

Chapter 2

The Ancient Moche of Trujillo

In order to understand the situation of the archaeological heritage of Trujillo, we must go back to the first millennium of our era for a snapshot of the ancient Moche. It is also important to describe environmental context in which the Moche and their modern descendants have lived. The following is a brief overview.

The Environmental Setting

Located on the western slope of the Andes, the Moche Valley is an elongated alluvial plain bordered by mountains and ravines. The northern margin of the Lower Moche Valley, where Trujillo and the sites mentioned here are located, is an area 25 km long extending between the Galindo, Caballo Muerto, and Laredo sectors and the Pacific Ocean (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2). The width of the irrigable area varies between 2 km at the junction with the middle valley and 15 km along the littoral. The study area is divided into two sections separated by the hills between the districts of El Porvenir and Florencia de Mora. The eastern section includes the plains of Laredo and El Porvenir, featuring small strings of low hills and relics of native forests. More broad and flat, the western sector comprises the plains extending between the El Porvenir-Florencia de Mora district borderline and the Huanchaco sector. A transverse division of this territory shows a first sector adjacent to the river and characterized by its abundant wildlife, an intermediate zone artificially irrigated, and a third sector of desert plains and foothills.

The mountain limit of the northern margin of the Lower Moche Valley contains three alluvial courses: Río Seco of Laredo, San Idelfonso, and Río Seco of El Milagro, small basins temporally active during the ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation) events (Nials et al. 1979; see also Huckleberry and Billman 2003). The Peruvian North Coast acquired its modern ecological traits from 8000 to 6000 BC onward, with the establishment of the current regional climate pattern of low

