

Beauties and beer: Another Peruvian tale

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It sounds like part of a bad movie plot, but Chicago scientists have found ruins of an A.D. 600 Peruvian brewery run by beautiful "brewmistresses."

Image: This one of the shawl pins found on the floor of a 1,000-year-old brewery built by the Wari empire high in the Andes mountains of Peru. The finding suggests the brewers who made the brew -- based on a pepper tree berry and known today as chicha -- were wealthy women of the highest social class.

The archeologists say the brewery in southern Peru was probably staffed by women selected for their "beauty or nobility," the Chicago Sun-Times reported. But the newspaper also noted one mark of feminine loveliness at the time was a sloped forehead.

Patrick Ryan Williams, a Chicago Field Museum curator, said the beer, made with corn and pepper berry, was called chicha, and was at "the heart" of the Wari culture.

Williams and his wife were members of the team that scaled the 2,500-foot "sacred mountain" on which the brewery operated for about 400 years until it was abandoned.

The Wari culture disappeared shortly before A.D. 1100. The scientists note previous research indicated the Inca society, which emerged about 200 years later, also used elite women as brewmistresses.

The research, authored by Michael Mosely of the University of Florida, appears in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

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