

Textiles of ancient Peru

Authors: María Ysabel Medina Castro | Roberto Gheller

INTRODUCTION

Since the earliest days of the Spanish conquest, Pre-Columbian textiles have been much admired for the great variety of materials, techniques, designs and decorative elements employed by the first nation peoples of the central Andean region occupied by present-day Peru.

The chronicles of the Indies from the 16th and 17th centuries and travel writings from later centuries speak of weavings so fine they were even compared to the silk of the Old World. The first of such reports came from Fernández de Oviedo, in his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, where he describes how the pilot Bartolomé Ruiz sighted, just off the coast of Ecuador, a vessel coming from the south loaded with a variety of products, including large quantities of woven garments and colorful blankets.

The importance of Pre-Columbian textiles was also recognized by the Bishop of Trujillo, Baltazar Jaime Martínez de Compañón y Bujanda, who amassed a collection that included pieces made from both wool fiber and feathers, as well as leaving for posterity a monumental work featuring a number of watercolors that vividly illustrate the weaving activity of the 18th century.

During the 19th century, Peru was visited by travelers and explorers who noted down their observations regarding textiles and subsequently included them in the accounts of their journeys. Charles Wiener, Ephraim George Squier, Mariano Eduardo de Rivero and Johann Jacob von Tschudi all included in their publications illustrative references to the Pre-Columbian textile tradition of Peru.

But it was only in the last century that the levels of interest we see today began, in the form of national and international research, publications and exhibitions focused on the Pre-Columbian textile tradition, including the first studies of its utilitarian, technological, iconographic, ethnographic and artistic aspects.

Such research was facilitated by the existence of a significant archaeological textile record, preserved by the favorable climatic conditions in parts of the Peruvian coast, where precipitation is minimal, as well as by the absence of decayed organic material in the tombs of cultures that carefully preserved the remains of their dead because they believed in the afterlife. Such conditions are comparable with those of North Africa, where ancient Egyptian culture developed.

The benign nature of the climate of Peru's southern coast contrasts with that of the northern coast, where a combination of the heavy precipitation experienced cyclically and the salinity of the local soil has destroyed almost all traces of the textile art produced by the Vicús, Moche and Lambayeque cultures. A similar fate befell the textiles of the highland Recuay and Huari cultures, where annual wet seasons ensured long ago that our modern archaeologists would find no vestiges of organic material. Consequently, their research has been restricted to coastal variants of Huari culture textiles, together with the information present in pottery artifacts.

The aim of this publication is not to present any definitive research, but rather to awaken in our readers an interest in Pre-Columbian textiles and recognition of the intrinsic value of this tradition, so that they might appreciate through their textile work the degree of cultural development attained by the ancient inhabitants of Peru. To that end, we will take a journey together through the chronology of several styles, emphasizing in our analysis the artistic and technological aspects of the Peruvian textile tradition.

IMPORTANCE OF TEXTILES IN THE PRE-COLUMBIAN WORLD

Textiles constitute a mirror in which the economic, social, political and religious development of every culture of ancient Peru can be seen reflected, as well as helping us to define the rank and status of the individuals for whom they were made, possessing as they do considerable mythical and sacred content in the form of their iconographic elements. Clearly, the production of textiles involved large numbers of people and huge quantities of raw materials –an achievement only possible within the context of highly organized societies able to implement the division of labor necessary for establishing the required processes.

The importance of textiles resided not only in their use as clothing. Their function went far beyond their role as garments. For example, there exist weavings the sheer size of which leads us to conclude that they were used as coverings for walls —as in the case of the painted fabrics which we will discuss later— or as wrappings for funerary bundles.

Weavings played a central role in social, political, religious and military organization. The power of the ruling class was evidenced, at least in part, by their dress, with an individual's rank expressed by the quality of the fabric worn, rather than the cut of a garment, given that in ancient Peru scissors were unknown and therefore clothing was more or less standardized in terms of style, although with variations between the dress worn by men and women.

In the Inca empire weavings were handed over to the state as a form of taxation, while alliances and marriages were sealed with the giving of items of clothing. In time of war, the victors would divest the vanquished of their clothing, as evidenced by Moche ceramics, with their fine line drawings in which naked prisoners are shown, deprived of both weapons and garments.

In his description of the Spanish occupation of Jauja, the chronicler Pedro Sancho wrote of how the Inca general Quizquiz burned a storehouse containing items of clothing, so that such a valued resource would not fall into the hands of the Spaniards.

In the religious context textiles also played a primary role, with weavings considered among the most meaningful offerings that could be made to the gods. Polo de Ondegardo mentions that “in all sacrifices the Incas burned large amounts of clothing which had been made by the community”. Another type of offering consisted of throwing weavings into rivers. Idols were often dressed in woven clothing, as evidenced by the offerings that accompanied sacrificed maidens, or *capaccochas*, like those found on Mount Ampato in the Peruvian region of Arequipa, Cerro El Plomo in Chile, and the province of Salta in northwestern Argentina. Some of the Chancay culture *cuchimilcos* unearthed by archaeologists have also been found to be wearing miniature woven garments.

