

# Growing up in ancient Peru – stages of childhood according to burial assemblages and iconography of the Moche culture

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Until fairly recently archaeology was almost exclusively androcentric, both in terms of research conducted and the researchers conducting it. The situation changed in the 1970s as a result of the development of feminism and gender studies. Soon also children became a subject of archaeological research. This article is an attempt to apply this relatively new approach to South American archaeology. Burial assemblages and iconography are analysed in order to obtain information about childhood and to identify the possible stages of childhood in the Moche culture (100–800 CE), paying special attention to the transition from being a child to being an adult. The results offer some interesting insights into the social structure of the Moche and their attitude towards the youngest members of their society.

KEY-WORDS: childhood, Moche, burials, iconography

## INTRODUCTION

Children were not an important subject of archaeological research for most of the time in the history of the discipline. The archaeologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries devoted their studies to ‘much more important subjects’ such as the beginnings of humankind, populating of the continents, development of the hunter-gatherer society model, domestication of plants and animals, processes of tool production, beginnings of settled lifestyle, emergence of towns and states, beginnings of religion, art, writing, the meaning of war, migrations and trade contacts – to name just a few. All these issues were naturally associated with adults. Children did not contribute to

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any of the developments mentioned above. They did not create anything important, then why should scholars be interested in children while the only valuable thing about them was that they would eventually become adults?

Like any other discipline archaeology, from its very beginning, was extremely androcentric. Not only did mainly males work as archaeologists, but also they interpreted the past as centred around our male ancestors. Women were not perceived as a substantial part of the society, they always remained in the background and, with very few exceptions, never played any significant role in the creation of reality. Neither did children.

This situation started to change only in the 1970s. Obviously, this shift was strongly related to the overall transformation of the society that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, especially with the development of feminism, followed by gender studies (see Ariès 1960, and the interesting study on art published much later by Wiber 1997). It became clear that the simplified vision of the past which could be described as the 'evolution of (solely) *man*' was incorrect. The role of the representatives of the previously marginalized groups such as women and children started to be noticed in the research, becoming, over the decades, a big part of the mainstream.

Children and their role in the past human societies evolved into an important research topic in the late 1980s and early 1990s of the twentieth century; first in history and anthropology, then also in archaeology. A lot of research became published, presenting the development of theory and methodology along with many case studies (Hardman 1973; Gottlieb 2000; Hirshfeld 2002; Hammond and Hammond 1981; Lillehammer 1989; Wilkie 2000; Kamp 2001; Baxter 2005; Wileman 2005; Stroud 2005). This new approach also became a subject of discussion in Poland in the recent decade (Pawleta 2003, 2005, 2006 or Dzieduszycki and Wrzesiński 2004).

This article fits into this stream as a case study and an attempt to bring this relatively new approach into the realm of the South American archaeology. The material used for this attempt comes from the sites of one of the best known pre-Columbian cultures – the Moche (100-800 CE)<sup>1</sup>.

#### CHILDREN'S AGE IN BIOARCHAEOLOGY

It is quite true that almost until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century children were barely noticed in the archaeological material, and consequently also in physical anthropology, or what

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<sup>1</sup> The first results of this research were presented as an article published in Polish in *Przegląd Historyczny* (Więckowski and Wołoszyn 2012).

later became bioarchaeology. Their presence was certainly obvious, as it is in any human population which wants to survive, but nobody was interested in studying their remains, their social status, or the role they could have played in the past societies. Bioarchaeology, being itself a relatively new field of study, started to pay more attention to children at the turn of the century (summed up in Lewis 2007; Halcrow and Tayels 2008, and with regard to the osteological remains, Scheuer and Black 2000; Baker *et al.* 2005). This rather rapid development of interest in children resulted in a demand to resolve the methodological issues related to the age stages in the ontogenetic development of humans, both from the biological and sociological perspective.

