

Possible evidence of Inca burying llama alive in ritualistic ceremonies

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Credit: *Antiquity* (2020). DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2020.183

A team of researchers from Canada and Peru has found evidence of Inca people burying llamas alive as part of ritualistic ceremonies approximately 600 years ago. In their paper published in the journal *Antiquity*, the group describes their study of five preserved llama

remains found at a southern Peruvian dig site called Tambo Viejo.

The Inca empire is believed to have existed from the early 1400s to the mid-1500s, when they were overrun by Spanish conquistadors. During that time, they built what is believed to be the biggest empire in pre-Columbian South America. In this new effort, the researchers describe the remains of five llamas found buried beneath the floor of an old building in what appears to be evidence of a sacrificial ritual conducted by the Inca people.

The remains of four of the llamas were described as being in excellent condition, thanks to the dry climate and the practice by the Inca of covering sacrificial burials in sand. The remains of a fifth [llama](#) were found nearby, but were not well preserved. All of the llamas were adorned with colorful strings and bracelets, which, the researchers suggest, was evidence of the value the Inca placed on llamas. The researchers were also unable to find any injuries to the animals, but their legs were tied together, suggesting that they had been buried alive. Radiocarbon dating of a chunk of charcoal found near the remains showed they had been buried sometime between 1432 and 1459.

The researchers note that previous evidence demonstrates that the Inca buried other animals and also children alive, adding credence to the theory that the llama were buried alive. They note also that Spanish settlers in the area had written about witnessing the mass slaughter of llamas by the Inca, which they believed had been done to appease the gods.

The researchers observe that the Inca people very much valued the llama. In addition to meat, it also provided them with material for making their clothes, a means of transportation and a source of fertilizer. Thus, the Inca believed that sacrificing these creatures was a way to prove to the gods that the people were truly grateful for what they had

been given, or were serious when asking for interventions such as rain.

More information: Lidio M. Valdez et al. Inka llama offerings from Tambo Viejo, Acari Valley, Peru, *Antiquity* (2020). [DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2020.183](https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2020.183)

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