

# A WEAVER'S TRIP TO PERU

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*EDITOR'S NOTE:—This article is based on the personal experiences of the author in Peru during the summer of 1939. All of the photos were taken by herself, and are of textiles which are in her own collection which she brought home from Peru. She has some over 200 of these ancient fabrics, including a loom illustrated in this article, and also a spinning basket with its full equipment of spindles, cotton on ancient distaffs, and a tool made out of a piece of bone which was used to beat down weft threads.*

**A**S most of you know, ancient Peruvian textiles are among the most beautiful in the world and noted not only for the fineness of their execution and the thread, but also for the great variety and kinds of weaving technique which were employed to create them.

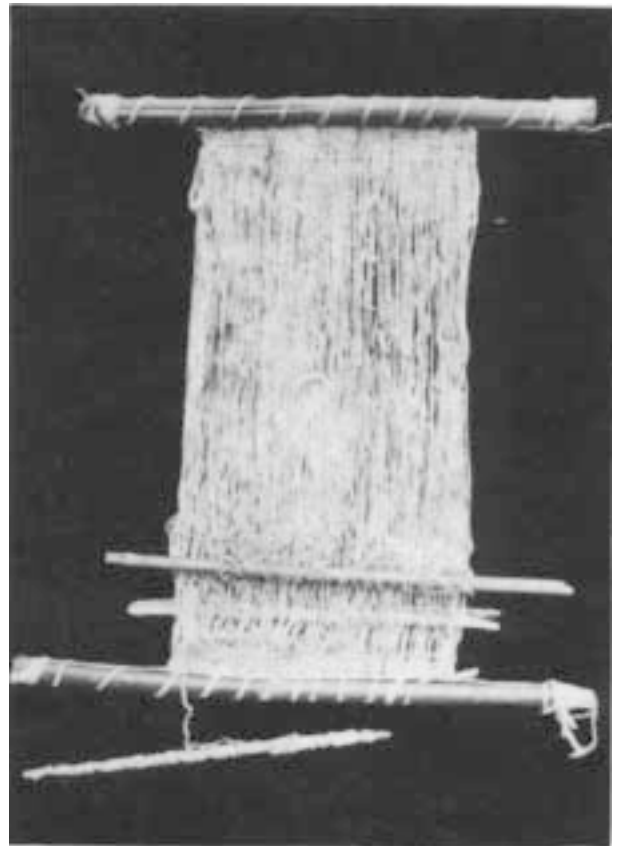
This summer of 1939, it has been my good fortune to spend my vacation in Peru and to have access to many of the wonderful textiles in the museums in Lima in order to study them in detail. And also I have brought home a most interesting collection of my own, both ancient Incan and modern Indian ones. It is not possible in writing to describe for you the real spirit of modern Peru. I wish that it were. One really has to see it and feel it to know what it is. The greater part of my time was spent in and near Lima, except for a four day trip up into the mountains. This took us up over the Sierras at Galera over 17,000 feet, and then down to the town of Huan-cayo which is 12,800 feet above the sea level. It was a wonderful experience. For we not only had an opportunity to see and study the people and city of Lima, but also saw how the modern Indians of the mountains live.

Lima is a beautiful city with many strange contrasts. One sees an old Incan mound of huge stone or adobe blocks partly unearthed, and right next to this an ultra modern cement home of the latest design. Or perhaps an Indian hut of adobe mud with a thatched straw roof was next to a stately old Colonial Spanish home with its open patio, lovely tiles and iron grille work. There were many parks and wide boulevards and of course a great many old Colonial Spanish churches and convents. What was of especial interest to me were the fine archeological museums and their collections of textiles. Here one can spend much time in study and real research.

It was winter in Peru, we wore our heavy clothes in the middle of July. But the climate is very mild with only an occasional damp mist, but never a real rain or any snow.

