Chachapoya iconography, appearing in pottery, architectural embellishments. Details of other activities and cyclical rituals performed to propitiate agriculture remain unknown. Apparently, the Chachapoya did not build temples dedicated to a virtual, although outdoor spectacles and feasts took place in central plazas. Excavations in ancient buildings at the sites of La Playa and Gran Pajatén did yield quartz crystals, rare metals, and evidence for ritual activities, perhaps within habitations, but no similar evidence has yet been found elsewhere in Chachapoya. Chronicles provide inordinate number of references to powerful elders, or “shamans,” in this region. The import of Chachapoya shamanism likely has local roots probably relates to the accessibility of herbs, sacred plants, and esoteric knowledge at a major way to the Amazon lowlands where the greatest humans reputedly dwelled. However, social and political chaos during the colonial period probably led to widespread increase in the hostile sorcery practiced by the Spaniards.

Art and Expressive Culture

Chachapoya art and iconography as we know it presumes war, male sexuality, and perhaps masonic transformation into alter egos, such as saints. Much expressive culture surely relates to ancestor veneration and agricultural propitiation, but interpretations rely heavily on indirect evidence. Chachapoya are most widely known for their stone carving and architectural skills, yet they have also been described by chroniclers as among the greatest Andean weavers. Still, Chachapoya textile arts remained virtually unknown until archaeologists revealed approximately 200 mummy bundles in 1997 during ongoing looting at the cemetery at Laguna de los Condores. The extraordinary preservation of the cliffery now permits experts to unravel the details of Chachapoya weaving techniques and iconography. Signs on textiles, pyro-engraved gourds, and other artifacts typically include representations of serpents, gods, and other fanged creatures, and feline-human hybrids. Anthropomorphic wooden sculptures accompany the dead at the Laguna and hang from ingenious stone hinges beneath the caves of mausolea at Pinchudos. Because of preservation conditions, wooden sculpture remains unknown elsewhere in the Andean highlands. An obsession with human heads, most frequently carved in stone and incorporated into building masonry, may represent concern for ancestors or trophy heads taken in war. These are among the most significant finds in a growing corpus of artistic media that promises to shed new light on Chachapoya culture. Unfortunately, the problem of looting at Chachapoya tombs is expanding, and sustained scientific archaeology in the cloud forest is a difficult and expensive enterprise.

— Warren B. Church

See also Peru

Further Readings


CHAGNON, NAPOLEON (1938–)

Napoleon Chagnon is biosocial professor emeritus in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Chagnon was born in 1938 in Port Austin, Michigan. He earned his PhD in anthropology at the University of Michigan in 1966. There, he studied unilineal cultural evolution under Leslie A. White. Chagnon tested White’s assertions that changes in technology played a primary role in social evolution when he gathered ethnographic field data among the Yanomamo Indians of Venezuela and Brazil. When Napoleon Chagnon began his study of the Yanomamo in 1964, few Whites had interacted with them, and none for extended periods of time. Chagnon was able to document the effects of Yanomamo acculturation to outside cultures, particularly the political
and technological impact of trade goods. Chagnon also documented the effects of diseases and epidemics introduced by lumbermen and miners on the Yanomamo population and social organization. In 1988, Professor Chagnon established a survival fund with nonprofit organizations to develop health care programs for the Venezuelan Yanomamo. The Yanomamo are victims of scourges like influenza and water pollution as a result of their contact with an influx of illegal miners.

Chagnon became world renowned for his analysis of Yanomamo warfare and his participant observation field research techniques. He is also widely respected for his international advocacy for Yanomamo land rights, environmental protection, and human rights. The nature of Yanomamo warfare and violence between villages has been the subject of much of Chagnon’s research. Chagnon’s most important observations of the Yanomamo include their use of hallucinogenic drugs in shamanistic healing rituals and the violent practice of fighting with axes. The “Ax Fight,” captured on film, is a popular ethnographic CD-ROM for college students. Chagnon explains Yanomamo violence and warfare as a result of a shortage of wives, perpetuated by female infanticide and cycles of vengeance. In response to protein-shortage explanations for warfare asserted by other anthropologists, Chagnon and partner Raymond Hames measured the amount of protein in several Yanomamo villages. They did not find a correlation between protein levels in local diets and violent warfare.

Chagnon continues to gather field data among extremely remote Yanomamo villages contacted in the early 1990s.

In 1993, Chagnon was part of a team that investigated the violent murders of Yanomamo women and children by illegal miners. The massacre of the women and children followed the Yanomamo shooting of Brazilian miners who had killed Yanomamo men over territorial disputes. In 1999, Patrick Tierney alleged fieldwork misconduct on the part of Chagnon early in his research career, in a sensational book titled Darkness in El Dorado. The American Anthropological Association engaged in a detailed investigation in 2001 of the charges that Chagnon and geneticist James Neel had been the cause of a measles epidemic among the Yanomami people. All major allegations made by Tierney were shown to be not only false, but deliberately fraudulent.

Chagnon is currently engaged in computer-assisted longitudinal analysis of Yanomamo demographic, settlement patterns, geography, and warfare patterns. He seeks to further understand and explain differences in Yanomamo village life and warfare interrelationships over time and place.

— Elizabeth A. Tierney

See also Darkness in El Dorado Controversy; Participant observation; Yanomamo

Further Readings

CHANTS

Chanting is an important linguistic act that is part of many secular and religious practices throughout the world. Many political rallies, sporting events, festive religious services, and private religious devotions involve some form of chanting. In general, chanting is distinct from other speech activities by having a unique rhythmic structure, by having distinctive stress and intonation patterns, and by being linked in significance to specific social situations.

The primary purpose of chants, in most cases, is to put the mind beyond words and into an altered state of consciousness in order to, for example, achieve enlightenment, to personally experience God, or to enter into the spirit world. Chanting such as this can be done alone or in a group. Anyone who has repeated the same word over and over again has noticed that any repeated word, or string of words, eventually seems to become strange and meaningless. Chanting like this can be found in Buddhist meditation, Christian devotions, shamanistic rituals, and...