The Taking and Displaying of Human Body Parts as Trophies by Amerindians

Edited by

RICHARD J. CHACON
Winthrop University
Rock Hill, South Carolina, USA

and

DAVID H. DYÉ
University of Memphis
Memphis, Tennessee, USA

Springer
Chapter 16

From Corporeality to Sanctity
Transforming Bodies into Trophy Heads in the Pre-Hispanic Andes

Tiffany A. Tung

INTRODUCTION

The taking, transforming, and displaying of human heads and other body parts has a long tradition in the Andes, beginning at least as early as 1300 B.C. and extending in most areas up until the European invasion in the sixteenth century. In southern Ecuador, the Jivaro continued this practice until the mid-twentieth century or later (Harner 1972).

The use of disembodied heads and other body parts in rituals is well documented in the Andes. Evidence shows that such rituals were often tied to complex social and political systems (see Benson and Cook 2001; Proulx 1989; Silverman and Proulx 2002; Tung 2003a, 2003b; Verano 1995) that may have shared general themes over time, while differing in some key respects. For example, the demographic profile of persons selected to be disembodied skulls or trophy heads varied over time and in different geographical areas, and the ways in which they were displayed and modified, if at all, differed among cultural groups. This variability may reflect differences in why the heads were obtained and how they were used for ritual, political, or other ends.

Given the likelihood that age and sex were culturally salient traits in the selection of a victim, wherever possible I provide population-level demographic data to gain insight into the meanings and practices surrounding the manipulation of human heads. Additionally, by noting the associated iconography and the archaeological contexts, the human body as a whole as well as separate body parts are evaluated as social and political objects that may have been used in different contexts for a variety of ends.
The term disembodied head (or skull) is used for those heads that may or may not show postmortem modifications, while the term trophy head refers only to those heads that have been modified postmortem, like those from Nasca (Verano 1995).

To evaluate the role of modified or unmodified disembodied heads in ancient Andean societies, this chapter will examine some examples dating from the Late Pre-Ceramic (1300 BC) to the Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000). (See Ogbeni 2007, Ch. 17 in this volume, for a discussion of the post-Middle Horizon examples.) While the examples analyzed here are by no means exhaustive, they derive from various time periods and diverse locations in the Andes, including the following: (1) the Late Pre-Ceramic site of Asia in the central coastal Andes; (2) the Initial Period site of Wachqana in the central highland Andes; (3) the Early Horizon site of Chavin in the northern highlands; (4) a large sample of Nasca trophy heads from various sites in the Nasca drainage of south-central coastal Peru; (5) disembodied skulls from the site of Moche polity in northern, coastal Peru; (6) defleshed body parts from the site of Tiwanaku in highland Bolivia; and (7) new examples of human trophy heads from the Wari site of Conchopata. (See Figure 16.1 for the location of the sites discussed in the text.)

THE BODY IN RITUAL

The human body is corporeal, yet it and its disembodied parts can also express sacredness. It is subjective and experiential (Merleau-Ponty 1962), yet external influences continually construct it, often objectifying the body in the process (Foucault 1978). While these concepts of the body may be viewed in opposition, perhaps theorizing the body in all its forms reveals its fluidity, multiplicities, and transformative aspects.

As a bioarchaeologist who studies human bodies of the past—literally the flesh and bones of once-living peoples—I observe the body as object, but recognize its former status as a corporeal subject affecting and being affected by cultural constructs and social interactions. This perspective acknowledges both constructivist and objectivist approaches to the body.

Foucault (1977, 1978) argued that cultural dispositions toward the body are predominantly determined by external forces. But to identify how cultural attitudes toward the body are created and reproduced (or rejected), we must first understand how individual actors have engaged forces external to them. Individuals are not mere receptacles to be filled and formed without some recursive relationship with what is external to their own being. Recognizing this blurs the line between the body as subject and object, even after death. Indeed, I suggest that significant exchanges between the body and society continue well after death, contributing to conceptions of the living body, the body as a subject of the state, and the role of the body in ritual. The latter two are particularly exemplified in cases involving human trophy heads like those found in the ancient Andes.
Figure 16.1: Map of Peru showing sites and valleys discussed in the text.
EARLY DISEMBODIED HEADS IN THE ANDES

The earliest known examples of disembodied heads date to the Late Pre-Ceramic around 1300–1100 BC and come from the site of Asina in the Omas valley of central coastal Peru (Figure 16.1). In an area that had 52 pits with human remains, four graves had a total of seven disembodied skulls: four children and three adults (Engel 1963). The high count of disembodied child crania is notable, but their inclusion is still poorly understood. They could represent grave offerings from naturally deceased children that may or may not have been related. (No biodistance analysis was done, so genetic relationships are unknown.) Conversely, given that child sacrifices have been documented in the Andes during the Inka period (Guaman Poma de Ayala et al. 1987 [1615]; Reinhard 1996) and are suspected at other Andean sites (Bourget 2001; Tung 2003b; Tung and Cook 2006), it is possible that they represented child sacrifices.

