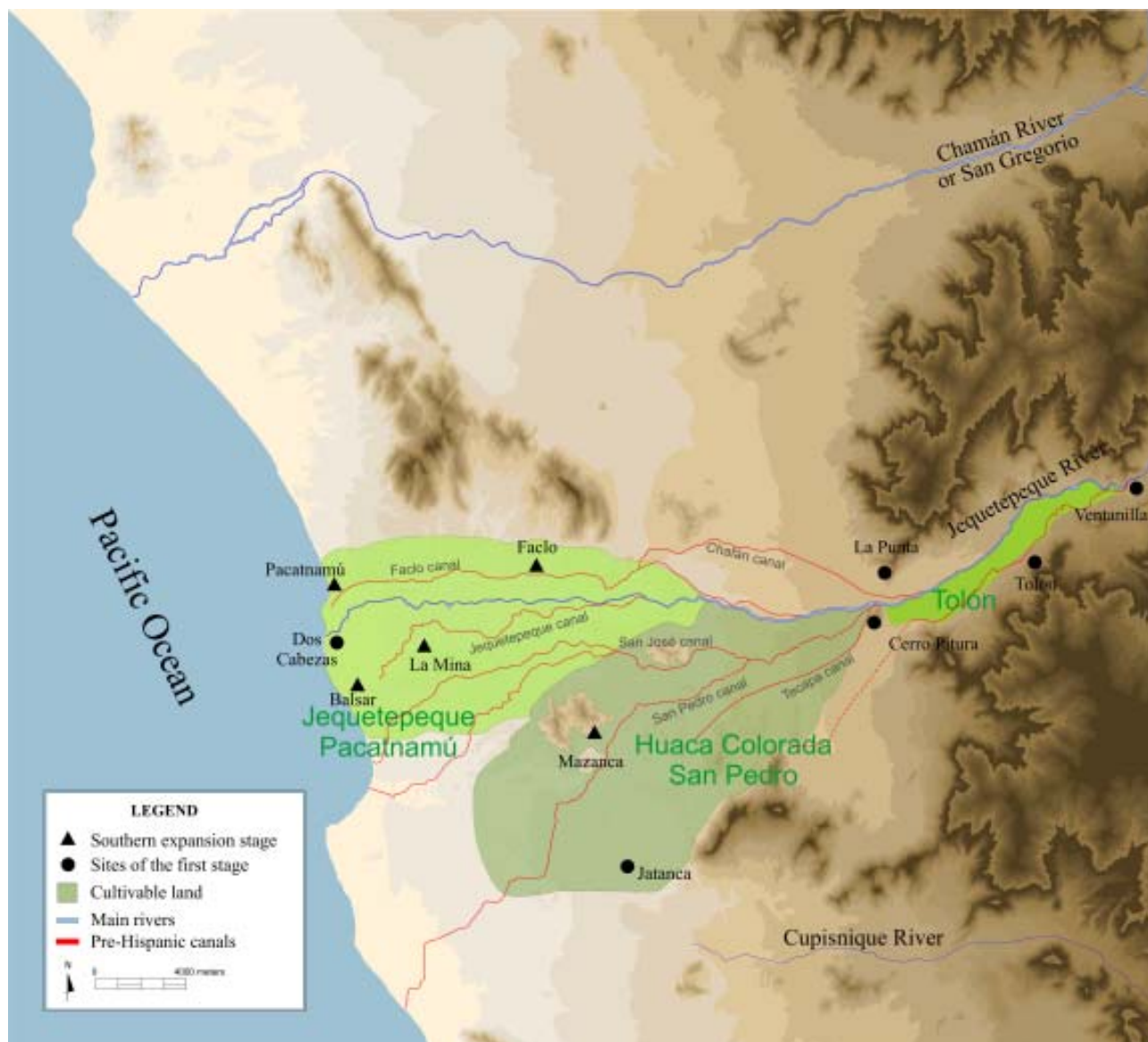


Fig. 3 The second expansion stage into the southern Jequetepeque Valley, during which time the Moche style consolidated. Graphic created by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

the extension to this part of the valley in pre-Moche times. The southern extension, thus, might have been going on earlier than expected and might coincide partly with the last stages of the consolidation of the central valley. It is likely that by Moche times, the settlement pattern of the southern Jequetepeque was made up mostly of medium- and small-scale domestic sites, located in proximity to agricultural fields, the kind of sites that are destroyed by large-scale agricultural expansion.

The third stage of development coincides with the Middle and Late Moche Periods and corresponds to the extension to the northern sections of Jequetepeque Valley, primarily irrigating the desert and organizing the new territories (Fig. 4). The development of the northern Jequetepeque Valley, and

particularly of the Chamán sector, is quite different in settlement patterns and in the kinds of sites located there. In contrast to the southern valley, the vast extensions of land that configure the northern valley show no significant human presence until Middle Moche, and necessarily had to be developed through the construction of irrigation systems.