The precise age-at-death of an individual is virtually impossible to tell. Without the clear information on the dates of the individual's birth and death, the age-at-death may only be estimated on the basis of the biological (developmental) changes of the organism, in the case of archaeological remains – bones and teeth. The intra-human variability in this regard is substantial. Therefore, instead of reconstructing the precise number of years an individual lived, bioarchaeologists tend to use 'age categories' in their research more than an age counted in years since the moment of birth. It needs to be stated, however, that in order to interpret the social status of an individual, his/her age is essential information. The process of ageing, although thought to be unaffected by culture, has a tremendous impact on how a human of a certain age is perceived within a particular society (see, e.g., Martin *et al.* 2014: 154). There are at least three different ways to understand the age (age-at-death) and its implication for the interpretation thereafter: chronological (i.e., how long the individual lived, calculated, e.g., in years), biological/physiological (i.e., the stage of the development of the individual's organism, in archaeology usually the skeleton), and social (i.e., the position within the age-related social hierarchy which a given individual fitted the best). The most important distinction associated with age, or the most fundamental age categories recognized universally in all of the human societies, are subadult and adult. A subadult (infant, child or juvenile) is an individual in the process of becoming an adult. An adult means generally that the individual has reached his/her 'final form': does not change drastically any more (the size of the body is established and changes slowly) and can 'produce offspring'.

The bioarchaeological subadult age category starts with the intrauterine stage of life followed by the birth, and is limited by becoming adult at some point. This time span can be divided into four sub-categories:

- fetal age (*fetus*) – the intrauterine stage of life limited by the birth (may vary in length, but generally lasts about nine months);
- infancy (*infans I*) – starts with the birth and lasts until the moment of eruption of the first permanent tooth – more or less until the seventh year of life;

- childhood (*infans II*) – covers the whole process of the permanent teeth eruption (excluding third molars), i.e., finishes around the 12th–14th year of life;
- juvenility (*iuvenis*) – the body develops and changes to reach the ‘final form’ – the ossification process is finalized in the long bones, generally it finishes around the 20th–21st year of life.

After that, the individual is considered to be ‘fully’ adult<sup>2</sup>.

The aforementioned age sub-categories are recognized mainly on the basis of tooth formation and eruption, together with the growth and eventual fusion of the skeletal elements. The age estimation obtained by one of the methods is sometimes also called the ‘skeletal age’ or ‘dental age’, since, although the variation in either skeletal or dental development is considered to be minimal, it still exists (in other words two children of the chronological age of five years may show different patterns and stages of skeletal and dental development reflected for example in their body size or number of the teeth present).

It is easy to notice that these biological, and, after all, artificially created age categories actually correspond with the social perception of an individual. The youngest children are treated differently from the older ones, and the latter ones in a different way from the ‘teenagers’ or ‘almost adults’. Thus it is clear that the *biological age* determines the *social age*, and influences purely social phenomena, such as status and hierarchy. Small children, although they may enjoy great attention from their own family, have a relatively low status: they have limited means of communication and have to be taken care of. When they grow a little, they can actively participate in social activities: communicate, take care of themselves and of younger siblings, for instance: their status changes drastically. The child starts to perform a certain role within the society, becomes gradually a member of the ‘adult’ group. The transition between the childhood and adulthood is often marked with a special event – the rite of passage (for example *bar mitzwah* marks the moment when a child becomes responsible for his/her actions in the eyes of God). Bearing that in mind, we can expect and assume that the stages of biological development, influencing the social age perception, will be somehow reflected in archaeological material – especially in regard to the funeral behaviour. An individual’s burial is not only an effect of the religious background, but reflects the position of the deceased within the society, in the perception of its hierarchy. Therefore, knowing that children generally had a different status from adults, we should expect some variability between how they were treated after death. This variability should shed some light on the status of children of different ages within the society they came from.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a whole plethora of published research on the topic, but for the nice summary see Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994.

## CHILDREN'S BURIALS IN THE MOCHE CULTURE

Children's burials are known from several Moche sites across the north coast of Peru. The ones used for the purpose of this article come from the eponymous sites from the Moche Valley – where two *huacas* (sacred places) were constructed – *Huaca del Sol* and *Huaca de la Luna*, as well as the cemetery of Huanchaco, and the cemeteries of Pacatnamu and San José de Moro, located further north, in the Valley of Jequetepeque (Donnan and Mackey 1978; Donnan 1995; Donnan and Cock 1997; Castillo *et al.* 2008; Bettcher 2001). The forms of publication of those graves vary: there is not enough bioarchaeological information provided in many cases. For that reason, the results may have a bit more speculative nature than it might be expected from a typical bioarchaeological analysis. However, taking into account that there is almost no research on the childhood stages in the Moche society, all the information obtained through such analyses will have a significant value.

