The Shape of the Divine: the Three-Dimensional Representation of Nasca Feminine Supernaturality

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Abstract. The Nasca culture of Southern Peru left an impressive artistic heritage including many ceramic objects, among these figurines, small statues and bottles bearing the image of a woman with a plump, naked, white-painted body that is often decorated with black paintings, probably representing tattoos. By delving into the matter of supernaturality representations in Andean art in general and in Nasca art in particular, the article explores the feasibility that this recurrent image represents a feminine supernatural being. On that basis, as well as on different iconographical components, possible identifications of this image as moon goddess, sea and water goddess as well as fertility goddess are examined. The article suggests that the representations of this feminine image probably refer to a single divinity with multiple roles, where certain images emphasize one or other of these. Likewise, the color, materiality and the three-dimensionality of these pieces are explored as well as the way these components, together with the iconographical massage, contribute to the creation of meaning in Nasca art.

[Nasca culture, femininity, divinities, figurines, ceramic]

Introduction

The Nasca culture (1–700 AD) prospered along the Peruvian south coast in a territory that extended from the Cañete Valley in the north to the Acarí Valley in the south, and its heartland was the Río Grande de Nasca basin. The area is one of the driest on Earth, with an average rainfall of 0.3 millimeters per year (Proulx 2006: 1), providing favorable conditions for the preservation of ancient artefacts. While the culture is primarily known for its geoglyphs, the Nasca Lines, shaped on the desert's surface, other artistic expressions, such as ceramics and textiles, may help us to better understand the spiritual life of this society.

The Nasca artistic tradition continued that of the Paracas (700 BC–1 AD), however, during its first cultural stages, the main medium for Nasca religious iconography gradually shifted from textiles to ceramics. The common chronology of the Nasca ceramic style was offered by the archaeologist Lawrence Dowson and it includes nine phases (Nasca 1–9), each with defined stylistic, technical and thematic characteristics (Proulx 2006: 26–29).[1] Nasca art is much more symbolic than descriptive; it includes representations of plants, animals, humans and mythical beings, however, these are not merely representations of the Nasca reality, but they transmitted symbolic massages in relation to the worldview of this society. Proulx (2006: 18) suggests that Nasca art served two main functions: to praise the natural world that surrounded the Nasca people, and to symbolize the supernatural entities that were part of the Nasca belief system. The recurring representations of divine figures painted on Nasca ceramics and known as the "Anthropomorphic Mythical Being", "Killer Whale" and "Horrible Bird" exhibit a combination of animal and human body parts and, in many cases, wear a loincloth and short shirt (Proulx 2006: 63, 82),[2] two typical articles of Nasca masculine attire. In any given society, clothing and hairstyles are the most common expressions of gender differentiation, and the Nasca were no exception (Proulx 2006: 122; Morgan 2012: 36, 41–42). This allows us to conclude that these mythical beings, appearing frequently in Nasca ceramics, were conceived as masculine. This raises the following question: Did the Nasca religious system not have feminine deities, or were they simply not portrayed on ceramics?

1 The last two phases (Nasca 8 and 9) are in fact a fusion of the Nasca ceramic style and that of the Wari, the political entity that emerged in the seventh century in the nearby highlands.

2 For an example of a Killer Whale wearing a loincloth, see piece ML013684 in the online database of the Larco Museum.

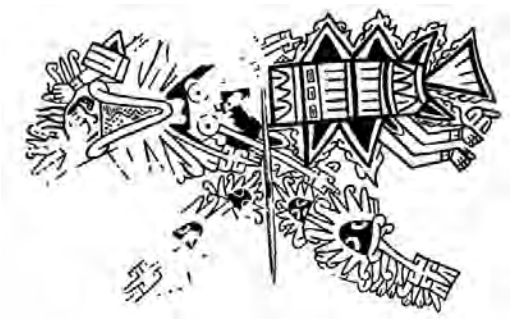

Fig. 1 Nasca Female statute V A 50926 from the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin (high: 26 cm.) and the drawing appears on the figure's buttocks (Photograph by Martin Franken, drawing Seler 1923, IV, fig. 208d.).

It is worth noting that during the early phases of the Nasca ceramic style, the feminine image was completely absent (Proulx 2006: 18). However, divinities and human images, including feminine figures, appear in Early Nasca needlework. The most renowned example is the magnificent Paracas textile kept in the Brooklyn Museum in New York, whose border is made using very fine knitting to create figures that appear almost three-dimensional.[3] Embroidered textiles from this period are scattered across a number of museums and collections, and many were most likely looted from an Early Nasca cemetery at Cabildo (Sawyer 1997). In these textiles the feminine figures can be identified by their long dresses which reach down to their feet and, in some cases, by their hairstyles. Textiles from this period were probably created during the gradual shift from textiles to ceramics as the dominant medium for religious imagery. It seems that this transition heralded changes not only regarding issues of technology and medium, but also iconographic content. Among these iconographical changes was the disappearance of feminine figures, whether human or mythical, from artistic expressions.

During the Nasca 5 phase, the feminine image reappeared, this time primarily on ceramics, and became one of the most common subjects depicted (Proulx 2006: 18). The Nasca 5 and subsequent phases constituted a time of change, probably as a result of long droughts.[4] Evidence of the changes and reorganization that occurred during this period can be found in settlement patterns, sociopolitical organization, and artistic style. At that time the important ceremonial site of Cahuachi was abandoned, a new funerary custom was introduced, filtration galleries were constructed in response to the droughts, and the number of geoglyphs on hillsides increased. There is also greater evidence of a trophy heads cult during this period, both in iconography and in actual archaeological findings of decapitated heads served as an offering (Silverman and Proulx 2002: 252–255).

3 This technique is known as cross-knit loop stitch. For this textile, see piece 38.121 in the online database of the Brooklyn Museum.

4 Thompson et al. (1985: 973), in their study of climatic changes in the history of southern Peru, found evidence of two major droughts during the Nasca 5–6. One occurred between 540 and 560 AD, and the other between 570 and 610 AD.

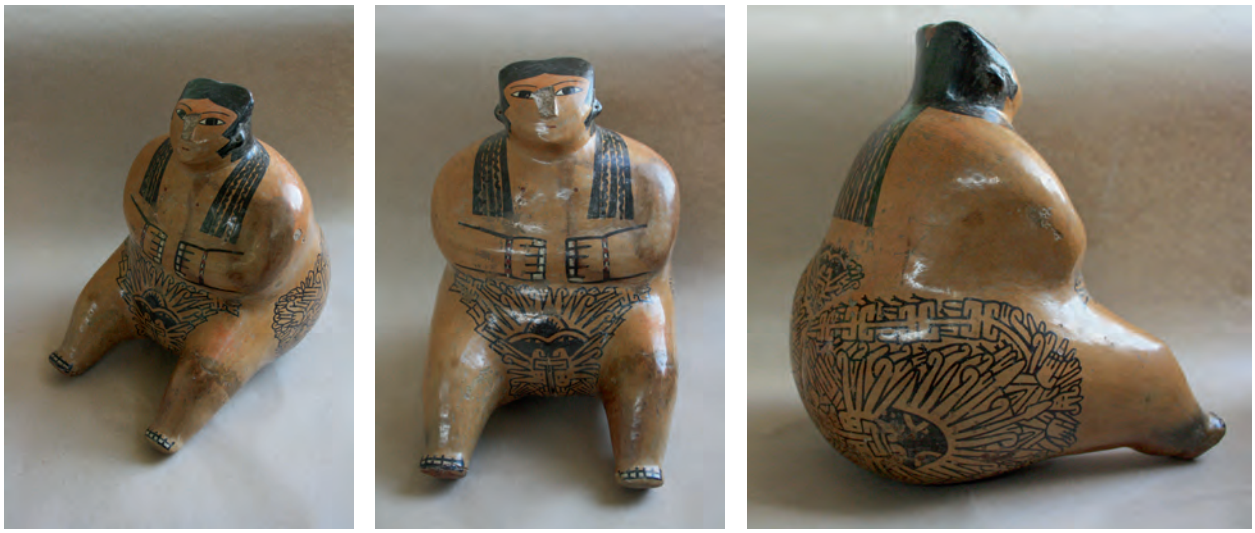

Fig. 2 Nasca Female statute 00143-01 from The Regional Museum Ica Adolfo Bermúdez Jenkins, Peru (high: 25 cm.) (photographed by the author).

Among the feminine images that appear on Late Nasca ceramics are figures that have been interpreted as mythical beings (Schlesier 1959: 83–86; Lyon 1978: 105–106; Clados 2000). These studies refer to the effigy of a woman with a plump, naked, white-painted body which is often decorated with black paintings on various body parts, probably representing tattoos. Images with these characteristics appear on bottles (figs. 4, 5), as figurines, and as small ceramic sculptures (figs. 1, 2, 10).[5] These representations are of sitting, standing or squatting figures, and in the case of the latter posture, there are pieces with presence of a head emerging from the figure's vagina describing in this way childbirth (fig. 4). Other representations show the figure holding a smaller figure, probably a baby (fig. 5). Only on very few bottles does the feminine figure appear alongside a masculine counterpart (figs. 8, 9). Other characteristics of these figures include deformed heads and jewelry, such as earrings and bracelets. Their hair arrangements are consistent with the typical Nasca feminine hairstyle, with a split fringe on the forehead, graded locks on the cheeks, and long hair falling to both sides and the back of the neck.[6]

The femininity of these representations is unquestionable, as the figure is always naked. In many cases the vulva is prominently displayed, and on a small number of pieces the nipples are also visible. Lyon (1978: 106) justifies her identification of these figures as supernatural beings basing on the paintings that appear on their bodies, which include representations of mythical Nasca beings. The author suggests that a number of different figurines and bottles decorated with the image of a woman with the same characteristics all refer to the same feminine divinity. Clados (2000), in a comparison of ceramics portraying the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body suggests that this figure is the feminine half of the mythical founder couple. The figure is associated with fertility, war, water, the sea, and the stars. DeLeonardis and Lau (2004: 111) also suggest that the Nasca figurines are "personal ancestor 'relics' or small-scale representation of significant members of society."

The present article focuses on images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body and suggests that these represent a mythical feminine entity or entities. However, in order to explore the divine aspect of these images, we must first address the question of how a figure may be identified as a supernatural being. The article will then offer a possible interpretation of these representations, thus contributing to a new understanding of the images.

5 For a detailed analysis of Nasca feminine and masculine figurines, see Morgan (2012: 33–66).

6 For variations of these components, see Morgan (2012: 365, plate 29).

Identifying the divine nature in Nasca and other ancient Andean styles

In the oral and written tradition, the divine nature of a figure is often declared outright and, if not, social structures may hint at the audience the supernaturality. In visual culture, the creators must be able to describe divinities in such a way that viewers will be in no doubt as to the personage depicted. This means that, in iconography, the appearances of supernatural beings must be in accordance with a certain set of conventions (Knight 2013: 122). For that reason, religious art features nuances and attributes which help the observer to distinguish between different entities: a human being, an animal, a mythical human being, gods and mythical animals.

In the case of the Nasca, Silverman and Proulx (2002: 137) suggest that "The term 'mythical creature' is applied to any anthropomorphic animal or human with special characteristics that suggest it is supernatural. These traits might include the presence of a mouthmask, forehead ornament or Spondylus shell necklace, special facial painting, or ritual clothing among others."

Scholars who have studied Nasca iconography agree that figures which combine human and animal bodies, along with anthropomorphized animals, represent supernatural entities, and many of these figures wear the attire and adornments mentioned by Silverman and Proulx (Yacovleff 1932; Ramos and Blasco 1977; Allen 1981: 48–49; Silverman and Proulx 2002: 137–139). However, contrasting opinions suggest that these images represent humans during ritual performances (Townsend 1985: 131). In fact, in the case of the figure he titled Masked Mythical Being, Roark (1965: 17) notes that it is unclear whether the images represent divinities or simply a human wearing a mask and other adornments in order to impersonate that divinity. The author proposes that during the Early Nasca phases, this figure depicted a human being, but that in the later phases it represented a mythical being. Roark (1965: 17–25, 54) suggests that ray-like forms which encircle the figures, along with the presence of "anatomical characteristics which do not occur in the real world," are indicators of supernaturality.

Another attribute of Nasca representations of mythical beings is an appendage attached to the body, which takes the form of a streamer filled with different elements, labeled by Roark as a "signifier." This element served to distinguish between different manifestations of the deity. The emanation of streamers and rays from the figure's body as indicators of its mythical quality is also mentioned in relation to Paracas iconography (Makowski 2000: 280).

However, the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body do not present any of these attributes. The figure has a human body with real human anatomical characteristics, and there are no rays or streamers attached. As such, the image would appear to be of a flesh-and-blood woman.[7] However, we can expand the perspective and review conventions in the representation of supernatural beings found in other Andean traditions.