Clearly, textiles were seen as indicators of the power held by the rulers of ancient Peru, particularly during the Inca period, when significant numbers of inhabitants were removed from

agricultural labor in order to work full-time on the production of clothing for the ruling elite and the army, who were the principal consumers of these costly resources.

RAW MATERIALS

From the dawn of humanity, people protected themselves from the elements by covering their bodies. Initially, this need was satisfied through the obtaining of fur and leather from hunted animals, but gradually humans began to discover how other aspects of their environment could furnish them with fabrics for both clothing and shelter. These new, softer fibers of vegetable (cotton) and animal (wool) origin replaced rushes, reeds and hemp.

The American cotton plant (*Gossypium barbadense*) is grown in the warm valleys of the Peruvian coast, producing long fibers ranging in color from white to dark brown.

The fibers of animal origin employed by ancient Peruvian cultures came from the wool of llamas (*Lama glama*), alpacas (*Lama pacos*), vicuñas (*Lama vicugna*) and guanacos (*Lama glama guanicoe*), and they ranged in color from white to brown, black or gray.

Use of primary resources was not limited to cotton or wool from camelids, as ancient peoples also made use of fur and skin from bats, human hair, gold and silver sequins, and multicolored feathers obtained through trade with ethnic groups in jungle areas, which they attached to plain fabric as decorative elements.

TEXTILE TECHNOLOGY

After cotton has been collected, it undergoes a washing process beginning with the removal of the seeds. It is then beaten repeatedly with a stick until a soft and spongy fiber is produced, which is ready to be spun.

After shearing, wool must be washed in order to remove any impurities, after which it is carded, or combed. These fibers are then laid out and washed again. Once they are clean, the fibers are ready to be spun.

In artisanal weaving, a forked wooden stick, or distaff, is used for spinning. The wool or cotton to be spun is placed in this device and wound through a spindle. A spindle is a small stick which is longer than it is thick, and tapered from the middle towards the ends. Traditionally, it was made from *chonta* wood. In order for the spindle to function, a weight, or *piruro*, must be employed, and this can be made from clay, stone, shell or wood. The size of the weight depends on the type of fiber to be spun.

During the spinning process, the fibers are stretched and twisted to give the thread elasticity and strength. This process can be performed to the right (S-twist) or to the left (Z-twist). Two S-twisted threads can be spun together, as can two Z-twisted threads. After the spinning comes the rolling or winding of the thread in order to form skeins organized according to color, thickness, or texture.

In Pre-Columbian Peru, prior to the weaving process and after spinning, when required the fibers could be dyed. For this process dyes of both vegetable and mineral origin were used. Vegetable dyes included indigo (*Indigofera suffruticosa*), chilca (*Baccharis polyanta*), California pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), and annatto (*Bixia orellana*). Cochineal (*Dactylopius coccus*), an insect that lives on cacti of the genus *Opuntia*, was also used. Dyes of mineral origin included hematite, limonite and cinnabar. Ancient Peruvians also utilized mollusks such as the Chilean abalone, or “*chanque*” (*Concholepas* sp.), similar to the European murex, from which they obtained purple dyes. To prevent pigments from fading or vanishing with use or over time, it was necessary to use a mordant, or fixative, such as alum or human urine. The yarn obtained from this labor intensive process was finally warped on a loom.

We know that at least three types of loom were used by ancient Peruvians: horizontal, vertical, and the belt or backstrap loom. The most commonly used variant was the backstrap loom, so-called because one end consisted of a kind of belt which was tied around the waist to enable the weaver to control the tautness of the warp, while the other end was tied to a tree, stake or other kind of support. Usually, the maximum width of weavings produced on this type of loom was 90 to 95 centimeters. To make larger weavings, horizontal or vertical looms were employed.

On these looms, textiles were produced through the progressive building up of sets of warp threads arranged vertically and weft threads arranged horizontally, with warps and wefts gradually interwoven to create the final object.

COMMONLY-USED TECHNIQUES

Many techniques were used in the manufacturing of Pre-Hispanic textiles, and below we will limit ourselves to describing those most commonly employed. The methods used varied across different cultural groups, and were also dictated by the ritual or utilitarian use to which the finished textile was to be put.

The principal techniques employed in ancient Peru included the following:

LOOPING: A structure consisting of a single element, built up through progressive interconnection to form successive loops, and often used for making bags and nets.

LACEWORK: This structure consists of two separate elements, where one serves as a fixed parallel component, while the other interacts with the first, interlacing with it.

TAPESTRY: Weavings in which the weft predominates over the warp, with the warp threads or yarn completely covered by the weft, and usually polychrome in order to form a design. Among the different types of tapestry, the most commonly seen is the slit tapestry, or kilim, where the weft threads separate the warp threads, creating empty spaces in the form of eyelets.

The most common decorative techniques were:

BROCADE: Unlike embroidery, this is a decorative technique created on the loom during the weaving process. To obtain this type of decoration, threads in the direction of the wefts are incorporated, thereby producing a supplementary element to the design.

WEFT FACE: Weavings where the weft completely covers the warp threads.

