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Identity, Innovation and Textile Exchange Practices at the Paracas Necropolis, 2000 BP

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Elayne Zorn's detailed ethnographic research demonstrated interrelationships between the organization of textile production, exchange relationships within and beyond Andean communities, persistence and innovation in style, and the meanings ascribed to textile-based iconography. All these issues can – and should – be addressed in the analysis of textile assemblages from documented archaeological contexts in the southern Central Andes, revealing evidence for complex and historically dynamic socio-political relationships.

The Paracas Necropolis cemetery, approximately 150BC-AD200, is the largest set of relatively well-preserved and well-documented burials documenting early complex societies on the desert coast of the Central Andes, one of the few regions of the world preserving evidence of textile history and its social contexts. In the Necropolis sectors, conical mortuary bundles constructed around each buried individual incorporate layers of large cotton plain-weaves, fine garments elaborately embroidered in polychrome camelid hair, and regalia created with diverse textile structures, product of one to six or more post-mortem rituals. While our analysis includes all artifacts in each Paracas Necropolis assemblage, textiles appear consistently as the principal material agent of social significance.

Paracas Necropolis and the Regional Context

Textiles from the Paracas 'Necropolis' mortuary complex of ancient Peru have inspired extensive study, not only for their diverse and elaborate imagery and vivid, complex color combinations, and principles of symmetry expressed in patterns of color repeat and figure direction (Carrión 1931, Stafford 1941, Frame 1986, Paul 1998). While textiles in this style from looted tombs are found in many museums, our study focuses on those with gravelot provenience from the Wari Kayan Cemetery at the Paracas site, excavated by Julio C. Tello in 1927-1928 (Tello 1929, 1959; Tello and Mejía 1979).

Just among the embroidered plain-weaves, the diversity of styles present has led to groupings defined as 'geometric', abstract or Linear contrasted with 'naturalistic' or Block Color imagery related to that of early Nasca ceramics, and Broad Line imagery related to that of late Paracas ceramics. (Paul 1982). Embroidery styles cross-cut types of garments, but at the same time certain styles are predominantly associated with specific garment forms.

Since the work of Carrion (1931) and O'Neale (1942) it has been clear that there is another set of Paracas textiles characterized by diverse and highly elaborate structures created on a loom or based on other types of interlace or interlink, associated with a different mortuary tradition in the adjacent Paracas 'Cavernas' cemetery areas. This distinct production tradition pre-dates the Necropolis-associated embroideries in the region, but a temporal overlap (Menzel, Rowe and Dawson 1964, King 1965, Dwyer 1979) has been demonstrated at both the Paracas site and to the south in the Ocucaje region (Figure 1).

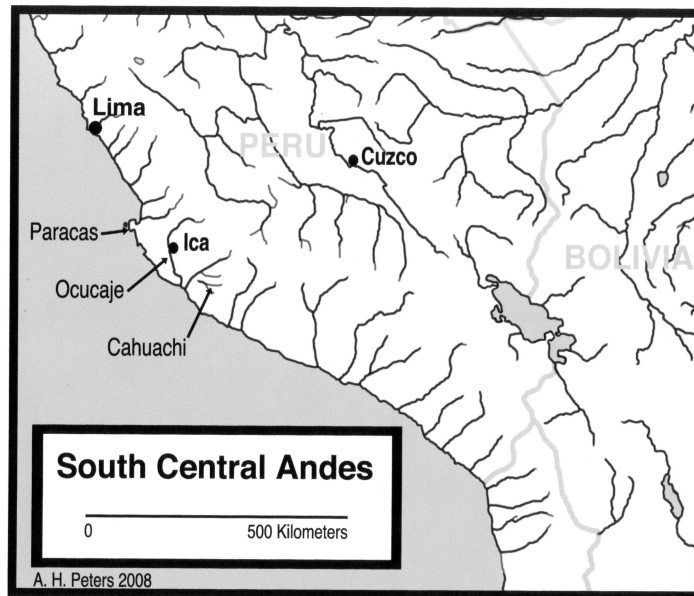


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Paracas site, Ocucaje basin and Cahuachi site in the south Central Andes.

