

Chapter 3

Differentiating Paracas Necropolis and Early Nasca Textiles

HELAINÉ SILVERMAN

INTRODUCTION

Bean (1998: 115) has argued that “[n]ext to language, cloth and clothing animate the most elaborated systems of representation in social and cultural life. In identity construction and manipulation ... dress dominates the interface between people and their social worlds.” Vivid examples of Bean’s contention abound across the world. Indeed, one of the foundational texts in the anthropological study of identity construction is Wobst’s (1977) study of stylistic behavior and information exchange manifested in the headdresses worn by members of different ethnic groups in what today is the former Yugoslavia. In addition to the construction of ethnic identity, dress is a dramatic expression of class, ideology, role, occupation, and gender.

In this chapter I am concerned with one dimension of expressive identity manifested in costume, that of ethnic or cultural identity. Specifically, I consider the identity of the adult men who wore in life the extraordinarily beautiful and technologically superb garments excavated by Julio C. Tello (1959; Tello and Mejía Xesspe 1979) in cemeteries along Paracas Bay on the south coast of Peru. This problem has confounded archaeologists for decades (Dwyer 1971: 220–223; Kroeber 1944: 32–34; Peters 1991; Rowe 1995: 35–38; Silverman 1991; Strong 1957: 14, 16; Yacovleff and Muelle 1934 *inter alia*) because the complex polychrome images on the textiles resemble complex polychrome images on Nasca pottery from the Ica-Nazca region [Note 1], while the thin-walled monochrome

pottery in apparent association with the mummy bundles is stylistically comparable to the Topará ceramic tradition of Pisco, Chíncha and Cañete (see Lanning 1960; Wallace 1986). My second goal in this paper is to define the textile tradition corresponding to Early Nasca pottery and to evaluate the competing textile definitions in terms of the ramifications of stylistic identity and stylistic influence for the interpretation of south coast culture history two thousand years ago.

THE CONFLATION AND SEPARATION OF PARACAS NECROPOLIS AND EARLY NASCA TEXTILES

Soon after the discovery of the Paracas Necropolis, Kroeber argued its “embroidery design styles showed close relationship to the pottery design styles which by then had become well authenticated as characteristic of Nazca ... The cause of this peculiar relation is unknown, but the fact is now indubitable.” Kroeber specifically called attention to the “Paracas [Necropolis] textile representation of demons or human beings [which] do not find their counterpart in Paracas [Necropolis] pottery, and, vice versa, the corresponding pottery representations at Nazca have only a rudimentary counterpart in the textiles of the Nazca culture” (Kroeber 1937: 128). Kroeber proposed that the “stylistic relation between Early Nazca pottery designs and Paracas textile designs is so close as to leave little doubt of a common origin; that is to say, of a transfer of the designs from one medium to the other.”

Subsequent investigators also were struck by the iconographic similarity between Paracas Necropolis textiles and Early Nasca pottery. Dwyer (1971) chronologically ordered the textiles from the several Paracas burial grounds excavated by Tello (1959; Tello and Mejía Xesspe 1979 *inter alia*) as “Paracas 9,” “Paracas 10,” “Nasca 1,” and “Nasca 2,” implying that there was evolution within a single cultural tradition whose heartland was Ica and Nazca. Rowe (1972: 67) reaffirmed that the textiles “form part of the Paracas-Nasca stylistic tradition, the earlier part of which is named for a group of sites on the Paracas Peninsula, the later part, for the valley of Nasca.” Dwyer (1971: 11) specified that “Nasca” was an appropriate term only for the textiles of the later phases at Paracas since “the local pottery style differs from that of Nasca.” Indeed, Lanning’s (1960) and Wallace’s (1986) research on the early pottery styles of the south coast clearly demonstrated that the well made, thin-walled, monochrome pottery associated with the spectacularly embroidered and complexly figured polychrome Paracas Necropolis textiles pertains to a non-Paracas/non-Nasca tradition called Topará. On the other hand, Nasca 1 pottery without polychrome slip imagery is quite similar to the EIP 1 Chongos phase Topará pottery found at the Peninsula (Menzel 1971; compare Silverman 1993: figs. 16.5–16.10, 16.34–16.37 and Strong 1957: figs. 7A-E, 9, 10F to Wallace 1986: fig. 3 and Silverman 1997: figs. 8, 10). But

the Nasca 1 ceramic corpus lacks the ubiquitous grater bowls of the contemporary Topará phase at the Paracas Necropolis (and also present in the Pisco Valley, see, e.g., Silverman 1997: fig. 9), and Paracas Necropolis/Topará lacks the panpipes (but note the depiction of panpipes in fig. 17 of the famous painted "manto calendario" from Mummy Bundle 290: see Tello and Mejía Xesspe 1979: 111), drums, trumpets, and polychrome slipped pots that are a hallmark of the Nasca tradition.

Furthermore, scholars who have compared and contrasted Paracas Necropolis textiles with textiles known or purported to be from the Río Grande de Nazca drainage and to date to the early EIP have observed that Early Nasca textiles emphasize complex figural three-dimensional borders whereas the Paracas Necropolis textiles emphasize embroidered designs on a base cloth with an embroidered border (see O'Neale 1937; Phipps 1989; Sawyer 1997). Moreover, Peters (1991, 1997) sees fundamental differences between Early Nasca ceramic and textile iconography and Paracas Necropolis Block Color imagery in terms of the subject matter represented (see Peters 1991: 311); bear in mind that Peters lumps all of Paracas Necropolis Block Color imagery, dating from EH 10B through EIP 2, and compares it to Nasca 3 ceramic iconography.