COMPLEMENTARY WEFTS: These are employed in the elaboration of structural designs where two sets of weft threads complement each other over the warp threads, forming different motifs. Usually floating weft threads are left on the reverse side of the weaving.

COMPLEMENTARY WARPS: Formed by the utilization of two warp threads of different colors that are structurally complementary; usually floating threads remain on the back of the weaving.

SUPPLEMENTARY WARPS are used for decorative purposes and might be compared with brocade work in reverse, in that they are super-structural threads arranged in the direction of the warp.

TIE-DYE: These are weavings where the decorative designs are added after the textile has been produced and parts of it are then covered according to the intended design, before being submerged in dye, so that the covered areas remain free of the dye being applied and the designs are formed by the base color of the cloth.

WARP FACE: Weavings where the predominant visual element is the warp, which covers the weft threads completely.

EMBROIDERY: Unlike brocade work, which is constructed during the weaving process, the decorative technique of embroidery is employed once the weaving has been completed, through the addition of superimposed stitches to form the intended design.

GAUZE: Part of the group of openwork structure techniques, gauze is composed of passive warp threads and active weft threads. Fine and delicate weavings are produced, formed by the combination of wefts over warps. In some cases, embroidery may also be employed over the structure as a decorative element.

DOUBLE CLOTH: To produce the warp, threads or yarns of two colors are placed in the loom, one over the other. The wefts are the same color as the warp threads, and the warp and weft are woven together to produce the intended design. In order to change color, warp threads in the desired color are employed, and in the completed weaving the designs produced can be seen on both sides of the piece, as a positive and negative image.

KNITTING: Using needles, this technique was often used to produce three-dimensional figures. These designs were positioned around the edge of a textile to form a border that was the only polychrome element of the overall composition.

REPRESENTATIVE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

BEGINNINGS

Weaving emerged very early in the history of Peru, beginning with the strings, baskets and matting produced from vegetable fibers and used by hunter-gatherers in their daily tasks. The oldest known examples of these types of objects have been dated to around 8000 BC (although there is disagreement among archaeologists concerning this date), and they were discovered at the Guitarrero cave site in Callejón de Huaylas, in the foothills of the Cordillera Blanca.

The use of weavings as items of clothing to replace the wearing of animal hides appears several thousand years later (around 2500 BC), with the discovery of cotton on the coast and wool in the highlands. These materials were adopted because they were more comfortable and flexible than hides, molding themselves more readily to the human form.

It is from this time —known as the Pre-Ceramic period— that the cotton textile discovered by Junius Bird at Huaca Prieta in the Chicama Valley dates. It was produced using the interlace technique, and despite being the product of a pre-loom era, the design of a bird-like figure (probably a condor) can be distinguished as the artistic intention of the creator of the piece.

CHAVÍN, 1000 BC - 200 BC

From around 1000 BC, a new artistic style appeared throughout the territory of Peru, during what has come to be known as the Andean Formative period. The artistic output of this culture is closely associated with religious concepts expressed through imagery that is both solemn and fearsome. The priest caste responsible for establishing the iconography used in a range of artistic expressions employed media that included textiles, pottery and stonework. Serpents, hawks, felines and anthropomorphic figures are featured, combined to form fantastic and fearsome beings that were subsequently adopted and modified in accordance with the worldviews of each of the successive cultures that emerged within the territory of ancient Peru.

During this period, significant advances were made in the art of textile production, such as the emergence of the loom, which led to the rapid growth of diverse weaving techniques, including tapestry, brocade and gauze.

In the different areas where Chavín cultural influence was felt, a marked variation is observed in the primary materials employed. Clearly, in the northern highlands (Cupisnique, Chongoyape and Kuntur Wasi) woolen products were produced, while in areas to the south (Carhua, Callango and Samaca) the preference was for painted cotton textiles. The motifs on such painted fabrics differ very little from the designs found on the stonework at the great temple of Chavín de Huántar, where the main protagonist is a deity with feline jaws, bird of prey claws, serpent hair or headdress, and outstretched hands, each holding a staff.

In the chromatic aspects of these designs, we find an absence of bright colors, with artists apparently preferring to employ a sober palette composed of ochre, white and sienna.

PARACAS, 700 BC – 100 AD

In 1925, under the supervision of Dr. Julio C. Tello, the first archaeological excavations were conducted on the Paracas peninsula. Previously, nothing had been known about the culture that would be given the name Paracas, and the many archaeological finds unearthed in this part of southern Peru had been associated with the development of Nazca society, due to the similarities they shared with the polychrome weavings and ceramics discovered in the Nazca region.

The dry climate of Peru's southern coast meant that the organic material of Paracas tombs was preserved, and this ancient culture has left us embroidered mantles with beautiful designs, made to the highest technological and esthetic standards, intended as offerings and placed inside funerary bundles. Research has shown that the social status enjoyed in life by the deceased was reflected in the richness and variety of the garments included as part of their funerary bundle.

During his excavation work at the tombs of Cerro Colorado and Cabeza Larga, Julio C. Tello unearthed more than 400 funerary bundles and concluded that Paracas culture went through two successive periods: Paracas Necropolis and Paracas Caverns.