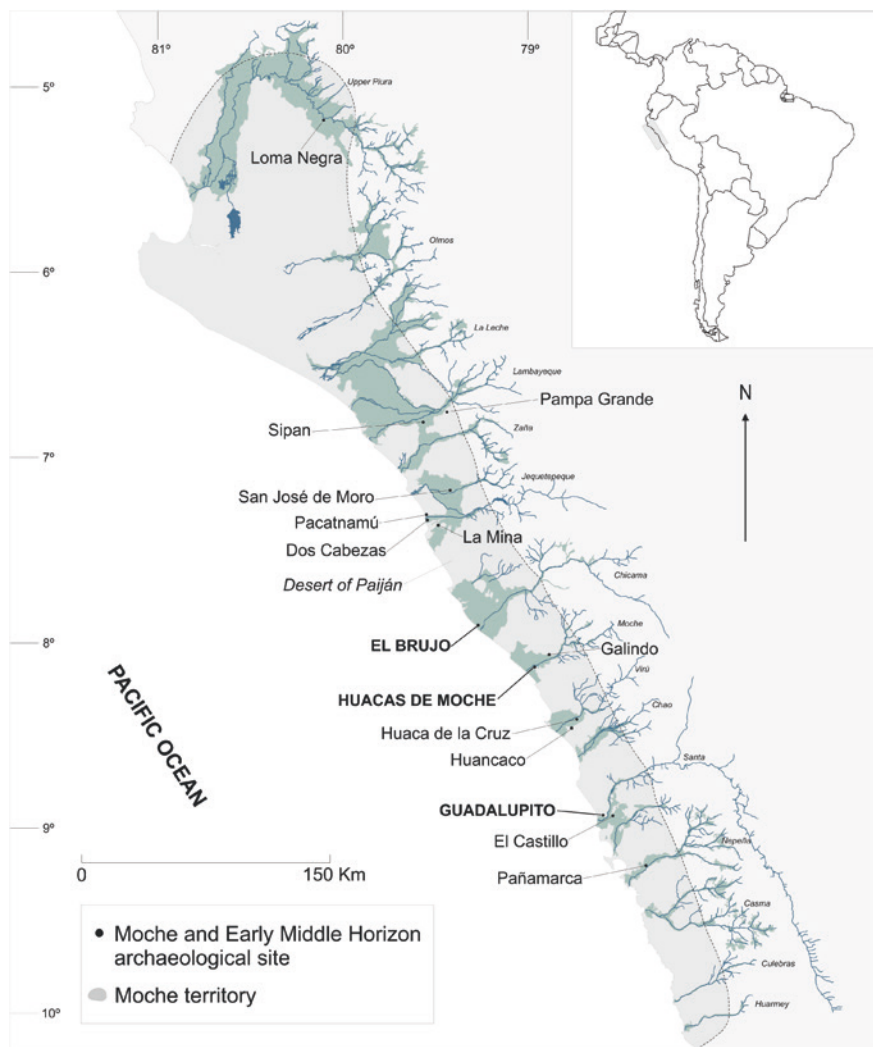


Fig. 2.1 Map of North Coast of Peru with main Moche sites. Drawing by J. Gamboa with support of Aldo Watanave

annual rainfall. These conditions are temporarily broken by the ENSO phenomenon, a global natural event that reverts the environmental conditions of the Pacific coast of South America to the more humid conditions encountered by the hunter-gatherers who arrived in the area ca. 10000 BC (Maggard and Dillehay 2011; Sandweiss and Quilter 2008). The alluvial events caused by the El Niño rains throughout the northern bank of the Lower Moche Valley is a relevant factor for the settlement of the area, causing damage during its occurrence in nearby residential and agricultural areas but permitting, in parallel, the temporal occupation of

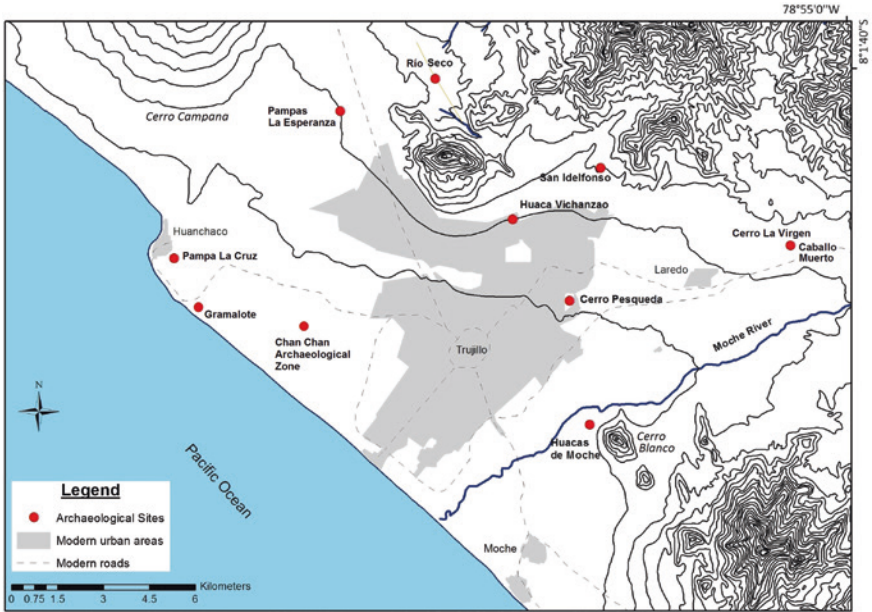


Fig. 2.2 Map of the Moche Valley with locations of modern cities and archaeological sites. Drawing by Jorge Gamboa and Jhon Cruz

the desert plains and an intensified exploitation of the *lomas* (piedmont areas with seasonal vegetation).

