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Nets, Bags and the Transformation of Headdress in the Southern Andes

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This paper looks at the associations of form, practice, and textile history embodied in netted and looped head coverings preserved in burials on the desert coast of the south central Andes between 400BC and AD400. Following on my previous work on headdress elements in Paracas Necropolis, Cavernas and Ocucaje (Peters 2004) I have gone south to look at wrapped and fitted headdress elements in the valleys that run directly from the high herded plains south of Lake Titicaca to the Pacific Ocean. This work is inspired, in part, by a paper given for the TSA by Nikki Clark and Amy Oakland Rodman (1994) and by Anne Paul's work on Paracas turbans (1982/3).

On the Paracas peninsula and in contemporary cemeteries of the nearby Pisco and Ica valleys, hammock shaped and hood shaped netted and looped headdress elements are wrapped around braided or bound hair, under the knotted or looped or diagonal interlaced headbands. In embroidered and painted images associated with the tombs, depiction of net-like structures is associated with images of headdresses, slings, and bags holding human heads or fish. Looped caps of dark brown camelid hair or human hair appear in several Paracas Necropolis EIP 1 burials and EIP 2 images. Examples from burial 89 are illustrated by Anne Paul (1991).

In contemporary societies of the coastal regions of far southern Peru and northern Chile, looped bags constitute an important textile form whose history stretches back to late Archaic fishing communities contemporary with the Chinchorro burial complex. Here I discuss transformations in the forms and roles of looped textiles in the context of the history of headdress and costume from the Archaic period to the rise of Tiwanaku as a regional influence, approx 4000BC to AD400.

The term "Chinchorro" refers to a number of related mortuary traditions present in coastal Archaic period sites of the South Central Andes, particularly the Pacific coast adjacent to a steep ascent to the high altitude plains south of Lake Titicaca. At this time about six thousand years ago, semi-permanent villages engaged in fishing, hunting and collecting in the rich coastal waters and river mouth areas. While both artifacts and dietary analysis establish that these populations were based on the coast, the presence of cordage spun from the hair of Andean camelids establishes their access to resources from the river canyons and highland valleys, home to the wild guanaco (*Lama guanacoe*), and the four thousand meter high spring-fed pasturelands of the *altiplano*, home to the wild vicuña (*Lama vicugna*).

Burials are located on dry sandy slopes adjacent to sandy beaches and rocky headlands. Chinchorro burials incorporated artificial mummification processes to reconstruct an upright body and model a new face for the deceased, apparently part of their transition to ancestral figures (Arriaza 1995). Most of the associated textiles were constructed of coastal reeds and grasses, including grass and cordage apron-like skirts

and fine twined mats, in some cases painted. While cotton, from the wild perennial cotton plants native to the region, appears in some cordage from this period, other bast fibers and camelid hair are the principal components of the Archaic textiles. Skeins of camelid hair may gird the waist and wrap the head in turban-like layers – and also extend to bind the twined reed mats that envelop the mummified bodies. While we only know the dress of the dead, the incorporation of skeins of camelid hair yarns like a belt at the waist and into particular, recurrent hair arrangements suggests that skeins were also worn in life as clothing and headdress elements. Headdress elements can include wrapped and plaited cordage, pelican feathers, and adornments made of sea urchins and other shells. The first headbands of a warp-faced plain weave structure appear in some child burials of the later archaic, associated with head modification (Ulloa 1982). The wrapping of the head in infancy to create an elongated skull here, as at Paracas, creates a lifelong social identity intimately associated with hair style and headdress.

Cylindrical bags constructed of close simple looping appear in this period, best-known from burials recovered in a series of burial clusters, different components of the Camarones 15 site at the mouth of a huge canyon that slices the coastal desert and creates a northern boundary of the Atacama desert region. These bags draw on the differentiated colors of camelid hair to create simple banded designs. Rectangular openwork bags of this period are constructed of bast fiber, S/2z plied yarns in complex looping. Sections of human hair cordage may be incorporated into the bag. The forms of closure in these bags recur in rectangular camelid hair bags – they appear to represent the emergence of a type of carrying bag.

We have examples of cordage headwraps over about a three thousand year period. The sample is small, given the extent of time. It represents not so much a sequence as clusters of related burials in certain places, from different periods. Carolina Aguero (1994, 1995) has studied the differences in head wrapping from different sites. Differentiated wrap patterns appear to involve both temporal and regional differences. While these wrapping patterns are preserved in the mortuary context, and wrapping in some cases occurs on top of textiles used as a shroud, the incorporation of headwraps into hair arrangements suggests that skein headdresses were also worn in life, particularly by men.

