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Of Gods and Men, Ancestors and Tapestry in the Central Andes

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During the Andean Middle Horizon, a period that lasted from approximately the eighth to perhaps the twelfth century, a new religion swept the Peruvian coast. In the previous period, known as the Early Intermediate, no single culture nor religion could characterize the entire region. Instead Paracas and later Nasca in the south, Lima in central Peru, and Moche in the north, each developed independent and very strong traditions that included distinct customs, deities, garment styles, textile structures, architecture, and burial pattern. This paper discusses the period following these seemingly strong and independent local cultural traditions along the Peruvian coast when a new religion spread from the adjacent highlands in association with the Wari culture (Figure 1). Some see the spread of Wari as distinctly militaristic and others as a more passive adoption of a new religion following local cultural decline and perhaps both of these scenarios formed part of this developing Peruvian complex (Isbel and McEwan 1991; Shimada 1991).

Actually, although the specific changes noticed along the Peruvian coast do appear to derive from Wari, the gods and religion itself did not originate there but further south in the Bolivian altiplano and the site of Tiwanaku where gods and attendants were carved in stone in gateways and incised in the surface of standing statues in human form centuries earlier. Textiles are rarely preserved in these highland environments where annual wet seasons destroy cloth and other perishable materials.

It is notable however, that by the eighth century Wari religion is visible in a variety of ways along the Peruvian coast. In this desert environment where preservation is exceptional, textiles provide the most important record of the new widespread religion. The religion is associated with the distribution of large funeral bundles containing a variety of Wari textile types. The bundles have been uncovered where they were placed in abandoned formerly sacred *huacas* or holy places, usually early pyramids, all along the Peruvian coast. In the late nineteenth century Wilhelm Reiss and Alphons Stubel (1880-87) uncovered Wari related bundles in the cemetery of the central coast at Ancon (Kaulicke 1997). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Uhle (1903), following their lead, found similar burial collections of Wari material in Pachacamac along the south central coast and in terraces of the temple at Chimu Capac in the Supe Valley (Kroeber 1925; Rodman n.d.). Further north Uhle again discovered the same burial complex on the largest pyramid of the earlier Moche culture in the Moche Valley, known as the Pyramid of the Sun or Site A (Kroeber 1925; Uhle 1913). Heiko Pruemers (1990; 1995) discussed the same collection of material uncovered in the Huarmey Valley at El Castillo. Most recently Peruvian investigators working at the Moche site of Huaca Cao in the Chicama Valley at El Brujo also discovered funeral bundles with at least a small portion of Wari textile styles (Fernandez 1998; Franco et. al 1994; Rodman and Fernandez n.d.). All of these sites demonstrate the new religion arrived with the placement of large cloth-covered funeral bundles in tombs within sacred precincts.

Some of the characteristics of this burial cult include large stone-lined tombs, collective burials in the tombs, and elaborate tunics placed as the outside garment. Not all

garments and ceramics are Wari highland styles and it appears that local cultures adopted Wari styles and added local components or techniques along with Wari motifs. But actual Wari ceramics and textiles are often included in these burial grounds far from the highland Wari capital. The most elaborate Wari textiles included are tapestry tunics and tie-dye mantles. Wari tapestry tunics are woven of two individual panels almost seven feet in length and just over two feet wide (Rodman and Cassman 1995). One loomend is cut and obliquely interlaced and on the other warp end the loomcord is removed and the remaining warp loops are chained together. The two pieces are stitched along the center and the long rectangle is folded and stitched along the sides leaving the arm holes and neck slit open. Although simple in construction, the appeal of Wari tunics is in the fine spinning and weaving of camelid yarns probably selected alpaca or vicuna often woven over cotton warps, and in bold, repetitive patterning with vibrant coloring. Several aspects of these garments suggest that they were actually woven in highland workshops and distributed throughout the vast range of this new Wari influenced coast. The upright tapestry loom and the interlocking wefts are essentially highland traditions where coastal people generally wove on the backstrap loom in a slit-tapestry or kelim technique (Rodman 1997; Rowe 1977). The warps are also revealing. In many tunics it is possible to plot a variety of different warp yarns used in the same garment with bichrome cotton and alpaca plied yarns of different colors distributed irregularly throughout the web (Bird and Skinner 1974). It appears that the person who warped the loom may not have been the same person who spun the warps and perhaps not even the one who would weave the tapestry. If one could imagine such an event one thousand years ago, the image would be of warping the loom with balls of spun and plied yarns of a great variety of types. It seems appropriate to suggest that these were probably spun by many different individuals and sent to this central location. This sort of redistribution was known to have taken place in the making of later Inca tapestry tunics and it is very possible that the Wari had earlier established workshops in a similar way (A. Rowe 1978; J. Rowe 1979). In addition, long diagonal lines especially visible in the plain colored ground between pattern stripes in some Wari tapestry tunics, identify weft yarns that have not been interlocked. Here is another area where a possible highland workshop situation might be imagined. These lines specify independent work sections where at least two individuals sat side by side weaving the cloth separately and building up the areas where they are working without interlocking the wefts of the weaver next to them. Wari tunics reflect the finest of Andean highland tapestry styles.