Although the first occupations of the area date from the Early Pre Ceramic¹ to the Late Archaic periods (ca. 10000–1800 BC), the northern margin of the Lower Moche Valley experienced its first general process of cultural transformation of the landscape between the second millennium BC and AD 700, a time during which the local systems of artificial waterways, settlements, and roads were gradually expanded until reaching the plains of the Huanchaco and El Milagro sectors. The creation of new agricultural lands in this part of the Moche Valley was made possible first through the expansion of the Moro and La Mochica canals by the ancient Cupisnique society (ca. 1500–500 BC), with the maximum extension of the cultivated area being subsequently reached through the construction of the Vichanzao canal by the Moche people (ca. AD 200–800) (Billman 2002; Farrington 1985; Gamboa and Nesbitt 2013; Pozorski and Pozorski 2003: 77). The Moche colonization of the Lower Moche Valley’s north margin was a major enterprise of the local

¹ The data reported so far for occupation of the northern Lower Moche Valley during the Paijanense period (10000–6000 BC) come from La Cumbre, a lithic station located to the north-west of Cerro Cabras (Ossa and Moseley 1971). In 1998, the author and his colleague Niel Pajuelo observed at Quebrada San Idelfonso, El Porvenir district, the presence at surface of bifacial stone artifacts and shell middens, elements indicative of another site of the Paijanense tradition.

communities and the Huacas de Moche site, which from AD 300 to 800 controlled the area and several sectors of the surrounding valleys.

Even while many aspects of the Pre-Columbian occupation of the Lower Moche Valley have yet to be identified (such as the productive orientation and temporality of use of the irrigated areas or the degree of autonomy of local communities), the Moche occupation of the area provides an invaluable opportunity to study the relationship between rural populations and major settlements during a stage that became a milestone in the ancient history of the Peruvian North Coast.

The Moche Society

After a century of research on local Pre-Columbian societies, it has been established that the emergence of the earliest agricultural communities in the Moche Valley dates back to the third millennium BC, with available data pointing to the fishermen and farmers of the lower valley as the creators of the first local ceremonial centers around 2000 BC (Briceño and Billman 2008; Pozorski and Pozorski 1979; Prieto 2011). Between 1500 and 500 BC, the region experienced the consolidation of the Cupisnique culture. The Cupisnique established a series of ceremonial centers that show the evolution of the principles of authority and social hierarchy during the Andean Formative period. The primary settlements of that period in the Moche Valley include the Caballo Muerto, Sacachique, Puente Serrano, Huaca de los Chinos, and Huaca Rajay sites (Gálvez and Runcio 2007; Nesbitt 2012; Nesbitt et al. 2010; Pineda 2004; Pozorski 1982, 1983 inter alia), each featuring massive buildings decorated with polychrome reliefs of jaguar-like beings (Fig. 2.3). Ceremonial Cupisnique ceramics in the Moche Valley included



Fig. 2.3 Cupisnique god effigy from Huaca de los Reyes, Caballo Muerto (Photograph by Thomas Pozorski)

finely made grayware and redware vessels, usually with modeled and incised decoration based on stylized motifs related to mural art.

After the heyday of the Cupisnique tradition, the North Coast witnessed between 500 BC and AD 100 the development of various societies identified together as the Salinar culture (Larco 1944). New studies on the settlements of this period have revealed a wide local diversity in ideological practices and spatial organization of residential and public spaces (Chicoine and Ikehara 2011; Ghezzi and Ruggles 2007; Swenson 2011). Research at the Moche Valley and neighboring valleys of the settlement patterns and material culture of Salinar populations suggests that this period was marked by an increase in the number of conflicts, with warrior and priestly classes forming ruling groups involved in ritualized warfare and a concomitant decentralization of political power.

The beginning of the first millennium AD marked the consolidation of urban life in the region, which was to become one of the poles of development of state-level societies in the Andes (Millaire 2010a; Stanish 2001). During the first centuries of our era, the Virú cultural manifestation appeared throughout the region. Continuing in part the regional traditions of the Salinar times, the period of consolidation of the Virú polities was marked by the coexistence of various sociopolitical entities in competition but with shared cultural values, among them an economy based on intensive agriculture and craft specialization. During Virú times the militarism of the regional polities became firmly associated with religious ceremonies and the celebration of agricultural fertility.