Certain relatively early burials from the Quiani site, roughly contemporary with the Chinchorro mortuary complex, do not incorporate mummification or facial reconstruction, but rather have highly developed headwraps incorporating dyed animal hair, both camelid and probably canine, in complex wrapped ‘furred’ cordage. Human hair cordage is also present, plied with delicate white shell beads (about 3000BC). These forms of complex cordage are combined with red-dyed skeins of camelid hair, of 2 S-plied z-spun yarns. Both the weight and spin are typical of the spin and ply pattern in this region over the following three thousand years.

By about 2500BC , the Chinchorro mortuary practices appear to fall into disuse, leaving the alternative pattern of naturally desiccated bodies with headdresses based on the wrapping of multiple skeins, regular in spin and ply but differentiated by fiber origin, the natural fiber colors and the use of dyes. Skein structures demonstrate the process of doubling a length of yarn, as the yarns in these headdresses usually appear grouped in multiples of 2, 4, 8, 16 or 32, when conditions of preservation permit their analysis.

Over this period, the hair used to spin yarns used to create skeins that were wrapped like a turban around the head – at least in the mortuary context – came to include a greater percentage of shiny cream-white fibers, reflecting the domestication process that led to the camelid ancestors of today's alpacas and llamas. The process of camelid domestication is accompanied by a process of fiber differentiation, including development of a dark brown, shiny camelid fiber that is difficult to distinguish from the earlier use of human hair in cordage. Gallardo (1993) considers human hair, and the camelid fiber that imitates it, a “privileged substance” of ritual importance in these societies.

Hair is gathered into a topknot and bound with yarn in coastal burials at La Lisera, just south of the Azapa valley. Such styles, dated about 1500BC once led to comparisons with Paracas and early Nasca, before dating methods and further research defined these as a distinct and much earlier tradition (Agüero 1995). Further south there are other localized styles, for instance in Pisagua, dark brown camelid hair resembling human hair, and the use of sea mammal bone pins. Similar yarn colors are combined in burials from the same cemetery or region, in characteristic localized patterns that may incorporate red and yellow dyes in particular combinations within skeins or different colored skeins wrapped in particular ways. A basic combination of beige and cream colored skeins recurs in coast and valley burials of the Azapa region, apparently for hundreds of years. Dark brown and blue are more common in the Camarones valley to the south. At the same time, burials with a combination typical of one region also occur in the others. More detailed information on dating and associations may facilitate development of a model of localized social groups and regional interactions in the context of the temporal development of cultural practices, based in part on the headwrap patterns.

Twined cloaks made with thickly plied or wrapped golden beige to brown camelid hair yarns may be wrapped around individuals buried in a flexed position. Such body wraps continue into the Formative period, when they begin to appear in a plain weave structure that replicates the thick wrapped yarns and mottled coloration of twined examples. Discontinuous weft patterning is used to create designs on woven loincloths with weft-dominant end panels. Symbols of the cross and “S” curve appear that echo similar designs known from throughout the central Andes in initial Period and Early Horizon sites or styles such as Chavín, Paracas and Pukara.

To the north in the Central Andean coast and highlands, the Initial period sees the development of monumental architecture involving regular periodic mobilization of labor from many different local communities and other evidence of social complexity, associated with exploitation of rich coastal resources and growing evidence for cultivation of many different annual crops and propagation of perennials, like tree fruits and native cotton, based on subsurface water or small scale irrigation systems.

In this southern region, there is no evidence for such social complexity. Throughout the late Archaic – a way of life based on hunting, fishing and gathering that extends later in this region - we see the propagation of early cultigens like squash and gourds for a long time, and much later adoption of other domesticates. About 500BC beans appear, and new cemetery sites inland, on coastal valley margins near natural springs, suggest a growing importance of horticulture. We don't have radiocarbon dates to determine the

exact temporal correlates, but over this general period, we also see the emergence of several recurrent types of yarn headdresses that appear in both valley margin and coastal cemeteries. In the Azapa region, the beige and cream/white yarn headwraps continue to characterize the “Formative” period, in this region 250BC to AD250, when evidence for diversified horticulture and the proliferation of settlements along the margins of the coastal valleys demonstrate the growing importance of local irrigation systems.

At the mouth of the Azapa valley, at the Faldas del Morro site, bags occur with simple looping in stepped patterns in beige and cream-white. Close-set simple looping is also used to create cylinders stuffed with unspun camelid hair or bits of skin. A bag of similar color and design but in complex looping appears in this burial of an older child used as a caplike headdress (figure 1). At about the same period (Faldas del Morro 2), complex headdresses may signal exceptional social roles. Gallardo (1993) illustrates two headdresses that incorporate copper pins, signaling contact with copper mines and copper working characteristic of the adjacent Andean highlands. An exceptional knotted fabric from this period has a diamond pattern reminiscent of Paracas headcloths far to the north. Yet the bulk of cultural practices continue to be distinctive of this region and demonstrate striking continuity from those of the late Archaic period.