With the exception of one article (Lyon 1978) there is no general study that addresses the problem of divine attributes from a pan-Andean perspective. In the majority of cases, experts on a given culture describe the various ways of depicting mythical beings found in the artistic expressions that they have studied. However, certain pan-Andean methods of describing the supernatural realm did and do exist, some of which even appear globally.

In Andean art, the presence of fangs is a very common indicator of supernatural quality, therefore constituting a hybridization of human and feline bodies. However, this is not an absolute sign, as not all supernatural images involve fangs. In Nasca art, for example, images of the divinities do not generally have fangs, although, as mentioned

7 There are several studies that interpret these images as representations of flesh-and-blood women. For example, Morgan (1988, 2012) sees them as a representation of human beings that had some ritual functions.

previously, they do feature hybridization of human and animal bodies. Lyon (1978: 96–97) mentions the frequent appearances of human bodies with an animal head, tail and wings attached, and of animal bodies with a human head and hands. The combination of human beings and animals, or of different kinds of animals, are methods used to describe divinities in many cultures in the world.[8] The mixture of human and animal body elements results in an entity that is manifestly from beyond earthly realm. Lyon notes three additional indicators of divinity. The first is the vertically-divided eye, which appears in Wari (600–1000 AD) and Pucara (200 BC–200 AD) art, although there are also supernatural beings found in the Wari style which do not have this type of eye but which do have fangs. The second are the streamers or rays that emanate from a figure's body and are tipped with a small head or a symbol (Lyon 1978: 97).

The last divinity indicator noted by Lyon (1978:97) is based on Rowe's (1971: 117) study of Chavín (800–200 BC) art and its influences on later styles. In this case, the figure's posture indicates their high status and supernaturality. Rowe refers to the posture as "the staff God pose", in which the figure is portrayed from the front with hands extended to both sides, holding staffs or other objects. Another posture that originated in Chavín art and lasted into the Middle Horizon Period (600–1000 AD) is that of the floating beings that were named by Rowe "angels".

In the case of the Tiwanaku (600–1000 AD) and Wari cultures, Makowski (2010: 63–64) also notes the glyph-like symbols that decorate the body and clothing of anthropomorphic figures. Certain elements hold by the figure, such as scepters, weapons, stylized plants, a nimbus of feathers, and pectoral adornments, indicate divinity. However, Lyon (1978: 97) emphasizes that the absence of a few or all of these attributes does not necessarily indicate that the figure is not a supernatural being. In light of this, the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body may still be portraying a supernatural being.

Aside from those attributes identified through meticulous iconographic analysis, two other indicators of a divinity can be found in colonial texts and ethnographic studies. There is a degree of ambivalence among iconographers and archaeologists who study ancient American societies regarding the ethnographic analogy between colonial or modern indigenous societies and ancient ones. Kubler (1985) was the founder of the school that avoids ethnographic analogy in studies on ancient indigenous art. The author claims that there is a clear break between the ancient and colonial societies, and that motifs that appear in ancient art were almost extinct during colonial times. This position brought Kubler to a categorical affirmation that later sources cannot reliably be used to interpret ancient iconography. An opposing and more practical approach suggests, however, that later sources, used with caution, may be of some use (Marcus and Flannery 1994; Quilter 1996; Knight 2013).

Knight (2013: 133) distinguishes between two types of ethnographic analogy used in iconographic analysis: "general comparative analogy" and "historical homology." The former refers to a generalization based on different societies, i.e. the use of a common denominator between unrelated societies. Historical homology is defined as an affinity between iconographic and ethnographic data relating to the same cultural tradition, but with a time gap between them. This means that both ancient iconography and later ethnography have a cultural link, therefore, some continuity between them can be assumed. If we can demonstrate that certain traits are broadly common within the studied area, we can assume that these characteristics have ancient roots in this area (Knight 2013: 137).

In this sense, the two divinity indicators detailed below can be understood as both general comparative analogy and historical homology, since they can be found both within the pan-Central-Andean tradition and around the world.

The two indicators are in fact subcategories of the attribute noted by Roark (1965: 17): "anatomical characteristics which do not occur in the real world." The first is an

8 Greek mythology, for example, tells of the Sirens, the god Pan, the centaur, and the griffin.

extreme size of the human body (tiny or enormous), and the second is the addition or exaggeration of certain human body parts. In this way the depiction of an atypical human body which, despite its anthropomorphic appearance, is clearly not a normal human being, alludes to its existence beyond the earthly realm.[9]

These supernatural characteristics are expressed by ethnographic and ethno-historical sources concerning Andean societies. Mariscotti (1978: 3–35), based on her conversations with informants from the Jujuy area of northern Argentina and on a study of other ethnographic and ethno-historical sources, suggests a number of ways conceptualizations of Pacha Mama, the earth goddess, held by the peoples of the Andes. The common image of this supernatural being in contemporary Andean communities is that of a woman – generally old and with a small body – who lives inside the earth. This corresponds with the testimony of Spanish chronicler Bernabé Cobo (1956 [1653] II: 177–178) who notes that small clothes were offered to the Pacha Mama. Other sources mention huge sandals – implying huge feet – and a hat with wide wings worn by the goddess (Mariscotti 1978: 31–35). Small body size is also a divine feature for the image of the mountain divinities in the community of Lunlaya (La Paz Department, Bolivia), who have the small bodies of a very old man and woman (Martínez 1983: 94–95). When describing their ancestors, Andean communities refer to them as either very small and weak or big and strong human beings (Martínez 1983: 88).

Another example is the idol of a feminine deity that the first Spanish expedition in the Andes found in the temple of Apurima. According to the description by Pedro Pizarro (2013 [1571]: 86) this image was "muy gordo, más grueso que un hombre muy gordo […] y en la delantera de él, dos tetas de oro grandes como de mujer […]".[10] In this description, the scale of the idol relative to the human body hints at the divine nature of this figure.

The mention of additional body parts can be found in the Quechua-Spanish colonial dictionary written by González Holguín. The Quechua word *huacca* or *puma runa* (puma man/human) is defined as: "when one has six fingers on a hand or foot like a lion" ("quando tiene seis dedos en manos y pies como léon") (González Holguín 1952 [1608]: 165). The dictionary contains other terms that refer to this phenomenon: *parcca chaqui*, *puma chaqui* or *huaccaruna* (González Holguín 1952 [1608]: 279, 295). The term *huacca runa* is defined as an animal with more or fewer organs than usual (González Holguín 1952 [1608]:165). Notably, some of these terms include the word *huaca*, which is a basic concept within the Andean worldview and has a variety of cult-related meanings, such as idols, and human or animal figurines (González Holguín 1952 [1608]: 165; Santo Tomás, 1560: 68r). The notion of *huaca* may be understood as a material expression of the divine, and the quality of *huaca* is contained in the unusual number of body parts.

With these two supernatural attributes in mind, the following section examines the Late Nasca images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body and explores the possibility that these are representations of a supernatural being or beings.

Images of Late Nasca feminine deities

Given the use of extreme size as an indicator of divinity, it can be suggested that all figurines fall into this category, in particular those of a very small size, such as one which is only 2 cm in height (Morgan 2012: 65). In fact, the rule may be applied to any figurine produced by Andean societies.

The addition of certain human body parts is another indicator found in Nasca art. I have studied six Nasca pieces portraying a feminine image with more than five fingers on hand, five of which have six fingers, while one has seven. Morgan (1988: 338–339) reports the existence of feminine Nasca figurines with three, four, five and six fingers.

9 This method is apparent in other world cultures, such as in the biblical textual representation of God with a human body: according to the book of Genesis, God made people in his own image, although he is described as having an enormous body. According to the description in Isaiah, God wears an immense garment which implies the large size of his body: "[…] I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isaiah, chapter VI, verse 1). Examples of the presence of additional body parts include the Hindu god Shiva with his six hands, two-faced Janus of the ancient Roman religion, and the depiction of the Christian Trinity as one body with three faces, common in colonial South American art.

10 "[…] very fat, more corpulent than a very fat man […] and on its front, two golden breasts, like those of a woman […]"

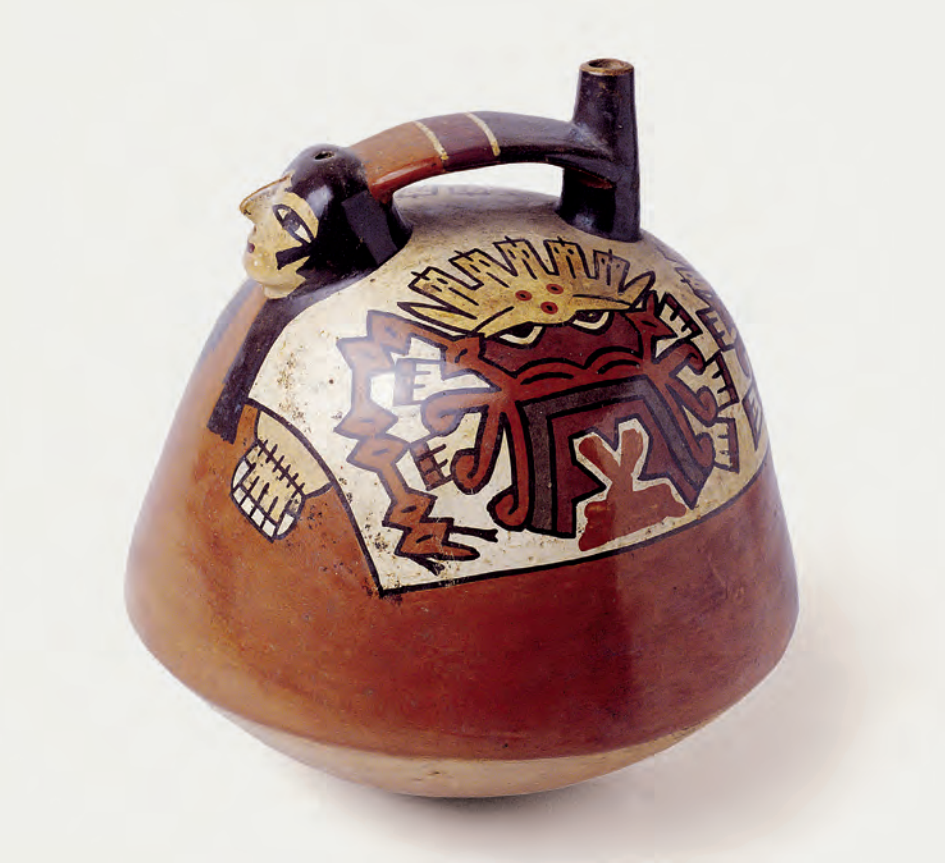

Fig. 3 Nasca ceramic bottle MC347, The Maiman Collection (high: 19.7 cm.) (Photographed by Abraham Hai).

Among the six cases, four portray a clothed feminine figure (fig. 3) and two depict the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body (figs. 4, 8). In these cases, six fingers can be seen on one or even on both hands. The fingers are painted with great delicacy and detail, even including the fingernails, leaving little doubt that the additional digit was included on purpose. It is worth mentioning that two later Wari style ceramics display images of feminine and masculine divinities with six fingers on one hand.[11]

The images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body also display the other indicator of divinity: the exaggerated human body parts. In a comparison of feminine representations of this kind with those of other women and men on Nasca ceramics, Morgan (1988: 329) notes two characteristics which are unique to the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body: "nudity and obesity." The two are interrelated, and Morgan suggests that their obesity is accentuated by their nudity. If we look carefully at the three-dimensional images, the concept of obesity is in fact inexact, since the upper part of the body – the torso and the arms – are in line with regular human proportions. It is mainly the lower part of the body that appears oversized, specifically the thighs and the buttocks. In many cases, figurines with the plump buttocks are not free-standing or free-sitting due to the weight of the molded buttocks. Furthermore, the buttocks are often decorated with the images of mythical Nasca beings, and this is another feature intended to emphasize this part of the body. The decision to exaggerate these body parts corresponds with the Andean feminine ideal of beauty to which ethnographic data (Gavilán 2005: 143–145) and a colonial Andean love song (Guaman

11 Wari feminine divinity with six fingers on one hand appears on a large ceramic urn (C-34738) kept at the National Museum of Archeology, Anthropology and History of Peru, and a masculine divinity with six fingers on one hand appears on an urn (41.0/5314) at the American Museum of Natural History, New York. Both pieces were found at the site of Pacheco in Nasca by the Peruvian archaeologist Julio César Tello (Menzel 1964: 26).

