

AnthroBytes

Anthropology Research Highlights

#5 Cerro Baul: The Masada of the Andes



The Andean Wari empire established an elaborate city high on the mountaintop of Cerro Baul in southern Peru sometime around A.D. 550. For roughly 500 years the Wari colony controlled the upper reaches of the Moquegua river valley from the heights of the sacred *apu* (mountaintop). The city functioned as both administrative center and regal embassy. Residents and guests were treated to sumptuary feasts involving ritual intoxication and the consumption of imported foodstuffs. The city was abandoned around A.D. 1050.

Since 1993 UF archaeologists--Dr. Patrick Ryan Williams (UF '97), Dr. Donna Nash (UF '02)--both now with the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago-- and Drs. Michael E. Moseley and Susan D. deFrance on the UF faculty--have been investigating the site. Generous financial support has been provided by the Heinz Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and logistical support by the Southern Peru Copper Corporation and the Contisuyo Museum in Moquegua, Peru.

Research findings to date at Cerro Baul:

- The oldest large-scale imperial brewery in the Andes. The facility was used for the production of *chicha*, a fermented alcoholic beverage made from maize or other fruits including the Peruvian pepper plant, *molle*. Facilities for the boiling, fermenting, and consumption of *chicha* were discovered. Chicha was consumed using special ceramic *keros* or cups.
- Ritual courts, large plazas, and elite residences where feasts were prepared and consumed. Drinking halls were constructed for high-level political and social interactions.
- Imported exotic goods including decorated copper plaques, an elaborate ceramic drum from the Nazca region on the coast, imported minerals and obsidian, and a counting device made from carved volcanic tuff.