The idea and the hypothesis behind the subsequent analysis is that the burials of individuals who died at different age stages (child – juvenile – adult) will differ in some respects. The differences may be reflected in the form of burial, its location, personal effects associated with the deceased, or the amount of effort put into the preparation of their body and the grave. If such a phenomenon occurs, and its presence is characteristic for a specific age stage, it could be interpreted as a reflection of the actual differences between individuals of particular age groups. These differences may have been translated into differentiation in the social status associated with these groups (Binford 1971; Taitner 1978).

There are two main archaeological contexts where remains of children are discovered: burials within the perimeter of the ceremonial centres and burials within the cemeteries. The burials located in the ceremonial centres are specific due to their location and function, as they are usually associated with either the elite, or the sacrificial character of the interments, and as such, do not necessarily represent typical behaviour towards the dead in a particular age group. As *atypical* by definition they still give us a glimpse into the relations between the social status and a given individual, showing, for example, that the 'elite membership' comes with the birth and not with deeds. The samples from the cemeteries, on the other hand, should be very useful for such an analysis. The social status aside, the burials from such locations represent the typical Moche populations of the area. The data may change, as the excavations are still ongoing, but the preliminary results show a typical demographic situation – the highest mortality rate within the youngest part of the population, decreasing sharply when it comes to the juvenile group. Children, especially in the initial years of life, are exposed to many potentially lethal factors, especially of pathological origin. After surviving that crucial time they enter the juvenile stage and then adult life, when the mortality rate is lower, and depends on the biological (illness and childbearing risk) or cultural (intragroup violence) factors.

The San José de Moro archaeological site, apart from a large number of collective burials, yielded 54 graves dated to the later Early Intermediate Period and to the Middle Horizon associated with the Moche culture. All of them were primary interments in pits, and more than half of them belonged to children younger than seven years old. Only two graves contained remains of older children, and the rest – of adult individuals (Castillo *et al.* 2008; Bettcher 2001).

We have more information related to the Pacatnamu site. As of the mid-2000s there were 84 individuals within 67 burial contexts found. 27 contexts contained remains of small children; only one represented an older, juvenile, individual. Most of the primary burials containing child remains were single interments, although there was one grave where a small, a year-and-a-half-old child and an adult woman (25–35 years old) were buried together. It is also possible that in the case of Pacatnamu there was a sector within the cemetery where small children were buried – there was a small cluster of three separate child burials found in the western part of the area (Donnan and Cock 1997).

The analysis of the grave goods associated with the burials, both of the children, and the adults, shows that children were given a smaller number of them, but generally of the same type as adults. The grave goods included, among others: pottery, gourd containers and small metal objects (nose and ear ornaments). The only substantial difference was that children were often given simple bracelets (beads on a string), never found in adult graves.

As opposed to the grave goods, the preparation of the burial itself shows greater variability. Typically, the body of an adult individual was laid on a cane frame and encased in a textile shroud or put inside a simple cane casket (tube), while a child's body was usually buried only in a simple textile shroud or in a shroud reinforced with cane splints to keep the body rigid. It is possible then that the amount of work, an effort put in the preparation of the deceased for burial, was much smaller with respect to the children than in the case of the adult members of the society. It is also possible that even if the children had a special status within their own families, their overall status within the society was rather low.

Yet again, this assumption does not apply to the burials from the first archaeological context mentioned: the ritual one. This also strengthens the hypothesis that 'birth status' was a very important factor in the burial behaviour. For instance, a child burial from within the perimeter of the Huaca del Sol in the Moche Valley contained a relatively rich assemblage that included a pectoral made with a lot of different types of beads. Another burial, from San José de Moro, was a collective grave with five separate chambers, where the main individual was a child accompanied by four other children, two adults, and rich grave goods (Donnan and Mackey 1978). At the Pacatnamu site there was also one burial relatively rich in grave goods: it was burial number 18 from the H45CM1 cemetery. It is important to state, however, that this 'richness'

was in numbers rather than in actual value of the buried artifacts (Donnan and Cock 1997).