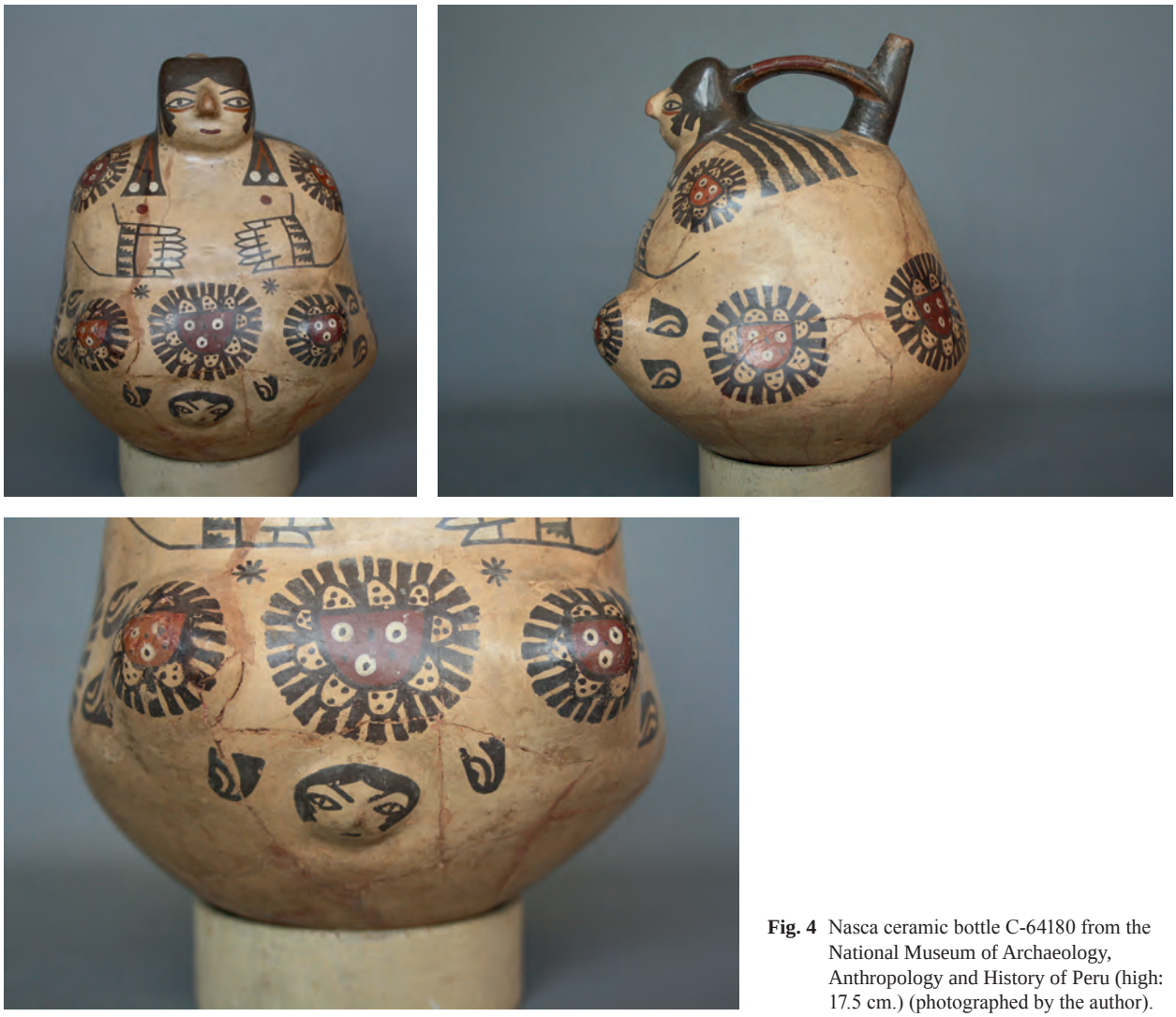

Fig. 4 Nasca ceramic bottle C-64180 from the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Peru (high: 17.5 cm.) (photographed by the author).

Poma 2001 [1615]: 317 [319]; Cerrón-Palomino 2013: 255–277) testify. These, along with other Andean feminine images, describe the desirable feminine body as having plump buttocks, thighs and waist. The fullness of these body parts indicates a healthy and fertile feminine body (Artzi 2016: 661–668). The buttocks and thighs of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body are unusual when compared to the physical characteristics of Andean women, and we may take this exaggeration as another indicator of divinity. The choice to exaggerate these parts is highly related to the femininity of these figures and to one of their responsibilities – generating fertility.

Given the likelihood that these images are indeed of a supernatural being or beings, we can examine the iconography of these feminine personages and suggest which deity or deities are represented in this way. While the ceramic bottles depicting the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body had a higher functional purpose (being used to hold liquids), the three-dimensional sculptures, be they figurines or small statues, were most likely created as cult objects or idols and thus provide a more vivid reflection of how Nasca society conceived the image of their feminine supernatural being or beings. However, the bottles provide us with a greater level of detail, often depicting the feminine figures in combination with other elements or alongside other anthropomorphic entities.

Other elements that can help us to associate these feminine figures with a specific divinity (or role) are the motifs painted on their bodies. Morgan (2012: 55–56) rejects Lyon's (1978: 106) suggestion that the motifs alone are an indication of supernaturality. In her study, the author classifies these paintings according to themes, thereby interpreting the three-dimensional figures as belonging to a "ritual context related to a specific cult or deity" (Morgan 2012: 55–65). In this particular study, identification of the being as supernatural has already been achieved based on other characteristics and not on the motifs painted on the figure's body. As such, we can understand these motifs as identifying attributes which helped the Nasca people – and now help us – to recognize the specific identity of the figure as moon goddess, sea goddess, fertility goddess, some other goddess, or even as a supernatural being that somehow amalgamates all of these personages. According to Knight's (2013: 98) methodology, the exaggeration of human body parts is a "classifying attribute" that helps us to *classify* the figure as a divinity, while the motifs painted on the figure's body serve as an "identifying attribute" which helps us to *identify* the specific figure. In light of this, Morgan's analysis of the motifs painted on the figures' bodies provides a useful reference for the present study, although she ultimately got to a different interpretation.

It is important to note that the bodies of these feminine images contain between one to four motifs. The motifs include stars, crosses, flower shapes, nets, faces, trophy heads, mythical beings, and fishes. These designs, according to Morgan, have magico-religious significance and relate to marine, agricultural and human fertility (Morgan 2012: 57–65). Based on these various motifs and other elements or personages that appear as part of the iconographical ensemble, these feminine images can be associated with five domains: the moon, sea, water, fertility and the ancestor cult. The latter will not be covered in the present paper, as the notion has been explored in detail by Clados (2000) and DeLeonardis and Lau (2004: 111).

At this point, it is unclear whether the images represent a single divinity with multiple roles or different divinities with common characteristics. The latter would suggest that the plump, naked, white-painted body constituted a convention in the representation of feminine supernatural beings. In order to avoid confusion, I will explore the different domains as separate divinities before addressing this problem in the final part of the present article.

The moon goddess

The moon goddess was a very important feminine divinity in the Inca Empire (1400–1532 AD) and the Chimu Kingdom (900–1470 AD), and in the Andean communities of today she is associated with the feminine domain. In his ethno-astronomical study of the contemporary Misminay community in the Cusco region, Urton (1981: 77–78) notes the enduring notion of the relationship between women and the moon. The author points out the biological nature of this connection and the fact that it is present in other societies around the globe. The female menstrual cycle correlates more or less with lunar cycles; this might be the reason why women are interested in the moon's cycle. Arnold (1999: 39–40) also found the same connection between menstruation and the lunar cycle among Aymara communities.

According to colonial texts the responsibilities of the moon goddess include the sea (Blas Valera 1992 [1590]: 47; Calancha (1977 [1638]: 1239), water (Guaman Poma 2001 [1615]: 285 [287]) and fertility (Calancha (1977 [1638]: 1239). However, the relationship between the moon and the sea is more prominent among inhabitants of coastal regions. This is reported in colonial chronicles (Calancha 1977 [1638]: 1239) and is apparent in the ancient art produced by the Moche (0–800 AD) and Chimu (900–1470 AD)

societies of the Peruvian north coast.[12] This connection is probably due the tidal phenomenon that links the sea and the moon. As is the case with present-day fishermen, the ancient Pacific coast fishermen probably also noticed the relation between the tides, the phases of the moon, and the best times for fishing (Alayza and Soldán 1954: 275, Rostworowski 2001: 213). In highland traditions, such as that of the Inca, the connection between the moon goddess and water is present but not as strong as in coastal communities.

If we take into consideration this relationship between the moon and the sea and its expression in the coastal societies of Moche and Chimu, we may speculate that the Nasca, a coastal society that likewise relied on the marine resources, also worshiped a supernatural being related to the sea and the moon. Ziółkowski (2009: 248) points out that some of the Nasca ceramic pieces depicting female figures have their bodies painted with the star-shaped designs which may refer simply to stars. Morgan (2012: 57) suggests that these paintings may represent a specific star but notes that on the coast it was more common to worship constellations than a single heavenly body. A good example of a piece with this design is part of the collection at the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Peru (Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú) (fig. 4). This ceramic bottle represents a woman giving birth, with two star-shaped elements below her hands. As mentioned previously, this feminine figure has a significant detail that exposes her divinity: she has six fingers on each hand.

We must now ask why the divinity described in this piece is depicted giving birth. Urton's (1981) ethno-astronomical study of the Misminay community may be of help here. The author describes the local perception of the synodic lunar cycle as corresponding to the human life cycle, beginning and ending with no life and encompassing three intermediate stages: infancy, adolescence and adulthood (Urton 1981: 82).

In light of this, we can suggest that in the piece in question, the woman giving birth is the adult moon and the newborn represents the new moon. One detail in particular backs up this suggestion: the newborn's hair is arranged identically to that of the mother. No flesh-and blood baby comes into the world with arranged hairstyle. In this case, the hairstyle includes long hair, locks on the cheeks, and a split fringe on the forehead, indicating that the newborn is female. In all of the Nasca representations of childbirth that I have studied, the newborns are identifiable as female by this hairstyle. Newborn males simply do not appear in Nasca ceramics.[13] As mentioned previously, Nasca art tends towards symbolism and not description: even naturalistic representations of animals or crops had a symbolic meaning for the Nasca (Proulx 2006: 18). As such, it may be inferred that this piece, as with other Nasca artifacts, represents a symbolic birth rather than a true depiction of labor.

Two colonial chroniclers mention that among the Andean societies, a clear relationship existed between childbirth and the moon goddess (Blas Valera 1992 [1590]: 47; Arriaga 1621 [1968]: 214), and that childbirth was one the responsibilities of this divinity:

> La luna que era hermana y mujer del sol, y que le había dado Illa Tecce parte de su divinidad, y héchola señora de la mar y de los vientos de las reinas y princesas, y del parto de las mujeres y reina del cielo. (Blas Valera 1992 [1590]: 47)[14]

If the moon gives birth every month, we can understand why women, in time of labor, invoke the moon goddess.

Another interesting piece from the Museum of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru (Museo Banco de la Reserva) depicting the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body, is decorated with a star design (fig. 5). In this case the figure carries in her arms another figure, small and naked, and with the typical Nasca feminine hairstyle. The larger figure holds the smaller one in the manner of a mother holding her baby. If the childbirth represented in Nasca art refers to the newborn moon, then we may conclude that the piece portrays the baby moon in the arms of the adult moon.

12 For the Moche, see Kutscher (1950: 85–87, 89) and Golte (2009: 70–75). For the Chimu, see Mackey (2001: 143–147).

13 The Moche ceramic style offers very naturalistic depictions of childbirth. As in the Nasca cases, the representations include only the head of the newborn, but there is no detail to suggest its gender. For an example of Moche representation of childbirth, see piece V A 47912 in the online database of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

14 "To the moon, who was the sister and wife of the sun, Illa Tecce [the Creator God] gave part of his divinity and made her the mistress of the sea and the winds, of queens and princesses and of women's childbirth, and the sky queen."

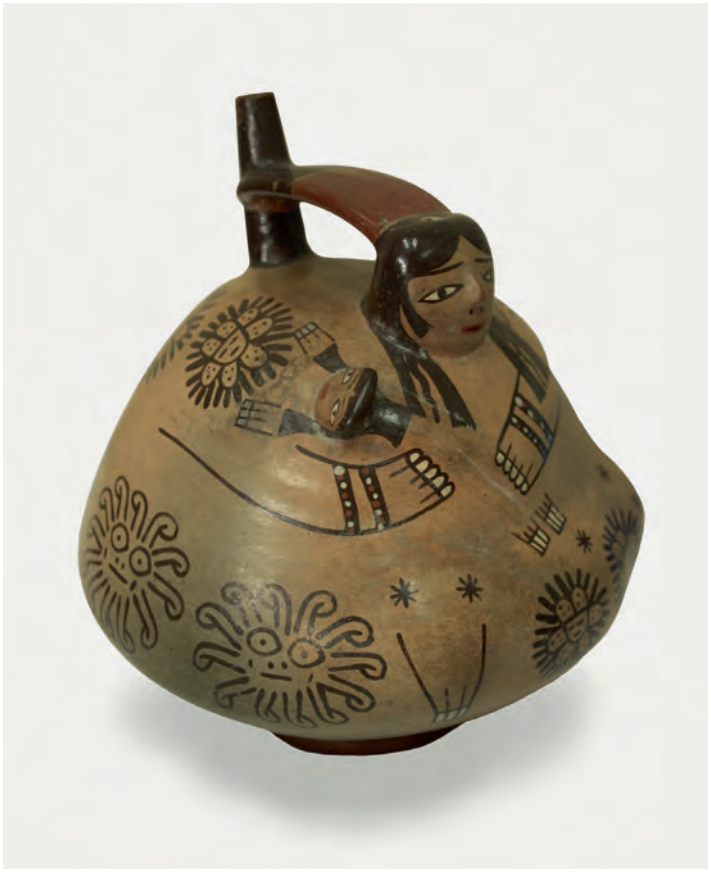

Fig. 5 Nasca bottle ACE 1304 from Museum of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru (high: 17 cm.) (photographed by the author).

