

TEXTILES AS POLITICAL ART

by

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Abstract

By comparing the role of textile craft specialization in the ancient Southwest to the central highlands of Peru, I explore how textiles act as a form of political art. Political art is a symbolic interpretation illustrating the relationship between a society's expression of power and life. Three lines of evidence help illustrate the comparison: archaeological data, ethnohistoric data, and ethnographic analogy. Peruvian textiles during the Wanka II to Wanka III transition symbolize an *effective* form of political control. The creation, trade and acquisition of the symbolically loaded crafts aid in sanctification of chiefly authority, ensuring acceptance of the political hierarchy. In contrast, textiles from the late Pueblo II to early Pueblo III transition in the Western Anasazi region symbolize an *affective* means of political control. The physical transformation of cotton into cloth is part of a longer prayer expressing a request to the rainmaking gods for water. In both instances, the societies of the two transition periods mark significant sociopolitical reorganization resulting in an increased demand for textiles. Yet, the symbolic meaning associated with textile production differs given two very different social contexts -- the Western Anasazi, a broadly defined, widely dispersed tribal structure, and the Wanka, a complex chiefdom resettled by the Incan state.

Introduction

Textiles act as a form of political art incorporating cultural values, morals and ideals, and the weaver's design process. Political art is a symbolic interpretation illustrating a relationship between power and life. The sharing of textile technology, style and design between individuals conveys a message of who they are. Thus, community members feel a sense of social belonging. The transmission of culture through portable symbolically loaded crafts affects the development of societies all over the world.

To explore these ideas I compare the role of textile craft specialization in the ancient Southwest with that of the central highlands of Peru. I focus on the period including the late Pueblo II (Expansion: A.D. 1000 - 1150) to early Pueblo III (Transition/Differentiation: A.D. 1150 -1250) transition in the Western Anasazi region and on the Wanka II (Late Intermediate Period: A.D. 1350 - 1460) to Wanka III (Late Horizon: A.D. 1460 - 1533) transition in the Yanamarca Valley (Figures 1 and 2). Societies of the two transition periods mark significant socio-political reorganization resulting in increased demand for textiles. My interests lie in the symbolic meaning associated with textile production and how this meaning manifests itself in two very different social contexts -- the Western Anasazi, a broadly defined, widely dispersed tribal structure, and the Wanka, a complex chiefdom resettled by the Incan state. In contrasting these societies, I wish to show how *power* manifests itself differently in distinct social contexts. Three lines of evidence help illustrate the comparison: archaeological data, ethnohistoric data, and ethnographic analogy. In my conclusion, I explore the relationship between skilled crafting and power, and *effective* versus *affective* power acquisition (Helms 1994; Rappaport 1971a, 1971b; Drennan 1976).

Archaeological Evidence for Textile Craft Specialization

Many inherent problems arise when identifying textile craft specialization in the archaeological record. Often the weaver's tools¹, spindle whorls, loom parts, loom holes, battens, and needles, have a higher chance of survival than the perishable raw materials and final products (Figure 3). By documenting the intensity of production and differential distribution of raw materials we can reconstruct the organization of production for these two transition periods.

Wanka II - Wanka III Archaeological Evidence

The Upper Mantaro Archaeological Research Project (UMARP) found that two competing chiefdoms were evident in the Yanamarca valley during Wanka II. The population doubled from previous periods and settlement shifted from low-lying, agriculturally productive land to marginal hill top localities, presumably for defensive purposes. Settlements tended to be self-sufficient, relying heavily on agropastoralism (Costin 1991b). Social hierarchy varied from site to site.

The expanding Incan Empire dominated the Wanka III period. The Inca state resettled "the population into smaller communities at lower elevations, closer to the most productive agricultural resources" (Costin 1991b:6). Several communities specialized in agricultural production (Earle et al. 1986), while others specialized in the production of additional commodities (Costin 1986).

Costin, a member of the UMARP, documented changes in the organization of textile production from the Wanka II to Wanka III periods. She concluded that spinning, and by inference weaving, occurred in all the households during Wanka II. Each

¹ The spindle usually consists of a thin, round piece of wood and a whorl. The whorl functions to keep the spindle rotating. The whorl's weight maintains the balance to ensure correct rotation without stretching and breaking the fibers (Hoppe and Edberg 1975). Thus, different size whorls and spindles determine thread sizes.

household was self-sufficient, producing utilitarian textiles for immediate consumption. In two instances, however, the amount of spinning was greater. First, weaving appeared more intensive at the high-elevation sites located closer to the pasturage of wool producing camelids² (Costin 1991b). Second, the elite households produced nearly twice as much as the commoners. Costin suggests "that most 'surplus' cloth production in elite households was destined for circulation within the political economy" (1991b:11). Thus, a system of elite household production structured the organization of manufacture.

