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## FUNERARY REGALIA AND INSTITUTIONS OF LEADERSHIP IN PARACAS AND TOPARÁ

*Ann H. Peters\**

The transition between the great historic periods known as the Formative and Regional Development on the southern coast of the Central Andes is defined by the interaction of two neighboring societies associated with the ceramic traditions Paracas and Topará. In the last 15 years there have been investigation of habitational sites associated with them in the valleys of Chincha, Pisco, Ica and Nasca. However, they are primarily known by the funerary complex of Paracas Caverns, Paracas Necropolis and Ocucaje, excavated archaeologically and clandestinely in the first half of this century.

A study of individual interments from three funerary complexes shows a complex relationship of mutual influence between approximately 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. I try to clarify the nature of this exchange between these neighboring societies through the examination of the relationships between the grave, the grave goods and the mortuary concept reflected in the tombs of each complex. I have found evidence of an institution of social, political and religious leadership that could be the missing link for understanding the dynamic multiethnic interaction and the social transformation characterized during this period.

**Key words:** Mortuary practices, ethnicity, social rank, dresses.

*La transición entre los grandes períodos históricos conocidos como Formativo y Período de los Desarrollos Regionales, en la costa sur de los Andes Centrales, se define por la interacción de dos sociedades vecinas asociadas con las tradiciones cerámicas Paracas y Topará, y el desarrollo de la cerámica Nasca. En los últimos quince años se han desarrollado investigaciones sobre sitios habitacionales asociados a ellas en los valles de Chincha, Pisco, Ica y Nasca. Sin embargo, se conocen mayormente a través de los complejos funerarios de Paracas Cavernas, Paracas Necrópolis y Ocucaje, excavados arqueológicamente y clandestinamente en la primera mitad de este siglo.*

*Un estudio de unidades de entierro de los tres complejos funerarios demuestra una relación compleja de influencia mutua entre aproximadamente el 200 a.C. y el 200 d.C. Intento aclarar la naturaleza de este intercambio en estas sociedades vecinas, a través del examen de la relación entre el enterrado, el ajuar funerario, y el concepto mortuario reflejado en las tumbas de cada complejo. He encontrado evidencias de una institución de liderazgo social, político y religioso, que podría ser una clave para comprender la dinámica de interacción multiétnica y transformación social, caracterizadora de este período.*

**Palabras claves:** Prácticas mortuorias, etnicidad, rango social, vestimentas.

Mummified human burials in many Andean traditions are buried in a symbolic context defined by (1) textiles and other artifacts wrapped around the body to form a funerary bundle and (2) offerings placed adjacent to the funerary bundle or elsewhere in a tomb construction associated with that burial. Here I examine social meanings of funerary associations, defining recurrent patterns that I consider evidence for a religious and political institution present in two neighboring coastal Andean societies over a three to four hundred year period between 200 BC and AD 200. This corresponds to the end of the Formative period or Early Horizon (phases EH 9 and EH10) and the initial Regional Development or Early Intermediate period (phases EIP1 and EIP2).

I argue that this institution was the vehicle for social, political, and religious leadership in social groups of the Topará tradition and for their dominance or influence over neighboring social groups of the Paracas tradition. Interactions between these two societies, or cultures, led to their mutual transformation and the birth of the Nasca tradition.

It is not clear whether the dead of other Andean traditions were publicly displayed and honored as were prominent Inka ancestors. However, in highland and coastal traditions of the central and Southern Andes they were certainly buried in a seated position analogous to that adopted by living persons attending a meeting or ceremony and carefully wrapped in textiles and other objects of personal, religious, and political significance. Whether or not some dead were subsequently disinterred, the funerary rites probably were a public process in which the individual social identity of the deceased person was redefined: both reinforced and transformed.

The individual was seated and wrapped in a fashion that would have facilitated their social presence during and after the funerary rites. The identities expressed in the objects of the funerary bundle may be interpreted as expressions of both their role in life and their new role as ancestor. Associated objects can be considered either to have been associated with the buried person in life or to have been contributed by the network of people who mourned and honored that person in the funerary process or in subsequent rituals.

