The tupo: ancestral symbol of feminine identity

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The *tupo* is a type of brooch, decorated at one end –known as the head– and tipped at the other end with a pin. Both utilitarian and decorative, this object was used in two ways: firmly set diagonally to hold the outer shawl that covered a woman's shoulders; or in pairs to fasten a woman's dress, while at the same time helping to ensure that the garment adhered to the contours of the female form. When used in this latter fashion, *tupos* were positioned at shoulder height with the decorative head facing downwards. In many cases, they were also fastened by a cord, which was passed through the orifices found in the widest part of the head of the *tupo*.

We cannot be sure if this type of personal jewelry was used as part of female clothing by all social classes –this being the case, it is likely that it would have been made from metals of varying quality, in accordance with individual rank– or if *tupos* were only used by the elite. We do know, however, that such personal decoration was used during festivities and other important moments in the life of a woman. They were also used as part of burial attire, in order to fasten the textiles in which individuals were wrapped inside their funerary bundles. In addition, they have been found as part of the clothing made to cover the miniature gold and silver Inca figurines that formed part of the funerary offerings that accompanied the sacrifices of young girls, such as those found at Cerro El Plomo, in Chile, and Mount Ampato, in Peru.

Very few researchers have referred to the *tupo*. Of those, the Peruvian Gonzáles Holguín, in his *Vocabulario de la lengua qquichua o del inca*, mentioned two types of brooches: «*Ttipqui: small pin or brooch with which the outer blanket is fastened»*, and *«Tupo: the pin with which Indian women fasten their saya* [tunic]*».* An interesting distinction between these brooches has been proposed, related to the manner in which they were employed. The *tupo* would have been used in pairs to fasten a tunic (*acso*) at shoulder height, with the decorative parts of the device facing downward. These were then secured with a woolen cord, which prevented them from working loose. In contrast, the smaller *ttipqui* would have been used singly to fasten a shawl (*lliclla*) at

chest height, with the decorated head facing upward. In this publication we will employ the term *tupo* in a general sense, for it is impossible to ascertain whether the pieces in the José Carlos Delgado collection were fashioned to be worn singly or in pairs, and therefore we cannot know if they were used to fasten a shawl –that is, as a *ttipqui*– or for securing a tunic, in the manner of a *tupo*.

According to some authors, in addition to serving as personal adornments, *tupos* would also have been employed as mirrors. In support of this hypothesis we can mention the mirror held in the left hand of the *coya* Mama Huaco in a drawing by Guamán Poma. The highly-polished silver surface would have been capable of reflecting an image and thereby serving as a mirror, although further ethnographic study is needed to clarify this supposition.

Other researchers have suggested that *tupos* may also have been used as knives: «*The pins,* topo*, or* thopu*, were usually sharpened at their broad ends, so as to be used also as knives*» (Zárate, quoted by Uhle 1991:89). Could Zárate be referring to the use of the *tupo* as a defensive weapon? Tristan Platt (quoted by Sagárnaga 2007) mentions a document in the Potosí Historical Archive, dated 1827, which tells of how an Indian woman killed her drunken partner when defending herself from the beating to which he was subjecting her, armed only with a *tupo*. Such incidents must have lain behind the coining of the popular saying: «*when women get out their* tupos*, men make themselves scarce*».

Coastal and highland ancestral use of the *tupo*, from Colombia to Chile

The *tupo* was used over a wide geographical area; evidence of its use has been found throughout the Andean region. The Swedish researcher Nordenskiold (1921) made a study of the geographical distribution of several types of copper-based artifacts within the territory dominated by the Inca state during the period of its maximum expansion. Among these objects we find *tupos* with characteristic Inca designs: circular, fan-shaped or semicircular. The circular form was found in Ecuador, the northern coast of Peru, the Peruvian-Bolivian highlands and northwest Argentina. Fan-shaped and semicircular designs were also found in these territories, as well as in Chile. In all cases, the chemical composition of the pieces was that of a copper and tin alloy used to produce bronze.

In Colombia, at complexes in the southern Andes such as Nariño, and particularly the earliest sites, including Yacuanquer (400 AD to 600 AD), which were heavily influenced by traditions from Ecuador, copper *tupos* have been found. These Colombian dates for *tupo* use are almost as early as those recorded in Peru. Also, at the sites of Calima Yotoco, Calima Malagana (200 BC - 1300 AD) and Quimbaya Temprano (500 BC - 700 AD), in the Cauca river valley and the Gulf of Uraba in the Caribbean, a number of objects have been found that experts have classified as dual-use spatulas and pins. In other words, it is presumed that these artifacts served two functions: the extraction of *llipta* (the alkaloid catalyst used when chewing coca leaves) from the containers known as *poporos*, and the fastening of the shawls that formed part of female attire. However, although many of these items have been found together with *poporos*, this does not mean that they were all used for this purpose. A lack of contextual information for such discoveries, coupled with the margin of error inherent in radiocarbon dating, means that it is difficult to determine the exact use and precise period of the items found.