In our inspection of the Chamán region, and the mountain range located in between this region and the Jequetepeque River, we have found numerous sites that contain large quantities of Middle Moche ceramics, particularly of the Middle Moche B type (Castillo 2003; Del Carpio 2008). Field data produced by numerous research projects also supports a Middle Moche origin for most of these sites, or at least for the oldest sectors within them.² The establishment of

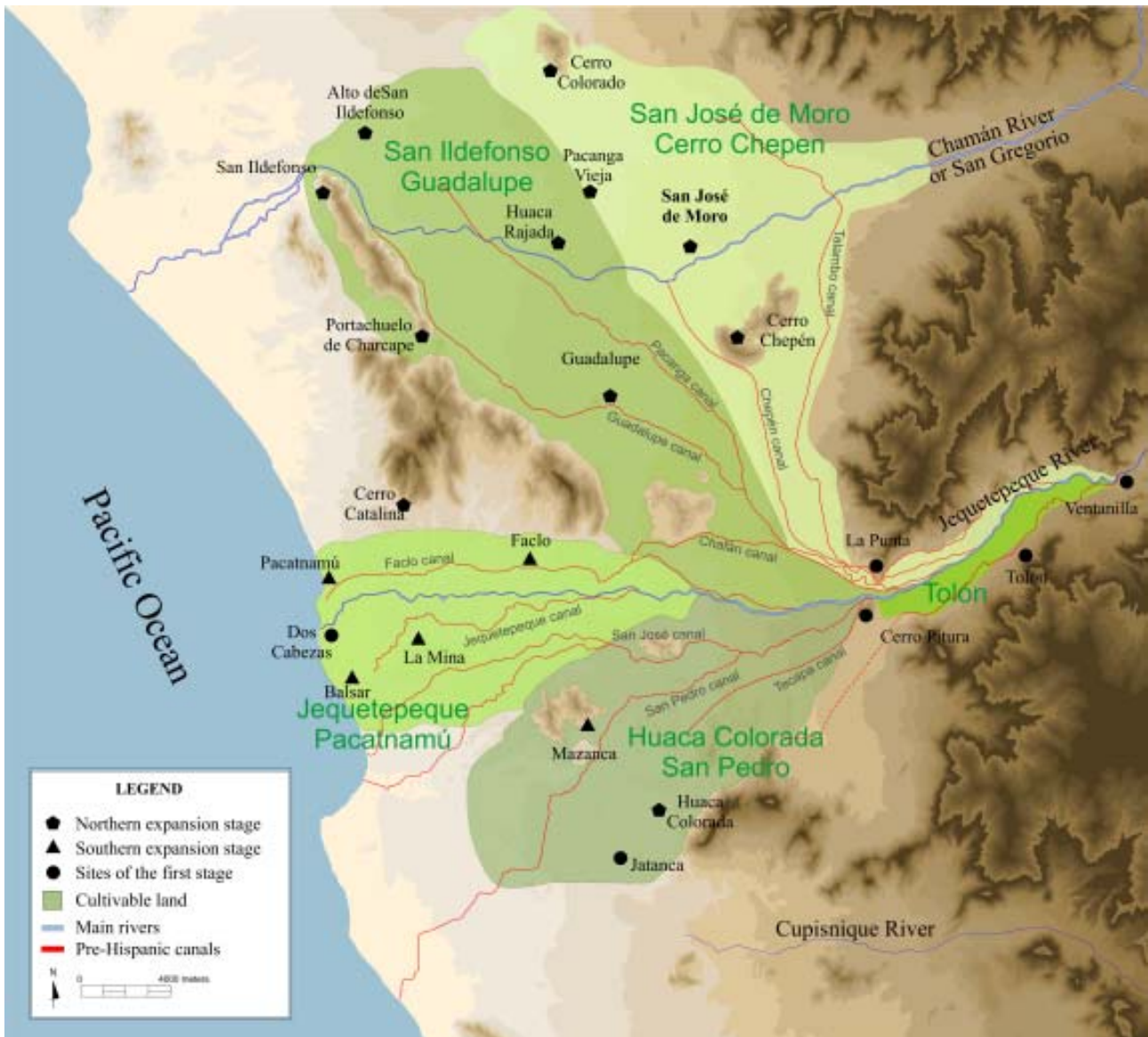


Fig. 4 The third expansion stage into the northern part of the Jequetepeque Valley. Graphic created by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

a detailed ceramic chronology has been particularly important for this critical determination, something that has been possible thanks to multiple concordances of stratigraphic and contextual excavations (Fig. 5). Middle Moche wares are notably different from Late Moche ceramics in terms of predominant forms and decorations (Fig. 6). They include a large number of face-neck jars with the representations of birds, mammals and wrinkled individuals. A specific type of domestic wares, including ollas and containers, features a peculiar double incurving neck with a small protruding lip (Donnan and Cock [eds.] 1997; Del Carpio 2008; Ubbelohde-Doering 1983). In Late Moche the typical forms are quite distinct (Fig. 7), with the dominant form being the face-neck jar locally called «Rey de

Assiria» (Ubbelohde-Doering 1966) and a crude representation of a llama face. Owls, the single most common face-neck impressed design in Middle Moche, are absent from Late Moche collections. Finally, an unmistakably diagnostic Late Moche form is the «platform» rim olla (Donnan and Cock [eds.] 1986). This form is found only in Late Moche B phase contexts and layers, that is to say, mid-way into the development of the period (Castillo 2000a). In summary, the precise dating of sites in this region is based on a very refined ceramic sequence, and in the absence or presence of specific and highly-diagnostic wares. The sequence has been constructed with burial associations and with detailed and repetitive stratigraphic associations found both at Pacatnamú and San José de Moro.

