



Embodying borders: human body modification and diversity in Tiwanaku society

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Abstract

Building upon recent studies of settlement patterns and material cultural, this paper focuses on human body modification preserved in human bone as a complementary means of studying diversity in ancient societies. A review of ethno-historical sources in conjunction with a human osteological study of cranial shape modification offers original data regarding diversity in Tiwanaku society, which was situated in the southern Andes from ca. AD 500–1100. The study sample includes 412 individuals from the site of Tiwanaku, surrounding sites in the Tiwanaku and Katari valleys, and Tiwanaku-affiliated sites in the Moquegua valley of southern Peru. A distinct regional pattern is clear in the ways in which head form was modified. In the Moquegua valley, solely fronto-occipital modification was employed, while in the Katari valley a distinctly different, annular modification was practiced. In contrast, individuals interred in the capital city of Tiwanaku displayed both head form styles. These results suggest that diverse groups of people from neighboring areas were drawn to the Tiwanaku capital in the highlands, and cranial shape modification was involved in symbolic boundary maintenance at the juncture of two distinct environmental niches, the precise location of the capital site of Tiwanaku.

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As one of the longest-lived and extensive South American polities, Tiwanaku flourished in the south-central Andes from approximately 500–1150 AD. At its point of greatest expansion, Tiwanaku was one of the most extensive pre-Inca forces in South America. Tiwanaku-style material culture was present throughout a large region, including the southern highland shores of Lake Titicaca and the lowland regions to the west and east in modern-day Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.

Early ethnohistorical documents provide rich descriptions of the site of Tiwanaku (e.g., Acosta, 1954 [1590]; Betanzos, 1996 [1551–1557], pp. 7, 196; Cieza

de León, 1959 [1553]; Cobo, 1979 [1653], pp. 95, 105, 141; de la Vega, 1961 [1609]; Molina, 1989 [1575]), and extensive archaeological research in the highland demographic “core” has significantly increased our understanding of this ancient society (e.g., Albarracín-Jordán, 1992; Alconini Mújica, 1995; Bermann, 1994; Blom et al., 2003; Couture, 2002; Escalante, 1992; Graf-fam, 1990; Isbell and Burkholder, 2002; Janusek, 2004; Kolata, 1993; Ponce Sanginés, 1972; Rivera Casanovas, 1994; Seddon, 1994; Stanish, 1994; Vranich, 1999; Wise, 1993). Likewise, additional archaeological studies have been carried out throughout the vast lowland regions to the east and west where Tiwanaku-style material culture has been found (e.g., Blom et al., 1998; Cohen et al., 1995; Goldstein, 1989a; Higuera-Hare, 1996; Janusek

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and Blom, 2005; Moseley et al., 1991; Mujica et al., 1983; Stovel, 2002). As a result of this research, new interpretations have been proposed to explain Tiwanaku sociopolitical complexity.

In spite of early interpretations as an unpopulated ceremonial center (e.g., Bennett, 1934; Lumbreras, 1974; Schaedel, 1988; Squier, 1973 [1877]), the site of Tiwanaku can now be characterized as a large, urban settlement of approximately 20,000–40,000 inhabitants (Kolata, 1993; Parsons, 1968). Most archaeologists (e.g., Janusek, 2004; Kolata, 1993, 2003; Stanish, 2003) consider the site to be the political core of a centralized “state” based on the presence of expansive irrigation networks; extensive monumental architecture; settlement patterns suggesting hierarchy, social stratification and restricted access; and iconographic elements suggesting violent coercion. Nevertheless, some researchers such as Albarracín-Jordán (1992, 1996a,b) argue that local, segmentary communities articulated through reciprocity and common ideology characterized the Tiwanaku realm. One element held in common by the various researchers is that they do not envision “Tiwanaku” as a monolithic, undifferentiated mass of bureaucratic institutions. Almost every model incorporates diversity, and Tiwanaku is viewed as encompassing various social groups, be they akin to *ayllus* (Andean descent groups) (Albarracín-Jordán, 1992), moieties, or ethnic groups (Bermann, 1994; Janusek, 2004; Kolata, 1993; Ponce Sanginés, 1972).

