

Experts reconstruct the face of Peru's most famous mummy, a teenage Inca sacrificed in Andean snow

October 25 2023, by Franklin Briceño



This Monday, Oct. 23, 2023, photo provided by the Catholic University of Santa Maria, shows the reconstruction of the face of a young woman who was found frozen and mummified near the summit of Mount Ampato in the Peruvian Andes after being sacrificed in a ritual more than 500 years ago, in Arequipa, Peru. The job was done by a team of Peruvian and Polish archeologists and a Swedish sculptor who specialized in facial reconstruction. Credit: Manuel

Ballivian Figueroa/Catholic University of Santa Maria via AP

The possible living face of Peru's most famous mummy, a teenage Inca girl sacrificed in a ritual more than 500 years ago atop the Andes, was unveiled Tuesday.

The silicone-made bust portrays a young woman with pronounced cheekbones, black eyes and tanned skin.

Produced by a team of Polish and Peruvian scientists who worked with a Swedish sculptor specializing in facial reconstructions, it was presented in a ceremony at the Andean Sanctuaries Museum of the Catholic University of Santa Maria in Arequipa.

"I thought I'd never know what her face looked like when she was alive," said Johan Reinhard, the U.S. anthropologist who found the mummy known as "Juanita" and the "Inca Ice Maiden."

Reinhard discovered the mummy in 1995 at an altitude of more than 6,000 meters (19,685 feet) on the snow-capped Ampato volcano.

"Now 28 years later, this has become a reality thanks to Oscar Nilsson's [reconstruction](#)," he said.

Nilsson, a Swedish archaeologist and sculptor who specializes in 3D facial reconstructions of ancient humans, told The Associated Press in an email that it took him "about 400 hours of work" to model the face.

Dagmara Socha, a Polish bioarchaeologist at the University of Warsaw's Center for Andean Studies, said at the ceremony that the first step in achieving Juanita's face was "to obtain a replica of the skull."



First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Peru Prime Minister Alberto Fujimori look over a 500-year-old mummy on display at the National Geographic Society in Washington, Tuesday, May 21, 1996. The Ampato Ice Maiden, discovered near the summit of Mount Ampato in the Peruvian Andes, is the first frozen Inca female mummy and may be the best preserved of any mummy found in the Americas. Credit: AP Photo/Ron Edmonds, File

Then "body scans, DNA studies, ethnological characteristics, age, complexion" were used in the facial reconstruction, the university said in a statement.

According to anthropological studies, Juanita was sacrificed between A.D. 1440 and 1450, when she was between 13 and 15 years old. She

was 1.40 meters (55 inches) tall, weighed 35 kilos (77 pounds) and was well nourished.

The probable cause of death was a severe blow to the right occipital lobe, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University who performed a CT scan.

Reinhard, who has uncovered more than 14 Inca human sacrifices high in the Andes, including three children in an icy pit at Argentina's Lulllaillaco volcano, said scientists have been investigating aspects of Juanita's life, such as her diet and the objects found next to her.

"These findings have helped us better understand her life and the Inca culture," he said. "Now we can see what she really looked like, which makes her even more alive."

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