



PLATE 9

NO. 540 X

## A GROUP OF ANCIENT PERUVIAN FABRICS

BY PHILIP AINSWORTH MEANS

**M**R. H. A. ELSBERG, the owner of the collection which I intend now to describe, is to be congratulated upon the possession of a series of specimens which, though not extensive, is of the highest importance to students of ancient Peruvian weaving. He has a multitude of rare and exquisite fabrics in his collections, proceeding from many lands and representing many periods, yet the Peruvian group will bear comparison with any of their companions, as I hope presently to make clear.

On the present occasion it is unnecessary to give a cultural outline of ancient Peruvian history. That was done, very briefly, in a former article of mine printed in Number One, Volume Nine, of *The Bulletin* (1925). The presently to be studied collection consists of twenty-four medium-sized specimens which represent two of the ancient cultural periods, namely, the Tiahuanaco period on the coast, *circa* 600 to 900 A. D., and the Late Chimu period on the coast, *circa* 900 to 1400 A. D., or, in other words, the eight centuries more or less of high civilisation that flourished along the seaboard of Peru before the Incas, sweeping down from their mountain homelands to the east, mastered the people of the shore-country and impressed their peculiar forms of art upon those of the vanquished.

The specimens, bearing Mr. Elsberg's catalogue numeration, are as follows:

540-A. Double-cloth, wool. As folded on the card it measures  $22\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $10\frac{1}{2}$ . The full size is 45 inches by  $10\frac{1}{2}$ .



PLATE I

NO. 540 A

The design is worked in brown and brownish white two-ply thread. As now displayed the background is in brown wool and the figures are in brownish white. On the other side of the fabric the colour-areas are, of course, reversed.

The background is of ordinary basket-weave rather open and loose in texture. The figures are also in basket-weave, but the fact that their threads are set into those of the background gives an additional thickness and solidity to the figures. This situation is revealed very clearly in those parts of the pattern where the white has worn away, leaving only the brown basket-weave of the background.

The design consists chiefly of a series of warriors arranged in three columns. The figures are substantially the same. In their left hands, which have four digits, they hold tall lances, grounded and with the points upward; in their right hands they hold, by the hair, the heads of decapitated foemen. The warriors wear helmets and they are dressed in garments embellished with geometrical designs. As the decoration is rather conventionalised many of the objects shown lack realism, but it is possible nevertheless to be sure of their meaning.

This specimen represents the Tiahuanaco period of the coast but the decapitated heads strongly recall the art of a still earlier period, that of Nasca, in which such heads were frequently shown. I am therefore inclined to date this specimen early in the Tiahuanaco period, let us say about 600 A. D.

540-B. Human figure worked in Tapestry and mounted on basket weave.  $7\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $8\frac{1}{2}$ . Wool, cotton, and bast fibre.

The colours in the tapestry panel are white (ground), which is of cotton; light brown, medium brown, dark brown, ochre, and blue, all of which are of wool; crimson and green, which appear to be of bast fibre, probably maguey or some similar substance.

The design shows a warrior wearing an elaborate helmet. In his three-digit hands he holds ceremonial staffs or clubs. In general the style in which he is portrayed resembles that of the central figure on the monolithic gateway at Tiahuanaco (near Lake Titicaca), and therefore I date this specimen between 600 and 900 A. D., the time when Tiahuanaco art was strong on the coast.



PLATE 2

NO. 540 B

The cotton basket-weave fabric to which the tapestry is attached is interesting because the warp, so-called because it is vertical at present, albeit in the loom it may have been the weft, is double, consisting of pairs of threads woven basket-wise among the weft threads.

540-C. A fragment of woollen and bast-fibre tapestry,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches, approximately.

The design here is much like that of 540-B. The colours are white (ground), greenish-brown, green, and red, all of them of wool save the red, which is apparently of a bast-fibre, probably maguey.

In the vertical lines of the design emphasis is got by a careful use of the kelim technique which gives rise to vertical *jours* or slots between some of the areas of colour. This technique is very common in ancient Andean weaving, and it is well represented in this collection.

The date of this specimen is 600–900 A. D. And is of the Tiahuanaco style.

540-D. Fragmentary tapestry panel of wool and bast-fibre, about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 8.

The design recalls 540-B. The colours are brown (ground), pale yellow, light brown, blue, sage green, yellow-brown, dark brown, and pink, all of them of wool save the sage green which is of bast-fibre.

The headdress of the figure is unusual because it is adorned with seven plume-like protuberances worked in loops of pale yellow woollen one-ply thread.

The loosely woven basket-weave fabric to which the panel is attached is of cotton.

Tiahuanaco style, 600–900 A. D.

540-E. A woollen panel. 9 inches by  $7\frac{1}{2}$ .

The ground consists of several shades of brown, with figures worked in whitish-brown, pinkish brown, green, and blue imposed upon it. The colours are all of wool. The design is made up of highly conventionalised human, fish, animal, and bird figures, all of them chaotic and unrealistic. The tapestry is attached to a brown cloth of wool, basket-woven.