Our current research supports a model of multiple, interacting producer communities that probably were identified with a particular locale but also travelled, with rights to access resources of the coast and Andean highlands. Like various kinds of historic and contemporary social groups termed “ayllu” in the Andean languages, these communities defined themselves based on kinship, and relationships among them included armed conflict, alliance and intermarriage. They had differing relationships to two different textile production traditions, as well as other aspects of material culture including ceramic production traditions that have been termed Paracas and Topará. Interaction between these communities between about 150 BC and AD 200 resulted in materials from both traditions appearing in the Paracas Necropolis gravelots, as well as in contemporary burials of certain Paracas Cavernas tombs and cemeteries of the Ocucaje Basin. A third textile production tradition has been defined in apparently later burials at the Paracas site, and the appearance of his “early Nasca” style defined the Early Intermediate (or Regional Development) Period phase 1 (Menzel, Rowe and Dawson 1964, Dwyer, Paul).

As a result, the term “Paracas” has been applied to all these textile styles, while the term “early Nasca” has also been applied to some of them. Despite a substantial literature that replicates this terminology, it is necessary to clarify and to some extent redefine these textile production traditions based on both technical analysis of production sequence (*chaîne d’opératoire*) and the distribution of the textile groups among gravelots that differ in associated practices (mortuary tradition) and artifact types (material culture). This analysis demonstrates the coexistence of multiple textile production traditions with relationships to material culture traditions that include artifact styles that have previously been called Paracas, Topara and Nasca, as well as apparently other material culture traditions from a wider geographic region and social world.

Here, I will focus on defining diagnostic features of these three material culture traditions and characterizing their distribution in the Paracas Necropolis gravelots studied to date.

Textile Production Traditions

Because textile production is an agglutinative process in which multiple elements may be produced with a broad variety of materials and techniques and combined in an unlimited number of joins – in a chain of practices that may include removal as well as addition – features from every step in production may be observable in the final product. I have previously discussed the potential for observing patterns of difference associated with the social organization of production (Peters 2012). For the purpose of defining a “production tradition,” it is important to trace large groups characterized by consistent use of a range of techniques and consistent practices throughout the production sequence. We should expect a production tradition to have fuzzy boundaries, just like the social group(s) to which its producers belonged. Likewise, within it many subgroups can be associated with communities of textile production (Arnold, Yapita and Espejo 2006), workshop groups or individual designer/producers.

Here I propose a working model of the characteristics of textiles of the late Paracas tradition, Topará tradition and “proto-“ and early Nasca tradition that have been contributed to the mortuary bundles in the Wari Kayan cemetery. The categories are based on a review of over 2,000 textiles from mortuary bundles studied in the 20th century, and comparisons with textiles from the Paracas Cavernas and Ocucaje assemblages. All textiles illustrated here are from documented Paracas Necropolis gravelots, though the styles demonstrate relationships with neighboring traditions. More typical ‘Necropolis’ textiles have been illustrated in a host of previous publications, some of them cited below.

The Paracas tradition textiles are characterized by a bewildering variety of complex techniques, woven in panels of a size appropriate to a backstrap loom, or created in techniques most appropriate to a vertical frame. Since the landmark study by d’Harcourt (1934), this mastery of most known textile structures by, at latest, 200 BC has introduced classroom discussion of the Andean traditions.

Large panels for tunics, headcloths and mantles were developed in non-loom techniques including simple looping and sprang, the latter explored in detail by Frame (1986, 1995). Knotted netting was used for hammock-shaped headdresses (as well as fishnets), including large panels of close-knotted polychrome camelid hair depicting rayed heads set in diamonds. Narrow close-knotted headbands are flanked by panels in complex diagonal interlace, panels in modified tapestry and a long fringe. Thick and sweater-like, polychrome looped tunics are typically fringed with knotted tufts of dyed but unspun camelid hair (Von Hagen and Morris fig. X). ‘Sprang’ panels have complex figures developed by the diagonal interlinking of a parallel set of camelid hair yarns, creating hood-like or turban-like headdress elements.

