

The Nasca culture developed out of the earlier Paracas culture, and its beginning is marked by the introduction of slip-painted pottery. Among the finest collections of Nasca ceramics are those of the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología in Lima and in The Art Institute of Chicago.

The Ancient Americas: Art From Sacred Landscapes
Richard F. Townsend



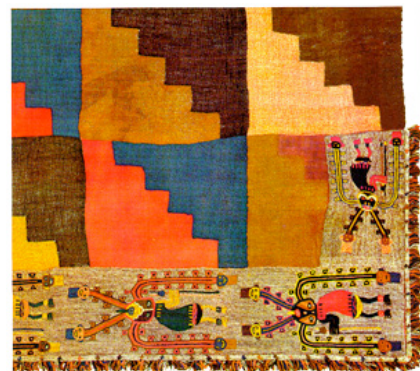
Shaped Bag with Feline
Nasca-Wari 600/700 AD



Human Head Jar
Nasca 600/700 AD

Located in the Ica and Nasca Valleys of the south coast of Peru, ancient Nasca culture dominated a large part of southern Peru between 100 BC and AD 700. The Nasca people lived in a dry desert environment, intersected with rivers carrying rain from the Andes. In areas with sufficient water, they practiced agriculture and exploited marine resources. Because they depended on water and other natural resources to live, many Nasca activities were devoted to the spiritual powers that controlled the forces of nature.

Textiles with elaborate decoration and images, including depictions of the ritual use of trophy heads, are found in both late Paracas and early Nasca cultures.



Textile
Nasca 400/600 AD

ART AND ARTIFACTS



Double Spout and Bridge Pottery Vessel with a
Bird Deity
Nasca culture (200 BC - AD 600)
British Museum



This globular jar depicts a fantastic bird in flight with a human face, adorned with a mouth mask and a diadem. The bird holds a human trophy head. Ritual beheading was a common practice in the Andes and scenes of decapitation can be seen painted on Nasca vessels.

Not all birds depicted in Nasca art can be identified to a particular species. Some representations are quite naturalistic, while others combine fantastic and anthropomorphic elements. Certain birds are still revered in the Andean region today. The people of the modern town of Nasca believe that the condor and other birds, such as the pelican and the heron, are manifestations of the mountain gods. To catch sight of one of these birds means that rain will fall in the mountains.

The technique and range of colors used on this large vessel mark the peak of Nasca achievements. The number of colors used by Nasca artists are larger than that used by any other culture in the Americas before European contact.

The iconography and symbolism represented by the Nasca lines are mirrored on polychrome pottery and textiles, with motifs portraying local fauna and plants, scenes related to subsistence activities, supernatural beings and deities associated with water and agricultural fertility.

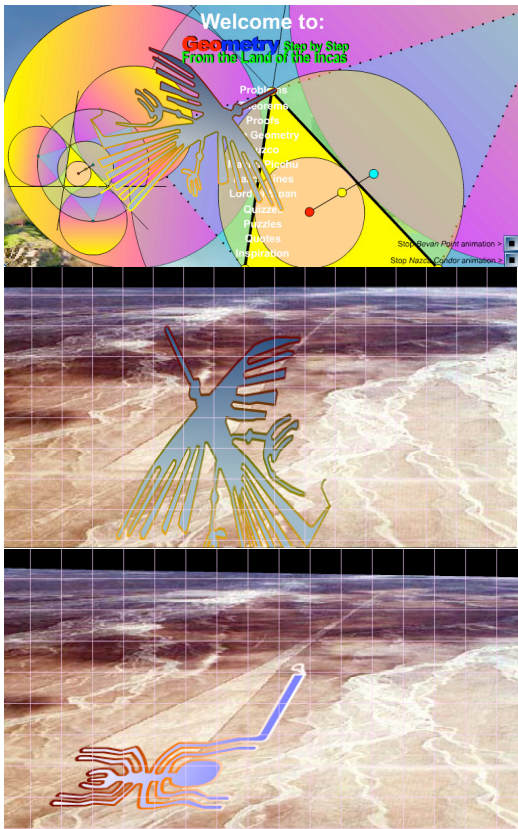
Water was vital for Nasca subsistence, which depended mainly on a diet of maize. The rivers were not a reliable source to sustain the levels needed to feed the local population and a network of irrigation canals made it possible to practice intensive agriculture. (The British Museum 2004)