Several disembodied skulls received distinct treatment, suggesting that they derived from persons of different status or resulted from different kinds of activities. Although all disembodied skulls and "regular" burials at Asina were found in association with vegetal mats, textiles, plants, and other artifacts, one adult skull (Grave 10) was buried with a decorated textile and showed evidence of trepanation, suggesting that this individual may have been of higher status than others interred in the vicinity (Engel 1963). Another of the isolated skulls exhibited cut marks on the frontal bone, leading Engel to suggest that the "skin of the [man's] face was pulled off" and that he may have been cruelly punished (Engel 1963: 69, 94–95). Verano (1985: 203) has suggested that the flayed skull may represent a person from the Asina settlement who was mutilated elsewhere and returned to the site for burial. Other than cut marks on the one skull, there is no report of other postmortem modifications to any heads (e.g., drilled holes) (Engel 1963; Hartweg 1958).

Given that adult and child heads were separated from their bodies and individually interred in a mortuary setting, it appears that this particular body part was of special significance. Perhaps this early instance of isolating skulls contributed to the practice of what has come to be called the Trophy Head Cult. Although this may have been related to the later trophy head phenomenon, this does not mean that there was a simple, evolutionary process from one form to another—that is, from an isolated, unmodified skull to a decapitated head that was eviscerated of its brain and drilled to make a hole for a carrying cord. The social significance attributed to disembodied skulls and trophy heads surely changed through time, but not necessarily in a linear sequence from "simple" to "complex" forms and meanings.

In the later Initial Period (or Formative Period), around 1150–750 BC, five disembodied skulls were placed in the floor of what seemed to be a U-shaped structure at the site of Wicchana in Ayacucho in the central Andes (Figure 16.1). The five heads were identified as female, and all exhibit tubular erect cranial modification (flattened on the frontal and occipital bones), which appears to have been common in the Formative Period (Rubiera 1981). The common cranial modification
form may also suggest shared ethnic affiliation among the women. Lumbreras (1981:173) argues that these skulls were decapitated while soft tissue was still intact, leading him to propose that “there can be little doubt that the heads were the result of human sacrifice, of some ceremonial import.” While the presence of the mandible and cervical vertebrae, all in anatomical position, supports his assertion that soft tissue was present at the time of decapitation, it is unclear if they truly represent human sacrifices.

The Wichiqana skulls did not receive any kind of postmortem modification; thus, like the heads from Asia, these should not be considered trophy heads in the strict definition (see Verano 1995). Nonetheless, as Lumbreras (1981:173) argues, the disembodied skulls are evidence of an early form of ritual closely connected to the Nasca Trophy Head Cult.

During the later Urabarri phase of the Early Horizon, around 850–460 BC, four human skulls were placed as votive offerings in a platform at the site of Chavin de Huántar in the northern highland Peruvian Andes (Burger 1984; Burger and van der Merwe 1990). The heads were associated with a cache of carbonized fruit and a ceramic fragment from a neckless olla (Haldas-style) that would have been complete when it was interred with the heads (Burger 1984; Burger and van der Merwe 1990). No other human skeletal remains were recovered in the vicinity (Burger 1984). The isolated skulls were identified as a 55–60 year old adult male, a 20–35 year old male, an adolescent female (14–17 years), and an infant (14–18 months) (Vidal 1984), perhaps representing a extended family (Burger 1984). If so, could this represent ancestor veneration or a sacrificed family? The frontal and occipital bones (cranial areas commonly modified to make trophies) were observed on two of the four skulls, and neither shows any postmortem alterations (Vidal 1984), indicating that they were not modified like the later Nasca or Wari trophy heads (described below).

In 1971, Luis Lumbreras recovered another isolated skull from Chavin, in the Galería de Ofrendas, a 24.6-m-long gallery under the rectangular court of the Old Temple. It was placed in the middle of the passageway, encircled by 40 deciduous (children’s) teeth (Burger 1992; Reichlen Barret 1973). I summarize the osteological data on this individual (see Reichlen Barret 1973) and provide interpretations on what those data suggest about the lifeways of the person whose head was used as an offering.

The skull was from an adult female who exhibited a healed nasal fracture and premortem tooth loss of the right maxillary anterior teeth (right incisors and possibly the canine). This suggests that one or more blows to the face fractured her nasal bone and could have dislodged her anterior dentition. While dental disease could have led to the dental exfoliation, premortem tooth loss typically affects posterior teeth first. Moreover, based on my observation of published photos, she appears to have a dental abscess on the anterior portion of her maxilla, a common outcome from a trauma to the face. The healed nasal fracture and the probable healed trauma on the maxilla were not the cause of death; rather, they suggest that she had been a victim of violence earlier in her life.
This female skull may be the earliest archaeologically documented occurrence of a modified trophy head from the Andes. The Galeria de Ofrendas skull displays a perforation on the frontal bone, and although it is laterally displaced and somewhat irregular, this is a diagnostic trait of intentionally prepared trophy heads. More convincing, however, is the slightly enlarged and damaged foramen magnum (the hole at the base of the skull where the spinal cord enters), suggesting that it was altered to extract the brain, similar to later Nasca trophy heads (Figure 16.2).