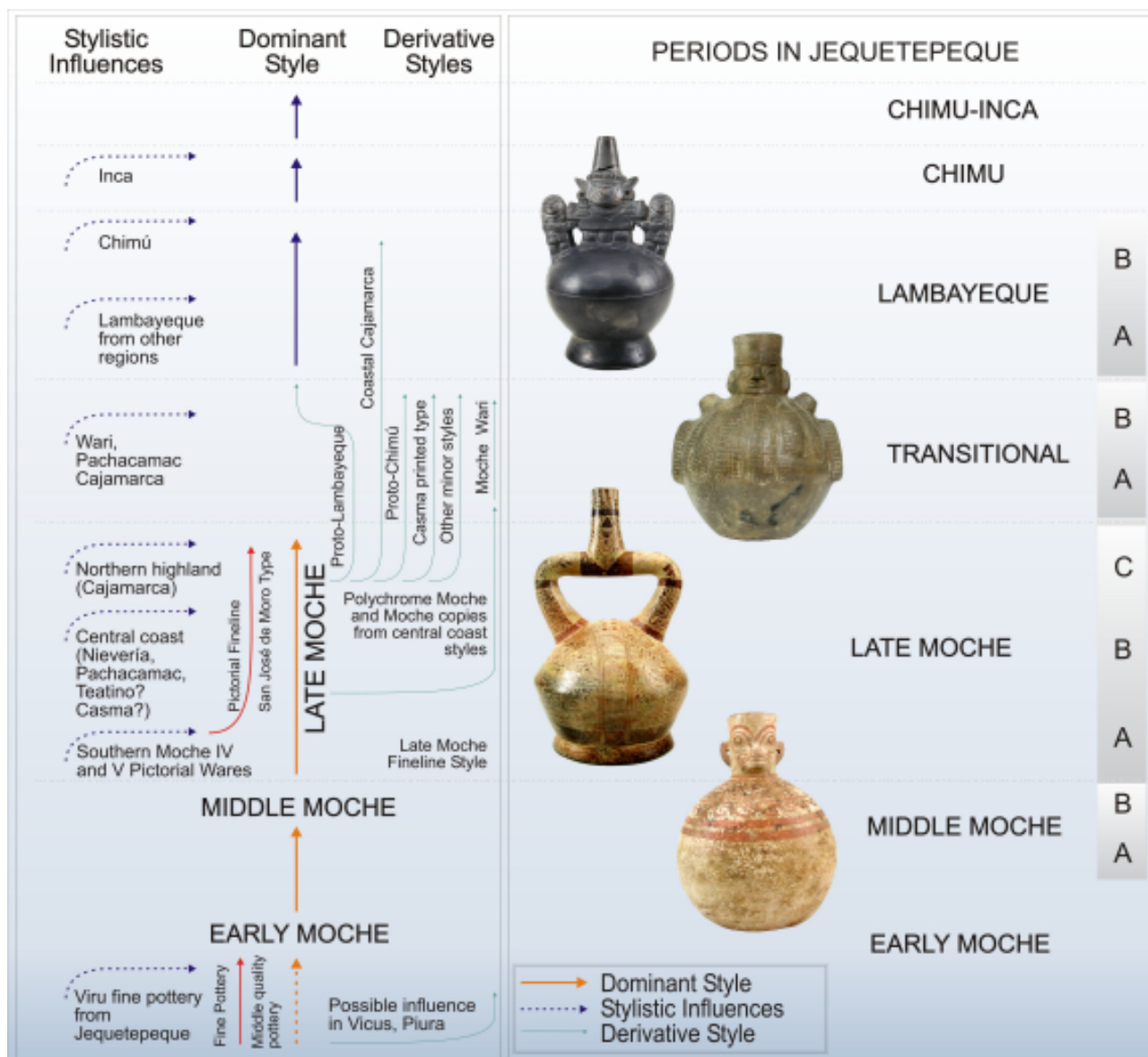


Fig. 5 Chronological sequence for the Jequetepeque Valley with representative examples of ceramics related to the periods and phases of the occupational history of San José de Moro. Graphic created by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

The Middle Moche date for the extension of the Moche realm to the northern part of the Jequetepeque is based on the oldest occupations of sites, and not on a direct attempt to date the irrigation canals. This method of indirect dating, based on the sites that are located in the extremes of irrigation systems, and the sites that were presumably served by them, was employed by Eling (n.d. [1987]) to reconstruct the extension of the irrigation system. However, he could not define the precise occupational affiliation for each site in his study because he did not have a reliable ceramic sequence. The one available, Larco's five phase sequence, would have produced more confusion than clarity. Even though earlier sites might

have been present in the region, these would have corresponded to seasonal occupations, when small numbers of peasants would have taken advantage of occasional water in the Chamán River. Only a reliable supply of water would have permitted the establishment of permanent settlements in this region, and such a supply was not developed until Middle Moche.