Loom-based weaving also tended toward the intricate. As in most Andean textiles, objects were designed on the loom and four selvages are usually intact. Headdress bands include a distinctive technique documented by Rowe (1977) in which supplementary warps substitute into a plain weave structure to create complex imagery. Another plain-weave technique uses ‘scaffolded’ warps in small sections, woven with the same yarn to create a patchwork of pure color in a balanced plain weave tunic (Desrosiers 2008).

Monochrome cotton plain-weave tunics and hoods incorporate openwork by crossing the warps in a ‘gauze weave’ and turning back the wefts to create small slits (Figure 2). These techniques suggest the extensive use of cactus-spine needles, planning and patience. However they are trumped by head-cloths,

tunics and mantles composed of large panels in (usually camelid hair) double-cloth, in which the two independently woven monochrome layers pass from one face to the other to create intricate images of areas of solid color. Finally, the warp-substitution band and double-weave techniques are combined to create modified triple-cloth, in which areas needle-woven with three colors of plain weave form images on the front face while the warps not in play hang on the back.



Figure 2. Burial 114, Sp. 17. Tunic of yellow-beige cotton with warp-cross gauze weave and weft slit openwork depicting the “rayed head” icon. American Museum of Natural History.

Late Paracas tradition embroidered mantles have two panels of light brown cotton plain weave, slightly warp-dominant, joined on one weft selvage. The embroidery way vary in distribution, but generally creates matching borders along the outer weft selvages and turns the corner to run along part of the loom end selvage, creating a bracket ([]) shape. The camelid hair embroidery creates Linear style figures that each fill a rectangle, juxtaposed and often alternating in pairs, in a dark palette of maroon, purple, dark blue, dark green and bright red, but sometimes with tiny details in bright blue and yellow. Due to the dye technology, one or more colors often have ‘carbonized’ – transforming the yarn into a shiny, brittle, brown-black substance.

The Broad Line embroidery style is best known in textiles from the Wari Kayan cemetery or ascribed to Paracas Necropolis. However, both the icons and the image style associated with these textiles are also characteristic of late Paracas ceramics designated as Ocucaje phases 9 and 10. Likewise, this embroidery style is found on textiles from the Ocucaje basin with diagnostic Paracas Tradition features, such as a looped tunic (Textile Museum 91.489) and a warp-crossed gauze headdress (Textile Museum 91.1009). I suggest that this large corpus of Broad Line embroidered plain-weave garments comes out of the late Paracas Tradition, in interaction with Topará. Proportions of the plain-weave cotton panels and embroidered borders, the use and style of sub-border figures, the color palette and ‘carbonized’ dyelots all place these embroideries “in between” the two traditions. In this sense they are analogous to the contemporary ceramic styles from the Ocucaje basin, that show ample evidence for interaction and mutual influence between the two traditions. Unfortunately, outside of the Paracas site not enough textiles have been recovered archaeologically – so far – to test this hypothesis well.

Topara tradition textiles are predominantly characterized by a fine control of large-scale balanced or slightly warp-dominant plain weaves, that would have required an unusually wide backstrap loom, or a

frame loom, with well-constructed heddles and tensioning arrangement. Complex weave structures are absent: rather there is a large production of plain weave panels in several colors of native cotton, used both for heavy yarns in large canvas-like or blanket-like cloths or fine yarns in garments. The consistency in the plain weaves is related to the nearly ubiquitous use of embroidery as a decorative medium. In distinguishing the Topara weaving tradition from the Paracas tradition, it is important to consider that both the typical dimensions of woven panels and the weave structures created demand different characteristics of the loom.



Figure 3. Burial 113 Sp. 5a. Warp-faced plain weave band with supplementary warp substitution used to depict the “falling figure” icon, emblematic of the Paracas Necropolis mortuary tradition. American Museum of Natural History.