The geographical origins (i.e., local or foreign) of the disembodied heads from Chavin are difficult to determine, but it has been suggested that the four skulls from the Urabarriu platform were local (Burger and van der Merwe 1990). The carbon isotope values ($\delta^{13}$C = $-18.7$ to $-19$) from the four platform skulls show that they consumed little maize, and because this crop was not easily grown, nor was it common in the region, they may have had a local Chavin diet with little to no maize (Burger and van der Merwe 1990). The dental health data corroborate this. Because maize is a cariogenic food (causes dental caries), it is noteworthy that none of the platform skulls show carious lesions (Vidal 1984). In contrast, the female skull from the Galeria de Ofrendas exhibited one carious lesion, perhaps suggesting that she had a distinct diet (or poorer dental hygiene) relative to the four individuals in the platform. Perhaps the healed trauma and dental carie suggest that she belonged to a distinct social class with a different lifestyle and access to different resources (either as a local or a nonlocal).
SECHIN STONE CARVINGS

The early osteological samples mentioned above are not the only medium in which disembodied heads were displayed during Formative times. Engravings on large stone blocks at the site of Cerro Sechin in the Casma valley depict bodies in pain with dripping entrails, along with other isolated body parts such as arms, legs, stacks of vertebrae, and decapitated heads (the most common image), often with blood flowing from the neck (Burger 1992). The images of mutilated bodies writhing in pain are contrasted with images of victorious warriors standing upright—opposing images that reflect the cultural salience of depictions of the body as material manifestations of Sechin authority and power.

While similarities among the Sechin stone carvings and the Chavin disembodied skulls are sometimes emphasized, they may actually reflect quite distinct practices. First, Sechin predates Chavin and should not be considered as part of the Chavin-dominated Early Horizon (Burger 1992). Nor should it be assumed to be part of the same cultural complex surrounding the ritual offerings of skulls at Chavin. Second, the age and sex of the Chavin human heads and the artistically portrayed ones at Sechin are distinct. At Chavin, the disembodied skulls are from two males, two females, and a child, while the Sechin carvings represent apparently male warriors and their captives. Moreover, the Chavin skulls were interred with fruit and ceramics, and the Sechin carvings of decapitated heads are shown in association with entrails, dripping blood, and other disembodied parts. This indicates that the same kinds of objects—disembodied heads—could have quite distinct meanings for different cultural groups in the Andes.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF EARLY DISEMBODIED HEADS

Because the differences in demographics, postmortem modifications, and manner of display presumably reflect meaningful distinctions for those who selected, processed, used, and viewed them in rituals, the age and sex of the 17 disembodied skulls from early periods are summarized. Although they represent a large swatch of time, they are combined for analysis in order to identify general patterns in the earliest uses of disembodied heads. Among the 17 heads from the Pre-Ceramic Initial Period and Early Horizon, 5 are children and 12 are adults, representing 29% and 71% of the sample, respectively.

Sex was reported only for those skulls from Chavin and Wari, and among those nine adults, seven are female and two are male. Clearly, females constitute a much greater proportion of the skull offerings—78% are female and only 22% are male. In other words, for every disembodied head of a male, there are nearly four disembodied heads from females. This suggests that female body parts may have been preferred for use in ritual offerings. Additionally, placing heads in a stone platform or surrounding them with 40 children's teeth underscores their ritual significance and demonstrates their physical and supernatural transformation from corporeal entities into sacred relics.
NASCA TROPHY HEADS

The best-known examples of Andean trophy heads derive from the Nasca drainage of south-central Peru and while the majority are from the Early Intermediate Period (AD 1–600), some Nasca-style trophy heads date to the Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000).

Prior and ongoing research has made major contributions to our understanding of Nasca trophy heads and their significance in Nasca society (Browne et al. 1993; Carrión 1986; Coelho 1972; Druxnet and Barba 1991; Forgey 2005; Forgey and Williams 2004; Kellner 2002; Neira and Coelho 1972; Proulx 1971, 1989, 2001; Silverman 1993; Silverman and Proulx 2002; Verano 1995, 2001; Williams et al. 2001), leading to at least three major interpretations regarding how and from whom Nasca trophy heads were obtained.

The first posits that trophy heads were procured in secular battles or raids and basically represent trophies of these violent conflicts (Proulx 1971, 1989, 2001; Verano 1995, 2001).

A second interpretation argues that ritual battles, sometimes referred to as *tinku* (Bohm 1998; Hartmann 1972; Orlove 1994), led to the taking and displaying of decapitated heads (Browne et al. 1993; Silverman 1993). Although *tinku* can be highly ritualized, the “games” or battles can actually be quite violent.

Finally, Neira and Coelho (1972) and Guillén (cited in Silverman 1993:224) have suggested that trophy heads represent familial heads that were modified, conserved, and used as relics in rituals of ancestor veneration.

Of course, these three categories are not mutually exclusive. Trophy heads may have been drawn from various populations, both from within and external to the community. Additionally, the source of the heads (i.e., who was selected) may have changed over time.