My arguments here are based on three propositions. First, I propose that the cultural differences expressed in different artifact traditions, such as ceramic and textile styles, tomb structures, and cranial alteration practices, correspond in some sense to different social entities. In the case of the Paracas and Topará traditions, I propose that this social distinction initially includes distinct political systems, kinship networks, and religious practices. Over a period of contact between the two societies, similarities and distinctions among artifacts appear to reflect increasingly intense interaction and mutual influence, as well as active differentiation in cultural practices that maintain the boundary between distinct identities of an "ethnic" or "tribal" nature.

Second, I propose that burial goods express to some degree the social identity adopted by the deceased person at or near the time of their death, and to some degree the social identity chosen for them by the community of mourners who construct the funerary ritual, the funerary bundle, the artifact associations, and the tomb context. It is valid to identify sets of associated artifacts with the personal identity of the mummified individual at the core of the funerary bundle. At the same time, associated objects reflect a network of social relationships. Particularly in the case of high status burials or in multi-ethnic communities, associations may combine artifacts of distinct provenience and social and cultural reference.

Third, I propose that it is possible to identify both relationships of style and relationships of function in the morphological distinctions among artifacts in different burial complexes, particularly in the case of culturally and historically related traditions. In the case of the Paracas and Topará traditions, we can compare the styles of artifact types common to both traditions, such as funerary bundles, *unku* shirts (and other garment types), or globular spouted funerary bottles. We can also make such comparisons on the level of the entire tomb and its contents, or on the level of a recurrent set of artifacts. Each level of comparison may combine objects or features that appear identical with others that are stylistically distinct. Once we have identified equivalent sets of objects that are stylistically distinct in related artifact traditions, we can consider their possible parallel functions in different social groups.

### **Tomb Form and Burial Patterns**

Do the differences in ceramic style that led researchers to define two different artifact traditions correlate with other features that would lead us to consider these artifact traditions to represent different societies? I begin comparison of evidence from the three cemetery areas by considering the tomb itself as an artifact.

The caverns tombs varied in form, but in general can be classified as multiple burials clustered in pits or dome-shaped chambers with tubular entrance shafts cut into hardened sand (*caliche*) and sandstone on a series of natural "terraces" along the top of the hill of Cerro Colorado. The larger burial chambers generally also have stone-lined entrances or "antechambers" above a platform of huarango logs<sup>1</sup> or whale ribs, reed mats, cotton cloth or sealskin that caps the entrance shaft. Simpler pit tombs predominate in some parts of the cemetery, associated with differences in the terrain<sup>2</sup>. Many of the tombs show clear evidence of reopening and inserting new burials. This includes the scattering of artifacts and human remains, especially the removal of heads.

The Necropolis tombs were placed in abandoned habitation structures on the north slope of Cerro Colorado, where habitation debris was associated with Paracas tradition ceramics. Simple pits were dug among the walls of the abandoned buildings, and burials were massed in the pits. Tello and Mejia report differences in the soil that indicate repeated excavation in some areas to insert more burials, and the use of clean sand fill around a few burials. Damaged or disturbed burials were not reported. Caked sand below some burials indicated decomposition in situ. In a couple of cases an intact room was used as a chamber for one or more burials, but in other cases room walls were destroyed when the burials were put in. Smaller groups of similar burials were located in the Arena Blanca sector of the Paracas site, where they were set into habitation structures associated with Topará tradition ceramics.

The Ocucaje tomb information comes from two cemetery areas, Pinillo and Cerro Max Uhle. In both areas, tomb form was quite variable ([Rubini and Dawson n.d.](#)). Many tombs were cuadrangular, with walls of paraboloid adobes. They frequently have two chambers, a rectangular chamber over a smaller pit, separated by a platform of huarango logs and mud and straw plaster. Canes can also appear as part of walls or floor. Tombs usually house individual burials, which may appear in either the upper or the lower chamber. Artifacts may be clustered in either chamber, or divided among the two. Many EIP 1 tombs are simpler in structure, and in some a large storage vessel is set into the lower chamber. Some simple pit tombs occur in this phase.

Based on tomb form alone, it would appear that we have three contrasting burial traditions: (1) collective, bottle-shaped pit tombs, ideally with a stone-lined antechamber (Caverns), (2) simple pit burials massed in abandoned habitation areas (Necropolis), and (3) individual adobe-walled tombs with one or two chambers (Ocucaje). It is tempting to suggest that the presence of simple pits in the Cavernas and Ocucaje areas might be associated with the Topará intrusion into the region, but the sample and artifact associations are not sufficient to support that hypothesis.