During the Caverns period, the predominant primary material was cotton, from which plain weaves, painted textiles, double cloths, warp-faced weaves, tie-dyed designs, gauzes, tapestries and embroidery were produced. These fulfilled a number of functions, ranging from mantles, *unkus* and *llautos*, to skirts, cummerbunds and funerary wrappings. The iconographic designs on these items mostly featured anthropomorphic, serpent-like and feline figures.

In the subsequent Paracas Necropolis phase, there were no major additional variations to the iconographic motifs present during the earlier period. What was new was the use of two types of fiber —cotton and wool— and the level of excellence achieved in embroidery over a fabric base. Cotton was used in its natural white and brown varieties, and the wools used were vicuña, llama and alpaca.

The extraordinary mantles of this period were produced with a plain weave, usually of wool, which was then embroidered with figures arranged in either a checkerboard pattern or in horizontal or vertical bands. Embroidered figures were repeated with alternating colors in their details. In some funerary bundles, burial attire has been found comprising a mantle, skirt, turban, cape and *ñañaka*, all featuring the same iconographic design. For example, funerary bundle number 310 contained 45 blankets, 47 capes, 35 skirts, 19 *unkus* and 7 *llautos*.

These iconographic designs evoke mythological beings richly attired and wearing masks or facial paint, as well as feather headdresses. As symbols of their power, they hold scepters, knives or trophy heads. From their mouths there emerge appendages in the form of serpent motifs, within which seeds and fruits can be distinguished. Additional figures represent ocelots, foxes, monkeys, condors, whales, otters, vicuñas and alpacas.

NAZCA, 100 AD - 700 AD

Toward the end of the Paracas Necropolis period, the southern coast witnessed the rise of a new culture which we now know as Nazca. The Nazca people developed their spirituality through rites and ceremonies performed by a priest caste with the aim of ensuring an abundant food supply and the spiritual wellbeing of the populace.

In its initial form, Nazca society appears as a continuation of the Paracas Necropolis tradition, as expressed in the similarities between the two cultures' realist imagery and depictions of the "ocular being", felines, birds, fish, and trophy heads. It was during the subsequent phase, considered Nazca proper, that iconographic elements became more "magical". These designs are more complex, having evolved into non-realist, mythological imagery, with individual features both elongated and distorted. Through this process, a new, "syncretic" being was created—an amalgam of the divine, the human and the zoomorphic—in a transition to a final phase, during which strong Huari culture influence led to "non-realist compositions", comprising abstract and geometric motifs. During this phase, the decorative elements employed consisted of rectangles, steps, circles and bands.

In terms of structural techniques, there was a gradual abandonment of the embroidery inherited from Paracas in favor of highly-skilled incursions into slit tapestry weaving, weft weaving and discontinued warp, as well as gauzes and three-dimensional weavings in which miniature human faces were depicted, along with hummingbirds and flowers. Two techniques mastered by ancient Nazca artists to decorate mantles were the use of paint and feathers. Also of particular interest are the beautiful and colorful patchwork textiles manufactured through the joining together of tie-dyed squares or stepped designs.

In Nazca culture, the most commonly used fibers were wool and, to a lesser extent, cotton. With regard to the colors employed, the pictorial art developed as part of the culture's masterly pottery output was transferred to its textile production, and the colors utilized ranged from pink to violet, magenta, turquoise, amber, red, blue and yellow.

MOCHE, 50 AD - 800 AD

A contemporary of the southern Nazca culture, Moche society developed in the north of present-day Peru, between the Lambayeque and Nepeña coastal valleys. This was a class-driven society divided into a hierarchy dominated by the aristocracy (essentially comprised of priests and warrior-chiefs), who oversaw the lives of the general populace and the slaves who were enemy combatants captured in battle.

In spite of the scarcity of textile remains, due to the acidity of northern soils and the torrential, cyclical rains which affect Peru's northern coast, fragments have been found and these have helped us to understand how Moche textile production developed and what its function may have been. Also, the clothing seen in decorated Moche pottery enables us to better understand the role played by textiles in Moche society.

It is worth mentioning here the so-called "weavers' ceramic" from the Chicama valley, which is now housed in the British Museum. This work features a fine-line illustration showing in full the organization of a Moche textile workshop, in which women can be seen weaving with a backstrap loom and reproducing motifs recorded on boards or samplers.

The techniques most commonly employed by the Moche were brocade and tapestry (kilim). The designs featured on their textiles included geometric elements, incorporating step motifs, eight-pointed stars, circles, zigzags and spirals. Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures were usually shown in profile, displaying long tails and rich attire. They carried scepters in their hands, as well as, on occasion, trophy heads, and they were framed by stylized geometric designs. Representations of animals have also survived, and these include jaguars, serpents and camelids. Cotton fiber was used for the warp, employing an "S" twist, while wool in a "Z" twist was used for the weft.

TIAHUANACO, 200 AD - 800 AD and HUARI, 600 AD - 900 AD

Following a period characterized by individual regional developments, the Middle Horizon was defined by Huari hegemony. This culture emerged from the southern highlands of present-day Peru and through conquest spread its influence along the entire length of the Peruvian coast.

