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Wrap the Dead : The funerary textile tradition from the Osmore Valley, South Peru, and its social-political implications

Minkes, W.

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2.1 Introduction

Never the favourite chapter, a short introduction into the theoretical background is necessary to understand the intentions of this textile study. Garments are considered to be the ideal medium to express the owner's identity. But what identities does man have, and how do garments contribute to man's identity within his society?

2.2 Style

Style is an inherent quality of all material culture produced by a group of people. Every step in the production of an artefact is the result of culture-specific choices. When stylistic patterning can be isolated in time and space, it is thought to point to a particular group of people, passing on their knowledge about how to make their typical artefacts to the next generation. Stylistic elements are highly conservative and will only be accepted when they conform to the group's cultural values and norms determined by many generations. Even if some or all stylistic elements are copied by another group, they would never be used in exactly the same spatial configuration or with the same meaning.

Style exchanges non-verbal information about the group's social, economic and political nature on intrasite as well as on intersite level. The artefact's symbolism sends out one or more messages that will be picked up by the addressed people, who are familiar with the cultural meaning. Thus stylistic messaging greatly increases the amount of information exchange of the group. The more standardized the message is, the easier its message is understood, even if the emitter and receiver are not simultaneously present (Hodder 1990, 8-11, 89; Wobst 1977, 319-326).

Stylistic features not only indicate, but also maintain and even manipulate the identities of persons. They can express (ethnic) group identity, social status, gender, religious beliefs or kinship. Stylistic messages can promote the social integration by summarizing the

economic and social position of the individuals and indicate that he or she conforms to the ideology behind the behavioural norms that are expressed by the symbols. This is especially useful among people who have little opportunity of direct and frequent contact. Simultaneously, stylistic messaging can create the opposite effect by stimulating social differentiation. In this case, stylistic features indicate the uniqueness of the status of an individual (group) among his or her peer. It follows that if the size of the social networks that individuals participate in grows larger, the quantity of stylistic behaviour increases as well (Hodder 1979, 448; Pancake 1996, 47; Wobst 1977, 327-328).

Variation of stylistic features is only allowed in areas outside the direct control of dominant groups (Hodder 1990, 149). Wiessner (1983, 256-258) differentiates this stylistic variability according to the specificity of the stylistic message (referent) sent out by artefacts. A clear and conservative ('emblemic') style distinguished in archaeological contexts is likely to have served as boundary marker between two or more groups. It would have functioned as a clear social message for defined target group(s), and therefore would have been tightly controlled by the dominant group. However, referents that constitute personal preferences in order to distinguish one individual from similar others, represent personal ('assertive') styles that are more easily subject to stylistic change. Additional observations were made by MacDonald (1990, 45) who separates group ('protocol') from individual ('panache') stylistic expression in order to trace changing relationships between these participants in a society. Sackett (1986, 269) warns that the actively communicating ('iconological') identity of some style may switch into a passive ('isochrestic') one and vice versa.

DeBoer (1990, 103-104) and Roe (1995, 45) found that individual artists in traditional societies innovate constantly, and that imitation is considered to mark an unskilled artist. Carr and Neitzel (1995, 438) conclude that the artist is a conscious decision maker who creates

artefacts with both outer world considerations (such as economic, ecological, technological, political, social, and ideological factors), as well as personal feelings and thoughts (and unconscious reflections of the cultural collective). When stylistic adjustment is approved by all group members, it eventually will lead to social and cultural change. Wiessner (1983, 269-270) warns that stylistic variation may not always represent conscious innovations, but rather restrictions of the material, technology, function, or complexity of the design.

Returning now to the stylistic features of garments. Outer garments and especially headgear were found to form the ideal medium to express the identity of the owner (Bogatyrev 1971; Carr 1995, 185-192; Earle 1990, 77-78; Wobst 1977, 331). Due to their daily use and high visibility in many different contexts, garments have a great capacity for information exchange. The information is contained in the stylistic features of the garment, which determine every step of the production. However, not all stylistic choices are equally visible and some of them, like fibre and structural preferences, may only be observed upon close inspection. The more the visibility decreases, the shorter the distances to transmit messages and the smaller the number of individuals exposed to them. Wobst (1977, 328, 332) calls this the positive correlation between the expression of stylistic messages and the degree of visibility of his four different garment categories:

First category items are visible over long distances due to the form and colour of the outer layers of clothing. They reach any member of a given social group and enter into most boundary maintaining interactions. These items are used to express the most inclusive social group to which an individual claims affiliation, usually an ethnic group. The more competition takes place between different social groups, the more prominently the boundary maintenance including the stylistic signalling among the competitors will be.

