

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. The designs of these forms were similar to those found on Nasca textiles and pottery. The Nasca people constructed large pyramidal structures for ceremonial purposes and an intricate system of underground canals.

However, it was the discovery, over fifty years ago, of giant desert markings that brought the Nasca to the public eye. On the desert arid coastal plain of southern Peru arose a culture that was to become one of the most famous in the prehistory of that country. Between roughly 200 BC and AD 600, the people inhabiting the Nasca River system made textiles and ceramics that were of the highest technical and artistic quality.

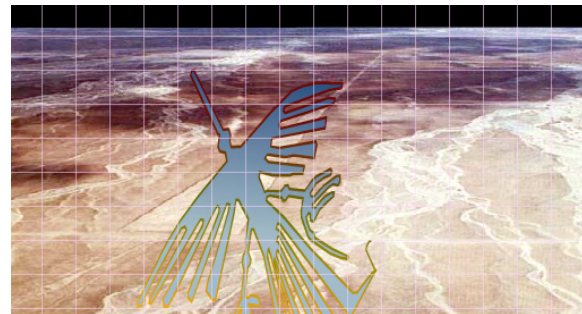
Thanks to the desert climate, many of these objects were preserved. Nasca lines are lines that have been scraped into the surface of the desert, revealing the lighter-colored dust underneath. These lines are found primarily in the southern coast of Peru. There are several dozen different figures that have been found, including serpent, condor, and feline shapes. Some include triangles, rectangles and spirals. Some straight Nasca lines run across the desert for more than a mile. There is little doubt who made the Nazca geoglyphs, the term used today to describe a drawing on the earth's surface. Many of the figures on the desert are also portrayed in the ceramics and textiles of the Nasca.

One of the most respected ideas about the origin and meaning of the Nasca lines is offered by Maria Reiche, who has devoted herself to the study of these lines. 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. For example, there is a drawing in the desert of the monkey, which was the symbol for the Big Dipper and the symbol for rain. Reiche speculates that this drawing was created during a drought to alert the gods that the Nasca people needed rain.



Nasca Lines

Nasca River Valley, Peru  
Photograph National Geographic Magazine



Spider Nasca Line

Artist, Antonio Gutierrez  
Lima, Peru



Maria Reiche

Nasca River Valley, Peru