The development of Huari weaving can be described as a process beginning with realism and ending with abstraction. The central iconographic element was a figure inherited from Tiahuanaco, a culture which originated on the high plains around Lake Titicaca and expanded into what is now northern Chile and southern Peru.

This central figure was carved onto the Sun Gate at Tiahuanaco. It is associated with the water god and bears the following emblematic features: From its head appendages radiate outwards, tipped alternately with stylized representations of condor heads; in each hand the figure holds scepters ending in the stylized heads of birds, and this central figure is accompanied by other winged figures, shown in profile and also carrying scepters.

Geometric motifs include designs featuring circles, triangles, half triangles, rhombuses, squares, rectangles, hexagons, heptagons and octagons, some of which are associated with agricultural activities and irrigation technology. Another recurrent theme is the use of stylized heads ranging from those of felines, to condors, hawks, serpents and humans.

Of particular interest in Huari weavings is the extreme fineness of the thread employed and the colorful harmony achieved through the use of vegetable, animal and mineral dyes. The fibers utilized were natural white or brown cotton and wool from vicuñas, alpacas, guanacos and llamas. The tapestry technique was elevated to its very highest expression in the elaboration of the culture's famously large *unkus*, which were produced in two halves using vertical looms more than 1.70 meters wide.

As they extended their territory to include the southern coast, the Huari exercised a marked influence on Nazca culture, and from this coming together there emerged a new kind of textile art, with novel variations in terms of construction, iconography and, above all, the use of color.

Also, as the Huari began to expand along the northern coast a fusion was produced with Moche art which we now know as "Northern Huari", in which a new figure distinct from the one found on the Sun Gate at Tiahuanaco can be seen, produced using the kilim tapestry technique. At the same time, on Peru's central coast a clear Huari influence was exerted upon the art of the Pachacamac culture of the period.

LAMBAYEQUE or SICAN, 700 AD - 1370 AD

At the end of the Middle Horizon, during which Huari cultural influence spread throughout most of the territory now occupied by modern Peru, a new period of localized development began. It is in

this context that Lambayeque culture appeared on Peru's northern coast, occupying an area of around 12,000 square kilometers in what are now the Piura, Cajamarca and La Libertad regions.

Early investigators tended to conflate this culture with Chimú, until the study and analysis of pottery by the renowned archaeologists Wendell C. Bennett, Alfred Kroeber and Paul Kosok led them to conclude that another style existed on Peru's northern coast which differed from the Chimú and Moche styles. In 1948, Rafael Larco Hoyle was the first archaeologist to employ the term "Lambayeque style" to describe the unique characteristics of the ceramics of that period and geographic location.

In the textile art of Lambayeque, cotton was the principal material employed, with wool used only infrequently. The scarcity of archaeological textile remains in this region means that it is difficult to establish with any clarity the type of iconography used in Lambayeque textiles, but it has been possible to ascertain from their ceramics and mural paintings, such as those found in Úcupe and Huaca Chornancap, that the principal motif featured in Lambayeque art in general was that of a winged figure, richly attired and adorned with a headdress, plumes and a belt of concentric circles, and carrying ceremonial objects in its hands. Through the myths recorded by Miguel Cabello Valboa, we know that it was believed that when Naymlap, the founder of the Lambayeque dynasty, arrived on the northern coast, the members of his court included Llapchillulli, who was skilled in the art of producing textiles decorated with feathers.

In the textiles of Chimú-Lambayeque it is common to see full-length images of figures with their arms extended to the sides, and these are interpreted as a reference either to Naymlap or to Tacaynamo, who in Andean mythology was the founder of the Chimú dynasty.

CHIMÚ, 1100 AD - 1450 AD

During the mid-12th century, the territory of northern Peru was occupied by the Chimú. During its height, this culture expanded throughout an area that included present-day Tumbes in the north and Lima to the south. The Chimú state was governed by a dynasty of kings who ascended to the

throne automatically upon the death of their predecessor, and who were believed to be the descendants of the mythical founder Tacaynamo.

The characteristic iconography of this culture featured elements from the flora and fauna of the areas it occupied, and its art frequently depicted a wide variety of animals, including felines, serpents, monkeys, birds, deer and fish. Other motifs include richly attired anthropomorphic figures crowned with fabulous headdresses and carrying scepters in both hands. Geometric motifs and non-figurative designs were often employed on painted fabrics and in embroidery.

Regarding the types of garments produced by this culture, we know that the Chimú manufactured complete sets of burial goods, and that these outfits included a sleeved tunic, or *unku*, a *wara* and a *llauto*. These items were made from cotton and usually featured a shared structural technique and iconography. Painted fabrics were also produced in quantity. Notable examples of these painted textiles are the “prisoners” and “Isla San Lorenzo” pieces, the enormous dimensions of which indicate that they were made to adorn a temple wall.

The Chimú also achieved a high degree of skill in the use of multicolored bird feathers, arranged to form decorative elements over a plain cotton base textile. These feathers were employed expertly to produce masterly artworks filled with bright colors.