Redundant Irrigation Systems and Political Organization

Irrigation of the northern Jequetepeque was based on canals that originated at intakes located in the middle Jequetepeque Valley, between the sites of



Fig. 6 Middle Moche ceramics collection from San José de Moro. Photograph by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

Ventanillas and La Punta, where the Chimú site of Talambo was later established. From these intakes, water was transported to the different sectors of the northern Jequetepeque and the Chamán drainage. One peculiarity of this irrigation system is that, in contrast to its southern counterpart, it was not composed of a single, large main canal, but of four independent canals, each one featuring an independent intake. Through these canals, water was transported to the modern circumscriptions of Farfán and Chafán (Chafán canal), Guadalupe, Pacanga, and Pueblo Nuevo (Guadalupe canal), Chepén (Chepén canal) and to the northern part of the Chamán Valley, including San José de Moro and part of Pacanga (Talambo canal). Because they crossed the Chamán River, some of these canals would have required elevated sections, locally called «*mampuestos*.»

Four independent canals could have been the outcome of four successive expansion phases of the

irrigation system and the incorporation of new and more distant territories. It is likely that the Middle Moche did not attempt to irrigate the entire Chamán drainage as one large land reclamation project, but that instead the process involved at least four phases of extension, made possible by adding a new canal each time. Each canal had its origin in an independent intake in the Jequetepeque River, which overcrowded the first few kilometers of the four canals where they were located almost one next to the other (Fig. 8)

It is also peculiar that the territories that were irrigated with each canal still correspond roughly to the modern districts in which the northern Jequetepeque is organized today: Guadalupe, Pueblo Nuevo, Chepén, and Pacanga. These modern districts are the same jurisdictions that were established early in Colonial times on the basis of the four large settlements and partitions of the valley (Martínez Compañón 1978–91 [1782–88]). The



Fig. 7 Late Moche stirrup spout bottles decorated with fineline designs from San José de Moro. Photograph by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

Jequetepeque Valley, in contrast to many other Peruvian coastal valleys, lacks a clearly-defined capital, since it includes two provinces: Pacasmayo, and Chepén, and two provincial capitals: the cities of San Pedro in the south and Chepén in the north. This non-centralized pattern, quite un-Peruvian, might have been an outcome of the Pre-Hispanic organization of the valley.

The concurrent use of four independent canals might have had some obvious disadvantages and advantages for the Moche. Each canal required control, maintenance, and yearly «cleaning,» which would have been extremely inefficient and costly. Multiple canals increase the effect of evaporation and water lost to infiltration. They may also imply the creation of four different bodies of regulation for the distribution of water. The advantages of having independent canal systems would be that if one canal was damaged the others would still be functional, allowing the populations of the valley to at least produce resources in the areas watered by them. However, in the context of a factionalized and confrontational political map, the destruction of one canal would imply the inability to irrigate an entire sector corresponding to an independent polity. True redundancy would imply that each region had more than one canal to insure its water supply, so that if one of them was damaged, the others would have come into use for each specific region-polity.

The nature of this redundant irrigation system, particularly when contrasted to the centralized nature of the southern system, is quite intriguing. It seems to me, and in this I agree with Eling, that irrigation of the northern Jequetepeque corresponds to a highly independent political configuration. Eling argues in favor of independent political bodies arising from independent canals. In his view «the parameters of the area under rule were probably determined by the canal system, that is, the people along a system were united by both a common water source and a common ruler» (Eling n.d. [1987]: 455). The organization of the irrigation system into independent canals could have been the effect of the coexistence of a series of independent autonomous polities in the Jequetepeque Valley. However, I do not agree with Eling in the categorization of the units that integrated the Jequetepeque as chiefdoms, as I would not agree either with their labeling as permanent and consolidated states. It seems to me that in spite of their independence, all of them belonged to a larger body: the northern Jequetepeque Moche Polity that could be better seen as a confederation of more-or-

less independent Moche polities that configured, at times, an opportunistic state. Eling argues that complex irrigation does not imply necessarily the existence of a traditional state organization (Eling n.d. [1987]: 461), and his idea might be corroborated by the fact that a centralized irrigation system was not developed in the northern Jequetepeque until the 1970s, when the state-sponsored Gallito Ciego Irrigation Project was put in place. It is likely that rights and regulations over land and water, and political divisions set forth at the time of origin, in Middle Moche when the canals were built, configured interactions and relationships that are still in place today.

Settlement Patterns and Political Divisions

The second line of information that corroborates the assumption that the northern Jequetepeque valley was politically fragmented through much of its Moche occupation is the location and configuration of Middle and Late Moche sites (Fig. 4). This subject has been investigated by several researchers and requires consideration of at least two different issues: the way in which time is represented in material culture and the location of sites in the valley. To address the issue of time, it is indispensable to define the chronological affiliation of the sites, and ultimately the chronology of the valley reflected in its material culture. The location of the sites is indispensable to understanding the extension and expansion of the Moche in this region. Both issues, building a chronology, and finding and dating sites, have been complex processes (Fig. 5) (Castillo 2001a; Dillehay 2001; Hecker and Hecker 1987, 1990; Donnan and Cock [eds.] 1986, 1997).