Child remains were also frequently found as accompanying burials, possibly retainers. The best example will be the most famous Moche burials ever found – the royal burials from Sipán (Alva and Donnan 1993). In the most important, and the richest, one, named the grave of the Lord of Sipán, one of the supposed retainer skeletons belonged to an older child (a boy, around ten years old). The child's body was deposited seated by the head of the lord. Bioarchaeological analyses revealed that the boy survived quite a few deep nutritional stresses during his short life – information suggesting that he was from the lower levels of the social hierarchy (Verano 1997). In a different location within the same burial complex, another ten-year-old child was buried, along with a young man (of the highest social status) and two women. The child had a copper face mask and a number of gourd containers were placed around him, as well as the remains of a dog and a snake located nearby (Alva and Donnan 1993). Nevertheless, it is difficult to confirm whether the children were actual retainers, or were sacrificed in order to accompany the main individual in the afterlife.

There are also known sacrificial contexts containing child remains. For example, there were remains of three young children (less than three years old) found at one of the Huaca de la Luna courtyards. A number of mutilated young male skeletons with clear signs of being sacrificed were discovered in the upper layers of the same courtyard. The children could of course have been buried without a connection to the sacrificial event, but the fact that two of them were deposited headless suggests strongly that their death was possibly the first stage of an elaborate long-lasting sacrificial ritual (Scott 1999).

Taking aside the elite and sacrificial contexts, it seems to be quite clear that children, especially younger ones, did not have any special status within the Moche society. They were buried in a quite similar way to adults, but lacking the same amount of dedication for burial preparation. The grave goods were also comparable, although their number and quality was lesser in general. Their graves were sometimes located in the areas of the cemeteries dedicated exclusively to children.

Knowing that, we may ask yet another question: when did the child become a legitimate, i.e., adult, member of the society? Was there any special event associated with that shift that could have left a hint in the archaeological material? Even with the small number of differences in the funeral behaviour reserved for children and adults, the answer should still be possible. Unfortunately, as it was already stated before, juvenile individual burials are quite rare. Demographically speaking: if one survived the difficulties of childhood, their chances to survive until and into adulthood increased. Therefore, there is a limited number of known burials associated with this particular stage of life available for the analysis. The burials are not only scarce but also difficult to interpret. It seems that in the burials of teenagers, pottery appears more often, and

other elements (among them gourd containers, metal objects and textiles) are more frequent and elaborate. The bead bracelets disappear. In place of the simple shroud, sometimes reinforced with cane splinters, the cane frame appears. Later, as the deceased gets older, the reinforcement sometimes changes into the cane coffin. It seems that the 'age of change' from a child into adult fell somewhere between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> year of life. The analysis of burials, however, does not show any special event accompanying that shift, which is not necessarily surprising. Probably, like in many other societies, the shift from childhood to adulthood concerned only the living members and was not clearly reflected in the funeral customs. It might be so because if one died, they died either as a child, or as an adult, and not a 'transitional being'. It seems that to be an adult in the Moche culture society meant to be able to bear children in the case of women, and to be able to fight with regard to men.