The examples of provenienced Nasca 3 textile art from the Nazca Valley (see, especially, O'Neale 1937) are singularly unimpressive when compared to the magnificent range of textiles from the Paracas Necropolis. Kroeber (1937: 128) concluded that "Early Nazca textile art ... is largely decorative and tends to the geometric. Its representative or naturalistic impulses are relatively undeveloped." O'Neale (1937: 199) stated that "by contrast with the quantities of sumptuous embroideries from the Paracas Necropolis these scanty bits from Cahuachi make a poor showing." Other textile collections from Cahuachi give the same impression (see Orefici 1993; Phipps 1989; Silverman 1993: chap. 18). O'Neale also observed significant differences in shape between Paracas Necropolis and Early Nasca mantles. Citing her, Bird and Bellinger (1954: plate CX) propose that Textile Museum 91.511 is a Nasca not Paracas Necropolis piece; it is virtually identical to the Krannert Art Museum mantle published by Sawyer (1975: fig. 124). These pieces are readily comparable to some of Kroeber's perfectly associated Nasca 3 textiles from Cahuachi (see O'Neale 1937: plate LXIf, LXIIa, e).

Rather than embroidery, Early Nasca textile artists "seem to have revelled in passementeries of the 3-dimensional type and veneered bands with tabs or fringes or both ... the 3-dimensional bird and flower fringes represent needleknitting ... at its peak" (O'Neale 1937: 176–177; see Silverman 1993: figs. 18.4–18.14; Ubbelohde-Doering 1952: fig. 143). Peters (1991: 313) identifies all cross-knit looped textiles as "Early Nasca" in style, a position also taken by Sawyer (1997). Phipps (1989: 308) concludes that the Cahuachi material "verifies our understanding of the importance of these needlework edgings- aesthetically, iconographically, and potentially as a tradition which played a part in the ritual and

ceremonial life of the period.” She argues that Early Nasca textiles extended and developed the Necropolis tradition, “especially a preoccupation with needlework as the dominant mode of textile expression, although I do not see the identical production of mainstream Necropolis-style textiles at the site [Cahuachi]. Instead, the three-dimensionally constructed needlework [cross-knit looping] took on distinctive and dominant characteristics, elaborately decorating the edges of the textiles” (Phipps 1989: 314). Phipps notes that “the central figures found in the Paracas Necropolis mantles are not found in the materials coming from Cahuachi.” She concludes that Cahuachi’s textiles belonged to a local style and were locally produced. According to Phipps (1989: 316–317), Nasca people inherited, transposed, and transformed the Paracas Necropolis textile tradition. The difference between the two textile traditions was succinctly expressed in 1954 by Junius Bird and Louisa Bellinger in their choice of title for a “catalogue raisonné” of the Textile Museum’s south coast textiles: *Paracas Fabrics and Nazca Needlework*.

Because Nasca 1 pottery does not constitute adequate antecedents for the iconographic explosion that occurred in Nasca 2 pottery (as seen on, e.g., the Haeberli Panpipe: Figure 3.1; the Bernstein/Guggenheim Drum: Figure 3.2) and, especially, Nasca 3, some scholars argue that *Paracas Necropolis textile* imagery was transferred to the medium of *Nasca ceramics* (Dwyer 1971; Peters 1997). But, Sawyer (1997: 42) attributes the poor impression of Early Nasca textiles to the fact that no high status Nasca burials have been scientifically excavated. Sawyer (1997) argues that extraordinarily fine and iconographically elaborate Early Nasca needlework exists, but has long been been misidentified as Paracas Necropolis in style and origin. Sawyer (1997) contends that Nasca 2 people made embroideries whose subject matter is as vast as that present on the Paracas Necropolis textiles. He says that this largely unknown corpus of elite Nasca 2 textiles provided the visual language for Nasca 3 pottery without calling into play a transference of imagery from Block Color Paracas Necropolis textiles.

Sawyer (1997: 27) specifically argues that double-faced embroidery, the double running stitch, and cross-knit looping were textile techniques executed only by Nasca people. He emphasizes embroidery thereby making Early Nasca textiles technically comparable to those of the Paracas Necropolis. Sawyer (1997: 97) also argues that the Early Nasca use of color on textiles is “sumptuous,” particularly in comparison to the darker tones of Paracas Necropolis textiles, in spite of the latter’s rich polychromy.

Furthermore, in a reversal of the usual argument, Sawyer (1997: 33) says that Early Nasca textiles of Ica and Nazca evolved rapidly and influenced the development of the more naturalistic Block Color style of Paracas Necropolis textiles. Sawyer (1997: 42) regards Paracas Necropolis Block Color textiles as more formal and less iconographically complex than those made by Nasca people. Specifically, he observes that “Necropolis Block Color embroideries display one or two deity figures related to the ritual function of the deceased. In contrast, elite

Nasca embroidered textiles often exhibit complex groupings of agricultural and trophy head cult deities” (Sawyer 1997: 43). I would counter argue that Block Color imagery on Paracas Necropolis textiles developed continuously from EH 10B through EIP 1A and B into EIP 2. On the other hand, although Nasca pottery evolved out of Paracas-Ocucaje antecedents in Ica (Menzel, Rowe and Dawson 1964: 251), Ocucaje 10 does not provide all of the necessary antecedents for the subsequent Nasca 1 pottery style. The situation in Ica created by this scenario would remain to be worked out, given the continuity between Ica’s Paracas and Nasca pottery.



Figure 3.1. The Haeberli Panpipe. Nasca 2. (photo: courtesy of Joerg Haeberli).

Andean Archaeology II
Art, Landscape, and Society
Silverman, H.; Isbell, W.H. (Eds.)
2002, XIV, 376 p., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-0-306-47250-3