On the other hand, during Wanka III times, the Inca reorganized the political economy to increase state revenues. Tribute and taxation fell on all members of society - elite and commoner. With the Inca conquest, "the organization of production changed to the dual system of corvee labor for the production of rough cloth and retainer workshops for the production of fine cloth" (Costin 1991b:20). That is, the state forced the labor and then removed the products "from the direct control of Wanka" weavers to redistribute the goods at their own discretion (Costin 1991b:18).

Late Pueblo II - early Pueblo III Archaeological Evidence

The Western Anasazi is a term encompassing a large and widely diverse region in Northeastern Arizona. Four branches comprise the area: the Winslow, Kayenta, Tusayan and Virgin (Gumerman and Dean 1989; Figure 4). A cursory analysis of ceramic and wooden spindle whorl counts from sites in this region suggests a dramatic increase in textile production after A.D. 1000 (Figures 5 - 6). By A.D. 1000, the Anasazi grew, spun and wove cotton with the aid of heddle looms.

The late Pueblo II period (A.D. 1000 - 1150) population increased resulting in dispersed settlement with sites occupying all environmental regimes. Farming was the primary subsistence strategy. Similar to the Wanka II patio groups, Anasazi hamlets appeared to be economically self-sufficient.

²Most of the Incan textiles were woolen.

The late Pueblo II heralds "the development of localized traditions in ceramics, architecture, and in some cases subsistence strategies" (Gumerman and Dean 1989:119). Archaeologists define these localized traditions in terms of stylistic similarities and raw material resource locations. Ceramic, architectural and textile styles express symbolic ethnic boundaries. Ethnic identity does not manifest itself unless it has a reason too. Ethnic groups tend to share similar symbols to convey a message of who they are. The only way they can convey this message is if they have an audience. In most cases, the audience is other ethnic groups (Pandian 1988). This symbolic, material manifestation of ethnic identities and boundaries implies an increase in the complexity of group membership and boundary maintenance.

In early Pueblo III (A.D. 1150 - 1250) settlement concentrated into dense centers located along lowland drainages where farmland and water were abundant (Gumerman and Dean 1989). Dependence on agriculture increased substantially. Site placement near natural water sources and construction of reservoirs suggests a primary concern for domestic water. Sites fall into two types: (1) scattered pithouses associated with masonry lined kivas; (2) "a more traditional pueblo configuration with a masonry roomblock facing an open or enclosed plaza containing one or more kivas" (Gumerman and Dean 1989:121). Communities continued to be self-sufficient with an increased emphasis on localization or ethnic group memberships and a decrease in interregional interaction.

Unfortunately, textile research in the Western Anasazi region focuses primarily on the description of the remains associated with textile manufacture. Studies typically avoid reconstructing the social dynamics of cotton textile production. Fortunately, preservation of spinning and weaving tools in conjunction with the final products is considerably better compared to the highlands of Peru. Paleoethnobotanists easily extract and identify cotton seeds, bolls and pollen. Pitstructure floors preserve loom anchor holes. Thus, each step of the production process can be defined. Problems of differential

preservation arise but this should not halt research focusing on the organization of production and its inferred meaning. Due to the lack of specific research on these particular issues, I draw on data from all over the Western Anasazi region.

As previously stated, cotton³ does not show up in the Western Anasazi region until after A.D. 1000. Once it arrived, presumably from the Hohokam area, cotton cultivation spread. Yet, the agricultural limitations confined it to hot, well-watered, low-lying locations. Thus, differential access to this highly versatile material began at the outset of its introduction. Where alpaca wool pasturage determined the locations of textile production intensity in the Yanamarca valley, the environmental limitations of cotton cultivation controlled this intensity on the Colorado Plateau. Careful tending of the plants was a prerequisite for cotton's success in these northern regions. Restrictions based on the environment imply the existence of production loci with varying levels of textile specialization. Raw cotton and textiles took on the role of prestige because it was so hard to obtain. This type of commodity set the early Pueblo III period up for a highly complex intraregional exchange system that developed further during the Pueblo IV (Wilcox 1987; Adams and Hays 1991).