Certain other characteristics of the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body may be interpreted as lunar indicators. The first is her color. In many Nasca pieces depicting male and female couples, the latter is painted in white or cream and the former in brown (figs. 8, 9). This suggests that white is associated with femininity. The chronicler Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1984 [1609]: 130–131) refers to the moon's color in relation to the moon sanctuary in Cusco: "[…] toda ella y sus puertas estaban aforradas con tablones de plata, porque por el color blanco viesen que era aposento de la luna."[15] However, it is not only the color that associates these images with the moon; the full, rounded body of these feminine figures beautifully echoes the rounded form of the full moon.

Another interesting detail is the jewelry worn by female figures. In many Nasca ceramic depictions of women and goddesses, these wear earrings. In many cases, these adornments are white discs (fig. 4) or white half-discs. These may refer to the moon's phases and changing shape. Another item of jewelry worn by Nasca feminine figures, including the divinities, is a bracelet decorated with small white and brown circles (figs. 1, 5). The ethnographic analogy of the Misminay community's perception of the moon may cast some light on this adornment. Urton (1981: 84) mentions the Quechua terms that refer to the different stages of the synodic lunar cycle: *wañu*, *kuskan* and *pura*. *Wañu* means inanimate or lifeless, this is not a static position but, rather, part of a process. *Kuskan* is the union between two equal parts; it occurs when the inanimate and the animate are even. *Pura* is at the opposite end of the scale to *wañu*, representing only the animate part. According to this perception, the moon comprises two parts, and their combination creates the different stages of its waxing and waning (fig. 6). If a similar perception existed among the Nasca, the circles of two colors on the bracelet may represent the two parts of the moon.

15 "[the whole chapel] and its doors were covered with silver plating because the white color would show that it was the moon chamber."

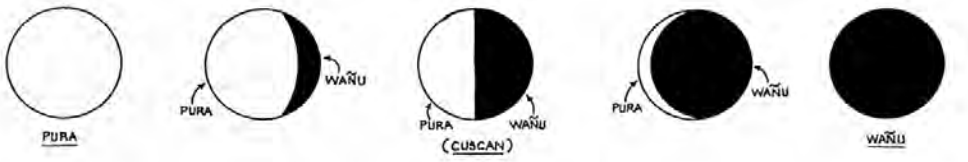

Fig. 6 Urton's schema of the two parts of the moon and the lunar sequence (Urton 1981:83, fig. 30).

It could be, therefore, that the appearance of these adornments in Nasca iconography is related to the Nasca moon goddess. Another possibility is simply that moon jewelry was popular among Nasca women due to the close relationship between themselves and the moon. This link between feminine accessories and the moon may also be reflected in the Andean *tupu*, a pin with round head that used to fasten Andean women's clothing since the seventh century.[16] In the metal craft of the Colonial Era and later, the head of the *tupu* was typically shaped as the moon in its different phases,[17] sometimes accompanied by the image of the sun (Vetter and Carcedo 2009: 102–103). It may therefore be that since the ancient societies the *tupu* heads, in the shape of circle, semi-circle or crescent, also describe the moon in its different phases. The *tupu* head could have many forms, and indeed there are *tupu* heads with different shapes, but the circular, semi-circular and crescent heads are by far the most common. I therefore suggest that this consistency is due to the close affinity of women with the moon in Andean civilization.

Returning to Nasca iconography, an image repeated frequently in Nasca ceramics is that of a woman clad in a white dress decorated with horizontal bands, and a shawl with vertical bands of different colors.[18] It may be that the woman or women described in these pieces fulfilled some role in the worship of the moon goddess. They wear the same bracelet, decorated with white and brown circles, as some divinities, and this jewelry is notable in that it appears only in images of the divinities and of the women with this kind of dress.

In summary, analysis of the features detailed in this section – childbirth, the white color, the star design, and the jewelry – suggests the plausibility that some of the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body represent a moon divinity. As mentioned before, the coastal moon divinity was strongly connected to the sea. However, it is impossible to determine whether the Nasca belief system included separate moon and sea deities, or whether it featured one goddess with different manifestations. The next section addresses the sea and water as embodied in the images of the Nasca feminine divinities.

The sea and water goddess

According to the Andean worldview, all bodies of water are connected. The Incas considered highland lakes to be representations of the sea, connected by subterranean channels to the sea (Sherbondy 1982: 3).[19] The Inca worshiped Mama Qucha as the mother of all water sources, including lakes, lagoons, rivers and springs. This name appears in Quechua and Aymara colonial dictionaries and is translated as sea, lake, big lagoon or puddle (González Holguín 1952 [1608]: 268; Bertonio 2011 [1612]: 405, 452). In the same dictionaries, the word *mama* refers to an initial state: the mother of an animal or a natural seam of metal (González Holguín 1952 [1608]: 225; Bertonio 2011 [1612]: 405). As such, the name *mama qucha* may be understood as the origin of water. However, it is important to note that the colonial dictionaries do not refer to *mama qucha* as a divinity, but simply as a place in which water pools.[20]

16 For an example of *tupu*, see pieces V A 8676 and V A 5457 in the online collection database of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

17 See, for example, Guaman Poma's (2001 [1615]:177 [179]) drawing.

18 See, for example, piece V A 33256 in the online collection database of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin and piece ML032472 in the online database of the Larco Museum in Lima.

19 There is evidence that this belief persists in present-day Andean communities. For example, in the *yaku cambio* ritual that is practiced by the San Pedro de Condo community, water from different sources is mixed together and poured out (Sikkink 1997b: 171–172).

20 Diego González Holguín and Ludovico Bertonio were Jesuit priests and missionaries, and they created these dictionaries to facilitate missionary work rather than to document local Andean customs.

Spondylus shells were common offerings made to water sources, and were considered to be the daughters of the sea (De Acosta 2008 [1590]: 176), offered to divinities by worshipers pleading for rain (Rostworowski 2001: 215). This is another expression of the belief that all water sources are connected, in this case, the rain and the sea. An Andean prayer documented by Juan Pérez Bocanegra (1631: 133) also testifies to this connection:

> No llouiendo, y secandose tu chacra, sueles adorar las nuues, y dezirles rogando: O madre mar, del cabo del mundo llueue, y rocia pues te adoro? Dizes a las fuentes y a las lagunas, y a los manátiales, adorándolas, y haziédoles bailes, y vistiéndolas como mujer en vn cantarillo, y dándoles de comer: O madre fuente, laguna ó manantial, dame agua sin cessar, orina sin parar?[21]

According to this text, rain was conceived as a bodily liquid released by the divinity. Another source also suggests that water emanated from the body of a feminine deity: in the village of Mama in the Huarochirí region, where an idol of the wife of Pachacamac was worshiped, there was a temple located at the confluence of two rivers: "[…] y como estos dichos dos ríos se juntan cerca del dicho pueblo de Mama, un poco abajo, decían ser las tetas de la diosa mujer de Pachacamac, y de sus tetas salían aquellos dos ríos…"[22] (Avila Brizeño 1965 [1571–1572]: 163). The Huarochirí manuscript uses the Quechua word *simi* (mouth) in reference to the outlet of a channel or lake (Tylor 2008: 44– 45, 46–47, 138–139), evidencing the Andean notion that water emerges from symbolic body parts.

Additional Andean water-related perceptions assign gender category to water. As mentioned previously, bodies of pooled water were conceived as feminine entities, but there is evidence that flowing and channeled water was viewed as a masculine entity (Salomon 1991: 15, 18; Isbell 1997: 270; Doyon 2006).[23]

A small statue from the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin bears the image of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body (fig. 1). The buttocks of this figure are decorated with the Killer Whale Mythical Being, which combines human and animal body parts. Yacovleff (1932) suggests that this supernatural being was the supreme Nasca deity and that its image was based on the appearance of the killer whale (*Orcinus orca*). Lyon (1978: 126), on the other hand, maintains that the image of this supernatural being represents a combination of the killer whale and other marine creatures. Inspired by myths from various South American communities, Lyon and Rowe propose that Nasca art describes the master (or mistress) of fishes as a "supernatural being who has in its charge all water creatures and who is in a position to provide rich fishing to those who please it and destroy those who do not" (Lyon 1978: 126, note 57).

As mentioned at the beginning of the present article, in some images, the Nasca Killer Whale wears masculine attire (a loincloth and short shirt), and this suggests that if the Nasca religion did indeed include a supernatural being similar to the later master (or mistress) of fishes, it was a masculine entity. Proulx (2006: 84) points out that the image of the Nasca Killer Whale is associated more closely with agricultural fertility than marine abundance. However, since this mythical being also appears in relation to marine life, it would seem that its role concerns both marine and agricultural fertility. Nasca subsistence was based on both agriculture and marine resources (Silverman and Proulx 2002: 52–56), and this would mean that the being was responsible for the overall provision of sustenance to humanity.

Back to the feminine statue, on light of the Andean tendency to conceive the pooling water as feminine entity, we can understand the statue from Berlin and a very similar statue from the Regional Museum Ica Adolfo Bermúdez Jenkins (Museo Regional de Ica "Adolfo Bermúdez Jenkins") (figs. 1, 2), as the representation of the sea or water goddess. In the case of the Berlin piece (fig. 1), the image of this divinity includes in her

21 "There is no rain and your field is dried out, do you worship the clouds, and tell them, pleading: O Mother Sea, from the end of the world let it rain and let there fall dew, and so I worship you? Are you saying to the fountains and to the lagoons, and to the springs, worshiping them, and dancing for them, and dressing a small jar like a woman, and giving them to eat: O Mother fountain, lagoon or spring, give me water without ceasing, urinate without stopping?"

22 "[…] and since those two rivers joined near to this village of Mama, just below it, it was said that these were the breasts of the goddess, wife of Pachacamac, and from her breasts the two rivers emanated […]".

23 For ethnographic studies that demonstrate the masculinity of flowing or channeled water, see Isbell (1978: 143), Allen (1982: 185–186) and Harrison (1989: 163).

body the Killer Whale mythical being, in the same way that the sea includes this mammal.

The Andean traditions regarding water-related divinities, mentioned above, indicate that water was believed to flow from the orifices of the divine body: from the vulva in the form of urine and from the breasts. In both the Berlin and Ica statues, the vaginal opening and the anus are clearly represented as holes and emphasized by black painting on the pubic area and on the buttocks (figs. 1, 2). The notion that water flows from the divine body through these orifices is a possible explanation for the emphasis of these body parts. The painting on the pubic area incorporates a slit which depicts the vulva as a tongue coming out from the mouth of the scroll mask. Representation of the tongue as fluid emerging from the divinity's face is common in Paracas and Nasca art (Proulx 2006: 17, 69). In this context it is important to remember that water and other liquids flow from the vagina during birth. This also fits perfectly with the prayer documented by Juan Pérez Bocanegra (1631: 133) in which the worshipers ask the divinity for rain and thus to "urinate without stopping."

A similar belief held by the Paresi community in the Brazilian Amazon was documented by Métraux (1942: 169) and said that "the first human being was a stone woman, Maisö, who made the earth and caused several rivers to flow from her vagina." It may be that Nasca myths ascribed the vagina a similar role as the origin of water.

Golte (2003: 186), in his study of complex Nasca iconographies involving mythical figures, notes that in place of the genitals is a feline face, and from its mouth emanate two bands (see, for example, Golte 2003: figs. 2, 3, 4, 5). This seems to be another attribute of supernatural figures in Nasca art, not only in the case of feminine divinities. This suggests that the divine genitals, whether feminine or masculine, are an important source from where abundance emerges, in the form of either fertility or water.

