

# Incan Mummy in Camelid Clothing Returned to Bolivia

Marking the first time human archeological remains have been repatriated to an Andean country, a 500-year-old mummy arrived safely in Bolivia from the Michigan State University Museum this past summer.

Originally found near what is now modern La Paz, the mummy was donated to the museum 129 years ago.

Dr. William Lovis, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Michigan State University, explains that the return is significant for several reasons.

“Among them is the fact that it has fostered scientific collaborations between U.S. and Bolivian scientists that will hopefully strengthen in the future. It also allows the young lady to contribute in a meaningful way to the heritage and patrimony of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia.”

The girl, thought to have been about eight when she died, probably lived during the last years of Incan civilization during the second half of the 15th Century. If she was originally from the area of La Paz, where she was reputedly found, she may have been a member of an ethnic Aymara group known as the Pacajes.

The mummy is extremely well-preserved, with thick black braids and a dress made from alpaca or llama fiber. She was deposited in a stone tomb, emphasizing her high status.

Other funerary objects found with the mummy are being studied in their own right. They include feathered ornaments found clasped in her hands, the sandals on her feet, a clay jar, pouches, maize, coca and other plants. It is unknown whether the high status Andean girl was a human sacrifice.

“Because of her remarkable preservation,” Lovis says, “we were able to conduct many analyses that would have been more difficult otherwise. We were able to obtain radiocarbon dates, identify plant and animal materials, perform isotope analyses and even genetic reconstructions of the maize. Much of this work was made possible by the excellent preservation.”


The project means a great deal to Lovis and his team. “If I may speak for my colleagues and the research team, we are all very pleased and humbled to have been able to undertake both the repatriation and the associated research that helps us to better

understand the life history of this young lady.”

“She is now home in the Andes mountains, where her presence is especially important to the patrimony and heritage of her modern descendants. We look forward to sharing our knowledge of the young lady both with Bolivia and more broadly as we move ahead with our research.”

Starting in November, the remains were exhibited in a refrigerated preservation chamber at the National Archaeology Museum (Museo Nacional de Arqueología) in downtown La Paz.





The mummy's remarkable state of preservation allowed researchers to clearly see the girl's braids, the feathers in her hands and to test her clothes, found to be made of alpaca or llama fiber. The girl, thought to be about eight when she died, was entombed before the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the Incan conquest.

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Some news reports call the mummy “Ñusta,” which means “princess” in the Quechua language, but Lovis points out how that name is probably incorrect. “The name given to her is a Quechua name, not an Aymara name – this is a problem. A closer translation in Aymara is ‘in aqua,’ often translated as ‘young lady.’ Nobody is willing to say she was a princess, but she was certainly an elite or noble person.”