To contribute to this debate, I summarize previous research and compile the data to provide a population view of trophy heads from Nasca (see Table 1b1). First, identifying trophy heads is best achieved by employing Verano's (1995) definition—diagnostic traits include an intentionally drilled hole on the frontal bone, used as a conduit for a carrying cord, and many have an enlarged foramen magnum for extracting the brain (Figure 16.3). Also, some Nasca trophy heads resemble masks, where the entire posterior half of the cranium has been removed, leaving nothing but the facial, frontal, and anterior portion of the parietal and temporal bones (Kellner 2002).

The vast majority of trophy heads from the Nasca drainage are adult males. Of the 145 described in the literature, plus the six that I analyzed in Nasca (N = 151), age information was available for 123 trophy heads. Of these, 93% are adults (115/123) and 7% are children (8/123). The sex distribution of the 98 adult trophy heads whose sex was reported shows that 92% are male (90/98) and approximately 8% are female (8/98). These numbers represent Nasca-style trophy heads from both the Early Intermediate Period (AD 1–600) and the Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000).
Table 16.1. Summary of Early Intermediate Period (AD 1–600) and Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000) Nasca trophy heads reported in the literature. These data were used to calculate the age and sex distributions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valley</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>N Juvenile</th>
<th>N Adult</th>
<th>Adult Male</th>
<th>Adult Female</th>
<th>No. age/sex</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Llipa</td>
<td>Cerro Carapa</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cantillec</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acon</td>
<td>Tambo Viejo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi Feature 24 Unit 19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi Feature 21 Unit 19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi Burial Area 1 (Burial 121)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi Burial 14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Nasca</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llipa</td>
<td>Huamanga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finos</td>
<td>Cerro de la Cruz (Located near Llipa)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acon</td>
<td>Aji</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Cahuachi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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(Cont.)
Table 16.1. (Continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valley</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Juvenile</th>
<th>Adult male</th>
<th>Adult female</th>
<th>Adult sex</th>
<th>No. age/sex</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tierra Blanca</td>
<td>Cantayo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find (Williams et al. 2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Las Cantas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find (Williams et al. 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Majpo Chico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find (Williams et al. 2001; Carrico 1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Majpo Chico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find (Williams et al. 2001; Carrico 1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Ferdenos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find (Williams et al. 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Trancas</td>
<td>Las Medinas</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find; Kellner 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Trancas</td>
<td>El Hampani</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find; Kellner 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Trancas</td>
<td>La Marcha</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Krocher find; Kellner 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Calchaichi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Excavated by Guaspe Orefic, examined for this study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasca</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>151</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16.3. Nasca style trophy head. (Photo by T. A. Tung.)
Table 16.2. Percentage of Juvenile vs. Adult Trophy Heads and Male vs. Female Trophy Heads in the Nasca Drainage for Each Time Period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Early nasca</th>
<th>Middle nasca</th>
<th>Late nasca</th>
<th>Middle horizon</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile (0-16 yrs)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult (17+ yrs)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N = 10)</td>
<td>100% (N = 67)</td>
<td>100% (N = 6)</td>
<td>100% (N = 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (N = 7)</td>
<td>100% (N = 59)</td>
<td>100% (N = 5)</td>
<td>100% (N = 9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total percentages differ and are lower than Table 1 because age, sex, and associated time period were not reported for all trophy heads.

A breakdown of the trophy head age and sex profiles by time period shows that adults were more common than juveniles, and males were more common than females in all temporal phases. However, the relative frequencies of adults to juveniles and males to females were lowest in the Early Nasca phase (Table 16.2), showing changing preferences regarding who was to be transformed from a living being or corpse into a ritually significant trophy head. In short, while adult males were preferred in all phases, they were particularly favored in the later periods, perhaps showing an increasing frequency of secular or ritual battles, where adult men would have been the primary combatants and victims (also see Proulx 2001; Verano 1995).

There is a significant difference in the demographic profiles of disembodied heads from earlier versus later eras. During the Late Pre-Ceramic to Early Horizon, 29% of the 17 disembodied skulls are juveniles, while only 7% of the 123 Early Intermediate Period to Middle Horizon trophy heads from Nasca are juveniles.

Fishers exact test shows that the age group distribution (juveniles vs. adults) significantly differs between the early and late periods (p = 0.008; N = 140). Similarly, female-male distributions for the two temporal components are significantly different (Fishers exact p < 0.001; N = 107). Disembodied skulls from women were more common in the Late Pre-Ceramic to Early Horizon, while men were more commonly selected for trophy heads in the Early Intermediate Period to Middle Horizon. The significant change in the demographic composition from early to later times suggests that the meanings associated with taking and/or displaying disembodied heads likely changed as well.