The other bodily sources of water mentioned by the Andean tradition are the breasts. The images of the woman with the plump, naked white-painted body rarely include female breasts, and if these are present, normally only the nipples are shown (Morgan 2012:37, 39). However, the two statues from Berlin and Ica have on their chest two very small dots painted on top of shallow bumps. It seems that the nipples, rather than the breasts as a whole, were crucial to the message of these two artworks. In fact, the image of the fertility goddess (fig. 10) features neither female breasts nor even nipples. This would suggest that the nipples were irrelevant to the role of the fertility goddess but of greater importance in the case of the water goddess, as can be seen in the two small statues (figs. 1, 2). This attention to the nipples can be explained by the Andean myth about the wife of Pachacamac, whose breasts gave rise to two rivers. An important note here is that, according to the Andean worldview, water, blood, semen, breastmilk and *chicha* (maize beer) are all associated and considered to be different versions of the same essence (Weismantel 2004: 499, 2008: 272). Based on this understanding, the female breasts, aside from being the source of breastmilk, may have been understood as a source of water.

There are two remarkable Nasca bottles that possibly bear the image of the sea goddess. The first, kept at the National Museum of Archeology, Anthropology and History of Peru, represents a small version of the woman with the plump, naked white-painted body sitting on the shoulders of a larger male human figure (fig. 7). The body of the male figure is covered with circular and rectangular net designs, which have been identified as fishing net (Morgan 2012: 58) based on the images of fishermen with similar representation of net.[24] Another motif, painted on either side of the figure, is the Fan-Headed Anthropomorphic Mythical Being (Proulx 2006: 75), although in this case the motif is simpler compared to its depiction on the pubic area of the two statues mentioned above (figs. 1, 2). The male figure is totally naked, but on his head he wears a headdress made of white netting. As with the two statues, the genitals are emphasized:

24 See, for example, pieces V A 50923 and V A 50924 in the online collection database of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

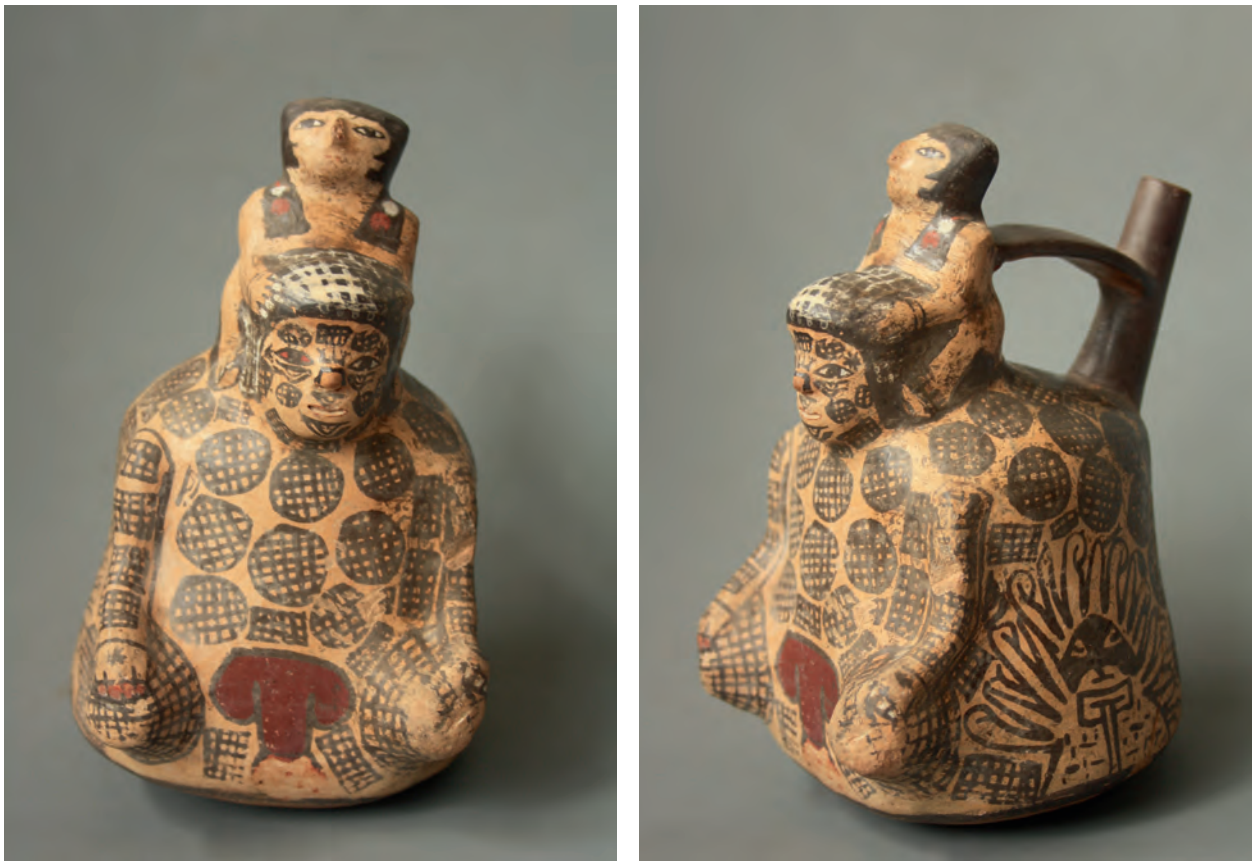

Fig. 7 Nasca bottle C-59449 from the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Peru (high: 17.5 cm.) (photographed by the author).

the penis is disproportionately large and painted in a red-brown color. The same color is used for the right eye, the fingernails of the right hand, and the lips. This color was probably used in order to draw attention to these parts. On the back of the figure's hands there is a star motif. It is not clear whether this figure represents a supernatural or human being. The only body part exaggerated is the penis, although it may be intended to represent an erection rather than to imply abnormal size.[25]

The other bottle is kept at the Five Continents Museum in Munich (Museum Fünf Kontinente). Its iconography is similar to that of the bottle from Lima; however, in this case there is no indication of the gender of the figure (Rickenbach 1999: 292–293). In the piece from Munich, the figure's body is also decorated with net motifs, its left eye is painted with a red-brown color, and it wears a white net headdress. Nevertheless, there are details that do not appear on the bottle from Lima, including certain body paintings of fish and images that possibly represent net needles, painted as two parallel lines with short lines running between them. Another interesting detail is that this figure has its hands stretched backward and carries a smaller figure on its back. The small figure is unusual and its gender is unclear.

Regardless of the differences between the two bottles, they appear to display the same iconography of a figure involved with fishing and that carries a smaller figure on its back or shoulders. One possible interpretation is that the male figure represents a fisherman who carries with him the image of the sea divinity. The white net headdress appears in many representations of fishermen (for example in the two pieces mentioned earlier: V A 50923 and V A 50924 from the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin). Further-

25 For an abnormally sized penis, see the Moche piece 1955.2680 in the online database of the Art Institute of Chicago. In this case, the length of the penis is equivalent to 70% of the body length.

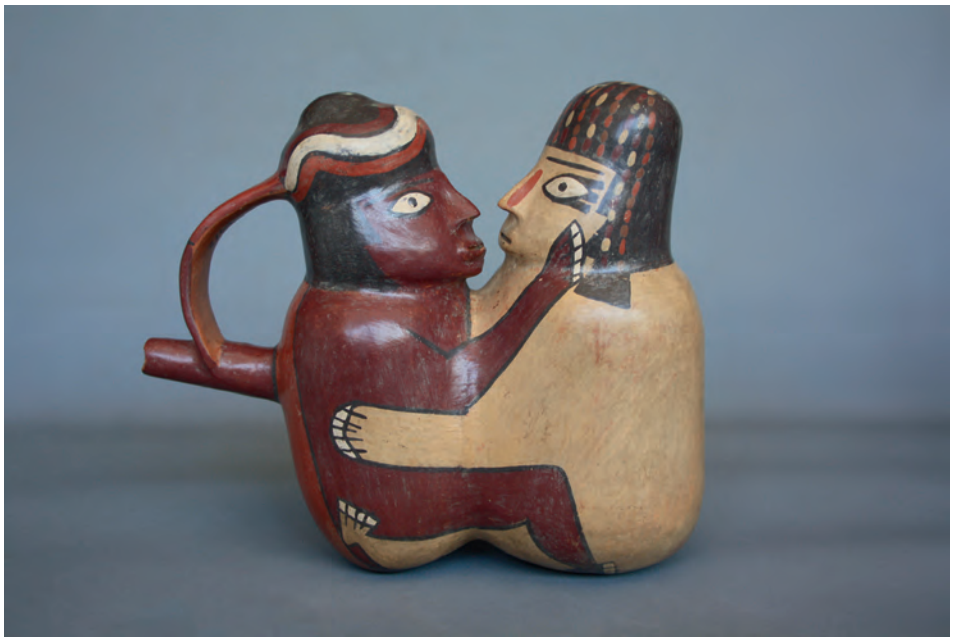

Fig. 8 Nasca bottle C-54228 from the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Peru (high: 19.5 cm.) (photographed by the author).

more, the nudity of the fisherman image is another feature that the two bottles in question share with the representation of fishermen in Nasca art. The small image of the feminine divinity, clearly visible on the bottle from Lima (fig. 7), may be a figurine or talisman thought to protect the fisherman and bless his fishing. Another interpretation would be to understand the image of the goddess as symbolic and representative of her spirit, which would accompany the fisherman in his work rather than a real idol in her image. One more possible explanation is that the masculine figure is a patron of fishermen and related in some way with the sea goddess. Whatever the interpretation, the bottle from Lima clearly describes the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body and it is another example of the association of this image with the sea and, in this case, with fishing.

The last type of iconography to be discussed in this section appears on a number of bottles that represent copulation between the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body and a male counterpart (figs. 8, 9). I have studied five Nasca bottles with this iconography, but there are at least six more in existence.[26] These pieces have been classified as belonging to the Nasca 5–8 phases. Most of the pieces depict vaginal intercourse, although three may show anal intercourse (see, for example, Lapiner 1976: 211). In Nasca sexual imagery, men tend to wear adornments on their heads, while women have body paintings on their arms and legs as in other representations of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body.

Before analyzing and interpreting these images we should take into consideration Voss' (2008:321) statement in relation to sexuality when it is studied in the field of archaeology by means of imagery depicting sexual relations: "Not all sexual representations are erotic, that is, designed to stimulate a sexual response in the viewer; sexual images may also be apotropaic, political, comical, or religious." Since, as mentioned before, Nasca art is more symbolical than descriptive, it seems that this kind of iconography was intended as more than a simple depiction of sexual relations.

The Moche culture of the Peruvian north coast, which was contemporary to the Nasca, left a far greater number of ceramics with representations of sexual activity (vaginal and

26 See, for example, piece Am1954,05.806 in the online database of the British Museum and piece ML004411 in the online database of the Larco Museum in Lima.

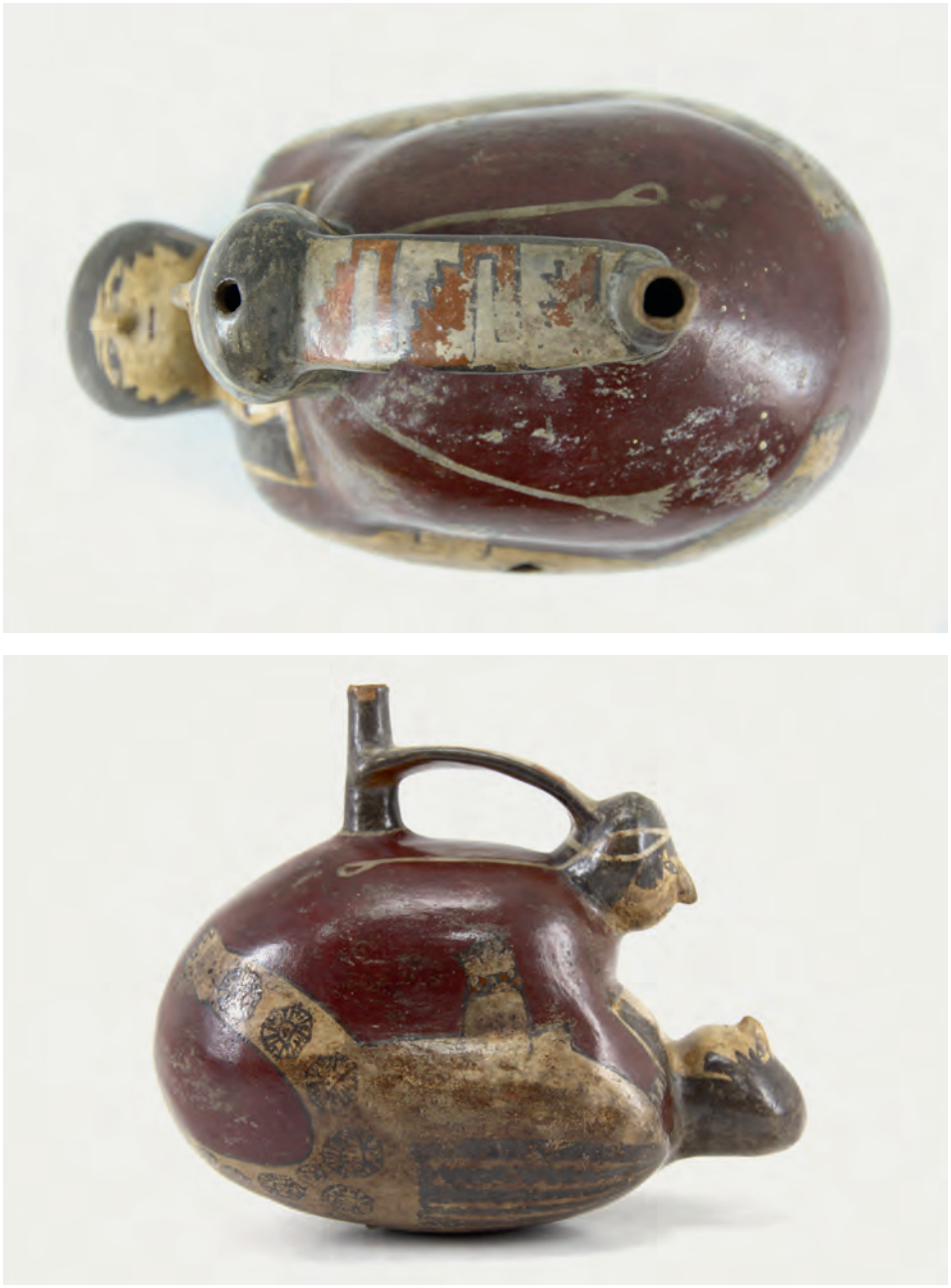

Fig. 9 Nasca bottle ML004414 from Larco Museum (high: 16.6 cm.) (Photograph courtesy of the Larco Museum, Lima – Peru).