In what ways these tunics may have been used in daily life is not known and few if any have been uncovered with patterns of wear. Instead, it is in burial where these garments have been discovered as the outermost covering of large mummy bales. Unfortunately few of these bundles have been excavated with complete contexts and associations of other grave goods are rarely known. In Pachacamac Uhle (1903:30-32) described Wari tunics and mentioned that these were uncovered in direct association with a particular Wari style textile, the tie-dye patchwork or discontinuous warp and weft tie-dye. Also from the Middle Horizon cemetery of Pachacamac Uhle discussed small squares that he called "fetiches" (Uhle 1903:30) and said they were placed as separate textiles around the mummy bundles. These small tapestries are not representative of highland Wari style. They are usually woven in slit-tapestry with images derived, but removed from highland motifs. They represent instead the fusion of the new religion as it

traveled to the Peruvian coast. The individual cloth tapestry squares often portrayed a single figure with arms raised and legs spread within a bordered space. Uhle (1903:30) noted the importance of these elaborately woven textiles and suggested that their inclusion in the bundles showed their mythological connections: "The figure of the design represented the divinity which protected them in life".

Uhle left few records of his discoveries in other cemeteries but it is clear from the collections themselves that he uncovered material of a similar nature. He found a tapestry square at Moche on the terrace of the Huaca del Sol and he uncovered many individually woven tapestry pieces in the large cemetery of Chimú Capac. At Chimú Capac Uhle excavated at least four Wari tapestry tunics and a great variety of tie-dye. Heiko Pruemers' (1990; 1995) analysis of the cemeteries on the mound known as El Castillo in the Huarney Valley also discovered the same pattern of material: Wari tapestry tunics, individually woven tapestry plaques, and tie-dye, along with a great variety of other textile types such as the Moche derived double cloth with discontinuous weft color "spots" woven over supplementary warp floats, a structure identified by William Conklin (1979) as particular to earlier Moche styles. Many have discussed the northern influences apparent in a variety of cultural artifacts during this period of the late Middle Horizon. In textiles this combination of a northern textile type of doublecloth with the new addition of brilliantly colored camelid fiber yarns is also an indication. Moche textiles are primarily woven of cotton (Donnan and Donnan 1997) and Moche doublecloth principally uses two colors of natural cotton. It is especially in this period of Wari influence when large quantities of camelid fibers appear in collections, spun and woven, often combined with local cotton, all included in the new burial bundles. Textiles woven in a variety of structures including supplementary weft patterning often include brilliant camelid fiber that particularly distinguishes collections from earlier and later periods in the Early and Late Intermediate when the local coastal cotton appears to have been the preferred fiber in most textile production.

Although it is not at all clear how Wari spread this similar cult, the religious icons, and the distinctive textile and ceramic styles associated with the religion make it apparent that the cult was spread over a wide portion of the Peruvian coast. The same techniques, structures, colors, images, and associated religion were adopted where formerly distinctive and very different cultural traditions prevailed. Even the Peruvian north coast, a region far from the Wari southern highland capital, was affected by this new religion and burial pattern. Recently, the same ceramics, textiles, and collective burials have been uncovered at the site of El Brujo in the Chicama Valley. Hundreds of burials were excavated in the fill covering the abandoned earlier Moche pyramid known as Huaca Cao Viejo (Franco et al 1994, Rodman and Fernandez n.d.). The burial bundles are particularly distinctive in this Moche region where extended burials were formerly the norm and ceramics and textiles identify a different cultural tradition following Moche decline.

The earliest of the burials at El Brujo appear similar to the collection of material discussed previously from more southern regions such as Pachacamac and Chimú Capac, but at least in the collection yet analyzed, a strong local tradition is combined with the new style. At El Brujo only one Wari tapestry (Figure 2) has yet been discovered and this garment did not constitute the outer covering of the funeral bundle but instead was burned as an offering along with the typically associated tie-dye patchwork and other

tapestry of a coastal style. The principal individual in the tomb was wearing a man's sleeved cotton shirt (Figure 3) with a tapestry plaque and a Wari derived design sewn below the neck (Figure 4). Another similar shirt was placed in the funeral bundle also containing a tapestry plaque with a related Wari design (Figure 5).