**MOCHE DECAPITATION AND MODIFIED SKULLS**

Evidence for intentional decapitation has been documented at the Moche (AD 100-800) site of Los Cabezas in the Jalcapeque Valley of northern Peru, where 18 disembodied heads were found in the end of a narrow chamber in a small temple.
(Cordy-Collins 2001). The cranium and mandible and some of the cervical vertebrae were still articulated, suggesting that soft tissue was present when the head was separated from the body, and cut marks on the anterior portion of cervical vertebrae demonstrate that a sharp object was used to sever the head (Cordy-Collins 2001). It is unknown if decapitation was the cause of death or if the head was severed postmortem, but based on Moche ceramic vessels showing beings decapitating humans with a tuni (a half circle-shaped blade), it would seem that the disembodied heads resulted from lethal decapitation (see Cordy-Collins 2001 fig. 2.8). Indeed, excavations at Dos Cabezas revealed the burial of an elderly male interred with a tuni in his left hand and a small clay modeled human head on the right side of his body; he may well be one of the Moche decapitators portrayed in Moche art (Cordy-Collins 2001).

While it appears that none of the Dos Cabezas heads were modified into trophy heads, there are two Moche skulls from the site of Huaca de la Luna that were altered to resemble bowls by cutting away the superior portion of the vault (Verano 2001). One of the heads also shows a drilled hole on the ramus of the mandible and both exhibit cut marks — evidence that soft tissue was intentionally removed from fleshed heads (Verano 2001). Although the Moche skull bowls share some similarities with other disembodied heads in the present discussion, Verano (2001) notes that Moche iconography suggests more interest in collecting blood than heads, perhaps revealing another facet of the varied functions and meanings of disembodied heads in the Andes.

HUMAN TROPHIES IN THE MIDDLE HORIZON: TIWANAKU AND WARI

Tiwankaku

In the highland Andes, the Middle Horizon (AD 600–1000) is marked by two empires that came to power— the Tiwanaku and the Wari—and recent research is revealing evidence for human offerings in the core areas of both polities (Blom et al. 2003; Tung 2003b). For example, at the site of Tiwanaku in Bolivia, Linda Manzanilla (1992) recovered isolated crania and other human skeletal parts from two areas at the monumental pyramid known as the Akapana. These ritually offered human remains were re-analyzed by Blom and colleagues (2003) who observed cut marks on the skeletal remains, indicating that body parts were defleshed. They note that these appear to have been processed carefully (light cut marks) in private spaces at the Akapana as part of an ancestor veneration complex, while others were violently butchered (many deep cut marks) in public zones of the Akapana (Blom et al. 2003). While these human remains are not trophy heads, the authors have argued that the Akapana human elements from the public area represent ritual offerings, possibly from captives.
Wari

The 1976 excavations at the Wari site of Jincamocco revealed an isolated skull from an older adult female placed in the center of a small circle of stones in the north bench of Patio 1, the largest patio excavated at the site (Schreiber 1992). The cranium exhibited three small holes described as unhealed (Schreiber 1992:183–184), but it is unclear if the holes are perimortem (i.e., the likely cause of death) or postmortem (i.e., modified after death). Two holes can be observed in the photo of the in situ skull: one on the superior-central portion of the right parietal and the second on the right side of the coronal suture. The location of these holes is atypical (i.e., they do not resemble the Nasca style or the Wari style), so it should not be identified as a trophy head. The head does, however, appear to have been an offering made at the time of construction (Schreiber 1992). This early discovery is significant, especially in light of the newly discovered Wari trophy heads described below. Perhaps the Jincamocco skull was part of a greater ritual tradition in Wari society that privileged disembodied skulls.

WARI TROPHY HEADS FROM CONCHOPATA

Recent excavations directed by William Isbell, Anita Cook, Jose Ochatoma, and Martha Cabrera at the Wari site of Conchopata in the central Andes has, for the first time, revealed human trophy heads associated with the Wari empire (AD 600–1000). The trophy heads were recovered from two architectural spaces: a circular ritual structure (EA143) and a D-shaped ritual structure (EA72) (Figure 16.4). All were burned and deposited on the floors, breaking many of them in the process. In the D-shaped structure, ritually smashed ceramic urns and camelid offerings were also present (Ochatoma and Cabrera 2002), but no ceramics were associated directly with the trophy heads from the circular structure (Tung and Cook 2006). I reconstructed and analyzed the trophy heads, showing that there are at least 31 trophy heads: 17 adult and 4 child trophy heads were in the circular room (EA143), and 7 adult and 3 child trophy heads were in the D-shaped room (EA72) (Tung 2003b).

The age distribution of the Wari trophy heads differs from the Nasca trophy heads. Among the Wari, nearly a quarter are children (7/31 = 23%) (Tung 2003b), and among Nasca trophy heads, 7% are children. This difference may reflect unique attitudes toward children and childhood or distinct functions of the trophy heads within each cultural group. In contrast to the age profiles, sex profiles are more similar, perhaps suggesting parallels in gender criteria for those deemed appropriate for head taking. Wari trophy heads are 88% male (N = 17) and Nasca trophy heads are 92% male (N = 98).

