

Llolleo Culture

150 - 900 CE

Environment and Geography

Groups of the Llolleo culture occupied Central Chile between the Aconcagua and Cachapoal rivers, a region with a temperate climate and a landscape that slopes gradually over 100 km from sea level to reach altitudes of over 6000 m in the Andes Mountains.

Economy

Although hunting and gathering were vital to the Llolleo people's subsistence from the beginning, over time the cultivation of crops such as maize and quinoa became more important, giving way to an increasing sedentary and complex society. Evidence shows that the Llolleo people ground their grain into flour and had tame guanacos. On the coast, evidence of Llolleo settlements shows that these people gathered shellfish, fished and hunted marine mammals.

Art

The quality of ceramics produced by these groups shows that they were finely skilled in this art. Notable examples include monochromatic pots with neck incisions and molded bottles with animal, plant and human images. Other notable features include faces with "coffee bean" eyes, and those with eyebrows and nose drawn together in a continuous line. Among the most common features of Llolleo ceramics are the so-called "duck-shaped jug" and the use of reinforced rims, two elements that indicate a strong link with southern Chile, especially with the Pitrén culture.

Social Organization

There is no clear evidence that Llolleo society was divided hierarchically. However, the presence of craniums with intentional deformations could point to social marking or differentiation of social status among certain individuals. Power was likely held by the head of the family, and the groups may have formed alliances with their closest neighbors.

Beliefs and Funeral Rites

Ceramic and stone pipes have frequently been found at sites formerly occupied by Llolleo groups, which indicates that they may have used hallucinogenic substances in their social rituals. In fact, archeological sites have been identified that could have been gathering places for large groups. Judging by the number of pipes found there, smoking likely played a central role in the activities held at these places. In regard to funerary practices, the Llolleo people buried their dead under the floors of their dwellings, in some cases making small cemeteries. Grave goods accompanying the bodies include body ornaments,

perforated stones, grinding instruments and ceramic recipients, most of which were intentionally broken or damaged. Children were buried in ceramic urns similar to those made for cooking or holding water.

Settlement Pattern

Some of the Llolleo residential sites identified are relatively large, and would have housed several families. These cannot be considered villages, however, as each family was located some distance from neighbors and many occupational sites accommodated single families only. Llolleo settlements were located close to the fields where the people cultivated their crops. The society shows no evidence of class distinctions.

History

Little is known about the origins of the Llolleo people, although they share several cultural features with most horticulturalist-ceramicist groups of the Southern Cone of America. This suggests that these cultures were all part of a large cultural movement that took place at the beginning of our own era. The Llolleo people shared the valleys of Central Chile with the Bato people, and would have had contact and shared some cultural traditions with them. In the mountains, they interacted and traded goods with hunter-gatherers who inherited the traditions of the Archaic Period. Around 900 CE, the history of the Llolleo people ends abruptly with the emergence of the Aconcagua culture.