Figure 1. Looped bag, Camarones 15.



Figure 2. Child burial, Faldas del Morro.

Looped bags present at Camarones conserve their techniques and proportions, while decorative patterning transforms over time. A recurrent, standardized form emerges, with complex designs incorporating symmetrical patterns worked in dense simple looping (figure 2). Complex looping at the mouth of the bag allows for greater flexibility. Golden-brown camelid hair is combined with predominant dark browns and highlights of cream-white. The aesthetic of these bags echoes that of roughly contemporary skein headwraps from the Camarones-Pisagua region.

Inland, at valley margin mound sites like AZ 70 and AZ 71 near reed-edged spings (*totorales*), a different form of bag based on complex looping forming rectangular panels also incorporates stepped designs (figure 3). These designs are integral to the production process, as the rows of looping in each color demonstrate a production sequence in which each stepped panel is constructed over the edges of the previous panel. The Azapa bags demonstrate a local aesthetic in their use of tones of beige and cream white, similar to

those that predominate in the skein headdresses on buried individuals in Azapa valley margin cemeteries and coastal sites close to the Azapa valley mouth.

Like the close-looped cylindrical Camarones bags, the rectangular pouches demonstrate consistency in their production, proportions and in the design elements. However, I would not characterize their production as standardized based on the available sample. Rather, it is a form of making a kind of bag whose specific features may vary. Among these variations are the uses of indigofera and madder dyes, echoing the same colors used in the skein headwraps (figure 4). It is interesting that in this bag the dyed yarns – and the undyed yarns used with them in one of the two visible panels – are spun more finely, creating an imbalance in this bag structure. The contrast in panels is replicated on the other side of the bag.



Figure 3. Looped bag, Azapa 70.



Figure 4. Looped bag, Azapa 71.

In burials associated with valley margin mound sites there are examples of new types of loom woven textiles. From the Camarones valley, a well-woven loincloth combines a warp-dominant central panel with weft-faced end panels, set off by a narrow transitional band in a beige and cream checkered pattern. Discontinuous weft patterning is used to create a zigzag pattern. From the Azapa valley, an '*unku*' or rectangular loom-structured shirt has a warp-dominant central panel with a woven opening, folded in half and bound up the sides with a whipping stitch in cream camelid hair. It also incorporates a densely woven end panel in a strong blue.

Several examples of this shirt, both the Azapa and Camarones valleys, include discontinuous warp patterned (tapestry) designs, separated by a fine checkerboard stripe in beige and cream. They demonstrate some surprising technical features and an extraordinary degree of standardization in imagery. All the known shirt fragments incorporate a central panel of warp-faced plain weave with fine striping, based on tones of beige camelid hair dyed with the madder red. The end panels are densely woven, weft-faced, in intense indigo blue, cream-white and dark brown, with beige highlights. The four examples that I have examined with discontinuous warp patterning in the end panels are all constructed on a separate warp, scaffolded onto some of the warps of the central panel and used in pairs. All four examples have the same colors in the panel, combining the intense blue with cream-white and the dark natural brown, in some cases overdyed

with the madder red, with beige details. All four examples carry the same image of the ‘cabeza radiada’ or rayed head, an image familiar to those who study Paracas far to the north. The head appears flanked by splayed quadrupeds.

These shirt panels are considered diagnostic of the late Formative “Alto Ramirez” phase, which has unfortunately not been associated with radiocarbon dates. They have been illustrated before as examples of long distance contact, and even called “Pukara” (Rivera 1976, 1985; Mujica 1985). Neither such shirts nor such images are known from altiplano contexts. Their structural features link them to local antecedents in textile production techniques, such as the end panels of the ‘wara’ loincloths. Their use of dyestuffs and color selection of certain tones of natural camelid hair link them to recurrent local variants of the skein headwraps best known from Camarones and Azapa. The specific recurrent form of shirt panel suggests that it carried an iconic reference linked to a particular social role equivalent in the different persons who wore the shirts in life or were buried with them. One weft patterned shirt panel, with the rayed head flanked by stepped motifs, was refashioned into a rectangular bag with a flap for closure, found with a paintbrush and tube for taking presumably hallucinogenic snuff. A second bag is known, fashioned from the warp-striped central fabric, complete with its side binding, closed with brown and cream cordage at one end and a looped closure in cream camelid hair at the other (figure 5).



Figure 5. Bag made of tunic shirt. Figure 6. Looped cap, Alto Ramirez style.

