

Nazca

Practices

This Peruvian civilization is famous for the line drawings found in the earth and the mummified remains found in the Chauchilla Cemetery. However, there forms of burial seemed to have been widely practiced.¹

- Chamber Tombs or “Barbacoas”

Mummified bodies were clothed in embroidered cotton and then painted with a resin and kept in purpose-built tombs made from mud bricks. The resin is thought to have kept out insects and slowed bacteria trying to feed on the bodies. Nearby pillars seemed to have been used as a place to dry out a body prior to internment.

Sometimes the heads of the body were removed and replaced with jar painted to represent a human head.

- Pit Burials

The most common Nazca funeral practice was to bury their dead in pits dug into the sandy cliffs or in the hills encompassing the river valleys. Graves average six to ten feet in depth and could be either square or a round cross section. The dead were buried in a seated position, knees flexed against the chest, with the body dressed in typical clothing with additional cloths wrapped around the bundle. Small children were sometimes buried in large pottery within a larger grave but most graves only contained a single body and often also contained items such as pottery. Vessels (often as offerings), sewing kits, weapons, and other items for everyday use. The graves were roofed over with wood beams which were then covered with small fieldstones or adobe bricks.² Often a single cane was stuck vertically into the mud cap to serve as a tomb marker.

- Urn Burials

Most urn burials involve children younger than six, although occasionally youths and adults were interred in this manner. The individuals were usually placed in a seated and semi-flexed position. Generally, the burials falling into this category were very simple, the bodies often being wrapped in nothing more than undecorated plain weave textiles. Grave goods did not normally accompany these simple burials.

The famous Nazca lines were used for religious processions. Some of the lines depict nature spirits that the Nazca sacrificed humans by beheading them. From the evidence there is no indication that these processions were a part of a funerary process.

Deities and Important Concepts

- The Nazca people practiced intensive agriculture in an area in a precarious area characterized by unpredictable natural events such as frequent droughts (as the area is a dessert), earthquakes and flash flooding. The need for water affected their entire lifestyle and played a major role in the form and practice of their religion.

There ritual practices seemed to center on appeasing the mountain gods who were responsible for fertility and also associated with water.

¹ Isla, Johny, and Markus Reindel. “Burial Patterns and Sociopolitical Organization in Nasca 5 Society.” N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2014. http://www.dainst.org/medien/de/nasca_isla_reindel_2006.pdf

² “Sacred Traditions- Anthropology 2120 – Danielle’s Eportfolio.” Danielle’s Eportfolio. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2014. <http://tink9966.weebly.com/sacred-traditions--anthropology-2120.html>

- The famous geoglyphs surely provided a kinetic, ritualistic reminder to the Nasca people that their fate was tied to their environment—its natural beauty, its ephemeral abundance, and its life-threatening austerity. Thus it is fitting that they be incorporated into a funeral for one who honors this culture.
- Domestic animals such as the llama and alpaca had been imported from the highlands at an earlier time and were present in Nasca society as was the Guinea Pig (*Cavia porcellus*) which was used in ritual and as a ritual food.³
- The Nazca religion centered on the concept of animatism or the belief in supernatural forces present in nature which control the resources that affect men's lives. These spiritual forces were often symbolized in the ceramic art by images of mythical creatures composed of elements of the most powerful creatures of the sky, the earth and the ocean.⁴
- Shamans, rather than priests, were the officiates in Nasca rituals. Shamans were the intermediaries between the spirit world and the everyday world. Shamans are depicted as playing 'pan pipes', drums and clay trumpets. They wore a figure eight turban and drank a hallucinogenic brew as part of their rituals.⁵
- Depictions of the deities are composite creatures representing the most powerful forces of the air (condor and falcon), earth (puma and jaguar) and water (killer whale and shark).
- Many items show plants growing out of skulls. From this we can see that the Nazca saw the connection of death to life. In fact, many decapitated skulls or trophy heads have been found. These offerings were thought necessary to ensure fertility.

Modern Adaptations

- Even though the Nazca lines were most likely not used for funerary reasons it would seem fitting to have people walk on lines similar to the Nazca lines as part of a funerary procession. This could be done in honor of the mountain gods whom are still worshiped by the Andean culture. These gods, who appear as animals such as the spider, the monkey and the whale could be invoked and honored as the very ground that the person shall be committed to.

Different ways exist to make temporary line drawings that people could walk on. One of the most common is to use a rope and stake system.

- Bury the person with a jar that has a face painted on it.
- Speak of how death and life is connected. How life needs death so that new things can come about. Plant something for the dead as representing that life continues.
- Stick a single cane into the grave to mark its place.
- Have someone play 'pan pipes', drums and/or clay trumpets. Alternately play recorded music that incorporates these instruments.

Sample Readings

The Nazca had no written system.

Resources

- Burial Patterns and Sociopolitical Organization in Nasca 5 Society
http://www.researchgate.net/publication/226923989_Burial_Patterns_and_Sociopolitical_Organization_in_Nasca_5_Society
- The Nasca Culture: An Introduction
http://people.umass.edu/~proulx/online_pubs/Nasca_Overview_Zurich.pdf

³ Proulx, Donald A. "The Nasca Culture: An Introduction." p 13–14., n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.
http://people.umass.edu/~proulx/online_pubs/Nasca_Overview_Zurich.pdf

⁴ Ibid. p. 14–15

⁵ Ibid. p. 15