**ART AND ARTIFACTS**

**Paracas Embroidered Mantle Detail**  
Paracas 500/200 BC

**Chavín de Huántar 900-200BC**

The first great art style of the geographical area that is now Peru was that of the civilization that flourished at Chavín de Huántar in the northern highlands. A more or less contemporaneous culture of the north coast produced a style of pottery known as Cupisnique.

**The Culture of Paracas: The Power of Garments**

The culture of Paracas flourished for several centuries in one of the driest areas of the Andes. During its apogee, from 300 BCE to 200 CE, its influence extended throughout southern Peru’s coastal valleys. The people of Paracas buried their dead in elaborate funerary bundles, wrapping them in layer upon layer of finely woven and embroidered textiles. Many of these bundles contained sheet-gold masks as well as offerings of Spondylus shell imported from the Ecuadorian coast far to the north.

The lords of Paracas lived in multi-tiered dwellings built on the slopes of hills and wore stunning garments decorated with embroidered images of their gods; the rich colors and intricate designs of their garments resemble paintings more than embroidered textiles. Fine garments such as these defined social position and status. In addition, the members of the Paracas elite wore wigs or colored their hair with a red pigment containing poisonous mercury that often led to an early death for the society's elite.

**Male Headdress I of the Late Paracas Period**

21 cm x 23 cm  
Pencil Drawing by Christiane Clados

**Male Headdress I of the Late Paracas Period**

Turbans were the predominant head garments of the Peruvian South Coast. The lords of Paracas wore elaborately wrapped turbans, some of which reached seven meters in length when undone.

**Turban Band of the Paracas Culture**

Ann Paul 1990  
Paracas Ritual Attire: Symbols of Authority in Peru

The turban in the reconstruction portrait is wrapped so that the tassels on both ends adorn the ruler's forehead. The gold discs on the sides of his face are not earrings; they are attached to the wig he wears under his turban. His shirt and his richly embroidered mantle are part of a set; the mantle covers his shoulders leaving only the collar of his shirt visible.
Both are decorated with a motif that represents a mythical being linked to the cycles of death, rebirth, and agricultural fertility. These motifs are also associated with headhunting and the trophy cult, widespread phenomena of the Peruvian South Coast.

Gold discs are attached to the two bands of the turban that appear on both sides of his face, and his hair is colored red and braided under the turban. The palette of colors and the labor invested in Paracas garments are astonishing. Nearly 190 different colors are recorded and as many as seven artisans may have worked on a single mantle. (Clados 2004)

Paracas mantles from Peru feature figures of ritually costumed priests, each clutching an animal by his side. Both priests and animals display human and animal traits, illustrating the religious connections between the social and natural orders. Mantles of this complexity belonged to the ruling elite and were worn only on important religious and festive occasions. Some were intended as burial clothes to be worn in the afterlife, representing the deceased’s status and office in the land of the ancestor spirits.

Paracas Embroidered Mantle Edge
Deborah Brinckeroff
Bruce Museum of Arts and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut

Paracas Woven Mantle
Nacional de Anthropologia y Arqueologia, Lima

Male Headdress II of the Late Paracas Period
21 cm x 28 cm
oil and ink on paper
Drawing by Christiane Clados

Male Headdress II of the Late Paracas Period
This reconstruction shows the headdress of an elegantly dressed man of Paracas. His tall turban consists of multiple bands embroidered in their entirety with colorful motifs that represent mythical beings.