Researchers working in regions distant from the Tiwanaku core have proposed various scenarios for the ways in which the Tiwanaku polity established its influence in these regions. Most concur that different methods were used to incorporate foreign areas into Tiwanaku’s “sphere of interaction,” depending on such factors as the distance from the Tiwanaku core and local social, demographic, and ideological structures (Kolata, 1993; Mujica, 1985). In the more distant regions, it has been suggested that clientage relationships were likely established, in which local elite strengthened their status through the exclusive social ties with the Tiwanaku core. In the less distant lowland valleys such as Moquegua, archaeological data suggest that direct colonization was employed in areas that often included various ethnic groups (Browman, 1980; Goldstein, 1989a; Kolata, 1993; Oakland Bodman, 1992; Owen and Goldstein, 2001; see also Higuera-Hare, 1996).

This recent focus upon social diversity has been productive, and additional lines of archaeological evidence are necessary to address the issue in detail and identify the nature of diversity in Tiwanaku society. Certainly, archaeologists cannot observe the most critical aspects of group membership such as ascription (Banks, 1996; Barth, 1969; Chapman, 1993; Jones, 1997), and researchers often acknowledge that the use of material culture can be problematic in studying these issues (see, e.g., Jones,

1997 for a synthesis of this debate). However, group membership has been viewed indirectly through material remains, providing archaeologists an opportunity to distinguish social groups through “style” in material culture (Aldenderfer and Stanish, 1993; Conkey and Hastorf, 1990; Plog, 1983; Shennan, 1989; Weissner, 1983).

Diverse archaeological approaches to detect ethnic and other social groups in Tiwanaku settlements have been employed, including studies of agricultural practices, residential patterns, household structure, and monumental architecture (Albarracín-Jordán, 1996a,b; Bermann, 1994; Goldstein, 1989a; Higuera-Hare, 1996; Janusek, 2002; Stanish, 1992; Wise, 1993). Also addressed are the nature of domestic and public rituals (Blom et al., 2003; Blom and Janusek, 2004; Goldstein, 1989a; Janusek, 2004), textiles (Oakland Bodman, 1992), diet (Janusek, 2002; Wright et al., 2003), style and iconography on serving vessels and other ceramics (Goldstein, 1989a; Janusek, 2002), and archaeolinguistics (Browman, 1994). Bioarchaeological data from Tiwanaku can enhance this archaeological inquiry by providing information that cannot be gleaned through the study of material culture alone. The present study emphasizes the use of human skeletal remains and provides a new dimension to the existing studies on the role of diversity within Tiwanaku society.

Contrary to folk wisdom in contemporary US society, anthropologists know that defining “ethnic,” or “racial,” groups on the basis of physical differences is invalid, since most variation occurs across a continuum or cross-cuts folk categories of race. As outlined in a public statement by the [American Anthropological Association](#) (1998), race and ethnicity are not biological variables; they are social constructs. However, within a specific cultural context, particular biological traits can be ascribed meaning and essentially used by societies to “racialize” bodies (Ahmed, 2002).

In addition to ascribing meaning to certain phenotypic traits, humans often actively distinguish themselves from others through body modification, marking personal identity while simultaneously demarcating group cohesion within society. Seen in this light, the human body is an interface between the individual and society (Comaroff, 1985; Durkheim, 1952 [1897]; Foucault, 1979; Lock, 1993; Turner, 1980). By creating distinct differences that are not present at birth and by giving meaning to these differences, “cultural bodies” are constructed, and symbolic boundaries (see Lamont and Molnar, 2002) created. The body as displayed socially can sometimes be directly observed by archaeologists through human osteological studies.

The present study offers an original review of ethno-historical sources and human osteological studies on body modification in the Andes, concentrating especially on modification that would have left its mark on human bone. In conjunction with archaeological variables, data

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