However, some of the techniques used in the Paracas tradition to create narrow bands are used in the Topará tradition to create wider ones (Figure 3). Plain weave with warp-substitution is most commonly used to create wide bands used as borders around the neck slit and garment margins of Topará tradition tunics where matching Linear 1 figures are embroidered on the plain weave cotton base cloth adjacent to the appliquéd borders. Close-knotting is used to create headbands parallel in structure and technique to those of the Paracas tradition, but expanded in size to depict Linear images like those of many Topará Linear 1 embroideries, on their signature bright red background. Because these techniques have been adapted to depict a style of imagery and some icons not characteristic of the Paracas Tradition, it is possible that not only the techniques, but also persons expert in their production may have been adopted from Paracas tradition communities.

Other off-loom techniques highly developed in the Paracas tradition are present in a simplified form in some Wari Kayan gravelots. Simple looping is used to create small monochrome caps in human hair or dark brown camelid hair. More complex looped structures are present in some caps and bags. Sprang is used on a small scale, without complex figures, to create striped bags. Knotted netting is present in some early burials, and common among miniatures tucked next to the body. However, taking into consideration the social model of exchange among contemporary communities with diverse socio-

cultural identities, the presence of these techniques employed on a small scale may be derivative or symbolic of the Paracas textile tradition.



Figure 4. Burial 136 Sp. 21. Tubular headband in complex looping, depicting “mask-type” figures characteristic of the Paracas tradition. Museo Regional de Ica.

The other headdress types in the Wari Kayan cemetery appear to be predominantly characteristic of the Topara tradition, or to mark the social relations of its male leaders. These include the diagonal interlace headdress, which appears in early burials with panels of balanced 2/2 interlace in bright red crossed by single-face bands in contrasting colors. In Early Intermediate burials the structure becomes gradually more variable and more associated with a color palette characteristic of early Nasca. The tubular headdress in complex looping appears in early Wari Kayan burials with two ‘fingers’ at the end and Linear 1 imagery (Figure 4). In later burials this technique is also used to ornament the ends of diagonal interlace bands. The slit tapestry headband appears occasionally in male burials across the Wari Kayan cemetery.



Figure 5. Burial 352, Sp. 23/24 and Sp. 21. Borders in Linear style with features characteristic of the Paracas textile tradition, including border proportions, stitching and color palette. The imagery is recurrent in both the Paracas and Topará traditions. Museo Regional de Ica.

The Linear 1 embroideries are diagnostic of Paracas Necropolis and recurrent in all the Wari Kayan burials except for those with many early Nasca features, assigned by Paul to Early Intermediate Period (EIP) phase 2. However, there are many different Linear 1 styles and their distribution suggests both contemporary social diversity and chronological development. Some very early Linear 1 styles share technical features with late Paracas tradition embroidery, including color range and ‘carbonization’ of yarns of certain colors or dye-lots (Figure 5). They also share some iconography, features of image style, and proportions of the woven panels and embroidered borders. This has been interpreted as evidence for relative chronology, which is valid, but above all these features are evidence of social contact and technology transfer that mark some burials in the Wari Kayan cemetery as having a more intimate relationship with the near neighbors of the Paracas tradition.

Other Linear 1 embroideries share features of stitching and color palette with early Block Color, and are found in burials assigned to EIP phase 1 (Paul 1986). In burials of this period, a large Linear 1 mantle is often placed on the outside “public face” of the mortuary bundle, on top of other mantles in early Block Color styles. This suggests that the Linear 1 style continues to be emblematic of the Topará tradition, even where textiles in other styles are numerically dominant among the mortuary offerings.



Figure 6. Burial 352 Sp. 77. Bracket corner of the border of a headcloth in the Linear 2 style, showing typical features such as diagonal stitch direction change at the corner and darning-stitched edge binding, combined with a unique use of alternating stitches, depicting an icon typical of late Paracas tradition textiles. Museo Regional de Ica.