Most of the large sites corresponding to the Middle and Late Moche Periods have in common the fact that they were heavily protected by walls and parapets, that they were built in isolated and inaccessible areas of the valley, either on mountain tops (for example, Cerro Chepén), or in isolated regions facing the desert (for example, Portachuelo de Charcape or San Ildefonso) (Fig. 9) (Dillehay 2001; Swenson n.d. [2004]). These locations are not close to the agricultural fields, where most of the population had to live and work, and many times present the added problem of not having easy access to water nor to any other primary resources. Inside these sites, in the platforms and rooms that compose

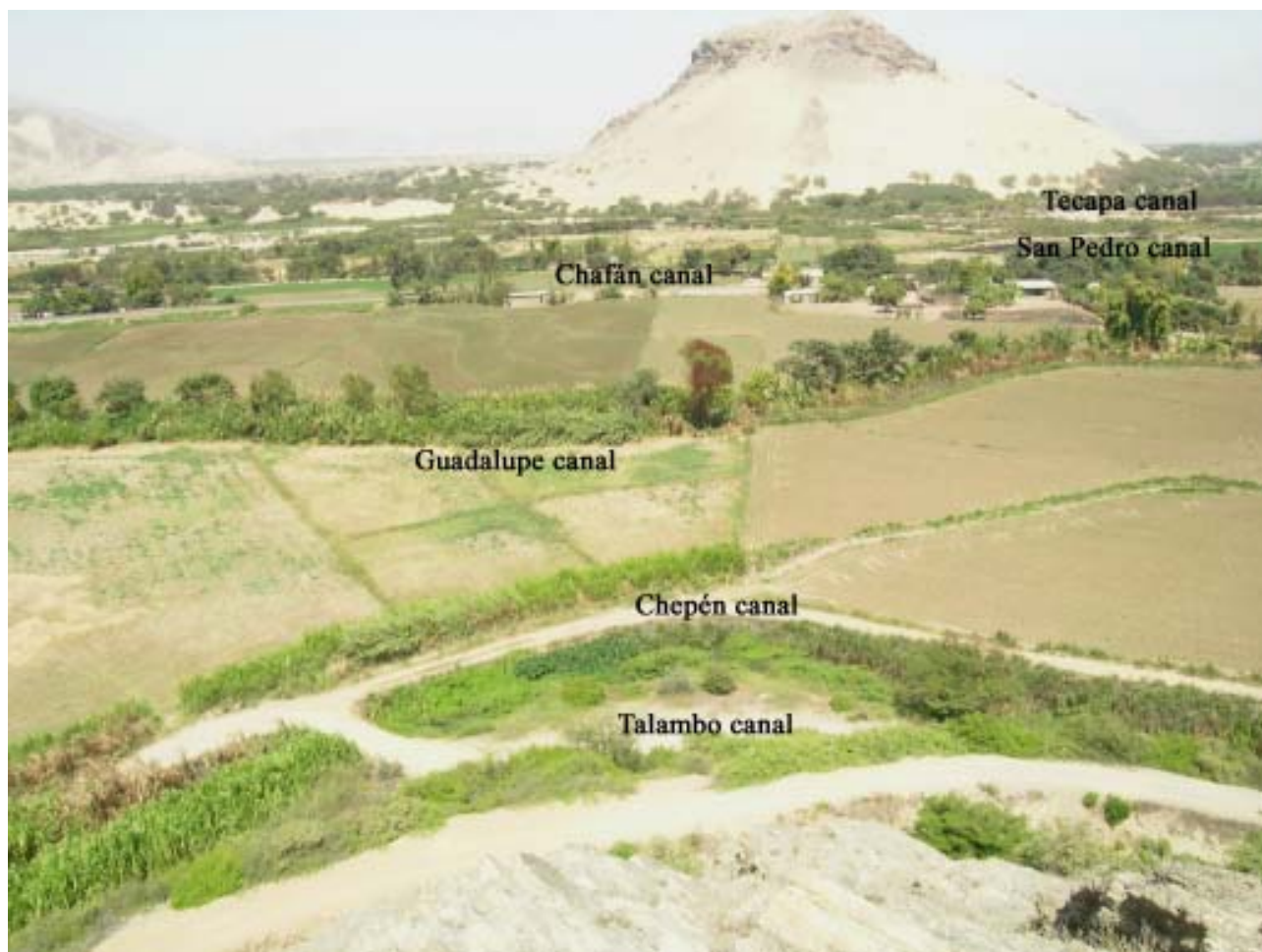


Fig. 8 View of the Jequetepeque Valley at the location of the intakes of the canals. Photograph by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

most of their visible architecture, we find unusual numbers of large ceramic containers, most likely used to store water and food, but not much other evidence of domestic life.