anal intercourse, masturbation and fellatio), and these have been interpreted in different ways (Bergh 1993; Kauffmann-Doig 2001; Weismantel 2004; Bourget 2006). Some of these interpretations suggest that Moche sexual imagery describes an exchange of fluids between human beings or supernatural entities. Bergh (1993: 80–81), for example, suggests that a Moche ceramic bottle with an image of mountain peaks, in which the middle peak appears as a penis, refers to the fluids which descend from the mountains. For inhabitants of the coast, the mountains were the origin of water; the rivers of the western slopes of the Andes flow downward and enable life on the desert coast. The water in this case is parallel to semen. The color taken on by the foamy river waters of the humid season resembles the color of semen, but also of the maize beer, which was poured as libation from Moche vessels with spouts in the shape of penises (Bergh 1993: 84).

It is important to stress that vaginal sex is the least represented in Moche sexual imagery and is related to the afterworld. It involves a masculine supernatural being and what appears to be a woman (Bourget 2006: 151, 169). Similar to Bergh's interpretation, Turner (2013: 22–24) suggests that the scene of vaginal copulation between a male deity and a human female includes metaphors of human and agricultural fertility, as well as circulation of fluids between the Andean highlands and the coast.

The interpretation of sexual relations as an exchange of fluids between the highlands and the coast may also serve the analysis of Nasca sexual imagery. Among these pieces is one in which the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body has six fingers on her left hand (fig. 8), alluding, as mentioned previously, to her supernatural quality. In light of this, we may interpret Nasca sexual imagery as being the opposite to that of the Moche: as sexual relations between masculine human being and feminine divine being. However, the following proposal suggests that the masculine image symbolizes the highlands, while the feminine image represents the coast.

The relationship between the highlands as the source of flowing water and the coast as the recipient and collector of the water (in the ocean) is materialized by the form of those Nasca pieces that present sexual imagery. In all of these bottles, the spout, or the opening of the bottle through which the liquid enters and exits the vessel, is located on the male body. The lower part of the bottles and their base, which is where the liquid pools, are shaped or decorated as the feminine image. This dichotomy is also a clear reflection of the sexual act, where the man pours the liquid which then drains into the woman's body. At the same time, it corresponds with the Andean gender assignation of water by which flowing water is conceived as the masculine entity and pooling water as the feminine.

There is an additional detail which may associate the feminine image with the coast and the masculine image with the highlands – the figures' colors. In most of the Nasca bottles that are shaped in a form of a man and a woman engaging in a sexual act or just posing side by side or back to back, the woman's body is always a white or cream color, while the man's is brown (figs. 8, 9). From this differentiation it could be deduced that the white color of the copulating woman alludes to the light-colored desert of the coast, while the man's brown color refers to highland soils.

The Inca conceptualized the coast as the *hurin* part, therefore associating it with the feminine force, while the highlands were associated with the *hanan* and thus with masculinity.[27] Zuidema (1964: 165–170) refers to this division in terms of the opposite relation between Viracocha, the creator god, and the sun god. Viracocha was associated with the *hurin* part – the earth, water and the coast – while the sun god was linked to the *hanan* part – the sky, fire and the mountains. Furthermore, Desrosiers (1992: 25), in her study of the vertical and horizontal directions materialized in Andean textiles, shows that, in general, horizontality represents the coast, *hurin* and femininity, while verticality indicates the highlands, *hanan* and masculinity.

A unique Nasca piece from The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York appears to represent the highlands as a masculine entity (Sawyer 1966: 132).[28] A large part of the bottle is painted in hues of brown, black, white and cream, and appear to represent a mountain chain.[29] A masculine figure[30] can be seen on the bottom of the bottle, but only his head, arms and feet are shown, as the body of the figure is actually the mountain chain itself. Basing our analysis on this piece, we can suggest that the Nasca, just like the Incas, conceived the Andean highlands as masculine entities. However, according to a traditional myth recounted below, the inhabitants of the Nasca region perceived Cerro Blanco (White Hill) in the Nasca valley as a feminine entity. This feminine hill may be represented in the piece from the Metropolitan Museum of Art by the female figure painted on the slope of the mountain chain. The perception of specific hill or mountain as a feminine entity – and indeed the similar notions among many Andean communities

27 One of the most basic foundations of Andean societies in the past, as well as in the present, is duality, a concept which involves two additional notions: complementarity and reciprocity. The Quechua terms for the two components in the dual ensemble are *hanan* and *hurin*. In González Holguín's dictionary (1952 [1608]: 333) the two terms are presented along with their spatial signification: *hanan suyu* refers to the high part ("el de arriba"), and *hurin suyu* to the low part ("el de abaxo"). Hocquenghem (1984: 13–16) suggests additional opposites that are included in the concepts of *hanan* and *hurin*. *Hanan* is the major part and is associated with the right side, masculinity, the front, the external, life, disappearance, the past, ancestors, and collaboration. *Hurin* is the smaller part and is associated with the left side, femininity, the back, the interior, the appearance, the future, descendants, and opposition.

28 See piece 64.228.67 in the online database of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

29 A similar method to represent mountains can be found in Nasca 7 iconography that displays warriors in action. In these scenes, the terrain is described, and in some cases the background includes mountains representations which are quite similar to those seen on the piece from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Proulx 1994: 92, fig. 11).

30 Identification of the figure as male is based on the presence of facial hair and the typical masculine fringe.

that certain mountains and hills were feminine[31]– does not contradict the previous suggestion that the highlands were believed to be a masculine being, since the highlands as a whole were considered a masculine entity, however, within this extended territory, individual mountains were conceptualized as feminine beings. According to this rationale, it is possible that the piece from the Metropolitan Museum of Art may represent a masculine mountain chain that is related to or that includes a feminine entity.

In the mid-twentieth century, Rossel (1977: 39–41) documented a local myth of the Nasca area that concerned three of the region's mountains: Illa-kata,[32] located in Pampas de Galeras (Lucanas), his wife Cerro Blanco, a hill in the Nasca valley, and Tunga, a hill close to the coast. The myth specifies Cerro Blanco, the wife of Illa-kata, as a feminine entity and explains the white color of the hill.[33]

Reinhard (1985: 16) quotes another myth that was documented by Urton in which water broke out from the summit of Cerro Blanco. Another myth documented by Urton tells that in time of drought, the people went to Cerro Blanco, the local place of worship, where they requested help from the god Viracocha. Viracocha came down from the sky and, upon hearing the cries of the people, began to shed tears from his eyes. The tears seeped down into Cerro Blanco where a reservoir formed. This reservoir, according to the myth, provided water for a subterranean aqueduct (see also Silverman and Proulx 2002: 208). Reinhard (1985: 16) stresses that it is a common belief in the Andes that the high masculine mountains supply water to lakes and smaller mountains, considered to be their wives. The flowing water – as mentioned previously, associated with semen – fertilizes the feminine entity. This kind of relationship also appears in the myths documented in the Huarochirí manuscript (Salomon 1991: 15).

The colonial chronicler De Acosta (1962 [1590]: 224) mentions a place sacred to the ancient people of the Nasca valley: a sand mountain surrounded by mountains of stone. Reinhard (1985: 17) maintains that the mountain described by De Acosta can be none other than Cerro Blanco. On a visit to the hill, Reinhard found offerings of pebbles and cotton plants at the summit. The pebbles were a votive offering commonly used in pleas for water, and the cotton plants were probably also offered in an appeal to the gods for water, specifically to irrigate their cotton fields.

Based on these myths, it seems that the inhabitants of the Nasca region believed – and indeed continue to believe – that the mountain deities control and provide water to the coast. In addition, the subterranean water source comes from a reservoir within Cerro Blanco, which is linked to the higher mountain Illa-Kata who fertilizes it (or her) with the water that he causes to flow into the hill (Reinhard 1996: 16). These concepts are made all the more significant if we take into account the water reservoirs built by the Nasca: the *pukyus*.

In light of the above, the symbolism of copulation in Nasca iconography may refer to the fertilization of coastal soils by water that flows down from the highlands. Flowing water is equivalent to semen, and the sexual act represented on Nasca ceramics may also symbolize the exchange between different bodies or sources of water. It is possible that the Nasca sexual imagery hark back to an ancient myth where the feminine coastal hill copulates with the masculine mountain. Through this union, water circulates and enables life on the desert coast. It is difficult to ignore the link between the white color of the feminine entity of Cerro Blanco in the myth documented by Rossel (1977: 39–41) and the same color used to paint the female figures in the sexual representations on Nasca ceramics. Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that the female represented in Nasca sexual imagery is an ancient version of the myth of Cerro Blanco, a sacred place beneath which water pools for use by the area's inhabitants.

As mentioned previously, the feminine image only came to prominence in Nasca ceramics during the later phases (Nasca 5 onward) (Proulx 2006: 18), which was a time of severe droughts (Silverman and Proulx 2002:255). It is possible that from this point

31 There are many myths from different communities that describe fights and rivalry between feminine and masculine mountains. See, for example, the Conde community in southern Bolivia (Sikkink 1997a: 105) and the Aymara communities of northern Chile (Gavilán Vega 1996: 100–101).

32 This name may be derived from the Aymara word *hilacata* which means chief or leader (Bertonio 2011 [1612]: 212).

33 In short, the myth tells that Tunga, the lord of the coast, deceived Illa-kata, the lord of the heights, who was his friend and host. Tunga kidnaped or seduced Illa-kata's wife and the two escaped toward the sea. The moment Illa-kata awoke, he searched for his wife but could not find her. He began by calling her and then he looked for her. When he got closer to his wife, Tunga covered her with maize flour. Tricked, Illa-kata could not find his wife and went back to his place. Illa-kata took revenge for this deception and sent a cataclysm to destroy the mountains. He cursed his wife and his friend, and the two fell under the debris and became inanimate beings. The maize flour turned into a huge dune under which Illa-kata's wife was buried. Since then, this hill has been called Cerro Blanco, the white hill. Tunga was close to the sea at the time and was turned into a black hill, which is now known by the name Markona (Rossel 1977: 39–41).

onward, women began to occupy a more dominant position within the cult domain. It was also during this phase that sexual imagery began to appear in Nasca ceramics, I propose that, either in parallel with the droughts or as a result of them, the Nasca developed a cult and form of artistic representation that highlighted their dependency on the water that flowed down from the Andean highlands. It is likely that the sexual imagery of Nasca 5–7 is a symbolic manifestation of this reality and expresses beliefs relating to this dependency. Piece ML004414 from the Larco Museum (Museo Larco) (fig. 9) represents this complementarity between the highlands and the coast, not only through copulation between the feminine and masculine figures, but also by the geometrical symbol painted on the bottle's handle. This symbol, called the step-fret motif, is repeated in the visual culture of many American indigenous societies, and in the Andes it is found from the Paracas style onward. This geometric symbol of steps attached to a wave represents the concept of duality and the complementation of opposites, a kind of *yin* and *yang* of American indigenous societies. However, it seems that within each culture, the symbol obtained local significance. In the case of Andean societies there are some indications that this symbol reflected the complementarity between the highlands and the coast.[34] The presence of this symbol on the bottle's handle reinforces the iconographical message of the piece, which shows the circulation of water from the highlands to the coast and so to the sea, from where the water continues to circulate to all water sources as rain and through subterranean channels.