Small groups of related textiles mark a number of other well-defined Linear styles. For instance, a style of embroidery with alternating stitching and a singular bold image style (Kajitani 1982 fig. 26) appears as a full garment set in Wari Kayan burial 421 and two garments in contemporary burial 24. This stitching procedure also occurs in a headcloth with Linear 2 layout but a Paracas tradition “mask-type” figure (King 1965) in earlier burial 352 (Figure 6).

The Linear 2 style is a recurrent embroidery style largely associated with headdresses and present in most – male or female – relatively elaborate burials throughout the Wari Kayan cemetery. In this style areas of solid color separate figures that fill a rectangular area, and are designed in a series of rectangular segments. A highly codified, recurrent set of icons on a red background border embroidered on a long rectangle of lightweight “gauzy” cotton cloth in the early burials is replaced by more diverse images in later examples (Paul 1986), which also incorporate variant features such as dyed cotton or camelid hair base cloth of more variable proportions and even fringe. A range of other forms of embroidered headcloths also appear in the Wari Kayan burials.

Our definition of the proto-Nasca textiles clearly lacks the detail present in the other definitions. To date no proto-Nasca textile style groups have been clearly distinguished from the late Paracas or Topará styles, prior to burials ascribed to the Early Intermediate Period. The earliest Nasca style garments draw on some techniques and design features typical of the Paracas tradition and others typical of Topará tradition textiles. I propose here a series of styles and techniques of garment groups that appear to come from outside the Topará textile tradition and that are associated to some degree with early Nasca image styles and icons. In the process, I identify proto-Nasca among the earliest burials in the Wari Kayan cemetery and trace the occurrence of Nasca tradition textiles among others similar in some aspects of image style and iconography but more typical of the Topará-associated assemblage.



Figure 7. Burial 352, Sp. 28 & 73. Yellow-beige cotton plain weave with Mosaic Style embroidered border and sub-border of polychrome camelid hair. Museo Regional de Ica.

The Mosaic embroidery style is the earliest candidate. The figure designs are Linear, but used to create small-scale monochrome figures arrayed across the embroidered border in diagonals or a tiled arrangement. The color range of the figures is bright and resembles that of Block Color embroideries in EIP phase 1, yet the Mosaic Style is found in early Wari Kayan burials 113 and 352 together with Linear 1 styles and Broad Line styles with late Paracas characteristics. The background color in most Mosaic style embroideries has carbonized. (Figure 7)

Underneath a long sequence of Linear 1 garments appeared in a headdress and mantle garment set from an inner layer of Wari Kayan burial 114, designated as early horizon 10B, in which diagonal stitching has been used to create condor figures on the central ground (Figure 8). Unlike in the Topará style, the colors do not vary in all details of the repeated figure: each condor has a black head, and a cream-white carbuncle, neck ruff and patch on the wing. This ‘motivated’ use of color is characteristic of proto-Nasca or Nasca 1 ceramics. The borders do not repeat the same figure, but instead are filled by a repeating stepped motif in a range of bright colors.



Figure 8. Burial 114 sp. 50b. Headcloth embroidered border and sub-border figure with remnants of base cloth. American Museum of Natural History.

Most relatively complex mortuary bundles of adult men from slightly later Wari Kayan burials include one mantle with borders of a woven band in a color contrasting with the base fabric, and appliquéd along the outer weft selvage, typically accompanied by a yarn fringe. These mantles share other characteristics: they are woven of dyed camelid hair, and if they are composed of two joined base panels, these contrast in color as do the two appliquéd borders. Other examples have the base fabric composed of a series of woven bands of contrasting colors, equal in length and width and stitched together (Figure 9). Burial 310 Sp. 42 has one tie-dyed panel; the other is embroidered with a series of condor figures in (carbonized) black with cream-white neck ruff and patches on the wings (Paul 1990 p. 151 fig. II.23). This burial has been designated as EIP phase 1b, and the condor figure might also be designated as Nasca 1.



