

Huari (Wari)

Practices

The Wari built an empire that spanned much of present-day Peru. Their Andean capital, Huari, became one of the world's great cities, laid out in specialized sections.

Rituals were accompanied by the drinking of chicha, a fermented alcoholic brew similar to beer but made from corn. Chicha was drunk in social rank and most likely a lot of toast was made as a part of any ritual.

From the archeological evidence the Wari fostered cult of royal ancestor worship. Royal tombs have been discovered with rows of seated human bodies buried in a seated position and wrapped in poorly preserved textiles. In other chambers the remains of royal queens were found along with an assortment of rich possessions (gold and silver ear ornaments, silver bowls, bronze ritual axes, a rare alabaster drinking cup, knives, coca leaf containers and brilliantly painted ceramics). Lastly evidence suggests that the Wari displayed the mummies of their queens on the stone throne of the ceremonial room, allowing the living to venerate the royal dead.¹

The location of the tomb was marked with a carved wooden mace that served as a grave marker.

As for non-elite Wari, they were honored via endocannibalism, the ritual eating of the body of the deceased. Right after death, the closest relatives would hug and embrace the deceased person. This was followed by a funeral song in which everyone referred to the dying or dead person by consanguine terms and recollected events they had experienced together during the person's lifetime. Relatives would be sent for and the funeral would usually take place about three days after the person died. Mortuary preparation involved ritual wailing and other ceremonies, building a fire, removing the visceral organs, and finally roasting the body. The decedent's closest kin would not consume the body, but they urged the attendant relatives to eat. Consumption of the flesh would assuage the family's grief, as it meant the soul of the person was being kept in the living body of relatives, rather than being abandoned to wander the forests alone.²

In Wari's visions of the afterlife, the spirits of the dead reside under the waters of deep rivers and lakes. The ancestors appear as they did in life, but everyone is strong, beautiful, and free of deformity, disease, and infirmity. The ancestors' social world resembles a village. Life is easy and crops grow abundantly. All food is vegetarian.

In the underworld the Wari align and intermarry with the Water Spirits who are primal forces that control human death, animal fertility and destructive storms.

The Wari believe that the dead will eventually regenerate into animals. That in this way their spirit will live on while providing food to their living relatives. It is believed that the deceased continues to care about their family and provide for them in this way. The most common animals that the ancestors are believed to regenerate into are fish and Peccaries (a type of pig).

Deities and Important Concepts

- Wiracocha, the "staff god"
Controlled life and death.
- Pacha Kamaq ("Earth maker")
Creator god.

¹ Pringle, Heather. "First Unlooted Royal Tomb of Its Kind Unearthed in Peru." National Geographic. National Geographic Society, 27 June 2013. Web. 03 Apr. 2014. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/06/130627-peru-archaeology-wari-south-america-human-sacrifice-royal-ancient-world>

² "Wari Culture." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Mar. 2014. Web. 03 Apr. 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wari_culture

- **Towira Towira**
A giant and leader of the Water Spirits. His beer is said to be the true cause of death. He also washes the deceased in a warm water bath to 'awaken' them. After the bath the deceased is painted with genipap which makes a black paint. This marks the social transitions and integration into the Water Spirit's society. (The same paint is used to mark social transitions in life).

Towira Towira can be thought of as a kind of grim reaper who helps the deceased transition into the next realm.

Modern Adaptations

- Starting with the eldest person in the family drink a toast that includes a memory of the deceased. Continue to the next eldest person, etc. If children are too small to make a toast state how they are related to the deceased.
- Create a song or poem talking about the deceased.
- Touch the body of the deceased letting it know that its soul shall pass to the living.
- Have a feast of roasted meat stating that the meat is being eaten in memory of the deceased. That in this way the deceased is being kept alive. Charge the people at the feast to remember the dead when they eat together.
- Speak of the village in the after life where the deceased will reside. Ask the Water Spirits and specifically Towira Towira to welcome the deceased into their society.
- Wash the body in warm water and mark it with a bit of black paint to represent that the person is now a part of the Water Spirit's society and has transitioned to the next phase of their existence.

Sample Readings

The Huari did not have a written language.

Resources

- First Unlooted Royal Tomb of Its Kind Unearthed in Peru
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/06/130627-peru-archaeology-wari-south-america-human-sacrifice-royal-ancient-world>
- Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion
<http://books.google.com/books?id=hdW-AAAAQBAJ&lpg=PA201&ots=G5-9qq7jbo&dq=Towira%20Towira&pg=PA201#v=onepage&q=Towira%20Towira&f=false>