The El Brujo cemetery has revealed other associated individuals, women, men, and children who form part of this style and widespread Wari related cult. Other shirts with tapestry plaques have been discovered, as well as burials as Uhle described for Pachacamac with small tapestry plaques rolled and added to the funeral bundle. Another important discovery here at El Brujo was the determination of a clothing style particular to women. Women wore a very large dress woven in two long loom widths, sewn horizontally together and secured in a tubular fashion and sew across the shoulders leaving space for the neck and armholes across the top. Additionally, these long, wide dresses were worn with narrow doublecloth belts (Figure 6) woven in the distinctive red and white pattern with discontinuous weft color spots over supplementary warps, typical for the period. The textile styles identified here do not appear to be highland styles transported to the coast, but instead a fusion of highland and coastal images and structures reflecting both regions in the creation of the new religious ideas.

The religion was apparently centered on a single deity, a male sky god depicted as facing directly forward with arms outstretched and legs splayed along with attendant figures in profile. His image is especially obvious in the small woven tapestry plaques that were fastened onto shirt fronts or rolled and left as offerings with the dead. But he was also represented in reliefs molded on ceramics and especially in bold images painted on plainwoven cloth from cemeteries of the central coast. Uhle uncovered over 150 of these painted images in the cemetery of Chimú Capac, many with representations of the Middle Horizon god and attendant figures as well as rayed designs suggesting the brilliance of celestial bodies in the sky, animals on earth, and fish in the sea (Menzel 1977). As Uhle suggested, the information being presented in these textiles placed with the dead appears to relate to stories of creation and myths of powerful, fertile gods. Ancient Peruvians certainly named these gods, but they were not recorded until the Spanish described them beginning in the sixteenth century. By then the Peruvian coast had known a series of transformations and cultural identities, the last two including the Inca invasions of the fifteenth century and that of the Spanish in the next. In the Spanish texts or early chronicles there were certain gods specifically mentioned as early and important beyond all the rest: Con and Pachacamac of the coast (Rostworowski 1989), Tunapu or Tarapaca of the southern highlands, and Viracocha of the Incas. Their stories are often interchangeable. Gutierrez de Santa Clara (1905, tomo III, cap. LVI: 493-495) discusses the Peruvian god Con:

“In all this land, large as it is, the Inca lords that there were, and all the Indians that inhabited it, adored two gods, one that was called Cons and the other Pachacama, as principal gods, and as helpers they had the Sun and the Moon . . . They say, the very old Indians that are now living, that they heard from their ancestors that the first god that was in the world was called Cons, he who formed the sky, sun, the moon, stars, and the earth, with all the animals and everything else that there is, that it was only with his thoughts and his breath, and that crossing these lands, that were totally empty,

unpopulated, he made and created all the things which are seen and known here...and that after this he went to the sea and that he walked with dry feet over it..and that he created all the fish that there are, with only his word, and that he made other marvelous things, and that afterwards he left this earth and rose to the sky. They say more these Indians, that after much time had passed and many years and centuries there came to the earth another god more powerful than Cons, called Pachacama, that means to say Maker of the earth or reformer, and that he destroyed with fire and water all that the god Cons had made and created. . . and that after he made these things and many others, they say that he returned to the sky. For this reason the Indians took as preeminent these two gods Cons and Pachacama, because they were more powerful than the sun, the moon, or the earth.”(Translation the author).

We will never know for certain exactly what he was called, but this god brought to the Peruvian coast during the late Middle Horizon was represented as a fertile, sexual entity, clearly male. He was associated with symbols that appear to place him in the sky, often over fish of the sea, and with animals of his creation. Images of this deity were brought to the Peruvian coast by the Wari or along with the religion transmitted through Wari and the result was the abandonment of earlier practices. A specific burial form, the funeral bundle and Wari influenced textiles and ceramics were added to local styles and forms. We know from accounts made at the time of the conquest that burial places were regularly visited by the living (Salomon 1995). Dead ancestors were entrusted with the capacity to control earth’s productivity, bring the rains, encourage the crops, and it was through them that humans could mediate power and ancestral wisdom (Salomon 1995). These funeral bundles, placed in principal and highly visible coastal huacas, must have created a vital link between living communities life-controlling gods.

In the periods following, funeral bundles do continue as the principal burial form, but the textiles contain a distinct textile style associated with a similar, but altered deity. At El Brujo for example, a very different style characterizes the burials that appear to follow the earlier Wari influenced styles. Large transparent cotton shirts decorated with lateral tapestry bands (Figure 7) identify the same front-facing god (Figure 8) but the associated ceramics and overall different textile style define cultural connections with the powerful Lambayeque region further north. By the fourteenth century, north coastal allegiances switched again to Chimú dominance. This change is evident in the burial pattern noted at El Brujo in distinct funeral bundles covered with narrow straw robes and a different garment and textile assembly. But in Chimú textiles the same deity is visible, repeated as an important image associated with funeral bundles of the culture.

