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**THE EVOLUTION AND CHANGES OF MOCHE TEXTILE STYLE:  
WHAT DOES STYLE TELL US ABOUT NORTHERN TEXTILE  
PRODUCTION?**

**María Jesús Jiménez Díaz**

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Although Moche textiles form part of the legacy of one of the best known cultures of pre-Hispanic Peru, today they remain relatively unknown<sup>1</sup>. Moche culture evolved in the northern valleys of the Peruvian coast (Fig. 1) during the first 800 years after Christ (Fig. 2). They were contemporary with other cultures such as Nazca or Lima and their textiles exhibited special features that are reflected in their textile production.

Previous studies of Moche textiles have been carried out by authors such as Lila O'Neale (1946, 1947), O'Neale y Kroeber (1930), William Conklin (1978) or Heiko Pruemers (1995). However, in spite of their scholarly interest, these works deal with Moche textile production in a very general way and do not attempt to place the textiles into a chronological scheme.

In August 1999 I had the opportunity to study one of the most interesting and most complete group of excavated Moche textiles, from the site of Dos Cabezas, in the Jequetepeque Valley<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). This was the starting point of my research, which is to establish the main features and evolution of the Moche Textile Style. For this purpose, I have assembled a corpus of more than 400 specimens. In this paper, I will present a synthesis of their analysis and some observations about them<sup>3</sup>.

**GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MOCHE TEXTILE STYLE**

The majority of these (Fig. 3) have a known origin and come from archaeological excavations on the north coast, while others in the sample come from outside the Moche core, but still exhibit Moche style.

After reviewing the data I can say that the Moche Textile Style are characterized by certain particular features that distinguish them from other contemporary textile styles. The following basic elements stand out:

- 1) Cotton (*Gossypium Barbadosense*) is the fundamental raw material and it appears generally in simple ply "S" spun yarns. With cotton, camelid fiber yarns were also used, although in a much more restricted way.
- 2) This sample of Moche textiles shows almost every textile technique used in the Prehispanic Andes. What differentiates Moche fabrics from their contemporaries are the remarkable preferences, all through its evolution, toward several textile techniques, such as twill or tapestry<sup>4</sup>.
- 3) The Moche used the backstrap loom (Fig. 4) to create garments, some of which, like the male headcloth, were particular to Moche and not documented in any other area of the Central Andes.
- 4) Textiles were used as an iconographic medium within Moche culture and their designs clearly reflect the evolution of this Textile Style. The textile iconography shows the same designs and stylistic features as the rest of Moche material culture.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank to Anne Paul and Carol J. Mackey for the revision and comments of the text. However, I am the only responsible of it.

<sup>2</sup> The preliminary results of these analysis have been previously published (Jiménez 2000).

<sup>3</sup> An extensive study of Dos Cabezas' textiles and the Moche corpus was the focus of my Master Thesis, presented in the Departamento de Antropología Americana, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Jiménez Ms. 2001).

<sup>4</sup> In the identification of textile techniques, I have followed the Irene Emery's work (1980).

The characterization of the Moche Textile Style and its evolution revolves around these four aspects. I plan to illustrate several changes that occurred during their evolution and comment on the implications of these changes from the general perspective of north coast textile production.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF MOCHICA TEXTILE STYLE: EARLY MOCHE, MIDDLE MOCHE AND LATE MOCHE**

My classification of each of the textiles that forms part of the corpus is based on the analysis of its technical and stylistic characteristics. Because Moche chronology is now under debate, I have divided the 800 years roughly into three phases Early, Middle and Late (Fig. 3), each of which is characterized by certain tendencies, more than by exclusive elements. I have also heavily weighted textile features in my analysis, since some of the textiles in my sample lack archaeological context.

Because of the limited space, I will only indicate the most important characteristics of each of the Moche phases.

