

RUSSIA: HOW LONG CAN YELTSIN LAST?

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THE ICEWOMAN OF THE ANDES



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SCIENCE

Children of the Ice

An anthropologist finds the mummified remains of three Inca sacrifices

BY DAVID SCHRIEBERG
AND SHARON BEGLEY

THE SNOWCAPPED VOLCANIC PEAK in the Andean cordillera looms majestic and forbidding above the Peruvian town of Cabanaconde, and for 500 years its summit has been wreathed in pellucid ice as high as a man's thigh. But in 1993 the volcano began furious eruptions, spewing nearby Mount Ampato with hot ash. Into this land of fire and ice Johan Reinhard—conqueror of more than 100 Andean summits and restless searcher for archeological remains of the great Inca civilization—set out this summer on what he figured would be a little reconnaissance trip. For three days in September he and his Peruvian climbing partner, Miguel Zárate, trekked across treacherous ice fields and braved the Hiroshima-like clouds, dust and ash of the sputtering volcano. When they reached the summit ridge of Ampato at 20,700 feet, Reinhard, 51, was stunned to find that the heat of the eruption had cleared it of ice and snow—and thus of the previously impenetrable layer of time itself. Sticking out of the thin ridge were some feathers, the headdress of a small, perfectly preserved statue. Two others sat nearby. The men scrambled down the ridge. There they spied the archeological find of a lifetime: the frozen, perfectly preserved body of an Inca girl, her high-cheekboned face and soft hair completely exposed and her body, curled into a fetal position, still locked in the ice's embrace.

She had fallen from the summit above as the ice melted and loosened her

500-year-old grave. Sharing her icy coffin were shards of ceramic and fragments of food, bits of wood and pieces of bone. It was clearly part of a ritual offering. The girl, probably 12 to 14 at her death, was "killed by Inca priests to appease the gods, especially the god of the mountain," says Reinhard, who announced the find last week. She was swathed in fine woolens, the outermost one a chocolate brown adorned with cream-colored stripes. As

darkness and snow fell, Reinhard and Zárate gathered all the artifacts they could, and then carefully wielded their ice picks to separate "Juanita," still in ice, from the mountain to which she had been offered so many centuries ago. Stuffing her as best he could into his backpack, Reinhard climbed out of the crater and, with Zárate hacking footholds in the perilously steep ice, carried her off the summit.

The Ice Child is at least the 11th Inca sacrifice discovered. In 1954 a mule keeper came upon the perfectly preserved body of a 10-year-old girl in an ice cave atop El Plomo near Santiago. Newspaper accounts described "youthful features" that bore "an expression of sweetness and repose." But unlike her predecessors, Juanita was found frozen instead of freeze-dried. And she has something as valuable in archeology as in real estate: location. She is the first Inca sacrifice found with such a complete stone burial platform and base camp used by the sacrificial party. "We have a complete context," says bioanthropologist Sonia Guillen, director of the Mallqui ("mummy") Center in Ilo, Peru. "We will have a better idea of the ritual and what it means for the reconstruction of this period of Andean history." In particular, Juanita might reveal "more about Inca religion," says Inca scholar Craig Morris of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. "Did they take many people to the summit to witness the



Face of history: The face of an Inca girl sacrificed to the gods on Mount Ampato in Peru some 500 years ago; frigid temperatures atop the mountain preserved her



Past as prologue: Argentine archeologist Juan Schobinger found this mummified Inca boy, a sacrifice to the mountain gods, on El Toro, a 21,000-foot-high mountain in the Andes

sacrifice? The size of the base camp might speak to that. And who exactly was performing the sacrifices? What preparations went into them?"

Juanita turns out to be only the tip of Mount Ampato's sacrificial iceberg. In October, Reinhard, having enlisted the logistical muscle of the National Geographic Society, headed back to the peak with an 18-person expedition. At 19,200 feet they found ritual platforms "deliberately placed

in crude circles," Reinhard says. About a foot underground, the team dug up another mummy (so-called not because it was embalmed, Egyptian style, but because the cold and aridity of the mountaintop preserved it so well). A girl, probably 10 to 12 years old, she wore an elaborate headdress of pinkish red and had been buried amid three distinct layers of pottery. Nearby lay a third body, a child of 12 to 14. Less well preserved, it is mostly skeleton. They, too,

died curled in a fetal position.