The second category items are visible at intermediate distance as the symbolism lies in the gross features of outer layers of garments and their colours or motifs. They send out messages about the hometown, religious affiliation, or the hierarchical position of the individual, such as status, occupation, family, and age.

The third category of items are visible at small distance only, that is, inside the house or in a social

gathering. These symbols are hidden in the quality and quantity of the details of small personal garments and decorative items. They inform more precisely about the owner's social position that is determined by his status, occupation, family, or age.

The fourth category items are the details that are visible only for members of the immediate household (Wobst 1977, 331-336).

Categorizing textiles according to the visibility of certain characteristics should therefore provide insightful information about the importance of textiles for communicative purposes.

2.3 Ethnicity

Ethnic groups are commonly defined as groups of people whose members identify themselves and are identified by others as belonging to that group. They are thought of as biologically self-perpetuating, its members forming a bounded social field of communication and interaction, while they share the basic cultural values manifested in overt cultural forms (Barth 1996, 75-82). The group has a name and shares historical memories as well as myths of common ancestry linked to a homeland (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 6; Weber 1996, 35-40).

Ethnicity may have started as tribal consciousness that was primarily formed by common political experience rather than by common descent. True ethnicity did not develop until communities grew into dominating and exploiting nation states (Weber 1996, 35-40).

It is important to stress that ethnicity is not a fixed identity. In fact, ethnic identity is self-referential and depends on priorities held by the individuals, which are determined by both psychological, genetic and symbolic factors, as by economic and ecological factors, especially when competition for scarce resources is fierce (Jenkins 1997, 19). As ethnic identity can be continuously negotiated and revised, new ethnic groups can be created, and as such, ethnicity can play a fundamental role in shaping nations and societies (Cassman 1997, 32).

Members of an ethnic group may also maintain their ethnic marking despite the fact that their people live far away (Oakland 1992, 318-319). But also, different ethnic groups can live side by side and interact while maintaining their distinctiveness. Stylistic distinctions will be more pronounced if the desire to maintain an

exclusive social boundary grows stronger. When there is no longer a necessity of boundary maintenance, the continuity of ethnic units may disappear (Barth 1996, 78).

An ethnic group may share some unique genes that may be expressed in physical features such as skin colour, height and eye shape. However, genetically related groups may just as well display ethnic differences in cases of competition over resources or in an ecologically varied area, whereas genetically distinct groups may share cultural traditions as the result of long term historical processes, such as trade relationships among unrelated individuals (Hodder 1979, 452; Nash 1989, 10-15; Sutter 1997, 274).

As an archaeologist has no access to the thoughts of prehistoric people, it is impossible to get into the self-conscious identification of an individual from some ethnic group. What remains are visible markers of ethnicity and ethno-historical writings. The visible ethnic markers are superordinate to most other statuses so that they should create a horizontal differentiation among populations. Ethnic markers have little inherent worth so that the raw materials to produce them are accessible to every member of the society to express his or her ethnic affiliation. The marking is laden with symbolism whose meaning is known to some extent to every individual. Typical ethnic markers are highly visible features that are applied by all female and male adults and often by children as well, such as their clothes and headgear, but also body paint or tattoos, hairstyle, or head deformation. In addition, food preferences or taboos and a variety of material culture, including domestic and burial structures, may be ethnically defined. Different material traditions in one region may indicate the presence of populations with different regions of origin, who consciously continued to distinguish themselves from their neighbours (Beck 1995, 171; Cassman 1997, 5-15; Hodder 1979, 447; Nash 1989, 12; Pancake, 1996, 46-54; Wobst 1977, 331-333).