From ca. AD 300 onward, the majority of ruling lineages and peoples on the Peruvian North Coast sponsored the adoption of the monumental and portable art style now known as Moche. The Moche societies did not develop “written records” based on phonetic signs, but created and mastered a complex system of graphical communication appreciated the world over for its narrative structure and diversity of human and supernatural characters (Fig. 2.4). The Moche cultural tradition came to extend from the Upper Piura Valley in the north to the Culebras and Huarney valleys in the south, covering 700 km of coastal territory limited to the east by the stepped western chain of the Andes.

The Moche elite settlements became centers of innovation in arts and technologies as well as places of consumption of raw materials and food on a grand scale. However, as in many other Pre-Columbian peoples, the basis of Moche society was formed by farmers, fishermen, and craftsmen, whose villages continued to dominate the rural landscape. The Moche are renowned in the annals of archaeology for their exquisite pottery style characterized by an exceptionally elaborate complex visual vocabulary, also expressed in metals, textiles, and wall decoration (Benson 2012; Bourget and Jones 2008; Donnan and McClelland 1999; Hocquenghem 1987; Larco 2001; Pillsbury 2001; Quilter 2002, 2011; Uceda and Mujica 1994, 2003) (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6). This remarkable set of symbolic and artistic expressions was closely linked to religion and political power. Moche art contributed both to the fulfillment of religious ideology and the maintenance of social memory and to the spread of forms of dynastic government that sought to concentrate resources and access to long-distance exchange networks (Quilter and Castillo 2010).



Fig. 2.4 Moche mural depicting a god recorded at Cao Viejo (Courtesy of Régulo Franco, Fundación Wiese ©El Brujo Archaeological Project)

The most famous ancient Moche site is Huacas de Moche, a primary settlement located just outside Trujillo in the south margin of the Lower Moche Valley (Fig. 2.7). Huacas de Moche was a large urban center composed of residential complexes, walled plazas, and craft production workshops, all dominated by the two monumental architectural compounds of Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna—immense, solid adobe pyramid mounds with room complexes in their summits. In the fourth century AD, the rulers of Huacas de Moche became inserted into the regional political scene, beginning a long-term partnership with the site of El Brujo in the Chicama Valley and establishing strong links with the lords of El Castillo de Santa in the Santa Valley (Chapdelaine 2010, 2011; Franco 2009; Mujica 2007). This was also the time of the flourishing of the royal courts of Loma Negra, Sipán, Ucupe, and Dos Cabezas in the northern Moche valleys (Alva and Donnan 1993; Bourget 2010; Donnan 2008; Jones 2001).



Fig. 2.5 Moche polychrome frieze at Cao Viejo, El Brujo. Dr. Sarahh Scher examines the painted reliefs (Photograph by J. Gamboa 2008)

Fig. 2.6 Moche vessel depicting *curandera* and woman with a baby, excavated at Cao Viejo (Courtesy of Regulo Franco, Fundación Wiese ©El Brujo Archaeological Project)





Fig. 2.7 Huacas de Moche (Photograph by J. Gamboa 2013)

Huacas de Moche is one of the most intensively studied urban landscapes of the Moche society. The eastern sector of the settlement (dominated by the towering Cerro Blanco mountain) was occupied by the Huaca de la Luna complex, a precinct dedicated to religious propitiation and the funerary rites of priests and nobles. Its main component was Platform I, a building profusely decorated with polychrome reliefs and mural paintings of deities, supernatural beings, and human warriors. Through its 500-year construction sequence, this building was associated with a main walled plaza and several courtyards, open spaces where the community brought together during public events such as celebrations of warfare, ritual dances, and meetings of high-ranking individuals (Bourget 2001; Gamboa 2008, 2014; Uceda 2001).