The Inca did not write, so archeologists' knowledge of their ceremonies and beliefs is based largely on accounts of the Spaniards. But since the conquistadors were more intent on obliterating the civilization than chronicling it, their reports are considered suspect. That's why archeological finds such as Reinhard's are so important. And already the inferences are flying fast and furious, starting with how the victims died. Since Juanita wears what Reinhard describes as "a pleasant expression," he suspects "that she may have been drugged and buried alive." *Chicha*—alcohol made from germinated corn—was a likely sedative. (The Plomo mummy had vomit stains on her clothing, suggesting that she was in a boozy stupor at the time of death.) Other sacrifices likely died by strangling, smothering or a blow to the head. The young victims were physically unblemished, and were probably chosen from families of middle to high social rank, says Reinhard. Some urchin off the street would hardly be a worthy offering. But the third set of remains may be a startling exception. Artifacts found nearby were less valuable than those found with the girls, raising the possibility that he or she was a servant chosen to serve the girl in the afterlife.

Red carpet: Archeologists have been in the dark about the rituals surrounding the sacrifice, and that's where the Ampato finds speak most eloquently. "We're getting a wealth of information about the ceremonial process," says Reinhard. Above the two children, for instance, are bits of sod and wild grass, probably carried up on llamas and enough to cover a square 100 feet on a side. "They even built a trail using grass and wood," says Reinhard—perhaps the Inca version of the red-carpet treatment leading the young victim to the glorious beyond.

How often were children offered to the gods? The Inca sacrificed llamas as often as once a day, says Morris of the American Museum, but human offerings were much rarer, especially compared with the sacrifice-happy Aztecs (box). Human sacrifice was "tied in to the life cycles of rulers, events in the royal family, seasonal

TOBIAS REINHARD



changes, agricultural cycles, celestial events, celebrations of birth and death," says archeologist Tom Dillehay of the University of Kentucky. Although the three mummies of Ampato may have been killed as annual offerings at events such as Dillehay describes, it is possible they gave their lives for a more immediate payoff. To build the sacrificial site on Ampato, the Incas had to climb the same spot Reinhard did. That is possible only if the nearby volcano, erupting, melted the ice first. Reinhard suspects that eruptions 500 years ago were contaminating water supplies and spewing ash over crops and pastures, and that the children died to appease the mountain god and quell its fire-spewing innards.

Sacred peaks: That possibility fits nicely with the reigning view of Inca religion. Ever since 1980, when Reinhard began to carve out a unique scholarly niche for himself as a high-altitude archeologist, he has been collecting evidence that "the mountains were not merely the homes of the gods," as he wrote in *National Geographic* in 1992. "They literally were the gods and could kill with avalanche, rockfall, lightning, blizzard, and wind or bless with rain-filled clouds." The sanctity of the snow-topped peaks is reflected in Inca architecture. Windows often open onto the sacred peaks; building stones are often shaped like mountains. And the importance of the mountains was reflected in the Incas themselves. Some who lived in the shadow of conical peaks deformed their heads into points, the Spaniards reported; some of those beneath a squat mountain flattened the tops of their heads, probably through binding like that once inflicted on the feet of Chinese girls. The Incas trekked 20,000 feet



Mountain man: Anthropologist Reinhard (above) unearths an artifact at Pichu Pichu in the Andes of southern Peru. Below, a clothed statue Reinhard's team found in September among the offerings left with the mummies on Mount Ampato.



into the clouds, and gave a few of their precious children to the mountain because the mountain was god.

Beyond Inca religion, the ice mummies may speak to larger questions of how the largest and most powerful civilization in pre-European America achieved cultural and political cohesion. The Incas' far-flung empire, assembled

through bloody conquest as well as peaceful absorption of almost 100 neighboring states, stretched from southern Chile into Colombia (map). At its pre-conquistador height beginning in 1438, the population reached an estimated 6 million. The empire, though under the control of an absolute ruler (called the Inka) regarded as the son of the sun, tolerated and even encouraged home rule and cultural diversity. Conquered states were permitted to retain their original religion. Perhaps finds such as those on Ampato will show that there were imperial sacrifices as well as local sacrifices—and a centralized imperial religion coexisting with local practices. With finds like the ice mummies, Morris says, "I think we will begin to see how the Inca used religion, as well as ideology and politics, to control people and to increase the cohesion of the society and the strength of the empire."