The Wari trophy heads are highly standardized, and this may suggest that the uniform modifications were monitored by the Wari state or devised and carried out by a select group of Wari ritual specialists (Tung 2003b). More than three-quarters
of the trophy heads display a perforation at bregma, an osteometric point on the superior portion of the cranium where the sagittal and coronal sutures intersect (Figure 16.5). The perforations are also of similar size and shape (Tung 2003b). These standardized modifications differ from the Nasca trophy heads where various sized and shaped perforations were more randomly placed on the anterior of the frontal bone. A hole at bregma, rather than the frontal, also would have served to suspend the head from a rope while maintaining it in anatomical position (i.e., upright and facing forward). (A dangling Nasca trophy head would not face forward, unless it was intentionally weighted to do so.) The Wari method of display is apparent on a large, state-produced ceramic urn from the D-shaped
room (Ochs and Cabrera 2002) where a warrior wears a trophy head around his neck while the face of the trophy head looks forward (Figure 16.6). The parallel representations of trophy heads in both artistic and osteological media further suggest standardization and perhaps state oversight inasmuch as the creation and representation of trophy heads were concerned.

War trophy heads also exhibit holes on the occipital bone. Among the eight individuals with occipital bones present, 75% displayed at least one hole. I suggest that the holes on the occipital bones were threaded with twine so they could, on occasion, be worn or dangling as isolated elements separate from the rest of the cranium. The archaeological context supports this assertion: two occipital bones were found in situ, placed together in a cluster. A fragmented calotte (cranium without face or base) was recovered near the occipital bone cluster, but it is unclear if it belongs to either of two isolated occipital bones (neither occipital could be joined with the calotte, but warping and tiny, missing cranial pieces may have prevented making joints). If one of the occipital bones does in fact belong to the calotte, one isolated occipital bone remains unaffiliated, suggesting that it may have been used as an isolated piece. Notably, the edges of the occipital bones exhibited
a patina, indicating that they were handled extensively, perhaps as amulets. A perforation on the occipital bone is unique to the Wari trophy heads. To my knowledge, no Nasca trophy heads display this feature.

The ramus of the mandible also exhibited drilled holes. Among the 9 individuals with an observable left ramus, three showed a perforation. These holes were probably used as conduits for rope so the mandible could be dangled separately, or tied back to the cranium, or perhaps both were done throughout the use life of the trophy head. One of the Moche skulls that was transformed into a bowl also exhibited drilled holes on the ramus, probably to thread it with cord and tie it back to the cranium (Verano 2001:Fig. 8.4). Reattached mandibles also were observed on Nasca trophy heads, but rather than drilling holes through the ramus, they were reattached by winding textile cord around it and tying it to the zygomatic bone (Verano 1995:Fig. 8).

Twenty-seven Wari trophy heads were well-preserved enough to observe for cut marks on either the cranium or mandible, and 15 were affected (15/27 = 56%), indicating that they were dismembered and defleshed. Incisions were particularly common on the posterior edge of the ramus, indicating that the masseter muscle was cut in order to separate the mandible from the cranium. Three specimens exhibited cut marks on the inferior edge of the zygomatic bone, further suggesting removal of the masseter muscle and perhaps indicating that the face was flayed.
The Ritual Context of the Wari Trophy Heads

Cook (1993, 2001) has examined Wari iconography reflecting themes of human sacrifice and head taking and was the first to suggest that Wari trophy heads would be found in D-shaped or other ritual structures. Indeed, Wari trophy heads were recovered from two ritual structures at Conchopata, suggesting they were part of a complex ritual practice, probably directed by ritual specialists. Those who modified the skulls (ritual specialists or some other subgroup) likely had intimate knowledge of skeletal and muscle anatomy. In addition to the elaborately prepared trophy heads, rituals included the destruction of large ceramic urns with images of supernatural and militaristic beings carrying trophy heads (Cook 2001; Ochatoma and Cabrera 2002). That, and the predominantly adult male trophy heads suggest that victims were probably taken during violent conflicts (Tung 2003a).

The presence of child trophy heads appears contrary to the possibility that heads were obtained violently. They could represent sacrificial offerings or naturally deceased children from the local community, or they may have been nonlocals taken from other communities. That is, if violent encounters occurred in the context of raids, then children and adults would have been present and perhaps fairly easily abducted. The notion of "social substitutability" (Kelly 2000) in contexts of warfare and raids suggests that any individual from a community is a representative of that group, and thus a legitimate target. This makes all individuals (nearly) equally susceptible to attack or abduction. Social substitutability is particularly likely in cases of raiding, where men, women, and children are all vulnerable (see Harner 1972), even more so than in warfare when only certain subgroups (e.g., men) may engage in battle and become victims.
That Wari engaged in raids and abductions, perhaps to obtain heads for rituals, is further supported by an iconographic depiction of a captive with hands bound behind his back, suspended from the staff of the Front Faced Staff Deity (Figure 16.7). (This ceramic fragment derives from an oversize urn that was part of an offering in a patio (EA2) at Conchopata (Isbell and Cook 2002).)

