Living on the Mimbres Western Edge: Regional Affiliation and Identity in Arizona’s Upper Gila River Valley A.D. 750 – 1130
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Introduction
Archaeologists in the U.S. Southwest have increasingly focused their research on understanding the lives and identities of people who lived outside core cultural areas. The Mimbres region encompasses southwest New Mexico and southern Arizona but the Mimbres core is believed to be the Mimbres River Valley area. The York-Duncan Valley lies at the far western edge of the Mimbres region, and understood area heavily impacted by hunting and land modification. Using new data derived from survey and local informant knowledge, we investigate this remote affiliation and identity shifted through time in the valley by examining material culture.

We address these questions using analytical methods developed by Pet Gillman (Gillman 2018) in her research on identity and social relationships in the Mimbres region. Gillman argues that daily practices in constructing residences, making and deploying pottery, and ritual performance reflect people’s community affiliation and group membership. Gillman suggests that while some edge communities’ identities and relationships were separate and different from those in the Mimbres heartland, they were long-term, constant and stable until at least the end of the Classic period ca. A.D. 1300.

To evaluate social relationships and affiliations in our research area, we compared architecture, site sizes and densities, pottery types and sequences, ratios of Mimbres Style III Black-on-white (BoW) representational versus geometric designs, and types of non-local pottery with those of the Mimbres core area.

Material Culture
- Surface assemblage data acquired through survey, informant descriptions, and photos of pits and refuse removed from York-Duncan Valley sites in the 1980s show the entire sequence of Mimbres-Magdalena pottery from the Early Postclassic period (A.D. 200 – 750) to the Mimbres Classic period. Further, like the core Mimbres area,late Postclassic sites include Haboham ceramics, vessels, and shell bead accouterments. Informants also describe Late Postclassic Haboham burials and shell workshops no longer present on the archaeological landscape.
- Unlike the core Mimbres area, however, in the York-Duncan Valley, relations with the Haboham appear to have lessened to the Classic period. Haboham pottery with production periods covering the Mimbres Classic were found in several sites in the York-Duncan Valley. Pottery from this feature area is present in both research area sites and the Mimbres Valley.

Conclusions
- Surface assemblage data acquired through survey, informant descriptions, and photos of pits removed from York-Duncan Valley sites in the 1980s show the entire sequence of Mimbres-Magdalena pottery from the Early Postclassic period (A.D. 200 – 750) to the Mimbres Classic period. Further, like the core Mimbres area, late Postclassic sites include Haboham ceramics, vessels, and shell bead accouterments. Informants also describe Late Postclassic Haboham burials and shell workshops no longer present on the archaeological landscape.
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- In contrast, in the Mimbres Valley, 10-34 percent of Style III potsherds found in Classic occupations have representational designs (Gillman 2018).
- Gillman’s research showed that in peripheral areas in the San Simon region and New Mexico’s upper Gila drainage, representational designs are virtually absent.
- Similarities in architecture and ceramic sequences from A.D. 750 – 1130 suggest that people in the York-Duncan Valley had stable and long-lasting relations with the Mimbres core area. However, stark differences in population size and the ratio of representational to geometric designs in Mimbres Style II pottery suggest that they had a separate identity. Further, people in the York-Duncan Valley enjoyed social relationships with their Haboham neighbors to the west well into the Classic period, unlike the Mimbres River Valley residents.