### **Necropolis Gravelots, Status and Social Roles**

The gravelot as a unit of analysis provides us with general criteria for distinguishing different classes of burials. I examine the Necropolis burials first because I have the most direct information on gravelot associations. Also, the evidence for extremely elaborate burials leads me to search here for evidence for the nature of social and political leadership associated with Topará. I will then compare it to the evidence for such leadership associated with Paracas tradition burials in the caverns and Ocucaje cemeteries.

The Necropolis gravelots consisted of a conical funerary bundle composed of textiles and other artifacts (which I will here call the "internal offerings") wrapped in layers around the interred individual, who sits in a squatting position (*en cuclillas*) with knees and arms drawn tightly to the chest and bound with a cord. Adjacent to the funerary bundle there are "external offerings," which typically include ceramics, baskets, and foodstuffs, often wrapped in a cloth, and may include staffs, spears, and a "signal staff" of cane tipped with cotton or feathers.

Tello and his team originally divided the Necropolis funerary bundles into three categories based on size. The X bundles are 1.2 to 1.5 meters in height, while the Y bundles are about one meter and the Z bundles less than one meter in height. Based on inventories produced when bundles were opened, I consider the funerary bundles to group into two categories, which I characterize as 1) diverse, low-status burials (most Y and Z) and 2) specialized, high-status burials (X and some Y).

The low-status burials consist of external offerings and a small conical bundle generally containing one individual, although in some cases an adult and child or two juveniles are together in a single bundle. Tello and other members of the Museo Nacional team identified men and women, infants, juveniles, adults and elderly persons among these burials<sup>3</sup>. As I have access to physical descriptions and inventories from only a small number of burials I will not draw any demographic conclusions, but the diversity among these burials suggests that they represent a general population. Most individuals have the distinctive annular (*cilindrico tabular*) type of head alteration associated with the Necropolis, though one example of a front-to-occipital (*cuneiforme* or *Tabular Erecta*) caverns type alteration is mentioned.

The person may wear a headdress and in some cases a loincloth is mentioned. The mouth is filled with wadded cotton, and cotton may cover eyes and other orifices. One or more sheet gold ornaments or fragments appear in mouth and in or near other orifices. One or more garments may be wadded against the chest. A garment may be wrapped around the body, and one or two shrouds of cotton or camelid fiber cloth are wrapped to make a well-formed conical bundle, which is generally stitched on the outer layer. The internal offerings differ from one burial to the next, and include tools such as fishnets or carrying nets, weapons such as a stone-headed club (*porra*) or spearthrower (*estólica*), and musical instruments such as a *quena* flute or cane or birdbone panpipe. Heavily embroidered textiles have not

been recuperated from these burials, though we must take into account the fact that textiles and other organic materials are poorly preserved in the simply wrapped burials.

The more elaborate burials contain many more objects, including the elaborately embroidered textiles that made the Paracas Necropolis famous. At the same time, the array of objects found in all of these burials is quite consistent, and the elaborate burials do not include all the types of objects - and types of people - found in the simpler burials. The large funerary bundles contain a single individual, with the exception of bundle 91, that contains a bag of black beans in place of the body (Tello and Mejia 1979). Tello and the Museo Nacional team identify the individuals buried in large funerary bundles always as elder males, between 50 and 70+ years of age. Based on study of artifact inventories from 18 of the 38 bundles in this category, I consider these to be burials of individuals who exercised a high-status specialist role in communities of the Topará tradition.

The body is generally unclothed, although he may wear a headdress. There are sheet gold ornaments or fragments of such ornaments in the mouth and perhaps over eyes and other orifices, and wadded cotton in orifices and over the face. A large gourd bowl generally covers the face or is fitted between the knees and chin. The individual is seated in a large coiled basket, a type only known from this context, and is wrapped in a deerskin. Some garments are usually wadded near the chest and around the body. In this layer there usually appear some garments that appear to show signs of use. Most carry embroidery in border areas characteristic for each garment type. In this innermost layer a number of other types of artifacts may appear, notably cloth bundles containing yarns, needles, and leather bags holding pigments, cloth bundles containing sets of miniature garments, in one case a human head, and/or some of the types of artifacts typically placed on the outermost layer (see below).