#### CHILDREN IN MOCHE ICONOGRAPHY

The images of children were rendered in sculptural (three dimensional), relief, or painted forms. The latter are rare, since there are only two fineline painted depictions of children known to the authors of this article: both probably created by the same author (e.g., Kutscher 1983: Fig. 163). This type of pottery was predominately of ritual use. It was used during sacrificial events and as a funeral offering, forming part of the burial assemblage. The representations of children usually show smaller human silhouettes, normally of undetermined sex, accompanying other, bigger human silhouettes – presumably adult individuals, practically always with a recognizable sex and status (for example dead or alive), or, in some cases, supernatural beings. It is worth pointing out that children always accompany an adult; they are never shown as the central person in any depiction. The form of the representation is very simplistic, if not totally schematic, lacking any individual traits. The way the children are represented in art may of course be a result of the artist's limited skill. The image measured not more than a few centimetres, and one-third or one-fourth of the child silhouette was the head. The head featured a simple representation of the eyes and mouth, sometimes also the nose and ears. The rest of the body was very schematic and simple. Another explanation for such a simplistic approach could be more ideological. Moche artists often differentiated between members of different status or ethnic groups with the quality and number of traits individualizing the person. For instance, the representations of elite members or priests, as well as the Recuay culture representatives (Moche neighbours) and prisoners are very detailed, while the representations of women and children are very simplified (Wołoszyn 2003).

The small size of the children's figures, especially in comparison to the accompanying adults, allowed the Moche artists to distinguish children from the other age

groups. The smallest ones, several times smaller than the adults, resemble dolls or figurines, as they are almost the size of a hand. They are usually shown naked or bundled in a textile, seated in the adult's lap, carried in a shawl tied on the back or laid along them on some bedding. The bigger ones, possibly a few years old, are shown as much taller individuals, although still three-four times smaller than adults. They have parts of the body outlined; sometimes their clothes are shown, as well as face painting. They are held by adults in their arms or carried on their back bundled in a textile. The oldest children are shown standing or sitting by the adults, and their images have more details: clothing elements, paintings, headdress, etc. It is not possible to tell the sex of the smaller children. As far as the older ones are concerned, it seems that only boys are shown, and, which is particularly interesting, they are the only representatives of the Recuay or Recuay-related cultural groups, who were depicted in Moche art quite frequently (Wołoszyn 2014). They are usually shown wearing typical attire associated with adult males: the loincloth, short-sleeved tunic, short hair, sometimes with a ponytail, round ear ornaments, coca containers, etc.

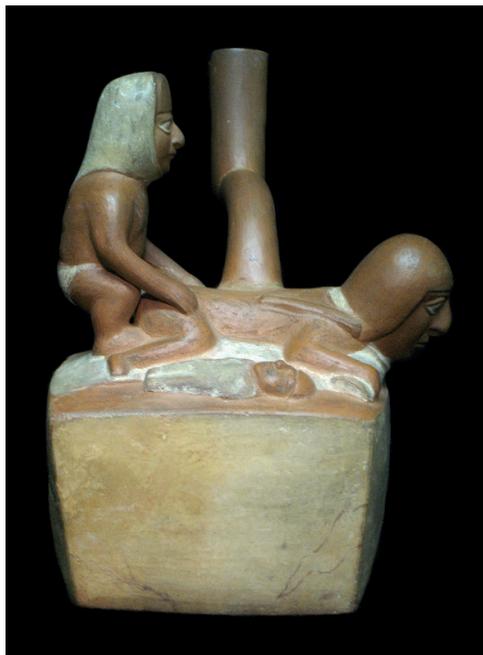
The scenes with children in Moche art may be listed as the following themes:

- a sitting woman, assisted by one or two midwives, giving birth to a child (e.g., Jürgensen and Ohrt eds 2000: 118);
- a child being breast-fed while the mother is seated or is lying on bed during a sexual act (Weismantel 2004; Fig. 1);
- a child being held by a woman in her arms, sitting in her lap, or carried on her back (Fig. 2);
- a child (smaller or bigger) held by an adult male personage (often whistling and with a wrinkled face) wearing a cape with a hood (Fig. 3);
- an older child sitting by an adult woman or, rarely, by a man (Fig. 4).