To the left of the Front Faced Staff Deity, a trophy head with what appears to be a dangling trachea hangs from a staff, which is carried by what Anita Cook (personal communication 2006) has termed the Winged Profile Sacrifice. The depiction of a bound captive and a trophy head under the control of Wari supernatural beings underscores the significance of ritual performance that physically and visually exploits human bodies and body parts. The literal and artistic portrayal of mutilated and incomplete bodies reveals their dual status as bodies controlled by the Wari state and their status as sacred objects and emblems of authority for those who created and controlled them.

The Social Life of Wari Trophy Heads the artistic representations of bound captives and trophy heads, combined with the physically altered and mutilated bodies, show how they may have been used in rituals, providing insights into the social life of trophy heads. As shown on the ceramic urn (Figure 16.7), the physiognomy of the human trophy head is still apparent; the person is fully fleshed with face painting and appears to wear a hat and an ear spool. The hole at bregma (on the superior of the skull) may have been drilled at this time to facilitate its dangling from the staff. This fully fleshed, recognizable head may have constituted the first phase in the use life of a trophy head.

Subsequent processing may have included defleshing and disarticulation, as evidenced by cut marks, enabling their display as isolated crania and mandibles. At some point, several crania were further processed by separating the occipital bone from the rest of the cranium, perhaps facilitating their use as amulets. The patina along the edges of the occipital bone supports this assertion, and the drilled perforations on the occipital suggest that the occipital amulets were threaded with cord and suspended for display. Eventually, the trophy heads and the cranial amulets were burned at high temperature such that the bone vitrified, altering it to a chalky whitish-grey color. In the end, they were smashed and deposited on the floor of the circular and D-shaped ritual structures. Large ceramic urns, some depicting human heads and faces, were also ritually sacrificed by intentionally smashing them and leaving them on the floor of the D-shaped room (Ochatoma and Cabrera 2002) in what appears to be one of the final acts in an elaborate Wari ritual.

Who Was Transformed into Wari Trophy Heads: Locals or Foreigners?

Determining if Wari trophy heads were from locals or foreigners should provide much insight regarding their function and meaning in Wari society. If locals
were the source of Wari trophy heads, it is possible that they derived from local enemies or family members (ancestors). The later Inka (AD 1430–1532), for example, are known to have preserved bodies and exuviae of Inka lords (Guaman Poma de Ayala et al. 1987 [1615]), and among the modern Uru-Uru Chipayas in Bolivia, las calaveras (skull handlers) incorporate disembodied skulls in religious rituals (Wachtel 2001).

Conversely, if the heads were from nonlocals, then they may have represented enemies whose bodies and body parts were later used in rituals. For example, head taking during raids has been documented among the Jivaro of Ecuador within the last half-century, where adults and children have been taken as trophies and ostentatiously displayed (Harner 1972). The heads also could have been obtained in ritual battles (akin to tinta). A case in point comes from the village of Ch’iaraje where informants reported that a prisoner taken in a ritual battle was later decapitated (Orlove 1994).

These examples do not constitute an exhaustive list of the varied ways that bodies and body parts can be used in rituals. Rather, they simply highlight some of the possible ways that body parts may have been obtained and used, either as trophies obtained in violent conflicts (war, raids, or ritual fights), as ancestral objects of veneration derived from human sacrifices or natural deaths, or some combination thereof.

STRONTIUM ISOTOPE ANALYSIS

To determine if adult trophy heads from Conchopata were from a local or distant geographical locale, five were analyzed to determine their strontium isotope ratio (Tung 2003b; Tung and Knudson 2006). (A sample of five represents nearly 20% of the adult trophy head sample.)

Strontium isotope analysis is ideal for the question at hand because strontium isotope ratios in a person’s tooth enamel and bone will reflect the strontium isotope signature of plants that they consumed and the soils in which they were grown. Thus, if primarily local foods were eaten, then the human strontium isotope ratio should match that of local soils (Grupe et al. 1997; Price et al. 1994; Price et al. 2002). Specifically, the dental enamel reflects strontium absorption during childhood because that is when teeth are forming; once dental formation is complete, strontium is no longer incorporated into the teeth (Hillson 1996). Bone, in contrast, remodels throughout an individual’s life, so it reflects strontium uptake for approximately the last 10 years before death, depending on the skeletal element analyzed (Mulhearn 2000; Mulhearn and Van Gerven 1997). Thus, if individuals from the Wari heartland were obtaining heads from enemies, it is possible that they were taken from peoples living outside the Wari imperial core in a distinct geological locale. If so, the strontium isotope values of trophy head victims should reveal this nonlocal strontium signature. Local strontium isotope values were established by local geology (Mégard et al. 1984; Wise 2000), local
small fauna and local burials from tombs at Conchopata. These samples indicate that the local strontium isotope ratio is $^{87}Sr^{86}Sr = 0.7050 - 0.7068$ (Tung 2003b; Tung and Knudson 2006).