One sunny afternoon we took a trip by auto to Pachacamac, a typical Pre-Incan burying ground about 12 miles outside of the city of Lima. Here were the ruins of the ancient town of Pachacamac we actually drove through one of its narrow ancient streets, and high up on the hill above the town the old Pre-Incan temple to Pachacamac, the creator god. While still higher on the same hill was the Incan temple of the Sun. Across the sand dunes in the valley below was also the ruins of the House of

the Virgins of the Sun, where much weaving was done for the use of the priests, the Inca, and for the temple. All of these ruins have been excavated enough to show the real size, construction, and plan of the buildings. Much of this work was done in the fall of 1938, under the direction of Dr. Albert Giesecke, who was appointed to carry on by the Peruvian government in preparation for the visitors to the Lima Conference in December of 1938. We were particularly fortunate in having Dr. Giesecke, who by the way is an American, personally conduct us through the ruins, and explain them to us. Many of the old colored paintings on the walls of the



*Ancient Peruvian Loom from a Grave*

Pachacamac temple have been uncovered. Fish, bird, and corn motifs are very clear and bright in yellow, blue, and a coppery red and black. Right in front at the base of the temple of Pachacamac some of the most interesting mummies have been found. Dr. Giesecke also said that they believed they had found, during the excavating, the original carved wooden idol which stood in the shrine of the Pachacamac temple, which was thrown out by the Spanish conquerors to be replaced by the cross. This idol we saw later at the National Archeological Museum in Lima. It is a very simple crudely carved wooden pole about 6" in diameter and possibly about 6 feet in length.

This idol resembles the Alaskan totem poles somewhat, and was held most sacred. Only the priests and the Inca himself were allowed to approach it, and then only after a long series of religious fasts and sacrifices had been performed in preparation for the event. Near the shrine on which the idol stood was the sacrificial stone, even now discolored by the blood of many animals, and possibly of humans as well. Here at Pachacamac it is possible to pick up fragments of cloth, pottery, skulls, bones etc. I found many things of interest to the weaver, among these a complete dark brown wool poncho in plain weave with a striped border

the warp threads, and the flat stick for the opposite shed. It seems almost unbelievable that all of the beautiful fine fabrics of these ancient people were woven on a loom no more complicated than this. One narrow tapestry ribbon which I have has 80 warp threads to the inch, and 320 weft threads of very fine wool to the inch. It is my contention that more people today would learn how to weave if it were not for the expense involved in buying a large loom. Certainly much more can be done with such simple equipment than is being done, although to use this loom well does require more skill and patience on the part of the weaver. A description of this type of loom was given in detail in "Handweaving News"



*Peruvian Brocade with Tapestry Woven Fringe*



*Three Double Woven Peruvian Fabrics*

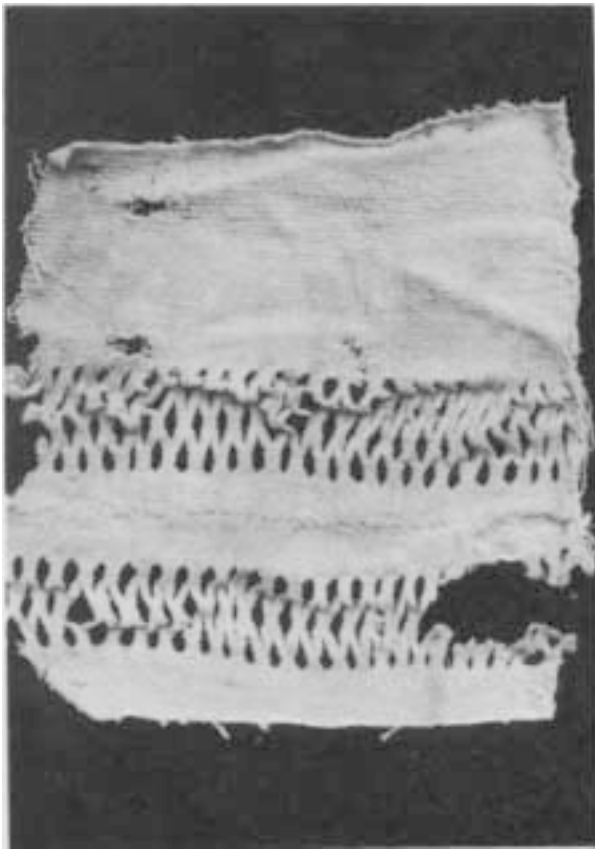
on each edge, quite a number of pieces of plain fabric in which mummies were wrapped, bunches of cotton with the seeds still in them, bits of colored pottery, shells etc. There is still a very large area at Pachacamac which has not been excavated at all. No one knows the wonderful discoveries which are waiting there still covered with the ever drifting sands.