The lack of water is likely to have accentuated the need for different types of fertility to ensure the continuation of human life, in particular that of the sea and the land. The need for marine fertility is clearly expressed in the image of the sea goddess as represented in the piece analyzed here (figs. 1). The need for land fertility is testified to by the dramatic increase in trophy head representations during the Nasca 5–7 phases (Proulx 2006: 40–43), a cult which was strongly related to land fertility (Allen 1981: 51–54; Proulx 2006: 9). Silverman and Proulx (2002: 255) suggest that, in general, the sudden appearance of the figurines of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body during Nasca 5 reflects growing concern within Nasca society about a reduction in fertility caused by droughts. The following section explores the image of the fertility goddess in relation to trophy heads.

The fertility goddess

To this day, the best known Andean fertility goddess is the earth goddess Pacha Mama, whose names have included Suyrumama (Bertonio 2011 [1612]:420), Chucomama among coastal inhabitants (the Augustinian priests 1992 [1560–1561]:34) and Camac Pachac (Polo de Ondegardo 1916 [1571]: 192). According to colonial texts, the earth was worshiped because it gave forth food (Bertonio 2011 [1612]: 420) and for its fertility: "Es cosa común entre Indios adorar á la tierra fértil, que es la tierra que llaman Pachamama, ó Cámac páchac…" (Polo de Ondegardo 1916 [1571]: 192).[35] Essentially, the name Camac Pachac appears to refer more specifically to fertile land, while Pacha Mama refers to the earth in general.[36]

The goddess Pacha Mama was believed to be the provider of food for human beings and animals; she was understood as the force which enables life and was thus associated with women and maternity. Mariscotti (1978: 39) suggests that Pacha Mama, as the goddess of all plants, encompasses other *mamas*, such as Zara Mama, Coca Mama, Quinoa Mama, and Oca Mama, each with the ability to bear an abundance of maize, coca, quinoa and oca (*Oxalis tuberosa*).

The cult of Pacha Mama is closely associated with agricultural work and manifested in plowing, sowing and harvesting ceremonies. There is evidence that, in Andean socie-

34 Two textiles from the Maiman Collection testify that the stepped part of this symbol refers to the highlands, while the waves refer to the coast. The Wari textile MC 507 includes the image of a camelid, probably a llama, whose tail takes the form of steps and to whose head a spiral wave is attached. The Chancay textile MC 776 contains a different formation of the symbol, whereby a wave in the form of a marine bird is attached to a stepped design. From this we may conclude that the steps, represented in the Wari textile by the typical highland animal (llama), symbolizes the highlands. The wave, on the other hand, which is replaced by a marine bird in the Chancay textile, symbolizing the coast (for the Chancay textile see: Makowski, Rosenzweig and Jiménez 2006: 234, catalog number 187).

35 "It is common among the Indians to worship the fertile land, which is the earth they call Pachamama or Camac Pachac […]"

36 This suggestion is based on information contained in Murúa's (2001 [1616]: 410) chronicle, González Holguín's (1952 [1608]: 524) dictionary, and in Santacruz Pachacuti Yamqui Salcamaygua's (1613: 13v) drawing of the Quri Kancha altar.

ties, the earth's fertility cycle is imagined as the fertility cycle of women. There is documented evidence of the belief among the Aymara of northern Chile that the earth, like a woman, menstruates (Gavilán 1996: 98–99, Carrasco and Gavilán 2009: 95). According to the Andean tradition, a woman is considered to be most fertile when she is menstruating (Harris 1985: 25, Gavilán 1996: 64, Platt 2002: 132–133, Carrasco and Gavilán 2009: 95). This belief is probably related to another conviction that the fetus is created by the woman's blood and the man's semen (Harris 1985: 25; Sikkink 1997b: 180; Carrasco 1998: 90; Arnold, Yapita and Tito 1999: 248; Platt 2002: 133; Carrasco and Gavilán 2009: 95). However, there is evidence of a local custom among Andean communities of avoiding sexual intercourse during menstruation (Gavilán 1996: 64).

Similarly, there are certain days in the Andean agricultural year on which agricultural work is forbidden, the most common being between the first and the sixth days of August. During this period, the earth needs peace and love (Gow and Condori 1976: 5). According to Andean thought, agricultural work is analogous to sexual relations, the most obvious expression being the penetration of the earth by the Andean hoe, the *taklla*, a phallic-shaped instrument used only by men. Plowing and opening the land is considered male-only work, while placing seeds in the ground is a job that only women do (Harris 1978: 30; Isbell 1978: 57; Carter and Mamani 1982: 125–126; Silverblatt 1987: 9–14). In light of these beliefs, it seems that the six days during which the earth rests in August are parallel to a woman's menstruation. There are myths that demonstrate parallels between the notion of a woman giving birth to a human baby and Pacha Mama giving birth to fruits (Valderrama and Escalante 1977: 57). Even certain vocabulary refers to the analogy between the fertile land and the woman's body: between the vagina and the furrow. In the Quechua dictionary of Santo Tomás (1560: 164r), the word for the female sexual organ is *raca*, while the word for furrow is *racan*, literally, "her sexual organ".

The image of Pacha Mama in contemporary Andean traditions is of an old woman, either very large or very small, who lives inside the earth. However, the divinity has different aspects and is represented by supernatural beings located in diverse places (Mariscotti 1978: 31–35) and is even believed to be a huge female toad (Hissink and Hahn 1961: 540–541).[37]

As mentioned previously, another recurrent fertility-related motif in Nasca art are trophy heads. Archaeological evidence of this practice has been found in the form of caches of trophy heads (Browne et al. 1993; Verano 1995). The bleeding that occurs as a result of decapitation, as well as the severed head itself, were probably linked with notions of agricultural fertility and regeneration, and this is reflected in representations of human heads from which plants grow (Allen 1981: 51–54; Proulx 2006: 9, 103). The trophy head is one of the most common motifs in Nasca art. It is present throughout all Nasca phases in association with supernatural beings and warriors, and as a single motif repeated several times on the same piece (Proulx 2006: 104). The trophy head motif frequently occurs as a body painting on feminine figurines and small statues, but it can also relate to marine and human fertility (Morgan 2012: 60–61).

There is one small unique Nasca 7 statue of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body that includes paintings of the trophy head motif, menstrual blood and two additional elements, all may serve to identify her as a fertility goddess. The piece ACE 3043, part of the collection at the Museum of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru, represents a naked woman sitting on her folded legs (figs. 10, 11). Compared to the other pieces, the figure's buttocks are enormous and the lower part of the body is disproportionate in size to the upper part. This detail corresponds with my proposal that the exaggeration of human body parts indicates supernaturality.

The figure's body is decorated with paintings: rayed faces (i.e. faces surrounded by rays) on the buttocks, an oval rayed element on the knees, and trophy head motifs on the arms. According to Proulx's (2006: 77) typology, the rayed faces on the buttocks may

37 Toads and tadpoles are common motifs in Nasca art, and Proulx (2006: 158) draws a strong connection between the toad and water, pointing out that the egg and tadpole stages of a toad's development depend on water, just as human beings do. This animal therefore symbolizes "water and life, water and fertility, water and sustenance."

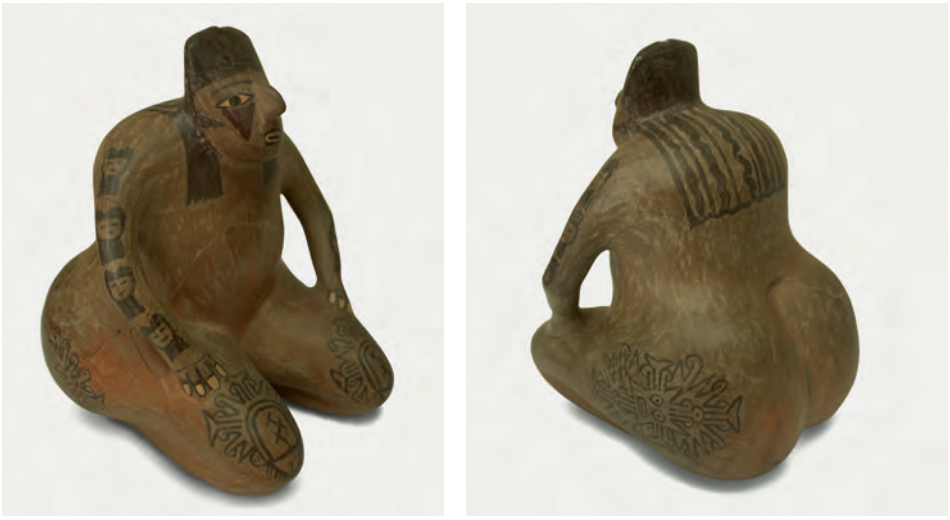

Fig. 10 Nasca Female statute ACE 3043 from Museum of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru (high: 17.5 cm.) (photographed by the author).

be a representation of the Bodiless Anthropomorphic Mythical Being. A similar face appears in the pubic area of another small statue (see Morgan 2012: 325, figurine 189), and Morgan (2012: 63) identifies the motif as representing a mythical entity that bears resemblance to other mythical beings. It may be the same motif that appears on the pubic area of the sea- and water-related divinity (figs. 1, 2), only that in this particular case, the rayed face is drawn in the Nasca 7 style. In this piece, the location of the motif changes from the pubic area to the buttocks and thighs (in the case of the piece in fig. 2, the buttocks are also covered with the rayed face motif). The change of location may be a result of the position of this figure, sitting on her folded legs. This posture creates a small space in which the vulva is represented, on the base of the piece, between the folded legs (fig. 11a). In addition, it seems that priority was given to depicting the menstrual blood emerging from the vagina, rather than to encircling the vulva with paintings. Another possibility is that the piece represents a Nasca 7 innovation on the theme of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body, in which the vulva is emphasized by means other than painting.

The elliptical element painted on the woman's knees may be a representation of the penis as viewed from above; the ellipse is pointed at one end where there is a short line, probably representing the external urethral orifice of the penis (fig. 11b). The line around the ellipse may represent the scrotum, and the rays and volute that encircle the element could refer to the pubic hair (these rays are typical of Nasca 6–7 motifs).

As mentioned previously, the trophy heads painted on the woman's arms are related to fertility. Archaeological and iconographical evidence shows that trophy heads were buried in the earth as part of agricultural fertility ceremonies (Allen 1981: 51–54; Proulx 2006: 9, 103). It seems that the trophy heads were offered to the earth in the hope of ensuring a good harvest. This combination of the penis on the knees and the trophy heads on the arms indicates that fertility is a prominent subject of this piece. There appears to be some parallel between the two elements: the trophy heads may be understood as semen deposited into the earth in order to fertilize her. Verano (1995: 213–214) examined a sample of 84 Nasca trophy heads, almost all of which (85%) were from adult male individuals. This finding clearly demonstrates that the Nasca cult involved with decapitated heads focused on a specific age group and gender. In this case, the severed heads, as with the penis shape painted on the woman's knees, are the masculine elements which fertilize the female figure of the fertility divinity.[38]

38 In Andean societies, sacrifice, including human sacrifice, was the masculine way to bring about fertility, while the feminine fertility is believed to be inherent to the female body (Artzi in print [2020]).

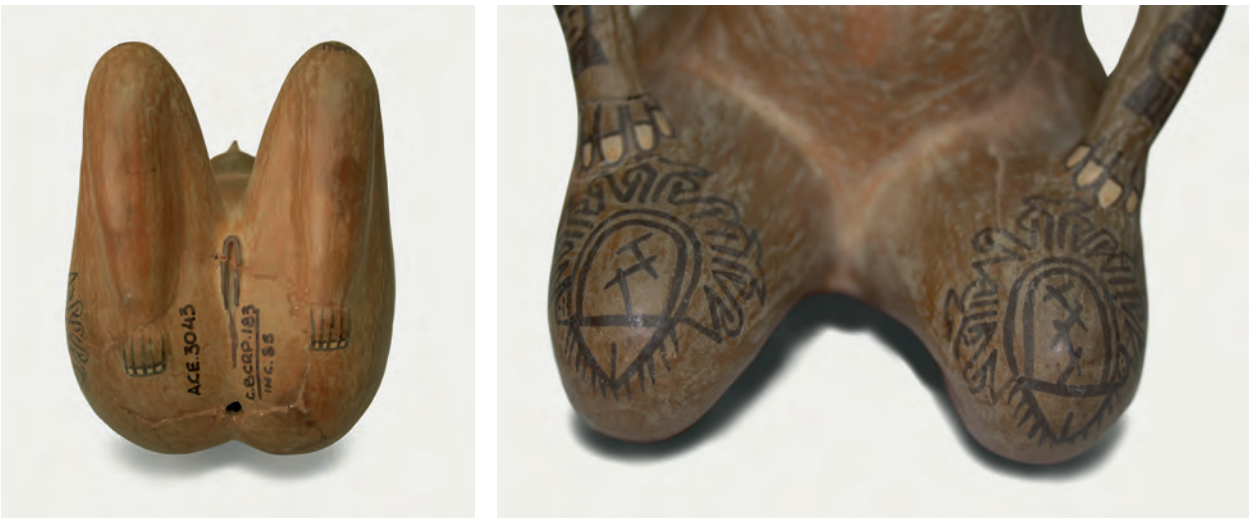

Fig. 11 Details of piece ACE 3043 from Museum of the Central Reserve Bank of Peru showing (a) menstruation blood and (b) the painting on the figure's knees.

