

Current Biography

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won an Oscar

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Courtesy of Mountain Institute

Reinhard, Johan

(RINE-hard, YO-han)

1943- High-altitude archaeologist; anthropologist; mountain climber. Address: c/o Field Museum of Natural History, 1200 S. Lake Shore Dr., Chicago, IL 60605; c/o Mountain Institute, Main and Dogwood Sts., Franklin, WV 26087

"I don't know if you've seen that mummy," President Bill Clinton said at a political fund-raiser in Connecticut in May 1996, as quoted by Roxanne Roberts in the *Washington Post* (May 24, 1996). "But, you know, if I were a single man, I might ask that mummy out. That's a good-looking mummy. That mummy looks better than I do on my worst days. . . . You need to go see her." The object of the president's admiration was the frozen, 500-year-old sacrificial remains of an Incan girl—christened "Juanita, the Ice Maiden"—which the anthropologist Johan Reinhard dug up near the 20,700-foot summit of the Peruvian volcano Mount Ampato. An explorer, mountaineer, archaeologist, and anthropologist, Reinhard is a pioneer in the anthropological specialties known as sacred geography and high-altitude archaeology, which is conducted at least 17,000 feet above sea level. He has built his career by unraveling some of the mysteries of the Incan civilization, which disappeared from South America almost half a millennium ago.

Gregarious and self-reliant, Reinhard was long viewed by his colleagues as something of a maverick. Since unearthing Juanita, in September 1995, he has enjoyed celebrity status rarely accorded anthropologists or archaeologists. *Time* magazine rated Juanita one of the 10 most important scientific discoveries of 1995, and record crowds came to view Juanita when she was displayed in Washington, D.C., in 1996. Reinhard has since continued his work as an expert on the cultures of South American mountain tribes. In April 1999 he unearthed the well-preserved remains of three Incan child sacrifices at the peak of Argentina's Mount Lullallaco, a discovery that, by all accounts, will prove to be even more significant than that of Juanita.

The son of a detective, Johan Reinhard was born in Joliet, Illinois, in 1943. As a boy, he told Roxanne Roberts, he read "every Hardy Boys book I could get my hands on," referring to the popular series about the amateur teenage sleuths Frank and Joe Hardy. At the age of 16, he ran away from home to join a railroad crew in Kansas. That motley group of workers, most of whom were southerners, fascinated Reinhard. "What astonished me was that there were people in my own country who had a whole different culture," he recalled to Roberts. His fascination with people and cultures led him to major in anthropology at the University of Arizona, where he earned a bachelor's degree. He later completed a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at the University of Vienna, in Austria.

Reinhard's interest in mountaineering and high-altitude climbing dates to the early 1970s, and he gradually incorporated those activities into his work in his academic field. He spent the bulk of his early career in Nepal, researching shamanism and witchcraft for his doctoral dis-

sertation and also directing a training program for the Peace Corps. He was a member of the successful 1976 American expedition that climbed the 29,028-foot Mount Everest, on the border between Nepal and Tibet in the Himalayas. Reinhard recognized that the Buddhists and Hindus from the Himalayan region shared a belief in the sacredness of the mountains. "To these people the Himalayas were not merely the homes of the gods, they were the gods, capable of killing by avalanche, rockfall, lightning, blizzard and wind, or blessing with rain-filled clouds, pouring life into rivers and lakes," he was quoted as saying in the *Geographical Magazine* (January 1998). By the 1980s Reinhard had begun working in the Andes mountains, which run from Panama to the southern tip of South America. His earlier observation of shared beliefs among disparate religions and cultures became the linchpin for his work relating to the Incan civilization.

For about a quarter-century, Reinhard toiled in relative obscurity. Like others among the few archaeologists who work without an affiliation with any major institution, he spent a lot of his time trying to secure grants to fund his projects. It was during a rare moment of leisure in 1995 that he happened on the find that attracted so much attention. Recent eruptions of long-dormant volcanoes in the Peruvian Andes had caused shifts in layers of ice and deposited black ash on perpetually snow-covered Mount Ampato, which stands about 60 miles from the city of Arequipa in southern Peru. Thanks to the heat of the ash, the snow had melted. "The Incas would not have been able to build on permanently snowcapped peaks, so I never paid attention to Mount Ampato before," Reinhard said to Shanti Menon for *Discover* (January 1996). "But I had some free time, and I thought I'd take a look at the effects of the eruptions." On September 8, 1995 Reinhard and his climbing partner, Miguel Zarate, a Peruvian mountaineer, stumbled upon a colorful ceremonial doll frozen in the ice about 200 feet shy of Ampato's summit. Nearby lay Juanita. Exposure to the air had dried the skin of her face and parts of her arms, and Reinhard and Zarate feared that her body would be badly damaged. As it turned out, most of the rest of her remains were encased in permafrost—a permanently frozen layer of ice and rock—so that her internal organs were preserved in a frozen state rather than freeze-dried.

As Reinhard gazed at Juanita, he felt exhilarated, because he knew that she was the first frozen female Inca to be found intact. He also knew that he was, in his words, "in for a hell of a night," because, not having anticipated making such an extraordinary discovery, he did not have proper equipment with him. "The worst part was getting [the body] out of the crater," he told Shanti

Menon. "It was really icy and full of gravel. The thing weighed about 85 pounds, and it was getting late—it was pretty unpleasant. And then I had to go down a 45-degree incline in the dark." It took Reinhard and Zarate two days to descend the mountain. Then they took the mummy on a seven-hour bus ride to the research center at Catholic University in Arequipa, worrying the whole time that the body might thaw and decompose. Later examination revealed that the mummy's body was wrapped in an elaborate and finely woven cloth made from the wool of alpacas, animals that are native to Peru, and on its head rested a colorful and ornate headdress. On a stone platform next to the girl's remains Reinhard found such items as maize and silver and gold statuettes between two and a half and six and a half inches long.

