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The origin of the Juch'uy pampa Cave mummies: strontium isotope analysis of archaeological human remains from Bolivia

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Abstract

Previous analyses of strontium isotopes from human bone and teeth have identified diverse patterns of residential mobility in the South Central Andes during the Middle Horizon (AD 500–1100). During this time, the large polity of Tiwanaku exerted great influence over what are now southern Peru, northern Chile, northwestern Argentina and Bolivia. Recently, five naturally-mummified individuals were discovered in the cave of Juch'uy pampa in the Pulacayo region of southern Bolivia. Although these individuals were buried with a number of fine Tiwanaku-style grave goods as well as non-Tiwanaku items, the burial site is isolated and does not conform to the pattern of large Tiwanaku-affiliated cemeteries and residential sites outside of the Lake Titicaca Basin. Strontium isotope analysis was performed on enamel from two adult men and bone from a third adult male in order to test the hypotheses that one or more of the males was from

either the Tiwanaku heartland in the Lake Titicaca Basin, the Chilean oasis of San Pedro de Atacama, which contains a series of cemeteries with Tiwanaku-style grave goods, or the local area in which they were buried. Results show that two individuals likely spent their childhood in the local area where they were interred, while the third man probably spent at least the last twenty years of his life in that region before being buried there. This raises interesting questions regarding the nature of Tiwanaku influence in southern Bolivia and the relationship between the Juch'uy pampa mummies and the Tiwanaku polity.



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Keywords

Strontium isotope analysis; South Central Andes; Bioarchaeology; Tiwanaku

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