While large numbers of embroidered textiles is a factor that correlates strongly with bundle size, in fact bundle size is caused by the quantity of very large cotton wrapping cloths or shrouds that appear in several layers, usually bound at the top with a cord to form a "false head" that also may be wrapped with headdress elements such as maquey fiber slings or plaited headbands. In bundle 378 bundle size is partly achieved by incorporating a large wicker basket placed upside down over a mass of vegetable fiber midway through the wrapping process (Tello 1929). In other large bundles, thick layers of wrapping cloths alternate with layers of large embroidered mantles and a few other garments and embroidered textiles of unknown use.

All garment types are based on fine plain-weave cotton or camelid hair four-selvage cloth panels.

Embroidery is done on border panels that are subsequently attached, as well as directly on the base fabric. There are examples of warp and weft interlocking. *Unku* tunics, *esclavina* shoulder ponchos, *wara* loincloths, and *falda* skirts are the basic body garments that recur in bundles of every period (see Paul 1990). *Turbante* or *ñañaka* headcloths are usually made of less densely woven cotton or camelid fiber fabrics with distinctive embroidery styles. Large mantles, often heavily embroidered, constitute a prominent part of the funerary bundle and in some layers are arranged as if "dressed" for public display. Smaller mantle-like cloths of diverse design occur in later burials, including *anakos* with ties attached on all four corners. In some burials there are many examples of each of the major garment types, while in others large numbers of one or two garments occur with few

examples of others. *Unku* tunics occur in large numbers in EH10 burials and are scarce in EIP2 burials, where mantles predominate.

It is common to find large numbers of garments with different imagery embroidered in closely related styles grouped in a single bundle. This second form of grouping has been used as a basis for seriation of the textiles. While there is certainly a sequential component to these style groupings, it is also the case that many of these groups appear to also correspond to a social unit, product of a single group of embroiderers under the same designer(s).

Were the bundles constructed in the process of a single series of funerary rites that occurred before the burial of the bundle, or were the funerary bundles of important people periodically disinterred and rewrapped? There is evidence to support both of these models. Most textiles that may have been used in life appear in the inner layer, together with other artifacts that may have been personally used. Many embroideries in inner layers appear to be earlier in style than those of the outermost layer. Unfinished embroideries can occur in all layers. Some garment sets appear scattered in the inner, middle, and outer layers. Finally, the outer layer always contains a distinctive set of garments and other artifacts that I consider to define the specialized role shared by all the individuals buried in this elaborate manner. If some bundles were rewrapped, this outer layer must have been reconstructed with each rewrapping.

The outermost layer of decorative textiles is capped by a quite standard set of artifacts. On top of one or more embroidered mantles there is an open-sided tunic constructed of panels of cotton cloth completely covered with featherwork, tabbed layers of deerskin, or a combination of the two. Small yellow-feathered panels that may have been wrist and ankle bands (Paul 1991) may appear on this layer or in the innermost layers. There are feathered "penacho," headdress ornaments, usually in pairs, and one or two feather fans with a twined reed handle. A hardwood (huarango) staff bound with bands of skin or sinew (sometimes feathered) usually has been roughly cut at one end<sup>4</sup>. A foxskin cut to be used as a headdress and in most cases decorated with featherwork is draped over the peak of the bundle. I will hereafter refer to this complex of objects as the "regalia."

Other headdress elements, such as headbands and slings, may also appear at this layer. Weapons, like the spearthrower (*estóllica*) and stone-headed club (*porra*), are commonly present. However, these tools of combat or the hunt also occur in simpler burials, whereas the regalia consistently occur together and only in the large funerary bundles. The large bundles are so consistent in their contents that it is easy to define a set of objects whose presence correlates with bundle size. Together with the regalia, these include heavily embroidered textiles, cloth bundles containing miniature garments or bags of pigment and embroidery supplies, coiled funerary baskets, a deerskin wrapping the cadaver, and a reed mat placed over the top of the fully wrapped bundle.