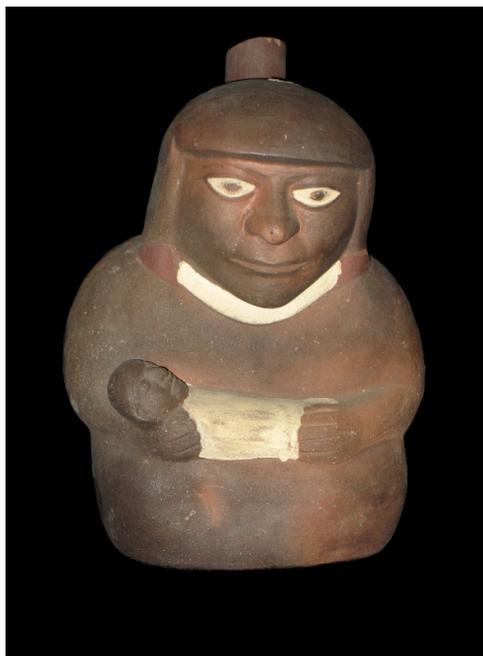
Besides the scenes listed above that may be called as quite realistic, children are also portrayed accompanied by supernatural beings or as members of the realm of death:

- a small cadaverous child carried or led by a cadaverous woman (e.g., Kutscher 1954: Figs. 30B and 31A);
- a woman, with a child in a bundle on her back, being beaten by the supernatural being with jaguar teeth (e.g., Kutscher 1954: Fig. 55A);
- a small child carried by an anthropomorphized bat-warrior.

Children are also portrayed in the so-called Moche 'portrait vessels': three-dimensional, usually realistic representations of human heads (Figs 5, 6). Most of such vessels represent heads of adult males, but it may be assumed that around 8.5% of them may be interpreted as representing heads of children. The faces have distinctively child facial

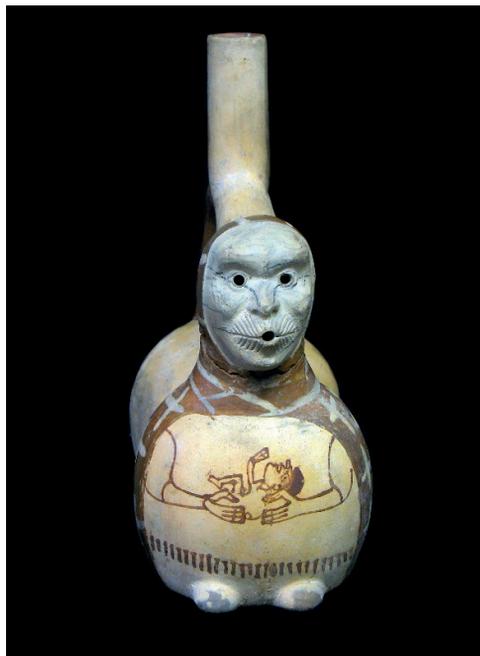


**Fig. 1.** Moche 'erotic vessel' with an accompanying child (Inv. No. VA 18537; author's photograph, courtesy of Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany)



**Fig. 2.** A woman holding a small child (Inv. No. VA 17991; author's photograph, courtesy of Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany)

**Fig. 3.** A small child held by a whistling adult male with a wrinkled face  
(Inv. No. VA 11437; author's photograph, courtesy of Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany)



**Fig. 4.** An older boy sitting by a woman  
(Inv. No. VA 64330; author's photograph, courtesy of Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany)



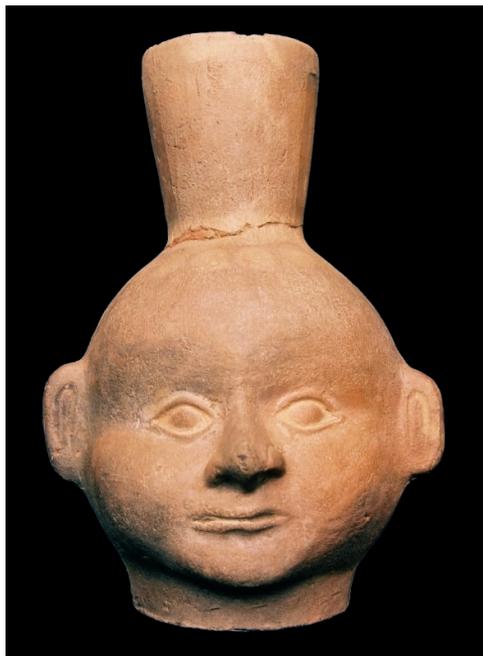


Fig. 5. Moche 'portrait vessel' with a depiction of a child with an uncovered head (Inv. No. MLo00444; author's photograph, courtesy of Larco Museum, Lima, Peru)

