Blue fibers found in teeth of ancient Mayans suggest sacrificial victims were gagged before being killed
11 October 2022, by Bob Yirka

A trio of researchers, two with California State University, Los Angeles, the other with the PaleoResearch Institute in Colorado, has found evidence of possible gagging of Mayan sacrificial victims prior to death. In their paper published in the *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology*, Amy Chan, James Brady and Linda Scott Cummings, describe their study of the dental calculus from teeth found in Belize's Midnight Terror Cave.

In 2006, a robber trying to escape a crowd of locals living near Belmopan, the capital of Belize, fell through a hole into a previously unknown cave. As the locals retrieved the robber, they discovered a large number of human bones. An investigation showed that the bones belonged to ancient Mayans who had been sacrificed in what later became known as the Midnight Terror Cave.

In this new effort, the researchers sought to learn more about the diets of the people who had been sacrificed in the cave by analyzing the dental calculus on the outside of their teeth. Prior research efforts have shown that calculus can hold minute amounts of material eaten by the person.


The researchers found tiny bits of fibers, some white and some blue, in the dental calculus. The researchers noted that the color blue was considered to be special to the ancient Mayans—it was used quite often to decorate ritual items. They note also that similar fibers have been found in beverages consumed by the Mayans. But the researchers suggest the fibers they found more likely made their way into the dental calculus through chomping on gags.

They suggest cotton cloth was dyed blue for ritual ceremonies and used as gags to silence the victims. They note that if such were the case, the gags would have been held in place for a considerable amount of time. Prior research has suggested, they note, that Mayan sacrificial victims were often held captive for periods of time or transported long distances—both of which could have involved the use of gags for extended periods of time.


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