CHANCAY, 1200 AD - 1450 AD

Located chronologically within the period during which cultural development was regional in nature, before the emergence of the Incas and contemporary with the rise of the Chimú in the north, the Chancay occupied the central coast between the valleys of the Fortaleza River to the north and the Chillón River to the south.

The development of Chancay textile art was notable for its quality and the variety of techniques utilized, as well as for the sheer number of pieces produced.

The Chancay grew cotton in tones ranging from white to dark brown, and they used it as a warp yarn, combined with a wool weft. The most commonly used techniques employed by Chancay

weavers were: ground cloth, ground cloth with color variations, ground cloth with variations in the number of warps, ground cloth with partial threads, interlaced weft and warp, kilim tapestry, face and warp designs, textiles with complementary and supplementary wefts, double-faced weaves, brocades, gauzes and reticular weaves.

The Chancay also produced outstanding examples of painted textiles, combining an innovative artistic language with balanced colors, in what some experts have compared to surrealist art. The use of feathers as a decorative element is also seen in Chancay textile art.

Chancay iconography featured mythical, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements such as birds, two-headed serpents, monkeys and fish, and they incorporated such imagery into the decoration of the utilitarian blankets they used in daily life, as well as in bags, slings, *unkus*, *waras* and turbans.

One particularly interesting aspect of Chancay textile production came in the form of the dolls they made from vegetable fibers and dressed in textiles produced using the techniques of tapestry and embroidery, and to which they added accessories such as *unkus*, *waras*, bags, necklaces and musical instruments.

INCA, 1200 AD - 1532 AD

Inca textiles marked the final phase in the evolution of the textile tradition in Pre-Hispanic Peru. The Inca state inherited a tradition based on four thousand years of textile development and within Inca society the majority of the materials and techniques employed by the many preceding cultures of ancient Peru converged.

During the Inca period, textile production was as important as agriculture. It is believed that the production of weavings was principally the domain of women. Two types of weavings were produced: the fine, or *cumbi*, weavings used by high status individuals; and the ordinary weavings, or *ahuasca*, destined for use by the general population. For the Inca sovereign and his wife, the Colla, fine garments were produced by the young chosen women known as the *acillacunas*. The Inca wore a short tunic known as an *unku*, and the Colla a length of cloth known as an *acso*,

wrapped around her body. Both of these items of clothing featured the polychrome and symbolic decoration known as *tocapu*. These were small, square, symbolic motifs, arranged in a checkerboard pattern or in v-shaped bands at the level of the neck or the waist, or in vertical panels running downward from the neck. Other decorative motifs included zigzags, dots or representations of camelids arranged in regular bands, as well as stylized geometric figures, such as the so-called “key” design.

As well as employing cotton and wool as their primary material, the Incas also occasionally made use of vizcacha fur and bat pelts, destined exclusively for use in garments worn by the elite.

The Incas also produced miniature items of dress for the small idols made from gold, silver or *Spondylus* that were associated with rituals such as the *capacocha* sacrificial rite.

...

1. Detail of a woolen mantle with embroidered decoration, showing figures moving through the air. The figures are repeated using alternating colors in their details.
2. Detail of a cotton and wool kilim tapestry band, with a central figure holding scepters.
3. A drawing of one of the weavings found by Charles Wiener at Ancón in the 19th century.
4. *Unku* (man’s tunic) made from cotton and camelid wool using the interlocking tapestry weave technique. The decoration is composed of ellipses, step symbols and heads shown in profile, arranged in six vertical bands.
5. Weaving produced from the joining of two wool panels, featuring step designs and using the discontinued weft and warp technique.
6. Fine line drawing taken from a Moche ceramic, showing prisoners stripped of their clothes and weapons.

(Taken from Donnan, 1999.)

7. Cotton gauze with alternating biomorphic motifs of birds, fish and felines.
8. Moche textile.
9. Female figures in silver and *Spondylus* used in *capacochas* sacrificial rites. They are wearing feather headdresses and knitted woolen garments.
10. Sewing work box containing cotton clews and spindles used in the manufacturing of textiles.

11. Plain cotton cape, with decorated borders and embroidered with wool designs featuring zoomorphic figures.
12. Diagram of "S" and "Z" torsion types.
13. Developed by ancient Peruvians, the backstrap loom is still widely used in the Andean region.
14. Bag, or *chuspa*, decorated with zoomorphic designs.
15. Man and woman spinning.
16. Set of eight wooden spindles with carved and decorated *piruros* (ceramic spindle whorls). Some of them still hold remnants of thread.
17. Backstrap and vertical looms. Drawings by Guamán Poma de Ayala.
18. Detail of a tapestry with stylized central figures and lateral bands with bird designs, adorned with long fringes.
19. Tapestry made with cotton warps and wool wefts, with a design featuring the so-called "lunar animal", wearing a large headdress.
20. Cotton and wool *unku* made using the tapestry weave and weft face techniques and decorated with eight-pointed stars and geometric shapes bordered by squares.
21. *All diagrams are taken from Morris (1995) and D'Harcourt (1975).
22. Weaving in brocade technique.
23. Gauze and reticular cotton weaving.
24. Detail of a kilim tapestry.
25. Detail of a double-cloth technique weaving.
26. A condor design from one of the weavings found by Junius Bird at Huaca Prieta.
27. Painted weaving on plain cotton, with repeated figures seen in profile and displaying feline features, with scepters in each hand.
28. Detail of a wool mantle featuring the emblematic Paracas flying deity. The human form is flanked by serpent motifs with beans at their centers.
29. Wool *unku* made using the simple looping technique, with a repeated motif of crosses and diamond-shaped figures formed by intersecting S and Z twists.
30. Wool cape with embroidered designs of felines, bordered by squares arranged in a checkerboard pattern surrounded by a decorative band at the sides and around the collar. The long fringes at the sides form sleeves.
31. Detail of a wool cape with decorative borders featuring embroidered two-headed felines carrying human heads in their mouths.