Among the five trophy heads sampled, three showed nonlocal strontium isotope values in their bones, suggesting that at least some adults who were transformed into trophy heads had lived at least part of their adult lives in a foreign locale (Tung 2003b; Tung and Knudson 2006). While it is possible that they lived in the local region and consumed imported foods, this seems unlikely because the majority of their diet would have had to be transported from another geological zone. It is also possible that they voluntarily migrated to Conchopata shortly before a natural death, but the iconographic images suggest otherwise. In short, the strontium isotope data, combined with the iconography of trophy heads and prisoners, suggest that at least some of the Conchopata trophy heads possible represent foreign enemies whose body parts were used in elaborate rituals within sacred spaces (Tung 2003b; Tung and Knudson 2006). The literally manipulative transformation of these bodies into sacred relics, and the spectacular display of this process in art and lively rituals, likely served to establish the authority of those who transformed them, while also highlighting Wari state control over the bodies within their domain.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There is much physical and iconographic evidence for the display and offering of human body parts in the Andes during the Late Pre-Ceramic to the Middle Horizon: practices that were generically similar but which carried variable meanings throughout time and across space.

In the earlier periods (Late Pre-Ceramic to Early Horizon), disembodied skulls were unmodified (save for one possible case from the Galería de Ofrendas at Chavin), and based on the demographic profile from Wichqana and Chavin, it appears that females were preferentially selected over males. Additionally, based on the demographically diverse group of heads in Chavin's stone platform, as well as the absence of trauma or cut marks, it is possible that a kin group was ceremoniously interred there as part of an ancestor veneration complex. These once corporeal heads may have been reinvented as ancestral objects that contributed to community identity. In contrast, the Sechin stone carvings that preceded the Chavín Horizon display bloody decapitated heads in association with warriors, suggesting a more prominent role for violence in obtaining and artistically displaying human heads.

The Nasca trophy heads and the earlier disembodied heads are similar in that both emphasize the corporeal yet supernatural quality of the human head. But they are categorically distinct: Nasca heads were modified to extract the brain and display them from a hanging cord, while all but one of the skulls from earlier eras appears to show no modification. Nasca trophy heads were not only prepared differently, they were also represented by a significantly different demographic
group, mainly young adult males. While this suggests that heads were probably obtained in violent battles (either secular or ritual), others have suggested that they represent ancestral relics.

In Wari society, trophy heads were also of ritual significance, but Wari ritual specialists modified the heads in a novel way, perhaps creating new meanings and paths to power in the process (Tung and Cook 2006). The potentially exclusive class of preparers likely had knowledge of human anatomy and other special skills, both practical and supernatural. This perceived supernatural quality may have enabled them to transform corporeal beings into relics that embodied sacredness and power, while simultaneously reifying their own. In this way, human bodies in the hands of ritual specialists continued to be objectified for ritual and political ends. With each new head they prepared, their ritual expertise and supernatural qualities increased.

This diachronic perspective on disembodied skulls and trophy heads in the Andes could be interpreted as representing some form of Pan-Andean unity, and while this may be possible, it is important to observe the distinctions in how heads were obtained, modified, displayed, and used in rituals. Based on the broad temporal and spatial variety of disembodied skull contexts, physical modifications, and representations in art, it appears that there is no single, clear-cut tradition that is shared among all Andean populations as it relates to obtaining and displaying human heads. While generic similarities are present, a profound essential quality is not. To suggest so would imply a sense of timelessness or ahistoricity that ignores the changing and/or competing social, ideological, and political relevance that ritualized human body parts could potentially express.

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NOTES

1. No ages or trauma data were reported for these crania, so the data are insufficient to draw conclusions.
2. Burger (1992) notes that one of the Asa skulls had a hole punched in the frontal bone, like a trophy head; however, Engel (1963) suggests that the hole is a trepanation and Hartweg (1958) makes no mention of it.
3. While Vidal (1984) notes the absence of caries, the type and total number of teeth observed was not reported, so it is difficult to make comparisons and conclusions (e.g., because molars are more commonly affected with caries, relative to anterior teeth, it is important to know if any molars were observed).

4. Ongoing studies are using ancient DNA analysis of Nasca burials and trophy heads to determine if locals, foreigners, or both were transformed into trophy heads (Forgay and Williams, 2005). Documenting this aspect of identity (biological affiliation) should aid in identifying some of the meanings associated with trophy head rituals.

5. Verano (1995) notes the difficulties in distinguishing between trophy heads (flesh intact) and trophy skulls (flesh intentionally removed) among archaeological specimens with variable preservation, so, for the purposes of this chapter, I use the general term trophy head to refer to any disembodied head or skull that has been modified as described by Verano. These criteria have been widely accepted and serve well for the identification of Nasca trophy heads.

6. Because I have personally reconstructed and analyzed all the Conchopata trophy heads, I provide a much more detailed account of those specimens relative to those from Tiwanaku.

7. The skull was poorly preserved, so no detailed osteological observations could be made (Schreiber, personal communication 2005).

8. While the Winged Profile Sacrificer is sometimes called the Winged Attendant, Cook notes that the latter term implies a secondary status or attending role, even though the relative status between the supernatural beings is unknown. For this reason, I avoid the term “attendant.”

REFERENCES


FROM CORPORALITY TO SANCTITY