The style of the design leads me to ascribe it to the later part of the Tiahuanaco period, between 800 and 900 A. D.



PLATE 3

NO. 540 C

540-F. A woollen tapestry panel. 5 inches by 6.

The design represents a conventionalised five-digit hand with cuff. The ground is white, and the pattern contains three shades of brown and one of ochre. The long *jours* formed by some of the vertical lines have been partly closed up by green stitching. The material is all wool.

540-G. A woollen panel. About 9 inches by 5.

The brown, white, and blue stripes at top and bottom of the central panel are in ordinary tapestry weave, but the central panel itself, consisting of a narrow stripe of greenish brown at top and bottom, of a central stripe of reddish brown, is of most unusual weave, which resembles brocade as much as it does tapestry because the threads of any given colour are carried loosely along the back from one area of that colour to the next. The warps are far apart, twice as much so as those in the tapestry woven portions of the fabric. The weft here consists of very loosely twisted threads which, in pairs or in threes, pass in and out among the widely separated warps and, at the same time, twist loosely around one another. It is a very rare technique, never seen by me before. The effect given is one of smoothness, marred, however, by the visibility of the white warp threads. The human figures are worked in the same manner, but with thicker threads more closely beaten up.

540-H. Woollen tapestry panel.  $5\frac{1}{2}$  by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Ground work is white, the design, reminiscent of 540-B, is worked in yellow, blue, green, red, and pink, all of them of wool. A few *jours* occur. Tiahuanaco style.

540-I. Woollen tapestry panel. 6 inches by 7.

The ground is of a greenish brown tinge. The figure is worked in dark brown, medium brown, green, and white, all of wool. The warps run horizontally, resulting in the horizontal *jours* which distinguish this specimen. The human figure, highly conventionalized, has a feathered helmet and ear-drops. His arms are extended with the elbows bent, and his knees also are bent. He has four-digit feet. Probably of the Tiahuanaco period of the coast, about 800 A. D.

540-J. Woollen tapestry panel.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $6\frac{3}{4}$ .

The ground is white or, more correctly, light tan coloured through



PLATE 4

NO. 540 D



staining by time and exposure. The design is worked in light brown, medium brown, and blue, and it is extremely ill-defined. The upper portion of it seems to represent a headdress adorned with two conventionalised birds' heads, and the remainder has a vaguely anthropomorphic shape. The weave is coarse and uneven, leading me to suspect that this specimen was a practice-piece made by some pupil in the use of the loom.

The material is all wool.

The design is so incomplete that it would be impossible to assign it any special period were it not that the two birds' heads strongly suggest the influence of Tiahuanaco art.

540-K. Woollen tapestry fragment. 5 inches by 5.

The ground is reddish brown bearing a design worked in light brown, dark brown, and blue, all of wool. The pattern is a human figure with arms extended and with elaborate headdress. The hands have but three digits. Late Tiahuanaco style, about 900 A. D.

540-L. Woollen tapestry panel. 5 inches square.

The ground is of light brown. The figure has a ruddy brown tinge, the face and abdomen being white. There is an olive green oblong on each side of the head. All the colours are of wool. In some parts of the design there is a curious use of the dropped-weft technique for the purpose of limning the figure with a series of *jours*.

Tiahuanaco style, probably.

540-M. Woollen tapestry fragment. 4 inches across.

The ground is red and the human figure with its adjuncts is worked in three shades of brown, in white, green, and blue, all of the colours being of woollen two-ply, hard-twisted thread. The weave is very fine, about 160 weft threads to the inch (in the red area between the feet.)

Tiahuanaco style, between 600 and 900 A. D.

540-N. Woollen tapestry panel. Originally about 13 inches square.

The central panel is enclosed in a border which has a green ground bearing a conventional pattern of diamond-shaped areas worked in light brown, dark brown and green.

The central panel has a dark brown ground with a human figure worked in grayish brown, white, and green. The white and the green



PLATE 5

NO. 540 G

are much discoloured, and certain other shades appear to have been lost altogether, albeit the holes in the headdress and in the staff held in the figure's right hand may be due to other causes than colour-loss.

The design is highly conventionalised but not quite symmetrical, for the stepped pattern on the breast of the figure is not so. The use of *jours* was formerly very effective in this specimen, for an elaborate system of horizontal slots existed there until they were sewn up at some time in the past.

The material is all wool.

540-O. Woollen tapestry fragment. 5 inches by 4.

The ground is a rich sage green colour and the design is grey and white, a most unusual colour-scheme. The material is all wool. The small fringe below the fabric proper is grey and ochre.

The small areas in which the two human figures stand facing one another are highly conventionalised houses embellished by porches and by stepped roofs surmounted by elaborate roof-combs of a totemic or heraldic significance.

Although the treatment of the design is formal, the spirit is fundamentally realistic, recalling strongly the determining spirit that ruled in Early Chimu art during the first five hundred years or so of our Era. This particular specimen, however, is undoubtedly Late Chimu, dating from perhaps 1000 A. D. or thereabouts. In its rigid symmetry we see the influence of Tiahuanaco art acting upon the essential realism of the designer's conception.

