Ancient West Mexican Clothing And Its Ecuadorian Origins: New Evidence Of Maritime Contacts

Patricia Rieff Anawalt
University of California - Los Angeles
ANCIENT WEST MEXICAN CLOTHING AND ITS ECUADORIAN ORIGINS: NEW EVIDENCE OF MARITIME CONTACTS (Precis only.*)
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Evidence of ancient cultural contacts between coastal Ecuador and the mountains of West Mexico exists in clothing similarities between the two areas, namely tunic-like shirts and short breeches for males and a tropical mode of dress for females. This non-Mesoamerican attire is illustrated in the early sixteenth century codex Relacion de Michoacan and also appears on mortuary figurines from the deep shaft tombs of Ixtlan del Rio, Nayarit (400 B.C.- A.D. 400). Coeval prototypes of this West Mexican clothing occur archaeologically along that section of the Ecuadorian coast which was the homeland of long-distance merchant navigators. Their trade goods, described by the Spanish, included local-style garments made of wool, a fabric foreign to Mesoamerica. The adoption of this exotic apparel by the West Mexican elite implies an association of great worth and power with those who introduced it. That these agents were Ecuadorian maritime traders is further suggested by zoological evidence.*

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STUDIO AND SOIREE: THE USE AND MISUSE OF CHINESE TEXTILES IN A EUROPEAN SETTING

VERITY WILSON
Far Eastern Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, SW7 2RL, UK

George Smith's painting, 'The Rightful Heir', exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874, serves as a melodramatic introduction to this paper. Sombre-suited gentlemen are depicted sitting around a table studying the disputed will. Two frightened ladies in crinolines and a small boy in a velvet suit confront the wicked usurper who is wearing a Chinese dragon robe. This angry Victorian was not unique in his choice of dressing gown.

The dragon robe, familiar from museum collections all over Europe and North America, was used in China in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an hierarchical garment. It was worn by bearers of rank in the Chinese bureaucracy. Its salient features are the hem design of stripes representing water with turbulent waves above, mountain peaks rising from the water and symmetrically-placed dragons among clouds covering the main body of the garment. It closes to one side with spherical buttons on shanks fastening through loops. The robe, when worn correctly, was part of an ensemble that included a plain dark overgarment with a rank badge sewn to back and front. This overgarment concealed all but the hem and the horsehoof-shaped cuffs of the dragon robe.

The furious relative in the genre painting by Smith is as far as he can be from the dignified mandarin of popular imagination. How was it that these meritorious administrators' uniforms, particularly the dragon robes, came to be transmitted to English drawing rooms even before the fall of the Chinese empire, and what made them especially attractive to Europeans?

To answer the first part of that question, how they came to Europe, we should note three points. First, a Chinese who had been given rank and office in the civil service did not have his dragon robe ensemble bestowed on him as part of his appointment. He, his family or a benefactor had to purchase the robes. They could be more or less grand according to his means. They could be especially ordered or bought off-the-peg. So, in a sense, they had always been commodities and although this was not how the foreigners who bought them as souvenirs wished to see them, it did make them available. Secondly, there were plenty of them. Twenty thousand civil and military officials helped govern the country during the Ming dynasty and the number was not much fewer during the succeeding Qing dynasty, from which most of the extant dragon robes come. Thirdly, their use was not confined solely to officials. Bridegrooms traditionally wore the