I suggest that the increase in spindle whorl counts from late Pueblo II to early Pueblo III indicate a dramatic growth in textile manufacture. New stylistic messages reflect "the need to develop mechanisms within the village units to encourage cooperation rather than competition between formerly autonomous social units" (Adams 1989). Similar to the Wanka II to Wanka III transition, the increased intensity of textile production correlates with a shift in sociopolitical organization. Where the Wanka II inhabitants experienced a resettlement by the Incan state, the Western Anasazi experienced an increase in the complexity of group membership.

³Cotton requires an extremely long growing season (172 days) and much water. Ethnographic evidence demonstrates that a variety of methods were used to obtain a cotton harvest. Farmers would soak their seeds before planting and break open the immature bolls if a frost threatened (Huckell 1993).

Ethnohistoric and Ethnographic Analogues

I use Peruvian ethnohistoric documents and Southwest ethnographic accounts to infer the meaning of textile craft specialization to the ancient people. I realize ancient Andean and Southwestern communities underwent extensive changes from the analyzed transition periods to the documentation of these historic accounts. Yet, considerable cultural continuity connects modern (historic) communities with the ancient communities. Perhaps the symbolic meanings associated with textiles did not drastically change. I assume that a significant portion of symbolic content remains in both cases.

Peruvian Ethnohistoric Documents

Although sixteenth century pictures and documents are severely biased by their Spanish (and sometimes native) authors, they aid considerably to our understanding of ancient Andean lifeways. In a thorough study of these documents, Murra (1980) reconstructs the ancient Incan political economy. After the conquest of the Inca state two types of weaving specialists exist: *cumbi camayoc*, male weavers, and *acela*, nun-like women of all ages. Both groups wove *cumbi*, the fine garments for stately purposes. *Cumbi* had the value of royal privilege (1980:74), brokering and solidifying the full range of social relations from marriage, to patron-client relationships, and to the political structure of the empire (Murra 1980). These products were the basis for the redistributive system, which maintained cohesion for the Inca state.

Furthermore, the Inca conquest represents a situation where a dominant power intruded with a different ideology (Silverblatt 1987). The Inca state had to incorporate their dominant views into the present society. Once accepted the Incan empire appeared as "a closed ethnic body" composed of several polities, chiefdoms and tribes (Moseley 1992) with numerous integrative structures holding together much diversity. In order for the principle of the hierarchy to exist it had to appear as "*natural (cosmological)* or

sacred-- and therefore unquestionable" (Helms 1992:324). The acquisition of wealth, in the form of textiles, visibly distinguished the elite from the commoners. When worn or displayed, the craft person's products carried aesthetic, symbolic and sociopolitical value. The wearing and possession of textiles appeared sanctioned by the divine, therefore the elites played a crucial role in continuing the harmony of the cosmos. The increase in textile production from the Wanka II to Wanka III represented how and why the Inca were a political success.

Southwest Ethnographic Analogs

In 1528, Alvar Nunez de Vaca and his three companions learned that "wealthy agriculturists who resided on the Upper Rio Grande," wove cotton blankets (Ortiz 1979). The villagers raised cotton and bartered their textiles for goods not produced at home (Ortiz 1979:190). Rio Grande textiles, like the Incan textiles, were an integral and significant part of the redistributive system helping to maintain social cohesion.

In ethnographic accounts of the Zuni, Matilda Cox Stevenson (1987) addressed the variety of roles cotton plays in puebloan society. The cotton plant symbolizes white clouds in the Zuni religion (Stevenson 1915) and often occurs in symbolic contexts with the rain-making gods.

In 1882, Matilda Cox Stevenson observed the preparing of cotton for the kiva loom at Shimopavi, a Hopi village.

This ceremony, which is strictly religious, must be performed with many prayers. A piece of commercial cotton cloth was spread upon the floor in the chamber of the high priest (head rain priest) and a disk-shaped bed of sand was laid upon the cotton cloth...The process of manipulating the cotton began. A white cloth containing cotton pods was deposited by the sand bed, and each man of the circle began picking the cotton and placing it on the bed. The picked cotton was patted with a willowy rod, some two and a half feet in length, with five fingers or prongs wrapped securely to it...The better part of a day was required to prepare but a small quantity of cotton for the spindle. Then the spinning began...(Stevenson 1987).