**Early Moche** covers the time period from, approximately 0 until 300 A.D (Fig.2). It corresponds to the beginnings of Moche culture and it has not yet been fully characterized by archaeologists. In my sample, there is just one Early Moche textile, associated with Moche I ceramics (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 61). It is a plain weave (Emery 1980:76) cotton fabric found in a tomb in the Pyramids of Moche (see Fig. 1) and, since there is not enough textile data to offer another alternative, I accept its classification as Early Moche.

**Middle Moche** spans the years, approximately 300 to 500/550 A.D (Fig. 2). During these centuries the Moche culture reached its greatest territorial extent and socio-political complexity. Textiles also show a great complexity in both techniques and iconography. Middle Moche Textiles have been found exclusively in north coastal valleys at such sites as Sipán, Pacatnamú, Pyramids of Moche (see Figs. 1 and 3), just to cite some of them. My sample of Middle Moche textiles consists of more than 295 pieces, many of them decorated.

The principal features of Middle Moche fabrics are:

- **Raw materials**: Along with the predominance of cotton spun in the "S" direction, the most remarkable element in this aspect is a high proportion of textiles with wool yarns "S" spun "Z" plied. With very few exceptions, we do not find this feature in any other period nor any other cultures in the Central Andes. The camelid fiber was generally restricted in Middle Moche textiles to decorative purposes, with the exception of the most elaborate examples.

- **Textile Techniques**: The most characteristic of Middle Moche textiles is the preference for those techniques that used additional heddles in the loom to manipulate the different groups of threads. In these textiles, the decoration is elaborated by manipulating the structural elements more than adding supplementary yarns. The most common technique is twill weave (Emery 1980: 92 - 107) which is used in simple cotton textiles as well as in other finer wool fabrics. Within this type of textile techniques that especially characterize Middle Moche Textiles are gauze weave (Emery 1980: 180 - 187), a technical procedure that I call "discontinuous wefts inserted on floating warps"<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 5) and also de textiles in double cloth technique (Emery 1980: 156-158). It is also

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<sup>5</sup> This is a decorative technical procedure in which a series of wefts yarns with different thickness and/or color from that of the ground fabric are inserted on floating warps. This procedure has been previously described and named in different ways by authors such as (Conklin, 1978; Donnan 1973; Engelstadt 1983 and Pruemers 1995).

remarkable the preference of Moche weavers for the rhythm of 2x2 in plain weave fabrics, previously noticed by Mefford (1978).

- Morphology and Function: There are a series of garments and textile objects that are characteristic of the Middle Moche textiles. The most important of them is the male headcloth, which consists of at least two textile pieces<sup>6</sup>. One of these pieces has an open structure, sometimes gauze weave, sewed to a narrow tapestry band, which was tied around the head. This headcloth is not found in other areas and it was characteristic of Moche in this phase.

- Iconography and Style: The most remarkable feature of Middle Moche textile representations is the tendency to realism and the importance of details (Fig. 5). This occurs in natural motifs, as well as in religious themes.

Finally, within Middle Moche textiles I would like emphasize the importance of Dos Cabezas' textiles, which, although associated with Moche I ceramics, showed typical features of a this middle phase. The radiocarbon dates obtained from their archaeological contexts confirm my classification, and place them around 450 A.D (Jiménez 2000, 2001; Donnan, En prensa).

**Late Moche** begins approximately 500-550 and lasts 700-800 A.D. During this period Moche textiles and material culture were intensively traded along the coast of Peru. Late Moche fabrics show the following tendencies :

In raw Materials, the former predominance of "S2Z" camelid fiber yarns disappeared. The opposite spin direction, "Z2S", that characterized the rest of the Andean area became the only one used. Cotton continued to be the preferred fiber type, although the use of wool<sup>7</sup> increased considerably.