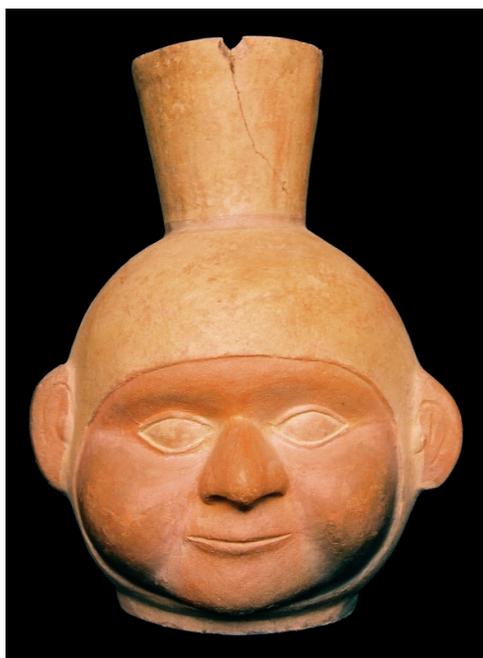


Fig. 6. Moche 'portrait vessel' with a depiction of a child with a head covered with a simple bonnet-like cap tied under the chin (Inv. No. MLo00392; author's photograph, courtesy of Larco Museum, Lima, Peru)

traits and proportions. Almost 30% of the total of these vessels show heads of children covered with simple bonnet-like caps tied under the chin. It is worth mentioning that this type of a headdress is associated exclusively with child representations. As the portrait vessels are considered to represent not individual persons but rather typical members of different social groups, it is possible that some of the children enjoyed a relatively high social status, most probably associated with their birthright (Wołoszyn 2003; 2008; *in contra* Donnan 2001; 2004).

Is it possible to tell the status of children on the basis of the pottery iconography? To some extent, it certainly is. First of all, as it was already mentioned before, the representations of children are almost uniformly schematic and very simplified (especially the images of the youngest children). In the case of the older ones, the number of individual traits is also extremely limited, as if the Moche artists did not want to show any interest in them. That implies indirectly that children did not have any special status within the society. The artist acknowledged their existence, used their images when it was necessary, but the uniformity of the images and their simplicity suggest they were somehow marginalized, at least in art. The presence of the vessels representing the scenes associated with children (birth, breast-feeding, taking care of a child) and the context they were found in, a grave, may suggest that they were used as an affirmation of life, fertility, often found in funeral contexts (Bourget 2001; Weismantel 2004).

The youngest children are always represented without any sex attributes and naked, which may be another hint indicating their status. In Moche iconography, nudity was used only in a very few, well-defined contexts. First of all, women could have been shown nude, especially during a sexual intercourse or giving birth. With reference to men, nudity is usually associated with prisoners, with warriors defeated in the battle and led by the victorious party (men in full dress and regalia) to death. This suggests that nudity was associated with a total dependency, passiveness, and the lack of resistance. If so, some of the representations of children, especially the images showing an old whistling wrinkled-face man holding a naked child may actually show a human sacrifice (Bourget 2001; Hocqueghem 1980). It is interesting in this light that the actual scenes showing the ritual of sacrifice (including throat-slitting, stoning to death or tearing bodies apart) never show any images of children. Moreover, the depictions of whistling wrinkle-faced men holding children show them wearing clothes not associated with priests, warriors, or supernatural beings, but quite typical images showing people supposed to be representatives of the Recuay culture. The depictions of older children, as it has already been stated above, also resemble those of the Recuay, with such attributes as a typical haircut with a characteristic ponytail above the forehead, ear ornaments and face paintings. Therefore, a question arises if the children were really shown as being sacrificed, or could they have actually been children of the Recuay/Recuay-related origin 'obtained' by the Moche for this particular reason (Wołoszyn

2012; Benson 1976)? That would in fact be just the opposite of the sacrificial procedures concerning adult people: as far as adults were concerned, the sacrifices were 'recruited' from the same (i.e., Moche) population, as it can be judged from iconographic representations.