To the west of Huaca de la Luna was the site's residential core: a plain occupied by houses, streets, temples and mausoleums. The largest residential complexes belonged to extended families or corporate groups dedicated to administrative work and craft production (Chapdelaine 2000, 2001, 2003; Topic 1977). These urban settlers developed forms of graphical communication through pictorial records and semasiographic signs, controlling the local production of pottery, textiles, and objects of gold and copper (Bernier 2010; Jackson 2008; Uceda 2010a; Uceda and Armas 1998). The main households belonged to local nobility, whose leaders were interred in burial chambers containing numerous fine vessels and even human companions (Chapdelaine 2001; Tello and Delabarde 2008). The residential quarters at Huacas de Moche also show the growing importance given by the inhabitants of the settlement to the conspicuous consumption of food and maize beer within the framework of diacritical and patron–client feasting, activities which toward AD 600 acquired a relevant role in the political economy of the site.

At the beginning of the seventh century AD, a new phase started in the history of Huacas de Moche. As in the late history of Cuzco under the Inca rule (Duviols 1979; Ogburn 2012; Zuidema 2014; see Rowe 1945, 1946: 202–203 for a traditional view on the Inca dynastic succession), this period of renovation in the urban

and political landscape of Huacas de Moche could originate from the competition between local elites (Uceda 2010b). After the enclosure of the Huaca de la Luna compound ca. AD 630, a new ceremonial building was built at the slope of Cerro Blanco: the so-called New Temple. Arranged on a platform that combined traditional architectural forms with innovative design features, the summit of this religious complex presented an iconographic program that included representations of women weaving with backstrap looms, warriors, and mythological characters (Uceda et al. 2011a, b). Huaca del Sol also flourished during this time, acquiring dimensions (340 m in length and 35 m in height) that dwarf both Platform I and the Cerro Blanco's New Temple. Huaca del Sol became a royal residence and a regional center of political interaction, featuring patios devoted to public meetings and festive ceremonies (Hasting and Moseley 1975; Herrera and Chauchat 2003; Tufinio et al. 2012).

Research carried out in the last two decades has shown that the North Coast between AD 300–700 was not a homogenous block dominated by Huacas de Moche, as supposed previously (Castillo and Donnan 1994a; Castillo and Uceda 2008; Millaire 2010b). The metropolis of the Lower Moche Valley acquired a leading role in several sectors of the southern Moche valleys, extending its power and influence to the Chicama Valley to the coast of Ancash during AD 450–750. For the Moche Valley itself, controlled excavations and surveys indicate a political centralization around Huacas de Moche from the fourth century AD onwards, a process that was linked to the acceptance throughout the area of the cultural values and artistic conventions of that settlement (Bawden 1994: 400; Chapdelaine 2003: 271–279; Gumerman and Briceño 2003). Although the production of domestic ceramics and the patterns of agricultural production—usual strongholds of local traditionalism—were largely maintained intact, the ceremonial paraphernalia and iconographic vocabularies of populations distributed throughout the valley were unified, reflecting a consensus by rulers and communal leaders in ideological practices and artistic patronage. Was this achieved by peaceful means or through violent imposition? The Moche visual culture and contextual data provide part of the answer.

Moche combat scenes seem to make reference to both a series of real battles as a prolonged state of competition among culturally related communities or neighboring ethnic groups, with the warfare engagements becoming an arena for expressions of hierarchy, rivalry, and complementarity (Lau 2004; Verano 2001). In the arts those forms of antagonism expressed mainly the association and opposition of regional elites. Burials and visual arts also demonstrate that Moche male and female paramount leaders adopted in life and after death mimetic identities with the Moche gods (Alva and Donnan 1993; Benson 2012: 77–78).