- Textile Techniques: The most remarkable feature of Late Moche textile techniques is the predominance of tapestry (Emery 1980: 76) with the particular variant of tapestry with decorative slits (Fig. 6). With regard to the previous techniques, twill almost disappeared and gauze weave became very scarce. Another big change appeared in the production of textiles with discontinuous wefts inserted on floating warps. The areas occupied with these wefts became much more reduced, forming "colored points" (Pruemers 1995). The exception to these transformations were double cloth fabrics which are frequently found together with the above mentioned discontinuous wefts on floating warps, especially found outside the Moche core, on the central coast (Engelstadt 1986; Desrosiers y Pulini 1992; Pruemers 1995).

- Morphology and Function: Late Moche textile production appeared to be more organized and standardized than Middle Moche one. It appears that numerous textile decorative bands would have been woven in mass production (Fig. 6), and then sewed to plain cotton fabrics, which were generally monochrome in color.

- Iconography and Style: The motifs represented in Late Moche textiles were characterized by broader representation of themes. Those of the northern tradition, such as the Priestess, coexisted with other designs with central coast origin (Fig. 6). Finally, designs of highland origin, although documented, were much more scarce. With regard to the type of representation, there are many changes that can be observed. The tendency to abstraction instead of the earlier realism became the norm (Fig.6). A greater use of geometric lines in forming figures can also be noted. This tendency to

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<sup>6</sup> See Donnan and Donnan (1997:229 Fig. 34 and 220, Figs. 8 and 9) for an illustration of the way these headcloths were worn as represented in ceramics, as well as a headcloth fragment from Pacatnamu (Jequetepeque Valley).

<sup>7</sup> Although the term "wool" refers specifically to sheep's fiber, it is commonly used in talking about Pre-Columbian Andean textiles, since this fiber was used just after the Spanish Conquest.

employ more abstract designs resulted in a substantial change of the appearance of Moche textiles.

In general, major transformations can be observed in Moche textiles during the Late Moche Style in both techniques and aesthetics. These changes are reflections of deeper transformations that occurred at other levels of Moche society.

### **THE EVOLUTION OF THE MOCHE TEXTILE STYLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN NORTH COAST TEXTILE PRODUCTION**

Late Moche textiles occurred during the first part of Middle Horizon, a period of great change in the Andean region. The results of my analysis indicate that the beginning of the Middle Horizon marked the abandonment of many characteristic elements of Early and Middle Moche textiles that, in my opinion, were an "heritage" from earlier cultural periods. Many of these elements would have appeared as early as the Preceramic Period in the fabrics of Huaca Prieta (Dimijitrevic Skinner 1986). For example, the predominance of cotton in S spun yarns, as well as certain technical procedures, such as the manipulation of elements used in twinned textiles.

My understanding of the relevance of these changes has been influenced by the concept of "technological style" first defined by Heather Lechtmann (1996). This concept emphasizes the cultural content of certain technical procedures in an object in comparison with other more external characteristics such as design and style elements. Also, Lechtmann notice the paramount importance of these technological procedures as an expression of cultural concepts deeply rooted in the Andean world. Her conclusions have been supported by numerous studies on textiles, like those of Anne Paul, Mary Frame, the Franquemonts, etc<sup>8</sup>. All of them, have clearly shown how technical textile procedures have been, by themselves, a form of expression of Andean weavers from ancient until modern times. The hypothesis I am following in my research is that similarly, northern textile production may have showed certain proclivities that remained constant over the centuries which expressed the cultural preferences of its inhabitants. These tendencies could have began in the Preceramic Period and reached their highest expression in Middle Moche textiles. The transformations that occurred in Late Moche textiles show a divergence from this deep rooted technical style of the north coast and may reflect some of the influences that came to the coast during the Middle Horizon, such as changes in funerary patterns and iconography.

