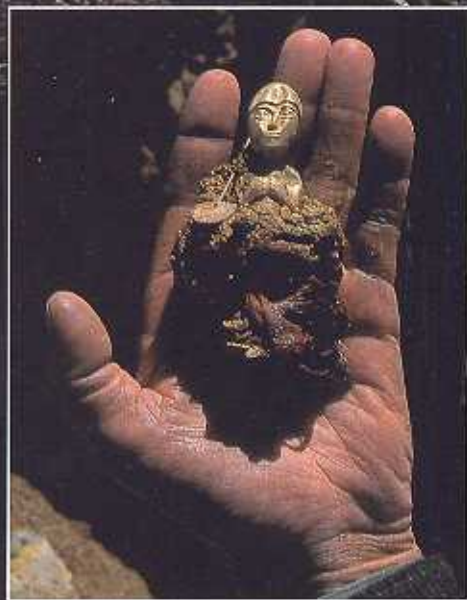


Article and photographs
by JOHAN REINHARD

Research Update:



ATOP THE FRIGID SUMMIT OF PICHU PICHU IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES, ARCHAEOLOGISTS EXCAVATE A 500-YEAR-OLD INCA TOMB. INSIDE THEY FOUND REMAINS OF HUMAN SACRIFICE AND A GOLD FEMALE FIGURINE (INSET), FRESH EVIDENCE OF ANCIENT RITES OF MOUNTAIN WORSHIP.

New Inca Mummies





Luck once again was on our side. A heavy snow began to fall just as we finished excavating a 500-year-old sacrifice of an Inca girl. It was December 1997, and we were back on Nevado Ampato, the 20,700-foot volcano where we had chanced upon a now famous frozen mummy in 1995.* That discovery had taught us how to transport an unwieldy 80-pound bundle down a mountain without thawing out the body. Our success turned out to be perfect training for the past two years of fieldwork. Though we brought back nothing quite as spectacular as the Ampato ice maiden, we did discover four new mummies. We also found more ritual statues, many of them still wrapped in textiles. With these finds we shed new light on complex Inca rites.

*See "Peru's Ice Maidens," in the June 1996 *GEOGRAPHIC*.

Expeditions in 1996 and 1997, led by me and project co-director José Antonio Chávez, took us to several peaks worshiped by the Inca during the 15th and 16th centuries, when they ruled the Andes. We broadened our search of Ampato's summit, and on Pichu Pichu and Sara Sara we excavated burial platforms.

Pichu Pichu ranked as one of the Inca's most sacred peaks, perhaps because water draining from its flanks made irrigated farming possible in the area. In August 1996 our team climbed to the 18,600-foot summit and began digging into a raised, six-foot-high platform. It was arduous work, the ground frozen and the air so thin we gasped for breath after every few swings of a pickax.

On the third day we found the skeleton of a girl sacrificed to the gods. As an infant her skull had been

molded into a conical shape. Though head deformation was a common custom in the Andes before the Spanish conquerors arrived in 1532, this is the first example we know of from an Inca sacrifice. Later we uncovered the skeleton of a boy. The pair may have been sacrificed together as symbolic marriage partners.

From the same platform we lifted out a textile too fragile to unfold, but it appeared that some 50 silver disks in rows of descending size were tied on. Beneath it lay a silver male figurine (right) wearing a crown of spiny oyster shell. At nearly 12 inches, it is one of the tallest existing Inca statues, perhaps representing the Inca emperor himself.

ILLUMINATE THE COMPLEX SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE INCA.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
PHOTOGRAPHER MARK THIESSEN



The emperor once dispatched 2,000 subjects to tend the sacred heights of Sara Sara, according to a 16th-century Spanish priest. In 1996 our team numbered ten as we searched for relics from that period. We explored the 18,060-foot mountain, tracking through snow up the middle peak (above). It was on the northern summit that we found the female mummy that villagers later named Sarita.

Excitedly we excavated the frozen remains (right),





the skull clearly visible, and brought them to Catholic University in Arequipa. Under the guidance of co-director Chávez (right), we have begun to study the textile-wrapped skeleton, the feet still clad in sandals.

Examination of her teeth suggested that Sarita died at the age of 15. A CT scan of the bones revealed a skull fracture, telling us she perished from a blow to the head, just as the Ampato ice maiden had. She was buried with her knees flexed and pressed to her

shoulders, a pose we had never seen in an Inca mummy. Was this intentional or accidental? We don't know.

Nearby, in a rock niche, we recovered a cache of figurines, probably gifts to

the gods. They include (above, left to right) a 5.5-inch silver female clothed in alpaca; a smaller silver male; a llama of spiny oyster shell; and a gold vicuña, a wild relative of the llama.



MARK THIESSEN (TOP AND ABOVE)

A frozen mummy bundle with pottery stuck to it like barnacles receives the attention of co-director Chávez, who photographed our latest discovery on Ampato. A drought in 1997 had left its summit free of snow (top), affording us a rare chance to search the area.

We started with the slope down which the ice maiden had tumbled. In addition to wooden spoons and llama bones, we found textile pieces from her outer wrap. Sadly, looters had preceded us, and we have no idea what they may have taken. Evidence of plunder only strengthens our resolve to excavate as many high-altitude sites as possible in advance of thieves.

We spent much of our time investigating a plateau at 19,200 feet, where we were lucky to find this new mummy bundle, as it was unmarked by a platform or stone ring. Examination later revealed a skeleton scorched by lightning, like two burials

National Geographic Society explorer-in-residence in 1997, JOHAN REINHARD has written three articles on his Andean research, as well as *Discovering the Inca Ice Maiden*, a children's book published by the Society.

we found on Ampato in 1995.