Figure 9. Burial 28 Sp. 8. Mantle of stitched bands with appliquéd border band and attached fringe with join covered by complex looping in polychrome sections matching the bands. Museo Inka, Universidad Nacional San Antonio Abad de Cusco.

Woven borders are also associated with embroidery in a few textiles with style features not typical of the Topará tradition. A mantle from the outer layer of burial 16, immediately beneath a Linear 1 style mantle, is the only textile in this complex male mortuary bundle woven of dyed camelid hair. Its borders are narrow bands woven of bright red camelid hair, with embroidered figures in alternating colors. However, the eyes and mouth are always embroidered in black and white, once again the ‘motivated’ use of color that defines Nasca 1 (Figure 10). The icon is antecedent to a series of dorsal (head-reversed) figures associated with condors or falcons in later burials.



Figure 10. Burial 16 Sp. T-IV-2. Mantle of dark blue camelid hair with red woven border, attached polychrome fringe and embroidered figures. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

In later Necropolis burials Nasca influence is pervasive and it becomes difficult to define which textiles are “Nasca” in some pure sense and which are produced in communities descendent from the Paracas and Topará textile production traditions but at the same time involved in a ceremonial activities and political relationships centered around the site of Cahuachi (Silverman 1994, Vaughn 2006, Orefici 2012). I consider that the motivated use of color, in particular black outlining in the eyes and other areas, may place a Block color embroidery in the Nasca textile tradition. Color palette is a diagnostic feature, along with straight borders (without bracketed ends). A range of new garment forms appear, including diverse headcloths and a garment type that Tello termed *anako*, with borders on all four sides and sets of yarns or diagonal-interlaced bands sewn on the diagonal on the four corners. Sawyer (199) and Silverman (2000) point out the early Nasca use of embroidery stitches that depict the figure on both faces of a textile.

A range of practices are associated with Nasca-affiliated burials in the Wari Kayan cemetery. These include a proliferation of artifacts made with human hair, including fringes of plied or braided hair of a consistent length and color, as if from a single individual. While most garment types are not present, headbands proliferate: masses of diagonal interlaced bands frequently combine camelid hair with the bast fiber from maguey leaves used also to make slings. Painted cotton panels are used in tunics and mantles, as in the famous examples from mortuary bundle 290 (burial 190) published by Tello (1959 figs XX) and Tello and Mejía (1979). Simpler burials also may demonstrate a strong early Nasca affiliation, as in the case of burial 23 (Figure 11).

Nonetheless, as analysis continues it will be important to consider patterns of style variation that may not correspond to simplified dichotomies among black-box “cultures” or even production traditions, but instead may point to a wide range of producer groups with complex and shifting identities and allegiances.



Figure 11. Burial 23 Sp. 2. Fragment of a cotton plain weave panel painted with symmetric images of two felines with prominent whiskers and striped legs and tails composed of a series of curving segments in an early Nasca style. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología e Historia del Perú.

Distribution of the Textile Styles

We should not be surprised to find late Paracas textile tradition, Topará textile tradition and proto-Nasca textiles all included in mortuary bundles from the Wari Kayan cemetery. Quite evidently these garments were not produced by the deceased; rather they were brought together in mortuary ritual that must have mobilized a wide sphere of social alliances and been important for the reproduction of power relationships among his/her descendents. However, it is surprising to find a striking representation of all three groups in Burial 114. We must rethink the regional chronology, as well as consider the curation of important textiles and a complex and possibly lengthy process of construction of the mortuary bundle.

We should also expect to find textiles representing all three traditions in burials in the lower Ica Valley and in early contexts at Cahuachi and other Nasca region sites. The recovery of a polychrome double-cloth mantle depicting a range of classic icons in the Broad Line image style at Cahuachi (Frame 2009) has already made an important contribution. To the degree that a substantial number of comparable textiles are documented elsewhere in the south coast region, it will be possible to test the validity of this model of multiple communities associated with (at least) three textile production traditions, and trace the exchange relationships among them.

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