32. Drawing of a Paracas funerary bundle, taken from Julio C. Tello (1959).
33. Cape with decorative borders around the outer and central sections, featuring embroidered designs over plain cloth of flying figures clutching ceremonial objects.
34. Cross section of a Paracas Caverns tomb like those discovered by Julio C. Tello in 1925.
35. Fragment of an embroidered mantle made from camelid wool and decorated with flying figures.
36. Wool mantle with decorative edges embroidered over a plain weave and showing feline creatures.
37. Mantle embroidered with condor figures made from camelid wool.
38. A cape with decorative borders around the side and central sections, with embroidered wool designs over a plain weave showing felines and birds.
39. Wool mantle with embroidered designs of human figures, each holding a small basket containing a child.
40. Embroidered cape on a cotton base, decorated with richly attired figures holding symbolic objects. The details of the figures are repeated in alternating colors.
41. Detail of a wool cape embroidered with designs of birds in different colors, with smaller birds on their breasts.
42. Embroidered cape with framed bean designs. Three-dimensional figures achieved through the cross-knit loop technique decorate the edges of the piece.
43. Detail of a cotton and wool band made using the kilim tapestry technique and decorated with stylized anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures.
44. Embroidered wool mantle: The central area is decorated with multicolored step motifs using the discontinued warp and weft technique, while the borders show anthropomorphic beans with appendages that end in trophy heads.
45. Detail of the mantle shown on the opposite page.
46. A woolen weaving in the cross-knit loop technique with a central design that appears to represent an anthropomorphic spider, surrounded by human figures seen in profile and zoomorphic figures.
47. Cotton and wool band created using the tapestry technique and decorated with geometric forms.
48. A three-dimensional wool piece representing a delicate row of hummingbirds, created using the cross-knit loop technique.
49. Three rows of small, three-dimensional dolls with human features, made from wool using the cross-knit loop technique.
50. A wool tapestry decorated with horizontally arranged bands. The colors in the central area contrast with those in the outer section.
51. Border of a mantle made by employing the cross-knit loop technique and featuring a stepped pyramid design and long fringes.

52. A wool cross-knit loop technique weaving showing an individual holding a weapon and a trophy head and surrounded by symbolic geometric designs.
53. Headdress comprising a turban over a knitted woolen cap with a fringed border of braided human hair.
54. Woolen tapestry *unku* with zoomorphic designs along its edges.
55. A tapestry turban similar to the one to the left, with a repeating stepped rhombus pattern and two braided appendages at the sides.
56. Wool *unku* with embroidered multicolored bands.
57. Wool *unku* with step design, made using the discontinued weft and warp technique.
58. An unusual textile featuring a stylized wave pattern, producing a sense of movement.
59. Fan with a vegetable fiber handle ending in short braids that hold the feathers in place.
60. Plain wool weave divided into two opposing fields of color.
61. Wool *unku* with a checkerboard design, made using the discontinued warp and weft technique.
62. Cotton and wool tapestry with bird design set within squares.
63. Three-dimensional wool band representing beans of alternating colors, produced in the cross-knit loop technique.
64. Plain weave cotton cloth with a geometric and zoomorphic design consisting of five tapestry bands.
65. Fragment of a cotton and wool tapestry with figures seen in profile carrying scepters in both hands and surrounded by a stepped diamond-shaped design.
66. A fine line drawing on a Moche ceramic bowl illustrating a textile workshop.
67. Pottery vessel depicting a man wearing a patterned shirt.
68. These richly-attired Moche figures showcase the great skill attained in textile manufacture.
69. Fragment of a textile panel made from cotton and camelid wool in the slit tapestry weave technique, showing winged figures in profile carrying scepters.
70. Cotton and wool tapestry band showing a lavishly-attired warrior with a long, serpent-like tail.
71. A tie-dyed cloth with a repeated patchwork, diamond-shaped design.
72. Cotton and wool band in the tapestry weave technique, showing a winged figure in profile carrying a staff.
73. The central figure of the so-called Sun Gate, the design that set the standard for Tiahuanaco and Huari textile iconography.
74. Cotton and wool tapestry with four vertical bands featuring figures seen in profile and carrying scepters.