2.4 Status

Cassman (1997, 42) warns against the easy interpretation of stylistic differences as evidence of the cohabitation of different ethnic groups, without considering the possibility of status differences. Status may have been

achieved through specific abilities or through fulfilling the social duties within age and/or gender groups within a society. Status may also have been ascribed through inheritance or through fulfilling some political or formal social position(s) within a society. In both cases, the hierarchy of rank is instigated by competition over essential resources that may represent the actual means of production or some form of knowledge (Brown 1981, 26-27; Shanks and Tilley 1982, 133).

Those individuals who have gained more power and prestige often claim and maintain their status through ideology and public rituals, and through the display of distinctive symbols of power. The manufacture of such objects commonly required substantial wealth or labour investment. Artefacts found exclusively in burial contexts and not in refuse middens are considered to be such symbols. If they cross-cut gender and/or age distinctions in burial context, such symbols probably are indicative of ranking. Clothing is found to be most common for the display of distinct status, in daily life as well as in mortuary treatment. By careful evaluation and comparison of quality and/or by identifying the presence of exotic materials in the clothing of a cemetery population, relative differences in status may be identified (Cassman 1997, 42; Pancake 1996, 49-50).

The location and shape of tombs themselves may be another indicator of status differences: individuals from an egalitarian or ranked society will be buried in shared cemeteries, but whereas the former group will bury all their dead with similar grave gifts, the latter will bury the higher ranked individuals with larger quantities and more varied grave gifts. Great differences in quality and quantity of grave goods are to be found in stratified societies, and the prominent members will be buried in segregated or even separate cemeteries, often with many sumptuous gifts (Braun 1979; Trinkaus 1995, 54-55).

Trinkaus (1995, 54-56) warns that archaeologists have to be aware that non-material rituals may have accompanied burials of people of higher status. Large scale feasting may have left no traces in the burial context. In addition, the presence of status symbols in infant burials need not always be indicative of inherited status. Byrd and Monahan (1995, 273-275) mention examples in which young people had been buried with more items of personal adornments than the elder. In such cases it is probable that ideological or sentimental factors account for the presence of apparent status symbols.

2.5 Gender

A final sub-group that may be identified by the physical remains or differential treatment of the dead is sex-related. In archaeology, sex can be identified by osteological evidence from burial sites and their associated artefacts that are thought to represent the social roles the deceased held in life. Such roles may have been extended towards children as well (Meiklejohn *et al.* 2000, 234).

Gender groups are often equated with two biological sexes. However, anthropological studies indicate that gender is in fact a socially constructed identity, of which biological differences form only one of the components. Conkey and Gero (1991, 8-9) state that gender is related to age, status and ethnicity identification within a group, so that gender distinction can have different meanings at different ages and in different social contexts, and even play a structural role in social life (Brumfield 1991, 243; Hastorf 1991, 139; Preucel and Hodder 1996, 417-418).

The gender distinction has generally been described as a functional means to organize labour and to mark sexually appropriate partners (Claassen 1992, 3-4). However, where the latter argument may hold universal truth in the light of procreation, the former may be a rather ethnocentric opinion. Nonetheless, variable gender behaviour appears to be universal and therefore may represent the key to the origin of social differences, even in egalitarian societies (Hayden 1992, 37).

Depictions of men and women, historical sources of the area and ethnographic cross-cultural analogy can give information on differential gender treatment and their particular complementary tasks (Johnsson *et al.* 2000, 170; Preucel and Hodder 1996, 418).

2.6 Rituals to confront death

Most textiles of this research were taken from human interments. Artefacts found in intact burial contexts were placed there intentionally by the mourners of the deceased individuals. Therefore, a short description of the nature of mortuary rituals is given here.

2.6.1 GENERAL FORM AND NEED OF RITUAL

Rappaport (1999, 24) defines ritual as *'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers'*. That is, on certain

occasions, spoken words, songs, processions, dances, and/or material symbols are made formal by placing them in invariant sequences of a performance, so that their meaning gets imposed by a ritual form. He adds that the rituals have to be executed correctly and completely, and that it has to be performed by properly authorized persons and under proper circumstances (*Ibid.*, 124). Most rituals are regularly repeated, as they are related to the annual seasons, biological rhythm, or the human physical condition. Due to their invariant repetition, ritual is experienced as timeless, momentarily uniting the profane world with the sacred world. Time is replaced by a sense of eternity while the individual becomes depersonalised. The power of a ritual partially lies in the fact that rituals can stimulate emotions, even if the participants cannot really explain what is achieved by the rituals or if their explanations are contradictory. Due to the multi-referential nature of symbols, each informed participant can experience the ritual performance and its symbols from his personal interests and emotions (Bloch 1975; Rappaport 1999, 33; Shanks and Tilley 1982, 133; Turner 1967, 27-29).