In the late 1400s and early 1500s, the Incas ruled the most powerful empire in South America—an area that encompassed much of what is now Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In the century following the Spanish conquest, which began with the arrival of Francisco Pizarro in 1532, the Incas all but disappeared, driven away or killed by Spaniards in search of gold and decimated by diseases the Europeans introduced to South America. Among the things known about the Incas is that they were highly skilled mathematicians and builders and kept records by tying knots in cords of different colors and lengths—a system that has yet to be deciphered. It is also known that the Incas performed human sacrifice—a highly controversial and little-understood practice—much less often than the Mayan, Aztec, and Toltec peoples who lived in the same regions.

Apparently the Incas preferred to use animals in their rituals, resorting to human sacrifice only when they believed an extra tribute was necessary to honor or appease their deities. "One reason the sacrifice [of Juanita] was done might have been that crops and herds were suffering," Reinhard said to Shanti Menon. "Because of the difficulty of getting to the summit [of Mount Ampati], I'd say the main reason for the sacrifice had to do with the mountain, not, say, the sun, because they could have done that lower down." The Incas revered the mountains as sources of water and feared them as sources of tremendous destructive forces, and they considered being chosen for sacrifice to the gods a great honor for the family of the person selected. "They wanted young—boy or girl—because they're more pure," Reinhard told Roxanne Roberts. The act of sacrifice, he added, brought "honor to the community." Examinations of Juanita's body revealed that the Ice Maiden was killed by a sharp blow just above her right eye.

Johan Reinhard's discovery of Juanita, which many have called a "mine of biological and anthropological information," has advanced anthropologists' and archaeologists' understanding of the Incas' culture. It has also eased Reinhard's struggle to secure grant money and other funding. The mummy was put on display in 1996 at the National Geographic Society's Explorers Hall in Washington, D.C., where record numbers of visitors came to view her. "What makes her attractive is the same thing that draws people to ancient Egyptian mummies, to the relics of saints, to bodies that have been dug up from bogs, to the bones of Holocaust victims, and to the embalmed corpse of Lenin, which has outlasted Soviet communism," Sarah Boxer posited in the *New York Times* (October 29, 1995). "Dead bodies are magnetic not as examples of extinct cultures, proofs of ritual sacrifice, evidence of human atrocities or emblems of political movements but as fleshly humans who chewed with these very teeth, walked on these very legs, and furrowed these very brows."

The publicity surrounding Juanita and Reinhard's archaeological excavations in the Andes also attracted the attention of looters, and some of Reinhard's research sites were picked clean after the initial dig. In addition, Reinhard has received some bothersome calls. One company approached him in the vain hope that, if the mummy's ovaries had been frozen intact, they would be permitted to harvest some of the eggs for insemination with sperm from 20th-century donors.

In April 1999, during an expedition sponsored by the National Geographic Society, Reinhard found three mummified bodies at the 22,057-foot summit of Mount Lullailaco, in the Andes on the Argentine-Chilean border. The remains were those of youngsters, ranging in age from about eight to about 15, who had been sacrificed and buried in much the way that Juanita had. Scientists have confirmed that they, too, died approximately 500 years ago. What makes Reinhard's latest find potentially so significant is the mummies' remarkable state of preservation. Buried under ice and scree atop a mountain more than 22,000 feet high, the bodies were protected from exposure to an even greater degree than Juanita. Two of the bodies looked as if they had died merely days before; the third showed evidence of lightning damage. "The preservation of the mummies is just fantastic," Reinhard told John Noble Wilford for the *New York Times* (April 7, 1999). "It's eerie looking at the arms. You can still see the light hair on their arms." Scientists plan to conduct medical examinations of the bodies in search of evidence of infections and diet and to determine genetic makeup. If the mummies' DNA has remained intact in their frozen blood, it will theoretically be possible to

trace their lineage to living South Americans. Such information would offer scientists clues to the fate of the Incas following the collapse of their empire.

Reinhard has climbed mountains of at least 17,000 feet more than 100 times, and according to the American Alpine Club, he currently holds the record for most ascents of peaks at least 6,000 meters (19,680 feet) high. He has also done underwater research: he has examined Roman shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea; explored an early Etruscan village submerged in an Italian lake; conducted the first archaeological research in Lake Titicaca, the largest body of water in the Andes and considered by the region's inhabitants to be the most sacred; and carried out the first archeological research at a neolithic lake site in Austria. In 1987 Reinhard won the Rolex Award for Enterprise, and in 1998 he became the

first Rolex laureate to serve on the selection committee for that honor. Currently, he is a senior research fellow at the Mountain Institute, in Franklin, West Virginia, a scientific and educational organization that, according to its home page on the World Wide Web, is dedicated to "preserving mountain environments and advancing mountain cultures throughout the world." Reinhard is also a research associate at the Field Museum of Natural History, in Chicago, Illinois, and an honorary professor at Catholic University in Arequipa. He has appeared as a guest lecturer on many cruises. — T.J.F.

Suggested Reading: *Discover* p22+ Jan. 1998; *Geographical Magazine* p78+ Jan. 1998; *New York Times A* p1+ Apr. 7, 1999; *Washington Post D* p1+ May 24, 1996