Embroidered clothing and the regalia are prominently featured in the imagery embroidered on the textiles. Human-looking figures are often depicted wearing and carrying the objects that appear in the outer layer of the funerary bundle, and "supernatural" figures that combine attributes of various predatory animals often wear and carry these objects. They are also shown with facial ornaments like the sheet gold ornaments found in many burials, and with weapons that appear either with or independent from the regalia, particularly spearthrowers, spears, knives, and slings. They frequently carry severed human heads, which are rarely included in the funerary bundles.

Gold facial ornaments do not strongly correlate with bundle size, despite their prominence in embroidered imagery. While some large bundles are associated with more and more complete sheet gold ornaments than are found in most simple burials, others only have a couple of pieces. In general, the gold face ornaments found in Necropolis burials are smaller and simpler in design than those known from Ocucaje, and are less prominent than the depiction of such ornaments on the embroideries.

The number and quality of ceramics, baskets and other external offerings also do not correlate with bundle size. While staffs and spears occur in embroidered imagery, the external offerings such as baskets, ceramic bowls, pots, and funerary bottles do not appear. Nor do the gourds typically found in the inner layer of offerings. The objects absent from embroidered imagery tend to be objects whose presence in the burials does not correlate with bundle size.

### **The Funerary Rites**

Based on this analysis of the gravelot unit, we can define three aspects of the funerary rite. One is a universal ritual, involving the preparation of the cadaver for burial<sup>5</sup>, the placement of cotton and gold ornaments or fragments in the mouth and elsewhere, the formation of a conical bundle with the outer shroud, sewing it closed, and the placement of the bundle in the Necropolis area with its set of external offerings and signal staff.

The second is a personal aspect of the ritual, which for most people involved the inclusion in the inner wrappings of some personal artifacts such as clothing, tools and other objects they may have used in life, or that were given to them by those who buried them. The particular ceramics, baskets, foodstuffs and weapons placed as external offerings may be part of the personal ritual. Perhaps linked more closely with the community of mourners than with the deceased individual, their nature and extent does not correlate closely with other evidence for status and personal identity of the buried person.

The third is a specialized ceremonial aspect associated with a high-status; a specialized identity associated with some elder males. It begins with special treatment of the body, including the special deerskin wrap and basket. The production of embroidered textiles for the funeral rites and burial is indicated by the inclusion of incomplete embroideries and many garments with no sign of wear. Objects associated with warrior and supernatural imagery are placed on the outside decorative layer of the bundle. Thus the bundle is topped by regalia that may have also been worn by that individual in life. Whether in life or in death, in this regalia the buried individual may become, or represent, one of the figures depicted on the textiles. If bundles were displayed in public ceremonies before their burial in the Necropolis or were disinterred for display at subsequent events, these objects would "dress" the bundle for that occasion.

The pattern of social differentiation associated with the specialist, high status burials does not correspond to a model of ascribed or inherited status, but rather to a model of status attained by elder males who achieve social power in the course of their lifetime. Based on the iconographic associations, I argue that they achieve this status through participation in a ritual society associated with the roles of warrior, ancestor, and mediator with supernatural power.



## Comparison with Caverns and Ocucaje Burials

The regalia of high-status Necropolis burials does not correspond to any comparable complex of artifacts in the caverns burials. Nor are there caverns burials associated with very large funerary bundles. Instead, the wrapping of individual burials, where preserved, creates irregularly shaped bundles that combine loose wrapping, sewing, and binding with cords. More of the energy invested in funerary ritual was of a collective nature, spent on the construction of the burial chamber and entrance tunnel. What kind of social unit occupies a single tomb? Interestingly, the bilobal and cuneiform head alteration styles indicate the presence of two social groups among the caverns burials, separated in some tombs and combined in others ([Tello and Mejía 1979](#)).

The diversity of human remains and associated objects described in the better-preserved caverns burial contexts is similar to the diversity of the simple Necropolis burials. The distinct styles of head alteration (bilobal and *cuneiforme*) and of associated artifacts differentiate most Paracas tradition burials of the caverns cemetery from most Topará tradition burials of the Necropolis. At the same time, parallels in function-related formal categories among their ceramics, textile garments, and other types of artifacts indicate that these different societies shared features of their way of life. Descriptions of a few burials that combine artifacts and practices characteristic of the two traditions indicates that they cohabited to some degree on the peninsula, as well as in Ocucaje.

