

Art and Architecture of Ancient American Civilizations

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Ancient indigenous art of South America is unique in part because of the nature of this geographical region. This lesson explores:

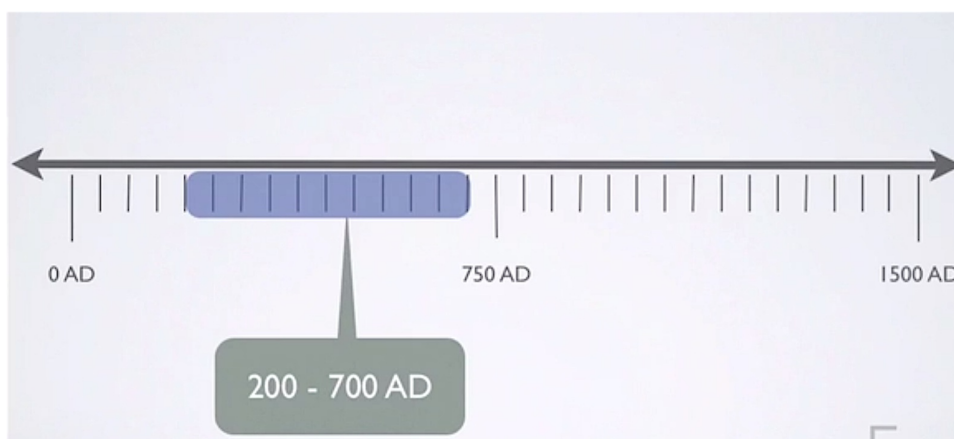


BIG IDEA

The ancient indigenous cultures of South America are actually older than the more familiar Mesoamerican cultures, and their people were accomplished artists, architects, and metalworkers.

1. Time Period and Location: South America

The artwork explored in this lesson dates between 200 AD and 700 AD, as highlighted on the timeline below, and comes from Bolivia and Peru. These are two modern-day, neighboring countries that are part of the continent of South America.



Historically, the South American cultures covered in this lesson are older than the Mesoamerican cultures of the Olmec and Maya. The South American indigenous cultures of the **Nazca**, Moche, and Tiwanaku were settled in the Andean high country in modern-day Peru and Bolivia.



TERM TO KNOW

Nazca

A pre-Incan culture located in southwest Peru; also the name of a city and valleys in the same

2. Nazca Line Images

The Nazca are probably best remembered for their land images or Nazca line images. These line images were made by drawing relatively wide paths in the earth, and then removing the darker stones from the Nazca plain where they were made, in order to reveal the lighter stone and soil beneath. While the true purpose of these drawings still remains somewhat of a mystery, theories include possible ritualistic processions along the lighter paths or a possible symbolic mapping system with a religious purpose.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Below is an example of a line drawing of a monkey.



Nazca line images

400-650 AD

Peru

At first glance, the above image might appear to be a cave drawing or a painting. However, it is an aerial view of a very large land drawing or **geoglyph**.



TERMS TO KNOW

Geoglyphs

Arrangements of elements of landscape—rocks, earth, gravel—to create artwork

3. Moche Portrait Bottles

The **Moche** were another culture that flourished in the northern parts of Peru. This culture included expert

ceramic artists, and kept extensive informational records on their ceramics.

➤ **EXAMPLE** This portrait bottle below is an example of their skill with ceramics, and depicts what may be a warrior or a ruler:



Moche portrait bottles

100-700 AD

Painted clay

Peru

The above is an impressive example of the level of detail and realism that the artists were able to achieve.



Moche

An early civilization characterized by iconography and monumental architecture

4. Moche Ear Ornaments

The indigenous civilizations of this area were also accomplished metalworkers.

➔ EXAMPLE Here is an example of ear ornaments in gold and semi-precious stone from Sipán, Peru:



Ear ornament

300 AD

Gold & semi-precious stone

Sipán, Peru

This is another impressive example of the attention to detail that these artists had. Each tiny piece would have been independently cut, shaped, and applied on a miniature scale. These were found with an assortment of other funerary items in a tomb of a warrior priest in Sipán.

5. Tiwanaku

The Tiwanaku civilization existed for almost 1,000 years in and around southern Peru, Bolivia, and northern Chile. The monolithic gateway of the sun has today been moved from its original location, but is a rather large block of carved stone with a central doorway. Above it is a carved relief depicting a deity, possibly a sun or sky deity, with rays emanating from his head.

➞ EXAMPLE Below is an image of the monolithic gateway of the sun.



Gateway of the Sun

375-700 AD

Tiwanaku, Bolivia

Notice the puma. The puma was the largest predatory animal in this region, and would have been a symbol of power. There are smaller attendant figures beneath him. The entire piece would have originally been elaborately decorated, the deity in gold and turquoise inlay, and the lower reliefs in colorful paint.

➞ EXAMPLE This is an example of a Tiwanakuan stela sculpture, which contrasts noticeably with the realism of the Moche portrait bottle shown previously in this lesson.



Tiwanaku stela sculpture

200-400 AD

Tiwanaku, Bolivia

This is a very boxy, stylized depiction of an individual rendered in shallow relief. Its discovery in a temple and

the fact that it appears to be holding some sort of tablet may suggest that it served some sort of religious function or simply as a marker to the entrance of a sacred structure.



SUMMARY

Ancient indigenous cultures of South America, such as Nazca, Moche, and Tiwanaku, had many accomplished artists, architects, and metalworkers. In this lesson, you learned about the **time period and location of South America**.

In this lesson, you explored art from these three South American civilizations. You started off by looking at **Nazca line images**. These enormous drawings were made by drawing relatively wide paths in the earth, then removing the darker stones. Next, you explored **Moche portrait bottles** and **Moche ear ornaments**. Finally, you learned about **Tiwanaku**, a civilization that existed for almost 1,000 years.

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