540-P. Fragment of cotton with decorative design in wool.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $3\frac{1}{2}$ .

The cotton is white and is basket-woven. The design is in tapestry weave on a warp-system made up by combining several of the cotton warp-threads to form a single warp in the tapestry.

The colours are crimson, dark brown, blue, sage green, and yellow, all of them woollen. The design is a highly conventionalised frog motif. Late Chimu style, *circa* 1000 A. D.

540-Q. Woollen tapestry panel.  $16\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $4\frac{1}{2}$ .

The colours are dark brown for the ground, light brown, brownish yellow, crimson, and black, all of them in wool. The pattern is a richly conceived interlocking design involving conventionalised bird-



PLATE 6

NO. 54 · I

or fish-heads and a variety of geometric patterns. The weave is rather fine, about 96 weft thread to the inch. Late Chimú style, circa 1200-1300 A. D.

540-R. Woollen tapestry panel.  $16\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $3\frac{1}{2}$ .

The ground is crimson; the design is in grayish lavender, greenish blue, dark brown and light brown, all the tints being in wool. The design is divided into four panels separated by a rectilinearly meandering stripe with a step-motif. The creatures shown in the panels are so highly conventionalised as to be hard to define. Probably an animal head motif of some kind.

Late Chimú style, 1200-1300 A. D.

540-S. Woollen basket-weave fabric with woollen panel in tapestry weave. Outside dimensions  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $4\frac{1}{4}$ .

The basket-weave is yellow in colour. The shades in the tapestry are brown (ground), yellow, and white. The design is a conventionalised bird-motif surrounded by parti-coloured diamond shaped areas. There are between 80 and 90 weft threads to the inch.

Late Chimú style, 1200-1300 A. D.

540-T. Woollen tapestry with fringe. 5 inches long.

Colours are red (ground), black, light brown, and white. The weave is fine, about 115 to 120 weft threads to the inch in the decorated parts; elsewhere it is more coarse.

The fringe appears to be made of bast fibre, probably maguey. It was made separately and sewn on later. A curious feature of the fringe is that it is a weft fringe not, as is more usual, a warp fringe. One of the warp threads, the fifth from the bottom, is missing, perhaps by intention, but more probably by accidental pulling out in recent time.

The design is of conventionalised animals, perhaps llamas (?), with head-decorations. It is in the Late Chimú style, 1200-1300 A. D.

540-U. Woollen panel,  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $3\frac{1}{4}$ , with fringe  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches deep.

Colours are brown, sage green, and light brown. The ground of the stripe having the conventionalised birds is sage green. Originally this specimen was in two pieces, but they were carefully sewn together, no doubt by the maker.



PLATE 8

NO. 540 Q

The selvage of the fringe is of much coarser weave than the tapestry itself. The fringe is of the loop type.

Late Chimú style, 1200-1300 A. D.

540-V. Woollen panel of tapestry, 13 inches long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide with fringe  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep.

The colours are dark brown, light brown, and sage green (ground of the central stripe.)

The design is a conventionalised bird-motif.

The fringe is of the loop type, made separately and sewn on.

Late Chimú style, 1200-1300 A. D.

540-W. Woollen tapestry panel 12 inches long by  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches wide, with fringe  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch deep.



PLATE 7

NO. 540 P

Colours are brownish red (ground), crimson, dark brown, and black. The fringe is crimson and of the loop type. The weave is rather fine, from 96 to about 110 weft threads to the inch.

The design involves conventionalised birds and a moderate use of the dropped weft technique.

Late Chimu style, 1200–1300 A. D.

540–X. Woollen tapestry panel.  $13\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $3\frac{1}{4}$ .

The colours are evenly distributed with the result that there is no ground colour. They are blue, yellowish brown, medium brown, dark brown, white, and pink. The design is an elaborate interlocking bird-motif. Many areas, but not all, are carefully outlined with self-tinted threads introduced eccentrically in addition to the ordinary weft threads. This gives unusual sharpness of definition to the colour areas so treated.

Late Chimu style, 1200–1300 A. D.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This small collection is remarkable for several reasons. It contains an unusually high representation of pieces containing the rare tints blue and green. It has a number of pieces in which bast fibre, in all likelihood the fibre of the maguey, is used. It has some interesting fringes and also the most curious looped decoration in the headdress of 540–D. Finally, it has one of the most remarkable pieces of weaving technique that I have ever seen, namely, 540–G.<sup>1</sup>

Since going to press this collection has been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

<sup>1</sup>Those who may be puzzled to account for my dating of the various specimens here mentioned are referred to my earlier article in this *Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pages 3–27, entitled *A Series of Ancient Andean Textiles*; and also to *A Survey of Ancient Peruvian Art*, published by the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, New Haven, 1917. In general I may say that the chronological assignments made here are all based upon stylistic peculiarities of the various designs.