Some Ocucaje gravelots are well documented and described ([Rubini and Dawson n.d.](#)) while other consist only of lists of objects reported to have been found in the same tomb ([King 1965](#)). In many of these looted burials textiles were not conserved, and the purported gravelots only include ceramics and gold ornaments. Where other objects were preserved, we find spears and spearthrowers, and baskets as well as ceramic bowls for the external offerings. Human remains are not included in the collections, so evidence for cranial alteration type is imprecise.

Most ceramic and textile types identified at Ocucaje are technically similar to those described at the caverns and are grouped as the same tradition. Regional differences in ceramic styles characterize the Paracas tradition. By EH 10, however, the presence of both funerary bottles in a pure Topará style and fine bowls combining features of both traditions speaks of a direct and intensive contact between the two societies. Painted funerary masks, a textile type unique to Ocucaje, carry an iconography that is intimately related to many Linear style figures embroidered on EH 10 Topará complex *unku* shirts and mantles.

One or more funerary masks are placed on the outer layer of decorative wrappings over a cotton-filled pad formed by their long warp ends, in some cases below a cane-and-feather structure placed like a headdress. In a few burials, a complex of associated objects appears on this outermost layer. This includes a feathered cotton band with a fox muzzle mounted in the middle, in one case equipped with panels that hang like feet on either side. A feathered cape or mantle is present, as well as a feathered fan and a hardwood staff bound with rings of skin or sinew. Headbands are incorporated into this outer "false head". In one case a spearthrower is said to be from the same burial. Purported ceramic associations in Soldi burials 27 and 28 include EH 9 Paracas ceramics and Topará style bowls.

In these apparently early Ocucaje burials we can identify a complex of artifacts that correspond to the regalia associated with high status Necropolis burials. The Ocucaje regalia associations are relatively reliable, as in several cases the objects constituting the "false head" were conserved after excavation as a single unit, as they had been found. In these Ocucaje burials other artifacts depicted in images of warrior figures and supernaturals are also present, such as large gold facial ornaments, slings, and garments. Other types of objects like those found in high status Necropolis burials also occur at Ocucaje, such as cloth bundles containing miniature textiles.

While there are only two examples of well documented associations of a set of regalia conserved and recorded as a unit at Ocucaje, incomplete sets appear among the groups of artifacts listed as associated in several other burials of the Soldi and Rubini collections. The existence of a parallel range of associated artifacts, distinct in style but parallel in function, suggests the existence of a social institution at Ocucaje parallel to that associated with high status in the Necropolis cemetery. Evidence for this institution appears at Ocucaje in burials contemporary with the earliest evidence for direct contact between the two traditions, and in association with such evidence. I argue that this institution became the vehicle for social, political and ritual leadership in both societies in the period when intensive contact was initiated between them, and was the vehicle for that contact.

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## Notes

1 In the Ica area "huarango" can refer to *Acacia* sp. or to *Prosopis* sp., elsewhere known as *algarrobo*.

2 Some simple pit tombs may reflect temporal or cultural differences, but ceramic associations in most cases were scarce and not well reported.

3 I base my arguments here on the physical identifications carried out by Dr. Julio C. Tello, a physician who trained in physical anthropology and archaeology at Harvards Peabody Museum before returning to Peru to become Perus first professional archaeologist. I also rely on the skilled and meticulous work of Tellos principle field and laboratory assistant, Toribio Mejía Xesspe, who compiled and published field and laboratory notes from the Museo Nacional team ([Tello 1959](#), [Tello and Mejía 1979](#)) and Pedro Weiss, who carried out extensive study of skeletal remains ([Weiss 1961](#)). Sex determination was largely based on characteristics of the skull, and on preserved genitalia where possible. Age was based on characteristics of the teeth and hair, and on cranial sutures where they were exposed.

4 In some cases the sinew-bound staff is reported among the external offerings.

5 Tello asserts that the mummified bodies showed clear signs of artificial mummification procedures ([Tello 1929](#)). Yacovleff, a member of the excavation team who published his own analysis of several burials, asserted that only natural mummification was evident ([Yacovleff and Muelle 1934](#)). This controversy may well reflect some variability in the process of body preparation.

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