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*100BC to
400AD*



*Sihuas Culture
Textile Fringed Deity Face,
Circa. 100-400 AD
Camelid fibres
15 x 30 cm*

*Sihuas Culture
Stylised Ocucaje
Deity Tunic, Circa.
300 BC
Camelid fibres
131 x 71 cm*



In this extraordinary selection of textiles dedicated to the relatively unknown Sihuas culture, we find a uniquely vibrant art style that is both aesthetically captivating and resonates to the spirit of our times although 2000 years and more have passed between us, what could the cause of that commonality be. That these ancient artists imbued the works with meanings that are maybe hard to grasp for us, they are impregnated with enigmas that implore our attention to go beyond the formal or art conventions and see them for what they are, radiant examples of the human inherent need to express their social and cosmic yearnings towards a higher realm. Ancient Andean honoured their gods with offerings and ceremonies and paid homage to their dead. The works of art that we see in museums were not usually objects intended for daily use. Although some of their apparently utilitarian forms may suggest such usages, their real function was to serve as spiritual rather than earthly objects.



*Sihuas Culture
Mantle, Circa. 50 BC
Camelid fibres
148 x 177 cm*

Little is known about the Sihuas culture (Sigwas), it was an archaeological culture that flourished from 500 BC to 400 AD beside the arid northern coast of present day Chile and the southern coast of Peru, its iconography was strongly influenced by the preceding Pucara culture on the shores of lake Titicaca, which was known for extremely complex stoneworks and extraordinary textiles, the Sihuas style produced an array of crafts and technologies such as ceramics, textiles, and geoglyphs. The Sihuas are mainly known for their technically complex and exquisitely made textiles. The textiles were most likely woven by women at habitation sites from spun cotton and wool. The textiles would have been made using a back-strap loom. This is similar to the way textiles are woven in the region today. Textiles were woven with these supernatural motifs earlier than they appeared painted on pottery. The dry desert has preserved the textiles of both the Pucara and Sihuas cultures, which comprise most of what is known about early textiles in the region. Shawls, dresses, tunics, belts, and bags have been found through excavations around the Atacama desert and elsewhere. Many textiles associated with the Sihaus culture are garments that were included at ceremonial offering sites. The deposits of dresses and shawls contained both high-status garments (with feathers, painting, embroidery) and plain garments, suggesting different social roles within a shamanic society.



*Nazca Culture
Sihuas Tunic,
Circa. 500AD
Camelid fibres*

These stylised and abstracted Sihuas (Siguas) textiles display an incredible virtuosity in composition, simplification and geometricization within these textiles, particularly in the later parts of the civilisation's chronology. This mantles in particular shows an abstracted deity with rays emanating from it. It would have been oriented vertically, with the small squares in the central white square standing in as eyes, with abstracted tears flowing from them. Although the precise meaning of these weeping eyes is not well-understood, it was common in the iconography of the Pucara, Arica and later Nazca cultures. Variants of this rayed deity are some of the most characteristic iconography of the Sihuas culture, with their degree of detail and realism varying significantly. The four-part crosses at the top and bottom of these mantles (when oriented vertically, as it should be) also presage the Andean cross so important for later Huari textiles. It is interesting that the deity is shown with rays, perhaps referencing spiders, whose skill at spinning and weaving made them of great importance in Andean textile artists.



Sihuas Culture
Sihuas Mantle (Arica), Circa.
400AD
Camelid fibres
114 x 222 cm

In preparing this online exhibition on this most mysterious of cultures, we are faced with the reality that there simply is not a lot of information to work with. Undertaking the daunting task of sifting through field notes, journals and books is not exceptionally exciting, and one has to be prepared to discover nothing. Finding a needle in a haystack couldn't be more applicable, but postponed pleasures are always the sweetest. Not only does it satisfy and fuel all the work you're putting forth, but it also gives a sense of accomplishment that you're able to share with the public, and lord knows what feedback might come.

*Sihuas Culture
Loincloth (detail),
Circa. 200AD
Camelid fibres*



In terms of Sihaus iconography we can only rely upon what was written by the much later Spanish and mestizo chronological records of the Inca period. One of the most important figures in pre-Inca Andean beliefs is the creator deity Viracocha, who even during Inca times was one of the most important deities in the Inca pantheon and seen as the creator of all things, or the substance from which all things are created, and intimately associated with the sea. As the chief deity Viracocha takes the form of the Staff God and in these Sihaus examples its a splayed human with rays radiating from it.. As the chief deity, Viracocha was the creator god and served as the primary religious icon of the entire Peruvian Andes, particularly during the Early Horizon (900-200 BC).come.



*Sihuas Culture
Mantle with Stylised Ocucaje Icon,
C-14 dating 50BC
Camelid Fibres
94 x 95 cm 81 x 43,5 cm*



Sihuas Culture
Engraved Gours sihuas
179 x 119 cm

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