Beneath an empty burial platform elsewhere on the plateau we detected a thick layer of volcanic ash, giving credence to the theory that the Inca offered summit sacrifices in response to

major volcanic eruptions.

Other forces of nature—snow and lightning—soon forced us to end our field season. As for our efforts to save and understand Peru's Inca heritage, we have just begun. □



AND A MUMMY FROM THE HEIGHTS OF AMPATO.



OnAssignment

■ YUKON RIVER

The Golden's Opportunity

The boat was piled with supplies that writer Mike Parfit and his wife, Suzanne Chisholm, would need for a 2,000-mile trip down the Yukon. But when Mike started the motor, the boat didn't budge. "It was too heavy. We had to find a stronger engine and lose a hundred pounds," says Mike. But the golden retrievers stayed. "Our marriage survived a month sleeping in a four-by-eight tent with two big, damp dogs," says Suzanne. "It can survive anything."



JOY BECKMAN

■ INCA MUMMIES

Johan Online

It was high-altitude, high-tech for Johan Reinhard. The Illinois-born anthropologist, a 30-year climbing veteran who has scaled more than a hundred Andean peaks, made notes on a laptop, cruised the World Wide Web, and sent e-mail during excavations on Peru's 20,700-foot Nevado Ampato. After finding a 500-year-old Inca mummy, Johan used a satellite hookup and called colleagues in Arequipa to bring supplies for five more days at the site. "I also waited out a snowstorm," he says, "talking on the phone."



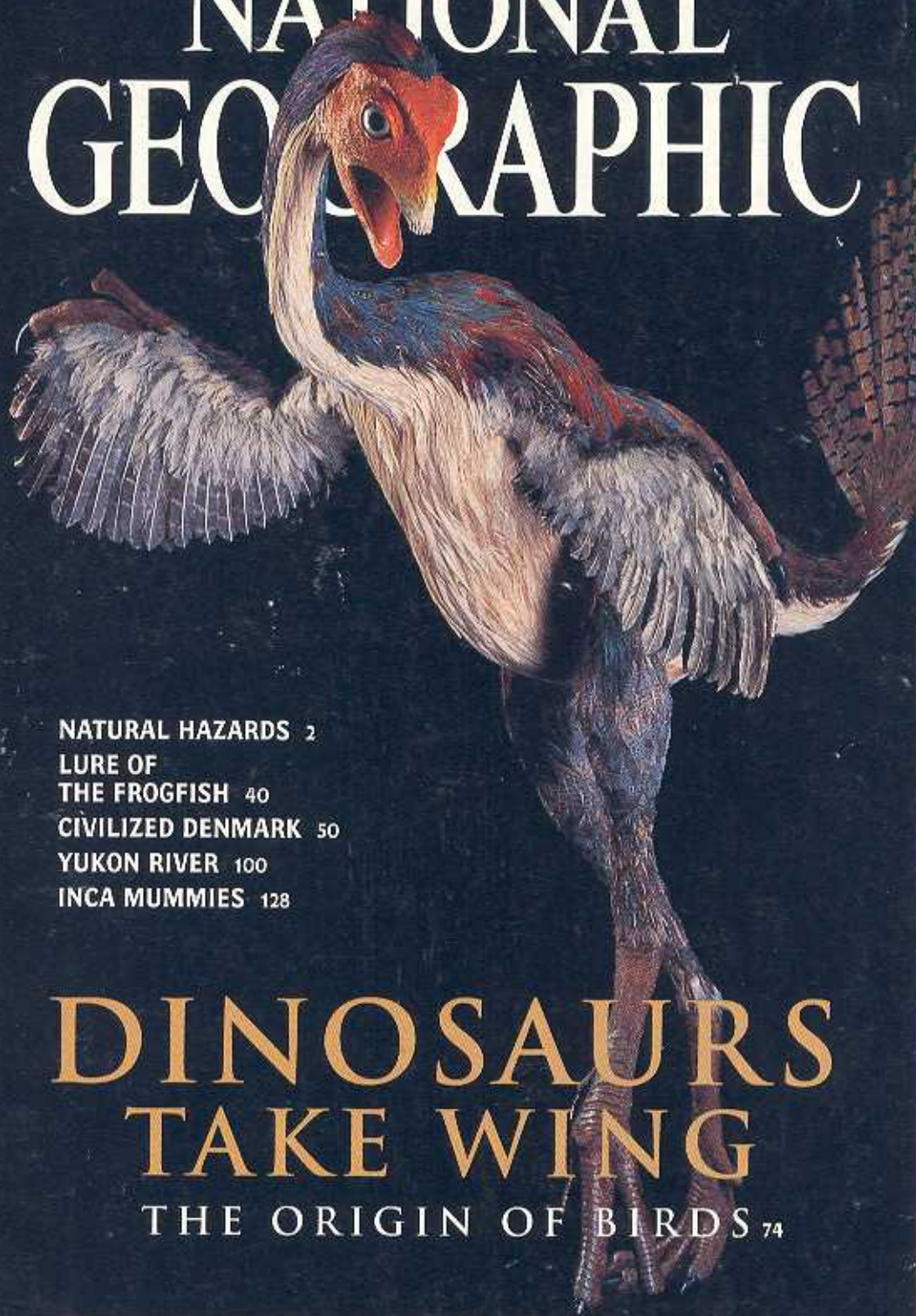
JOSE ANTONIO CHAVEZ

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