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## Scientific Notes on Paracas Mummy Bundle No. 294

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*deceased*

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## SCIENTIFIC NOTES ON PARACAS MUMMY BUNDLE NO. 294

Rebeca Carrión Cachot de Girard

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Thanks to the kind invitation made to me by the government of El Salvador, I have been honored with the scientific responsibility of opening Paracas mummy bundle No. 294, donated by Peru to our sister republic. In this way I have been able to assist in the highest Americanist and cultural goals of both countries.

This bundle offers important evidence for establishing the history of Paracas in particular, and that of precolumbian Peruvian civilization in general, revealing once more the value of the remains discovered in the priests' mausoleum of the Paracas Peninsula in 1927. There, 429 bundles containing mummies of high-ranking people were found, accompanied by sumptuous ceremonial clothing and ritual objects. Here I present some of the results of the preliminary study I made of the contents of this bundle, during the exhumation undertaken on the 10th of July. It has characteristics of great interest for determining its approximate age, the value of certain ritual objects, and the process of mummification.

### Textiles

1. All the ceremonial textiles, including the burial wrappings, are of white cotton. There is no woolen cloth.

2. We did not find large mantles with checkerboarding or polychrome figures embroidered on a plain background. Nor did we find well-known objects of clothing like skirts, *unkus*,<sup>1</sup> cloaks, or turbans.

3. Very few items of clothing accompanied

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<sup>1</sup> Quechua for a man's sleeveless shirt, usually made of two untailored pieces of fabric sewn together vertically, with slits left for the head and arms. In Inca times the *unku-kuna* of high-status individuals were very fine, and decorated with designs denoting rank, status, and ethnicity. [This, and subsequent notes, are by the translator.]

the deceased individual. These consisted only of a narrow cloth or *ñañaka*<sup>2</sup> with an edging of red fringe decorated with realistic birds; two medium-sized cotton mantles, one with fringes decorated with stylized felines executed in relief,<sup>3</sup> produced by a skeuomorphic corded technique in three colors; a small net cloth over the head; and another, of an older technique, rolled and knotted, placed around the neck of the mummy.

4. We did not find cloths folded into six or more parts, as is usual, nor did we find cloth wrapped in the form of "cradles" to fill in the spaces adjacent to the body.

5. As for the condition of the clothing and offerings, they were placed in a manner similar to that of the majority of bundles studied under my direction by the National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology of Peru. A large cotton cloth, in good condition, was wrapped several times around the exterior of the bundle. It was attached in various places with knot stitches, executed with cotton thread. Beyond that, two textiles of the same material appeared, placed above to form a "bun" attached with a rolled cord. Between the second and the third cover were placed the two fringed mantles mentioned above. Towards the rear of the bundle carbonized remains of other cotton textiles were found, forming a dark, powdery mass, that hindered the process of unwrapping. Finally, small cloths covered the head of the mummy, which wore a small tuft of yellow feathers, almost destroyed, an insignia of the dead person's rank.

### The mummy

6. We found the mummy leaning against the base of the bundle, with the arms half folded and the legs completely flexed, indicating that it was originally placed in the center of the bundle, in a crouching position. The

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<sup>2</sup> Quechua for "headcloth", especially of the type worn by high-status Inca women.

<sup>3</sup> "inscritos" in the original.

mummy was displaced from its original position by the weight of the textiles, or by other bundles placed on top of it in the mausoleum. Because of this the head had separated from the trunk, being found almost at the edge of the base, with the face pointing toward the left, the arms and legs displaced, and the ribs, vertebrae, and [other] bones of the corpse were scattered within the carbonized mass.

7. The head is preserved in perfect condition thanks to the mummification process to which the corpse was subjected. The ocular globes are intact, as are the eyelids. The nasal cavities are preserved, but they are flattened and folded up and back because of the effect of the weight they supported. The epidermis is complete, except for the part surrounding the mouth. This mouth holds a complete set of small teeth, without the brown stains observed on other examples because of the consumption of fluorine-rich water. There is no facial paint. The hair is rather red,<sup>4</sup> cut to chin length, covered with a net, but left bare at the back. There is no turban, a garment frequently found with the mummies of this mausoleum.

