



HOMENAJE

In Honor of Verónica Cereceda

Verónica was a woman who wore many hats. As an anthropologist, a textile and weaving specialist, a museum curator and exhibition organizer, a thinker, a writer, a scholar, a person deeply engaged with her surroundings and the people of an expanded horizon. One of the aspects that connected all these parts was a deep sensitivity to human behaviour and creativity. For me, while I always admired her work with weavers, her research on the “*talegas* of Isluga” and the “aesthetics of beauty” were the two seminal studies that impacted my own thinking about the significance of textiles in the Andes.

Aproximaciones a una estética andina: de la belleza al tinku

In this essay (Cereceda 1987), Verónica discusses a hierarchy of beauty in the Andes. Examining *wayruru*—a seed, red and black—opened a viewpoint to a world of significance in color and its values and also called attention to the integration of color associations within the categories of the Inca *acllas* (the cloistered chosen women). This idea of sets of colors holding cultural significance was something I had observed over many years of looking at the Inca *capacocha* dressed figurines—which seemed to fall into groups, according to the colorful stripes on their clothings. There were those dressed in garments of red, black (or purple), and yellow, while others with browns and cremes of the natural alpaca and llama hair, and some with predominantly black and white.

Verónica explored the taxonomy of the idea, and mines the colonial sources for evidence and variations of its significance. And she argues that these sources have not fully explained the ideas, the sense of harmony, the quality of the color, the physical aspect—whether matte or shiny—something is missing. She notes that it is now a question of objects, but what is actually being classified through human relations that occurs between debtors and payees are *los colores* (the colors), apart from the media that holds them—whether they be stones, or seeds, or cloth. She does not focus on the idea of the objects themselves but rather indicates that what is being classified are human relationships regardless of the fact that the physical object is a seed or a stone (Cereceda 1987: 177).

The notion she explores is that the Aymara language utilizes single words to evoke a combination of ideas. And so, the focus on the red and black seed and its beauty is about intervention and nuance, the “optical conflict” between two things: opaqueness and brilliance. That such a large idea can be perceived through the tiny seed underscores her view of Andean cultures—which she says “[...] han sido maestras en hablar con estos lenguajes visuales: sus máximos discursos son los textiles” (Cereceda 1987: 180).¹

The Semiology of Andean Textiles: The Talegas of Isluga

In this essay (Cereceda 1986), Verónica begins with a question: Can an Andean textile be viewed as a text? And to what extent can the woven text be comprehensible within but also beyond the Andean communities within which it has been elaborated? To address this, she looks at the organization of woven space and the significance of formal elements.

The idea of woven space—in the larger term as opposed to the physical plane—opens the possibility of discourse that engages in human relations with the world beyond the confines of the loom. Perception via the organization of the yarns, the spacing and rhythm of the colored stripes in the humble *talegas*, the small striped bags, establishes a vision charged with meaning.

Repetition, symmetry, and order focus the visual language while establishing boundaries and formats that extend beyond the physical. We see through her study the power of a single thread, a demarcation of space and meaning. Persistent associations of protecting entities from ancient times to today, with the *allqa*, for example, the small stripe that accompanies and intervenes between the larger span with a color change, which she identifies as the “meeting place between daylight and ultimate darkness” (Cereceda 1986: 160). This notion of the transition of color mirrors ideas expressed in the *wayruru* discussion on two things (i.e., the red and the black) carrying aspects of transformation rather than finite objects. While Verónica focuses on these small sets from a contemporary view, she brings in the terminology of the early 17th century Aymara dictionary of Ludovico Bertonio (1956 [1612]) that supports her analysis. I believe we can see some of these same configurations even earlier—seen as a woven feature that goes as far back as at least the Chavín and Paracas cultural complexes. While Verónica looks at the present world around her, she provides tools for those of us who look at the ancient past. This helps us to consider the deeper significance of these small but powerful woven entities that we can observe but not always understand. She opens the window.

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¹ “[...] are *maestros* to speak in these visual languages—maximized in the discourse around textiles” (Cereceda 1987: 180. Author’s translation).

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