

Infants from 2100 years ago found with helmets made of children's skulls

November 19 2019, by Bob Yirka



Credit: (c) Sara Juengst

A team of researchers from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and Universidad Técnica de Manabí in Ecuador has found and reported on ancient infant skulls that were excavated at a site in Salango, Ecuador. In their paper published in the journal *Latin American Antiquity*, the group describes how the infant skulls were encased in the skulls of older children.

The researchers note that the human head was often a powerful symbol for many early South American cultures, which might explain what they found. While on a dig in Salango, Ecuador, the researchers came across and unearthed the remains of 11 people buried at the site approximately 2100 years ago. The people that lived there at the time were called Guangala—the researchers also found multiple artifacts in addition to the bones.

The researchers report that among the remains they found were two infants, each with the [skull](#) of an older [child](#) fitted over their head—like a helmet. One of the infants was believed to have been approximately 18 months old at the time of death—its skull helmet came from a [second child](#) who was believed to have been approximately four to 12 years old at the time of death. The other infant was believed to have been approximately six to nine months old at death, and its skull helmet was believed to have come from a child approximately two to 12 years old at death. It is not yet known if the deceased children were related to one another, or the reason skulls were used as helmets for deceased infants. The researchers did note that the skull helmets fit snugly, which, they suggest, could indicate a simultaneous burial of the infant and the child that donated the skull helmet.

The researchers note that the find is the only known instance of using children's skulls as helmets for [infants](#) as part of a burial ceremony. They

also note that it was possible that those who buried them were attempting to confer some sort of protection in the afterlife. They also note that it was possible the infant and/or the child involved in the ceremony were part of a ritual meant to calm a nearby [active volcano](#), though they also suggest either of the deceased young ones could have died as a result of starvation due to the aftereffects of the volcanic eruption.

More information: Sara L. Juengst et al. Unique Infant Mortuary Ritual at Salango, Ecuador, 100 BC, *Latin American Antiquity* (2019). DOI: [10.1017/laq.2019.79](https://doi.org/10.1017/laq.2019.79)

© 2019 Science X Network

Citation: Infants from 2100 years ago found with helmets made of children's skulls (2019, November 19) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-11-infants-years-helmets-children-skulls.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.