Clearly, the act of crafting or the transformation of cotton into cloth plays a significant symbolic role in maintaining "a direct, living connection between the

temporal/spatial here-and-now of the cultural setting and the there-and-then of outside dimensions" (Helms 1993:18). The physical transformation of cotton is part of a longer prayer expressing a request to the rainmaking gods for water. In conclusion, cotton and cotton textiles could also play a socially integrative role to the early Pueblo III societies maintaining cohesion through redistributive and ritual practices.

Discussion

At the onset I suggested textiles were a form of political art. Throughout the paper I demonstrated how textiles played a critical role in the social maintenance of a group. The increase in textile production in both instances directly correlated with a shift in socioeconomic power. Textiles served as a symbol of and vehicle for this power through ritual and redistributive practices.

Clearly, *power* is a loaded term having numerous meanings in different social contexts. Helms regards "power not as something to be exercised or as a relational condition but as a 'thing' or 'quality' to be acquired or accumulated, power must be understood not as an analytical term or an abstract concept but as something real and concrete; as something that simply 'is'" (1993:9). She views crafting and acquisition of long-distance trade goods as activities associated with the acquisition of power.

Robert Drennan (1976) elaborates by applying one of Rappaport's theoretical stances. Rappaport recognizes two types of power: *effective* and *affective*. *Effective* power suggests the existence of a larger "administrative structure capable of wielding a certain amount of power" to "ensure the acceptance of social conventions" (Drennan 1976:346). On the other hand, Drennan associates *affective* power with the evolutionary stage "during which the *technology of force* was not sufficiently advanced to render large numbers of men a truly effective coercive body" (Drennan 1976:346). Religion, through ritual, is the *affective* means to ensure social acceptance, strengthening the bonds uniting members of a single local group (Drennan 1976: 347-348).

With this in mind, the ancient Peruvian textiles symbolized the *effective* means of political control. Upon resettling the competing chiefdoms into the lower elevations, the Inca imposed a regional peace. Surrounding the capital at Cuzco, the commoners supported the city by contributing their labor services through tribute and taxation. Textiles were a chief commodity in this redistributive system. In addition, industrial goods, such as textiles, expressed wealth in a vertically differentiated society (Renfrew 1984). The quantity and fine quality of the *cumbi* symbolically expressed the wealth, power and control of the elite. Therefore the display of prestige goods, aids in sanctifying chiefly authority therefore ensuring its acceptance.

In contrast, the ancient Western Anasazi textiles symbolized an *affective* form of political control. The late Pueblo II to early Pueblo III transition period experienced the emergence of a sequential hierarchy -- "a structure for the organization of consensus among basically egalitarian aggregates of increasing inclusiveness" (Johnson 1989:378). In these instances population levels were too high to reach a decision based on consensus. Yet, population was too low to support a large administrative structure. Thus, the formation of an institution beyond the "basal organizational units" (Johnson 1989:379) was necessary to make decisions affecting all concerned. More common than not, ritual was the basis of this institution (Johnson 1989).

Simultaneous with the introduction of cotton cultivation in the Western Anasazi region, we saw the emergence of the Kachina Cult (Adams 1991). During this period, Gumerman and Dean (1989) suggested early Pueblo III inhabitants had a heightened concern for domestic water. In response, the puebloan peoples built a variety of water management facilities, primarily reservoirs and other storage structures (Gumerman and Dean 1989). Could another response to this water shortage include an increased emphasis on ceremonies focusing on rainmaking themes? If so, the transformation of raw cotton into cotton cloth was an active and material expression of this ritual *affective* power. In addition, "the importance of raw cotton, yarn, and cloth as logical trade items

to areas where the plant was not cultivated cannot be underestimated" (Kent 1983:28). Due to this restriction these items carried a certain amount of prestige. Thus, the power and wealth of a community relates to the possession of these ritually charged items.

Conclusion

To conclude, the textile craftsperson constantly creates and brings this power, whether *affective* or *effective* to their society. Weavers become "associated with, perhaps filled with, this same power, as do those who come to possess such goods and surround themselves with such extraordinary objects" (Helms 1993:9). In this sense, textiles are a form of political art, acting as a symbolic manifestation of the relationship between a society's expression of power and cultural values, morals, and ideals.

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