75. Cotton and wool tapestry featuring two bands of zoomorphic designs.
76. A cotton textile inlaid with multicolored feathers depicting a two-headed zoomorphic creature repeated within three color fields.
77. Four-cornered cap made from cotton and wool and decorated with zoomorphic and geometric designs.
78. A false head from a funerary bundle inlaid with multicolored feathers and wearing a knitted headband.
79. Cotton and wool tapestry with a design featuring heads seen in profile and step motifs set within squares.
80. Cotton mantle inlaid with macaw parrot feathers arranged into four blocks of color.
81. Wool tapestry *unku* with four decorative vertical bands of zoomorphic heads and geometric designs.
82. Detail of a cotton and wool *unku* made in the tapestry wave technique and decorated with highly symbolic abstract figures.
83. Detail of a cotton and wool tapestry *unku*. The design incorporates spirals and steps set within diagonally-divided squares.
84. Cotton and wool tapestry with a pattern of human skulls arranged in rows.
85. Cotton and wool tapestry *unku*. The design features spirals, triangles and faces, arranged in rows.
86. Abstract patterned wool tapestry featuring highly-stylized birds and human heads.
87. *Unku* (man's tunic) made from cotton and wool in the interlocking tapestry weaving technique. The design consists of eight vertical bands incorporating a stepped diamond pattern and human heads set within squares.
88. Cotton and wool tapestry *unku* made from four pieces with a pattern of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures set inside squares.
89. Typical figures from Lambayeque iconography on a multicolored mural discovered in the Zaña Valley (taken from Alva, 1983).
90. Cotton and wool tapestry weaving formed by the joining together of five pieces. The pattern shows figures wearing large headdresses accompanied by other individuals of a lesser rank.
91. A tapestry-weave sleeved *unku* and loincloth decorated with anthropomorphic figures in the central area and at its borders.
92. Detail of an *unku* inlaid with parrot feathers arranged in a design representing a feline creature flanked by birds.
93. Decorative tapestry band. The central design depicts two figures wearing headdresses and sailing a raft, while the lateral designs represent waves.

94. Cotton and wool slit tapestry weaving. The pattern consists of human figures set within squares on a checkerboard background. The lower band was woven in the complementary weft technique and features zoomorphic figures.
95. Sleeved cotton and wool *unku* in the discontinued warp and weft technique. The pattern is comprised of a bird and scrolls representing waves.
96. Cotton and wool tapestry. The central figure is being carried on a litter and is escorted by two other individuals, while the lower band is comprised of knitted tassels and fringes.
97. Cotton and wool tapestry panel with a design composed of stylized birds arranged in pairs.
98. Four semi-circular tapestry-weave panels. The design features a bird wearing a headdress and carrying a fish in its beak, and the lower section ends in a row of tassels and fringes.
99. Sleeved cotton *unku* incorporating plain cloth, brocade and gauze techniques and featuring a pelican design.
100. Cotton and wool tapestry *unku* with sleeves and a bird motif design.
101. Cotton weaving employing reticular and gauze techniques with a pattern of felines framed in squares arranged in vertical bands.
102. Detail of a band woven in the warp face and complementary warp techniques, with a design composed of felines with curled tails.
103. Detail of a tapestry showing birds in profile wearing half-moon headdresses, with a row of monkeys holding scepters in the lower section of the piece.
104. Scene set on a small cushion comprising four dolls engaged in weaving on a loom.
105. Sampler made from cotton and wool. All these varieties of designs and constructive techniques were employed by ancient weavers.
106. Detail of an unusual cotton and wool tapestry featuring stylized zoomorphic figures.
107. Cotton and wool tapestry weaving featuring a checkerboard pattern and birds seen in profile with repeated step motifs. The fringes in the lower part of the piece are decorated with zoomorphic motifs.
108. Weaving employing tapestry and complementary warp techniques with a pattern of birds, felines and octopuses' heads ending in long fringes.
109. Cotton weaving using reticular and gauze techniques with a design composed of waves, step motifs and feline heads.
110. Detail of a cotton and wool textile combining the techniques of gauze and tapestry, with a pattern of pelicans shown in profile.
111. Delicate cotton gauze with a quadrangular pattern.
112. Detail of a woven tapestry band with geometric designs.

113. A painted cotton textile featuring a face with two appendages that end in heads, surrounded by birds and monkeys.

114. Detail of a woven tapestry band with geometric and zoomorphic designs.

115. A sleeved *unku* (man's tunic) made of cotton and wool and bearing an unusual design in which figures wearing headdresses appear framed in a checkerboard pattern.

116. A painted cotton textile with a central figure surrounded by symbols related to the worldview of Chanca culture.

117. Detail of a cotton textile painted with red bird figures alternating with geometric representations of fish.

118. Cotton textile painted with bird and feline motifs arranged in diagonal bands.

119. Detail of cotton weaving featuring negative painted stylized representations of birds and fish.

120. Cotton and wool tapestry *unku* covered with 156 *tocapus* on both the front and back.

121. *Unku* woven from wool and cotton with a monochrome upper section and checkerboard lower half.

122. Cotton and wool wave technique tapestry *unku* patterned with geometric motifs repeated diagonally.

Detail of a wool textile created using the discontinuous weft tapestry technique and patterned with star, bird and fish designs.

123. Bag, or *chuspa*, made from wool and cotton.