The head is large, with prominent cheekbones. There is a very well-defined artificial deformation with enlargement at the top and flattening at the base. This type of deformation is obtained by placing a pillow on the forehead and another in the occipital region. Contrasting with the large size of the head is the small and fine appearance of the hands that are perfectly preserved, with the epidermis complete and the oval fingernails well cut and with the finger whorls still visible. Several dark blue stains adorn the legs. These appear to be tattoos, but their final identification will be made in the lab. Similar stains are also found on the elsewhere on the body.

As for the age at death of the deceased, this will be determined by physicians who have assisted us in studying the cadaver. We can calculate an approximate age between 40 and 45 years to judge from the dentition, physical appearance, and other points of reference like the young appearance of the

<sup>4</sup> Probably as a result of oxidation processes involved in decomposition.

hands. By contrast, the individuals studied earlier were between 50 and 75 years old at the time of their death and mummification.

### **Other new evidence encountered in the funeral bundle**

Among the interesting remains found within the bundle we can also list:

8. A little bundle made from a large, rectangular, striped, napkin-like cloth, carefully rolled up, and containing two purple marine shells, of ritual character. They were adhering to the cloth and had colored it where they were in contact with it, as if they had been impregnated with sea water at the time they were placed within the bundle.

9. A rectangular sheet, approximately 45 cm. long and 25 cm. wide, of very fine deerskin, carefully lined with two fine, white cotton cloths, attached with very small stitches. The upper face of this skin was decorated with small, bright blue beads, arranged in pairs on pendant threads. Very few of these beads could be recovered from the carbonized mass, but we were able to see more than forty threads which allowed us to determine that these beads were placed equidistant from each other. The mummy was seated on this leather sheet, instead of in a funerary basket or on a straw disk. New evidence will become available after we have studied this artifact.

10. Various spangles of laminated gold decorated the mummy, two bands of gold circled the wrists, four rectangular spangles with perforations must have adorned the forehead, and small discoidal earrings with ten punctations along the edges covered the earlobes. At present we have only recovered one earring. These sheets were irregularly cut, revealing a lack of skill, or the use of an inappropriate instrument.

### **Conclusions**

From the evidence presented above one arrives at the following conclusions:

Paracas Mummy bundle number 294 is one of the oldest from the Priests' Mausoleum to judge from various traits including textile techniques. The designs decorating

the textiles are transitional between those of the first Paracas period (Cavernas) and the second (Necropolis). The presence of only cotton textiles and the use of wool thread only in the fringes, as well as the simplicity of the outfitting of the bundle suggest an early date. We didn't find certain ritual objects, such as feather fans and fox skins, commonly associated with other bundles. Neither did we find large turbans. This bundle also lacked any type of ceremonial weapons such as clubs, slings, and staffs.

As for the position of the corpse, this must have been the usual one, that is crouching, but with the right arm extended and with the hand in a fist, and with the left hand clasping a gourd plate containing camote, manioc, and peanuts. Maize was not present.

Taking into account the characteristics of this bundle, we can calculate an age of 2,600 years for this evidence of the Paracas culture. Radiocarbon dates will be obtained as soon as the government of El Salvador sends the necessary samples to laboratories in the United States.

From the point of view of the archaeology of Peru, and of the Americas, the study of this funeral bundle will shed new light on

the precolumbian history of the people of our continent.

At the Thirty-second International Congress of Americanists to be held in Copenhagen in the first week of next August [1956] I will present a study of Mummy 294 and the ritual offerings that accompanied it, in fulfillment of the Americanist commitment of my country, Peru, and of El Salvador, whose government and cultural representatives and journalists have emphasized, to an extraordinary degree, the valuable gift of my country.<sup>5</sup> The continental renown of this cultural message of the Peruvian people is due to the high public spirit of the ambassador of El Salvador to Peru, his excellency, Señor Doctor Rafael Barraza Monterrosa.

San Salvador, July 12, 1956

Translation from the Spanish by  
Monica Barnes

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<sup>5</sup> There is no record of this paper in the proceedings of the congress (Richard E. Daggett, 1994:67, *Andean Past* 4:53-75[this volume]), nor of it having been presented or published elsewhere.