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The Moche, or Mochica, created an extraordinary civilization on the north coast of Peru for most of the first millennium AD. Although they had no written language with which to record their history and beliefs, the Moche built enormous ceremonial edifices and embellished them with mural paintings depicting supernatural figures and rituals. Highly skilled Moche artisans crafted remarkable ceramic vessels, which they painted with figures and scenes or modeled like sculpture, and mastered metallurgy in gold, silver, and copper to make impressive symbolic ornaments. They also wove textiles that were complex in execution and design.

A senior scholar renowned for her discoveries about the Moche, Elizabeth P. Benson published the first English-language monograph on the subject in 1972. Now in this volume, she draws on decades of knowledge, as well as the findings of other researchers, to offer a grand overview of all that is currently known about the Moche. Touching on all significant aspects of Moche culture, she covers such topics as their worldview and ritual life, ceremonial architecture and murals, art and craft, supernatural beings, government and warfare, and burial and the afterlife. She demonstrates that the Moche expressed, with symbolic language in metal and clay, what cultures in other parts of the world presented in writing. Indeed, Benson asserts that the accomplishments of the Moche are comparable to those of their Mesoamerica contemporaries, the Maya, which makes them one of the most advanced civilizations of pre-Columbian America.