Every society needs to reaffirm their collective sentiments on a regular basis in order to preserve the unity and personality of the group. *"Ideology may be regarded as practice which operates to secure the reproduction of relations of dominance and to conceal contradictions between the structural principles orientating the actions of individuals and groups within the social formation"* (Shanks and Tilley 1982, 130).

The participation of the group's members in these rituals demonstrates their acceptance of the order and in fact give ground to their very existence. The participants of the ritual usually stand for important sub-groups of the secular social systems, such as families or lineages, age or gender groups, professional groups, etc. Without rituals, the inherent tendency of humans to pursue individual goals would undermine the social control (Rappaport 1999, 123, 125, 145; Turner 1967, 22-23).

In human rituals, both conservative and personal messages are sent out simultaneously. The participants of the ritual performance follow clearly prescribed actions, yet are allowed to reinterpret the value-laden symbols, as long as the basic ritual is left untouched. As a result, the repeated enactment of a ritual is a dynamic process, responding to changes in people's lives and

cultural values (Bell 1997, 73). Rappaport calls the first kind *canonical* messages that represent the general and eternal aspects of universal orders, transmitted through liturgical symbols or symbolic actions of the participants, that are not subject to variation (Rappaport 1999, 52-53, 58). The second kind he calls *self-referential*, which are messages that inform the others (both animal and human) about the participant's current physical, psychic or social state through indexical signs of distinction, yet remain closely related to the invariant canonical order to remain meaningful. Consequently, self-referential messages may be adapted by each generation of participants (Rappaport 1999, 73, 106). The dominant, canonical symbols commonly recur in various ritual contexts with more or less consistent significance. Consequently, they represent easily recognizable and relatively fixed points in the social and cultural structure of the group (Turner 1967, 31-36).

2.6.2 NEED OF RITUAL TO CONFRONT DEATH

Another circumstance that calls for the performance of rituals is when fear is present in a group, especially when caused by death. Malinowski (1948, 47-53) stated that all religion and rituals originated from the need to alleviate fear in the individual experience. Rituals are then performed to alleviate the anxiety. Arriaza (1995a, 25) agrees that the fear of dying and/or being in intimate contact with supernatural forces was most likely the primordial force in the shaping of mortuary rituals, whereas political or economic needs for ritual actions would not be important until more complex societies had arisen. Rituals then, may have emerged as a magical means for the living to protect them from further death and to regain their inner peace. The rituals would prevent some members from leaving the group, which would make the group more vulnerable. Religious and mortuary ceremonies restore the broken chain of life by creating group solidarity, and therefore are thought to primarily serve the ones left behind. Simultaneously, the mortuary rituals would help the deceased's soul to leave the body, to be purified and to ensure its safe arrival and eternal existence in the hereafter (Arriaza 1995a, 21-23; Durkheim 1976, 408); Geertz 1973, 110, 162; Hertz 1960, 77; Malinowski 1948, 52-53; Van Gennep 1960, 209-236).

The funeral of an individual then coincides with the celebration of the group's regeneration according to

their fundamental social and cultural values and beliefs, be it direct descent group and/or the society as a whole. The human remains are buried in conformity with the principles that reproduce the social order's power relations. Follows that death rituals, like all rituals, often contain elements that mystify society's two major but often contradicting structuring principles, namely, the kin relations and the asymmetrical power relations (Bloch 1988, 20-24; Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 108; Eastmond 1988, 77; Geertz 1973, 94-98; Shanks and Tilley 1982, 151-152).

