

Two Heads Are Better Than One!

Well, some cultures have thought so, anyway....The practice of headhunting has been the subject of intense study by scholars trying to assess and interpret its social roles, functions, and motivations: mortification of rivals, ritual violence, cosmological balance, the display of manhood, cannibalism, dominance over the body and soul of enemies in life and afterlife, as a trophy and proof of achievement in hunting, a show of greatness, prestige by taking on a rival's spirit and power, and as a means of securing the services of the victim as a slave in the afterlife.

Headhunting was practiced by many Austronesian people in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Headhunting has at one time or another been practiced among most of the peoples of Melanesia, including New Guinea. A missionary found 10,000 skulls in a community longhouse on Goaribari Island in 1901.

In Southeast Asia, the Murut, Dusun Lotud, Ilongot, Igorot, Iban, Dayak, Berawan, Wana, and Mapurondo tribes were all headhunters. Here, headhunting was usually a ritual activity rather than an act of war or feuding. Headhunting acted as a catalyst for the cessation of personal and collective mourning for the community's dead. U.S. authorities in the Philippines suppressed headhunting among the Ilongot in the 1930s. The Igorot in the Philippines also practiced headhunting. In New Zealand, the Māori preserved the heads of enemies in a form known as *mokomokai*.

In China, Qin soldiers frequently collected their enemies' heads. The soldiers earned promotions and rewards from superiors by collecting the heads of enemies, a type of body count. In this area, authorities displayed heads of executed criminals in public spaces up to the 20th century. In Japan, Samurai also sought glory by headhunting. When a battle ended, the warrior would ceremoniously present trophy heads to a general, who would variously reward him with promotions in rank, gold or silver, or land from the defeated clan. Generals displayed the heads of defeated rivals in public squares.

Headhunting has also been found in India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar till the 19th century. Several tribes of the Jivaroan tribes of the Amazon practiced headhunting for trophies. A wooden rack in several Mesoamerican civilizations was used for the public display of human skulls, typically war captives or sacrificial victims. It's been calculated that there were some 60,000 skulls on the great Skullrack of Tenochtitlan, in Mexico. And then there were the Celts in Europe and...

Are there any headhunters left today? Apparently not, but as of 2020 there were still natives in Papua New Guinea who could remember practicing headhunting in their earlier years.