A painted rock art panel located by Helena Horta in the Loa river valley in the Atacama region to the south shows exactly the same design. Horta, analyst of textile-based iconography, immediately recognized the image. It carries the rayed head characteristic of the tunic shirts, surrounded by stepped patterns like those of the complex looped rectangular bags (Berenguer 1999). The work of Carolina Aguero and Bárbara Cases in the Quillagua region of the middle Loa provides further evidence for strong networks of long distance travel and the movement of objects and concepts among the coastal valleys, desert plains and highland valleys and pasturelands of northern Chile.

To the north in the southern Peruvian coast, there is evidence that the Tacna region forms part of this sphere of interaction and socio-cultural development (Gordillo 1999, Muñoz 2004b). Further north in Sihuas, Camaná and Ilo, looped and warp-faced bags

with related patterns are known (Rocklin 1994). Some of these have been associated with the rayed head discontinuous warp- and weft-patterned grave wrappings studied in detail by Joerg Haeblerli (2003). And of course all of these stepped designs and rayed heads are antecedents for later Tiwanaku designs, best known from the carved relief panel over the ‘Gate of the Sun.’

In the Azapa mid-valley cemetery contexts, another new textile form appears in late Formative contexts. This is the close-looped cylindrical cap, with polychrome stepped design (figure 6). The yellow is innovative, but has earlier antecedents in the region. Both the madder red and the carmine red are present, and in different examples of this cap the two reds are consistently contrasted, appearing in the same positions in the design. In fact, these caps show an astonishing degree of standardization in design: while proportions and terminations may vary, the color sequence and stepped pattern are identical. They suggest a standardized social role that may be “put on,” assumed by an individual who may vary in local skein headdress, hair style or head modification – much like the rayed head shirts might have been worn by individuals in an important, equivalent role.

Several nearly identical examples of this type of cap have been recovered from valley margin mound site cemetery contexts in Azapa. Very similar cylindrical caps with the stepped motif and same color sequence have been reported from Camarones, Tarapacá and the Quillagua region (Aguero and Cases 2004). Therefore, like the tunic shirts with rayed head motif, these caps constitute a standardized garment designed to symbolize an equivalent social identity that may be assumed by different individuals, circulating on the regional level. I hypothesize that this identity is symbolic of both social group identity and, within the group, of a leadership role of both ritual and political importance.

The transformation from looped bags to a new type of looped headdress lays the technical foundation for a new relationship between the wearer and that worn, and constitutes a transformation of the social meaning of headdress itself. Up to this point in the south Central Andes, headdresses have been composed on the head, as an extension of hairstyle and underlying head modification. In Camarones and Azapa they are composed of skeins of yarn, with additional objects sometimes pinned or set into the skeins.

To the north over a period from about 600BC to AD200, in burials of the Paracas, Topará and early Nasca mortuary traditions, headdresses are based on a specific, immutable head modification: composed with braided and knotted hair, covered with knotted netting head covers, bound with headbands and adorned with pins or tassels (Peters 2004). In such a system, the social meaning created by head and skein headdress are built on the person and suggestive of a lifelong, accumulative biography. At the dawn of the Nasca tradition the first dark brown looped caps appear, at about the same period as the appearance of looped head coverings in the Azapa tradition that develop into the standardized cylindrical stepped caps of ‘Alto Ramirez.’

The Azapa valley, while slow to adopt features that might suggest political centralization or social complexity, in the course of the Formative period becomes an center of agriculture and a major crossroads for llama caravans between coast and altiplano. In this context, the representation of regional social identity to ‘others’ and

institutions of political leadership appear to emerge (Rivera 1994, Muñoz 2004a). The inversion of the looped bag and its transformation into headdress constitutes the creation of a social role that can be bestowed upon an individual at a certain moment, as part of their acceptance of particular responsibilities. It can overlay their prior and ongoing headdress. The extraordinary standardization of the “Alto Ramirez’ looped caps, which occur in different regions in the same form, suggest that they may be assumed to signal an equivalent social position exercised by different individuals.

In late Formative contexts to the south at the Tarapaca 40 site, Amy Rodman (2000) describes a second form of knotted cap of a standardized, distinct local type worn on top of a cordage headwrap. The textured monochrome patterning created on the Tarapacá caps is an antecedent for later four-cornered knotted caps of this region (Clark and Rodman 1994), as the Alto Ramirez cylindrical caps are antecedent for dark brown and white cylindrical caps from later contexts. Local and regional cap styles prominent from the Middle Horizon to the Later Horizon typically feature monochrome textured patterning in dark brown, cream white and madder red. This use of color and technique continues to express the striking continuities in regional headdress forms and aesthetics that we have also observed in over three thousand years of skein headwraps prior to the emergence of the looped and knotted caps. Such caps continue to identify local social, ritual and political leaders under the Inka Empire and are depicted as characteristic of the region in the early colonial period.

I argue that they all began in the Formative period with a transformation from looped bags to looped caps in the context of the development of specialized, assumable social roles that are standardized on a regional level.

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