Animal Remains and Archaeological Context in the Reserve and Mimbres Mogollon Areas, AD 200-1450

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Can faunal remains identify communal spaces and ritual activity?

Ritual and communal spaces are often identified based on size, architecture, and specific sets of architectural features.

- Examining concentrations of remains of taxa not often used for subsistence or everyday utilitarian purposes
- Ritual and utilitarian activities are not mutually exclusive and the same taxa may be used for both (e.g., feasting)
- Data from 82 faunal assemblages, AD 200 – 1450

Potentialy important taxa

References used to identify taxa likely used more often for ritual rather than other activities:

- Southwest ethnographic studies, especially Puebloan ethnographies
- Iconographic studies, including painted pottery and kiva murals
- Previous archaeological studies of placement of animal remains in areas not primarily associated with household refuse (communal spaces, burials, caches)

Carnivores

- Did not help identify formerly unrecognized ritual or communal spaces
- Often associated with known ritual or communal spaces (kivas, plazas)
- Canis sp. and domestic dogs are most numerous (especially interments)
- Canis sp. elements are also dispersed across some sites in various contexts
- Hough (LA 3276) great kiva has a large carnivore assemblage, other sites with >20 carnivore specimens don’t show spatial patterning
- Context isn’t always well reported, nor are interments or partial interments

Birds

- Sometimes helped identify formerly unrecognized ritual or communal spaces
- Often associated with known ritual or communal spaces
- When guil and perchering birds are common, they are widely distributed like food remains (NAN Ranch, Ch 1 Town, Luna), all other assemblages have <10 specimens
- Turkey are mostly interments (including counts here), but occasionally widely distributed elements (Wind Mountain, Metoluck, Gila Cliff Dwellings, Hough)
- Assemblages with unusually high numbers of other birds have likely unreported bird interments (especially raptors) with one individual reported as many elements
- Bird interments are found in known ritual and communal spaces but also “regular” habitation rooms and outdoor areas
- Reserve area kivas and likely ritual spaces often contain jays and other blue-black birds

Fish

- Only four sites have more than 20 specimens
- All four are in the Upper Gila area (Woodrow, Fornith, 3-Up, and Gila River Farm)
- Most fish remains are from spatially discrete deposits in habitation rooms (floor fill, floor pits) or sheetmiddens adjacent to a room block

Reptiles and amphibians

- Concentrations often associated with rooms with additional signs of ritual or communal function
- Most turtle specimens are casuscope fragments, possibly ratties, this inflates reported counts
- Seven assemblages have >20 specimens, all are post-AD 1200 except Gila (Late Pueblo II assemblage with probable single shell)

Identifying ritual activity and communal spaces

- Concentrations of these taxa are often associated with known important spaces (kivas, plazas)
- Concentrations also found in some unexpected contexts (habitation rooms, outdoor areas)
- Can strengthen otherwise tenuous interpretations of special use spaces (e.g., Luna Room 12)
- Can highlight special functions of otherwise “ordinary-looking” rooms
  - “Cornfarms”
  - Other scales of ritual or communal activity
- Future research could examine found data from all known ritual and communal contexts (even with very low specimen numbers) to assess how widespread these associations are