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*Moche Tombs at Dos Cabezas*, by Christopher B. Donnan, 2007. (Cotsen Monograph 59.) Los Angeles (CA): Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA; ISBN 978-1-931745-51-2 paperback £35 & US\$49.95; xii+241 pp., col. t/out, 308 figs., 3 tables

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In recent years, scholars have intensified the pace of research on Moche civilization with such alacrity that Peru's north coast must now rank among one of the best studied archaeological areas of the Americas

— rivalling the American Southwest, the Maya lowlands and the Basin of Mexico. Every year, more and more Peruvian and foreign teams flock to the region, exploring the narrow valleys of the desert coast where the culture flourished around AD 100–800.

An emphasis on mortuary practices and large ceremonial centres dominates current research objectives. The tombs in huaca platform pyramids and high-status necropoli appeal to archaeologists and looters alike because they yield the spectacular material culture for which the culture is famous: ceramics, metals, polychrome murals and sculpted friezes, lapidary work and woodcarving. Such artworks have occupied the scholarship of many a luminary in Andean studies (Uhle, Tello, Larco Hoyle, Kroeber, Kutscher, Benson) and continue to feed current interest. Since the mid-1990s, there has been a steady stream of Moche volumes that endeavour to deliver the state of the art or, very commonly, deliberate on the art of the state. Yet new data, such as those from Dos Cabezas, emerge continually which challenge orthodoxies about the Moche archaeological record.

Spurred by the late 1980s work at Sipán, which uncovered among the richest burials ever documented in the New World, mortuary archaeology drives current interpretations of Moche socio-political organization. For example, Sipán's sheer tomb wealth, along with theorization of Moche-Vicús as a socio-political entity (hitherto largely a ceramic/metalwork style from looted cemeteries), transformed perceptions about complexity in the Moche world; scholars reconceptualized Moche from a single expansionist state into northern and southern lordships. Now, opinion leans toward a system of smaller, competing polities centred in single valleys, especially as additional rich tombs and expressions of cultural elaboration come to light outside the known capitals. More generally, the frequency and character of grave goods help demonstrate the great differentiation in Moche society. Both males and females were celebrated members of ruling elites, who drew political power through elaborate ritual displays. Leaders assumed the roles of mythical beings in a widespread cosmology dedicated to social/environmental renewal, punctuated occasionally through sacrificial ritual. And they were buried, neatly, with the costumes of their divine personas.

In a nutshell, the understanding of Moche mortuary behaviour and its social implications has advanced considerably over the last 25 years or so. And so it was with some initial pause to see another book on Moche tombs. What more can be learned of the society through its burials? Can five new graves tell us much more? Under Donnan's deft hand, it is clear that much more can be revealed. The book is a

tremendous addition to the already rich literature on Moche funerary practices.

It might be mentioned that the fervour to study the civilization is in no small part due to Donnan. He has worked in the region for some four decades, written extensively, facilitated the investigations at Sipán and other key sites along the north coast, and mentored researchers; he is regarded as Moche culture's preeminent scholar and one of the deans of Andean archaeology. His work on Moche art and archaeology have captured the imagination of students, scholars and the general public alike.

In this publication, Donnan chronicles the investigation of a series of tombs in the southwest corner of a large platform pyramid complex at the Dos Cabezas site, a civic-ceremonial centre established near the mouth of the Río Jequetepeque. While the general funerary patterns and lavishness of the grave goods are very familiar, the tombs are perhaps most remarkable for their peculiarities. For example, the interments were of very tall individuals. They were, on average, *c.* 20 cm taller than most Moche period people. Three of the tombs also featured nearby compartments which contained miniature copper metal sheet effigies, *c.* 15–20 cm tall, perhaps simulacra of their anomalously-sized human prototypes. The effigies were also containers, each carrying a small valuable (shell, bone, textile).

Another significant insight concerns the chronology of the burials and associated materials. Donnan and his team recovered stunning Early Moche style ceramics with Gallinazo style and additional wares not typically Early Moche-associated; the absolute dates fall toward the middle of the first millennium AD, more or less contemporary with Middle Moche. So the work continues to unravel the once unassailable Larco sequence, at least for the northern Moche region. Finally, Donnan identifies recurrent use of number groups — namely 5s, 10s, 20s and 40s — in the burial contexts: these occur in the counts of objects in offering caches, as well as in patterned architectural elements, e.g. wood beams. Numeracy in the Andes before the Inka and Spanish remains poorly known, and Donnan's findings open up new ground about ancient practices.

Like his other contributions, the book maintains a no-nonsense tone. The text proceeds rather like an excavation journal and follows the work's unfolding, completed over 1997–2000 (as part of a larger project also examining domestic architecture and activity areas near the main mound). The chapters covering the individual tombs form the core of the book. Each narrates the work and discovery process: the peeling away of the layers of adobe bricks, soil deposit, grave

offerings, etc. to reveal a hidden surprise. Each word is considered and, yet, for all its economy, the text remains rich and engaging. The remarkable finds and efficient, high-quality figures liven up the dry minutiae of typical excavation description. If archaeological site reports could ever be deemed page-turners, this one might qualify.

A brief, insightful analysis of the animal remains in the tombs, by Thomas Wake, concludes the presentation, as an appendix. A very limited spectrum of animals was found, focusing on camelids. Adult male llamas (11+ years) and younger animals (*c.* 3 years), probably females, were represented; and certain parts of the carcass were preferred as offerings, especially heads and limbs. Macaws and parrots, meanwhile, were also found, and may have been pets of the people interred. This contribution also helps to document different episodes in the interment process and, clearly, the significance of animals in ritual life.

The volume, in general, remains tightly focused on the Moche. Donnan exercises a very characteristic restraint in the reach of general interpretations, leaving further work and thinking to be completed by the readers. This is almost certainly by intention, but it does mean that it will be difficult for non-Andeanists and even non-Moche scholars to apply lessons learned from the work.

So questions may linger when considering the wider implications of the data. For example, if the five tombs occupy only a corner of the huaca complex, how may have they articulated with the rest of the mound? Also, the close association between the interments and copper metal miniatures resembles the relationship detailed by Spanish sources about the simulacra/effigies of Inka kings and of later prehispanic groups of the north coast. The effigies acted as surrogates, symbols and agents of a sort, in various official matters — in consultations, combat, ceremonies. Did the Moche miniatures occupy commensurate positions and serve similar roles in the past?

Another issue concerns the wider record of variability in Moche funerary practices. With more graves being studied, the patterns are simply becoming more heterogeneous through time and space. So while there are common elements of a general Moche tradition, mortuary variability cannot simply be reduced to social differentiation or access to wealth. The record shows increasingly strong cultural differences, almost certainly associated with the unique histories and composition of local collectivities. Finally, just how many people of high rank or special status existed in Moche culture anyways? The current record suggests that individuals given elaborate treatments comprise no small proportion of the total sample. Was there a

purposeful ostentation for funerary purposes? The questions raise concerns about any neat dichotomy between elites and non-elites, but also about the constituted character of cemetery populations. The question is equally germane for many other studies of coastal cultures relying on burial data and attendant artworks to characterize the society. With the new burial evidence over the last few decades, it is becoming increasingly clear there are many levels of Moche social standing, as well as many special identities fashioned/intensified for funerary ritual. Some were depicted in the imagery but most, apparently, were not.

Only further research will clarify the broader implications raised by the Dos Cabezas results. Donnan's book stands as an excellent contribution: a paean lamenting what has been lost to archaeology through centuries of looting, and exemplary of what can be achieved through careful fieldwork and reporting.

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