In addition to all these changes, the textiles analyzed also show the persistence of certain features that emphasize coastal regional tendencies. The most important is the preference for the cotton in "S" spun yarns (Bird 1979), which is consistent with the development of Moche textiles. This feature, that can be observed in the Preceramic textiles of Huaca Prieta is, in my opinion, the best evidence of how the Moche expressed themselves through the weaving process. It is important to mention once again the preferences of Middle Moche textile techniques. I would like to propose that these techniques could have had their roots in Preceramic textiles, followed by the importance of twill weaves during the subsequent Initial Period as the earlier antecedents. Although this is just a hypothesis that needs to be developed, it is important to take it into account, since the continuity of these tendencies in techniques would be a definite expression of that "northern technological style" that I wish to stress.

The North Coast of Peru is a region with a particular personality in which a series of cultural developments gave form to its history. Authors like Garth Bawden (1996)

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<sup>8</sup> See Bibliography.

maintain that Moche culture had its base in the long cultural tradition of the north coast of Peru. In this paper, I propose that Moche textiles are not only stylistic manifestations of a given time period, but also the expression of a dynamic tradition that lasted centuries and characterized this area. The definition of its principal features by the analysis of my sample allows us to compare it with other contemporary manifestations like Nazca or Lima. From a broader perspective, my research also follows to define the significance of Moche Textile Style within the northern textile development.

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Fig. 1. (Left). Map of the North Coast of Peru with the principal Moche sites. Based on Castillo y Donnan 1994.

Fig. 2. (Below) Chronological table of Pre-Hispanic Andes. (Based on V.V.A.A. 1998).

		<b>COSTA NORTE</b>	<b>COSTA CENTRAL</b>	<b>COSTA SUR</b>	<b>SIERRA NORTE</b>	<b>SIERRA CENTRAL</b>	<b>SIERRA SUR</b>
<b>HORIZONTE TARDÍO</b>	1534 1460	Chimú-Inca	Inca	Inca	Inca	Inca	Inca
<b>INTERMEDIO TARDÍO</b>	1460 1000	Chimú Lambayeque	Chancay Rímac	Chincha Ica	Huamachuc o	Chanca Huanca	Reinos Altiplánicos
<b>HORIZONTE MEDIO</b>	900 700	Huari Transicional Moche-Huari	Pachacámac	Huari Nazca-	Cajamarca	Huari	Tiahuanaco-Huari
<b>INTERMEDIO TEMPRANO</b>	600  100 D.C.	<b>MOCHE TARDÍO</b>  <b>MOCHE MEDIO</b>  <b>MOCHE INICIAL</b>  Gallinazo	Lima  Miramar	Nazca  Paracas Necrópolis	Recuay	Huarpa	Tiahuanaco
<b>A.C. HORIZONTE TEMPRANO</b>	200 1000	Cupisnique	Ancón	Paracas Cavernas	Chavín		Pucara
<b>PERIODO INICIAL</b>	2000	Caballo Muerto Cerro Sechín	Garagay		Huacaloma La Galgada		Marcavalle
<b>PERIODO PRECERÁMICO</b>	4000	Huaca Prieta				Kotosh	
<b>PERIODO ARCAICO</b>	10.00	Paijanense	Paijanense			Kotosh	

VALLEY	Early Moche	Middle Moche	Late Moche
Lambayeque	0	5	0
Jequetepeque	0	>226	3
Moche	1	26	4
Virú	0	>19	0
Santa	0	15	0
Nepeña	0	1	0
Huarmey	0	0	51
North-Central	0	0	2
Necrópolis Ancón	0	0	26
Lurín	0	0	3
Rímac	0	0	2
Central Coast	0	0	3
Unknown	0	2	14

Fig. 3. Table with the provenience and classification of the Moche Textile sample.



Fig. 4. Moche ceramic representation of the backstrap loom used in textile production. (Donnan 1978).



Fig. 5. Detail of Middle Moche fabric with discontinuous wefts inserted on floating warps. The design shows a warrior emphasizing many details. Cotton and camelid fiber. MNAAHP Collection. Photo by the author.



Fig. 6. Detail of a Late Moche fabric of tapestry with decorative slits and the stylized representation of a monkey. Cotton and camelid fiber. . MNAAHP Collection. Photo by the author.