

Chavin

Practices

The first civilization in Peru going back to around 1000 BC. The religion of the Chavin was animistic and polytheistic. Starting in pre-Chavin culture we see the beginnings of ancestor worship, where the deceased chief became a god. Offerings of bone thought to bear representations of deity were left in the tomb of a chief. From the evidence animistic belief changed into worship of ancestral spirits giving rise to the feline cult that is evident in Chavin.¹

Tombs for the elite have been found with precious metals and colorful textiles. The majority of burials, however, were found in shallow pits with only a simple cotton cloth and the tools they used in every day chores.²

Chavin, was both a ritual and residential site. Evidence has been found that the oracles / shaman used conch shells as part of their rituals.

Deities and Important Concepts

- Main deity
Shown with long fangs and long hair made of snakes. This deity was responsible for balancing opposing forces.³
- The deity of the underworld
Represented by anacondas.
- Shape shifting into a jaguar
Shamanic experience most likely aided by the use of hallucinogenic drugs. The shaman in Chavin were an elite class and the use of these drugs may have been limited to this class.
- Eagles and hawk
The most represented animal depicted in Chavin art.⁴

Modern Adaptations

- Bury the person in a simple cotton cloth along with tools they would have used frequently.
- Play a conch shell to call to the spirit of the deceased to transition to the other world.
- Place a representation of an anaconda, to represent the god of death. Speak of this as a protective and regenerative force.
- Invoke the eagle and the hawk as guides for the newly deceased.
- Speak of the dead as one who will be like the jaguar, effective with dealing with their habitat. Agile, strong and fierce.

Sample Readings

The Chavin civilization left behind no writings.

Resources

Gale Student Resources – “Chavin Culture.”

<http://tinyurl.com/bvoerue>

¹ Kano, Chiaki. The Origins of The Chavin Culture. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979.p 37. Web. 31 July 2013. <http://tinyurl.com/ln323os>

² Chavin Culture . Photos.” Chavin Culture. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 July 2013. <http://www.huaraz.com/culturachavin/>

³ “Saylor.org's Ancient Civilizations of the World/The Chavin.” – Wikibooks, Open Books for an Open World. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 July 2013. http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Saylor.org%27s_Ancient_Civilizations_of_the_World/The_Chavin

⁴ Howland Rowe, John. “Sixth Emeritus Faculty Lecture Honoring John Howland Rowe.” N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Aug. 2013. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/ANTH/emeritus/rowe/pub/chavin/>