However, there is another detail that demonstrates the potent fertility of this goddess: the lower part of the piece which incorporates a bleeding vagina (fig. 11a), a feature which probably refers to menstruation. Earlier I mentioned that Pacha Mama, in contemporary Andean communities, is considered to menstruate at certain days in the Andean agricultural year (Gavilán 1996: 98–99, Carrasco and Gavilán 2009: 95). In addition, there is evidence that in contemporary Andean communities, the menstruation period is believed to be the woman's most fertile period (Harris 1985: 25, Gavilán 1996: 64). In light of this, I suggest that the female figure in piece ACE 3043 represents the earth itself in her most fertile state. It may be that the ritual of planting trophy heads took part at these fertile days: the heads inseminate the earth and, in doing so, reinforce her fertility. There is no evidence that can help us to understand the ritual cycle of the Nasca fertility goddess, but it is possible that, as with contemporary Andean communities, the Nasca also believed that the earth menstruates. If such a belief did exist, menstruation probably occurred at a specific point in the agricultural cycle. Another important point concerning this figure goes back to what I suggested previously regarding the color of the woman with a plump, naked, white-painted body represented in Nasca art. The white-beige color of the body alludes to the color of the coastal soil, in the case of piece ACE 3043, this perfectly matches the iconographic message.

The image of piece ACE 3043 does not incorporate any indication of the woman's breasts, but the lower part of her body is very prominent. The breasts, as we saw earlier, are among the organs from which liquid emerges – water in the case of the water divinities. In the case of the two statues from Berlin and Ica (figs. 1, 2), there are two points on the chest that represent female breasts. The absence of breasts in piece ACE 3043 reinforces the interpretation that the figure is not providing water.

The three-dimensionality and materiality of Nasca feminine supernatural images

The primary characteristics common to the Nasca feminine supernatural images are a plump, naked, white-painted body and the black motifs drawn on the surface of that body. Another important feature is the three-dimensionality of these images. The latter makes them substantially different from the typical Nasca two-dimensional representa-

tion of supernatural beings on ceramics, textiles, gourd made artifacts, walls, or the surface of the earth. Interestingly, there are very few Nasca pieces with three-dimensional representations of masculine supernatural beings.

A similar situation is found in Chimu art, which features an image of a female divinity whose association with the moon and the sea is clear. This figure is only ever represented in three dimensions on the upper part of ceramic bottles or as figurines. The body is depicted naked, and the genitals are not detailed, although in some cases her breasts are visible (Mackey 2001: 143–146).[39] In the same style, frequently occurring images of two masculine divinities tend to be rendered in only two dimensions, as paintings or low reliefs on ceramics, textiles or other materials. Curiously, these two divinities appear as humans and do not exhibit hybridism in the form of animal body parts or other special body treatments. This appearance may be explained by the history of the two figures, who were deified rulers (Mackey 2001: 138–143).

For the Nasca and Chimu, three-dimensionality allowed the artist to emphasize the corporeality and nakedness of the figure. An important part of this corporeality in Nasca feminine supernatural beings are the plump buttocks and thighs, as well as the presence of body paintings. If the body were covered by clothing, these important components would be invisible to the observer. There are many Nasca bottles which bear the images of plump feminine figures wearing typical Nasca dress, but their general aspect does not point directly to plump buttocks and thighs (see, for example, fig. 3). On many such bottles, body paintings, probably representing tattoos, appear only on the arms and chin, while images of naked bodies show decoration on many different parts. In short, the nakedness of these images enabled the artist to represent female corporeality in its entire splendor and to emphasize the figure's divine quality, her fertility, and her reproductive and nutritional powers. A two-dimensional representation would clearly not be capable of creating the same effect.

The play between two- and three-dimensional representations of supernatural beings runs through many phases of Andean art. For example, in Tiwanaku (600–1000 AD) art, divinities are represented in two dimensions, while humans are represented in three (Conklin 2009: 121). It seems more adequate to represent supernatural beings using two dimensions, since a three-dimensional image is more fleshy and vivid, better suited to earthly subjects such as human beings. However, another factor that should be taken into consideration is the use of the artifacts bearing the human or divine image. Nasca figurines and statues of feminine divinities and ancestors were cult objects that may have been used in the private sphere and accompanied the worshipers through life and afterlife.[40] In contrast, the two-dimensional images of the divinities which appear on ceramic bottles, textiles and other media were tools for communication of the religious messages.

There are few surviving cult objects that were used in the public sphere of ancient Andean societies. The most famous is the statue known as the Lanzón which remains *in situ* within the Chavin temple.[41] Other idols that probably served as cult objects in other cultures, such as Pucara, Tiwanaku, Wari and Recuay (250–700 A.D), bear the images of divinities and ancestors. All of these, including the Lanzón, involve hybridism between two- and three-dimensional representations; while the general shape of the idol may be portrayed in three dimensions, most of the details are rendered in two dimensions as reliefs. This hybridism is not the result of technical issues: I believe it has to be related to the materiality of these idols. It seems that the artists intended for the stone to remain part of the image itself and thus did not sculpt the image entirely out of the stone. It is important here to bear in mind the importance of stone in highland cultures.[42]

There is not a single surviving Nasca idol that served in the public sphere, although there is one testimony that hints at the existence of idols within sacred spaces. An Early Nasca model of a pyramidal temple was found at the site of Majuelos 99. In this small

39 For images of this feminine divinity, see pieces V A 17209, V A 17407, V A 48329, V A 51290 in the online collection database of the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin.

40 Morgan's (2012: 41, 65) study database includes 30 figurines and fragments found in archaeological excavations. The majority were found in graves, and few examples were found at domestic and cult sites. This suggests that the figurines were counted among an individual's personal belongings.

41 Although access to the space in which this idol was situated was highly restricted, the temple as a whole was the result of public effort, and the more accessible parts of the temple, such as the courts, were part of the greater whole at the center of which stood the cult object now known as the Lanzón.

42 The Spanish chronicler Pablo Joseph de Arriaga (1968 [1621]: 201–202) describes the natural features worshiped by the Andean peoples: "and they also worshiped and mochan [the Quechua verb for worshiping] a few very large stones, and they call them with specific names and they have thousands of fables about them and their transformation and metamorphosis and that they were previously human beings that were converted into those stones." For the importance of stone among the Incas, see Dean (2010).

temple, an idol is attached to the wall so that its feet are far above the floor (Orefici 2012: 128–130). This case also evidences an idol that is not totally three-dimensional.

Nasca representations of men and women in ceramics also combine the use of two and three dimensions. In most cases, the head and the general shape of the body are represented in three dimensions, while the hands, legs and other details are described in two-dimensional paintings (fig. 3). This makes the Nasca figurines and small statues (along with figurines of other Andean societies) quite unique – they are the most three-dimensional images in Andean art, with only their hands rendered in two dimensions.

There is no doubt that modeling in clay, a more plastic material, makes the creation of three-dimensional figures easier. As mentioned previously, the Nasca favored the medium of ceramics for communicating their ideological and religious concepts (Proulx 2006: 13), therefore, clay was very much suitable for modeling the image of their feminine deities. There may be another reason for this choice, however. Mariscotti (1978: 31–32) describes a practice among ceramists in Jujuy, Argentina, of depositing offerings to Pacha Mama in the place from which they obtained the raw material – the clay. In addition, offerings of coca leaves are worked into the base of the vessel during the first stages of production because "the clay is pachamama." In addition, the chronicler Gutierrez de Santa Clara (1963 [1544–1548]: 231–232) records that the Inca idols of the sun and the moon were made of gold, but the Inca idol of Pacha Mama was formed from mud or clay. It is therefore quite possible that the choice of clay as the material in which to model small idols of feminine deities was motivated by something other than the favorable properties and wide availability of the clay itself, or the Nasca preference for ceramics as a medium for artistic expression. Instead, it is conceivable that the material of these small idols – the flesh of the earth goddess – contained the very essence of the earth as an animate entity. As mentioned several times in the present article, there is a close relationship between these divinities and the Nasca land, and this motivated the creators of figurines and statues to shape their idols with the material of their land. It is conceivable that the crisis caused by the droughts drove the Nasca to seek comfort in more tangible divinities, and it was in this phase that small statues and figurines in the image of the divinities first emerged. This cult appears to have been more private, and it is possible that the image itself was inspired by a public cult idol, although as yet there is no evidence of the existence of such an idol. The intimate relationship between the worshipers and the figurines may be represented on the bottle from the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History of Peru (fig. 7), which depicts a fisherman carrying the image of the divinity on his shoulders. Considering all of the above, the materiality and three-dimensionality of these cult objects may be understood as important components of the creations that fulfilled the religious needs of the Nasca at a time of crisis.

Nasca feminine divinity or divinities?

The final issue to be addressed in the present article is the question of the identity of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body. Do all of the images represent a single divinity with multiple responsibilities, including the moon, the sea, water, fertility, and even ancestry? Another possibility is that the plump, naked, white-painted body is simply a common convention for depicting feminine divinity in Nasca art, and that a number of feminine divinities existed: the moon goddess, the sea and water goddess, the earth and fertility goddess, and a feminine ancestor who was one member of a couple, as suggested by Clados (2000).

This kind of question has been discussed by a number of scholars. Allen (1981: 47–48) suggests that the Nasca divinity appears differently according to aspects related to the theme being represented. For example, the Masked Mythical Being can be associated

both with war and with fertility, the latter represented by the plants that grow from his body. Golte (2003: 181) suggests that the mouth mask with feline characteristics is an element used to represent divinity in general, but does not serve as an identifying attribute for a specific supernatural being.

It is unlikely that a decisive answer to this question will ever be reached. However, in the case of the images of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body, it is important to stress that there is no clear way of categorizing the images as different divinities, although some images are more closely associated with one or other of the four domains: moon, sea, water and fertility. Earlier, I suggested that the motifs painted on the divinity's body are identifying attributes that helped the Nasca – and may now help us – to distinguish the figure. This is the case, for example, with the star motif painted on bottles depicting the figure which I suggest may represent the moon divinity (figs. 4, 5). However, the bodies of these figures are also decorated with the trophy head motif, a symbol more commonly associated with fertility. In addition, star motifs are painted on the bodies of copulating women which, according to my interpretation, represent the coastal feminine entities that receive water from the Andean highlands. It is important to mention that in each image of the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body there are between one and four painted motifs (Morgan 2012: 57). Therefore, we can suggest that these feminine images represent a single divinity with multiple roles, and certain images emphasize one or other of these, other images not underline any of the four domains.

The white color used for the body of these images may be related to femininity, to the color of the Nasca land, or to the color of the moon, suggesting that, as with the painted motifs, color is yet another component used to indicate more than one role of the feminine divine figures. In light of all the above mention, it seems safest to suggest, as Lyon (1978: 106) does, that we are dealing with a single divinity with several facets or roles. Colonial and contemporary testimonies of Andean feminine divinities report that each has several roles. For example, the moon goddess was the queen of the sky and in charge on the sea, the wind, women and childbirth (Blas Valera 1992 [1590]: 47). The only instances in which we may incline toward a specific identity is when the image appears alongside a masculine counterpart so that, together, they represent a mythical couple, probably of ancestors (Clados 2000) or highlands and costal entities in a process of exchanging water. Cases such as these are very few compared to the number of lone feminine images. Furthermore, the number of masculine figurines found is much lower than those of feminine figurines (Morgan 2012: 65). The frequency of Nasca feminine figurines, in contrast with masculine ones, indicates that feminine power was more prominent in this type of expression and also reflects the popularity of this divinity.

In summary, the iconography, color, materiality and three-dimensionality of artifacts depicting the woman with the plump, naked, white-painted body all point to the uniqueness and significance of this divinity within Nasca society. This often-repeated image opens a window not only into the Nasca belief system, but also to the way in which Nasca society conceived its surroundings. This artistic expression demonstrates that in spite of their apparently harsh environment, the Nasca worshiped their land and cherished that which it provided, thus forming a reciprocal relationship between themselves and the animated landscape that surrounded them.

Thanks

This research based on artifacts that are stores in five museums. I would like to thank these museums and their staff for their assistance. Among these museums I would like to thank specially to Dr. Manuela Fischer and the Ethnologisches Museum of Berlin where I always find great support, hospitality and generosity.

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