At Figure No. 1 is shown a Peruvian loom. This is an ancient one which came from a mummy bundle. It is similar in construction to the loom of the Navajo Indian of today, except that most of these old looms weave only a very narrow width. This one weaves about 7" wide, and has a few rows of plain weave started at the top as well as at the bottom where the shuttle stick is. It also has the heddle rod still in position with a fine thread on it around

for July of 1936. This is a weaving service sent out each month by the author of this article.

At Figure No. 2 is shown a simple brocade pattern of interlocked puma heads in bands. The background cloth is a very firm close weave of cotton, with the brocade thread of wool spun a bit coarser than the plain weft. At the bottom of this piece is a red tapestry woven fringe which was woven separately and sewed on. Many of the Peruvian weavings have this type of woven fringe. This brocade is about 10" in width with the bands about 2" wide.

Double weavings seem to have been a rather common form among these ancient people, for there are many cloths woven in this technique. At Figure No. 3 are three different pieces. The square piece at the left top is of brown and white cotton and 10" square. It is a complete piece with selvage on all sides. Note



*A Variation of Tapestry Technique*



*A Tapestry Woven Gauze Fabric*

especially on this piece that the figures on the extreme left are very indistinct. This might have been due to the fact that these last weft threads were darned in with the needle. It is possible that such a piece was used as a handkerchief, for I have a number of these in my collection. The large piece of double weaving at the right is an interesting combination of the bird and fish motif, and has an attractive border at the top. It was part of a large mantas, and I have several pieces of this same pattern. The small piece at the bottom left of Figure No. 3 is of very fine thread and also an interlocked fish and bird design of brown and white. It is possible to do double weaving on the four harness loom, and for those who are interested in learning how, I will refer you to "Lesson on How To Do Double Weaving on the Four Harness Loom" by the author of this article. This lesson is described in simple clear directions and includes the loan of a sample of the weave. Since March of 1934, when directions for this technique were published for the first time in the English language in the above mentioned "Lesson", many weavers have availed themselves of the opportunity to learn how to do it. For it is not difficult, and any design which can be drawn out on cross section paper may be woven.

At Figure No. 4 is a small fragment of coarse cotton. This is woven in a variation of the tapestry technique where the slits are made to form the pattern, a more or less rare form of tapestry weaving.

At Figure No. 5 is a tapestry woven gauze. It is woven of cotton all white. The bottom border with its little fringed edge is four and three fourths inches wide and is sewed to a piece which was 19" wide when it was woven. The interlocked bird design is woven on the gauze background with thread somewhat coarser than the background warp and weft. A description of this technique may be found in "Handweaving News" for October 1939, and will not be repeated here for lack of space.

It is the hope of the author that this brief description of a few of her Peruvian textiles and the places where they were found will be of interest to other weavers. For there is much to be done to make them better known, and our own weaving can be greatly improved through a study of what ancient peoples accomplished with simple looms and simple designs. One weaving student who recently saw these textiles said, "It just makes our modern weaving look like nothing at all, doesn't it." And so we marvel at the fineness, ingenuity, and skill with which these ancient fabrics were woven.