The ubiquity of the same front-facing figure with legs splayed and arms raised suggests that the associated rituals continued as well. These rituals involving the Andean dead which literally connected humans with the original creator were much too potent to neglect. Centuries later, the Inca placed mummified ancestors in the center of state religion. Throughout the Andes during the Middle Horizon the local name of the creator will never be absolutely identified. It was surely something like that reported at the time of the conquest: Con Ticci Tocapo Viracocha, the maker of all things, the one at the beginning, he who created it all with only his breath, all the humans that there are, the animals, the sun, moon, and stars, lowering the mountains and raising the valleys, with

only his will., He went away, or so they say, foam of the sea, walking across the water. He was remembered even then, in the sixteenth century when the Spanish arrived and asked, the images of him buried more than six centuries, now nearly a thousand years.

Acknowledgments: I thank the National Endowment for the Humanities (RZ-20323-98) for research funds supporting textile analysis at El Brujo and Vuka Roussakis, Arabel Fernandez, and John Verano, my colleagues at the site. I appreciate the collaboration with the El Brujo Project and directors Regulo Franco, Cesar Galvez, and Segundo Vasquez and am grateful for the support of project members at El Brujo: thank you all.

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Fig. 1 Map of the Andean region with sites mentioned in the text

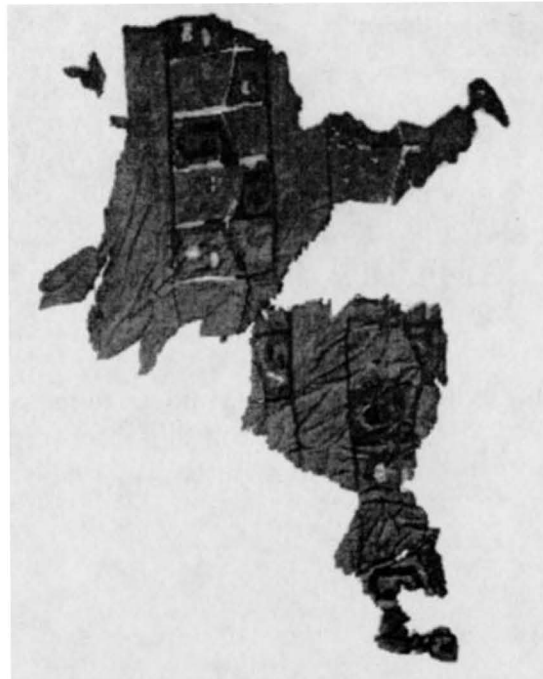


Fig. 2 Fragment of a Wari tapestry tunic discovered in Burial 1 of 1995 at Huaca Cao Viejo, El Brujo.

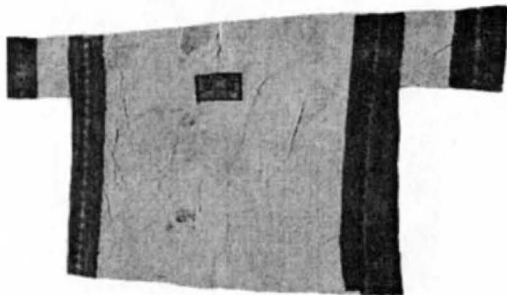


Fig. 3 Outermost shirt of Burial 1 of 1995 El Brujo. The shirt is cotton with warp-patterned bands and a tapestry plaque applied to the surface



Fig. 4 Tapestry plaque applied to the outermost shirt from Burial 1 excavated at El Brujo.



Fig. 5 Tapestry plaque applied to the surface of a sleeved cotton shirt discovered in the interior of Burial 1 of 1995 at El Brujo.



Fig. 6 Woman's doublecloth belt worn with cotton dresses at El Brujo.

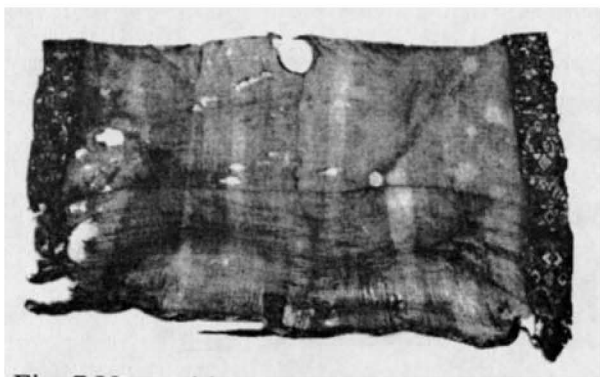


Fig. 7 Very wide, transparent cotton shirt with brilliantly dyed camelid-fiber tapestry bands sewn to the sides.



Fig. 8 Detail of tapestry band in a Lambayeque period burial at El Brujo, Chicama Valley, Peru.