The second characteristic of most of these sites is their defensive nature. They were built as fortresses or strongholds, as in the case of San Ildefonso or Cerro Chepén, surrounded by several lines of walls. On top of these walls we still find concentrations of pebbles that were used as ammunition for slings (Dillehay 2001). Based on this evidence it seems plausible that these sites were not residential, but rather temporary refuges, where people could find shelter in case of attack. Furthermore, it is my impression that some of these sites could have functioned as secondary settlements working in conjunction with real residential settlements located closer to the agricultural fields and resources. This seems to be the case of both San Ildefonso and Charcape, where the defensive settlement had a typical domestic settlement nearby. In both cases, regrettably, the

residential site has been severely affected by the extension of agricultural fields.

In some of these sites Swenson (n.d. [2004]) has reported the existence of specialized ceremonial components. Structures composed of a peculiar combination of adjacent platforms connected by ascending ramps, containing a small number of decorated ceramics, exist in Cerro Chepén, San Ildefonso, Charcape, and Cerro Catalina (Figs. 9 and 10). Swenson argues that these structures might have been temples, albeit of a small scale, and that the existence of these components can be interpreted as attempts by the residents of these sites to acquire independence in the realm of ceremony and liturgy by replicating religious facilities inside their independent settings. Swenson's reconstruction of the fragmentary and independent nature of the religious infrastructure is concordant with the notion presented here that the existence of defensive sites demonstrates the fragmentary character of the political organization of the northern Jequetepeque.



Fig. 9 Late Moche sites with evidence of ritual functions (Cerro Chapén and San Ildefonso). Photographs by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

Defensive features such as parallel lines of defensive walls and parapets, although great for power display, imply a readiness to withstand attack. If the Moche of each one of these communities invested so many resources in their defense, it is probable that they had to face strong military or violent threats. But, who were they defending themselves against? At this point there is no evidence of a foreign threat coming from the Southern Moche, the Wari, or from the Cajamarca in the highlands. For instance, there is no evidence of foreign control of the sites manifested in a high quantity of foreign goods. Thus, the only plausible foes were the Moche themselves, that is, Moche from other independent communities in the valley. Whether these attacks were economically-motivated raids to pillage the resources of neighboring communities, or ceremonial wars aimed at capturing prisoners for human sacrifice

ceremonies (which are rare in the archaeological record of ceremonial centers in Jequetepeque), they must have been so constant and costly that they required massive investments of labor and resources in the construction of heavily-walled sites. The defensive features seem to point to the fact that the Moche in Jequetepeque were not only divided into independent polities, but that a high state of factionalism and confrontation had arisen among them. The high walls that concentrated the storage of staples, the location of the fortress-like sites, and the evidence of weaponry configure a state of permanent aggression or endemic warfare among the Moche polities of the Jequetepeque. In order to assess when and why this state of confrontation developed, it is critical to determine at what point the Moche started fighting against each other, and whether war was a permanent state or only a circumstantial and

occasional development.

In order to understand the nature of the Moche political system in the Jequetepeque the critical issue is to define when the Moche expansion towards the Chamán drainage happened, and if the expansion coincided with the process of factionalization. Both Dillehay (2001) and Swenson (n.d. [2004]) place the expansion process in the Late Moche Period. Their assessment is based on radiocarbon dates and on their identification of ceramic components of the sites as pertaining to Late Moche times. They conclude that the expansion of the Moche towards the desert areas of the valley and the process of political factionalization are late phenomena, even going as far as to contrast the extension of the northern Jequetepeque with the territorial contraction that supposedly was occurring in the Lambayeque and Moche Valleys at the same time. Moche sites there were moved up valley, to Pampa Grande and Galindo, close to the intakes of irrigation systems in order to assure control of water. My understanding of the process is somewhat different, but the difference is critical to understanding the entire development process in the northern Jequetepeque. Ceramics associated with most of the sites involved in this expansion, or in their older sectors, match the ceramic styles that are associated with the deeper levels of occupation at San José de Moro, dating the development of these sites instead to the Middle Moche Period (Fig. 6).³

A Middle Moche date for the defensive settlement would indicate that the fragmentation and factionalization process coincided with the expansion of the Moche into the Chamán drainage, and not with its Late Moche development. The fragmentation of the valley into small, independent regional polities, thus, would not have been a consequence of the weakening of a Moche centralized state that was unable to prevent the peripheral sites from gaining independence, from achieving total political autonomy, and from assuming their own line of defense against competing Moche polities (Dillehay 2001). It seems that the peculiar way in which the irrigation systems were built sprang out of, and later reinforced, the creation of autonomous political systems. We have, in reality, very limited evidence to support the idea that the Moche of the northern Jequetepeque ever constituted a unified and centralized state. The Moche expansion into the Chamán drainage was not the extension of a centralized state, as were the extensions of centralized empires such as the Inca, but instead it was more

likely a process analogous to the extension of the Greek city states into their colonies in southern Italy. Moche polities in the Jequetepeque seem to have shared the same traits that ancient Greek metropolises and colonies shared—religion, culture, and recognition of a shared ancestry—while at the same time they maintained political and economic independence.