In life, every man and woman creates their '*social persona*' through their social relations with different individuals and groups (Goodenough 1965, 7). The social persona is therefore directly related to the individual's position in the ranked hierarchy of his society. During the funerary rituals, the social identities that are considered appropriate to be expressed are carefully selected by the group. Or, as Saxe (1970, 6) said, "*death thus calls forth a fuller representation of ego's various social identities than at any time during life*". This explains how death ritual expresses the social order: the sanctified and eternal nature of the ritual differentiates and stresses the unequal status hierarchy in death as well as in life. As a consequence, the treatment of the body, the associated artefacts and the tomb itself are directly related to the deceased's social persona (Brown 1981, 28; Hertz 1960, 57).

2.6.3 DEATH RITUAL IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The processual approach of New Archaeology of the 1970's represents the first systematic method to link the mortuary remains to the social complexity of the society. It related the social identities recognized in the treatment of the deceased directly to his social persona in the living community and to the composition and size of the social unit(s) that recognized (status) responsibilities to the deceased. The mortuary differentiation was considered to be conditioned by the degree of social organization of the society that produced it. According to Binford (1972, 225-227), the primary distinctions of the social persona that are commonly given recognition in differentiated mortuary ritual are age, gender, social position, subgroup affiliation, cause of death, and location of death. The distinctions were categorized by the treatment of the body (preparation and disposition),

the preparation of the grave (form, orientation, location), and the burial furniture placed with the body (form and/or quantity) (Bendann 1969, 269; Chapman and Randsborg 1981, 8; O'Shea 1984, 3-8). Binford (1972, 235) concluded that the specific dimensions varied significantly with the organizational complexity of the society, which he measured by evolutionary stages of subsistence practice (hunter-gatherer, shifting agriculturist, settled agriculturalist, and pastoralist).

Apart from such quantitative assessment of status variability, Saxe (1970, 69-71; 119) stated that formal disposal areas for the exclusive disposal of a group's dead will be present if the corporate group maintained lineal ties to their ancestors for the purpose of legitimising group rights to use and control the restricted resources of their territory.

In the 1980's, however, the generalized and straight identification of social status deduced from the inequality of mortuary remains was criticized. Post-processual archaeologists showed the importance of historical and ethnographic studies in the analysis of archaeological mortuary remains. For instance, Metcalf and Huntington (1991, 17) found that the cost of constructing graves could have been marginal compared to expenditure on the death rituals as a whole, making these an unreliable indicator of status. Material signs of social ranking may be excluded from the burial practice, or on the contrary, be exaggerated. The differential treatment of the dead could also depend on ideological criteria instead of on mere power relationships, whereas the identification of status symbols was likely to be influenced by the archaeologist's subjectivity. In addition, the significance of grave artefacts may vary among the different sub-groups of one population (Byrd and Monahan 1995, 253; Hodder 1992, 45-80).

Kingsley (1985, 10-11, 64-65) warns that the focus on identifying the ego-specific, (vertical) hierarchical ranking in archaeological contexts obscures the identification of (horizontal) group-specific affiliation. Especially clan and lineage groups were found to be recognizable in spatial symboling, often as segregated cemeteries. Saxe's theory (1970) on the presence of exclusive disposal areas was criticized for being solely based on economic factors instead of including political, social, religious or ethnic factors (Kingsley 1985, 116-130).

In short, the attention should no longer be merely directed towards the social persona of the deceased, but to the mourners. For they were responsible for the building of tombs, the preparation of bodies and the nature of mortuary rituals, and they behaved under the influence of the social, political and economic circumstances (Buikstra 1995, 232).

Stanish (1992, 9), however, questions the degree to which mortuary goods reflect the (ethnic) identification of the population as a whole. He states that grave gifts are often highly desirable and labour intensive goods that may be produced especially for ritual and/or for exchange purposes. Reyecraft (1998, 160) defends the use of mortuary evidence, provided that it comes from known contexts. The preparation of the interred body for burial, the position of the body in the tomb, and the form of the tomb itself are often highly (ethnic) expressive.

O'Shea (1995, 126, 142) finally, stresses the importance of the regional and spatial approach in case of mortuary analysis. By viewing the treatment of the dead in their own distinct historic trajectories, a more reliable understanding of the social implications of the observed mortuary differentiation can be obtained. Differences of mortuary treatment may in fact be the result of changes in technology and in the organization of trade, instead of the result of changes in social organization.