There are no images of children old enough to be regarded as representing the age of transition into adulthood. Nor are there scenes that could be interpreted as such. For this reason, just like in the case of bioarchaeology, it is possible to see the images of children when they are indeed children, and then only of adults. As a consequence, it is virtually impossible to confirm or contradict the existence of rites of passage.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is quite clear that both bioarchaeology (with funeral archaeology), and iconography are very valuable sources for the research on children and childhood in the past societies. The former provides direct information about the actual children through their remains and the context they were buried in, and the latter, through the perception of them in what we could basically call art. It is necessary to remember that both of the sources have their own limitations. In bioarchaeology this limitation is quite obvious – only the remains of the individuals who did not succeed are available. As such, the actual grave goods may represent more the feelings of the mourners than the actual status or wealth of the deceased. The ones who actually survived the difficulties of the first stages of life became adults, and obviously their status is changed. In the case of iconography, the limitations are of a different nature. First, it is the quality of the representations, some of them may be biased due to technological restrictions, some due to the iconographical canon that might not be comprehensible nowadays. Most, if not all, of the representations of children were created by adults and for adults. They could then represent the perception of children through adult eyes but also show either the actual, or idealized information about children's role and status within the society, or even used as a metaphor of the behaviour or traits visible in adults (Baxter 2005).

Despite these limitations both the actual remains of the children and their representations in iconography form an extremely valuable document of the past, difficult to overestimate. The interpretation of these sources provides a lot of information on children themselves as well as on the perception of children and childhood in the past. It must be remembered that although the osteological remains, the skeleton and teeth, are substantial and non-disputable evidence of someone's life and death, with regard to iconography there are a lot of factors making the interpretation difficult. A depiction of a woman holding a child may be interpreted in various ways, depending on the

quality of the imaging, the reason the image was created, the information it was supposed to carry. The image may represent a woman holding a child or a figurine representing a child, a supernatural holding the metaphorically represented mankind, or even a human being holding a spirit or soul (Scher 2010; Bourget 1996).

Nevertheless, the analysis of the actual remains supported by the analysis of the iconography helps to obtain a lot of information regarding not only the stages of life of the individual (in the case of this article, the stages of childhood), but also, for example, gender roles of different age and sex groups. The possibility to cross over the firm biological information with highly interpretative iconographical one may translate into the information on the individual maturation (sexual and social), socialization, reaching different levels of status and the hierarchy characteristic of a given society or archaeological culture.

With respect to the Moche culture, the analysis of the skeletal remains of the children within the funeral contexts, along with the detailed iconographical analysis of the available depictions, show clearly that, in general, children did not have any kind of a special social status, although they could have enjoyed a high status in their own family/kin groups. Both the funeral attire, and the iconography seem to support that hypothesis. Children's burials, although similar to those of adults in many regards, show less effort in their preparation, smaller amount of work dedicated to their creation, and their grave goods are simpler and less abundant. Similarly, their depictions in Moche art lack details known from the representations of adult, mostly elite-related, males. Their images are schematic and simplified: the younger the child, the simpler the picture. Their importance (meaning the social significance and not the one in the family) grew with age, and most probably changed completely when an individual reached adulthood (the age allowing to bear children, produce food and useful artefacts, play a certain role in rituals, or to fight). Small children are never depicted in the centre of the scenes showing the ceremonies of adults. They are sometimes depicted being held by the whistling wrinkled-face man, the picture interpreted as a part of a sacrificial ceremony, but it is not clear what this picture actually represents. The depictions of older children are very similar to the images depicting members of the Recuay culture. Were the children sacrificed then? There is no clear answer to that. Unfortunately, but quite expectedly, we have no clear information about the precise 'age-of-transition', or about any rites-of-passage, either.

Children certainly did arouse interest and possibly warm feelings. The grave goods given to them and the numerous depictions of childbirth, breast-feeding and hugging, carrying or holding children by women (conceivably their mothers) prove that beyond any doubt. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that this kind of depiction could also have played a particular role in the rituals connected with fertility and life, since most of the vessels with this kind of iconography were found in the burials.

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