The development of both the irrigation systems and the sites that correspond to the irrigation canals seems to point in the direction of successive expansion phases. Each phase, in turn, implies the creation of an intake in the Jequetepeque River, an irrigation network of canals and fields, and the development of residential settlements. Although this expansion process could have been the action of a centralized entity, it could also have been the result of independent segments of society. As Susan E. Ramírez has documented (personal communication, 2005), when a community grew beyond its carrying capacity the local *curaca* would commission one of his sons to develop new lands and take part of the community to the new territories. The new settlement and agricultural lands could then be integrated into the original community or they could develop into an independent community. A similar scenario might explain the Moche development of the redundant irrigation systems in the northern Jequetepeque.

In this scenario, the Chafán canal would have been built first, incorporating the agricultural fields of the Farfán area, followed by the construction of the Guadalupe canal that extended irrigation beyond the Jequetepeque Valley and into the southwestern end of the Chamán Valley. The third irrigation program, the Chepén canal, would have incorporated the southeastern sector of the Chamán Valley around the Cerro Chepén Mountains. At this point the barrier for all further developments seems to have been the Chamán River and its deep water channel. Bridging this natural barrier required the development of an alternative technology because it is likely that, even then, the river was deeper than the surrounding land. Alternatively the Moche could have used the Chamán River as the main irrigation canal or they could have built mampuestos to cross the river and irrigate the land north of the Chamán. The last phase of expansion seems to have been the incorporation of the northern Chamán Valley, through the extension of both the Guadalupe and Chepén canals into the Pueblo Nuevo and Pacanga sectors, and the addition of the new, even higher Talambo canal that irrigated the northeastern sector of the Chamán River. The



Fig. 10 Fortified Moche sites in the Jequetepeque Valley (Cerro Chapén, San Ildefonso, Portachuelo de Charcape, and Santa Catalina). Photographs by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project.

Talambo canal is still a mystery in terms of its chronological affiliation and nature. Eling (n.d. [1987]) was not sure if it was developed by the Moche or by a later society. On the other hand, this canal is the most likely candidate for an inter-valley, Jequetepeque-Zaña irrigation program

Conclusions: Reconstructing the Moche State of the Jequetepeque Valley, a Case for Opportunistic Political Organization

The political organization of the Jequetepeque Valley describes a developmental process that changed from centralized to fragmentary. In the Early Moche Phase a small and centralized state centered in Dos Cabezas developed in the margins of the Jequetepeque River. By the Middle Moche Period, population pressure probably forced the Moche to expand their territory into the adjacent northern and southern deserts. The southern sector—now the San José and San Pedro districts—was developed through a single, centralized irrigation system. The northern sector—the Chamán drainage—was irrigated by a peculiar set of four irrigation canals that, as argued above, could correspond to four independent jurisdictions: Farfán, Guadalupe, Chapén, and Talambo. Several large defensive sites correspond to these canals. It is likely that the expansion of the irrigation system created autonomous regions that eventually became independent polities. These polities seem to have engaged in factional competition and developed hostile relationships that required self-defense, and thus the construction of defensive sites

such as Cerro Chapén, San Ildefonso, and Cerro Catalina (Fig. 10). There are not many signs that political integration was the norm among these northern Jequetepeque polities. However, more or less integration seems to have occurred at certain moments in order to take advantage of opportunities or to confront needs or threats. Signs of interaction can be found in San José de Moro where all these polities seem to have participated in regional ceremonial activities and buried their elites. It must be stressed that in the northern Jequetepeque the process of political fragmentation seems not to have been an effect of a weakened state unable to prevent its regions from gaining autonomy, but rather a foundational effect. Key to understanding the process of political configuration in Jequetepeque is the way the irrigation system was created, with autonomous and redundant components. Colonization of the northern Jequetepeque seems to have been the result of entrepreneurial agents and not a state-sponsored, centralized endeavor.

At this point in the reconstruction of the political configuration of the northern Jequetepeque it is important to consider the effects that such a fragmentation process could have had. If completely isolated, the regional polities should have begun a process of cultural drift that would have led to the creation of completely different identities. But as mentioned above with respect to the harmonization factor in the multi-valley origins of the Moche, I think that a strong cultural mechanism must have existed to prevent cultural divergence. Furthermore, small and isolated communities are only autarchic in appearance. The exchange of goods and participation



Fig. 11 A funerary ceremony depicted on a Late Moche stirrup spout bottle. Photograph by the San José de Moro Archaeological Project; drawing by Donna McClelland.

in a complementary economy are almost unavoidable among these communities. One of the biggest dangers of isolation happens at the genetic level. It is likely that these communities recognized the importance of limiting inbreeding in order to renew their genetic pools and to prevent disease. To attain this they had to participate in social interaction so that local youth could have the opportunity to find marriage partners among young people of different communities.

In all of these cases, it seems that there was always a great need to integrate the region and to create opportunities for social interaction. The regional ceremonial center of San José de Moro might have provided all of the communities in the region with such services. The role of ceremonial centers would have been, first and foremost, to create opportunities for social interaction.

A second role that these centers played must have been geared toward the ruling elites, who were exposed to the Moche tradition in these settings and to the ritual activities that were celebrated there (Fig. 11). The participation of the elites in ritual combat, in sacrifice and presentation ceremonies, and in public performances of mythical narratives shared throughout the North Coast must have been vital to their integration into the Moche tradition and would have produced a homogenization effect visible in much of the elite material culture. Ultimately, the primary role of dominant ideologies is not to

dominate, but to articulate and integrate, to give a sense of community to the dominators (Abercrombie et al. 1980).

