

Paleopathology and Human Sacrifice in the Tiawanaku Culture

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Human sacrifice as practiced in Mexico and Central America was done for the purpose of bringing into back the next day in the calendar for the welfare of the cultural group. This required daily sacrifice of many people who were often taken in a ritual warfare. Ritual human sacrifice in the Andean area was rare, but animal sacrifice was common over the centuries and is still done today to determine the outcome of an event or to diagnose an illness. Mutilation and torture of prisoners was common throughout the Americas and must be distinguished from true sacrifice, which was usually a member of the same cultural group for communication with a religious figure or spirit who will send an answer to a problem though the organs of the victim.

The temple of Sechin near Casma, Peru is 4,000 years old. It has life size figures of warriors, and many anatomic views of their possible victims carved on the outside walls. While it is difficult to know why these views are shown, it is probably dealing with methods of killing captives taken in warfare as warriors with their clubs are also present.

A dead Inca was always accompanied by a number of people who were killed to serve him. While early ones were thought to be volunteers, later small metal statues were often substituted and supposedly carried the spirit of the person to serve their dead lord. The Wari people gave elegant burials to children who had been strangled to accompany dead adults. They were generally buried in a separate tomb above the adult burials. The Colonial Indians frequently had adult female burials with an infant at their feet. One female mummy had the baby in her arms. While some of these might be dead Colonial mothers and infants from a delivery, others have children of 2-4 months buried with them, and possibly death may be due to one of the imported virus diseases, or a sacrifice.

One mummy from a typical Tiwanaku burial was autopsied, and had very interesting findings. The mummy was found in a vandalized cemetery. in a replica of a mountain house, with 22 other mummies ceremonially burial in the Tiwanaku style. When this mummy bundle was unwrapped it was noted that the body was a male about 20 years old. He lacked the buttocks and legs. The autopsy showed visible skin lesions consisting of pendulous tumors and scars. The only internal organs found were the liver, right lung and diaphragm. Samples were taken of these for histological

studies with Gram and Giemsa stains, and electron microscopy. The stained tissues of the skin lesions and organs showed that the etiology of these lesions was Bartonella bacilliformis. This agent produces bartonellosis with two manifestations: “Oroya Fever” (a hemolytic phase), and “Verruga Peruana” (a nodular skin phase). These are also known as Carrion’s Disease.

The time of his death was one of unrest with armies marching to and fro in the land. It seems reasonable that this man, who had a ceremonial burial, was part of an army that contracted Bartonellosis in one of the valleys on their decent to the coast. He was chosen as a sacrifice for examination of his organs to see the future of this expedition. His ceremonial burial indicates that he belonged to the community and was in good standing, and had not been punished for some crime. The Inca culture used llamas for this purpose, but were known to sacrifice a human in times of great importance to foretell the future of an uncertain situation. This was done by reading the entrails of the victim.

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