Archaeological research has revealed that Moche ceremonial buildings, in addition to containing spaces used for the establishment of public and private meetings, also presented areas dedicated to the celebration of socially-sanctioned violence (Bourget 2001; Swenson 2003). At Huaca de la Luna, El Brujo, and El Castillo de Santa have been identified bodily remains of adult males (some with evidence of intense physical stress and trauma characteristic of the life of a warrior) and, to a lesser extent, adult and young women violently killed and with evidence



Fig. 2.8 Fineline drawing of a Moche vessel depicting a ceremonial architectural setting. Drawing by Donna McClelland. The Christopher B. Donnan and Donna McClelland Moche Archive, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC

of postmortem dismemberment (Chapdelaine et al. 2009; Verano 2001, 2008). Dismembered human remains also appear in tombs of high officials, with sacrificed individuals (or curated bodies) being found as companions of main buried individuals (Alva and Donnan 1993: 164; Strong and Evans 1952: 150–156). These practices are represented in Moche iconography, which shows that human sacrifice was performed by warriors, religious officials, and priestesses as the ultimate offering to gods and ancestors. The manipulation of the human body allowed its transformation into a material symbolizing the symbolic and political power of rituals that established metaphorical linkages between the prisoners, the feminine, and the fertilizing power of blood (De Bock 2005; Scher 2012). In local context, the political hegemony and strategies of dominion implemented from Huacas de Moche could have been conducted through warfare against other polities. Confrontations and dominion were however clearly immersed in the politics of social interaction, ceremonial drama, and ritual management of social reproduction and fertility (Fig. 2.8).

The sixth to eighth centuries AD were times of change for the Moche. As mentioned before, at Huacas de Moche, the closure of the Huaca de la Luna's older compound ca. AD 630 was followed by new architectural projects that culminated around AD 750 with the final dedication of the Huaca del Sol. During the end of the sixth century and along the seventh century AD, the elite settlements at Sipán, Dos Cabezas, El Brujo, and El Castillo de Santa were abandoned or experienced relocation. Meanwhile, places such as Pampa Grande, San José de Moro, Huaca Colorada, Galindo, Guadalupito, and Pañamarca became in flourishing, primary administrative and pilgrimage centers (Bawden 1982; Castillo and Donnan 1994b; Chapdelaine 2011; Lockard 2009; Shimada 1994; Swenson 2006; Trever et al. 2013).

Though the causes of the sociopolitical changes perceptible in the Moche territory between AD 570 to 800 are still under scrutiny, it is possible to consider a multivariate set of cultural and economic modifications initiated after the period of regional climatic alterations detected for the end of the sixth century AD (Dillehay and Kolata 2004: 4326–4327, 4329; Shimada et al. 1991). The final Moche period was marked by innovations in the composition and role of the ruling groups, which gradually adopted new traditions, including some ideological expressions and production technologies of the Wari society (a culture whose heartland was the south-central highlands; see Bergh 2012). Although in some cases this change was associated with the interaction with the Wari and their allies in the northern highlands, the final transformation of Moche society seems to have occurred mostly through a long-term process of evolution of the regional and local structures of power and authority (Castillo 2000, 2001, 2012; Giersz 2011; Rosas 2007).

For the Moche Valley, we are still far from understanding what factors led to the abandonment of most of the Moche settlements reviewed here. Around AD 750–800, the public and residential compounds of Huacas de Moche started to be used as burial places by settlers with a material culture evidencing contacts with Wari. The area was used through next centuries as a sanctuary and funerary ground by the Chimú people (Donnan and Mackey 1978: 241–287; Uhle 2014: 174–185). The last prehispanic occupation at Huacas de Moche spanned from AD 1470 to 1532 during the period of Inca control of the North Coast of Peru.

From AD 900 onward, a new agricultural and urban expansion on the upper plains of the northern Lower Moche Valley was initiated by the Chimú society, which built at Huaca Tacaynamo (at Pampas La Esperanza near the Vichanzao canal) a sanctuary decorated with reliefs replicating the face of the main god of Huaca de la Luna (Piminchumo 2004: Fig. 3). This second colonization reached its apogee toward AD 1300, when a catastrophic El Niño episode influenced the subsequent reduction of the cultivated areas to the north of Chan Chan, the Chimú capital (Pozorski and Pozorski 2003). But as we shall see in the next chapter, the cycle of population growth in the area had only started, continuing in our day with the growth of Trujillo and its peripheral districts.