In sum, there is evidence of both strong cooperation and association among the territories and sectors that compose the Jequetepeque Valley. Ceremonial activities seem to have been shared by all units in the valley, particularly among the elites that were buried at San José de Moro. A shared ceremonial tradition would have provided them with opportunities for social integration, economic interaction, and political coordination that were not available at the local level. Under certain circumstances, for instance, if the valley was threatened by an external enemy the local polities could have articulated a common defensive strategy. It is likely that the same settings and organizations that served to structure ceremonial life were also useful in organizing the region to face threats or to take advantage of opportunities. In any event, some form of regional organization must have existed; otherwise the Moche polities of the Jequetepeque would have been a fairly weak adversary for the powerful Southern Moche.

The evidence presented here indicates that, in the Jequetepeque Valley during the Moche era, a particular form of political development existed that can be best understood as an Opportunistic State. This form of complex, yet unstable, political organization

meant that under certain circumstances, in some occasions for collaboration, and in carrying out of certain duties, true political integration and centralization was achieved, albeit of short duration and only to seize opportunities for mutual benefit. In the absence of such opportunities or circumstances, or in times when such conditions did not arise, the political organization of the valley likely remained fragmented; unstable, conflictive relations likely developed among the local political units. The key to coexisting state formation and fragmentation and regional independence is the unusual emphasis on ceremonial activities that were celebrated around regional centers such as San José de Moro. These ceremonial practices were the cement that bonded all the sectors of the valley. In combination with these practices, strategies also developed for domination, resistance, and negotiation. As a last resort, political power would have derived from the ideological prestige that came from the manipulation of a complex ideology, which was manifest in ritual objects and ceremonies on the regional level. Likewise, the uniting pressures of religious ideology also would have thwarted movements toward independence present in ideologies of resistance. The concept of negotiation, in which different sides negotiate their interests in order to diminish the cost of opposition and to maximize benefit, seems to have been intrinsic to political control within a highly fragmented political scene. The Moche state of the Jequetepeque Valley manifests a political formation that existed in some circumstances, for example, during the celebration of regional rituals, in combat against a common enemy, and in the maintenance of a large irrigation canal. This political unification would also have existed in order to complete some duties that went beyond the local sphere, such as dispute resolution or the negotiation of water rights. When these opportunities, circumstances, and functions were not present, the political formation seems to have returned to its fractioned state, in which individual interests of the sectors took priority, each community maintained its own territory and belongings out of the reach of other communities, and the role of the state was very restricted. Finally, the elites played an important role in integration. They certainly remained in near constant contact, as they would have been incorporated into networks of ritual practices and connected by the interregional sphere of the Moche religion. This complex system of power, based in the manipulation of symbols and in the participation in rituals, seems to have been

activated seasonally in ceremonies that would have taken place in sites such as San José de Moro.

Notes

¹ Studying the irrigation systems of a valley as large as the Jequetepeque is a daunting task. Fortunately, the system was examined in great detail in the 1980s by Herbert Eling, then a doctoral student in the University of Texas, Austin. Eling's (n.d. [1987]) study of the irrigation networks in the Jequetepeque is a fundamental source of information and insight in the role that irrigation had in the definition of the characteristics of the Jequetepeque Valley. Even though his research focused on the later periods, and not on the origins of the irrigation system, his data and interpretations can be adapted in light of the research done in the last 20 years. According to his study most of the irrigation systems were already in place and working by his Period 1 (Pre- A.D. 500), roughly corresponding to the Early and Middle Moche phases.

² This region is fairly well known thanks to surveys done by Wolfgang Hecker and Gisela Hecker (1987), Tom Dillehay and Alan Kolata (Dillehay 2001), and the San José de Moro Archaeological Project. Several of the most important sites within it were recently excavated by Edward Swenson (n.d. [2004]), Ilana Johnson (2008), and Patrick Scott. Particularly relevant for the study of this region are Marco Rosas' mapping and excavations at Cerro Chepén (Rosas n.d.). Finally, the site of San José de Moro has been studied continuously for 18 years, and has produced relevant information allowing us to reconstruct ceremonial practices, funerary traditions and a complex occupational history applicable to the entire northern Jequetepeque Valley (Castillo et al. n.d.).

³ In the northern Jequetepeque the most diagnostic elements to differentiate Middle from Late Moche is the contrast between press molded face-neck jars and platform rim ollas. The first type is the quintessential Middle Moche form, present not only at San José de Moro but in Middle Moche burials in Pacatnamú (Ubbelohde-Doering 1983; Donnan and McClelland 1997). Meanwhile, Late Moche is associated with a peculiar form of olla which has a pronounced platform parallel to the rim. This form, identified by Donnan in Pacatnamú (Donnan and Cock [eds.] 1986), is so diagnostic that no examples of it are known from any Middle Moche context, nor does it last into the Transitional period (Castillo et al. n.d.).

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