ACTIVITIES

Art • Technology • Geometry

Research to find artists who have used outlines of animals in their work such as M.C. Escher. Look for other artists that may have created earthworks as an art form. Create an image gallery of artists work on a webpage or using PowerPoint. As an example look at the following website to see how the artist, mathematician Antonio Gutierrez has created puzzles by using the ancient art of Peru.

Geometry Step by Step from the Land of the Inca



Art

Have students draw an animal that has special significance to him/her. Make the drawing of the animal using simple geometric shapes to abstract and simplify the animal. Using a grid system enlarge their design to ten times the original size. Discuss how the student's drawings are similar to Nasca lines.

TEXTBOOKS

Unwrapping Ancient Mysteries

Invitations to Literacy
Level 6 Theme 3
Houghton Mifflin 2001

Discover Our Heritage

The Ancient Americas
Level 7 Chapter 6
Houghton Mifflin 2001

RESOURCES

Aveni, Anthony F. *Between the Lines: The Mystery of the Giant Ground Drawings of Ancient Nasca, Peru*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press. 2000.

Aveni, Anthony F. *Eighth Wonder of the World?* London: The British Museum Press 2000.

Barbier, Jean Paul. *A Guide to Pre-Columbian Art*. New York, New York: Abbeville Publishing Company. 1999.

Lumbreras, L. G. *The Peoples and Cultures of Ancient Peru*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1976.

Pritchard, Chris. *The Changing Shape of Geometry: Celebrating a Century of Geometry and Geometry Teaching*. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press. 2003

Silverman, Helaine and Donald A. Proulx. *The Nasca*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc. 2002.

Stone-Miller, Rebecca. *Art of the Andes from Chavin to Inca*. New York, New York: Thames and Hudson. 2002.

Townsend, Richard F. *The Ancient Americas: Art From Sacred Landscapes*. Chicago, Illinois: The Art Institute of Chicago. 1992.

INTERNET LINKS

Geometry Step by Step From the Land of the Inca

<http://agutie.homestead.com/files/index.html>

Solving the Mystery of the Nasca Lines
<http://www.archaeology.org/0005/abstracts/nasca.html>



Nasca Geoglyphs
Nasca River Valley, Peru



Human Head Jar
Nasca 600/700 AD
Museo Nacional Bruning de Lambayeque, Peru



Double Spout and Bridge Pottery Vessel with a
Bird Deity
Nasca culture (200 BC - AD 600)
British Museum

GLOSSARY

Nasca

A people who lived in and around the Nasca river valley in the south coast of Peru.

Context-Nasca pottery and textiles are vividly colored and very expressive although not the realistic style, as the Moche. The Nasca are best known for the gigantic lines and line drawings created in the desert.

Geoglyphs

A man-made or nature-made landform. Term used today to describe a drawing on the earth's surface.

Context- The Nasca are also known for their *geoglyphs* or "Nasca Lines", geometric forms and giant drawings of birds, animals and other natural forms etched in the desert of southern Peru.

Iconography

Pictorial illustration of a subject. The collected representations illustrating a subject. A set of specified or traditional symbolic forms associated with the subject or theme of a stylized work of art.

Context- Reiche hypothesized that the lines served a religious and social function, and that they were iconography intended as reminders to the gods, to insure that the needs of the Nasca people were not forgotten.

Polychrome

Having many or various colors; polychromatic. Made or decorated in many or various colors. An object or a work composed of or decorated in many colors. Context-Thanks to the dry climate many polychrome pottery were saved.

Globular

Having the shape of a globe or globule; spherical.

Context-This globular jar depicts a fantastic bird.