Chan Chan: The Later Chimú of Trujillo

Although this book focuses on the ancient Moche landscape of Trujillo, I would be remiss were I not to indicate the presence of the spectacular post-Moche site of Chan Chan. Indeed, Chan Chan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1986) with its own set of challenges because of that designation.

Chan Chan was the administrative and religious capital of the Chimú kingdom, the expansionist sociopolitical entity that dominated the North Coast of Peru between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries AD. Located between the modern cities of Trujillo and Huanchaco, the archaeological complex of Chan Chan is considered the largest adobe site of the Andean coast. The central sector of the



Fig. 2.9 Chan Chan. Xllangchic-An Compound, formerly known as Uhle Citadel (Photograph by J. Gamboa 2011)

settlement included walled compounds that housed the Chimú nobility and extensive lower-class residential areas occupied by weavers, metallurgists, and ceramists (Day 1982; Kolata 1990; Topic 1982, 1990). Chan Chan progressively grew in size from 900 AD, with dynastic successions and a pattern of split inheritance resulting in the construction of ten royal precincts, the largest one covering an area of 210,900 m² (Moore 1996: 68–86). Each walled compound was composed of inner plazas, elite tombs, and extensive storage areas (Fig. 2.9). The walls of the principal buildings were covered with clay friezes illustrating maritime scenes and geometric compositions inspired by textile designs (Pillsbury 2009). Many of the walled compounds and temples of Chan Chan were apparently oriented toward prominent mountain peaks considered as sacred places (Sakai 1998). The ideology and economy of Chan Chan's residents was characterized by the intensive exploitation of marine resources and the management of agricultural production supported by extensive systems of artificial irrigation. Craft production and long-distance trade of goods such as *Spondylus* shells also played a major role in the socioeconomic organization of the Chimú capital.

About 1470 AD, the Chimú became the most powerful rivals of the Incas in the Andean area (Rowe 1948). The confrontation between these two states ended with the conquest of the Chimú territory by Inca armies, which led to the gradual abandonment of Chan Chan. With the formation of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru, the temples and mausoleums of Chan Chan became a target for the so-called *compañías de huacas*—companies aimed to exploit indigenous temples and palaces—and grave looters (Zevallos 1994), a situation that continued well into the twentieth century.

During the formation of the Peruvian Republic in the nineteenth century, Chan Chan attracted the attention of local antiquarians and travelers from Europe and the USA (Rivero and Tschudi 1851; Squier 1877; Wiener 1880), which did not impede the continued destruction of the site. At the same time, the extent, monumentality, and architectural quality of its adobe buildings turned Chan Chan into a symbol of *norteño* identity and stimulated the interest and pride of Trujillo's

intellectual and political elites. Although the site had been considered as an exceptional example of Andean antiquity since 1781 (Pillsbury and Trever 2008), the first modern systematic studies of Chan Chan began during the first decades of the twentieth century (Bennett 1939: 82–83; Kroeber 1930). The chronology and function of Chan Chan started to be more intensively studied in 1969 with the Chan Chan-Moche Valley Project of Harvard University (Moseley and Mackey 1974), which determined that this Pre-Columbian metropolis covered, at its apogee, no less than 20 km² of residential areas, agricultural fields, and roads.²

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² After the Chan Chan-Moche Valley Project, most excavations conducted at Chan Chan were organized by the Peruvian state. These archaeological interventions involved research and rescue excavations as well as conservation works in the monumental sector and zones affected by modern infrastructure. Although only partially published, those initiatives produced new data on the origins and functions of the site (Narváez 1989; Uceda et al. 1980).

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Archaeological Heritage in a Modern Urban Landscape

The Ancient Moche in Trujillo, Peru

Gamboa Velásquez, J.

2015, XI, 96 p. 44 illus., 36 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-15469-5