DNA test: All three mummies are now in a deep freeze at Universidad Católica de Santa María in Arequipa. Every evening last week scientists led by Guillen removed Juanita, and, applying the lessons learned with the "Iceman" found in the Italian-Austrian Alps in 1991, began to peel carefully away a few of Juanita's wrappings. At one session, NEWSWEEK'S Sharon Stevenson reports, green-suited researchers lifted

the mummy onto the table in the makeshift laboratory. For an hour, they used a hair dryer to warm cloths that they had laid on the ice-filled blankets, and managed to get the outermost blanket to fall away, revealing the small girl's slim knees and shins. Attacking the thick ice mounds embedded in the cloths, Guillen probed the blankets with a soldering iron, hissing the ice into

vapor puffs. Dr. Silvia Quevedo, a Chilean bioanthropologist, explained that "each layer of clothing has meaning and describes the person"—her social class, marital status, age and other characteristics. Wrapped around Juanita's waist, the researchers found, was a wide woven belt with tiny, intricate geometric designs characteristic of the Incas. Eventually, the sci-

entists hope to compare the mummy's DNA with modern samples and establish which South American peoples are closely related to the Inca.

"She's a lovely child," says Guillen. Whatever good Juanita's early death brought to her people 500 years ago, she is already proving herself an even more precious treasure to archeologists today. ■

The Gods Must Be Hungry

Religion has a bloody history that's not all in the past

BY JERRY ADLER

EVEN BEFORE THERE was political correctness, civilized people would never dream of running down someone else's religion, but let's face it: sometimes you just can't help yourself. To read about a 12-year-old girl plied with liquor and left on a frigid mountaintop to die is to experience a revulsion that no degree of moral relativism can rationalize away. A revulsion, however, tinged with the faint, grim satisfaction of finding scientific evidence of an atrocity perpetrated in America that cannot by any stretch of logic be even remotely blamed on the Europeans.

Not, of course, that the religious practices of indigenous peoples were previously unknown. There is ample documentation of human sacrifice compiled by the outraged Spanish conquistadors, who preferred to shed blood in the more straightforward enterprises of war and enslavement. Accounts of an Aztec priest ripping the beating heart out of a human offering were great arguments for Christianizing the continent. Lately, though, Western culture has made a high-minded effort to avoid sensationalizing such potentially embarrassing spectacles. The definitive 15-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion*, published by Macmillan in 1987, makes only a few passing references to human sacrifice in its entry on

"Inca Religion." The author placidly observes that "offerings were selected from the great complementary ecosystems of nature (plants, birds, shells, the blood of animals—particularly llamas—and men) and culture (maize, coca, pepper, corn, beer, cloth, statuettes)." It must have gone very hard on the llamas.

To list human beings as sacrificial objects along with shells, birds and maize requires a very high order of intellectual detachment, but anthropologists today rise to the challenge. "There's been a tendency among conquering people to use sacrifice as an excuse to say, 'Those people are barbarians, those people should be taken over,'" says John Verano, a Tulane University anthropologist who has written about ritual killings. "[But] within the context of [Aztec] culture, it all made sense. The sacrifice of human blood, and particularly the heart, was necessary to make the sun go around every day. It ties in to their stories of creation and myth. It was part of the cultural tradition."

And the cultures of Central and South America were hardly alone in this. In his book "The Highest Altar," writer Patrick Tierney documented the prevalence of human sacrifice in cultures from almost every part of the world.



Pound of flesh: Offering to the 'feathered serpent' Mexican god Quetzalcoatl

And not all of them are as extinct as the Aztecs and Incas. In 1988, Tierney visited a mountaintop near Lake Titicaca, in Peru. A few days earlier, someone had brought a male college student to this remote site and slit his throat. Tierney saw ritual signs, such as a particular type of confetti, and empty liquor bottles. Alcohol was an integral part of Incan rites. He believes that "regular seasonal sacrifices" still take place in the Andes, including some by superstitious cocaine traffickers who want to enlist divine protection for their businesses. Asked about such claims, Michael Moseley, a University of Florida an-

thropologist who studies the Incas, says he's heard "rumors that during certain recent natural disasters, such as extreme droughts, sacrifice of young individuals had taken place" in modern Peru or Bolivia.

He says he doesn't know whether to believe the rumors, but it "wouldn't surprise" him if they were true.

In the West, of course, society has left these things far behind, although not always as far as people suppose. Many scholars now endorse a new interpretation of the bas-relief frieze around the Parthenon, one of the best-known artifacts of classical antiquity. Rather than a benign procession honoring the goddess Athena (as was thought for two centuries), it is now believed to depict the sacrifice of one or more young women, the daughters of an early Athenian king, to ensure success

in battle. The religious tradition of the West begins with a great renunciation of blood offering, when Abraham put down the knife and unbound Isaac. And it proceeds through the glorious sacrifice on Calvary, when God himself offered up his Son to redeem the world.

Modern people know better than to think that the sun needs a fresh heart to rise each day, or that natural disasters can be bought off with corpses. Funny, though, we keep on killing one another. We just don't have any reasons that would make sense to an Incan priest.

With NINA A. BIDDLE